CHAPTER - IV

4.00: Khasi Religious Ceremony

When Ka Jingkieng Ksiar (Golden ladder) was disconnected, the relation between man and God discontinued. The transgression of mankind was getting from bad to worse. As God refused to converse with human beings directly, He promised to continue the dialogue through ‘Ki dak ki shin’ (signs) for all their doings and sacrifices.

The Khasis believe that cock became part of their ritual since the day of ‘Ka krem lamet ka krem latang’ (sacred cave) the story behind this goes like this. In the olden days, there was a grand dance festival, all living creatures were invited to participate in the dance, to celebrate with joy and happiness. All birds and beasts danced all day long towards evening, the sun and moon who were sister and brother arrived in the dancing ground disapproved it, as they thought it was immoral for a brother and sister to dance together. According to H.O.Mawrie,

It was the evil in the heart of Man to see evil when it was not there. In anger the Sun went to hide herself inside one cave called ‘Ka krem Lamet ka krem Latang’ with
her withdrawal to the cave, the Earth was enveloped in total darkness."

It was no wonder that the Sun should fly into a rage and make for 'ka Krem Lamet ka Krem Latang' to be away from man, as it is the animal in him to entertain such an idea as to think that a brother and a sister should harbour such an evil thought.

The earth became shrouded with darkness because the Sun had gone away to hide herself in a large cavern into which she could not be followed. Man and all living creatures had a grand meeting to discuss this critical situation and to select among them someone who would go in search of the Sun. Some animals tried but failed. The Hornbill had promised to go in search of the Sun, when he arrived at her house, he tried to woo her, the Sun in anger threw the wooden stool at him. This stool struck him on the head and it remains till today a reminder of the sad incident. Finally came the cock who is termed as 'u lymboit u lymbiang' not sufficiently dressed and after getting the dress from the birds and the beasts, he agreed to go in search of the Sun. The cock succeeded in bringing back the Sun from the hiding place. As the Sun promised the cock that she would come out after he crowed three times, so the Sun rises every morning synchronizing with the crowing of the cock. As it is pointed out that,

the position of the cock in the Khasi Religion has still to be made clear. Many have given a very un-Khasi interpretation to it. In the Khasi Religion it is the only medium through which Man can converse with God.²

J.K.Tariang through his article described that,

Ha kine ki por mynta iohsngew ba don kiba pynsngewthuh bakla ìa u syiar, hana, u long uba kit ba bah khala ìa ka lait ka let, ka pap ka sang kaba u briew u kum leh. Kynmaw parakur parakha ba ka jingshisha jong ka jingngeit jong u Khasi kam long kumta. Ha ngi kiba sdang ban bat ìa la ka jong ka niam bad kiba ju iohi bad iohsngew ìa ka jingkhad syiar ha la iing la sem, u syiar u long tang ka lad ha kaba ngi pдиang ìa ka jubab Blei, ìngba ki dak ki shin kiba ngi ìapan ha u rwieng jong u.'(At present there is a misunderstanding that the cock sacrificed its life for human beings and washed away all sins. The actual belief is that during the process of the divination of the cock and in the course of man's asking for signs in the Rwieng (intestine).

This can be described as:

In the 'Rwieng' (intestine) of a full grown Khasi cock, from the naval to a place about 52 cm there is a junction from which two tubes bifurcate and these two tubes run side by side along a layer of fat for about 15cm of 16 cm until they come to their ends in the form of heads. One of these tubes is called 'God' (U Blei) and the other is called 'man' (u briew) and man is little longer than God. This phenomenon explains the very

2. Ibid., p.38.
basis of the Theology of the Khasi Religion. It is Man that should ‘feng rangbah’ and God is there watching over him, watching whether he is covenant-abiding or not.  

Rabon Singh Kharsuka describes the practise of ‘Ka shat ka Khein’ which is made whenever any miseries or misfortunes, like calamities or illness, strikes a particular person or the whole family. He stated that,

U briew u lah ban khan da ka pylleng, da u sbai, da ka shanam, da ka rynhtieh, da u khwai, da u maw ne da kano kano kaba u sngevbite bad da kaba ong ba ka lah ban iathuh. 5 (There are ways and means by which an individual uses his own method of divination, such as egg, couries or shells, ka shanam or a lime case used by the Khasis, a bow, rice grains, stone or any other objects which can show the cause and reason through these signs).

It is a firm belief among the Khasis that rice is a life preserver and life giver, therefore it has immense control over human life. There is also a custom among the Khasi people to carry a handful of rice on their person, wherever they go, or whenever they go out of station. The reason for this is to avert all dangers in course of his or her journey.

