Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Khasi society is changing fast. The influence of changes brought about by education and modernization has had a decisive impact on the life and culture of the people. One of the most prominent cultural traditions of the Khasis is the institution of the maternal uncle (*u kñi*). *U kñi* has been, since time immemorial, a central figure in Khasi society. If he is the *kñi rangbah* (chief uncle) of the clan (*kur*), then he wields great authority among his clan members. He functions as the chairperson of the *Dorbar-kur* (Assembly of the *Kur*). A *kñi* of the *kpoh* (descendants of a single ancestress) instead exercises his authority only among the members of the *kpoh*. However, today we witness the gradual decline of the role of *U Kñi* among the Khasis especially at the level of the *kur*. His traditional role has gradually been taken over by the father of the family. This transition has in turn transformed Khasi society considerably in the recent years. It is the importance and significance of this transition that has prompted me to undertake this study.

Actually, almost every married man in the Khasi society is both a *kñi* (uncle) and a *kpa* (father) simultaneously. He is a *kñi* in his sisters’ or in his cousins’ families while
he is a *kpa* in his children’s family. However, the role of man as *kñi* has always dominated the Khasi society in the past. The *kpa*-ship was to a great extent played down. In fact, the father is usually referred to as “*u nongai khun*” (one who begets children).

The changing role from the *kñi* to the father of the family in Khasi society has a tremendous significance for the family and for the society at large. It is not merely a change of role, but also a change of cultural paradigm. This change is bound to affect the lifestyle, value system and behaviour of the Khasis. The transition has to a great extent also affected the identity of the Khasis. Hence the proposed research is significant for the Khasis of the present generation in particular.

This research hinges upon the central concept of patriarchy. Hence, I may briefly explain the concept as it is perceived for the purpose of this study. Patriarchy refers to an institutionalized domination of women by men. Most societies in the world exhibit some form of patriarchy in their social stratification. Even the Khasi social system, although matrilineal in nature, has a unique form of patriarchy where the *kñi* (maternal uncle) exercised authority over the family members. He acted as the adviser, mediator, a disciplinarian and a helper in times of need. The maternal uncle was by tradition the centre of authority and economy, the pivot of the whole family or the clan. He had control over his sisters’ children and he safeguarded the well-being and integrity of the clan. In the last few decades some changes are seen in the Khasi social system whereby the patriarchal role traditionally held by the *kñi* is gradually being assumed by the father of the family. Although the institution of *kni* still exists its role and status are expected to be no longer what it used to be in the past.
1.2. JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

After a long period of contact with the British administration and with Christianity in particular, the Khasi society has undergone tremendous socio-cultural and economic changes. This is seen in the changes in dress patterns, housing, food habits and life style in general.\(^5\) With the establishment of Shillong as the premier capital of Northeast India, the process of migration from the rural areas was set in motion. This in turn has affected the traditional family system among the Khasis. The processes of urbanization and Christianization have been greatly responsible for the weakening of the traditional roles of the \(kñi\) as the ultimate male authority and of the \(khatduh\) as the custodian of family religion. The power of the \(kñi\) has now been toned down to a great extent.\(^6\) The adoption of Christianity as a new religion has greatly affected the cultural life of the Khasis. The traditional cultural practices like erecting megaliths, household and community celebrations and festivals have been largely abandoned. The cultural practices related to marriage, funeral, house building etc have become almost extinct.\(^7\) Although some basic elements of culture like matriliny, traditional polity, inheritance etc, have survived yet many other aspects of culture and tradition have disappeared. For this reason this study is considered opportune and important:

a) Since the Khasi society is undergoing a great socio-cultural transformation due to reasons cited above, it is necessary that a scientific study be undertaken in order to understand the process. Understanding the various factors of changes and their dynamics may enable the people concerned to adapt themselves more effectively to these changes.
b) Socio-cultural changes and transitions should not be taken incognito but they should become a subject of serious study and reflection. Taking these things for granted will spell the doom of a culture. Great civilizations in the world have always made significant studies and reflections on their cultural changes and transitions. Therefore in the face of such a serious cultural transition of family and clan structure, the Khasis need to undertake an elaborate study of the same.

c) It is always important to ascertain the impact and significance of any cultural change in a society to enable a better comprehension of the situation. Such knowledge can be obtained only through a scientific study of the problem. Consequently, this study bears substantial importance and significance in the context of the Khasi society.

d) Knowledge of the socio-cultural situation in one’s society has both a preventive and corrective value. It can help the community to prevent certain factors from affecting the culture adversely or it can also correct certain faults which if left untended may corrode the cultural wealth of the people.

e) This study may also contributive towards formulating future policies regarding Khasi family system which the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) or the Jaiñtia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC), undertakes from time to time. From the perspective of policy making, this study therefore is necessary and significant.
1.3. **DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS USED**

Before we go deep into the study of the problem, it is necessary to understand some of the most basic terms that are being used in the study.

