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Demographic Structure of the Khasi-Muslims of Shillong, Meghalaya

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INTRODUCTION

Meghalaya is essentially a tribal state. Nearly 82% of the population is of Scheduled Tribes of which the Khasi and Garo are the two most predominant populations. There are many other tribal and non-tribal populations, who migrated from other parts of the country and eventually settled here permanently. The Khasi-Muslim is one population, which has emerged out of inter marriages between the indigenous Khasi and some other non-indigenous populations, particularly the non-tribal Muslims. Early historical records show that the Khasi first came into contact with the Muslim traders, wanderers, fortune hunters etc. in and around the 17th century A.D. These occasional visits to the Khasi hills continued even during and after the British rule. In course of time, they married Khasi women and adopted the Khasi traditional customs and practices (Mathur,1975). Like all the other Khasi subtribes, the Khasi-Muslims have adopted the matrilineal clan titles, which are often reflected with Muslim names. But all of them believe in and practise Islamic rites.

The Khasi-Muslim community, comprising of different ethnic stocks, maintains their relationship with both the maternal and paternal relatives (Roy,1995). The contact with the non-tribal Muslims has not affected their clan organisation as such. Marriage within the clan is the most heinous crime that a Khasi can ever commit (Mathur,1975). So clan exogamy, as found in other Khasi groups, is very much prevalent among the Khasi-Muslims.

Unlike many tribal and non-tribal population studies in the North-east of India, there is no demographic account on an admixed population of recent origin such as the Khasi-Muslim despite the fact that the region has been undergoing such processes of intermixture since time immemorial. Hence in this study, an attempt has been made to explore demographic structure and composition of this population, *viz.*, Age-sex composition, marriage patterns, fertility and mortality behavior, besides assessing the opportunity for natural selection and scope for random genetic drift. A comparative analysis of the selection opportunity in the Khasi Muslims is made with the available data on the other populations of the North East as well as the other Muslim groups of Eastern India.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present work was conducted during the period between January and March, 1996. The Khasi-Muslims are mostly concentrated in Laban, and its adjoining areas of Lumparing, Bishnupur, Kenche's Trace, Law Sohtun, etc. all within the vicinity of Shillong, though some of them have settled in other parts of the state as well. Demographic information, including age, sex, marital status, ethnic affiliation of the spouses, migration histories, marriage patterns and reproductive histories etc. were collected from 93 out of the 120 households located in the Shillong city. The data were collected by interviewing mostly the women, besides other family members. The estimation of total population, breeding and effective population sizes were made by extrapolation to the total number of households.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Marriage Pattern and Endogamy

It can be said that the founders of this Khasi-Muslim population in Shillong has been the matrilineal Khasi women and the non-tribal Muslim traders and businessmen coming from neighboring states of Assam, Bengal,Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), etc., who after marriage converted their wives into the Islamic faith. Marriage, thus, had always followed a pattern which can be described as a 'unidirectional paternal gene flow'where by the in-flow of genes into the Khasi population was from the non-tribal

Muslim populations. This type of marriages are still in practice, although less frequently. A steady increase in its population size with the Khasi-Muslim identity has gradually restricted marriages contacts from outside.

Table 1 shows to what extent endogamy by religion is maintained in the Khasi-Muslim population. Out of 228 marriages, 76.75% have married within the same religion i.e. Islam, whereas 23.35% of the marriages are between the Muslims and non-Muslims. These non-Muslims include some Khasis, practising indigenous religion or Christianity or even some non-Khasis, practising either Hinduism or other religion(s) prior to marriage. However, the spouses who were initially non-Muslim were converted to Islam after marriage. It is apparent from the table that whereas 60% of the males have married within the religion, only 40% of the females have done so. It is also seen that nearly 84.91% of the females of different religion have converted to Islam after marrying the Khasi-Muslim males and 15.08% of the males have converted themselves to Islam after marrying Khasi-Muslim women.

Table 1: Endogamy by religion

Total No. of marriages	*Marriages within the region*			*Marriages in which atleast one person has come from another religion*		
	M	*F*	*T*	*M*	*F*	*T*
228	105	70	175	8	45	53
(%)	60.00	40.00	100.00	15.09	84.91	100.00

The Frequency of Multiple Marriages Among the Khasi-Muslim

Out of 111 married males, only 6 or (5.41%) have changed their mates twice, while only 5 or (4.55%) out of 110 married females have done so. So it shows that the frequency of multiple marriages is more or less same in both sexes. This marriage among the Khasi-Muslims is by and large very stable. In this connection it may be noted that no case of polygyny (*i.e.,* a man having more than one wife simultaneously has been detected among them. The mean age at marriage was found to be 27.14 ± 0.53 years and 21.4 ± 0.38 years for males and females, respectively. In comparison to other Indian populations, this difference is definitely higher which may be due to the impact of urbanisation since, the Khasi-Muslim are mostly restricted to the Shillong City.

