

**Name of the Element:** Meghalaya's Whistled Language

**Community/ies:** Khasi tribe

**Region:** Meghalaya

**Brief Description:** In the Kongthong village of Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills, mothers have a unique tradition of composing a distinct tune, called *jingrwai iawbei*, for each child instead of giving them a conventional name. These melodic tunes, inspired by nature—especially birds—are used for communication within the village. A short version of the tune is used for everyday interactions, while the full melody, which lasts about a minute, is used in the fields or forests. The melody's ability to travel long distances is particularly useful in the region's steep mountains and rugged topography.

Longer tunes are believed to ward off evil spirits in the forests, showcasing the deep cultural and spiritual significance of this unique tradition. Some villagers believe the melodies honor the women who founded their clans, reflecting the matrilineal nature of the Khasi tribe.

This whistled language, recognized by UNESCO as a method of communication, developed to overcome the challenges posed by the terrain. Traditionally passed down orally, these tunes have no written record and are specific to individuals, disappearing when a person passes away. Although the practice faces threats from modern technology, such as mobile phones, younger generations are striving to preserve it by recording the tunes and using them as ringtones.