

THE FUNERAL RITES AND PRACTICES IN THE KHASI MAINLAND: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY

By
JOSEPH SYIEMLIEH

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

To



NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
SHILLONG

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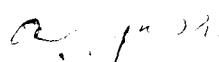
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Certified that the thesis entitled "THE FUNERAL RITES AND PRACTICES IN THE KHASI MAINLAND: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY" is the record of work done by JOSEPH SYIEMLIEH, that the contents of this thesis did not form a basis of the award of any previous degree to him, or to the best of our knowledge, to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by him for any research degree in any other University.

In habit and character JOSEPH SYIEMLIEH is a fit and proper person for the DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.


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Professor of Anthropology


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Co-Supervisor
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SHILLONG

THE 21st.3.1995

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PREFACE

Dr. P.K. Mishra, Head of Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong, saw me performing the funeral service of an old man at the Catholic Cemetery, Laitumkhrach, in September 1989. I was, then, studying in the Fourth Semester of M.A. in the above Department. He called me and expressed his wish to me if I could prepare a thesis on funeral services of the indigenous religion. He was much impressed by the religiosity and social concern of the Khasis. I replied to him that I would try it.

At the M. Phil level I took up the subject matter as topic of my inquiry: Funeral Rites and Practices in the Khasi Mainland: An Anthropological Study. But as I got a direct Ph.D. I took up the same subject for the doctoral thesis, thanks to his inspiration and encouragement.

When he left for the West Indies on a Government of India Mission, Dr. A.K. Ghosh took up the post of Head. He and Dr. H.W. Sten, Head of Department of Khasi, NEHU, accepted gladly to supervise me. My heartfelt gratitude to them for their guidance.

The subject is an interesting one. A complete descriptive and analytical work is absent in it. As I feel a great love for my people, I took up the challenge as a means to leave behind history something written down upon the rich cultural heritage that my people have handed on from one generation to the next.

Somehow certain aspects of myself as a Catholic priest have left some imprints upon the topic. I may be termed 'biased' for it. As far as I possibly can I have, however, tried to be as scientific and objective as possible, leaving behind me my subjectivity and personal inclination.

I am highly indebted to all who have helped me when I interviewed them. Thanks to Sacred Heart Theological College, Mawlai, for being generous with their library as well as for NEHU Library.

I will be happy if the readers get something out of my study to develop further in their inquiry and research.

SHILLONG

THE 24th 3. 1995


(JOSEPH SYIEMLIEH)

CHAPTER I

THE MEANING OF DEATH ACCORDING TO
KHASI INDIGENOUS BELIEF

THE MEANING OF DEATH ACCORDING TO KHASI INDIGENOUS BELIEF

The Khasis form a larger number of inhabitants as a group in the present State of Meghalaya. They are estimated to reach 8.5 lakhs or a percentage of 48.27% according to Provisional Census of India 1991. They are subdivided into Khyntiam, Pnar, Bhoi and War according to the respective areas of residence or geographical distribution.

The proposed research study will be mainly focussed on the Khasis who inhabit the mainland of Khasi Hills. The area is selected on the assumption that the Khasis of this region represent the way of life and thought of the Khasi people. Hence, samples have been taken from inhabitants of Shillong, Sohra, Nongkrem and Marbisu. These places are important centres of trade and political activities and of the thinking elite.

According to 1981 Census, the Khasis practising

the traditional religious belief number 1,27,130 or a percentage of 23.88% in the above mentioned mainland. Christians number 2,48,540 or 48.60%; Muslims 6,707 or 1.31% and Hindus 1,29,355 or 25.30% respectively.

The total population of the Khasis in this region according to 1991 Provisional Census is 6,57,100.

The focus is on the funeral rites and practices of the Khasis professing a traditional religious belief.

This study is taken up as there is no systematic research work on the topic though much has been written on the Khasis by both the Khasis and non-Khasis.

Through this study, an attempt is being made to bring out the different perspectives of religious, social, cultural custom and relationship, economy and politics of the Khasis. The basis of the rituals and their interpretation in the context of wider social and cultural framework of Khasi society will be discussed.

The topic will be presented according to the different stages of disposal of the dead according to rites and practises in Khasi religion.

There are several hurdles in carrying out research on the topic. Firstly, there are few written sources.

Secondly, the Khasis who profess to practice the traditional belief are not sure of the basis of their practice. Most of them confess that they have been left as orphans. Sacrifices and religious practices are being abandoned as they are not sure as to what they are supposed to perform and how to perform them. There is also a fear that improper and faulty fulfilment of religious rites and practices may incur the wrath of God and the snare of evil. The results of which are terrible calamities like plagues, famine, deaths. Moreover, with the influx of outsiders into Khasi land, there have been numerous intermarriages between the Khasi and non-Khasi resulting in further diluting the traditional Khasi beliefs.

Christianity has done much harm to Khasi religious customs and practices. Its religious leaders had looked at the Khasi traditional religious rites and practices as superstitious. Their drive was to do away with any religious rite and practice found among the Khasis. Over 150 years of aggressive existence of Christianity in Khasi land especially in Sohra, the site and centre of Khasi religious belief and practice and learning, must have adversely affected the very existence of the indigenous belief system.

Yet much of the indigenous religious practices have been preserved especially in the traditional practices of disposal of the dead.

Present-day Christianity is much more conducive and sympathetic to indigenous religion. It shows much concern in preserving the culture and pattern of belief of the traditional religion.

To a Khasi, death is a separation of the soul from the body. It is a completion of life as given by God the creator. However, if death occurs untimely, by violence or accident, the Khasi, through diviners, will determine the cause of such death. It may be the will of God. It may be the fault of the deceased. Or it is the malicious design of the evil ones called suid-lum suid-wah (devils of land and rivers).

Death is in the plan of God the creator. God has given a man life to live here on earth. His body is a temporary dwelling place called ka ruh bynda and the earth is a temporary dwelling place too called ka pyrthei shong basa. As he has come from God, he has also to return to him by means of the passage of death. Hence, there is a saying among the Khasis, 'kamai ia ka hok ba phin dup im suk hakhmat u Blei' (live well in this earthly life so that you can live happily in the house of God).

There is a story among the Khasi people concerning their origin. In the Golden Age called ka Aiom Ksiar, God walks with man. He descends and ascends from heaven to earth and earth to heaven through a special ladder called ka jingkieng ksiar so as to commune with man. There are nine (9) families in heaven and seven (7) families on earth known in Khasi as 'ki khyndai shajrong bad ki hynniew sha tbian.'

Through the evil design of some enemy, this relationship was snapped. So God remains with the nine families in heaven and the seven families remain on earth. The seven huts form the Khasi people.

Away from God, the forefathers of the Khasis, according to folktale, have remained orphans. They lack much in everything. They become victims of every circumstances. Only men of evil roam around. They harm the helpless and the poor.

In this sad plight, the Khasis longed for the erstwhile happy union with God, their creator. Religion is the means for re-establishing the relationship between God and men. The belief is that one's means of going to God is through death and through the funeral rites and services.

Two things are necessary for one to reach God: a good life on earth and a proper funeral rite when one dies. The latter has to be carried out by the relatives of the bereaved.

As the true abode of the Khasis is not this world but the house of God (ban bam kwai ha iing u Blei - symbolically stated as eating kwai in God's house), death has become for them not the end of life but the beginning of true and lasting life. It is conceived as the completion of life.

Some writers have similar conceptions on this topic of death. Riley, in 'Death and Bereavement', speaks of death as 'a socially significant event, set off by ritual and supported by institutions. It is the final rite de passage.'¹

Thielicke defines death as an:

Inevitable biological or metaphysical process, as something natural, a part of the order of nature, a necessary component of life itself. So death is an expression of the transitory and perishable aspect of nature.²

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1. John W. Riley, Jr. "Death and Bereavement", International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, Vol. 4, (1968), p.19.
 2. H. Thielicke, Death and Life, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1970).

He also writes of death as "integral to life. As we inquire about death — we need to inquire about life. What is life! means also what is the meaning of life."³

Plato in his Phaedo treats of death negatively as "annihilation of the peripheral, non-essential realm of existence, and positively, as the awakening of existence to its own intrinsic life."⁴

Parsons highlights of death in American society positively as "termination of a completed life cycle of effort and achievement."⁵

A Khasi truly believes in life after death. This is his life and faith. He lives, thinks and acts in his life according to this faith and hope. Hence, he is very careful in his life and activity to please God, to do his will, to placate the spirits and to live friendly and honestly with his neighbours. These are the conditions for his being reconciled with God after the end of his short stay here on earth.

3. Ibid., p. 8.

4. Plato, Phaedo, 67, 81.

5. Talcott Parsons, "Death in American Society: A Brief Working Paper," 1963, p. 21; American Behaviourist Scientist, 6, 61-65; Cfr. International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, 1968, Vol. 4.

As he comes here on earth through a family and clan, he has also to be in the presence of God with his own clan (Kur). It is expressed as being with the great ancestors, the Iawbei (the great primeval ancestress) and Suidnia (the primeval maternal uncle). Hence, the funeral rites are sine qua non conditions for this purpose. If funeral rites are not performed, the souls of the deceased will have to roam around. Perhaps they will pester the family members as to make them perform the required rites for the dead. They may harm them by disease and death and some other calamities. If funeral cremation rites are performed, and they are able to be in the presence of God, then, they can also bless the family members here on earth.

In this Khasi perspective, there is no projection of death as an escape from this difficult life on earth. Life on earth may be difficult and hard going. It may be a life and death struggle. But to him, we should not shirk our responsibility. We need to live honestly and thoroughly committed to life here on earth. Even though this life is a temporary one. Of course, living a bad life is against the norms and wishes of Khasi society. However, there are evil people in any society. They are, of course, looked at with disgust.

However, there is a common conception that man

is not perfect. He is full of faults and shortcomings (uba dap tang ka tam ka duna suda). Hence, prayers, supplications, divinations, sacrifices are for this purpose so as to beg the forgiveness and help of God, to be free from all evil, as he may be at fault by thoughts, words and deeds.

To eat betel nuts (bam kwai) is a social activity. Hence, it has a great social significance. When they meet especially at home, it is an act and a sign of good manners and good will to give betel nuts (kwai) to those who come to one's house. Even a poor man does so. Hence, there is a saying: "There is nothing that I can give you except at least for a piece of betel nut" (Ngam don eiei ban ai iaphi tang shikyntien u kwai).

Kwai is not given to an enemy. It is given only to friends. Kwai giving establishes friendship and confirms and strengthens this pact of social relationship.

Eating betel nut (a simple process of mixing betel nut, betel leaf and lime) unlike the more complicated custom in other parts of India symbolizes good will, friendship, love, unity and cooperation and a feeling at ease in each other's presence. It is also an atmosphere of peace, safety, and contentment.

It is customary for Khasi dwellings to have a veranda outside the house and joined to the house. At this veranda they use to bathe in the sunshine and fresh air and to while away their time. Then they eat betel nut (kwai) and smoke hooka (tang duma). Here guests and friends are received and from here passers-by are greeted. Afterwards they are welcome into the inner dwelling.

Hence, in the imagery of eating betel nut (kwai) in the veranda (dwar) of God's dwelling (bam kwai ha dwar u Blei) heaven is symbolized as a true abode after one's death. There, one meets God as well his his ancestral mother (Iawbei tymmen) and his great maternal uncle (u Suidnia). In this action of being in the veranda, eating betel nut, one has got sufficient time for purification and getting appeased with God in order to enter into God's dwelling place. Thus in this way, an idea of purification is implied in this imagery of bam kwai ha dwar u Blei.

In the Khasi folktale, the Mother Earth (ka Mei Ram-ew) is to be disposed of at its death. The Moon, Sun, Water, Wind and Fire — her children, had decided to do something for its cleansing. The Moon, Sun, Water and Wind, in turns, had tried but to no avail. Then finally, Fire only was able to complete the process of disposal.

In this way, the Khasi custom of disposal of the dead by cremation has arisen. However, in case of dangerously infectious diseases, the corpse is first buried. Only when there is no fear of its spreading to others, that the corpse is exhumed and cremated according to traditional religious rites and practices of cremation.

As Fire is the last of the above children of Mother Earth, so it has become customary for the last daughter in Khasi society to see to the funeral rites and services.

Cremation is thus a powerful cleansing agent. By means of this the body of the deceased is not allowed to decay. In this way, the uncalcined bones are collected to be kept in the stone-cairns (mawshyieng). Later on they are finally deposited at a common repository called mawbah. At this mawbah all the bones from individual cairns are collected and preserved. Thus, the deceased members of the clan are put together. Their being together on this cromlech is a sign and symbol of their being together in God's abode with their primeval ancestress and primeval maternal uncle.

This also shows that in Khasi mentality, religion except that of the State (Hima/Syiemship) is mostly of the family and clan (kur). In it, the maternal uncle is

the diviner who performs all the necessary religious functions of divination, prayers, supplications and sacrifices. No one outside the clan is fit to perform these religious rites and duties. The diviner does his religious functions without any payment. The family members have, however, to provide the requisite materials for divination and sacrifice.

In the Khasi religious function, two criteria are involved. They are the words and their actions. Prayers, intercessions, finding a cause are uttered by mouth in the form of words. Action is followed. Eggs are broken in the divining wooden-frame. Sacrifice of cows, bulls, pigs, goats and cocks are offered. The latter are action.

In cremation the body is destroyed but not the soul. The soul escapes from the incumbrances of the body to reach the abode of God as its proper home. Hence, there is a phrase when one has died: 'he is gone' (u la leit).

A Khasi accepts death realistically. He has no undue fear of evil spirits to haunt him. He is convinced that the spirits usually help him in his earthly life. As father or mother loved their children on earth, at death, they continue such care and protection to the living members.

In spite of Khasi matrilineal system and matrilocal

practice, the man usually dies in the house of his children and wife. Seldom he dies in the house of his kur. An exception applies to the Pnars. The man remains in the house of the kur and works for his kur, namely, his own sisters, nephews and nieces. He does not work for his wife and children so as to maintain them and feed them.

Another exception to the rule mentioned above, is for the man who lives in successive marriages or who has several wives simultaneously. Such a person can die in the house of his kur or outside the house of his wife.

Funeral rites and practices among the Khasis are very elaborate and complex. This action implies the great respect the Khasis have for the dead. Hence, the corpse is disposed of in a proper manner with full decorum with all pomp and ceremony according to one's financial means. Khasi society expects one to do so for his deceased relative. That the body is not left to decay, they cremate it.

There is another folktale among the Khasis. It seems once upon a time, they had been wanderers. The best way to deal with the corpse of their dear one(s) is by cremation. It is an easy way for the living members. They can also gather the bones in a special container to carry with them in their sojourn.

Proper funeral rites are carried out as a sign of respect and love for the deceased. When a father has done much in life for the upkeep and well-being of his children and wife, it becomes bad will and disrespect not to show him the due ceremonies at his death. His clan members (kur) may express sadness and offence if their man (kur) is ill-treated. If it has been so, then evil can befall on such a family and children who are ungrateful.

There is a problem ensuing from this subject. It is about the fate of the soul after death. It is put as follows. Is there a difference between the soul of the deceased being in the kpep-bah (final family cromlech) and being at dwar u Blei (God's dwelling place)? Has the soul, therefore, a dual existence, or is it just a way of speaking which implies one and the same meaning and reality?

The Khasi traditional religious belief is clear on the existence of the departed spirit after life here on earth. Earthly life is a temporary one. It is called ka ruh bynda (a borrowed cage, in its literal translation). The soul is conceived as a moina (a mina or myena bird). Ending of this earthly life is considered as an escape and freedom from such a cage. It is phrased in Khasi as 'u moina ba la lait na ka ruh bynda.'



This indigenous religious belief system recognizes man as imperfect. He has fault and failings. He cannot remain innocent. Somehow he commits sin in thought, word and deed.

A Khasi believes that there is a purificatory means to expiate for one's sin and the hereditary ones too. During life on earth, purificatory sacrifices are means to obtain God's forgiveness which one can acknowledge through its manifest signs like recovery from an illness, obtaining financial help, or is at peace with one's neighbour.

As in life so at death, there are complicated purificatory funeral rites of cremation and of depositing of the uncalcined bones and ashes into the common family incinerarium as means of enabling the soul to reach God's dwelling place. The first one is an initial funeral ceremony and the last one is a culminating one. It is the most solemn and important one.

Can we say that the first one is sufficient to allow the spirit of the departed to reach God's abode? We can be affirmative in this for all the religious ceremony of disposal at cremation has all the symbols of such a belief. There are for example, the three distinct cocks,

in meaning and significance, which are used as sacrifices on this occasion. They are respectively called iar-krad-lynti, iar-syngkhong and iar-padat.

'U Iar-krad-lynti' conveys the meaning of a cock that is sacrificed for the purpose of making way for the departed soul so that it can proceed safely on its way to God's dwelling place. This is a place for every Khasi man and woman. In Khasi, there is a saying: 'kamai ia ka hok ba phin dup bam kwai ha iing u Blei' (live well and honestly here on earth so that you can eat betel - kwai - at God's abode in the next life, and in peace for ever).

'U Iar-Syngkhong' represents the idea of being bound. It signifies the spirit of the departed that has been bound by the earthly cares and by one's personal and hereditary sins. Now by sacrifice of this cock, the spirit is set free from all its bondage so that it can go to its Creator in the next life.

'U Iar-padat' is a cock that is sacrificed at the funeral pyre. It is tossed from left to right, and to and fro, namely, backward and forward for three times. It symbolizes an action of a cock that leads the departed spirit through all difficulties (ka maw ka dieng) safely

to the dwelling place of one's maternal ancestress and uncle (ka Iawbei u Suidnia).

If this is so, we can say that the Khasi funeral rite should end here. There is no need any more to proceed further. It looks superfluous and redundant to carry on with other customary sacrifices and ceremonies of putting the uncalcined bones and ashes of the departed at maw-shyieng, mawphew mawkynroh and at kpep-bah.

But a Khasi religious life and belief system is a family one. So as one comes into this earthly life through a family, through his kith and kin, in a genealogical line from the mother, he is also to go back (by death) to his own departed primeval ancestress and maternal uncle to live there in peace for ever. They live as a kur here on earth. They are also supposed to be together in heaven as a kur (clan).

This situation is required when a Khasi is still illiterate. He requires concrete signs and symbols to indicate this belief in life after death. This is a universal condition. Only when a man has become literate and intelligent by means of education and experiences, he becomes abstract. The concrete gives way to the abstract expression.

It is in this background that there should be something concrete in the belief system of a Khasi. Hence, he keeps the bones of the individual departed relatives into the mawshyieng (individual stone-cairn). Then after some years, upon mutual understanding and agreement among relatives of the same family line or clan, he gathers the above mentioned bones to preserve them in the larger one called ka mawphew mawkynroh. Finally, the uncalcined bones are kept in the common family cromlech called the mawbah pepbah.

It has come to such an extent that if the above ceremony of final repositing is not done, the departed, then, are made incapable of remaining together as one community in the next life in God's mansion.

This belief system is later fundamentally disturbed with the influx of new religious belief systems. Non-Khasis (Indian Hindus and Muslims) and Christian Britishers and Khasi Christians enter upon marriage alliance with indigenous believing Khasis. This situation has affected adversely the traditional Khasi religion and its practice is gradually disappearing.

From what is seen above, can we propose that there is a dual existence for the soul? A Khasi believing in

the traditional religious system does not accept such a suggestion. The kpep-bah is only symbolic of what is really happening to the spirits of the departed in the next life.

It can be said, therefore, that in every religious system, there are two sides of the one reality, viz., the outward and the inward, or the visible and the invisible, and finally, the appearance and the reality. The outward sign symbolizes and points to the more perfect inward reality. The outward is not the inward. The former represents and indicates the latter.

As we are cultural beings, we need signs and symbols. We are using them while we live on this earth. But in the next, we hope to see reality as it actually is.

Hence, there is no dual existence in the Khasi religious belief system. The kpep-bah is only an outward manifestation of what is actually happening in reality. The spirits of the departed relatives are living together with their primeval ancestress and maternal uncle in God's house in peace and joy for ever, as symbolized by their eating of 'kwai'.

CHAPTER II

DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD: FUNERAL RITES AND PRACTICES

DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD: FUNERAL RITES AND PRACTICES

1. When one is seriously sick

When one gets sick, the maternal uncle as diviner, makes supplications, prayers and divination by egg-breaking and grains of rice to find out the reason of the sickness.

Through divining, he seeks an answer for the cause. Can it be from the patient, who is afraid and ashamed to confess a reason which is hidden? Can it be from the evil one (daw lum daw wah), or the punishment is from God for the sick person to amend oneself.

Upon finding the reason, the sacrifice of cocks is followed to appease the offended party. An expenditure is already involved here. The members of the family or the clan must provide the necessary materials for divination and sacrifice like eggs, cocks, goats, bulls and the specific utensils.

When someone is sick, it becomes a personal concern for all the family members. Friends and neighbours show

their spirit of neighbourliness by visits, words of consolation, encouragement and good health wish. At times, someone shows the sign of solidarity and mutual help by giving financial help or bringing some eatables.

In spite of every effort for care and medication, someone is seriously sick at point of death. It is customary to inform the nearest members of the kur and family who include both the kur and the kha.

As far as possible, the near and dear ones try to be present at the crucial moment of the ebbing life. Elderly relatives sit close by the patient. They make an effort to console and encourage him/her. They wish the sick God's blessing and help. They pray over the sick. The maternal uncle is busy with divination and sacrifices, for God's mercy and help, if he can spare the life of the patient.

One who is still in his senses and who has realised that his end is approaching, can gather his children around. Whatever property or income acquired by him can be distributed to them irrespective of sons and daughters alike.

He can advise the children to live a good life. He can also request his wife and elderly relatives to perpetuate the work that he has done. He assures all around

that he will help them from the next life. He may also give a final blessing in the form of a prayer or a wish. All these are very precious as they are the last words of the dying person. These are to be cherished and observed as far as possible. They believe that abiding by the bidding of the departed brings about God's blessing and protection throughout their life here on earth.

2. At death

When one gives no more sign of life, some elderly relative makes sure of this by bending close to the ear of the person and calls his/her name three times. If no response is given to this effect, the person is declared dead. The Khasi phrasing to it is 'u la leit, um don shuh bad_ngi' (he is gone, he is no more with us).

The relatives (kur and kha) start mourning over the loss. Someone elderly makes the body straight. The hands and feet are properly arranged. The eyes are closed. The corpse is removed to a separate room. It is laid on the mat (u shylliah). The room is set apart and curtained with precious cloth like dhara and jain sem. A lamp is also kept in the room. By the side of the body, a plate containing kwai is kept. Visitors (relatives and friends) on paying homage and respect to the deceased, put their kwai on it. This is symbolic of their continued friendship

and good-bye wish. It confirms their traditional belief in life after death. It also ascertains that God is merciful and will accept the departed one to come to his abode for eternal peace.

Other personal use of the deceased like hooka and liquor are also placed near the body. A bag of kwai and of liquor is also put by its side.

Gurdon¹ adds:

A dish containing eatables and betel (kwai) and a jar of water (u luta) are placed near the head of the corpse by way of offering refreshment to the spirit of the departed.

The food is given each morning and evening that the corpse remains in the house.²

This food is called in Khasi japha, ja-step and ja-miet.

Above the corpse, there is a bamboo basket fastened by strings and kept hanging over. In it, portions (ki khot ki lamjew) of sacrificed animal is set as food for the departed.

Above the navel (ha u sohpet), an egg called ka leng-kpoh is placed. It is to be put there up to the time of the cremation. It is broken at the pyre.

1. P.R.T. Gurdon, The Khasis, (Cosmo Publications, Delhi, 1975), pp. 132-139.

2. Ibid.

With the ensuing of death, the relatives express their grief by mourning. The extent of the sorrow depends on the role, status and type of person as well as his age. This mourning lasts until the day of cremation.

Cremation day is fixed after a day, two or three days after death. This depends upon the ability of the bereaved relatives to prepare the funeral service and to inform the kur and kha (relatives from the maternal and paternal side). Delay can happen to wait for a dear son or daughter to arrive.

Friends help keep the wake and console the bereaved family. Time is spent in talking to friends, or play some game. Card playing is a common sight at present. Tea and kwai is served. The menfolk have their hooka (u tangduma).

It is also a time that relatives who have been absent from each other meet to renew their old bond or to build new relationship. It is also an occasion to come to know of the social relationship each member has to one another.

When the family can financially afford, they invite mourners for the occasion. They are a band of musicians called in Khasi 'duhalia'. They play flute, cymbal and drum. Their tune is called in Khasi sur jingrwai iam-briew

or dirge. Their music gives a special touch of sorrow to all attendants. They remain in the house of the deceased as long as the body is kept at home until the appointed day of cremation. They are paid. Food and liquor are also served to them.

Though a Khasi weeps over death of a member of the family, he also is aware that he has not to overdo it. He believes that the departed spirit enters a new reality of life in the next world. It is this perspective that has enabled a Khasi to 'celebrate' death. Giving of food to those who had come to show sympathy is both out of necessity and a sign of celebration. The earthly life has ended. New life which is lasting has started.

Waiting for one, two or three days before the corpse is cremated depends, apart from what has been mentioned earlier, on the type of sickness, weather and easy communication, and if the deceased is a baby, a child, a youngman or woman, an adult or an elderly one.

Invitation depends also on the age, status and role of the departed one. More relatives and friends will be informed and invited when someone important in society dies. When a baby dies, it is enough to invite a few people.

In short, death of a child and infectious disease requires immediate cleansing of the corpse, first by burial (for an infectious one) and cremation finally.

The moment of death is an important social event. It is a trying one too. Friendship, feeling of togetherness and solidarity is shown then. One can easily notice who is a true friend, and who is not.

Death is an important occasion for inhabitants of the same village to express their spirit of solidarity and mutual help. It is the courtesy from the part of the bereaved family to inform the village headman and to request for his help. The latter readily obliges by sending a circular or making an information through the sangot (appointed announcers). The villagers refrain from their daily work and come to the aid of the aggrieved family. Not only do they help manually. They also make a contribution in cash as well. At present, collection is a practice, as a means to help the family in such straits.

It is required to obtain the approval of the village headman with regard to place and date of cremation. Side tracking him can incur social liability to the loss of the concerned family.

Rules and regulations of social life are thus

involved. They are to be abided by all inhabitants. Help can be obtained but on the condition that one observe the principles at play. One can also be isolated if these rules are spited upon.

The occasion of death brings about rights and duties to everyone in the village in their social dealings. The time of urgency does not excuse one from following what is necessary and harmonious to social life. An exemption to the rule can bring about an irregularity in the normal working of the social fabric.

The sociability shown at the time of death has its reciprocities. Slackness in this social concern can be adverse to one's own advantage in moments of need. Mutual service has its own binding.

The usual chores on this event are diverse. Some are given charge to prepare a cremation ground (jaka thang or jynthang). Some prepare the bamboos. Others cut the firewood. There are those who see to the planks, the bier, the coffin and the canopy (shanduwa). Some do cooking. Some cut the vegetables and clean the rice. The girls and women can see to preparing kwai and to decorating. Serving tea and food can be done by men and women. There is someone from the family to supervise the over-all activities and expenditure.

Immediately with the onset of death, the members of the bereaved family meet for consultation. They discuss the various areas of action. One of them is how much they can pool together the fund to spend for the occasion. A greater of it will have to be borne by the family itself. But any maternal uncle who is financially well-off can sponsor a share. Grown up children who are earning can also contribute to the expenses. The paternal relatives (ki kha ki man) feel an honour to contribute as much as they can. Their presents are known as pynkham pynsoh. It can be a cow, a bull, a pig, a cock or simply liquor.

Gifts rendered by the paternal relatives are offered to the deceased's widow (ka meikha). They try to console her over her loss. She also responds in the following words of blessing:

You have given your relative to us. He has been good to me and to my children. We are grateful to you for this. Thanks for your gifts. May God bless you and protect you. May you have more in abundance with all good health and prosperity.

It is shown above that the widow shows sign of gratitude to the relatives of the deceased. In the Khasi social framework, genealogy is counted from the mother. All children bear the surname of the mother. The mother is the one who gives birth to children. She nurtures them when they are young.

But without the father it is impossible to have progenitors. The father is called in Khasi 'u kpa uba kha, uba lah uba iai, uba peit uba sumar, uba kit ia ka khia ka shon'. (The father is responsible and makes possible so as to have children. He is patient and arduously working on behalf of the maintenance of the children and wife. He is watchfully guarding the house. He bears all the burden of the family).

Hence, in Khasi society, the father is an indispensable agent of procreation. He is much respected. Without him the race will not multiply. It is wrong to dishonour him.

Historical and social reasons have lessened adversely the image and role of the father. Khasi society is trying itself to find a way out to this difficult problem.

It is in this historical background that the Khasis display great appreciation for the paternal relatives.

While preparing the coffin called shyngoid, the relatives of the deceased kill one pig called u niang shyngoid. Those who prepare siarkait decorations (siarkait is a conical shaped shoot of banana fruit before flowering), sacrifice one pig.

After keeping the corpse in the coffin (shyngoid) (a hollow carved out of a tree trunk to the size of the body), offerings are made by kur and kha. The presents from the maternal relatives are received by the left hand, and those from the paternal ones by the right hand.

Generally, it is a sign of good manners to receive gifts from people by the right hand. The above action signifies male and female symbols. A male (namely, the father) is represented by the right side, and a female (or mother) is shown by the left respectively. It can be said that this is a common conception. It is universally found in any human society.

The above action is, therefore, not a sign of disrespect. It is a symbolism. It conveys the different functions rendered by a man and a woman who represent the paternal and maternal relatives.

After completion of construction of a platform called kpep for cremation, a bull is sacrificed. On the previous night before cremation, drums and liquor libation are set out. Prayers and supplication are also accompanied.

Presents are sacrificed. Their hind-parts are given to the paternal relatives who take the gifts on their return home. The front-part is used for the celebration for all who have come for the function.

Animals of sacrifice other than the cock and eggs have no religious value as such. Cows and pigs are offered by relatives as help for the expenses. They are a sign of mutual concern and respect as well. These animals are eaten by the attendants. There is also a traditional belief that the departed spirits are pleased with such action of feeding those who have come to the funeral service.

When someone dies, the maternal uncle as diviner breaks eggs to find the cause of death. He also beseeches God not to send any more calamity to the family.

If a king dies, like the Cherra Syiemship, a successor is selected. He can claim to the throne if he is able to perform the necessary obsequies with due pomp and ceremony. He must also be a rightful heir to the throne.

When he is capable of seeing to the necessary expenditure for the deceased king and he is a proper heir, he is enthroned. Next day after this enthronement, the funeral service is carried out.

Advisers of the deceased king called 'myntris' and the subjects of the kingdom are invited for the solemn cremation rites. More details will be given later on in a different section of this chapter.

More presents are given to a deceased who dies in his old age. Relatives do this as a sign of respect and appreciation. Sacrifice of a cock is actually sufficient for the departed. To solemnise the occasion and to feed the sympathizers bulls, cows, and pigs are needed.

Inner portions of 5, 7, or 9 (depending on each family traditional custom) from the sacrificial animal are offered to the deceased and to God. This is known as jingpynnoh dkhot. These inner parts are generally the heart, lungs, liver, spleen, kidneys, spine of the cock, and the large and small intestines. The rest of the meat is cooked for the feeding.

The maternal uncle sacrifices a cock called u iar-krad-lynti. It is meant to lead the spirit of the dead safely to the dwelling-place of the great maternal ancestress (Iawbei) and primeval maternal uncle (u Suidnia). In other words, this is God's abode. The following words are uttered as a prayer for the deceased:

Hey, listen, this is the fore-runner, as the day has arrived. As in divination I find no cause to be a bad omen or it is God's will; listen, o then, go in peace to the abode of the great ancestress and great maternal uncle who are Iawbei and Suidnia.

(To sngew mo ba long u krad lynti u krad syngkien, te ba poi ka sngi ka ia, te wei ngam lap ia ka khein ka bishar, te la pom ka tyrut ka smer, la pom ka bneng ka khyndew, te kynrad sngew ho, ba men leit da kaba suk da ka babeit ha kpoh la ka kmie ka kiaw, u ni u ma suidnia ka Iawbei ho). 3

In the sacrifice of this cock, the diviner does not look for signs (evil or good). It is enough to sacrifice the cock.

3. On cremation day

On the fixed day for cremation, the relatives of the deceased make a sacrifice of a pig. The paternal relatives follow likewise, with a bull, a pig, a cock, or liquor, depending upon their wish and financial position.

On receipt of the gifts (ka pynkham ka pynsoh), the diviner informs the deceased that the offerings have been bestowed, say a bull, a cow, a pig, or a cock. He also mentions the name of the donor, and describes the relationship he has to the departed one. Grains of rice are thrown on the offering and water is also sprinkled. With this the presents are slaughtered and offered in sacrifice. The inner portions are presented to the dead and the hind-part given to the paternal relatives. The front-part upto the waist is used for the meal for the attendants.

3. G. Costa, Ka Riti Jong Ka Ri Laiphew Syiem, Part II, (Don Bosco Technical School, Shillong, 1947), p. 42.



Above: Initial stage of preparation for the bier in the Khasi funeral rites.



Below: Preparing the bier in which the corpse will be placed for carrying to the pyre.

Near sunset, before setting out in procession for cremation, the corpse is bathed by the elderly relatives. The body is clothed with the best new clothing specially bought for the occasion. The dressing up is done differently opposite to that of the living. It is called ka rukom, riam snaiap (a ghost dressing). The male is clothed by dhoti and petti-coat and turban (jain-spong) from the left side. The female's outer garment (jain kyrshah) is also done likewise, inside out.

According to Gurdon,⁴ sometime after death, the body is bathed in warm water from three earthen jars. Then it is reverentially laid on a mat (shylliah). The colour of the dress is white. The waist cloth and turban (jain-boh and jain-spong) are folded from left to right opposite to that of the living. An egg called lengkpoh is placed on the stomach of the deceased. Nine fried grains of riew-hadem (Indian corn) are tied around the head of the deceased with a string.

White dress symbolizes death. A living person may dress in white with some variety of colours either in his petti-coat or shirt.

