An Ethnographic Exploration of the *Lyngam* Ethnic Community in Bangladesh

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Abstract The *Lyngam* community is living over a hundred years as a distinct ethnic group maintaining racial and cultural identity at Kalmakanda Upazila of Netrokona district in Bangladesh. Generally, mainstream people are not aware of their culture. Yet the scholars and researchers did not study on their origin, history, and culture. A few anthropologists, sociologists and linguists examined the *Lyngams* culture and trend of cultural dynamics as part of Khasi and Garo (dominant tribes). This paper attempts to understand and describe how the way of life and culture of *Lyngam* is constructed to the context of self-image and other communities with Christianization. To explore the *Lyngams*' cultural traits, attributes, and existing trend, an ethnographic approach round a year and an in-depth interview method are employed here. These methods along with secondary information reveal that the *Lyngams*' way of life and cultural dynamics are the amalgamation of Khasi and Garo culture. The intermingled product of Khasi and Garo culture is treated as a separate ethnic group that could be considered as the *Lyngam* community.

Keywords *Lyngams* Community, Hybrid Culture, Christianization, Cultural Dynamics

1. Introduction

The *Lyngams* is a small ethnic minority living the northeast part (in Netrokona district) of Bangladesh. Most of the people of the country do not know much about them. Normally, *Lyngam* people are known as part of the major Khasi tribe. In fact the *Lyngams* are a specific group of people, both racially and culturally. The meaning of the word *Lyngam* is disputed. *Lyngam* is a Khasi name. The Garos call them *Megams*. Playfair calls them 'Nunia Garos'. Some scholars [6, 13, 4] consider the word '*Lyngam*' as 'we are men'. The *Lyngam* oldest folksong tells them as '*Kon Blei*' (children of God). The *Lyngams* may denote another word

'*maram*' which signifies something that is clammy. Normally, the Khasi community is composed of five sects- *Khasi*, *Synteng*, *War*, *Bhoi* and *Amwi* [1]. Among these sects there are no *Amwi* people in Bangladesh.

The largest *Lyngams* community lives in the western part of the Khasi hill in Meghalaya in India. Their area extends from *Boko* to Bangladesh. They are supposed to have *Garo* origins, but have inclination to *Khasi* customs. In fact the origin of the *Lyngam* people is shrouded in obscurity. The *Lyngams* speak dialect of their own. A few existing tradition indicates that the *Lyngams* are considered as a non-Khasi people. Some scholars consider that they may be a hybrid group and intermixture of *Garo-Khasi* in the *Lyngam* area [1]. Ethnically *Lyngams* could not be called pure Khasi; nor are they Garo. Though, they live in *Khasi* hills, they are different from the *Khasis* in language, customs and the way of life. The *Lyngams* may be identified with the *Khasis*. They dislike being called like *Garos*.

In physical features *Lyngams* look more similar to *Garos* than *Khasi*. A good number of *Garos* live in west Khasi hills and they have been living with the *Lyngams* from time immemorial are called them the *migmams*. The earliest deeds on the *Lyngams* [6] indicate that they look as a Khasi sub-tribe. Anthropologists, sociologists and linguists are not fully agreed on ethnic identity of the *Lyngams*. They are neither pure *Khasis* nor pure *Garos* [10]. Some scholars [7] show that the *Lyngams* to be a very special group. The *Lyngams* are a separate division, being half *Khasi* and half *Garo*. Although, they are considered *Khasi*, marked differences, exist between them and their neighbours, the *Garos*, in physical traits, dress, customs and their dialects. The *Lyngams* physical structures and linguistic peculiarities show that they are an Austro-Asiatic Mon-Khmer speaking indigenous people.

