

The Festivals in the History and Culture of the Khasi

Mary Pristilla Rina Lyngdoh



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The purpose of this pioneering work is to study the Khasi festivals in historical perspective and to focus on the social relevance and historical contents of the festivals which had been lying dormant for so long. The festivals which are observed, coincide with the activities of the people throughout the year. It is during the observation of the festivals that the people propitiate God their Creator for His blessings and kindness throughout the year, so that they will have a prosperous harvest, good health, general prosperity and that they could live happily throughout the year. The festivals play a very important part in the life of the Khasi, as each festival has certain meaning to them. Besides providing entertainment and social festivities, the festivals act as an integrating force, hold the community together and strengthen their identity. The festivals have also preserved the distinctive traits of the culture and traditions of the people.

The book is a descriptive profile of the selected festivals of the matrilineal Khasi, and an analytical enquiry into their historical origins, forms and contents and the influence that they have on the life of the people. The study of the festivals is not only a matter of interest for research, but it is considered as a connecting link between the past and the present and highlights the significance of the festivals in relation to the socio-economic and political organisations of the Khasi. The author has made a serious attempt to bring to light how important are the festivals in tribal life and to understand the rich cultural heritage of the people. A comprehensive and comparative study of the various fascinating festivals of the tribals of the North East is very essential, and this book will serve as a beginning for further research in the field.



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the History and
Culture of the Khasi

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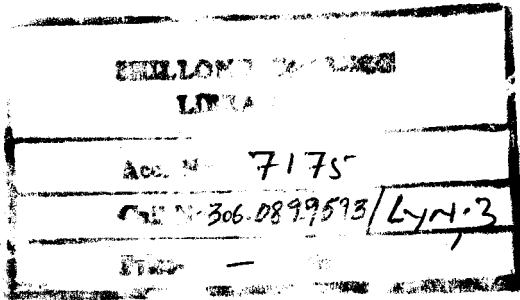
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Mary Pristilla Rina Lyngdoh

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DEDICATED TO MY LOVING HUSBAND
(L) D. KHARKONGTH WHO PASSED
AWAY ON 4-2-2007 IN REMEMBRANCE
OF HIS DEDICATION,
HUMILITY AND THINKING

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Foreword

The festivals are inalienable components of folk/tribal cultures, originating in specific stages of social development as the creative response of the masses to their problems, needs and aspirations. Be it for rich harvest, good health or general prosperity and welfare, to fight the vagaries of nature, the ravages of wild animals, disease and pestilence, or to immortalise personalities, deeds and events, these festivals have survived the test of time as the occasions of joy and entertainment, held the community together and strengthened its identity. The elements of change and continuity in the life of the society are dormant in the dance and song forms, the costumes and the rituals associated with the festivals. The way these are spread throughout the year synchronizing the change of seasons and activities of the masses, and the indigenous calendars revolve round them, it symbolizes how men organised themselves to negotiate with the nature in specific conditions. The festivals are indeed the living archives of folk traditions.

A model of scientific social enquiry, the festival study can be a key to understanding the social milieu, social differentiation and power structure, history of the masses, their creative genius in the fields of music and literature, art and crafts, the occupation and the market linkage conditioned by the level of technology and the resource-base. The desperate need is of an appropriate comprehensive methodology to tap the hidden data for a multi-disciplinary research.

Mary Pristilla Rina Lyngdoh's *The Festivals in the History and Culture of the Khasi* is a compendium of the fascinating festivals of the Khasis of Meghalaya in historical perspective. A combination of descriptive profile of the festivals and analytical enquiries into their historical origins, forms and contents, and the on-going revivalist and modernist trends, this pioneering work is indeed a serious attempt at understanding the material and spiritual heritage of the matrilineal Khasis. She has ably brought out how important is festival in tribal life, how its contents can guide the sensitive observers to the

situation that a festival originated or absorbed changes and reinforcements, and how the evolution of a society can be traced in a time frame through the changing forms and contents of festivals involving the masses. It is my pleasure to recommend the book to the widest solarium of our readership.

J. B. Bhattacharjee

Preface

The festivals are very important in the life of the Khasi. Besides providing entertainments and social festivities to them, they also act as an integrating force for the community as a whole. The festivals which are observed in different parts of the year coincide with the activities of the people throughout the year. Most of the festivals are connected with agriculture and cultivation rites of the people. It is during the observance of the festivals, that the people propitiate God their Creator for His blessings and kindness throughout the year, so that they will have a prosperous harvest, good health, general prosperity, and that they could live happily throughout the year being free from diseases and evil spirits.

The study of the festivals in historical perspective has been selected as an attempt to study the festivals in the history and culture of the Khasi, and to focus on the social relevance and the historical contents of the festivals which had been lying dormant for so long, and at the same time to bring to light what is left by our ancestors, and to try and dig out their past history. The study is not only a matter of interest for research, but it is considered essential as a connecting link between the past and the present. We have tried to study the significance of the festivals in relation to the socio-economic and political organisations of the Khasi.

The study of the festivals has been made by some scholars and books and articles both in English and Khasi have been written. A survey of these literature shows that no one has attempted to make a comprehensive study of the festivals, their origin, contents and social relevance. This study will serve as a beginning for further research in the field.

In this book, eight important festivals of the Khasi have been selected. It opens with a profile of the Khasi, dealing with their origin and migration, religious and social system, and the physical environment of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The second chapter discusses the life of the Khasi throughout the year, how the villages, political and social institutions came into existence. The

The chapter also shows how the people made adjustments with their own environment for the sake of existence, and how this organisation of life throughout the year when refined over the ages led to the evolution of the Khasi system of reckoning time or calendar. The third chapter attempts a general survey of the festivals, the objectives of each festival, the areas where they are held, and the months in which each festival is being observed. The fourth chapter shows their historical origin, evolution and how each festival is being preserved till date. Chapter five attempts to examine the form and contents of the festivals, the different functions, which include the rituals, dresses, ceremonies, musical instruments and so on. Chapter six examines the importance of the festivals in tribal life. An attempt is made at a comparative study of the festivals of the Khasi with some of the festivals of the other tribals of the North East. Chapter seven brings into focus the contemporary trends, particularly the modernizing and revivalist dichotomy. The Chapter shall examine whether the people are moving away from tradition or want to revive the same. Chapter eight is the concluding chapter of the book, which reviews the earlier chapter and highlights the main findings.

The study has been based mainly on data collected during the field work, through interviews with selected knowledgeable persons, and those who participate in the festivals. Besides these, we have consulted whatever books, magazines, journals, which are available on the subject both in English and Khasi.

The book has emerged out of my doctoral dissertation submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University in 1989. I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to my Supervisor, Professor J.B. Bhattacharjee, for his inspiring and sympathetic guidance, valuable and untiring advice and for sparing for me his most valuable time. I am also grateful to him for having kindly written a Foreword to this book.

I am deeply obliged to the Librarian and Staff, NEHU Library, Shillong, Gauhati University Library, Guwahati, and the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati, State Central Library, Shillong, Anthropological Survey of India Library, Shillong, for their kind help and cooperation.

I am indebted to Shri D.T. Laloo, Shri L.G. Shullai, and all those knowledgeable people who have given me their valuable information during my field work in the different parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. My sincere thanks and gratitude to all of them for having spared their most valuable time and giving me precious information. I am thankful to Shri B.P. Domes, Shri W. Sohliya, Shri S.S. Sawian and Shri K. Kharumnuid who have helped me in my photographic illustrations.

Grateful acknowledgement to the University Grants Commission for the award of the U.G.C. Teacher Fellowship and the Education Department,

Meghalaya, for the academic leave which enabled me to complete my work. I am also thankful to the ICSSR-NERC, Shillong, for their assistance.

The Book on the Festivals in the History and Culture of the Khasi had been reviewed by (L). Prof. B. Pakem, former Vice Chancellor North Eastern Hill University, Shillong and published in the North Eastern Hill University Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, Volume XI, No. 4, October- November, 1993. It was also reviewed by Dr. A. A. Sinha, former Head of the Department of English, St. Anthony's College Shillong, and published in the Indian Book Chronicle, Volume XIX, No. 6, June 1994.

The Second edition of the book, is the outcome of the suggestion from my friends and well wishers, to whom I owe my sincere thanks for their encouragement.

To all the teachers and staff, Department of History, NEHU, and to Prof. N. K. Sarkar, Dr. M. N. Bhattacharjee, Miss C. Khonglah, Shri. B. Mukhim and all those who have helped me in their different ways, I would like to say a very big *Khublei*, Thank you.

I am thankful to the Radha Publications, New Delhi, for bringing out the second edition of my book.

I am most grateful to my dear mother and my husband and other members of my family, who have been sources of inspiration to me.

My thanks would be incomplete if mention is not made of Mr. Joseph F. Khongbuh and Mrs. S. Mawthoh who helped me in my typing works.

Shillong

June, 2008

M. Pristilla Rina Lyngdoh

Some Folktales

1. The Creation of the world

God the Creator in the beginning created *Ka Ramew* or mother earth and her husband *U Basa*. *Ka Ramew* gave birth to five children, namely, *Ka Sngi*, *U Bnai*, *Ka Um*, *Ka Lyer*, and *Ka Ding* corresponding to the Sun, Moon, Water, Wind and Fire. All were females except the Moon, the only son of mother earth. On the prayer and request of this mother earth, God sent the seven huts to this world, who lived happily, learnt cultivation and who increased and multiplied. They led a happy life and they could come and go to heaven as they pleased, through the ladder till the Seven Huts decided to stay here on earth and the ladder was severed. The five children of Mother earth lived happily till one day the Moon became wicked and fell in love with his eldest sister, the Sun. The Sun became very angry, she took ashes in her hands, rebuking him angrily for his daring and bad intention towards her, who was like a mother and taken care of him, threw the ashes on his face. The Moon felt very much ashamed of himself, he left the house and since then walked only at night, not during the day time.

2. The Hynniew Trep the Hynniew Skum

God the Creator in the beginning created sixteen families. They were allowed to move freely between heaven and earth by means of a golden ladder which touched the top of a mountain peak named *Sohpetbneng*, literally meaning, the navel of heaven. This was the golden age, when the people lived happily. Later, nine out of the sixteen families chose to live in heaven and they were known as the *Khyndai hajrong* or the nine above. The seven families known as the *Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum* decided to live here on earth and the ladder was severed. Thus the Khasi traced their origin to these seven families and are known as the *Hynniew Trep* or the Seven Huts. This legendary origin is accepted by all the Khasi.

3. The Diengiei Tree (a Gigantic Tree)

After the *Hynniew Trep* had decided to stay on earth, the golden ladder was severed. Then, a very big tree known as *Ka Diengiei* grew, which became so gigantic, that its leaves and branches overshadowed the earth and became very dark. The people decided to cut and destroy this tree. They started cutting the tree in the morning and went back to their homes in the evening as they could not finish the job in one day. When they came the next morning they found that the tree grew again and the cutting marks disappeared. The people were surprised because every time they cut it, the next day the cutting marks could not be seen. Then, *ka Phreid*, a very small bird told the secret to the people, that it was the tiger who came every night and licked the part of the tree which had been cut, and cutting marks disappeared, and the tree grew again. Having come to know the secret, the men did not take the axes and knives home, but kept them upwards on the part of the tree which had been cut. The tiger came as usual and licked the tree, but the edge of the axes and knives cut his tongue. So, the tiger did not dare to go and lick the tree any more, and the mission of men succeeded. The *Diengiei* tree fell and light appeared once more to the world.

4. U Lakriah the Reformer

When the *Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum* came to stay on earth, they were led by their leader or chief known as *U Lakriah*. When they reached the earth, the seven families soon found that the world was full of stones, there was no land for cultivation and other works. So, *U Lakriah* went back to heaven to ask God for the earth or soil. God directed the supreme goddess to give three basketful of earth from heaven and threw the earth all over the stones.

U Lakriah came to his people with the message of God. God conveyed. His wishes and advice through *u Syiem Lakriah*, the most important were to earn righteousness, to respect their parents and to know man and to know God, and God could be reached through prayers and sacrifices.

5. The Story of Ka Krem Lamet Ka Krem Latang - (A Cave) - and the Origin of dances

Once upon a time, a day was fixed for the dance festival, and all the living creatures turned up in their grand costumes. They danced throughout the day, until they were tired and towards evening, when they were about to depart, there arrived the Sun and the Moon who were a sister and a brother, and they also started dancing. Everyone in the dancing arena said that it was unethical that a brother and a sister should dance together. In anger, the Sun went to hide herself in a cave known as *Ka Krem Lamet Ka Krem Latang*, and the world was enveloped into total darkness. Many animals and birds went to

persuade the Sun to come out of the cave, but failed. Lastly, the cock went out to search for the Sun. The Sun narrated to him, how she was laughed at, sneered and abused. The cock promised to the Sun that thenceforth, no creature would abuse her in anyway. Then the Sun agreed to reappear only, when the cock would signal her by crowing thrice. Since then, the cock hold a sacred place in the life of the Khasi.

Another story tells us that in the olden days, all the living creatures lived happily here on earth and could communicate with one another. One day, some animals and a bird went out for a walk. They saw a dancing arena where men and women danced together with the beating of the drums and playing of the pipes and flutes. The animals were so much impressed by the dances performed by the human being, that they decided then and there, that they too should perform a dance. A day was fixed and all the animals reached the dancing field in their best dresses. Then the music started with the beating of the drums and playing of the pipes. They were amidst the joyous mood, when at that time appeared the lynx with a big silvery sword, He danced beautifully with his sword, that all admired him. The lynx became very proud. After sometime, U Pyrthat or Thunder came, he borrowed the sword from the lynx. The Thunder performed the sword dance, after which he went up to the sky taking the sword along with him. The lynx was very sad that he had lost the sword, and everytime; he tried to go to the sky, to get back the sword from Thunder but could not. From that time onward started the enmity between the different animals.

6. How do Eclipses occur? And Why There are Spots on the Moon?

Eclipse is known as *Ka bam Hynroh* meaning eaten by the toad. The story goes that once upon a time, there lived a beautiful and innocent girl named *Ka Nam*. She ran away from home as she was afraid of the tiger and took shelter in the house of the Sun. To hide her beauty, she covered her face with a toad's skin. Later, the Moon who was the Sun's brother, fell in love with the girl. He asked his sister to arrange his marriage with *Ka Nam*. The Sun did not agree as the girl was ugly. The Moon came to know of *Ka Nam's* beauty. So one day, he hid himself near the river and when he saw that the girl has taken her bath, he took away the toad's skin and threw it, so that she would not cover her face any more. After she had finished her bath, she looked for the toad's skin and at that time, the Moon caught her hand. The girl shouted and all came running to help her. A Durbar was summoned to try this case. The Sun became angry and scolded him. She brought some ashes, spat on his forehead and threw the ashes on his face. From that time, onward, whenever the Moon passed by that river where he had thrown the toad's skin, the toad would catch and eat him, hence occurred the eclipse of the Moon.

Another story tells us that the Moon became very wicked, and fell in

love with his eldest sister, the Sun. Knowing his bad intention, the Sun became very angry, she took ashes in her hands, rebuking him angrily, threw the ashes on his face. The Moon who felt much ashamed of himself, left the house and walked only at night and not during daytime. When we look at the Moon, we can see something like clouds, these the Khasi believe to be ashes thrown by the Sun.

The eclipse of the Sun has another story. The Moon was very angry with the Sun, as she had disgraced him in public. So he went to Thunder and borrowed a sword from him. Early in the morning, the Moon went to the Sun's house, and hid himself near the window. The Sun did not know the bad intention of the Moon, she came out and the Moon gave a blow with the sword and ran away. The Sun was wounded, she fell down sprinkled with blood all over. From that time onward, the eclipse of the Sun took place, whenever she felt the pains from those wounds, and could not come out and remains hidden as she has to rest and sleep.

7. Origin of Ka Phur or Ceremonies Connected with the Dead

Longtime ago, in one small village lived a widow and her son named u Synring. The poor mother had to work very hard to earn her living and take care of her son. Both lived happily. Then one day the mother became very sick and died. Her son cremated her and took the bones of his mother and kept properly in the *Mawshyieng* or stone cist. After many days, he started to do his works as usual. One day, he saw a sow coming to the field. He shot an arrow, and the sow ran away with the arrow. U Synring wanted to get back the arrow, so he followed her and reached a different world altogether. There, he met his mother who told him that it was she who had come to help him in the field. U Synring was very disappointed that he had shot his mother, so he took care of her. Then, his mother told him that the time had not come for him to live in that new world, until his death so, she told him to go back to the world. She gave him some drums and flutes and told him to beat the drums and play the flutes and collect her bones to be placed in the *Mawbah* or clan ossuary, along with the dead members of the clan. She further asked him to hold a feast and ceremonial dance known as *Ka Phur Ka Siang*. Henceforth, began this ceremony connected with the dead.

8. The Virginity Dance

In any Khasi dance, the female dancers must be unmarried and virgins. The origin of the virginity dance is obscured. One interpretation of its origin is that Ka Pah Syntiew, the legendary female ancestress of the Hima Shillong was a virgin, when a man belonging to the Myllemngap clan caught her. Ka Pah

Syntiew loved dances and songs she used to teach the small children how to sing and dance. The boys who tended the cows used to see her dancing on the rocks. So, the female dance of only virgins among the Khasi, must have originated from the dance of Ka Pah Syntiew.

According to another tradition, once a dance festival took place, and many dancers both male and female came out to dance. The fairest of all the dancers was the wife of U Myndi. The king was impressed by her beauty and dancing performance. So, he planned to kill her husband. U Myndi who was killed came back to life by some hidden powers. A Durbar was summoned and the king's misdeed was exposed and he was dethroned and U Myndi's wife was invited to take the throne. Since then no married women could dance.

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Chapter I

The Khasi -A Profile

Located in the northeastern corner of India, north of Sylhet District, which is now in Bangladesh, is the land of the *Hynniew Trep* known to the people of Sylhet as "Khasia Pahar" or "Khasi Pahar" that is Khasi Hills. The term *Hynniew Trep* is an ethnic perception of the days of mythology, where God the Creator, in the beginning created sixteen families. These families were allowed to move freely between heaven and earth by means of a golden ladder which touched the top of a mountain peak name Sohpetbneng, literally meaning the navel of heaven. This was the golden age when the people lived happily. But, as time passed, nine out of the sixteen families chose to live in heaven and they were known as the *Khyndai Hajrong* or the "Nine Above". The seven families known as the *Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum* decided, to live here on earth and the ladder was severed. Thus, the Khasi traced their origin to these seven families and were known as the *Hynniew Trep* or the Seven Huts. So So Tham¹ the great Khasi poet, in his work entitled, "*Ki Sngi Barim u Hynniew Trep*" or the Days of the Seven Huts, clearly mentioned that there were sixteen families and the seven that lived on earth are known as the children of the *Hynniew Trep*. This legendary origin is accepted by one and all in the *Hynniew Trep* land. Many authors² are of the opinion that Khasi is a generic name which includes the *Khyrniam*, *Pnar*, *Bhoi*, *War*, the *Lyngngam*, and those living in the north eastern slopes who called themselves *Labang*, *Khyrwang* and *Nongphyllut*. Their definition however is based on the geographical or topographical expression of the land. L.Gilbert Shullai³ however, is of the opinion that the *Hynniew Trep* comprised of *ki kur* meaning clans. The grand total population of the *Hynniew Trep* is the total population of all the clans. The land of the *Hynniew Trep* comprised of many states e.g., Nongstoin, Cherra, Jaintia, Shillong (now Khyrim and Myllem) Maharam, Shella, Rambrai and many others collectively known as the Khasi States. The British began to extend their political influence to the land of the *Hynniew Trep* after the Burmese were defeated and a treaty known as the

Treaty of Yandaboo was concluded in 1826. One of the prominent Khasi States, known as Jaintia State, locally known as the *Hima Sutnga* or Sutnga state, had already concluded a treaty in 1824, when u Ram Sing was the *Syiem* or chief of Jaintia. State In 1826, the Nongkhlaw state also concluded a treaty with the British, when u Tirot Sing was the *Syiem* of Nongkhlaw state. In 1829, there was an uprising known as the Anglo –Nongkhlaw war or the Anglo- Khasi War. U Tirot Sing was arrested in 1833 and the war ended which led to the creation of a Political Agency known as the Cossayah Hills Political Agency. The first political Agent was Colonel Lister who took charge of office on the 11th February, 1835. After the death of u Ram Sing, his successor, Rajendra Sing became the *Syiem* of Jaintia state. In 1835, the Jaintia state was annexed by the British and became British area. The plain portion of the Jaintia state was tagged to Sylhet District and the hills portion remained under the Cossayah Hills Political Agency. After some years, a new administrative setup known as *Cossayah* and *Jynteah* Hills came into being, under a Principal Assistant Commissioner. C. K. Hudson was the first Principal Assistant Commissioner who took charge of office on the 10th April, 1854. In 1869, a sub-division known as Jowai sub-division was created comprising of the hills portion of the Jaintia state. The district known as the Khasi and Jaintia Hills district comprising of two sub-divisions, the Shillong sub-division and the Jowai sub-division. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills District does not include the Khasi states. At present the Hynniew Trep land comprised of the East Khasi Hills District, Jaintia Hills District, the West Khasi Hills District, and the Ri Bhoi District. In other words, it comprised of the erstwhile Khasi states and the erstwhile Khasi and Jaintia Hills District minus Block I, and II, which were included in the Mikir Hills District.

The indigenous people of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills are one and the same people having common ethnicity and common mythology. Hence the expression Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Khasi in the subsequent chapters are taken as corresponding names for the land and people respectively. The term *Hynniew Trep* is more popularly used, many Associations and Organisations which have been formed recently, used the name *Hynniew Trep* such as the Hynniew Trep Students and Youth Organisation, the Hynniew Trep Business Syndicate, the Synjuk Hynniew Trep, Guwahati, Hynniew Trep Welfare Association, Madras, the Hynniew Trep College Students Organisation, the Hynniew Trep Endeavour Society and many more.

The plateau of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills lies approximately between 90° 40' to 90° 45'E Longitudes and 25° to 20° N Latitudes, covering an area of 14, 46 35 sq.km⁴. The United Khasi and Jaintia Hills was one of the districts in the erstwhile composite state of Assam. After the creation of the Autonomous state of Meghalaya on 2nd April, 1970 and after the attainment of the full statehood on 21st January, 1972, the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills Districts formed the constituent Districts of Meghalaya with the headquarters at Shillong and Tura respectively. The capital of Meghalaya is at Shillong, it was also the Capital of the composite state of Assam as well. The two districts were further divided into seven districts as shown below⁵:

Former Districts before the creation of Meghalaya	Name of New District	Date of Creation
1	2	3
United Khasi & Jaintia Hills	Jaintia Hills	21st Feb 1972
	East Khasi Hills	28th Oct 1976
	West Khasi Hills	28th Oct 1976
Garo Hills	Ribhoi	4th June 1992
	West Garo Hills	23rd Oct 1976
	East Garo Hills	23rd Oct 1976
	South Garo Hills	18th June 1992

The Term Khasi

All the indigenous people belonging to the different *Kur* or clans who inhabit the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, be as it may, that they have local variations in manners, customs and dialects are one and the same people, as they have the same ethnic origin and sprang from the same racial stock and above all have their common mythology. They speak according to the world renowned linguists, Khasi language which is an offshoot of the Monkhmer language, a group of the Austro-Asiatic Family of the Austric super-family. The discovery of the Monkhmer language spoken in Burma (Myanmar), Indo-China and Malaysia was first revealed by J. R. Logan in the middle of the 19th century. Pater Schmidt elaborated the classification of the Austric super stock and different datum were presented afterwards by other linguists for the reassessment. Within the Austro Asiatic-Family are found the related languages, Mon, Palaung-wa, Khmer, Semang-Sekai, Khasi, Munda, Annamite, Muong and Cham⁶. S. K. Chatterjee⁷ believes that the original Austric speech appears to have been characterized in India from which it spread in pre-historic time.

Many authors have tried to interpret the word Khasi. (Hamlet Bareh⁸ suggests that Khasi is a term which has a particular significance. Kha means born of and *Si* refers to an ancient mother. Therefore, *Khasi* means born of the mother. Many Khasi clans derived their names from their ancient mother, for example, *Sawian* clan has its origin from *ka Sa*, the ancestress of that clans, *Kurkalang* to *ka Lang*, their ancient mother and so on.) The plainsmen, the

British, the German and the *Welsh*, when they first came to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills called the *Khasi*, "*khashi*", "*Cossyah*", "*Khasia*", "*Khosa*."⁹ Another opinion is that *kha* means water and *chai* means persons or children. *Chaikha* or *Khachai* means bloody water. The people living by the side of the spring from which reddish water oozed out were the *Khachais*, and later were known as *Khasia* or *Khasi*¹⁰. According to Pandit Narayan Sastri, in his first message to All India Mahasabha said that the Khasi Hills according to the Shastra and the Puranas of the Aryans were known as "*Khos Parbat*", "*Khos*" is derived from the Sanskrit word '*Kho*' meaning power to understand, and thus "*Khos*" means people with the power to understand.¹¹ The word Khasi might have originated from "*Cassia*", the name of a particular bay leaf found in plenty in these hills, and it is also an item of export to the plain. The word Khasi might have also originated from the word '*ghas*' meaning grass in the neighbouring plains. It might be that the plains people referred to the hills people as "*Ghasia*" which later on became Khasi¹². The word Khasi might have also been originated from the word *kash*, which is a kind of grass used for Hindu rituals, found in plenty in the border areas, in the foothills of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In Karimganj District of Assam, it is known as *Kashaipata* or the kashia leaves. This grass is essential in the Hindu rituals of the Bengalis of Sylhet and Cachar particularly in *upanayana* or the sacred thread ceremony which is a Hindu ritual performed by the Brahmins only¹³. According to L. G. Shullai,¹⁴ the expression Khasia or Khasi might have come from the word "*Khas*" meaning private exclusive land of the owner. In the Khasi and Jaintia Hills land belongs to the people. There are two main classes of land *Ri Raid* or Community land and *Ri Kynti* or private land, under which there are many sub classes. There is no system of land revenue according to the ancient customs and usages.¹⁵ Father G. Costa¹⁶ stated that the Khasi people were once very distressed, and they did not know as what is to be done to free themselves from the oppression of *u Thlen*, a serpent which feeds on human blood. When the people were about to give up hope, God sent a redeemer, to free them from that oppression. The name of this redeemer was *u Khasi*, his father was *u Thawlang* and his mother was *ka lawbei*.

Considering all these theories propounded by many authors and scholars it is very difficult to trace the origin of the word Khasi. However, Khasi is a generic name for all the indigenous people living in or outside of the land presently known as the Khasi and Jaintia Hills in the state of Meghalaya in the Indian Union.

Origin and Migration

The origin of the Khasi has been discussed by many authors, although there is no unanimity of views. The first race of people with a more or less

organised form of society to inhabit the province of Assam were the Austro-Asiatics or the Austrics.¹⁷ Many authors held the view that the Khasi are racially and linguistically an offshoot of the Monkhmer branch of the Austro - Asiatic stock and are believed to be the remnants of the first Mongolian overflow into India.¹⁸ It is not possible to decide whether the Khasi are the result of the intrusion of a wave of Mongoloids into the Khasi Hills, where they intermarried with settled group of Monkhmer speaking Proto-Australoids or whether this process took place in South East Asia or even in India, after which the ancestors of the modern Khasi already endowed with approximately the same language and racial characteristic as at present migrated to their present home.¹⁹

The Khasi have established themselves in these hills for a very long time, and the process of migration is from east to west. There is a tradition of a migration over the eastern hills, possibly the Patkai ranges on the Indo Burma sometimes in the past.²⁰ Many supported the view that the Khasi migrated from the east. Another tradition prevailing among the Khasi shows that they came to these hills from the north eastern direction through Nowgong, Lumding and Haflong areas across the Kupli river, and the original place was somewhere in Western China, Cambodia, Burma and other region of the east.²¹ There is also another opinion that the Amwi Khasi reached their present land from the east and that their ancestors are connected with the Mekong river. This may give a clue to the belief that the ancient Khasi were immigrants somewhere from the Cambodian region and from the bank of the Mekong river.²² The Khasi were named by the Anthropologists as the Austric or Austro-Asiatics. The Austrics came to these hills in search of iron.²³ B.M. Das²⁴ in his recent book suggests two possibilities regarding the origin and affiliation of the Khasi, one is that they are racially Mongoloid, but have adopted the Austric language. The other possibility is that the Khasi were an Austroloid people and their language was Austric. In course of time, their physical features have undergone remarkable changes but their language has been retained. I.J.S. Jaiswal²⁵ has propounded a new theory that the Khasi are probably Proto- Australoids who migrated initially from the Indian mainland to the south Chinese region, it was here that the Khasi got heavily admixed with the Mongoloid population, but retained the Austro- Asiatic speech and certain elements of their social structure. Later this hybrid group migrated towards the south and south west. The Khasi formed the western most population of this scatter. Of the same stock are the Mons of Northern Burma, and in the south eastern extreme, this stock is represented by the Khmer of Kampuchea. The Khasi are by race Indo Mongoloid, but their language is different. They would appear to be a Mongoloid people who have adopted the language of the earlier race, the Austrics (or Proto- Australoids) after they came down south from the Tibeto Burman area of dispersion. They might have come to Assam and ensconced themselves in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, successfully resisting all possible

attempts of the Bodos who followed them in dislodging or absorbing them. It is equally likely that they were a congeries of diverse Tibeto- Burman speaking tribals in the Khasi Jaintia Hills and in the plains of Sylhet settling among original Austric speakers, whose language, the Tibeto Burman settlers in this areas found convenient to adopt, when their own tribal dialects were too numerous and too diverse. Possibly, this linguistic change over occurred before the coming of the waves of Bodo expansion. They have preserved their linguistic uniqueness among the surrounding Tibeto-Burmans (Bodo) and Aryan speakers (Bengalis and Assamese).²⁶

So, there is no unanimity of views in regard to the ethnicity of the Khasi. However, the generally accepted view is that linguistically the Khasi are the offshoot of the Monkhmer which is within the Austro -Asiatic family and racially, they are Indo Mongoloid-.

POPULATION

The population of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills from 1901 to 2001 and of Meghalaya from 1981 to 2001 is as follows: ²⁷

Year	Population
1901	2,02,250
1911	2,35,069
1921	2,43,263
1931	2,89,926
1941	3,32,251
1951	3,63,599
1961	4,62,152
1971	6,05,084
1981	8,23,340
1991	11,05,848
2001	14,43,596

The population of Meghalaya on the whole from 1981-2001 is as follows:²⁸

Year	Population in numbers	Decadal variations
1981	13,35,819	32.04
1991	17,74,778	32.88
2001	23,06,069	29.94

The density of population per sq. km in the state according to the census 2001 is 103 with 84 persons in the rural area and 1970 persons in the urban area. The total urban population in the state has increased considerably from 3, 30,047 to 4, 52,612 during 1991 and 2001²⁹. The percentage of literacy in the state is

are provided in tabular format³⁰

63.31%, an improved rate from 49.1% in 1991 census. The literacy rate in urban area is 87.19% and in the rural area 57.00%, the male literacy is 66.14% and female literacy is 60.41%. The sex ratio, females per 1000 males is 975.³⁰

Mountain and River System

The Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya is a plateau generally of rolling grasslands interspersed with river valley which in the southern portion, take the form of ravines. Altitude varies from 1220 metres to 1830 metres above sea level.³¹ The mountain ranges in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills run from west to east. The highest peak is the Shillong peak with an altitude of 1967 metres,³² about 6445 ft. The Diengiei peak west of Shillong is 6077 ft. The Symper peak near Kmawan is 5700 ft, Kyllang rock near Mawnai is 5684 ft, Raitong, Rableng and Mawthadraishan peaks are also high. In the Jaintia Hills the Bahbo Bahkong range rises parallel to the hills of North Cachar. The other peaks are Tiniang near Raliang and *Nongjingi* peak east of *Nartiang*.³³

The rivers of the state flow either to the *Brahmaputra* or the *Surma* valleys. In the Khasi Hills the rivers that flow in the north are the Umkhen, the Khri the Umtrew, the Umiam and the Kynshi, the Umiew Umiam and their tributaries. In the Jaintia Hills the biggest river is the Kupli on the border between Jaintia Hills and North Cachar Hills. Its important tributaries are the Mynriang, Myntang and Umiurem, which flow eastward. The south flowing rivers are the Myntdu, Lubha and Umngot.³⁴ The Khasi and Jaintia Hills are said to be geologically much older than the Himalayas. In comparison with other hills, they show mountain features that are more rounded, and the extent of the central plateau is considerable.³⁵ Due to the rugged mountainous nature of the land, most of the rivers have to go through difficult areas. This gave rise to numerous waterfalls in rivers and tributaries, particularly in the southern slopes. Most of these waterfalls are seasonal. In and around Shillong, we have the Bishop's falls, Beadon's Falls, Crinoline falls, the Sweet falls, the Spread Eagle's falls and the Elephant's Falls. Other important falls in the Khasi Hills are the Shadthum Falls, the Kynshiang Falls and the Winnia falls on the Kynshi river. The Kyrshoh Nianglong falls and the Thup Weikhudoi falls on the Umkhen river, the Thylliej Lyngwa falls and Shlem falls on the Umiam Khwan river.³⁶ Other important falls are the Nohsngithiang, Nohkalikai and the Dainthlen falls. In the Jaintia Hills, the most important is the Iale falls beyond the Kupli river, this falls has a religious and historical significance. It was here in the olden days that the Jaintia kings performed human sacrifice. Other important falls are the Myntdu and the Leshka falls. Most of the falls in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills besides being beautiful, have historical legends or are connected with folktales.

Climate

The climate of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills is according to the physical features of the land. The northern and southern slopes because of their low altitude have a climate similar to the plains, whereas the plateaus have temperate climate. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills along with the whole state of Meghalaya is directly influenced by the south west monsoon, originating from the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian sea. The monsoon begins sometimes in the month of May and continues till October. From November to April, the climate is almost dry. During winter from December to February, frost falls in the higher altitudes of the land. The climate is pleasant in autumn and spring.³⁷ The hills are characterised by heavy rainfall especially in the southern region. The Cherrapunjee Mawsynram belt in the southern slopes overlooking the plains of Bangladesh has the distinction of having the world's heaviest rainfall with an average of 500 inches (1270 centimetres) per annum.³⁸ The climate of the central plateau is temperate, and that is why the people are healthy. But at the foothills in the Southern slopes, the climate is humid and warm and this region is thinly populated.

The Climate is suitable for various crops and fruits. With the varying climate and sufficient rainfall, evergreen tropical forests are to be found on the northern slopes. Temperate forests of a variety of pines, oaks are to be found in the central region. While in the southern region not much natural vegetation is to be seen. The principal crops of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills are rice, maize, millet, potato, arecanut, pan leaves and bay leaves. Rice is the principal food of the people. Temperate fruits like oranges, lemons, pears, peaches, plums pineapples, bananas and many other fruits are grown. The climate is suitable for cattle and sheep rearing, piggery and poultry farming, bee keeping and others.

Food and Drink

The people eat a variety of food, but rice forms their staple food. Besides rice, they also eat millet, jobs tears and maize. They are very fond of meat, like pork, beef, chicken, venison and others. The men go out hunting both for sport and meat. Fish and dried fish are also popular. Some Khasi clans observed food taboo, for example, the Kharumnuid clan do not take pork. Some people in the Jaintia Hills do not take beef, due to the influence of Hinduism as they had close contact with Sylhet plains and the Jaintia chiefs became Hindus. There is no tradition that dog's meat is eaten by the Khasi. A variety of rice cakes called *ki kpu* are popular among the people. *Kwai* or *betelnut* is very popular. The Khasi men consume a kind of beer called *ka kiad um* and *ka kiad hiar* made from either rice or millet. Rice beer is necessary in all religious rites and ceremonies in which the sacrificer pour out libation from a hollow gourd called *u klong*.

Dress and Ornaments

The Khasi have their own traditional dress. The men wear a sleeveless coat called *ka jymphong*, they also like to put on caps. In ancient days, they wore a cloth round their waist which reached above the knees, this cloth is known as *ka Shympiar*. Even till now, in the villages, they still wear it when they go to work in the field or the forest.³⁹ The elderly men put on a *jainspong* or turban usually of white colour and a *jainboh* or *dhoti*. When they go out, the men wear a shawl which is known as *ryndia tlem*.

The normal Khasi women's dress consists of a garment next to the skin called *ka jympien* or *jainpien*, which is tied round the waist and comes down below the knee. Over this is worn the *jainsem* which is hanged loosely from the shoulders down, and is kept in position by knotting it over the shoulders. Another garment called *Ka tapmohkhlieh* is worn over the head and shoulders. The next garment is called *ka jainkup* which is worn over the shoulders like a cloak.

Local variations in the people's dresses can be seen. The people from Shella and Lyngngam wear a cloth called *ka jainthoh khyrwang*, and on occasions, when they go out they wear their expensive muga and *dhara jainsem*.⁴⁰ The Pnar women's dress differ a little from that of the upland Khasi. The *Khyrwang* is worn round the waist which comes down below the knee, over it a muga silk is worn and is fastened at the other end of the shoulders. The *jainsem* is also worn differently, the Pnar women use one piece which is fastened round the waist and tied at one end of the shoulders only, whereas the upland Khasi women wear two pieces of *jainsem* which are fastened at two ends of the shoulders. The *tapmoh khlieh* and *jainkup* are common to both the Pnar and the upland Khasi women. The traditional dress now have become modernised particularly in the town. Most of the men put on pants and shirts and coats. However, the women still retain their traditional *jainsem*, but there are certain changes and modifications in their dress. The *jainkup* and *tapmohkhlieh* are rarely used now except in the villages. The changes, modifications and modernization in both men and women dresses came after the coming of the British in these hills.⁴¹ The women are fond of gold and silver ornaments, which can be seen particularly during dancing occasions. The dancing dress and costumes are different for both men and women and from the ordinary dresses, they are more gorgeous and bright, and we shall discuss them in another chapter under the form and contents of the festivals.

The Khasi Religion

The Khasi have their own traditional religion since the beginning of times. They believe that their religion is the covenant that they had with God since the beginning of the world,⁴² and that their religion had been given by God Himself. With the coming of Christianity into Khasi and Jaintia Hills, most of the Khasi embraced the Christian faith belonging to different denominations, few of them belong to religions, other than Christianity. There are still many who

follow their own traditional religion.

The Khasi believe in the supreme God the Creator, *U Blei* is the name given to God. He is almighty and all powerful, *omniscient* and *omnipresent*. Being all in all, He is above gender, so they call Him *U Blei* or *ka Blei*. He is also above number, and they call Him, *U Blei*, *ka Blei* or *ki Blei*. Different names are given in different aspects of His Creations.⁴³

It was a generally accepted opinion that the Khasi religion is theistic and animistic. This view has been contradicted by many Khasi authors like H. Lyngdoh, Rabon Singh, Sib Charan Roy Dkhar, H.O. Mawrie and others. In reality, the Khasi religion is monotheistic, and God is known by different names and he can be addressed in many different ways in order to signify the different relations in which he manifests Himself. In all spheres of our life and in all aspect of His creation, he is there with a name.⁴⁴ In the Holy Book, mention is made, God of Abraham, God of Jacob, God of Isaac, this does not mean that there are three Gods, Abraham also worshipped El Shaddai-meaning the god of mountains and nature. Melkhisedekh of Salem called Him El Elyon, meaning God above, El Elyon of Melkhisedekh does not differ from El Shaddai of Abraham, the Israelites worshipped only one god.⁴⁵ So, also, the Khasi believe in one Supreme God the Creator, but He is addressed in different names. He also manifests himself in different places, in a number of groves, forests, hillocks, peaks and river, and these became places of worship. This may be the cause that non Khasi authors called the Khasi religion theistic and animistic. As God the Creator, the Khasi called Him, *U Blei Nongbuh Nongthaw*. God's creation is a process of continuity and in this reproduction, He is *u Nongsei u Nongpylnlong*. As the maker of man, He is *u Nongthaw bynriew*, *u Nongbuh bynriew*. As the protector and guardian of the *kur* or clan, He is *U 'Lei Longkur*, *u 'Lei. Longjaid*. As the protector and guardian of *our iing* or family or home, He is known as *u 'Lei Longiing*, *u 'Lei Longsem*. As the mainstay of our economic welfare, He is *u 'Lei Longspah*, *u 'Lei Longphew*. As the defender of the village, He is *u 'Lei khyrdop*, *u 'Lei kharai*, and of the territory and state, He is *u Lei Muluk u Lei jaka*.⁴⁶

When the *Hynniew Trep* had decided to remain here on earth, then God gave them three commandments to observe and follow to enable them to join the nine families above to whom they wanted to return when their earthly term was over. The three commandments are (1) *Kamai ia ka hok* which literally means to earn righteousness or to earn what is due (2) *Tipbriew- tiplei* meaning to know man and to know God (3) *Tip kur tip kha* that is to know both the maternal and paternal relations.⁴⁷ These three commandments are the fundamental tenets of the Khasi religion. The Khasi believe that all their actions are accountable to God, a man is responsible for his own actions, and no other persons could share his burdens of sins for him. So, man should lead a righteous life, speak the truth and should be honest. The people speak of *ka hok* or justice or righteousness in all their works and speeches. He should also love God and his fellowmen. Being a social being, man does not come alone to this world, he

has his *kur* or clan to whom he belongs to, which traced their descent from a common ancestress. Besides, he also has his *kha* that is paternal relations through marriage alliances between the members of his clan and those of other clans. The *kur* and *kha* concept has an important significance, because Khasi kinship is exogamous and marriage within the same clan is forbidden and such a marriage is known as *ka shongsang* or taboo. To the Khasi, there cannot be a greater sin than a marriage between members of the same *kur* or clan. Other sins are forgiveable but not this before God or man, people who are guilty of this sacrilege are outcasted.⁴⁸ The Khasi fear of *ka shongsang* as they believe that such a union is unlucky and will face misfortunes, such as by striking of thunder, devouring by wild animals like the tiger, fatal accidents and other calamities.⁴⁹ Even the converted Khasi did not give up this basic trait of their traditional customs, they still consider *ka shongsang* as a taboo and a great sin which is unpardonable.

The Khasi believe in a reason and a cause behind everything. Thus when there is any distress, calamity, diseases and other misfortunes, it is believed to be one's own errors and not fate or luck. To find out the reason and cause or *ia pandak* of all these, divination by breaking of an egg on the *diengshat* or wooden block, or by the use of a *shanam* or lime case or even by examining the entrails of a cock or hen, play an important part. When the reason and cause is found, prayers and sacrifices have to be given to God.⁵⁰

According to their belief, the Khasi came to this world by the cause, *ngi wan sha kane ka pyrthei da ka daw*, meaning that we came to this world through that cause. Each one has a place and an allotted part to play. In the great plan of God, man has a destiny and a mission. He also comes to this world by and with *ka Hukum*, *ngi wan sha kane ka pyrthei da ka hukum*, that is we came, to this world by Divine Decree, a fore ordaining external purpose of God, which also embodies that prescribed conduct which man should lead himself in life.⁵¹

The Khasi have no fixed days of congregational worship, like the Sunday of the Christians, the Friday of the Muhammedans, or the Sabbath of the Jews. But in fact he is a very religious persons, as he must *kamai ia ka hok* or earn righteousness in the world, which he can fulfill only by means of honest work, truthfulness in thoughts, words and to do justice in all his transactions.⁵² God the Creator according to them fills heaven and earth, and that they can save themselves through their own actions. The Khasi religion has no missionary intention like other religion, they have no organised church, and they do not claim that their religion is better than any other religion. Man's soul is very pure when it comes to this world, it comes with a purpose, and when that purpose is done, it goes back to where it comes from. All religions are good and true to them, and are from God, but the covenant that each race entered upon from the beginning of time is different from one race to another.⁵³

Veneration or Respect for the Ancestors

The Khasi have a great respect for the dead, as they believe that although they are no longer here on earth, yet they live in another world in the house of God. Among the important spirits are those of the first ancestors of the *kur*, who could inflict much pain and sufferings upon the living, if all the funeral and other rites are not performed. The offering of food to the dead ancestors is known as *ka aibam* and it is performed in order to protect the living from evil spirit and also to obtain material prosperity.⁵⁴ The dead ancestors are believed to have a power to help and bless them. The ancestors are *ka lawbei* or the first grandmother the progenitress of the clan. *U Thawlang* her husband and the first progenitor, and *u Suidnia* or *Kni rangbah*, the first maternal uncle of the clan. The Khasi used to offer offerings in front of the monoliths which are erected in their memory.⁵⁵

Animal Sacrifice

Animals such as pigs, goats, cattle and fowls and sometimes pigeons are offered as sacrifices. However, the cock has a special place as a sacrificial offering. According to a tradition, once the world was plunged into darkness, when the Sun refused to come out from her hiding place at a cave called *ka krem lamet ka krem latang*.⁵⁶ Finally, a cock was used as a messenger to persuade the Sun to come out. With the cock's crowing the Sun reappeared once more and there was light again. For this reason, the cock has a special place as he is considered as a mediator between God and man. Another characteristic feature is the egg divination, in which a diviner breaks an egg on *ka diengshat* or wooden block and signs are read out from the broken fragments of an egg. Egg breaking is intended to discover the cause of the displeasure of the High God in respect of illness, accidents and other misfortunes. After the cause is found, then prayers and sacrifices are offered. Signs are also read out from the entrails of the cock or hen when they are killed. Good or bad signs are also examined and read out from the livers, lungs, spleen, gall bladder of pig, goat and cattle after being killed.

Birth and Naming Ceremonies

To the Khasi, children are the gifts and blessings of God to the couple. So, the birth of a child is a happy occasion in the family. There are certain rituals which are connected with the birth of a child. When a child is born, its umbilical cord is cut with a piece of sharp bamboo. It was never cut with a knife. The placenta is carefully preserved in an earthen pot till the naming ceremony. The next morning after the birth of the child, the naming ceremony is performed. The ceremony is accompanied by pouring libation of rice liquor from *u klong* or gourd, and the name of the child is chosen from a number of alternatives by this method. The ceremony is accompanied by the dedication of certain articles.

If the child is a boy, they place a bow and three arrows near the child. For a girl they place *u star* or head strap, *ka khoh* a conical basket used for carrying things and a dao or a slashing knife.⁵⁷ These ritual objects have deeper meanings, the objects chosen for a boy symbolised the ideal man as a warrior and hunter, and a protector of the family, the clan and the race. The objects for a girl show that the woman is a strong hardworking housewife and co-worker in the field, who contributes much not only to the welfare of the family and the clan, but also to the race in general.

Among the Pnar, another method is by throwing two sticks by an aunt or by an eldest lady, who drops the stick as possible name is mentioned. If the sticks fall crosswise, the name is taken to be auspicious.⁵⁸ They also arrange for *sip syin* literally meaning ginger eating ceremony, where dried fish and ginger are cut into pieces and mixed with salt to be eaten after the birth of the child, usually the next morning if the child is delivered at home.⁵⁹

Life after Death and Bone Collection and Depository Ceremony

The Khasi have a strong belief in the life after death, as to them death is the end of life in this world and a beginning of a new life. They use to say that they cannot take anything from this world except *ka hok* or righteousness. They consider earth as a temporary place and are more concerned with their life after death in the *Ing U Blei* or the house of God.⁶⁰ The world is referred to as *ka pyrthei shong basa*, meaning the world a temporary abode. Thus while talking about or referring the dead people, they often say *bam kwai ha Ing u Blei*, meaning eating betelnut in the house of God. As we love and respect the living here on earth, in the same way, they will get love and respect in the house of God.

The bone collection and depository ceremony has its origin in the life after death. The Khasi cremate the dead, the *Kur* or clan have a common platform known as *ki kpep* on which cremation is done. After the cremation, the bones are collected and placed separately for males and females first in the *mawshyieng* or a small stone cist. The *mawshyieng* is a depository stone where only the bones of the deceased members of the family are kept. Then these bones are transferred to the *mawphew mawkynroh* or the bigger stone cist, where they are kept until they are finally taken to the *mawbah* or *pepbah* or the clan ossuary, where the bones of all the deceased members of the same clan are kept. The *mawbah* is a huge chamber of stone with a square or round lid on top. The bones are then placed, the males in one chamber and the females in another. The bones of the *kur* and *kha* that is maternal and paternal relations cannot be mingled together. The ceremony for the dead is not completed until the bone depository ceremony is over. It is believed that the

spirit of the dead cannot go to the house of God, if their bones are not placed in the *mawbah*. Their spirit stay in the river and forest and come to disturb the living by disease or any other trouble. Therefore, the bones are placed in the *mawbah*, so that the spirit of the dead will rest in peace, and to free the living from disease, trouble and misfortune and also that the souls of the deceased will stay together for ever in the house of God. There are certain rituals and ceremonies involved in the cremation, bone collection and depository ceremony. However, the bones of persons who have led a life of sin for example *ka shong sang*, whose sacrificial and religious rites have not been performed are not kept in the *mawbah*. The spirits of these are believed will not go to the house of God, but will stay on earth and become evil spirits. The people also speak of a place known as *ka khyndai pateng niamra*, or *ka mynkoi u Jom* or *ka nurok ka ksew*, in which people who have led a life of sin will go to after their death, as they cannot go the house of God.

Megalithic Culture

Wherever we go in the different parts of the Khasi and Jaintia hills, we can see a group of upright stones, table stones and other stone structures. They are usually seen at places which can be viewed properly such as the market place, on the roadside and on hilltops. All these megaliths have social, religious, economic and political significance. Some of them are connected with religious rites and ceremonies, others are erected in memory of the dead in remembrance of the chiefs or heroes of war or to commemorate any important event. In the Khasi and Jaintia Hills a large number of monumental stones of various types namely menhirs, dolmens and stone cists are found.⁶¹ The upright stones or menhirs are known as *mawshynrang* or male stone, and the table stone or dolmens are known as *mawkynthei* or female stone.

Megalithic erections are also connected with cremation, bone collection and depository ceremony. On the way to the cremation ground, or to deposit the bones to the *mawphew mawkynroh* or the *mawbah* clan used to erect the *mawlynti* or *mawkjat*, literally meaning stone on the way, or foot stone on the roadside. On their way to the cremation ground, they used to stop here and place the bier and sacrificed a goat known as *u blang mawlynti*. In the same way during the bone depository ceremony, they used to stop here, and sacrifice a goat. They did this in order to give food to the dead ancestors and also to inform them that they would go to the cremation ground or to deposit the bones in the *mawphew mawkynroh* or *mawbah* or stone cist.⁶² Other stones are the *mawumkoi* which are erected when the bones of those who died of unnatural death are washed in a pool known as the *umkoi umsham* to free them from defilement and that their spirit could go to the house of God. Before this ceremony, their bones are kept in a separate stone cist known as *mawbasa* or

mawlum suidiap. After their bones have been washed followed by certain rites and ceremonies, then only that they can be placed along with others. There are other types of stones known as *ki mawklim* which are erected during the *knia jingsang*, performed by the deceased son's mother and clan, when his wife had married again. They used to take the *jingsang* from the deceased wife in the form of cowries, where they bought all the necessary things for the sacrifice. These stones are erected on the roadside to bear witness to the world that they had cleaned themselves from any taboo, defilement and adultery.

There are other megaliths known as *mawbyinna* or *mawnam*, meaning stones of proclamation or memorial stones. These stones consist of three menhirs in a group with a dolmen, usually one bigger and taller upright stone and two smaller and shorter ones on the sides, with a flat table stone in front. If the *menhirs* vary to five, seven, or nine, more than one dolmen is erected. These stones are erected in memory of the dead maternal relations or by the children in memory of their paternal grandmother, uncles and aunts. There are different name to the menhirs and dolmens according to the purpose and occasion for their erection. In setting up the megaliths, all the members of the clan render voluntary help, however, skilled workers were also employed to cut and shape the various stones.⁶³

Matriliny

The unique institution among the Khasi is the matrilineal system. There is a tradition that a 'women's kingdom' existed among the Khasi. In the writing in the *Calutta Review* about ancient Assam, the author said that after the visit of Hieun-Tsang to Assam, Lalitaditya, a king of Kashmir who ruled from 714 to 750 AD, invaded the Jaintia kingdom which they called 'Stri Rajya', a women's kingdom in which Lalitaditya was repulsed.⁶⁴ The social structure of the Khasi originated from the clans. All clans traced their origin to the ancient mother called *ka lawbei tynrai*, who was the mother of the whole clan. Next in order was *ka lawbei tymmen*, the old grand mother of a subclan or *kpoh*, *ka lawbei khyinraw* was the ancestress of the family or *iing*.⁶⁵ Each clan has its triad, *ka lawbei* the ancestral mother, the progenitress, *u Thawlang*, the ancestral father, the progenitor, and *u suidnia*, the maternal uncle who is the eldest son of *ka lawbei*.⁶⁶

There are many traditions about the origin of the clans, which throw some light on their structure. Some clans adopted the mother's and father's names, for example, the Sawian, Ngapkynta, Phanbuh and Wanlang clans. *Ka Sa*, *Ngap*, *Phan*, *Wan* were names of their female ancestresses, while *Wian*, *Kynta*, *Buh*, *Lang* were that of their fathers respectively.⁶⁷ Some of the clans trace their descent from a goddess, and these clans would become ruling family, for example, the origin of Shillong Syiemship centers round *ka Pah*

syntiew.⁶⁸ Ka Pah Syntiew was believed to be the daughter of the Shillong God. There are clans which bear the names of animals such as *Shrieh* and *Tham* which means monkey and crab respectively. However, there is no evidence that these clans ever regarded the animals as tribal totems.⁶⁹ There are also clans which bear their names from the places they dwelt, like Lamin and Nongkhlaw which are names of places, so these clans might have originated from these places' names. A large number of clans like the Dkhar clans traced their origin to the plains and plains' women as their ancestress. Members of the Lyngdoh or priestly clans had the right to perform sacrifices, but not all members of these clans followed the same occupation as priest, they might take up any profession, sometimes acting as priest, in their spare time. All the Lyngdoh and Dkhar clans are not at all descended from a common ancestress and are not debarred from intermarriage.⁷⁰

Due to the matrilineal character of the Khasi society, the children always adopt the names of the mother's clan. The Khasi system of kinship is exogamous, and clans which claimed from a common ancestry could not intermarry. Inter-clan sexual relationship is a mortal sin, and the couple who commit such a crime are excommunicated from the society.⁷¹ This marriage is termed as *ka shong sang*. Some of the clan are prohibited from marriage with other clans, for example, the *Kharkongor* clan cannot marry the *Kharshiing* clan and the *Diengdoh* clan cannot marry the *Lalu* clan. This may be, because they share a common ancestress. A non-Khasi woman who marries a Khasi man is not only accepted and assimilated, but she becomes the progenitress of a new clan. The Dkhar clans originated in this way. As the children adopt the mother's clan, therefore, they belong to the mother, and there is no illegitimate child in the Khasi society, whether the woman bore that child from a husband with whom she had gone through a formal ceremony or not.⁷²

Position of Women in the Society

Women are highly respected in the Khasi society, they enjoy an unusually dignified and important position. For generations, Khasi women have been the custodians of property in whose strength of life and character, the men of their clan confide their life earnings and the hope of the peaceful resting of their souls.⁷³ The women enjoy comparative freedom and bride price does not exist in the Khasi society. A woman is accorded respect as one through whom the race, and the clan is propagated. In recognition of the fact that commitments as a mother and housewife are a full time occupation, responsibilities relating to regulation of the family are entrusted to menfolk. Household responsibilities are shared between the maternal uncle and the father. In matters affecting the clan or the family, such as, the arrangement of marriages,

management of ancestral property and performance of religious duties, it is the uncles who make decision, though generally in consultation with other members of the family.⁷⁴ Khasi women are respected as the propagators of *ka kur ka jaid* or the clan. Therefore, they are held in great esteem and accorded a high status. But with all the privileges in the society, Khasi women are not aggressive and do not have superior feeling towards men. There is a Khasi saying, *u kpa u ba lah uba iai, u kni uba tip ha ka iap ha ka im*,⁷⁵ meaning the father who provides for the family, and the uncle who has to know in matters of life and death. Although the Khasi society is matrilineal, yet in ancient days women have no rights in the political and administrative spheres, they never attended any Durbar and are excluded in the process of legislation, administration and judiciary. There is a Khasi saying, *Wow la Kynih ka 'iar kynthei, ka pyrthei ka la wai*, meaning that when the hen crows the world will come to an end or will be in destruction. This is a saying that as only the cock crows, so also the crowing job should be carried on by men only. The Khasi in the evolution of their democratic system have in their wisdom not burdened a woman with politics, and in the traditional political institutions, she has hardly any function or place, she has more vital functions to perform in her career as a woman, besides her all important vocation as a mother.⁷⁶

Inheritance

According to the matrilineal system, prevailing amongst the Khasi, the inheritance to property is from mother to the daughter. The *khatduh* enjoys the privileges of getting the lion's share of the property including the residential house of her parents. Her sisters are entitled to smaller shares of the family property. The status of the youngest daughter is of special importance, she is an embodiment of everything, that is enduring and sacred in the Khasi concept of family. Her house is called *ka ing khatduh*, or the youngest daughter's house, which has special sanctity, this is the ancestral house of generations of youngest daughters which provides refuge or shelter for the indigent and the improvement of the members of the family. This undoubtedly accounts for the rarity of beggars in the Khasi society. As long as a man remains unmarried, he stays in his parents' house and contributes whatever he earns to the common fund.⁷⁷ According to custom, the earning of a man before his marriage goes to his family, which later may become part of the ancestral property.

