CHAPTER IV

THE CONCEPT OF KA MEIRAMEW

The Khasis, since time immemorial, have perceived *ka Meiramew* as a living entity having a distinct and real existence. She is also conceived as the active goddess of the Earth. Like E. Bars, Phrikshon Lyngdoh describes *ka Meiramew* as the active goddess of the earth. He writes:

As the living creatures increased upon the surface of the earth, it was the duty of the mother earth to meet the needs of everything that lived and moved. As God had bestowed all the powers on her, it was her responsibility to approach God so that she could provide all the requirements that dwell on her. Khasis in the days of old, when they encounter any danger, they would call upon the mother earth, in response the mother earth comes to rescue...¹

*Ka Meiramew* has a significant role to play in the relation between *U Blei* and creation for she serves as a link between the visible world and the invisible world. Fr. G. Costa says: “In the beginning God created the heaven and Mother Earth.”²

Another Khasi writer Donbok T. Laloo holds a similar view. Laloo explains that *ka Hukum* is one of the names of God. He says: “In the beginning God created the Mother Earth.”³

Both these scholars emphasize the view that *ka Meiramew* is the first product of creation. All the celestial bodies of heaven and all
the living beings who live on the surface of the earth came into existence out of the joint efforts of \textit{U Blei} the supreme God, \textit{ka Meiramew} and \textit{u Basa u Ryngkew}.

Soso Tham, who is a Khasi poet, holds almost the same view. According to Tham, the Spirit of God is always at work in the world. In the beginning, it is the Spirit of God which created a conducive atmosphere for the creation to come into existence. Tham says: "The Spirit of God moves in the Heart of the seas and out of which the earth comes into existence." 

The three scholars mentioned above emphasize the view that \textit{ka Meiramew} has a dual nature. It has both, a material aspect as well as an immaterial aspect. While \textit{ka Meiramew} can be perceived as a goddess, she can also be seen as holding all living beings on her lap. Though \textit{ka Meiramew} is said to have arisen from chaos. She becomes a common and impersonal mother of all living beings: the humans, the gods, the elements like earth, fire, water, air etc. She gives birth to the sky and everything living on the surface of the earth and under the earth. It seems that the Khasis have a belief that \textit{U Blei} after creating the heaven on high and the earth below, has given the creative power to \textit{ka Meiramew} to complete the creative process by creating and recreating the remaining part of creation. G. Costa says:

\begin{quote}
In the beginning God created the heaven and Mother Earth. Mother Earth gave birth to the five children namely: the Moon, Sun, Water, Wind and Fire. The Moon and the Sun begot all kinds of stars in the firmament with their own glory and honour. The Wind, Water and Fire begot all things on the surface of the
\end{quote}
earth beginning from a big tree to the small grass, all kinds of animals, insects and all those who live on earth. When all these things were there, the Earth appeared greenery and beautiful.\(^5\)

*Ka Meiramew* seems to have numerous affairs and functions which resulted in the births of various other creations. However, the Khasi mythologies present *ka Meiramew* as a devoted mother who helps her children to maintain their continued existence. She is said to have nurtured and protected humanity and other living beings for thousands, even millions of years. She has patiently endured our hatred for one another and our disregard for the delicate balance of her nature. She has also endured our reckless manipulation of her body for selfish purposes. Despite our ignorance and indifference to *ka Meiramew* she continues to protect us from the perils of outer space by providing us with a home suited to our needs.

G. Costa and D. T. Laloo in their account hold the view that *ka Meiramew* had fervently and repeatedly requested *U Blei Nonghukum* (God who is the law-giver) to send down to Earth a ruler to rule it with a sense of stewardship and responsibility. The task of the earth’s ruler is to look after and promote the harmonious relationship among the created beings who are living on the lap of the Mother Earth. The ruler is meant to rule justly on behalf of God and to protect *ka Meiramew* from degradation.

As the story goes, in responding to *ka Meiramew*’s request, *U Blei* convened *ka Dorbar Blei kaba nyngkong* which means the first divine council of God held in heaven. The council decided that the
earth's ruler should be sent from amongst the members of *ki Khathynriew Bynriew* which means the members of the sixteen families in heaven. Out of the sixteen huts or families, the members of the seven huts or families known in Khasi local language as *ki Hymniew Trep* were selected to go down to earth and be the rulers of *ka Meiranew* and all the living beings.

At this point of discussion, I want to refer to some Khasi myths which describe the relationship between *ka Meiranew* and other sacred forces and also the relationship between the human beings who lived in *ka Bneng* up above known as *ki Khynrai Trep* which means the members of the nine families and the members of *ki Hymniew Trep* or the members of the seven families who lived on earth below.

