CONCLUSION

The festivals and dances play a very important role in the social, economic, political and religious life of the Khasis. Most of the festivals are very old, and as old as the society itself. The Khasis are a happy and lively people, they love dances, music and songs, and the way of life of the people is reflected in their various festivals and dances. Festivals are a very important component of tribal life, they are of a rich comprehensive nature, that combines intense worship, dance, revelry and feasting with the most dramatic scenes of solemnity. The Khasis like other tribals, lived in isolation, they have maintained their distinct identity and retained their individual traits through the ages. The area in which they live, has its own geographical and ecological peculiarities. The community is required to condition itself to adapt to the situation that they are forced to live. The way of life of the people, their temperament, taste, food and dress habits are reflected in their various festivals. The people lived on high mountainous tracts of land and this environment favoured them to lead a secluded life and kept them aloof from outside influences. Till very recently, after the British had occupied several parts of the North-Eastern Region, they introduced modern civilization like Education, Communication etc. With the coming of civilization and forces of

modernity, the Khasis like the other tribes of the North East, could no longer resist the modern influences, and began to give up their traditional way of life and accepted the change. During the pre-colonial period, when the Khasis lived in isolation with no means of communication and medical facilities, they had to struggle for existence as no outside help was available. Their very existence depended on their bountiful harvest, as the mainstay of the Khasi economy was agriculture. If their crops grew well, they would have an easy life and free from starvation. Economic need is there to fight against starvation and pestilence, diseases like plague, cholera, diarrhoea and others. So to fight diseases and starvation and other natural calamities, the people propitiated the deities by offering sacrifices and the rites and rituals were performed, so that they will be saved from all these dangers. Hence, the people performed the festivals and dances to invoke God's blessings in all respects and to thank Him for all His kindness. They were scared of natural calamities like earthquake, thunder, hail and storms etc. So, in the Behdeinkhlam festival, sacrifices are given to thunder, so that it will not destroy the crops, people and the cattles. There is a tradition among the Khasis that once upon a time, the people suffered very much due to the frequent occurrence of earthquake, hence the people gathered together and tied up the earthquake and from that time onward, earthquake does not occur very often.
In the words of Shri R. T. Rymbai, commenting on the festivals wrote:

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

It is through the various festivals and dances that the life of the Khasis is reflected. During these occasions, ceremonies, rites and rituals are performed which shows that the Khasis are deeply religious people, they pray to God for His blessings, for peace, well being and general prosperity and at the same time, they do not forget to thank Him for all the blessings that he showers upon them. The Khasis also show respect to their ancestors and the dead, because prayers, sacrifices and offerings are given at the Pomblang Nongkrem to the first ancestress mother and maternal uncle of the Syiem clan, that is the ruling family. At the Behdeinkhlam festival, the women do not take part in the public celebration, their role is to offer prayers at home to the dear departed to whom they also offer sacrificial food, symbolising the faith, that they live high above, watching us here below. The Khasis have their own traditional

religion believing in the Supreme God the Creator, the Rishot Blei or the Holy Pillar or the pillar of God at the Ingsad at Smit shows that the Khasi religion is monotheistic and they worship God the Creator. The study of the festivals reveals that the Khasi religion is very democratic, there is no jealousy or ill feeling towards one another. The festivals of the Khasi centre round the Sviemsad, the Syiem, Myntri, Lynqodoh, Doloi, the elders and the people on the whole. Therefore, religion to the Khasis is a factor that brings the people closer together, it also brings the ruling class closer to the people. On the final day of the Behdeinkhlem festival, the Doloi, the priest, headmen and their assistants go to the locality known as Kmai Raid, while the Pator, the Basan and their assistants go to the locality known as Khon Raid, to beat every roof with bamboo sticks. This ceremony gives an opportunity for the ruling class to meet the people once a year. It also shows equality of man, there is no difference even when the ruling classes visit the common people's houses. The people on the other hand are happy and pleased to meet their rulers. The Khasis are democratic in nature, which is reflected in their organisation, whether it is social, political or religious aspects. The Khasi society was formed on strong democratic tradition, for the Syiem, the Myntri, the Doloi, the Lynqodoh, the elders and the Dorbar are responsible for the day to day administration. In the various festivals,
special status is given to the members of the ruling classes like the Syiem, Lynodoh, Doloi, Myntri and the elders. They play different role, although the people are involved. The differentiated roles of the ruling family and the state officials in the festivals indirectly results in the acceptance and recognition of the highest status of the ruling classes by the masses.

