

CHAPTER 4

ETHNICITY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

In social sciences categorization of people are normal necessities, which are mostly based on biological attributes, cultural traits, language, religion, territory and so on. Here one takes cognizance of all such factors either collectively or singularly. Conventionally the term racial group based on physical/biological characteristics such as skin colour, eye fold, hair colour and texture, stature, etc. occupied in almost all anthropological literatures. Accordingly, racial groups were classified into Caucasoid, Mongoloid, Negroid, and Mongoloid. The scientific validity of such a classification has its own limitation, and hence, especially in the Indian social context such classification is not a factor to be reckoned with.

The term ethnic group fits in almost all societies across the globe as an accepted term and can be considered as having a better appellation. It can be defined as 'a category of people who identify themselves and are also identified by others with a distinct cultural tradition based on religion, language, province, or any other common cultural heritage'. In India we accommodate all castes and tribes belonging to any religion or language under this fold. There is an objective emphasis on culture, rather than biological or geographical factors. However, in the context of caste system in India, defining an ethnic group in terms of only culture is problematic since in one hand there are many castes accommodating a number of sub-castes under one generic caste name that can be referred to as an umbrella term; and on the other there are a number of castes having individual ethnic identity sharing a common cultural pool that can be referred to as local culture or regional culture depending on the spread of the cultural pattern across both time and space. Therefore, in India, caste as well as religious and linguistic groups

considerably overlap, making it difficult, if not impossible, to define ethnicity in terms of a single criterion such as culture. Similarly, such examples also exist among many tribal communities in India, especially in Northeastern India and central region of the country.

While dealing with such a topic one comes across another term, minority group, who are subjected to prejudice and discrimination in a given society. Sociologically speaking, minority groups are not necessarily numerically small groups; rather they are victims of differential and unequal treatment. In India the government makes a distinction between 'minorities' and 'weaker-sections'. Religious communities like Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, and Jains and so on are treated as minorities in this country, which also include differently abled and elderly people. All such groups are numerically smaller groups. In contrast to this *dalits*, tribals and backward classes are treated as weaker sections; and interestingly enough women are also treated as weaker sections, whether or not they are numerically small. Hence, it appears that weaker sections actually mean minorities or groups who suffer discrimination and unequal treatment.

Segments of population form ethnic groups by virtue of sharing the combination of (i) common descent that can be real or supposed; (ii) a socially relevant cultural or physical characteristic; and (iii) a set of attitudes and behaviors. So, on this definition, people are usually born to an ethnic group rather than acquiring their ethnic status through a special act. Usually people remain within the fold of a common ethnic group or of origin throughout their life, though mobility is feasible as in the case of religious conversion or through Sanskritization especially in India, both within caste and tribal fold. Since members of an ethnic group are actually or putatively related to one another by blood ties, an ethnic group may be presumed to be a kind of super-extended family.

A primary basis for differentiation between ethnic groups can be either cultural – such as language, a nationality and a religion – or physical – such as skin colour and body shape or both. The distinguishing feature is considered significant in the society, and people use it in differentiating themselves with others. Members of an ethnic group also share certain feelings, ideas and behaviours. There should be a feeling of 'we' and 'they' to form a real ethnic group and not merely an ethnic collection of people. There should be

a sense of perception of distinctiveness among the members. It helps to stabilize 'identity' by outsiders as well as by themselves.

In the Indian context different language groups existed over centuries in common geo-political entities maintaining their own ethnic identities based on occupational pursuance or otherwise. The administrative divisions called provinces or provincial states created by the colonial administrators demarcated linguistic based ethnic groups, when majority and minority statuses were ascribed. However, the decadal census exercises since 1872 helped to create ethnic categories based on caste or tribal identities and sometimes occupational pursuits. In the case of Meghalaya territory played an important role for creating an identity for tribal communities like inhabitants of Garo Hills as 'Garo' as exonym, the endonym being *Achik*; Khasi Hills for Khasi as exonym, the endonym being *Khyriam*; and Jaintia Hills for the Jaintia as exonym, the endonym being *Pnar*.

4.1. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The most important feature of any society is its stable social organization, which regulates the inner dynamics of the society maintaining the stability and solidarity of the society, in turn safeguarding the identity and ethnicity of the community. In a way each social organizational parameter is considered as the pillar of the structure of the society and the inter linkage of these units forms the organizational aspect of the society as the most stable social web of the society. Scholars interested in the fields of ethnicity and identity formation consider social organization as the most viable data base to understand the society. Many places in India and in the rest of the world language is considered to be an important aspect for the formation of the states and it is a basic criteria for the determination of a community. While language is associated with ethnicity of the community to a great extent, the aspect of identity rests more on the social organizational pillars like clan, marriage, family, inheritance, descent and so on. As has been understood from the empirical study the Pnar have a stable social organization that helps to build up their ethnicity and identity in a formidable way in a polyethnic mosaic.

4.1.1. Language

Linguistically the Pnar represents the *Mon-Khmer* speech family spoken in South East Asia. *Mon-Khmer* belongs to the Austro-Asiatic family under the Austric super family. Both Khasi and Pnar have survived as a distinct island owing to its past connection with a number of *Mon-Khmer* speeches that exist in the far-flung South Eastern part of Asia, and are still spoken in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam and as far as Malaysia with inclusion of mainly the Khmeric and Bahnaric. Pnar is one of the least studied languages. At the phonological level, Pnar has 12 vowels and 26 consonants. Besides it also gives ample variety of diphthongs. There is a distinction of tense and lax in the monophthongs. There is a four-way distinction of nasal consonants at bilabial, dental, velar and palatal. These consonants occur at all the positions in a word. Final consonants are unreleased. The phenomenon of lamino dental is found among the Pnar as well. The aspiration of plosives is found in cases. All the obstruents are voiced except the velar plosive /k. The Pnar show the characteristic of agglutinating language. The words with two distinct syllables often get merged into compounds which are endocentric or syntactic (Chaudhary, 2004).

The Pnar do not have a script of their own. The dialect is known as ‘Pnar dialect’. This dialect is not developed enough to replace Khasi language in the lower and upper primary grades in the school. All the transactions and official communications are done and written in Khasi language. It is evident from that though Jaintia dialect is different from Khasi dialect yet the medium of instruction in schools of the Jaintia Hills from the days of British administration was the Cherra dialect (Gatphoh, 1990: 302; Lamare, 2005: 111). It could also be noted that Rev. G. Angel Jones, a Welsh missionary, who was based at Jowai had a fair knowledge of the Jaintia language. He wanted to get the Holy Bible published in the Jaintia language. But his proposal was turned down in one of the meetings of the Assam branch of the Bible Society. The Pnar converts who were in the meetings opted Khasi language over Jaintia language. After that no attempt was made and the schools started by the missionaries continue to impart knowledge with the language which they mastered already. The Christian converts did not try to develop the Jaintia language and used Khasi language extensively in their homilies and services. This

left the Jaintia language in a dormant state and still it continues to be so. It was only in the beginning of twentieth century that late Albin Pariat, the national poet of Jaintias through his book *Ki Rwai Pnar* (1937) tried to revive the language of the Pnar. However, the attitude of the British officials, missionaries and the Jaintia kept the Jaintia dialect in the embryonic form. Jaintia Language and the Literary Association which was formed on 8th February 1975 urged everyone to preserve, develop and make research on the Jaintia language and literature. Since then books, pamphlets are published borrowing the Roman script of the Khasi version of English alphabet (Lamare, 2005: 111-114).

4.1.2. Clan (*Kur*)

The important dimension of the Pnar social organization is clan. Since they believe that the children belong to the mother, they usually bestow the clan of the mother to the children. There are countless clans among the Pnar tribe. The origin of the clan among the Pnar can be traced back to the first settlers of the Jowai territory, *U Niang Lyngdoh*, his sister *Ka Long Lyngdoh* and her four daughters *Ka Bon*, *Ka Tein*, *Ka Wet* and *Ka Doh*. Over the years they decided to stay in different localities in and around the Jowai territory. The clan of four wombs and twelve clans (*sookpohkhadarwarnai*) came from these four sisters who were known as *Ki Iaw Blei*. After them there came other clans to the Pnar habitat through others, such as *Le-Kyllung* from which came the clans like Shylla, Pde, Pariat, Blah and from *Iaw Chibidi* proceeds Laloo, Nartiang, Marong, and Pyrbot. Apart from these, there are innumerable clans exist in the Pnar world. Though all the clans are equal, the original occupants of the Jowai are the four mothers and their progenies get preferences during the *Beh-dien-khlam* festival to offer rituals to the God. A table shown by Lamare (2005: 63) and Mohrmen (2015) presents the origin of the clans known as *sookpohkhadarwarnai*.

Table 4.1

Origin of Clans

Mother	Husband	Place of stay	Clans	Bone Repository
Ka Bon	From Thangkhiew clan	Chilliang Raij	Pasubon, Lipon, Rangad	Ka Khloo Langdoh
Ka Tein	From Mukhim clan	Dulong	Pakynstein, Nikhla, War	U Lum Kyrwiang
Ka Wet	From Shadap Manar	Wah Synji Panaliar	Paswet, Lakiang, Mutyen, Kma, Kynjin, Katphoh, Seinphoh, Lanong, Leinphoh, Liwait, Niangphoh, Litan	Ka Blai, below the hillock <i>U Lum Moo-Likso</i>
Ka Doh	From Dkhar Clan	Lum Iongkjam	Siangbood, Syngkon, Nangbah	Ka Blai
Ka Bor Kuli (later addition claiming the same ancestress)	U Yale	Kupli	Passah	--
Ka Iaw Chibidi (later addition claiming the same ancestress)	--	Iapngar	Laloo, Nartiang, Marong, Pyrbot, Lamin, Kjam, Hek, Katkeh	--

Ka Iawbei (later addition claiming the same ancestress)	From Dhar Clan	--	Am Prai/Amtapoh	--
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4.1.3. Marriage

The institution of marriage prescribes community endogamy through monogamy. However, in the event of death of either of the spouse or divorce, a person can remarry. Marriage between members of the same clan is forbidden and is considered a taboo and a punishable offence. Hence, clan exogamy is the strict rule. Negotiation is the normative pattern of the society. However, self choice is also allowed, which sometimes results in elopement. However, in such form of marriage by elopement is regularized through settlement at the level of council of elders. This is called *Ia bia tymmen*.

Marriage among the Pnar entitles the woman to stay with their own family members. She continues to live in her mother's house and carries on the usual domestic chores, if she is the youngest. In case of other daughters, in the initial years of marriage, they remain in the mother's house along with their husbands. In due course of time it is expected that she moves out of her mother's house along with her husband and children. The role of the husband in supporting his wife in setting up a new unit portrays the Pnar male as a husband and a father, which can be attributed as emancipation of Pnar men.

4.1.4. Family

Family (*Chi Yung*), like any other communities, is the smallest unit of the social organization. Traditional Pnar family consists of mother, grandmother, sisters, brothers, maternal uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces. Sometimes one could see grandfathers and fathers may also reside in the same house. It resembles like an extended family. 'The family among them forms an important socio-economic and religious unit and, therefore,

forms the core of their social organization' (Lamare, 2005: 16). The members of the Pnar family are formed by birth and there is no contingent relationship between marriage and the mode of residence of the matrikins. Since descent is traced through the mother, residence is naturally matrilocal (Gassah, 1994: 75). 'The mother is entrusted with the important duties of performing family rites and ceremonies, though in actual practice, her brothers perform the task of sacrifice and other religious activities. The mother, the maternal uncle and the father are all held sacred by the descendants in each group of the clan' (Lamare, 2005: 16). In traditional Pnar family the man lives and works with his mother and he visits his wife only at night. Therefore, his wife does not have any ownership of his property and savings. Though the Pnar male has close attachment with his clan, especially with his mother's house, he cannot shed his obligation towards his wife and children. Now a days men prefer to have 'neolocal' as opposed to 'natalocal' residence. He establishes his own house with his wife and children either in the property given to his wife by her parents or in the land which he bought for this purpose.

