Chapter IV

THE KHASI MATRILINY
4.1.0 INTRODUCTION

The present chapter aims at a broad-view description of both marriage and family from the Khasi perspective. The Khasi society being matrilineal, this chapter has been titled KHASI MATRILINY.

Discussion on Khasi matriliney begins with a clarification of some misunderstandings and difficulties that have arisen out of the attempts, particularly by non-Khasi enquirers, to study and interpret the Khasi concept and practice of matriliney. That clarification is followed up by a glossary of some primary and secondary concepts on the basis of which Khasi social and family systems can be understood.

4.1.1 Clearing the Decks

1) While reviewing the literature available and relevant to this chapter, it became evident that the different writers belonged to several categories.

   a) The *insiders* are those writers who are from one of the sub-tribes of the Khasi people. It is far more likely that they have first-hand knowledge of what they are writing about. Their works are far more reliable than those who are writing from outside the culture.

   b) Different writers interact with "word" differently. We shall see shortly that the spoken word is of paramount importance and significance in most tribal societies. Some writers can interact with the tribal "word" very superficially, entirely through the medium of interpreters, whose media-
tion is often through literal translation of the words. This may lead to inaccurate rendering of the tribal spoken word.\footnote{1}

c) When people talk or write about Khasi matriliney, it makes one wonder whether they are talking or writing merely about the mechanics of the system, and not about the dynamics of it. Many writers cannot go beyond the mechanics of a culture. All they see is the Khasi matriliney as a mechanical system that is made up of separate, distinct and interrelated parts. What happens, then, is that one can do no more than merely scratch the surface. To get to the bottom of Khasi matriliney or other cultural systems, one has to delve deep into the dynamism and the inner life-force of the system. Jacob Aluckal's "Marriage Among the Khasis or Hynniew-Treps",\footnote{2} for example, is a dry, lifeless and mechanical description of Khasi marriage.

2) Among those writers, who are 'insiders' and have written something about Khasi matriliney, and have put forward arguments for or against it, are themselves confused.

There are those who write for or against matriliney from an emotional point of view.\footnote{3} There are also those who speak from the level of cool reason. They are more logical and articulate.\footnote{4} There are those who are facile, simplistic and naive.\footnote{5} There are those who genuinely look for solutions to problems by begging the question, or getting enmeshed in cyclic arguments.\footnote{6} There are writers who approach the problem as a matter-of-fact.\footnote{7} But there are
also those who moralise too easily.\textsuperscript{8}

There are some writers who fail to make the distinction between what is traditional (often perceived as sacred, ideal and unchangeable) and what is modern or current (considered volatile and versatile).\textsuperscript{9} Such writers fail to see that change in one part of a system brings about corresponding changes in other parts. These authors find it difficult to take stock of the changes that are brought about by existing circumstances on the practice of matriliny.

Khasi matriliny has undergone tremendous changes over the last 100 years, with the result that what is found today is far removed from what it should be. Similarly, there are several who cannot distinguish between cause and effect.\textsuperscript{10} They seem to confuse between matrilineal descent, which is the cause, and incest, which is the result.

A mistake that most commentators on Khasi matriliny make is to make a list of words and misinterpret them through a literal translation of them. In the process, they miss the entire wealth of the inner, finer and subtler thought-content. They cannot but misrepresent the system. There isn’t, for example, anything more alien to the Khasi matriliny than the idea of "priestess" that Nalini Natarajan\textsuperscript{11} speaks about. However, we cannot blame her entirely because even A.S. Khongphai says: "Ka khadduh (youngest daughter) obtains her important position as the family priestess, ..."\textsuperscript{12}. The difference lies in the fact that Nalini Natarajan seems to think of a priestess performing the religious rites instead of a priest, whereas Khongphai points to the "position" of "ka khatduh" as the custodian of the family religion.
Khongphai knows too well that there has never been a priestess. Hence it is not only that "generally" priests are male but always "priests are male".\footnote{13}

Part of this confusion can be attributed to the inability on the part of those who express an opinion on the Khasi matriline either verbally or in writing, to distinguish between human nature which is universal, and human culture which is particular and specific. It is quite wrong, for example, to suppose that in Khasi matriline, the name or the title is matrilineal only because it is the mother who conceives and gives birth to children, goes through the ordeal and pangs of childbirth, suckles the children, etc., as A. Nengnong and H.S. Nongkynrih,\footnote{14} H.O. Mawrie,\footnote{15} and quite a number of others suggest, don't mothers in patrilineal societies go through exactly the same experience? And hence T. Phanbuh asks: Is it only for that reason?\footnote{16}

3) Before speaking about Khasi matriline, two sets of glossary of the basic concepts, or tenets, as R.T. Rymbai calls them, will be of help to know their thought-content which may elude verbal explanations.

Upto 1841, when Rev. Thomas Jones of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission, introduced the Roman script,\footnote{17} Khasis had no script and no written records of their own. Cultural life of the people depended on the strength of the oral tradition from one generation to the next. As in most tribal cultures, the 'word' acquired very extraordinary importance and significance. The entire philosophy of life and the outlook on life are embodied in the spoken word.

We must again distinguish between 'Word' and words. The 'word' belongs
to the dynamics of the Khasi concepts and philosophy of life; the words express
the 'word', and belong to the mechanics of that philosophy. The following
glossary is meant to help one go through the words of the 'word', from mecha­
nics to the dynamics.

4.1.2 Primary Concepts

R.T. Rymbai says that the "whole gamut of a Khasi culture stems from
the three basic tenets of his religion": i) kamai ia ka hok; ii) Tipbriew tipblei,
and iii) Tipkur tipkha. 18

In view of the inclusion of one or two additional entries in Rymbai's
list, the investigator prefers the term 'concepts' to Rymbai's 'tenets'.

Lyngdoh, a learned District Judge, way back in 1938, pointed to the
supremacy of religion "...a Khasi is a Khasi because of his religion (Niam)
more than anything else. This is a great fact. To understand him therefore
one has got to go deep down into the very root of his religion. It is religion
in the sense of his 'Niam', which regulates all his thoughts and activities.
Forget his religion and you will never understand a Khasi". 19 Religion is
the 'deciding factor'. 20

R.T. Rymbai analyses the word and the thought-content of the word
'Niam' (religion). He says it is a (conceptual) combination of two
words - Nia which means 'Reason' and Im which means 'Living'. So "Niam"
means "Living Reason". 21 Nia does not mean only 'Reason'; in fact, as a
plain man's language, it means argument, or argumentation.
The essence of the religious conviction, or the philosophy of life of a Khasi is spelt out in a few key concepts.

i) **Longbriew manbriew**: briew = man, human nature, human being; long = to be, to exist; man = to become, to grow, to develop. It is not enough to be or to merely exist; one becomes truly human, truly a man only when one develops and becomes fully human according to one's nature. Similarly, we have the concept of **longrynieng**, which means one's stature as a developed (in all aspects) human person.

ii) **Kamai ia ka hok** = to 'earn righteousness', to live up to one's dignity and destiny as a human person and member of one's family and clan, that is achieved through being "fair in all his dealings, pure both in thought, action or inclination".

iii) **Tipkur tip'iait**: Tip = to know; kur and jait = clan, identity (surname). The kur (clan) is made up of all the members who belong to the jait (family title). The basic idea is that one should admit and recognise the fact that man is not alone in the world, but in a group (clan), that one interacts with every other one, and all are responsible to and for the other.

iv) **Tipkha tipman**: Kha is the short form of meikha, niakha, and anyone else belonging to one's father's kur or jait (clan). It also means 'to bear', 'to be born'. Through one's father, his clan is considered responsible for one's being born into life, not merely 'to be', but 'to become', not merely 'to exist', but to grow, develop and become fully human. One must recognize the relationship and responsibility one has to those who caused one's existence.
v) *Tipbriew tipblei*: briew = man; blei = God. A constant conscientiousness is an infallible guide to one's earthly existence and relationship spelt out in "tipkur tipjait" and "tipkha tipman", are included in *tipbriew*, and the relationship with God, *tipblei*.

vi) *Ka sang ka ma*: ma = dangerous, frightful, dreadful; sang = incest. *Ka sang* does not mean only taboo\(^26\) as we have been wont to say. As children we were taught not to look at anyone who is relieving himself. And if this was not followed, we were threatened with total disaster to our parents. That is a taboo.

