

FOLK DANCE AND FESTIVALS OF KHASI TRIBES OF NORTHEAST INDIA

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Abstract :

Khasi were earliest immigrant tribes who came from Myanmar and Settled down in the plains of East Assam. The 'Khasi' are an indigenous tribe, living in the state of Meghalaya which is in the North Eastern part of India with small population in neighbouring Assam. The Khasi are divided into seven sub-tribes : *Khnrriam, Pnar, Bhoi, War, Maram, Lyngngam* and *Diko*. The khasi tribe in khasi hills in known as 'Khyrnriam'. There are belongs to Mongoloid stock. There language are belongs to Austroasiatic language. The Khasi Tribe's are one of the largest surviving matrilineal culture in the world. Its means the mother and the children reside with the maternal family. The main aim of this paper is to bring into highlight the richness of the Khasis traditional festivals with Dance of North East India. In this process, special emphasis would be put on their traditional festivals and Dance. These tribes are a great Lover of Music and Dance. And also celebrate different traditional For example : *Nongkrem, Shad-Suk-mynsiem, Shad-Mastieh, Ka-Shad-Leh-Niam-Lewduh, Bangsorat* etc. In my Research paper it is tried to analysis how can celebrated their traditional festivals with dance.

Keywords: Khasi tribe, Festivals, Dance, Matrilineal, Nongkrem, Traditional.

0.01 Introduction :

According to the 2011 census of India, over 1.41 million the Khasi Tribe lived in the state of Meghalaya in the districts of East Khasi hills, West Khasi hill, South West Khasi Hills, Ri-bhoi, West Jaintia Hills and East Jaintia Hills. They call themselves 'ki Hynniew Trep' which means 'The Seven Huts' in the Khasi language.¹

0.02 Objective of the study :

- ❖ To give a brief information about the traditional festivals and Dance of the Khasi Tribe's.
- ❖ To study about their food habits, traditional dresses and marriage.

0.03 Methodology :

In this essay the descriptive methodology has been applied while discussing the mentioned topic. The present study is based on primary and secondary data collection. To collect primary data the researcher would use ethnographic research method. This data are attained by means of questionnaires, schedule and also collect it through interview and observation method such as marriage, traditional dresses, Food habits and their traditional dance and festivals of the Khasi

Tribe's. Secondary data are gathered from the individuals books, some documents etc. and can also be collected through census reports, books, various information published in newspaper and magazine.

0.04 Social Life of Khasi people :

0.04.01 Sub Tribe :

The Khasi are divided into seven sub tribes – *Khyntiam, Pnar, Bhoi, War, Maram, Lyngngam* and *Diko*. The Khyntiam (or Nongphlang) inhabit the uplands of the East Khasi hills district. The *Pnar* or *Synteng* live in the uplands of the jaintia Hills. The Bhoi live in the lower hills to the north and north-east of the Khasi hills. And jaintia hills towards the Brahmaputra valley, a vast area now under Ri-bhoi District. The war usually divided into *war - jaintia* and *war-khyntiam* in the South of the khasi hills, live on the steep southern slopes leading to Bangladesh. The Maram inhabit the uplands of the central parts of west khasi hills districts. The Khasi tribe belongs to Mongoldoid stock. Khasi tribe in khasi hills in known as '*Khyntiam*'.²

0.04.02 Language :

Khasi is categorized as the northern most Austroasiatic Language. This language was essentially oral until the arrival of European Missionaries particularly significant in this regard war welsch missionary, Thomas Jones, who transcribed the Khasi language into Roman Script.

0.04.03 Clan :

The Khasi society is matrilineal. Children adopt their respective mother clans. Khasi matriliney makes a clear distinction between *kur*, relatives from the mother's line and *kha* relatives from the father's class. The *kur* or *clan* is a kinship group. Most clans trace their roots to their great grandmothers. The mothers of the family is the head of the family and the father doesn't play any important part in a khasi family. Khasis ascribe to the youngest daughter the bulk of family inheritance. Only the youngest daughter (*Khadduh*) would inherit the remains of her parents wealth and property without any further consideration towards the other siblings. The youngest daughter also takes care of her parents during their old age when she does get married her husband ends up moving in with her and her parents.

