Chapter V

Cultural and artistic significance

The art of these tribes is essentially an art where utilitarian importance is the first aspect of developing their art such as weaving, basket craft (Fig5.1 A & B), house building, making agricultural implements and weapons out of basic indigenous materials. They used natural products such as bamboo to build the four walls of a house and hay for making the roofs but the weaving structure of the house is an art work, as it is woven with plain weave to twill weave as design pattern (Fig.5.2). Design, patterns and symbols is vital for these tribes.

The Bengali scripts (before the coming of the British) were adopted for official purposes as well as the medium of expression, but they had never followed the religion and culture of their neighbors in the plains. The religion they follow is both theistic and animistic though at the beginning, it was apparently monotheistic. The tradition says that in the beginning the supreme God (Blei Nongthaw) alone was worshiped. Animistic beliefs comprised cult of fertility worship of mountains and river spirits, divination, glorification of ancestors and other allied elements. Therefore, in villages in the interior area the design, pattern and symbols is still a vital way of stating their identity. A design symbol represents a certain identification created by one group of people from another group. Especially when it comes to illiterate society as these designs, patterns and symbols can express and give meaning to selected objects, identity, nationality, dominance or allegiance. Sometime these designs can also be the prerogative of certain society, such as religion and aristocracy or government institution who wants to prelude the uneducated.

The Khasis and Jaintias design patterns restrained to a particular format when compared to ones used by other surrounding tribes; as they believe that each symbol has a meaning and all cannot be used in the costumes. Therefore motifs, symbol,
design and colour patterns are incorporated with care in their traditional textiles (Fig.5.3). They believed all forms of nature have its own character so using them without proper care will cause negative effect on the person wearing it. They also believe that all colours cannot be used by men as can be used by women.

A pattern is a style of decoration which relies on the repetitions of certain elements to produce the whole; this can include animal motifs, geometrical structures and floral motifs. Geometrical motifs having many ways it can be repeated as it can reduced to mathematical formulae as required to be wove in a loom. The pattern symmetries are formed initially from a single motif, the smallest unit possible to make the pattern. This fundamental unit can be rotated, mirrored and glide-reflected, the end result producing a single unit cell, which is always in the form of a hexagon or a parallelogram. The fundamental unit must have a shape that fits together with itself, and it is the repetition of this unit that forms the overall pattern (Fig5.4). A motif is not the same as a symbol, but a symbol can be used as a motif. A design is defined as a plan or pattern from which a pattern can be made. There is always an initial idea behind a design because its repeat is always seen in well arranged in the pattern.

Symbols, patterns, motifs and designs

A symbol represents certain concepts or qualities that one group of people wishes to convey to another group without the needs of words or writing. Symbols can express and give meaning to selected objects or to concepts of spirituality, identity, nationality, dominance or allegiance at times symbols can be prerogative of certain sections of society such as aristocracy and religious or government institutions who wish to preclude the uneducated. These tribes have a Siar Rynkoh meaning Cock as their religious symbol which we see used on a flag of the Seng Khasi, painted with white on a red dyed cloth (Fig.5.5). The cock is a religious symbol and it has a special place as a sacrificial offering. According to a tradition, once the world was plunged into darkness, when the sun refused to come out from her hiding place at a cave called Ka Krem Lamet Ka Krem Latang. A cock was used as a messenger to
persuade the sun to come out. With the cock’s crowing the Sun repaired and there was light again. For this reason the cock has a special place as he is considered as a mediator between God and man. Signs are read out from the entrails of the cock when they are sacrificed. The Cock is also seen a design embroider on the Jymphong the jacket worn by the male.

A pattern is a type or style of decoration with relies on the repetition of certain elements to produce the whole. It can include decorative figures, symbols or combination of marking that occurs naturally or by chance. Many patterns contain geometrical elements, and can be reduced to mathematical formulae that correspond to the patterns that occur in the natural and scientific world. There are only seventeen ways in which a pattern can be repeated. The pattern symmetries are formed initially from a single motif, the smallest unit possible to make pattern. This fundamental unit can be rotated, mirrored and glide reflected, the end result producing a single unit cell, which is always in the form of a hexagon or a parallelogram. The fundamental unit must have a shape that fits together with itself, and it is the repetition of this unit that forms the overall pattern or lattice. This format of designing is seen in the Khor silk cloth used for turban (Fig. 5.6).