Perhaps the thought-content of *Ka sang* is also more than that of "crime" as mentioned by Juanita War,\(^27\) or that of "sin" as R.T. Rymbai\(^28\) says. The true reason why *Ka sang* is "unforgivable"\(^29\) or dangerous, frightful or dreadful is because it is a sacrilege against one's sacred ties or bond with the Kur or the Kha.

### 4.1.3 Secondary Concepts

The following are some additional or supplementary concepts:

i) *Shongkha shongman*: It is equivalent to marriage. *Shong* means to live, to stay. The concept is appropriately applied only to man who, in matrilineal systems, comes to live with his wife to cause birth and generate offsprings. A man's mandate is not only to bring forth offsprings (kha) but also to make them human.
ii) Ka jing ka sem: The traditional meaning of it is family, a home, or even a house. jing and sem being only imitatives, like 'bed and board' or 'high and dry'. It is also used, though rarely, to refer to the two families to which a man belongs:

    Ka jing is his family of orientation, or of origin. Another term used is jing Kmie or family or house of his mother, or jingkur, family of his clan members.

    Ka Sem = literally refers to farm sheds or cow- or horse sheds, or chicken roost. If applied, it means the man's family of procreation. The word sem has the nuance of something that is temporary, uncertain, unstable, indicating a man's position in his family of procreation in a matrilineal system. The family of procreation is also referred to as jingkhun, the family where man begets offsprings or the family of his children.

iii) Jutang, jubanlak: Jutang = a covenant, a solemn or sacred agreement. It usually takes place between God and man. Jubanlak is one's word of honour, a solemn or sacred promise, made usually to God.

iv) Niam Khasi or Khali Religion is a family religion. Originally, no one outside one's family could participate in any religious function of the other. It is the seniormost uncle of the family who performs the religious acts for his own family consisting of his brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces. Ka Niam-im is for the living and Ka Niam-lap is for the dead.
v) *Ka pap ka sang*: *Ka pap* is sin or crime and *Ka sang* is sacrilege or desecration. The Khasi concept of sin is bound to a person's attachment to his clan. Sin is always something that is committed directly or indirectly against the interests, well being or destiny of the clan, and as such, sin is always social, not personal or individual as it is in Christianity.

There are other concepts that touch on the Khasi philosophy of life. They will be explained as they are met in the course of this chapter.

4.1.4 The Kur and the Kha

The Khasi concept of religion is a horizontal-vertical one. On the one hand, there are two fundamental human relationships: *ka tipkur* and *ka tipkha*. Every person embodies within his existence, personality and identity these are two inalienable sides-of-the-same-coin. He is the combination of these two relationships. On the other hand, there is man's dependence and relationship with God, *ka tipblei*. This is the "foundation and the basis on and around which the religion, the family, the society and the economic and political structure of the race is built." A man has obligations both to his *kur* (maternal clan) and to his *kha* (paternal clan). The obligation, Kynpham Singh says, is separate and distinct. No man is separable from his *kur* and his *kha*. He has his duties towards his *kur*, and his obligations towards his *kha*.

A true Khasi has tremendous respect and regard for his *meikha* (paternal grandmother) and *niakha* (paternal aunts) and his paternal uncles.
H.D. Mawrie writes that the meikha is "like a goddess to his (the man's) children." Quoting Fr. H. Ellas, SDB, L. Gilbert Shullai says that the Kharkongor clan members hold their Khas in high esteem and affection. The khas are said to be the source of their existence and personality-stature.

An illustration would be something like this:

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  Tipplei
   God
     ↓
  Man       Tipkha
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"The two concepts in Khasi religion and Khasi thinking are indicative of right relationship between man and man and between man and God. The stress, therefore, was on the social as well as the spiritual."

4.2.0 THE KHASI MATRILINY

In the past, scholars, missionaries and administrators have confused between matriarchy and matriliney. This confusion was more prevalent among the earlier writers. P.R. Gurdon (1990, pp.76-78) wrote that Khasis are "a people who observe the matriarchate." Capt. Fisher was quoted by P.R. Gurdon as reporting in 1840, "the prevalence of Matriar-
chy or mother kinship among the Khasis. In 1938, C. Lyngdoh mentioned the existence of this matriarchal system among the Khasis, and the fact that "amongst Khasis cognates get the preference over agnates."

Hipshon Roy Kharshiing did declare that "the one great confusion that has persisted about the Khasis is that they are a matriarchal society; they are not so, they are very much matrilineal ... It is a beautiful and correct observation on one of the basis structures of a Khasi way of life ... is not matriarchal but a matrilineal society ..." The reason for asserting that the Khasi family system is not matriarchal but matrilineal has been already discussed in Chapter L

4.2.1 Marriage and Family

A Khasi believes that every individual comes to the world to a particular clan, with a purpose and a mandate from the creator, to contribute to the continuity and growth of the clan and the race. This is the duty and obligation that Kynpham Singh spoke about.

The desire to prolong one's life, and experience, says A.S. Khongphai, is universal, and since man cannot live on forever, he achieves this by continuing his life and existence through his children, or perhaps through nephews and nieces.

Like Khongphai, many others believe that marriage is the foundation of religion and has been in part, responsible for the survival of the race. But even more than them, Sr. Philomena Kharakor considers marriage (in
the sense that a Khasi understands it) "the crown of (or the vital point, the supremacy, etc.) of the race." 46

H.O. Mawrie 47 thinks that at present both traditional and "western" forms of marriage practices are found in the Khasi society. There are at least three factors that are responsible for the above differences:

a) People in the rural areas are simpler and more traditional than the urbanites.

b) Those who are outside any religious affiliations are more liberal than those affiliated to some religious groups.

c) There are those who promote the traditional way of life (like Ka Seng Khasi), and are quite different from those affected by modernity in their marriage practices. It may be presumed that Mawrie's "western" can be understood as "modern".

Generally, Khasis hold their marriages in high regard; it is something sacred, willed, and blessed by God as part of His plan for man. A.S. Khongphal says it is "holy" and "permanent". 48 It is a "civil contract" 49 which is at the same time a sacred and solemn agreement ("juban jutang Blei"). 50 Marriage is also permanent. It is entered into with the intention of making it a permanent, and life-long commitment. 51 In fact, Mawrie says that in a traditional marriage ceremony, on the way to the marriage, the groom "never turns back towards his own house." 52 As in any human arrangement, accidents do happen. What is important is that it is not intentional or pre-
mediated. The sacredness and permanence of marriage is also apparent in the fact that:

a) A great deal of careful and detailed enquiry is carried out by the parties concerned before any commitment is made. It is never done haphazardly.

b) On the part of the parties concerned, everything is open above board. There is nothing to hide, no ulterior motives (khlem "buhrieh") and everything is in the knowledge of all concerned (khlem "iyndet"). The uncles of both parties are the intermediaries.

