Demographic studies on tribal population of India are not many and still less are data on matriarchal population where women enjoy higher status.

The Jaintias of the Jaintia Hills District of the state of Meghalaya is the best example existant today of a society, which is nearest to the matriarchy. They are matrilocal and matrilineal people. They trace their descent from female ancestress. They reckon their descent from the mother, that is along the female lines. Property is inherited from the mother by the youngest daughter. The earnings of the male members go to their mothers' family. The matrilocal residence, matrilineal descent and inheritance of property through the female line, which add to the status of women do also exist among the Khasis and the Garos of the same State. The Jaintias are unique, because they have a traditionally altogether different system of marriage, the 'Night Visit Marriage System' (NVS), in which the husband comes to his wife's house after dusk and leaves for his mother's house before dawn and maintains this practice so long the marriage-bond remains. During his stay with his wife, he does not even partake a cup of tea. He also need not look after his children. As a matter of
fact, the husband's role in his wife's family is only biological. But with the advent of Christianity, urbanization and modernization, this system of marriage is losing its ground.

Divorce, among the Jaintias is not rare. After the dissolution of marriage, they can remarry. There are women who are found to marry more than two times. One woman has found who married up to 7 times.

Most of the Jaintias live in rural areas. Only a few of them are found to live in Jowai, the district headquarters, which is the lone urban centre in the district.

Traditionally, the Jaintias are animist. Their traditional religion is known as the Niamtre. Quite a good number of Jaintias are found to have professed Christianity. Some of the Jaintias were converted to Hinduism in the long past under the patronage of the Jaintia King. They are found only in one village.

The present work, endeavours to study the fertility and infant and child mortality of the three religions groups of the Jaintias, living in the rural as well as in the urban areas.

This study is based on the data collected from two rural areas, namely; Nartiang and Mihmyntdu villages and from the only urban centre, Jowai during 1992-93. A total of 847 numbers of households (431 from the urban area and 416 from the rural areas) were surveyed. From these households, altogether 1091 (554 from the rural areas and 537 from the urban area) numbers of married Jaintia women were interviewed, following the questionnaire method.

Three structured schedules were designed to collect the information regarding (i) general demographic composition, (ii) fertility
and mortality, and (iii) cultural values related with fertility and family planning. In addition, the case study method was followed in order to supplement some of the findings of the study evidence.

In understanding the population in details, demographic compositions have been studied based on age, sex, marital status, rural-urban residence, education and occupation.

Fertility among the Jaintia women has been studied in relation to various bio-social correlates, such as, age at menarche, age at marriage, age at first delivery, age specific fertility, fertility based on rural-urban residence, religion, education, occupation, marriage system (women following night visit marriage system and women who do not follow this system), number of marriages, age at last delivery, age at menopause and fertility in completed families.

An attempt has also been made to explore the various family planning methods used by the Jaintia men and women. It has also been intended to examine the various cultural dimensions affecting fertility as well as mortality.

Finally, an attempt has been made, to study the infant and child mortality. The study includes sexwise mortality in various age groups of mothers, mortality at different ages, mortality according to birth order, mortality according to educational and occupational status of couples, mortality in relation to the system of marriage and number of marriages, symptoms and causes of mortality and relationship between fertility and mortality. Apart from these aspects, pregnancy wastage on the basis of mother's age, marriage system and number of marriages have also been investigated.