0.04.04 Marriage :

The Khasi Tribe's marriage ceremony is very simple. According to Khasi Law, the marriage is purely a civil contract. Male's marriageable age group is from 18-25 while women's is 13-18. Arrange marriages do occur but not in a preferred form young men and women are given freedom to choose their mates. According to Khasi society rules, a khasi cannot marry a girl from his own *clan*. If one does, he will be liable to serious religious and socially cut off. The most remarkable feature of the Khasi marriage

is that it was customary in the earlier days for the husband to live with his wife in his mother-in-law's house till the time his wife in his mother-in-law's house. There is no polygamy amongst the Khasis.

0.04.05 Dress :

The Khasi habitually dress themselves with traditional. Specially male are wearing '*Boh Khaila*'. Its called '*Dhoti*'. It made from cotton and silk. They are using two types of Dhoti one is white colour its called '*Boh Khaila*' and on the is totally Embroidery based its called '*Boh Khor*'. '*Jaienspong*' is another one male dress. Its called '*pagri*'. A multifarious coloured red and yellow turban of pure silk. Sometimes using tringle type of '*pagri*'. Khasi males are also wore the '*Jymphong*'. Its called sleeveless coat which is a garment leaving the neck and arms bare, with a fringe at the bottom and with a row of tassels across the chest ; It is fastened by frongs in front. They are usually were that type of dress in during festivals.

The Khasi females are also wore in traditional dress '*Ka Jainsem*' – a long piece of cloth especially muga silk is worn which hangs loosely from the shoulders down to a little above the ankles and is not caught in at the waist. Its always kept in position by knotting each piece over both the shoulders. '*Ka Jain Kup*' is another female dress. This is thrown over the shoulders like a shawl, the ends being knotted in front, it also hangs loosely down the back and sides to the ankles. '*Ka tap-moh-khlieh*' is called wrapper. According to the traditions Khasi women always cover their head and shoulder. This again is frequently of some bright colour, but is often white.

'*Tapmoh*' is another one female dress. *Tapmoh* made from Eri cotton. *Tapmoh* wears in head its have Red and yellow colour. Its called '*Rindi yatlem*'. *Tapmoh* upper head part its fold like that the wearing person head is fully covered. Lower two part is turned on the back of the neck in such use of *Tapmoh* is similar to Assamese '*Dupatta*'.

0.04.06 Food :

Khasi people are mostly like to eat rise. They are specially loved to eat boil food items. '*Rice-Beer*' is also traditional liquar foods. They take the meat of all animals and birds. They also loves at eat fish item. Khasi society have also used '*pitha*' for food items. Their likes to be Assamese pitha. Some pithas names are gives below- *pujer, pus yep, pu doh, pu maloi, pu nei, pu khlein, pu niang hali, pu saw pu tyndong, pulum, pu saw* etc.³

2.00 Festivals and Dance :

The Khasi society also celebrate their festivals along with dance. Some of the main festivals along with dance are given below –

2.01 Nongkrem :

This is the most important and most colourful festival in Khasi hills. It is usually held in the month of May at Smit, the head quarter of Khyriem Syiemship. Khasi tribe's organize this festival in Shillong for period of five days known in Khasi as *pamtiah*, *umni*, *Iewduh*, *Lyngka* and *iew Shillong*⁴ The Nongkrem Dance is one of the greatest festivals among the Khasi hills. The Nongkrem Dance is really part of what is known as the *pom-blang* or goat-killing ceremony, performed by the siem of Khyrim. A lucky day having been fixed, the siem sends a ring of cane (*Kyrwoh*) by way of a summons to the people of every village in the state at the same time informing them of the and requesting them to attend with their offerings consisting of goats and different article of food. It is also proclaimed by playing the music of drums and pipes once a week on every '*Pamtiah night*' in the "*Ing Sad*" the house of the eldest sister of the ruling syiem. On this night, which is always a '*pamtiah night*', the High priest known as the '*Soh Blei*'⁵, first enters the *Ing sad* and site near the hearth. The syiem sad the eldest sister of the ruling syiem then gives him a gourd of rice beer which he pours libation to '*Blei Shillong*' founder of the state invoking him to bless the syiem clan and the people of the state with social and moral well-being, prosperity and ever flowing goodness in everything. A second gourd of rice beer is then given and poured invoking the blessing of the '*Lei Long Syiem*'⁶ the first ancestress of the syiem clan and a third gourd is poured invoking the blessing of the first maternal uncle of the syiem clan.

