

Dr. O. L. SNAITANG

**CHRISTIANITY AND
SOCIAL CHANGE
IN
NORTHEAST INDIA**

**VENDRAME INSTITUTE
FIRMA KLM PRIVATE LIMITED**

CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN
NORTHEAST INDIA

(A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY IN SOCIAL
CHANGE AMONG THE KHASI-JAINTIA HILL
TRIBES OF MEGHALAYA)

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VENDRAME INSTITUTE, SHILLONG
FIRMA KLM PRIVATE LIMITED
CALCUTTA * * 1993

Published by

Vendrame Institute

Shillong-793 008

AND

Firma KLM Private Limited

257-B, B. B. Ganguly Street

Calcutta-700 012

India

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Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

1. History of Khasi-Jaintia Tribe
2. Christian Missions and Churches
3. Tribal Identity

ISBN 81-85408-00-12

Printed by

Sankar Kumar Dey

SREEMA MUDRAN

8B, Shibnarayan Das Lane,

Calcutta-700 006

DEDICATED
TO
MY PARENTS

FOREWORD

The scholarly study of the history of Christianity in Northeast India began only recently been begun. Earlier there were a number of books written about missionaries in the region, the purpose of which was to inform their constituencies in the West about the nature of their work and to encourage them to provide continuing support. Subsequently there began to appear a few histories of the churches of the region. Some of these were produced on the occasion of jubilees and centenaries—what might be called Jubilee History—while others were more scholarly studies but they were basically “internal” histories of the establishment and development of the church and its programmes. Unlike the earlier mission histories these were written for the enlightenment of the Christian people of the region. It was their history, not the history of foreign missionaries.

In recent years historians have begun to give attention to the relationship between Christianity and the socio-cultural context in which it was introduced and developed. While those who were primarily responsible for the initial proclamation of the Christian Gospel in the Northeast India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were foreigners, the distinctive nature of Christianity as it developed in the region arose out of the inter-action between that which was introduced from outside and the existing cultures which both shaped and were shaped by the new religion. Studies are being done on both aspects. Some historians are studying the way in which the traditional primal cultures of the hill people contributed to the development of distinctive forms of Christianity; others are studying the way in which Christianity contributed to social change.

This study by O. L. Snaitang falls within the latter category. He has convincingly demonstrated that among Khasi-Jaintia people, Christianity played a significant acculturative role in helping them maintain their distinctive identity while at the same time preparing them to function effectively within the new order introduced by British administration. Christianity thus not only provided the people with the means of dealing with the modernisation of their society that followed the breakdown of its previous isola-

tion, but it also provided them with the means of preserving a distinctive identity in the process. In fact, he demonstrates that Christianity greatly strengthened, in a sense created, a Khasi-Jaintia identity through the creation of a standard written language, through its educational work, ideology, evangelism and church structures. While much of the old was destroyed in the process, the argument of the author is that the process remained fundamentally indigenous because it built upon the one element in the traditional Khasi-Jaintia culture that was common to all sections of the people—the social code known as *tipkur tipkha*.

It was my privilege to be associated with Dr. Snaitang, as his doctoral supervisor, in the research which produced this book. I am honoured to be asked to write this foreword to a book that makes an important contribution to the understanding of the impact of Christianity upon tribal societies in the North East. I hope that it will stimulate similar research among other tribal groups in the region.

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26 Nov. 1991. *B.D.*, *Ph.D.*

Prof. and Head of the
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PREFACE

Christianity came into the Khasi-Jaintia area after the introduction of British rule in the 1820s. The Khasi-Jaintias of the present Meghalaya state were the first among the hill tribes of Northeast India to be brought under British colonial rule and the influences of Christian missions and churches over a period of more than 150 years.

There is a variety of sources on the interaction between Christianity and the Khasi-Jaintia society, published and unpublished, produced by a number of British officials, foreign Christian missionaries and the local Khasi-Jaintia Christians. Some of these are not only in English and Khasi languages but also in German, French, Spanish and Latin.

Many scholars in the recent past have made several studies on Christianity and the Khasi-Jaintia tribe. But they have not given sufficient attention to the missionary sources and the role of Christianity in social change. It is against this background that I have undertaken this study.

This book has grown out of a dissertation that was submitted to the Serampore University in 1990 for the degree of Doctor of Theology. In this connection, I am grateful to those who have helped and encouraged me in the original project. Prof. Dr. Frederick S. Downs, my guide, stands in the front rank. I record my deep sense of gratitude to him for his constant inspiration, guidance, openness, patience and for giving whole-heartedly of his time at every stage of the research. But for his supervision I would not have completed the writing of the dissertation in time. I am thankful also for his Foreword to this book.

My grateful thanks also go to my friends Fr. Dr. Sebastian Karotemprel, SDB, Fr. Dr. George Kottuppallil, SDB, Dr. David R. Syiemlieh, Dr. Milton S. Sangma and Dr. A. C. Sinha, who have read the manuscripts and given me their critical suggestions. Their comments have been incorporated into the book and sources updated.

My deep sense of appreciation and thanks also go to the librarians, archivists and staff at the West Bengal State Archives,

National Library, both located in Calcutta; Carey Library, Serampore; Otto Hopfenmueller Library of Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong; the United Theological College Library and Archives, Bangalore; NEHU Central Library, Shillong; Jeebon Roy Memorial Library, Shillong; Khasi-Jaintia Presbyterian Synod Office Library, Shillong; Mr. L. G. Shullai's "Shillong Collection Centre" and the personal libraries of Bah U Hipshon Roy Kharshiing and Rev. I. Kharkongor.

Dr. Henry Wilson, the former Director of the Board of Theological Education, Department of Research, Bangalore, deserves my special gratitude for his interest and encouragement at the initial period of my doctoral research. To the Director and Associate Director of the South Asia Theological Research Institute, Bangalore, the Governing Board and Principal of Cherra Theological College, Cherrapunji; the Pastors' Fellowship and the Business Association of the Church of God, Meghalaya and Assam, I owe a debt of gratitude, for their help and co-operation. Fr. Leguori, CMI, my mentor in learning the Latin language and Fr. Dr. A. Mathias Mundadan, CMI, of the Dharmaram College, Bangalore, deserve my deep gratitude. I am thankful also to Mr. Lohori Sawkmie, my father, Diana, my wife, my children and Mr. Shrolenson Marbaniang, my brother-in-law, for their support during the course of my research.

I am indebted to Fr. Dr. Sebastian Karotempel, SDB, Director, Vendrame Institute Publications, Shillong and his staff for their understanding and keen interest shown in the publication of the book.

Shillong,
1 January 1992.

O. L. Snaitang

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1. INTRODUCTION

I. THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to investigate the Christian role in social change among the Khasi-Jaintia people of Meghalaya from 1841 to the present.

There are two main reasons for undertaking such a study. First, the role of Christianity in social change among the hill tribes of the North East has not been studied in depth by anyone. Second, those scholars who have touched upon the problem have disagreed concerning the nature of the role Christianity has played in relation to social change.

Beginning from the advent of the British in the 1820s until the present, Khasi-Jaintia society has undergone significant transformation. Almost from the beginning Christianity was associated with this transformation. And yet scholarly studies have either completely ignored or minimized the Christian role. For instance, in his study of the Khasi tribal solidarity movement, P.R.G. Mathur¹ argues that the Seng Khasi was the primary agent in providing a religious basis for the Khasi tribal effort to establish solidarity in the face of change. The Seng Khasi, formed in 1899, is a revival movement of the Khasi traditional culture which rejected in theory all that was Christian. Mathur is puzzled by the fact that despite his hypothesis of the central role of the Seng Khasi, the dominant role in many contemporary aspects of Khasi society has been played by Christians. The puzzle would have been solved if he had studied the role of Christianity with the same scholarly thoroughness with which he studied the role of the Seng Khasi. Mathur's study is typical of research done by many scholars in that it almost totally ignores Christian sources. The Christian role is mentioned in passing, but it has not been seriously studied. Thus, while the concern of scholars with the

1. *Khasi of Meghalaya : Study in Tribalism and Religion* (1979). pp. 140f. Hereinafter cited as Mathur, *Khasi*.

question of social change in the hill tribal societies is significant, their passing allusions to and ignorance of the Christian role in social transformation leaves an important gap to be filled.

In the second place, those few scholars who have given attention to the Christian role in social change have reached divergent conclusions. Chaube and Downs suggest that the role was essentially acculturative.² Natarajan,³ on the other hand, argues that Christianity was the principal agent in bringing about social change. The work of Chaube and Downs on this subject are macro-studies of the entire North East. The question needs to be raised as to whether a micro-study of one tribal area, the Khasi-Jaintia, would support their hypothesis. Natarajan's work is a micro-study of the Khasis, but her sources were limited and methodologically questionable. It is my intention to examine these conflicting views in light of the evidence in relation to the Khasi-Jaintia tribal society.

The proposed study of the role of Christianity in social change among the Khasi-Jaintia people over the past one hundred fifty years is important for the following reasons :—

First, it will make an important contribution to academic studies of social change in general, and particularly with relation to the hill tribes of the North East India. As indicated above, a number of scholarly studies have largely ignored the role played by Christianity in social change among the tribes. In part this is because they have ignored mission/ecclesiastical sources, relying largely on government sources. But the journals, reports and proceedings produced by the missionaries, ecclesiastical bodies and individual local Christians contain a wealth of information on the

-
2. S. Chaube, *Hill Politics in North East India* (1972), p. 42. Herein-after cited as Chaube. F.S. Downs, "Christianity as a Tribal Response to Change in North East India", *Missiology*, VIII. 4 (October 1980), pp. 407-416. Hereinafter cited as Downs, "Tribal Response". See also Frederick S. Downs, *Christianity in North East India : Historical Perspectives* (1983), pp. 172-278. Hereinafter cited as Downs, *Christianity*.
 3. Nalini Natarajan, *The Missionary Among the Khasis* (1977), Hereinafter cited as Natarajan.

subject. Some of this material is, of course, only accessible to those with a knowledge of the Khasi language. This perspective and these sources will be brought to the attention of the academic community through this study.

Second, a full understanding of the several factors contributing to social change is highly relevant to the present situation where rapid change continues to take place.

Third, it will contribute to a clearer understanding of the Christian role in tribal societies. That role has often been misunderstood in India as an anti-national one. It is hoped that this study will help remove such misconceptions and help people understand its positive contribution.

Fourth, it will contribute to the self-understanding of the Christian people in the Khasi-Jaintia hills.

II. DEFINITIONS

“Christianity” refers to the religion of all those within the Khasi-Jaintia area who call themselves and are considered by others to be followers of Christ, irrespective of denomination. It includes both foreign missionaries and indigenous adherents of that faith.

“Social Change” is a term used by social scientists, though not all define it in exactly the same way. B. Kuppuswamy defines it as,

a process in which (there) is discernible significant alteration in the structure and functioning of a particular social system. When we speak of social change we simply assert that there is some change in social behaviour, social structure and social and cultural values.⁴

T.B. Bottomore defines it as

a change in social structure (including here changes in the

4. *Social Change in India* (1975), p. 43.

size of a society), or in particular social institutions or the relationships between institutions.⁵

Another definition is proposed by Zaltmann and Duncan :

Change is defined as the relearning on the part of an individual or group (1) in response to newly perceived requirements of a given situation requiring action and (2) which results in a change in the structure and/or functioning of social system.⁶

The implication of all these definitions is that social change is a dynamic, progressive or evolutionary process which involves social, religious, cultural, political, economic and linguistic components. These various components are certainly all involved in tribal societies like that of the Khasi-Jaintias. In such societies they are also so closely interrelated that a change in one affects all. It will be noted that the study will be complicated further by the fact that Christians affirmed some and rejected other components of the society. Hence in some cases they were prominent exponents of social change in other cases they supported the status quo against change.

“Khasis” and “Jaintias” are one matrilineal tribe inhabiting the present East and West Khasi hills and Jaintia districts of Meghalaya, who are popularly known today as u Hynniew trep though without any Government constitutional sanctions. The name “Khasi” is shrouded in mystery. It is, however, believed to have been a combination of two words, kha meaning “born” and Si, the name of a particular mother. “Khasi” therefore literally means “born of the mother Si”.⁷ The names “Jaintia” and “Synteng” have sometimes been used interchangeably. On this subject B. Pakem writes :

5. *Sociology : A Guide to Problems and Literature* (1975), p. 297.

6. *Strategies for Planned Change* (1977), p. 16.

7. During the early years of their contact with the area the British officials and missionaries wrongly spelt the name “Cossyah” instead of “Khasi”. This incorrect usage was rectified in 1868 and therefore the “Khasi” form was used by the British officials. Cf. *Proceedings of the Lieut. Governor of Bengal, General Department* (Date of Previous order B file October 1868, Nos. 106 and 107), p. 2.

The Jaintias thoroughly despised the word "Synteng" (a name formerly common) because the Khasis associated it with the word "Sahteng" which means either the people who were "left behind" on their westward migration, or simply a "backward" community. However, according to Dr. S. K. Chaterjee...the word Jaintia (Zantain or Zonten) was derived from the word "Synteng". And I should like to add further, that the word Synteng, in its turn, was derived from the word "Sutnga" (Suteng), the ruling dynasty of the Jaintias. Or it may be derived from the word "Sohmynting" (Smynting or Synting), a village through which the Khasis used to come to Jaintia hills before the present road communication. So the two words can be used interchangeably.⁸

Though the Khasi-Jaintias can be identified as distinct and separate peoples, historically for over a hundred years both within the context of administration and church they have functioned as a single community. For this reason, they are treated as a single entity in this dissertation. In fact, in the dissertation it is demonstrated how Christianity contributed to the process, the creation of the Khasi-Jaintia identity.

III. LIMITS OF THE STUDY

While there was some work undertaken in the Khasi hills by the Serampore Baptist Mission in the late 1820s and 1830s, the first permanent mission work was started by the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission (later the name was changed to the Welsh Presbyterian Mission) in 1841. Hence that is the year from which this study commences. Insofar as we will be studying a limited aspect of Christian history, and insofar as important changes have taken place in the recent past, the period of study continues until the present.

As already indicated, the study will take into account Christianity as a whole rather than a particular denomination because it would be impossible to isolate the impact of a single denomination

8. In S. K. Singh, ed., *Tribal Situation in India* (1972), p. 362. Hereinafter cited as Singh, *Tribal Situation*.

in bringing about social change among the Khasi-Jaintia peoples. The largest groups are the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches, but there are a number of smaller groups that have also played a role in the changes that have taken place.

IV. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

We propose to classify a number of studies on the Khasi-Jaintia tribe into four general categories.

(1) Studies which overlook the Christian impact. There have been a good number of studies on the tribe produced by social scientists of various kinds—historians, political scientists and economists—which fall in this category. Mathur's *Khasi of Meghalaya : Study in Tribalism and Religion* (1979) which has already been mentioned is a good example. It is a scholarly study that deals with social change and reaction to it among the Khasis, but does not seriously study the contributions of Christianity.

(2) Studies in which Christianity is seen as anti-national. Some scholars who have studied the tribes have taken an a priori position against any positive role for Christianity. In his book, *A Tribe in Transition : The Jaintias of Meghalaya* (1981),⁹ H. L. Deb Roy not only disregards the impact of Christianity and ecclesiastical sources, but jumps to the unwarranted conclusion that Christianity was responsible for creating an anti-national spirit among the members of the tribe. Though speaking about the North East in general, rather than the Khasi-Jaintia area in particular, B. P. Sukhla's *What Ails India's North-East ?* (1980) takes a similar position, seeking to perpetuate the idea that Christianity works against the interests of the country. In neither case is the charge carefully investigated nor documented.

(3) Institutional Mission Studies. There are a few good histories of Christianity among the Khasi-Jaintia. These include John Hugh Morris' *The History of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists' Foreign Mission, to the end of the year 1904* (1910),¹⁰ and *The*

9. Hereinafter cited as Deb Roy.

10. Hereinafter cited as Morris, *Welsh Mission*.

Story of our Foreign Mission (1930),¹¹ C. Becker's *Early History of the Catholic Missions in North-East India* (English ed. 1989)¹² and *History of the Catholic Mission in Northeast India, 1890-1915* (English ed. 1980).¹³ These institutional histories were written by foreign missionaries from the perspective of the sending side of their respective Missions. They are traditional Mission histories. J. Fortis Jyrwa's *The Wondrous Works of God : A Study on the Growth and Development of the Khasi-Jaintia Presbyterian Church in the 20th Century* (1980)¹⁴ is essentially a denominational history, though written by a Khasi. None of these deal with social change as such.

(4) Writings on the Social Impact of Christianity. Natarajan's *The Missionary Among the Khasis*, which has already been indicated, does deal with the role of Christianity in social change, but is inadequate methodologically. In any event that subject is not its main focus. Fr. Sebastian Karotemprel's *Albizuri Among the Lyngams : A Brief History of the Catholic Mission among the Lyngams of Northeast India* (1985)¹⁵ is a good study of the Christian impact upon its subject people, but they constitute a single sub-ethnic group not the entire Khasi-Jaintia tribe. Downs has done several studies on the social impact of Christianity in the Northeast in general,¹⁶ but has not done specific study on the Khasi-Jaintia people and has not utilized sources in the Khasi language.

11. Hereinafter cited as Morris, *Foreign Mission*.

12. Hereinafter cited as Becker, *Early History*.

13. Hereinafter cited as Becker, *History*.

14. Hereinafter cited as Jyrwa.

15. Hereinafter cited as Karotemprel, *Lyngams*.

16. Cf. Downs, "Tribal Response", pp. 407ff; Downs, *Christianity ; Frederick S. Downs, "Christianity and Cultural Change in North East India", in Somen Das, ed., Christian Faith and Multiform Culture in India, (1987), pp. 85-101. Hereinafter cited as Downs, "Cultural Change". F.S. Downs, "Tribal Ecumenism in North East India : The Christian Role in Solidarity Movements", *ETC Journal*, 2.2 (January-May, 1989), pp. 4-66. Hereinafter cited as Downs, "Solidarity". F.S. Downs, "Christian Conversion Movements among the Hill Tribes of North East India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (Unpublished MS. 1987). Hereinafter cited as Downs, "Conversion".*

V. METHOD OF RESEARCH

The study consists of an historical analysis of the subject, based on the government, academic and ecclesiastical sources. The focus will be upon the impact of Christianity in relation to the Khasi-Jaintia people. While this is a study in social history rather than in sociology or sociology of religion, it certainly utilizes the research done by scholars in those fields as well as the other social sciences.

In addition to the study of government proceedings, census reports, statistical accounts and the general works on social change on the Khasi-Jaintias and on the history of Christianity in North-east India, records available in the Khasi language have been examined, most of which have been passed over by many scholars (because they did not know the language). Some of these are *U Khasi Mynta*, *U Nongialam Katholik*, *U Nongialam Khristan*, *Ka Pateng Kristan*, *Ka Iing Kristan*, *Ka Jingshai Ka Gospel*, *U Lurshai*, *Ka Juk*, *U Nongpynim* and *U Nongphira*.

VI. THE STRUCTURE

The structure of this study is designed to establish the thesis that, from the perspective of the people and in the context of the changes that were taking place in Khasi-Jaintia society, Christianity provided a means through which they could accommodate themselves to the changes that were imposed through British administration and the process of modernization it brought with it.

Chapter 2 examines the history of the tribe prior to the nineteenth century for the purpose of determining the nature of tribal identity and social change. It notes that there was, in fact, no strong sense of common identity in a tribe that was fragmented politically, religiously and linguistically. The only elements that brought them together were geographical proximity and a common kinship code. We also examine the reasons why the Khasi-Jaintia peoples had been able to successfully resist outside agencies of changes prior to the advent of the British.

Chapter 3 studies the changes that began to take place following the imposition of British administration and seeks to identify

their causes, especially in light of the fact that they had hitherto successfully resisted such radical changes. The agencies that were involved in bringing about change were the British administration and the contacts that is fostered with outsiders in the form of Hindus and Christian missions. In this chapter it is the first two, i.e., the British administration and contacts with Hinduism, that are studied with the third, i.e., Christian Missions, being introduced.

Chapter 4 deals with the introduction and growth, both numerically and geographically, of Christianity among the Khasi-Jaintias. It describes how it was well into the twentieth century before its numbers were sufficient to represent a major influence, but that subsequently it was to become dominant. It describes the geographical expansion of Christianity and the institutions and programmes it introduced that were to have a role in relation to social change. This chapter is essentially descriptive.

Chapter 5 discusses the Christian, both missionary and Khasi-Jaintia, attitudes towards the traditional culture and, consequently, their attitude towards the changes that were taking place in that culture. It seeks to demonstrate that the Christian position was ambiguous on this subject. The Christians opposed those elements in the traditional culture that were thought to be religious in nature and thus strongly advocating social change where they were concerned, on the other hand they supported those elements of the traditional culture of which they believed to be purely social in nature, the most important being the kinship code, and became their guardians against those who sought to bring about changes in that area.

Chapter 6 examines the impact of Christianity on Khasi-Jaintia society. It seeks to demonstrate how the combination of advocacy of change in some areas and conservative resistance of change in other areas created a unique synthesis, a cultural synthesis which provided the people with a new sense of inclusive tribal identity or solidarity. It shows how this new tribal identity was fostered through literature, education, ideology and ecclesiastical structures.

2. IDENTITY AND CHANGE AMONG THE KHASI-JAINTIA PEOPLE IN THE PRE- NINETEENTH CENTURY PERIOD

I. THE PEOPLE AND THEIR LAND

(1) Geographic Factors in Determining the Nature of Khasi-Jaintia Social and Political Organization. The identity of the Khasi-Jaintia people was not in their polity and religion. It lay in their geographical proximity and in certain common social structures. In her book, *The Missionary Among the Khasis* (1977), which has already been mentioned, Natarajan writes as follows :

The rugged physical features led to the isolation of the people. Despite the division of the area into various political units, sentiments of kinship aroused a vital sense of oneness and served as a continuous link through centuries.¹

The geography of the Khasi-Jaintia hills contributed to the isolation of the people and insulated them from outside pressures for change. The region lies approximately between 25° and 26°10' N and 90°45' and 92° E.² It has passed through a series of geographical changes. According to the Census Report of 1881, the approximate area of the region was 6,157 square miles.³ As a consequence of the bifurcation of the northern Jaintia State, which became part of Karbi Anglong hills, the total area is now reduced to approximately 5,541 square miles.⁴ The area is bounded on the north by the Kamrup and Nowgong districts of Assam, on the

1. Natarajan, p. 9.

2. *Basic Facts Meghalaya* (Shillong : Directorate of Information and public Relations, Meghalaya, C. 1980), p. 4.

3. *Report on the Census of Assam for 1881 : Table No. 1 Showing the Area and Population of Assam* (1883), p. 32. See also W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Accounts of Assam*, Vol. 2 (First published 1879, reprinted 1975), p. 203, Hereinafter cited as Hunter, *Assam*.

4. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People* (1967), p. 8. Hereinafter cited as Bareh, *Khasi People*.

east by Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar hills in the Assam, on the south by Sylhet district of Bangladesh, and on the west by the East Garo hills.

The Khasi-Jaintia area itself may be divided into three zones : the Ri Bhoi, the Ri Lum, and the Ri War. The Ri Bhoi covers the northern portion of the region.⁵ This area slopes downwards from the central belt to the Brahmaputra valley. The climate is warmer than that in the Ri Lum, the central region, and is affected by malaria.⁶ The area is a plateau with flat lands and valleys. Thick forests and bamboo groves cover the area. In them reside wild animals like tigers, snakes, bears, deers, birds and monkeys. The whole area was sparsely populated. The physical features like an irregular plateau and heavy forestation, as well as the presence of wild animals resulted in the area having minimal contacts with the neighbouring people of Assam. Thus the nature of the area contributed to the insulation of the Khasi-Jaintias from outside agencies of change.

The Ri Lum is the central belt area extending from the Jowai region in the east to the Lyngngam region in the west. The Shil-long region of this area has the highest elevation in the Khasi-Jaintia hills. It is an irregular plateau with hills and ravines through which flow rivers and rivulets. In both the Jowai region to the east and in the western part of the area there are ranges of hills with valleys and flat lands between.⁷ Pine trees grow in abundance, contributing to the beauty of the area. The southern slope receives heavy rainfall during the summer and cold in the winter. The majority of Khasi-Jaintias live in this area. The high cliffs to the

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5. For a good account of the Ri Bhoi see F. Sngi Lyngdoh, *Ki Riti Khyndew ba la buh u Longshwa Manshwa Jong Ka Ri Bhoi* (1965) ; K. Vincent, *A Socio-Economic Study of Bhoilymbong : A Village in Meghalaya* (1978) and I.D. Marwein, *Ka History Ka Balang ha Ri Bhoi 1875-1984* (1984). Hereinafter cited as Marwein, *Ri Bhoi*.
 6. R. A. Hughes, 'Ka Mission Jingpynkhiah Ka Synod', in *Ki Khubor Jong Ki Jingiaseng Jubilee 1841-1966* (1967). Hereinafter cited as Hughes, "Mission".
 7. B. C. Allen, *Gazetteer of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills Garo Hills Lushai Hills* (First published 1905, reprinted, 1980), pp. 1-9. Hereinafter cited as Allen, *Gazetteer*.

south, dropping precipitously to the Bengal plains, together with the inhospitable terrain of the Ri Bhoi contributed to the isolation of the peoples living in the Ri Lum area. Hence there was minimal pressure for change from outside.

The Ri War is on the southern side of the Khasi-Jaintia hills.⁸ The climate is warm and the area is bisected by long ridges, gorges, elevated ravines and valleys. It is an agriculturally productive area, the main products being oranges, bananas, pineapples, betelnuts, bay leaves and black-pepper. There are also substantial lime quarries. These products were taken to the markets in the Bengal plains. Hence the people inhabiting the southern zone, especially the Shellas and the Jaintias, had constant contact with the Bangla traders and were thus subject to outside influences to a far greater extent than other inhabitants of the Khasi-Jaintia hills. These influences affected their thought patterns and religion.

Thus, with the exception of the people of the Ri War area, the whole area was isolated from the outside world. The geographic features of the Khasi-Jaintia hills contributed to this. While they were isolated from the outside world, the people of the three contiguous areas were in frequent contact with each other. There was free movement of the people throughout the region, even though there were a number of autonomous political units. Geographical proximity was therefore, one of the main factors in the establishment of their identity as a distinct people.

(2) Political Organization. A second factor contributing to a sense of common identity in any society has been political organization. The Khasi-Jaintia people had never been ruled by outsiders prior to the British conquest in the early part of the nineteenth century. This was the only common political element. We have seen that geographical proximity contributed to a com-

8. For further information of the Ri War see P. K. Das Gupta, *Life and Culture of Matrilineal Tribe of Meghalaya* (1984) L. S. Gassah, "The War Jaintia in transition", in S. Karotemprel, ed., *The Tribes of North East India* (1984), pp. 355-65; *Ka War Shella: Souvenir* (1987); and T. Rodborne, *Ki Khanatang Na Ri War* (Shillong: Warphlang, 1980).

mon identity, but there was no reflection of this identity in the political set up because the region was divided into a number of wholly autonomous political units. There was no centralized political structure. This indicates that whatever sense of tribal identity existed as a result of the factor mentioned above, it was weak. The twenty nine Khasi states functioned independently as sub-ethnic units.⁹ These autonomous village units created distinctive and separate identities which weakened the sense of unity of the people as a whole.

Each of the states was governed by a Durbar presided over by the chief, and consisting of representatives of the ruling families and villages within the state. There was no comprehensive political structure linking the whole Khasi-Jaintia people. For this reason the sense of solidarity or identity was felt only with people of the same small state consisting of a few villages. As we will see below, there were even significant dialectical differences among the states. The boundaries of the states were not always clear, with the result that there was frequent conflict and insecurity among them.¹⁰ Because of the absence of a common political unity traditionally, and the important role that Christianity eventually came to assume in creating such a unity, it is necessary to look into the traditional political context in more detail, with particular reference to the concepts of U Syiem, Ka Sad Ka Sunon and the Khasi wars.

a. *The Traditional Political System.* As indicated above, the Khasi-Jaintia peoples did not have a centralised political system. The political units were entirely independent of each other and

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9. The Khasi States were as follows : 1. Bhowal, 2. Dwara Nongtyrnem, 3. Jirang, 4. Khadsawphra, 5. Langrin, 6. Lyngiong, 7. Maharam, 8. Malaisohmat, 9. Mawiang, 10. Mawdon, 11. Mawlong, 12. Mawphlang, 13. Mawsynram, 14. Muliang, 15. Myllem, 16. Myriaw, 17. Nobosohphoh, 18. Nongkrem (or Khyrim), 19. Nonglwai, 20. Nongpoh, 21. Nongspung, 22. Nongstoin, 23. Pamsanngut, 24. Rambrai, 25. Shella, 26. Sohbar, 27. Sohiong, 28. Sohra (or Cherrapunji), 29. Sutnga (Synteng or Jaintia). For a good account of the background of the Khasi States see H. Lyngdoh Nonglait, *Ki Syiem Khasi had Synteng* (1938). Hereinafter cited as Nonglait, *Ki Syiem*. Bareh, *Khasi People*, pp. 54-131.
10. Cf. Nonglait, *Ki Syiem*, pp. 71-74 ; 90-96 ; 117 ; 120 ; 147-154.

were ruled by chiefs variously known as Syiem, Lyngdoh, Wahadadar, Dolloi and Pator.¹¹ Each state had a similar form of government which was basically democratic. The elements within these polities can be identified as (i) the Chief, (ii) Ki Bakhrav or the Founding clans, (iii) the State Durbar, (iv) the Durbar Raid, (v) the Village Durbar, and (vi) the Clan Durbar.

(i) *The Chief.* The chief was the executive head of the state. The office of chief was reserved to the ruling clan of that particular area (ka hima). Representatives of other clans could not be considered for the chieftainship. The ruling clan was known as jait Syiem. The jait Syiem was made up of different sub-clan (kpoh) and families (ki iing). These were important because even all members of the jait Syiem though having a common ancestress (ka lawbei) were not eligible to serve as chief. Only the male members of a particular family from a designated sub-clan were eligible. Among the eligible male members the choice of chief was generally made on the basis of seniority. While women were debarred from serving as chief, eligibility was determined by the candidate's matriline. In other words, the mother determined who would be the ruler of the state. The system of succession was clearly defined in customary law. The first choice went to the eldest son of the appropriate mother. A chief was usually succeeded by his next uterine brother. In some states, such as Cherrapunji,¹² these brothers in effect served as deputy chiefs (Syiem khynnah). The hereditary office was for the life time of the holder.

The chief played a prominent role in all social, religious and festive gatherings as well as in the market place. He was respected by all people of the state and his visits to the villages of the state

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11. Hunter, *Assam*, p. 203. The office of Sirdar was introduced after the imposition of the British administration.
 12. Cherrapunji is not a local Khasi name. It is a combination of a mispronounced Cherra for Sohra and Bangla word punji for village. While it was perhaps originally coined by the neighbouring Banglas of the present Bangladesh, the name became widely known after the British officials anglised and used it for all official and non-official purposes. As of today, both Cherrapunji and Sohra are used interchangeably.

were marked with due respect. People were always ready to help the chief at any time.

He played a dual role. First, in respect of the secular duties, and secondly in religious affairs. He was responsible for maintaining law and order and to ensure its peace and prosperity. The successful defence of the state depended on his ability to give courageous leadership. In times of emergency, such as times of war, the chief exercised the powers of commander-in-chief. In addition he heard the petitions of the poor and needy, seeking social justice. Meetings of the State Durbar were convened by him, the meetings always being held in the chief's village. He initiated discussion and fixed the agenda.

The religious duties of the chiefs were shared by priests. In the case of the Khyrim State, a priestess (Ka Syiem Sad) looks after religious affairs. While rituals like the cremation of a dead chief (in Cherrapunji State) and state rituals like Pomblang (in Khyrim State), as well as other sacrifices and religious activities may have been conducted by the priests, the presence of the chief was necessary and he took a prominent part in making arrangements for them.

Despite their many responsibilities and powers, the chiefs were subordinates to the State Durbar. Their powers were controlled by the council and they could not take decision without its consent. As executive head, he implemented the decisions taken by the Durbar and could not function independently of it.

(ii) *Ki Bakhraw*. Ki Bakhraw (founding clans) consisted of those few clans which were believed to have been the original settlers of the state. Each founding clan had its own durbar (Dorbar Kur). The senior member was designated headman of the clan (Rangbah Kur) and he represented it at the State Durbar. The office was not hereditary nor was there a term system. Once appointed, the headman held his position until death. If it became difficult for him to function effectively in old age, he might have been persuaded to nominate someone else to represent him in the State Durbar. Traditionally a married person was favoured on the grounds that he was more mature. The founding

clans served as personal advisors to the chief in carrying out the affairs of the state.

(iii) *The Dorbar Hima*. The Dorbar Hima (the State Durbar) was the supreme authority of the state.¹³ In addition to the Chief and Ki Bakhraw, the State Durbar included representatives of the raid and village councils. The chief summoned the Durbar and acts as its president. All the clan councils, village durbars, etc., were joined at least together in the State Durbar.

The cultural integrity of the state centred around the Durbar Hima. It maintained law and order, it was the keeper of the traditional customary laws and exercised power in maintaining the moral behaviour of the people. It was the highest legislative, judicial and executive body. Traditionally, it did not legislate new laws but was, rather, responsible for the proper implementation of traditional laws, customs, manners and usages. It was responsible for seeing that the rights of the people were maintained and for the administration of common markets, rivers, forests and state religious ceremonies.

It also acted as a supreme court. The chief and Ki Bakhraw served as chief justice and judges. In the Khasi-Jaintia political system there were a number of judicial bodies, beginning from the family level and moving up through the level of clan, village and raid up to the state court. All cases that could not be solved at the lower levels were referred to the state court. The Durbar Hima was not only responsible for settling disputes, but it was also responsible for executing its decisions. In the event that a party to a dispute did not accept the decision of the Durbar Hima, it would take appropriate action.

(iv) *The Raid Durbar (Ka Dorbar Raid)*. The Raid Durbar covered an area comprising several villages. The Rangbah Raid (Headman of the Raid), elected by the Durbar Raid, was the executive head. Normally all village headmen were members of

13. "Ka Dorbar Ka Dorsha Ki Khasi Hyndai", *U Nongialam Katholik*, 2 (Rymphang 1903), p. 29.

the Durbar Raid, but in some cases additional representatives were elected. The elected members acted in an advisory capacity. The officers of the Durbar Raid were not hereditary but once chosen the members served at least for life. The function of the Durbar Raid was to maintain the raid lands. It looked after the landless among the people and allotted land for residential buildings, cultivation, cattle rearing etc. It allocated some part of the Raid land for public purposes such as cremation and sports grounds. It looked after the forest and ensured that trees were not felled indiscriminately. Boundary disputes within the village were also settled by Durbar Raid.

(v) *The Village Durbar.* Each Khasi-Jaintia village was an organized political unit. As such it had its own council (Ka Dorbar Shnong). The village headman (U Rangbah Shnong) presided. His office was elective, not hereditary, but once elected served for an unspecified number of years. Its membership consisted of the male members representative of each family. They acted as advisors to the headman. The Village Durbar was responsible for the welfare of the village. It maintained law and order, administered public ponds, bridle paths, bridges and forests, and looked after the village security. All this was done through seeking the co-operation of the people and ensuring proper conduct. The Village Durbar also had a judicial function. It tried cases involving such crimes as murder, assault, theft, sorcery, adultery and even a rare case as rape. Conflicts among members of the clans were brought to the Village Durbar when they could not be settled within the clan. The headman was expected to know well each member of the village.

(vi) *The Clan Durbar.* The clan constituted the nucleus of Khasi-Jaintia society. Almost every clan had its own Clan Durbar (Ka Dorbar Kur), consisting of the male members representative of each family or sometimes of sub-clan (Ka Kpoh). The eldest member of the clan was always appointed Clan Headman (U Rangbah Kur), commonly referred to as U Kni Rangbah (the head uncle). He had to be able to preside over the Durbar as its executive head. Decisions were made by consensus rather than vote. Its meetings were always held at the original house

of the clan (Ka lingseng). Its duties were to look after the clan property (Ri Kur) and to settle dispute among clan members, including trying cases of theft, adultery, trespass, damage to property, etc. It is also responsible for looking after the clan's general welfare, including the provision of assistance to landless members. The Rangbah Kur also serves as the clan priest, performing all clan rituals, assisted by his brothers and nephews.

As we have already seen, the Clan Durbar was not an end in itself, but had representatives on the village Durbar, and through it on the State Durbar. Loyalty was thus expected to the whole, not simply the clan.

Thus the traditional political structure was based upon an interlinking hierarchy of Durbars—Clan, Village, Raid and State which combined a modified form of democracy with hereditary elements. While officials were elected, they were chosen on the basis of membership in certain clans and, often, seniority. But this system did not extend beyond the state level to encompass the entire Khasi-Jaintia people. Hence while it strengthened state identities it did not contribute to a sense of tribal solidarity. Political structures, hence, were not primary agents of identity.

b. *The Different Understandings of "U Syiem"*. We have seen that although there was a democratic element in the various Durbars within a given state, there was no centrally administered structure. While this fact in itself indicates that the political structure did not contribute to a common Khasi-Jaintia identity, the unifying role of the political structure was further weakened by different understandings of the role of the Syiem.

(i) *Ki Syiem Ki Blei*. There were those, such as the members of the Khyrim State, who regarded the Syiems as gods, or at least as representatives of the gods. Their saying "ki Syiem ki blei" means "the Syiems, the gods". According to the folklores and myths of the Khyrim people, it was believed that the Syiems were of divine origin.¹⁴ The traditional god of the Syiem's people

14. Rafy, *Khasi Folk Tales* (First published 1920, reprinted, 1985), p. 23. Hereinafter cited as Rafy.

was U 'Lei Shyllong, that is, the Shillong God. The origin of the ruling clan was traced to Ka Pahsyntiew, the daughter of U 'Lei Shyllong.¹⁵ The Syiem's Durbar (State Durbar) was known as the god's durbar (Ka Dorbar blei). Consequently the chief was traditionally revered and his words were regarded as the words of god. Hence his subjects could only obey, never question his orders. The chief was believed to have supernatural powers, including healing powers. Subject suffering from illness would go to the Syiem who through prayer and the burning of hair would drive away the demons. In this sense the Syiem was regarded as an agent of salvation from the demons and had strong religious sanction.

The significance of this understanding of the relationship of the chief to the divine was embodied in the concept of Ka Sad Ka Sunon. It indicates the belief of the people that the state was formed not simply by social contract but by divine sanction.

R.S. Lyngdoh writes that,

This institution (i.e., 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 deal of Khasi religion.¹⁶

The concept of Ka Sad Ka Sunon did contribute to a sense of solidarity among the people of the Khyrim State, but it was unable to contribute to a sense of solidarity among all the Khasi-Jaintia people. The first reason for this limitation is that it exalted one state, implying that all others were subordinate to it. This contradicted the general understanding of the people as a whole. The nine above (a transcendent world) and the seven below (the seven huts on earth) of the concept, i.e., of Ka Sad Ka Sunon,

15. Raby, pp. 22-30.

16. The material aspect represents the royal house "Ka lingsad lingsunon". See in S. K. Chattopadhyaya, ed., *Tribal Situation of Meghalaya* (1985), p. 6.

strictly did not operate beyond the boundaries of the one state. No representative from any other state was involved in any of its functions. The very concept of the divine sanction of a particular state in fact acted as a barrier to solidarity among all the states.

