Prior to the British annexation of the Khasi Hills in 1833, the Khasis had been able to maintain a splendid political isolation, which inspite of the subtle influences of the plains people at the northern and southern fringes of the hills, the Khasis successfully maintained their traditional political and social institutions in tact. But the British rule, coupled by the missionary activities in these hills, were too great a force for the Khasi society to reckon with. The Khasi society gradually melted under the wind of change brought about by the British and the missionaries, and a considerable social transformation soon took place within it, from which emerged a new civilized society. However, no critical study on this particular social change of the Khasi society has been made. Earlier works done on the Khasis, did not throw much light on this aspect. Bareh, in his History and Culture of the Khasi People, (Calcutta, 1967), and Meghalaya, (Delhi, 1974), no doubt depicted the past and the present Khasi society, and Natarajan, in her Missionary among the Khasis (N.Delhi, 1977), had gone into the details of the many and varied impact of the missionaries on the Khasi society and its transformation. But these works could not however focus all the forces and processes of social change. With particular reference to Natarajan's book, which has dealt extensively on Khasi social change, the other forces and instruments of change were not properly dealt with, as it concerns only with the activities of the missionaries and the impact they had on the Khasi society.

The object of the present study is to reinterpret the Khasi structure realistically and objectively, to make a proper focus on the instruments and processes of social change, to draw the impact these had on the society by showing the response and reaction on the part of the people, and to answer the scope of orientation with indigenous social institutions. Accordingly, the pre-colonial
period, the instruments of change, and the response and reaction of the people, were thoroughly dealt with in this study. The period covered in the present dissertation is from 1833 to 1921. The year 1833 saw the induction of British rule in the Khasi Hills. But there is no specific reason for taking 1921 as the concluding year, other than that continuing up to 1947, would be too long a period for the purpose of the dissertation, and that the Census data of 1921, that contains considerable information on the society and social change, could be made use of.

Unfortunately, sources for this study, particularly the pre-colonial period, are extremely meagre. Nevertheless, British records and studies made subsequently, the tradition current among the people, and the present society which still firmly retain its basic tenets, provide us with some tools. Primary sources, unpublished as well as published, available at the National Archives, New Delhi, and Assam Secretariat Records Office, Shillong, have been consulted, apart from other published secondary works, including local Khasi books.

My great indebtedness are due to Dr. J.B. Bhattacharjee, Head of the Department of History, North Eastern Hill University, without whose help, encouragement, guidance and supervision, this study would not have been accomplished.

I also owe my indebtedness to the Director and staff of the National Archives of India, New Delhi; Director and staff of the Assam Secretariat Records Office, Shillong; Librarian and staff, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi; Librarian and staff, State Central Library, Shillong; Librarian and staff, North Eastern Hill University Library, Shillong; for the permission and aid granted to me for the use of the valuable materials in their custody. My acknowledgments and gratefulness and also due to the various authors, whose works have been consulted for this study, and all those who helped me with information from within the Khasi society.

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