

# LEST WE FORGET



KHASI NATIONAL CELEBRATION COMMITTEE

PUBLISHED BY :-  
SEVENHUTS ENTERPRISE  
26, SHILLONG SUPER MARKET,  
MAWKHAR, SHILLONG-793 002  
INDIA

NE  
301.4510954164  
KHA; 1

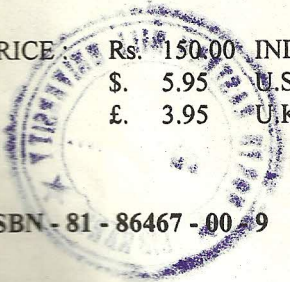
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FIRST PUBLISHED 1994

LASER COMPOSED BY :-  
UREKA PTS & COMPUTER CENTRE  
2/1A, REV. KALI BANERJEE ROW,  
CALCUTTA-700 006.  
WEST BENGAL, INDIA.

PRINTED BY :-  
ASHUTOSH LITHOGRAPHIC CO.  
13, CHIDAM MUDI LANE,  
CALCUTTA-700 006  
INDIA  
PHONE : (033) 30-5593

NEW LIBRARY  
Acc. 19653  
Acc. 20  
Date 24/3/95  
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PRICE Rs. 150.00 INDIA  
\$. 5.95 U.S.  
£. 3.95 U.K.



ISBN - 81 - 86467 - 00 - 9

### PUBLISHER'S NOTE

WE ARE VERY GLAD TO PRESENT THIS BOOK "LEST WE FORGET" TO THE READERS ON BEHALF OF THE KHASI NATIONAL CELEBRATION COMMITTEE WITH A HOPE THAT IT WILL GO A LONG WAY TO CREATE AN INTEREST ON ALL THOSE WHO READ IT, TO KNOW MORE AND MORE ABOUT THIS TINY NATION ON EARTH.

S. K. MAJAW.  
ADVISER OF PUBLICATIONS  
SEVENHUTS ENTERPRISE  
SHILLONG.

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## PREFACE

From the little room of the Khasi Jaintia Welfare Association, Shillong, the seed was sown which gave birth to the Khasi National Celebration Committee in response to the international year of the World's indigenous peoples, 1993, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly. We present in this small volume, "Lest We Forget" - a collection of writings contributed by our people. The opinion expressed is that of the writers. However, the Souvenir Committee takes into account the solemn pledge of the Khasi National Celebration Committee to present the unity in varied diversity of the Khasis, as an indigenous race, from the ages past.

Throughout the ravages of time, changes have crept in, the socio-cultural life of the race, their beliefs and political concepts, their economic organisation, their way of life, their moral code of conduct, their land system - all have undergone stress and strain, yet it survives with all its paraphernalia, as one of the indigenous races of the world.

From the pages of history, written or unwritten, mythology or legends, it has been proved that the race belongs to the same origin. (Khasi is a generic name given to the Khasis, namely, Pnars (eastern plateau), Bhois (northern slopes), Khyrnriams (western plateau), Wars (southern slopes), Nongphlang, Nongtungs, Jyngams, etc.. Any Khasi residing anywhere also comes under the above generic term. There is a general tendency among the Khasis to identify himself first, as a resident of a particular locality where he resides as, U Nong Sohra (resident of Sohra), U Nong Jowai (resident of Jowai), U Nong Nongkrem (resident of Nongkrem), U Nong Dawki (resident of Dawki), U Nong Nongpoh (resident of Nongpoh) etc., but it does not mean that they originate from different origins. To scholars, who are not aware of the Khasi attachment to such territorial names, confusion creeps in, thus paving for the division and further fragmentation of the Khasi race. It appears that innumerable factors have been at work in widening the chasm.

Exogamous by nature, the system of clanship forms a very strong factor which, we may say, proves the strength and oneness of the race. Strictly speaking, territorial affinity alone cannot change or affect the indigenous system. For example, there can be no inter marriage between the Diengdoh clan (Khyrnriam) and the Laloo clan (Pnar); the Syngkli clan (Bhoi) and the Majaw clan (Khyrnriam); the Massar clan (War), the Massar clan (Pnar), and the Massar clan (Khyrnriam), etc.. In a word, Ka Ri Lai-phew-Syiem, Khat-ar-Daloi (The land of Thirty Syiems and Twelve Dalois), Ka Ri Tip-Kur Tip-Kha (The land of those who know the Cognates and the Agnates), speak volumes of one race, call it by any name.

