The institution of the District Offices was in tune with the time honoured Indian system of territorial organisation which entailed repeated sub-divisions of areas with graded levels of administration, each entrusted to the charge of an official of the central government. The district which was in origin a land revenue division became over a period of years, the fundamental administrative unit, on whose framework were built civil, criminal and police jurisdiction and also those of welfare and technical services provided by special departments of government. The district collector was the nucleus of the system and the district its key-link and the centre of life in the Indian empire.

Throughout British India the District, technically so called, was the unit of administration. In the details of District organisation there were great variations in different Provinces, with the general principles on which the administrative system was based were much the same everywhere. In every district of British India the government had its representative in whom all executive Civil authority centred. Th3 District Officer, whether known as Collector-Magistrate in the Regulation provinces and Deputy commissioner in the Non-Regulation Provinces, was the responsible head of his jurisdiction.

British India, had been for practical purposes governed under a bureaucratic form of government. At the top of the hierarchy stood what had come to be known as the Indian Civil Service consisting of covenanted, uncotaenanted and soldiers - civilians - forming a crog d' elite, once described by Mll« lyod George as the steelframe of the Indian administration. This service, for a major portion of British rule in India, constituted both the 'government' and the 'administration* or both the policy-making and executive body.

Deputy Commissioner of Khasi-Jaintia Hills in the Assam Commission was an institution by himself. In conformity with his comppeers in the British Indian district he was generally head of the civil administration of his district. But though there had interesting similarities between them, the Deputy Commissioner of Khasi-Jaintia Hills was somewhat a different institution. While European bureaucratic
principles were gaining ground in the British-Indian administration, the District officer of Khasi-Jaintia Hills was very much akin to the Mughal Prototype - the Subader. While the authority of the administration was heading towards decentralisation, a trend of centralisation of administrative duties had been concentrating in the person of the Deputy Commissioner of Khasi-Jaintia Hills. There is another side of the shield. He was the Political Officer of the Khasi states along with his normal duties as a Magistrate, Collector and Civil Budge. The position of a Political Officer, was by no means an easy one. It called for great qualities of character, tact, sympathy, patience, and good manners. He had to identify himself with the interests of both the paramount power and the Princes and people of the states. He must have all the qualities and accomplishment of a diplomatic office. For the Khasi Hills the Political Officer required to be something more than expected elsewhere.

The district officer and his role in British Indian administration has been dealt with in many standard works. The "Civilian" writers left behind enough of materials on the role of the District Officers in their Memoirs, essays and articles. Haridwar Rai in his article "Institution of District Collector" in The Indian Journal of Public Administration, Vol. XI, No. 3, July-September, 1965, A.H. Aslam in The Deputy Commissioner: A Study of Public Administration; Sudeesh Kumar Sarma in Deputy Commissioner in Punjab, have very exhaustively assessed the different aspects of the institution of the Deputy commissioner. But no one has yet found an opportunity to study the Deputy Commissioner of a Hill District like the Khasi-Jaintia Hills.

The object of the present study is to provide a comprehensive and critical appreciation of the Deputy Commissioner of Khasi-Jaintia Hills as an institution. On the broad perspective of India as a whole, an attempt has been made to throw light on the Hill administration of the British India and the corresponding role played by the Deputy Commissioner therein. Emphasis has been given to examine the dual role of the Deputy commissioner in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, viz. a head of the district and the Political Officers in the same person.

This work is based mainly on official documents - both published and unpublished - available at the National Archives of India, New Delhi; West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta; Assam Secretariat Records office, Shillong; District Records
Roomrat Shillong have been consulted. Besides official reports/ gazetteers/ gazettes, journals/ manuals and memoris/ a large number of relevant books have also been consulted.

I am greatly indebted to Dr. J.B. Bhattacharjee/ Professor and Head of the Department of History/ North Eastern Hill university/ Shillong, for his supervision throughout the course of investigation. His learned guidance has helped me greatly to traverse on the right path and to broaden my perspective on the subject.

My acknowledgement are due to the authors whose works I have consulted/ and to the Director of National Archives of India, New Delhi; Director of Archives, Government of West Bengal; Keepers of the Records, Assam Secretariat/ Shillong; Librarian National Library, Calcutta, Dr. B. Dattaray, Secretary, North East India Council for social Science Research, Shillong; Mr. Khympam Singh of Umsason, Shillong for allowing me access to the materials in their custody. I will be failing in my duty unless I acknowledge my greatfulness to those friends and well wishers who encouraged and helped me in various ways during the investigation of the study. My thanks due to Sri Nishi K.P. Choudhury who very kindly took much pains in typing this thesis.

SHILLONG
the T° - Co 1983

DIPU MUKHOPADHYAY