In Khasi society property is of two kinds inalienable and alienable, the first type is a legacy, an ancestral property, which is known as *nongtymmen*, this property cannot be disposed of without the general consent of the whole family or clan. The second type consist only of the earnings of the present members, this property is known as *nong-khynraw*.⁷⁸ The youngest daughter

inherits the major share of the property, but other sisters also receive a share of inheritance. The *khatduh* is one who is responsible for all the family religious rites, her house is called *ka Ing seng*, *Ing niam* and *Ing kur* meaning the organizing house, religious house or the clan's house. She has to bear the expenses of these rites, and the funeral rites of her parents including the important ceremony of placing the bones of the dead under a family small stone cist or *mawshyieng* and finally to transfer them to the clan's bigger stone ossuary or the *mawbah*. Although the *khatduh* has to bear all these expenses, but some contribution is given by the children of the deceased. In all cases, the maternal uncle, has great influence and prestige in the family. Even so, the father of the family is in no way subservient to him, he enjoys a high status in both his own and his wife's family.⁷⁹

In spite of the high position of the Khasi women, the men too have their roles, they are not only the sons, but the maternal uncles of the sisters children, and act as counsellors and guardians of his nephews and nieces. In his wife's house, a Khasi man is a husband and a father who brings up and provides for the children. The Khasi use to say *u kpa u ba ai ia ka long rnyieng*, meaning the father who gives the stature and his mother and sisters are duly respected as *Meikha* and *kha*. The *khatduh* is called *ka nongriing* or the keeper of the house and has to make all arrangements for the performances of religious rites and ceremonies of the family or clan, and the maternal uncle performs the ceremonies. Will and gift did not exist in the Khasi society, but there was a custom in respecting the wishes of the parents or grandparents who sometimes said their wishes, as to what should be done after their death and even named property which should be given to a certain child.⁸⁰

Political Institutions

The Khasi have their own unique customs, religion, culture and also their own political system, which functions in a very democratic way. In the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, there is no land revenue, as the chief is the only democratic ruler, who has no right to levy a land tax from the people, as land is the absolute property of different clans, villages, and private owners. The Khasi belong to a race quite distinctly individual from any other race in India. They have been characterized in Memorandum of the Assam Government prepared for the Statutory Commission as a remarkable people, socially and politically, the people show a sturdy independence and democratic equality. With their separate history, culture and institutions, the people are however distinct from the plainsmen who form the bulk of the province.⁸¹

Khasi democracy was founded in the *Dorbar Raid* or the Durbar of the Communes, and the *Dorbar shnong* or a village Durbar, which had an elected

headman each at the top.⁸² The will of the people is considered supreme in the Khasi political set up, and thus the Khasi state is truly democratic, the chief is in no sense a territorial sovereign, but being merely elected heads of village confederacies.⁸³ The Durbars of the Khasi present the appearance of little oligarchical republics, subject to no common superior yet of which each member is amenable to some degree, to the control of his confederates.⁸⁴

Syiemship or chieftdom is a unique institution of sireship and is peculiar to the Khasi states.⁸⁵ According to tradition available, the first Khasi Syiem were the *Syiem Madur Maskut*, the *Syiem Synteng* and *Syiem Shillong*.⁸⁶ These three ruling families traced their ancestry from a divine and totemic origin. The *Syiem Madur Maskut* traced their origin from a pig, the Jaintia Syiem to a fish and the Shillong Syiem to a goddess. There is a close bond of relationship between the *Syiem* and his subjects. This closeness of relationship could be clearly seen from the way the people sometimes addressed their *Syiem* as *Païem* or father king and *mei iem* or mother queen. In return the *Syiem* referred to their subjects as *ki khun ki hajar* or children.⁸⁷ The *Syiem* are regarded next to God, hence they are known as *ki Syiem ki Blei*. Some *Syiem* are said to be *Syiem Blei* or God kings, as they had divine origin. Some others are called *Syiem briew* or men kings because they had no divine origin.

The Khasi political set up consists of the rulers which include *Syiem*, *Wahadadar*, *Sirdar* and *Lyngdoh* and the *Bakhrav* or elders which are made up of *Myntri*, *Basan*, *Doloi* and *Lyngskor* and the subjects and riots.

The head of the Khasi state is the *Syiem* or chief, who is a limited monarch, his power is very much circumscribed, according to custom, he cannot perform any important act without first consulting and obtaining the approval of the Durbar.⁸⁸

The *Sutnga Syiemship* had a glorious beginning, it traced its origin to *ka Li Dohkha* which was a fish and reincarnated into a beautiful woman, married to *u Woh Ryndi*. One tradition, relates that *ka Teng*, *ka Lieh*, *ka Pung* and *ka Lang* were born of them. In another tradition, we find two daughters, *ka Rapunga* and *ka Raputong* with three sons. *U Shyngkhlein Am*, *U Bani Am* and *u Tetia Ksaw*, were born of them. *Ka Rapunga* got married and their offspring were called *ka Het* and *ka Subot*, they were the progenitresses of the present line of *Sutnga Syiem*. *U Shyngkhlein Am*, the eldest son of *ka Li*, is supposed to have been the first *Syiem* of the kingdom.⁸⁹ The kingdom expanded through conquests and allegiances. The *Sutnga Syiem* wanted to shift the headquarter from *Sutnga*, later on Jaintiapur was annexed and became the new headquarter and political center of the *Sutnga Syiem*. *Nartiang* became their summer capital. The *Sutnga Syiem* held large tracts of lands in the plains, which were very fertile and brought wealth to the country. These lands in the plains formed the Jaintia parganahs which were under the absolute control of

the *Syiem*. The *Doloi* and *Lyngdoh* or local priest conducted the administration of each respective districts as well as religious performances, the *Dolois* very often went down to Jaintiapur to attend to state Durbar. The glory of the Sutnga Syiemship came to an end with the annexation of Jaintia Hills in 1835 by the British.⁹⁰

After the British had established and consolidated their position, they had set up and recognised twenty five petty states in the Khasi Hills. ⁹¹ Fifteen of the first class presided over by *Syiem*, one confederacy under an elected officer, styled as *Wahadadar*, five under *Sirdar*, and four under *Lyngdoh*. The names of the states are Bhowal or Warbah, Langrin, Malaisohmat, Maharam, Mariaw, Mawiang, Mawsynram, Myllem, Nobosohphoh, Nongkhlaw, Nongspung, Nongstoin, and Rambrai. Shella was ruled by a *Wahadadar*. Dwara Nongtyrnm, Jirang, Mawlong, Mawdon and Nongrang were under *Sirdar*. Lyniong, Mawphlang, Nonglywai and Sohiong were under *Lyngdoh*. In all, the *Syiemship*, *Lyngdohship*, *Wahadadarship* were worked out in strict accordance with the Riti or unwritten constitution which grew out of past usages and practices.

The succession to the *Syiem* was from uncle to nephew, the customary law of succession was and still is matrilineal, although the ruler is always a male. The son of the eldest sister normally becomes the heir, but in the absence of male heirs from the eldest sister, the succession passes to the next eldest sister. ⁹² In this manner, the matrilineal principle of the Khasi society is followed. However, in case of the total absence of male heirs from the particular ruling clan, a female could also succeed to that position and such a case was seen in the Nobosohphoh Syiemship, where a female by the name of ka Lar has been able to obtain the seat of a *Syiem*. ⁹³ The *Syiem* is usually appointed by a council of ministers, from the ruling family or clan, and the members of the council in the same way are elected from certain selected clans.

The Khasi state is a limited monarchy, the *Syiem* cannot do as he pleases, without obtaining the approval of his *Dorbar*. White in his memoirs of the death of David Scott was, deeply impressed by the conduct in the Khasi Durbar held to discuss David Scott's proposal to build a road across the Khasi Hills. He observed,⁹⁴

"I was struck with astonishment at the order and decorum which characterized these debates. No shouts of exultations or indecent attempts to put down the orator of the opposite party, on the contrary, every speaker was fairly heard out. I have often witnessed the debates in St. Stephen's Chapel, but those of the Cossayah parliament appeared to be conducted with more dignity and manners".

Broadly speaking, the *Syiem* has four duties, those of a chief priest, judge, executioner, and general. As a religious head, the *Syiem* consults the auspices of soothsayers for the welfare of the state, he also appoints a *Lyngdoh* to help him in the performance of religious rites. State religious ceremonies are also performed by the *Syiem*, and he is also responsible for those who die without any relatives to take care of their bodies and properties. In judicial matters, he acts as a judge, the whole Durbar being the jury. In the olden days, the *Syiem* marched to war as the head of the army.⁹⁵ Regarding their military organisation, the *Khasi Syiem* had no armed forces, but in time of war and trouble, it was the people themselves who rose as one man to defend their hearths and homes.⁹⁶ The *Syiem* has to organize state ceremonies, and also act as the keeper of the religion of the state. The income or possessions of the *Syiem* is taken by the *Syiemsad* or high priestess, the mother, or the eldest niece of the *Syiem* who distributed to the wife and children including the family members.⁹⁷

As we have seen, land tax is unknown amongst the Khasi, as land is the property of the people. So the income of the chief is very less. Revenue of the *Syiem* is derived from tolls levied on all goods sold in the market in his territory, and this is perhaps, the most important source of income. Income is also derived from state lands and also judicial fines. Besides these, the *Syiem* also derives a collection known as *Pynshok*, or state subscriptions, a kind of tribute which was also paid to other categories of rulers such as *Lyngdoh*, *Sirdar*, and *Wahadadar*.

Social Changes amongst the Khasi

With the coming of the British rule and its consolidation in the whole of India, the integration of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills in the British dominion also took place. The British rule brought along with it christianity, western education and other forces of modernity which led to the transformation in the Khasi society. Formal education was introduced to the Khasi, and their language was put into writing as the Khasi have no script of their own. The history of education and literature in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills began with the Serampore Baptist Mission, which carried on evangelical works among the Khasi mercantile class who lived in the Sylhet District. The first missionary was a *Bengali* named Krishna Chandra Pal, who was converted by William Carey.⁹⁸ Under this mission, a translation of the New Testament and some primers in Khasi in *Bengali* script were prepared. In 1841 the Welsh Presbyterian Mission came to these hills. It was Rev. Thomas Jones of this mission who replaced the *Bengali* and introduced the Roman script.⁹⁹ This mission built churches and started schools, and this was the real beginning in the field of education. The history

of proselytisation began with the Welsh Presbyterian mission, and a large number of the Khasi embraced christianity. The Catholic mission came later in 1890,¹⁰⁰ and they started schools and building churches. The coming of these missionaries is important, for it was due to their endeavours that literacy increased rapidly in these hills.

In the precolonial period, the Khasi lived in isolation, although there were some contacts through trade with the neighbouring plains. They had their own traditional religion, unique culture, social and political system. The people depended much on agriculture for their living and existence. Besides agriculture, there were other occupations of the people like craftsmen, traders and iron smelters etc. Their social, economic and political activities were all governed by their geographical and ecological environment that they lived in. The people relied very much on supernatural powers for whatever happened to them either good or bad. A good harvest and well being was supposed to be a blessing from God, while diseases, bad harvest, starvation and pestilence were believed to be evil influences. So they propitiated God for a bountiful harvest and to free them from all evils. Their festivals and dances are also linked with agriculture and cultivation rites throughout the year. All these gave way to new changes and civilization with the coming of the British and Christianity. They introduced a new era which brought about social, economic and political changes in these hills. These changes brought about by western values and culture came as challenges to the Khasi traditional religion and culture. The traditional political system was replaced by a new administration, and the social system was disturbed. Besides, christian and western influence, contact with the other cultures of the neighbouring plains also took place and these had an influence in the bordering areas. The coming of the christianity and education had a great impact on the Khasi, as they accepted christianity readily and became somewhat westernized. The rituals during festivals and dances which form part of the Khasi social and religious life are performed mostly by non christians only.

In recent years, we witness a transitory period which is undergoing in the Khasi society. Old values are given way to new ones, education spread rapidly, new forces of modernity are bringing in considerable changes in the society. The opening up of better means of communication ended the isolation of the people. The establishment of government offices, and other establishments and private sectors, the growth of towns and villages brought in many people from outside and thus affected the population structure, particularly in the town. These are some of the factors which influenced the social change among the Khasi.

Footnotes

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4. *Hill Geographer*, Vol. I, Number 1 and 2, 1982, p. 42.
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7. S.K. Chatterjee, *Kirata-Jana-Krti*, pp. 8-9.
8. H. Bareh, *The History and culture of the Khasi people*, p.10
9. T. Rodborne, *U Khasi*, p.6.
10. R. M. Nath, *The Background of Assamese culture*, p.2
11. Cited in H. Lyngdoh, *Ka Niam Khasi*, Introduction, p.1
12. T. Rodborne *op.cit.* pp.4-11
13. Discusson with my supervisor and some people of the Surma Valley
14. L. G. Shullai, *op. cit.*
15. *Report of The Land Reforms Commission for Khasi Hills*, 1974, p.17.
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17. R. M. Nath, *op.cit.*, p. 55.
18. H. Bareh, *op. cit.*, p.15, P.R.T.Guardon, *The Khasis* pp.10-11
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21. H. Lyngdoh, *op.cit.*, pp. II-VI
22. H. Bareh, *op.cit.*, p. 12
23. L. Barua, *Whither Assam*, p. 2.
24. B. M. Das, *The people of Assam*,34.
25. *News item in The Shillong Times*, May 24th 1986, Vol XLI, No.41
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29. *Ibid*.

30. *Ibid.*
31. *Meghalaya*, Basic facts, p. 2
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34. *Ibid*, p. 5.
35. I. M. Simon, *op. cit.*, pp.3-4
36. P. T. Marwein, *op. cit.*, p5.
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38. *Meghalaya*, *Basic facts*, p.2
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40. *Ibid*, p.39.
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55. P. R. T. Gurdon, *op. cit.*, p.110
56. H. O. Mawrie, *op. cit.*, p. 7
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78. H. Bareh, *op. cit.*, p.296
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Chapter II

Life Throughout The Year

Man and His Environment

The story of man started about two million years ago. He had travelled a long way to reach the modern age and in course of this long journey, he had to struggle for existence against several difficulties, the forces of nature and the wild beasts. The primitive man passed through several stages of evolution before he could reach a minimum standard of life. He had to work hard to get food, and he migrated from one place to another in search of food and shelter. Man's intelligence helped him to survive, it was through his gifted intelligence and reasoning that he could establish his supremacy over the rest of the animal kingdom. Throughout his life on earth, man has to face various challenges, his life is a continuous struggle for adjustment and adaptation to his environment.

The civilization slowly and gradually evolved through certain difficult and intelligent steps taken by our ancestors, in the early days. The story of man from the remotest past to the growth of settled life is the story of progress and continuous adjustment to his environment. It was due to the unsatiable thirst, desire and want of man to know the unknown, to conquer the unconquered, to explore the unexplored and to improve himself that the various stages of progress and development took place, which enabled us to reach the present modern age, the age of science and technology.

The Khasi and the move to Early Man

We have discussed the origin and migration of the Khasi in the previous chapter, and we have seen that different views have been propounded by scholars with regard to the origin and migration of the Khasi. The Khasi have no recorded history till after the advent of the British, as they had no script of their own. So, not much literary evidence is available to reconstruct the pre-historical period. Therefore, with regard to the ancient period, we have

to seek the help of archaeological and anthropological data. An intensive study of the antiquities in the ancient ruins, stone remains, sculpture and architecture with collaborative evidence from the local traditions is essential to bring to light the past history.¹ According to the widely accepted tradition, after the *Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum* or the Seven Huts, the ancestors of the Khasi had decided to stay here on earth, the ladder was severed and they could no longer communicate with the Nine Above. They remained here on earth, believing that after their earthly life is over, they would one day go back to the house of God. The Khasi then settled down and cultivated their lands, braving all the difficulties, and challenges which they faced from nature and had to adjust themselves to their environment that they lived in.

State Formation Amongst the Khasi

The word 'state' comes from the Latin word 'status' which means standing or position. The word 'polis' which was the precursor of what we call state, originally meant a citadel, 'polis' was an appellation given to citadel which was the natural centre of gravity and the focus of authority.² A state then stands for a fortified authority and is concerned with the distribution of power in the society.³ The state as an ancient institution, is a specific kind of social organization which "gives expression to the existing relations in a society and to ideas pertaining to power, authority, force, justice, property and many other phenomena."⁴ The state or polity formations among the tribal communities in precolonial India emerged either from the indigenous tribal bases or through military adventurism.⁵

The Conceptual Frame⁶

Our researchers in the tribal state/polity formations in pre-colonial/medieval period suggest that there had been common elements in the process of such formations in all cases, although some of these elements and not others might have been more prominent in specific cases. These include (i) the tribal formation underwent transformation with the emergence of private property, when the tribal societies were stratified into classes in terms of differentiated landholding and the extent of political dominance that strengthened the position of the traditional chiefs at clan/tribal level; (ii) the sphere of political dominance of a chief was extended either by subduing the neighbouring tribes/clans/communities or by direct territorial conquest or through their voluntary submission to his protective authority; (iii) the authority was further strengthened by leading the people in war path either for offensive or defensive purposes and it continued to be unquestioned, at least at the formative stage, in cases where the state came into existence through military adventurism; (iv) the ruling chiefs succeeded in developing a centralised

administration with an elaborate defence structure and the means to appropriate surplus through a hierarchical state order; (v) the introduction of more developed agricultural technology to ensure increased production and production control on the part of the ruling chief could be an essential pre-condition for a centralised state authority; (vi) the families with traditions of administrative proficiency and artisans and peasants were induced to immigrate and settle in the territory; (vii) the process of Hinduisation/ Sanskritisation and the role of the Brahmins in establishing the divine origin of the ruler (i.e., his ancestors) helped the legitimization of the assumed status of the latter and its consolidation, and the myths that were created in the process resulted in the universalisation of the culture; (viii) the adoption of the language and culture, of the majority in the territory's population by the ruling family and aristocracy enlisted loyalty and support of that dominant revenue-paying group; (ix) the rulers emerged as the champions of their new faith and patrons of the culture, and language of their subjects; (x) the matrimonial connection maintained with the ruling houses in other states with almost similar ethno-cultural traditions evoked mutual support and raised them in the estimation of their subjects; and (xi) the diplomatic relations with more powerful neighbours were essential either to guarantee political existence in the face of expanding influences of such neighbours or to pacify the disgruntled elements within the state.

With regard to the political structure of the Khasi, some of the above concepts seem to be relevant. Traditions tell us that families which belonged to the same *kur* or clan lived together in groups. When clans grew and expanded, they amalgamated with other clans. Villages were formed by the biggest clan with the addition of more clans. Thus clans increased and so also, the boundaries of their villages. As clan expanded, the people felt that it was a necessity to have someone to run the administration. The eldest male member of the family or clan also became *the ruler of the village, he became known as the Basan Shnong or the Basan Raid*. There are also *Raid* which elect a *Lyngdoh* to rule over them.⁷

According to Kynpham Singh⁸ in the distant past, families belonging to the same clan lived together in clusters. The eldest male member or any other male member chosen by a council of adult males became the *Saidnia* or *Lyngdoh* of the clan. He was also a priest and all the religious rites of the clan were performed by him. His youngest sister or the *khatduh* became the custodian of the clan, the ancestral property and were also responsible for the religious rights of the clan. Then the clans grew and formed alliances or amalgamated with other clans in the government and administration of their areas of occupation. This expansion gave birth to a *Raid* or commune. The administration of the *Raid* followed the same pattern as that of a clan with the *Lyngdoh* as the head and to look after both religious and secular administration and having a community home or *ka Ingsad*. The *Raid* took the form of small oligarchies

which federated to emerge as states with the clans of the *Lyngdoh*, *Basan* or *Bakhrav* as the founding members sitting at the helm of the affairs through their respective clan representative. The emergence of a state might also be by a direct confederacy of clan units which joined together to create a state without going through the intermediate stage of forming *Raid*.

A Khasi state has been formed by the voluntary association of villages or group of villages. The head of the Khasi state is the chief locally known as *Syiem* who is assisted by a council locally known as a *Dorbar* of Ministers.⁹ Every village has a village durbar known as the *Dorbar Shnong* with the *Tymmen shnong* or *Rangbah shnong* to run the affairs of the village. In a similar way, every *Raid* has a *Dorbar Raid* or community *Durbar* with a *Basan* or *Lyngdoh* to look into the affairs of the whole *Raid*. Thus the foundation of Khasi democracy was laid on the *Durbar* of the communes and the village *Durbar*. On top of these stood the *Dorbar Hima* or state *Durbar* which is also known as *ka Dorbar Blei* or an assembly of God, because it is very much respected and held sacred.¹⁰

In 1928, a meeting of leaders from the Khasi native states recorded an account of the formation of states. The proceedings of the meeting was sent to the government and it runs as follows,¹¹

"There was still current a tradition that originally the Khasis formed themselves into numerous communes. Each commune acquired a well defined area of land for its own settlement and occupation and administered themselves by councils of which every adult male was a member there of. They guided and influenced these councils, but were never vested with any authority. Gradually these communes federated themselves into federacies or states."

The account suggests that the Khasi state, in most of the cases were formed by the voluntary association of *Raid*. The initiative came from the *Bakhrav* and they retained the political powers in their hands by virtue of being the original clans.

The clans grew in the size, families or even whole branches moved away to start new settlements in other parts of the country, or they might reside in the midst of another clan, commune or within a *Raid*, where though accepted in the social life of the commune, yet were denied participation in the affairs of the state, they were called *ki shong thap shongbiang*. With the intrusion of the outsiders, the internal discipline and clan loyalty could no longer be maintained. Thus disputes and crimes started cropping up. Thus it was necessary for the purpose of executing the unpleasant decisions of the state council, *Syiem* were appointed to whom were assigned the duties of executing the decisions of the council. The clans would not also dare to assume the office of *Syiem* for fear of *ka byrsieh*, a defilement, a taint and a curse which could be fall upon their near and dear ones, due to any deed or action by any member, which was spiritually

responsible or bad. But there should be someone to fulfill the need of the society who would be appointed as *Syiem*. Thus the institution of *Syiemship* was instituted.¹²

The state and the institution of *Syiemship* emerged out of the need of civil society, and the needs of the civil society are conditioned by the economic structure prevailing at a particular stage of social development. It can be said that the state came into existence only at a stage of social development conditioned by economic development and when social stratification appeared.¹³

In a festival or say rituals when ruler or members of the ruling family or important official or dignitaries of the state do perform certain rituals, these ritual functions strengthen their authority that is control over the people. In many cases in Indian context because of this ritual function a divine origin, it is ascribed to the ruler and his ancestor. Theoretically this is called the Divine origin of Kingship. The role of rulers like *Syiem*, *Lyngdoh*, *Doloi* and other state dignitaries helps them in making their position indispensable to the people, in turn it helps the growth and functioning of the political system and political institution. Ritual roles strengthen the authority, it was these differentiated ritual functions of the elites who had also specific political and administrative functions augmented the stratification processes which is considered as an essential pre-condition for the formation of states or political system emerging out of indigenous egalitarian tribal bases.

Thus the Khasi like the rest of the people in the world had struggled for their existence till they reached the present age. It was a continuous adjustment and adaptation with nature and environment. All these changes took place in isolation, uninfluenced and unaffected by any outside forces, except some contact through trade with the neighbouring plains. In their isolated life, the Khasi organized their life throughout the year. Although the mainstay of their economy was agriculture, yet there were traders, craftsmen and other occupations. They knew when is the time to work and to enjoy themselves, they knew which is the period of ploughing, weeding and harvesting. They used to enjoy their outdoor life like hunting, fishing, arrow shooting and other sports which served as recreations during their leisure time, when they were not overburdened with work. They organized their festivals and dances either before the sowing season or after harvesting, to thank God for all the blessings that He has showered upon them in the year that had passed and also to invoke His blessing for the coming year. All the development and changes took place out of the social, economic and political need of the society. Two things occurred to the Khasi, firstly, to make adjustment they organized their life throughout the year. This organization of life throughout the year, when refined over the ages, led to the evolution of a Calendar for the Khasi.

The Primitive Calendar

The primitive man required a Calendar for religious observances, and when he settled down to agriculture, he needed it for his agricultural activities or agricultural cycle throughout the year. They utilized the cycle of recurring natural phenomena familiar to them in their everyday life. The primitive men however, observed that the Sun and the Moon appear at different points in the sky in different seasons, the most obvious and most precise was the alteration of day and night, and the phases of the Moon. They also watched the sprouting of leaves, the different habits of animals, the coming of the rain and frost and others.¹⁴ The primitive men began their Calendar by observing and utilizing the most obvious natural phenomena, they were not conscious of the rotation or revolution of the earth. Later on along with their progress, their Calendar was increasingly based on astronomical observations. A day is a natural division of time, its division into hours, minutes, seconds were of later development. To the primitive societies, the day was recognized merely as an alteration between light and darkness,¹⁵ he counted the days as so many dawns, Suns, nights or sleep. The need for an agricultural Calendar in which seasons of one people could be correlated with seasons of another became vitally necessary after the development of civilization, and increasing trade and commerce between people of different places. Thus a solar Calendar was more convenient to be adopted over those areas of the world where trade was carried on amongst them. The concept of the year was also a later development. In primitive days, the concept of a year grew from the need to have a Calendar period longer than a month, for example, when they wanted to compare the age of one man with another, they calculated years not by numbers, but by reference to some notable events like a war, natural calamities like an earthquake, a famine etc. If they wanted to compare the age of a child, they did so by observing a period from one harvest to another, a child who has lived for four harvests is four years old and so on.

Need of Calendar

A Calendar is a means of grouping days in ways convenient for regulating civil life and religious observances of the community. The term Calendar is derived from the Latin word *Calendrium* meaning interest register, or account book. *Calendrium* is derived from *Calendae* or *Kalendae*, the first day of the Roman month, the day on which future market days, feasts and other occasions were performed.¹⁶ The word Calendar in the present usage refers to an accounting, usually for civil purposes of days and other division of time. The Calendar which is now used for civil and for all practical purposes throughout the world, is called the Gregorian Calendar after Pope Gregory XIII,

who introduced it in the sixteenth century.

For measuring time today, we have important units which consists of a day, a week, a month and a year. A day is further divided into twenty four hours, an hour is divided into sixty minutes and a minute into sixty seconds. A day is related to the rotation of the earth round its axis, a month with the revolution of the Moon round the earth and a year with the revolution of the earth round the Sun, which causes the four seasons. The Gregorian Calendar consists of 365 days and it is divided into 12 months of rather unequal duration. However, 365 days is not the exact number, it is the approximate number of rotation. To compensate for the deficiency, one day is added in the Calendar every fourth year, that is a leap year of 366 days, the number of the year being divisible by four. In a leap year, a day is added to the month of February, making it a month of 29 days as against its usual duration of 28 days.¹⁷ Thus the average length of a year and a month is 365.242199 days and 29.53089 days respectively, and in a year there are 12.368267 months.¹⁸

The basis for all the calendric system is the motion of either the Sun or the Moon. So, there are three kinds of Calendars used in the world, the solar Calendar, the lunar Calendar and the Calendars with the combination of solar and lunar elements. The solar Calendar is based on the solar year or seasonal year or the earth's motion around the Sun of about 365¼ days.¹⁹ The Gregorian Calendar is a solar Calendar, the year is divided into 12 months, but the length of the month is not the same. A lunar Calendar is based entirely on the motion of the Moon around the earth, period of 12 lunar months constitute a lunar year. If a lunar month is counted as 29½ days, the lunar year contains 354 days, there is deficiency of about 11 days in a year. The deficiency is made good by adding one month to the Hindu Calendar, once in every three years. The lunar system of reckoning days and month is very convenient to ordinary people, as everyone can see for oneself the Moon and gets the idea of approximate date in a month. The Hijri Calendar is entirely lunar, its year is much shorter than the solar year, that is why Muslim festivals do not fall in the same months, when reckoned on the Gregorian Calendar. The Hindu Calendar combined elements of both the lunar and the solar Calendars. The month in the Hindu Calendar is lunar, but the year is solar.²⁰ The Republic of India has adopted the Gregorian Calendar for its secular life, its Hindu religious life continues to be governed by the traditional Hindu Calendar. This Calendar is based on the Shaka Era with Chaitra as its first month. Its normal year consists of 365 days, the days of this Calendar have permanent correspondence with the days of the Gregorian Calendar. Chaitra 1st (first) falling on the 22nd March in a normal year and on the 21st March in a leap year.²¹

The calendar system is very important and essential for the primitive man and also for modern civilization. The Calendar is vital and very essential for agriculture, the time of sowing and harvesting, for the observance of various

festivals and dances, for business, trade and commerce, for domestic and academic purposes, for maintaining chronology, historical dates and other events and also for keeping the exact period of time. All these will not be possible without a calendar system. A Calendar in the words of Durkheim, expresses the rhythm of the collective activities, while at the same time, its function is to assure their regularity. A reckoning of time was always a necessity to man to regulate individual and group activity.²² Thus the Calendar system began since the ancient times with the primitive societies, and as social life became more and more complex, a more exact calendar system became a necessity.

The Calendar of the Khasi

The Khasi like the rest of the people in the world, have their own method of reckoning time, which is based on the agricultural cycle and nature. Their Calendar is a lunar one based on the phases of the Moon. Among an agricultural community engaged in market operations, a Calendar follows both the cycles of agricultural activities and exigencies of market operations. In such Calendars, years are counted by counting seasons, month are determined by different kinds of agricultural activities and weeks are measured by market days.²³ The Khasi Calendar is one, in which the months are counted on the basis of agricultural activities and nature. They have an eight days week which is based on market operations, as markets play an important role in the social, economic and political life of the Khasi. The people observed the occurrence of the most obvious phenomena, such as the appearance of day and night. They had no watches in ancient days, they just observed the position of the Sun and the Moon and could tell the approximate time. They calculated their age by referring to important and notable events that took place in their time. Till the present day, old people used to ask each other of how old were they when *u Khynniuh* or *u Jumai bah* that is the great earthquake of 12th June, 1897 took place and they calculate their age accordingly. The Khasi have a high regard for the soil which produces food for them and their children. So, when they sow or harvest, they should always go with a happy heart. If they sow the seeds with an angry or sad heart, they believe that will affect the growth of the crops. The festivals and dances are linked with their agricultural activities. The Khasi do not sow when the Moon is waxing, that is *haba shai bnai*, always they sow when the Moon is waning, *haba ngen bnai*, because when the night is clear the insects and caterpillars will eat up the seeds.

The Khasi have four seasons in a year, namely *ka Pyrem*, *ka Lyiur*, *ka Synrai*, *ka Tlang*, corresponding to the spring, summer, autumn and winter respectively. The Poets and writers used to compare the four seasons to the

four stages of human life. The spring time is the period when the plants sprout out and is compared to the birth of the child and his early childhood, which is the first stage of life, when he is under the affectionate care of his parents. Summer is the period when nature becomes beautiful, and the rivers and waterfalls bubble due to heavy rain. This season is compared to the second stage of man's life, when he grows up, and also it is, a difficult period due to the difficulties that he comes across during his later childhood. Autumn is the pleasant season, when the sky is clear, the fruits and crops ripen and flowers bloom nicely. This season is compared to the third stage of human's life, when he reaches his youth and manhood. It is during his youth time that he begins to mould his future, a period of youth time is a period of love and marriage, and he also becomes a responsible person, as he reaches manhood with his family. The last season is winter, a period of snow and frost, when leaves and flowers die out. This is a sad period, as it is compared to the last stage of man's life, when he becomes old, and a period when he prepares himself to go back to *ka iing u Blei*, that is the house of God from where he comes from.

To The Khasi, the Moon is regarded as a male name *U Bnai*, and the Sun as a female name *ka Sngi*. In the olden days, the people were not conscious of the rotation and revolution of the earth. They just observed the appearance of the Sun in the day time and began to call the day in the morning as *ka step or mynstep*, in the afternoon as *mynsngi*. The appearance of darkness in the evening is known as *janmiet*, and at night as *ka miet* or *mynmiet*. Most of the Khasi are agriculturists, so they are more closely attached to the soil to whom they give high regard. Their agricultural cycle and activities depend very much on the condition of the seasons, such as temperature, rain, moisture, heat, dryness and coldness throughout the year. These characteristics and changes follow one season after another, till a year is completed. A year is known as *u snem*, a month as *u bnai* or *shibnai* and a week as *ka taiew* or *shitaiew*.

According to a tradition prevalent among the Khasi, God the Creator at the beginning created *ka Ramew* or mother earth, and her husband *u Basa*. *Ka Ramew* gave birth to five children namely, *ka Sngi*, *U Bnai*, *Ka Um*, *ka Lyer* and *ka Ding*,²⁴ corresponding to the Sun, Moon, water, wind and fire. All were females, except the Moon, the only son of mother earth. When the Moon is full and clear, the Khasi have a special name for him known as *u 'Nai Khatsaw Synnia*, whose beauty is compared to a very handsome man. On the prayer and request of mother earth, God sent the Seven Huts to this world, who lived happily, learnt cultivation and who increased and multiplied, they led a peaceful life and they could come and go to heaven and earth as they pleased through the ladder till the Seven Huts decided to stay here on earth and the ladder was severed.

Eclipses, both solar and lunar, have legends behind them. Eclipse is known as *ka bam hynroh*, meaning eaten by toad. The solar eclipse is known as *ka bam hynroh ka sngi* and the lunar eclipse is as *ka bam hynroh u Bnai*. The story²⁵ tells us that once upon a time a girl named *ka Nam*, who was a good, beautiful and innocent girl ran away from her home as she was frightened of the tiger. To hide her beauty, she covered her face with a toad's skin, she went first to the house of the morning star and the evening star who refused to give her shelter. At last she went to the Sun who gave her shelter. Nobody knew that *ka Nam* was a beautiful girl. Later on, the Moon came to know of her beauty, when he saw her after she had taken bath and washed her clothes besides a river. He went to the Sun, being his eldest sister and asked her to arrange his marriage with *ka Nam*. The Sun did not agree, as the girl was ugly. Next time, the Moon hid himself near the river, and when he saw *ka Nam* who was taking bath, he took away the toad's skin and threw it, so that she would not cover her face anymore. After finishing her bath, *ka Nam* looked for the toad's skin, and at that time, the Moon caught her hand, the girl shouted, all came running to help her. A *Dorbar* was summoned to try this case, the Sun came, and she was very angry and scolded him. She brought some ashes, spat on his forehead, and threw the ashes on his face. From that time onward, whenever the Moon passed by that river, where he threw the toad's skin, the toad would catch and eat him, hence occurred the lunar eclipse. Since then, there was an enmity between the Moon and the toad, and the dark spots which are visible in the Moon's faces are the ashes which were thrown by the Sun.

Another version tells us that the five children of mother earth lived together in perfect peace and harmony. Then later on, the Moon became a wicked man and fell in love with his eldest sister, the Sun. Knowing his bad intention, the Sun became very angry, she took ashes in her hands, rebuking him angrily for his daring and wicked intention towards her, who was like a mother who had taken care of him, threw the ashes on his face. The Moon felt very much ashamed of himself, that he left the house and walked only at night not during day time. Before the Moon was as bright as the Sun, but after this incident, he gave out a pale light because the Sun had covered him with ashes. When the Moon is full, we could see something like clouds, these, the Khasi believed to be ashes thrown by the Sun.

The eclipse of the Sun has another story,²⁶ The Moon was very angry with the Sun, as she had disgraced him in public, so he went to the Thunder, and asked for a sword from him. Unknowingly, the Thunder gave him the sword, as he thought that the Moon wanted it for dancing purposes. Early in the morning, the Moon went to the Sun's house and hid himself near the window. The Sun did not know the bad intention of the Moon, she came out and the Moon gave her a blow with the sword and ran away. The Sun was

wounded, she fell down sprinkled with blood all over. Mother earth gave her medicine to be applied on her wounds. Mother earth became very sad, that there was no peace between a brother and the sisters, she became very sick. After a few days, the Sun recovered, but the mother died. From that time onward, the eclipse of the Sun which is known as *ka bam hynroh ka sngi* took place whenever, the Sun felt the pains from those wounds, and could not come out and remain hidden, as she has to sleep and rest. Since then, lightning and Thunder never occurred when the Sun is shining as the Thunder felt very much ashamed, and at the same time feared that the Sun might snatch away the sword from him.

Eclipses whether solar or lunar, total or partial are believed to have very bad effects on the people on earth, for example, plague, bad harvest, famine, diseases, and other calamities would befall on the people. During the occurrence of eclipses, the people up to the present day, use to come out with shouts, beating of drums and tins, in olden days particularly they fired their locally made guns. By doing so they wanted to frighten the toad, so that it will not eat up the whole Moon as they fear the eclipses which have very bad effects on the people. The Khasi belief has a resemblance with other Indian mythology. The Moon's orbit cuts the ecliptic at two points which are called the Moon's nodes, Rahu and Ketu are the Indian names for these nodes. The eclipses occur when the Sun and the Moon appear in the vicinity of the Moon's nodes. Thus the mythological view that lunar and solar eclipses occur when Rahu and Ketu swallow the Moon and the Sun respectively.²⁷

The Khasi Months

The Khasi Calendar is now used in accordance with the Gregorian Calendar 'Nai is the short form of *u Bnai*, meaning Moon, for example, *Nai Kyllalyngkot* is *u Bnai Kylla Lyngkot*. The names of the months are common throughout the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and the names of the twelve months of the Khasi Calendar in their equivalent to the English Calendar are as follows:

Khasi Months

Corresponding Months

1. 'Nai Kyllalyngkot	-	January
2. 'Nai Rymphang	-	February
3. 'Nai Lber	-	March
4. 'Nai Iaiong	-	April
5. 'Nai Jymmang	-	May
6. 'Nai Jylliew	-	June
7. 'Nai Tung	-	July

8. 'Nai Lar	-	August
9. 'Nai Lur	-	September
10. 'Nai Risaw	-	October
11. 'Nai Wieng	-	November
12. 'Nai Nohprah	-	December

The Khasi Calendar has sometimes a twelve months' year and sometimes a thirteen months' year. According to some, the Khasi Calendar starts from the day that follows the longest night and ends in the day which has the longest night.²⁸ The 22nd December has the longest night and the shortest day, in that case the Khasi new year starts from 23rd December because this is the day that follows the longest night. According to others, the first month of the Khasi Calendar is the appearance of the Moon in October or '*Nai Risaw*', when paddy in the fields starts ripening to be harvested. It cannot be said for certain when the first Khasi month starts. The coming of the British with the Gregorian Calendar changed the Khasi Calendar and the months are conveniently placed on the basis of the English Calendar. In the olden days, old people used a piece of white cloth²⁹ to look at the Moon and could determine exactly whether it has appeared for one or two days. If only one layer is seen that means the Moon has appeared for one day and if two layers, it is two days and if three layers it is three days, then they could see visibly without using any more white cloth. Sometimes the Moon appears twelve times and sometimes thirteen. In that case, if the Moon appears thirteen times, the twelfth month is known as *u 'Nai Shonglad*, and the thirteen month remains the same '*Nai Nohprah*'. In 1971, the new Moon appeared on the 28th December 1970, but did not affect the calculation of the year, as it is calculated from the day that follows the longest night. In 1971, the new Moon appeared as follows:³⁰

1. Bnai Kyllalyngkot	-	28th December 1970
2. Bnai Rymphang	-	26th January 1971
3. Bnai Lber	-	25th February 1971
4. Bnai Iaiong	-	26th March 1971
5. Bnai Jymmang	-	25th April 1971
6. Bnai Jylliew	-	24th May 1971
7. Bnai Tung	-	22nd June 1971
8. Bnai Lar	-	22nd July 1971
9. Bnai Lur	-	20th August 1971
10. Bnai Risaw	-	19th September 1971
11. Bnai Wieng	-	19th October 1971
12. Bnai Shonglad	-	18th November 1971

13. Bnai Nohprah

- 17th December 1971

In 1972, the new moon appeared twelve times as follows:

- | | | |
|----------------------|---|--------------------|
| 1. Bnai Kyllalyngkot | - | 16th January 1972 |
| 2. Bnai Rymphang | - | 14th February 1972 |
| 3. Bnia Lber | - | 15th March 1972 |
| 4. Bnai Iaiong | - | 13th April 1972 |
| 5. Bnai Jymmang | - | 13th May 1972 |
| 6. Bnai Jylliew | - | 11th June 1972 |
| 7. Bnai Tung | - | 10th July 1972 |
| 8. Bnai Lar | - | 9th August 1972 |
| 9. Bnai Lur | - | 7th September 1972 |
| 10. Bnai Risaw | - | 7th October 1972 |
| 11. Bnai Wieng | - | 5th November 1972 |
| 12. Bnai Nohprah | - | 5th December 1972 |

The Khasi Months and their Meanings

The first month of the Khasi Calendar is *U Bnai Kyllalyngkot*, which corresponds to January of the Gregorian Calendar. *Kylla* means change and *lyngkot* means short, this month derives its names from the change of days and nights. In December, the days are very short and the nights are very long, in the month of January, the days have become longer and the nights shorter. The name *Kylla- lyngkot* might have been derived from this change. It may also mean turning of fire brand or pieces of wood,³¹ in the fireplace. This is the coldest month, and the people are fond of sitting near the fireplace to keep themselves warm. In the Khasi traditional house, the fire place or the hearth is in the centre of the kitchen, and the people sit around it, warming themselves up specially at night when the day's work is done. It is here that the old people especially the grandparents used to tell nice stories which are handed down from generation to generation, until the children will fall asleep listening to these stories. It is also a place where they sing and play their musical instruments known as the *duitara* or harp and the *bisli* or flute. *Rymphang* corresponds to the month of February, it is a dry and windy month, which has become warmer than January. The word *Rymphang* is derived from the Khasi word *raphang*, when nature looks bald and barren which can be compared to a women with long hair who has just cut it.³² Literally, it means that during this period, nature looks dry and barren as the leaves of the trees and plants dry out and fall. *Lber* corresponds to the month of March, the third month of the Gregorian Calendar is the period of the year when leaves of trees and plants sprout out, and there is a particular grass which grow

during this period.³³ *Iaiong* is the next month which means dark, *iaiong iangit* is the term used by the Khasi for darkness. This month's name is derived from the heavy storms that occur during this period of the year, causing darkness around. It is the most unreliable month because the days' weather is not certain, sometimes in the morning, it may be hot and clear and later on in the day, it may be dark with clouds and storm. It is for this reason most probably that the Khasi do not normally hold any ceremonies like marriages, to start building a house, moving to a new house and so on. *Jymmang* is the fifth month, corresponding to May, it is the time of the year, when flowers called *u Tiew jymmang* blooms in plenty. It is a nice month, where rain is not too heavy, and other flowers also bloom making the nature green and lovely. *Jylliew* corresponds to the month of June, which is the sixth month of the year. The word *Jylliew* means deep, so it is a month, when all the rivers, wells, streams and waterfalls become big and deep, due to the heavy rain. The sky too is dark and overcasted with clouds and the Sun could hardly be seen. *Naitung* that is July is the seven month of the year, *iwtung* means ill smelling. It is the month of bad odours and ill smelling, because of the decay of vegetation after the heavy rain in June. This is the time when the people used to get bad diseases like cholera, dysentery, diarrhoea and others. The rain is still heavy during this month and clothes do not get dried up and produce a bad smell, and black spots are seen. During this month the people usually avoid any ceremonies like marriages etc, as they knew there would be heavy rain. *Nailar* corresponds to August, the eight month of the year. This month derives its name from a flower known as *u 'tiew Janailar*, which grows well during this month. This is a very nice period of the year, because the weather is nice and clear,³⁴ or *synlar* which means clear and the water in the rivers and streams becomes clear and not muddy as in the previous two months. This is the month when autumn has begun and insects start humming beautifully.³⁵ *Nailur* is the ninth month of the year corresponding to September of the Gregorian Calendar. The word '*lur*' has several meanings, it means plough, it also mean *khlur* or star, whose short form is '*lur*'. The word *lur* also means to work hard, *Lur* does not mean only to plough or work in the field, this is not the period that the people begin ploughing, because rice in the fields start ripening to be harvested. During this month, there is no more heavy rain, and the sky becomes clear, and the stars are clearly visible at night. Another interpretation of this month is that there are people who keep the *thlen* or serpent, which feeds on human blood; in return it will give wealth and prosperity to the keepers. During this period, *u nongshohnoh*, or a man who seeks or tries to kill human victims to get the blood to be offered to *u thlen* or the blood sucking snake or serpent tries very hard to get the blood to be offered to the *thlen* as it will undergo a period of hibernation, that is, it will hide itself during winter due to the severe cold. Thus the *nongshohnoh u lur bha* or is running and seeking

hard for human victims.³⁶ The tenth month of the year is *Risaw* corresponding to October, this is the time when the landscape becomes red. The word *Ri* means land or country or a short form of the word *bri* which means agricultural land, and *saw* means red. This may also suggest that the rice in the field starts ripening to be harvested. When the Khasi say *u soh u la saw*, it means that the fruit is ripened, so the field looks red when fruits and rice are ripened. During this month, rain has become less and dry weather begins. The people begin their favourite pastime of arrow shooting. As a preparation for this sport, they make coloured arrows with small bamboo or cane called *thri* or *thri saw* or red cane, the short form of which is '*risaw*'.³⁷ The eleventh month is *Naiwieng* corresponding to November. This is a happy and joyous month, as most of the harvesting work is done and their granary is full. To celebrate after the harvesting work, the people used to cook *u raishan* or millet and the different kinds of *ki kpu* or Khasi rice cakes in earthen pots called *wieng*. This is to show their jubilation, happiness and festivity when the harvesting work is over. Another interpretation is that, there are hilly parts of the land which are cleared, slashed and burnt or *wiang* for cultivation, this applies to the jhum cultivation in the hills. Thus it may be assumed that the word *wieng* might have been derived from the word *wiang*, which as time passed was pronounced as *wieng*.³⁸ The last of the twelve months is *u Nohprah* which corresponds to December of the Gregorian Calendar. This is the time, when the people *buhnoh* or put away their *prah* or bamboo sieves and baskets and other necessary articles used for carrying crops as their harvesting work is done. Harvesting work may still continue in the month of December but most of the work is done in November. It is also a period of rest as the old year will go away and the new year is approaching. Another interpretation is that during this month, winnowing to separate husked rice is carried on with the help of *ki prah* or winnowing sieves which are made of bamboo. This indicates that the granary is full and harvesting is over.

These twelve Khasi months' names are generally known in different parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. However, there are other names in some of the places in the hills which the people give according to the nature of the area, their agricultural and other works and climatic condition.³⁹

The Khasi Week Days

The Khasi *ka taiew* or week consists of eight days which are based on market days. As we have seen, the names of the months throughout the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, are common, whereas, the names of the days are different. The names of the days are places where the principal market days are held. For instance, *ka lewrynghep* in the Hima or state of Myllem is *ka lew Musiang* in the *Hima Sutnga* or Jaintiapur, and it is *ka lewbah* at the *Hima Sohra* and it is *ka lew Khlawduh* at the *Hima Nongkhlaw*.⁴⁰ *Iew* means market, and market

plays a very important part in the life of the Khasi. The following are a few names of the Khasi days of the week.⁴¹

<i>Mylliem</i>	<i>Khyrim</i>	<i>Sepngi</i>	<i>Bhoi</i>	<i>Sohra</i>	<i>Jaintia</i>
Iewduh	Langkyrdem	Rangblang	Iewduh	Iewrit	Hat
Lyngka	Dawki	Nongstoin	Mawhati	Mawlong	Khyllaw
Nongkrem	Pynursla	Sanshong	Umden	Shella	Pynsing
Mawlong	Lyngkhat	Khlawbah	Nongpoh	Tyllap	Mulong
Rynghep	Langkyrdem	Khlawduh	Iewrynghep	Iewbah	Musiang
Shillong	Dawki	Maram	Umroi	Mawlong	Mushai
Pamtiah	Pynursla	Mawngap	Pomtiah	Shella	Pyngkat
Umni	Lyngkhat	Langstieh	Umsning	Tyllap	Thymblein

The Modern Khasi Week Days

The modern Khasi are using a seven days' week which came into force with the coming of the Christian missionaries. The modern Khasi seven days' week are conveniently fitted in the English seven days' week. The people, particularly the Khasi peasants⁴² in the rural areas still follow the old system of an eight days' market days, rather than the recent seven days' week as the old system is more convenient and more practical to them. The Khasi farmers up to the present day rely more for their agricultural activities on the natural phenomena such as the phases of the Moon, the sprouting of leaves, climatic condition like rain, wind and heat, etc. rather than on the Calendar dates. The modern names of the Khasi week and their English equivalents are as follows:

Saxon	English	Khasi
Sun's day	Sunday	Sngi U Blei
Moon's day	Monday	Sngi Nyngkong
Tiw's day	Tuesday	Sngi Baar
Woden's day	Wednesday	Sngi Balang
Thor's day	Thursday	Sngi Palei
Frigg's day	Friday	Sngi Thohdieng
Saterne's day	Saturday	Sngi Saitjain

Ka Sngi U Blei or Sngi U Trai which corresponds to Sunday is a

special day for the Christians. Undoubtedly, Christianity brought about important changes in the political, social, economic life and the way of thinking of the Khasi. Before the advent of the British and Christianity, the Khasi people used to take rest on the day that followed the big market day in their village, but now Sunday has become a day of rest and it is known as *ka Sngi U Blei* or the day of God. This day has a special significance to the Christians, they take rest on this day and spend in going to church and worshipping God. This is a special day for God, as the people have devoted the rest of the six days of the week to various activities. *Ka Sngi Nyngkong* corresponding to Monday is also known as *ka lah Sngi U Blei*, that is, the day which follows Sunday or *Sngi U Blei*. It may be the Catholic mission who gave the name of *ka Sngi Nyngkong*, which is more popularly known now for Monday.⁴³ The British Government and the Welsh Mission started at Cherrapunjee which was the headquarter of the Cossiyah Hills Political Agency which later on became the Cossiyah and Jynteah Hills District. From Cherrapunjee the people go to a market known as *Hat Majai* which takes place on Tuesday.⁴⁴ But now Tuesday which is known as *ka Hat Majai* is popularly known as *ka Sngi Baar*, which may also have its origin from the Catholic mission as *ka Sngi Nyngkong*. *Ka Sngi Balang* that is Wednesday, is the day when the Christians belonging to the Presbyterian church used to have their religious gathering or prayer meeting. *Ka Sngi Balang* means a day of the *Balang* or church, *balang* has another meaning that is gathering together. This is the day when the Christians belonging to the Presbyterian denomination gather together and pray to God. *Ka Sngi Palei* corresponds to Thursday, this day is in the middle of the week, when the people are not much overburdened with works, and they are somehow in a bit of relaxing and leisurely mood. Some people are also happy and peaceful and have peaceful minds after they had prayer meeting on the previous day, that is Wednesday.⁴⁵ *Ka Sngi Thohdieng* is Friday, *thoh dieng* means to cut firewood. In the olden days, till very recently, kerosene stoves, electric and gas cooking system were unknown to the people, and they relied mostly for their cooking purposes on firewood. So most of the people on this particular day used to go to the forest to cut firewood which would be sufficient for the whole week.⁴⁶ *Ka Sngi Saitjain* is Saturday in its English equivalent, this is the day when the people do all manual works like cleaning the house and utensils properly. *Saitjain* means washing clothes, clothes are washed, so that everything will wear a clean look on the following day that is Sunday. *Sngi Saitjain* or Saturday has an important part now, particularly in Shillong. Earlier the weekly labourers used to get their wages on the *Sngi lewduh*, the big market day of the *Hima Shillong* (Myllem and Khyrim), but now this system is changed and these weekly labourers get their wages on Saturday. It has also become a day, when the people do all their weekly marketing which was earlier done on *ka Sngi lewduh*.⁴⁷

The Khasi Calendar and the Festivals

The Khasi Calendar reflects the way or life of the people, a proper reckoning of time is very essential to them to regulate individual and group activities. The Calendar is very much essential to them for their agricultural activities and their collective life. The names of the Khasi months are therefore linked with their agricultural activities and nature. The festivals and dances of the people are connected with their cultivation rites and agricultural activities, it is through these occasions that they pray to God for the well-being and general prosperity and to thank him for all the blessings and kindness that he has showered upon them. The *Pomblang Syiem* or *Pomblang Nongkrem* or *Shad Nongkrem* or the Nongkrem dance is one such festival which is connected with agricultural activities. This festival is held to honour and respect the ancestors and to invoke God's blessings for good rain, bountiful harvest and prosperity in all aspects. Another festival is *ka Behdeinkhlam*, which is annually held after the sowing season. During this festival, the people pray to God for prosperity, good harvest and to free themselves from various diseases and other evils. The *Lukhmi* festival of certain places in the Bhoi area is also a festival held after the harvesting season and before the sowing period to ensure good harvest. *Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem* is also a thanksgiving dance, which is held after the sowing season, in which the people invoke God's blessings for general prosperity and good harvest and also to thank Him for the year that had passed. Besides these major festivals, there are many dances in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills which are connected with fertility rites and cultivation. At some places in Jaintia Hills, during the removal of weeds from the field, a *Longhai* dance is performed with two groups of dancers, females and males is one line facing one another, holding a hoe in one hand. Another similar dance is *Shyrnai*, but in place of hoe, stick is used. Another popular Jaintia dance is the *Laho* which is similar to the *Bihu* dance of the Assamese, all these fertility rites are very ancient among the Khasi.⁴⁸ Another dance is *ka Shad Kynthei na Nongkharai*, or the female dance of Nongkharai which is a thanksgiving dance to God the Creator for having showered His blessing for general prosperity and good harvest. Another dance is *ka Shad Krud Lyngkha bad ka Shad Kylla Mohkhiew*, which means the sowing dance and the hoe dance, performed by the people of Warmawsaw and Patharkhmah in the Khasi Hills District. The sowing dance reflects the spirit of joy and merriment at having sown the seeds with hope for a prosperous harvest.

As we have seen, the month of the Khasi Calendar are based on nature and agricultural activities, while the days of the week are based on market schedule. *Ka Iew* or market plays an important role in the economic,

social and political life of the Khasi people. To them market is not only a place for buying and selling goods and other commodities, but it is also a place where they have all sorts of transactions.⁴⁹ Even important festivals like ka Pomblang Nongkrem is held on the market days of *Pomtiah*, *Umni*, *Iewduh*, *Lyngka*, *Pyensing* or *Nongkrem*. The *Behdeinkhlam* is also held on the market days of *Pyensing*, *Mulong*, *Musiang* and *Mushai*.

The market place is an important place of meeting the relatives and friends. Again, it is at the market place, that they gather information about political, social, economic and cultural happenings, for example, about people's death, marriages, political situation and other important things. Market was a social link between different villages in the olden days. If they want to send important news to other villages, for instance, a man who stays in Shillong, wants to send any important message to certain people in Sohra, he will surely send it through a person who goes to market to Sohra. Before the coming of transport, post and telegraph, messages were sent in this way from one village to another. Whenever the people meet their relatives and close friends at the market place, they used to chat and talk over a cup of tea or eating *kwai* or betelnut. Sometimes, marriageable boys and girls meet in the market and later on arrange for the marriage. It is a great pleasure and enjoyment for the people to go to the market on the big market day, and they usually take rest on the next day after the big market day.