The Khasis believe that human beings do not suffer without reason. For every single happening there must be a cause, as errors

and shortcomings are a part of human nature and no one can
escape them. This can be amendable as the Khasis called it ‘ka
lait ka let kaba don ha ka longbriew ka manbriew’. Rabon Singh
described about the mishap and the misery of the human beings
which he tries to find out the cause for such kind of misery, through
‘ka shat ka khan’ and ‘ka khein ka bishar’ known as diagnosis
through divination:

Haba ki shat pylleng ban kylli haba pang briew ne haba
ki kwah ban tip ia kaei kaei kaba ki thmu ki ju buh ia
ka pylleng hapdeng ka diengshat ki pynneh ia ka da
kaba buh khaew khyndiat kumba phra ne shiphew
symbok ynda u nongshat pylleng u la lah kren da kaba
u thmu u pan ka dak da ka jingkem lane jinglar; tang
tita ki dak artylli ki kham kongsan.6

The diagnosis means, during divination, in order to find out
the reason of misery or mishap or to learn about any important
issue, the diviner takes out a flat object made out of wood or an egg
breaking board and rice grains are kept aside. The diviner dashes
the egg on the board, he starts to read the signs of the bits and
pieces of the egg shell which spread out on the wooden board, and
to recognize the inside and the outside of the bits of the egg
distinctly. The eggshell that lies with its inside downward in the
right side of the board when the egg dashed is called ‘jinglar’ and
the eggshell that fall to the left side of the board with its inside

6. ibid., p.7.
downwards is called 'jingkem' only these two are important in asking for sign.

H.O. Mawrie described man as:

a special creature of God. He is comparably higher than any other creature. Man alone can express his mind and commune with God. If there is any deterioration on his part as a man, either he does not submit himself before God or because he forsakes Him altogether. 7

As the Khasis believe that their Religion is given by God which is based on the belief that as the understanding of the mystery of the Supreme Being thrives and grows with his stature and maturity, he would not resort to any forceful way of diverting the reason, thought and initial knowledge inborn in a Khasi. Man goes by the reason and adhere to the covenant from the beginning of time i.e. the golden age (aïom ksiar) where the relationship between man and God still very close.

The Khasi religion is the fundamental faith and the belief of the Khasis together with rites and ceremonies, based on such faith and belief;

For a *Khasi Ka Niam* (Religion) necessarily complements 'Ka Rukom' (Rites); hence the phrase 'Ka Niam Ka

Rukom'. *Ka Rukom* indicates the ceremonial aspect of religious observances, which must be according to the norms laid down in Ka Niam. The observances may occur in diverse ways and may differ from one part of the land to another but the principles of Ka Niam are the same. Observances and practices may differ even from one family to another but such diversity does not affect the religion.  

So the Khasi religion does not prescribe of any church, temple or mosque for worship. Nor does it depict God in any form or shape at all. Therefore a Khasi’s hearth and home is the abode of God, where all ceremonies for the living and the dead are performed, though different in ways amongst different clans without change in the fundamental belief. Therefore, the ancestors formulated a social philosophy from the faith and belief. There is a reason as pointed out that;

ba wat la ki jinghikai jong ka Niam Khasi ki long kiba lah ban pdiang da ki paid bynriew jong ka Pyrthei salonsar, hynrei kam lah ban kdup ia kiwei pat ki jaitbynriew namar kim don ka longkur longkha kum ki Khasi.9

It is the religion followed and practiced by the Khasis who have not adopted or converted to any other religion. It is the religion, which originates and thrives in Khasi Land. The religion that does

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8. Ibid., p.33.
not preach to convert others (other people belong to different religions of the world), because they do not have the kinship relationship as the Khasis.

Some of the religious ceremonies of the Khasis are mentioned below:

4.01 : Ka Polkha Poiman (Marriage)

The traditional Khasi system of marriage has been quite simple, arranged marriage was permissible. After the marriage generally the bride remains in her mother's house with the husband. The marriage is prohibited between the people who are related by blood. Not only this, marriage between man and woman belonging to the same clan is considered a taboo. This system is quite strict, both male and female cannot marry a person belonging to a clan with whom their fathers and mothers have blood relation. Marriage within a related clans is a great sin. If a Khasi does so, he or she will be ex-communicated from their kinsfolk. It is considered to be

the violation of Ka Shongsang of type, it necessarily entails banishment and complete rejection of the culprit as a respectable member of the community.\(^{10}\)

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It is further described that;

Intra-clan sexual relationship is a mortal sin and a couple who commit such a crime are ex-communicated from society. In ancient times there were even expelled to certain segregated places. In deaths, their bodies are never cremated with any rites and their bones are not collected.\textsuperscript{11}

Therefore marriage among the Khasis takes place from one clan to another and this shows that marriage plays a vital role in clan formation among the Khasis.

Marriage is a bond between a man and a woman, a bond for co-operation and understanding to build a new home. It is one of the many duties that human beings perform in this world. It is a bond that connects two kur (clan), the kur of a woman and the kur of a man, from different ancestral mothers not from the same clan. It has been described that,

Marriage between the members of the same clan is an abomination and it is called Ka Shongsang. It is because of this fear of incest and irregularity in the notion of Tipkur that a Khasi is very meticulous when proposals for marriage came to the uncles from their children.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11}. Hipshon Roy (Ed.), \textit{Khasi Heritage}, Shillong : Hipshon Roy, 1979, p.100.
In a Khasi marriage the husband is the son of one clan (kur) who marries a daughter from another clan where there is no blood relations. Jeebon Roy stressed that marriage among the Khasis in the past was arranged by the parents as,

Ki Khasi ki khmih poh bad khlemraiñ khlemakor shibun eh ia kiba ioh hi, bunsin bunsin kiba na ing ban kylli ki paralok ba ka la ioh tnga ne em, nangta ki ong shisyndon 'tip ei ka runar.13 (The Khasis looked down on those who stay together as husband and wife without parental consent.)

