

***KA PYRTHI* (WORLD) AND *KA MEIRAMEW* (MOTHER
EARTH) IN TRADITIONAL KHASI THOUGHT**

BY

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This is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy.



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Khasis¹ have a strong cultural and philosophical tradition. They had a script and lived within the framework of their own culture from time immemorial. After they had lost the script² they passed on their traditional wisdom orally from generation to generation. Today, the ancient myths and legends can be seen as a storehouse of their concepts, thoughts and ideas.

Though there is a spurt of writings on various concepts of Khasi culture, a lot more needs to be done towards analysing the significance of the core concepts of the Khasi world view. It is in this spirit, that I have selected the topic “*Ka Pyrthei* (World) and *Ka Meiramew* (Mother Earth) in traditional Khasi thought”.

These two selected concepts are key to the whole array of the traditional Khasi thought. The other traditional Khasi concepts revolve around these two concepts. Unfortunately, these two concepts, *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* have been presented and discussed by many authors in a very confused manner. This thesis gives a conceptual clarification of both the concepts and examines the relation between them.

This thesis deals with conceptual exploration and is an exposition of the concepts *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* in the light of the thought system or world view of the Khasis. To do this, I need first to explore the etymological and dictionary meanings of the terms, *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew*.

The word 'ka' is an indicative article. When article 'ka' is asserted, it indicates that an object or thing spoken of belongs to the feminine gender. Its plural form is 'ki'. The article used for a male object or thing is 'u' in the Khasi language. The Khasis used article 'ka' in relation to the word 'Pyrthei' or World and the word 'Meiramew' which means Mother Earth. This shows that according to the Khasi culture and language, *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* are conceived in the feminine gender.

In the present thesis, after exploring the etymological meaning of the two terms, I have attempted a conceptual exploration of *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* in Chapter II. I have at first discussed the various ways in which the terms *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* have been used in Khasi literature. Going by the dictionary meaning, the term *ka Pyrthei* (World) stands for one of the planets while the term *ka Meiramew* (Mother Earth) refers more specifically to the geological aspect. Let me attempt a clarification of this.

The Khasis believe that it is God who created *ka Pyrthei* out of the atomic elements that existed in Him. They also believe that there is nothing in this *Pyrthei* which precedes the existence of God. To the Khasis the word *Pyrthei* has more than one meaning. At least there are two *Pyrtheis* in the traditional Khasi thought. First, there is an empirical world or phenomenal world which is known as *ka Pyrthei shongbasa* which means the spatio-temporal world. Second, there is another *Pyrthei* which is not physical but metaphysical. It is called *ka iing U Blei* which means the House of God. The relation between *U Blei* and *ka Meiramew* I have attempted to analyze on the pattern set by Spinoza's distinction between the *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.

Spinoza had a unique conception of God and creation. This is so because Spinoza identifies God with the whole cosmos. He holds the view that nothing can really exist apart from God. To him, God is like a universal substance which permeates everything in the world. He goes to the extent of identifying God with nature. To him, Nature has two aspects – *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*.

An attempt is made in this thesis to show that there is a possibility of comparing the Khasi conception of *U Blei* with the *Natura naturans* and *ka Meiramew* with the *Natura naturata* of Spinoza. However, since for the Khasis,

ka Meiramew is not just the fruit bearing soil but also the goddess of the Earth. *ka Meiramew* could be conceived as both the *Natura naturans* and the *Natura naturata*.

The third chapter entitled 'The concept of *ka Pyrthei*' concentrates specifically on the analysis of the Khasi conception of *ka Pyrthei*. It is *ka Niam Khasi* (the Khasi religion) which gives us a substantive background to the thoughts and speculations regarding the concept of *ka Pyrthei*. In the course of discussion, I have pointed out that the Khasis see *ka Pyrthei* (World) as an orderly system. It consists mainly of (i) *Ka Bneng* which means heaven or sky or the space above us, (ii) *Ka Meiramew* which is below the sky, and (iii) *Ka Hawhaw* which means the atmospheric region which is between *ka Bneng* and *ka Meiramew*. In other words, the Khasi thinkers conceived *ka Pyrthei* as having two halves, namely, *ka Bneng* (heaven or space above) and *ka Meiramew*. According to their tradition, the two halves were initially joined together by *u Sohpetbneng* (Navel of heaven) which was in the form of a bridge connected heaven and earth. This sacred bridge was known in Khasi language as *ka Jingkieng Ksiar* which means the golden ladder. But *u Sohpetbneng* was broken in the later stages. It was through the instrumentality of *u Sohpetbneng* that the human beings of the golden age could go to heaven and come down to earth and vice versa.

The very first of our ancestors, it is believed, came down from heaven to live in this empirical world. It is for this reason that they regard heaven (*ka Bneng*) as the original home of man. The Khasis do not draw a sharp distinction between this empirical world and the world beyond. They called this empirical world *ka Iingshongbasa* which means a spatio-temporal world which falls within our sense experience. It is mutable and changing, yet it exhibits certain order. The world beyond is viewed simply as the metaphysical world because our senses cannot experience it. But man as a spiritual being can think of it. The Khasis called the world beyond, *ka Iing U Blei* which means the House of God. To them, the world beyond is a continuity of the empirical world.

In this chapter, I also try and compare Ramanuja's conception of God and creation to the Khasi conception of *U Blei* and creation. The Khasis, like Ramanuja, see the relation between *U Blei* and *ka Pyrthei* as the creator-created type of relationship. Let me quote an actual prayer addressed by a Khasi man to *U Blei*, which is the metaphysical entity.

Ah Blei Lord the creator of Heaven and Earth,
 The giver of all things, structure and form,
 Health, wealth and wisdom and conquest,
 The protection from any danger and disgrace,

All in all mighty Lord, we bestow ourselves upon
 Thy good care,
 All together we thank thee.³

They see *ka Pyrthei* as a dependent entity which has no independent existence apart from God. Like Ramanuja the Khasis hold the view that *ka Pyrthei* is real. They emphasize on the notion of sacredness of *ka Pyrthei*. To Ramanuja what is not God is either the modes or attributes of God. To the Khasis, God is formless and can take any form. He is everywhere and at all times. This is one of the reasons that the traditional Khasis do not see the necessity to construct temples to worship God because God is permeating everything in this world. Again, according to the Khasis, this phenomenal world is purposive. This world is an instrument which God created to manifest Himself. It has been created to fulfill the eternal plan of God. Man must earn righteousness by living righteously in his earthly existence.