A motif is not the same as the symbol, but the symbol can be used as a motif. The motif may be anything from a single flower to a geometrical shape. It is possible to use a single motif as decoration, or several motifs can be combined to make a repeator overall pattern.

A design is defined as a plan or pattern from which a picture or an object can be made. In this context the word pattern means something that can be copied. There is always an initial idea behind a design, which corresponds to the end purpose for which the design is intended. To some extent, and especially in the world of textiles, the design will be affected by the limitations of the particular craft. In the context of weaving, geometric patterns are easier to work than pictorial designs, where a series of steps, however small the scale, are needed to form the curves.

These tribes have live a life of uncertainty as they have migrated from place for livelihood, so there is a fear dominance or aggression by their neighbours or
superior powers, it is essential that the group stays together\textsuperscript{113}. Textile is also one hope of survival. Some tribal societies are known only by the difference in their dress or by the colours they adopt, and although these attributes are not symbols as such, they stand as means of identifying the particular group and often provide a name by which the tribe is known. (Fig. 5.7).

*Khla* meaning Tiger is also used as one of the motif in the costumes *Dhara* especially worn by the Female of the Royal family members as well as turbans by Khasi men during the dance festival. The costume worn by the Royal female dancers has an overall tiger pattern (Fig. 5.8) and sometimes mirror imaged with that of a peacock. But the Tiger pattern is seen only on the borders of the non Royal female dancer’s costumes. Tiger has an important place in their folk stories of the Khasi, to where one clan is literally called Nong-Kla meaning tiger people. They stay away from the other clan. It is believed that at night one can here the tiger groan literally in the village where the Nong-Kla resided.\textsuperscript{114} Tiger being a powerful animal believed to be found in abundant in these hills was respected beside feared. These tribes believed living in harmony with nature so they never hunted a tiger. Using tiger motif is to show strength and power the characteristic of the animal so it is restricted to be Royal attire. But during the research it's known that the silk cloth bearing the tiger and peacock motif all over too long time to be woven and so very expensive for a layman to afford\textsuperscript{115}. There few weavers in Assam who weave the traditional costumes of the Khasi and Jaintia tribes. Who have not recorded their trade affairs, so not much is known about whom or how many weavers knew to weave their special all over patterned costumes.

It is seen that the daily worn costumes have no motifs, symbols and design but only a geometrical patterns are of simple checks and strips. The colour combination seen earlier that is before the coming of the British was red and black, black and white, red and yellow and white and red. Since the colours used were natural colours, therefore the combinations were limited.

*Sala* or cotton pagri was put on by young men\textsuperscript{116}. And men of the middle age put on a turban of eri and cotton. Ruling officials like the dalois, myntris, basan use silk
design pagris coined *Khor* as seen in Fig.3.20. Whereas the cotton and eri pagris were white and had no patterns on them as seen on Fig.1.2. It was only the way of draping it on their head that was unique. They believed that while the person was alive the pagri should be wrapped clockwise and when the person dies it is wrapped anticlockwise during his funeral\textsuperscript{117}. The pagris have different styles in which they are wrapped depending on the region and the age of the person wearing them, yet on factor that remains common amongst them is the interlocking of the cloth in such a manner that the pagri takes shape of a cap and does not open up when removed from the head and hence can be re-worn many times although it is not stitched.

Silk dhotis were worn by the ruling officials and are similar to the Dhara or Nara worn by the women. The motifs and design patterns are also similar i.e. floral, geometrical and animal motifs. Some designs seem to point at a far eastern origin showing similarity with Chinese patterns. We could also presumed that the *Khor* (a silk turban) could also have been woven in Assam since it has got the similar far eastern animal motifs or it might have been imported from China directly since the Khasis had trade relations with them as seen in Fig.3.20. The motifs and design patterns on the *Dhara* are specified by these tribes and would not except if the Assam Weaver added any new design or made any changes on the size of the borders. The Jaintias were flexible\textsuperscript{118} and accepted any new designs and patterns on their *Muga or Nara*.

