

KHASI KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY¹

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Irawati Karve, the acknowledged authority on Indian kinship, who admits to unfamiliarity with the Khasi language, lists twelve Khasi words in her study of kinship (Karve 1965), but none of these words are included in U.R. Ehrenfels (1953) paper, nor are they recorded in the four Khasi dictionaries (Nissor Singh 1906, 1920; *Leemuel* 1965 (= Diengdoh); and Kharkhongngor 1968) known to me. Since these same twelve words were also never mentioned by any of my Khasi informants, they should probably be considered as non-existent in the Khasi language; Karve's erroneous listings may be understandable, however, as her only sources were Roberts (1891), Grierson (1904), and Gurdon (1914). U.R. Ehrenfels' article (1953) is, therefore, the only modern treatment of Khasi kinship terminology; it had apparently not come to Karve's attention.

Ehrenfels includes an almost complete list of kinship terms in four dialects -- Plateau Khasi, that is, the standard language; War Khasi; Pnar (or Jaintia); and War Jaintia -- indexed under 43 English glosses, the purpose of which was one of comparison. Although the author collected the vocabulary in an actual field situation, aided by native interpreters, his spellings are not always reliable and the literal meaning of most terms remains hidden from the reader unfamiliar with the language. I, therefore, see my task as that of amplifying Ehrenfels' work, of correcting some errors, especially in the orthography, and of explaining the underlying morphemes occurring in the incredibly complicated Khasi system.²

Khasi kinship terminology is based on three principles:

- (1) a differentiation between blood relatives and relatives by marriage;
- (2) classification by relative age of each member with regard to the person they are related to; and
- (3) distinction between terms of address and terms of reference.

Khasi society is generally considered to be matrilineal and matrilocal; the kinship system could be called 'bifurcate merging' since mother is equated with mother's sister, father with father's brother, while mother's brother and father's sister are denoted by distinct terms. Ancestry is traced through the

mother's clan, ka kur, often used as an 'imitative'³ ki kur ki kmie (lit. 'the clans the mothers'). Gender number⁴ morphemes (called 'prefixes' by the Khasis) must precede each noun; ka indicates feminine, u masculine singular; ki is used for plural number and i for respect, endearment, and smallness, the latter two not distinguishing gender.

Upon marriage, the husband remains in his mother's clan while his children belong to his wife's clan. kur is used in three phrases: iadei kur 'to have a relationship on the mother's side, to be related within the same clan'; in the compound para kur 'children of mother's siblings', and in the verb tait kur tait jaid,⁵ an imitative 'to be banished from the clan' (lit. 'reject clan, reject kind, caste').

The most respected member in the clan is the mother's elder brother, u kfi or kfi rangbah (rang-bah translates as 'adult male, an elder' and is composed of rang, the combining form of shynrang 'man' and bah 'older brother', probably based on the verb bah 'to be big'). The kfi is addressed as mama or ma, a word which seems to be of Indo-European (IE) origin since Hindi, Bengali, and Assamese use it for 'maternal uncle' as well. The kfi is consulted on all important decisions and acts as the ultimate arbiter in disputes. Mother's other brothers are referred to as kfi pdeng 'middle brother' and kfi khadduh⁶ 'mother's youngest brother, the very last' respectively. The latter two uncles are addressed as ma-deng⁷ and ma-khadduh or ma-duh; duh 'the last, the youngest' is used for blood relatives only, never for those related by marriage.

The word for 'mother' has two forms which are probably not related morphologically (see discussion below). kmie is used for reference and mei for address; mother's sisters are also addressed as mei plus the appropriate modifier for age-ranking.

Father is referred to as i kpa and addressed as papa or pa, a term strangely familiar to speakers of Indo-European languages. His brothers, as well as the husbands of his sisters and of his mother's sisters are all referred to as 'fathers' (pa- used in compounds is explained below). Father's sisters are all addressed and referred to as kha. kha is based on a verb meaning 'to give birth', thus, according to Ehrenfels (1953: 408), apparently recognizing the father's biological function in procreation. kha also functions as the second constituent in compounds designating father's mother, kmie-kha, and cousins on the father's side, shi para kha-shi is the numeral 'one' used for units and measurements (as opposed to wei 'one'); para designates brothers and sisters of one's own generation.

