Conclusion

As affirmed in the introduction, the study of textile reveals the diversity of techniques and accurate classification of our indigenous tribes. Every tribe throughout India has distinct weaving patterns which encouraged the study of the traditional costumes of the Khasis and the Jaintias. Their cultural and artistic significance facilitates demonstration of uniqueness in the patterns of art and craft activities, hence deserving not to be understated. These tribes have played an integral role in marking themselves different and thereby achieving aesthetic merit. Therefore, the research covered the cultural role and how it emphasized the designs and motifs utilized on the traditional textiles of these tribes. The Khasis and Jaintias have their own strong cultural belief and customs.

It has also been observed during the research that these tribes take great care of what they wear and do not part with their clothes until worn out. On demise of a tribal, all his belongings are burnt with his body. They wear specific costumes for a particular program with specific designs but on casual occasions they wear traditional costumes with a new design. The Jaintias are more liberal and acknowledged new designs. One can observe this phenomenon in their attire. This was perhaps due to cultural contact or what might possibly be called, in anthropological term, “Cultural expansion.” One can find that their dresses have two divisions – traditional and modern. In the course of this research, it was also established that the dressing pattern of all men and women depended upon their stature in the society. This easily distinguished the repute of a
tribal – the royals, common man & children. Hence, textile plays a vital role in the life of these tribes.

However, one very interesting find is the transformation which slowly and gradually gripped the cultural essence. The tribal spirit has undergone a lot of conversions in the last fifty years. This was mainly because of the British invasion in India which witnessed sea changes in respect to the traditional dresses of the Khasis and Jaintias. Religious transformation was a major change. Festivals and rituals witnessed a roadblock. The invasion of foreign powers changed the tribal environment. Their norms of society, culture, religion, especially costumes faced the most drastic change.

Therefore, the main purpose of this research is to provide a detailed description and analysis of different aspects of the Khasi and Jaintia textiles being a part of their rich culture and to further observe their artistic values. Descriptions of such textiles prior to the 19th century was limited because they no longer existed and because early observers of the Khasis and the Jaintias provided very little information about how the textile looked or how they were made.

This research has also thoroughly explained the techniques of spinning, weaving and dyeing. One can find the sources of raw materials obtained for spinning the thread – cotton, silk etc., and also the art of making dyes. Looms and weaving techniques is also exclusive to these tribes thus making their textiles distinct from the textiles of other tribes of India. They have divergent techniques, tools and rich aesthetic qualities. This research throws light into how the tribal’s in this region exploited the wealth of nature to make the raw materials for textiles such as cotton
and silk; bamboo and wood for construction of looms; use of plants and minerals required for dyeing the yarns. This art was prevalent from times immemorial. Each village in the state of Meghalaya produced different texture and designs of silk.

This observation had further encouraged more research in the area of how the raw materials were obtained. Thus this thesis also gives an accurate idea of how silk and varied fibers are acquired from plants viz., cotton, pineapple, banana etc., Silkworms are currently reared at the homes of the weavers for easy access and harvesting of silk yarn. The tribes also harvests materials from local plants and trees to make dyes, as well as mordant the yarns by use of plant extracts, ashes etc.

The Khasi and Jaintia tribes are also majorly using the traditional loom – a ground loom and back-strap loom and not the modern looms. The origin of the ground loom is unclear, but it is the ancestor of the modern counterbalance loom. It has an advantage over the back strap loom as in the ground loom the body of the weaver is not strapped to the loom. Each village in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills has its distinct ground loom. The main highlight of this loom is that each of its part is handcrafted by men. However, the weaving task is left to the women. The bamboo reeds, here deserves a special mention because it is spotted, made and used only by these tribes. No other tribes in India use such make. The reason behind the wide utilization of this loom is that it is ideal for the hand spun cotton and silk compared to the steel reeds used by other tribes. This model needs no special place and can be set up anywhere so that a woman can access it between household and farming chores.
However, the back strap loom also had its advantage as it gave the woman an advantage to work anywhere. This research has covered this topic extensively. The utilization of different methods has thus made the final produce unique and distinct to these tribes.

In current times, one can only observe the Khasi/Jaintia men and women dressed in their traditional costumes only during festivals, weddings or any other social gatherings. It is only during such events that one can get a glimpse of their unique cultural and artistic significance which derives a comparison to other tribes in India. The culture is unique in contrast to any other tribes in India because they have their own belief systems in which the surrounding nature plays a vital role. The festival reflects their exclusiveness and has a spiritual meaning. They are celebrated to thank Mother Nature for providing them with basic necessities viz., food, shelter and clothing, in the absence of which no humankind can survive.

These tribes have also suffered repeated pillage and destruction of their tradition over the years after the British dominance. The absence of a written script made it difficult for research on how these tribes wove. Many researchers from various fields are yet documenting about these tribes and their different aspects have caused many controversial conclusions. Hence, circumvent to such difference, this thesis is typically based on the need to understand the art, culture and gain insight into the rich heritage of indigenous textiles. Designs are restricted to different segments of the tribe which can be observed during their festivals. However this rich heritage is facing extinction due to the introduction of mill manufactured varieties.
This thesis also displays creativity in women. One of the imperatives in tribal textiles is the expressions of a woman. The loom acts as a symbol of womanhood – also an analogy for fate or destiny. Tribal men acknowledged this special significance by not touching a loom once it is set up and in use. Dignity, purity and respect for a woman comes under view as well as duties of men towards nature and society are all involved including reverence to divine principles revolves in an amalgamation of music, dance, costumes, jewellery etc.

This research also provides an insight to the challenges faced in conservation of such textiles as the region faces heavy monsoons and severe winter. The fabric is so fragile that the natural fiber cannot withstand the fluctuations caused by weather.

In the preceding chapters of this research, one will observe how ancient the Khasi and Jaintia tribe is, yet consistently holding on to their own traditional culture, religion, language and norms which makes an interesting study. It throws light on the traditional dresses of the Khasis which are a genuine expressions of their Culture and is deeply rooted in their tradition.

One interesting find of this research is the existence of trade routes from China to Bengal via the Khasi Hills which influenced the exchange of designs.
The traditional dresses not only throw light on the dress code or self beautification but it also reflects symbolic implications in many aspects of the Khasi society where religion and social status are involved.

This study also reflects the British settlement in the latter half of 18th Century which slowly and gradually transformed the tribal culture. Still continuity of cultural identity was somehow preserved. The credit goes to the emergence of the Seng Khasi – an institution founded by some thoughtful Khasi leaders, ninety nine years ago on 23rd November, 1899. Their objective was to propagate and revive the traditional dances and arts of various kinds which were gradually fading partly due to the lack of patronage and non-appreciation by the British.

Lastly, this research creates an awareness of the traditional customs through which the Khasis might be stimulated to preserve their indigenous designs.