4. P.R.T. Gurdon, The Khasis, Cfr above, pp. 132-139.

The Indian corn grains signify the living condition of the people then. There is no other type of food. It indicates how poor the people were in the past. Their condition is thus miserable.

The rich place ear-rings on the ears and other jewellery on the body. They are specially made for the event. The corpse is also clothed with precious vestments.

This action signifies a person is prepared for a journey to his everlasting home, to the abode of the nine families of yore in heaven.

The Khasi folktale cites the origin of the Khasis. Nine and seven families communed with one another through a ladder connecting heaven and earth. God also travels along with them. Unfortunately, through the evil machination of an enemy, that connection is cut off. The nine families are left in heaven. The seven forming present day Khasis, are abandoned on earth.

This may be also another reason why funeral rites take place. It is to enable the spirit of the dead to reach the abode they had earlier been. There is no other way apart from this. For speedy journey of the soul, the body must be burnt.



The initial stage of preparing the pyre.



The pyre is being prepared.

To go back to the aspect of dressing the corpse, some advocate vesting up normally as for the living. In case of females, the outer garment (jain kyrshah) is cut into two pieces according to size. The remaining part of it (as it is a long one) is kept with the relatives at home.

Depending on the gender of the deceased person, a bull or cow is killed and sacrificed. It is called masi pynsum. Portions of the left leg of the cock (u iar-krad-lynti) and the lower part of the jaw of the bull or cow, are kept aside to be placed later on in the stone-cairn (mawshyieng).

The corpse is then laid on the coffin. The latter is put on the bamboo bier called ka krong. The bier can be supported by a more elaborate structure called lyng-khason. This is done for king or nobles. Above it, there is transfixed a canopy (shanduwa).

Over the bier, there are decorations according to one's taste and financial means. Necklaces, precious garments, and other ornaments are bedecked on it. The personal belongings of the deceased like dhoti, shirt, and turban are hanged on it.

Money is placed with the corpse. The purpose is as wherewithal for the spirit to buy food and the needful on its journey. The Romans⁵ are said to have this practice.

Cotton cloth and silk (if they are rich) is tied cross-ways over the bier if the deceased is male and in a parallelogram if female. They can decorate it with costly garments known in Khasi as 'jain banat-saw, jain khor jain khriam and jain sem muka dhara.'

Before setting out in procession to the place of cremation, a cock is sacrificed. It is called u iar syngkhong. The words which the diviner utters explain the purpose and meaning of this special cock. He speaks out as follows:

Listen o deceased one, as you are put in the bier, a sign that you are bound up, free from shame, that you may reach safely the dwelling place of the ancestress and uncle, of Suidnia and Iawbei. 6

The cock is strangled to death. Its blood is oozed out. It is smeared on the three pieces of wood bound

5. C.M.J. Toynbee, Death and Burial in the Roman World, (Thames & Hudson, 1871, Chapter III: "Funerary Rites and the Cult of the Dead"), pp. 43-72.

6. G. Costa, Cfr above, pp. 44-45.



Above: The biers for
male and female corpses



Below: The rituals and
personal clothing are
left inside the pyre

together. They are put in a bamboo basket. The sides of the bier is also rubbed with the blood.

If planks are used for coffin, a goat is killed as amendment and supplication. It is called u lang sait-ksuid. It is a goat for the purpose of warding off evil. This is not done in case of ordinary wood is used.

According to Gurdon,⁷ before lifting the bier, a handful of grains of rice and water from the jar are thrown outside. The above lang-sait-ksuid is sacrificed. These are purificatory ceremonies.

Khasis do not use goats for meat. Bulls, cows, pigs and cock are of course rich delicacies. The former are not ordinarily used for sacrifice, except for the purpose of warding off evil (ban lait na u ksuid u khrei bad ban sait ia ki pap ki sang). The latter are common victims of sacrifice.

In the meaning given above, there is a similarity in the use of sheep as expiatory victims. This is found among the Jews. Christianity has proclaimed Jesus Christ as the sacrificial victim who has expiated for the sins of men by his death on the Cross.

The funeral procession forms up and slowly passes

7. P.R.T. Gurdon, Cfr above, pp. 132-139.

along the way to the plaintive music of flutes (sharati), and the beating of drums (ki ksing). At intervals, the rich throw copper coins on the route and have gun-salute.

Anyone can help to carry the bier. The male members of the family and close friends do so. Decorum and quiet mood is the norm.

The relatives of the deceased take to the pyre japha food and the seven pieces of bread (kpu um), a container (u phiang), a copper jar (u luta jrong), kwai prepared as kwai dong, the food which had been given while the corpse was at home, the bow and three arrows (ka tieh-tympem and nam tympem), one jar (klong), liquor, a cock, leng-kpoh, plates, luta (jar) and cooking pots (khiew thang-iap). They are to be burnt together with the corpse.

The tieh and nam tympem are the bow and three arrows which are used at the naming ceremony of a male child. Some eight days after birth, a male child is being named. The above materials are symbolically given to the child. It signifies the duty and responsibility of the male in the family and society. His duty is to defend. He is a warrior. At death they are burnt together with the corpse to represent his completion of a mission given him in life.



The bier containing
the male corpse.



The bier containing
the female corpse.

On nearing the pyre, the corpse is exposed to view. The pieces of flesh from the sacrificial animals kept with the body are thrown away.⁸

Having reached the cremation ground, the diviner kills one goat known as u lang mawlynti (Gurdon calls it u lang mawkjat). It is literally a goat for the path and for the steps.

The corpse is then laid on the pyre, head westward and feet eastward. The purpose is that the spirit of the deceased can go straight to God's abode. At birth one is understood to have come from the east or the rising sun. At death, he goes to the west or the setting sun. Logs of wood are placed around the body. The leng-kpoh is smashed on the pyre in the direction of the feet of the corpse as the fire is set ablaze.

Mawlynti or mawkjat are memorial stones erected at the time of cremation. They are intended as resting stones during the service. The attendants at the funeral stop for a while on them. It is also thought that the spirit of the departed is rested there before it goes to its destined abode.

8. Ibid.

Costa⁹ has given a different description for the leng-kpoh. According to him, it is thrown towards the head of the pyre once the blaze is on.

The iar-padat is also sacrificed. Its blood is sprinkled round the pyre, three times. Across the corpse, it is also tossed to and fro thrice.

Costa¹⁰ explains the purpose of the cock mentioned above. It is to help the deceased to reach safely through fire and hurdles to the dwelling place of the ancestors, of Iawbei and Suidnia.

Fire is applied to the pyre, first by the kur and by the children of the deceased. The kha (paternal relatives) follow suit with fire-setters (ki nongbylla thang) last.

After the decorating cloth and ornaments have been removed, the bier is broken into pieces and thrown into the fire. Some interviewees state that the cloth and ornaments are held over the fire three times (shu syaw). Then, they are folded properly and brought home.

9. G. Costa, Cfr above, p. 43.

10. Ibid., pp. 45-46.



The canopy and the
pyre.



The pyre is set on
fire.

The eatables and jaw-bones of sacrificial animals which are placed at the head of the pyre are thrown away with completion of burning the corpse.

In regard to the bow and arrows mentioned earlier, they are shot from the bow to three directions, north, south and east. The intention is that the arrows can protect the spirit of the dead from any evil power on its sojourn to his final home.

When the fire is consuming, u lang duhalia (a goat of the musicians) is also sacrificed. The personal clothes of the deceased can also be either burnt or held over the fire. They can be used again by the living, especially when they are poor. Costa¹¹ also adduces to just holding over the fire for personal utensils and clothes. Cooking pots (khiew thang-iap) of the deceased are burnt in the pyre. After one year of death of the person, they can be used by the living members.

The relatives and friends attending the service, before they bid good-bye, throw one piece of betel nut and leaf mixed with lime (shi kyntien kwai) as a sign of respect and love. The betel leaf in this occasion is

11. Ibid., p. 46.

not folded as it is done for the living. While they do so, they wish good-bye to the departed in the following words: "Bye, go to eat betel in God's dwelling-place" (to khie leit bam kwai ha iing u Blei).

The womenfolk do not remain till the corpse is completely burnt. As the fire is ablaze, they throw kwai and return home. The menfolk and fire-setters (nongkylla thang) remain. At interviews in Marbisu, this information is obtained. In other places, however, some women relatives, do stay back upto the collecting of the bones and ashes. It is their duty to carry them back home.

The nongkylla-thang (fire-setters) are not paid anything. Only food and liquor is served to them. The sbai rupa (in earlier times, money consisted of cowries and silver coins) thrown into the pyre goes to them. How do they do to collect the money? They usually eat a mouthful of kwai so that they can keep the burning coins in their mouth without disturbing their work of keeping the fire ablaze. Apart from the fire-setters, flute-players also share in the benefit of gold and silver coins. If there are precious decorations, these go to those who had prepared them.

Then the corpse is completely incinerated, the

workers ask the relatives if they are satisfied so that they can extinguish the fire. Before they do so, they rake the ashes to look for any piece of flesh that is left unburnt. They do this thrice. Upon satisfaction by the relatives, the fire is put off by throwing water thrice from foot to head. Then the ashes and bones are collected from right to left and from head to foot. The pyre is, then, destroyed and the stone-structure is pushed backwards.

Costa¹² says that before collecting, the relatives call the name of the deceased. Having done so, the wife, daughter or niece starts gathering the uncalcined bones. Gurdon has this opinion in the action of collection the bones, that they are wrapped carefully in a piece of new white cloth (ka jain sala lieh). He also narrates that some elderly woman may throw some powdered rice from a leaf on the ground and simultaneously adjures the spirit of the dead not to trouble the kur as the funeral ceremonies are duly performed.

4. To the stone-cairn (mawshyieng)

Costa¹³ describes how the collected bones are put in a plate. They are then washed thrice. Then, they are

12. Ibid., p. 46.

13. Ibid., p. 47.

wrapped with the same piece of white cloth. The wife, daughter or niece takes the bundle and contains it within herself. She proceeds towards the stone-cairn (mawshyieng). The latter has been kept ready in the outskirts of the village.

The size of the stone-cairn/bone repository is 1' square. The purpose is to remove the bones from these individual repositories so as to preserve them in a larger one with those of other members of the clan.

While moving to the place intended, the carrier is not to turn to either side. She is to walk straight. It is said that if the bearer happens to turn to any side then her life span is cut short. Those who follow the carrier make sure that she does not do so.

Moreover, if the bearer happens to turn back, it means that the action is not acceptable. In such case, then, the bones will have to remain in the house of the wife. The deceased person will not be able to reach safely the dwelling place of his ancestors (ryngkat bad la ki kur ki jait).

According to Gurdon,¹⁴ after collecting the bones, the party sets out to go to the bone repository (mawshyieng).

14. P.R.T. Gurdon, Cfr above, pp. 132-139.

In front walks one who strews along the route leaves of a diengshit tree whose berries are used for fishing. He also spreads the grains of rice all along upto the place of the cairn.

What is the purpose of the leaves of diengshit? It is to prepare the way for the spirit of the dead. It is this tree that is used in the ling niam of the Cherra kings as a sacred post (u rishot blei). Leaves of this tree are also used as container to keep the red mud in the breaking of eggs.

The grains of rice may signify means of support for the deceased on its way to the cairn viz, towards its destined abode.

If any stream is to be crossed, a rough bridge is made of branches of trees and grass. This is to guide the spirit of the deceased safely to the place of its destiny. In some areas in Marbisu, they can use a thin thread to do the job of bridge across any stream.

Having reached the bone repository, the diviner washes the bones thrice. He, then, places them in an earthen pot. The mouth of such pot is tied up with a white cloth. Three pieces of hard yolk of egg, three leaves of bread, a left leg of the cock (u iar-krad-lynti) and

the lower jaw-bone of a sacrificial animal are also kept inside the cairn. Its opening is, later, shut. Eatables and betel (kwai) are laid on top of the cairn.

Costa¹⁵ adds by stating that upon reaching the cairn, the diviner pours liquor in libation with words of supplication. The bones and the piece of white cloth are enclosed into a small earthen pot which is kept inside the cairn. Then its opening is closed. Eatables are also placed. Then all return home.

Before the bones are kept inside the cairn, a religious function is carried out. The diviner makes a prayer. He calls upon the deceased relatives informing them that so and so (with name and surname) belongs to their kith and kin. Then he states that he has brought the deceased so that he can dwell happily with them. The bones are then kept inside and the stone cover is put. Eatables (japha) are laid on top of the stone-cover.

When they come back home, the family members of the deceased are not supposed to mourn any longer.

Mawshyieng is a bone repository for an individual deceased person. No other bones are kept in it.

15. G. Costa, Cfr above, pp. 47-48.

Eatables are kept for three consecutive days. Others report that this is done only for the first day.

Gurdon¹⁶ wrote that early next morning, the relatives and friends go to the cairn with fresh food and water. They try to see if there are any footprint or finger-print. The idea is that these signs can foretell the future events. They can carry on looking for signs upto the third night after cremation.

From interviews, it is learned that early the next morning after cremation, two or three relatives go to the place of cremation. They watch out for any sign. Sometime they find footprints or finger-prints of a child, or a grown up similar to those living relatives. It is believed that the Rngiew (shadow) of the living is cast there somehow mysteriously even though they have not stamped into that place.

The belief is that some calamity may happen again in the bereaved family. The diviner breaks eggs and looks for a reason. He seeks God's forgiveness and protection as to ward off any danger to happen to that family. It is by such prayers and supplications that the living members are spared from all harm.

16. P.R.T. Gurdon, Cfr above, pp. 132-139.

Another version of this which I have learned from Sohra is this. After cremating the corpse, all people go home. In the quiet hour, an evil man or a witch puts his footprints or finger-prints as means to cause harm to the family. Or he may not do it himself. He may cause the wandering spirits to do his job. These spirits are called ki suid-iap.

Suid-iap are souls of the dead who have not managed to go to the dwelling place of the ancestors. The reason is that their living members had not observed the necessary religious rites and ceremonies for the dead. The funeral services have to be performed for the departed to enable them to reach God's abode. Even if one lives honestly and a good life he still requires the necessary obsequies for eternal happiness.

The above wandering souls come and disturb the living members of the clan. They can be used by evil men to do acts of harming others.

There is one true story narrated in Sohra. It runs like this. One Nongkynrih family had the misfortune of death of one elder brother. The evil one has cast his shadow on some other living members of the family. The living ones had not taken care to watch and to make prayers

to ward off any evil design. It so happend that the father of the same family got sick and died. After that, some footprints had appeared on the cremation place. Fingerprints of a lady were even planted inside the house of that family.

So the younger sister of the deceased also got so sick that she was only skin and bones. There was no hope of her recovery. The family members felt that something was wrong. They guessed that an evil one must have had a hand in this. So they called a diviner to seek protection and to ward off evil. The woman was healed and she is still alive now.

Nothing was heard in this case that the witch-doctor can fall sick himself as a kick-back for his failure.

The day after cremation is a day of accounting (ka step khein sbai). The relatives sit down to consider the income and expenditure of the event of death. When this is over, the sbai (cowries) are poured with liquor in libation. The diviner addresses the deceased as follows:

Oh listen, so much has been spent ...
(an exact amount is mentioned) in order
to cremate you. Be okay and be well. Wait
for the judgement. 17

17. G. Costa, Cfr above, p. 48.

Costa's Khasi rendering runs as follows:

Hei, to sngew ho, la lut la sep... na
ka bynta ba thang ba ring ia me; to nang
kyrsoi, to nang kyrsih, to nang ap ia
ka khein ka bishar.

The deceased is also requested to bless the living one for prosperity and for a good life.

It is remarked that such accounting is painstaking and carefully carried out. There is no chance for any mistake. Every type of expenditure is put in record except only for salt and the ingredients of cooking curry. Those interviewed at Marbisu have given this reply.

When the expenditure is calculated, they turn to the gifts (ka pynkham ka pynsoh). The pig offered in homage is slaughtered. Its hind-part is given back to the relatives and the upper half is used for the meal. The paternal relatives take back the hind part to their respective houses. They perform their religious rites at home and use the meat for a celebration.

During the three nights consecutively, the front door of the house formerly occupied by the deceased is not closed. The belief is that the spirit of the departed may wish to return to visit its earthly abode.

The whole family of the departed is taboo (sang) during this period. No manner of work can be done during the three days. When it is over (lait-ia), three eggs are broken to ascertain the cause of death. After this, the family members go to bathe and to wash the clothes and mats. The taboo is then released. Others state that with the day of accounting itself, the family members can already wash themselves, their clothes and the house. Of course, they cannot resume their daily work until the three days are completed.

During divination, the sacrificer utters the following words towards the deceased:

Oh, wait for the reason, when all relatives have assembled, the judgement will be made manifest, then offering will be given you. Take and drink this liquor. O you great ancestors, the mother Iawbei, the one who gathers everybody into your fold.¹⁸

In Khasi it runs:

Hei ap ia ka nia ka jutang ynda ialum
iakynshew ia u khun u para, u kur, ka
meinah meisan, yn sa tai ia ka khein ka
bishar, yn sa long ka ai bam ka ai sa
ia me, ka kynrong, dih sa ka kiad sa ka
um mo! sngew ryngkat maphi ka Blei ka
Iawbei, ka nonglum ka nongkynshew shikhrum
ka maw ka nar mo.

18. Ibid., p. 48.

Though all family members bathe themselves and clean the house, the wife of the deceased will not comb her hair. She will just tie it and let it flow. She does this for one full year. This is done as a sign of mourning. It is taboo (sang) for her to re-marry within one year. This is also binding to the husband in case his wife dies. The taboo incurred when a year was not lapsed is removed by payment of a fine to the clan of the deceased. The fine is reduced after one year's completion. This fine is for the purpose of bearing the necessary expenditure for religious rites of disposal.

Jeebon Roy,¹⁹ narrates that Khasi widows generally do not re-marry unless they have no female issues. Then the clan urges them to do so so that the chain of heredity and inheritance is not broken.

When a month is over, a pig is offered in sacrifice. The poor offer only a cock. Then they wait until one year is completed. This above ceremony is called in Khasi ai bam lait bnai.

It is learned from interviews in Sohra that at the time of death, the headman orders the villagers to

19. Jeebon Roy, Ka Niam Khasi, (Ri Khasi Press, Shillong, 1899).

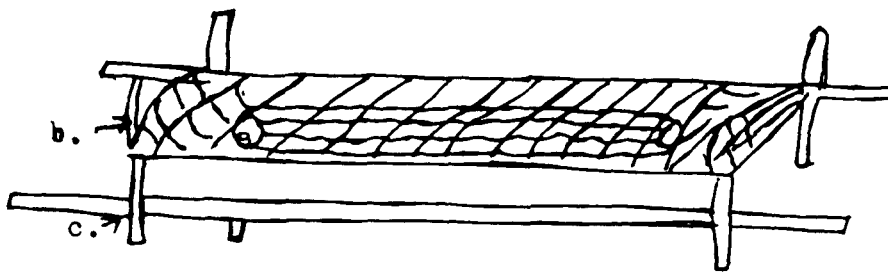
lend a helping hand. This is so when the news is brought to him. At the lapse of a month and a year respectively, and at the final depositing, the living members have to invite the people to come.

From the above situation, two instances of social obligation take place. The first instance shows the obligation of the villagers to the bereaved family. The second, is a social event which the bereaved family initiate to invite their relatives and friends.

5. Different decorations for cremation

At any cremation ceremony, sacrifice of the three cocks (u iar-krad-lynti, u iar-syngkhong and u iarpadat) is sufficient. Sacrifice of other animals (bulls, cows, pigs) is only to add to the solemnity of the occasion. Only the rich can afford to do so.

Moreover, depending upon the financial position of the living family members, the body of the deceased can be carried in procession to the pyre in different ways. These are understood as different types of funeral service. Rather the funeral service is intrinsically and basically the same. However, the outward show is different according to status, role and financial ability of the living members.

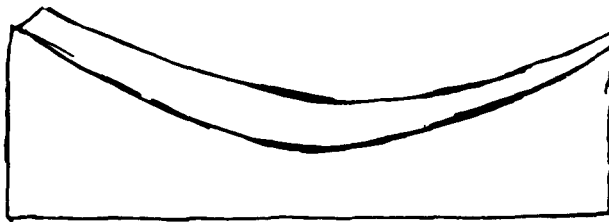


a. Corpse Nicely Folded with Mat
b. Fibre to tie the Mat and Corpse

c. Bier

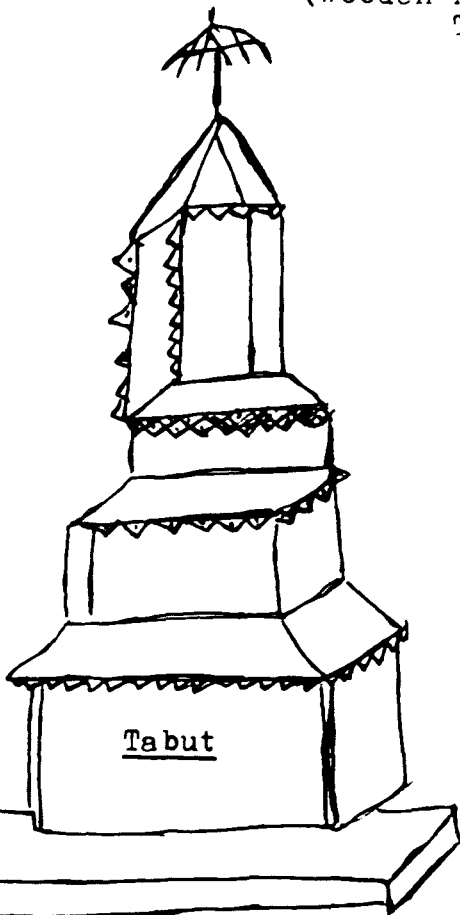


Lyngkhason(Bier)

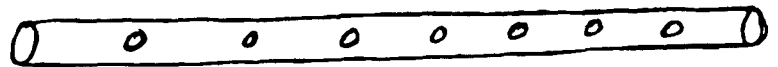


Shyngoid

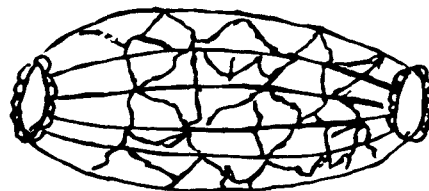
(Wooden Hollow To Contain
The Corpse)



Tabut



(Sharati)Flute



Ksiang(Drum)

The following are the four modalities of cremation service.

- A. Ka Thang Diengtylli/Thangkrei (Burning with logs of wood).
- B. Ka Thang Baitwait (Burning on roughly hewn wood).
- C. Ka Thang Lyntang (Cremating on Properly Hewn Planks).
- D. Ka Thang Lyngkhason (Thang Siarkait) (Cremation with use of specially decorative support and raised structure).
- E. Customary cremation rites for deceased kings of Sohra Syiemship.

A. Ka Thang Diengtylli/Thangkrei

This type of cremation is simple. It is used for the poor. It is also done when no religious rite is undertaken for some one who has lived publicly in sin (like marriage within the same clan which is called shong sang). It can also be death by violence or accident.

In this situation, the pyre is made on a platform of logs enough to protect and fence for cremating the corpse. Underneath there is a space for setting the fire. The body is folded on a mat (shylliah) and is borne on

the bier. It can be conveniently carried by six or seven people to the pyre.

Having reached the pyre, the corpse is put on top of the logs and is set fire. The diviner is there to perform the cock sacrifice.

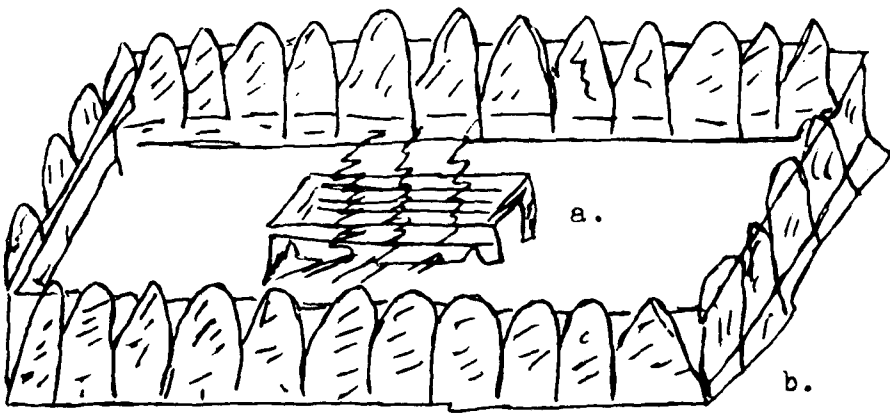
Thangkrei is cremating without any religious rite. No prayers are said in this.

At present, this practice is in vogue. It is not because that the deceased has lived a bad life. It is due to non-availability of diviner. No one knows exactly what and how to perform the religious rite. There is a fear for wrong performance. In which case calamity may befall upon the sacrificer and the concerned family.

In this type of burning, family members cannot expect any gifts (pynkham pynsoh) from relatives. They may accept them when offered. Without pynkham, there cannot be any portions (pynnoh dkhot) for the deceased. The bones here are not collected.

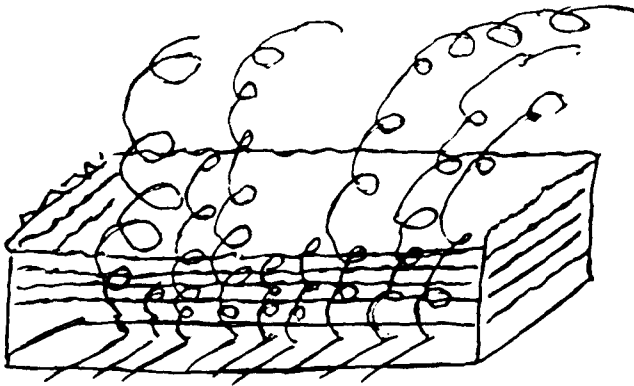
B. Thang Bait-Wait

This type of cremation is done by those of average income. In this, all necessary religious ceremonies are followed.

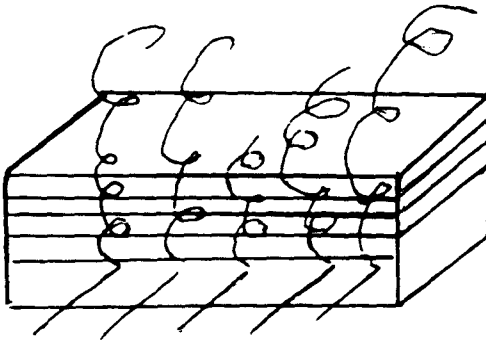


a. Pyre

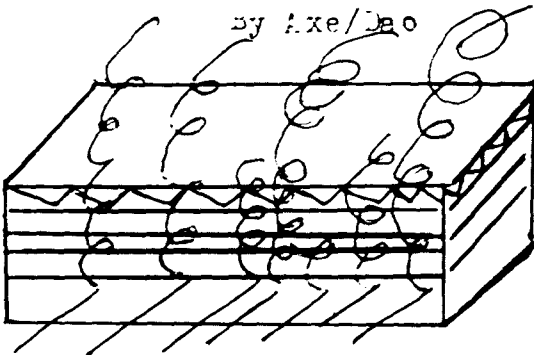
b. Pyre Enclosure fenced with flat-stones



Pyre Prepared With Logs For Poor People



Pyre Prepared with Planks Roughly Hewn
by Axe/Dao



Pyre Prepared With Properly Dressed
Planks For Rich People

Gifts (pynkham) are received from maternal and paternal relatives. Portions (pynnoh dkhot) are given to the deceased and to God. The planks used in this, are, however, not properly hewn.

C. Thang Lyntang

Properly dressed planks are used for coffin and pyre platform in this type of cremation. The planks are richly decorated on their edges (da ki khyrnit bad oh-shrong). The pyre is also covered with precious garments. Above it, a canopy (shanduwa) of red colour is arranged. The bier is made in the form of a boat, a horse, or an elephant.

As long as the corpse is kept at home, there is celebration. Drums are beaten and flutes are played by duhalia. Gun-salute is also followed.

At the time of cremation, and when the gift-offering is accomplished, male dancing with swords takes place. It is first enacted in the front-portico or maidan in front of the house. This dance is a sign of homage to the deceased father/mother and it is called ka shad nguh mei-kha pa-kha.

When the religious service is over, towards evening before sunset, they prepare to proceed to the pyre.

The corpse is wrapped in a mat (shylliah), it is put inside the bier. The latter is covered with precious garments of red or white colour (jain khor jain khriam, jain sem muka dhara, jain mokmor).

The garments covering the bier are arranged in the form of a parallelogram for deceased female and cross-ways for males.

Immediately when the corpse is put in the bier, one cock is sacrificed. It is called u iar syngkhong. The function of this cock is to release all bondage and to protect the deceased for safe journey to the abode of the ancestors. Inner portions are not examined for good or bad omen.

A goat is also sacrificed in front of the house.. It is called u lang sait-ksuid. It is a goat to release the spirit of the departed from the clutches of evil and from any fault.

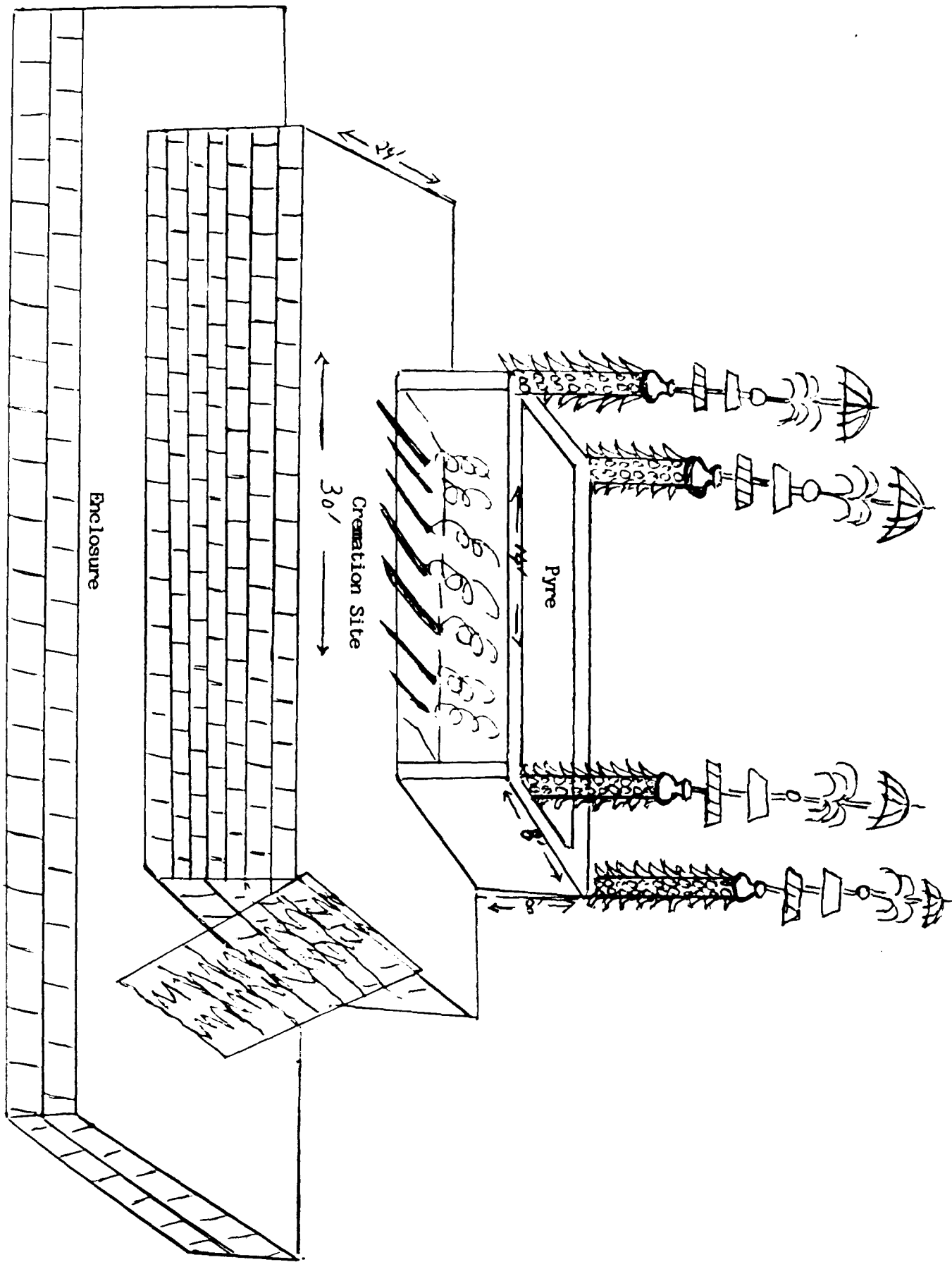
When the sacrifice is over, they prepare to move out in procession to the pyre. One male relative carries a live fire-brand to the pyre. He moves ahead of the others. Another elderly relative carries a handful of rice and water (a luta shynrang/luta kynthai) depending on the gender of the deceased. He utters the name of the departed

bidding him safe journey and to have no regret for the living. Then he throws the grains of rice in front of the house and pours water from the jug.

The bearers of the bier walk ahead. The kur and kha follow them. Finally, come the friends and well-wishers. The relative carry with them eatables and leng-kpoh.

As they proceed in procession, there is beating of drums and playing of flutes and gun salute. The rich also throw money now and then all along the route up to the pyre. Other functions follow as have been mentioned earlier in this section.

This type of cremation service is for the rich, the royalty and the people of high social standing. In this service, the relatives of the deceased receive gifts (pynkham) from the kur and kha. There is a festive mood with beating of drums, playing of flute and dancing. The last item is started first by relatives (youngmen and young women). Others like friends and well-wishers follow. Sacrifice of bulls, cows, pigs and cocks also takes place, together with gun-salute.



D. Ka Thang Lyngkhason

Thang Lyngkhason (Lyngkhason cremation) is the most solemn. It is done only for kings and the royalty. An example of this is that of cremation services for the deceased king in Sohra Syiemship. This is described later on in a different section.

In this type, the cremation place is fenced around by planks just hewn in the form of a coffin. It is big enough to contain the corpse. The length of this pyre is approximately 5½', its breadth 2' and its height 4½' to 5½'. Those who can afford and if the deceased is next of kin to the royalty, the pyre is covered with precious red garment. Some others also prepare a high canopy (shanduwa). It is decorated with salu saw or banat-saw (red garment). The bier is also bedecked with decorations in the form of a horse. Gold chain and ornaments are hung on it together with precious garments.