Parallel cousins and cross-cousins are distinguished both in terminology and in marriage practices; marriage between

parallel cousins is sang 'taboo', while marriage between cross-cousins is permitted though not common. Mother's brothers' children are also referred to as ba-kha, since by definition his children will belong to their own mother's clan.

All brothers and sisters within the immediate family are designated by terms that specify whether they are older or younger than the speaker; there are also terms to indicate a 'middle' brother or sister and terms for the youngest brother and sister (Table 1).

The oldest sister is kong or kong ieit, 'sister-beloved', the oldest brother is bah bah 'brother big', or bah rangbah 'brother grown-up man', terms that show a position of respect occupied by the elder siblings. There are actually two homophonous morphemes bah, one meaning 'brother', the other 'to be big'; and since modifiers follow the noun in Khasi, kong ieit would have to be translated as 'sister who is beloved' and bah rangbah as 'brother who is grown-up.'

Unfortunately, Table 1 shows some gaps. Also, no two of the young Khasi speakers who recently supplied me with information agree on all terms; they have all been living abroad for a long time and have become accustomed to our simplified Western terminology using aunt, uncle, cousin, etc. One speaker also suggested that address by name is coming into vogue among the younger generation.

khynnah 'child' is used for the youngest brother, bah khynnah 'kid brother'; i rit (lit. 'little one') and i duh (lit. 'the last one') are best rendered by 'kid sister'. One word glosses for hep and hynmen are difficult to suggest; older people, even non-relatives, can address young people as hep; it is a term of endearment and is roughly equivalent to the American usage of 'sonny' or 'kid' when used by men for little boys, or 'dear' when used by old ladies for younger women. The morpheme hyn- occurs in several other Khasi words that relate to 'time past, ago': folk-tales always begin with hyndai-hynthai... 'once upon a time...'; hynne means 'a short time ago', hynnin 'yesterday', so that hynmen could perhaps be rendered by 'born before, born some time ago'. The morpheme -men occurs in tymmen 'old man or woman', so that it may mean 'old human being'.

	<i>Elder S/B*</i>	<i>Middle S/B</i>	<i>Younger S/B</i>	<i>The Youngest</i>
Sister	'kong ieit'** kong, hymnen kynthei	kong-deng	'hep' hep	i rit, i duh
S's husband	'hymnen kynsi' kong heh, hymnen kynsi (by female) kyn-um (by male)	kong-deng	'para kynsi' 'hep kynsi' (by female)	
Brother	'bah, bah bah, bah heh' 'bah rangbah'	'bah khynnah' hep (by female)		'bah duh'
B's wife	hymnen shynrang 'kong kynsi'			

* Abbreviations used here and in following tables are: B = Brother, F = Father, M = Mother, S = Sister
 ** Quotation marks indicate terms of address

Table 1: *Khasi sibling terms of address and of reference*

kynsi and kyn-um are best translated by 'in-law'; the minor syllable⁸ kyn- occurs in so many words, nouns and verbs alike, that it is impossible to assign a definite lexical meaning to it.⁹ Ego's, i.e. the speaker's, maternal and paternal aunts and uncles are, as Table 2 shows, classified according to the same system as siblings; older or younger than parent referred to, in-between the older and the younger aunt or uncle, and a designation for the youngest aunt or uncle. Mother's and father's in-laws take their age-ranking appellations from their respective spouses rather than from their actual age. Terms of address and terms of reference are usually identical in the second and third ascending generation (grandparents and great-grandparents), and for the first descending generation (children, nephews, and nieces): terms are, however, as Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate, differentiated for ego's siblings and for ego's parents and their siblings. The term of address is often a shortened or reduced variant of the full term which is used for reference; the shortened variant, also used in compounds, is derived by loss of the initial consonant (usually k-), or loss of the initial syllable in bisyllabic words. Examples are: pa vs. kpa 'father', rád vs. kynrád 'lord, master', mei vs. kmie 'mother', -rang vs. shynrang 'adult male'.¹⁰

