CHAPTER - VII

7.00 : Conclusion

The Khasis believe that they belong to the *Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum* and it has its own religion, which is the fundamental faith and belief. It is the religion given by God, which rests on the belief that 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 reason. He believes in the existence of God, the creator who is invisible, kind, loving, forgiving, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient.

It is found that many Khasi writers agreed that God gives the Khasi religion, but non-Khasi writers are more influenced by their fixed ideas and are much influenced by books already written after the coming of the British, which would not be in a position to adjudge the correct basis of the Khasi religion. There is also such a difference even among the Khasi writers themselves. The fact is that the writers were not trained to handle such a religious profession. They wrote what they heard from others, and may not be in a position to understand of what they passed on to others, by simply picking a few disjointed words from what the priest mumbles.
at the time he performs a certain ritual. It is high time that the basic principles which laid down the Khasi faith and belief be thoroughly researched and edited properly by a Khasi professing the traditional faith with a correct view to focus to the world at large.

The work of the prominent Khasi writers and thinkers who had tried to lead the way to the present generation which will enable others to know the Khasi religion and its traditions and practices. Their devotion has undergone tremendous efforts to put into writings the most important work on Khasi religion. The book *Ka Kitab Niam-Kheïn Ki Khasi* by Rabon Singh Kharsuka contains many subjects about Khasi religion. However, the method he demonstrated how to perform a ritual in a relevant ceremony is not set in proper stages and orders and it is incomplete. This book is not written for the purpose to serve as a textbook or a religious manual to teach or instruct any Khasi to become a 'Nongknia' or a priest. The author had collected his information from the person called 'ki Nongshat Nongkheiii' conjectures, which had been stated in the forward of the said book.

In this book he included two controversial topics, one is about 'Kaba buh phan buh kyrpad' or the induction of other spirits as helpers (Chapter III) and the other one is about the offering of
sacrifice to the devil, who torments the people for withdrawal of
the sickness from the person concerned (Chapter XXV). These
practices are not universally accepted by all Khasis, it is practiced
only by a few misguided families, they are known as evil institutions.

People who has gone astray, have turned away from God
and fled to the devils or other evil powers, instead of worshipping
God he starts to worship the devils through evil institutions. These
evil institutions affect the society as good people did not agree with
these, which are harmful to the society at large. According to
H.O.Mawrie,

In contemporary Khasi society, there are people who
have no fear of sins of incest and sacrilege and keep the
devils as their household deities and worship them.
These deities being the keepers of wealth material
prosperity and splendour. These deities are of different
types having different qualities.¹

These evil spirits are mostly connected with selfishness,
jealousy and riches. They are identified as family gods or deities
which they have to be propitiated. Amongst these evil spirits the
less painful ones are ‘Ka Sabuit’, ‘Ka Skai’, ‘Ka Taro’, ‘Ka Lasam’,
‘Ka Raliang’ and others are the ferocious ones like ‘Ka Shwar’, ‘Ka
Bih’ and ‘U Thlen’.

¹ H.O.Mawrie, The Khasi Milieu, p. 42.
7.01: U Thlen

The word literally means a python or a big snake or a serpent, it is the most ferocious among all evil spirits. As it is described that,

Those who keep this devil are to offer it only human blood and for this reason, they become a 'nongshohnoh briew.' One of the methods adopted by the keepers to get human beings into their grasp is to cut off a little of his hair or a bit of his garment and then to offer this in some kind of a sacrifice by means of which the 'rungiew' of the victim is captured to give as an offering to u Thlen. Another way is to chase and capture the human being physically and kill him.²

The family which owes allegiance to it is locally known as 'Nongri thlen' or 'Nongshohnoh'. The idea of the physical existences and the appearance of u thlen is quite vague. Though its physical form is of a snake but it can physically transform itself into various forms such as fish, cat, snakes, etc. U thlen is identified as the family god of riches.

There are always ways and means that good people could protect themselves from the 'nongshohnoh' who is trying to capture and kill others for the sake of u thlen, such as:

² Ibid., p. 45.
A Khasi believes that rice which supports human life is also a source of the power with which to protect man from the clutches of the devil. This is the reason why a Khasi never sets out from his home on a journey without taking some grains of rice in his pocket. He can throw this rice back at the 'nongshohnoh', if such one attacks him with 'u khawtyndep'.

*U khaw tyndep* or *u khaw rawai* is the rice grains which is offered and sacrifices before 'u thlen', and it has the power to enchant and bring temporary numbness or senselessness to the person on whom it is thrown.

As it is believed that 'u thlen' can make people rich and prosperous as long as the owner or the keeper can satisfy it with the feedings of human blood. If they fail to satisfy, the blessings will turn into a tragedy and the family would be put to shame and poverty.

