6 Identity of the Lyngngam in Comparison with the Khasi and Garo in Meghalaya

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INTRODUCTION

The Lyngngam inhabit the remote area in Meghalaya, a hilly state in the Northeast region of India. The Lyngngam and Megam are sandwiched between the eastern extremity of Garo hills and western part of Khasi hills (Figure 6.1). The term Lyngngam designates those people inhabiting the Khasi territory and Megam is used for those who reside in the Garo territory. *Nuniya* is the term referred to the Megam by the Assamese of Boko in Kamrup district of Assam (Gurdon, 1907; Playfair, 1909; Dalton, 1978).

It may be mentioned that Gurdon (1907) classified the Lyngngam as a sub-group of the Khasi, but he also said that they "differ so very greatly from the Khasi in their manner of life, and in their customs . . . they are more Garo than Khasi". He further stated, "Although it is true they speak what may be called a dialect of Khasi, and observe some of the Khasi customs", we may consider the Lyngngam as a "hybrid race" arising from the inter-marriage between the Khasi and Garo in the past. Gurdon's perception of the identity of the Lyngngam reverberates in the writings of later scholars - both local and non-local. Playfair (1909) reiterates the views of Gurdon in his brief statement about the Megam, "In appearance and custom they closely resemble the Garo, but their language has been classified by Grierson as Khasi, and is absolutely unintelligible to the ordinary Garo.... They seem to represent a fusion of the Garo and the Khasi, and should be looked upon as a hybrid race". Ehrenfels (1955) too considers the Lyngngam as culturally intermediate between the Khasi and Garo.

Bareh (1967) considers the Lyngngam as non-Khasi, "Who are supposed to have a Garo origin but have embraced Khasi customs". At the same time, he is of the opinion that they are the hybrid group of the Khasi and Garo. Mathur (1979), on the other hand, regards them as a

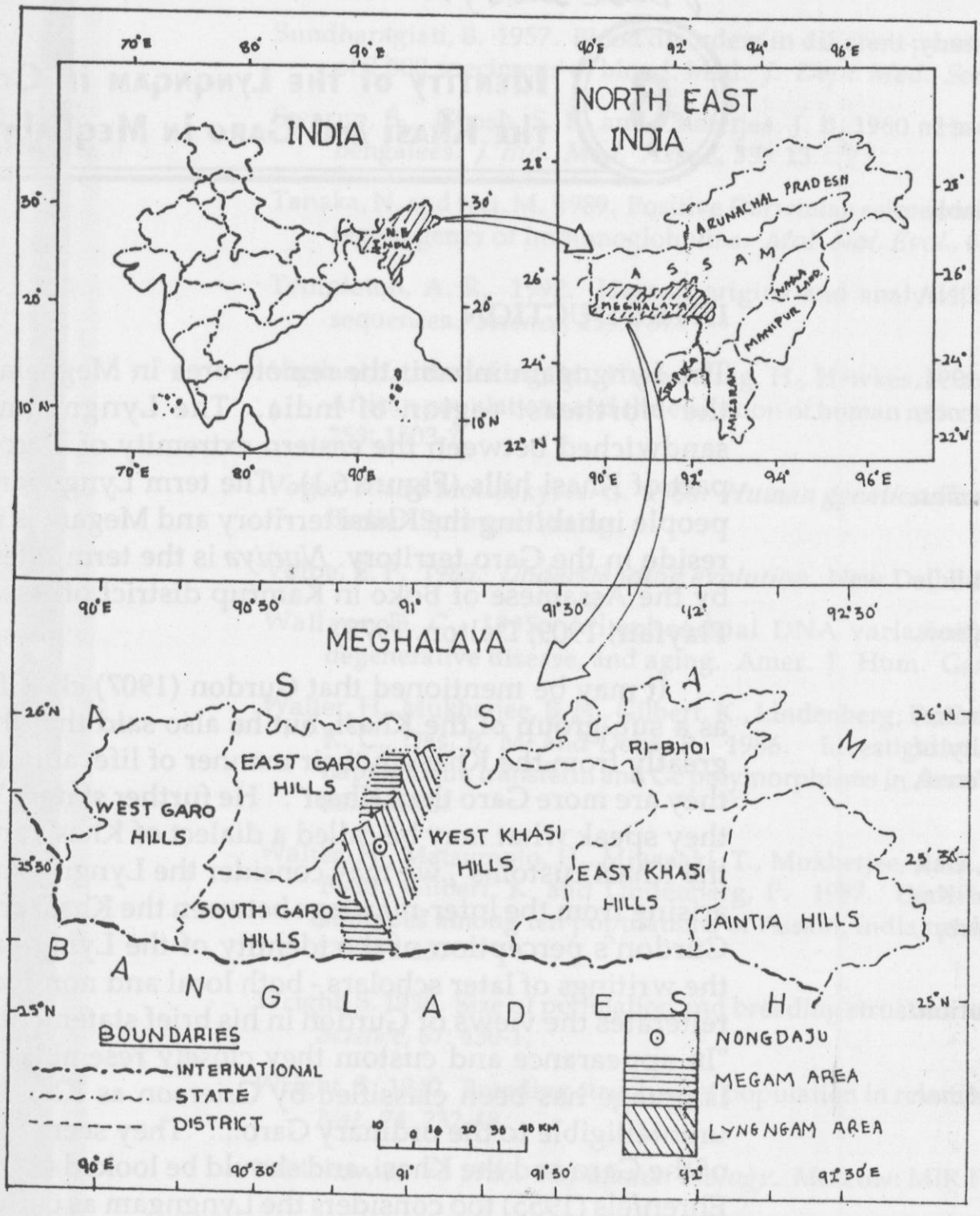

Fig. 6.1. Map Showing the Distribution of the Lyngngam and Megam.

separate tribe. He writes, " The other hill folk (besides the Khasi) found in Shillong are the Naga, Mizos, Mikirs, Garos, Lalungs, Lyngngams and Hadems". As far as the Megam or those Lyngngam inhabiting in Garo region are concerned, Sangma (1981) claims that they are the sub-tribe of the Garo.

Considering the views as to the identity of the Lyngngam by various writers including anthropologists, historians, linguists and others; one can say that there is a concordance, yet without confidence. The questions that arise, who are the Lyngngam and/or Megam? Are they a sub-tribe of the Khasi or Garo? Are they an amalgam of Khasi and Garo ethnic groups? Or are they a people with separate genetic entity who have assimilated Khasi and Garo cultural identity due to their geographical proximity to these tribes? Last but not least, is what do they consider themselves to be?

This paper attempts to understand the Lyngngam through the maze of identities attributed by those who have attempted to study, or mentioned about the Lyngngam in their writings. The task here is to compare certain biological and socio-cultural traits known through secondary materials and whatever little was observed during the preliminary study conducted among the Lyngngam of Nongdaju in West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya.

BIOLOGICAL TRAITS

At the outset, it is imperative to stress that materials relating to the biological characteristics of the Lyngngam are almost non-existent. The paucity of data limits the following comparison to ABO and PTC taste sensitivity only, based on the study of Ahmed *et al.* (1997) among the Lyngngam of Nongdaju village.

The percentage distribution and allele frequencies of the ABO blood groups among the Lyngngam (of Nongdaju village), Garo and Khasi sub-populations are presented in Table 6.1. It is seen from the Table that the Lyngngam are characterised by a high frequency of allele A and a low frequency of allele B. The frequency of AB blood groups is also high (12.50%) in comparison with the other sub-groups of the Khasi population like the Pnar, Bhoi and War. The χ^2 value indicate that the Lyngngam differ significantly from the Garo and other Khasi sub-groups with respect to the distribution of the ABO blood types. It may be mentioned that Ahmed *et al.* (1997) have reported that the frequency of Rh (negative) blood groups (1.64%) is also higher than that reported for the Khasi and Garo populations. Thus, with respect to the ABO and

Rh(D) blood groups, the Lyngngam seem to distant themselves from both the Khasi and Garo.

