CHAPTER IV
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

In chapters II and III of this dissertation, I have discussed individually, the views of Gurdon and Mawrie on the Khasi Religion as reflected in their writings. In this chapter I intend to analyze their views more clearly and bring them together in the form of a comparative study. This will enable us to know their similarities and differences in their thoughts, speculations and interpretation of the Khasi religion. In this chapter, an attempt has also been made to re-examine the relationship between the views of Gurdon and Mawrie of the Khasi Religion at the conceptual level. In this brief comparative study, the main points that I intend to cover are as follows:

(A) Animism and Monotheism

It is a fact that the Khasi Religion has been described differently by different writers at different times. For instance, P.R.Gurdon, a British writer describes the Khasi Religion as ‘animism’ which means an animistic type of religion. As I have already pointed out earlier, the term ‘animism’ was first propounded by Sir Edward Tylor and later it came to be known as the ‘theory of animism’. Gurdon seems to have been so strongly influenced by the thoughts of E.B.Tylor. While he was working as a British Officer in the Khasi Hills, Gurdon keenly observed the life-style and religious practices of the Khasi people. He found that the Khasis, for a very long time, were living an
isolated life in the various hill tracts and forests of the North-eastern region of India. Gurdon thought that the Khasis have the belief that all living things have been animated by spirits.

Gurdon seems to have under-estimated the Khasi Religion on the basis of race and the place they are living. According to him, the Khasi Religion is a tribal religion of tribal stage of organization. Gurdon holds the view that the Khasi Religion is both an unorganized and a pre-literate religion because the Khasis do not have written language and script of their own, prior to the arrival of the Missionaries from Wales. If we try to analyze the writings and views of Gurdon on the Khasi Religion, we will certainly find that his view were narrow and not convincing. Again, Gurdon seems to pay more attention to the external aspects of religion because he gives importance to the organization and pays less importance to the internal aspect of religion. The internal part of religion includes the thoughts about religion which normally brings to our mind, the ideas about God as the supernatural Being in worship, festivals, belief, and rituals. In other words, religion is a practical system of belief (in the metaphysical Being) which human beings consider to be beyond themselves. It is precisely, such a belief that binds a group of people together so as to organize their life into some sort of socio-religious community. It is obvious that many scholars, especially the western writers have described the Khasi Religion as a ‘Primitive Religion’ and Gurdon is one of them. However, Gurdon employed the word ‘animism’ as a means to describe the theory which
endows the phenomena of nature with personal life. Reacting to the writings of Gurdon, a modern scholar, Pascal Malngiang writes:

Writers including P.R. Gurdon, Bivar and others have given a wrong information to readers all over the world on the Khasi conception of religion. First, we will begin with the discussion on the term Niam used by the Khasi to denote religion.¹

H.O. Mawrie rejected the animistic view of Gurdon. He gives his own view saying that Khasi Religion is a monotheistic religion. The Khasi word 'Niam' means 'Religion'. Etymologically, the word 'Niam' in Khasi language is a composite word which is made up of the words 'Nia' and 'Im' which can be translated as Living Reason. As we commonly know that the Khasi Religion or Niam Khasi is first and foremost associated with God (U Blei). In Jainism, it is possible to have a religion without God, but in Khasi Religion it is not possible to have religion without God. According to some thinkers, the word Niam means a thing or things associated with God. The translation of the word Niam as the Living Reason is closely associated with the meaning in the Immortal Being. According to Mawrie God is the ever living Being. He is the first without the second. God is eternal, infinite self who creates, maintains and can destroy the world. God is the uncaused cause. He is the moral Governor of all living beings including human beings.

According to Mawrie, the Khasi thinkers do not feel the need to have proofs for the existence of God (U Blei) because it is only an insult to their

