CHAPTER ONE
THE LAND AND PEOPLE

1.1 Geographical Setting

The land where the Khasis live and which they call their home lies on the eastern part of the State of Meghalaya in North East India. This land is known as the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and is bordered on the north and east by Assam, on the south by Bangladesh and on the west by Garo Hills. Till January 1972, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were part of Assam but these along with the Garo Hills were carved out of Assam to form a separate state for the Khasis and Jaintias and the Garos. "Meghalaya", a Sanskrit compound word was first coined by S.P. Chatterjee in 1936 in his book LE PLATEAU DE MEGHALAYA. In this book Meghalaya definitely refers to "Garo-Khasi-Jaintia." S.P. Chatterjee coined the term Meghalaya on the analogy of the Himalayas. He contended that if Hima means snow and alaya means abode thus describing the snowy mountains as Himalaya (abode of snow) why not the plateau of Garo-Khasi-Jaintia whose characteristic features being clouds.

be also not named Meghalaya where Megha means clouds and alaya (abode). The name had seemed appropriate to the Government of India; so when a state was created out of Assam in 1970/72, the area became known as Meghalaya.

In Medlicott's memoirs, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills are referred to as Plateau of Shillong. The name is not inclusive enough and that is why, perhaps, the hills are till today known as the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills form three out of the five districts of Meghalaya, namely, East Khasi Hills District, West Khasi Hills District, and Jaintia Hills District. The other two districts are East Garo Hills and West Garo Hills.

The Khasi and Jaintia Hills are located between 20°48 and 26°7 North Latitude and 90°45 and 90°52 East Longitude and cover an area of 13,738.5 square kilometers.

1.2 Physical Feature

The physical feature of the land may be divided into three broad divisions, namely the Ri War, the Ri Lum and the Ri Bhoi. The Ri War is the area on the south overlooking Bangladesh. This area is marked by dense

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forests over rugged mountain slopes, sheer cliffs and ridges, rivers and waterfalls. There is plenty of limestone in this area. Oranges, areca nut and betel leaf, growing on these limestone strata for which this area is famous are the best in the state. These used to be traded to the erstwhile East Bengal, now Bangladesh right from those early days prior to the coming of the British. Agriculture here is practically nil due to the terrain not permitting such work.

The Ri Lum refers to the upland country which comprises of a table land which, generally speaking, is barren of vegetation. Capt. Fisher who visited the hills in 1840 attributed this sterility of the tableland to the nature of rock strata. He wrote:

The sterility will, I think, be found to be closely connected with the character of the rocks, and the disturbance of the strata, but more especially with the latter, for where these are horizontal there is an absence of vegetation and wherever the strata are inclined to the horizon, symptoms of fertility begin to show themselves.

Another striking feature of the tableland is the presence of large boulders in numerous places. The presence of such boulders coupled with their peculiar shapes has perhaps given rise to placenames beginning

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with 'maw' (Maw means stone) e.g., Mawryngkneng, Mawmih, Mawshbuit, Mawphlang, Mawkria etc. Usually, at the foot of these boulders and along the slopes of the plateau, cultivation of potato, rice, maize, soyabean, sweet potato is done. Potato is one of the main cash crops for the people of this area.

The Ri Bhoi refers to the northern slopes facing Assam Valley. This area has rich alluvial soil suitable for the growth of several kinds of fruits and vegetables. But rice cultivation is the main occupation of the people here. The rice grown here is much finer than the one grown in the Ri Lum. These slopes are warmer than the Ri Lum being of a lower elevation and so while in the latter pine trees are seen, in the former teak plantation and banana groves are seen.

On the whole, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills boasts of magnificent natural beauty. David Roy⁴ wrote,

The country is beautiful and that is why every Khasi is so proud of the hills which he calls his home.

1.3 Climate

The climate of the three areas varies considerably. The upland country (the Ri Lum) is of a higher elevation than either the Ri War or the Ri Bhoi

and therefore is colder than the other two areas. The highest peak called Shillong Peak is 6,449 feet above sea level. Generally speaking, Ri Lum has pleasant summers but severely cold winters. Most places in this area receive hoarfrost during the winter months of December through February.

Ri War and Ri Bhoi have hot summers and pleasant winters. Climate always has a bearing on the physique of the people and so while the cold climate of Ri Lum tends to make people hardy and strong, the warm climate of Ri War and Ri Bhoi develops in people of those areas a softer physical make up.