7.02 : Ka Bih:

'Ka Bih' means poison. This evil spirit is also related to wealth. There are different types of poisons, the poison which causes chronic pain and slow death to a person who consumed it. There is also the poison which acts so fast and causes death very soon. The keeper secretly passes on the poison to somebody

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through eatable things, the particular person who consumed did not know or seen how it is acquired. When the poison is passed on to a person, the affected person is likely to get some kind of physical irritation.

7.03 : Ka Shwar:

‘Ka shwar’ literally means a witch. The keeper of ‘ka shwar’ can cause an evil spell on any body who illegally intrudes or possesses their rights or belongings without their knowledge or permission. The victim affected by the evil spell would get convulsion fits as the evil spirit strangling or twisting his neck. Only people who are well versed can drive away its evil spell.

7.04 : Ka Sabuit or ka Skai

It is the evil spell cast on somebody simply by appreciating or flattering them, the victim will get a stomachache or some other physical ailments. Ka Taro is a kind of a witchcraft identical to ka Shwar. Ka Lasam is a kind of a poison. Ka Raliang can cause the victim to suffer from some pain or it will swell with cancerous trouble or any kind of diseases. Though these evil spirits cause pain, but the people who keep these are very much despised and often looked down by the society.
The keeper must fulfill their needs if they cannot do so there will be 'Ka Siar ka lait kylla' which results in the failure and decadence of man himself. If anything is done with an evil intention to harm others, that same evil intention will rebound to the person concerned, which is called 'ka laitkylla'. R.S.Berry in NO.LXV of his book *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* Part II had stated that,

"Na ka siar kan thaw ka laitkylla,
Ia ka laitkylla haduh phim lahshna ."\(^4\)

(This underhand act is a damage so serious, A breach that can't be easily redressed)

The *laitkylla* in relation to the conduct and application of treacherous dealing in matters of wealth and property is a departure from the usual conduct of the Khasi.

So *ka laitkylla* means violation by omission or departure from what had been covenanted between man and God and in relation to deal with fellow men. According to Khasi traditional faith, which retributes a turn to the person because of this laitkylla or retribution comes to pass as a reward of punishment. It makes a person analyze his misfortunes, calamities coming his way, to

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appraise him of the conduct of his life. So as to determine the cause and its effects.

These evil spirits, all of them known as ‘Ki phan ki kyrpad’, and their names mentioned above are spirits of apostasy. It is very wrong and very unfortunate that some people place them under the cover or under the umbrella of the Khasi religion. They should be detached permanently from the cover of the Khasi religion, as such thinking is very wrong. In fact the majority of the Khasis look upon these new emergent spirits with contempt, that they call it a ‘man-made worship’ (ka thaw jingbriew) or an apostasy.

At present many people do not believe in these evil institutions or evil spirits, as they call or term them as superstitious beliefs. It is difficult to say how far this judgment is correct, that it might be true as most people believe in the existence of such evil spirits.

Khasi religion is based on the three basic tenets: 1) Kamai i'a ka Hok (Earning righteousness), 2) Tip Briew Tip Blei (knowing Man and God), 3) Tip Kur tip Kha (knowing his own cognates and acgnates). Kamai i'a ka Hok, implies the duty to earn righteousness by one’s toil and efforts. Tip Briew tip Blei, means knowing himself as a man and knowing God as his Creator and earning righteousness in ways of life are the chains which connect man to
God. The Khasi would not precede his relationship to God without knowing his fellowmen first, because he believes that God has created many human beings on earth having different ways of worship to God the creator.

"Ka Tipbriew Tipblei" is one of the Khasi religious aspects but Sib Charan Roy's idea in his book *ka Niäm Ki Khasi Ka Niäm Tipblei Tipbriew* said that it is 'ka niäm tipblei tipbriew'. There is a wrong placement which should be Tipbriew Tipblei in the correct sequence of words in the philosophical thought, as other authors have not changed the sequence which have been embedded in Khasi philosophy. As we all know that Sib Charan Roy wrote a book only after having read other books and thus may have been influenced otherwise by other religious dictates. However, this book, speaks only of the religious rites and customs. The rest of the chapters, give an account only of promoting good manners and moral conducts. He pointed out that,

Ha khmat ka niäm ki Khasi ka niäm tipblei tipbriew u para bynriew shi snieh pyrthei dei tang u 'kur' u 'kha'; ym don bapoh ne bakor, baroh ryngkat, hakhmat ka niäm bad u Blei.\(^5\)

Literally means that the Khasi religious belief is also called 'ka niäm tip-Blei tip-briew' (knowing God and man). All human

beings are the cognates and agnates, there is no class or caste systems, all are equal in front of God.