¹ Pascal Malngiang, Aspects of Khasi Philosophy, (Shillong: Seven Huts Enterprise, 1991), p.33
Creator. In other words, all the things that we see around us, either big or small are the manifestations of God who created them. Mawrie, throughout his writings, tries to present the Khasi notion of Religion. The whole realm of the Khasi religious beliefs and rites are really comprehensive. For instance, the stock of the Khasi’s religious beliefs and practices include among other things, belief in the existence of the Supreme Deity and a host of both benevolent and malevolent spirits: the belief in the life after death; the belief in the concept of priesthood and sacrifice. The basis of the Khasi Religion is the deeply ingrained belief in the existence of an infinite number of spirits. *U Ryngkew u Basa* is believed to be among the benevolent spirits and *u Thlen, ka Taro* and *ka Shwar* are among the malevolent spirits. It is obvious, that the whole of the edifice of the Khasi religious system of beliefs and rites is founded on their firm and unshakable faith in the existence of a Supreme Deity called *U Blei*. The different religious beliefs and rites have their primordial reasons in their theistic beliefs. The Khasi’s religious doctrine admits of both benevolent and malevolent spirits. The performance of their various sacrifice and rituals implies their recognition of the existence of the supernatural powers that can be exercised by the spirits. These rituals are performed to secure the goodwill of the benevolent spirits and to avert the ill-will of the malevolent ones. One thing, we need to make clear, is that, *U Blei* is the creator God who is supreme and all in all, while the spirits are created beings of God. The benevolent
spirits are like the guardian angels while the malevolent spirits are the different types of evil spirits which are moving around the world.

Monotheism (One-God-ism) is the belief that there is but one supreme Being. He is infinite and self-existent. He is the ultimate Reality, the omnipotent and omniscient Being. Also, he is the sustainer and the destroyer of the world. When Mawrie addresses God as (i) *U Nongbuh Nongthaw* (the Planner and Creator) (ii) *U Nongsei U Nongpynlong* (the Giver and Dispenser of life) etc., he only means that the one and the same God can be given different names by his worshippers. Most of the discussions of Mawrie on God (*U Blei*) speak on the immanence and the transcendence of God. Though God is in the world yet He is beyond it. Mawrie, like Sankara, holds the view that God has certain attributes which Sankara called God by the name *Saguna Brahman*. In other words, Mawrie does not discuss much on the nature of God as He is in Himself or *Nirguna Brahman* in the language used by Sankara in Indian Philosophy. Again, like Spinoza, Mawrie holds the view that God is the ultimate substance of everything. He is the object of worship and the God worshipped.

(B) The views of Gurdon and Mawrie on God

As it is, Gurdon is a western writer. He came from England as a high ranking officer of the British East India Company. While he was staying in Shillong he took keen interest in observing and interacting with the local

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Khasi people with a view to get a clear understanding of the Khasi conception of God. His thought and understanding of the nature and attributes of God is similar to that of the Greek as well as Christian understanding of God as the supernatural Being. We should not forget that Gurdon belongs to the Country which is highly developed with a superior culture while the Khasi culture has been regarded as an inferior one. In this way Gurdon has some a cultural complexity. At this point of discussion, I intend to point out some of the thoughts of Gurdon with regards to the concepts of God and religion as follows:

No doubt, Gurdon has been influenced by Judaism and Christianity in the understanding of God. Both in Judaism and Christianity, God is unquestionably transcendent. He is wholly other than the world he made. In Judaism his transcendence was emphasized by, among other things, the prohibition of idols. According to the tradition of Christian thought, is also immanent. St. Augustine said “… the light of God’s presence in the human mind enables it to recognize eternal truth”\(^3\). Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand said “God is in all things, not, indeed as part of their essence or as a quality, but in the manner than an efficient cause is present to that on which it acts”\(^4\).

According to the western thought, the degree to which God is transcendent or immanent depends on the view that is taken of his relation to

\(^{4}\) Ibid
the world. Often, God is seen as the final cause of the world. Aristotle called God the unmoved mover of the world. Plato held that God is bounded on the one hand by the world of forms and on the other by the pre-existent matter. Gurdon also had some knowledge of God through his meetings and interactions with people of different races. Though he was neither a trained theologian nor a student of Philosophy yet he had made an effort to get a wide range of knowledge of the things around him through his personal readings and interacting with people. It seems he had a high appreciation of the divine attributes of God as discussed by the Christian thinkers. According to them God is endowed with characteristics that distinguish him from other forms of being. Briefly speaking, these characteristics are as follows:

(a) **Infinity of God:** The infinity of the Christian God was implied above in the accounts of his transcendence and creative power and in most systems. It is this infinity of God that makes him free from all human limitations.

(b) **Unity of God:** The Greek thinkers and Philosophers used the term ‘gods’ and ‘god’ interchangeably. But in Judaism the belief that *Yahweh* is the only God became an unquestioned axiom that was inherited by Christians and was well defended and explained by Thomas Aquinas.

