CHAPTER II

FAMILY

Most of the writings on the indigenous institutions of matriliny and family system have been approached with some sense of wonder or to compare it with the widespread patrilineal systems. Such approaches have prevented the social analysts and the ethnographers from focusing attention on much needed transaction processes of social life as obtained in the matrilineal societies.

Very little was written on the Pnar matriliny and their society. The Pnar matriliny stands out distinct from the Khasi and Garo matriliny of Meghalaya and also from other forms of matriliny found in other parts of the world. The Pnar practice has the natalocal segmented lineage residence and domestic group pattern, while the Khasis and the Garos have the uxorilocal nuclear family residence and domestic group pattern.

2. Ibid. p. 2
The Pnars of the Jowai district have their own social life. The husband is only a father and has nothing to do with the management of his wife's family. He must live and work with his mother and his clan on his right of ownership whatsoever exists only in his mother's line. By Pnar custom the husband does not live with his wife. He remains in the house of his mother or female kur and only visits his wife. His connection with his kur is therefore more intimate than amongst the Khasis. Pnar families make a strong claim to the earnings and property of the sons. The Khasi husband leaves his mother's house, and lives in the house of his wife after marriage. Apart from this difference in respect of self-acquired property, the customs of law of inheritance regarding ancestral property is the same among the Khasis and the Pnars as both follow the matriarchal system.

In the strict sense of the term, family as a conjugal unit is not known to traditional Pnar matrilineal system. The Pnar are a matriarchal people and the traditional household pattern is matrilocality rather than

3. Ibid. p. 3
conjugal. At present there is a tendency for the Pnar wife to insist that her husband stays with her and not with his mother. The influence of modern education and modern way of life with its sophistication is inducing people to adopt nuclear family system.\(^4\).

A Pnar family is an Iing Dei i.e. mother's house. It consists of the mother and her offspring both minor and major, married and unmarried. The father has no place in the family as father.\(^5\).

Those who are working outside their native place are compelled to break the traditional custom. Traditionally the father must reside with the mother and earn for her. But if the mother permits the father can live with his wife and children as in the Khasi Hills.

In the southern border areas of Jowai district, most of the Pnars follow the family system prevalent in the Khasi Hills.\(^6\). That is, the groom migrates to the wife's house and lives with his wife and children.

5. Ibid. p. 22
Here the father is included in the family of his wife and not of his mother. But he cannot own the property unless he earns it. After his death his dead body should go to his mother's house because he belongs to his mother. It may be said that the family system mentioned above is a deviation from the original one. In Jowai and in other ancient localities in the north, the property earned by the husband belongs to the mother and not to his wife. But in the border areas the father may earn for his wife and children. Here the influence of the neighbouring plains are much felt.

A Pnar family refers to a mother and her children. It is like a tree with its leaves, branches and fruits. There are two identities of a family, viz. the mother as the creator, container and sustainer (the tree) and her children (the branches). Unlike patriarchate it is the mother who is responsible to feed her children. Father has no place. The onus of the care of the child's is on the mother. Likewise, children should look after the well-being of the mother first. So the husband is a

7. Ibid
8. In a questionnaire 75% of the questiones maintain that both the mother and father should look after the children.
son first and a father next. The mother has a natural claim and jurisdiction over her sons. She, therefore, cannot give up her claim and so she permits him to visit his wife and live there only for the night. The son is expected to die in the mother's house. A Puja is offered if the son dies in his wife's house. He belongs to the mother in life and also after death. His bones should be preserved along with his mother's. The mother is the custodian of the property. She is the head and author of the family. So not only the household but the other related matters are controlled by her. She may allow her son to work or to supervise her works as a manager. So a Pnar family is known by the name of the mother. The aim of every family is to survive and thrive in men and money. The extinction of a family is considered to be the result of some sins committed by some members of the family. A mother prefers to have more children so that the clan may spread over the hills. Most of the girls wish to have as many children as possible. This tribe has a hidden complex of being outnumbered by the neighbouring people and that is why they are after more children.

9. Gurdon P.R.T. The Khasis p. 32
10. Interview with Rev. Herman age 65 Raliang
A family as defined in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, is "technically a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood or adoption constituting a single household, interacting with each other in their respective social positions of husband and wife, mother and father, son and daughter brother and sister, who share, create and maintain a common culture".11.

The main basis of a family is the tie of marriage between the husband and the wife for the procreation and up-bringing of the offspring. As such, the mother as well as the father constitute the two vital pillars of a family. But in the Pnar family, the father does not belong to the family of his wife or children. He is only a night visitor to his wife's house. Again, he has responsibility towards his mother first and secondly towards the other members of his mother's house. Therefore the conception of a family as mentioned by the Britannica Encyclopaedia is not true of the customary Pnar family.