*Kur:* The concept of *kur* (clan) is very central in Khasi society. *Kur* refers to a cluster of *kpoh* (families) who bear the same surname and who trace their origin to a common distant primeval ancestress. The origin of a clan is often shrouded in mystery and many were perhaps born due to the process of migration. The concepts of *kur* and *kpoh* are very fundamental in understanding the socio-cultural structure of Khasi society.

*Kpoh:* This term refers to a sub clan among the Khasis. A *kpoh* is a consanguinal group of families who descend from a single ancestress. The size of the *kpoh* therefore depends on the chronological distance of the ancestress which will in turn determine the number of generations.

*Ka Ing:* This term refers to a family unit within the *kpoh* (sub-clan). It is the smallest social unit. It consists of the father, mother and their children.

*Kñi:* This term will be often repeated during the study. It is a Khasi terminology for the maternal uncle. There are two levels of *kñi*-ship among the Khasis. One is known as *kñi-rangbah* (major uncle, usually addressed as *ma-heh* or *ma-rangbah*) who is the eldest brother of the *kpoh* (family) and the others are the *kñi-khynnah* or *kñi-synrop*, the younger brothers. The *kñi-rangbah* exercises greater authority and plays a greater role than other brothers in the affairs of the family.
**Kpa:** This term refers to the father of the family. He is the executive head of the family and his life is linked to his wife and children. He is second only to the *kñi* in terms of authority in the family. While he is loved and respected by his wife and children as *u kpa u balah u baiai* (one who guides and provides), yet it is the *kñi* who is *de facto* controller of the family.

**Kñi-synrop:** This term is used for classificatory uncles, namely, the younger brothers of the *kñi* if he has any. Classificatory uncles are also termed in Khasi as *kñi-*khynnah (young uncles). They do have some influence on their nephews and nieces.

**Kpa-synrop:** The term is used to indicate the classificatory fathers, namely, the elder or younger brother/s of the father of a family. In Khasi there is a title for each of them: *Pa-heh* (eldest brother), *Pa-deng* (middle brother), *Pa-khynnah* (younger brother) and *Pa-duh* (youngest brother). They also have some influence on the family although not as much as the classificatory uncles.

Patriarchy and matriliny: Patriarchy refers to the system where the father or some other male acts as head of the family and takes all important decisions on behalf of his family. In Khasi society it refers to the authority and control of the *kñi* (mother’s brother) over his *kur/kpoh* members and that of the *kpa* in his family. Matriliny is a form of kinship structure where family trees are organized around females with all children becoming members of their mother’s descent group.
1.4. **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The present study deals with an important aspect of Khasi family structure, namely, the roles of the *kñi* (uncle) and the *kpa* (father). There is a gradual transition of roles between these two traditional institutions. So far no extensive study has been made on this particular development in Khasi society.

The data collected from the two sample localities and from other independent sources, will form the basis of this study. The study will also try to understand the factors (endogenous and exogenous) responsible for such transition. Further, the study will examine the impact the transition has on Khasi family and clan in particular and on Khasi society in general.

1.5. **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

a) To study the changing patriarchy from *kñi* (maternal uncle) to the father (*kpa*) in the Khasi society. This is a socio-cultural phenomenon that is taking place today especially in urban and semi-urban areas.

b) To understand the process of this transformation as it is being seen and felt today. To identify both the endogenous and the exogenous factors that are facilitating such transformations.
1.6. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Before we undertake an investigation into the problem of this research, it is necessary to have a review of literature. As far as the knowledge of the present researcher goes, no serious study till date has been done on patriarchy in the matrilineal Khasi society. This is evident from the following review of literature on this society. However, as far as cultural movements are concerned, there have been quite a few significant ones in the past few decades. For this reason, we need to review these movements and their objectives as well so as to have a complete picture of the problem in hand.

1.6.1. Scholarly Works

McLennan (1865) proposes a theory that matriarchy was a primitive system in society due to the practice of what he termed “rude polyandry” wherein it was easier to establish kinship systems from blood relationships traced through women.

According to Maine (1906), patriarchy was the starting point of every social system. His defense of patria potestas was based on his theory that male dominance was a characteristic of any society.

Nakane’s (1967) study is perhaps one of the earliest scholarly research on matriliny in Meghalaya. Her study throws a lot of light on the unique family systems of the Garos and the Khasis. Her study on Khasi matriliny shows that the status of a man who marries the youngest daughter, that is the heiress, is rather weak because in such cases the management of property and all economic activities are controlled by the
maternal uncle (kñì) or the wife’s brother. Even his works are under constant supervision of this authority. If the kñì resides in the same family, the children appear to be more attached and obedient to him than to their father. The man (father) in this kind of family situation lives in constant relational tension with his in-laws. On the other hand the status of a man who marries a non-heiress, is stable and better established and his parental authority is stable. Men who marry non-heiress are able to establish new ìng (house) and are not dependent on natal ìng. As such, the maternal uncles (kñì) do not usually meddle in their family affairs. Thus the husbands in such families enjoy more independence and authority.

