CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Health is an important input for the development of human resources and the quality of life, necessary for the overall development of a community as a whole. To have a healthy mind and body is a common desire among all people all over the world. In fact, health is a human right, which is defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity” (WHO, 1971). Although it may not be possible to attain all such types of well-being as referred to in this definition, the WHO’s constitution says, “The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political, economic and social condition.” As such, health is a holistic concept, and one may define health in any manner relating to either one or all physical, mental and well-being of an individual, or a population, according to one’s expediency of study. To make an individual healthy in mind and body is to build human development and a healthy nation necessary for peace and security (WHO, 1998).

In physical anthropology, the study of human biological variations and processes of human evolution is one of its central themes. In the early part of the 20th century, physical anthropology was primarily concerned with the taxonomic classification of human population with a view to understanding the human evolutionary history. It is under this theme of study that the sub-discipline has undergone different stages of changes and development. The advent of the science of genetics, in particular, has brought about a considerable impact on the anthropological perspective of human
evolution. During the 1950s, one of the major breakthroughs is the recognition that the changes in the genetic composition of population from generation to generation are but an evolution. The population as such is the “unit of evolution”. As a unit of evolution, a population has a heredity, which consists of an array of genes of the different genotypes, or individuals of such a population. “It occupies a definite position in space and time. It derives what it needs for energy, growth, body repair, reproduction, protection against the elements of enemies, from its physical environment, and so affects it and is affected by it. If the population is successful in meeting its needs it survives or expands; if not, it diminishes and become extinct” (Roberts, 1991). Anthropologists’ concern for health and physical fitness is a part of traditional anthropology. The theory of human evolution is based on Darwinian concept of “Survival of the fittest”. A group of people may be genetically well endowed and physically more fit or capable to live in a particular environment. For its survival, the population must maintain such a balance through time. Physical fitness is a must in maintaining a satisfactory level of health. This realization has now dominated the views of many modern physical anthropologists, or biological anthropologists. Anthropological studies have also revealed that every known human society has its own concept regarding health and disease and also methods of coping with them. The impact of other disciplines such as demography, zoology, molecular genetics, physiology, auxology, nutrition, ecology, etc. has considerably expanded the horizons of physical anthropology as a holistic discipline of human biology. The areas of interest are nowadays manifold ranging from functional aspects of anthropometry to mapping of human DNA. The concepts and approaches that have emerged in the fields of modern physical anthropology are more holistic in nature with more emphasis on biological and
social problems of the world today – overpopulation, environmental destruction, poverty, nutritional and health problems. Medical science is directly involved with the study of health condition, disease and its treatment. But for proper implementation of public health programme communities' acceptance and participation is very essential. Many physical anthropologists today are interested to understand the relationship between human biology, especially to those aspects relating to health and nutrition, and various socio-cultural factors (Strickland and Tuffrey, 1997). In fact, it is now believed that the human biological processes are largely influenced by various social, economic and cultural aspects of the society. It may be noted that there is always a “delicate balance” between a population and its environment. Thus, Physical anthropological knowledge can be used as an evaluative tool for knowing people's health problem and health status.

