CHAPTER V
CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES VERSUS SENG KHASI ON RELIGION

I. The Khasis before the Coming of Christianity

Generally speaking, all the Khasi people believe in God (U Blei). Generally speaking, all the Khasis take this belief for granted. This notion of believing in the existence of God, in the course of time, becomes the centre for the Khasi Religion and dominates all other beliefs. But the Khasis have no clear evidence to exactly show when this belief in God originated. We only know that it is a very ancient belief in the Khasi religious life.

Some of the reasons which made the Khasis to believe in God may be summarized as follows:

(A) The Khasis came to believe in God by reflecting on the universe, that is, through their reflections concerning the universe. For instance, they believe that this universe must have been created by someone which they call U Blei, who is the Lord and Creator of everything seen and unseen. This becomes somewhat logical and necessary for them to hold a belief in God. As thinking beings they reflected on the enormity and continuity of the earth and the heavens. This provides them an idea that this universe must have, someone who looks after it, keeps it and sustains it. For the Khasis, it is impossible to have a religion without God. Therefore, they do not feel or see the need to
have proofs on the existence of God. For them, God exists everywhere and at all times. This reflects in the prayer of Sib Charan Roy:

Ko Blei Najrong Natbian, Ko Trai, Ko Kynrad, Ko Nongthaw, Ko Nongbuh, Ko Nongsei rynieng Nongsei rta, Ko Nongsam bynta, ko shihajar nguh.¹

(Oh God on High and Below, oh God and the Lord of all, the Creator of all, the designer and giver of life. You bestow on us different talents and gifts, thousand thanks to you)

(B) The probable cause for the origin of the belief in God among the Khasis is probably, through the realization of the people of their own limitations and weaknesses. Man as a rational being, realizes how limited he is, both in his powers and knowledge. Man comes across inevitable events like death, various calamities and the forces of nature, such as thunder storms, earthquakes, mighty rivers, and so on which cannot be controlled by any simple ways. This makes man to speculate that there must be someone greater than him and the power of nature. This idea made it logical and necessary for man to depend on the one who is more powerful than any human being on earth.

(C) The idea of believing in God may have been suggested by the powers of the weather itself, as manifested in the form of storms, thunder and lightning, and the phenomena of day and night together with the expanse of the sky with its sun, moon and stars. These heavenly forces, powers and bodies, no doubt might have drawn the attention of man from the very beginning. This is due to the very fact that the people have depended on them for light, warmth, rain

¹ Sib Charan Roy, Ka Niiam Ki Khasi (Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, 1979 reprint) p. 3
and so on and so forth. They could not help noticing them, since the sky is vast and is visible from any angle of the earth. Ultimately, they associate themselves with the ultimate power of heavens with the one whom they eventually call *U Blei* (God).

(D) The Khasi myths and legends are not only the product of imagination of the human mind but they are also a product of the revelation of God. The divine plans of God are hidden from the knowledge of man. Unless God reveals to man of his plans, man will not be able to know them all. Perhaps, it is through the revelations of God that the Khasis come to know that heaven is their original home. And it is through their myths and legends that they try to communicate this knowledge from one generation to another generation orally and traditionally. The main thrust of their myths and legends is this, that at one time, God created sixteen families in Heaven. Out of the sixteen families, seven families were selected to come down to this earth which is the third planet of the Solar System while the nine members of the families remained in heaven. Though the members of the nine families and the seven families could go up and down for a long time, yet one day they could no longer do that because they had disobeyed God. Consequently, the golden ladder which served as a bridge between heaven and earth was removed by God. These things make the Khasis to have the concept of God as a ‘Supreme Being’ who is all in all. Though the history of man in Khasi Hills is very long but most of that history is unknown to us today, because the art of writing came much
later. Before the advent of Christianity the Khasis had no script at all. The local scholars tried to explain this event by narrating some stories of what had taken place in ancient days. According to Hamlet Bareh, the indigenous script was lost due to the flood. To cite his words:

According to a tradition, an indigenous script was lost during an incendiary at Nongkseh, but another story states it was lost in the flood. The flood episode causing the loss of their script is interesting. It tells us that two survivors managed to escape the flood by swimming across. One swimmer was a Khasi and the other was a Hindu man known as U Dkhar. Both carried with them only the bundles of their respective scripts. The Dkhar managed to retain his script while swimming but the Khasi swimmer swallowed his. The swallowed script, the tradition says, thus became mingled with his flesh and bones, his mind and heart which helped in turn to build up the fabric of an oral literature which freely expresses itself in songs, folk-tales, epics, poetry and incantation.²

Most of the Major Religions of the world have their own founders and their own sacred Books as the main sources for teaching of their Religions. For instance, the Bible is the sacred book of Christianity and the Qu’ran is the scriptural text of Islam, but Khasi Religion has no scriptures at all. This does not mean that the Khasi Religion has no teachings to pass on from one generation to another generation. The Khasis have a deep respect for their tradition and their traditional beliefs especially in respect of religious beliefs and teachings. Usually, the Elders and Priests are main teachers of their religious and traditional teachings. To the question “Where can a Khasi

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Religion be found?" The Elders and Priests of Khasi Religion use to give answers as follows:

The Khasi Religion cannot be found in shrines but it can be found:

(i) In the rituals, ceremonies and the festivals of the people
(ii) In the proverbs, riddles and wise-sayings
(iii) In the customs of the people, especially the different aspects of life
(iv) In the different expressions of their beliefs
(v) In the use of religious objects and the expressions of their prayers
(vi) In the manner of worship and the materials they use for making sacrifices and offerings.

The Khasis believe that God (U Blei) is the sublime and pure Spirit who does not stick just to one particular form or image. In other words, God is formless and no man can really know the totality of God's nature. This is one of the reasons that the Khasis have no idol worship for we cannot symbolize God by means of our spatio-temporal objects. Since the Khasi Religion has no scriptural source of information, it has been considered to be a primal religion by P.R. Gurdon, that is, primitive in nature and dominated by the animated spirits. Again, Gurdon regarded the Khasi Religion as a preliterate Religion in
the sense of being inferior comparing to Christianity and other major Religions of the World.

Though the Khasis have lost their script, but still they could have a strong philosophical tradition. They continued living within the framework of their own culture since the olden days. They made a tremendous effort to pass on their wisdom based on oral tradition from one generation to another generation. Today, the Khasis especially the non-Christian Khasis regard their traditional myths and legends as a storehouse of their thoughts, ideas, wisdom and conceptual formation. Before the coming of Christianity, the Khasis pay high respect to their myths and legends. Their mythical stories tell that man originally came from heaven to settle on this earth but they do not specify the date or year. Ultimately, we see that science has its own ideas while religion has its own ideas about the reality of man and other things around him.

Though the Khasis during the pre-christian days could have only the oral tradition literature, but we should not under-estimate the truth and reality of their belief system. Even in the absence of any script, still the Khasis could have fostered many wise sayings, proverbs, incantations, fables and folk songs. Most of them are in the form of ethical instructions and moral teachings upon behavior patterns and character formation. Hamlet Bareh writes:

Maxims in verbose expressions are addressed in recitals upon the household or a group, sometimes in the accompaniment of harps and drums. Proverbs treasured through generations and
transmitted from father to son, in a great magnitude of vision and thought, are portraits of the oral literature and in the past, other devices were established to keep them to the memory of listeners. Each household passed every night in imparting ethical values in rich garb of proverbs to the young minds while alternative arrangements may have been made to hold recitals by harpists, who on their harps, performed story-telling, sang dirges and recited epics which have profound ethical lessons so as to instill tastes and passions for adventures and noble deeds.  