Gurdon (1975) speaks of the father in Khasi family as one who is addressed as U Thawlang or one who creates together. Even after his death he is revered by the family as U Thawlang and propitiation is offered to him.

Mawrie (1981) opines that the matrilineal system has been practised by the Khasis since time immemorial. According to him lineage is traced through women because God himself created the ancestress to expand the Khasi race. Secondly, the Khasi ancestress is considered as complementing the Godhead and in prayers she is always mentioned next to God. Thirdly, since men were often engaged in wars and had no time to look after the family affairs, so the women were endowed with the right to lineage and the management of the families. The Khasi man when he enters into marriage always seeks for offspring. He considers this as a proof of his virility and a favourable sign from God. It is a strong Khasi custom that the child or children of a woman pay a traditional homage to their meikha (mother of the husband). This brings
joy and honour to the parents of the man. This custom is known as *ka ngu h meikha pakha*. Thus when the couple has no children it is a cause of sorrow for the *meikha* and this is looked upon as a sort of curse from God.

Mawrie (1983) also writes about the origin of family, clan, religion and culture. In a section on the Khasi institutions of uncle and father, the author throws important insights into the origin of family, but the discussion on concepts of *kñi* and *kpa* is very skeletal. Regarding the *kñi’s* role, it is simply said that he is responsible for his clan members from their birth to their death.

Das Gupta (1989) is of the opinion that the Khasi man does not enjoy the same status that his wife enjoys in the family. He is usually considered only as a begetter (*shongkha*). If he happens to marry the last daughter of the family (*khatduh*), his status and role is even less. The author comments on the better position of the husband in War Khasi areas where the man wields greater authority over his wife and children.

Nongrum (1989) writes about the traditional image and authority of the *kñi* in his own clan. In fact, a married man visits his children’s house only at night while during the day he resides in his mother’s house and he works and earns for his clan members. Among his clan members he exercises great authority and commands respect. He is the administrator of the ancestral property. He is also the priest of his family and his clan and is hence responsible for the rituals of the clan. The *kñi* acts as a disciplinarian of his nephews and nieces. He counsels them and at times punishes them for their faults. The author also speaks about the socio-cultural dilemma because the present day *kñi* has lost his status and authority on account of his own fault. The author writes at length
about the traditional image and authority of the *kpa* among the Khasis. He is referred to as *u thawlang* (procreator) and *uba buh ka longshynrang longkynthei* (one who determines the sexes of children).  

Sen (1992) brings together some scholarly articles on Khasi family structure as mentioned here below:

a) “Status of women in traditional Khasi culture” by Juanita War, where the author writes about the status and role of women especially the *khatduh* in Khasi family. The privileged role and authority of the *kñi* is also referred to here. He is the one who the author thinks makes the final decisions in family affairs.

b) “Women in Khasi Society” by I. M. Syiem deals with the privileged status of women in the Khasi matrilineal society. It points out that the position of authority and control rests in the hands of the maternal uncles and the fathers. The article refers to the *kñi’s* role as the one responsible for the family/clan rituals.

According to Kuper (1994) with the growth of property and the practice of sons succeeding as heirs to their fathers’ estates, gradually the system of kinship through males came into existence. Thus patriarchy became a common phenomenon in most groups of people.

Bareh (1997) in his elaborate study on Khasi culture gives a general view of family organization, marriage, inheritance etc, and has a small section on *kñi* and *kpa*. According to the author, the *kñi* is the one who plays an important role in family affairs like the marriage of the clan members in Khasi family.
Chacko (1998) also brings together a collection of scholarly articles on the Khasi family system which throw abundant light on this issue. The following are the most important articles which deal with this subject:

a) “The Khasi Concept of Family: Changes in structure and function” by War throws light on the Khasi concept of family and family structure. It explains elaborately the units of Khasi society from the micro unit of ḫing to the macro unit of kur.\(^{30}\) Further, it explores the on-going changes in the Khasi family structure and functions due to modern development and its influencing factors.\(^{31}\)

b) “The Khasi Matriliny: Its Past and its Future” by Lyngdoh makes an enlightening reading on the traditional status and role of the kñi in Khasi society.\(^{32}\) There is a discussion on the changing Khasi family and the factors that effect such changes like Christianity and modernization. According to the author Christianity has not effected any significant change in Khasi matriliny.\(^{33}\) The article also deals with various socio-cultural movements that want to bring about some changes in the present family system.