TABLE 6.1

ABO blood groups among the Lyngngam, Garo and Khasi

Population	*Obs*	*Phenotype frequency*				*Allele frequency*			χ^2 *with the Lyngngam*
		O	*A*	*B*	*AB*	*p*	*q*	*r*	
Lyngngam	120	20.0	39.2	28.3	12.5	0.319	0.246	0.435	—
Khynriam	202	49.0	29.2	18.7	3.1	0.178	0.116	0.706	32.46**
Pnar	197	52.8	33.5	11.6	2.1	0.198	0.071	0.731	45.66**
Bhoi	192	38.7	30.4	23.0	7.8	0.218	0.169	0.616	12.21*
War	230	55.7	28.6	11.9	3.7	0.179	0.082	0.739	46.82**
Khasi (pooled)	821	48.6	30.4	16.7	4.3	0.192	0.108	0.700	42.59**
Garo	142	26.76	22.53	40.85	9.9	0.178	0.295	0.522	10.48*

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.001$.

Sources : Majumdar (1950); Das (1978); Ahmed *et al.* (1997).

TABLE 6.2

PTC taste sensitivity among the Lyngnagam, Garo and Khasi

Population/sub-population	*Number*	*Frequency of non-tasters*		χ^2 *with the Lyngngam*
		Percentage	*Allele frequency*	
Lyngngam	120	30.00	0.548	—
Khynriam	222	11.26	0.336	18.66*
Pnar	170	17.06	0.413	6.77*
Bhoi	210	21.90	0.468	2.67
War	236	12.29	0.351	16.71*
Khasi (pooled)	838	15.39	0.392	15.63*
Garo	125	21.60	0.465	2.26

* Significant at 0.1%.

Sources : Das (1978); Deka (1978) and Ahmed *et al.* (1997).

The frequency of tasters and non-tasters to phenylthiocarbamide (PTC) among the Lyngngam in comparison with the Garo and Khasi populations is shown in Table 6.2. It can be observed from the Table

that the frequency of non-tasters is much higher in the Lyngngam than in the Garo and other Khasi subgroups. The χ^2 - values also show that with the exception of the Bhoi, the Lyngngam differ significantly from the Khynriam, Pnar and War. However, the difference between the Lyngngam and Garo in respect of PTC taste sensitivity is not statistically significant.

Overall, with respect to these limited genetic markers, Ahmed *et al.* (1997) are of the opinion that the Lyngngam seem to be a "distinctly different population and with all probability not either a sub-population of the Khasi or of the Garo". This conjecture is, however, subject to further studies with more genetic markers.

SOCIO-CULTURAL TRAITS

Comparing the whole list of socio-cultural traits however desirable it may be, would lead to the narration of untenable data and defeat the purpose of this presentation. Thus, customs pertaining to marriage and divorce, family structure and residence, inheritance and adoption, ritualistic and customary practices of the Khasi, Garo and Lyngngam are compared and deliberated briefly in this paper. The traditional usages are considered and cogitated upon, rather than customs prevalent at present, with a view to unravelling the identity of the Lyngngam. Besides, the time frame of past and present and/or traditional and modern is suspended while concentrating on these aspects, because the practice of certain traditional customs in these three societies is in vogue even today. In comparison with the biological traits, data on socio-cultural characteristics are at least available, despite their limitations. The earliest ethnographic accounts on these groups are those written by the British administrators (Gurdon, 1907; Playfair, 1909). These have been liberally used in the following discourse along with those data generated by the later scholars and the limited field data collected from Nongdaju village, a mid point of the Lyngngam area.

Marriage Regulation

The Lyngngam like the Khasi and Garo observe the rule of clan exogamy. The Khasi till date observe this rule very strictly as compared with the Garo where it is reported that about 10% of the married couple violate the rule of *chatchi* or *machong* exogamy (Playfair, 1909; Sangma, 1981). The Lyngngam of Nongdaju also observe this rule strictly, and to violate it, is regarded as the greatest sin that one could ever commit.

Polygyny is not a customary practice in Khasi society. Gurdon (1907) says, "Polygyny does not exist amongst the Khasi; such a practice

would naturally not be in vogue." However, Nakane (1967) reported two cases of polygyny in Sohkynduh and Kongton villages. Natarajan (1977) also referred to the occurrence of polygynous marriage among the Khasi. Polygyny is not customary *per se*, but "there are instances of men having wives other than those they have regularly married" (Gurdon, 1907). In most cases, such a polygynous union is against the wishes of his first wife who is known as *Tnga trai*, meaning rightful wife, wedded or not. The second or third wife is termed as *Tnga-tuh* or *Tnga-kliar* meaning the stolen-wife or side-wife respectively. Polygyny does not serve any socio-economic purpose in the Khasi society like in Garo society. It does not raise the social status or prestige of a man. Instead, "the polygynist was regarded as a somewhat ludicrous or tragic figure" (Nakane, 1967).

In Garo society, polygyny is a customary practice. It is reported that a Garo male may marry up to three wives who are related or unrelated. If it is a sororal type, the wives usually belong to the same clan. It is a rule that a man must marry the elder sister before the younger one. He must obtain the permission of the first wife or chief wife, *Jik-mamung*, before marrying other wives known as *Jik-gite*. All wives are regarded as legally married, but it is the chief wife who holds the key position in the family (see Playfair, 1909; Nakane, 1967; Sangma, 1981). Besides the above, another form of prescriptive polygyny prevails among the Garo. It is a rule that the *Nokrom, i.e.* husband of the heiress, must marry the widowed mother in law who was the wife of his maternal uncle. In such a case, the mother-in-law as the second wife is often known as *Jik-mamung*, even though a man might have married her daughter earlier. Another instance of mother-daughter polygynous union occurs when a widow without an heir marries an heir (provided as a replacement spouse) and he is promised a young wife who is the widow's daughter and heiress. In the first instance where a man marries the daughter first and the mother later, the man does not always have sexual relation with the mother. In the second case, however, it is expected and aspired that a man should maintain sexual relation with both mother and daughter (Playfair, 1909; Nakane, 1967; Burling, 1997).

Ehrenfels (1955) has reported that Polygyny among the Lyngngam is not infrequent, rather it is well integrated in their society. The consent of the first wife is required before a man can marry a second, or a third one. The position of the other wives is, however, subordinate as compared with that of the first one. There is no stigma to a man marrying more than one wife. 'Lyngngam polygyny of "concubine-type" thus conforms to the Garo pattern, but the institutionalised polygynous

nokrom marriage of a widowed mother-in-law by her son-in-law and during the lifetime of his wife, *i.e.* the mother-in-law's daughter is not practised by the Lyngngam'. After proselytisation polygynous union is rare in all three societies. This holds true for the Lyngngam in Nongdaju also.

The Lyngngam deviate from the Khasi with regard to cross-cousin marriage. Cross-cousin marriage in Khasi society is neither prescriptive nor proscriptive. "A Khasi cannot marry his maternal uncle's daughter during the lifetime of the maternal uncle... Marriage with the daughter of a father's sister is not allowed during the lifetime of the father, but after the latter's death there is no religious ban, although such unions are looked upon with disfavour by the Khasi. In the War country, however, such marriages are totally prohibited" (Gurdon, 1907). The Lyngngam and Garo have no such clause to cross-cousin marriages.

Among the Garo, "matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is strongly preferred in the marriage of the heiress and the heir to be" (Nakane, 1967). In fact, the matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is the basis of the Garo social structure. "Lyngngam, like their Garo neighbours, allow this type of marriage, although it does not fulfil the function, which it has in connection with the rather peculiar *Nokrom* system of Garo society" (Ehrenfels, 1955). As in Garo society, a Lyngngam man can marry his maternal uncle's daughter and also his father's sister's daughter even during their lifetime.

Sororate is a practised among the Khasi, Garo and Lyngngam. Junior sororate is not infrequently in Garo and Lyngngam societies, but for different reasons. "Amongst the Khasi when the wife dies a man can marry the younger sister" (Gurdon, 1907), though it is not common. In Garo society, when the woman dies before her husband, it is the responsibility of the deceased wife's lineage to provide another wife. Replacement of the dead wife by an actual or classificatory sister is for maintaining the *Akim* (affinal) relationship that is intricately woven into the socio-economic aspect of the Garo society and culture (Burling, 1997).

Among the Lyngngam as with the Khasi society, the custom of junior sororate is a preferential one. In Nongdaju village, I came across three such cases and the reasons attributed to such a union are to facilitate the upbringing of the children, since a sister can take better care of her deceased sister's children, and the family can retain the 'good-son-in-law' within it. If the deceased wife is the youngest daughter, the widower's in-law will try to procure another wife who belongs to the clan of his first's wife.

