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# **Kinship and Marriage System among the Khasis of Bangladesh: A Study of Khasi Culture and Identity**

**Rajmoni Singha\***

## **Abstract**

The main objective of this study is to examine the kinship and marriage system among the Khasi (an ethnic minority in Bangladesh), who are the only communities in Bangladesh still strictly following a matrilineal system. The study also touches on some of the key challenges the Khasi face in maintaining their matrilineal culture. Most Khasi live in ancestral forests, but most of their land is formally lease-based from the Government of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a country with one of the highest population densities in the world. The migration of non-tribal populations into the Khasis' areas threatens the Khasis' culture, livelihoods and even existence as an ethnic minority in Bangladesh. The Khasi matrilineal system is a unique system that is rooted in rich culture and needs urgent protection by the State and development stakeholders.

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## **I. Introduction**

While the mainstream of Bangladesh is a male dominant society, which is heavily influenced by the patriarchy system, the Khasi women play an important role in preserving their culture and in developing their socio-economic relationships. According to Khasi customs and tradition, the head of a household should be a female.

This paper explores how the Khasi retain their matrilineal culture and what factors play an important role in that. There has been some research on the Khasi tribe, but the key elements which help them retain their matrilineal culture, identity, livelihoods and existence have not been emphasized. For example, ethnicity plays an important role in bridging the gap between the Bengali and Khasi communities in Bangladesh. Ethnicity means some cultural difference and similarity between two cultures (Eriksen, 2002). This hidden connection between the Khasi and Bengalis has never been worked on. Moreover, early research did not focus on the Khasi marriage and its linkage to the matrilineal system.

The fieldwork was a part of the requirement to fulfill the Master of Philosophy degree in social anthropology at the University of Bergen, Norway in 2005. The fieldwork was conducted through the participatory observation method from June to December of 2003. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected via interviews in two Khasi villages. The two locally elected village leaders (called mantri), the heads of households (which are all female), and common Khasi people were selected for the interviews. A translator was hired to implement the fieldwork as the Khasi have their unique and distinct language, which is different from mainstream Bengali language. The fieldwork was carried out in two Bangladeshi villages: Magurachara and Doublechera.

- Magurachara is located in the middle of the forest between Srimangal and Kamalganj sub-division; as of 2003, it has a population of 205 people;
- Doublechera is located near the Indian border under the jurisdiction of Kamalganj sub-division; as of 2003, it has a population of 277.

The political organization and governance system is similar between the Magurachara and Doublechera punjis (villages). The two punjis were revisited in May 2014 in order to explore any changes and development regarding the matrilineal system, culture, and daily livelihoods in the Khasi communities.

The paper is structured into five sections. Following this introduction, the second section provides some basic information on Khasis in Bangladesh. The third section presents the findings from the interviews with regards to the Khasi social organization. The fourth section summarizes some of the more recent challenges to the Khasis traditional organization, which are related to attacks by outsiders, disadvantages of Khasi in selling their products, and single family preferences by more educated Khasi. The fifth section provides some conclusions.

## **II. Basic Information on Khasi in Bangladesh**

According to the 1991 Bangladeshi population census, there are 45 ethnic minorities in Bangladesh, constituting 1.28 percent of the total population. The Khasi are one of these 45 ethnic minorities in the country and their population is approximately 12,280 (Shikdar, Biswas and Mollick, 2013). Within Bangladesh, the Khasi community lives mostly in 11 upazilas (sub-



The Khasi are the only communities in Bangladesh, who still strictly follow a matrilineal system. They have a matrilineal family composition and a matrilineal abode structure (Chakravarty, Iqbal and Shahriar, 2013). The Khasi language belongs to the Mon-Khmer division of the Austro-Asiatic language group (Brightbill et al., 2007). The five Khasi groups are: The Khyntiam, the Pnar, the War, the Bhoi and the Lingsam (Philemon, 1995). The Khyntiam are the largest among the Khasi groups. The Khasi are born and brought up in nature among the forests. The Khasis' local administration system is governed by a locally elected leader, recognized as mantri. The mantri's house is in the middle of any punji (village) and is established to monitor the members of a Khasi punji.