Most family members, it will be noticed, are not addressed or referred to by name but by their kin classification; even husband and wife have traditionally referred to each other as 'the mother (of) [oldest child's name]' e.g. i kmie u Dan, and i kpa u Dan 'the father (of) Dan'. One woman informant told me that a woman can also address her husband's sister's husband, i.e. her brother-in-law, as the kpa of the first-born child. Husband and wife address each other by phi, the polite second person pronoun 'you'. Younger Khasis state that nowadays husband and wife may use names for addressing each other. Another Khasi friend gave me the terms of ka lok for 'wife' and u lok for 'husband', but a young man said: 'lok is a harsh word, don't use it.'

The reference terms for parents-in-law, kiaw for 'mother-in-law' and kthaw for 'father-in-law', do not distinguish between maternal and paternal ancestry. The terminology for grandparents is structured parallel to that of one's own parents; however, distinctions between terms of address and of reference are not as varied. 'Mother's mother' is mei-rád, 'mother's father' is pa-rád; their respective siblings add -heh for the older sister, -deng for the middle sister, but the youngest is simply another mei-rád. Great-grandparents on the mother's side are mei-buh and pa-buh,¹¹ father's mother and father are kmie-kha and pa-kha respectively. Referential terms for parents in all generations take the respectful 'prefix/article' i.

<i>Mother*</i>	'mei'	<i>Older than M/F</i>	<i>Middle S/B</i>	<i>Younger than M</i>	<i>The Youngest</i>
	i kmie				
M's Sisters		mei-san	mei-deng	mei khynnah	nah rit
M's Ss' Husbands		pa-san	pa khynnah	pa khynnah	pa khynnah
M's Brothers		'mama rangbah'	'ma-deng'	'ma, mama'	'ma khadduh'
		kfi rangbah	kfi pdeng	kfi	kfi khadduh
M's Bs' Wives		fia	fia	fia	fia
<i>Father</i>					
	'pa, papa'				
	i kpa				
F's Brothers		pa san	pa-deng	pa khynnah	pa-duh
F's Bs' Wives		nah	nah	nah	nah
F's Sisters		kha rangbah	kha-deng		kha-duh
F's Ss' Husbands		pa-kha? mama?		mama?	mama?

- * For the unfilled slots definitive information is lacking
 Quotation marks indicate terms of address; terms of reference have no quotes. When only one term is listed, address and reference are the same
 Khasi usage of hyphens is not systematic; my own usage is to hyphenate 'reduced' morphemes

Table 2: *Khasi terms for maternal and paternal aunts and uncles*

Parents refer to and address their children's spouses as pyrsa, the term also used for maternal nephews and nieces, pyrsa kurim (kurim 'wife'); uncles and great-uncles on the mother's side refer to a child as pyrsa ksiew while the child addresses his great-uncle as bah. ksiew, or khún ksiew, are the terms for 'grandchild', and ksiew tun for 'great-grandchild'. Great-grandchildren are referred to as khún miau (lit. 'cat children'), and great-great-grandchildren as khún khnai (lit. 'mouse children'). Step-children are referred to as khún ruid /khvon ruj/ and 'stepfather' is u kpa nah according to Nissor Singh (1906: 38, 45). Unfortunately, no sources of information, informants or dictionaries, could provide a literal meaning for tun or ruid.

Kinship terms are generally assumed to be of native stock, along with body parts and numerals. However, Khasi has borrowed extensively from the geographically surrounding languages with many loans so well integrated into the native sound structure that their detection is difficult, if not impossible. Three words may be of Indo-Aryan derivation: (i) pa (see above), but a prefixed k either indicates a very early borrowing or would be counter-indicative; (ii) para (see above) is listed by Karve (1965) under Hindi, Sindhi, and Punjabi as referring to blood-related maternal/paternal grandfathers, while in Khasi this word is used for younger relatives on the mother's side; and (iii) kurim 'wife', has an unchecked long vowel in the first syllable which, according to my earlier findings, points to Indo-Aryan origin; kurim 'wife' and kur 'clan' are definitely not related.