It is interesting to note that the Khasis, during the preliterate period, could have a religion without scriptures, places of worship or creed. The main reason that brought them together is the corporate worship of one God. But today the spirit of willingness to come together with a view to have a corporate worship is much weakened. This is due to the fact that today, most of the non-christian Khasis try to perform their rituals and ceremonies clan-wise. Those members who have the same family name or surname are still trying to come together to have a corporate worship of God. Among the Khasi Kingships known as *Hima Syiems*, only *Hima Syiem Khyrim* (Khyrim Syiemship) which has still a regular annual corporate worship known as “*Ka Pomblang bad ka Shad Nongkrem*” (Goat sacrifice and Nongkrem Dance). The annual festival of Shillong known as “*Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem*” is a Dance of the virgins because only unmarried girls can dance while the men only accompany them. It cannot be called a corporate worship. Similarly, the annual festival of the Jaintias known as “*Ka Beh Deinkhlam*”, though it is a

religious festival of the Jaintias yet only the people of Jowai usually use to take part in the festival.

It may be appropriate at this point of discussion to mention some of the well-known belief systems that are commonly practised by the Khasi people before the arrival of Christian faith in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Briefly speaking, some of these belief systems may be stated below:

(i) **State Religion:** Before the coming of Christianity and before the British Administration, the Khasi-Jaintia people had together 29 states and each state has its own State Religion. The nature and practice are different from one State to another State. For instance, the religion of *Hima Sohra* (Cherrapunji Syiemship) was part and parcel of the institution of the *Dorbar Hima* (Council of the Syiemship). During the death of the King, his dead body should be cremated with the religious ceremonies of the *Dorbar Hima* and the expenditures should be borne by the *Dorbar* itself. But the State Religion of *Hima Khyrim* (Khyrim Syiemship) is only a ritualistic religion in the sense that the *Syiem Sad* (Queen cum-Priestess) is entrusted to perform some rituals. Besides adoring the one great God, she should also offer sacrifices to the Shillong God known in the local Khasi language as ‘*U 'Lei Shillong*’.

(ii) **Religion is independent from the State:** There are many Khasi States like Maharam, Mawiang, Myriaw and others which do not have any such State Religion. In many such states, religious matters are affairs of the clans and the
families concerned. The State authorities are concerned only with the secular activities like maintaining Law and Order and the administration of justice in the State.

**Cock Sacrifice:** A Cock Sacrifice is very significant for those believers of the Khasi traditional religion. It is believed to be the sacrifice of peace and reconciliation. It has an interesting story which describes how a cock in the ancient days became a sacrificial victim for the sake of humankind and the whole world. The Khasis use to remind themselves of the three ages in the olden days. The first age was the age of peace, harmony and perfect happiness between God and man as well as with other beings. The Khasis talk of this age as the age of golden era which they call the age of *U Sohpetbneng*. The literal meaning of the word *Sohpetbneng* means the heavenly umbilical cord. But metaphorically, it means the covenantal relationship between God and man. As long as man could maintain the right and healthy relationship with God his Creator, man could enjoy his fellowship with God. In other words, God provides all the needs of man without sparing. But the moment man broke his covenant with God he had to face the problems of life.

The second age was the age of darkness which the Khasis speak of the age of *u Diengiei*. Literally speaking, *Diengiei* means a gigantic tree. It is a symbol of sin, pain, worries, hopelessness and chaos. The moment man went against the will of God confusion began to prevail upon his mind accompanied
with a feeling of desperation. In such a state of despair and helplessness man
began to experience the vacuum of spiritual life. Man began to think of
rebuilding and restoring his relationship with God. The third age was a new
age, it was an age of propitiation and restoration of what had been lost or
damaged. Interestingly, the Khasis called this particular age, the age of ‘Ka
Krem Lamet Latang’. Literally, Ka Krem Lamet Latang means a deep Cave.
But metaphorically, it means the other world which is different from the
physical world that we are living in. In other words, it is not like our world of
here and now. First of all, the Sun which is the source of light and energy was
hiding itself in the other world known as ‘Ka Krem Lamet Latang’ in Khasi
mythical stories. Secondly, here, we see that man cannot get any help from
other living beings which are living around him to be his friend and redeemer
as to give his life willingly and freely for the sake of man. Finally, the Cock
came out from the other world to rescue man and be a sacrificial victim for the
good and welfare of man. One fine day, the Cock went to meet the Sun in the
other world and the Sun accepted the request of the Cock to give its light to
the world like before. It was since that time that the Khasis used the cock as a
sacrificial item.