In this chapter, an attempt has also been made to criticize those writers who have portrayed the ancient Khasis as having no conception of the sacred. It is the Khasi Religion (*ka Niam Khasi*) which records the Khasi tribal wisdom in the form of myths, legends, songs, rituals, etc., and helps us to know the Khasi conception of life and its meaning. Prior to the arrival of Christianity in Khasi

Hills, it was Khasi religion which preserved the traditional wisdom of the ancient Khasis.

The fourth chapter is devoted to expounding the concept of *ka Meiramew* as mother Earth. The Khasis viewed *ka Meiramew* as the totality of the cosmic order. The earthly beings, I point out, can exist precisely because *ka Meiramew* exists. In this chapter, I try to refer to the three Khasi myths, namely, (i) *U Sohpetbneng* which means the navel of heaven, (ii) The Diengiei Peak myth, and (iii) The *Krem Lamet Latang* myth. These three myths show that *ka Meiramew* (Mother Earth) is a living entity which has real existence. *Ka Meiramew* is the first product of creation. It co-exists with *U Blei*. In a sense it serves as a link between the visible world and the invisible world. It has a dual nature because it has a material as well as an immaterial aspect.

An attempt is made in this chapter to show that *ka Meiramew* performed various functions like giving birth to sacred forces like the Sun, Moon, Earth, Water, Fire, etc. and thus to serve as the universal Mother who feeds, nurtures and protects humans and non-humans. She patiently endures our reckless manipulation of her sacred body. Hence, *ka Meiramew* is a concept which connotes different things in different situations. It is pregnant with lot of meanings (Refer Chapter II). May be for this reason

different scholars give different views regarding the meaning of *ka Meiramew*. It is widely understood as the material principle, the material cause, the ultimate material principle, the birth-giver, the nourisher and goddess of the Earth itself.

In this connection, a conscious attempt has been made to compare the concept of *ka Meiramew* with that of *Prakrti* in the *Samkhya* system of Indian philosophy. A brief account of the relation between *Prakrti* and *Purusa*, their mutual interaction and the *Samkhya* theory of evolution is given. This has been made necessary because in this chapter I have highlighted the relation between *ka Meiramew* with the male principle namely, *u Basa* in the light of the relation between *Prakrti* and *Purusa*.

On the authority of tradition the Khasis advocate the eternal and absolutely independent existence of the male principle called *U Basa*. As the legendary accounts state *U Basa* and *Ka Meiramew* cohabit and produce the empirical world. Referring to their union as a divine marriage, the Khasi thinkers reiterate the independence of *U Basa* on lines similar to that of the *Samkhya* conception of *Purusa*. However, I have tried to argue that unlike the *Samkhya Purusa*, *U Basa* is dynamic and changeable.

The fourth chapter ends with a description of what to my mind appears as the differences between the concept of

Prakrti and *Ka Meiramew*. Here again, though *Ka Meiramew* like *Prakrti* is viewed as (a) female,⁴ (b) active, (c) ultimately real, (d) all pervasive and (e) material cause of the world, she is regarded unlike *Prakrti* as conscious, as goddess and as coexisting with God, but functioning dependently.

As pointed out earlier, the Khasis see man (*u briew*) as created by *U Blei* having initially lived with *U Blei* in heaven. He is viewed as endowed with a body (*ka met*) and a soul (*ka mynsiem*). He is the creature who possesses *ka rngiew* which means the rational power which adds personality and dignity to him.

In the conclusion, I re-emphasize the point that man with his fellow creatures, including animals should live together on the lap of *ka Meiramew*. *U Blei* does not expect man to conquer or subdue mother earth but to love and have mutual relation with it. Mother Earth feeds man like a mother feeding her child. Man is not at all a master of mother earth. He should perform all his actions in accordance with the natural Laws. He should not destroy the natural environment that sustains him. *U Blei* expects man to fulfill the divine plans in the world.

In the traditional Khasi thought, the concepts *U Blei* and *Kyntang* (sacred) match closely. Most of the Khasi villages have sacred forests called *ki khlaw kyntang*. They

are regarded as special dwelling places of God (*U Blei*) or gods (*ki blei*) who will protect and bless the villagers. These forests are also a reminder to man of *U Blei's* sustaining and unifying power.

Ka Niam Khasi teaches that only *U Blei* has absolute sovereignty over all creatures including human beings. Man has no dominion over his own life and non-human life. In other words, man cannot act as the viceroy of God over the planet. He has no right to take his own life or the life of his fellowmen. Man can kill the animals just to meet his basic needs and no more.

Most of the present day Khasis have been converted to Christianity. They accept Christ as the Redeemer, the Son of God. In other words, Christ is the only link between man and God, the Father. Consequently, the Christian-Khasis do not equate either *ka Pyrthei* or *ka Meiramew* with the sacred/Christ. Their status as goddesses gets reduced, leaving man free to exploit nature as and when he likes to. He has been indulging in large scale destruction of his natural habitat *ka ramew* (earth). The modern Khasi man by his reckless actions has polluted *ka ramew*, *ka um* (water) etc., whose purity is an essential condition for sustaining every form of life living on the epidermis of the earth.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The Khasi community is said to be of Austro-Asiatic origin. According to the views of some authors, the Khasis came into Assam either from Burma or from the North through Sylhet. In the course of time they were driven back into the present hill areas of Meghalaya by a flood in some distant past.
2. The Khasis believe that they had received the script from God and lost it in the course of time.
3. S. Miri, *Khasi World View: A conceptual Exploration*, Chandigarh: Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Developing, 1988, p. 22.
4. Iswara Krisna, *Samkhya Karika*, Delhi: Indological Book House, 1978, pp. 98-101.

CHAPTER II

KA PYRTHEI AND KA MEIRAMEW IN THE KHASI WORLD VIEW

The chief objective of this chapter is to clarify and analyze the concepts of *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew*. These two concepts, *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* are the key concepts which constitute almost the whole gamut of the traditional Khasi thought and world view. Other concepts revolve round these two concepts. They are like the two legs of a man which give support to his body and without which man can neither stand nor walk. Any study which is related to the traditional Khasi thought and world view without referring to the concepts of *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* will be incomplete.

Etymologically, the word ‘*ka*’ in the Khasi language is an article. It indicates that an object or thing denoted by it is of the feminine gender. Occasionally, the word, ‘*ka*’ is used both as a definite article and as an indefinite article in Khasi language. Normally, the word ‘*ka*’ is used to show or indicate that an object spoken of belongs to the feminine gender whether it is used in the sense of a definite or an indefinite article. We say it is a definite article when it points out a particular object, person or thing. For instance, “*Nga la iohi ia ka Dr. P. Lyngdoh.*” which means, I saw Dr. P. Lyngdoh, indicating some particular Doctor. At

times, the word 'ka' is also used as an indefinite article, when it leaves indefinite an object or thing spoken of. For instance, *ka briew*, which means any woman. Generally, the article 'ka' is used in Khasi language in an indicative sense because it indicates that such and such an object, person or thing belongs to such and such gender.

