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Introduction

The Khasi Clan: Changing Religion and Its Effect

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Introduction

The Khasi are the indigenous inhabitants of the Khasi and Jantia Hills district of Meghalaya. It is situated between 20°1' and 26°5' North latitude and 90°47' and 92°52' East Longitude. Khasi is the umbrella term for its various sub-groups, including the Khynoiam (usually referred to as Khasi) Par or Synteng, Bhoi, War and Lymngam.

The Khasi society is one of the few matrilineal group of the world whose social-structure is more or less intact. A distinctive feature of Khasi society is the matrilineal principle of descent, succession and inheritance. In descent and inheritance the line passes from mother to daughter, but succession to political offices is from maternal uncle to sister's son. "Another remarkable feature of the Khasi Synteng society was its extreme clannishness. In fact it may be said that their entire society was a conglomeration of clans which they call, *Kur* or *Jajids*" (Dutta 1982:7)

Many of the clans traced their descent from an old ancestress who is styled *Ka Lawbei Tynrai*, literally grandmother of the root. Descent is traced from the mother. Since mother is the perpetrator of the clan, the children take her clan name. Every individual belongs to a particular clan traced from the mother. Therefore, the

popular saying *Long jaid na ka kynthei* meaning, from the woman sprang the clan or from the woman one traces one's clan (see also Gurdon 1975:82 and Roy 1938:122).

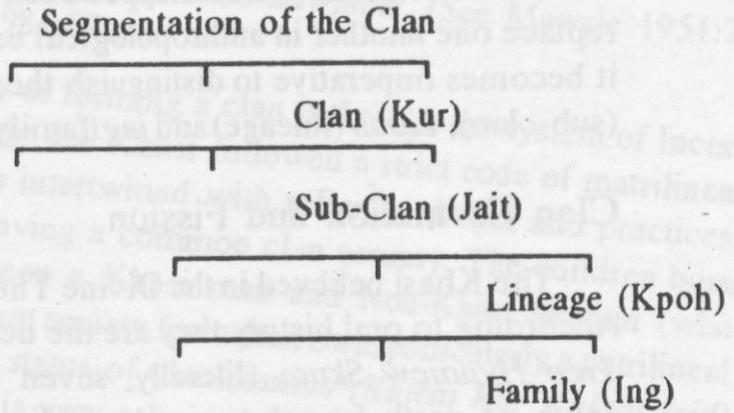
This study aims at reviewing the traditional clan organization, formation and function, also the changes affecting it. First, I will discuss the concept of clan *Kur* and the segmentation within it. In the second part discussion will be on clan formation and fission. For this I will cite an oral history of how the '*So-Kpoh Khadar Wyrnai*' clan originated. Thirdly, I will bring forth the function of the clan in the traditional society. In conclusion I will analyse the changes that is taking place in the society (special reference to christianity) and the impact on the above. Thus within the framework discussed, I will be able to bring out the tradition and change in the clan organization and function, comparing the past and present situation.

Concept of Clan (Kur)

According to Giri (1985:159), the *kur* is the first social entity of the Khasi around which every social institution revolves.... Each *kur* traces its descent to *Ka lawbei Tynrai* or root ancestress. The *Kur* is subdivided into *Jaid*s which claim their descent to *Ka lawbei Tymmen* or old ancestress. The *Jaid*s are further subdivided into a number of '*kpohs*' whose descent is traced to *Ka lawbei Khyraw* or young ancestress. Each *kpoh* is subdivided into a number of families or house.

Thus the Khasi clan or 'Kur' is divided into four segments. Nongbri (1987:1) had presented this diagrammatically as follows :

Chart - 1



1. *Shi-Kur ne Shi-Jaid* (one clan) are descendants of the common *Jawbei Tynrai*, Root Ancestress where the degree of Kinship is untraceable. Members of a clan are supposedly blood relatives of the 'Root-Ancestress'. The assertion of this fact is always supported by a stereotype fiction or mythology in some clans.

2. *Shi-Jait Shi-Kynja* (one sub-clan) are descendants of the common *Jaw Bei Tymmen* or Ancestress of the sub-clan where the degree of kinship is not traceable still. So the blood relation at this level is also is mostly fictive.

3. *Shi-Kpoh Shri-Sohpet* (lineage of the same womb or same navel) are descendants of ka *Jaw bei Khyrrow* or Young-Ancestress of the same sub-clan. The degree of kinship is traceable and it extends to ten generations at the most. The blood relation at this level is real and not fictive.