2. The Arrival of Christianity in Khasi and Jaintia Hills

The Serampore Mission under the leadership of William Carey took
keen interest in sending Missionaries to North Eastern Region. Carey had a
close contact with the people of North East India, especially the Khasis. Eventually, in 1813 Krishna Chandra Pal, the first convert of the Serampore Mission was sent as a missionary to Khasi Hills and he stationed at Pandua near Cherrapunji. Two Khasis accepted the Christian faith, namely, u Duwan and u Anna and they were baptized. This event paved a way for the encouragement and enthusiasm for the people of the Khasi community to embrace Christianity as their new Religion. Some scholars tried to introduce the Bengali script among the Khasis, but it was not so successful. Though the Serampore Missionary, Krishna Chandra Pal left Khasi Hills within a very short period of stay yet he had made a tremendous impact in the heart and mind of the Khasis. In the year 1832 the Serampore Mission resumed its work among the Khasis by sending a Missionary to Cherrapunji. This young Missionary was Alexander Lish. He was a hard working Missionary. Within a short span of time, he managed to open up schools at Cherrapunji, Mawsmai and Mawmluh. This was a beginning in the development of Khasi literature. Later u Duwan Rai and u Jungkha, served as the first local Khasi language pundits for the Welsh Missionaries.

The Welsh Presbyterian Mission also initiated their missionary works in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Missionaries decided to begin their mission works and to have nothing to do with the Government. Consequently, Thomas Jones and his wife arrived at Cherrapunji on the 22nd June, 1841. Thomas Jones introduced to the Khasi people the Roman Alphabets. Hamlet Bareh writes:
In 1841 Khasi was reduced to the Roman Alphabets. The pioneer was Thomas Jones I. He just reached the country when it had not recovered yet from the strain and stress of wars fought between the Khasis and British for a ten year term (1829 – 1839) and when the new administration had been taking the only rudimentary shape with the new administrative headquarters at Cherrapunji. Jones quickly learnt the Cherra dialect which had begun to grow as the court medium of expression. He set up the first three schools in the different localities of Cherrapunji: the new alphabet was taught to the pupils.⁴

R.S.Lyngdoh gave Thomas Jones the title ‘The Father of the Khasi Alphabets and the founder of the Khasi Literature.’⁵ H.W.Sten said, “Out of Jones’s experiment in the military camp came out the first Khasi Primer, and the Primer made him, as D.Ropmay proposes, “the father of the Khasi Alphabet and the founder of a permanent foundation of Khasi literature”⁶. The advent and growth of Christianity in the soil of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills during the pre-independence period was like the dawn of a new age for the Khasi-Jaintia people because it brought about many changes. Different Christian Missions tried their best to bring about social changes in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Almost all of them strengthened their mission strategies. Many of them set up mission schools and presented the Bible as the literature of salvation. The Serampore Baptist Mission managed to translate the Bible into the Khasi language by making use of the Bengali script for the purpose. This work was first begun in the year 1813 but later the Missionaries also tried to make use of the Shella dialect.

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⁴ Ibid., pp.19 - 20
⁵ Cf. R.S.Lyngdoh, Ka History ka Thoh ka Tar (Shillong: K.M.Lyngdoh Nongbri, 1998 (reprint), p.31
To cite the words of O.L. Snaitang:

"... one positive result was the decision made by Serampore to translate the Bible into the Khasi language. The work would appear to have started in 1813 itself. Since the Khasi – Jaintia people did not have an alphabet, the mission decided to use the Bengali script for the purpose. Thus the translation used the Shella dialect and the Bengali script. The Shella dialect was used even though it was not understood by the people of Cherrapunji Syiemship or those who lived upland."

