CHAPTER III
MAJOR FESTIVALS

The Khasis observe some important festivals and dances throughout the year, they have religious festivals as well as secular celebrations. These festivals usually take the form of dances, which show the joy, happiness and jubilation of the people. The festivals of the Khasis are very ancient, and cover a very wide field of human existence. Nobody could say when these festivals and dances started as no written materials are available, as the Khasis have no script of their own. Only the Shad Suk Mynsiem, which was started since 1903,1 and it was held regularly since 1921,2 under the auspices of the Seng Khasi, a socio-religious and cultural organisation of the Khasis who are still following the traditional religion. The Seng Khasi took over the management of the dance in 1911 and it was held at the Weiking field. The aim of this organisation is to safeguard the essence of Khasi culture, religion and custom from the onslaughts of the western, christian and other outside influences. The festivals and dances of the Khasis are very old as the society itself, and are handed down through the ages from generation to generation. The Khasis are deeply religious people, they believe in God the Creator, and pray to Him to shower his blessings for a good harvest, good health, peace, well being and general prosperity. Some of the festivals survive to this day, while some others are no longer performed due to the political, economic and religious changes which are undergoing among the Khasis.

For the present dissertation, we propose to discuss only five festivals of the Khasis, to bring into focus the objectives, contents, origins, the different stages of the festivals, the months that they are held and the places of celebrations, including the dress and ornaments, the musical instruments used and so on.

The five festivals are placed in the Khasi calendar as follows:

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<td>held in the month of May,</td>
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<td>June or July)</td>
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<td>12. Nohprah</td>
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The above festivals shall be described one by one in the following pages —

I. KA POMBLANG SYIEM OR KÁ POMBLANG NONGKREM OR KA SHAD NONGKREM

Ka Pomblang Syiem or ka Pomblang Nongkrem, which means the goat killing ceremony, or most popularly known as ka Shad Nongkrem or the Nongkrem dance, is one of the most ancient religious festival of the Khasis. It is a state religious festival which is performed annually by the Khyrim Syiemship at Smit, about 20 Km from Shillong at the Ingsad or the royal residence. The Ingsad served not only as a royal residence in the past, but also used as a court, assembly house and the state house of worship. The festival is held for five days, these days fall on the important market days of Pamtiah, Umni, Iewduh, Lyngka, Pynsing or the market day at Nongkrem. Previously, the festival was held in the months of May to July, but now it is being held in the months of October-November, after the harvesting season. Regarding the shifting of the months, I was informed, that it is mainly for the convenience of the people, and also from an economic point of view. The season is that after the sowing season, the people find a hard time, not much work could be found, and much money is being spent for ploughing, sowing and other works. Financially, the people are in great difficulty, they cannot even buy new clothes for the occasion. But after the harvesting season, the people are

3. H. Bareh, The History and Culture of the Khasi People, p.259.
4. Information given by ka Shortimai Syiem sad of the Khyrim Syiemship.
happy and joyous as their granaries are full, and they are in a better financial position, and they can buy new clothes for the festival. So, the Syiem and his Dorbar, seeing the difficulties faced by the people, decided to shift the festival to October - November after harvesting. The religious rites, rituals, aims and objects are not affected and remained unchanged.

(a) The Khyrim Syiemship

The Pomblang Nongkrem or Shad Nongkrem is related to the Khyrim Syiemship of the central Khasi Hills and the Pah Syntiew legend. The origin of the Syiemship, the clan organisation, and the social and administrative structure of the Hima or state are reflected in the Shad Nongkrem festival. The word Khyrim is derived from the word Khynriam, may be due to mispronunciation during the British rule.

The origin of the Shyllong or Khyrim Syiemship is traced back to ka Pah Syntiew, who is believed to be the mother ancestress of the royal dynasty. According to the popular Khasi tradition, Ka Pah Syntiew had a mythical background. She lived in a cave at Marai, which is situated between Nongkrem and Pamlakrai. Ka Pah was a very beautiful girl and was very simple, she used to come out during day time, as she was attracted by the warm air and the beauty of nature. She used to sit on the rocks, and many boys who tended the cows saw her every now and then and they went and told their parents. Many tried to catch her, but as soon as they reached near her, she quickly went inside the cave, through
a narrow entrance, which they could not proceed inside. Then one day, a man who belonged to the Mylliemngap clan, went to the cave, holding a bunch of flowers, known as ū Tiew Jalynkteng. He went to the entrance to attract her to come out, she approached near the entrance to catch the flowers, but before she could snatch them from his hands, he withdrew and the maiden followed him, and he caught and took her home. The Mylliemngap family looked after her and loved her as their own daughter, and she grew up to be a very beautiful woman. She was known as ka Pah Syntiew, meaning one who is allured or enticed by a flower. She won the love and admiration of all, who came in contact with her. She particularly loved the little children whom she taught how to sing and dance.  

Ka Pah Syntiew was given in marriage to a young man from Nongjri who was a warrior and statesman. They lived happily, and she bore him two sons and one daughter, who grew up to be strong, healthy and wise. One day ka Pah Syntiew left the house, her husband and children, and went back to her cave at Marai, her husband and children tried hard to bring her back but she refused. The fame of ka Pah Syntiew and her children, spread to all the Raid, and the nobles and rulers of these Raid planned to form a common state, the question arose as to who should be the king, and all cried out in the Dorbar, the eldest son of ka Pah Syntiew. The proposal was accepted, and the three children of ka Pah Syntiew were consecrated as the founders of the new royal family, and the eldest son

became the first king of ki Syiem Shyllong or the Shyllong kings, thus the Khyrim or Shyllong Syiemship started. The Mylliemngap clan became important, as it was one of the families of this clan that looked after ka Pah Syntiew. This clan was given a special privilege up to the present day, for a male member of this clan is the Lynskskor or Prime Minister of the chiefdom.

Ka Pah Syntiew like ka Li Dohkha of the Sutnga Syiemship and also the Malngiang Syiem had mythical divine origin. It is believed that ka Pah Syntiew was the daughter of u Blei Shyllong or the Shyllong God, hence they are known as ki Syiem Blei, or God sent Syiem, because they have divine origin. There are Syiem, which have no divine origin and they are known as ki Syiembriew or man made Syiem. Up to the present day, at the Pomblang Nongkrem festival, propitiation is offered to the Shyllong God and his daughter ka Pah Syntiew, the female ancestress of the royal clan. As the Khasis have no written records, we cannot say for certain, when was the Shyllong or Khyrim Syiemship, and the Pomblang Nongkrem started, but the syiemship must have been very old and the festival is as old as the syiemship itself, which they have inherited from their ancestors since the beginning of times.

(b) Divisions of the Hima Shyllong or Khyrim

The division of the Hima Shyllong or Khyrim took place in 1853 after the civil wars and the united and strong state with

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the capital at Nongkseh, was divided and torn into two parts, the 
Mima Khyrim and the Hima Mylliem. The division of the powerful 
chiefdom was regarded as a very sorrowful and unfortunate event 
in the history of the Khasis. But one thing is saved from being 
perished, the Ingsad Ingsunen was not divided, the office of the 
Sviemsad, or the high priestess, was not tampered with and the 
religion was left untouched. The Sviemsad with her typical func­
tion and the ancestral religion with its institution as founded 
at Nongkseh, remained with the Sviem at Nongkrem.8 The origin of 
the Pomblang Sviem or Pomblang Nongkrem was at Nongkseh, but after 
the division of the state, it was shifted to Lyngkyrdem, then to 
Nongkrem, and then to Smit, which remains the place of celebration 
of the festival till today.9

(c) Administration

From time immemorial, the Khasis have a strong democratic 
tradition. The state of Khyrim has a democratic institution which 
is governed by a Dorbar or council, consisting of the Myntri or 
Bakhraw, who are elected by the people, and the Sviem who in turn 
is elected by the Myntri or Bakhraw, from a member of the Sviem 
clan. This state again is formed by an association of units known 
as Raid, which consists of a group of villages and governed by a 
Dorbar consisting of persons elected by the people. Under them, 
we have village Dorbar of every particular village.10 The hima

9. R.S. Lyngdoh, "Ka Dorbar Sla ha ka Pomblang Sviem," U Kritik, 
Vol. II, No. 43.
10. Maham Singh's Article, "Nongkrem Festival," in Khasi Heritage, 
p. 147.
Khyrim consists of 1. the Raid Nongkrem, 2. the Raid Nongbri, 3. the Raid Mawlieh or Khatar Blang, 4. the Raid Mawshai or Phra Blang, 5. the Raid Lawai, 6. the Raid Nongkynrih.\textsuperscript{11}

(d) The contents of the festival

The Pomblang Syiem or Pomblang Nongkrem is a religious festival, held to honour and respect the ancestors, the founders of the state and religion and to invoke God's blessings for a bountiful harvest, and well being and general prosperity of the royal family, the Bakhraw and also the people and the whole state. The festival is held at the royal residence at Smit, and all the sacrificial rites and rituals, are carried on at the Duwan, and the Iewduh Pomblang, and at the Inqsad where the Syiemsad or high priestess lives. Ka Duwan is a place which is surrounded by walls, and it has three outlets for entering and leaving, one in the north, one in the east and one in the west. Inside this compound there is ka Inqsad, that is the religious house, which has many rooms. Before the division of the Khyrim Syiemship, ka Duwan and Inqsad, were at Nongkseh, the old capital of the Syiemship.

The Inqsad consists of many rooms for religious purposes, these are 1. ka shiur, which is a room at the back, where there is u Rishot Blei, or the Holy Pillar or pillar of God, which is made of a particular wood called u Diengsning, a kind of oak tree. 2. Ka Inqbah, is a room in the middle, where the Syiemsad lives. 3. Ka kynram blang is another room in western side of the house, where the goats for sacrifices are kept. 4. Ka tyngkong or shynkub

\textsuperscript{11} Pamphlet, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 25-26.
is the verandah in front of the house, where they held a solemn Dorbar known as ka Dorbar Sla. 5. Ka kyrpong is another room which is used as a sleeping apartment. The ground in front of the Inqsad is properly cleaned and levelled, and it is here that they kill the goats for the sacrifice, and it also serves as a dancing arena. Ka Iewduh Pomblang is a place on the hill, a few distance from the Inqsad. The ground here is also properly cleaned and levelled, there are three outlets for entering and leaving, one in the north, one in the east and another in the west. Inside this ground there is an altar known as ka Duwan. The Pomblang Nongkrem centres round the Syiem, his Myntri and Bakhraw and the people. The Syiem and his Dorbar, fixes the day of the ceremony and send information to all the Raid which have to bring goats and request them to be present at the ceremony. Three months before this religious festival, the Dhulia or the pipers and drummers beat their drums and play their pipes and pour out libation, at the religious house, on every Pamtiah night, to show that preparation is undergoing for the Pomblang festival.12 We will see through this festival, beginning from the first day along with the rites and rituals of each day.

(e) Stages of the festival
(i) The first day (Pamtiah)

Early in the morning of the first day of the festival, that is Pamtiah, the Dhulia beat their drums till morning when the sun rises, to wake up the people and remind them that on that night

12. H. Lyngdoh, Ka Pomblang Nongkrem bad Thang Syiem Sohra, p.3.
the religious ceremony of the Pomblang Nongkrem will start. On
the Pamtieh night, the Sviemsad prepares in the Ingbah three
earthern vessels of ka iadum or rice beer and one gourd. On that
night, the Sohblei or high priest, who belongs to the Rumnong
clan will perform the ceremony in front of the fireplace or
hearth in the house. First of all, the Sviemsad gives one gourd
of rice beer from one vessel, to the Sohblei, who dedicates this
first gourd to u Blei Shyllóng. The Dhulia beat their drums and
play their pipes, the Sohblei prays for the well being of the
Sviem and the royal family, the state and the people on the
whole, he pours the rice beer in the hearth. Then the Dhulia
change their tunes and the Sviemsad gives to the Sohblei, a gourd
of rice beer from another vessel, he offers this second gourd to
ka Blei long sviem or ancient ancestress mother of the Sviem
clan which means to ka Pah Syntiew, praying for her blessings and pro-
tection to all, he also pours the rice beer in the hearth. The
Dhulia continues to beat their drums, and the Sviemsad gives a
gourd of rice beer from another vessel, and the high priest offers
the last gourd to u Saidnia longsviem, or the first maternal uncle
of the Sviem clan, for his blessings for general prosperity. After
this, the musicians stop playing and the Sviem and others who are
present there stood up and enter in another room known as ka shlur.
Here the eldest of the Dhulia pours a gourd of rice beer to
u Syrmoh u Syrphin u khatar kamar. U Syrmoh belonged to the Sviem
clan of the hima Shyllong, who killed the thlen at Rangjyrteh, he
was the founder of iron, arts and technical skill. U Syrphin was
the brother of u Syrmoh, who was the founder of the drums and musical instruments, which were used while the children of the seven huts danced. When the Shyllong Syiem defeated the plain areas from Nowgong to Eeltola and to u lum ka Meikha, now called Kamakhya, the ryots there requested the Syiem to absorb Viswakarma in the Pomblang Nongkrem. The offering of rice beer to u Syrmoh u Syrphin, u khatar kamar to ask for his protection is an old ceremony. Later u Biskorom is absorbed along with the festival, u Biskorom is similar to the Hindu God Vishwakarma, who is the God of artisans and craftsmen, particularly popular in Assam and Bengal. The respect shown to the founder of arts and technical skills is as old as the festival itself, and the musicians by pouring libation in his honour ask for his protection. Another view is of the opinion that u Biskorom, may have an influence from the plain ryots who came to work here in the hills. These people worshipped Vishwakarma, and the Syiem may be due to love and respect and to please these ryots absorbed Vishwakarma in the Pomblang Nongkrem, not as God to be worshipped, but just to show their respect and love to the ryots of the plains, in this manner, u Biskorom is taken in the Nongkrem religious ceremony. After pouring rice beer, the Dhulia beat their drums and all who are in the shlur including the Syiem Rangbah, or the Elder Syiem, eat the dried fish which have been burnt and consume the rice beer. After