Battacharjee [2] and Sangma [15] suggest that the *Lyngams* are one of the sub-divisions of the *Garos* (*Achik*). Some scholars of NEHU (North Eastern Hill University, India) note that the *Lyngams* differ not only from most of the *Khasi* sub-populations but from the *Garo* also. Scholars

could not venture to arrive at any definite conclusion. But possibly suggest that the *Lyngams* seem to be a distinctly different population and with all probability not either a sub-population of the *Khasi* or of the *Garo*. Hellen Giri, lecturer of NHEU says, “Tradition tells that the *Khasis*, whether *Bhoi*, *Khynriem*, *Lyngam*, *Maram*, *Pnar*, *Synteng* and *War* etc. belong to one race (*Khasi*).” Lyngdoh [9] states that the *Khasi* includes all the *Khasis* - *Bhoi*, *Khynriem*, *Maram*, *Pnar*, *Synteng* and *War* those are residing in the *Khasi* hills and some of them are residing outside the hills, the plain land areas of Bangladesh.

2. Methodology

This study is carried out in villages – Jagirpara, Bangkona, Panchgaon, Patlaban and Dippur – at *Kalmakanda* Upazila of *Netrokona* district, where the *Lyngam* community lives and maintains their ethnic and cultural identity. Researcher gathered information over a year from 2012 to 2013. The field study was conducted through ethnographic approaches including participant observation, in-depth interviews, unstructured and open-ended interviews and others tools and techniques by adopting emic and etic approaches. This study analyzed how and what extend the *Lyngams* culture differ from other communities especially in terms of *Khasis* and *Garos* and their overall influences, similarities and differences. This is an exploratory inquiry, used qualitative methods to generate data based on the live experiences, views, attitudes of *Lyngams* existing customs and behaviour. To perform this study a total number of 125 respondents were chosen from the study area based on convenience sampling which is sort out by the help of community leaders and experienced persons with differing backgrounds and histories including the cultural dynamics of the *Lyngam*. The interview was carried out with different ages of people including gender among the community people. To accomplish this study an unstructured interview schedule was administered with them. A thematic method was employed after a systematic transcription of narratives.

3. Discussion

This paper investigates the inherent position of *Lyngams* way of life - how they lead traditional and modern life in keeping with other communities. It also examines their origin, histories and existing trend of cultural dynamics. It is believed that based on racial and cultural ground the *Lyngams* are a distinct ethnic minority. But the thing is that the distinctiveness of *Lyngam* culture is the consequences of diffusion of diverse culture. It is mixed up of *Khasis* and *Gros* cultural etiquettes. The *Lyngams* major social and cultural construction and constituents derive from the spectrum of *Khasi* and *Garo* culture. But it has not been officially or institutionally acknowledged. There are some oral tradition prevailed in *Lyngam* society that the source and

origin of *Lyngam* culture is emerged from *Khasi* and *Garo* tradition. Now the *Lyngam* custom, ritual, and belief are reformed through Christianization. Traditional ritual is being changed by outer influences. Social, political, and economic institution bring forth the overall change of the *Lyngam* contemporary culture including Christianity and traditional religiosity. Global village concept is not now excluded from *Lyngam* cultural practices. Major findings of *Lyngams* obtained from narratives are presented here briefly. Themes focussed for analyses were struggle for redefining respondents’ cultural phenomena, traits, trends, and its implications, and diverse use with experiences, economic and social stigma, and influences of matrilineal dominance.