H. Lyngdoh further described that;

La ki samla kiba shu iahap klet lane kiba shu ia ioh hi, ki kur ki kmie, ki kha ki man bad ki lok ki jor baroh ki khein poh bad khein khlemraiñ ia ki bad kim ju ñew ia ki ba ki ialong shitnga tad haduh ba kin da iohkhun iohhti.14 Those couple who decided to live as husband and wife are not considered as married until they beget children, then only they will be considered as married.)

It shows that among the Khasis marriages must be arranged by the parents. For those who stayed together as husband and wife or settled down without the consent of the parents, they are often looked down upon and if there is a question from friends or relatives of her marriage, the answer is that she is a disobedient one.

Therefore in the past there was only arranged marriages as love marriage were rarely known. There are three types of marriages:

(a). Pynhiar Synjat (putting on of a ring) (b). Lamdoh, identical with Pynhiar Synjat but there is no ring (c). Ka ladih Kiad (partaking of liquor), a much simpler form.\(^\text{15}\)

*Ka Pynhiar synjat* is the exchanging of rings between the boy and the girl who would be husband and wife. Another type of marriage is ‘Ka Lamdoh’ and ‘Ka Íadih Kiad’ where there is no exchanging of rings. On the appointed day the groom along with his kith and kin starts from his house to the bride’s house, female members do not accompany the groom as according to Khasi belief pointed out by these writers like u Jeebon Roy that,

\[\text{U kpa u rangbah lane u kynja kpa uba dei u kpanah u kpasan ki kheiñ bam bit ban leit on ia la u khun, ka kmie u rangbah lane ka kmienah kmiesan ruh ym bit ban leit on.}\(^\text{16}\)

According to H.Lyngdoh; “Ka kmie, ka kmienah, ka kmiesan, u kpa, u kpanah, bad u kpasan kim ju bit ban leit on ia la u khun.”\(^\text{17}\)

G.Costa described that;

\[\text{Te haba la poi ka por ban iamih ban leit sha ing ka kynthei; ki kur jong u shynrang kim ju leit on, lada ki long ki shynrang ne ki kynthei; kum ki kynum, ki para,}\]

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According to Sweetymon Rynjah,

Kane ka mih namar ka kam leit kha leit man, kam pynkut noh ia ka longkur jong u khun shynrang Khasi, na la ka ing ka kmie ba kha ia u. Ki Khasi ki ong ba lada ki leh pyrshah ia kane, ka long kumba 'ai khaw duh' ia ka longkur jong u.19

From the above authors, customary Khasi traditions prohibit the groom's father or the paternal uncle to accompany the groom. Even the groom's mother and her female relations cannot do so. It is believed that by accompanying the groom to the bride's house his family members sell the groom to the other clan.

In a marriage ceremony there must be a maternal uncle from both sides called 'ki Ksiang' or mediators. In the past there was only an arranged marriage as love marriage was nearly unknown. But with the change of time there is also a change in marriage ties. According to the information collected;

With the changing of time, love marriage is also permissible as the boy and the girl stay together and settle down as husband and wife without the consent of their parents or maternal uncle.20

20. An interview.
The other transition that prevails during the last few decades is that people do not only follow the old tradition of marriage, but they have also accepted the Civil Marriage Act 1872 that members and lawyers from the court look after as marriage registrars or marriage legislators.

4.02: The Ksiang (Negotiators):

In a marriage ceremony of the Khasis there must be a maternal uncle (u Kñi) from the sides of the groom and the bride called Ki Ksiang or family spokesmen. It is the duty of the male members to welcome the groom and his party by exchanging ‘kwai’ (betlenut), before reaching the bride’s house. After this the spokesmen from each side declare the marriage of the bride and the groom as:

A dialogue between the two ksiangs marked at the start of the ceremony. If during the dialogue, nothing transpires, that would go against uniting the two, then religious rite is performed and rings are exchanged with a declaration of the two are husband and wife.  

H.O. Mawrie further described that,

On reaching the courtyard of the bride’s house, a serious discussion takes place between the mediators. They proceed to dig out and bring to the surface and within

hearing of the crowd collected around them, all the arguments to justify the marriage so that all possible mistakes can be avoided and that there will be no regret in the future.22

Marriage in the Khasi religion is very sacred, the most remarkable feature of the Khasi marriage is that it is usual for the husband to live with his wife in his mother-in-law's house, and not for him to take his bride home, as it is in the case of other communities. Among the Khasis, when a man marries a non-heiress, after having one or two children and if the married couples get on well together, the husband frequently removes his wife and children to a house of his own.