Selection of Spouses

By and large, the Khasi have a free choice in selecting a spouse whether a man or woman. Marriage by choice is thus a common practice. However, under certain circumstances, free choice is not left to an individual. It is not unheard for the parents to arrange a marriage of their children, if the children show no inclination or interest in finding a spouse on their own, whatever the reason may be. This happens even in today's society. Besides marriages based on free choice and arranged-marriage, Khasi do accept elopement of their children. The case of marriage by capture known as *'Ring-Kongor*, meaning pull the duke, was once prevalent in the *Hima* (state) Khyrim of Khasi society. The capture is mostly fictive, but at times real. In the first instance, when the *Syiem Sad* (sister of the chief) is in love with a certain boy, a mock capture is practised. On the wedding day, her fiance will be pulled on the elephant's back to the ceremony to be held at *Ing Sad* (House of the Chief's mother). In the second instance, a man approved by the *Syiem* and his family will be forcefully dragged to attend the wedding rituals with the *Syiem's* sister. The former type of marriage could be a survival of marriage by force (Deb Barman, 1977).

In Garo society also, all the above three types of mate selection prevail, but with a definite variation. The non-heiress who marries for the first time has a free choice in selecting her husband. Arranged marriage is compulsory for the heiress, or *Nokna*, and the heir or *Nokrom*. The husband of the heiress must belong to her father's clan and be her father's heir. Another type of arranged-marriage is replacement of spouse for the widow or widower. In both types of arranged-marriage, the sub-clan or *Machong* members play an important role in selection of a spouse. Once the groom is decided upon whether for the heiress or non-heiress, the method of bringing him to the girl is to capture him—mockingly or actually. Besides the above, marriage by probation is customary among the Atong of Garo Hills (Playfair, 1909; Sangma, 1981; Burling, 1997). The Lyngngam by and large practise marriage by free choice, arranged by the parents or relatives and do accept elopement of the children. Gurdon (1907) has also reported the practice of marriage by capture. In this respect, they are similar to the Khasi and Garo in general, but marriage by probation is not reported. The Lyngngam, however, differ markedly from the Khasi and Garo in marriage by trial. It is a custom for a boy to undergo certain trial to actually win the approval of the girl's family and clan members. Trial by strength or courage is practised in Nongdaju till recently, and according to the villagers, it is still occurring in many neighbouring

Lyngngam villages. The prospective groom has to undergo certain physical trials to test his strength and courage. One way of testing the boy's courage is to beat with a stick on his knees by the strongest and healthiest member of the girl's clan. If the boy does not display pain or can keep without crying out, he is considered to be the suitable mate for the girl and good son-in-law to the family. In the second case, a boy has to wrestle with the girl's strongest clan member. To be able to marry the girl of his choice, he has to come out as a winner in the wrestling competition. These trials are a kind of physical torture to test the boy's strength and courage. In comparison with the Khasi and Garo societies, this custom among the Lyngngam is a unique one. The elderly men in Nongdaju admit that when the kinsmen are disposed towards the boy, the trial is a mocking one. If the Borang or kinsmen do not favour the boy, the trial is real. Many boys cannot withstand the beating and lose the bride of their choice.

Proposal for Marriage

Formal proposal for marriage always comes from the boy's family in Khasi society. The boy's parents will send a mediator, *Ksiang*, (family member or non-relative) to arrange and discuss the matter with the girl's parent. "It is considered inappropriate or even looked down if the proposal comes from the female side"(Gurdon, 1907). In contrast to the Khasi society, proposal for marriage in Garo society must come from the woman's side only. The girl will indicate her choice and enlist the services of her father, uncle or brother to bring about the alliance. There is an exception to this rule in which a girl may choose her husband. This exception is applied to the heiress who is given in marriage to the father's sister's son who is actual or classificatory. The Lyngngam in this respect amalgamate the Khasi and Garo custom. Proposal for marriage may come from the boy's side or from the girl's side, even if the partners have made their own choice. The mediator- *Ksiang* - negotiates or arranges the matter with the parents of the girl or boy as the case may be (Playfair, 1909; Deb Barman, 1977).

Marriage Payment

The custom of marriage payment is not practised by the Khasi and Garo. The Lyngngam, on the other hand, have a unique customary marriage payment termed as *Seng-Kdoh*. In contrast to the custom of bride price found in many tribal societies, *Seng-Kdoh* is a payment in cash, transferred by the bride's parents or her clan members to the bridegroom's parents. The same is distributed to the clan members of

the groom. The amount expected to be paid on the wedding day, or following it, is fixed on the engagement day, to the satisfaction of both the parties. The amount varies according to the economic status of a young man. The clan members gather together their resources to meet such a payment. At times, the husband of the girl helps his wife's parents from his earning.

This custom of *Seng-Kdoh* is also known as *Bai Jainbah* meaning the payment for the sling-cloth used for carrying children. It has been interpreted as a compensation for the parents who lose their son to another family after his marriage. This payment is returned on the event of divorce or death of a husband (Karotemprel (1985). Many of the elders in Nongdaju village admitted that in their marriage *Seng-Kdoh* passed the hands of their relatives. The amount paid ranges from hundreds to a few thousands. The maximum amount paid in this respect at Nongdaju was reported to be Rs. 5, 000. This custom stands out the Lyngngam society from that of the Khasi and Garo. In Garo society, however, the son of a wealthy man, or *Nokma*, sometimes may receive a sword, shield and spear, and perhaps a cow or a bull as gifts on the occasion of his marriage. When a man dies, his widow is expected to return to his parents or family members whatever he may have received from them (Playfair, 1909).

With the advent of Christianity, the custom of paying *Seng-Kdoh* or *Bai Jainbah* is not popular anymore. The church opposes to such practices in Nongdaju. Those who still follow the tradition do it, others make a token payment of a few rupees only. The girl's family and clan members sometimes pay what they can afford, and no bargain exists as it did in the past.

Divorce

Divorce among the Khasi is not infrequent and may occur for a variety of reasons such as adultery, bareness, incompatibility of temperament, etc. The rule is that both the parties must agree to be divorced. When one party is unwilling to divorce, the initiator has to pay a compensation known as *Ka Bai Mynrain* or *Ka Thnem*. Tradition forbids the remarriage of the couple who have divorced each other. Besides a woman cannot be divorced during her pregnancy. "At Kongton out of 61 couples, the number of persons who had experienced divorce was 33 (15 females and 18 males) and those who married more than twice numbered 19 (females 7 and males 12). Only 31 couples out 61, are cases where neither husband nor wife had been divorced... In addition to divorce there are many actual separations of husband and wife of

short or long duration. This needs not necessarily ends in divorce" (see Nakane, 1967).

Like in the case of the Khasi, the occurrence of divorce is common among the Garo. The grounds for divorce are more or less same as stated above. Compensation is paid to whomever a wrong is committed, an initiator for a divorce must pay compensation, called *Akim dai* to the opposite party, irrespective of which side is wrong. *Akim dai* is a compensation for breaking the *Akim* (affinal) bond which could have continued from one generation to the next (see Sangma, 1981; Burling, 1997).

Divorce among the Lyngngam is similar to that among the Khasi in which the consent of both the parties is needed. Compensation is paid to the person who is wrong and also to the one who is not willing to divorce. However, the Lyngngam divorce custom is distinct from that of the Khasi and Garo because the man has to return the marriage payment given to his parents. If the woman is in the wrong and initiates a divorce, the return of the *Seng-Kdoh* can be negotiated.

Family and Residence

In matrilineal groups of Meghalaya, the heiress and non-heiress types of marriage result in different types of residence, which in turn determine the type of family. In all three communities, the heiress residence after marriage is matrilocal and her husband joins her uxorilocally. Thus, marriage of an heiress results in the formation of an extended matrilineal family. The non-heiress (after a year or so) moves out from her parental house and she along with her husband and children starts a nuclear family. The residence for a non-heiress and her husband is largely matrilocal (if both are from the same village) and uxorilocal for the husband if he is from a different village and joins his wife in her village. It may be virilocal for the non-heiress if she moves to her husband's village. Thus, nuclear family and matrilineal extended family are the common types of family in these three societies.

