

# **TRADITIONAL FORMS OF RECREATION AS COPING AMONG THE TRIBALS OF EAST KHASI HILLS, MEGHALAYA, INDIA**

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this study is “the traditional forms of recreation being used for relaxation among the Khasi tribal population of Meghalaya” Using a purposive sampling method thirteen experienced community elders participated in this study to identify the existing traditional forms of recreation among the Khasis in East Khasi Hills. The elders were identified purposely based on years of experience, expertise in the form of recreation, recommendations from other elders of the community, and involvement in the recreation. In-depth interviews and Photography methods were used to collect the data to document the traditional forms of recreation. Some of the approaches that were used during the interviews include a pre-interview discussion, an interview guide, and exploration descriptive. A thematic analysis was used to determine how the traditional forms of recreation help in the coping process. Using the pictures, the traditional forms of recreation were also documented.

Results shown that the Khasi tribe of Meghalaya among other tribes in India has been preserving traditional identities and languages by resisting the change of other dominant cultures. Cultural leisure is more effective in making people from a particular community believe that this leisure help with their well-being. As indigenous peoples, there are certain traditional practices that may have been a form of life in coping to help with everyday living. Identifying these traditional practices and documenting them becomes important hence, this study

aims at identifying recreation at the traditional local level and documenting them. Recreation in East Khasi Hills is mostly categorized under games, sports, music, hobbies, and social events. There is evidence of the practice of traditional recreation such as fishing, hunting, gathering, games, social events, and other modern leisure.

**Keywords:** Traditional forms of Recreation; Khasi Tribe; East Khasi Hills

## Introduction

Recreation dates back many centuries ago. The term recreation and leisure are used interchangeably during the previous eras. The royal Egyptian official, Ptahhotpe, wrote in the twenty-fourth century BCE, saying “do not do anything beyond what you are asked to do, especially to limit your leisure or recreation time because it is wrong to take away time of enjoyment” (McComb, 2008). Then during the Renaissance, Jansenist theologian Jean Baptiste Thiers in his writing from the *Traité des jeux et divertissements* in 1686 wrote these words below about recreation.

"Man would not have needed either play or amusements, had he remained in the blessed state of innocence in which God had created him. In fact, although, according to the Holy Scripture, in the Garden of Eden it was his duty to work, his work would have been pleasant for him, far from being a pain; he would have made it a pleasure for himself, rather than becoming tired because of it, as Augustine puts it [. . .]. Consequently, he would not have needed to relax either his spirit or his body. Therefore, to be accurate, play and amusements have become necessary for us because of sin" (Arcangeli, 2003, p. 10).

There are other writers during the Renaissance who have written about recreation like Cesare Rao who wrote ‘Without any recreation or pastime, ‘life is like a long road without any hostel. Unless they are occasionally eased, bows tend to lose their strength, and eventually break. If fields did not periodically rest, in the end, they will become bare (Arcangeli, 2003, p. 12).

Kraus (1998) defines recreation as "a vital component of a well-planned system of intervention directed toward creating self-sufficient, responsible, involved citizens and environmental stewards and toward breaking the cycles of poverty, addiction violence, boredom [and] discrimination. [It provides] citizens with positive opportunities to exercise their need for power and control [and results] in energy, excitement, enthusiasm, and an appreciation of life" (p. 28).

Recreation became more organized during the industrial revolution and during the twentieth century. People from all working communities were working eight hours, resting eight hours, and having eight hours of leisure with two days during the weekend and more vacation (McComb, 2008).

## Research Objective

1. The traditional forms of recreation being used for relaxation among the Khasi tribal population of Meghalaya.

## Review Literatures

Leisure or recreation is originally associated with indigenous cultures such as activities and celebrations after a good hunt. However, leisure and recreation are more connected and practiced by the elite of the society like the noble, soldiers, and religious leaders (Torkildsen, 2005).

The ancient Assyrians and Babylonians had parks, gardens, gardens with designs, and terraced hanging gardens which are one of the wonders of the ancient world. Then the Sumerians and Mesopotamians also mixed business with leisure and fun. Along with their products, they would also have magicians, snake-charmers, storytellers, dancers, sword swallowers, and craftsmen (Torkildsen, 2005). The Greeks were very much involved in recreation according to the writings of Plato and Aristotle. Activities and events like sports, public entertainment, and competition were many parts of ancient Greek society (Torkildsen, 2005).

In American modern society, recreation is important because it helps to rejuvenate and prepare for the work to come (McComb, 2008). In India, it is safe to say that leisure cannot be confined to some specific group of people or activities. It varies because of the diverse population. It is highly influenced by religion which exists in the country (Bhattacharya, 2006).

