CHAPTER III

THE PARADIGMS OF CONFLICT IN H.W. STEN’S

KA MAHADEI

The tragic love story of Ka Makaw and U Manik\(^1\) had captured the creative imagination of H.W. Sten to recreate it in the form of a drama Ka Mahadei. Rendered from the available sources both written and oral, the author\(^2\) has poignantly presented the dramatic events in a powerful and natural manner, which is close to life and life-situations. He was a conscious artist, as mentioned earlier, who had a model and an ideal\(^3\) in mind and applied it in his practice of the art of creation. As the author himself had put forward, his idea of the drama is that it is a life-like

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presentation of life on the stage.\textsuperscript{4} True to his vision, the author of the drama applied typical devices of suspense to convey the constant human mental activity that goes on in human beings.

Journey, as one of the favourite motifs of H.W. Sten, has been used as a powerful and meaningful instrument in the drama. In an approach similar to that in his novel, \textit{Kwah Bym Ju Kut}, H.W. Sten pictures an atmosphere of quest in his drama, \textit{Ka Mahadei}, wherein all the characters embark on a journey. The journeys of the main characters is more prominently shown. However, in a manner specific to their roles and functions in the play, all the characters make a journey whether externally and physically or internally and mentally. It is quite clear that H.W. Sten understood human life as a journey in quest of something as it is innate in human nature to seek and to find.

The main characters make their journeys, which impact repercussions in the lives of others. However, the journeys of the different characters are not actually acted on the stage but are referred to or are activated by the action on the stage – Ka Mahadei’s journey to the house of U Manik

is not acted on the stage; U Syiem⁵ appears on the stage after his return; U Manik is shown to leave the stage on his journey to the funeral pyre. Similarly, the journey, after the summons of U Syiem to U Sangot and U Rangbah Shnong to go and fetch U Manik from his hut,⁶ is not shown on the stage. However, whether in physical action or in mental exercise, H.W. Sten powerfully communicates the impact of the journeys of the different characters in quest of a value or values that are close to the heart and most prominent of all is the quest for self-fulfilment. H.W. Sten paints his heroine, Ka Mahadei, in a most realistic and colourful manner – a woman with flesh and blood imbued with all qualities of head and heart. It is in the process of her quest for self-fulfilment that conflict is created in a most disturbing way which affects all in the society.

The epicentre of the conflict in the drama is the relationship and encounter of U Syiem and Ka Mahadei. The direction of the conflict is the search for the truth of the cause of the birth of Ka Mahadei’s son. U Manik’s and Ka Mahadei’s death is the culmination of the conflict. It is created in a most disturbing way which affects all in the society.

⁵ According to the Khasi Encyclopaedic Dictionary Ka Dienshonhi, U Syiem is a ruler or a chief. Larington Kharkongor, Ka Dienshonhi, (Shillong: Shandora Press, Synod Complex, 2002), p. 425. In the context of the traditional political system in Khasi Hills, the title is given to the head or chief of the “hima” which is ordinarily understood as a ‘kingdom’ or a ‘state’. Larington Kharkongor, op. cit., p. 172. Similarly, the term “U Syiem” is understood to mean ‘king’ whenever reference to it is made as it is clear from the translation of the English word ‘king’ in E. Blah and L. Harrison’s English-Khasi Dictionary. E. Blah and L. Harrison, English-Khasi Dictionary, (Shillong: M. Harrison Syiemlieh, Qualapatty, 1992), p. 524.

⁶ Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 34.
the different layers of focus\(^7\) and the different approaches, which gravitate the conflict. In the process of the search, all the prominent members of U Syiem’s court share the same viewpoint, that the cause should be found out\(^8\), but their vision of the cause is not the same as that of Ka Mahadei who, while expecting that the truth will come out at the end, her concept of the reality is different from that of others.

U Pator points out the knotty problem of the birth of Ka Mahadei’s child in the absence of U Syiem and states that it is unknown in what way it has come about.

PATOR: I Pa iem i la jah slem. Shisha i la jah slem … Ka buit ka dum, ym don ba tip shuh kumno yn leh … Ngi sngewsih … Ngim tip ïa ka daw balei ba i Mahadei jong ngi i íoh khun haba i Pa iem im don ha shnong.\(^9\)

(PATOR: U Syiem was away for a long time. Really he was away for a long time… We are at a loss, no one knows what to do… We are sorry … We do not know the cause how Ka Mahadei gave birth when U Syiem was not in station).\(^10\)

\(^7\) For U Syiem and his elders, the focus of the search was the father of Ka Mahadei’s child. The search for the cause was only a subsidiary issue though towards the end, it became an important determining factor of the tragic end of the drama.

\(^8\) Sten, *Ka Mahadei*, pp. 21 – 22.

\(^9\) Ibid., pp. 21 – 22.

\(^10\) Translations are by the researcher unless specified.
There is duplicity of meaning in the statement of U Pator, that while referring to the cause, his level of thinking was actually directed to the father of the child. At the same time he unconsciously states that there is a real cause behind the whole issue.

With the same point of preoccupation and in the same direction, U Syiem insists:

SYIEM: Lada phim lap īa u kpa une u khunlung katne phi īadon; lada ngim lah ban wad īa ka daw katne ngi īadon;\(^{11}\)

(SYSIEM: If you do not find the father of the child when you are so many; if we do not find the cause when we are so many;)

U Basan too emphasises:

BASAN: Hooid, in bishar bad wad īa ka daw. Ka jingbishar ka dei ban lap īa ka daw.\(^{12}\)

(BASAN: Yes, he will judge and find out the cause. The judgement should be to find out the cause).

\(^{11}\) Sten, *Ka Mahadei*, p. 23.
\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 22.
In the context of the development of events in the Syiemdom, the consensus of the assembly of the durbar was the need to find out the cause of the embarrassment. All the leading citizens of the Syiemdom emphasised the need of finding the cause. U Pator stated the material aspect of the situation and related it to the effect. Similarly, U Basan, too, stressed the point vehemently. U Rangbah Shnong reiterated the point and added motivation for a greater cause as the basis for searching the cause. However, all the while and for all concerned, the focus of the discussion and the intention was to find out the father of the illegitimate child of Ka Mahadei.

On the other hand, from the beginning, Ka Mahadei's emphasis has a different direction all together. When warned by the servant that they would look for the father of the child, she insisted that the matter should be clarified in the public durbar:

MAHADEI: Balei ngam ïathuh, balei ngam khana?
Ym don kaban set ha khmat u Patsha;

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13 As explained earlier, ‘Syiem’ means ‘ruler, chief, king’. U Syiem is the Chief or Ruler of a political area or territory. The area under the authority of U Syiem is referred to here as a “Syiemdom” in a way similar to the description of a ‘kingdom’.

14 Sten, *Ka Mahadei*, p. 22.
Hynrei ha Paidbah ha pdeng ka dorbar,
Ka hok kan tyngshaiñ, pyrthei kan shai kdar.15

(MAHADEI: Why would I not tell, why would I not confess?
There is nothing to hide from U Syiem;
But in public in the assembly,
That truth will shine and all will be clear).

Basically, the conflict and the conflict situations in the drama are linked to the vision and aspirations especially of U Syiem and Ka Mahadei. U Syiem had his own ideal and ideology, plans and visions, wishes and aspirations, which were mainly related to power and politics. On the other hand, Ka Mahadei’s aspirations were those of a woman, a lover, a wife. The problem originated at the level of conflict of interests because of the incompatibility of the areas of interest and goals. The focal point of the conflict lies in the actions and reactions of U Syiem and Ka Mahadei. The act of unfaithfulness of Ka Mahadei, which sparked off fire, leading eventually to the fire, which consumed the lovers, is the

15 Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 17. In the context of the traditional Khasi society where democratic system was very strongly practised in the durbar – as it was part of the life of the people, public opinion was very important. Once the public had approved or sanctioned or refused, anything would have absolute validity. Moreover, the Khasis believed that the durbar is a ‘divine assembly’ (ka Dorbar Blei). That was the reason why the Mahadei wanted that the disclosure of her action, if it were to be done at all, had to be in public. The idea has been elaborately explained in H. Onderson Mawrie, Ka Pyrkhat u Khasi, (Shillong: ... 1987), pp. 66 – 73.
dramatic centre around which the dramatic actions converge.\textsuperscript{16} Apparently, the most popular and most impressive event was the interpersonal conflict between U Syiem and his wife, following the birth of her son during the two year long absence of U Syiem. The problem looms large in the atmosphere of \textit{Ka Mahadei} and even the various forces of nature symbolically participated pointing to the human condition and this aspect has immensely added to the aesthetics of the drama. Of course, deep down, there was the reality of the intense internal conflict of Ka Mahadei, U Syiem, the elders and, practically all. Status plays an important role in the conflict. U Syiem was conscious of his status and wanted to use power as a means of ending the conflict within him and the conflict with Ka Mahadei. On the other hand, for Ka Mahadei, status was subservient to her personal life, in fact, with the desire for the fulfillment of her goals and expectations, she sacrificed every thing, even life.

U Syiem and Ka Mahadei were of completely different personalities, that convergence of goals, aspirations and visions was impossible. The "intense interpersonal and intrapersonal dissonance" arose as a result of

\textsuperscript{16} The idea of conflict dynamics has been taken from Peter M. Kellett, \textit{Conflict Dialogue}, (California: Sage Publications Inc., 2007), p. 152.
“incompatible goals, needs, desires, values, attitudes”. The marriage covenant between U Syiem and Ka Mahadei had not united their hearts in love as pertaining to marriage; they were still separate individuals with separate entities – in fact, they were poles apart in their perception of goals, aims and values, and both perceived each other as “potentially interfering with the realization of the goals”. In such a situation of incompatibility where there is conflict of interest and opposition of goals and vision, crisis of relationship with threats and frustrations was inevitable. The opposition in value system is seen with U Syiem and his advisers symbolizing a static order in the society, and, on the other hand, Ka Mahadei symbolizing a dynamic order where the individual occupies absolute importance. Thus, looking from a different angle of perception, there is a clash between the individual and the social standard of value system where social norm and belief do not stand compatible with personal attitude and conviction. The clash is punctuated with a lot of questions, which, in fact, form a pattern of the development of the play.


18 Linda L. Putnam, op. cit., p. 6. The idea has been applied to the dynamics of relationship between U Syiem and Ka Mahadei.
The drama opens with a big question mark regarding the whereabouts of U Syiem; he could be alive or dead! Where is he? The real answer is given only at the end of the drama. Essentially, the question transcends the possible answer regarding presence or absence and goes beyond to the realm of existence and non-existence through morality which finally resulted in the voluntary banishment of U Syiem.

Soon after the birth of U Moiñ the message was sent to U Syiem, but there was no news from him and the elders were worried.

PATOR: ... lai bnaï pura!
Katta la dei ban poi shane;
Hynrei jar jar! U don hangno?
... ¹⁹

(PATOR: ... three full months!
By now he should have been here;
But completely silent! Where is he now?)

The anxiety grew worse everyday as it was symbolically externalized in the personal appearance of U Pator whose turban was about to fall as remarked by U Sangot:

SANGOT: "Haba la kulmar kaba hapoh ka shynrong khlieh te phi Pator, kaba halor lei lei ka wad kajia lynter."^°

(SANGOT: When the inside of the head is confused, you know Pator, the external will be all in confusion).