The above is a one-way classification based on heiress and non-heiress marriage. The structure of family is also determined by marriage rules existing in the society and changes with the domestic cycle, *i.e.* progression and regression of the domestic group. Nuclear families in one generation become extended matrilineal one in the next and *vice versa*. Polygynous marriage may lead to a polygynous domestic group. However, in Khasi society even polygynous marriage ends in a nuclear family, since such a union never meets the approval of the first wife,

thus, the husband cannot attempt to bring the wives together. In certain areas of Khasi Hills and in most parts of Jaintia Hills, the practice of visiting husband system (*e.g.* in Kongton and Sohkynduh villages and also in Pnar society in the past) results in consanguineal family, *i.e.* the domestic group consisting of mother, brothers, sisters, sister's children and grand-mother. In Garo society, polygynous marriage involving the marriage of an heir or heir to be with the daughter and mother-in-law, or with the mother first, and with the daughter later, takes the usual form of matrilineal-extended family (polygynous type). Only few cases of strictly polygynous families surface in Garo society. In Lyngngam society, based on Ehrenfels' (1955) study, polygynous family of one man, his wives and children is not unheard of.

From the above discussion, one can assume the following types of family in Khasi society (see also Nakane's1967 classification of Khasi residence) :

1. Nuclear family resulting from marriage of non-heiress (Nakane's serial 4).
2. Extended-matrilineal family resulting from marriage of heiress (Nakane's serial 1).
3. Consanguineal-family resulting from visiting husband system (Nakane's serial 2).
4. Combination of 2 and 3 resulting from husband who does not stay permanently with the wife or mother (Nakane's serial 1 and 2).
5. Unclassified.

It should be noted that the above were forms of family in the past society, at present, the most common forms are those mentioned in 1 and 2 above. Besides these, at present, extended-matrilineal family from the son does occur when there is no female issue, and extended-matrilineal family from the other daughters (not the youngest) is also found due to many reasons.

In Garo society, one can find the following types of family :

1. Nuclear family resulting from marriage of the agate or non-heiress.
2. Extended-matrilineal family resulting from marriage of *Nokna* or heiress.
3. Extended-matrilineal family (polygynous) resulting from marriage of heir to both mother and daughter.

4. Polygynous family resulting from marriage of a man to non-heiress whether related or not.

5. Unclassified.

Based on Burling's classification of 60 households, 27 can be clubbed together as nuclear families, of which 7 are incomplete, *i.e.* they consist of married couples without children. The classification of the rest, *i.e.* 23 households is not clear. However, 20 of these seem to be extended-matrilineal families in various stages of the domestic cycle, 11 of which included a single surviving parent of the wife (the other members are not stated), and 9 consisted of a mother, a daughter, their husbands and children of one or both couples. Polygynous families occurred in 8 households, which are not specified whether they are of extended type or not. The presentation of the rest, *i.e.* 5 households is not clear, thus, these are unclassified types (Burling, 1997).

In Nongdaju village, nuclear and extended-matrilineal families are the only types known. From the analysis of 115 households, 90 belong to the nuclear type, these include 5 incomplete nuclear families, meaning such households consist of only one parent and children due to divorce and/or separation of parents, or death of one parent. The rest of the households, *i.e.* a total of 25 are extended-matrilineal family. Of these 17 and 6 are extension from the youngest and the elder daughters, respectively. In the case of the latter, 4 are transient type, since the elder daughters, their husbands and children will shift out once they built their own houses and 2 are permanent in nature, because the youngest daughters and their husbands resided elsewhere due to their employment in Government services (Wanswet, 1994).

Inheritance of Property

The customary law of inheritance is similar among most Khasi communities. The parental property passes from mother to daughter. It is often stated that the youngest daughter inherits the lion's share of the property (Gurdon, 1907). There are exceptions to these rules in certain War areas. Firstly, in some War communities, like in Shella and Sohra areas, both sons and daughters share the parental property. Secondly, in Nongwar village it is the eldest daughter who gets the so-called lion's share of property, *i.e.* the parental house and most of the family heirlooms. Besides, in War area a man can transfer his inherited property to his children and in this way property of one clan in one-generation is owned by another in the next generation. With the exception of the Pnar, men in other Khasi communities, *viz.*, Khynriam

and Bhoi, can pass their acquired property to their children (usually females) since it became ancestral property in his children generation. In traditional Pnar society, the self- acquired property goes to his female clan members and not to the wife and children. Nowadays, inheritance of property among all Khasi sub-groups has taken a new dimension. Parents may give a share to the males also, if their resources permit. The Meghalaya Self-Acquired Property Act of 1984 empowers the parents to bestow their acquired property to son(s) or daughter(s) according to their will.

In Garo society, according to Playfair (1909) "property once in the motherhood cannot pass out of it". Thus, unlike the Khasi law of inheritance, Garo's pattern of inheritance is strictly matrilineal. Burling (1997) has aptly described the rule of transference of property rather than inheritance. "Property is never decided at death. The heir and heiress simply continue the family possession.... No goods are inherited privately, and non-heirs have as much access to village land as heiress. Heiress retains the house, any associated out buildings, woodsheds, pigsties, granaries and the grain stored in them, and any animals belonging to the households. Standing crops may represent considerable value, and all tools, articles of clothing, basketry and other small movable property are also automatically retained by the chosen daughter (heiress) and her husband. Finally, heirlooms, which may be of great value, but may also be almost non-existent, are inherited by them. Besides objects of wealth, social status is also inherited by the heir and heiress. When an older member of a household dies, the Garos view his heir as stepping into the social position of the dead person—a woman into the position of her mother and a man into the position of his uncle and father in-law". The status of an heiress in Garo society is not determined by birthright, *i.e.* primogeniture or ultimogeniture (as in Khasi society), but it depends on the choice of the parents. The clan plays an important role in the selection of an heiress when the parents are unable to choose. Like the Khasi, the youngest daughter is in most cases chosen as the heiress.

The Lyngngam follow the general Khasi rule of female ultimogeniture, "the youngest daughter obtains the largest share of the ancestral property, the reminder being divided between the remaining daughters. The rule is also said to apply with regard to acquired property" (Gurdon, 1907). According to Gurdon sons do not get any share, but in Nongdaju village the sons also get a share in the parental property.

As discussed, the position of the Lyngngam is sandwiched between the Garo and Khasi communities in general with regard to the so-called inheritance or actual transference of property. Among the Lyngngam as with the Khasi, the management and control of property rest with the maternal uncle and brothers termed as *Borang*. In Garo society, on the other hand, the management of property is under the heiress's husband and the control with the male members of the heiress clan. The heiress husband has full use of his wife's property during his lifetime and has a control over its management even after his death, since he has the right to choose a male member of his clan (as a husband to the heiress) to represent him as an heir. It may be noted that he is not an heir to ownership of property, and the person whose heir he is, has nothing to leave, "but he is the channel through which the motherhood of the husband maintains its hold on the property of the wife" (Playfair, 1909).

Unlike Khasi and Lyngngam where one clan owns, controls and manages the property, Garo society is paradoxical, ownership and management lies with two different exogamous clans. Practically, two clans who are the wife-givers and wife-takers own and manage the property. This seems to be the quizzing angle in Garo ownership, management and control of property; yet it is the base of Garo moietic structure.

In Nongdaju village, the traditional pattern of ownership, management and control of property is still followed. The male members of the clan manage the landed property. It is through the clan council that agricultural plots (for shifting cultivation) are allotted to different members of the clan. Besides clan lands are leased out to other landless individuals on cash payment. The revenue collected from such cases is divided among the clan members (family basis)—both males and females. In Nongdaju there are four major clans (first settlers), *viz., Synshiang, Ryntong, Daju* and *Puwein*, which are the major landholders, and they lease out land to others. It is interesting to note that in Nongdaju, both male and female members can attend the clan council, though it is governed and controlled by the males. The women are not allowed to hold any offices in the clan council, but their opinion is considered, especially in matter relating to clan land (see Mawlong, 1994).

Adoption

Adoption as a tradition among the Garo and Khasi is primarily linked with the "dying out of the lineage" and perpetuation of the clan. In

Khasi society a female's child is adopted, if the family is on the verge of dying out or being extinct. A girl so adopted may belong to the same clan or could be a non-Khasi one. The traditional custom of adoption in Khasi society relates not only to the question of inheriting the family property but is also significant in the socio-religious and socio-political sphere (see Pakyntein, 1999 for detail). Among the Garo also, adoption of a girl is enmeshed to their intricate structure of property and inheritance. In most cases, the Garo adopt a girl from among the closed matrilateral relatives (Burling, 1997). A non-Garo is sometimes reported to have been adopted (Sangma, 1981). The adopted girl then became the heiress and inherited the family property. If inheritance of property is the main cause for adopting a girl in Garo society, adoption of a man is to compliment the heiress position. It is a custom that a man should adopt the sister's son, whether actual or classificatory, to succeed his position as the caretaker of property belonging to his wife, and to be inherited by the daughter. Adoption of a nephew takes the form of selecting a spouse for the man's daughter. After his marriage to the heiress, the heir manages the property inherited by his wife. Adoption of a male in Garo society does not arise because of the absence of male issue in the family, but for every heiress the father of the girl adopts an heir. In past Khasi society, on the other hand, it is unheard that a male is adopted. Custom of adoption has not been reported among the Lyngngam and in Nongdaju also.