GLOSSARY

The following is a complete inventory of all kinship terms with which my informants supplied me, many of which are listed in Nissor Singh's famous dictionary (1906).¹² The alphabetical order is that commonly used for European languages; it deviates from the established Khasi alphabet in three respects: the aspirated stops kh, ph, and th are treated as separate phonemes and are, therefore, not arranged within the k, p, and t listings; k and kh are listed after letter j and not after letter b as in the Khasi alphabet; ng /ŋ/ follows n instead of taking the place of g.

bah to be big; u bah 'big brother'; a polite form of address for any man older than speaker /baʔ/

bah bah, bah heh, bah rangbah 'older brother' /baʔheʔ/,
baʔ-raŋbaʔ/

bah duh, bah khynnah 'youngest brother' /baʔduʔ/, /baʔ
khinnaʔ/

ba-kha children of mother's brothers; relationship between mother's children and maternal uncle's children (Nissor Singh (1906:6), also includes 'paternal aunt' (qv. also Kharkhong-ngor 1968:10b).

bih form of address for a young girl (bi?/

bu affectionate form of address for a young boy (not common)

deng from pdeng 'in the middle, between', used in compounds
/pdeŋ/

kfi pdeng referring to mother's middle brother

kha-deng addressing father's middle sister

ma-deng addressing mother's middle brother

mei-deng addressing mother's middle sister

pa-deng addressing father's middle brother

duh from khadduh 'the last one, the youngest' /khat-du?/

nia khadduh 'mother's youngest brother's wife' /ña-khat-du?/

i duh 'the youngest sister, baby sister'

heh 'big'

hep a polite way of addressing and referring to anybody younger than the speaker; used for younger siblings; woman addressing and referring to brother-in-law if married to younger sister; same as kong hep kynsi, woman referring to younger sister's husband /knsi/

hynmen i referring to elder sister /hnmən/

u referring to elder brother

hynmen hynbew (imit.), elder brother or sister /hnbew/

hynmen kynsi younger sister addressing older sister's husband

hynmen kynthei referring to elder sister

hynmen shynrang referring to elder brother /hnmən šnraŋ/

ieit 'to love, to be loved' /ʔiet/

mei ieit addressing mother's mother

pa ieit addressing mother's father

kong ieit addressing elder sister

ing, iing, ying 'house'

ka iing ka sem household, family (ka sem 'stable, shed, shelter') /ka yieŋ ka sem/ (imit.)

kiaw mother-in-law

kmie 'mother' when referred to (reduced form i mei) /kmi/

kmie hep referring to father's mother

ki kmie ki kpa 'parents' (imit.)

kmie kha referring to father's mother

kmie-nah referring to mother's younger sister; stepmother
also: i mei-nah khadduh /'i mey-na' khat-du?/

kmie-rād referring to mother's mother /kmi-raat/

kmie-san referring to mother's elder sister

kñi u, i mother's eldest brother (= kñi rangbah, p.44 above),
the most respected person in the clan; he is addressed as ma
or mama

ki kñi ki kpa relatives on mother's side (imit.)

kñia ka, i mother's brother's wife; in compounds fia /kñia/

fia-kha addressing and referring to father's sisters

fia-kha rangbah father's oldest sister

fia-khadduh father's youngest sister /fia-khat-du?/

fia-pdeng father's middle sister

kong ka, i addressing and referring to older sister; man
addressing wife's female relatives; polite form of address for
any woman older than speaker; in compounds also used for males

kong-deng husband of middle sister, brother-in-law

kong heh woman addressing and referring to brother-in-law

kong kynsi addressing older sibling's spouse

kpa u, i referring to 'father', pa when addressed and in most
compounds

kpa-nah referring to step-father, nah from khynnah

kpa-rād referring to father's father; /raat/ from knraat/
'lord'

pa-buh i great-grandfather on mother's side

pa-deng father's middle brother

pa-ieit addressing mother's father /pa-?iet/

pa-kha referring to father's father (cf. Nissor Singh 1906:
147; 'pakha, u, n. a male relative (father's side)')

pa-khynnah addressing father's youngest brother and mother's
youngest sister's husband