(c) **The existence of God:** According to the Bible and also affirmed by St. Augustine that the nature of God is unchangeable. Thomas tries to prove the existence of God in five ways which are as follows:

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(i)  **From motion:** It is certain and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion.⁶

(ii)  **Efficient Cause:** Thomas Aquinas also made an attempt to prove the existence of God from the nature of efficient cause. According to him, in the world of sensible things, there is an order of efficient causes. This order of efficient causes shows the existence of the first cause which is God.

(iii)  **Possibility and necessity:** The third way of proving the existence of God, Aquinas takes from possibility and necessity. He says, we find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated and to be corrupted and consequently, it is possible for them either to be. This shows that there is a possibility to exist and not to exist. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible but must exist something the existence which is necessary.

(iv)  **The gradation found in things:** In his observation and investigation, Aquinas found that there is a gradation of beings. For instance, there are some living beings which are better in their quality of life while others are of less good. Some beings especially human beings, some of them are more true and noble while others are less true and less noble. This presupposes the existence of an Intelligent Being.

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(v) **The Intelligent Being:** According to Thomas Aquinas, the things like the natural bodies act for an end. They act to produce certain result. This also presupposes the existence of an Intelligent Being.

When Gurdon said that the Khasis have a vague belief in God the Creator (*U Blei*), it certainly indicates Gurdon had some ideas about God. It appears that he might have gone through some writings of some well-known Philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza and others. He might have also read the writings of some famous theologians like Thomas Aquinas and St.Augustine, how they have expressed of their conception of God. He might have found that the Khasi traditional thought on the concept of God (*U Blei*) does not conform to the writings of the western writers. Above all, Gurdon admittedly, does not deny that the Khasi people have the understanding that God exists as a Supreme Being who is both in the world and beyond the world. H.O Mawrie discusses the existence of God in a different way. For instance, he does not show any proof for the existence of God, but he tends to discuss on the eternal attributes of God. In his discussion, Mawrie refers to God as the Supreme Being who is self-existent in the sense that He is made by no other being. In other words, God (*U Blei*) is the Maker of all things - seen and unseen. He is unmade and exists on his own. It also means that beyond him there is none. According to Mawrie, God is the first, who has always been in existence and would never die. He is immortal and always upholds the
universe. In other words, God always lives as the first principle. To cite the words of Mawrie:

God as the first principle of being is called ‘U Nongbuh U Nongthaw’ The designer and the Maker, the Lord God, Creator of all things in the universe. He is ‘U Nongsei U Nongpynlong, the one that gives life and form in the continuous process. He is the maker of Man, the Lord and Guardian of our clan, family, state, village, economic welfare and so on and so forth. We give Him different names according to the different aspects of our life in relation with Him.7

It is interesting to note that Mawrie tries to explain the nature of God by saying that God is self-sufficient and lacks nothing. God has no father, no mother, no wife and no children. In other words, God is all alone, he cannot be a child or an old man, since he is the God of all ages, He is the same yesterday, today and forever. The different descriptive names given by Mawrie are:

(i) *U Blei Nongbuh Nongthaw* (The planning and designing God)

(ii) *U Blei Nongthaw* (The God who is the Creator) of all things).

(iii) *U Blei Longkur longjait* (The God who is the protector and and Guardian of clan and family).

All these descriptive names discussed by Mawrie, clearly, show that God is the first cause who is himself uncaused. He is the spring of being and

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the fountain or source from which all other forms of existence came into being. He is also the ultimate fountain head of all power and authority.

(C) Gurdon and Mawrie on the worship of God.

I. Gurdon’s view

The word ‘worship’ in common parlance means an act of reverence towards God or gods. The worshippers may express their reverential attitude towards God in different ways. It may be in the form of prayer, offering sacrifices and as such the vocabulary of worship in Christian understanding means a ‘service’. In the Jewish tradition, before offering a service to God, the worshippers must prostrate themselves. But the understanding of worship in the Christian context of today, involves the manifestation of reverential fear and adoration. Worship can be done either individually at home or publicly in temple or other places of worship.