**Meghalaya and Recreation:** Recreation in Meghalaya is mostly categorized under games, sports, music, hobbies, and social events. The researcher found that the Khasis of East Khasi Hills still practice traditional recreation such as fishing, hunting, gathering, games, social events, and other modern leisure. Khasis among other tribes in India have been preserving traditional identities and languages by resisting the change of other dominant cultures (Bhale, 2016). Dance is also preserved among the Khasis. Some of the dances are Shad Nongkrem, Shad Suk mynsiem, Shad-Mastieh, Ka Shad Leh Niam Lewduh, and the Bangsorat (Begum, 2019). Other forms of recreation have also been found and recorded by the researcher. Recreation in this study context is interchangeable with the word leisure and it means a certain amount of organization, self-direction, benefit, and purpose such as entertainment, diversions, festivities, vacations, sports, and games (McComb, 2008).

**Recreation as Coping:** Many studies being conducted provides evidence that shows leisure as coping resource against chronic and acute stress (Hutchinson et al., 2008). Leisure and recreation make the worker be at ease simply by being away from stressful situations (Trenberth et al., 1999). Iwasaki found that leisure coping beliefs which means that people who believe that leisure helps in coping with stress found themselves to have better mental, physical and psychological well-being in comparison with general coping (Iwasaki, 2003).

Every culture has certain coping skills when disaster strikes. Studies conducted in various parts of India found that when disaster strikes especially in agriculture, new coping methods are adapted to sustain the crops by the local farmers (Padmanabhan, Arora, & Oktari, 2009). Cultural leisure is more effective in making people from a particular community believe that this leisure help with their well-being (Iwasaki, 2003).

**Tribal and the World:** There are about 370 million "indigenous and tribal peoples" spread across 70 countries in the world. "Indigenous and tribal peoples have their own cultures, languages, customs and institutions, which distinguish them from other parts of the societies in which they find themselves." They are usually identified by "terms such as native peoples, aboriginal peoples, first nations, adivasi, janajati, hunter-gatherers, or hill tribes" (International Labour Organization, 2021).

**Tribals In Meghalaya:** The Khasi, Jaintia, Bhoi, War also called the Hynniewtrep people occupy east Meghalaya, belonging to the Proto Australoid Mon-Khmer race (East Khasi Hills district, 2021). In the west, the Garo tribes occupy the area. The Khasis residing in Jaintia hills are called Pnars. The Khasis occupying the northern lowlands and foothills are generally called Bhois. Those who live in the southern tracts are termed Wars. A gain among the Wars, those living in the Khasi Hills are called War-Khasis and those in the Jaintia Hills, War-Pnars or War-Jaintias. But collectively are descended from the 'Ki Hynniew Trep' and are now known as the Khasi-Pnars or simply Khasis. Traditions, customs are very similar to each other East Khasi Hills district, 2021). In the west, the Garos, also called the a chiks, are the second largest tribe in Meghalaya. The Garos believed that they have come from Tibet. There are five clans called *chatchi* among the Garos, with a number of sub-clans called Ma·chong. Initially there was only two clans which is Sangma and Marak. Later on, Momin, Areng and Shira emerged out of the two original clans (South West Garo Hills District, 2021).

**Culture as a Coping Agent:** In the west, individuality is dominant whereas in many non-western cultures it is more communal. This have an "impact on the individual's willingness to seek social support from others but it also affects the extent of the social support that is available to the individual. There is considerable evidence that social support is one of the most important variables that affects the impact of stress" (Sammons, as cited in Sarafino, 1998). In accordance with Sammons, the researcher agrees that culture and social support are closely associated. Social support in this study is reflected as part of culture because the participants in this study are from non-western cultures.

**Coping In Different Cultures:** Cultural coping is not a new term. It can be understood as using cultural knowledge to cope with stressful events (Lewis-cole & Constantine as cited in Slavin, Ranier, McCreary, & Gowda, 1991). A study conducted by Lewis-cole and Constantine (2006) found that African American used Africultural coping strategies and religious problem solving to cope with racism related stress. In Certain Asian countries like the Philippines, Korean and Taiwan, initial studies were conducted by Marsella, Escudero, and Gordon in 1972 and some coping strategies that were found were "projection" which means to linking the cause and reason to an external force, the other is

“acceptance” which is to accept the problems as God’s will, the third is “religion” to turn to religion for comfort and peace and finally “perseverance” which is to endure and bear (See & Essau, 2010).