With the changing of time Jeebon Roy saw that,

Kat ha ka jingkhmih jong nga, ka rukom Khasi mynta ka long lyngkar shaphang kane ban pynneh skhem ia kiba iashongkha. La bit ban pyndonkam da ka Marriage Act III of 1872 bad ai bor ha ki syiem ki sirdar ban long kum ki Marriage Registrars.23 (Marriage at present does not have a strong foundation. It is high time to follow the Marriage Act III of 1872 and to entrust upon the Syiem or the Sirdars (chief) the duty to be the marriage registrars to codify the marriage.)

According to Jeebon Roy there is a transition in marriage that the husband as a father of the family does not take upon his shoulders all the responsibilities. He also saw the changing trend

that in many cases there is no strong relationship between husband and wife.

4.03: Ka Pyllait San Shyieng (Divorce)

A Khasi man understands his self-importance. About his own life he says thus, from the woman sprang the species and the man as a father who gave the status and the children spring from the union of a father and a mother. Marriage existed among the Khasis from the beginning of time, a Khasi does not want to live without children or without 'jaid'. To live without a 'jaid' is a curse. Therefore marriage to a Khasi thought is to fulfill one of the purposes of life on earth, to multiply and to expand the clan as; “A married life without issues is of no value, and without children a family cannot even begin.”

Marriage to a Khasi means a procreating power and if the couples do not have children there is an advice from the family members to separate.

For childless couples there are only feelings of sympathy, not only from the members of each family but from the society as a whole. Frequently, relatives of either partner would come up with suggestions of separation.

25. Ibid.
According to Sweetymon Rynjah;

Kumta ki longing longsem ki bym don ki syntiew ki soh ha ki mat kylliang kynthei shynrang, kim long satia kiba iadei dur bad ka saif longing u Khasi.26 (Without any child the woman cannot become a mother and a man cannot become a father and as such there can be no family or continuation of a family).

As this affects the couple and the relatives of both sides and so separation took place, which is called 'ka pyllait san shyieng'.

According to information collected;

The word 'Ka Pyllait San Shyieng' means to let-loose the nuptial knot of the union of man and woman in marriage which is of cohabitation or performed by a Khasi custom, with the knowledge and consent of the two families. Literally 'pyllait' means to untie whereas the word 'san shyieng' means five numbers of shells. These five shells are equal to one piece. We all know that the word 'shyieng' is a synonym of 'u sbai-u shyieng'. This perhaps is the medium of buying and selling of the Khasis before silver coins came to be used.27

Divorce among the Khasis is socially discouraged but permissible under certain circumstances especially when the wife does not bear any child. Actually divorce is adopted for the settlement and the benefit of the discontent couples and having no connection with religious rites and ceremonies. The consequence

27. An interview.
would be in the case barrenness and sterility, because marriage
according to the Khasi belief is a procreating power to produce
children to enlarge one's family (Ban pyniar ia u tnum u tyndai).
There are also reasons where husband and wife feel that they cannot
live together any longer they can divorce through mutual consent,
that is,

\[\text{Ka jingiaiehnoh ka dei ban da ia kohnguh iamynjur baroh arliang te lah ban ialait. Ban isih shiliang shiliang lane ban ai san shiing tang shiliang shiliang da lei lei ruh ym lah ia lait.}^28\] (To divorce one must get the legal dispensation from the witnessing ksiangs from both sides as divorce cannot take place only from one side.)

This separation called 'ka ia pyllait san shyieng', is always
performed in the presence of senior members of the community,
preferably by the Ksiangs (negotiators) who recited the marriage
ceremony. H.Lyngdoh wrote thus:

\[\text{Ka jingpyniaiehnoh tnga ka ju long shabar ing, da ki shiphew tylli ki sbai, san ba bat ka kynthei bad san ba bat u shynrang. Ia kine ki sbai ki ju khot 'u san shyieng'. Ka jingiapyllait ka ong ha kane ka rukom- Ka kynthei ka ai shuwa ia la ki san tylli ki sbai ha u shynrang, bad u shynrang u pynphai pat ia kita ki sbai sha ka bad la ki jong de san tylli, kata, u ai sha ka shiphew tylli. Nangta, ka kynthei ka ai biang sha u shynrang ia kita ki sbai baroh shiphew tylli, bad u, u bret ia ki ha khyndew.}^29\]

According to G. Costa,

Ha ka rukom hapdeng ki Khasi ki iehnoh da ki sbai sanshyieng, shiliang-shiliang; ka kynthei ka bat san tylli ki sbai, u shynrang san tylli; nangta, ai ka kynthei shuwa ha u rangbah, u rangbah pat u sa ai baroh shiphew ha ka kynthei; ka sa ai pat ha u rangbah, u sa bret pat sha khyndew; kumta ki mut ba la ialait-iakhuid.³⁰

The two statements mean that,

the procedure is simple - both the husband and the wife hold in their hands five cowries or five pieces of betel vine each. The husband hands over the contents of his hand to his wife. The latter turns them with those of her own and the husband takes them and casts them away from his hand.³¹

For both husband and wife, they cannot re-marry until and unless they are separated. After the divorce is over, any one who wants to have a match with them can do so because now they are both free. This ceremony is by mutual consent and takes place in the open air.

