RESPONSE AND REACTION

Long before the advent of the British, the contact of the Khasis with the people of the neighbouring plains had produced profound influence on the Khasi society, acting as the initial introduction to social changes in the Khasi Hills. But this influence that the plains people had on the Khasi society, was very minor, as contacts between them were mostly confined to trade and commerce. The few stray people who had come from the plains to settle in the Khasi Hills, were more influenced by Khasi culture and were ultimately converted to the Khasi way of life. Yet the subtle influences of this contact with the people from outside their isolated hill abode, had laid the Khasi society open to new and different ideas, customs and usages. Thus Kamaleshwar Sinha observed, "The winds of change that blew across the tribal borders to their huts and shelters mingled tradition with innovations, heralding a new order and laying the foundations of new ways of life". However, this change that

1 Kamaleshwar Sinha, Meghalaya: Triumph of the Tribal Genius, p.89.
came into the Khasi society, was imperceptible and progress was slow till the advent of the British who accelerated it. The British had lost no time in exploiting the internecine strifes between the Khasi Chiefs for their smooth and easy conquer. Divide and rule was their policy, and they utilized every possible means to annex the Khasi Hills. Disunity among the Khasi Chiefs for instance, can be seen when U Duwan Singh, Syiem of Cherrapunji, gave asylum to David Scott in the revolt of 1829, headed by Tirot Singh, Syiem of Nongkhlaw. The fall of Tirot Singh in 1833 marked the formal entry of the British with the capacity as rulers in the Khasi Hills.

The introduction of the British colonial rule in the Khasi Hills in the 1830's, was followed by the integration of the hitherto politically isolated Khasi States and villages into a single administrative unit (first in Bengal Presidency and then a district in the province of Assam) within the British colony in India, and the supercession of the traditional institutions. Such supercessions were the results of the imposition of the colonial pattern of the

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3 Hamlet Bareh, The History and Culture of the Khasi People, p.145.
administration and the introduction of various laws and institutions at the convenience of the ruling power. Such inductions occurred in spite of the various policy statements of the British authorities not to interfere with the traditional way of life of the Khasis and other tribals and their customs and usages. And these, together with the activities of the western missionaries which came along with the British rule, brought profound changes, leading to the most drastic and spectacular social change in the Khasi society. Through these processes of change, the Khasis both responded and reacted, although response was sometimes circumstancesed directly or indirectly, due to the stretch and strain of the colonial rule.

REACTION

The ascendancy of British paramountcy to the hills, was resented from the very beginning. The treaty of 1826 signed by Tirot Singh and other Khasi chiefs with the British, allowed them free passage through the Khasi Hills as they construct a road from Kamrup to Sylhet. But it did not take long for Tirot Singh to realize the danger of this agreement, and as the British military and the
labourers they brought with them from the plains, started showing signs of their highhandedness and domineering attitude, and on the whole, their gross misbehaviour towards the Khasis, as early as 1829, Tirot Singh started making wide designs to expel these aliens from his country. He and other Khasi Chiefs, like Bor Manick Syiem of Mylliem, who supported him, led the Khasis on a war footing with the British, leading to the general massacre and the murder of two British Lieutenants, Bourton and Beddingfield. This incident has been described as 'Murder in cold blood'. But the Khasis were only reacting against alien forces that were threatening to capture their freedom. As lovers of freedom and as preservers of their ancient legacy, they were not altogether in the wrong in the National uprisings. Tirot Singh proved to be the bravest of the Khasi syiems, as when the whole country was defeated, he alone stood unconquered till his capture in 1833. He is thus remembered as a hero of the Khasis, and a monument was erected for him at Myrang. Thus it was the fear of losing their freedom as a race and their religious and political identity, which induced in the Khasis a strong sense

4 A Mackenzie, North East Frontier, p.222.
of urgency to unite themselves against the intrusion of the British power.

The annexation of the Khasi Hills was followed by a period of negotiations and agreements, by which the British annexed more and more territories and weakened the powers of the Syiems, thus consolidated their power in these hills. Treaties were not enough to satisfy the British greed for power, and Sunnads and Parwanas were promulgated to curb the power of the native rulers to a greater extent. Further more, additional clauses were inserted to the Sunnads to enable the British Government to have a hold on mineral resources, waste lands and forests too. Thus British paramountcy was sought to be consolidated by a process of imposing these agreements and sunnads to Khasi chiefs. This act caused a general resentment and from time to time, Syiems voiced their resentments against these undue impositions. On the occasion of the first promulgation of the Sunnads, the Syiems and their durbars had resolved to oppose the enforcement of those terms which were not laid down in the original treaties executed with David Scott thirty years back. But many of the Syiems had to accept them lest they would be subject to further
humiliating terms, Rabon Singh, Syiem of Khyrim, in 1859-60, denounced the imposition of conditions with regards to cession of lands and minerals belts and remonstrated against the government decision to take over judicial jurisdiction in cases of homicide, suicide and accidental deaths. People at large also began to voice their resentment against the British encroachments on their individual rights of ownership in case of land and forest. In 1880, U.Rawon and U.Madan, sent a petition to the Government against the reservation of their private forests. Imposition of land revenue and other taxes also were not in accordance with the people's wishes and in 1890, U.Manj Singh, appealed to the Government against the assessment of income tax. Thus even in the early British period, Khasi Chiefs and their subjects were quite conscious of their rights and had reacted in different ways against the dangers which they had foreseen. Opposition against British measures were more vigorously voiced in later years by Political parties like the Khasi-Jaintia National Guild (1918), Khasi National Durbar (1923) and the Khasi States Federation (1933). These resulted from a sense of loss of political and

