EPILOGUE

The integration of the Khasi Hills in the British dominion in India in 1833, set rolling the process of transformation of the Khasi society. Colonialism was destined to influence the traditional way of life of the people in the whole of India, and that Khasi Hills could not be an exception to reckon with the factors and the forces of change. The immediate consequences of the political occupation was interference with the traditional authority in the Khasi States. The Syiem, Lyngdoh, Sardar, Wahadadar, all had to enter into certain agreements and received Sunnad from the British authority. If properly interpreted, these agreements or Sunnads would sometime appear as letter of appointments. As a matter of fact, the traditional chiefs continue to exercise authority only as entrusted by the supreme government. The political relations with other states, as well as the maintenance of law and order within a Khasi state, gradually passed into the hands of the British officers. Appeals
could be made against the hitherto supreme judicial authority of the syiem and others. The traditional laws of succession were also interfered with at the political will of the colonial rulers, and customs and usages of the people were conveniently interpreted.

Along with the British came the western missionaries and the western education. The Khasis were introduced to formal education and their language was reduced to writing. Thanks to the endeavours of the missionaries, literacy made rapid progress, and the Khasi literature has since then developed fast. The history of education and literature in the Khasi Hills, began with the Serampore Baptist Mission, which translated the new testament and prepared some primers in Khasi, in Bengali character or script. But when the Welsh Presbyterian Mission came to Khasi Hills in 1841, and which made the real beginning in the field of education and literature, the Bengali was replaced by the Roman script. The Welsh Presbyterian Mission started schools and churches, and also a normal school and theological institute for the training of the teachers and the preachers. The history of
proselytisation also began with them, and a large number of the Khasis were converted to Christianity, during the period under our review, and in larger numbers during the period beyond.

The western values and culture spontaneously came as a challenge to the traditional religion and culture of the Khasis. The converts in the beginning took fancy in the western way of life and the traditional values and systems were thoroughly depreciated. And as the social and political systems of the Khasis revolved around the religion, the process of social change, as a result of the new impact, was bound to disturb the traditional society and culture. There were occasions when the Government interfered in traditional customs and certain traditional rituals and customs were outlawed. The churches also sometimes prohibited their members from attending traditional festivals.

The consolidation of administration, on the other hand, opened up the hitherto isolated countryside by linking it up with the centres of different culture in the neighbourhood and by the growth of urban centres which generated new culture for the Khasi society at large. A striking feature
of the period, was that whereas in the pre-colonial period a benign influence was made on the bordering areas by the culture of the neighbouring plains, the major factors of social change in the colonial period were education and Christianity. The growth of towns and establishment of government and private sectors, offices and establishments, brought in a large number of people from the plains in employment, and some of them and their descendants settled down permanently. This was an additional factor that influenced social change among the Khasis.

Whereas in the pre-colonial period, the mainstay of Khasi economy was agriculture and the people were craftsmen and traders at leisure and used to balance the deficit in exchange of their surplus. But in the colonial period, a number of them became wage earners, either in the coal and lime quarries worked by European companies, or in the construction of roads and buildings under the government. The educated ones were attracted towards white collar jobs. A considerable mobility of population was noticed from rural areas towards the urban centres, where many set them up as petty traders or even as domestic servants.

The progress of education and the impact
of new civilization in non too distant future, brought in an educated middle class to play their role as elsewhere. They began to react towards social problems and worked for social development. In Khasi Hills, the beginners in this field were a group of intellectuals who were inwardly more concerned with the development of Khasi literature and to protect and preserve the traditional culture and religion of the Khasis. They laid the foundation of the first organisation in the hills called Seng Khasi in 1899, a section of them, added by others, formed the Khasi Jaintia National Guild in 1918, which was the precusser of the Khasi National Durbar 1923. It was this Durbar which pioneered the political activities in the Khasi Hills and in generating a spirit of political and social consciousness among the Khasis. All these happened however during the period beyond our present comprehension, but it is important to note that the origins of the later development are to be found within this period.

A careful study of the situation however shall reveal that the western influence came as a challenge to the traditional Khasi culture and that the orthodox section of the Khasis became determined to retain the traditional order. But, the revitalist
attempts of the Khasi intellectuals succeeded in bringing the values of the two systems together in a way that the tradition and modernity both continue in the present day Khasi culture. The traditionals and the converts alike became bound by the customary laws and usages of the society. The society has on the other hand adopted things that modern influences had to offer it; but at the same time has those values of the past that are meaningful to the ecological condition that they live in. Inspite of the modern way of life, western education, and for many a new religion, the people continued to be the Khasis and they take pride in their own heritage.)