c) “Some aspects of Change in the Family System of the Khasis” by Mawlong has great significance for the present research. The article is based on a simple survey in Shillong. The study shows that there is a strong desire for change in the present family system. It reveals that men and women feel that the kpa should become the head of the family.\(^{34}\) The study also shows that most Khasis are opposed to changing matriliny and that matriliny does not undermine the role of the kpa. It also shows that kñi-ship today has become more of a symbolic than a decisive institution.\(^{35}\) Today Khasi society in both rural and urban settings is experiencing a lot of changes. Modernization, education,
urbanization, and Christianization have greatly influenced the Khasi family system. The roles of the Khatduh have also changed considerably.

d) “Changes in the matrilineal system of Khasi-Jaiñtia Family” by Passah explores the traditional roles of the youngest daughter and the uncle in the Khasi-Jaiñtia family.³⁶ There is also a discussion on the origin and history of different cultural movements to change the present Khasi family system.³⁷

e) “The impact of Christianity on the Khasi-Jaiñtia matrilineal family” by Snaitang examines the traditional roles of the kñi and the kpa in Khasi society, where the former wields tremendous authority while the latter becomes insignificant, “u khun ki briew” (someone else’s son).³⁸ The article also deals at length with the cultural changes on Khasi family system brought about by factors like British rule and Christianity. However, it is seen that these factors have not brought about radical changes in traditional matriliny, inheritance and system of village administration.³⁹

“In-law conflicts”, Women’s reproductive lives and the roles of their mothers and husbands among the matrilineal Khasi”, by Leonetti et al (2007) shows that the presence of the grandmother (i.e., the mother-in-law) in the household keeps the husband at the periphery while the status of the father is enhanced by the absence/dead status of the grandmother. The study reveals that while the mother-in-law takes a protective stance the husband takes an exploitative stance with regard to the reproductive woman.⁴⁰ The co-residence with her mother gives economic security to the woman and protects her from her husband’s reproductive exploitation but it also increases divorce. Death of the mother leads to greater dependence and acceptance of
husband as household head. However access to mother’s resources may weaken such dependence.\textsuperscript{41}

Rapthap (2005) writes about the Khasi hereditary custom. Some sections of the book, deal with the \textit{kñi} and his declining role and authority. According to the author, the causes of the decline of \textit{kñi}-ship are the following:

a) The emergence of the practice of \textit{kamai inglok} (earning for the wife) and the gradual disappearance of \textit{kamai ingkur} (earning for the \textit{kur/kpoh/ïng}). Because he does not bring his earnings to his mother’s family, the \textit{kñi} has gradually lost his authority over the members of his \textit{kur/kpoh/ïng}.\textsuperscript{42}

b) Since \textit{kñi}-ship is closely linked to the practice of the traditional religion wherein the \textit{kñi} is the priest of the \textit{kur/kpoh/ïng}, therefore with the conversion to Christianity the role of the \textit{kñi} has been curtailed.

c) Lastly the author argues that the enactment of the Law of Inheritance by the British government in 1918 has dealt a blow to the authority of the \textit{kñi}. Earlier the \textit{kñi} had a great say in the administration of ancestral property, but the 1918 law has given the right to property to the \textit{khatduh} (last daughter).\textsuperscript{43}

d) The book also deals with the changing role of the \textit{kpa} in Khasi society. According to him, the \textit{kpa} today displays a greater responsibility towards his children’s upbringing. Consequently, he exercises more authority and influence among his children than their \textit{kñi} does. Further he suggests that the authority of the \textit{kñi} should be transferred to the \textit{kpa}.\textsuperscript{44}
Kharkrang (2012) gives an elaborate description of Khasi matrilineal system and its quintessence. At the same time he discusses what he calls “the winds of change” in the Khasi family system. He discusses the declining image of the *kñi* and the emerging figure of the *kpa* in today’s Khasi family.

As seen above, the studies of McLennan, Maine and Kuper provide a theoretical backdrop to the family system in human history and the emergence of matriarchy and patriarchy in society. This theoretical backdrop is essential for a better understanding of these basic concepts in the present study. In most other studies indicated above, the discussion is centered around the traditional status and authority of the *kñi* in contrast to that of the *kpa* and also about the matrilineal system of the Khasis. These serve as the context to this particular study. Such knowledge is essential before we discuss the present changes. However, some studies need special mention as they relate directly to the present research. Nakane’s study on matriliny is one such study. Her reference to a man marrying a non-heiress as having a better status as a *kpa* is perhaps true. However, the position of a man marrying an heiress has quite changed from the way she describes. The educational and economic status of the Khasi man today has brought about a tremendous change of his image in the family. Leonetti et al’s study similarly shows that a man who marries an heiress, where the grandmother is alive, is in a disadvantageous position because she controls her daughter’s reproductive agenda. Death of the grandmother enables the husband to take a more exploitative stance with regard to his wife. In cases where the husband commits his full income to his children he is likely to solicit more allegiance from the wife and exercise more authority. A study done by
Mawlong (1998) is more directly related to my study. Mawlong’s study has indicated that many Khasis are inclined to accept the changing patriarchy, that is, from the maternal uncle to the father. Although this is not an exhaustive study, it serves as an inspiration for the present research. The latest study done by Kharkrang (2012) on Khasi matriliney where he discusses the emerging status and role of the kpa in the present Khasi family, provides further inspiration to my present research. This particular study is quite an exhaustive discussion on the changing concept of patriarchy. As such it provides a perfect background to the present study.