His manifold responsibilities as son, husband, and uncle make him more responsible and dutiful. This has been attested by Lamare (2005: 19) as: "The role of husband in the wife's house is very different. He does not interfere in the management of any affairs or family matters. It is the duty of the wife's brothers and her uncle to accomplish this task. It is precisely because of this that the Pnar traditional household pattern is being regarded as matrilocal rather than conjugal".

In the Pnar social structure, the family is the basic unit, where the members are taught to know one's own cognates and agnates, educating to know the lineage and descent from the blood tie of the mother, where marriage with one's own clan is forbidden as a taboo. The word *tip* conveys an inherent knowledge in-born in man which thrives and grows with his development in stature and intellectual ability. So *tipkur* means to know one's own cognates, and *tipkha* means to know one's own agnates, in which the prohibitory degree of relationship for three generations is upkept from the father and the womb of the paternal grandmother (*meikha*). It is through marriage that the term *tipkha* came into existence. *Ka Tipkur Tipkha* is a respectful recognition of the basic social structure, which consists of either maternal or paternal relationship. All those who are descendants from the same ancestral mother belong to the same *kur* or clan. Members

of the father's clan are not *kur* but *kha*. Therefore, the foundation of the Pnar society is based on the concept of *kur* and *kha*. It enjoins all to know and respect each other, to recognize one's relations on both sides and to give due regard to them (Shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream retrieved on 10/6/2019).

4.1.5. Divorce

Among the Pnar divorce (*Ia Pyllait Kurim*) may take place due to adultery, barrenness, incompatibility of temperament and issues with genuine cause. Divorce could be effective only if it has the consent of both the parties. If one party fails to comply, then the other party has to pay an amount as compensation (*thnem*). Though both the parties are free to remarry after divorce, it seems to be quite inappropriate for the divorced parties to remarry each other again. No divorce could take place during pregnancy. The rules relating to divorce require that *U Kni* or *U Ksiang* of the respective parties along with acquaintances and friends that witness the divorce ceremony.

After the ceremony, the village elder (*U Tymmen Chnong*) or Magistrate (*U Wasan*) declares that the two parties have divorced each other, and that any other party is free to marry any one of the divorcees. To signify that the divorce proceedings are over, *U Tymmen Chnong* or *U Wasan* throws away five cowries or pieces (*San-chyein*) collected from the two parties. Earlier, the symbolic act of divorce was the tearing away of betel leaf (*Khet-pathi*) into two pieces. After the divorce, the children belong to the mother.

4.1.6. Matriliney

The Pnarsociety is purely matrilineal. Mothers play an important role in every family. She is the custodian of the family and domestic affairs. The husband remains as a progenitor while the uncle becomes the cultural father (Kharkrang, 2012: 49). Whether the society is patrilineal or matrilineal it is the children, both boys and girls, who make the continuity and perpetuation of the family and clan possible. They carry forward the

family / clan identity, property, authority and family religious tradition. They are counted as the vehicle for biological and cultural continuity. Thus, children are the most valued constituent elements in every society and family. David M. Schneider and K. Gough (1961) gives three features as the basic characteristics common to both matriliney and patriliney: (i) in both unilineal descent groups are exogamous; (ii) women have primary responsibility for the care of children; and (iii) men have authority over women and children. The critical difference between the two systems is that while both the principle of group membership and the line of authority run through the male line in patrilineal societies they are separated between males and females in matrilineal systems, that is the principle of group membership runs through the female sex, the line of authority goes through the male sex.

Gurdon (1906/2010: 76) was the first scholar, who gave a detailed description about the Khasi and the Pnar citing a subtle difference between the matriliney among them. He writes ‘the most remarkable feature of the Khasi marriage is that it is usual for the husband to live with his wife in his mother-in-law’s house and not for him to take his bride home amongst the *Synteng*, however the case is different; for them the husband does not go and live in his mother-in-law’s house, he only visits her (his wife) there’.

Kharkrang (2012: 16) speaks about three cultural elements that make sense and meaning in the life of children in a matrilineal community.

Descent: It gives identity of a child whether he / she belongs to the father’s or the mother’s clan. In other words, descent decides whether children perpetuate the father’s or mother’s line; whether they live patrilocally or matrilocally, or whether the father exercises ultimate authority over them or uncle.

Inheritance: It speaks about the material substance and support children which includes all moveable and immovable goods, wealth and property; whether the inheritance comes from the father’s side or the mother’s side and the property shared by sons and daughters.

Succession: It is mostly concerned with the decision making, who succeeds the authority. In patriliney the eldest son succeeds the father while in matriliney the nephew

succeeds the uncle with regard for the responsibility in caring the family of his sister or aunt.

The origin of mother's right and practices among the people still remains unexplained. There is every possibility that they might have brought it from China or Indo China, where mother's right is wide spread among the tribes or maybe have adopted it when they came into contact with others during their migratory process' (Lamare, 2005: 18). The matrilineal 'system does not actually favour women although certain aspects of their ideology and inheritance rules may give a contrary impression' (Chacko, 1998: 9). Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh, one of the first indigenous priests of the Roman Catholic Church, who extensively wrote about the *Niam Tre* and their religious nuances, speaks about the crucial role played by *Kni* (uncle) in a matrilineal family. He is the centre of authority and the economy and the chief administrator of all goods, moveable and immovable, which is principally earned by him. He is also the priest, the teacher, and the intermediary between God and his sister's children (Chacko, 1998: 5).

In Pnar matriliney lies the fact that the children belong to the mother and she has the natural claim and jurisdiction over her sons even after their marriage. In Pnar community it is expected that 'the son should die in his mother's house. He belongs to the mother at all times. During his trouble period it is his clan would look after him. They are responsible for his cremation and even after his death, his bones should be preserved along with his mother's. This indicates that the male person continues to be the member of his mother's house all his life' (Lamare, 2005:18).

But over the years one can see that matriliney among the Pnar is getting a new dimension as Fr. Sngi says:

"When spouses had to be sought from distant villages the traditional system could not survive and the husbands were forced to stay with their wives ... the disintegration of the ancient matriliney started much before the Britishners or the Christian missionaries arrived ... society is going through a difficult period because though the uncle has lost his pivotal role, the father has not yet attained his due role. There is an authority vacuum. There is no one to bring up the children in proper discipline and the father is still an outsider' (Chacko, 1998: 6).

4.1.7. Inheritance

For Pnars the inheritance and hereditary is drawn through the mother. However, 'it is noted that the religious and secular powers are being vested with the male' (Lamare, 2005: 26). The women in the Pnar society play an important role in bringing up the children and looking after the household chores of the family. Nevertheless, political and administrative powers are not vested with them. Among the Pnar property is of two kinds: ancestral inalienable (*yongrim*), and personal alienable (*yutran*). The ancestral land would pass from the mother to the youngest daughter (*Ka Wasdiah / Ka Iang Yung*). She has no full authority of the family property and cannot sell off or dispose off any part of it without getting permission from the members of the family. Hence, she remains only as a custodian of the property. Along with the ancestral property she also gets certain responsibilities and obligations to perform as the house keeper of the house of Goddess (*Ka Blai Yung*). Though the property belongs to the youngest daughter yet there are instances that the family members, only daughters, share it among themselves before they move out from the ancestral house to establish a new house with their husbands and children. If the youngest daughter is incapable of discharging her responsibilities or dies then the second in line will succeed her and if there is no daughter at all in the family then the youngest son receives the property (Lamare, 2005: 27).

Individuals are free to acquire property of his / her choice. This property can be disposed according to the will of the owners. If the family succession is extinct (*wiar jait / duh jait*) with the condition of having no children in the family then the system of adoption (*rap yung*) is resorted to. The parents are free to adopt a girl child and she succeeds the mother and the ancestral property. In case of no succession, either natural or adopted is available, then the property is counted as that of the ruler (*Syiem*) (Pakem, 1990: 82). Pnar males have no right over the ancestral property as long as the female heir is there. It does not mean that he cannot acquire property for himself. His self-acquired property (*yutran*) remains as long as he wishes. Such property will pass on to whomever he wishes to give. If he dies without a will (*pynkam*) then the property will go to the mother or his sister not to his wife, but if the wife takes an oath not to marry again

then she gets a portion of her husband's income. This could be done through the ceremony called *I Kit-Khah* (Pakem, 1990: 83; Bareh, 2001: 316; Lamare, 2005: 27). When this property is passed on either to mother or sister of the wife then it becomes an ancestral property for the next generation.

4.1.8. Kinship

The study of the social organization of a community involves understanding of an individual and group behavior in a specific context. In a simple society, the individual and collective manners are habituated by the kinship structure (Goody, 1971). Kinship provides the basic framework of a society. The kinship arrangement offers principles on interpersonal relationships, individual obligations and responsibilities. The study of kinship has engaged the center stage of anthropological investigation for a long time (Bhandari, 1992). It is the kinship that decides the structure of marriage, marriage ritual and divorce. Kinship system can be classified as 'classificatory system' (Murdock, 1949). The Pnar kinship system is mainly drawn from the mother's clan. There are several kinship terms as used commonly for many kins.

Table 4.2

Kinship Terms

Kinship Relationships	Pnar Kinship Terms	Generation
FFF / MMF / FMF	<i>Pa Pun</i>	+++
FFM / MMM / MFM	<i>Bei Pun</i>	+++
FF / MF	<i>Pa men / Woh Kha</i>	++
FM / MM	<i>Bei men / Men Kha</i>	++
F	<i>U Pa</i>	+
M	<i>Ka Bei</i>	+

F eB	<i>U Pa San</i>	+
M eB	<i>U Ma San</i>	+
F eSH	<i>U Pa Kha</i>	+
M eSH	<i>U Pa Heh</i>	+
M eBW	<i>U Kinia</i>	+
F eBW	<i>Be Ruit / Memih</i>	+
F eS	<i>Ka BehKha</i>	+
M eS	<i>Beh Heh / Be Mai</i>	+
F yS	<i>Beh Khaduh / Be Kha Khian</i>	+
M yS	<i>Be Khain</i>	+
F yBW	<i>Be Kha</i>	+
F yB	<i>Pa Kha</i>	+
M yB	<i>U Makhian / Ma Duh</i>	+
F ySH	<i>Pa Kha</i>	+
M ySH	<i>Pa Phian / Pa Lud/ Pa duh</i>	+
Father –in-law	<i>Pa Nia</i>	+
Mother-in-law	<i>Bei Nia</i>	+
Step Mother	<i>Be Ruit / BeMih</i>	+
EGO	<i>NGA</i>	0
Wife	<i>Ka Kurim</i>	0
Husband	<i>U Kurim</i>	0
Brother elder	<i>San Pun</i>	0
Brother Younger	<i>Diah duh</i>	0