A blending of myth history provides clues to the origin of their art and craft. There is mentioned that *U Sarmoh* and *U Sorphin* were the first men who used iron implements especially axes, swords and choppers while cutting down a *Diengiei* tree\textsuperscript{119}. *U Barikor* and *U Karikor*, two brothers were the first renowned craftsmen who wove colossal baskets and prepared handles, notched cane threads for axes and swords. *U Shyngkrem Bania Syiem* is said to have been the first goldsmith. In fact became the King of Goldsmiths. *U Khadar Kamar* (twelve blacksmiths) and *UKhyndai Kamar* (nine blacksmiths) formed the first team of blacksmiths who had shown a great degree proficiency in the smelting of iron and the manufacture of several iron implements.
Earlier, Neolithic and Megalithic culture prevailed in society. In observing the megalith, the *U Maw – Shata* at Mawsmai, we remark from a crown belonging to postmegalithic culture. It symbolically represents the power and royalty of the *Syiem* (chief). Similarity with such a crown can be observed in the female Khasi dancer. The many menhirs, dolmens, dissolith, basins and even the stone utensils, vessels and containers used for the commemoration of certain events connected with the cremation of the death and the performance of the post funeral ceremonies are further note worthy and can be appreciated for their fine artistic rendering in shapes, sizes, form and arrangement. Besides, its height which towers to the sky, structure etc, suggest a monumental quality which is compatible to its usage.

As remarked earlier the Khasis made weapons of iron and steel, combined with other several crafts for warfare and self protection, namely, swords shields, spears,scabbards, bars, bats, rakes, guns etc. All these show traces of design, indicating again their interest in decorative art. The geometrical designs which we see on them have also a close proximity to those on the ornaments.

*Shun* or Lime vessels of *Rupa* or silver, *Rynnong* or brass, copper and even *Ksiar* orgold provided with *Jingtap* or lids and *Kynjri Khongwain* or twisted chains, equallydecorated were also manufactured in this region.

Besides, metal and stone, the Khasis have will as well as bamboo for the making of wooden dishes and mugs for drinking. Bamboo mats and other objects daily need show excellent artistic skill. In all this items the decorative sense of the Khasi comes clearly to the fore. Some of these designs reflect themselves in the jewellery. For example *the Khaila Khoh*, a conical shaped earring takes its form and name from one of the bamboo basket, which is often used for carrying things.

Pottery was once a wide spread industry. Urns, pots, wares of different shapes and sizes were made for functional purposes, example, for cooking and preservation of food and religious ceremonies and rites. We also find that clay pot have been
decorated with floral designs on their surface. Also here we find pattern which may have influenced the decorative approach towards the jewellery.

Ornamental art and jewellery in particular with the Khasi tribe also developed because of their interest in self beautification. They have actually passed from the rudimentary phases of the basic needs towards the realization of aesthetics aspects in life. Jewellery is one of the oldest forms of decorative art. It has been said that jewellery assures a deep human need for self beautification.

Also the Khasis soon showed love, appreciations and interest for jewellery and patronized this art with great Endeavour. Gold and silver are the two main material needs for their ornaments. The 24 caret pure gold is exclusively used. Let’s note that the word *Ksiar* is an indigenous term of the Khasis for gold. According to some opinion, they did not find gold in the region itself, but other statements contradict the prior opinion.

Dr. Oldham’s writing on gold washing has stated, ‘I obtained distinct traces of gold although in very minute quantity, quite too trifling to admit of its profitable extraction. These hills, or the continuation of the same ridge to the eastward, may prove to the source of gold found in the rivers of the Assam Valley.

Another writer Dr. P.C. Choudhury notes, “The washing of gold from the rivers and the smelting of the iron from rocks particularly in the Khasi hills, have been practiced for long and the non Aryan elements had a great deal to contribute to the development of these teachings.”

The excavation of gold was believed to be carried on in the past on the northern and central regions, whereas it was more limited in the southern area. According to the Khasi legend, *Ka Pah Syntiew*, the first queen of Shillong, of divine origin, is introduced ornamental arts in which music and dance become largely oriented.

Many other legendary tales suggest excavation of gold grains and dust. Mawpun in Sohra (Cherrapunjee), Nongspung, Maram and other kingdoms are pointed at. The
ancient Bhoi Syiem (chief) and many other evidently possessed large gold reserves. Many of them had gold Mohurs the whole year through for the making of the jewellery and minting their own coins. The Khasis use jewellery as part of their daily life. Always we will find that never the neck, hands and ears are left bare. Either a simple gold earring or a pendant or a bracelet adorns the women. The symbolic attributions of the jewelleries are also interesting to know because it complements the traditional costumes as a whole.

