

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

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Even the seemingly most trivial folkloristic item can, upon analysis, reveal fascinating insights about people and their cultures. (Dundes, 1989, viii)

### **1.1 Introduction of the Study**

Folk media is considered to be a rich cultural reservoir that collects ethnic knowledge, experiences and expressions handed down from one generation to another. Intertwined into proverbs and verses, songs and dances, puppet plays and lore's, rhythms and beats, they are rooted with a sense of cultural distinctiveness. It is an established fact that all human societies have folktales, myths, proverbs, riddles, ballads, songs, folk dances, etc.

In prehistoric civilisations, there was no actual difference between art and life. Folk art forms are a part and parcel of their day-to-day lives and it touches the essence of their existence. It can be said that folk media is the earliest means of communication, and is deeply ingrained in a society. Therefore, it plays an important role in teaching and strengthening the ideologies or altering principles and attitudes.

Folk media grows as the society advances and helps in maintaining the necessary concert for a society to function. Therefore, it is not an external entity but entwined in the system of the society itself having a profound influence on the culture and life of the people. In this light, it becomes obvious that every community has its own folk media that represents idiosyncratically its traditions, beliefs and culture.

The folk media of India from prehistoric times have been used for moral, spiritual and socio-political purposes. This form of media is familiar, personal and more reliable, with which everyone can connect irrespective of being literate and illiterate. It is indeed interesting to note that folk forms are religion, community,

caste, culture and language/dialect specific and bear values and associations often unique to them (Kumar, 2009, 253). In short, folk media is embedded in the culture and social structure of a community.

Against this milieu, the study has been an endeavour to construe the meanings that are infused in folk media which is handed down across generations. And also understand matriliney in contemporary times, using folk media as a lens. The thrust of the enquiry is on Khasi folk media and matriliney as practised by the Khasis of Meghalaya.

Why a study of this nature is of significance is principally three fold: firstly, the focus herein is away from the extravagance of ceremonies and performances, but the thrust has been to understand the thoughts and ideas infused in the folk practices that impacts the Khasi social practices and organisations. Furthermore, Khasi worldview is explored in the context of the gendered roles and performances in the folk media, which makes this study relevant. Secondly, the study takes cognizance of the chasm between tradition and modernity, but delves more in the space where both intermingle. In a world which is grappling with rapid homogenisation, hybridisation and people's movement for identity assertion, a study on folk beliefs, philosophy and practices does make a case. Thirdly, the Khasi society is witnessing an upsurge wherein demands for patriliney is emergent raising many questions on the viability of continuing matriliney. In a kinship structure and philosophy, which seemingly is in favour of the women, an analysis of the folk media unveils the dichotomy that prevails in the Khasi society that calls for an ingenious rethinking.

This study is imbued with the argument that even in modern times, social change or movements, social structures and society at large can be examined using indigenous knowledge which is as a complementary partner to modernity.

Centuries ago what was our society like? What would be our society in the coming future? How our society has come to its present state and in general how do societies change over a period of time? These are some basic questions that perplex the mind of people who are a witness to the rapid changes taking place in their own community and the world around.

Change is inevitable in any society and through the course of history every society has undergone a process of change triggered by social movements by a deprived section of a community, challenging the time-tested values, norms and traditional institutions.

Transformation in a society comes in many forms, at various levels as a result of multifaceted factors. Sociology has been engaged not only in the study of established traditions of a community's social, political and cultural life but also with disturbance, movement and social change that affect a community. A community cannot be considered to be a homogeneous unit rather it is inclusive of subcategories belonging to different levels in the social strata with conflicting interests. As a result, incongruity and conflict are a part of the life of a community. Social movements have been a key factor in ushering in transformation in a community.

For Heberle “social movements consists of collective attempt to reach a visualized goal especially a change in certain social institutions” (Heberle, 1951, 6). Gusfield treats social movements as “socially shared activities and beliefs directed towards the demands for change in some aspects of the social order” (Gusfield, 1972, 2). For Roberts and Kloss social movements are attempts at changing power and income (order) in reaction to social tendencies (Roberts & Kloss, 1974, 15). Roberta Ash Garner defines a social movement as ‘a set of actions of a group of people’ that is ‘self - consciously directed towards changing the social structure and/or ideology of a society, and they either are carried on outside of ideologically legitimated channels of change or use these channels in innovative ways’. (Roberta Ash Garner, 1977, 1, cited in Das, 1981, 129)

## **1.2 Matrices of Communication and Society**

Having stated that change is an inevitable part of a society, it is also imperative to note that at a time when social movements are initiated, people very often look back into the traditional practices to make sense of the contemporary situations. Herein

comes the element of communication, which is the lifeline of any civilization, the core of social life.

The indispensability of communication in a society can be assessed from contemporary situations in which leaders of states and governments have endeavored to impede networks of communication between citizens of their nation by placing prohibition on political movement, reprimanding of news media, proscription of some organizations and even stopping the assemblage of four or more persons in one place, in an attempt to impede anticipated opposition.

Societies since antiquity have devised various strategies of transmitting information, for instance, the beating of drums to indicate danger and so on. In other words potentially no society exists where individuals do not come together to discuss, debate and celebrate; all these being indicators of a communication process, for it is said 'No Man Is an Island'. Communication is considered to be a substance of symbolic forms that can mould interaction, relations, affinities and happenstances between humans.

“Systems of communication mirror systems of cognition. Social forms of symbolic communication drive us towards their anthropological foundations in the cultural moorings of the communities” (Bel et. al., 2010, xiv). Symbolic methods of communication have a transactional character and they have the capacity to bind individuals into groups and connect the same groups with one another in a persistently growing social tie. “Much in the same way that symbols cannot be reduced to bytes and pixels, cultures cannot be reduced to sets of items traded in the hegemonic space of global communication” (ibid., xiv).

The word communication is derived from the Latin word *communis* (noun) and *communicare* (verb), which means commonality and to make common respectively. The closest Indian language equivalent to the original concept of communication is *sadharanikaran* (Kumar, 2009, 7). Communication is the effective transmission or sharing of ideas, feelings and also becomes the key organising principle of any social arrangement. Furthermore, communication is not just the act of communicating information, but also the representation of shared

beliefs and common experiences. Theorists, also define communication as the process by which people interactively produce, sustain and manage meaning. According to James W. Carey, “communication is seen in three perspectives; first, communication is a behavioural science whose objective is the elucidation of laws; second, communication is a formal science whose objective is the elucidation of structures; third, communication is a cultural science whose objective is the elucidation of meaning” (2009, 36-37). Communication is dynamic, which means that it continually changes, evolves, and moves on. Because communication is a process, communicative interactions have no definite beginnings or endings.

Communication occurs in particular situations or systems that influence what and how we interact and what meanings we attach to messages (Wood, 2009, 32). At a very basic stage the process of communication can be understood in the light of the communication model propagated by American political scientist and communication theorist, Harold D. Lasswell - *who* [Sender] *says what* [Message] *to whom* [Receiver] *in what channel* [Medium] *with what effect* [Result/Impact]. Communication is the name given to the numerous methods that people use in keeping touch, not only words and music, but also pictures, signs and symbols, nods and becks, postures and plumages and every action that conveys some meaning. Denis McQuail (2005) takes into consideration laws, traditions, customs, attires, gestures, architecture and even flags as a means of human communication.

It is thereby being argued that “communication like language is symbolic and impersonal, as is, for example, mathematics. It is, on the other hand, expressive and personal like music. Both forms of communication function in bringing about those understandings between individuals and peoples which are the substance - the warp and woof - of culture” (Park, 1983, 187). Thus, the social function of communication is to bring around and preserve cultural cohesion among individuals and communities. Communication assists in the dissemination of cultural traits and also broadens the cultural arena in which social relations can exist. Because it defines a society, a community and the world at large, ‘culture’ is an all-encompassing concept. Most universally culture is a term used to refer to a community of group where people live following certain common practices, values

and worldview. As Adam Kuper puts it, “[i]n its most general sense culture is simply a way of talking about collective identities” (cited in Raday, 2003, 666), around which people organise themselves and connect to one another.

For long the dominant view was that culture is comparatively static and uniform, but the opposing view soon took center stage whereby culture is considered to be undergoing continuous change and is adaptive. Herein, the element of communication comes in which nurtures the dynamism of culture. The need to communicate is “both a natural individual demand and a requirement of social existence to use communication resources in order to engage in the sharing of experiences, through ‘symbol mediated interaction’” (Kumar, 2009, 3-4).

Culture and communication in tandem “is instrumental and subservient to the aims of societal construction as it offers each collective, whether a small local community or large regional entity, a symbolic means of social binding. We should, therefore, activate all the static categories of culture perceived as symbolic systems as they tend to build up orders and secure social cohesiveness. Cultures ‘perform’ viable collectives” (Bel et. al, 2010, xiv).

Scholars have also argued that cultural practices and connotations are an amalgamation of the mesh of multifaceted historical interactions. Herein, an important point that comes to fore is peoples instinctive longing to communicate. History stands testimony to the fact that human beings have had the longing to communicate and pass on traditional knowledge to the next generation. An outcome of this need were the cave paintings dating back to 30,000 BC, petroglyphs - carvings on rock surfaces, pictogram or pictograph - a emblematic depiction of an idea, object, action, place or occasion through illustration, ideograms - denotes more abstract concepts which finally made way for the written text. The central idea being that people had devised varied mechanisms to communicate and hand down information which ultimately becomes a store of knowledge for the coming generations. With the passage of time and human evolution, better and more sophisticated methods of communication were formed.

It can be said that with the genesis of living things the art of communication began, which has given rise to various medium of expression since times immemorial. The varied forms of such expression are identified by an umbrella term folk media, also known as traditional media. Folk media being one of the earliest forms of organised communication systems used by a group or community. It is important to understand folk practices although not mass produced is influential and inclusive. These forms of media come from the people and are the forerunner of the mass media; so they have both functional and artistic appeal. In traditional societies, art is an essential component of the life of the individuals.

Though several genres of folk forms have been identified, yet for the purpose of research and analysis they have been classified into four broad categories oral literature, material culture, social folk custom and performing folk arts (Handoo, 2000, 12).

What folk is constituted of is important; it includes dances, music, tales, lores, myths, legends, proverbs, foods, medicine, games, customs and rituals. While discussing about ethnic groups, Max Weber in his work, *Economy and Society*, looks upon customs as being a vital element in describing ethnicity. Customs are but the standard genus of the folk.