It is a stupendous task to present all the aspects of the Khasi indigenous race in this small volume within so short a time, coupled with financial constraint. We acknowledge with thanks all the messages we received. We express our gratitude to the Seven Huts Enterprise, Shillong for the publication work. We appreciate our

friends and well wishers and all those who have been instrumental in making the celebration an important landmark in the history of the race. The success of the two volumes, 'Lest We Forget' and 'Ba Ioh Ngi Klet' (Khasi), goes to the hard work of the Souvenir Committee members, in particular, the Cultural Committee for critical remarks and suggestions.

Thank you and Khublei\*

Members of the Souvenir Committee :

- (1) Prof. I. M. Simon. Chairman, KNCC
- (2) M. R. Allya. Vice-Chairman, KNCC
- (3) D. K. B. Mukhim, General Secretary, KNCC
- (4) Prof. L. M. K. Lyngrah
- (5) Raphael Warjri

} Art work Etc.

Dr. (Mrs) Helen Giri,  
Convener, Souvenir Committee,  
Khasi National Celebration Committee  
SHILLONG.

\***Khublei** is an honourable word which means God bless you. It is politely used for all occasions — good morning, good day, good night, thank you etc. .

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# **Khasi National Celebration Committee**

**FOR THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' YEAR (KNCC)**

**KJWA OFFICE, MAWKHAR, SHILLONG - 793001, MEGHALAYA (INDIA)**

**PHONE : 227003 (3 - 6 P.M.)**

Conforming with the United Nations Proclamation of 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples

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**Convener**

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**Dr(Mrs) H. GIRI**

**General Secretary**

**Bah. D. K. B. MUKHIM**

From

The Vice-Chairman's Table

The Khasi National Celebration Committee was formed in the month of July 1993 to celebrate with the rest of the world, the International Year of the Indigenous People 1993. The Committee spared no pains to organise the month long programme as a token of co-operation with the United Nations for this memorable year which came but once in the life time in the history of the World.

The inaugural function of the Committee which started in Shillong on 10. 11. 1993 ended well at Dawki of the War Jaintia Civil Sub-Division, Meghalaya on 30. 12. 1993. Members of the Khasi community extended full co-operation right from the administrators, laymen, particularly the young generation with traditional dresses, dances, songs and indigenous musical instruments. The Syiem of Myllem, who is the administrator of the Myllem Syiemship with the head-quarter at Shillong has played an important role in the various programmes. The Committee has placed on record his contribution to make the celebration a success.

The Committee has also placed on record with grateful thanks, the messages from the President of India, th Vice-President, the Prime Minister, the Governor of Meghalaya, the Chief Minister and other V. I. Ps. Due to the unforeseen circumstances, the Chairman could not function his duties and responsibilities, hence the Vice-Chairman had to shoulder this big responsibility which I apologise in case of any lapses that might have occurred.

Khublei,

"Quiet Corner"  
Lum Kshaid,  
Lower Mawprem,  
Shillong-2.

(M. R. Allya) .  
Vice-Chairman,  
Khasi National Celebration Committee,  
Shillong

## INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' YEAR CELEBRATION 1993

We the Khasis, like many other indigenous peoples the world over, have been very grateful to the United Nations which declared 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples. We had welcomed and celebrated the year with much joy, inspiration, and hope.