6 H. Barch, op. cit., p. 201.
7 A.S.R., Home Proceedings, No.3 & 4, dated 26th April, 1880.
8 Ibid., File No.26-31, F & C(B) Nov. 1890.
individual rights caused by the interference of the British administration on the traditional political system. Yet despite these oppositions, the British established themselves firmly in the Khasi Hills.

The consolidation of the British power in the Khasi Hills was followed by the arrival of Western Missionaries at the request and welcome of the Government. Till then, the relations between the British and the Khasis was mostly political and commercial. It was the missionaries and their activities in the field of education, medicine and proselytisation, which produced the most effective changes in the Khasi society. The spread of Christianity in these hills could not be checked, as it enjoyed the full patronage of the British Government. But the vital steps, by which the Khasis climbed the ladder of civilization, shedding their mental reservations and adopting new ideas and an altogether new mode of life, was the introduction of formal and informal education by the Missionaries, and its growth. However, these forces did not come to stay without any opposition. From the very beginning, the Khasis did not like the
idea of an alien religion to spread among them. The initial phase of Missionary work in Khasi Hills was marked by many and varied difficulties, as the people were still suspicious and hostile towards them. There were cases where villages were even burnt down and deserted for fear of the missionaries, and missionaries' residences were often surrounded by a hostile crowd which threatened violence. 9 Opposition to missiology grew stronger with the conversion of the first two Khasis U Amor and U Rejon at Cherrapunjee in 1846, leading to a major commotion. Since then every baptism was a signal for renewed antagonism and threatening opposition. 10 Early christians were persecuted and excommunicated from the society, thereby losing their rights of inheritance and other social rights. According to Bareh, in the year 1857, when Ram Singh, Syiem of Cherra died, the claims of both Syiems and Myntris who had been converted to christianity, were not recognised, as the traditional Khasi religion was the core of the State ceremonies. 11 However, these difficulties did not hinder the zeal and devotion of the missionaries, and their admirable preserverance led to the rapid growth of converts to the christian

9Nalini Natarajan, Missionary Among the Khasis, pp. 64-65.
fold. The various factors which add up to the success of Christianity in the Khasi Hills has already been discussed in the preceding chapter. On the other hand, however, the fact that converts were debarred from attending markets on a Sunday, that they were deprived of the benefit of unrestricted divorce and that drunkenness was forbidden, acted as a deterrent to the less spiritually minded members of the tribe. Marriage of a Christian to a non-Christian was also forbidden by the missionaries, the violation of which could cause the loss of his or her church membership. Converts were also debarred from joining traditional religious rites, ceremonies and festivals, thus their connection with the traditional Khasis was severed and Khasi unity was tempered on the whole. All these, led many to hesitate and deter in embracing Christianity easily, as most Khasis still attached great importance to their earlier religious and social customs which gave them a sense of identity.

In order to draw more converts to their religion, the missionaries undertook the task of educating the people of these hills. In this field too, the missionaries had to face opposition which

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12 B.C. Allen, Assam District Gazetteer, p. 67.
they no doubt overcome with patience, tact and perseverance. This opposition started when it became evident that the missionary teaching was adversely influencing the students and eroded into Khasi values.\textsuperscript{13} There were instances when school boys refused to join their family religious rites and ceremonies. Besides, school books mostly consist of Christian publications to propagate that faith, hence the fear of being converted through education. Kynpham Singh was also of the opinion that the Christian teaching, that a person is born a sinner, is in contradiction with the Khasi way of thinking and belief.\textsuperscript{14} As a result of this lack of response to education, schools were frequently shunned for days together or the attendance was irregular.\textsuperscript{15} Opposition to schools and education became more threatening when attempts were made to burn down these educational institutions. It was also argued by some Khasis that they lost their script due to the will of \textit{U Blei} (God) that they should remain without one, and opposed to the introduction of a Khasi script by the missionaries. It was also felt unnecessary for women to join in education as she had already been entrusted

\textsuperscript{13}N. Natarajan, \textit{op. cit.}, p.116.
\textsuperscript{14}Kynpham Singh, "Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills upto 1874 (An Historical Outline)" Shillong Centenary Volume, pp.6-7.
\textsuperscript{15}J.H. Morris, \textit{op.cit.}, p.27.
with the duty as the Keeper of the house and
religion and thus the need of her taking up work
in another sphere, did not arise. These oppositions
and reactions on the part of the Khasis, could
however in no way stand against the strong deter-
mination of the missionaries, coupled by the
Government aid which the missionaries enjoyed in
the form of grants and scholarships to enhance
education. But progress was slow due to this lack
of response on the part of the people, and even
the few who had become interested in education,
mostly, converts, were also interested only up to
a degree as to enable them to read the Bible and
hymns and to make them fit to become school
teachers or village pastors. Agriculture, being
the main occupation of the people, also demanded
more hands in the fields, and children were either
taken away from school before they have obtained
more than a smattering of instructions, or they were
not at all permitted to join school. Thus initially,
the education imparted to the Khasis, was a very
rudimentary one. However, the opening of schools
in the interior formed a base for academic and
vocational education and training. In 1869, a
printing press, the first in Khasi Hills, was started
by the Welsh Missionaries at Cherra. This was

16 Census of India, 1911, Vol.VIII, p.89.
followed by the rise in the number of schools and students, resulting in the increase of educated men and women among the Khasis.