It may be noted that some places in Khasi and Jaintia Hills receive heavy rainfall during the monsoon months of April through August. Cherrapunji and recently Mawsynram have been called the rainiest spots in the world. Cherrapunji and Mawsynram are apart by quite a distance, but they both are on the same altitude and range facing Bangladesh. Referring to the climatic condition of Khasi Hills Sri Joseph Dalton Hooker5 wrote the

The climate of the Khasis is remarkable for the excessive rainfall. Attention was drawn to this by Mr. Yule, who stated that in the month of August, 1841, 26\(\frac{1}{2}\) inches fell or twenty two feet; and that during successive days, thirty inches fell in every twenty four hour. Dr. Thomson and I also recorded thirty inches in one day and night, and during the seven months of stay, upwards of 500 inches fell, so that the total annual fall perhaps greatly exceeded 600 inches, or fifty feet, which has been registered in succeeding year. From April, 1849 to April 1850, 502 inches (forty two feet) fell. This unparalled amount is attributable to the abruptness of the mountains which face the Bay of Bengal, from which they are separated by 200 miles of Jheels and Sunderbunds.

It should be borne in mind that the hills do receive heavy rainfall but the description given above mostly applies to places in the southern slopes, particularly Mawsynram and Cherrapunji. Bareh observed that these two places are racing with each other to reach the top. Mawsynram having taken the lead occasionally but never exceeds Cherrapunji, hitherto renowned as being the rainiest place.

In recent years, records of rainfall available with the Meteorological Office at Cherrapunji show that rainfall was even heavier than the one recorded by Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker. The year and record of rainfall from 1984 onward are as follows:

- 1984 - 16,760.0 mm
- 1985 - 11,816.3 "
- 1986 - 8,139.5 "
- 1987 - 10,405.3 "
- 1988 - 17,929.4 "

1988 was a year of heavy rainfall. But the heaviest rainfall much heavier than in 1988 was in 1974. It was recorded that 24,553.3 mm or 982.2" of rain fell in that year.

Syndai, Mo-te-le-knup and its adjoining areas are other places in Jaintia Hills that receive very heavy rainfall.

1.4 Minerals

The Khasi and Jaintia Hills are rich in minerals. Limestone, coal, sillimanite are the most prominent. The limestone belt extends along the Ri War slopes from Langrin to Sheila. Theriah on the border of Bangladesh and Cherrapunji have huge reserves of limestone.
Coal deposits are located at Umrilang areas, Mawbeh, Lakher, Sohrarim, Shyrmang, Bapung, Jarain, Rymbai, Sutnga, Mawsynram and Cherrapunji. Laitryngew in Cherrapunji, three decades ago was rich in coal but its reserves are almost exhausted now. About the quality of coal from Cherrapunji, H. Piddington\(^7\) wrote in 1855 the following:

It would thus appear, so far as laboratory experiment can guide us, that this coal is a first rate gas coal, but would not give a coke applicable to any present known use, the coke being in fact a black carbonaceous froth. As a steam coal, unless it be perhaps with tabular boilers, it would not be found an economical one; as though from its rapid flaming, the steam would be quickly raised, yet from the large proportion of gas much of it would be unconsumed, and driven up the funnel or chimney, and the proportion of carbon (coke) is too small to keep up a long steady glowing heat, without a fresh supply of coal.

Today, the Rymbai-Khliehriat area in Jaintia Hills boasts of being perhaps the largest coal reserve which is being quarried and sent to Assam in hundreds of lorries everyday.

Sillimanite deposits are concentrated in the as Mawthengkut area also known Sonapahar in West Khasi Hills.

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About this mineral, Simon wrote,

A very important mineral product, a profitable foreign exchange earner, is sillimanite which is found in association with corundum, in the Mawthengkut (Sonapahar) area under the Nongstoin Syiemship. The quarries here account for about three quarters of the country's total production. This product is almost entirely sent out of the state or exported for its usefulness in the construction of blast furnaces. The deposits were nationalised in 1976.

Other mineral deposits are clay, fire clay, kaolin, lithomarge, beauxitic, copper, lead, zinc, iron ore, corundum, dumortierite, glass sands, phosphates and pyrites.

1.5 Flora

Vegetation ranges from tropical to temperate. Dense forests cover large areas on both the southern and northern slopes of the hills. In Jaintia Hills the Narpuh forests are very impressive. This along with forests on the Ri War and Ri Bhoi have important hard wood trees such as sal, teak, birch, schima, magnolia, champa and a host of others. Sal is traded outside the state and is particularly used as: slippers on railway tracts. Others are used in building houses, furniture etc. Forests have

been greatly damaged and reduced due to indiscriminate felling of trees for building purposes, making of coke and jhum cultivation. Besides the above, pine which thrives in those places which are above 2400 ft. high is another important wood tree used both locally and outside the state.

The Khasi and Jaintia Hills is marked by the existence of sacred groves known as Lawkyntong from where no man can fell any tree. It is believed that anybody who dares fell any tree for any purpose from any of these groves will have his neck turned backward. This, whether is mere superstition or otherwise has kept the groves intact.