On this second day, the villagers also clean the dancing place and the path from the '*Ing sad*' to the hill where the sacrifice of the he-goat only, in honour of '*u shillong*' is to be performed. Beside other libation a puja or religious ceremony is performed invoking the aid of '*Ka Blei synshar*' the goddess of justice to bless the state with justice and righteousness in all actions so that its honour and dignity may be maintained continuously.

On the third day just after sunset, in the syiem, the Bakhras and public proceed together from the '*Ing sad*' to the Hillock where a he-goat in honour of '*U Blei Shillong*' is to be sacrificed. They are led by the dancers who dance along the way and Dholias who play the music followed by the high priest, the female members of the syiem clan, the ruling syiem and Myntries, the female member of the syiem clan take their respective seats arranged in the position and facing east. After, 'puja' a dance known as the '*Mastieh*'.⁷ is performed first by the high priest, and one of the '*Dholias*' then by the public and then by the ruling syiem himself or his nephew and a member of the *Bakhras* or Myntries clan and then again by the public. He-goat brought from different Raid (country) and villages are formally offered to the syiem in the verandah of the '*Ing sad*' in presence of all, as an indication that they are united to one state. These goats are sacrificed on the following day.

The fourth day of the festival starts with dancing of the female members of the syiem clan together with the *Bakhras* or Myntries early at sunrise. First, round the hearth in the main hall of the *Ing sad* and then in the court-yard. The main attraction in this festival is the participation of the ladies of the ruling syiem's family adorned with heavy gold ornaments and best dresses, come to dance in the

court-yard of the '*Ing-sad*' to the accompaniment of the music of pipes and drums. Also participation in this ceremonial dances is restricted only to young unmarried girls whereas there is no such rigid restrictions for the males. The girls dance in a circle inside and the men in circle outside. They don't lift their hands up and dance a very slow speed. A women dance goes on, though separately but throughout the night because the Khasi's women believe that it gives them the fertility in order to spreading of their clan.

On the fifth day of the festival specially on this night all must pray to God the creator. The Khasi Tribe's don't give any offerings or sacrifices to God and all most observed a complete silence. The syiem and the people, so assembled in the '*Ing sad*' and this assembling is known as '*Durbar sla*' is also called '*Durban Biei*'⁸ The syiem sits on a mat spread out in a raised platform facing east and another elderly person sits on other platform facing north and the public faces the syiem. After sometime proclamation is made that all should observe complete silence, no one should sleep, no one should talk and no one should come in or go out. Then all are asked to pray in silence within themselves. It is ceremony performed to honour and respect ancestors, the founders of the state and religion and to invoke their blessings on the people.

2.02. Shad-Suk-Mynsiem :

Shad-Suk-Mynsiem is one of the another colourful festival among the Khasi tribe's. This festival is celebrated in Khasi hills region occupied by the Khyntiam clans. This festival is always celebrated in the month of April every year as a welcome festival to the onset of spring at the wiking grounds near Shillong. The Literally meaning of '*Shad-Suk-Mynsiem*' means *the Dance of joy, hence this festival is always a great occasion for special gathering.*⁹

The seng khasi the indigenous religion of the Khasi Jaintias organize this festival in Shillong for a period of three days. Religious ceremonies are first performed at the seng khasi hall at *Mawkhar* in the heart of Shillong. It is a dance of thanks giving to God for all the blessings of the past year and devotion prayers to God for the blessing yet to come in the coming year. Maidens attired in traditional finest dresses and menfolk in colorful dresses, takes part in the dance. Dancing and Marry making for the whole day, they return to the seng Khasi hall by the sunset to continue their festivities. The Khasis believes in God, who is good and kind desires them to live their lives fully. The dance during the festival is supported by the music of flutes, drums and pipes signifying the joy of living and the ardent desire for happiness. The ladies dance in the middle of the ground, arms on their sides with slow shuffling of the feet only ; while the male dancers dance around in the outer circle with livelier steps with a sword his right hand signifying the symbol of power and strong determination, while swishing '*the bunch of yak tail hairs*' called '*sympiah*' with his left hand a sign of understanding and wisdom.