pa-rād i addressing father's father, mother's father
/pa-raat/

pa-san addressing father's older brother, also mother's
older sister's husband

ksiew ka, u, i grandchild /ksiw/

ksiew tun great-grandchild

khún ksiew i referring to grandchild; is addressed by name

para ksiew mother's mother's sister's son (grand-nephew)

pyrsa ksiew man referring to sibling's grandchildren; a grand-niece or grand-nephew on mother's side

kthaw addressing and referring to father-in-law /kthaaw/

kur ka clan; ka kur ka jaid* (imit.), a relative on mother's side /ka jaj/

ki kur ki karo, ki kur ki kmie (imit.), considered obsolete

iadei kur to be related within the same clan (lit. 'come together (in) clan') /yadey/

para kur member of the same clan, children of mother's siblings

tait kur tait kmie (imit.), obsolete, and

tait kur tait jaid* (imit.), to be banished, excommunicated from the clan; /taj/ from /kntaj/ 'to reject, set aside'

kurim ka wife, spouse; to have intercourse (probably of Indo-European origin)

kiaw kurim ka mother-in-law (Singh 1906:40)

shong kurim to marry (lit. 'lie with wife')

shong kurim shong kupai (imit.) kupai = ? from Hindi ?)

jingshong kurim marriage (lit. 'lie with wife') /jiŋʂoŋ/

kynsi addressing and referring to brother- or sister-in-law

hep kynsi = para kynsi woman referring to younger sister's husband

kynmen kynsi woman referring to elder sister's husband

kong kynsi woman addressing elder sibling's spouse

kyn-um u, i man addressing and referring to sister's husband /knʔum/

kha to give birth, to bring forth

kha deng father's middle sister

kha-duh father's youngest sister

kha-rangbah father's older sister

kmie-kha referring to father's mother; she is addressed as mei-kha

para kha (shi) father's brother's children; cousins /ʃi/ 'one' (numeral)

khadduh to be last /khat-duʔ/ see duh

kñi khadduh referring to mother's youngest brother

ma-khadduh, ma-duh addressing mother's youngest brother

pa-duh addressing father's youngest brother

* From Hindi, see n.5. (Ed.)

khún ka, u, i child, girl, boy, baby /khvon/
khún ksiew grandchild (maternal uncle's child)
khún khnai great-great-grandchild (lit. 'mouse child')
/khvon khnaay/
khún miaw great-grandchild (lit. 'cat child')
khún ruid step-child /khvon ruj/

khynnah ka, u, i to be young; girl, boy /khna?/
pa-khynnah addressing and referring to father's younger
brother, also to mother's younger sister's husband (cf.
p.45
khynráw u referring to a young man
ka referring to a young woman
u khynraw u samla (imit.) (arch.)

lok friend (arch.)
ka lok wife
u lok husband
para lok friend

lúd to be young (arch.) = khynráw /luot/

mama, ma addressing mother's older brother who is referred to
as u kfi
ma-deng addressing mother's middle brother
ma-khadduh, ma-duh addressing mother's youngest brother
ma-Rangbah (or: mama--) addressing mother's oldest brother

mei i mother, alternate form for kmie, used in all compounds
mei-buh great-grandmother on mother's side
mei-deng addressing mother's middle sister
mei-hep respectful appellation of an older woman (Nissor
Sing 1906:131)
mei-ieit addressing mother's mother
mei-kha addressing father's mother
mei-khynnah referring to mother's younger sister
mei-nah addressing mother's younger sister and father's
younger brother's wife
mei-rád referring to mother's mother
mei-san addressing mother's oldest sister

myngkew ka, i used by wife when referring to husband's older
sister (arch.)

nah reduced form of khynnah to be small, be the youngest (used
in compounds)

mei-nah i addressing mother's younger sister; also
father's younger brother's wife; addressing stepmother
nah rit mother's youngest sister