4. *Shi-ing Shi-Sem* (of the same family) are the descendants of the still-remembered great grand-mother. The degree of kinship is nearer than that of *Kpoh*. At this level of segmentation generations extend to five at the most. The branching-off, of the *kpoh* or the processes of fission of the *kpoh* starts at this point.

In Khasi parlance, the term *ku* is sometimes used synonymously with *Jaid and Kpoh*. This common use of the terms misled

many writers to regard them as similar in connotations; albeit all could clearly grapped the term *ing* i.e., *family*. So, these conterminous terms though overlapped each other, does not necessarily replace one another in anthropological usage especially. Therefore, it becomes imperative to distinguish these term as *Kur* (clan), *Jaid* (sub-clan), *Kpoh* (lineage) and *ing* (family) before discussing further.

Clan Formation and Fission

The Khasi believed in the Divine Theory regarding their origin. According to oral history they are the descendants of the *Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum*, (literally, seven huts) who came to settle down on earth from heaven. According to this myth, the apical ancestor and ancestress are *ka lawbei Tynrai* (root ancestress) *U Thawlang*, her husband and *U Suidnia* her brother. The overgrown families of these seven huts constitute the Khasi population which is divided into many clans. (see also Mathur 1979:61-62).

Every clan traced its' origin to a common ancestress. The clan names are sometime taken from the name of the ancestress or at times it is a combination of ancestor and ancestress. This can also be mythical or real. Others takes the name of plants, animal etc. "There are a large number of clans among the Khasi and some of the clan names are those of animals and trees. *Shrieh* is monkey, *Tham* a crab and *Diengdoh*, a tree; yet they do not constitute totemic clan organization. (Mukherjee, 1958:209).

Some of the Syiem clans trace their origin to women whose name were linked with myths and Legends. From Pahsyntiew¹ emerged the *Jait Shiem Shyllong* (Syiem clan of Shillong). Then

1. Pahsyntiew (literally *Pah* is to lure and *Syntiew* in a flower) is believed to be a beautiful damsel who lived in a cave at Shillong Peak. A man name Myllichem, lured her with a flower and persuaded her to marry him. Their descendants were later ordained as Chief (Shiem) of Shillong and therefore, known as Syiem Shillong till the present date.

there is Lidohkha² who is the ancestral mother or ancestress of *Jaid Syiem Sutnga* and *Syiem Khad-Sawphra*³. (See Mawrie 1951:70 and Deb Roy 1981:67).

Another way of forming a clan is through the system of Incorporation. Formerly, the Khasi followed a strict code of matrilineal descent as this is intertwined with religious belief and practices, particularly, in having a common clan ossuary. The children born of a Union between a Khasi man and Non-Khasi woman (who belonged to different society from their own, particularly a patrilineal society); face the status of clanlessness (*Khlem Kur Khlem Jaid*) of which a Khasi is very ashamed. This is so because, on the one hand such offspring cannot retain the father's clan name; since it is against their custom of tracing descent through the mother, but most importantly the practice of bone internment. The man's children cannot belong to the father's clan because after their death, the uncalcined bone cannot be deposited in the clan ossuary. To do this amounts to defilement and pollution of the clan ossuary.

On the other hand the children of such union cannot gain their mother's clan name (or caste) as they will not be accepted as Khasi in the first place; and secondly it would be against the norm of her (mother's) society (patrilineal). Thus descendants of any such union are given a new clan name (either mother's name, combination of mother and father's name or after their own personal names). These also have to follow the Khasi custom and tradition both material and non-material. Gradually, such individuals are inducted and

2. Lidohkha (literally *Dohkha* is a fish) is believed to be a mermaid fished by Woh Ryndi from Kupli river in Jaintia Hills. He persuaded her to leave her mermaid form and to become his wife. She bore him children but later returned back to the river and left him. Their descendants were later ordained as Chief (Syiem) of Sutnga. Presently they are known as *Jaid Syiem Sutnga*.

3. The people believed that these maidenes were God send that is the why their descendants were ordained as Chiefs of these particular areas.

assimilated into the Khasi cultural fold (see also Nongbri 1984:6; Khongphai 1974:10; Mawrie 1970:72 etc.).

To distinguish them from the indigenous clans, such adopted clans are known under the general title, the *Dkhar* clan. But to designate their identity among themselves, many of them use the prefix *Khar* before their acquired or adopted name. For example KharKongor, Kharbamon, Kharbuti, Kharujon (Nongbri 1984:6). The word *Dkhar* is used by the Khasi for people inhabiting the plains area near their (Khasi) territory hence the common title *Dkhar*.