The festivals are not only religious ceremonies, but also social festivities. It is on these festive occasions that they could meet the members of their community, their relatives and friends, the near and dear ones to enquire about their health and well being. Those who have to work outside came back during this period, to meet their family and friends to join together in the common worship of God and to share the happiness, joy and love of a community as a whole. It is a time of merriment and enjoyment, to imbibe the spirit of love and brotherhood. Most of the people have worked very hard the whole year, and these occasions give them an opportunity to share the love, joy and concern for one another and for the community on the whole. It is a time for the young unmarried girls to show their beauty and gracefulness, and also could display their rich costumes, gold and silver ornaments and jewelleries. It is on such occasions, that the young men could see and choose the beautiful girls, and later on propose and arrange for their marriage. The youths particularly, and the people in general, could display their best dresses, gold and
silver ornaments on these occasions. The festivals provide a social gathering and a collective activity to the people. The festivals and dances provide different activities at different seasons in collaboration with the agricultural works of the people, and also serve as a time for recreation and enjoyment to them. The festivals also provide the occasions, when the people who are otherwise occupied with agriculture and other works came together in free mood during these festive days. This helps the growth of solidarity among the people, their concern for the welfare of all the people and the state and also the maintenance of unity and integrity against external threats. The study of the festivals also brings to light that in the Khasi society, apart from social, political and religious aspects, the festivals have direct connection with the economic activities of the people.

A tribal society is generally looked upon to have emerged from an egalitarian base. In case of the Khasi society, there are elements of egalitarianism that exist till today, but at the same time, the elements of feudalism and social stratification become noticeable for a long time. The symptoms of egalitarianism as well as social stratification are very much reflected in the behaviours, form and contents of the dances and of the festivals. Elements of equality are clearly seen in the Behdeinkhlem festival, the performance of the ceremony in the mud, shows that all
men are equal, many fall in the muddy water. Some pull other hands and legs, yet there is no ill-feeling towards one another, they do it with the spirit of love and brotherhood. Social stratification is best seen in the Nongkrem festival, on the first night of the festival, before the Bakhraw or elders dance, they bow the Holy Pillar and then the Elder Syiem. This shows that the Bakhraw and the people respect and submit themselves to the Syiem. It also shows the acceptance and recognition of their highest status by the people. The dance of the female members of the royal family is another example of social stratification. The dance is started by the opening or inauguration dance by the female members of the royal family, after this dance, then other dancers also can follow suit. When the female members of the royal family dance, there are someone to cover them with umbrellas, this is to show the respect to the royal family and also to differentiate them from the other dancers. Here a sign of differentiation and social stratification are clearly visible. The contribution of goats by the different Raid also show a sign of acceptance, recognition and allegiance by the Raid to the Syiem and the state.

The male and female dance have special meaning behind. The shad Mastieh and shad wait are typical war dance by the male dancers which depicts that the people perform a dance after their
victory in the war. The duty of a man is to protect the family, the clan, the race and the motherland on the whole. The men's dance with sword, arrows and shield shows the high responsibility, that a man should possess, in defence of his family, race and his motherland against the external threats. The women's dance exhibits humility, simplicity, purity and honesty, the qualities that a woman should possess. The dance of the women in the inner circle of the dancing arena shows that a woman as the keeper of the house and propagator of the race is held in high respect in the Khasi society. The men's dance in the outer circle shows that the men should protect the womenfolk, the family, race and the motherland. The role plays by the high priestess at the Pomblang Nongkrem festival is also in accordance with the matrilineal system of the Khasis, where a woman is accorded a special and high status in the society.

The study of the festivals also reveals that the Khasis have a deep love for their culture. It is this love which sustains them, they feel proud that even in spite of many social and modern changes, they are still able to preserve their culture, and it is not swamped by any outside influences. In spite of christianity, modern and other outside influences, the Khasis still continue to take pride in their festivals and also in their customs. The Kur and Kha concept is very much deeprooted
among the Khasis, even till the present day, marriage within the same clan is still considered as a taboo, and there are only few cases of intra clan marriages. When the important festivals of the Khasis like ka Pomblang Nongkrem, Behdeinkham and Shad Weiking and other festivals are approaching, everybody is in a festive mood. Thousands of people in their best attire, gold and silver ornaments, irrespective of their religious creeds, go to witness these festivals. The most prominent festivals of the Khasis are getting bigger and attract more and more people than ever. The people realised the value of their culture and feel proud of their rich cultural heritage, which should be preserved at all costs. Our late Prime Minister Shrimati Indira Gandhi, who witnessed the Pomblang Nongkrem in 1976, said to the Khasi people, to keep the best of the old and take advantage of the new.