13. R.S. Lyngdoh, op. cit.
14. Information given by Shri B. Kharkongor, a knowledgeable person of the festival.
15. Sohblei Sngi Lyngdoh, Ka Pomblang Shisien Shisnem Iong ka Hima Shillong, pp.11-12.
this the Syiem Rangbah and the Dhulia beat the drums known as ka sing shad tyngkoh, and the Bakhraw or Elders from certain clans of the Raid dance two by two. Before dancing, they first bow the Rishot Blei, and the Syiem Rangbah. After all these rites and ceremonies are over on the first night, then the people on the whole can dance and continue as they like. 16

The Syiem sad is the custodian of the state religion, this is in conformity to the matrilineal system of the Khasis, where a woman holds a respectable position in the society. Her main functions are to keep ready the necessary equipments and instruments on occasion of festival in concurrence with the priestly clan. In the past she sent a proposal for the appointment of a new Syiem to the Dorbar. Syiem sad is a unique political institution of Khasi political thought, she is entrusted with the custody of rites and ceremonies of the state, in order that her moral force may act as a restraining hand, a power behind the throne. In the Khyrim Syiemship, the line of descent for ka Syiem sad is to the eldest daughter, but in the other states as in Cherra and Nobosohphoh, the youngest daughter occupies her place. 17

(ii) The second day (Ka Umnj)

Early in the morning of the second day, before the sun rises, the Dhulia bring all their drums to the Tyngkong, and here they beat all the religious drums. In the afternoon, men both young and

old, come and clean the whole path from the Inqsad to the Iewduh Pomblang, this is known as soi lynti, they also dance at random, while going and coming. In the evening the Dhulia beat the drum known as ka sing mastieh in the Tyngkong. The elderly men from the Bakhraw clans of the Raid, dance a kind of dance known as ka mastieh, they dance two by two in the ground in front of the Inqsad, and the Syiem Rangbah also dances. At night in the Ingbah, the Sohblei offered libation to u Blei Shyllong, ka Blei longsiyem, and u Saidnia longsiyem in the same way as on the previous night. Then the musicians beat the drums and eat the dried fish which have been burnt and consume rice beer and the Bakhraw also dance in the same way, as on the Pamtiah night. After this the Dhulia perform a sacrifice known as ka knia Muhuri, to ka Blei Synshar, the Goddess of state and to u Syrmoh u Syrphin, u Biskorom, u khatar kamar. In this sacrifice, the Syiemad gives to the elderly Dhulia one banana leaf, five pieces of pan leaves, one jar of water and one hen. Then the Dhulia takes all these and place them in their respective positions. He offers the sacrifice by pouring out libation and by praying to ka Blei Synshar, so that she will protect the syiem and the state, and to u Biskorom, so that he will protect and preserve the drums and pipes and the musicians, after the ceremony, the remaining beer is consumed among the musicians. 18

(iii) The third day (Iewduh)

The third day begins early in the morning, on this day certain ceremonies are to be performed at the lum Iewduh Pomblang. 18

The Syiemad is making ready all the necessary things to be taken to the hillock. Then the Syiem Rangbah, and all the people leave the Ingsad and walk in a procession to the hillock. The procession is led by the Dhulia and the dancers in their full dancing dress, with their swords and flyflabs in their hands, dancing all the way. After them follow the Sohblei, then the man who carries all the things for the sacrifice. Then follow the female members of the royal family, the Syiem Rangbah and the Bakhraw and the people. There are also men who carry guns who fire now and then, and also burst crackers. When they reach the sacred hill, the Sohblei offers a sacrifice at the altar to u Blei Shyllong, with a cock and then with a he-goat, which they call u lang Iewduh. In this sacrifice, the Sohblei prays to God for His manifold blessings to protect the Syiem and the state and also the people on the whole. The cock's entrails are removed for divination, having cut and killed the goat, its blood is sprinkled at the altar. Then the helpers collect the nine portions which are taken from the lung, liver, spleen, kidney, intestines and gall bladder of the goat, these are known as dkhot im, these are given to the Sohblei for divination and offer them as sacrifices. After the ceremony a dance is performed known as ka shad mastieh, after the dance, they leave for the Ingsad dancing all the way. At the Ingsad, they also perform the same dance as in the hillock. After the dance, the Sohblei takes the remaining nine portions and burn them, these are known as dkhot ing and these are also offered as sacrifices. The remaining nine portions are eaten in front of the holy pillar and the musicians again start beating the religious drums.

In the middle of the night of the same day, they prepare for a sacrifice known as ka bujai blang, which is held at the Tyngkong of the Ingsad. Here the goats brought from the different political units known as Raid are presented. This ceremony shows the democratic tradition of the Khasis, as the administration of the state are in the hands of the Syiem, his myntri and the Bakhraw. The presentation of goats by the different Raid shows the political unity of the state, if any Raid, who no longer wants to have allegiance with the state, it no longer presents a goat. The Syiem and Dhulia on the other hand, cannot refuse the presentation of goats, if they refuse, it means that they have driven away the Raid from the state.\(^{21}\) At the ceremony, all the Raid who will contribute the goats are present. One elderly Dhulia and some people stand near the room known as the kynram blang, to accept the goats and put in that room. First of all the goats from the Syiem which are already in the room are accepted, then the Dhulia calls each Raid and their goats are put in the kynram blang. Every time that the Dhulia takes the goat from each Raid, he prays for the well being of the people of that Raid and also for good health, prosperity of the race, and a bountiful harvest and the well being in all respects.\(^{22}\) All the goats brought by the different Raid are to be kept in the kynram blang for one night. The goats are given back to those who contributed and the cooked meat of the same is to be eaten by them. After the ceremony of bujai blang the elder Syiem and others enter another room in the Ingsad known as ka shlur,\(^{21,22}\)

\(^{21}\) Sohblei Sngi Lyngdoh, *op.cit.*, pp.2-3.

\(^{22}\) Ibid, p.3.
and eat the meat of *u-lang Iewduh*, which has been sacrificed at the hillock. After this, the Dhulia beat their drums and the Bakhraw dance two by two, and before they dance they first bow the holy pillar and the elder Syiem, after this dance is over, the people can dance the whole night till the next morning.\(^{23}\)

(iv) The fourth day (Lyngka)

The fourth day of the festival is the day when the goats are killed for the sacrifice and it is also a day of dancing. This is a grand day for everybody, because multitude of people in their colourful and best dresses, from different walks of life, belonging to different communities, flock to Smit to witness this festivity. On this day the Syiensad and the Sohblei fast the whole day long. Early in the morning, the musicians beat the drums known as *ka-sing kynthei* or the female drum in the room of the Ingsad known as *ka Ingbah*. The female members of the royal family who are virgins, in their beautiful traditional dancing dress, bedecked with gold and other ornaments, wearing gold crowns, dance round the hearth three times, along with the Bakhraw of the state. After this dance inside the house, they come out and perform a traditional dance known as *ka shad nohkjat ki Syiem*, which means the opening or inauguration of the dance by the female members of the royal family. When they dance, there are someone to cover them with umbrella.\(^{24}\) This is to show respect to the royal family, and also to differentiate the female dancers of the royal family from other dancers.\(^{25}\) One of the

\(^{23}\) H. Lyngdoh, *op.cit.*, p.15
\(^{24}\) Ibid, p.19.
\(^{25}\) Information given by Shri B. Kharkongor, a knowledgeable person of the festival.
chief dancers is the daughter of the Syiemsad or any female virgin member of the royal family who will be the Syiemsad later on. After this dance, then follows the dance of other male and female dancers who come from the different parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. All female dancers should be virgins, no married woman dares to enter the dancing field, regarding the male dancers, both married and unmarried can dance.

On the same day after sunset, the Syiemsad makes preparation at the Inqbah, for a sacrifice. She distributes all the necessary things for the sacrifice to u Sohblei and all those who will perform the sacrifice. The ceremony is performed at the sacrificial ground in front of the Ingsad. The Sohblei, the other sacrificers, the Syiem and the people are ready in the place for the sacrifice. Each sacrificer sits and makes a small altar in front of him, in which he puts all the necessary things for the sacrifice, each of them holds a cock or a hen in his hands. The Sohblei will first of all offers a sacrifice to u Blei Shyllong, then the other sacrificers also offer their sacrifices. After sacrificing the cocks and hens, the entrails are taken for divination and they pour out libation. After this ceremony, they sacrifice twelve goats known as 'lang sla. The goats contributed by the people are killed by the Bakhraw, the blood of the twelve goats is sprinkled on each of the altars. Then the nine portions of the twelve goats known as the dkhot im are taken and given to
the sacrificers. After this ceremony, a dance known as *ka shad mastieh*, is performed. At night, the Sohblei takes the nine portions and burn them and offer as sacrifices, he pours libation and the Dhulia start beating their drums and play their pipes as they please.\textsuperscript{26}

(v) The fifth day (Ka Pynsing)

The Pomblang Nongkrem festival comes to an end on the fifth day at night, which is considered very sacred, early in the morning of the last day, the drummers stop the beating of the different drums, this is the sign that this festival has come to an end. On this day at the Ingsad, the Sohblei sacrifices a pig known as *u niang suidnia long syiem*, in which the Sohblei invokes the first maternal uncle of the *hima* Shyllong who started the state religion. Then the Sohblei from the Mawroh clan, kills the pig and takes it to *tyngkong*, and here the Sohblei takes out the nine portions and offer as sacrifices.

The next important ceremony of the Pomblang Nongkrem is the *Dorbar Sla* or *Dorbar Blei*, which means God's assembly. This assembly is held at the *Tyngkong* of the *Ingsad*, in the middle of the night on the last day of the festival. Before holding this assembly, *u Sangot*, or announcer, enters all the rooms at the *Ingsad* and makes an announcement for three times that no one should sleep, talk, cough, yawn, and that everybody should lay

\textsuperscript{26} H. Lyngdoh, *op.cit.*, pp.23-26.
awake but remain silent and should not walk here and there. In the middle of the night when the world sleeps, this assembly is held. The most important part is the prayer of the Syiem Rangbah, when he prays, there should be pindrop silence, the prayer is observed in deep solemnity. It is a special and solemn hour, when the Syiem kneels down and prays to God the Creator, this shows that the Khasi religion is monotheistic. In this prayer the elder Syiem invokes God's blessings for the welfare of the Syiem clan and the different clans of the Bakhraw and also for the welfare of all his people. He also prays for the good health, prosperity of the race, bountiful harvest, prosperous trade and for well being on the whole. The Syiem also asks for forgiveness of his shortcomings and that of his people, he also prays to God to free them from diseases, war and other dangers in the society, and for the well being and general prosperity of all. After the prayer of the elder Syiem, another elderly man from any clan of the Bakhraw also prays to God. After the prayers are over, the Dhulia beat their drums, and enter the shibur, they bow the Holy Pillar and the elder Syiem, then they perform a dance known as ka shad tyngkoh, in which two by two of the Bakhraw dance. After this dance, then the people can dance the whole night and the festival also comes to an end.