Sister Younger	<i>Ka diah</i>	0
Elder sister	<i>Ka Ruit/ ka Bah</i>	0
Elder Brother's wife	<i>Ka Kong</i>	0
Elder Sister's Husband	<i>U Kong</i>	0
Younger Brother's wife	<i>Ki Boo</i>	0
Younger Sister's Husband	<i>U Boo</i>	0
Wife's Elder brother	<i>U Kong</i>	0
Wife's elder brother's wife	<i>Ka Kong</i>	0
Wife's younger brother	<i>U Boo</i>	0
Wife's Younger's wife	<i>Ka Boo</i>	0
Wife's elder sister	<i>Ka Kong</i>	0
Wife's elder sister's husband	<i>U Kong</i>	0
Wife younger sister	<i>Ka Boo</i>	0
Wife younger sister's husband	<i>U Boo</i>	0
Husband's elder brother	<i>U Kong</i>	0
Husband's elder brother's wife	<i>Ka Kong</i>	0
Husband's younger brother	<i>U Boo</i>	0
Husband's younger brother's wife	<i>Ka Boo</i>	0
Husband's elder sister	<i>Ka Kong</i>	0
Husband's elder sister's husband	<i>U Kong</i>	0
Husband's younger sister	<i>Ka Boo</i>	0
Husband's younger sister's husband	<i>U Boo</i>	0
Son	<i>U Khon</i>	–

Brother's Son	<i>U Khon wa kha</i>	–
Elder sisters Son	<i>U Pysa khon</i>	–
Younger sister's Son	<i>U Pysa Khon</i>	–
Elder Brother's Daughter	<i>Ka Khon</i>	–
Elder sister's Daughter	<i>Ka Khon</i>	–
Daughter	<i>Ka Khon</i>	–
Younger Brother Daughter	<i>Ka Khon</i>	–
Child's Father in law	<i>U Kong / u Boo</i>	–
Child's-in-Law	<i>Ka Kong //Ka Boo</i>	–
Son's Wife	<i>Ka Pysa Kurim</i>	–
Daughter's Husband	<i>U Kysa Kurim</i>	–
Grand Child	<i>U / Ka Ksu</i>	--
GGC	<i>U / Ka Ksu Miaw</i>	----
GGGC	<i>U / Ka Ksu Khnea</i>	-----
GGGCC	<i>U / Ka Ksu Miaw</i>	-----
GGGCCC	<i>U / Ka Ksu Ksaw</i>	-----

4.2. RITES OF PASSAGE

A society is built upon social institutions. It remains as an axis and the activities of a particular society revolve round it. The Pnar Society is equipped with strong social institutions which differentiate it from all other tribal communities of the region maintaining the individuality among allover tribal communities of the country. The most striking feature could be its presence of matriliney. The Pnar keep with great valour the matriliney of their culture and they feel proud of it. Though the other two communities, Khasi and Garo, are also matrilineal, yet there are differences among them if seen

microscopically at the empirical level. As per their oral tradition, Pnars are referred to as the progeny of four wombs, *SooKpoh*, four sisters. The clans have originated through them. Lamare (2005: 15) refers to the four sisters as *Ka Bon*, *Ka Tein*, *Ka Wet*, and *Ka Doh*. The Pnar clan traces their origin from the ancestress and their lineage descended from the mother to her daughters. Pnars generally keep in the same cairns, *Moo-Tyllein*, and the ashes of the members of the clan if the lineal connection is from the same ancestral mother. Like all other communities they observe elaborate rituals which are performed by them on various occasions from conception (anti natal care) till observances of mortuary rites passing through the passages of birth, child rearing (post natal care), puberty, marriage till death.

4.2.1. Puberty (*Pynheh Rngu*)

A girl reaching puberty is considered to be a good omen to the family (*chi yung*) and clan (*chi kur*). Though she is considered ritually polluted for a day, an appropriate day is fixed by the parents to perform a ritual called *pynheh rngu*. Friends and relatives are invited for this and the *Lyngdoh* who officiates in the rituals. They pray for her before handing over gifts and other items. The most striking element of the celebration is eating in the leaves called *bam ja ha ka sla*.

4.2.2. Marriage Rituals (*Chongkha Chongman*)

Marriage is a powerful social institution, which keeps up the identity and uniqueness of every community. Like many other tribal communities, the Pnar also consider marriage has both social and religious significance. It is strictly exogamous at the clan level, i. e., outside the clan (*kur*). Marriage is a sacred union of the male and the female as a cultural practice. There cannot be a greater sin than coition between consanguine members (Rymbai, 1979: 76; Lamare, 2005: 20). Though they practice cross cousin marriage but it is not advisable to marry maternal uncle's daughter as long as he is alive (Passah, 1985: 212; Lamare, 2005: 20; Gassah, 1994: 73). The traditional law prohibits marriage within the clan as well as marriage with paternal uncle or aunt is alive.

‘The latter is commonly known as *I lai Paruit*. In some cases, *I Lai Paruit* has been tolerated, but then at the time of the death of the spouse, his or her bones are kept outside the *tpep* or cinerarium of the clan’ (Lamare, 2005: 20). Those who violate the traditional custom by marrying within the clan the couples are exiled from the villages and treated as ostracized. They are denied all the religious solace and their ashes after death will not be kept in the cairns of the *kur* (Rymbai, 1979: 76; Lamare, 2005: 20). Marrying one’s own father’s sister’s daughter is a taboo (*I ya kylliang*). If marriages of such nature take place diseases leading to death (*langshor*) can befall upon either of the clans (Lamare, 2005: 20). The well accepted and appreciated marriage is between persons belonging to different clans (*KynsaiPongrai*) and between similar age groups or generations (*ratap-rabiang*).

Though various forms of marriages are found among the Pnar of Meghalaya the most accepted one could be arranged marriage. Often when a boy reaches a marriageable age either his uncles or his parents would make effort to find out a suitable girl for him through their friends and relatives. Even if the boy and girl are in love and have consented each other to get married, yet their marriage should be arranged by their respective clans. When the parents of a boy find a suitable girl, they make a formal proposal (*I Kyllat-Kurim*) and after considering all the aspects age (*ryta*) and lineage (*KynsaiPongrai*) of the boy and the girl they make arrangement for the marriage. A few days after the *I Kyllat Kurim* is made, the family of the boy ascertains whether there is any change in the decision from the girl’s side or not. The uncle (*U Kni*) of the boy or in his absence any mediator (*U Ksiang*) goes to the girl’s house. A few days later engagement (*I Pynskhem Ktien*) is arranged and a ring made of Brass, Silver or Gold is presented to the girl. From then on, the boy is not allowed to visit the girl till the marriage. If there is a breach on either side a taboo (*sang*) is conferred on both clans that no marriage would ever exist between the two clans (Passah, 1985: 213; Lamare, 2005: 21).

‘A day before the marriage is to be solemnized, the groom’s family provides the bride’s family an amount of money for the purpose of a special mat (*U Chylliah Chlain*) on which the groom will sit on the night of wedding day’ (Lamare, 2005: 21). Necessary preparation would be thought of by the persons from both the sides for a big feast and

both the sides send persons to help each other where food is exchanged between both the parities. In the evening the friends and relatives of the bride go to bring the groom (*Lichoo*). The uncle of the bride leads the procession by carrying lighted firewood. The procession is greeted with songs of jubilation. On reaching the groom's house the lighted firewood is kept along with the two other lighted bunches prepared by the groom's family in a room called *I Tre Thlong*. While the four bunches of firewood are burning inside the room both the parties sit together and lovely conversation is initiated by chewing betel nuts. After seeking blessing from the mother, the groom together with his uncle leaves for the bride's house. The uncle of the bride leads the procession with lighted torch followed by the uncle of the groom. These two are followed by *U Kha* of the groom followed by the *U Kha* of the bride. The entire function is carried out in the evening. They move with jubilation with songs and shouting announcing the arrival of the groom. Upon reaching the house of the bride the groom goes to the prayer room (*Yung Blai*) of the bride and keeps all the torches together. They make sure that all who have accompanied the groom get their place in the *Yung Blai*, where marriage ritual is going to take place while from the bride's side only the elders and uncles may attend the service inside the *Yung Blai*. Cooked pork will be brought to the people for consumption and the uncle (*U Kni*) of the groom and uncle (*U Kni*) of the bride mixes the gourd of rice beer in a brass bowl, each taking turns in pouring the beer in the bowl begins from the bride's uncle followed by the groom's uncle.

After that the four torches are removed from the room and stone slabs are taken out and the room is cleaned. Before the groom enters the room again for the marriage his legs are washed by a male relative of the bride, while a special mat (*Chilliah Chlain*) is spread in the room either by the mother or aunt of the bride. Since it is a sacred ritual no one touches the mat with their leg. Once the groom has taken the place the solemnization (*I Lam Yutang bad Sawar*) takes place.

The uncle of the bride takes the lead by addressing the people with a speech and he never fails to mention the creator, creation of earth, coming of seven huts (*Niaw Wasa*), the way their ancestress and they lived and multiplied in the present habitat. He moves on mentioning about the bride and her lives how she has grown up till the present day. He then addresses the groom and mentions the duties and responsibilities of the

groom as a son and a father both in his mother's house and the wife's house. At the end thanksgiving (*Chihajar Ngooh*) is performed for the God bringing the ceremony (*Lam Yutang*) to end at the bride's side.

After that the uncle of the groom delivers his speech with all the narration about the groom as a boy, young man and as an adult man. Here the uncle also mentions the duties and the responsibilities of the bride, and warns her to be away from lure of the world and keep her trust in her husband even if he is away from home in search of work. This also ends with a thanksgiving (*Chihajar Ngooh*).

After the *I Lam Yutang* the marriage ceremony is considered to be over. Then the bride's relatives come and meet the groom. From this it is clear that the bride is absent in the entire ceremony. She enters the room after all the guests depart from the room.

Accompanied by her grandmother or aunt, the newlywed bride visits (*I lie kiad Pynche*) her in-laws house a week after the marriage. She brings with her a gourd of fermented rice beer. She is welcomed by the groom's mother or aunt. After spending time in leisure talks and chewing betel nuts the relatives of the bride leave the house then the male members of the groom's house would take the rice beer for invoking blessing on the newlywed couples. At dusk the couple leaves the groom's house after their meals.

Traditionally after the marriage the husband visits the wife's house only at night. When day breaks, he returns to his mother's house for labour and food. It is only after some time especially after getting a few children they may stay together. If the husband is from a distant place, he may stay with his wife soon after the marriage. 'After his death his body is returned to his mother's house for death ceremonies. And if the wife promises not to remarry then, she may keep the bones of her husband after cremation' (shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in retrieved on 7/06/2019).

4.2.3. Child Bearing (*Pun Khon*)

Like any other communities the Pnar also consider children are the gift of God. Thus, they respect pregnant women and try their best to meet every requirement of theirs. When a woman is diagnosed with pregnancy the family members take extreme care to

satisfy her needs. Her bodily weakness and desire for food and special delicacies are taken care by the family members. They believe that if the desire of a pregnant woman cannot be satisfied it will have adverse effect in the baby. Along with these there are certain restrictions for a pregnant woman, such as accompanying funeral procession, leaving any one work half done like weaving, sewing, etc. Contrary to this some of the Pnar believe that the pregnant woman should not complete the sewing which she began before pregnancy.

Along with the pregnant woman her husband also should abstain from certain activities, such as avoid killing animals, fishing, hunting, cutting pumpkins, melting of iron, etc. If he does anything contrary the baby will have marks and cuts on his body. When the pregnancy crosses the fifth month the mother and her family should keep things necessary for delivery.