Another possibility of forming a new clan is through clan expulsion. For instance, if a man and a woman from the same clan committ an act of incest, the ensuing punishment is clan ex-communication and banishment from the village.

Such individuals may enter a new village in the guise of nomads etc. and may assume a new clan name for themselves and their children.

Thus clan is formed in many ways according to different circumstances such as intermarriages between Khasi man and non-Khasi woman, migration, clan ex-communication etc.

The clan is however not an indivisible unit. When the clan becomes too big for its members to know each other and to come together for any social events, or when its members have become geographically scattered some section calls itself by a new clan name (Nongbri 1984:2).

Clan fission or segmentation does takes place from time to time albeit not in an orderly way. Lineage and family fission on the other hand is a cycle which takes place after every five generations or more.

The branching off pertains only to women. "A man continues to be a member of the same *ing* whether he marries or not. A

woman if she is not the heiress (the youngest daughter) will branch off after the marriage and though she herself will continue as member of her mother's *ing*, the third generation from her will form an independent *ing* (Nakane 1967:120). Thus, one can say with the death of ego's grandmother and her sisters if any, the process of lineage fission takes place. On the other hand "the establishment of a new household by a Khasi woman with her husband, means the beginning of the establishment of new *ing* separated from the natal *ing* not only in residence but also sociologically. In other words it is the process of fission and segmentation of an *ing*, matrilineal descent group" (Nakane 1967:131).

Formation and Segmentation of The So-Kpoh Khadar Wyrnai Clan

In order to understand clan organisation, segmentation, and their functions, I will relate an oral history of how the '*So-Kpoh Khadar Wyrnai*' clan traced its origin of ancestor/ancestress and how through a long history of fission and split, the clan segmented till the present time. This information was mostly provided by an old lady (around 90-95 years) belonging to the Pakyntein Sub-clan and also through informants belonging to the 'Khadar Wyrnai' clan whom I met during my field work.

Once upon a time four sisters and a brother, came to the Jaintia Kingdom (the oral history did not state from where). When they reached Jowai (present administrative headquarter of Jaintia Hills District in Meghalaya State) they decided to settle there. These four sisters were believed to be the founders of the Jowai town. Thus, the offsprings and descendants of these four sisters named, Ka Bon, Ka Wet, Ka Tein, and Ka Doh multiplied and made the town populous. Their descendants and the overgrown families and lineages formed four sub-clans viz. *Pasubon* or *Libon*, *Paswett*, *Pakyntein* and *Langdoh* (from Ka Bon, Ka Wet, Ka Tein and Ka Doh respectively). These four sub-clans formed the exogamous

'So-Kpoh' clan, literally, four wombs. *Langdoh* in Pnar dialect (in other Khasi dialects *Lyngdoh*), means a priest or a priestess. The youngest daughter in family rituals acts as its priestess who performs the rites along with the maternal uncle (from mother's generation) or elder brother (ego's generation) as a priest. For this reason maybe 'Ka Doh' and her descendants are known as *Langdoh*, or *Lyngdoh*.

The fission and split of the *So-Kpoh* Clan brought about the formation of other eight sub-clans viz. *Syngkon* and *Litan* (from *Pasubon* or *Libon*), *War* and *Nikhla* (from *Pakyntein*), *Kynjing*, *Lanong*, *Lakiang* and *Mutyen* (or *Myrten*) from *Paswett* and *Lyngdoh*. According to Roy (1981) the last four sub-clans come from *Ka Wet*. (What he actually means is from the *Paswett* Sub-clan). Thus the original 'So-Kpoh' clan multiplied into twelve sub-clans in all, and these sub-clans came to be known under the common term, as the '*Khadar-Wynrai*' clan (meaning the twelve sub-clan).

The further fission and split of the *Khadar-Wynrai* brought three more sub-clans viz. *Ryngad*, *Lywait* and *Gatphoh*. Many informants belonging to the original *Khadar Wyrani* do not acknowledge these three as belonging to their clan. The other twelve sub-clans mentioned above are closely linked, so clan-exogamy and kinship relation is strongly felt among these. The case of clan formation and fission is a puzzling riddle, similar to the question of 'What came first the egg or the chick?'

Clan is formed through the over-grown families and lineages. But over-grown families and lineages on the other hand formed sub-clan and a clan. Therefore clan formation and fission is cyclical.