Footnotes

1. H. Bareh, "Sources of the History of the Khasis and Jaintias" in S.P. Sen, *Sources of the History of India*, Vol. II, p. 196.
2. Cited in S. Sen, *Social and State Formation in Khasi- Jaintia Hills*, p.132.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Cited in J. B. Bhattacharjee, *State Formation in Pre-Colonial Tribal North East- A case Study of the Dimasa State*, NEHU Publications, p.1.
5. J. B. Bhattacharjee, "Tripuri State Formation in Medieval Tripura" in the *Proceedings of the North East India History Association*, Third Session, Imphal 1982, p.57.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.
7. H. O. Mawrie, *Ka Pyrkhath U Khasi*, p.69.
8. Kynpham Singh, "Syiems and Durbars in Khasi Society" Seminar paper on *The Indigenous Institutions of the Garos, the Khasis and the Jaintias, of Meghalaya* Department of Education; Government of Meghalaya, Shillong 1980, pp.12-13
9. K. L. Bhowmick, *Tribal India, A Profile in Indian Ethnology*, p.142.
10. H. O. Mawrie *op. cit.* 69.
11. Kynpham Singh, *op. cit.*, pp.15-16.
12. *Ibid.*, pp.16-17.
13. S. Sen, *op. cit.*, p.133.
14. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 4, p.611.
15. *Ibid.* p.612.
16. *The New Encyclopaedia. Britannica Micropaedia*, Vol. II, P.454.

17. *Physical Geography*, NCERT, Publications, pp.16-17.
18. *Every Man's Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 2, p.621
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22. S. Sen, "A Note on the Khasi Jaintia Calendar" in the *Journal of N. E. India Council for Social Science Research*, Vol. IV, No. 1, p.26.
23. *Ibid.*
24. H. Elias, *Ki Khanatang U Barim*, P. 1.
25. *Ibid.* pp.12-16.
26. *Ibid.* pp.19-21.
27. *Physical Geography, op. cit.*, p.16.
28. We are thankful to Shri L.G. Shullai, a knowledgeable person and an eminent Khasi author for this information.
29. W. R. Laitphlang, "U Khasi Bad Ka Rukom Khein Por" in *Apphira Magazine*, 1985, p.4.
30. Discussion with Shri L.G. Shullai.
31. P. R. T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, p.189.
32. Discussion with Shri . L. G. Shullai.
33. W. R. Laitphlang, *op. cit.*, m p.4.
34. We are thankful to Shri H. S. Nongbri, Lecturer, Department of Khasi, Shillong College, for this information.
35. W. R. Laitphlang, *op. cit.*, p.5.
36. Discussion with Shri H. S Nongbri.
37. Discussion with Shri L. G. Shullai.
38. *Ibid.*
39. W. R. Laitphlang, *op. cit.*, p.4.
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Chapter III

The Festivals – A General Survey

The Khasi have many important festivals and dances which are performed either before the sowing or after the harvesting work is over. The Khasi usually hold their festivals during spring and autumn seasons, but spring festivals are more important.¹ They have festivals which are connected with religious rituals as well as secular ones. These festivals usually take the form of dances, which show the joy, happiness and jubilation of the people, and their involvement in the social and economic life of the community. Some of the Khasi festivals are very old and cover a wide range of human activities, and have survived the stress and strain of time and circumstances uptill today. Nobody can say with certainty, when these festivals and dances started, due to the absence of records as the Khasi have no script of their own. Only the origin of the *Shad Suk Mynsiem* or the *Shad Weiking* or the Weiking Dance is known as it was organized for the first time by the Seng Khasi on the 14th and 15th April 1911². Commenting on the *Shad Suk Mynsiem*, Kynpham Singh wrote,³

"We must know that though the dance is organised and managed by Seng Khasi, it is actually the dance of the whole Khasi nation, which we hope, will further the preservation of our customs, usages and culture and which will be held annually."

The *Shad Suk Mynsiem* is being held regularly from 1921⁴ under the auspices of the Seng Khasi, a socio-religious and cultural organisation of the Khasi, who still adhere to their traditional religion. It had its origin during the British period when a need was felt for the preservation of the traditional culture of the Khasi, due to the threat posed by the process of westernization and modernization. A dance is organised known as *Ka Shad Tirot* or the *Tirot Sing's*

Day Celebration, where male and female dancers dance in a similar way as in the *Shad Suk Mynsiem*. This dance celebration started decades ago at Mairang in the West Khasi Hills District to commemorate the heroic deeds of U Tirot Sing in the Khasi War of resistance against British imperialism during 1829-33.

The British East India Company's early concern with the Khasi and Jaintia Hills was commercial. Necessities of trade and commerce arising from the Khasi lime quarries, from which Bengal had drawn its supplies from time immemorial attracted European enterprises to the Khasi Hills.⁵ As the British began to take active interest in these hills, good and friendly relationship prevailed between the Khasi and the British, as the commercial intercourse between them was found to be mutually convenient. David Scott, the British political agent of the North East Province was impressed by the cool and healthy climate of the hills and thought of obtaining a salubrious spot for the recovery of health.⁶ He also discovered that the hills were suitable for the cultivation of European crops like potatoes, pears and others. Moreover, the most important of all was the need of a proper road through the hills to connect the two important British headquarters, Gauhati and Sylhet, for the smooth running of the British administration. Thus, David Scott concluded a treaty with Tirot Sing the *Syiem* or chief of Nongkhlaw in 1826, by which he obtained permission for the construction of the road through Tirot Sing's territory.⁷ At the beginning, things were amicably maintained, but later on, the highhandedness of the soldiers at Nongkhlaw, the false manoeuvre, their harsh treatment of the poor inhabitants, these and other misdeeds,⁸ led to the Khasi rebellion under U Tirot Sing in 1829, which lasted till 1833, and inevitably led to the annexation of the Khasi Hills in the same year. Tirot Sing became prominent when he organised and fought wars of resistance against the British rule. It was on the 4th April 1829, that the Khasi states took up arms in a concerted effort to drive away the British from the Khasi land. It became a long drawn struggle, when on 13th January, 1833, accompanied by a party of swordsmen and bowmen, numbering about thirty, with utmost dignity, the valiant chief tendered his submission to Henry Inglis. On 26th January, 1833, Tirot Sing appeared before the Foujdari Court at Gauhati, in lieu of capital punishment, he was sentenced with transportation of life to Tenasserim, then he was removed to Dacca till his death.⁹ This record is contradicted by a tradition which says that it was, during the truce arranged by the British to continue the talk for affecting the final settlement, when he came out, that Tirot Sing was captured by Inglis at Lum Sohmylleng near Lum Shyllong.¹⁰

Thus, the *Shad Suk Mynsiem* and the Tirot Sing's Day Celebration started with definite objectives, namely to preserve the identity and culture of the Khasi against the forces of change and to commemorate the deeds of a hero who had also contributed to the same objective. Both are therefore,

connected with the history of the British rule in Khasi Hills and we have recorded history about these. Our study of the other festivals, particularly the involvement of the folk masses in festivals suggests that the recent dances like *ka Shad Suk Mynsiem* too form part of the Khasi tradition in which a dance or a festival started in a given phase of history when there must have been special occasion to commemorate or reorient the society to its corporate community life.

Some of the festivals and dances of the Khasi are very old and perhaps as old as the society itself, and are handed down through the ages from one generation to another. The Khasi are a deeply religious people, they believe in the Supreme God, the Creator, and pray to Him to shower His blessings for a good harvest, good health, peace, well-being and general prosperity. The social relevance of the festivals is very great, as each festival has certain meaning to them. In the pre-colonial period, the Khasi lived in isolation, except some contact with the neighbouring plains. Thus, their social, economic and political activities were all governed by the situation and environment that they lived in and their very existence depended on their good harvest. To free themselves from plaque, pestilence, and various diseases, and to get a bountiful harvest, they propitiate God through sacrifices, and rites and rituals are performed during their festivals. It is during the celebration of the festivals, that the people thank God for all His kindness and blessings that He has showered upon them in the year that had passed, and also to invoke His blessings for a bountiful harvest, good health and general prosperity for the coming year. R. S. Lyngdoh observes.¹¹

"If we study carefully the Sukra Dance and the six Behdeinkhlam festivals in the Jaintia Hills, if we watch the Nongkrem Dance, the Shad Suk Mynsiem Dance, the religious ceremonial dance at Sohbar, Nongjri, Wakhken, Mawja or the dancing festivals at Iapngar or at Bhoilasa or at other places, the main theme of all these festivals is to express our strong faith in God and to pay homage to Him for the blessings He has bestowed upon us, and to chase away all evil influences of evil creatures".

The Khasi have a rich cultural heritage, their history is preserved through the ages in the form of festivals, folk songs, folk tales and folk dances. They are a happy and lively people, they love dances, music and songs which are connected with their various colourful festivals and religious ceremonies. The Khasi festivals usually take the form of dances apart from rituals, when people can be joyous and happy and can forget their everyday monotonous life. Many of these festivals have religious association, although a few of the celebrations are plainly secular.¹²

A festival means a time or day of feasting or celebration or a series of performances of a certain kind. A festival in the accepted usage of the

term, may be defined as an aggregate of rituals observed mostly in an astronomically or ordinarily fixed date and time and celebrated with rejoice, pomp and grandeur by an ethnic group or a social group or a community as a whole.¹³

The festivals and dances play an important role in the social life of the people, because it is through these occasions that the people express their joy and happiness and also gratitude to their Creator. It is not known, when the art of dancing was first introduced to mankind, but people in the different parts of the world dance and move their feet to the rhythm of their music. About the role of the festival in the life of the people, R. T. Rymbai wrote,¹⁴

"As one would not be able to keep a beautiful fabric in tact by separating the weft from the woof, so would it be impossible to view the life of a Khasi fully lived, if torn away from his festivals."

Origin of the Festivals and Dances

It is believed that amongst the Khasi, festivals and dances had started since the beginning of times. There is a tradition about a cave known as *ka lamet ka krem latang*, which shows that dancing festival originated since the beginning of their life on earth. The story goes that once upon a time in the olden days, a particular day was fixed for the dance festival and all the living creatures turned up in their grand costumes. They danced throughout the day until they were tired and towards evening, when they were about to depart, there arrived, the Sun and the Moon who were a sister and a brother, and they also started dancing. Everyone in the dancing arena said that it was unethical that a brother and sister should dance together. In anger the Sun went to hide herself in a cave, and the world was enveloped into a total darkness.¹⁵ Another story,¹⁶ tells us that in the olden days all the living creatures lived happily here on earth and could communicate with one another. One day a porcupine, a squirrel and another bird known as *U Shakyllia* went out for a walk, they saw a dancing ground where men and women danced together with the beating of the drums and playing of the pipes and flutes. The animals were so much impressed by the dances performed by the human being, that they decided then and there, that they too should perform a dance. When they reached home, the porcupine took the cymbals, the *shakyllia* the pipe and the squirrel the drum. They played their instruments so loud and hard that it echoed throughout the forest. All the animals in the forest got very much excited, they all came to that place where music was being played. The animals of the forest took a decision that they should hold a similar dance like men. They chose *u Pyrthat* or Thunder who was very smart and active to inform all the animals

about the dance festival. When that big day came, all the animals reached the dancing ground in their best dresses.¹⁷

Then the music started with the beating of the drums and playing of the pipes. They were all amidst the joyous mood, when at that time appeared the lynx with his best dress bringing along with him a big silvery sword, which he had made purposely for this occasion. He danced beautifully with his sword, that all the people admired him and shouted with joy. *U Kui* or lynx became very proud. After sometimes came *U Pyrthat* or Thunder and asked for the sword from *U Kui* who hesitated to give, but the animals asked him to give the sword as Thunder had worked very hard to organise the dance. Then the Thunder performed his sword dance very well and all were very pleased. Amidst the gaiety and shouts of joy of the animals, the Thunder, who was dancing moved his sword here and there that all the animals became frightened. In that confusion, the Thunder went up to the sky taking the sword, along with him. *U Kui* was very sad that he had lost the sword, and every time he tried to go to the sky to get back the sword but could not. From that time onward started the enmity between the different animals.

Origin of ka Phur or Ceremonial Dance connected with the Dead

Another tradition¹⁸ tells us that long time ago when the Khasi people were very few and they lived in scattered villages and were not organized under *Raid* or communes and states, there lived in one small village a widow and her son. The poor mother had to work very hard to earn her living and take care of her son. When her son whose name was *U Synring* grew up, he too helped his mother in doing hard work. Both lived happily and his mother was very proud of her only son. Then one day the mother became sick and her health deteriorated day by day. Her son was very sad because his mother could not be cured. The sad day was not far behind when she died and left this world. The son cremated her and took the bones of his mother and kept properly in a stone cist or *mawshyieng* in the garden. After many days, he started to do his works as usual in the field which he inherited from his mother.

One day, while *u Synring* was working in the field, there came a sort of a sow, he was very much surprised when he saw her trying to help him in his works. Everyday, when he started his day's work in the field, the sow came and tried to destroy his crops. Then one day out of anger, he shot an arrow at her, the sow ran away along with the arrow, *u Synring* wanted to get back the arrow, so he followed her till he reached a different world, where he met his mother who told him that it was she who had come to help him

in the field. Her son was very disappointed that he had shot his mother, so he took care of her, u Synring was very much surprised at the life of the people there which was quite different from the worldly life, so he wanted to come back to earth. Then one day, his mother told him that the time had not come for him to live in that new world until his death, so she asked him to go back to his world. Before leaving, u Synring asked his mother that what would he do to please her and make her happy. His mother gave him some drums and flutes and asked him to beat the drums and play the flutes and gather her bones to be placed in the *mawbah* or clan's ossuary along with the bones of the other dead members of the clan. She further asked him to hold a feast and ceremonial dance known as *ka phur ka siang*, she also taught him how to beat the drums and play the flutes and to dance a particular dance known as *ka shad symphiah*, which is a kind of male dance holding a *symphiah* in one hand, u Synring returned to earth.

When his relatives, friends and neighbours saw him, they were much surprised because they thought that he had died, as they did not see him for quite a long time. He told them all what had happened and showed him the drums and flutes and how to play them and also how to dance. After that, every evening after their day's work, they came to u Synring's house who taught them how to play the drums and flutes and how to dance. They all became very happy that they had learnt all these to pay respect to their dead relatives.

U Synring gathered his mother's bones, he killed cows, goats, pigs and fowls to give a feast to honour his dead mother and also a dance was held and the bones of his mother were placed in the *mawbah*. The people were so impressed by these religious performances of U Synring that everyone followed him and from that time onward, began the ceremonial dance known as *ka phur ka siang*, the art of playing the drums and flutes. Till now, in some village they still play the *sharati* or flute when the dead body is still kept at home and also during the *thep mawbah* or bone depository ceremony. There are men who use to sing the *phawar* or set of rhymes or couplets narrating u Synring as the founder of *ka phur ka siang* or the ceremonial performances for the dead.

Another popular tradition¹⁹ prevalent among the Pnar in the Jaintia Hills is that U Synriang was considered as a reformer and it was through him that the people learnt the system of the cremation of the dead. Before him the dead bodies were being burnt by the fire of fire-fly. This fire was not reliable and sometimes the dead bodies could not be burnt properly, and as a result these dead bodies were visited by ghosts and evil spirits which harmed the people. Seeing this, U Synriang went to the God of fire known as U Blei Biskorom, and asked for a divine fire. The God of fire showed him how to make fire by rubbing two pieces of wood. The God then disappeared

and u *Synriang* tried to make the fire but could not. He was at a loss, the monkey who was on a nearby tree saw the whole event. He demonstrated again how to make fire and *U Synriang* learnt how to make fire from the monkey. This fire is known as the monkey fire, and the cremation of dead bodies since then was done by this fire.

The above traditions suggest that dances and festivals have started long time back with the beginning of the life of the Khasi people in these hills. In the ancient days, the parents used to encourage and teach their children how to dance in the religious dance and other dancing festivals. In the evening time, when their day's work was done, the young girls gathered together in a spacious place to learn the art of dancing. They also used to call some one who could play the drums and pipes. In this way the Khasi encouraged their children to dance.²⁰ It is a great pleasure and pride for the parents to see their children in their dancing dresses performing the dance in the dancing field. There are two kinds of dances - (1) *Ka Shadniam* or religious dance which is connected with religious performances and ceremonies, (2) *Ka Shad Sngewbha* or festive dance without any religious ceremonies. The male and female dancers dance during the bone collection ceremony or state religious festival or during the cremation of the *Syiem* or chief. Those who participate in these kinds of dance are performing *Ka Shad Niam* or religious dance. Sometimes, there are festive occasions which are organised in different villages by the community as a whole; for example, *Ka Shad Shnong* or village community dance, the dancers who participate in these dances are performing *ka shad sngewbha* or festive dance.²¹

L. G. Shullai²² observed that in the land of the *Hynniew Trep*, there are many festivals which are organised by the villages, *Raid* or communes and the *Hima* or state or by any other organisation. There are festivals which are associated with religious rituals for any reason or motive, and there are festivals which are not connected with any religious rituals. About thanks giving and prayers to God the Creator, this is very much inherent in man. For example, *ka Shad Suk Mynsiem* or *Shad Weiking* has no religious rituals, whereas the *Shad Nongkrem* or the *Nongkrem* dance is associated with religious rituals.

Survey of Literature

The festivals play a very important role in the life and culture of the Khasi, but festivals have not been taken up by anyone as a separate study. Although many authors have dealt with the festivals and books and articles have been written, but none has made a specific study on the various festivals of the Khasi and their influence on the social, religious, political and economic

aspects of the people. H Lyngdoh's work entitled *Ka Pomblang Nongkrem bad Thang Syiem Sohra* first published in 1928, is a unique work in itself. The author has dealt very widely on the various aspects of the *Pomblang Nongkrem* or the goat killing ceremony of Nongkrem or the Nongkrem dance and the *Thang Syiem Sohra* or the cremation ceremony of the Cherra Chief. P. R. T. Gurdon's book *The Khasis* and H. Barch's *The History and Culture of the Khasi people* are two important books on the Khasi. Both the authors have included some of the festivals and religious ceremonies in their books, but as their works are on the different aspects of the Khasi, the authors could not deal elaborately with only the festivals. Another book is the *Khasi Heritage*, published by the Seng Khasi. In this book informative and interesting articles are given by the different prominent authors on the festivals but these contributed articles cannot cover the wider aspects of the festivals. Two important books on the festivals written in Khasi are *Ka Sajer Ka Raid Nonglyngdoh*, Vol. I and II by D.T. Laloo and *Ka Lukhmi* by O. S. Lamare. These books give a detailed study of the two important festivals, *Ka Sajer* and *Ka Lukhmi* which are performed by the Khasi living in the Bhoi areas in the northern part of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Another book is *A Tribe in Transition* by H. L. Deb Roy, in which the author makes a study of the different aspects of the life and culture of the Jaintia inhabiting the Jaintia Hills. A more recent book on one of the festivals is *Ka Behdeinkhlam* written in Khasi by S. S. Laloo in which the author has dealt with all the important aspects, religious rites and ceremonies of the Behdeinkhlam festival of the Jaintia. Another book is *Social and State Formation in Khasi Jaintia Hills* by Soumen Sen where he analyses the social and political contents of Khasi and Jaintia folklore in the social and state formation. Another book is the *Khasi Canvas* by J. N. Chowdhury in which he deals with the different aspects of the Khasi. Besides these, articles are found in the different newspapers, journals and magazines both in English and Khasi. A survey of all these existing literature reveals that not a single book is written specifically on only the important festivals, and the various aspects of the festivals and dances of the Khasi, have not been studied in a proper perspective and treated thoroughly as they should have been done so. Therefore, an attempt is made in this work to study some of the important festivals of the Khasi and their influence on the social, economic, political and religious aspects in the life of the people.

For the present work, we propose to discuss only eight festivals of the Khasi, to bring into focus the origins, objectives, contents, the different stages of the festivals, the months in which they are held, the places of celebrations, dresses and ornaments, the musical instruments used and the glimpses that they offered in the past and how the festivals influenced the life of the people.

The eight major festivals of the Khasi are placed in the Khasi Calendar as follows:-

KHASI CALENDAR

Khasi Months	Corresponding Months to the English Calendar	Festivals
1. Bnai Kyllalyngkot	January	<div style="border-left: 1px solid black; padding-left: 10px;"> Ka Rongkhli Ka Sajer ka Raid Nonglyngdoh Ka Lukhmi Ka Lakympong </div>
2. Bnai Rymphang	February	
3. Bnai Lber	March	
4. Bnai laiong	April	
5. Bnai Jymmang	May	Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem or Shad Weiking
6. Bnai Jylliew	June	
7. Bnai Tung	July	Behdeinkhlam
8. Bnai Lar	August	
9. Bnai Lur	September	<div style="border-left: 1px solid black; padding-left: 10px;"> Ka Pomblang Nongkrem, shad Nongkrem or Nongkrem Dance (Previously it was held in the month of May June or July) </div>
10. Bnai Risaw	October	
11. Bnai Wieng	November	
12. Bnai Nohprah	December	

The Khasi are mostly agriculturists, so they are more attached to the soil and agriculture. They also observe fertility rites associated with dances and songs and sacrifice to the deity to protect the crops from being destroyed by evil spirits. The Khasi have a variety of festivals and dances which they performed in the past. Some of those survive till today, while there are other which are no longer performed or occasionally performed due to the social, religious and economic changes which are going on in the society. The Khasi also have their own musical instruments which are made locally and consist of various kinds of drums, harps, pipes and flutes. Although there are many festivals and dances, but in this work only eight major festivals are focussed on, these are as follows.

1. Ka Chad Chiphiah or Chad Iong Nikhla or Chad Laho or the Laho Dance

The Laho dance is one of the oldest traditional dance of the Pnar or Jaintia living in the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. The original name is *Chad Chiphiah* or Chiphiah dance. The term *Laho* came only after the tune of the singer who sings "Hoooh ka la hoooh". *Ka Chad Chiphiah* was revived by a particular clan name Nikhla, then it became known as *ka Chad long Nikhla* that is the Nikhla dance or the dance of the Nikhla clan.²³ The Nikhla clan celebrated it at a place called *Biar longpiah* in Jowai in the Jaintia Hills. This is a very important dance festival as it is associated with the creation and origin of the people in these hills, when they had a close and direct relation with God. Besides the Nikhla clan, other clans and people can also participate in this dance. The *Chiphiah* or Laho dance is a thanksgiving dance to honor God, the Creator for all His blessings that He has bestowed upon the people. The dance festival is also important it is associated with the earliest settlement and habitation of the Pnar.

2. Ka Rongkhli or Tiger Festival

Ka Rongkhli²⁴ is the most important festival of the War Jaintia and is performed at Nongtalang village, which lies in the southern part of the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya bordering Sylhet District of Bangladesh. *Rong* means festival and *khli* means tiger in the local dialect, so Rongkhli means the Tiger festival. This festival is held whenever a tiger is killed accidentally or by the villagers on an organised hunting. In whatever manner that the tiger is killed, God is to be worshipped and the festival is to be held. It is believed that if God is not worshipped, certain calamities and misfortunes like epidemic diseases, starvation, blindness, will befall on the people. The festival is usually held in the months of January, February or March after the harvesting work is over.

3. Ka Behdeinkhlam

Ka Behdeinkhlam is another religious festival which is celebrated by the Pnar or Jaintia inhabiting the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. This festival is celebrated annually at Jowai, the headquarter of the Jaintia Hills District about 66 Kilometres from Shillong. The festival is also celebrated in some other places of Jaintia Hills such as Tuber, Shyrmang, Ialong, Mukhla and Mutlong. *Beh* means drive, *dein* means stick, *Khlam* means plague, so it means a festival to drive away plague with the help of sticks. The festival is held in the rainy months of June or July after the sowing season. The people observe this festival to free themselves from various diseases and other evils that plagued the human life, and to invoke God's blessings for a bountiful harvest, and well being of the people on the whole, so that they could live happily throughout the year.

4. Ka Lukhmi

*Ka Lukhmi*²⁵ is an important religious festival of Raid Iapngar and some other places in the Bhoi areas in the northern parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. It is held in the month of March before the sowing begins and after the harvesting work is done. This festival is connected with agriculture and cultivation rites of the people. The people in the Bhoi area depend much on agriculture which is the mainstay of their economy. This festival is performed to *ka Lukhmi* or *ka 'Leikba* the goddess of rice and agriculture which symbolises wealth and prosperity, and also the house deity of the Khasi. It is celebrated for the prosperous harvest of rice and other crops and also for the general welfare of the people on the whole, so that they would have enough food for the whole year and free from many evils.

5. Ka Sajer Ka Raid Nonglyngdoh

Ka Sajer is a popular festival of the Bhoi area in the northern part of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. This festival is observed in the months of December, January or February after the harvesting is done and before the sowing of seeds for the coming year. It is a religious celebration of the whole Raid Nonglyngdoh. It is connected with agriculture and cultivation rites of the people for the prosperity of crops particularly rice which is the staple food of the Khasi. At the same time during this religious performance, the people thank God the Creator for all the blessings that He has showered upon them. The places which are under the Raid Nonglyngdoh are Nongthylong, Mawiong, Pahambir, Mawryngkang, Umskhen, Shakoikuna, Umjong, and Umling Lamb-rang. Other villages which come to participate in the religious festival but do not fall within the Raid Nonglyngdoh are Mawphrew, Umdap, Byrni, Umshoh Khlieng, Nartap and Korstep from the Raid Myllem, Pani-Kynti from Kamrup, Pahambir on the border of Kamrup District and Umskun from the Raid Nongkhrah. Most of the people who live in these places belong to the Raid Nonglyngdoh but have left their old Raid in search of better lands for cultivation.²⁶

6. Ka Lakympong

Ka Lakympong is another festival of the Bhoi area, which is celebrated in Raid Tyrso and Raid Nongtung and other places of the area. There are two types of Lakympong Dance festival, the first one is *ka Shad Lakympong Khyrnaw* or the dance of the youth which include only young unmarried boys and girls, the second one is *Ka Lakympong Lukhmi*. The first one has no religious connection, it is a celebration of the youth. Some said that Lakympong is the goddess of love and marriage.²⁷ The Lakympong is celebrated usually in the month of February or March after the harvesting work is over and before the sowing for the new year begins. The second one is celebrated once in every five years. It is a festival in which the people pray to God to invoke His blessings for a bountiful harvest particularly rice which is the main food of the

people and at the same time to pray for their general welfare and prosperity. This dance festival is connected with their agriculture and cultivation rites as most of the people depend on agriculture.

7. Ka Pomblang Syiem or Ka Pomblang Nongkrem or Shad Nongkrem or the Nongkrem Dance

The Nongkrem dance is a well known religious festival of the Khasi which is held annually at the *Ingsad*, the official residence of the Khyrim Syiemship at Smit, a few kilometres from Shillong. It is a state religious festival of the Khyrim Syiemship. The festival is held to honour and respect the ancestors, the founders of the state and religion and to invoke God's blessings for a bountiful harvest, well-being and general prosperity of the ruling family and all the people on the whole. Previously, this festival was held in the months of May to July, but now it is held in the months of October or November after the harvest. During this festival, all the political units known as *Raid* who are under the Khyrim Syiemship also take part to show their respect and political unity.

8. Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem or Shad Weiking or the Weiking Dance

Shad Suk Mynsiem means a dance when the heart is happy or peaceful. It is an annual Thanksgiving Dance, which is held under the auspices of the Seng Khasi, a socio-religious and cultural organisation of the Khasi. This dance is held at the Weiking field in Shillong, the headquarter of the East Khasi Hill District and capital of Meghalaya. During this festival, the people thank God for all His blessings in the year that has passed and to invoke His blessings for the coming year for a bountiful harvest and general prosperity. The dance is held for three days in the month of April, after the harvesting season and also when the sowing work for the new year is over. This dance is also held in other places of the Khasi Hills District like Marbisu and Nongthliaw.

The Khasi Music

The Khasi love dances, music and songs. The beautiful hills and valleys are filled with music from the songs which are sung by men and women working in the fields, and from the whistling tunes of men. The boys who tend the sheep and cows sing and blow their pipes and flutes and fill the air with music. In towns, sweet voices of the people and the melodious tunes could be heard in the churches, radio and in different social and cultural function. R. S. Lyngdoh observes, ²⁸

"Music is an art whereas dancing in an artistic form is the best

manifestation of that art. Like all other arts, both music and dancing are the best means of communication of ideas and cultures among the different peoples of the world. Unlike other arts, music can easily be understood and appreciated by all people. The young and old, the educated and the uneducated, the white and the coloured people can freely understand the language of music. Music is the best international language through which all people of the world can communicate their ideas or get those ideas communicated to all parts of the world."

From time immemorial, the Khasi have their own indigenous musical instruments which consists of different kinds of drums, pipes, harps and cymbals. They have their own style of folk songs which include thanksgiving songs ballad, lullabys, chants, laments or dirges, dance, music and others.²⁹ Their musical instruments are used to accompany their songs, traditional dances and religious performances and other festive occasions. While the *bom* or drum, *tangmuri* or piping instruments and cymbals are used to accompany dances, other instruments such as *ka duitara*, *ka marynthing*, *maryngod*, *ka donglod* are used for accompanying songs.

The musical instruments are of different types, sizes and styles and are locally made which show the artistic skill of the Khasi. Some different types of musical instruments are shown below.³⁰

1. The drums

- a. *Ka bom ka nakra*, *bad tasar* or the big drum
- b. *Ka ksing bom* or '*sing nakra* or the smaller drum
- c. *Ka ksing kynthei* or the female drum
- d. *Ka ksing shynrang* or the male drum
- e. *Ka padiah bad ka ksing dingpong* are smaller drums.

2. Musical Instruments

Some of the musical instruments are *ka duitara*; *ka marynthing*, *ka maryngod*. *Ka duitara* and *maryngod* have four strings.

3. Blowing instruments

- a. *Ka tangmuri ne ka muhuri*
- b. *Ka sharati*
- c. *Ka besli*
- d. *Ka mieng*
- e. *Ka shawiang*
- f. *Ka tanglod*
- g. *Ka put sla*

All these blowing instruments are made of bamboo, except *ka put sla*.

The *shawiang* and *sharati* are used during sorrowful events when somebody dies or when singing lamentation songs or dirges. The *tangmuri* or *muhuri* are used in dancing occasion along with the beating of the drums and cymbals.

The above are the various indigenous musical instruments of the Khasi. Here we will focus only the musical instruments which is connected with the dances and festivals. The instruments are³¹ (a) *Ka bom ka nakra* is the big drum, the shape of this drum is like an egg, which is cut flatly at the top and is covered with the hide of a cow. Two sticks are used for beating this drum at the top. This drum is used for dancing purposes, it also serves as a calling drum used for public announcement for calling a *Dorbar*. It is also used for calling the people of the village to rally in the times of war and other emergency. (b) *Ka ksing bom* or *ksing nakra* are smaller drums which are used together with the big drum in male dance, and the *ksing kyndum* or *ksing padiah* is used for female dance. *Ka bomrit* or *padiah* is also used for female dance. *Ka ksing ding phong* is a small type of drum used for playing at home. It can be used for accompanying dance, but its sound is not suitable for outside playing. (c) *Ka tangmuri* is a blowing instrument which is used for dancing purposes. It is like a small type of pipe or trumpet, the *tangmuri* is played to the accompaniment of the drums during the dancing occasion. It is played by a good player on the dancing occasion. *Ka tanglod* is another blowing instrument, it is of much smaller size and it is used for teaching female dance at home.

The *Dhulia* or musician including the pipers and drummers can play different tunes to suit the different type of dancing like *ka mastieh*, *ka shad wait* or *sword dance* and *ka shad kynthei* or female dance in which they display their musical talents.

The people in the villages still enjoy playing their own indigenous musical instruments, during their dancing and other festive occasions. After their day's work is done they also sing at night to the accompaniment of their musical instruments like drums, pipes and harps. In the town, the impact of western education and civilization shaped the musical tastes of the Khasi especially among the Christians. Their musical composition leans towards the western mode not only in form and melody but in harmony and counterpoint as well.³² Besides the western influence, the influence of the neighbouring plains is also visible. The Jaintia up till now are skillful in playing instrument like harmonium, tabla and others. Their modern songs have Hindustani notes which are popular and have come to stay as an established school of Jaintia music. The influence of Hindustani music on the Jaintia is as great as if not greater, than that of western music.³³

To the Khasi, music and songs are part of their life. They sing whether they are happy or sad, when they are busy or not. There is a tradition among the Khasi,³⁴ about how they learnt to make the instruments from the shouts

and sound and dances of animals which they observed. These beautiful hills will be ringing with music and songs forever.

The Phawar

The Phawar literally means couplets, a set of rhymes generally in couplets. *Phawar* are parts of the Khasi traditional songs. In the *jingphawar shad* or couplets for dancing, there are three different kinds, (1) *Ka jingphawar singshad*, (2) *Ka jingphawar sing dum dum ne sing lynghai*, and (3) *Ka jingphawar sing mareh*. The different couplets is sung during the male and female dance along with the beating of the drums. There is also the *jingphawar shad wait* which are sung during the sword dance known as *ka shadwait*. Besides these, there are also the *jingphawar thep mawbah*, which are used to be sung during the bone collection ceremony, where bones of the dead are placed together in the clan's ossuary.³⁵

The Virginity Dance

The origin of the virginity dance among the Khasi is obscured, but the dance of only the virgins has an important significance. One interpretation of its origin, is that *ka Pah Syntiew*, the legendary female ancestress of the Hima Shyllong was a virgin when a man belonging to the Myllemngap clan caught her. It is also said that *ka Pah Syntiew* loved dances and songs. She used to teach the small children how to sing and dance. The boys who tended the cows used to see her dancing on the rocks. So the female dance of only virgins among the Khasi had originated from the dance of *ka Pah Syntiew*.³⁶ The virgin dance might also have a connection with the fertility of the soil. The Khasi have a high regard for the soil which produces food and feeds them, and as the soil produces crops to sustain them, so also the female is respected and associated with the propagation of the human race and the sustainer of life. Another factor is from an etiquette point of view, because for a married woman, it is not wise that she should go and dance, as her prime duty after marriage, is to look after the family and home, and to take care of her children. The women work very hard throughout the year, and it is only on the dancing occasion that the real beauty of any women can be seen, when they all dressed up with their rich costumes, gold and silver ornaments and jewelleries. It is on the dancing occasion and in the dancing arena, that the men could see the beautiful girls and later on propose for their marriage.³⁷ According to a tradition,³⁸ once a dance festival took place, and many dancers both males and female came out to dance. The most prominent and fairest of all the female dancers was the wife of one man named U Myndi. The chief was impressed by her beauty and dancing performance, so he planned a conspiracy to kill her husband. U Myndi

who was killed came back to life by some hidden powers, and a *Dorbar* was summoned, in which the chiefs' misdeed was exposed, and he was dethroned and u Myndi's wife was invited to take the throne. Since then, no more married women could dance. Hence the young men could look and see the young unmarried girls on the dancing occasion and later propose for their marriage. They could choose freely as there is no fear as the dancing girls are all unmarried and virgins. The virgin dancers should dance for three consecutive years as it was their traditional belief.

Other Festivals and Dances

Besides the above eight festivals, the Khasi have many more festivals and dances which are celebrated in the different parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Some of them are associated with religious rituals and there are others which are plainly secular in character. An attempt has been made to collect the names of the various festivals and dances, so that further research would be carried on in the near future.

At Nongjri and Sohbar in the southern parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the important festival is the *Shad Phur Nongjri-Sohbar* which is a ceremonial dance for the dead. There is also another dance known as *ka Shad Lyngdoh Wakhken* and another one known as *Ka Phur ki Khatar Shnong*. In Mairang, they have *ka Shad Mawniam Mawkyntroh*³⁹ which is a ceremonial dance for the dead during the bone collection ceremony. In Cherrapunjee, they have *ka Shad Thung Syiem Thang Syiem* which is a ceremony during the coronation and cremation of the syiem or chief. In Marngar in the Bhoi area, they have *ka Shad Raid Marngar* that is a religious dance held at the same time as the Rongali Bihu of the Assamese. The dance is performed to thank God the Creator and to invoke His blessings for the whole year.⁴⁰ They also have *ka Shad Krud Kba bad Shad Langhei* that is a thanksgiving dance for peace and prosperity of the whole *Raid* and for a prosperous harvest.⁴¹ There is another dance known as *ka Shad Kynthei na Nongkharai* which is a religious dance. It is a thanksgiving dance, where people thank God the Creator for all His blessing that He has showered upon them and at the same time to invoke His blessing for general welfare and bountiful harvest. Another dance festival which is held at Mawkyrwat known as *Ka On Pepbah na Mawkyrwat*, which is connected with the bone burial ceremony. They perform this festival in order that the souls of the deceased will go straight to the house of God. There is another dance known as *ka Shad Krud Lyngkha* and *ka Shad Kylla Mohkhiew* or the sowing dance and the hoe dance of Warmawsaw and Patharkhmah. The sowing dance reflects the spirit of joy and merriment at having sown the seeds with hope for a prosperous harvest, while the hoe dance is performed by the people after returning from the

fields.⁴² There is a dance festival known as *Ka Shad Raid Shabong* at Pynursla⁴³ held at the dancing field at Rynghylliang, at the end of winter in the month of February. It is also a thanksgiving dance to God the Creator for all the blessings that He has showered upon the people of the Raid for a bountiful harvest and general prosperity. There is another dance known as *ka Shad Nguh Meikha* in the Raid Iapngar to show respect to the paternal grandmother. In Jaintia Hills, there are many festivals and dances. At some places, during the removal of weeds from the field, a *Longhai* dance is performed with two groups of dancers, females and males on one line facing one another, holding a hoe in one hand. Another dance is *ka Shyrnai*, but in place of a hoe, a stick is used.⁴⁴ There is also a dance known as *ka Shad Nongsakyriad* of Ialong village in Jaintia Hills.⁴⁵ Then in the War Jaintia, besides the *Rongkhli* festival they have *ka Shad Rong Pyrtuh* also known as *ka Shad Kerai Jongprai* which include male and female dancers. There is also *ka Shad Behmradi ki Shangpung*, which is an all male dance where men carry their spears and shields, the leader of the dance used to wear a tiger's face mask. Another dance is *ka Shad Mastieh Behkhla ki Mynso bad Raliang*, this is also a male dance in which some men carry bamboos, and others carry spears and shields. This dance depicts a mock fight where each one tries to hit another. Another dance is *ka Shad Kyndei Re Dei*,⁴⁶ this dance is performed in the field, where men stay waiting for the remaining rice to be harvested in paddy field. The men dance two by two, while others are singing. Beside these, there are *ka Shad Rong Khusi ha Darang*, *ka Shad Phur ki Lamin*, this dance festival is connected with the bone collection ceremony. Other dance festivals are *ka Shad Kyrton ha Nartiang*, *ka Shad Sukra ha Nongbah*, *ka Pastieh Kynrih ha Raliang*, *ka Shad Kylla Pliang* or a plate dance which is held at Nongjiri, *ka Shad Lympung ki Wyrto*, *ki Mynser*, *ki Ummynso ki Umpanai*. There is also another dance known as *ka Shad Rah Kynthai ki Nongwataw*,⁴⁷ it is a male and female dance. The female dancers dance in the middle holding their hands together. This dance is held in the month of December after the harvesting work is over. In many villages annual community dance, known as *Shad Shnong* are organised either after the sowing work is over or after harvesting is done.

Footnotes

1. R. S. Lyngdoh, "The Sonata of Music and Dance Across the Blue Hills of Meghalaya" in *Cathedral Band 44th Anniversary Souvenir*, p.27.
2. Kynpham Singh, "Shad Suk Mynsiem" in *Where Lies the Soul of our Race*, p.25.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *U Kritik*, Vol. II, No. 13, April 8th, 1982.
5. W. W Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol. II, pp. 205-206.
6. R. B. Pemberton, *Report of the Eastern Frontier of British India*, p.249.
7. R. S. Lyngdoh, "Circumstances Leading to the Anglo-Khasi War" in *U Tirot Singh. 150th Death Anniversary Souvenir*, pp.11-12
8. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, pp.116-117.
9. H. K. Barpujari, *Problem of the Hill Tribes, North East Frontier*, Vol. I (1822-42), pp. 65-66.
10. H. Bareh, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
11. R. S. Lyngdoh, "The Sonata of Music and Dance Across the Blue Hills of Meghalaya", *op. cit.*, p. 28.
12. I. M. Simon, *Meghalaya*, p.32.
13. Asim Maitra, "Definations and Critical Analysis of Festivals- Some Preliminary Observations" in the *Journal of Social Research*, Vol. XXVI, No.1.
14. R. T. Rymbai, "The Festivals of a Khasi and Their Influence on his Life" in *Khasi Heritage*, p.123.
15. H. O. Mawrie, *The Essence of the Khasi Religion*, pp.6-7.
16. H. Elias, *Ki Khanatang U Barim*, pp.33-35; also Rabon Singh, *Ka Kitab Jingphawar*, p.38.
17. We are not aware of the dresses of the animals. Apparently, it looks impractical to think that animals would have dresses, and they would go in their best for the festival. But this is how we got in the legend and we have put it accordingly.
18. H. Elias, *op. cit.*, pp.65-69.
19. Discussion with Shri R. T. Rymbai, also in H. L. Deb Roy, *A Tribe in Transition*, pp.204-206.
20. G. Costa, *Ka Riti Jong ka Ri Laiphew Syiem, Ka Bynta Kaba Ar*, p.132.
21. *Ibid.* p.137.
22. Discussion with Shri L. G. Shullai, a knowledgeable person and an eminent author.
23. M. Belbin Kyndiah, "The Jaintia Laho Dance" in the *Seinraij Seinlang Souvenir Magazine (Special)* 1983-1984, pp.36-37.
24. We are thankful to Shri Chui Lyngdoh, Shri Deng Lyngdoh, Shri Hatdoh Pohsnem of Nongtalang village, who are knowledgeable persons on the festival, for this information.
25. We are thankful to Shri Ceril Mashli and Shri Tishon Basan of Raid Iapngar who are knowledgeable persons on the festival, for this information.

26. D. T. Laloo, *Ka Sajer Raid Nonglyngdoh Bynta-1*, p.18.
27. O.S. Lamare, *Ka Lukhmi*, p.75.
28. R.S. Lyngdoh, "The Sonata of Music and Dance Across the Blue Hills of Meghalaya", p.24.
29. W. D. Jyrwa, "Ki Sur Khasi Pnar" in *Ka Kolshor U Khasi*, p.6.
30. Discussion with Shri T. T. Mukhim, a noted singer and composer of Khasi songs; also C. Khongwir, "Ki tiar put tiar tem bad ki ksing ki dhah u Khasi" in *Ka Kolshor u Khasi*, pp. 30-31.
31. E. Webster Davies, "The Indigenous Musical Instruments of Meghalaya" in *The State Museum*, Inaugural Issue, 1981, pp.15-16.
32. P. R.Kyndiah, "A Peep into Khasi and Jaintia Music" in *Khasi Heritage*, p.153.
33. *Ibid.* p.159.
34. R. S. Lyngdoh, "Kumno ki Tiar Tem U Khasi Ki Wan Dur" in *K.S.A. Magazine*, Shillong, 1962-63, p.31.
35. Rabon Singh, *Ka Kitab Jingphawar*, pp.1-5.
36. We are thankful to (Late) Ka Shortimai, Syiemsad of the Hima Khyrim, for this information.
37. Discussion with Shri R.T. Rymbai, an eminent author.
38. Hamlet Bareh, *Khasi Fables and Folktales*, pp.10-14.
39. D. T. Laloo, "Jingshad Khasi- Ki Jingshad ha Jaintia Hills" in *U Kritik*, Vol. VII, No. 14, April 2nd, 1987,p.3.
40. B. R. Kharlukhi, "Ki Rukom Jingshad Khasi- Pnar Bapher Bapher" in *Ka Kolshor U Khasi*, p.1.
41. D. T. Laloo, *op. cit.*, p.3.
42. Ki Jingshad U Hynniew Trep" a Pamphlet issued on the 2nd Annual Dance Festival Organised by the Syngkhong Kyntiew Ri, 30th December, 1980.
43. *Paila Ksiar*, Rymphang 24th, 1987.
44. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, p.311.
45. D. T. Laloo, *op.cit.* p.3.
46. *Ibid.*
47. S.S. Laloo, "Ka Shad Rah Kynthai ki Nongwataw" in *Dongmusa*, 28th June, 1985.

Chapter IV

Historical Origin— An Analytical Study

The Khasi as we have seen had no script of their own till the advent of the British, so they do not have any written history. In the absence of historical records, we have to depend much on the analysis of their folk ways, the folk religion, and the economic structure.¹ By studying and analysing their traditions, myths and legends, their folktales, folk songs, and folk religion, we can come to certain conclusions about their social, economic and political life.

The traditions suggest that the festivals and dances of the Khasi are very old, perhaps these are as old as the society itself. We cannot say for certain, which festival is the earliest, perhaps the most ancient festivals are those connected with the family and clan, as we have seen that the *Raid* or communes and the *Hima* or state were organised at a later stage. The earliest and smallest unit was the *ing* or family and several families belonging to the same clan formed the *kur* or clan and several clans formed the *Raid* and several *Raid* formed the state by associating themselves together. So the earliest religious ceremonies are those which are connected with birth and death in the family and clan as birth and death are part of human life. Several families lived together in a cluster, they had to condition themselves according to the situation and environment. The birth of a child is a happy occasion in the family, so they organise ceremonies which are connected with the birth of a child to thank God the Creator and at the same time to free the child from diseases and other evil spirits. When a person dies they have to cremate him with due ceremonies, so that the spirit of the person would go straight to the house of God from where he came from, as that is the traditional belief of the Khasi. They strongly believe that persons belonging to the same clan would stay together in the next world in the house of God. Thus, the bones of the members of the same

clan are collected after cremation and placed together first in the *Mawshyieng* or stone cist, then later on, they are placed together at the *mawbah* or clan's ossuary, which is a final resting place. During this occasion, ceremonies which include feast and dances are organised, which show they have fulfilled their duties towards the dead and at the same time to show their respect to the dead. Thus ceremonies, which are connected with birth and death are perhaps the earliest organised religious ceremonies among the Khasi, where the families and the clans are involved. Later on, when the Khasi have organised themselves into commune and state, then evolved other festivals and ceremonies which are connected with the commune and state.

We cannot say for certain, which of the eight festivals is the oldest, but we have taken those festivals which are connected with the clans as the earliest organised festivals and dances, and those which are connected with the commune and state as the later organised festivals. On this basis, the historical origins of the festivals and dances are placed as follows:

1. Ka Chad Chiphiah or Chad Iong Nikhla or Shad Laho

The Laho dance festival is a very old one as it is connected with the origin and habitation of the people. According to the traditional belief of the Pnar,² God in the beginning first made the Sun, Water, Air and Fire who used to quarrel among themselves for supremacy. Each one wished to rule the world, so they went before God. In this situation, God took a piece of flesh and asked them to consume it. The Sun tried first, but the flesh became harder and harder and gradually it was reduced to a small hard piece. Then water tried the same, it came rushing and engulfed and merged it into water, but the piece of flesh became swollen in size. Next came air, which blew the piece and it began floating in the air, and so the air also failed. Lastly, came the fire, its heat dried first and then in one gust, it consumed the piece. So God, selected fire as the king among the four children in the world.

In the kingdom, God had Jom as his chief servant. Jom in course of time earned all the powers except the power of creation, he became very proud that he dared to challenge the authority of God. So God drove him out from heaven, he went to a place where he established his own kingdom known as *ka Mynkoi u Jom* or hell. Jom had many followers, the chief among them was Sani, who was a forceful orator who could influence or induce anybody to commit the wrong. U Jom sent Sani to this earth, by his oratory and manipulation, he was able to bring quarrel and enmity between the birds and the beasts.

In the beginning there were sixteen families in heaven with God, so they could come to earth and go to heaven as they like through a golden ladder, known as *ka Tengkein ksiar* or as some would believe, through a big tree known as *ka jri ka kya*. The nine families remained with God in heaven and the

seven came to stay on the earth, they were led by their leader or chief known as u Lakriah. When they reached the earth, the seven families soon found that the world was full of stones, there was no land for cultivation and other works, and they found it very difficult. So their Chief U Lakriah went back to heaven to God for the earth or soil. God directed the supreme Goddess, *ka Blai synshar*, to give three basketful of earth or soil from heaven and threw the soil all over the stones. In another version, it is said that *ka Blei synshar* sent *ka Bei Rymmaw* or mother earth to cover the stones with soil. Another story³ tells us that it was the termite who got the soil from Patar and deposited in a very extensive plain. God then considered how to distribute this soil and so He deputed two minor gods, *u Simsong* and the *Syiem Madiah* who agreed to scatter the soil over the whole earth. The Simsong in the hill regions and the *Syiem Madiah* in the Plains, while the Simsong was wandering here and there, he saw some gamblers and joined them in their gambling and lost the soil. The *Syiem Madiah* did her work very well, when she returned, she was very surprised to see that in the hills, there was no soil yet. She shook off what remained in her sack on the hills, that is why there are more soil and less stones in the plains and not in the hills.

U Lakriah came to his people with a message of God. God conveyed His wishes and advice through *u Syiem* Lakriah, the most important were to earn righteousness, to respect their parents, to know man and to know God and not to be intoxicated and God could be reached through prayers and sacrifice.

Origin of the Laho Dance Festival

When U Lakriah came to his people with a message of God, all became very happy. The people were in the dark not knowing what to do and how to express their gratefulness and thankfulness to God their Creator for all the blessings that He has showered upon them and for the message that their leader u Lakriah had brought to them. Then they decided to commemorate their happiness by a kind of dance. They did not know which dance would please God most. To solve the problem, the *Ynniaw Wasa* or Seven Huts, offered the choice through *ka suit ka chor* or libation. A gourd was filled with country made liquor, and it was decided that if froth came up to the brim, then God was willing and if not, He was unwilling. They offered the first choice through *ka suit ka chor* with the *Chad Chijur* or the couple dance, a male and a female dancer, but no froth came out. This was, they believed because God did not like that His children should glorify His name with a couple dance. The couple was a marriage relationship between a husband and a wife and was a taboo to dance for the glory of God. It was taken as God's refusal and it was interpreted that a pair dance would result in social evils and misunderstanding and it might

spoil the chastity and character of the young boys and girls. Then *u Ynniaw Wasa* put forth the second preference through *Ka Chad Chiphiah* or the triple dance or the Laho dance and *Ka Samen* or the individual dance. Both the dances were agreeable to God, the froth came up to the brim which was taken as the sign of God's willingness and acceptance. *Chiphiah* means dividing, it means dividing the dance between two males, one on the right and another on the left and the female dancer in the middle. Consequently, the people observed the *Chiphiah* dance or Laho dance as the traditional dance of the Pnar.⁴

U Lakriah called a *Dorbar* of all the creatures for the observance of the festive day. All assembled in a place where dancing was started and they played the *tang muri* or flute, the *bom* or drum and so on. *Ka Sngi* or the Sun was enjoying the festival from above. She could not resist the temptation of coming down and participated in the dance. She came down with her brother *u Bnai* or the Moon. They did not know that it was a taboo to dance in pair. Both of them began dancing and in the process, the Moon made love to his sister, thereby raising a wave of laughter from the assembled spectators. This made the Sun very much ashamed and embarrassed. She fled away to a certain cave known as *ka krem lamet ka krem latang*. The Moon proposed to marry his sister, this made the Sun very angry and in her anger, she threw *u dpei* or ashes over his face, and this explains why there are black spots in the Moon.

After the Sun fled and hid herself in the cave, there was no more light on this earth and it was overcast by darkness. U Lakriah called a *Dorbar* of all creatures and discussed how to bring the Sun back. U Lakriah asked for volunteers who could go and persuade the Sun to come out of the cave. The strong animals like the elephant, the horse and the buffalo, each in turn volunteered but ultimately failed to get back the Sun. Next came the turn of birds, but they too failed to bring the Sun back.

The people were very much worried. Then someone mentioned that the cock was absent from the meeting, so U Lakriah sent for the cock. The cock had no proper dress, he was known as *u lymboit u lymbiang* and because of this, he failed to attend the meeting. The cock was thus provided with dresses, to wear over his body, and he went out to search for the Sun. On the way, he fell tired and sat on a stone and the latter asked a favour from the cock in the coming world of the Sun. The cock assured the stone that in the coming world of the Sun, stone would be used for preserving bones of the dead and for erecting monoliths. Then the cock resumed his journey and finally reached the cave. The Sun tried to allure him by charm and drink, but could not as the cock was conscious of his mission and responsibility. The Sun narrated to him, how she was laughed at, sneered and abused. The cock promised to the Sun that thenceforth no creature would abuse her in

any way. Then the Sun agreed to reappear only when the cock would signal her by crowing thrice. The cock also assured the Sun that henceforth he would be responsible for all acts of omissions and commissions by any creature under the Sun.

The cock came back and reported to u Lakriah how he persuaded the Sun to reappear. U Lakriah warned all the creatures not to abuse the Sun nor commit anything wrong under the Sun lest the responsibility would be of the cock. Since then the cock hold a sacred place in the life of the Pnar.⁵

It seems that the *Chad Chiphiah* or Chad Laho is connected with the creation of the world, and how God having provided them with all their needs and requirements on earth went away. He expressed through u Lakriah that He could be reached through *Ka nguh Ka dem*, *Ka suit Ka shor* or through prayers and sacrifices. So the *Chiphiah* dance or Laho dance was accepted by God to be performed by His children to express their happiness and thankfulness to Him. So this dance festival may be the first organised festival of the Pnar. *Ka Chad Chiphiah* nearly disappeared and it was discontinued for many years. It was revived by the Nikhla clan, and it was for this reason that *Ka Chad Chiphiah* is also known as *ka Chad long Nikhla* or the dance of the Nikhla clan.

2. Ka Rongkhli

The Rongkhli or Tiger festival is another ancient festival of the War Jaintia which is performed at Nongtalang village. Besides this, the people have other festivals. One such festival is *ka Rong Beh Lyngkan*, a festival to drive away evils which is similar to the Behdeinkhlam festival. Another one is *ka Rong Pyrtuh*, which is a big festival and before they perform it, they should first of all perform *ka Rong Beh Lyngkan*. There is another ceremony known as *ka Phur*, that is connected with the bone collection ceremony of the dead.⁶

About the origin of the Rongkhli festival, nobody could say when it was first started as the people have no written records. However, this festival is very old and is handed down through the ages from generation to generation. It might have started long time back before the people settled at the present village of Nongtalang, or they might have brought it from the place of their migration or might have learnt it on their way. It is a war dance where certain religious rites and ceremonies are performed, after the victory in the war. There is a tradition that in the olden days, after the victory in a war, the head of an enemy is chopped off and put in a long pole. Then the people came along with the enemy's head, shouting and dancing all the way, to the accompaniment of music played by the drummers and pipers, to celebrate their victory in the war. Nobody could say for certain, whether this could be taken as the origin of the

Rongkhli festival. Head hunting is not unknown, and cases of head hunting and head offering were reported from the hills. Propitiation was given to *u Syngkai Bamon* and *ka Ramshandi*, the former being the deity who gave the heads of the enemies to the successful warriors. They offer a cock, after the cock has been sacrificed they fixed its head on the point of the sword which symbolised the fixing of human head of an enemy killed in battle. The Khasi used to sacrifice to a number of other gods for success in battle.⁷

To the people, a tiger is symbolised as an enemy and is hated by them. This hatred might have started with the origin of the people themselves. According to a tradition, after the *Hynniew Trep* had stayed here on earth the golden bridge was severed. Then grew up a very big tree on *u Diengiei* peak, which grew to be so gigantic, and its leaves and branches became so thick, that the earth was overshadowed and became very dark. The people were determined to cut and destroy this tree, so that light would come to the world. They cut the tree in the morning and went back to their homes in the evening, as they could not finish cutting it in one day. When they came the next morning they found that the tree grew again and the cutting marks disappeared. The people were surprised. Every time they cut it, the next day the cutting marks could not be seen. They wondered how this could happen, then *ka phreid*, a very small bird, told the secret to the people that it was the tiger who came every night and licked the part of the tree which had been cut, and the cutting marks disappeared and the tree grew again. Having known the secret, the men did not take their axes and knives home, but kept them upwards on the part of the tree which had been cut. The tiger came as usual and licked the tree, but the sharp edges of the axes and knives cut his tongue. From the time, the tiger did not dare to go and lick the tree any more, and the mission of men succeeded. The *Diengiei* tree fell, and light appeared once more to the world. Crops grew well and people were happy that they had got light and warmth. Since then the tiger is looked upon as an enemy of man. The tiger asked the goddess *Pyrtuh*, that he would fight a war with man. whether he won or lost, but the goddess should accept him if he died in the war, and a festival would be observed to the goddess, and the tiger's head would be carried and put in the village gate in his memory. The goddess *Pyrtuh* agreed, hence the tiger festival began.⁸ If this event is to be taken as the beginning of this festival, that means, the festival is very old and as old as the society itself. The enmity between the tiger and man was seen in yet another story. Once a woman who was carrying, wanted to eat the fruits from a tree. She saw the tiger who told her that he would give the fruits if she promised that if she gave birth to a girl, she would give the child to him. The woman did not know what to do, as she was craving to have the fruits, she agreed. The woman gave birth to a girl and true to

her promise, the tiger came to ask for the girl. The girl grew up to be very beautiful and innocent, she was very much frightened of the tiger. One day she ran away from home to the house of the Sun. These stories show that there was an enmity between the tiger and the people.