Birth Ceremony

The Khasi perform a special ritual known as *Ka Tap Kpoh* (consecration of the mother's womb) for the expectant mother and the child to be born. This is performed for the mother's physical health and for the safe delivery of the child. Besides, it provides a safeguard against pre-natal or post-natal death, considered by the Khasi as unnatural death, known as *Iap-Tyrut*. For this ritual, a hen whose limbs must be spotless is usually sacrificed. This sacrifice is offered to the Godhead and the ancestress, known as *Ka Iawbei* (Mawrie, 1981).

The Garo's rituals pertaining to birth of a child are more elaborate when compared with that of the Khasi. Many sacrifices are performed before and after birth of a child. About four sacrifices are performed (more if a woman is sick) before the child is born. The first among these is done when the movement of the baby inside the mother's womb is first felt. Other three rituals are performed at the interval of a few days or weeks. It is believed that these rituals ensure the health of both the foetus and mother. It is the woman's husband who

usually performs these rituals and a father for an unmarried daughter, who became pregnant. Each ritual is designed to appease a different spirit. Ideally, a bull, a pig, or a goat should be sacrificed, but poverty may force a substitution for a fowl. It is their belief that if all sacrifices are properly performed, the woman will be healthy and should have no difficulty in giving birth, but otherwise the baby or even the mother may die. Rituals for the safety of delivery may occur if labour is protracted. Chicken or a pig sometimes, if the family is wealthy enough a cow may be sacrificed to ensure the woman's health (Playfair, 1909; Burling, 1997).

After the birth of a child, three more rituals are performed. Sacrifice of an egg is done to erase the filth and pollution to which the mid-wife has been exposed at birth. Another ritual is carried out to ensure the closure of the fontanel and in this a rooster is sacrificed. The last sacrifice is done about a month after birth and the baby's hair is then cut-off. The essential animal for this sacrifice is a chicken, however, if parents can afford it, a pig is killed and few relatives are invited to this ceremony.

Unlike the Khasi and Garo, there are no special elaborate rituals or custom relating to birth of a child in Lyngngam society. Rituals are performed when the labour is protracted so as to relieve the suffering mother, and another one is carried out when the umbilical cord falls (Gurdon, 1907; Nongsiang, 1994). In Nongdaju, *Ka seng Iawbei* is performed, which is similar to the Khasi birth ritual, *Ka Tap Kpoh*, in form and function.

Naming Ceremony

Among the Khasi naming rite is elaborate. The naming ceremony known as *Jer Khun*, is performed on the morning after a child is born. The biological and social status of a child is asserted in this ceremony. If a child is a male, a sword, a bow and three arrows, are placed near him and for a female a conical basket, *i.e.*, (*Khoh*) and a, head-strap, *Star*, are placed near her. These articles symbolise their responsibilities as adult members of the society (Gurdon, 1907; Pakyntein, 1996). The actual rituals are performed by a diviner (*Nongknia*) with the assistance from other family members especially a father and father's mother and/or sister. In fact, two rituals are performed at this time, one to ward-off pollution after childbirth, the other is to name a child. A few months after the name is given, a confirmation ceremony is performed known as *Ka Tap Lubri*. In this, the diviner ensures that the name chosen is appropriate, and there is no displeasure from the God, goddesses, ancestors and ancestress. It is believed that if there is no satisfaction

from the above, the child will be sickly and the name chosen is inappropriate. Thus, the naming and confirmation ceremonies are to be repeated. In the confirmation ceremony, certain articles are presented to the child, a boy will receive a new Jymphong (hard-woven jacket without sleeve) and a girl will receive a new *Jain Kyrshah* (apron like cloth wore on top of a dress). These articles symbolise adulthood and responsibilities of each sex (Mawrie, 1981; Pakyntein, 1996).

Unlike the Khasi, the Garo do not have elaborate naming ceremony. Acoording to Burling (1997), as soon as a baby is born, the midwife calls out whether it is a boy or a girl and she immediately bestows a name. It could be for this reason that Playfair (1909) writes, "Majority of the Garos do not observe any ceremony in connection with the naming of children". However, among the Abeng Garo, a custom exists but it is not always adhered to. Among them it is permissible to name a child directly after birth, but it is usually done in three weeks or a month later. A sacrifice is offered to the guardian spirit of all the children and sometimes to the sun and earth. The child is usually named after an ancestor or ancestress that had been dead for some years. The name of a living relative, or that of the one, who had died recently, is never given.

According to Gurdon (1907), children are named without any special ceremony in Lyngngam society. Nongsiang (1994) has, however, reported that a ceremony is similar to that of the Khasi *Jer Khun*, and the same is observed in Nongdaju village. The naming ceremony usually takes place one day after the birth of the child. An elderly man who knows the act of divination with cowries performs this ritual. Symbolic articles are placed near the baby during this ceremony. During this ritual, a dao's and a spade's handle is placed near a male child and female child, respectively. These articles symbolise the responsibility of the child as an adult member. They point out to the sharing of labour in the *jhum* field, since in Lyngngam area, shifting cultivation is still widely practised. It is the men's duty to clear the forest (with a dao) and the women's duty to sow and weed (with a spade). The symbolic articles in Khasi and Lyngngam societies differ not only in form but also in function.

Marriage Ceremony

Marriage rituals among the Khasi are elaborate, many gods and goddesses are invoked on such an occasion. Three kinds of marriage ceremony are in vogue, *viz., (a) Pynhiar Synjat (b) Lamdoh* and *(c) Iadih Kyiad.* The first and the second forms are considered more

respectable than the last. *Pynhiar Synjat* is marked by an exchange of rings between the bride and groom, accompanied by a lavish feast to all the villagers, hosted by the parents of the bride. In *Lamdoh* ceremony, on the other hand, exchange of rings does not take place and the feasting is moderate. *Iadih Kyiad* is marked by absence of the exchange of rings and feasting. In this ceremony, few relatives may gather and participate in the occasion, no pigs, cows, etc. are slaughtered for consumption and those who participate eat and drink humbly. This type of ceremony is resorted to by the very poor who cannot afford the expenses entailed in the first and second types stated. The actual ritual of tying the knot, the invocation and incantations of the priest or diviner, however, remain the same in all the three types of ceremony.

The wedding ceremony is more or less as follows : On the wedding day, the bridegroom, a mediator from his side and his entourage (consisting of relatives and friends) proceed to the house of the bride, where the ritual is to be performed. Halfway, the male and female relatives of the bride await the groom's party to escort them to the house. On reaching the house, a symbolic exchange of *Kwai* (betel nut) takes place. The mediators from both sides begin to mediate and recite certain incantations. After this, each hands over a gourd containing liquor to a priest who will perform the rite. The priest begins to adjure the God Almighty, other gods and goddesses, the apical ancestral figures and finally the *Syiem* (Chief), the elders and all present. With the invocations and chants, the diviner performs the rites accordingly. This is followed by a sacrifice of a fowl and reading of auguries and exchange of rings (*Sati Synjat*). The killing of pigs, cows, etc. usually takes place before the ritual starts, since these slaughtered animals are prepared for the feast. But omens are also read from the entrails of these slaughtered animals (Gurdon, 1909; Mawrie, 1981 for detail).

"There is very little of religious nature in Garo marriages... the nearest approach to anything of a religious nature is the consulting of omens by the village priest, to ascertain whether the wedded couple will be happy and prosperous or the reverse" (Playfair, 1909). The actual details of rituals and reading of auguries from a hen for a bride, and a rooster for a groom differ from one subgroup of the Garo to another. After readings of the omens, the usual feasting along with drinking and dancing follows (Sangma, 1981).