1.6.2. Novels

The cultural discourse on patriarchy in Khasi society has found conflicting voice in Khasi literature. While the Khasi society is patriarchal, many prominent Khasi novelists have indicated a precarious position of men in Khasi society. This is seen in the following novels and dramas.

Tiewsoh (1975) depicts the ideal image of a Khasi father of the family, one who commands respect and love through his good character and devotion, in the novel Kam Kalbut in the character of U Melkhan. He is a father who laboured hard for his family. He even adopts the role of his children’s kśni in the engagement of his daughter Ritila.46

Nongrum (1988) depicts the less privileged position of male children in a Khasi family. The story shows how the parents of Lurstep coerced him to discontinue his education in order to make him work in the field while his sister Soni is being pampered by her parents.47 We also see a typical Khasi father, Shemphang, who has no control
over the situation. However, in volume II of the novel we see Lurstep as an ideal *kñi* who wanted to safeguard the well being of his sister.\(^\text{48}\) He also proves himself to be an ideal father who is responsible and industrious.

Synrem (1986) shows the father of Pynnehmon as a man of integrity, one who loves his family and acts responsibly. He cares for his children and admonishes them regularly.\(^\text{49}\) However, he is gradually depreciated by his wife till the point of being sent back to his clan members. At the same time Pynnehmon, the *khaduh*, tries to get rid of her eldest brother (*kñi*) from her house.\(^\text{50}\) The novel shows that the Khasi father undergoes tremendous psychological stress on account of being ignored and being deprived of his proper status and role in the family. He develops an inferiority complex when he sees that his children do not care for him as much as they do for their mother.

Sten (1989) shows that if there is no offspring marriage breaks off for the husband is not easily satisfied with adopted children. This is well depicted in the novel *Kwah Bymjukut* where U Abi becomes disenchanted with his wife Ka Pura because she is barren.\(^\text{51}\)

Pde (1991) shows how a Khasi father is capable of being responsible and dutiful towards his family. Bianglang, the father of Wandashisha, continues to look after his daughter even after his wife’s death. He remains a widower in order to bring her up with utmost care.\(^\text{52}\)
1.6.3. Plays

Jala (2010) depicts the struggle for control of the family between the *kñi* (maternal uncle) and the father of the family, which characterizes the Khasi society today in the drama *Haba ka Kupar jot ka Dawa* where the father U Ksan Umteng comes at loggerheads with his son Jwain over his authority in the family.\(^{53}\)

Pde (1987) shows that given the chance a Khasi father is capable of showing great devotion and responsibility towards his family. He has great concern for his children’s welfare as is seen in the drama *Yn Map?* where the father U Kyrshân displays great devotion to this two sons, U Donbor and U Wanbor.\(^{54}\)

Dkhar’s (2002) drama tells the tragic story of Banlum as an HIV/AIDS patient who unknowingly infected his wife and child with his disease. He is however shown as someone who in spite of odds has love for his family and an urge to bring up his children in a proper way. He feels remorse for his past sins and the fate he has brought upon his family.\(^{55}\)

In general Khasi literature tries to depict a positive image of the father. However, there is conscious attempt to indicate the weak position of a Khasi father in his family. The bipolar tension between him and the *kñi* is often depicted as a great disadvantage for the family.

1.6.4. Contemporary Movements

The post-British period saw a few socio-cultural movements among the Khasis. In the beginning it was more of a reaction against the cultural depreciation under the colonial
rule. Of late, movements have emerged which attempt to address the challenges of socio-cultural changes in the society especially the one related to patriarchy.

a) *Seng Iktiar Longbriew-manbriew (1961)*

*Ka Seng Iktiar Longbriew-Manbriew* (SIL) was actually started in Sohra in 1939. Their constitution published in 1961, states:

   a) That the *kpa* should have full authority in his family and that the wife should only be his help-mate.

   b) That in the absence of the *kpa* the eldest son should assume authority and if he is no longer alive then the second son takes over and then the third and so on.

   c) That if there are no sons, the eldest daughter should step into the *kpa’s* shoes.

   d) That parents should have the power to make wills for their children.

   e) That laws should be enacted to regulate marriages towards orderly family and social life.56