In ancient times, when man began to conceive of abstract principles expressing the relationship existing in the physical world, he gave graphic expression in abstract geometric forms. These forms were abstract since they represented intangibles or ideas, rather than natural organic or inorganic forms. The square, cylinder or circle and triangle are examples such geometric abstraction. These with variations, were used in designs and decorations of the Khasis.

The economy of primitive and folk societies like that of the Khasis was based on hunting and agricultural and gathering pastoral. So it is not surprising to find that the importance of nature on their society led the people to utilize natural forms in design. Besides being decorative pieces of art, the jewellery also carries symbolic meanings. The simplicity of the forms indicates however the simple life style and nature of the people. Even the advance of technology did not change the taste and attitude of the people at large. The daily traditional textile and jewellery which they often wear are even far more simplified than the dancing ornaments but still maintain the basic bold geometrical structure and reference from nature.

The crown called Ka Pansngiat is peculiar of the Khasi tribes; it is made of gold or silver (Fig 5.9 & 5.10). It consists of a circular form which has pointed structures in curve shape. The topmost part resembles the cockscamb. Once again the importance of the cock is enhanced. These designs can also be seen in the Dhara. Sometimes also these pointed structures can be said to represent hills and mountains. On the lower part of the crown, diamond shaped designs of floral with are used. Small
ordinary red stones are seen in laid on the crown to further decorate it and enhancing the silvery colour of the crown (Fig.5.11).

The Lasubon which is actually a rare of sweet perfumed flower which grows in the forest has been represented symbolically through silver Lasubon, which is made to be affixed to the crown. On it a bunch of colored flowers are attached for the purpose of decoration. Its design is cone shaped in structure and has silver chain with pendants hanging on its body called Iop Iop, serving also as accompaniment to the rhythm of the body (Fig.5.12). We can say that these pendants help to maintain the rhythm for the dancers. These silver chains may have floral designs, simplified fish, leaf motifs etc. attached to its endings. In some cases, the topmost or the apex of the Lasubon has extra protruding structures of different kind of designs with pendants hanging out of them, and while in some remain very plain and undecorated. The Lasubon as well as the crown on the whole signifies chastity, purity and sovereignty of a woman in the Khasi society. The uniqueness of this flower and the scent it produces runs parallel to the status and moral behavior of the women. On the crown at the back, there is another symbolic design of a hair bun in silver, round like a ball and decorated incised lines.

A natural hair bun (which acts also as a support for the crown) is made behind the head and the ending of hair bun is not entwined so as to be attached to another ornament called the Ksai Khyllong (Fig.5.13) which consists of a very fine silver thread whose lower portion has a design of a triangle. To this, three main pendants (hung in chains) in a hollow coned structure hangs from the base of the triangle one on the extreme left and one in the middle. In some cases we can also find many smaller triangular pendants hanging between the intervals of these three main (big) cone shaped structures. And again addition of a number of other floral motif pendants is further attached round the base of these conical forms.

Most of the big triangles have been decorated with horizontal lines and filled up with tiny a circular design which visually does give the effect like a honey comb or a net.
Variety of floral designs and also a kind of a bird symbol, inlaid with red and green stones also form a part of the design on the three side of the triangle.

*U Kpieng Paila Ksiau* this ornament is considered to be one of the most precious possessions of the Khasis (Fig. 5.14A & B). Both men and women wear it, but the number of strands of the necklace varies between them. The male dancers wear only a single strand, whereas the females can wear three strands. It is made of orange colour coral beads and gold balls which is actually a hollow sphere of lac with gold covering. Both of these two different materials are arranged alternatively and to avoid friction between them, a red cloth called as *Banat Saw*, lies in between each of them. Moreover, this red colour cloth also enhances the richness of the yellow gold and the orange colour coral.

Coming back to these three stands, we can also find differences in there. It consists of *Kpieng Heh* or *Kpieng Khmat* the biggest one in size, secondly, *Kpieng Pdeng* slightly smaller in size (in the middle) and lastly *Kpieng Rit* which is the smallest\(^{131}\). (Fig. 5.15)

The biggest ones consists usually of 10 pieces of gold balls, 11 pieces of coral and 22 red Banat, the smaller (middle) has around 8 pieces of gold, 9 corals and 18 Banat and the last one will have the lesser number obviously.

These balls are attached together by a thread which runs through the tiny holes in the middle of the beads. The endings of this thread are then attached to a silver ornament which got ring on one end so as to be fixed to the bigger silver ending. When worn altogether they cover the chest area which symbolically can be referred once again as protection, respect, and modesty of womanhood.