(a) **U Sohpetbneng Myth (Refer Appendix I)**

The phrase 'U Sohpetbneng' means the navel of heaven. This myth explains the arrival of human beings on earth and how they lived on the lap of *ka Meiranew*. According to this myth the members of the nine families who lived in heaven could easily meet their counterparts who are the members of the seven families who lived on earth below. At that particular period of time, there was a huge navel string provided by God in the form of a golden ladder where the members of the nine huts or families who lived in heaven and the members of the seven huts or families who lived on earth could easily go up to heaven and come down to earth as they wished.
H.O. Mawrie is of the opinion that *u Sohpethneng* or navel of heaven is symbolic of a healthy relationship between man and God and man with other living beings. H. O. Mawrie says:

The central idea of the parable of *u Sohpethneng* is ‘Peace between God and Man’. In the context of this parable, God is imagined as a Personal God (anthropomorphized) who has a personal relation with Man. On the top of *U Sohpethneng* Peak there grew a tree which served as a ladder of communication between God and Man. That was then the Golden Age after the Creation. But this happy state of things had its end for in the course of time Man i.e., *U Hynniew Trep U Hynniew Skum*, the ancestors of the Khasi Race, drifted away from God to choose his own way and thus the Golden Bridge had to collapse. This parable speaks of one thing and that is Man’s transgression and Man’s fall.

S. S. Majaw however disagrees with Mawrie. He says, “*u Sohpethneng* is a symbol of Light because darkness was unknown at that period of time. It is also a symbol of covenantal relationship between God and Man. Man was a law abider of *Kamai ia ka Hok* which means the Law of Righteousness and the universal principle of Righteousness. Perhaps at that time, there was neither sunrise nor sunset”. One of the reasons for disconnection and separation of the naval string that connected *ka bneng* (sky) and *ka Meiranew* (Mother Earth) was that man did not abide by the Law of *Kamai ia ka Hok* which is the universal law and the essential principle of Righteousness.

Till today, the Khasi people, especially the traditional Khasis regard *u Lum Sohpethneng* as a sacred hill attached to the navel string
of heaven. It is believed that this particular hill is situated at Ri Bhoi.

As Sumer Singh Sawian writes:

Lum Sohpetbneng Peak is shrouded in an aura of sacredness and sanctity being the repository of ancient wisdom and the fountain head of deep religious philosophy, zealously guarding the spiritual belief, the territorial integrity and cultural heritage of the Hynniew Trep people.⁸

Then again, on the occasion of the Seng Khasi he states that a pilgrimage to Lum Sohpetbneng Peak signifies:

An awakening to understand the depths of the deep rooted Khasi Philosophy and Religious belief which is believed to have been bestowed upon the Hynniewtrep families, according to a covenant reached with God the Creator, upon the three stones of respecting fellow beings, while maintaining self dignity and respect, and continuous and spiritual communion with the Creator, Tip Briew Tip Blei, to settle on earth, having strong bonds of kinship both between the matrilineal bloodline and lineage and close patrilineal ties, Tip Kur Tip Kha, and earning of righteousness Kamai ia ka Hok.⁹

The traditional Khasis believe that U Blei reveals or manifests Himself on Sohpetbneng Peak which is part and parcel of ka Meiramew. But most of the Christian-Khasis regard the creation narrative associated with Sohpetbneng Peak just as a narrative technique used by the ancient Khasi thinkers to explain the vital relationship between God and man or between the Mother Earth and man. According to Fr. Barnes Mawrie, “This mythology explains the arrival of man into this world.”¹⁰
Hence there are two different views regarding the concept of ka Meiramew held by the Khasis. While the traditional Khasis regard ka Meiramew as a sacred mother, nourisher and provider of their needs, the Christian-Khasis do not regard ka Meiramew as a sacred mother.

(b) The Diengiei Peak Myth (Refer Appendix II)

‘Ka Diengiei’ is a gigantic tree which symbolizes the fall of man in general, and the people of Hynniew Trep race in particular. It is a symbol of darkness. It is the biggest gigantic tree ever grown on the laps of ka Meiramew. H.O. Mawrie writes:

The collapse of ‘The Golden Bridge’ on the top of U Lum Sohpetbneng marks the end of the Golden Age of U Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum and ushers in another which may be termed ‘The Dark Age’ as symbolized by ‘U Diengiei’. The Diengiei Peak is another peak lying just a few kilometres to the south-west of U Sohpetbneng Peak. The story goes that after the fall of U Sohpetbneng Tree which symbolizes the Fall of U Hynniew Trep U Hynniew Skum there grows on the top of U Lum Diengiei another tree which is so big and tall as one could imagine. The branches of the Tree are so overspread and the leaves so intertwined as to overcast the Earth with darkness.