The sacred groves as well as all the forests of Khasi and Jaintia Hills contain in them a variety of ferns, orchids, wild flowers, flowering shrubs, edible leaves and tubers, medicinal plants and herbs. About the orchids in these hills, the distinguished botanist Sir J.D. Hooker wrote that the orchideae are, perhaps, the largest natural order in the Khasia where fully 250 kinds grow, chiefly on trees and rocks, but many are terrestrial, inhabiting damp woods and grassy slopes. According to Bose and Bhattacharjee9,

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the number of varieties found in Khasi Hills is 309. Out of 132 genera of orchids growing in different parts of India, 95 of them are also in Khasi Hills and 18 varieties of the 95 genera grow only in Khasi Hills.

1.6 Fauna

Just as the hills are rich in flora they are equally rich in fauna though perhaps not in as great abundance. Among the animals that are true wild life, the forests are habitats of tigers, leopards, wild pigs, wild buffaloes, mithuns, bears, elephants, deer, monkeys, wolves, jackals and foxes. There are birds of different species. The Ri War still boasts of a variety of song birds. If one walks down along the forest glades there, one will hear music of birds singing, perching on different trees and branches. The hills are not deprived of snakes, reptiles and insects. Even though Sir Hooker had concluded that the snakes found here are non-poisonous, the Zoological Survey of India is of the opinion that some of them like the Indian cobra, king cobra and others are poisonous. Insects are of various kinds, some of which have been described as new to science. The butterfly fauna cannot of course be left without mention. These are so beautiful. Their colours and sizes are commendable. They serve as raw materials for a profitable business. The butterflies are caught and encased beautifully. They are a beautiful souvenir from the hills of Khasi and Jaintia.
1.7 The People

In the preceding paragraphs only the physical features of Khasi and Jaintia Hills have been considered. The people who inhabit these hills shall now be considered.

"Khasi" is an inclusive term used to refer to the various sub-ethnic groups called (1) the Khynriam or Khasi living in the Ri Lum in Khasi Hills; (2) the Pnar or Synteng inhabiting the Ri Lum in Jaintia Hills; (3) the War who live in the southern slopes of both Khasi and Jaintia Hills; (4) the Bhoi both Khasi and Pnar who occupy the northern slopes of both Khasi and Jaintia Hills and (5) the Lyngngam who live in the western part of Khasi Hills bordering Garo Hills.

The Lyngngam are believed to be of Garo origin. But they are known as Khasis because they have embraced the Khasi customs and traditions. They are considered to be the most under-developed among all the sub-groups living in Khasi and Jaintia Hills (Jyrwa). Today a few schools have come up in this area. It is hoped that they too will soon come up in terms of development.

According to the Census Report 1981\textsuperscript{11}, the total population of Meghalaya is 13,28,348 of which 8,23,340 are in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. This number includes other ethnic groups like the Assamese, Bengalis, Garos, Nepalese and Mizos. The Census Report does not give figures for ethnic groups.

The terms 'Khasi' should be noted refers to the people, the hills and their language. What this name means and how it originated are questions which thus far have not been answered satisfactorily. Bareh\textsuperscript{12} suggested that the meaning of the term can be realised only if the term Khasi is divided into two syllables \textit{Kha} and \textit{si} where \textit{Kha} means born and \textit{si} the name of the ancient primeval mother. Considering the fact that the Khasis are matrilineal, the conjecture sounds plausible enough. Besides there are a number of clans today which are named after their ancient mothers. The clans Sawian and Ngapkynta are reported to have been named after their ancestresses according to Bareh\textsuperscript{12} and Natarajan\textsuperscript{13}.

\textsuperscript{12} H. Bareh. \textit{The History and Culture of the Khasi People}, Naba Mudran Private Ltd. Calcutta 1967:12-13
But Bareh in his *The Language and Literature of Meghalaya* (1977) seemed to have revised his opinion above because he wrote,

Kha appears to be once a common prefix of some speeches associated in this family and which still exist as Kha So, Kha Tumpuen and Kha used as an alternative term for Mois and their kindreds as it also forms a prefix of Khasi. The derivation seems to be the same in the case of Khmer, Khmu, Kha, Khas, Khasi, Khaso and Kha Tumpuen all starting with the initial Kh. The Khasis in Meghalaya have a tradition of their forefathers who migrated at one time westward into Meghalaya via the Assam plains - Pnar and War (Khasi sections in Meghalaya) appear to have had certain relations with Bahnar. Therefore, Kh used as identical initial consonant in respect of Khmer, Khmu, Khasi, Kha, Kha So, Kha Tumpuen, Khasai, Khasoi has more relevance in this connection as the safe linguistic evidence.

From what he wrote above, it is clear that Bareh has indeed departed from the idea about the nomenclature Khasi expressed in 1967.

Chowdhury believed that the term had actually originated with them and they called themselves Khasi since time immemorial. He also believed that the publication of a Khasi Newspaper called *The Khasi Today* helped to popularise the term which today has become fixed. But whether this paper actually contributed to what

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Chowdhury claimed above or not, the general belief is that the name Khasi as a general term for all the subgroups mentioned earlier has been in use since time immemorial before any written records became available.