In Malaysia, living in society means living in accordance with the adat, which is the cultural guideline to govern both the living and the dead. The adat influences coping strategies as well (See & Essau, 2010). The Mexican Americans used a traditional method called sweat lodge to cope with stress and other ailments. Participants can address “personal problems, concerns, or needs by sweating, praying, singing, drumming, talking, or sitting in silence in search of solutions, while the sweat leader places medicinal plants and pours water on the heated stones for purification and to create steam” (Zermeño et al as cited in Garrett et al., 2011).

**Coping Skills from the Cultural Perspectives:** Certain skills and practices of a culture are often passed down from ancestors to future generations. Twigg (2015) uses a term called local knowledge for such practices. Local knowledge includes stress coping when a disaster occurs. According to Bhale (2016) tribal culture in India “plays an important role in how people of different backgrounds express themselves, seek help, cope with stress and develop social supports” (p. 2). A study conducted in Arunachal Pradesh among the Brokpa pastoral nomads found that they adopted certain coping skills to cope with climate change (Maiti et al, 2014).

## **Research Methodology**

**Research question:** What are the traditional forms of recreation being used for relaxation among the Khasi tribal population of Meghalaya?

**Sample selection:** Using a purposive sampling method thirteen experienced community elders participated in this study to identify the existing traditional forms of recreation among the Khasis in East Khasi Hills. The elders were identified purposely based on years of experience, expertise in the form of recreation, recommendations from other elders of the community, and involvement in the recreation.

**Data Collection:** In-depth interviews and Photography methods were used to collect the data to document the traditional forms of recreation. Some of

the approaches that were used during the interviews include a pre-interview discussion, an interview guide, and exploration descriptive.

**Data Analysis:** A thematic analysis was used to determine how the traditional forms of recreation help in the coping process. Using the pictures, the traditional forms of recreation were also documented.

**Data Evaluation by External Experts:** The traditional forms of recreation were viewed and vetted by three experts in indigenous arts and culture.

The first expert is Assistant Professor III at the Department of Music from Martin Luther Christian University. He has completed his doctoral studies on the musical art form of the Khasis specifically on analysing the existing and development of new playing techniques for the *Duitara*. He has a considerable experience in traditional Khasi Music. He has worked and been involved in many fields such as cultural programs and festivals, judge and examiner for various programs, one such being organized by the Department of Arts and Culture, Govt of Meghalaya. He is also a member of *Hynñiew Trep* Cultural and Welfare Organization (HTCWO) in charge of the music.

The second member is a retired teacher of St Anthony's Higher Secondary School, Shillong. He was the founder President of the Khasi- Jaintia Deficit School Teacher's Association (KJDSTA), Ex-president of the *Synjuk ki Rangbah Shnong, Sor bad Khap Sor*, Ex-vice president of Shillong Sports Association (SSA), and Currently the President of *Hynñiew Trep* Cultural and Welfare Organization (HTCWO).

The third member is the director of the Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Cultures located in *Mawlai Phudmuri*, Shillong, Meghalaya. The members reviewed and established the correctness of local terms and meanings.

## Results

The researcher interviewed 13 community elders who shared the following forms of recreation.

### 1. Siat khnam/ka Rongbiria (English Translation: Archery)

Description: This recreation is played using a bow, arrow, and a target. It is usually played by men and they would gather in the field or empty ground and

set a distance of about 30 to 50 feet and shoot the arrows. How it reduces stress: *“While playing we forget everything, worries and happiness are both forgotten. We focus on the target whether we lose or win”* (Male elder, EKH).



## 2. Khwai dohkha (English Translation: Fishing)

Description: It is a recreation that helps relax since it involves patience. Mostly practiced by men using a fishing rod and other tools for catching the fish. How it reduces stress: when we are in the fields farming for one or two weeks continuously, for a break we go for fishing to help reduce the work stress, it helps relax our mind, by concentrating on the fish and storytelling while fishing we forget the stress that we have" (Male elder, EKH).



### 1. Siat sim: English Translation: Bird hunting

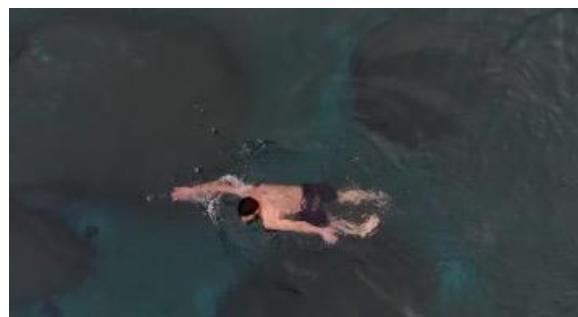
Description: It is also known as bird hunting in which a catapult is used. A small x or y shape of wood is formed from tree branches and two thick rubbers are tied to each side of the wood with a small leather in between to put the stones for shooting the birds. How it reduces stress: “These games help us to be healthy, we move around and it keeps us fit.