According to another tradition,⁹ when one of the powerful Jaintiapur chief was ruling, he wanted to get one tree which is known in the local dialect as *Niarepetai Laijeskop*, a kind of tree which resembles the feet of a dove, this tree grew in Nongtalang village. Some of the people who belonged to the neighbouring villages of Pamchedong and Padu went to cut this tree to give to the chief. On hearing this news, the people of Nongtalang village went to take this tree. So a war started between the people of Nongtalang and the people of Pamchedong. In this war, the people of Nongtalang prepared their best warriors, the best two were *u Khew and u Ktah*. These two leaders along with their people went to Pamchedong and Padu. After a serious fighting, the people of Nongtalang were victorious. These two warriors were able to chop off the heads of some of their enemies. They came back to their village with the enemies' heads along with the swords and the beating of the drums and playing of the pipes. On their way home, they passed by one village, known as Nongbareh to show their victory over the two villages. As a sign of good gesture and brotherhood, the people of Nongbareh came and joined the war dance, together with the people of Nongtalang. The people of Pamchedong and Padu planned to come and follow them again, but they could not find them, they only heard the beating of the drums on their way to Nongbareh. So, the people of the two villages, having no other alternative declared and accepted the defeat. They were afraid lest the people of both Nongtalang and Nongbareh would jointly come to their villages and that would be very dangerous. Nongbareh came as a helper and became friendly with Nongtalang. Another version¹⁰ tells us that in the olden days, some people used to keep on watch, to protect their village, in case any enemy came and harm them. If any enemy happened to come, the watchers cut his head and ran as fast as they could to their village, beating their drums very hard. They beat their drums continuously with a loud sound and the enemies were frightened and could no longer enter the village. They continued their beating of the drums till morning, when the Sun rises, they started dressing up and started dancing. So, the Tiger festival might have originated from this performance of the ancestors of Nongtalang village.

We cannot say for certain, how this festival originated, but there is no doubt that it is a very old festival. The tiger is symbolised and looked upon as an enemy of the people, but it cannot be said that the head of a tiger in this festival substitutes that of a human head. The forests are infested with wild animals, and a tiger is a danger and a menace to the people, sheep, cattle and other domesticated animals. So the tiger is a great enemy of the people and its killing is like the killing of an enemy which brings relief to them.

3. Ka Behdeinkhlam

There are many views about the origin of the Behdeinkhlam festival. Some believe that this festival is very old and has been given by God Himself to the *Hynniew Trep*, the ancestors of the Khasi and which is handed from generation to generation. That was the time when the animals, birds, stones and trees conversed with the people in the same language. This is not surprising, as in the Bible story we learn that, when King Solomon ruled in Israel, the ass of Balam spoke to him. From reports available, the great plague visited the erstwhile Jaintia Hills in 1917-18.¹¹ But this date cannot be taken as the date of the origin of the festival as it is too recent. The festival was discontinued for 16 years and it was revived in 1948¹² after India has achieved her independence. Another version is that the Behdeinkhlam might have started on or before 1500 A.D. One of the Jaintia Chiefs went to study at Nartiang, and the Nartiang monoliths were erected at the direction of the Chief, and it was u Mar Phalyngki with the help of the people, who erected the stones. Bearing testimony to this fact, it may be said that the Behdeinkhlam started on or before 1500 A. D.¹³ But this date too may be too early to be taken as the beginning of the festivals. The Behdeinkhlam festival very ancient, the people might have brought it from the place of migration or have learnt it on their way. The Mynnars also observe the Synteng ceremony of the Behdeinkhlam, though they are quite far from each other. The Mynnar of Jirang dialect of the Khasi, spoken on the extreme north of the hills appears to be akin to the Synteng, Lakadong, and Amwi form of speech.¹⁴

The Behdeinkhlam festival also had an origin and link with the migration of the first colonising families of Jowai. Tradition goes that when Jowai was a forest, inhabited by wild animals and birds, the hills and rivers and so also the religious stones were already there, and these stones were the elder brother known as u *Mookhai*, *moo* means stone in the Jaintia dialect. U *Mookhai* was also known as u *Kongwasan*, and his brothers were u *Mooralong*, u *Mutong* and u *Musniang* and their sister was ka *Wah Myntdu* or the *Myntdu* river, which was known as ka *Tawiar ka Taken*, meaning one who protects. According to a tradition, it was the four sisters named ka *Bon*, ka *Tien*, ka *Wet* and ka *Doh* and their maternal uncle who formed the first colonising family at a place known as Lakyrnah which is situated near u *Mookhai* at Jowai. When they reached that place there was a heavy storm, accompanied by Thunder and lightning. In that situation u *Mookhai* danced as if he was happy, that human being had reached there. The five were frightened and terrified and

trembled with fear. When *u Mookhai* saw this, he said to them not to be frightened and that he would protect them from all enemies and would bring prosperity to them to increase their family and clan, their crops, trade and their village. He asked them that they should perform a religious ceremony every year to him and his brothers and also to *u Pyrthat* or Thunder, for good rain, bountiful harvest and that Thunder would not destroy their crops and house. The four sisters and their uncle accepted this. The families of the four sisters increased and their generations are known as the *soo kpoh khat-ar wyrnai*.¹⁵

As years passed, many people came and settled at Jowai, and it became very big. So an idea came to the people that they should have religious ceremonies, as at times, there occurred a plague in Jowai and other nearby areas. So, a *Dorbar* was held known as *ka Dorbar Pyllun* of the Saw Lyngdoh or of the four Lyngdoh, that is the Lyngdoh of Jowai, the Lyngdoh of Chyrmang, the Lyngdoh of Tuber and the Lyngdoh of Mukhla and the elders. At that *Dorbars* they decided to perform a religious dance to be known as *ka shad Behdeinkhlam* or a dance to drive away plague, and this dance is to be performed in the mud, this is to show that all are equal and there is no distinction between the rich and the poor, the high and the low.¹⁶ Another version tells us that it was *u Niang Lyngdoh* and his sister led by *ka Long Lyngdoh* that were the first people who came to Jowai, and it was *u Niang Lyngdoh* who was the first Lyngdoh, who gave the name of Jowai. The first place of habitation was at a place known as *u Lum Sooyung*, meaning the hill of the four house or families.¹⁷ It was *u Niang Lyngdoh* who erected the *Moosmai*, meaning the oath taking stone and around this stone he planted bamboos. At that time, there was no court, if there was any quarrel, which could not be settled, the two sides used to go to this stone, to take an oath, where nothing would happen to the innocent, whereas the guilty would collapse and die.¹⁸

Another story tells us that this festival have been given by God Himself to the *Hynniew Trep* or the Seven Huts, the ancestors of the Khasi. It is believed that in the olden days God used to talk and walk with man and the Seven Huts used to come to earth and go to heaven as they pleased. When the Seven Huts decided to stay on earth, and before God departed, He asked the people to perform a religious dance for four days in the mud, to show that they were equal. At the same time God commanded that Thunder would put his four daughters on earth for intermarriage with the sons of the *Hynniew Trep*, to live and die together with them.¹⁹

We cannot say for certain which version is true, but it may be mentioned that once upon a time, a plague took place somewhere in the hills, that made the people very frightened of the plague, and hence the *Behdeinkhlam* festival is held to prevent its occurrence. Again, it was the plague that took place somewhere that made the four sisters to leave the previous habitation and come to Jowai. So the festival might have taken root somewhere, before it

came to Jowai. The Behdinkhlam festival at Tuber village, south east of Jowai is very big, as many villages participated in it. It may be that the four sisters might have migrated from that area, and that the Behdeinkhlam might have started there since the beginning of times, and it was brought to Jowai. The Behdeinkhlam is not only a festival to drive away plague and other evil spirits, but also to invoke God's blessings for the well-being of the people, for a bountiful harvest, for prosperity of the trade and other works of the people, for the increase of the family and the race and also to ask God's forgiveness for all the shortcomings.

4. Ka Lukhmi

The Khasi like other tribal have important rites which are associated with cultivation and agriculture. These rites have much in common for example, with the fertility rites of the Boros and the Bihu festivals of the Assamese, and thus it can be maintained that these fertility rites had long been observed and practised by the Khasi. The important festivals of the Khasi like the Nongkrem dance and the Behdeinkhlam of Jowai are associated directly with cultivation and agricultural life of the people. In the main Khasi plateau, fertility rites have disappeared, though in the Bhoi areas and Jaintia Hills, they still constitute important ceremonies of local people. In Nartiang in the Jaintia Hills, rites are performed regularly in connection with fertility and cultivation.²⁰ The Lukhmi festival and the Sajer of Raid Nonglyngdoh are two important festivals in the Bhoi area which are performed for prosperity of agriculture and general welfare. The fertility rites and dances are very ancient and might have started long time back, when the ancient men learnt how to cultivate and plant crops for their livelihood. According to traditions, the Assamese people obtained their idea of Bihu folk dance from the old Austrics of Assam.²¹ *Ka Lukhmi* may be identified as the goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth of the Hindus. We cannot deny the Hindu influence among the Khasi, but the latter too have their personified deities of the house, such as *ka Lukhimai*, *ka 'lei khuri* which are the house or hearth deities.²² So, *ka Lukhmi* of the Bhoi areas, might be the *Lukhimai*, the household deity of the Khasi, who looks after the welfare and prosperity of the house and family and also fills their granaries. *Ka Lukhmi* must have been a very old festival.

In the olden days, the people were more attached to the soil as most of them were agriculturists and depended very much for their existence on their local agriculture. The people lived in isolation with very little contact with outsiders. In the precolonial period, there was no means of communication and nothing like outside help would be available to them, if plague, starvation and pestilence or any other calamity would occur to them. If crops do not

grow well, starvation would take place. So, propitiation is offered to God before or after the sowing work, in which occasion, they pray to God for a bountiful harvest, well-being and to free them from plague, pestilence and other evils, so that they could live peacefully throughout the year. There are festivals which are observed after the harvesting work, to thank God the Creator for all the blessings to them.

The Lukhmi festival is also observed in the Raid Thaiang besides other areas in the Bhoi area. During the festival the people invoke God's blessings for their well-being and the prosperity of crops especially rice which is their principal food.

According to a tradition²³ of the area, it goes that once upon a time a rat brought rice from the plains to these hills. There was a time when the people suffered very much from poverty, they told their sufferings to the Lyngdoh. The older people found out that the reason for their suffering and poverty was because they did not perform a ceremony which would please God. So they took some soil outside the village and also a handful of rice from each house and put it in the conical basket called *Khoh*. They went to the place where that rat had given them rice long time ago. The priestess had to carry that rice in the basket to her house. They then perform a dance along with the beating of the drums and the playing of the pipes. The *Sohblei* then killed and sacrificed a white goat, which they called *ka blang Lukhmi*, and its blood is also mixed with the rice in the basket, the rice is then distributed to each house. This ceremony is performed by the people before the sowing season to invoke God's blessings for a bountiful harvest and for general prosperity.

Another story²⁴ about the origin of *ka Lukhmi* tells us that in the olden days when the people did not have any idea of rice, they lived by eating wild fruits, roots, bark of trees and other wild vegetables. Once a man from the plain came to visit his Khasi friend, it so happened that at that time, there was less wild fruits and vegetables. The Khasi friend could not offer much food to his friend who came along with his small daughter. On the next day both of them went out for fishing in a nearby river. The small girl cried as she was hungry. Both of them got many fishes and also a bunch of flowers which they gave to the small girl to play with. To their great surprise the baby stopped crying. In the evening they returned home and took the flowers with them, and the Khasi friend kept them inside the house. His friend along with his daughter left for home. When the winter months came, the flowers became dried up and fell everyday on the ground. Whenever the floor was swept, the dried flowers along with the rubbish were thrown outside. When summer came the field was covered by the growth of these yellowish flowers. At that time, the plainsman along with his daughter paid another visit to his

friend's house. As soon as they reached the house, the daughter cried again and again. The Khasi friend plucked a bunch of these flowers and gave to the child who stopped crying immediately. The Khasi friend asked the plainsman to take the seeds and sow at his place. Meanwhile, the crop grew wild in plenty, a thought came to the people to eat this crop. They cooked and tried on a thin dog, and in no time, it became very fat. Next they gave it to an aged and sickly woman who became fat and got cured. Seeing this, the people wanted to grow this crop. As they did not know its name they called the crop as *ka Lukhmi* as a kind of respect to the crop, which had fed them. When the time of sowing came, unknowingly, the people cooked the seed first and then sowed in the field. It was believed that *ka Lukhmi* became very angry and left for the river and did not return.

Ka Lukhmi stayed in the river, and she was seen very often bathing in the river. Most of the people tried to find her. One day, a man hid himself in one corner and took away her clothes while she was bathing. When *ka Lukhmi* finished her bath, she looked for her clothes, but could not find them. Then the man said to her that if she promised to come back he would give her clothes and come and fetch her with the warriors and the beating of the drums. *Ka Lukhmi* promised to come back as her wish was to live in every hearth and home of the people. The man returned her clothes, she came back in a boat and brought along with her the gourds, pumpkins, maize and other seeds. After her return the crop grew well again.

As time passed by, the children of the *Hynniew Trep*, became prosperous and well off, and gained in wealth. They kept their wealth along with rice, *ka Lukhmi* became very angry, as she did not want that men should equalise her with wealth as her wish and desire was to live in every home, rich or poor. She left again, and the people became very sad as they knew the reasons for her leaving them, they promised to perform religious rites and ceremonies to her. From that time onward, the ceremonies were performed in her honour and since then, the Khasi believed that it was an evil thing to steal other's wealth and it is a taboo to steal rice. Hence goes the Khasi basic teaching *kamai ia ka hok*, to earn righteousness, to give everyone his due. The *Lukhmi* festival must have been very old, as rice has been the staple food of the Khasi people since time immemorial.

5. Ka Sajer ka Raid Nonglyngdoh

Ka Sajer of Raid Nonglyngdoh is another important festival of the Bhoi living in the northern parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. It is celebrated by the people of the whole Raid-Nonglyngdoh and is performed by the five clans of the Raid. These clans are the Maring, Nongkoun, Makri, Nongjiri, and

Lapang.²⁵

Previously, the area of the *Raid* was very big but now it has become very small. The present boundaries are in the east, the river Shyrku near Pahambir, in the west from the boundary stone which is situated between Nongkhrah and Nonglyngdoh, in the north Plasha and in the south Patharwang. In the *Raid* Nonglyngdoh the *Syiemsad*, *Lyngdoh* and five *Basan* or elders are the rulers of the whole *Raid*, and they are known as the *Hynniew Kni*-, *Hynniew kpoh*, meaning the seven uncles and the seven families.²⁶

Ka Sajer is a religious festival, performed for the prosperity of agriculture, particularly rice, which is a source of wealth and principal food of the Khasi. It is a thanksgiving festival to God for all the blessing that He has showered upon the people. There are important rites which are associated with cultivation and agriculture in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. It can be maintained that these fertility rites had long been observed and practised by the Khasi.

Origin of the Festival

The *Sajer* is a very old festival. No one can tell when it was first started, but it is as old as the society itself. The festival lasted for four days but preparation for holding the same took place one or two months in advance. In the olden days, the festival was held at the altar of the *Syiem* or chief for four consecutive years, and in the fifth year, it was performed at the altar of the *Lyngdoh*. It so happened that the chief became very weak in later years, and they did not perform this festival. The traditionalists wanted to preserve the festival, which they thought would be a great sin, if they did not perform the ceremony, and it is their prime duty to preserve the same. They then unanimously decided to revive the festival which had been lying dormant for many years. So they performed the festival at the altar of the *Lyngdoh*, instead of at the altar of the *Syiem* till the latter could hold the festival. In spite of their best efforts they could not hold the festival in some years.²⁷

Long time ago, according to a tradition,²⁸ there was a cruel and wicked chief from Sutnga. He demanded to get five bamboo glasses of mother's milk in the morning and five in the evening and ordered his soldiers to collect the same from the nursing mothers. The next cruel act was that he demanded a small child to serve as a pillow, and another to place under his feet while sleeping. The mothers were very sad but could do nothing as they were scared of the chief and his soldiers from the plains. When the elders were thinking as what is to be done to free themselves from this cruel chief, one soldier from the plain demanded mother's milk from the daughter of u Kongsan Lapang. The latter was one of the elders of the Sutnga state, he was also

known as u Lirpator Lapang or Lirpator Sutnga from his early childhood. The woman felt very much insulted as she was the daughter of one of the elders. She became angry and gave a sudden blow with an axe to the soldier who died instantly. U Kongsan Lapang who foresaw the consequences of this incident, collected his men and asked the 290 clans to leave the state of Sutnga at once. On that night itself, they left towards the west, they crossed the river Umkhen and reached the Raid Nongkharai, and after a talk between u Kongsan Lapang and u Lyngdoh of Nongkharai, they were allowed to stay there. It was from here that the 290 clans spread to the other places. After sometimes a quarrel ensued between the people of Nongkharai and the 290 clans over a difference in the religious sacrifice. The former used to sacrifice a goat, while the latter sacrificed a bull during the religious ceremony. Thus u Kongsan Lapang and the other members who wished to follow him left Nongkharai and on their way spread to other places. U Kongsan Lapang and some other clans reached a place called Bommuni north of Nongbah. They stayed here for a short time and left again and reached a place in the hilly part known as Nurim Nandoh. Here at this place they settled down and established a market for trade and commerce. The people who came to this market were mostly from the plain areas ruled by *u Syiem Dambri* or *Rajah Dambri*. It was here at the market place that u Kongsan Lapang killed one person who came to sell fish over the cause of bargaining. *U Syiem Dambri* got very angry at this incident whereas, u Kongsan Lapang admitted his mistake and asked for forgiveness from the chief and at the same time asked the chief to do anything he liked. The chief said that he did not want to kill anyone and in return, he wanted only a woman to marry. U Kongsan Lapang agreed and asked him to come and choose any women he liked. On the market day, the chief came and it so happened that the wife of u Kongsan Lapang came to do her marketing. The chief chose her as she was very beautiful, he took and married her. When u Kongsan Lapang came in the evening, he heard the news, he called all the people including his soldiers who sympathised with him. Then u Kongsan Lapang, u Jang Nongkoun, u Basan Makri and their best men went to the place of *U Syiem Dambri*. There, they learnt that u Kongsan Lapang had agreed to give anything to the chief. U Kongsan Lapang was imprisoned and his men fled. The people of u Kongsan Lapang felt very sorry for his mother, so they hold a *Dorbar* to plan for his release and his mother promised to bear all the expenses for his release and so they went and got u Kongsan Lapang released.

In the morning, the chief realised what had happened, he collected an army and followed u Kongsan Lapang and his men but after reaching some distant, they got frightened thinking that the men of u Kongsan Lapang were as strong as giants. So, they returned and u Kongsan Lapang and his men

escaped and planned to set his wife free from *U Syiem Dambri*. They collected a group of fighting men to release her and in the middle of the night, they went and took her. When the chief got up in the morning, he was very much surprised as he did not hear anything in the night. He collected his men to find her but his men refused to go. So the chief finding no other alternative had to remain contented. U Kongsan Lapang went back to their village, as they were much frightened lest the men of the chief would come to that village. U Kongsan Lapang and his men fled with his clan and promised to *U Basan Makri* and u Jangpuhding Nongkoun, his trusted men who had saved him, that he would come and fetch them after he got a good place to stay. It was said that u Kongsan Lapang and his family fled from place to place till they reached a place called Umtrew, but unfortunately the ruler did not allow them to stay there. Then they went again and reached another village called Lapataw and the ruler allowed him to stay there. Here they settled down and u Kongsan Lapang became very rich. He fled again from this village and he reached a place called Nongbah, he invited Jangpuhding Nongkoun to stay there also. The Makri clan also fled from their village and came to Nongbah. Thus, the three clans Lapang, Nongkoun and Makri settled there.

At that time the Raid Iapngar whose capital was Nongbah was ruled by ka Iong Saring. One day this ruler was busy arranging for the naming ceremony of her son, when a poor woman named ka Luh Shadap carrying some fruits for selling came to the queen. The queen insulted her by saying, what would be the use of her fruits in front of all the meat and nice food in her house at which Ka Luh Shadap felt very much insulted. They arranged for a bet, whether the queen's plate of meat would make the women desire to have the meat and spit it or gulped the saliva repeatedly or ka Luh Shadap's plate of fruits would make the queen desire to have them and gulped the saliva. It was arranged that whoever gulped the saliva would get the chiefdom. Ka Luh Shadap asked the queen to first eat the plate of meat. She started eating but could not make the woman feel the desire to have the meat and she did not gulp the saliva. Then came the turn of Ka Luh Shadap who started at once to eat the sour fruits from her plate. At once the queen felt the urge to have the fruits and swallowed or gulped the saliva. Thus, Ka Luh Shadap won the bet and as it had been arranged, she became the ruler of Iapngar and, Ka Iong Saring fled to a place called Khangrang Marang near Mawryngkang.

Then one day when u Kongsan Lapang went for fishing, he met the son of Ka Iong Saring who was also fishing and who told him how they had lost the chiefdom. U Kongsan Lapang narrated his story of his flight from Sutnga till he reached Nongbah. U Kongsan Lapang asked the chief

to come to Nongbah to perform his religious rites and ceremonies. Thus, the chief agreed and with all his clan and men came to settle at Nongbah, in the land given by u Kongsan Lapang. When they had stayed together at Nongbah, the four *Basan* or elders namely, the *Maring*, *Lapang*, *Nongkoun* and *Makri* selected the men who would look after the administration and religious rites and ceremonies, and they decided that u Basan Maring would become the chief or *Syiem Maring*, u Lirpator Lapang would become u *Kongsan Lapang*, u Latin would become u *Lyngdoh* and u Jangpuhding Nongkoun would become u *Doloi Nongkoun* and u Makri would become u *Sangot Makri* or u *Maji Makri*. When they have arranged everything, they decided to perform the religious rites and ceremonies and to hold their festival and dances, which included the *Sajer*. Thus, the *Sajer* festival originated.

6. Ka Lakympong

The *Lakympong* is an important festival of the Bhoi which is celebrated in Raid Tyrso, Raid Nongtung, Raid Namsha and Raid Thaiang and some other places in the Bhoi areas. The *Lakympong* is the goddess of love and marriage of the Khasi.²⁹ Now, this dance festival is no longer performed. The origin of ka *Lakympong* is not known, the last celebration of this festival was held at Raid Nongtung. This *Lakympong* dance is connected with the fertility and agricultural rites of the people. It is performed after the harvesting work is over. This festival has no religious celebration, it is a secular one. The *Lakympong* is an indigenous name, and it must have been a very old festival. The goddess of love is worshipped in many parts of the world and so the Khasi and Jaintia Hills is no exception. There are two types of *Lakympong* dance festival. The first one is *Ka Shad Lakympong Khyinraw* that is the celebration of the youth to the goddess of love and marriage. The second one is *Ka Lakympong Lukhmi* which is celebrated once in every five years³⁰ when the people pray to God to invoke His blessing for a bountiful harvest, particularly rice which is their main food and also for an overall prosperity of the people.

Nobody knows when this festival originated but as it is connected with love and marriage, it must have been very old.

7. Ka Pomblang Syiem or Ka Pomblang Nongkrem or Shad Nongkrem

The *Pomblang Syiem* or *Ka Pomblang Nongkrem* or *Shad Nongkrem* or the *Nongkrem* dance is a state religious ceremony of the Khyrim Syiemship. *Pomblang Syiem* or *Pomblang Nongkrem* means the goat killing ceremony of the ruling family or the goat killing ceremony of Nongkrem. This festival is related to the origin of the Shillong Syiemship of the central Khasi Hills and the Pah Syntiew legend.³¹ The origin of the syiemship, the clan organisation and

the social and administrative structure of the *Hima* or state are reflected in the Nongkrem dance festival. The word *Khyrim* is derived from the word *Khynriam*, may be due to mispronunciation during the British rule.

The origin of the Shillong Syiemship is traced back to *Ka Pah Syntiew*, who is believed to be the mother ancestress of the ruling family. According to the popular Khasi tradition,³² *Ka Pah Syntiew* had a mythical background, she lived in a cave at Marai, which is situated between Nongkrem and Pamlakrai. *Ka Pah Syntiew* was a very beautiful girl and was very simple, she used to come out during day time, as she was attracted by the warm air and the beauty of nature. She used to sit on the rocks, and many boys who tended the cows saw her every now and then, the boys reported what they have seen to their parents. Many tried to catch her but as soon as they reached near the entrance, she quickly went inside the cave through a very narrow entrance which they could not proceed inside. Then one day a man who belonged to the Myllemngap clan, went to the cave, holding a bunch of flowers, known as *u tiaw jalyngkteng* to attract her to come out. She approached near the entrance to catch the flowers, but before she would snatch them from his hands, he withdrew slowly and the maiden followed him, and he caught and took her home. The Myllemngap family looked after her and loved her as their own daughter, and she grew up to be a very beautiful woman. She was known as *ka Pah Syntiew* meaning one who is allured or enticed by a flower. She won the love and admiration of all who came in contact with her. She particularly loved the little children where she taught how to sing and dance. *Ka Pah Syntiew* was given in marriage to a young man from Nongjri who was a warrior and statesman. They lived happily and she bore him two sons and one daughter who grew up to be strong healthy and wise.

One day *Ka Pah Syntiew* left the house, her husband and children and went back to the cave at Marai. Her husband and children tried very hard to persuade her to come back, but she refused. The fame of *Ka Pah Syntiew* and her children spread to all the *Raid*, and the nobles and rulers of these *Raid* planned to form a common state, the question arose as to who should be the *Syiem* or chief, and all cried out in the *Dorbar*, that the eldest son of *Ka Pah Syntiew* should be the chief. The proposal was accepted and the three children of *Ka Pah Syntiew* were consecrated as the founders of the new ruling family. Thus, the eldest son became the first chief of *Ki Syiem Shillong* or the Shillong chiefs. Thus, the Shillong Syiemship originated. The Myllemngap clan became important as it was one of the families of this clan that took care and looked after *Ka Pah Syntiew*. This clan was given a special privilege up to the present day, for a male member of this clan is the *Lyngskor* or Prime Minister of the Chiefdom.³³

Ka Pah Syntiew like *Ka Li Dohkha* of the Sutnga Syiemship and also the Malngiang Syiem had mythical divine origins. It is believed that *Ka Pah*

Syntiew was the daughter of *U Blei Shillong* or the Shillong god, hence they are known as *Ki Syiem Blei* or God sent chiefs, because they had divine origin.³⁴ There are chiefs which have no divine origin and they are known as *Ki Syiem Brier* or man made syiem. Up to the present day, during the ceremonies of Ka Pomblang, Nongkrem, propitiation is offered to the Shillong God and his daughter Ka Pah Syntiew, the female ancestress of the ruling family.

As the Khasi have no written record, we cannot say for certain, when was the Shillong Syiemship and the Nongkrem dance festival started. But more or less the festival must have been very old, as old as the origin of the Shillong Syiemship itself. From the tradition available, the following *Syiem* or chiefs were the oldest in the chieftdom. In chronological order, they were (1) U Narain, (2) U Sangmein, (3) U Santab, (4) U Ksan Sing, (5) U Mit, (6) U Piar, (7) U Ksan (8) U Bor Manik, (9) U Shan Rai. From the Ahom chronicles we learn that u Bormanik, the eighth king of the list was a contemporary of Rudra, a famous Ahom king who imprisoned U Ram Singh, *Syiem* of Jaintia in 1707. The Shillong Syiemship must have begun between 1400-1450 A. D.³⁵ The Shillong Syiemship is a very important chieftdom in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and if the above date is taken as the beginning of the Shillong Syiemship, that indicates that the Nongkrem dance festival must have started between that period and one thing is certain that the festival started after the people have organised and formed a state.

8. *Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem or Shad Weiking*

Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem or Shad Weiking or the Weiking dance is of very recent origin, it was started during the British Period, when a need was felt to preserve the traditional culture of the Khasi, due to the threat posed by the process of westernization. During the colonial period, many changes took place in the social, political, economic and religious life of the people. To safeguard the Khasi from all these changes, culture, religion and customs from western contact, and the influence of Christianity and other outside influences, some prominent and thoughtful Khasi elders established the *Seng Khasi* on 23rd November 1899. This memorable date is known as *ka Seng Kut Snem*. On this day, the *Seng Khasi* Flag was first hoisted which consists of the red colour depicting valour, the white circle in the middle representing truth and imprinted at the centre, with the motif of a crowing cock, the harbinger of light and the manifestation of humility.³⁶

The Weiking dance was organised first by the *Seng Khasi* on the 14th and 15th April 1911,³⁷ and it was held more regularly since 1921.³⁸ The colonial period was a very critical one for the Khasi and the country as a whole, who was fighting against the British imperialism. There were some thoughtful Khasi men who apprehended that in future years, time might come when the people of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills would forget their own religion, culture, customs,

dance and music. Thus, they established the Seng Khasi, a socio-religious organisation of the Khasi. The four principles of the Seng Khasi are.³⁹

1. The association or assembly of persons who adhere to the tenets of kinship as specified by the Khasi ancestors.
2. The coming into being of a man in the world to earn righteousness through service or that man is born to seek love and propagate truth.
3. The respect for one's own fellowmen with the sense of humanity and divinity.
4. God, the Sovereign Lord, the Almighty Creator, the Giver of all.

One of the aims and objects of the Seng Khasi is to encourage national sports like archery and to preserve and protect the cultural dances and other festivals in which the Khasi from all over the Khasi and Jaintia Hills have been taking part.⁴⁰ Thus, to carry on their aims the Seng Khasi started the *Shad Suk Mynsiem*, which is a Thanksgiving Dance held annually in the month of April.

An analytical study of the origin of the festivals brings to light that some of the festivals are very old, whereas, there are others which are of comparatively recent origin. The festivals had come into existence at different points of time and in specific historical context, which is a phase in the growth of Khasi History. The Information regarding the earlier festivals is not adequate for deduction regarding historical reasons behind the beginning of such festivals, whereas in case of the later festivals, the genesis of the festivals can be clearly established.

Footnotes

1. S. Sen, *Social and State Formation in Khasi-Jaintia Hills* p. 7.
2. We are thankful to Shri O. P. Lytand, Secretary Seinraj and some elders in Jaintia Hills for this information.
3. I. M. Simon, *Khasi and Jaintia Tales and Beliefs*, pp. 28-29.
4. M. Belbin Kyndiah, "The Jaintia Laho Dance" in *Seinraj Seinlang Magazine (Special)* 1983-84, pp. 36-37.
5. H. L. Deb Roy, *A Tribe in Transition*, pp. 202-203. We are also thankful to Shri O. P. Lytand, Secretary, Seinraj for the discussion we had with on this aspect.
6. Discussion with Shri Chui Lyngdoh, Deng Lyngdoh and Hatdoh Pohsnem of Nongtalang Village, all are knowledgeable persons on this festival.
7. P. R. T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, p. 97.
8. D. T. Laloo, *Ka Ksaw Ka Kpong U Hynniew Trep*, p. 7.
9. We are thankful to Shri S. Paduna, a knowledgeable person on this festival, for this information.
10. Discussion with Shri D. Pohlong of Nongtalang Village.
11. H. W. Sten, "Ka Behdeinkhlam Festival of the Jaintia" in *North Eastern*

Spectrum Vol. I, pp. 55-56.

12. *Ibid.*
13. S. S. Laloo, *Ka Behdeinkhlam*, p. 9
14. P. R. T. Gurdon, *op.cit.*, pp. 203-204.
15. S. S. Laloo, *op.cit.*, pp. 13-14
16. *Ibid*
17. H. L. Deb Roy, *op.cit.* p. 112.
18. S. S. Laloo, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.
19. *Ibid.*
20. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, p. 322.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 311
22. *Ibid.*, p., 339.
23. Catholic Church Publication, *Ka Syrwet Pyrkhath u Thajang*. p. 22.
24. D. T. Laloo, *Ka Sajer Ka Raid Nonglyngdoh*, Vol I, pp. 27-31. Also our discussion with some knowledgeable persons from the Bhoi area.
25. We are thankful to Shri Hari Maring, Secretary Raid and a knowledgeable person on the festival and also some elders from the Raid.
26. D. T. Laloo, *op.cit.*, p. 19.
27. D. T. Laloo, *Ka Sajer Ka Raid Nonglyngdoh*, Bynta II, pp. 1-2.
28. *Ibid*, Bynta I, pp. 2-18 and also our discussion with some knowledgeable persons from the Bhoi area who hold more or less similar views about the origin of this festival.
29. O. S. Lamare, *ka Lukhmi*, p. 75.
30. Discussion with Shri D. T. Laoo, a renowned author in Khasi.
31. Discussion with Smt. (Late) Shortimai, Syiemsad of the Hima Khyrim.
32. R. S. Lyngdoh, *Investiture Ceremony of Dr. Balajied Singh Syiem. A Syiem of Hima Khyrim*, p. 13.
33. Discussion with (Late) Shortimai, Syiemsad of the Hima Khyrim.
34. H. Bareh, *op, cit* p., 42.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
36. S. S. Sawian's article in *Sentinel*, 26th November, 1984, p. 3.
37. Kynpham Singh, "Shad Suk Mynsiem " in *Where Lies the Soul of Our Race*, p., 25
38. U. Kritik, Vol, II, No, 13, April 8th, 1982.
39. A. S. Khongphai " Shad Suk Mynsiem " (Thanksgiving Dance) in *Khasi Heritage*, pp. 129-130.
40. Hipshon Roy, " Introduction" in *Khasi Heritage*, p. (ii. a).

Chapter V

Forms And Contents

Every Khasi festival has its own history, the meaning and contents also differ from festival to festival. Some festivals have religious rituals, whereas others are secular in character, while some of the festivals have both religious and secular elements. We propose to discuss below, the forms, contents, rites and rituals, dresses, ornaments and musical instruments of a few selected festivals.

(1) Ka Chad Chiphiah or Ka Chad long Nikhla or Ka Chad Laho

The *Chad Chiphiah* or most popularly known as the Laho Dance, is the traditional dance of the Pnar, and it has become the most important symbol of the Pnar's culture and their oldest dance festival as it is connected with the beginning of the Pnar's habitation here on earth. Now it is held whenever there are occasions like cultural programme and others to depict the cultural life of the Pnar.

The Laho dance signifies the family structure of the Pnar, it is a dance which glorifies the name and glory of God, which shows the intimate relationship between God and man.¹ The Laho Dance is a festive dance, which is performed after the harvesting work is over and when the rice from the fields has been brought home.² During this dance the people thank God the Creator for all the blessings that He has showered upon them, it is a kind of thanksgiving dance.

Musical Instruments

The Laho Dance has no religious ceremony, it is a thanksgiving dance. The musical instruments which are used during the dance are locally

made and consists of (1) *ka bom* or drum (2) *ka dhulok* or '*sing kynthei* which is a kind of a small drum, (3) *ka shawiang* is a kind a flute, (4) *ka shalamem* or cymbals, (5) *ka chakudiah* a kind of instrument made of bamboo and matched nicely with *u Nongniaw Laho*³ or the singer during the Laho Dance.

The Dance is organised in a big field, when the dancers enter the dancing arena, only the big drum is played. The male dancers enter first, then the female. The drum is stopped when the female dancers reach the dancing place, then the musicians play the other instruments. The musicians are professionals, having the skill to play the various musical instruments. The female dancer who leads the group, and who is dancing all alone is *Ka langdoh* or the priestess, in any dance, she symbolizes the *langdoh*. The inclusion of the priestess's dance may be of later addition, as nothing is mentioned in the tradition about the dance of the priestess. It may be that the people want to show respect and honour to the priestess that her dance is included. The Laho Dance could be arranged in as many groups as possible subject to a minimum of five groups.⁴ There is a man known as *u Nongniaw Laho* or the singer. When all the dancers, both males and females enter the field, the singer sings and the rest reply *oh-aho-aho*. There are three dancers in each group, the female dancer is flanked on both sides by male dancers. The female dancer dances in the middle, which shows that the woman is held in high regards in the Pnar society. She is regarded as the custodian of the family, as well as the preserver of posterity. The male dancer on her right symbolises the uncle, who is the protector of the family and the clans as a whole. The male dancer on her left stands for the husband or the father who is the progenitor of the clan. The lone female dancer who dances backward and forward right, and left in the midst of the dancers as we have seen, stands for the *langdoh* or the priestess who is the head and custodian or religion.⁵

The Laho Dance depicts the family structure or the dance is arranged at the family level, where the uncle, the niece and the husband or the father are represented. This dance also shows the various duties and responsibilities that the uncle and father have in the Pnar family set up. As in other dances of the Khasi, the female dancers should be only virgin. Married women do not participate in the dance. This shows the purity, standard and prestige of the *Chiphiah* dance.⁶

Dress and Ornaments

The male and female dancers put on their traditional costumes, which match with their smiling faces and their beautiful and attractive dances. They dance to the tunes of the drums and flutes played by the musicians. The male dancers wear their costly silk dhoti and turbans, put on a white shirt and black or blue waistcoat and wear silver chains. The female dancers put on their traditional *khyrwang*, a piece of cloth tied around their waist and reach below

their knees. They put on their one piece, *muga jainsem* which is tied at one end of the shoulder. They adorn themselves with coral beads round their necks, gold necklaces and chains and a long sleeve blouse, gold earrings and bangles. The *langdoh*, besides all these gold and silver ornaments wears a crown.

Chiphiah means dividing into two. In the Laho Dance, it means dividing two male dancers by one female dancer or two male dancers encompassing a girl in the middle. The male dancers put one of their hands round the waist of the female dancers and hold the hand of the female dancer by another hand. The female dancers puts both her hands on the shoulders of the male dancers, one hand on the shoulder of the male dancer on the left, and another hand on the shoulder of the male dancer on the right.

Contents of the Festival

As time passed, the Laho Dance lost its appeal and eventually it was completely discontinued. The Laho Dance would have been forgotten but for the Nikhla clan who revived the same. It was for this reason that the Laho Dance became known as *Ka Chad long Nikhla* which means the dance of the Nikhla clan. A tradition,⁷ suggests that there lived from time immemorial an honest woman named *Ka Ring Nikhla*, at Jowai who belonged to the Nikhla clan. The people called her *ka Rangkit*, and it was believed that she was a God gifted woman. This woman, it was said did many good works to her people in her life time. Later on, her time came when she had to leave the world and she disappeared all of a sudden at Chah-tngit, a place near Mynthong at Jowai. The people who followed her were surprised at the sudden disappearance of *Ka Rangkit*. Since then the Nikhla clan respected her as their family deity.

After many years, one night, *ka Syndur Nikhla*, another woman who belonged to the Nikhla clan, saw a dream in which *ka Rangkit* advised her to revive the Laho Dance. This was regarded as a vision and it was told to all the members of the clan. Immediately after that, they arranged for a cow sacrifice at Molikso, a place at Jowai, where all the people joined in the sacrifice. After the sacrifice, the Laho dance was performed with great pomp and grandeur at the spacious premises of *u Sin Nikhla* at Chilliang Raji. Thus, the Laho dance once again came into existence after long years of discontinuance. The *Chiphiah* or Laho dance after it was revived by the Nikhla clan came to be known as the Nikhla dance, but it does not mean that the participants should all belong to the Nikhla clan. Other clans can also participate but the implication lies in the fact that one virgin-female who belongs to the Nikhla clan should participate, otherwise, the dance could not be performed.

The last Nikhla dance was held at Jowai sometimes in the year 1917 during the first world war.⁸ At the time, there was no virgin female who belonged

to the Nikhla clan at Jowai, except Ka Sngi Nikhla who lived in Shillong. The elders of Jowai who organised the dance had to come to Shillong to take ka Sngi Nikhla to Jowai so that the dance could be performed. Ka Sngi Nikhla could not go because her mother was in the advanced stage of pregnancy, and moreover, she was the only elderly female in the family to attend to her mother. It was said that, if after delivery, her mother had no objection to her daughter's going, then she would go. The elders finding no other alternative, prayed to God on behalf of the mother to deliver a child that night. The prayer lasted for many hours, when the mother gave birth to a female child that very night. Next morning, ka Sngi Nikhla along with her uncle u Khro Nikhla went immediately to Jowai. Thus, the dance was observed successfully in the year 1917.⁹

According to some, the Nikhla Dance could not be performed due to a case between the Shullai clan and the Nikhla clan over a dispute of the dancing ground at *Biar longpiah* at Jowai. The case ended only with the *Doloi* of Jowai at the time when Mr. Shadwell was the sub-divisional officer.¹⁰ Thus, the last performance of this dance was in the year 1917.

Thus, the *Chiphiah Dance* or the Nikhla Dance or the *Laho Dance* as it is more popularly known today, has become the traditional dance of the Pnar. This dance is not merely a dance for entertainment or enjoyment. It is also not a mere traditional dance of the Pnar, but the dance is very significant from the historical point of view as it marks the beginning of the Pnar habitation here on earth and a dance which characterised the social life and the family structure of the Pnar. It is a dance to honour and glorify God and depicts an intimate relationship between God and man. Its preservation is credited to the elders of Jowai and the Seinraij through whose efforts the Laho Dance is still preserved till date for posterity.

(2) Ka Rongkhli

Ka Rongkhli or the Tiger festival is one of the most important festivals of the War Jaintia living in the southern part of the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. It is held at Nongtalang village.

The Origin of the Nongtalang village and its Administration

Nongtalang is the biggest village in the War Jaintia, Nongtalang means *Ka shnong ka Talang* or the village of *ka Talang*, which is a female name, which may be the first ancestral mother of the clan. Before they came to the present village of Nongtalang, the people originally lived at a village named Amtapoh. They left that village due to some reasons, may be due to inadequate and infertile agricultural lands. The first clan that came and settled at Nongtalang village was the Lyngdoh clan and *Ka Talang* was *ka lawbei* or the first female ancestress of

that clan, who came and settled at Nongtalang . Thus, the present village of Nongtalang derived its name from ka Talang. She was at the same time responsible for starting the religion and the administrative system of the village.¹¹

The village of Nongtalang lies in the southern part of the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya, it is situated in the international border line with Bangladesh about 7 or 8 Km away from this border.¹² The village is very progressive, the people are quite well to do, there are a number of two or three storeyed buildings. About 70% of its population are still in their own traditional religion, which they called *niam chnong*. The people are well off because of their forest resources, the village has less land for cultivation, and they practise shifting cultivation. Agricultural products include betelnuts, betel leaves, fruits like oranges, and others. Besides these, rice is also grown and limestone is found in certain parts of this village. There is a college, High School, Middle School, and some Primary Schools, there is also a Hospital and a Dispensary.¹³ Nongtalang is an example of a progressive village in all fields. It is the headquarter of the Nongtalang Doloiship, because it is the biggest village, centrally located, so it is very convenient for the *Doloi* to run the administration.¹⁴

The village administration is run by a *Dorbar*, which is quite different from other village *Dorbar* of the Khasi. The village *Dorbar* in Nongtalang is known as *ka Dorbar Manniew*, *Manniew* means uncle in the local dialect so, *Dorbar Manniew* means the *Dorbar* of the uncles. The *Dorbar* consists of the elderly uncles from the twelve *kur* or clans. These clans are the Lyngdoh, Pohsnem, Pohrmen, Padu, Myrchiang, Pohlynniar, Pohchen, Bareh, Pna-Lamare, Mohrmen, Pohlong and Pohiti. The three important persons in the *Dorbar Manniew* are (1) *u Lyngdoh Niam* or the religious priest, he is selected from the Lyngdoh clan, he acts as a priest and performs religious rites and ceremonies and at the same time, he also has religious functions. He is also at the same time a Headman, thus he is held in high regard and respect by virtue of his office. (2) *U Lyngdoh Korbar* or secular priest, is another important person, he is also selected from the same Lyngdoh clan, his function is related to administrative matters and he has to convene and preside over the village *Dorbar*. (3) Another important person is the village Secretary, he must be a literate person for writing minutes and keeping records.¹⁵ This is the necessary qualification in this age in keeping pace with the need and change of time as now, everything has to be put into writings. The village secretary holds a respectable position, he can be chosen from other clans also if there is no suitable person from among the 12 clans. At the time of interview on this festival, Shri Chui Lyngdoh is a *Lyngdoh Niam*, Shri Deng Lyngdoh is a *Lyngdoh Korbar* and Shri Hatdoh Pohsnem is the village Secretary, he is head-teacher in the Nongtalang Lower Primary School, The two *Lyngdoh*, should belong to the *niam chnong*, converted

persons cannot hold these posts, as they have to perform religious ceremonies, and sacrifices. The village Secretary has many duties to perform in the day to day administration, such as matters dealing with government authorities. The village headman has to depend much on the secretary in carrying out the administration of the village.¹⁶ Besides these, there is a *Maji*, *U Sangot* and other elders who will help in the administration and religious affairs.

Besides the *Dorbar Manniew*, there is another *Dorbar* known as the *Dorbar Chnong* or the village council, which runs the whole administration of the village. Adult male members of the village are allowed to participate in this *Dorbar*, and it is the *Lyngdoh Korbar*, who presides over the *Dorbar*.¹⁷ The position of the maternal uncle is very high in this village, he is held in high esteem as a husband and father in his wife's house, and as an uncle to his nieces and nephews in his mother's house.

Contents of the Festival

The Tiger Festival is not a regular one, it depends on the killing of a tiger. When a tiger is killed, God is to be worshipped. The Rongkhli festival is performed whenever a tiger is killed during an organised hunting or even when the tiger is killed accidentally by anybody. When the tiger comes to the village in search of prey, somebody shoots or kills the tiger, even then, the festival has to be performed.¹⁸ Sometimes the people of a village organise a group hunting, where the male members take part. Sometimes a particular clan organises a hunting, in that case the members of that clan meet together and unanimously decide to go for that hunting. People from other clans are also invited, but in case a man who does not belong to that particular clan who has arranged for the hunting, happens to shoot or kill the tiger, he and his clan however, will not have to perform the ceremony, as the organising clan has taken the responsibility of performing the festival, and as a sign of good gesture, the person who kills the tiger will get one turban on the day of the festival.¹⁹ In whatever manner that the tiger is killed, God is to be worshipped, as there was an agreement as we have seen from the olden days that a tiger was to be offered as sacrifice to God. If God is not worshipped when the tiger is killed, certain calamities like epidemic diseases, starvation, blindness or any other ill luck will befall on the people. Killing the tiger by someone in the clan is said to be a good omen for the prosperity of the clan. The carcass of the tiger when consecrated becomes holy and to have small piece of it may bring luck to such a person.²⁰ If anybody kills the tiger, the clan to whom he belongs must perform the ceremony. If the person who kills the tiger belongs to the Bareh clan, and if his clan performs the ceremony, it is known as *ka Rong u Bareh* or the festival of the Bareh Clan. If he belongs to the Pohsnem clan, it is known as *ka Rong U Pohsnem* or the

festival of the Pohsnem clan and so on.²¹ Even when only one particular clan performs the sacrifices, the village on the whole is involved.

The Festival is usually held in the months from January to March. In 1985, the festival was held on 15th of February and it was the Pohchen clan who organised the same. Recently on 2nd March, 2005 the festival was organised by the Myrchiang clan. In 2007, the Ronghkli festival was held on the 23rd, 24th and 25th of March in Nongtalang village and it was organised by the Padu clan which has killed the tiger. It was this clan that killed the tiger, and according to tradition, they have to hold the tiger festival. After killing the tiger, the clan to whom the killer belongs, inform the *Lyngdoh* and when the *Lyngdoh* and the *Dorbar* agree, the clan can perform the festival, if not, they cannot perform the same. Usually, a two months' time is given by the *Lyngdoh*, if there is any delay, the clan has to pay fine. If for some unavoidable circumstances, the clan cannot perform the festival after killing the tiger, they can perform later on, but by any means, they have to perform the sacrifice, else, their clan would suffer from certain diseases, death and other calamities, as that is the promise that they had made in ancient times. After the clan gets the permission from the *Lyngdoh* and the *Dorbar* for holding the festival, they should inform the day for holding the same. The expenditure for the festival is borne by the organising clan, but a certain amount is contributed by the *Dorbar Manniew*. After the permission is given for holding the festival, the *Lyngdoh* gives the drums which are used only during the festival. There are two kinds of drums, the religious drums which are used only for religious purposes, and those used on festive occasions.²²

Stages of the Festival

Before the festival, the organising clan performs certain sacrifices. These sacrificial rites are performed to inform God about the holding of the festival. The actual festival lasts only for one day. After the tiger is killed, its flesh and intestines are taken out. The meat is dried up and the body of the tiger is kept outside the village in the *phlong* or village gate, whose walls are made of stones. There are two such kinds of gates, one in the east and another in the west. The body of the tiger cannot be brought inside the village until one day before the festival. When the day of the festival is nearing, the people in their various localities used to beat the drums and play their pipes till the day of the festival comes.²³

Ka sngi pynrung Khla or the day when the body of the tiger which has been kept outside the village, is brought to the village, which takes place on the day before the festival day usually in the evening. On this day all the people gather together in the dancing ground along with the beating of the drums and playing of the pipes. Then they all go to the village gate to fetch the tiger. The elder uncle of the clan will lead the group, in his dancing attire

carrying the shield and the sword and he will dance in front of other dancers and thus they will continue dancing all the way. The dead body of the tiger is taken from the village gate and they all come back to the *lympung madan shad* known as Remmusan or the dancing ground. The body of the tiger is kept in a special place inside the tent, which is purposely made for the occasion. The male members have to wait for the whole night, accompanying with the beating of the drums and the playing of the pipes, they keep on dancing for the whole night till the next morning, but this is not a religious dance. A big fire is lit and the food and liquor are provided by the clan which organises the festival.²⁴

The Festival Day

On the day of the festival, early in the morning, they leave the dancing ground, and they also go to the elder uncle's house of the organising clan. At his house, they perform certain religious rites, the elder uncle pours libation and the *Lyngdoh* along with the elders of the *Dorbar Manniew* pray for the well-being of the people, for good health, general prosperity, good harvest and to free the people from other evils. They pray to the goddess *Pyrtuh* and they also pray to the ancient ancestors. When these religious sacrifices are completed, then the male dance follows. They dance in front of his house, they first perform a particular dance known as *ka nam chai wat*, then they dance another dance known as *ka mastieh*.²⁵ In this dance, persons from the organising clan will dance first. The person who kills the tiger will dance first with his elder uncle, then follows the dance of the elder uncle with the *Lyngdoh* or anybody from the *Lyngdoh* clan. Then the *mastieh* of the *kur* or clans starts, here they dance two by two. The two dancers should be from different clans, they dance as follows: (1) U Rymbui and u Pohti (that is the person who belongs to the Rymbui clan and the Pohti clan), (2) U Pohsnem and u Myrchiang, (3) U Bareh and U Padu, (4) U Paduna and U Pohrmen, (5) U Pohlynniar and u Manar, (6) U Pohlong and U Pna, (7) U Pohing and anyone from the *Lyngdoh* clan.²⁶ The dance is accompanied by the beating of the drums and the playing of the pipes. The dancers carry their shields and swords, after this dance of the *kur* or clan, then other dancers can also participate in the dance.

After the dancing is completed, they go to the *Lyngdoh*'s house to show respect to the *Lyngdoh*. At his house, prayers, rites and ceremonies are performed with due solemnity. When these ceremonies are performed, there should be complete silence, they should not talk, cough, yawn or laugh etc., a pindrop silence is maintained.²⁷ The people who are outside should not dance as long as the ceremony is going on, after it is over, then a dance is performed which is similar to the dance at the elder uncle's house. They first perform a dance known as *nam chai wat*, then another dance known as *ka mastieh* follows. The *Lyngdoh* will dance first with anybody, from among the clan that

kills the tiger, then the other dancers from the different *Kur* follows.²⁸

After the ceremonies and dancing are completed, they all go to the *phlong* or village gate to put the body of the tiger. If they want to put the body of the tiger in the east gate, then they go first to the west gate, and if they want to put it in the west gate, they go first to the east. This ceremony is known as *ka pynnguh phlong*, which is a kind of respect. If during the last festival, the body of the tiger is placed in the east gate, then in the next festival, it must be placed in the west and *vice versa*. Here at the gate, they also dance and before finally placing the body of the tiger, they pour out libation and prayers are said. Here, the religious ceremony comes to an end and they all leave for their respective houses. Then at night on the same day, there is only a female dance, which continue for the whole night till the next morning, along with the music played by the drummers and pipers.²⁹

Dress and Ornaments

The dancing costumes³⁰ of both men and women are different from that of the Nongkrem and the Weiking dance. The female dancing dress consists of a *jainsem dhara*, which is a costly silk material and a traditional dress of the Khasi, and is of many colours. It is tied at both ends on the shoulders and reaches below the knee. They also wear *ka jaintawah*, which is a kind of a shawl, which they put in their body. They wear their *sopti kti* or long sleeve blouse. They adorn themselves with necklaces of gold, but they do not wear a crown like the female dancers of the upland Khasi Hills. They wear a flower made of paper and is tied to their hair knot. The men's dress consists of a long sleeve shirt, and a kind of lungi with black border, and on their heads, they wear a turban. Like the male dancers of the *Nongkrem* and *Shad Weiking* they also carry a *sympiah* or a kind of flyflab or a whisk, a sword and a shield.

Although the Rongkhli or the Tiger festival is organised by a particular clan, yet people in the village as a whole take part. People from the neighbouring villages also come to take part in the dance and *Tangmuri* or music competition. The dance is held during day time, it continues throughout the night and even till the Sun rises in the next day. Competitors from the different villages come to compete, and prizes are awarded to the winners and even the losers, prizes are always paid in terms of cash, the judges are selected from the elderly persons who are considered knowledgeable of the art, and their decision is final. The *Rongkhli* festival is important, because it is in this kind of festival that both religious and cultural activities are combined together.³¹

The last ceremony of the *Rongkhli* festival is the sacrifice which is known as *ka Ron Chyndi Rongkhli*, which is held after the festival. It is a concluding ceremony in which a goat, two hens, a dove and bananas are offered to the goddess.³²

The people of Nongtalang village, like other tribals have their own festivals, but many of these festivals are no longer observed by them due to the social change which is going on among the people. Some of these festivals are celebrated in connection with their agricultural activities, and also a thanksgiving to God. Few other festivals have both the socio-cultural and religious connection.³³ The Rongkhli festival is a very important festival and is regularly performed. Besides this festival, there are other festivals, like *ka Rong Beh Lyngkan*, *Ka Pyrtuh* and *ka Phur*

(3) Ka Behdeinkhlam

The Contents of the Festival—Rites and Rituals

There are certain rites and rituals which are performed and observed during the Behdeinkhlam festival. It is held for four days on the week days of *Pymsin*, *Mulong*, *Musiang* and *Muchai*, that is from the market days of *Nongkrem* to *Shillong* of the *Hima Myllem*. The Behdeinkhlam is performed jointly by the administrative head known as the *Doloi*, the high priest, the elders who help the *Doloi* and the people.³⁴ The first religious ceremony known as *ka dih soopen* is performed in the month of March or April.³⁵ This ceremony consists of pouring of libation with a special liquor known as *ka kiad jyndem* or *kiad um*. The ceremony is performed in *ka ing Lyngdoh* or the priestess' house where a special altar is raised. The priest and the priestess are helped in this ceremony by the *Doloi*, the *Pator* and the *Basan*.³⁶ Before the ceremony, they offer prayers in the middle room of *ka ing Lyngdoh*, in which they ask God's blessings for general prosperity, they pour out libation and at the same time consume the liquor.³⁷

After performing the first religious ceremony of *ka dih soopen*, they next observe what is known as *ka kbai mooknor wa nyngkong*, meaning the first announcement which is done from the *mooknor*, a stone situated at lawmusiang, a market place at Jowai. This announcement is made twice a year in the market place in the month of March or April. Before they proceed to lawmusiang the *Doloi*, *Lyngdoh* and the elders meet together at the *Lyngdoh*'s house and they then go to lawmusiang to inform the people that the Behdeinkhlam festival is approaching, and that the people should not bring the bones of the dead to be deposited in the stone cist, and they should not plough or sow. After completing this first announcement, then on the weekday of Thymblein, they perform *ka thoh Lyngdoh* or *knia Lyngdoh*. This ceremony is performed in the month of March or April in the *Khloo Lyngdoh* or the sacred grove. The expenditure for this ceremony is borne by the *Lyngdoh* of Jowai. When they reach the place, sacrifices are performed where a cock is offered as sacrifice.³⁸ Then, in the month of June, *ka kbai mooknor wa ar*, or the second announcement or proclamation from the same *mooknor* takes place.