But Sib Charan Roy's writing in 1903 explained the term 'Khasi' in connection with two other terms 'Dkhar' and 'Ri'. 'Dkhar' sometimes spelt "Dykhar" is a term used by the Khasis to refer to non-Khasis. 'Ri' always refers to the land, so 'Ri Khasi' means land of the Khasis. Sib Charan Roy believed that the Khasis came somewhere from the plains where Sanskrit was the language used. It seemed that on their journey to the Khasi land they brought with them a number of Sanskrit terms which changed their original sound as a result of separation in time and distance. According to him, the term 'Khasi', 'Dkhar' and 'Ri' are of Sanskrit origin. 'Khasi' means people inhabiting an uninhabited land or land not conquered. It comes from 'Khas' which means wasteland or unconquered land as opposed to 'Dkhar' which comes from 'Dokhol' meaning conquered land. When the Khasis came to live in the hills which hitherto had been unconquered perhaps by a people more powerful than them, they called themselves 'Khasi' and those in the 'Dokhol'.

land 'Dkhar'. He further explained that the land came to be called 'Ri Khasi' because it was in these hills that the Khasis found their means by which to live. According to him the term 'Ri' (land), 'Bri' (a grove/an estate/a farm) and 'Rep' (farming or cultivating) together came from the Sanskrit word 'Bhri' meaning that which feeds. To prove that the origin of the three terms: Khasi, Dkhar and Ri is Sanskrit, Roy listed another 57 (fifty seven) Khasi words which also seem to bear some relationship with Sanskrit. The fiftyseven words mentioned appear in a list form, but besides these there are many other Khasi words whose origin is Sanskrit which are mentioned in course of writing his book Ka Jingiakyrsieu (An Awakening).

Lyngdoh's conjecture which appeared thirty three years after Sib Charan Roy's that the term Khasi perhaps came from 'Khos' or 'Khoss' the name of a people living at the foot of the Himalayas according to some remarks found in the Bhagavat Puran does not prove much.

Perhaps of the views given above, Sib Charan Roy's is the most convincing of all.

1.8 Origin of the People

If the origin of the term Khasi is hard to ascertain, so is their origin. Whether the Khasis were the autochthons or their forefathers migrated to these hills from elsewhere is a question the answer to which can hardly be satisfactory.

Writing about the origin of the Khasis, the Rev. Alexander Lish\textsuperscript{18} allied them with the Indo-Chinese. He wrote:

From the fact that the Khasee hills are not more than 300 miles from the province of Yunam in China, it is not impossible that, at some remote period, hordes of Chinese migrating from their territories travelled in this direction, and took up their abode on these hills . . . .

The Rev. Hugh Roberts\textsuperscript{19} like Lish thought that the Khasis had migrated here from the east. He alluded to a tradition known to him that the Khasis were politically connected with the Burmese to whose King they were up to a comparatively recent date rendering homage by sending him an annual tribute in the shape of an axe as token of submission.


\textsuperscript{19} H. Roberts. A Grammar of the Khasi Language Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner Ltd. London 1891:XVI.
But Captain Fisher assigned a western origin to the Khasis coming from over the frontiers of Bhutan and Nepal. He thought that this conjecture of a western origin was countenanced by their appearance and especially by the absence in them of those peculiarities about the eye which stamp the tribes of Indo Chinese.

Lyngdoh\(^\text{20}\) (1937) wrote that the Khasis were those people referred to as 'Khos' and their land as 'Khos Parbat' and that these 'Khos' did not follow the Vedantic religion simply because they had their own religious, social and political system. The fact that the Khasis have their own name Lum Makashang for the Himalayas proves that the Khasis had known the mountains and possibly had lived in its vicinity but when defeated and driven away from their home by stronger people who possibly could be the Aryans moved away from there through the land north east of Assam. The route they took was possibly from east to west since the same placenames occurred time and again and also since traditions known to him corroborated this. David Roy\(^\text{21}\), another Khasi thinker agreed with Lyngdoh that the Khasis came to these hills moving from east to west.


In a recent study entitled The Khasi Conjectures about their Origin (1984) Chowdhury discussed in detail the different views expressed by different scholars about languages, social and political organisation, religion and culture and seemed to have succeeded in linking the Khasi with the Austric speaking people who are widely scattered in different areas stretching from the Himalayas to Eastern Island and from Madagascar to Hawaii. He however, failed to show how the Khasis came to be on these hills.

Rymbai, himself a Khasi, claimed that the Khasis were the autochthons of these hills. He based his claim on a popular tradition that God in the beginning created sixteen families and that the Khasis were seven of those families which one day came down to earth to farm it but could not ascend back to heaven as they had always been doing because the ladder through which they descended or ascended had been cut off by the evil one. The ladder, it was said, touched the top of Mt. Sohpetbneng.