### Our Celebration

To celebrate the International Year we formed the Khasi National Celebration Committee (KNCC) and drew out a planned programme. Rev. P. B. M. Basiawmoit and Mr. H. S. Lyngdoh initiated the process of forming this committee. On the memorable day, 10 November 1993, the celebration was inaugurated amidst dances in traditional costumes to the accompaniment of drums, cymbals, and wind pipe by our traditional rulers under the leadership of Syiem of Myllem, one of the traditional States, at the auspicious junction in front of his Durbar House at Shillong, the capital of both Myllem and Meghalaya. The grand inaugural ceremony was conducted by Prof. C. Khongwir, Convener, KNCC Cultural Committee, in which J. M. Pariiat, Home Minister of Meghalaya, represented the Government. Those who addressed the function from among the traditional rulers were G. Myllemngap, Lyngskor of Khyrim, Shonroy Syngkli, Representative of Ri-Bhoi Khat-ar Lyngdoh, H.S. Lyngdoh of Mawiang, besides the Syiem of Myllem who hosted the function. Inspiring messages were also received from Laian Kynjing, Doloï of Jowai, and Pa'iem Osten L. Syiem, Syiem of Nongkhlaw. Other speakers were Prof. G. G. Swell, M.P. Ms. Roshan Warjri, MLA, P.R. Mawthoh, President of Synjuk ki Rang bah shnong and Ms. Trilian W. Shadap, ex-President of Tribal Women's Welfare & Development Association of Meghalaya. The Vice Chairman and the General Secretary of the Celebration Committee also addressed the function.

On 29th November, the Khasi Humorists' Society, under the direction of its chief Organiser L. H. Pde, staged a Drama in the State Central Library Auditorium, Shillong, as a part of the celebration. The KNCC Literary committee organised a Seminar on 11 December at Shillong, which discussed the social subjects of our society with Pascal Malngiang, Dr. Kynsai. M. Warjri, Dr. H. Ghonglah, Ms. Iamonlang Syiem, Dr. (Ms) H. Kelian Synrem, and Dr. (Ms) S. Dkhar as resource persons.

Another public celebration followed at Sohra (Cherrapunjee) on 11 December under the patronage of Pa'iem F. Syiem, Syiem of Sohra. In addition to cultural items, the function also included speeches from T. Dkhar, Sub-Divisional Officer, Jerin Sawian, Headman, and W. Knight, Principal of Cherra Teachers' Training Centre. Vice Chairman M. R. Allya, Ms. Lucky Swer, and Dr. (Ms) H. K. Synrem represented the Celebration Committee.

The greatest celebration outside Shillong was held at Nongstoin on 17 December, under the joint patronage

of Pa'iem F. Syiem, Syiem of Nongstoin, and other traditional rulers of West Khasi Hills, in which the Syiem of Myllem was the Chief Guest. Others who addressed the gathering were Pa'iem O.L.Syiem of Nongkhlaw, Pa'iem N.Syiemiong of Maharam, R.K. Syiem, Deputy Syiem of Nongstoin, H.S.Lyngdoh, MLA, H.N.Diengngan, MDC, H.Marwein, Deputy Commissioner of West Khasi Hills, W.G.B.Marwein, and the General Secretary of the Celebration Committee. Myntri Thomlin Byrsat, KNCC Sports Organiser, declared the winners who then received the prizes from the Chief Guest. The western Khasi States also erected a monolith to mark the celebration. Various cultural programmes were presented and the most spectacular scene depicting the coronation ceremony was supervised by Skendrowell Syiemlieh, a renowned artist of All India Radio fame.

Desmond L.Kharmawphlang, Convenor the KNCC Literary Committee, was invited as a resource person and poet by the organisers of the ETERNAL VOYAGE, an International Meet of Tribal and Analogous Peoples at Bhopal, Central India, during 15-17 December, 1993. He attended the Meet on his own behalf and also to represent the Celebration Committee.

On 19 December, the Celebration Committee paid a special visit to Nartiang to discuss matters of indigenous concern with Don Dkhar, Doloi of Nartiang Elaka(state) and his Durbar. Similarly, the Committee also visited Nongpoh on 29 December, to meet Jim L.Syiem Nongshai, Sirdar of Ri-Bhoi Khat-ar Lyngdoh and his Durbar. Both meetings were held in a very cordial atmosphere.

The last public function to mark the year was held at Dawki, a major trading centre on the southern border adjoining Bangladesh, in which J.D.Pohrmen, Finance Minister of Meghalaya attended as the Chief Guest. The celebration was chaired by B.Kongwang, Doloi of Darrang. Various cultural items heightened the spirit of celebration besides meaningful addresses delivered by a number of participants including G.W.Pohti, General Secretary of Ri-war Area Development Council, and Pascal Malngiang. The function also made the Declaration and the Resolution to safeguard our indigenous character and rights.