27. H. Lyngdoh, op. cit., p.30
(f) The virginity dance among the Khasis

The origin of the virginity dance among the Khasis is obscure, but the dance of only the virgins has an important significance. One interpretation of its origin, is that ka Pah Syntiew, the legendary female ancestress of the hima Shyllong or Khyrim was a virgin when a man of the Mylliemngap clan caught her and it is also said that Ka Pah Syntiew loved dances and songs, she used to teach the small children how to sing and dance. The boys who tended the cows used to see her dancing on the rocks, so the female dance of only virgins among the Khasis have originated from the dance of ka Pah Syntiew. The virgin dance might also have a connection with the fertility of the soil. The Khasis have a high regard for the soil, which feeds them, and as the soil produces crops to sustain life, so also the female is respected and associated with the propagation of the human race and the sustainer of life. Another factor is from an etiquette point of view, because for a married woman, it is not wise that she should go and dance, as her primary duty after marriage, is to look after the family and home, and to take care of her children. The women work very hard throughout the year, and it is only on the dancing occasion that the real beauty of any woman can be seen, when they all dressed up with all their rich costumes, ornaments and jeweleries. It is on the dancing period, in the dancing arena, that the men could see the beautiful girls and later on propose for

29. Information given by ka Shortimal Syiem Sad, of the hima Khyrim.
their marriage. According to a tradition, once a dance festival took place, and many dancers both males and females came out to dance. The most prominent and the fairest dancer was the wife of one man named Myndi. The king was impressed by her beauty and dancing performance, so he planned a conspiracy to kill her husband. Myndi who was killed came back to life by some hidden powers, and a Dorbar was called, in which the king's misdeed was exposed, and he was dethroned and Myndi's wife was invited to take the throne. Since that time, no more married woman could dance, but only virgins were invited to dance. Hence the unmarried men could look and see the young unmarried girls on the dancing occasion and later propose for their marriage, they could choose freely, as there is no fear, as all the girls are unmarried and virgins.

The Nongkrem dance is held in the dancing ground in front of the Tngsad. In a group dance, women are confined to the inner dancing court, the female dance consists of the crawling of the toes, and their eyes casting downwards, and not looking this way or that way. This signifies the modesty, humility, and purity of the women, the whole body is balanced and the hands remain straight and do not move. The male dance is more lively, they hold a flyflab in their hands and they move with fast steps forward and backward to the accompaniment of the beating of the

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30. Information given by Shri R. T. Rymbai.
drums and the playing of the pipes by the musicians. In another
dance known as ka shad wait or sword dance, the male dancers
hold the swords.

(g) Dress and ornaments

The dancing dress of both men and women are very costly,
only the rich can possess the full and complete dancing dress,
which consists of rich costumes, gold and silver ornaments and
jewelleries. The dancing dress of the women consists of (1) a
mukmor sopti kti, which is a long sleeve blouse of costly velvet
cloth which cover the hands, a red or maroon, blue and green velvet
are preferred. (2) Ka jainpien is a piece of cloth tied round the
waist and form a sort of loongi, whose lower end is visible, the
upper end is covered with the jainsem, it may be of any colour.
(3) Ka jainsem nara or dhara, is a costly and valuable material
which is the traditional dress of the Khasis, it is tied at both
ends on the shoulder and reaches down below the knee. The jainsem
dhara is of many colours, but for dancing purposes, a yellow
dhara known as ka nara shad is used by women. (4) Ka Pansngiat
is a sort of a crown which is made either of pure gold or silver,
which the female dancers put on their heads, with an artificial
flower known as u tieng lasubon which is attached upwards at the
back of the crown. The real flower, u tieng lasubon, is very
difficult to get, it is a beautiful flower and has a sweet smell,
this flower is compared to the beauty, purity, simplicity, and modesty of a girl. (5) Lyngkyrnenq ksiar are ear ornaments, kyniri wahdong ksiar are round earings of pure gold which are like chains, ki khaila ksiar are earings without pendants, that the women wear in their earlobes. (6) U shan ryndang, is a kind of necklace of gold, tightened and fixed at the neck. (7) Ki synqkha bad khadu, are bracelets made of gold which are very heavy, thick and costly. (8) Ki tad ki mahu are bracelets made of gold and silver; ki tad are bracelets worn on the arms, ki mahu are worn just below the elbow. (9) Synkха shrong bad khadu ksiar are bracelets made of gold. (10) Kyniri ksiar are chains made of gold and of different length, a female dancer wears two or three gold chains. (11) U kanopad are coral beads of reddish colour, but half of them being modelled in pure gold. (12) Sati ksiar are gold rings which they wear in their fingers. (13) U sai khyljong is a head ornament. (14) Ka rumar rusom, is a silk handkershief which the women hold in their hands.

The male dancer's consists of (1) Ka jainspong, a turban of red and yellow colour made of pure silk, sometimes a dhara is also used as a turban. (2) A sleeveless coat which they wear in their body. (3) Ka boh khor or khaila is a dhoti made of silk with multifarious colours or a plain silk dhoti for boh khaila, sometimes a dhara or muka jainsem is used as a dhoti. (4) U kyniri tabah is a kind of chains made of silver, which the men
wear across the shoulders. (5) **U kyniri syngkai**, a silver waist belt for men. (6) **Ki'siar shynrang** which they wear in their ears and could be distinguished from the **siar kynthei**. (7) **Paila sohpieng ksiar** are gold and coral bead necklaces, the coral beads are of red colour, the god is made into plain round balls, and a coral bead is placed between two gold balls. These necklaces are commonly worn by both the male and female dancers. (8) a long sleeve shirt generally of white colour. (9) **ka waitlam** or the sword which they hold on the hand. (10) a sword belt and scabbard in pure or plaited of silver on which the sword is hung. (11) **Ka Ryngkap** or quiver in which the arrows are kept. (12) A sheath. (13) **A laputa** is a band of birds feathers, which the male dancers put over their turbans. (14) A **symphiah** or flyflab in which they hold in their hands while dancing. In a group dance, a man holds a sword in one hand and a **symphiah** in another, but in one particular dance known as **ka mastieh**, the shield substitutes the flyflab.

(h) **The Khasi music**

From time immemorial, the Khasis have their own musical instruments which consists of different kinds of drums, pipes and harps. They have their own original style of folk songs and poetry, their musical instruments are used to accompany their songs and their traditional dances and religious performance.

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and other festive occasions. While the bom or drums and tangmuri or pipes are used to accompany dances, the other instruments such as ka duitara, ka maryntheng, ka donglod and ka maryngod are used for accompanying songs.

The musical instruments are of different types, sizes and styles and are locally made which show the artistic skills of the Khasis. The different types of musical instruments are shown below:

1) The Drums
   (a) Ka bom or ka nakra or the big drum
   (b) Ka ksing bom or sing nakra or the smaller drum
   (c) Ka ksing kynthei or female drum
   (d) Ka ksing shynranq or male drum
   (e) Ka ksing dymphong, or smaller drum

2) Musical Instruments
   (a) Ka duitara
   (b) Ka maryntheng
   (c) Ka sitar
   (d) Ka donglod
   (e) Ka maryngod

3) Blowing Instruments
   (a) Ka tangmuri

32. Information given by Shri T.T. Mukhim, a noted singer and composer of Khasi songs.
These are the various indigenous instruments of the Khasis, here only the musical instruments which are connected with the dances are focussed. **Ka Bom or ka nakra** is the big drum, the shape of this drum is like an egg, which is cut flatly at the top which is covered with the hide of a cow. Two sticks are used for beating this drum at the top. This drum is used for dancing purposes, it also serves as a calling drum used for public announcement for calling a *dorbar*. It is also used for calling the people of the village to rally in times of war and other emergencies. **Ka ksinq bom or sing nakra** are smaller drums which are used together with the big drum in male dance, and the **ksinq kyndum or ksinq padiah** for female dance. **Ka Bomrit or Padiah** is used for female dance, **ka ksinq dympheng** is a small type of drum used for playing at home. It can be used for accompanying dance, but it sound is not suitable for outside playing. **Ka Tangmuri** is a blowing instrument which is used for dancing purposes. It is like a small type of pipe or trumpet, the **tangmuri** is played to the accompaniment of the drums during the dancing occasion.

It is played by a good player on the dancing occasion. Ka Tanglod is another blowing instrument, it is a much smaller size and is used for teaching female dancing at home.  

The musicians including the pipers and drummers could play different tunes to suit the different types of dancing like ka mastieh, ka shadwait or sword dance and ka shad kynthei or female dance in which they display their musical talents. In the Pomblang Nongkrem the Dhulia have ten different kinds of drums and twenty seven tunes. These are known as ki ksinq Pomblang or ki ksinq niam meaning the religious drums. These are (1) Ka sing Blei, (2) Ka Sing mastieh, (3) ka ksing khrop, (4) ka ksing lynti, (5) ka sing kynthei, (6) ka sing kher, (7) ka sing surmaw, (8) ka sing rong, (9) ka sing shangkiah, (10) ka sing mastieh.

The people in the villages still enjoy their own indigenous musical instruments, during their dancing and other festive occasions and also after their day's work is done, at night they use to sing to the accompaniment of their musical instruments like drums, pipes and harps. In the towns, the impact of western education and civilization shaped the musical tastes of the Khasis especially among the christians, their musical composition lean towards a western mode not only in form and melody but in harmony and counterpoint as well. Besides the western influence, the influence of the neighbouring plain is also visible.

34. Ibid, p.16.
The Jaintias upto now are skillful in playing instrument like harmonium, tabla etc., their modern songs have Hindustani notes which are popular and have come to stay as an established school of Jaintia music. The influence of Hindustani music on the Jaintias is as great as if not greater, than that of western music. 37

2. KA BEHDEINKHLAM

*Ka Behdeinkhlam* is one of the biggest religious festival of the Khasis, it is celebrated by the Pnar, a sub-tribe of the Khasis, inhabiting the Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya. *Beh* means drive, *dein* means stick and *khlam* means plague, so it is a festival to drive away plague with sticks or a plague driving festival. It is celebrated annually in the months of June to July. This festival is observed by the people who are still in their own traditional religion, which is known as *ka Niam Tre*. The *Behdeinkhlam* is held annually at Jowai, the headquarter of the Jaintia Hills District. The festival is also observed in some other places of the District such as Tuber, Shyrmang, Ialong Mukhla and Mutlong. The War Jaintias also observed a festival, which is similar to the Behdeinkhlam, which is known as *ka Rong beh Lynakan*. The people of Raid Iapngar in the Bhoi area also observe a festival. 37. Ibid, p.159.
known as **ka knia Pyrda**, which is similar to the Behdeinkhlem in Jaintia Hills. But, what we refer here, is only the festival which is observed at Jowai.

As we have seen from the second chapter, **Jylliew** that is June is a deep water month, when the rivers, waterfalls and wells, become very deep due to heavy rain. **Naitung** that is July, is the ill smelling month, or **iewtung**, because of the decay of vegetation after the heavy rain. This is a very dangerous period for the people, because it is the time of the year, when people get bad diseases like cholera, diarrhoea, dysentery and others. It is also a period after the sowing season, when the crops are growing and are in great danger to be destroyed by pests, insects, heavy storm lightning and thunder. So, the people observe this festival, to invoke God's blessings for a bountiful harvest, and well being of the people on the whole, and to free them from various diseases and other evils, so that they can live happily and peacefully throughout the year.

(a) **The origins**

Nobody could say when was the festival of Behdeinkhlem started, as the Khasis have no written record or they have no script of their own. Undoubtedly, the festival is very old and as old as the society itself, and is handed down through the ages from generation to generation. It is believed that
this festival is given by God to the Hynniew Trep or the seven huts, the ancestors of the Khasis, and that was the time when the animals, birds, stones and trees conversed with the people in the same language. This is not surprising, as in the Bible story, we learn that when King Solomon ruled in Israel, the ass of Balam spoke to him. From reports available, the great plague visited the erstwhile Jaintia Hills in 1917-18, but this date cannot be taken as the origin of the festival as it is too recent. The festival was discontinued for 16 years and it was revived in 1948, after India has achieved her independence. Another version is that the Behdeinkhlem might have started on or before 1500 A.D. One of the Jaintia Sviem went to stay at Nartiang, and the Nartiang monoliths were erected at the direction of the Sviem, and it was u Mar Phalynkki with the help of the people who erected the stones. Bearing testimony to this fact, it may be said that the Behdeinkhlem started on or before 1500 A.D. But this also may be too early a date to be taken as the beginning of the festival. The Behdeinkhlem festival is very ancient, the people might have brought it from the place of migration or have learnt it on their way to India. The Mynnars also observe the Synteng ceremony of the Behdeinkhlem, though they are quite

39. Ibid.
40. S.S. Laloo, Ka Behdeinkhlem, p.9.
far from each other. The Mynnar or Jirang dialect of the Khasis, spoken on the extreme north of the hills appears to be akin to the Synteng, Lakadong, and Amwi form of speech.  