ñia reduced form of kñia, referring to mother's brother's wife
/kñia/

ñia kha, ka addressing father's sister

ñia kha rangbah referring to father's older sister

ñia kha khadduh referring to father's younger sister

ñia kha pdeng referring to father's middle sister

pa father, reduced form of kpa, used in compounds

para ka, u, i, ki children, brothers and sisters of same generation

para ar kmie mother's sister's children (lit. 'children (of) two mothers') /para 'aar kmi/

para briew u having no relationship either by blood or by marriage; fellow human being

para ksiew mother's mother's sister's son, i.e. grand-nephew on mother's side

para kur member of the same clan, mother's sister's children

para kynsi referring to wife's younger sister and her husband

para lok friend

para mynshong u wife's sister's husband

para shong-kha husband's sister's husband, two men marrying into the same family

para trái ka, u brothers and sisters of the same parents

para kha shi children of father's sisters and brothers, first cousins and half-siblings on father's side

pyrsa referring to one's own children and to sister's children; and nephews and nieces on mother's side

pyrsa ksiew mother's mother's brother referring to speaker, i.e. great-uncle on mother's side referring to speaker

pyrsa kurim referring to child's spouse

phi 2nd person pronoun (polite), used by husband/wife in addressing each other

rangbah to be grown-up; an older respected person, an elder

bah rangbah addressing older brother

mama rangbah addressing mother's oldest brother (even if younger than mother)

kha rangbah addressing father's oldest sister

rád reduced alternate of kynrád 'master, lord' used in compounds

kmie-rád, mei-rád mother's mother

kpa-rád, pa-rád mother's father

rit small

i rit = i duh the youngest sister

nah rit mother's youngest sister

samla marriageable young person

san to grow up, grown-up

mei-san mother's older sister

pa-san father's older brother, mother's older sister's
husband

(sang taboo)

tnga ka wife, when referred to (arch., 'a harsh word')

u husband, when referred to

trái u lord, master /'u traay/

para trái ka, u, i brothers and sisters of the same
parents

NOTES

1. This article represents a thoroughly revised version of a paper delivered at the American Oriental Society Annual General Meeting in Toronto, Canada, 11 April 1978.
2. Bowing to Khasi preference, I have decided to abandon my usual practice of using phonemic transcriptions for Khasi sounds; I use instead established Khasi spelling and only add transcriptions in those cases where the standard spelling system fails to indicate vowel length or vowel quality. Sometimes it will be necessary to separate morphemes by means of hyphens, although some of these hyphens are not used by the Khasis themselves. Certain morphological features, necessary for the reader's better understanding, will be explained at the appropriate places.
3. 'Imitatives', which I called 'redundants' in Rabel (1968), consist of two nouns whose combined meaning is equal to that of the first constituent alone; the meaning of the second constituent is often unknown to the native speaker. Sometimes the second word is a borrowing from Indo-European.
4. The Khasis call the four gender/number indicators 'prefixes'; I called them 'articles' in Rabel (1961). Neither term is entirely adequate since these words are free morphemes which also function as 3rd person pronouns.

5. jaid=/jaɟ/, with a short vowel, is of Hindi origin.
6. khadduh=/khat-dʊʔ/, is a compound of /khat/ 'to dole out' + /dʊʔ/ 'to be last.'
7. deng is the reduced form of pdeng; see n.10 below for loss of initial consonant.
8. 'minor' syllables have no full vowel nucleus, the second consonant -- a liquid or nasal -- functioning as the vocalic element; they are always unstressed.
9. Referring to n.10, it may be derived from (k + stem) + infix -n-.
10. A theory first proposed by Pater Wilhelm Schmidt (1904) and elaborated by Henderson (1976) states that initial k should be considered a fossilized prefix denoting living things (kinship terms, body parts, animals, plants). Since simplification of initial clusters is otherwise never accompanied by vowel change, it seems unlikely that mei 'mother' is related to kmie.
11. Dictionaries do not list buh; one speaker pronounced this word /bu/, two others said /buʔ/.
12. Khasi kinship terminology is, as we have seen, an interesting topic and remains, as this paper demonstrates, a subject of varying interpretation and discussion. Not all of the terms mentioned in this article are included in its glossary, or vice versa, nor do they correspond precisely when they are; nor, for example, do they always agree with the dictionary definitions (when these occur) of U Nissor Singh (1906) or E. Bars (1973), among others. This is, however, the most recent study of the question and makes it most intriguing and informative. (Ed.)

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