Mawrie, however, believes that "the institution of marriage is neither a covenant nor an agreement or a contract, but is a mutual adventure between a woman and a man in a harmonious blend of mind and thought to establish a family." This statement itself is some type of an adventure, which, perhaps, does not deserve to be taken seriously. However, Mawrie's reason for saying so is that, "contracts and covenants are legal arrangements, and they cannot be dissolved without going through the due process of law - whatever that process might be; but a Khasi marriage is not thus bound by law".54

A.S. Khongphai infers that marriage does have an aspect of social sanction, and even legal binding. It is a "civil contract", and marriages should be "registered" in court, a "marriage certificate" should be obtained.55 These three give marriage a legal standing and without them marriage would indeed be a squandering "adventure", as Mawrie prefers it to be.
Norbet N. Nongrum too disagrees with Mawrie. Marriage is sacred, a covenant made before God Himself, even as Khongphai says, "Our ancestors regarded marriage as very sacred, and not only a civil contract ... Khasis consider it as a holy covenant."\(^57\)

Chie Nakane reported in 1967 that the common practice of finding a marriage partner was through "personal choice" of the man who "proposes to the girl."\(^58\) It is, therefore, not to be wondered at the many people, as does K.C. Lyngdoh,\(^59\) who believe that marriage is totally an individual and personal affair, involving no one else but the two parties.

Sr. Philomena Kharakor is very articulate in this, she says that marriage is a matter not only of the two individuals involved, but also of the clans to which the two parties belong. So it finally involves the two individuals ("ki arngut"), as well as the two clans ("ki arkur")\(^60\) through their spokesmen and intermediaries, the uncles.

A.S. Khongphai does not commit himself fully. Marriage, he says, is the business of the two individual persons, the man and the woman; but their kurs must know and can interfere or even intervene.\(^61\) That is, as it sounds, speaking legally. He ultimately agrees with the opinion of Sr. Kharakor. The traditional practice reported by H.O. Mawrie seems to confirm this fact. Before leaving his house to go and live with his would-be wife at her house, the groom is anointed and blessed by his parents. On his arrival at the girl's house, he is reverentially welcomed. On her first visit to her in-laws after the wedding, the bride is similarly anointed
and blessed by her mother-in-law. She is then taken to the kitchen garden
where she is made (symbolically) to dig a hoe or two, or to weed the garden,
signifying economic cooperation. 62

4.2.2 Ka Sang (Incest)

A marriage may turn out to be unhappy, or mismatched. But there
isn't anything that is so sacrilegelous and desecrating as incest. Que Nakane
reported in 1962 that an incestuous marriage "is considered as the worst
kind of sin; a Khasi Christian intellectual said to me that it was worse than
homicide." 63 Incest, as discussed in Chapter I, prescribes that marriages
should be exogamous. The greatest sin that a Khasi can commit against
his clan is to profane and desecrate it by having sexual union, whether in
or out of marriage, with a member of his own clan (Ka Kur ka Jait). Clan
exogamy 64 is the rule and the law.

The universal rule of incest forbid sexual intercourse between members
of the nuclear family excepting the father and mother. Following is an
illustration of this rule.
Generally, grandparents and parents-in-law are included within the illustration.

The Khasi rule of incest is more serious to a Khasi mind, and is a little wider in extension.

**First Degree Incest:**

i) Sexual activities with any immediate member of one's own clan (the near members of one's kur);

ii) With the immediate members of one's father's clan or kur, i.e., one's immediate kha.

Incest of primary degree is the most serious sacrilege and profanation of oneself and his clan. This is the "worst kind of sin", the "unforgivable sin", and there is no forgiveness for the one guilty of **Ka sangiap sangim** (primary degree incest) because one defiled, desecrated and profane, has cursed one's own existence by committing the most serious, hideous sacrilege against the two sources of one's existence and personality.

**Ka sangiap sangim**: Sang = incest, sacrilege, profanation, desecration, serious defilement; lap = death; im = life. It has the meaning of being unforgivable even after one's death.

The Khasi term for incest is **sang**. A.S. Khongphai equates its meaning with "sacrilege, taboo". The meaning that Sib Charan Roy gives to the term **sang** is "Sah ka ang". Khongphai further explains: Sang = "sah-ang; sah = remain; ang = gaping, i.e. to remain gaping". The idea is that
one is utterly shocked and left gaping and speechless.

**Second Degree Incest:**

Sexual relations with any mediate or distant members of one's clan, or with any of one's own distant relatives within the forbidden degree. The secondary degree sang is forgiveable through sacrifice, divination and mediation.

Besides the sangliap sanglm, there are at least four other types of sang which are slightly less in gravity:

1. **Ka sang synr̄h** forbids a man to marry a niece or a cousin sister of his father.

2. **Ka sang sohpetkha** forbids all sexual activities between paternal cousins, i.e., between two whose fathers are blood brothers or very close cousins.

3. **Ka sang syngkenkha** forbids sexual activities with any of one's own kha, i.e., the sisters or nieces of one's own father.

4. **Ka sang sohmynt̄ig** forbids a man to return to his wife after she or he or both has/have committed adultery, or are remarried, particularly if the wife has had issue(s) from other husband(s).

Incest is always severely punished by being disowned, ostracised and excommunicated or even by being clubbed to death. Fr. Sngi S. Lyngdoh, one of the recognized authorities on Khasi culture, makes certain concessions in this matter which may be shocking to a few. As editor of *Ka Sur*
Shipara, a weekly, Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh answered a barrage of questions by S. Lyngdoh and P. Lyngdoh. Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh certainly would never encourage unions between persons of the same kur or clan. Neither would he be too harsh or hasty in condemning such unions as ka sang if they fulfill the following conditions:

a) If there is no direct link between the two families to which the parties belong, i.e., if they belong to two clans that happened to go by the same name. There could indeed have been a direct link between the two clans, but the link is buried in the distant past.

b) If the two parties are at least three generations apart.

c) If the two parties concerned and their respective families arrive at marriage arrangements honourably, and are duly blessed by pastors or priests, in case they are Christians.

S. Kharjarln found the opinion of Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh totally in consonance with sound reason, and heaved a sigh of relief for the many such unions at Lawbyrtun (West Khasi Hills) who could, from then on, be considered spared of the scourges of ka sang.

U Bah Balelt explains that the concept of Kur or the true kur includes only the following two categories of lineages of the kurs.

a) Those who still participate in and partake of the same family sacrifice (keeping in mind that the Khasi Niam or religion is a family religion). However, the term family here is not restricted only to the nuclear family,
but the meaning of the term is extended.

b) Those who have the right to a fair share of the wealth and property of any deceased male who is of the same lineage as they are. They are expected also to look after the orphans of their lineage.\(^\text{73}\)

It may look strange that father-daughter,\(^\text{74}\) mother-son, brother-sister, uncle-niece or aunt-nephew incests have not been enumerated among the sangs. These are the most serious cases of incest. So serious are they that in the traditional Khasi thought one does not expect them to happen.