The missionaries and their activities in the fields of conversion, education and medical aid, brought the Khasis face to face with the acute awareness of their own tribal identity and the danger of losing it in the face of that overwhelming impact of the West. Khasi intellectuals saw a need for its preservation, and this cultural awakening found its expression through a literary movement initiated by Babu Jeebon Roy, who may be regarded as the apostle of the Khasi Renaissance. He wrote books not only to acquaint the Khasis with their own history or to remind them of their great past, but also to familiarise them with their own noble traditions. He also saw the benefits of higher education, and through his efforts, the first Entrance School was established in Shillong enabling the Khasi Youths to enter the portals of higher education. He himself, had but a very elementary education, and joined government service in the lowest rank as a second clerk, but by dint of his merit, he rose to retire as senior Extra

19 R.T. Rymbai, op.cit., p.68.
Assistant Commissioner in 1894. For the spread of education, he started the Ri Khasi Press in 1896. And as the Khasi intellectuals of his time joined him in his effort to preserve and revive Khasi culture, by first responding to the forces of education and later using it as a tool for reaction, a socio-cultural organisation the seng Khasi was born in 1899. This organisation was aimed to protect and preserve the Khasi culture, religion and customs, against the onslaught of christianity and western influences, and for the revitalisation of the Khasi Usages, manners, folk-lore and festivals, on the basis of truth, love and service to their fellowmen. The seng Khasi brought out a number of publications both in Khasi and English, high-lighting the importance of Khasi Culture and the essential need for maintaining the traditional heritage. Apart from Jeebon Roy, other founders of his movement namely, U Sib Charan Roy and Chandra Nath Roy (his two sons), Radhon Singh Berry, Hormu Roy Dipengdoh, Rabon Singh, Rash Mohon Roy, etc., were all notable literary men who followed in the footsteps of Jeebon Roy. Through their books, periodicals, journals, pamphlets, etc., the cause of traditional Khasi culture was

20 P. R. G. Mathur, Khasi of Meghalaya, Study in Tribalism and Religion, p. 89.
championed, and it did not fail to arouse public political and cultural consciousness as a reaction to British rule and inductions.

P.R. C. Mathur is also of the opinion that clan societies, present within the Khasi social structure, which were formed by the voluntary membership limited to the members of a particular clan, by aiding Khasi unity also acted a resistance to alien forces and a revivatist of Khasi heritage. Other small political units of the village and commune, which are inseparable from the state, also helped the Khasis as a tribe to put up a valiant resistance against the onslaught of powerful external forces like Christianity, western civilization and influences of the people from the plains, who are outside the Khasi fold.

RESPONSE

The submission of Tirot Singh, was almost immediately followed by a general pacification and the strengthening of British hold on Khasi states. In his letter to the government, Col. Jenkins was of the opinion that the Khasis were unable to fight or defend their own interests and therefore it was up to the Government to interfere on their behalf by

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21 P.R.C. Mathur, op. cit., p. 137.
extending its protection to those conquered territories within the Khasi Hills. Thus under British protection and guidance, a number of changes were introduced within the administrative structure to safeguard the interests of the people, but in reality, to suit the British administrative needs, convenience and profit. These changes were mostly responded by the people. As has been referred, the introduction of Sunnads and parwanas were resisted by some, but the majority of the Khasi chiefs, realizing the superior power of the British, were more willing to accept them than to act on the contrary, which might have caused the wrath of the British Government and the introduction more humiliating terms. Ever since the rebellion under the leadership of Tirot Singh, some Khasi chiefs had sided with the British and gave protection to David Scott, and some had already adopted the sagacious policy of withdrawing from an unprosperous cause. Even the few who had supported him, were glad to avail themselves of the opportunity afforded by his surrender to throw themselves on the clemency of the paramount power. Moreover, states and villages that were still maintaining their independence

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22 A.S.R., Letter No.64 Vol. 19(a) 1855 (Letters issued to Govt.).
even after the British annexation, having seen the benefits of British rule and protection, expressed their wish to come under the British sovereignty. In 1872, the village of Marbisu came to be under the direct administration of the British, as they refused to be under the sovereignty of the Syiem of Mylliem. In 1888, the inhabitants of the village of Nonglait, also prayed that they may be allowed to become British subjects.
P.N. Dutta also remarked that the chiefs of the Hills, indeed seemed to have been deeply impressed by the power of the British, that they respected the Parwanas and admitted traders in the hills, carrying one with them.