Research on health status of a population is very important, because it is likely to provide a framework for a better understanding of both the cultural and biological variation of human populations. Thus, from the anthropological point of view, one may consider health as a state of well-being due to the interplay between socio-cultural and biological factors - environmental and genetic factors (Kar, 2000). Further, such a study is very vital for the integration and development of anthropology as a discipline, which is primarily concerned with both socio-cultural and biological aspects of human populations. So, it is important for physical anthropologists to undertake such studies with a view to understanding of not only the processes of human evolution, but also the health and nutritional aspect of human populations.
In order to measure the health status of a population, one needs to take into consideration certain health parameters which are generally considered as health indicators, although the method of measuring may vary from one study to another (Gwatkin, 2000). Park (1995) has listed a number of health indicators under different categories, viz., mortality rates, morbidity rates, disability or illness and injury rates, nutritional status, health care and delivery indicators, family planning and epidemiological policies, social and mental health indicators (e.g., include suicide, homicide, acts of violence and crimes, road traffic accidents, juvenile delinquency, alcohol and drug abuse, smoking, and the like), environmental indicators (e.g., physical and biological environmental conditions in which diseases occur like air and water pollution, radiation, solid wastes, noise, exposure to solid substances in food and drinks, etc.), socioeconomic indicators (e.g., population growth, per capita income, per capita expenditure, per capita gross national product, level of unemployment, literacy rates, family size, number of persons per room, per capita calorie availability, social security and welfare services), and health policy indicators (e.g., GNP spent on the health services, water supply, sanitation, housing, community development, and so on). Health, besides others depends on body constitution, determined by genes, life style and self discipline adopted by the community of individuals, the food habits and the totality of environment in which they live. Environmental changes are having tremendous impact on human species’ biology and thus providing tremendous scope for planned anthropological studies. The impact of environmental stresses for instance high altitude or migration on human health has opened fresh vistas for anthropologists to explore.
It is therefore, obvious that there are a large number of health parameters, and for that reason, it is often argued that health status is the function of many biological and socio-environmental factors. Accordingly, it is not simple to assess the health status of the population, especially in the case of individual research as it requires a technical knowledge of different fields or disciplines. “This is because health, like happiness, cannot be defined in exact measurable terms. Its presence or absence is so largely a matter of subjective judgement” (Park, 1995). Nevertheless, selection of few sensitive, specific and reliable parameters is also meaningful especially for screening or identifying the health problems of a specific population at a given point of time, which are required for immediate intervention. From the biological anthropological point of view, demographic variables (e.g., fertility, mortality, and reproductive wastage), self-reported morbidity, nutritional anthropometry of adults, growth and nutritional status of children, and hematological tests such as blood pressure and hemoglobin content are commonly used as health indicators of population (Khongsdier, 1996). These health variables/traits are in turn influenced by numerous bio-social factors (Eveleth and Tanner, 1990; Vijayalakshmi and Devanaki, 1976; Ayeini and Oduntan, 1978; Bharti, 1981; Barua, 1982; Visaria, 1988; Gwatkin, 2000). An attempt to understand the relationship of these health traits with various socio-economic factors like educational level, occupation, income and expenditure of the household, family size, religion, etc., is very helpful in understanding better the health status of a population.

This thesis is concerned with certain aspects of the health status of the Khasi population in Domiasiat area of the West Khasi Hills district, Meghalaya in Northeast India. Domiasiat is a proposed uranium mining site, which has become a burning
question, especially on the issues relating to the ill-health condition of the people in the area. However, no scientific study has so far been carried out relating to the health status of the people in this area. Thus, the urgent need to carry out a study on the health status of the people in Domiasiat area with a view to understand the effects of socio-cultural and environmental factors (including radiation) on the health of human populations living in the area in general was felt. This study is a small attempt to deal with the health status of the people with a view to understanding how certain selected socio-economic variables interact or associated with demographic and biological measures of health and nutrition. It also aims at providing preliminary information from anthropological view point on the effects of the environment if any especially exploratory mining that had taken place in the area on the health of the people. It may, however be noted that the present study is not concerned with the direct effects of radiation on the health condition of the people of Domiasiat area due to many operational difficulties and subjective constrains. However an effort has been made to report on the health conditions of the people of the area although the present study is delimited particularly to understand and address the following objectives. Therefore, we undertook a study on the general health status of the Khasis in Domiasiat and Rangblang areas of West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya with the following objectives:

OBJECTIVES

1. To describe the demographic structure of the Khasi population in Domiasiat and Rangblang areas.

2. To understand the growth status of children aged 2 to 6 years, and to assess the nutritional status of both children and adults in terms of selected
anthropometric measurements and indices.

3. To understand the morbidity pattern of the study population and to find out the possible relationship between morbidity and body dimensions.

4. To understand the relationship between health parameters (such as fertility, mortality, physical growth of children, adult body dimensions, morbidity, hemoglobin level and blood pressure) and other biosocial factors (such as age, sex, family size, education and household income, and anthropometric variables).