Hence a system of divorce has been in existence with the Khasis right from the very inception with a Khasi way, mode and manner. Here, also we see the balanced thought of our forefathers

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³⁰ G. Costa, *Ka Riti Jong Ka Ri Laiphew Syiem*, p.28.
to adopt a system, which is affordable by one and all, rich or poor for such a separation.

When we study the chapter XXIX of *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen-Part I* by R.S.Berry, a Khasi book on moral ethics, we come across the word 'ka bitbai' preceded by 'ka Raibi', in his admonition and caution in matters of marriage as a Khasi. The word 'raibi' means tainted heredity, whereas 'bitbai' appears to relate to the system of 'Ka Pyllait San shyieng'. The word 'bit' means sticks or take after a while, 'bai' means 'sbai' meaning cowries or shells. What the author wants to focus in his admonition and warning is to take marriage with a serious view so that disruption and dislocation of the future lineage would not repeat what had happened to the parents.

This practice, in the modern days, is not in existence, any more in its original mode and manner. This is because with the development of knowledge and the civilized way of life, people are aware of the feeling of their children and its effects on them. Nowadays, separation between the Khasi couples is done with amicable settlements by the parties to the marriage. Even guardianship of the children is not touched at all because of the lineage, and no breach at all has been created in view of the custom and tradition of the matrilineal system.
4.04: Ka Jer Ka Thoh (naming ceremony)

The Khasi naming ceremony is known as ‘Ka Jer Ka Thoh’ which normally takes place in the morning. When the child is born in the morning the naming ceremony takes place on that particular day, but when the child is born at midday, in the morning or at night the ceremony is performed in the following day. After the birth of the child there must be certain rites and rituals which must be followed according to Khasi customs.

According to Rabon Singh Kharsuka,

Haba ka por ba la jan ia ka ban kha, ki la buh lypa uwei u khiew um bad kawei ka ktang, kumba ki ju khot ia u khiew um Sohpet, bad ka ‘tang sohpet, kata ban pynsum ia i khyllung da uta u khiew bad ban theh um na kata ka ktang haduh ban da dktu u Sohpet ita i khyllung. Lada la kha ia ita i khyllung mynsngi ne mynmiet, ki ap ban jer ha ka por mynstep kawei pat ka sngi, hamar ba dang lah kha ki ot sohpet da kaba theh khyndiat na ka ‘tang sohpet, kaba nep kum ka tari...ki lum ia ki jhep baroh ki buh ha u khiew khyndew ban leit bret ha ka sngi jer kyrteng.32 (When it is time for a woman to give birth they prepare a water pot and a bamboo cylinder, as they called it an umbilical water pot and an umbilical bamboo cylinder, to bathed a new born baby. If the child is born at noon or in the evening or at night, the naming ceremony will be held in the following day. When the child is born, its umbilical cord is cut with a piece of a sharp bamboo and the placenta is carefully preserved in an earthen pot to throw away after the naming ceremony has been performed).

32. R.S. Kharsuka, Ka Kitab Niam Kheiñ Ki Khasi, p.23.
P.R.T. Gurdon further pointed out that,

The father takes the pot containing the placenta, after having previously placed rice flour and fermented rice therein, and waves it three times over the child, and then walks out with it through the main entrance of the house and hangs up the pot to the tree outside the village.33

The naming ceremony is held in the presence of family members, relatives, neighbours and friends. Things which are needed during the naming ceremony are 'u pujer' or rice flour which is soaked in the water put in a bamboo tray called 'u prah', 'u skaw' or guord contained of a rice beer, 'ka laliar' or a banana leaf.

According to H. Lyngdoh,

Lada dei i khun shynrang, ki shna kawei ka ryntieh kaba ki khot ka 'tieh-iawbei' bad lai tylli ki khnam kiba ki khot ki 'khnam-iawbei' bad, lada dei i khun kynthei, ki wallam kawei ka wait, bad uwei u star; bad ki buh ia ki de ha nengpei.34

G. Costa pointed out that,

Lada ita i khyllung iba dang kha i dei da u shynrang ki shna ka ryntieh bad ki khnam lai tylli, ban pyni ba u long u rangbah ban ieng ka thma-ka ktien bad u

34. H. Lyngdoh, Ka Niam Khasi, p. 175.
nongialeh; hynrei lada ka kynthei, ki buh ka wait bad u star, kaba mut bad thew ka nongri ing”.15

Both H. Lyngdoh and G. Costa describe the status of the child in the naming ceremony, that if it is a male child a small bow and three arrows is needed and for a female child a dao and a large blade and a strap is kept. The male symbol is to guide and protect himself, his family and his country and the female symbol is that, it is the duty of the woman who will look after the welfare of the family.