The above statement of Playfair can be explained by referring to Burling's (1997) narration of the Garo wedding. According to Burling, whenever a boy is successfully captured and brought to the house of a

girl, the marriage ceremony is performed, though this does not ensure a real marriage. A boy may frequently run away temporarily or permanently. As a result, some peoples go through several ceremonies before they marry permanently. When a boy is brought to the girl's village, his captors lead him into the house of the bride, and someone must be present who can act as a priest. He may be a relative, though he need not be, and the girl's father would never perform the ceremony even if he knew the ritual. After a few days of marriage the couple generally go together to visit the husband's parents in his village. Occasionally, a bachelor still accompanies them to guard the new husband, but often the two of them go alone, a real sign that they are acting like husband and wife.

The Lyngngam marriages are arranged by *Ksiang* or go-between, much in the same way as Khasi marriage, but the mediators in Lyngngam community have an additional task of negotiating for the marriage payment (*Seng-Kdoh*) and also for being the formal judges in the trial of strength and courage. Gurdon (1907) describes the marriage rituals of the Lyngngam as less elaborate, and shows a mixture of Khasi and Garo customs. It is associated with the sacrifice of fowls and pigs, besides libation of liquor. The marriage ceremony narrated by the villagers of Nongdaju village is, however, similar to that of the Khasi, *Pynhiar Synjat*, which they termed as *Salutei*. It involves an exchange of rings by the bride and groom followed by feasting.

Death Ceremony

Of all the ceremonies among the Khasi, the death customs are the most detailed and elaborate, but they possess a significance of their own. Customs and rituals pertaining to disposal of the dead body are more or less as follows (Gurdon, 1907 for detail). When a person dies, a member of the family first of all confirmed it. The body is then bathed, dressed and laid down on a mat. The rich dress the corpse with good clothes and jewellery too. *U 'Iar Krad Lynti*, meaning the cock which paves the way, is sacrificed to guide the spirit to the next world. The dead body is kept for two or three days, and food, etc. are offered while it is in the house. Relatives, in turn, accompanied the dead body a day and night. When all the relatives congregated, cremation takes place.

On the funeral day, the coffin is carried on the bamboo bier (*Ka Krong*), and the pall-bearers are usually relatives and friends. The cortege proceeds to the cremation ground (a little away from the village) accompanied by musicians, who play the flutes and beat the drums. Among the rich and powerful, salutes from guns are fired and coins

scattered along the route. When the body is laid on the pyre, a goat is sacrificed (*'Lang Mawkjat*). A male member of the clan first lights the pyre, followed by the children of the deceased. Another fowl, *'Iar padat,* is sacrificed at this time. The three arrows (presented at birth) are shot in different directions. When the fire is ablaze, another goat, *'Lang dholia,* is sacrificed. Before leaving the cremation ground, betel nuts are placed on the pyre by relatives and friends to bid farewell to the deceased.

When the fire is extinguished, the female relatives collected the uncalcined bones in three rounds, to make sure that none is overlooked. These were wrapped in a cloth and placed in *Mawshyieng,* or bone repository. The relative, who carries the bones to the place where *Mawshyieng* is located, is not supposed to turn his back lest the deceased goes astray. Soon after reaching the place, another sacrifice is performed before placing the bones into the *Mawshyieng.* On the funeral day, pigs, cows, etc. are contributed by the relatives. It is customary among certain sections of the Khasi that on the death of *Ka Mei Kha* (Father's mother), her *khun kha* (Grand children from the sons) paid respect to her by giving pigs, cows, etc. These animals are slaughtered for serving food to each and everyone who attends the funeral. It is important to note that the Khasi do not regard this as feasting. On the third day following the cremation, the relatives and friends clean the house, wash clothes, etc. to ward-off pollution. Eggs are then sacrificed to lift the taboo and the mourning period is over, *Lait ia.*

The post funeral ceremony takes place after a year or more depending on the convenience of the living members. The uncalcined bones deposited into the *Mawshyieng,* the lineage ossuary has to be transferred to *Mawbah* or *Mawphew,* a large clan sepulchre (Pakyntein, 1996). At the outset it is important to note that this ceremony is not performed for a single individual or family. Preparations are made to bring together the remains of the dead members of the clan. The members of a various lineages collect the bones from different *Mawshyieng* when a ceremony, *Khot ia U Lor U Kap,* is announced after the consensus. A day is fixed to gather in a specified place. Sacrifices are first performed at familial level, before proceeding to an agreed place. The waiting period may last from one to nine days and when all clan members gathered a day is fixed to proceed to the *Mawbah.* On the eve of departure, a ceremony called *Beh Tempew,* is performed so as not to interfere with the spirits of the deceased. The next morning, further sacrifices are made and the party sets out in its journey. More sacrifices are performed on the way for different purposes. On reaching

its destination, the various groups clean the bones and place them in different pots meant for males and females. This is associated with certain rituals. The opening of the *cinerarium* is done, and the bones of males and females are placed in the opposite direction. After this a dance is performed and the sepulchre is closed. Erection of megaliths (monoliths and dolmen) to commemorate certain dead members is completed that day or later. Besides smaller megaliths are erected on the way, *viz., Mawkjat, Maw ai bam* and *Maw shongthait.*

The Garo death custom is not complex in rituals *per se,* but in other aspects such as rules of replacement of spouse, ceremonial gifts and head hunting prevalent in the traditional society (Playfair, 1909; Burling, 1997; Sangma, 1981). The Garo incinerate the dead, except in some cases. A dead body is bathed in undiluted liquor among the rich and water among the poor, and dress in good clothes. It is then laid in state with the properties of the deceased hanging around. A body is kept for a few days, waiting for all relatives to gather for the ceremony to be performed. The Abeng, a sub-group of the Garo, tethered a chicken to the big toe of the deceased. In fact, the chicken takes the place of a slave who was sacrificed at the funeral of his or her master in the past. This custom is termed as *Dojasi.* The Akawe's custom of pantomime is considered important part of funeral ceremonies, so that the watchers keep awake. Contribution of cotton and rice-beer is made by the women and logs by the men, and these are used in the ceremony.

After a day or so, the close relatives carry the dead body to the pyre, *Ganchi,* built in the village square close to the house of mourning. A dog is sacrificed in the pyre and burnt with the corpse believing its spirit will accompany that of a dead person and be of service in the next world. The uncalcined bones and ash are temporarily preserved in a number of ways. Among the Akawe the bones are placed in a pot and lashed to the *Maljuri* post of the house of the deceased, whereas the Abeng and Chisak collected the bones and buried them outside the house of the deceased. Over the pot a little shrine is built, called *delang,* and to this offerings of foods are made.

After about two months, the post-funeral ceremony, *Delangsao* is held. Dancing and feasting marked this ceremony. In many Garo communities, the bones are brought out from the pots, and the relatives bind them to their person and dance. Finally, the bones are buried in the jungle, preferably on the bank of a stream. Memorial posts, *Kima,* are then erected in front of the dead person's house.

In the past when human sacrifice was practised, every endeavour was made that a rich man or *Nokma* should have a servant in the land of the dead. If a slave was not available, relatives will find a victim elsewhere and sometimes only the head could be brought to the funeral ceremony. Thus, one aspect of the head hunting among the Garo in the past is related to the above belief and ritual.

A practice of giving gifts during funeral ceremony also exists among the Garo. On the death of a man or a woman—the surviving members of the household must present *magual* to the natal family of the deceased. There is an exception to this rule in which an heiress never receives *magual.* Another type of ceremonial gift, *Kokam,* is given to the person who slaughtered a cow in honour of the deceased. Any heirloom may be given as *magual* or *Kokam,* but the most appropriate gift is a fine brass gong (Burling, 1997).

The death ceremony practised in traditional Lyngngam society can be described as a mixture of Garo and Khasi (Gurdon, 1907). The Lyngngam like the Khasi and Garo cremate their dead. However, they differ from both the groups in the custom of keeping the dead body for months or more than a year at times. When a person dies, the dead body is rolled in a mat and kept over a fire place. The keeping of the corpse inside the house was forbidden when Khasi Hills came under the British rule. U *Syiem* Sib Sing of Nongstoin (under whose political territory the Lyngngam belong) had taken very strict measures against this practice in 1955. After this prohibition, the dead body is no longer kept at home, but tied in between the branches of a tree (*Diengsning*), or buried temporarily outside the village, till the cremation ceremony takes place. The preservation of the dead body is no more practised in Nongdaju village. However, the villagers themselves have admitted that this custom is still prevalent in remote Lyngngam villages, but the period of such preservation may last for a month or so at the most. It is reported that this custom perpetuates till the middle of 1980s (Karotemprel, 1985). Warjri video filmed one such death rite among the Lyngngam of Nongshyrkon village in 1992. The same has been presented in his article entitled "Cremation rites called Phor Sorat" (Warjri, 1994). In this particular case, the dead body was kept for three months at the outskirts of the village.