The Khasi mainly produce *thai* (a high-quality betel leaf)<sup>1</sup> as a cash crop. This unique type of betel leaf is only available in the hilly forests of Sylhet. Their lifestyle is related to betel leaf production. Approximately 75.5 percent of the Khasi are involved in betel leaf cultivation (Costa and Dutta, 2007). The Khasi community is known to produce the best quality betel leaf in Bangladesh. The quality of betel leaves varies according to location and local climate within the greater Sylhet region. The Khasi of Sylhet District also produce oranges, rice, and keue (betel nut). Most other Khasi areas (like the Khasi of Moulvibazar District) do not produce betel nuts, but produce—in addition to betel leaves—rice, maize, sweet potatoes, and lemon.

Land is vital for the Khasis in Bangladesh. A few of the Khasi punjis have their own cultivable land, but most of the Khasi villages do not formally own the land for their betel leaf plantation. Here, land means forestland with tilas (small hills), which are suitable for betel leaf production. They typically get forestland from the Government of Bangladesh under a lease system. According to the terms and conditions of the lease documents, the Khasi can typically use the leased forestland for 99 years. However, after 30-40 years, the forestland is no more suitable for betel leaf production because of the reduction in soil fertility. The jhum (slash and burn) method is not common in the Khasi society but they support themselves according to their needs and based on local environment. When slash and burn is applied, the burnt land is initially also used for producing ginger, lemon, and sweet potatoes. Afterwards, they start to plant trees for betel leaf.

The different Khasi punjis keep in touch with one another even though they may be far away from each other. The Khasi are also connected to other ethnic communities in Sylhet through business, local festivals and marriages (Costa and Dutta, 2007).

### **III. Findings on Khasi Social Organization**

Even though the Khasi are culturally divided into five dialect groups, they all believe and share a common social organization based on a matrilineal system. The matrilineal system is a principle of Khasi organization that significantly shapes their society. Based on various interviews and the existing literature, this section provides a description of the key elements of the Khasi matrilineal system, covering (1) the Khasi marriage, (2) Khasi kinship and clan, (3) land ownership and property inheritance, (4) the division of labor between Khasi men and women, (5) the Khasi clan council, and 6) the Khasi village council.

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<sup>1</sup> Betel leaf is the leaf of a vine belonging to the *Piperaceae* family, which includes pepper and kava. It is valued both as a mild stimulant and for its medicinal properties. Betel leaf is mostly consumed in Asia.

### III.1. Khasi Marriage

The Khasi strictly follow an exogamy marriage system. Both husband and wife sexually monopolize through marriage. Marriage within the same clan is strictly prohibited by Khasi law. They also strictly follow a local marriage system. After marriage, the groom moves to the bride's house. The wife's mother is the head of the family. When the wife's mother dies, the youngest daughter becomes the head of the family. Children have no right to use the father's clan because the father's clan is limited at the wife's place, which cannot expand further.

Marriage is a social and civil contract in the Khasi custom. Marriage within the same kuris (clan) is strictly prohibited, known as lishang. If someone marries within the same clan, they will be punished by the Khasi punji. The newly married couple will be declared as *shang* (prohibited people). It is believed that after death, their soul cannot meet with their ancestors. Sometimes, these types of crimes are reconsidered by performing a lishang ceremony. Marriage within the same clan is the greatest sin in the Khasi society. Sometimes, they do not marry even out of their clan because of friendship. A friend's children are considered as their own children. So marriage with a friend's children is sinful. It is perceived to be a marriage between a brother and a sister.