The obvious willingness on the part of the Khasis to respect and accept the innovations and inductions of the British Government, paved the way for the smooth growth of Christianity and education, which formed the basic weapons for the drastic social changes in the Khasi Hills. After the first few conversions, the ice of the society had been broken, and Khasi isolation was shattered. More and more conversions took place and by 1921, 16.7% of the population of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills had embraced the Christian faith. The arrival of Thomas Jones of the Welsh Mission at Cherrapunjee in 1841,

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24 F.P.P. File No.295-296, Political (A), dated August 1877.
25 Ibid., File No. 290-297, Extl. (B) dt June 1888.
ushered a new chapter in the religious and social history of the Khasis, their most striking contribution, being the substitution of Bengali by Roman Alphabet for the Khasi language. As the Welsh Mission gathered up strength in the Khasi Hills, other foreign missions like the Roman Catholic, All Saints Church, Seventh Day Adventist etc., followed suit. Non-Christian missions like the Rama Krishna Mission, Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj also made their appearance in the Khasi Hills. And as missiology made a gradual but definite progress, certain superstitions that held a grip on the Khasi mind were slowly but surely shaken. Indeed, as has already been stated in the previous chapter, British rule by itself, had no influence on the social life of the Khasis, the objective of the imperial rulers being material, and such material contacts with the outside world had already taken place long before the advent of the British, but without any major effect. It was the missionaries who made profound and lasting contributions in the spheres of religion, other beliefs, social practices, arts and crafts, medicine and general health betterment, economic uplift and most important, in the field of education. Thus as


the missionaries brought the Khasis in contact with education, they unfastened the forces of resistance and opposition (as observed) and at the same time, they nourished the forces of adoption and adaptation, to which the Khasis greatly responded.

(The Khasis who had come into contact with christianity and had accepted christian faith and teachings, and observed christian ways of worship, mode of living and way of thinking, abandoned their former religious beliefs, rites and rituals altogether. Bareh observed that the spread of education and the beginning of Shillong was truly epoch making, leading to the decline in iron smelting, monolithic erections and herculian jobs, and the emergence of new tendencies. In fact megalithic erections were totally abandoned by both christian and non christian Khasis. Due to educational, medical and general help extended to Khasi converts by the missionaries, and also the opportunities to jobs etc., the standard of living of the christian Khasis was greatly raised, making them the most prosperous and most civilized section of the community.) B.C. Allen observed that the old Khasi Religion soon became

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29 H. Bareh, Meghalaya, p.99.
genuine paganism, a religion of the villages.\textsuperscript{30}
Indeed the Khasis belonging to the traditional
religion were looked down by the converts, giving
rise to an inferiority complex among the traditional
Khasis, and a desire in them to become equal. This
resulted in the emulation of Christian way of living
by the traditional Khasis. In imitating the western
mode of life, both the traditional and the Christian
Khasis lost their inborn originality. The dress,
diet, music and other social values underwent a
significant change under the impact of this imitation.
In fact this imitation of the culture of their
rulers and missionaries from the west, affected
every ethos of Khasi social life.\textsuperscript{31} B.R. Kharlukhi
opines that the love of nature and the faculty to
appreciate its paraphernalia is being replaced by
the love of physical beauties with the result that
education in villages is being deprived of changes
for growth and improvement for want of dearth of
qualified hands to handle the job.\textsuperscript{31}

Influence of the people of the plains on
the Khasi way of life, can also be marked in the
way the Khasis imitate their culture as well. Hindu
beliefs and deities were incorporated in the

\textsuperscript{30}B.C. Allen, \textit{Assam District Gazetteer}, p. 67.
\textsuperscript{31}B.R. Kharlukhi, "Christianity and Social
khasi Niam and the picking up of words from the languages of the neighbouring plains and their adaptation to the Khasi language, widen the vocabulary of the Khasis. Indeed, contacts with Hindus and Muslims, offered by the opening of better communications, improvement of trade and commerce, inter-tribe and inter-ethnic marriages, and also the activities of Hindu Mission like Rama Krishna Mission, Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj, no doubt opened avenues for a fuller and richer life for the Khasis. The urbanisation of these hills, coupled by the influx of outsiders, heralding the emergence of a plural society, did not fail in making a strong impact on the Khasi social life, beliefs and practices. Thus R.T. Rymbai remarked that although this imitation of the western culture and that of the plains people, was pitfully superficial, as the British were imperially aloof and the plains people socially so, yet it jettisoned the traditional Khasi way of life, which they thought went ill with their newly acquired habits. 32

However, inspite of these many and varied changes within the social structure of the Khasis, the Khasis still retain their basic character of

their race and maintain their identity. No doubt christianity have penetrated deep into the innermost strata of human sentiments, but it did not really affect the ancient Khasi culture, which revolves around the Ing or family. Natarajan observed that christianity itself, did not achieve total success in the Khasi Hills, and traditional Khasi Niam or religion still maintains a strong hold on the Khasi population. 33 Bareh too maintained that inspite of the fact that christianity had obliterated megalithic creations, priestdom, household and regions celebrations, inside its own circle, it had not yet changed the laws of inheritance, traditional policy and land tenure. 34 Mathur too, in supporting this view, held that the prolonged contact of the Khasis with christianity and western civilization has not undermined the age-old political institutions of the people. 35 Indeed western influence and those that came from the neighbouring plains, were no doubt many, varied and deep, yet they could not affect nor undermine the basic structure of the Khasi society. Social changes in the Khasi Hills were also held to be more evolutionary than revolutionary. 36 The disappearance of superstitious beliefs, sorcery, human sacrifice