There are no known oral-tradition of how these eight sub-clans multiplied, except for the *War*-Sub-clan. It is believed that one

+ The term *War* may be confusing to the reader. But the term is used in different contexts, as a sub-clan also a region or the people belonging to *War*-area, both from Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

woman from the Pakyntein, married a man from the War-Jaintia area, since this place was far from Jowai and the traditional visiting-husband system was inconvenient for these love besotted couple; he took her to his village so that they could be together always. The descendants of this woman who belonged initially to the Pakyntein sub-clan were later known as Pakyntein-War (from the area). The prefix Pakyntein was later obliterated and came to be simply known as War. There are also War-clans among the other Khasi sub-groups besides the Pnar. In tracing kinship relation one has to specify that he or she belongs to a War-clan from which area i.e., either from Khasi Hills or Jaintia Hills, and if from the former, which area of Khasi Hills. Thus, for ascertaining kinship relation one's origin is thoroughly investigated.*

The 'Khadar Wyrnai' clan is the biggest clan probably in terms of membership, but particularly in segmentations in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. These twelve sub-clans were later appointed and ordained as the 'Dolois' or ministers of the Jaintia Kingdom.

The Khasis (especially composers of songs and poetries usually refer to Khasi and Jaintia Hills as the "*Ka ri ki Laiphew Syiem bad Khadar Dolois*" meaning the "land of the thirty chiefs and twelve ministers." It seems that the *Khadar Wyrnai* clan must have had a very strong root in Jaintia Hills, as well as numerical and physical strength that they should be ordained as the Dolois of the North East and the rulers were well known in the regional history. Traditionally the twelve Dolois are appointed from the original *Khadar Wyrnai* clan. But at present this is not strictly adhered to.

Roy (1981 Appendix 3) presented a *So Kpoh* fission which is not very accurate.

From Ka Bon	From Ka Tein	From Ka Wet	From Ka Doh
came the clan	came the clan	came the clan	came the clan
Libon ⁺¹	Pakyntein ⁺¹	Pariat ⁺³	Lyngdoh ⁺¹

Ryngad ⁺²	Nikhla	Lywait ⁺²	Nongbah ⁺⁴
Syngkon	War	Kynjing	etc.
Litan		Gatphoh ⁺²	
		Myrten ⁺²	
		Lanong	
		Lakiang	
		Niangphoh ⁺⁴	
		Kima ⁺⁴	
		Siangbord ⁺⁴	
		Pyrdiang ⁺⁴	

(+ marked with number is the indication for further explanation by the author of the article)..

+1 the original 'So-Kpoh' are the Pasubon, Pakynterin, Paswett and Lyngdoh and Roy, omits out the 'Paswett' which is one of the original sub-clans. Probably the Pasubon sub-clan was later on known as Libon, just as Langdoh later spelled as Lyngdoh and Mutyen as Myreten.

+2 Ryngad, Lywait and 'Gatphoh' are the sub-clan which splitted later making the original 'So-Kpoh Khadar-Wyrnai' multiply into fifteen cub-clans in all.

+3 Pariat is never regarded as belonging to the So-Kpoh clan.

+4 May by these are the new sub-clans through split and fission.

Functions Of The Clan

The clan (*Kur*) is a basic unit of the Khasi social structure The continuity and equilibrium of the society depends on the functions

of the clan and its units. This revolves around religious, economic, social and political.

Social

The clan Kur is an exogamous group. Inter-marriage between the members is tantamount to incest. This is known as *Shong-Sang*. The offending members are cut-off from the clan membership, banished from the village and even after their death their bones cannot be deposited in the family Cairn, *Mawbah*. Therefore to a Khasi incest is *Ka Sang Iap* literally, forbidden unto death. (See Nongbri 1984:1 and Roy 1938:129).

Formerly, the Pnar of Jaintia Hills had a very extreme view of incest. Birth of twins was regarded as pollution especially if they were a boy and a girl. Since, foetus was believed to have been in an intimate and compromising position in the mother's uterus, *Ka Shong-Sang* is believed to have taken place. Therefore, after the children grew up to the age of about 12 years, they were driven away from the village, a girl towards the East and the boy towards the West. This practice is not observed anymore.