Furthermore, the youngest daughter cannot convert religions. If she does, she will lose her ancestral wealth and properties (Khongphai, 1974). When someone marries a non-Khasi, big problems arise when dealing with the *kur* (cultural law). According to Khasi believe, Khasi who marry non-Khasi cannot meet with their ancestors after death. They will be considered *shang*. When someone marries with non-Khasi, society looks down upon their family members. To relieve these people from social sanctions, these Khasi and their family typically leave Bangladesh for Meghalaya, India.

Polygamy is strictly prohibited in the Khasi society. Moreover, they cannot marry their cousins from both the father's and mother's sides. The Khasis are also prohibited to marry the wife's elder sister. When a Khasi's wife dies, the man has to wait for one year before looking for a new wife. In the beginning, they try to marry a wife's younger sister. Moreover, he has to pay the price of shang to his wife's clan, e.g., a certain amount of betel leaves. If he does not like his wife's sister, he can look for another girl. His first wife is known as Ka Tang-Gatu.

Sometimes, a Khasi man keeps another wife or *Ka Tang Tuh* (girl friend) in another punji, though they live with their first wife and children. The second wife does not live with the family of the first wife. Therefore, such Khasi men keep the second wife in another punji to avoid any trouble from the first wife. The Khasi society and law does not approve a second marriage system. The children of second wife do not get any property from their father. These children use their mother's clan as per the rules of the Khasi custom.

Symbolic action produces solidarity units of a society (Inden and Nicholas, 1977). Marriage creates solidarity between family components. New members are included into solidarity through symbolic initiation. Symbolic work rebuilds, re-establishes, and strengthens a set of harmonious relationship. Marriages are concerned with the allocation of a number of distinguishable classes of rights (Leach, 1991). Children receive legalization from the parents and society through marriage. Couples also receive their legality on children through marriage. The Khasi marriage also helps the affinity relationship between the wife's brother and husband, which is very important in the Khasi society. A father is just like a guest in Khasi society.

### III.2. Khasi Kinship and Clan

Kinship relates to the connection between human beings due to reproduction. The reproduction of human beings is formulated as a sexual and biological process. Biological relations have unique qualities; they create and constitute attachments, ties, and cohesive relations proportional to the biological closeness of the kin. These are natural ties inherent in the human condition, distinct from the social or cultural ties (Schneider, 1984).

The Khasi matrilineal culture comes from the *kur*. *Long Kur Na Kakynthei* means woman produce clan. The clan is a pivotal issue among Khasis. Most of the cultural practices happen because of the clan. All children use their mother's clan as last name. A father's clan is inactive at the wife's residence. He keeps his mother's clan membership. All clans have their own legal system. All internal clan issues are overseen and monitored by the head of clan and elders (Gopalkrishnan, 1995). There is an *iing* (natal house) for every clan. The natal house is the centre of all family rituals. It is a centre of gathering of all relatives. It is a house of solidarity. Religious rituals bring the relatives together under *iing*. All family members come and join religious functions such as *hoktoy* (religious ceremony) and funeral. They show loyalty, solidarity, and respect to their natal house (Chowdhury, 1996). After a mother's death, ancestral property is handed down to and controlled by the youngest daughter. Ancestral property cannot be disbursed to other siblings. After marriage, a sister to the youngest daughter can build a house and that can be considered as new *iing* for the second generation. It means that this newly built house will be the new natal house of their children. Every third generation can form a fully independent *iing* (Shadap-Sen, 1981).

The Khasi call themselves *Ki Hynniewtrep*, which indicates the seven huts in their language (Khan, 2013). Most Khasis strongly believe that all women are descendants from the seven mythical mothers (Lala, 2014). The Khasis claim that they came from sixteen groups: nine live above and seven live in the hills (Rana, 1989). Every Khasi believes that they are the descendants of one of the seven mothers and that their clans have come from these ancestral mothers. Several sub-ancestral mothers have been divided from these seven mothers. Khasi people have a *Lawbei Tynrai* (ancestral mother). Step by step, it has been divided into several sub-clans such as *KaLawbei Tymmen*, *KaLawbei Khyraw*, and *Lawbei Tynrai*. After three sub-clans, a new ancestral mother can be created. However, this newly created clan maintains relationship with the main ancestral mother. There can be several families under the *kur*. A family is comprised by three generations (Potam, 2010).

