CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION
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In this chapter we would summarize and highlight the salient points discuss in detail in the previous chapter.

I

Pdefngshnong, the village we studied consists of people who had migrated at different times from various places, near and distant, and belong to 92 kurs. There was neither any domination of any particular kur in political economic or numerical terms; nor any stratification amongst them. Our sample of 40 households had representation from 27 kurs. Most of the kurs were found to have more than one household each. This clearly showed a lack of kinship network amongst the households within the village.

The population per household varied on an average between 7-8 persons which was in conformity with the average population per household at the state level. Looking at the age structure of the population we can reach the conclusion that the two-thirds of the population was below 40 years and therefore could be called young. Similarly, two-thirds of the population consisted of Christians in the village.
The level of education was rather low yet there were very few illiterates in the village. There was an almost equal number of persons who were undermatric and those who had studied up to graduation. If there is any indication towards a high rate of school dropouts it was equally true that no child was sitting idle at home. Those who had discontinued their studies at an early stage were engaged in occupational activity. This was true for members of both the sexes. Irrespective of the sex difference most of them were engaged in low income occupations. The various factors as discussed in the text (Chapter II) explain the low economic level of households.

II

It has been pointed out above that most of the households in our sample were found to be unrelated in terms of kinship which means that their kinship network cuts across the village boundaries. It is perhaps due to the characteristic features of the rules of residence in Khasi society which makes all the male and female members but for the youngest daughter disperse away from the natal group after marriage. There is no restriction on the elder daughters to continue to stay with their mothers even after marriage. No doubt, for doing so they must have socially valid reasons
— either the youngest daughter was too young to look after the parents, or the youngest daughter had to move out for some reasons; or any other such convincing reasons. The elder daughters have a right to return with their children after a divorce with their husband or after the death of their husband. Of course, if any of the elder daughters remained a spinster she may continue to live with the mother and later with the youngest sister. Similarly, bachelor sons, divorced or widowed sons may also return to their mother — in the case of the latter two they do not bring the children with them. Same is true with mother's sisters and brothers if the mother happens to be the youngest in her group of siblings. In exceptional circumstances the society allows the married sons to stay with the parents. Consequently we come across a variety of domestic compositions in terms of the number of generations living together as well as the consanguines and affines living together. This makes it difficult to fit them into any of the family types. We therefore chose to take household as the unit of study. This household unit is called ing in the society.

Those siblings who disperse after marriage and set up independent ing in places far away from the village continue to maintain kinship links and express kin-group solidarity through the institution of kpooh and ing seng at the
operational level (the kur is a wider unit and kur identity is revoked for very limited purposes). Kpoh consists of all the ings set up by the married female children from the same mother. In general terms it includes also the ings set up by the succeeding generations of married female daughters as well. Each kpoh expresses unity of all its constituents ing through ing seng which is actually the ing of the mother. But in practice a tendency can be noticed of splitting of the original kpoh into smaller and localised kpoh with the establishment of separate ing seng as the focus of each parent kpoh. Society legitimize this particular and called it phiah kpoh. It is no wonder that with constant dispersal of members and the practice of phiah kpoh members of a particular generation find it difficult to trace their descent beyond 2-3 generations. It is then that the kur identity comes in handy and saves them from committing incest. Society is very particular about observing the rules of incest which prohibits marrying within the mother's group as well as some relatives in the group of the father.

Ban on the intra-kur marriages in the context of our village means that more number of households are available for establishing alliance relationship. That is why we found that marriages within the village were quite common. The position of affine in the Khasi society is also of great
significance. This is quite evident from the fact that husband's mother plays very important role after her son gets the first child. The bond between father's mother and son's children is very strong. The children shows greater respect to their father's mother than to their mother's mother in the sense that the children dare not take such liberties with the former as they might take with the latter. The former is considered to be domineering and the society believes that she is vested with additional powers of curse and blessing as compared to the latter.