As the caste system is highly complex in nature, it determines the size of a particular group. It also determines the extent of one caste to another and it enables action as a corporate body. The Hindu society have been divided into several small groups called castes and sub-castes called superiority (highness) and inferiority (lowness) depending on the ranking. The Brahmins are placed at the top hierarchy and called the superior or supreme. The untouchables or the harijans occupied the lowest class so:

Religion and caste are inalienable elements of Indian life. Even after more than forty years of secular democratic government, religion and caste continue to hold a very important place in the lives of vast majority of the inhabitants of the sub-continent of India. Rapid socio-economic changes that swept over the country after Independence (1947) have led to an erosion and undermining of traditional values upheld by religion and caste system.  

Since castes are groups which are defined by a boundary of their own, their status cannot be determined either by birth or by accomplishment. Their membership in a society remains unchangeable, un-acquirable, inalienable, unattainable and non-

transferable. So in Khasi society, there is no caste system which will differentiate one person and the other.

The change has taken place in the society due to a lack of responsibility and laziness. Tip Briew tip Blei was no longer practiced by most of the people in the present day, because the way of life in these days portrays a change contrary to the principles. Evil forces of theft, robbery, extortion and the like, are the order of the day. People no longer fear God and his fellowmen.

Besides 'kamai ialog ka hok' and 'tip briew tip Blei' there is another tenet called 'tip kur tip kha' that a Khasi must strictly follow. The foundations of the Khasi society is based on the concept of 'kur' (clan).

A clan is a matrilineal exogamous kin group, and marriage within one clan is a taboo or 'ka sang ka ma'. The word 'sang' means 'sah-ang' meaning 'a gaping' an act which is unforgivable or a taboo. While 'ka ma' means an act which is dreadful and forbidden that would cause a snare or a trap that cannot be unshackled or unleashed. In the Khasi original faith and belief, these two words signify an act of commission which cannot be condoned before the eye of man and before God. Since the commission as such would never be bridged by any means, instead it would be a gap for the
religious aspects which battle the truth and breach of the tenet and covenant. So in the Khasi faith, the taboo committed by a person cannot be redeemed by his parents or anyone else but by him alone.

In the Khasi society the children give their title or clan’s name from the mother and not from the father’s side. For this reason the Khasi society is a unique matrilineal society. In the event of a Khasi man marrying a non-Khasi woman there is bound to be some problems, as children cannot take the clan’s name of the mother who obviously has no Khasi title. If it is in this case, the usual practise which the Khasis have followed was to start a new clan, usually by putting the word ‘khar’ before the new adopted surname or title. ‘Ka Tang Jait’ or sanctification of the new clan was now accepted and got the assent of the Governor on 23rd February 2005 through the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council - Khasi Social Customs and Linage Act 1997.

It is found that the change of religion has influenced the life of the Khasis in many ways and even has been responsible for the formation of some so called new adopted foreign clan; hence making conflicts among the Khasis and their clans.

When Christianity had established a foothold in the Khasi society, those elements of conflict began to show in the new trend
of life and ethos of the original Khasis. Christianity was accompanied by a western cultural influence which disparaged everything that was indigenous. It weaned the Khasis away from the beliefs of rites and rituals which from the Christian standpoint were animistic and primitive. It, therefore, created a vacuum of values which is inevitable in transition from one religion to another.

With regards to the family structure, the home is considered as an institution the basic and the most important functional unit. It represents the religious unit which keeps ancestral property and shares common religious ceremonies for the whole Khasi social organisation.

It is found that the Khasi society is in transition and is generally being exposed to the cross current and forces of modernisation. This brings about a radical change in the religious field and the powers and functions of the family. As it is seen that the increasing establishment of neo-local residence, which in turn had led to an increasing authority of the husband and the decline of the power and authority of the maternal uncle. Conversion to other religion has also affected the family institution of the youngest daughter and has gone a change in complexion and principles.
Coming to the religious ceremonies of the Khasis, the traditional Khasi system of marriage is quite simple, in a marriage ceremony there must be the maternal uncles from both sides called 'ki ksiang' or mediators who will preside over the marriage. But it is found that there is a transition witnessed during the last few decades that many do not follow the old tradition of marriage. But they also accepted the Civil Marriage Act 1872 where the lawyers looked after as marriage registrar or marriage legislators.

Divorce among the Khasis is socially discouraged but permissible under circumstances, especially when the wife could not bear any child. The separation is always performed in the presence of the senior members of the community preferably by the 'ksiang' or mediators who presided the marriage ceremonies.