Especially when we were small, we look forward to playing right after school" (Elder Male, EKH).



## 2. **Jngi:** English Translation: Swimming

Description: Swimming is a favorite pastime among the Khasi Tribal of East Khasi Hills and also a good means of exercise and relaxation. How it reduces stress: "When we were young, we never boil water for bathing, right after work even in the evening when it's getting darks we would go to the river and swim to clean ourselves and we feel so relaxed and relieved. No matter how cold the water is, when we swim our body gets heated and we feel healthy and strong" (Female Elder, EKH).



## 3. **Shad Suk:** English Translation: Dance for peace and mind

Description: It is a dance form with different types of forms and steps which brings peace and calm to the dancer. How it reduces stress: "*While dancing there a peace that soothes us, not too much happiness nor sadness. We carry that pride as we wear the dress and dance*" (Female Elder, EKH).



**4. Mawkor Shongthait:** English Translation: Resting stones

Description: A group of stones cut in similar shapes and designed for sitting and relaxation. Usually found in a hilly area in which travelers can relax after a long walk. How it reduces stress: *"When we carry a heavy load, our head and shoulder hurts, and it gives stress to our body. When we arrive on the mawkor shongthait we feel a sense of relief and it relaxes our head from the stress of carrying"* (Female elder, EKH).



**5. Tied Malai-Shito/ tied dieng hai:** English Translation: Hitting sticks

Description: A game that is usually played using two sticks. A mother stick for hitting and a baby stick. The aim is to hit the baby stick as far as possible and measurement is done using the mother stick from the home hole to where the baby stick is located. How it reduces stress: *"Every evening we would play this game because it has become a habit and it helps us to be healthy and free of worries. It involves running and physical exertion thus it is very good for us"* (Female Elder, EKD).



#### 6. **Mawpoint:** English Translation: Flat stones

Description: The Maw poin is a game that is played by multiple players divided into two teams. The two teams will either be the attackers or the stackers. Attackers will throw a cloth ball to the other team who tries to stack the flat stones on top of each other until all the stones are completely stacked up. The winner will be determined if the team is able to stack up the flat stones, or if the attackers are able to eliminate the opponents by throwing the ball and hitting the person stacking.

How it reduces stress: *"When we play this game, we forget our sorrows, and after when we study, we feel we can concentrate better. To have fun and relax is great medicine and it helps to reduce stress. I feel like my brain is more relaxed when I play this game"*(Female elder, EKH).



#### 7. **Leh skoi:** English Translation: dodge ball

Description: It is a game that is played by two groups. One group stays inside a circle and one outside. The aim is to eliminate the players inside the circle by throwing a ball made of cloth. How it reduces stress:

*“When I am alone and sad, I would go to the ground and meet my friends to play this game. We would shout and play and all the sorrows seem to disappear” (Female Elder, EKD).*



#### 8. **Ka Mawkor Katia:** English Translation: Mancala

Description: The Mawkor Katia is a game that is played by two players. A flat stone slab is used as a base with either 6-7 holes on each side. In each hole, 5 small stones are kept. How it reduces stress: *“This game helps to reduce stress a lot, when we were younger and played this game, we just forget everything and have a really good feeling” (Female elder, EKH).*



#### 9. **Duitara:** English Translation: Duitara

Description: It is a Khasi traditional musical instrument that is made of wood and specialized string. How it reduces stress: *“When a musician has understood the music he plays, he forgets the worries of the world and focuses on his music. We think about the techniques and we do not have time to think about other tensions” (Male Khasi Traditional Musician, EKH).*



#### 10. **Ia ring sai tyllai:** English Translation: Tug of war

Description: A game in which two equal groups pull the rope as a show of strength. How it reduces stress: *"When we play, we forget everything, even when our parents beat us because we are still playing, we don't really feel anything because we had a lot of fun while playing. We forget our troubles because of the game"* (Female elder, EKH).



#### 11. **Bsait Shyieng ne bsai:** English Translation: Seed or shooting

Description: It is a game played by two players. The aim is to get as many seeds or broken pottery by shooting at each other. How it reduces stress: *"Games are fun, anything that is fun helps reduce stress. We don't remember anything else because we focus on the game"* (Male Elder, EKD).