11. The Encyclopaedia Britannica 1966 Vol. IX p. 54
The Pnar family or rather domestic group comprising of (1) the female head (2) her mother (3) married and unmarried male and female siblings i.e. brothers and sisters. (4) male and female offsprings of married sisters. In this unit the spouses of married sisters and children of the married male matrikins are absent. It is apparent that membership to the traditional Pnar domestic group is by birth\textsuperscript{12}. There is a perfect adherence to the matrilineal rules of descent, succession and inheritance. The rule of residence is natalocal\textsuperscript{13}

Marriage for a Pnar girl, however does create a number of new situations. (1) After marriage one of the initial problem confronting a Pnar women is the need for exclusive privacy in the house. The traditional boat shape Pnar house contain very few rooms, and there is no possibility of adding new rooms with the increasing demand for them. The only solution is the construction of a new residential structure by the married daughters for themselves. (2) The economic imperative and the urge of the married woman to be able to manage and decide about her economic consumption and thus production of material

\textsuperscript{12} Interview with Bah Chisim headman of Pokseh village age 65
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
goods vital for her own subsistence and that of her children. There is a deliberate consideration now of the distribution and exchange aspect of economic goods as in this there is an active involvement of the male head of the domestic group, which under the traditional practice in her brother and the husband under the emerging forms of practice. The overall suggestion is not that the Pnar women after her marriage is in any way deprived or denied her basic economic needs, on the contrary the married daughter continues as before to share the kitchen and economic pursuits of her mother's domestic group. There is a slight distinction (a) between the rural and the urban experiences and (b) between the pattern of trend as observed among the christians and non-christians.

According to the Anthropologists who have attempted to identify the causes which sustain matrilineal system in contemporary societies say that matrilineal system survive in plough areas or wet-rice irrigated areas, they tend to appear in high-land refuges, less on dry rice or wet rice without extensive irrigation and lacking the plough. The argument is that there may be a general

15. Aberle D. 1961 Matrilineal kinship p. 8
tendency for matrilocal units to predominate in matrilineal cultivating societies of lower productivity and for lineage residential units to predominate in cultivating societies of higher productivity\textsuperscript{16}.

According to the political economists and historians the revolution from matriarchy to patriarchy occurs as human society was on the threshold of development of privately owned wealth and class society was in its formative period. Surplus wealth, a by-product of the food-producing revolution, was held by families.

The proponents of the matriarchate hold that the original form of human social organization was the matriarchal clan, a social group emanating from the more obvious role of the female\textsuperscript{17}. They also argue that matriarchy constituted an epoch or stage in human history during which women were powerful and influential, remaining so until a patriarchal revolt reversed the situation\textsuperscript{18}.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Gough K. 1961 Matrilineal Kinship Systems p. 4
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Fluehr Lobban C. 1979. Current Anthropology Vol.20 p.2
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid. p. 2
\end{itemize}
There have been a number of external social environmental factors which have provided stimulii for change in the pattern of Pnar domestic groups. These have been factors associated with the elements of modernization and social change. I shall briefly list them. (1) Increasing opportunity for diversification of economic activities and modes for subsistence, (2) diffusion of education (3) influence of christianity (4) a comparative evaluation of the norms of matriliny, in the face of contact with patrilineal societies and the consequent feeling of inferiority and backwardness associated with the customs of matriliny\(^\text{19}\). Each of these factors individually and in combination with others have created a social environment of emancipation of the Pnar male and released various forms of stimulii motivating the Pnar male to economically and socially assert himself in the conduct of the affairs of the domestic group.

\(^{19}\) Sinha A.P. The Pnar Family-paper delivered at the seminary. Indigenous Institutions of Meghalaya December 3th 1980 p. 14
PLACE OF MOTHER AND FATHER

The origin of matriarchy in the Pnar Hills cannot be traced in certainty. The Pnars might have adopted this institution from their original abode. Another probable origin of this institution may be traced to the Mohenjodaro culture\textsuperscript{20}. The Pnars might have adopted this system from the immigrants of Mohenjodaro who in course of time got Aryanised but the isolated Pnars remained as such. Also remnants of matriarchal culture are still noticeable in the Himalayan region\textsuperscript{21}.

As the actual transition of society into matriarchy or mother-right has nowhere been observed or recorded. The reason for its origin can only be speculated. Matriarchy requires a social justification for its sustenance. This institution might be traced to long absence of male from home during wars, during trade, cultivation and hunting which gave women an opportunity to adopt a dominant position in economic and social matters\textsuperscript{22}.