The Behdeinkhlam festival also had an origin and link with the migration of the first colonising families. When Jowai was a forest, inhabited by wild animals and birds, the hills and rivers and so also the religious stones were already there, and these were the elder brother known as u Mookhai, moo means stone in the Jaintia dialect. U Mookhai was also known as u Kongwasan, and his brothers were u Moolalong, u Mutong, and u Musniang and their sister ka wah Myntdu or the Myntdu river, which was known as Ka tawiar ka takan, meaning one who protects. According to a tradition, it was the four sisters named ka Bon, ka Tein, ka Wet and ka Doh and their maternal uncle: who were the first colonising family at a place known as Lakyrnah which is situated near u Mookhai at Jowai. When they reached that place, there was a heavy storm, accompanied by thunder and lightning. In that situation u Mookhai danced as if he was happy, that human being reached there. The five were frightened and terrified and they trembled with fear. When u Mookhai saw this, he said to them not to be frightened and that he would protect them from all enemies, and he would bring prosperity to them to increase their family and clan,

their crops, trade and their village. He asked them that they should make a religious ceremony every year to him and his brothers and also to u Pyrthat or Thunder, for good rain, bountiful harvest and that Thunder would not destroy their crops and houses. The four sisters and their uncle accepted this, the families of the four sisters increased and their generations are known as the Soo Kpoh khatar wyrnai.42

As years passed, many people came and settled at Jowai, and it became very big. So an idea came to the people, that they should have religious ceremony, as at times, there occurred a plague in Jowai and other nearby areas. So, a Dorbar was held known as ka Dorbar Pyllun of the Saw Lyngdoh or the four Lyngdoh, that is the Lyngdoh Jowai, the Lyngdoh Shyrmang, the Lyngdoh Tuber and the Lyngdoh Mukhla, and their elderly people. At that Dorbar they decided to perform a religious dance to be known as ka Shad Behdeinkhlam, or a dance to drive away plague, and this dance is to be performed in the mud, this is to show that everybody is equal, no distinction between the rich and the poor, the high and the low.43

Another legend tells us that it was u Niang Lyngdoh and his sister ka Long Lyngdoh that were the first people who came to Jowai, and it was u Niang Lyngdoh who was the first Lyngdoh,

who gave the name of Jowai. The first place of habitation was at a place known as **u Lum Sooyung**, which means the hill of the four houses or families.\(^{44}\) It was **u Nianq Lynqdoh** who erected the **Moosmai**, meaning the oath taking stone, and around this stone, he planted bamboos. At that time, there was no court, if there is any quarrel, which could not be settled, the two sides used to go to this stone, to take an oath. Nothing will happen to the innocent, whereas the culprit will collapse and die.\(^{45}\)

Another legend tells us that this festival is given by God Himself to the **Hynniew Trep** or the seven huts, the ancestors of the Khasis. It is believed that in the olden days, God used to talk and walk with man and that the seven huts used to come to earth and go to heaven as they please. When the seven huts decided to stay on earth, and before God departed, He asked the people to perform a religious dance for four days in the mud, to show that all men are equal. At the same time God commanded that Thunder will put his four daughters on earth for intermarriage with the sons of **u Hynniew Trep**, to live and die together with them.\(^{46}\)

We cannot say for certain which version is true, but it may be mentioned that once upon a time, a plague took place

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\(^{45}\) S.S. Laloo, *op.cit.*, pp.15-16.
\(^{46}\) Ibid, pp.16-17.
somewhere in the hills that made the people very frightened of the plague, and hence the Behdeinkhlam festival is held to prevent its occurrence. Again, it was the plague that took place somewhere that made the four sisters left the previous habitation and came to Jowai. So the festival might have taken root somewhere, before it came to Jowai. The Behdeinkhlam festival at Tuber village, south east of Jowai is very big, as many villages participated in it. It may be that the four sisters might have migrated from that area, and that the Behdeinkhlam might have started there since the beginning of times, and it was brought to Jowai. The Behdeinkhlam is not only a festival to drive away plague and other evil spirits, but also to invoke God's blessings for the well being of the people, for a bountiful harvest, for prosperity of the trade and other works of the people, for the increase of the family and the race and also to ask God's forgiveness for all the shortcomings.

(b) The contents of the festival - Rites and rituals

There are certain rites and rituals which are performed and observed at this festival. It is held for four days, on the week days of Pynsin, Mulong, Musiang, and Muchai, that is from Nongkrem to Shillong of the market days of the hima Mylliem. The Behdeinkhlam is performed jointly by the administrative head known as the Doloi, the high Priest, the Elders
who help the Doloi and the people. One month before the festival, they perform the religious ceremony known as ka dih soopen. This ceremony is performed in the month of March or April, and it consists of pouring of libation with a special liquor known as ka kiad jyndem or kiad um. The ceremony is performed in the Inq Lyngdoh or Priestess house where a special altar is raised, the priest and priestess are helped in this ceremony by the Doloi, the Pator and the Basan. The dih soopen ceremony is performed in the weekday of Thymblein. Before this ceremony they offer prayers in the middle room of Ka Inq Lyngdoh, in which they ask God's blessings for general prosperity, they pour out libation and at the same time consume the liquor.

After performing the first religious ceremony of ka dih soopen, they perform what is known as ka kbai mooknor wa nynakong, which means the first time that an announcement is made from the Mooknor, a stone which is situated at Iawmusiang, a market place at Jowai. This announcement is made twice a year on the Iawmusiang market day in the month of March or April. Before they go to Iawmusiang, the Doloi, the Lyngdoh and the Elders meet together at the Lyngdoh's house.

and then they go to Iawmusiang to inform the people that the Behdeinkhlam festival is approaching, and that the people should not bring bones of the dead to be deposited in the family cairns, and they should not plough or sow. After they finish the first \textit{kbai mooknor}, then on the weekday of Thymblein, they perform the \textit{thoh Lyngdoh} or \textit{knia Lyngdoh}. This ceremony is also performed in March or April in the \textit{Khloo Lynqdoh} or the sacred grove. The expenditure for this ceremony is borne by the \textit{Lynqdoh} of Jowai. When they reach the place, certain sacrifices are performed, and a cock is also offered as sacrifice.\footnote{S. S. Laloo, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.22-25.} Then in the month of June, the \textit{kbai mooknor waar}, or the second announcement or proclamation from the \textit{mooknor} takes place. They first of all go to the \textit{Lynqdoh's} house, and then to the \textit{Mooknor} at Iawmusiang, and an announcement is made that the time for the festival has come and a certain contribution is to be made by them. After the proclamation has been made, then some of the elders start collecting subscription from the market, then they leave for the \textit{Lynqdoh's} house and the money is accounted for.\footnote{Ibid, pp. 37-40.}

The next part of the ceremony is \textit{ka knia khang wa nyngkong}, \textit{knia} means sacrifice, and \textit{khang} means close. So, it is the first closedown ceremony, this means to close down the entry of evil spirits by this sacrifice. This sacrifice is
held in the month of June, two weeks before the knia Pyrthat or Thunder sacrifice. In the first knia khang four hens and one cock are sacrificed to the Goddess which protects them and also to the four religious stones that is u Mookhai, u Mutong, u Mooralong and u Musnianq. On the weekday of Muchai, all go to the House of u Lyngdoh, and the sacrificers go to the four places to offer sacrifice, and the fowls are offered as sacrifice.

The next part of the ceremony is ka knia Pyrthat, that is a sacrifice which is offered to Thunder, this ceremony is held one week before the Behdeinkhlam. This sacrifice is offered to Thunder, so as to get rain during the festival and also good rain for the crops to grow well, and to prevent the people, animals and crops from the striking of the Thunder. But God of Thunder, has a friend named u Mon Ryngkhlaw who was the best flute player. Everynight, when he tuned the flute melodiously, the village girls came and listen to his playing. One night while he was playing the flute, all the klew or peacocks danced to the tune, and it was at this time that the God of Thunder took him alive to heaven. In that year the Knia Pyrthat did not work well, and the people through divination found out that u Mon Ryngkhlaw wanted a sacrifice annually. So a feast is observed annually in remembrance of him.  

52. Ibid, pp. 53-54.
every year the worship of Thunder is accompanied with a feast in honour of u Mon Ryngkhlaw. The latter who was a lover of all unmarried girls and who was taken up to the sky by the Thunder God, could very well be compared to the Krishna cult of the Hindus.\textsuperscript{54} The expenses connected with the Knia Pyrthat are met from the income derived from four plots of paddy fields called religious lands namely, Bri Pyrthat, Brikho, Brisla and Bri kiad. The priests of Shyrmang, Ialong and Tuber take part in the sacrifice, and they bring the sacrific­ial leaves, liquor and rice. For one week before the perform­ance of this sacrifice, the Doloi, the Basan and the priest must stay in their mother's house, and should not at all visit their wives.\textsuperscript{55} In the knia Pyrthat, a pig and a cock are sacrificed. Not only the Pnar offer sacrifice to Thunder, in the early Vedic period, the Aryans worshipped Indra, the God of Thunder and rain. The Anglo-saxons also worshipped Thunder which was known to them as Thor. The offering of sacrifices to Thunder by the Pnar might have been very old and the festi­val itself must be very old.

The next part of the festival is ka bam tyngkong wa nyngkong, which means the first feast of the ceremony before the Behdeinkhlam. Before this one of the Basan or elder goes to inform the phra kur phra kmai, meaning the eight clans and eight mothers that the first feast will be held on that night.

\textsuperscript{54} H.L. Deb Roy, op. cit., p.171.
\textsuperscript{55} R. T. Rymbai, op. cit., p.141.
These are the clans which are responsible for the growth and increase of Jowai. These clans are the Pyrbot, Iongkjam, Laloo, Shylla, Lato, Syngkong, Siangbod, Pakyntein, Kma, Paswet, Slong, Nikhla and Rngad. Out of these thirteen clans, only eight are chosen for the ceremony, then the sacrifices are offered and the ceremonial feast are taken. 56

A few days before the festival, the different localities of the town called Dong, start constructing their rot which resembles the Muslim Tazia 57 and send out a group of people to fell a tree called Deinkhiam from the jungle, the Deinkhiam should be tall and straight. When the people go to the forest to get the tree, they play the chew chew, a sort of musical instrument, throughout the road, till they reach the place, where they cut the Deinkhiam. The object of this is to drive away all evil spirits on the way, and at the same time to inform the people that the Behdeinkhiam festival is nearing. One particular dong called Khon Raid or Shilianq Raid is to fell another tree called Khnong Blai, which should be bigger than the Deinkhiam and is held more sacred, 58 and the Symbud khnong which should be smaller than the khnong Blai. A week before the festival, the rot are prepared artistically, which are decorated with flowers and coloured papers.

56. S.S. Laloo, op. cit., p.63.
57. H. Bareh, op. cit., p.364.
(i) **The first day (Pynsin)**

On the first day of the festival, some elders go to cut three trees known as *Khnonq Blai* and two small trees known as *Deinkham* or plague tree, and take these trees to the Lyngdoh's house. The *Khnonq Blai* are to be broken on the last day of the festival. One small deinkham is to be broken by the youths of one particular locality known as *ka dong Ionqpiah*. Another small *deinkham* which belongs to the Lyngdoh or the priestess is to be broken at the Aitnar pool on the last day of the festival. On the same day the Khon Raid brought the *Symbud khnong* from the forest and put on the hill, a place where it is supposed to be kept. On carrying this sacred tree the Kmai Raid also help. Kmai Raid means all the localities except the Khon Raid which is also known as the Shiliang Raid. There are seven such *dong*, these are Panalier, Lulong, Treppale, Lumkyrwang, Lum Iong Kjam, Iongpiah and Shiliang Raid. Before taking the sacred tree, one elder propitiated God by pouring libation. The Elders brought the three *Khnonq Blai* and the two small *Deinkham* and in the evening they go and fetch the *Doloj* to come and see the *Khnonq Blai*. When the *Doloj* arrives they perform a ceremony at the verandah of the Lyngdoh's house known as *ka bam tynkong*, first by drinking rice beer, which is purchased by the

Doloi himself, and the second time by eating rice. After the ceremony, they enter the Lyngdoh's house, where they have ka bam tyngkong kaba ar, that is the second feast, where they eat rice and fish, after that, they leave to their own houses. 61

(ii) The Second day (Mulonq)

On the second day that is ka Mulonq, a sacrifice is performed known as ka knia aitnar or a sacrifice at the pool called Aitnar. On this day they sacrifice a black goat and one hen to the Goddess Aitnar, the expenditure for the sacrifice is borne by the Doloi of Jowai. Before they leave for the place of sacrifice, they first of all go to the Lyngdoh's house. 62 Before they leave one of the Elders makes an announcement till they reach the place, that the Knia Aitnar is going to be performed, when they reach the pool, certain ceremonies are performed. In the morning of the same day, the Kmai Raid go to take all their Deinkhlam, from the forest, before they take them, they pour out libation on the trees. Then they carry the Deinkhlam to Iawmusiang, a market place at Jowai, when carrying the trees, they dance and shout all the way. In the evening, the youths and Elders of the Khon Raid go to take the Khnong Blai, from the forest, they pour out libation before they take it on their shoulders to the place where all the Deinkhlam of the Kmai Raid are kept.