**14. Mieng:** English Translation: Khasi Lamellophone

Description: It is a Khasi traditional musical instrument played by using the mouth and the thumb. How it reduces stress: *“It brings calmness and relaxation when using it. It is connected to respect and traditions thus it helps even the wayward to be in order with their lives”* (Male Elder, EKD).



**15. Puh Syiar:** English Translation: Cock fight

Description: It is a game in which a group of boys would try to push each other with one leg lifted up and both hands kept behind. The goal is to push the other opponent outside a drawn circle and make him drop the leg. The last man standing is declared the winner. How it reduces stress: *“These games help us to be healthy, we move around and it keeps us fit. Especially when we were small, we look forward to playing right after school”* (Male Elder, EKH).



#### 16. **Kynting Mawsan:** English Translation: Lifting stones

Description: It is a game that is played using a set of stones. Five, seven, nine, and twelve stones. How it reduces stress: “Oh yes, when we were kids, we really enjoyed this game. When we win, we would rub charcoal on the losing opponent and we would laugh uncontrollably. All the worries disappear” (Female Elder, EKD).



#### 17. **Sohtyngkoh:** English Translation: Hopscotch

Description: It is a game that is played using a slab of stone and lines in box shape are drawn on the floor. How it reduces stress: “*When we get scolded because of our wrongdoing, we go out and play this game and we forget all the scolding and pain because of the games*” (Female Elder, EKD).



#### 18. **Khla Bam Blang:** English Translation: Tiger-eating Goats

Description: It is a game played on a board with four stones. One big stone represents a Tiger and three smaller stones represent goats. It is played between two players. The player representing the tiger tries to eat the goats and the player representing the goats tries to escape and block moves for the tiger. How it reduces stress: *“These games help in reducing stress because when we play, we forget all the scolding and worries, we laugh with friends and it does really help”* (Female Traditional game player, EKD).

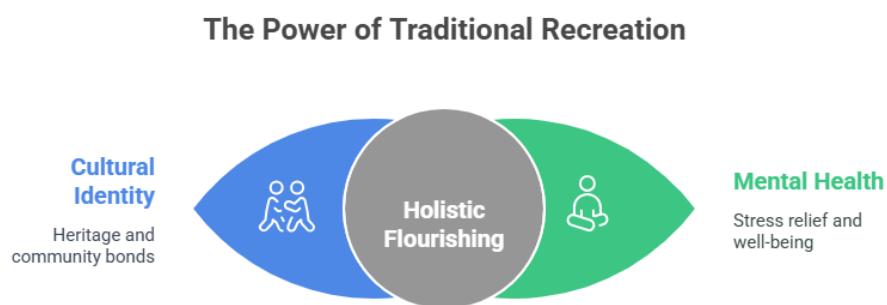
### Discussions

The findings showed that Khasis for years have practice recreations that help in rest and relaxation. There is clear evidence in villages in East Khasi Hills of the practice of the recreations. They are mostly categorized into dance, games, exercise, hobby, rest, music and parts of social life. In India, it is safe to say that leisure cannot be confined to some specific group of people or activities. It varies because of the diverse population. It is highly influenced by religion

which exists in the country (Bhattacharya, 2006). Khasis among other tribes in India have been preserving traditional identities and languages by resisting change of other dominant cultures (Bhale, 2016). Dance is also preserved among the Khasis. Some of the dances are Shad Nongkrem, Shad Suk mynsiem, Shad-Mastieh, Ka Shad Leh Niam Lewduh, and the Bangsorat (Begum, 2019). The findings correspond to the existing literature where recreation such as Shad Suk Mynsiem which is a dance form, duitara which is a musical instrument, and many other forms are still in existence.

## New Knowledges

Traditional recreation is an important part of any cultures. It serves as a tool for various purposes. When practice has been shown to reduce stress. It is well-recorded that it helps in stress coping.



**Figure 1:** The Importance of Traditional Recreation in Cultural Practices.

## Conclusion

The findings showed that Khasis for years have practice recreations that help in rest and relaxation. There is clear evidence in villages in East Khasi Hills of the practice of recreation. They are mostly categorized into dance, games, exercise, hobby, rest, music, and parts of social life. The outcome of the study may be used as a record of traditional recreation that may be used as a learning material for teachers, health, and community workers in encouraging the preservation of traditions and promoting well-being by reducing stress. Traditional forms of recreation have been identified as a medium to help in stress reduction. Community elders responded that the traditional forms of recreation do play a role in relaxing the mind and in reducing stress.

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