Besides this significance, the *Paila Ksiau* also carries some other meanings according to Mr. Donbok, T. Laloo, a well known Khasi writer and researcher. He says that, ‘the gold beads mark the wealth and prosperity of the clan, the love, respect for all the elders, ministers, the priest and the king dom. Whereas the coral ones points to the
*Syiemship* (chief-ship) who is the guide and protector of the people and in whom the people can look upon in all times of sorrow and happiness. The thread indicates the whole Khasi community and the *Red Banat* which is made of cloth, signifies the duties of every citizen in maintain a good relationship. The silver pieces at the endings of the thread point to the *Sem Sad*, the ancestral Queen at Nongkrem, who provides shelter and takes care over all her people’s needs as well as linking the people and the world and who acts also as a communicator between God and man through her passive involvement in the religious duties and rites.

Another kind of *Paila Ksiar* called *Manduli Ksiar* was also used in the Bhoi areas. It is similar to the *Paila Ksiar* except that an extra solid, (previously in a drum shape, later alter into a crescent moon shape) is attached, hanging in the middle or lower portion of the necklace, (right at the middle of the chest). This type of ornament has also been largely used by the Ahom kings of Assam and is familiar in all parts of Assam, called *Gejra*. It was actually fond at a village at Shnong Lyngdoh (Bhoi district) and considered to be a very precious treasure of the people. According to geographical divisions, it has been referred to by different names. *U Menjili* in some other places.

*Kynjri Tabah Shynrang and Kynthei* (Silver chains for male and female) this is another bunch of silver chains used by both male and female[132], but its difference lies in the way it is worn (Fig.5.16). For the male it is worn across the shoulders and has a cross section both at the back and in front. In the middle where the cross is formed, there lay a number or one single squarish oblong or round block which has beautiful designs on them (Fig.5.17). These designs may be either intricate floral patterns or animals like birds. At times with incised linear quality are seen. We can also find that the repetition of one corner of the pattern to complete the whole design block or area. Red stones are used for inlay works. The chain which makes the entire ornament consist of three strands of flat floral shapes. The middle of it comprises of a big plain circular shape with many tiny Petals.
This *Kynjri Tabah* for men symbolically brings out the warrior in him, in the way it has been placed across the chest, shoulders and back. It indicates glory and power.

As for the women folk, the essential pattern is alike to the man’s, except that it is worn around the neck and falls up to the waist front (Fig.5.18). It is usually in three bunches as the man’s. It has also a decorated square flat plane at the back below the nape of the neck. This ornament for the females suggests modesty and dignity. *Shan Ryndang or Kanopad*: (necklace male and female). A semi-circular plate of either gold or silver for both male and female. It is constituted of oblong pieces of gold beads and small corals, for men (Fig.5.19). This ornament is meant to balance the neck by acting as a support, so as the neck does not drop down while dancing. We see most in case of the female, a ball or dome like structures which resemble the helmet of the Muslim warriors and pagodas of the Persian architecture. Decoration of flower motifs protrudes from the mid surface of the plate to form design. The middle portion of the dome is inlaid with red stone and cone shaped pendants, also worn as earrings, extended from these and from the ground level too lastly, sharp triangular or pyramidal designs project from the edges of the plate to give an extra charm to the ornament. Other type of ‘*Kanopad*’ (Fig.5.20) designs are only decorated with floral designs, elevated from the surface of the plane to have a volume of its own. Often they are decorated with chains and tiny pendants.

The posture of the female’s the neck embellished with this ornament reminds us again of her position in society. Self respect and also respect to male counterpart is, strengthen by the fact that she always keeps her eyes down when dancing. *Mahu* and *Tad* are the two cylindrical silver ornaments worn by females on their hands. Their sizes as well as the placement on the hands differ. *Mahu* the bigger one is worn just above the wrist and extends halfway near the lower arms, (Fig.5.21) whereas, the *Tad* is smaller in size and worn in the upper arms (Fig.5.22). It resembles the *Bajuban*. Both these ornaments are seen in several parts of Indian continent as depicted in many sculptures of old civilization and periods. Both ornaments have got some intricacy but decorated with simple curves in relief. A pointed pyramidal structure also use in the *Mahu* or *Kanopad*, rises above the
surface. Visually it resembles the skin texture of the jackfruit. Along with floral motifs in relief, we also find inlaid red stone. In the Tad, the design is normally not so heavy. Low relief, kinds of dots, forms a particular pattern. A big cone shaped structure is also added so as to conceal the joint when they wear the ornament. It resembles the pagoda of a temple or mosque adorned with interesting design. In some cases we also find floral relief in place of the dotted design.