During the period of waiting, all relatives must be informed. Generally, this takes time because till now many Lyngngam live a semi-nomadic life of shifting cultivators, thereby relatives may spread out in

different directions not easily communicable. Moreover, the family of the deceased must gather enough resources for the feast to be given to the relatives and the villagers. Formerly, relatives contribute cattle, pigs, etc., but at present donation may be in the form of cash. Besides, it is not only the relatives who made such contribution, but friends as well help to meet the expenses.

The cremation ceremony is termed as *Phor-Sorat, Bangsorat* or *Liniang* in different areas of the Lyngngam. About a week before the funeral day, relatives bring the remains of the deceased (from where it is temporarily kept) to the house, and a ritual is performed. This marks the beginning of the weeklong celebration, which ends when the final rite is observed. Within this week and before cremation, elders of the clan from various areas gather for the ceremony, bringing along with them their contribution. During this period, the musicians beat the drums and play the flutes every evening in the house of the deceased where not only the relatives, but the villagers as well gathered. Food, rice beer and betel nut are served to all those who congregate in the house of the deceased. Two days before the cremation, the gathering takes place not only during the evening time, but during the day also. Each one helps in preparing the funeral pyre, *Ka Thyrnang*, and the grand feast to be served when the cremation rite is over. Food is offered to the deceased every morning and evening, *i.e.* when the dead body, or its remains, is still in the house.

On the cremation day, a ritual called *Dahsla-Dahtlor* is performed. Auguries are read through the breaking of eggs or from the entrails of the fowls, pigs, goats and cattle slaughtered for the feast. The cremation takes place in the courtyard of the house of the deceased. During the cremation, a bull (which is set aside for this purpose) is sacrificed, its rib-bones and limbs are placed on the pyre to be burnt along with the corpse. This bull takes the place of human sacrifice, which was practised in the past. As a mark of farewell to the deceased, when the blaze subsides, female relatives circled the pyre three times without turning. After the ritual, all partake in the feast and dancing. Next morning, relatives collect the ash and uncalcined bones, which are then wrapped in a cloth and buried in a pit, within the premises of the house of the deceased, or at the outskirts of the village.

Post-funeral ceremony termed as *Rein Maw* is held at any time according to the convenience of the relatives. Memorial stones termed as *Mawnop* or *Mawtheng* are erected in a place where the bones are

buried. Behind the memorial stones, two wooden posts are erected and crossed over at the top. Memorial stones are not erected for every one, but only for the important members of the clan. Wooden post is commonly erected for one and all. A bull is sacrificed; its blood is smeared over the megaliths and wooden posts, while its head is buried. Like their Garo neighbours, the Lyngngam believe that the spirit of the bull guides the spirit of the deceased to *Balpakram* (the abode of the dead). When human sacrifice was practised, human beings were sacrificed in place of bull.

Like the Garo, the custom of head hunting is closely linked with the rituals pertaining to cremation and post-cremation ceremonies. It was reported that the *Rashir* clan practised head-hunting and this clan has ways and means for deciding the number of heads demanded or a particular head needed by the ancestor or ancestress (Karotemprel, 1985). However, head hunting is not limited to this clan only, but was practised widely in the past. At present this custom is no more in practice in both Garo and Lyngngam societies.

Another distinctive custom of the Lyngngam that sets them apart from that of the Khasi and Garo is death compensation paid to the relatives of the deceased husband, by the surviving wife and her relatives. This is termed as *Bailet* among the Lyngngam in Nongdaju village. The amount to be paid is not fixed, but depends on the economic status of the family. The rich pay more and the poor pay less. An agreement for the *Bailet* between the wife and her relatives, on one side, and the mother or relatives of the deceased husband, on the other side, should be decided upon before the rituals for the dead body can be performed. If there is a disagreement, the wife will be barred from performing the last rites for the husband. It is also necessary to pay some amount, if not all, before cremation takes place. This practice is still followed even by some Christians in Nongdaju. Among the Christians in Nongdaju, death rituals are performed in the Christian style. Dead bodies are not kept for more than three days. The feasting is, however, same among them.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

An appraisal of the above comparison in respect of the biological and especially the socio-cultural traits is to be seen *vis-a- vis* the dynamic aspect of human society and culture. Nearly a century has passed since the publications of treatises by Gurdon and Playfair, which have been used as the basic sources of data in the present study. At the outset, I

have stated that the timeframe is suspended, since certain traditions perpetuate even in the present time. However, one cannot ignore the changes that occurred due to many factors, pre-eminently conversion to Christianity and political factor. The discussion in the ensuing paragraphs will take into consideration the changes that have taken place.

It is a general belief that the intermarriage between the Khasi and Garo in the bordering territory resulted in the creation of the Lyngngam as a hybrid group. It has also been stated that in appearances the Lyngngam are more similar to the Garo than to the Khasi. By observing the Lyngngam at Nongdaju, it is difficult to prove or disprove this statement. At the most, I can say that some of them look like the Khasi while others look like the Garo, depending upon the frequency of intermarriages. However, without factual data, such a statement is baseless. The comparison of the ABO blood groups and PTC taste sensitivity, on the other hand, indicate that the Lyngngam are similar neither to the Khasi nor the Garo. Broadly speaking, there is no doubt that the Khasi, Garo and Lyngngam belong to the same Mongoloid racial group. One may argue that the Lyngngam is probably a third group being sandwiched between the Khasi and Garo. The intermarriage of the Lyngngam with the other two groups over a period of time could have influenced their socio-cultural traits more quickly in comparison with their biological traits, since the latter are more enduring than the former.

The traditional and socio-cultural traits have been condensed and presented in a tabular form (Table 6.3) to make the task of comparison feasible. As observed, the marriage rules among the Lyngngam stand in variance to both the Khasi and Garo. There is, however, a similarity to both the Khasi and Garo in family structure and inheritance pattern. If Gurdon's work is to be taken verbatim, the Lyngngam do not perform any special rituals pertaining to birth and naming of children. Nongsiang (who is a Lyngngam by birth) has, however, reported birth and naming rituals similar to that of the Khasi. This fact is borne out by the investigation in Nongdaju also. But are these rituals adopted from the Khasi at a later period of time? Or whether they were present in their original culture, one cannot ascertain. The ceremony pertaining to the disposal of the dead is, however, unique among the Lyngngam. The practice of preserving the dead body, the feast in honour of the deceased given to the relatives and friends, and the custom of death compensation are not features of either Garo or Khasi culture. The sacrifices performed during cremation and post-cremation are, however, similar to the Garo.

TABLE 6.3

Comparison of cultural traits among the Lyngngam, Garo and Khasi

Cultural traits	*Khasi*	*Garo*	*Lyngngam*	*Remarks*
1	2	3	4	5
Marriage Regulation				
1. Clan exogamy	Followed strictly	At times violated	Followed strictly	Similar to Khasi
2. Polygyny	Neither prescriptive nor proscriptive but tolerated	Institutionalised-*nokrom*-marriage besides a rich man can have about 3 wives	Well integrated. Wives at times brought to live in one household	Similar to Garo
3. Cross-cousin marriage	Neither prescriptive nor proscriptive-but a man can marry MBD only after the death of maternal uncle	Institutionalised-*Nokrom* and *Nokma* marriage	Permissible during the lifetime of maternal uncle or father, but not institutionalised like Garo	Different from both Khasi and Garo
4. Junior sororate	Permissible	Prescriptive	Preferred	Similar to Garo
5. Selection of spouses	Free-choice, arranged and capture	Free-choice, arranged, capture and probation	Free-choice, arranged, and capture, but through trial of strength	Different from both Khasi and Garo
6. Proposal for marriage	From boy's side	From girl's side	From any	-Do-
7. Marriage payment	Non-existent	Non-existent	Payment from bride's to groom's family	-Do-
8. Divorce	Common	Common	Common	Similar to both Khasi and Garo
9. Divorce compensation	Compensation is paid by the wrongdoer and to the one who is unwilling to divorce	Same as Khasi except for Akim dai	Same as Khasi and Garo, except return of marriage payment	Different from both Khasi and Garo
Family, Inheritance and Adoption				
10. Family structure	Nuclear, extended-matrilineal (EM), consanguinal (C) and	Nuclear, EM, EM (polygynous) and polygynous family	Nuclear, EM and polygynous family	Similar to Garo

(Contd.)