The works of the Welsh Mission in Khasi and Jaintia Hills which started in 1841 made tremendous impact, especially the mission enterprise of Thomas Jones. Many school teachers who had been trained by the missionaries were encouraged to become Elders of the Church and many women were also appointed as mission school teachers. In this way the Missionaries gave training for generating local leadership in the different parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

In the 19th century, the Roman Catholic Mission began to send some Missionaries to North East India. Pope Gregory XVI gave his Apostolic Order that the Vicariate Apostolic of East Bengal extended its jurisdiction to North East India from the year 1846 onwards. Different Catholic Orders came to Khasi and Jaintia Hills, like the Salesians of Don Bosco, the Salvatorians, and the Lay Brothers Catholic Missionaries. After the arrival of Fr. Otto Hopfenmueler in Shillong in 1890 many other Catholic Missionaries came to Khasi and Jaintia Hills. They learnt the local Khasi language and in due course of time, they started translating some Catholic Religious writings. Towards the

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end of 1891 more centres were opened and they also started opening up schools.

In 1874 the Anglican Church started its Mission works in Shillong. The Headquarter of the Chief Commissioner of the Church was shifted from Guwahati to Shillong. The Seven Day Adventists also started their Mission Works in Shillong during the first half of the twentieth century. The Mission works started with the pioneering works of Rev. and Mrs. Burges in 1933. The Mission works started in Shillong in a more organized manner in 1935 after the arrival of Rev. J.F. Ashlock. It undertook missionary works by establishing schools in different parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

Among the Churches of indigenous origin, the Church of God has more Church members. The Church was formed in 1902 by the two local persons viz., Mr. Wolley Mohan Roy Laitphlang and Mr. Joy Mohan Roy, both of these Church pioneers were from Khasi Hills. This Church has its Headquarter at Qualapaty, Shillong. Today this Church has more than 600 local Churches in Meghalaya and Assam.

3. Christian Missionaries versus Seng Khasi on Religion

(i) The Missionary Attitude

The growth and development of Christianity among the Khasi and Jaintia people was strengthened gradually and steadily. It was towards the end
of the nineteenth century that it gained strong momentum among all sections of the Khasi tribal society. The Missionaries set up more schools, churches and medical services and the people in large number responded positively to these new social changes. The Christian Missionaries came to Khasi and Jaintia Hills with the unshaken evangelistic commitment and the conviction that religions other than Christianity were considered to be false religions. The missionaries took the words of Jesus literally when he said:

(a) I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. (John 10:7 – 10) NIV

(b) Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:15 – 16) NIV

Having understood the words of Jesus in a literal sense of the term, the Christian Missionaries had an exclusive thought that outside the Christian Church there is no salvation. The main aim and objective of the Missionaries was to liberate the people from the bondage of what they regarded as superstitious beliefs and devilish practices. A renowned Church historian from Khasi Hills, O.L.Snaitang writes:

The missionaries came with an evangelistic commitment and conviction that religions other than Christianity were false. When they came they were ignorant about primal cultures. Their main aim was to liberate the people from bondage to what they regarded as superstition.8

In their preaching and teachings, the Missionaries proclaim boldly that Christ is the only Saviour of the World. He is the metaphorical gate of heaven. In other words, Jesus is the only Redeemer who can save the souls of those who believe in him. Other religions or religious teachings are regarded as a means of preparation to the messianic mission of Jesus Christ like the Christian Old Testament, and if not, other religions and their teachings are false religions in the sense that they are not pro-Christ. The Missionaries termed the Khasi Religion as a set of superstitious beliefs. Again, the Missionaries presented Jesus Christ in their doctrinal teachings to the Christian and non-christian audience that Jesus is the image of the Invisible God and it is only in him that we can see God in heaven as on earth. Those who reject Christ, are presumably considered as having rejected God and ultimately, they will be in the domain of darkness of sin and they are under the binding power of Satan. In his historical research works, O.L.Snaitang pointed out the attitude of the Christian Missionaries towards the Khasi traditional Religion, he writes:

While the Christians generally agreed with the negative attitudes of the missionaries towards the traditional Religion, there were some among them who sought to relate that religion positively towards Christianity. Perhaps these members of the Christian intelligentsia were influenced by the Seng Khasi, both of which tended to live in the urbanized context of Shillong. Hence while virtually all Christian Khasis had a positive attitude towards the changes in the material and political culture, there were some among them that did not agree with the comprehensive missionary condemnation of the traditional religion of the Khasi-
Among the educated Christians who spoke courageously and openly against the verbal faith attack of the Missionaries on the Khasi traditional Religion were Rabon Singh Kharsuka and Soso Tham. The Missionaries expressed dissatisfaction against the two Church members who reacted and criticized the Missionaries for speaking ill-favoured against the Khasi Religion. Rabon Singh, though he was a converted Christian yet he still showed his love and appreciation to those spiritual and moral teachings of the traditional Khasi Religion. He even wrote some articles on the Khasi Religion. The Missionaries of the Welsh Mission at Nongsawlia (Cherrapunji) disapproved the attitude developed in Rabon Singh’s thinking. In the course of time, Rabon Singh also expressed dissatisfaction for joining the mission school at Nongsawlia and finally resigned from the job as a mission school teacher but he remained as a Christian till death on 6th November, 1910. But Soso Tham left the Welsh Presbyterian Church and joined the Church of England in Shillong. He died on 18th December, 1940 and was buried in the cemetery of the Church of England in Shillong. It is an undeniable fact that some of the Khasi-Jaintia Christian converts reacted against the condemnation of the Khasi traditional Religion by the missionaries.

9. Ibid., pp. 134-135
The Missionaries asked the British Government to give them the education grants for spreading western education in different parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills District. The missionaries planned to print their own text books for their schools. This had been made in such a way as to make the Bible as the literature of salvation. The motive behind this master plan was to bring about Christianization among the people of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. This was a serious attempt to make Khasi and Jaintia Hills District a sort of Christendom. Babu Rash Mohon Roy wrote:

The British Government gave education grants to the Christian Missionaries for spreading education among the people of Khasi and Jaintia Hills District. The missionaries printed the text books for schools according to their liking and choice, viz, history of Jesus, Abraham, Issac, Jacob and so on and so forth. They translated the Bible into Khasi language and made it a text book for schools. You will find the inspecting staff of this District consists entirely of Christians. Fortunately for the Khasis, some pure Khasi gentlemen of hollowed memory took the initiative for providing national education for the Khasi children and started Seng Khasi Free Morning School as early as 1921, with a view to preserving Khasi national culture. They wrote books containing ideals of ancient Khasi culture and religion.¹⁰

It was obvious that the main objective of the Christian Missionaries who were working among the people of Khasi and Jaintia Hills District during the 18th and 19th centuries was to make their mission schools as an instrument for propagating Christianity. They did not show that they were interested in education for the sake of Education but for the sake of Jesus Christ and his divine mission. In this context, the missionaries and the school teachers were

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regarded as soul winners and agents of the Kingdom of God. Having understood of the missionaries’ plans to make their mission schools instrumental for the development of Christianity, the Khasi veteran leaders reacted and decided to establish their own schools. Some emotional and reactionary leaders thought that the missionaries had the anti-national spirit against the members of the Khasi tribe. J.B.Bhatacherjee writes:

The Welsh Mission which was in charge of education in Khasi-Jaintia Hills, on the other hand had adopted education as the media for propagating Christianity. The Scope of education was limited to the primary standard and the text books were mainly based on Biblical themes ... Babu Jeebon along with some Bengalee civil servants ... requested Rev.Thomas Jones of the Welsh Mission to upgrade the Shillong M.E.School to Entrance Standard. But the Reverend remarked: “We have come here for religion and not education”. Jeebon Roy and his Bengalee friends then started a High School at Shillong.\[11\]