LAND AND PEOPLE

Area of study: Called the ‘Scotland of the East’, by the colonial rulers long ago, Meghalaya is a hilly region of unsurpassed scenic beauty, waterfalls and mountains, lakes and valleys. Meghalaya is essentially a small tribal state which came into existence on 21st January, 1972. Initially, it was a part of Assam and it was composed of only two districts namely, the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district and the Garo Hills district. At present, there are seven districts, namely, East Garo Hills, East Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills, Ri-Bhoi, South Garo Hills, West Garo Hills and West Khasi Hills. Meghalaya lies between 25° 47' and 26° 10' N latitude and 89° 45' and 92° 45' E longitude, covering an area of 22,429 km² with a total population of 2,306,069 individuals out of which 1,167,840 are males and 1,138,229 are females (Census, 2001).

West Khasi Hills, presently the largest district of Meghalaya, was carved out of the erstwhile Khasi Hills District on the 28th October, 1976. In the same year, on 10th November, the Mairang Civil Subdivision was inaugurated, whereas the Mawkyrwat
Block was converted into an Administrative unit. With the upgradation of Mawkyrwat into a full-fledged Sub-Division on June 26th 1982, the District now comprises three Sub-Divisions (including the Sadar Sub-Division), one Administrative Unit, viz., Mawshynrut which came into being on the 9th February, 1996 and 6 (six) C & R D Blocks, viz., Nongstoin, Mairang, Mawkyrwat, Mawshynrut, Ranikor including Mawthadraishan Block, which was created on 20th March, 2001. The District comprises eight Syiemships, viz., Nongstoin, Nongkhlaw, Maharam, Myriaw, Rambrai, Mawiang, Langrin and Nobosohphoh, together with the three Sirdarships of Jyrngam, Riangsih and Nonglang.

The present study was conducted in Domiasiat area of the West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya. It is located between 25° 47' and 25° 57' N latitude and between 91° 10' and 91° 57' E longitude. It is situated to the south-western part of the West Khasi Hills district. Domiasiat and its adjoining villages are situated at an altitude of 987m above sea level. It is located at a distance of 150 km from Shillong and 60 km from Nongstoin, the district capital. Domiasiat area as well as the whole of West Khasi Hills district is dominated by the Khasis, who speak the Mon-Khmer language of the Austro-Asiatic group and have been following the matrilineal system of society. Thus in the present study, the term "Khasis" refers to the people inhabiting West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya and also those living in Domiasiat area. The villages that had been taken into consideration for the present study are located about 10 km radius from the uranium mining site. These villages include Domiasiat, Mawthahab, Nongbahjynrin Wahkajee, Mawkhlaitngap, Mawlaikhap, Nongtynger, Umjarain, Phlangdiloin and Nongtynniaw. Rangblang which is
situated approximately 25 km from the mining areas is considered as the non-mining area. The main occupation of the people in this area is agriculture and charcoal making. It is also believed that this area is more backward and illiteracy rate is still very high when compared with other parts of West Khasi Hills.

**Topography:** Meghalaya maybe broadly divided into five geological formations, namely Archean Gneisses Complex, Shillong group of Rocks, Lower Gondwana Rocks, Cretaceous Tertiary sediments and Sylhet Traps (Bhakta, 1991). Shillong Group of Rocks is exposed in the central parts of the Khasi hills comprising mostly Quartzite. Rocks of this type rest uncomfortably over the gneissic rocks with basal thick bed of conglomerate in the western part. The mildly folded sediments have suffered low grade metamorphism and are dissected by numerous faults. These rocks are intruded by ultra basic and acidic sills and dykes. The granite intrusive along the axial region of the Shillong group of rocks around Mylliem is termed as Mylliem granite. Several granite bases such as Kyllang Plateau are intrusive into the gneissic complex in different parts of the region.

**Minerals:** Meghalaya is endowed with a number of economically important minerals, the major ones being limestone, coal, uranium, siliminite and clay, especially West Khasi hills district but most of the minerals are under investigation.