(Contd.)

1	2	3	4	5
	combination of EM and C			
11. Inheritance of property	Vary from one sub group to another	From mother to daughter only	From mother to daughter only	Similar to Garo
12. Heir and heiress	Generally lion's share to the youngest daughter	Heir and heiress chosen by parents	Lion's share to the youngest daughter	Similar to Khasi
13. Management of property	By male clan members and heiress' husbands	By *Nokrom* or heir	By Borang-male clan members and heiress' husbands	Similar to Khasi
14. Control of property	By male clan members mostly	By *Nokrom* and male clan members	By male clan members mostly	Similar to Khasi
15. Adoption	Adoption of female only (as heiress)	Adoption of both male and female (as heir and heiress)	Not reported	?
Rituals and Ceremonies				
16. Birth rituals	*Tap-kpoh* is performed	Very elaborate-many ceremonies are performed	*Seng lawbei* is performed	Similar to Khasi
17. Naming rituals	Two rituals are performed—naming and confirmation	Simple—no special ritual	Ritual is performed with a different symbol	Similar to Khasi
18. Marriage rites	Different types of ceremonies but rituals are same	Rather simple but consummation of marriage does not take place if groom runs away permanently	Less elaborate-mixture of of Khasi and Garo customs-*Salutei* at Nongdaju is similar to Khasi custom	Similar to Khasi
19. Pre-cremation	Bathed, dressed and laid in state-dead body is usually not kept beyond three days	Similar to Khasi	Preserved dead body for months or a years	Different from both Khasi and Garo
20. Cremation place	Outskirts of the village	Within village square or near the house of the deceased	Near the house of the deceased	Similar to Garo

(Contd.)

(Contd.)

1	2	3	4	5
21. Sacrifice of bird and animal	Egg, rooster and goat-reading of auguries	Fowl, goat, dog and bull	Egg, rooster, goat and bull	Similar to Garo
22. Sacrifice of human (head-hunting)	Non-existent	Present in the past	Present in the past	Similar to Garo
23. Offering of food to the deceased	Practised	Practised	Practised	Similar to both Khasi and Garo
24. Feasting and Dancing during funeral	Provide food to relative and friends but not feasting *per se*- no dancing takes place	Similar to Khasi	Feasting and dancing from vital part of death rituals	Different from both Khasi and Garo
25. Pollution	Ward-off pllu-tion by sacrifice and cleansing	Not reported	Not reported	?
26. Collection of ash and uncalcined bones	Collect uncal-cined bones and deposit in *Mawshyieng*	Collect ash and uncalcined bones and temporarily preserve in a pot or in a number of ways	Uncalcined bones are collected and buried within the premises of the house of the deceased or at the outskirts	Similar to Garo
27. Post-cremation Permanent placement of uncalcined bones	After a year or so, bones are trans-ferred from *Mawshyieng* to *Mawbah*	After 2 months or so, bones are taken out from pots and finally buried	Bones are not dug out or transferred	Different from both Khasi and Garo
28. Feasting and Dancing during Post-cremation	Practise-relatives do not dance with the bones	Practise-relatives dance with the bones	Practise-relatives do not dance with the bones	Similar to Khasi
29. Memorial stones/posts	Erect memorial stones for impor-tant persons and other types for everyone	Erect carved wooden posts soon after cremation	Erect memorial stones for impor-tant persons, and uncarved wooden posts for others	Similar to Khasi and Garo
30. Gifts and compensation	On the death of father's mother, children give fowl, pig, cow, etc. as a mark of respect	Ceremonial gifts of *Magual* and *Kokam*	Death compensation (*Bailet*) is paid by the wife to the family of the deceased husband	Different from both Khasi and Garo

Both Garo and Lyngngam believe that the abode of the spirit of the dead is *Balpakram* or *Wakpangram*. Besides the Garo believe that their first dead ancestor is *Megam Airipa*, suggesting a linkage between those two groups.

Considering the overall cultural traits, the Lyngngam have by and large amalgamated certain Khasi and Garo customs almost equally. At the same time, there are a considerable number of traditional cultural traits that are distinctive to the Lyngngam group only. One may, therefore, argue that the total assimilation has not taken place till the time of the writings by Gurdon and Playfair. The differences in certain socio-cultural traits in relation to their neighbouring culture seem to corroborate the differences in biological traits. Considering the unique socio-cultural traits, it may also be argued that the Lyngngam belong to a different ethnic group formerly. The questions that can be raised here are: Who are the Lyngngam originally? Who are these people in the remote past and what is their biological and cultural affinity?

The Lyngngam believe that they came from Mymensing district of present Bangladesh, where they were known as *Ki Man*. Owing to severe flood that occurred in the plains where they settled in the remote past, some escaped to the hills, their present abode. Here they were known as Lyngngam. According to them, the term Lyngngam is an etymon of "*La ngam*" (Khasi standard dialect) meaning the people who are nearly wiped out by the flood, or literally washed away. If this myth is to be relied upon, does the term "Man" point to the probability of their relationship with the Man group inhabiting Garo Hills as well as Kamrup district of Assam? According to Barua (1994), the word "Man" literally means 'Burmese migrant". There is a close biological and cultural intermixture of the Man in Assam with other Hinduised tribes, like the Rabha, Kachari, Koch, Hajong, etc. as well as with other Assamese caste groups. Thus, the Man in Assam have been 'completely Assamised and assimilated into the greater Assamese culture'. Are the Lyngngam originally the same group of people like the Man? Does their intermixture with the Khasi and Garo result in assimilation of their matrilineal culture? Are they being gradually assimilated into Khasi culture? As stated in the preceding paragraph, the total assimilation had not taken place till the early 1900s, but what is the present scenario?

At this juncture it is important to stress Nongdaju village as the heart of Lyngngam area. It is the most modern village of the Lyngngam. Its location on the Shillong-Rongjeng highway facilitates transport and communication. This enables the people to carry on trade and commerce

and go for higher education outside their area. Cultural contact with other groups from outside the Lyngngam region also contributes to the changes in the way of life of the people.

Nongdaju is the most Christianised village of the Lyngngam. About 90% of the population are Christians, 5% belonging to the traditional faiths and the rest 5% are Hindu migrants. Christianity without doubt started the winds of change in the whole North-eastern region of India, and so is the case in this village. In Nongdaju, the old customs and rituals pertaining to the disposal of the dead have been replaced by Christian rites. Marriage customs like payment of dowry, marriage by trial, etc. are discouraged by the Church, and many, if not all, Christians have abandoned these practices. Naming ceremony is replaced by baptism, and the Christian Marriage Act governs the union of spouses. Many of the traditional practices have become almost extinct, *e.g.* preservation of the dead body, feasting, erection of memorial monuments and especially animal and human sacrifices. Proselytism of the Lyngngam starts much later (during the 1950s) as compared with other areas in Khasi and Garo Hills, however, many of the old practices have been eschewed. The local Khasi Missionaries, who have undertaken the evangelising activities in this area, implicitly impose their own norms and values besides the Christian ones.

The Lyngngam area falls under the political territory of the Khasi in the past as well as in the present. It is under the traditional Nongstoin Syiemship in the pre- as well as in the post-Independence era. With the attainment of Meghalaya statehood, it falls under the West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya. The administrative juxtaposition of the Lyngngam with its Khasi neighbours influences the assimilation of the Khasi dominant culture.

The Lyngngam dialect according to Gurdon (1907) differs so much from the standard Khasi. Karotemprel (1985), on the other hand, has stated that it is a mixture of the Khasi and Garo. The roots of the words are Khasi, yet the people do not seem to know Khasi. The Lyngngam as stated above, comes under the administrative jurisdiction of the Khasi. Besides the medium of instruction in the vernacular schools in Lyngngam area is the standard Khasi dialect. These compel the Lyngngam to learn the standard Khasi dialect for official, educational or other purposes.

The above mentioned factors of political affiliation, common religion and language together expedite the Khasinisation process. The assimilation of the Khasi culture among the Lyngngam is escalating in

the recent decades. At present, they readily identify themselves as belonging to the Khasi group, and the other Khasi also concede the Lyngngam as one of them. It would be interesting to know the position of the Megam who are located in Garo hills, considered to be the same hybrid group as the Lyngngam by many scholars. How far the assimilation process has taken place among them?

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