Since that time the seven families remained here and came to be known as KI HYNNIEW TREP HYNNIEW SKUM (Seven Huts Seven Nests). On these hills, they dwelled and multiplied and now Ki Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum are known as the Khasis. Rymbai argued that whatever the similarities and affinities with other Austric races, the tradition clearly showed that God had placed the Khasis here and therefore granting that they had come from some original place, that original place is none other than these very hills.

Chowdhury in the study mentioned earlier refuted Rymbai's autochthonous claim as baseless since the tradition is not supported by other material evidence. It may be mentioned that Chowdhury is right in his contention but his being right still does not solve the problem.

Sten, another Khasi thinker upheld the tradition of Ki Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum mentioned above but went further than Rymbai. According to him, the Seven Families were the grandchildren of Noah from Japhet whose names were Gomer, Magog, Midai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras.

He came to this conclusion after he has discussed at some length how the great flood recorded in the Bible could be the flood that the Khasis always refer to in another legend, which Gurdon also recorded in his book *The Khasis*. After the flood, four families, that of Noah, and those of Noah's children Shem, Ham and Japhet survived. The Bible does not bear much account of the children of Shem and Ham. According to Sten, the reason behind this could possibly be because the children of Japhet had moved eastward away from Palestine to Central Asia. There and in course of time the name Japhet became corrupted to Rajput and Gomer became Khmer and these Khmer were the Khasis who in their search for fortune finally reached the present homeland.

Looking at the linguistic map of those languages under the Mon Khmer sub-group one notices that Khasi is in the western most corner of the map. The implication of this, perhaps is that the Khasis just did not come from anywhere else but that they are the autochthons of these very hills just like Rymbai claimed. But this view is again subject to further research.

What could be concluded from the above views is that they are all conjectures which may or may not be true. The truth however remains that the Khasis have lived here since time immemorial.

1.9 Characteristic Trait

The general characteristic traits of the Khasis are found expressed in teachings given by elders to young folks. Radhon Singh Berry compiled all these teachings in Ka Jingsneng Tymmen Part I - II. The traits find expression in other writings too such as 'Ki Jingrwai SengKhasi, Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep'. The traits are briefly listed as follows:

1. They are straightforward. Uprightness is upheld. Kamai ia ka hok (earn righteousness) is what the Khasis believe they are here for. The SengKhasi takes this as one of its basic principles. In 'Ki Jingrwai SengKhasi' by I. Lyngdoh there is a lot of repetition about Ka Jingwan long briend ha pyrthei ban kamai ia ka hok (man is placed on earth so as to earn righteousness).


2. They are hard working. Borrowing and lending of household needs is a common feature found especially in the rural area, but generally speaking Khasi don't beg. Very rarely does a Khasi go begging.

3. The Kasis have a strong sense of clan loyalty. They feel at home wherever they go if only they know members of their clan are there. They are exogamous. Marriage within a clan is the greatest sacrilege which usually results in members being declared outcasts. The outcasts have no right to the family inheritance, religious rites and ceremonies.

4. They are observant. This made them evolve certain 'dos and donts.' Shong sang (incest or inbreeding) is one of the donts feared most for it results in physically or mentally handicapped children.

The Khasis don't sow seeds during moonlit weeks. They wait till after full moon. They believe that seeds sown during moonlight weeks yield a product which is somewhat gangrenous or if it were paddy the ears of corn will be empty.

5. The Kasis venerate their ancestors. The non-Christian Khasis offer 'Va knia ai bam' (Thanks
offering) to the departed ancestors; the Christian Khasis also arrange memorial services for their departed loved ones. The difference between the two is that in the former there is *ka suit ka shor* (pouring of libations) while invoking blessings from the departed souls for whom the offering is done; in the latter, they thank God in the name of Jesus Christ for the departed loved ones.

### 1.10 Language

As mentioned earlier the language which the Khasi people speak is also called Khasi. Scholars who studied the language linked it with other languages under the super language family which Peter Schmidt in 1906 called the Austric. The Austric language family divided itself into two main language families called Austro-Asiatic and Austronesian. There are different classifications of the Austro-Asiatic language family. Sebouk (Bareh 1977:39) classified it into three sub-groups

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as follows:

1. Monkhmer: Cham, Semang, Nicobarese, Palaung, Khmer, Mon, Khasi etc.

2. Munda;

3. Moung - Anam, Vietnamese, Muoung

In Macropaedia Vol.2 of the New Encyclopaedia Britannica it is recorded that the Austro-Asiatic family divided itself into three main subfamilies viz., Munda, Nicobarese and Monkhmer. Within the Monkhmer subfamily, twelve main branches are distinguished of which Khasi is one. Based on glotto-chronological study, the date during which these twelve specific branches was given at 1000 to 2000 B.C. The following is a list of the related languages:

Austro Asiatic

Austric

Austronesian

Munda Nicobarese Monkhmer

Khari Palaung Mon Khmu Viemuong Katu Bahmar Prea Khmer Jaha Seno Semala

In India the three subfamilies of Austro-Asiatic languages are found spoken in Central and Eastern
India (Munda), in Nicobar Islands (Nicobarese) and in Khasi Jaintia Hills in North East India (Khasi). Khasi is the only Monkhmer language in India. Flourishing amidst diverse linguistic influences, from the Indo-European languages like Assamese, Bengali, Hindi and Tibeto-Burman languages like Garo, Bodo, Mizo and Naga, it is a surprise that it has retained its indigenous character. In a paper on Sociology of Language: North Eastern Case published in Linguistic Situation in North East India, Tunga wrote,

The speech communities of north eastern India have certainly an inner strength of their own. They have lived here long. Yet their speeches remain unaffected, independent and completely separate. But for an inherent strength, it would have never been possible to exist independently, especially when the powerful Indo-Aryan language, Assamese and Bengali are ready in the neighbourhood to grasp them.

The inner strength referred to above is actually the ability of a particular language to absorb into its system all lexis borrowed from other languages. This absorption should be both from the phonetic as well as grammatical point of view.

Khasi is one such language that has enriched itself greatly by borrowing a lot of words from the nearby languages, and yet has been able to keep its indigenous character because it has done exactly what has just been mentioned above. The number of loan words in Khasi according to Rabel-Heymann from Indo European languages i.e., Hindi, Assamese, Bengali etc. is about 10%. 10% is calculated on the basis of words listed in Nissor Singh's dictionary Khasi-English Dictionary (1906). According to her, the percentage is rather low because a large number of words have been so 'Khassified' that they could no longer be detected whether they are loan words or not.

The loan words taken into the language pertain to different areas of life, but particularly to trade and commerce and courtly life. Terms of kinship have remained for a very long time unaffected by contacts with other cultures, but today this is no longer the case. English words daddy, mummy, auntie and uncle have


come to stay and are commonly used in families particularly those in towns.

Chowdhury (1978) quoted Simon's note that a word that has an imitative e.g., Khasi - khara (the Khasi people as a whole) bears the stamp of being a native word. But this idea does not seem to stand. Khara the imitative of Khasi according to Waseem33 (1983) is a Hindi word which means pure. The Hindi meaning of Khara seems to fit in very well with what is meant when the Khasis are referred to as Khasi Khara or para Khasi khara (fellow pure khasis). If Waseem's explanation of Khara is accepted, then it means that the imitatives are sometimes borrowed words. Borrowing in this case is partial in the sense that only the latter part of the imitative is a loan word. But sometimes it is total borrowing as in musla-mul (spices). In this case, I think there is an inversion of the Bengali musli-musla.

That loan words have been taken into the language is an undeniable fact. But to say with Goswami34

(1982) that Khasi has had to borrow terms to indicate happiness, sorrow, sin, time implies that the Khasi world view does not include these ideas at all and that these have come to be known or felt only when contacts with Indo European speakers were made.

There are two questions arising out of Goswami's assertion above. First, could it be that the Khasi had terms of their own to express the above ideas, but because of some reasons they switched over to what are called Sanskritic terms? Secondly, could it be that it was the Indo European speakers (Aryans) who adopted these terms from the Munda speaking people? It could not be improbable that the Aryans also borrowed from the Mundaic languages particularly if we are to believe that the Munda speaking people were the original people of the Gangetic plains and of West Bengal. (Haddon A.S., quoted by Costa G., 1958:49).

1.11 Khasi Dialects

Khasi has four dialects viz., Khasi spoken in the upland country which also includes the Cherra dialect taken to be the standard Khasi. This is what

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will be used in this study. Synteng or Pnar spoken in Jaintia Hills and Lyngngam spoken in the western part of Khasi Hills bordering the Garo Hills.

Bareh (1977:41) however listed eleven (11) main dialects namely

1. Amwi - in the southern Jaintia Hills,
2. Shella - in the southern Khasi Hills,
3. Warding - another dialect of the south of Khasi Hills,
4. Myriaw, Nongkholaw, Nongspung, Maram, Mawiang - spoken in the mid-western area of Khasi Hills,
5. Cherra - mid-southern Khasi Hills,
6. Nongkrem, Mylliem, Laitlyngkot, Lyniong - Khasi - spoken in the central parts,
7. Jowai - Central Jaintia
8. Bhoi - in north east Khasi Hills,
9. Manar, Nongwah, Jirang - north Khasi Hills
10. Khadar Blang (Mawpran) - mid-southern, and

The classification is too fine to be accepted as a general classification of the main dialects of Khasi. It will no doubt serve a good purpose for a study
of dialectical variation in Khasi. But for our purpose the former classification is good enough.