The description of a stormy weather with a violent wind, thunder and lightning^1 displays the inner disposition and conflict of the people. At the same time, they are an indication of prophecy or foreboding of the approaching events and are a bad omen for the future in a way very similar to the events in the dramas of Shakespeare where human situations and natural or cosmic phenomena are interrelated.^2 The supernatural elements, which are at work in Raitong, the locale of the action of the drama seem to foretell the events that would take place:

MAHADEI: Wa ka bneng Raitong jong ngi te mu seh. Hynne da ka dum, ka byrthen myntan i kham shai; mynta pat utei u lyoh u leit khih stet balei kumtei, i kumba u ลำshoh para ma u! U lyoh u leit tap sa ḫa ka sngi.^3

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^° Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 8.

^1 Ibid., pp. 14-16. The involvement of the powerful natural powers gives the play a dimension of magnanimity.


^3 Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 16.
(MAHADEI: What a weather in Raitong. Just a little while ago, it was gloomy and rough and then it was clear; now the clouds move fast as if they are fighting against one another! Then the cloud covers the sun.)

Assuming the role of the chorus\textsuperscript{24} like in T.S. Eliot’s plays, especially in \textit{Murder in the Cathedral}, the character, KA SHAKRI, through her exclamatory repetition, intensifies the tension of fear of the coming events:

SHAKRI: … Ani! Nga sngew syier, sngew syier balei kumta? Nga pisa, nga lynga sa ma nga. Nga sngew kumba ngan pdem la ka khmat sha khyndew ba ngam kwah ban iohi ĩa kaban jia mynta. Kita! Sngew par snieh.\textsuperscript{25}

(SHAKRI: … I am afraid, I am anxious, why? I am worried. I feel as if I should bury my face in the ground so that I would not see the coming events. It is frightening.)

In T.S. Eliot’s drama, \textit{Murder in the Cathedral}, the chorus plays the role of ‘commentators’ on the dramatic actions and events. Though Ka Shakri is part of the play she stands as a neutral person who by her

\textsuperscript{24} T.S. Eliot followed the tradition of the Greek tragedies where the Chorus served as a commentator on the dramatic actions and events and provided the audience with special perspective of the characters and events. H.W. Sten was a keen admirer of T.S. Eliot as it is clear from his introduction to the drama.

\textsuperscript{25} Sten, \textit{Ka Mahadei}, p. 16.
comments provide the audience a special perspective of the events that are about to happen.\textsuperscript{26}

In the prevailing circumstances of anxiety, the discussion is centred around the problems relating to U Syiem's long absence as mentioned earlier. Of course, the immediate cause that provokes the discussion is the illegitimate birth of Ka Mahadei's child whose father is not known. Practically, the question centres around the fact that since U Syiem has been absent for over two years, how was Ka Mahadei's conception possible, "La poi ha baeh ngang."\textsuperscript{27} ('we are in a very difficult situation'). The burning question that involves every one and all in the Syiemdom is: "Hynrei mano une u kpa?"\textsuperscript{28} (but who is the father?).

However, to Ka Mahadei, the above question is simple, and perhaps, irrelevant because, taking every thing into consideration, the real question is "what is the cause that led to the birth of the child?"

MAHADEI: Ka leit ba don ka daw.
SYIEM: Kaei kata ka daw?\textsuperscript{29}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Sten, \textit{Ka Mahadei}, p. 9.
\item Ibid., p. 10.
\item Ibid., p. 49.
\end{thebibliography}
(MAHADEI: She went because of a reason.  
SYIEM: What is that reason?)

U Syiem’s question “Kaei kata ka daw?” (what is that reason?) is like Pilate’s classical question “what is truth?” (The Holy Bible Jn. 18.38)\(^3\) at his judgement seat where the innocent was condemned unjustly. According to Pheme Perkins in his article “The Gospel according to John” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, at that moment of the questioning Jesus regarding ‘truth’ “Pilate is really the one who is on trial”.\(^3\) In *Ka Mahadei*, taking every aspect into consideration, U Syiem himself is on trial.

To a great extent the conflict arose because of the different levels of approach and search for the reality of the cause and effect of the pertinent issues in the drama. To U Syiem and his elders and advisors, the relevant question was, “who was the father of Ka Mahadei’s child?” But to Ka Mahadei, the relevant question was, “what was the cause of the child?” The communication gap which arose because of the complexity of the task of merging the two levels, produced tragic results.

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of heartaches and pain in the lives of many. The unfolding of the mystery of “who” and “what”, reached its climax at the funeral pyre, which ignited the new light on “who” and “what” was the cause, and the revelation brought the tragedy to its completeness.

Right at the beginning of the search for truth, U Rangbah Shnong (Village Headman) unknowingly and in an indirect way of giving an answer to the question of “who”, explicitly pointed to Ka Mahadei’s fondness for music, which was like her weak point which is a tragic flaw that would finally lead to her downfall:

RANGBAH: ... Tang kawei kaba nga la lap ka long ba i bang ban sngap 'ia ka sur duitara bad sharati.32

[(RANGBAH: ... Only one thing that I found that she is fond of listening to the music of the duitara (harp) and the sharati (flute)]

The complexity of the problem was so intricate that humanly speaking, the learned elders of the Syiemdom were lost and they thought of resorting to supernatural elements:

32 Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 11.
PATOR: Ngam tip shuh! ngam tip shuh;  
Ngam neh shong, ngan shu iêng ... 

BASAN: Katba phi dang ap, ngan shu leit khot syndon da  
u nongkren blei. Ka dei îa ki blei ban tip ... 

SANGOT: Kata te, balei da ma phi? Ngan leit manga keîn. 

PATOR: ... Khot da uto uba la tymmen. Un batai uba la  
tymmen ubym don jingangnud shuh ban long ei ei îa lade.  
Sa tang ki blei! Sa tang ki blei.\(^{33}\) 

(PATOR: *I do not know! I do not know; I am restless. I  
shall stand.* 

BASAN: *While you wait, I shall go and call the diviner.*\(^{34}\) *It  
is right that the gods would know ...* 

SANGOT: *Then, why should you go? I shall go.* 

PATOR: *Call that elderly one. An elderly diviner will  
explain without any selfish motive since he has no more  
ambition. Only the gods! Only the gods.* 

The nagging problem of knowing “who” or “what” haunts every one in 
the drama from the beginning till the end. In fact, even after the death of 

\(^{33}\) Sten, *Ka Mahadei*, p. 18. 

\(^{34}\) Nongkren literally means “speaker” or “spokesperson”. Here he is designated as ‘diviner’  
because of his role. He speaks or conveys a divine message. H.W. Sten introduced the idea of  
the supernatural in the drama in the tradition of the great plays. However, he skilfully adapted  
the prevailing practice in certain parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills, thus, making the role of the  
diviner culturally tasteful and relevant. It is known in some cases even today that a person  
endowed with the power to impersonate the divine power, is able to prophesy and to disclose  
realities otherwise unknown. Circumstances may be different from the time of H.W. Sten, but  
the basic characteristics of the phenomenon are the same.
Ka Mahadei, the burning question of 'what the cause was' dominates the atmosphere with a new direction, that is, 'what the cause of her death was.' It is the approach to the question and the search for an answer, which complicated matters. While to the vast majority, the burning issue was to know "who the father of Ka Mahadei's son was", to Ka Mahadei the most relevant issue was "what the cause was". With the widening gap of knowing due to different levels of approaches, the problem of knowing 'who' or 'what" continues till the end of the play and links all issues to the same focal point – the search for truth – because the truth is beyond the physical aspect of conception and birth. Truth is conceptually unknown; it is unknown even to Ka Mahadei. That someone was the father of her child was clear to her but a mystery to others. However, Ka Mahadei was sure within herself that the truth extended beyond the answer to the question 'who was the father of the child?' Her quest was beyond the physical aspect; in fact, her interest was in discovering the truth. The process was long and difficult because it was a journey through the heart and into the deepest levels in human realities; it was the search for something beyond life and existence. That was the reason why she could not take necessary steps of action to prevent the death of U Manik; it was only after the pronouncement of the death sentence that she began to act in order to save his life. Tragically, it was the unknown truth, (as realized at the end) which caused the
death of U Manik and Ka Mahadei, and at the end, the fall from grace and the self-banishment of U Syiem.\textsuperscript{35}

Though all the issues in the drama are related to Ka Mahadei, at the first stage of inquiry, she did not show any interest for she knew that the matter was irrelevant without U Syiem's presence. The real cause, and not merely the superficial issues, which the others were interested in, was to be sought for. Ka Mahadei seriously came into the picture only when the question of life and death had started. When the issue of identifying the father of the child was taken up, Ka Mahadei took keen interest, particularly, when the face and banana judgement had been finalized, as the means to decide the guilty person\textsuperscript{36} and his fate, because the judgement could mean life or death. Secondly, when the life of U Manik was at stake, Ka Mahadei actively involved herself. Before the return of U Syiem, the elders to whom U Syiem had entrusted the care of the Syiemdom before leaving, questioned Ka Mahadei on the matter but her adamant silence embarrassed them and they accepted that they did not know the truth and cannot report any thing to U Syiem. After the return, the problem went deeper, for even after a closed door and private discussion\textsuperscript{37} with Ka Mahadei, U Syiem could not find the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Sten, \textit{Ka Mahadei}, p. 61.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 33.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 20.
\end{itemize}
culprit. It was clear that U Syiem had no other alternatives but to bring the matter to public discussion. In the midst of such a complicated and uncertain matter which did not favour any hint for solution, a voice cries out “Ngan bishar. Kin bishar.” The people who heard the voice repeated it in unison. It was a moment when even natural elements like the sun seemed to join the process of judgement.\(^{38}\)

The judgement is an act when the past is brought face to face with the present. It is an attempt at converging all elements of human experiences, which have surfaced from the past to the present. The physical and psychological absence of U Syiem brought unimaginable strain and stress to his wife, Ka Mahadei. The absence of his affirming personality as a man and husband caused frustration and mental agony to her. She saw her future bleak and unpromising and experienced a crisis of identity as a married woman – because she had no child by the legitimate husband who left her just five months after the wedding due to the call of duty as the Chief. It is when she was face to face with a bleak future that she looked for an alternative solution in order to redeem her sorrowful state.

