

# Cultural Dimension of Kwai among the Khasis

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## Abstract

*The Khasi identity has always been rooted on three main pillars: the belief that they are the 'children of the seven huts', the ethical code of conduct guiding thought and action and the matrilineal system. There is however an outlier that neatly binds up their sense of identity that being 'kwai'. Kwai (areca nut) is always chewed along with 'tympew' (betel leaf) and 'shun' (lime) and is indispensable both at the individual and social level. It has a place in the everyday life of the people forming what we may call its profane aspect and its role is also seen in rites de passage and other ceremonies which reflect its sacred character. An understanding of how closely the Khasi identity is bound to kwai is possible only by a proper examination of the beliefs and attitudes surrounding kwai and its incorporation into the Khasi way of life.*

**Keywords:** Khasi, Kwai, Tympew, Shun

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The Khasis of Meghalaya are known for their distinctive cultural heritage which sets them apart from other tribes of North-East India. A prominent aspect of their culture that is an intrinsic part of their life is kwai. For the purpose of chewing, the areca nut or kwai (*Areca catechu*) which is popularly called betel nut, the betel leaf or tympew (*Piper betel L*) and shun or lime are always served together and are collectively also referred to as kwai. Kwai or 'paan' as it is referred to in Hindi is not peculiar to the Khasis alone but among Khasis it has an extensive role in the life of the people. In the mundane world it is viewed as a source of pleasure, entertainment, an extension of friendship and courtesy. In its sacred dimension kwai is associated with the after-life; and in the performance of many rites and rituals. The implication of kwai is therefore seen in the personal or private

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