H.O.Mawrie stated that,

The morning after a child is born the ceremony of jer khun (naming ceremony) is performed. At this ceremony, the status of the child is asserted by means of obvious symbols. If it is a male child, they keep by the altar a sword, a bow and arrow; and if it is a girl they keep a khoh (a head strap generally made of cane).36

The diviner mixed the ground rice or rice flour with water to mark as a symbol of thoh or marking, after the name is selected, Jeebon Roy described that,

Ki sa thoh shwa ia u kpa na ka kjat kamon nangta sa bud ia i khyllung bad sa ia ka kmie na ka kjat kadiang.

35. G. Costa, Ka Riti Jong Ka Ri Laiphew Syiem, p.36.
36. H. Mawrie, Khasi Milieu, p.76.

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Kynja ki kur ki kmie ita i khyllung ki thoh na sha ka kjat kadiang kynja ki kha ki man baroh ki thoh na sha ka kjat kamon.37 (They first put a marking symbol on the right foot of the child’s father followed by the newborn baby and its mother on the left foot. Those who have the relationship or belonging to the same clan (ki kur) with the child, marking is always done on the left foot. While those who are from the father’s clan (ki kha) the marking is done on the right foot.)

The naming ceremony is common among the Khasis but as mentioned earlier that Khasi religion is ‘Ka Niam ing’, the preparation might have some differences from one family to another, as religious functions are not performed in a common platform. At present there is a change regarding the day of the naming ceremony, it might be after three days, seven days, nine days, a month or even a year or after having three or more children according to the convenience of the family concerned.

4.05: Ka Niam ḥap (Dead Ceremony):

The Khasis believe that the world is not a place where every person can live forever, but the world is only a temporary place where every one must die and the house of God is the eternal place. Thus Khasi religion puts great emphasis and importance on Kamai ia ka Hok (earn righteousness) as it is one of the basic

37. J. Roy, Ka Niam Jong Ki Khasi, p.18.
principles of the Khasi faith, a Commandment of God, the creator of man. His creature is to regulate his life through his conduct and application in life, with an all out effort to meet his material needs by the sweat of his labour. Thus Jeebon Roy explained:

Kumba ngi ju ong ha ka ktien Khasi ba kane ka pyrthei shong basa long lehnohei ym lah leit lam ryngkat wat tang uwei u sai jaiñ ruh, bad ba ym pat don uba leit lam ne u ban dang leit lam ruh, ka pyrthei shiphang sngi shu wan kai, kumba wan iathaw iew ia thaw hat shiphang arphang, kat uba nang kloi u nang leit sha la ing kat u bam pat kloi u nang sah dien.38 (The Khasis always use the term ‘Ka Pyrthei shong basa’ or a temporary place or residence, that one cannot carry with him even a thread, and there is no one who had carried along or who would be carried along when he died. One lives in this world for a short time, as making a market place for a short time, for those who are in a hurry to go home can go ahead of the others and for those who are not ready are yet to go.)

Sib Charan Roy stated that when a person dies,

Ki Khasi ki ju ong bad ju rwai ba ym lah kit ei ei na kane ka pyrthei wat tang uwei u niuhkhlieh ruh; ki ong ruh de ba ym lah leitrah wat tang uwei u sai jymphong ruh. Na kata ka bynta ki sneng ki kynu ha ha ka pyrthei donkam ban kamai tang ia ka hok leh tang ka sot ka ban leit lam ia ki sha Ing-U Blei, ka jingleit shongsuk mynsiem.39 (The Khasi faith teaches that when they die or leave this life on earth, they could not take any earthly things or possessions along with them, not even a small

strand of thread or a single strand of hair. That is why while on earth we should not be too greedy for material wealth, we should always follow the path of righteousness, a path that will give us peace of mind while living on earth and will lead us (not wealth) to the abode of God and we live in eternal peace with their kith and kin.)

According to H.O.Mawrie,

A Khasi believes that God made him, which means that he made him a full fledged man to inhabit this world. A man belongs to God during his lifetime as well as when he has left this world. After he leaves this world he goes on to God’s house to spend his time chewing betel (Bam kwai ha ing u Blei).40

Pascal Malngiang stated that,

It is believed that in this house of God, the righteous enjoys pure happiness, chewing betel nut (Bam kwai) throughout. This act of chewing betel nut (bam kwai) is one of supreme happiness for the Khasi in this world. It is a simple food signifying hospitality, cordiality and love of family members and friends.41

This implies that man, as the creature of God, has to regulate the inner thoughts, feelings as well as his dealings with purity, truth and honesty as a spiritual tribute to his creator in his afterlife, which is accountable before the soul leaves his body, to enable

his soul to reach the house of God. To be there with his great ancestors and ancestress of his clan, through whom, God had given him, the descent in human form as well as his lineage.