4. Structural and Demographic Analysis of *Lyngams*

The word ‘*Lyngam*’ means ‘cool’. The *Lyngam* people are calm in nature. The matrilineal systems of the *Lyngam* and the *Khasi* are quite similar. The *Lyngams* as culturally intermediate between the *Khasis* and *Garos*. In appearance they resemble to the *Garos* with their flat noses, small eyes and strong body structures. In Bangladesh a few family (not more than ten villages) of *Lyngams* reside in *Kalmakanda* Upazila in the north-eastern district of *Netrokona*. In Bangladesh, the *Khasi* community lives in the five districts that is to say: *Habiganj*, *Moulvibazar*, *Nertokona*, *Sylhet* and *Sunamganj*. The *Khasi* who resides in *Habiganj* and *Moulvibazar* are called them the *Wars*. The *Khasi* who abides in *Sylhet* are called them the *Synteng* (*Jaintia*) or *Jaintia Khasi*. In this country a considerable number of *Khasi* are settled in the district of *Moulvibazar*. The *Khasi* who inhabits at *Tahirpur* (*Sunamganj*) and *Kalmakanda* (*Netrokona*) are called them the *Lyngams*. It is estimated that the *Lyngams* population is 3100 only. They have been living in harmony with *Khasi* and *Garo* culture over a long time. An idea is introduced in *Lyngam* society that they inter-marry the *Garos* and they are the descendants of the *Khasi*. The population distribution of the *Lyngams* is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. population distribution of the *Lyngams*

Village	Families	Population
Boro Mongara	80	310
Choto Mongora	85	301
Mohadeo	NA	NA
Patlaban	150	455
Kandapara	40	122
Sannyasipara	110	423
Jagirpara	50	231
Bangkona	40	225
Panchgaon	175	685
Nongyllai	30	148
Dippur	40	210
Total	700	3100

Source: Survey of *Baruakona* Catholic Mission, 2012

In addition, five *Lyngam* families live in *Rajai* village in *Tahirpur* Thana of *Sunamganj* district and in a few *Khasi pinjis* (villages). The *Baruakona* Catholic Mission on enumerated the *Lyngams* in *Kalmakanda* Thana at 3100 in 2012. A good number of *Lyngams* who used to live in *Tahirpur* migrated to India during the partition in 1947. The *War Khasi* constitutes the majority of the 12280 *Khasis* as to the 1991 census in Bangladesh. In Indian State of Meghalaya, about 1,000,000 *Lyngams* are native to the *Khasi* and *Jainta* hills. A good number of *Lyngams* live with other *Khasi* tribes in the *Brahmaputra* valley and the *Surma* Valley in the northern and southern part of the state. The real numbers of *Lyngams* are difficult to say because they are enumerated with other *Khasi* tribes. However, why the *Lyngams* living in *Kalmakanda* are cut off from other *Khasis* in the northeast is still unknown.

5. Customs and Habits

Literature reveals that up to 1950 *Lyngams* made minimum use of clothing, women had little more than a loin cloth. The little loin cloth was resembled the *Garos* dress. The *Lyngam* harvest paddy in September- November and celebrate feast in every village. While the paddy field is prepared, then the first phase of paddy cultivation is performed collectively with friends and relatives. This kind of community cultivation process does not need to pay cash to them. At best the organizer has to arrange a food festival for them with liquors. In *Lyngam* term it is called *Yiarab* (help of friends in work). Same system is lingered in harvesting period also. In this way, they are like *Khasis*. *Lyngams* made rice-beer called '*kiad*'; rice is need for *kiad* industry and the rest is eaten. Many *Lyngams* have no thought for the morrow and once the feasting is over, there is not much paddy left. The *Lyngams* not thought of lean months till the next harvest season. Even sometimes they face paddy shortage for sawing. In this process, they are like *Garos*. In earlier times, the *Lyngams* would go to a long trip/journey with some eggs to avoid risk of journey, while they cross a river or multiple intersections of roads or rivers; they break an egg for success of their trips and same thing they would do to the next step up to the destination. To see the black cat, empty jar was the symptom of trouble full journey. They believe these practises till today. But youngster *Lyngams* do not practice it anymore due to the influence of scientific knowledge. The *Lyngams*' birth, death, and naming ritual prevail as their respective culture and heritage. Today's *Lyngams* look smart and well dressed, generous and like to share what they have, men are progressive, advance compared with women. It may be due to outer influence of plain land people.