These ornaments once again reveal the power and strength endowed upon the women, as acknowledged by society itself. They may not represent as much her physical strength as his spiritual energy, as a protector and simultaneously protector of the social and cultural structures.

**Syngkha or Ki Khadu**: These are golden bracelets for women worn on the wrist of the hand, just below the ‘Mahu’. They form the smallest hand ornament. Intricate stylized floral designs beautify and enhance the hand decorations. Another, similar type, called the Khadu Khir is worn usually by men.

**Ka Ksiar Lang Kyrneng** or gold earrings of many types for both men (Fig. 5.23) and women in the shape of books, plugs, and pendants and chains are worn profusely. The principal types are the ear brackets, the drops hung down with the chains. In their simplest forms they are ring shaped. Of these **Ka Ksiar Lang Kyrneng - a gold earring form the most important type of female earring** (Fig. 5.24). They are plugged at the ear lope coiled upward to the top for the ear, then lowered down to the position near the lope, a helix with a pagoda being attached. Shaped like a LangKyrneng, a tiny golden flower is the most valued one. It is heavy, rounded almost with many pendants hanging down. The body too has got incised lines which runs from the centre to the circumference ad tiny dot relief designs cover the whole semi-rounded ball forming textures.

Another earring called **Khaila Syntiew**, like the Lyngkyneng is also used (see plate no 17) its model is more intricately designed, which from the lope, a chain is towered to the top of the ear and worn round to another end, where it is plugged, then pinned to the lope where it is tugged with an ornamental disc which resembles a typical
flower locally found and lowered from the lope and ends down in a drop. Men’s
earrings are also plenty but the typical rings of gold are the *Ksiar Shahbah
Dohkha*¹³⁶ and *Sohskkor* (plugged to the ear). The prior one is shaped and designed
like the fins or grills of a fish from where its name is derived. Besides these,
Kynpham Singh also named *Namti* and *Makor, Kyndor* which are like the circlers of
gold. Furthermore we can name some other earrings like the *Star Khang,
Nianghyrna, Kyrlia Bhoi(silver), Sohskhor Lakadum and Khala Budam* whose drops
have a rounded button, tobe fitted to the lobe.

*Kynjri Syngkai:* This is a silver wrist belt which flaps loop downward a worn onlyby
male dancers¹³⁷ (Fig.5.25) It is generally made up of floral chains attached to a
square. Beautifully decorated plates help to fasten the waistband round the wais.
Actually these three plates are interlocked to each other by means of a silver stick,
which passes from one to another end to fix them together and also to fasten the wrist
belt to the body. As we can see in the photograph, the flower motif is represented in
acircle on the middle of the plates and the leaves and ferns have been abstracted and
simplified with incised lines only.

In some of those ornaments we will find that out of the three plates, two plates have
smaller designs (on the sides) and the one on the middle is altogether different
(Fig.5.26). The floral designs here are very much stylized and one part has been
repeatedly used on the whole plate to form one single design.

Pendants of flat angular shapes are laid with red stone tri foil leave pattern also
hanging loose in chains, decking up the waist all around. Such ornaments serve as
girdles as seen in ancient Indian sculpture. Male have adorned themselves not only
on the front but all around the body¹³⁸*Rynkap OR Quiver* The male unlike the
female wears an exquisitely designed silver quiver which contains three silver arrows
and has a bird’s tail of the *Rynmaw* fixed at its lower ending (Fig.5.27). The designs
may vary, but mostly we find floral designs arranged symmetrically except on the top
most portion in some quiver floral chain pendants hang closely down from the
surface. This suggests a weapon of a warrior which has been symbolically used as an
ornament. As for the three arrows, they signify the duties imbibed by the custom to the males. The first arrow is for self defense; second one is to defend his own clan and the last one to defend his king and his land. These symbolic arrows they have an important place in the naming ceremony of a male child, likewise in the cremation ceremony of his death.