**4.2.3 Clarifying Some Misunderstandings**

Popular jargons have led to a lot of misunderstandings of the concept of kur. There is a family of the Mawlein clan. At some point of time in the recent past, they put away the title Mawlein and adopted the title Wahlang. They are, therefore, pseudo-Wahlangs. Krioshon Rapthap, therefore, rightly asks, how could the marriage between the pseudo-Wahlang and a true Wahlang be an instance of sang.\(^\text{75}\) The fact is that the pseudo-Wahlang marrying a true Wahlang is not an instance of sang. But the pseudo-Wahlang marrying a Mawlein is an instance of sang because the concept of kur, is not merely a matter of title but primarily a matter of birth.

Another misunderstanding arises from situations such as the one brought up in Ka Sur Shipara.\(^\text{76}\) Lyngdoh and Syiem are not clan titles but are indicative of executive functions. Lyngdoh is a priest and Syiem is a king. Lyngdohs and Syiem can belong to any clan. And if a Lyngdoh Mawphlang
marries Lyngdoh Thalang it is not a case of sang. What distinguishes them are the clan titles, Mawphlang and Thalang, but both perform the Lyngdoh (priestly) functions. Similarly, if a Syiem Twa marries a Syiem Marwet it is not a case of sang. The misunderstanding is due to the practice of reducing the family title merely to Lyngdoh and Syiem. In reality, there are no lineage titles such as Lyngdoh or Syiem without the accompanying specification.

If a Kharshrieh marries a Kharpiria there is no sang. Although both titles begin with "khar", "shrieh" and "piria" distinguish the two clans, and their common "khar" is only indicative of the fact that the first ancestresses of these two clans were non-Khasis. The confusion arises when people reduce their titles to "Dkhar".

Majaw and Syngkli claim to be of the same kur as Kurbah, Rapsang and Hynniewta, because somewhere in the distant past, the first ancestresses of these clans are said to have been daughters of the same mother. Now, if Kurbah/Majaw marries a Syngkli/Rapsang, is it an instance of sang? It is a potential moot point, though many people are ready to consider such unions as incestuous.

4.2.4 Purpose of Marriage

As discussed earlier, Khasis believe that a man is born into the clan/family with the mandate from the Creator that he should contribute to the maintenance and continuity of the clans/families. The biological mechanism
through which every culture and race achieves this is marriage.

Children are the foundation of family and race, because they are visibly the future life, the prolongation of the family, of the clan and of the race. This fact should be understood from two complementary points of view:

a) **From the point of view of the children:** In the original Khasi matrilineal family, especially at the time when the system of visiting husbands was prevalent, the father was responsible for the biological existence of children in his family of procreation, but the uncle was responsible for their upbringing and socialization in their society, in their clan and in the family of orientation. The uncle takes over from the father after the conception of the child. So, from the children's point of view, both the father and the uncle are responsible for them; the former for their biological life and the latter for their social life.

b) **From the point of view of man:** Man is father in the family where he has caused the existence of offsprings. The same man is uncle in the family where someone else has fathered the children, who are his nephews and nieces. Here the woman (if there is) of the older generation is not his mother-in-law but his mother. The woman of his generation who is the mother of the children present there, is not his wife, but his sister.
Thus, Khasi matriliney gives man a double identity and responsibility of being father to one set of children and uncle to another. Similarly, the children also have a double identity and obligation of being sons and daughters to one man, and nephews and nieces to another. Both identities of man come into play in the consideration of children as the continuity of the family, clan and the race, except in cases of unlimited promiscuity.

This is the mandate to man: beget children, have nephews and nieces, in order that the race may continue and grow ("parum pareh").\textsuperscript{78} It is no wonder, then, that:

a) Sterility and barrenness are sufficient reasons for divorce.\textsuperscript{79} The traditional concept of marriage is that it is entered upon for the supreme purpose of begetting children. Little or no consideration is given to the satisfaction of sexual needs.

b) The greatest punishment for a Khasi family is not be blessed by the Creator with the presence of children. "The foundation of the family ... is not the parents, but the children. A couple without issue cannot, under any circumstances, build a family".\textsuperscript{80} S.J. Duncan’s drama, \textit{Ka Tiwlarun}
(1968), is on this theme. U Hat, the hero of the drama, is all anxious to see his sister, Ka Shatal, blessed with a family embellished by children.

c) Sr. Philomena Kharakor should call marriage 'The Crown' of the Race.

It is not quite true to say that marriage, in the traditional concept, is for "procreation" as Jacob Aluckal thinks. To say that is to miss the vital point. Even if that is happening today, it was not the case in the early days, as Nalini Natarajan said. This is the result of getting stuck at the mechanics without being able to get to the dynamics of a culture.

If procreation is for its own sake, it can be done without marriage. If at all it is entered upon, it is required only as a legalizing factor.

4.3.0 THE KHASI MATRILINEAL SYSTEM

At the beginning of the discussion on Khasi matriliney, it will be well to recall the graphic representation of the system given in Chapter I.
The illustration carries the essential features of matriline. Two of the three constituent elements of matriline, inheritance and descent are reckoned along the female line, and the third essential ingredient, succession, is reckoned along the male line on the maternal side. Naturally, there are also the concomitant features in the system.

4.3.1 The Visiting Husband is a common feature of most, if not all, matrilineal systems. Gurdon reported in 1906 of the presence of this practice among the Khasis. Mawrie says that traces of it can still be found among the Pnars. He says that a "married man stays in his mother's house after marriage until his wife has borne him an issue or two, and then only he goes to stay permanently with his children. During the time that he stays in his mother's house, the married man works and earns for his mother's house, and should the children be in any difficulty due to their poverty, he would feed them. During this time he works and eats in his mother's house and only during the nights he goes to his wife and children."

The practice of visiting husband could have been co-existing with village endogamy as Krieshon Raphat believes it was. If a man married a little far away from his home of origin, he would find it difficult commuting between his mother's house and his wife's.

The weakening of the Khasi matrilineal system started with the gradual disappearance of the visiting husband. Usually, if a man married a little too far from his mother's house, he would find it difficult commuting between
his mother's house and his wife's house. Eldon Rapthap has recorded that it was Thomas Jerman Jones who, more than a hundred years ago, persuaded the Pnars to turn away from the practice and advised them that the men should live with their wives and children.

The age of the visiting husband was the age of U Kni, the Uncle. With the gradual passing out of the practice of visiting husband, and with the advent of the nuclear family, the Kni distanced himself more and more from his nephews and nieces and was reduced in importance, but still exercise authority over them. The image of the father is becoming more and more defined in the family where a man lives with his wife and children.

The dual identity and function of man as husband to his wife, and brother to his sister(s), and as father to his children and uncle to his nephews and nieces, is nothing new. It is a universal fact. The cultural differentiation lies in the stress and significance on the one hand, and the functions and the authority on the other. When the practice of visiting husband was prevalent, the image of man as brother to his sister and uncle to his nephews and nieces was most significant; his image as husband and father was minimal.