\textsuperscript{20} Roy Deb. A Tribe in Transition 1931 p. 39
\textsuperscript{21} Stephen Fuchs - The Origin of man and his culture p.136
\textsuperscript{22} Stephen Fuchs - The Origin of man and his culture p.138
Dr. Bareh thinks that matriarchate came into being when there was decrease of males population at a point of time. To preserve the race from extinction, the tribal ancestors devised the principle of mother-right. Bareh also thinks that it may be the result of an agreement among males who resolve to transfer the rights of man to woman. But the social contract as a theory is un-historical anti-evolutionary and anti-dynamic.

A decrease of male population may be considered as the motive behind the evolution of the Pnar matriarchy. The sex ratio of the undivided Khasi and Jaintia Hills revealed that per 1000 males there were 1033 females in 1870. And in 1901 the ratio was 1,118 females per 1000 males.

The decrease of male population may be due to war, hunting, hazards of male avocations, trade commercial pursuits and an apathetic attitude towards male children. The Pnar social geography informs us that Pnars had to depend on external trade with the neighbouring plains.

23. Bareh. H. History and Culture of the Khasi people p.336
24. W.W. Hunter - The statistical Account of Assam p. 215
for their sustenance. The markets in the plains are difficult to negotiate through the jungle tracks. A journey of a hundred mile or so with head-load of merchandise involve a good number of sturdy males. Therefore the long absence of males from the house on economic activities in the face of a dwindling male population sustained the matriarchate and made it socially acceptable.

A Pnar woman is the author of the family, bearer and sustainer of the children, owner of property and a temporal link of the great ancestral mother (Ka lawei) who is in heaven. A house belongs to a woman, particularly the mother’s house. The mother rears up the children. She also controls them when they grow up. But a mother, in case of a difficulty, may consult the wisdom of her mother or may take advice from her brother (Knii). Again in a jungle-life of toil and strain, the hazards of jhum-cultivation, made human labour much valuable to the mother. Therefore she cannot give up her natural right over the children. A husband should give nothing to an alien clan but patrimony only to the

children. He is even debarred from eating or anyway utilising the wife's property, which may facilitate the wife to lay claim over his earnings. A husband is a worker in his mother's house where he acts sometimes as a manager of his mother's estate\textsuperscript{26}. With the consent of the mother, he may spend his earnings on himself but theoretically everything including himself belongs to the mother. A husband may live with the wife after obtaining the consent of his mother or from other maternal relatives. In that case puja must be performed. It is something like severence of ill ties with the mother. But this is generally done when a man approaches old age, because it is against the custom to die in wife's house. So, it is a sentimental issue to an ailing father to live and die amidst his children. It is an escape route from matriarchy. The original custom is that when a father dies the property descends either to the mother or in case of her death, to her inheritor - the youngest daughter. Therefore a Pnar man is known as a son first and then the father of the children\textsuperscript{27}. His duty towards his mother's family is customary and obligatory, but not to his children whom he fathered.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{27} Deb Roy - A Tribe in Transition 1931 p. 42
The son, if eldest in the mother's house, is not only a family manager, but an adviser to the families of his married sisters. He manages the external affairs of his mother's family and extends his advice and help whenever necessary to the married sisters. Here also, his powers are derived from his mother. His powers are not like the powers of a man in a patriarchal family. An unworthy son may be expelled by the mother from the family in case of misbehaviour. The mother, in that case, will take the help and advice from her brother. Therefore, a son, who acts as a maternal uncle (kini) derives his power and authority either from his mother or from his sister or sisters.

Things spiritual should be performed by the mother. This refers to family or household worship and clan-worship. She must sustain her family tree by propitiation of gods or goddesses. Ancestor worship in its vital parts, like offering of food, transportation of bones etc. are performed by the mothers. The belief and philosophy underlying these are that a mother can regenerate ancestral mothers for the well-being of the progeny. Ancestor

23. Ibid. p. 42
29. Ibid. p. 43
worship seems to be the original religious faith of the people. The later additions were the minor spirits of nature, of village, of river. The male activities were external in nature and communal in spirit. So the induction of communal god or goddesses required a community propitiation. These are performed by the male members exclusively. The Vedic or Aryan influences were discernible where the transition from female to male in worship has taken place. The death rites, the community worship and some other elements of oblations and ouja were inducted from alien sources; and like the other patriarchal people, were performed by the males in exclusion of the females. But the original rites of food-offering remained with the mothers.

Here it may be pointed out that the Jaintia Kingdom followed long a pure matriarchal form of lineage to the succession of throne by the youngest daughter of the youngest sister. But, perhaps it is rightly assumed that this form got distorted into a mixture of patriarchate from the neighbouring patriarchal kingdoms (Anom, Bengali, Cachar etc). R.M. Nath holds that the Ahom (Kamarupa) ambassador, Krishok when married the ruling queen Ka Urvara changed the mode of succession from female to male.  