It is believed that the Diengiei (tree) overcast the earth with dark shadows everywhere. Man had a tremendous sense of fear. He had a fear that under the dark cover of the Diengiei tree all kinds of wild and ferocious animals will come to kill him as their prey. Finally, man cut the Diengiei tree and consequently, there was no light in the entire world
(c) The Krem Lamet Latang Myth (Refer Appendix III)

When the Sun failed to give light the whole world of Hynnieuw Trep (people of seven huts) was totally in darkness. H.O. Mawrie writes:

A day was fixed for the Dance Festival and all living creatures turned up in their grand costumes. They danced throughout the day until they were tired and towards evening when they were about to depart, there arrived the Sun and the Moon, a sister and a brother and they too danced. Every one booed at them mockingly saying that it was evil that a brother and a sister should dance together... In anger the Sun went off to hide herself inside one cave called ‘Ka Krem Lamet ka Krem Latang’. With her withdrawal to the cave the Earth was enveloped with total darkness. Finally a Cock was used as a Messenger and its crowing the Sun reappeared and there was light again.12

This myth symbolizes a broken relationship among the members of God’s creation reminding one of the traditional Khasi belief that the World was originally just one unit. If there is any disorder of the things above or the things below it will consequently affect other members. The Khasi view of ka Pyrthei is thus a holistic view. This particular myth reminds us of the fact that sunlight is very essential for the living beings who live on the lap of ka Meiramew and caring of each other is another important aspect of social life.

First of all, a mother is a female parent of a child. This is a relative term which presupposes a relationship of love and care between the mother and the child. The concept ka Meiramew is an
attributive concept. It is so, because the term *ka Meiramew* in the Khasi language is not used in a literal sense but in an attributive sense. *Ka Meiramew* is a relational expression which shows the close relationship between the humans and the *Ramew*. According to Phrikshon Lyngdoh (Nongkrem), the term *Meiramew* includes, stone, soil, fire, water, earthquake, thunder, sun, moon, wind, etc. He says, *ka Meiramew* is a living entity and all the living things on *ka Meiramew* can grow.\(^{13}\)

In other words, if *ka Meiramew* is lifeless or dead, then the plants, vegetables etc., will not be able to grow. As a pregnant mother feeds and gives growth to the unborn child through the umbilical chord, so also *ka Meiramew* (Mother Earth) gives some sort of life substances. D. T. Laloo, G. Costa, H. Elias and R. S. Lyngdoh hold the view that human beings came to live on *ka Meiramew* (Mother Earth) from Heaven much later. This gives us an idea that the ancient Khasi thinkers have the notion that *ka Meiramew* was not livable in the beginning. May be it was too hot or its atmosphere was smoky or even poisonous at some stage.

To reiterate, for the Khasis *ka Meiramew* is not just the earth in its geological sense but a living entity which has a cosmic soul. They personified *ka Meiramew* as a female being who has a soul. As a human being cannot live without a soul or spirit, so also *ka Meiramew* can live or become a living entity only because it has some sort of spirit or soul. In other words, it means that the spirit of God works in *ka Meiramew*.
At times, the concept *ka Meiramew* has been used loosely by some people as a translation of the word 'nature'. But the concept *ka Meiramew* in the traditional Khasi thought refers to a metaphysical principle of great importance. It is also known as the principle of matter. The later use of *ka Meiramew* in the Khasi mythology as an epithet of the various goddesses, makes some scholars to identify *ka Meiramew* as a female principle.

*Ka Meiramew* is also understood widely as the productive principle, the substratum of *ka Pyrthei*. The Khasis in the olden times have the understanding that *ka Meiramew* is the source and power from which the things of the world are produced. It is perhaps, for this reason that some thinkers identify *ka Meiramew* with *ka Mariang* or Nature. In the other words, it means that *ka Meiramew* is also the material principle.

To recapitulate, the term *ka Meiramew* has a cluster of meanings in the traditional Khasi thought. It means, (i) the original state and the archetype, (ii) the material cause, (iii) the producer of effects, and (iv) the generative principle or the ultimate material principle. It also means the birth-giver or producer which is associated with goddesses and females beings. A pluralistic understanding of *ka Meiramew* would include the 'principles', the 'constituents' the 'parts' or the 'components' of *ka Pyrthei*.

It will be interesting at this juncture to compare *ka Meiramew* with the concept of *Prakrti* and the concept of *Purusa* with *U Basa U Ryngkew*. 
Samkhya, as is well known, is one of the philosophical systems of India. The founder of this system is Kapila. The Samkhya system deals with the existence of the two principles namely, Prakriti and Purusa. From the interaction or the interplay of these two principles, all varieties of life and matter are produced. This goes to say that every atom of matter is prakrti ensouled by an individual purusa which is the manifesting activity and life. In this fashion the entire phenomena of the universe is accounted for.