*Ka Waitlam* or Sword: Were made from silver or *Rynnong lieh* (literally the whitecopper) and some bronze (Fig.5.28). And are about three feet or more in height. Some small portion of the sword has been incised with geometrical patterns. An overview of the Khasi dancing costumes and jewellery reveals an era of wealth, might and velour, expressed by the amount of gold and silver, used the silk and the brightly rich colour costumes. Incorporating social religious and aesthetic significance makes them even more valuable. The status and relationship of man and woman in the society has been clearly depicted through them, as both of the two share equal power, but with due respect and understanding of their role.

In regards to forms and design, we can very clearly state that their basic quality is primarily based on geometrical patterns, the square, the circle, cylinder the triangle etc. the flora, fauna and animal designs. Are undoubtedly inspired from nature, but the artist did not copy them as they are, but transformed the natural forms into his own creative imagination by extracting only the essential. Thus he expressed his creativity capabilities through the simplified, bold motifs of flowers, leaves. They are rhythmically arranged along with the lineal modulations, so as to form an interesting network of designs, which in turns reacts on the visual sensation.

This is to be regarded as one of the special feature or aspects of the Khasi jewellery as a whole and another one is that most of the designs are often elevated at different levels from the ground level of the platform, thus forming a texture, rendering a tactile feeling to the forms.

Beside gold and silver, imitation stones occupy another regular item of decoration. Though the jewellery is considered as folk-art, because of their simplicity they
nevertheless achieve some degree of refinement for that period of time. At times the artist went in for intricate details but most probably due to manual technical know-how, they could not achieve that much of sophistication. As a result of finishing is crude to s the use of dark colours often serves to highlight the sparkling jewellery. For examples, the silver Mahu and Tad are well projected up from the red or maroon colour background of the blo9use, the orange corals and along with the Kynjri Tabah from the yellow background of the Dhara in the female costumes and the navy blue or dark colour waist coat of the means, so on and so forth.

The Khasis, have undoubtedly colour consciousness, and execute their costumes and jewellery both with intuition and understanding. On the whole, the brightness of the clothes and the radiance of the jewellery blends together to invoke a sensation of joy, wealth and pride, as they dance contributing to the essence of ‘a real festive atmosphere’, in which the values of their societies are kept high.

This type of juxtaposition of design is also found in the early times by Indian sculptors. And to analyze further, these designs resembles the Alpana design of Bengal, eg. The repetition of one set of the twist turns and swirls designs to form a whole unified design block. Somehow they also appear to be like block designs in character.

The Crown, in the socio-cultural context is familiar almost too every culture. But the Khasi dancer’s crown is only for a virgin. This is where its stand unique.

On visiting Sualkuchi a weaver’s village (Fig.5.29 A&B) which started near end of 16th century as it was patronized by the Kings of Assam, one will see each house has a loom and every knows how to weave. There are still many Weaver families who still weave the traditional costumes of the Khasis and the Jaintias(Fig.5.30 A-E).

The coming of foreign powers who wanted to change their environment of these tribes in Meghalaya be it their daily way of living, culture, religion, especially costumes faced most of the drastic change. It is only when the Khasi men and
women as well as the Jaintia men and women come in their traditional costumes during their festivals, wedding or any social gatherings (Fig. 5.31 A-D) that a casual observer gets a glimpse of their unique culture and artistic significance.

The people of the Khasi and the Jaintia region wear brightly patterned costumes. Against a background of green trees and green rice fields the geometric patterns and bright colors create a stunning picture. On Sunday when they go to their prayer halls we can see most men and women in their best traditional attire (Fig.5.32 A-F). Lastly we should name appreciative comments on the colour sense of these people. It would be hard to disagree with the assertion that the yellow, blue, green, red and white in the costumes has been juxtaposed harmoniously enhancing the value of ‘each’ individual colour.
References:


109) The elders of these tribes are the one who verbally inform the younger generations which patterns are supposed to good and harmless.


115) Information acquired after discussion with the elders of Royal family of these tribes during the field.


117) Explained by members of Seng Khasi, Shillong.

118) Informed by the Weavers’ of Sualkuchi in Assam during field work.


122) Ibid


124) Rynjah S. (2009), Ki Snap-Ki Skor Mardeng Shad Khasi, Shillong, Published by Author, p.9.