But the source of power remained, perhaps, in the mother. The son was like a manager (King) of his mother's estate. The queen mother was the first priestess (Ka Siem sad) of state religion. She was the power behind the throne. Her consent was necessary for accession to the throne.

This form of female priestess survived in the neighbouring Khasi Hills\(^\text{31}\). The female priestess has some role now also, but curtailed and modified. She now helps the Langdoh in preparing and performing communal sacrifices.

When the males assemble in a village-durbar (council) the issue is generally communal in character. Private disputes are settled, in most cases, privately by the family or by the clan. The conception of a village-durbar might have sprung up from the communal necessity of fighting an enemy, deforesting land for shifting cultivation, worshipping a communal god or gods etc. for some common benefit. The presence of females are superfluous in such a council unless they are directly involved. Again, such assemblage has always the consent and approval of the females (Mothers) of the community. A woman can participate in a village council if she is accused directly of anything.

\(^{31}\) Dr. Bareh - The History & Culture of Khasi people p.260.
The village-council has only communal legislative powers and that too, should not go against any customary laws or practices. The deliberations of such council are mostly confined to the details of worship finance, management of community land etc. No doubt it acts as a village court, but that is also limited by customary laws. So, they could in ancient times punish, fine, banish or outcaste the guilty. But now, its powers are curtailed by appellate courts and so, it is confined mostly to cultural and religious fields.

It may appear that a woman had no right to participate in the acts of legislation, administration and judiciary. The female may not directly be associated with the village court which is communal in character, so long as it does not go against the interest of the woman. But, the male participants are nothing but sons to their mothers. So the mothers along with the customary laws, act as an unwritten constitution or checks on the village-durbar. Otherwise, the village-council might have scrapped many customary practices long ago or might have changed the social pattern including the matriarchy.

32. Ibid. p. 337
The children bear the title of their mothers. The titles or clans as already discussed were evolved out of convention. The necessity of title or clans arose for identification of mother or the root\textsuperscript{33}. The mother should be identified to avoid the dreaded taboo of consanguinous marriage. Children belong to the mother. So the original law of inheritance of property, as I was told, allowed all the children to share the mother's property equally except the youngest daughter for whom double share was allowed\textsuperscript{34}. It may be noted that the mother's ancestral house symbolises a temporal link with the ancestral world. The mother might have many houses, but the ancestral house where she and her mother or grand-mother lived, should go to the youngest sister or in case of a joint family, the youngest sister should stay in that house for performing annual family puja and offerings to the dead. It is this mother's house (Iung Bei) which may be considered as a sacred temple to the other family members. All kinds of worship and ceremony relating to any member of the family living far or near should be performed in this mother's house. Therefore it is reasonable that the youngest daughter who had the customary mandate of all sorts of family functions and festivities must be

\textsuperscript{33} root = Kpoh-womb

\textsuperscript{34} Interview with Sr. Catherine Jowai
provided with extra money for meeting such common family obligations\textsuperscript{35}. Therefore she should get a double share and the unalienable mother's ancestral house. This also confirms the earliest institution of visit-marriage and the living together of married and unmarried brothers and sisters. But in course of time, the nobility of male and female population poverty, quest for new life made the joint family system loose resulting the concentration of ancestral property in the hands of the youngest daughter. She cannot move out because the onus of kindling the family-light is on her. This explains the concept of the Pnar joint-family by the married brothers and sisters. Otherwise, where the sister would live after the death of her mother. There is no point of inheritance by a son\textsuperscript{36}. The son, as such, vanishes with his death. Therefore the division of property for the brothers is meaningless because the property so divided goes back to the sisters after his death. Therefore it is not probable that a married son (i.e. the husband) can inherit any type of ancestral property.

\textsuperscript{35} Deb Roy - A Tribe in Transition 1931 p. 45
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. p. 45
However, he can possess during his life-time the property he earned as his own. But this too, would go to the sisters after his death unless he willed it otherwise. Customarily, the husband cannot live, eat or drink in his wife's house. His children or wife cannot claim his earnings. The children, in turn, inherit whatever possible from the mother.

In the Pnar family system the father is a 'non-entity', whatever he does, is on the authority of the mother. In control of the mother is both extensive and intensive. He does not leave any mark when he dies; his traces are vanished. However, the present trend is changing many traditional customs, prides and prejudices. This may have some effects on the matriarchate as well.