(ii) *U Syiem U Kmie*. Literally, *U Syiem u kmie* means "the Syiem, the mother". The Cherrapunji State described its chief as the mother. This relates the chieftainship to the matrilineal system. In Khasi-Jaintia society the mother is always supposed to remain with her children. The father may leave them, but not the mother. The mother's duties are to care for the children, feeding and protecting them, teaching them the basic customs/laws of *ka tipkur tipkha* (literal meaning: "know mother's clan, know father's clan"), loving and suffering for them and being impartial in their upbringing. In the Cherrapunji State it is these responsibilities and qualities that were associated with the Syiem in his relationship with his people.

(iii) *U Syiem U Mraw*. In contrast to the understandings of the chief ranging from that of divine origin to one having the positive, caring qualities of a mother which have been described above, the people of Mawiang State, including at least part of Mawsynram, described the position of chief as a degraded one. He was described as "a slave", and the position as constituting "slavery". In fact those clans that should rightly have had the chief chosen from among them rejected the right. It was regarded as tainting the clans because they would have to share the taboos of other clans. There seems thus to have been a concept of the religious purity of the higher clans that was behind this. Or it may simply have been that given the low esteem in which the chief was held, they did not want to bear the heavy social responsibility of the position. Another factor may have been that the chiefs were made the scapegoats for anything that went wrong. In fact, none of the clans wanted to assume this responsibility, with the result that the position came to be taken over by outsiders. The Mawiang State appointed a non-Khasi to the office of chief.¹⁷

17. Nonglait, *Ki Syiem*, p. 184.

Thus the concept of U Syiem, from the most exalted to the most debased, did not contribute to the development of a sense of Khasi-Jaintia solidarity.

c. *Warfare.* That the traditional political system did not create tribal unity is made quite evident in the facts that inter-state (and intra-tribal) warfare was very common. Territorial expansionism and enmity among the states led to a constant state of warfare. Members of other Khasi-Jaintia states were regarded with suspicion as outsiders. While they made a distinction in the names used to identify them between the people of the plains, called *ki dkhar*, and those from other Khasi-Jaintia states, called *ki khun soh syiem*, there was no difference in the way they were treated. When people from neighbouring states came to their markets they had to pay toll, and they were referred to as the people from outside (*Ki briew kiba nabar* or *ki nongwei*). It is not possible to know if the average villager always had this attitude of suspicion about people from other states, but the political system certainly re-enforced a sense of alienation. It isolated the people not only from the plains but also from each other.

When the British entered upon the affairs of the Khasi-Jaintia area the fragmented nature of the traditional political system became apparent in their inability to put up a united resistance. The Anglo-Khasi War (1824-1833) was fought between U Tirot Sing of Khadsawphra State and his allies against the British.¹⁸ The Chief called the other Khasi states to join him but there was no unanimous response. Some supported, some abstained, and a few allied themselves with the British.¹⁹ Clearly there was no unity, no practical realization of the "spirit of the seven huts". Each state acted independently in terms of traditional relationships and what were perceived to be its own interests. When Sngap

18. R. B. Pemberton, *The Eastern Frontier of India* (First published 1835, reprinted, 1966), pp. 231-43. Hereinafter cited as Pemberton. See also U. H. Barch, *U. Tirot Singh* (1984), pp. 46-53. Hereinafter cited as Barch, *U. Tirot*.

19. A. Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India* (First published 1884, reprinted, 1979), p. 238. Hereinafter cited as Mackenzie, *North East*. Cf. Barch, *Khasi People*, pp. 145-57.

Sing of Maharam State continued the struggle no one came to his side²⁰. In the Jaintia area U Kiang Nangbah had to fight alone with his Jaintia allies, betrayed by his own people.²¹

This makes it clear that there was no political cohesion, no sense of a common interests or of common identity. This again re-enforces the conclusion that whatever it was that contributed ultimately to a sense of Khasi-Jaintia identity it did not lie in the traditional political structures.

(3) **Language.** Language is generally an important factor in creating a sense of common identity among a people. Again, as in the case of traditional political structures, language did not serve this purpose in the Khasi-Jaintia area. The twenty-nine small states did not have a standard language understood by all. Each state had its own dialect, largely unintelligible to other dialectical groups. This was the situation when the British first entered the affairs of the region. Nevertheless there was a belief among the people that at one time they had a single language. This is expressed in their folklore. Here we will investigate the pre-modern role of spoken language, for the purpose of determining to what extent language contributed to the sense of common identity.

a. *Folklore.* Prior to the middle of the nineteenth century language was spoken, not written. There are a number of folk tales that suggest the contribution of language to a sense of common identity. We will here consider two of them. "The Seven Huts of Ancient Days" (Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep) and "The Cavern" (Ka Krem Lamet Ka Krem Latang).

*The Seven Huts of Ancient Days.*²² In the beginning God created sixteen huts (or families). They lived together, stayed

20. Bareh, *U. Tirot*, p. 139.

21. Bareh, *Khasi People*, p. 184.

22. R. T. Rymbai, "Some Aspects of the Religion of the Khasi Pnars" in U. Hipshon Roy, ed., *Khasi Heritage: A Collection of Essays on Khasi Religion and Culture* (1979), pp. 110-11. Hereinafter cited as Rymbai "Aspects".

together and worked together between heaven above and earth below. All sixteen families including God himself spoke one language. Heaven above and earth below were connected by a tree which served as a ladder for communication. The tree was situated at the peak called *U Lum Sohpetbneng* (the navel of heaven). When seven of the families were on the earth below, the evil one cut the tree, thereby severing physical contacts between heaven and earth. Communication was broken. The nine families remaining above could no longer come down to the earth, and the seven below could not go up to heaven any more. However, in order to maintain the relationship, God in heaven gave three commandments: *tipkur tipkha* (know clan, know father's clan); *tiplei tipbriew* (know God, know man); and *kamai ia ka hok* (earn righteousness). Following these commandments the families below lived in solidarity, speak one understandable language and work together in unity. Thus despite being cut off, the seven families below and the nine families above were in solidarity due to the one spoken language.

*The Cavern.*²³ It was reported that once upon a time when all the creatures in this world were honest and spoke only one language, the thanks-giving dance was arranged. Each and every creature came to participate in the dance, dressed in gorgeous attire as befitted the occasion. The dance continued for the whole day and by late afternoon the crowd began to disperse. Just then the Sun and the Moon, a sister and brother, arrived to participate in the dance. There was really nothing wrong with their steps, but in spite of that there was a greater uproar of scornful laughter because a sister and brother were dancing together. The sun was overcome with shame and fled to the cavern (*Ka Krem Lamet Ka Krem Latang*). Immediately the whole world was enveloped in darkness. Though the story speaks about the fall of humankind, it nevertheless indicates the solidifying role of a spoken language in the primal Khasi-Jaintia community.

These two folk stories tell us that language was a unifying factor. Everybody could speak and understand through a com-

23. H.O. Mawrie, *Ka Pyrkhath U Khasi* (1973), p. 12. It was subsequently translated into English as *The Khasi Milieu* (1981).

mon language. The language enabled people to communicate with each other and with God, therefore it also had religious significance. Even today the Khasi-Jaintia people tell the story of "The Seven Huts of Ancient Days". The idea of those ancient golden days still influences the beliefs of the people. They look back to the days when one language bound them in solidarity. Thus language functioned both at the social and religious levels.

These folk stories do not say anything about division among the people. There is no suggestion of dialectical variation of sub-ethnic identities. The seven huts represented solidarity, the spoken language brought all families under one roof. It represented equality, justice, peace, understanding and divine commandments that are passed on from generation to generation. The community of the seven huts was a sharing and worshipping community.

Language not only bound the people into a single community, but was a factor in religious community. Hamlet Barch notes that,

Khasi religion is both theistic and animistic though in the beginning it was apparently monotheistic. Traditions maintain that at first God-creator (U Blei Nongthaw) alone was worshipped. But later on it was polluted with animistic beliefs.²⁴

The reference to the beginnings would suggest the time of the Seven Huts of Ancient Days when people believed in one God and there were no other deities. The people had a language in which they could communicate directly with God, thus linking the universality of religion with the universality of language. In light of later developments in relation to Christianity, this linkage of language and religion is especially significant.

But somewhere in the historical life of the Khasi-Jaintia people this primal unity was lost, and with it the potentially solidifying role of language as well as religion.

b. *The Role of Written Language.* Folk stories indicating that at one time there was a common written language indicate the

24. Barch, *Khasi People*, p. 355.

belief among the Khasi-Jaintias that at one time they were one people. They not only have common myths about their origins as a single community, but there are also stories about how they lost the written language they originally possessed.²⁵ While there are several different stories, the main point of each is the same. The first story was that a Khasi (U Khasi) and a plainsman (U Dkhar) each had an alphabet of their own. Caught on the other side of a river by a flood they decided to swim across. The Khasi, who took things lightly, did not give much attention to the script and simply kept it in his mouth while swimming. The plainsman, on the other hand, tied his script to his head with his turban. While swimming the Khasi's script got wet and finally he swallowed it, losing it forever. The plainsman who had taken greater care to preserve it was able to carry it safely to the other side. The second story is a variation of the first. The Khasi and the plainsman both carried their respective scripts in their mouths while crossing the river. Because the Khasi was talkative he could not keep his mouth closed, with the result that his script fell from his mouth and was carried away by the river. The third story says that the alphabet was written on the bark of a tree at Nongkseh (a village near Shillong). The piece of bark on which the alphabet was written was reduced to ash by a fire and hence lost forever. Like the stories of a common spoken language, these stories of a lost written language indicate the belief that at one time the people were one. A written language is an important factor in strengthening a sense of solidarity among the people.

Similarly the stories of the loss of a written language signify a loss of identity. Firstly, the loss of the alphabet was equivalent to losing one's *rngiew*. This is a word without a precise English equivalent. Broadly it refers to the inner human personality and power which determines the success of human development. If the *rngiew* is lost, a people may continue to exist but will remain of no account—unfortunate, insignificant, unsuccessful, timid and insecure. In other words, the total personality of distinctive identity is affected.

25. H. Bareh, *A Short History of the Khasi Literature* (1979), p. 14. Hereinafter cited as Bareh, *Khasi Literature*.

The loss of the alphabet resulted in the loss of the Khasi-Jaintia *rngiew*, the loss of their identity. The image of the people was degraded and the inner binding force, the spiritual power that brought them unity, was lost with the result that they were divided into numerous factions. Thus the idea of a written script was extremely important to the Khasi-Jaintia sense of identity and self-worth.

Secondly, the loss of the alphabet had the effect of keeping the people in a primitive state of existence, perpetual infancy. This is described with the expression *ki la sah khymnah*, that is, "They who have remained children". It is usually applied to children who were orphaned, without parents to feed them or even uncles to look after them. In this stage the children do not know the kinship code, family religious code or the code of economic justice.

The loss of the written language was thus perceived to have shaken the defences of their existence, because it is the parents who are responsible for teaching kinship consciousness. It was the uncles who gave a sense of direction, leadership and management. The loss of the written language orphaned the community and made it weak, impotent and helpless.

The loss of the alphabet also affected adversely communication with god. In the Khasi-Jaintia mythology U Biskorom was a messenger of God. He participated in the creation of the earth. The effect of the loss of the script on communication with the deity is thus described in popular folklore :

U Biskorom is said to have persuaded men to make a great kite which would carry him back to heaven. He promised to write all the knowledge which he had not yet imparted to them upon the kite, which they could then pull back to earth. But he was incensed with men for their unholy wish to learn the secret of imparting life to clay images, so he wrote instructions on the kite, but when it returned to earth the men found that they could not read what was written on it.²⁶

26. N. C. Shadap-Sen, *The Origin and Early History of the Khasi-Synteng People* (1981), pp. 212-13. Hereinafter cited as Shadap-Sen. See also Rafy, p. 57.

Hence communication with God as well as among themselves was affected. Not only could the people not write, but neither could they read divine message. They now had no way of knowing God's instructions for their welfare. There was thus a close connection between the tradition of a written language and Khasi-Jaintia religion.

c. *Dialectical Variations.* We have seen how the Khasi-Jaintia people attributed the fragmentation of their identity to the loss of a written language. Certainly by the early nineteenth century they were linguistically fragmented and language could not contribute to a common sense of identity. This was clear to the British Administrators and Christian missionaries when they first came into contact with the people. As the first writer to do a systematic study of the Khasis, P.R.T. Gurdon, put it :

The inhabitants of the Khasi and Jaintia hills may be said to be divided into the following sections : Khasi, Synteng or Pnar, War, Bhoi and Lyngngam. These divisions represent collections of people inhabiting several tracts of country and speaking dialects which, although often deriving their origin from the Khasi roots, are frequently dissimilar to the standard language as to be almost unrecognizable.²⁷

Thus, though the total Khasi-Jaintia population prior to the arrival of the British was less than two lakhs they were divided into more than 29 different dialectical groups (since some of the states, like the Jaintia State, had more than one dialect). These dialectical differences were so great as to functionally constitute separate languages. As Hamlet Bareh writes,

...Some dialects located on the southern border such as Amwi, as well as Nongstoin and Lyngngam on the west, and Bhoi Jirang on the north, are more different from others in respect of morphology, phonology as in syntax and grammar. They are not mutually intelligible with others.²⁸

27. *The Khasis* (First published 1907, reprinted 1987), p. 62. Hereinafter cited as Gurdon.

28. *The Language and Literature of Meghalaya* (1977), p. 41.

The political divisions were a major factor contributing to the development of distinctive dialects. Each dialect was an official dialect. The dialect helped build a sense of solidarity in the state, but had the opposite effect for the people as a whole. Dialectical difference based on the political system was indicative of the division of the people. This re-enforced the perception of people from other states as being "outsiders" rather than fellow members of a common tribe. This in turn contributed to intra-tribal conflict. It also re-enforced the idea that developed in some states that they were superior to the members of other states—a kind of class idea. So strong were these feelings that the members of each state tended to regard themselves as a distinctive ethnic group, disapproving of marriage between its members and members of other states.²⁹

It is clear that by the time the British appeared on the scene language was not a contributing factor to a sense of tribal identity for the Khasi-Jaintia people.

(4) Religion. Religion is an important agency of identity among a people. The traditional story of "The Seven Huts of Ancient Days" suggests that the Khasi-Jaintias believed that at one time religion had been a unifying factor. But in time that religious unity was fragmented. By the early nineteenth century religion was no longer a significant factor contributing to their identity.

a. *The Tradition of a Single Religion.* Was there ever a Khasi-Jaintia religion without scriptures, places of worship or creed but which brought them together in the corporate worship of one God? While some traditions suggest that there was, by modern times it had ceased to exist. By the time that the British and Christian missionaries entered the area there was no uniformity in their manner of worship, in performing the rituals or in the adoration of their several deities. The religious system was in essence family religion. It had connection only within the sub-

29. P. K. Das Gupta, "Marriage among the War Khasi", *Man in India*, 44.2 (April-June 1964), p. 51.

clan (*ka kpoh*) and, to some extent, the clan which bore the same family name. The heiress was the keeper of religion. She arranged the necessary elements for the family rituals and her brother or maternal uncle served as priest. He was the one that actually performed all the rituals, including sacrifices and prayers. The husband/father, by virtue of belonging to another clan was not permitted to function as priest. This demonstrates the extent to which Khasi-Jaintia religion was family/clan based. It did not extend to others. This was strengthened by the prominence given to the generation of ancestors (family/clan ancestors) in their religion. Some clans had their own deities, such as *U Thlen*, *Ka Shwar*, and *Ka Taro*. Members of one family/clan, did not participate in religious observances with members of other families/clans. In fact, if members of one clan were found to have worshipped one of these deities would be shunned, banished and their possessions and houses burned. The nature of worship and the understanding of deity were both clan-centred and consequently narrow. Religion at this time did not contribute to tribal solidarity.

b. *Different Belief Systems*. The religious system of the Khasi-Jaintia states was different. In the first place, the understandings of the religious sanction of the chieftainship differed and, in any event, the religious functions at the state level never extended beyond its boundaries. The understanding and practice of religion differed in the 29 states. They can be identified as consisting of at least four types, each incompatible with the other.

(i) *Religion of Strict Observance (State Religion)*. The first type of religious practice was one in which emphasis was placed upon the strict observance of the rituals and taboos. Any violation would lead, it was believed, to severe consequences for the community. The religion of Cherrapunji state is an example. Religion was part of the institution of the Durbar Hima, a representative of a noble clan, Nongrum, being assigned responsibility for religious affairs. He was in effect the Durbar priest. The succession to the throne required a series of rituals, including the cremation of the dead chief, which had to be done in strict accordance with religious tradition. The chief and the priest were the joint keepers of religion. If either converted to another religion they lost state powers.

This was part of a religious system traditionally called *Ka Niam iap* (literally : "The Religion of the Dead"). The royal and priestly families were expected to take the religion seriously, and to know well the customary laws related to the Durbar Hima. They were expected to strictly observe the sacrifices and offering of required prayers. If for any reason they did not know precisely how something should be done, it was thought better, to be on the safe side, that they not do it at all. If a thing were done improperly the royal and priestly families would be adversely affected by weakness, illness and premature death. In this system religion was ritualistic and the gods feared. The gods did not tolerate those who took religion lightly and ignorance of the proper ways would lead to extinction.

(ii) *Ritualistic but Forgiving Religion (State Religion)*. A different kind of state religion was practised by the ruling house of Khyrim State. As in Cherrapunji State, religion was connected with the state. There too people could not think of the state apart from its religious sanction. The Syiem Sad, the eldest sister of the chief, was the keeper of religion. The chief, nobles and representatives of the villages participated in the state religion. Apart from their belief in the one great God, the lesser deity important to the state was *U'Lei Shyllong* (The Shillong God). While the religious practice of the state was ritualistic, it was not thought that those responsible would be severely punished for mistakes made in religious conduct. Their god was more forgiving. The state was responsible for trying its best to carry out the traditional religious customs, but it did not matter if they were conducted without proper knowledge.

(iii) *Religion Independent of the State*. Many Khasi states like Maharam, Mawiang and others, do not appear to have related religion to the state. In these states, religion was a family and clan affair. The state simply dealt with civil matters, maintaining peace and justice among its citizens.

(iv) *Sanskritized Religion*. In the Jaintia area there was a certain amount of sanskritization.³⁰ The Syiem/Raja himself had

30. E. Gait, *A History of Assam* (First published 1905, reprinted, 1981), pp. 259-68. Hereinafter cited as Gait.

been converted to Hinduism and sought to introduce deities and temples of that religion among his people. Most of the Jaintias did not follow the new religion, but it had its influence upon them in various ways. Human sacrifices is said to have been one evidence of this. In general, however, religion among the Jaintias was not a state affair but was confined to the villages.

Hence, it is clear that in the early nineteenth century there was no single religion or religious practice that unified the Khasi-Jaintia people. Essentially a family/clan religion, even where it had a state dimension this was limited to that state and did not extend to the whole people. Religion was exclusive rather than inclusive. It certainly did not provide a basis of tribal solidarity.

c. *Festival.* The best known traditional festivals of the Khasi-Jaintias were *Ka Pomblang Nongkrem*, *Ka Behdien Khlam*, and *Ka Thang Syiem Sohra*.³¹

(i) *Ka Pomblang Nongkrem.* The Pomblang Nongkrem was a festival of the Nongkrem or Khyrim state involving the sacrifice of a goat to the Shillong deity.³² It was arranged by the Syiem Sad (priestess) in consultation with the chief and State Durbar. It was one of the grand festivals of the state in which the people participated through their representatives. It normally took place in the autumn and was conducted annually.

(ii) *Ka Behdien Khlam.* The Behdien Khlam was a religious festival of the people of Jowai in the Jaintia area.³³ It was conducted annually in the summer. Like the *Pomblang Nongkrem*, it

31. For a recent study of Khasi-Jaintia Festivals see M.P.R. Lyngdoh, *The Festivals in the History and Culture of the Khasi*. (1991). Hereinafter cited as Lyngdoh, *Festivals*.

32. For a detailed account of the Pomblang Nongkrem see H. Lyngdoh Nonglait, *Ka Pomlang Nongkrem bad ka Thang Syiem Sohra* (1928); P. Bonardi, "Heathen worship amongst the Khasi Hills of Assam" *The Salesian Bulletin*, XVII.5 (September-October 1925), pp. 146-49.

33. See R. T. Rymbai, "Behdien Khlam", in U Hipshon Roy, ed. *Khasi Heritage*, pp. 139-45.

was localized involving only the people of Jowai, not even all the Jaintias.³⁴

(iii) *Ka Thang Syiem Sohra*. The Thang Syiem Sohra was the cremation ceremony for the Cherrapunji Chief.³⁵ Traditionally the successor was responsible for making arrangements for it before joining duty with the Durbar Hima. The cremation process was a lengthy affair, involving preparation and performance in accordance with traditional procedures. The new chief also had to meet all expenses of the participants. Normally, it was a grand function with nobles and village representatives present.

In each case the festivals were limited to a particular state and thus played no role in creating a sense of tribal solidarity.³⁶

d. *Different Deities*. The purpose here is not to discuss the complexity of traditional Khasi-Jaintia religion, ranging from its alleged theistic roots to its more animistic manifestations, but to examine the way in which the plurality of deities functioned with respect to tribal solidarity. Deities here means those objects to which people paid homage, offered devotion and made sacrifices. Some were seen, some were unseen (what Shadap-Sen calls demonalatry),³⁷ some were major, some were minor. In his book *social and State Formations in Khasi-Jaintia Hills*, Soumen Sen enu-

34. While the Tubers—(Jaintia) on the Northern Jaintia hills celebrate a different Behdien Khlam festival, the Wars on the southern slope of the region maintain their own localised religious ceremonies.

35. H. Lyngdoh Nonglait, *Ka Niam Khasi* (1937), pp. 202-24. Hereinafter cited as Nonglait, *Ka Niam*.

36. Cf. Lyngdoh, *Festivals*. While Lyngdoh's thorough study of the Khasi Festivals is based upon an assumption that festivals act as an "integrating force for the (Khasi) community," (p. 9) in addition to providing entertainments and social festivities, she has nevertheless found out that the actual practices of the various festivals (pp. 101-141) have proved otherwise and so has concluded even against her basic working hypothesis thus, "all festivals under study are localised in particular area and places, and there is no common festival (for all the Khasi) that will bind the community as a whole like for example, the Bihu festival which is celebrated by the Assamese people in our neighbouring state of Assam." p. 202.

37. Shadap-Sen, p. 214.

merates 15 deities, 9 female and 6 male.³⁸ But all of them were not worshipped by all Khasi-Jaintias. This again indicates the fragmentary nature of the traditional religion.

U Thlen, *Ka Shwar*, *Ka Taro* were familiar deities—worshipped by the families that rear them. *U Thlen* (a Python) is also sometimes known as a black cat, fish, etc., *Ka Shwar* was reared by the *Khasis*, and *Ka Taro* by the Jaintias. These were secret deities worshipped by certain families. They are reputed to suck human blood. Worshipped secretly, the object of rearing them was to gain wealth. The houses in which they are reared is secret, and if their presence is definitely discovered the whole village will destroy them and burn the houses, with the persons rearing them being ostracised. These deities do not suck non-Khasi-Jaintias blood. Such deities are certainly divisive in nature.

Ancestors worshipped and localized deities (such as the Shil-long God) were not worshipped by the entire people. Hence they did not constitute a unifying element.

e. *Lack of Social Concern.* The traditional Khasi-Jaintia religion was not oriented towards service to society. The purpose of its practice was limited to the interests of family, clan or at most in a limited way the state. A person would not give aid to a wounded person or have anything to do with the remains of one killed in an accident. It was believed that to do so would bring the same fate (*Ka tyrut*) on one's own family or clan. Help to the unfortunate could only be given after determining the omens by egg breaking or the sacrifice of a cock—but by the time this process was completed it may have been too late to save the person's life. Again, one must conclude that the traditional religion did not have within it concepts that would contribute to a sense of tribal solidarity.

(5) **Traditional Social Structures: Matriliney.** We have thus far seen that apart from geographical proximity and isolation, the political structures, language and religion did not contribute to

38. Published in 1985, p. 97.

wards a sense of tribal solidarity among the Khasi-Jaintia people in the pre-modern period. In fact they worked in the other direction, as divisive rather than unifying elements. Whatever sense of identity did exist was due to the fact that all the people shared a common, distinctive social system based on matriliney.

As indicated earlier, the *tipkur tipkha* is a socio-religious term meaning, literally, "know mother's clan, know father's clan".³⁹ It represents the basic sense of social integrity, but it was traditionally believed to be of divine origin, divine commandments.⁴⁰ The means of knowing the *tipkur tipkha* is the family (*ka iing*).

Family is the primary social unit in Khasi-Jaintia society, the *tipkur tipkha* rests upon the principle of *Ka Iawbei* (the ancestress), *U Thawlang* (the ancestor) and *U Saidnia* (the maternal uncle). The family basically consists of the children, father, mother and maternal uncle. Among the Jaintias and the Bhois the husband does not stay in the wife's house while he does elsewhere, yet the *tipkur tipkha* consciousness is found among them as in all sections of the people.

The *Iawbei* is the ancestress of the clan, the sub-clan and the family. She primarily functioned as the keeper of the home and the goddess of the house. She thus was also responsible for the family rituals. It is through her that the clan was believed to expand and hence she was the builder of community. She looks after the children. This reflects the role of the mother in the home, to which the children are more attached than to their father or uncle. She feeds them and looks after their welfare. The family depends upon the mother's wisdom. She also makes all necessary preparations for family religious rituals. Standing between the husband and uncle harmony in the family, the clan and the father's clan is dependent upon her wisdom. She is also held responsible for keeping the *tipkur tipkha* relationships, which means she must know all the relationships among the families in the clan as well as among the immediate relatives of her husband, especially the

39. Rymbai, "Aspects", pp. 112-14.

40. Ibid, p. 112.

mother of her husband. She instructs the children concerning these relationships with the purpose of avoiding the horror of incest.

U Saidnia is the *de jure* head of the family. He holds the deciding authority. The marriage of his nieces and nephews, questions of inheritance and the buying and selling of ancestral lands depend entirely on him. Without his consent no family function could take place. He acted also as family priest. He is therefore the protector, caretaker, defender, priest and legal head of the family, the sub-clan and the clan. As a father, he is the executive head of the wife's family.

U Thawlang, the ancestor, is the grandfather of the family. Having the status of a father he is never an outsider in his wife's family. He played an executive role. J. N. Choudhury may be right when he says,

the father should better be referred to as the executive head in contrast to the uncle being the *de jure* head.⁴¹

And as a grandfather, though his bones are preserved in his clan ossuary, he is revered by his wife and children. He is revered as one of the ancestors worshipped by a family. The significant role of *U Thawlang* is to expand the *tipkur tipkha* solidarity. Along with his wife, he establishes a strong foundation for the extended family on *tipkur tipkha* relations. He is responsible for providing the livelihood of the family. In certain areas, like the War area, a husband is looked down upon as "someone else's son", and among the Bhois and the Jaintias the husband does not stay in his wife's home. This does not minimize the importance of the *tipkur tipkha*. Whether he stays or not, once the marriage was publicly conducted and recognized, the relationship has been established.

In the clan the three persons upon which the family is based was the foundation of ancestor worship. While they were different for each family/clan, the concept of the triad, *tipkur tipkha*, was

41. *Khasi Canvas* (1978), p. 145.

basic to the social consciousness of all the Khasi-Jaintia people and constituted to a sense of common identity.

The *tipkur tipkha* thus brings together the mother's and the father's clans, each having its own role. Since the prohibition of intra-clan marriage as incest, the code of necessity ensures that there will develop a larger sense of kinship solidarity transcending the clan.

The *tipkur tipkha* was believed to have been one of three divine commands.⁴² It is thus a socio-religious creed on which the sanctity of social relationship is based. It was perceived as the meeting point of the human and divine. It was regarded as a sin to marry within the clan of the mother, and even close relations in the father's clan. Though a father's nephews, for instance, are permitted to marry his daughter this can only take place a year after his death. Those who violate the code are not simply looked upon as having broken human rules, but as having broken God's commands. They are outcaste and even their bones cannot be placed in the clan ossuary.

The quality of life is established by the *tipkur tipkha* code. All members of the related clans have responsibility for the welfare of the children of a family. Though the Khasi-Jaintias do not have the joint family system as far as living arrangements are concerned, family bonds and both physical and moral responsibilities are nevertheless very strong. All members are cared for in their need, including the orphaned and destitute. This is the basis of kinship solidarity. It is a mark of contempt to say that someone is "without clan (*khlem kur khlem jait*)". A family without a clan name (*Ka kyrteng jong ka jait*) is always in serious danger of falling into an unexpected unforgivable sin *ka shong sang*. That is the reason why the Khasi-Jaintias always maintain a special policy of identifying their respective clans with particular names.⁴³

⁴² The other two commandments as already indicated, are *kamai ia ka hok* (earn righteousness) and *tipbriew tipblei* (know man know god). See Rymbai, "Aspects", pp. 111-12.

⁴³ While paying due emphasis upon the name of a clan, the Khasi-Jaintias have thus far adopted a reverse policy of christening their

The *tipkur tipkha* is thus the foundation of Khasi-Jaintia society, and its primary basis for a sense of common identity as a people in the pre-modern period.

Nevertheless even this has its limits. While the *tipkur tipkha* prohibited marriage within the clan and thus theoretically opened up the possibility of kinship relationships being established throughout the tribe, in fact it tended to be limited, like other aspects of the peoples' life, by a feeling of ethnic difference within the tribe. These feelings were undoubtedly strengthened by dialectical and political barriers. It seems that the people preferred to marry from their own or neighbouring villages within the same state. While there was no caste system in the essentially egalitarian society, there were nevertheless elements of one group believing themselves superior to other groups. Those in the central area looked down upon others and used the names Synteng, Bhoi; Maram, Lyngngam as terms of derision. They were considered backward. This was accompanied by inter-marriage with such groups being discouraged. Such attitudes greatly weakened the sense of common identity.

II. RESPONSE TO AGENCIES OF CHANGE

(1) **Contact with Traders.** While the geographical features of the land inhabited by the Khasi-Jaintias isolated them from the outside world, there were some contacts. One of them was with traders. This was especially true of the people living on the southern slopes. Those inhabiting the War area had regular contact with the plains people through trade. There were goods produced in the Khasi-Jaintia area that were marketable on the plains. These included iron, eri, cotton, limestone, orange, betel nut, bay leaf and other natural products.⁴⁴ While the main com-

children. Though the process of giving names to children is normally associated with traditional religious rituals, it is however based upon an unfounded conventional policy of adopting names that sound sweet. The people do not pay any serious weightage upon the imposition of the first names upon their children because first names though have to go through a series of religious rituals, have nothing to do with the heinous socio-religious crime *ka shong sang*.

44. Allen, *Gazetteer*, pp. 70-78.

mercial contact were with their immediate neighbours in Sylhet, there is evidence that they also had contacts with more distant commercial centres.⁴⁵ While it may be assumed that such contacts affected the world-view of the people involved in the trade, there is no evidence that it led to any change in Khasi-Jaintia society as a whole.

(2) **Inter-Marriage.** While the trade contacts were limited to the southern edges of the region and hence understandably had little impact on society, the practice of inter-marriage between Khasi-Jaintias and outsiders would seem to be a potentially more important agency of change. There were some cases of Khasi-Jaintia women marrying plainmen, in which case they lost their clans status and so would have limited impact on society. Much more frequent was the practice of Khasi-Jaintia men marrying women from the plains.⁴⁶ These men brought the women to their own home, or that of their mother. It is not clear how this practice began or how they got the women. It is possible that they were part of the "loot" of the raids that the Khasi-Jaintia warriors frequently made on the plains.⁴⁷ But in such cases the society devised means of absorbing them. The children of such marriages constituted new clans which adopted the Khasi-Jaintia social codes. It has been estimated that such new clans which were the product of inter-marriage between Khasi-Jaintia men and plainswomen constituted as much as one third of the population.⁴⁸ The village of Sohryngkham had perhaps the largest concentration of these Dkhar clans, as they are called. Though the introduction of such a large number of outsiders into the society would normally be expected to bring about social change, in fact it does not seem to have done so. They were simply absorbed into the traditional

45. Mathur, *Khasi*, p. 24.

46. U Donrai, *Ka History Shaphang Ka Jingwallam Nyngkong eh ia ka Niam Khristan ha Kane Ka Ri Khasi—Jaintia Da Ka Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Lane Ka Presbyterian Church of Wales* (First published 1914, revised ed. 1956). Hereinafter cited as Donrai.

47. Gurdon, p. 66.

48. T. Rodborne, *U Khasi* (1977), pp. 174-214. Hereinafter cited as Rodborne, *Khasi*.

culture, adopting its language, religious customs and the matrilineal system.

(3) Contacts with Hinduism. The commercial and marital/contacts between the Khasi-Jaintias and the plains people also brought them into contact with Hinduism. This was especially true in the War and Jaintia areas. It is said that the Jaintia chief appointed Hindu (and Muslim) officials to assist him in the administration of the state. Some states like Khyrim, Myllem and Cherrapunji also had Hindu subjects in the plains areas into which their jurisdictions extended. They would travel to those area periodically to collect revenues due. Even the chief of Mawiang was a non-Khasi. Nevertheless these contacts with Hinduism do not seem to have led to any significant changes taking place in these Khasi states. They did not "borrow" Hindu deities or ways of worship.

The one exception to this was the Jaintia chief. Jaintia contacts with Hinduism had extended over a long period of time before the British annexation in 1835. The Jaintia chief, in fact, was converted to Hinduism, adopted a Hindu way of life, introduced Hindu deities and even shifted his capital to Jaintiapur in the plains area. His plains possessions were extensive, extending all the way to Sylhet town. He transformed Nartiang into a Hindu village where temples were built and Hindu priests were resident. Human sacrifices were offered to the goddess Kali. But in the hill areas at least none of the people followed their chief in adopting Hinduism.

Though Hinduism was not a missionary religion at least in the pre-colonial Khasi-Jaintia hills, nevertheless an important question is, why did the Jaintia people not follow their chief into Hinduism, but maintained their traditional primal faith? This question cannot be answered with certainty on the basis of available evidence, though it is likely that the reason lies in the fundamental differences between the Hindu and traditional Jaintia culture.⁴⁹

49. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. VIII : Second ed. (1989), pp. 174-75. See also D. L. Snaitang, "Ki Jaintia bad Ka Niam Hindu", *Ka Surphira*, 1.20 (October 17-23, 1989), p. 5.

a. *Matriliney.* Jaintia society was founded, as we have seen, on a kinship code, *tipkur tipkha*, that was matrilineal. Believed to have been divinely instituted it was the single most important element in the Jaintia identity. If this institution were abolished, the whole social structure would crumble. Since the plains Hindu societies were patriarchal in character, the conversion of a numerically small group to that religion would have meant adopting its social system and losing their own identity.

b. *Caste.* Another factor that would have made conversion to Hinduism difficult was the caste system⁵⁰ with its taboos on diet like beef. Not only was this in contradiction with the egalitarian nature of Jaintia society, but it would also have involved assimilation into the majority plains social system.

It is possible that the Jaintia chief was converted to Hinduism because he gained certain advantages in doing so, including control over large tracts of fertile revenue producing lands in the plains. It is equally probable that his subjects in the hills did not follow his example because they gained no similar advantage. In due course more change might have taken place in the hills, but the arrival of the British and the annexation of the Jaintia area intervened. In the Khasi areas the general isolation and the absence of any outside power attempting to impose its will upon them did not create a situation in which change through outside contacts was likely. Whatever contacts there were in the pre-nineteenth century were so limited that they could easily be resisted.

50. Hunter, *Assam*, p. 222.

3. AGENCIES OF CHANGE DURING THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

In the previous chapter we examined those features of the Khasi-Jaintia situation that might have contributed to the series of common tribal identity in the pre-British period, as well as trying to discover to what extent the people had been subjected to change from outside contacts in that same period. The conclusion was reached that there was in fact not a strong sense of common identity, the political structures, linguistic divisions, and religion tending to contribute towards solidarity only up to the level of the many small Khasi-Jaintia states but not beyond. Geographic proximity combined with isolation from the outside contributed to a sense of identity, but not to any significant extent. The only common bond the people as a whole had was distinctive kinship code, but even that tend to operate more at the state than the tribal level. It was also concluded that while the main body of the people were isolated from outside influences for change, even in those areas where the outside contacts were more extensive—as in the War and Jaintia areas—there is no evidence of significant social or religious change having taken place as a result. In brief, the people had strongly resisted major change during their pre-British history.

This makes what happened in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries all the more remarkable. Now outsiders, in the form of British administrators and Christian missionaries, were responsible for creating a situation in which major social changes began to take place. The question to which this chapter seeks an answer is: why, after having resisted change for all of their previous history, were the Khasi-Jaintia now so subject to it? There were three main agencies of change during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: British administration, new contacts with Hinduism and Christian missions.

I. BRITISH ADMINISTRATION

(1) **The Beginnings.** At the time the British East India Com-

pany was given the revenue collecting authority over the province of Bengal (which include Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and parts of lower Assam) in 1765 the Khasi-Jaintia people were isolated and unknown to any in the outside world except their immediate neighbours.¹ The British became aware of this tribal area after they have occupied Sylhet at the beginning of the nineteenth century. One thing that brought the Khasi-Jaintia people to their attention was their incessant raiding of plains villages.²

British administrative involvement in the North East began with the first Indo-Burmese war and the Treaty of Yandaboo that ended it in 1826.³ The war itself was due to the instability that existed in the North East at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Conflict between rival claimants to the Ahom throne, the then dominant power in the region, enabled the Burmese to occupy not only Assam but neighbouring Cachar and Manipur as well.⁴ The Burmese military rule from 1819 constituted something of a reign of terror. The people were victims not only of the Burmese armies, but also of raiding by the aggressive hill tribes in the region. Property was looted, people were captured and enslaved, and many left their homes to seek security in territories under British administration to the west.

Aggressive raiding into British territory, which at that time include the western portions of lower Assam as well as Sylhet in Bengal, by the Burmese armies led to the outbreak of war in 1824.⁵ The Rajas of Manipur and Jaintia supported the British forces and with their co-operation, particularly that of Manipur, the Burmese were defeated and forced to leave the area. The Treaty of Yandaboo, ending the war, was signed on 24 February 1826. By the provisions of the treaty the Burmese surrendered

1. Hunter, *Assam*, p. 205.

2. Mackenzie, p. 220.

3. B. C. Allen, et. al., *Gazetteer of Bengal and North East India* (First published 1905, reprinted, 1979), pp. 36-38. Hereinafter cited as Allen, *Bengal*. Cf. Mackenzie, pp. 3-4.

4. W. Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam* (First published 1841, reprinted, 1979), pp. 158-79.

5. Allen, *Bengal*, pp. 37-38.

all claims to Manipur, Assam, Cachar and Jaintia.⁶ In their place the British now claimed sovereignty over most of the North East.