**Climatic Condition:** The climate of Khasi Hills shows considerable variations due to altitudinal differences in the areas. Shillong which is situated at about 1500m above sea level has a pleasant climate, neither extremely hot nor cold. The temperature rises above 24°C-34°C in the summer and falling below 4°C in winter. The average temperature and annual rainfall vary from one region to another. Cherrapunjee and Mawsynram areas receive the heaviest rainfall in the world (1270 cm).
Flora and Fauna: The district is blessed with a rich heritage of flora. The vegetation of Khasi Hills may be broadly classified into two major types, viz., the Tropical and Warm Temperate types. The forest of Meghalaya is the rich source of timber. The important timber yielding species included Khasi pines (*Pinus khasiana*) in the higher altitude areas and Teak (*Tectana grandis*), Sal (*Shore robustra*), Titachap (*Michaelia champaca*), Gamari (*Gmelina or borea*), and Makri Sal (*Schima khasiana/wallichii*) in the lower reaches. Pitcher plants (*Nepenthes khasiana*) and varieties of orchids are also found in many pockets. However, with the passage of time, owing to the deforestation process most of the species have been depleted. Different types of bamboo also grow in abundance. Also Broomstick cultivation is widely practiced in these areas.

Some of the important crops grown by the people of the area are paddy, maize, millet, potato (*Solanum tuberasum*), bayleaf (*Betula acuminate*), Black pepper (*Piper nigrum*), rice (*Oryza sativa*), mustard (*Brassica juncea*), radish (*Raphanus sativus*). Among the vegetables chilly especially raja mircha (*Capsicum chinense cv*), beans etc. Horticultural crops like oranges (*Citrus sinenses*), lemon (*Citrus limonium*), Pummelo (*Citrus spp*), jackfruit (*Arthocarpus integrifolia*), papaya (*Carica papaya*), mango (*Magnifera indica*), guava (*Psidium guyava*), Arecanut (*Areca catechu*) and other varieties of citrus fruits are grown too. Tezpatta (*cinnamomum tarnata*) is also grown in this area.

The area is not so rich in wildlife owing to large scale deforestation for making charcoal and hunting practices that are still being practice. The fauna of the district includes elephants, apes, monkeys, deer, sambar, tigers, wild boars, bears, leopards and many others. Currently, elephant depredation is the common occurrence due to the fact
that their original habitat has been disturbed by the haphazard cutting of trees. Indiscriminate burning of forest and plantation impedes the regeneration process. Different types of birds are also found although the numbers are dwindling with deforestation still being practiced even with the ban on cutting trees. However, leeches are found in large numbers during rainy seasons and the summer months.

The People: In West Khasi Hills, the total population is 296,049 of which 150,419 are males and 1,45,630 are females. The sex ratio of the district is 968 females per 1000 males which is lower than the ratio of the state (984 females per 1000 males) and a lower literacy rate of 65.10% when compared to that of the state (i.e., 76.98%).

The present study was carried out in Domiasiat and its surrounding areas of West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya, which is predominantly inhabited by the Khyriam Khasis who speak the Mon-Khmer language of the Austro-Asiatic group. So far as the Austric language is concerned, it is believed to be spoken by the earliest inhabitants of the country, particularly the Australians and their descendants (Ghosh and Khongsdier, 1997). The people of the district have their distinct dialects of about 23 in number. Majority of these dialectical groups, understand Khasi, which is common or link language of the people. They follow the matrilineal pattern of society as in the case of other Khasi sub-groups. At present, besides the Khasis, other peoples like the Kols, Mendas, Nicobarese of Nicobar Islands, etc. are the Austric speakers in India. Das (1987) has reported that the Wanchoo of Arunachal Pradesh also use some Austric words in their language.
The people of this district belong to the scheduled tribe community. The Khynriam Khasis are the predominant inhabitants of West Khasi Hills District. However, they are known by different names according to geographical areas:

(1) *Ki Nongphlang* are those people living in the central up land also called *Khatsawphra*, Mawiang, Maram, etc. (2) *Ki War* are those living in the southern slopes towards the border with Bangladesh. (3) *Ki Mailang* are those in the Langrin Syiemship (South-west). (4) *Ki Rimen* are those living in the Northern side. (5) *Ki Muliang* are those in Langpih area and Jyrngam Sirdarship. (6) *Ki Nongtrai* are those living in areas between the Nongphlang and Lyngngams. (7) *Ki Lyngngam* are those living in the western part and in close proximity with east and south Garo Hills. (8) The Garos are found in Langrin Syiemship, Nongstoin Syiemship, Maharam Syiemship, Mawiang Syiemship, Jyrngam Sirdarship and Nonglang Sirdarship. There are a small number of Hajongs in the Maharam, Langrin and Mawiang Syiemships, as well as about 20 families of the Banai Community in Nongjri village of Ranikor Block, Nongstoin Syiemship.

**Physical Characteristics and Affinities**: From Anthropological point of view, the Khasis (or Khynriams, Pnars, Bhois, Wars and Lyngngams) belong to the Indo-Mongoloid of the Mongoloid racial stock (Das, 1981). Das (1987) has decided that “the Khasis have brown skin colour. Their head hair is dark brown with a reddish tinge in colour, straight or flat wavy in form and coarse to medium in texture, rich in quantity and with a single whorl in the occipital region. They have scanty beard and moustache. The forehead is medium to low in height, medium in breadth with none or slight slope. The colour of the eye is brown to dark brown. The eye slit is mostly oblique and palpebral
fissure is medium. Straight eyes with broad fissure are also frequently met with. Eye fold is present in most cases. Among the Khasi the supra-orbital ridges are slightly prominent. The nose shows slight to medium depression at the root and the nasal profile is straight with a horizontal septum. The malar region is very prominent. They are short in stature. Their head is mesocephalic, hypsicephalic and acrocephalic. Face is euryprospic and nose is platyrrhine but the frequency of mesorrhine nose is also high". Regarding the four sub-groups of the Khasis, Das (1978) says that these four divisions (i.e., Khynriams, Pnars, Bhois and Wars) do not deviate much from the average Khasi in relation to stature and trunk height. He, however, points out that the "Pnars and the Bhois show most often deviation in higher magnitude and that these two populations are standing porpoise to one another in relation to the average Khasi." It may be mentioned that the people have so far treated the Khynriams, Pnars, Bhois, Wars and Lyngngams as one and the same ethnic group. Marwein (1987) says that the Khasis are known sometimes by different names at different places. The names are either confined to a particular Syiemship or state or a particular geographical region. All these sub-groups claim to have descended from the same origin, i.e., U Hynniew Trep U Hynniew Skum (The Seven Huts). Recently the Government of Meghalaya has published one volume of Meghalaya (DIPR, 1991) which clearly stated that these Khasis groups are of the same ethnic origin, sharing common traditions and customs, although there may be some variations, owing to different geographical conditions and admixture with other communities.

**Economic life:** Agriculture is the primary occupation of the Khasis. They produce rice, millets, pumpkin, chilly, mustard, maize, yams, sweet potatoes, potato, etc in the hills to a great extent and export them to different places. They also produce maize and rice in
some areas much. Besides, the Khasis grow various fruits like orange, pineapple, betelnut, cassia leaf, cinnamon, ginger, long ground, turmeric and various vegetables. Basically the community is a land owing community. The lands are classified under two main divisions: public lands or *ka raij* and private lands belonging to the individual proprietor.

Rearing of domestic animals like pigs, cows, chickens, goats are also practiced by the people. Some of the people also practice bee-keeping which is mostly for home consumption. Horses are also being kept by some people living in interior places which helps them in transportation, especially during the weekly market days. The majority of small business like tea stalls, grocery, selling fish, keeping small shop outlets are mostly run by women.