Therefore a father has, in such a system, no other identity except the son of so and so. He has only two roles to play. Firstly a biological role of procreation to his wife; secondly an economic role to his mother. To the mother, his service is essential and material; to the wife and children, it is spiritual. In this predicament of a circumscribed world a husband feels that

37. Ibid. p. 46
he is an alien in his own family. Perhaps this can explain massive drunkenness and indifferent attitude to life among many Pnar men. The society prefers girls to boys and the former are well cared for than the latter. It appears that the Pnar male - personality is a suppressed one; they are more callous and less responsible than the females.

On the other hand the females are visibly active in all spheres of life. A Pnar market is a free place for all females, as buyers and sellers. The family-marketing is done exclusively by the females. Still now the majority of the tribal shop-keepers are females. Even in the outdoor activities, like agriculture, earth-cutting etc.; where manual labour is involved, the females are found active. In woman education, in relation to other plains people, the Pnars are far ahead; sometimes resulting in difficulties in a matrimonial alliances. The males are found less qualified in proportion to the females. The mother-right has made the males a subdued personality.
The system could keep the population under check because the mother is the determining factor and male-aggressiveness in the matter of sex is lacking. Female independence and the system of divorce might have checked the population growth. The Pnar ladies fancy of getting husbands from the patriarchal families. Because the ladies want their husbands to earn and strive for the well-being of the family. In any case, the alien husband so selected is beneficial for the family life. It may be the reason for many plains' men marrying the Pnar girls. The opposite case of the Pnar boys marrying girls from the patriarchal stocks are totally rare.

The good-effects of the matriarchate are its woman-liberty and respect for mothers. Its net gain on the cultural front is its retention of some ancient cultural and customary traits. Alien husband could effect no change in the cultural plane as their death erases all the alien marks from the family. A husband having different faith, language, culture etc. from those of his wife could leave behind no visible mark of him. Only the matriarchate can explain why many primitive practices are still prevalent in the society.
Another good effect of the matriarchate is its soothing effect on society. As the mother is the controller of the family, the role and responsibility of the husband is lesser. He needs not worry for the maintenance of his children. He is not supposed to take any risk for earning. This male passivity might have contributed to the peaceful atmosphere of the society. Men are candid, passive easy and carefree. It may be recalled that it is the best peaceful set up in a primitive society and a good one in an agrarian society as well.

Its bad effects may outweigh the good results. The system made the males reckless, indifferent and a good number of them are drunkards. The males are viewless in life. In education, they are found less attentive, less sensitive in the interest of life and devoid of ambition. Most of them dislike going out of their hilly nest. Majority of the college enrolments are for scholarship or for cheap degree for some government employments. Again, the boys lack idealistic sense and politics to them is nothing but tribalism. Politics or community interest is male's concern as they understand...
it from their collective mind. But a male does not know how or where his future family will be. Marriage may dislodge his political base, if not, it may affect his political career. It is curious to note in this connection that the state of Meghalaya having matriarchate has no female legislator in the state assembly or no female politician of calibre. Therefore politics or state as understood today would be weak, incomplete and meaningless unless the mothers are given predominance in state affairs. The mothers having the foremost social status are the important citizens. This administrative paradox may nullify the attempt of social upliftment.

To a questionnaire, the persons questioned furnished their answers in favour of the matriarchate. They liked it as it is, ancient, traditional and reasonable. Some hold that patriarchate is better but it is not possible for them to go against the ancient custom. Some males gave reasons why the present system should not be changed. They say that incest is the dreadest sin for the Pnar and consanguinous marriage or endogamy is unthinkable. So, before marriage the clan lineage (kur) of the bride and the groom are to be traced. If matriarchy is changed,
the father will come into the scene and the children will follow the title of the father. In that case the sang (sin) from endogamy cannot be avoided. Therefore matriarchy should be followed.

Again it is mother who brought one to the earth after much pangs and reared one up also. Therefore the duty of the son is first to his mother. Love thy mother first. It is explained that this should not mean that the wife should be neglected either. However it is difficult to find a golden mean between the two the mother and the wife.

It may be suggested that charity is love and love is service. Therefore let the son serve his parents, wife and children; giving each one due respect, love and dedication.

HOUSES

The houses especially in the villages as a rule are thatched cottages with plank or stone walls. The floor is raised 2 to 3 ft. high from the ground.  

38. Interview with Rev. Herman - Raliang age 65
The only window is a small opening one side of the house, which admits but a dim light into the interior. The beams are low. The fire is always burning on an earthen or stone hearth in the centre or in a corner of the house. There is no chimney, the smoke finds its exit as best as it can. The fire-wood is placed to dry on a swinging frame above the hearth. The pigs, cows, hens and such animals and birds have separate houses.