From the observation of this festival, it may be assumed that the Khnong Blai stands for the Khasi monotheistic belief. A tree stands for a strong male procreating principle, which is vital for race preservation, it signifies a phalbic symbol, like Shivalinga of the Shaiva Hindus. The Shaiva Hindus, particularly the Nepalese, sacrifice he-goats nearby such a tree post as observed here during the Durga Puja. Trees are also objects of worship indirectly as king post or as sacrificial post. U Rishot Blei, or the Holy Pillar or the pillar of God in the Ingsad at Smit, is held in high respect and also symbolised the monotheistic belief of the Khasis. Trees are the main show of the Behdeinkhlam, which are considered sacred and possess occult power. At least the worship of sacred groves has a good effect in the locality, it has preserved the sacred groves from the hands of wood cutter.

(iii) The third day (Musiang)

On the third day, that is Musiang, certain ceremonies are performed. Early in the morning, the Khon Raid go to take the Symbud Khnong from the place where they keep it, dancing and shouting all the way. Effigies of a man and woman are made, and taken all the way, these do not have any connection with

64. Gurdon, op.cit., p.109.
the religious ceremony, they are only outward show to make the festival more colourful and grand. These effigies are pushed down the pools in the same place where they push the rot. In the Behdeinkhlam festival, the Hindu influences are prominent, the Behdeinkhlam car or chariot is called rot by them. In the border areas, the rot rolls on wheels, but in other areas, it is carried over to the selected places. In the Beh lyngkan festival of Nongtalang village, which is similar to the Behdeinkhlam, the rot rolls down on wheels, and it carries the effigies of persons whom the people claim as ancient heroes. Next the Kmai Raid comes out with their drums and pipes to go and take the Deinkhlam from the Iaw Musiang, dancing and shouting all the way till they reach a place known as Iaw Ionqpiyah rim. In the afternoon the Khon Raid go to take the Khnonq Blai, dancing and shouting all the way, till they reach Iaw Musianq. Here they dance for sometimes and continue to dance till they reach the place where they keep the Khnonq Blai. Before taking the sacred tree, they pray to God for good health, well being, prosperous trade and a bountiful harvest. They pour out libation, and consume the rice beer and dance for sometimes. Then the Kmai Raid takes their Deinkhlam to their own localities and dancing all the way. At the same time the small Deinkhlam are put in all the houses of those who are still in the traditional

67. S.S. Laloo, op.cit., p.139.
religion. The Khon Raid also takes the Khnonq Blai to a place known as Madan Moosyiem which is a field and they keep it there where certain ceremonies are performed.

(iv) The fourth day (Muchai)

The fourth day which falls on the weekday of Muchai is the last day of the festival. Certain ceremonies are performed on this day, early in the morning, the religious elders and other elders perform the bam tyngkong, a certain ceremony at the Lyngdoh's house. After this ceremony, the youths of a particular locality known as Iongpiah, come dancing and shouting all the way, till they reach the Lyngdoh's house, to perform a ceremony known as Kynting Khnonq, meaning to throw the khnonq to show respect to ka Wet, ka Tein and ka Doh, the first colonising family of Jowai. For ka Bon it is the locality known as Shilianq Raid who will give the Khnonq Blai to be pushed down at Aitnar in her honour. Certain ceremonies are performed at the Lyngdoh's house. After that they throw the three Khnonq to the sky one after another. After the ceremony of Kynting Khnonq, the youths of Iongpiah leave the house of the Lyngdoh, they carry the small Deinkhlam in which they break them at the field of Law Iongpiah rim. After breaking the small Deinkhlam, they go back to the Lyngdoh's house to

perform the second Kynting Khnong. Then the elder uncle of Iongpiah beats the roof of the Lyngdoh's house to chase away the plague, the evil spirits and the various diseases that endanger human's life. After this, they perform the second Kynting Khnong. The youths of the Iongpiah locality go back to their village, dancing and shouting all the way and they also start beating the houses and rooftops of their relatives and friends in their village. Early in the morning, one various localities came out to beat the houses of their relatives and the houses of all those who are still in the traditional religion. They beat with the small deinkhlam, when beating the roof tops, they ask God to bless the houses, and for general prosperity and to drive away the evil spirits and the various diseases and also for a prosperous trade and bountiful harvest.

On the same day in the morning, the Doloi, the Lyngdoh, the headmen and their assistants go to the locality known as Kmai Raid, while the Pator, Basan and their assistants go to the Khon Raid to beat every roof with bamboo sticks. Evil forces such as diseases and even plague and pestilence should be threatened with sticks to quit the houses, and the country as a whole. This part of the festival also offer an opportunity to religious leaders to meet the people at home once a year, and also it is an occasion where the people can meet their rulers and elders. Besides this, the festival has a special

69. Ibid. p. 191.
significance from the hygienic point of view, because on this occasion, the people clean their household goods, their houses and compound, the roads and pathways etc., so that all will wear a clean look for the Doloi and Elders and also the people, who came to visit them on this great occasion.

The Knia khang wa ar, or the second closedown ceremony is held in the morning, on the last day of the Behdeinkhlam where certain ceremonies are performed. The other ceremony is the third kyangting khnong, when the Khnong are thrown to the sky. The rot now have to be taken to Aitnar by the different localities, before taking the rot the different localities pray to God to let the rot reach the Aitnar peacefully, and safely, so that they will not be broken on the way, and that the festival will be a grand and colourful one.71 The rot are very colourful and tall and many people have to carry them. The Khon Raid takes the Symbud Khnong to Aitnar, then they bring their rot to the same place, last they bring the Khnong Blai. When all the rot of the different localities reach Aitnar, the women and children and the people in their best dress come and watch the men dancing, they dance happily in wild joy. After the rot are immersed, the Khon Raid brings the Khnong Blai, this is the time when the people from Kmai Raid and others too can touch the sacred tree, by touching

71. S. S. Laloo, op.cit., p.237.
or standing on it, they believe that they will have good health throughout the year. Immediately after the rot are taken out of the lake, the Khon Raid or Shiliang Raid brings the Khnon Blai. While bringing the sacred tree, the people of the Khon Raid do it leisurely with a playful touch of not allowing it to reach the destination. Whereas the people of the Kmai Raid wave their hands towards the lake to be brought to them and not to waste time on the way. When the sacred tree arrives, the people are very happy. Everyone struggles to touch it, at this moment, the part of the festival looks wild, many fall into the muddy water. Some pull others hands and legs, yet there is no malice and ill feeling towards one another, they do it with the spirit of love and brotherhood and that it is part of the religious festival. In the immersion of the rot one notices signs of unity of one rich culture. The festival has an element of the Muharram of the Muslims and also of the Rath Jatra of the Hindus. This resemblance clearly shows the influence of Hinduism on the Jaintias. After the immersion of the rot, the people leave for their respective houses. The festival comes to an end, and the Behdeinkhlam has a touch of Durga Puja, the Holi and the Rath Jatra.

In the afternoon of the last day, there is the concluding ceremony known as ka Dat lawakor, which resembles a football

73 R. T. Rymbai, op. cit., p.145.
game but in this game, they do not play with a rubber or leather ball, but with a round wooden ball, and the players do not put on boots but play barefooted. At this time the Basan or Elders make a sacrifice of a fowl in the sacred grove called Khloo Lyngdoh. Two teams participate in the game representing the Dongnein or upper valley, and the Dongwah or the lower valley of the River Myntdu. The players of both sides struggle hard to take the ball to the end of its own part of the field. There is a belief that if the players of the upper valley wins, the latter will have or will be blessed with a prosperous and bountiful harvest and if the lower valley wins the game, the valley will have a prosperous harvest. In case of any dispute only the Doloi as umpire can separate them. Before many people took part in this game, but now only a few people play, so that the game can be conducted in a better way. The festival is very ancient, so the game of Dat lawakor might have been very old also, it is surprising that the game is being played at this festival, this shows that the Khasi people love sports and games and also outdoor life. With this game, the Behdeinkhlam festival comes to an end, and the people who have come from the different parts return to their own homes. After the celebration of this festival, the people feel happy and contented, as they have full faith and confidence and also hope that no plague, pestilence and epidemic diseases will take place and endanger them in their villages, and God will be pleased as they have performed the festival.
3. KA RONG KHLI

*Ka Rong Khli* is one of the most important festivals of the War Jaintias living in the southern part of the Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya. The festival is performed at Nongtalang village, *Rong* means festival and *Khli* means tiger in the local dialect, so *Rong Khli* means the Tiger Festival. This festival is held whenever a tiger is killed accidentally or on an organised hunting by villagers. The dance which is known as *ka Shad Khla* or Tiger dance which is performed is a kind of war dance, in which the people dance to celebrate their victory in the war.

(a) The origin of the Nongtalang village and its administration

Nongtalang is the biggest village in the War Jaintia, Nongtalang means *ka shnonq ka Talang* or the village of *ka Talang*, which is a female name and it may be the first ancestress mother of the clan. The people first lived at a village named Amtapoh, before they came to the present village of Nongtalang, they left that village due to some reasons, may be due to inadequate and unfertile agricultural lands. The first clan that came was the the Lyngdoh clan, and ka Talang was *ka Iawbei* or the first female ancestress of that clan, who came and settled at Nongtalang. So, the present village of Nongtalang derived its name from *ka Talang*, she was responsible
for starting the religion and the administrative system of the village.\textsuperscript{74} The village of Nongtalang lies in the southern part of the Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya, it is situated in the international border line with Bangladesh, about 7 or 8Km away from this border.\textsuperscript{75} The village is a progressive one, the people are quite well to do, there are a few two or three storeyed buildings. About 75\% to 80\% of its population are still in their own traditional religion, which they call niam chnong. The people are well off because of their forest resources, the village has very less land for rice cultivation, the people carry on shifting cultivation. Agricultural products include arecanuts, betel leaf, fruits like oranges and others. Rice is also grown, and limestones is also found in certain parts of this village. There is a High School, Middle Schools, and five Primary Schools, there is also a Hospital and a Dispensary.\textsuperscript{76} Nongtalang is an example of a well progressing village in all fields, it is the headquarter of the Nongtalang Doloiship, because it is the biggest village, centrally located so it is very convenient for the Doloi to run the administration.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{74} Information given by Shri Chui Lyngdoh, Shri Deng Lyngdoh and Shri Hatdoh Pohsnem, all are knowledgeable persons of the festival.


\textsuperscript{76} Information given by Shri J.D. Pohrmen, who belongs to the village of Nongtalang, MDC and Chairman of the Jaintia Hills District Council.

\textsuperscript{77} L.S. Gassah, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.10-11.
The village administration is run by a Dorbar which is quite different from other village Dorbar of the Khasis. The village Dorbar in Nongtalang is known as ka Dorbar Manniew, manniew means uncle in the local dialect. So, Dorbar Manniew means the Dorbar of the uncles. The Dorbar consists of the elderly uncles from the twelve Kur or clans. These clans are the Lyngdoh, Pohsnem, Pohrmen, Padu, Myrchiang, Pohlynniar, Pohchen, Bareh, Pna-Lamare, Mohrmens, Pohleng and Pohti. The three important persons in the Dorbar Manniew are (1) u Lyngdoh ni am or the religious priest, he is selected from the Lyngdoh clan, he acts as a priest, performs religious rites and ceremonies and at the same time, he also has non-religious functions, he is also at the same time a headman, so he is held in high regard and respect by virtue of his office. (2) u Lyngdoh Korbar or secular priest, is another important person, he is also selected from the same Lyngdoh clan, his function is related to administrative matters, he has to convene and preside over the village Dorbar. (3) Another important person is the village secretary, he must be a literate person for keeping records, and minutes etc. This qualification may be of recent invention, keeping pace with the change of time, as now everything has to be put into writing. The village secretary holds a respectable position, he can be chosen from other clans also, if
there is no suitable person from among the twelve clans. At present Shri Chui Lyngdoh is a *Lyngdoh niam*, Shri Deng Lyngdoh is a *Lyngdoh Korbar*, and Shri Hatdoh Pohsnem is the village secretary, he is a Head Teacher in the Nongtalang Lower Primary School. The two Lyngdoh should belong to the *niam chhong*, converted persons cannot hold these posts, as they have to perform religious ceremonies and sacrifices. The village secretary has many duties to perform in the day to day administration, such as matters dealing with government authorities. The village headman has to depend much on the secretary in carrying out the administration of the village.79 Besides them, there is *u Bajii*, *u Sangot* and other Elders who will help in the administration and religious affairs.

Besides the Dorbar Manniew, there is another Dorbar known as the *Dorbar chhong* or the village council, which runs the whole administration of the village. Adult male members of the village are allowed to participate in this Dorbar, and it is the *Lyngdoh Korbar* who presides over the Dorbar.80 The position of the maternal uncle is very high in this village, he is held in high respect as a father in his wife's house, and as an uncle to his nieces and nephews in his mother's house.

(b) The origin of the festival

The people of Nongtalang have their own festivals, one such festival is ka Rong beh lyngkan, a festival to drive away evils which is similar to the Behdeinkhlam festival. Another festival is ka Rong Pyrtuh, which is a very big festival, before they perform this festival, they should first of all perform ka Rong beh lyngkan. There is another festival known as ka phur which is connected with the bone collection ceremony of the dead.