Age-sex Composition and Sex Ratio

The population pyramid of the Khasi Muslim has a shrunken base (Fig.1). The sex ratio in the pre-reproductive age group of 0-14 years is quite low *i.e.,* 122 females per 100 males and in the age group of 50 + years it is as high as 94 females per 100 males. The overall sex ratio among the Khasi-Muslims is found to be 103 females per 100 males. This indicates that at the initial stage the rate of male mortality is higher than that of female mortality (Table 3). But as age advances, the frequency of female mortality increases and eventually, as seen in the oldest age group *i.e.,* 50 + years, sex ratio is tilted in favour of males. However, as the population pyramid indicates the average longevity is by and large the same in both sexes, though slightly more in case of males. The sex ratio of Khasi Muslims is slightly at variance, qualitatively, when compared to that in Meghalaya (96 females per 100 males) as well as All-India level sex ratio (93 females per 100 males; Census of India 1991). According to Sundberg's classification of population on the basis of age groups, the Khasi-Muslim population seems to be of a stationary type.

Fertility and Mortality

The fertility ratio also known as the 'child-woman ratio' was calculated on the total number of children (age group 0 to 4 years), divided by the total number of women in the reproductive (age group of 15 to 49 years). This was found to be low at 30.11 per 100 women which may be due to the fact that both males and females among the Khasi-Muslim marry relatively late.

For calculation of completed fertility, we have taken into consideration only those women, who are 45 and above years of age and have married only once and lived continuously in wedlock till the age of 45 years. The mean number of livebirths is 6.17 ± 0.45 per mother and the mean number of surviving children per mother is 5.13 ± 0.41. This seems to be much

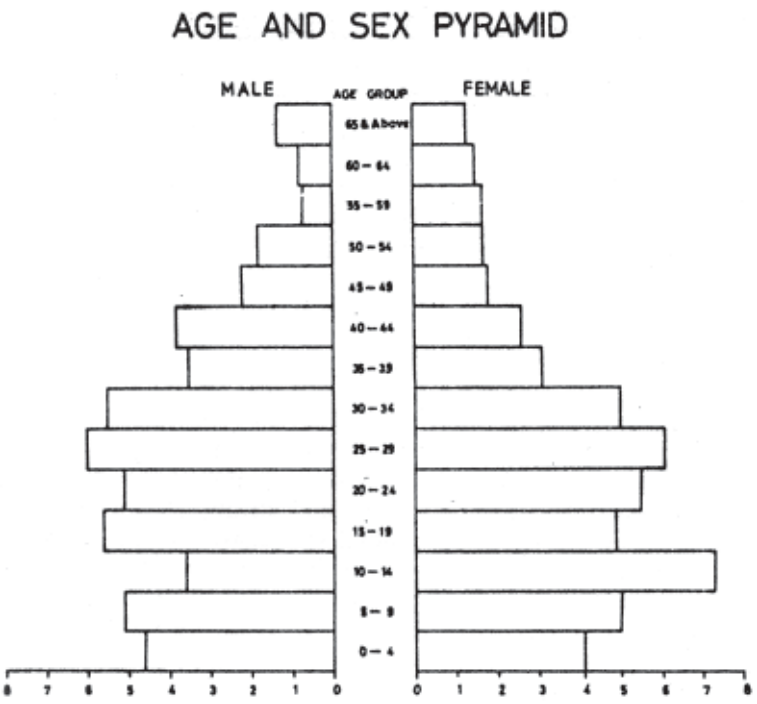

Fig. 1. Age and sex pyramid of the Khasi-Muslim population of Shillong, Meghalaya

lower when compared to that among the Jaintia women at 8.1 live births (Deka, 1989).

Table 2 depicts the age specific fertility which indicates that the reproductive period among the Khasi-Muslim women rarely starts before 15 years of age. However, the highest age specific fertility was found among women aged 25-29 years . The total fertility for women in age groups 15-49 years was found to be 4.6 children per women.

Table 2: Age Specific Fertility among the Khasi-Muslim population

Age group in years	*No. of mothers*	*No.of live births*	*Age specific fertility*
15-19	119	50	0.4202
20-24	118	136	1.1525
25-29	107	123	1.1495
30-34	88	93	1.0568
35-39	68	43	0.7846
40-44	50	7	0.1400
45-49	38	1	0.0263
Total fertility			4.5777

Table 3 shows the Child Mortality at different ages: infant (0-1 year), toddler (1-4years) and juvenile (5-14 years). Out of 422 livebirths, the frequency of infant mortality is found to be 4.98%, toddler mortality is 3.08% and juvenile mortality 0.005%. The total frequency of prereproductive mortality among the Khasi-Muslim is found to be 8.53%. This relatively low mortality could be because of the urban residence of the concerned group with relatively easy access to the medical amenities. It may be noted that in all the three categories the male mortality

Table 3: Child Mortality Rate among the Khasi-Muslim population

Age	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
< 1 year (%)	11 (2.61)	10 (2.37)	21 (4.98)
1 - 4 years (%)	9 (2.13)	4 (0.009)	13 (3.08)
5 - 14 years (%)	2 (.005)	-	2 (.005)
Total child deaths	22 (5.21)	14 (3.32)	36 (8.53)
Total no. of livebirths	220 (52.13)	202 (47.87)	422

is higher than the female mortality. Out of a total number of 466 conceptions for the 113 mothers, the frequencies of abortions and stillbirths were 4.94% and 4.51%, respectively, the prenatal deaths amounting to a total of 9.44%.