Traditional cultural forms are often understood as folk media, ingrained in native culture, originating from diverse societies and developing over time, they have been continuously used for moral, religious and socio-political education. Folk media is good for effective communication owing to their closeness to rural life, credibility, utilisation of familiar signs and symbols, community participation, collective presentation, utilisation of past experience, plot and the subjects from their own life (Jinadasa, 2011). Folk media forms are personal, familiar and credible, community members can easily identify themselves as part of their folk art forms. Additionally, the charm of traditional cultural forms is also that they are universal and intimate, for they use colloquial dialects, which makes the communication clear and distinctive, along with being flexible in accommodating new ideas, themes and issues. They are popular irrespective of the educational, social and economic

standing of any community. The indigenous equivalent of exogenous mass media is the folk media which facilitates communication among the rural mass for socio-economic growth and development (Mohanty, 2011).

While using the term media along with folk indicates that folk is a means of communication or transmission. Media implies the means or channel of communication, it is derived from the Latin plural of 'medium'. Communication as a method is centered on the cultural dialectics in a society.

Folk media is an umbrella term and has been classified into four broad categories by Richard M. Dorson, an American folklorist as mentioned earlier:

- i. Oral literature called verbal art or expressive literature are 'spoken, sung and voiced forms of traditional utterances'. Traditionally, this sector has been known as folk literature, oral narratives, oral poetry or folk poetry is its sub-divisions.
- ii. Material culture denotes the technique, skills, recipes and formulas transmitted across the generations.
- iii. Social folk custom lays emphasis on group interaction rather than on individual skills and performances. Of particular importance are the rites de passage connected with birth, initiation, marriage, death and similar rites.
- iv. Performing folk arts concerns traditional music, dance and drama. Performance here in its traditional sense strictly means the conscious presentation of these arts by individuals or groups who carry these art forms from one generation to another (cited in Handoo, 2000, 13-20).

Notably, folk also refers to "to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor" (Dundes, 1989, 11). Member of a group may not be acquainted with other members, but there is a likelihood that he will be aware of the common core traditions binding the group and which help in the formation of the group identity. Folk is not merely a means of procuring data, it is in fact one of the key methods by which a person or group ascertains his or their identity.

The contemporary discourse on globalisation has many comprehensive implications and raises the vital issue of how people communicate in a global



village and what helps in identity formation. It is increasingly being recognised that indigenous media is the source of understanding the life and culture, and also discover a common means of communication for dissemination of information, that is 'person-centered'.

Several studies have shown how folk media is witnessing a phase of revival across the globe. Scholars state that the application of folk media for communication resuscitates ethos of a community. For example "Keertan as a folk media perform many functions in society like information, education, motivation, persuasion, entertainment, cultural promotion and integration. It transmits the social cultural heritage" (Patil, 2011, 5). Reference can also be drawn of the Patuas of Bengal who specialise in the folk art of making painted narrative scrolls (pat) and sing songs to complement the unveiling of the scrolls. Operative as both performers and instructors, they meandered from village to another during festive times of the year looking for clientele to support their craftsmanship.

As they entered into the cash economy during the British colonial period, however, they began gradually to incorporate new themes and motifs of a social nature into their largely mythological repertoires, adding journalism to their multi-talented skill set. But it was not until the 1970s that the Patuas began to collaborate prominently with various outside agencies to propagate particular messages associated with modernity and development. (Korom, 2011, 182)

From these examples the idea being put forth is that, Indian society with its multifaceted family structure, classes, ethnic communities and clans has not completely moved out of the deep links of the folk culture. On the contrary folk media is being revisited to reconnect with the past and understand the contemporaneous.

In remote villages and in tribal communities, indigenous strands of basic Indian culture persist through the use of oral and functional role of folklore. This emphasises the strong links the Indian society

has with the past. This aspect of cultural perpetuity is discernible in our attitudes and taboos, in spite of the acceptance of modern innovations. Hence, the folk arts have been used for moral, religious and socio-political purposes in India right from ancient times. Rarely have they been resorted to for pure entertainment alone. (Gaur, 2012, 24)

Having articulated about the role of communication in the perpetuation and maintenance of culture, it is imperative to note that communication helps to sustain the society. Communication propagates the multifaceted dimensions and ever-changing framework of social life. Communication acts as a substance of symbolic forms that tend to mould the dialectics, i.e., the discourse, interface, associations, rapports, osmosis or happenstances between human beings. Classical theorists of sociology, Mead and Cooley, in their work highlighted the prominence of expressive communications as a component of the social process, which assists in the establishment of social norms and identity. Herein, it is argued that social structure like matriliney also get articulated via different forms of communication, specifically folk media. Communication links people to their communities by transmitting both shared and contested values. As per the Oxford dictionary, matriliney denotes a society founded on the matrilineal kinship principle. Whether or not a society follows matriliney can be adjudicated by examining the rules of descent/lineage, rules of inheritance, rules of residence and rules of authority. “Matriliney and matriarchy are not synonymous. There is a general belief that all the matrilineal societies are matriarchal as well” (Sasikumar, 2006, 65). Supremacy of women in the decision making process where authority is entrusted on her both in theory and practice is considered to be matriarchy.

Also, matriliney suggests descent through woman and matriarchy rule by woman; scholars opined that from the evolutionary angle it was quite probable that the two segments were combined. But alongside there have been several instances where lineality is not necessarily connected with power.

Friedrich Engels noted that ancient society followed a system of mother's right and gradually proceeded to father's right owing to economic considerations. Some societies even today follow the system of mother's right and therein originate the idea of matriliney. In matriliney, the lineage is traced through the mother and maternal ancestors, also, family name or mother-line surnames are handed down from mother to daughter in some matrilineal cultures, similar to the patrilineal surnames which are given down from father to son.

Residence is matrilocal, i.e., a woman remains in her mother's household after reaching adulthood and brings her husband to live with her family after marriage. Sons, on the other hand, move out of their natal home after marriage to join their wife's family.

In terms of inheritance, women typically inherit the property directly from their mothers in matrilineal societies. Along the lines, the inheritance patterns for men in matrilineal societies often mirror the significance of the mother's brother.

### **1.3 Juxtapositioning Symbolic Interaction, Matriliney and Folk Media**

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical viewpoint in sociology that deals with the means through which individuals create and preserve society through face-to-face, recurrent, important communications. The fundamental objective of symbolic interactionism is to examine the functioning of a society from the 'bottom up,' directing the emphasis to micro-level practices that develop during face-to-face happenstances. Symbolic interactionism is a means of understanding how people give meaning to their bodies, feelings, situations and the larger social world in which they live. Attention is on streams of activities with their alterations and results, rather than the rigid arrangements.

Humans are always associated with others, there is nothing called the solitary individual. Thereby engaging in a constant process of interaction either with self or with others. The defining factor of symbolic interactionist thought is the notion that people employ language and substantial symbols in their communiqué with others and in the process understands how meanings emerge. Consequently, meanings are managed and transmitted through an interpretative process that people use to make

sense of and manage the objects that form their social worlds. Analysis of the symbols facilitates the process of examining the underlying forms or arrangements of social life. An outcome of the process of interaction is the formation of objects (physical objects, social objects and abstract objects) that determines how people see the object and act towards it.

Human group has humans involved in action, which is multifarious and takes place when they meet one another and deal with certain situations. The action can be singular, collective or act in lieu of some organisation/institute/group of others. Essentially, community or society survives in action and should be seen in terms of action, this also becomes the first point for the empirical study of human society. Concepts that define human society are only derivatives of the intricate process of action that forms group life.

Primarily a society comprises of people interacting amongst each other, where the actions take place in reaction to one another or in relation to one another. Symbolic interactionism does not look at social action as a mere ritual that express the human behaviour but stresses on the fact that it is a method that 'forms' human behaviour. "Human beings in interacting with one another have to take into account of what each other is doing or is about to do; they are forced to direct their own conduct or handle their situations in terms of what they take into account" (Blumer, 1986, 8). Which implies others activities have an impact on one's own activity and one has to tow the lines keeping in mind other's acts. It cannot be disregarded as an ordinary manifestation of what one is likely to do.

As the theory of symbolic interactionism states that "interpretation should not be regarded as a mere automatic application of established meaning but as a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of actions" (Blumer, 1986, 5). Which means that meaning is not merely a psychological process but is an outcome of the interaction between people. The positioning being "man is essentially a symbol-using creature and as such he exists in a world of meaning created by his symbols. The consequence of this condition is that human existence is mediated, as well as created, by symbols"

(Gecas and Libby, 1976, 33). Thus, it can be said that symbols have meanings which are seen as social products, as constructions, that are shaped through the essential actions of people as they interact.

Herbert Mead has argued that there are two levels of social interaction in a society that affect the action 1) 'the conversation of gestures' i.e. 'non-symbolic interaction' and 2) 'the use of significant symbols' i.e. 'symbolic interaction' (ibid., 8). Non-symbolic communication takes place as a response to others actions without interpreting the action, on the other hand symbolic interaction construes action of others. Thus, symbolic interaction is important for it is the demonstration of "gestures and responses to the meaning of those gestures" (ibid., 9). It implies that a person plays the role of both a stimuli for action and also a respondent to that action based on circumstances.

Such common role taking is the *sine qua non* of *communiqué* and operational symbolic interaction. The relevance of symbolic interactionism is apparent in understanding human society where people live by association and interaction largely takes place at the symbolic quarter. "Human group life is a vast process of such defining to others what to do and of interpreting their definitions; through this process people come to fit their activities to one another and form their own individual conduct" (ibid., 10). In the context of symbolic interaction it is inferred that human group life progression is fundamentally a constructive process and not simple dome for the demonstration of pre-existing subtleties. As Mead had argued "all social interrelations and interactions are rooted in a certain common socio-physiological endowment of every individual involved in them" (Dingwall, et.al, 2003, 640).

Because communication is being taken into consideration, language thereby, is not restricted to only verbal or written form of communication, but it is also inclusive of any scheme of formalised sounds, gestures, symbols, signs, or the like used or conceived as a means of communicating thought, emotion, etc. "To ignore the meaning of the things towards which people act is seen as falsifying the behaviour under study" (Blumer, 1986, 3).