III

Inheritance of property can be viewed in terms of the nature of property which is transferred from one generation to another. The society makes a distinction between two types of property which is transmitted between two consecutive generations. The ancestral property and the self-acquired property. The former is understood in relation to the mother and the latter is understood in both the parents. Thus ancestral property is that which the mother had herself inherited while the self-acquired property is that which both the parents had created through their own efforts — singly or jointly. Whereas, the society puts certain restrictions on the manner in which the ancestral property could be transferred it gives greater freedom in
relation to the self-acquired property. The youngest daughter has a bigger claim over the ancestral property as compared to the elder daughters or the sons. The elder daughters at the time of their marriage are given smaller shares from the ancestral property and they lose all claims over the rest thereafter. But, they are more than compensated by giving them a right to be maintained by their youngest sister whenever they are in a crisis. We can say therefore that on the one hand, the elder daughters have an absolute right of ownership over their share of ancestral property and in addition to this they enjoy a further right to share the remaining part of ancestral property which is left by the mother in the ing khadduh. However, the only reservation is that they should be able to justify the exercise of this additional right which can only be done by proving their inability to sustain themselves and their children independently. The youngest daughter is always in an advantages position because she continues to stay in her mother's house with all the facilities thereby escaping the difficulty of setting up a new household. She can bring in her husband to live with her and make use of the ancestral property for the maintenance of her own family. She is not permitted to dispose of this property at her own discretion. It is here that her brother who does not inherit any part of this
property comes into the picture. They enjoy the right to maintenance like the elder sisters and the right to live in their mother's house if they remain a bachelor or decide to return alone after divorce or widowhood. Besides this they enjoy another right which is very important and exclusive to the male members of a group — that is, the right to manage the property and the right to be consulted before any decision to dispose of the property could be taken. It could be said then that the youngest daughter has only the right to use the property. These positions were clearly evident from our data when we examined the composition of households in our sample. However, some strains may be visible if the quantum of ancestral property may be very meagre or some other factors come into play. But then a discussion on the conflicts is beyond the purview of our work.

IV

An interesting interplay can be observed between the ancestral property and the self-acquired property at every generation regularly. The self-acquired property of both the parents in any generation become transmitted property for the children of both sexes in the subsequent generation. There is no restriction on the father to give his self-acquired property or income (ka kamai ing khun) to
his children and his natal home has no claim over it. There is no restriction on either of the parents to distribute their respective ka kamai ing khun amongst the male children as well. Moreover, the parents have full rights over their kamai nongkhynraw which they had earned before their marriage and by working on the ancestral properties of their respective mothers.

Ka kamai ing khun(227,413),(335,439) received by the female children acquires the status of nongtymmen (ancestral property) in the third generation from the parents. Thus there is a constant process of fission and fusion or distribution and accumulation of ancestral property at alternate generations. The point to be noted here is that the husband-father coming from another group contributes materially to the formation and accumulation of the ancestral property in his wife's lineage but has no say in its management. If he is denied the right of counsel on the ancestral property of his wife's group and in which he has played an active role then he is given this dominant position over the affairs of the ancestral property of his mother's group in which he may not have made any significant contribution after marriage.

V

After discussing the various issues involved in the question of inheritance of property in relation
to the kinship structure of society we would still maintain
that our work may have the same limitations which could
apply to any micro level study which is descriptive and
explanatory in nature. We therefore hesitate to make any
claim about its generalization about the entire Khasi society
which we think shows regional variation in various aspects.
Moreover, we could not include the conflict cases in the
application of the principle of inheritance because coinci-
dently they did not find expression in our sample for reasons
beyond the control of the sampling techniques of randomness.
Our reading on secondary literature describing the situation
in other parts of Khasi Hills particularly where agricultural
land has been a common asset of property indicated the pre-
sence of conflict in the inheritance of property. In our
opinion a study of such cases would require full length
independent enquiry which we propose to undertake in future.