Breeding Size, Effective Population and Admixture Rate

From a total of 714 individuals in the present sample, the effective population size (N_e), was calculated following the method given by Wright (1940), which is found to be 140. This indicates that it is 50.77% of the actual breeding size and 20% of the total population size. The breeding size of the Khasi-Muslim population is found to be only 276 and the admixture rate was high at 31.56%. The coefficient of breeding isolation (Lasker and Kaplan, 1964) among the Khasi-Muslims which was calculated by multiplying the effective population size with the admixture rate is found to be 44. It indicates that the effect of genetic drift on this population is perceptible, though it may not be very strong. The variance due to drift i.e. Vk^2dq ($q = 0.5$) is found to be 0.00116.

Opportunity for Natural Selection and Comparison with Other Populations

Table 4 shows the parameters used for calculation of selection potential in this population. It has been calculated according to Crow (1958), and also according to the modified formula given by Johnston and Kensinger (1971). The selection potential in this population is moderate and the relative contribution of the differential fertility to the total index is much greater than that of the differential mortality, a trend typical of the urban/industrialized populations. However, it is seen that the total selection potential falls towards the lower half of the range found for the Indian populations (Reddy and Chopra, 1990).

Table 4: Crow's indices of selection and the parameters used in calculating selection intensity

1.	Number of women aged 40 years and above	48
2.	Number of reported pregnancies	313
3.	Number of livebirths	264
4.	Proportion of survivors to birth (P f)	0.9393
5.	Proportion of child deaths i.e. before 14 years of age (P d)	0.1136
6.	Proportion of embryonic deaths (P ed)	0.0607
7.	Mean number of livebirth per mother aged 40 years above (X)	5.5
8.	Variance (V f)	10.46
9.	Index of fertility (If)	0.3458
10.	Index of mortality (Im)	0.1282
11.	Total selection (It)	0.5183

Comparison of the data on Crow's selection indices with other neighboring tribal and non-tribal populations of the North East and also with some of the Muslim populations of West Bengal, suggests that the operation of selection through differential mortality (I_m) for the Jaintia reported by Deka (1989) was found to be the highest 0.456, while its value was lowest at 0.060 among the Gangte tribe of Manipur (Hemam and Reddy, 1999). On the other hand, the potential for selection through differential fertility (I_f) was highest (0.3458) among the Khasi-Muslims and lowest was among the Jaintia (0.125). According to the modified formula by Johnston and Kensinger (1971), the prenatal mortality component (I_{me}) was highest among the Pnar 0.2016 (Khongsdier,1990) and lowest among the Hajong 0.032 (Barua,1983). This index was also low among the Khasi-Muslim (0.0646).

Among the other Muslim populations, the highest index of Crow's selection potential was among the Muslims of West Bengal (I_m value 0.450; Aird, 1956) and lowest (0.1282) among the Khasi-Muslim. The I_f value was again highest (0.3458) among the Khasi-Muslim and lowest (0.189) among the Muslims of West Bengal (Roy and Bharati, 1982).

In conclusion it may be said that the Khasi-Muslim is a stationary population. They do maintain their identity as an endogamous population, although there is a fair degree of intermixture with other Khasi subtribes and even with the non-Khasis. The effective population size is small and the coefficient of breeding isolation suggests a strong possibility for genetic drift. Selection potential although low is qualitatively different when compared to the tribal populations and other Muslim groups in the sense that the contribution of fertility component to the total selection potential is much larger than the mortality component. The genetic implications of these demographic trends can only be gauged when data on genetic markers

become available.

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KEYWORDS Khasi-Muslim. Shillong. Endogamy. Admixture Rate. Drift.

ABSTRACT The present study has been carried out among the Khasi-Muslim population, residing in the capital city of Meghalaya, Shillong. The Khasi-Muslim is a resultant population which has emerged out of the inter-marriages between the various matrilineal Khasi subtribes and different non-tribal immigrant Muslim populations, who came from other parts of this country and eventually settled here. Besides the demographic composition, the present study indicates that the admixture rate was quite high in this comparatively small population of recent origin. Selection pressure was moderate, with greater contribution of differential fertility than differential mortality. The Khasi Muslims choose mates mostly from within the group indicating that they have maintained and established themselves as a separate religious endogamous group within the Khasi fold.

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