On the day of cremation, the bereaved family offers one pig in sacrifice. Paternal relatives (kmie-kha, khun-kha) follow them. Other friends can also offer a bull, cow, cock as they wish. Some may bring only liquor (iad-rong). The sacrificer announces to the deceased that such pig, bull, or cow has been given by such and such a person. Grains of rice are sprinkled over the sacrificial animal

as well as water. The animal is slaughtered. Its inner portions are offered to the deceased (pynnoh dkhot). The hind-part upto the waist is returned to the offerers and the rest is eaten by the attendants.

When all preparation is carried out, the corpse is put inside the bier (krong). It is explained above in this page itself how richly it is decorated. Flutes are played together with drum-beating and cymbals in the finest tune possible up to the pyre.

Before it is carried, a cock is sacrificed. This cock is known as u iar-syngkhong. Its symbolism is given here with the words:

Oh listen you who had died as you are put into the bier. It has appeared like you are bound up, protecting you from shame. By doing this, it is intended that you reach safely the dwelling place of your great grand-parents of Suidnia and Iawbei according to the religion put forth by our forefathers.

The cock is strangled. Its blood is oozed out. It is smeared on the three pieces of wood bound together and kept in a basket. The diviner also smears the bier all round. If the pyre is prepared with properly hewn planks, a goat known as u lang sait-ksuid is also killed.

The rest of the procedure is followed as is detailed in section 3 earlier.

The above three pieces of wood symbolize ka jing-kieng ksiar. They are used as ladder for the spirit to climb up to the pyre and later into the stone-cairn. A Khasi folktale explains the use of jingkieng ksiar (golden bridge). Once at an ancient time, the nine families above and the seven families below commune with each other and with God their creator through this special bridge. The nine families come to earth and the seven go to heaven. But an enemy has snapped away that relationship by cutting away the bridge. It is in this perspective that there is a lingering longing in Khasi thinking that one day they will go back to God. The ladder made of the three pieces of wood represents this longing.

E. Customary cremation services as followed for deceased kings of Sohra^{20, 21}

The modality of funeral service for the deceased kings of Sohra Syiemship differs from all others. It is uniquely its own since time immemorial.

This rite of disposal is necessarily connected with the crowning of a new king. The king-elect is to be selected by the 12 nobles (mantris) representing the

20. H. Lyngdoh, Ka Pomblang Nongkrem bad ka Thang Syiem Sohra, (Ri Khasi Press, Shillong, 1928), pp. 35-60.

21. G. Costa, Cfr above, p. 53.

12 clans known as kurs. Later in the history of Sohra Syiemship, the general populace is also given a right to select the king. He is to be a fit person. He must come from the proper royal family. He must also be an able one. He is able to bear the necessary expenses to expedite the traditional funeral services with due pomp and ceremony as laid down by the ancestors.

It has happened often in the history of Sohra Syiemship that a new king elect was fit for the post but had no means to bear the huge expenses required for a worthy funeral. The expenditure estimated in the year 1945-47 by Costa in his book printed in 1947 was around Rs. 25,000/- to Rs. 30,000/-. It means at present lakhs of rupees. A new person is able to spend but has no legal and hereditary right to succeed. Hence, the corpse of the deceased king remains for a long time without funeral service. Only when one who is fit and able has been selected, then the body of the late king is purified. The coronation ceremony precedes one day before the funeral.

As the corpse is to be kept for a long time (for many years, or for a duration of several kings), a means is sought to preserve it. Earlier, they keep it in a carved out hollow made of wood mixed with honey.

The above method is abandoned for a new technique of preservation. In the same carved out wooden space, the corpse is soaked for three consecutive days in rice-beer (iad-um). Then they wash it and keep it dry for one day. Again it is soaked but in lime-juice in the same carved out hollow. It is then covered and sealed so that no stench can escape. Beneath the container, there is a hole which is connected to a bamboo-pipe. The latter is immersed into the earth. All the dirt from the corpse is drained into the mud. The corpse is kept in this position until the day of its solemn funeral.

The matrilineal relatives of the deceased king like an eldest or younger sister or niece sees to the performance of rites. Immediately after death of the king, they with their male counterparts take the corpse to their house for the necessary religious rites.

The maternal relatives of the deceased king prepare first a place to lay the corpse. It is a hollow space carved out of a tree trunk. Then it is well decorated. Before putting the body into it, they bathe it. Before washing it, one noble belonging to Nongrum clan as official sacrificer for the royalty breaks eggs and offers sacrifices. When he has finished doing so, then, comes cleaning the body. Having clothed it with the best new clothes, it is laid in the above mentioned wooden hollow.

It is in the house of these relatives that the corpse is preserved according to the technique mentioned above. A house where the body is kept is called ka Syiem-Sad or Syiem-niam and the religious rites so carried out, household rites (ka niam-iing).

When the above action is over, the nobles prepare for an election of a new king according to the rules and regulations of succession laid down from of old. The subjects also have a right to elect. An elderly male from the royalty is usually the most likely choice.

When one who is fit and able is elected, a date is arranged for the royal funeral service and for the coronation. Sangot (announcers) are sent throughout the kingdom to inform of the above preparation. For weeks and months, the king-elect oversees the preparation of Kpep (the pyre), the Lyngkhason (a special bier richly furnished and decorated), the Tabut (a Muslim type special decorative structure which is kept over the Lyngkhason) and the Lynti-Lyngkhason (the route for carrying the corpse from the house to the place of cremation). He also supervises all the materials necessary for the funeral rites. Rice and pigs are kept ready for feeding the workers for the day of coronation and of cremation as his subjects arrive from all over the kingdom.

When the cremation day is within weeks, dancing by unmarried girls of varying ages is conducted daily. It is prepared near the market-place of Sohra. Every night the menfolk play the flutes in the house of the Syiem-Sad (the maternal relative of the king who is either an eldest or younger sister or eldest niece).

The Kpep is a pyre prepared outside the village. In it the corpse of the deceased kings of Sohra and nearest maternal relatives known as Syiem-Sad or Syiem-Niam are cremated. It is a raised structure made of stones or mud. At Pomsahmen, Sohra, there are two of such raised structures. One is used for the kings and another for the Syiem-Sad. The platform is made of stone-blocks of size 10" by 12" respectively. Their size is 30' x 20' x 10' for the first category and 40' x 30' x 10' for the latter. Around it, there is a wall made of stones with opening in front-side and on one wing. At the time of cremation of deceased kings, people climb into it through a wooden or bamboo bridge in order to carry the Lyngkhason to it.

The Lyngkhason is a special bier to keep the corpse. It is burnt together with the body. It is a type of cremation done only for kings and Syiem-Sad of Sohra. Its size is 7' x 4' x 4'. It is made of planks and beams which have been hewn and polished properly. The planks are

covered from outside with red garment called banat-saw and the beams with black cloth called mukmor iong or dhara iong. Silver-plated nails called janeri are used to fasten the above decorations. On its head-side, bright hues are used as decorations. Then the muca-thread of striking colours is also alternately arranged. Over it, ten pieces of decorations called siar-kait are attached. They are painted in bright colours. They are 3' in length. Right from bottom to top they are carved out in different shapes in the form of Khasi wooden stool called lyngknot, as luta (pumpkin shape copper jug), as comb (ka snad), as noisha (a hooka-shaped pipe), as brush (ka brut), as bed-frame (ka palong), as umbrella (ka shatri), as hooka tobacco-container (ka shlim) and as banana-fruit shoot (ka siarkait). The last portion is covered with gold-plated crepe-paper.

Tabut is a special structure made of bamboo posts and mats. Its size is about 30' in height. It is fixed on top of Lyngkhason. It is covered all round with china and crepe paper decorated in various forms. Its shape, size and length depends on the taste of the king-elect in consultation with his nobles. On top of this tabut, a bamboo-umbrella is attached. Over it, a special paper decorative called u thuia kot is placed. This speciality

is not original to the Khasis. It is used in the funeral services of the Muslims. Its very vocabulary already conveys a foreign word. It indicates the allegiance of the Muslim population in the plains of East Bengal now called Bangladesh they owe to the Sohra king in former times.

Lynti-Lyngkhason is the path used for carrying the corpse in the Lyngkhason from the house of Syiem-Sad to the kpep on the day of cremation. This route has been existing since olden times. It is 20' wide. Thorough cleaning and repairing of it is done for the purpose.

On the week before cremation, the king-elect goes to Sohra market place and fires a gun-shot. Such day is called sngi Iewbah (Iew Rynghep) and sngi Iewrit. In the morning of sngi Hat Iewrit (Lyngka day), he and the Syiem-Sad perform all the obsequies rites in the house of the Syiem-Sad in which the corpse of the deceased predecessor is laid.

It is in this house that offerings from maternal and paternal relatives are received. The nobleman from the Nongrum clan is the official priest in this. When U Syiem Robasing was cremated on 29th March 1926 by Join Manik Syiem crowned on 28th March 1926, the offering was

first by a pig for the deceased. This is to proclaim that the departed has gone to his destined dwelling place and has bequeathed his kingly duties to the newly elected successor. Pigs were given by the clans of U Syiem Robasing known as Swer clan. The relatives from Robasing's father's side, the Lyniong clan, known as kpa-kha kmie-kha came second. In turns, then, came the children of Ramsing Syiem (the Sohbar clan), the children of Robasing Syiem (the Diengdoh clan), the children of younger brother of Robasing Syiem (the Jyrwa clan), the children of Join Manik Syiem (the Dkhar clan) and finally other paternal children who have no taboos or impediments to do so. Upon receipt of these offerings, a sacrifice is made and the inner portions (pynnoh dkhot) of the animals' body like the heart (u klongsnam), lungs (u tor), liver (u dohnud), pancreas (u khlab), kidneys (ki khyllai), spleen (u lamjew) and the big and small intestines (ka nierlang) are given to deceased and to God.

The sacrificer cuts a piece each from the above portions, transfixes them on a bamboo spike, and burns them in the fire (shu syaw). Once they are cooked, he pinches a piece from each and throws them into the sacrifice. The remaining pieces are eaten by maternal relatives of the deceased. He finally pours liquor in libation into the sacrifice.

Participation by eating is a sign that the relatives pray for the deceased and for God's mercy. No other person outside the clan can partake of such sacrificial offerings. That is why a Khasi religion is called a family one. Without this participation the relatives' part in the sacrifice is incomplete. Nor can it be said to be efficacious.

When the sacrifice is over, the king-elect goes to the place of worship called ka iing-niam or iing sad iing sunon. He sits in a chair opposite the Sacred Post (U Rishot Sad Rishot Diengsning) on its southern side in the room most foremost and turning towards the north. There he is crowned with due ceremonies amidst the special invitees and subjects.

Early on the following day after coronation, called Iew Mawsmi, Iew Nongkrem or Iew Pynsing (the market-day of Mawsmi, Nongkrem and Pynsing respectively), the relatives of the deceased king take out the wooden hollow which contains the corpse. On their doing so, they shower grains of rice all along the way. Then they put it within the Lyngkhason which has been kept ready in front of the king's house. They tie it tightly and cover it with precious cloth. The cock sacrifice follows. This cock is known as u Iar-syngkhong. The diviner utters the words:

Listen, o master, you have been raised into the Lyngkhason. It has appeared that you are bound. I stand now by the strength of syngkhong cock so as to untie what is shameful and disgusting so that you can reach safely the abode of your ancestress Iawbei and Suidnia upon this due religious rite and ceremony.

Its Khasi rendering runs thus:

To sngew mo kynrad, kumba la kyntiew ha ka Lyngkhason, la long shisha ka teh ka khum. Nga ieng mynta da ka jong u syngkhong ba un law ba un loit na ka teh na ka khum na ka rain na ka rem, ba men poi da ba suk da ba sain ha ka kmie ha ka kiaw, ha u ni ha u ma, ha u Suidnia ka Iawbei, ha ka niam ka rukom mo. 22

The diviner strangles the cock to death. He smears its blood on the three pieces of wood of three inches in length. They are bound together. Their size is as big as human fingers. Then the pieces are put in one bamboo basket to be thrown outside the village.

After this, the volunteers put the Tabut on the Lyngkhason. The newly elected king sits on the chair in front of the house of prayer. He receives the royal homage given him by the Swer clan, his subjects and his friends bound by age-old friendship ties.

At noon, when the people have paid their respect, homage and loyalty to the king, the volunteers assigned

take upon their shoulders the Lyngkhason to carry it to the cremation ground. The Lyngkhason is tied to a specially erected platform of size 20' x 15'. On this platform, stands the newly elected king, his nephews and some of his nobles. Around three hundred of his subjects help in the carrying.

Before the bearers take up the Lyngkhason, the specially invited musicians (duhalia) play dirges. One of them cuts a goat in sacrifice. This goat is known as Lang-sait-ksuid for the purpose of driving away all evil. After this, the musicians lead the way with their tunes.

After this, follow the carriers of the Lyngkhason and the bearer of the flag (lama). The queen mother, sister(s), the children of the deceased king, the 12 clans, the 12 villages, 16 villages and 3 villages with their male dancers in their colourful costumes (ki nongshad wait ha la ki jingriam shad ba iphiew bad itynnat), musicians and invitees join in the procession.

As the bearers of the Lyngkhason proceed on the prepared route, the nobles from the platform give directions to them: to lower, to raise or to turn right or left according to the need of the route.

Half-way, they rest for a while. They are given

liquor or water. Then they resume their journey towards the kpep (pyre).

Nearby this route (Lynti-Lyngkhason), a cairn (mawshyieng) is constructed before hand for keeping the uncalcined bones of the deceased king after cremating him.

When they have reached Pomsahmen, a place near the cremation ground, they take rest for some time at a specially erected structure called Mawkjat. Here they sacrifice a goat known as Lang-mawkjat or Mawlynti.

These Mawkjat or mawlynti are three stones (maw-bynna) well polished for the purpose of memorial erection. The middle one is higher than the two others on either side. They have been erected near the route. In front, a flat lying stone is placed and raised by flat-chiselled stones from beneath so as to form a sort of sitting platform. This is known as mawkynthei to represent the female ancestress.

After the above sacrifice is over, the bearers continue to proceed to the cremation site. There they climb into the kpep by means of a bamboo bridge (syrdeng) constructed for the occasion. There they place the Lyngkhason on it turning the feet towards the plains of

present Bangladesh and the head towards the Khasi Hills. The newly elected king standing on it towards the bamboo bridge receives the royal homage given him by his subjects.

In this act of homage to the newly elected king, the people of Sohra come first. They advance slowly towards him by means of the bamboo bridge with music and dance. When they near him, they lower their swords to the ground and bow to him. The nobleman who leads them utters these words:

Now we have laid down the deceased by cremation and he has gone into the abode of his ancestress and maternal uncle; now you have been crowned king of Sohra in place of the deceased whom you have completed his funeral services. May you be blessed abundantly and may you rule over us in peace and harmony.

(Mynta ia une uba iap la thang noh, bad u la leit sha la iing ka kmie ka kiaw u ni u kong; bad mynta phi la long maphi u Syiem jong ka hima ha ka jaka jong u, uba la pyndep pynkhuid ia ka met jong u: phin bha phin miat ban synshar ban khadar ia ka hima). 23

After this, they recede from the king and dance (shad-wait) around the Kpep.

After them come in like manner the 12 villages (ki khatar shnong), the 16 villages (ki khat-hynriew shnong),

and the three villages (ki lai shnong). After having paid their homage to the king, the last in line, play a very special dirge known as Sing-iam (a drum of mourning). They sing this in doublets as follows:

- 1) "Ba phi la thang ia la u kni,
Ngi iam ha khmat jong phi, ko Pa-iem."

(As you o king have cremated your uncle,
We mourn before you, o King).
- 2) "Ban isynei u Pa-iem baiap,
Ban neh ha ri lai-shnong."

(To show sympathy to the deceased king,
So that the three villages will remain).
- 3) "Hangne ka iing shongneh jong phi,
To leit ha khmat u Blei."

(Here is your permanent abode,
So that you can reach the abode of God).
- 4) "Mynta kan sa beit sa bha, ka hima lai-shnong,
Khublei ia phi, ko Pa-iem."

(Now everything will be okay, especially
the three villages, Bye o King).
- 5) "Ngi iapoi ha kane bad ngi dem,
Ha ki kjat jong phi, ko Pa-iem."

(We have come here and we bow before you,
Before your feet, o King).
- 6) "Mynta ngin leit noh,
Khublei, ko Pa-iem."

(Now we depart, Adieu, o King).²⁴

24. Ibid., p. 58.

They recede backwards from the king, until they reach the ground. After that, they dance (shad-wait) with swords around the Kpep.

Most of those who come forward to show homage to the newly elected king, advance in dancing costumes with swords in their right hand and a special artificially made flower (u symphiah) in their left.

When the fire has been prepared (mawknep-dpei-ding), the newly elected king is the first to kindle the fire to be followed by the king's mother and sisters and nieces (syiem kynthai) and the nephews (ki syiem shynrang) and later by the relatives from the wife's side (ki kha ki man baroh).

When the fire has been burning well, the sacrificer smashes an egg called Leng-kpoh on the head-side of the Lyngkhason. A goat known as lang sher-thang is slaughtered. One cock known as Iar-padat is also killed in sacrifice. The three arrows known as nam-tympem are shot on three directions of north, south and west. After this, comes gun salute, burning of rosni and crackers up to the completion of burning and gathering of charred bones.

The bones which have been collected are kept in the special stone-cairn made for the event (mawshyieng).

They also call this as mawbasa or mawkhad. This is different from their putting the bones at Mawbah for all the deceased members of the clan.

The day of mawkapiah (Mawlong), the day after cremation, is a day of accounting. On that day after coming from the cairn for the purpose of giving food to the deceased called ja-miet ja-step, they handover the hind-part of the sacrificial animals to the relatives from the wife's side (kpa-kha khun-kha baroh) who had come to give their offerings. They utter words of blessing upon them and ask them also to pray for the maternal relatives of the deceased. This is done according to ancient customs.

In the house of prayer (iing-niam), the newly elected king sits down with the 12 nobles and his subjects. He informs them of the rules and regulations laid down by the ancestors. Then he makes a handing over of charge to each region of the kingdom in matters of rule and religion. He gives first to the elder of the 12 villages (ki khat-ar shnong) twelve pieces of black cloth (banat-iong) and 12 rupees (12 tyngka). Then he allots to the elder of the 3 villages (ki lai shnong) who is known as basan four pieces of black cloth (banat-iong) and four rupees (4 tyngka) and to the elder of 16 villages (ki 16 shnong)

four rupees (4 tyngka) according to former practices at the time of royal cremation. In the meantime when the king gives the cloth and the money, he also utters these words:

This cloth and money I give you (to 12 villages, 3 villages, or 16 villages) as a ceremony laid down from of old and I pray that you flourish, that your cultivation grows well as you have participated in these rites of cremation and coronation.

(Kine ki banat bad kine ki tyngka nga ai haphi u (12 shnong, 3 shnong, ne 16 shnong), kum ka niam na u longshuwa naduh mynbarim, bad nga duwai ba phin long rangbah man rangbah, phin bha phin miat, phin roi phin pa, ban bha ka rep ka riang, kumba nga la bujai ia ka niam ka rukom long syiem, kumba ka long naduh u Longshuwa). 25

Then the elder from each of the above mentioned groups of villages also replies the king in the following words:

As you, o King, have been crowned according to due religious rites and services in the line of succession to the deceased king, and as you have completed the ritual of disposal of the deceased, may you flourish in your kingdom and be in good health until your old age and you rule the kingdom in peace and harmony, and trade and commerce will flourish.

(Kumta maphi u Syiem ... phi la long u Syiem kat kum ka niam ban mih bteng ia

25. Ibid., pp. 59-60.

u Syiem ... uba la iap, kumba phi la pyndep
 pynkhuid ia ka niam thang-iap, kumta phin
 bha phin miat, phin koit phin khiah, phin
 im tymmen im-san, bad phin synshar ia
 ka hima ba kan bha ka duwar ka lynti bad
 ka iew ka hat). 26

When the newly elected king has finished empowering those who work with him in the kingdom, he gives to the menfolk of those groups of villages some money for liquor (bai kiad bai um) as he wishes to give and bids them farewell so that they can return safely to their respective villages.

From the day of cremation, for three continuous days, the 12 villages arrange a dance by unmarried girls (shad kynthei) in the Cherra market place. The dancers from Mawshuit village dance first. Before the dance, a divination and libation of liquor is prepared so that the market will flourish and the 12 villages increase and multiply, and their cultivation will grow well.

5. Funeral services on the occasion of death by violence or accidents

Violent death or death caused by accidents is regarded as death caused by the violation of taboo and sacred laws. In such a case, the body is first retained in a shed specially constructed for the purpose attached

26. Ibid., p. 61.

to the main residence.²⁷ The corpse is not admitted into the house as it is considered polluted.

a) If a man dies by the sword, sacrifice of a black hen must be done to ka Tyrut (goddess of death) before his body can be cremated. Then the bones are collected and placed in a stone-cairn. Once again they are removed from the cairn. After eggs are broken and divined, the bones are taken to a river-bank and washed. Often an artificial pool of water is dug for this purpose. Such a pool is called ka Umkoi.

Sacrifice of a goat is done to the god U Syngkai Bamon and a sow to ka Ramshandi (evil deities). Another sow is sacrificed to ka Tyrut. Then the bones are placed in a newly built cairn.

This ceremony of placing the bones in one cairn and removing them to another is usually performed three times. It is only at favourable auspices through breaking of eggs that relatives can resume sacrifice and remove the bones to another cairn. When these have been done, a flat-table stone called ka maw kynthai is set up for the ghost of the departed to sit upon Upon

27. Hamlet Bareh, The History and Culture of the Khasi People, (Naba Mudran Private Ltd., 170A, Acharya Prafulla Chandra Road, Calcutta 4, 1967), p. 370.

returning home, they propitiate their ancestors with offerings of food.²⁸

Costa²⁹ gave a little different account of funeral disposal of someone who dies an unnatural death by the sword. Before they cremate the corpse, the relatives take a special basket called ka iarong. They divine it to ka Tyrut called khad-tyrut. Only then they cremate the body. The bones are collected and placed in a stone-cairn. They remove again the bones a second time. Before doing so, they divine with eggs. After that, the bones are taken out of the stone-cairn. They are carried to a place near the river or stream. There an artificial pool of water (ka Umkoi) is dug for washing the bones. A goat is sacrificed to Syngkai Bamon and a she-goat to Ramshandi. A sow is offered to ka Tyrut. After completing all these sacrifices, the bones are placed in a newly prepared stone-cairn. When they return home, they appease the evil deities (khein ksuid) through divination in order to make sure that everything is made well and clean.

If the relatives are not yet certain that everything is settled, they remove again the bones from the

28. P.R.T. Gurdon, Cfr above, pp. 105-159.

29. G. Costa, Cfr above, p. 50ff.

stone-cairn to place into a new one. Again they divine to ka Tyrut and sacrifice a bull. A flat-stone (mawkynthei) is prepared. Then the bones are placed in a new cairn. Upon returning home, a banquet is offered to all invitees and well-wishers.

Whenever bones are removed, a new stone-cairn is always constructed. They leave the bones in it until the day when they place the bones of all deceased relatives into the family cromlech (thep mawbah). These deceased can belong either to the same clan or to one family lineage (shi kpoh). This is known as a family sepulchre or incinerarium.

b) The case of murdered victims of u thlen (ba iap shoh-noh), a case of some families which preserve an evil superhuman power in their homes for the purpose of obtaining special favours like getting riches and to be better off than others in society. To such power they vow to offer human blood preferably blood from the Khasi tribe. Failure of keeping this promise, the family members may be punished by death and other incurable diseases and finally be exterminated. No scientific inquiry is done nor is possible in this case. Corpses of victims of this circumstance are cleansed as explained above.

c) Dying by drowning, fire, wild animal or child-

birth is also known as unnatural or violent death. Similar sacrifices as mentioned above are offered except no sacrifice is given to u Syngkai Bamon.

Those who die by small-pox (niang-thylliew) are also treated as above.

d) If one dies at a distance from his home, outside his own village (for Gurdon, in a 'foreign country') whose body has not been burnt according to custom and whose bones have not been collected, the members of the clan or his children take three or five cowries (sbai) to a place outside the village where two or three pathways meet. Here, they summon the spirit of the departed in a loud voice and they throw the cowries up into the air and when they fall to the ground, they utter the following words: "Come, so that we can gather you up" (to alle noh ba ngin sa lum sa kynshew noh iaphi). Here the cowries represent the bones of the deceased.

Having thus collected, the cowries are brought home. They treat them as if they would do to a person who has just died. Then a funeral service is performed. The cowries are placed in a bier and are carried to a pyre outside the village. Such a pyre is used throughout the years by the members of the clan. It is usually outside the village. They can also select a new site.

The customary services for the dead are performed as if a real body is there. If possible a portion of a person's clothes should be burnt together with the cowries in the bier. The cowries and the piece of cloth represent the deceased person himself.

After the cremation ceremony, they collect the bones (of the cowries) and put them in the stone-cairn as they do normally.

e) If a person dies of cholera, small-ox or other such contagious disease, the body is first buried. No proper sacrifice and ceremony is done then. Only purgatory rites³⁰ are performed. Then when fear of infection is over and when the situation is normal again, the body is dug up again and is burnt with all the customary rites as befitting the position of the deceased.

f) If a person dies in a village outside his own, the members of the clan or his friends will cremate his body without any ceremony. The bones are collected and are reached to his house. When his bones have arrived at his home village, funeral service is carried out as it is customarily done.

30. H. Bareh, Cfr above, p. 369.

g) If a person dies in a 'foreign country' (sha ri Dkhar) whereby funeral service is not possible with due religious services, the corpse is just thrown down into the river or sea. This may be due to the impossibility to cremate it. The members of the clan or friends will bring along the cloth of the deceased or a little of his hair, to his home. They burn it, with all religious ceremonies as if they do with the corpse. Such a piece of cloth or hair of the deceased is called 'rpat'. In this reference, they would say: "they bring home the rpat of the deceased." It is rendered in Khasi: "Ki ong ki wanlam ia ka rpat jong u nongiap."³¹

h) In certain areas upright stones called maw-umkoi are erected along the line of route or pathway when the remains of a person who has met with an accidental death are brought home. Such was the case in Rambrai Syiemship.

6. Philosophical and social background on disposal of the dead

With regard to the subject of cremation of the dead as a custom among the Khasis folktale background is given as follows: Mother Earth has five children - the Moon, Sun, Water, Wind and Fire. When Mother Earth

31. G. Costa, Cfr above, p. 50ff.

dies, the children decide to dispose her honourably. Their common decision is to cremate her. The Council give first preference to the eldest son, the Moon to do the job. (The Moon is considered a male in Khasi imagery).

As eldest son, he agrees. He has prepared everything. He informs and invites everybody to come to the event. Many invitees and well-wishers have come. Food and drink have been served to all.

When everyone has had his fill, Mother Earth is taken out of the house to the cremation site. The Moon has tried his level best to cremate her. But it is to no avail.

The Sun comes second to fulfil the rightful duty to her deceased mother. (The Sun is considered female in Khasi mentality). She also tries her best. But the hotter it is, the corpse becomes more swollen up.

The Council hand over the cleaning work to Water. It tries her best with all might. The more force it applies, the body becomes torn into pieces and scattered throughout the place.

Wind comes next. She blows from East, West, North and South. It is all in vain. There is only stench. It becomes unbearable to all attendants.

Finally, the youngest daughter, Fire, is given the duty of disposal. She accepts it with all due respect and love. Invitees and well-wishers gather around in a happy mood, shouting, dancing and beating their drums. Fire uses her effort. In no time, everything is consumed. The dirt and stench is cleansed.

Fire is thus a powerful cleansing power. Secondly, Fire, namely, the youngest daughter is the rightful one to dispose of the dead members of the clan. Religious functions for the dead and the living is all prepared by her. She is to see to whatever is necessary for the religious services like utensils, animals for the sacrifice, eggs for divination and the rituals as well as all necessary expenditure. Others, brothers and sisters will help only as much as they are financially able to. It is not compulsory for them to do beyond their means.

It is on this account that the youngest daughter has the largest share of the ancestral property. Yet, she is not the rightful heiress but only its custodian.

Unnatural or violent death is believed caused by violation of taboo or sacred laws. Such type of death is called in Khasi "Ka iap tyrut."

Taboo violation is occasioned by marriage of consanguine brother and sister or incest, marriage among children of two true brothers, marriage of father to daughter or son to mother, marriage of a widow who has not returned the bones of her deceased husband, and other wrong-doings like rape, murder, lying, cheating and robbery to a great degree, and forcibly usurping the land of others to oneself.

Due to such wrong doings, one is believed to have died a sorrowful death.

Before disposal of the dead body, the relatives require divination to find out the cause of death. Such action is called 'khad-tyrut'.

But the family members of the deceased do not desire such misfortune to happen again. Hence, they request the diviner to have the religious function of 'mait-tyrut' so as to ward off any evil from the family members in the future.

A Khasi respects the corpse as he does the living. During life, he is careful in his manner of talk and walk. In a social gathering, he is courteous. In walking before others, he takes care not to touch others. He begs their permission to pass by them. He seeks their excuses if he has stamped upon anyone.

Likewise he does to a dead body. He does not abhor nor feel repulsive of it. He does not treat it roughly. Hence, he washes and bathes it. He dresses it up as best as he can. He does not bury it as he does an animal. He knows that the body is just rubbish. He believes that his spirit lives on and goes to another world of the living where his great ancestress (Iawbei), his maternal uncle (u Suidnia) and his great grand-father (progenitor) (u Thawlang) lie forever.

The living can and must compensate for the faults and failures, mistakes and shortcomings of deceased members of the clan (ki kur ba la iap). This is the reason why he gathers the bones of the departed to keep them safely in the stone-cairn. As in life, one lives as a member of the family or clan, the bones too live together in the cromlech called successively in their different stages of depositing as mawlum, mawphew and mawbah respectively.

Proper rituals of keeping the bones into the final family cromlech (thep mawbah) enables the spirits of departed to live together happily. Evil spirits and witches have no opportunity to harass the living members. The dead will likewise shower blessings upon the living with prosperity, increase in population, and so on.

Funeral rituals give occasion for maternal and paternal relatives, friends and well-wishers to come together. They are able to renew or create new friendship ties. At times, enemies are reconciled and relatives are strengthened in their unity. Social ties are thus fulfilled.

It is customary for Khasis to entertain guests with giving of eats like betel (kwai), and at present tea and meals. It is a sign of etiquette and friendship. An occasion of death enables them to practice their concern and appreciation to all attendants.

Khasis also believe that by doing so the departed spirits are pleased. To some extent it is this sense of closeness of a Khasi while alive and when dead that he is unwilling to renounce his indigenous religious belief for a new one foreign to him.

Khasi religion is family-wise. Proper performance of religious services for the living and the dead brings protection and help. God, Iawbei, Thawlang and Suidnia will shower blessing upon such a family.

The youngest daughter gathers the living members by means of religious rites and duties. The dead are also brought together by means of putting the bones of the deceased in one family cromlech, a manifest sign of their

living eternally with their great ancestress and maternal uncle in God's house. She collects the contribution from her brothers and sisters and maternal uncles for the proper ritual of disposal of the departed. In short, the purpose of religion is redeemed (ieng ka daw niam) and the benefit of the family is ensured (ieng ka daw iing).

If some departed member of the family happens to be left unattended somewhere in the forest or isolated place, immediately the youngest daughter tends to it. Inattention to such mishap is a sign of spite to great ancestress and the family god (ka lei iing) may also be displeased.

If the family is blessed (ka khlain ka daw iing), it means that religious ceremonies for the living and the dead is alright. A Khasi will then feel happy and contented (u heh mynsiem). His activities will run well. His council in the village and in the kingdom will go on smoothly. He will be strong both at home and outside (u khlain ha rympei haduh ha pyrthei).

There is a fairy tale which states that one Synring has established the funeral rites of the Khasis. This man has reached the 'other world' where his deceased mother lives. She instructs him how to play the flute (put

sharati), how to beat the drums and how to dance (shad symphiah). Then she sends him back to this world. Upon reaching this earth, he gathers all the bones of his mother and of all members of his clan. He teaches his maternal and paternal relatives and his friends and neighbours how to play the flute, to beat drums and to dance. In Bhoi region of Khasi Hills, now Ri-Bhoi district, in Meghalaya, those who still preserve the traditional religious rites and practices of disposal mention the name of Synring, the founder of funeral ceremonies (u nongseng ia ka phur ka siang). They narrate this through music (phawar) at the time when they put the bones in one family sepulchre (mawbah or mawniam).

Death does not bring a Khasi to non-existence or nothingness. Rather by death he goes to a different world to live in the house of God with his ancestors (Iawbei, Suidnia). It is the responsibility of the living to perform funeral rites for the dead so that faults and shortcomings of the departed ones are expiated. Through this religious function, the living pray to God for his mercy and pardon to cleanse the dead making them worthy for the eternal abode. To make this longing into a reality, the living members need to collect the bones of the dead from their individual cairns (mawshyieng) to put them

into a common cairn and final sepulchre progressively.

On such occasion of gathering the bones, the living relatives serve meals and drinks to all attendants. This custom indicates the type of social life of the Khasis. Relatives and friends come to participate in the event. It pleases the dead when all invitees have been given enough food and drink.

The dead do not turn into evil spirits or devils. Rather, the devils harass the living members when the latter do not do anything on behalf of the departed ones. The departed spirits are taken care of by means of funeral rites. By this means, the spirits of the dead are made free to move on their way to God's house. The evil ones have no means to hinder them nor harass the living relatives. Hence, Khasis use to say: 'Ngi ai bam ia ki suidiap jong i mei' or 'ngi ai bam ia i mei' (we give food to the departed spirit of our mother, we give food to our mother). They also say: "We pay respect to our mother who has died because she has fed and brought me up in life" (ngi burom ia i mei ba la khlad noh iba bsa bad pynheh pynsan ia ngi).