(2) The Annexation and Control of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Initially the British had no interest in extending their political and administrative control over the hill areas, except to the extent necessary to maintain stability. In large part this was because expenditures for administering those areas would have far exceeded revenues. Why then did they eventually adopt a policy of annexing and controlling the Khasi-Jaintia area? There are several reasons. First, the tribes were warlike and accustomed to raiding the plains villages, now within British territory.⁷ This threatened the interests of the new government as it tried to re-establish stability in the area. Second, the British wanted to establish direct communications between Sylhet and the Brahmaputra valley through the Khasi hills.⁸ Third, they were interested in establishing "sanatorium" (health stations) for their personnel in the hills.⁹

The extensive raiding by Khasi-Jaintias on the plains of Bengal to the south of their hill led the British to adopt and seek to enforce Regulation No. 1. of 1799.¹⁰ Its aim was to curb the frequent raids by the tribes. The supply of arms from the plains was prohibited, and non-tribes were not allowed to enter the hill areas with arms. They also sought to secure their interest through treaties with the Jaintia Raja (1824)¹¹ and with U Tirot Sing of Nongkhlaw State (1826).¹² Jaintia Raja gave permission for the construction of a road through his State, connecting Sylhet with Nowgong. David Scott, the Commissioner of Assam, was authorized to negotiate with the Khasi chiefs to secure the right of way

6. Mackenzie, p. 4. See also Gait, *Assam*, p. 289.

7. Allen, *Bengal*, p. 483.

8. R. M. Lahiri, *The Annexation of Assam 1824-1854* (First published 1954, reprinted, 1975), p. 74.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-3.

10. Bareh, *Khasi People*, p. 137.

11. C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, And Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries* Vol. I (1892), p. 219. Hereinafter cited as Aitchison.

12. Aitchison, p. 224.

for a road through the hills connecting Sylhet with Guwahati.¹³ When David Scott asked U Tirot Sing for permission to build the road the Nongkhlaw State Durbar passed a resolution in favour of the project. Among other things, the treaty,

required the Rajah to allow free passage of the Company's troops in this country, to furnish materials and attend to repairing works in connection with the road, and to place himself under British protection against a foreign enemy.¹⁴

The road construction started in 1828. The British brought soldiers as well as labourers from the plains for the work. The presence of aliens came to be seen as a threat to the indigenous people and their traditional power. In less than a year relations became strained. This led to the incident in which two British officers were killed in 1829 and David Scott himself narrowly escaped to Cherrapunji through Mawphlang.¹⁵ This led to a war against the British which was finally crushed when the Nongkhlaw chief was captured in 1833.¹⁶ One account suggests that the Nongkhlaw massacre was caused by a foolish statement made by a Bengali chupprasee that the British would impose taxes on the Khasis.¹⁷ The oral accounts of the local people, however, suggest that the reason was because the lower ranks of the British party looked down on the Nongkhlaw people and took away goods on sale at the market place without payment.¹⁸ The Khasis in the service of the Company were mistreated and the people in general were oppressed. Though the Nongkhlaw rebellion was put down in 1833, resistance continued in Maharam under the leadership of U Sngap Sing Syiem.¹⁹ The war ended after the Chief

13. N. K. Barooah, *David Scott in North-East India 1801-1831* (1970), p. 193. Hereinafter cited as Barooah.

14. Barch, *Khasi People*, p. 141.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

16. Mackenzie, p. 140.

17. Allen, *Bengal*, p. 483.

18. Barch, *Khasi People*, p. 142.

19. H. K. Barpujari, *Problem of the Hill Tribes in North-East Frontier 1822-42*, Vol. I (1979), pp. 138-40. Hereinafter cited as Barpujari, *Hill Tribes*.

surrendered and made a treaty with the British in 1839.²⁰ After that the most powerful Khasi chiefs were subdued and their territories controlled, the control of the remaining states was just a matter of time.

The Jaintia rebellion put additional pressure on the British in the hills. Earlier the Jaintia Raja had supported the British in the war against the Burmese and had approved the construction of a road through his State connecting Sylhet with Nowgong. But he was to get into trouble due to the practice of human sacrifice at the Kali temple in Jaintiapur. In 1832, four British subjects were kidnapped for the purpose of these sacrifices.²¹ One of them escaped to tell the tale.²² This act of the Hinduised Jaintia devotees enraged the British, especially since the Raja had previously been warned by them to discontinue the practice.²³ In this the British demanded that the culprits should be handed over to them. When the Raja refused, the British annexed his territories in the plains and brought an end to the hereditary Syiems-ship among the Jaintias.²⁴ Under Capt. Jenkins, who had replaced David Scott as Commissioner of Assam, the possessions of the Raja in Jaintiapur and the plains were confiscated on 23rd February 1835.²⁵ The Jaintia State was eventually declared a British territory.

But the hill Jaintias continued to resist. An armed conflict in 1835 was quickly suppressed, but an uprising in 1860 continued for three years before it could be suppressed. The causes of the Jaintia rebellions can be thus described: the demolition of the traditional political institutions; confiscation of the traditional ancestral property of the Syiems' families, prohibition of cremation near the police station at Jowai; the imposition of house taxes and stamp duties; the taking of the census; the replacement of the life-long tenure of the Dolois by a term system; the arrogant attitude of the British officials; police interference at the

20. Aitchison, p. 259.

21. Pemberton, p. 221.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

24. Hunter, *Assam*, p. 206.

25. Barpujari, *Hill Tribes*, p. 97.

dancing festival on 28 December, 1858 ; and the confiscation of the weapon used for the festival.²⁶

While the Jaintia, Sohbar, Muliang, Nongpoh and many villages of the Khasi hills were made British territory, the Company saw the inadequacies of the previous treaties with the Khasi chiefs. Hence sanads were introduced in 1857 which were in effect amended treaties with more clauses incorporated.²⁷ The sanads gave ultimate power to the British authorities with respect to judicial, administrative, legislative and executive affairs. The ownership of minerals and raid lands was now ceded to the British. The sanads reduced the status of the chiefs too, in the words of V. V. Rao, "messenger boys".²⁸

Thus during the nineteenth century the Khasi-Jaintia hills were brought under British administration. For the first time in their history the people were subjected to an alien administration the centre of political power of which was outside the area. The whole area was ruled and divided into two distinctive administrative classes. The Jaintia State and areas of the Khasi hills were declared British area and formed into a separate district called "The Khasi and Jaintia Hills District", under the supervision of a Deputy Commissioner and Sub-Divisional Officers. The remaining 25 Khasi states were classed as "native states" and placed under the jurisdiction of the Deputy Commissioner in his dual role as Political Officer. Inevitably this imposition of an alien administration had tremendous impact on the people unlike anything they had previously experienced.

(3) The impact of British Rule. We have seen that the control and annexation of the Khasi-Jaintia hills was gradually done over a period of time in the nineteenth century. The isolation of the area was ended and the traditional independent political structures were brought under a comprehensive central administration.

26. Mackenzie pp. 241-42. Cf. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 146.

27. V. Venkata Rao, *Century of Tribal Politics in North East India, 1874-1974* (1976), p. 33. Hereinafter cited as Rao, *Century*.

28. Rao, *Century*, p. 35.

Furthermore, the area was connected with a larger Indian administrative structure. British and Indian officials moved into the region as administrators and to exploit the region economically. The tribal world was shaken to its foundations.

In his analysis of this situation in North East India in general, F.S. Downs, describes the what he called the "traumatic change consequent upon British annexation", as follows :

—the subjection of the tribes to an external political authority for the first time in their history ;

—the introduction of an alien administrative and judicial system and the imposition of entirely new principles of authority and jurisprudence ;

—the introduction of a money economy and consumer goods such as mill cloth and kerosine lanterns which undermined the largely self-sufficient economies of the tribes and created new concepts of wealth ;

—the development of modern communications, including a postal system, roads and new forms of transport ;

—bringing in many outsiders—administrators, clerks, soldiers, merchants, technicians and missionaries—who provided new life-style models, particularly in the town areas that grew up around the administrative centres ; and

—the imposition of laws that seriously affected traditional institutions.²⁹

The impact was even greater in the Khasi-Jaintia hills than in other regions of the North East because the provincial capital was established in 1874—in Shillong.³⁰ Besides, the British introduced new housing models, which were perceived to be superior to the

29. Downs, "Tribal Response", pp. 408-409.

30. *Proceedings of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal*, General Department, Misc. (December 1864), p. 51. See also *Shillong Centenary Celebration : Souvenir* (1874-1974).

poorly ventilated traditional houses. In the Khasi area the cultivation of the potatoes was successfully introduced, as well as other crops such as peas. The British also brought in iron goods from Manchester and sold them at prices cheaper than those manufactured in the Khasi hills themselves, thus destroying the traditional iron-smelting industry.

The establishment of the provincial capital in Shillong initiated a process of urbanization unmatched in any other hills area of the North East. It led to an unprecedented influx of people from outside the district and state.³¹

While some of them were brought by the government to work in different offices, many had come for employment, education and trade.³² As a result there was a rapid growth of population in the town. From a little over 4,000 in 1881, the population of Shillong went up to 26,536 by 1931.³³ This phenomenal growth was attributed mainly to outsiders. This large alien population in their midst contributed significantly to rapid social change—and a crisis of identity. As the Census Report of 1931 put it :

The advent of an alien population in the midst of a comparatively small tribe like the Khasis may increase the revenue of the Syiems but is not likely to prove an advantage in the long run.³⁴

The introduction of a large alien population as well as an alien government, posed a threat to the traditional polity. The Syiems and their durbars became less important instruments of the new administration rather than autonomous as previously—even though it was not the Government's explicit intention to undermine traditional institutions.³⁵ The creation of the Shillong Municipality

31. *Census of India, 1931* Vol. III, Assam, Part I—Report (1932), p. 38.

32. Mathur, *Khasi*, p. 10.

33. *Census of India, 1931*, Vol. III (1932), p. 38.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

35. *Census of India, 1931* (1932), p. 45.

in 1923 entirely replaced the traditional political system of the Myllem state.

The sense of tribal or at least state autonomy was also undermined by the presence in Shillong of a cantonment with alien military personnel as well as the introduction of police. Both contributed to the awareness that the people were now ruled by outsiders, something that had never happened before. Their presence was a threat to the autonomy on which traditional Khasi-Jaintia or at least state level identity had been based. It certainly shattered the traditional world view which had been limited to a clan, village or state.

The introduction of modern modes of transportation and communication affected not only the traditional order but also the attitude and thought patterns of the people. As a monetary system replaced the traditional barter economy, urbanization brought new consumer goods, books, newspapers, clothing material and modern shops with their storehouses. These all contributed to a changed life style. Changes were also brought about by the introduction of new sports, construction of recreational centres like Ward Lake, parks, the golf links, play grounds, the race course and eventually, the cinema. The traditional world was turned upside down. The influence of the town of Shillong with its urbanization had significant impact on the village people as well who visited it from time to time.

The introduction of these new administrative structures and material goods had radical political, social, economic and cultural implications—potentially serious threat to the traditional way of life. In the traditional Khasi-Jaintia society all of these elements are closely intertwined. If one element was affected, the whole would be affected. All the above mentioned taken together led to traumatic change.

(4) The British and Christian Missions. Speaking of the substantial response to Christianity in the hill areas of the North East, F.S. Downs suggests that it was the

People's response, however unconscious, to the traumatic experience of being placed under British administration

and the consequent opening up to the region to the process of modernization which touched every facet of tribal life.³⁶

In the Khasi-Jaintia hills, the Welsh Mission arrived at a time when the whole area was brought under British administration. Christianity was therefore a participating agent in the changes that took place. As we shall deal at some length in the following chapter with the question of the role of Christianity in bringing about social change, the main concern here is to trace the relationship between the British Government and Christian Missions in the Khasi-Jaintia area.

Missionaries did not come to the area at the request of the government. Though Krishna Pal of the Serampore Mission who baptized the first Khasis in the foothill village of Pandua in 1813 worked there with the encouragement and protection of local British officers,³⁷ he was sent for the work by Serampore and not the government.³⁸ The government was in no way involved in the decision of the Welsh Mission to send missionaries to the Khasi hills in 1841. The same was true of the Roman Catholic missionaries who came later. Christian missions and government worked together only in limited areas, such as education. Even that co-operation was not due to mission initiative but in response to government requests.³⁹ Even prior to securing government support, the missions had started educational work—and would have continued to do so.

This co-operation between the British administration and Christian missions in certain areas of mutual interest began during the time of the first two important British Commissioners, David Scott and Francis Jenkins.

36. Downs, "Tribal Response", p. 408.

37. Downs, *Christianity*, p. 88.

38. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 70.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-35.

David Scott served in North East India from 1826 until his death in 1831.⁴⁰ It was under his leadership that the first steps were taken that led to the eventually control and annexation of the Khasi-Jaintia hills. He was an evangelical Christian deeply influenced by the Serampore Baptists, particularly William Carey. He studied under him at the Fort William College in Calcutta. He was responsible for running a private Christian school among the Garos and even invited the Serampore Mission to start a school at Guwahati. He negotiated treaties with the Khasi chiefs and was responsible for the road construction project through the Khasi hills that eventually led to war. He made Cherrapunji the British headquarters for the Khasi-Jaintia hills, and died there in 1831.

Francis Jenkins served as Commissioner from 1834.⁴¹ He also was an evangelical Christian. He was instrumental in promoting the interests of the American Baptist missionaries working in Assam. Christian missions greatly benefited in the early part of the nineteenth century from this kind of official encouragement. Nevertheless, the official policy of the government was religious neutrality. British officers were directed not to interfere with the religion of the people lest this should lead to unrest. At first they did not allow missionaries to work in India, but the British Parliament, under evangelical influences, forced them to do so after 1813. When David Scott supported a private Christian school among the Garos at Singamari he was condemned for it in 1831 by the Court of Directors in London.⁴² David Scott justified his actions by differentiating between the Hindus and Muslims of the plains, and the tribal peoples of the hills.⁴³ He noted that people like the Garos and Khasis did not have any established religion and therefore would not react to Christian work in the negative way that the plains people often reacted. Francis Jenkins took a similar position when referring to government involvement in supporting missionary work among the tribes. This differen-

40. For a good account of David Scott see Barooah.

41. Downs, *Christianity*, p. 61.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64, Cf. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 134.

tiation seems to have been accepted by the highest authorities in the Company and, after 1857, the Government of India.

The only significant area in which the government and Christian missions worked together was education. When British administration was first being established some officials were convinced that education was the best means of "civilizing" the tribes. But it would be difficult and expensive for the government to undertake this work so it entrusted the missions with the job. Because of this it was difficult for the people to distinguish between education and Christianity. Even today in the Jaintia area the word used for "Church" is *Ka Skur* (School). The larger Presbyterian denomination is called *Skur Heh* (Big School).

The subsidy that the government began to give the Welsh Mission in the Khasi-Jaintia hills in the 1850s was then justified on the grounds that government money was only used for the secular aspects of the school programmes. Of course, the officers were fully aware of the fact that the mission schools were closely connected with the church, the school often preceding the church.

The close personal relationships between government officers and the missionaries undoubtedly strengthened the impression of close co-operation. The pioneer missionaries of the Welsh Mission were warmly received by the local British officials at Cherrapunji and the missionaries received protection from the authorities.⁴⁴ But for the protection of the British government there would probably have been many martyrs in the Khasi-Jaintia hills. Lieutenant Lewin of Cherrapunji took interest in the mission and seems to have been instrumental in securing a site for a mission station in the Jaintia area in 1842.⁴⁵ This pattern of relationship had been first established by David Scott and Francis Jenkins who both were evangelical Christians and both helped the missionaries in many ways.

44. Ibid., p. 78.

45. See G. Angel Jones, *Ka History Jong Ka Balang 1841-1966* (1966), p. 11. Hereinafter cited as Jones, *Ka Balang*.

The only policy of the Welsh Mission to which the British authorities objected was the decision to introduce the Roman alphabet in place of the Bengali that had been used previously (the Khasi language having been first reduced to writing by the Serampore missionaries).⁴⁶ Finally, however, the government agreed to the change.

The government support for Protestant schools contributed to the impression to be found even today among some of the people that Christianity results in de-nationalization. Christianity rather than the government was thus blamed for having broken down the barriers that had previously contributed to preserving the culture of the people in isolation.⁴⁷

(5) The British Policy on the Hill Tribes. From the beginning of British administration in the North East the policy of excluding the hills areas from the application of regulation was adopted for other parts of the country. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries different administrative procedures were adopted to maintain this distinction.

Because of this policy a distinctive administrative arrangement was developed in the Khasi-Jaintia hills district. As has already been noted, it was a centralized system through which the British controlled two classes of territory, state and non-state areas. The difference between the two was evident when, for instance, the Government of India Act of 1919 was implemented with the inauguration of the Governor's Council in 1921.⁴⁸ It applied to the non-state areas, but not to the Khasi states. Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy, the elected representative from the Khasi-Jaintia area, did not officially represent the Khasis belonging to the states.

46. See below Chapter VI, p. 218.

47. Cf. B. P. Shukhla, *What ails India's North-East?* (1980), p. 12. See also Deb Roy, p. 184; S. Pramayananda, "Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement in the North-East", *Ramakrishna Mission Shillong Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 1937-1987*, p. 37.

48. D. R. Syiemlieh, *British Administration in Meghalaya: Policy and Pattern* (1989), p. 1/6f. Hereinafter cited as Syiemlieh. See also Rao, *Century*, p. 52.

It should be noted that the government policy to develop a separate administrative system for the hill areas, based initially upon David Scott's belief that legislation designed for more complex societies could not and should not be applied to tribal societies, which to a large extent resulted in the hill tribes being outside the mainline political developments in the rest of India had nothing to do with Christian missions or Christianity. There is hardly any supporting evidence that Christianity was responsible for promoting any negative attitude among the people against the interest of the country.

(6) The Role of Khasi-Jaintia Leaders in Pre-Independent India. Soon after the implementation of the Government of India Act of 1919, Khasi leaders⁴⁹ felt the need for having a Durbar which would include representatives of the 25 Khasi states. Most of these leaders were educated Christians. The proposal was enthusiastically supported by the chiefs, *ki bakhrav* and village headmen. This led to the formation of the Khasi National Durbar in 1923.⁵⁰ The main work of the Durbar was to codify the traditional law of property.⁵¹ It was the political organization in which members of the different states came together for a common purpose.⁵²

49. L. G. Shullai, *U Babu Wilson Reade* (1980), p. 6.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

51. Cf. *Ki Proceedings Jong Ka Khasi National Durbar* (Dorbar Hima Khasi) Kaba Lai Kaba la long ha Shillong naduh 25 tarik haduh 26 tarik U March, 1925 (1925). Also see *Ka Ain Bri Khyndew ha Ki Hima Khasi*, (1956).

52. The Khasi National Durbar was not the first political organisation among the tribe. The first political move took place on 11th February, 1901 at Shillong in which 7 Syiems, 1 Wahadadar, 3 Lyngdohs, 5 Dolois, 7 Sirdars took part. The meeting was presided by U Ron Singh Syiem of Myllem. Though the movement was not properly organised, it inspired the Khasi intelligentsia like U Dohory Ropmay. U Alexander, U Chandranath Roy, U Rash Mohan Giri, U David Roy, U Nalak Singh, U Kali Charan Roy, U L. Harry Singh, U Mustan Singh, U Hilix Charan Roy, U Sosi Mohon and U Indro Muni Roy to form "Ka Synjuk Khasi-Synteng" or The Khasi-Synteng United Guild, in 1907. Its first public meeting was held on 8th June, 1907 at Mawkhar, Shillong. These movements had subsequent impact on

Two other organizations, the Federation of the Khasi States and the Khasi-Jaintia Federated State National Conference played a dominant role in the unitary political development of the tribes.

a. *The Federation of Khasi States*.⁵³ Over the years the name of the organisation which since 1947 has been known as the Federation of Khasi States has changed. When it was formed in 1933 it was called the Khasi State Federation,⁵⁴ and in 1945 or 1946 the Khasi States Federation.⁵⁵ Its leaders included Prof. R. R. Thomas, Dr. H. Lyngdoh, Rai Bahadur D. Ropmay, Wilson Reade, Miss. Mavis Dunn, Prof. G. G. Swell, and Olim Singh Syiem of Khyrim. Except for the last, all were Christians. The Federation was only concerned with the Khasi state areas. Its role in relation to Indian Independence was significant.

The position of the 25 Khasi states at the time of Independence was similar to that of all princely states. Like Jammu and Kashmir, most Khasi states were in a border area. In light of the treaties and sanads, they had apparently the option of joining either India or Pakistan. The Muslim League leader, Md. Ali Jinnah, claimed for Pakistan not only the whole Khasi-Jaintia area but the other hill tribes of North East India as well. In this situation the decision of the Khasi-Jaintia leaders was crucial. The political leader best known for repudiating the claims of Jinnah was J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, who wrote :

Mr. Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, demands that Assam should be inside his Pakistan plan. The feeling of the people of the hills of Assam and of the non-Muslims in the plain districts of Assam are terribly against such an unreasonable and wild demand. No hill

the modern political organizations of the tribe. See *U Khasi Mynta* 54 (Rymphang, 1901), p. 4-5. Also "Ka Synjuk Khasi-Synteng (Khasi-Synteng United Guild)", *U Nongphira*, 63 (Lber, 1907), p. 10f. Cf. in *Ka ling Khristan*. 1.11 (Naitung, 1907), pp. 82-83.

53. L. G. Shullai, *Ki Hima Khasi* (1974), p. 9. Hereinafter cited as Shullai, *Ki Hima*.

54. Bareh, *Khasi People*, p. 234.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

people can imagine of being included inside Mr. Jinnah's Pakistan.⁵⁶

The Federation of Khasi States finally joined the Indian Union by signing the Standstill Agreement and the Instrument of Accession.⁵⁷ Insofar as the advisers and most of the office bearers of the Federation of Khasi States were Christians, the accession of the Khasi states to India had a religious dimension to it. It was the Christian leaders who persuaded the Khasi states to accede to India.

b. *The Khasi-Jaintia Federated State National Conference.* The Khasi-Jaintia Federated State National Conference was another party under the leadership of J. J. M. Nichols-Roy. It was formed in Shillong in November 1945.⁵⁸ This party and the Federation of Khasi States agreed that the Khasi states should accede to India. They differed with respect to the areas which had been under direct British administration. In the non-state area the traditional chieftainship had been abolished and authority was vested in the Deputy Commissioner.

The Federation of Khasi States did not want to be associated with the non-state areas in independent India.⁵⁹ This reflected both the divisiveness and lack of a sense of common identity with the traditional political set-up, and the effect of the division created by British administration. The Khasi-Jaintia Federated State National Conference argued for the unification of the state and non-state areas into a single autonomous district.⁶⁰ This effort was successful and hence the area came to be known as the United

56. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, "A Memorandum Regarding the Hill Districts of Assam: Their Future in the New Constitution of India", (1946), p. 3.

57. See Shullai, *Ki Hima*, p. 23.

58. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, "Memorandum of Personal Views supporting the Demand for the separate Hills State" (c. 1955), p. 2. Hereinafter cited as Nichols-Roy, "Personal Views".

59. Shullai, *Ki Hima*, p. 10.

60. Nichols-Roy, "Personal Views", p. 2.

Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, brought into the Indian Union within the framework of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.⁶¹

The main aim of the Christian Khasi leadership was to promote Khasi-Jaintia solidarity, within the framework of independent India. The key person in promoting this tribal unity was J. J. M. Nichols-Roy.⁶²

II. NEW CONTACTS WITH HINDUISM

Under the British administration contacts between the Khasi-Jaintia people and people of Hindu religious faith increased. In addition to the traditional contacts in the market places, Hindus were brought into the hills as workers of the new government. When the Inner Line Regulations were adopted late in the nineteenth century the Khasi-Jaintia hills were not included and hence there was free interaction between their inhabitants and outsiders. This influx was in no small measure due to the fact that Shillong was made the capital of the entire province of Assam. Due to these factors there was more contact with Hinduism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries than ever before.

61. For a recent study of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution see B. L. Hansaria, *Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India: A Study* (1983).

62. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy (1884-1959) was born on 12 June, 1884 at Shella in the Khasi Hills. He had his primary education at Shella and did college Entrance Examination through the Shillong Government High School in 1899. He decided to become a Christian in the aftermath of the great earthquake of 1897. He continued his studies at Scottish Church College (then known as Duff College) in Calcutta, securing his B. A. in 1904 from Calcutta University. He was one of the founding members of an indigenous church, the Church of God, in 1902. In 1907 he married an American woman, and they had three children. In 1918 he started a joint stock company, the United Fruit Company Limited, for the purpose of helping uplift the Khasi-Jaintia people. In 1920/21 he joined politics. He was a Cabinet Minister in the Assam Government for several years. As a member of the Constituent Assembly he was instrumental in writing the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. While Nichols-Roy sought to strengthen Khasi-Jaintia tribal solidarity, he wished to do so within an integrated India.

One result of this was more inter-marriage between Khasi-Jaintias and peoples from the plains, mainly Hindus. Nevertheless, the traditional practice of absorbing into the society, through the creation of new clans, of plains women who married Khasi-Jaintia men continued and this therefore did not cause serious social problems. Similarly, when plains men, mostly Hindus, married Khasi women, they have accommodated to the traditional social customs and lived in their wife's residences. These tend to be well educated people and do not bring significant Hindu influence as such.⁶³ In other words, inter-marriage with people of other faiths has not affected the Khasi sense of identity. Mathur notes this as follows :

. . the internal structure of the political and social systems based on matriliney, the position of women in the family or the laws of inheritance and other religious beliefs and practices of the Khasis, particularly those of the Pnar Khasis, did not completely change after and on account of their contacts with Hinduism.⁶⁴

There were some cases in which conversion to Hinduism was combined with continuance of the practices of primal worship. This was the case of some Pnar families at Nartiang. Primal deities were still worshipped to the extent that the Hindu priests had to comply with them.⁶⁵ But even such cases are rare. The Hindu religion had very limited following among the Khasi-Jaintia people, almost entirely in Nartiang and Disong (Shella) villages.

Several cases of prominent Khasi leaders who were said to have become Hindus are publicized. More prominent among them were U Jeebon Roy and U sib Charan Roy. Their primal ancestress

63. In the home of a Hindu Police Officer who married a Khasi woman who maintains the traditional primal religion, it was found that no Hindu elements had been incorporated into the family religious ceremonies. See Mathur, *Khasi*, p. 22.

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

was a Brahmin woman married to a Khasi.⁶⁶ Because they translated some books like *Hitopadesha* (1898), *Ramayana* (1900), *Chaitanya* (1900) and *Buddha Deva* (1901) into Khasi it was said that they were propagators of Hinduism. There might have been some basis for saying this, but a careful examination of their writings on Khasi religion suggests that their basic commitment to the traditional primal religion remained. They opposed the worship of idols and affirmed their belief in one god.⁶⁷ It is true that they opposed the Welsh Mission,⁶⁸ but in doing so they allied themselves not only with Hindu groups like the Brahmo Samaj⁶⁹ but also with the Roman Catholics⁷⁰ and the Church of God too.⁷¹

Another source of Hindu influence in the Khasi-Jaintia area was the Brahmo Samaj, which came in following the British administrators and Christian missionaries.⁷² Following in the footsteps of the missionaries, they started working at Shella and then moved to Cherrapunji. Their teaching had similarities with the traditional primal beliefs of the Khasis but they could not make great impact, despite the support that they received from the Seng Khasi. Christian Unitarians, who had a small following among the Khasis, also supported them with money and ideas.⁷³ The

66. Kynpham Singh, *Ka Jingim U Babu Jeebon Roy 1838-1903* (1973), p. 30. See also Bareh, *Khasi People*, pp. 315-317.

67. U Jeebon Roy, *Kr Kitab Shaphang U Wei U Blei* (1900) and *Ka Niam Jong Ki Khasi* (1987). See also U Sib Charan Roy Jaitdkhar, *Ka Niam Ki Khasi* (1919). Hereinafter cited as Jaitdkhar, *Ka Niam*. Cf. *U Nongpynim*, 3 (Nai Jymmang, 1928) and *Ka Jingia Kyr sieu* (1903).

68. See in *U Nongphira*, 5 (Kylla Lyngkot, 1904), pp. 32. 15.

69. J. B. Bhattacharjee, "The Messenger of Khasi Heritage" in U Hipshon Roy, ed, *Khasi Heritage*, p. 15. Hereinafter cited as Bhattacharjee, "The Messenger".

70. U Sib Charan Roy Jaitdkhar was one of the contributors to *U Nongialam Katholik* published in 1903.

71. Some of the prominent members of the Seng Khasi extended their support to the Church of God movement and fought for its right of building a Chapel at Mawkhar. Cf. *U Nongialam Katholik*, 10 (Risaw, 1903), p. 135-136, and also *U Nongphira*, 56 (Nailar, 1906), p. 197.

72. S. Lavan, *Unitarians and India* (1977), p. 149. Hereinafter cited as Lavan.

73. Natarajan, p. 85.

small foothold that the Brahmo Samaj had secured suffered a serious setback when Sachindra Nath Roy, a resident missionary of the mission at Mawlong, Shella, renounced the Samaj's faith and became a Christian in 1936.⁷⁴

The Ramkrishna Mission was the most organized of the Hindu groups that worked in the Khasi-Jaintia area, beginning its work there in the 1920s.⁷⁵ According to one source, it was encouraged to undertake missionary work among the hill tribes by Jawaharlal Nehru himself ;

Nehru had taken help from the mission (Ramakrishna Mission) to sort out national problems. It was at his behest that its monks fanned out to the northeast where Christian missionaries were active.⁷⁶

The mission concentrated on rendering humanitarian works, establishing schools and health services. Cherrapunji was its headquarters. At least in its initial stages the main support for its educational work, especially in Cherrapunji, came from Khasi Christians.⁷⁷ As a result of its work it gained no more than five hundred converts to its mission from villages scattered around Cherrapunji. Some of those Christians who supported its educational work did so in the conviction that it did not really represent the Hindu religion.⁷⁸ In any event its impact was very limited. It neither made many converts nor developed local leadership for the mission.

It is clear that the new contacts with Hinduism that were made in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did not contribute to significant change among the Khasi-Jaintia people. What impact it did have was limited to a few people in scattered areas.

74. "Ka Jingphla U Sachindra Nath Dykhar", *Ka Jingshai Ka Gospel*, XXXII (June, 1936) p. 6.

75. U. S. Prabhananda, *U Nongpart Lynti ha Rilum Khasi*, (1974), p. 3.

76. Tapash Ganguly, "Arise ; Awake !—The call has been given out for 100 years now", *The Week*, 5. 11 (March, 1-7, 1987), p. 22. Herein-after cited as Ganguly.

77. *Ramakrishna Mission Cherrapunji Souvenir* (1982), p. 7.

78. Tapash Ganguly explains that Ramakrishna Mission is a religion that is not Hinduism. See Ganguly. p. 22.

III. CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

We have seen that Khasi-Jaintia contacts with Hinduism in the pre-British period had not resulted in significant changes taking place. By contrast, the response to Christianity during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was positive. Large numbers of the tribe became Christian. Insofar as we will be dealing with the introduction and development of Christianity as well as with the impact of the new faith at length below, here we will only introduce the subject of the role of Christian Missions in social change. The Christian role cannot be studied in isolation. As Downs wrote,

The history of the Christian movement in the North East can only be understood as an integral part of a larger process of change—political, social, economic, cultural and religious change.⁷⁹

The growth and developments of Christianity in the region was a response to changes that were taking place in the traditional order as a result of the overwhelming force of the British presence. It was the British government that was the main cause of the radical changes that took place. Its administration, imposed by forces and backed by the power of the Government of India through military forces stationed in the area, not only changed the political and economic system, but affected the world view of the people. The psychological impact of having to accommodate themselves to alien rule when they had previously been governed only by their own chiefs was great.

The new government changed and weakened the traditional political order based on hereditary leadership and village or state *darbars*. The State *Durbar* (Ka *Dorbar Hima*) of the Khasi-Jaintia States had provided the basic component of tribal life. It defined the identity of those that lived within its boundaries, differentiating them from people belonging to other Khasi-Jaintia States. The chief was an executive head who exercised power on behalf of the *Durbar*. The State *Durbar* was an important institution, linking

79. Downs, *Christianity*, p. 3.

clans and villages, regulating their lives and providing them with an identity. While many of the State Durbars remained under the British, their powers were greatly reduced through the sanads, treaties and other agreements that they were forced to sign. The autonomy of the State was destroyed because it now had to function within a larger political framework under the control of an alien power. The Khasi-Jaintia hills was constituted as a district, and within it there were sub-divisions under jurisdiction of British officers with such titles as Political Officers, Deputy Commissioners, Sub-Divisional Officers or Magistrates, etc. This loss of political freedom inevitably undermined the cultural base, the self-consciousness of the people within the traditional order.

When the State Durbars became subordinate to the central British power it also affected the religious function that some of the important State Durbars had exercised. The new laws were enforced without the traditional religious sanction.⁸⁰

There was also a loss of the economic self-sufficiency when a monetary economy under the control of outsiders replaced the traditional barter economy.⁸¹ Again, the identity of the people which was based on isolation and control of their own affairs was adversely affected. Modern communications and urbanization also undermined the traditional autonomy. The whole process of establishing British administration not only brought in outsiders, but often placed those outsiders in a dominant position, either politically or economically. In the early years there had been violent resistances against the new order⁸² but these had failed. There was no alternative but to accommodate themselves to the new order.

It is in this connection that the role of Christianity can best be understood. The imposition of British administration created a cultural crisis, a crisis of identity. Many Khasi-Jaintia people began to see Christianity as a means of preserving a distinctive identity. It was because they wanted to preserve their identity that the peo-

80. Cf. *U Nongpynim*, No. 6 (Nailar, 1928), pp. 25-6.

81. Downs, "Tribal Response", p. 408.

82. Nongkhlaw resistance of 1829-1833, the Maharam resistance of 1836-1839, and the Jaintia rebellion of 1860-62.

ple had resisted Hinduism. The Jaintias, as we have seen, did not change their religion even when their kings became Hindu. It cannot be argued convincingly that the resistance to Sanskritization was simply due to their isolation, because the people of the War area and the Jaintias had been exposed to Hinduism for more than one hundred years and yet did not give up their primal religious belief system.⁸³ Hinduism was perceived to be a threat to their identity — especially since minority tribals tended to be assimilated into that religion at the negligible level of its social strata.

In contrast, many of the Khasi-Jaintia people, certainly those who were to come to play the dominant role in their political, social and economic life, accepted Christianity as a means of adjusting to the new order without losing their essential identity. The contention that they became Christian to secure material benefit⁸⁴ is not supported by the evidence. Many early converts underwent severe persecutions, lost their rights of inheritance, lost their traditional clan rights, renounced the chieftainship and resigned from well-paying and prestigious positions in order to serve as evangelists or teachers in distant villages where they often suffered hardship. Actually the tribe would probably have had more to gain materially by absorbing Hinduism. At least that was the conclusion of the officer commenting on the subject in the Census report of 1881. The people would gain more by becoming Hindus, whereas Christianity offers "little or no worldly prospects of advancement and success".⁸⁵

The attraction of Christianity for those who came to have dominant influence on the tribe has to be related to the trauma created in the minds of the people by the loss of their traditional autonomy to alien rulers.⁸⁶ This explains, for example, the rapid growth of Christianity in the Jaintia area following the failure of the uprising in the 1860s. When the traditional culture could not explain or

83. Downs, *Christianity*, p. 186-87.

84. P. R. G. Mathur, "Khasi Solidarity Movement", in K. S. Singh, ed. *Tribal Movements in India*, Vol. I (1982). p. 195, Natarajan, p. 141, Cf. Below Chapter IV, pp. 110-12.

85. *Census of India, 1881, Assam* p. 38.

86. Downs, *Christianity*, p. 11.

deal with the new order people sought an alternative way of preserving their essential identity in the face of irresistible change. Sociologically speaking, Christianity provided that alternative.

The way in which Christianity preserved certain elements in the traditional culture but brought them into a new synthesis will be discussed at length below. It is enough to say here that it was a gradual process, and a complex one. Through the introduction of a standard language, through its schools, indigenous leadership, ecclesiastical structures and ideology, the new religion created a new inclusive tribal identity. While the Welsh Mission contributed the most due to the fact that it was the first permanent mission to work in the area, those that came later, including the Roman Catholic mission and numerous small missions and churches all contributed to this end. Hence, Christianity was not so much an agent of change as it was a means whereby the people could accommodate themselves to the changes that the new administration forced upon them — and which in due course they themselves welcomed in their own way.

4. THE ADVENT AND GROWTH OF CHRISTIANITY

In the preceding chapters we have studied the context within which social change on a significant scale began to take place among the Khasi-Jaintia people in the nineteenth century. It has been noted that an important agency in this development was Christianity. Before specifically addressing the question of the Christian role in those changes we will in this chapter describe the introduction and development of Christianity. While the origins of Christianity go back to the early part of the nineteenth century, and while certain developments connected with missionary activities in the early years of Christian history in the region were to have considerable impact, by and large the Khasi-Jaintia Christian community itself did not begin to have dominant influence upon the society until well into the twentieth century.

I. CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

(1) Serampore Baptist Mission. The beginnings of Christian work among the Khasi-Jaintia hill people go back to 1813 when Rev. K. C. Pal of the Serampore Baptist Mission spent several months in the foothill.¹ While K. C. Pal's mission to the Khasis was to some extent approved by the British authorities in Bengal, he was sent under the auspices of the mission, not the government.

He left Serampore in March 1813 and took up residence at Pandua, a marketing centre of the Cherrapunji Syiemship, in the plains, "where there are no distinctions of caste."² The results of his work seemed promising. U Duwan and U Anna, both Khasis, were among seven people who were baptized by Pal in April of that same year. After working in Pandua for eight months the missionary returned to Serampore. Despite the promising beginnings the mission did not establish a regular work or start a church at Pandua or in the hills at that time.

1. Morris, *Welsh Missions*, p. 70.

2. *Ibid*, p. 71.

Nevertheless one positive result was the decision made by Serampore to translate the Bible into the Khasi language. The work would appear to have started in 1813 itself. Since the Khasi-Jaintia people did not have an alphabet, the mission decided to use the Bengali script for the purpose. Thus the translation used the Shella dialect and the Bengali script. The Shella dialect was used even though it was not understood by the people of the Cherrapunji Syiemship or those who lived upland. Though Pandua was within the Cherrapunji Syiemship, the majority of those who lived and traded there were people from the War Shella, and the Shella dialect was the language commonly used in all business transactions. It seems to have been for this reason that it was chosen by Serampore. It is also probable that the person they found to do the translation work was only familiar with that dialect. Because of this the 500 copies of the New Testament published by Serampore in 1824 were not found useful. Even those few persons who were literate in the Bengali script were puzzled by the unfamiliar words and the imperfect translation. Nevertheless this edition of the New Testament constituted an important milestone in the history of the Khasi-Jaintia people for it was their first literature.