The Samkhya presents Purusa as a male principle. According to Samkhya, Purusa is eternal and absolute in its own sphere. It is absolutely independent. It does not depend on any one for its existence. The system treats Purusa as 'ultimately real'.

In the Samkhya system of thought Purusa is regarded as 'self' in the sense that it is pure consciousness which exists independently and apart from Prakrti. It is noted that according to Samkhya Karika there are many Purusas. However, Purusa is not to be regarded as 'self' in the sense of ego or mind. Purusa is the presupposition of individual consciousness. It is by the mere presence of the pure consciousness called Purusa that, the unconscious Prakrti can become intelligible. Again, it is the proximity of Prakrti with the pure consciousness Purusa that can lead to the emergence of self-awareness in the Prakrti.

It is said in the Samkhya Karika that the purpose of the coming together of Purusa and Prakrti and the resultant creation is two-fold. Firstly, it is for the enjoyment of Purusa. Secondly, it is for the
liberation of Purusa. In the process of coming together of Purusa and Prakrti, Purusa provides consciousness which makes creation possible and Prakrti by means of its first evolute, buddhi (intelligence), provides the knowledge which enables the realization that Purusa is different from Prakrti. This realization of the absolute distinction between Purusa and Prakrti is the precondition for isolation (Kaivalya) or release (Moksa) of Purusa from Prakrti.

Though Purusa and Prakrti are thought to be separated or unconnected, they have mutual interaction for the purpose of bringing about the process of creation, self-awareness and enlightenment.

Prakrti is also known as nature while Purusa is known as soul. Purusa is a still and silent witness of whatever Prakrti chooses to create. It does not interfere with her work. Prakrti, on the other hand, is restlessly creating, acting and effecting for the pleasure of Purusa. In the Samkhya Karika, Purusa is often described as a pure witness. Purusa is also regarded as the subjective counterpart of Prakrti (Primordial stuff) which is the material basis of the world. In the reproduction of the world, Purusa plays the role of an efficient cause.

Purusa is not only the great principle but also a force whose presence is necessary to awake the creative energy of Prakrti and to lead her into different evolutes. Purusa himself does not execute but he upholds Prakrti in her action and allows her to express her energy. He contains the action of Prakrti with his consciousness and enjoys it. It is he who gives the sanction to the work of Prakrti and she works out just what is sanctioned by Purusa for his pleasure and delight.
It may be noted that *Purusa* is not the surface ego but a silent self. He is a source of power and the original receiver of knowledge behind the ego. *Purusa* is the supporting consciousness, the cause, the recipient and support of all the works of *Prakrti*. According to *Samkhya Karika*, *Purusa* by nature is the witnessing soul which is isolated, neutral, inactive and perceptive.\(^\text{18}\)

The main aim of the evolution of *Prakrti* is for the production of a world of infinite form which serves as bodies for the *Purusa*. A wise man who identifies himself with *Purusa* can escape suffering by neglecting his relationship with the body which is a product of *Prakrti*.

The other of the two co-present co-eternal realities of *Samkhya* is the *Purusa*, the principle of pure Consciousness. *Purusa* is the soul, the self, the spirit, the subject, the knower. It is neither body nor senses nor brain nor mind (*manas*) nor ego (*ahankara*) nor intellect (*buddhi*). It is not a substance which possesses the quality of Consciousness. Consciousness is its essence. It is itself pure and transcendental Consciousness. It is the ultimate knower which is the foundation of all knowledge. It is the pure subject and as such can never become an object of knowledge. It is the silent witness; the emancipated alone, the neutral seer, the peaceful eternal. It is beyond time and space, beyond change and activity. It is self-luminous and self-proved. It is uncaused, eternal and all-pervading. It is the indubitable real, the postulate of knowledge, and all doubts and denials presuppose its existence. It is called *nistrãigunya*, *udasina*, *akarta*, *kevala*, *madhyastha*, *saksi*, *drasta*, *sadapra$k\tilde{a}$hasvarupa*, and *jnata*.\(^\text{19}\)
Chandradhar Sharma says, *Samkhya* gives the following five proofs for the existence of the *Purusa*:

a. All compound objects exist for the sake of the *Purusa*. The body, the senses, the mind and the intellect are all means to realize the end of the *Purusa*. The three *gunas*, the *Prakrti*, the subtle body all are said to serve the purpose of the self. Evolution is teleological or purposive. *Prakrti* evolves itself in order to serve the *Purusa*’s ends. This proof is teleological (*sanghatapararthatvat*).\(^\text{20}\)