Women are considered to be the protectors of the clan, ancestral wealth, home, culture, tradition, and religious rites. A woman is not only the guardian of the family, but also of her clan. Her duty is to expand the clan through marriage. Since the woman is the founder of the clan, she is respected by every family member and household. The status of Khasi woman is high in the society because of her inheritance and significant liberty in choosing a partner (Costa, Dutta, Malik and Gain, 2011). If a Khasi woman dies without performing her duties, it is believed that she cannot meet her ancestors in heaven. Her soul will not find a resting place.

The Khasi believe that women bring the destiny to their children. A woman is the mother of all of the Khasi. They believe that the Goddess has sent women to reproduce the clan and to preserve it. If a woman fails to fulfill her primary duties, such as reproduce and performing religious rituals, she will be considered a meaningless woman. In addition, she will be looked

down by Khasi society.

All the Khasi children will be under the control of women in terms of clan, rituals and rights, according to the Khasi customary law. All children of a Khasi couple belong to the mother's clan. A father has no kin relation with his children because he belongs to his mother's clan (Gurdon, 1987). After death, a Khasi's burnt ashes are taken to the mother's grave to meet in heaven. According to Khasi law, a woman has no right to keep her husband's burnt ashes, because a man belongs to his mother's clan. Birth rituals help newborn babies to be incorporated into the family and the mother's clan. If a son is the first child, he becomes the head of his family's clan council. He plays a significant role to his youngest sister because it is the youngest daughter of a family who will control all ancestral property. If there are any rituals, all members (male or female) from the mother's side have to come to attend *hoktoy* ritual ceremony. Through *hoktoy* ritual, they restore and retain their family membership.

All the daughters of a couple will be under the control of a wife's brother (u-mama). Moreover, a father has to work for his wife and family members. Being a maternal uncle is a matter of respect in the Khasi society. The maternal uncle is the guardian of all of his nieces. The maternal uncle is considered as a guard and a guest in the family. He is also a ritual priest in his nieces' families.

### **III.3. Land Ownership and Property Inheritance**

According to the Khasi customary law, women inherit properties of their parents whether it is an ancestral or earned property. Men have no right to inherit any type of property. All sisters get the same amount of land from earned property, except the youngest daughter who gets additional property because of her extra responsibility for performing religious ceremonies (Rana, 1989). The youngest daughter is known as *khatduh*, who is responsible for arranging religious ceremonies such as *hoktoy* and funeral ceremonies. She has to pay for all these ceremonial costs. If the ancestral property or land is unused, cousin sisters have the right to utilize the land. Even when cousin sisters face economic problems, they have right to ask the *khatduh* to use the land for time being.

There are two kinds of properties: one is ancestral property and another is the parents' property or earned property. These two types of properties cannot be combined. The youngest daughter is in charge of ancestral property as well as her parents' property. She cannot take over ancestral property. The house of the youngest daughter is considered as ancestral property. She cannot leave ancestral property without the family members' consent. Here family members mean her brothers, sisters, and maternal uncle. She can consult with her father. But the father cannot make any final decision without the other family members. Her mother was once a youngest daughter like her. Her mother had the role as custodian of ancestral property. Now this is the time to follow her mother's role. She is also responsible for providing or distributing money for religious, social and family needs. It is her duty to look after the parents. She is allowed to earn money for herself (*Nong Khyrrow*) as much as she wants.

Children can acquire the right to inherit property after the death of their parents. If their children do not want any property, they can give it to relatives of their wife and husband. If a man earns money before marriage, it is known as *Kamai Iing Kur*, which will go to his mother's side. After marriage, a man's earned money is recognized as *Kamai Iing Khun Iing Tnga*, which will go to his wife's side.