Feeding to all attendants is according to one's financial means at the time of removing the bones from

the individual cairns into the one final family stone-cairn. On their way to the final depositing site, a special monument or memorial called 'u mawlum' is constructed. At its construction, the relatives of the departed served food and drink to all attendants.

Delving a little deeper into the occasion of funeral rites, we can notice the relationship between religion and society. The Khasi religion is a family one. It is binding to all members of the same clan. Social life is directed according to this belief system. Hence, there is the development of a unique Khasi genealogical system. It is matrilineal. And it is an exogamous endogamy.

As there is a social binding during life, there is also a social binding at death. All members of the clan deriving from the original mother have all privileges and rights. Others even though they are bound by affinity are excluded from this.

One important insight from the funeral rites and practices of the Khasi is their complete reliance on the power and goodness of God. If one has lived well and has fulfilled one's religious duties to God, he is saved. No evil power is able to supersede it. This God can be expiated. He is a one who can forgive the faults and

mistakes done during life. There is at times a feeling that a proper ritual and correct performance, can be sufficient. One's conversion and sorrow does not seem required in order to obtain God's mercy and pardon.

Khasis have great fear of evil power. They cannot overcome it by their own effort. With God's help, they are sure to obtain necessary assistance.

At times, Khasis can also stray from the right belief in God. They may put their trust in the power of evil. Hence, we can have witches or evil men who can do much harm to society.

The departed members of the clan are not able by themselves to obtain necessary mercy and eternal life without the help of the living members. But they can help the living members when they are made free to reach God's abode.

As one may notice, funeral rites for the traditional Khasis are sine qua non ritual actions for the spirits of the dead to reach their destined abode. Failure of performance of the above religious rites creates an estranged situation to the departed spirits. They become wanderers. In their straying, they can disturb and harm their living members. Their desperate case becomes a means

for the evil one to cause danger, calamity and death to the concerned family. Such is a dangerous loophole which the family members fear to tread. They will try by all means to avoid it.

To purify the corpse, cremation is a necessity. It is also a sign of respect and concern for the departed one. It is an elaborate and expensive effort. It sags one's energy, time and money. It involves the religious and social aspects. While the latter seems to persist intact, the former has only a few supplicatory prayers in order to display a trace of religion. The earlier differentiation made between normal death and death by violence or unnatural death seems to have disappeared when cremation is done equally to all. A large number of Khasis practising the indigenous religion has accepted burial for their dead.

Diengshit receives special treatment by the traditionalists. Its trunk is used as sacred post (u Rishot Blei) in the house of prayer of the king of Sohra. It is a witness to the religious ceremonies on the day of coronation of the king. Its leaves serve as bridge during the carrying of bones of the departed whenever crossing streams is required on the way to the stone-cairn. Again, its leaves are used to contain the red mud (dew-saw) at

the time of egg-breaking so as to form a sort of 'altar' of sacrifice.

It is difficult to interpret its symbolism. Christians attribute the immanent meaning of the tree to symbolize the cross of Christ, who is the Saviour of the world. The egg stands for the cock. The latter has an important role to play. With the snap of a golden ladder in the golden age (Aiom Ksiar), darkness sets in. By a special 'durbar' of the men of the seven huts (ki hynniew-trep) the cock is empowered to plead for the cause of man, to appease God's wrath and to beseech for his blessing by bringing again the light into the world. The cock accepts to do so. His action however will be effective only up till the coming of the son of God (u khun ka Blei) whom the Christians call Christ, the Anointed One.

Several tribes in North East of India have the sacred post made of wood or bamboo. It is decoratively painted. It represents a symbol and a taboo. It signifies a deity. The traditional Khasis of Sohra call their sacred post u Rishot Blei (a pillar of God). It may convey the meaning of God's presence and power. And as they have no sign of representation of God in visible forms, they are different from other tribes. The latter have the sacred post to represent their deity. The traditional believing

Khasis have no deity but a capital 'Deity': namely, the Supreme God, besides whom there is no other. This is the Creator God whom they believe and who directs their daily life here on earth and who prepares a place for them in the destined abode with Him eternally.

Death, to certain persons, has its political consequences as well. Whenever a village elder, headman or a basan of a few villages, and finally a king dies, there immediately arises the question of a successor: who will succeed the deceased. Parties are formed. Each of them has its own opinion, ideas and ambitions. Political intrigues follow suit so as to select their own man. In the case of Sohra Syiemship the deceased king is cremated by an able and fit successor. His succession to the throne is confirmed by a religious rite. In this way, religion and politics are closely linked. Politics does not side-track the role of religion. It receives its sanction and authority through it. In many other parts of the world, in the middle ages, this link is clearly expressed. Even a despot gets his power from such religious function. His power is sanctioned by God. He represents the latter here on earth. In this way, his very person is considered sacrosanct and no one dares to rebel nor to harm him. The present age has witnessed an attempt at its separation.

Such kingdom or country adheres to a secular scheme of governance. Religion is not in the purview of politics. Its sphere of work is however not hampered in any way by the latter.

In a lesser degree, death has its role to play in the succession of a new village elder, headman and basan.

Its economic consequences are dealt later on in Chapter V.

Reflecting upon what has been described and analysed above in this chapter, one can see the depth of thinking and culture the Khasis of traditional religion have attained. And that this happens at a time when they are in many ways isolated by their hills, without any form of education and writing prevailing in them. One can compare them with those of other highly civilized peoples who have means of education and the written word.

Yet it is a pity that so rich a culture and depth of thinking should evanesce from them upon coming into contact with others who migrate into their areas.

CHAPTER III

**THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS RITES OF FINAL
REPOSITING OF BONES**

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Sib Charan Roy Jait-Dkhar in his book, Ka Niam Ki Khasi: Ka Niam Tip-Blei Tip-Brieu,¹ considers the final repositing of uncalcined bones of the dead into the final family sepulchre by the Khasis as merely a social event. It is only a social celebration for the deceased relatives (uncle, mother) and for the purpose of getting to know each other (ban ithuh kha ithuh man) and as a memorial..

The cock (u Iar-Krad-Lynti) is not required anymore. Only a pig (u niang-kyntiew-iing) and a bull (u masi plie maw) are slaughtered. The cock as is mentioned above is meant only for those who have died by violence, accident, or an unnatural death (ki lor ki hap) and for whom there was no possibility of cremation. In this way, then, their bones can be kept together with those who

1. Sib Charan Roy Jait-Dkhar, Ka Niam Ki Khasi: Ka Niam Tipbriew Tipblei, (Ri Khasi Press, Shillong, 1966), p. 28.



have died properly in the common cromlech (mawniam/mawbah).

In the sacrifice of the pig and bull, the following words are uttered: "Behold this is a portion so that you are brought together" (Hei une ne kane ka bynta ban leit lam ia phi baroh ha ka ryngkat). The idea here is to keep the bones of the deceased members of the clan together with those of the first Ancestress. In Khasi, it is rendered as: "Ban leit buh lang ia ka shyieng haba don ryngkat bad ka jong ka Iawbei long jait la jong." There is no reason to mourn on such occasion. There is only rejoicing and dancing as there has arrived an opportunity to preserve all the bones of the departed together with those of the first ancestress with due honour and solemnity.²

In this occasion of commemoration (leh-kam)³ for the departed relatives, the living will repair any footpath or bridge for the benefit of the passers-by. At times, they erect resting-stones (ring mawshongthait)⁴ and dig wells or lakes as memorials for their dear departed ones and for the convenience of the fellow-villagers. The living relatives do all this without any expectation of increase in wealth nor in their numbers. Relatives from the paternal

2. Ibid., p. 28.

3. Ibid., p. 29.

4. Ibid.

side (ki kha: kpa-kha khun-kha) do likewise on behalf of their deceased so that such festive commemoration is remembered from generation to generation as a sign of respect and honour. Perhaps it is on this perspective that Khasis are considered as having "ancestors worship."

In the family cromlech, only those who died a natural or good death are put together. Those who die by incestuous union, suicide, aborting of child in the womb or at childbirth or born as brother-sister twins are not kept together in the above common family cairn. The living members do not perform any religious rites for them. In such case, the relatives from the father's side do the cleansing ceremony of disposal of the dead.

It is customary for the living relatives of the family not to take anything belonging to those who died an unnatural death. The reason is that the dwelling-place of the Khasis here on earth is like a temple in which no corpse of others nor riches of others can be brought in.

To entrust the family to any evil power for the purpose of getting rich or to deify one's own first ancestress or first maternal uncle or first paternal ancestor is wrong. This action indicates a turning away from and

a refusal of God as creator of everything. People have received calamities and sorrows due to such wrong doing (ba ki thaw iing seng shi kur ne shi kpoh).⁵ The end result is also dissension, false accusation and avoidance of each other among relatives from maternal and paternal side.

The only true dwelling place (ka iing seng shi-kur) is the family cairn. Such placing of uncalcined bones must be family by family when they have increased and multiplied and have created separate family groups.

The family association (ka seng kur seng-kha balang) for the purpose of mutual help and counsel for the members for the purpose of mutual help and counsel for the members of the clan and paternal relatives (ryngkat u kur u kha) is customary to the Khasis from years immemorial (naduh hyndai hynthai). With this standpoint, Khasis remember their ancestors. This outlook has become a directive of behaviour and good life (sah burom don burom i kur i kha).

The elders used to say that it is proper to help each other in good counsel. It is improper to keep it to oneself. If it is done so, one becomes righteous before

5. Ibid., p. 30.

God. But whatever is evil is to be kept within oneself. It is not right to reveal such stench so as to malfify others. By leading others to the wrong, one commits wrong to oneself and the world will curse such a one.

Love and converse respectfully to one's own children, nieces and nephews, to people to the opposite sex to the elders, the sacred post within the iingseng (U mawblei u diengblei), to one's fellow-villagers and to paternal relatives. In doing so, one will earn great respect to oneself from all around.⁶

It is commonly said that the final repository of uncalcined bones is for all deceased members of the clan. It is not so. Those who had lived an incestuous life or who had been converted to a religion other than that of the traditional one have no share in the common family cromlech. Likewise are restricted those who had renounced kin-relationship by oath and who profess that a man or a woman comes from parents and not from consanguinity nor affinity.⁷

As the diviner throws the specified portions of the sacrificial animal and when he utters the words

6. Ibid., p. 31.

7. Ibid., p. 32.

"as there is no fault nor blame" (kumba ym don ka sang ka kyndiah) but to plainly say: "you the members of the clan" or "you the members of the paternal side" (phi ki kur baroh, phi ki kha baroh). In this way, one avoids making mistakes. As in a multitude, there can be someone married with people different from the Khasi tribe and religion (shongkha khleh haba bun paid).

In contribution, the calculation as to who is still a paternal relative (ka jingkhein iapoi kha poi man) is according to what one can draw the line of kinship or genealogy. But if the line is broken, then, it is proper to do away with the above contribution (ka pynkham pynsoh), with sacrifices (ka phur ka siang) and the final repository. In short, it is to be family-wise, and not as groups of families of the same clan.⁸

If they happen to settle in the plains with non-tribal Indians or in a foreign country, they can establish their own separate family sepulchre. In doing so, they need to mention the place of the first ancestress or of the first maternal uncle where they had lived. They are not to give name of a new ancestress in the new family cairn. If they have a new name, they bring about a separation and a division into new families or clan.

8. Ibid., p. 33.

When a new family cairn is prepared, one is not allowed to divine in God's name (ban iathuh khana ia u Blei) nor to seek his permission, nor to change the number of portions which have been specified originally according to each clan. If they have not done so, they can do whatever they feel proper without divining what is God's desire in this. This is purely a social one, and there is nothing religious in it (ka jingleh briew). Once they have selected the specified number of portions, they have to observe it successively.

As it is mentioned earlier, it is not permitted for members of the clan to have some sort of family deity (buh phan ne buh blei longiing longkur kumban da shna iing-seng) as there is no religious norm to do so. The true family association (ka iingseng iingkur) is only within the family cairn for all deceased members of the clan.

A religion that knows and accepts God is a religion that worships him in prayer, day and night, in the image and form that the ancestors had imagined him. The true religious function and sacrifice to God is only one's good action.

A religion that knows and accepts man is that

which lives in peace and harmony with each other in society. It strives for proper honour and its 'religious act' is by having an agape (kynja jynbam)⁹ as a sign of mutual love and respect. In such social relationship, God has no part. Due to this reason, it is not needed to seek God's permission nor to inform him of what one is doing with his fellow men.

If the members of the clan do not feel the need to deposit the bones together in one family cairn, but to have separately for each family, they can do so. Then they do not need to contribute pigs, cock or bull. There is to be a common understanding in this, avoiding offence or dissension.

It is not necessary to seek God's permission for cremation. Divination is also not required in this. Hence, there is nothing to sacrifice to God. This applies also for the final repositing of bones into the one family cromlech. Just perform as has been done long time ago by the forefathers. Some elders state that the forefathers with only five eggs can erect a family cairn (hyndai ki lah thaw mawniam).¹⁰

9. Ibid., p. 34.

10. Ibid., p. 35.

Other actions such as the chasing away of the evil one from the surrounding (ki kam beh tymphem), ghost marriage by means of two elderly man and woman for those who died unmarried (ki beh lyngka pyngrei), the spraying of rice-grains all along the route to the family cairn from the house of the youngest daughter of the family (ki leh khaw rawai) are not to be performed as they have no religious tinge. There is no need to do so.¹¹

At the time of putting the bones of all the departed members of the clan, the relatives can erect three properly hewn standing stones in a place before reaching the family cairn. One flat stone is also placed right in front of them. This construction is for lasting memory of their dear ones. The paternal relatives sacrifice one goat as a sign of respect (ka nguh meikha pakha). From this place onwards only the consanguinal relatives can proceed to the above mentioned family cromlech. Others including the paternal relatives have to return home.

With regard to the above three menhirs, the middle one is called an 'uncle-stone' (u mawkni), the right one, a 'drum-stone' (u maw-ksing) and the left one, a 'banan-stone' (u maw-kait). The drum-stone symbolizes a leader -

11. Ibid., p. 35.

as it leads the procession to the family cairn. The banana-stone signifies the 'banana' that feeds and brings human being up from their early childhood.

If there are more of the above stones on either side, they represent the brothers and nephews of the 'uncle'. These stones are known as religious stones. It is during the religious function of final repositing that they are put up.

Besides the above stones, there are also 'honour-stones'. They are placed with an intention to honour and respect. This is done by the children for their primeval father (u Thawlang). In Khasi, these stones are called 'Maw-nam'. This category of stones has only three menhirs. The mid-one represents the primeval father. Those on either side indicate his brothers and nephews. The flat-stone in front refers to the first ancestress of the primeval father (ka Iawbei tymmen u Thawlang). This action is purely social. There is nothing religious in it.

To amuse and enhance the occasion, a Puron (a sort of effigy made of bamboo representing the first ancestress, having the shape of a conical Khasi basket called khoh and Tyngshop (another effigy to represent the first maternal uncle, made of bamboo, in the form

of a Khasi cage called 'ka ruh') are prepared. They are richly decorated and are carried as banners in the event of final disposal of bones to the family cairn. Elderly men, experts in the art of ancient sayings, enthuse and lead the crowd with their rhythmic doublets.

The religious rites of disposal of the dead among the Khasis start with cremation, is followed by depositing of bones into the individual stone-cairn, thirdly, there comes the putting of bones of several deceased members into a larger cairn (mawphew mawkynroh) and finally ends at the final family incinerarium as coined by Gurdon.¹²

The final play of bones depends much on the willingness of the members of the clan to spend and to perform the rite. The youngest daughter of the clan whose house is called 'ka iing-seng iing-khatduh' is responsible for the gathering of all the bones of the clan wherever they be. She is the one to put them into the final bone repository.

Unlike what has been stated by Sib Charan Roy, the final collection of bones to place them ultimately in the clan repository (thep mawbah) has detailed religious

12. H. Lyngdoh, Ka Niam U Khasi, (Shillong: Shillong Printing Works, 1970), p. 225.

rites and practices. It involves a lot of time and money. This is one of the reasons why at present it is discontinued, even though there is an urgency to keep all the bones into the one family cromlech to enable the departed spirits to live eternally in peace in God's dwelling-place. Failure of this action makes the soul to wander about. It remains disquiet. It becomes a source of trouble to the living family members, pestering them with diseases, death, poverty, lack of sleep and fear. In other words, it becomes an evil force. Other evil spirits have an opportunity to harm the living family members for their negligence and lack of concern.

For the final repositing of bones, the living members of the clan gather for a meeting. They discuss all the pros and cons. When everything is alright, and everyone is of one mind, they start divining to seek God's will and permission.

When God, the Creator and Law-giver, is found pleased by divination, a date is fixed. Then every adult member prepares for the occasion. One important action is to prepare a stone-cairn. It is usually on a raised ground outside the village. It is the biggest of any stone-cairn. Usually, it is 6' by 6' called in Khasi 4 pruh da 4 pruh. (A pruh is roughly one and a half foot in

length) or 10' by 10' (8 pruh da 8 pruh). Its height is around 3' (2 pruh) or 6' (4 pruh).¹³ It is fenced on all sides with properly chiselled stones. In one side, preferably the southern part, a small opening (jingkhang) is provided. On top, it is covered by a big flat stone. The opening mentioned above is to be closed with a flat hewn stone fitting to it.

When the stone-cairn has been prepared, a cow is sacrificed for it. Three standing stones are also erected along. They call them 'u Mawniam'. A pig is slaughtered for it.¹⁴

When the aunts and uncles, children, nephews and nieces have gathered, the uncle carries out his divination to seek God's permission and to beg his mercy for any fault and failing.

Having selected a day and month for final placing of bones, another immediate action is to start collecting money from the members of the clan. This collection is known as 'u synniang u bynhei.' Paternal relatives also prepare their own contributions called 'u pynkham u pynsoh'.

13. Ibid., p. 227.

14. Ibid., p. 227.

In regard the right choice of a day and month, a sacrifice is done called 'ban tang ia u bnai'.¹⁵

The collection helps expediting whatever is necessary for the religious function. It also solemnises the occasion.

It is the responsibility of each family of the clan to gather the bones of their deceased members from individual and group cairns known as mawshyieng and mawpnew and mawpnew mawkynroh, as well as from cromlechs kept by wife and children. If somebody dies outside the village and is not cremated nor are his bones kept in the stone-cairn, the diviner has to invoke the spirit of the departed by means of cowries. He then collects 'the bones' through them.

To collect the bones, all members of the family go (men and women). They carry with them drums and they beat them while they move along. Some grains of rice as well leaves from a special tree called 'dieng-shit', some eggs, one jug of unrefined rice-beer¹⁶ (shi klong ka iad-

15. Ibid., p. 228.

A 'klong' is either an earthen pot, or an oblong-shaped type of pumpkin commonly available vegetable of the Khasis. When kept dried up, the inside of it can be emptied and it becomes hollow inside so that it can be used as water container. It is also used to contain water or liquor (unrefined rice-beer) for the sacrificial purpose.

16. Ibid., p. 229. Female dancers are usually virgins or those who are not yet married.

um), one plate and one container (u luta) are taken with them.

The modality of collecting the bones is as follows. When they reach the stone-cairn, the uncle opens its 'door'. An egg is smashed. It is called 'mait pylleng'. Rice-beer is poured out in libation in front of the 'door'. Having completed this prayer, the diviner takes out the pot containing the bones.

The bones are then placed on a plate. They are washed thrice. Then they are properly wrapped in a clean new cloth usually white in colour. This may symbolize purity and cleansing. The bundle is then given to a female member of the clan to carry. She is preferably the youngest of the family.

Having gathered the bones, all return home. The female bearer leads the rest. Some will spread leaves of 'dieng-shit' all along the route in front of the carrier. If a river is needed to cross over, a bridge is made by a special thread called u sai-thir. It is tied from one side to another across the stream. The idea is to enable the spirit to cross the river. The bearer is not supposed to turn to either side nor back until she reaches home.

Turning to either side or backwards can bring harm to the bearer. It also shows a sign of her distraction and inattention to the religious and sacred action.

When the house of the youngest is reached, the bones are preserved in a room kept ready for the purpose. It is usually near the hearth or somewhere in the corner of the house. A pig is slaughtered in sacrifice. Its meat is used for meals for the invitees. Each family follows the same procedure of collecting the bones. However, this work takes some days to complete.

When the bones are washed and bundled, they usually keep the bones of male members separately from those of females.

All the bones are put from different families into the house of the youngest called ka iing-seng iing-khatduh of the clan.

When the members of any clan feel that they have the means to solemnise the occasion with lots of fanfare so that people around will praise them, they conduct dancing by males and females.¹⁷ This may extend from three days upto five days at a stretch before the day of final repository.

17. Ibid., p. 232.

As it is narrated earlier in this chapter, an effigy for the primeval uncle and for first ancestress respectively called u Tyngshop and ka Puron is prepared. They dress them in full Khasi dance costumes: that of a man with shirt, petti-coat, turban, dhoti, and necklaces. During the preparation of these effigies, one or two pigs are killed for the celebration.

When the dance has commenced on the first day, friends and well-wishers are invited to help the relatives of the departed to prepare 'path-way stones' (ki mawkjat mawlynti) in a place mid-way from house to the stone-cairn. Each of these pathway stones has three menhirs called 'mawthung'. The middle one is tallest. A dolmen is put in front.

If the members of a clan belong only to one family lineage, only one set of stones is constructed. If several family lines come together for the religious function, then, each will have a separate set of the above memorial stones. In this way, there can be two, three, or four sets of menhirs and dolmens as there are separate family lineages called in Khasi 'ki kpoh'.

A family lineage means all those deriving and bearing surname from the one first ancestress known as lawbei khyntaw. It is called in Khasi 'Tang shi kpoh'.

Let us state this by an example. Suppose that A is first primeval ancestress. She has three daughters called B, C, D. They in turn have their own children from generation to generation. They then become first ancestresses to their own grand-grand-children issuing from them. They each have a family lineage.

The above stones are called 'pathway stones' (mawkjat) as those who carry the bones must rest awhile there. They may just pass by then. They are also meant as places of rest for the departed spirits on their way to their final abode. This symbolism is carried from the visible to the invisible. That is, they are at rest together in the cromlech. They will also be at rest together in their eternal abode in God's dwelling-place, together with their first ancestress and primeval maternal uncle. This repository likewise symbolizes eternal peace and harmony.

In the early dawn of the day fixed for the final placing of bones, two unmarried girls, one belonging to the family and the other an outsider, will dance in the house of the youngest (ka iing-seng iing-khatduh). This type of dance is called 'noh-kjat.' It is followed by other dancers in the dancing ground near the market or in a convenient place specially prepared for the occasion.

Drums are beaten and flutes are played. There is also gun-salute. They also carry around the 'Puron' and the 'Tyngshop'.

Much is still to be narrated about bone-collecting. On the second day of ritual dance, all relatives of the clan, of one or more lineages, are obliged to reach the bones of their departed into the house of the youngest daughter. Each family group brings two bundles of bones, that of males and of females respectively. The rightful one of the house takes the bones and keep them separately — those of males together, those of females together. The place where these bones are kept is curtained as they would do when somebody dies. On the partition thread, the relatives hang precious clothes and ornaments of gold and silver as decorations and curtains.

It is also on this day that erection of pathway stones is to be completed. Pigs are killed to feed the dancers and the workers. Then they sacrifice one he-goat. Its horns are decorated with silver crepe-paper. Such a goat is called in Khasi 'u lang-rupa'. A man from a noble family (u briew na ka jait bakhraw) cuts it at the village-altar (duwan shnong). They also sacrifice a bull called 'u masi-lam-lynti'. It resembles that of 'u Iar-krad-lynti' with a difference as it is used for meat for the meal.

At mid-night, a 'ghost-marriage' called in Khasi 'ka Lyngka ka Pyngrei' is conducted. It is meant for those who have died unmarried - who have not borne any children for the clan. Two persons are hired for this - an old lady to take the place of departed females and an old man that of departed males. They are to jump over the pestle and the thistle (ban pynryngkang thlong bad synrei). They must eat the rice of the departed which is called 'ka jingpynpyngrei' from the same plate just as it is done at marriage feast for the newly married couple.

After the 'ghost marriage,' there follows another ritual which is known as 'beh tympem beh khaw-rawai'. This is a ceremony of chasing away the evil one who can impede the way for the departed at the time of final and repository. The sacrificer spreads grains of rice all around the house of the youngest daughter. This action is called 'bet khaw-rawai'. He does not spare any space. In the meanwhile, he also utters the following words:

I am the chase - chasing away the evil one who blocks the way that leads to the common family sepulchre by means of the religious rites and practices established from of old - so that the departed members of the clan can be together with their first ancestress and first maternal uncle.

In Khasi, it is worded as:

Nga long ka beh ka tur, ka sympat ka kawiat,
 ia u ksuid u khrei, uba khang uba kah,
 uba wit uba wai, ia ka lynti ka syngkien,
 ban leit ha ka niam ka rukom, ka kmie
 ka kiaw; phui. 18

When the diviner has finished his prayer, the youth starts beating about the place with sticks, bamboo sticks and brooms. They accompany with shouts in this act of chasing away the evil one. They begin first from the house and its surrounding. Then they proceed to the outskirts of the village. This action is repeated thrice. If anybody or anything is found on the way, man or beast, is not spared. It is beaten to death. People are of course warned before hand not to approach the area.

At the completion of the 'chase', the participants are served 'rice-beer' (ka iad-um iad-nonglieh).¹⁹ A cock is sacrificed. A three-step bamboo ladder in miniature called 'ka jingkieng siej'²⁰ is prepared. Its purpose

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., p. 234.

20. Ibid., p. 233. Jingkieng-siej is a symbolic bamboo-ladder made out of the two short and small pieces of bamboo in the rungs or steps. Its length is unspecified. Some consider it as a caricature of a bamboo ladder and others as a true bamboo ladder that we can make use of. It is prepared for use of the spirits for their climbing into the tomb.

Perhaps this bamboo ladder may have a symbolic reference to the golden ladder (jingkieng ksiar) of the

is to help the souls to ascend into the family sepulchre (ban kiew sha ka mawniam). Then grains of rice are sprayed in the portico of the house.

On the third last day of the ceremonial dance, the day for final repositing of bones, one can see the giving of presents from the maternal and paternal relatives. They in turn are offered in sacrifice. First offering and sacrifice is from that of the nearest relatives of the house, and ultimately from those of affinal relatives. Offerings may be a bull or a pig. From the paternal side, offerings from the children of the eldest maternal uncle are received first. Finally, those of the youngest maternal uncle are taken last. They can bring any offering depending upon their financial ability, which can be a bull or a pig. They bring these gifts amidst the play of drums and dancing by men (shad-mastieh).

golden age (ka Aiom Ksiar) of the seven huts (ki hynniew-trep ki hynniewskum) and of the nine (ki khyndai shajrong) in heaven who move upto heaven or come down to earth by it. It may have the reference to the spirits who have lived on earth to go now up to heaven to their heavenly abode to be again united with God in his abode as well as to be with the 'nine' in heaven.

As they arrived the house of the youngest daughter of the clan, the children from the maternal uncles show great respect to their father who has given birth to them by having a ceremony of 'ka nguh ka dem mei-kha pa-kha.' As they hand over their presents, they bow reverentially receding backwards with face towards the father. Beating of drums accompanies this action. Others come in turn to do likewise.

The children of maternal uncles who are well off offer a bull. They adorn it with silver-crepe-paper. As they retreat backwards, they offer in sacrifice a he-goat. This is also decorated with silver crepe-paper.

Performing the sacrifice out of these offerings, the diviner accompanies his action with the following sacrificial words:

Listen, o father, Thawlang, you who are good.
 It is through you that sons and daughters have been formed.
 As I have become a human being and fully groomed up, as a proper man or woman;
 As there is no fault or shortcoming or impediment whatsoever,
 Now I come to offer this offering and this sacrifice,
 Kindly accept, o father, you who have been responsible for my human formation.
 This is all.

The Khasi rendering of this runs as follows:

To sngew ho,
 Ko pa, ko Thawlang, babha bamiat,
 Ko babuh kynthai, ko babuh shynrang,
 Kumba nga la long briew man briew,
 La long kynthai la long shynrang,
 Wei kum bam don ka sang ka ma, ka kyndiah
 ka kyndon,
 Mynta nga wan ai kane ka pynkham ka pynsoh,
 ka phur ka siang,
 Diangti, ho pa, babha balong, babuh u
 sohpet u ksai,
 Katta mo. 21

The sacrificer, after having said the above words, pours in libation the rice-beer. While pouring, he mutters the words: 'One, two, three, four, five.' Again he speaks: "Behold this grain of rice of faults and shortcomings so as to free the departed from sin." (In Khasi it runs: "Hei, u khaw-tam u khaw-lait ban lait na ka pop ka puin, mo"). Then he slaughters the pig by piercing a knife into it. Such a knife is called 'ka tukri'. It can also be with a sharp-pointed splinter of wood or bamboo.

To kill a bull, they hammer its head with a crowbar or a heavy sledge. After killing the victims, the priest-diviner extracts the inner portions. He pierces a piece of each into a piece of iron or bamboo slit for smoking it in the fire. Once they are cooked, he pinches a small piece from each to throw it into the fire as a gesture

21. Ibid., pp. 235-236.

of offering to the departed souls and to God. The rest is given to the maternal relatives as a sign of participation and prayers on behalf of the departed ones. On this occasion, he does not look for good or bad sign.

After the sacrifice is done, the diviner lets loose one bull. Its horns are adorned with silver crepe-paper. Anyone can catch it. It is up to his own risk.

With the sacrifice being completed, the relatives take out of the house all the uncalcined bones which are kept in a special room within the house. One female relative carries the bones of all departed males together with the Tyngshop, and another, those of the departed females together with the Puron. They carry them on their shoulders. A he-goat is slaughtered in front of the house. It is called 'u lang-sait-ksuid'. Its role is to intercede on behalf of the departed spirits so as to free them from the clutches of the evil one. The relatives emerge from the house to go to the family sepulchre. They move along in a solemn procession with music, drum beating and dancing by men (shad mastieh). The consanguinal relatives come immediately after the bearers of the bones. After them, follow the affinal ones. They also walk in processional arrangement, the children of the eldest maternal uncle going ahead and those of the youngest following last.

They also advance with music, drum beating and dancing. Someone gifted in tongues shouts aloud in rhythmic words so as to solemnise the occasion. Gun salute is also accompanied.

The following words are customarily uttered in the processional entry:

I go to put the bones of the maternal uncle, I go to put the bones of my father, According to the rules and regulations as laid down by God the Creator. I do this by the sign that has been manifested through divination. In fulfilling whatever has been thus instructed, the relatives of the departed concerned will flourish in numbers and in material goods.

The Khasi words run as follows:

Ka phireit bashibidi, ko, ka phireit ba shikynda,
 Nga pynleit ia u kini, ho, nga pynleit ia u kipa,
 Kit kum ka kyrbei, ho, kit kum ka lyngdikhur,
 Ba hukum hi ka Blei, ho, ba hukum hi ka longkur.
 Ka dohkha kum ia ka shakhat, ho, ka dohkha kum ia u bsein,
 Ba ka phla hi ha ka shat, ba ka phla hi ha ka khein,
 U pathaw ia ka jalyngkhiang, u pathaw ia ka jamynrei,
 Ba yn khraw la u synniang, ba yn khraw la u bynhei.
 Soh biroi ia ka lyngdikhur, soh biroi ia ka sohlyngkait,
 Ba yn roi la i kur, ba yn roi bad la i jait:

U pathaw ia u thyllah, u pathaw kum ia
 u kisew,
 Ba yn khraw bad ka spah, ba yn khraw bad
 ka phew:
 U thyllah ia ka tham, u thyllah kum ia
 ka dingdyngkhong,
 Ba yn sah la ka nam, ba yn sah la ka rong.22

The maternal and paternal relatives carry with them seven pieces of 'bread' (pu japha) for the departed, along with betel nuts and betel leaves (u kwai u tympew) and the jaw bones of the sacrificial victims.

When they reach the pathway-stones (mawkjat maw-lynti), they slaughter one he-goat for the memorial stones. This goat is bedecked on its horns with silver crepe-paper. The affinal relatives follow suit after the consanguinal ones in this commemoration. This depends much on their financial means.

The jawbone of the bull called 'u masi lam-lynti' is kept poised on top of a bamboo stick which is tied to the middle stone of the menhirs. The dance, drum beating and religious functions of the affinal end here. The role of the jawbone of the sacrificial he-goat also ends here. The affinal relatives, friends and well-wishers have to turn back home. The cosanguinal relatives (maternal ones) will proceed to the family cromlech with the Tyngshop

and Puron, the bones, food for the dead and the music-players (ki duhalia).

Once they reach the bone repository, the viner takes out the bones from the bundles and washes them thrice in a plate. He can also keep near the fire called in Khasi 'shu syaw'. Then he breaks one egg on the special wooden piece eked out for the purpose of divination. It is called 'ka diengshat.' He later opens the piece of flat stone which closes the opening of the sepulchre. One man who has been hired for the purpose sits near the opening. He crows like a cock thrice. He represents the cock for the dead called in Khasi 'u iar sna-iap'. This action is for the purpose of waking up the dead who are kept there. The sacrificer also does likewise and utters the words:

Oh mother, o mother-in-law, oh maternal
uncle,
Oh departed spirits, oh dead ones, you
who have been kept in this stone-cairn;
Wake up now as your grand-children have
come,
By means of this religious ritual;
Hey, listen.

The Khasi rendering is as follows:

Ko mei, ko kiaw, ko ni, ko ma,
Ko suidiap, ko nongiap, shikhrum ka maw,
To khie, to khie, ba la wan u ksiew,
Hapoh ka niam ka rukom;
To sngew, ho. 23

The sacrificer then keeps the bones in family sepulchre. The bones of departed males are kept either in front of the opening or on its right side; those of the departed females are kept behind or on its left side. He takes the seven pieces of bread and pinches a little bit from each by his fingers. In the meantime he utters the following words:

Hey, listen, oh you departed spirits,
 As I have now put you inside,
 The family sepulchre,
 Together with your mother, your maternal
 uncle and your first ancestress, who are
 gathering you up together,
 All you who are dead, well or by an unna-
 tural death, together within one family
 stone-cairn.
 Behold, this is the food for you, according
 to the rules and regulations laid down
 by the elders,
 So that you can remain firm for ever,
 by means of this religious performance,
 of putting you inside this stone-sepulchre.