As in the first announcement, they first of all go to the Lyngdoh's house, and then to the *mooknor* at lawmusiang, an announcement is thus made that the time for the festival has come and a certain contribution is to be made by them. After the proclamation has been made, then some of the elders start collecting subscription from the market, then they leave for the Lyngdoh's house and the money is to be calculated and accounted for.³⁹

The next part of the ceremony is *ka Knia Khang wa nyngkong* which means the first close down or closing ceremony or to close down the entry of evil spirits by this sacrifice, which is held in the month of June, two weeks before the *knia pyrthat* or Thunder sacrifice. In the first *knia Khang*, four hens and one cock are sacrificed to the goddess which protects them and also to the four religious stones that is *u Mookhai*, *u Mutong*, *U Mooralong* and *u Musniang*. On the week day of *Muchai*, all go to the *Lyngdoh's house*, and the sacrificers go to the four places to offer sacrifice, and fowls are offered as sacrifice.

This is followed by *ka knia Pyrthat*, a sacrifice which is offered to Thunder. This ceremony is held one week before the *Behdeinkhlam*. This sacrifice is offered to Thunder so as to get rain during the festival and also good rain for the crops to grow well and to prevent the people, animals and crops from the striking of Thunder.⁴⁰ It was believed that Thunder has a friend named *u Mon Ryngkhlaw* who was the best flute player. Every night, when he tuned the flute melodiously, the village girls came and listen to his playing. It so happened that one night while he was playing the flute, all the peacocks danced to the tune, and it was at this time that the Thunder took him alive to heaven. In that year the *knia Pyrthat* did not work well, and through divination, it was found that *u Mon Ryngkhlaw* wanted a sacrifice annually. So from that time, a feast is observed annually in remembrance of him.⁴¹ Every year, the sacrifice to the Thunder is accompanied by a feast in honour of *u Mon Ryngkhlaw*. The latter, who was a lover of all unmarried girls and who was taken up to the sky by Thunder could very well be compared to the Krishna cult of the Hindus.⁴² The expenses in connection with the Thunder sacrifice are met from the income derived from the four plots of paddy fields called religious lands namely, *Bri Pyrthat*, *Bri Kho*, *Bri sla* and *Bri Kiad*. The Lyngdoh of Chyrmang, Ialong, and Tuber take part in the sacrifice and they bring the sacrificial leaves, liquor and rice. For one week before the performances of this sacrifice, the *Doloi*, *Basan* and the *Lyngdoh* must stay in their mother's houses, and should not at all visit their wives.⁴³ In the *knia pyrthat*, a pig and cock are sacrificed. Not only the Pnar offer sacrifices to Thunder, in the early vedic period, the Aryans worshipped Indra, the god of Thunder and rain. The Anglo Saxons also worshipped Thunder which was known to them as Thor. The Garos prayed to Goera who is the god of strength who causes thunder and lightning. He is always sacrificed to at the foot

of a tree and pig, fowl or a duck must be offered. When a tree has been blasted by lightning it is said that Goera has struck it, and a sacrifice must be offered at the foot of that tree so that no harm would come to the houses in the vicinity.⁴⁴ The offering of sacrifices to Thunder by the *Pnar* might have been very old and the festival itself must be very old.

The next part of the festival is *ka bam tyngkong wa nyngkong*, which means the first feast of the ceremony before the *Behdeinkhlam*. Before this, one of the *Basan* or elder goes to inform the *phra kur phra kmai*, meaning the eight clans and eight mothers that the first feast will be held on that night. These are the clans which are responsible for the growth and expansion of Jowai. These clans are the Pyrbot, Iongkjam, Laloo, Shylla, Lato, Syngkon, Siangbod, Pakyntein, Kma, Paswet, Slong, Nikhla and Rngad. Out of these thirteen clans, only eight are chosen for the ceremony, then the sacrifices are offered and the ceremonial feast are taken.⁴⁵

A few days before the festival, the different localities of the town, called dong, started constructing their *rot* which resemble the Muslim *tazia*,⁴⁶ and sent out a group of people to fell a tree called *deinkhlam* from the jungle, the *deinkhlam* should be tall and straight. When the people go to the forest to get the tree, they play the *chew chew*, a sort of musical instrument, throughout the road till they reach the place, where they cut the *deinkhlam*. The object of this is to drive away all evil spirits on the way and at the same time to inform the people that the *Behdeinkhlam* festival is approaching. One particular locality called *Khon Raid* or *Shiliang Raid* is to fell another tree called *Khnon Blai*, which should be bigger than the *deinkhlam* and is held more sacred,⁴⁷ and the *symbud Khnon* which should be smaller than the *Khnon Blai*. A week before the festival, the *rot* are prepared artistically which are decorated with flowers and coloured papers.

(1) The first day (Pynsin)

On the first day of the festival, some elders go to cut three trees known as *Khnon Blai*, and the smaller trees known as *Deinkhlam* or plague trees and take these trees to the Lyngdoh's house. The *Khnon Blai* are to be broken by the youths of one particular locality known as *ka dong Iongpiah*. Another small *Deinkhlam*, which belongs to the *Lyngdoh* is to be broken at the Aitnar pool on the last day of the festival. On the same day, the *Khon Raid* brought the *Symbud Khnon* from the forest and put on the hills, a place where it is supposed to be kept. The *Kmai Raid* also helps to carry this tree. *Kmai Raid* means all the localities except the *Khon Raid* which is also known as the *Shiliang Raid*.⁴⁸ There are seven such localities, these are Panaliar, Lulong, Treppale, Lumkyrwiang, Lum Iongkjam, Iongpiah and Shiliang Raid.⁴⁹ Before

taking the sacred tree, one elder propitiated God by pouring libation. The elders brought the three *Khong Blai* and the two small *Deinkhlam* and in the evening they go and fetch the *Doloi* to come and see the *Khong Blai*. When the *Doloi* arrives, they perform a ceremony at the verandah of the Lyngdoh's house known as *ka bam tynkong*, first by consuming rice beer which is purchased by the *Doloi* himself, and the second time by eating rice. After this ceremony, they enter the Lyngdoh's house, where they have *ka bam tynkong ka ba ar* that is the second feast, where they eat rice and fish, after this, they leave for their own houses.⁵⁰

(II) The Second Day (Mulong)

On the second day that is *ka Mulong* a sacrifice is performed known as *ka knia Aitnar* or a sacrifice at the pool called *Aitnar*. On this day they sacrifice a black goat and one hen to the goddess *Aitnar*. The expenditure for the sacrifice is borne by the *Doloi* of Jowai. Before they leave for the place of sacrifice, they first of all go to the Lyngdoh's house.⁵¹ Before leaving, one of the elders makes an announcement till they reach the place where the *knia Aitnar* is going to be performed. On reaching the pool, rites and ceremonies are performed. In the morning of the same day, the *kmai Raid* go to take all their *Deinkhlam* to lawmusiang, a market place at Jowai. When carrying the trees they dance and shout all the way. In the evening the youth and elders of the *Khon Raid* go to take the *Khong Blai*, from the forest, they pour out libation before they take it on their shoulders to the place where all the *Deinkhlam* of the *Kmai Raid* are kept.

From the observation of this festival, it may be assumed that the *Khong Blai* stands for the Khasi monotheistic belief. A tree stands for a strong male procreating principle which is vital for race preservation, it signifies a phallic symbol, like Shivalings of the Shiva Hindus. The Shiva Hindus, particularly the Nepalese sacrifice he-goats nearby such a tree post as observed here during the Durga Puja.⁵² Trees are also objects of worship indirectly as king post or sacrificial post.⁵³ *U Rishot Blei*, or the Holy Pillar or the pillar of God in the *Ingsad* at Smit is held in high respect and also symbolises the monotheistic belief of the Khasi. Trees are the main show of the *Behdeinkhlam*, which are considered sacred and which possess occult power. At least the reverence of sacred groves has a good effect in the locality, it has preserved the sacred groves from the hands of woodcutter.⁵⁴

(III) The Third Day (Musiang)

On the third day, that is *Musiang*, certain ceremonies are performed. Early in the morning the *Khon Raid* goes to take the *Symbud Khong* from the place where they have kept it, dancing and shouting all the way. Effigies of a

man and woman are made, and taken all the way. These do not have any connection with the religious ceremony, they are only outward show to make the festival more colourful and grand. These effigies are pushed down the pools in the same place, where they push the *rot*. In the Behdeinkhlam festival, the Hindu influences are prominent. The Behdeinkhlam cart, or chariot is called *rot* by them. In the border areas, the *rot* rolls on wheels, but in other areas, it is carried over to the selected places. In the Beh lyngkan, festival of Nongtalang village, which is similar to the Behdeinkhlam, the *rot* rolls down on wheels, and it carries the effigies of persons whom the people claim as ancient heroes.⁵⁵ Next, the *Kmai Raid* comes out with their drums and pipes to go and take the *Deinkhlam* from the lawmusiang, dancing and shouting all the way till they reach a place known as law longpiah rim. In the afternoon, the *Khon Raid* goes to take the *Khong Blai* dancing and shouting all the way, till they reach lawmusiang. Here they dance for sometimes and continue to dance till they reach the place, where they keep the *Khong Blai*. Before taking the sacred tree, they pray to God for good health, well-being, prosperous trade and a bountiful harvest.⁵⁶ They pour out libation, and consume the rice beer and dance for sometimes. Then the *Kmai Raid* takes their *Deinkhlam* to their own localities and dancing all the way. At the same time, the small *Deinkhlam* are put in all the houses of those who are still in the traditional religion. The *Khon Raid* also takes the *Khong Blai* to a place known as Madan Moo Syiem which is a field, and keeps it there.

(IV) The Fourth Day (Muchai)

The fourth day which falls on the week days of *Muchai* is the last day of the festival. Certain ceremonies are performed on this day. Early in the morning, the religious elders and other elders perform the *bam tyngkong*, a certain ceremony at the Lyngdoh's house. After this ceremony, the youths of a particular locality known as *longpiah*, come dancing and shouting all the way, till they reach the Lyngdoh's house, to perform a ceremony known as *kynting Khnong* meaning to throw the *khong* or post to show respect to ka wet, ka Tein and ka Doh, the first colonising family of Jowai. For ka Bon, it is the locality known as Shiliang Raid who will give the *khong Blai*, to be pushed down at Aitnar in her honour.⁵⁷ Certain ceremonies are performed at the Lyngdoh's house where the *kni ki longpiah* or the uncle of longpiah performs ceremonies, and *u Doloi* hands over a gourd of rice beer to the uncle, who utters some prayers to God. After that they throw the three *khong* to the sky, one after another. After the ceremony of *kynting khnong*, the youths of longpiah leave the Lyngdoh's house, they carry the small *Deinkhlam* in which they break them at the field of *law longpiah rim*. After breaking the small *Deinkhlam*, they go back to the

Lyngdoh's house to perform the second *kynting khnong*. Next, the elder uncle of Longpiah beats the roof of the Lyngdoh's house to chase away the plague, the evil spirits and the various diseases that endanger human's life. After this they perform the second *kynting khnong*. The youth of the Longpiah locality go back to their village, dancing and shouting all the way and they also start beating the houses and rooftops of their relatives and friends in their village. Early in the morning the various localities come out to beat the houses, of all those who are still in the traditional religion. They beat with the small *Deinkhlam*. When beating the roof tops, they pray to God to bless the houses and for general prosperity and to drive away the evil spirits and the various diseases, and also for a prosperous trade and bountiful harvest. On the same day in the morning, the *Doloi*, the *Lyngdoh*, the headmen and their assistanse go to the *Khon Raid* to beat every roof with bamboo sticks. Evil forces such as disease and even plague and pestilence should be threatened with sticks to quit the houses, and the country as a whole. This part of the festival also offers an opportunity to religious leaders to meet the people at home once a year,⁵⁸ and also it is an occasion where the people can meet their rulers and elders. Besides this, the festival has a special significance from the hygienic point of view, because on this occasion, the people clean their household articles, houses, and compounds and their clothes, the roads and pathways etc, so that everything will wear a clean look for the visit of the *Doloi* and elders and also the people who come and visit them on this great occasion.

The *knia khang waar*, or the second close down ceremony is held in the morning, on the last day of the Behdeinkhlam. The other ceremony is the third *kynting khnong*, where the *khnong* are thrown to the sky. The *rot* now have to be taken to *Aitnar* by the different localitites, before taking the *rot*, the different localities pray to God to let the *rot* reach the *Aitnar* peacefully and safely, so that they will not be broken on the way, and that the festival will be a grand and colourful one.⁵⁹ The *rot* are very tall and colourful and many people have to carry them. The *Khon Raid* takes the *Symbud Khnong* to *Aitnar*, then, they bring the *rot* to the same place, last they bring the *Khnong Blai*. When all the *rot* of the different localities reach *Aitnar*, the men, women and children in their best dress come and watch the men dancing, happily in wild joy. After the *rot* are immersed, the *Khon Raid* brings the *Khnong Blai*. This is the time, when the people from *Kmai Raid* too can touch the sacred tree, by touching or standing on it, they believe that they will have good health throughout the year. Immediately the *rot* are taken out of the lake, the *khon Raid* or *Shiliang Raid* brings the *Khnong Blai*. While bringing the sacred tree, the people of the *Khon Raid* do it leisurely with a playful touch of not allowing it to reach the destination, whereas the people of the *Kmai Raid* wave their hands towards the lake to be brought to them and not to waste time on the way.

When the sacred tree arrives, the people are very happy. Everyone struggles to touch it, at this moment, the part of the festival looks wild, many fall into the muddy water, some pull others' hands and legs, yet there is no malice and ill feeling towards one another. They do it with the spirit of love and brotherhood and that is the part of the religious festival. In the immersion of the *rot* one notices signs of unity of our rich culture. The festival has an element of the Muharram of the Muslim and also of the Rath Jatra of the Hindus. This resemblance clearly shows the influence of Hinduism on the Jaintia.⁶⁰ After the immersion of the *rot*, the people leave for their respective houses. The festival comes to an end and the *Behdeinkhlam* has a touch of Durga Puja, the Holi and the Rath Jatra.⁶¹

In the afternoon of the last day, there is the concluding ceremony known as *ka Dat Lawakor*, which is a kind of football game. In this game, they do not play with a rubber or leather ball, but with a round wooden ball, and the players do not put on boots, but play barefooted. At this time the *Basan* or elders make a sacrifice of a fowl in the sacred grove, called *Khloo Lyngdoh*. Two teams participate in the game representing the *Dongnein* or upper valley and the *Dongwah* or the lower valey of the river Myntdu. The players of both sides struggle hard to take the ball to the end of their own part of the field. There is a belief that if the players of the upper valley win, the latter will have or will be blessed with a prosperous and bountiful harvest and *vice versa*. In case of any dispute only the *Doloi* as umpire can separate them. Before, many people took part in this game, but now only a few people play, so that the game can be conducted in a better way. It is not certain how this game of *Datlawakor* is associated with the *Behdeinkhlam* festival, or how did it originate or come to be linked with the festival of the Jaintia. It only indicates that the people love sports and games and also fond of outdoor life. The festival comes to an end with this game, and people who have come from the different parts return to their own homes. After the performance of the *Behdeinkhlam*, the people feel happy, safe and contented, as they have full faith and confidence and also hope that no plague, pestilence, and epidemic diseases will take place and endanger them in their villages, and God will be pleased as they have performed this religious festival.

(4) Ka Shad Lukhmi

As the Khasi have no written records, it is very difficult to ascertain the exact date of the origin of the state of Iapngar, where the Lukhmi festival is held. However, according to a tradition, it was a very powerful and famous state with the capital at Nongbah, but due to wars between them and the Sutnga chiefs, it became weakened and later on fell under the hands of the Khyrim chief. Thus, the state of Iapngar became a poor and declining power.⁶²

Now the Raid Iapngar is under the Khyrim Syiemship and it is ruled at present by the *Syiem Raid* or chief named u Dontius Shadap. The Raid Iapngar is about 40 Km from Shillong. The *Raid* comprises of the following places, Mawbri, Khweng, Mynrilum, Liarshluit, Thadnangiaiw, Kdonghulu, Iarkhla, Liarbang, Sohliia, Mawshut, Lumblei, Lumdohthli, Umsohlang, ka It Sohpaiair, the last three are the newly settled villages inhabited by those people who went there for cultivation.⁶³ The Lukhmi dance is also held at the Raid Lasa, and the Raid Thaiang.⁶⁴ The Raid Lasa was under the Raid Iapngar. There is a tradition about how this Raid Lasa came into existence. At the time when a female ruler named ka Iong Saring ruled over the Raid Iapngar, it so happened that one day, her daughter went to the river for bathing and washing clothes. The girl was swallowed by a big snake. Nobody saw this incident except one of her maids whose name was Lasa. At first, she hesitated to relate what she had seen but later on she told all what had happened. The Queen was very grateful to her, so she gave away a part of her chiefdom and named it as the Raid Lasa in honour of the maid.⁶⁵

The Festivals of Raid Iapngar

The people in this area have many festivals. Besides *ka Shad Lukhmi*, they have *ka Knia Pyrda*, which is similar to the Behdeinkhlam festival of the Jaintia. The latter might have influenced the people of Iapngar, as there was much interrelation between the Jaintia and the people of Iapngar in the early days. This *knia Pyrda* is held in the months of July, August or September at Nongbah, the capital of the *Raid*. They first performed this sacrifice before they hold the Lukhmi festival. This *knia Pyrda* is held in order to invoke God's blessing for the welfare of the land and the *Raid*, to free the people from a bad year, from heavy storms and rains, plague, diseases and also for the prosperity of agriculture particularly rice.⁶⁶ Another festival is *ka Knia Lynnonng*, which is a ceremony performed every year to prevent the different evil spirits from entering and harming their villages. There are other festivals also but here only the Lukhmi festival is to be studied.

The Lukhmi festival is not a festival of a family or of a particular clan, it is the religious ceremony of the whole *Raid*. It is performed by the five clans of the Raid namely, (1) Rymbai (2) Rynghkhang (3) Maklai (4) Sumer, (5) Lyngdoh and the *Syiem* or chief who belongs to the Shadap clan. The Shadap clan in the Raid Iapngar is split into two families, one takes the task of Lyngdoh and another the *Syiem* to perform the ceremony.⁶⁷ The *Basan* belongs to the Rymbai clan. The *Sohblei* or high priest from the Maklai clan, the *Doloi* from the Sumer clan and the *Maji* from the Rynghkhang clan and the *Syiem* or chief from the *Syiem* clan and the Lyngdoh or priest from the Lyngdoh clan.⁶⁸

Stages of the Festival

The word Lukhmi might have originated from the word *Lukhi* which means rice in the dialect of Marngar in Bhoi area.⁶⁹ The Lukhmi Festival is held on the market days of Nongkrem or *Pysing*, *Mawlong* and *Rynghep*.⁷⁰

A few months before they perform the Lukhmi festival, they hold the *Knia Pyrda*. One day before this ceremony, they sacrifice a pig known as *u sniang suni* at Nongbah. This pig is sacrificed in remembrance of the ancestors who have founded and organised the religion, to ask for their help in the performance of this religious ceremony. The meat is eaten by the people.⁷¹ On the week day of *Iewduh*, *Ka Knia Pyrda* takes place where they sacrifice two pigs and a goat. During this ceremony, they pray for the whole *Raid* and the people, and for the prosperity of crops and agriculture, for good health, to free themselves from various diseases, thunder, hails and storms. The *Lyngdoh* offers the prayers, they make nine *Diengkhlam* or plague tree about one foot each, out of a particular tree called *Diengngan*. They also make cages to keep the bones. The meat of the sacrificed pig should not be taken home, they should eat all, at the time of the sacrifice. They believe that if they take the meat home, they would die. During our interview, we were told that a few years back one person, took some meat home and as soon as he reached home, he collapsed and died. The remaining portion of the meat should be kept at the place of sacrifice, so that *u ryngkew u basa* in the form of a tiger will eat all the meat. It is said that before they offered human sacrifice, the person came by himself to the house of the *Basan* to be sacrificed, and nobody knew where the man came from.⁷² There seems to be an idea generally prevalent that the Raja of Jaintia, owing to his conversion to Hinduism took to sacrificing human victims.⁷³ The practice of human sacrifice to the Kupli river goddess may be an example of Hindu sakta influence on the Khasi-Syntengs, rather than the reverse since the locality where it was practised, was within the Jaintia Kingdom and no similar practices are attested from the Khasi areas not under the direct control of Jaintia.⁷⁴ If there had been human sacrifices, it must have been the influence of the Jaintia rulers, because of their earlier contacts between them, or because the Jaintia chiefs wanted to impose the human sacrifice among the people of the Bhoi area.

(1) The First Day

The Lukhmi festival begins with the ceremonies in the *Syiemsad* or high priestess' house, before they go to Nongbah, which is the old capital of the state of Iapngar. The *Syiem* or chief, the *Lyngdoh*, and the elders and the people gather together outside the priestess' house, where a big fire is lit along

with the beating of the drums and the playing of the pipes. The *Syiem*, the *Lyngdoh* and the members of the *San kur* or the five clans have to go to Nongbah. Before they leave for Nongbah, the *Lyngdoh* prays to God and after the prayers, he pours out libation. Then a male dance known as *ka mastieh* is performed. From the priestess' house, all of them will go to the Nongbah and the *Sohblei* or high priest who belongs to the Maklai clan will perform the religious ceremonies. Nongbah has a special significance to the people of Iapngar, for it was here that their state was founded and their religious ceremonies had started. So the old capital at Nongbah is still fresh in the memory of the people of Iapngar.⁷⁵

At Nongbah, there are special huts made purposely for this occasion. They all have to stay here for one night and leave in the next morning to a place besides the river Umtung, where sacrifices and ceremonies are to be performed. On that night at Nongbah, there are no religious rites and ceremonies. The pipers and drummers will play their pipes and beat their drums, and a dance known as *ka Mastieh* is performed in which two by two dance. On the next morning, they will go to another place where there is *ka duwan Lukhmi* or the altar of the Lukhmi besides the river Umtung, but before they leave for Nongbah, a cock is sacrificed.

(II) The Second Day

The altar of the Lukhmi is situated besides the river Umtung, it is made of mud. Before the commencement of the religious rites and ceremonies, the *Shutia*, that is the person who carries all the necessary things for the sacrifices, will bring one gourd of rice beer and gives to the *Basan* or elder who belongs to the Rymbai clan. The *Syiem*, the *Lyngdoh*, the *Sohblei* will sit in front of the altar,⁷⁶ and at their back will stand the *Dhulia*. Then the religious rites and ceremonies of *ka Lukhmi* start. First of all, a hen is sacrificed and thrown in the river. The hen is then picked up from the river and then it is cut, and its entrails are taken out for divination, either for good or bad signs. If good signs or omens are seen, the people are very happy. Then the *Shutia* brings in the goats to the altar and gives to the *Lyngdoh* who says certain prayers and the *Syiem* sacrifices the goat, only the *Syiem* can kill the goats. At the same time, the bodies of the goats are thrown in the same river, and are picked up again by the *Sangot*. It is believed that the goats must be killed with one blow.⁷⁷ The bodies of the hen and goats which have been killed are placed at the altar as sacrifices. The *Sohblei* will go into the river, he goes naked except for a small piece of cloth and takes up some sands from the bottom of the river. Then the *Doloi* massages the whole body of the *Sohblei* with oil, and he goes back to the river. There he stands still for sometimes and prays to God. The sand which the *Sohblei* has brought from the river is kept properly, to be distributed among

the five clans, to be mixed along with the seeds and to sow in the fields.⁷⁸

As the religious ceremonies at Umtung are over, a dance known as *ka mastieh* is performed by the members of the five clans. They dance two by two, after the *mastieh* of the five clans, then other people can also dance, along with the beating of the drums and playing of the pipes by the *Dhulia* or musicians. This dance lasts for one hour, and then, they all prepare to go back to Nongbah.⁷⁹ When they reach Nongbah, they sacrifice a pig and its blood is mixed with the sand. After having eaten all the meat, they come back to their village and bring the sand and keep in the house of *ka Lyngdohsad*, or priestess, the sister of the *Lyngdoh*. This sand is mixed up with the seeds and given to those houses who are in the traditional religion. The duty of *ka Lyngdohsad* is to arrange all the necessary things which are needed for the sacrifice, all the articles for the sacrifice are kept in the house of *ka Lyngdohsad*.⁸⁰ After the ceremonies are over at Nongbah, the *Lyngdoh* thanks all the people in general and also the five clans and pray to God for general prosperity, good harvest, health, wealth and happiness.⁸¹

After the performance of the religious ceremonies, a festive dance is held for two days at the dancing ground at Liarkhla. The dance is similar to the *Shad Suk Mynsiem* or *Shad Weiking*, which is held annually at Shillong. The musicians are five in number known as the *Dhulia*. The musical instruments consists of the *tangmuri* or flute, *ka shalamen* or cymbals, two small drums and one big drum. The converts take part in the festive dance, but not in the religious ceremonies. On 3rd December 1986, Shri E. K. Mawlong, who was at that time the Speaker of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly and MLA from Umroi constituency in the Bhoi area, laid the foundation stone of the dancing ground at Liarkhla in the Raid Iapngar. Speaking on the occasion, the Speaker asked the people to preserve their rich culture as the people without their culture will not survive.

The celebration of the Lukhmi festival is a sort of fertility cult. *Ka Lukhmi* is the goddess of wealth, prosperity and agriculture of the people of Iapngar. She is also known as *ka 'Leikba* or the goddess of rice of the Khasi. Sacrifices and religious rites are performed, so that she will shower her blessings for a bountiful harvest and fill up their granaries and bless their day to day work and protect the crops from rain, storm etc. Thus this festival is held before the sowing season and after the harvesting work is over, and it is very old festival. Some say that the Lukhmi festival has a connection with or it originates from the Lakshmi celebration of the plains.⁸² The Lukhmi festival was performed in 1985 and again in 1988.

(5) Ka Sajer Ka Raid Nonglyngdoh

Ka Sajer of the Raid Nonglyngdoh is another important festival of the Bhoi. It is celebrated by the people of the whole Raid Nonglyngdoh and it is performed by the five clans of the *Raid*. These are the Maring, Nongkoun,

Makri, Nongjiri and Lapang.⁸³

The *Sajer* is a very important festival of the people of the Raid Nonglyngdoh. It is a religious ceremony which is performed for the prosperity of agriculture, particularly rice which is a source of wealth and principal food of the Khasi. It is a thanksgiving ceremony to God, for all His blessing that He has showered upon the people. They also pray for good health and prosperity of all and for the welfare of the *Raid*.⁸⁴

In 2005, the *Sajer* dance festival was held on the 18th March in Nongpoh the headquarter of the Ribhoi District where the rulers, elders, of the Raid including the people and officials of the district administration were present. Traditional dances that were performed included the Shad Shut Wait, Shad Rah Kynthai of Raid Khatar Lyngdoh and Shad Dumahi and Shad Dong Dong of Raid Nongkharai.

Stages of the Festival

The meaning of *ka Sajer* according to D. T. Laloo,⁸⁵ is the naming ceremony of *ka Lukhmi*. The places under the Raid Nonglyngdoh are Mawphrew, Mawryngkang, Umshohkhling, Korstep, Umiong, Umdap, Umling-Lambrang, Mawiong, Umskhen, Umskun, Sohbar, Shohkoikuna and Pahambir. All these places which fall under the Raid Nonglyngdoh, perform the *Sajer*.⁸⁶

The *Sajer* is a very old festival. It must have originated when the people learnt rice cultivation. The *Sajer* is held in the month of February and it continues for some days, but the preparation for the festival started about one or two months in advance.⁸⁷ Most of the people there believed that they migrated from Sutnga, as such, it is very likely that the *Sajer* which is a religious ceremony, must have had its origin there.⁸⁸

The ceremony starts on the market day of *Iongshai*, which is the *Sngi Iewduh* or the big market day of the *Hima Myllem*, *Nikpur* or *Sngi Lyngka* and *Nongshong*, *Iewrit* or *Iew Nongpoh*. It ends on the big market day of the *Raid*. The expenditure for this ceremony is properly accounted for, and each clan sends each member to see that the account is a correct one.⁸⁹ The ceremony begins at the capital of the *Raid*, two pigs and a number of fowls are sacrificed and they eat the meat at the place of sacrifice. The religious rites and ceremonies are performed by the uncles of the participating clans. They used the sacrificial leaves called *lamet*, rice beer is offered during the sacrifice. Only one woman who belongs to the Makri clan can give the rice beer. At present the woman who gives the rice beer is *ka Slong Makri Bhoi*. The *Syiem* or chief is from the Maring clan. Ason Syiem is the chief and he belongs to the Maring Khongjing clan.

Ceremonies and Festivities

The people of the Raid Nonglyngdoh have many religious festivities and ceremonies, but the most important is *ka Sajer*. This festival starts from the *mer Sajer* or the naming *Dorbar*, but for the people as a whole, it starts from the evening of the market day of *longshai* or *lewduh* and ends on the market day of *Iew Khyllawbah* or *Mawlong*. In this festival, they sacrifice a goat, fowl, pig along with the beating of drums and cymbals and flute. Sacrifices are there in each house, as this is not only the ceremony of the *Raid* but it includes the house ceremony also.⁹⁰

The First Day-Ka Sngi Iongshai - Mer Sajer

When the market day of *longshai* comes, and as arranged by the *Dorbar*, after the ceremony of the *knia lyngdoh*, which is held in the winter months of December or January at Nongbah, the capital of the *Raid*, the *Syiem* or chief, the *Lyngdoh*, the five *Basan* and the people who belong to the participating clan of Lyngdoh, Maring, Lapang, Nongkoun, Makri and Nongshli will go to Nongbah for the *mer Sajer* or naming *Durbar*. At midday, when all have arrived, they start the *mer* or *Durbar* and the chief presides over it. At this *Durbar*, they first decide the week to hold the *Sajer*, having agreed upon that, they proceed to discuss other matters. After they have finished all their discussions, then the diviner breaks some eggs to know from which direction the goddess would come from, whether from the plains or from the Hills. If she comes from the plains, they go and fetch her from Lad Tynei and if she comes from the hills they fetch her from a place called Lad Nongthyrlong. The diviner takes the egg in his hands, and after uttering some prayers, he puts some rice on the *diengshat* or wooden block, then divination is read out from the broken pieces of the egg's shells.⁹¹ If there are no clear signs of divination, he prays again. If signs come out clearly, then he informs the people, the place where the goddess will come.⁹²

After the *mer Sajer*, and when the days of the ceremony are fixed, they start preparing for the ceremony. All those clans who have religious huts at Nongbah go there to decorate and repair their own religious huts. On the market day of *Khyllawbah* or *Mawlong*, some women go to Nongbah to prepare rice beer, and on the market day of *Pynsin* or *Pamtiah*, all the people go to clean the path at Nongbah.⁹³

On the evening of the market day of *longshai* or *lewduh*, the youths of the Raid Nonglyngdoh go to Nongbah, to perform the religious ceremonies. The youths including young boys and girls choose a leader to look and keep a watch over them. The way is very far and they have to carry along with them, rice, clothes in their conical baskets called *ki khoh* and other things. They walk and carry their heavy loads with smiling face without grumbling or frowning. Sometimes, they rest on their way to take *kwai* or betelnut. The moment they enter their religious huts, they put their conical baskets and take the rice which they carry with them. Married

people do not go to stay at Nongbah on this night, except from those families which have no unmarried youths. Then the couple can go and stay but they do not disturb the youths.

On this night, the young boys play their pipes and flutes, but there is no drum or cymbals. The youths take their food at Nongbah. At night the boys go to visit the girls' huts, this is the night of the youths, whoever falls in love on this night, they use to go straight to the girl's house after the *Sajer*, to inform the parents, who usually give consent. There is no force towards the girls, if there is any brute force, the boy has to pay a heavy fine. The boys do not like to use force, as they too have their own sisters and nieces, and they do not want that a boy should use force or behave badly towards the girls. On this occasion, there is no bar for the boys to take rice beer, but they should behave well. Those who do not want to visit the girls' huts stay in their own huts, but they are not jealous of the other boys. The next morning, they go back to their villages, to take bath, so that they can come again in the evening.⁹⁴

Ka Miet Nikpur (Lyngka)

On this day, all the people young and old including the *hynniew kni hynniew kpoh* or the seven uncles of the seven families go to Nongbah once a year. Then the young boys and girls which are already there, come out to greet the people. Some women carry ginger, a gourd of rice beer, dried fish, ash, some sacrificial leaves and others. These women run hurriedly to keep the *dur* (basket for carrying things) on the stones on the way. In the evening, some men in their best dancing dress carrying the shield and sword perform a dance in the dancing arena in front of the altar and shouting while dancing.

Next, the *Syiem*, *Lyngdoh*, the five *Basan* or elders hold a *Dorbar* and the dancing stop while the *Dorbar* is going on. The *Dorbar* is held to find out, whether everything is going on well. As soon as the *Dorbar* ends, dancing along with the beating of the drums and tuning of the pipes start again. Inside the huts of the *Syiem* and *Lyngdoh*, they perform some religious rites along with incantation of prayers, and the religious rites are also carried on in the huts of the other clans, where the maternal uncle performs these rites and rituals.⁹⁵ While they perform these ceremonies at their own huts, dancing goes on outside.

Then another ceremony is performed known as *ka leit kroh syrngu*. Some necessary articles are carried by one woman who covers her head with an expensive cloth known as *muka*, carrying a supporting stick. Firstly, this woman will walk with some women, then follow the two *Lyngdoh*, known as the *Lyngdoh sad* and the *Lyngdoh sla*, then followed the musicians along with the drums and pipes and then the men who carry swords and shields, finally follow all the people. There is a man who carries the *prew ding* or small dry reeds or bamboos which are burnt to serve as a torch on a journey at night. The journey

is a troublesome one, over rugged paths and ways, yet the people are happy and dancing is going on all the way. On reaching the place which is properly cleaned, they take out all the things. They *Lyngdoh sla* performs the rites and rituals and he looks for the sign whether the *syrngu* or shadow would come from the plains or the hills, and the dancing continues. The priest performs the rites, where a hen is sacrificed. The musicians play their instruments and dancing continues. He utters some prayers and throws some rice to the right and left and on finishing, the youths try to find a particular insect which is very difficult to get. Six insects are required and when found, some prayers and incantation are uttered by the *nongkroh syrngu*.⁹⁷ Next the priest sacrifices a hen, a goat and a pig.

The next ceremony is when they go and fetch the *dur* or conical baskets which are put in various places, during midnight. When they go to take the *dur*, the musicians play their pipes and beat their drums. When they reach the place, where the *dur* are kept, the uncle takes all the things from the *dur*. He utters some prayers and pours out libation from the gourd. After taking food and rice beer, the uncle puts all the things in the *dur*, and covers it with a silk cloth known as *jain muka*. Then the *dur* is carried away, along with the beating of the drums and playing of the pipes by the musicians. They also perform a dance known as *ka nguh*, they bow down five times, then they perform a dance known as *ka Mastieh* and then *Shadwait* or sword dance. They return along with the beating of the drums and playing of the pipes. All the *dur* should be placed at the *duwan lyngdoh* or altar and *u Maji u Sangot* sees that all the *dur* are kept nicely and properly. After the sacrifices, they carry all the *dur* to the religious huts and the uncles perform the religious ceremonies in their own huts.⁹⁸

Ka Iong Shong or Nongkrem

Before the ceremony of *ka Sajer*, the elder uncles from the respective clans, hold meetings to discuss the family religious rites, held once a year at Nongbah. They also discuss about the contribution and other works. It is on this day that all those who perform the festival of *ka Sajer* go to Nongbah and on this day, dances like *ka Shad Wait*, *Shad Mastieh*, *Shad Kynjuh Kynthei*, the latter is a male and female dance, and other forms of dances are performed.

In the olden days they used to dance in front of the chief's house, after the killing of a goat. When the time comes for the *Shad Kynjuh Kynthei*, the men go to take the female members of the ruling family, and one of them with two men perform a dance known as *ka Shad Iuhkjat* at the chief's altar which is a kind of inauguration dance. After this dance, then other girls can dance. In the *Shad Kynjuh Kynthei*, the men who dance cannot dance with female members of the same clan. Then they perform *ka Shad Wait* where they hold a sword and a shield, and they also perform *ka Shad Mastieh*. There is a

Mastieh by two dancers and a *Mastieh* by four dancers. They also hold a sword and a shield. Another dance which is known as *ka Shad Malangho*, is also a male dance, and they hold a shield on the left and they put the right hand on their hip. In the *Shad Dong Dong*, the two hands are placed on the hips and in the *Shad Kynjuh Kynthei*, the women dances in between two men, the female dancers hold the men from the hips and also the men hold the women from the hips. The last man in the line holds a shield. Before the Sun sets, a woman goes to take the *umlei* or holy water or god-water from *umlalung umtron*. Every religious hut has to take this water. This water is used to be taken only once a year during this ceremony. At night, during the religious ceremonies, they hold the feast, then they sacrifice two pigs along with the religious rites and ceremonies.⁹⁹

Ka Sngi Iew Khyllawbah or Mawlong

The meat of the sacrificed animals is eaten in every house. In the house of *Lyngdoh*, the dance is performed along with the beating of the drums and playing of the pipes, without any sign of fatigue. After having a feast, the *Lyngdoh*, the chief and the people gather together and perform the *Shadwait* and *Shad Mastieh* five times, till they reach the house of the chief, and end with the *Shadnguh* five times. The musicians change the beating of the drums into a different tune, and then perform the *Shadwait* and come back to the house of the *Lyngdoh Kmei*. Then the five *Basan*, along with the *Syiem*, and the *Lyngdoh* enter the house of the *Lyngdoh kmei* to pray to the *ka Lukhmi*. Then they hold a Durbar, where the chief, *Lyngdoh*, the *Basan* discuss among themselves various matters. The Durbar ends by prayers and pouring out libation for the prosperity of agriculture.¹⁰⁰

(6) ka Lakympong

The *Lakympong* is an important festival of the Bhoi which is celebrated at Raid Tyrso, Raid Nongtung, Raid Namsha and other places of the Bhoi area. There are two types of *Lakympong* :

- (1) *Ka Shad Lakympong Khyinraw*, this dance has no religious connection, it is a festive dance. They hold it every year, but now it is no longer held. The last celebration of the *Lakympong* was held at the Raid Nongtung and was lastly held at Sohrublei.¹⁰¹
- (2) *Ka Shad Lakympong Lukhmi*, which is held once in every five years, has religious rites and ceremonies.¹⁰²

Contents of the Festival

- (1) *Ka Shad Lakympong Khyinraw* or the dance or celebration of the

youth is a dance where only young boys and girls can participate. Before the dance they choose a leader which they call *u Baheh Khyinraw* or the elderly youth. They organize *ka trei bara* or community work where they help each other. This sort of community work is prevalent in the Bhoi area, and it is very much helpful particularly for those families who have no men or able person to do their work.¹⁰³ In this collective work, the youths work jointly from one family to another. Having collected the money, they then organise the dance. The organiser of this dance is known *u Damdar*. This festival usually takes place after the harvesting work is over, and before the sowing is done as there is less work.

The *Baheh Khyinraw* has many responsibilities. He should be a strong and healthy man who has a loud voice to get respect from the people, as they have to agree to whatever he says. He has to keep all the money they get from their collective work.¹⁰⁴ At the end of the year, they divide the money into two heads, the first portion of the money is kept for the dancing day, and the second portion for buying dried fish and salt to be distributed among the people. A week before the festival, the *Baheh Khyinraw* along with some others go to buy dried fish and salt from the market. When they return, they are not supposed to enter the village, but have to stay outside in the temporary huts. It is here that they distribute them among the people, and they in return have to bring some liquor to the *Baheh Khyinraw*.¹⁰⁵

Before the dancing day, all the villages participating in the dance will bring one decorated stick, which symbolises each participating village. The sticks are cut nicely and well decorated and are painted with red, yellow, black or white colour. They are put behind the *Dhulia* or musicians. From that night, all the youths, boys and girls will stay in a temporary hut till the dancing is completed. The food for them is spent from the money raised from the collective work. Young boys and girls stay there, this is to test their character. The hut is divided into two parts, one for the boys and another for the girls. In the middle, the *Damdar*, will stay for the whole night. If he finds anyone misbehaving, he or she will be punished and fined and even expelled.¹⁰⁶

On the first day of the dance, the dancers are only the married men and women and the youths are mere spectators. This is just to show the youths how to dance the following day and also to show God their true love to each other. They dance in a circle, one male and one female alternately. The left hand of the husband holds the waist of the wife and the left hand of the wife holds the right hand of another man, who in a similar way holds the waist of the wife. This dance is known as *ka Shad Rah ne Shad Kadiang*, meaning the carrying or left dance. The area of the dancing arena depends on the number of dancers.¹⁰⁷

On the second day, the *Damdar* remains busy right from the morning. The beauty of the dance depends on how he arranges the dance, which would attract a large number of spectators. On the day of dancing,

the *Damdar* holds a white flag in a long pole, it is he who brings life, joy and pleasure to all the dancers and the spectators.¹⁰⁸ If the *Damdar* is a man who knows the art, how to sing and play, who could attract the spectators, then the dance would be a grand one. On the day of dancing, the musicians will start playing their pipes and beating their drums in the dancing arena to tell the people that the dance will commence. When the people have gathered in the dancing ground the *Damdar*, who is the busiest person of all has to perform well, as his prestige will depend much on the performance of this day. If he conducts well, he would earn prestige and glory and if he fails, he would get all the blame as its success is his sole responsibility.¹⁰⁹

The parents who have young sons and daughters of marriageable age would bring them for the dance. It is here in front of the family members and elders, that the youths show their luck and fortune in marriage. The family members go to hand over the girls to the *Damdar* who in turn would find young boys for them one by one. The *Damdar* chooses a boy, and the latter would choose a girl from among the many girls. After a boy has chosen a girl, the *Damdar* would ask the clan of the girl, so as to know whether they have a blood relationship or not, as marriage within the same clan in the Khasi society is a taboo. If they are not related, the *Damdar* would take them to the dancing arena and hold their hands together. Supposing they have any relationship either from the mother, or father's side, then the boy has to choose another girl. In this way the *Damdar* will continue till all the boys have chosen their partners.¹¹⁰

Both boys and girls dance together, by holding their hands round the waist in their best costumes, the girls wear their *jainsem dhara* and put on gold and silver ornaments. The *Damdar* starts singing the couplets along with the playing of the pipes and beating of the drums by the musicians. The spectators shout out of joy at the end of every couplet song which is sung by the *Damdar*. The parents give freedom to their sons and daughters at this time, so that they could choose their life partners. If a boy falls in love with any girl, he goes straight to her house after the dance and the parents usually do not object as they consider it as God's will. In case a boy who had already got a girl friend and falls in love again with any other girl, he could do so, and his old girl friend could not object if he leaves her. The arrangement for marriage is very fast during this festival.¹¹¹ If the boy does not dare to go by himself to the girl's house, *u ksiang* or mediator is sent to arrange for the marriage.¹¹² Both married and unmarried men can participate in the dance, but the girls must be unmarried and virgins. The dance comes to an end in the evening and is followed by the *Shad Lymmu*, which is an unorganised dance of the people. Those who have selected their partners, can arrange for a marriage ceremony, others just bow down to each other and go to their respective houses.¹¹³

During the *Lakympong Khyinraw* dance festival, there is no religious

ceremony, as the *Lakympong* does not expect anything from man. The only sacrifice that she wants is the real and true love of the couples from here on earth till the next world. She has no time to remain in the same place, as her duty is to see to the welfare of all the people.¹¹⁴

We cannot say with certainty how this word *Lakympong* originated. Some say that *Lakympong* is the goddess of love and marriage, whereas others believe that *Lakympong* originated from the word *lympung* which means a field used for recreation. The word also could have originated from the word *Latympang* who was a famous queen in the olden days.¹¹⁵

(2) Ka Shad Lakympong Lukhmi

This festival is held once in every five years, and it involves religious rites and ceremonies. The festival starts with the ceremony of *knia ryngku* where a cow is sacrificed. Then the people go to sow in the field known as *Pynthor Lyngdoh*, where a fowl is sacrificed. The rice that is grown from this field is used for preparing rice beer for the Lukhmi dance.¹¹⁶

Before they hold the *Lakympong Lukhmi*, they first hold a *Dorbar* of the *Basan* or elders of the *Raid*. When they sit for one meeting, they make two sticks out of bamboo and decorate them by carving in the form of flowers. If they sit for two meetings, they make four decorated sticks and so on. They collect bunch of paddy from each family and go and put in the house of *ka Lyngdoh* or priestess. The *Lyngdoh* gives to a *Maji* who is known as *u Basan Khnai*. In the morning of the dance, the *Maji* carries the bunches of paddy, and then runs to the forest. The *Lyngdoh*, the elders and the people along with the drums and pipes and one goat go to fetch him. They make the goat bleats, whereas the *Basan Khnai* runs further and further. There is one person who tries to allure and persuade him with the singing of couplets and rhymes. Then the *Basan khnai* returns, he goes to put all the bunches of paddy in the conical basket of the *Lyngdoh*, which symbolises that the goddess *Lukhmi* has come after which they sacrifice a goat. Here they bring their coloured and decorated sticks in the dancing arena of the *Raid Tyrso*. There is a specially raised platform where the musicians sit on this occasion. In the dancing ground there is a platform known as *ka pyrdi*. There is a circle where only the virgins dance, and there is another circle where both girls and boys dance.¹¹⁷ After the goat is sacrificed, the *Lyngdoh* distributes the paddy which has been collected from every family, and this is mixed with the rice seeds which means that the *Lukhmi* has come. As in the *Lakympong Khynraw*, on this day, if any boy or girls falls in love with each other they can go home and inform the parents and the latter will not object to this kind of love and marriage, as they believe it is God's choice.¹¹⁸

Musical Instruments

The important instruments are *ka bom heh* or the big drum, two smaller drums which are known as *shakudiah*, the pipes known as *ka shawing* and *tangmuri* and *ka shalamen* or cymbals. The people put on nice and colourful dresses during this occasion.

(7) Ka Pomblang Nongkrem or Shad Nongkrem

Before we discuss in details about the Nongkrem Dance, we would first of all like to know how the powerful chieftom known as the Hima Shillong or Shillong State was torn apart. The division of the Hima Shillong took place in 1853 after the civil wars. During the reign of u Piar, a civil war occurred which caused great dissensions. The war was fought between two parties, on one side was the ruling party supported by the Nongkseh Thangkhiew *Basan* on the other, the three *Basan* who had conspired to annihilate the ruling dynasty. The united and strong state with the capital at Nongkseh, was divided and torn into two parts, the *Hima Khyrim*, and the *Hima Myllem*. The division of the powerful chieftom was regarded as a very sorrowful and unfortunate event in the history of the Khasi. But one thing is saved from being perished, the *Ingsad Ingsunon* that is the religious house was not divided, the office of the *Syiemsad* or the high priestess was not tampered with and the religion was left untouched. The *Syiemsad* with her typical function and the ancestral religion with its institution as founded at Nongkseh remained with the *Syiem* at Nongkrem.¹¹⁹ The origin of the *Pomblang Syiem* or *Pomblang Nongkrem* was at Nongkseh, but after the division of the state, it was shifted to Lyngkyrdem, then to Nongkrem and then to Smit, which remains the place of celebration till today.¹²⁰

Administration

From time immemorial, the Khasi have a strong democratic tradition. The state of Khyrim has a democratic institution, which is governed by a *Dorbar* or council, consisting of the *Myntri* or *Bakhraw*, who are elected by the people, and the *Syiem* who in turn is elected by the *Myntri* or *Bakhraw* or elders of the State from a member of the *Syiem* clan. This State is again formed by an association of units known as *Raid* which consists of a group of villages and governed by a *Dorbar* consisting of persons elected by the people. Under them, we have a village *Dorbar* of every particular village.¹²¹ The *Hima Khyrim* consists of the (1) *Raid Nongkrem* (2) *Raid Nongbri*, (3) *Raid Mawlieh* or *Raid Khatar Blang*, (4) *Raid Mawshai* or *Raid Phra Blang* and *Sarikrai*, (5) *Raid Lawai*, (6) *Nongkynrih*.¹²²

The Contents of the Festival

The *Pomblang Syiem* or *Pomblang Nongkrem* is a religious festival, held to honour and respect the ancestors, the founders of the State and religion and to invoke God's blessings for a bountiful harvest, and well-being and general prosperity of the ruling family, the *Bakhrav* and also the people and the whole State. The festival is held once a year at the official residence at Smit, and all the sacrificial rites and rituals are carried on at the *duwan*, and at the *Iewduh Pomblang* and at the *Ingsad*, where the *Syiemsad* or high priestess lives. *Ka duwan* is a place which is surrounded by walls and it has three outlets for entering and leaving, one in the north, one in the east and another in the west. Inside this compound there is *Ingsad* that is the religious house, which has many rooms.¹²³ Before the division of the Shillong *Syiemship*, *ka duwan* and *ka Ingsad* were at Nongkseh, the old capital of the *Hima Shillong*.

Ka Ingsad consists of many rooms. For religious purposes, there are (1) *ka shlur* which is a room at the back, where there is a *Rishot Blei*, or the holy pillar or pillar of God, which is made of a particular wood called *u diengsning* a kind of oak tree. (2) *Ka Ingbah* is a room in the middle, where the *Syiemsad* lives (3) *Ka Kynram blang* is another room on the western side of the house, where the goats for the sacrifices are kept. (4) *Ka tyngkong* or *shyngkub* is the verandah in front of the house, where they held a solemn *Dorbar* known as *ka Dorbar sla*. (5) *Ka Kyrpong* is another room which is used as a sleeping apartment. The ground in front of the *Ingsad* is properly cleaned and levelled, and it is here that they kill the goats for the sacrifice, and it also serves as a dancing arena. *Ka Iewduh Pomblang* is a place on the hill, at a little distance from the *Ingsad*. The ground here is also properly cleaned and levelled. *Ka pomblang Nongkrem* centres round the *Syiem*, his *Myntri* and *Bakhrav* and the people. The *Syiem* and his *Dorbar* fix the day of the ceremony, and send information through a traditional method known as *ai kyrwoh* in a form of cane rings to all the *Raid* which have to bring goats and request them to be present at the ceremony. Three months before this religious festival, the *Dhulia* or musicians which include the drummers and pipers beat their drums and play their pipes and pour out libation at the religious house, on every *Pomtiah* night to show that preparation is going on for the *Pomblang* festival.¹²⁴ We will go through this festival beginning from the first day along with the rites and rituals of each day.