\(^{38}\) Sten, *Ka Mahadei*, p. 20.
Ka Mahadei had carefully observed herself and found that she had undergone through a few cycles of periods as a woman after she started living with U Syiem but nothing has happened to her physically as a woman and wife. She could not understand but questions rose in her mind regarding the compatibility of her husband, U Syiem. By ordinary standard, she doubted his fertility and fitness as a man. As it appears later in the play, she expressed herself clearly:

**MAHADEI:** ... San bnai bad u Syiem,
Mat kylliang um shym ai,
Tang shi miet bad Manik,
Ba ngan bah nga la ioh.³⁹

(MAHADEI: ... five months with U Syiem
He has not given any issue
One night with Manik has given me a child)

Ka Mahadei went through a lot of strain, stress and frustration because of the absence of her husband. She felt deeply humiliated by the inability⁴⁰ of U Syiem to give her a child to fulfill her aspiration as a wife. Apart from the sad situation of the doubt about the physical fitness


⁴⁰ After living together with U Syiem for five months she had not conceived. The situation invites investigation. It could be because the two did not live together in sharing the same bed (and having sexual intercourse) or if they lived together, U Syiem could have been sterile. (It could not be the physical defect of the wife since she conceived and bore a son from another man).
of U Syiem, his long absence from home due to the call of duty had made the life of Ka Mahadei extremely unbearable as a human being. A sense of extreme loneliness had crept into her lonely life, since to all intents and purpose, she had only one companion, her servant, and all others acted only as spies on her. She passed through many sleepless nights alone and it was in a state of loneliness and rejection that she could not resist the call of the music of the flute that filled the air of the quiet nights. It was the sense of frustration which had given her the energy and courage to fly in the wings of the tune not only mentally as a lover of music but to dare the night and journey alone to the physical territory of music and finally into the bosom of Manik. The time of the absence of U Syiem had been the most challenging moments in the life of Ka Mahadei. The length of the time of waiting for the return of the beloved husband, if expressively compared, had been like an eternity to her. However, she patiently waited for a year\(^{41}\) without taking any action whatsoever. To a great extent, her action of breaking the door of U Manik's hut and finally breaking the door of his heart, had happened as a result of the pressure of longing for consolation not only in the

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\(^{41}\) When backward calculation is made, it is found that when U Syiem returned, it was two years since he left and at the time of his return, the son of Ka Mahadei was three months old. When pregnancy time of nine months is taken into consideration, it is found that Ka Mahadei went to U Manik's hut one year before the return of U Syiem and it was at the end of the first year of absence.
music of the flute but in the music of the heart of U Manik which finally took place.

In the absence of U Syiem, which took place both physically and psychologically, his wife, Ka Mahadei, has critically reflected upon the reality of human life. The vision of a bleak future, as mentioned above, because of the infertility\(^{42}\) of U Syiem, had preoccupied her mind even when U Syiem was near her till the fifth month of married life. The reality of life that she had experienced had shattered her dreams and vision of the future. Honeymoon had ended and married life had started but nothing happened to her as a woman. The tension had been a long battle in her mind.

In her reflection of life, Ka Mahadei had experienced the emptiness of the moment and of the future. The observation of Fulton J. Sheen regarding womanhood fits the situation of Ka Mahadei, "a wife ceases to be a woman if she fails to have children."\(^{43}\) It was the fear of not becoming a mother, which had brought conflicting situation in the life of Ka Mahadei. It was in the context of her doubt of the manhood of her husband, that Ka Mahadei had taken the extreme step to go beyond the

\(^{42}\) In the context of the five months of married life, the inability to have pregnancy had raised serious doubts in the mind of Ka Mahadei who had hoped for fulfilment as mother of a child.

boundary of tradition in search of her human fulfillment as a woman and wife. It was the occasion of the long absence of U Syiem who she thought had died since no news was ever sent to her, which had given an opportunity to her to search for an alternative. Symbolically, U Syiem's insensitive and irresponsible behaviour of long absence without any information to his wife is a 'death in life', in fact, the noble sentiment of love and attachment of his wife has been deadened since he has never considered it necessary or important to connect to his wife in two long years.

According to Peter M. Kellett, conflicts generally begin with misunderstandings and misinterpretations of information rather than with a coordinated, rational, and reasonable communication about oppositions or differences. In *Ka Mahadei* the conflict is centred on the issues about being together and not being together and the results that followed from these two situations. In connection with her hope for fulfillment as a woman in the birth of a child, it was her genuine and simple belief based on experience that the result would be the same whether U Syiem was present or absent and that being together and not being together would not make any difference. She stated it explicitly,

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“San bnai bad U Syiem, Mat kylliang um shym ai.”\(^5\) (Five months with U Syiem, he has not given any issue).

Ka Mahadei reached a saturation point after having undergone through conflicting moments of crisis and being left alone she had to make her own judgements and choices. To a great extent, the cause of her inner struggle with herself was her genuine perception that the values which were held dear in her social tradition would be compromised because of her individual goal. Having carefully reflected on the reality that she had one life to live she eventually put herself and her values above all other considerations. Having come to live in U Syiem's palace did not turn a human being, who was still with flesh and blood, into an automaton. It was in the circumstance of frustrations and personal decision that Ka Mahadei having been carried by the sweet music, crossed over the bridge of crisis and came to a state of ecstasy in the haven of U Manik Raitong who provided her solace, comfort and courage in her low ebb and she attained a state of fulfillment of her goal in the birth of a son. When the diviner (Nongkren) enlightened Ka Mahadei during the process of the unfolding of the mystery of the cause, towards the end of the play, that it is usually men who take the first step in wooing, she did not make any comment.

\(^5\) Sten, _Ka Mahadei_, p. 53.
because she knew the tradition and she had made the desperate decision and crossed the boundary of tradition.

The conflict gravitated further because of the wrong and vindictive approach of U Syiem who tackled the problem with an already decided revengeful punishment for the culprit. There was violence of emotions in the mind of U Syiem – a) he felt extremely jealous and possessive of his wife whom he loved tenderly but had betrayed him, b) he wanted to punish the culprit, have his revenge and cleanse the Syiemdom from filth. A sense of disappointment gripped him deeply as he experienced the hard reality of the bitter betrayal of his wife. U Syiem’s anger was provoked by the usurpation of his role as husband, that is, that someone had used his wife in his absence. The action had caused hurt, and he perceived that his self-concept and public image had been tarnished. Thus, in the judgement, U Syiem was preoccupied with himself and conducted the judgement in a sort of identity management. However, given U Syiem the status of an ordinary husband, it was natural for him to react because he had perceived that the primary relationship with his wife had been threatened by a third party. Being naturally in a high degree of jealousy he was both in a state of conflict and was emotionally charged. The situational circumstance of U Syiem can be better understood in the context of the model offered by John G. Oetzel and
Stella Ting-Toomey regarding the context of conflict and accompanying emotions. They explained that “the event that triggers conflict also triggers emotion. Both emotion and conflict are inherently relational and identity based. Emotions and conflict are intensified when the precipitating event revolves around one’s self-identity.”

In their study on interpersonal conflict, commenting on relationship between husband and wife, writers, Laura K. Guerrero and Angela G. La Valley, say “romantic jealousy is caused by the disruption of the goal to have a particular type of relationship with a valued partner. Because goal disruption is a major cause of aversive emotions such as jealousy, ... jealous individuals would engage in different communicative responses ...” Ka Mahadei had been hurt when U Syiem left her for months, and without sending any information. She had nurtured hurt in the form of emotions like agony, anger, anguish, sadness, and suffering. On the other hand, U Syiem too had been hurt by the act of relational transgression, which is the act of betrayal of relational rules of marriage. He too was intense with emotions even to the extent of meditating revenge on the offender. Decline in the quality of relationship, for whatever reasons, causes conflict.

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47 Laura K. Guerrero and Angela G. La Valley, op. cit., p. 77.
H.W. Sten concludes his introductory comment to *Ka Mahadei* in his “Ka Plie Pyrda” with a note of hope and expectation that the Khasi scholars and dramatists whom he calls the ‘Aristotles’, the ‘Arnolds’ and the ‘Eliots’ of the Khasi land would find his work up to the mark, “Nga ngeit ruh ba kane ka drama kan ym pynshitom jingmut ìà ki Aristotle bad ìà ki Arnold ne Eliot ka ri Khasi”*^ (I believe that this drama would not confound the Aristotles, the Arnolds and the Eliots of the Khasi land). The remark gives a hint that H.W. Sten has carefully perused the works of such authors and is inviting comparison to their works as yard sticks to judge the value of his drama. Secondly, it gives a clue that H.W. Sten has been influenced by these authors both in theory and in practice of writing.

The **epicentre** of Eliot’s plays, viz., *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*, and, *The Cocktail party*, are not in the death of Becket, or Harry’s wife, or Celia, but in the encounters in these plays.49 According to Anju Dhadda Misra, “the actual locus of conflict in the three above mentioned plays, to any reader would seem to be the actual murder of Becket, the actual death of Harry’s wife, and the actual homicide of Celia. But in the plays we find that the locus of the dramatic

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conflict in each of these plays has been dislocated and shifted to new sites – Becket’s encounter with the tempters, Harry’s harrowing experience with the *Eumenides* and Celia’s encounter with heathen cannibals.”\(^\text{50}\) Similarly, in *Ka Mahadei*, the epicentre of the conflict is in the relationship and encounter of U Syiem and Ka Mahadei.

In U Syiem – Ka Mahadei’s relationship of personal life there was clearly a relational transgression where some of the traditional rules of relationship were grossly violated. The implicit violation of marriage code has been on the part of Ka Mahadei who delivered a baby in the absence of U Syiem, her legal husband. He was hurt and he felt justified in getting angry and in contemplating a revengeful punishment for the culprit. On the other hand, Ka Mahadei felt justified in her action because of the insensitive action on the part of U Syiem. If U Syiem were to have been more thoughtful, he would have explored options how to treat his wife more responsibly. Some options are: a) he could have taken her along with him on the journey as he himself said that she was free and not having a baby; b) he could have kept her informed of his whereabouts from time to time. It was only at the end that U Syiem

realised his miscalculations and eventually experienced guilt and took an action which ended the drama tragically.

There had been intense emotional flooding in the encounter of U Syiem and his wife, Ka Mahadei as noticed and witnessed by the maidservant. U Syiem approached the situation and his wife with disgust for her action. He was filled with contempt and hatred for Ka Mahadei's accomplice who seemed to have plotted against him. In the judgement scene U Syiem with his elders and all present displayed a sense of disgust and contempt. From the words spoken by U Syiem and others, the action of Ka Mahadei was viewed as a heinous crime and all felt sickened and repulsive at it, in fact, U Syiem was literally frustrated with the situation. The gravity and intensity of Ka Mahadei's crime is better understood in the perspective of the Khasi understanding of "ka sang." According to Rev. E. Bars, ka sang is a “sacrilege” or “what is forbidden” or “something unforgivable." U Sib Charan Roy Jaitdkhar describes ka sang ka ma as "kaba 'sah ka ang ka lait ka palat' hakhmat u Blei uba nang tip nang ūohi ba ngi leh lada habar ne harieh; ka thew de ūa kiei kiei ki jingleh kiba ym don hukum na khmat ka hok ka sot" (ka sang ka ma is what remains as a stain before God who knows and sees

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51 Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 20.
52 E. Bars, Khasi – English Dictionary, (Shillong: Don Bosco, 1973), p. 777
53 U Sib Charan Roy Jaitdkhar, Ka Niam-Ki-Khasi, (Shillong Ri Khasi Press, 1919, rpt 1979), pp ix-x
every thing inside or in secret; it means those actions done without being sanctioned and that they are against righteousness). The term ka sang is also referred to certain situations in marriage. It is considered as a monstrous sin when there is an incestuous co-habitation between a man and a woman.\textsuperscript{54} It is also considered as adulterous and ka sang when a widower or a widow remarries, and, in fact, it is more serious if it is done when the bones of the wife or husband are still in his or her possession. In such situations prescribed sacrifices have to be offered as acts of purification.\textsuperscript{55} The relationship between Ka Mahadei and U Manik has been considered by U Syiem and the Elders as adultery and, thus, ka sang, an act which was not sanctioned, neither by the Divine nor by the customary standards of the society. It is a sacrilege an action which is forbidden and considered unforgivable. Hence, it is outrageous and displeasing in the eyes of every one.