1.12 **Khasi became a Written Language**

Khasi became a written language only in 1842 when Thomas Jones\(^{36}\) translated into Khasi *Rhodd Mam* (Mother's Gift) using the Roman script for the purpose. Before Thomas Jones, William Carey in 1831\(^{37}\) translated the New Testament into Khasi using the Bengali script as medium. The Bengali medium had been in use in Khasi states or Siemships much earlier than Carey's translation of the New Testament. Bhattacharya and Bhattacharjee\(^{38}\) (1982) noted that the official records and official seals of some Khasi states like Sohra, Shella etc. were in Bengali. But the use of Bengali script was discontinued as a result of the colonial transformation viz., the coming of the British with their

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colonial policy, but particularly when the Baptist Mission terminated its work among the Khasis. Thomas Jones, the first Welsh Presbyterian missionary discontinued the use of Bengali script not because it was deemed unsuitable but probably because he did not know it. So in order to avoid delay in his missionary work, he used the script he knew which was Roman. The switch over from Bengali script to Roman was received with misgiving. The Rev. William Pryse himself a Welsh Presbyterian missionary thought that Thomas Jones' decision to adopt the Roman script was an unwise decision. In his prefatory note to his book *An Introduction to the Khasia Language* (1855:V) he wrote,

> It is obvious that such a small and uninfluential tribe will not be able to retain characters different from those of the larger nations of the plains which surround their hills. Should the Khasi tribe be ever brought under the influence of education, civilization and commercial intercourse, the Bengali character must supplant the Roman at a not very distant day. For the sake of the Khasis that would be very desirable. Nor would it be less desirable for the Bengali language to supplant all the hill dialects of the north east frontier.

It seemed that a year later, perhaps after seeing the progress of Thomas Jones' work, Pryse changed
his opinion regarding the suitability of Bengali script over the Roman when he wrote,

It was as difficult for the illiterate Khasis to learn some hundred or more signs of different sounds including the whole of the Bengali letters - simple and compound while some 18-20 Roman marks of sounds properly combined would be ample to represent and express every sound in the Khasi dialect. (Pryse, 1856 in Calcutta Review Vol.XXVII September 1856 p 81 - Jyrwa 39 1980:16).

Commenting on the suitability of the Roman script over the Bengali script, Bareh (1977:60) held that the latter was not suitable for Khasi language and that the Roman alphabet in its more legible and simple type was found to be more suitable and convenient. This assertion is linguistically illogical. No script may be superimposed on any language without having studied the phonology of that particular language on which the script is to be imposed. Having done the study, the symbols which closely represent the phonetic system of that language need be taken. In other words, there cannot be a total transfer of any script to any language. There is bound to be addition, subtraction or modification on

the existing script before it can be adopted for another language. This means that one script after having been modified is as good as any other which again implies that the Bengali script used by William Carey for Khasi was good enough for Khasi and would have continued to be in use today, had not the Baptist Mission discontinued its work in Khasi Jaintia Hills and also had it not been because Thomas Jones thought it inexpedient to spend time learning Bengali in order to transliterate Khasi when he could do it through the Roman script.

After the Roman script was adopted, mainly religious books were published. The spelling system used by Thomas Jones seemed quite uncouth. Thus towards the end of the nineteenth century particularly from 1896, some enlightened Khasis like Habu Hormu Rai Diengdoh, Radhon Singh Berry, U Jeebon Foy published a Khasi Newspaper **U Khasi Mynta** (The Khasi Today) in which views regarding inappropriate spellings of words and unacceptable sentence constructions were aired. The introduction of "i" and "u" into the existing list of Khasi letters was suggested by Berry⁴⁰ in March 1896. It

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appeared that in August 1904 it was adopted into the family of Khasi letters. It could not be ascertained when it was adopted. The views aired in U Khasi Mynta were taken into account and this led to "a new and phonetic mode of spelling in writing letters, books, tracts etc in Khasi language" as Hormu Rai Diengdoh himself remarked in his article "The Education in the Khasi Hills" addressed to the Editor of the "Bengalee", Calcutta. (U Khasi Mynta 1902:5).

The present spelling system is not without faults. First, there is a lack of uniformity in spelling. While the Khasi Bible of the Catholic Mission spells ieid (love), the Khasi Bible of the Bible Society of India spells ieit and occasionally one finds it spelt ieij. Again, while the Khasi Bible (Bible Society of India) spells lyngkhuid (naked), the Seng Khasi spells lyngkhuit, dwai (pray) is spelt in two other ways besides this one: duwai and duai. Examples of such different forms of spelling are indeed many, but perhaps the ones given above are enough to show a lack of uniformity in spelling.