The study of the festivals also reveals that the Khasis have a deep love for freedom and independence. They could not reconcile their fate under the British rule, because the rulers interfered with their traditional way of life. The Jaintias rose against the rulers and that led to local uprisings, when the English banned the cremation of dead bodies near the Jowai town and interfered with the processionists of the Behdeinkham at Jalong village. These discontentments and dissatisfactions

took a shape of revolt under the leadership of u Kiang Nangbah, but the revolt was suppressed in 1863. The ailing u Kiang Nangbah was captured and hanged to death by the British. When asked why the people revolted, u Kiang Nangbah stated that it was due to an interference with the religious rites of the people. The Behdeinkhlam festival has assumed its present form only after India's independence. The festival could not be held for sixteen years and it was revived in 1948. The reasons for suspending the celebration of this festival were attributed to differences of opinion among the religious leaders, and also to the instigation of the government agents that it should be stopped at once. After the achievement of Independence from the British rule in 1947, the religious leaders revived it, in order to please God and preserve the cultural heritage of the people. Thus we see that the Jaintias by reviving this festival, have every reason to be proud and to rejoice the country's independence like other people of India. It is this love of freedom and independence which made u Tirrot Singh to revolt against the British, which ultimately led to annexation of the Khasi Hills in 1833.

The dances and dancing costumes of both male and female dancers, have no influence of any outside culture. They have got

5. H. Bareh, The History and Culture of the Khasi People, p.184.
their own originality and beauty, the dancing costumes are very costly, it is surprising that the Khasis have realised the value of gold, silver and jewelleries from time immemorial: Only the rich could possess the dancing costumes, thus the wealth of the people could be determined by the possession of the dancing dress and gold and silver ornaments. The gold and silver ornaments are artistically made which shows that the Khasis are artistic goldsmiths and have artistic talents. The dhara and khor are made outside the Khasi and Jaintia hills in Assam, this shows that the Khasis are rich people who can patronise these industries. It also brings to light that trade is carried on extensively between the Khasis and the people of the plains. The quivers, shields, swords and arrows are locally made, which shows that the Khasis are experienced craftsmen.

Regarding the antiquity of the festivals, nobody could say which one is the oldest, as most of the festivals are very old and as old as the society itself. But ceremonies which are connected with birth and death, such as the bone collection ceremony which is known as ka Thep Mawbah must be very old, as birth and death are part of the circle of man's life, which he has to undergo with the beginning of life itself. The Shad Suk Mynsiem or Shad Weiking, is an important festival, for the fact that a festival can come into existence at the wish and decision
of the people. This dance festival came into being when the Seng Khasi Organisation introduced it, in order to preserve the cultural heritage of the Khasis. The other dance which also came into being is *ka Shad Tirot*, which is held annually in the month of March, but from 1985, the dance is going to be held in the month of April, as the 4th of April is commemorated as the Tirot Singh Day. The dance is held at Mairang in the Nongkhlaw Syiemship about 40 Km from Shillong. It is here that the Tirot Singh Memorial was erected. This dance was instituted to honour and commemorate, the hero of the Khasi land, U Tirot Singh, who laid down his life for the defence of his mother land, against the foreign rule. So, at the wish and decision of the people, a festival can be instituted.

We cannot deny the Hindu influence on the festivals of the Khasis. The religion and culture of the Hindu neighbours in the plains had made some impact in the pre-colonial period, and a process of assimilation took place in the bordering areas. Ka Lukhmi of the Bhoi areas may be identified as the goddess Lakshmi of the Hindus. Again, U Biskorom of the Pomblang Nonokrem is identified as Vishwakarma of the Hindus. The Pehdeinkhlem festival also resembles the Hindu and Muslim festival. View from this context, this identification and similarity, show the unity of our rich and varied culture of our great country that is India. Similarities are noticed in rites and rituals, the concept of God, birth, death and rebirth,

rites relating to harvest, disposal of the dead, dispelling the evil spirits, are similar with all aboriginal or indigenous cultures in the greater Indian sub-continent and the Khasis could not be an exception. Our country is like a big garden with varied flowers, as each flower adds to the beauty of the garden, so also each different culture adds to the beauty of our great country. Despite differences in many respects, our country stands in unity amidst diversity.

The Khasis are very much conscious of preserving their rich cultural heritage, and their distinct identity. They cannot but feel proud that the festivals and dances are still being preserved till now, in spite of so many forces of modernity and westernization, that are undergoing in the Khasi society.

8. Ibid.