The Khasi naming ceremony is held in the presence of the family members, relatives and friends. At this ceremony, the status of the child is asserted by means of symbols. If it is a male child they keep a bow, three arrows and a sword. If it is a female child they keep 'ka khoh' (a cornical basket made of bamboo) and "u star"(a head strap made of cane). Then the diviner mixed the ground rice with water to mark as a symbol of 'thoh' of marking after a name is selected.
It is found that the naming ceremony is common among the Khasis but the preparation might have some differences from one family to another as religious ceremonies are not performed in a common platform.

The ceremony of the dead begins as soon as a person is declared death. After the person is dead some rituals are done to the decease before he is cremated. After cremation, the Khasis would collect the bones and takes it to the clan ossuary. Together with the religious ceremonies they erected the ‘mawbynna’ (megaliths). These are called ‘ki maw niam’ because it relate to the rites and rituals which the clan erected during the ceremonies related to the dead. With the passage of time, the Khasi spread out to various places and the above ceremony is no longer practiced. The other factor is due to conversion to other religion which do not have such practices.

Khasi ethics which is called ‘Ka Akor Khasi’ is what a person has to follow in a day to day life, such as to use a decent language which will not hurt others, to dress in a decent manner especially Khasi women, that the female’s body is an object of great respect, she must cover the whole body and not to expose or flaunt any part of it. People who did not do so reflect the lack of proper guidance and teaching at home.
As time passes by there was a change in the way the Khasi dress especially among the youth. The use of a 'jainsem' and over this a 'jaintapmoh' is put on around both the shoulders to cover the head by tightening it with a single knot behind the neck has now changed. The use of 'jainkup' has become very rare as most women do not use any more. Before Khasi girls would never go out of their house without putting on the 'jaintapmoh' because it is not considered dignified for them to do so. But at present girls would go out with frocks and skirts only, most of them would prefer wearing pants for their comfort, this is because they tend to follow the western style of dress.

Education in the past was unknown but nature as a teacher, teaches and guides the Khasis in their daily existence, whether in their movement from place to place or in their occupation. The Khasi examined meticulously and with great care the objects around him. He cares for it as it could be of help to him in all his needs. It is also like a hospital which has all types of medicines that can heal all bodily ailments. Missionaries were harbingers of modern medicinal practices, that they were reluctant to take up a regular medical programme as they thought it would be a diversion from their primary aim of evangelization.

It is through nature that folktales arise and in the olden days the Khasis use story-telling through instruments like 'ka
duitara’, around the hearth to engrave upon the mind of the people the various human values since they have no writings whatsoever. It is described that:

The stories center round things and objects seen conspicuously in nature relating them to events and experiences of human life. The stories are told not only for amusement but also for the purpose of giving moral lessons. Advice and instruction to the story teller’s kith and kin as well as to future generations. 7

These stories convey lessons which relate to human life, for example in the remote past the two brothers the Symper peak and the Kyllang rock had a big fight amongst each other. In the duel, the Kyllang rock won, after winning he marched proudly towards the north to pronounce its success. When it reached Nongkhlaw there was no mere soil on its body. On the other hand, on the body of Symper peak it is found to this day a few caves, it is believed to be the injury caused during the fight. The moral lesson behind this is that there must not be a quarrel between brothers and sisters, as it will bring sadness and misfortune in the future and ruin the family.

The story of u Manik Raitong and the up-side bamboos also laid down the ethical lesson of adultery. Another story about u Sier Lapalang is that he was an adventurous son, he did not listen

to the advice and counsel of his mother. He left home for the hills against his mother’s wish and he met an unnatural death. As it is believed that when a mother is not happy the son’s adventures can never prosper.

These folktales are of various kinds which embody different layers of thought to different aspects of human life through human experience. The practice of story telling in the modern days is not in existence anymore in its original mode and manner. This is because of the development of educational knowledge and civilized way of life with the introduction of science and technology.

Berry and Kharkongor have made tremendous effort to put into writings about the Khasi moral code with its ethical elements and etiquette of the society. More norms of courtesies and regards are laid down related to neighbours, friends, elders and fellow human beings.

The changes that take place are that the Khasis came into contact with the outside world and modern culture. In this generation the maternal uncle does not have time to spent in his sister’s home as he is busy in his wife’s house to bring up and educate his own children. Another factor is that both parents are working and have little time to spend with their children teaching them moral values.
It has been found that the Seng Khasi has a great role in upholding Khasi indigenous religion. It stresses on the religious identity of the Khasis. It aims to safeguard the essence of the Khasi religion and culture and keep vigil over the sanctity of traditional practices. The advancement of education was also looked into by the Seng Khasi. Besides social and cultural activities the Seng Khasi has also worked hard in the literary field by the publication of some books, magazines and journals. The contribution of different authors towards these books show that they do not want Khasi religion disappear into oblivion.