6. Language

The *Lyngam* is an Austro-Asiatic language of northeast

India; once it is listed as dialect of *Khasi*. In current literature, the *Lyngam* has been classified as a distinct language which shares a common custom with standard *Khasi*. The *Lyngams* speaks their own language even though they can understand and speak the *Garos* language as well. They speak in a dialect that is the mixture of *Khasi* and *Garos*. But the root of the word is *Khasi* and very little are known about the origin of the *Lyngams* dialect. For long it was considered to be a dialect of *Garos*. *Garierson* demonstrates that it has no correlation with any language of the Tibeto-Burman family. Scholar *Grierson* (1928) estimated half a century ago, there were only about 2000 people who spoke *Lyngam*. Now it is admitted by the scholars that *Lyngam* is a peculiar dialect of *Khasi*, which has been influenced by *Garos* (*Grierson*, 1928). But some *Lyngam* sources report that their language is nearly 70 per cent identical to the *Khasi* language. Though, there is a controversy about it. They do not have an alphabet. In writing, they use the Roman alphabet.

7. Marital System of *Lyngams*

Matrilineal system, mother right, and other similar terms refer in general to the organisation of a social group centred on the mother in a given social group. It affects descent, kinship, inheritance, authority, marriage and individual and social privileges. Social inheritance is determined by descent from the mother, descent is matrilineal. The name of the individual is taken from the mother of the family. The *Lyngam* community has 25 to 30 sub clans, each with separate last names or surnames. Some of these names are: *Dkhar*, *Nongmin*, *Nonglandu*, *Nongbri*, *Rengcheng*, *Nongsarab*, *Nongtingir*, *Nongmausor*, *Nongura*, *Hahshah*, *Nongdaju*, *Sohlomar*, *Langam*, *Maram*, *Rongrim*, *Noughchyrkon* etc. They are more related to the relatives of the mother. Inheritance is determined by one's relationship to the mother of the family. It is a central factor in any matrilineal system. But sometimes it may be held by the uncle. In fact one's right to inheritance is determined by the kind and degree of relationship to one's mother.

Succession in regard to office, rank, and chieftaincy are determined by one's relationship to the mother. The holding and exercise of power and authority in the family is related to mother. This social system is called matriarchate. This is more common that the *Khasis*, *Garos* and the *Lyngams* are matrilineate in nature. It is protected in relation to mother. In matrilineal society, marriage system is endogamous within a given social group, in others marriage is exogamous, and it is within the tribe but always outside the clan. Sometime brother of the mother is powerful than husband. The *Lyngams* are a fusion of *Khasi* and *Garos*, practice a form of mother-right closely resembling that of the *Khasis*. Men can exercise power on his acquired property and also sometime over the property of his wife and even appoint a member of his clan. The *Lyngams* follow matrilineal system. However, it is not strictly applied; boys can receive some share in the family property. The family is ruled by the mother and

children adopt the name of the mother's '*Jait*' or clan [14].

Marriage

The *Lyngams*, like the *Khasis*, do not marry within the "*Kur*" or clan. This is strictly forbidden. They intermarry to the *Garos*. However, a *Lyngam* never marries within the groups, sub clan or community, where he or she belongs. In keeping with the matrilineal custom, a male usually moves to the female house after marriage. On the day of wedding they sacrifice a pig and two fowls at the house of the bridegroom. Another nuptial practice among the *Lyngam* is that the bride's family gives the bride groom's family around Tk. 20 to 30 thousand. However, this is not the dowry or bride price practice of the Bengalis; it is observed as a symbol of respect among the *Lyngams*. In *Lyngam* society, there is no custom of reciprocity of dowry. Divorce is allowed in *Lyngam* society; during a divorce, the money which is given to the bridegroom's family that have to give back to the bride's family. Nowadays, mixed marriage between the *Lyngam* and the *Garos* in *Kalmakanda* is very common. The tradition and custom of the *Lyngams* marriage sometimes seems as the composition of *Khasi* and *Garo* marriage, though it has an unique character.