To a great extent, the judgement in the presence of U Syiem, his elders and other citizens was an act of conflict management. U Syiem had been extremely hurt when his expectations were not met. But what is the cause? Wherein lies the problem? In a way, the issue revolves

\textsuperscript{54} U Sib Charan Roy Jaitdikhar, \textit{Ka Niam-Ki-Khasi}, (Shillong Ri Khasi Press, 1919, rpt 1979), p 21
\textsuperscript{55} U Rabon Singh, \textit{Ka Kitab Niam-Kheiñ Ki Khasi}, (Shillong NEICS Printing Department ), pp. 39-40 Also, U Homwell Lyngdoh, \textit{Ka Niam Khasi}, (Shillong Sawlyer Printing Press, 1937, rpt as third edition, 1990), pp 75-77 Also, Sr P Kharakor, \textit{Ka Kolshor Khasi katkum ba ka paw ha ka Litereshor Khasi}, (Shillong St Mary’s College, 1988), p 144
round great expectations: Ka Mahadei had had her great expectations —
love and attachment from her husband together with the gift of children.
On the other hand, U Syiem expected unconditional love, faithfulness
and obedience from his wife, Ka Mahadei. It is a case of "expectancy
violation with a severe relational transgression" as Laura K. Guerrero
and Angela G. La Valley say.56

In the background of the circumstances leading to the judgement of
the action of Ka Mahadei, there are certain aspects which need to be
considered: a) there was a false assumption on the part of U Syiem that
love and relationship culminates in marriage and that it is static, an
attitude which is like a perfect match made for each other and has no
more scope for any defect, b) there were certain standards of belief and
practice which were considered as idealised forms of relationship and
any departure from those norms is considered a deviation from the
standard ordinary way of behaviour. In the husband-wife relationship
there is, normally, a certain type of belief which constitutes "standards or
beliefs about what relationships and partners should be"57 and precisely
Ka Mahadei had deviated and committed ka sang as mentioned above.

56 Laura K. Guerrero and Angela G. La Valley, op. cit., p. 84.
57 Michael E. Roloff and Courtney Waite Miller, "Social Cognition Approaches to
Understanding Interpersonal Conflict and Communication", The Sage Handbook of
Conflict Communication, ed. John G. Oetzel and Stella Ting-Toomey, (California:
In the course of the journey of life, there is an aspect of quest for abundance in life on the part of both U Syiem and Ka Mahadei. However, in the process of the journey, there was a conflict of two forces: that of positivity and negativity, as symbolised by Ka Mahadei and U Syiem respectively. Negation of life with barrenness and thirst for revenge and destruction is seen in the life force of U Syiem which contains a tendency towards evil and destruction. On the other hand, Ka Mahadei's positive approach to life is evident in her reaction to life's experiences. Her quest for life is prominent – even at the last moment, her desire was to save life. It was in the process of the interaction of the different forces that the psychological battle sparked off though the inner conflict (which Ka Mahadei has experienced), as if it were in the psyche of an introvert, is not displayed in the drama. However, the dialectic of the expressible and the inexpressible in content overlaps with that of the representable and the unrepresentable in form and figure.\(^58\)

Looking from another angle it is found that conflicts often occur when one person is seen as frustrating another person's goal in a

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blameworthy manner. The result is anger, rage, exasperation and indignation. In the life of Ka Mahadei, there was a dimension of quest of what psychologists call the instrumental goal, which required her partner to deal cooperatively with her so that she could reach her goal. From this point of view, it is clearly found that U Syiem had failed to contribute instrumentally to the attainment of Ka Mahadei’s goal. Secondly, there was an aspect of the identity management goals, which involves presenting a particular image to the partner. It is found that U Syiem had failed to project himself in the image of a father, and that he had also failed to present his wife as mother figure. Thirdly, the relational goals, which define the nature of relationship between U Syiem and Ka Mahadei, were taken for granted and not emphasized. In fact, U Syiem and Ka Mahadei individually and separately assumed that relationship is bound with the limits of standard beliefs and practice. It is clear from the reaction of Ka Mahadei that she had her own set goals, which operated in a sort of wavelength moment of variation of the tripartite typology mentioned above. On the other hand, U Syiem, too, had his own aspirations, goals and expectations. Unfortunately, the two individuals

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60 Daniel J. Canary and Sandra G. Lakey, op. cit., p. 194.
61 Ibid., p. 194.
62 Ibid., p. 194.
63 Ibid., p. 194.
ran parallel to each other and a wide gaping gap existed between them. It was in the context of this high incompatibility that crisis in relationship was inevitable. Even if not incompatible, the situation of the two, husband and wife, can be described as having *incommensurate* aspirations, attitudes and behavioural patterns.⁶⁴

In the context of a performance on stage, it is possible that as the audience watches the progress of the play, emotions build up and there is a spontaneous tendency to sympathize with U Syiem who had been apparently wronged by his unfaithful wife. There is also a spontaneous and natural tendency to sympathize with Ka Mahadei in her death. The audience feels suspense, horror and awe, latent with admiration and sympathy. However, there is also a natural tendency to turn against U Syiem who has been so insensitive to the human nature of Ka Mahadei.

Ka Mahadei was ecstatic about her own experience in quest of personal fulfillment. Following the unprecedented volley of attack against her during the judgement, she, further, decided to continue the journey alone in quest of her cherished goals and in her quest for personality fulfillment she rushed to the fire as an effort to eternalise the truth which had not come out due to the prejudiced act of judgement of U Syiem and

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the *durbar*. From another point of view, it is a moment when art and life blend at the aesthetic level when transformation of the reality takes place. As Ka Mahadei jumped to the fire to catch up with her beloved U Manik, she reached the realm of existence which is meta-theatrical, meta-poetic, meta-fictional and at that state, what is of the earth, like the wedding gift of U Syiem, fell at his feet. To the gaping crowd, it looked like a disaster – in fact, it was a tragic end of one whom U Syiem still loved and cherished tender feelings as it was apparent from the fact that he did not dismiss or send her away from the palace.

On a deeper level of analysis, it is found that the conflict between U Syiem and Ka Mahadei has many layers of issues; it is related to the specific here-and-now and it is also about deeper relational issues of compatibility and expectations. The compatibility is linked to the evolving goal and identity of Ka Mahadei and the insensitivity and complete ignorance of U Syiem as regards women’s sensibility and nature. U Syiem was absolutely unaware of Ka Mahadei’s expectation and aspirations, which largely influenced and shaped her actions and judgements. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, U Syiem too had

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66 The ideas have been taken from Peter M. Kellett, *Conflict Dialogue*, (California: Sage Publications, Inc. 2007), p. 38.
his own expectations – that his wife would be faithful to him. This is clear from his reaction of jealousy and frustration when the news of childbirth was brought to him. In U Syiem’s mind, the psychological battle of conflict was uppermost when his family was linked to his role and responsibility as u ‘Syiem’ (king/chief) because all considered the action of Ka Mahadei as a direct impingement on the issues of name and office of U Syiem.

From the point of view of Ka Mahadei, it is found that long absence of U Syiem without even caring to send a message to his wife, had brought her a strong sense of loneliness, alienation and entrapment. She faced a situation of dilemma – to integrate and harmonize her internal needs vis-à-vis the external situations and standards. She was caught in the net of many conflicting situations. The search for wholeness within and without had been a very painful reality for Ka Mahadei since she was caught amidst conflicting situations and fragmented identities and still she sought to preserve her individual autonomy by adopting a singular approach to life. Mental dilemma permeated the inner and outer reality of Ka Mahadei’s life and she was entangled in frustration. Her situation fits the observation of Neeru Chakraverty in similar circumstances, “swept by the eternal flux of life, she is buffeted by the exigencies of this dilemma and desperately sought ways and means to comprehend the
disillusioning and frustrating aspects of life." Self-fulfilment is associated not with material desires but with the achievement of emotional and intellectual desires, related to internal peace and serenity. The quest for self-fulfilment seems to be a precarious desire amid the unpredictable contradictions and progressions of life. That is why, in the midst of the many pressures operating on human beings resulting in psychic traumas and fragmentation, Ka Mahadei needed a matching mental strength to assert her personal autonomy in the face of social pressures and regulatory forces. A dynamic energy was required of her to be able to reorient her life towards a proactive approach and a meaningful perspective to life.

The stand off following the action of Ka Mahadei had provoked a retrospective action on the part of U Syiem. His, however, was a self-egotistic approach. He was emphatic in his commitment to the welfare of the people and the Syiemdom, and wanted to find the cause of the embarrassment,

SYIEM: …

Ar snem nga jah shabar hima,
Ar snem la jngoh shibun jaka

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U Syiem pronounced a judgement that, whoever the culprit was, he had to be severely punished. Thus, the issues at stake as stated by different persons are, i) ‘who was the father of the child?’ and ii) ‘what was the cause of the embarrassment?’

The genesis of the issues was fundamentally the absence of U Syiem from his family and Syiemdom. He undertook a long distance journey in quest of promotion of power and fame but eventually returned home poorer having learnt that trouble had been fermented right in his hearth. Ka Mahadei, too, undertook a journey and returned richer – she was a changed person, because her goal had been fulfilled. In the process of the journey of U Syiem and Ka Mahadei, manifold expressions of emotions and instincts with greed for power and possessions, love, anger, jealousy, anxiety, revenge, etc. are manifested with different

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degrees of intensity. At the house of U Manik, Ka Mahadei experienced the strong blowing of the wind, the flashing of lightning, which threaten small creatures like the birds. This scene is highly symbolic of the violence of passions in Ka Mahadei: anger, pride, love and probably even lust. Moreover, taking into consideration from the psychoanalytic perspective, the phallic symbolism of the flute,\(^69\) it can be understood that Ka Mahadei was drawn to its music with passion. Further, when Ka Mahadei’s proper name is taken into consideration for psychoanalysis, it is found that a sexual symbolism is connected to it. Her proper name according to Donbok T. Laloo\(^70\) and Jespil Syiem\(^71\) is “Ka Liengmakaw”. “Ka Lieng” in Khasi literally means “the boat” or “the ship”. According to the *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Psychological Terms* by J.C. Banerjee\(^72\), the boat or the ship symbolizes the female sexual organ. From this point of view, Ka Mahadei whose name is “Ka Lieng” or “Ka Liengmakaw” is sexy in herself and symbolizes sexual energy which is a natural match for U Manik who is symbolically represented by the flute which is the male sexual symbol.

Two years passed and Ka Mahadei on the eve of the return of U Syiem, knowing fully well her position and her role in the Syiemdom,

\(^69\) Web page: http://books.google.co.in?isbn=0765804050.
\(^72\) Web page; http://books.google.co.in/books?id=Pw.5U2qShfC&pg=PA77, p. 77.
battled with herself – she was not sure whether she would be able to continue in her position as Ka Mahadei after the return of U Syiem, since her action would not be pleasing in his sight – that was why even a place for sitting was not prepared for her because nothing was sure about her future: “Ía nga te ...” \textsuperscript{73} (for me, well ...). However, she tried to balance things and to put everything in the right perspective. She was very clear in her vision of her quest for the goal. She was in a genuine quest of an order, which was natural, legitimate, basic and fundamental to life and existence. Truly, she was in pursuit of her individual goals with the values that had been upheld by all humankind. She was in search of permanence, stability and fulfilment in family life with the gift of progeny in the normally accepted way:

MAHADEI: ...
Ba la slem ka jah, ña u Syiem nga kheïñ ñap,
Kumno ngan sep ei ba ka rta ka dang biang?\textsuperscript{74}

(MAHADEI: ... Since the absence was long, I thought U Syiem was dead, why should I waste my life when my age is still fit for childbearing).