2.03. Shad-Mastieh :

This is the one of Khasi Tribe's Warrior Dance. The Khasis depicting the social and customary practices when men go out for wars. This is a narrative dance from showing the fighting skill of the warriors with their bows and arrows and swords. A sword dance is a typical combat dance in which males only participate holding a sword and a shield and showing signs as if they were assaulting thrusting and 810ueling. A mastieh is which male dancers use a sword and fly-flap consists of stepping forward and receding, starting three steps forward, then bowing down their heads and dropping down their swords and fly-flaps, then receding and the process is repeated. Dancers in group face each other charging forward and receding in the above style.

2.04. Ka Shad Leh Niam Lewduh :

This is a goat sacrifice ceremony performed annually at lewduh or Bara Bazar in shillong, by the syiem of Myllem Syiemship to propitiate the market deity. '*Ka shad Leh Niam Lewduh*' it's a very pretty dance. Its another name is '*Ka shad lymmoh*'. Its performed by men who held the leafy branches of trees in their hands. This is most effective. Then followed a dance of some forty young girls, very well dressed, covered with the usual gold and coral beads and silver chains and wearing the silver crown. The young women danced with great spirit and with an absence of all shyness, but still with the greatest decorum. Many of the women, spectators as well as dancers, were observed to be without the usual *Tap moh Khlih* (head-cloth) the absence of which is always a sign amongst the khasi women of merry making. Dancing may be described as one of the characteristic features of Khasi life.

2.05. Bangsorat :

This is one of the funeral ritual of the *Marams* or *Lyngngams* a sub-tribe of the *Hynniewtrep* who lives in the western portion of the Khasi hills. This sub-tribe is however more like a cross between the Khasis and the Garos. Sandwiched between the Khasi's on one side and the Garos on the other side, they have managed to remain neutral and beautifully adapted themselves to the way of living of both the tribes. The Khasis call them *Marams* or *Lyngngams*.

Bangsorat is the main celebration an elaborate funeral rites and rituals of this sub-tribe. Among the *Lyngngams* when a man dies in the olden days it was customary to keep the dead body for days, months or every years till they could arrange for the cattle to be slaughtered at the time of final funeral rites. Till the arrangement is complete they roll up the dead body in a mat and keep near the fire place supported by poles to keep away the flies and to prevent it from decomposing. One member of the family had a keep a close watch at all times so that no damage to the body would come.

Finally the body is ready for cremated with all the fanfare of a festival for they want the spirit to go away happy. They don't dispose of the body immediately after death for they believe that the spirit of the dead continue to remain on earth for a long time. The cattle are slaughtered and a fest organized for

the whole village and neighbourhood. During this period of waiting the family members are to make all efforts to gather sufficient grains stock the rice beer and get the cattle, for its an essential part of the ritual to slaughter cattle.

The khasi tribe's every year celebrate their different festival with joy and happiness.

3.00 Conclusion :

In Conclusion it may be remarked that the study of the festival also shows that the Khasi have a deep love for their culture and it is this love which has sustained them. Although the study reveals that most of the festivals are localized yet whenever the *Nongkrem*, *Shad-Suk-mynsiem*, *Shad-Mastieh*, *Ka Shad Leh Niam Lewduh*, *Bangorot* and other festivals are approaching everybody is in a festive mood. Thousands of people in their best and colourful dress irrespective of religious creeds witness these festivals and the above festivals are getting bigger and attract more people than ever the festivals have persevered the distinctive traits of the culture and tradition of the people. The Khasi Tribe's is still transmitting their own tradition. The Khasi's are developing their sense of identity by continuing their traditional dance with festivals.

Footnotes :

1. H.G. Joshi : Meghalaya (past& present) p. 219.
2. Ibid : p. 219
3. Ibid : p.203
4. Captain B.S. Rana : The people of Meghalaya, p.87
5. Ibid : p.87
6. Ibid : p.88
7. Ibid : p.89
8. Ibid : p.90
9. C.T. Sangma : Meghalaya – yours to discover, page No. 40

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