“Language is not a passive tool social actors use to communicate, but is an active part of their comprehension of the world around them” (Ransome, 2010, 216). Language helps to convey meaning or ideas and it is impossible to communicate anything without a language; social life is created by individuals in interaction with others. “Language integrates social actors when they search for their own sense-of-self, as a shared medium of communicating and as a key purveyor of shared norms and values in society” (ibid., 211). Meaning, individual and their relationships to behaviour have been the dominant trepidations of the sociological framework known as symbolic interactionism. Longmore highlights in her study *Symbolic Interactionism and the Study of Sexuality* “as a theoretical framework that emphasizes the micro (face-to-face) interaction among individuals, symbolic interactionism has been most influential among American sociologists specialising in social psychology, and its primary unit of analysis is the individual” (1998, 44). She refers to the work of Herbert Mead in highlighting the significance of communication i.e. interaction between people, and how it helps in the formation of the idea, ‘self’ and the ‘other’.

According to Mead, the ability to communicate not only gives rise to the self, but the existence of society is only possible because of communication. That is, to communicate, it is essential to see the world from the other person's point of view, to role take or to put oneself in the other’s shoes, so to speak, and to see things, including oneself, from the other’s perspective. (Cited in Longmore, 1998, 45)

A detailed analysis of how symbolic interactionist approach to the study of sexuality is carried out taking into consideration the “situational, structural and biographical-historical approaches to contemporary symbolic interactionism are compared in terms of methodological orientations, assumptions and concept” (ibid., 44) and the conclusion is drawn that sexuality is a social construct formed by the process of how people perceive, react and interpret sexuality.

It implies that in general also human life becomes meaningful to the magnitude that it is subsisted in symbolic communication. This symbolic communication, or

cosmos of dialogue, is the medium from which people develop the various cognitive and emotional foundations like values, outlooks, beliefs and also feelings. These concepts of social construct, interaction, interpretation, language, symbol-mediated communication is taken as the base for examining Khasi matriline and folk media. How through a process of folk communication, subsequent interaction and interpretation, connotations of matriline have been fashioned and transmitted. How the folk has been formed and transmitted over centuries, people's perception towards it, what people understand out of it. That folk media and matriline both are matrixes that have been formed out of the social process where people interact amongst each other. Where the actions take place in reaction to one another or in relation to one another. Social action only was considered to be platform via which sociological or psychological elements move to bring about a particular human behaviour. But symbolic interactionism does not look at social action as a mere ritual that express the human behaviour but stresses on the fact that it is a method that 'forms' human behavior. In this light, assessment has been made.

The theory of symbolic interactionism as a framework forms the basis of understanding the Khasi society by addressing the meanings that people impose on objects, events, and behaviours. The core principles of the theory consists of meaning, language and thought which leads to the inference about the formation of a person's self and socialisation into a greater community. Meanings are given importance since it is believed that people act based on what they accept as true and not just on what is objectively true. Thus, society is thought to be socially constructed through human interpretation. People construe one another's behaviour and it is these elucidations that form the social bond.

The process of communicating through the Khasi folk media also entails a process of meaning making that takes place amidst social interaction where interpretation takes place. Folk media is not merely an apparatus for communication, but it also provides platform for the people to interact, transmit their views and initiate the process of meaning making. "Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (Blumer, 1986, 2) which includes the entire

gamut of what a person can see and feel, physical substances, other creatures, organisations, guiding philosophies, daily life circumstances and undertakings.

Further, the communication and interpretation process taking place via folk media in this case (Khasi folk media) is carried out by the humans who are members of a community. Human group has humans involved in action, which is diverse and transpires when they meet one another and manage certain circumstances. The action can be self-contained, shared or action in lieu of some organisation/association/group of others.

Additionally, as a process of symbolic interaction objects are formed which are categorised as “a) physical objects, such as chair, trees or bicycles b) social objects such as students, priests, a president, a mother or a friend and c) abstract objects such as moral principles, philosophical doctrines symbolic interactionism, or ideas such as justice, exploitation or compassion” (ibid., 10-11). Object is everything that can be pointed to or mentioned, it encloses meaning which sets the course as to how a person looks at the object, determines an action towards it and discusses about it. Since, it is said that following a course of shared indications common objects transpire - objects that have the same connotation for a group of people who see the object in the same manner.

Correspondingly, human environ comprises of the objects that humans identify and are acquainted with, nature of environ is established by the connotations attached to the objects. Additionally, objects in the milieu of their meanings is reckoned as social creations, moulded and ascending out a process of interpretation and explanation that takes place during interaction. It is to be noted that meaning is shaped, cultured and communicated “through a process of indication - a process that is necessarily a social process” (Blumer, 1986, 12). Correspondingly, objects in the framework of their meanings are deemed to be social creations, produced and ascending out a process of interpretation and explanation that takes place during communication. In this light, it is being argued that via the elements of folk media the principles of a social structure is communicated. Thereby, both folk media and matriliney are abstract objects formed out of social communication, elucidation.



Khasi folk media and matriliney become exemplars of abstract objects since they are imbued with varied moral principles, philosophical doctrines or ideas, rules of behaviour, social organisation and the like. Also, folk media and matriliney are considered objects that are a product of social construct, whereby through them meaning is cultivated and transmitted.

Furthermore, “human beings in interacting with one another have to take into account of what each other is doing or is about to do; they are forced to direct their own conduct or handle their situations in terms of what they take into account” (Blumer, 1986, 8). Which implies other’s activities have an impact on one’s own activity and one has to tow the lines keeping in mind other acts. Symbolic interaction becomes the base of empirical study where folk practices and matriliney is examined within the casing of how people observe, construe and act leading to joint action. Herein, this joint action is also an indicator of the communication process that takes place between people which eventually leads the process of joint action, such shared role play is the essential element of communication and efficacious symbolic interaction.

The significance of symbolic interactionism is evident in understanding human society where people live with different relationships and interaction principally takes place at the symbolic sector. By dint of symbolic interaction, human group lifecycle is essentially a determinative process and not a mere showground for the expression of pre-existing dynamics. In studying folk media and matriliney, four key elements have been vital “(1) people possess consciousness and can think; (2) communication is intrinsic to all human social activity; (3) all human activity takes place in situations; and (4) human collectivities are forms of action” (Maines, 2003, 6). Thus, folk media is seen as forms of human communication, taking place in varied locations and conditions like the home and hearth; festivals; marriages; funerals; meetings and rallies. Such varied interactions creates a social network through which information or traditional knowledge is passed across generations. In this case overt or covert nuances of matriliney is passed on by means of folk forms like oral narratives, material culture, performances and rituals.

In this backdrop, inference is also drawn from the theory of communicative action which places communication between social actors as the central focus. Jurgen Habermas looks at communication not “as a by-product or incidental feature of some other kind of action, as a means to some other kind of end, but rather as a distinct form of action in its own right” (Ransome, 2011, 294). Communicative action can be understood as a cyclic process in which the actor takes two roles: one as an initiator who controls situations through actions for which he is responsible, and second as a product of the changes surrounding him, of groups whose interconnection is based on solidarity to which he belongs, and of processes of socialisation in which he is raised. Communicative action according to Habermas uses all the human ways of thinking and language, which enables groups to come together, understand and harmonise with one another (cited in Mabovula, 2010, 1). Values, customs, etc. are rooted in a society and it becomes so by means of communicative action over a period of time. “Social actors engaged in communicative action will accept that a particular proposition, claim or statement as ‘valid’ or ‘true’ if they are able to construct in their minds a feasible support for that proposition” (Ransome, 2010, 299). Though Habermas’s concept is difficult to understand, but he drew home the idea that social actors participate in communicative action with one another, they advance towards a contract which is negotiated. The motivation is drawn from the collective experience they previously have of creating and using effective avowals.

If we assume that the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its members and that this coordination is established through communication - and in certain spheres of life, through communication aimed at reaching agreement - then the reproduction of the species also requires satisfying the conditions of rationality inherent in communicative action. (Habermas, 1984, 397)

From the above assertion, it is argued that social actions pertinent to culture production, socialisation and social assimilation do not have specificity and are

challenged with an array of indices of social action which are not precise. Because the subject matter deals with the everyday life-world of the people it becomes imperative to take into consideration all forms of symbolic interaction, for life-world cannot be separated from the study of culture and community. “The abstract concept of the world is a necessary condition if communicatively acting subjects are to reach understanding among themselves about what takes place in the world or is to be effected in it. Through this communicative practice they assure themselves at the same time of their common life-relations, of an inter-subjectively shared life-world. This life-world is bounded by the totality of interpretations presupposed by the members as background knowledge” (ibid., 13).

On this set, people’s expressions have the element of meaningful action, where the actor can connect to the world and the legitimacy of symbolic expressions which points to background information intersubjectively shared by a community. In this study, it is conspicuous that folk practices are both a source of expression and knowledge and matriline is a lifeworld which a community shares. An important pointer is the fact that the world that exists for humans and their groups, is made of objects which is an outcome of symbolic interaction.

Folk media as a communication system and arena of symbolic interaction forms the lifeline of every society. “Our basic orientation to communication remains grounded, at the deepest roots of our thinking, in the idea of transmission: communication is a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people” (Carey, 2009, 13). This process of symbolic communiqué taking place among members of a community is further assessed in the milieu of transmission view and the ritual view of communication. The transmission view of communication is defined by expressions such as ‘imparting’, ‘sending’, ‘transmitting’, or ‘giving’ information to others’. The ritual view is the oldest view of communication and is defined by terms such as ‘sharing’, ‘participation’, ‘association’, ‘fellowship’, and ‘the possession of common faith’. Communication is not restricted to merely transmission of messages but also aids in the maintenance of society across ages. Symbolic communication is not just the act of divulging information but the illustration of shared beliefs and philosophies

of a community. A study about a group of people, their lifestyle, kinship patterns, customs and traditions shall be incomplete without assessing the lifeline of their sustenance as a community i.e. their communication network. Research work on the use of images for communication has shown how images itself become means of transmitting information and how these images also help in forming an association. This implies that any medium of communication appears to respond to a requirement, on the part of the individuals to embed their social relations within a framework, and appropriate their social spaces, in this case visually (Villi, 2006, 4). From these perspectives, it can be inferred that communication is a process through which reality is formed, preserved, revamped and altered and ultimately forms the setting of human existence.