With the disappearance of the visiting husband and the advent of the nuclear family, man's image as husband to his wife and father to his children is becoming more and more marked. The following illustration may be of help.
When the age of the brother and uncle moves out to give room to the age of the husband and father, two kinds of changes are seen to take place:

a) Three primary changes:

i) The position of man shifts to the right; the husband-and-father comes into the family of his wife and children and evicts the brother-and-uncle.

ii) The status of the man changes significantly from being a brother-and-uncle to being a husband-and-father.

iii) The locus of his authority changes from his family consisting of his sister, nephews and nieces, where he exercises his authority as brother-and-uncle, to another family, consisting of his wife and sons and daughters, where his authority is that of husband-and-father.

b) Two secondary changes:
i) The locus of the woman remain constant; it is the man who shifts. Her relation to the children remains constant, but her relation to the man in the family changes from that of a sister to that of a wife.

ii) The position and role of the children in the family remains unchanged. However, their identity in respect of the male in the family may be altered from being nephews and nieces, to being sons and daughters.

There is a considerable change in the orientation of the socialization of children. Under the authority of the uncle, socialization is maximum towards the cognates, the Kur. In the presence of the father, socialization goes also towards the agnates, the Kha.

4.3.2 Man: Uncle and Father

In Khasi matriliny, the identity of man being at the same time a father and an uncle was all right when the matrilineal system was strictly adhered to. He was the uncle and he exercised full powers over his family consisting of his sister and his nephews and nieces; he worked for them and their well-being. The changes that started more than a hundred years ago, and which have been gathering momentum since the last few decades, have badly affected the system and man has ended up being a split personality. At present he is neither one nor the other, precisely because he tries to be both. He is a man in two worlds,89 the world of his family where he is the father and the world of the family where he is the uncle. He has very aptly been compared to the colossus of Rhodes90 which was bound to fall. He is torn
between the "conflicting obligations towards the inning of his sister and the inning of his wife". His position and authority as the king climbed down rapidly. This would not have affected his position so badly if he was only advisor, as C. Lyngdoh seems to believe. As things stand, he is a man of divided loyalties and it is here that his middle begins to show.

4.3.3 The Matrilineal Puzzle

Matriliny is a system which differs from patriliny in that in patriliny the three constituent elements, succession, inheritance and descent are all conveniently vested in the father, whereas in most matrilineal systems, inheritance and descent are vested in the female, and succession is vested in the male and female on the mother's side. This is shown in the illustration on page 104.

Popular writers and columnists have not been able to appreciate the significance of the division. Our ancestors (Longshwa-Manshwa) have been praised for their singular wisdom, by many like E.L. Lyttan. After all, Khasis are said to be ancestor worshippers (even more than hero-worshippers) and hold their ancestors in awe and special reverence, as Hipshon Roy says. But when we find that this is not only about Khasis, then we begin to wonder whose ancestors these columnists are praising.

What must be realized soon enough is that in matrilineal transmission of property and the principles of descent are usually in the hands of women. Property is handed on from the mother to the daughters. Descent is traced
from the mother to her children. For one reason or another, both in patriliney as well as in matriliney, wisdom has always entrusted authority to males. It is exercised by the dominant male and passed on from him to the next dominant male. In patriliney, it is passed on from father to son, and in matriliney from the maternal uncle to the nephew.

The why and wherefor of this separation have not yet been clearly known. But the opinion that "transmission of property through inheritance is the practice most obviously informed by, or embodying, matrilineal ideology in that it equates those who have a right to one another's property with those who share common substance" sounds viable enough. It also becomes logical that descent should follow inheritance.

4.3.4 Inheritance and Descent

Khasi thinkers are conscious that both inheritance and descent are vested in the women and many a man is groaning under the system. Before attempting an answer to the question why inheritance and descent are matrilineal, the question whether inheritance follows descent or is it the other way around, has to be disposed of.

If we call inheritance the material or visible substance, and descent the invisible substance, it does seem likely to stand to reason to suppose that human prudence would base the family system on the visible substance. Human survival depends primarily on the material support. Therefore, at the level of an intellectual exercise, we may conclude that descent follows
Inheritance. At the same time, Ladislav Holy's finding is that "there is no logical reason to assume that a change in the system of inheritance has invariably to be accompanied by a change in the conceptualisation of descent".\textsuperscript{98}

Inheritance is matrilineal, because:

1. It was the instinctive wisdom of our ancestors.\textsuperscript{99} Our system is "unique"\textsuperscript{100} it is a wise institution of our ancestors, so it cannot be changed,\textsuperscript{101} because it will lead to incestuous unions. Matrilineal inheritance brings about and reinforces "matrilineal solidarity".\textsuperscript{102} Joplin Nongdhar, a staunch feminist, goes even beyond the ancestors to God the Creator Himself; it was his wisdom.\textsuperscript{103}

One cannot help asking what is unique about the Khasi matriliney. The world over, there are hundreds of matrilineal societies. Are the ancestors of all patrilineal societies wise? Is God wise only because he has ordained our society to be matrilineal?

2. Inheritance was originally reckoned along the male line. D.T. Laloo\textsuperscript{104} says that it was because of the bravery of women who defended their honour, territory and property against a plundering chief from the plains while the menfolk were out hunting, that men entrusted to their women their children, land and property. Men's activities often required them to be away from home.

C. Lyngdoh supposes that matrilineal inheritance is the result of the
guilt feelings of the men who, "like David of old, their hands were full of blood" because of "constant warfare and bloodshed". So they thought it best to leave religion, their children and property "in the hands of their womenfolk". Similarly, S. Nongneng and H.S. Nongkynrih impute the system to the fact that men were warriors and the womenfolk remained at home. Many of the men died in the battles and raids, leaving their children fatherless.

The Khasis were warriors is a fact. Gurdon described them as "troublesome marauders, whose raids were a terror to the inhabitants of the plains". Lindsay, in his accounts, quoted by Gurdon, called Khaïs "a tribe of independent Tartars".

Hamlet Bareh narrates a similar "fable" or "folk-tale" as he calls it. On their migration from Tibet, the Garos were being pursued and harassed by the Koches. The Garos appealed to the Khasis who had settled in an area the centre of which was the Kamakhya hill near Guwahati. In their defeat, the Khasis abandoned their kingdom and migrated. In the battle, the king fell by the sword and the crown was offered to his commander-in-chief, who refused it because he felt he was unworthy of the office. So the crown was offered to the maternal nephew of the king, and the boy accepted it. The "from uncle to nephew" procedure developed into the matriliney that Khasis have.

3. Many people like Fabian Lyngdoh, feel that matriliney is entirely
in tune with nature. God the Creator has ordained for all creatures that the
young should be cuddled "close to the heart of the mother". They are her
"flesh and blood"; she is the nest builder, while the man is the bread winner.

The traditional Khasi understanding of "flesh and blood" has a peculiar
connotation which is not necessarily scientific. It is believed that both father
and mother contribute to the biological conception of their children. A child
is considered the result of a combination of ka ksuit from the father and ka
snam from the mother. Ka ksuit really means the puss; it refers to the semen
which, in appearance is very much like puss. Ka snam means the blood of
the mother. The inference is the cyclic menstrual flow of women, which, howe­
er untrue, readily lends itself to the conclusion that blood is the mother's
contribution to the conception of a child. What is more important is the conco­
mittant belief that Ka snam ka kham rben ban ia ka ksuit (the blood is thicker
than the puss) is that the relationship of the children with the mother is stronger
and far more vital and important than their relationship with the father. Whenev­
er a Khasi speaks of ka snam and ka ksuit, he knows exactly what he means,
and what is implied.