As part of the concluding function, the Celebration Committee visited the legendary Sohpetbneng Peak on 31 December 1993, in which the Syiem of Myllem was present and gave a word of blessing and appreciation to the Committee for organising and making the eventful celebration a success.

The following sample excerpts are taken from the messages received by the Committee during 1993:

**Pa'iem L.M.Syiem of Myllem :-**

“... The younger generation should be aware of the fact that our rights in the matter of land, education, economy, and culture are threatened. Only when we cherish our traditional system and values and make use

of them ... only when we have strong roots, ... can we then march ahead with hope ...”

**Paiem O. L. Syiem of Nongkhlaw state :**

“I represent the Khatsawphra or Nongkhlaw state, the beloved state of u Tirot Sing whose name and fame are still alive. Here I would like to mention just one thing about his personality and integrity. This fact appeared in the *Durbar* held at Nongkhlaw (sometime in the 1820s) to discuss on the request of the British Government to allow road construction through the khatsawphra State (from Assam to the present-day Bangladesh). When dusk had set in before any resolution was made, David Scott, a British crown representative, sent liquor to conclude the meeting for the day. But to David Scot's disgrace, the *Durbar* of u Tirot Sing rejected the liquor on the ground that the Khasis never entertain such an intoxicating thing before the task is completed...After some years later when u Tirot Sing was captured by the British, he was offered a choice to return back home from Dacca prison and rule over his state under the British supremacy. His answer was clear: *Better die an independent layman than reign like a vassal* if we can stand upright like U Tirot Sing against various evil designs, we can certainly avoid various forms of suppressions...”

**Doloi L. Kynjing of Jowai :-**

“... I am very grateful to the United Nations which has made 1993 a memorable year for us ... It is the year that will awake us, the descendants of the Hynniewtrep, to value and love what our forebears had left for us to inherit ... to stand up and fight against the outsiders who come to annihilate, to fool, to lead us astray ...”

**Our People, our Land, and our Problems**

Quite a number of articles of this volume have described about our people. From the historical and anthropological point of view, our origin is perhaps, still shrouded in obscurity. Our indigenous belief, however, is that we came from Heaven via the Golden Bridge that once stood on the Sohpetbneng Peak. God gave us our land, our religion, our social and political systems.

Way back in 1941, our land was nearly 16,000 sq. km in area. However, in just about half a century, our territory has been shrinking considerably. Our State government (1991) estimated our area at about 14,262 sq.km only, as a consequence of which about ten percent of our population of about a million have been left out by means of artificial boundaries.

Under the present circumstances, we are governed by the Central Government (of India), the State Government (of Meghalaya), our two District Councils, and our traditional rulers. Though they can collect certain taxes and exercise some judicial powers, our rulers are being controlled to a great extent by the District Councils.

The complicated problems faced by us today resemble those faced by many other indigenous peoples worldwide. In his message to the Committee, Prof. G.G.swell, our own representative in the IndianParliment, noted:-

“... we share with the rest of the world’s indigenous peoples our critical dependence on our land and vulnerability. Take away the land from us we can easily be swamped, uprooted and dispersed...”

Our survival is threatened by morden development, division of our territory with artificial boundaries, colonisation, militarisation, policies and designs aimed at submerging us into the so- called mainstream’ of dominant culture and population.

### Our Hope

The year was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly to strengthen international coperation for the solution of problems faced by the indigenous peoples. The Year’s theme-*Indigenous peoples: A New Partnership* - has encouraged the development of new relationship between sovereign states and indigenous peoples and also between international community and indigenous peoples at large. This new partnership was meant to be equitable based on mutual respect and understanding. This is very significant especially, when we have lately realised that we are all passengers aboard the same spaceship Earth with limited resources. We hope the sovereign states the world community will help us get our rightful share and justice for which we shall reciprocate in peace. We also hope to join hands with the rest of the world in general and other indigenous peoples in particular to bring liberty, justice, and peace to the world.

D. Khlur Baiaineh Mukhim  
General Secretary, KNCC

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