Although the *Lyngam* are associate with the *Khasi* community, there is a confusion among the people of *Kalmakanda* about their identity due to their alienation from the larger part of the *Khasi* community. Being unaware of their anthropological history, some members of the *Lyngam* community even believe themselves to be part of the *Garo* community. However, they do not think that they belong to the two large *Abeng* or *Atong* groups of the *Garo* community; they mistakenly think that they are a separate group among the *Garos*. Except some specific attributes the *Lyngam* community is almost identical to those of the *Garo* community. That is why researcher considers *Lyngam* as part of the *Garo* community. But '*Lyngams* are not *Garos*', says Ms. Preetilota Nongura, assistant headmistress of *Baruakona* School (personal communication with respondent).

Polygamy

Some historian and anthropologists hold that polygamy was practiced by the *Lyngam* [12]. It was practiced among the *Khasi* too, which was borrowed from *Khasi* to *Lyngams*. Today the practice of polygamy among *Khasi* as well as *Lyngam* is not very widespread as before due to the process of Christianization for over a hundred years. The practice of polygamy in some areas of *Khasi* hills are found in a special form which was made to fit into *Khasi* social structure [11]. The first wife had a privileged position and the others were considered as secondary wife. That is seen among the *Lyngam* also and they did not live in a single household with second wife. The *Khasi* practices polygamy in a new shape to the context of their social and family structure that could be called polygyny [3]. Nowadays pure polygamy and polygyny system are not found among the *Khasi*, *Garos* and *Lyngam* in *Kalmakanda* of Bangladesh. The *Lyngam* polygyny differs greatly from the polygyny of other societies

in terms of its operation and structure. It also varies in the incentive to its practice. Among the *Garos* the practice of polygyny usually depends on a man's economic capability. But among the *Lyngams*, it appears rather to depend on his whim. In *Lyngam* areas now Christian missionaries discourage the polygyny system. Child birth system among the *Kalmakanda's Lyngam* is marked by the sacrifice of a fowl. There is no special ceremony to mark the occasion of the naming of a child.

8. Head-hunting

Among the *Lyngams* in *Rashir* clan Head-hunting was performed till the year 1850 [6]. The *Rashir* clan of the *Lyngams* seems to have been head-hunters till recently. There have a sign that some of them were also cannibalistic. In fact the *Khasi* used to call them 'bam briew' that means man-eaters. Head-hunting among the *Rashir* clan seems to have been part of a ritual. It was the part of ritual of them. The man of the clan hunted for anyone's head and brought it to be buried with the bones. It would be exciting to examine the impact of such ritual head-hunting and burial practices. If that was not possible at least the blood of the victim was brought and buried with bones for salvation of the spirit of deceased person and prosperous of the clan. But urbanisation, industrialization and Christianization have died out head-hunting ritual among the *Rashir* clan, that speed of spirit of head-hunting ritual disseminated different parts of northeast India as well as *Kalmakanda* of Bangladesh. Now instead of head-hunting, animal hunting prevail for deceased person as well as their livelihood. In addition, somebody believed that head-hunting ritual was not true, only to protect themselves from the other community. They pretend themselves as a wild community, to give threats to other community to survive with their prestige (source: personal communication from informant).

The *Lyngam* burial used to be an exclusive function. In earlier times if any stranger comes during the time of burial he will be killed and buried along with deceased. They believe that the strangers' spirit will belong to the devil and the deceased departed soul keep in peace. If more heads are offered to him, he would make the clan prosper more. If the required number of heads were not buried with the dead body, they feared that they would be impoverished and various misfortunes would befall them. The status of the clan would also be tarnished. Such practices are infrequently reported now. In fact, there are very few cases of murder among the *Lyngams*. The *Lyngam* also had funeral ceremonies called *Lynneng* that they celebrated in remembrance of the dead. *Kaior Chieng* is another *Lyngam* ritual observed for the dead. In this ritual people sing a song while wandering with a bone of the deceased person. The song is sung to call for the peace of the departed soul. A flute played in a mournful tune accompanies the song. As the *Lyngams* have become Christians, this and other rituals are no longer in practice.