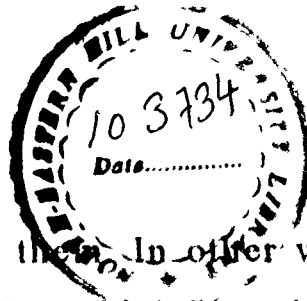
But in the strict sense of the term, the word 'ka' is an article which is categorically used for an object which belongs to the feminine gender. In this sense, the word 'ka' is a gender-based article. On the other hand, article 'u' is used for an object which belongs to the masculine gender. For example, when we say, *ka Pyrthei* or *ka Meiramew*, it indicates that *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* are objects or realities which belong to the feminine gender as far as Khasi Grammar is concerned. However, a language is part of a world view and cultural landscape of a community. It is a living system and a dynamic activity. Hence, when the Khasi people use the word 'Ka Pyrthei' and 'Ka Meiramew', they mean that attributes applicable to womanhood is being thought of as attributes of *Ka Pyrthei* and *Ka Meiramew*. In other words, whatever is applicable to a female being is thought of, by the Khasi people, as also applicable to *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew*.

When we reflect upon the concept of *ka Pyrthei*, we find that this term 'pyrthei' is not a composite concept

because it is not made up of different concepts. If we take the word '*Pyr*' separately as a prefix to the term '*Pyrthei*', we find that this word '*Pyr*' does not connote any intrinsic meaning because it does not have any definite meaning of its own. It does not have any intrinsic meaning in the sense that it does not connote any meaning specifically. It may possibly have some meaning only if it is added with some other words as its suffix. For example, the words, '*Pyrthat*' (thunder), '*Pyrthuh*' (imitate) etc. The word '*Pyr*' does not connote anything clearly in Khasi language. If it has any meaning at all, it is just an indicative meaning to point out to something on a tentative basis. For instance, the term '*Pyrshang*' means to try or to make an attempt.

On the other hand, if we take the word '*thei*' separately as a suffix of the word '*Pyrthei*' then, we can say that the word '*thei*' is an abbreviation of the word '*Kynthei*' which means a female being. But there is no clear etymological indication whether the word '*thei*' is associated with the term '*Pyrthei*'. If there is something common between the word *ka Kynthei* (female being) and the word *ka Pyrthei*, it can only be assumed on the basis that both of the terms belong to the feminine gender in Khasi language.

Briefly speaking, by the concept *ka Pyrthei*, is meant the totality of the visible and invisible realities in the sky



above them and in the world around them. In other words, *ka Pyrthei* is a living system and reality which has within it many other systems or realities. Soso Tham personifies *ka Pyrthei* (world) as a living reality which regulates itself and other realities. He says:

*The world keeps itself awake till midnight,
It looks at the stars how they disappear;
It is through the dark and cloudy night,
Morning star Evening star give us consolation;
It is with you the cock will crow,
As a sign that the world will have light.¹*

In the above quoted lines, Tham speaks of this *ka Pyrthei* as a system which is connected to other systems within it. The fall of man by disobeying God² is a failure of one system within the big system and it affects other systems. In this particular context, Soso Tham speaks of *ka Pyrthei* as the cosmos which has visible and invisible realities in it. *Ka Pyrthei* has a wide connotation. In a broad sense it has an inclusive meaning. It includes the solar system, the land masses, the oceans, the surface of the earth, the fruit bearing soil, the earth's substratum etc. By way of equation, we can safely say that the term *ka Pyrthei* is equivalent to its English translation 'world'.

It may be mentioned that the Khasis have used the terms, *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Pyrthei-mariang* (universe) interchangeably. This gives us an idea that the term *ka Pyrthei-mariang* to the ancient Khasi thinkers, seems to

mean the world and its nature.

The term *ka Pyrthei* has been used in a variety of senses in the Khasi language. But mainly it stands for the present world of here and now. It is the opposite of the metaphysical world.

Sib Charan Roy, who is one of the prominent traditional Khasi thinkers, speaks of *ka Pyrthei* as a creation of *U Blei*. According to Roy, God created this *ka Pyrthei* out of the pre-existing matter. In this connection, we can say that *ka Pyrthei* has been created out of something and not out of nothing. Again in this connection, we can say that Roy is in line with the phrase 'ex nihilo nihil fit' which means 'out of nothing, nothing comes'. Roy does not speak of *ka Pyrthei* as a process of emanation but as a process of combination of the different '*Phngit-longdoh*,'³ which means the different elements or atoms. Roy does not mean to say that this world is eternal but is a reality which has been created by *U Blei* with some definite purpose. Roy wants to say that since *U Blei* is the Creator of *ka Pyrthei*, the relation between God and *ka Pyrthei* must be of the Creator-created relationship.

The Khasi thinkers since the ancient times seem to have been struggling in conceiving a reconciliation of the mysteries of *ka Pyrthei*. *Ka Pyrthei* is seen as an object which begins and ends with *U Blei*. There is a substantive

unity that exists between *U Blei* and *ka Pyrthei* and, therefore, Khasis can worship God anywhere and at any time. Metaphorically, U Sib Charan Roy views, this *ka Pyrthei* as '*Ka ĩng-shong-basa*,'⁴ which means a temporal house which is the contrary of '*ka ĩng-shong-neh*,'⁵ which means a permanent or an eternal house. At the time of dissolution, *ka ĩng-shong-basa* will disappear and only *ka ĩng-shong-neh* will remain. Roy's idea could be interpreted in the language of Sankara's Advaita that this world is *maya* or illusion in the sense that it is a product of God's creative power. It will disappear when the true knowledge is attained and Brahman alone will remain as an eternal and immutable Reality. However, as I will show later here, the comparison if it need be drawn should be between the Khasi view and the Visistadvaita of Ramanuja. What Roy wants to emphasize is that at the time of dissolution, man-world which is created and subjected to mutability will disappear while God-world, which is uncreated and not subject to mutability or change will remain. Most probably, Roy wants to say that *ka Pyrthei* is not ultimately real because it is changeable and destructible and only something that survives all changes is real.

Khasi authors like D. T. Laloo, H. O. Mawrie, Sib Charan Roy, Rabon Singh, Hipshon Roy and others believe that *ka Pyrthei* is created by *U Blei*. According to this view, *ka Pyrthei* cannot precede God's existence. If *U Blei*

is the Creator of *ka Pyrthei* then *ka Pyrthei* must be a dependent reality because it has no independent existence apart from God. In other words, *ka Pyrthei* is limited by time and space. As pointed out earlier, the Khasis called this present *Pyrthei* as *ka ĩng-shong-basa* or a temporal house because they have in mind the notion of *ka ĩng-u-Blei* meaning the House of God or the heavenly abode. In other words, it means that the other world which is immutable and eternal is not possible in this physical world.