Stages of the Festival

The First Day (Pomtiah)

Early in the morning of the first day of the festival, that is *Pomtiah*,

the *Dhulia* or musicians beat their drums till the Sun rises to wake up the people and remind them that on that night, the religious ceremony of the *Pomblang Nongkrem* will start. On the *Pomtiah* night, the *Syiemsad* prepares in the *Ingbah* three earthen vessels of *ka iadum* or rice beer and one gourd. On that night, the *Sohblei* or high priest, who belongs to the Rumnong clan will perform the ceremony in front of the fireplace or hearth inside the house. First of all, the *Syiemsad* gives one gourd of rice beer from one vessel, to the *Sohblei*, who dedicates this first gourd to *u Blei Shillong* or Shillong God. The *Dhulia* beat their drums and play their pipes, the *Sohblei* prays for the well-being of the *Syiem*, and the ruling family, the State and the people on the whole, he pours the rice beer in the hearth. Then the *Dhulia* change their tunes, the *Syiemsad* gives to the *Sohblei*, a gourd of rice beer from another vessel, he offers this second gourd to *ka Blei longsyiem* or ancient ancestral mother of the *Syiem* clan which means to *ka Pah Syntiew*, praying for her blessings and protection to all. He also pours the rice beer in the hearth. The *Dhulia* continues to beat their drums, and the *Syiemsad* gives a gourd of rice beer from another vessel, and the high priest offers the last gourd to *u Suidnia long syiem* or the first maternal uncle of the *Syiem* clan, for his blessings for general prosperity. After this, the musicians stop playing and the *Syiem* and others who are present there stand up and enter in another room known as *ka shlur*. Here the eldest of the *Dhulia* pours a gourd of rice beer to *u Syrmoh u Syrphin u Khatar kamar*, *u Syrmoh* who belonged to the *Syiem* clan of the *Hima Shillong*, who killed the *thlen* or serpent at Rangjyrteh. He was the founder of iron, arts and technical skill. *U Syrphin* was the brother of *u Syrmoh*, who was the founder of the drums and musical instruments, which were used while the children of the *Hynniew Trep* or seven huts danced. When the Shillong *Syiem* defeated the plain areas from Nowgong to Beltola, and to *u Lum ka Meikha*, now called Kamakhya, the ryots there requested the *Syiem* to absorb Vishwakarma in the *Pomlang Nongkrem*.¹²⁵ The offering of rice beer to *u Syrmoh u Syrphin u Khatar Kamar* to ask for his protection is an old ceremony. Later *u Biskorom* is absorbed along with the festival. *U Biskorom* is similar to the Hindu God Vishwakarma, who is the god of artisans and craftsmen, particularly popular in Assam and Bengal. The respect shown to the founder of arts and technical skills is as old as the festival itself, and the musicians by pouring libation in his honour ask for his protection.¹²⁶ Another opinion is that *u Biskorom*, might have an influence from the plain ryots who came to work here in the hills. These people worshipped Vishwakarma and the *Syiem* might have been due to love and respect, and to please these ryots included Vishwakarma in the *Pomblang Nongkrem*, not as a god to be worshipped but just to show their respect and love to the ryots of the plains. In this manner *u Biskorom* was taken in the *Nongkrem* religious ceremony.¹²⁷ After pouring rice beer, the *Dhulia* beat their

drums and all who are in the *shlur* including the *Syiem Rangbah* or the Elder Syiem, eat the dried fish which have been burnt and consume the rice beer. After this, the *Syiem Rangbah* and the *Dhulia* beat the drum known as *ka'sing shad tyngkoh*, and the *Bakhrav* or elders from certain clans of the *Raid* dance two by two. Before dancing, they first bow the *Rishot Blei* and the *Syiem Rangbah*. After all these ceremonies are over on the first night, the people on the whole can enjoy themselves.¹²⁸

The *Syiemsad* is the custodian of the state religion, which is in conformity to the matrilineal system of the Khasi, where a woman holds a respectable position in the society. Her main functions are to keep ready the necessary equipments and other articles on the occasion of a festival, in concurrence with the priestly clan. In the past, she sent a proposal for the appointment of a new *Syiem* to the *Dorbar*. *Syiemsad* is a unique political institution of Khasi political thought. She is entrusted with the custody of rites and ceremonies of the state, in order that here moral force may serve as a restraining hand, a power behind the throne. In the Khyrim Syiemship, the line of descent for *ka Syiemsad* is to the eldest daughter, but in the other states as in Cherra and Nobosohphoh, the youngest daughter occupies her place.¹²⁹

The Second Day (*Ka Umni*)

Early in the morning of the second day, before the sun rises, the *Dhulia* bring all their drums to the *tyngkong*, and here they beat all the religious drums. In the afternoon, men both young and old, come and clean the whole path from the *Ingsad* to the *Iewduh Pomblang*, which is known as *soi lynti*. They also dance at random while going and coming. In the evening, the *Dhulia* beat the drum known as *ka'sing mastieh* in the *tyngkong*. The elderly men from the *Bakhrav* clans of the *Raid* dance a kind of dance known as *ka Mastieh* in which they dance two by two in the ground in front of the *Ingsad*, and the *Syiem Rangbah* also dances. At night in the *Ingbah*, the *Sohblei* offers libation to *U Blei Shillong*, *ka Blei Longsyiem* and *u Suidnia longsyiem* in the same way as on the previous night. Then the musicians beat the drums and eat the dried fish which have been burnt and consume rice beer. The *Bakhrav* also dance in the same way, as on the *Pomtiah* night. After this, the *Dhulia* performs a sacrifice known as *ka knia muhuri*, to *ka Blei Synshar*, the goddess of state and to *u Syrmoh u Syrphin*, *u Biskorom*, *u khatar kamar*. In this sacrifice, the *Syiemsad* gives to the elderly *Dhulia*, one banana leaf, five pieces of pan leaves, one jar of water and one hen. Then the *Dhulia* takes all these and place them in their respective positions. He offers the sacrifice by pouring out libation and by praying to *ka Blei Synshar*, so that she will protect and preserve the drums and pipes and the musicians. After the ceremony, the remaining beer is consumed among the musicians.¹³⁰

The Third Day (Iewduh)

The third day also begins early in the morning. On this day certain ceremonies are to be performed at the *Lum Iewduh Pomblang*. The *Syiemsad* makes ready all the necessary things to be taken to the hillock, then the *Syiem Rangbah*, and all the people leave the *Ingsad* and walk in a procession to the hillock. The procession is led by the *Dhulia* and the male dancers in their full dancing costumes with their swords and *symphiah* in their hands, dancing all the way. After them follow the *Sohblei*, then the person who carries all the things for the sacrifice. Then follow the female members of the *Syiem's* family, the *Syiem Rangbah*, the *Bakhraw* and the people. There are a few men who carry guns and fire every now and then, and also burst crackers. On reaching the sacred hill, the *Sohblei* offers a sacrifice at the altar to *u Blei Shillong* with a cock and then a he-goat, which they call *u'lang Iewduh*. In this sacrifice, the *Sohblei* prays to God for His manifold blessings to protect the *Syiem* and the State and also the people on the whole. The cocks' entrails are removed for divination. Having cut and killed the goat, its blood is sprinkled at the altar. Then the helpers collect the nine portions which are taken from the lung, liver, spleen, kidney, intestines and gall bladder of the goat. These are known as *dkhot im* and these are given to the *Sohblei* for divination and offer them as sacrifices.¹³¹ After the ceremony a dance is performed known as *ka Shad Mastieh*, after which they leave for the *Ingsad* dancing all the way. At the *Ingsad*, they also perform the same dance as in the hillock. After the dance, the *Sohblei* takes the remaining nine portions and burn them, these are known as *dkhot ing* and these are also offered as sacrifices. The remaining nine portions are eaten in front of the holy pillar and the musicians again start beating the religious drums.¹³²

In the middle of the night of the same day, they prepare for a sacrifice known as *ka bujai blang*, which is held at the *tyngkong* of the *Ingsad*. Here, the goats brought from the different political units known as *Raid* are presented. This ceremony shows the democratic tradition of the Khasi, as the administration are in the hands of the *Syiem*, his *Myntri* and the *Bakhraw*. The presentation of goats by the different *Raid* shows the political unity of the state. If any *Raid* which no longer wants to have allegiance with the State, it no longer presents a goat. The *Syiem* and *Dhulia*, on the other hand, cannot refuse the presentation of goats. If they do so it means that they have driven away the *Raid* from the State.¹³³ At the ceremony, all the *Raid* which will contribute the goats are present. One elderly *Dhulia* and some people stand near the room known as the *kynram blang*, to accept the goats and put in that room first of all the goat from the *Syiem* which are already in the room are accepted, then the *Dhulia*

calls each Raid and their goats are put in the *kynram blang*. Every time that the *Dhulia* takes the goat from each *Raid*, he prays for the well-being of the people of that *Raid* and also for good health, prosperity of the race, and a bountiful harvest and the well-being in all respects.¹³⁴ All the goats brought by the different *Raid* are to be kept in the *kynram blang* for one night. The goats are given back to those who contributed and the cooked meat of the same is to be eaten by them. After the ceremony of *bujai blang*, the elder *Syiem* and others enter another room in the *Ingsad* known as *ka shlur*, and eat the meat of *u'lang Iewduh*, which has been sacrificed at the hillock. After this the *Dhulia* beat their drums and the *Bakhraw* dance two by two and before the dance, they first bow before the holy pillar and the elder *Syiem*. After this dance is over, the people can dance the whole night till the next morning.¹³⁵

The Fourth Day (Lyngka)

The fourth day of the festival is the day when the goats are killed for the sacrifice, and it is also a day of dancing. This is a grand day for every body, because multitudes of people in their colourful and best dresses, from different walks of life, belonging to different communities, go to Smit to witness this festivity. On this day, the *Syiemsad* and the *Sohblei* fast the whole day long. Early in the morning, the musicians beat the drum known as *ka'sing kynthei* or the female drum in the room of the *Ingsad*, known as *ka Ingbah*. The female members of the ruling family who are virgins dressed in their beautiful traditional dancing dresses bedecked with gold and other ornaments wearing gold crowns dance round the hearth three times along with the *Bakhraw* of the State. After this dance inside the house, they come out and perform a traditional dance known as *ka Shad Nohkhat ki Syiem*, which means the opening or inauguration of the dance by the female members of the ruling family. When they dance, there are someone to hold the umbrella to cover them.¹³⁶ This is to show respect to the *Syiem's* family, and also to differentiate the female dancers of the ruling family from other dancers.¹³⁷ One of the chief dancer is the daughter of the *Syiemsad* or any female virgin member of the ruling family who will be the *Syiemsad* later on. After this dance, follows the dance of other male and female dancers who came from the different parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. All female dancers should be virgins. No married woman dares to enter the dancing field but regarding the male dancers, both married and unmarried can dance.

On the same day after sunset, the *Syiemsad* makes preparation at the *Ingbah*, for a sacrifice. She distributes all the necessary things for the sacrifice to *u Sohblei* and all those who will perform the sacrifice. The ceremony is performed at the ground in front of the *Ingsad*. The *Sohblei*, the other sacrificers, the *Syiem* and the people are ready in place for the sacrifice. Each sacrificer sits

and makes a small altar in front of him, in which he puts all the necessary things for the sacrifice, each of them holds a cock or a hen in his hands. The *Sohblei* will first of all offer a sacrifice to *u Blei Shillong*, then the other sacrificers also offer their sacrifices. After sacrificing the cocks and hens, the entrails are taken for divination and they pour out libation. After this ceremony, they sacrifice twelve goats known as '*langsla*'. The goats contributed by the people are killed by the *Bakhraw*, the blood of the twelve goats is sprinkled on each of the altars. Then the nine portions of the twelve goats known as *dkhot im* are taken and given to the sacrificers. After this ceremony, a dance known as *ka Shad Mastieh*, is performed. At night, the *Sohblei* takes the nine portions and burn them and offer as sacrifices. He pours libation and the *Dhulia* start beating their drums and play their pipes as they please.¹³⁸

The Fifth Day (Pynsing)

The *Pomblang Nongkrem* festival comes to an end on the fifth day at night, which is considered very sacred. Early in the morning of the last day, the drummers stop the beating of the different drums, which is a sign that the festival has come to an end. On this day at the *Ingsad*, the *Sohblei* sacrifices a pig known as *u'niang suidnia longsyiem* in which the *Sohblei* invokes the first maternal uncle of the *Hima Shillong* who started the state religion, then the *Sohblei* from the Mawroh clan kills the pig and takes out the nine portions and offer as sacrifices.

The next important ceremony of the *Pomblang Nongkrem* is the *Dorbar sla* or *Dorbar Blei* which means God's assembly. This assembly is held at the *Tyngkong* of the *Ingsad* in the middle of the night on the last day of the festival. Before holding this assembly, *u Sangot* or announcer enters all the rooms of the *Ingsad* and makes an announcement for three times that no one should sleep, talk, cough, yawn and that everybody should lay awake, but remain silent and should not walk here and there.¹³⁹ In the middle of the night when the world sleeps, this assembly is held. The most important part is the prayer of the *Syiem Rangbah*. When he prays, there should be pindrop silence because the prayer is observed in deep solemnity. It is a special and solemn hour, when the *Syiem* kneels down and prays to God the Creator. This shows that the Khasi religion is monotheistic. In this prayer the elder *Syiem* invokes God's blessings for the welfare of the *Syiem* clan, the different clans of the *Bakhraw* and also for the welfare of all his people. He also prays for the good health, prosperity of the race, bountiful harvest, prosperous trade and for well-being of all. The *Syiem* also asks for forgiveness of his shortcomings and that of his people. Then he also prays to God to free them from diseases, wars and other dangers in the society, and for the well-being and general prosperity of

all.¹⁴⁰ After the prayer of the elder *Syiem*, another elderly man from any clan of the *Bakhrav*, also prays to God. After the prayers are over, the *Dhulia* beat their drums and enter the *shlur*, they bow the holy pillar and the elder *Syiem*, then they perform a dance known as *ka Shad tyngkoh*, in which two by two of the *Bakhrav* dance. After this dance, the people can dance the whole night and the festival also comes to an end.

The Nongkrem dance is held in the dancing ground in front of the *Ingsad*. In a group dance, women are confined to the inner dancing court, the female dance consists of the crawling of the toes and with their eyes casting downwards, they should not look this way or that way. This signifies the modesty, humility and purity of women, the qualities that they should possess, The whole body of a female dancer is balanced and the hands remain straight and do not move. The male dance is more lively, they hold a *symphiah* a sort of fly flab or a whisk in their hands and they move with footsteps forward and backward to the accompaniment of the beating of the drums and the playing of the pipes by the musicians. In another dance known as *ka Shad wait* or sword dance, the male dancers hold the swords.

Musical Instruments

In the *Shad Nongkrem*, the *Dhulia* have ten different kinds of drums and twenty seven tunes.¹⁴¹ These are known as *ki ksing pomblang* or *ki ksing niam*, meaning the religious drums. There are (1) *ka 'sing Blei*, (2) *ka 'sing mastieh*, (3) *ka sing krop*, (4) *ka ksing lynti*, (5) *ka ksing kynthei*, (6) *ka 'sing kher*, (7) *ka 'sing surmaw*, (8) *ka'sing song*, (9) *ka'sing shangkieh*, (10) *ka'sing mastieh*. Besides the drums, the *Dhulia* also play their piping instruments and cymbals.

Dress and Ornaments

The dancing dress and costumes, of both men and women are very costly. Only the rich can possess the full and complete dancing dresses, which consist of expensive silk clothes, gold and silver ornaments and jewelleryes. The dancing costumes of both men and women¹⁴² are given here. The women's dancing dress consists of (1) a *mukmor sopti kti*, which is a long sleeve blouse of costly velvet cloth, to cover the hands. A red, maroon, blue or green velvet cloth is preferred, (2) *ka jainpien* is a piece of cloth tied round the waist and form a sort of loongi, whose lower end is visible, the upper end is covered with the *jainsem*, it may be of any colour, (3) *ka jainsemnara* or *dhara* is a costly and valuable silk material, which is the traditional dress of the Khasi. During dancing, the *Jainsem* is tied only at one end of the left shoulder and reaches down below the knee. The *jainsem dhara* is of many colours, but for dancing purposes, a yellow *dhara* known as *ka nara shad* is used by women, (4) *ka*

pansngiat is a sort of a crown which is made either of pure gold or silver, which the female dancers put on their heads, with an artificial flower known as *u'tiew lasubon* that is attached upwards at the back of the crown. The real flower *u'tiew lasubon* is very difficult to get, it is a beautiful flower and has a sweet odour, this flower is compared to the beauty, purity, simplicity and modesty of a girl, (5) *Lyngkyrneng ksiar* are ear ornaments, *kynjri wahdong ksiar* are round earrings of pure gold-which are like chains, *ki khaila ksiar* are earrings without pendants, that the women wear in their earlobes, (6) *u shan ryndang*, is a kind of necklace of gold, tightened and fixed at the neck, (7) *ki syngkha bad khadu* are bracelets made of gold which are heavy and thick, (8) *ki tad ki mahu* are bracelets made of gold and silver, *ki tad* are bracelets worn on the arms, *ki mahu* are worn just below the elbow, (9) *Syngkha shrong bad khadu ksiar* are bracelets made of gold, (10) *kynjri ksiar* are chains made of gold and of different length, a female dancer wears two or three gold chains, (11) *u karopad* are coral beads of reddish colour but half of them being modelled in pure gold, (12) *sati ksiar* are gold rings which they wear in their fingers, (13) *u saikhyllong* is a head ornament, (14) *ka rumar rusom* is a silk handkerchief, which the women hold in one of their hands.

The male dancers' attire consists of (1) *ka jainspong*, a turban of red and yellow colour made of pure silk, sometimes a *dhara* is also used as a turban, (2) a sleeveless coat which they wear in their body, (3) *ka boh khor* or *khaila*, is a dhoti made of silk with multifarious colour or a plain silk *dhoti* for *boh khaila*, sometimes a *dhara* or *muka jainsem* is used as a dhoti, (4) *u kynjri tabah* is a kind of chain made of silver, which the men wear across the shoulders, (5) *u kynjri syngkai*, a silver waist belt for men, (6) *ki'siar shynrang* which they wear in their ears and could be distinguished from the '*siar kynthei* (7) *Paila sohpieng ksiar* are gold and coral bead necklaces, the coral beads are of red colour, the gold is made into plain round balls, and a coral bead is placed between two gold balls. These necklaces are commonly worn by both the male and female dancers, (8) a long sleeve shirt generally of white colour, (9) *ka Waitlam*, or the sword which they hold on their hands, (10) *u panpoh bad sop waitlam* which is a sword belt and scabbard in pure or plated of silver on which the sword is hung, (11) *ka ryngkap* or quiver in which the arrows are kept, (12) *ka stieh* or a shield, (13) *a laputa*, is a band of birds' feathers, which the male dancers put over their hands while dancing. In a group dance, a man holds a sword in one hand and a *symphiah* in another, but in one particular dance, known as *ka Mastieh*, the shield substitutes the *symphiah*.

(8) ka Shad Suk Mynsiem

The *Shad Suk Mynsiem* or *Shad Weiking* is a thanks-giving dance to God the Creator for all His blessings in the year that had passed and to invoke

His blessings for the coming year, for a bountiful harvest, well-being of all and for general prosperity. This dance is held every year in the month of April after the harvesting work is over, and the sowing work for the new year is done. In the *Shad Suk Mynsiem*, the female dancers should be unmarried, whereas men both married and unmarried can participate in the dance. Women are held in high respect and regard in the Khasi society. They are the keepers of the house and the propagators of the race. The Khasi female dancers dance in the inner circle of the dancing arena, moving their barefeet gracefully forward and backward with their eyes casting downward. The men dance in the outer circle of the women, this shows that the men are the protectors of the family, clan and the race. The men's dance is more lively and enthusiastic, the women dance looking downwards which shows their purity and simplicity. The women have to move their feet in conformity with the beating of the drums and playing of the pipes. The female dancers would not lift their eyes for fear of being branded a coquette, a reputation that a sensible girl would not like to be associated with.¹⁴³ Some people say that the female dance is lifeless, and that there is no difference in the female dance from the beginning to an end. The only attraction is the display of gold, jewellery and gorgeous dresses. To judge the female dance, only those who know the dance and the beating of the drums could do so. Occasionally, when the dancers get tired, they leave the dancing arena and go to the place where their relatives are sitting and waiting in the dancing field, to have their faces wiped and to take rest for sometimes. This helps the people to know and recognise to which clan or family the dancers belong, and if there is any proposal for marriage they can know the clan. A man who falls in love with any dancer could know to which clan, she belongs, whether they are within the permissible kinship to avoid *ka shong sang* or marriage within the same clan.

The drummers used to beat different tunes with their drums. The people in general cannot understand these tunes, but in reality, each has a meaning and precious advice to the society. The beating of *ka ksing padiah* is an advice given to the children, brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, that they should be faithful in all their works for self-sufficiency. The beating and tune of *ka'sing dum dum* means that the uncles and fathers in their own family, show their nieces and nephews and children that they should walk in the right path, in speech and manners, at home and outside among the maternal and paternal relations. The beating and tune of *ka 'sing nalai*, means that the dancers will exhibit their talents in their dances which would be in a befitting manner with their dresses and their talents. The beating and tuning of *ka 'sing klang* is very fast, this shows activeness and smartness, this is a lesson to be taught to the children to be smart and active in their works to free themselves from hunger and that they should fulfill their duties properly here on earth. The beating of *ka'sing pyllun* shows that the women and children are under the

inspiration, care and protection of the uncles, brothers and menfolk, and the womenfolk, can sleep and work in peace without any fear or harm.¹⁴⁴

Stages of the Festival

The *Shad Suk Mynsiem* or Shad Weiking is held for three days. In 1984 it was held from the 14th to 16th April.¹⁴⁵ The dance has no religious sacrifices and ceremonies. Only some prayers are said to thank God for all His blessings that He has showered upon the people in the year that had passed and to ask for many more blessings for the year to come. This is a social gathering, a kind of collective activity, to bring in the spirit of love, brotherhood, unity and solidarity among the people, and that the people from the different corners could show their collective feeling, and peace of mind. This dance brings the people closer together and brings in the spirit of oneness and integrity among the people. The *Shad Suk Mynsiem* has no connection with the *Shad Nongkrem* which is the state religious ceremony of the Khyrim Syiemship. It is a dance of a joy and happy heart, a dance of merriment and gratitude to God the Creator. For this reason it is known as the Thanksgiving Dance. The dancing costumes of the male and female dancers are the same as those in the Nongkrem Dance. The dancing costumes, gold and silver ornaments are very costly, only the rich can afford to have the dancing costumes. Those who do not have their own dresses, use to borrow from those who have them only for the dancing occasion.

The First Day

The dance begins in the afternoon of the first day, the function starts with a prayer, by one of the elders of the Seng Khasi in front of the Seng Khasi Hall. In this prayer, God is invoked for His blessings for prosperity and well-being of the land and its people and for the preservation of the Khasi heritage. After the prayer, they all bow three times, and all the people who have gathered there pray together. After this all shout three times and the male dancers put their swords and *symphiah* up and down. After that, the drummers and pipers, the male and female dancers in their dancing costumes, the leading men of the Seng Khasi proceed to the Weiking field. On reaching there, the Seng Khasi flag is hoisted and the dancers perform the first dance known as *ka Shad noh kjat* or the inaugural dance to the accompaniment of the music played by the *Dhulia*. At the Weiking field, a separate raised platform is constructed for the musicians. Some chairs are also kept in a covered enclosure for the guests and members of the Seng Khasi. Thousands of people witness this dance, there are snack shops and tea stalls, for the convenience of the people. In the evening, the dancers, musicians, members of the Seng Khasi and all the people return to

the Seng Khasi Hall. The male dancers perform *ka Shad Wait* or sword dance on the way. When they reach the Seng Khasi Hall, they perform *ka Shad Mastieh*. The first day comes to an end with a meeting of the members of the Seng Khasi.

The Second Day

The second day also starts in the afternoon, with a prayer by one of the elders of the Seng Khasi. Then the dancers along with the drummers and pipers leave for the Weiking field. In the evening, they come back to the Seng Khasi Hall. The male dancers perform *ka Shad Wait* on their way as on the first day. When they reach the Seng Khasi Hall, they perform another dance known as *ka Shad Mastieh*. The second day also comes to an end with a meeting of the members of the Seng Khasi.

The Third Day

The third day is the final day of the dance and it is a grand day. Dancers from many parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills come and take part in this dance. Invitees and people in their best and colourful dresses come to the Weiking field, to witness this traditional dance, irrespective of community and creed. The dance continues the whole day and comes to an end in the evening with an unfurling of the Seng Khasi flag. Then the *Dhulia*, the male and female dancers and the members of the Seng Khasi go back to the Seng Khasi Hall. The male dancers perform *ka Shad Mastieh* in front of the hall as in the previous days. The day comes to an end with the meeting of the members of the Seng Khasi.

Ka Shad Wait and Ka Shad Mastieh

Ka Shad Wait or sword dance is a male dance, it is a typical warrior dance where a male dancer holds a sword in one hand and a shield in another as if they are assaulting, thrusting and fighting. *Ka Shad Mastieh* is another dance by the male dancers which exhibits a type of an old war dance. In this dance, the dancers hold a sword and a *symphiah*, and stepping backward and forward, bow their heads and drop down their swords and *symphiah* and then recede, this process is repeated several times. The dancers in groups face each other charging forward and receding in the above style.¹⁴⁶

In the male dancing apparel, the most important is the sword, the silver quiver and arrows. This brings the memories of their forefathers who laid down their lives to guard and protect the honour, purity and chastity of their

womenfolk whose status is very highly respected in the Khasi society,¹⁴⁷ and also to protect their land from the enemies. This dance is also held in some other villages, after the sowing season. The hearts of the people are filled with joy and happiness, when this occasion comes, and the parents are proud to see their sons and daughters in the dancing arena once a year. *Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem* is a unique dance, it has no influence of any other outside culture, the style, movement and rhythm of the dance has its own distinct beauty. The dance has a special significance. It brings together all the people of this State to enjoy and experience a collective sense of comradeship and peace, and also to express gratitude to God for the future.¹⁴⁸

The Shad Suk Mynsiem is a dance which has no religious rituals, it is a dance of a happy or peaceful heart, it is a thanksgiving dance, to show the people's gratitude to God for all the blessings that He has showered upon them in the old year that had passed and to invoke His blessings for the new year.

The musical instruments which are used, are the same as in the Nongkrem Dance. The instruments include drums, pipes and cymbals. The men and women dancing dresses are the same as those of the Nongkrem Dance.

The rituals, music, dresses, form and contents are different for different festivals. In each case, they have their own beauty and meanings. As regard the character of the festivals, the survey does establish that there are some festivals which are associated with religious rituals, where as there are some which are plainly secular. One hypothesis is that, a festival started at a given point of time, in Khasi or tribal history and it represents the nature of social development in that point of time. As the society grew and developed, changes were inducted in the forms and contents of the festivals, although the meanings must have remained the same. Changes in the details and contents are because of the changing attitude of the people, their taste, likings and dislikings.

Footnotes

1. M. Belbin Kyndiah, "The Jaintia Laho Dance" in *Seinraij Seinlang Souvenir Magazine* 1983-84, p. 38.
2. D.T. Laloo, "Ki Jingshad Khasi-Ki Jingshad ha Jaintia Hills" in *U Kritik*. Vol. , VII, No. 14, April 2nd, 1987.
3. Discussion with Shri D.T. Laloo, an eminent author in Khasi.
4. Belbin Kyndiah, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.
8. Discussion with Shri O.P. Lytand, Secretary, Seinraij.

9. M. Belbin Kyndiah, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.
10. Discussion with Shri L.G. Shullai, an eminent author and member of Khasi Authors Society.
11. We are thankful to Shri Chui Lyngdoh, Deng Lyngdoh and Hatdoh Pohsnem of Nongtalang village, all are knowledgeable persons on the festival for the discussion we had on this festival.
12. L. S. Gassah, "Village Administration in Jaintia Hills—A Comparative Study of Two Villages" in the *Journal of NEICSSR*, Vol. IV, No. I, April, 1980.
13. Discussion with Shri J.D. Pohrmen of Nongtalang Village, who was also an MLA and MDC of War Jaintia at the time.
14. L. S. Gassah, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.
15. Discussion with Shri Chui Lyngdoh, Deng Lyngdoh and Hatdoh Pohsnem of Nongtalang village.
16. L.S. Gassah, *op. cit.* p. 13.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
18. Discussion with Shri H. Pohsnem of Nongtalang Village.
19. Discussion with Shri K. Myrchiang a participant in the festival.
20. L. S. Gassah, "A Note on Few Festivals of the War Jaintias" in the *Journal of NEICSSR*, Vol. 7, No.2, October, 1983.
21. We are thankful to Shri D. Pohlong, a school teacher of Nongtalang village, for this information.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Information given by Shri S. Paduna of Nongtalang Village, a knowledgeable person on this festival.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Discussion with K. Myrchiang.
26. Discussion with Shri C. Lyngdoh, D. Lyngdoh and H. Pohsnem.
27. We are thankful to Shri S. Min Pohrmen who is from Nongtalang Village, for this information.
28. Discussion with Shri C. Lyngdoh, Deng Lyngdoh and H. Pohsnem.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Researcher's own observations.
31. L.S. Gassah, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-24.
32. Discussion with Shri Hatdoh Pohsnem and other knowledgeable persons.
33. L.S. Gassah, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
34. R.T. Rymbai, "The Festivals of a Khasi and their Influence on his Life", in *Khasi Heritage*, p. 128.
35. S. S. Laloo, Ka Behdeinkhlam, p. 19.
36. R.T. Rymbai, "Behdeinkhlam" in *Khasi Heritage*, p. 140.
37. S.S. Laloo, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-21.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-25.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-40.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.
42. H.L. Deb Roy, *A Tribe in Transition, the Jaintias of Meghalaya*, p. 171.
43. R.T. Rymbai, "Behdeinkhlam", *op. cit.*, p. 141.

44. Major A. Playfair, *The Garos*, p. 81.
45. S.S. Laloo, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
46. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, p. 331.
47. R.T. Rymbai, "Ka Behdeinkhlam", *op. cit.*, p. 143.
48. S.S. Laloo, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
49. H.W. Sten, "Ka Behdeinkhlam Festival of the Jaintias" in *North Eastern Spectrum*, Vol. I, p. 57.
50. S.S. Laloo, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117.
51. *Ibid.*
52. H. L. Deb Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
53. P.R.T. Gurdon, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
54. W. W. Hunter, *The Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol. II, p. 208.
55. H.L. Deb Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 196.
56. S.S. Laloo, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
58. H. W. Sten, *op. cit.*, pp. 57.58.
59. S.S. Laloo, *op. cit.*, p. 237.
60. H. W. Sten, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
61. R.T. Rymbai, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
62. O. Lamare, *Ka Lukhmi*, p. 5.
63. Discussion with Shri Her Dkhar, ex-headman, Mawbri.
64. We are thankful to Shri Ceril Mashli, a school teacher and he belongs to the Thadnangiaiw village, a knowledgeable person on the festival, for this information.
65. *Ibid.*
66. We are thankful to Shri Klan Lyngdoh, Lyngdoh of Iapngar, Shri Tishon Rymbai, Basan of the Raid and Shri C. Mashli for the discussion we had on this festival.
67. O. Lamare, *op. cit.*, p. 4 and also our discussion with Shri Ceril Mashli.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
69. Our discussion with Rev. Father Sngi Lyngdoh, a knowledgeable person.
70. Discussion with Shri Tishon Rymbai, Basan of Raid Iapnagar.
71. Discussion with Shri Klan Lyngdoh, who is the religious priest of the Raid Iapngar.
72. Discussion with Shri Klan Lyngdoh, and Tishon Rymbai of Iapngar.
73. P. R.T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, p. 103.
74. N. C. Shadap Sen, *The Origin and Early History of the Khasi-Syntreng People*, p. 217.
75. O. Lamare, *op. cit.*, p. 16
76. Discussion with Shri Tishon Rymbai.
77. *Ibid.*
78. O. Lamare, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-52.
79. *Ibid.*
80. Discussion with Shri Klan Lyngdoh, religious priest of Raid Iapngar.
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82. Fabian Lyngdoh, "Ka Lehniam Lukhmi" in *Dongmusa*, dated 18th August 1988.
83. Discussion with Shri Hari Maring, Secretary Raid.
84. *Ibid.*
85. D.T. Laloo, *Ka Sajer (Raid Nonglyngdoh) Bynta I*, p. 30.

86. Discussion with Shri Hari Maring, a knowledgeable person on the festival.
87. Discussion with Shri D.T. Laloo.
88. Discussion with Shri Hari Maring and ka Slong Makri.
89. *Ibid.*
90. D. T. Laloo, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
91. D.T. Laloo, *op. cit.*, Bynta II, pp. 2-3.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
94. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-33; also our discussion with Shri Hari Maring and other elders of the Raid.
95. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-38.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
98. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73; also our discussion with some people from the Raid.
99. D. T. Laloo, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-78.
100. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.
101. O.S. Lamare, *Ka Lukhmi*, p. 76.
102. Discussion with Shri D.T. Laloo.
103. Discussion with Shri Ceril Mashli.
104. *Ibid.*
105. O. S. Lamare, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
107. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.
108. Discussion with Shri D.T. Laloo.
109. O. S. Lamare, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
110. *Ibid.*
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112. We are thankful to Shri Pilat Shadap, a knowledgeable person on this festival, for this information.
113. O.S. Lamare, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
114. *Ibid.*
115. Our discussion with some people from the Bhoi area.
116. Discussion with Shri D.T. Laloo.
117. Information given by Shri D.T. Laloo.
118. *Ibid.*
119. R. S. Lyngdoh, *Investiture Ceremony of Dr. Balajied Singh Syiem, A Syiem of Hima Khyrim*, 26th August 1978, p. 23.
120. R.S. Lyngdoh, "Ka Dorbar Sla ha ka Pomblang Syiem", in *U. Kritik*, Vol. II, No. 43, p. 1.
121. Maham Singh, "Nongkrem Festival" in *Khasi Heritage*. p. 147.
122. H. Lyngdoh, *Ki Syiem Khasi bad Synteng*. pp. 103-105.
123. H. Lyngdoh, *Ka Pomblang Nongkrem bad ka Thang Syiem Sohra*, pp. 1-2.
124. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
125. R.S. Lyngdoh, "Ka Dorbar Sla ha ka Pomblang Syiem", *op. cit.*, p. 8
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127. Sohblei Sngi Lyngdoh, *Ka Pomblang Shisien Shi Snem Jong ka Hima Shyllong*, pp. 11-12.
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130. H. Lyngdoh, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-10.
131. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
132. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
133. Sohblei Sngi Lyngdoh, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.
134. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
135. H. Lyngdoh, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
136. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
137. Information given by Shri B. Kharkongor.
138. H. Lyngdoh, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-26.
139. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
140. Sohblei Sngi Lyngdoh, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.
141. H. Lyngdoh, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.
142. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20; also H. Bareh: Meghalaya, pp. 81-82 and I. M. Simon, "Notes on Dress and Ornaments among the Khasi and Jaintia people", *State Museum*, Inaugural Issue, pp. 45-46 and the researcher's own observations.
143. R.T. Rymbai, "The Festivals of a Khasi and their Influence on his Life", in *Khasi Heritage*, p. 25.
144. We are thankful to Smt. Mira Kharshiing, a member of the Seng Khasi, for this Information.
145. Observation of the researcher.
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147. A.S. Khongphai, "Shad Suk, Mynsiem" (thanksgiving dance) in *Khasi Heritage*, p. 137.
148. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *Tribalism in India*, p. 157.

Chapter VI

The Festivals in Tribal Life

A Comparative Study

While discussing the Khasi festivals in the preceding chapters, we have observed an important fact, that the festivals are essentially linked with the way of life of the people and the environment that they do live in. The philosophy of life, the attitude, the likings and dislikings of the people are reflected in the theme and contents of the festivals which contribute towards the corporate communal functioning of the tribal society. This fact is noticeable not only in the Khasi case, but also for all the tribal communities. We would like to elaborate this point by reference to select festivals of some of the tribals communities of North East India like the Garos of Meghalaya, the Mizos of Mizoram, the Angami Nagas of Nagaland, some tribes of Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh, and then compare these with the relevant Khasi festivals that we have already discussed.

The North Eastern Region comprises of seven states, namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The region has diverse people, with different cultures, speaking different languages and professing different faiths. The region may be regarded as the epitome of India. It is a land where streams of people from Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman and Mongoloid stock have met and mingled with the aboriginals in common conditions. In the composition of its population, there are the Austric or the Austro-Asiatic elements, the Dravidian elements, the Indo-Aryan and the Indo-Mongoloid elements.¹

The various tribes of the region have their own distinct history, cultures, traditions, customs and beliefs. Their way of life is one of direct responses determined by the environment and their beliefs which spring from fertile imagination. The various myths and legends are the result of the natural reaction of the tribes to their environment. The tribals are strictly agricultural people, tied to their immediate environment which affords opportunity for cultivation. The

social system which functions at all levels are essentially democratic in nature.²

The tribes of the region are to a great extent free from many of the social evils of the larger Indian society. They have no caste system and the evil of untouchability or social inequality. They also do not have the dowry system. Their womenfolk enjoy equal status with men, and both men and women share the burden of life equally. However, the tribals are changing very fast since their contact with the outside world and the forces of modernity like education, communication, urbanization and other factors. Like their counterparts in other parts of the country, women of the region have areas of common concern like illiteracy, dropouts, unemployment, health care and other social issues.

The Garos

The Garos belong ethnically and linguistically to the great Bodo family, which at one time occupied a large part of the valley of the Brahmaputra and they were probably driven from the plains into the hills by early Hindu settlers from Bengal. They are a section of the Tibeto-Burman race of the Tibeto-Chinese family, whose cradle is said to have been the north western China between the upper waters of Yangtsekiang and Ho-ang-ho.³

The Garos are mainly agriculturists, Jhum cultivation is their principal occupation, and they naturally attach much importance to the worship of the presiding deities over different seasons of jhum cultivation. These occasions are observed with due solemnity. To the Garos, observance of these occasions or worship of the deities are regarded as essential for prosperous and luxurious growth and good harvest of their jhum crops. Thus, they coordinate the agricultural activities of the people, marking out significant stages in the annual cycle, providing also at the same time, occasions for the most joyous celebrations of the year. The festivals of the Garos consists of two parts, namely, religious and social. The religious functions of the festivals are first completed, it consists of the worship of the various deities and the spirits having special relations respectively with the individual and the village. Then the social side of the festival begins, which consists of feasts, music and dancing.⁴

The following are the annual socio-religious festivals, which are celebrated by the Garos :

(i) O' Pata Ceremony

The annual cycle of the socio-religious ceremonies and festivals begins with the *O' pata* ceremony literally meaning to clear a little. Before a man decides to clear and cultivate a plot of land, he consults the omen. A small portion of a plot of land in one corner is cleared after which he consults the deity by chanting rituals, then he goes home. At night when he sleeps, if he

dreams a bad or unlucky dream, he abandons the land and looks for another plot of land where the omen is more favourable. This ceremony is performed by every individual, but no festivities are held.⁵

(ii) Den 'bilsia Festival

Den 'bilsia festival marks the completion of clearing of the new jhum field. It is celebrated sometimes in January or early February, as soon as the clearing of the jungles is over. The concerned deity is invoked to bless the new field. It is held in the house of the Nokma and lasts for one day. An altar is built by the villagers, and at about midday, the Nokma sacrifices a goat at the altar invoking the help of the deities for the luxuriant growth of the crops. In the afternoon, a community feast follows, after which the men beat the gongs and some of them dance with the sword inside the Nokma's house. Sometimes and in some places, eating, drinking and dancing continue till late at night.⁶

(iii) Asiroka

Asiroka festival is celebrated in connection with the planting of rice and other crops in the old jhum field. Literally, it means the clearing of the ground and it is celebrated after the clearing of the jungle in the old fields. The festival is performed in order to start the planting of crops invoking the aid of deities for bringing rain and sunshine in proper time. The festival begins with the slaughter of a cow purchased jointly by all the villagers and the distribution of its meat. This is followed by a sacrifice offered by the Nokma of the village. The next day is a day of rest and no one is allowed to go to the fields. The main ceremony begins on the next day, when each person sacrifices an egg and the richer people sacrifices a fowl or a pig and call upon *Saljong*, the Sun-god, to witness the sacrifice and bless the planting of rice and other crops. Poor people, who cannot afford to perform their sacrifices, however, attend the sacrifices offered by the rich people and join them in their dinner. The following day is again the day of rest after which all the people of the village attend to their work in the old fields and start planting of rice and other crops. During this festival, a dance is also performed by unmarried young men and women.⁷

(iv) Agalmaka

Agalmaka literally meaning the clearing of the unburnt materials after the felled jungles have been burnt down. This ceremony is performed just after the burning of the new fields. It is also performed in order to invoke the help of the deity to bless the new jhum fields. Every family performs this ceremony individually in their own fields. In the morning, each family sacrifices an egg and the Nokma sacrifices a fowl for the luxurious growth of the jhum crops.

completed, everyone returns to the village and in the afternoon all of them drink and feast in the house of the Nokma. During the day they eat and drink in every house they visit, while the younger folks visit them at night. Everyone of them eat, drinks and dances continuously for several days and nights.⁸

(v) Mi Amua

'Mi' means rice and 'amua' means sacrifice. This ceremony is performed so as to ensure good harvest. It is usually performed by the end of June or early July, when rice in the field has grown tall. The Nokma sacrifices a big pig in his own field invoking God's blessings upon the crops and the villagers gather there to help him prepare and share the feast. In the afternoon, they return to the Nokma's house in the village and play music with gong, flute and buffalo horns, but they do not dance, the ceremony lasts for one day only.⁹

(vi) Rongchu Gala or Ginde Gala

The thanksgiving offering ceremony of the first fruits to the gods is called *Rongchu gala* or *Ginde gala*. They believe that before any of the crops is harvested, it is necessary to offer the first fruits to the gods and hence this festival. *Rongchu* is a flattened rice, '*ginde*' is a powdered rice and '*gala*' means to throw away. The offerings consist of flattened rice or powdered rice prepared from new paddy or millet, and the Nokma offers them on the banana leaves, at the spots prepared for the purpose. Other articles of offerings are lime, fruits, and sugarcane which are cut into pieces, which are sprinkled with rice beer. This is followed by eating, drinking and playing of gongs at every house of the village, but they do not dance. Rice and dried fish are considered proper food during this festival.¹⁰

(vii) Ahaia

Ahaia ceremony is performed in order to thank their gods for the harvests. On this occasion, the young folk shout in a peculiar way called *Ahaia*. This ceremony is held in September after the harvest of rice has been completed. Every household cooks fish, dried fish, crab or fowl and offer them to the gods. After the sacrifices and rituals are over, they make rounds of the village, eating, drinking, playing music and dancing at every house of the village. This kind of amusement continues for many days. During this festival, they can dance, but they cannot do so at the earlier festivals because it is improper to beat the drums while the rice is growing and without drums, dancing is not possible.¹¹

(viii) Wangala

The *Wangala* is the most important of all the festivals of the Garos. It is celebrated with due solemnity and it is performed in connection with the jhum cultivation. *Wangala* literally meaning post harvest festal ceremony of hearty sent off.¹² Before the celebration of this festival, the village Nokma or chief fixes the date for holding the same. It usually takes place in the the period of the year from the second week of October to the second week of November.¹³

The *Wangala* festival is celebrated with great pomp and grandeur after the harvesting work is over. This festival is observed to honour and offer sacrifices to their greatest God called *Saljong* or the Sun god and to ask for his blessings for the future. The history of the origin of the *Wangala* seems to go back far into the mist of time, further than human memory,¹⁴ the *Wangala* is a very ancient festival of the Garos.

The *Wangala* festival is celebrated in the same season as the Pujas, which are celebrated by the neighbouring Bengali and Assamese Hindus. The Garos are aware of the parallel and sometimes even refer to their own celebrations as the 'Garó Puja' but it does not mean that the Garos are worshipping the same god.¹⁵

A day is fixed by the village Nokma, well ahead of the festival, so that the people could make their elaborate preparations. The best cows are purchased from the market, to provide meat for the feast. The people buy new clothes, ornaments and other necessities and they repair their houses to accommodate guests and visitors. On the preceding day of the festival, the village is busy with the slaughter of cows, and in the distribution of its meat. The villages are cleaned, the village paths are cleaned and repaired. Liquor plays a very important part in *Wangala*, each of the families of the village prepare as much rice beer as it is possible.¹⁶

The performance of *Wangala* is helped by the joint cooperative effort of individual householders of the performing village and the festivities and dances and fostered up by the organised efforts of unmarried young men, who are inmates of the village *Nokpante* or bachelor's house, and also helped by the womenfolk of the village.¹¹ The festival begins in the evening in the bachelor's house where the young men act as hosts to all the villagers. Rice beer, rice and beef curry are served by the bachelors to the whole crowd. This is followed first by a few dances which are only the preliminary of what is to come on the following day. Rice and dried fish are considered proper food during this festival.¹⁸

The actual festival begins on the next day with the '*Chu Rugala*' ceremony (Chu - liquor, and Rugala - pour out). But before the actual pouring out of liquor ceremony is performed, worship of the various deities and spirits are made first in the house of the Nokma, then in the house of other villagers.¹⁹

When the worship of these spirits is over in the house of the Nokma,

and actual '*Chu Rugala*' or pouring out of liquor ceremony begins. With the beating of the drums and gongs and playing of musical instruments, liquor is poured out on all the places where worship has been made. The Nokma then brings a pot of liquor prepared for the occasion and offers a glass of it to the priest. After he has drunk, all persons of the village are allowed to drink, and the entire quantity of drink required is supplied by the Nokma. After this, the priest wearing his traditional dress first dances round the fireplace inside the house of the Nokma, and after him, the Nokma dresses himself in the same fashion and dances, then all the villagers are allowed to dance till a late hour at night. After the dance, a ceremony known as *wanchi* is performed. It begins with paddy being pounded, and a quantity of water being mixed with it. This white liquor is then distributed to all those present in the house of the Nokma. The women then dress themselves in their best attire and dance for the first time in the house of the Nokma. Then the priest takes all persons of the village to this house to worship the three spirits namely, *Rongdik Do'tata*, *Pakmana Do'tata* and *Krong Do'tata*. These three spirits are worshipped and three hens are sacrificed to them in the same manner as described above, after which dancing follows. The '*Wandhi*' ceremony is then performed and after that the women dance there. After finishing the worship in his house, the priest with all the men of the village goes to each house, the priest performs *Rongdik Do'tata* and sacrifices a hen. The *wanchi* ceremony and the dancing follow.

At dawn, the villagers again assemble in the house of the Nokma, and a feast is arranged by him with pig, hen, and rice beer. After the feast, the '*Sasat soa*' ceremony (burning of incense) is performed. First the priest takes a piece of sasat or incense and goes near the Maljuri post where all the jhum products and the agricultural implements are collected and burns the incense with queer incantations. The idea of worshipping the Sasat tree is that according to Garo cosmology, God first made the sasat tree and after it, all other trees were made. Therefore, they annually worship this tree and in each worship sasat forms an important ingredient.²⁰ The burning of the sasat is destined to attract the notice of the God Saljong, who it is hoped, then ensures that the harvests of the following year will be good.²¹

Wangala is one of the many festivals in which group dancing takes place. Both married and unmarried male and female take part in the dances. Group dancing is almost exclusively a night past time and continues till dawn. Group of girls always dance more or less opposed to group of boys, though they pair off now and then temporarily. During this festival, the boys and girls associate far more freely than on ordinary days sitting together during the breaks between dances and passing round rice beer, betelnuts and tobacco.²² This festival is also used as an occasion for selecting brides and bridegrooms. When all the rice beer is exhausted, the celebration comes to an end and the

people are ready to go back to their works of tending the fields that have been neglected for a week. Some may go to another village to get in a few more days of dancing and to their daily activities until the next festival comes around. None of the other ceremonies are as elaborate or protracted as *Wangala*, but they include many of the same elements. Most of them are held during the hot or rainy seasons, rather than during the cold season. It is because most ceremonies have something to do with agricultural cycle, and because plants do not grow in the cold season.²³

According to the old belief of the Garos, Minima Rokhime, the mother goddess of rice, and Miri Saljong Jobepa Rangrupa, the Divinity of light, fertility and fruitfulness in the Garo pantheon, do most for continued survival of mankind. They are the most benevolent divinities, *Wangala* typifies the most solemn post harvest community thanksgiving ceremony, a ceremony of solemn hearty send off and fixing up of time for the next happy reunion with the spiritual mother and spiritual father of human kind. They are believed to be visiting the world at the season of the year.²⁴

The Mizos

The Mizos belong to a Mongoloid stock, they came from the east, and their original home was in Mekong valley, and that they once lived in the Hukawng valley, was further corroborated by many including an old Burmese priest at Mandalay to Mizo historians who had visited that place to trace the history of their origin and migration. According to him, the ancestors of the Mizos came from Shanghai, possibly in the 10th Century. By which route they came and how long they took to reach Hukawng valley in Burma (Myanmar) is now lost in obscurity.²⁵ It is now accepted that the Mizos came to the Mizo hills from the Chin hills of Burma and the area now known as Mizoram was inhabited by the tribes who were driven out to other areas or were later absorbed into Mizo tribes.²⁶

The Mizos are agriculturists, they practise jhum cultivation, they slash down the jungle, burn the trunks and leaves and cultivate the land. All their activities revolve around the jhum operation and their festivals are all connected with such agricultural operations.²⁷ The Mizos have many community festivals which they call *Kut*, each of them is held at a specified time and season of the year. These are *Pawl Kut*, *Chapchar Kut* and *Mim Kut*²⁸ and others.

(i) Chapchar Kut

Chapchar Kut is the spring festival of the Mizos which is celebrated sometimes in March after the jhum operation. In this celebration, the elders and young men and grown up girls take the leading part. Before the ceremony is due, villagers start preparation of rice beer in good quantity and the men folk

go out hunting and fishing for the feast. The traditional dance of the Mizos called *chai* in which men and women take part is performed.²⁹

The word *chapchar* means the time of waiting for the jhum to dry after cutting before burning.³⁰ *Chapchar kut* is the biggest festival of the year. It has little or no concern with agricultural or religious themes. When the festival day comes, each house kills an animal it can afford usually a pig for the feast. In the evening of the second day, all the villagers will gather at a particular place where memorial stones are erected in their festive dress bringing platters of rice, eggs and meat which each and everyone tries to ram down one another's throat in merry treat. Rice beer is given freely. In the evening, young boys and girls gather in an open space in front of the chief's residence for dancing and singing which will last the whole night until dawn as it is a custom to sing and dance the whole night, otherwise it is not allowed to continue for the next day. This special occasion for singing and dancing is called '*chai*' and the songs are known as *Chai Hla*. There are different groups of *Chai Hla*. The duration of *Chapchar kut* depends on the availability of the supply of meat and drinks. As long as these last, they continue the festival.³¹ Usually the festival continues for three to seven days.

(ii) Pawl Kut

The word *Pawl* means hay, this is a festival to be performed at the end of the harvest to celebrate the end of the year and to welcome the new year. It is celebrated during September to January after harvesting work is over. Everyone is presumed to have completed his harvest and gathered his crops. After this festival none can lay claim to any crop left over in the fields. *Pawl Kut* is usually a festival for children, though young men and grown up girls freely take part in it.³² *Pawl Kut* is also a thanksgiving festival held at the end of the harvest every year. It is also a celebration at the end of the year and welcome for the new year. The Mizo year conveniently agrees with the agricultural and seasonal year. Merriment is the essential substance of this festival. Another significant thing in this festival is '*Zulawm*', which is a brand of rice beer called *se*, because it is prepared from grain collected from house to house by a group of boys and girls, with the idea of selling it and dividing the price money among them, or for their own consumption. It is only on this occasion that the juveniles are permitted to drink.³³

(iii) Mim Kut

This festival is usually celebrated during August and September, after the harvest of maize and other crops. *Mim Kut* is celebrated with great fanfare with plenty of rice beer being passed round and singing, dancing and feasting.

This festival is performed when the first crop, other than paddy in the field is reaped. It is originally from the legendary lovers, Tlingi and Ngama, Tlingi died leaving Ngama alone. He felt so lonely that he went to visit the dead men's country to meet his beloved Tlingi, there he found that Tlingi had become so thin that he promised to feed her with the first crop reaped from the field. Three days are given to this festival, during which everyone is expected to be able to make an offering to their dead relatives. *Mim* is a kind of millet and as harvesting of millet precedes that of paddy, it is this crop which is offered to the dead, hence the name *Mim Kut*.³⁴

Mim Kut is a festival for the dead which takes place sometimes in September every year, when the first crop is gathered in. In this festival, vegetable food and rice beer are offered to the departed souls in every house, especially in family where one had died during the year. These offerings are placed on the shelf near the place where water is kept, usually to the right or left of the entrance. The offerings are laid for two to three days during which time, the departed souls are expected to have partaken of the food offered though not in a literal sense. Thus, *Mim Kut* represents perhaps one and the only festival of the Mizos having religious meaning or function. During these days, parents would come together at such houses where there has been death since the last festival and mourn for death.³⁵

The Angami Nagas

The Nagas are one of the Mongolian social groups, generally, they bear the Mongolian features and cultural traits. They have their distinctive tribal names with a number of subnames, about fifty, of which better known are Angami, Chakhesang, Ao, Sema, Rengma, Lotha and others. They are a fine, stalwart, cheerful, humorous and devout people. They love liberty, independence and universal brotherhood.³⁶ The Nagas love dances, music and songs and celebrate many festivals.

Here, we are going to discuss only the festivals of the Angami Nagas. The Angamis observe many festivals, which play an important role in the political, social and economic life of the people. Each festival has certain meaning to them, Some festivals glorify agricultural activities, while others are for preserving community health and other objectives.

The festivals of the Angamis are very ancient. Some of their festivals are participated and celebrated by the whole village, but there are also certain rituals and rites performed by an individual or by a family. There are six major festivals involving different complicated rituals and rites which are celebrated on village level, although these festivals are not celebrated at the same time by all villagers. They are considered major festivals because the whole villages are involved. Each village is unique in its own way. They fix the time and date

of the festivals according to their agricultural works and at their convenience.³⁷

We shall now discuss these festivals one by one :-

(i) Sekrenyi

Sekrenyi falls on the second day after the full moon of the month of *Keno* or of the month of *Kezi*.³⁸ The *Sekrenyi* is the beginning of the Angami Calendar and the rituals involved in this festival amounted to New year celebration. It falls in the month of February and lasted for 10-15 days, it is held before the beginning of the agricultural season. It is a time when moderate climate prevails with not too much rainfall and the people too are physically and mentally relaxed to participate in the festival as the granaries are full and the people are happy.³⁹ The ceremony is to ensure the health of the community during the coming year. This festival begins with *Kezie* rituals which among other things include invocation of the ancestors and recollection of the past. Another part of the *Sekrenyi* festival is the *Thekrahie* or the dancing and singing by the adolescents, this occasion provides the boys and girls with opportunity to understand each other and marriage often resulted from such understanding. The main purpose of the *Sekrenyi* is to purify the people physically and mentally before the agricultural activities would start. The purification programme would particularly include those who had to go out of the village for head hunting missions. In course of such adventures they had to pass through different terrains, come across strange people and experience different air and weather. The rituals also aim at good health for the entire village community in the coming year and to dispell sickness. The washing of clothing and the body and cleaning of the houses, form a special feature of the festive occasion, they buy new utensils and make new clothings for the festival.⁴⁰

(ii) The Gnonyi

Gnonyi festival falls on the third day after the full moon of the month of *Kero* or April and continues for a period of 4 to 5 days. This celebration marks the completion of the sowing of jhum land. ⁴¹ Besides the rituals, the actual beginning of agricultural activity is done by the oldest male member in the village. He later on collects contribution from each house after the harvest which was generally after *Terhuounyi*.⁴²

(iii) Kerunyi

Kerunyi festival falls on the day of the full moon of the month *Chachu* or June and which lasts for 4 days.⁴³ The Angamis employ both jhuming and wet cultivation. The beginning of wet cultivation is marked by this festival *Kerunyi*. An interesting feature of this festival is that everyone in the village would participate by treating themselves with the best food they could afford

to nourish their body for the hard work which is ahead of them.⁴⁴

(iv) Chadanyi

Chadanyi festival is celebrated in the month of August after the recession of rain in the month of July which experiences heavy rain, it lasts for 4 days. This festival is known as 'path clearing'.⁴⁵ The village roads and graves are cleared, no animals or bamboo shoots for pickle may be taken through the village paths, and no one is allowed to speak to anyone of another village.⁴⁶ During this celebration, the people understand community works and programmes like clearing village paths, paddy fields and the village itself. This work is in fact indirectly the nursing of the paddy fields.

(v) Khoupfunyi

During the month of September, harvesting starts, the harvesting work is accompanied by another ritual in which an old lady, if not the oldest female member of the village, known as Liede, will perform the inauguration of harvest. The beginning of the harvest season is again marked by another festival called *Khoupfunyi*, which lasts for 4 to 5 consecutive days. But the festivities as such continues for the entire harvest period which may continue up to November. The end of the harvest season will be marked by a one day celebration of *Kevakete* ritual which is known as thanksgiving and all the female members of the village will participate in the ritual. The *Kevakete* ritual marks the end of the *Khoupfunyi* festival which had been started from the month of September.⁴⁷

(vi) Terhuonyi

Terhuonyi is the concluding festival in the series. *Terhuonyi* 'a feast of merit' falls in the month of December. It last for about 10 to 15 days. This festival is rather an exclusive one and not a mass festival and was usually given by the new emerging wealthy persons. The people to be invited for the feast was at the discretion of the host. Those who had already celebrated this festival were definitely invited and besides these people, members of the clan, relatives and people closely connected with the host are also invited for the feast. After performing this first feast of merit, a new special type of House could be constructed which would signify a special status in the society which he had acquired through the performance of *Sa* or *Thesa*. The first two feasts of merits are followed by the construction of special type of house known as *Nyieso* and *Pfuge*. The third feast is marked by the dragging of a wooden carved piece. The fourth and fifth feasts are marked by stone pulling. This stone is a commemorative symbol of the feast. The expenditure incurred in the feast would be met by the person celebrating this feast of merit but in the

subsequent feasts rice and other foodstuff would be contributed by people participating in the feast. The last or the sixth feast is marked by the digging of a lake in honour of the performer. During these feasts of merits, a rich person who aspires to alleviate his social status would share his wealth to the prosperous members of the community by providing enjoyment and food in abundance. In these big feast, people would indulge in singing dancing and merry making. There would be enough meat, rice, beer, for every person, men, women, and children in the whole village. It is found that most of the people no longer conform to the rituals prescribed for an Angami by the traditional beliefs and practices, although they have not altogether changed their belief. One reason is that they have no one within the family to perform the rituals from womb to womb as a result of Christian conversion. After the Angamis embraced Christianity, there was very few left with the traditional beliefs, which became practically impossible for them to carry out the entire rites and rituals prescribed.⁴⁸

The Tribes of Tripura

Tripura is predominantly a hilly land and most of the people are agriculturists. The majority of the population are Bengali Hindus who are concentrated in the thickly populated plains. There are altogether ten scheduled tribes, which are recognised throughout the State. The major scheduled tribes of Tripura are the Tripuris, Reangs, Mag, Lushai and Kuki. The Tripuris and Reangs are believed to be the earliest inhabitants of the State, others are believed to be later migrants. Numerically, the Tripuris are the largest tribe belonging to the Bodo group of Indo-Mongoloid origin. The Bodos, who are spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley and North Bengal from the main bases of the present day population of the State. The Reangs, the second largest tribe is considered to be of Kuki origin. They originally came from Myanmar (Burma) and entered Tripura through Chittagong hill tracts. The customs, languages and religions of the tribes vary, but the Tripuris, Noatias, Reangs and Jamatias have the same religion, custom and speak the same language.⁴⁹

Most of the tribal people have their own tribal customs and beliefs, but in the broader sense of religion they are the followers of Hinduism. Although the religion of the majority of the tribal people is termed as Hinduism, it is a curious mixture of Hinduism and Animism.⁵⁰

The tribals of Tripura dance and sing when they work or observe some rituals and festivals, they dance and sing not only in joy but also in sorrow.⁵¹ Sacrifices form an important part of their religion, pigs, goats and fowls are used for their sacrifices.