4.2.4. Child Birth (*Ka Syip Syin*)

Children are considered to be the gifts from God (*U Blai*). They keep always few things ready and handy (*Booh Pangrai*) even before the birth of a baby for the rituals being performed soon after the birth. These could be special mat (*U chylliah chlein*), soap (*sabon pangrai*), mustard oil (*phniangbam*), thread-ball (*U kse langlot*), clothes for various usages (*lusiang, lulum-lukdung*), ginger (*U syin*), a jar of water (*U klong um*), a particular type of fish (*ka dacha dapatli*), small pot (*U kchu larnai khian*), big pot (*U kchu larnai heh*), and a sharp splinter of bamboo (*ka sapied*). The mat is used during the labour period up to the child birth and the sharp splinter of bamboo is used to cut the umbilical cord. They believe that the evil deity's (*Ka Ron Chyndi*) curse will fall upon those who use sharp metal or knife to cut the umbilical cord of the newborn.

The small pot is used to keep the placenta till the naming ceremony while the big pot is used for boiling water to give bath to the newborn baby. With the thread-ball (*U kse langlot*) they measure the umbilical cord till the knee of the baby and then fastened it enough and the remaining part would be cut and removed from the body. The father of the baby cannot cut the umbilical cord whereas the mother can do so if no other family

members are around (Lamare, 2005: 29). When the labour pain begins special prayers are offered to the Goddess of family (*Ka Blai Yung*) and to the creator God (*Ka Bei Waboooh ka Bei Wa Thoo*) for the safe delivery of the child. If the child comes out with fisted hand no one tries to open the fist. First bath should be given to the baby with the water that has been heated on the earthen pot and the pot will be used for three days for heating water. On the third day it will be broken (Laloo, 2007: 18).

Child birth is considered to be an occasion of joy and merry making. While thanking the God (*u Blai*) for giving a new member to the family (*Chi Yung*) and clan (*Chi Kur*) they perform a ritual called *I sip-syin* during which fish (*ka dakha dapatli*) and ginger (*u syin*) are consumed along with rice beer by the people present and request the *Ka Yung Blai* to ward off the child from all the possible dangers that could be befallen on it. Prior to this the guests are invited for a ritual called ‘through the danger’ (*Ka Noh Mynso*), that is disposing of the placenta collected and kept in an earthen pot in a traditional way. During which ash (*tpai*) is spread over the placenta, which is in the earthen pot, over which powdered yeast and turmeric (*Chyrmitt*) is smeared. It is based on the belief that anything that stinks and rots should not be buried. If they do so it pollutes the mother earth. Thus, they burn everything even the dead body. Pollution is also associated with child birth. The mother’s family observes pollution for five days and five nights. It is the uncle (*ma heh*) who purifies them at the end.

4.2.5. Naming Ceremony (*Pyrtuit Khon ne Chadlanei*)

Naming ceremony (*Chadlanei*) often takes place on the day after the birth of a child (*Wanki Dhar*). Since it is an elaborate ceremony many household items are used. For a boy child they keep some significant items nearby like a bow and three arrows (*u khnam bad ka ryntieh*) signifying a warrior, whereas for a girl child a conical bamboo basket and a head strap is kept which signifies her role in the family and in the clan. Usually the one who is quite knowledgeable with regard to the rubrics perform the rituals; often it is an elder from the family or clan. They keep a plantain leaf on the floor and sprinkle water on it and take a gourd filled with water or rice beer while invoking God. People are asked to mention the names they intent to give to the baby and then

repeat the same till the end of the ritual. Meanwhile he pours out water or rice beer from the gourd. The last name which was uttered by the one who conducts the ritual while pouring out the last drop of water from the gourd is accepted as the name of the child (Gassah, 1994: 77; Lamare, 2005: 29).

4.2.6. Mortuary Rites (*Pyndep NiamIap Bru*)

When a person dies the body is washed in warm water and laid on a mat dressed with white cloth. For men, *dhoti* is made to wear and a turban on head is put around. The corpse is clothed always from left to right and body is placed in the room facing eastward. White *muslin* cloth (*Myrkin*) is spread on the floor. Betel leaves, betel nut and an egg is placed in the left hand of the deceased. Special rice (*Ja wasinag*) and fish (*Ka dakha daptli*) along with drinking water and rice beer is kept near the corpse. For a male person, a sword or a *dao* on his left hand and a shield in his right hand is given. If a man dies in his wife's house the corpse is brought to his mother's house for the last rite. The wife keeps betel and betel nut in her husband's mouth as a last rite. Three days of prayers are made to the God for the peaceful passage of the departed soul from this world to the next. These three days are considered to be the days of mourning. The covered body will be taken to the crematorium accompanied by fire, which is taken from the mother's house. The body is placed in the pyre facing eastward and the eldest male member of the family lits the pyre. Bones are collected from the ground once the cremation is over. The bones are collected by the relatives including a woman could be either the mother or any close relative of the deceased. They collect it so reverently without looking backward and talking to each other. They offer food again to the departed soul in the crematorium, while a female holds the bones in a white cloth. When a person dies outside his village (*Iap palat chnong*) the body is cremated in that place and bones are carried to his native place (*I rah chyien*). This journey cannot be done at night and by sunset they break the journey and hung the container with bones in a tree. They take extreme care that it does not fall on the ground. Meitei and Marak (2015: 76) narrates that:

“In Nartiang, after cremation they first carve out a small hole in a tree near the cremation site. The hole of the tree is at a height so that it can be protected from animals and accidental nuisance activities. Small pieces of bones or ashes of the dead person are then collected, and placed inside the small hole made on the trunk of the tree. Usually, the tree selected for this rite is owned by the clan; at other times, it can be a commonly owned tree (by the whole village), but selected by the deceased’s family for the purpose. After two or three years, the head of the family (only a man) will take it out and transfer it permanently to the clan burial stone (dolmen) which lie in the *Kpep*. This dolmen already houses the bones of the dead ancestors of the same clan. For the transference of the newly deceased, the family invites relatives to bear witness and to share in the happiness of reunion of the bones of the deceased with those of the ancestors”.

In accidental death, the body is cremated and bones are taken to the native place of the person concerned in the next day. The *Pnar* consider accidental death is a sin. Thus, the cremation place and the repositories could be separate in his/her natives place. Lamare (2005: 30) narrates that:

“If a man dies by the sword, before his body can be cremated a black hen must be offered to the evil Godddes (*Ka Ron Chyndi*). After the cremation the bones of the dead are placed in a stone cairn. Eggs are broken and the bones are removed and taken to a river bank and washed. If there is no river close by, a tank is dug for the purpose, which is called *Ka Um Koi*. The sacrifice of a goat is offered to *U Synkoi Bamon*, and a sow each to *Ka Ron Chyndi* and *Ka Tyrut*. They are the deities of the dark and are being feared by the people. After the ritual the bones are placed in another newly built cairn. The ceremony of placing the bones in one and removing them to another cairn is usually performed three times but unless the auspices as deduced from the eggs are favourable, the relatives must go on sacrificing and removing the bones until they are so”.

At the death of a person who lived a life not in conformity with the clan’s regulation, his bones are not mixed together with the bones of the family/clan members. Even if they are kept in the same cairn, they are kept separately a little far off. Their bones are kept in the cairn permanently, while other bones are removed to *Mookylliam*(dolmen).

The offering of ritual item for the deceased could be various things like rice, wine, *beedi*, flower, betel leaf, areca nut, coins, and various food items together with some items which are used by the deceased when he/she was alive. Cock, goat, bull and fowls are sacrificed for appeasing the spirit. The family members of the deceased perform the rituals with reverence so that the soul could rest in peace and his/her life in the next world a happy one.

4.3. RELIGION

Religion plays an important role in the identity formation of the Pnar, where ethnicity and identity are embedded in it. It is one of the dominant components existed irrespective of different forms of human formations (Mibang and Chaudhary, 2004: 1). While ethnicity is a communal concept and cannot be changed, identity can be seen in the dynamics of changing attribute particularly when it is seen through the religious prism. Religion is a universal and social phenomenon. It provides answers to human beings about many facets of life where science fails. For many it is a belief in supernatural powers, while others accept religion as a moral watch dog who controls every actions of the human being. It touches all most all aspects of human life. 'It is a social force exerted influence in both the preliterate and literate societies' (Gupta, 2012: 134). The vast majority of the world population is either associated with one particular religion or another. The values one hold is life are largely shaped by one's religious beliefs, perceptions and world views. 'The religions unite the people in faith which they commonly share' (Thomas, 1995: xii). Though we cannot trace the origin of the religious practices among all human societies, yet, carefully carved figures, strikingly executed paintings, and elaborate burial customs have been interpreted as evidence of religious activity among the humans (Coogan, 1998). Celebrated anthropologist Stephen Fuchs (1975: 12)says:

“All the students of human culture admit that religion is one of the important factors in culture. It finds expression in material culture, in human behavior, and in value system morals and ethics. It interacts with systems of family and clan organization, marriage, law and politics, it enters into the realms of medicine, science and technology, it has inspired rebellions and war as well as sublime works of art”.

Etymologically the English word religion is derived from the middle age English 'religioun', which in turn has derived from old Franch 'religion'. However, the root word seems to have come from the Latin word '*religo*', which means 'good faith' (Sahay, 2012: 79). While quoting Yinger, Gupta (2012: 135) says that the word religion came from the Latin root 'religare' which meant 'to bring together' or from the word 'religere' which meant 'to rehearse' or 'to execute painstakingly' Religion is the set of beliefs, feelings, dogmas and practices that define the relations between human being and sacred

or divinity. It is a 'social force exerted influence in both the preliterate and literate societies' (Gupta, 2012: 134).

James George Frazer (1922) in his famous book *The Golden Bough* says that religion is 'a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and human life'. 'It could be a unified system of beliefs', says Durkheim (1912: 62), 'and practices relatives to sacred things, that is to say things set apart or forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called the church, all those who adhere to them'.

William James writes in his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 'it is a feeling, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine' (1902). 'Some philosophers have called religion 'a superstitious structure of incoherent metaphysical notion'. Some sociologists refer religion as the 'collective expression of human values'. Followers of Karl Marx define it as 'the opium of the people and some psychologists call it as 'mythical complex' surrounding a projected super ego' (Jose, 2014: 65).

Max Weber believed religion could be a force for social change. Karl Marx viewed religion as a tool used by capitalist societies to perpetuate inequality. That could be the reason that Karl Marx called religion as 'opium of man'. The great traditions of the world religions shaped the values of the societies of which they have been an inseparable element. In case of the indigenous communities, the belief in the existence of spirits, ancestral honour, respect to the forces of nature has shaped, directed and nurtured a worldview that has enabled them to live in harmony with the cosmos un till their exposure to the outside world (Tellis, 2015). With regard to the understanding of religion among indigenous people they may have a crude concept about the Divine yet, they do see a 'divine touch' in every occurrence in nature and in their lives. That is why E. B. Tylor (1871) defined religion as a 'belief in the supernatural beings'. He built his concept on the foundation that 'the origin of all religion lies in animistic belief'. Further he develops that animism refers to religious practices and beliefs centering on the notion that spirits or souls inhabit and animate most, if not all, natural phenomenon.

Paul Tillich (1973) states that 'religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary, and a concern that in itself provides the answer to the question of the meaning of our existence'. The contemporary philosopher Alston (1967) gives nine features as characteristics of religion: (i) Belief in Supernatural beings; (ii) A distinction between sacred and profane; (iii) Ritual acts focused on sacred objects; (iv) A moral code believed to be sanctioned by the gods; (v) Characteristically religious feelings which tend to be aroused in the presence of sacred objects and during the practice of ritual and which are connected in idea with gods; (vi) Prayer and other forms of communication with god; (vii) A world view or a general picture of the world as a whole and the place of the individual therein; (viii) A more or less total organization of one's life based on the worldview; and (ix) A social group bound together by the above. These nine points envelop the entire concept of religion and whole deposit of faith that is carried from one generation to the next. Smith in 1994 said that 'religion is a mark of humanity'. It gives you an identity, much more, it remains with you and with your spirit. When religious tenets are taken out, one loses the human flavor from the universe. Religion binds the individuals together and by helping them to transcend from their narrow interest and organizes the individual's experiences in terms of a higher order (Kanjamala, 1981:13).