The negative attitude shown by the Christian Missionaries towards the traditional Khasi Religion was offensive to the leaders of the Khasi Religion in particular and to the people of Khasi and Jaintia in general. This incident made the leaders of *ka Niam Khasi* (Khasi Religion) to form a sort of indigenous association to create a sense of awareness that the non-Christian Khasis would be able to retain their socio-cultural and religious heritage and to inculcate among the Khasi and Jaintia Hills a spirit of nationalism. J.B.Bhatacherjee seemed to have exaggerated when he pointed out that the missionaries compiled school text books with strong Christian bias and

\[11\] Ibid., p.5
segregated policy of the British Government. The missionaries established more schools in different parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

(ii) The attitude of the Seng Khasi

Babu Jeebon Roy, Chandranath Roy, Sib Charan Roy and other senior leaders decided to promote the spirit of patriotism and nationalism among the people of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. They planned to have an indigenous association of the Khasi and Jaintia people. This association will work for the welfare of the Khasi-Jaintia people in general and for the preservation of the Khasi culture and religion in particular. Eventually, on 23rd November, 1899 ‘Ka Seng Khasi’ was inaugurated with Babu Chandranath Roy as its first Secretary and the post of president was regularized only from 1955 onwards.

As every effect has a cause, so also there are some causes which led to the establishment of ‘Ka Seng Khasi’ in the year 1899 A.D. Some of these causes may be briefly mentioned as follows:

(a) The rapid progress of Christianity in term of school establishment and opening up more mission centres in Khasi and Jaintia Hills was considered to be a challenge to the Khasi traditional culture and religion. It was a struggle for survival and preservation of the Khasi traditional values in term of cultural heritage and the age-long Khasi religious teachings. J.B.Bhatacharjee, a well known historian in North East India recorded the expressions of the leaders of ka Seng Khasi as follows:
The progress of Christianity was considered as a challenge to the traditional culture of the Khasis and the official patronage to the evangelists made it apparent that the indigenous religion would be extinct in not too far future. This situation made a section of the Khasi intellectuals to resort to certain measures for the preservation of their religion and culture by inspiring the people with that every Khasi should be proud of his rich heritage. The 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 leading to the establishment of the Seng Khasi.\(^{12}\)

(b) The leaders of the Seng Khasi were strongly influenced by the Bengali Hindus. For instance, Babu Jeebon Roy was the first Khasi to enter the Government service who was promoted to the prestigious rank of a senior Extra Assistant Commissioner. He was greatly influenced by his Hindu friends when he was a student in Calcutta (Kolkata) and his profound knowledge in Hindu classics like the Geeta, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata and other masterpieces in Sanskrit and Bengali religious literature. He also regarded Khasi Religion as a sister religion of Hinduism.

(c) The spirit of nationalism was at work among the leaders of Seng Khasi, especially among the Khasi intellectuals. Sib Charan Roy who thought contemplatively on the close proximity between Khasi Religion and Hindu Religion (Hinduism) inspired his fellow Khasis with the spirit of nationalism. He was an active member of the Indian National Congress and publicized Indian nationalism among the Khasis and always focused the similarities between Khasi and Hindu culture both in his writings and public speeches.

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\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 3
(d) It was due to the love of nationalist education and traditional culture that the leaders of *Ka Seng Khasi* did not pay any attention to the sharp criticism from any Church quarter against the *Seng Khasi*. They had a strong determination to consolidate themselves in order to combat the Christian education by promoting nationalist education. Interestingly Sib Charan Roy looked upon Khasi Religion as a species in the genus of Indian culture.

(iii) The Aims and Objectives of *Ka Seng Khasi*

The Seng Khasi which came into being on the 23rd November, 1899 was not a political organization. It was a socio-cultural organization of the Khasi people. Normally, the membership was given to those Khasis who still continued to adhere to the traditional Khasi Religion. It was exclusive in nature and spirit. It emerged as a reaction against the attitude and the works of the Christian Missionaries in Khasi and Jaintia Hills during the pre-independent period. To a great extent it was anti-Missionaries and anti-Britishers. This organization was limited to the Khasi people only. The Khasi Christians were not expected to join this organization except those who were re-converted Khasi traditional religion. Some of the aims and objectives of *ka Seng Khasi* may be shown as follows:

(i) To foster a sense of brotherhood among the Khasis who still retain their socio-cultural and religious heritage.
(ii) To create consciousness of God, the Sovereign Lord, the Almighty the Creator, the omnipotent, the omniscient.