The next contact with the Khasis was made through a school that the Serampore Mission began in 1829 at Guwahati, in the Brahmaputra valley on the opposite side of the hills from Pandua. The school was under the charge of a young Scotsman named James Rae. The aim was to reach the Garos and Manipuris as well as the Khasis and neighbouring peoples.³ There were three Khasis and nine Garos enrolled in the school.⁴ This work too was discontinued due to the resignation of James Rae in 1836.⁵

3. Morris, *The Story*, p. 25.

4. James Rae reported that the three Khasis were princes sent by David Scott and the nine Garo pupils could read Bengali. There was no evidence that these students became Christian. See *Periodical Accounts of the Serampore Mission* No. XXXII (February 1830); and No. XXXV (May 1830), p. 2.

5. It is interesting to note that in this school the major tribes of the present Meghalaya, the Garos and the Khasis, came together.

These early contacts of the Serampore Mission with the Khasi people were from outside the hills proper. The first actual work of that or any mission in the hills was undertaken by the Serampore Mission when it established a work at Cherrapunji in 1836. Alexander B. Lish, the missionary, established schools in three places—Cherrapunji, Mawsmal and Mawmluh. Two converts, U Duwan Rai and U Jungkha worked with him. Reading lessons for use in the schools were prepared in both English and Khasi (using the Bengali script) and other religious writings were translated. The work was difficult. Lish found it hard to discipline the pupils, who preferred to behave as they pleased.⁶ Some came to school for fun, others could not understand what was being taught.⁷ It was even more difficult to make the people understand the Christian faith. Lish explained it by describing the Khasis as “so steeped in ignorance as to make it almost impossible to convey any religious ideas to their minds.”⁸ Language was apparently the main obstacle. Lish considered the use of the Roman alphabet instead of the Bengali because he thought it might be easier for the people to learn and better fit the Khasi phonic system⁹ but he could not put this into practice because the reorganization of the Serampore Mission in 1838 led to the abandonment of the Cherrapunji mission.¹⁰

In 1841 the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) turned over its “field” in the Khasi-Jaintia hills to the newly formed Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission. Though it began the work afresh it had the advantage of building on foundations that had already been laid by Lish. Lish’s converts, U Duwan Rai and U Jungkha, were very helpful to the new Welsh missionaries, providing continuity between them and the earlier work.¹¹

6. *Periodical Accounts of the Serampore Mission*, 3D Series, No. LXVII (January 1833), p. 2.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 74.

9. Bareh, *Khasi Literature*, p. 19.

10. With the death of the last of the Serampore Trio, Joshua Marshman, in 1838 the work of the Serampore Mission reverted to the Baptist Missionary Society, the parent body from which it had worked separately for some years, which was in no position to maintain the widespread operations which had been undertaken by Serampore.

11. Jones, *Ka Balang*, p. 8.

(2) **The Welsh Mission.** The first Welsh missionaries entered the Khasi-Jaintia area on 22 June 1841. Their presence was to have tremendous impact in due course, as they entered the area at a time of traumatic change due to the imposition of the alien rule of the British.

a. *The Background.* The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Foreign mission was created by the Calvinistic Methodist Church of Wales.¹² Previously this church has supported and sent missionaries through the inter-denominational London Missionary Society (LMS) which had been formed in 1795.¹³ Morris says that,

the formation of the Missionary Society (now called LMS), in 1795, afforded to the Welsh dissenting churches their first opportunity of participating in missionary efforts.¹⁴

While the Welsh churches at first joined enthusiastically with other denomination in the LMS, in due course they came to the conclusion that they should establish a missionary society of their own. There were several reasons why co-operation with the LMS did not work out. First, there were differences in theology and church structure between the Welsh Church and the predominantly Congregationalist (then known as Independent) Churches that had come to dominate the LMS. As Morris put it,

The theological controversies which agitated Wales for thirty years or more, had created much bitterness in some parts of the country between the Calvinistic Methodists and the Independents ; and the later controversies on church polity had helped to widen the breach.¹⁵

12. Because of its polity was essentially Presbyterian and its theology Calvinistic, the Welsh Church developed closer relationships with the Presbyterian Churches of Britain than with the other Methodists. Consequently, early in the twentieth century they officially changed their name from the Welsh Methodist Calvinistic Church to the Welsh Presbyterian Church.

13. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 1.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Secondly, an increasing denominational spirit led to further deterioration in the relationship. Again, to cite Morris :

The management of the London Missionary Society was almost entirely in the hands of the Independents ; and the Directors, more than once, had rejected candidates from among the Calvinistic Methodist. . . . a strong suspicion prevailed that their (Wales) only disqualification was the fact that they were Methodists.¹⁶

Another factor may have been that with a predominantly agricultural and working class background, the Welsh candidates were not as well qualified as others in the view of the Directors. While it may be difficult to document, another factor was almost certainly the national one. The LMS Directors and missionaries would have been predominately English—and the Welsh have always considered themselves a nationality distinct from their English conquerors. They have their own language and culture, and have always had a suspicious if not antagonistic attitude towards the English.

Gradually alienation from the LMS led to the creation of a Welsh mission society. The Welsh churches in Liverpool took the initiative with the formation of an autonomous society. Gradually it gained the support of all the Welsh Methodists and led to the formation of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists Foreign Mission Society (WCMFMS) in 1840. Now that they had their own society, they began searching for fields in which to work.

b. *Selection of the Khasi Field.* It had been agreed at an early time that they would send missionaries to India, but it was not determined as to which part of the country they would go. The well known Scottish missionary, Dr. John Wilson of Bombay, recommended Gujarat. Another missionary, Rev. Tomlin of the LMS, suggested three places ; the Khasi hills, the Manipur valley, and Malour in the Central province.¹⁷ While Tomlin himself

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., p. 35.

favoured the first and the WCMFMS tended to agree with him, what finally decided the matter was the offer of free passage to Calcutta for the first missionaries. Insofar as the Khasi hills were the closest to that city the decision was made.¹⁸ In any event the selection of the place had nothing to do with the government, though individual officers of the government warmly welcomed the first missionaries to Cherrapunji when they arrived.

The first missionaries were Rev. and Mrs. Thomas Jones I. They arrived at Cherrapunji, as already indicated, on 22 June 1841. Though it was the location of both the earlier Serampore mission under Lish and the British district headquarters, Cherrapunji at that time was an isolated and thinly populated village. Communications were backward and the people were warlike, having no mercy on outsiders. They were adherents of a traditional culture and religion that did not easily give way to the new. Though it was certainly healthier than even the adjoining plains of Bengal, the heavy rainfall made it difficult to keep books, papers, clothing and other household items from being damaged by the damp.

c. *Opposition to the Missionaries.* Apart from the hardships of the isolated life in the hills, the missionaries had to deal with a people who traditionally had resisted alien influences. Not only had this preserved the traditional ethnic identity over the centuries, but it had also led to violent opposition to the first entry of the British into their hills. During the early years of their work the missionaries faced fierce opposition from the Khasis. When the first Khasis began to become Christians, the opposition intensified. The chief of Cherrapunji would not protect them, so whatever protection they had came from the British officials. Despite the insecurity of their position they persisted and gradually there began to be more interest shown in the new religion by the young people who were looking for a change in their lives. In response to the new situation young Khasi women in particular came forward in opposition to traditionalism. Given the important role

18. The Welsh believed that this was an act of divine providence and not a mere accident. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

of women in Khasi-Jaintia society this development was to be highly significant. As Khasis, both men and women, gradually began to confess the Christian faith and seek membership in the church, strict rules were adopted by the missionaries which each candidate was required to abide by before being admitted to the church.

d. *Early Development of the Church.* As the Khasi Church began to be formed stress was placed on two things : (1) a new quality of life, and (2) the development of Khasi-Jaintia leadership. The Welsh Mission did not believe in admitting members hastily. They believed it important to test the sincerity of the would-be converts before admitting them to the church in order to establish a strong church from the beginning. The requirements were :

1. *They should completely disclaim all traditional religious practices and rituals.*
2. *They should faithfully observe Sunday (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.*¹⁹

According to Morris, candidates, with the exception of the old and handicapped, were required to be able to read and write.²⁰ The candidate was first placed on probation. Candidates who were judged to have satisfactorily met the conditions laid down were given baptism. In a sense this strictness reflected the "testing" of a person's "elect" status characteristic of traditional Calvinism, but nevertheless had the practical effect of setting high standard for church membership.²¹

19. S. Evans, "Ka Jingpyniaid Balang", in D. Ropmay, ed., *Ka Centenary History Ka Balang Presbyterian ha Ri Khasi-Jaintia maduh 1841 haduh 1940*, pp. 110.11. Hereinafter is cited as Evans, "Balang". (English translation is mine).

20. Morris, *Welsh Mission* p. 91.

21. Jyrwa, p. 25.

In 1843 the Mission shifted its place to Nongsawlia hill, a site just outside Cherrapunji village provided by the Cherrapunji chief. It was there that the first converts of the Welsh Mission, U Amor and U Rujon, were baptized on 8 March, 1846.²² That event marked the beginning of a permanently established church in the Khasi-Jaintia hills. But others were slow to follow. The first decade of missionary work gave little evidence of progress. Undoubtedly the minimal early response was due in part to the strict rules laid down by the missionaries.²³ The Khasi-Jaintias who had previously lived according to quite different rules found it difficult to adjust to the new order. Prohibitions placed upon traditional practices — such as drinking intoxicants, engaging in gambling, a relatively free sexual life discouraged many.

In spite of the strict rules, the converts saw the new order as a solution to the traumatic situation that had been brought about by the imposition of British administration. A few at first, and then more were willing to abide by the rules in order to become Christian.

The second missionary emphasis was upon the development of indigenous leadership. Schools in the interior areas were mainly run by Khasi Christians who had received their training from the missionaries in mission schools. Gradually the Presbyterian polity was established in which mature members of the congregations were set apart as elders. Women were also encouraged to become teachers. Some of the converts served as evangelists and others were pioneers in establishing new schools and churches, e.g., in Jowai in the Jaintia area.²⁴

e. *Motives for Conversion.* In the egalitarian Khasi-Jaintia society, conversion had nothing to do with social status or material gain. Quite to the contrary, the decision of the early converts to become Christian took place within a context of strong opposition that required personal sacrifice.

22. S. Evans, "The Centenary of the Welsh Mission in Assam", *NCCR* LXI. 3 (March 1941), p. 126.

23. *Census of India, 1901. Vol. IV., Assam Part I-Report (1902)*, p. 45.

24. Jyrwa, note 71. p. 27.

An example is provided by the case of the first woman convert, Ka Nabon Sawiar²⁵ of Mawmluh, a village close to Nongsawlia, who was baptized in 1848. Her tenacity was extraordinary. Her decision to embrace the new faith met with strong opposition from her parents, relatives and friends. She certainly gained nothing by becoming a Christian. Women in the Khasi-Jaintia society enjoy special privileges, especially if they are heiresses. Even if they are not, every woman inherits a substantial share of the family property. When she becomes a mother it would be through her that the children would draw their lineage and she becomes one of the ancestors in the triadic household worship. Although the missionaries and Khasi-Jaintia Christians did not oppose the system of matrilineal lineage and inheritance, early women converts were harassed and physically abused by their families and finally sent out of their houses, deprived of their inheritance rights. Nabon thus renounced her inheritance and status in order to become a Christian. Certainly she secured no material gain. Even if they had wished to help her, the Welsh missionaries were in no position to do so, coming as they did from a church whose members were mostly poor and whose mission society had very limited financial resources.

Converts from the ruling families provide another example of what had to be given up by way of status and material possessions in becoming Christian. In the Cherrapunji Syiemship, an heir to the throne was an important person. To become the chief of the Cherrapunji Syiemship was to be conferred with high status. He was not only the executive head who was respected and honoured by the people but he earned a lot from the markets in the plains areas. The chief was revered as the "mother".

A member of the ruling clan of Cherrapunji, U Borsing was converted to Christianity and was baptized in April 1876.²⁶ As was the case in the Nongkrem Syiemship, the Cherrapunji ruling family had an important role to play in traditional religious rituals and ceremonies. A convert to any other religion could therefore

25. "Ka Welsh Mission ha ri Khasi", *U Nongialam Khristan*, XXIV. 12 (December 1925), pp. 177-78.

26. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, pp. 165-66.

not function as chief. Within six months of his conversion to Christianity, the Syiem died and U Borsing was recognized as the rightful heir to the office of Syiemship. The Durbar acknowledged that he was the true successor, but said that he would have to renounce Christianity before he could be made Syiem. Borsing rejected the condition. He replied, "I can throw off my cloak or my turban ; but the covenant I have made with God I can no wise cast away".²⁷ In making this decision he not only was denied the position of chief, but he lost all of his rights and property.

There were many others who suffered great hardship at the hands of their families and neighbours because they became Christian. They not only accepted these sacrifices but many of them became active evangelists of the new faith among their people.²⁸

f. *The Expansion of the Church.* Despite strong opposition in the beginning, the mission gradually gained a foothold among all sections of the Khasi-Jaintia people. A church was established at Shella in 1853 and the following year a school was started in Jowai, the main centre of the Jaintia State. Churches were organized in the West Khasi hills in 1860-61 and work among the Bhois in the North had begun to make progress by 1875. Towards the end of the nineteenth century missionary operations began among the Lyngngams. The spread of Christianity was mainly due to the work of Khasi-Jaintia Christians themselves rather than to the activities or financial investment of the missionaries.²⁹

By 1866 there were sixty five mission schools with some two thousand pupils distributed among almost all the Khasi syiemships.³⁰ People had begun to realize the importance of education and children were beginning to be encouraged to attend the schools. By the end of the century it was reported that there were schools and churches in almost all 29 Khasi states. The schools,

27. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

28. Downs, *Christianity*, p. 218.

29. Cf. Nongsiej, pp. 3-7 ; Marwein, *Ri Bhoi*, pp. 7-41 ; Karotemprel, *Lyngams*, pp. 26-28.

30. Downs, *Christianity*, p. 103.

literature, medical services, church organizations³¹ and teaching (ideology) were all means by which Christianity helped prepare the Khasi-Jaintia people for the new situation in which changes of many kinds were rapidly transforming the traditional society.

Events of the last decade of the nineteenth century prepared the way for a new situation in the twentieth. As indicated, Roman Catholic Church began work among the Khasi-Jaintia people. It was to play an increasingly important role in the twentieth century. At this time also the Seng Khasi emerged as an organization determined both to resist the inroads of Christianity and to establish ethnic unity on the basis of a religious synthesis that sought to transcend the traditional state, clan or family based religions. Its organization was similar to that of the church. In the last decade of the century there was much literary activity under the leadership of U Hormu Rai Diengdoh. All of these developments were affected by a natural calamity. In 1897 the Khasi-Jaintia area was at the centre of a devastating earthquake, the most severe to have taken place in the North East in recorded memory, with great damage being done to property as well as the loss of many lives.³² One of the consequences of this traumatic experience, and the help that was extended to the victims by Christians, was that large numbers of people became Christian. The final decade of the nineteenth century was hence a turning point in the history of Christianity among the Khasi-Jaintia people.

g. *The Church in the Twentieth Century.* From the very beginning, the Welsh Mission had encouraged the development of indigenous leadership. The growth of Christianity was largely due to such leadership. It took an organized form when the Home Mission was started in 1900. Independent of missionary supervision it was to become the cradle of the autonomous church that

31. In 1867 all the existing Khasi Churches were brought together within a comprehensive church structure known as the Presbytery. This provided the first structure of any kind, religious, or political, in which representatives from all Khasi-Jaintia areas met together for any purpose whatsoever. For further discussion of this development see below, Ch. VI, pp. 253ff.

32. See *Report on the earthquake of the 12th June 1897* (1897).

was to be formed in the middle of the century. The Home Mission worked in areas where Christianity had not previously been introduced. These included the Mawlat area in the Khasi hills, the Padu and Pamtdong areas in the Jaintia hills, Ri Lyngngam on the border with the Garo hills, and also among the Karbis of what is now Karbi Anglong.³³ These areas were considered backward because they were in the interior, had primitive communications and no schools. Khasis served in these areas as evangelists, pastors and teachers, establishing schools and churches. The work was financed through money raised from among the Khasi-Jaintia churches, much of it through the *U Khaw Kham* (handful of rice collection) introduced by U Joel Gatphoh. Churches in the Home Mission areas were linked to the existing ecclesiastical structures. This strengthened the sense of unity among people from various dialectical groups.

In addition to the work of the Home Mission the rapid growth of the church can also be attributed to the revival movement of 1905-06. It was inspired by the Welsh Revival that had taken place the year before. As J. Edwin Orr suggested,

by far the most significant overseas event influencing the life of the Indian Church in the early twentieth century was the Welsh Revival of 1904.³⁴

It certainly affected the Khasi-Jaintia people. Though there were no mass movements in the sense that large groups decided to become Christian collectively, large numbers of persons were affected by the continuous prayers, singing, dancing, etc. and church membership increased.

The first World War though fought far away from the Khasi-Jaintia hills nevertheless had a significant impact here. For many of the tribal peoples of the North-East it was, "the end of the age of innocence concerning the larger world".³⁵ Prior to this

33. Jyrwa, pp. 37-41.

34. *Evangelical Awakening in India* (New Delhi : Masihi Sahitya Sanstha, 1970), p. 50.

35. Downs, *Christianity*, p. 129.

war the people's contact with the outside world was limited to adjacent plains areas in Assam and Bengal, to some government servants from other parts of the country—and to a few Europeans in government, business or missionary work. But during the First World War many Khasi-Jaintias were recruited by the government for service in a Labour Corps that went to France with the British military forces. Those who returned had a completely transformed world view. The war adversely affected the Catholic Mission insofar as most of its missionaries were Germans who as enemy nationals were interned and eventually sent back to their homeland by the government.

The policy of the Welsh Mission to develop indigenous leadership for the purpose of creating a wholly autonomous church came to fruition at the time of the Centennial Jubilee Celebration in 1941 of the arrival of the first missionaries. At that time what is today known as the Presbyterian Church of North East India was given full responsibility for all the work previously under the control of the Welsh Mission, with the exception of medical work and a theological college. Because of the expense involved in maintaining the medical institutions and because of lack of Khasi-Jaintia theological trained personnel in running the what is today Cherra Theological College, it was agreed that for some time the mission would continue to be responsible for them. But in due course this responsibility too was transferred to the church. Hence in the early years of the Second World War, well in advance of Indian Independence, the oldest and largest of the Christian denominations in the Khasi-Jaintia hills had become fully indigenous in its functioning.³⁶

In the meantime certain ecumenical developments, initially limited to the several different Protestant denominations but eventually beginning to include the Roman Catholics as well, contributed to a sense of common tribal identity. The Presbyterians and several other Protestant groups were active members

36. Evans, "Balang", p. 146.

of the Assam Christian Council³⁷ which was formed in 1938. The Presbyterians were also among the founders of the ecumenical Union Christian College at Barapani outside of Shillong in 1952, and played an active role in church union discussions in the region.

(3) The Roman Catholic Mission. As has already been suggested, the advent of systematic Roman Catholic missionary work in the Khasi-Jaintia region during the last decade of the nineteenth century was to introduce a significant new element into the christian movement. Roman Catholic Missions began working in India in the fifteenth century, but there was only occasional contact with the North East prior to the nineteenth century. For a time the North East was placed within the Mylapore diocese, which extended from present day Tamil Nadu all the way to the Burma border. In 1834 Pope Gregory XVI divided the Mylapore diocese by creating the Vicariate Apostolic of East Bengal under which the North East was placed. When Lhasa, Tibet, was separated from Agra and made a Vicariate Apostolic in 1846 the North East was brought within its jurisdiction. When the hopes to gaining access to Tibet through what is today Arunachal Pradesh were dashed following the murder of two missionaries the North East was once again brought under Bengal in 1856. During the period when efforts were being made to reach Tibet through Assam and Arunachal and for some years afterwards a few Catholic priests were resident in Assam but their main work was to minister to the Catholics already in residence there. No missionary work as such was done.³⁸

Prior to 1890 there was only limited Roman Catholic contact with the Khasi-Jaintia hills. Shillong was contested between different Catholic orders and jurisdictions, but the primary interest in it was as a health resort rather than a mission field. Fr. Broy, who had worked among Catholics resident in the Assam valley

37. In the 1950s the name was changed to the North East India Christian Council.

38. For a detailed account of the early contacts with the North east see Becker, *Early History*; Becker, *History*; George Kottuppallil, *History of the Catholic Missions in Central Bengal 1855-1886* (1988).

for a number of years had established a small chapel in Shillong but undertook no missionary work, in part because of the dispute.³⁹

The dispute was in effect resolved with the creation, in 1889, of the new Prefecture Apostolic of Assam, Bhutan and Manipur. The area was made the missionary responsibility of a new German order, the Catholic Teaching Society which later came to be known as the Society of the Divine Saviour, or the Salvatorians. It had been established by Fr. J. B. Jordan in 1881. Two priests and two lay brothers the first Catholic missionaries proper to be assigned to the North East, under the leadership of Fr. Otto Hopfenmueller arrived in Shillong in the early part of 1890. They started learning the language and in due course translated some Catholic religious writings. The young mission suffered a serious setback with the death of Fr. Hopfenmueller in August of that year. The following year more missionaries together with three sisters were sent to join the mission. Towards the end of 1891 the first Khasi convert to Catholicism was baptized. More centres were opened at Raliang (1892), Shella (1893) and Cherrapunji (1897), and schools were also started.⁴⁰

The mission was strengthened when it was joined by Fr. Christopher Edmund Becker in 1906. In due course he was to become its head. He took interest in establishing schools for boys and girls, especially for the local people. Publications printed on the printing press started by Fr. Hopfenmueller included scripture portions, a catechism, a song and prayer book and, from 1902, a periodical *U Nongialam Katholik* (A Catholic Leader). In September 1907 the title of the periodical was changed to, *Ka Ing Khristan* (A Christian Home). These were influential in spreading Catholic teaching and perspectives among the people.

39. For a discussion of the jurisdictional dispute over Shillong, see George Kottuppallil, "Roman Catholics and Shillong: 1871-1890." *ICHR*, XXIII. 1 (June 1989), pp. 72-83.

40. Cf. O. Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands: The Story of the Archdiocese of Shillong-Guwahati, 1934-1984* (1987), p. 9. Hereinafter cited as Paviotti.

But the main emphasis was on educational work, especially in Shillong.⁴¹

The work of the German Salvatorians was seriously disrupted due to the First World War. They were deported and not permitted to return to work in India. During the war and until it was known whether or not the Salvatorians could return the Archbishop of Calcutta requested the Jesuits working in Bengal to take on the additional responsibility of the North East. Fr. Paul Lefebvre arrived in Shillong on 24 June, 1915. Due to shortages of priests the Jesuits could only spare four missionaries to look after Shillong, Raliang and two other centres in the plains of Assam. The industrial school at Shillong was closed down and the horticultural and sericultural farm at Umlyngka (Upper Shillong) was turned over to government. Other educational and medical institutions which had been established by the Salvatorians were also adversely affected. In order to keep the work going Fr. Lefebvre sought help from Dhaka, which sent five sisters of the Sisters of Notre Dame des Missions (RNDM) to maintain educational institutions that had been run by the Salvatorian sisters.

Though the Jesuits could maintain only a few centres, during the time they were in charge the church expanded. While the membership in the tea gardens of Assam increased by 50% during the six years they had this responsibility,⁴² the number of Catholics in the Khasi-Jaintia area remained basically the same.

When it became clear that the Salvatorians could not return and the Belgian Jesuits from Bengal could not indefinitely extend their resources to serve the North East, the Holy See decided to

41. It was reported, "The Roman Catholics established Loreto (1909), St. Mary's (1913), St. Edmund's (1915), Don Bosco Training School (1923) and other reputed schools besides colleges to be followed by St. Anthony's (1935), St. Mary's (1935) and St. Edmund's (1937). By the late thirties of the present century Shillong had become the biggest centre of higher education in Assam and of the missionary activities not only in the Khasi Hills but in the whole of the North-East Frontier India." Cf. Mathur, *Khasi*, p. 20.

42. Downs, *Christianity*, p. 131.

turn over the region to the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB) in 1921. With the arrival in Shillong of eleven missionaries, six priests and five brothers, in January 1922 Catholic Missions in the North East entered into a period of stability and expanded operations that had continued until the present. A group of Salesian sisters arrived a year after the first missionaries, thus beginning their significant educational and medical services.

After reoccupying the already established mission centres the Salesians began to undertake missionary activities in new areas of both the hills and plains. In the Khasi-Jaintia hills they began to give attention to the rural people, in addition to the previously begun educational work. At the same time, the educational work was expanded. In many areas they were the pioneers in introducing higher education. They also introduced technical courses in various trades like handicrafts, tailoring, carpentry, shoe-making, printing, composing, motor mechanics, book binding and electricity.⁴³ The size of the church steadily increased. It was reported that "by 1931 it was 15,056 and ten years later had increased to about 50,000".⁴⁴ In 1934 the Prefecture of Assam was made into a Diocese, with Fr. Louis Mathias as its first Bishop.

The Second World War affected the Italian and German priests, who were interned, but the work was not affected as it had been during the First World War, because there were missionaries of other nationalities to carry on in addition to Indian Salesians from South India.

Following the War and Indian Independence, the growth of the Catholic Church throughout North East India was rapid.⁴⁵ In

43. Cf. Letter From The Prefect Apostolic of Assam to Rev. Mother M. St. Ambrose of 1st September, 1925.

44. Downs, *Christianity*, p. 131.

45. The Church which was formerly under a single diocese centered in Shillong has now 8 dioceses as follows : Shillong (1934) ; Dibrugarh (1951) ; Tezpur (1964) ; Silchar (1969) ; Tura (1973) ; Kohima (1980) ; Imphal (1980) ; and Diphu (1983). In 1969 Shillong Diocese was elevated into the Archdiocese of Shillong-Guwahati.

the Khasi-Jaintia area many churches, schools and training facilities were established.⁴⁶

(4) The Anglican Church. Except in the tea gardens of the Brahmaputra valley where the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) did some work, the Anglican Church⁴⁷ did not undertake missionary work in the North East. Chaplaincy churches were established in urban centres for the benefit of British members of that church, and for the few Indians who joined. When it was decided to shift the seat of the Chief Commissionership from Guwahati to Shillong in 1874, it was also decided to construct an Anglican Church in Shillong. Two years later the church was opened. Because it was their only to serve the Europeans it did not grow. A major obstacle to the conversion of Khasi-Jaintias would have been its opposition to the traditional kinship system. Persons who could not be married in the Presbyterian Church because of its adherence to the traditional customs, were warmly received in the Anglican Church. In spite of objections raised by the Standing Incest Committee of the Shillong Presbytery in one case,⁴⁸ the chaplain of the Anglican Church proceeded to solemnize the marriage. He said :

But as a minister in the Church of Christ I am unable to admit the right of any committee to declare that a non-Chris-

46. It was reported that the Church operates in 28 parishes spreading over the whole region, runs 879 primary schools, 50 High Schools, 3 Colleges and 5 Training and Technical Schools in addition to a number of orphanages, creches and printing presses. *Catholic Directory of India*, 1990. pp. 738-43. Hereinafter cited as *Directory*, 1990 ; see also J. Kallarackal, et. al., "Data on the Church in North East India" (Unpublished Ms. 1975), pp. 82-175. Hereinafter cited as Kallarackal.

47. First known as the Church of England in India, and then, from the 1920s, as the Church of India, Burma and Ceylon. After independence the same was again changed to the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon but the Indian portions of the Church were by 1970 merged into either the Church of South India or the Church of North India.

48. "Haba Ka Jingialong Shi-Kha-Shi-man Ka La Poi Shaba er", *Ka Juk*, 2, 19 & 11 (October & November 1934), pp. 4ff.

tian custom must be held as binding on the consciences of Christians who seek to live within the Christian law.⁴⁹

This disregard for traditional custom, as well as its status as a chaplaincy church, undoubtedly accounts for the small number of members among the Khasi-Jaintia people. Today it has less than four thousand members in the Khasi-Jaintia area.⁵⁰

(5) The Seventh Day Adventists. The Seventh Day Adventist Mission entered the North East India region through its pioneer missionaries—Rev. and Mrs. L. Burges in 1933.⁵¹ The work in the Khasi-Jaintia area was started by Rev. J. F. Ashlock in 1935. Though its total membership by the end of the year 1989 is estimated to have been around 1500 in the entire Khasi-Jaintia hills, its impact on the people is significant.⁵² It undertook missionary work in the form of schools, literature, technical, agricultural and social welfare schemes. Its main centres are Shillong, Thadlaskein and others.

(6) Other Missions. Other missions started by outside groups but which did not have significant impact include the several Pentecostal Churches and a now defunct Jehovah's Witness Church.

II. CHURCHES OF INDIGENOUS ORIGIN

In addition to churches that owe their origin to the work of missionaries that came into the Khasi-Jaintia area from outside there are several churches which came into existence after Christianity had been introduced into the area but which were largely or wholly indigenous in origin and maintenance.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

50. Information provided by Canon H. B. Rev. Syngoh on 18/5/90. The former members of the Anglican Church are now members of the Church of North India. The entire North East is covered by one diocese of that Church, with the Bishop resident in Shillong.

51. See President's Report of the Assam Section of Seventh-Day Adventist (1966); p. 1.

52. See J. M. Dkhar, "Facts About the Seventh Day Adventist Church in the North-Eastern States of India" (Unpublished Ms. 1990), pp. 1-2.

(1) Church of God. The Church of God has its origin in the logical differences of opinion between the Presbyterian missionaries and some Khasi Christians relating to salvation, baptism and the practice of foot-washing. It was formed in 1902. Mr. Wolley Mohan Roy Laitphlang, Mr. Joy Mohan Roy, Mr. Jobin Roy Khain and Mr. E. Dhorum were the founding members of the Church of God.⁵³ Though the church was established by Khasis, the ideas that were to lead to its establishment came from outside, notably from the Salvation Army and the Baptist.

The Church of God movement in Khasi hills was started by Mr. Wolley Mohan Roy Laitphlang.⁵⁴ Born and brought up in a Christian family, Wolley Mohan Roy was both a mission school teacher and a Sunday School teacher in the Mawkhar Presbyterian Church in Shillong.⁵⁵ He seems to have been influenced by the teaching of the Salvation Army.⁵⁶ When the Army put to him the question "Are you saved?" the unshaken faith he had within the established church was shaken. Keeping that question in mind he began reading again the Scriptures in both Khasi and English. In due course he came to believe that a person can live a life free from sins.⁵⁷ Though the Salvation Army was not a holiness group, the question that it put forward had tremendous influence upon Wolley Mohan Roy's understanding of salvation.

The impact was even greater from the Baptist tradition. It all began with U Donrai Diengdoh, Wolley Mohan Roy's father, from

53. See O. L. Snaitang, *U Rev. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, Ka Balang U Blei bad Ka Jingiatylli Khristan* (1983), p. 12.

54. See J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, "Ka Jingynmaw leij ia 1 Bah Wolley M. Roy", *Ka Jingshai Ka Gospel* (July 1940), pp. 1-2.

55. For a detailed account of the life and work of Mr. Wolley Mohan Roy see O. L. Snaitang, *I Bah Wolley Mohan Roy : Ka Jingsdang Ka Balang U Blei Ha North East India hadpeng Ki Khasi-Jaintia* (1984). Hereinafter cited as Snaitang, *Wolley*. See also M. W. Laloo, "U Bah Wol (Wolley Mohan Roy) : 1874-1940", *Ka Jingshai Ka Gospel* (July 1960), pp. 3-7.

56. L. Pohsngap, "A study of the Administrative Structure of the Church of God in Meghalaya Among the Khasi with Recommendations". (Unpublished B. D. Thesis, Yavatmal, 1979), p. 9.

57. See Snaitang, *Wolley*, p. 15.

Cherrapunji. He was one of the early converts. The differences with the established church were on issues of holiness in which he appeared to have shown dissatisfaction. This becomes more conspicuous with a careful examination of his book *Ka History Shaphang Ka Jingwallam Nyngkong eh ia Ka Niam Khristan ha Kane Ka Ri Khasi-Jaintia Da Ka Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission Lane Ka Presbyterian Church of Wales*. (The History of the First Introduction of Christianity in Khasi-Jaintia Hills by the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission or The Presbyterian Church of Wales), published in 1914.⁵⁸ Though the book describes the beginnings and development of the Welsh Mission, nevertheless its intention was to emphasise the authenticity of a "holiness church".⁵⁹ To cite his word,

The aim of this little booklet is firmly that all Christians, female and male must know it for sure about their salvation that they were forgiven from their sins.⁶⁰

In due course he developed contacts with the Baptist Church in Calcutta and it was reported that he was ordained by that church.⁶¹ A new church of the Baptist tradition was started by him in Shillong and its location was near the present Thangkhiew Fill-In Petrol Pump, Iewduh. However, for unknown reasons, U Donrai later reverted to the Presbyterian Church as a lay person. The benches used by his group are still preserved at the Presbyterian Church in Mawlai Iewrynghep, and the new movement disappeared.

Therefore, there is every reason to believe that the Baptist faith of U Donrai might have had influence upon Mr. Wolley Mohan Roy. While the Army introduced rethinking on the question of salvation from sin, the Baptist distinctive might have directed him

58. Already indicated above and cited as Donrai.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-50.

60. *Ibid.*, p. i.

61. Information provided by Mr. Maurice G. Lyngdoh, President of the Khasi Authors Society, during a discussion on U Donrai, at the Meghalaya House, Calcutta on December 24, 1989.

to the proper knowledge of the way of holiness.⁶² He came to affirm that God's grace brings salvation to a repentant person here and now, and it is available to all people.⁶³ With his understanding of a regenerated life and an examination of the New Testament he did not see any validity in the institution of infant baptism.⁶⁴ He came to believe that while baptism is a symbol of man's regeneration and entering into a new life in Christ, he insisted that baptism does not precede faith—but the reverse. Besides that, he saw the need of practising foot washing in literal obedience to Christ's command. The emphasis on believer's baptism and foot washing in addition to the idea that a person can be free from sin, runs contrary to the established church which teaches the opposite. As efforts to convince Mr. Wolley Mohan Roy by the established church failed, his services were eventually terminated.

Joy Mohan Roy, who became Christian after his experiences of the devastating earthquake in 1897, appears to have developed contacts with Baptists in West Bengal. He went to Calcutta in 1899 in connection with his graduate studies at Duff College (today Scottish Church College). In December 1900 he attended a Students' Conference held at Serampore and made a public commitment there, with six others, dedicating himself to the service of God.⁶⁵ His first article was on the historical Jesus,⁶⁶ whom he had experienced; and the following one was about sanctification.⁶⁷ His first booklet *Ka Balang U Blei* (The Church of God) published in 1905⁶⁸ which emphasized a christo-centric understanding of

62. W. M. Roy, "Ka Jingpynkhuid ia Ka Dohnud," *Ka Jingshai Ka Gospel* (April & May 1929), p. 4.

63. W. M. Roy, "Ka Jingpynim Ym Ka Dingpynkhuid," *Ka Jingshai Ka Gospel* (November 1928), p. 7.

64. W. M. Roy, "Ka Balang U Blei", *Ka Jingshai Ka Gospel* (October & November 1915), p. 3.

65. "Ka Jingkhot U Blei ia I Rev. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy ban trei ha ka Iyngkha jong U", *Ka Jingshai Ka Gospel* (December 1959), p. 4. Hereinafter cited as "Ka Jingkhot".

66. Joy Mohan Roy, "U Jisu Kum Ka Rukom Jongngi", *Ka Pateng Khristan*, VI 2 (February 1902), pp. 12-13.

67. Joy Mohan Roy, "Peit ! Peit !! Peit !!! Jingynkhuid", *Ka Pateng Khristan*, VI. 9 (September 1902), pp. 70-71.

68. Reprinted by S. K. Marngar 1985.

the church and the way of holiness through repentance and faith, is an indication of his theological position before he was influenced by the Anderson Church of God in U.S. through his wife, Mrs. Nichols-Roy.

Though both Wolley Mohan Roy and Joy Mohan Roy had similar theological experiences, they did not know each other until U Bah Dino, the younger brother of Mr. Sib Charan Roy, introduced Mr. Joy Mohan Roy to Mr. Wolley Mohan Roy in Shillong in around 1901.⁶⁹ As a result, both committed themselves to the propagation of their new found faith. Others who joined the movement were U Jobin Roy Khain and U E. Dhorom. While the former was one of the first theological trainees of the Welsh Mission School of Theology (today Cherra Theological College), the latter was an ardent evangelist of the Home Mission. These four members and others of like mind met together at Myllem in 1902 and formed the Church of God. So, though the leadership was indigenous, the teaching came from a variety of outside sources.

As indicated, the theology of the new movement was believed to be Biblical. Their teachings on the converted life, baptism and foot washing led to controversies with the established church. While emphasizing a new life style, the Welsh Mission and for that matter the Catholics too, taught that baptism precedes the faith of the person being baptized and so can be given to the infants, children of Christian parents. The statement "I am a sinner. He is a sinner. You are a sinner. They are sinners",⁷⁰ issued by the Welsh Mission was incompatible with the emphasis of the new movement on freedom from sins. While its leaders agreed that human beings are sinful, they believed that it could be overcome by God's grace in Christ, through faith based on a regenerated life and baptism.

No sooner was the new church formed than Mr. J. M. Roy left the Khasi hills to continue his studies in Calcutta. He left behind

69. "ka Jingkhot", p. 4.

70. *Ka Kitab Nyngkong Ba'n hikai ia ka ktien Khasi* (1916), p. 3.

a small group of church members and evangelists without any financial support. In fact, those who formed the Church of God had to resign their jobs with the mission and hence were without an income. In Calcutta Mr. J. M. Roy met others with experiences similar to his own. One of them was John A. D. Khan, a Muslim convert, who had already established contacts with the Anderson Church of God in the U.S.A. in 1903.⁷¹ As a result of a visit he made to the U.S., Khan returned to Calcutta in 1904 with a group of Anderson Church of God "Faith" missionaries. Among them was Miss Nora Evalyn Nichols who would later become the wife of J. M. Roy, who had by then completed his B.A. from Calcutta University. Soon the missionaries left for their homes except for Miss Nichols who preferred to stay back in the Khasi hills in order to fulfil her commitment to work among the Khasi women. In 1907 she married J. M. Roy, and their family name was thereafter changed to Nichols-Roy.

The Church of God which was originally formed as a "holiness/baptist" type of church now came under Mrs. Nichols-Roy's Pentecostal influence. In 1913 the Nichols-Roys went to America where they established contacts with the Anderson Church of God. From that time onwards there was a link between the Anderson Church of God and the Church of God in the Khasi hills. Both the Nichols-Roys were made missionaries of the Anderson Church of God, returning to Shillong in 1916. The link was strained, however, as Rev. Nichols-Roy became involved in Politics in 1920s, and his acceptance of the post of Minister in the Governor's Council in 1927. Though they received no more financial assistance from the Anderson Church of God,⁷² the spiritual link remained. Mrs. Nichols-Roy introduced the "tongue" movement among the members of the new church. Though there is no evidence of his speaking in tongues, yet Rev. Nichols-Roy defended the phenomena introduced by his wife even against

71. "Ka Jingkhot", p. 5. See Berry L. Callen, ed., *Beginnings : A Time to Remember* (1977), p. 111.