The *Lyngams* now bury dead bodies according to Christian practice.

9. Economic Life

The *Lyngams* used to be a swidener and semi-nomadic tribe like many others, living on forest products and cultivating rice and other product like maize, chillies, bananas, etc. But gradually they settled down in permanent villages and they keep domestic animals such as chickens, cows and pigs. In fact the practice of *Jhum* cultivation has led to very extensive deforestation and consequent ecological imbalance and soil erosion. Now the increase of population, in-migration and shortage of farming land the *Lyngams* have given up their most traditional farming system *Jhum* (slash and burn) and have taken up agriculture and private services in order to earn a living. Most of the *Lyngams* in *Kalmakanda* earn a living from agriculture. Their landholding system is divided into public and private lands. These are owned by syiems (petty chiefs), clans, villages and individuals. These categories of land are controlled by king, priest and villagers. The output and dispute of land is distributed and mitigated by respective village *Sirdars* or *Mantris*. Today the numbers of landless *Lyngams* are more due to the impact of industrialization, urbanization along with land grabbers. As a result landless *Lyngams* cross the Indian border to sell vegetables, fish and purchase sugar, salt, dress material and special cloths made by Indian indigenous people. They then sell these items in Bangladesh. Recently, some of them are working in coal mine in India and also do business of coal and become well of day by day (personal communication). Some *Lyngams* also work in other people's fields and quite a significant number of them almost 40 percent work in church related services. The *Lyngam* community wants to improve their economic condition. According to the survey of *Baruakona* Catholic Mission, *Lyngam* possess 1200 acres of land in *Netrokona* District. Many *Lyngam* sell their labour through different jobs to earn a living. The *Nongmin* of *Barukona* claimed that local Bengalis have grabbed most of their land by lending them money at a high interest rate and taking away their land as collection on their debt (personal communication). The land of this area is naturally less fertile. The extraction of coal that occurred near the area ruined much of its original fertility. The arable land that remains is frequently eroded during the monsoon when water from the hills flushes the area. There is no electricity in *Kalmakanda* and communication is poor. The major transports are carts, bicycles, motorbikes and boats due to unpaved roads. However, the *Lyngams* are trying to improve their condition by migrating to the city and taking up jobs in shops, offices, homes, diplomat mission and beauty parlor, says Father Wilson Jambil of *Baruakona* Catholic Mission (personal communication with respondents).

10. Education

The Baptist Christian missionaries, together with converting the *Lyngams* to Christianity, emphasised their educational needs. The first Christian missionary to settle in the *Khasi Hills* of *Cherrapunji* was Rev. Alexander B. Lish in 1832. He established three primary schools. Later, in 1841 the Welsh Presbyterian Church sent Rev. Thomas Jones to start the Roman script in their schools, discarding the Bengali script. He published the first Khasi elementary textbook along with a few other books, including translations of parts of the Bible. It could be mentioned that the above institution and person have inspired and reformed the seed of modern education. However, missionary efforts on education and education materials were mostly very rudimentary, only fit for village school teachers or village pastors to spread Christianity and glorify the West. As the time went on, the *Lyngams* realized the needs for higher education. That essence of education spilled over on *Lyngam* areas and a few of them get opportunity to study higher education. Researcher found in his study in January 2013 only 230 students studying in high schools in ten *Lyngam* inhabited villages in *Kalmakanda*. Among them 130 were boys and 100 were girls and twenty five boys and thirteen girls studied in college. Eleven boys and three girls studied in a university. Twenty one boys and eleven girls had obtained a bachelor degree, ten boys had obtained their masters degree and one girl had done so. Christian Missionaries played a vital role in spreading education among the *Lyngams*. Most of the children study in Missionary schools. Among the *Lyngam* poverty is the main cause of poor education and also lack of sufficient educational material, infrastructure, and institution. Though, nowadays *Lyngam* leaders practise on education for the integrated progress of their community. There is another interesting phenomenon that except the general education system, the vocational, technical and religious education system prevails among them. It is extremely important for the *Lyngam* specialized education, in fields such as health, law and justice, engineering and technology and natural science and environment. It is important to realize that for small groups of ethnic communities. It is almost impossible to arrange support for such specialized education. State support is essential to provide the starter-push.