b. All objects are composed of the three *gunas* and therefore logically presuppose the existence of the *Purusa* who is the witness of these *gunas* and is himself beyond them. The three *gunas* imply the conception of a *nistraigunya* that which is beyond them. This proof is logical (*trigunadiviparyayat*).\(^\text{21}\)

c. There must be a transcendental synthetic unity of pure Consciousness to coordinate all experiences. All knowledge necessarily presupposes the existence of the self. The self is the foundation (*adhisthana*), the fundamental postulate of all empirical knowledge. All affirmations and all negations equally presuppose it. Without it, experience would not become experience. This proof is ontological (*adhisthanat*).\(^\text{22}\)

d. Non-intelligent *Prakrti* cannot experience its products. So there must be an intelligent principle to experience the worldly products of *Prakrti*. *Prakrti* is the enjoyed (*bhogya*) and so
there must be an enjoyer (bhokta). All objects of the world have the characteristics of producing pleasure, pain and bewilderment. But pleasure, pain and bewilderment have meaning only when there is a conscious principle to experience them. Hence Purusa must exist. This argument is ethical (bhoktrbhavat).

e. There are persons who try to attain release from the sufferings of the world. The desire for liberation and emancipation implies the existence of a person who can try for and obtain liberation. Aspiration presupposes the aspirant. This proof is mystical or religious (kaivalyartham pravrtteh).

Then again, Samkhya gives the following three arguments for proving the plurality of the Purusas. According to Samkhya Karika, prakrti is one but there is a plurality of purusas (Karika XVIII).

a. The souls have different sensory and motor organs and undergo separate births and deaths. Had there been only one Purusa, the birth or death of one should have meant the birth or death of all and any particular experience of pleasure, pain or indifference by one should have been equally shared by all. Hence the souls must be many.

b. If the self were one, bondage of one should have meant bondage of all and liberation of one should have meant liberation of all. The activity of one should have made all persons active and the sleep of one should have lulled into sleep all other persons.
Though the emancipated souls are all alike and differ only in number as they are all beyond the three *gunas*, yet the bound souls relatively differ in qualities also, since in some *sattva* predominates, while in others *rajas*, and in still others *tamas*. Hence their difference.\(^7\)

Now, I want to just highlight the Khasi conception of *u Basa*. According to the traditional Khasi thought, *u Basa* is a male principle which co-exists with *u Blei* (God). It is eternal and absolutely independent from any female principle. It is also absolutely real. It is one of the basic concepts in the Khasi worldview. There is a plurality of *u Basa*. Before the arrival of Christianity in Khasi Hills, almost all the Khasi villages had their own ‘*u Basa*’ (male principle and deity) who as they believe, protect them, their villages and their properties. According to Phrikshon Lyngdoh,\(^8\) *u Basa* is the husband of *ka Meiramew*.

*U Basa* does not need to be liberated because it was never in bondage or captivity of any one. *U Basa* is the silent witness and protector of creation living and existing on the lap of *ka Meiramew*. According to the Khasi philosophical thought, all existent beings except human beings are composed of *u Basa* and *ka Meiramew*. Both *u Basa* and *ka Meiramew* are equally active. They cooperate with each other as husband and wife for the production of the world of objects. Their works and interactions are not for their own sake but for the sake of fulfilling of the divine plan of *U Blei* that is to produce creation in the universe.
The Khasis do not give proofs for the existence of $u$ Basa, but believe in its existence nevertheless. The reasons, which are purely descriptive and historical that make them believe in the existence of $u$ Basa are as follows:

a. Their ancestors traditionally and orally educated them to believe in the existence of $u$ Basa as a divine being who along with $ka$ Meiranelew carried out $ka$ Hukun $u$ Blei or divine command of God to continue His creation process. Through their divine marriage the world of objects will be brought into existence or into being.

b. In Khasi Hills, there are many sacred groves called ‘$Ki$ Khlaw Kyntang’ and each of these is believed to be the dwelling-place of $u$ Basa.

c. L. H. Pde and other thinkers hold the view that $u$ Basa is the protector and custodian of sacred forests or sacred groves ($ki$ Khlaw Kyntang Khlaw Niam). $u$ Basa will punish those who destroy the sacred forests by making them fall sick or appearing before them in the form of a tiger or a snake.\(^{29}\)

d. The traditional Khasis (non-Christians) even today offer annual sacrifices to $u$ Basa.

e. In the days before the arrival of Christianity, almost all the Khasis used to ask the help of $u$ Basa in their fighting against their external enemies. Even the Christian-Khasis believe in the
existence of $u$ Basa as an entity which is existing and operating in the world.