Pohlong (2004) says, if religion is seen as a set of rules, practices or patterns of human behavior or as an institution, it provides the whole gamut of life. For him religion touches every aspects of life. Human response to environment and exploration to new boundaries and response to every life situation religion has a role to play just like culture does. According to Malinowski (1954) 'religion is a mode of action as well as system of beliefs and a social phenomenon as well as personal experience. It not only fulfills the religious aspirations of the people, but cares the social and psychological needs'.

Religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, persuasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic, says Clifford Geertz (1956). For him basic elements of religion are: (i) Belief in Supernatural Power; (ii) Man's adjustment to

Supernatural Powers; (iii) Acts defined as Sinful; (iv) Method of Salvation; (v) Belief in some sacred things; (vi) Procedure of Worship; and (vii) Place of Worship. According to Anderson and Parker the eight aspects of Religion include: (i) Beliefs; (ii) Myths / Stories; (iii) Sacred Texts; (iv) Ethics and Morality; (v) Rituals;(vi) Symbols; (vii) Social Structures; and (viii) Religious Experience (www.yourarticlelibrary.com/religion retrieved on 5/06/2019).

Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657-1757), the celebrated French author of middle ages, says that religion is human explanation of powers of nature. He further says as primitive people were simply at an earlier developmental stage, and as time went on, they would presumably grow out of it (Charles, 2007: 9-19 cited in Kuruvachira, 2013: 46). Religion is an attempt to explain frightening aspects of nature speaks Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), an Italian philosopher and Jurist. David Hume (1711-1776), a Scottish Enlightenment philosopher, historian, economist and essayist, views religion as an outcome of the confrontation with frightening powers of nature. As a radical empiricist he insisted that everything we know should have gained through sense and experience. Thus, he concludes that polytheism or idolatry is the first and most ancient religion on mankind (David Hume, 1956: 23; Kuruvachira, 2013: 47).

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) opines that the origin of religion lay in the propitiation of dead ancestors or ghosts, while Friderich Max Muller (1823-1900) says that human beings gain the sense of divine from the nature, thus, they began nature worship. Religion have their origin in the personification of the natural forces and objects and the myths that rise from these personifications (Kuruvachira, 2013: 50-51).

4.3.1. Tribal Religion

In a tribal context religion is intimately interwoven with their tribal way of life, their day to day activities, and their material ethical life. They look at everything with awe and wonder. They worship everything which is higher in strength, power and might. For them deities and gods are everywhere, who controls the rain, wind, crops and epidemics. Thus, Davi says ‘tribal religion is a part of their everyday life, not confined to

individual faith or creed. It has simple social ethical codes distilled all through the ages' (2004: 10). A tribal religion is only the embryo and the relic of the pre-logistic state on imagination and ideas, upon which much of the organized religion have depended for their spiritual quest' (Lamare, 2005: 58).

Nineteenth century writers who wrote about 'primitive religion' hoped to figure out how religious beliefs originated that became characteristics of the earliest primordial religion. Edward Burnett Tylor's two-volume work on *Primitive Religion* (1877) is devoted to religion finding out a minimum definition of religion that applies to all religions in different parts of the world and different stages of development. Theologians considered this aspect stemming from revelation, a view Tylor rejected. Tylor developed the concept of monotheism from animism in the evolutionary scale and elevated the concept of one God dominating over others.

An evolutionary sequence of forms of religion has been proposed by Robert N. Bellah (1964) who sees five stages: Primitive Religion, Archaic Religion, Historic Religion, Early Modern Religion, and Modern Religion. His Primitive Religion has two main features: (i) the high degree to which the mythical world is related to features of the actual world, and (ii) the fluidity of organization.

All these put an anthropologist, who specializes in the study of preliterate societies, to face the difficult problem of defining what kind of phenomena can be called religious. This has led social scientists to try a whole range of definitions, usually settling with little conviction on formulae such as: religion involves the belief in supernatural forces (Goody, 1961). But the problem lies in the line of demarcation to understand: what is 'natural' in contrast to 'supernatural' knowledge.

4.3.2. Pnar Religion: *Niam Tre*

The Pnar call their religion as original religion (*Niam Tre*). Kyndiah (2000: 49) speaks that the indigenous religion of the Pnar is known as *Niam Tre* which means 'original religion'. For him the word *Niam* stands for 'religion' and *Tre* for 'own', thus *Niam Tre* means 'own religion'. It also signifies that their religion is not borrowed from

anyone and also not converted into other religious traditions either. The oral tradition speaks about sixteen huts (*U Khandynru Wasa*) that stayed in heaven. God (*U Tre Kiro*) ordered seven huts (*Niaw Wasa*) to go down to earth (*Ka Pyrthai*). Thus, they claim that their ancestors are directly created by God (*U Tre Kiro*) and their ceremonies and religion are pure and they follow it since time immemorial.

The Pnar call their Supreme God, God Almighty as '*U Blai Wa Booh Wa Thoo*' In their general talks they call him as *U Tre Kiro*. Since the letter '*U*' indicates the masculine gender the supreme God (*U Tre Kiro*) is male. His abode is in heaven (*Soorkep*) (Shullai, 2000: 62). It is this supreme God who controls everything, the universe and all they contain. At times they call God as *Ki Blai*, which indicates that they do believe in other gods, goddesses like God of Thunder (*U Blai Pyrthat*), goddess of river (*Ka Myntu*) and others. The Supreme God dwells in a place much higher than the place of other gods and goddesses. 'While gods, goddesses and spirits usually live on earth below the sky where human being are living, the creator dwells in the high heavens above the sun, the moon and stars' (Athparia, 2019: 194). Usually the gods and goddesses and spirits dwell on earth below the sky, while the 'creator God' dwells in the high heavens. Pnars have a clear concept about the heaven (*Soorkep*) and hell (*Ka Nurok* or *Ka Ksaw*). The Pnar believe that there is only one God who is the supreme god and the creator of everything. He is also believed to be the most powerful and almighty. According to their belief god resides both in heaven and earth. *U Tre Krot* is believed to be present among the gods of both heaven and earth. There are also numerous gods who are empowered by *U Tre Kiro*, the important ones being:

Table 4.3

God or Goddess and Their Functions

Name of Gods and Goddesses	Functions
<i>U Blai Muluk</i>	God of the state, Propitiated with the sacrifice of a goat or cock.
<i>U Blai Lum U Blai Wah</i>	God of the hill and water, Propitiated annually with the sacrifice of a goat or cock.
<i>U Blai Spah</i>	God of wealth, placated with various offerings in view of becoming rich.

<i>U Blai Ryngkaw Wasa</i>	Tutelary deity of the village, propitiated with sacrifice but no fixed time for sacrifice.
<i>U Blai Shong U Blai Thaw</i>	God of the villages, to protect the people and villages from danger, propitiated annually.
<i>Ka Blai Iing Ka Blai Sem</i>	God of the family, look into human's health and to sustain human being by being healthy and to live a long life. This god is worship by the clan.
<i>Ka Syiem Synshar</i>	God the Ruler, create human beings and to lead and sustain them in the earth.
<i>U Blai Pyrthat</i>	God of Thunder, natural forces. This god is propitiated annually.
<i>Ka Ron-Chyndi</i>	God of Accident, propitiation takes place by clan and family.
<i>Ka Myntdu, Ka Kopli bad Ka Synhen</i>	Goddesses of River.
<i>Ka Blai Hew</i>	Goddess of Market.
<i>Ka Ron Chandi</i>	God of accident.
<i>Ka Taro</i>	Goddess of wealth, perform sacrifice of cock, pig or goat annually by family.
<i>U Mookhai or U Kongwasan, U Muralong, U Musniang bad U Mutong</i>	Principal male deities who guides the four corners of Jowai.
<i>U Psa</i>	The God of Drought.
<i>Ka Thlang</i>	The Goddess of Harvest.
<i>Ka Bei Rymmaw</i>	The Goddess of Mother Earth.

The Pnar explain that there is a remarkable difference between the male and female deities. Male gods are principal defenders of the village and their territory. Sen (1988: 17-18) opines that the role of the male deities is 'administration authority and territorial integrity, while the female deities are confined with the family, social well-being and economic deeds'. Mostly female deities are to be propitiated since they could inflict sickness and various other calamities in life like epidemics and other associated diseases. Thus, they take extreme care to appease them annually with various sacrifices. Lamare(2005: 60), a renowned Pnar scholar, says that:

“*U Tre Kiro*t is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. They have no churches, temples or any other concrete place of worship. They are monotheistic in

their approach and would invoke god by various names according to the need of the movement. In their day to day life they would attribute different names ... but when they invoke the name of God in general, they would address him *U Tre Kirof*'.

The *Niam Tre* religion is an innate part of the social fabric of the Pnar of Meghalaya. Therefore, God should be worshiped anywhere, anytime and by anyone with a clean and sincere heart. We cannot worship the god when our body and souls are in defilements. The religion and its influence are so great in *Niam Tre* religion that its importance could be traced even in the womb of a mother. They call it as *U Trop Ksiar* and *Trop Rupa* (Lamare, 2005: 61), where the duty of the pregnant mother along with the husband and uncles adhere the religious norms and perform the rituals laid down by the ancestors for the well-being of baby, family and clan. 'In fact, the religion does not start or end up with the social life of the people only. It also permeates into the political organization, law of inheritance and land tenure system' (Lamare, 2005: 62). For a pnar every aspect of their life should have a religion saction behind it.

4.3.3. Golden Teachings of *Niam Tre* Religion

The main characteristics of the *Niam Tre* could be seen in three-fold manner. The Pnar believe that these are the commandments that they received from God (*U Tre Kirof*), when He sent their ancestors to the earth (*Ka Pyrthai*). These golden rules could be summarized as follows:

To earn righteousness (*Ban Kamai ia ka hok*): God sent them to the earth not just to multiply but to live by means of one's own effort and labour by following the path of righteousness. Any wrong means used for earning money or prestige leads to condemnation. Saying lie, coveting other's property bring shame and disasters in the family. Thus, showing respect to God and loving service to others is always expected from every Pnar individual. Man 'comes out of that Divine cause and he is the counterpart of the Divine righteousness and therefore as long as he lives, he must walk in righteousness, act righteously, live righteously and he has one thing to earn in his life and that is righteousness' (Mawire, 1981: 12). The Life purpose of a Pnar is to earn righteousness and it has to be shown in all of his / her dealings. A Pnar has to regulate his

/ her life through his / her conduct and application in life, by their effort and struggle they have to meet material needs by the sweat of their labour. By accepting rule every Pnar is taking up a responsibility of propagating righteousness and truthfulness.

To know god and man (*Ban Tip-Briew Tip-Blei*): This rule teaches that in order to be aware of God, one has to be aware of man through services. In other words, it is ‘to God through man’. This invites everyone not just worship the *U Tre Kiro*t but reach out to the people who are in need of. Our knowing god should lead us to human being. To be conscious of God, man should know how-to live-in harmony with his fellow human beings on earth. It also exhorts us to perform our duty towards our fellow beings for their good and prosperity. No way can one inflict pain and agony to anyone in the society for one’s own gain or profit. One should love the other reach out to help them in their need and most of all treat with love and compassion.