Religious

The members of a clan (share) common deities and propitiate their ancestors and ancestresses. There are certain rituals which are performed, pertaining to the welfare and goodwill of the members. But, the most important function is concerning death rites, especially bone-internment. Traditionally the osteological ceremony is carried out in three stages. After the incineration ceremony is over, the uncalcined bones are collected by the male relative and prepared by the female relatives for keeping them in the depository. The bones are first kept in the lineage ossuary, *Mawshyieng*, then shifted to the sub-clan ossuary, *Mawphew* and family deposited in the clan ossuary *Mawbah* (Gurdon 1975:132-134). This must have

been a custom when the members of the clan, *shi-kur* must have shared a common territory, having a common land, *Ri-Kur* and a common clan ossuary, *Mawbah*. The transfer of the bones to the *Maphew* was not practiced by all the Khasi clans except a few, and this is discarded long ago. With migration and immigration within the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and increasing population of the clan, the *Mawbah* must have been converted into sub-clan ossuary. This custom is no more, especially among the Christians, and even among those who follow the traditional *Niam Khasi* or Khasi religion, very few observe the norms of bone-internment.

Economic

Besides being the exogamous unit and performing common religious rites, the *Kur* also serve as an economic unit. Economic bond among them is due further to the possession of common land (*ri-Kur*), which is divided into separate holdings held by families (Mukherjee, 1958:211). The common land is tended and cared for, by all members having a share in it. Whatever is yielded, is being shared equally among the members but priority is given to the poor relations.

Political

The clan (*Kur*) is also an important unit in the Khasi political system. The traditional political structure can be referred to as a "Democratic Native State." The hierarchical democratic feature is one of the most interesting aspect of Khasi society. As observed by Mathur (1979:65), the traditional political system of the Khasi functioned at four level (i) clan (ii) village (iii) Raid and (iv) State. Some clans are ordained as chiefly clan, *Syiem* and others as minister's clan i.e., those clans who can succeed to the position of *Myntris* in Khasi Hills or *Doloi* in Jaintia Hills. Most of the chiefly clans (*Syiem*) were ordained because of their 'Divine Origin'; other minister's clans like *Doloi*, on the basis of their roots and numerical strength (refers to clan formation).

Succession to political offices was ascriptive in the past. Mostly, the son of the eldest uterine sister succeeded to the position of chief or ministers with the approval of the clan council (*Durbar Kur*) But at times if the council deemed that the successor (*nephew*) is not worthy to succeed the office (of his maternal uncle); they may appoint any other male member of the *Kur* as the successor. This is done with the concensus or nomination of the clan council. The *Syiem and Myntri* or *Doloi* do not have the ultimate power as they are always answerable to the clan council and at times to the village council.

The rules of succession is rigidly applied to *Syiem* clan even at present. But succession to position of *Myntris* or *Doloi* has become flexible. In some cases men who does not belong to the minister's clan is appointed to such office.

From the above discussion, the function of the clan seemed to be encompassing all aspects of the social structure. Broadly there are two operational units of the clan. These are (i) Clan Council (*Durbar Kur*) (ii) Family (*ing*).

Clan Council

Each clan has its own council known as the *Durbar Kur*. A clan head *Khlich Kur* is elected by the male members of a particular clan. Besides the clan head, a few other clan elders (*Rangbah Kur*) are also elected. Thus the clan council consists of the clan head and clan elders. The clan council does not have a fixed place to meet. Meetings can be held in any of the foundation houses (*ing seng* or *ing khadduh*) of its members; preferably in one of the aged youngest daughter's house. The clan council plays an effective role in the society at large.

The clan council also acts as a judiciary unit in managing the affairs of the members. All members of the clan fall under the

jurisdiction of their clan council. The inter-clan and intra-clan conflicts are settled amicably by the clan council. It settles disputes among the members of the clan and cases like adultery, trespass, damage to property, theft etc. It also has the sanction to award and punish the members. In cases of intra-clan disputes, the clan head will commune with other clan heads and clan elders, to straighten out the problems; whenever he deems necessary.

The clan head can allocate the common clan land (*Ri-Kur*) for cultivation and residence. He also acts as the spokesman of the clan. It is his duty to see that the members obey the orders of their political superiors, such as village headman and territorial chieftains. He also conducts several religious and ritual ceremonies pertaining to the clan. He is assisted at all times, by his other clan members in discharging his multifarious roles (for details see Mathur 1979:65:66).

The succession to clan head and clan elders is from the female line. It follows the same course as the succession to political offices like Chiefs and Ministers. In succession to these offices the rule is of primogeniture.

Family (Ing)

The basic and most important functional unit of the clan is the *ing* institution, which keeps ancestral property and performs religious ceremonies. In Khasi, the term *ing* stands for a house, residential unit or family. Therefore, in discussing the functions of the family, *ing* refers to the uxorilocal residential pattern of the youngest daughter and not the neolocal residential pattern of the elder daughters.