It is noteworthy to mention that `$u$ Ryngkew' is another name of $u$ Basa. At times, $u$ Basa is called `$u$ Basa $u$ Ryngkew'.

According to Phrikshon Lyngdoh, $u$ Basa is the first husband of $ka$ Lisan which is another name of $ka$ Meirumew. It is for this reason that in the previous chapters, $u$ Basa $u$ Ryngkew has been translated as 'the sky fathers and deities'. This simply means that $u$ Basa has different names and there is a plurality of $u$ Basa. But whatever may be the case, $u$ Basa or $u$ Ryngkew stands for a male principle or divine being created by God and co-existing with Him.

People believe that $U$ Basa manifests itself in two forms of a snake or a tiger. Snake is signal for danger and it appears only when people have done something wrong. Such snakes are quite different from normal snakes. The tiger appears to protect people from harm. In anticipation of any danger or epidemic, Lyngdoh (Priest) may offer prayers. Although these days the Lyngdoh is a Christian, he observes these rituals. Now-a-days no sacrifices are made inside the forest but the same is be done elsewhere. But the sacrificed animals (chicken or goat) are brought to the forest as token of offering to the Basa. People say that the sacred forest at Mawphlang is very old. They relate a number of instances indicating the power of $U$ Basa.

Once a lady from Mawphlang was on her way to visit her sick brother at Lynkien, a village which is a few kilometers away from Mawphlang. As she was walking
towards this village a snake appeared in front of her way. She was scared and called upon *U Basa* to help her. She spoke to the snake saying "if you are the *Basa* and wish to bring good news/luck please slip aside and let me proceed." The snake did not move. She pleaded with it over and over again but the snake continued to block her way. Then it dawned upon her that the snake was a bad omen. She realized that the snake had come to tell her that her brother, whom she was going to visit had done something wrong. She asked the snake to permit her to go to her brother saying that she would convince her brother who was ill to seek his forgiveness through the *Lyngdoh*. The snake moved aside and the lady hurried to her brother's house. There she asked her brother if he had desecrated the *Law Kynrang* in anyway. He admitted that he had cut down a few trees and had sold them. He then realized that he was sick on account of his action in the sacred forest. Realizing this he rushed to the *Lyngdoh* and confessed what he had done and appealed to him to seek forgiveness from *Basa* on his beheld. After this incident her brother slowly recovered.\(^{32}\)

In this story a close knit character of the Khasi society is clearly indicated. It was the brother who had cut trees of the sacred forest. He was sick but he never realized his mistake. His sister was reminded by the snake about the mistake committed by her brother. The actions of a person have their repercussion on the close kin. Therefore, they compel the wrong doer to realize his mistakes and seek forgiveness.\(^{33}\)

Another story popular in the village is that once an army unit had come to Mawphlang for some training. After their training was complete they entered the sacred forest, cut some trees, and loaded them in their trucks despite protests from the local people. As they were about to leave most of the army men suffered epileptic
fits. Later on it was learnt that some of them had become very sick. People thought that Basa intervened and punished the army people for their doings in the sacred forest.  

A comparison between Samkhya concept of Purusa and the Khasi concept of U Basa would help to understand the status of U Basa in the Khasi traditional thought.

**Samkhya Concept of Purusa**

- **Purusa** is known as ‘self’ in the sense of pure consciousness.
- **Purusa** is absolutely separate and independent of Prakrti.
- **Purusa** is not dynamic but static, knowing neither change of place nor of form.
- **Purusa** is also known as conscious soul.
- **Purusa** suffers from pain; it needs liberation.

**Khasi Concept of U Basa U Ryngkew**

- **U Basa u Ryngkew** is the divine ‘Being’ and God’s Agent.
- **U Basa u Ryngkew** always has an independent existence from ka Meiramew.
- **U Basa u Ryngkew** is dynamic and changeable. It can change its place and form.
- **U Basa u Ryngkew** is also known as divine soul.
- **U Basa u Ryngkew** does not suffer pain and does not need
- **Purusa** and **Prakrti** come together for the causation of creation.

- There are many **Purusas**.

- **Purusa** and **Prakrti** are eternal realities.

- **Purusa** is the silent witness of whatever **Prakrti** chooses to create.

- **Purusa** is the efficient cause of creation.

  *U Basa u Ryngkew* come together in the form of divine marriage for the purpose of making creation possible.

  There is a plurality of *u Basa u Ryngkew*.

  *U Basa u Ryngkew* co-exist with *U Blei*.

  *U Basa u Ryngkew* is the silent protector of creation, like sacred groves, etc.

  *U Basa u Ryngkew* along with ka Meiramew continues the process of creation.