126) Ibid, p.422
129) Rynjah S. (2009), Ki Snap-Ki Skor Mardeng Shad Khasi, Shillong, Published by Author, p.21.
130) Rynjah S. (2009), Ki Snap-Ki Skor Mardeng Shad Khasi, Shillong, Published by Author.
131) Rynjah S. (2009), Ki Snap-Ki Skor Mardeng Shad Khasi, Shillong, Published by Author, p.40.
132) Rynjah S. (2009), Ki Snap-Ki Skor Mardeng Shad Khasi, Shillong, Published by Author, p.45 &74.
133) Rynjah S. (2009), Ki Snap-Ki Skor Mardeng Shad Khasi, Shillong, Published by Author, p.37
136) Rynjah S. (2009), Ki Snap-Ki Skor Mardeng Shad Khasi, Shillong, Published by Author, p.77.
138) Rynjah S. (2009), Ki Snap-Ki Skor Mardeng Shad Khasi, Shillong, Published by Author 80.
139) Rynjah S. (2009), Ki Snap-Ki Skor Mardeng Shad Khasi, Shillong, Published by Author, p.85.
Fig. 5.1A. Basket craft an art in Khasi and Jaintia tribes.

Fig. 5.1B. Bamboo craft of various kinds.
Fig. 5.2. Huts walls are woven by using bamboo and the design pattern are plain or twill weave.
Fig. 5.3. Traditional design selected with utmost care to maintain ethnicity of their culture.
Fig. 5.4. Dhara, has a design pattern which is the repetition of this unit that forms the overall pattern.
Fig. 5.5. Siar Rynkoh, meaning Cock which is their religious symbol painted with white on red dyed cloth.

Fig. 5.6. Khor silk cloth used for turban by Khasi male dancers. (Original picture of old Khor in Assam weaver’s collection given for reference to weave.)
Fig. 5.7. Different tribal society seen in their traditional costume.
Fig. 5.8. Royal female dancers with an overall patterned Dhara with golden thread Khala or Tiger motifs on the borders and bright golden floral design on red back round.
Fig. 5.9. Gold Crown and gold jewellaries is worn by Royal members. Whereas the others are seen mixed wearing a silver crown.
Fig. 5.11. Silver Crown with semi-precious stones.

Fig. 5.12. The silver chains behind the crown called Iop Iop.
Fig. 5.13. KsaiKhylong silver ornament hanging at the back after the hair bun.

Fig. 5.14A. U Kpieng Patla Ksiar, gold cum coral necklace worn by female dancers.
Fig. 5.14A. U Kpieng Paila Ksiar, golg cum coral Necklace worn by male dancer.

Fig. 5.15. Kpieng Paila Ksiar-Kpieng Heh, Kpieng Pdeng & Kpieng rti.
Fig. 5.16. Kynjri Tabah Shynrang, silver chains worn by male dancers.

Fig. 5.17. One single silver squirish design that joins the chains of Kynjri Tabah Shynrang and have engraved floral design on it.
Fig. 5.18. Kynjri Tabah Kynthei, silver chains worn by female dancers.

Fig. 5.19. Shan Ryndang, gold cum coral Neck rest ornaments for Khasi male dancer.
Fig. 5.20. Shan Ryndang or Kanopad, gold Neck rest ornaments for Khasi female dancer.

Fig. 5.21. Mahu, silver wristlets with geometrical designs.
Fig. 5.22. Tad, silver armlet with intricate design.

Fig. 5.23. Ka Ksia Leng Kyneng a gold Earring common for both male and female with fan like design.
Fig.5.25. Ka Ksiar Lang Kyneng a gold Earring common for both male and female with fan like design.
Fig. 5.25. Kynjri Syngkai, a silver chain worn on the waist.
Fig. 5.26. Square plates which joined the Kyndri Syngkai.
Fig. 5.27. Ryngkap or Quiver which contains silver arrows.
Fig. 5.28. Ka Waitlam or sword.
Fig. 5.29.A & B. Sualkuchi Weavers village in Assam.
Fig. 5.30. A. Cloth woven on a Throw Shuttle loom in Sialkuchi, Assam.
B. Looking at the textile with the weavers.
C. Interviewing the Weavers, at Sialkuchi.
D. The Weaver Mr. Ram Bayan who weaves the Ka Jainspong, Khor for the Khasis.
E. Wife of the weaver at Sialkuchi demonstrating the wearing of Jaintia attire.
Fig. 5.31 A, B, C & D Women in their traditional attire attending wedding ceremony and social gatherings.
Fig. 5.32 A, B, C, D, E & F. Wearing of best traditional attire by the tribes on Sunday’s to go to their Prayer hall.