### III.4. Division of Labor

The division of labor among the Khasi is very clear:

- The Khasi women's duty is to organize or process betel leaf for marketing. They organize *gushi* (12 betel leaves), *guta* (144 betel leaves) and *kuri* (2880 betel leaves) in betel leaf classification. The *terua* (cane) ties these betel leaves one by one in order to make them ready for marketing. It is also the women's duty to cook and rear babies. Women also wash families' cloths. The Khasi women do not participate in any political activities, even though women are the decision-makers in the family. Older women can also look after babies. In this way, they enjoy their retired life. When their daughters marry, they can enjoy more leisure life.
- The Khasi men's duty is to plant and nurture betel leaf, and to pluck betel leaf from trees. Older men are busy with buying daily necessities from the local market. They may also look after babies at home. Khasi men try to work in the garden as long as their body allows them. Traditionally, only men can participate in the Khasi's political activities in the *punji*. But this trend is changing now as some Khasi women have started to join the village council, which is headed by a *mantri*. There are about eleven members in a village council.

The head of a household is the wife's mother. She is the decision maker in the family. When the mother dies, the youngest daughter will replace her. She will play the same role like her mother. She is the custodian of family property according to the Khasi custom. The wife's father is just a retired person from his daily work in a *punji*. If he is physically strong enough, he can keep up his daily work. A newly married husband is relatively vulnerable in the family. He is a guest as well as a worker in wife's family. His power is very limited. He becomes a new member in the wife's family after marriage, though he remains a member of his mother's clan.

Husbands have to work hard and have to look after their wives and family members. His duty is also to attend the village meetings, and to show off his strength and loyalty to the rules of the *punji*. Having a man in a family is a sign of a respected family. Without a man a family is considered by Khasi society as barren and impotent. Despite the leadership role of women in the family, women are typically not allowed to attend any village meeting. Within village affairs, it is only the husbands that represent a family. His duty is also to keep in touch with the Bengali traders for betel leaf marketing. If the family needs anything, he has to go to the local market to get it. If there is a younger brother and sister from his wife's side, it is the wife's and husband's duty to look after them. As stated above, the mother's brother will be the *u-mama* of her daughters or next generation.

### III.5. Khasi Clan Council

Every Khasi clan has its *kur darbar* (clan council), which rules the specific clan. Here clan means outgoing male members who are living at the ancestral house. There is an election system to become a head of the clan. The elder male members form the clan council. The head must be from the mother's clan side. Normally, a council is held at the youngest daughter's residence. The head of clan and elders are the supreme authority of the clan. The head of the clan and senior members of the clan council supervise all internal affairs and problems. In most of the *punjis*, it

is the eldest maternal uncle who holds the position of head of the clan.

Many political problems can be handed over to the head of village to solve it. Ancestral properties and customs are to be protected and developed by the head of the clan. There should be tranquility among the clans. If there is any problem in a family of a clan, the head of the clan will interfere and try to solve it by mutual understanding. The Khasi who belong to their respective clans are bound to respect their clans and especially the head of the clan. The head of the clan is responsible for allocating the land to his clans or families.

### **III.6. Khasi Village Council**

In addition to the Khasi clan council, every punji (village) also has a village council, headed by the Khasi mantri (headman). There is a boro-mantri (senior headman) and a shoto-mantri (junior headman) in every Khasi village. There are fourteen advisory council members, which are elected by the people of the punji.

The Khasi headman is very important in Khasi society. He plays many important roles in the society. He has to manage the social, political and economic roles of Khasi punji. How much a Khasi punji will develop depends on the leadership role and skill of a mantri. The advisory council members help the mantri to perform his duties as well as advise and help the mantri if bigger problems (like divorce, killing, and attack by outsiders in the punji) arise.

Even though some punjis have female members as advising members, no female member was included in the Doublechera and Magurachara punjis. There is an election system every four to five years. If a mantri fails to show his good performance, he has to step down from his position. Nowadays, it is not effective in some punjis. In Doublechera and Magurachara, a hereditary system of mantra has been maintained. The earlier mantri of Doublechera had three sons, of which two are educated. One of them is mantri in Doublechera punji, and another is mantra in Magurachara punji.