To know the maternal and paternal relations (*Ban Tip Kur Tip Kha*): *U Blai* created the human being to lead a righteous, honest and truthful life. They should follow justice (*ka hok*) in all their dealings. They should know and love God and his fellow human beings respect their relatives both from the mother’s and father’s side. According to the traditional religion a person alone is responsible for his / her own actions; no one can share the burden of his/her sins. Pnar religion expects ‘them to live righteous life, and their dealings with their fellow men should be followed with truth and honesty not only in their thoughts and actions, but in their wishes as well’ (Lamare, 2005: 62).

4.3.4. Role of Cock in *Niam Tre* Religion

Usually the Pnar keeps a flag above their houses carrying the picture of a cock (*U Khon Lymboit-Lymbiang*). ‘The cock is usually sacrificed by the people to invoke or appease gods’ and goddesses. Along with this, other animals are also sacrificed, but cock sacrifice is taken as the original one’ (Lamare, 2005: 60). ‘Cock signifies the opening of man’s mind to a new window of communication with the creator. It is like a letting in the light of enlightenment into the minds of a man and this consequently lead to wide ranging developments’ (Tariang, 2012: 26). Since cock is the one that wakes up the human beings

every morning it stands in the place of a mediator. So, cock sacrifice is considered to be original one; however, these days they replace cock with other animals. For them ‘the cock has come to be a symbol of man’s ability to re-establish communication with his creator’ (ibid.).

4.3.5. Priestess (*Ka Lyngdoh*) in *Niam Tre* Religion

Priests (*Lyngdoh*) plays an important role in the *Niam Tre* religion. All the religious functions and duties are reserved for the male priest (*U Lyngdoh*) except a few to the priestess (*Ka Lyngdoh*). The heads of the religious institutions are reserved for males except for that of *Ka Lyndoh*. The post of *Daloi*, a religious administrative head of the *Elaka* is reserved only for male (Laloo, 2010: 59). The post of female priest (*Ka Lyngdoh*) is hereditary in *Niam Tre* religion, while the male priests are chosen from the *Lyngdoh* clan. She belongs to the family of first settlers of Jowai, U Niang Lyngdoh, his sister Ka Long Lyngdoh. Usually the youngest daughter of the family becomes the priestess of the family if she dies or is incapable of charging her duties, then the penultimate daughter from the particular family assumes the role of priestess.

“The female priest (*Ka Lyngdoh*) has to follow strict characteristics; she should be righteous; she cannot commit any sins nor do anything taboo. She gets high respect from others. She is more responsible and has a higher status than the male *Lyngdoh*. Before the actual rituals, tremendous preparations are required. For *Knia Lyngdoh* ritual, the *Ka Lyngdoh* needs to prepare for at least one month. Usually every ritual starts at mid-night and continues till the morning of the next day. All the pre ritual preparations are done in the *Ka Lyngdoh*’s house and she alone did all the preparations like grinding rice, brewing rice beer, and carrying water in the night and so on. Before the ritual, she has to endure various sanctification processes for herself. She should abstain from eating meat for a month; she can only have dried fish and vegetables; she should refrain from sleeping with her husband for a month and she also cannot talk to anybody for one night just before the *Knia* ritual” (shodhganga.infibnet.ac.in retrieved on 12/06/2019).

Her duty is seen during the community religious festival called, *Beh-dien-khlam*, to perform the ritual known as, *Ka Siang*, offering foods and prayers to ancestors. She also engages in preparing rice beer for libation and food for the religious leaders during the festivals.

4.3.6. Moral Teachings

Pnar religion has a high moral teaching. Through the three commandments God has given to them they do believe that they are created to worship the God and serve the humanity. Among the many Moral teachings some could be: (i) Respect the parents, (ii) Love everyone, (iii) Earn righteousness, (iv) Do not steal, (v) Worship God and ancestors, (vi) Serve God and human beings, (vii) Love the creation of God, (viii) Respect the *kur* and *kha*, (ix) Virtuous living.

4.3.7. Religious Taboos: Proscriptions in Society

Tribal religion always keeps certain taboos to regulate one's life. *Niam Tre* religion of the Pnar also has certain taboos associated with life, relationships and conduct, like constructing a triangular house; cutting tree from the sacred grove; encroaching the land of the neighbor; touching the broom while sweeping the entrance of the house door; urinating in the fire; spitting in the fire; keeping broomstick at the entrance of the house; sleeping with feet towards east; offering anything with left hand; sleeping over any one's body; keeping the washed cloth outside at night; marrying in the own *kur* or *khaor* from the branches of them, and so on.

4.3.8. Ancestor Veneration

In all tribal traditions, the custom of venerating deceased ancestors who are considered still a part of the family are integral to it. They believe that the ancestors do have power to intervene in the affairs of their life. They possess the ability to influence the fortune of the living a guide them in their struggles. They have the ability to look after the family and show their interest in the affairs of the world. They are constantly watching over the lives of the members of the clan and family, punishing those who break the customs or fail in their kinship obligation. Such persons are cursed with illness,

misfortune or barrenness. Those who adhere to the prescribed norms of social conduct are blessed with progeny, prosperity, health and longevity (Mawlong, 2009: 196).

Ancestor worship occupies an elevated position in the Pnar community. The ancestors are integral part of their world who invoke their blessing at every auspicious movements of their life. ‘They also believe in the spirit of the dead ancestors and it has its affection and sentiments and should be attached to the parts of its own body, the bones’ (Lamare, 2005: 60). The bone repositories are the place where the spirits reside. The practice of offering food near the bone repositories is carried out and the people observe the same sincerely. Now food is being offered to the ancestors once a year before the community festival, *Beh-dien-khlam*, and people pray for the well-being the prosperity of the community (Lamare, 2005: 60; Athparia, 2019: 194).

With the death of a person his soul returns to creator God (*U Blai Wa Booh U Blai Wa Thoo*) and the mortal remains need to be purified by fire, since they have the commandment from God through *U Lakriah*, and not to bury which may rot and decay in the womb of mother earth. The concept of a living spirit after death is very clear and this spirit remains and carries on living to bless and watch over the family members. Since this belief is very strong, they show their respect to their ancestors by offering prayers, flowers and food to them annually, especially during the festivals. Generally, once in a year, in the dry months between January and March people collect the bones of the deceased and keep these in the bone repositories of their respective families or sub-clans in the presence of all, and the bones of the individual remains with his / her mother (Roy, 1985: 83).

4.3.9. Megalithism: A Living Tradition

Meghalaya is famous for its megalithic structures and it is profoundly present in the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. The term ‘megalith’ is derived from two Greek words ‘*mega*’ means large and ‘*lithos*’ means stone. It is a worldwide phenomenon first appearing during Neolithic times as the stone henges. These structures largely relate to the Iron Age and are often described as burial complexes along with memorials. The term

megalith means a large standing stone or an erect stone, frequently referred to as monolith. The usual sight when one passes through the Jaintia Hills is the three stones erected uprights and one table stone placed in front. The upright stones are always in odd numbers with central stone higher than those flanking it on either side representing the maternal uncle of the clan / lineage. The shorter stones represent the younger male member of the clan / lineage. The flat table stone or dolmens represent the female members of the matri-kin, usually the root of ancestress from whom the lineage originated (Mawlong, 2009: 195). Hence, there is abundance of monoliths, megaliths, dolmens, and menhirs across the Pnar inhabited area, which serves as a living tradition among them pursued since the lithic age.

In the Jaintia Hills monoliths were erected not only to commemorate the memory of the deceased, but also to commemorate the social events. Its erection is also connected with the secondary burial system. There are various types of megaliths found in Meghalaya. They are: (i) Menhirs, (ii) Alignments, (iii) Avenues, (iv) Barrows, (v) Cairns, (vi) Cairn Circles, (vii) Cists, (viii) Dolmens, (ix) Dolmenoid Cists, (x) Umbrella Stones, (xi) Hood Stones, (xii) Rock Cut Stone (Sharma, 2014: 2-45).

The megalithic sites are located mainly in four places of the Jaintia Hills.

Ladthalboh: Ladthalboh megalithic site contains 4 megaliths. It is built as a commemorative site of the deceased ancestors. People from the nearby villages perform rituals for the deceased at this site.

Nartiang: It is a protected monument site under the Archeological Survey of India. The total number of megaliths found here are 715 of which 356 are menhirs and 349 are dolmens. The largest menhir is 8 meter high. It is also the site for *KaPom Blang Iaw* festival when a number of animal sacrifices are done.

Nongbah: The Nangbah contains 2 megalithic sites. The Pnar from time to time performs huge cultural extravaganza with rites and rituals named as *KaPom Blang Iaw* when ancestor worship is done.

Raliang: At present Raliang site contains three megaliths. Many of the megalithic structures are destroyed over the long passage of time (Sharma, 2014: 53-60).

There are also instances of megaliths that function as boundary stones demarcating various kinds of territorial units like villages, communes and *Hima, Elaka*. There are special boundary markers that function like title deeds to the ownership of private land distinct from the community land (Malong, 2009: 198).

4.4. FESTIVALS

Feast and festivals play an important role in the life of the tribal people. Their life is coloured with varieties of celebrations, which make them connected with the nature, God and ancestors. Changes in the season, sowing and harvesting are observed with splendor and gaiety and their departed members of the family, clan and tribe are reminisced and venerated with respect and love. They pay homage to their ancestors, adore the god and goddess and make offering to appease the malevolent spirit as a retribution for any wrong done and seek blessing from the benevolent spirits are the chief activities associated with the festivals. Most of the feast and festivals accompany with dances, merry-making, food and drinks. Through these celebrations they keep their life peaceful and prosperous and forget the anguish and struggle of life and celebrate life to the fullest. The fairs and festivals are also related with the joys and jovial sentiments and amusements of the Pnar tribals.

These festivals play a major role to build up strong social contacts, strengthen community relations and maintain social solidarity. Fairs and festivals strengthen religious and cultural life of the tribals. The endless succession of mountain ranges, the beauty and majesty of the peaks, the colourful flowers with various designs and fragrance, the fruits with their varieties and tastes, the clouds which seems to touch the stars in the background, all have left their impression on the religious ceremonies, festivals and other fairs of the Pnar of Meghalaya. These festivals and fairs are related with local Gods and Goddesses. Seasons have also played an important role and each season has its own appropriate festivals. The ceremonies in each season are largely influenced by the climatic needs or other characteristics of particular season. Festivals are of different types such as national, regional, local and community specific bringing forth

solidarity in the community. The foregoing discussion will portray the community adhered festivals of the Pnar that help them to maintain their ethnic and socio-cultural identity at the greater regional network building up communal or ethnic ties, rejuvenation of traditional culture and continuity of knowledge for the posterity of their community. Among the many festivals that the Pnar celebrate, the annual celebration of *Beh-dien-khalm*, occupies the greatest position making it a significance of remembrance in the entire state of Meghalaya in general and Jaintia Hills in particular.

4.4.1. Beh-dien-khlam

Beh-dien-khlam literally means chasing away the pestilence with sticks (*Beh* = chasing, *dien* = stick, *khlam* = pestilence). The feast is celebrated ever since the Pnar started settling in Jowai. The first two settlers of this place were *U Niang Lyngdoh* and his sister *Ka Long Lyngdoh*. They migrated to this place due to a plague that wiped away the people of their land. Gradually people came to know about this place and started coming to settle down in this new place. They called the new place 'Jowai'. Later these two individuals decided to perform a ritual so that such devastating plague or pestilence should never attack them again. They decided to call the festival *Beh-dien-khalm*. To get rid of epidemic pestilence and plague. Thus, the ritual starts off from the houses of one of the four daughters of *Ka Long Lyngdoh* who were the original settlers of the place and they act as the high priestess of the celebration. A month-long preparation is being carried out for the great feast. The *Dalois*, *Pators* and the *Wasans* assist the high priestess in ritual performance and collect fund from the people of Jowai. The next day they disperse in four groups and move to four corners of Jowai to perform the ritual called *Knia Khang* to appease the four protecting deities of the locality, *U Moo-Khai*, *U Moo-Ralong*, *U Moo-Tong* and *U Moo-Sniang*, through sacrifice and prayers.