As she clearly stated above, Ka Mahadei was particularly concerned about her desire for having children since she is of childbearing age

\textsuperscript{73} Sten, \textit{Ka Mahadei}, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 52.
Apart from personal fulfilment, it is Ka Mahadei’s innate consciousness of the requirement of a complete family in the context of the Khasi philosophy of a family which includes the mother, the father and the children, as explained by Sweetymon Rynjah, "Kumta ki dhot jong ka shi-īing shi-sem, ki kynthup īa ka kmie, u kpa bad ki khun."75 ("So the members of a family include the mother, the father and their children.") which has convinced her in her journey in quest of the objective.

It was the long and unconcerned absence of U Syiem which cast a dark cloud in the life of Ka Mahadei. U Syiem’s unconcerned behaviour precipitated the circumstances and made the situation humanly unbearable for Ka Mahadei. It was at that point of circumstances that she was captivated by the music of a flute from an unknown source. Music, as has been universally and traditionally accepted, has the ability to soothe the aching soul and drooping spirit.76 The sweet music in the middle of the night has the power to transport the mind and the heart of Ka Mahadei to the realm of hope and hopefulness. At the same time the music attracted her to the point of irresistibility that all other emotions and feelings remained suspended, that she lost all fear, shame, anxiety,

etc. and these were substituted with the courage to leave the palace in search of the sweet melody which filled the universe and especially the universe of her head and heart. Apart from the aspect of the power of music, the compulsion of earlier familiarity and love,\textsuperscript{77} as narrated by Donbok T. Laloo, is another aspect which compelled Ka Mahadei to leave her palace chamber in quest of the much needed love and consolation in the absence of the legitimate husband.

Symbolically, the music, which floated in the air from afar, was the aspiration of the longing heart of Ka Mahadei whose quest was for the finer values of life and existence. The music of the heart would be best blended when properly adjusted in harmony and appropriately synchronised. The rush of Ka Mahadei towards the external music was because of the pressing attraction for synchronisation between the music of the heart and the heart of the music\textsuperscript{78}. Thus, attracted by the irresistible music, Ka Mahadei went uninvited in search of the truly objective goal and absolute value of her heart. It was a journey towards an eternal welding of the wounded heart, which no external force could soothe. The flux of time stood still in the presence of the eternal time of

\textsuperscript{77} Donbok T. Laloo, op. cit., pp.13-14.

\textsuperscript{78} That is, the longing of Ka Mahadei’s heart and the achievement of the goal. In this case, the journey towards synchronisation of the two came with the invitation from the hearth of U Manik from where a mesmerising music floated and filled the air and to which Ka Mahadei rushed to find fulfilment.
value system where values are superior to any other aspect whatsoever. It is in the context of that value system that Ka Mahadei violated the existing traditional practice of decency where only men approach to woo the maiden:

NONGKREN: Kata ka aįn shnong;
Kynthei kam ju tur;
Dei kynja shynrang
Uba plie įa ka phang.\textsuperscript{79}
\begin{quote}
(NONGKREN: \textit{That is the law of the land; Ladies do not initiate}
\textit{But men do open the topic}).
\end{quote}

On the other hand, the goals of the quest of U Syiem were selfish in nature. Overconfident in himself, he took things for granted, even the relationship with his wife. While keen in relational maintenance with his wife, he was insensitive to her human needs. Mutual understanding and concern is fundamental in sustaining relationships.\textsuperscript{80} His unbalanced quest for name and fame through political influence did not yield satisfactory results. U Syiem was blurred in his vision of life and the human circumstances as it is clear from the way he approached the

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{79} Sten, \textit{Ka Mahadei}, p. 53.
\end{footnotes}
embarrassing situation in his family with a vindictive attitude – to have a revengeful satisfaction. He was also caught in a net of indecision when he was pulled into different directions. He was described by the diviner as an ambitious man who combined in himself wrong priorities and weak points:

NONGKREN: ...
Ka daw te dei na u briew,
U briew basynshar, u briew ba ieit nam,
U briew bymshai ka jingmut.
...
Ban synshar da ka nia,
Ban bishar da jingstad;
Jingieid nam bad dur kam myntoi,
Kum syntiew kan sa tlor.  

(NONGKREN: ...The cause is from a man,
The one who rules, an ambitious man
One who is without clear visions
...
To rule with discernment
To rule with wisdom;
Thirst for ambition and love for beauty are useless
Like the flower they will wither).

81 Sten, Ka Mahadei, pp. 56 – 57.
With the realities of family life and Syiemship, U Syiem was entangled in a multi-dimensional situation, which demanded of him a maximum capability for adjustment and adaptation. The action of the tragedy is centred on the ability and inability to adapt and adjust to life's real situations, which confronted both U Syiem and Ka Mahadei. The conflicting reality of unfaithfulness on the part of Ka Mahadei leading to the birth of the child which became the hot issue and on which the drama revolves, is actually the externalisation of the reality of the uncomfortable relationship.

The two aspects of U Syiem's personality – the personal aspect as husband of Ka Mahadei, and the social aspect as a public figure – have been beautifully and artistically blended so as to unite the action and movement of the drama. It is because of the improper management of the two aspects of life that the conflict arose in the personal life of U Syiem. The family, which has been formed after the marriage of U Syiem to Ka Mahadei, is a symbol of 'order' in the society and when the 'order' has been broken by the arrival of the child born outside the sanction of the normal standard of the society the conflict was inevitable. It is the conflict between two standards: the personal standard of Ka Mahadei and the existing social standard. It is evident that there were assumptions on the part of U Syiem, which to a great extent, served as a
model of married life for him. He has assumed that love and relationship culminated in marriage and that all problems ended with it. This is a static model of married life, which finally became a mirage for him. Moreover, it is a common experience that in the husband-wife relationship, there is a certain set of beliefs and practices, which constitutes "standards or beliefs about what relationships and partners should be".\[^{82}\] Considered as idealized forms of relationship any departure in terms of behaviour from the set norm and patterns are considered as a deviation or *ka sang* in the Khasi context, as mentioned above.

At the judgement, the aspirations of the heart and mind, along with the notions of relationships became externalised in the form of seriousness and light comedy. The recourse to the supernatural by calling the diviner (Nongkren) gives the play a touch of the metaphysical dimension, which brings a sense of mystery to the events that happen all around. In fact, the birth of a child, apart from the reality of the human aspect of nature and sexuality, has a dimension, which is beyond the physical side. In the tradition of the quest for truth, the final recourse to supernatural intervention is common especially in the Khasi context –

the supernatural forces are involved in the policy making and actions of
the Khasi people. However, in the search for truth, U Syiem was a
pragmatist who looked more to the natural aspect of the reality. When
suggested by U Basan for entrusting the matter to the gods, U Syiem
replied that they should first use all human wisdom and knowledge:

SYIEM: U briew u dei ban wad lad shwa. Balei un leit
pynbun kam ìa u Blei katba um pat kut lad kut lynti.84

(SYIEM: *Man should first search for ways and means.*
*Why to trouble God when all the ways and means have
not been tried out*).

And with that conviction, U Syiem used the traditional way of linking
and finding the cause and the effect. He used the banana fruit in order to
detect the father of the child. There are, however, two dimensions in the
act: to U Syiem, the act was probably more of an effort to use the natural
instinct of the child who was expected to stretch his hand for the banana
in the hand of one of the men. Ironically, U Syiem was not in favour of
any thing divine or supernatural because that would give a fair
judgement beyond his wisdom and power.85 For others, including Ka

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83 Right from birth till the very end of life, divine invocation is made on every event of life, e.g.
confer U Rabon Singh, *Ka Kitab Jingphawar*, (Shillong: Scorpio Printers, 1987), pp. 20 – 19,
(chapter 14 to chapter 19).

84 Sten, *Ka Mahadei*, p. 32.

85 U Syiem thought that he was wise enough to be a judge in that situation. Besides, he was bent
in having his revenge on the man who allegedly brought disgrace on his family.
Mahadei, it was an invocation for justice from God. Ka Mahadei, however, knowing that the child's father was not among those men, prayed aloud to God to prevent the child from stretching his hand to any man.

MAHADEI: Lada don hok don blei hangne
Kin lait ki briew ba la shah suba;
U Moin un ym kner la ka kti,
Um shim jingim jongno jongno hangne.
Ko Blei, me tip ìa ka hok,
Bishar da ka hok ba kine ki hok;
To khang ki ksuid, to khang ki khrei
Ba thaw ban knieh ka hok ki blei. 86

(MAHADEI: If righteous if God is here,
May those suspects escape;
May Moin never stretch out his hand
To take the life of any one.
Oh God, you know the truth;
Stop the devils from appropriating divine rights).

In the prayer of Ka Mahadei, there is a tone of innocence and determination. The query of the assembly for the identity of the father of the child was not the uppermost issue in her mind; for her, the root cause of the whole issue was the most important and nothing else. U

86 Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 33.
Basan noticed the pleasant appearance of Ka Mahadei after her invocation and commented that it was a sign that God had listened to her prayer.\textsuperscript{87}

The failure of the \textit{durbar} to identify the culprit had provoked further investigations. U Syiem showed his wisdom and broadmindedness by being opened to queries and suggestions for involving the supernatural elements and welcomed the diviner; he also further warned U Rangbah Shnong on pain of losing his position since he claimed he knew every man in the village:

\begin{quote}
SYIEM: Kynmaw lada dang don u kynja rangbah briew ha kane ka shnong, te men duh ka rek ka tek. Nga la pynbna naduh hynne.\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

\textit{(SYIEM: Remember if there is any man in this village who is left out, then you will lose all your holdings. I have announced earlier.)}

The diviner threw a vague possibility for suspicion on U Manik who was considered as a person who was not completely in his senses due to his extreme poverty and loneliness and was considered not even

\textsuperscript{87} Sten, \textit{Ka Mahadei}, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p. 33.
worth inviting to the *durbar*. The Khasi concept of the durbar is that it is a sacred assembly\(^9^9\) and, thus, restrictions are imposed on the attendance and membership.\(^9^0\) It is on the basis of that that the convener of the durbar did not think it necessary and worth to invite U Manik to the assembly. The diviner gave a signal that U Manik was just like any other man:

\begin{quote}
NONGKREN: U briew te u briew! a u briew!
U don ka mon, u don ka bor pyrkhat.
Ha suk kynjai; ne kthang ki ummat.
Riewbha ne riewduk, riewstad ne riewbieit
Um lait um shan ha ki khnam ka jingieit.\(^9^1\)
\end{quote}

*(NONGKREN: A man is a man! Just a man!)

*He has a will and intelligence."