According to Mukherjee (1958:121) the functions of the family centre around the :

1. performance of basic religious rites;
2. management and inheritance of family property;

3. maintenance of social relation with the kin of *Ka-Kpoh* and *Ka-Kur*; and
4. protection of familial kin.

The rule amongst the Khasi is that the youngest daughter 'holds' the religion '*Ka-bat in Ka niam*'. Her house is called, '*Ka ing Seng*' and it is here that the members of the family assembled to witness her performance of the family ceremonies. Hers is, therefore the largest share of the family property, because it is she whose duty is to perform the family ceremonies, and propitiate the family ancestors (Gurdon 1975:83).

In religious matters the *ing* emerged as a corporate group in that its members worshipped common deities and had common ancestress and ancestor cult. The functional nature of the *ing* is further heightened by the fact that each *ing* has a common *ing-seng* (house of the organisation) or *ing khadduh* (house of the youngest daughter) where the rituals of the *ing* are carried out. Each *ing* recognises the youngest daughter (*Khadduh*) of the group as its priestess and the old maternal uncle (*kni*) as its priest. (Nongbri 1984:2). The religious element in the *ing* institution lay stress only on matrilineal solidarity. These elements tend, therefore, to orient each individual of the domestic unit to his or her own matrilineal kin group, the *ing* (Nakane 1967:127).

The arrangements of marriage and performance of rituals are also completed by an individual *ing*. The *Jer-Khun* or naming ceremony is also performed by the individual *ing* with the *Meikha* i.e. father's mother as an important role performer. Thus the *ing* though coming in the lowest order of clan segmentation, is the most important in the functioning of the *kur* or clan. The central focuses of personality in the *ing* is the youngest daughter '*khadduh*' as the heiress and custodian of the ancestral property, and the oldest maternal uncle *kni-rangbah* as the authority and manager of property in the *ing Kmie* i.e. natal family. Nakane (1967:131), termed these two as 'Pairstatus', for they bind the *ing* together and carry

out the functions related to the *ing*, *kpoh* or *kur*. Though the other siblings take part in all the family functions and activities, their role is only secondary compared to that of youngest daughter and maternal uncle. In the absence of the maternal uncle the eldest brother takes up his role.

The function of the *kur* can be broadly categorized into two groups (1) and clan and sub-clan (2) lineage and family. The clan is the broadest, seconded by the sub-clan in representing the boundary of the uterine kin. The clan regulates marriage rules of clan exogamy. The sub-clan regulates the use of common titles by the members and their succession to political offices. Besides, the presence of common ossuary, common land, common deities, ancestors and ancestresses bind the members together. These two, the clan and sub-clan, are symbolic and motivates the members to perform their duties towards their unit. The clan council and family are units to operationalize the rules laid by the clan. On one hand, the maternal uncle and the youngest daughter are the one who are the actual operators in performing the social, religious and economic functions in a family. On the other hand, the clan head and clan elders are the members who carry out and perform the functions relating to the clan at large.

The unity and solidarity of the clan is emphasised among the members. In the naming ceremony *Jer Khun* the father of the child presents him or her specific articles. If it is a male child, they keep by the after a sword, a bow and (three) arrows, and if it is a girl they keep a conical basket, *Ka Khoh* and a headstrap *U Star*, generally made of cane. Another ceremony *Tap-Lubri* (confirmation ceremony) to conform the name of the child is performed, after the *Jer Khun*. In this ceremony of '*Ka Tap Lubri*' a new hand woven, sleeveless jacket *Jymphong* is presented to the boy and a *Jain Kyrshah* (one piece of cloth used to cover their body) to a girl. It is only after this that the name is selected for the child during the preceding name ceremony is confirmed (See Mawrie 1981:7677).

According to Mukherjee (1958:212) "with the first arrow man has to fight for *Shi-ing* (members of the same family) and *Shi-Kpoh* (members of the sub-clan), with the second for his *Shi-Kur* and with the third for the state." Firstly, *Shi-Kpoh* means members of a lineage not sub-clan. Secondly, the idea of protecting a state is related to the territorial nature of the clan in the past.

The articles presented are symbolic and they in fact indicate the duty assigned to each individual, towards the clan etc. With the first, second and third arrow, the man (male child) has to defend his family *ing*, lineage, *Kpoh*, and sub-clan *Jaid* respectively. With the sword a man has to protect and guard the clan as a whole. The sleeveless coat *Jymphong* is usually worn by men (those who have passed the childhood). This implies that when a male child grows up as a man, he is fit to perform the duties assigned to him. The conical basket *Ka-Khoh* and the head strap *U-Star* are usually for carrying loads (e.g. carrying water). This means that girl's duty is to bear the burden of the family. The *Jainkyrshah* is usually worn by women (those who have passed their girlhood) and this is used to shield the exposure of the body. At present it is used on top of a dress. This infers that when a girl child grows up as woman, her duty is to 'guard the honour' of her family, her lineage, her sub-clan and the clan as a whole; and not bring any shame to the family.