This is another point of difference between Norbert N. Nongrum and H.O.
Mawrie. Mawrie calls the children the flesh and blood of the mother, while
Norbert calls them the flesh and blood of the father. And yet both say
the same thing and are both right. It does seem a contradiction to the special
love and reverence that a Khasi has to his Kha.

Finally, Dr. Homiwell Lyngdoh agrees with the supposition that matri-
liny is in consonance with the ways of nature, because:

a) Even mother earth nurtures the seeds planted in her till it is fully grown. The fruits and flowers return to the earth.

b) The vapour rises up from water as cloud, and returns to the earth as rain.

c) The young ones of the animals follow the mother and cry for her when they are hungry or in danger.

4. Another source of support for matriliny comes from those who say that the mother is the one who conceives and nurtures the child within herself for nine months, goes through the ordeal of childbirth and fondless and suckles the infant after it is born. This sort of reasonings contain high emotional charge.

Evidently, there is a confusion between nature and culture. Mothers of all times, places and cultures, and bear, dandle and suckle their children in the same way. Yet more than half of the mothers in the world are not from the matrilineal system which is purely a cultural mechanism. Rightly then, does T. Phanbuḥ challenges the above stand.

5) Another alleged cause for matriliny is the uncertainty of fatherhood.

It is not that matriliny causes the uncertainty of fatherhood which can be as uncertain in patriline, nor that patriline is anymore solution to the problem than matriliny. But matriliny is seen as a design which takes care, not of the certainty of fatherhood, but of the consequences of sexual activity, whether
or not intended, Khasi matriliney accepts and cares for all the children whether
they are born within the wedlock or not. There are no "illegitimate children." It is not in the sense that fatherhood is automatically certain, but that children
are not unclaimed because matrilineal descent legitimizes them into the clan.
This is both an advantage as well as a disadvantage.

6) "... The human male is stronger and more aggressive than the female,
and that is very likely one major biological source of the dominance of males
in all family systems". Khasis have another way of saying the same thing.
They call man u khatar-buit u khatar-bor, he is warrior, and the woman is
ka shi-buit ka shi-bor:  

buit : a) sagacity, practical wisdom, shrewdness, acumen; b) means,
resources, ways and means.

bor : power, strength, authority, influence.

khatar : literally, it means twelve (12); figuratively, it signifies full-
ness, abundance, or plentitude.

shi : literally, means one, single; figuratively, it indicates paucity,
inadequacy, exigency or indigence.

Miss Nycil Mon is the only one who likes to differ from that universal
and time-hallowed piece of wisdom. Her equation is: Man is 1 buit + 12 bor
and Woman is 12 buit + 1 bor. Man is powerful, but not cunning; woman is
weak and dependent, but full of craftiness, seductiveness, treachery and guile.
She is a Delilah. Nycil Mon's experiential conclusion is devastating indeed:
"Therefore, Man falls to her charms, crumbles under her spell, and is destroyed, 'as Samson was', by her seduction, treachery and deceit".122

Evidently, Miss Nycil is tuning on the wrong wavelength. What is meant is not the mutual conquests of man and woman through power and authority on the one hand, and guile, seduction and betrayal on the other; but the natural endowment to man and woman.123 After all, the maxim that the strength of the weaker sex lies in the weakness of the stronger sex for the weaker sex is being proved more and more true day by day. M. Deva Santhanam has something very interesting to say in this connection.124

Matriliney is supposed to compensate womankind for the lack of natural endowment. Matriliney also protects womankind from being exploited, mal-treated and unduly harassed by the in-laws when they are married into patrilineal families.125 Mr. Subash Sangma, with whom the investigator had a discussion, believes that matriliney means also virilocal residence. In India, we are not unfamiliar with stories of bride-burning. Matriliney protects woman by keeping her in her own house.

7. Matriliney has an intimate relation to agriculture. On the one side, matriliney is an aspect of the agricultural economy. Agriculture, the "bounty of the soil",126 is believed to have been discovered by woman. Womenfolk band themselves together in cooperative work in farms. Women came to be compared to the earth and this gave rise to the emergence of the garden concept of marriage and womanhood.
Several people write and talk of marriage and womanhood with reference to the garden concept, but the most articulate has been Snenglem A. Kurbah. The others are Dr. Homiwell Lyngdoh, H.O. Mawrie, Joplin Nongdhar, T. Sohtun, Dolin Mallai among many others.

The garden concept of marriage and womanhood was developed by Walter Trobisch in the 1970s, based on the book *Marriage : East and West* by David and Vera Maces. The garden concept of marriage or womanhood is based on unscientific assumptions. It conceives man as the sower of the seed, and woman as the soil, or the earth, or the garden. Man plants his seed in the woman, whose body receives and nurtures the seed just as the soil does to the grain of rice. Just as the plant grows out of the grain, the child grows out of the seed of man.

The garden concept in its totality is a patrilineal ideology, the whole of which cannot be transferred to and fitted into the matrilineal system. The patrilineal system looks at the concept from the vantage point of man as the owner of the field, the sower of the seed, and the owner of fruits. Matriliney looks at it from the point of view of the woman as the field and recipient of the seed. The seed once sown belongs to the woman. It is something like "Goods once sold cannot be taken back", or reclaimed.

4.3.5 Inheritance

Inheritance according to the matrilineal principle is from mother to daughters. The War people along the southern and south-western border of Meghalaya
are known to practice bilateral inheritance, that is, from both parents to sons and daughters.\textsuperscript{134}

Property is divided into:

(a) \textbf{ancestral property} which, "from its very nature, denotes jointness. It is supposed to be held in common by every member of the family. It was never meant to be sold or disposed of."\textsuperscript{135} Ancestral property is called Ka Nongtymmen. Khongphai defines it as "the property one inherits from one's parents or grandparents."\textsuperscript{136}

(b) \textbf{Self-acquired or separate property (Nongkhynraw)} is "the one which one earns while living or earning alone,"\textsuperscript{137} that is, before marriage. Traditionally, self-acquired property is never owned by the individual alone. Presently, there are several cases of unmarried young men and women who earn, and are even encouraged by their parents to keep their earnings as personal.\textsuperscript{138} However, when self-acquired property is owned by the clan, or more often, by the family of orientation it becomes Kamai iingkur.

(c) \textbf{Kamai iingkur} is the "property one acquires while living with his mother, brother and sister ... or property belonging to his mother, that is to his clan."\textsuperscript{139} Kynpham Singh is of the opinion that children cannot acquire the wealth and property belonging to the father before marriage.\textsuperscript{140}

(d) \textbf{Kamai iing-khun iing-tnga} consists of the "property one acquires after marriage."\textsuperscript{141} This property goes to the man's family of procreation. A man can take to his wife's home only his personal effect which must be returned
Matrilineal inheritance has two outstanding features:

(a) according to matrilineal descent, inheritance passes on from mother to daughter(s),

(b) among the daughters, the youngest gets "the lion's share".

Back in 1938, C. Lyngdoh, probed deep into this practice and answered, among others, two relevant questions.

(i) "Why women and not men are holders of properties? The answer is, I believe, because like David of old, their hands were full of blood - constant warfare and bloodshed - they thought it best to leave the religion in the hands of their womenfolk." One thing becomes abundantly clear: C. Lyngdoh started out with the question on "properties" and ended with "religion". It means that religion was considered by him to be part of the inheritance, or/and that religion is intimately linked to inheritance.