The following are the major festivals which are observed by the tribals

of Tripura:

(i) Kharchi Puja

Kharchi Puja or the worship of the fourteen gods is observed in the month of *Ashar* (June -July), it lasts for seven days. The most important feature of this puja is the sacrifice of thousands of he-goats and pigeons before Chaturdash Devata or 14 gods. It is held in the temple of Chaturdash Devata or the temple of the fourteen gods. On this occasion, a mela or fair is held that attracts thousands of people. Though originally it is a tribal festival, devotees of all classes of people both tribals and non-tribals from every corner of Tripura participate during this festival.⁵²

(ii) Ker Puja

Ker Puja is observed in the month of *Ashar*, fourteen days after the *Kharchi puja*, this puja is held with a view to warding off all dangers. It lasts for two and half days and observed with the greatest secrecy.⁵³ The *Ker puja* is held within the boundary specially marked with previous notice. During the Puja, nobody is allowed to enter or come out of this specified boundary.⁵⁴ The *Ker Puja* is a tribal festival and as such sacrifice of animals is common. It is held with great pomp and honour. A fair is also held which is attended by thousands of people.⁵⁵

(iii) Garia Puja

The tribals of Tripura perform *Garia puja* on the seventh day of the month *Baisakhi* (April). The people believe that this puja brings prosperity and enjoyment for the whole year. Cocks are sacrificed and after the puja, the people start dancing.⁵⁶ *Garia puja* and the dance known as *Garia dance* is very popular among the Tripuris and Reangs. On the occasion of *Garia festival*, men and women dance in a body. The tribal's daily life of Tripura and their culture revolve round jhum cultivation. When the sowing of seeds in a plot of land selected for jhum is over by the middle of April, the Tripuris pray to the god '*Garia*' for a good harvest. The celebration attached to the *Garia puja* continue for seven days, when they seek to entertain their beloved deity with song and dance.⁵⁷

After the *Garia festival* is over, the tribals have a time to rest, awaiting the monsoon. During this period of the year, flocks of charming colourful insects called '*Lebang*' used to visit the hill slopes in search of seeds sown on it. This annual visit of the insects render the tribal youths to indulge in merry making. The menfolk use to make a peculiar rhythmic sound with the help of two bamboo chips in their hand and the womenfolk run tottering the hill slopes to catch hold of these insects. The rhythm of the sound made by the bamboo chips attracts the insects from their hiding places and the women in groups

catch them. With the change of time, jhuming on the hilly slopes is gradually diminishing. But, the cultural life that developed centering round the jhum delved deep into the society. It still exists in the State's hills and dales as a reminiscence of the life which the tribals of today cherish in memory and preserve as treasure.⁵⁸

The Reangs of Tripura dance at the time or observing post funeral rituals. They are very fond of music and dance, which have become part of their daily life. There is a particular dance of the Reangs where the women stand on an earthen pitcher with a bottle on the head, and a lighted lamp on it. The movement of the hands or even the upper part of the body are somewhat restricted, whereas the movement being from their waist down to their feet create a wonderful wave. This dance is very beautiful to look at.⁵⁹

(iv) The Ganga Puja

Another remarkable tribal festival is *Ganga Puja*. This puja is held in March-April. To perform this puja, the people build a temple with bamboos just in the middle of the river. This puja is performed to save them from any epidemic disease.⁶⁰

Besides the above festivals, another important festival of Tripura is the new year festival which is observed on the last day of Chaitra in order to welcome the new year. In this festival, there is little religious devotion.

In the month of Aswin, at the beginning of the harvest season, a festival called *mikatal* (from *mi* which means paddy and *katal* means new) is observed by the tribes of Tripura. Its main object is to invoke the deities to bless the land with abundant rice crops.

In the month of *Agrahayan*, when the winter paddy is being cut and gathered, a festival is held in honour of the new wine made from species of paddy called *manui*, which is the most favourite drink of the hill people of Tripura. During this festival, new rice is eaten and also offered upto the deities. Goats, fowls and pigs are killed for the entertainment of guests, and much wine is drunk.

Paus Sankranti mela of Tirtha Mukh in Amarpur subdivision attracts devotees even from distant parts of Tripura. Thousands of people both tribal and non-tribal assemble every year on the occasion of the *Uttarayan Sankranti* at this place for a holy dip in the small lake which is the source of the river Gumti and is known as *Tirtha mukh*. There are still other fairs and festivals which are celebrated both by tribals and non-tribals in Tripura.⁶¹

The Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh, previously known as NEFA, was a land sarcastically called 'AARU-NAA-Chal' meaning do not move further due to its

slow progress and backwardness in cultural, social and political life. But, gradually this north eastern part of our country has become 'Arunachal', after the great *Aruna* or *Danyi* adding filip to the normal and traditional aspiration of the people. No where else in India, has there been such a conglomeration of different tribes as in this province and nowhere in India have the people lived in such harmony.⁶²

There are a number of tribes and subtribes in Arunachal. The inhabitants of the extreme northern and western regions, have had an age long economic and social contacts with Tibet and Bhutan, so that their languages, religion, dress and social habits have strong Tibetan affinities. The extreme eastern region on the other hand have been subjected to influence from Burma and there are number of small settlements of people of Burmese origin known as Khaptis and Phakials, who have maintained their identity as Buddhist communities in their adopted home land. The inhabitants of the southern fringe of Arunachal, particularly the villages along the plains and lower hills, have had traditional economic and social contacts with the Assamese and have also some knowledge of the Assamese language, the main bulk of the inhabitants in the interior hills, until recently, had little contact with the outside world. Of Mongoloid stock, they speak their own languages which are mainly of the Tibeto-Burma family.⁶³

All the tribal communities of Arunachal observe their traditional festivals with colourful folk dances and music which to them is something more than recreation. Some of the popular festivals are *Losser* of the Monpas, *Ojiyele* of the Wanchos, *Solung* and *Mopin* of the Adis, *Loku* of the Noctes, *Reh* of the Idu Mishmis, *Nyokum* of the Nishis, *Tamladu* of the Taraon and Kannan Mishmis, *Mol* of the Tangsas, *Khan* of the Mijis, *Si Donyi* of the Tagins and others.⁶⁴

Here, we are going to discuss only some of these festivals which include *Ojiyele* of the Wanchos and the *Loku* and *Chalo* of the Noctes.

(1) Ojiyele of the Wanchos

The Wanchos live in Tirap district, in the villages bordering international borders with Tibet and Myanmar (Burma). Tirap district has a common border with Nagaland and the Wanchos inhabit the western part of Tirap bordering Nagaland. Therefore, beginning from the dialect spoken, the Wanchos have many things in common with the Nagas. Even head hunting like the Nagas was not uncommon with them. Their social order is very strict and disciplined and governed by the village council. The Wanchos have no separate music to be mentioned specially. Dance is their music, and dance is part and parcel of their songs.⁶⁵

The *Ojiyele* festival is celebrated in February-March after the sowing

of millet and paddy. The date of this festival varies from village to village and it is fixed in consultation with the village council, the village elders and the chiefs. It continues for six to twelve days immediately after meat and drinks are made ready for the feast.⁶⁶

On the first day all the youths of the village catch pigs which are generally stray, they chase the pigs, catch and cage them in the bamboo cages, prepared by each household. The householder entertains the youths with drinks for their help. At night young men and women pound rice powder in bamboo tubes, pigs, cattle are also slaughtered.⁶⁷

Next day early in the morning, each householder slaughters his pigs and cut the meat. A portion is kept to be eaten in the dormitory (morung) and the other portion in the house. The house owner takes out the boiled heart and the unboiled tail of the pig, goes to the rear of the house invoking blessings of God. He then throws the tail there and eats the heart of the pig along with his very intimate friends, good rice beer are exchanged in the village as greetings. In the afternoon, each man has to take long strings of pig's skin to the chief as greetings. After that, all go to the place of dancing which is generally away from the village. In this place, men with ornamented spears or guns in hand and women decorated with coloured beads dance to the beating of drums and tuning of songs. These dances are very artistic and fascinating. Then betelnut with a kind of spice are offered to each villager and similarly exchanged with people of other village units. Each village unit greets other units with cakes, beer and betelnut. After that again the dance starts with the beating of gongs and drums. From that place the crowd enter the village singing all the way and stop before each house of young girls singing and dancing there. This kind of singing and dancing mostly indicates that the youths among the dancers is betrothed to the damsel of the house.

Next day, people are entertained with rice, meat and beer. Black or white loin cloths presented from the house of the betrothed girls to the elders of the family of the prospective bridegroom. Throughout the night of that day, people sing song praying for happiness of the young boys and girls. The third day is spent in dancing and offering prayers to the gods of crops in the community field, by offerings of chicken and rice beer. On the fourth day, the villagers are allowed to take presents or goods to their relatives and friends of other villages. Otherwise in no other day they should go out of the village. On the fifth day, visits to other villages and dancing continue. The sixth day is observed as a day of 'taboo' when no one can go outside. On the seventh day, the taboo is raised to be enforced again on the eighth day. On the ninth day all the people go to their own respective fields to give offerings of chickens and cooked rice with rice beer to the god of crops and also partake of all, those delicacies. Thereafter they come back to villages beating gongs and singing prayer songs. They met just at the outskirts and exchange presents of food. On the tenth day

the malefolk assemble in their own dormitories for feasting and the people prepare weeding forks of bamboo in their dormitories. Each dormitory has to supply 40 such weeding forks to the chief. On the last day, that is, the twelfth day, young men of each unit collect cane ropes and all the villagers go and construct the hanging cane bridge over the stream. Thus, the Wanchos people observe this festival by dancing, singing, feasting, praying and doing community welfare work, after this they go to the fields for weeding.⁶⁸

The Wanchos also observe many other festivals connected with sowing and harvesting rites. *Sakila* and *Chachai* festivals are held to celebrate the sowing of millet and paddy seeds in the field. Successful harvesting of millets is the occasion of another festival called *Chachaban Laudangle*, *Chachiywan* and *Poatak-le* are also harvest festivals. On the occasion of *Chachiywan* festival, seeds of millet with a sacrificed hen's blood are sprinkled before the millet is brought home from the field, and at the time of *Poatak-le* a few grains of millet are thrown over the earth by the mistress of the house expecting a better crop next time.⁶⁹

(2) The Festivals of the Noctes

The Noctes are found in Tirap district where they occupy the central part of the district to the North East of the Wanchos.⁷⁰ The Noctes are a brother tribe of the fierce Konyak Nagas, they belong to the Mongoloid stock of the human family.⁷¹ According to the legend prevalent among the Noctes, it was Lotha Khunbao who came down from heaven and became their first chief. The present chiefs have descended from him. It was he who taught them the acts of singing and dancing.⁷²

The Noctes have many festivals and their prime festival is called *Loku*, the word *Loku* is derived from *Lofe* meaning to drive out and *Rangku* or season. *Loku* therefore literally means to drive out the old season or year. This festival is celebrated in the month of July-August, just after harvesting finger millet. In some villages *Loku* is celebrated after the reaping of Ahu paddy in the month of October-November. After calculating the digits of the waxing or waning moon, the date for the festival is fixed by the village elders.⁷³

Just before the festival, young boys and girls go to the forest to collect *Kou* leaves for making dishes and cups. They are also required to collect fuel for the bonfire to be lighted during the *Loku* festival. They have to collect subscription of rice and beer from each house.⁷⁴

The *Loku* festival starts with the sacrifice of buffaloes and pigs for the communal feast. The real merry making begins from the second day, when families invite each other for drinks. It is a happy sight to see young men visiting houses and the housewives busy in receiving and serving guests.

Chya-Choam or the starting place for the dance is away from the village. On the second day all malefolk assemble there and some prayers are offered. Feasting and drinking start followed soon after by dance. The dancers come back and visit the chief's house especially arranged for the festival (*Ngong wahum*) where the dance is performed by children, youths and maids. The dance continues with short intervals for drinks. At night a big bonfire is lighted round where they continue the dance. So, the feasting and dancing go on for several days. The songs sung during *Loku* describes the past history of the battles fought and also social laws. On the concluding day either early in the morning or after sunset, the *Loku* dance comes to an end. Young boys then go out for communal hunt in the forest and this hunt is meant to drive out the evil spirits and lethargy. *Loku* festival is really captivating. It is so centred round people's lives that they yearn for the days of the festival even after it is ended.⁷⁵

The sowing festivals of the Noctes are called *Khapkut* and *Challiwan*. These festivals continue for four days during which games for children, exhibitions of the local chiefs' possessions, cock fights are arranged. The *Ranglo* (harvesting of millets) and the *Chalo* (harvesting of paddy) are two important festivals, which are observed on the successful reaping of harvest.⁷⁶

During the *Chalo* festival,⁷⁷ the Noctes offer prayer to the Rang in order to appease him and to seek his blessings for a better crop and happier life. The Noctes believe that there is a power in this universe who is unseen and is known as *Rang*. The *Rang* is both benevolent and malevolent. The Noctes believe that he is the Creator and also the destroyer.

With the advent of season, the village leaders assemble with the chief to find out a suitable date for *Chalo*. It should be a proper time to start a new agricultural operation and also a new year. The traditional man, '*Raamva*' then declares it in public to prepare for the *Chalo* by collecting various items required for it.

The happiness and joy spread in all villages. Village girls go to the nearby forests to collect leaves, bamboos, firewood etc. The juvenile unmarried young girls of the village then gather in one of the village headman's house to collect rice from every household to prepare *Kham* (local rice beer). The unmarried girls are engaged for brewing *Kham*. The menfolk collect money from every family to purchase buffaloes and pigs to be slaughtered and eaten during *Chalo*.

The *Chalo* is celebrated for three days. The first day is called the *Phamlamja*, which is the final day of preparation. Buffaloes and pigs are slaughtered on this day and distributed among all families. Late in the evening, the cheerful boys of the village go to the girls' place where rice beer is kept. After brief merry making, the boys return to their *Paang* (merong). Thus, the first day passes amidst all anticipation of the joys next day.

The second day, called the *Chamkatja*, is marked with slaughter of a pig by the village youth at the chief's house. In the afternoon, all malefolk of the village gather together at a place on the outskirts of the village for performing Rangsuam (prayer). This place is known as *Cham*. At this place the ritual expert performs the usual rites in the name of *Rang* by offering cooked rice, meat, rice beer on a bamboo platform constructed for the purpose and in return seeks blessings for prosperity and well-being of the community. A community feast is arranged at this place.

After the feast, they all come home dancing all the way up to the chief's house. This dance is basically performed by only the male members. They then disperse for dinner. A folk dance accompanied by songs and music is performed after dinner. Now the girls can participate in the dance. The folk dance continues for the whole night with timely breaks for drinking *kham*. The dancing is staged to the accompaniment of songs and beating of drums. The singers and drumbeaters produce notes to correspond to the pace of dancers. The malefolk have daos and spears while performing the dance. The dancers keep up the rhythmic and fast pace but there is no violent convulsion of the body.

The third day is called *Thanlangja*, which is a very important day. In the morning, everyone goes to his or her maternal uncle's house to seek annual blessings. The uncle at the time of blessing fastens a string with a piece of ginger around the neck of the nephew or niece. This custom is known as *chinlit*. Another important function of the third and final day of *Chalo* is the fixation of new agricultural operations. After *Chinlit* ceremony, the important people gather near the chief's house of Morong to perform a rite which is known as *Wosoak* ceremony. Eggs are collected from all available houses. The chief, in the presence of all, breaks the eggs that determines the well-being of all the neighbouring villages. After the rituals, all villages perform *Thanlang* dance from house to house to pray for the prosperity and well-being of every family and the community as a whole. By the grandeur, gaiety and gorgeous display of dress and ornaments and by unique composition of the songs, history and social customs of the Noctes, are reflected in the *Chalo* festival.

Besides the above festivals, the Noctes have some other minor festivals, namely, *Tobi or Pobi* and *Charom* concerning agricultural rites.⁷⁸

The Festivals in Tribal Life in North East India

The North East has the pride of being the land of a number of fascinating tribal people who maintain cultural distinctiveness. The first thing that strikes a visitor to any part of the hills, is the beauty of the natural scenery, and the attractiveness of the people. They are cheerful, honest and simple.

They are very colourful and full of life and very democratic in outlook.⁷⁹

Very few parts of the world still preserve such a variety of tribes of anthropological interest as do the North Eastern States of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal and Tripura. The peculiar geographical position and physical contour of the region explain to a large extent the extreme isolation of the tribes and their subdivision into innumerable clans. Bounded by the eastern Himalayas, southern Tibet and China on the north, Myanmar (Burma) on the east, Bengal on the west, and Bangladesh and Myanmar (Burma) on the south, the seven North Eastern States cover an area of about 253,000 square kilometres.⁸⁰

The tribal people of the region live in the hills and mountains, and in their struggle for existence, they developed into isolated tribes which differ widely in appearance, customs and language. The region is a very interesting part of India, from an ethnological point of view, for many tribes of ancient origin like the colourful Nagas, the Khasi, Garos, Mikir, Mizos, the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura had their homes in this eastern part of the country, with different customs and rich cultural heritage.

Following the disarmament and the military occupation of several parts of the hills by the British Government, and the introduction of the new forces of modernity and civilization, the long isolated tribes could no longer resist the influences of the outer world and soon began to shed their primitive customs. Modernism had destroyed much of the old glamour of these tribes, for the ease of communication and the consequent ingress of civilization and the desire to keep with the times has made drastic changes in their mode of living, with a tendency towards uniformity and equalisation.⁸¹

Prior to the coming of the British, the tribals of the North East had very little contact with the outside world. They lived, progressed and developed according to their ecological environments. The tribals as a whole are a gay and lively people, the special characteristic among them is that they love dances, music and songs which are connected with their various colourful festivals. It is on these occasions that they thank God, the Creator for all the blessings that He has showered upon them, and at the same time they pray to God to shower His blessings for the coming year, for a bountiful harvest, good health and general welfare of the people as a whole.

The various tribes of the region have different traditions, customs and culture. The distinctive feature of the Garo and the Khasi society is their matrilineal system, where descent is traced from a common female ancestress and goes down through the females. Life in the hills is more or less the same. Most of the tribal people are agriculturists, and the little industry, they had existed mostly as cottage industry since most of the tribes live in the hills, and forests are, plentiful, their favourite past time is hunting. The water of

the rivers and lakes provide fishing. Thus, fishing and hunting became the main recreation of the tribal races and incidentally yield much needed food.⁸²

The festivals of the tribals of the North East, largely revolve around their agricultural operations. Most of their festivals are observed either before the sowing season or after the harvesting is over. In agricultural communities, two major events, the sowing of seeds and the harvest are frequently the occasions for a particular celebration of festivals. The Khasi festivals like *ka Pomblang Syiem* or *Pomblang Nongkrem*, the *Behdeinkhlam*, the *Lukhmi*, *ka Sajer* and others besides other meanings and objectives are connected with agriculture and cultivation rites of the people. Similarly, the Garo festivals like the *Wangala*, the Mizo festival like *Pawl kut*, the Angami Nagas festival like the *Khoup funyi*, and *Garia puja*, of the tribals of Tripura and *Ojiyele* festival of the Wanchos and the *Chalo* festival of the Noctes are largely connected with agriculture, and centre round agricultural operations, and around jhum cultivation. During these festivals, the people pray to God to shower His blessings for a better crop and general welfare of the people and so on.

The Khasi like other tribals have fertility rites which are connected with agriculture and cultivation. They observe fertility rites which are associated with dances and songs. Various rites are observed in the different months of the year to pray for the protection of crops from being injured by evil spirits,⁸³ and for prosperous harvest. The fertility of the field and of women are closely associated in the mind of the Nagas, as a woman embraces her lover, so may the earth takes the seed of the rice into her womb. The Naga head hunting also had its inspiration in the belief in fertility.⁸⁴ The fortune of the Indian villagers generally depend on the condition of harvesting. The Indian peasants whether tribal or non-tribal have several characteristics in common irrespective of which part of the country they belong to. The tribals who are mainly agriculturists are deeply attached to mother earth, that produces food, feeds and sustains them. Thus, the agricultural communities throughout this vast country observe some festivals in common with the other parts of this country, which have different names in different parts.

Man has always had a passionate concern with fertility, it has been a consistent feature of almost every type of human society and particularly of agricultural society. Human life depends too upon the fertility of the fields which man has tilled, the fruits which he gathered, the animals which he ate, milked or hunted. Failure of fertility, whether of man, animal or field, meant death. That is why the idea of fertility has become important in his thinking and feelings.⁸⁵

Fertility was entirely subject to the power and control of the spirit world, whose greatest gift was the gift of life. When life came into being,

it was because the spirit had made it so, when life is ebbd or disappeared, or was withheld, this too was the work of spirits. If a woman conceived, it meant that the spirits had put a child into her womb. If the corn sprouted in due season, it was because the sky father had impregnated the earth mother and caused her to bring forth.⁸⁶

In agriculture, the great fertility cycle is that of the seasons of the year. To the seasons corresponded the stages in the growth of the crops, and the mating habits of animals. The objective of the festivals was the continuation of the seasonal pattern, and the ensuring of a good fertile year. The high gods of the sky are the protector of the cosmic order and the great givers of fertility, and so the festivals are centred explicitly and implicitly around the mighty deeds of these gods.⁸⁷

The festivals play a very important role in the social life of the tribals, they have an educational, social as well as religious character. The religious and social aspects of festivals cannot be separated, all activities being endowed with a religious or at least traditional character.

One may look at a festival as an institutionalised observance, but it is not always religious in character. Every festival whether folk or traditional or secular has a particular aim or theme for which it is observed. Propitiation of deities or spirits for success, to prevent certain diseases, to prevent snake bite, to avert untoward happening, welfare of the members of the family, crops and girls to get good husband, are some of the aims from the view point of propitiation. To welcome the new year, and the particular season, to commemorate the ancestors, kings, and to take food of the first crop, reveal another kind of themes. Aspiring for salvation, ensuring a permanent stay in heaven, bringing about divine blessings for health and happiness are the third category of purposes.⁸⁸

Festivals are a very important component of tribal life. They have a rich comprehensive nature that combines intense worship, dance, revelry and feasting, with the most dramatic scenes of solemnity. They generate revelry by dancing, singing, pantomimes and games to enliven the lot of the village. When the event has passed, it remains as a sign post in the community's flow of life. They build up precious memories to be cherished. Mothers recall the birth of their children by their proximity to any of the festivals. On the religious and social side, the festivals bind the members of the community together as well as relate them to their tribal spirits and ancestors. The offerings and rituals shared by all, keep alive their sense of oneness and belonging. They also serve to stimulate vitality and give meaning to their songs and games.⁸⁹

Certain features are common to all festivals like on a festival day, work is a taboo. There is a great bustle and much ado with the preparation, such as collecting grains, husking and cleaning rice, brewing beer, collecting wine.

New dresses are made, dance costumes redone. There is a routine worship of demi gods and spirits as indicated by Calendar, offerings are made to bless the mortar, the hearth, the threshold and the cattle shed, the dead are honoured too. A special effort is to provide wide and hearty participation by the youth in the festivals of all villages within a certain radius. For this reason, the Calendar observing some festivals is approximately arranged in a circle. They also become occasions for the reunion of broken intimacies, for forging new ties, for courtship, for finding mates, testing romances and for a host of other emotional and aesthetic experiences. There are special ceremonies to bring estranged people together and to end feuds, which were more touching and significant.⁹⁰

The festivals largely revolve around agricultural operations determined by natural phenomena and important events of life like births, marriages and death. Without them, the severity of conditions under which tribals live and struggle for existence would make their life deadly and miserable. Through festivities and the accompanying rites, a cheerful atmosphere is created. The costumes worn on these occasions fill them with a sense of pride, the charm and emotion of songs stir their sensitivities and out of their dance comes a release.⁹¹

The cathartic effect of rhythm in restoring equilibrium through songs, dance and drumming is universally testified by experience. Objects like masks also became instruments for ostracising terrors of the unknown. Long ago art expressions may have performed this very function which today may seem absurd to many of us, since man has moved away from the primeval moorings which rested on self expression. With the tribal, cultural forms are still communal. In sophisticated groups, the emphasis shifts from a common vision or values of the whole to a single person.⁹²

Most of the fairs and festivals of different tribal communities with all pageantry and colour, feast, music and dance are seasonal and are celebrated coinciding with agricultural operations or leisured intervals. These occasions are meant for offering prayers in one form or the other to the Supreme power. However, in due course of time, sentimental ties seem to have emerged in the otherwise secular rituals. Some of the occasions are also remindful of the events and incidents found in their legends.

The tribal folklore, folktales, folksongs, folk music and dance, folk crafts, wood carvings and their countenances, combine to offer them an aesthetic life which is worth mentioning. They have ample time at their disposal during off season, and the evening hours they utilize in their favourite arts.⁹³

As in the case of other societies, many changes have taken place in the tribal society also. The way of life of the tribal communities are guided by the different spheres of their life. Contacts are there between the tribals and their neighbours. Modern forces have been actively moulding their life. As

culture is dynamic, the tribals have faced and are facing changes. The factors responsible for the transformation are broadly of two types, traditional and modern. The traditional process characterised by the impact of certain traditions of the major neighbouring communities on the tribal group, has long been in operation and has led to the resultant concepts like Hinduization etc. The modern process include, such factors like Christianity, urbanization and industrialization. Tribal development, community development schemes, democratic set up of the nation, modernization in education, communication and administration and the like are of recent origin, and are directly or indirectly external factors which do not emerge as a result of normal contacts of the tribal people with the non-tribal people of the areas.⁹⁴

Thus, we have seen the festivals of the tribals of the North East are closely linked with their agricultural activities. They are also closely connected with their social life and the environment that they live in. The tribal way of life, their beliefs and ideals are expressed or reflected in their festivals. The tribals of the region love dances, music and songs and their folksongs, music and dance are a composite whole which is one of the dominant characteristic of their culture. The varied tribal cultures bloom in the isolated highlands and forests of our great country India and characterised by their own language and rich cultural heritage which add to the richness of the great Indian culture. The tribal festivals reflect the cultural adjustment to the climatic and ecological conditions in which they live in. This adjustment to their environment shows man's relationship and harmony with nature and sometimes with gods and spirits. The beating of drums and blowing of pipes and flutes are the significant tunes that reflect their joy and happiness and also sadness. The festivals also indicate the common elements or traits of a culture and also depict traditional manners and customs of a community and also bring the feeling of oneness which promote the unity and solidarity of the people and also reflect their love of freedom and self identity which contribute much to the corporate communal life of the tribals. In spite of the many forces of modernity, nevertheless, the tribal people of the North East have retained the principal elements, of their Culture and ways of life, though these are modified to a greater or lesser extent with the passage of time.

Footnotes

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4. *Ibid.*; also B.N. Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
5. A. Playfair, *The Garos*, p. 93.

6. Robbins Burling, *Rengsangri*, p. 68.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
10. A. Playfair, *op.cit.*, p. 94; also R. Burling, *op.cit.*, p.69.
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13. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
14. *Ibid.*
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16. B. N. Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
17. D. S. Rongmuthu, *op.cit.*, p. 10.
18. A. Playfair, *op.cit.*, p. 94; R. Burling, *op.cit.*, p. 69.
19. M. S. Sangma, *op.cit.*, p.241.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 242-243.
21. R. Burling, *op.cit.*, p.65.
22. M. S. Sangma, *op.cit.*, p. 244.
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25. L. B. Thanga, *The Mizos*, p. 3.
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32. L. B. Thanga, *op.cit.*, p. 32.
33. Lalruanga, *op.cit.*, p. 80.
34. B. Thanga, *op.cit.*, p.33.
35. Lalruanga, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
36. Asoso, Yonuo, *The Rising Nagas*, pp. 6-7.
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41. J. H. Hutton, *op.cit.*, p. 198.
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45. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
46. J. H. Hutton, *op.cit.*, p. 198.
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50. N. R. Roy Choudhury, *Tripura Through the Ages*, pp. 98-99.
51. *Dances of Tripura*, Pamphlet, published by the Directorate of Public Relations and Tourism, Govt. of Tripura, p. 1.

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57. *Dances of Tripura*, *op.cit.*, p. 2-3.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
60. N. R. Roy Choudhury, *op.cit.*, p. 100.
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Chapter VII

The Contemporary Trends

The Revivalists and the Modernists

In 1826, Tirot Sing the *Syiem* or Chief of Nongkhlaw concluded a Treaty with David Scott, the British Political Agent of the North East Province, by which he obtained permission for the construction of the road through u Tirot Sing's territory. As the British began to take active interest in these hills, good and friendly relationship was cultivated, as the commercial intercourse between the British and the Khasi was found to be mutually convenient. Later on, the highhandedness of the military at Nongkhlaw, the Company's highhanded way of treating the hillmen,¹ and other causes led to the Khasi rebellion under u Tirot Sing in 1829 which lasted till 1833, which inevitably led to the annexation of the Khasi Hills. In regard to Jaintia Hills, in August 1832, a few months before the death of Ram Sing, an unfortunate incident occurred, four British subjects were seized at Gobha² by the Rajah, a vassal of the kingdom of Jaintia. Of the four, one escaped and the three were later, sacrificed before the goddess Kali. At this juncture, the ruler of Jaintia, Ram Sing died, and he was succeeded by his nephew Rajendra Sing. For two years, the British Government, asked Rajendra Sing to surrender the culprits, but the young Raja was stubborn. At last by a proclamation of 1835, the kingdom of Jaintia was annexed to the British Empire.³

Thus, two trends appeared in the 19th Century in relation to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The first trend was that the British annexed the Khasi Hills in 1833, followed by the Jaintia Hills in 1835. With this annexation, the process of transformation of the society started. Before the British annexation, the Khasi had been able to maintain social and political isolation, in spite of the influence of the neighbouring plains' people, particularly Bengal (Sylhet) at the southern

borders of the hills with whom the Khasi had commercial contact. Trade and commerce of the Khasi with Sylhet and Assam had been a source of wealth as well as a means of obtaining their necessities. It appears that barter trade was carried on a large scale in the border markets and fairs both in the north and south of their hills.⁴ Orange and other fruits, tezpat, pepper, turmeric, lac, honey, betel leaves and benelnut, were often sold and in return, they received besides other things fish, salt, dried fish, silk cloth, cloths and clothings.⁵ The Khasi also supplied the plains with lime and coal. This commercial relation with the plains provided an important route for the exchange of cultures. The influence of Hinduism could thus be seen, and many words of the plains were incorporated in the Khasi language.

With the arrival of the British, the Khasi started feeling a gentle breeze of change which led to the transformation of the Khasi society. With the British came two new things, Christianity and education. Conversion started, the Khasi were introduced to formal education and their language was put to writing. The missionaries made a great contribution to the hills, as it was through their efforts and endeavours that literacy made rapid progress and Khasi literature has since then developed fast. The Khasi owed much to the missionaries who brought rapid progress in education, and gave them a modern language and literature and health care. Thus, from their efforts, zeal and devotion came out many channels which not only helped conversion and enlightenment, but also contributed to the richness of the social life of the Khasi. Thus, on the contribution of the missionaries, H. K. Barpujari observes,⁶

"Among the unofficial enterprises, the contribution made by the missionaries to the vernacular schools in Assam and in the tribal areas in particular, though inspired by the zeal of spreading the Gospel, was indeed unparalleled."

The history of education and literature in the hills began with the Serampore Baptist Mission, which started propagation work among the Khasi mercantile class, who lived in the Sylhet district. The first missionary to make this contact was Krishna Chandra Pal, one of the early Bengali converts of William Carey. This mission continued its work among the Khasi inhabitants in Sylhet up to 1838. The mission translated the new Testament and prepared some primers in Khasi in Bengalee script. In 1841, the Welsh Presbyterian Mission came to the Khasi Hills. They brought about a transformation in the religious, educational and cultural life of the people. With their arrival, a real beginning was made in the field of education and literature. Khasi were introduced to the Roman alphabet, and the pioneer in this was Thomas Jones I.⁷ The Welsh Presbyterian Mission started schools and Theological Institute for the training of the teachers and the preachers. The history of proselytisation

also began with them and a large number of the Khasi were converted to Christianity.

In spite of the various services rendered by the missionaries to the Khasi, the early missionaries have been severely criticised for letting the cultural identity of the people to decline. Several restrictions were placed by them on the new converts such as the performance of indigenous religious rites, participation in the dances and festivals which had religious connection. All these had been forbidden as contrary to the tenets of the teaching of Christianity.

With the arrival of the British, the alien rule and the missionaries, the Khasi society was bound to be affected. The western values and culture spontaneously came as a challenge to the traditional religion and culture of the Khasi people. In the beginning, the converts took fancy and pride in the western way of life, and the traditional values and systems were thoroughly depreciated and the process of social change as a result of the new impact was bound to disturb the traditional society and culture of the Khasi.

On the social change from a hundred years of contact with the British rule, H. Bareh⁸ observes.

"Christians no longer observe their old religious beliefs and rituals. The avuncular trait therefore no longer predominates. Christianity has not materially changed the law of inheritance and succession so that some of the old political institutions still survive. There is no denying the fact that in Christian areas, old usages of megalithic erections, household and community religious celebrations and festivals have become obliterated. Christianity has also caused reversals in marriage, funeral, house building and village ceremonies. With them several social traits, some sports and games and other aspects of cultural heritage have also been forgotten. Christianity on the other hand, was embraced with firm convictions because of its enlightening power which stood the test of persecutions, excommunications from the community, loss of property and other untold sufferings on the part of the early converts, otherwise without such convictions cultivated, none would make too great that sacrifice."

The consolidation of the British administration opened up the isolated Khasi and Jaintia Hills by linking it up with the centres of different cultures in the neighbourhood. In precolonial period, an influence was made on the bordering areas by the cultures of the neighbouring plains, but in the colonial period the major factors of social change were education and Christianity. The process of education and the impact of new civilization brought in a new educated middle class which played their role as anywhere else. They began to react towards social problems and worked for social development. The beginners in this field were a group of intellectuals who were more concerned with the

development of Khasi literature and to protect and preserve the traditional culture and religion of the Khasi. They started the first organisation in these hills called the Seng Khasi in 1899. Some educated Khasi also formed the National Durbar in 1923. It was this Durbar which pioneered the political activities in the Khasi Hills and in generating political consciousness among the Khasi.

The second trend in the 19th century was the Indian Renaissance or modern awakening, which started in Bengal and sought to rediscover India's past. In the 19th Century, India made great progress both in the religious and social fields, it was a period of transition from medievalism to the modern age. The Indian Renaissance was a glorious chapter in the history of India. The first hundred years of the British rule in India (1757-1857) despite political and economic revolution was memorable, for it saw a remarkable outburst of intellectual activities which brought about a radical transformation in social and religious ideas. The change came about as a result of the introduction of English education. Despite the East India Company's declared policy of strict religious neutrality, Hindu religious thought underwent transformation as a result of western contacts. The liberal ideas of the west created a critical outlook on the past, and new aspirations for the future. The new awakening was characterised by reason and judgement in place of blind faith and belief, scientific attitude in place of superstition. Immobility gave place to progressiveness and dynamism, and a zeal for reform of social and religious abuses. The new spirit of free enquiry and free thinking fed by rationalism of the eighteenth century European thought at first affected a small group of persons, but gradually the spirit spread among larger sections of the people and eventually its influence reached even to the masses. Western humanitarian, rational and scientific approach to life gave the doctrine of social equality. The English educated Indians began to examine the Hindu social structure, religion, customs and conventions. This enquiry gave birth to modern socio-religious movements like the Brahmo-Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj and the Theosophical Society and others. Indian intellectuals looked back to the country's past and found that many things were no longer of any use and also much was of intrinsic value to India's renaissance. The leaders told their country men that they should not become blind followers of everything European nor should they give up their own religion, culture, and way of life.

The British conquest of India and the cultural impact of the west had exposed the weaknesses and decay of the Indian society, and a number of thoughtful Indians began to look for the ways and means of reforming the society. The ideas were influenced by modern science and the doctrines of reason and humanism, leading to a great intellectual debate over India's path to

social regeneration. The contact with western culture injected the spirit of challenge through the initiative of some Indian thinkers and through a process of modernisation of the traditional Indian society, an awakening among the people became visible. This new spirit was born in Bengal and gradually spread to the rest of the country. Bengal's initiative in the matter resulted from the historical fact that the impact of British rule, modern economy and western culture was first experienced in that region.

The Indian Renaissance instilled in the minds of the people in general, a pride in their own heritage. The educated Khasi too started a cultural awakening which found its expression through a literary movement led by u Babu Jeebon Roy who may be regarded as the apostle of the Khasi Renaissance,⁹ leading to the establishment of the Seng Khasi. U Jeebon Roy was the first Khasi to enter the Government service and to be promoted to the rank of a Senior Extra Assistant Commissioner. U Jeebon Roy took all the opportunities to cause a cultural awakening both in literature and social regeneration. He established the Ri Khasi Press at Mawkhar, Shillong, in 1896. He wrote his first book which appeared in 1897, entitled *Ka Niam Jong Ki Khasi* (the Religion of the Khasi). The book provides information on the indigenous religious rites, customs and other themes. Another book of u Jeebon Roy which appeared in 1900; was *Ka Kitab Shaphang U Wei U Blei* which exposed the Khasi monotheistic belief. In 1899-1900, his three Khasi Primers, *Ka Kitab Khasi Banyngkong*, *Kitab Baar and Balai*, were printed as school textbooks. In 1900, another book was published entitled *Ka History Jong Ka Ri India*. In the same year was published *Ka Kitab Chaitanya*, an adoption from the *Mahabharata*.¹⁰ Besides these, there were other works which were of immense contribution, u Jeebon Roy passed away in 1903.

U Rabon Sing was another architect of Khasi literature, his first publication was *Ka Kitab Jingphawar*. He published another book entitled *Ka Niam Khein Ki Khasi* which was an elaborate work on the religion of the Khasi. Another work of Rabon Singh was *Ka Kitab Puriskam*, a collection of folk tales.¹¹

Another writer was u Sib Charan Roy, whose contributions were mainly in the field of culture and on awakening. His main contributions were *Ka Jingpyini Ka Kmie Bad Ki Khun*, *Ka Kot Tohkit Tir Tir* and *Ka Niam Ki Khasi*. In 1903, he started a journal entitled *U Nongphira*, which served as a powerful exposition of public opinion. The paper was in circulation for many years, after some years he edited another monthly, *U Nongpynim*.¹²

It was in 1896, that U Hormurai Diengdoh edited the first monthly entitled *U Khasi Mynta* (the Khasi today) which remained in circulation for more than ten years and which contained a number of articles on religion.¹³

These were the early writers who were mainly responsible for the

cultural awakening in the Khasi society, although u Jeebon Roy played the most important role. These writers started some lines of enquiry into the Khasi past and their cultural heritage, rites and rituals, and they contributed towards the growth of a new consciousness which may be described as the Khasi Renaissance. In the process was noticed a revivalist-revitalist trend in the society.

Seng Khasi - Origin, Growth and Development

The Seng Khasi was founded on the 23rd November, 1899 in the Brahmo Samaj Hall at Mawkhair.¹⁴ This day is commemorated as the *Seng Kut Snem* which has been declared as a State holiday in Meghalaya. The Seng Khasi was established by sixteen young men whose names are u Kupardon Dkhar, u Mohon Roy Rynjah, u Rubi Sing Swer, u Burton Sing, u Rash Mohon Roy Nongrum, u Nalak Sing Iangblah, u Joshon Tariang, u Said Sing Dkhar, u, Ram Charan Dympep, u Robert Dkhar, u Rajinshon Marbaniang, u Nadon Roy Diengdoh, u Rutonmuni Roy War and u Indromuni Jyrwa. U Jeebon Roy was their mentor, inspirer and guide.¹⁵ These Khasi intellectuals and elders apprehended that in future years, the indigenous religion would be totally extinct and time might come when people of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills would forget their own religion, its teaching and their own culture, dance and music, so they resorted to certain measures for the preservation of their religion and culture, and to inspire the people to be proud of their own heritage. Thus they initiated a literary movement and established the Seng Khasi to propagate the doctrine of truth and the teaching of Khasi culture, religion and customs.

The aims and principles of the Seng Khasi are¹⁶ (1) The association or assembly of persons who adhere to the tenets of kinship specified by the Khasi ancestors; (2) The coming into being of a man in the world to earn righteousness through service, or that man is born to seek, love and propagate truth; (3) The respect for one's own fellowmen with the sense of humanity and divinity; (4) Consciousness of God, the sovereign Lord, the Almighty Creator, the giver of all (5) To work for the mental and physical development of the fellow members, to regulate the way of living and moral and social conduct; (6) To work for the advancement of education; (7) To encourage, national sports like archery, cultural dances and other social festivals; (8) To undertake welfare and development activities such as maintenance of cremation ground for those who dispose off the dead bodies according to traditional religion.

The Seng Khasi is a socio-religious and cultural organisation which has continued to work through education, cultural celebration and social service activities. The Seng Khasi has struggled hard since its inception to safeguard the customs, traditions and religious beliefs of the Khasi from the

onslaught by other religious groups. On the background of the foundation of the Seng Khasi, Kynpham Singh wrote as follows.¹⁷

"urged by a deep concern for the future of their race whose social structure was being eroded, whose moral fibre weakened and whose bond of unity disintegrating by the inroad of foreigners, especially the Welsh Calvinistic Mission, who mercilessly attacked, denigrated and maligned their religion, condemned their culture, belittled and actually encouraged its followers to discard and disown the Kur-Kha concept of kinship, which is the source and fountain of existence of the race."

The Seng Khasi organised group discussions on Khasi religion and culture and published books, pamphlets and journals on the socio-cultural life of the Khasi. The organisation also encouraged the game of archery, which is the favourite past time of the people to show their skill and prestige of one's own village or locality. Thus, the Seng Khasi organises archery competition every year and villages from all over the Khasi Hills participate. The Seng Khasi also organises the *Shad Suk Mynsiem* or *Shad Weiking* annually with the advent of spring in the month of April after their harvesting work is over and sowing for the new year is done, to show their love and gratitude to their Creator and at the same time to invoke His blessings for a prosperous harvest and welfare of the people. To the Khasi, dances and songs are part of their religious and social life. The Welsh Mission launched practically a campaign against it by excommunicating anyone from the church who might have attended the dance or any function organised by the Seng Khasi.¹⁸ In 1937, when the issue for extending respect to the traditional culture emerged, the church leaders opposed it. There was a great opposition to H. Lyngdoh's attending the Nongkrem Dance festival and the cremation of the Chief of Cherra. But, he pleaded that the culture should get a due place of respect and honour in the society as well as in the church. As a result H. Lyngdoh had to face opposition from the church and his relation with the church leaders was not always cordial then. To him his love for his own culture out-weighed all other considerations.¹⁹

In spite of the several opposition, the dance was held at Mawkhair. When the Seng Khasi acquired the Weiking field at Jaiaw, the *Shad Suk Mynsiem* was held at this field in the spring of 1911. Thus, the Seng Khasi helped the Khasi to preserve their traditional dances which was fast dying out due to the lack of patronage and depreciation by the missionaries. In 1905, the Seng Khasi organised an archery competition at the Pologround, Shillong and Sib Charan Roy donated three prizes.

The missionaries imposed restrictions and prohibitions on the converts

to participate in any cultural and religious festivities of the Khasi. Conversion to Christianity was followed by the abandonment of one of the national festival of the Pnar, the Behdeinkhlam.²⁰ The festival was revived much later. When the converts heard about Seng Khasi's plan to hold a Khasi dance in the Weiking ground, they under the leadership of a Welshman J. C. Evans, went and blocked the path leading to the dancing ground and enclosed it in their new cemetery. This act culminated in the famous Weiking criminal case of 1915. On the 22nd of June 1911, celebrations were held at Polo ground to mark the coronation of King George V. There were archery competitions and Khasi dances. The Chief Commissioner and the English residents of Shillong attended the function, but the Khasi Christians with J. C. Evans chose to hold their own celebration in the mission ground in Jaiaw. It was u Soso Tham who ignored the dictates of the missionaries and actively participated in the celebration at Polo ground and he even took part in the archery competitions.²¹ The missionaries, the Methodist, Roman Catholic, Presbyterians, all forbade the converts to take part in any religious festivities of the Khasi.²² These restrictions adversely affected the traditional dances, music and festivals which are an essential part of the social life of the Khasi.

The Seng Khasi also started a Free Morning School in 1921, the books written by u Jeebon Roy, u Sib Charan Roy and u Radhon Singh Berry and others were taught in the school.

Thus, the Seng Khasi has been able to promote its ideas by creating cultural consciousness among the people. It came into existence, when the Khasi were fast drawn to Christianity and the missionaries were being patronised by the then British Government.²³ It emerged at the time when the progress of modernization and westernization posed as a challenge to the traditional religion and culture of the Khasi. The Seng Khasi aroused the consciousness of the Khasi to be proud of their own cultural heritage and to preserve the religious and cultural usages. The Seng Khasi at present runs the Seng Khasi School and the Seng Khasi College. Today any Khasi whether Christian or non-Christian is proud of his Khasi heritage and the traditional dances and festivals are attended by all irrespective of their religious denominations. The Seng Khasi is now a member of two important organisations, the Indian Tribal Cultural Forum and the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF).

The Birth of Seinraj

The British annexed Jaintia Hills in 1835. The Pnar or Jaintia could not reconcile themselves under the British rule because their rulers interfered in their traditional way of life. There were local uprisings when the English banned

cremation of the dead bodies near the Jowai town and interfered with the local festival at Jalong village.²⁴ These dissatisfactions took the shape of revolt under the leadership of u Kiang Nangbah, but he was captured and hanged to death on 30th December, 1862 and the revolt was suppressed.

Christianity was introduced to the Pnar, the missionaries established schools and churches and spread the enlightenment among the people. The missionaries also fought against superstitions and traditions. The converts had to face many difficulties on account of their new religion. Unlike the upland Khasi, the Pnar had long contacts with the Hindus on account of their proximity with the plains. Hindu officials were appointed by the Doloi for carrying on the administration. Some of the Doloi had political relations with the kings of the plains.

The Pnar also had commercial contact with the plain's people and this contact resulted in the enrichment of wealth, business and learning. The Pnar came into contact with the Muslim rulers in the 17th Century. G. G. Swell unearthed a number of silver plaited coins from a pond in Jowai in the Jaintia Hills, which shows that the people had maintained some sort of trade relationships with the Mughal Emperor through his viceroy stationed at Murshidabad.²⁵

By suppression of their revolt, the British tried to weaken the Pnar's opposition to foreign rule and to strengthen their hold by imposing their way of life, culture and religion. The British had tried to suppress the religious festivals, like Behdeinkhlam, *Shad Wait* and others. The Doloi or Chief of Jowai who combined the secular and religious function, through British influence was converted to the Christian faith, as a result of which the Behdeinkhlam festival could not be performed for many years since he occupied the function of a high priest.²⁶

As evidence from the case in the Khasi Hills, the Pnar leaders felt the necessity for a revival in the cultural and religious spheres. So after the independence of our country, the leaders like u Pati Laloo, u Pati Ryngad, u Sahon Lanong, u Harison Kyndiah, u Wikin Shullai, u Kistobin Rymbai and many others formed an association in 1947, at Jowai, the headquarter of the Jaintia Hills, known as *Ka Seinraj*.²⁷ *Sein* means an association or organisation and *raj* means an area. The headquarter of the *Seinraj* is at Jowai, but it has its branches in Shillong and other places. The main aim and objective of the *Seinraj* is to revive ancient culture and to preserve and protect the indigenous culture and religion, to do social services and to fight for the religious and cultural rights of the people. The *Seinraj* is an elected body comprising of the President the General Secretary, Treasurer and other members. It was through the pioneering activities of this organisation that the cultural activities were revived. The Behdeinkhlam festival was performed again annually after a lapse of 18 years. This organisation also published pamphlets

and journals. In 1987, it published a Souvenir on the 125th Death Anniversary of u Kiang Nangbah. They also organized a cultural programme with dances and songs.

The Khasi society is now making a conscious effort to preserve its identity through revivalism. Revivalism has made the people conscious of their past heritage. Both the Khasi and Khasi Christians have contributed much to the new spirit. In recent years the appreciation for the traditional culture is very strong among all sections of the Khasi. The people are very much conscious politically, economically and culturally as is evident from many of the recent writings and movement which includes students, youths and other social and welfare organisations. These organisations particularly the youths have got a tendency to revive social institutions, indigenous songs and music and renaming of places. They want to preserve their language, identity, culture and also their festivals and dances and their rich cultural heritage.

The Modernist Trend

The term modernization indicates a swift, widespread change and transformation of the societies and the main factors of the process are education, industrialization, urbanization, literacy and mass communication. The process of modernization may take various ways. Some traditions remain, some undergo changes and some of them indeed may help in the process of modernization to carry forward the past traditions and brings about a new pattern and a fresh combination.

Among other factors, literature plays a very important role in the process of modernization. It was through the efforts of the educated Khasi who started a cultural awakening which found its expression through a literary movement led by u Jeebon Roy and others. Besides the contribution of these early writers, there were many others who have contributed to the growth of literature.

U Job Solomon, wrote his *Companion* in 1895 (a guide to writing the Khasi language) under three sections, grammar, phrases and Dictionary (English Khasi). U Nissor Sing wrote three books on the subject, he started writing a grammar entitled *Hints on the Study of Khasi* which came out in 1900. In 1902, he produced the *Khasi English Dictionary*. U Hari Chandran Roy presented in 1910, a drama entitled *Savitri*, a translation from the Mahabharata, while U Dino Nath Roy's translation entitled *Srommotimai* came out in 1912. The first historical work was *Ka History Jong Ka Ri Khasi* by B. K. Sarma Roy in 1914. U Radhon Sing Berry published *ki Jingsneng Tymmen* in two parts in 1902-03, he is considered to be the first Khasi poet.²⁸

In regard to journalism, in 1902-03, we find Presbyterian monthlies namely *Ka Pateng Khristan* and *U Nongialam Khristan* were in circulation. Apart from a Catholic monthly entitled *U Nongialam Katholik*, mention may be made of two monthlies, *U Nongphira* and *U Lurshai*.²⁹ As earlier, *U Khasi Mynta* was already in circulation since 1896.

An important landmark in the growth of modern literature was the contributions of u Soso Tham in Poetry, U. H. Lyngdoh, U P. Gatphoh, Rev. Fr. G. Costa, Rev. Fr. H. Elias and u T. Cajee. U Soso Tham translated Aesop's Fables into Khasi in which he picked up beautiful idioms. His most important contributions was *Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep* (the olden days of the seven huts) which was published in 1937. It was a narrative poem, which served as a guidance and inspiration not only to the later authors and poet, but to the Khasi race in general. The writers, students, youths, politicians all drew inspiration from him. *Ki Sngi Barim u Hynniew Trep*, exposes the heavenly origin of the Khasi which the poet was very proud of, and also of the religious, political, social and cultural hertiage of the Khasi. His other work was *Ka Duitara Ksiar* which comprised of beautiful poems, u Soso Tham was a patriot, he always thought and had a deep concern for the future of his beloved land. In his inspiring words the said,³⁰

"Jingshai ngi wad sawdong pyrthei

Jingshai ka Ri ngim tip ei ei"

meaning that we search for knowledge of the world, but know nothing of our own land, or we ignore the knowledge of our own land. He has been a source of inspiration to the Khasi people in general.

Another gifted author was u Homiwell Lyngdoh. Although a medical man, he was equally succesful as a writer. He published a few booklets on health and maternity. In 1922 he published *Ki Ain ka Jingkoit Jingkhiah*. His important contribution was *Ka Pomblang Nongkrem bad Thang Syiem Sohra* published in 1928. The book is about the annual state festival of the *Khyrim Syiemship* which is held at Smit. It is a detailed account of the festival which is popularly known as *Ka Pomblang Nongkrem* or *Pomblang Syiem* or *shad Nongkrem*. The same book also gives an account of the cremation of the *Cherra Syiem* or Chief and also the coronation of the newly elected *Syiem*. In 1937, he brought out his most important work *Ka Niam Khasi* which is on Khasi religion. In 1938 he published a book entitled *Ki Syiem Khasi bad Synteng*. In the same year, he edited a Presbyterian monthly, *Ka Pateng Khristan*. U H. Lyngdoh wrote *Ka Niam Khasi* at a very challenging period.³¹ Before 1937, the preaching of the missionaries and other Khasi church elders was against the

Khasi religion, and everything of the Khasi was bad and should be done away with. The missionaries' attitude towards the Khasi religion without knowing the truth, and also their desire to impose the western thought in Khasi culture brought an misunderstanding not only against the missionaries and the Christian religion but also between the missionaries and the Khasi elders. Being one of the Presbyterian elders, U H. Lyngdoh was deeply touched by the then existing state of things. He knew that the missionaries' way of preaching would not win the hearts of the Khasi to the Christian faith, he also knew fully well that the Khasi would accept Jesus Christ only if they could understand the truth in the Christian religion. It was with this idea that U Homiwell Lyngdoh wrote his *ka Niam Khasi*.³² By Birth and upbringing, U H. Lyngdoh was naturally expected to be more orthodox Christian than his parents and his maternal uncle in his outlook in life, but later, he was found to be more interested in studying the main tenets of the Khasi religion which the missionaries of those days would not encourage. He is recognised today as one of the authorities in traditional Khasi religion.³³

In 1931, Rev. Father J. Bacchiarello compiled a book entitled *ka Dienjat Ki Longshuwa*, Which contains beautiful folktales. In 1937, U P. Gatphoh published his book entitled *Ki Khanatang bad u Sier Lapalang*, which is a collection of folktales. In the same year, Rev Father H. Elias brought about his book, *Ki Khanatang u Barim*, a collection of folktales. In the same year he brought out his *Ka Saron Ksiar* which later on was retitled *Ka Hamsaia ki por*. Besides these, later on, Rev. Father Elias wrote many books which are being used as school textbooks. Rev. Father G. Costa published in two volumes his books entitled *Ka Riti Jong Ka Ri Laiphew Syiem* in 1937-38. U T. Cajee translated the *History of Assam* and a Geography and a section of K. Cantlie's *Notes on the Khasi Law*.³⁴

There were other monthlies and quarterlies besides the Presbyterian monthlies namely *Ka Pateng Kristan* and *u Nongialam Kristan* and a Catholic monthly entitled *u Nongialam Katholik*. Journalism fosters the growth of general education and helps the people to become conscious and become instrument of promoting both cultural regeneration and political consciousness. A number quarterlies appeared such as *u Lurshai* and *u Nongialap*. Among the important papers mention may be made of *u Nongpyrta* circulated in 1921. In 1922 appeared two monthlies, *u Khasi* then followed *u Jaintia*. *Ka Sngi* was in circulation in 1924. In 1925-26, *Ka Jingshisha* went on in circulation. In 1930 *u Woh* and *u Jingtip* were circulated. In 1931-32 U M. Bareh edited *Ka Jingshai Jong ka Ri Khasi Pnar*, an educational monthly magazine. In 1933 *Ka Juk* and *u Paidbah* were in circulation. In 1938-39, *Ka Meirilung*, an educational journal of the Khasi Students came out.³⁵ In 1937, the new elite was formed with a group of cultured persons who sponsored a cultural journal, *Ka Syngkhong Jingtip*, which contains many contributions. Journalism saw its further growth

and development after 1941. We have seen many weeklies brought out by different editors and the major ones are *u Nongsain Hima*, *ka Sur Shipara*, *Apphira*, *Dongmusa*, *ka Pyrta u Riewlum*, *u Lum Shyllong*, *u Jaintia*, *Ka Surphira u Paila Ksiar* and *u Diengiei*, *u Rupang*, *u Mawphor* as a daily and many more. However, at present *Ka Sur Shipara*, *Apphira* and *u Paila Ksiar* are no longer in circulation.