In the light of these views, folk media as a communication structure is used to analyse matriliney, where meaning formation is a dynamic process. Folk media becomes the bearer of matrilineal philosophies and helps in its propagation across time. "Human group life on the level of symbolic interaction is a vast process in which people are forming, sustaining and transforming the objects of their world as they come to give meaning to objects" (Blumer, 1986, 12). It is but obvious that objects are not static but their meaning is preserved through clues and explanations that people make of the objects. The action and life of humans modify and move in line with the modifications taking place in their 'world of objects' (ibid., 12).

What is also of significance is the idea that human beings are acting organisms, where the human interacts with oneself, interprets clues provided by others. All this is possible by possessing a sense of 'self', this self also enables him to interact with himself which is social form of communication "with the person addressing himself as a person and responding thereto" (ibid., 13). It is thus, deciphered that humans merely do not react to factors; it is rather an organism that responds based on its own understandings which is accomplished by a process of 'self-indication'. Through this method of 'self-indication', it creates an object based on the understanding, allots certain meanings to it and these meanings form the basis of the human action. In such a process, rationality is at work, and the subsequent action is guided by norms, self-presentations, interpretative expressions against the milieu

of the life-world. “The necessity for coordinated action generates in society a certain need for communication, which must be met if it is to be possible to coordinate actions effectively for the purpose of satisfying needs” (Habermas, 1984, 274).

Because communication, action and collectiveness is at the core, one cannot ignore the concepts of interpretation and definition. The specialty of symbolic interaction lies in the fact it points at the distinguishing character of interaction that takes place among human beings which is combination of interpretation and definition and it is not limited to only reacting to each other’s actions. The response is founded on the meaning attached to the actions. The process of uniting the individual act does not happen mechanically “the participants fit their acts together first, by identifying the social act in which they are about to engage and second, by interpreting and defining each other’s act in forming the joint act” (Blumer, 1986, 70). What implies is that the never ending process of joint act forms the essence of the society for without it any association among people would be futile.

Human beings are seen as living in a world of meaningful objects - not in an environment of stimuli or self-constituted entities. This world is socially produced in that the meanings are fabricated through the process of social interaction. Thus, different groups come to develop different worlds - and these worlds change as the objects that compose them change in meaning. Since people are set to act in terms of the meanings of their objects, the world of objects of a group represents in a genuine sense its action organisation. People are not locked to their objects; they may check action toward objects and indeed work out new lines of conduct toward them. This condition introduces into human group life an indigenous source of transformation. (Blumer, 1986, 69- 70)

Folk media and matriliney both are the core elements of Khasi social life. Positioning them within the larger framework of symbolic interactionist perspective enables micro level analysis of social patterns. Folk media is the micro structure, embedded

with the competencies of creating the arena for interaction where information is exchanged and interpretation takes place. As a result, worldview, philosophies and norms about the macro structure i.e. matriliney is formed, reinforced and perpetuated.

#### **1.4 The Khasi Community**

The Khasis of Meghalaya like the other communities of India have a rich folk media. By assessing this rich source of information a deep insight can be drawn about the matrilineal society, which is among the world's few surviving matrilineal systems.

Khasis are the native residents of the state of Meghalaya [meaning the abode of clouds, derives its name from Sankrit words *Megh* (cloud) and *Alaya* (home)], which is situated in the Northeastern part of India. Khasi is a common term used to refer to various sub-groups viz. *Khyntiam*, *Pnar or Synteng*, *Bhoi*, *War* and *Lyngngam*. The Khasi belong to the Mon-Khmer group of the Austro-Asiatic language family. This feature makes the Khasis stand out among the other tribes of the region who belong mostly to the Tibeto-Burman language family.

As per Khasi legends, the tribe traces its origin to *Hynniewtrep* (seven families). According to the mythology, *U Blei* (the Creator God) had initially scattered the human beings to sixteen heavenly families (*Khad Hynriew Trep*). *Ka Hukum* (the Mother Decree), after a request from *Ka Ramew* (nature), seven of these houses were permitted to come down on the earth through a golden ladder *Jingkieng Ksiar* (Golden Ladder) that was placed on the Sohpetbneng (situated in the present-day Ri-Bhoi district), and this is how they settled in the hills of Meghalaya. But, with the passage of time, the Seven Huts on earth committed sin and so the bridge was detached, a bifurcation took place separating the group into 'Nine Above' and the 'Seven Below'. This is how the Khasis remained back on earth, after losing the possibility of shuttling between heaven and earth.

The Khasis follow the clan system in which every clan (*Kur*) has legends that helps in tracing the root ancestress called *Ka Iawbei Tynrai* or the first grandmother, *U Thawlang* (her-husband) and *U Suidnia* (her-brother), as their special ancestress

and ancestors. The sub-clan is called *Shi Kpoh* (one womb) and further the smallest division of the clan is the *Iing* (family). Khasi follow a strict system of clan exogamy thus, clans *Kur* and sub-clans *Kpoh* having a common descent cannot marry amongst each other. The clan system also occupies an inviolable importance since it regulates the affiliation of its members; governs the norms of inheritance and lineage, patterns of residence, authority, marriage, death and the like.

The Khasis abide by the tenet *Ka Tip Kur Ka Tip Kha* (know the maternal and paternal clan). This forms the basis of the kinship system, in which kins from the paternal side are held in high esteem since they are the giver of life and stature to a child *Ki Nongai Nongsei Rynieng* and in every ceremony the presence of the paternal family is imperative. If grandparents pass away from paternal side, the son's children pay rich tribute and offer according to the established rituals a process which is called *Ka Yam Meikha Pakha*. The maternal uncles *Kni* are considered to be the *Ki Nongbtin Lynti* (communicators or guide), *Ki Nongduwai Phirat Bad Ki Nongsaid – Nongthew* (the spiritualists and the pleaders).

The Khasi saying *Long Jaid Na Ka Kynthei*, (from the woman sprang the kind or species), clearly indicates that in reckoning descent they count from the mother only. The children take the clan name of the “mother and it is through her (Khasi mother) that they are recognised as Khasi. The descent rule is that of affiliation of the person with a group of kinsmen who are related through females only. The matrilineal principle is applicable in matters of inheritance too. Ancestral property is passed on from the mother to the youngest daughter called *Ka Khadduh*” (Talukdar, 2004, 14). Also maternal uncle plays a significant role in policy making in the household, but he as a husband has very limited role in the wife's house.

If a child is born out of a wedlock between a non-Khasi mother and Khasi father, the custom is to take the father's title by adding the initial *Khar* as a prefix to the father's surname. It is a system of incorporating a non-Khasi into the Khasi society and culture. This ceremony is called the *Tang Jait*, which is performed in accordance to the existing traditions of the Khasi father's clan. In case of those families who are converts and do not have such customs; a senior male member or

any uncle from the clan who is a Khasi himself can conduct the proceedings. The ceremony is conducted in the presence of the chief or headman of the village or locality in which the father lives. The non-Khasi mother is bestowed the title of *Ka Iawbei* (root ancestress) and the Khasi father is titled *U Thawlang* of the new clan that is formed. As the originators they have the duty of safeguarding the Khasi traditions for each clan in the Khasi social set-up is a vital element. It is worthy of mention that each clan has its own legends of origin through which matriliney is preserved.

Therefore, perpetuation of a lineage and clan is from the woman only. Property passes from mother to daughter. The youngest daughter *Ka Khadduh* inherits both ancestral and acquired property by the parents. The other elder daughters also inherit a portion of the property. But it is pertinent to mention that the youngest daughter is only the custodian of the property; she is not the singular owner. It is the maternal uncle who manages and has equal control over the property (Pakyntein, 2000).

The Khasis were among the first communities of the Northeastern region to have met the evangelists, whereby the process of proselytisation has had a tumultuous impact on Khasi life and culture. Today 74.59 percent (Census, 2011) of the Khasis are followers of Christianity of different denominations, and the Christian population seems to be growing. There are a few Khasi families who also are followers of Islam. The followers of Niam Khasi i.e. the Khasi indigenous faith are less in number and have been trying to sustain the faith stating it is a part of Khasi culture, philosophies and customs. Seng Khasi (formerly known as Khasi Young Men's Association) since 1899, through various programmes has been carrying out continuous efforts to uphold the practices of *Niam Khasi*. Also, with the introduction of the Roman scripts by Thomas Jones in the year 1841, the Khasis embarked in the process of documenting their history and culture; Khasi literature has flourished since then. The Christian mission has been lauded for bringing in modern education, health care system among the Khasis. Nevertheless the effect of religious conversion on the Khasi life and culture also cannot be discounted.



## 1.5 Statement of the Problem

“Fundamentally, human groups or society exists in action and must be seen in terms of action” (Blumer, 1986, 6). Notions that describe human society are offshoots of the complicated process of action that shapes group life. This concept becomes important in studying two branches - sociology of culture and social structure. “Culture as a conception whether defined as custom, tradition, norm, values, rules or such like, is clearly derived from what people do” (ibid., 6). Also, social structure is characterised by expressions as social status, role, power, and reputation in connection to how people act toward one another. For the Khasi folk is a part of what people i.e. do action. The narratives tell how people should act/behave in a community and towards each other, the social structure i.e. matriliney is also defined by folk practices where people struggle to live up to the traditional norms, basic premise being action. “A cardinal principle of symbolic interactionism is that any empirically oriented scheme of human society, however derived, must respect the fact that in the first and last instances human society consists of people engaging in action. To be empirically valid the scheme must be consistent with the nature of the social action of human beings” (ibid., 7).

After an extended era of interaction with the British government and encounter with Christianity, the Khasi society has experienced remarkable socio-cultural and economic fluctuations. Changes have been seen in the dressing patterns, housing, food preferences and way of life in general. Also, with Shillong becoming the education hub many viable business opportunities opened up, this also triggered a process of migration from the rural areas, which in turn had an effect on the traditional family system among the Khasis.

Many scholars argue that the processes of urbanisation and evangelisation have been significantly responsible for the wearying of the folk practices and norms of the Khasis. For instance, the cultural practices of instituting megaliths; household and community festivities; ceremonies related to marriage or funeral; naming ceremonies; dances that would take place after a new house is built have almost become non-existent. Though some elementary components of socio-cultural life

like matriliney and traditional administrative system have persisted yet many other aspects of the folk culture have disappeared. This is one of the key reasons for which this study is considered appropriate and significant.