33N. Natarajan, op.cit., p.96.
34H. Bareh, Meghalaya, p.97.
36B.R. Kharlukhi, op.cit., p.25.
and certain taboos were attributed to the realization of the people of their senselessness and futility. Yet these and many other changes, whether evolutionary or brought about by the impact of western culture and religion, or those influenced by the people from the plains, are all due to the response on the part of the Khasis to these exotic influences. Thus the response of the Khasis to the forces of different religions and civilizations that they came into contact with, and the blending of the new ideas and innovations with the old, led to the emergence of a new and more advanced Khasi civilization.

EDUCATION

Response in the field of education can also be marked by the steady and rapid growth of educational institutions and the increase of interest in obtaining education showed by the Khasis, resulting in the growth of the number of educated Khasis. Even the traditional Khasis who initially showed signs of antagonism towards the introduction of education, soon realized its benefits. It was through the response of the people to education, that the elements of political, social and economic awareness came into existence, and which later
formed part of the resistance and reaction to British rule, their impositions and christianity. The formation of the Seng Khasi was made possible by this very response of the traditional Khasis to the education imparted by the Christian and non-Christian missionaries. Literary works, journals, poetries etc. which were the tools not only for the spread of education, but also to infuse in the people the spirit of nationalism and pride in their traditional heritage, were the outcome of education. Through these, the people not only became more acquainted with the Christian teachings and precepts, and western literature and culture, but they were also awakened by the patriotic fervour of the Khasi patriots, who fought for the preservation of the Khasi culture. Thus it was the initial response to education which sowed the seeds of reaction.

English education was also more attractive to the Khasis than their own vernacular schools. This probably arose from the fact that English medium was used in the processes of the courts of law, public offices or business transactions, that the ignorance of this language posed to the Khasis, the problem of having a foreigner to interpret and express
their ideas for them. The preference and response to English medium schools, brought the Khasis into closer contacts with Western ideas, culture and literature, culminating in the imitation of western civilization by most educated Khasis. As has been referred, even the mode of dress, diet and behaviour became more westernized. Their taste in music also change and although indigenous musical instruments, tunes and forms still exist and used by some, they are almost obsolete. Musical composition lean towards a western mode, not only in form and melody, but in harmony and counterpoint as well. English education also encouraged the Khasis to think beyond their own religions and social structure, and thus widen their horizons of knowledge and wisdom. Under its impact, Khasis started to think boldly and express their opinions with frankness and clarity, as a prelude to political, social and religious leadership among them. With the growth of education, more Khasis started leaving their homeland for better education or for better jobs, thereby broadened their outlook on life and widened their scope of knowledge. Khasis educated by missionaries provided excellent leadership which carried the torch of nationalism.

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37 A.S.R., Letter No.58, Vol.31 dated August 1864 (Letters issued to Govt.).
Education also affected the status of men and women. With the growth of female literacy, many women started to take up jobs as doctors, nurses, teachers etc. Some joined government service and even became magistrates and high officials, adding to their independence and leading some to even become active participants in politics, and other social and religious activities. The same is the case with men who had become more politically and culturally aware. Their varied jobs and higher education exposed them all the more to new ideas which led them to assert themselves more independently, resulting in the decline of the importance of maternal kin. In the matrilineal Khasi society, the father is second to no one except the maternal uncle, in the affairs of his wife's family or his children. In fact, the significant roles of eldest maternal uncle or the elder brother, counter-balanced the matri-centred nature of the Khasi society. Now the importance shifted from the maternal uncle to the father, as the Khasi men became more attached to their own wife and children than to their mother's family. And, by asserting their own importance and rights as the father or head of the family, the menfolk neglected their roles as maternal kin.

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40 N. Natarajan, *op. cit.*, p.100.
uncles to their mother's house. Children too became more attached to their father than to their maternal male relatives, and under the influence of these changes, children became more independent, ambitious and well-behaved.

The growth of education also paved the way for the growth of literature. The missionaries not only introduced education in the Khasi Hills, but they also shouldered to themselves literary responsibilities, by publishing books and other important publications for the rapid spread of education and knowledge. Remarkable attempts of the British Deputy Commissioners and Officials to produce important informations on Khasi culture are worth-noting. In this context, Gurdon's monograph, The Khasis, Joseph Hooker's, Himalayan Journals and Henry Yule's Notes on the Khasi Hills, may be mentioned. And as educated Khasis are on the increase, literary men rose from among them, in whose works the mixed pattern of different ideas, clearly denotes the impact of the new cultures and religions that cross their ways. Some Khasi writers, as has already been stated, who saw the danger of losing their own identity, their art,

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41 H. Bareh, A Short History of Khasi Literature, pp. 7-8.
culture and religion if they allow the Khasi society to drift with the overwhelming impact of ideas from the west and the plains, started to write books, journals, poetries and articles to arouse and awaken people to the urgent need of preserving their own. At the same time, other Khasi writers who have become devout Christians, brought out publications for the propagation of their new found religion. Government financial assistance also further the progress of education and literacy in the Khasi Hills.