We begin our knowledge of the physical *Pyrthei* with sense-experiences. We see with our eyes the sky, stars, moon, etc., as objects in the sky above us. We also see the trees, plants, vegetables, living beings and non-living beings etc., around us. It is perhaps for this reason that the term *ka Pyrthei* can be identified with the material forms of life including land masses, oceans (*ki duriaw*) etc. To put it in other words, *ka Pyrthei* is a system of life and within it there are various forms of life which consist of animate and inanimate beings. The life of animate beings is a very important element because it consists of human beings who are bestowed with consciousness, dexterity and intelligence. H. O. Mawrie emphasizes the anthropocentricity of man in God's creation. He says:

Among all the members of God's creation who live in this empirical world, man is the best of

all. He has all wisdom and potentialities. He can fly by aeroplane round the world.⁶

Interestingly, *ka Pyrthei* is also viewed as a personal household which implies not only a form of existence but also a form of fulfillment and performances in coping with our duties, obligations and responsibilities in the span of our life time. The ancient Khasis speak very little in term of human rights but they speak more in terms of duties and obligations. For instance, the notion of "*Kamai ia ka Hok*," which means to 'earn righteousness' it also means to abide by the divine law and principle of righteousness, which is similar to the Law of Karma. In this connection, the Law of *Kamai ia ka Hok* is the Universal Law of Righteousness and Justice, the *dharma*. The other laws, *Tipbriew Tiplei* which means knowing man and knowing God, are ethical laws which are meant for social life. One who maintains the right relationship with his fellowmen may also have the right relationship with God. In other words, we cannot have the right relationship with God if we are causing harm to our fellowmen. The Khasis hold the view that righteousness cannot be earned only by means of preaching but by means of right living. Our freedom and responsibility should go together with the Law of Righteousness which is the moral law and the highest goal of life.

The Khasis also called this present world *ka Īng-*

shong-basa (temporal hut or house). This resulted from their comparison of it with the world beyond which they metaphorically called as *ka ĩng-shong-neh* (permanent house). This reveals their inner longing to attain eternal bliss in the world hereafter.

Another phrase used in this connection is '*ĩng-shong-neh*' which means the eternal home. It is said that the idea of *ka bneng* or heaven as opposed to hell came much later, more as an influence of Christianity. By the word *ka bneng* or heaven the Khasis meant the physical heaven or sky. They had always the desire and longing to go to *ka ĩng-shong-neh* or the eternal house. There, in the eternal house or heaven, they hoped, not only to live peacefully and eternally with *U Blei* but also to meet their earthly counterparts who had preceded them.

As already pointed out earlier, the term *Pyrthei* has been very often used as a general term in Khasi language. It can be used in a variety of senses. It denotes different things in different contexts. Fr. Emmanuel Bars,⁷ in his *Khasi-English Dictionary* tries to give a conceptual meaning of *ka Pyrthei* by equating it with the term cosmos so as to mean the space seen in the universe as an ordered system. This simply means that *ka Pyrthei* of here and now is within the cosmos and not outside the cosmos. He also tries to explain the term *ka Pyrthei* as the globe which

means a reality which consists of the continents, countries, cities, rivers etc. Further, Bars makes an attempt to explain the term *ka Pyrthei* as the planet earth. *Ka Pyrthei* is the physical world where we are living, which is one of the planets of the solar system. Again, Bars uses the word 'earth' to explicate the term '*Pyrthei*'. By employing the word 'earth' in his attempt to explain the term '*Pyrthei*,' Bars means to say that '*ka Pyrthei*' is our home planet which is having some geological connotations in it. Here, we see that term '*Pyrthei*' has a universal meaning. He tries to explicate the term '*Pyrthei*' from a social point of view when he used the word, '*paw pyrthei*' which means to 'appear in the world'. To put it simply, it means to live a public life as opposed to private life. In this sense, the term '*Pyrthei*' means a common natural habitat of humans and other living beings. Bars attempts to elucidate the term '*Pyrthei*' by using the term '*riew pyrthei*' which means a secular man. In this sense, the term '*pyrthei*' means the world where we are living and spending our earthly life. The term '*Suk Pyrthei*' which means universal peace is another clue to get the meaning of the term '*pyrthei*'. In this sense, the term '*pyrthei*' means an empirical world. He used the term '*Baroh shityllup ka Pyrthei*' which means "everything except heaven and hell." This shows that '*ka pyrthei*' in its inclusive meaning means the whole created world where all living beings have the right to live.

U Nissor Singh⁸ attempted to explicate the meaning of the term '*Pyrthei*' from the existential point of view. He describes it as '*ka Pyrthei ba tang shipor*' which means *ka pyrthei* which has a finite existence. In this sense, Singh looks at *ka pyrthei* from an eschatological viewpoint. In this sense, it means that *ka pyrthei* is the created reality which has been created by the uncreated Being who is infinite. Singh also shows that *ka pyrthei* stands contrary to the concepts of 'heaven' and 'hell'. Singh makes the declaration that this present '*Pyrthei*' or 'world' will some day cease to exist.

According to Soso Tham, it is not sufficient to explore the conceptual meaning of the term '*ka Pyrthei*' in terms of 'cosmos', 'globe' or 'earth' but we should also explain the concept '*ka Pyrthei*' as a world which consists of people from different nationalities or communities.

We search for the Light round the World
 The Light of our own we know not,
 Like other days we will rise up,
 We will search our own old Light;
 The Root, Seed of the living Light,
 Its root is in those ancient days.⁹

U Soso Tham seems to have in his mind the thought that the people of each race or country have their own wisdom and conception of knowledge. It is absolutely

necessary to seek the knowledge of other people or different communities so as to enrich our own. In this sense, to Soso Tham the term '*Pyrthei*' includes the people of the whole world who belong to different communities and continents.

At times, the Khasis used to say "*ka Pyrthei kaba pyllun*" which means the world is round. This is a geographical expression which means that *ka Pyrthei* is round in shape. The Khasi have the 'notion' that '*ka Pyrthei*' is one of the heavenly bodies which became livable in the course of time. The three senses in which *ka Pyrthei* has been interpreted are as follows: (i) in a broad sense, *ka Pyrthei* means our home planet, (ii) in a narrower sense, it refers to the geological qualities of our home planet, and (iii) in an ordinary sense, it means the mental aspects of human life. For instance, *ka Pyrthei ki Myllung Khasi* which means 'the world of the Khasi poets'.