(iii) To earn righteousness through service and to respect one's own fellowmen with the sense of humanity and divinity.

(iv) To work for the mental and physical development of the fellow members and the way of living and moral and social conduct.

(v) To work for the advancement of education.

(vi) To encourage national sports like archery, cultural dances and social festivals.

(vii) To undertake welfare and development activities such as maintenance of cremation ground for those who dispose of the dead bodies according to tradition and religion.\(^{13}\)

To recapitulate, the Seng Khasi started as a movement to achieve certain goals which may be pointed out as (a) A religious solidarity movement (b) Tribalism solidarity movement (c) A movement towards nationalism. I have intended to briefly explain as follows:

(a) **As a Religious Solidarity Movement**

The Khasi leaders, at all cost, wanted to preserve their traditional religion because they considered it as the core of culture. This movement strengthened the solidarity of the people to a great extent. It helped the Khasis as a tribe, to put up a valiant resistance against the onslaught of powerful external forces like Christianity and

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Western civilization. It was also an attempt to preserve and protect the traditional customs, laws and rights of the Khasi people. No doubt, that the leaders of the Seng Khasi have been inspired by their allegiance to the traditional values. In the name of religion the leaders appealed to come together and express their solidarity under the banner of State Religion. It was with a view to promote religious unity that Jeebon Roy wrote two books on Khasi Religion. (i) *Ka Niam Jong Ki Khasi* (The Religion of the Khasis) and (ii) *Ka Kitab Shaphang Uwei U Blei* (A Book on One God).

**(b) Tribal Solidarity Movement**

The leaders of Ka Seng Khasi tried to convince that the Khasis as an ethnic group should come together on one platform. The emphasis of ka Seng Khasi on tribal heritage has gone to produce the spirit of tribalism. The word ‘tribe’ is originally derived from the Latin word ‘tribus’. It has been defined differently by different scholars at different times. The *Compact Oxford Dictionary* (2005) defines the word ‘tribe’ as “*A social group in a traditional society consisting of linked families or communities sharing customs and beliefs*”. The Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in his Report for the year 1952 has listed eight common features. These are: (i) They live away from the civilized world in the inaccessible parts lying in the forests and hills. (ii) They belong to either one of the three
stocks – Negritos, Australoids Mongoloids (iii) They speak the same tribal dialect (iv) Profess primitive religion known as “Animism” in which the worship of ghosts and spirits is the most important element. (v) Follow primitive occupations such as gleaning, hunting and gathering of forest products (vi) They are largely carnivorous or flesh and meat eaters (vii) They live either naked or semi-naked using tree-barks and leaves clothing (viii) They have nomadic habits and love for drink and dance. But in Indian context, the tribes are those ethnic groups recognized by the State Government and the Central Government of India which have been scheduled by the President’s Scheduled Tribes Order, 1950 when the Constitution of India came into force.

As it has been pointed earlier, the word ‘Khasi’ is a generic term. The Khasis have been listed by the President of India (1950) in the list of Scheduled Tribes. They are the aboriginal inhabitants of Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. Their society is a matrilineal society.

(c) A Movement towards Nationalism

The rejection and opposition of some Khasi leaders against the negative attitude of the Christian Missionaries in Khasi and Jaintia Hills was mainly due to the fact that the spirit of Nationalism was at work in the mind and hearts of the leaders of the Khasi tribal Society. It

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became apparent in 1923 when they organized the ‘Khasi National Durbar’. The word ‘Nationalism’ plainly speaking, is the spirit of attachment to one’s native soil. It is a devotion to the State. It binds people to a family, a clan, a village or a city. It is a state of mind which synthesizes historicity with territoriality. It is founded on primordial elements like race, language, cultural tradition, religion and territory. It is obvious, that the leaders and members of the Seng Khasi have been awakened to a great extent, by the spirit of Nationalism. We should also bear in mind that the Khasis had produced a good number of freedom fighters.