Khasi language too, under the impact of these various and close contacts with the people outside the Khasi fold, grew wider and its vocabulary richer. Numerous words having English, Sanskrit-Bengali, Islamic and Assamese origin, were naturalised in the Khasi language. P.N. Dutta remarked on the great power of adaptation that Khasi language possess, that it can modify the pronunciation or spelling of foreign word and render it more Khasi like and then use it as from its own home stock. Consequently, with a more enriched vocabulary and a script which they can call their own, the Khasis set forward in the sphere of education, literary works and general uplift of their standard of living.

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ELITE AND POLITICS

The advent of British rule was marked by the many administrative changes which had already been dealt with. Yet, the policy of the British government, not to interfere with the tribal laws and customs, enabled the Khasis to maintain the independence of their basic political structure, inspite of the various modifications. Indeed, the powers of the Syiems and the tribal courts had been shorn many of their powers and rights, including the right to wage war, enter into any independent treaties or to try cases involving murder. Chiefs were made to submit implicitly to all orders issued by the Deputy Commissioner, and some willingly entered into agreements with the British Government, placing themselves under the control of the Deputy Commissioner. The British government also possessed the power to appoint or remove and replace them by others, relegating them to a position equivalent to that of a mere British official. But inspite of these curtailments of their rights, the office of Syiemship still exist, and the Syiems still play a vital role in the administration of justice, commanding the respect of his subjects and proving that tribal loyalty did not cease to exist. The
office of syiemship and the ancient pyramidal political structure also enjoyed British protection, inspite of the fact that their powers have been weakened. Democracy which is an inborn trait of Khasi character, and which forms the core of their political set up, also aided them to maintain their old and time-honoured institutions against the broad changes that were taking place in the society. Yet the fact remains that under the impact of British innovations, the Syiem and his subordinates became but titular heads at the hands of the British. The class of Lyngdohs found no more place in this changed social and political set up.

(However, the same factors that brought about the social changes also sowed the seeds of political awareness and nationalism. There was a strong sense of pride in the Khasi political and social culture and religion, and political elites, rising from the acceptance of missionary education, started to devise ways and means to control the effects of western ideology and to combat against the power of the British administration.) It was indeed the missionary educated elites who proved to be excellent political leaders, and this led
Mathur to observe that,

"The social and cultural movements have been dominated by tribal Khasis, while the political movements have been led mostly by Christian Khasis, who are better educated, politically more conscious and who, inspite of their small number, were inducted into the echelons of governmental authority during the British days." 43

Yet, during the British rule, the fact that young syiems who were educated in Christian missionary schools were drawn closer to the British administration than to the traditional power-structure of their land, was greatly taken advantage of by the British, especially in a case of dispute between a traditional syiem and a missionary trained or Christian syiem. 44

Nevertheless, the efforts of the political elites and leaders in the field of nationalism and glorification of traditional culture and values, bore fruits with the formation of the Khasi-Jaintia National Guild in 1918, Khasi National Durbar in 1923, Khasi States Federation in 1933, and the subsequent political organisations and parties. Through these, the Khasis were able to do much in reviving and reinstating the traditional institutions, political as well as social, of the people. For example the Khasi National Durbar made important attempts to codify the laws of inheritance

44 Ibid., p.73.
and succession, and to retain the status of Khasi States either as independent or semi-independent States. It also advocated the launching of a solidarity movement for the development of the Khasi National genius on independent lines. This class of elites which command political leadership, was none other but the fruits of a certain response to the different new forces and elements of change.

SOCIAL FORMATION

The political change, introduction of modern education, christianity and the increased contact with the outside world inducted changes in the traditional structure of the Khasis as well. In the traditional Khasi society, the hierarchical order or the social stratification was not very distinct, although, as has already been mentioned, the Syiems and Bakhraws constituted a status group in the society in a limited sense. The British administration alienated the Khasi chiefs, viz., Syiems, Sardar, Wahadadar, etc., from the common people and raised them in the estimation of the people, but at the same time, their traditional status underwent transformation to the extent that they executed their function on behalf of the

45 P.R.G. Mathur, op.cit., p.106.
British power. In relation to the common people, the Khasi Chiefs, actually assumed a new role as go-between, between the British government and the common people, as the existence of the superior power was made felt to the common people through these chiefs only. On the other hand, new classes started emerging from within the Khasi society on the basis of their educational status and occupation. The introduction of christianity as stated already, divided the Khasi society into christians and non-christians. Next came the literate and illiterate. Agriculture no longer was the mainstay of economy of all the Khasis. A section of the Khasis served as day labourers under the various European companies who worked the lime and coal quarries in the Khasi Hills. Ever since the administration started the construction of roads and buildings, a section of the hitherto agriculturist Khasis got employment as wage-earners. In the christian churches, some found their position as pastors. The newly educated Khasis were by and large attracted towards white collar jobs to be employed generally in subordinate capacity in the government departments and as school teachers. Some took to the medical
line as doctors and nurses and some threw their lot in business and a few survived also in that capacity ever since money economy had started to replaced the traditional barter economy under colonial rule.) The capital raised from business was invested by some in setting up landed property in the urban sectors especially a few constructed houses for the purpose of giving on rent which meant a substantial unearned income. A new type of house owner-tenant relationship emerged in the process.