The word '*Pyrthei*' seems to have some sort of association with other languages. For example, the word '*Prithivi*' in Sanskrit language is similar to the Khasi term '*Pyrthei*'. They connote more or less the same reality. Both of them mean the third planet of the solar system which has geological connotations. Conceptually, both the terms '*Pyrthei*' and '*Prithivi*' mean the physical world where we are living in. So also the concept of '*Prakrti*' in *Sankhya*

system has some bearing on the Khasi concept of '*ka Meiramew*' because both of them play an important role in the process of causing the world of objects to come into existence. This I will take up for discussion later. At this point I wish to state that '*ka Meiramew*' which means the Mother Earth is a very important component of *ka Pyrthei*.

In the Kantian sense, *ka Pyrthei* may be said to be the world of phenomena which is opposite of the world of noumena. As is well known, Kant made a distinction between noumena and phenomena. But in the Khasi traditional thought and world view, there is no clear-cut distinction between them. It is rather a continuation of life from this empirical world to the world beyond. In the Platonic sense, *ka Pyrthei* is a world of change and imperfection as opposed to the world of form. For the scientists the term *ka Pyrthei* designates the totality of things and facts. The term *ka Pyrthei* to the Physicist is a reality which is full of magnetic energy. It has weight, gravitational force etc. *Ka Pyrthei* to an astronomer is an object of his observation.

The term *ka Meiramew* is almost untranslatable because of the fact that there is no equal English word which could exactly correspond to it, so as to give its exact meaning. In this context, a word to word translation is not possible in this particular case. What we can do is to give

some clarification of the root words of the term *ka Meiramew*. This will help us at least to give the nearest meaning of what the term *ka Meiramew* possibly means. Etymologically, the nearest English translation of the term *ka Meiramew* is 'Mother Earth'.

The Khasis believed that *ka Meiramew* is a co-creator who plays an important role in the process of bringing out the world of objects into existence. In this sense it resembles *Prakrti* in the Sankhya system. *Ka Meiramew* is next to the *U Blei* in their relation to creation. This term *ka Meiramew* has been used in a variety of senses in the Khasi language. The analysis of *ka Meiramew* would help us to know of the interrelatedness between *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew*.

The concept of *ka Meiramew* is a composite concept because it is made up of three concepts, that is, of 'mei', 'ram' and 'ew'. Logically, the term 'mei' or mother is a relative term. For instance, the term 'mother' is related to her children or family. Generally, the term 'mother' is used in two senses, that is, in a personal sense and impersonal sense. The term *ka Meiramew* is used in an impersonal sense in Khasi language. We should also take note that the term *ka Meiramew* is used in a metaphorical sense and not in a literal sense of the term.

Generally, the Khasis have great reverence for *ka*

Ramew because of various reasons. They regard *ka Ramew* as an object of loveliness, beauty and the source of their continued existence. This is one of the reasons that *ka Ramew* has been given the attribute of motherhood. To the Khasis, the concept of *ka Meiramew* is sacred because to it is attributed all the qualities of a mother.

The concept '*ram*' is an ambiguous concept in the Khasi language. Different scholars explain it differently. One of the possible meanings of the term '*ram*' is 'debt'. It means a debt which needs to be repaid. If we add the prefix '*khoh*' to the word '*ram*' it will be '*khohram*' which means 'not smooth'. If we attach the prefix '*rep*' to the word '*ram*' it will be '*repram*' which means *jhuming* cultivation. Again, if we add the prefix '*kam*' to the word '*ram*' it will be '*kamram*' which means 'duty'.

We should remember that the Khasis have a strong sense of 'givenness' in their relation to *ka Metramew*. According to the traditional Khasi thought and world view, land, soil, water, fire, trees and vegetation are the free gifts of *U Blei* through the instrumentality of *ka Meiramew*. The Khasi people believe that man who is a rational being has many obligations and moral duties to fulfill in his life time. Man as a rational and superior being has the moral and ethical duties to preserve the sanctity of *ka Meiramew* who is his sacred Mother Earth. Man also has an ethical duty to

protect all the living beings who are living in it. This is a debt which man needs to pay through action.

Etymologically, the word 'ew' is an abbreviation of the word 'khyndew' which means 'soil'. It is more accurate to call it the fruit bearing soil. The term *Ka Meiramew* also includes the underworld which comprises of *ki Khyndat Pateng Niamra* which means "the underworld of the nine layers of the substratum." Fr. Emmanuel Bars¹⁰, defined *ka Meiramew* as the goddess of the earth. This shows that *ka Meiramew* is a feminine noun made with the root 'ram' as a prefix and the root 'ew' as the suffix which signifies action. In this context, *ka Meiramew* stands for action and creativity. It means to 'make', 'cause', 'create', 'produce' or 'perform'. It has a sense of forward movement and indicates a creative force; the urge to create in the sense of a biological and natural process.

The logic of this is contained in the obvious role of the female principle of *ka Meiramew* as the birth-giver. Till today, in the Khasi culture and traditional thought the role of *ka Meiramew* as a female principle has not been replaced by any male figure. This means that *ka Meiramew* is the goddess of the earth and Mother Earth herself. She is perhaps, the first goddess of Khasi mythologies.

Bars also explains the term *ka Meiramew* as the ground which means the 'foundation', the 'original',

‘first’, and ‘prime matter’. *Ka Meiramew* is the ground of our being in the sense that our physical existence without *ka Meiramew* will be metaphysically impossible. This means that we could have our physical existence precisely because *ka Meiramew* exists. When a serious Khasi thinker thinks of *ka Pyrthei* what first comes to his mind is *ka Meiramew*.

A fairly accurate translation of world, to my mind be “mother earth”, with all the usual connotations of this phrase. Mother earth is the sustainer of life, both human and non-human. It is the source of vitality, and symbol of absolute generosity and grace, the integrator of all creatures.¹¹

Ka Meiramew seems to take many forms in the Khasi account of creation. It gets a metaphysical meaning when it is perceived as female supreme deity and primary creatrix. At times, the scholars identify *ka Meiramew* as the generating earth itself. In this sense, *ka Meiramew* can also be seen as the fruit bearing soil. Here, we see *ka Meiramew* is not just the primordial cause of creation but is also the material principle. The scholars like G. Costa, D. T. Laloo and H. Elias viewed *ka Meiramew* as the primordial element out of which the Sun, Moon, Wind, Water, Fire, stars, etc., originated. *Ka Meiramew* is said to have had the divine marriage with *u Basa u Ryngkew* who are the sky fathers and deities of land and rivers. Out of their union,

the different world of objects have come into existence.