About the origin of the Rong Khli festival, nobody could tell, when was it first started, as the Khasis have no written record. However, this festival is very old and is handed down through the ages from generation to generation. It might have started long time back before the people settled at the present village of Nongtalang, they might have brought it from the place of their migration, or might have learnt it on their way. The dance is believed to be a war dance, in which certain religious rites and ceremonies are performed after the victory in the war. There is a tradition that in the olden days, after the victory in a war, the head of an enemy is chopped off and put in a long pole, and the people came along with the enemy's head, shouting and dancing all the way, to the accompaniment of music played by the drummers and pipers, to celebrate their
victory in the war. Nobody could say for certain, whether this could be taken as the origin of the Rong Khli festival. Head hunting is not a new thing, cases of head hunting and head offering were reported from the hills. Propitiation was given to u Syngkai Bamon and ka Ram Shandi, the god and goddess of the War area, the former being the deity who gave the heads of the enemies to the successful warriors. They offer a cock, after the cock has been sacrificed, they fixed its head on the point of the sword which symbolised the fixing of human head of an enemy killed in battle. The Khasis used to sacrifice to a number of other gods for success in battle. 81

To the people, a tiger is symbolised as an enemy and is hated by them. This hatred might have started with the origin of the people itself. According to a Khasi tradition, God created sixteen families, nine families stayed in heaven with Him and the seven families known as u Hynniew Trep, u Hynniew Skum or the seven huts stayed on earth. These families used to go to heaven and come down to earth as they pleased through a golden ladder. It was so, till the seven huts drifted away from God, and decided to remain here on earth, and thereby the golden ladder was severed and the seven huts became the ancestors of the Khasis. Then grew up a very big tree on u Diengiei Peak, the tree grew to be so gigantic, that its leaves and branches became so thick, that the earth was over-
shadowed and became very dark. The people were determined to cut and destroy this tree, so that light would come to the world. They cut the tree in the morning and went back to their homes, as the tree was very big they could not finish it in one day. When they came the next morning, they found that the tree grew again and the cutting marks disappeared. The people were surprised, every time they cut it, the next day the cutting marks could not be seen. They wondered how this happened, then ka phreid, a very small bird, told the secret to the people that it was the tiger who came every night and licked the part of the tree which had been cut, and the cutting marks disappeared and the tree grew again. Having known the secret, the men after cutting the whole day, did not take their axes and knives home, but kept them upwards on the portion of the tree which had been cut. The tiger came as usual, and licked the tree, but the sharp edges of the axes and knives cut his tongue. From that time, the tiger did not dare to go and lick the tree any more, and the mission of man was successful, the Diengiei tree fell, and light appeared once more to the world. The crops grew well and people were happy that they had got light and warmth. Since then, the tiger is looked upon as an enemy of man. The tiger asked the goddess Pyrtuh, that he would fight a war with man, whether he won or lost, but the goddess should accept him if he died in the war, and a festival would be observed to the goddess, and
the tiger's head would be carried and put in the village gate in his memory. The goddess Pyrtuh agreed, hence the tiger festival began. If this event is to be taken as the beginning of this festival, that means, this festival is very old and as old as the society itself. An enmity between the tiger and man was seen in another tradition, once a woman who was carrying, wanted to eat the fruits from a tree, she saw the tiger and he told her that he would give the fruits if she promised that if she gave birth to a girl, she would give the child to him. The woman did not know what to do, as she wanted to have the fruits very badly, so she agreed. The woman gave birth to a girl, and true to her promise, the tiger came to ask for the girl. The girl grew up to be very beautiful and innocent, she was very frightened of the tiger, so, she ran away from home to the house of the sun. The stories indicated show that there was an enmity between the tiger and the people.

According to another story, when one of the powerful Jaintiapur chief was ruling, he wanted to get one tree which is known as Niarepetai Laijeskop, a kind of tree which resembles the feet of a dove, this tree grew in Nongtalang village. Some people belonging to the neighbouring villages of Pamchedong and Padu went to cut this tree to give to the chief. On hearing this news, the people of Nongtalang village went to take this tree.

82. D.T. Laloo, Ka Ksaw ka Kpong, p.7.
So a war started between the people of Nongtalang and the people of Pamchedong and Padu. In this war, the people of Nongtalang prepared their best warriors, the best two were u Khew and u Ktah. These two warriors along with their people went to Pamchedong and Padu. After serious fighting, the people of Nongtalang were victorious. These two warriors were able to chop the heads of some of their enemies. They came back to their village with the enemies' heads along with the swords and the beating of the drums and the playing of the pipes. On their way home, they passed by one village, known as Nongbareh to show their victory over the two villages. As a sign of good gesture and brotherhood, the people of Nongbareh came and join the war dance, together with the people of Nongtalang. The people of Pamchedong and Padu planned to come and follow them again, but they could not find them, they only heard the beating of drums on their way to Nongbareh. So, the people of the two villages, having no other alternative declared and accepted the defeat. They were afraid lest the people of both Nongtalang and Nongbareh would jointly come to their villages and that would be very dangerous. Nongbareh came as a helper and became friendly with Nongtalang. Another version tells us that in the olden days, some people used to keep on the watch, to protect their village, in case any enemy might come and harm them. If any enemy happened to come, the watchers cut his head and ran as fast as they

83 Information given by Shri Siangdu Paduna, a knowledgeable person on this festival.
could to their village, beating their drums very hard, they beat their drums continously with a loud sound, and once they heard the sounds of the drums, the enemies are frightened and could no longer enter the village. The drums kept on beating continously till morning, when the sun rises, they started dressing up and started dancing. So, the tiger festival might have originated from this performance of the ancestors of Nongtalong village.

We cannot say for certain, how this festival originated, but it is a very old festival. The tiger too is symbolised and looked up as an enemy of the people, but it cannot be said that the head of a tiger in this festival substitutes that of a human head. The forests are infested with wild animals, and a tiger is a danger and a menace to the people, who came to the village, killing the people, Sheep, Cattle, and other domestic animals. So, the tiger is a great enemy of the people and its killing is like the killing of an enemy which brings relief to them.

(c) The contents of the festival

The festival is not a regular one, it depends on the killing of a tiger. If and whenever a tiger is killed, God is

84. Information given by Shri Dennis Pohlong, a Primary School Teacher and a knowledgeable person on the festival.
to be worshipped. This festival is performed whenever a tiger is killed during an organised hunting or even when the tiger is killed accidentally by anybody. When the tiger comes to the village in search of prey, somebody shoots or kills the tiger, even then, the festival has to be performed and God is to be worshipped. Sometimes the people of the village organise a group hunting, where the male members took part. Sometimes a particular clan organises a hunting, in that case the members of that clan meet together and unanimously decided to go for that hunting. People from other clans are also invited, but in case a man who does not belong to that particular clan who has arranged for the hunting, happens to shoot or kill the tiger, he and his clan however, will not have to perform the ceremony, as the organising clan has taken the responsibility of performing the festival and as a sign of good gesture, the killer of the tiger will get one turban on the day of the festival. In whatever manner that the tiger is killed, God is to be worshipped, as there was an agreement as we have seen from the olden days, that a tiger was to be offered as sacrifice to God. If God is not worshipped when the tiger is killed, certain calamities like epidemic diseases, starvation, blindness, ill-luck will befall on the people. Killing the tiger by someone in the

85. Information given by Shri Hatdoh Pohsnem.
86. Information given by Shri Klasor Myrchiang who is a participant in this festival.
clan is said to be a good omen for the prosperity of the clan. The carcass of the tiger when consecrated becomes holy and to have a small piece of it may bring luck to such a person. If anybody kills the tiger, the clan to whom he belongs must perform the ceremony. If the man who kills the tiger belongs to the Bareh clan, and if that clan performs the ceremony, the festival is known as ka Rong u Bareh or the festival of the Bareh clan, and if the killer belongs to the Pohsnem clan, it is known as ka Rong u Pohsnem or the festival of the Pohsnem clan and so on. Even when the particular kur or clan performs the sacrifice, the village on the whole is involved.

The festival is usually held in the dry months from January to March, this year that is 1985, the festival was held on 15th February and it was the Pohchen clan who was organizing the festival. After killing the tiger, the clan to whom the killer belongs, informs the Lyngdoh, and when the Lyngdoh and the Dorbar agrees, the clan can perform the festival, if not, the clan cannot perform the festival. Usually a two months time is given by the Lyngdoh, if there is any delay, the clan has to pay fine. If the clan due to some unavoidable circumstances, cannot perform the festival after the killing of the tiger, they can perform later on, but by any means, they have to perform the sacrifice, else their clan would suffer from certain diseases,

88. Information given by Shri D. Pohlong.
death, and other calamities as that is the promise that they have made in ancient times. After the clan gets the permission from the Lyngdoh and the Dorbar for holding the festival, they should inform the day for holding the same. The expenditure for the festival is borne by the organising clan, but a certain amount is contributed by the Dorbar Manniew. After the permission is given for holding the festival, the Lyngdoh gives the drums which are used only during the festival. There are two kinds of drums, the religious drums which are used only for religious purposes, and the drums used for festive occasions.\footnote{Ibid.}

(d) **Stages of the festival**

Before the festival, the organising clan performs certain sacrifices, this sacrificial rite is carried on to inform God about the holding of the festival. The actual festival lasts only for one day. The tiger after it is killed, its flesh and intestines are taken out, and the body of the tiger is again made into its own form. The meat is dried up, and the body of the tiger is kept outside the village in the phlong or village gate whose walls are made of stones. There are two phlong or gates one in the east and another in the west. The body of the tiger cannot be brought inside the village until one day before the festival, when the day of the festival is nearing, the
people in their various dong or localities used to beat the drums and play their pipes till the day of the festival comes.

(i) Ka sngi pynrung khla

Ka sngi pynrung khla or the day when the body of the tiger which has been kept outside the village is brought to the village, which takes place on the day before the festival, usually in the evening. On this day all the people gather together in the dancing ground along with the beating of the drums and playing of the pipes. Then they all go to the village gate to fetch the tiger. The elder uncle of the clan will lead the group, in his dancing attire carrying the shield and the sword, he will dance in front of the other dancers, they will continue dancing all the way. The dead body of the tiger is taken from the village gate and they all come back to the lympung madan shad, or the dancing ground. The body of the tiger is kept in a special place in the tent, which is purposely made for the occasion. The male members have to wait for the whole night, accompanying with the beating of the drums and the playing of the pipes, they keep on dancing for the whole night till the next morning, but this is not a religious dance. A big fire is lit and the food and liquor are provided by the clan which is organising the festival.  

90. Information given by Shri S. Paduna.
(ii) The festival day

On the day of the festival, early in the morning, they leave the dancing ground, and they all go to the elder uncle's house of the organising clan. At his house, they perform certain religious rites, the elder uncle pours libation and the Lyngdoh along with the elders of the Dorbar Manniew pray for the well being of the people, for good health, general prosperity, good harvest and to free the people from other evils. They pray to the goddess Pyrtuh, and they also pray to the ancient ancestors, when these religious sacrifices are completed, then the male dance follows. They dance in front of his house, they first dance a particular dance known as ka nam chai wat, then they dance another dance known as ka mastieh. In this dance, persons from the organising clan will dance first. The person who kills the tiger will dance first with his elder uncle, then follows the dance of the elder uncle with the Lyngdoh or anybody from the Lyngdoh clan. Then the mastieh of the Kur starts, here they dance two by two, the two dancers should be from different Kur not from the same Kur. They dance as follows (1) u Rymbui and u Pohti (2) u Pohsnem and u Myrchiang (3) u Bareh and u Padu (4) u Pohduna and u Pohrmen (5) u Pohlynniar and u Manar (6) u Pohlong and u Pna (7) u Pohing and anyone from the Lyngdoh's clan. The dance is accompanied with the beating of the drums.

91. Information given by Shri K. Myrchiang.
92. Information given by Shri C. Lyngdoh, D. Lyngdoh and Shri H. Pohsnem.
and the playing of the pipes. The dancers carry their shields and swords, after the dance of the Kur, then other dancers can also participate in the dance.

After the dancing is completed, next they go to the Lyndoh's house, to show respect to the Lyndoh, at his house certain rites and ceremonies are performed with due solemnity. When these ceremonies are performed, there should be complete silence, they should not talk, cough, yawn or laugh etc., a pindrop silence is maintained. The people who are outside also should not dance as long as the ceremony is going on. When the ceremony is over, then a dance is performed, which is similar to the dance at the elder uncle's house. They first perform a dance known as nam chai wat, then another dance known as ka mastieh follows, the Lyndoh will dance first with anybody from the clan that kills the tiger, then the other dancers from the different kur follow.