72. W. M. Roy & J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, "Ka Kam Jongngi Ka Balang U Blei", *Ka Jingshai Ka Gospel* (June-September 1929), pp. 4-5.

the objection of certain church leaders.⁷³ Upon her death in 1960s the "tongue" movement also disappeared.⁷⁴

The growth of the church was gradual but steady. Today it has churches established in 420 villages over the Khasi-Jaintia hills with a total membership of about 50,000.⁷⁵

The ecclesiastical structure of the new church was similar to that of the Presbyterians. There is a local church committee, a circle and the Ministerial Business Council which is represented by members from different circles. However, the Church of God Business Association has been exercising the sole deciding powers in almost all affairs of the church. Theological training for pastors was not emphasized. Any male members who claimed that they were called by God would be ordained after long years of testing the authenticity of the claim. In 1982, however, it was felt that in light of the increased number of well educated members in the church theological training should be given. Accordingly a Bible Institute was established for the purpose on the same year.

The Church of God undertook much the same sort of work as other churches. It published religious books and, since 1906, a magazine entitled *The Light of the Gospel*.⁷⁶ An indigenous publication was a hymn book entitled *Ki Jingrwai Shem Mynsiem* (The Experienced Spiritual Songs), the main portion of which consisted of hymns composed by the members with only a few adapted western hymns. The church also became involved in educational work. Today it runs more than 50 Primary Schools, 3 Middle English Schools and 2 High Schools.⁷⁷ It carries out evangelistic work throughout the Khasi-Jaintia area, among the Karbis and in Nepal.

73. Those who objected to the "tongue" movement included U Dhormo Roy Khongwir, U Aquila Siege, U Neddy Beatson Pyrbot and others.

74. Some of the Church members in Shillong were believed to have unsuccessfully proposed for a merger with the Baptist church.

75. Information provided by the Secretary, Pastors' Fellowship of the Church of God, Meghalaya & Assam, Shillong of dated March 6, 1990.

76. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy was the founder Editor.

77. Information provided by the Secretary, Central Education Committee, Church of God, Meghalaya & Assam, Shillong of dated March 6, 1990.

One of the most distinctive features of the Church is the practice of divine healing. Many people have been healed through prayers and fasting. The growth of the church has generally been attributed to its healing ministry. The members of the church were mostly the poor and the illiterate from the interior areas. Because of this emphasis on healing through prayer the leaders did not see the need for starting medical services. In fact, in the initial period of the church's life the members opposed to conventional medical help for disease.

(2) Church of God—Ecclesia. This is an offshoot of the Church of God started by W. M. Roy and J. M. Roy. Its founders⁷⁸ had been active members of the former church, serving as evangelists and elders. The separation was due to theological, structural and political factors. The basic problem was the practice of speaking in tongues introduced by Mrs. N.E. Nichols-Roy in the late 1920s. This reflected her Pentecostal background in the Anderson Church of God in the U.S. While Rev. Nichols-Roy himself did not speak in tongues or believe that it was necessary, he nevertheless, believed that the "tongue" movement initiated by his wife should be permitted. Some members of the church were puzzled by this development, others regarded it as unhealthy. When their efforts to have it banned were unsuccessful they became discontented and eventually decided to leave the church.

A second factor was changes in the structure of the church which tended to a representative centralized system in which most of the people did not participate as before. The originally Church Of God Ministerial Business Council was atleast put aside. In fact most of the church affairs were handled by Rev. Nichols-Roy himself, who was the President-cum-Business Manager and his wife who was the Secretary-cum-Treasurer of the established Church of God Business Association.⁷⁹ In a sense it had become a "family" church.

78. They included U Dhormo Roy Khongwir, U Neddy Beatson Pyrbot, U Aquila Siege, U H. Rumnong and others.

79. See the Constitution of the Church of God Business Association of Assam (As amended on 24th March, 1920), "Name of the Officers", Section 24.

The third factor related to Rev. Nichols-Roy's involvement in politics. U Dhormo Roy Khongwir and others opposed it. Though he had explained that his involvement in state politics was a response to God's call and was based on the understanding that the world is God's world,⁸⁰ those who opposed involvement argued that the church, especially ordained ministers, should not become involved in the "dirty game" of politics. They believed that this violated the sanctity of the church and even the church building. Nichols-Roy did not share these views.⁸¹ There was strong opposition among the dissident members to the use of the church building for political meetings.

The Church of God—Ecclesia was finally formed by the dissidents in 1940. At first it used the name Church of God—*Ka Turoi Gospel* (Gospel Trumpet) but eventually changed it to the present name. It kept the "Gospel Trumpet" name to signify that it was not breaking away from the Anderson Church of God started by Rev. D. S. Warner in the nineteenth century. It did not repudiate either the spiritual or material support of that church. Its organization was similar to that of the mother church, though there was more participation of the people in running its affairs. It engaged in preaching, running some schools, publication of religious writings and publishing a magazine, *Ka Turoi Gospel* (now renamed *U Khristan*) from March, 1941. The first issue contained an article against "speaking in tongues" written by Aquila Siegel which evoked a strong reaction from Rev. Nichols-Roy. The controversy continued for some time. While there are some churches scattered throughout the hills who broke away from the mother church,⁸² there has recently been a tendency for these churches to return to the Church of God.

80. See J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, *U Blei bad Ka Spah* (1924).

81. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, "Ka Jingsngewthuh bakla Shaphang Ka Jingpy-niakhleh ia Ka Niam bad Ka Politics", *Ka Jingshai Ka Gospel* (December 1952 and January 1953), pp. 1 ff. Nichols-Roy had gone to the extent of using churches for political meetings.

82. "At present there are 31 congregations under the Church of God (Ecclesia) with 4000 people." See N. Rynjah, "The Church of God (Reformation Movement)," in *Church of God (Ecclesia) : Souvenir* 1990, p. 18.

(3) **Christ National Church.** The Christ National Church was established in 1924 as a splinter group from the Welsh Presbyterian Church, by Rev. Mon Lyngdoh of Laitumkhrach, Shillong, an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church, and Rev. Jones Passah of Jowai. The cause of the division was the policy of the Presbyterian Church towards members who had committed adultery. In 1910 the Calcutta High Court granted permission to divorce eight Christian couples (seven Khasis and one Jaintia).⁸³ This action of the court was seen as insulting to both the Khasi-Jaintia community and the Christian church.⁸⁴ Rev. Mon Lyngdoh and others from Laitumkhrach expressed their opinion that marriage was not a mere civil contract but a divinely ordained religious institution concerning which the courts had no right to interfere.⁸⁵ In the following year the General Committee of the Welsh Mission proposed that those who committed adultery should be suspended for a period of two years after which they should be allowed to be members of the church, and also be permitted to undergo remarriage.⁸⁶ Rev. Mon Lyngdoh raised objection to this action, believing that it would lead to more divorces taking place and people taking marriage lightly.⁸⁷

The Welsh Mission authorities apparently resented the position taken by Rev. Mon Lyngdoh and his Laitumkhrach supporters not so much because of the opinions expressed, but because of the violation of Presbyterian Church discipline. Instead of attempting to deal with the matter through proper church channels, Lyngdoh and his group had made it public through the press. The controversy led to increased misunderstanding within the Laitumkhrach Church, especially with the intervention of the Mawkhar Mission. In the end the dissident group withdrew.

83. M. Lyngdoh & J. Passah, *Ka History Lyngkot Ka Christ National Church Khasi and Jaintia Hills* (1933), p. 1. Hereinafter cited as Lyngdoh, *National Church*.

84. "Ka Jah Burom", *U Lurshai*, 2 (May 1910), p. 2.

85. U Mon Lyngdoh et. al., "Ka Jingkynthoh Shaphang Ka Jingia pyllait tnga", *U Lurshai*, 4 (July 1910).

86. See *U Lurshai*, 4 (April, 1911).

87. Ibid.

At first they simply worshipped together in a private house, not intending to start a new church. But they were not prepared to alter their views.⁸⁸ Separation was inevitable. Mon Lyngdoh did not disagree with the doctrine of ecclesiastical structure of the Welsh Mission. His was a personal grudge against what he regarded as the dictatorial behaviour of the missionaries. He wanted the missionaries be sent away from the hills or, at least, that they be assigned subordinate responsibilities. In this sense he was advocating the autonomy of the church. When the group was unsuccessful in making the proposed changes they, with the support of friends from Sohryngkham and Jowai, formed the Christ National Church in 1924. It gained a following in the East Khasi Hills and the Jaintia Hills. It did not have much impact in other areas. Its impact was consequently minimal. Today its membership is estimated to be around 1500.

(4) The Assembly Church of Jesus Christ (Full Gospel). The Assembly Church of Jesus Christ (Full Gospel) was another splinter group of the Presbyterian Church. Though the movement on which it was based began in the 1920s, the separate church was not constituted until the next decade. Rev. Joseph Dkhar who resigned from the presbyterian ministry was the pioneer of the movement, and five local churches⁸⁹ that had been under Dkhar's pastoral supervision became the members of the new church.⁹⁰ There were at least three reasons why Rev. Dkhar tendered his resignation :—

1. *A sharp decline in christian life among the leaders and its members ;*
2. *The inconsistency of the Constitution and the Gospel of Christ and the governing of the church by it ;*
3. *The imposition of the Marriage Act upon the church members as a way of salvation.*⁹¹

88. Lyngdoh, *National Church*, p. 14.

89. Nongthyllep, Rikhen, Myriaw and Nongriat.

90. Assembly Church of Jesus Christ (Full Gospel) Meghalaya 1930-1980, p. 1. Hereinafter cited as Assembly Church.

91. P. Ryntathiang, "Ka History ka Balang U Jisu Khrist ha Meghalaya" (Unpublished Ms. 1980), p. 3.

Besides that, he found it impossible to freely exercise his "Full Gospel Faith" in the Presbyterian Church. His resignation, therefore, was not imposed by the church but it was his personal decision, due to dissatisfaction with the Presbyterian Church.

The leaders of the five churches who did not want to break relationship with the Presbyterian Church but were faithful to Dkhar's leadership met together at Myriaw in April 1930 and decided to ask the Welsh Mission for clarification concerning Rev. Dkhar's status.⁹² The Mission's response confirming acceptance of the resignation was received towards the end of 1931. Consequently, the

churches (i.e. the five local churches) seeing that they had been abandoned by the Mission they followed their own course of action by calling a separate meeting at Kynshi in January 1932 where all willing christians were invited,⁹³

and formed the new church.

Due to evangelistic activity, visitation and a faith healing ministry the new church gained influence in different parts of the Khasi-Jaintia hills. The headquarters of the church is in Shillong. Like other churches, it established schools, published books, magazines and songs and even the New Testament. Other activities included an orphanage, Bible Correspondence Courses, a Bible Institute and service to the poor. The supreme governing authority is its Assembly, and the church places strong emphasis on the ordained ministry. The church like the movement that led to its split with the mother church was Pentecostal in nature. It believed in the outpouring of the Spirit manifested in the speaking with tongues as the true indication of members having received the "baptism of the Holy Spirit." This church has been strengthened by association with groups like World Vision, Samaritan's Purse of India, Maranatha Crusade and with foreign organizations like Christ for the Nations and the Christian Activity Centre, both

92. See *Assembly Church*, p. 1.

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

located in the U.S.⁹⁴ These contacts helped the church become involved in missionary activities in other parts of India. Its membership is reported to have been more than 6500 in the entire Khasi-Jaintia hills.⁹⁵

(5) All-One-in-Christ Church Fellowship.⁹⁶ The All-One-in-Christ Church Fellowship with its headquarters in Jaiaw, Shillong, was started by Rev. K. K. Biswas in 1955. It is connected with a Church founded by H. R. Samaddar in West Bengal in 1947. It engages itself mainly in preaching and direct evangelistic activities. It does not run schools, provide medical services or involve itself in any way with social activities. Its impact is mainly confined to several villages in West Khasi hills and has less than 4000 members in the whole area.⁹⁷

(6) The Unitarian Church. Unitarian Church is unique not only because of its indigenous foundation by Hajom Kissor Singh at Jowai in 1887, but also because its roots are in the liberal rather than conservative/fundamentalist Christian tradition to which the other smaller Christian groups in the Khasi-Jaintia area belong. Hajom Kissor Singh was a convert of the Welsh Mission in 1880. But in due course he became dissatisfied with the orthodox Calvinism of that church,⁹⁸ and wished to purify the traditional Khasi religion rather than simply condemning it.⁹⁹ Like Christian Unitarians elsewhere, Hajom Kissor Singh emphasized the ethical teachings of Jesus and was critical of traditional orthodox theology (trinitarian theology). This is evident in his preface to the first edition of his *A Book of Services and Hymns in Khasi Language* :

94. Ibid., p. 4.

95. P. Rynthiang, "The Church of Jesus Christ (F.G.)" (Unpublished typed script 1990), p. 1.

96. For further information see H. R. Samaddar, *All-One-in Christ Church Fellowship* (1982).

97. Information provided by Asst. Pastor K. S. Lyngdoh of the All-One-in Christ Church Fellowship, Shillong on 19/5/90.

98. C. Lyngdoh, "Historical Background of the Unitarian Union", Unitarian Special Edition (July 1981), p. 14. Hereinafter cited as Lyngdoh, Unitarian.

99. Lavan, pp. 150ff.

The flag (themes) of these hymns are "THE LOVE OF GOD and THE LOVE OF FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS", "THE FATHERHOOD AND MOTHERHOOD OF GOD and THE BROTHERLINESS OF HUMAN BEINGS", the truths which were clearly explained by Jesus in his teachings and life.¹⁰⁰

The Unitarian movement was intended to get rid of the Welsh legacy rather than Christianity as such.

The second objective was to purify the Khasi belief system which had become tainted with rituals and sacrifices to the spirits. It was reported that,

He (H. K. Singh) now declared Khasi religion was untrustworthy and the time had now come when God's pure, simple religion was to be practised.¹⁰¹

Because there was no written record, Mr. Singh was convinced that the Khasi religion of his time was corrupted and not the original.¹⁰² He believed that his Unitarian teaching was closer to that pure, simple original religion of God.

As in the case of the other indigenous Churches, this movement too came to be influenced by foreign agencies. It was such influence that brought prominence to the Unitarian movement in the Khasi-Jaintia hills.¹⁰³ Through a Khasi Brahmo, H. K. Singh came into contact with Rev. C.H.A. Dall, a missionary of the American Unitarian Association in Calcutta. This led him into association with J. T. Sunderland, editor of the *American Unitarian Magazine*,

who enlisted his sympathy and affection to the spiritual

100. U Hajom Kissor Singh, ed., *Ki Sarvis Bad Ki Jingrwai Na Ka bynta Ka Jingmane Lang ne Marwei* (1907), p. X. (English translation is mine).

101. Lavan, p. 151.

102. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

103. Lyngdoh, Unitarian, p. 14.

inspiration of Hajom Kissor Singh and rendered spiritual and financial support in his adventure.¹⁰⁴

But for the support of Sunderland, the Unitarian movement would not have grown in the Khasi and Jaintia hills.

It was further strengthened by the services of Rev. Magnus Ratter in 1930 and the late Margaret Barr from 1936 to 1973.¹⁰⁵ While their presence had "deepened the bond of friendship and co-operation" between the Unitarian Union in North East India and the General Assembly of the Unitarian Association in England,¹⁰⁶ it had also contributed to sustaining its movement.¹⁰⁷ The Unitarian Union engaged in activities like medical services, schools, printing and publication but they were concentrated in only a few places—mainly Shillong, Jowai and a few villages. Its influence on Khasi-Jaintia society as a whole was minimal.

III. THE GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

We have thus far described the establishment and growth of Christianity in the Khasi-Jaintia hills from a mission or denominational perspective. Here we describe the spread of the Christian community into all sections of the tribal society, hence, from a geographical perspective. The purpose is to demonstrate the contribution that Christianity made to the development of a comprehensive Khasi-Jaintia tribal identity. This will be done in relation to the following geographical areas: Cherrapunji-Shellia, Jaintia, Shillong area, Ri Bhoi and the Western area.

(1) Cherrapunji-Shellia Area. Cherrapunji and Shellia are neighbouring chieftainships located in the southern part of the region. Cherrapunji is in the upland area while Shellia is in the foothills, part of the Ri War. In the pre-British period there was free

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid.

107. Nalini Natarajan remarks that "upon her (Margaret Bar's) death in 1973, the curtain closed down on a dedicated, selfless life." Cf. Natarajan, p. 82.

movement of the people between the two chieftainships but no common identity was developed due to political, religious and dialectical differences.

It was into this area that Christianity first entered when first the Serampore Mission and then the Welsh Mission established their headquarters in or near Cherrapunji (Nongsawlia).¹⁰⁸ As we have seen, after the brief sojourn of Alexander Lish of the Serampore Mission, Rev. & Mrs. Thomas Jones I of the Welsh Mission reached Cherrapunji in 1841. They started learning the local language, introduced the Roman alphabet, built schools and translated religious books even before the first church was established in Nongsawlia in 1846.¹⁰⁹ From 1850 onwards the missionary operations, which until then had been concentrated in the Cherrapunji area, gained footholds in Shella, Nongkroh, Nongwar, Sohbar, Mustoh and neighbouring States like Mawsynram, Malaisohmat, Dwara-Nongtyrnem and Bhowal. Schools and churches began to be established in different villages within the area. The first Presbytery meeting (1867) and the first Assembly meeting (1896) were held in this area—at Nongsawlia and Shella respectively.¹¹⁰ As of today, the Presbyterian Church has as many as 16,019 members, 84 local churches (including branch churches), 1 High School, 5 Middle English Schools and 29 Primary Schools in the area.¹¹¹ A Theological College and a Normal Training School are also located in Cherrapunji.

The Catholic Mission started work at Shella in 1893 but abandoned the station after the great earthquake of 1897 for a more suitable station at Laitkynsew and Cherrapunji in 1897. It established churches and schools in the area.¹¹² Speaking about the growth of the Cherrapunji Mission, Job Kallarackal and others wrote that,

108. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, pp. 83-41 ; See Also Jones, *Ka Balang*, p. 12.

109. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 93.

110. Jones, *Ka Balang*, pp. 47 & 77.

111. *Ka Report Jong Ka Khasi-Jaintia Presbyterian Synod Kaba Laiphew, March 15-19, 1989* : Hereinafter cited as *Report 1989*.

112. Becker, *History*, pp. 183-93.

All the villages except Umwai and Thieddieng and the Garo villages, have a Catholic Primary school each.¹¹³

It was reported that the Catholic Mission had established schools and churches in 60 villages in the Shella and Cherrapunji area.¹¹⁴ While there are separate High Schools for boys and girls, they are also running orphanages and a training centre.¹¹⁵

The Church of God entered this area in the early 1900s and established its first Christian community in 1903 at Dukan, Cherrapunji.¹¹⁶ From there it spread to neighbouring centres in the Shella area.

(2) Jaintia Area. The Jaintia area lies to the east of the Khasi hills and is inhabited by a people that the pioneer missionaries believed belonged to the same racial stock as the Khasis.¹¹⁷ Though the Jaintia State was ruled by one chief, tribal identity was weak. There were the Wars (also called Amwis) on the southern slope, the Pnars in the central uplands, and the Bhois to the north. These groups were differentiated either by dialect or religion or political divisions known as dolloiships. In addition there are a number of groups like the Tubers, the Labangs, the Nongtungs, the Khyrwangs and Nangphylluts. The Jaintia society was further complicated by the existence of a mythical and dreaded deity, *Ka Taro*.¹¹⁸ In the view of the early missionaries the people were also "more drunken and degraded than in almost any village on the Hills, and wholly given to gambling."¹¹⁹

Christianity was introduced among the Jaintias in 1842. It was reported that,

At the close of the rainy season of 1842, Mr. Thomas Jones,

113. Kallarackal.

114. Ibid.

115. See *Directory* 1990, pp. 139ff.

116. See *Ka Jingiasyllok Ka Sarkl Ka Balang u Blei Mawsynram, Thieddieng bad Kiwei* (1976), p. 16.

117. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 46.

118. Deb Roy, p. 90.

119. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 135.

accompanied by Lieuts, Lewin and Yule, visited the Jaintia hills, to ascertain something of the condition of the Synteng people, and the prospects of opening schools in their midst.¹²⁰

In response to this visit it was decided to expand the operations of the Welsh Mission into that area inspite of local opposition. Before the end of 1854 a school was opened at Jowai.¹²¹ Speaking about this, Morris wrote that "with the opening of the Jowai school a beginning was made in evangelizing the Jaintia territory".¹²²

The first Christian community of twelve communicant members was established at Jowai in 1858, under U Luh, a Khasi, who served there as school teacher and evangelist.¹²³ U Larsing Khongwir, who succeeded U Luh, conducted the first Christian marriage (of U Hat and Ka Syushar Chalam) in the same year.¹²⁴ As soon as the mission secured a foothold, it expanded its work into other areas of the Jaintia hills. A second school was started at Lamin on the south in 1859.¹²⁵

The Jaintia rebellion of 1862-63 greatly impeded missionary work for a time. Though it is sometimes charged that the Christians had been cause of the rebellion, that is hardly likely insofar as their number at that time was exceedingly small and almost entirely confined to Jowai. Most of them simply took refuge with the government because of attacks upon them by the rebels. Though they could not have had any significant effect upon the outcome, the government increased its educational grants to the Welsh Mission in gratitude for the fact that at least the Christians had not joined the rebels.¹²⁶

Following the opening of a Normal Training School at Cherrapunji, trained teachers became available for opening schools in

120. Ibid., p. 82.

121. Jyrwa, p. 27.

122. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 135.

123. Ibid., p. 140.

124. Ibid., p. 141.

125. Ibid.

126. Downs, *Christianity*, pp. 80-81.

different areas. As a result, schools were opened at Nangbah, Shangpung and Nongtalang in 1866.¹²⁷ Despite strong local opposition, a church of 14 members was established in that same year at Shangpung village, and at Nangbah under the leadership of a local convert, U Mon.¹²⁸ As already indicated, there was strong opposition to the entry of Christianity into the Jaintia area. In Jowai, Mrs. Hughes and her children had a narrow escape from being burnt to death when the villagers set ablaze the mission residence during the absence of her husband.¹²⁹ In Nartiang the villagers opposed the local chief (U Dolloi) for welcoming missionary operations in his area.¹³⁰ Similar resistance to Christian activities took place at Shangpung, Nangbah and elsewhere. Thus, the growth of Christianity in the Jaintia area was largely due to the work of indigenous evangelists.

In addition to evangelistic work and schools, the Welsh Mission introduced medical work in Jowai in 1887 which in due course developed into a hospital. The organization of a Presbytery in 1895,¹³¹ was of great significance for it provided a structure with which, for the first time, Pnars, Amwis, Bhois and other sub-ethnic groups of the Jaintias were brought together for fellowship and common work. Today the Presbyterian Church has six Presbyteries with a total membership of some 60,000 in more than 200 local churches spread throughout the Jaintia area.¹³² There are 4 High Schools, 7 Middle English Schools and about 70 Primary Schools.¹³³

In 1892 the Catholic Mission entered the Jaintia area in response to the request of the people.¹³⁴ Raliang was established as the mission centre and from there the church expanded into other rural areas, as well as Jowai, Khliehriat and Namdong. It built

127. Jones, *Ka Balang*, p. 45.

128. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 149.

129. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

130. Jones, *Ka Balang*, pp. 61ff.

131. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 186.

132. See *Report*, 1989.

133. *Ibid.*

134. See Paviotti, p. 9.

churches in more than 150 villages within the parishes of Jowai and Raliang.¹³⁵ In addition to Primary, Middle English and High Schools, there were also dispensaries, orphanages, creches, training and technical schools.¹³⁶

Other groups also established churches in the area. The Anglican Church, Church of Christ, Seventh Day Adventists, Church of God and Church of God—Ecclesia among them. The Seventh Day Adventists extended their operations to the Jaintias through their Multi-Purpose training centre at Thadlaskein which provided useful training to the people in different trades. The Church of God which started its work there in the early part of the century¹³⁷ has established churches in at least 50 villages in the Jaintia area.¹³⁸

(3) Shillong Area. The Shillong area comprises mainly the Khyrim and Myllem Syiemships. They were generally called Khyrnriams or Nongphlang. Though the area had Christian contacts earlier (the district headquarters was shifted from Cherrapunji to Shillong in 1866), the real beginnings of Christian work took place when the Welsh Mission opened a¹³⁹ permanent station there under Rev. Griffith Hughes in 1871. In 1895 the Presbytery of Shillong-Mawlai was created.¹⁴⁰

As a result of the transfer of the provincial capital from Guwahati to Shillong in 1874 the area witnessed a concentration of Christian missions and Christian institutions. The Welsh Mission established schools, a college, a hospital, printing works, an orphanage, a book room and the administrative establishment of the Khasi-Jaintia Synod in Shillong and large churches grew up in different localities. Except for a few villages, the whole area

135. See Kallarackal, pp. 105, 161.

136. *Directory*, 1990, pp. 740ff.

137. See *U Lurshai*, 4 (August 1912), p. 3.

138. Information provided by the Secretary, Pastor's Fellowship of the Church of God, Meghalaya and Assam, dated 5th September 1987, quoted in L. Pohsngap, "Trumpets for the Khasis" (1988), pp. 299ff.

139. W. Shullai, *Ka History Jong Ka Balang Mawkhar*, 1871-1978, 1979.

140. See Jyrwa, p. 32. cf. Jones, *Ka Balang*, p. 77.

was evangelized with permanent churches established in each village. It is now divided into 3 presbyteries, viz., Shillong Ri Lum, Shillong Ri War Sepngi and Shillong Ri War Mihngi with a strength of 103 churches, 54 branch churches and a total membership of around 69, 579.¹⁴¹

The Catholic Mission, which had entered the area after Shillong was made the capital of the former undivided Assam province started its missionary operations at the new capital itself.¹⁴² Besides opening schools for both boys and girls, medical services, technical and training centres, printing works and other activities, the Catholics made a unique contribution to the development of higher education through the establishment of institutions of higher learning at Laitumkhrach, Mawlai, Mawkhar, Laimer—Upper Shillong, Jongsha, Pynursla, Laitlyngkot and other places. Churches were established in more than 200 villages with a catechist and a teacher in each village.¹⁴³

Shillong is not only the headquarters of the Presbyterian and Catholic churches, but is also the headquarters of all the churches working in the Khasi-Jaintia region. With the exception of the Church of God and the All-One-in-Christ Church Fellowship, all churches have at least one school in Shillong. Though much work is concentrated in Shillong, those served by the programmes there come from all parts of the region. These programmes have thus contributed to the development of a sense of common identity.

(4) Ri Bhoi Area. The northern region with its thick forests and wild animals and fatal black fever had been isolated from the rest of the hills. This isolation was broken down with the coming of Christianity to the area in 1875.¹⁴⁴ Rev. T. Jerman Jones of the Welsh Mission was the pioneer, establishing the first permanent churches in the Ri Bhoi area. Before his departure from the area in 1890, churches had been established in nine villages.¹⁴⁵ The work was taken over by Rev. Dorkha who subsequently came to

141. Cf. *Report* 1989.

142. Becker, *History*, pp. 11ff.

143. Kallarackal, pp. 101, 111-12, 141-42, 156.

144. Marwein, *Ri Bhoi*, p. 5.

145. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

be known as the "Apostle of the Ri Bhoi"¹⁴⁶ because of his long and fruitful service. Before the end of the nineteenth century Christians numbered more than 1,400 in the area. Educational activities and a travelling dispensary had been introduced. The people were brought into the larger Khasi-Jaintia society through the Presbyterian ecclesiastical structure of which they were a part. There are today some 64 Presbyterian churches with more than 14,000 members.¹⁴⁷

The entrance of the Catholic Mission into the area further strengthened the solidarity of the Bhois with the Khasi-Jaintia peoples.¹⁴⁸ That mission has 7 High Schools along with a number of Primary Schools in the area. The establishment of an agriculture training centre at Umran-Sohbatnong has benefited the agriculture of the Bhoi area. The Sisters of Charity run a Leprosy Hospital at Nongpoh and look after the general medical needs of the area. Catholic churches have been established in more than 70 villages in the northern Ri Bhoi area.¹⁴⁹

Other churches too have entered the area, contributing to the break-down of the isolation of the region and hence strengthening the new tribal identity.

(5) The Western Khasi Area. The Western Khasi ecclesiastical area begins from Mawphlang-Mawreng on the east to Sonapahar on the west and from Balat-Maheskhola on the south to Jirang-Mawdem on the north. It includes a number of dialectical groups who were also divided politically. Some of the main divisions of the area were known as Mawphlang, Nongkhlaw, Mawiang, Wār, Maram, Bhoi, Lyngngam and Muliang. We will break down our survey according to the following sub areas : Mawphlang, Khadsawphra, Nongstoin-Mawiang, Maharam and Lyngngam.

a. *Mawphlang.* The beginnings of Christian work in the Mawphlang area can be traced to 1849.¹⁵⁰ While the work was started by missionaries, the rapid growth of the Christian com-

146. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

147. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

148. Paviotti, p. 13.

149. Kallarackal, pp. 145, 148-49, 175.

150. Nongsiej, p. 2.

munity was attributed to the work of indigenous Christian workers. U Ramjan the first convert from the area, was ordained evangelist in 1867.¹⁵¹ Schools and churches were started, and the first Christian medical service instituted by Dr. Griffith Hughes at Mawphlang in 1897. The dispensary was later shifted to Cherrapunji and finally to Shillong.

From Mawphlang village the Gospel was carried to other villages within the chieftainship, and beyond to the neighbouring States of Lyngiong and Sohiong.¹⁵² The former Mawphlang-Mairang Presbytery which was organized in the 1890s included churches in villages scattered throughout different chieftainships of the western area.

b. *Khadsawphra*. Khadsawphra is another sub-area of the western area which was receptive to the new faith. In response to the invitation of the chief, U Jidor Syiem, the Welsh Mission started its first school there in 1853 at Mawnai village under the headship of U Simon.¹⁵³ Members of the royal family of the syiemship were the first converts of the Mawnai church, which was organized by Rev. Thomas Jones II in 1865.¹⁵⁴ The new faith was in due course spread among the different villages in that and adjacent syiemships. Later on the chief himself was baptized and U Kine Singh, who succeeded to the office of Syiemship was ordained an elder of the church.¹⁵⁵ His work influenced the subjects in his territory to embrace Christianity.

Like U Jidor Syiem, a chief of Mawdem, U Lear who was impressed by the faith about which he had heard from the Cherrapunji missionaries in 1860 invited the Welsh Mission to start work at Mawdem.¹⁵⁶ In response to this request, the Mission sent U Dorshan in 1863.¹⁵⁷ No sooner had a school been opened than a church with 50 members was organized at Mawdem in 1868 by

151. Ibid.

152. Ibid., p. 3.

153. Ibid.

154. Ibid.

155. Jones, *Ka Balang*, p. 65.

156. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, pp. 161-62.

157. Ibid., p. 162.

Rev. Griffith Hughes.¹⁵⁸ U Lear Sordar, who was one of the first converts, was later ordained pastor of the church.¹⁵⁹ His political powers were thus combined with his priestly powers. Largely through his influence Christianity spread to the neighbouring Rambrai and Myriaw States. While the Gospel was planted at Myriaw in 1876 or 1877, the conversion of the chief of Rambrai and his wife was the beginning of the church there in 1894.¹⁶⁰ Before the end of the nineteenth century each major village in Khadsawphra, Mawdem, Rambrai and Myriaw chieftainships had at least a school and a church.

c. *Nongstoin and Mawiang.* U Larsing Khongwir and Rev. O.L. Stephens were the first to preach the Gospel in Nongstoin in 1855 and Mawiang Syiemship in the 1880s.¹⁶¹ Almost immediately after schools were established churches were organized. The converts were in turn responsible for spreading the new faith not only in their own area but also in neighbouring syiemships. The revival movement of 1905 started at Pariong in the Mawiang Syiemship and made a significant contribution to the expansion of the church throughout the whole Khasi-Jaintia region.¹⁶²

d. *Maharam.* Khasi Christians from War Shella are believed to have been the first evangelists to preach in the Maharam Syiemship in 1860 or 1861.¹⁶³ Unlike the conversion movements of the other areas, the fast growth of Christianity in this syiemship after the establishment of the first church at Rangthong in 1866 was due not to schools¹⁶⁴ or any missionary methods but to a miracle. It was reported that a woman from Rangthong gave birth to a son who later on died. The dead son was made alive again due to the prayers of the first convert of the village.¹⁶⁵ As in the Apostolic Church, the news about the new faith spread far

158. Nongsiej, p. 4.

159. Jones, *Ka Balang*, p. 67.

160. Nongsiej, p. 5.

161. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7.

162. Jones, *Ka Balang*, pp. 124ff.

163. Nongsiej, p. 5.

164. A school was not established at Mawten village until 1937. In 1952 it was shifted to Mawkyrwat.

165. The dead son who was made alive through prayer was U Kpa U Oblimohan Roy. See Nongsiej, p. 6.

and wide with the result that people were ready to accept it even before the evangelists arrived. It is not surprising that due to this unusual history there is a high concentration of Christians in the area but not many educated people.

e. *Lyngngam*. Located in the extreme western corner of the Khasi hills, the Ri Lyngngam remained isolated longer than other areas. The thick jungles with dreaded wild animals inhabited by a people reputed to be cannibals undoubtedly contributed to the isolation and the delay in preaching the Gospel in that region.¹⁶⁶ Though Khasi Christians entered the area towards the end of the nineteenth century, the first Christian community was established at Nongkharai only after the turn of the present century through the work of Rev. Dorsingh and U Kynjobier.¹⁶⁷ In 1919 the first school was started at Nongriambha with a teacher from Nongstoin who later on married a Lyngngam woman convert.¹⁶⁸ After his death, however, the church disappeared to be revived only in the 1950s.

Speaking about the spread of the Christian church among the Ri Lyngngams, S. Karotemprel writes :

Preachers from Nongstoin used to visit the Lyngam villages as early as 1930 and made a few Christians in Nongkulang and Riangba villages. But being very small in number, they soon disappeared. Between 1955 and 1960 a survey of the Lyngam area was made. Through the preaching of Kong Helisa Royal and Kong Maysalyne War from Sonapahar village a certain Adok and his whole family were received in the church... In 1956, the Presbytery of Pariong organized a preaching campaign in the area of Mawshynrut. During this time Hollinshon and 17 others received baptism. Soon the newly baptised, under the leadership of Kong Helisa Royal, went out to preach in several villages of Ri Lyngam.¹⁶⁹

In this manner Christianity was eventually spread throughout

166. For further information regarding the primal life of the Lyngngam and the growth of Christianity see Karotemprel, *Lyngams*.

167. Ibid.

168. Ibid.

169. Ibid., p. 27.

the Ri Lyngngam area. Evangelistic campaigns conducted by the neighbouring converts from Nongstoin and Pariong have been successful in evangelizing the neglected people. Because of its rapid growth the young Ri Lyngngam Christian community was granted a separate Presbytery in 1982.

Christianity grew steadily in the western region of the Khasi hills. By the end of 1988 the Presbyterian Church had 8 Presbyteries covering the entire area with 318 local churches, 113 branch churches in small villages and hamlets and a total membership of around 105,506.¹⁷⁰ It runs 16 High Schools, 34 Middle English School and 189 Primary Schools in addition to two rural health centres.¹⁷¹ Even the Ri Lyngngam area which received Christianity relatively recently now has churches, including branch churches in more than 48 villages with a membership of around 7,293.¹⁷²

The Catholic Mission has also met with success in its work in the western Khasi hills. The Marbisu Parish was initially the main centre for that mission in the area. Now there are parishes and mission centres at Mairang, Umkhatdor, Nongstoin, Rangblang, Mawkyrwat, Mawsynram Riango-Sonapahar and other villages in the northern area. Besides the establishment of schools, the church introduced medical service and training facilities. While attending to the spiritual needs of the people in churches, the educational activities were undertaken on behalf of people of all backgrounds. Fr. Albizuri had a successful ministry in the Lyngngam territory.¹⁷³ His commitment to the people there was so great that the growth of the church has been attributed to him. Catholic churches have been established in more than 370 villages in the area.¹⁷⁴

Other churches have also been established in the area. The Church of God has congregations in more than 100 villages and runs a few Primary Schools and two High Schools. Other churches have started entering the field with some following.

170. See *Report* 1989.

171. *Ibid.*

172. *Ibid.*

173. See Karotemprel, *Lyngams*, pp. 56ff.

174. Cf. Kallarackal, pp. 119, 122-25, 150, 166.

Summary : As the above survey indicates, Christianity has been established in all the geographical areas in which the Khasi-Jaintia people live. While many of the people have not become Christian,¹⁷⁵ though almost every village has a church, yet the new religion has become representative of people from the different areas like Khyntriams, Pnars, Bhois, Wars, Lyngngams and other small sub-ethnic groups, women and men alike. It has brought together the poor with the more prosperous, the rural with the urban people. It has become a microcosm of the Khasi-Jaintia people.

IV. CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS

We have thus far seen how Christianity in several different denominational forms, but predominantly that of the Welsh Mission, had rooted itself in virtually all of the Khasi-Jaintia villages, establishing new relationships on the basis of which a new sense of tribal identity would be based. It was primarily the institutions introduced by the several Christian missions and churches that were the principal agents of this development. To these institutions we will now turn our attention.

(1) Ecclesiastical. While for an essentially democratic society the Khasi-Jaintia people found the local representative structures of the Presbyterian Church familiar enough, the unique contribution of Christianity was the establishment of comprehensive ecclesiastical structures that brought representatives of the people together at levels on which they had never met before. The first such structure was established by the Welsh Mission in the 1860s. Though differing in detail (and in theological understanding) all of the churches established in the region, combined features of local structure with a more comprehensive structure that brought representatives from all areas of the hills together. These structures helped break down the old barriers created by traditional dialectical, religious and political differences.

In this section we will be dealing primarily with the Welsh Presbyterian Mission structure. Though one could study the con-

175. According to the Census of 1981, out of the total population of 829, 389 in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Christians number 456, 461 or 55%. See *Census of India, 1981, Series 1, Paper 4 of 1984.*

tributions made by the structure of each of the churches that exist in the area, and reach similar conclusions, the Welsh Mission was without question the first and most influential Christian agency to work in the region and even today has the largest number of adherents. It has hence had the major impact.

a. *The Presbyterian Form of Church Government.* The form of church organization gradually introduced as the number of churches began to increase in different areas was the Presbyterianism that the Welsh missionaries had brought with them. By the 1860s the Welsh Mission had established itself in a wide area. Its schools and churches were distributed as follows :

Ri War : Shella, Nongkroh, Nongwar, Sohbar, Mustoh. Ri Jaintia : Jowai, Lamin, Shangpung, Nongbah, Nongtalang. Western Khasi Hills : Mawphlang, Mawnai, Nongrmai, Mairang, Laitdom, Nongthymnai, Mawdem. Central Zone : Mawlai, Mawtawar, Laitumkhrach.¹⁷⁶

During the 1860s the mission organized a Presbytery which brought together all these local churches from the different regions of the hills into a single organization. The first Presbytery meeting took place in 1867 at Nongsawlia. As churches increased in number new Presbyteries were created, but under the single umbrella organization of the Assembly. By 1895 there were five Presbyteries : Cherrapunji-Shella, Shillong-Mawlai, Mawphlang-Mairang, Jawai-Shangpung and Ri Dkhar.¹⁷⁷ The Assembly was organized in 1896 and its first meeting was held in the same year at Shella.¹⁷⁸ Until 1953 when there was a reorganization of the entire Presbyterian Church of North East India, the Assembly was the supreme body bringing together and having jurisdiction over the Presbyteries and local churches throughout the Khasi-Jaintia hills.

