

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to re-examine folk material related to the Khasis (A tribe from Meghalaya, India), and discussing them in a manner that will throw light on the larger question of identity. The important connection between identity and folklore can never be denied. Folklore is the most important source for the construction, articulation and perpetuation of identities in oral and semi-oral communities. The Khasi society is one such tribal community, which is gradually making a transition from folk society to a modernized one. Societal transition across cultures in every part of the globe has never been an easy one. Very often folklore of a people is used as an instrument in identity politics, as has happened with the Khasi society and other tribes of North-East India; resulting in the assertion of ethnic identities that has led to large-scale violent conflicts in these regions. A fresh look at how we interpret folklore and the role it plays in building community identities is what this Thesis attempts to study. This study also examines the social structure of Khasi society; viewed in the historical process—its continuity, and makes note of different social changes that have taken place over a span of more than a hundred and fifty years.

In its transitional phase, we witness the myriad changes in Khasi society both pre and post-independence; affecting religion, literature, social customs, rituals and practices. Like every small community in the world, whose social ties and identification are largely based on clan affiliation, the Khasi community too, has in the past few decades seen social

conflicts, whilst resisting modernity. The same applies to other tribes of North-East India, where rapid social and cultural transformation, has permeated every aspect of life. These Tribal societies can no longer deny the irreversible effects of globalization on their distinctive cultures. This study in its conclusion, is also an attempt to show the relationship between identity and politics in the wider context of North-East India.