Another traditional occupation prevalent among the Khasis of these areas is charcoal making. The burning of charcoal (*thang rnga*) for domestic use is very common. Charcoal of these areas is being transported to Byrnihat which is an industrial area where the demand is very high. Hence, it has led to wide scale deforestation making most areas to look completely barren, unfertile and a loss of many plant and animal species. Lack of proper roads and infertility of the land have further pushed many people to this occupation. Except for a few women who are having small children, both men and women are engaged in different kinds of work to support the family. A number of people are also engaged as daily labourers either within their village or its surrounding areas or work in far away areas like the coal mines of Garo Hills and Jaintia Hills District. Other people are also engaged in trade, business and other services. In Rangblang, one of the
villages under my study grinding of dry chilly is a thriving cottage business among the people for supply to Lewduh (Bara bazaar) in Shillong.

**Food Habits:** The food habits of the Khasis of the area is very simple as it depends on the availability of the resources. They prefer boiled food than fry food or spices, although, nowadays oil is used more often in some families. The staple food of the Khasis is rice. They are non-vegetarian and eat almost all kinds of meat which they get from the market and meat of wild animals which they hunt from the forest except cats, dogs, snakes, lizards unlike some other tribal communities of North-East India. If there is no curry with the rice they simply burnt a dry fish together with salt or sometimes rice with only warm water mixed along with salt. They domesticate cows and pigs and eat their flesh. Meat and fish are bought from their weekly market hence consumption is mostly once or twice in a week. Chicken are eaten only sometimes during marriages or some other occasions. Most people also eat tadpoles (dohlun), grasshoppers and silkworms if available. However, dry fish is liked by all and is found in different varieties in almost each and every house who can afford to buy which is kept dried in their ‘Tynger’ or the wooden structure hanging from the roof down towards the hearth. On this they dry almost everything from firewoods to maize, beans which would be sown for the next season. ‘Tungtap’ is one type of dry fish taken as chutney. In the weekly market, the red grounded rice cake or the ‘pu-saw’ or ‘pu-tharo’ which is white in colour or ‘pu-khlein’ which is red grounded rice cooked in oil is taken as snack along with tea. Red tea is mostly taken by the people. The nutritious value of milk is not known to the Khasis, so milk-tea or drinking of milk is not practiced by the villagers, which however is changing nowadays with time.
Smoking and drinking is restricted to men only in the olden days, however, some women are also seen drinking in the present days in some places although taking of raw tobacco or 'duma' is allowed for women. Chewing of areca nut 'kwai' with betel leaves 'tympew' is very common in a Khasi family even if a family is poor. It is immediately served to visitors before anything else and it is almost every man's habit to chew it.

**Marriage and Divorce:** Marriage is the oldest and universal form of social institution in the history of mankind. According to Malinowski “Marriage is a contract for the production and maintenance of children.” Radcliff-Brown (1950) in his introduction to African Systems of Kinship and Marriage described that “Marriage is a social arrangement by which a child is given a legitimate position in the society, determined by parenthood in the social sense”. Marriage as an institution has different implications in different cultures. Its purpose, function and forms may differ from one society to another society. But it is present as an institution in traditional as well as in modern society.

Among the Khasis, marriage is an extraordinary serious matter. According to Shadwell’s view in Gordon’s (1906) book “The Khasis”, marriage among the Khasis “is purely a civil contract.” However, it is to be noted that originally marriage is not done in random but it is done in a very serious manner by the elders of the family -a prearranged marriage. The sole aim of marriage is procreation of children. If no issues are born, then the marriage is considered as faulty and not pleasing to the gods. The Khasis are strictly clan exogamous unlike the other neighbouring tribes like the Hmars, Vaiphei, Zuo (Bareh, 2001; Zehol, 1998; Kumar, 1999) but not strictly endogamous at community level. They consider it a great crime to marry within one’s clan as they belong to the same ancestress or lawbei. Incest or ka sang means cohabiting with a member of a man’s
or woman’s own clan was punishable with exile or fine (Gordon, 1906). It is sacrilege and an alien thinking for a man and woman becoming one flesh-one blood after marriage as in the Christian concept as for them it is synonymous to saying that they are of the same kur which is a taboo or sang. People who befall into this, are excommunicated from the clan, their rights of inheritance are removed, exiled and after their death their bones are not kept in the family cairn. It is believed by the the evils resultant from incestuous connection is very great; the following are some of them: being struck by lightning, being killed by a tiger, dying in child birth etc (Gordon, 1906). Marriage with the maternal uncle’s daughter or with a paternal aunt’s daughter is prohibited during their lifetime but the prohibition is removed after their death. Such marriages are not favoured.