(ii) "... How is it that in the case of all ancestral property, the Khatduh (youngest daughter) gets the largest share of the property?" Lyngdoh started answering this question by clarifying a misunderstanding of most non-Khasis:

a) Ka Khatduh succeeds not to the property but to the office as custodian and keeper of it.

b) She does not own the property, she is only the custodian of it on behalf of the family.

c) She cannot dispose of or transfer or alienate it. She is the custodian;
but in all matters, she has to consult her brothers and sisters, and above all, she has to take only their "advice", as C. Lyngdoh says; but the final authority lies with the seniormost uncle or the one after him. This is not only because she is the "least experienced", but also because females inherit and the ownership resides with the entire clan, both males and females, and the controlling authority lies with the males. This constitutes one of the inherent contradictions of matriliney.

Commenting on the opinion of C. Lyngdoh, Hipshon Roy further quotes him, "it is a Khasi sentiment that the first daughter should be married first and so on according to the order of seniority. Each daughter when she gets married is given a separate house inside the ancestral land. By this process of elimination the last daughter is naturally the last to remain in the house and she is, therefore, left in charge of the properties belonging to the family".145

Ka Khatduh is the custodian of the family property and the family religion. "Being in charge of the properties," says C. Lyngdoh, "she has also to look after the religion of the family. To be more correct, she holds the properties because she holds the religion of the family."146 The ancestral or parental house which passes on to her custody is also the house where the family religion is maintained and is continued. It is the house in which any member of the family may take shelter in moments of personal difficulty.

Ka Khatduh is entrusted with the maintenance and safe-keeping of the family property, religion, name and the security of all the members. She has the duty to care for all the orphans of the family and the members in distress.
Mawrie says that the khatduh "judges and arbitrates over whom to pull up and whom to give the necessary help."\(^{147}\)

Corresponding to these obligations, she is also given the means to enable her to discharge her duties,\(^{148}\) each of which, can involve a lot of money. Then again, she is not the owner, but the custodian for and on behalf of the family. Kynpham Singh puts that across very clearly: "... nowhere in the teaching of the Khasis is it indicated that the woman, whether she be ka khun mihling\(^{149}\) or ka khatduh is the absolute owner of the wealth or property and that hers and hers alone is the right to dispose, transfer or alienate. A woman inherits her position in the kur with the responsibility reposed thereon but not the property."\(^{150}\)

Kynpham Singh also confirms that the plots of land allotted to daughters other than the khatduh are given only for use and occupation. The ownership residing with the kur. The senior-most male, the uncle or the eldest brother advises, directs and controls all the affairs of the kur, whether material or religious.

Reportedly, the long-standing and widespread misunderstanding of the position of ka khatduh began in 1918 when the British Government legalized position of the youngest daughter as the hieress to all the family wealth and property. In that instance, inheritance was distinguished and separated from religion.\(^{151}\)

Changes have been rapid and the question of inheritance is one area where people are still very susceptible. They have been quick to take advantage of
the spirit of change whenever they can bypass the responsibilities. The "special status" of ka khatduh gradually emerged as the heiress, and her image as the custodian faded into the past. As it has been pointed out earlier, today many parents share the property among all the daughters, and even among sons.

Norbert N. Nongrum is one of those who feels that self-acquired property of the father should be passed on to the son(s), and no longer to the daughter and, through her, to the son-in-law. C.B. Jawphriaw and Pyniarbor Sylem, go even further in their claim that all the children have an equal right to the wealth and property of their parents. Eldon Raptap alleges that male inheritance had its precedents even in the time of Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy. The movement gathered momentum and gained the support of eminent persons like the members of the TWADAM and Mrs. Maysalin War, Mrs. Bon Marbaniang and others who spoke very positively about the movement in the Dinam Hall, Shillong, on 25 July, 1980. Mrs. Tri Shadap instead had already been more vocal and convincing in her language of deeds. This is still a sensitive issue, and, quite naturally, politicians, as a matter of convenience, were cautious and slow to commit themselves lest they affected their vote banks.

4.3.6 Separation and Divorce

The raison d'être of marriage as it has been said earlier, is the begetting of offsprings for the purpose of continuity of the race. Therefore, if, for any reason, on the part of either partner, that primary purpose is not achieved,
a particular marriage need not continue. H.O. Mawrie says that children are a man's fulfilment as father, a woman's fulfilment as mother, and a bond of unity between the parents and the clan. Thus, barrenness and sterility justify separation and divorce.

Another cause of divorce is infidelity on the part of the woman. The Christian and legal understanding of infidelity and adultery is different from the understanding of it by a traditional Khasi. The Khasi understanding of adultery or infidelity is especially on the part of the woman who has not honoured her word, her sacred covenant with her husband by going for illicit sexual intercourse with a man other than her own husband, either in his lifetime, or after his death, but before the prescribed period of time has expired, usually a lapse of one year following the death of the husband. Before the woman is allowed by customary laws to remarry, she is required to return to his clan the bones of the deceased husband. Until then she is not considered free of her obligations to her husband and his clan.

The sin of a woman consists in this that she breaks her solemn promise, her sacred covenant and profanes the sacred marital ties. The covenant is not only between her and her husband, but also between her clan and his.

Gurdon mentions incompatibility as another reason for separation. Incompatibility only means that the two cannot live peaceably and cannot get on well with each other.

Customary laws do not allow a man to divorce his wife during her pregnancy; he must wait till she delivers.
As in other family systems, the rule of adultery is much more stringent on the woman who is the home-keeper and nest-builder, and lenient on man who is the bread-winner, for obvious reasons. This is particularly so in patriarchal cultures. Couple no.5-P1 is a case of separation subsequent to the infidelity of the woman. The man left the first wife and then remarried.

Khasis regard marriage as a sacred institution, and divorces were few till the time of the British rule. The Native Converts Marriage Dissolution Act XXI was passed in 1866, and the Indian Divorce Act IV in 1869. These two Acts were included in the powers of the District Commissioner who was made the District Judge Under Act IV of 1869. In 1883 the legal procedures of divorce were universalised in India. Assam further tightened the rules in 1895, and by 1897 court divorces had become a matter of fact.

4.3.7 Position of Man and Woman

When considering the position of man within the Khasi matriliney, we may begin with the time when man was based in the mother's household, and as uncle held all authority. As father, he was only the procreation. To his wife, he was only her visiting husband. In the second stage, when the husband started living with his wife and children, his status and role as husband and father became more pronounced. His authority as uncle started to wane as a result of the fact that he no longer lived side by side with his sisters, nephews and nieces. Thus the mighty Colossus shifted his weight from one leg to the other, from the right that had been hitherto firmly planted in his family of origin.
to the left in his family of procreation. However, in the second phase, he is only gradually building up his status to the measure of that which he had previously. The statement made by P.R. Gurdon in the first decade of this century that "in his wife's clan he occupies a very high place, he is second to none but u kni, the maternal uncle, while in his own family circle a father and husband is nearer to his wife than u kni",\(^{163}\) must be understood in this sense and within this context. H.O. Mawrie says that "a father's status in the family is unique. He is the main pillar supporting and sustaining the family."\(^{164}\)

Another factor that affects the status of a Khasi man is the status of his wife. If he is married to a woman other than the youngest daughter (Chie Nakane calls her non-heiress), he is "respected and honoured as a father in his family for the rest of his life. By this type of marriage the man's status is firmly established. It is, therefore, a more secure form of marriage ..."\(^{165}\) Kynpham Singh confirms Nakane by making the man the "head of the family".\(^{166}\) On the other hand, if the wife is ka khatduh - a heiress - his position is precarious. He usually lives matrilocally, that is, with his wife, her parents, her unmarried brothers and sisters. His "life after marriage under such circumstances require great adjustment and endurance. The husband's status is especially weak when a male member of the wife's kin lives in the same household... The tie between the uncle and the nephew is so strong that the father is rather an additional member of the household",\(^{167}\) he is only an appendix.