The Khasi plant betel leaves on *tilas* (small hilly areas). They get forestland under a leasing system from the Bangladesh Government. After getting forestland, they find a suitable tila for betel leaf production. They can get this forestland from the mantri because he is an elected leader of a Khasi punji. Getting forestland totally depends on the role of the mantri. He has to keep liaison with government officials to get the forestland. Some main duties of the mantri are:

- a. to solve conflicts within the Khasi punji,
- b. to communicate with local politicians and government,
- c. to communicate with influential persons in Dhaka,
- d. to welcome tourists and outsiders,
- e. to communicate with other mantris, and
- f. to communicate with the Bangladesh Khasi Welfare Society (BKS).

Any type of social program within a punji is headed by a mantri. Most of the programs within a village require the permission from a mantri. Normally, a mantri is busy with his other activities. Before Khasi make a marriage contract, both family members (bride and groom) have to inform the mantri. Moreover, both families have to take permission from the mantri and he will be one of the important guests during the marriage ceremony.

During divorce, a meeting is called headed by the mantri. If somebody breaks the rules of the

punji, the mantri will punish him or her like becoming sang (out of society). Extra-marital sex is strictly prohibited in the Khasi punji. If someone knows that there has been an extra-marital relation within a punji, the mantri will call a meeting and the accused man will be punished for some years. For example, the accused will not be allowed to attend any local program in the village. If the accused man can correct his mistake under the given correction time, he can come back again to the punji.

Finally, if a Khasi fails get a severe problem (like a murder or killing) resolved through the mantri, she/he can (typically after permission of the mantri) go to the local administration to solve it.

#### **IV. Recent Challenges**

There are three main challenges to the traditional Khasi living style: (1) attacks by outsiders, (2) disadvantages of Khasi in selling their products, and (3) single family preferences by some more educated Khasi.

##### **IV.1. Attacks by Outsiders**

The Khasi were not well organized in the past, but nowadays, they have become more organized and more careful, especially after facing a number of attacks by outsiders, such as land grabbing, forcible wood cutting, harassment and being forcibly ousted from their areas. The main target of attacks by outsiders is related to the Khasi's land property so that outsiders can expand their land areas.

Local non-Khasi political leaders, *mastan* (gangs), and tea estates are the main players of land grabbing operation. For example, Nihar, Nirala and Chalita punjis face frequent attacks by a local gang patronized by tea owners. Furthermore, three Khasi punjis were displaced by the state-owned Gas Company in Habiganj District between 1968 and 1969. The same company acquired a Khasi village in 1987, 2004 and 2005, consecutively. However, Khasi communities were not compensated properly (Potam, 2010). In this way, many Khasi families face displacement and an unsecured life. Threats and intimidations to Khasi people create anxiety, tension and hopelessness.

Forged land documents prepared by corrupt local leaders have forced the Khasi to leave their ancestral land (Ahmmed, 2005). Sometimes, certain development projects destroy the habitat of the Khasis and their forests. Forests are a part of their daily life and belief system. As Chowdhury (2005) has pointed out, if the State and people destroy the nature and forests, they will destroy the Khasis.

In 2001, the Bangladeshi Government tried to establish an eco-park with an area of 1,500 acres in the Khasis ancestral land without prior consent of the community, which implied that about 1,000 families faced eviction according to Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact (Stidsen, 2007). The Forestry Department evicted 15 Khasi families and 2 Garo<sup>2</sup> families in 2002 in the name of an eco-park (Costa and Dutta, 2007). The project was stopped because of heavy protests by local people as well as international stakeholders.

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<sup>2</sup> The Garo are another ethnic minority group in Bangladesh.