In the Samkhya system, **prakrti** is eternal and absolute in its own sphere. It has an independent existence. It does not depend on any other for its existence. This system treats **prakrti** as ‘ultimately real’. **Prakrti** is, that from which this material universe with all its varieties has been evolved. According to *Samkhya*, this material
world including the human beings are the products of a 'single substance' called *prakrti*. It is assumed to be complex and all-pervasive. *Prakrti* is regarded as the primordial stuff of the entire world (manifest and unmanifest). In other words, *prakrti* is the name given to an entity from which this physical world has been evolved. According to Samkhya, *prakrti* is independent and ultimate. Its principle is 'spiritual'. It can be known by means of true knowledge or cognition. Davies John writes:

> Nature (Prakrti), is the root (of material forms), is not produced. The Great One (Mahat Buddhi or intellect) and the rest (which spring from it) are (substances), producing and produced. 

It is noted in the *Samkhya Karika* that there is only one *Prakrti*. *Prakrti* is an unconscious entity which implicitly contains the possibilities of all thought and substance. *Prakrti* can become intelligible. In the *Samkhya* system, *Prakrti* is more of a pure potentiality rather than a perceptible substance. It is composed of three strands of energy called *Guna*. These three strands of energy are *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Kapila holds the view that all objects of the world possess the three *Gunas* of producing pleasure, pain and indifference. In the *Samkhya* system, *sattva* is marked by pleasure and knowledge. Rajas is marked by the tendency of activity. It is the principle of movement, pain and mobility. *Tamas* is marked by indifference, bewilderment and heaviness. It is responsible for confusion. These *Gunas* are present in everything in the world. The pure potentiality of *Prakrti* can cause physical and psychic
happenings like pleasure, pain, indifference, etc.\textsuperscript{37} In the primordial matter (Prakṛti), these three strands of energy are in equilibrium. As long as this equilibrium is undisturbed, no actual manifestation can occur.

Prakṛti by means of its first evolute, buddhi (intelligence) provides the knowledge which makes realization possible. Prakṛti is thought to be separated or independent yet it has mutual interaction with Purusa for the purpose of bringing about creation. This system of thought is devoted to the achievement of absolute independence of man’s spirit from the phenomenality of Prakṛti (matter).\textsuperscript{38} According to the system of Kapila, existence is composed of Prakṛti and Purusa. Prakṛti is also known as nature. It is Prakṛti who chooses to create. She is restlessly creating, acting and effecting. Prakṛti (primordial stuff) is the material basis of the world. In the reproduction of the world, Prakṛti plays the role of an efficient cause.

She stands for female principle and no male can replace her either formally or functionally. This shows that Prakṛti as female principle is required for making creation possible.

The Samkhya divides existence into twenty five categories (Karika XXII). Twenty four of these are evolutes of Prakṛti. They are subject to modification and change.

When Prakṛti chooses to create, there is no one who can interfere with her work. Prakṛti is restlessly creating, acting, forming and effecting things.
The theory that causation means a real transformation of the material cause leads to the concept of Prakṛti as the root cause of the world of objects. All worldly effects are latent in this uncaused cause. As the first principle of this Universe, it is called Pradhāna, as the unmanifested state of all effects, it is known as Āvyaktā, as the extremely subtle and imperceptible thing which is only inferred from its products, it is called Anumāna; as the unintelligent and unconscious principle, it is called Jāda, and as the ever-active unlimited power, it is called Shakti. The products are caused, dependent, relative, many and temporary as they are subject to birth and death or to production and destruction; but Prakṛti is uncaused, independent, absolute, one and eternal, being beyond production and destruction. The extreme subtleness of Prakṛti makes it unmanifest and imperceptible; we infer its existence through its products. Motion is inherent in it in the form of Rajas. As the source of the inanimate world, it is unconscious. The entire world of objects is implicit in the bosom of Prakṛti. Evolution is the explicit manifestation of this world of objects, while dissolution is the returning of this world to Prakṛti.39

_Samkhya_ gives five proofs for the existence of Prakṛti which are as follows:

i. All individual things in this world are limited, dependent, conditional and finite. The finite cannot be the cause of the universe. Logically we have to proceed from the finite to the infinite, from the limited to the unlimited, from the _peros_ to the _aperos_, from the temporary to the permanent, from the many to
the one. And it is this infinite, unlimited, eternal and all-pervading *Prakriti* which is the source of this universe (*bhedanam parimanat*).\(^{40}\)

ii. All worldly things possess certain common characteristics by which they are capable of producing pleasure, pain and indifference. Hence there must be a common source composed of three *Gunas*, from which all worldly things arise (*samanwayat*).\(^{41}\)

iii. All effects arise from the activity of the potent cause. Evolution means the manifestation of the hitherto implicit as the explicit. The activity which generates evolution must be inherent in the world-cause. And this cause is *Prakrti* (*karyatah pravrttescha*).