According to the Khasi custom when a person dies the death ceremony takes place. The Khasis normally burn the dead bodies and the cremation takes place in the cremation ground known as kpep. There are three types of cremation such as:

- Kawei kaba thang ha ka jingthang kaba shu thaw da ki dieng thala, dieng tylli tang ban ing ka met iap; kaba ar pat ki da stah lyntang kumba ki ju khot ka jingthang baitwait, ha kine ki pynbit u pynkham u pynsoh ka niam ka rukom baroh. Kaba lai pat, ka jingthang lyntang, kane kaba kham donburom ki da tem ka ksing ka dhah, ka suloi ka man, ki pyniap bun ki sniang ki masi, ki lah ruh ban pynshad wait, bad rah ha ki krong lieng ne kulai ruh. (The first type of cremation is by using big and large firewood just to burn the dead body; the second type is used by wooden planks and there are also rites and rituals performed at the time of cremation. The third one is different from the first and the second type, where a grand ceremony is performed together with the playing of pipes and beating of the drums for male dancers and the sacrifice of cows and pigs is being performed. The krong or bier made of bamboo is made similar to a boat or a horse which has been prepared in a very decent manner.)

The Khasis have a great respect for the dead as they believe that although they are no longer here on earth, yet they live in

42. R.S. Kharsuka, Ka Kitab Niam Khein Ki Khasi, p.25.
another world in the house of God. According to G. Costa when a person died,

Ki thied da ki jain thymmai suda, ki pynkup pynsem. Ia u shynrang ki leh kaba don rukom ba kup ba sem u shynrang tang ba, ki pynkup kadiang, pynbohkaila kadiang, ka long ka jingpynkylla na kaba ju kup ju sem; ia ka jain spong ruh ki pynspong kadiang. Ia ka kynthei pat, ki ju pynleh kumjuh hi ka jain-sem ei ei baroh pyrshah ia kaba ju kup myndang im.43 (When a person dies, the family bathed the dead body with warm water, they dressed the dead body with new clothes as they did to the alive person, but to the dead they put in an anti clockwise different from the living person.)

An egg called 'Ka Leng kpoh' is placed above the naval on the dead body. On the day of the cremation, the relatives of the deceased along with other members carry the krong or bier to the pyre. When they reached the cremation ground the corpse is then laid on the pyre on the prepared crematorium with the head westward and the feet eastward. After this the diviner smashed the egg or 'leng kpoh' on the pyre and burnt together with the corpse.

During the birth ceremony for the male child they used 'ki nam iawbei' or the three arrows which symbolizes the duty and responsibility of a person as he is to defend himself, his family and the society at large from all dangers. But when a male member

43. G. Costa, Ka Riti Jong Ka Ri Laiphew Syiem, p.41.
dies they used the three arrows which they called 'ki nam tynpem', as stated by Jeebon Roy that,

Ki sa shim uwei u khnam ki siat shaphang kamon ka jingthang ki phaidien na ka ki pyda ia u khnam sha lum sha wah kat shaba poi uwei pat shaphang ka diang ki pyda kumjuh ia uwei pat shaphang sepngi.⁴⁴ (With regard to this they shoot these three arrows one to the right to any destination, the remaining to the left and the westward side.)

This is done with the intension to protect the soul of the dead from evils on its journey to the house of God.

After cremation the Khasis would collect the bones of the dead person and keep them in the family stone urn. Later on, these bones are then taken to the clan urn known ‘Ka Mawbah’ or great ossuary and it is the last site that the living members of the family perform for the dead persons. This ceremony of bringing these bones together is called ‘Ka Thep Mawbah’. When the bones are collected to take it to the clan ossuary or ‘Ka Mawbah’ the rites and rituals which are connected with the dead ceremony are performed. Together with the religious function, they erected megaliths or ‘Ki Mawbynna’ of stone structures which are famous among the Khasi, these are called:

⁴⁴. J. Roy, Ka Niam Jong Ki Khasi, p.22.
Mawbynna, or mawnam, are erected to commemorate deceased parents or ancestors, and consists of 3, 5, 7, 9, or even, in an exceptional cases, 11, upright stones with flat table-stone infront. The upright stones are called 'mawshynrang', or male stones and the flat table stone 'mawkynthei', or female stones.

According to H. Lyngdoh,

Ki mawbynna ki don arjait. Shijait kiba thung haba ki leh ia ki niam ki rukom thang iap bad kynshew-shyieng ia la ki kur ki jait kiba la iap. Kine ki mawbynna, ha ka bashishha, ki long ki mawbynna-niam lane ki 'mawniam'. Shijait pat kiba ki thung haba ki buh nam buh kyrteyg ia la ki kur ki jait, ia la ki kha ki man, ia la u syiem u kmie kiba la iap lane ia kano kano ka jingjia donnam kaba la jia.46 (There are two types of megaliths, the first type relates to the rites and rituals which the clan erected during the death ceremony in honor of the deceased members they are called 'Ki Mawniam'. The other are called memorial stones or 'mawnam' which are erected not for rites and rituals but in honour of the deceased family members, the rulers (chiefs) and any uncommon events which had happened.)