When Gurdon said “The Khasis cannot, however, be said to worship the supreme God, although it is true that sometimes they invoke him when sacrificing and in times of trouble”*, he means to say that the Khasis have no regular or organized worship of the supreme God. The local Khasi vocabulary for the supreme God is ‘UBlei’ (He-God). According to Andrew Lang, a well-known writer, the idea of supreme God is commonly called “High God” or “The Creator and Sustainer of the universe”. Gurdon regarded the Khasis as the ‘Primitive Tribe’ of India and their religion as a primal Religion, and if

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not, a Primitive Religion. Gurdon did not deny that the Khasis have the concept of the Supreme Being, as the High God, the great Creator, Sustainer and the destroyer of the world. According to Gurdons's view, the Khasis have the worship of the Supreme Being only in times of trouble, like in times of natural calamities, sickness or in times of war. But by carefully examining the faith and practice of the Khasi people, it is not so. The Khasis do have faith in the Supreme Being regularly as a community.

Gurdon has a wrong impression of the Khasis' belief in the Supreme Being. He holds an opinion that the Khasis believe that the Supreme Being (U Blei) is to be good and benevolent and He does not interfere in the day to day affair of man. This attitude has made the Khasis to think that they do not have to bother much about the supreme Being since he will not do harm to them and thus they are preoccupied themselves with the various kinds of malevolent spirits of the sacred groves, rocks, trees, lakes and mountains since they cause them continual troubles. By claiming that the Khasis have a vague belief in a God the Creator, Gurdon was actually revealing his inability to grasp the Khasi conception of God. The Khasis have a very clear conception of God. He is the ultimate cause of creation, the sustainer who maintains and destroys the world at his own free will. Since time immemorial the Khasis believe that God (U Blei) is the eternal infinite self who creates, maintains and destroys the world. We should also bear in mind that he also punishes the law-breaker and those who do not abide by the Commandments he had given.
As it has been pointed out earlier, according to tradition, God has given three commandments. These commandments are: (i) *Kamai ia ka Hok* which means to earn righteousness. This implies that according to God’s divine will, people should live honestly and justly. This belief is similar to the concept of *Karma* in Indian Philosophy. It gives us an idea that we must be honest and true not only in our words and actions but in our very thought too. (ii) The second commandment given by God is, *Tipbriew Tipblei* which means knowing man and knowing God. This implies that our duty to love and respect God should begin with our duty to love and respect our fellowmen. In other words, it means that knowing our fellowmen or our neighbours in the right perspective implies that we also know God or have the knowledge of God who had created each one of us. (iii) The Third Commandment, *Tipkur Tipkha* means to know the maternal relatives - who are the paternal relatives. This Commandment deals more with the morality of social life in general and the environmental ethics in particular. As we all know, the Khasis are one of the Indian tribes. As a tribal community, it consists of some clans known in the Khasi language as ‘*Kurs’*. It strictly prohibits any Khasi man or girl to marry within the same clan or *kur*. It is not allowed also for any Khasi boy or girl to marry a person who is closely related. For instance, one cannot marry his or her own aunt or cousin. The Khasi people, right from the ancient days had adopted some social taboos. One who violates any of the taboos is said to have
committed ‘ka sang’ which means a serious social sin which is not pardonable.

Generally speaking, the concept of ‘ka Sang’ refers to the sin of incest, that is, marriage within the same kur (clan) or intermarriage with the in-laws (Niakha). It is good to know the consequences when one commits ka sang: (i) Any one who commits ka sang by marrying with a person from the same clan, such a person should be excommunicated from the Khasi society and he is prohibited from taking part in ritual performance. (ii) Marriage with the father’s brother or sister is prohibited. A person who commits such a sin will be excommunicated from the entire society. (iii) Marriage with the closely paternal relative is not allowed. Anyone who commits such a sin will not be allowed to live in the Khasi society at all. The motive behind these taboos is this, the Khasis strongly believe that marriage with the close relatives of the mother’s side or father’s side is offensive before God and there are chances to have deformed children. Most of these moral ethical teachings of the Khasi Religion are practised even by the so-called Khasi Christians even today. Some of the non-Khasi writers and scholars have a wrong conception of the Khasi Religion. Gurdon called the Khasi religion as a religion of ancestors-worship. It is wrong because the Khasis do not worship their departed relatives. It is true that the Khasis believe that the souls of their departed ones do continue to live in the other world or the world beyond. It is equally true that the Khasis do show some respect to the souls of their departed relatives.
Sometimes they do offer prayers to God and they also mention the names of the departed relatives as a mark of love, respect and remembrance of their lives and works. At times, they even put betel nuts and betel leaves and lime in their cremated ground or grave yards. The two names of the ancestors which the Khasis frequently mention are, (1) ‘Ka Iawbei’ which is the name of the first ancestress and (2) ‘U Thawlang’ the name of the first ancestor. All these things show that it is false to say that the Khasis are worshippers of their ancestors. An attempt is briefly, made here, to show the differences and similarities in the understanding of Gurdon and Mawrie with regard to the worship of God in Khasi Religion which are as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gurdon's view</th>
<th>Mawrie's views</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A Religion should have a founder like Christianity, Islam, etc.</td>
<td>1. Khasi Religion is God-given, it has no human founder at all.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. A Religion should have scriptures or holy book like the Bible for the Christians and Qu’ran for Muslims.</td>
<td>2. The Khasi Religion has no scriptures or holy books. The teachings are through oral history written in the hearts and the experiences of the people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The Khasis are worship their own ancestors.</td>
<td>3. The Khasis pay respect and venerate the souls of their departed relatives but never worship them at all.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. The Khasis worship the different types of spirits.</td>
<td>4. The Khasis generally worship U Blei who is the supreme Being but a few of them may worship U Thlen (Snake) and other devilish spirits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. The Khasis have a vague belief in a God the Creator.</td>
<td>5. They have clear understanding of God in their system of belief and they worship God as Creator.</td>
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6. The Khasis have no clear understanding of the gender of God.