The above assertions have been the framework within which the study looks into the social set-up of the Khasi community (matriliney) which is facing challenges owing to movement for patriliney and other threats posed by evangelisation, westernisation and globalisation. Despite such challenges the matrilineal system has been sustained, which necessitates a look into its traditional communication channels to decipher if there are any matrilineal philosophies that get transmitted through it across generations.

Folk media or indigenous media is one of the most influential modes of communication operating in a society for it comes directly from the people (folk) and evolves in the society itself. It can be said that it is an indissoluble constituent of the society at large since it is through folk media people learn and share believes, rituals and customs. A society cannot be understood without a study of its communication pattern and systems, in this folk media being the core. (Dutta, 2016, 35)

Thus, this study has used folk media as a lens to look into the social set-up of the Khasis, a community that till day relies profoundly on its folk media primarily it oral narratives. As Nongkynrih writes, “but the alphabet is nothing to judge the Khasi people by...theirs was a society of great wisdom and civilized conduct at a time when brute force held sway” (2007, vii).

This study explored and examined the social set-up of the Khasi community i.e. matriliney, through the lens of folk media as stated earlier. Khasis like several indigenous tribes are experiencing rapid purging of their ethnic and folkloric practices owing to their exposure to modern education, homogenisation, urbanisation and modernisation. The Khasis become an important community to study for they have held on to matriliney, despite history standing testimony that many society over a period of time have shifted from mother’s right to father’s

right. The prime focus of the study has been to understand and relate the Khasi matrilineal social structure with the folk media which is an important communication channel, for no society can function or exist without a communication system.

## **1.6 Review of Literature**

Friedrich Engels in his book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, while tracing the kinship pattern that existed in the primitive times, enunciated that process of transition took place from mother's right to father's right. Quoting the work of Bachofen - *Mother Right*, Engles argued that the people of antiquity followed matriarchy owing to the system of Hetaerism; any certainty regarding paternity could not be defined and there was no alternative but to give space for mother's right/gynaecocracy. Only subsequently when Hetaerism gave way to monogamy did the transition from mother's right to father's right evolve. According to Bachofen, "it is not the development of the actual conditions under which men live but the religious reflections of these conditions of life in the minds of men that brought about historical changes in the mutual social position of man and woman" (Engels, 2009,10).

Bachofen also reiterated that it is woman who must have longed for chastity, permanent marriage, introduced monogamy, with the outcome of diminishing jungle tradition of sexual intercourse, development of economic conditions of life, growth in population etc. From the complexities of kinship ties emerges another facet that is the ownership of property. As per mother's right, the property ought to remain with gens and the gentile relatives of the dead who can inherit the property. But this was changed with a minute alteration, the descendants of the male members should remain in the gens and those of the females were to be excluded and transferred to the father, thereby giving space to male lineage and inheritance from father, in short patriarchy.

Monogamy arose out of economic causes and the changes in it will also occur owing to economic reasons and changes in the position of both men and women. With the transfer of inheritance from mother's right to father's right, marriage too

began to be set on economic basis. Thus, economy played such an important role that everything was treated as a commodity, rights and customs were substituted with purchase and sale. The arguments put forth in this book is an entry point to understand the Khasi matrilineal system in contemporary times. In the past, many matrilineal communities have undergone transformation adopting patriliney for example, the Rabhas of Assam, Nairs of Kerala and among the Khasis a movement for transforming to patriliney has had an upsurge.

In the present day, Khasi society wrangle between matriliney and patriliney, which is an outcome of the fear that Khasi land and economy is being occupied by non-Khasis, and because Khasi men have no right over ancestral property they are less successful in the economic ventures. It is also argued that Khasi women are lured into marriage by non-tribal men who eventually get access to property and business using the name of the wife. As stated, development of economic conditions of life was a driving force for transformation though the demand came from the women. In the Khasi context, the factor is the same though the demand is made by the menfolk.

In a common sense understanding Khasi matriliney has been misconstrued as matriarchy, implying that a Khasi women is a matriarch running the entire show. Herein reference is drawn from Virginius Xaxa's article *Women and Gender in the Study of Tribes in India*, where he notes that studies customarily portrayed women in tribal societies, had better social status than their counterparts in caste society. The perspective of studying gender in tribal societies has to change, potentially avoiding the lens of high/low status and adopting the lens of gender inequality, which is more relevant. He also refers to the work of Tiplut Nongbri and states that "the myth of gender equality or higher status of women in tribal societies has also been critically viewed through an examination of customary laws in respect of property, marriage, inheritance and so on. It has been shown that women in tribal societies are at a deprived position vis-a-vis men in their respective societies" (Xaxa, 2008, 477).

Herein, it is important to state that matriliney does not warrant complete authority to a Khasi woman, a detailed analysis of the matrilineal structure reveals that women are only nominal heads. In her article, *Khasi Women and Matriliney: Transformations in Gender Relations*, Tiplut Nongbri studies the connection between matriliney and gender stating that women have relative security under matriliney, but that they are not completely free from subservience. The egalitarian standard, which is the highlight of a matrilineal descent, is undermined by men's desire for power and the classified political organisations from which women as a rule are barred. Interestingly the author notes, "Perceiving that the age-old practice of bestowing descent, and inheritance rights on women is detrimental to the male, a section of Khasi men have actively sought to replace the matrilineal with the patrilineal system" (Nongbri, 2000, 360). Progressively it is evident that the Khasi men are using their position to construct a structure that overrides women. To withstand the impact of modernisation and the danger it is posing to their individualism, men are increasingly using the state apparatus to develop processes that modify the matrilineal arrangement "a close examination of the cultural notion of women and men and the division of gender roles shows that the characterisation of the Khasi as matriarchal is misleading. On the contrary, there are strong social pointers which show that women are held to be inferior to men" (ibid., 369). Women's traditional exclusion from politics has efficaciously abetted men in this aspect.

Herein, it is pertinent to mention that Khasi matrilineal system has been surviving despite the mauling it has been facing from varied quarters. The Khasi customs and philosophies are embedded in matrilineal ideologies. Leela Dube in her book, *Women and Kinship: Comparative Perspectives on Gender in South and South-East Asia*, put forwards vividly the material and ideological underpinnings of women's lives. A strong point is made that very often gender studies evade kinship systems under the supposition that these are fixed structures, and argues, that kinship and its rules are extremely significant for "kinship systems are an important context within which gender relations are located" (1997, 1).

Kinship is seen as an organising principle that directs the enrolment of individuals to social groups; the author notes “the very notion of entitlement - whether to membership of a family, to access to strategic resources, to food and nutrition, to healthcare, to education, or to authority and decision-making cannot be understood without accepting that the kinship system to a large degree provides the language for it and gives it legitimacy” (ibid., 5). This argument is of utmost importance in understanding Khasi matriliney since their kinship structures are considered to be a binding factor for the community in to this day. Clan exogamy is adhered to austerely, which defines the norms of marriage, birth and death, clan rituals, family rituals, allocation of property and most importantly conferring the right to make decisions.

The notion of customary time-honoured practices associated to the matrilineal structure comes to the fore in the above mentioned assertions. Which brings upon the idea of folk media that acts as a pool of ethnic knowledge and a tool for passing on information across generations. The argument being regardless of the demands for patriliney, Khasi woman’s lack of authority in the traditional political system and in the home, matriliney has been surviving. The roots of matriliney cannot be traced however, an analysis of the different forms of folk media establishes the idea that matriliney among the Khasis is entrenched in the socio-cultural and political life, that the forefathers have succeeded to inoculate through oral narratives, customs, performances and material culture.

Reference is drawn from the works of Alan Dundes, who in his book, *Essays in Folkloristics*, states that the examination of folk practice is essential for seeing how the folk use and comprehend it, and simultaneously how it may help in unfolding principles of worldview to better understand the nature of man. Dundes defined folk as “any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is - it could be a common occupation, language or religion - but what is important is that a group for whatever reasons will have some traditions which it calls its own” (1978, 7) and that members of a folk are not restricted to the family, region, religious or ethnic group, also that it is inclusive of both literate and non-literate, urban and rural.

A very prominent way of describing folk is the means by which it is transmitted. Most common way of transmission is oral, but not all of its transmitted orally, as people acquire by participating, observing etc., not all folk would come under the oral tradition. Oral written dichotomy always exists and there are many examples of written folk like traditional letters, flyleaf rhymes etc. Folk can be defined in many ways but the emphasis is given on the task of finding out the wide-ranging fundamental beliefs held by members of a given culture, entrenched in the folk. Worldview may be enunciated through varied folk forms, what is of importance is the deduction of the ideas as whole from the folk and examine to what magnitude these are connected to the culture and the ways in which it is expressed.

The importance of folk media forms in a community as a means of communication is also put forth by Jawaharlal Handoo in his book, *Theoretical Essays in Indian Folklore*. He writes “folklore is perhaps as old as mankind” (Handoo, 2000, 5) and that there is no society which does not own any kind of folklore. Though some folklore could be culture specific and some folk genres are rich than others, the author states that “all available evidence leads us to believe that all human societies have folktales, myths, proverbs, riddles, ballads, songs, folk dances...” (ibid., 9).

Folk media since times immemorial had been looked down as inferior, but from 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, scholars began to realise the importance of the folk to understand the past and thereby make sense of the present. Folk media embedded in the culture and life of every society and the Khasis are no different. The Khasi folk media is rich and even to this day, despite the ascendancy of the written word, Khasis rely heavily on their oral narratives and folk customs. Therefore, arises the need of examining the Khasi matriline through the lens of folk media.

Furthermore, folk media is also a source of understanding people’s identity, as Dundes writes in his book, *Folklore Matters*, folk is a mirror of people’s identity and that folklore presents before researchers a perfect field to study identity which is felt by both individuals and groups. As discussed ‘folk’ is an inclusive term that encompasses all aspects of a person’s life and culture. It also binds a community by creating the shared traditions and norms. An important point that is brought to

light is that no branch of folk is so inconsequential that it cannot be a base for the understanding of worldview. “Worldview, the way a people perceives the world and its place in it, permeates all aspects of a given culture and this is why the pattern of the whole is to be found even in that whole’s smallest part” (ibid., 83).

Along the same lines, Richard Bauman in his article, *Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore*, draws on the works of Alan Dundes *The Study of Folklore*’ and Jan Brunvand's *The Study of American Folklore*, and argues that “folklore is a function of shared identity. One may look first for the group, as Dundes does - people who share at least one common factor - and be confident that it will have some traditions which it calls its own; or one may operate on Brunvand's premise that the first test of a folk group is the existence of shared folklore. Either way, the assumption is that the sharing of identity features within a group is what paves the way for the presence of a body of shared folklore” (1971, 32).