The house is divided into three rooms, a porch, a centre room, and a retiring room.39.

**HOUSE IN THE VILLAGES**

In the villages the houses are no longer of the old Khasi type; most of them are of an improved type and some are of modern type. The improved Khasi type are those still constructed with traditional materials or the same materials used for the construction of the old Khasi type, but they are in many ways more hygienic than the traditional ones. It is the general practice among the Pnars to raise the floor of the house above the ground. The floors are almost always made of wooden plank

39. Ibid.
supported by timbers which in turn are supported by stone wall foundations or by upright single stones. The roofs which are supported by wooden rafters are covered with thatch kerosene oil tin sheets or corrugated iron sheets. There are also houses with thatched roofs. In constructing the walls, either split bamboo or ekra plastered with mud or plastered with sand mixed with lime or wooden planks are used. In comparison with the old Khasi type, these improved houses are taller, they have better ventilation through wide windows. In the old type there are generally only one or two rooms, while the improved ones always have more than two rooms. The modern types on the other hand, are constructed according to what is now generally known as the Assam type of houses. These have glass windows, many rooms with proper ventilation and are very comfortable to live in.

Though conforming to the Assam pattern, the shape of the houses vary from one another. There are also two storeyed buildings. There are of all sizes. The number of rooms may also vary from house to house.

40. Ibid.
The Pnar women are generally proud of the neatness, cleanliness and tidiness of their houses.\(^{41}\)

Right from the footpath leading to the house across the compound and also within the house, everything is kept neat and clean. In the front courtyard of many houses, flower beds are found. In the house, especially in the front room where friends or outsiders are entertained, the sitting arrangements either by benches, chairs or stools are systematically arranged.

Pictures, photos and portraits are hung on the walls as part of the decoration. In some houses friends are entertained in the veranda where sitting arrangements are always provided. Bed rooms are furnished with bedsteads made of wood over which a neatly kitted mat of bamboo is placed before other bed sheets are spread. It is in these rooms that clothes are kept in wooden or iron boxes. Sometimes the big basket in which paddy is stored is found in these rooms. But the most important

41. Ibid.
room in a Pnar house is the kitchen. It is provided with a hearth and the washing place. In the washing place which is made of big slabs of stones or cementsed, water containers made of brass and carefully polished stand in rows. There are other kind of containers such as kerosene oil tins, bamboo pipes and porcelain vessels. The fireplace in different houses shows that though the form and shape of houses are no longer of the traditional Pnar type, yet they cannot altogether throw away their past. Here is something typical in the floor of the kitchen where a space is left out about four foot square without plank covering. This portion is made of earth and stones, raised right up from the ground level up to the level of the room. Three stones are fixed in such a way that some space is left between each one of them, of these three stones, the bigger one forms the back and the other two the front part of the fireplace. In this way wood which is the common fuel used for cooking can be placed into the fireplace from three sides i.e. front and sidewise. The function of the stone is to support the vessel over the fire. The peculiarities of

42. Information collected from Jowai.
43. Ibid.
these fireplaces are that they have no chimney or outlet for the smoke and they are always near the centre of the kitchen. Over the fireplace there is a hanging platform where small knitted bamboo splits and sometimes meat, salt and other things are kept for drying. There is no ceiling and inside in pitch dark due to the effect of smoke. Instead of a ceiling, straight bamboo or poles are kept in a horizontal position across the room over which maize and other things are dried. The kitchen walls are provided with shelves where vessels and plates are arranged or other household articles are kept. On the shelves the plates are kept spread out and exposed to the sun⁴⁴. Potato, rice and other things for consumption are kept in this room either inside knitted bamboo baskets or in wooden boxes. In some houses, tools also are kept in this room.

However there is no dead uniformity. In bigger houses where there are many rooms, the above arrangement or even a better one is followed but in small houses with one or two rooms the above arrangement is adjusted according to the size of the house. Whatever the

⁴⁴. Ibid.
differences between these houses are, two important things are always common i.e., the Pnar hearth and the neatness and cleanliness in which the houses are kept.

In olden days the Pnars considered nails as something wrong to be used in the houses but now-a-days they are not so particular.

The Pnars plaster the space in front of the house with red earth and cow-dung, this custom being probably a remnant of Hindu influences. The Pnars at Nartiang offer sacrifice after the construction of the house. They offer one fowl for U Biskuram (Biswa karma) and one fowl for Ka Siem Synshar. The feathers of the fowls are affixed to the centre post of the house, which must be of a dieng sning, a variety of the oak. If the walls of a house have been plastered with mud then it is a sign that the householder has an enemy. The plastering is a preventive of fire which is in these hills a common form of revenge.