7. The Khasis do not believe in the idea of eternal punishment for they have no idea of hell.

8. The Khasis have the Priests called Lyngdohs who offer sacrifices for the propitiation of the spirits.

6. God has no human gender for he is beyond gender. He can be addressed in the masculine gender or feminine gender for God is not gender-specific.

7. The Khasis believe that there is hell which is a place to punish the wrong doers. The Khasi word for hell is *Ka Myngkoi U Jom* which literally means the lake of fire and *U Jom* is the name of the chief Devil.

8. The main function of the Khasi Priest is to offer sacrifices to the supreme God (*U Blei*) and he can also exorcise the evil spirits.

According to H.O. Mawrie, in matter of worship, the Khasi Religion realizes God in three aspects, which are as follows:

(i) **God Universal**

Mawrie holds the view that the type of God which the Khasis believe is the Universal God. The World holds its existence from God as its ultimate principle and its preserver. It obeys the laws given to it by the Creator. God is the Supreme Being, infinitely perfect and we must revere his name and we must adore Him. To cite the words of Mawrie:
According to the Khasi religion there is but one God and He is the God universal. He is the one who creates mankind. He is the God of all, the absolute and sustainer of life and the supreme Reality, the Giver and sustainer of life and universe. He reveals and known to his people in different parts of the Earth... a form of worship according to their capacity and understanding.10

(ii) God Localized

Mawrie also holds the view that the one and the same God who is known as the Universal God is identically the same God who is known as God Localized in the sense that the people of different races and countries can claim that He is God of our Motherland and the God of our race. For the sake of administration, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills have been divided into States, Doloiship, Elakas, raids, and villages. By way of clarification, the so-called the ‘United Khasi and Jaintia Hills’ was divided into different States before Independence. It would be helpful to put in this way:

1. To a state, the God Localized becomes *U Leihima U Leisima* (the God who reigns and controls);
2. To the Elakas and raids, God is known as *U Leimuluk U Leijaka* (the God of District and sub-district);
3. To a village level, God is known as *U Leikhyrdop U Leikharai* (the God of the gates and safety walls).

All the above different names or titles show that God is the general Protector and Guardian of all the peoples who protects the peoples in every

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10. H.O. Mawrie, 'A Short view of the Khasi Religion', *Where lies the Soul of our Race*, 1982, p.70
nook and corner. He is always and ever ready to come to our rescue. Mawrie writes:

According to the Khasi Religion there is but One God and He is the God of all – the Absolute and supreme Reality, the Giver and the Sustainer of Life and Universe. He reveals and makes known to his people in different parts of the Earth, according to their spiritual capability and understanding. The God Universal is also the God localizes to become the God of our land and people. Our Country is divided into states, doloi ships, elakas, raids and villages.¹¹

Normally speaking, worship includes words spoken, hymn of praise and prayer and the performance of ritual. With regard to worship, two things need to take place. First, there should be a community of worshippers and also there should be a being which is worshipped. In the context of the Khasi community, the worshippers bow down and worship the Supreme Being known in the local Khasi language as ‘U Blei’. They have faith in Him on the basis of what he has been to them. The way of worship may appear to be primitive or rudimentary or low in the scale of development, but the worshippers usually gather together for worship and have innumerable rituals which may have slight difference from one place to another. The members of the Khasi Religion till today they have no printed prayer books or hymn books. They recite their prayers orally. It may appear to be disorganized when we compare to the Christian worship but we cannot overlook their spiritual needs and meaningfulness.