11. Religious Beliefs

Today most of the *Lyngams* have embraced Christianity and belong to different Christian Churches. The original religious beliefs of the *Lyngams* are only their ancestral religion [6]. Most of the tribal people of northeast India the *Lyngams* are animistic in religious beliefs, practices and forms of worship, especially ancestral worship. They believe in the existence of spirits and their presence in forest, rivers, etc. The *Lyngams* believe in a 'primeval ancestress' from whom they are said to have descended. The welfare of the

clan and tribe, a cow is sacrificed to this 'primeval ancestress'. Along with it a gourd of rice-beer, some leaves and the jaw-bone of the animal sacrificed are hung up in the house. Lyngams are animistic and traditional religion has many rituals and deities. *Kynnia* is one of the *Lyngam* religious rituals in which animals are slaughtered and dedicated to their deity for recovery from ailments. Another ancient *Lyngam* deity is called *Blee*, one funeral ceremony is called *Lynneng* celebrated for remembrance of the dead.

The *Lyngams* have a very vague notion of sin. Only that which hurt another is considered as sin. But their oldest form of practice like head-hunting are not considered as hurting others and hence not sinful. Though, it is not exist in *Kalmakanda* now. Animal sacrifice is introduced not only during the birth of a child but also for the God of the forest, illness, and cultivation etc. The idea of life after death and the spirits of dead have a connection with the living. They are benevolent or malevolent towards the living. The *Lyngams* believe in a sacred mountain, departed souls of them abode there like heaven.

Tribal life all over the world presents us with strange, impressive, touching and traditional practices. The *Lyngams* tradition is not out of it. The dead body of the *Lyngam* is kept in bamboo hut where they used to live, near the fire place or above it is supported by three bamboo poles almost year round. The closest to the dead person keep eyes not to gather flies and insect on it. Once the dead body becomes de-hydrated and turned to a skeleton and remained in a hut with psycho-physical hazards for a year or so. During the period of waiting family gather sufficient resources in kind to give 'banquet' to all in village for emancipation of spirit of the dead. In this burial celebration relatives of the dead person arrange week-long food and drinks with liquors. It is usually a sabbatical week free from all moral restraints. This kind of funeral practice has been controlled by British administration in the last century. But some pagan families still follow this custom, though rarely and clandestinely. The corpse may also be rolled up in a mat and tied to a tree and the same procedure is then followed with regard to the burial of the bones. If any corpse is not buried following the *Lyngam* customs due to the complexities of state codes, later year after the bones are dug out and cremated as customary celebration.

12. Social and Political Organizations

Although the *Lyngam* are connected with the Khasi community, there is a puzzlement among the people of *Kalmakana* about their identity due to their isolation from the larger part of the Khasi community. Being unaware of their anthropological history, some members of the *Lyngam* community even believe themselves to be part of the Garo community. The *Lyngams* share similar food habits, family systems and kinship affairs with Khasis and Garos. Resembling the Garos, the *Lyngams* are matrilineal like Khasis also, their community has twenty to thirty sub-clans,