   The constitution provides for a radical change in Khasi lineage system and the right of inheritance. The movement however could not make much headway. In the course of time, some of its members wanted a change only in the right of inheritance and not in lineage.57

b) *Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai (1990)*

The issue of the role of the father in Khasi family has not remained in books or in the academic circles, but has also caught the attention of the society at large. It has assumed
a lot of social, political and cultural importance in modern Khasi society. In 1990 a
group of enlightened Khasis came together to form an organization called *Ka Syngkhong
Rympei Thymmai* (New Family System). This is a movement for change from matriliny
to patriliny.
The constitution of *Ka Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai* has the following objectives.

i) To empower the father of the family to be the head of his own wife and children and
that his wife should be his strong support.

ii) That the lineage of the family should henceforth be from the father’s side and no
longer from the mother.

iii) That the family property be equally divided among the sons and daughters.
However, the daughter will lose her share of the property if she marries a non-Khasi.

iv) That the eldest son of the family will assume the responsibility of looking after the
parents.

v) If the wife is harassed and persecuted by her husband the woman’s parents or
brothers and sisters have the right to recall her. She has the right to be protected by
her relatives.

vi) Any man who leaves his wife has the obligation to look after her well being until she
is married to another person and has her own family.58

The preamble to its constitution says, “to unite the people for generations to
come…the role of the man is very vital in the family. Therefore we have to empower the
father of the family and give him full responsibility over his wife, his children, his
family, family property and lineage so that there is uniformity among people and the country may be united”.

Today more and more Khasis have become conscious of the need of such changes in the family. This movement is becoming popular and gaining support.

c) *Mait Shaphrang Movement (MSM)*

This is a socio-cultural movement of some literate Khasis whose objective is to reform the society on the basis of the modern development. This group has spearheaded the movement for reform and rejuvenation of Khasi culture and tradition especially those connected with family life. In recent years the MSM has pressurized the government to consider the introduction of two bills, namely, *Registration of Marriage Act* and *Equitable Distribution of Self Acquired and Ancestral Property Act*. The first Act would help regularize marriages and become a deterrent for divorces while the second Act would empower male children and enable them to cope with the challenges of life.\(^{59}\)

1.6.5. *Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) Acts/Bills*

The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) was created on 26\(^{th}\) January 1950 under the provision of the 6\(^{th}\) Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Its objective is to safeguard the traditions and customs of the Khasi people and to uphold their traditional democratic system. For the last many decades this institution has been playing a major role in the socio-cultural life of the Khasi people. The KHADC has been
able to formulate many policies on behalf of the people. Some of the policies which have a great influence on the life of the Khasi people are discussed below:

a) *Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act of 1997*

This Bill was passed by the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) on 13th March 1997 and it received the assent of the Governor on 23rd February 2005. It was then published as an Act in the Gazette of Meghalaya on 25th February 2005. The Act is significant as it deals with important issues related to the Khasi society and culture, viz:

a) Definition of who a Khasi is by tradition and law. This clarifies the identity of a Khasi as differentiated from other people.  

b) The Act also specifies the concept and practice of *Tang-jait* and the role of the *kñi* in this traditional ceremony. 

c) This Act clarifies the criteria for a Khasi lineage like being born of a Khasi mother and following the Khasi custom and tradition. Observing the matrilineal system is considered as an indispensable criterion for a person to be considered a Khasi. In fact, the Act also mentions the criteria leading to the loss of Khasi status. 

This Act is of great value and significance with respect to the preservation of the Khasi matrilineal system which is at the core of Khasi culture itself. The stability of this system ensures the relevance of the different traditional institutions like *kñi*-ship. Moreover, it also clearly defines the status and role of the *kñi* and *kpa* in a Khasi family.
b) Village Administration Bill, 2011

This was placed for discussion in the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) in 2011 but is yet to become an Act in order to become operative. The Bill as the name suggests, is meant to safeguard the traditional democratic administration of Khasi villages. The foreword to the Bill speaks about the value-based Khasi administrative system in contrast to the post-modern materialistic governance. Some important and relevant aspects of the Bill are:

i) The Bill speaks about Dorbar-shnong (village council) and specifies the traditional role, powers and responsibilities of this council.

ii) In the section on election and nomination of the rangbah-shnong (headman), the Bill has made provisions to ensure that only Khasis are eligible to this post. In clause 7(b) it makes provision for a kñi or prominent member of a clan to assume the office of rangbah-shnong.

iii) The Bill has adequately specified the status, authority and responsibilities of the rangbah-shnong, dorbar shnong (village council) and the village development council.

This Bill in itself has got many positive aspects with regard to the status and authority of a Khasi man in society. By upholding the traditional role of the village democratic system, the Bill indirectly empowers the Khasi males who would either be a kñi or a kpa or both in any Khasi family or clan. This Bill which could become law in the near future, would have tremendous impact on the status and authority of the Khasi
males. It would at the same time safeguard the traditional patriarchal dimension of Khasi social system.