The fragile position of man is, thus, the result of the conspiracy of two
independent factors: a) the loss of authority in his family of orientation which loss is not compensated for by his authority in his family of procreation; b) the position of his wife as heiress or non-heiress.

Whereas the status of man has grown downwards, the position of women has been rising steadily. P.R. Lyngdoh, in her speeches and writings, has given more than the following four opinions about the Khasi woman of today:

a) Khasi women are comparatively more free. "To the fair sex of the world who are fighting for women's lib, here we offer the best example, a society in which the women are held in high esteem and regard and hold a dignified position." However, by what criteria does she judge that this is the "best example"? What are her terms of comparison?

b) "... Khasi women are not aggressive and do not think themselves superior to men. In fact, the married woman is subordinate to her husband in all respects." That the Khasi women are "not aggressive" and do not "think themselves superior to men", and their subordination to their husbands, are all small mercies to men, or are they so by propriety and nature?

c) Even in the Khasi society (which has been traditionally quite a female-centred society), women have been systematically excluded from the exercise of political or administrative authority. Hens do not crow, but if they do, it is a sign that the world is tumbling to its end, goes a Khasi saying.

d) The youngest daughter (ka khatduh) is the custodian of the family religion, but priesthood has always been the privilege of menfolk.
Nalini Natarajan points out that education has greatly enhanced the status of women.\textsuperscript{170}

The female-centric characteristic of Khasi matriliney has given rise to centripetal tendencies among men. Natarajan makes an observation that a Khasi is deeply attached to his land and his kin.\textsuperscript{171} Ten years earlier than Natarajan, Chie Nakane had taken note of men's "strong tendency to spend most of their time at their sister's house".\textsuperscript{172} Then she concluded: "Thus the strong matrilineal structural principle tends to orient a man towards his own descent group, the \textit{jing}'\textsuperscript{173} (house), where he is secure and feels more truly a man.

The centripetal tendency lends itself to some domestic aberrations both for the man, and for the woman.\textsuperscript{174} Excessive attachment to one's family members, on the part of either partner in life, is often the cause of difficulties, tensions, or even break-up of marriages.
Notes and References


20. Ibid., p. 11.


24. Ibid.

26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. For example, see Nongrum, N.N., 1989, p. 5.
31. See also Rymbai, R.T., loc. cit., p. 32.
33. Kynpham Singh, pp. 122ff and Juanita War, loc. cit., p. 8, express similar idea.
37. Gurdon, P.R., The Khasis, Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990 (Reprint), p. 77. (The Original Print was in 1907).
38. Ibid., p. xix.
41. Ibid.
42. U Hipshon Roy, "The Land where Women are Women and Men are Men", Seng-kut-Snem, 1988, p. 88.
45. Ibid., p. 1.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
60. Kharakor, P., op. cit., p. 45.


70. There was such a case as recently as in 1990. U Pherbak and Ka Slipti had already been living together. Both are Lyndgoh-Rngaid, and divorcees. Their *kur* had advised and warned them against the union. When the couple failed to comply and deliberately went against the directives of the *kur*, the pair was disowned, dispossessed an excommunicated by the clan in the clan durbar held on 28 February 1990, and the fact, excommunication and their photographs were published in *Dongmusa*, VI(13), 29 March 1990, p. 5.


73. See Letter to the Editor *Ka Sur Shipara*, 3 June, 1978, p. 3.

74. Like the "I was Raped by my Father" case reported in *Readers' Digest*, 132(793), May 1988, pp. 173ff.

Father-daughter Incest: Ulrieh Traeger who was jailed on his own confession of having slept with his daughter "three times". His daughter Manuela Belz, now aged 25 and a mother of three, was terrorized at the age of 15 and raped by her father "at least once a week for more than five years". Traeger was jailed for 6 years (Tomy Caterall, "German Incest Trial Ends in Murder"), *The Telegraph*, IX(87), 17 October, 1990, p. 3.

76. Letter to the Editor (name withheld) *Ka Sur Shipara*, 18 November, 1978, p. 3.
133

81. In the sense of something that is of paramount importance, that is most beautiful, most essential or vital.
85. Gurdon, P.R., 1990, p. 76.


100. Lyngdoh, P.R., *loc. cit.*, p. 11.


135


120. Good, W.J., 1987, p. 27.


123. Most people subscribe to this belief. In fact, the interviewee couples S-Ls:1, S-Jo:1, S-Lab:1, S-B:19, S-Mk:15, did say that they will give more property to their daughters because "they are weaker". This is an additional advantage of being weak.
Did Adam sleep like a log
Before he met his help-mate;
Before the Potter moulded his rib
Into a weaker Eve?

He didn't wave his omnipotent wand
And say, 'FIAT HOMO'
Clay He took; put His nimble fingers
To squeeze out Adam but not a dame
Curse upon him who calls a woman weak
For she is made of a sublime substance
A bone of contention?!

Man is sodden and so he dissolves
While even a 'femme fatale' is nobler
Mysterious than the mystical rose
Womb is she of man and wooed
Woe unto him who abuses her.

Man is a cur who wags his tail
Shoots his tongue and pants, prowling.
A bone, a walking bone...
Would he pounce on a bone
Having nibbled for long?

A dog cannot eat and digest bones
A bone only mars, only bruises.
Can't he learn this?
Why did the Potter create dogs and
Why bones?
125. See, for example, Nongrum, N.N., 1989, p. 33.


129. Mawrie, H.O., op. cit., p. 66.


132. In a conversation with the investigator on 10 October 1987.


137. Ibid.


139. Ibid.


141. Ibid.

142. Ibid.

143. Lyngdoh, P.R., loc. cit., p. 13.
149. Daughters other than ka khatduh.
151. Rapthap, K., "Ka Jingkhyllum ka Bor u Kni", *Dongmusa*, IV(50), 8 December 1988, p. 4.
156. *Ka Sur Shipara*, 2 August, 1980, p. 3. It reported that B.M. Pugh and M.N. Majaw were unwilling to interfere with the traditional Khasi law of inheritance lest they made a mistake. S.D. Nichols Roy was for the status quo, for the time being, as the people at large were not yet aware of the need of the hour. The Editor answered S.D. Nichols Roy, forthrightly that leaving the matter of sharing self-acquired property to all children optional to parents would lead to discriminations either against the other children in favour of ka khatduh, or against the sons in favour of the daughters.


160. Gurdon, P.R., 1990, p. 79.


163. Gurdon, P.R., 1990, p. 79.


168. Lyngdoh, P.R., loc. cit., p. 11.

169. Ibid., p. 13.


171. Ibid., p. 160.


173. Ibid., p. 127.

174. See letter to the Editor Ka Sur Shipara, XXVI(23), 21 August, 1989, p. 3.