each with separate surnames and they never marry a member of their own group or sub-clan. The *Lyngams* kinship ties are very strong. Besides this, a *Lyngam* is very helpful to other *Lyngam* due to their similar character. Modernization and over all development concepts count distort their familial unity too much. In *Lyngam* community it is observed that most of the *Lyngams* embraced the Christianity with different sects of Christianity – Presbyterian, Church of Gods, and Baptist Christianity and so on. As the *Lyngams* have become Christian, their traditional and ancestral ritual is no longer used too much. Even modern educated young person would not go very frequent in Churches. Though, the Fathers of Church in different sects of Christianity play a role among the *Lyngams* social life. If any disputes arise among them surrounding familial issues such as land, domestic animal, children, sports, marriage, farming, meeting, leadership, debates of local leadership or any other issues, then the *Sardars* and his selected *Morols* and *Murobbis* along with local *Panchayet* initially solve it. Normally most of the problems are mitigated locally and usually they don't go to the court in town. In these activities, Christian missions' Fathers and pastors are employed as block (area) chairmen to surveillance the *Lyngam* villages. They also give moral ethical support to the *Sardars*, *Morols*, *Murobbis* and *Panchayet system*. Their rural arbitrary and judicial system is very authoritative. Besides this *Lyngams* villagers make some clubs and associations to develop socio-economic position. These institutions provide loan and credit to their respective members of the *Lyngams* to update their health, hygiene and sanitation system. They also get grant from local and central government with different NGOs and Mission. The *Lyngams* are very peaceful; they are not directly related to national politics. But they participate in national referendum to choose their favourite parliamentarian and local government representatives.

13. Myths and Legends

The *Lyngams* have some myths and legends. The *Syntengs* have a myth surrounding cats. The *Khasis* and the *Garos* believe in the tiger as the embodiment of the human spirit. The *Lyngams* believe that each man has their own entity and inner power that is called tiger - the part of the spirit of man himself. The tiger is his other self. Each man possesses it that protects him, or takes revenge up on him or his behalf or punishes him as his conduct demands. The myth of *Lyngams* that is a man's spirit takes the form of a tiger, it becomes a tiger. Sometime it becomes a snake. When the spirit is not present the man concerned becomes drowsy. If someone hurts or attacks the incarnated tiger, the embodied spirit of tiger-man is died automatically. The attachment of the spirit of tiger-man aware the man what is happening around, who are his enemies. When the man dies, his tiger comes to claim the body. The *Lyngams* also believe that the dead man sometime transform into a cat. There are many legends prevail in *Lyngam* society. The spirit of tiger-man is inherent

in different form and shape among the *Lyngams*. It is closely related to lycanthropy, namely, the belief that a man is actually transformed into an animal such as tiger, leopard, hyena etc. Such myths are found in Europe, China, Africa etc. [8]. In northeast India among several other tribes have similar stories of 'tiger-man'.

The Chakasang Nagas believe that each man has a tiger of his own. Similar belief has in Sema Nagas community. Hutton told in his writing of the Sema Nagas that the soul may be visualized of as a shadow, and that it is separable from the body, and may occupy the body of a leopard or a tiger during life. In addition to its habitation the human body is leading a sort of dual existence. Another parable was introduced that one man of a group has fallen under a fallen tree and one his leg crushed. He lay in jungle for eight days. A tourist recovered him and admitted him in hospital with accompanied his brother. But he died soon and his body was kept in a hut. While his brother went to have his meal, some boys came to take his place. Within those few minutes of change over, the wounded man's leg disappeared. Immediately they all said that his tiger spirit has come and taken away his leg!

14. Conclusions

The findings discussed here for exploring a distinct mode about the *Lyngams* way of life that is accumulated through the spectrum of *Khasi* and *Garo* culture. In this write up the analysis of *Lyngam* culture is highlighted on their societal form, customs and habits, language, marital systems, property ownership, economic life, education, belief and ritual, myths and legends along social and political organization. All these issues are influenced by outer influences. The *Lyngams* encounter many social challenges in redefining their identity including diverse issues of culture. All these traits and attributes of *Lyngams* culture are enriched through the integration of different elements of dominant culture. But the *Lyngams* ethnically assumed that their culture is distinct from others. On the other hand, different scholars and researcher found that the *Lyngams* are not pure *Khasi* and not pure *Garo*. At best they may be considered as partially blending, but distinct character, of

Khasi and *Garo* community. The *Lyngams* physical structures and linguistic peculiarities show that they are an Austro-Asiatic Mon-Khmer speaking people in the region.

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