In Khasi, the words of the sacrificer run as follows:

Hei, sngew ho, me u suidiap,
 Kumba nga la thep la tian,
 Hapoh ka mawbah mawniam,
 Hapoh ka kmie ka kiaw,
 U ni u maw, u suidnia ka iawbei,
 Ki nonglum nongkynshew,
 Ia u suidiap u nongiap, u lor u kab,
 Shikhrum ka maw ka nar.
 Sngew ho, kane sa ka japha ka jasiang,
 Ka niam ka rukom ka jong me,
 Ba men neh men skhem,
 Hapoh ka niam ka rukom,
 Ka mawbah ka pepbah, mo. 24

Having said the words, the sacrificer places the seven pieces of bread into the family sepulchre. On its top-surface, he keeps the food (jingbam jingsa), kwai and the jawbone. He also pours rice-beer as libation in front of the opening. He takes three burning firebrands (lai tylli ki tyllaw ding). These are bound together. He beats the family sepulchre with them. As he does so, he utters the following words:

Behold, now, I take up that action of putting fire,
As a cleansing power for the spirits of the dead, as a continuation of the religious rites and practices as founded from of old,
Listen, oh first ancestress and spirits of the dead all you who are within their stone-sepulchre.

The Khasi original words are coined thus:

Hei, mynta, nga ieng sa ka tan-ding tan-theh,
Ban sah ban suba u suidiap u nongiap,
Ban neh ban skhem ka tynrai ka niam ka rukom.
Sngew ho, iawbei, suidiap, nongiap,
Baroh shikhrum ka maw, mo.

Again, he beats the stone-cairn and utters the following words:

Listen, kindly do not move do not wail,
in case there is an evil one,
who has the intention of harming and disturbing.

In Khasi, it runs as follows:

Sngew ho, wat leit khih wat leit win,
Lada don u ksuid u khrei,
Uba mang uba thew,
Uba shun uba pen, mo. 25

And again he beats the cairn a third time and finally closes the 'door' with the flat stone. He adjusts it till it fits in properly. The sacrificer may pour libation of rice-beer again this time. After that, all return home, except for three male members.

One of the three sits in front of the opening. He offers one cock in sacrifice. Such a cock is called (u iar tan-ding). The second man sits behind the first. He holds three pieces of burning fire-brands which have been bound together. His duty is to wave the fire-brands three times and to crow like a cock thrice. The third one remains behind the stone-cairn. His part is to listen quietly if there is any noise or sound or movement within the stone-cairn. If there is no sound or movement, then it shows that the religious service just performed is

25. Ibid., p. 238.

Jingknia tan-ding is an action of test by fire. The stress is on the correct performance, on action rather than on a right intention or motive. The personal motive is put aside for the success of this sacrifice.

successful. They in turn return home. They inform the relatives that everything has gone well. This latter action by the three is called 'ka jingknia tan-ding tan-theh.'

But if the religious rites and duties so carried out are not successful, the cairn will shake upon the sacrifice of the above cock. The spirits of the dead may come out of it. They may roam around. They may then harass the living relatives.

On the following day of the final repository, the relatives begin to check the income and expenditure in the house of the youngest daughter. The hind-parts of the sacrificial animals offered by the affinals are given back to them to carry back home for their personal use. They in turn pay their respect and homage called 'ka nguh ka dem meikha' and display a ceremonial mourning before they depart for home.

At this ceremonial mourning, one stands from within the house as a 'father' and another from outside as a 'son'. Each one holds in his hand a specially decorated artificial flower called 'u symphiah'. They alternately repeat thrice the following words:

Father: According to the will and order of God to pay
homage for the maternal uncle, for the father.
As it is manifested in divination and sacrifice,
So that our name and honour will remain.

Son: Oh father, oh Thawlang, o paternal aunt, oh Iawbei,
Behold I come in mourning by drum beating and
dancing,
So that I may be blessed and I may flourish.

Father: As there is no fault nor sacrilege, nor impediment,
May you be blessed and increase in numbers;
God the Creator may also be with you to protect
and help you.

Son: This is the only true word, nothing else but this.
Oh father, you have been able to feed and bring
us up;
You who have been patient and sacrificing for
us.
So that our tears are beneficial and are a sign
of our true loss.

Father: Listen and be merciful oh Iawbei, you who have
been responsible for generation of the clan;
So that our pleading is ended and our covenant
with you is fulfilled;

Now we take the rice-beer as a sign of rejoicing that the work is accomplished. ²⁶

In connection with the above responses, the Khasi rendering is given in footnote. It is used in doublet, one line of sentence is a catchy language conveys no meaning. It sounds similar to the second line which conveys the meaning and intention of the speaker.

26. Ibid., pp. 239-41.

The following are the words alternately spoken by the father and the son in the ceremony of the 'ka nguh ka dem meikha pakha' as used in Khasi:

U kpa: Kit kum ka skei, u phreit, u shibidi, u shikynda,
Ba hukum ka Blei ban pynleit ia u ni u kpa;
Ka dohkha ka shakhat, ka dohkha kum ia u bsein,
Ba ka phla ha ka shat, ba ka phla ha ka khein;
U thyllah ia ka tham, u thyllah ia ka dieng-dyng-
khong,
Ba yn sah la ka nam, ba yn sah la ka burom.

U khun: Ka dohkha u sohleng, ka dohkha kum ia ka kyrbei,
Ko pakha, ko Thawlang, ko meikha, ko Iawbei.
U synniam ka War Lyngshing, u synniam ka War Shala,
Ba nga wan iam da ka ksiang, ba nga wan iam da
ka lama;
Ka lapadong ia u dkhiew, ka jalyngkhan ia u dkhiew,
Ba ngan long bynriew, ba ngan man bynriew.

U kpa: U mawpyllon kum ia u risang, u mawpyllon kum ia
ka dohkha,
Kumba ym don ka sang, kumba ym don ka ma;
Ka lapadong ka tohkum, ka lapadong ka jakynde,
A, to long parum, A, to long pareh;
Ka skei ka phai pyrshah, ka skei ka phai pyrshing,
Ka Blei ruh kan nangbthah, ka Blei ruh kan nang
bthing.

U Khun: Ka dohkha u kyndok, ka dohkha ia ka dieng lyngkot,
Tang kata ka tien hok, tang kata ka tien sot,

On the second day, viz., the day after the accounting, Tyngshop and Puron are carried to the houses of affinal relatives and to those of friends and well-wishers. As they move along, they accompany drum-beating and giving of kwai to Tyngshop.

On the third day, which is called 'free' day, the sacrificer slaughters one pig to give to Tyngshop and Puron. Such a pig is named 'u niang aibam Tyngshop.'²⁷ Its meat is served for all the invitees and for the dear and near ones. When all have had their fill, the Tyngshop and Puron are dismantled amidst gun-salute which is shot thrice.

On completion of one month after the final depositing of bones, the consanguinals offer in sacrifice one pig which is called 'u niang aibam lait bnai'. Again, at completion of one year, 'u niang aibam lait snem' is slaughtered.

Ko dohkha u thyllah, ko dohkha kum ia u brai,
 Ko pakha ko balah, ko pakha ko baiyai;
 O soh-lah ka shakhat, u soh-lah ia ka sohpdung,
 Ba yn sah ka ummat, ba yn sah ka umpung.

U kpa: Bam-sap ka kyrbei, bam-sap ka lyngdkhur,
 Sngap ho iawbei, sngap ho longkur;
 U ksai u thyrnia, u ksai kum ia u risang,
 Ba yn sa iawai ka nia, ba yn sa iawai ka jutang;
 U kshih u banang syntait, u kshih u banang kit kum,
 Ban iadih sa ka kiad, ban iadih sa ka um.

27. Ibid., p. 242.

Commencing from the third day of 'free' day, the consanguinals will pay off any debt or loan. It is wrong to keep pending in this respect. Doing so will implicate the purity of intention in the religious rites just performed. It will mean that the spirits of the departed will be impeded from their being together in the final abode with their first Ancestress and first maternal uncle in God's house. It will give an opportunity for the evil one to cause harm to the living members of the clan.

The religious ceremony for final repository of bones for a family or for several families is the same. The difference is that there is no dancing by unmarried girls in case of that of a single family.

Another action that is done after the final repositing of bones is that relatives go to the sepulchre to give food for three continuous days.

After having narrated and described in detail concerning the rite and practice of final depositing of bones, an analysis is required to find its raison d'etre.

An analysis of the chapter

The final bone repository is seen to be simultaneously religious and social both in word and action. The words which are uttered in the ceremony of disposal

seek God's mercy and pardon for the departed spirits. They also indicate clearly the earthly needs for the living members - that they be protected and that they increase in wealth and in numbers. The action of slaughtering of bull, pig or cock is for interceding before God on behalf of the departed and for the feeding to all the attendants.

In this action, somehow the living and the dead are closely related. The living remember their departed ones. They show great respect and concern for them. Such behaviour and attitude point to their belief in life after death. The dead live in a different world other than that of this world. The world of the living is not lasting; that of the dead is. The departed ones are anxious and concerned about the welfare of their living members. They are ready to help. They are also capable of doing so.

God is merciful. He listens to the intercessional prayers and sacrifices of the living for their departed ones. What is done for them is not gone unattended.

This relationship between the living and the dead recalls what has happened in the 'golden age.' It was at that time that God lived with men. He ascends and descends by the 'golden bridge.' Through this bridge, the Khasi people (u hynniew-trep u hynniew-skum) communed

with those in God's heavenly abode (ki khyndai shajrong). The bridge was however snapped by a jealous enemy. This evil force has managed to remain incognito. The situation has completely changed. Those who are 'below' have no access of communication any longer with those from 'above'. The longing is alive. It is deeply embedded in the heart and mind of every Khasi. It is by way of religion and its religious rites and practices that the relationship is bridged once again. The ritual ceremony for the dead is one instance which closes the gap of this deeply felt longing.

The Khasi situation is an egalitarian and a democratic one. Perhaps this reflects their tribal mind and attitude. It is also based on the matrilineal system it practices. In this tradition, descent is from the mother. The father is not 'part' of the family, even though he can do everything for his wife and children. He is an outsider. He belongs to another family. He is so while alive and at death. The religious function is for the mother and children, maternal uncles, nephews and nieces. Out of respect and gratitude for the father, certain religious activities are participated on his behalf. He is, however, related to his wife and his children by affinity. Hence one is related closely to the mother in religion

and social dealings by the 'kur' he professes. It is thus this genealogical classification that determines one's social and religious position and privileges.

The practice of final bone repository also strengthens the matrilineal ties of the Khasis. They are not to marry each other in the same clan. They are to enter into wedlock with those who belong to other clans. By being a member of the clan, one is entitled to whatever social and religious prerogatives the clan has. As they are united in life, so they are at death. Hence, there arises the Khasi phrase: Ka kur kaba peit kaba khmih."

In accordance with this matrilineal custom, Khasis practice an endogamous exogamy. As it is, they are by tradition obliged to marry within the tribe and not anyone outside it.

With regard to matrilineal genealogy, the Khasis have recourse to an ancient folklore. It says that once upon a time the Khasi menfolk had gone for a hunt. It requires their being absent from the village for quite some days. It was on one of such occasions that the plainsmen had ventured into the village. Upon a signal of danger, the womenfolk dressed up as men and got ready with bows and arrows for a fight. With their skill and courage with

such armoury, they managed to drive off the enemy. The menfolk in a gesture of appreciation, agreed to surrender the right of giving surname for their children to the mother. Thus the matrilineal custom among Khasis has taken shape.

The above narration has, of course, several flaws. How could the Khasi menfolk be so silly and quick to vital decision. How could they have only one village? If they are able to change not only their surname but the social system altogether, then, they can do so now, depending upon the situational need of the people. The story is possibly just a ploy to fit in with the matrilineal set-up.

At least one thing is certain. Khasis, too, have been wanderers earlier in their primitive age. It may be this background that has enabled them to devise a means for the disposal of the dead. Cremation is a clean act. It also serves the purpose of getting the bones so as to carry them along with them during their wandering. At least this practice has made sure that the dead also go along with them. It also reminds of an ancient practice with some primitive people in other parts of the world. In other words, they carry their dead along with them in their wandering stage. It is only on a later stage that they discovered a means to dispose the dead, either by burial or by cremation. Can it not be this same mentality

that has taken shape and modality with the Khasis before they get into contact with others who profess different belief systems and practices in this regard.

Another underlying idea is that Khasis have also been fighters once upon a time in their wandering stage. Their martial spirit and character is shown clearly in 'shad-wait', a Khasi dance done by male members with their swords in their right palm. Khasis have raided the plainsmen for food and for conquest. They had taken along with the booty some plainswomen as their wives or concubines. Upon marriage with them, they coined new surnames to suit to the local matrilineal make-up. Hence, non-indigenous surnames like Dkhar, Kharshiing, Kharjana, Kharbhih, Kharbithai, Kharmih etc. etc., have originated from this. These surnames are so numerous that Khasi society seems to be less truly its own in their identity. Whatever one may speak of at least one notices that the fighting spirit of old takes shape and form even in the disposal rites of the dead and at the final depositing of bones.

In this ritual of disposal of the dead and the final bone repository, the role of the youngest daughter and that of the maternal uncle is clearly shown. They wield an important and unavoidable power. The youngest daughter often called 'ka khatduh' of the clan has both

religious and social prerogatives within the matrilineal set-up of the clan. She has to see to whatever is necessary for the smooth running of the religious functions for the living and for the dead. She has to bear the necessary expenses. She is to provide the necessary sacrificial tools and animals. Socially, she is to see to the material needs of the members of the clan when they are sick, orphaned, homeless, and in whatever trouble and mishap they are in. The maternal uncle is responsible for both religious and material needs of the members of his clan (kur). He is their official priest and spokesman. He functions in all religious rites and ceremonies for the living and for the dead. He advises his sister, nephews and nieces with regard to any important step they need to take in life: it can be a decision on sale of property, marriage of a niece or a nephew, or any important issue which affects the well-being of his sister(s)'s family.

It is the Khasis' common belief in life after death and their egalitarian spirit that have drawn them to the aid of each other. It is seen especially during the vital occasion of death in the house of any of them. This behaviour and readiness is much prevalent with those who live in the villages than with those who live in the towns. As long as they settle in rural areas, they have

their common concern for each other. Once they live in urban areas, this traditional practice becomes less in vogue and binding.

As they believe in life after death, the Khasis show their joy and hope by their celebration. They are sorrowful yet they rejoice. This ambivalent spirit and attitude prevails in their life-style and behaviour. Serving of meal, kwai and drink of rice-beer are signs of their festivity and their belief in the after life for their departed ones.

Outsiders may judge that Khasis love spending and that they have no sense of saving. But this is due to their belief that the dead are pleased when the attendants (relatives and friends) are served food and kwai. It is also a means to show one's gratitude and friendship. It is also a sign of their love and concern. Some may tend to overdo it. Others try to keep it within a certain limit.

In conclusion, one can easily notice the close relationship of religion and society in the life of the Khasis. This is indeed a universal phenomenon. Everywhere people of every type and place, especially as they are still closer to their primitive age, show their constant

closeness of belief with their daily life, though the expression may differ in each of them. Emile Durkheim in his book, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,²⁸ has rightly expressed this character.

One may of course say that as long as one is primitive, there is a sense of religion and the sacred. And when one becomes more scientific, he loses all about the religious sense. But this is only a matter of degree rather than its complete absence. One may also try to wipe away this religious aspect.

The Khasis have shown themselves to be deeply religious and deeply related with each other in life and in death. No matter what is the cost, they are ready to do something on behalf of the other.

Another display of this characteristics as discovered through the rites and practices of disposal and final bone repository is the happy go lucky spirit of the Khasis. Many, of course, may feel this as silly. They feel the need to take life seriously. But this is one type of philosophy of life. After all the Khasis' one is: why should we take life so seriously that one ceases

28. E. Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1976) Cfr. Introduction, pp. v-xii and the whole book itself.

to be fully alive and happy in life. This does not mean of course that one should not live a good and honest life. Hence, though we are like 'minas in a temporary cage,' we need to live righteously before God and man. 'Kamai ia ka hok ba phin dup leit bam kwai ha iing u Blei'. (Live well and honestly so that you can eat kwai in God's dwelling place).

Khasis have strong belief in God's existence, in his goodness and mercy. He is the Creator of everything that we see and do not see. He is the friend of man as he has walked with him in the 'golden age.' He is the one who has given religion to man. By it, man can once again communicate with God and obtain whatever is spiritually and materially needed. Apart from God, there is no other than a Khasi should adore. Evil Spiritual powers can be present. They are powerful. But with God's help, they cannot harm man. Nor can they do so without God's permission. In this perspective, it is partly wrong to attribute to Khasis as 'ancestors' worshippers.' No doubt they have great reverence for their departed relatives. It does not mean that they deify them.

The religious rites of final placing of bones have also witnessed the sense of sin and God's forgiveness in the religious belief of the Khasis. Man can and does

commit sin. This is a personal one. The greatest sin one can incur is consanguinal marriage and incest. This is called 'sang.' But God is a merciful one. He listens to the intercessory prayer of the sacrificer. He forgives the faults of anyone provided that one accepts one's mistakes. Then he is reconciled with God and with man. Society is also affected by one's sins. He creates a void in human relationship. God cannot bless such a one. In this purview, Khasis believe in the need to pray for the living and for the dead.

The 'beh lyngka beh pyngrei' has indicated an important way of life of the Khasis. They have great esteem for virginity. Only virgins can dance. To show that sign of appreciation, the male dancers surround the female dancers. Of course, it also implies men protecting and guarding them.

Yet as much as they admire and hold in high esteem for virginal state, this is not to be the end purpose. It is only a step towards the marital status. It is by marriage that one can have children and obtain fulfilment in life. One is not fully attaining life's purpose, if he or she dies without having any issue. In the latter case, then, there has to be conducted a 'ghost marriage.'

The question is now: what about those who die in their early years like babies and children? They are also included in the above ceremony.

Marriage is of this world. It is not for those who live in the after life. Hence, in the final bone repository, the bones of males are put separately from those of females.

To put forth an idea here that marriage is evil, that it blocks one's going to God's eternal abode, is not possible. In Khasi society, one enters into the marital state by means of a religious service, after the concerned parties have seriously judged its possibility.

CHAPTER IV

MEMORIAL STONES

MEMORIAL STONES

Introduction

If one travels any part of the Khasi Hills,¹ one will notice memorial stones, or places specially prepared for passers-by along the footpaths. These are erected by the ancestors according to their socio-religious needs.

What can one learn from these constructions of our ancestors. They are built in commemoration of the deceased relatives who have been disposed off with proper religious rites and ceremonies. They believe that by doing this, the spirits of the dead are enabled to enter the heavenly abode of peace in God's house. As a gesture of joy and hope, the religious diviners have carried out such constructions as a traditional practice to be carried out for generations to come. Such action has made the inhabitants of those times to rejoice and to dance and

1. Khasi Hills is a generic name which includes the geographical areas of Khyntiam, Bhoi, War, Jaintia and Lynggam. It is now politically divided into East, West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi District and Jaintia Hills District.

feast. It has also given hope and strength to the younger generations especially that they can make use of such structures for refreshing themselves from their tiresome journeys.

The mawbynna or mawbna of the Khasis are called by Gurdon as memorial stones.² These refer to monoliths or menhirs, tablestones or dolmens and cromlechs found almost everywhere in Khasi Hills. He takes the root-meaning of kynmaw which literally means 'to mark with a stone' for the Khasi word 'to remember.'

In the ordinary sense of the word, the memorial stone is a memorial to the dead. In this respect, it is a constant custom among many people in many places. The erection of grave-stones to mark the spot where the remains of the dead are buried is an almost universal practice in the Western nations and in some Eastern ones too.

However, the Khasi menhirs are more than tombstones. Rather they are also cenotaphs as the remains of the dead are carefully preserved in stone sepulchre called incineraria often at some distance apart from the memorial stones.

2. P.R.T. Gurdon, The Khasis, (Cosmo Publications, Delhi, 1975), p. 144.

Lyngdoh³ describes the stones as one-piece stones which are erected standing along side by side in line and in front of them are the tablestones. They are the witness-stones, sign stones, proclamation-stones and record-stones in commemoration of religious obsequies for deceased relatives (mother's line) or out of respect, love, honour and appreciation to departed relatives (mother's and father's side), deceased king or in memory of any striking event that has happened.

Memorial stones are erected in a line of not less than three standing stones called monoliths or menhirs. They can be three, five, seven, nine or eleven in a line. They are always in odd numbers. The vertical stones are called menhirs or literally 'male-stones' (maw-shynrang in Khasi). There can be one or more flat-stones or dolmens in front of the vertical stones. They are literally called as 'female-stones' (maw-kynthei).

The menhirs are placed erect side by side in a row. The tallest of them is in the middle. Right in front of it, the dolmen is arranged.

Each monolith is a one-piece stone. It is dressed and hewn up roughly. Its height can vary from 3 ft to 27 ft.

3. H. Lyngdoh, Ka Niam Khasi, (Shillong Printing Works, Shillong, 1970), p. 243.

Its side from right to left can stretch from $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft to 4 ft and its thickness $\frac{1}{2}$ ft to 3 ft. The part beneath and close to the ground is thicker and bigger in size than the one above the ground. On its top, it is somewhat tapering to the top.

Often the top part of the tallest menhir is crowned with another piece of flat stone properly hewn round in shape or decoratively dressed. It looks like the Khasi turban (jainspong) or a crown. It is a sign of respect and honour. It also implies a greater expertise in the work. An example of it is that at Mawsmal village.

Each table-stone is a large flat-stone dressed up in square or rounded form. Its length ranges from 3 ft to $28\frac{1}{2}$ ft. Its width is from $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft to $13\frac{1}{2}$ ft and its thickness can span from $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft to 6 inches. To support it, from beneath and touching the ground as supports are kept the prop-stones (maw-thnah mawkhrum) which can be three or four pieces as need be. Their length can be $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft to 3 ft from the ground. They are dug into the ground in front and near the tallest menhir.

The memorial stones are of hewn gneiss granite or sandstones depending upon their availability and skill of those who put them up.

These stones are raised near the place where funeral rites or final disposal of uncalcined bones are held. They can be along the path leading to the pyre. They can be near important places easily visible to passers-by like near pathways, hill-tops or market-places.

On occasions of final repository of bones and ashes of the departed into the family cromlech, the living relatives prepare a memorial stone to commemorate and remember their deceased relatives. As soon as collection of the bones and ashes of the deceased gets started, preparation for memorial stones also goes side by side.

Preparing them requires hard and skilled work. It needs skill to select the proper stones, the site for fixing them up, skill to hew them and to carry them to the place(s) intended. This is a voluntary service. The villagers come out to a man to help in such a venture. The volunteers are fed with 'cold rice' which is cooked with a special ingredient called til seed (u nei in Khasi). Such food is called in Khasi ja-khaw-nei as cited by Costa in page 74 of his book. This is a peculiar delicacy of the Khasis. It is a practice that has been traditionally handed down. It is not to be missed. They eat this rice with honey or jaggery.

The memorial stones are often brought from a distant place. This depends upon the availability of stone materials. If they are of smaller size, they are pulled with cane rope or tree-bark called in Khasi u jyrmi. If they are of big size and heavy, they prepare a bamboo or wooden platform with or without wooden wheels or trolley underneath them. Such a platform is called in Khasi ka Po and the stones are pulled in this or on tree-trunks, or logs.

At the time of pulling them, one man well-versed in rhythmic sayings sits on top of the stones. He holds in his hand a piece of wood like a sort of stirring. With it he directs and gives sign to the men who are pulling to go fast, slow, to stop, and to turn to right or left. He also utters special words which can enthuse the working party. They in turn reply as follows.

The man on the stirring; utters— Altogether in strength;

The working party reply: Hui-hah (in Khasi language which means: it is so).

Stirring man: 'altogether one idea.'

Working party: hui-hah.

Stirring man: 'Straighten the cane-rope.'

Working party: Hui-hah.

Stirring man: 'So that our name will remain.'

Working party: Hui-hah.

The words are limited to the above phrases. Yet, if one is eloquent in his saying and clear, he can cheer up the working party. The words and action attract a lot of onlookers who turn in big numbers.

The above action implies social solidarity of the villagers. It saves a lot of money. It is a quick work. It unites and strengthens their sharing the same belief and social tradition. It indicates that every villager is keen to learn the art of preparing the stones with chisel and hammer. It gives training to them for other stone activity that will be economically useful for a living. It is often said that Khasis are skilful in masonry especially in construction of earth-work and walls.

Types of memorial stones

Costa⁴ has categorised the memorial stones into different types as if they have no connection within themselves. Lyngdoh⁵ has distinguished them into only two main classifications. He has subdivided them each into

4. G. Costa, Ka Riti Jong Ka Ri Laiphew Syiem, Part II, (Don Bosco Technical School, Shillong, 1947), p. 76.

5. H. Lyngdoh, Ibid., p. 244.

different sub-class or category. The latter's classification is more clear-cut and systematic.

Hence according to Lyngdoh, the memorial stones are mainly of two types: One type of memorial stones are done during the performance of funeral rites and at the final bone repository of thep mawbah/mawniam. These are called 'religious' memorial stones or literally 'religious stones' (mawniam).

Another category of memorial stones are constructed in order to commemorate and perpetuate the memory, honour and glory of their deceased maternal and paternal relatives, of kings and nobles, and of any important social or natural event. These are literally called 'glory-stone' (maw-nam).

(a) Religious memorial stones

The religious memorial stones are those which are put up by the living maternal relatives for the purpose of sign, witness, memorial and proclamation that the necessary rites and practices for the disposal of the dead, either at cremation or at final bone depositing, have been fulfilled.

This type of memorial stones has only three vertical stones or menhirs and one table-stone (dolmen) at

a stretch. Costa differs in proposing five of them.⁶ The tallest menhir in the middle is called the 'maternal uncle-stone (mawkni). It represents the maternal uncle (u suidnia) of the clan, or the spirit of the eldest maternal uncle of the family or sept. The vertical stones on either side of this middle one are called 'maternal nephew stones' (ki maw pyrsa). They signify the spirits of the youngest maternal uncles of the family or clan. They may be brothers and nephews of the deceased persons.

The dolmen symbolizes the 'ancestress stone' (ka maw iawbei). It points to the spirit of the primeval ancestress (ka iawbei tymmen or iawbei tynrai), or the younger ancestress (ka iawbei khynraw) of the clan. Sacrificial offerings of 'u dkhot u dkhai' are placed on this stone. It is a sort of altar. It also signifies the root-source of the clan and of the family religion. In doing this, the sacrificer announces before the stone to the ancestress and ancestors that the religious ceremonies due to the dead are duly fulfilled for the deceased relatives.

The religious memorial stones are smaller in size and shorter in height than those of the commemorative stones (mawbyinna-nam or maw-nam).

6. G. Costa, op.cit., p. 75.

There are four sub-categories of the religious memorial stones which are dealt at length as follows.

(1) Mawlynti or Mawkjat

These stones are literally called 'path-stone' or 'foot-stone'. They are religious memorial stones prepared by the living members of the deceased during the time of cremation and at the bone depositing, whether individual, collective or final (mawshyieng, mawphew and mawbah).

The above stones are constructed near the route to the cremation ground or to the individual or family sepulchre. The distance is roughly mid-way from the house of the departed to the cremation site or final bone repository.

During cremation, those who carry the bier stop to rest on these memorial stones. Here they sacrifice a goat for the path-stone (u blang mawlynti). It is for giving food to the spirit of the dead, and to make known to the deceased ancestress (lawbei) and great maternal uncle (u suidnia) that the living relatives intend to bring the corpse of the recently departed members to the cremation site.

Costa⁷ has a special classification in this subclass. He calls the stones 'ki maw lynti shimet.' That

7. Ibid., p. 76.

means, they are memorial stones for individual persons who have died. Such stones are raised on cremation day of any elderly person. They are three monoliths and one dolmen.

The stones are also called mawkjat as the bearers of the corpse must step on these stones before they can proceed to the pyre. The Khasis also name them 'mawlynti' for the bier and those who participate in the cremation service must pass through them.

Costa calls them only 'mawkjat.' They are put up during depositing of uncalcined bones and ashes into the stone-cairns (thep mawbah). They consist of two sets, each containing three vertical stones and one table-stone. This is due to the fact that the bones of the departed males are collected and carried separately from those of the females. They (the bones) are however kept in one incinerarium. In this, the bones of the males are kept in front or in the right side, and those of the females either on the rear or left side within the stone-cairn.

The living relatives of the departed ones collect the bones and ashes to keep in the individual cairn, later at mawphew mawkynroh and finally at mawbah. Gurdon calls such stone-cairn as sepulchre or incinerarium. But sepulchre conveys the meaning of a place where corpses are

buried. The terms 'cairns' and 'cromlech' are better for these bone receptacle.

At the time of bone repository, the bearer of the bones (usually a female close maternal relative) and those who accompany her, stop on these memorial stones. As it is said with regard to cremation, it is on these stones that a goat is slaughtered in sacrifice for the purpose of giving food to the departed spirits and to inform the great ancestress and great maternal uncle of the clan that the bones are kept at mawshyieng, at mawphew and finally at mawbah respectively.

With regard to mawlynti or mawkjat, Gurdon explains that they are erected to serve as seats for the spirits of the departed clansfolk on their way to the tomb of the clan. This is during the carrying of the remains of the departed by the living relations to the clan cromlech. He differs from the others when he posits only three upright stones and one flat-stone as a general rule. Having more sets is an exception with some clans. Again he is different from the others when he says that they are placed at each site that the bearers make a halt for the night on their way to deposit the bones of the deceased relatives at the mawbah. With regard to their height, according to him, they are not more than 3 or 4 ft and they are

not massive as mawbyнна. They are found in big numbers all along the paths toward the clan cromlechs. And that they have no names.

To continue, it is only upto these stones that all beating of drums, the sword-dance, playing of musical instruments, sacrifices and prayers given in respect and homage of the dead by the paternal relatives end. Then they go back home. Only the maternal relatives, the Tyng-shop, Puron, flute-players, the food for the departed and the uncalcined bones and ashes proceed to the final family cairn.

If those who deposit in the final family cromlech belong only to one family line, they will have only one set of upright stones (viz. three of them) and one flat-stone. A set of them signifies an origin from one maternal uncle and one maternal ancestress. Gurdon is absent in this aspect.

When those who place the bones into the final family incinerarium belong to two family lines or lineages, they will put up two sets of three vertical stones and two flat table-stones. And if they are more than these, they will do likewise.

Gurdon in his book, The Khasis, in page 146, explains of cairns or cromlechs as means to confine the spirits

of the departed so that they are not allowed to escape from the tomb and to harm the living members. He describes them as being square, oblong or circular in shape. With regard to direction, they are placed in any direction, usually alongside the route or well-known lines of route which can readily attract the attention of passers-by. He concludes that it is difficult to extract information from the Khasi people about these stones. This may be due to their ignorance of their tradition, their apathy, or their feeling delicate in revealing the secrets of their religious belief to a foreigner.

Rather than to bring in the idea of confinement in respect of the cairns, the Khasi mentality is different. Cairns are means to contain the bones. These bones belong to departed maternal relatives. They are gathered in them so that they may be able to be together. It is a sign of their being together in their destined abode of peace with God and with the great ancestress and great maternal uncle. It is in short a kind of 'dwelling place' to represent the eternal 'resting place.' The former is temporary, the latter is permanent.

Gurdon states in page 151 of his book, The Khasis, that Khasis must have borrowed their religious custom largely from the Synteng inhabitants of Jaintia. This

is also with regard to 'erecting of table-stones'. Rather, we can say that the erection of memorial stones at religious ceremonies for the dead and the religious rites and practices for the departed belong to the indigenous belief system original to the Khasis and peculiar to them.

(ii) **Mawniam**

Mawniam are specifically religious memorial stones. They are constructed during the religious service of cremation and depositing of bones at the mawniam. They are prepared by the maternal relations.

These stones are erected on hill-sides near the newly constructed mawbah. During this event, they kill one pig for the mawniam which is called 'u sniang mawniam'. This is to give food to the departed spirits and to declare before the maternal ancestress and uncle that they have carried all the necessary religious services, as ordained by God from one generation to the next. It is an occasion to gather the departed spirits and their bones and ashes into the one mawniam.

(iii) **Maw-umkoi or Maw-tyrut**

Maw-umkoi or maw-tyrut are also religious memorial stones which are constructed by the living maternal relatives on the occasion of washing the bones of their departed

ones in the special artificially prepared cleansing pool of water called 'umkoi umshan.' The washing is done for the bones of all departed relatives who belong to the same family line or clan, and who have died an unnatural or violent death. The bones are collected from all the individual cairns. After having washed them, these bones are kept in a new cairn which is called 'u maw lum suidiap.' It is a special cairn to preserve the bones of all who die an unnatural and violent death.

At times, some relatives may just pitch three flags in place of the vertical stones. It is on the above stones and flags that the diviner performs his religious ceremonies. He pours the rice-beer in libation. He announces to the great ancestress and great maternal uncle that he has cleansed the bones of those who died an unnatural and violent death. He has done so in a specific purificatory pool of water (umkoi). Now they are made clean of all impediments, impurities and sins and hereditary mishap (ka tyrut ka smer). They are made fit to live in the destined abode in God's house together with their fore-parents. The stones are put up near such purificating water-pool. By means of washing, the departed spirits are absolved of all their personal faults and failures which they have done during their life-time.

Costa, in his book, Ka Riti jong ka Ri Laiphew Syiem, Part II, in page 77, simply states that maw umkoi (memorial stones raised near the purificatory water-pool) are set up during the sacrifice on behalf of those who die an unnatural and violent death. He is slightly different from what others have described.

(iv) Mawklim

Mawklim are religious memorial stones which are raised at the time when the sacrificer offers a sacrifice of sacrilege (ka jingknia jingsang). It is for the purpose of making one free from any bond or life-long agreement actually settled between two persons like between husband and wife. They are put up at the time of the above sacrifice on behalf of the husband or wife who intends to remarry someone else, as their previous husband or wife has died.