The birth of an educated or elite middle class in the Khasi society, was the most spectacular social phenomenon during the period under review. These urban based middle class not only participated in the emerging urban society, but also generated social values and political culture for the rural areas for which the town served as the hinterland. They began to respond and react to the social problems and the policies and actions of the government. It was such elites, as mentioned, who started the first public association, namely the Seng Khasi, among the Khasis. Interestingly, the members of Seng Khasi, were also instrumental in the formation of the Khasi-Jaintia National Guild.
in 1918, which was in fact the pressure of the Khasi National Durbar (1923), that ventilated the social, political and economic grievances of the Khasis and took steps for the preservation of the customary laws and way of life. In none to distant future, other organisations cropped up in Khasi Hills and many Khasis were drawn towards all India as well as regional parties, which contributed towards the growth of political consciousness and the politicisation of the local problems in which the emergent middle class played the most crucial role.

**TRADITION AND MODERNITY**

According to Bareh, "Social change is more phenomenal among the Khasis and Jaintias than their neighbouring and far flung tribes .......... The change has its impact made into various spheres of social life and culture." However, as has been observed, this phenomenal change did not succeed in altering or eradicating the basic structure of the Khasi society. The basic laws pertaining to inheritance, land tenure; family organisation; political institution; religion and its role in the naming of a child, marriage, divorce, funeral etc., remain unchanged. Even the indigenous arts

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and crafts, dances and songs, folk-lore and proverbs, sports and games, still survive. But, inspite of the fact that these institutions and features of traditional Khasi life still exist, certain adjustments could not be avoided with the change of times and civilization.

The matrilineal system, which form the basic foundation of the Khasi social structure, continued as a living and active institution, but minor changes had crept into it under the impact of the colonial rule, missionary work and civilization. For instance, although adopting the mother's clan name is still widely followed, preference for patrilineal system was indicated by the adoption of the father's title by some. The early Khasi society, as has been mentioned, revolved around the Ing or family, and because it was kin-oriented, the size of a Khasi family was usually large, as it included Ka Kur ka jait (the whole clan), and Ki Kha Kiman (father's clan). It even spanned six generations on an average. In course of time, the size of a Khasi family unit became smaller due to migration and also to the fact that people had become more individual-oriented. The Khadduh or youngest daughter also still retained her earlier
status by enjoying the inheritance of a major share of the family property, but her position as the priestess of the family began to wane. In some cases, she even voluntarily surrender her rights to inheritance in order to be free of her duties as the keeper of the house, and of her responsibilities of looking after her parents till their death. For the Khadduh to set up a separate home with her husband and children away from her parents' house, is not in accordance with the traditional rules of the society, which entrusted to her, the care and maintenance of the ancestral house. Yet in later years, many Khadduh seemed to prefer their freedom and independence by refusing to stay in the ancestral house. This new sense of freedom on her part, reduced the importance and influence of her maternal uncles and brothers. In fact all Khasi women no longer act under as many safeguards as before from their maternal uncles and elder brothers. 47) Earlier Khasi custom also ordained women to be loyal to their domestic duties, especially in the task of procreation and furthering family ties and affection. But with education, women started to be more liberated and many took up jobs in different spheres as doctors, nurses.

47 N. Natarajan, Missionary among the Khasis, p.98.
teachers, clerks and officers. Some took up to business too. The growth of new occupation and number of educated women, led women to became more independent and they participated actively in political, social and religious affairs. As Natarajan observed, "Interest in politics on the part of women led on a chain of wider interests - economic, social, legal and even religious". However, where tribal courts are concerned, women although were later permitted to attend the village durbars, yet they still could not actively participate in its proceedings. As women became more civilized, they also developed an eye for utility and beauty, unlike their previous outlook which was based on sheer utility. The growth of education and civilization had the same impact on the Khasi menfolk too, as they felt the need to assert their independence even more, by resenting the interference of their wives' maternal uncles and brothers, in affairs concerning their wives and children. They showed more importance and interest in playing their roles as fathers than as uncles, and preferred to give counsel and guidance to their own children rather than to their nephews and nieces. In fact, the responsibility of rearing

48 N. Natarajan, op.cit., p.100.
children, which earlier was partly borne by the wife's relatives, started to shift to the independent shoulders of the father, thereby making him the sole ruler or head of the family.