41. Mentioned in a letter to the Editor U Khasi Mynta No.94. September 1904.
In an attempt to systematize spelling, Elias (1960) suggested that the prefix \textit{jing-} be \textit{jing-} when prefixed to verbs the combination of which results in abstract nouns thus: \textit{jingshih\textjiang} (truth), \textit{jinglong} (quality), \textit{jingthiang} (sweetness). When \textit{jing-} is compounded to verbs and when that compounding does not refer to an abstract noun, \textit{jing-} should be written \textit{jyn-} thus: \textit{jyntah} (curry, ointment), \textit{jynri} (domesticated animal), \textit{jynthiah} (bed). Without arguing whether the suggestion is linguistically acceptable or not, the suggestion, had it been accepted by most writers would have systematized spellings of abstract and concrete nouns definitely. In spoken Khasi, one hears both \textit{jingtah} and \textit{jyntah} for curry or ointment. In written Khasi, Elias' suggestion did not find much acceptance. So the problem still remains.

The issue of systematizing spelling was raised from time to time. Kharakor raised this very issue in a dialogue form, but it should be pointed out that spelling committees have come and gone, but not much was done in this regard. The Khasi Linguistic Society (KLS)

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should perhaps consider to take up the matter seriously.

Secondly, the length and quality of vowels which has not been marked has created a lot of confusion to native young learners as well as to non natives trying to read and pronounce words spelt alike. In a statement like _u sum it is difficult to know whether it means a spear or a man takes/is taking a bath_. Ray\(^45\) (1960) in his article "Ka Kynrong Shongdak Khasi (Marking of length of Khasi vowels) referred to an anecdote which had embarrassed him greatly because he did not know that the second syllable _tud_ of _pyntud_ (delay) is not pronounced like _dud_ (milk) is. The _u_ in _tud_ is long, whereas the _u_ in _dud_ (milk) is short. The non marking of length marks in Khasi vowels has indeed created problems. In April 1959 an article _Ki Jnit Sohramjan Ka Longing ki Dak_\(^46\) (The Family of letters) appeared in a bilingual journal called _Ka Syngkhong Jingtip_ (A Treasury of Knowledge) wherein this very same problem was discussed in detail. The suggestions that were made were that where the letter


\(^{46}\) Tiewlarun "Ki Jnit Sohramjan Ka Longiing Ki Dak in _Ka Syngkhong Jingtip_ Vol II, No.1, ed. S.J. Duncan, April 1959."
u represents the sound /oː/ it should be written ou instead of just u; thus lum (hill) should be spelled loum, sum (to pierce) should be spelled soum. It further suggested that /aː/ which occurs in words like sam (distribute), bam (eat) should be written saam: and baam; the contiguous sounds of /j/ and /i/ which occurs in words like ieng (stand) or iaid (walk) should be written ijang and iing respectively. The use of diacritic such as was used by Roberts in his Grammar was also suggested. These suggestions were again repeated in other issues of the same journal, and it was seen that P.E. Swer who wrote a short story Ka Samla Ri Loum (A Hill Maiden) which appeared in its December 1960 issue, followed the suggestion given earlier. But since they were not followed by most Khasi writers, attempts such as those of P.E. Swer died out shortly.

Problems pertaining to juncture also need to be sorted out. While some write the reduplicatives with hyphenation as in mano-re-mano (someone or other), iwei-pa-iwei (each, everybody), others write them without, thus: mano re mano, iwei pa iwei.

There are problems relating to whether pre-verbal particle such as ja marking reciprocity should be written together as iashoh or ja shoh (fight, lit. fight together).

The problems of whether ba (that/who/which) should be treated as a suffix of u/ka/i/ki in uba, kaba, iba, kiba or a prefix in words such as basngaid (fat) bajrong (tall, long) etc will be discussed in the chapters that will follow.

A linguistic study of the language will perhaps reveal a lot more problems to be sorted out. The ones mentioned above are only some of the highlights.

The Bibliography 48 of literature written on the language prepared by the Reception Committee that received the members of the Sahitya Akademi visiting Shillong listed 1020 books in all. A look at it reveals that very little is done on the study of Khasi as a language. The family of the language as discussed earlier is accepted to be a branch of the Mon Khmer group of the Austro-Asiatic language family. But studies of the internal structures of Khasi are indeed very few. It is

48. Reception Committee. Bibliography on the Khasi Literature
Presented to Sahitya Akademi Delhi, 1977.
because of this lack of such studies that this study may be taken up.

A Descriptive Study of the Khasi Noun Phrase is proposed to be taken up.

The aim of the study is to find out the pre-modifying and post modifying constituents in the noun phrase and to examine in detail the syntactical and semantic considerations which allows a certain constituent to co-occur with other constituents, to study whether one constituent is in complementary distribution with another. It is also the aim of the study to analyse whether the constituents are mobile or not and what semantic changes each constituent mobility causes to the phrase.

The methodology that I am going to use for the purpose of achieving the above aim is inductive. The data is examined in the light of different linguistic frameworks basically because as a native speaker of the language I feel convinced that this approach will give a better description of the language rather than that which takes a particular linguistic model and fits in the data accordingly.

In the next chapter the related literature will be reviewed.