¹¹. Ibid., pp.46 – 47
(iii) God at Home

In his writing, Mawrie goes on to say that the God localized becomes the God of our clan and our home which the Khasis popularly speak of ‘*U Leilongkur U Leilongjait*’. They even go to the extent of saying that ‘the God of the family’ (*Ka Leilongiing*). As we generally know that the Khasis have a different conception of God because according to them, the supreme Reality is above gender and number. At times we find that they address God (*U Blei*) in the masculine gender ‘*U Blei*’ but at times, we find that they also address God as a female Being (*Ka Blei*). There might be misunderstanding for those who are not familiar with the Khasi culture, when they come across that the Khasis address God in plural form ‘*ki blei*’(gods), but this is only the functional title. In other words, it means that God has been given different titles because He performs different functions. Referring to the Christian concept of ‘Trinity’ it all means that God performs different functions as ‘the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit’. According to Christian understanding, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are one and the same in Unity. But in the Khasi Religion, it means that those different titles or names do not make difference at all. They refer directly to the one and the same God. Mary Pristila Rina Lyngdoh in her book ‘*The Festivals in the History and Culture of the Khasi*’ (1991) made some attempt to throw some light related to the Khasi conception of God. To cite her words:
The Khasi have their own traditional religion since the beginning of times. They believe that their religion is the covenant that they had with God since the beginning of the world and their religion had been given by God Himself. With the coming of Christianity into Khasi and Jaintia Hills, most of the Khasi embraced the Christian faith belonging to different denominations, few of them belong to religions, other than Christianity. There are still many who follow their own traditional religion. The Khasi believe in the supreme God the Creator, U Blei is the name given to God. He is almighty and all powerful, omniscient, and omnipresent. Being all in all He is above gender, so they call Him U Blei or Ka Blei. He is also above number and they call Him, U Blei or ki Blei. Different names are given in different aspects of His creations.12

(D) Gurdon and Mawrie: their understanding of Khasi Theology

When we reflect upon the concept ‘Theology’ we find that this term is a composite word because it is made up of two Greek words, namely, ‘Theos’ which means ‘God’ and ‘Logia’ which means ‘thought’ or ‘science’ or ‘study’. Etymologically speaking, we can say that ‘Theology’ is the science or study of God. In other words, we can also say that ‘Theology’ is an investigation or exposition of God expressed in words. Russel R. Byrum gives his own definition of the term ‘Theology’. To cite his words:

Theology is the science about God and of the relations existing between him and his creation. Theology in this broad sense is logically and commonly divided into four main divisions: (1) Exegetical (2) Historical (3) Systematic and Practical.13

By the term ‘Exegetical Theology’ Byrum refers to the interpretation of the scriptures or the study of the sacred texts. Again, by the term ‘Historical Theology’ Byrum refers to the study of the historical development of a given

religion. Byrum by the term ‘Systematic Theology’ he means a systematic study of the doctrine and the texts of a given religion. In other words, it means a study of the texts in a logical order. The so-called ‘Practical Theology’ has its foundation on the ‘Systematic Theology’ while the ‘Systematic Theological’ has its basis on the ‘Exegetical Theology’. ‘Practical Theology’ deals either directly or indirectly with the application of theology to the individual life and the propagation of it in the world.

As we all know, that the social scientists make a sharp distinction between the mainstream religions and the tribal religions. According to them, the mainstream religions like Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism etc., have the literate traditions because they have scriptures, documents and other recorded materials. On the other hand, the tribal religions of North East India and other tribal religions, almost all of them, have no scriptures, no temples and very few documents. They have been considered as the religions of the preliterate traditions. In this context, the Khasi Religion is the tribal religion because it does not have scriptures, and other written documents. It may be regarded according to the view of the social scientists to be a religion which belongs to the preliterate traditions. Normally, the art of writing makes it possible to have a print culture which can be associated with the formal system of education which is an important informative institution for a culture. The tribal religions in India and elsewhere are being assumed by the social scientists as the religions of the non-literate tradition which are said to be ‘un-developed’ or
‘under-developed’ religions. Perhaps it is because of these things that made Gurdon to find it very difficult to grasp the truth and reality of the Khasi Religion as reflected in his strong remark, “The Khasis have a vague belief in God the Creator, *U Blei Nongthaw*.\(^{14}\)