45. Deb Roy - A Tribe in Transition 1981 p. 159
Now-a-days the houses of well to do people are built after the modern style with iron roofs, chimneys, glass windows and doors. In Jowai the well to do traders have excellent houses of the European pattern as in Shillong. They use also curtains and furnitures.

In some villages there are small houses called keksuid (spirit houses). In these houses offerings to the spirits are made. In some places they have separate bachelor's quarters, like the Nagas and the Garos.

**VILLAGES**

The Pnars do not build their villages on the extreme summits of hills, but a little below the top, generally in small depressions, in order to obtain some protection from the strong winds and storms which prevail in these hills at certain times of the year. They build their houses fairly close to one another. The Pnars seldom change the sites of their villages, to which they are very much attached, where, as a rule, the

46. Interview with Donbok T. Laloo, author of Ka Monshiri U Hynniew trop Shillong.

47. Narrated by the people of Puriang.
family tombs are standing and the Mawbynna or memorial stones.

During the Jaintia rebellion the village of Jowai was almost entirely destroyed, but as soon as the rebellion was over the people returned to the old site and rebuilt their village. Similarly, after the earthquake, the ancient village sites were not abandoned in many cases but the people rebuilt their houses in their former positions. There is no such thing as a specially reserved area in the village, all the people rich and poor live together.

To the democratic Pnar the idea of the doloi living apart from his people would be repugnant. In the vicinity of the village, often are to be seen dark woods of oak and other trees. These are the sacred groves where they worship the deity of the village Jryngkew U basa. These groves are taboo, and it is an offence to cut trees therein for any purpose other than performing funeral obsequies.

48. Ibid.
There are areas set apart in the villages for durbar, dances etc. The pigs run about unchecked. They eat everything. They are usually country pigs or Pnar pigs, black in colour. Now-a-days potatoes and other vegetables are grown in the plateaux of the villages. They are protected against animals.

At times we find the path leading to the village barricaded with bamboo to protect against demons. They sacrifice a monkey and nail its skull over the barricade to appease the demon (khlam)

MUSIC

The Pnars of Meghalaya are all musical minded. Their radio songs are much liked by all. Their musical ear is so good that they can readily pick up tune and melody whether indigenous or foreign. They can handle any musical instrument, however complicated with little training and practice. 49.

49. Ibid
A porter treading a lonely path or a carpenter absorbed in his work will go on whistling tunes which are often very pretty. With Hindi film songs becoming popular, they will render any hit-song perfectly and with ease.

Music whether sung or played on the Pnar instruments like Tangmuri or Ka Sharati in part of any social occasion however solemn or gay. Music is in the core of the people.

A funeral dirge on bamboo flute adds much to the solemnity of the scene as a funeral procession slowly progresses towards the cremation ground.

A happy-working cowboy while tending his herd or while resting gaily on the top of the hill would play his favourite flute pouring out beautiful tunes which speaks of the green meadows and pine trees and of the natural beauties in all its glory.

50. Chowdhury J.N. The Khasi Canvas 1978 p. 92
It is worth mentioning here that the Pnars have adopted the harmonium and tabla which they play with considerable skill. The influence of Hindusthani music assimilated to their own indigenous musical notes, has helped creating a distinct school of Jaintia music. The proximity of Jaintia Hills to the plains of Sylhet contributed to the Jaintia musical progress.

A popular type of vocal music known as kieh-ki in Pnar is sung in groups without instruments. The popular composition consists of two stages of two lines each. The first line which is a combination of a cluster of words having no meaning at all is employed to rhyme with the second line which carries real meaning 51.

Vocal music is associated with archery, the national game of the Pnars. A victorious party, proceeding homeward after the days competition, indulge in this form of music. A male voice gives the lead and others join him in chorus.

51. Ibid.
Jokes are hulecl at each other through songs,
composed on the spot and joined in chorus by members of
each party kyndei nea ka ladei. This form of music with
the addition of flutes and drums is also a feature of
the Pnar Laho dance 52.

The folk songs of the Pnars are however, the real
repository of their cultural traditions. They are varied
according to seasons and festivals. The folk songs are
generally in praise of the scenic beauty of the hills,
the murmuring streams, green valleys, waterfalls, paddy
fields as they turn golden with ripened crops. There
are also examples of occupational songs like harvest
songs, rich in local variations.

We must take note of the predominant influence of
the western form of music on the modern Pnar society.
As a rule, the field of Pnar music has been a masculine
preserve. However a number of Pnar women have established
a place for themselves in this field. Some of the most
popular composers of Pnar music and lyrics are worth
mentioning here. These are Kong Listrimai Syiemlich,

52. Interview with Dr. Ngenmon Sutugna M.B.B.S.
U Siken Swer with humorous songs, U Siken Syiemlieh adopted folk-tales to music, the Wahlang family of Labun, Edith Ermina and U Adolf Denitonel, U Hedroneal Nongleit a good composer etc 53.