(In the process, children too became more attached to their parents alone, and under the influence of these changes, they became more independent, ambitious and well behaved. Mixing of opposite sexes also became more free, as society became more permissive. On the whole, the standard of living has risen and this can be seen by the fact that education was given priority next to food, and also by the decrease of savings and investments in gold or other solid items, as people began to spend more on day to day needs and entertainments. Even the dress of the Khasis underwent a change, and where the menfolk are concerned, they have altogether abandoned their traditional dress for the western dress. Women still retained their traditional mode of dress with slight modifications. Yet their preference for synthetic materials such as nylon, silk, cotton etc. from Indian Mills and abroad, led to the decline in the use of indigenous woven and
An improved and balanced diet, with more taste, also supplements indigenous ones, and even house models started to change. With regards to games and sports, archery, hunting and fishing, remained the favourite games of the Khasis, but other new games like football, golf etc. started to develop. Gambling and drinking which the early Khasis were very fond of, were condemned by Christianity. As has been referred, the musical taste of the Khasis also took a more westernised bend, yet indigenous tunes and instruments continued to exist side by side with those of the west.

Khasi chiefs and their subordinates, that is the Syiem, mynris, lyngdohs, Sardars, Wahadadars etc., were retained by the British government, but they became mere puppets in the hands of the British and indeed were only titular heads. Courts of law have replaced the tribal courts, and as has been observed, the growth of new occupation gave rise to the growth of new social classes. While the Syiems and Bakhraws retained their status, the new political and social set up, left no place for the Lyngdohs or priests. Priesthood no doubt continued to exist, but the demand for priests

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49 H. Bareh, op. cit., p.96.
declined considerably, that many traditional priests or Lyngdohs had to look elsewhere for new vocations. The clan of bondsmen and slaves of the pre-colonial days, also became extinct.

Where Khasi marriage is concerned, the basic modes and values remained the same, but customs and elaborate practices associated with marriage, became more simplified. With regards to the actual marriage ceremony, things like divination and some sacrifices were omitted. Belief in taboos and omens also began to fade, but all earlier rules of abstinence in matters of marriage were still observed. During the later years, tribal endogamy diminished, but clan exogamy still remained an important feature of Khasi marriage. Influx of outsiders into the Khasi Hills, led to a greater mobility of the population, and this in turn, led to the increase in the number of inter-tribal and marriages with non-Khasis. Inspite of the spiritual base that Khasi marriage had, there was an increase in divorces and separations. Concubinage, which was earlier accepted as human weakness, was condemned and considered as sin by the Christian institutions. Marriage among christian converts
and traditional Khasis and other non-Christians still continue to pose difficulties, while traditional marriage rituals and customs became more relaxed. This can be marked by the attendance of the groom's distant relations to the ceremony, and by the fact that the groom was no longer forced to stay on at his mother-in-law's place till the birth of one or two children.

(Ancient industries and incentives also received a death blow by the introduction of modern scientific industries. Indigenous industries like iron-smelting, gold-washing etc. became extinct, and weaving and block-smithing diminished. But agriculture was improved by the introduction of new ways of cultivation and new crops, but it no longer was the mainstay of Khasi economy. Christian missionaries had also contributed largely in imparting vocational knowledge to the Khasis, thus new occupations like carpentry, tailoring, book-binding, printing, bakery etc., came into existence.)

The colonial rule, coupled by the missionary work in the field of education and urbanisation, as has been discussed, also gave rise to a variety of other new occupations for the Khasis, that apart
from white collar jobs, avenues were opened in the fields of medicine, teaching, evangelical work, trade and commerce, construction and engineering etc.. The substitution of the earlier barter trade by the money system, also gave rise to a number of new occupations for the poorer classes who worked as day labourers, carpenters, domestic servants, sweepers and cleaners, porters etc..

Laws pertaining to inheritance, as has been mentioned did not alter much, but a new trend of sharing the property equally among children had set in. In fact, although the youngest daughter continued to enjoy the lion's share of the property her sisters and in some cases her brothers too, were given a share of their parents' property. Wills and gifts which were earlier absent, have started to become in vogue. Land tenure too, maintained its basic form, but levying of taxes, land revenues, issuing of leases and pattahs, and claiming of salami or key money, which were British innovations, were duly followed by the Khasis.

Khasi niam or religion, maintained its grip over a large section of the population, but contact
with other religions like Christianity, Hinduism and Islam, resulted in a number of changes even within the structure of the Khasi niam itself. Hindu deities and ways of worship were incorporated within the Khasi religion, and traditional rituals and religious ceremonies were simplified. The simplification of these rites and ceremonies, were held to be more due to the economic pressure, as they were found to be too expensive and time-consuming. In the words of Natarajan, "only affluent families could now afford ceremonies like the bone-burial ceremony or elaborate sacrifices". Superstitious beliefs, omens, taboos, sorcery and witchcraft diminished, but the cult of Thlen still had a grip over many people. Erection of memorial stones for the dead was given up entirely, and only few families kept the bones of the members of the family in the family cromlech. Migration of members of the clan to far off places, also posed a problem of keeping together the bones of the clan members in the clan stone or Mawbah. But ancestor worship and sacrifice of the rooster were still preserved. Divination was still in vogue, and even Christian converts, sometimes still resorted to divination in times of crisis.

50 N. Natarajan, op. cit., p. 142.
Rites and ceremonies pertaining to the naming of a child, marriage, divorce and funeral were all simplified, and although priesthood still continued, yet the demand for priests was on a decrease. The initial conversion of Khasis to the Christian faith, gave rise to antagonism between them and the traditional Khasis. But in course of time this antagonism diminished, and a larger part of the population became converted to Christianity.