When moon appears *Knia Pyrthat* is performed by the priests from Charmang, Yalong and Tuber villages only on the hill top outside the town of Jowai. After this sacrifice the preparation for the *rots* in different areas (*dong*) of Jowai. Then people will go in search of a tall and straight tree that is to be venerated as *Dien-Khlam*. They members of the *Khon Raid* fell a second tree, which is bigger than the first, and is

regarded as *Khnon*. The last three days are very important for the celebration. Two days before the final day the tree (*Dien-Khlam*) would be taken out from the *jungle* by the male members of the respective *dongs* and is brought to the market with jubilation. They lay these overnight in the ground and on the next day keep these in an upright position. Meanwhile the *Khnon* is taken out only by the members of *Khon Raid* and no one else participates in carrying the *Khnon*. By evening people place a replica of *Dein Khlam* on the top of their house.

The last day begins with a ritual (*Kyntin Khnon*) being performed in the house of high priestess to honour the four ancestors of the tribe (*Ka Bon, Ka Tein, Ka Wet* and *Ka Doh*). After this ceremony they have the famous ritual called ‘beating the house’ (*Sympat Yung*). This is the symbolic act of driving away the evil spirits of plague, sickness and pestilence. This takes place by beating the house tops with bamboo poles by the men folk. Then people would gather at a pool called *Aitnar* for watching the immersion ceremony. Tall decorated structures called *rots* are brought to the *Aitnar*. After the immersion of these *rots*, the polished sacred trunk called *Khnon* are brought into the pool by the *Khon Raid*. As soon the *Khnon* enters the *Aitnar* there is an enormous rush from the part of the people to touch it by running the muddy water.

In the afternoon people gather at Mynthong to witness a game called *Datlawakor*, a football game with round piece of wood in the place of ball by two contending teams from the upper and lower regions of Myntu River. During this time the *Wasan* makes a sacrifice at the ‘priest forest’ (*Ka Khloo Lyndoh*). It is believed that the winning team will reap a better harvest. (Lamare, 2005: 62-66). In the evening a lot of funfair and merry making is done as part of the celebrations, which makes the end of the festival *Beh-dien-khlam* (<https://www.meghalaya/tourism.html> retrieved on 14/09/2016).

There are altogether six *Beh-dien-khlam* festivals celebrated among the Pnar community. *Raij Chyrmang* begins the festival followed by *Raij Jowai*. After *Jowai*, *Tuber* celebrates it with great valour and enthusiasm. *Tuber* being the largest gathering it gets altogether 25 *rots* from different villages of the districts. From *Jalapet Sutnga elaka* to *Mupyut Amwi elaka* to *Mihmyntdu* and *Khlietyrchi* in *Jowai elaka*. After *Tuber*

Kmaichnong celebration begins in Ialong followed by Mukhla and concludes with Muthlong.

‘One can attest this festival to be the greatest ever gathering of the pnaronce in a year that breaks the barriers of their clan affiliation solemnly submitting themselves to the tradition that has a continuity of knowledge over eons’ (Bhattacharya, 2017: 157).

4.4.2. Lahoo Dance (*Chad Lahoo*)

Lahoo dance is a traditional dance of the Pnar to venerate and express their gratitude to the creator God (*U Tre Kiroi*) for His blessings He has bestowed upon the people and it is associated with the earliest settlement and habitation of the Pnar (Lyngdoh, 1991: 101). This dance was earlier referred to as *Chad Chipiah*. Both males and females perform the *Lahoo* dance. Any number of people can participate in this dance but they should dance in groups of three individuals. Attired in their best finery, usually, young men on either side of a woman holding arms together, dance in steps. The female dancer should be virgins, who represents the priestess *Ka Lyngdoh* and the male dancer on the right side symbolizes the uncle, who is the protector of the family, while the one in the left represents the husband who is the progenitor of the clan. In place of the usual drum and pipe, a cheer leader, usually a man gifted with the talent of impromptu recitation, recites couplets to the merriment of the audience. This is usually a religious dance. Apart from these there are other types of *Lahoo* dances which are performed during various agricultural activities like preparation of the field (*Ka Puh Hali, Ka Puh Kper*), planting the seeds (*Ka Tung Kba*), harvesting (*Ka Choh Kba*), carrying the sheaves (*Ka Kit Kba*) and so on.

4.4.3. Sukra Dance (*Chad Sukra*)

Sukra dance is held in many villages for a day in the months of April-May before the sowing season. The annual *Chad Sukra* (sowing festival) is celebrated during the middle of **April or early May** every year by the Pnar people. The Pnar believe that a

farmer could start sowing the seeds on his land only after the festival is over. The festival is observed to invoke God, the Creator, to protect their crops from all forms of natural calamities besides ushering in peace and harmony among the people.

4.4.4. Chipiah Dance (*Chad Chipiah*)

Since long *Chipiah* dance was not performed among the Pnar for reasons unknown. It was revived by the members of the *Nikhla* clan. A grand old lady who disappeared at the time of her death at Mynthong near Jowai appeared in a dream to another lady called, Syndur, of the same clan and asked her to revive the *Chipiah* dance. Soon the news spread everywhere and the members of the clan took very seriously who considered the old lady had some element of divinity in her. Sacrifice was offered at a place called Moolikso in Jowai. After this *ChadChipiah* came to be known as *Nikhla* dance (*Ka Chad Yung Nikhla*) (Lamare, 2005: 66-67).

4.4.5. Pastieh Dance (*Chad Pastieh*)

It is an important war dance of the Pnar people. The dance is attributed to the four doors that are spread in four different corners of Jowai, i.e., *U Moo-Khai*, *U Moo-ralong*, *U Moo-tong*, and *U Moo-sniang*. 'In this dance form, only the males take part carrying their sword and shield dancing to the beat of the war drums and the *ghungru*. The *Daloi* leads the dance followed by the *Lyngdoh* and the remaining dancers' (Lamare, 2005: 68).

4.4.6. Plate Dance (*Chad Pliang*)

Shad Pliang or plate dance is performed by the women using plates in their hands. While dancing they keep the plates in head, forehead, mouth and hands and move according to the tunes of the music. Later male dancers join them in Western outfits and a hat in their head (Lamare, 2005: 69). This originated in the plains and Jaintiapur kings

(today's Bangladesh) introduced it to the hills. It is just a dance of amusement that is being carried out by the people during any festival and merry making.

Apart from these important festivals there are various minor celebrations also like *Ka Chad Rawa*, *Ka Chad Khla*, *Ka Chad Mih-iaw*, *Bam Phalar*, *Tpep* ceremony, *Ka Knia Khang*, *Ka Knia Blai Lyngdoh*, *Ka Knia Kupli*, *Ka Knia Umtisong*, *Ka Knia Pyrthat*, *Ka Knia Pyrdong Chnong*, *Ka Knia Khlam*, *Ka Pom Blang Iaw*, etc. (Lamare, 2005: 69-71).

4.5. ADOPTION OF HINDUISM AMONG THE PNAR

Religion is a symbolic canopy stretched out over the network of social institution giving them the appearance of stability and rightness that they would otherwise lack. Thus, every religion in the world tries to absorb or proselytize and add numbers to teach them the rightness. The serene tribal lands are often being visited by the preachers of various religion promote and propagate their deposit of faith. Hinduism is a way of life that tries to absorb primordial people to a great extent bringing them under the greater Hindu canopy, where all are considered to be Hindus by birth. However, this sort of absorption hardly transforms the philosophical base, rather it influences Hindu ritualistic behavior over the receiving group.

It was during the period of Jaintia rulers that Hinduism entered the Pnar territory. Though the Jaintia kingdom had its headquarters at Jaintiapur (today's Bangladesh), the kings built their summer capital at Nartiang in the West Jaintia Hills district of the present day. He spent Naritang every year and his long stay resulted in introducing the new faith to the people of Nartiang, who belonged to the Pnar community. Thus, the religion of the king became the religion of the subjects. It was during Bor Kuhain, the first Hinduised king who built a palace at Borkhat and a shrine of Lord Shiva near Syndai was installed. King Bijoy Manik (1548-1564 AD) was a powerful king and during his rule he consolidated his kingdom and Brahminical cult made steady inroads to Pnar territory. Many were absorbed into the faith of Hinduism and 'a distinct community in the capital of the kingdom called *Suhtnga Samaj* was formed' (Ali, 1954:

72). All the leading members of the community got attracted to the new faith and got converted making Nartiang as the capital of Hindu faith among the Pnar of Meghalaya.

Soon a temple was built at Nartiang that installed Goddess *Kali* and *Shiva* as the principal deities. They not only adopted the Hindu faith but also appropriated these deities into their world by giving them local names like *Biswakarma* became *U Biskurom*, *Shiva* as *U Mahadev Khloo*, *Lakshmi* as *Laskmi* and *Durga* as *Parvati Chandi* as *Ka Ran Chandi*. Soon after the Brahminism gained ground in among the Pnar, Tantric cult also found its way in the lives of the people. It is believed that human sacrifices were carried out in the hills (Gurdon, 1906/2010: 101-104; Lamare, 2005: 74). The impact of Hinduism had a substantial bearing on the Pnar ethos. The life of the people altered steadily, but the tradition of the people did not wane out from this kind of absorption. The grade of its endurance hinges on its own ethnic self image and uniqueness. Its conception of itself as a group at least is based on the deep-rooted attitudes and values enshrined in the oral tradition (Dube, 1990: 99).

The followers of Hindu faith among the Pnar celebrate a number of religious ceremonies like any other Hindu worshipper. A few main celebrations could be *Holi (Dol Jatra)*, *Bisari Puja*, and *DurgaPuja*. The influence of Hinduism in the Jaintia Hills had brought considerable impact in the society, but it remained restricted to Nartiang alone. Though people apparently observe that the Pnar are Hindus, yet it is a false assertion since *Niam Tre* still remains as a religious identity marker among the Pnar, which is evident from the perpetuation of traditional festivals as discussed earlier. Hence, the Hindu converts are a microscopic minority. The big chunk of people still adheres to *Niam Tre* religion and find solace in worshiping their almighty (*U Tre Kiro*), who does not have any image, not in the temples or in any laces but in their heart.

4.6. IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY

‘The intention of the English officials coming into the Hills was the need for markets and if possible, to tap the natural resources like limestone, coal, etc. for their trade with Bengal. This task was not easy as they were always being looked upon as

intruders and coming to an understanding with the hill tribes was not an easy job' (Lamare, 2005: 82). But the coming of the British Missionaries coincided with the British rule and in consequence and there was emergence of a new social, psychological and religious need among the Hill people of the region. 'The process of proselytization in these Hills began with the work of British Baptists of Serampore Mission under the leadership of Rev. Willaim Carey' (Mawlong, 2009: 194). Much later in 1841 the missionary activities of the Baptists were replaced by the Welsh Presbyterian missionaries who recognized the Khasi-Jaintia Hills as their domain of toil who reckoned this land as remarkably penurious and exceptionally promising ground for missionary activities. Much before his actual arrival of the missionaries the British administrators David Scott (1745-1805) and Francis Jenkins (1834-1861) repeatedly requested the higher authorities for bringing the foreign Christian missionaries (Pakem, 1990: 88). But after the annexation of the Jaintia kingdom and joining it with the Khasi kingdom under one political agency in 1835, the missionaries started coming into this region, which marked the transformation of the lives of the people extensively.