The above review of literature gives a bird’s eye view of the problem under investigation. It is evident that the socio-cultural changes that the Khasi society is experiencing, especially the arrival of Christianity, modernization and the interaction with other cultures, has caused a lot of conflict between tradition and change.

1.7. METHODOLOGY OF THE PRESENT STUDY

To study the specific problem selected for this particular research on Khasi society, we have identified two villages as sample. To represent the rural Khasi population, Marbisu village has been identified while Mawlai-Mawroh has been chosen to represent the urban Khasi population. Marbisu has been deliberately chosen because of its sizable number of Khasis who still uphold the traditional religion. Mawroh on the other hand has been chosen to represent the urban Khasi population.

1.7.1. The Population

For collection of data different parameters are considered, namely: (i) age, (ii) sex, (iii) religion, (iv) education (v) socio-economic status.

Questionnaires were served on a total of 500 persons in Marbisu and 300 in Mawroh. However, only 397 (that is 79.4%) responded from Marbisu and 205 (that is
68.3%) from Mawroh. Therefore the total number of respondents for the present study is 602.

1.7.2. Profile of the Respondents

In order to secure the required results of the analysis, the profile of the respondents chosen for this study consists of the following:

a) Men-women distribution

Table 1.1 below provides us the man-woman distribution of respondents in both Marbisu and Mawroh. It is evident that the women respondents are more than the men respondents. In Marbisu out of the total of 397, 239 (60.2%) are women and 158 (39.8%) are men. In Mawroh out of the total 205 respondents, 133 (64.9%) are women while 72 (35.1%) are men. Thus, of the total sample population of 602 respondents, 372 (that is 61.8% of the total percentage) are women and 230 (that is 38.2% of the total percentage) are men.

**Table 1.1 - Marbisu/Mawroh - Gender distribution of respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villages</th>
<th>To whom the questionnaires were served</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marbisu</td>
<td></td>
<td>245</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>60.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mawroh</td>
<td></td>
<td>146</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>391</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
b) Age

Table 1.2 gives us the age groups of the respondents. The respondents have been grouped under (i) 15 to 35, (ii) 36 to 55 and (iii) 56 and more. As the table indicates most of the respondents fall under the first age group. Thus of the total 602 respondents in both villages, 414 (68.8%) belong to the first age group, 128 (21.3%) belong to the second age group while 60 (9.9%) belong to the third age group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villages</th>
<th>Age of respondents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 - 35</td>
<td>36 - 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marbisu</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mawroh</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2 - Marbisu/Mawroh - Age of respondents

Table 1.3 indicates the religious affinity of the respondents in both the localities. In both majority of the respondents are Christians, in Marbisu 325 (81.9%) are christians and only 72 (18.1%) profess the traditional Khasi religion. In Mawroh instead, 191 (93.2%) are Christians and only 14 (6.8%) belong to the traditional religion. Thus of the total sample group of 602 respondents, 516 (85.7%) are Christians and 86 (14.3%) profess the traditional religion.

c) Religion

Table 1.3 indicates the religious affinity of the respondents in both the localities. In both majority of the respondents are Christians, in Marbisu 325 (81.9%) are christians and only 72 (18.1%) profess the traditional Khasi religion. In Mawroh instead, 191 (93.2%) are Christians and only 14 (6.8%) belong to the traditional religion. Thus of the total sample group of 602 respondents, 516 (85.7%) are Christians and 86 (14.3%) profess the traditional religion.
Table 1.3 - Marbisu/Mawroh - Religion of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villages</th>
<th>Religion of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marbisu</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>81.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mawroh</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>93.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

d) Education

Table 1.4 indicates the educational background of the respondents. The table shows that literacy is higher in Mawroh than in Marbisu. While post graduates and graduates of the total sample stands at 112 (28.2%), most of the respondents are in the category of higher secondary.

Table 1.4 - Marbisu/Mawroh - Educational qualifications of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villages</th>
<th>Educational Qualification of respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post Graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marbisu</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mawroh</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
e) Occupation

Table 1.5 indicates the occupations of the respondents in both localities. The total number of government employees is 54 (9.0%), those engaged in business are 58 (9.6%), the farmers number 56 (9.3%). Those engaged in other types of work form the majority of the respondents, 434 persons (72.1%).