In a nutshell *ka Meiramew* is a female principle who is powerful, self-regulating, a conscious organism and a biologically controlled system. Till today, the traditional Khasis have the conception that *ka Meiramew* is a living entity. For this reason, they offer some grains of rice to her at the time they take their meals. Generally, they use to say a few words, like:

Oh! Mother Earth, I bow and thank to you,
 You have blessed mankind with food grains;
 Take this food, I offer to you,
 Take it and share my food.¹²

Above all, *ka Meiramew* or Mother Earth has been conceived by the Khasis as the female active principle, while *u Basa u Ryngkew* are conceived as the lesser active male principles.

The term *Ramew* (Earth) is at times equated with the Latin term 'terra' which means 'land'. U Nissor Singh defines the term '*ramew*' as land or soil which has certain potential forces in it. In an ordinary sense, the term '*ramew*' means the geological earth and its lower strata. In the context of agriculture, *ka ramew* refers to the cultivable or usable land or soil where the agriculturists can cultivate or till it. Incidentally the Khasis also conceived *ka Ramew*

as the provider of our needs.

The Khasis hold two views with regard to the question of, how *Ramew* becomes *Meiramew*? The first view, presents *Ramew* as a character, that is, a female being. *Ramew* married *u Basa* (Divine being) and gave birth to five children, *ka Sngi* (Sun - daughter), *u Bnai* (Moon - son), *ka Um* (Water -daughter), *ka Lyer* (Air – daughter) and *ka Ding* (Fire – daughter). *Ramew* died and the dead body was given to the daughters to burn. After all other daughters failed to cremate their mother's body, the chance was given to the last daughter, *ka Ding* (Fire). The dead body was reduced to ashes and became the earth. As earth was the mother of Sun, Moon, Water, Air and Fire, she becomes *Meiramew* or Mother Earth.

Another view, states that *ka Lisan* (Primal Earth) married *u Basa* (Divine Being) and gave birth to seven children, namely, *ka Sngi* (Sun-daughter), *u Bnai* (Moon-son), *u Pyrthat* (Thunder-son), *ka Um* (Water-daughter), *u Jumai* (Earthquake-son), *ka Lyer* (Air-daughter), and *ka Ding* (Fire-daughter). *U Basa* left and never came back. *Ka Ramew* now single, married *u Ryngkew* (another male being) and gave birth to *u Maw* (Stone-son) and *ka Khyndew* (Earth-daughter). *Ka Lisan* died and her dead body was given to the daughters for cremation. One daughter after another failed to cremate their mother's

body. Finally, a chance was given to *ka Ding* (Fire-daughter) who successfully managed to cremate her mother's dead body. The other sisters got angry at her success and wished to kill *ka Ding*. *Ka khyndew* (Earth-daughter) saved the life of *ka Ding* by hiding her. After this, however, there was a reconciliation between *Ka Ding* and her sisters and *ka Khyndew* was given the title of *ka Meiramew*. Since that time, there is a close link between *ka Ramew* and *ka Meiramew*. *Ka Meiramew* holds different life forms on her lap and provides their various needs. She becomes a source of growth, fertility and natural beauty.

Very often, the Khasis regard *ka Meiramew* as a symbol of fertility and fruitfulness. Soso Tham emphasizes the produce given by *ka Meiramew* when he says:

Forever cultivation is there,
 Evening they come, morning they go;
 They sow the seeds on the soil,
 Mother Earth will give them life and growth.¹³

Spinoza has a unique conception of God and the world. He identifies God with the whole cosmos. His famous formula is *Deus sive Natura* which means God or Nature. He uses the terms 'God' and 'Nature' interchangeably. He holds the view that nothing can exist or be conceived without God. God is a being absolutely infinite. In other words, God is a substance consisting of

infinite attributes. Each of the attributes expresses the eternal and infinite essence of God.

Unlike Descartes, Spinoza is a monist. He holds the view that, there is only one substance. He speaks of God as a single and infinite substance. He defines substance as "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself: I mean that the conception of which does not depend on the conception of another thing from which it must be formed."¹⁴ This means that substance has no external cause but has the cause of itself within itself. In this connection, Spinoza conceived God as a self-caused infinite substance. He defines attribute as "that which an intellect perceives as consisting the essence of substance."¹⁵

Spinoza does not contrast God and the world as if they were as different and distinct as cause and effect. In other words, he does not regard God as the immaterial cause and the world as the material effect. For Spinoza, God is interchangeable with Nature. He holds the view that there is only one substance.

Let me examine here briefly the similarities and differences between Spinoza's and the Khasis' view of God and creation. God is the ground of the world for Spinoza. According to him, there are two aspects of Nature. He uses the two expressions, namely, (i) *Natura naturans*, and (ii) *Natura naturata*. By the expression, *natura naturans*, he

means substance and its attributes. It means God insofar as He is considered to act by the requirement of His own nature. On the other hand, by *natura naturata*, Spinoza means that everything that follows from the necessity of the nature of God or of any one of God's attributes.

As quoted in *Spinoza*, edited by Marjorie Grene:

By *Natura naturans* we must understand that which is, in itself and is conceived through itself, or those attributes of substance which express eternal and infinite essence, that is, God in so far as he is considered as a free cause. By *Natura naturata* I understand all that follows from the necessity of God's nature, or of any one of God's attributes, that is, all the modes of the attributes of God in so far as they are considered as things which are in God, and which without God can neither be nor be conceived... *Natura naturans* as *actus* i.e., the exhaustively determinate actuality, of this potency it is *Natura naturata*. Genetically God is prior to the world; ontologically they are identical as interminately infinite and infinitely determinate.¹⁶

According to Spinoza, the world consists of the modes of God's attributes. Everything in this world is determined by God. He equates substance with God and identifies God with Nature. For Spinoza, God is the primary or principal substance which is infinite, indivisible and eternal. It is an all inclusive Reality. All things belong to this all pervasive substance. This means that God or Substance is an all pervading principle of the universe

including nature.

One can equate the Khasi *U Blei* with Spinoza's conception of God. If I am to use Spinoza's terminology, *U Blei* as the *Natura naturans*, is the ultimate reality and the immanent ground of the world and mother earth. This world and mother earth cannot exist without *U Blei*.