iv. The effect differs from the cause and hence the limited effect cannot be regarded as its own cause. The effect is the explicit and the cause is the implicit state of the same process. The effects, therefore, point to a world-cause where they are potentially contained (*karanakaryavibhatag*).\(^{12}\)

v. The unity of the universe points to a single cause. And this cause is *Prakrti* (*avibhatag vaishvarupaya*).\(^{13}\)

'We bow to Prakrti', says Ishvarakrsna, 'the red-white-dark, the unborn mother and “nurse and receptacle of all generation”. Such is the conception of Prakrti in Samkhya.'\(^{41}\)
This reads very alike the Khasis vision of *ka Meiramew*. Like the *Samkhya’s prakrti*, for the Khasis *ka Meiramew* has an independent existence in the sense that it does not depend for its existence on *u Basa u Ryngkew* or any male principle at all. On the one hand, *ka Meiramew* is the first product of God, but on the other hand, it has an eternal existence because it co-exists with God. As discussed earlier, the Khasis also regard *ka Meiramew* as the primordial stuff of the entire material world (manifest and unmanifest).

The Khasis believe that the physical world come into existence, partly as a result of direct creation of God by His act of initial creation. But the rest of creation is a result of indirect creation in the sense that the variety of the world of objects come into existence or into being out of the mutual interaction of *ka Meiramew* with *u Basa u Ryngkew*. This process of creation is to fulfill the divine will and plan of God. P. Malngiang writes:

The Khasi believes that everything in the universe is created by God both directly and indirectly. The Khasi maintains that in the evolutionary process, God is always the efficient and final cause. According to the Khasi thought, the nucleus of the universe comes from God and not through an act of emanation. Basically there was an act of initial creation... In the beginning of time, God, who is also known as *ka Hukum* (Command) created *Ka Ramew* (Earth or terra firma) and from *Ramew*, He created *Ka Sugi u Bnai* (Sun and Moon), *ka Mariang* (nature), *Ka Layr* (Air), *ka Um* (Water) and *ka Ding* (Fire). *Ka Ramew* which is attributed with the notion of Mother Earth married *u Ryngkew* (land) and from this union, *U Maw* (the stone) and the *Khynkew* (the soil).
came into being. All these primordial elements worked hand in hand according to the design of God, the creator and Supreme Command. From Ka Ramew (Earth), there were born the green vegetation, trees and life that inhabit the earth.\(^{15}\)

The following points of differences and similarities between *Prakrti* and *Ka Meiramew* may be noted at this juncture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Samkhya Concept of <em>Prakrti</em></th>
<th>The Khasi Concept of <em>Ka Meiramew</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Non-conscious</td>
<td>Conscious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Primordial stuff of the world</td>
<td>Primordial stuff of the world and goddess of the earth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Active and ever forming the cycles of evolution.</td>
<td>Active and caused the birth of creation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Object.</td>
<td>Object and subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ultimately real.</td>
<td>Ultimately real.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Complex and all-pervasive.</td>
<td>Complex and pervasive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Eternal and self-existing.</td>
<td>Its substance is eternal and it co-exists with <em>U Blei</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exists independently.</td>
<td>Co-exists with God and functions dependently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The material cause of the universe.</td>
<td>The first product of God’s creation is both perceivable and imperceivable.</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uncaused and imperceivable.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Prakriti</em> is only one</td>
<td><em>Ka Meiramew</em> is only one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female principles</td>
<td>Female principle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Prakriti</em> is not produced.</td>
<td><em>Ka Meiramew</em> is produced and God dwells in her.</td>
</tr>
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<td><em>Prakriti</em> is the efficient cause of creation</td>
<td>God (<em>U Blei</em>) is the final cause of creation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Prakriti</em> is composed of the three <em>gunas</em>.</td>
<td><em>Ka Meiramew</em> is composed of innumerable elements and sacred forces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty four categories of existence belong to <em>Prakriti</em>.</td>
<td>Existence is not limited just to twenty five categories. It is full of complexities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NOTES AND REFERENCES


3. D. T. Laloo, Ka Rongbiria U Hynniew Trep, p.3.

4. Soso Tham, Ki Sngi Barim, XIV.

5. G. Costa, Ka Riti Jong Ka Ri Laiphew Syiem, p.1.


9. Ibid., p.52.


12. Ibid., pp.6-7.


35. Davies John, *Hindu Philosophy*, p. 44.


40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., p.153.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.