It is undeniably impracticable for anyone to make a successful attempt to have an exegetical study of the Khasi theological thought and understanding in the absence of scriptures and other written documents. It is equally not possible to study the historical development of the Khasi Religion when we have no proper sources to be based. It is so, because the Khasis depend on their oral tradition as their authority of their religious teachings. This also creates lots of problems for the scholars who are proposing to have a systematic study of the belief system of the Khasi Religion. For those scholars who would like to study the Khasi Theology, it would be possible for them, if they could take up their studies from the perspective of ‘Practical Theology’ because this kind of approach is based on the practical aspect of theological understanding. For instance, we examine meaningfully, their rituals, sacrifices, dances, ceremonies, festivals, religious objects and so on.

**(E) Gurdon and Mawrie on the Khasi Religious language**

The studies on the Khasi Religion reveal that the different religious leaders at different times repeatedly have employed some myths. Some scholars called them ‘mythical stories’. It is important to note that Religious

Language is symbolic-mythical, and it interprets facts and events. It would be useful and helpful in this thesis to devote a few lines in discussing on the philosophy of Language. As we commonly know that man is a social Being, he lives in a community and the context of our community life is language. In any language, there is a system of meanings which is practically derived from man’s encounter with certain reality or realities. Grammatically, language is a system of articulate sounds. In other words it produces sound when we speak and it has to do with symbols when we put in writing. Man uses language as a means of communication in the context of community life. In this way language is both a context and instrument of communication. It is a fact that all of us have been born and brought up in a linguistic context. It is through the instrumentality of language that we are carrying on our daily discourses. In this sense, language is the ground and the bridge for both grasping and communicating reality.

The Khasi religious leaders, since ancient times, have employed three major myths in their attempt to convey some facts and events which have taken place in the relationship between God the creator and man as the creation. The three prominent myths in the Khasi Culture and literature are (i) The Sohpetbneng Peak myth (ii) The Diengiei Peak myth and (iii) The Krem Lamet Latang myth. The Sohpetbneng myth is a mythical story which tries to explain the arrival of human beings on Earth and how they began to live on the lap of Mother Earth. This myth tells us that the ancestors of the Khasis
came from heaven. It goes on to narrate that in the ancient days, God (U Blei) created altogether sixteen families. Out of the sixteen families, nine families continued to live in heaven while the other seven families came down to Earth and settled down as agriculturists. God in his wisdom provided the people a Golden Ladder where the members of the nine families or nine huts who lived in heaven and the members of the seven families or seven huts who lived on Earth could easily go up to heaven and come down to Earth as they wished. This myth plainly presents the picture of the golden era where the God-Man relationship was at best.

The Diengiei Peak myth in the form of a mythical story narrates the decline of God-Man relationship. According to this myth, there was a big tree called ‘Ka Diengiei’. Its leaves and branches overcast the earth with dark shadows everywhere. Man at that particular period lived with a tremendous sense of fear and insecurity. This myth indirectly tells the story of the fall of man. According to this particular myth, God gives man three Commandments as the ethical and moral rules of life. These three commandments as mentioned earlier, are (i) Kamai ia ka Hok which means to earn righteousness (ii) Tipbriew Tipblei which means man-knowing, God knowing (iii) Tipkur Tipkha which means knowing of maternal relatives, knowing of paternal relatives.
One day, the Devil came to this earth in the form of a serpent known in the Khasi language as ‘U Thlen’. He cunningly tempted man to go against all the commandments given by God. Since that time the golden ladder provided by God was broken and the God-Man relationship was also broken. In other words it marks the end of the era of perfect peace and happiness and it ushered in a new era of broken relationship. Evil things began to take place in the forms of killing, hatred, lovelessness and revenge in the world.

The *Krem Lamet Latang* myth marks the age of reconciliation and restoration. Since the time that man went against the will of God, the Sun refused to give its light and consequently the world was under complete darkness. It was the sacrifice of the Cock that the Sun once again gives light like before in the world. This myth tells that Man began to think of God once again and seeks his forgiveness and to restore the broken God-Man relationship through worship, adoration and offering of sacrifices.