Folk is then thought to be shared in a group and made unique by this ‘esoteric’ sharing. Two prime factors can be deciphered in seeing folk as a collective representation 1) the uniqueness of folk within cultural units 2) it is a product of creation and recreation of homogenous social units and an expression of their shared character. “It is spoken of in terms of traditions, with a tradition conceived of as a superorganic temporal continuum; the folk are ‘tradition bearers,’ that is, they carry the folklore traditions on through time and space like so much baggage - particular people and generations come and go, but the group identity persists and the tradition lives on in two essentially separate realms” (ibid., 33).

Seeing folk media as a social base helps in its research wherein attention is directed to folk practices as action and this becomes the key to see the actual amalgamation between people and the folk form at the practical level. “This is to conceptualise the social base of folklore in terms of the actual place of the lore in social relationships and its use in communicative interaction” (ibid., 33). Interaction has to be the focus and the social identities which are significant to the performer of folklore in the milieu of particular situations, for it is in this backdrop that the connection between folk media and its carriers can be established.



In the process of viewing matriliney and identity using folk media as a loupe, the function of folk as ‘tradition bearers’ comes to the fore even among the Khasis. Even though the Khasi society has been affected by modernisation, globalisation, evangelisation and westernisation, yet they fall back on their folk media to define who is a Khasi or what it means to be a Khasi?

Folk media cannot be negated even though the oral-written dichotomy prevails, since folk is a means of understanding both past and present, so in case of the Khasis as well the relevance of folk media practices stands tall. For instance, in the article, *Emergent Events and the Folklore Archive in Bengal*, Roma Chatterji, brings to fore that it was through the efforts of the colonial rulers that the space for documenting and archiving Indian folklore began. She cites the example of Bengal where the documentation of folk helped the process of history writing in Bengal, this collection gained momentum after the Swadeshi Movement and the partition of Bengal.

The author quotes Derida “Not only did the early attempts at collection and documentation require a new way of relating to the past but they also shaped a particular orientation to the future” (2007, 2). The intellectuals of Bengal started to become alert of the fact that folklore had an important part in the historical rebuilding of the region other than monuments and dynastic history. “They argued that folk culture itself could be treated as living history and could be used meaningfully to constitute a telos for contemporary events” (ibid., 3).

It is important to note that using folk as a reference point gave historical profundity to the national uprising. The author also refers to the work of Mead’s concept that “some events are emergent in that they stick out of the flow of time and have the power to reorganize the past, present and future” (ibid., 3). The idea here, is folk media is more than a resource material but more of an archive which can become an important part of the identity. “In India, as in most other parts of the world, contemporary folk culture has been shaped by the practices of folklorists, and it is no longer possible to study these cultures without locating them within self-reflexive circuits of knowledge and power” (ibid., 4-5). The folk delineates a

region, for a region is not simply geographical location but a site in itself shaped by connections of economy and culture that was formed based on kinship relations and the flow of knowledge.

Identity is a vast concept and includes components like individual identity, personal identity, and collective identity, and that these are not merely categories but these are experience or expression communicated through the folk that eventually led to the formation of an identity. In the article, *The Arts, Artifacts, and Artifices of Identity*, Elliott Oring observes that though collective identity also called cultural identity is not the same as culture, but it can be detached from culture. When it comes to folk and identity, Oring brings in the concept of 'artifact' which comprises of "any material, verbal, or behavioural form that is held to exist apart from the times and conditions of life in which it was originally fashioned and employed" (1994, 213). Also comes in the idea of 'art' which is a creative endeavour which is basically oblivious and through which the world is metamorphosed. 'Artifice' indicates the procedure of construction, "a process that is deliberate, controlled, utterly replicable, and expedient" (ibid., 213). Also, years of research in folk studies has established the understanding of folklore "as an art, artifact, or artifice of identity" (ibid., 213).

Furthermore, narratives are also part of an 'artifact'. Narratives are an important part of the life of any community which helps in establishing norms and values. And one way of assessing the embeddedness of matriliney in folk media and subsequent identity formation is through the oral narratives. Narratives are an important part of tribal life and other than narrating history/tradition it is also used as a means of expressing resistance. A close look at the narratives shows how elements are added and subtracted from the content creating a sense of identity, indicates time and spatial lapses, alongside narrating physiological and ideological accounts, argue Sukalpa Bhattacharjee and Rajesh Dev in their book, *Ethno-narratives Identity and Experience in North-east India*. Additionally, how the idea of other is constructed in the narration of one's own experience through tales/stories is also of significance. It is believed that "stories involving self-other relationship have an inbuilt element of universality atleast in the domain in which it is intended"

(2006, 1). It is pertinent to note that narratives are domain specific which include culture, myths, rituals and beliefs and run across various disciplines.

Narrative identity is formed on the basis of responsibility towards the other, by setting up space for dialogue and solidarity in times of conflict. It reconstructs cultural and political communities building new space for living together by means of shared meanings and memories. It also creates the possibility of interventionist role for the narrative actors, space for translation and transcription of identities. While discussing folk, it is stated that folk is an indicator of cultural survival, a connection that goes beyond time and history, a dialogue between past and present, repository of values and knowledge and are completely internalised. Thus, Khasis construct their identity based on the matrilineal structure and one way of imbibing this is through the oral narratives.

The notions of Khasi matriliney, folk media and identity is also a microcosm of understanding the socio-political milieu of the Northeast region of India at large. Birendranath Dutta in his book, *Cultural Contours of Northeast India* argues that there are two things that are distinct in the understanding of Northeast India 1) despite having cultural diversity which is beyond grasp, there still runs a stream of affinity/togetherness that binds people together and that 2) people are misinformed about Northeast India. Northeast is an integral part of India and stands as its sentinel, but due to its topographical position Northeast stands alienated from mainland India. Other than housing its tribal population, the region also amalgamates culture from regions of South Asia. “This delightful combination of the indigenous and the exotic has helped in making Northeast India the cultural treasure trove that it is” (2012, 4). Language and literature too is diverse in the region, which is of no surprise “while some of the tribal languages have developed written literature in more recent times, all the communities, whether tribal or non-tribal, have extremely rich stores of oral literature and other genres of folklore” (ibid., 6). He also states that Northeast is distinct because it is home to large tribal population; there is a continuing process of integrating tribals into the Hindu fold and more. “It is against background of commonness and togetherness in the midst

of variations and distances that we have to study the folkloric material of Northeast, without of course losing sight of the broader all India backdrop” (ibid., 12).

In conjunction with the above arguments Soumen Sen in his book, *Folklore Identity Development (In the Context of Northeast India)*, deliberates on the idea that folklore stands for the process which even etymologically means the lore (wisdom, knowledge) of a group of people (folk). “Folklore defined as productions consisting of characteristics elements of the traditional artistic heritage, developed and maintained by a community reflecting traditional artistic expectations of a community” (2010, 16). By this means, it cannot be disregarded and its investigation unwraps evidences that helps in understanding the challenges posed to a community. While discussing Khasi folk he states “folklore of the Khasi-Jaintia has largely been an expression of clan, ethnic and religious identities and of the sanctity of the matrilineal order, social organisation and political system” (ibid., 18). It becomes or appears like a strategic knowledge structure functioning as a communication tool nurturing/promulgating community life, refurbishing and enhancing shared convictions. “The narrative establishes its social authority acting from a ‘mythological space’” (ibid., 19), in case of the Khasis to the narrative and its representation are entrenched in the social organization and belief system. The Khasis deeply believe in the authenticity of the myths in describing their identity, ancestry, religion and ethnicity.

For long, folk practices were considered as quaint, thing of the past. Some change in perception began to happen when William Thomas described folklore (lore of the people) being inclusive of manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, etc. of the old times. Over a period of time research on folklore also began to prove that “folklore represented the cultural expressions and ideology of a people living in nature, following the habit, manners etc., of the olden times and untouched by changing realities under the impact of technical discoveries and development processes” (ibid., 31).

Evangelisation has had a colossal impact on the communities of Northeast region, whereby indigenous way of life has been lost. The Khasis were among the first

communities in the region to meet with the Christian mission, “though Christian Missions have come from different contexts and denominational affiliations, they espoused similar vision and adopted mostly the same institutional means” (2009, 273). But the diverse methods did leave its influence on the Khasi folk life and culture. As O. L. Snaitang in the article, *Impact of Christianity on the Khasi-Jaintia People of Meghalaya*, points out one of the catastrophic impacts has been the “rejection of the traditional religious components as in the case of the Khasi-Jaintias which has made them unable to successfully perform traditional dances and sports in a meaningful way” (ibid., 274). Though many positive impacts, of the works of the Christian missionaries can be recounted yet the negative outcome is reflected in the life and culture of the tribes, who have lost many indigenous knowledge and practices in the process of assimilating new religious tenets.

Echoing a similar view, H. Kelian Synrem in her book, *Revivalism in Khasi Society*, writes the principal risk to the Khasi culture came from ‘proselytisation’ i.e. conversion to Christianity, since religion formed the very core of the Khasi society. *Niam Khasi* is the traditional faith of the Khasis which has been enduring the brunt of proselytisation; it is also of relevance that the religious beliefs are reflected through folk practices of the Khasis. A wave of revivalism helped in sustaining some of the religious, cultural and folk norms of the Khasi society.

With the influence of religious conversion, modern education etc., it has become increasingly difficult to decide who an actual Khasi or rather what are the actual traits of the culture. There has been a point of conflict in the society ever since conversion began, “while the Seng Khasi (*Niam Khasi*) revivalist feels that religious revivalism is a must for the Khasi if it has to retain its traditions, the Christian revivalist’s only wish to revive culture” (Synrem, 1992, xvi).

Emile Durkheim had seen society as the most powerful combination of physical and social forces. Herein the author says the Khasi society is no different, people live together, interact, and share attitudes, values, and customs and so on. But problem starts when social structures established to meet certain goal come in conflict. As the author tries to explain this conflict using William Graham

Summer's concept of 'crescive' and 'enacted' institutions which implies there is an ideal Khasi pure kind and then there are the others who do not match up to the level of being pure Khasi and the conflict starts. Though the missionaries and British have been credited for introducing education to the people, on the flip side they have been responsible for disintegrating the Khasi society. But interestingly, despite the effect of Christianity, the Khasi society has withstood the challenge based on its strong kinship patterns based on their system of clan exogamy '*Ka Tip Kur Ka Tip Kha*' which means know and honour ones maternal (*Kur*) and paternal (*Kha*) relations.