In this sense, God is the only substance which is infinite and eternal. The Khasis believe that it is *U Blei* who created this world and *ka Meiramew*. They cannot exist independently of God. It is so, because both this world and mother earth are just the manifestations or attributes of the Divine. In other words, they are the expressions of *U Blei*. Their existence follow from the necessity of the nature of God. In this connection, this world and *ka Meiramew* belong to the realm of *natura naturata* in Spinoza's terminology. The discussion on the two concepts namely *U Blei* and *Ka Meiramew* will be enriched if I can take a cue from Miri's remarks on the relation between the two. She recalls Spinoza's distinction between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*, and writes:

This resembles Spinoza's distinction between *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*. *Ka Meiramew* is *natura naturans*.¹⁷

If I were to equate Spinoza's conception of Nature with *ka Meiramew* I could describe it as the Khasis' belief

that *ka Meiramew* is not just the earth (soil) but also the goddess of the earth which has a close association with God. They regard this World and Mother Earth as the dwelling places of the deities. God is not completely outside this World. In a broad sense, we can say, *ka Meiramew* is *Natura naturata* which has a close link with the *Natura naturans*. This World and mother earth will be dissolved into God who is the only ultimate Reality and eternal substance. In this case, *Natura naturata* is not completely distinct and alienable from the *natura naturans*. The Khasi thinkers conceived *U Blei* as the only infinite system which can be looked at from different points of view.

The Khasis differ from Spinoza in the sense that they never identify God with Nature. For them, *U Blei* is the Divine Creator of the World. This world is God's manifestation which He created as an act of His free will. On the other hand, the Khasis hold a similar view with Spinoza. For them this world has no independent existence apart from God. In a strict sense, it is well fitted to say that is the Khasi world view, *U Blei's* attribute is *Natura naturans* while *ka Meiramew* is the *Natura naturata*.

In this chapter, I have made a modest attempt to understand the reality of *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* not only as they are conceived in themselves but also in

relation to *U Blei* who is the supreme God.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that *Ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* are seen as the abodes and dwelling places of the various deities. As pointed out earlier, they are regarded as the manifestations of the Supreme Being. A few words about the concept of *U Blei* and the different deities will be of relevance here. H. O. Mawrie says:

The term 'gods' is another way of addressing God and it does not mean to say that there is one or many gods. It means that God has various names but it does not mean that we are worshipping many gods. They are just the different names given to God in relation to our life and our relationship to Him.¹⁸

Ka Pyrthei is the manifestation of the Divine. *Ka Pyrthei* is not the body of *U Blei* but is a means where He reveals Himself through the various phenomena which happen from time to time. So also *ka Meiramew* which is part of *ka Pyrthei* is an instrument by which God reveals Himself.

Mawrie holds the view that *U Blei* is at work in *ka Pyrthei* where he reveals Himself in various forms because He himself is formless. Those deities who have the attributes of *U Blei* are generally called *ki blei* (gods).

According to Khasi tradition the highest reality is one supreme being called *U Blei*, God the Creator. He also is the provider (*Nongbuh*) and

the maintainer (Nongsei). However this God has no form. Sometimes he is addressed as a female deity but very often as a *U Blei ka Blei* (He-God, She-God).¹⁹

Not only does *U Blei* reveal Himself in a variety of forms in the world, but also reveals the deities that dwell within the various phenomena of *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew*. The gods and goddesses constitute the very essence of *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew*. This suggests that *U Blei* is both active and operative in the world. He has unlimited manifestations and operations in the world. This is one of the reasons that makes the Khasi thinkers to regard *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* as the abodes of the Divine. According to this understanding, *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* are the means and the sources of the divine revelation of God to man.

We should bear in mind that the Khasis believe that the plans or purposes of God are hidden from man's knowledge. It is for this reason that man is in need of the revelation of God from time to time. It is very interesting to note that the Khasis believe that God can reveal Himself in and through *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew*. On the other hand, *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* are the manifestations of God's mind or inner reality. In other words, it means that they are the expressions of the Divine. Soso Tham also strongly believes that *U Blei* and other deities dwell and

operate actively on '*U Lum Shyllong*' (Shillong Peak). According to Tham, *U Lum Shyllong* is a symbol of God's greatness and artistic creativity. He says:

What more do I want,
Of the whole world;
But to have just a glance.
How do the gods live.²⁰

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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3. U Sib Charan Roy, *Kot Tohkit Tirtir*, Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, 1929, p. 69.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 8
5. *Ibid.*
6. H.O. Mawrie, *Ka Theology Jong Ka Niam Khasi*, Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, 1991, p. 73
7. E. Bars, *Khasi-English Dictionary*, Shillong: Don Bosco Press, (Reprint), 1973, p. 738
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 14. S. E. Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977, p.258
 15. *Ibid.*
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 17. Sujata Miri, *Khasi World View*, p. 55
 18. H.O. Mawrie, *Ka Theology*, p.80
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 20. Soso Tham, *Ka Duitara Ksiar*, Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, 1972, (Reprint), p.40.

CHAPTER III

THE CONCEPT OF *KA PYRTHEI*

Ka Niam Khasi (Khasi Religion) gives us a substantive background of the elders, thoughts and speculations regarding the concept of *ka Pyrthei*.

When the poets and myth-tellers refer to *ka Meiramew*, *ka Bneng* (heaven) and *ka Hawhaw* as the atmospheric region between them, they actually speak of the various phenomena occurring in these above mentioned regions. They talk about certain powers that are abiding and operating in these different regions generally known as *ki blei* (gods).

It is very difficult to trace the historical development of the Khasi conception of *ka Pyrthei*. But one assumes that the Khasi speculation about *ka Pyrthei* started very early and together with the totality of the speculations regarding existence itself. They may have asked themselves these questions: (i) Was there any creator of this *ka Pyrthei*? (ii) How did he create it? (iii) What is the nature of this *ka Pyrthei*? (iv) How it is related to us? (v) How can we know or study it?

Before attempting to answer these questions, let one point be made clear right at the beginning, and that is – Khasis see *ka Pyrthei* as an orderly system consisting of *ka*

Meiramew as below *ka Bneng* which is the physical heaven or sky or the space above *ka Meiramew*. And *Ka Meiramew* on which we live is separated from *ka Bneng* by a vast expanse of the atmospheric region (*hawhaw*). While *ka Meiramew* is the Mother goddess and Divine Creatrix, *ka Bneng* is regarded as the original home of man. *Ka Meiramew* and *ka Bneng* are actually a complementary pair of realities. It is unthinkable for the Khasis to think of a divine marriage between *ka Bneng* and *ka Meiramew* because in Khasi language both of them are of the feminine gender. It is therefore believed that *ka Bneng* sent its agents *u Basa* and *u Ryngekew* who are the male deities to be the sky fathers to have the divine marriage with *ka Meiramew* to cause the world of objects to come into existence. In any case of the two, that is, the male versus the female deity, it is the female which occupies the centre stage in Khasi tradition. The union of *U Basa* and *Ka Meiramew* may be compared with the vision of the *Vedic* thought where Earth is given more importance in comparison to the sky, that is, *Dyava*. The name of the male is mostly in combination with the female.