The religious language used by the Khasi religious thinkers like Sib Charan Roy and H.O.Mawrie refers to no other than the fundamental expression of man’s spirit and mind. According to them, language gives man the power to abstract from the concretely given sense data. For instance, the world of sense experience has been described in the form of mythical stories. And these stories in course of time have been regarded by the posteriors as sacred stories. The Khasi religious leaders regard language as the necessity for
all their cultural functions. In the use of religious language it consists of those religious statements that have the form of factual assertions, for example, “God loves mankind”, it refers to a special kind of fact which differs from the scientific facts, because it fulfills a different function altogether. In this way the three mythical stories of the Khasi Culture do not mean the same as the scientific facts which the modern scientists are talking about, in their scientific enterprise. According to Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 – 1951), the languages of religion and of science, constitute, different ‘language-games’ which are the linguistic aspects of different “forms of life”\(^\text{15}\)

According to Paul Tillich, religious language constitutes not only of Symbols such as God but also myths and rituals. Most post- Modernists are facing with the problem of the interpretation of our cultural myths and symbols, advocate what has come to be known as ‘deconstructionism’. Modern Biblical scholars, in the context of the literary and historical criticism of the Biblical narratives, have adopted a similar method called ‘demythologization’. These modern scholars tried to do with the creation myths of the Bible as appeared in the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis. This is a grave error and we should not accept any idea of demythologization. To a large extent myths constitute the ‘stories’ of the symbols of religion, therefore, should not be robbed of its myths. The three mythical stories of the Khasis which had been already earlier, seem to have

begun as personal myths but gradually in the course of time, they become popular among the Khasi Jaintia people of Meghalaya.

Apparently, Gurdon has not gone deep to study the background of the Khasi Religion. He was content with his superficial observation of the religious performances of the Khasis. He never made any attempt to study the Khasi religious myths and legends. We should remember that almost all the religions of the world have their own myths and legends. First of all, he should venture to give a broad-based connotation of the Khasi understanding of myths and legends especially in the domain of religious truth, facts and rites. It seems Gurdon has some misconceptions regarding the fundamental meaning of myths which are prevalent among the Khasis. In fact, myths have their own value in the attempt of the human mind, in a primitive and unscientific age, to explain the various forces of the phenomena of nature with which man is confronted. They represent, in fact, the conjectural science of a primitive mental condition.

Mawrie on the other hand, has made use of the Khasi major traditional myths and legends with a view to understand the meaning and significance of the Khasi religious belief system. To Mawrie, myth is a view of life no less valid in itself for those who propound it than any rational view for its own adherents. Its roots plunge much deeper in human nature than was ever suspected by the superficial nineteenth century mind. Mawrie seems to agree
with B. Malinowski who said "a myth...is not merely a story but a reality lived". The Origin of the Khasis is shrouded in mystery till today due to the lack of recorded history. The struggle is going on among the researchers to rediscover the lost history of the Khasis. Some scholars go to the extent of tracing the origin of the Khasi people by going back to the divine origin. B.L. Mawrie writes:

The origin of the Khasis is popularly traced back to the coming of the Seven Huts (Hynniew trep) from their heavenly aboard through golden ladder on Sohpetbneng peak... This at best be seen as an etiological account to indicate that the Khasis believe in the divine origin.

The rationality of the Khasi thought of their divine origin is that human beings ultimately come from God as God's creation and they will also ultimately go back to God as the giver and author of life. The Khasi religious myths may be termed as the language of faith that religious faith could be more effectively expressed in the form of symbolic expressions.

After a careful observation of H.O. Mawrie's account of the so-called three commandments given by God, it can be said that his interpretation is insufficient as he did not state when and where God had instituted those commandments. Besides, these three commandments as called by Mawrie are termed as the three tenets by some other leaders of Khasi Religion. Mawrie did not mention the so-called Dorbar Blei (Divine Councils) as mentioned by D.T. Laloo, one of the eminent Khasi writers, in his book entitled, Ka Ksaw ka

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17. B.L. Mawrie, "Origin and History of the Khasis" *Hynniewtrep Folk Media*, (Shillong: Rilum Printing House, 2003), p. 6
**Kpong u Hynniewtrep.** According to D.T. Laloo, God summoned the divine councils in heaven among the *Khadhynriew Trep* (Sixteen Huts) and it was in the *Dorbar Blei ba nyngkong* (First Divine Council) that God passed the order for the *Hynniew Trep* (Seven Huts) to come down and settle on this Earth as the rulers over all the creatures and to work as agriculturists.