The aforementioned deliberations incorporating matriliney and folk media have a binding factor i.e. the communication. Folk media apart from being a reservoir of knowledge is also a mechanism of communication and matrilineal principles are communicated via the folk. In the book *Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular Entertainments (A Communications Centered Hand Book)* edited by Richard Bauman states that analysis of culture, performance and folk forms reveals that information is passed on from one generation to another and that helps in the formation of socio-cultural, political background of a society. He draws upon thinkers like Clifford Geertz who opined that culture includes everything that can be produced and sustained by shared symbolic experience. Levis Strauss considered culture as universal and comprehensive. Culture also evolves from the creative expressions of a society like arts, literature, symbols, etc. Such culture contributes to cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation. Hence evolved a need to preserve, communicate it. Also it is mentioned that the understanding of culture has always been linked to the history of communications, wherein folk media forms are part and parcel of the cultural life of the people.

Folk media is a form of people's communication which talks about a community's beliefs, customs and history. At its core lies the transmission of information and information cannot be transmitted in vacuum. In his book, *Mass Communication in India*, Keval J. Kumar, defines communication as a "human relationship, involving two or more persons who come together to share, to dialogue and to commune, or just to be together, say at a festival or at a time of mourning" (2009, 1). The author

also relates the word communication to its etymological origins like community, communion, commonality, communalism and communism, which implies that communication, is an integral part of any individual's life and society at large. The simple form of communication developed from the time mankind started to evolve from the lower species. But sensory communication was not sufficient and led to the development of symbolic communication by means of language. Language is indicative of both verbal and non-verbal communication and folk media here is an important constituent. "The folk or traditional arts of India have from ancient times been used for moral, religious and socio-political purpose" (ibid., 253), this in itself denotes that folk art is ingrained in every society and also that folk media "have their roots in the tradition and experience of a large majority of the population" (ibid., 254).

Further, to understand folk media as a communication medium, two models of communication transmission and ritual communication are of relevance. James W. Carey, in his book *Communication as Culture*, states the transmission view of communication is labelled by terms such as 'imparting,' 'sending,' 'transmitting,' or 'giving information to others.' It is fashioned from an allegory of geography or transportation. The author uses the words 'sharing', 'participation', 'association', 'fellowship' and 'community'. He argues that a ritual view is directed "not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs" (2009, 15). Both these models are indicative of the sender, message, channel and receiver elements of communication. Carey is concerned with communication's role in a larger social realm and writes "communication 'is the most wonderful' because it is the basis of human fellowship; it produces the social bonds, bogus or not, that tie men together and make associated life possible. Society is possible because of the binding forces of shared information circulating in an organic system" (ibid., 18). Another interesting point that the author brings forth is that "communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed", function that folk media also plays (ibid., 19).

In the process of communication, messages in the form of content are transmitted to the receiver by the sender. The sender decodes the message received and makes meaning out of it. Meaning making or interpretation is affected by the process of interaction that human beings have with self and others. As Herbert Blumer in his book, *Symbolic Interactionism - Perspective and Method*, states “human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. The meaning of such things is derived from social interaction. These meanings are handed in, and modified through, and interpretive process used by the person dealing with the things encountered” (1986, 2).

Further, symbolic interaction considers action as the center of human society. “Culture as a conception, whether defined as custom, tradition, norm, value, rules, or such like, is clearly derived from what people do. Similarly, social structure in any of its aspects, as represented by such terms as social position, status, role, authority, and prestige, refers to relationships derived from how people act toward each other” (ibid., 6-7). Interpretation occurs between stimulus and response and interpretation forms symbols, is what is posed by symbolic interactionism, “fundamentally, group action takes the form of a fitting together of individual lines of action. Each individual aligns his action to the action of others by ascertaining what they are doing or what they intent to do – that is, by getting the meaning of their acts. For Mead, this is done by the individual ‘taking the role’ of others – either the role of a specific person or the role of a group (Mead’s ‘generalized other’)” (ibid., 82). Mead’s symbolic interaction reasons that interaction is the interpretation and defining of one another’s acts, and challenges the central view which depends on the innate stability of social structures. Members develop actions by means of designation and interpretation. Institutions are assorted sets of members who perform in accordance to certain set of meanings. The organisation itself is a result of an evolving phenomenon, and not innately constant. The process of communication involved in folk media and folk media role in perpetuating matriliney is being examined in this context.



## 1.7 Basic Research Questions

The study has been conducted with the following research questions:

1. What are the popular folk traditions of Khasi society?
2. Who are the caretakers of the folk media in Khasi society?
3. What are the impacts of new forms of media on the folk media?
4. How do the followers of *Niam Khasi* view folk tradition? What are the views of the Khasi Christian convert on the same?
5. Are there any connections between matriliney and folk media?
6. What is the role of the folk media in shaping the matriliney set-up?
7. How does folk tradition define the role of women in the Khasi society?
8. Is there any power politics involved in determining the role of woman and man within the folk media?
9. Are there changes in the gender role over a period in contrast to what is defined through generations in the folk traditions?
10. What is the impact of periodic social change on the folk media and its repercussions on matriliney?
11. Do the present generation Khasi find any relevance of the folk media in the current cultural context?
12. Has the folk media played any role in sustaining matriliney or is it merely a means of entertainment?

## 1.8 Objectives

The study aims to:

- a) Understand the different folk forms and decipher traces of matriliney.
- b) Analyse and examine the role of folk media in transmitting Khasi customs and traditions through generations.
- c) Comprehend the changes and continuity that folk media has experienced post the advent of Christianity.
- d) Get an insight on the gender equation as perpetuated through folk media and subsequently to locate the position of women.

- e) Find out the relevance of folk media and matriliney in the present Khasi society.

## **1.9 Methodology**

Historically, the position of the researcher in the field has always been debated. Whether or not the researcher should be a member of the community being studied has been a long standing debate. “The issue of researcher membership in the group or area being studied is relevant to all approaches of qualitative methodology as the researcher plays such a direct and intimate role in both data collection and analysis” (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, 55). Because culture and life of a community is under examination, locating the position of the researcher and his/her background becomes crucial.

Undoubtedly, there is the question of accountability on the part of the researcher towards the community since the interpretations made by the researcher does have some effect on the community.

Whether the researcher is an insider, sharing the characteristic, role, or experience under study with the participants, or an outsider to the commonality shared by participants, the personhood of the researcher, including her or his membership status in relation to those participating in the research, is an essential and ever-present aspect of the investigation. (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, 55)

Further, there are many views on the debate about the insider and outsider position of the researchers. One, the position of the researcher in the context of power, where the researcher “is the one with power; the researched is the one without power” (Rabe, 2003, 150) which historically were the colonial researchers and mostly male. Over the years consciousness has developed among the researchers about the disparity in the power relation between them and those under study. Second, the insider-outside continuum is also understood from the milieu of knowledge. Uwe Flick mentions in his book *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* that based on knowledge, the researcher can have different roles - foreigner, guest, initiator and insider. The role is determined on the basis of the awareness or incongruity with

which the researcher meets those being studied. The third context is that of the etic and emic perspectives. Both views are consequential since they impact the researcher who may or may not be a member of the community selected for study. Emic interpretations are those that are taken by an investigator who is a native of the community. On the other hand, etic viewpoints are those taken by a researcher who is an outsider to the community under study. But interestingly the etic account also has an emic source, and it has been established that a researcher should be able to establish both the etic and emic views. Though such contexts of power, knowledge, etic and emic views are used to locate position of the researcher, it is pertinent to remember that the position thus taken is also dynamic.

Keeping this in view, the researcher's position in this study seems to be twofold. In one context the researcher is not a native to the Khasi community and hence considered to be an outsider. By contrast the researcher is not new to the area of the study, by dint of being the third generation in the family who is born and brought up in Shillong. The scholar speaks the Khasi language and can also read it; and did not have to learn the language specifically for the study. A sense of familiarity to many rituals and practices of the Khasi community prevailed since the researcher was an audience to them in the growing up years and finds connect with them. Thus, can the researcher be considered an insider in some way, in this case? But again being a non-native, the position of the researcher is questioned. Nonetheless irrespective of being an insider or outsider, the attempt was to keep aside all personal biases and bring forth the etic and emic views as comprehensively as possible.

### **1.9.1 Universe of Study**

Meghalaya with an estimated population of 29.67 lakhs (Census, 2011) is a landlocked state of Northeast India and which is the abode of three major tribes, namely the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo. The state is largely inhabited by the tribes and where majority of the population (74.59 percent) follow Christianity. The Khasi tribe of Meghalaya, being a matrilineal society has attracted many scholars who have done creditable studies about the matrilineal structure, the customs and its

traditions over the years. And as such, a good number of materials on documented Khasi matriliney, legends, folktales and traditions are available. But so far, no study has been attempted to relate or sketch a linkage between the social structure and folk media. This study has attempted to understand and relate the Khasi matrilineal social structure with the folk media as an important communication channel. The study relied on field work carried out in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya and four villages. Two important festivals were also part of the study namely, Pomblang festival and Seng Kut Snem festival. During the fieldwork, the researcher gathered first-hand knowledge on the problem of study, whereby the data generated is used to integrate and substantiate the available existing literatures.

**Kongthong** - Nestled between the Sohra and Pynursla ridges, Kongthong village is located in Khatarshnong Laitkroh Tehsil of Sohra Syiemship, East Khasi Hills district in Meghalaya and is 65 kms away from the capital town, Shillong. Notably Kongthong has lower literacy rate compared to Meghalaya in 2011. The literacy rate of the village was 69.33 per cent. As per 2011 census, the village is a scheduled tribe village. Children generally have to go out of the village to nearby towns like Shillong to complete schooling and pursue higher education. The village is a compact village whereby the households are grouped together and the agricultural land is situated on the slopes of the hill. Although it is a multi-clan village, the positioning of the houses cannot determine the social hierarchy of the clans. The study finds out that there are ten major clans in the village, out of which four clans proclaim that they are the founders of the village, these clans are Khongsit, Majaw, Lynrah and Pohnong. The village has 109 households with a population density of 567 out of which 275 are males while 292 are females. Up to 20.63 per cent of the village population consists of children aged between 0-6 years. The average sex ratio of the village is 1062 which is higher than Meghalaya state average of 989. The primary occupation of the residents of the village is agriculture, wherein both men and women take equal part. Village economy is largely agrarian, though some villagers are also engaged in trade and service sectors. The residents of the village have started to engage themselves in tourism services with the inauguration of the 'Travelers' Nest' of the Indigenous Agro Tourism Cooperative Society at

Kongthong Village, from January 2016. Women of the village actively take part in all activities but do not participate in *Dorbar Shnong's* which is the traditional local governing units.