*In peace or in sorrow.*

*Rich or poor, wise or foolish,*

*He cannot escape the arrows of love).*

Basing on the argument and philosophy that love is universal and that man is man even if he is in any condition, and is liable to be captured by


\(^9^0\) According to E.W. Dkhar, those who cannot attend the durbar are those without a beard, those without a clan, the handicapped persons like the dumb, the lame, the blind, those with serious sicknesses like leprosy, and those who committed adultery and incest. Cf. E. Weston Dkhar, op. cit., p. 31.

\(^9^1\) Sten, *Ka Mahadei*, p. 35.
the "arrows of love", the diviner emphatically suggested that U Manik should be brought to the durbar for judgement. Meanwhile, U Syiem had been put into a battle with himself when the diviner proclaims:

NONGKREN: U briew te u briew! a u briew!
Wei ba la phah, sngap ïa u.
Ka kam ka jong phi,
Sakhi ka jong u,
…

(NONGKREN: Man is man
Once you called listen to him
The action is yours,
His is the testimony).

It is in the process of the unfolding of the self that U Syiem mused on the words with questions, "Ka kam jong nga. Kumno ki blei ki kynnoh ïa nga? Ka kam aïu nga la leh?" \(^{92}\) (The action is mine. How is that the gods blame me? What have I done?).

On the other hand and to a certain extent, in his reply to U Syiem, when he appeared in the durbar, U Manik had unconsciously explained the condition of the mind of U Syiem and others:

MANIK: Hoooid, ka khia ïa kibym tip,

\(^{92}\) Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 37.
\(^{93}\) Ibid., p. 37.
Ka pisa lynga ía kiba wad,
Ka beit ía kiba tip,
Ka shai ía kiba leh.⁹⁴

(MANIK: Yes, it is a heavy load for those who do not know,
It is agonizing for those who search,
It is definite for those who know,
It is clear for those who did).

And true to what he said U Manik was clear in his understanding and vision of the truth. When he had gone through the same trial and was found guilty, U Manik accepted and briefly narrated how he committed the crime. However, his statement “Nga shu pyndep, nga shu pynkut”⁹⁵ (I just completed, I just concluded) brought controversy into his role and the whole council wanted to know the details. As he continued to narrate the development of events, U Manik charged U Syiem as the one who began, followed by Ka Mahadei and concluded by him. On further inquiry, the curious audience was satisfied when U Manik bluntly stated that it was Ka Mahadei who came to his house and broke open the door and tempted him to commit sexual action with her. The confession of U Manik brought to an end the question, ‘who the father of the child was’. When every thing was clear and certain, U Syiem passed the judgement and U Manik was awarded a capital punishment. However, U Syiem

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⁹⁴ Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 38.
⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 40.
granted him all his last wishes including death in a fire and blowing the flute.

*BYNTA IV* (Act IV) contains the most poignant and rhythmic part of the drama. In this part of the drama, the issue of the cause has surfaced in another form. It is the issue of life and death which has been vehemently emphasised. The author has displayed a very high degree of artistic skill. In the dramatic technique is seen the craft of the poet and dramatist who has skilfully visualised and grasped the tension and emotions in the minds of the characters and has graphically displayed them on stage. The different voices speak aloud or whisper different tunes but the direction of the focus is the same – life. In the course of the actions and discussion, which airs the aspirations of the individual or the community, the conflict is apparent because of the lateral nature of relationship and social life. Even U Manik who lived his single life alone, was entangled and trapped in the web of human relationships unexpectedly. Thus, the conflict, as it appears, is centred around three factors – i) U Syiem who is with his preoccupation on having his revenge on the man who was the accomplice of his wife’s unacceptable action; ii) Ka Mahadei who is keen in preventing and saving the life of U Manik who is convicted through no fault of his own; iii) U Manik who is at the receiving end of both U Syiem and Ka Mahadei.
True to his nature, the diviner takes the neutral approach as a supernatural being and in an emphatic manner, dwells on the transience of human life. With all its complexity, life is one and the same in space and time and the same universals govern the life of every individual without discrimination. Love as one aspect of human life is real and operative in all circumstances of life and in the same pattern though with different psychic wavelengths in the context of variants relating to a particular space and time. This is beautifully described by the diviner:

NONGKREN: …
A u biew! marwei u shong
Sa tang khyndiat por
U syntiew un sa tlor.
…
Riewbha ne riewduk, riewstad ne riewbieit,
Um lait um shan ha ki khnam ka jingieit. 96

(NONGKREN: Poor man! He sits alone
Only a short time
Like a flower he will whither.
…
Rich or poor, wise or foolish,
He cannot escape the arrows of love).

The diviner functions as an element, which links the various characters and in connecting the agents of the issues at different stages

96 Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 45.
of action. He assumes the role of the supernatural that also predicts and warns, though the individuals are not able to understand or grasp all that was said. It was only at the latter stage that things were clear in all respects. Introduced into the play in the traditions of the great plays of Shakespeare and others, the diviner functions as a dispenser of justice.

Ka Mahadei, who is the central character of the drama, assumed different roles according to the need of the hour. She played the pleader who tried to redeem the fate of U Manik; she played the psychologist who counselled U Manik at the most critical crisis of his life when it was needed to reaffirm his personal identity and to sustain his composure to face the reality of life courageously.

U Manik lamented his fate that he was doomed to die according to the sentence of the judgement. He regretted the fate of his son who was to lose his father soon. The parting scene brought to the mind of U Manik all the miseries and misfortunes that his family endured.\(^7\) U Manik experienced intense emotional moments when he realized that those were the last moments of his life. He underwent the internal conflicting battle mainly on the issue of life in a Hamlet-like situation, to be or not to be.\(^8\) At one moment he was happy to go away from this world since he

\(^7\) Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 46.  
\(^8\) *Hamlet*, Act. III, Scene 1.
was going to meet his dear ones. At another moment, he regretted that he had to leave. However, he reconciled himself with the fact that he had tried to live a good life. He only fell prey to the universal dynamics of love and to the temptation of a woman. He regretted the ecstatic moments he shared with Ka Mahadei when she came to his hut:

MANIK: Da kumto! Da kumto mo
Mahadei, da kumto!
Jinglong rangli shem pap
Phi pynwai.  

(MANIK: Just like that! Just like that isn't it Mahadei!
My lonely life you ended).

Ka Mahadei stood by U Manik in the bitterest moments of his life. He struggled to accept the reality of the fast approaching end of life in compliance to the pronounced death sentence. It was the struggle between life and death, between existence and non-existence. In reply to U Manik's lamentation, Ka Mahadei who played the role of the psychologist counselled him with a presentation of the philosophy of living after death through one's children in the Jewish pattern as

99 Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 46.

100 Living after death through one's issue is a favourite philosophy of H.W. Sten. This theme has been beautifully presented in Sten's novel, Kwah Bym Ju Kut. The main character, Abi, laments because he is childless and when he dies, his life is over since he is childless. Cf. H. W. Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, (Shillong: Gratus Publication, 1989, rpt., 2007), p. 80. Also, I. Warpakma, Ka Pyrshiaw 1, (Shillong: Sacred Heart Boys' Higher Secondary School, 2000), p. 39.
spelled out by Abi in H.W. Sten’s novel *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*.  

MAHADEI: Balei jingim jong phi kan wai

Haba la ìoh u khun shynrang?  

(MAHADEI: *Why should your life end when you have a son?*)

In response to U Manik’s remorseful and guilty lamentation, Ka Mahadei who clearly saw his need, gave him an affirmation and a fair judgement:

MAHADEI: Manik ha nga ba tip phi ksan.

Phi khuid, phi ksan, phim rem, phim ran.  

(MAHADEI: *Manik for me who know, you are innocent. You are clean, you are acquitted, you are not defeated*).

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101 Sten, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*, p. 80
102 Sten, *Ka Mahadei*, p. 46 It is a common expression of the Khasis that someone’s life is seen in his/her son or daughter. When a son or daughter is born after a long time of waiting or after a long time of married life, it is said that the child has come to replace his/her parents on earth. The child is said to have come “ban mih khmat mih phi” i.e. “to replace or represent.” It is rather interesting to note the idea of continuing to live after one’s death through the son in the context of the Khasi matrilineal society, where the popular opinion is that only through daughters that the clan is continued. However, the idea of representing the father or mother is not connected with the clan or “kur” system but it is related to one’s personality.
103 Sten, *Ka Mahadei*, p. 46
Ka Mahadei provoked further controversy when she courageously defended the innocence of U Manik and claimed that it was not U Manik who committed the 'crime' but she herself: “U Manik um dei ka tnga u Syiem jong ngi”\textsuperscript{104} (It was not Manik but U Syiem’s wife).

The controversial statement of Ka Mahadei sparked off further discussion on the matter and she was able to present her point of view and drew all to pay attention to the cause for investigations. When U Syiem asked, "Kaei ka daw? (what is the cause), she replied:

\begin{quote}
MAHADEI: Ía ka kynthei te, ki khun keiñ.
Ym don kynthei kabym kwah thum,
Ym don kynthei kabym kwah bah,
Ym don kynthei kabym kwah ri,
Ía mat kylliang. Ka dukhi dei kata
Kaba wad jingsngewbha, khlem da kha.

\ldots
Shi snem ban jah ka slem
Ía kiba dang shu pynrhem;
Ar snem lei lei te, jìang!
Thei briew ka shu ìap ang.
Nga rai ìap haba jah slem
Kham tam da ar ki snem.\textsuperscript{105}
\end{quote}

(MAHADEI: \textit{For a woman, children are important.})

\textsuperscript{104}Sten, \textit{Ka Mahadei}, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{105}Ibid., p. 49.
There’s no woman who does not want to fondle,
There’s no woman who does not want to carry,
There’s no woman who does not want to nurse
Her own child. The problem is that
Looking for pleasure without giving birth.

...  
One year long absence is too much
For someone just married.
Two years is a long time!
The woman would die
I thought he died
Especially when it was two years).

With the above expression, Ka Mahadei spelt out her philosophy of womanhood in a summarized form with a sharp and direct exposition of her reasoning. It was her way of defending herself and U Manik in front of all present in the durbar. In the process of defending herself, Ka Mahadei explained her quest for womanhood to which U Syiem replied, “Pha mut nga la ieh noh ia pha mo?”106 (Do you mean that I have left you?).

From his reply to Ka Mahadei’s statement, it is clear that U Syiem had not understood the legitimate aspirations of women. According to psychologists, the wife’s needs can be listed as follows: a)

106 Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 49.
conversational intimacy, in which the husband is an active, interested and understanding listener and participant, b) emotional intimacy, i.e. an understanding and participative attitude to the emotions of the wife, c) physical intimacy, i.e. an aspect of relationship in which the husband communicates to the wife with body language, d) sexual intimacy, which is an expression of love in the sexual manner. The pattern of relationship from U Syiem’s part does not show any fulfillment of any of the criteria spelled out. To make the matter worse, apart from ignorance and neglect, he had been too busy with the affairs of the Syiemdom and the quest for power and fame that he did not have any time for his family matters. U Syiem not only lacked understanding but also showed his utter lack of sensitivity to the needs of Ka Mahadei. It is interesting to note that the difference in thought perspectives had exposed the narrow-mindedness of thought and even prejudice in U Syiem and his councilors. If marriage is to be successful, it has to be a union of mind and heart. U Syiem did not show any.

Ka Mahadei’s utter helplessness and desperation is depicted in her statement:

MAHADEI: ...