From the above discussion it may be inferred that the social groupings of the Khasis function in different dimensions and make the individuals aware of their duties and obligations towards each other. In the process of socialization and enculturation of the individuals, the different social groups and the community at large are inseparable (Mukherjee 1958:212).

Conclusion : Declining Importance Of The Clan

As mentioned earlier the functions of the clan is socio-political, socio-economic and socio-religious, in nature. In fact, the functions of the clan covers all aspects of the Khasi social structure. The

common clan ossuary for bone internment is a symbolic uniting factor for members dead or alive. Besides the worship of common deities, ancestors and ancestresses by the members of the clan; and the performance of these rituals by certain members of the clan like, clan head on one hand, and youngest daughter and maternal uncle on the other, bind the members of the clan together. Clan exogamy ingrained a sense of oneness and belonging to the wider kin groups. Common clan land (*Ri-Kur*) is a symbol of economic unity among the members. Among the ruling clan succession to political offices is a symbol of power and status accorded to them.

The changes taking place in the society has left an indelible mark on the clan and its functioning. This can be attributed mostly, to changes in religious belief which became intensified with colonization of the area, by the British and proselytization by the Christian missionaries. Secondary factors, like economic change, migration, urbanization, modernization, culture contact etc., also did contribute to the weakening of the clan as an elementary functional unit of the society.

The traditional religion *Ka Niam Blei Ka Niam ing* (Literally, religion of god and religion of the family), has been infiltrated by Christianity, Hindu and Islam. Christianization came about through the conscious efforts of missionaries¹, Hinduization through social economic and political contact², and Islamization mostly through inter-marriages of Khasi women to Muslim men³ (though a few but not negligible). These affected the socio-religious life of the people,

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1. For details see Nataranjan, N. 1977 'Missionaries among the Khasis' also, Dutta, P.N.:1982 'Impact of the West on the Khasis and Jaintias (A survey of political, economic and social changes).
 2. For details see Bareh, H.:1967 'History and Culture of the Khasi People' also Das Gupta, Kumar Pranab 1984. 'Life and Culture of Matrilineal Tribe of Meghalaya.
 3. For details see Mathur P.R.G. 1979: The Khasi of Meghalaya (study in Tribalism and Religion).

intertwined into the function of the clan. The 'organized diffusion' of Christianity has much more impact compared to the 'Unorganized Diffusion' of Hindu or Islam.

With the advent of Christianity, the converts turned away from Khasi culture, thereby creating a rift between the Christian and orthodox (non-convert Khasi). The cleavage had initially been frequent and bitter and feelings of hatred were mutual. The missionaries made rules and regulations about Christian way of life and instructions were given to dissociate with everything 'native' and 'pagan'. There were conflicts over the performance of the converts death rites i.e., either burials in Christian style or cremation and bone internment in Khasi traditional style (Nataranjan 1982:154-157). At the initial stage of conversion, the problems of maladjustment was the most severe when *Ka Khadduh* after conversion refused to perform the customary religious ceremonies expected of her.

The alien religions tipped the balance in the functioning of the clan and its members. The religious rituals performed by the youngest daughter and eldest maternal uncle in the foundation house '*ing seng*' of the youngest daughter, *Ka Khadduh* are currently performed by other religious leaders, among those who abandoned the traditional religion. The intricate death rites have been replaced by burial among Christians and Muslims, and cremation among the Hindus. Osteological rite is abandoned by the converts, and even those who follow the traditional religion, very few orthodox adhere to it. Commemoration ceremony among the Christians is a syncretized form of the old tradition.

Christianity, Hinduism and Islam emphasised the importance of men based on the patrilineal principle. This no doubt influenced the converts. At the early stage of Christianity the Khasi converts started taking the father's clan name (Nataranjan 1982:154 and 163). Patrilineal favour is expressed in the birth of a local organization, *Ka Seng Iktiar Longbriew Manbriew* in 1961. Its objec-

tives were to propagate the patrilineal system of descent, succession and inheritance. (see Passah, January 1988). In the Cherra Durbar (assembly of the local chief, the ministers and subjects) a resolution was introduced seeking the use of father's clan name but the motion was defeated (Nataranajn 1982:164).