During this sacrificial performance, the diviner informs the spirit of the departed husband or wife that the obligation (ka jingsang) from the living wife or husband is now free from the bond and is allowed to remarry someone else. The impediment is thus removed. There is no more sanction to prohibit him or her.

Having informed the departed spirits, the diviner makes the sacrificial offering. He throws into the flat

table-stones the specific allotted portions (ki dkhot ki dkhai) from the inner portions of the slaughtered sacrificial animal. Such portions are smoked first in fire before they are given in offering. The horns of such sacrificial animal are hanged on the monoliths. Simultaneously as he puts the inner portions and horns of the sacrificial victim, he utters the following words.

Oh, listen,
 All impediments, sacrileges, and sins are
 absolved
 Before the stones,
 As witness and
 Hearer of everything. 8

The Khasi phrasing runs as follows:

Hei, sngew ho,
 La lait ka klim ka ngat,
 Ha khmat ki mawthung mawpynieng,
 Kum u sakhi u satar,
 U nongsngew u nongsngap, mo.

The relatives of the departed ones set up the stones near or along the footpath. They become witnesses that the husband or wife who is still alive is free from the previous matrimonial bond and is free to settle a new one with anybody else.

8. H. Lyngdoh, op.cit., p. 249.

(b) Other special constructions

There are other mawniam which are not mawbynna. That is, they are religious stones but not memorial stones. They are briefly explained as follows.

(i) Kpep

Kpep is a stone structure in which the corpse is put for cremation. It is meant for the deceased members of the same family line. The father is excluded as he belongs to different family lineage.

It is forbidden to destroy it as long as it is still in use. It means that as long as the family line persists the structure is also to remain.

Only those who have shared in the expenditure for its construction like contributing a pig each (kiba pynnoh dkhoh sniang shi kur shi kur) have right of access to its usage at cremation.

A detailed explanation is given in the glossary.

(ii) Mawshyieng

Mawshyieng is a stone-cairn for an individual deceased persons' bones. It is square in shape. It is made up of flat chiselled stone-slabs of even size and shape, of size 1½ ft in height and 2 ft in length.

The uncalcined bones and ashes of individual departed persons are kept in it on a temporary basis. Later they are collected for final depositing in a common family sepulchre (mawbah).

This can be destroyed only when the bones have been removed from it.

(iii) Mawkhad

Mawkhad is a special stone in which divination is carried out to find the will of the deity in the disposal rites of the dead.

Only when this is done, cremation rites can take place immediately.

These stones are constructed near the houses of the departed at the time of cremation.

(iv) Mawbasa

Mawbasa is a more collective though intermediary stone-cairn. It is larger than that of the individual stone-cairn. It is however smaller than the final common family cromlech.

Its alternate name is mawphew mawkynroh.

By mutual agreement among members of the clan, the bones are removed from the individual cairns to keep them

in this intermediate stone-cairn.

Such bone repository is usually placed outside the village in a place suitable for the living family members.

(v) Maw-lum-suidiap

The maw-lum-suid-iap is a special stone-cairn for the bones of those who have died an unnatural and violent death. The living members gather these bones from the individual cairns, now and then, after several intervals of years in order to put them together there.

This action of removing the bones of those who died an unnatural death from individual stone-cairns to keep them at this new stone-cairn is called ka kynrong shyieng.

Before the bones are removed from each individual cairn, an egg is broken on a special wooden frame (ka diengshat) so as to look for signs.

Upon collecting the bones, they are washed thrice in a purificatory pool of water (ka umkoi umsham). Such is prepared near the cairn.

Near this water-pool, three flags are pitched. Three bamboo pieces called in Khasi 'ki tyndong' and three bamboo rings (ki kyrwoh) are kept ready.

When the diviner takes the bones in his hand for washing, he utters the following words:

Oh, listen, I now stand up to wash all of you who have died an unnatural and violent death so that you can be made clean from all the above impurities and impediments. Then you will be able to remain with your great ancestress and great maternal uncle by means of this religious rite. 9

After this, the diviner soaks the bones thrice in the water-pool as means of washing.

Then he takes an egg and utters the words:

It is clean and there is nothing that hinders, misfortune or the devil; come, then, show us good signs. If perhaps it has not been alright, then show also such indications. 10

After saying this, he smashes it on the diengshat (specially made wooden frame).

9. Ibid., p. 196.

The Khasi rendering is as follows: "Hei, sngew ho, nga ieng ka pynsum ka pynsait ia phi ki iap-mynsaw iap-snam ki iap-tyrut iap-smer, ba phin khuid phin sab na ka tyrut na ka smer na ka pap ka sang, ba phin leit ryngkat ka mei ka iaw u pun u kong, ryngkat u ni u ma ha ka niam ka rukom, mo."

10. Ibid., p. 197.

In Khasi, it runs as follows: "La khuid la bha ym don shuh ka bakhang ka bakah, ka tyrut ka smer, u ksuid u khrei: ale, da liem tak liem ngai, mo. Lehse ym pat khuid ym put sab: haw da kemkhap kemkhun, mo."

If the egg-shell pieces turn face up, it is good sign. If they turn face downwards to the ground, it is bad one. He has to smash another egg to examine the signs. Once, it is right, then, he gathers all the bones and everything else.

Apart from this breaking of eggs, some diviner offers a pig for Tyurut (an evil power that brings bad luck like unnatural and violent death), one goat for Ramshandi (a goddess of war). If one dies by the sword, a goat is offered to Syngkai Bamon. They also put three monoliths and one flat table-stone near the water-pool (maw-umkoi).

When the diviner has finished the above religious rites, he carries the bones to the house of the youngest daughter (ka iing seng). Inside the house, he offers one pig (u niang kyntiew iing). It is for feeding the spirits and of course all the attendants.

The diviner sits near the pig which has been pressed down by the neck to the ground by means of a small wooden pole. After smearing it with grounded rice soaked in water as food (kpu rynsi), he utters the following sacrificial words:

Listen, oh, God, Creator of humankind,
You who have been responsible for human
lineages,

As you have ordered us,
 To perform the necessary rites for the dead,
 Now their bones have been brought home
 So as to give them food,
 Let everything then be alright as shown by means
 of signs. 11

He then drops some grains of rice upon the pig and counts 'One, two, three, four, five.' He explains this action thus: "This is a grain of rice to free the departed ones from all impediments."¹²

Turning the head of the pig towards the north, he pieces it with a bamboo-slit or a sharp iron-piece from the left side of the breast to reach the heart, thus

11. Ibid., pp. 197-98. Its Khasi phrasing is thus:

To sngew mo, Blei Thawbriew Buhbynriew,
 Ko Longkur, ko Seijait,
 Kumba la hukum hi Maphi,
 Te, balong ka lum ka kynshew,
 Ka kynrong ka kyntaw,
 Ia u suidnia u nongiap, u lor u kab,
 Te, mynta balong ka kyntiew iing ka kyntiew sem,
 Ka aibam ka aisa.
 Ia u suidiap ia u nongiap,
 Baroh shikpoh ka kmie ka kiaw;
 Nangsgew kyndiang ia ka nia ka lynti, mo.
 Haw da pyllun lymphuin,
 U nud u ksang, u shata u kweh,
 Ka lynti ka syngkien, u sohpet u ksai, mo.

12. Ibid., p. 198. The diviner utters in Khasi:

Wei, ar, lai, saw, san,
 Hei, u khaw tam u khaw lait,
 Ban lait na ka jot na ka rem mo.

killing it. With a knife, he cuts the pig and extracts the lungs. He then breathes upon them. Next, he takes out the liver and looks at it for signs. Even if there are good or bad signs, they will not kill any more pigs for the sacrifice. They will just keep record of all such signs so that on the day of divination, they can be made use of.

On the following morning, the living members of the deceased invite all their friends and neighbours to help them to prepare the stone-cairn for keeping the bones. Again one pig is sacrificed as an offering to the departed spirits.

The paternal relatives (ki khunkha) offer another pig. This is accepted and offered in sacrifice. The diviner utters the following words on this occasion:

Oh listen,
 This is an offering from the father's children,
 As a sign that there is no impediment;
 Kindly accept oh Thawlang
 You who have been responsible for generation of
 children - to bring about male and female children.
 So that this honour and respect will remain,
 So that this sacrificial offering will continue,
 So that mourning and weeping will be perpetuated.¹³

13. Ibid., p. 199. The Khasi rendering is as follows:

Te, sngew mo,
 Ba long ka pynsoh ka pynkham u khunkha u khunlong,
 Kum bam don ka sang ka ma,

The diviner then kills the pig by piercing. He cuts it and extracts the inner portions. He is not so keen to examine the good or bad signs. If there happens to be some bad signs, he keeps record of it for the day of divination.

As the above offering is over, a meal is served to those who have helped in the preparation of the stone-cairn. Then they proceed to the place of the new cairn to keep the collected bones and ashes there with all the required religious rites for such an occasion.

As they finish putting the bones inside the cairn, they place 'food' (ka japha jasiang) for the departed spirits. Then all return home. The diviner examines whether everything has been alright or not. He does this by divination. If he finds that it is not alright, he will destroy the stone-cairn. He will have to build a new one. He will do so until it is fully satisfactory.

A bull is killed for feeding the invitees and for offering to the departed. 'Food' for the spirits is also kept in the new stone-cairn.

Ka kyndiah ka kyndon,
 Diangti ho pa Thawlang babha bamiat,
 Ban sah ka nam ka rong, ka phur ka siang,
 Ka um-mut ka um-pung, mo.

(vi) Mawphew mawkynroh

Mawphew mawkynroh is a larger stone structure than that of mawshyieng. It is for the purpose of keeping the bones of departed relatives after they are removed from the individual cairns. It is an intermediate state before the common final bone repository at mawbah.

Bones of departed members of the same family line are kept in this cairn. It is known in Khasi as 'shi-kpoh.' This can consist of a grand-mother (iaawbei khynraw), her children, and the children from them on the female line. Another sister, younger or elder to her, can form another shi-kpoh. They become intermediate ancestresses and are related to each other. They belong to the same clan. Their bones can ultimately be kept in the one family sepulchre of the mawbah pepbah.

In case of disputes, the above two sisters, call them A and B, can decide to have separate mawbah. Distance and settlement in a different place is reason enough to establish a separate mawbah.

(vii) Mawbah pepbah

The mawbah pepbah is the largest stone-cairn. It is much larger than that of mawshyieng or mawphew. It is the final repository for all the bones and ashes

of those who have died for generations from the first or intermediate ancestress(es) as memory can recollect. They are members who belong to the same clan from the female line. Upon mutual agreement and understanding, for the final bone keeping and for the expenses, a date is fixed for such ceremony.

The intention of doing so is that all the members of the same genealogical line can be together as brothers and sisters in the destined abode in God's house. There they will be happy for ever with their first ancestress and ancestor.

In this way, Khasi religion is traditionally a family one. It is exclusively for all members of the same family line. The father, his brothers and sisters and relatives have no share in this family religion of his wife and his wife's relatives.

In this Khasi religion, the maternal uncle is the official diviner. Eggs, hens, cocks, pigs, goats, and bulls are the customary materials needed for the religious rites and sacrifices. The words may not be the same though the formulas are identical. The difference is in the number of inner portions used for offering and giving to the departed spirits. Some families have five, some

seven and some others nine according to their traditional understanding and practice.

(c) The social memorial stones

This classification is actually outside the purview of this study. Yet a little can be described of this in order to complete what has been distinguished above.

They are called social memorial stones as no religious ceremony is involved in constructing them.

They are put up in memory and respect for the deceased father or father's relatives by the children as a sign of their appreciation. The motive is that the father has been responsible for reproduction and fertility like a seed in the mother-earth. He is, therefore, known as 'u pa-kha,' that is, the father who bears. The stones are therefore called 'honour-stone' (mawbynna or mawnam).

The subjects in a kingdom may also raise such structures in honour of their deceased king or noble.

Finally, such memorial stones are set up in memory of an important social and natural event.

The usual site for these stones is a market-place, a prominent place near the footpath or near the 'durbar' ground (ka lumpung dorbar). They are set in a row in odd

number of 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11 or more vertical stones and one or more flat table-stones. A crown stone may be fixed on the top of the highest menhir. Costa in page 77 of his book gives number five monoliths and two dolmens as usual number.

The tallest menhir is known as 'uncle-stone', usually with a crown stone on its top. Those on either side of the middle one are called maternal nephew stones (mawpyrsa). But if it is those put up by the children, they are differently named. Thus the middle one is known as 'u maw-thawlang' and those on its either side as 'maw-ksing', 'mawkait' and 'maw-khun-kha' (a drumstone, banana-stone). The flat stone is known as 'maw-kiaw-kha.'

These social stones are also variously subdivided as follows: (a) maw-lum and (b) maw-shongthait.

The stones are, however, larger in size and taller in height than the religious memorial stones. Nartiang's stones called 'ki mo jong syiem' (ki maw ki syiem) (stones of the king) erected by Lah Laskor and Mar Phalyngki are an example.

Kor and Palong are also added to the social memorial stones. The former one is built in memory of departed relatives and the latter in remembrance of kings and nobles.

(d) Gurdon's comparison of menhirs, cromlechs and dolmens found in Khasi Hills and elsewhere

Gurdon¹⁴ in his book, The Khasis (pp. 146-149) compares and contrasts the Khasi menhirs, cromlechs and dolmens with those of people found in other parts of the world.

Those of France and Circassia in Waring's book of "Stone Monuments, Tumuli, and Ornaments of Remote Ages," differ from those of Khasis as the latter have no windows. It thus implies a different belief system. The latter confines the departed spirits that they are not able to escape to haunt the living.

With regard to those described in Waring's book and in Lord Avebury's "Prehistoric Times" and Pergusson's work, he found similarity in appearance with those menhirs and dolmens in the Khasi Hills. He makes this conclusion:

Given like conditions, amongst primitive peoples, totally unconnected with one another as regards race, and living in countries far remote from one another, the results, i.e., the erection of stones as memorials of important persons, or events, are probably the same all the world over.

14. P.R.T. Gurdon, The Khasis, pp. 146-149.

The menhirs of Waring resemble those of the Khasis as they are painted circular or oval. This is not so in Khasi Hills. Such painted marks signify that certain sacrifices of animals have been performed.

Gurdon found the stones in Fergusson's "Rude Stone Monuments" of page 447 of Belgaum are "dedicated to the spirits of deceased ancestors" and are in uneven numbers just like that of the Khasis. He deduces that they imply 'worship of ancestors.' So they are fitting to the four characteristics: they are similar in appearance, conformation, invariable unevenness in number and identity of purpose.

In Bradley Birt's book on Chota Nagpur with regard to Ho memorial stones, Gurdon finds similarity in their appearance with those of Khasis' incineraria. He discovers also in them as having cremation of body, collection of ashes, their consignment to a grave and the offering of food to departed spirits. He concludes that this may be due to their linguistic affinity and common origin of Mon-Khmer as proposed by Logan.

The Karbis and Naga tribes also have memorial stones for important personages like mauzadars and gaon-buras. The vertical stones and flat-stones are mere

cenotaphs like those of the Khasis. But they are different as they do not collect the bones and ashes to keep them in stone-cairns. But they have water-pools and feasting during the raising of the monuments.

(d) Costa's comments on destruction of memorial stones

Costa¹⁵ gives the reason for destruction of memorial stones with need for new settlement. An example of this is that of Nonglba village near Sohra. In this area, many cremation grounds and stone-cairns have been demolished.

Certain conditions are however to be observed before destroying the memorials:

(1) Cremation grounds for individual persons can easily be abolished when there is a need. In case of a cremation site for the family lineage or mawbah, permission of the King and his council is necessary so as to remove them outside the village.

(2) Individual stone-cairns can be removed by father's relatives (ki kha ki man) upon an urgent need. Those who do so must be reliable persons and as many people as possible should know it. It is suspicious if one or two persons do it. In this case, they can be considered witch-doctors (ki nongai-ksuid).

15. G. Costa, Ka Riti Jong Ka Ri Laiphew Syiem, Part II, pp. 80-81.

(3) Concerning mawbah, it is better to avoid it as far as possible, even if it falls within the village. Such is the case of the Khongwir family in the market-place of Sohra. This has been destroyed by an earthquake of 1897.

(4) With regard to 'religious' memorial stones linked with mawbah, they are not to be demolished. They are to be left aside even though the place is urgently needed.

But if they are not connected with mawbah, they can be done away with upon public need provided that permission is obtained from the village headman.

(5) Mawbynna-umkoi can be done away with when religious purifications are completed. It means that they are not required any longer.

(6) Mawniam are not to be pulled down.

(e) An analysis of the chapter

At a glance, one can easily notice that there is no inscription in the Khasis' memorial stones. It is therefore difficult for the future generations to keep track of the memory of their departed relatives. Oral tradition can continue for some years. But it fades away

gradually. They then become useless and meaningless as time goes. It is a pity that such great work of art is left neglected and in disregard.

Having no inscription has made non-Khasis as well the coming generations of Khasis difficult to interpret the intention and meaning of these memorials. However, they serve an important purpose. By them, we remember the ancestors who have toiled with skill and effort to prepare them.

Perhaps, one reason why they are abandoned is that it is a universal characteristic: that the old must give way to the new. Masterpieces such as those of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb in Agra have become only monuments for tourists. Secondly, old forms are crude and uneconomical unlike that of the present age.

The ancients of Khasi Hills have striven hard, investing much effort and expenses, to put up these memorials. Their effort is an expression of their belief in their religious activities. These erections are done simultaneously with the performance of religious rites for the departed. They are a witness that religious ceremonies have been duly carried out and successfully at that, so that the departed have reached their destined abode. An

example of this is the mawklim which testifies to the world that necessary religious functions have been fulfilled on behalf of the departed husband or wife, and that the living wife or husband is made free to remarry someone else without incurring any taboo or sanction.

When a people is under-developed and illiterate, memorial stones are easy unwritten witnesses of their belief in the afterlife of their departed relatives. They also become expression of their art-work, mentality and attitude, especially in their respect and appreciation of their departed ones. As they have great respect and love for their dead, they also express such in their daily life by their congeniality, kindness, respect and consideration in words and actions in their dealing with others. Kwai is a typical expression of friendship and neighbourliness. Such practice projects the inestimable value of their underlying culture. Their democracy, and egalitarianism has been much acclaimed the world over.

These memorial stones also are an expression of the state of 'education' they are in. That they are simple in their thinking, in their living habits and in their dealing with others.

Memorial stones are also an expression of their work culture. Khasis have been experts in stone-work,

in building houses, walls and earthwork. The type of stone-houses in Sohra and Mawsynram, the two world famous heaviest rainfall places, is able to protect from the inclement weather of rain and wind. It also keeps the house warm and secure.

As the one-piece memorial stones are roughly hewn, there is an indication of the degree of development of Khasis in their style of living, earning and work skill. Though there are cases of improved skill in work in the Southern part of the Khasi Hills like at Sohra and Mawmluh where they are able to smelt iron ore and produce lime, there is, however, not much commendable progress in other areas.

With regard to the degree of religious belief, surely Khasis have firm belief in God the Creator. They believe in monotheism. Their God is benign, merciful and forgiving. He offers eternal life to man. One can offend him. But he can also obtain mercy by means of intercessory prayers and religious sacrifices. The living have a close link with the dead. The dead are not able to free themselves nor to seek God's forgiveness. The living can offer intercessory prayers for their departed ones. The religious rites are complicated, multifaceted and expensive. It is a long way through. Yet, such religious services are efficacious.

From the above conclusion, one can gauge the implication why the dead cannot free themselves. Perhaps, it is because their fundamental option is final with the onset of death - that moment of separation of the body from the soul. At death, one's personal will and decision is complete. In life, one can still mend his own way of life. But it is not so after death. However, this proposition is not explicated in the Khasi religious thought.

There is a certain isolationism in Khasis' social and religious practice. Their religion is a family one. Members belonging to the same family lineage can participate in religious rites for the living and for the dead. Others are excluded. Such attitude and behaviour can and do isolate the others. There is an inclination for one to think only of his 'own', and not for others. It brings about narrow mindedness and lack of universalism. Some trace of this parochialism can be seen in those who work in Government offices when they prefer to select their 'own' for any vacant post, or to bolster the image of one's own locality in preference to that of others. Another example of this is prevailing in a majority of Khasi homes. That is, if a husband (who is also the father of the house) is not able to support his wife's family and children or has some unreconcilable problem can be chased away

by his wife, his wife's brothers and parents. After all, he is not of their own. He is son of others (u khun ki briew). The problem is heightened here as there is matri-locality system among the Khasis.

The differentiation made by ancient Khasis with regard to memorial stones is highly informative and constructive. They have shown a deep sense of distinction. It shows that they have attained great height of thinking and logical classification as they are able to point out what is religious and what is social. Though they can hardly read and write, the depth of their thinking process is, however, mature. In this aspect, they can be compared with those of the other parts of the world like the Greeks and ancient Indian thinkers. Some even venture to say that Khasis originate from Greece as they have similarity in their thinking and syllogistic process. An ancient folklore explains that upon crossing a river in spate the Khasis have swallowed up the book of wisdom. Not the least, one can witness developed proverbs, rhythmic doublets and ancient sayings in their tradition. They are deeply philosophically minded and far-reaching in their thought process.

One constant variable in the subject of memorial stones is the relationship that exists between the social

and religious. Khasis offer sacrifices for the dead; they believe in their afterlife, and in God's mercy and forgiveness for their sins. They also simultaneously relate such action to the living members. Relatives and friends enjoy in the celebration and witness what is done for the dead by their participation and presence. In other words, the implication is that by remembering the dead, the living members also renew themselves, by forming new family and friendly ties with each other together with their dedication and belief in God's love and goodness.

Another aspect of the close relationship that exists between the living and the dead, is that the latter is not lacking in showing their concern and blessing for the living relatives by making them prosperous, successful in life, and numerous in their numbers. But when the living are neglectful of their departed relatives, the dead too become revengeful: they come to haunt the living by causing harm and sickness. The evil one also has an opportunity to bring calamities to the living.

Apart from what has been said of the Khasis' mental make-up in religion and social life, one more insight can be gleaned from their religious philosophy. It is on the theory of right and wrong. Khasis are fully aware of this aspect. They advise the younger generations with

the saying: Live well and honestly that you may be able to eat kwai in God's abode. (kamai ia ka hok ba phin dup bam kwai ha iing u Blei). Its implication is this: One reaps good life or a difficult one in the next according to the way of life one leads during his life here on earth.

Personal sins are a reality. They can be forgiven by God through intercessory prayers, divination and sacrifices. They can cause disunity and harm to social dealing. One most important sin is 'sang'. It is a sacrilege that is caused by incest and marriage within the same clan. Such a sin has an important social and matrilineal backing. It protects the matrilineal system and maintains it so that it can remain intact throughout generations.

It can be said however that there is no systematic and detailed explanation of what is sin and all its implications. It is in Christianity that this issue is much clear-cut and elaborate.

CHAPTER V

THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE DEATH

THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE DEATH

To observe the prescribed traditional religious rites and practices of disposal of the dead involves immense expenditure. This has to be borne by the family members themselves, or together with their married brothers and sisters, uncles and aunties (ki meinah meisan).

The fellow-villagers upon request to the village headman can also give a helping hand for the family in need. This is purely voluntary. It brings about a sense of fellowship, unity and belonging to each other. It also saves a lot of financial burden for the family concerned.

With regard to the deposition of bones and ashes at individual stone-cairn, the family members alone see to its cost for the religious and social need. Keeping of bones at the common stone-cairn (mawphew) requires a sharing among members of different families. However, in the case of final bone repository, a larger part of the expenditure is to be met by the youngest daughter (ka khatduh).

Khasi society is matrilineal in organisation. Descent is from the mother. Inheritance is therefore to the daughters. A larger share goes to the youngest one. The reason is not far to find out. The social and religious role of the youngest empowers her to have a lion's share of the parental ancestral and acquired property.

Inalienable property is a legacy. It is an ancestral one which is handed over by the predecessors to the present living generations. Such type of property cannot be disposed of without obtaining a general agreement of the members of the clan or members of the family concerned. This property consists of movable and immovable goods, jewels and ornaments, dresses and costumes, houses and residential quarters, cattle and sheep, and agricultural implements.¹

The youngest daughter of the family or clan has the duty of placing the bones in the family sepulchre. This is the final, most expensive, social and religious event. That is why she gets a larger share of the ancestral property.

In case that there is no female issue, a male of the same family line can receive the property. But he

1. H. Bareh, The History and Culture of the Khasi People, (Naba Mudran Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1967), p. 329.

holds it only during his life-time. A female helper (Ka nongrap iing) of the same clan can inherit the property after the demise of her foster-parents, instead of the male person. And when the family has no male or female issue, inheritance will go to females of the same clan though they belong to different family lines.

Partition of property is possible if it is a big one. Then all daughters get a share. If it is a small one, only the youngest daughter inherits it.

If any member of the family wishes to dispose of her property, she is obliged to offer first to her own sisters. If they are not ready to buy it, she can lease it to others. Even to do so she has to obtain consent of the 'khatduh' and of all members of the same family.

There are conditions for males to hold property:

1. He holds it for life only. His children cannot inherit it as they belong to the clan of their mother.
2. He can take a female kur (ka nongrap iing) as keeper of property during his lifetime and as successor upon his death.

3. If he is a minor, a member of the family selected by the body of kurs must be guardian of the property.
4. He must keep the property intact. If it is land, he cannot sell it. If they are ornaments, he must preserve them for his kur, and not for his wife and children.
5. The profits of his labours in the landed property can be used for his wife and children.

The following conditions are to be observed in the choice of a female heiress (ka nongrap iing):

1. If a female has a separate share but has no daughters, she can select a female of the family as heiress to herself and as keeper of her house after her death.
2. A male caretaker of the property can also choose a female of the family to take care of the family house and to perform the family worship and to be his heiress after his death.

Nongrap iing cannot be the youngest, but the eldest or elder living female within the family who is not in-charge of ka iing seng (foundation-house) or iing tymmen (ancestral house).

The property of a female who resides in the house of her mother or her kur before her marriage, upon her demise, can be taken over by her mother or the nearest female kur.

If a woman after marriage has acquired property by her own efforts and she dies, such property is divided equally among the daughters. It is considered ancestral property.

When the husband remains with his children after demise of his wife, the property is jointly his as hers, and the children cannot drive him away.

Mr. David Roy, EAC, in British Assam, with regard to self-acquired property (ka nongkhynraw) of a male, has the following note:

At the demise of the father, the children must return to his kur not only his body but also his full dress and ornaments and something of his earnings. 2

With regard to self-acquired property, a man may keep it a little for himself though the rest he gives to his mother. Upon his death, such a property goes to

2. Sir Keith Cantlie's Notes on Khasi Law, (Ri Khasi Press, Shillong, 1934), p. 18.

his mother or to his nearest female kur when his mother has died. In this way the property becomes ancestral property.

When a man acquires a separate property apart from his wife, by means of his work and business, he can dispose of its surplus in his life-time by way of gifts to his own relatives.

If it is a joint earning by husband and wife, upon his death, the property goes to his wife and children. But if she dies, it goes to the youngest daughter. When there are no daughters, then the youngest son acquires it. But when the wife has no children, upon death of her husband, half of it will devolve to his kur for the expenses in performing the funeral ceremonies for him.

If it is not a joint earning, even if he has children, his kur can claim the property acquired by him before marriage and which he retains after marriage. In practice it is seldom claimed. Whatever property or money given him at his marriage in order that he starts a living, upon his death, will return to his kur. But what he earns in the house of his wife and children upon his demise will go to them.

A man can hold self-acquired property and ancestral

property. He can gift it in his life-time. He can also make his kur custodian of a portion of his property and gives his earning to them from time to time. He brings to his wife only sufficient to maintain himself and her. Upon his death, his kur inherit whatever has been deposited with them.

Property settlement is done by a council of the family (kur). It is, however, flexible. There is no rigid law about it. Such indefiniteness may give rise to disputes in the courts between the surviving widow and his kur. This flexibility of the custom suffices to make an adequate decision of each case according to its merit.

The mother can inherit the self-acquired property of her son upon his death as if she acquires it herself. She can divide it among her other children as she pleases. No other kur can treat like that to his self-acquired property.

The living wife, upon his death, when it is a joint earning, can gift her share of it away from her children. But if she has no children, she can dispose of it only in agreement with her husband's kur. They will usually restrict her to do so.

Again, if he dies leaving a widow and child, the surviving wife can take his self-acquired property. but if the child dies subsequently, his kur can claim a share of it.

Though the youngest daughter is said to be the rightful heiress to ancestral property, she can forfeit it on the following conditions:

(1) If she commits a sang by marriage with a person of the same clan or a clan which has a mutual agreement forbidding inter-marriage. Murder by the mother of her own child can disown her from her property and make her lose the right of inheritance.

(2) Misconduct can lead one to lose the right of inheritance. For instance, a mother can consider her daughter to be disobedient, undutiful or defective of moral character. Then the elder sister can be made keeper of the foundation-house (ling seng) and heiress to the property. The offender may also be expelled from her own locality and deprived of all rights (ai khaw duh and khi-lai-nuid).

'Ai-khaw-duh' (give the last grain of rice) means that all kin relationship is cut off from the offender.

The relatives will disown her and will not look after her in her misfortune. Another word in Khasi is 'kyntait kur.'

'Khi-lai-nuid' is a form of punishment to the offending person by shaving his/her hair off his/her head in the form of a triangular. This type of punishment is abhorrent to anyone. It is shameful to the person concerned and it brings dishonour to the family members and to the clan.

(3) If the 'khatduh' is converted to Christianity or to any religion other than the indigenous one, she loses her right of inheritance. She has no more right to fulfil her religious duties for the family and for the clan.

(4) If one fails to bear a share of expenses for religious rites in times of difficulty (khang apot), such person loses the right of inheritance. This right can be suspended for a time, and it is regained through payment of the allotted share.

(5) If a surviving widow remarries before a year is passed after death of her husband and has not returned the bones of her husband to his kur, she loses the right to the property of her husband. Her children will take

the property and return the bones. Moreover, the concerned widow has to pay a fine (ka jingsang) to the kur of her deceased husband in order to perform a ceremony of divorce between her and the deceased.

In the above pages, a mention has been made that a man can dispose of his self-acquired property and the half of his personal earning. But there is a fear that by empowering him so, he can be very powerful. He can divest of his property to whomsoever he wants and that his wife will be nowhere and powerless.

In response to the protest by memorialists, the Government of Assam, in letter 9708-J of 1918 refused to allow wills for a male person in the following words:

The Chief Commissioner agrees with you and the Deputy Commissioner that it is not necessary at present to give to the Syntengs or any section of them a power to dispose of property by will, which they do not enjoy already. 3

Gift-giving of ancestral and self-acquired property to children has provided substitutes for wills as follows:

(a) The property is divided by parent during his/her life-time;

3. Ibid., p. 67.

(b) Information is given to the children by the parent while still alive of the share which he/she wishes them to get after his/her death. Such a promise has a moral rather than a legal effect or binding. The children respect these wishes if they are equitable. They are considered by society as having failed in their moral duty if they refuse to abide by this wish.

Gifts of ancestral property away from the heirs cannot be made without the consent of them. Such is an ancient custom which is necessary for the disposal of the dead and their bones by the relatives.

Gifts of self-acquired property can be disposed by the acquirer in his/her life-time without consent of the heirs.

With regard to ornaments or personal clothing that a son or a man has received from his mother and which are taken to the house of his wife and children, upon his death, must be returned together with his bones.

The self-acquired property of a man which he earns when his wife has died and while he remains unmarried after that will go to his mother or his youngest sister upon his death, whether he remains in the house of his relatives or that of his deceased wife.

With respect to the earning of rulers it all goes to the Syiem Sad (mother) of the said ruler, to his eldest sister or to his eldest maternal niece.

The mother of the deceased king can dispose a part of it to his wife and children and to her maternal relatives.

The self-acquired property which is kit-khih (kamai iing kur) an earning before marriage and beh-khih (kamai iing khun) an earning in the house of his wife and childre upon death of the mother of the house can become ancestral property. It is to be inherited by the youngest daughter. But if there is no daughter, it goes to the youngest son. If there are no children, it will devolve to the wife and her relatives.

The ancestral property of the king goes to the Syiem Sad or eldest maternal niece as the right of succession passes from the maternal uncle to the maternal nephew.

With regard to kingdoms which have no hereditary right of succession, the right of inheritance follows the same as it is done for private individuals in Khasi society.

In case a male or female person dies in the

that has become extinct, the king of that area looks after the necessary funeral rites of disposal of the corpse and for the depositing of bones. As he bears all necessary expenses, property of such person is taken over by the king.

With respect of male persons of such extinct clan, if they have children before they die, his children will see to the necessary cremation rites. But the bones have to be handed over to the king for proper deposition. The property of the deceased father can be used by the children. And as the king does the necessary bone deposition, whatever contribution is made in that occasion, will go to him.

Finally, any property within the kingdom which remains unclaimed becomes the property of the kingdom or raid and the basan raid (ruler of the raid) can see to its management and control.

A note is to be added with regard to the right of inheritance and possessions. A Khasi must inherit it in a rightful way and in a just way respectively. It must be such property that is justly earned and justly inherited as it is connected with religious performance for the dead.

The religious rites of the Khasis prohibit any unjust or unlawful earning to be mixed with rightful earning of the family (nongkhynraw or nongtymmen). To mix it will sully the whole earning rightfully earned by the family and clan.

The unlawful earning can be stolen goods or property, earning by lottery or gambling, what is dropped by people on the way, earning by cheating, earning by means of unlawful and sacrilegious marriage (ka shong sang), earning in adulterous living and any earning which is obtained by means of any action considered taboo.

A person who collects such unlawful property loses righteous earning before God and turns evil his own soul. When he brings such property to his own maternal relative's house or to his children's house, he causes abomination, woes and calamities upon his own family members or that of his children.

An analysis of the chapter

The relevance of the chapter is clearly shown by the necessary connection of the right of inheritance with that of proper performance of religious rites of disposal and final bone repository.