Regarding the contemporary literature, we saw an expanded trend in growth which touched diverse field. The noteworthy publication was *u Mawpun Jingtip*, which contains indigenous folktales and compiled by U D. Bareh and published in 1955-56. In 1960, appeared U F. M. Pugh's book *Nangno u Khasi u Wan Mih*, a dialogue telling us from where the Khasi comes. His other publication was *ka Jingiar ka Ktien Khasi Part I and II*, which came out in 1966. U. F. M. Pugh's other works are *ka Sawangka ia ki Sawngut Balap Mynsaw* and in 1967, he presented another social drama, *ka Sawangka ki Sanngut Ba lap*. In 1968 U I. Kharkongor published a Dictionary, *Ka Dienshon Hi* and in 1973 he brought out *ki Biria u Peh Sylli*, which is a collection of stories and fables. In 1973, Rev. Father E. Bars, published his Khasi-English Dictionary, which is of commendable contribution. Miss D. Franklin Basaiawmoit's important contribution was *Ka Grammar Khasi* which came up in 1974. Rev Father Sngi Lyngdoh's contributions are his Dictionaries, the three Dictionaries are entitled *Greek - Khasi*, *Hibru-Khasi* and *Aramaik-Khasi* published in 1975.³⁶ In 1965, he brought out *Ka Riti Khyndew ba la Buh u Longshuwa Jong Ka Ri Bhoi*, which is on land tenure system in the Bhoi area. He also edits a paper entitled *Ka Sur Shipara*. In 1957, came out a historical drama, *Ka Drama u Tirot Singh* by u V. G. Bareh. In 1966 came out another drama of u Mondon Bareh entitled *u Mihsngi*. U S. J. Duncan published a drama entitled *ka Tiewlarun* which is based on a folktale and *Phuit ka Sabuit Bad Kiwei Kiwei Ki Khana*. In 1968, U. D. S. Khongdup published *u Baieit Don Shkor* also based on folktales, his other work was *Hq Ki Sngi U Syiem*, U O. S. Lamare published in 1974 a drama entitled *Ka Kut lapngar*.³⁷ U Kynpham Singh has published the books entitled *Ka Jingsdang ka Jingspel bad Jingthoh ia ka Ktien Khasi da ki Dak Roman*, *ki kot Khasi ba la Thoh da ki Khasi 1896-1903*, *Ka Jingsdang ki Skul ha Ri Khasi*, *u Babu Jeebon Roy 1834-1903* which appeared in 1969,³⁸ and give us valuable information on the awakenings. In 1976, u B. C. Jyrwa, another Khasi author published *u Pyrkhat* which is based on fiction. In 1975, u W. Tiewsoh, a novelist published *Ka Kam Kalbut*, a novel which helps us to understand the condition of the people in borderland. U R. T. Rymbai published his book entitled *Ban Pynieng ia la ka Rasong bad Kiwei Kiwei De ki Ese*. It is a collection of 16 essays. In 1979, u H. W. Sten published his book *History Ka ktien Khasi*. In 1976, u Kitbor W. Nongrum brought out his book entitled *u Shanbor bad u Wad Bor*, which is a theme on

family life. In 1979, he published *ka Pung ka Jingieit*, which is based on a traditional village life.³⁹ In 1967 u P. R. Mawthoh, brought out a book entitled *Balei U Khasi Um Roi Spah*, in which he attributed the economic backwardness of the people to several factors. In 1979, U Webster Davies Jyrwa published *ki Drama Lyngkot* which comprised of translations.

Poetry also made much headway during this period. In 1957, u V. G. Bareh composed *Ki poetry Khasi*. In 1970, u B. C. Jyrwa brought out his collection of poems entitled *Na Pongshai ki Puramit*. His other contributions is *Na Nengpei Ki Sur U Myllung*. In 1973, emerged u *Ksan Bad u Thombor*. In 1980, came out his other work *Jingkmien Bla' Bam Hynroh* which is based on family life. In 1973 u P. Kharduia published *Seibor Meghalaya* which is a collection of 11 simple poems. U Chosterfield Khongwir published in 1975, his song book entitled *Ki Sai Muka Ka Duitara*. In 1977, u Hamarbabiang Myllemngap published his poetry *Na Pneh U Lum Shillong*. In the same year, Jerome Diengdoh contributed *Ki Mieng Pynpang Mynsiem* which is a collection of 78 sonnets.⁴⁰

In 1981, u Spiton Kharakor, published *Ki Khun Ki Ksiew U Hynniew Trep*, which is on the history and culture of the people. His contribution was the preparation of a list of 3363 clans of the Khasi people.

U H. O. Mawrie has made a lot of contributions to Khasi philosophical thought. In 1973, he published *U Khasi Bad La Ka Niam*, which is a work on religious thought and philosophy. In the same year, he published *Ka Pyrkhath U Khasi* and in 1974, he brought out another publication *Hei Nga Bat Ho la Ka Nia*,⁴¹ the two books are on Khasi philosophical thought. U H. O. Mawrie has been converted to the Presbyterian church in his childhood and has reverted to the Khasi religion and philosophy.

Another eminent author is u Donbok T. Laloo. In 1975, he brought out *Ka Thymmei Pyrkhath u Khasi Bad ki Parom*, which is based on philosophy and religion. Another prominent work is *Ka Rong Biria U Hynniew Trep*,⁴² which focusses on archery, the favourite past time of the Khasi which at the same time adds to the understanding of religious philosophy and cultural heritage. In 1982, he brought out *Ka Sajer Raid Nonglyngdoh Bynta I. Bynta II* which is one of the religious festivals of the Bhoi. In the same year he brought out *Ki Paju Lyngkot* which are based on the short stories of the Pnar. In 1984, he published another book *Ka Ksaw Ka Kpong U Hynniew Trep*. In 1985, he published two other works *Ka Shat Jingtip* and *Ki Khana Hyndai Bynta I-II*. The last two are based on folktales. In 1986, he published *Ka Sati*, which is based on a folktale. In 1987, he published *Ka Lasubon* which is based on fiction,⁴³ and there are many more books at his credit.

U D. T. Laloo is a modern writer. His writings include originality with a lot of research works. His writings reveal that he has a deep love for his

people, and he has contributed much to the understanding of the rich cultural heritage of the Khasi.

Besides these, we have historical writings, u H. Bareh published *Ka Thma Synteng Bad U Kiang Nongbah* in 1962, H. Bareh has made a lot of contributions in the Khasi literature. In 1977, he brought out a small publication entitled *U Syiem Tirot Singh Ka Hima Nongkhlaw Bad Ki Para Syiem Ki Hima Khasi* which is on a brief historical background on freedom struggle. Another historical work was u E. W. Chyne's *Ka history Jong Ka Hima Mawlong* published in 1977, which gives us a short historical background of Mawlong. In 1975, u L. G. Shullai published his book, *Ki Hima Khasi*, which is a historical and constitutional arrangement of the Khasi States 1947-1950. In 1978, he brought out his other work *Ka Ri Shong Pdeng Pyrthei*,⁴⁴ which is a glimpse of a historical transformation and the changes which followed one after another, u L. G. Shullai has made a lot of contributions in the newspapers, journals and magazine, he has an excellent collection of books and records in the Shillong Records Collection Centre which is under his care. In 1984, u Jor Manik Syiem published *Ka Jingiathuh Khana Pateng Shaphang Ki Syiem Jong Ka Hima Myllem 1830-1960*, which is an account of the Khyrim-Myllem Syiemship. Another promising young author is u Pascal Malngiang who has written many books, some of which are *U Khun Ka Ri* which is about the life of Rev. Father Elias Hopewell, *Ka Indira Gandhi*, *ka Gitanjali*, *u Rabindranath Tagore* which is a translation of Tagore's *Gitanjali*, the most recent one is *130 tylli ki sonnet*, and many more.

There has been an enormous growth of literature in recent years with the contributions of many new writers. The modern trends in the growth of Khasi literature could be seen by the appreciation for the traditional culture, as a result folk tales, oral traditions and religious mythology are being used in writing. The rising generation has developed a new mental outlook which is different from the old generation. There is a tendency towards revivalism as we have seen from modern writings. With many research scholars coming up, there is every possibility that new light will be shed which will help in the growth of social institutions, traditions, beliefs and cultural practices, and literature must be an important factor for the awakening of the people, so that they could value their own history, language and their rich cultural heritage in their right perspective.

The impact of the awakening or revivalism of the consciousness about the past was not limited to the non-Christians only. The Khasi Christians too contributed to the growth of the new spirit. Many Khasi today whether Christian or non-Christians are beginning to take part in the traditional dance, sports and other festivals. Some of the Christian elders who reverted to the Niam Khasi, are u H. O. Mawrie, u B. D. Pugh, u Atiar Syiem, u D. Shangliang, u P. Dkhar and others. Many of those who had taken their father's title have changed back

to their mother's.

The youths today are very much conscious of reviving their own culture and traditions. In 1981, the Khasi Students Union organised the Khasi cultural blow up in the forms of debates, seminars, on different aspects of culture and heritage.⁴⁵ In 1982-83, the cry of the Khasi Students Union was 'Pynieng ia ki Dorbar Hima' (to revive the state Durbar) and posters and wall writings were seen in and around Shillong.

The Seng *Khih Lang* is another revivalist organisation which is known as the United Endeavour Society. This organisation has joined hands with the Indian Tribal Cultural Forum. It is a socio-religious cultural voluntary welfare organisation for the advancement of the tribals and their traditions.

Another organisation is the Seng *Kyrsiew* organised by the youths under the leadership of u Khlur Singh and other members. The youths of this organisation aim at discovering ways and means to preserve their culture and traditions. Recently, *ka Seng ki Nongshat Nongkhein* or the organisation of the diviners was formed to preserve the ritual aspects of the Khasi religion.

In 1978, the *Syngkhong Kyntiew Ri*, an organisation of Khasi College lecturers organised *Ki Jingshad U Hynniew Trep* or the dances of the seven huts. The dance festival was held on the 29th December 1978 at Polo ground, Shillong. Dancers from the different parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills were brought to Shillong. Among the important dances that were performed were the *Shad on Pepbah*, *Shad iam Meikha*, *Shad Darrang*, *Shad Nongtung* and others.⁴⁶ This dance festival marked a cultural reconstruction programme as a special effort made by this organisation. Again on 30th December 1980, the same organisation held the second annual dance festival, the important dances that were held were *ka Shad Kynthei na Nongkharai*, *ka Shad Krud Lyngkha bad Shad Kylla Mohkhiew*, *Ka Sajer Nonglyngdoh*, or *ka Sajer Maring*, *ka Shad Wakhken*, *ka Shad Kynthei na Marngar* and *ka on Pepbah na Mowkyrwat*.⁴⁷ This dance festival could be held only on these two occasions, the organisers could not hold it, although it should be encouraged, because it involves a huge expenditure on transport, food and accommodation of the dancers and musicians which have to be brought from the different parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

On 3rd April, 1987, as part of the celebration of Tirot Sing anniversary which falls on the 4th April, the Khasi Cultural Society, in collaboration with other students and youth organisations and other social organisations like the Khasi Student Union, the Hynniew Trep Students and Youth Organisation, the Tribal Women Welfare and Development Association of Meghalaya (TWW ADAM) organised the public celebration at the State Central Library of which the most important highlight was *ka Shad Wait* or the Sword Dance of the male. On 4th April, the celebration of u Tirot Sing anniversary was held at Mairang, by holding a Khasi dance and other competitions in songs and music. The Tirot Sing Dance celebration is organised every year at Mairang where there is a memorial of u Tirot

Sing. This shows that the Khasi love and respect their heroes, or in other words it is the Khasi way of immortalising heroes in history.

Tirot Sing breathed his last in Dacca on the 17th July 1835. For so long, the exact date of Tirot Sing's death could not be established, and many scholars gave different views. At first the 29th March was observed as the Death Anniversary of Tirot Sing. This date marked the installation of the nephew of Tirot Sing, U Rajon Sing, as his successor in 1834. It was through the views expressed by some educated Khasi like Maham Singh and others, who wrote to the Government against the observance of the 29th March as the death anniversary of Tirot sing, the Government shifted the date to the 04th of April, and this date was observed as Tirot Singh's Day. This date is significant, as it was on this day, in 1829 that the Khasi people under leadership of Tirot Sing and other chiefs launched their war of resistance against the British. It was Prof. D. R. Syiemlieh, Department of History, North Eastern Hill University, who through his sincere effort came across a document, that revealed the true light on the date of the death of Tirot Sing that is 17th July, 1835. This ended the long misconception of the people which they have come to believe due to non-availability of facts.

The Hynniew Trep Students and Youth Organisation (HSYO) was formed and has the motto 'for a brighter tomorrow', besides other aims and objectives. This organisation wants to preserve the language, culture, tradition, songs, music and dances. It also requested the Central Government to issue a stamp on u Tirot Sing. It may be mentioned that the other social organisations have also made similar request, and accordingly, the Government of India issued a postage stamp of u Tirot Sing on the 3rd February, 1988. This organisation also wants the renaming of places and to preserve the indigenous names such as Iewduh for Barabazar, Umiam lake for Barapani lake, Nongmynsong for Lalchand Basti and so on.

Efforts were made by the Catholic church to preserve the culture of the people. The Catholic mission started in 1876, but the mission was established permanently in 1890.⁴⁸ The Catholic church built churches, convents, schools, colleges, technical institutions and hospitals, and some of them are among the best in the country. The Catholic mission has many publications on religious themes, *U Nongialam Katholik* and *Ka Ing Kristan* were the earliest Catholic monthlies. Rev. Father Sngi Lyngdoh was an editor of a Khasi paper, entitled *Ka Sur Shipara*, which was out of circulation now. The Salesian Mission has other publications, Rev. Father J. Bacchiarello, G. Costa, H. Elias, E. Bars, S. Sngi Lyngdoh were the main contributors. The Catholic mission did not object the Khasi dances, and in fact traditional dances are encouraged except rituals and religious ceremonies. As early as 1934, Mgr. Mathias took three Khasi men u Leviticus Raptap, u Shon and a Khasi priest Francis Diengdoh and two others non-Khasi to Rome, they wore their own traditional costumes and were

highly appreciated and attracted everybody's attention. They had a chance to meet Mussoloni and Marconi.⁴⁹ On festive occasions and celebrations, cultural dances and songs are performed. During the Golden *Jubilee of the Salesians* in 1972, besides other programmes on November 18th, there was a cultural display at Garrison ground by the various tribes of the North East. During the visit of his Holiness Pope John Paul II to Shillong on 4th February 1986, in his message to more than three hundred thousands people who gathered at Golf-link, Shillong, he said that the people should love and appreciate one's own culture, language and past history. Various colourful dances of the people of the North East greeted the Pope.

The Catholic church organises *ka Shad Paskha* (Easter Dance) at Pynursla, a village on the Shillong-Dawki Road. Various kinds of dances of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills are performed. Rev. Father Norbert Nodren Nongrum is the first Khasi priest to put on full dancing costumes and took part in the Khasi dance.

The attitude of the Catholic church towards the culture of the people changed after the second Vatican Council which has stated that Christ and Christianity crown all religions, fulfill the hopes and anxieties of all people and do not destroy cultures, but perfect them and bring them to fruition. The Catholic church followed the cultural approach to evangelization and laid stress on culture and inculturation⁵⁰ - Rev. Father Sngi Lyngdoh questioned the term "animism" used for the Khasi and other tribals, the Khasi have a clear conception of God, he pointed out as follows: ⁵¹

"that the Khasi people feel a deep void in their religious life, a void they cannot themselves fill up. They are not completely satisfied with their own form of religion. There is thus a longing for some sort of a Saviour from outside. They keep on looking forward because religion for them is "incurably eschatological". It is exactly at this point that Christianity has fulfilled their longing."

Father Sngi Lyngdoh wants to preserve and protect the Khasi culture but not the rituals aspects. He participates in the Nongkrem festival, he uses Khasi terms like *ka Jer lea Thoh* for baptism, *Sohblei* for Catholic priest, he uses the traditional *klong* or gourd to baptise his converts. To him religion should not destroy the culture of the people.

The Stage development also saw the spirit of revivalism, the Rympei Theatrical Centre, the prominent Khasi – dramatic group has staged two historical dramas, the *Last Days of U Tirot Sing* and *U Kiang Nangbah*, the latter won the best historical play at the National Drama Competition known as Allahabad Natya Sangh held at Allahabad in 1985. U Mihsuk Nongrum played the role of the two heroes. He also received the *Miet Apphira* best Actor award for his role of u Kiang Nangbah in Shillong in 1986. The full length plays of *U Kiang Nangbah* and *Ka Bniat Namar Ka Bniat* (based on U Tirot Sing) were brought out in form of dramas in 1985 by U Remy Phankon and U Reginald Nongkynrih respectively. The Khasi Cultural Society staged plays of freedom

struggle such as U Sngap, U Tirot Sing and others. Another dramatic group the Hynniew Trep Cultural and Welfare Organisation has staged remarkable plays to infuse consciousness among the people.

When examining all these recent movements⁵² of the students, youths, and social and cultural organisations and writings, one thing is very clear, that is, the people in general are very much conscious of their past heritage and they are proud of their identity and want to preserve their language and culture. The converted Khasi however, want to preserve cultures but not religion and ritual parts of it.

The question is now posed, why the glorification of the past, its heritage and culture? Revivalism movement appeared as a result of the quest of identity. There is a crisis of identity, which the people are very much concerned about. At first, the Khasi accepted and welcomed the changes like modern education, Christianity, new way of life and other factors of modernization. Later on they found that these changes which they have welcomed is too much. With the progress of modernization, and with so much of transformation, the people fear that there may not be anything Khasi left, and in no time, their traditions and their old way of life would disappear. There is a danger in their political and economic life. A large number of people came from outside as employees in the Central and State Government, as businessmen, contractors, as employees of private and public establishments and other menial services. These people participate actively in the political field through the battle of the ballot boxes and by contesting in the elections. This is a dangerous situation in a small tribal population, and there is an apprehension, that the tribal people will be outnumbered in no time, and they will lose their political strength. The people always refer to the State of Tripura and Sikkim, where the indigenous people are outnumbered by others. Economically, there is a danger too, due to the competition of the outsiders in the economic field as well. The tribals fear that they would lose their jobs through competition. So it is these contemporary political and economic problems that the society is facing with the influx of the outsiders, that the people have become conscious of their identity and in their attempt to strengthen their identity that they appreciate their past, when it was uncontaminated and unadulterated. It was this thought of this uncontaminated and unadulterated past, that strengthen their quest of identity. The people start to appreciate their indigenous way of life, like festivals and dances, songs and musical instruments, their basic customs and traditions, to show that they are a unique and different people, from those coming and infiltrating into the State.

It is this appreciation of the past that led to a revivalist movement. On examining deeply, some questions appear to be answered. Is reviving the past possible? Who are the revivalists? Are all Khasi revivalists? The champions of the revivalist movements, whether Christians or Non-Christians are the urban

educated elites who through their writings and speeches appreciate the past, its heritage and culture. It is through these champions of revivalism that the question of a revivalist movement is possible. The wish of the revivalists is to revive the Khasi way of life, its customs, festivals and dances, music and others. This is more possible in the villages, as most of the people are agriculturists and as we have seen that the festivals and dances are linked with the agricultural life of the people. But revivalism among the Khasi educated urban elites is difficult. Agriculture is not the occupation of the elites, all most of them are converted and doing white collar jobs. They are officers, businessmen, teachers, technicians etc., with a different standard of living, having modern facilities like good education, good and well furnished houses, and other facilities. Are they going to perform the festivals and dances? As most of the festivals are performed in the villages, they can just write and tell others to appreciate the past, the festivals and dances and the Khasi way of life. However, they can preserve only the basic traits of their culture like matrilineal system, kinship ties and other customary laws of the society.

Another question may be asked, is it necessary to maintain the identity? By identity we mean the tradition and culture of a people. Traditions grew over a long period of time, it grew whatever was necessary for the people, things which were necessary in the past are relevant even today. Maintaining the identity means maintaining the traditions and culture of the people which were important and are important, therefore, the community, should maintain its identity. A revivalist trend is very important in the society, which means to bring back certain things which have already existed and for one reason or another were given up. Not only to bring them back but to revitalise in such a way that it will suit modern conditions, to bring back in a new form which will be adaptable to the modern society.

Thus, with the advent of Christianity, and western education, a transformation took place in the social and cultural life of the people. The converts abandoned their former religious rites, beliefs and rituals, and accepted the Christian teachings. But in spite of the massive Christianization of the Khasi people, their social structure has withstood the challenge of change. They still preserve their laws of inheritance, and observe the Khasi cultural and political customs. One important factor which has helped to retain some elements of Khasi customs are kinship ties and ethnicity. Blood ties still forms the essential base for the Khasi including the converts alike, they became bound up by the customary laws, and still preserve the basic structure of the society, for example, the matrilineal system, although they have adopted things which modernization has offered. In spite of all factors like Christianity, modernization, western education and others, the Khasi people irrespective of religious denominations still take pride in their identity as Khasi and of their rich cultural heritage.

Footnotes

1. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, pp.116-117; also Tiplut Nongbri, in the *Souvenir of the 150th Death Anniversary of u Tirot Sing*, p.66
2. H. K. Barpujari, *Problem of the Hill Tribes: North East Frontier*. 1822-42, p.93.
3. P. N. Dutta, *Glimpses into the History of Assam*, p.112.
4. P. N. Dutta, *Impact of the West on the Khasis and Jaintias*, p.28.
5. H. Bareh, *op. cit.*, p. 441
6. H. K. Barpujari, *Assam in the Days of the Company*, p.280.
7. H. Bareh, *A Short History of Khasi Literature*, p.19.
8. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, pp 404-405.
9. J. B. Bhattacharjee, "The Messenger of Khasi Heritage" in *Khasi Heritage*, p. 3.
10. H. Bareh, *op. cit.*, p.367.
11. *Ibid.*, p.368.
12. H. Bareh, *A Short History of Khasi Literature*, pp.34-36.
13. *Ibid.*, p.28.
14. Kynpham Singh, 'Seng Khasi' in *Where Lies the Soul of Our Race*, p.7.
15. *Ibid.*
16. A. S. Khongphai, "Shad Suk Mynsiem" (Thanksgiving Dance), in *Khasi Heritage*, p.129 ; also Hipshon Roy, *Sneng Tymmen*, p.13. No. 1984/10/53.
17. Kynpham Singh, *op. cit.*, p.7.
18. Kynpham Singh, *Shillong Centenary Celebration Souvenir*, p.79 ; also Kynpham Singh, *Ki Por Bad Ki Kam U Rash Mohon Roy*, pp. 40-41; also N. C. S.Sen, *The Origin and Early History of the Khasi-Synteng People*, p. 277.
19. M. G. Lyngdoh, *The Life and Works of Dr. Homiwell Lyngdoh*, pp. 38-39.
20. H. Rymbai, "The Birth of Seinraj" in *Khasi Heritage*, p. 58.
21. Hipshon Roy, *Where Lies the Soul of Our Race*, p.12.
22. Kynpham Singh, *Ki Por Bad Ki Kam U Rash Mohon Roy*, pp.40-41.
23. J. B. Bhattacharjee, *op. cit.*, p.25.
24. W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol. II, pp. 206-207.
25. *U Nongsain Hima*, No. 5-27, cited in H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi people*, p.4.
26. H. Rymbai, *op. cit.*, p.185.
27. *Ibid.*
28. H. Bareh, *A Short History of Khasi Literature*, pp.36-37.
29. *Ibid.*, p.40.
30. Soso Tham, *Ki Sngi Barim u Hynniew Trep*, p.1.
31. H. Bareh, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-49.
32. Rev. Wat Singh. Warbah, "U Dr. Homiwell Lyngdoh Nonglait Kum U Riewniam" in *Dr. Homiwell Lyngdoh Birth Centenary Celebrations*, p.11.
33. R. S. Lyngdoh, "A Short Account of the Life and Works of Dr. Homiwell Lyngdoh Nonglait" in *Soso Tham Birth Centenary Celebrations*, pp.82-83.
34. H. Bareh, *op. cit.*, pp.50-51.
35. *Ibid.*, p.53.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-79.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 89-94.
38. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi people*, p. 392.
39. H. Bareh, *A Short History of Khasi Literature*, pp. 103-105.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-127.
41. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, p. 383.
42. H. Bareh, *A Short History of Khasi Literature*, pp. 140-141.
43. Researcher's own Collection.
44. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, p. 381.
45. "Ka Seminar Kaba Iadei bad ka Imlang Sahlang" a *Programme* issued by the Khasi Students Union, 1981.
46. H. Bareh, *A Short History of Khasi Literature*, p. 166.
47. "Ki Jingshad u Hynniew Trep" (2nd Annual Dance Festival), organised by the Syngkhong Kyntiew Ri, 1980.
48. O. Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, p. 7.
49. Interview with u Leviticus Rapphap.
50. O. Paviotti, *op. cit.*, p. 220.
51. Julius Richter, *History of the Missions*, p. 247, cited in J. Fortis Jyrwa, *The Wondrous Works of God*, pp. 12-13.
52. Researcher's own observations.

Chapter VIII

Conclusion and Appreciation

Our study of the Khasi festivals has revealed that the festivals and dances play a very important role in the social, economic, political and religious life of the Khasi. Most of the festivals are very old, as old as the society itself, but there are some which are of recent origin. The Khasi are a happy and lively people, they love dances, music and songs which echo in their hills and dales. Their way of life is clearly reflected in their various colourful festivals and dances. In the precolonial society, the Khasi lived in isolation, except with some contacts for trade with the neighbouring plains. They have however maintained their distinct identity and retained their individual traits through the ages. The area in which they live, has its own geographical and ecological peculiarities. The community is required to condition itself to adopt to the situation that they are forced to live in. The way of life of the people, their temperament, taste, food and dress habits are reflected in their various festivals. The people live in high mountainous tracts of land and this environment favoured them to lead a secluded life and keep them aloof from outside influences. Till very recently, after the British has occupied several parts of the North Eastern Region, they introduced modern civilization like education, communication etc. With the coming of education and other forces of modernity, the Khasi like the other tribes of the North East, could no longer resist the modern influences and began to give up their traditional way of life and accepted the change. In early times when the Khasi lived in isolation, with no means of communication and medical facilities, they had to struggle for their existence in their very own natural way as no outside help was available. Their very life and existence depended on their bountiful harvest, as the mainstay of the Khasi economy was agriculture. If their crops grow well, they would have an easy life and be free from starvation. Economic need was there to fight against starvation,

pestilence, diseases like plague, cholera, diarrhoea, and others. So to fight against diseases and starvation and other natural calamities, the people propitiated the deities by offering sacrifices and the rites and rituals were performed, so that they would be saved from all these dangers. Hence, the people performed the festivals and dances to invoke God's blessings in all respects and to thank Him for all His kindness that He has showered upon them. They were scared of natural calamities like earthquake, Thunder, hail and storms etc. Thus, we see in the *Behdeinkhlam* festival, sacrifices are given to Thunder, so that it will not destroy the crops, people and cattle.

Dances and songs are an intimate feature of Khasi existence, and a part of every event in life. The valleys seem to ring forever with the music of pipes and drums.¹ R. T. Rymbai,² commenting on the festivals said,

"I cannot imagine him living his life in its fullness without his festivals. Without them his life is not only incomplete, but rootless and parasitic, for the roots of the whole being of a Khasi, his very culture, are embedded in his traditions which blossom forth through his festivals. In a word, a Khasi is known by his festival, as a tree by its fruits."

It is through the various festivals and dances that the life of the Khasi is reflected. During the festivals, the rites and rituals show that the Khasi are a deeply religious people. They pray to God for His blessings for peace, well-being and general prosperity and at the same time, they do not forget to thank Him for all the blessings that He has showered upon them. By observing the festivals the people feel contented and satisfied emotionally and religiously. The Khasi also show respect to their ancestors and also the dead, a ceremonial offering of food known as *ka aibam* is observed. During the *Pomblang Nongkrem*, prayers, sacrifices and offerings are offered to the first ancestral mother, and maternal uncle of the *Syiem* clan, that is the ruling family. At the *Behdeinkhlam* festival, the women do not take part in the public celebration, their role is to offer prayers at home to the dear departed to whom they also offer sacrificial food, symbolising the faith, that they lived high above, watching us here below.³ The continuity and relation between the living and the dead is maintained by communal offerings to the dead during festivals. The Khasi have their own traditional religion believing in the Supreme God the Creator. The *Rishot Blei* or the holy pillar or the pillar of God at the *Ingsad* at Smit shows that the Khasi religion is monotheistic and they worship God the Creator. Tree plays a very important role in the Khasi religious ceremonies, sacred trees are used during the *Behdeinkhlam* festival. A particular tree known as *diengsning* is used during sacrifices, and a wooden block known as *ka diengshat* is used for egg divination.

The study of the festivals reveals that the Khasi religion is very

democratic in nature, there is no jealousy or ill feeling towards one another. The festivals of the Khasi centre round the *Syiemsad*, the *Syiem*, *Myntri*, *Lyngdoh*, *Doloi*, the elders and the people on the whole. Therefore, religion to the Khasi is a factor that brings the people closer together, it also brings the ruling class closer to the people. On the final day of the *Behdeinkhlam* festival, the *Doloi*, the priest, headmen and their assistants go to the locality known as *Kmai Raid*, while the *Pator*, the *Basan*, and their assistants go to the locality known as *Khon Raid* to beat every roof with bamboo sticks. This ceremony gives an opportunity for the ruling class to meet the people once a year. It also shows equality of all, there is no difference even when the rulers visit the common peoples' houses. The people on the other hand are happy and pleased to meet their rulers.

The democratic outlook of the Khasi is reflected in their organisation, whether it is social, political or religious aspects. The Khasi society has been formed on strong democratic tradition for the *Syiem*, *Myntri*, *Doloi*, *Lyngdoh*, the elder and the *Dorbar* are responsible for the day to day administration. In the Khasi political set up, the power of the ruler is limited, he cannot perform any important act without first consulting the *Dorbar*. In the various festivals, special status is given to the members of the ruling classes like the *Syiem*, *Lyngdoh*, *Doloi*, *Myntri* and the elders. They play a different role, although the people are involved. The differentiated roles of the ruling family and the state officials in the festivals indirectly results in the acceptance and recognition of the highest status of the ruling classes by the people.

The study also shows that the festivals are not only religious ceremonies but also social festivities. It is on these festive occasions that they could meet the members of their community, their relatives and friends, the near and dear ones to enquire about their health and well-being. Those who have to work outside, come back home during this period, to meet their family and friends, to join together in the common worship to God and to share the happiness, joy and love of a community as a whole. It is a time of merriment and enjoyment, to imbibe the spirit of love and brotherhood. Most of the people have to work very hard for the whole year, and these occasions give them an opportunity to share the love, joy and concern for one another and for the community on the whole. It is a time for the young unmarried girls to show their beauty and gracefulness, and also could display their rich costumes, gold and silver ornaments and jewelleryes. It is on the dancing occasions that the young men could see and choose the beautiful girls and later on propose and arrange for their marriage. The youths in particular and the people in general could display their best dresses, gold and silver ornaments, on these occasions. The festivals provide a social gathering and a collective activity to the people, they also provide different activities at different seasons in collaboration with the

agricultural works of the people, and also serve as a time for recreation and enjoyment to them. The festivals also serve as occasions, where people who are otherwise occupied with agriculture and other works come together in free mood during these festive days. This helps the growth of solidarity among the people, their concern for the welfare of all the people and the State, and also the maintenance of unity and integrity against external threats.

The study of the festivals also brings to light that in the Khasi society, apart from social, political and religious aspects, the festivals have direct connection with the economic activities of the people as we have seen that the Khasi festivals are linked with agriculture and cultivation rites. If the people get a good harvest, and are well off, then the festival is big as they have enough money to buy clothes and other things. If on the other hand, the year is bad without reaping a good harvest, then naturally, the festival is small as the people do not have money to buy their necessary things. Festivals are a source of income to many people like those who sell clothes, tea and other things. Those who have been to Smit, where the Nongkrem dance festival is held, they would see many tea shops and other shops which come out in large numbers in which the people could make extra earning, and at the same time serve the needs of the people, who go to witness the festival.

The festivals also have an educational value as they have preserved the distinctive traits of the culture and tradition of the people. In the primitive society, having no written records, recitation of prayers, incantations, mythology etc. during the festival time serves the function of transmitting traditional lore within the tribe. Festivals bind together the religious group, the members of the clan and family and the society as a whole.

A tribal society is generally looked upon to have emerged from an egalitarian base. In case of the Khasi society, there are elements of egalitarianism that exist till today, but at the same time, the elements of feudalism and social stratification becomes noticeable for a long time. The symptoms of egalitarianism as well as social stratification are very much reflected in the behaviour, form and contents of the festivals and dances. Elements of equality are clearly seen in the *Behdeinkhlam* festival, the performance of the ceremony in the mud, shows that all men are equal, many fall in the muddy water. Some pull others hands and legs, yet there is no ill feeling towards one another, they do it with the spirit of love and brotherhood. Some elements of social stratification are seen in the Nongkrem festival. On the first night of the festival, before the *Bakhraw* or elders dance, they first bow to the holy pillar and then the elder *Syiem*. This shows that the *Bakhraw* and the people respect and submit themselves to the *Syiem*. It also shows the acceptance and recognition of the higher status by the people. The Nongkrem dance starts by the opening or inauguration dance by the female members of the ruling family, after this dance,

then other dancers can follow suit. When the female members dance, there is someone to hold the umbrella to cover them, this is done to show respect to the ruling family and also to differentiate them from the other dancers. Here a sign of differentiation and social stratification are clearly visible. The contribution of goats by the different Raid which fall under the Khyrim Syiemship also show a sign of acceptance, recognition and allegiance by the *Raid* to the *Syiem* and the State. The *Shad Nongkrem* is also known as *Ka Shad Nguh Syiem Nguh Kmie* which is a dance to show respect to the *Syiem*.

The male and female dances have special meanings behind them. The *Shad Mastieh* and *Shad Wait* are typical war dance by the male dancers only, which depict that the people perform a dance to celebrate after their victory in the war. The duty of the man is to protect the family, the clan, the race and the motherland on the whole. The male dance with sword, arrows and shield shows the high responsibility that a man should possess in defence of his family, race and his motherland against the external threats. The female dance with their eyes casting downwards exhibits humility, simplicity, purity and honesty, the qualities that a woman should possess. The dance of women in the inner circle of the dancing arena shows that a woman is the keeper of the house and the propagator of the race, and she is held in high respect in the Khasi society. The men's dance in the outer circle shows that the men should protect the womenfolk, the family, race and the motherland. The role which is played by the *Syiemsad* at the *Pomblang Nongkrem* festival is also in accordance with the matrilineal system of the Khasi, where a woman is accorded a special and high status in the society.

The observance of the festivals and dances is an important factor for the development of artistic talents and activities of the people. In celebrating a festival, care is taken to present dance, and music very artistically. It is also ensured that dresses and costumes are properly worn and prepared in a very artistic way.

The dances and the dancing costumes of both male and female dancers have got their own originality and beauty. It is surprising that the Khasi have realised the value of gold, silver and jewelleries from time immemorial. Only the rich and well to do could possess the dancing costumes. Thus, in olden days the wealth of anyone could be determined by the possession of the dancing costumes, gold and silver ornaments. The gold and silver ornaments are well designed and artistically made which prove that the Khasi are artistic goldsmiths and have artistic talents, skill and taste which also shows their technological advancement. The *dhara* and *khore* worn by women and men respectively are made outside the Khasi and Jaintia Hills in Assam, which indicates that the

Khasi are rich and well to do as they could patronise these industries. It also brings to light the fact that trade was carried on between the Khasi and the people of the plains from time immemorial. The quivers, shields, swords, arrows, various kinds of drums, pipes and flutes are locally made, which shows that the Khasi are experienced craftsmen.

In the olden days festivals also helped in determining the age of a person, that is through the observance of the festival from one year to another. For example, a child who is one year when the festival is celebrated, he will be two years in the next festival.

Festivals are also of great hygienic importance. Before the festivals, efforts are made to clean the house, utensils and clothes. People work together to clean the roads, footpaths, wells etc. so that everything will wear a clean look on the festival days. It is an occasion, where community works can be organized.

The study of the festivals also reveals that the Khasi have a deep love for their culture. It is this love which sustains them. They feel proud that in spite of many modern changes that the society is facing, they are still able to preserve their culture and it is not swamped by outside influences. The people still continue to take pride in their customs and traditions and in their festivals. The *kur and kha* concept that is a relation between the maternal and paternal relatives is very much deep rooted among the Khasi, even till the present day, marriage within the same clan is still considered as a taboo. When the important festival of the Khasi like *ka Pomblang Nongkrem*, *Behdeinkhlam* and *Shad Weiking* draw nearer, everybody feels happy and develops a festive mood. Thousands of people in their best attires, irrespective of their religious creeds, go to witness these festivals.

The most prominent festivals of the Khasi are getting bigger and they attract more and more people than ever. Cultural identity is highly valued by the people and they feel very proud of their rich cultural heritage, which should be preserved at all costs. Our late Prime Minister, Srimati Indira Gandhi, who witnessed the *Pomblang Nongkrem* in 1976, said to the Khasi people to keep the best of the old and take advantage of the new changes in the society.

The study of the festivals also shows that the Khasi have deep love for freedom and independence, and thereby could not reconcile their fate to the British rule, because the rulers interfered with their traditional way of life. The *Pnar or Jaintia* rose against the rulers which led to local uprisings, when the English banned the cremation of the dead bodies near the Jowai town and interfered with the processionists of the dancing festival at Jaloŋg village.⁴ These discontentments and dissatisfactions took the shape of revolt under the leadership of u Kiang Nangbah, but he was captured and hanged to death

by the British on 30th December, 1862 and the revolt was finally suppressed in 1863. When asked why the people revolted, u Kiang Nangbah stated that it was due to the interference with the religious rites of the people.⁵ The Behdeinkhlam has assumed its present form only after India's independence. The festival could not be held for sixteen years and it was revived in 1948. The reasons for suspending the celebration of this festival were attributed to differences of opinion among the religious leaders, and also to the instigation of the government agents that it should be stopped at once. After the achievement of independence from British rule in 1947, the religious leaders revived it, in order to please God and preserve the cultural heritage of the people.⁶ Thus, we see that the *Pnar or Jaintia* by reviving this festival, have every reason to be proud of and to rejoice the country's independence like the rest of the people in our country. Again it is this love of freedom and independence which made u Tirot Sing to revolt against the British imperialism, which ultimately led to the annexation of the Khasi Hills in 1833.

The study of the festivals helps in the interpretation of Khasi history through the information and oral traditions available about them and to present a comparative picture of the observations in historical perspective. Regarding the antiquity of the festivals, nobody could say with certainty, which one is the oldest, as most of the festivals are very ancient. However, ceremonies which are connected with birth and death such as the birth and naming ceremonies and the bone collection and bone depository ceremonies which is known as *ka thep mawbah* must have been very old as birth and death are part of man's life which he has to undergo with the beginning of life itself. However, we have taken those festivals that are connected with the family and clan as the earliest as the *Raid* or commune and the state were organised at a later stage. Later on, when the Khasi have organised themselves into commune and state, then evolved other festivals and ceremonies which are connected with the commune and State. Another presumption may be taken by the story of migration. Many authors supported the view that the Khasi migrated from the east so, if the history of migration of the Khasi from the east is accepted, then probably the earliest festivals are those which are celebrated in the eastern part of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and due to the geographical mobility, the people spread to the other parts. The Laho dance festival must have been very old as it is connected with the origin and earlier settlements of the *Pnar or Jaintia*, who inhabit the eastern part of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The *Shad Suk Mynsiem* or *Shad Weiking*, is an important festival for the fact that is of comparatively recent origin, and it came into being at the wish and decision of the people. This dance festival started when the Seng Khasi organisation introduced it in order to preserve the cultural heritage of the Khasi. The other dance is the *Shad Tirot*

or the Tirot Sing's dance or Tirot Sing's day celebration, which is held annually at Mairang in the Nongkhlaw Syiemship about 40 Km from Shillong. It is here that the Tirot Sing memorial was erected. This dance consists of a male and female dance. It was instituted decades ago to honour and commemorate the hero of the Khasi land u Tirot Sing who laid down his life for the defence of his motherland against the foreign rule. Thus we have seen that a festival can be instituted at the wish and decision of the people.

The religion and culture of the Hindu neighbours of the plains had made some impact in the precolonial period, and a process of assimilation started in the bordering areas.⁷ *Ka Likhmi* or *ka 'Leikba* goddess of rice and agriculture which symbolises wealth and prosperity of the Bhoi areas may be identified as the goddess Lakshmi of the Hindus. Again, u *Biskorom* of the Pomblang Nongkrem is identified as Vishwakarma of the Hindus. The *Behdeinkhlam* festival also resembles the Hindu and Muslim festival. View from this context, this identification and similarity, show the unity of the rich and varied culture of our great country that is India. Similarities are noticed in rites and rituals, the concept of God, birth, death and rebirth, rites relating to harvest, disposal of the dead, dispelling the evil spirits are similar with all aboriginal or indigenous cultures in the greater Indian subcontinent, and the Khasi could not be an exception.⁸ Our country is compared to a very big garden with varied flowers, as each flower adds to the beauty of the garden, so also each different culture adds to the beauty of our great country, India. Despite differences in many respects, our country stands in unity amidst diversities.

A question may be asked whether we can preserve the various festivals with strict observance of religious rites and ceremonies. As it appears, with the growth of population, forces of modernity and other changes, the festivals have become more secularised and less elaborate. Moreover, the government highlights the festivals for tourist attraction, not the religious part of it. The economic factor is very important in the preservation of the festivals. The Khasi festivals involve a huge amount of expenditure, as the religious ceremonies include the sacrifices of pigs, fowls, goats and rice beer. Some festivals could not be held due to this economic problem which the people are facing. Moreover, most of the Khasi have now been converted to Christianity. After conversion they no longer take part religious ceremonies of the festivals, they simply witness the dances. The government of Meghalaya had set up the Department of Art and Culture, and we hope that this concerned Department will be able to preserve the rich cultural heritage of the people. Children must be taught the art of playing the various kinds of musical instruments. Dancing costumes and musical instruments should be preserved. Culture should not be static but progressive, adopting to the changed situation and condition of

time. What we need today is revitalization, so that the distinct identity and the rich culture of the people could be preserved.

Although the festivals bring unity and closeness to the participating families, clans and community on the whole yet the study of the festivals reveals that there is no common festivals for all the Khasi. All the festivals under study are localised in particular areas and places, and there is no common festival that will bind the community as a whole like for example, the Bihu festival which is celebrated by the Assamese people in our neighbouring State of Assam. The reason for the localisation of the festivals may be attributed to the geographical factors and distance from one place to another. In early days, when communication was a great hurdle, the people had to condition and adopt themselves according to the ecological environment that they lived in. So the different festivals which are celebrated by the people fitted in according to the geographical condition of the place.

The study also shows that the festivals of the Khasi and the other tribals of the North East are closely linked with their agricultural activities and their social life. Their tribal way of life is clearly reflected in their various colourful festivals.

A festival is a symbol of identity, it is not specific, but general for all communities. In a festival, the entire community feels emotionally involved. At the time of the festival, the entire community is emotionally so awakened that all their activities during the period centre around the festivals. A festival is specific to one community, and the members of that community during the festival feel themselves to be different from others. In the meaning and contents of the festival, the community discovers itself, its feelings and its way of life. During the festivals, the entire community gets an opportunity of coming and sharing together, exclusive of others.

It would be a very appropriate step if besides holding the festivals, traditional dances and other cultural programmes are held regularly which will be a kind of get together and will bring unity and integrity among the people and provide an opportunity to all the people to come together and join hand in hand to share the joy and happiness of the celebration, and sink their differences in an atmosphere of love and respect. This will pave the way for emotional integration which will automatically lead to national integration, the goal that our country is fighting for.

The Khasi are very much conscious of preserving their rich cultural heritage and their distinct identity. They cannot but feel proud that the festivals and dances are being preserved still, in spite of many forces of modernity and westernization that are going on in the society. However, with a proper understanding of the people to value their culture, coupled with the government's encouragement, the festivals and dances are sure to be preserved to depict the true life and culture of the people.

Footnotes

1. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *Tribalism in India*, p.155.
2. R.T. Rymbai, "The Festivals of a Khasi and Their Influence on his Life" in *Khasi Heritage*, p.128.
3. R.T. Rymbai, *op.cit.*, p. 127.
4. W.W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Assam*, pp. 206-207.
5. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, p.174.
6. H.W. Sten, "Ka Behdeinkhlam Festival of the Jaintias", in *North Eastern Spectrum and Book Supplement*, Vol. 1, 1976-77, p. 56;
7. J. B. Bhattacharjee, "Changing Khasis - A Historical Account" in S. Karotemprel, *The Tribes of North East India*, p. 332.
8. *Ibid.*

Glossary

Aitnar	—	a sacred pool where the rots are immersed during the Behdeinkhlam festival
Aibam	—	to feed, to give food, a ceremonial offering of food to the dead ancestors
Basan	—	elderly man in the village, a nobleman, state official in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills
Bam	—	eat
Bakha	—	cousin
Bakhraw	—	great, large, nobleman, elder, aristocracy, member of a high family
Bam hynroh	—	eating by the toad, it refers to an eclipse
Bam hynroh ka Sngi	—	meaning the Sun is eaten by the toad, it refers to the solar eclipse
Bam hynroh u Brai	—	meaning the Moon is eaten by the toad, it refers to the lunar eclipse
Beh	—	drive, chase
Bhoi	—	a Khasi tribe living in the northern part of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills
Biskorom	—	god of artisans and craftsmen
Bisli	—	a kind of flute made of bamboo
Blei	—	God
Blang	—	goat
Bneng	—	heaven
Bnai	—	Moon
Briew	—	man
Buhnoh	—	to put away
Byrsieh	—	a defilement, tainted
Ka	—	feminine, singular, definite article
Kamai	—	earning, to earn
Kha	—	born, paternal relations, father's, sister, related through marriage
Khynriam	—	a Khasi tribe inhabiting the highland middle portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills
Khatduh	—	last, youngest sister, youngest daughter
Khyndai Hajrong	—	the nine above, this refers to the Khasi belief that in the beginning God created sixteen families. Out of them, nine remained in heaven and were known as the <i>Khyndai Hajrong</i> , and the seven families

		on earth were known as the <i>Hynniew Trep</i> or the Seven Huts.
Khun	—	son or daughter, children
Khoh	—	conical basket of the Khasi for carrying things
Khlam	—	plague
Khalarni	—	a kind of fish
Khlur	—	star
Khla	—	tiger
Ki	—	definite article, plural
Kiad	—	liquor, beverage
Kiad um, kiad hiar	—	a kind of beer, made from either rice or millet
Klong	—	gourd
Klim	—	adultery
Knia	—	sacrifice
Kni	—	maternal uncle
Kpa	—	father
Kpu	—	rice cakes
Krem	—	cave
Krem lamet		
Krem latang	—	a cave where in the olden days, it is believed that the Sun went to hide herself and refused to come out, and then the world was plunged into darkness
Ksiar	—	gold
Ksuid	—	devil, evil spirit
Kur	—	clan, maternal relations descending from a common female ancestress
Kwai	—	betelnut, arecanut
Ksing bom ne	—	smaller drums
Ksing nakra		
Kylla	—	change
Khyrwang	—	a piece of cloth which is worn by the Pnar women which is tied round the waist and reached down below the knees, it is a combination of white and black or maroon and white colour in stripes. Khyrwang is also the name of the Khasi tribe, inhabiting the north eastern slopes of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills
Daw	—	reason or cause
Damdar	—	organiser
Dhulia	—	musicians, which include drummers and pipers
Ding	—	fire
Diengshat	—	wooden block, which is used for breaking the eggs for divination

Dong	—	locality
Doloi	—	chief, the ruler or chief in Jaintia Hills,
Dorbar	—	an assembly or Durbar, council
Dorbar hima	—	State assembly or Durbar
Dorbar Raid	—	Durbar of the communes
Dorbar Shnong	—	a village Durbar
Duwan	—	altar
Duitara	—	a harp, a kind of musical instrument
Hima	—	State
Hok	—	justice, truth
Hukum	—	order, commandment, Divine Decree
Hynniew Trep	—	the Seven Huts or families who are believed to be the
Hynniew Skum	—	ancestors of the Khasi
Hynroh	—	toad
Iawbei	—	ancient female ancestress of the clan
Iawbei tynrai	—	the ancient mother of the whole clan
Iawbei tymmen	—	the old grandmother of the subclan or kpoh
Iawbei khynraw	—	the ancestral mother of a family
Iew	—	market
Ing	—	house, family
Ingsad	—	official residence of the ruling family
Ingkur	—	clan's house
Ingniam	—	religious house
Ingseng	—	organising house
Ingkhatduh	—	youngest daughter's house
Iwtung	—	ill smelling, bad odour
Janmiet	—	evening
Jainspong	—	turban
Jainboh	—	dhoti
Jainsem	—	traditional dress of the Khasi women, the <i>jainsem</i>
		are kept in position by tying over the shoulders
		and come down below the knee
Jainpien ne jympien	—	a piece of cloth worn by Khasi in the olden days.
		It is worn round the waist and comes down below
		the knee
Jaintawah	—	a kind of shawl
Jainkup	—	a garment which is worn over the shoulders like a
		cloak
Jylliew	—	deep, the name of the sixth month of the Khasi
		Calendar corresponding to June
Labang	—	a Khasi tribe, living in the north eastern slopes of
		the Khasi and Jaintia Hills
Lum	—	hill or mountain, to collect, gather together
Lur	—	plough, and a short form of Khlur meaning star

Lukhmi	—	goddess of wealth and prosperity of the Khasi
Lyjur	—	summer
Lyngskor	—	a Prime Minister of the Khasi State
Lyer	—	air, wind
Lyngkot	—	short
Lyngngam	—	a Khasi tribe, inhabiting the western part of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills
Lyngdoh	—	a priest, a ruler
Maw	—	stone
Mawniam or Mawbah	—	religious stone, a clan's ossuary where bones of the dead belonging to the same clan are deposited
Madan	—	field
Mawshyieng, Mawkynroh— or Mawphew	—	a family stone cist for depositing the bones of the dead of a family
Mawshynrang	—	male stone, menhirs, standing stones
Mawkynthei	—	dolmens, flat stone or slab
Mawlynti ne Mawkjat	—	stones which are erected by the clan on the village road
Mawbna ne Mawbyinna	—	stones of proclamation
Mawnam	—	memorial stones
Mawumkoi	—	stones which are erected to indicate the site of the pool in which the bones of those who died of an unnatural death like accidents etc. are washed before taking the family stonecist
Mawklim	—	stones erected by the mother of the deceased son, whose living wife has entered into an illegal marriage
Niam	—	religion, belief
Niangphlang	—	a kind of hairy caterpillar
Nongphyllut	—	a Khasi tribe living in the north eastern slopes of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.
Nongtymmen	—	ancestral property
Nongkynraw	—	earning or property of the present members, it is not an ancestral property. Earning or property acquired before marriage
Paiem	—	father king
Pator	—	official in Jaintia Hills
Phawar	—	set of rhymes or couplets
Phreid	—	small bird
Pnar	—	a tribe inhabiting the Jaintia Hills in the eastern parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills
Pomblang	—	goat sacrifice, goat killing ceremony
Pop	—	sin
Prah	—	bamboo sieves and basket

Pyrem	—	spring, one of the four seasons in a year
Pynshok	—	state subscription, annual subscription to the state
Pyrthat	—	Thunder
Raid	—	commune, administrative unit
Ramew	—	mother earth
Rangbah shnong	—	village headman
Ri	—	country or land, to keep
Riti	—	unwritten constitution
Rynieng	—	stature
Ryndia tlem	—	white muga silk, a kind of shawl, a traditional shawl of Khasi men
Sang	—	taboo, incest
Saidnia	—	ancient maternal uncle
Sangot	—	an announcer
Saitjain	—	to wash clothes
Sharati	—	a kind of blowing instrument
Shakyllia	—	a kind of bird
Shawing	—	a kind of blowing instrument
Shanam	—	lime case
Shrieh	—	monkey
Shad	—	dance
Shadniam	—	religious dance
Shad sngewbha	—	festive dance with no religious rites and ceremonies
Shad Mastieh	—	a male dance which is very fast, it depicts an old war dance. In this dance, a dancer holds a sword and a Symphiah kind of flyflab or a whisk
Shad wait	—	a sword dance, it is a male dance
Shad shnong	—	village community dance
Shong sang	—	marriage within the same clan, which is taboo in the Khasi society
Shympiari	—	a piece of cloth which men used to wear in the olden days, it is tied round the waist and reached above the knee
Sirdar	—	ruling chief
Snem	—	a year
Sohblei	—	high priest, sacrificer
Sopti Kti	—	a blouse which is worn by women
Sohpet bneng	—	literally meaning the navel of heaven. It is the name of the hill peak where it is believed that in the olden days, there was a bridge which touched the apex of this hill and connected heaven and

	—	earth. The sixteen families of the Khasi used to go to heaven and come down to earth, as they pleased through this ladder
Star	—	headstrap, it is used with the conical basket for carrying things
Step	—	morning
Suidwah	—	river spirits
Suidlum	—	mountain spirits
Syntiew	—	a flower
Synshar	—	to rule
Synrai	—	autumn
Syiem	—	king or chief
Syiemsad	—	the high priestess, the custodian of religious rites and ceremonies, sister of the Syiem
Symphiah	—	a kind of a whisk or fly flap which is used by male dancers
Taiew	—	week
Tanglod	—	a kind of blowing instrument
Tapmohkhlieh	—	a garment worn over the head and shoulders by women
Thawlang	—	ancient male ancestor
Tham	—	crab
Thlen	—	a serpent or monster, which feeds on human blood
Tipbriew	—	to know man
Tipblei	—	to know God
Tlang	—	winter
Trep	—	hut
Tymmen shnong	—	village headman
U	—	personal pronoun, masculine, singular, definite article
Um	—	water
Umblei	—	Godly Water, holy water
War	—	a Khasi tribe inhabiting the southern area of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills
Wahadahar	—	a ruling chief in Shella in the Southern part of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills

(N.B.: arranged in Khasi alphabetical order)

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The bulk of the data used in this thesis have been collected between January 1984 and February 1988, mainly through interviews involving respondents of various profession like teachers, social and political workers, village and church elders government servants, housewives, farmers and writers, traditional heads and those who take part in the festivals belonging to both sexes and all religions. The researcher has also attended the festivals during these years. As an insider, it was possible to converse freely with the people and observe every details of the festivals.

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The Male and Female Dancers in the Laho.Dance.



The Male and Female Dancers in the Laho Dance along with the musicians.



The Male Dancers during the **RONGKHLI** Festival.



The Female Dancers during the **RONGKHLI** Festival.



The Male Dance known as ka Mastieh during the **RONGKHLI** Festival.



The rots which are brought to Aitnar (Sacred Pool) during the Behdeinkhlam Festival.



The colourful rots during the Behdeinkhlam Festival.



A male dance known as ka shadwait during the Sajer Festival of the Raid Nonglyngdoh.



A male and female dance known as ka Shadkynjuh Kynthei during the Sajer Festival.



A male dance known as ka shadnguh during the Sajer Festival.



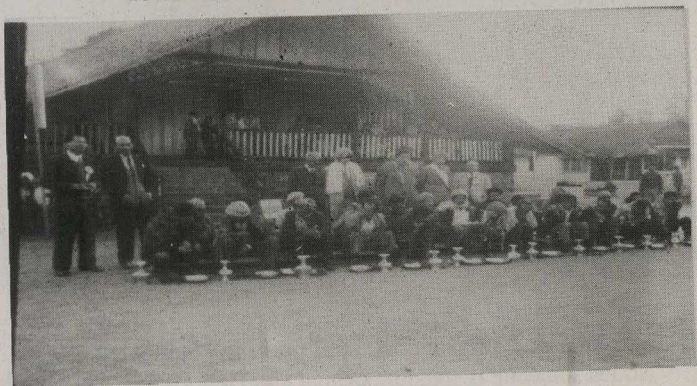
The Ingsad at Smit the official residence of the ruling Family of Himakhyrim.



The Syiem, the Bakhraw and the people at the Lum Iewduh Pomblang (the sacred hillock)



The Sacrifice of a goat known as u Blang Iewduh at the Sacred hillock.



Preparation for a Sacrifice of the twelve goats known as 'LANGSLA'



Khasi Female dancers at the Nongkrem dance.



Nongkrem dance A female dancer of the ruling family dances- Notice someone is standing behind and **HOLDING** an umbrella to cover her which is a kind of respect.



The female dancers during the Shad suk mynsiem.



Khasi male and female dancers in their dancing costumes.



The Khasi female dancers in their dancing costumes.



The Dhulia or musicians from the Bhoi Area.

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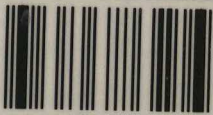
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