After the ceremonies and dancing are completed, they all go to the phlong or village gate to put the body of the tiger, the head or the whole body of the tiger is put on a bamboo pole. If they want to put the body of the tiger in the east gate, then they go first to the west gate, and if they want to put it in the west gate, then they go first to the east. This is known as

93. Information given by Shri S. Min Pohrmen.
ka pynnquh phlong, which is a kind of respect. If in the last festival, the tiger's body is put in the east, then in the next festival, it must be put in the west and vice versa. Here at the phlong also they dance, and before putting the body of the tiger, they pour out libation and prayers are said. Here the religious ceremony comes to an end and they leave to their own houses. Then at night, there is only a female dance, the dance continues for the whole night till morning, along with the music played by the drummers and pipers.

(e) Dress and ornaments

The dancing dress of both men and women are different from that of the Nongkrem and the Weiking dance. The women dancing dress consists of a iainsem dhara which is a costly-silk material and a traditional dress of the Khasis, it is of many colours and is tied at both ends in the shoulders and reaches below the knee. They also have ka jaintawah, which is a kind of shawl which they put in their body. They also wear their sopti kti or long sleeve blouse, they also wear necklaces of gold, but they do not wear a crown like the female dancers of the upland Khasi hills. They put a flower made of paper and is tied to their hair knot. The men's dress consists of a long sleeve shirt, and

94. Information given by Shri C. Lyngdoh, D. Lyngdoh, and Shri H. Pohsnem.
a kind of lungi with black border, on their heads, they put on a turban. Like the male dancers of the Nongkrem and Shad Weiking, they also carry a flyflab, a sword and a shield.

(f) Conclusion

Although the Rong Khli or the tiger festival is organised by a particular clan, yet people in the village as a whole take part. People from the neighbouring villages also come to take part in the dance and Tanglemuri competition, which is a sort of music competition. The dance is held during day time, it continues throughout the night and even till the sun rises in the next day. Competitors from the different villages came to compete and prizes are awarded to the winners and even the losers. Prizes are always paid in terms of cash, the judges are selected from the elderly persons who are considered knowledgeable persons of the arts, and their decision is final. The tiger festival is important because it is in this kind of festival that both religious and cultural activities are combined together. 95

The last ceremony of the Rong Khli festival is the sacrifice which is known as Ka Ronchyndi Rongkhli, which is held after the festival. It is a concluding ceremony in which a goat, two hens, a dove and bananas are offered to the goddess. 96

96. Information given by Shri H. Pohsnem.
The people of Nongtalang village, like other tribals have their own festivals, but many of these festivals are no longer observed by them due to the social change which is going on among the people. Some of these festivals are celebrated in connection with their agricultural activities, and also as thanksgiving to God, for other festivals have both the socio-cultural and religious connection. The Tiger festival is still performed, but other festivals of the village like ka Rong beh lyngkan, ka Pyrtuh and ka Phur are not held regularly now.

4. KA SHAD LUKHMI

Ka shad lukhmi is an important religious festival of certain places in the Bhoi areas in the northern parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. At one particular place known as Raid lapnqar, this festival is performed once in every three years. The people in this area depend very much on agriculture which is the mainstay of their economy. So, this festival is observed in February - March before the sowing season and after the harvesting work for the old year is over, to Ka Lukhmi the goddess of wealth and agriculture, to ask for her blessings and prosperity, for the welfare of the people and for a bountiful harvest.

97. L.S. Gassah, op.cit., p.23.
(a) **The origin of ka Lukhmi**

The Khasis like other tribals have important rites which are associated with cultivation and agriculture. These rites have much in common for example, with the fertility rites of the Boros and the Bihu festival of the Assamese, and thus it can be maintained that these fertility rites had long been observed and practised by the Khasis. The important festivals of the Khasis like the Nongkrem dance and the Behdeinkhlam of Jowai are associated directly with cultivation and agriculture of the people. In the main Khasi plateau, fertility rites have disappeared, though in the Bhoi areas and Jaintia hills, they still constitute important ceremonies of local people. In Nartiang in the Jaintia Hills, rites are performed regularly in connection with fertility and cultivation.98 The Lukhmi dance and the **Sajer** of Raid Nonglyndoh are two important festivals in the Bhoi area which are performed for prosperity of agriculture and general welfare. The fertility rites and dances are very ancient and might have started long time back, when the ancient man learnt how to cultivate and plant crops for his livelihood. According to traditions, the Assamese people obtain their idea of Bihu folk dance from the old Austrics of Assam.99 Ka Lukhmi may be identified as the goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth of the Hindus. We cannot deny the Hindu influence

among the Khasis, but the Khasis too, have their personified deities of the house, such as ka Lukhmai, ka 'lei Khuri, which are the house or hearth deities. So, ka Lukhmi of the Bhoi areas, might be the Lukhmai, the household deity of the Khasis, who looks after the welfare and prosperity of the house and family and also fills their granaries. As the Khasi religion is very old, so the Lukhmi festival must have been very old also.

In the olden days, when most of the people were agriculturists, they were more attached to the soil, as their very existence depended very much on their local agriculture. The Khasis in the precolonial period led a life of isolation, with no means of communication, and nothing like outside help would be available to them, if plague, starvation and pestilence occurred. If crops do not grow well, starvation would take place, so propitiation is offered to God before or after the sowing season and also after the harvesting season in which occasion, they pray to God for a bountiful harvest, well being and to free them from plague, pestilence and other evils, so that they could live peacefully throughout the year.

Ka shad Lukhmi is also performed in the Raid Thaiang in the Bhoi area. During the festival, the people invoke God's blessings for their well being, and the prosperity of crops.

100. Ibid., p.375.
especially rice which is their principal food. According to a tradition about the festival, once upon a time, a rat brought rice from the plains to these hills. There was a time, when the people suffered very much from poverty, they told their sufferings to the Lyngdoh. The older people found out the reason for their sufferings and poverty because they did not perform a ceremony. So they took some soil outside the Nongbah Thajang, they took a handful of rice from each house and put it in the khoh, a kind of conical basket of the Khasis. They went to the place where that rat had given them rice long time ago, the priestess has to carry that rice in the khoh to her house. Then they perform a dance along with the beating of the drums and the playing of the pipes. The Sohblei then killed and sacrificed a white goat, which they called ka blang Lukhmi, and its blood is mixed with the rice in the basket. Then a fowl is sacrificed and its blood is also mixed with the rice in the basket, the rice is then distributed to each house. This ceremony is performed by the people before the sowing season to invoke God's blessings for a bountiful harvest and for general prosperity.¹⁰¹

Another story,¹⁰² about the origin of the Lukhmi tells us that in the olden days when the people did not have any idea of rice, they lived by eating wild fruits, roots, bark or trees

¹⁰¹ Catholic Church publication, Ka SYngwet Pyrkhat u Thajang, p.22.
and other wild vegetables. Once the plainsman came to meet the
Khasi friend, it so happened at that time, there was less wild
fruits and vegetables, and that plainsman who came with his
small daughter did not get much food. On the next day, both of
them went fishing to a river. The small girl cried as she was
hungry, both the friends got many fishes and also a bunch of
flowers which they gave to the small girl to play, to their
surprise, the baby stopped crying. In the evening, they returned
home, and took the flowers with them. The Khasi man kept the
flowers in his house, and the plainsman went away with his dau-
ghter. When the winter months came, the flowers which have been
dried fell everyday on the ground. Whenever the floor was swept,
the dried flowers along with the rubbish were thrown outside.
When summer came, the whole field was covered with these yellow-
ish flowers. At that time, the plainsman along with his daughter
paid another visit to his Khasi friend’s house. As soon as they
reached the house, the daughter cried again and again, the Khasi
friend plucked a bunch of those flowers and gave to the child
and she stopped crying. The Khasi friend asked the plainsman to
take it and sow at his place. Meanwhile, the crop grew wild in
plenty, at one time a thought came to eat this crop. They cooked
and tried on a thin dog and it became very fat. Then they gave to
an aged and sickly woman, she became fat and cured, all who ate
this food became fat. So all wanted to grow this crop and they
named it as ka Lukhmi as a kind of respect to the crop which had fed them. The plainsman also wanted to get the seeds, the people cooked it first and then they sowed, the crop which was believed to be ka Lukhmi angrily left to the river and did not return.

Ka Lukhmi stayed in the river, and every time she was seen taking bath in the river. Most of the people tried to find her, and one man hid himself in one corner and took her clothes, while she was bathing. When Lukhmi finished her bath, she looked for her clothes, but could not find them. That man said to her that if she promised to come back, he would give back her clothes and he would come and fetch her with the warriors along with the beating of the drums. She promised to come back as her wish was to live in every hearth and home of the people. The man returned her clothes, she came in a boat, along with the gourds, pumpkins, maize and other seeds. When she came back the crop grew well again. As time passed by, the children of the Hynniew Trep or the seven huts became prosperous and well off, and gained in wealth. They kept the wealth along with ka Lukhmi, she became very angry, as she did not want that man should equalise her with wealth, as her wish and desire was to live in every home. She left again, the people were very sad and knowing the reasons for her leaving, promised to perform religious rites and ceremonies to her. From that time onward, the ceremonies were performed
in her honour, and since then, the Khasis believed that it was a very cruel thing to steal other's wealth and it is a taboo to steal rice. Hence goes the Khasi saying kamai ia ka hok, to earn righteousness, to give everyone his due. As Lukhmi is connected with agriculture and rice, she is held in high respect, and the festival connected with Lukhmi must have been very old, as rice has been the staple food of the Khasis since time immemorial.

The Lukhmi festival which is performed by the people of Raid Iapngar only, is to be focussed under this dissertation.

(b) The origin of the State of Iapngar

Nobody knew when the State of Iapngar was founded, but according to a tradition, it was a very powerful and famous state with the capital at Nongbah. But due to the wars between them and the Synteng chiefs, they became weakened and later on fell under the hands of the Khynriam chiefs, and the State of Iapngar became a poor and declining power. 103

Regarding the origin of the Lukhmi festival, as in the case of the State of Iapngar, nobody could say, when was it first started, as the Khasis do not have any written record. But the festival must have been very old as it is connected with agriculture. 

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103. O. Lamare, Ka Lukhmi, p.5.
The people of Iapngar have their own festivals, besides *ka shad Lukhmi*, they have the *knia pyrda*, which is a festival very similar to the *Eehdeinkhlam*, festival of the Jaintias. The latter might have influenced the people of Iapngar, as there was much interrelation between the Jaintias and the people of Iapngar in the olden days. Another festival is *ka knia lynnonq*, which is a ceremony performed every year to prevent the different evil spirits from entering and harming their villages. There are other festivals also but here only the Lukhmi festival is to be dealt with.

(c) **Stages of the festival**

(i) **The first day**

The Lukhmi festival begins with the ceremonies in the *Syiem sad* or high priestess's house, before they go to Nongbah, the old capital of the State of Iapngar. The *Syiem*, the *Lyngdoh*, and the elders and the people gather together outside the Priestess's house, where a big fire is lit, along with the beating of the drums and the playing of the pipes. The *Syiem*, the *Lyngdoh* and the *san kur* or the five clans have to go to Nongbah. The five clans are the Rymbai, Maklai, Sumer, Ryngkhang, Syiem and the Lyngdoh. Although there are six clans, but it was only the five clans who were the founders of the religious
ceremonies. Before they leave for Nongbah, the Lyngdoh prays to God, and after the prayers, he pours out libation. From the Ingsad, all of them will go to Nongbah, and the sohblei who belongs to the Maklai clan will perform the religious ceremonies. Nongbah has a special importance to the people of Iapngar, for it was here that their state was founded, and their religious ceremonies had started. So the old capital of Nongbah is still fresh in the memory of the people of Iapngar.

At Nongbah, there are special huts made for the occasion, they all have to stay here for one night and leave in the next morning to another place where sacrifices and ceremonies are to be performed. On that night at Nongbah, there are no religious ceremonies, the pipers and drummers will play their pipes and beat their drums, and a dance known as ka mastieh is performed in which two by two dance. On the next morning, they will go to another place where there is ka duwan Lukhmi or the altar of the Lukhmi, but before they leave for Nongbah, a cock is sacrificed.