U Chesterfield Khongwir whose compositions are sung by his wife Helen Giri. The couple have been on a tour to Germany in their professional capacity. U Bernard Kyndiah an accomplished compose of Pnar music and a very capable performer on the piano and violin. Vivana Modi War and Marvellous Massar are two very gifted singers of the Pnar songs.

The Pnars follow the wise saying - He who sings prays twice. Therefore they sing to express their happiness and also in moments of sadness 54.

**MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS**

The Pnars have different kinds of musical instruments 55.

There are several kinds of drums viz. ka nakra, which is a large kettledrum made of wood having the head covered

53. Ibid
54. Interview with Bah Peter Sullai age 42 Jowai
55. Chowdhury J.N. The Khasi Canvas 1978 p. 94
with deer-skin; ka ksing which is cylindrically shaped drum, ka ksing kynthei takes its name from the fact that this drum is beaten when women (kynthei) dance, ka padian, a small drum with a handle made of wood, katasa, a small circular drum. The Pnar drums are nearly always made of wood, not of metal nor earthenware.  

Ka duitara is a guitar with muga silk strings, which is played with a little wooden key held in the hand. Ka maryngod is an instrument much the same as the last but is played with a bow like a violin. Ka marynting is a kind of guitar with one string played with the finger. Ka tangmuri is a wooden pipe, which is played on some occasions. Ka kynshaw or shakuriaw are cymbals made of bell metal; ka sharati or ka shingwiang, is a kind of flute made of bamboo. This instrument is played at cremation ceremonies and when the bones and ashes of a clan are collected and placed in the family tomb or mawbah. This flute is not played on ordinary occasions. There are other flutes which are played on ordinary occasions. Now-a-days the modern instruments such as harmonium, tabla and cornet are also played.  

56. Ibid. p. 94  
57. Interview with Rev. Bacciarello age 70 Mawlai.
The Pnars have many games but their principal game is archery. The real time is from January to May. The men of one village challenge those of another. There are men on both sides called nong khan khnam (he who stops the arrow). These men, by uttering spells and reciting the shortcoming of the opposite side, is supposed to possess the power of preventing the arrows of the opposing party hitting the mark. Before the match commences conditions are laid down by the umpires of both sides, such as (a) the day on which the contest is to take place (b) the place of the meeting (c) the number of arrows to be shot by each archer (d) the distinguishing marks to be given to the arrows of either side (e) the amounts of the stakes on each side (f) the number of times the competitors are to shoot on the day of the archery meeting etc.

The targets are generally small bundles of grass called U skum about 1 ft. long by 4 inches in diameter, fastened on a small pole. Targets are also made from

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53. Ibid.
the root of a plant called ka soh pdung. The distances from the point where the marksmen stand to the targets are some 40 to 50 yards. Each side has its own target, the different targets being placed in a line, and the competitors taking up their position in a straight line at right angles to the line of fire, and facing the targets; each side in turn then shoots at its own target.59

Early in the morning of the day fixed for the contest the umpire of each side stands near the targets. The umpire then repeats all the conditions of the contest, invokes the aid of the primeval woman (ka mei ka nong hukum). The umpire goes through certain incantations freely referring to the many faults of the opposite side, and pours water at intervals in front of the target. This business lasts about two hours. Then they exhort the competitors to their respective sides and the match commences amidst loud snouts. Every time there is a hit there are loud cheers, the competitors leaping high into the air, the umpire muttering their incantations all the while. At the end of each turn the number of hits are

59. Ibid.
counted by representatives of both sides. At the close of the day the side with the greatest number of hits wins the match, the successful party returning home, dancing and shouting\textsuperscript{60}. The young women admirers of both sides assemble and dispense refreshments to the competitors, taking a keen interest in the proceedings. The practice of betting is common. Those who prepare the targets get presents from both sides especially from the victorious ones. The range of the arrow shot is between 150 to 180 yards.

At times a very tall bamboo is planted in the ground and well oiled. A silver ornament or a few rupees are placed on the top of the bamboo. Any one who can climb the greasy pole gets the reward. A leg of a goat or that of a pig fixed at the top of this pole would render the pastime identical with the greasy pole.

Other games are wrestling, tug-of-war with a piece of stick, the two combatants placing their feet one against the other; butting like bulls, long jump, high jump;

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
flying kites and marbles for boys.

The modern culture, civilization and education are gradually influencing and taking deep roots in the Pnar society.