Similar developments had been taking place in other parts of the North East where the Welsh Mission was working. There were

176. Jyrwa, p. 27.

177. Ibid.

178. Ibid., pp. 32ff.

three Assemblies, viz., the Khasi-Jaintia Assembly, the Cachar Assembly and the Lushai Assembly. These three Assemblies were brought together under a Synod in 1924.¹⁷⁹ In 1953, the names were reversed. Now the highest body was named Assembly, and the term Synod was used for the regional organizations. The Khasi-Jaintia Assembly then became the Khasi-Jaintia Synod.¹⁸⁰

b. *The Synod.* The supreme legislative, administrative and executive body of the Presbyterian Church in the Khasi-Jaintia hills is what is now known as the Synod. It is constituted by the Presbyteries which in turn bring together the churches in a smaller area. Its annual meetings bring together delegates deputed by the Presbyteries and Districts. As such it has much more than simply ecclesiastical significance. It is an agency that has promoted the solidarity of the Khasi-Jaintia people as a whole.

c. *The Presbytery.* In the 1860s, when the number of Churches was relatively small though representative of most areas in the Khasi-Jaintia hills, the Presbytery served as the single integrative body—both for church and society. As the church grew, several more Presbyteries were established and what is now known as the Synod was created to bring them together. There are now 22 Presbyteries within the Synod. Even with the breakdown into numerous Presbyteries, they still cross the traditional political, religious and dialectical barriers. Nearly all Presbyteries include churches from several different syiemships.

d. *The District or Sub-District.* Each Presbytery is composed of several Districts or Sub-Districts made up of ten or more local churches, supervised by ordained pastors with the help of elders and Biblemen. Though it operates in a restricted sphere, it does bring together people from neighbouring villages and thus contributes to the development of the tribal solidarity at that level.

179. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

180. The proposal to change the levels to which names "Assembly" and "Synod" were used was made by Rev. Llewelyn Jones, then General Secretary of the Welsh Mission. It was accepted by the Presbyterian Church in North East India in 1953. Cf. *Assembly*, p. 24.

e. *The Pastorate.* The Pastorate was introduced in the late nineteenth century. It brings together three or more local churches to re-enforce each other. The Pastorate, chaired by the Pastor, was accountable to the District. It conducts evangelistic campaigns and generally provides assistance for the weaker churches in terms of worship, leadership and provision of teachers for Sunday Schools. It also identifies appropriate actions to fulfil the need.

f. *The Local Church.* The Local Church is the primary unit of the Presbyterian system. It consists of members from a single village. At the turn of the century there were 282 local churches while in 1988 the number had increased to more than 800.

g. *Presbyterian Structure and the Khasi-Jaintia Polity.* Though the Presbyterian polity was more comprehensive in that it came to embrace the entire area inhabited by the Khasi-Jaintia peoples, it was founded upon principles of democratic decision-making that was closely related to the traditional polities of the Khasi-Jaintias. One Welsh missionary felt that because of this the Khasi-Jaintia church was even more democratic than the church in Wales :

But, when comparing the system of governing of the Presbyterian Church in the Khasi and Jaintia hills and the system of governing of the Presbyterian Church in Wales, we find that people are more powerful here ; the Presbyterian Church in Khasi Jaintia is more democratic.¹⁸¹

In the traditional polity, the village Durbar was linked with the State Durbar through village representatives duly elected by the village "electoral college". The State Durbar, which was made up of the chief, founding clans and the village representatives, acted as the highest court of appeal. Decisions were made on the basis of the consensus of this representative body. The Presbyterian polity functioned in a similar way—except that it extended beyond the old state level to encompass the entire Khasi-Jaintia region.

181. Evans, "Balang", pp. 109-10 (English translation is mine).

In extending the traditional system in this way it helped them adjust to the new political realities and the radical changes that they had brought. It certainly contributed to the development of a sense of tribal as distinct from village or state identity.

h. *The Ministry.* The Presbyterian polity's emphasis upon the function of well trained pastors with considerable but not unrestricted authority within their pastorate coupled with a policy of developing indigenous leadership contributed to the further indigenization of the church. The first converts were given responsibilities as evangelists, teachers, elders and pastors from the beginning.¹⁸² In 1890 the first four Khasi pastors were ordained giving them the status equal to that of the missionaries in the church.¹⁸³ The fact that the leadership of the church placed in the hands of the Khasi-Jaintia Christians helped remove the stigma of foreignness and contribute to the church's role as a genuinely indigenous agent of accommodation to change.

(2) Education. While writers about the role of Christianity among the Khasi-Jaintia people usually overlook the significance of the church organization to the development of a sense of tribal identity, almost all recognize the important role it played in the educational sphere—though not necessarily recognizing its contribution to tribal solidarity. The first Christian school—indeed the first schools of any kind—in the region were those established by the Serampore Mission. These did not continue when that mission withdrew in 1838. When the Welsh missionaries arrived at Cherrapunji in 1841, the Khasi-Jaintia people “possessed neither schools, nor books, nor even a written language.”¹⁸⁴ The first thing that the missionaries did was to begin to correct that situation by opening schools and introducing a written language. This work was started even before churches were organized.

The dialect spoken at Cherrapunji, the one learned by the missionaries resident there, became the standard language for all

182. Jyrwa, pp. 26, 29, 31.

183. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

184. Morris *Ambassadors*, p. 11.

sections of the Khasi-Jaintia people. It was propagated through schools, literature and the worship of the church. With the exception of the aged and the handicapped, literacy was made a condition for church membership. The first network of schools concentrated in the Cherrapunji but in due course it was expanded throughout the region. Excepting the two Presbyteries of Saipung and Karbi Anglong, which are mainly outside the Khasi-Jaintia hills, even as late as 1988 when many schools were being run by the government the Presbyterian Church was running 436 Primary Schools, 78 Middle Schools, 30 High Schools and 1 College.¹⁸⁵

The Catholic Church played a significant role in the development of higher education in the region. Because of its primary emphasis upon God's action for redemption, the Church saw education as one of the practical means of transferring faith into action among the marginalised and uncivilised people based on "reason, religion and amiability." In fulfilling that motive, the Catholic Church, particularly the Salesians, though entered upon the educational affairs among the Khasi-Jaintias rather lately has successfully made much headway in providing higher network of educational and technical schools and colleges more than the stable pioneering Welsh mission. True to the principles of the Salesian Society, the Church looked more after the rural folks, boys and girls, irrespective of class, faith and ethnic backgrounds, and help them to avail every opportunities to enter schools and stay in the boardings. The schools, colleges and boardings are supervised by well trained priests and dedicated nuns. In addition to the caring of the poor and the rural folks, the Church made Shillong the educational capital of the entire North East India enabling the Khasi-Jaintias in particular and other students in general to prepare themselves for the all India Service Examinations and other higher vocations through the three colleges and their respective hostels. As of 1990, the Catholic Church runs in Khasi-Jaintia hills alone, as many as 879 elementary schools, 50 high schools and 3 colleges with a number of boardings and hostels in its parishes and centres in the region.

185. See *Report* 1989.

In addition to academic schools, Christian Missions and churches introduced technical education as well. The Don Bosco Technical School in Shillong, the Training Centre in Shillong, St. Mary's Girls Training Centre in Jowai, Lum Jingshai Training Centre and St. Joseph's Agriculture Training Centre at Umran-Sohbatnong established by the Catholics as well as the Multi-purpose Training Centre of the Seventh Day Adventists at Thadlaskein are examples. The graduates of these technical and training centres either set up small businesses or were employed in government and private enterprises.

Like the other schools, particularly boarding schools, theological education institutions made significant contributions towards breaking down the old barriers among the people. Among them are the Cherra Theological College of the Presbyterian Church (the oldest theological institution at the collegiate level in North East India), Sacred Heart Theological College in Shillong, Christ King College in Laitumkrah, Oriens Theological College in Mawlai (the last three being theological training institutions of the Roman Catholic Church), and a number of Bible Schools and Institutes run by different denominations. They draw students from all sections of the Khasi-Jaintia tribe as well as from other parts of the North East and India.

Christianity made an especially important contribution in the education of women. There were more than 10 Girls' High Schools run by Christian Churches and one college, the St. Mary's College, Shillong, for women. These schools and colleges helped advanced literacy among the women. There was a time when Khasi-Jaintia women had the highest percentage of literacy amongst women in the whole of the erst-while composite Assam,¹⁸⁶ and second at the all India level.

Closely associated with education was the development of literature. Without it there can be no schools. While the Serampore Mission had put the Khasi language into the Bengali script, the Khasis had apparently found this difficult to read so the Welsh

186. Syiemlieh, p. 171.

Mission used the Roman alphabet. Primers and readers were published for the schools, then other religious books and translations of scripture portions—and eventually of the whole Bible. The missionaries introduced a prose and poetic style that became the foundation for modern Khasi-Jaintia literature. This literature has developed to the point where it is recognized by Calcutta University, Guwahati University and now is studied in a separate department at the North-Eastern Hill University in Shillong up to the post-graduate level. This literature in the standard language again promoted a sense of cultural unity among the people.

Education and literature were closely related to evangelism. Education, was in fact, one of the most effective instruments for the spread of Christianity. With rare exception a school was the forerunner of a church in a village. Education was so highly valued that it was even made a condition for church membership among the Presbyterians in the early years. So close was the connection between school and church that the people generally did not differentiate between them. They were synonymous.

We have seen how, in cases like that of U Jidor, chief of Nongkhlaw Syiemship, and U Lear Sordar of Mawdem, they initiated the contact with the mission by requesting that it establishes schools in their states. Khasi-Jaintia Christians trained in the Normal School at Cherrapunji would approach a non-Christian village and propose the opening of a school. After negotiation a school teacher would be appointed and school begun. In addition to his school responsibilities he worked to evangelize the village. When some people became interested the school building was used as a temporary place of worship. Weekly Sunday School classes were also conducted in the school building. Thus the villagers were taught the knowledge of God, the value of human existence and the new Christian life style. In due course neighbouring villages joined the movement and received the new faith. When churches were organized and church buildings constructed the school master was atleast appointed as the first pastor.

The relationship between education and evangelism was so close, in fact, that if one was affected so too would be the other.

It was, of course, not the only method used to evangelize the tribe—but it was without question the most effective.¹⁸⁷

(3) Medical Work. Though the Khasi-Jaintia hills were healthier than the neighbouring plains of Bengal and Assam, nevertheless people suffered from a number of diseases. The missionaries discovered that diseases like cholera, hyperendemic malaria, gastro enteritis, rickets, kerato malaria exophthalmic, black-water fever and epidemic typhus were widespread.¹⁸⁸ In addition to the prevalence of such deadly and infectious diseases, the people also suffered from malnutrition which led to high rate of infant mortality. It was reported that,

We have found that out of 1000 babies who were born there were between 300 to 500 who passed away before attaining the age of one year.¹⁸⁹

Traditionally, it was believed that sickness was caused by demons and that its cure was therefore a religious problem. Nalini Natarajan noted that,

Sickness was believed to be caused by angry deities through the agency of witches and wizards; this gave it a religious colour and the 'sickness' was dealt with by performance of rites connected with black magic.¹⁹⁰

Initially the missions did not plan to become involved in medical work because they believed that this would interfere with their primary task of evangelism. However when confronted with the suffering of the people the missionaries began to treat the diseases as best as they could. The early missionaries were not trained for this purpose, but gradually picked up a little knowledge of

187. F. S. Downs, "Christianity in North East India", in C. B. Firth, *An Introduction to Indian Church History* (First published 1961, reprinted, 1983), pp. 284-85.

188. Hughes, "Mission", pp. 1ff.

189. *Ibid.*, p. 4. (English translation is mine).

190. Natarajan, p. 27.

first-aid and simple treatment of the most prevalent diseases. Angell Jones noted that,

the early missionaries made efforts in accordance with their elementary knowledge and means to cure the people's diseases and sufferings.¹⁹¹

The people were at first reluctant to take the medicine offered by the missionaries but as they saw its effectiveness they gained confidence in the treatment offered. People began to travel great distances to the mission centres for medical aid. The Catholic missionary, Don Hauber wrote,

From great distances they came to the Mission-house to procure medicine, and they expect the Missionary to know their diseases even without their indicating the symptoms to him.¹⁹²

While the missionaries themselves thought such a service as an act of compassion not directly related to their "religious" responsibilities, the people clearly looked upon the healing ministry as one of religious significance. Diseases had always been perceived to be a religious problem, therefore the curing of disease was a religious activity—by whatever means it was accomplished.¹⁹³

By the end of the nineteenth century the Welsh Mission had been so impressed by the importance of medical work that they began to send fully qualified medical missionaries—the first mission working in North East India to do so. Dr. Griffiths started a dispensary at Mawphlang in 1878 and Dr. A. D. Hughes started a second one in the Jaintia area in 1887. While the medical centre at Jowai continued in that location and was expanded in later years, the one in the Khasi area was eventually shifted to Shillong. The early Catholic missionaries, like the Protestants, provided simple medical service to the people. Dispensaries came to be established in due course looked after by the sisters, as well as the priests. By 1914 it was reported that,

191. Jones, *Ka Balang*, p. 58. (English translation is mine).

192. Don Hauber, "Life in Assam", *The Salesian Bulletin*, XV. 2 (March-April 1925), p. 46. Hereinafter cited as Hauber.

193. See Downs, *Christianity*, pp. 237-39.

In the six dispensaries for the poor now functioning in the mission, 3,101 sick people were given treatment and 13,553 medicines dispensed. The visits to the sick people by the sisters amounted to 2,000.¹⁹⁴

Eventhough qualified doctors like Dr. Griffiths and Dr. Hughes had begun medical work earlier, it was not until Dr. G. Roberts arrived in 1913 that a major medical mission among the Khasi-Jaintia people was begun. He wished to establish a full-fledged hospital, rather than simply dispensaries. Initially he served as a Civil Surgeon under the government but finally, in 1922, the 140 bed Welsh Mission Hospital in Shillong was opened.¹⁹⁵ It was regarded as the leading hospital in the region, and one of the best medical institutions in the sub-continent for many years. The maintenance of the hospital was strengthened by the assistance of local Khasi medical graduates, Drs. Drinsingh Hynniewta and Phin Singh.¹⁹⁶ They were products of mission schools in the Khasi hills. The arrival of a well qualified surgeon, Dr. R. A. Hughes, in 1939 raised the prestige of the institution. A hospital in Jowai was inaugurated in 1953 under the headship of a local Khasi Christian medical graduate, Capt. Dr. Homiwell Lyngdoh Nonglait. He was the only local person who was given the position of missionary by the Welsh Mission in 1938.¹⁹⁷ In addition to these major hospitals, the Presbyterian Church maintained travelling dispensaries and rural health centres at Mawphlang (1964), Laitmawsiang (1970) and Shangpung (1972). These centres served the need of the people in at least all regions of the hills.

The Catholic Mission in due course came to realize the importance of establishing a medical mission. The priests, though unqualified medically, had from the beginning served the people's medical needs as best they could. C. Becker noted that,

in the remote regions of the Khasi hills, where no first aid

194. Becker, *History*, p. 299.

195. Downs, *Christianity*, p. 236.

196. Jyrwa, p. 80.

197. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

was available, the missionary and also his mission personnel had to play a dual role, as a healer of the body and soul.¹⁹⁸

Sisters began to run dispensaries and mini-hospitals in Catholic Mission centres in remote areas,¹⁹⁹ but it was not until 1965 that the first Catholic hospital in Shillong, the Nazareth Hospital was opened. It has now developed into a first class medical institution.

(4) Other Institutional Services. In addition to the institutions mentioned above, Christian missions and churches undertook a number of humanitarian works through different kinds of institutions. These included orphanages, houses for the aged, creches, working hostels, village development and relief work. They reinforced the role of Christianity as one of the services to the needs of the people.

198. Becker, *History*. p. 298.

199. As of 1990, the Catholic Church runs 1 Hospital, 32 Dispensaries, 1 Home for the aged, 1 Leprosarium, 22 Mobile Clinics and 10 Orphanages. Like educational Schools and Colleges, these institutions serve people in the region irrespective of caste, class or creed. (Information available at the Historical Documentation Centre, Sacred Heart College, Shillong).

5 CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS SOCIAL CHANGE

The growth and development of Christianity among the Khasi-Jaintias was gradual. It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that it gained a significant foothold among all sections of the tribe. Schools, churches and medical services were established and the tribal response to change was positive. Insofar as Christianity played a significant role in shaping this development, it is necessary to examine the attitudes of Christians towards social change. We will first examine the missionary and then the Khasi-Jaintia attitudes.

I. THE MISSIONARY ATTITUDE

(1) The Background. The missionaries came with an evangelistic commitment and the conviction that religions other than Christianity were false. When they came they were ignorant about primal cultures, but in course of time many of them became outstanding linguists and authorities concerning the people among whom they worked. Their main aim was to liberate the people from bondage to what they regarded as superstition.¹ One of the ways in which they sought to do this, through education, was to play an important role in helping the people accommodate themselves to the traumatic changes that followed the imposition of alien rule without becoming detribalized.

The missionaries tended to make a distinction between the religious (what they frequently referred to as "superstition") and the non-religious elements in the cultures. Their attitude towards the non-religious elements that they did not regard as contrary to Christianity was positive. Thus, for instance, their attitude towards the Khasi language was positive and in putting it into writing they actually re-enforced the culture. In an earlier chapter we noted the way in which the stories of the loss of an alphabet previously possessed adversely affected their self-image. Over the years they had contact with literate cultures, mainly the Bengali,

1. Cf. in *Ka Pateng Khristan* VI. 7 (July, 1902). p. 49.

and a few of the chiefs, founding clans and businessmen in Cherrapunji and the War areas were able to use and even write the language to some extent.² This was necessary to carry out transactions in the plains markets. But the ordinary people did not know Bengali. When the missionaries entered the region they discovered that the knowledge of the Bengali language, which had hitherto been promoted by the British officers, was limited to the "upper classes". In any event they were convinced that it was necessary for Christian work to be done in the Khasi language itself. The Serampore Mission had begun the work of putting Khasi into the Bengali alphabet, but the Welsh missionaries were convinced that this was not suitable and so introduced the Roman alphabet—despite the opposition of the traders³ and British authorities.⁴ This missionary concern for the ordinary people and not simply the elite was to contribute towards the development of a common sense of identity.

The missionaries who first came to work among the Khasis were the Welsh Presbyterians (until the early twentieth century known as the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists), followed towards the end of the nineteenth century by the Roman Catholics. The Welsh missionaries came from the lower classes of their own society, many coming from a background of coalminers who had to struggle hard to make a living.⁵ Their ideology was understandably egalitarian and their primary sympathies were with the ordinary people (people with whom they could readily identify) rather than the

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2. S. Bhattacharya and J. B. Bhattacharjee, "Khasi-Bengali to Roman : The Colonial Transformation of Khasi-Jaintia Hill", in M. Miri, ed., *Lingustic Situation in North East India* (1982), pp. 6-8.
 3. "Ki Khasi Ki Dei ba'n pule Bangla", *U Khasi Mynta*, 31 (Lber 1, 1899). p. 1.
 4. While opposed to using of Roman characters by the Welsh Mission, the then DPI, Mr. W. S. Atkinson, ESQ. pointed out that it was a rule to adopt Bengali alphabet for the Khasi Language. See *Proceedings of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal*, Education Department October 1863, Proc. Nos. 17-19, p. 9. Hereinafter cited as *Proceedings, October 1863*.
 5. Downs, "Cultural Change", p. 95, See in *U Nongialam Khristan* (Sept, 1908), p. 4. Cf. K. W. Nongrum, *Ki Nongthoh Kot Khasi*, I (1982), p. 25. Hereinafter cited as Nongrum.

elite. Once they had decided to become missionaries the further training required often involved further self-sacrifice. This helps explain their concern to liberate the tribal people from illiteracy and ignorance, contributing factors in the poverty of their own people in Wales. People coming from the under-class generally have positive attitudes towards social change—at least that kind of social change that will improve the condition of the poor.

Religiously and socially the people of Wales, which was a much neglected and improverished part of Great Britain, had been influenced by social revolutionary movements that can be traced back to the English Revolution of the 1640s. While concerned for better conditions of life, they reacted against the excesses of the revolutionaries and developed a somewhat conservative attitude towards at least radical change.⁶

Nevertheless, theologically the Welsh missionaries were the products of eighteenth and nineteenth century evangelicalism. While that revival movement is known for its emphasis upon personal spirituality, it equally emphasized the need to transform a society marked by immorality and delinquency. Social renewal and change was always a central objective. Speaking about the background of nineteenth century Protestant missionaries from the English-speaking West, James P. Alter writes :

The Protestant missionary movement in Britain and North America was born and grew to its greatest strength during an era marked by revolutionary fervour and great changes in political, social, economic and religious life.⁷

Coming from this background the missionaries believed that the acceptance of Christianity would necessarily involve social change.

In the Welsh missionaries, then, there was a combination of a conservatism that sought to preserve traditional values with an

6. See J. F. McGregor and R. Beay, ed., *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, (1986).

7. James P. Alter, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Themes in Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in the Church in North India, 1800-1914", *ICHR*, VIII (June, 1974), p. 14.

understanding of religion as a dynamic force for social change. Thus while they believed that change of religion should result in social change, they also believed that those elements in the tradition that give a people its distinctive identity (always very important to the Welsh people) should be preserved. When they came to the Khasi-Jaintia area out of this background they tended to take a similar attitude here. Their object was to reform the way of life together with the belief system, "rescuing men and women through the power of the Gospel from sin, ignorance, false religion, and oppressive social customs and practices" in the words of Alter,⁸ but at the same time not changing the social practices that were basic to the identity of the people.

Both the social background and the theology of the Welsh missionaries led them to understand their primary responsibility for the common people of the Khasi-Jaintia hills. Their services to these people, the contributions to modernization through literature and education, and the conversion of many of them to Christianity was consciously understood as contributing towards desirable social change.

The Catholic missionaries by and large came out of a similar background to that of the Welsh missionaries, though they were from continental Europe rather than Great Britain. They were devoted priests who were prepared to live lives of great hardship and self-denial for the sake of the people.⁹ Some of them had had difficult childhoods, some having been orphans and struggled in life before offering themselves for the priesthood and missionary service.¹⁰ They were committed to working among the poor, to care for both their bodies and spirits.¹¹ In addition to their per-

8. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

9. Becker, *Early History*, pp. 145-72, Fr. L. Mathias, "Assam". *The Salesian Bulletin* XIV. 5 (Sept-Oct, 1922), pp. 147-50. See also Sr. Elizabeth Pakumala, "Bishop Stephen Ferrando: Apostle of Christ" (Unpublished typed script n.d.), p. 11.

10. A. Pianazzi, *Dare and Hope* (1979), pp. 3-5.

11. *Pro Memoria* 6443/3 (1923), p. 3, Cf. "Progress Report of the First Decade of the Salesians in Assam 1922-1932", *Don Bosco of India*, 11.5 (May, 1932), p. 83.

sonal experience of human hardships, the Salesians' spirit of service is grounded upon Don Bosco's charism.¹² As a founder of the Salesian Society in 1854, Don Bosco has had difficult early life at home following the sudden passing away of his father when he was only two years old.¹³ In order to get opportunities for education, Don Bosco made personal sacrifices to work as a tailor, a waiter, a shoe-maker in a blacksmith's shop or any job that can support him paying fees for his school education and lodging.¹⁴ The growing human sufferings in Turin has had considerable influence upon the young Don Bosco. He identified himself with the labourers who were being exploited to serve in substandard workshops. In his 'Oratory' of Valdocco in Turin, Don Bosco gathered all of the poor unemployed and abandoned boys who were uprooted by the industrial revolution of the 19th century Italy and Europe, to teach them in a proper way of human living and the knowledge of God based on a triadic principles of reason, religion and loving kindness. He understood that God has not called him to the service of rehabilitation but to prevention. This word "prevention" is introduced in a positive sense. It is a word of vision based on a divine spirit of redemption, experiences of human sufferings and the commitment to check the phenomenal growth of ignorance, inhumanity, immorality, unemployment, irreligion and social evils. It is a process of social healing, a humanisation towards liberation and self-reliance. Don Bosco's educative method was in due course incorporated into the *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of St. Francis of Sales*.¹⁵ It insists upon the works of charity on behalf of the young, especially of the poorer classes,¹⁶ and the neglected irrespective of class, colour, creed or nationality. The members of the Salesian

12. For a recent detailed study on Don Bosco's Charism from the Asian perspective see S. Karotemprel, ed., *Don Bosco's Charism and Asian Culture* (1988).

13. For a recent biographical study of Don Bosco see Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco's Pedagogical Experience* (1988).

14. Cf. *Don Bosco's Centenary & Fr. Aurelius Maschio's 80th Birthday Celebrations: A Tribute*, 1989, p. 21.

15. An Indian edition is published by the Provincial Office, Madras, on the 31st January, 1967.

16. Cf. "Object and aim of the Salesian Society," in *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis of Sales*, pp. 69f.

Society who prepare themselves for the ministry of the Church should abide by the rules of the Society and must make vows in obedience, poverty, chastity and live in a fraternal community.

It is against this background that the educational programme of the Catholics in the Northeast has been among the very best. Though at first they were not in a position to provide the extensive network of schools that the Presbyterians had under state patronage, nevertheless they have successfully placed emphasis not only at the elementary but at the High School and college levels including technical education. As pioneers of higher education among the tribes, the Catholics have established first class colleges in Shillong and about 50 High Schools and proceeding high schools in the capital town and in the various mission centres and subdivisional head-quarters of Khasi-Jaintia hills.

In due course, they too became involved in the activities that brought about social change. They sought to save the people from spiritual bondage to the fear of evil spirits and superstitions and from material bondage to poverty, ignorance and alienation.

(2) The Attitudes. Because of their backgrounds and their theological motivation the attitudes of the missionaries towards social change was complex. Some elements in the traditional society, such as the kinship system, the language and village administration, were approved, while other elements, which were thought to have religious implications, were condemned.

As stated earlier social change involves "a dynamic, progressive or evolutionary process which involves social, religious, political, linguistic and economic components". Each component is related to the others. The missionaries, however, did attempt to distinguish between the components that made up the primal society that they found in the Khasi-Jaintia hills in the middle of the nineteenth century. They believed that it would be possible to abolish some elements and maintain others. They realized that this would contribute to change, but that the emerging Khasi-Jaintia identity would be better than the traditional.

As already indicated, the Welsh missionaries totally rejected any element within Khasi-Jaintia culture which they believed had

religious implication.¹⁷ For the Evangelical missionaries only Christianity was the true faith, and therefore any other faith system was dismissed as superstition and incompatible with the Gospel. From this perspective, the cultural elements that they rejected included sacrifices, belief in spirits, dances, cremation of the dead, totemism and ancestor worship. Some of these were practices related to the state or village community, others were family rituals. Unlike the Welsh Mission and other Protestant Churches, the Catholic Church gradually approved most of the traditional religious elements.

Though the people theoretically believed in the existence of the one God, their religious practice tended to emphasize the propitiation of the unseen spirits who hovered in the sky or lived in forests, rivers, hills or caves. People would not build houses or cultivate in places that were believed to be the abode of spirits.¹⁸ Doing so would bring misfortunes including many kinds of suffering, physical deformities and early death. Sacrifices had several objectives such as the discovery of the cause of illness, misfortune and unnatural death, to give thanks to the deities, to determine the will of the deities before undertaking any work or business or a journey, and to secure blessings. All such practices relating to the spirits were prohibited by the Welsh missionaries within the Christian community.¹⁹

It should be noted that these traditional elements of Khasi-Jaintia culture had not liberated the people from fear. They perpetuated a feeling of being in bondage to the spirits and, moreover, fostered suspicion of neighbours who were believed to possess spiritual powers with which they could do harm to others. This religious component, related as it was to the family or state level at best, that is, at the sub-ethnic level, did not contribute to a sense of tribal solidarity.

While opposing the religious component of the traditional culture, the missionaries provided substitutes in the form of sacra-

17. See in *Ka Pateng Khristan*, VI. 7 (July, 1902), p. 49.

18. Becker, *History*, p. 186.

19. Evan, "*Balang*", p. 110.

ments, 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. Rejection of the religious element in the old life did not in any way alienate or result in the loss of the people's identity, because the traditional religious element had not contributed to that in the first place. In fact it was in the new forms of religious life that tribal identity was strengthened because the practices and structures of the church operated at the ethnic rather than sub-ethnic level.

It is interesting, however, that while the missionaries in general attempted to remove the religious component of traditional culture some of them did much to preserve some of that element insofar as they sought to preserve the folklore of the people. Examples of the efforts to preserve the oral traditions in written form because they were in danger of being lost with the death of those who remembered them are John Roberts' *Jaintia Folklores and Legends and the History of the Khasi Religion*,²⁰ and Fr. Paul Bonardi's "Heathen Worship amongst the Khasi Hills of Assam",²¹ Fr. Giulio Costa's *Ka Riti jong Ka Ri Laiphew Syiem*, Bynta I & II (1936, 1937). Though these were written from a Christian perspective they nevertheless indicate an interest among some missionaries in preserving a memory of the old ways.

Nevertheless, in general it can be said that the missionaries sought to displace the religious element in traditional culture with Christian ways.

While the Welsh missionaries sought to replace the religious elements in the traditional culture, they affirmed the value and maintained in the Christian community the social component of the culture. Thus they maintained *ka tipkur tipkha*, the clan system, inheritance laws, the land holding system, the status of women, marriage relations and village administration. Converts were allowed to continue these customs within the church. In

20. It was later published by Mrs. John Roberts.

21. See in *The Salesian Bulletin*, XVII.5 (September-October, 1925), pp. 146-49.

other words, consciously or unconsciously, the missionaries affirmed and re-enforced through the structures of the church those very elements within the traditional culture that had contributed most to a sense of common tribal identity.

The Anglican missionaries at first tended to reject or at least disregard important social as well as religious components. Hence they did not maintain the *tipkur tipkha* kinship system within their communities.²² As a result there was discontent among the converts and many reverted at least to the primal religion. Later they changed their position and supported the traditional kinship code in the same manner as the Presbyterians.

In addition to their affirmation of the *ka tipkur tipkha*, the Welsh missionaries honoured the traditional prohibition against marriage within the same clan (*ka shong sang*, regarded as a great crime against society). In order to enforce this traditional discipline the Welsh Mission even created a special committee known as *Ka Komiti Sang* (Committee for the Prohibition of Incest).²³

While affirming the essential forms of the Khasi-Jaintia social structure, certain social practices were condemned by the Welsh Mission. These included sexual promiscuity, concubinage, drinking alcoholic beverages and the use of opium. These practices were regarded as destructive to the individual, the family and the whole society. The missionaries were very strict about this. Unless converts renounced all these practices the church was not prepared to admit them to membership. Hence Morris reported :

No undue haste, however, was made to baptize the converts. The standard of church membership on the Mission

22. See in *Ka Juk* II. 11 and 12 (October-November, 1934), pp. 4-6. Hereinafter cited as *Ka Juk*. Though Natarajan reports that the Catholic Church ignored the traditional kinship code among its converts at Mawsmat and Laitkor (p. 102), these were, nevertheless, mere sporadic instances carried out by one individual non-Khasi priest without any official direction from the Church authorities.

23. The members of the Standing Incest Committee included both the missionaries and the Khasi-Jaintia converts. See in *Ka Juk*.

field was set high and clear from the beginning. It was enjoined that every candidate should not only have renounced all heathen practices, and lead a moral life, but that he must possess an intelligent knowledge of Christian principles, observed the Sabbath, and abstain from all intoxicants.²⁴

Closely related to these efforts to change certain social practices that were judged, in fact, to be anti-social, were missionary efforts to change those aspects of the material culture which they judged to be detrimental to the interests of the people. These included efforts to improve the hygienic conditions under which the people lived. As Nalini Natarajan put it :

The missionaries placed emphasis on the maxim 'cleanliness is next to Godliness' and taught the Khasis inexpensive methods of personal hygiene. Regular bath, keeping oneself otherwise clean, wearing washed and pressed clothes, especially on church service days (Sundays), etc., were gently inculcated in the people and it became a part of the routine.²⁵

Other contributions made by the missionaries to improve the living conditions of the people included suggestions concerning better ways in ventilating houses, of developing water systems, of quarrying lime by the burning of coal, introduced improved methods of carpentry and tailoring, and the idea of kitchen gardens.

In many cases the introduction of material improvements involved rejection of taboos. These taboos were the reason why the Khasi-Jaintia people tended to resist changes. Cutting of the hair, for instance, was considered a dangerous act to the unseen demon *U Thlen*.²⁶ Taboos also led to resistance to changes in the way houses were built, what food was eaten and a number of other matters relating to the material environment. Insofar as taboo was an important element in the traditional world view, the successful demonstration of their violation did much to under-

24. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 91.

25. Natarajan p. 104.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

mine confidence in the old religion.²⁷ In due course this prepared the way for the development of a dynamic culture—and significant social change.

One important element in the changes that were taking place was the dynamics of the new political system introduced by the British. The missionaries arrived on the scene after the British had already introduced their system. The imposition of a new judicial system with new procedures and laws, the introduction of a money economy and the induction of a number of outsiders into the area were major factors in bringing about social change. The missionaries accepted the new system as they found it, and provided the means whereby the Khasi-Jaintia people could successfully accommodate themselves to the new order. The missionaries did not reject the traditional political structures that continued to function, howbeit with limited authority, in some areas in the form of the village and State Durbars. Nor did they object to the system of Syiemship succession or the duties of the founding clans. Converts from the ruling and founding clans were permitted to continue their political duties.²⁸ In practice not only did the Welsh Mission approve the traditional democratic ideals of the people, but they incorporated them in the ecclesiastical structures that were established. The major innovation was that those structures were not now limited to the state level, as in the traditional political system, but at the ethnic level of the whole people—hence making an important contribution to the development of a sense of ethnic identity.

We have already noted that the missionary support for the traditional kinship system also constituted a major affirmation and even strengthening of the one element with the traditional culture that contributed significantly to a sense of tribal identity. Equally important with their support for the traditional kinship system, was the missionary affirmation of the linguistic component

27. Allen, *Gazetteer*, p. 65.

28. For instance U Lear Sordar of Mawdem and U Kine Sing Syiem of Nongkhlaw Syiemship Jones, *Ka Balang.*, pp. 64-5; Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 176.

of Khasi-Jaintia culture. This reflected their emphasis not only upon the common people but also the Protestant conviction that all people should read the scriptures and worship in their mother tongues.²⁹ Consequently one of their first and most important works, from the point of view of the development of tribal solidarity, was to reduce the Khasi-Jaintia language to a written form (using the Cherrapunji dialect for the purpose) and produce the first literature of the people.

(3) Summary. It is clear that the "mixed" policy adopted by the missionaries of rejecting some elements of the traditional culture (those believed to have religious or moral implications) and affirming others did not adversely affect the Khasi-Jaintia sense of identity. Quite the reverse was true. Those elements that they affirmed and strengthened were actually those that had traditionally provided whatever weak sense of ethnic identity existed. Hence as the church grew and developed the overall effect was one of contributing to an awareness of tribal identity.

II. THE KHASI-JAINTIA ATTITUDE

(1) The Background. By the end of the nineteenth century Christianity was well established, with both schools and churches³⁰ throughout the Khasi-Jaintia hills. Christianity had not only provided the institutional and ideological foundations on the basis of which the people adjusted to the social change the new order

29. Downs, "Cultural Change" p. 85.

30. The growth and development of the Welsh Mission in the nineteenth century can be compared from the following table :

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
Churches & preaching stations	16	32	102	189	396
Preachers	8	12	11	30	45
Deacons	×	10	11	85	171
Communicants	62	106	452	2147	4945
Church members	158	514	2060	6862	15678
Day School Scholars	190	1250	2666	4625	7337

Cf. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, pp. 182, 197.

had brought, but it also had significantly contributed to the development of indigenous leadership in the community.³¹ The development of local leadership had been a policy of the Welsh Mission from the beginning of its work. One consequence of this was that it was the people themselves that carried out nearly all of the evangelistic and educational work and hence became the agents of ethnic solidarity.

While it is difficult to document the attitudes of the earliest Christians towards social change, what evidence there is suggests that the great majority would at least outwardly have taken the same position as the missionaries. The very fact of their conversion to the new religion in increasingly large numbers³² implies that their attitudes towards the social changes, such a decision involved, were positive. This may also be implied insofar as the Christians were the main beneficiaries of the changes that took place. They supported the missionary emphasis upon the traditional kinship code (*tipkur tipkha*) and did not believe that as Christians their ethnic identity was in any way compromised.

One element in the context was, therefore, the emergence of a Christian elite which had been trained in mission schools in the hills and, at the more advanced level, in Bengal and Assam. This

31. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

32. The following statistics is selected as an indication of the conversion of the tribe to Christianity :—

Year	Total population	Christian population
1881	169,360	2,107
1891	197,904	7,144
1901	202,250	17,321
1911	235,069	31,257
1921	243,263	41,122
1931	289,926	59,573

Cf. *Census of India, 1881* (1883) pp. 38f; *Census of India, 1891* (1892), Assam Vol. II, *Tables*, p. 29; *Census of India, 1901* (1902) Vol. IV *Assam Part-I Report*, p. 52; *Census of India, 1911* (1912) Vol. III *Assam Part I-Report*, pp. 24-46; *Census of India, 1923* Vol. III *Assam Part I-Report*, pp. 26, 61; *Census of India, 1931* (1932) Vol. III *Assam Part I-Report*, p. 195.

provided this influential group of leaders with a new world view and exposure to a wide variety of religious traditions.

At the end of the nineteenth century there were some of the newly emerging intelligentsia that did not choose to meet the changes taking place through adoption of Christianity. Instead these people sought to deal with the situation by encouraging a renaissance of traditional Khasi religion. In 1899 they formed the Seng Khasi to advance their cause.³³ The pioneers of this movement included U Jeebon Roy, U Sib Charan Roy, U Rash Mohan Roy Nongrum and U Hormu Rai Diengdoh.³⁴ They wrote extensively concerning the traditional Khasi religion, affirming its essentially monotheistic concept of God, its ideas concerning heaven and hell, sacrifices and righteousness.³⁵ They saw the traditional religion as the core of the Khasi-Jaintia identity. Every element in the traditional culture was perceived to be based upon a common religious perception. The problem, of course, was that there was no single religion among the Khasi-Jaintia people and any renaissance effort of necessity involved the construction of a common religion based upon either the religion of one part of the region, or a combination of elements of several different parts.

(2) Attitude Towards the Traditional Religion. While the Christians generally agreed with the negative attitudes of the missionaries towards the traditional religion, there were some among them who sought to relate that religion positively towards Christianity. Perhaps these members of the christian intelligentsia were influenced by the Seng Khasi, both of which tended to live in the urbanized context of Shillong. Hence while virtually all Christian Khasis had a positive attitude towards the changes in the material and political culture, there were some among them that did not agree with the comprehensive missionary condemnation of the traditional religion of the Khasi-Jaintia people.