## **IV.2. Disadvantages of Khasi in Selling Their Products**

The Khasi's livelihood depends on the availability of natural resources, local people and the State. Khasis have to work with the local Bengali traders and communities in order to create a niche for betel leaves in the local and international markets. The Khasi and Bengali communities are quite different in terms of language, culture, and clothing. In addition to their own language, most Khasi can only speak the local Sylheti dialect, which helps them to connect with the local Bengali people. The Khasi actually depend on Bengali people to sell their products because the Khasi do not sell their products directly to the market due to deep-rooted communication barriers. On the other hand, local Bengali businessmen also depend on the Khasi people to run their betel leaf business.

The Khasi claim that they have been cheated and misguided by the local Bengali people in the market. According to the Khasi, local businessmen borrow money from them but do not repay them. That is why the Khasi changed their strategy to sell their betel leaves directly from their punjis. The villagers stated that it is safer for them to sell their products from their punji. Due to these business interactions, there is a better understanding between the Khasi and non-Khasi in some areas.

However, a disadvantage of selling their products directly from their punjis is that the local Bengali traders typically buy the betel leaves at a cheaper rate than the market rate. Hence, the Khasi are deprived from the actual price of betel leaf. Sometimes, a Khasi trader within the village collects betel leaves from the Khasi families and sells it to Bengali traders. But the Khasi people look down on them because they do not allow business minded persons within themselves. The Khasis come to the local markets only for buying some necessary items. Some Bengali traders also go to the punjis with daily necessities in order to sell them to the Khasis.

In any case, the Khasi have become worried about the non-Khasi. If a non-Khasi settles in their territory, they feel that there will soon be a problem in their clan. Stealing and land conflict is not frequent among the Khasi societies, but it is between the Khasis and the local Bengali population.

## **IV.3. Single Family Preferences**

Based on a recent survey by Potam (2010), there are eighty Khasi students studying in Dhaka city. There are seven Master Degree holders and 41 graduates among the Khasis in Bangladesh. Though these numbers are overall a positive sign for their development, some newly educated Khasi tend to prefer a single family rather than an extended family clan. Moreover, a new generation of Khasi prefers to lead individual choice marriage than arranged marriage (Costa and Dutta, 2007). Furthermore, maternal uncles no longer enjoy the same power as before. Though most educated Khasi try to protect and practice matrilineal culture, some of them have started to move to Dhaka. Staying in the wife's house is contradictory for some educated Khasi because they study and work in the city. These Khasis absorb new information, knowledge, and technology and challenge the Khasis' traditional life style.

## **V. Conclusions**

The Khasi matrilineal system says that their *iing* (clan) is the ritual center which fosters solidarity among matrilineal kin groups. They never allow extending their matrilineal groups into

a collateral system. Their extending process is a vertical system. When a Khasi husband moves to his wife's house, his coming generations cannot use the husband's clan. All children have to use the wife's clan. The husband is just a guest to his wife's house.

Khasis maintain their uniqueness through social and religious ceremonies. These ceremonies bring together all matrilineal kin groups and show that they are living under the iing. Social and religious ceremonies also help them to strengthen the bond among kin groups and to unite in a single sentiment.

The Khasis mostly produce betel leaves because it is highly suitable in hilly areas but not in the valley areas. Betel leaves are a part of Khasi daily life because their main economy is based on betel leaf plantation. Getting forestland from the Government depends on the village headman. If he is not skilled in local and central politics, it is easy for Khasi to lose their existence in Bangladesh. They have to keep relocating to find new forest land within the limited area. Without land, the Khasi cannot grow betel leaves.

However, the Khasi face displacement due to encroachment by the tea gardeners and the State in their ancestral territories, which is land that is formally under the control of the Bangladesh Government. Land disputes threaten the Khasis' livelihoods and existence as an ethnic minority in Bangladesh. Moreover, without betel leaves, the Khasi cannot live their matrilineal culture in Bangladesh. Their matrilineal culture and heritage help the Khasis to bring uniqueness and unity as well as prosperity to their society. Therefore, landownership and rights of the Khasi must be established in order to lead sustainable livelihoods.

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