When somebody dies, it is customary for the relatives of the deceased to invite the maternal and paternal relatives as well as friends and neighbours. Fellow-villagers and neighbours are ready to come upon invitation for aid. Now it is a principle of good manners and appreciation to serve kwai and food. This itself involves a lot of expenditure. Added to this, the relatives have to provide the sacrificer whatever is necessary for funeral rites of disposal of the corpse. Eggs, goats, pigs, bulls and cocks are to be kept ready. The bier and the pyre have to be prepared. All these involve money. So far, one can say it is a universally accepted practice to do all that.

The Khasis go further in their funerary practice. They have also the depositing of bones at mawshyieng, mawphew and at mawbah. The last one is the most important social and religious event. It requires a lot of expenses in order to accomplish it. The youngest daughter has the obligation to supervise and bear the necessary cost. It is the typical matrilineal system of the Khasis which enables her to obtain the necessary money. This is by means of her right of inheritance of a larger part of the ancestral property, together with the ancestral house.

The division of property is unique. It depends on the religious need. The social need and the religious need are so intimately connected. The social function helps the religious one and vice versa. In fact, the social role of property is strongly based upon the religious one. The latter is normative of the former. Hence, the youngest daughter of the family and clan as she has the duty to fulfil the necessary religious function of final depositing of bones at the family cromlech for the whole clan receives the largest share of the ancestral property. Others do not have this obligation. They also do not have the same right and responsibility.

In the matrilineal system of social organization, inheritance goes to the daughters. If this is so, what is then the function and role of sons, and ultimately of man in the Khasi society? It is often spoken of that man in the Khasi society has no identity. He is a non-entity judging from the above conclusion. However, upon careful analysis, one can discover a wealth of functions entrusted to man in the Khasi society. It can be classified as follows:

(a) At a glance, it looks that man in Khasi Hills has no right and identity.

(b) At most he can claim a share of his self-acquired property.

(c) He can also have something of the ancestral property, depending that upon lack of female issues, he enjoys the property during his life-time; and secondly, if his parents express a desire to give a share of their property; the father, out of his self-acquired property, and the mother, out of the ancestral one which the children must abide upon their death.

(d) As maternal uncle, the man has the power of supervision: to see that property of the clan is properly administered. In this case, he becomes the manager. In respect to sale of property, it cannot be done so without consultation with the brothers and sisters and especially, the maternal uncle.

The youngest daughter of the family and clan is only the custodian of the ancestral property and house. She uses the fruit of the above property for the purpose to meet the expenses in the discharge of her religious duties for the final bone depositing at the family sepulchre. She also uses its income for the well-being of her brothers, sisters, aunties and uncles who suffer misfortune, sickness, hunger and loneliness. At the moment of

need, they all turn to her. She has to feed and help them. Hence, she deserves to have the right of inheriting the lion's share of the ancestral property.

Apart from what has been said above, she is not the sole heiress that she can do whatever she likes with such property. She can dispose of it only when all members concerned in the family and clan have agreed upon such decision.

She may even forfeit her right to inherit property as it is shown in the chapter. That depends on her style of life. If such manner of life is not in accordance with the rules and regulations of tradition and the code of conduct, she then loses her right to ancestral property. Moreover, she is bound to fulfil the necessary religious duties for the dead. She will be able to do so on condition that she behaves well. In conclusion, there is a necessary link between social function and the religious function. Such link is also intimately related to the manner of life one leads.

Property is for the religious need. If there is no religious duty, then there is no right of inheritance to property. Social obligation enables the parents to see to the social need of their children. The latter get

some share of the property to support their newly established families. The son gets some property and finance to settle well in his new family life and to support his wife and children. This is of course on a temporary basis. Daughters also get the right of inheritance to ancestral property in order to maintain their families. But they do not get much of it as they have no social and religious responsibility.

Religious functions are sacrosanct. The sanctity of religion must be observed by all means. Nothing sullied should be mixed with it. If money from dubious means is to be used for meeting the expenses of the religious rite, then the religious value goes. This perspective contributes a lot to the sense of honesty and hard work in Khasi society. It projects an image and a lesson that a just earning and honest work is more valuable and rewarding ultimately. Dishonest work and unjust earning leads one to ruin. Outwardly and immediately it may not be so. But finally, the former triumphs over the latter.

The above position affects every aspect of the human life, in word, thought and action. One has to be honest and sincere not only in money matters. He has to be so in everything: whether in trade, in work, in offices, in teaching, in dealing with others, in conversation and

in thinking. Hence, goes the ancient Khasi saying: 'kamai ia ka hok ba phin dup bam kwai ha iing u Blei' (Work honestly that you may live in eternal peace in God's abode). In turn, one's honest living affects efficaciously in his religious participation and duties.

A necessary conclusion demands for a just and better standard of life. As one advances in the scientific knowhow and in the skills of work and earning, he also deserves a better fare. It means that he can live a decent way of life. Poverty and the burden of life have loosened their grip over man. Naturally this leads to certain rights a man must have.

(a) He must enjoy the fruit of his hard-earned work. The Autonomous District Council of Khasi Hills has recently devised a way to enable man to claim some right to property. This is with respect to the self-acquired property (ka kamai nongkhynraw). However, this proposition has not been enacted. It has become only a white-elephant. Some parents have taken courage from this: to reward the children who deserve. That is, if any son or daughter behaves well and takes care of their parents, will have the right of inheritance to their ancestral and self-acquired property.

(b) A few families have taken up the idea of equity and fair dealing by allotting equally to all children their ancestral and self-acquired property. The War people of the Border Areas of Khasi Hills have this practice. The Khasis of mainland Khasi Hills have also taken up this example to a great extent.

(c) Some attempt is being made to make sons follow the footsteps of their father: namely, to learn the trade and business of their father. Daughters will not be able to do so in certain trades. It is reasonable, therefore, to hand over to each one, that is to sons and daughters, according to their talents and ability. Moreover, the present day mentality is to look for profit and gradual increase in one's earning. Such cannot be so if there is no proper succession and continuity.

(d) There is another aspect of the present trend. To treat all children equally by giving them equal opportunity to wealth, health, education, food and clothing. Division of property has its limit. It can be distributed as long as it is economically feasible. Wholesome upbringing of children is the norm of the day. It means parents must provide good health, sufficient food, clothing and fitting educational facilities to their children. They fail in their duty and responsibility if they are not able to provide them.

In short, one can see the occasion of death in the Khasi society to imply a lot of consequences. One important variable is that of right of inheritance to ancestral property. This right is necessary, in order to pave the way for the proper fulfilling of necessary religious rites and practices both for the living and especially for the dead.

Hence, the subject under study is truly relevant. Without this consideration, one may conclude, the religious performance may not also be there. Secondly, it requires a code of conduct to determine one's ability to perform the above religious duties.

Finally, the modality and occasion for parents to distribute their self-acquired and ancestral property is not regular. Parents may express their desire and allot the share to children individually or severally at different moments of time. To some they may have actually doled of, to others they just make an expression. Old age is more or less a sure timing for enacting of their handing over charge of property and goods. The moment of death determines their wish. Whatever has not been settled, the concerned members of the family will meet in council together with their maternal uncles so as to decide each case amicably. It is not so easy after all as there is

no written code in this issue. The flexibility of the situation may give rise to suit-cases to be determined by the court of law. Only time will enable Khasi society to devise a pliable way out of this mess.

Death is in conclusion the determining norm for allotment of shares to self-acquired and ancestral property. This division is ultimately on its behalf. Expenses and property are, therefore, involved. The economy of death is thus actualized.

CHAPTER VI

AN OVERVIEW

CHAPTER VI

AN OVERVIEW

The examination of the subject matter under study in the previous chapters shows the following ideas:

1. The religious perspective

Funeral rites is part of the complete rite de passage. The religious function of disposal of the dead is a very important one. It helps one to obtain God's forgiveness, to be at peace with one another and finally to assure one a lasting peace in God's house along with all the departed ancestors and ancestresses.

However, the purity of religious rites is much diluted now. Traditional believing Khasis are not sure of their religious rites and practices. They fear to make a mistake. Any incorrect performance will make the spirit of the dead wander around to torment the living members. It also shows that God is still displeased. It therefore impedes one's going to the destined abode in God's house.

Even in thang krei some prayers are said so that God who knows everything will do what is necessary for the departed.

In the Khasi religious practice, there is a preliminary stage called divination (ka shat ka khan) with the breaking of eggs and some other ways for making sure of the reason of the malady. Only after that, there follows a sacrifice of a cock, a goat, a pig and a bull.

Some sort of differentiation has been followed like in the example of thang krei, thang dieng tylli, thang bait-wait and thang lyntang. Each of these involves different degrees of expenditure in preparing the container to keep the corpse. It is also said that it is enough to have just a cock sacrifice and even prayers if one cannot afford to spend more so as to have a solemn religious function.

If this is so, why then, should so rich and complex a religious function as the Khasi religious rites of the dead disappear so nearly totally.

Having reviewed critically what has been described in the funerary rites, one can see in depth the essential belief of the Khasis. It is on the theory of life after death. This is an essential component of their belief system.

Life after death has its derivative from the traditional folklore. The Khasis once communed with God and his saints through the golden ladder (jingkieng ksiar). God descends and ascends through it. Likewise, the seven huts (ki hynniew-trep) communicated with God and the nine families (ki khyndai shajrong) through this means. But an enemy has snapped away this connection. What remains for the seven who were fortunately left on earth is by means of divination and sacrifice.

The Khasis, therefore, have in them this immanent longing: to reach God's house one day. That is their destined abode. Only then they can be happy fully and eternally. Funerary rites of disposal by cremation and bone depositing at cromlech will enable the departed to be together with their ancestors and ancestresses. Their prestine condition is normative of their present life on earth. At death they will also need to be together as one family. That is why members of the same clan will try their best to put all the bones of the deceased together as a symbolic sign of their union with themselves and with God.

The traditionalists believe in God's mercy and pardon as well as in the effectiveness of supplicatory prayers and sacrifice for their departed. That is why they follow the religious ceremonies so meticulously.

It is also an expression that they believe in the living God. Their God is creative and eternal. Otherwise how can there be such a longing in a non-existent one. He is also a good and helping God. He can help one when he is in a difficult condition of life. That is why by means of divination and sacrifice, God accepts the prayers of the living and forgives the deceased so as to give them life eternal. This is the basic element of their belief.

As they believe in the after life, they imagine the departed to have a life similar to those here on earth. It is this conception that makes them treat the dead as if they are alive needing the customary needs of any ordinary human being: food, drink, warding off evil and mutual help.

Moreover as it is said earlier in this chapter, an egg and cock alternatively means the same: the cock of the ancients who has been an expiator and victim for the sake of man in order to bring about a reconciliation with God and to bring the light of his presence and help to man.

As the cock has pleaded on behalf of the whole humanity (the seven huts), he is able also to intercede

by his death so as to obtain mercy and eternal life for the deceased. By his power of intercession, no evil power can hinder the departed from reaching God's abode.

The cock is therefore an important victim of sacrifice in the traditional religion. It is very interesting that the crowing of the cock is good news to man. In the early dawn it awakens man for the great hope of a new day. Thrice it crows. The third time really brings about the sunlight. It must have meant great relief and comfort to the Khasis of old that the light of day is coming, and that he can still continue his daily activity and communion with each other. Calculating from the cock's crow, one can imagine different times of the day. It is indeed very mysterious that this creature can be so informative and helpful to man.

The use of the cock and other animals for the sacrifice is indicative of the historical stage of life the Khasis were in. They have passed through the period of life called the neolithic age whereby man has learned to domesticate animals for their daily use as food, sacrifice and work. It is also a stage of cultivation. It means that their life has become settled. They have left their wandering stage behind. An exception to this rule cannot, however, be ruled out.

The crowing of the cock brings about sunlight. The sun is creative in its function. It gives warmth and light to all living beings. The sun is feminine in the Khasi mentality. In Khasi folklores, it is described as a beauty. It is wooed by the moon (male) and by the peacock (u klew). The moon is, of course, her own blood brother. It is taboo to marry her. He commits sang (sacrilege) to offer his hand to her for the purpose of marriage. The inherent meaning of this is therefore for preserving and continuing the practice of endogamous exogamy prevailing in Khasi society.

The peacock is married to the sun. But he is unfaithful to her. He leaves her for the yellow blossoms of the fields in the plains. He is deceived by his eyes. But he cannot go back to his beloved. The sun weeps for him. Her tears are the reason of the varied bright hues on the feathers of his wings. This is a lesson of warning against infidelity in married life. It also shows the dignity and sanctity of marriage to which one must promote and preserve at all cost.

The most important of all is the idea that by the sin of man, the sun has hidden herself. The outcome is darkness. In the dark, of course, there is fear for all. Only the wicked roam around to display their might

and whims. The plight of man is beyond imagination. It is the cock who has volunteered to intercede before God on man's behalf so as to allow the sun to appear once again in the world of man. The appearing of the sun is thus the sign of man's reconciliation with God and with his fellowman.

Added to this, there is another important component of belief. Though sacrifices are important, one has to follow the norm of life: call it the code of conduct in order to obtain life with God eternally. This norm is: kamai ia ka hok ba phin dup bam kwai ha iing u Blei (live well and honestly so that you can live happily in the eternal abode with God). Such is an important social and personal code of conduct which helps in their daily social relationship. It also directs one's daily activities: that one must not cheat and treat each other harshly and dishonestly. Again, one is to work honestly and intelligently in order to earn a living and to be a means of help to each other in society. This is a sufficient injunction of conscience which can help the Khasis in their behaviour, attitude and thinking.

The way one lives is also conditional of the type of end he will meet. When one has lived dishonestly and a bad life, he meets a sad end. By this unnatural and

violent end, one is to undergo a purificatory religious rite, otherwise he becomes a wandering spirit that torments and harms the living as he will not be able to reach his destined abode.

Man begins his life here on earth and has his end at death. Hence, to the Khasis, there are the seven steps. They are both religious and social: namely, ka jer ka thoh (naming ceremony), ka pyneh-rngiew (confirmation), ka iasip iabam dkhot (participation at sacrificial portions), ka synjat lator (marriage), u lyngdoh nongknia (sacrificer), at time of sickness (haba pang), and at the time of death (haba iap briew). Hence, the Khasi man has to undergo these different stages of life before he attains eternal life with God.

In his religious practice, the maternal uncle (namely, the male member) is the official sacrificer. But the youngest daughter is also the one to provide whatever is necessary for the religious rite and for the expenses. One can easily notice the different division of religious duties. Again, one can see the importance which is given equally to man and to woman. But in spite of all that one can notice that the official religious function is always done only by man (male). Though a Khasi female is highly exalted in position in the matrilineal set-up, yet she has no right in the religious sphere.

It is in this light that funerary rites are the last step in our human life. It concludes it. It is an integral part of it. Without this life will be incomplete.

In the above analysis, one can already see that the traditional Khasis make a clear-cut distinction between the sacred and the profane. It is this sense that even though they do not follow exactly the traditional religious rite of disposal and bone depositing, they, however, display great respect for those places where religious functions have been held. Places like mawshyieng and mawbyinna set-up during religious disposal of the dead are not destroyed. Destruction of them becomes iconoclastic.

2. The social perspective

It easily strikes the eye of a non-Khasi at the big gathering of people at such social event like when somebody dies in the village, locality or family in a Khasi society.

This social sense is mutual. It has now reached such an extent that if anyone happens to occasionally shun such vital events of need, then his neighbours and friends will avoid him when he is in need. This feeling of responsibility for each other is still in vogue in the villages. Unless something is unavoidable, everyone will try to attend such family in need.

It is an embodiment of etiquette and a sense of belonging and service that a family in such straits should inform the village headman so that he can send the announcers to inform the villagers to come to the rescue of the bereaved family. The menfolk will see to the preparation of the cremation site and the bier, and in the cutting of meat and cooking. The womenfolk will be busy with preparing of kwai and its distribution to invitees, to serve food to them, to wash the dishes, to clean the rice-grains, to decorate the bier and to prepare flower-bouquets. In earlier times, they help pound the rice for a special bread called u pu-rynsi, pu-japha, pu-syep and pu-khleim.

Perhaps it is due to this social sanction that prevails for such occasions of need that friends feel morally and practically obliged to participate in order to help the family in need. This sort of help goes round in turn from one family to another.

Apart from this obligation, it is naturally inscribed in the mentality of the Khasis to spontaneously come to the aid of people in need. Perhaps it is the modern mentality such infused by the influence of non-Khasis who are not so inclined to be of help that they have become a little reserved. Though this influence is great, their sociability is still noticeable to any outside spectator.

It is a pity that such social awareness and attitude should gradually vanish from the Khasi society and mentality.

With the onset of modernity, new job opportunities, need of migrating to far distant places for work and better standard of living, there is a gradual change in the means of earning. More people work in government offices and in private enterprises like business, workshops, carpentry and other skilled labour away from the land and fields. A sense of profitability has entered the mind of the people. They compare and contrast seeing the pros and cons. Where there is more profit, there they would put in more attention. Such an attitude has adversely affected the social sense of togetherness and cooperation among the Khasis to a great extent. A restrained reaction prevails when someone dies in any neighbouring family. Individualism becomes the new rule of one's behaviour, attitude and life-style.

A difference in religious practice and belief systems has also affected to a great degree the feeling of belonging and helping each other in need. There can be cases when neighbours and blood relatives who profess different religious beliefs rejoice at the misfortune of others.

Only an urgent social need that affects everybody can awaken one's social sense and mutual need. Recent cases of social upheaval against stringent measures of the Government or of one ethnic group against another, have brought together the indigenous population. Differences of religion, geographical distance and high cost of living do not hamper them.

Whatever may be the case, the occasion of death and funeral rites have indeed brought the Khasis together irrespective of their professing any religious belief. One is still at heart a relative or a friend to another. It is an opportunity for people to come to know each other and to learn of their kinship ties to one another. It is also an opportune time for expressing their social sense and solidarity.

The modern spirit has no doubt disturbed the above social sense. Apart from what has been written earlier in this perspective, a little more can be dwelt upon this subject for clearer understanding of the situation.

The British raj has affected the peaceful existence of the local Khasis. They go for education and become qualified for a job. They are posted to different areas of work. Such situation has hampered them greatly from

the easy and convenient fulfilment of social obligation and religious duties. It becomes difficult, at times impossible for them to carry out the various demands of disposal for the dead and bone depositing. The least that they can do is to attend the funeral rites of their relatives.

With the rise of new form of government and administration, influence of education, influence of other people having different social and religious customs and practices, new fashions and eating habits, new housing styles, new outlook, new avenues of work and business, the local population have been immensely influenced. The traditionalist Khasi are likewise captivated like every one else by the spirit of modern ideas and new life-style. Such new influence has greatly done away with whatever is traditionally followed in the manner of dress, eating, housing, behaviour and social relationship. In certain respects, there is something good to add to the traditional one and something detrimental as well.

The Pocket Oxford Dictionary gives the connotation of modernisation as (1) an adaptation to modern needs and habits; and (2) as an adoption of modern ways and views. As part of the process of growth and development, every tribe and people on earth do take up to this new

spirit of living. They cannot remain completely isolated from others. The process of change may be slow or fast. But the certainty of it is there. No one can escape it. One can also be influenced by what is formative or deformative to one's growth and development.

It is this new spirit of freedom of thinking and way of life which can affect adversely one's belief and practice. It is this which has also affected the traditional believing Khasis. By this influence, they are much watered down in their religious belief and practice.

What can be noticed is also the Khasis' social, egalitarian and democratic spirit. This is an important contribution to social relationship. It is normative to one's behaviour and attitude. It is this democratic and egalitarian spirit which has attracted the attention of many great Indian leaders. They applaud the local population in this respect. They also imitate and modify it according to the needs of the country.

3. The political perspective

Death of an ordinary man may not affect the social situation of a society. But if an influential and public person dies, it does create a vacuum and even loss to the social framework. Everybody feels the loss of his

absence. It means that an important person does play an important and vital role to social well-being and life. Such is also occurring in the Khasi society. When a local king dies, it is a big loss if the person has done well, and they feel relieved if he has been a problem to them.

Another aspect is the problem of succession. Who will succeed the deceased ruler. The Khasi traditional custom as it is observed in Sohra kingdom is matrilineal in form. The nephew follows the maternal uncle. But to do so, political intrigues are involved. Each party will desire their own choice.

Some local Syiemship however do not have the successional form. When an incumbent dies, the public can select any fit person. It is not necessary that he must be a kin of the deceased. Political tactics are also at play in this respect.

What is discussed above has shown that death does play a political role. It gives an occasion for the living to fight for the man of their own liking.

The successional system in Sohra Syiemshi peculiar indeed. The one who will succeed must be both fit and capable. He must be fit, that is, he must belong to a proper family which has successional rights. He must

also have intelligence and is capable in administration and rule. He must also be capable, that is, he must be able to expedite the funeral rites and ceremonies for the deceased king with due pomp and solemnity, according to the rules and regulations laid down from of old. Such a person only can succeed.

Marbisu Sirdarship has certain conditions at play. One must be a member of the Kurbah clan, the Langstieh clan and the Sun clan. He then can have the right to stand for an election. This event of electing a new Sirdar occurs when the previous one has died. It is based on a life term.

Sirdarship on the whole in Khasi Hills is by free election. Any one can stand for the post of Sirdar upon the demise of the previous one. Sirdarship can be for life or for a term.

The post as is said above can be for a term or two after which one has no right to seek for a third one. But usually it is for life. It means that as long as a ruler lives and is capable to perform his duty he continues to rule. Only his old age and death can prevent him from ruling. Another successor comes in according to set rules of succession.

The event of death has enabled candidates to succeed to different ranks of ruling. The Sohra Syiemship has set-rules that the newly elect king must perform the funerary rites before he can be able to reign the kingdom. In the latter part, one can notice the close relationship between the social, political and religious aspect. One can attain politically to the highest social rank as a ruler or basan only if he can perform with due pomp and solemnity the funeral rites and practices befitting the deceased king. The correlation is sine qua non. The act of religious function is consequential to one's being crowned a king. Yet one can be crowned a king only because he is able to perform such religious rites as solemn as possible. One cannot be without the other. One cannot be a king without performing the religious rites of disposal. But at the same time, one cannot perform the religious duties without being crowned a king.

The political perspective takes place in a social milieu. The king is not only to be able. He must be fit. He has to fit in according to the traditions set up by a society. Normally a maternal nephew will succeed to the post left vacant by the deceased maternal uncle. Of course the personal qualities of head and heart are also included in this choice. It means that such a ruler can

also be beneficial to the welfare of the subjects. Such is an ideal which a Khasi chief is supposed to perform. He must be someone fully concerned for the needs of his subjects. His important concern is for proper and just rule. Yet he has also to pay attention to the material needs of his poor subjects. The needy and the down-trodden as well as those who are without kith and kin will find solace, refuge and help from the king. The traditional phrase for such a sympathetic king is u dei u syiem u kmie (he is the king who behaves like a mother to his subjects).

When a king has died, the relatives will preserve his body in their house by soaking in lime and honey. When a suitable person has been found who is fit and able will dispose the body as it is mentioned earlier. This time of preservation is unique and original to the Sohra Syiemship.

A question may arise. Why should they wait for so long a time for disposal of the deceased ruler. Can they not follow just anyhow. At least they can perform the religious part without giving full weight to the social and economic aspects. To provide eggs, cocks, goats, pigs and bulls for the religious rites of disposal will not be so difficult. But to provide food and drink to all

attendants is really difficult. Somehow this aspect seems to escape their attention and thinking. Tradition has given it this way. It must be observed.

With respect to giving of surname, inheritance and religious belief, Khasis in general are slow to change and to adapt to new ways of life and thinking. Even with the great influence by people having different social customs and practices, they still linger on to the old social set-up.

To conclude, one may not side-track this issue of politics with regard to the event of death of certain persons. It is, however, a universal issue. It is being observed and followed in other peoples as well. The difference is in the way of succession. It may be through dictatorship, by free election, or by hereditary rights of succession as British kings and Sohra Syiemship.

4. The economic perspective

On the vital occasion of death of a member in the family, whether an adult, baby, male or female, rich or poor, high or low, something has to be spent for the purpose of religious ceremonies and for feeding of relatives and friends. The difference is only in the extent of spending. A stranger to the Khasi society will immediately notice this characteristic.

At times, one out of deference to human respect and appreciation, is obliged to exceed his means. Others, fearing the huge expenditure, feel inclined to do away with the necessary religious ceremonies, though this may not be the only reason. Perhaps another intrinsic reason is that the official sacrificer does not know any longer what he is supposed to fulfil. Fearing repercussion to his incorrect and inappropriate performance, he declines to oblige for the necessary religious rites of disposal. That is why thang krei has become the present common phenomenon. However even though the exact religious ceremonies of old are not carried out at present, spending is still unavoidable.

It is a custom for Khasis to spend on such occasion. This is a unique feature which can be easily noticed. There does not seem to be any effort at lessening of this spending spree. They may go to such extent as to borrow money to save the honour of the family for the above occasion. In this way, it has brought great hardship to many Khasi families for repayment of the debt. They may have to sell whatever they have: land and belonging. Thus they are often reduced to poverty.

Some invitees take advantage of the above occasion at the expense of the relatives of the deceased. At times

such feeding may lead to spread of infectious diseases when proper precaution and care is not taken. There are instances of sickness and death to participants at such events.

Another factor which encourages the Khasis to spend and to celebrate is their belief in the after-life for the dead. They 'feast' as they believe that their departed ones will reach a new life: to be for ever in God's house with their ancestors and ancestresses. That is their true abode which is destined for every Khasi. They celebrate as the departed ones leave this world of misery and a temporary one as well. Their philosophy is thus: u moina ba la lait na ka ruh-bynda (the mina which has been set free from the cage). The world is to them a temporary dwelling place (ka pyrtnei shongbasa).

The problem of expenditure is thus discussed. There is something to add to this. The Khasis believe that serving food will please the departed relatives. The latter will bless the living relatives to prosper, to increase in population and to be free from any danger. Moreover, it is their expression of appreciation and etiquette to the attendants. And if they do not do so they offend the dead.

One may discuss that the family is not alone in the spending. Other married brothers and sisters, uncles and aunties as well as friends may also help the bereaved family.

Apart from the question of spending at the time of death and disposal and during the bone depositing ceremony, there is also another economic consideration. It is the area of inheritance to ancestral and self-acquired property of father, mother or maternal uncle who have succumbed to death. This is also generally effected with the event of death.

The Khasi customary law of inheritance has favoured the youngest daughter as the rightful heiress to ancestral property. The first reason is that she is the rightful custodian of all religious duties in the disposal of the dead and the bone depositing. Secondly, she has to take care of her aged father and mother, uncles and aunties, brothers and sisters and close relatives who have suffered from any misfortune: sickness, orphaned, or poverty. They all come to her house. It is her duty to help them. Hence, the youngest daughter of the family and clan receives the largest part of the above property from her parents. The other sisters will also receive but of a smaller share.

Even though it is shown above that the youngest daughter gets the largest share: ancestral property (land and the ancestral house) and ornaments, yet she is not entitled to dispose of such property as she wishes. She will need to consult her maternal uncles, brothers and sisters. Upon their consent only she can dispose of a part or all of the property upon a valid reason.

The above right is given to the youngest daughter according to traditional custom. The title is however conditional. If she remains in her traditional religion. If she has not joined a new religion. If she has behaved well. If her parents are pleased with her behaviour. If she has not committed any crime like sang. As she can provide the necessary religious needs, she can rightfully claim for the use of the ancestral property.

So before a mother dies, she can already allot or express her wish to divide her ancestral property to her daughters. She can give something to her sons so as to start a new family life. The latter will have to return such property upon their demise. This is done by his wife and children. The father can likewise do so with regard to his self-acquired property (nongkhynraw when he earns during his youth, or what he has earned in his married life). The children usually abide by the expressed will

of their parents. It is an offence if they fail to do so. Any one who breaks the promise given by the parents will not be blessed by the deceased and will be a laughing stock in public.

Though it looks smooth in the division of property, it is not always so. Intrigues and self-interest may arise so as to get the property to oneself. The customary law is however flexible and unwritten. On the question of disputes, a council of all married brothers and sisters with their uncles and aunties is required. Even then the solution may not be found. Some may enter upon law-suit in order to obtain one's ambition. However the flexibility of the property issue helps to arrive to some amicable solution.

There are attempts to entitle the man for inheritance. But the traditionalists are afraid to do so. They fear that a man may become powerful. He may not think for his own kith and kin. He may dispose of all his property and earning to his own wife and children. But the trend is set at present. The father is becoming more responsible for the welfare of his own family. He is taking less interest of his relatives however close they may be. At the point of sickness and misfortune, he does not need to go back to his own maternal relatives. His wife and children will take care of him.

The modality of allotment of property is gradually changing. Certain property which requires skill and management is given to sons to manage. Some families give shares to all children irrespective of sons and daughters. The bill of self-acquired property of the Autonomous Khasi Hills District Council has not been passed. But its spirit has penetrated into the minds of some families.

The Khasi society is not different from any human society. Death is a determining factor on the economic issue. Some human societies may not be so extravagant with regard to the disposal of the dead rites and ceremonies nor with giving of food and drink. Certain sophisticated societies hand over this responsibility to an agency. One needs only to pay them. It depends upon what type of burial one desires that one has to pay accordingly. The Agency will follow his direction. This itself has become a new direction and way of behaviour in the spending on the occasion of death of any member of the family.

As the Khasis still have great respect for their dead, they try to enhance the occasion as far as they can financially. The economy of death is a reality. It is an important issue. It can be a uniting or a dividing means for the living family members. When each living relative has thought and concern, then everything runs

smoothly and each feels united to one another. If this is not so, the family members become estranged from one another.

5. The impact of traditional religion

One important aspect arising from the funeral rites and practices is the normative code of conduct. It is this which determines one's behaviour and attitude in life. It is this which also in a way formulates the future: what he will attain in the next. If one has not led a good life, he cannot expect to attain a happy one in the next. Hence, the Khasi philosophical code of conduct is: kamai ia ka hok ba phin dup leit bam kwai ha ling u Blei. Such code of conduct can give a right direction in one's behaviour and attitude. It leads to a person's good conscience. This is a universal principle. The traditional Khasi religion has contributed immensely to human society by this directive. If anyone irrespective of sex, caste or creed, race and nation, acknowledges this principle in one's life and practices it, the human social dealing and relationship will be much better off.

Christians have taken this stand as an immediate step to the teaching of Christ who has come to make perfect whatever is good and valuable in any human society. The traditional religion is thus not looked down upon. Rather it is appreciated for its sound teaching.

Added to this, no doubt there is in any human society the sense of sin and culpability. There is a need to expiate for them. There is an expiator for that. Prayers and sacrifice are necessary so as to obtain God's mercy and forgiveness. The cock is an important created agent to serve the purpose of the Khasis in the area of his faults and shortcoming.

This is also an important contribution to human society. It is common knowledge that no one is perfect. Everyone has faults and mistakes in some degree. By means of this shortcoming, one offends God and the neighbour. One needs the forgiveness of the neighbour and of God. Prayers and sacrifice are the right means to attain mercy, forgiveness and help of God. The traditional Khasis acknowledge this human frailty and know that there is a way out for this.

The Christian moral norm is as follows: Do what is right and avoid what is evil. In this way, one's way of life and action is guided by do's and dont's: positive and negative commands. In one respect, they are clear-cut. At the same time, they seem to curtail one's human freedom of action and thought. All what one needs to do is to abide the mid-path. He cannot get outside of this periphery.

The traditional religious norm is positive. There is no indication of the negative. Perhaps, the only implicit meaning is that one may not reach God's abode if he does not follow the command: kamai ia ka hok ba phin dup leit bam kwai ha iing u Blei (live honestly and righteously so that you may reach God's eternal abode).

Comparing the two different commands: one can notice, the Christian moral code seems to be down-to-earth, while that of the traditional religion of the Khasis is from 'earth to heaven', or from this 'worldly to the after-life.'

The traditional religion has contributed also in the sphere of sin. Its concept of sin is however moralistic than religious. It is more social-oriented. For instance, shong sang (cohabitation and marriage within the same clan) is more socially-oriented. The social norm of matrilineal system directs one's way of life and behaviour. From this social sphere, the religious sphere is also affected. Because of breaking of the social taboo, one displeases God. The latter will not be able to forgive such shortcoming.

Those who have fallen into the above shortcoming can be cleansed through prayers, sacrifices and washing

of bones at the umkoi. In this way, it seems to imply that one's faults and mistakes can be ritually purified, viz., mechanically. The personal sorrow and resolution does not seem necessary. The personal aspect like one being truly sorry from the depth of his own heart seems to be absent.

The traditional art and culture have made a dent into the life-style and religious rites of Christians. This is in the area of language and dance. This is another important contribution from the traditionalists. It is this aspect which preserves one's identity and projects it likewise to the world. It is the common trend to promote one's custom and culture. It is also hurting the ethnic emotion if the unique art and culture of a people is spited upon. Wars and conflicts may set in just because others do not respect the art and culture of others. It is also the spirit of modern age to respect the integrity of art and culture of others. It is a spirit of freedom and of 'let live'. It becomes undemocratic if one interferes and curtails them in others.

The modality of funerary rites and practices is also a unique art and culture of a specific ethnic group which one must respect even if he does not promote it. So the way Khasis bathe the dead, dressing them up after

that, putting food and egg and sacrifice of a cock, goat, pig or bull is also art and culture. The way that they deposit the bones at mawshyieng, mawhew and mawbah is also a unique Khasi expression.

6. The impact of Christianity

Christ is the greatest expiator to a Christian. He replaces the cock and all animal victims of sacrifice. The latter are not so efficacious as Christ. He is both victim and sacrificer. Animal victims are not sacrificer. He has proved his topmost superiority. His death on the Cross has washed away the sins of humankind. One needs only to acknowledge this new reality and must lead a new, good life. Then he can obtain God's help and blessing and be reconciled with him. He is looked up as God-incarnated into the truly human reality and situation. He is like us in everything except sin. Such a proposition is considered superior. This impact has gone deep into the lives of converts into Christianity. They leave the traditional one in order to embrace the new one as projected by the Christians.

Many are much influenced by the Christian moral code of do's and dont's. They are clear-cut. They look simplistic. They seem to deny one's full freedom to speak, think and act. In the ordinary affairs of the day, tradi-

tional Khasis and others as well follow this guideline. Let alone moral norms and religious sanctions, one may even notice this influence in economics, games and sports and in every sphere of life.