Table 1.5 - Marbisu/Mawroh - Occupation of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villages</th>
<th>Occupation of the respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Govt. Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marbisu</td>
<td>31 7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mawroh</td>
<td>23 11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54 9.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.7.3. Tools used

In pursuing the research and in collecting the required data, the following tools were employed by the investigator:

1) Questionnaire

2) Interview schedule
1.7.4. Data Collection

Step I – Formulating the first draft of the Questionnaire

In formulating the questionnaire, first of all, the researcher had recourse to an open blue sky method wherein questions were noted at random keeping in mind the theme of the research. After this, they were grouped together under various sub-themes. This was followed by the process of shortlisting wherein inappropriate questions were rejected. Finally, 64 questions were selected and were grouped under 6 sub-titles. The sub-titles which are as follows:

I. Biodata (7 questions)

II. Image of the $kñi$ among the Khasis (12 questions)

III. Status of the $kñi$ today (15 questions)

IV. Role of the $kñi$ today (9 questions)

V. Status of the $kpa$ today (14 questions)

VI. Role of the $kpa$ today (7 questions)

Each question had options for respondents. Sections II, III and V had three response options (Agree, Disagree and Can’t Say). Sections IV and VI had three response options (Always, Seldom, Never). Therefore the questionnaire was a closed-ended one. The questionnaire was prepared in Khasi to enable all respondents to understand it properly.
Step II – Seeking experts’ opinion on the Questionnaire

When the first draft of the questionnaire was prepared as described above, it was given to three experts to obtain their opinions. The feedback in general was positive but it was suggested to reduce the number of questions from 64 to 58. As per this suggestion, the questions in each section were reduced as follows:

I. Biodata (7 questions)
II. Image of the kñi among the Khasis (11 questions)
III. Status of the kñi today (14 questions)
IV. Role of the kñi today (8 questions)
V. Status of the kpa today (12 questions)
VI. Role of the kpa today (6 questions)

This second draft was then approved by the research guide and the final draft was prepared for use.

Step III – Trial of the Questionnaire

This second draft of the questionnaire was then used on a trial basis. It was served to 20 persons (10 in Marbisu and 10 in Mawroh). The trial was meant to ascertain the validity, comprehensibility and relevance of the questionnaire. The result indicated that all the three criteria were satisfactorily met. The responses indicated that they understood the questions accurately.
Step IV – Final draft of the Questionnaire

Based on the outcome of the trial round, the questionnaire was finalized. Four questions were found to be redundant and so they were deleted from the list. The final questionnaire had 54 questions as follow:

I. Biodata (7 questions)
II. Image of the kñi among the Khasis (10 questions)
III. Status of the kñi today (13 questions)
IV. Role of the kñi today (7 questions)
V. Status of the kpa today (11 questions)
VI. Role of the kpa today (6 questions)

ii) Interview Schedule

Regarding the interview schedule, the investigator had prepared a schedule consisting of 22 questions. The details of the schedule are given in Table 1.6 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Questions</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Questions on Kñi</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Questions on Kñi synrop (classificatory uncles)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Questions on Kpa (father)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Questions on Kpa synrop (classificatory fathers)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total no. of Questions</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interview schedule was prepared both in Khasi and English. It was intended for oral as well as written responses.

1.8. **DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

a) Since the problem under investigation is an on-going socio-cultural reality, it is impossible to reach at a definitive conclusion. Therefore, this study cannot claim to make a final call on the issue. However, it throws sufficient light on this cultural phenomenon that the Khasi society is going through.

b) The study is limited to two sample localities, Marbisu and Mawlai-Mawroh, a few selected Khasi eminent persons, a few indigenous cultural movements: *Seng Khasi*, *Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai* and *Maitshaphrang Movement* and also the legal documents on issues related to Khasi family lineage and inheritance procured from the *Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC)*.

c) Since this problem has not been dealt extensively by anyone so far, except for a few indirect references to it, there is a limitation of available resources which could have helped to deepen our understanding of the issue. Therefore, much of the data collected have come from field research by way of responses to questionnaires and interviews.
NOTES

6 Cf. Ibid.
7 Cf. Ibid., 405.
8 Cf. Ibid., 286.
12 Cf. Ibid., 126.
13 Cf. Ibid., 129.
14 Cf. Ibid., 130.
16 Cf. Ibid., 71.
17 Cf. Ibid., 72.
18 Cf. Ibid., 65.
20 Cf. P. Das Gupta, Life and Culture of Marilineal Tribe of Meghalaya, 81.
21 Cf. Ibid., 84.
23 Cf. Ibid., 6.
24 Cf. Ibid., 10.
25 Cf. Ibid., 18.
26 Cf. Ibid., 27.
29 Cf. H. Bareh. The History and Culture of the Khasi People, 301-302.
31 Cf. Ibid., pp. 26-29.
33 Cf. Ibid., 41.
34 Cf. A. Mawlong, “Some aspects of Change in the Family System of the Khasis”, in Matriliny in Meghalaya, 85-86.
35 Cf. Ibid., pp. 87-88.
37 Cf. Ibid., 76-78.
39 Cf. Ibid., 67.
41 Cf. Ibid., p. 864.
43 Cf. Ibid., 55.


This group consists of persons employed as teachers and daily wagers like masons, building workers, cleaners etc.