Man ka íew nga kmih lynti
Baieit ban phai sha la ka ri.
Nga rai ïap haba jah slem
Khantam da ar ki snem.
Haba la kheiñ, la kheiñ!
Haba la pait, la pait!
Haba la mong, la mong!  

(MAHADEI: ... Every market day I expect
My darling’s return.
I thought he died
Especially when it was two years.
What was broken, was broken!
What was shattered, was shattered!
What was wounded, was wounded!)

As it clear from the above expression of Ka Mahadei, her patience
had been drained out; she had reached the zenith of expectation. It was
in the context of utter helplessness, complete feeling of frustration and
rejection that she sought consolation elsewhere outside the bond of
marriage. At a moment of the highest peak of loneliness, in the middle of
the night, when sleep evaded her eyes, she heard the captivating tune of
the flute. Her restless heart wanted to take refuge in the consolation of
the soothing balm of the music and so she quietly and silently slipped
out of the palace to seek the source of the beautiful music. She explicitly

Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 49.
stated the fact, “Ba khot ka sur, shata nga tur”¹⁰⁹ (the music invited, so I went). Thus, it was in an extreme circumstance of loneliness, rejection, frustration and discouragement, that Ka Mahadei left the palace in quest of comfort and consolation from the music. It was not her intention to break the marriage bonds or to desert U Syiem nor did it occur to her mind to deliberately abandon or displease him. It was simply the response to the desperate cry of human need.

The narration of Ka Mahadei about her romantic escapades to the hut of U Manik throws light into the development and transformation of her consciousness as a human being. The journey to the hut of U Manik is a very powerful scene with the beautiful description of the participative involvement of the powerful elements of nature – thunder, storm and lightning powerfully appear and threaten to upset the normal circumstances of everything. The experience actually represents a two-fold encounter of Ka Mahadei – the encounter with her own self and the encounter with the external reality of the person of U Manik. As mentioned earlier, the prevailing conditions of the natural elements depict an externalization of the inner disposition of the mind of Ka Mahadei in the middle of the night. The strong onslaughts of violent

¹⁰⁹ Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 50.
passions, which attack a weak individual, are a window to the realities of the time and the circumstances faced by Ka Mahadei and U Manik.

The focus of the confession of Ka Mahadei was towards saving U Manik’s life. With the burden of the “cause” on her mind, she did not show any concern to the morality of her action because her attention was on life itself. On the other hand, the subject of discussion and the task of the assembly of the durbar was on the morality of Ka Mahadei’s action. In such a circumstance of the conflict of interest, Ka Mahadei’s plea to save U Manik went unheard. The concluding remark regarding the morality of Ka Mahadei’s action was unceremoniously made by U Pator with an effort to make Ka Mahadei understand the situation: “Phi sngewthuh ba kaba phi la leh ka dei ka pap?” (Do you understand that what you did was a sin?).

Ka Mahadei’s answer to U Pator regarding the morality of her action, referred back to U Syiem, “Ba la wan phai u Syiem” (because U Syiem has returned). She admitted the fact that her action became a sin or a sacrilege because U Syiem returned and the situation became embarrassing as stated by U Nongkren, “ka tnga ha khmat ki tnga”.

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110 Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 51.
111 Ibid., p. 51.
112 Ibid., p. 48.
(the wife in front of husbands). Her argument was focused on issues beyond morality because they were issues of life and death, existence and non-existence. For Ka Mahadei, it was U Syiem’s absence which was similar to death and absence of life – since living together with him for five months did not give any hope of new life – which was an important issue (and not morality). She had, in fact, thought that he died since he did not even care to send news about his whereabouts. It was an indication of the lack of love and concern on the part of U Syiem for his newly wedded wife.\footnote{It may be commented that the act of U Syiem was rather unnatural. The need for love and tender loving care especially from the wife is very natural and human. The failure of U Syiem to communicate to his wife was a very serious lapse from the part of the husband.}

Ka Mahadei’s plea went unheard as U Manik’s fate came to a final conclusion as time and tide waited for no one. It was U Syiem’s privilege to have the last word to send U Manik to the fire and also to grant him his last desire to blow the flute as he made his journey to the funeral pyre. U Syiem’s command came when the sun was setting. Chronologically, the setting of the sun indicates progress of time and reduction of rays of light. It is a process of change or transition from light to darkness in so far as light and darkness are correlated to the face of the earth. Symbolically, the setting of the sun has a powerful significance at that point of time when the final conclusion of the judgement of U
Manik had been made. It is the time of the ending of the tune of the flute. The passage from light into darkness is an common expression of the end of life or a passage from joy to sorrow. It is the time when the life of U Manik was coming to an end; it is the time when Ka Mahadei made her decision to follow U Manik through the same path.

The rejection of Ka Mahadei's plea up brought her to the final step of decision-making. Processes of conflicting reasoning and reflection went on in her mind in the form of a monologue. The only two individuals who witness the condition of Ka Mahadei, U Nongkren (diviner) and U Pator, did not make any impact on her with their comments. It is as if she did not hear the interruption from U Nongkren and U Pator since she was dialoguing with the self; she was on a violent journey in her mind. In her expression, she put together the pros and cons of the cause of her actions. She also acknowledged that she took the initiative in the action:

MAHADEI: Tang ki blei ba tip, tang ki blei! Manik um shym tur hi!  

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114 It is an ordinary and common expression of sorrow, especially at the death of a loved one. An example is found in U Soso Tham's translation of W. Wordsworth's poem, "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways", in *Ka Duitara Ksiar*, (Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, 1979), p 83, "Nga te la sep ka sngi". (If Tham's sentence is literally translated into English, it would be, "for me the sun has set". However, it is Tham's rendition of Wordsworth's "What a difference to me").

115 Sten, *Ka Mahadei*, p. 52.
(MAHADEI: *The gods know, only the gods! Manik did not come to me!*)

However, she also expressed the reason of her action in her argument of rebuttal:

MAHADEI: *Ba la slém ka jah, ìa u Syiem nga kheiń íap, Kumno ngan sep ei ba ka rta ka dang biang?*¹¹⁶

(MAHADEI: *Because of the long absence, I consider U Syiem dead why should I waste my life when it is still time to give birth?*)

After considering the pros and cons, Ka Mahadei was convinced that the durbar had not sufficiently dealt with the case and had given an unfair judgement as the real cause had not been found and investigations were not complete. She strongly felt that U Manik should wait to throw himself into the fire till the investigation was over. Resolutely she decided to take actions even at the cost of her life by going against the pronounced sentence that whoever tried to save U Manik would face a severe punishment:

MAHADEI: *

Kata kajuh ka sur,

¹¹⁶ Sten, *Ka Mahadei*, p. 52.
Ngan knieh Manik bapli
Na tyngam ka jingiap.
Lap ne ym lap shuh:
Nga dang dei Mahadei
Ìa nga kin kohnguh.
Lada ngam lah pynlait,
Sha īìing ngam wan phai hi shuh
Bad Manik ngan her
Ha ki thapniang ki saw lyer!
Hangta jiwnom ngin īasoh,
Ha lyndet ki lyoh!"\textsuperscript{117}

(MAHADEI: That's the same tune; I shall snatch poor Manik from the jaws of death. Whether I reach or I am late: I'm still Ka Mahadei. They will obey me. If I cannot prevent Manik's death, I will not return. With Manik I shall fly in the wings of the four winds! And then forever we shall be one in a land beyond the clouds!)

Ka Mahadei’s choices are very clear – if she could not save U Manik, she would not return to the palace but she would end her life along with him in the fire. She wanted to be united with U Manik and the way to that union was death. She viewed death as a passage to another life; she considered it as the necessary road to the life beyond.

\textsuperscript{117} Sten, 	extit{Ka Mahadei}, p. 54.
In her final statement, Ka Mahadei convincingly expressed her view regarding U Syiem’s actions that he was confused and that there was an internal warfare in him and that he was guided by passion rather than reason and human consideration. In a very emphatic manner, Ka Mahadei explicitly stated that U Syiem was caught in the complex web of human life in all its mysteries; she charged him for lack of clarity:

KA MAHADEI: ...
U Syiem um shai kaei u wad,
Ka kput? Balei um nud kren shai?
U briew um lah sah slem
Hapdeng ki lai jingmut:
Ka kput, ka aiñ bad dohnud.118

(MAHADEI: U Syiem is not clear what he is looking for, Revenge? Why he does not dare to state clearly? A man cannot continue too long In the midst of three choices; Revenge, law and heart).

It is the trial and testing of the circumstances that pushed and pulled the psyche of U Syiem to such an extent that he did not seem to be in his own self. U Syiem was confused in his act of making choices – on the one hand, he was pulled by the passion to have his revenge on the

118 Sten, Ka Mahadei, p. 54.
man who brought dishonour to his family; he was also keen to uphold the customs and laws and avoid compromise. On the other hand, he was pulled by the warmth of his heart to Ka Mahadei from the angle of a lover where the heart prompts patience and forgiveness. The conflict in U Syiem's mind has been visible to Ka Mahadei from the way he acts and reacts. The pull of the willingness to love and forgive has been strongly countered by the thirst for revenge as has been powerfully and poetically captured by U Jespil Syiem in his poem of lamentation, "Ka Liengmakaw"

"La bakla ma-nga, namar nga klet ka por!
Ka burom, ka spah ña nga ka shet shukor.
La katta, ngan pynhia-kput, ngan pynhia-kput
Ba burom-ijot jong nga kan nym jngut!"

(I mistook, because I forgot the time!
Fame, wealth cheated me.
Even then, I shall revenge
That my name and fame will not be tarnished!).

For U Manik, and Ka Mahadei who joined him a short while later, everything ended in the funeral pyre. However, the "cause" continued to haunt the atmosphere of Raitong. The flute, which U Manik carried to the

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119 U Jespil Syiem, op. cit., p. 1297.
judgement scene, assumed symbolic importance in the context that his life had an intimate link to it. Every evening till late into the night, U Manik played the flute after the day’s hard labour. He washed and dressed in the best of his robes and his flute became his companion both in his hut and in the depth of his heart. His life had been intimately linked to music. He found joy, confidence and happiness in the company of his flute; music had been immersed into his life and life rhythm that he could not part with it. For him, music was life, and the flute as a musical instrument, which gave him happiness in his act of expression, was a symbol of life – because his life had been sustained to a great extent by the support of music which had given him strength and courage. Both ended at the funeral pyre with fire consuming the life of U Manik and ending the music. The flute, as the story¹²⁰ has it, which has been planted upside down rejuvenated and grew into a big plant, symbolizing the rejuvenation of U Manik’s life somewhere else where the shore never ends.

H.W. Sten's drama, *Ka Mahadei* is an exercise in human experience of life. The love story and relationship of U Manik and Ka Makaw which was recreated becomes alive on stage with a powerful display of emotional feelings of love, hatred, disappointment, hurt and other passions, which are normal aspects of human life. The vulnerability of human life with all its ups and downs of conflict and disappointments is vividly shown in the drama. Life is a journey from one milestone to another, which involves new experiences at every turn of events, and one can always expect the unexpected.

As mentioned earlier, H.W. Sten has recreated the drama *Ka Mahadei* basing on the stories from the available sources both written and oral. It is worth mentioning that some works which came after the publication of H.W. Sten's drama, have slightly different versions of the story of U Manik Raitong and Ka Mahadei.