To a Christian, marriage is to be enacted through a religious function. The religious norm like first and second degree of consanguinity is directive to one's invalid marriage. This is an impediment which is looked as God-given. There is no such prohibition for one to marry within the clan, provided that the relationship is distant in degree of relationship. However Christianity is a great respecter of art and culture of every race and nation. It does the same towards the culture and social system of the Khasis. Even though it does not see any difficulty for marriage within the same clan, it however respects the sentiments of the local populace.

Funerary rites and practices are simpler and less meticulous than that of the indigenous religion. Yet its promise is much realistic. By the blood and promise of Christ especially his words: 'I go to prepare a place for you', the Christians are more hopeful of life eternal with God. The cock's promise of expiation may be realistic but his action is less meritorious. The latter is far less worthy as he is lower in rank, status and being than

Christ is. Such promise has indeed captivated many traditionalists that they change to a new religious belief. They see in this new religion a better promise of their intrinsic longing. Here is a fulfilment of their long-awaited expectation.

The Christian concept of sin is more integral and total. It is a deliberate and conscious commission and omission of God's command of a good life. Infraction of it brings about a distortion and break-away of relationship with God and man. The fall is personal. It is a doing away with right personal relationship. Yet one can attain pardon and blessing if he is sorry for it and is resolved not to do it again. Some Christian denominations stop just like that so as to obtain God's forgiveness and blessing. Others feel the need of a clear sign of forgiveness through one who has been empowered to do so by a religious function. By means of this power, a believer is forgiven of all his sins before his end. By so doing, he believes that he is reconciled with God and man, for the God's representative here amidst humankind absolves in the name of God and of his religious community. He is put at peace to reach God's dwelling place in heaven. There he will live happily for ever, praising God with all the saints. The traditionalists find once again a fulfilment of his

long-awaited longing by means of this concept of sin and its solution.

While in traditional religion, the dead are remembered after the funerary rites of disposal after a month and a year, the Christians remember their dead relatives all the time by praying for them and by renouncing oneself as a sort of mortification and penance of whatever is lawfully alright in one's daily action like in food and drink, in dress, etc. Instead of one being extravagant, he saves. Whatever he saves he gives to the poor and the hungry. By doing so, he believes he is doing a good act which becomes meritorious for the departed relatives. This attitude is also a great fulfilment of whatever has been found in the traditional religion.

The revivalist group Seng Khasi has realized the tremendous impact of Christianity. That is why it is reacting to this impelling force. As the Christians have set prayers and hymns in their religious services, the group also has prayers and hymns. Christians have houses of formation for their own members. The Seng Khasi is also now having a special school to teach one how to divine and to make sacrifices.

Christian religion is universal. Everyone is accepted into its fold irrespective of sex, caste or race and

creed. All become brothers and sisters in one belief, in Christ and in one baptism. The brotherhood is a universal one. It is a huge family of faith. The departed of this community are remembered by any one irrespective of caste and race. This is unlike in traditional Khasi religion. The latter remembers only the members of their own clan. But the clan is a very small community in comparison to that of the Christians. The latter is thus far superior in its perspective and ambit. It creates a strong impact among the traditionalists. They do not become any longer an isolated community. They become members of a bigger community. While being so, they do not at the same time lose their identity and uniqueness. They can become simultaneously particular and universal. In their particularity, they are unique and identical in their art and culture. Yet they are universal, as they become brothers and sisters in the world-wide community of believers of the same faith and practice. They are like the multi-coloured flowers in a beautiful garden of fraternity and fellowship. As they are united in one faith here on earth with God as their father, they are also united as brothers and sisters in the next.

The maternal uncle of traditional religion is the official priest. The one who has been empowered by

religious action is the 'uncle' to perform the religious functions. He can belong to any tribe, race and nation. There is no limit for his functions. Such insight has made a great impact on the local populace. While the traditional one is very much limited, that of the Christians is much broadened. The official priest of the Christians can perform religious functions for any one who belongs to this same faith.

The Christian position gives a broader outlook. One can become a Christian without losing his ethnic identity. For instance, he can become a Christian and a true Khasi at the same time. This proposition and standpoint has given them a new identity, sense of purpose and outlook. Its impact is greater than that of the traditional religious outlook of the Khasis. The latter's religion is limited only to the family and clan.

Funerary rites and practices in the Khasi mainland has given to an inquirer deep insights in religious belief, in social dealing, treatment of economy, politics and the mutual impact with Christianity and modernism.

The subject matter is vast, intricate, complex and interesting. It is up to the inquirer to prove the worth of this finding.

If this paper has served the purpose of inquiry and truth, then the person who has studied and prepared it feels truly satisfied.

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GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

Ai Bam - To give food. This phrase has two connotations: Firstly, it means to serve food to attendants at the funerary rites of disposal of the dead. Secondly, it means to keep some food near the corpse. The belief is that the dead live on in the next life. They need the food on their journey towards their destined abode in God's house so as to be together with their first ancestress (Iawbei and Suidnia).

Bam kwai - To eat betel. Khasis are fond of eating betel. The mixture is simple. It consists only of betel nut, leaves and lime. They eat when they sit down with friends. When friends visit their homes, they express their love and friendship by giving of kwai. It is also an expression of good manners to do so.

There is a story to explain its origin in the Khasi society. A poor man and a rich man were great friends. It happens one day that

the rich man goes to the house of the poor man. The latter wishes to give him something. But he has nothing. He feels so ashamed of his sad plight. He takes a knife and kills himself. The wife searches him and seeing him dead, she takes the blood-stained knife and kills herself. The good rich man wonders of their absence. He enters the inner portion of the house. He saw that both were dead. He realises that the cause of their death is because they are too poor to give him anything. He feels so sad for this. He also takes the knife and kills himself.

A thief chances to reach the house. He sees that nobody is in the house. It is so quiet. He enters it. He searches for anybody. He wonders why it is so silent. In the interior he senses some blood flow. This is the end for him. If people find him here they will accuse him. But if he runs away, people will be after him. He also takes the knife and pierces himself to death.

God seeing this terrible happening decides to help man. He creates betel nut (kwai), betel-leaf (tympew), lime (shun) and tobacco (dumasla).

These materials represent the rich man, poor man, his wife and the thief. From thence onwards kwai is an important means for Khasis to express their etiquette, love and friendship to each other.

Banat long - Woollen cloth or flannel. It is used to cover the bier. Its colour is black.

Banat saw salu - Red flannel.

Beh tympem - To chase away the evil one. This is done during the bone depositing at mawbah. Early in the morning before the relatives and friends set out to reach the stone-cairn, they conduct the above ritual.

Youth take sticks and beat around the house and on the way toward the stone-cairn. The idea is to chase away the evil one so that the deceased can go unimpeded to his destined abode in God's house. If anything and anybody happens to stray that way, he will be beaten to death. Prior warning is of course given to the villagers to avoid the place.

Blei nongbuh nongthaw - God is acknowledged by the traditional religion as a creative one. He makes

everything that are visible and invisible. Besides him, there is no other. His existence is thus taken for granted.

The spirits of the dead go to his abode as their destiny.

Buh shyieng - To deposit the bones at stone-cairn. This is a traditional practice by followers of the indigenous religion.

Such an act of depositing takes place at three different stages. At the individual level, it is called mawshyieng. When bones of several deceased members of the clan are kept together at another cairn, the repository is called mawphew mawkynroh. The final bone repository for the bones of all deceased members of the clan or family is called mawbah. The last one is the most solemn and most expensive one.

To perform the above final ceremony, the living family members of the same clan must come to a common understanding to do so, to fix the date and to pool money from everybody.

Kha - To give birth. The affinal relatives are also

called ki kha ki man. This kinship is formed by marriage. All the relatives from the father's side are called such.

The Khasis have great respect and appreciation for the relatives of the father. The reason is that due to him, the clan of the wife is enabled to have increase in population.

As a sign of homage to the father's relatives who have given him to the wife's clan, the children manifest special signs of respect called ka nguh meikha pakha.

During this nguh meikha pakha the children bring gifts and presents to the relatives of the father. The diviner (a maternal uncle of the children) expresses gratitude and respect to the relatives of the father. The latter also extend blessings upon the former.

On the occasion of death from his wife's relatives, the paternal relatives come to offer their presents like cock, goat, pig and bull. These offerings are called ka pynkham ka pynsoh. The front part of these animals is used for the sacrifice. The hind-part is returned to

the givers. They in turn take it home for their prayers and celebration.

Khad - To perform a sacrifice with cocks. It can be on behalf of the living members or for the deceased. The purpose is to seek God's forgiveness for the faults and shortcomings of the living and of the dead.

The cock is traditionally an important sacrificial victim to expiate the sins of man. He is a go-between with God and man. By it, man is reconciled with God and vice versa.

Khaw - Rice-grains. These are sprinkled around the house and on the route towards the cremation site as well as on the way to the mawshyieng, mawphew and mawbah.

Rice-grains are pounded. Soaked in water to form a dough, they are steamed. They can also be fried in oil. The former type is called pu rynsi and the latter is called pu khlein. If they are kept near the corpse, they are called pu japha.

Rice is a daily staple food. It serves the living. It also serves as a viaticum (food for

the journey), for the departed spirits on their way to the destined place in God's dwelling.

Khyndai shajrong - The nine families in heaven. According to Khasi folktale, in the golden age, God and the nine communed with the seven (ki hynniew trep) by means of the golden ladder (jingkieng ksiar).

The enemy destroyed the bridge. The seven are left on earth, but the nine are in heaven. They are considered as saints in heaven. They enjoy God's presence. The seven can enter this abode by means of death and the funerary rites of disposal.

Klong u skaw - A utensil made of clay, silver or gilded with gold. It is rounded in shape and has a small opening.

Vegetable creepers have pumpkin-like fruits. They are also called klong. When dried up and the inner portion is cleaned out, the hollow can be used to contain water.

The utensil is used for water to use at the sacrifice of the sacrificial animals.

Kni - Maternal uncle. In the Khasi matrilineal system of social organization, the maternal uncle is a very important person who holds a prominent role in the clan socially and religiously. Without his consent no social nor religious function can be carried out.

His position and role is diminishing at present.

Knia - Sacrifice. It can be a verb or a noun. Sacrifice is present when victims of sacrifice are slaughtered. The sacrificer performs it either for the living or for the dead as a supplication for God's mercy, forgiveness and blessing.

Religion without sacrifice (ka niam khlem jingknia) is considered not so meritorious. Whenever there is a religious function, sacrifice is a must.

Kpep - It is a cremation-site. It is a construction for the purpose of cremation. It is made of stones with a hollow beneath for putting firewood and to kindle fire.

Once a funerary rite is performed, the place is considered set apart. No one is allowed to

demolish it except when the members of the clan have shifted to another place or the place is truly needed for public use.

Krong - It is a frame to contain the corpse. It can be carried by the bearers to the cremation site.

It can be made of bamboo or wooden posts.

Ksing - It is a special drum for use at cremationary rites of someone who is rich or noble. It is used for male dancing as well as to lead the procession to the cremation ground. It adds to the solemnity of the occasion.

Kur - The consanguinal relatives who bear the same surname or originating from the same ancestress. The latter can be first ancestress (Iawbei tym-men) or second generation ancestress (Iawbei khynraw).

In this social matrilineal system, the father cannot claim surname of children to himself nor can he inherit anything for himself. All surnames go to the mother, and inheritance goes to the daughters.

Khyrwait - A form of killing by twisting the neck of the cock so as to prevent loss of blood of the sacrificial victim.

Dak ki shin - ki shympriah-ti, ki shympriah-jat - Imprints which can be discovered on the following morning after the day of cremation.

It is believed that if there are footprints or finger-prints, it means that somebody will die from the bereaved family.

Having learned of this, the family is not to take this situation lightly. They must immediately call the sacrificer to ward off the evil plan.

It is said that evil men can cause the wandering spirits to torment and harm the members of the bereaved family. It can be that he bears a grudge or is jealous of the family.

Dkhot - Inner portions of the sacrificial animal which are used to offer to God and for the deceased. The members of the clan will have to participate in them by eating a piece each from them.

Depending on each family lineage and background, some have five (5), seven (7), or nine (9)

different inner portions of the sacrificial animal. They can be the heart, the lungs, liver, entrails, pancreas, and so on.

Diengshat - It is a wooden frame specially prepared for egg-breaking in order to look for signs according to what has been placed before God.

Diengshit - A special type of tree whose leaves are tapering from branches upto their tips. They are small leaves.

This tree is very special to the Khasis. Its wooden post is used in the house of prayer of Sohra king at the time of coronation of a new king.

It represents God's presence and witness.

Dwar u Blei - It literally means a veranda of God. But it can also mean God's dwelling-place. It is a destined abode for every deceased Khasi.

Khasis have got a veranda and an interior portion of the house. They bathe in the sunshine in the morning in this veranda.

Hynniew-trep - Literally it means seven huts. It conveys an idea of the seven families. The Khasis are their descendants.

According to traditional folklore, the seven huts communicated with God and the nine families through the golden ladder. The latter is snapped away by an enemy. The relationship is cut off. The seven are left here on earth.

A relationship is once again established by means of prayers and sacrifice.

Iad-um - It is an impurified type of rice-beer. It has not undergone distilling. It is not so strong as it contains very little alcohol. It is not so injurious to health. It requires a big dose in order to become intoxicated.

This type of drink is used at the sacrifice of a cock, goat, pig or bull. Before the slaughter is done, some rice-beer is poured upon the victim and the sacrificer utters prayers of supplication to God on behalf of the living or the dead.

It is said that distilling is learned only with the coming of the British.

Iar-krad lynti - This is a special cock which is killed in sacrifice immediately with the onset of death of a member in the family. The purpose of this cock is to lead the deceased safely to God's house.

The literal meaning is: cock who prepares the way.

Iar-padat - This is the cock which is used during cremation. It is thrown across the pyre to and fro, north and south. Its function is also expiatory on behalf of the deceased.

Iar-syngkhong - This type of cock is used before the start of a procession towards the cremation site or the stone-cairn. The idea is that the corpse though it is bound, it will be released. The cock will free the spirit of the departed so that it can reach straight God's house.

Syngkhong means to bind. It therefore means a cock that is bound up.

Iawbei - The primeval ancestress. She can also be a younger one (Iawbei khynraw).

The idea is to explain the matrilineal system

of social organisation which is prevailing in the Khasi society.

Japha - Food for the dead. It can be cooked rice or pu japha. The idea is that the dead will require on their journey towards the destined abode in God's house.

Jingkieng ksiar - It is a golden ladder which connects heaven and earth. By means of this bridge, the seven below and the nine above communed with each other and with God. Such period of time is called a golden age. It is an age of happiness and brotherhood. Everything is peaceful. There is no fear for anything.

But an enemy has cut it off. The relationship has disappeared. Man lives in fear and is at the mercy of evil people.

The present means to relate the seven (the Khasis) with God and his saints is by means of prayer and sacrifice.

Jingkieng syrdeng - It is a bamboo bridge which is specially prepared on the occasion of cremation of the king of Sohra Syiemship.

Those who bear the Lyngkhason ascend to the Kpep through it.

In front of it, the king sits and welcomes his subjects who come to pay homage to him.

Jynthang - It is a cremation site. Kpep is such. It can be prepared with planks or wooden posts. Banana trunks are also used.

It is in this that the corpse is burnt.

La liar - This is a special leaf which is used to contain the red mud. It is used also to dip into the water kept in the klong for sprinkling the sacrificial victim.

Lang-said-ksuid - It is a goat which is used for warding off evil especially from those who die an unnatural and violent death. In this way, the deceased is believed, is made able to reach God's abode.

Lang-sait-pop - It is a goat which is used for sacrifice in order to obtain God's mercy and pardon. It washes away the sins of the person to enable him to attain the mercy and blessing of God.

Lama umkoi - Flag hoisted on a bamboo post stands to remind the people that purificatory rites of washing is performed at the umkoi pool for the bones of those who died an unnatural and violent death, and before they can be kept together with the bones of those who die a peaceful and natural death.

Lait bnai - With the completion of one month, the relatives of the deceased whom they have cremated perform a sacrifice of a cock, goat, pig or bull and offers japha to the deceased. They invite the relatives and friends to come for the occasion. It is an occasion to remember the departed.

Lait snem - After completion of one year, the relatives will again invite relatives and friends to remember the departed one. They make a feast. It is called in Khasi khawai dap snem. It is a means to remember and pray for the deceased.

Lai tylli ki dieng rit - Three pieces of wood are bound together. Upon sacrifice of a cock, blood is ouzed out and it is smeared on the three pieces which have been bound together. Then they are thrown away.

The symbolism of the pieces seem to indicate unity is strength, or the three persons: Iawbei, Suidnia and Thawlang.

Laskor Phalyngki - This person is believed upon an order by the Jaintia Kings, he prepares the monoliths and dolmen at Nartiang.

Leng-kpoh - It is an egg which is kept above the umbilical cord of the corpse. It will be thrown away at the pyre during the time of cremation.

As the cock is a great expiator of man, the egg must have symbolized the same meaning of expiation.

Luta - An earthen, silver or gold-plated vessel rounded in shape and has a big opening on top.

The water of blessing is usually kept on it for use during the sacrifice and slaughter of a sacrificial victim.

Lyngkhason - A special frame to contain the bier and corpse of the king. It is carried by over 300 subjects from the house of prayer of the king to the place of cremation.

Its size is 10.5 ft by 6 ft x 6 ft. It is very artistically decorated with siarkait, luta, snad, brut, palong, thuia and shatri. These are very light decorations made of wood, crepe paper and paper. On the top of these, tabut is also fixed to it.

The king and some nobles sit on it while on procession to the cremation ground.

Mait tyrut - It is a sort of sacrifice to wipe away the sting of evil like when some one dies an unnatural and violent death.

Tyrut is an evil goddess. It can cause misfortunes such as unnatural death. It happens so because the victim when alive has committed a sacrilege like marrying within the same clan or when the husband or wife has died within less than a year and whose religious rituals have not been performed, nor the bones returned to the respective relatives.

Mawbah - It is a final bone repository. It is variously called. Gurdon calls it incinerarium or family sepulchre. It can also be called stone-cairn or cromlech. It is the biggest one in size than any other stone-cairn.

For this occasion, there is required the mutual agreement and understanding by the members of the clan for the final bone repository, for keeping in the same cairn, and for spending for the occasion.

The idea is to contain all the deceased in one place so that they can be together in the next with their ancestress and ancestors in the house of God.

Mawbyinna - It is a memorial stone. It can be religious or purely social. The former are set up during the funerary rites of cremation and at bone depositing. The latter are prepared in memory of a king, a dear uncle, or an important social and natural event. In the latter, no religious function is performed.

Mawkait - When memorial stones are set up in memory of the deceased father by the children, such stones are called mawkait. Those stones are on either side of maw-thawlang. The meaning of it is a banana stone. At the time of naming ceremony, the paternal relatives bring bananas to the newly named. The intention is to show

that the father is the one who nurtures by his work and dedication.

Mawkni - The middle erect stone of the religious stones is called mawkni. It represents the primeval uncle Suidnia.

It is the tallest of the three standing stones. In front of it there is a flat table stone called mawkynthei. It represents Iawbei (the primeval ancestress).

Mawkjat - Religious memorial stones are also called mawkjat. The reason is that upon carriage of corpse or bones, the bearers must stop on these stones before they proceed to the cremation site or stone-cairn. It also means that the deceased stop in them before they proceed on their way to God's house.

Mawkynthei - It is a flat table-stone which is also called dolmen. It is supported by flat chiselled stones from beneath so as to serve as a table. Its size can vary according to intention of the family which sets it up. It is placed right in front of the middle standing stone called

monolith. It is set up always together with the vertical stones to form as memorial stones.

At the time of funerary rites and during the bone depositing, the sacrificer throws the pieces from the inner portions of the sacrificial animal into it as an act of offering to the departed spirits and to God.

Mawlynti - They are memorial stones which are set up during the funeral rites of disposal and during the bone depositing at stone-cairns. They are also called mawkjat depending upon the intention of using them.

Mawlynti and mawkjat are put up in mid-way from the house to the cremation site or stone-cairn. During the funerary rites and rite of depositing of bones, the bearers of the corpse and of the bones stop awhile near or on these stones. The sacrificer makes a sacrifice of a cock or a goat.

They are also considered resting-stones for the spirits of the dead on their journey before they reach God's abode, their destined resting-place.

Mawkynroh - It is the same as mawphew. It is a stone-cairn to keep the bones of those members of the clan which are taken from the individual stone-cairns.

This is a mid-way before they are collected for final depositing at the final family cromlech.

Mawniam - Certain memorial stones are called mawniam as they are set up during the religious ceremonies of cremation of the dead and at the bone depositing.

This set of stones has different names according to their use, viz., (i) mawlynti or mawkjat, (ii) mawniam, (iii) maw-umkoi, and (iv) mawklim.

While raising the above mawniam, a pig is slaughtered in sacrifice.

Mawphew - It is another name for mawkynroh. This is explained above.

Mawpyrsa - The vertical stones on either side of the middle one are known as mawpyrsa. Its English meaning is maternal nephew stones. They symbolize the maternal uncles who have died many years before.

Mawshyieng - It is an individual stone-cairn. In it are kept the bones of a person just cremated recently.

This is the first step in the bone depositing before putting at mawphew and later at mawbah.

Mawshynrang - They are the standing stones which are also known as monoliths or megaliths. They stand for the maternal uncles.

They are memorial stones. They can be classified as religious and social memorial stones respectively.

Mawthawlang - The children of the deceased father set up memorial stones in his honour. The middle standing stone is called maw-thawlang. Thawlang is the primeval father of the first Khasi family in origination. Out of this family arises other families, to form a clan.

Each clan has a Thawlang, Iawbei and Suidnia.

Maw-umkoi - They are classified as religious memorial stones. These are put up during the religious purificatory rites of washing the bones of the dead who die a violent or unnatural death.

They are a witness that those who die as above are cleansed of their faults and shortcomings through the purificatory washing of the bones. They are now fit to keep them together with other bones in the final family cromlech or incinerarium.

Mukmor - A kind of woollen coated cloth of reddish-brown or blue colour. It is very costly. It is used for covering the bier as well as a curtain when the corpse is cordoned off in a separate room while keeping it.

Mynsien u nongiap - The spirit(s) of the dead. They are believed to live on in the next life. Their destined abode is in God's dwelling-place.

The spirit(s) can go to God's abode if the proper religious rites for the dead are fulfilled. Failure of such action hinders them from reaching God's abode and makes them wanderers here on earth. In that situation, they can torment and harm the living.

Nam tymphem - During the naming ceremony when a male-child is about eight days, the arrows and bow are presented to him. They signify his function

and role in society. He must be a soldier to defend the family and the clan.

Such arrows are called nam tymphem. After the naming, they are kept properly. During cremation, his arrows are taken out and are shot into the three directions of north, south and west. The purpose of these arrows is to defend the spirit of the departed person so that it can reach safely the abode of God.

Nguh meikha pakha - After cremating and after the bone depositing ceremony on the following morning, the children of the deceased father come to meet his relatives. They come to show their sympathy at the loss of their dear one. They express blessing of God upon them. Then they depart to their own homes.

The paternal relatives also express gratitude and wish God's blessing on the latter.

The underlying idea is that the role of the father is precious. He has been instrumental for giving birth to the new members of the clan of his wife. They are grateful for this.

Nguh Syiem - The newly elected king in Sohra Syiemship receives homage from his subjects on top of the Kpep, when the cremation ceremonies for the previous king have been completed.

The people of Sohra start first. Then come the 16 villages, the 12 villages and the 3 villages in turn. Upon reaching the king, they bow deeply and a spokesman utters words of consolation and wishes the new king all the help of God in his new reign. Then he recedes backwards. Upon reaching the ground, male dancing with thua and sword in hand is done around the Kpep. The next group follows suit.

Nongknia - The sacrificer. He is usually a maternal uncle of the family. In the matrilineal system of social organisation of the Khasis, the maternal uncle is the official functionary of all religious services for the living and the dead.

Nongkhein - A diviner. He is the maternal uncle as mentioned above. Another word for this is nongshat.

Noh dkhot - Pieces of inner portions of sacrificial animals after they have been smoked in fire, are thrown into the fire as a sign of offering to God and

to the spirits of the departed. These pieces are called dkhot and the action of throwing them into the fire is known as noh.

Noisha - A kind of hooka-pipe made of bamboo. In the decoration of Lyngkhason, this is also a part of the structure.

Nongai ksuid - A witch-doctor or an evil man. Khasis believe in the existence of such evil people in any human society. They are bent upon harming others. They feel satisfied if they can manage to do so.

After cremating the corpse, on the next morning, relatives of the deceased go to the cremation site to look for signs. Finger-prints or foot-prints can be caused by the evil man, or he can authorise the wandering evil spirits to put those imprints. Such action will bring calamities and death to the member of the bereaved family.

When these signs are discovered, the sacrificer must immediately perform his religious ceremonies of warding off evil from the family. The family will then be saved.

Nongkhynraw - It is a self-acquired property. This can be an earning in cash, belongings or land. It is out of the sweat of one's hard work while unmarried and in the house of the wife. It is separate from a joint property.

A male or female member of the family can dispose a part of this property to whomever he/she desires. In the case of a male member, if he marries the property goes to his mother.

Nongtymmen - It is an ancestral property, movable and immovable of ornaments, belongings, landed property and the ancestral house.

This property is usually divided to the daughters, and the youngest one receives the largest share as she has the role and function of providing for the religious duties as well as she has to help any close members of the family in urgent need.

Even though there has been an allotment of the property, the persons concerned cannot dispose of it to anyone. The council of the family members consisting of maternal uncles, aunties, brothers and sisters will decide upon

each case. Even after that, permission is given only to sell to their own kins.

Phawar - A proverb, spoken in rhythmic doublets. One line leads and gives a nice sounding. But the second one gives the real meaning of the situation.

Phawar is known to be original to the Khasis.

Pu japha - A sort of viaticum for the dead on their journey towards their destined abode in God's house, there to be together with their ancestress and ancestors.

The food may consist of steamed powdered rice. Kwai is also given. Such eatables are kept in a place near the corpse while it lays in the house of the bereaved family.

Pynkham pynsoh - The presents given by the paternal relatives to the children of his wife as a sign of homage and appreciation. They consist of a cock, goat, pig or bull, or simply liquor.

The animals are slaughtered for the sacrifice. The front-part is eaten by the attendants and the hind-part is given back to the givers for their use at home upon their return.

Pynnoh dkhot - It is a giving of pieces from the inner portions as a sign of offering to the dead and to God.

Pynphong jain - After having bathed the corpse, it is dressed up but opposite to the living. They use the best clothes for this occasion.

At the time of cremation, the best clothing is taken out in case of poor families. The clothes are just smoked in fire and after that they are carefully folded and kept. They can be used again after the expiry of one year.

Pyngrei, shongkha pyngrei - It is a special ceremony of marriage. Two people, one old man and another an old lady are hired to represent the male and female dead respectively who have not entered upon marriage and who have not given birth to children. In the middle of the night, they are married, by eating rice from the same plate.

This action symbolized marriage to the unmarried dead persons. Marriage is an important condition for one's reaching heaven. Otherwise, it means that they have been barren and useless. It is a shame that they (especially the women) have not brought children for the clan.

Pynsum - The corpse is usually bathed and dressed up before it is taken to the cremation site.

It is an expression of respect and concern by the living for the dead.

Ramshandi - It is the goddess of war. Sacrifice is made to it to appease and to obtain God's mercy and pardon for those who die an unnatural and violent death. A she-goat is slaughtered for this purpose.

Riam kynthei - Vesting to a female-corpse after bathing. It is done as for a living person.

Riam shynrang - Dressing up for a male corpse is done opposite to that of the living.

Ring mawbyinna - To carry the memorial stones to the site for their setting up. To do so fibres are used for pulling them on rolleys put beneath. The latter are made of wooden frame. Usually some gifted in the art of speech sits on top of the stone with a stick in hand to give direction to the labourers.

This work is on a voluntary basis. During the preparing for these stones, rice cooked with til-seeds is served to the masons together with honey.

Rishot - A wooden post from a diengshit tree. This post is set up in the middle of the house of prayer in Sohra Syiemship to stand as witness and to represent God's presence, during the coronation services.

Sala lieh - It is a cotton white cloth. The brand new piece of such cloth is used for bundling the uncalcined bones and ashes of the dead in order to carry that to the stone-cairn.

Sanshyieng - It means five cowries. The cowries are used by the traditional priest for the living when the husband and wife are not able to reconcile any longer and have decided for a divorce. In the presence of witnesses, the maternal uncle acting as priest and most important witness takes the five cowries from the man and the woman, mixes them together and throws them up in the air. After that a sangot (a special messenger or announcer chosen for a term or permanently by the village durbar goes around the place to announce that so and so have made a public separation. They are now fit to remarry again).

Another usage of the cowries is when somebody dies outside his home and village in a far-away place. His whereabouts is not known. The priest then takes the cowries to the junction of footpaths and calls the spirit of the dead. With them he bundles up and puts in the house as if it is done to a corpse. Then they are cremated. The 'bones' of this are collected and kept in the stone-cairn.

Sharati - It is a seven-holed flute made of bamboo pipe. Its length can be around 1'. It is used only when dirges are played for the dead. According to a Khasi folktale, Manik Raitong has originated it.

Shatri - An umbrella. It is a paper-decoration in the form of an umbrella as part of the decoration for the Lyngkhason.

Shat pylleng - It is an egg-breaking as one form of divination which the sacrificer performs in order to find out the cause of the malady for the living and the cause of death for the deceased.

In order to do it, a sort of altar is prepared. The sacrificer keeps the diengshat. A

little red mud is kept on it. Some water is placed nearby. The diengshit leaf is placed on the backside of the diengshat facing the diviner.

Until the reason is found out, the diviner seeks for good and bad signs. So he breaks the eggs as many as need be.

Shong sang - It is a taboo marriage which is socially forbidden. It can be a marriage of members of the same clan, or with someone forbidden by social sanctions, or when the husband or wife marries within a year of death of the spouse without performing the necessary religious functions necessary for the dead.

Breaking of the above social rules of marriage leads one to a sad end by lightning, storm, falling from a tree, or killed by wild animal.

For such death, purificatory rites of divination and washing of bones at umkoi are to be performed so as to obtain God's mercy and forgiveness. The dead is enabled to reach his destined abode in God's house.

Shu syaw - It is an action of keeping clothes of the deceased person and his/her ornaments near the fire. After that they are folded properly and kept for use later on.

Shyiang - Bones. They are the uncalcined bones collected after cremating the corpse. These are bundled in a white cloth and are put in the stone-cairn.

Shylliah - A bamboo mat. It is used for enclosing the corpse to be kept in the krong (bier) for carrying it to the place of cremation.

Shyngoid - It is a wooden hollow big enough to fit the corpse inside. This is used for the deceased kings of Sohra Syiemship.

The corpse after bathing in lime is then kept in the shyngoid which is filled with honey as a means of preservation until the time for cremation when the newly elected king is able to perform the cremation rites as befitting the king.

Often the corpse is kept in this shyngoid for many years. A hole is made from beneath which is connected by a bamboo pipe to a hole

in the mud. The corpse is kept in the ling seng or house of the mother, eldest niece of the deceased king.

Siarkait - The young banana fruit shoot before it begins to flower and bear fruit. Decoration of this shape is put in the Lyngkhason.

Sla diengshit - Diengshit leaves. The leaves of this tree are used to lead the bearer of the bones on the way to the stone-cairn. They are strewn all along the route. It is a sign of making way for the spirit of the dead on its way to the destined abode in heaven through the cairn.

Snad - Comb. It is in this form that a decoration made of paper or wood is kept in the Lyngkhason.

Syngkai Bamon - A god who causes a violent death in people. To this god, a goat is sacrificed so as to appease him and to seek the mercy of God for the deceased.

As it is indicated above, the sacrificer makes a sacrifice of a goat when somebody dies a violent death.

Syiar nongiasaid - The cock is considered as a go-between

and an intercessor before God on behalf of man.

Suidnia - The primeval maternal uncle.

Suidiap - The spirit of the dead. The indigenous belief is that the dead live on in the next life. They can reach God's abode as their destiny if the living members have carried out the religious rites due for them. Otherwise, they become wanderers here on earth and will torment the relatives with disease, calamities and even death.

Symphiah - A whisk. A type of decoration which is used at the Lyngkhason. It is also used by male dancers keeping it on the left hand.

Synring - A name of a person obtained from folktales as an inventor of cremationary rites of disposal.

Tabut - A special Muslim decoration which is kept over the Lyngkhason to add to the decoration.

The original meaning is a carriage which is used to draw the corpse.

Thang bait-wait - Cremation done upon a structure made of wood just sliced by dao or big knife. It is done for deceased people of average means of income.

In this one, pynkham is accepted from the paternal relatives. Celebration and food is served to attendants.

Religious rites are duly performed.

Thang-krei - It is a cremation of the corpse with a simple prayer of supplication. The meticulous rites of the dead are not followed.

Thang diengtylli - It is a type of cremation in which the structure for keeping the corpse for burning is prepared only of wooden posts. It indicates that the family is very poor. No pynkham is taken in this.

Cremationary rites are of course not excluded.

Thang lyntang - In this, the bier and the structure for cremation is done with planks which are properly dressed.

Cremationary rites are followed in detail. Pynkham is accepted from the paternal relatives. Duhalia play their flutes and drums. Gun-salute is also followed.

The wealthy people follow this solemn cremation.

Thang Lyngkhason - It is a type of cremation which is done only for the rich, nobles and kings.

A clearer explanation of this is found in the cremationary rites for the Sohra king.

Tyngshop - A kind of effigy made of a bamboo post and dressed up like a man to represent the primeval maternal uncle and all the deceased males.

It is used at the time of bone depositing.

Thuia - Crest, plume about 18 inches long worn by Khasi men in their turbans when dancing.

Tyрут - A demoness who brings misfortune, especially violent death. In order to drive it away (ban mait tyрут) sacrificers are performed by the diviner.

Umkoi - An artificially dug well where oaths and sacrificers are performed, especially the washing of bones of those who die a violent death.