Ki Mawbynna niam or the megaliths which stand for the religious purposes to perpetuate the death ceremony. As it is shown that,

Ki Mawbynna ki thaw san tylli uwei uba ha pdeng ki khot u maw kñi uba kham jrong na kiwei sa ar sha ka diang ar sha kamon ki khot ki maw pyrsa. Ki thaw pat

46. H. Lyngdoh, Ka Niam Khasi, p.244.
had ki mawkynthei de. 17 (There are five stone structures. The taller in the middle is called u 'mawkñi' or it stands for the maternal uncle, the remaining four, two from the left and two from the right are called 'ki mawpyrsä' which stand for the nephew of the clan. A stone slab is being made to put in front of the five stone structures known as 'ka Mawkynthei' meant for females.)

The purpose of these religious rites and rituals is to preserve the bones of the dead of the clan in a particular cavine or clan ossuary. The monolith culture of the Khasis goes side by side with the rites and rituals. The most common erection of monolith consists of three stone structures and one flat stone or a stone slab.

The classifications of the mawbyrna niam are:
1. Ki Mawlynti or Mawkjat
2. Ki Mawumkoi or ki Maw tyrut

1. ‘Ki Mawlynti or Mawkjat’ are erected to serve as seats or a resting place when the mortal remains of the dead is carried to the cremation ground. This erection of such stone structures is done halfway from the house of the deceased to the crematorium or even to the clan ossuary. Kynpham Singh in his article stated that:

When a member of the family died at the ripe old age, his or her funeral possession was accompanied by a band

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47. J. Roy, Ka Niam Jong Ki Khasi, p.33.
of musicians playing a dirge, while others threw up showers of coins. Wherever they rested they set up these monoliths with a flat table stone in front, a ‘Mawlynti’. The centre monolith represents the maternal uncle or Saidnia (Intercessor) of the ‘Kur’ and the dolmen the Mother. These routes usually followed the easiest way and the shortest distance from the village to the cremation site and coincidently, later on, these marked the shortest roads connecting villages or important market routes. The ‘Mawlyntis’ conveniently became resting places for the travelers.48

He further described that on the way to ‘Ka Mawbah’ or the great ossuary of the clan that, “Halfway to the sacred place ‘the Mawkjat’ was erected, a pair of three monoliths standing behind a dolmen.”49

So these flat table stones served as a seat not only for the mourners who accompanied the dead body or the bones to the cremation ground or to the clan ossuary but also serve as a resting place for the weary travelers.

2. Ki Maw umkoi or ki Maw tyrut:

When there is the un-natural death or death caused by an accident or any other calamities which strikes a person’s life, before the cremation of the dead body ‘Ka Khad tyrut’ is performed to

drive away the evil spirit (ka tyrut) by sacrifices. Tyrut means demons who brings misfortune, especially violent deaths. After this there is also ‘ka mait tyrut’ which means to rid the evil of misfortune from a person. During the ceremony ki Maw Umkoi or mawtyrut are erected by the particular clan near the water known as ‘umkoi’ or a tank to cleanse the bones of those who die an unnatural death before taking the bones to the clan ossuary which goes together with performing of rites and rituals.

The bringing of bones of the dead together by the respective clan in the clan ossuary is called ‘ka thep Mawbah’. There must be a spokesman when the clan reached the clan ossuary. So the spokesman speaks on behalf of the clan before opening the ossuary these words;

Hei sngew ho me u suidiap, kumba nga la thep la tian hapoh ka Mawbah ka Mawniam, hapoh ka kmie ka kiaw, u ni u ma, u suidnia ka lawbei, ki nonglum nongkynshew ia u suidiap u nongiap u lor u kap, shikhrum ka nar, sngew ho, kane ka japha ka jasiang, ka niam ka rukom ka jong me, ba men neh skhem hapoh ka niam ka rukom ka Mawbah ka pepbah mo!50 (The act of veneration and prayers when the diviner opened the cist to place the bones of the clan together with the bones of the ancestral mother and the bones of the ancestral maternal uncle, as they are the keepers and the collectors who will look after the bones of the clan.)

The food for the dead is given as a symbol of respect as the rites and rituals go side by side. It is the religious aspect that a

clan is a consanguine kin group, so each clan is a matrilineal exogamous kin group. The exogamous principle of the clan is rigidly maintained, any transgression involves ostracism from the clan, this is evident from the fact that any person who violates the exogamy rules and regulations is not given a place after death in the clan ossuary. The bone burial ceremony in which all the bones of the dead are placed in the clan ossuary is considered to be an extension of the funeral ceremony, bones are finally deposited in the clan ossuary. Therefore, membership of an individual in a clan is not only important during his lifetime but even after death.

With the passage of time the Khasis spread out to various places. There were also conversions to other religions. As the bone burial ceremony is very expensive, most of the Khasis these days do not follow this system. The most important fact is that, when the maternal uncle was converted to another religion, the rites and rituals of the family towards the dead ceremony cannot be performed by other members. In the Khasi belief, if this is done against the customs there might be a retribution to the person concerned because of the act of fault, this is called 'Ka Siar ka Laitkylla'. Because of this threat, most of the Khasis did not follow this system any more.