Donbok T. Laloo wrote his book *Pluh Ka Jingieit* in 1999 but the work was published later, in 2005, by his family members, three years after his death. D.T. Laloo’s book is a product of research based on

121 Sten, *Ka Mahadei*, p. 61. It is significant that the particular name “Makaw” is mentioned only once in the drama. It is only after her liberation from her role as Ka Mahadei that her particular name is given back to her by U Syiem.

122 Donbok T. Laloo, op. cit., p. 4.
information from people from the locale of the story of U Manik Raitong and Ka Liengmakaw. Basing on the information given mainly by elderly persons from Raitong and other places, D.T. Laloo narrates the story in his own way. While most of the main events are common with other versions and books, some aspects are prominently different. Among the aspects that were not incorporated in H.W. Sten’s drama, the following are significant: a) D.T. Laloo clearly points out that U Manik Raitong and Ka Liengmakaw were in love before U Syiem married her after choosing her from among all the girls who attended the dance organized for the purpose of giving U Syiem the opportunity to choose one.\(^\text{123}\) b) U Syiem live for five years with Ka Lieng without having a child and left for visiting the plains areas of his kingdom.\(^\text{124}\) c) When U Syiem came back and discovered that Ka Mahadei had given birth to a son, he sent her to live with her parents.\(^\text{125}\) d) After the judgement, U Manik was sentenced to a slow death by burying alive with salt up to the neck.\(^\text{126}\) e) U Manik died in the grave after playing his ka sharati (flute).\(^\text{127}\) f) The dead body of U Manik was cremated and Ka Lieng Mahadei jumped into the funeral pyre and died.\(^\text{128}\)

\(^{123}\) Donbok T. Laloo, op. cit., pp. 18-20.  
\(^{124}\) Ibid., p. 21.  
\(^{125}\) Ibid., p. 29.  
\(^{126}\) Ibid., p. 33.  
\(^{127}\) Ibid., p. 36.  
\(^{128}\) Ibid., p. 37.
U Manik’s lamentation, *KA LIENGMAKAW* (2005), sang by U Jespil Syiem, describes the last moments in Ka Liengmakaw’s and U Manik’s life. The poem, of 14,502 lines, recounts the warm and loving conversation and expression of the lovers, U Manik Raitong and Ka Liengmakaw, regarding their devoted and loving relationship. The poem forcefully reveals the power of love and attachment of the lovers to each other which eventually led to their death. U Jespil Syiem sang the story of the lovers basing on the knowledge of the lovers’ life from oral tradition of the region where the dramatic events took place. Apart from the features which are commonly found in other version, the poem is similar to D.T. Laloo’s *Pluh Ka Jingieit* (1999) in certain other aspects relating to the stages of relationship between U Manik Raitong and Ka Liengmakaw.

The poem is more specific about the background of the two lovers and being placed in a wider area of operation, it involves more characters than in any other version of the same story. Besides, linked to the traditional and religious faith experience, the supernatural elements and metaphysical powers are known to operate in the course of the development of events. Unlike in H.W. Sten’s drama, where there is no direct information that the lovers had prior closeness, the poem clearly indicates that they knew each other and were in love before U
Syiem selected Ka Liengmakaw during a dance function. Though she did not like, she was forced by her uncle to marry U Syiem and to go and stay in the palace as she says:

"Dei u Kňi-bamkur, u Kňi Rangbah jong ngi,
Uba la patan ia nga sh'u Syiem dukhi!"^129

("It is the clan eating uncle, our eldest uncle,
Who pulled me to the terrible U Syiem!")

In fact, Ka Liengmakaw's uncle who arranged for the marriage to suit the pursuance of his ambitious plans for position and power in the kingdom, threatened and forced her with inhuman words:

"U kem ktien byrngem bitar u kňi bam kur,
'Khun ka mrad! Ka rai jong nga pham mon kubur?
Khun haramjada, pha khlem akor khiem rain!
Ha ka kur, ka rai jong nga ka dei ka aĩn!"^130

("The clan eating uncle threateningly replied,
'Daughter of an animal! Don't you accept my decision?
Ungrateful daughter, no shame!
In the clan my decision is the law!"")

^129 U Jespil Syiem, op. cit., p. 1141.
^130 Ibid., p. 835.
However, though Ka Liengmakaw was given by her uncle to U Syiem, the marriage was not consummated and she remained a virgin as she told her sister-in-law, "Nga dang long sotti haduh kane ka sngi."\(^{131}\) ("I am still a virgin till this day"). The protection of Ka Liengmakaw from the seductive approach of U Syiem is attributed to the intervention of the supernatural elements which is due to the fact that the marriage has not been contracted as per divine sanction.\(^{132}\)

In the background of the unhappy relationship, U Syiem decided to informally divorce his wife, Ka Liengmakaw, with time bound conditions. Having failed to return as specified, the wife with whom there was no consummation of marriage became free as clearly sang by U Jespil Syiem:

"Hei, u Syiem Matlong i a phi u la pyllait,  
Bad ha khmat jong nga u la kyntait!  
Ia kane hynrei u 'riewbymman u leh jar jar!  
Ha ka shnong kiei kiei kim pat shai kdar! 

"A, hynrei ka la palat ka por b'la buh!  
La shisnem! Imat um kwah ban wan phai shuh! 

...  
"La palat ka por! Nga la lait na jingkular!  
Jubanlak i a nga kam teh ban iai sngap jar!"\(^{133}\)

\(^{131}\) U Jespil Syiem, op. cit., p. 983.  
\(^{132}\) Ibid., p. 982.  
\(^{133}\) Ibid., p. 1140.
("Listen, U Syiem Mailong has divorced you,  
And before me has rejected you!  
But the wicked man did this quietly  
Without any information to the people.  

"Yes, the appointed time has lapsed  
One year passed! It seems he does not want to return.  

...  

"The time is over! I am free from promises!  
The oath does not bind me to keep quiet!")

The marriage of U Manik and Ka Liengmakaw was solemnly held "Ha ka Hok-Hukum ha khmat u briew, u Blei"\textsuperscript{134} (in righteousness according to divine plan and before God and people) and without ka sang ka ma\textsuperscript{135} (sacrilege). However, to U Syiem, the action of Ka Liengmakaw with the unexpected birth of her child was a transgression considered as a "sacrilege" as stated by U Syiem, "Ka la rung ka Sang ka Ma hapoh hima"\textsuperscript{136} (Sacrilege entered the Syiemdom) and the solution to it would be death, in order to rid the society from such evils.\textsuperscript{137} As threatened that the guilty person would undergo a slow death by being buried in the salt, U Manik underwent that punishment but did not die. Unlike D.T. Laloo's version, U Manik was brought alive to the cremation site where the fire

\textsuperscript{134} U Jespil Syiem, op. cit., p. 1190.  
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., p. 1190.  
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., p. 1319.  
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., p. 1296.
was lit. Ka Liengmakaw joined him on the stage above the fire and when they slipped of the floor both fell into the burning furnace.\textsuperscript{138}

A significant difference from other versions, is that U Syiem inwardly accepted his mistake and the innocence of Ka Liengmakaw (Ka Mahadei), but did not retract from the punishment on account of his thirst for revenge as it is clear from his monologue:

\textit{“Kam shym klim”, u thnum, “namar nga la pyllait Bad shisha jar jar ìa ka nga la kytait! Ka kyndon nga buh: ban ap ìa nga shipor; Ka kyndon hynrei ma-nga ngam shym ñiewkor!}

\textit{“La bakla manga, namar nga la klet ka por! Ka burom, ka spah ìa nga ka shet shukor. La katta, ngan pynhiar kput, ngan pynhiar kput Ba burom ijot jong nga kan nym paw jngut!”}\textsuperscript{139}

\textit{“Hok Manik Raitong! Shisha, um klim um ngoh A, hynrei ka kput b’la rai ngan ym iehnoh!”}\textsuperscript{140}

\textit{(She did not commit adultery, because I have divorced her}\n\textit{And quietly I rejected her!}\n\textit{The condition I have put: to wait for some time;}\n\textit{The condition which I never consider important!}

\textsuperscript{138} U Jespil Syiem, op. cit., p. 1361.  
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., p. 1297.  
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., p. 1332.
I made a mistake, since I forgot the time!
Fame and wealth cheated me.
Even then, I shall take revenge
So that my position is upheld!

U Manik Raitong is innocent! True he did not commit adultery. Yes, but the revenge decided will not be abandoned!

As compared to most of the available sources, though there are differences in the newer versions of the story of U Manik Raitong and Ka Liengmakaw, the main aspects are the same that the two loved each other and finally having been condemned to die, U Manik died and the incident was followed by the death of Ka Liengmakaw in a short span of time. U Jespil Syiem gave a clean chit to Ka Liengmakaw who contracted marriage in the long absence of her publicly pronounced husband.

The development of events in the story of U Manik Raitong and Ka Mahadei (or Ka Liengmakaw) in H.W. Sten’s *Ka Mahadei*, in D.T. Laloo’s *Pluh ka Jingieit* and in U Jespil Syiem’s *Ka Liengmakaw* reveals one fact, that the quest for self-fulfillment is a reality of life which is innate in human beings. It is in the process of the quest for self-realization and self-fulfillment that an individual interacts with various forces some of which would contribute positively while some would be
detrimental to the aspiration. Conflict arises because of the interference of various forces, which stand as an obstacle towards the realization of the goals thereby thwarting the expectation of the aspirant.

Ka Mahadei's quest for self-fulfillment had been totally upset by the circumstances of life that she lived – in the palace and in the absence of U Syiem who left her shortly after their marriage. Moreover, the personality of U Syiem did not suit her. Unconcerned and insensitive to the needs of Ka Mahadei, his long absence caused unimaginable pain to her. Frustrated, discouraged, abandoned, Ka Mahadei sought solace, consolation and encouragement from other sources. A lover of music, the tone of music in the middle of the night beckoned her wounded heart with a promise of consolation. In search of the soothing music, she braved the darkness of the night and the violent forces of nature, which in a way were an external expression of her inner disposition and signs and symbols of the foreboding events. The music of her heart melted and blended with the heart of music at the hearth of U Manik in the universal synchronization of the force of love that even fire cannot destroy.

The return of U Syiem after the birth of Ka Mahadei's child fermented trouble since Ka Mahadei had treated his long absence as equal to death. The judgement at the durbar to find the cause was coloured with
prejudice as U Syiem was pulled in different directions by "Ka kput, ka aiñ bad dohnud" (revenge, law and heart), that is, by thirst for revenge, by conviction to uphold the law and by emotional attachment to his wife. The process of judgement was marked with conflicting views and opinions, which arose as a result of different approaches and goals. While for Ka Mahadei, the root cause was the most important issue and should be found out, for U Syiem and others, the effect was superficially treated as the cause of the whole issue. Conflicts arose mainly between Ka Mahadei and U Syiem because of the incompatibility of personality, the incommensurate aspirations, attitudes and behavioural patterns, different levels of understanding of life and life situations, together with the self-egotistic approach of U Syiem to the issue of finding the cause. In the midst of all issues and circumstances, the final resolution was the death of Ka Mahadei at the funeral pyre and the voluntary banishment of U Syiem. While Ka Mahadei rushed to the fire to catch up with her lover, U Syiem withdrew from all.

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141 Sten, *Ka Mahadei*, p. 54.