(ii) The second day

Ka duwan Lukhmi is situated besides a river named ka Wah Umtung, the altar is made of mud. Before the ceremonies,
the shutia, that is the man who carries all the necessary things for the sacrifices, will bring one gourd of rice beer and gives to the Basan, who belongs to the Rymbai clan, who is a religious elder. The Sviem, the Lyngdoh, the Sohblei will sit in front of the altar, and at their back will stand the Dhulia. Then the religious ceremonies of ka Lukhmi starts, first a cock is sacrificed and is thrown in the river, the cock is then picked up, and then it is cut, and its entrails are taken out for divination, if good signs or omens are seen, the people are very happy. Then the shutia brings in the goat to the altar and hands it to the Lyngdoh. Certain prayers are said by the Lyngdoh, and the Sviem sacrifices the goat. At the same time, the Dhulia play their pipes and beat the drums, then the body of the goat is thrown in the same river, and is picked up again. The bodies of the cock and goat which have been killed are placed at the altar as sacrifices. The Sohblei will go into the river and take up some sands from the bottom of the river. Then the Doloi massages the whole body of the Sohblei with oil, and he goes back to the river, he stands still for sometimes and prays to God. The sand which the Sohblei brought from the river is kept properly, to be distributed among the five clans, to be mixed along with the seeds and sow in the fields. 106

106. Ibid, pp.50-52.
The religious ceremony is over, then a dance known as *ka Mastieh*, is performed, by the members of the five clans. They dance two by two, after the *mastieh* of the five clans, then other people also can dance, along with the beating of the drums and playing of the pipes by the musicians. This dance lasts for one hour, and then they all prepare to go back to Nongbah, then to their respective homes. Then the Lynqdoih thanks all the people in general and also the five clans and pray to God for general prosperity, good harvest, health, wealth and happiness.107

(d) Conclusion

The religious ceremonies come to an end, and a festive dance is held for two days after the religious ceremonies of *ka Lukhmi* are over, the dance is held for two days at Liarkha. This dance is similar to the *Shad Suk Mynsiem* or *Shad Weiking*, which is held at Shillong annually.

The celebration of the Lukhmi festival is a sort of fertility cult, *ka Lukhmi* is the goddess of wealth, prosperity and agriculture, and cultivation of the people of Iapngar. She is also known as *ka ʻlei’kba* or the goddess of rice of the Khasis. Sacrifices and religious rites are performed to her, so that she will shower her blessings for a bountiful harvest.107. Ibid, p.72.
harvest and fill up their granaries, and bless their day to
day work and protect the crops. Thus this festival is held
before the sowing season, and after harvesting is over and
it is a very ancient festival of the Khasis. This year that
is 1985, the Lukhmi festival is to be held from the 22nd to
25th March, a religious ceremony will be for two days and a
festive dance will be held for two days, it is expected
that this festival will be a grand one, as many people will
take part, and also witness this festival of the Khasis
which is not an annual festival, but is held once in every
three years.

5. KA SHAD SUK MYNSIEM OR SHAD WEIKING

K a Sh ad Suk M ynsiem means a dance when the heart is
happy or peaceful. It is an annual Thanksgiving Dance or­
ganised by the Seng Khasi, a socio-religious and cultural
organisation of the Khasis. It is a Thanksgiving Dance to God
for all the blessings that He showers upon the people in the
year that had passed and to invoke His blessings for the
coming year. This dance is held annually in Shillong, the
headquarter of the East Khasi Hills district, and capital of
Meghalaya. The dance is held at the Weiking field, which is
situated besides a river known as ka Wahumkhrah. Before the

Information given by Shri Sebastian Madur who belongs
to Raid Iapngar.
Shad Suk Mynsiem was held at Mawkhar, but when the Seng Khasi took over the management of this dance, they shifted to Madan Weiking or Weiking field and this dance derived its name as ka Shad Weiking. 109

(a) The origin of the dance

The Shad Suk Mynsiem festival is of very recent origin, it was started during the British period, when a need was felt to preserve the traditional culture of the Khasis, due to threat posed by the process of westernization. During the colonial period many changes were brought about in the social, political, economic and religious life of the people. To safeguard the Khasis from all these changes, culture, religion and customs from western contact and the influence of Christianity and other outside influences, some prominent and thoughtful Khasi elders established the Seng Khasi on 23rd November 1899. This memorable date is known as ka Seng kut snem. On this day, the seng Khasi flag was first hoisted which consists of the red colour depicting valour, the white circle in the middle representing truth and imprinted at the Centre, with the motif of a crowing cock, the harbinger of light and the manifestation of humility. 110 The colonial period was a very critical one for the Khasis and the country

110. S. Sawian's article in Sentinel, 26th Nov. 1984, p.3.
as a whole, who was fighting against the British imperialism. These thoughtful Khasi men apprehended that in future years, time might come when the people of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills would forget their own religion, culture, customs, dance and music. The four principles of the Seng Khasi are (1) The Association or Assembly of persons who adhere to the tenets of kinship as specified by the Khasi ancestors. (2) The coming into being of a man in the world to earn righteousness through service or that man is born to seek love and propagate truth. (3) The respect for one's own fellowmen with the sense of humanity and divinity. (4) God, the sovereign Lord, the Almighty Gcreator, the Giver of all. One of the aims of the Seng Khasi was to preserve and protect the cultural dances and other festivals in which the Khasis from all over the Khasi and Jaintia Hills have been taking part.

(b) Contents of the festival

The Shad Suk Mynsiem is a Thanksgiving Dance to God the Creator for all His blessings in the year that had passed and to invoke His blessings for the coming year for a bountiful harvest, well being of all, and for general prosperity. This dance is held in the month of April after the harvesting

Ill. A.S. Khongphai, "Shad Suk Mynsiem (Thanksgiving Dance)" in Khasi Heritage, pp.129-130.
season and also when the sowing work for the new year is over. The Khasis like other tribals, have fertility rites which are connected with agriculture and cultivation. The Garos of Meghalaya have their annual Wangala festival which literally means the post harvest festival ceremony of hearty sent off, Wangala denotes the end of the agricultural year for the jhum cultivating Garos. Wangala festival or the Hundred Drums festival of the Garos is a very ancient festival, which is held every year in the Garo land in the month of Berokja, which is the period of the year from the second week of October to the second week of November, after the harvesting season. The Bihu dances of the Assamese is a fertility cult, held in a reverential attitude, this festival is held for the welfare of the community, cattles and crops. The fertility of the field and of women are closely associated in the mind of the Nagas, as a woman embraces her lover, so may the earth take the seed of the rice into her womb. The Naga head hunting also had its inspiration in this belief in fertility.

In the **Shad Suk Mynsiem**, the female dancers should be unmarried ones, whereas the men whether married or unmarried

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could dance. Women are held in high respect in the Khasi society, they are the keepers of the house and the propagators of the race. The Khasi female dancers dance in the inner portion of the dancing arena, moving their barefeet gracefully forward and backward with their eyes casting downwards. The men dance in the outer circle of the women, this shows that men are the protectors of the family, clan and the race, the men's dance is more lively and enthusiastic. The women dance with their eyes casting down to show their purity and simplicity. The women have to move their feet in conformity to the beating of the drums and the playing of the pipes. The female dancers would not lift their eyes for fear of being branded a coquette, a reputation that a sensible girl would not like to be loaded with. Some people said that the female dance is lifeless, and that there is no difference of the female dance from the beginning to an end. The only attraction is the display of gold, jewelleries and gorgeous dress. To judge the female dance, only those who know the dance and the beating of the drums could do so. Occasionally, when the dancers are tired, they go to the place where their relatives are sitting and waiting in the dancing field, to have their faces wiped and to take rest for sometimes. This also will help the people to know and recognise to which clan or family,

the dancers belong, and if there is any proposal for marriage, they can know the clan. A man or woman who fell in love with anyone of the dancers, also could know to which clan, he or she belongs, whether they are within the permissible kinship to avoid ka shong sang or marriage within the same clan.

The drummers used to beat different tunes with their drums. The people in general cannot understand these tunes, but in fact each tune has a meaning and precious advice to the society. The beating of ka ksinpadiah, is an advice given to the children, brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, that they should be faithful in all their works for self-sufficiency. The beating and tune of ka'sing dum dum, means that the uncles and fathers in their own family, show their nieces and nephews and children that they should walk in the right path, in speech and manners, at home and outside among the paternal and maternal relations. The beating and tune of ka'sing nalai, means that the dancers will exhibit their talents in their dances which would be in a befitting manner with their dresses and their talents. The beating and tune of ka'sing klang is very fast, this shows activeness and smartness, this is a lesson which is to be taught to the children to be smart and active in their works, to free themselves from hunger, and that they should fulfill their duties properly here on earth. The
beating of ka 'sing pyllun shows that the women and children are under the inspiration, care and protection of the uncles, brothers and menfolk, and the womenfolk can sleep and work in peace without any fear or harm.

(c) Stages of the festival

The Shad Suk Mynsiem or Shad Weiking is held for three days, in 1984, it was held from the 14th to 16th of April. The dance has no religious sacrifices and ceremonies, only some prayers are said to thank God for all His blessings, that He showers on the people in the year that had passed, and to ask for more blessings for the year to come. This is a social gathering, a kind of collective activity, to bring in the spirit of love, brotherhood, unity and solidarity among the people and that the people from the different corners could show their collective feeling, and peace of mind. This dance brings the people closer together and brings in the spirit of oneness and integrity among the people. The Shad Suk Mynsiem has no connection with the Shad Nongkrem, which is the state religious ceremony of the Khyrim Syiemship. It is a dance of a joyful and happy heart, a dance of joy and merriment and gratitude to God the Creator. For this reason, it is known as the Thanksgiving Dance. The dancing costumes of the male and

115. Information given by Smt. Mira Kharhiing, a member of the Seng Khasi.
female dancers are the same as those in the Nongkrem dance. The dancing dress, gold and silver ornaments are very costly, only the rich can afford to have the dancing costumes, those who do not have their own dancing dress, use to borrow from those who have them only for the dancing occasion.

(i) The first day

The dance begins in the afternoon of the first day, the function starts with a prayer by one of the elders of the Seng Khasi, in front of the Seng Khasi Hall. In this prayer, God is invoked for His blessings for prosperity and well being of the land and its people and for the preservation of the Khasi heritage. After the prayer, they all bow three times, and all the people who have gathered there pray together. After this, all shout three times and the male dancers put their swords and flyflabs up and down. After that, the drummers and pipers, the male and female dancers in their dancing costumes, the leading men of the Seng Khasi Organisation go to the Weiking field. When they reach there, the Seng Khasi flag is hoisted, and the dancers perform the first dance known as ka shad Nohkijat, or the inaugural dance to the accompaniment of the music played by the Dhulia. At the Weiking field, a separate raised platform is constructed for the musicians, some chairs are also kept in a covered enclosure for guests and members
of the Seng Khasi. On all sides of the dancing ground, there are people in thousands watching the dance. Snack shops and tea stalls are plenty for the convenience of the people. In the evening, the dancers, musicians, members of the Seng Khasi and all the people return to the Seng Khasi Hall. The male dancers perform ka shad wait or sword dance on the way. When they reach the Seng Khasi Hall, they perform another dance known as ka shad mastieh. The first day comes to an end with a meeting of the members of the Seng Khasi.

(ii) The second day

The second day also starts in the afternoon, with a prayer by one of the Elders of the Seng Khasi. Then the dancers along with the drummers and pipers leave for the Weiking field. In the evening, they come back to the Seng Khasi Hall, the male dancers perform ka shad wait on their way as on the first day. When they reach the Seng Khasi Hall, they perform another dance known as ka shad mastieh. The second day also comes to an end with a meeting of the members of the Seng Khasi.

(iii) The third day

The third day is the final day of the dance, and it is the grandest day, dancers from many parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills come and take part in this dance. Invitees and people in their best and colourful dress, come to the Weiking
field to witness this traditional dance irrespective of community and creed. The dance continues the whole day, and comes to an end in the evening with the unhoisting of the Seng Khasi flag. Then the Dhulia, the male and female dancers and the members of the Seng Khasi go back to the Seng Khasi Hall. The male dancers perform ka shad mastieh in front of the hall as in the previous days. The day comes to an end with the meeting of the members of the Seng Khasi.

(d) Ka Shad Wait and Ka Shad Mastieh

Ka shad wait or sword dance is a male dance, it is a typical warrior dance, in which a male dancer holds a sword in one hand and a shield in another, as if they are assaulting, thrusting and fighting. Ka shad mastieh is another dance by the male dancers which exhibits a type of an old war dance. In this dance, a dancer holds a sword and a flyflab. It consists of stepping backward and forward, bow their heads and drops down their swords and flyflabs and then recede, this process is repeated several times. The dancers in groups face each other charging forward and receding in the above style.\(^{116}\)

In the male dancing apparel, the most important is the sword, the silver quiver, and arrows. This brings the memories of their forefathers who laid down their lives to guard and

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protect the honour, purity and chastity of their womenfolk, whose status is very highly regarded in the Khasi society, and also to protect their land from the enemies. This dance is also held in some other villages, after the sowing season. The hearts of the people are filled with joy and happiness, when this occasion comes, and the parents are proud to see their sons and daughters in the dancing arena once a year. Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem is a unique dance, it has no influence of any other outside culture, the style, movement and rhythm of the dance has its own distinct beauty. The dance has a special significance, it brings together all the people of this state to enjoy and experience a collective sense of comradeship and peace, and also to express gratitude to God for the future, and to thank Him for all the blessings that He showers upon the people in the old year that had passed and to invoke His blessings for the new year.

117. A. S. Khongphai, op. cit., p.135