**Wakhen** - is situated at a distance of 37 kms from Shillong in Pynursla of East Khasi Hills district, and is the abode of the war Khasis. The Wakhen village has population of 1347 out of which 671 are males while 676 are females residing in 275 households, as per Census 2011. A place encircled by greenery, the narrow road inclines downwards in a spiral for 15 kilometers. The village swarms in 'Synsar' or broom crop and jackfruits and in winter, ripe oranges add color to the scenic beauty. The ancestors of the village were the inhabitants comprising of the 10 *kur* (clans) - Trai-iu (Malngiang), Tynsong, Khongwet, Khongjirem, Nongrum, Buhphang, Majaw, Khonglein, Khongji and Mynring. Majority of the people in this village are followers of the traditional faith *Niam Khasi* while a small number has converted to Christianity. There is a health sub center and two Anganwadi centers, along with one government lower primary school, two private lower primary schools and two government aided lower primary schools. It has only one secondary school run privately by the village. The nearest markets are Pynursla and Laitlyngkot about 30 kms each. The crops primarily cultivated by the people of the village include orange, broom, jack fruit, bay leaf, yam, maize (*Soh riew*), ginger, pepper, pineapple, betel nut, betel leaf, chilly, potatoe, banana among other local fruits. It is said that the oranges from Wakhen is one of the best in the state. Notably, this village is famous for its contribution to Khasi traditional music. Residents of this village are occupied in making traditional drums of various types that are used in ceremonial functions since times immemorial.

**Rangthylliang** – is housed in Pynursla of East Khasi Hills district, Meghalaya. The Rangthylliang village has population of 241 of which 113 are males while 128 are females as per population Census 2011. Literacy rate of Rangthylliang village is 71.51 percent. The major *Kur* (clans) in the village are Khongmawloh, Khongthaw, Sohkhlet, Marbaniang, Khongthohrem etc., of which Khongmawloh is the biggest clan. About 70 percent of the people are followers of the traditional faith, *Niam Khasi* while 30 percent have converted to Christianity. There are 3 Anganwadi

centers, 4 schools - Rangthylliang lower primary school, Riwar seng khasi secondary school Rangthylliang, Ri War Seng Khasi English section school, Dewsaw-pathaw upper primary school. The village also has also one college Ri War Seng Khasi college run by the government. The nearest market is the Pynursla market, villagers produce cash crops like wild black pepper, bay leaf, wild brooms and some fruits like orange, guava, etc.

**Nongbah Myrdon** - is located in Umsning of Ri Bhoi district, Meghalaya. There are 162 families residing in the village with a population of 903, of which 459 are males while 444 are females (Census, 2011). Literacy rate of Nongbah Myrdon village is 68.67 per cent. There are total 10 clans (*Kur*) residing in the village out of which Lyndoh, Nongphlang, Sohktung, Syngkli, Maring and Laloo the major clans. Kyntla, Sohkhwai, Pnar and Kharjanti are the smaller clans. In this village except one person the rest all others are followers of Christianity. There are three churches in the village, Presbyterian Church, Roman Catholic Church and Grace Covenant Church. The village also houses 2 Anganwadi centers, 3 lower primary schools, 1 primary school and 1 secondary school. Villagers cultivate rice and ginger and some seasonal vegetables. Nongbah Myrdon is also one of the four villages of Meghalaya adopted to be developed as model villages under Saansad Adrash Gram Yojana (SAGY).

### **1.9. 2 Techniques of Data Collection**

In understanding and analysing matriliney vis-à-vis folk media, it becomes a paramount necessity to get first-hand account from the direct practitioners of the communication system as well other important stakeholders of the community. For the interview, an optimum sample size of respondents was interviewed by making use of both structured and unstructured questions. The population was purposively stratified into representative categories inclusive of old people residing in Shillong and village elders, church leaders, members of Seng Khasi, young professionals (male and female), members of Seng Kynthai (Malki), academicians and intellectuals. The informants were then randomly selected from the proposed categories.

The study had sorted out Kongthong, Wakhen and Rangthylliang villages located in the East Khasi Hill district. The population in these three villages are predominantly followers of the traditional faith *Niam Khasi* and houses considerable number of people who have knowledge about varied folk forms. The fourth village Nongbah Myrdon is located in Ri Bhoi District and its residents are followers of Christianity. Also this village has been adopted for developing into a model village under the Saansad Adrash Gram Yojana (SAGY) and varied development projects have been implemented in this village. This village is in sharp contrast to the other three villages which are located in remote parts and have no access to such schemes. Also, these villages preserve and follow folk practices and while Nongbah Myrdon paints a different picture where its residents are involved in planning and implementation of development projects. Thereby, the data gathered from all the four villages is important for making contrast and comparisons. Alongside, social mapping was done for all the four aforementioned villages.

Other than the villages, selected respondents were also identified in Shillong town and interviewed. Two important festivals were also part of the study, namely Pomblang festival and Seng Kut Snem festival. Observation technique (non-participant) was used as a supplementary tool for gathering primary information on rituals and dances during the festivals. Additionally, the audience and participants of the festivals both male and female were interviewed. Audio-visual recordings and photographs were taken to document the events.

In total, 200 respondents representing varied stratified categories were interviewed, which include - old people and village elders (60), church leaders (14), members from Seng Khasi (5), members from Seng Kynthei (20), academicians and intellectuals (21), young professionals (50), audience and participants of the festivals both male and female (30).

Additionally, two daily newspapers Mawphor (vernacular) and Shillong Times (English) were taken up for analysis. The newspaper coverage for a period of one

year (January-December 2014) was evaluated to assess the frequency of coverage and type of news content with relation to Khasi folk media and matriliney.

Reviews of pertinent literatures, books, journals and magazines, newspapers, research and surveys carried out by the various organisations, published articles, e-journals, government records and other records were used as secondary data.

### **1.9.3 Period of Fieldwork**

The field work was carried out in three phases, the first phase began from September 2014 to November 2014, the second phase from January 2015 to March 2015 and the third phase of field work was carried out from June 2015 to August 2015. During the course of field work, key respondents were interviewed from four villages namely Kongthong, Wakhen and Rangthylliang in the east Khasi hills and Nongbah Myrdon in the Ri Bhoi District, of Meghalaya. Also, in Shillong town the capital of the state of Meghalaya, interviews were conducted with church leaders, elders, and Khasi youth, members of Seng Khasi and Seng Kynthei and academicians. Pomblang festival also known as the Nongkrem dance, held annually in the month of November in Smit which is about 11km from the capital city Shillong, was part of the field observation. Also, Seng Kut Snem festival held on 23rd of November every year in the Weiking Ground, Shillong, was witnessed as part of the field work.

Mobility in Shillong for conducting field work was not difficult, yet the concern was getting appointments since some respondents are eminent people with busy schedules, while some others were elderly whose health always did not allow them to sit for long hours of interview. But the sessions always ended with words of wisdom, inspiration and blessings for the researcher. Getting the attention of the youth was a hurdle at an age when people are always on the move; convincing them for interviews was a challenge and the experience will be memorable for many counter questioned the scholar on several occasions; some interviews were conducted at odd hours while the venue for some interviews were inexplicable.

The period prior to setting foot in the select villages for interviews was filled with anxiety, though contact was already established with one person from each village



who acted as the facilitators. First visit was in Kongthong village; when the researcher arrived in the village after a long drive from Shillong, the warmth with which she was welcomed made her feel at home. The people were happy about the fact that the scholar could communicate to them in Khasi, they understood the purpose of her visits and extended full cooperation, and in few occasions people went out of their way to facilitate her work.

In Wakhen and Rangthylliang too, the researcher's admittance became comfortable owing to the help extended by the resource persons who were contacted in prior.

In Nongbah Myrdon, too, the experience was pleasant but different as compared to other villages, since the residents of the village were more occupied with the various on-going developmental projects.

Every field study has its setbacks which is inevitable but at the end the fieldwork, has been a humbling experience; where many became friends and the researcher was showered with love and blessings by every person that became a part of this study.

### **1.10 Chapter Schematisation**

The thesis has six chapters, inclusive of the introduction and the conclusion. The first chapter is the introductory chapter provides a rationale behind the work and places the study in a theoretical context to enable the reader to understand and appreciate the objective of the study. It deliberates on the methodology of the study and concisely introduces the field setting, where the fieldwork has been carried out.

The articulations in chapters two, three, four and five have been formed with the help of narratives from the field coupled with secondary literature.

The second chapter begins with comprehensive overview of concept of kinship systems with a focus on matriliney and progresses to an analysis of Khasi matriliney. And subsequently, Khasi matriliney is discussed and with the help of field narratives, the changes and transition experienced within the Khasi society is underlined.

In the third chapter the preliminary focus is on the examination of folk media and its relevance in the modern day, wherein the term media implies a source or means

of communicating via the folk. Subsequently, the chapter progresses to an exploration of Khasi folk media in the milieu of the established discourse on folk media.

In the fourth chapter, the significance of folk media and its underpinnings of worldview is discussed. Also, a mention is made about the relevance of examining folk media and identity formation. Following which deliberation is made on the potential linkages between Khasi folk media and matriliney.

Gender equation in the Khasi society is an important theme that has emerged in the course of the study and this has been discussed in the fifth chapter. The position of women in Khasi society is deliberated which is traced through the folk practices vis-à-vis the social set-up, in understanding the gender continuum among the Khasis.

The sixth chapter is the concluding chapter, where a brief summary of the key points of each chapter of the thesis is presented. Further, the chapter reflects on the issues that the study set out to examine, in this vein the chapter points out the success and constraints of the work. Additionally, a discussion is also made on matters that have likelihood of development in future hinting at possible revisits in the future.

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