A Khasi can have only one wife by formal alliances, but he can keep another woman as his partner by an informal alliance. In this case the first wife is called ka tnga trai (real wife), while the second wife is called ka tnga tuh (stolen wife). The children of ka tnga tuh (stolen wife) have no right to the self-acquired property of their father as long as he lives with ka tnga trai. Divorce among the Khasis is quite a common phenomenon. There are numerous reasons why divorce is practiced. Lack of understanding between the couple, ill-treatment of the husband, adultery (ka klim) and failure to bring forth issues which is one of the chief reasons of divorce. This fact, however, should not lead us to think that marriage is a trivial matter. The Khasis hold marriage to be sacred as they generally believe that it is the scheme of God for man. Thus, a Khasi would undoubtly expect every couple to live in peace and harmony. If God really willed it, he will fructify this sacred union. Therefore, a marriage that does not
bring such happy consequences is looked upon as unfavourable to God. Marriage among the Khasis is strictly clan exogamy.

**Position of women:** One of the few parts in the world where people rejoice when a girl is born, is a unique societal structure of the Khasis- the matrilineal group. A Khasi woman comparatively enjoys more freedom and autonomy than women in other parts of the country. Anthropologists describe it as a matrilineal society. Socially Khasi women are considered equal to Khasi men. Depending on the seriousness of any matter a Khasi women can take decision regarding family matters on their own or in consultation with husband or other relatives. A family without a girl child is considered incomplete as there is no more continuity of lineage of the clan. In the earlier times, adoption of a girl child was practiced preferably from the clan or relatives and orphans who could carry on with the title of the particular clan. Nowadays too, some families still practice adoption, although now people are more cautious. However, it should not be mistaken that boys are ill-treated as its generally thought by people of other communities because birth of a boy child is equally welcome in the family as that of the girl child. A man is considered a “protector” and a “provider” of the family whereas a woman is the “caretaker”. In case if divorce happens between the spouses, the children stays with the mother. Traditionally, women are prohibited to participate in political matters of the village council or “durbar”. Even if women enjoy social freedom yet, few women participate in politics. Nowadays, slowly some women are taking part in the state politics but when it comes to the “durbar” they still are not yet ready to change the age old traditional system.
Religion: According to the Khasis, religion is a relationship between God and man. Originally, the native Khasi religion was neither Hindu nor Muslim. It was, according to tradition, a religion based on the belief in one formless living god (*U Blet*) who was omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. They considered it a sacrilege to symbolize God or to picture God in any shape or form. The religion taught that through service to others, one serves God. One of the commandments says, “Tipbriew –tipblei” (know man-know God). At the same time they believed in gods and goddesses of rivers, streams, jungles, etc. Their religion was based on conciliating good, evil and ancestor spirits through animal sacrifices to these gods and goddesses. Reverence for the tree spirit, protecting and keeping of sacred groves “Law Kyntang” is seen in many areas near the vicinity of the villages. These groves are taboo and it is an offence to cut trees therein for any purpose other than performing funeral obsequies. The Khasis do not worship the dead. The giving of food (ai bam) to the spirit of the departed ancestors is to win their favour and blessings. The spirits being in the house of God are in a position to intercede for the living before God and secure his help and protection for them. (Minattur, 1955).

In the olden times, the Khasis used to erect memorial stones or megaliths in memory of the ancestors or in commemoration of some big events in the past and present. These megaliths are seen scattered in some pockets of Meghalaya. The indigenous Khasi religion is still practiced by many in the region. However, these days majority of the people are Christians belonging to different denominations. A small number of them are Muslims through marriage alliances with the other communities.