The arrival of the Christian missionaries could be seen in three phases.

Welsh Missionaries: It was Rev. Thomas Jones, who preached the Gospel for the first time in Jowai in 1842. Jones considered the Jaintia Hills as an inviting field for the spread of Christianity to the multitudes upon multitudes of untutored heathen (Morries, 1930: 26; Mawlong, 2009: 194). He was followed by Rev. Daniel Morton Sykes who started a school in 1854. When Francis Jenkins was the Commissioner of Assam, people came in contact with the missionaries and meanwhile Jones frequented the ruler of Cherra managed to get a piece of land at Nongsawlia for a Church and a school and soon Cheerapunji was made the base of his missionary activities. From there it spread to Jaintia Hills, Cachar, Mizoram and many other parts of Northeast. This marked the beginning of the fusion of Christianity into the *ethos* of the 'HynniewTrep tribe'.

Unitarian Missionaries: Hajom Kissor Singh took the lead in establishing the Unitarian Church in Jowai on 18th September 1887. Through their frequent visits and interaction with the people the numbers started growing by 1889 and they could get a

small church built on the top on hill called, *U Lum Phuhniuhlieh* at Jowai. Later due to the stiff resistance and various attempts by the hostile elements to burn down the Church it was shifted to a new place and built a Church in 1947. Hajom Kissor was an educationist, who opened a co-education school, Jowai Unitarian Free School, in 1893. Later he established a printing press for the cause of spread of education.

Catholic Church among the Pnar: Catholic Church is the late comer to the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. They reached almost fifty years after the arrival of Welsh missionaries to Jowai. It was in 1891 a delegation from Raliang came to meet the Apostolic Administrator at Shillong requesting him to send missionaries to their place. In the 1892 thirty Pnars received Baptism setting greatest zeal for the missionaries for their endeavor. On 1st March 1894 Fr. Taddeus Hoffman blessed the temporary chapel at Raling and set up the first Catholic mission frontier among the Pnar (Becker, 1980: 210). Along with the Church activities they also engaged in humanitarian services like charitable works, health care and educational activities (Passah, 2009: 203). By 1911 they established eleven schools at different localities. At the present day the Catholics have established themselves in all the areas of life of the people of Jaintia Hills. There are indigenous priests among the Catholics, the first Bishop of the Jowai diocese is from the Pnar tribe who governed the activities of the Catholics almost six years before he slept in the Lord in the year 2012.

According to 2011 census both East and West Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya has 68.73 per cent of Christian population while the whole of Meghalaya has 74.59 percent. The people of Jowai resented to the British and missionaries and considered them intruders, who manipulated the political reins from the Jaintia king and introduced new faith to the people. The people looked at these as an attack on their political freedom, religious ritual and freedom. This could be seen as a remote cause for the 'Jaintia Resistance' which began in 1862. There are stories of strained relationship among the Pnar, Britishners and missionaries. The formation of *Sein Raj* in 1899 created a new platform for the Pnar to adhere to the traditional practices to act as guardian of Pnar culture, and to codify the religious customs and usages (Kulirani 2009: 110). But all agree that the education reached to the remotest villages of the Jaintia Hills is the tireless effort of those committed souls. Though many converted to Christianity, yet a

good number of them retained those beliefs and values like matriliney, religion of *Niam Tre*, marriage, inheritance, descent, etc. which they received from their ancestors and cherished them as marks of their identity and still hold and adhere to the *Niam Tre* religion.

4.7. PNAR WEEKDAYS, MONTHS, WEEKLY MARKET DAYS

In the foregoing discussion data have been arranged in terms of territory, Pnar calendrical months and their week days. However, while delineating the same it was observed that the modern week days do not corroborate with the traditional Pnar week days, which are eight in number. The importance of traditional week days are important life line for the Pnar since it caters to the economic needs of the people and this serves as the only platform for modern economic exchange.

Table 4.4

Calander

Eleven Traditional Market Places	Twelve Months	Eight Traditional Week Days	Seven Modern Week Days
Jowai	<i>Dui-Iatara</i>	<i>Hat</i>	<i>Ka Sngi U Blai</i>
Dawki	<i>Thoh-Lakhmi</i>	<i>Khyllaw</i>	<i>Dep Sngi U Blai</i>
Changpung	<i>Wisu</i>	<i>Pynsing</i>	<i>Sngi Wa-Ar</i>
Khliehriat	<i>Nai-Tung</i>	<i>Mulong</i>	<i>Sngi Wa-Lang</i>
Iooksi	<i>Nai-san</i>	<i>Musing</i>	<i>Dep Sngi Wa-Lang</i>
Mynsoo	<i>Nai-Ynru</i>	<i>Muchai</i>	<i>Sngi Thoh-Dein</i>
Muktapur	<i>Nai-Niaw</i>	<i>Pyngkat</i>	<i>Sngi Sait-that</i>
Khanduli	<i>Nai-saphra</i>	<i>Thymblein</i>	
Borato	<i>Nai-Khynde</i>		
Borghat	<i>Nai-Chiphaw</i>		

Mowkaiaw	<i>Khon- Chonglad</i>		
	<i>Kmai- Chonglad</i>		

However, in later days some more markets came into being spreading over a large area of Pnar inhabitation.

Table 4.5

Weekly Markets in the Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya

Sl.No.	Name of the Market	Distance from Block Headquarters in kms.	Distance from District Head Quarters in kms.
1	Thadlaskein C& RD Block		
	Ummlong	3	13
	Nartiang	17	27
	Khanduli	60	70
2	Laskein C&D Block		
	Mookaiaw	3	38
	Raliang	6	29
	Shangpung	14	21
3	Amlaram C & RD Block		
	Jarain	10	17
	Muktapur	23	52
	Dawki	27	56
	Khliehriat C & RD Block		
	Khliehriat	0	0
	Chiehruphi	24	24
	Lumshnong	28	28

4	Umkiang	55	55
	Sutnga	14	14
5	Saipung C& RD Block		
	There is no market so the people visit Sutnga market.		

4.8. JAINTIA AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL

The British annexed the Jaintia Parganas in the plains, and the then Syiem of Jaintiapur Rajendra Singh handed over the Hill areas also to them and as such, from the year 1835 the whole Jaintia kingdom came under the British rule till India achieved independence on the 15th August 1947 (www.jhadc.nic.in retrieved on 12/06/2019). During the British rule, the Jaintia Hills formed part of the Khasi Jaintia Hills district in the status of a Civil Sub-Division known as Jowai Civil Sub-Division.

Consequent on the independence of India from the British rule, the Syiems of 25 Khasi States signed the Instrument of Accession and these States came under the administration of the district which was later renamed as United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district. The Constitution of India which was proclaimed in the year 1950 has under Article 244(2) a provision for administration of tribal areas in the then State of Assam as per the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The United Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council was then created in the year 1951 under the Sixth Schedule with headquarters at Shillong and a Branch Office at Jowai. A separate Autonomous District Council was created for the Jaintia Hills by the then Government of Assam in the year 1964 bearing with the name of Jowai Autonomous District Council vide Notification No. TAD/R/50/64 dated 23.11.1964. After Meghalaya achieved full-fledged statehood on the 21st of January, 1972 the Jowai Civil Sub-Division was upgraded into a full-fledged Civil district in the same year in the name of Jaintia Hills district. The Jowai Autonomous District Council was subsequently renamed as the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council. Hence, the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule

of the Constitution and a Civil district under the charge of a Deputy Commissioner administered the same geographical area and by and large the same inhabitants playing their respective role and functions until the 31st July, 2013 when the Government of Meghalaya created a new Civil District, viz: East Jaintia Hills district with headquarters at Khliehriat and the parent district with headquarters at Jowai was renamed as West Jaintia Hills District. Now the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council covering two civil districts under its jurisdiction (www.westjaintiahills.gov.nic.in retrieved on 12/06/2019).

Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council came into existence on 1964 when amalgamated State of Assam by notification No. TAD/R/50/64 dated 23.11.1964 carved out of the erstwhile United Khasi Jaintia Hills and the whole area that was known as Jowai Sub- Division to form a separate District Council called as Jowai Autonomous District Council. Later when the State of Meghalaya attained its Statehood in January 1972, Jowai Sub-division was raised as Civil district known as Jaintia Hills district and likewise, the Jowai Autonomous District Council was renamed as Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council vide Notification Dt-14.6.73 (www.jhadc.nic.in retrieved on 12/06/2019).

With the passage of time and for administrative convenience, three Civil Sub-Divisions have been created to effectively bring the administration and development nearer to the people. Khliehriat Sub-Division Amlarem Sub-Division and Saipung Sub-Division. In the year 2013 Khliehriat Sub-Division was upgraded into a Civil District to form a new district known as East Jaintia Hills. However, the name of the Autonomous District Council continues to remain the same in view of ethnicity, culture and common belief of the people.

There are 29 elected members in the District Council as given in the following table.

Table 4.6

Elected Members in the District Council

Sl. No.	Name	Constituency
01	Shri Gillroy Tariang	War East

02	Shri Holando Lamin	War Central
03	Shri Het Pohthmi	War West
04	Shri Lakhon Dkhar	Sohmynting Khliehtyrshi
05	Shri Ailad Bhoi	Mukhla-Wahiajer
06	Shri Jesse Suiam	Ummulong-Moodymmai
07	Shri Lakhon Biam	Nongbah
08	Shri Thombor Shiwat	Nartiang-Umladang
09	Shri Evening Star Teron	Nongjingi
10	Shri Dawan Lyngdoh	Mynsgad-Khanduli
11	Shri Ruda Ioo Tang	Shiliang Myntang
12	Shri Aiborlang Shadap	Barato Mukro
13	Shri Habahun Dkhar	Saphai
14	Shri Winning Garland Sungoh	Mowkaiaw
15	Shri Robinus Syngkon	Raliang
16	Shri J. Treilang Suchiang	Shangpung
17	Shri Bright Star Chyrmang	Jowai North
18	Shri Awhai Andrew Shullai	Jowai Central
19	Shri Saron Pasweth	Jowai South
20	Shri Lomris Lyngoh	Muthlong Sohkympkor
21	Shri Lasky Rymbai	Tuber
22	Shri Phasmon Dkhar	Musniang Rngad
23	Shri Finelynes Bareh	Rymbai Khliehriat
24	Shri Seiborlang Shadap	Sutnga Narwan
25	Shri Richard Singh Lyngdoh	Sutnga Nongkhlieh
26	Shri Krison Langstang	Sumer
27	Shri Arbor Hima Darnei	Saipung
28	Shri Emlangky Lamare	Narpuh
29	Shri Sankey Shangpung	Bataw Lakadong

From the above note it is evident that the Pnar are an endogamous tribe who are divided into exogamous clans having further exogamous matrilineal families, being maintained through the perpetuation of matrilineality over ages. The aspect of matrilineality not only subscribes to the pattern of inheritance, but also it is related to the afterlife when one looks into it from the observances of entire life cycle rituals. Language is another aspect that can be reckoned with the maintenance of ethnicity. Empirical study has suggested that maintenance of ethnicity and identity formation among the Pnar can be elaborately understood through their stable social organization, religion, fairs and festivals and practice of megalithism as a living tradition.