The first Christian to do so was Rabon Singh Kharsuka. He was born around 1840 at Mawmluh and had his education at the

33. Bhattacharjee, "The Messenger", pp. 1-28.

34. Ibid., p. 7.

35. U Jeebon Roy, *Ka Niam Khasi* (1897); *Ka Kitab Ba Batai Pynshynna Shaphang u wei Blei* (1901); and Jaitdkhar, *Ka Niam*.

Welsh Mission School at Nongsawlia. While in school, not yet a Christian, he had reacted negatively to the missionary criticism of the traditional religion. Later, in about 1864, after he had joined government service he had a religious experience that resulted in his conversion to Christianity. He became an active member of the Mawkhar Presbyterian Church in Shillong and was highly respected by the missionaries. Later on he resigned his government post to become a mere primary school teacher of the Welsh Mission at Mawmluh, at a much lower salary.

While serving in the mission school, Rabon Singh became interested in the religious practices still being followed by some of the people at Mawmluh and in neighbouring areas. He came to the conclusion that there was no reason why a convert should renounce his or her traditional religious practices. He believed that these practices should be adopted into the value system of the Christian community. Many of the traditional rituals, he said, were compatible with Christianity and therefore should be recognized. Hence he wrote articles on the traditional religion and a book on its religious rituals.³⁶ The rituals and practices he advocated were those practised at Mawmluh and the Cherrapunji area. Rabon Singh did not seem to be aware, in advocating the indigenization of these practices into Christianity, that they were only the practices of a limited area, and that to do so would be to weaken not strengthen the Khasi-Jaintia identity. The missionaries appeared to have disapproved the attitude developed in Rabon Singh's thinking. In due course, he expressed dissatisfaction³⁷ for joining the mission school and finally resigned³⁸ from teaching job but remained a Christian until his death in 1910.³⁹

Nearly two decades after Rabon Singh died in 1910, Dr. H. Lyngdoh Nonglait published a book entitled *ka Pomblang Nong-*

36. *Ka Kitab Niam Khein Ki Khasi* (Originally published in c 1900, reprinted, 1972).

37. Nongrum, p. 70.

38. Kynpham Singh, *A Collection of Writings about Khasi Hills and Khasis* (1979), p. XXV.

39. P. T. Marwein, *Meghalaya Handbook* (1981), p. 90.

krem bad Ka Thang Syiem Sohra (1928), the ideas of which were subsequently incorporated into his book *Ka Niam Khasi* (1937). Depending on the writings of U Jeebon Roy, U Sib Charan Roy and U Rabon Singh Kharsuka, Dr. Nonglait went even further by advocating *Ka Pomblang Nongkrem*, a sacrificial act observed strictly by the people within the Nongkrem Syiemship. The author's intention was to show that the accounts of Jeebon Roy and the others associated with the Seng Khasi were limited, insofar as they reflected the religious traditions of the Cherrapunji Syiemship alone. By adding a practice of the Khyrim, Dr. Nonglait believed that it could rightly be called "Ka Niam Khasi" (The Khasi Religion). Even this book is an account of the rituals of the two Syiemships and does not take into account the traditions of the other areas, this was the implication of his writing. While only Christianity provided the basis for Khasi-Jaintia solidarity, he nevertheless believed that there was value in preserving some elements of the tradition, or, atleast, in being familiar with them.

U Soso Tham was another Christian leader of Dr. Nonglait's time who had respect for the traditional religion. Educated in mission schools, he had even some theological training at the Welsh Mission School of Theology at Nongsawlia. After working as a school teacher in several different places, he was appointed as Assistant Master of the Shillong Government High School.⁴⁰ Among his writings, *Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniewtrep* (1936) is the most important. It is ranked as one of the best poems in Khasi literature. Prof. R. R. Thomas refers to it as a "classic".⁴¹ Based on his personal experience and reflection upon the "Seven Huts of the Ancient Days", the poem does not say anything about rituals and religious practices. Rather, it attempts to trace the golden age during the time of the "Seven Huts". Applying this to the contemporary situation, the poet echoes certain basic concepts like heaven, hell, sin, righteousness and justice. Soso Tham attempts to relate the traditional world view to the Christian faith. It seems

40. Nongrum, p. 134.

41. R. R. Thomas, "Opinion", in U Soso Tham, *Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep* (First published 1936, reprinted, 1976), p. XVIII.

that he was reacting against modern Khasis who appeared to have totally forgotten the traditional thought patterns.

While Rabon Singh Kharsuka and H. Lyngdoh Nonglait emphasised the ritual aspects, and U Soso Tham the philosophical, Fr. Elias Sohlyia, SDB, of the Catholic Church based his writings on the myths of the Khasi-Jaintia people. He tried to understand the underlying significance of the traditional religion on the basis of unrecorded stories. He believed that it was important that these stories should be written down, which he did in his book *Ki Khanatang U Barim* (1937). He believed that knowledge of the traditional stories would deepen the understanding of the role of Christianity among the people of the area. He said that it was a Christian duty to know the myths, and to see how they could be accommodated with a Christian theology.

Dr. Hamlet Barch is a contemporary layman of the Presbyterian Church, who has sought through his writings to revive the values of the traditions. His book, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People* (1964)⁴² exemplifies his attitudes towards Khasi culture. Following the ideas of Sib Charan Roy, he reacts strongly against the missionaries for denouncing the traditional religion as "crude". In his opinion, the traditional had a well developed monotheistic understanding of God, a personal God who is absolute and unknown. He feels that it is important to retain the traditional concepts, but not the rituals.

In Rev. T. Rodborne of the Presbyterian Church one finds the concept of Christianity as the fulfilment of the traditional religion.⁴³ He contributed to Khasi literature through numerous books on religion, theology, biography and the Khasis. In his book *Ka Niam Jong U Khasi Pnar* (1984), Rodborne examined the basic doctrines of the traditional religion. His conclusion was that Christianity is the fulfilment of that religion. Though the old religion had developed some authentic ideas, it still was unaware of

42. A revised and enlarged edition was published in 1985.

43. U Donbok T. Laloo, a prominent Khasi author, appears to have shared similar views with Rev. Rodborne. See *Ka Thymmei Pirkhat U Khasi bad Ki Parom I* (1975), pp. 11-12, 19.

the true nature of God. Thus it prepared the way, filling a vacuum that had to be filled for the people who were seeking for knowledge of the true God. Christianity did not come to destroy but to fulfill and widen the horizons of the old. Thus he did not condemn the old religion, but believed its complete form could be seen in Christianity.

While we have thus noted that there were individual intellectual who affirmed the value of perpetuating elements of the traditional religion, none of them actually put these ideas into practice. They simply put the traditions on records. Among Roman Catholics, the post-Vatican II period has seen the traditional rituals being taken seriously by Khasi priests. Among them there is a movement not simply to record the traditions, but to actually introduce some of them into Christian practice. This relates especially to some of the traditional festivals. It is successful to some extent because it has the backing of the church. Among the leaders of this movement is Rev. Fr. S. Sngi Lyngdoh. Coming from the Ri Bhoi of the Khyrim Syiemship, Fr. Lyngdoh is on the staff of the Sacred Heart Theological College where he teaches Scriptures. In addition to this priestly and teaching responsibilities, he is active in social movements, politics and literature. He has written much as is the founding editor of the paper, *Ka Sur Shipara*. His approach to the traditional Khasi religion is positive, believing that Christianity should incorporate elements of it. While the church had already been participating in traditional dances, Fr. Lyngdoh went further in adopting for himself the traditional Nongkrem priestly title, Lyngdoh Sohblei.⁴⁴ This title was traditionally reserved for the priests of the Nongkrem Syiemship. He was an active participant in the traditional Nongkrem festival which had earlier been condemned by Christians. He also took an active part in the revival of the forgotten sacrificial act called *Ka Bujai Blang*,⁴⁵ a sacrifice of the royal family and durbar of Nongkrem.

44. The traditional priestly title was used in his book *Ka Pomblang Shisien Jong Ka Hima Shillong* (Probably published in the late 1970s).

45. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

His activities in reviving traditional practices have been warmly welcomed by the Nongkrem people.

(3) Summary. We have seen that while the Khasi-Jaintia Christians reacted positively towards material and political changes in the culture, some among them did not share the missionary condemnation of the traditional religion. It is also clear that a revival of traditional religious practices will not contribute to ethnic solidarity for the whole people, because religious practice differed widely in the Khasi-Jaintia states. Hence the Christians who seek to find a common identity in the traditional religion are up against the same problem as the Seng Khasi. Either they choose the religious practice of one or several states and try to universalize it to the entire people, or they construct an artificial synthetic religion trying to harmonize the religious practice of the many states. Nevertheless, the effort itself suggests that at least some Christians are not content with the way in which Christianity in the past built a Khasi-Jaintia identity on the basis of certain elements in the tradition, but believe that any such effort must ultimately also embrace the traditional religious perception. It is appropriate to ask whether a concern with inculturation of Christianity based on the traditional religion is truly indigenous to the Khasi-Jaintia people or whether it reflects the influence of similar efforts being made elsewhere in India in relation to the traditional Brahminic culture.

6 THE CHRISTIAN IMPACT ON KHASI-JAINTIA SOCIETY

I. INTRODUCTION

We have indicated in the previous chapter that the Christian attitude towards social change among the Khasi-Jaintia people was mixed. While it sought to bring about changes in the traditional religion by replacing it with Christianity, it retained certain traditional features of society, especially the kinship code. Both in rejecting certain features of the traditional society and in affirming others, Christianity had the effect of contributing towards a strengthening or a creating of a comprehensive Khasi-Jaintia identity.

Over a long period of time, sanskritization had led to no significant change among the people.¹ By contrast, the coming of the British and the consequent imposition of a new political, administrative, judicial and economic order in the nineteenth century brought about radical change. The danger of these traumatic changes was that they could easily lead to detribalization, i.e., the loss of a distinctive tribal identity.² Insofar as the old order could not cope with the new, it was necessary to find a new basis for such an identity.

The absence of a single language weakened the unity of the tribe and made it more difficult for it to adjust to the changed context. Similarly the traditional political system, limited as it was the village and state levels, could not offer resistance to the new powers. In any event it was the political structure that was most seriously weakened and made impotent by the imposition of the new administration which held supreme political power in its hands.

A social system which placed more emphasis upon the clan or, at most, the state as the unit of basic identity could not provide

1. See above, Chapter II.

2. See above, Chapter III.

what the tribe needed to preserve a distinctive character. Another option was required to save the people from being detribalized and to function effectively in the modern context.

Christianity was seen by many members of the tribe as such an option. It was an agency which made it possible for them to maintain a distinctive Khasi-Jaintia identity through a blending of the most important element in the new world imposed upon them. It was, perhaps, the failure of sanskritization to fulfil this need that accounted for its inability to significantly influence the people.³ It did not represent the imposition of an alien system over which the people had no control, but came in itself to represent the people through the new ecclesiastical structures. Though introduced by foreign missionaries, the evangelization of the tribe was largely the work of indigenous Christian converts. It was they that were the main instruments of creating a new sense of tribal self-awareness, not the missionaries.

An important question in this connection is whether Christianity itself was a cause of the tribal trauma and hence a primary agent of change, or whether it functioned in a situation where it simply helped people respond to the changes instituted by more influential agencies. Downs is of the view that while the British government was primarily responsible for cultural change, Christianity contributed to this process by consolidating the tribe and creating a new cultural synthesis.⁴ Its impact was gradual, but once it was deep rooted among the people its role became unique.

Another question related to Christianity's role in Khasi-Jaintia society is how it has come to assume a dominant position in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres even-though today Christians only constitute a little over 55% of the total population. In his study of the Seng Khasi movement, which has already been stated earlier, Mathur is puzzled by this fact.⁵ He might have

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3. Downs, *Christianity*, pp. 191-93. See also Sylvanus Lyngdoh, "The Christian Approach to the tribals and their culture", in J. Pathrapankal, ed., *Service and Salvation* (1973), p. 541.
 4. Downs, "Cultural Change", pp. 85ff.
 5. Mathur, *Khasi*, pp. 140-41.

been less puzzled if he had examined Christian sources as carefully as he examined Seng Khasi sources.

It is easy to argue that the growth of Christianity in the Khasi-Jaintia hills was a challenge to the traditional culture.⁶ Because the missionaries rejected the religious element in the Khasi-Jaintia culture it is assumed that there was a complete change in attitude towards the culture on the part of those who adopted the new faith.⁷ We have already seen, however, that such an assessment represents an over-simplification. The missionaries and Khasi-Jaintia converts, rejected only those elements of the traditional culture which they believed to be religious in nature. They not only accepted other even more significant elements in the culture, such as the kinship system, but contributed towards strengthening those elements within the context of a new ethno-cultural unity for which Christianity was largely responsible. It can be argued that Christianity was responsible for consolidating the tribe. In fact, tribal solidarity existed only after the establishment of Christianity. It was within the structures of the church that representatives of the Khasi-Jaintia people from all areas of the hills met together for any purpose whatsoever.

Interestingly enough, while some scholars have argued that Christianity has completely displaced the traditional culture, others have expressed the opinion that the tribal culture did not undergo significant change in spite of the influence of Christianity. Instead a new community emerged that was a synthesis of the old and the new which nevertheless maintained a distinctive tribal identity.⁸ One of the reasons for this, it is suggested, was the indigenization of the Gospel. Thus, Puadipto Roy, who noted that Christianity did not bring about any change in the traditional matriliney and social structure,⁹ went on to conclude that,

...the tempo of conversion has not abated due to the early nativisation and grass-roots growth of the church.¹⁰

6. Bhattacharjee, "The Messenger", p. 3.

7. Rymbai, "Evolution", p. 67.

8. Downs, "Conversion", p. 12.

9. "Christianity and the Khasi", *Man in India*, 44.2 (April-June, 1964), pp. 14-16.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

The principal agent of change in the Khasi-Jaintia culture was British administration. Christianity's role was to bring the tribe together and provide it with the necessary intellectual tools to cope with the new realities. Christianity's role was mainly acculturative. Those who have studied the tribe have demonstrated that the Christians are more educated, change-oriented, and successfully engaged in modern economic activities than the non-Christians.¹¹ These are indicators of the impact of Christianity. Usually this impact is identified as being due primarily to the educational work of the Christian missions. While education undoubtedly did play a major role, the impact upon the people was due to many other factors associated with the growth and development of Christianity during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The most important of these factors are studied below. They are : the introduction and development of literature, education, the influence of the Christian ideology itself, the new life-style, and the development of ecclesiastical structures.

II. THE INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF LITERATURE

As noted earlier, the absence of a standard written language was one of the major reasons why the many groups speaking a variety of dialects living in the Khasi-Jaintia hills had not developed a sense of common identity. Insofar as the solidarity movement for which Christianity was primarily responsible was a major element in the social change that took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the work of the missions in the sphere of language is of the greatest significance.

(1) Creation of a Written Language. The first mission to attempt to reduce the Khasi-Jaintia language to written form was the Serampore Mission. It used the Bengali script to put the Shella dialect into written form. This early effort had not led to many Khasis becoming literate by the time that mission with-

11. S. M. Dubey, "Education, Social Change and Political Consciousness among the Tribes of the North East India", in Singh, *Tribal Situation*, p. 283 ; See also A.P. Sinha, "Politics and Economic Development in Assam", in *Ibid.*, p. 350.

drew in 1838. When the Welsh Mission came in 1841, it started over again, this time using the Roman alphabet. Since Cherrapunji was both the mission and government headquarters, the Welsh missionaries used the Cherrapunji rather than the Shella dialect as the standard language for the purpose. This was the dialect spoken by the people of Cherrapunji.

A later commentator on the decision to change from the Bengali to the Roman alphabet suggested that "the effect of writing Cossyah (sic) in the Bengali character appears much the same as writing English in the Persian",¹² the missionary responsible, Thomas Jones 1, explained it more clearly. He said that the reason Lish's students found it so difficult to master the much more complex, as compared with the Roman, Bengali alphabet. They were convinced that the people learned the Roman alphabet and their own language written in the alphabet more quickly.¹³ Of course, the pioneer Welsh missionaries were totally unfamiliar with any primal language—or with Bengali for that matter. No matter what rationalization they made to justify the decision, the main reason for the change is unlikely to have had anything to do with the alleged abilities or otherwise of the Khasi-Jaintia people but, rather, to the fact that the Welsh missionaries knew the Roman script and did not know the Bengali.¹⁴

The decision to use the Roman characters was made by the missionaries without consultation with the government. In fact the government objected to it. The Director of Public Instruction of the Government of Bengal, Mr. W.S. Atkinson, commented as late as 1863, saying, "I cannot do otherwise than give my voice in favour of the Bengali alphabet in preference to the Roman."¹⁵

In response to the counter argument that acquisition of the Roman alphabet would enable the people to learn the English language and hence better communicate with their British superiors, Atkinson responded still that he could not recommend.¹⁶

12. *Proceedings of October*, 1863, p. 9.

13. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 81.

14. Downs, *Christianity*, pp. 251ff.

15. See *Proceedings of October*, 1863, p. 8.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

His argument was that adoption of the Roman alphabet would leave the Khasi-Jaintia people far behind their Bengali neighbours.

The local traders and others who had developed some familiarity with the Bengali language also opposed the introduction of the Roman alphabet. They believed that it would adversely affect their economic transactions in the plains markets. Apparently they not only favoured the use of the Bengali alphabet, but the use of Bengali language itself as the medium of instruction in the schools. There were some advocates of this proposition even in the late nineteenth century, though their motives seems to have been to counteract the influence of Christianity. Leaders like U Jeebon Roy not only started Bengali medium schools at Lyba Shella and Shillong, but also prepared Bangla lessons for the Khasis.¹⁷ Nevertheless Banglalisisation never became popular among the tribe.

(2) The Basis of Khasi Literature. A written language provided the basis for the introduction and development of Khasi literature. Besides developing a written form of the language, the missionaries were the first to produce a literature—grammars, dictionaries, vocabularies, scripture portion and articles. The first published works included primary readers and the translations of religious books, mainly for use in the schools. These were followed by the publication of parts of the New Testament, then the entire New Testament and finally the whole Bible. The missionaries also brought out a hymn book in the 1850s which became the basis for modern poetic writing among the Khasi-Jaintias. Journals and, eventually, printing technology were also introduced.

Though these were all produced for religious purposes, nonetheless they laid a strong foundation for the emergence of a permanent tribal literature. The Khasi-Jaintia people had traditionally oral literature in the form of myths, fables and folklore. These were passed from generation to generation, during which process some were forgotten and new ideas were added. The introduction of a written literature ushered in a new era of both prose and poetic literature. It also enabled the local people to participate in

17. "Ki Khasi Ki dei ba'n pule Bangla", *U Khasi Mynta*, 31 (Iber 1, 1899), pp. 1-2, See also Nongrum, pp. 15ff.

the functioning of the new government, something they could not have done unless they were literate.

(3) One Language. The Khasi-Jaintia tribe had traditionally been divided into numerous dialectical groups. Some of these dialects were unintelligible even to the immediate neighbours of the speakers. Examples are the Amwi and Pnar dialects in the Jaintia hills and the Lyngngam and Maram dialects in the Khasi hills. The Cherrapunji dialect which was adopted by the missionaries as the standard language had only been understood previously by a few villages in the Cherrapunji area—those in the immediate vicinity of the mission centre.¹⁸ The missionaries made the decision to use this dialect solely on the basis of its being spoken in the villages near where they lived rather than any selective process based upon an evaluation of which the many dialects would be most suitable. Even when they did discover the existence of many dialects, the missionaries insisted that only the Cherrapunji dialect should be used in their schools, churches and literature. This was to be especially significant in the case of the Jaintia area where it could have been argued that a different language should have been used. The mission policy of using a single standard language for both areas contributed to the unification of the Khasi-Jaintia people.

It could be argued that this contradicted the basic Protestant principle of worship in the mother tongue—and the logic of the long battle the Welsh people had fought in their homeland to preserve their mother tongue against the imposition of English—but the overriding consideration grew out of the equally important Protestant principle of making the scripture available to people in their mother tongue. It would have been impractical to produce scriptures—let alone primers, grammars, hymn books, etc.—in the many dialects of the region.¹⁹ Hence they insisted upon the creation of a standard language based upon one of the dialects more or less arbitrarily chosen. Whatever their motives for doing

18. As to the different dialects which were spoken in various sections of the Khasi-Jaintia, people, even among the immediate neighbours of Cherrapunji, see Rodborne, *Khasi*, pp. 90ff.

19. Cf. *Ibid.*

so, the consequence was that the standard language contributed towards the unification of the tribe—the most important social change to take place.

(4) The Impact of Literature. As we have seen, the creation of a written language and the insistence that there should be a standard language for the whole tribe contributed to building up a new Khasi-Jaintia community.

According to tradition, the loss of a written script had resulted in the development of dialect groups which could not communicate with each other and hence had adversely affected tribal unity.²⁰ It was, in effect, a kind of detribalizing process. The missionaries introduced a written language for their own purposes, but one of the social effects was the provision of a linguistic base for a restored tribal unity. This, in turn, helped them to retain a distinctive identity in the face of the changes brought about through the imposition of British administration.

The political divisions of the tribe were related to dialectical groups with no standard language. Traditionally the dialectical group which was identified with a village, a group of village or a state was regarded as more important than the tribe as a whole. In fact at the tribal level there was no relationship at all. What relationship there was between even neighbouring states was often hostile, each being vigilant against territorial encroachment by the other. The existence of different religious rituals, and variant understandings of the relationship between religion and the states also contributed to a weak tribal identity.

A standard language promoted through education, worship and literature helped to create a new sense of cultural community among all the members of the tribe. A common language freed the people from alienation and suspicion which often arose because of an inability to communicate. With a common language they were able to come together in the Presbytery and Assembly/Synod meetings to discuss together issues of common interest. This led to a cultural revitalization which created in reality the tribal

20. See above, Chapter II.

unity that had in the recent past, at least, existed only in mythical memory of the "Seven Huts of Ancient Days".²¹

The introduction of a written language also related to certain religious concepts found among the people. It was a kind of restoration of divine grace. In the account found in the stories the deity, Û Biskorum, reflected upon the plight of the people who could no longer read the precepts of God.²² The written language introduced by Christianity seemed to solve the spiritual problem described in the folklore. The rmgiew of the tribe which was believed to have been affected as a result of the loss of the ancient script was now revitalized, and a lost self-confidence was restored.²³

As we have seen, the introduction by Christian missionaries of a written form of their language thus had inter-related sociological and religious significance. Its importance to the development of a new, consolidated consciousness of tribal solidarity cannot be overemphasized. It was a new consciousness closely identified with Christianity. The division of the tribe had been due to religious factors ; its reunification was therefore appropriately perceived to be as much religious as socio-political.

III. EDUCATION

The creation of a standard language and literature would have had little impact apart from the educational structures created by the Christian missions and churches. In fact the reason the missions created the standard language and produced literature in the first place was for the sake of the schools. The Welsh Mission was not only committed to education, but to education in the mother tongue. While they viewed the schools as part of their evangelistic strategy, one of the unintended consequences of the missionary educational system was to help prepare the Khasi-Jaintia people to cope with the new situation in which they found themselves under British administration—and also to provide an instrument to promote tribal solidarity.

21. See above, Chapter II.

22. Cf. Rafy, pp. 55-7.

23. See above, Chapter II.

One of the first things that Alexander Lish of the Serampore Mission had done after his arrival in Cherrapunji in 1833 was to establish schools. School work was a major part of his activities during the five years he remained there. The three schools he ran were closed at the time of his departure in 1838. But when the Welsh Mission arrived in 1841 they immediately began school work again. Their object became to establish schools throughout the Khasi-Jaintia region.²⁴ Like all Evangelical missionaries of the nineteenth century, the Welsh missionaries believed that schools were the most effective instruments for bringing about change. While they were primarily concerned about religious change, i.e., conversion to Christianity and the maintenance of the Christian life through study of the Bible and other religious literature (hence the early requirement that all Christians should be literate),²⁵ their schools were instrumental in bringing about radical social change in many spheres of tribal life.

The writings of the early Welsh missionaries reveal the motives behind their emphasis upon schools. They believed that those elements in Khasi-Jaintia society that were religious in nature and therefore needed to be replaced by Christianity were based on irrational myths, what they referred to as superstition. The best way that such "superstition" could be demonstrated to be false was through the use of the rational facilities—which facilities were developed in the schools. Once the validity of the traditional "superstitions" were called into question, the people would be prepared to receive and accept the teaching of the new religion.²⁶

In the second place, the missionaries believed that once the "superstition" was stamped out and people became Christian, they would be able to maintain their new faith through the reading of the Bible and other religious literature in their mother tongue.²⁷ This was especially important when there were few trained leaders in the churches. Thus education was viewed as an agency through which the tribe would be given instruction in Christianity.

24. Morris, *The Story*, p. 26.

25. See above, Chapter.

26. See Downs, *Christianity*, p. 266.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

In the third place, education was viewed as a means of developing an indigenous leadership for the present and future church. Hence in addition to the village primary schools where the fundamentals of reading and writing were taught,²⁸ Middle English Schools and a Normal (Teacher's Training) School were established by the Welsh Mission.

While those were the motives of the missionaries, the actual impact of their educational work, as has already been suggested, was much greater than they had consciously intended. Thus, for instance, the decision to use a single standard language for all the schools irrespective of the dialects spoken where the schools were established was made for essentially practical reasons by the missionaries. Learning all of the required dialects, finding teachers familiar with them and producing literature for each of them was not a practical proposition. Nevertheless the consequences of this practical decision was to create a standard language that would contribute to the consciousness of belonging to one tribe.

(1) Mission Responsibility of Entire Educational System. While the government maintained a few schools of its own in town centres, it entrusted the Welsh Mission with responsibility for the entire education system in the Khasi-Jaintia hills.²⁹ Commenting on the significance of this, F. S. Downs wrote :

When government gave the missions the responsibility for running an entire educational system it put into their hands an instrument of influence far more powerful than any other type of Christian activity.³⁰

From 1854 onwards the government began to provide grants to the

28. The content of the curriculum of the village schools included not only reading, writing and religious instruction but also simple science, like geography, arithmetic, and history too.

29. The other parts of the North East in which the government turned over the maintenance of the entire educational system to Christian missions were the Garo Hills of Meghalaya (American Baptist), Nagaland (American Baptist), hills areas of Manipur (American Baptist) and Mizoram (Welsh Presbyterian and British Baptist).

30. Downs, *Christianity*, pp. 75-6.

Welsh Mission to help meet the expenses of running its schools.³¹ Thereafter the grants were regularly given, the amount being increased following the Jaintia Rebellion.³² Though a Government High School had been started in Shillong by U Jeebon Roy in 1876, even that was handed and placed under Welsh Mission management in 1891. In the 1930s the Welsh Mission adopted a policy of gradually turning over its schools to government. Nevertheless, even after government assumed more responsibility for education—complete responsibility after Independence—Christian churches continued to maintain schools, especially English medium schools. The Catholic Church had maintained educational institutions at the higher level for a number of years, even-though at first its activities along these lines were not encouraged by the government.³³

During the period when the government was maintaining the educational system through grants-in-aid to the Welsh Mission it had to justify what appeared to some critics to be a violation of its policy of religious neutrality. At first the government responded to its critics with the argument that the Khasi-Jaintia people did not really have any religion and so the question of interference

31. Jones, *Ka Balang*, p. 40.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

33. J. R. Cunningham, DPI, "Note on St. Anthony's Orphanage and the Don Bosco Industrial School, Shillong", 6443/2 (12/7/26), p. 5. There has not been any evidence of the Catholic educational institutions being handed over to the government. Until the 1990s the church runs more than 50 High Schools, 5 Training and Technical Schools, 189 elementary schools and 3 Colleges. The Presbyterian Church began to hand over the management of educational institutions to the government since the 1930s, nevertheless it still maintains 1 High School, 7 ME Schools, about 385 Primary Schools and 1 Normal School in the Pre-independence period, and it continues to manage 31 High Schools, 58 ME Schools, 416 Primary Schools, 1 Normal School and 1 College in the Post-independence. The Church of God which took interest in the educational works mainly after the 1950s had until recently 52 Primary Schools, 3 ME and 2 High Schools. Other churches too manage a number of schools in Shillong and in the rural areas. Cf. Jyrwa, p. 61; *Report 1989*; *Directory 1990*; Kallarackal; A Report provided by the Secretary, Central Education Committee of the Church of God, Meghalaya & Assam of dated March 6, 1990.

with religion did not arise. Subsequently it argued that the grants were not used to support the religious programmes of the schools, but only the "secular".³⁴

Initially at least the government's real motive seems to have been to avoid the heavy financial expenditure on its part that would have been necessary to maintain a school system throughout the district as required by the Government of India. Grants made to missions prepared to run schools for their own purposes were a much cheaper way to meet their obligation than running the entire system would have been. As S. Chaube observed,

It was in accordance with Administration's aversion to considerable involvement in the hills that education in the hills was almost entirely left to the church, subsidized by Government.³⁵

During the early years, the small numbers of both missionaries and indigenous Christians made the direct influence of the new religion insignificant. However, the decision of the government to subsidize mission schools enabled the Welsh Mission to greatly increase its impact on the Khasi-Jaintia people. They were able to establish far more schools throughout the region than they with their limited resources would have been able to do otherwise.

(2) Education of Women. An important component in the work of Christian churches in the matrilineal Khasi-Jaintia society was educational work among women. Though women played an important role in the structure of that society they were not necessarily highly regarded or permitted freedom of action as persons. The education of the women undertaken by the missions brought about significant change. First, it successfully counteracted the prevailing view prohibiting the education of women. Speaking of the work among the Khasis, Miss. A. W. Thomas, a Welsh missionary, wrote :

The status of women in the Khasi and Jaintia hills was

34. Downs, *Christianity*, pp. 73-5.

35. Chaube, p. 56.

entirely different from other parts of India. Here the mother is the head of the family. . . .

Such phenomenon has however evolved intricate problems when the first effort of educating women was initiated.³⁶

Modern education devalued the importance for women of a status merely based on their position as head and guardian of the family. Educated women wished to be freed from the limitations imposed by the status quo.

Mrs. William Lewis pioneered education among Khasi women at Cherrapunji in 1843. It was reported that the problems experienced by the mission in trying to get boys to attend their schools was nothing compared with the difficulties encountered with respect to girls. Parents strongly opposed the education of their daughters, and religious sanction was given to the opposition.

inquire whether it is permissible for women to read books, but the egg divination always revealed that it is not permissible and should not be allowed at all cost, for any families which sent their daughters to school would face great troubles and the women who read books would never have any more children with the result that their clan would suddenly perish!³⁷

Dangers implicit in the education of women within their society. They were, of course, not successful in their resistance and women's education eventually flourished.

The second consequence of women's education was to provide them with opportunities for leadership in areas where they had not previously exercised it. This was important in the Khasi-Jaintia society where women were debarring from taking a leading role in public life, however important their role had been in family life. They were not permitted to be members of either the

36. "Ka Jingtrei hapdeng Ki Kynthei Ri Khasi bad Jaintia", in D. Ropmay, ed., *Ka Centenary History Ka Balang Presbyterian* (1975), p. 31. (English translation is mine).

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-2. (Translation mine).

village or state durbars, nor were they able to have a leading voice in the councils of the clan. Though woman's education did not change the traditional system in this sense, it did provide opportunities for women to assume positions of leadership in new institutions. For instance, Ka Nabon of Mawmluh, the first Khasi woman convert, after receiving training in the mission school was appointed the first woman teacher in a school—the school at Shella. Since then Khasi-Jaintia women have assumed prominent roles in educational and other new institutions and professions—as headmistresses, principals, doctors, lecturers in colleges, political leaders, and officers in Christian schools and hospitals as well as in government establishments.³⁸ And, as in the case of all schools, educated women also shared a role in the creation of a new tribal consciousness.

(3) Provision of Tribal Leadership. As has already been indicated, one of the main purposes of the mission schools, particularly the Middle English and Training Schools, when they were first established was to help develop leadership for the church. But because it was the only education available the Christian schools also provided the kind of new leadership that was required in the administrative and political sphere in the context of radical social change. Because this was not the primary purpose of the schools they did not always provide the students with the kind of education that was most appropriate for the “secular” sphere. There is some truth in the statement Chaube makes on the subject :

Consequently, the hills people got only half-an-education. The subsidized mission schools, throughout the British period, were almost entirely of Middle English standard. The primary objective of the missions was to collect good preachers. Their teaching was biased towards religion and literature. The general standard of knowledge remained quite low.³⁹

It is, however, unreasonable to expect the missions to place em-

38. Out of the 32 Khasi-Jaintias mentioned under a section “First in Meghalaya : Persons”, there were 11 women who had achieved high educational degree and played leading role in different institutions. See P. T. Marwein, *Meghalaya Handbook* (1987), pp. 78-81.

39. Chaube, p. 43.

phasis on higher education before a solid ground work was laid at the lower levels. Thus D. R. Syiemlieh challenges Chaube's conclusion :

The school curriculum may have been heavily biased towards learning the Bible and catechism up to the middle school, but the standard was by no means low for the high school course that was laid down by Calcutta University.⁴⁰

He goes on to argue that the report of the Census of India 1891 clearly indicates that the progress of education among the hills people in Assam was notable. While there were 38 literate males to every 1,000 persons in the population in the Khasi and Jaintia hills, which was high, the percentage of literate females was the highest in the entire Assam province.⁴¹ Again, in 1921 literacy in the Khasi-Jaintia hills was 7.64 per cent, second only to Kamrup district with 7.71 per cent. Female literacy was again the highest in the province—and second on the all-India level.⁴²

Even the statement that the primary purpose of mission education was to “collect good preachers” needs to be qualified. While that was the purpose of certain institutions, it was not the purpose of the village schools. Their purpose was to create a literate population that could read religious literature and develop the skills necessary to function in the new world introduced through British administration. Hence this general purpose did in fact contribute to the development of non-ecclesiastical leadership of the Khasi-Jaintia people. The capabilities of these leaders were further developed in the colleges that were also established by missions—especially the missions of the Roman Catholic Church in the early part of the twentieth century—long before government entered the field at that level.

(4) Education and Tribal Identity. In addition to the role of schools as evangelistic agencies and for development of a knowledge and well-led Christian community of men and women as

40. Syiemlieh, p. 171.

41. Ibid.

42. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 148.

well as of the future leaders of all aspects of society, Christian educational activities made an important contribution to the development of tribal identity, the most important component of the social changes that took place among the Khasi-Jaintia people during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The educational network based on a standard language first established by the Welsh Mission and later augmented by other missions and churches linked together the dialectical and political divisions of the region in a way they had never been linked before. The more centralized Middle English Schools and the Training School at Cherrapunji with their boarding brought together students from different geographical areas into a common living community.⁴³ The traditional barriers were broken down, thereby opening a new sense of unity.

The Christian schools were the "nurseries" for the development of Khasi-Jaintia solidarity. When a school was opened in a new village, the teacher almost always came from a different dialectical group. For instance, U Larsing Khongwir from Mawsmai was sent as teacher-evangelist to the Jaintia hills, and Ka Nabon from Mawmluh was sent to work among the War in Shella. The fact that a dialectical group with its own political integrity accepted the presence of a teacher from another political area was in itself an indication of the breaking down of the old barriers. This was possible because the Christian involvement came not to exercise power or to exploit, but to serve.

Gradually such contacts promoted social relationships. Members from those areas which had previously been looked down upon were now treated as friends, members of a common community. The introduction of schools thus contributed to a breakdown of the traditional clan and territorial (hima) identities and promoted a tribal identity.

This in turn led to cultural revitalization. When the British and Christian missions entered the area the Khasi-Jaintia society was divided dialectically, politically and religiously. This meant that

43. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 148.

the culture itself had become fragmented, despite the vaguely remembered myths of ancient unity. Christian schools and literature became the channels through which the vague sense of unity was made real. When the new literature replaced the lost literature cultural revitalization was inevitable. It was a dynamic culture not identical with the ancient culture—that would have been unsuitable to the new situation—but nevertheless in continuity with it.

When a primary school was established in a village its life was revitalized. Many changes began to take place such as the construction of more hygienic house, improving the water supply, introducing standards of personal cleanliness like regular bathing and the washing of clothing⁴⁴ that had previously sheltered lice, fleas and other insects. Such a school was also not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a network that linked the villages in which they were located. A new material culture was being built on the old.

Christianity even contributed towards the preservation of the religious myths of the Khasi-Jaintia people even though the missionaries and converts rejected their validity. Alexander Lish himself made a record of some of these traditions as early as 1838.⁴⁵ The first person to do so in a systematic way was U Jeebon Roy who demonstrated in his writings that the essence of the Khasi religion was belief in one God. Even though he strongly opposed Christianity and the Welsh missionaries he was able to make a record of Khasi religion through the use of the alphabet introduced by them ! The first really detailed and less “motivated” account of the traditional Khasi religion was made by a Khasi Presbyterian medical missionary, Dr. H. Lyngdoh Nonglait, in 1937.⁴⁶ Other tribal Christian authors like U Morkha Joseph Khain, U Soso Tham, Fr. Elias Sohlyia, U Hamlet Bareh, U Donbok T. Laloo, Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh, Sr. P. Kharakor have made contributions to the

44. Downs, “Cultural Change”, p. 91.

45. A. B. Lish, “A Brief Account of the Khasi”, *The Calcutta Christian Observer*, VII (January to December, 1938), pp. 129-43.

46. Cf. Nonglait, *Ka Niam*.

process of cultural revitalization with an emphasis upon Christianity as a model for tribal unity.⁴⁷

IV. THE CHRISTIAN IDEOLOGY

Studies of the role of Christianity in social change among tribal peoples have virtually all ignored the impact of Christian ideology. Yet without its ideological basis all other aspects of Christian work would not have been able to provide the foundation for the new Khasi-Jaintia identity. The impact of the Christian ideology upon a tribal society where emphasis was placed upon the clan, village, dialectical group or, at most, the small state was extremely important. At a time when the old order, the old isolation was broken by the coming of the British, Christianity provided a conceptual framework for making a positive adjustment to the new. Especially important was the Christian world-view that embraced all peoples, not just the tribe or sub-tribal groups.⁴⁸ We propose to discuss the extent to which Christian ideology played a role in relation to the social changes that were taking place among the Khasi-Jaintia people under four headings : (1) The Concept of God ; (2) New Social Relationships ; (3) Universal Community ; and (4) Freedom.

(1) The Concept of God. Christianity teaches about a God who creates and redeems all that is, a God who is not localized in time or place. He is the God of all humankind. In the context of a tribal society such a concept is significant because it proclaims a God that is not limited as in the traditional belief systems. While Khasi-Jaintias believed in the existence of one supreme God, the manner of worship and sacrificing localizes that God as the God of their people alone. Ancestor worship was limited to a clan or

47. Cf. U Morkha Joseph Khain, *Ka Ryngkapne ki Poetry Khasi*, edited and published by H. James Tham (Shillong, 1967) ; U Soso Tham, *Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep* (1936) ; Fr. Elias Sohlyia, *Ki Khanatang u Barim* (First published 1937, reprinted, Shillong : St. Anthony's College, 1972) . U Hamlet Bareh, *Khasi People* ; U Donbok T. Laloo, *Ka Thymmei Pyrkhat U Khasi bad ki Parom I* (1975) ; Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh, *Ka Pomblang Shisien Shisnem Jong Ka Hima Shyllong* (C 1970s) ; Sr. Philomena Kharakor, *Ka Kolshor Khasi Katkum ba ka Paw ha ka Literashor Khasi, 1930-1940*, (1988).