The breach of clan exogamy was and still is the giant stumbling block for those who herald the patrilineal descent. But with the weakening of the clan as a functional unit, the once strictly female descent seems to be giving way. The system of Incorporation i.e., the custom of giving a new clan name to the progenies from the Union of a Khasi man and non-Khasi woman and assimilating them into the Khasi culture, isn't observed by many. During my field-work in Shillong, I came across many such unions but none gave a new clan name to their offsprings.

Khasi men who marry non-Khasi women give the children, their own clan name. The offsprings from the union of Khasi women and non-Khasi men take their father's clan or sub-caste name or sometimes that of both parents. Besides, patrilineal influence and sentiments, materialism and expediency seems to be the cause of taking the Khasi father or mother clan's name. Khasis are classed as Schedule Tribe by the Indian government and are eligible for special benefits. Therefore, a person who can identify himself or herself as a Khasi can avail of the benefits provided to this status group.

Even among the children of Khasi parents a few take the father's clan name or those of both parents. Is patrilineal influence and inclination the cause? In few cases studied, the motive seems to have been quite different. If a father has a high social standing (e.g. if he is highly ranked in the government job etc.), the children feel secure and proud in his shadow. This is a common practice among the upper class (which has started to spring up). But in a few cases the patrilineal trend seems to be the genuine reason for taking the father's name.

Taking the father's clan or sub-caste name is made easy for converts and non-converts alike because, in the first case, the clan would not be defiled by the interment of their bones in the father's clan or sub-clan ossuary; and in the second case many orthodoxes (those who follow Khasi religion) do not observe the osteological rites.

The change in the economic scenario, from subsistence (food gathering, hunting and agriculture) to cash economy turns the concept of common clan land (*Ki-Kur*) redundant.

Common clan land is most effective if the clan is more territorial in nature and people engaged in agricultural activities. Changing economy and migration, with opportunity for new economic pursuit, in the present cash economy, decreased the importance of common clan land. If changing religion draws apart the mutual cooperation which the maternal uncle and the youngest daughter have in carrying out the obligation of family rituals; changing economy severs the control which the maternal uncle had over the family property. Ancestral property has become more an individual property (of the youngest daughter) and others have no claim in it. This is especially so in a family where agriculture is a thing of the past. Thus the concept of common clan land is almost defunct except among members of a few clan who still practice agriculture.

With the declining of the clan as an important religious and economic unit, individuals are being drawn apart from each other. Thus 'individualisms' and 'materialism' have been creeping in with the former replacing 'familialism'. The closeness of family members *Shi ing* is no longer regarded as before, which is a cluster of domestic units of sisters and their children, also their male sibs. Now individuals are responsible for duties only towards their immediate domestic units. The saying *Lah Ki Briew Shi Sngi* meaning, Kiths are more reliable than kins (which must have emerged late), indicates that dependency on one's clan is lessening. The

changing attitudes and values towards one's kin manifested in disunity of clan members.

The spread of Christianity, changing economy and changing political structure has curtailed the functions and privileges of the clan council. Members of the clan are no longer united under the banner of religious, economic and political unity. The concept of clan council is almost defunct. Disputes and conflicts are more complicated in nature. In most cases the courts settle these matters. With the deterioration of clan council as an operational unit, members are scattered and disunited.

At present, some clans are forming the clan societies. Both Christians and non-Christians have come together and formed such societies with voluntary membership limited to the members of particular clan. Almost, invariably the aim of such a society is the revitalization of the Khasi heritage. A considerable number of clan have formed such societies. This is an attempt to unite and express the lost clan solidarity. (for details see Mathur 1979:101-106).

The symbolic presentation of articles in the naming ceremony '*Jer-Khun*' and the ensuing confirmation ceremony '*Ka Tap Lubri*' emphasized one's duty towards the clan. This has been replaced by baptism among Christians. The birth and death rites were psychological factors which oriented the individual to the clan. The individual was psyched up to perform his/her duties towards one's clan while alive, because even after one's death he or she belongs to it. In Christianity and other religious, these rites have a different connotations.

The function of the clan in the past, revolved around the whole society and the life of individual members. The change in the society degenerated the functions of the clan. The unity and solidarity of the clan members is dying away. Clan exogamy and the incest prohibition is however, still observed. The taboo and its ensuing curse being still dreaded by most. At present, the sense of

solidarity, among the clan members (*Kur*) is expressed only in clan exogamy.

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