48. Downs, "Solidarity", p. 13.

a sub-clan (*ka Kpoh*). The worship of a Shyllong God was limited to the people of the Nongkrem Syiemship, and to a certain extent to those in the Myllem Syiemship because both formerly belonged to a composite chieftainship, the Shillong State. The people from other chieftainships did not participate in the sacrifices to the deity. While the Nongkrem people proclaimed belief in one great God, in practice they place more emphasis upon the local Shyllong God.⁴⁹ The same was true of other areas. When the new order greatly weakened the power of the individual chieftainships, Christianity provided an attractive alternative. It provided ideological meaning for the new religious community that was coming into existence, bringing together all sections of the tribe. The Christian God could be a God of all the Khasi-Jaintia peoples.⁵⁰

(2) New Social Relationships. Even as their traditional religion was limited to a clan or state, so too had the social relationship of the Khasi-Jaintia people. As intra-tribal conflict and the raiding on the plains of Bengal indicated, little value was placed on people other than those who belonged to the small group that established the limits of social relationships.

This limiting attitudes were also evident in relation to the question of inter-marriage among people from different areas from one's own. Thus Gurdon wrote :

Syntengs (Jaintias) more often marry Syntengs than Khasis, and vice versa, and it would be usually considered derogatory for a Khasi of the uplands to marry a Bhoi or War Woman, and disgrace to marry a Lynngam.⁵¹

It followed from a view that held only one group to be important that there was no concept, in traditional society, of service to others. They would not offer help to a member of another

49. Cf. Nonglait, *Ka Niam*, pp. 86ff.

50. One of the main reasons why the Seng Khasi failed to gain a wide following throughout the region was because apparently, to cite Jaswal "The Seng Khasi, though formed in Shillong, remained largely an association of a few families from Cherra area". Cf. in K. S. Singh, ed., *Tribal Movement in India*, Vol. I. (1982), p. 177.

51. Gurdon, pp. 62-3.

group even if he or she had suffered from an accident. As life was centred on a clan or common group, social responsibility was limited to that group. Such attitudes certainly could not contribute to the development of a sense of common tribal identity.

The Christian teaching about the central importance of love for all, closely related to its understanding of one God for all, transformed the thinking of the Khasi-Jaintia peoples on their relationships with each other and with outsiders. It was this new ideology that led converts to go to the villages of those who had traditionally been their enemies to serve them as school teachers and evangelists. It was thus this ideology that set in motion those new relationships which were to become so important an element in the social changes that took place.⁵²

Schools, medical institutions and church organizations contributed to the development of this new understanding of relationships. In the context of the new community one was perceived to have a responsibility to work for others.

(3) Universal Community. The introduction of the idea and structure of the church created a model for tribal unity. Christianity represented a prototype of single tribal religion, something that the Khasi-Jaintia people had not previously possessed.⁵³ Almost each syiemship had its own religion, with different ceremonies and sacrifices. Even within a single State like that of the Jaintias there were many different religious rituals practised in different areas. The situation was further complicated by the worship of family gods. There had been no religion inclusive of the entire tribe.

In the context of the failure of the traditional religions to cope with the traumatic changes taking place due to the imposition of an alien government the people were in danger of being detribalized. The Christian concept of an inclusive religion counteracted this tendency by introducing an inclusive religion which gave meaning to tribal life in the new context. In due course the theory became fact, with the establishment of a church structure and

52. See above, Chapter IV.

53. See above, Chapter IV.

church institutions and programmes that linked the entire tribe in a single network.

This was possible because of the Christian teaching that all were equal. This teaching was made manifest in the concern for evangelizing even the members of the tribe who had previously been regarded as inferior or insignificant. That this was implicit in the acceptance of Christianity is clear from the fact that it was Khasi-Jaintia converts themselves who were responsible for this work of evangelism among peoples whom they had previously either feared or despised.⁵⁴ Some of the evangelists were employed by the missions, but many were volunteers. It was these evangelists, themselves members of the tribe, who were the first agents of tribal solidarity.

The church also broke down the limitations on the priestly function. Previously such functions were reserved to particular clans or families. Now religious leadership was open to any one with the necessary qualifications. This promoted a concept of religious equality and freedom. A person's destiny was no longer determined by the clan to which one belonged, but rather to one's own talents and willingness to work for the interest of the community.

The introduction of an inclusive religion did not undermine the traditional social structure or polity. It rather served as a means of bringing together the fragmented parts of the society into a new whole, under the auspices of a new ideology.

(4) Freedom. Despite belief in the existence of a transcendent, benevolent, creator God, the actual religious practice of the Khasi-Jaintia people had been based upon fear of the malevolent spirits. Christianity with its teaching about a loving God liberated the people from this fear. It was this teaching about a powerful, loving God which most appealed to the people and accounted for their conversion. Certainly they did not convert in order to get material benefits. Ka Nabon, the first woman convert, renounced

54. For instance, the evangelization of the Lyngngams. See Karotem-prel, *Lyngams*, p. 26-31.

her inheritance, which was large, for the sake of the new faith. U Borsing preferred to live a life of semi-poverty rather than an honourable propertied life as chief of Cherrapunji State and U Rai Bhajur, towards the end of the century, resigned his high salaried government job to become an evangelist with a meagre salary. These examples suggest that it was the liberating attraction of the Gospel rather than material gain that motivated the early converts to Christianity.

The new faith set the people free from fear of the unseen spirits which were traditionally believed to be the source of all kinds of troubles, all kinds of enslavement. Belief in demons was not totally eradicated among those who became Christian, but it was believed that their power to do harm was much reduced in light of the power of God in Christ.

Traditionally one's hair was never cut in a public place or outside the house for fear of falling victim to *U Thlen*. The missionaries dealt with this by insisting that the hair of their students should be cut in public—and pointing out that nothing happened to them. So clans which were believed to have originated from animals or other non-human things virtually lived in great fear. For example, a clan bearing the name Tham, meaning "crab", used to avoid eating crabs for fear of tragic consequences—but upon becoming Christians they would do so with no harm coming to them.⁵⁵ Missionaries were similarly responsible for removing the traditional taboo upon eating eggs, chicken or milk. While eggs and chickens were regarded as taboo because they were essential elements in rituals and sacrifices, milk was thought unfit for human consumption because it was the waste product of a cow.⁵⁶ They were liberated from such taboos.

Sickness had been regarded as having religious causes. As Morris noted,

In a case of sickness, the Khasi, knowing nothing of medicine, hastens to the village priest to enquire which demon

55. Natarajan, p. 108.

56. Allen, *Gazetteer*, p. 86. See also Natarajan, p. 105.

has been offended, and what sacrifice must be offered to ensure recovery.⁵⁷

Because sickness was believed to be caused by angry spirits, the means of curing it was by "the performance of rites connected with black magic".⁵⁸ Epidemic diseases like cholera were believed to have connection with demons and not germs. Any sort of suffering was attributed to the spirits.⁵⁹

In such a situation the role of the priest was important. The medical activities of the Christian missions and churches transformed the old belief system. Though there was opposition to the new medical techniques, when the people found how effective they were they lost confidence in the rituals and hence in the traditional religious system. Even those who have maintained the primal religious belief have been affected by the new medicine.⁶⁰

Nevertheless they still tended to see the new medicine not as "secular" but as part of the new religious system. For many healing of diseases was still a religious affair. The only difference was that the effective healing was now done by the Christian "priests" with their own rituals, rather than the traditional ones.⁶¹ The attitude of the people was described by a Roman Catholic missionary in the words they would use when bringing a patient for medical treatment—

. . . you are the one to restore health, for God is with you ; a little dawai (medicine) and our patient will soon be cured.⁶²

Even the introduction of a written language had a liberating effect. Many had opposed the new alphabet on the ground that

57. Morris, *Ambassadors*, p. 12.

58. Natarajan, p. 27.

59. See *Census of India*, 1891, Assam, Vol. I, Report (1892), p. 260.

60. Natarajan, p. 108.

61. Cf. Hauber, p. 46.

62. Fr. Paul Bonardi, "In Assam During Holiday-Time", *The Salesian Bulletin* (September—October, 1923), p. 149.

they believed it was against the will of God.⁶³ Its successful introduction undermined the belief system that enslaved them. Education had a similar effect. Not only did it break down the barriers that had separated the people geographically (thus in a sense imprisoning them), but it broke down the myth-centred perception of the world and introduced the value of reasonable thought based upon other sources of authority. A person was free to shape one's own life through hard work, study and under the influence of modern technology. The time of year had nothing to do with it. As a result of the introduction of rational thinking the old taboos lost their force.⁶⁴

V. LIFE STYLE

Like all Evangelical Protestant, the Welsh missionaries place strong emphasis on a distinctive Christian life. This meant that when a person became Christian that fact should be clear to all in a changed life style. We will consider the impact of Christianity in the area of life style in its individual, social and material aspects.

(1) Individual. From the beginning the Welsh missionaries made it clear that no candidate would be admitted to the church unless there was a personal transformation. They insisted not only in a change in belief, i.e., belief in God as revealed in Christ, but in the change in belief being demonstrated by the adoption of a new life style. Hence, the convert was required to renounce all traditional religious rituals, to have a sound understanding of the Christian faith, to observe the Sabbath/Sunday as a day for worship, to stop drinking intoxicants and to adopt a morality appropriate to a Christian.⁶⁵

The drinking of intoxicants which was very popular among the Khasi-Jaintia people in the form of their traditional country made liquor was condemned because, it was argued, it degraded the

63. Natarajan, p. 117. See also Morris, *The Story*, p. 18.

64. Cf. "Ki Khasi mynhyndai bad Ki Khasi mynta", *U Nongialam Katholik*, 9 (Nailur, 1902), pp. 107-09. See also "Ka Pyrthei Kaba ngi Shong", *U Khasi Mynta*, 2 (Jymmang 1, 1896), pp. 4-5.

65. Morris, *Welsh Mission*, p. 91. See also Jyrwa, p. 25.

individual, adversely affected one's health and wasted money thus disturbing the peace of the family. The renunciation of the use of such drinks was considered a sign of the person's seriousness about wanting to live a changed life. The prohibition on the use of intoxicants included both the country made liquor and opium. Opium use was at that time confined to the northern Bhoi region. The use of intoxicants, it was said, not only affected the quality of life but was in effect a spiritual defilement of the body.⁶⁶

Similarly there was strong opposition to sexual freedom outside of monogamous marriage. A Christian should neither commit adultery nor have many spouses. In doing so the missionaries strengthened the institution of marriage.

We have already seen that early converts were also required to be literate. That had an impact on life style. Instead of spending their leisure time hunting, fishing and roaming the village, the earlier converts had to give their time to learning how to read and write. The reading habit that this introduced was entirely new.

There was also significant change in the life style of the women. In this connection, Natarajan writes :

Under the impact of missionary influence and of western culture, women now enjoyed far more latitude in family affairs. They were quite free in their movement and participated actively in political and social affairs.⁶⁷

Though the Khasi-Jaintia women had an important role in traditional society, they were essentially passive.⁶⁸ They contributed to the family through their hard work in household matters. As a consequence of the new order, they began to involve in public activities of various kinds. They adopted new methods of child

66. The missionaries appeared to have even opposed use to tobacco (u duma sla) and betel nut (u kwai) too. See *Ka Pateng Khristan*, IV. 8 (August, 1900), 57-8.

67. Natarajan, p. 99.

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 18ff.

care and keeping the house clean. In due course, "an eye for utility and beauty, a keen sense of aesthetics was developed, unlike the rigid criterion of sheer utility to which the woman clung in the earlier days".⁶⁹

The transformation required was not, however, simply at the personal level. It also had a social dimension.

(2) Social. The changed life of the individual had social consequences. The Christian ideology promoted new social relationships. The church organizations created social contacts in a way that had never been done before among the Khasi-Jaintia people. A new community was established making up of members belonging to different dialectical groups which had no previous alliance with each other. Now they were related in a common ethnic identity through the Presbyteries, Synods, Diocese, Assemblies or Conventions. The new relationships were made possible by a standard language, schools and the Christian faith.

Nothing like it had ever happened among the members of the tribe before. Before there had only been differing political, religious and linguistic identities which often led to intra-tribal conflict. Christian universalism with its emphasis on love and service for others provided a foundation for the new relationships.⁷⁰

(3) Material. The impact of Christian ideology was seen not only in changed personal and social values, but also in the material culture of the people.⁷¹ It manifested itself in personal cleanliness, more hygienic houses, and healthier food. The Christian emphasis upon hygienic living conditions contrasted sharply with what had gone before. As Natarajan notes,

The missionaries, patiently and regularly taught proper grooming and hygienic habits. Thus, even the poorest man became aware of the importance of cleanliness. A major contribution of the Christian missionaries was better health

69. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

70. Downs, "Solidarity", p. 13.

71. Downs, "Cultural Change", p. 91.

care of the people through hygiene. Soap, tooth-powder and brushes came to be used increasingly in urban areas.⁷²

The stress on cleanliness both at the personal and community levels had considerable impact on traditional taboos. The people gradually realised that human persons are more important than observing the taboos with a lot of rituals and started adopting an entirely new life style.⁷³ In rural areas a locality with Christian residents is cleaner than the one with a non-Christian population. Therefore, the introduction of a method of a clean living at home and in a community contributed to the humanisation of the tribe.⁷⁴

As indicated above, part of Christianity's impact on the material culture of the Khasi-Jaintia people was in redesigned houses. Traditional houses were dark with no proper windows for light and ventilation. New model houses which were both lighter and healthier in due course replaced the old. The surroundings of the houses and the ponds were also now kept clean, thus providing a healthier environment which was symbolic in the minds of the people with the changes brought by the new faith.

Attitudes towards food also changed. Food that was previously rejected such as eggs and chicken and milk now began to be eaten. The missionaries were particularly concerned that the old taboos on the drinking of milk should be removed in the interests of the people's health.⁷⁵ New healthful food items like cauliflower, cabbage, beans, tomatoes, brinjals, capsicums and fruits like pineapples, plums and peaches were introduced to bring variety to the traditional diet.⁷⁶ Tea drinking which was intro-

72. Natrajan, p. 111.

73. For instance, the Lyngngams in the West Khasi hills who traditionally believed that sweeping of a residential house and its surroundings with a broom would cause blindness have now started ignoring it and lived a changed life with confidence and without any dangerous consequence to their eyesight. Cf. Donrai, p. 99.

74. For further details see F. S. Downs, "Faith and Life-Style: How Christianity was understood by 19th century converts in North East India", BTF XIV. 1 (January—June, 1982), pp. 29ff.

75. Natarajan, p. 105.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

duced at the beginning of the twentieth century⁷⁷ also became a substitute, among many tribal Christians, for country liquor or rice beer drinking. Even as new food habits were introduced, so too were new cooking and eating materials such as dishes, cutlery, cups, plates and seating arrangements that transformed the life style of urban and, to some extent, village dwellers as well.

All of these changes were symbolic of a new community.

VI. ECCLESIASTICAL STRUCTURES

Even as scholars have ignored the contribution of Christian ideology to social change among the hill tribes of the North East, so too have they ignored the central role played by ecclesiastical structures in promoting tribal solidarity movements.⁷⁸ Among the Khasi-Jaintia people they were to be a major factor in the development of an inclusive tribal identity.

Before the advent of the British administration and Christianity, the people maintained a number of separate political structures, e.g., Village Durbars, Raid Councils and State Durbars. Each political unit was made up of people duly elected. The chieftainship was hereditary and was reserved to those from the ruling clans. In certain syiemships like Nongkrem, Cherrapunji and others there were *Bakhraws* who served as elders with specific responsibilities. The priestly responsibilities were reserved for particular clans and no others could assume them. The traditional structure had three characteristics: (a) it was an essentially democratic polity confined in scope to one state, (b) leadership at the state level was closely connected with the ruling clan, and (c) there was no political structure embracing the whole tribe.

The ecclesiastical structure that was first introduced and had the greatest impact was the Presbyterian.⁷⁹ It bore a certain resemblance to the traditional political structures. It was also essentially democratic, but leadership was not reserved to hereditary groups and it evolved a structure that embraced the entire tribe.⁸⁰

77. Ibid.

78. Downs, "Solidarity", p. 14.

79. See above, Chapter IV.

80. Evans, "Balang", p. 109.

The local Presbyterian church has an Executive Committee similar to the traditional Village Durbar. When the churches multiplied, a new larger ecclesiastical unit was formed known as the Pastorate or District level committee which can be compared to the traditional *Raid* Council. A number of these were eventually brought together to form a Presbytery, comparable in scope to the State Durbar, and these in turn form the new level of structure the Synod which represents all the churches throughout the region.⁸¹

The first Presbytery was formed in 1862, with its first meeting being held in 1867 at Nongsawlia.⁸² It represented local churches scattered in different parts of the Khasi-Jaintia hills.⁸³ Two decades later the numbers of churches had grown to the point where it was decided to reorganize them into four Presbyteries for administrative and pastoral convenience.⁸⁴ In 1895 the Presbyteries were brought together under the Khasi-Jaintia Assembly (later Synod), the supreme body uniting four hills and one plains Presbyteries. The Assembly/Synod then represented approximately two hundred local churches distributed throughout the hills, with a few in the Cachar plains.⁸⁵ By 1941 the Presbyteries and Assembly/Synod of the Presbyterian Church brought together people from all groups and political areas (*ki hima*) of the Khasi-Jaintia hills. They met together to share their experiences and discuss issues of common interest, as well as making decisions concerning the development of the churches, institutions and programmes for which they were responsible. Though the agenda was ecclesiastical, these meetings represented the first assemblies of any kind in which representatives of the whole tribe met together.

The ecclesiastical structures also developed new democratic models that replaced the older ones. Representation was now open to the entire tribe instead of particular clans only, and people from groups which had traditionally been considered inferior or enemies

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 128ff; See also Jyrwa, pp. 101ff.

82. Evans, "Balang", p. 128.

83. See a Map of the Khasi-Jaintia hills above.

84. Evans, "Balang", p. 129.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

sat together as equals with those who previously would have nothing to do with them. As the traditional polity withered under the British administration, the new inclusive democratic structures of the church provided an alternative arena in which the people could deliberate—an arena that now went beyond the states to the level of the tribe itself.⁸⁶

The church organization also provided a place where all the people could gain experience in democratic decision making up to the tribal level. In the Presbyterian Church all crucial issues had to be passed up through appropriate channels—from the local church through the District to the Presbytery and finally the Synod. In the process of extending the decision making process to the tribal level a sense of tribal consciousness was promoted. It is not so much that Christianity replaced the values of the traditional polity as it supplemented and lifted it to the tribal level. As such it became a model for all subsequently established tribal organizations.⁸⁷

The Christian church structures also developed new more democratic forms of leadership. Traditionally leadership was limited to certain clans. For instance, the chief of a state could only be selected from the ruling clan. Similarly the *Bakhravs* who acted as advisors to the chiefs came from specified clans. Priestly responsibilities were exercised by representatives of particular clans as well. Thus traditional leadership was not only confined to the state level, but its exercise was limited to the members of some of the clans.

In contrast, the leadership of the church was open to members of all the clans.⁸⁸ Leadership in the Presbyterian church consisted in elders, evangelists, teachers, probationary pastors and pastors. In a traditional setting, a member of one political unit could not be involved in the affairs of another political unit—except in the

86. For a more detailed discussion see Evans, "Balang", pp. 127-30; Jyrwa, pp. 101-110; *Assembly*; Kallarackal; Menamparambil, *The Church*.

87. Downs, "Conversion", p. 14.

88. Cf. Donrai, pp. 59ff.

rare cases when a ruling clan refused to accept leadership responsibility.⁸⁹ The first place where this began to break-down was in the expansion of the mission schools which were headed by evangelist-teachers who came from different political units and dialectical groups. It was further developed in the meetings and committees of the church. The end result was the development of a tribal-level leadership from various dialectical groups.⁹⁰

Since pastor would often be posted in villages which did not speak his dialect, this in turn promoted trans-dialectical unity. The way in which pastors were appointed in the Presbyterian Church played an important part in the developments we have been studying. Pastors were in fact appointed without regard to dialectical origins. Christianity introduced a new system of choosing leadership, a system that has influenced the way in which even the government functions in the post-Independence period. The new system was quite different from that of the traditional matrilineal society in which considerations of clan membership and who one's mother is were decisive. Though the chief and priests were men, their right to hold the position was determined by a line passing through their mothers. Leaders were not chosen on the basis of their competence or intelligence. The church did not choose its leaders on the basis of hereditary considerations and thus established radical new principles of leadership.

There was also a significant change in the way the church and its property was managed. Whereas traditionally the communal lands (*ri raid*) were controlled by men, women played a decisive role in determining which men would be members of the bodies controlling that property. In the case of privately held property the women were more directly involved. But in the management of church properties the men who make up its governing bodies are responsible without reference to women.

In the internal government of the church the tradition that men alone serve as leaders has been maintained with respect to the

89. Bareh, *Khasi People*, pp. 117-18 ; 127-28.

90. Jones, *Ka Balang*, p. 48.

ordained ministry.⁹¹ Nevertheless there were many other areas of Christian leadership where women organizations developed in the churches which provided ample opportunities for them to exercise leadership and have a voice in the management of the church and its institutions. As for example, women missionaries of the Welsh Mission like Mrs. Lewis, Miss. A. W. Thomas ; Mothers and Sisters of the Catholic Church played a leading role among the tribe in different aspects of the mission, particularly in helping uplift the women. The role played by Mrs. N. E. Nichols-Roy of the Church of God is even more significant. While not ordained she served effectively as the head of the church and her leadership was accepted by the people.⁹²

To reiterate, the ecclesiastical structures, most notably those of the Presbyterian Church, provided the basis for new tribal level organization and leadership. It was the first tribal solidarity movement, organized long before the Seng Khasi (1899), the Khasi National Durbar (1923), Jaintia Durbar (1900), the Khasi-Jaintia Federated State National Conference (1945), the Federation of Khasi States (1947) and many tribal political parties and movements of the post-Independence period. The ecclesiastical electoral system not only long preceded the political electoral system, but came to serve as a model for all other inclusive tribal organizations. Christianity not only was responsible for creating tribal unity but built the foundations for modern tribal politics, and even of other religious movements like the Seng Khasi, Sein Raj and Seng Khih Lang.

It should be noted that Christianity not only played a central role in the development of a Khasi-Jaintia identity and solidarity, but it also brought the members of that tribe into close positive association with people from outside. The Welsh Mission did not work in the Khasi-Jaintia region alone, but expanded its work to Cachar, the Mizoram (1897), Manipur and the Cachar hill tribes of Assam.⁹³ The Synod of Assam which was officially constituted

91. The traditional polity debar women from participation in legislative, administrative or judicial affairs.

92. See also above, pp. 231f.

93. Cf. *Assembly*, pp. 5ff.

at Shillong in 1926⁹⁴ (now known as the Presbyterian Church of North East India) brought together several different ethnic groups for common fellowship and work. With the formation of the Assam Christian Council (now known as the North East India Christian Council) in 1938 the Khasi-Jaintia Christians were brought into relationships with Christians from a large number of tribal and non-tribal groups throughout the region. It served as a model of inter-tribal relationships.⁹⁵ The Catholic Church was even more comprehensive. The Diocese of Shillong (now the Archdiocese of Shillong-Guwahati) brought together Catholics from throughout the region in inter-tribal solidarity.⁹⁶ Thus the intra-tribal unit found in the Khasi-Jaintia hills was linked to a larger Christian fellowship.

This fellowship was not simply among tribals. Christianity also contributed to the development of positive relationships between tribals and non-tribals—a relationship that had previously usually been negative.⁹⁷ This happened within several of the organizations already mentioned within the what is now known as the Presbyterian Church of North East India itself as well as within the North East India Christian Council. The contribution of the Catholic Church to the development of these relationships is especially significant. Tribal and non-tribal Indian priests worked together in that church from an early time. Its educational institutions also contributed to that dimension. It was reported as early as 1927 that the students at St. Anthony's in Shillong included all kinds of boys; "we have Protestants, Mohamedans, and Hindus."⁹⁸ The same was true to St. Edmund's, St. Mary's Loreto as well as institutions of higher education run by Protestants. At the same time Protestant pastors and Roman Catholic priests began to go outside the area to undertake higher theological training.

94. Assam was formerly included all the States of the North East except Manipur and Tripura; though even these States were under the authority of the Governor of Assam.

95. Downs, *Christianity*, pp. 155ff.

96. For further details see Paviotti; Kallarackal; Menampambil, *The Church*.

97. Downs, "Cultural Change", p. 79.

98. *Pro Memoria*, 6443/3 (1927), p. 4.

They went to Christian Colleges, Theological Institutions and Bible Schools in other parts of India where they developed wider contacts. Commenting on the significance of this fact, Dr. Downs wrote :

The role played by theological colleges is particularly noteworthy. Large numbers of northeastern students have undertaken advanced theological studies in Serampore, Leonard, Union Biblical Seminary as well as U.T.C. (Bangalore) and a number of Bible schools.⁹⁹

Perhaps the dispersal of Roman Catholic students has been even greater. While the purpose of undertaking theological studies outside the area was essentially religious, it inevitably had influence upon the attitudes towards other peoples of the leadership of the churches.

VII. CONCLUSION

Christianity entered the Khasi-Jaintia hills at a time when the imposition of the British administration had so overwhelmed the people that they were unable to absorb the alien impact into their own institutions the way they had in the past. The old order was weakened and ineffective. A cultural crisis was created. At first the Christian presence was too small to make much difference, but gradually through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century it began to shape the course of events and to provide an acculturative option to detribalization. While the missionaries and converts rejected much in the old culture, especially those elements which they thought to be either of a religious or unhealthy nature, they retained and even strengthened the only element in the traditional culture which was inclusive of the many separate political and dialectical units that made up the tribe the kinship system. The primary role of Christianity, however, was to provide a new Khasi-Jaintia identity based upon the whole tribe rather than parts of it through the creation of a standard language, a unifying literature, a network of educational institutions, an inclusive ideology, a new life style and comprehensive church structures.

99. Downs, "Cultural Change", p. 100.

7 CONCLUSION

We have studied the role of Christianity in social change among the Khasi-Jaintia hill tribe from 1841 to the present by using both ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical sources. The attempt has been made to show that in a situation where radical changes were taking place, Christianity provided institutions, a new life style and ideology which protected the society from the danger of detribalization and a consequent loss of identity. In the process a new sense of tribal solidarity which transcended the traditional fragmented order was created. This was founded upon the maintenance of the traditional kinship code, which was the only feature common to the tribe as a whole prior to the coming of the British.

I. IDENTITY AND CHANGE IN THE PRE-BRITISH PERIOD

Our study reveals that the identity of the tribe prior to the coming of the British in the nineteenth century did not consist in the political, linguistic or religious spheres, but in the accident of geographical proximity and the common kinship code. The political divisions among the tribe was the main reason why there had been no sense of common identity and solidarity among the people in the past. Each state was autonomous, being governed through its own chief and State Durbar. There was no central agency to link the different states into a single unit. Differing views in the different states about the office of the chief contributed to this division.

Closely connected with the political division were dialectical differences. Though some of the folklores speak of a time when there was a single spoken language among the Khasi-Jaintia people—in the time of the “Seven Huts of Ancient Days”—this was certainly not the case when the British administration and Christian missions entered the region in the early nineteenth century. Not only were there a multitude of mutually unintelligible dialects, but there was no written form of any of them. According to tradition there had been a time when there had been such a written language, and its loss was perceived to have had religious as well as social consequences, a kind of fall from grace.

The traditional religious system which placed high value on family, clan or at most, a state, could not contribute to the identity.

of the tribe. Most of the deities were localized. The belief systems were different from one state to another. We have also seen that while certain syiemships like Khyrim and Cherrapunji saw religion as closely related to the state, other syiemships did not believe that there was any connection between religion and the state. The sanskritized religious element in the Jaintia hills, where there were human sacrifices, further complicated the religious situation among the tribe. Certain important festivals like *Ka Pomblang Nongkrem*, *Ka Thang Syiem Sohra*, and *Ka Behdien Khlam* were not festivals of the entire people but were limited to a single state or a village.

What contributed to a sense of tribal unity was the geographical proximity of the people and certain elements in the social structure. Each state lies adjacent to other states. Though each state was politically autonomous the people could move more or less freely among them. The kinship code contributed what sense of common identity there was among the Khasi-Jaintia people who all observed the same social laws connected with it.

The tribe had successfully resisted major change in the pre-nineteenth century period. The process of sanskritization which had been at work among the Jaintias and the Wars remained insignificant. The conversion of the Jaintia chief to Hinduism did not have any impact on the Jaintia people, who preserved their old belief system and way of life. Hinduism among the Wars was confined to a few families in a single village, whereas the War people as a whole maintained their primal belief. It was noted that one of the reasons why the people rejected sanskritization was because it would have necessitated radical changes in their traditional social system, and hence their distinctive identity. We also noted that the relatively minor sanskritic incursions, which were not backed by a major political thrust into the regions, were easily absorbed into the traditional system.

II. SOCIAL CHANGES IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

The main agency of change beginning in the nineteenth century was the British Government. It provided the political power to effect change that the earlier sanskritic contacts had lacked. One

of the effects of the new political order was to permit more extensive penetration into the area of Hindu agencies such as the Rama-krishna Mission and Brahma Samaj as well as promoting more inter-marriage between the local people and Hindus. Nevertheless it was too late for these to have significant cultural or social consequences. That was because the British administration was an overwhelming influence which completely revolutionized the traditional order. It was hence the primary agent of social change among the Khasi-Jaintia people. Not long after their first penetration of the hills in the 1820s the British began to rule the Khasi-Jaintia states. Though it was the official British policy not to make extensive changes in the traditional order, in fact the introduction of a new political, judicial and economic system led to extensive changes. The old polity based on hereditary chieftainships and State Durbars while maintained to a certain extent in some areas, was nevertheless reduced to relative impotence. Urbanization together with modern communications and transport systems broke down the barriers that had previously isolated the area from the outside. This was further advanced with the increasing presence in the area of outsiders in the form of officials, army personnel, police, traders, engineers and others. These outsiders brought new perspectives that called into question the traditional identity based as it was on isolation. As the traditional political and religious world views were challenged, the people were no longer able to resist the changes introduced by the British. This led to a cultural trauma and a search for alternative socio-cultural models by which the people could order their lives in the new circumstances without complete loss of power or identity.

While the British were largely responsible for introducing the elements that led to rapid social change among the Khasi-Jaintia people, it was Christianity that provided the alternative models which enabled them to accommodate themselves to the new order. Because the Christian missionaries were prepared to accept the social system which was the main component of the traditional Khasi-Jaintia identity, Christianity was not seen as a threat to their distinctive identity.

III. THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY

As indicated above, Christianity was introduced at a time when

the imposition of British power had created a cultural crisis for the tribe. The foreign missionary agencies involved were mainly the Serampore Baptist Mission (only for a brief period), the Welsh Mission (starting in 1841) and the Roman Catholic Mission (starting in 1890). Other smaller denominational missions such as those of the Anglicans and Seventh Day Adventists also entered the area in due course. There were also several indigenous churches (though with some foreign associations) which began to flourish in the twentieth century such as the Church of God, the Church of God—Ecclesia, Christ National Church, Church of Jesus Christ (Full Gospel), the All-One-in Christ Church Fellowship, and the Unitarians. Of these the greatest impact was made by Welsh Mission, followed in importance by the Roman Catholic.

By the end of the nineteenth century Christianity had expanded into all the geographical areas of the Khasi-Jaintia hills. Though it was foreign missionaries that introduced the new faith, it was the indigenous Christians serving as school teachers and evangelists who were actually responsible for its spread throughout the hills. The work of those who were paid workers of the missions and churches was supplemented by the many lay people who undertook evangelistic work voluntarily.

The Christian contribution to the adjustment of the people to the new situation was aided by its literary, educational and medical work as well as by its ecclesiastical structures.

IV. THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS SOCIAL CHANGE

We have dealt with the attitudes towards social change of both missionaries and Khasi-Jaintia Christians. The early missionaries, especially those of the Welsh Mission which had the most extensive work in the region, were selective in their support for social change. They did not believe that everything about the traditional society needed to be changed. They only sought to change those things which they believed to be religious in nature. The religion of the people and social practices clearly related to it in their view needed to undergo radical change, to be replaced by the Christian faith and social behaviour appropriate to it. Other aspects of the traditional society such as the kinship code, matriliney, the status

of women, the system of inheritance, village and state administration and the language of the people were regarded positively. Hence while they favoured social change in many areas, they did not require change of the converts in those areas that were most characteristic of the Khasi-Jaintia people as a whole.

By and large the Khasi-Jaintia Christians adopted attitudes similar to those of the missionaries, though they were often more positive towards certain aspects of the religious tradition as well. Nevertheless they were the people at the vanguard of social change among the people. They were the ones who related positively to the changes taking place and who consequently acquired the attitudes and skills necessary to become the leaders in the new situation. Especially important was the extent to which indigenous Christians became the primary agents in developing a new sense of tribal solidarity, creating a new identity based on certain important features of the old but in accommodation to the irreversible social changes taking place.

V. SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY

While Christianity itself was not the primary agent of social change—the British administration served that role—it did provide the means for dealing with the changes that were taking place by creating a new inclusive tribal identity. This provided the unity necessary to face the challenges of the times. Christianity served this purpose through the creation of a literature, through its ideology, through its emphasis on a new life style and through its ecclesiastical structures.

The introduction of a written alphabet and literature where they had not previously existed made an important contribution to the development of tribal solidarity. The Cherrapunji dialect was adopted as a standard language in the schools, literature and church services. For the first time people were able to communicate with each other in a common language. The literature produced by the missionaries, though meant for ecclesiastical purposes, in fact became the foundation for all subsequent Khasi-Jaintia literature. We also noted how, in the culture of the people, a written script and common language had both religious and

social dimensions—rooted as they were in the mythology of the people which told of the loss of a written language as being the main reason for the loss of prestige and the fragmentation of the tribe.

The role of education was especially important, especially since the government gave the church control of the entire education system. This was the main area in which the missions and government made common cause. The government justified its financial assistance for Christian schools in the early years on the grounds that the tribal people had no proper religion and therefore subsidizing such schools did not amount to interference in the people's religion. Later it justified its contributions for mission run educational institutions on the grounds that it was only supporting the "secular" aspects of the programmes of those schools. Control over education gave the missions a very important instrument of influence. These mission schools were to contribute also to the development of a sense of common identity among the various sections of the tribe.

The Christian ideology based as it was upon a universal world view was seen as more appropriate in the new situation by many of the Khasi-Jaintia people. Christianity proclaimed a God who was God for the whole tribe, indeed for all human beings—thus replacing a concept of religion in which local gods concerned themselves only with affairs of a limited part of the tribe. The new Christian universalism was promoted by Khasi-Jaintia Christians themselves who began to teach and evangelize groups with whom they would previously have had no dealings. Values were thus introduced that transcended the old dialectical groups. This Christian ideology was to provide the basis for the new sense of tribal solidarity that began to emerge as the most potent means of dealing with the social changes that were taking place.

Closely related to the Christian ideology as taught and practised by the Evangelical missionaries was the conviction that when one became a Christian one's way of life needed to be changed. New life style standards were adopted. These included living a moral life according to Christian values, abstaining from the use of alcoholic beverages and opium, keeping one's persons and living

quarters clean, as well as living in friendly relationships with all irrespective of linguistic or regional origin.

Finally, with Christianity came ecclesiastical structures that brought representatives of the entire tribe together for the first time. The first Presbytery meeting was held in 1867, an institutional expression of the tribal solidarity movement that was coming into being through Christianity. The church organizations were, at their lower levels, similar to the traditional village and state durbars, but they transcended the old order by providing a framework which brought together the entire ethnic group. It also provided a new basis for selecting leadership. Leaders were now chosen for their ability rather than their clan membership. Women were also given new roles that involved them in public leadership which they had never exercised before. The church structures, specially that of the Presbyterian Church, became the model for all tribal political and religious organizations, thus laying the foundation for modern politics. Church structures not only promoted Khasi-Jaintia solidarity, but did so in the context of new relationships established with other Christian communities in the North East India as a whole and the world. This provided the foundations for the functioning of the people in the modern world into which they had been drawn due to the coming of the British administration.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

One cannot understand modern Khasi-Jaintia society apart from the role that has been played in its formation by Christianity. While it contributed much in providing the people with the skills necessary to function effectively under the new order, its most important contribution was in providing the people with a sense of identity. It was a new identity, based upon the solidarity of the tribe as a whole rather than on the component villages, clans and states as in the old order, which represented both continuity and discontinuity. It promoted the continuity of the basic social structure, the kinship system which has been one element in the traditional society that was common to all the people, while it displaced those lesser identities based on religion and dialect which had weakened the ability of the people to deal with the challenge of the new order.

The studies of social change among the Khasi-Jaintia people that have often been done in the past have failed to understand the dynamics of the present situation in which Christians play the leading role in economic, political and cultural life because they have not studied the Christian movement itself. Many otherwise excellent studies have not consulted ecclesiastical sources at all. It is my hope that this study will have made it clear that no study of the development of the Khasi-Jaintia in modern times can be complete unless the central role of Christianity is taken into consideration. At the same time such studies will bring about self-understanding among the Khasi-Jaintia Christians themselves.

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GLOSSARY

Bakhraw : Original settlers in a particular state (Hima) who in due course became the founding clans and prominent members of Ka Dorbar Hima.

Dolloi : Title of a chief of respective traditional administrative units in Jaintia hills.

Dorbar : An assembly or gathering of adult male members.

Hima : An administrative polity or territorial jurisdiction of a particular geographical area in Khasi hills which falls under the office of u Syiem, Lyngdoh, Wahadadar or Sirdar.

Lyngdoh : It generally refers to the priestly clans spreading over the entire Khasi-Jaintia Hills. It stands for the elected political and administrative head of Ka hima.

Pator : A local village chief of subordinate authority in Jaintia hills.

Raid : An administrative unit covering a number of villages within a respective territorial jurisdiction below a State Durbar.

Sanad : An official order issued by the British authorities to the Khasi Chiefs concerning jurisdictional administrative powers and control.

Sirdar : A chief of a particular Hima in Khasi-Jaintia hills.

Sirdarship : A Khasi State whose chief is called by the name Sirdar ; a territory or office of Sirdar.

Syiem : A chief of Khasi State.

Syiemship : A Khasi or Jaintia State whose chief is a Syiem ; a territory or office of Syiem.

Wahadadar : Title of a chief of Shella Confederacy.

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It is a welcome addition to growing literature on North Eastern region because of many reasons. Firstly, unlike the common practice of "others" studying tribes and their problems, here is an indigenous scholar, who has studied a burning and alive issue of his own community using a variety of sources. Secondly, in place of denominational-missiological studies normally undertaken by the scholars associated with the missions, here is a study, which may claim a fair amount of academic credit in any University in the world.

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