The *Vedic* people loved the Earth much more than the Sky or the Heaven, and the word for the Sky or Heaven, *Dayus*, occurs more often in combination with the name of the Earth as a dual compound than alone. There are such dual-compounds of the word *Dyaus* with a few names of the Earth, *Dydva-Prithivi*, *Dyava-Ksama* and

Dyava-Bhumi. And this pair appears far more times in the Rgveda than any pair of god.¹

It is interesting to note that the Khasi thinkers thought of *ka Pyrthei* as having two halves, namely, *ka Bneng* which is *shajrong* (above) and *ka Meiramew* which is *sha tbian* (below) and the two halves are joined together by a gigantic tree which is regarded as the symbol of goodness and righteousness. H.O. Mawrie writes:

On the top of U Sohpetbneng Peak there grew a Tree which served as a ladder of communication between God and Man. That was then the Golden Age after Creation. But this happy state of things had its end for in the course of time Man i.e., U Hynniew Trep U Hynniew Skum, the ancestors of the Khasi Race, drifted away from God to choose his own way and thus the Golden Bridge had to collapse. This parable speaks of one thing and that is Man's Transgression and Man's Fall.²

After the Fall there grew on the top of U Diengiei Peak another Tree which was as big as it was tall and its ever spreading branches and leaves became so thick as to overcast the Earth with darkness.³

In both Khasi creation myths of *U Sohpetbneng* (Mount navel of heaven) and *U Diengiei* (Divine Tree), there is a talk of a world tree which is the unifier and separator of the two halves, *ka Bneng* and *ka Meiramew* of *ka Pyrthei*.

Ka Bneng is the physical heaven because human beings could come and go from *ka Bneng* to *ka Meiramew* and vice versa through the Golden Ladder (*Jingkieng Ksiar*) which bridged the gap between *ka Meiramew* and *ka Bneng*. Soso Tham, in his poem, *Ka Aiom Ksiar* which means the Golden Age writes:

Out of the sixteen huts on high,
 People of seven huts came to live here;
 To show the Righteousness of God...⁴

R. S. Lyngdoh while referring to the people of the Golden Age as seen in the Khasi mythologies describes it as follows:

... The people of the Seven Huts in heaven were sent to come and live on the empirical world with a view to be its rulers and to continue to come and go to heaven through the Golden Bridge which was located on the hill of Sohpetbneng.⁵

Here, we see that the number *Khathynriew* (sixteen families) which Soso Tham refers to, means sixteen tribes or families. Prior to *ka Dorbar Blei ba nyngkong*⁶ (First General Divine Council) the people of the sixteen huts remained with *U Blei* in heaven. They came down to live on Earth with a specific purpose: to till the land, to

cultivate it and to be the steward-rulers of *ka Meiramew* and all the living beings. Creation at that particular age was in perfect harmony with *U Blei* and with each other. This appears in sharp contrast to other theories of primeval origin. For instance, in China, Lao-Tzu describes this state as: "There was something formless yet complete, that existed before heaven and earth; without sound, without substance, dependent on nothing, unchanging, all pervading, unfailing. It was from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang."⁷

The hymn then continues: "Darkness was in the beginning hidden by darkness; indistinguishable, this all was water. That which, coming into being, was covered with the void, that One arose through the power of heat." In the *Tao Te Ching* we find: "We can but call it the Mystery or rather the 'Darker than any Mystery'; the Doorway whence issued all Secret Essences"; and in *Genesis* (1:2). "And darkness was on the face of the deep and the spirit of God was moving on the face of the waters."⁸

However, the *Khasis* insist that during that time the human beings and the animals could understand and speak the same language. *Soso Tham* speaks about this common language as follows:

Man, Animal, Tiger, Snake,
All they speak of one language;

That is before devil could appear,
All of them worship the Supreme God.⁹

Donbok T. Laloo referred to the prevalent scenario of the living beings of the Golden Age as follows:

The people of the Seven Huts managed the administration verbally and orally. They maintained healthy relationship with the members of the Nine Huts above and God. They could communicate with every one with the universal language. The administration functioned smoothly and every one lived in peace and harmony during the time of the Golden Age. All species increased in number. The ruling Seven Huts got the title Seven Crowns who ruled the seven Kingdoms with clean and efficient administration under the leadership of King Lakriah.¹⁰

The Khasis in the ancient past spoke of the presence of the realities in the space above us. Both, the realities above and the earth below, were seen as the abodes of the gods (*ki blei*).

To recapitulate, *ka Pyrthei* may be seen as consisting of three main regions, namely, *ka Bneng* which is above, *ka Meiramew* which is below and *ka hawhaw* (an atmospheric region or space) between *ka Bneng* and *ka Meiramew*. Their conception of *ka Pyrthei* as of three-fold division, regards each region as inter-related with the other regions. Of course there is no mention

anywhere of the actual distance from *ka Meiramew* below to *ka Bneng shajrong* (heaven above).

Incidentally when the Khasis speak of *Bam Hynroh ka Sngi, u Bnai* (Solar Eclipse, Lunar Eclipse and the Sun's refusal to shine) they also hint at other concealed places which are not visible and are a mystery to humans.

We could understand that the people who lived in this golden era lived an active life on earth. They worshipped a number of gods and *Ka Hok* seen as the Universal Principle of Righteousness operated everywhere in the world.

Ka Pyrthei is composed of many elements, namely, Earth (*Khyndew*), Water (*Um*), Wind (*Lyer*), Fire (*Ding*) and others. U Sib Charan Roy holds the view that the living material objects and living organisms like plants and animals are composed of various kinds of elements and their combinations. The celestial regions are associated with light while the earth is related to smell and darkness. The month of July is called *Naitung* which means 'smell-month'.

Interestingly the Khasis found most of the phenomena on the earth as having originated from the higher regions. They appeared to have perceived other regions which are behind and beyond what we normally see around us. This can be seen in their discussion of the three-fold division of

ka Pyrthei consisting of *ka Ramew*, *ka Haw-haw* (atmospheric region) and *ka Bneng*. First is their conception of the visible *ka Pyrthei* as seen with their eyes but at the same time they have an insight into something deeper than what ordinary men can see and hear. They speak of the nature of *ka Pyrthei* as not merely limited to what is seen with the physical eyes.

Only few men can see the finer aspects of *ka Pyrthei* which consists in *ki blei* (gods) and *ka Hok* as the source of cosmic order and moral law. It is noteworthy to mention in this connection that the ancient Khasis have the perception of the connective relation between the visible *Pyrthei* and the concealed *Pyrthei*. The visible part of *ka Pyrthei* in this connection refers to the physical world in which we live. As mentioned earlier *ka Ramew* is the visible part of the sum total of *ka Pyrthei* and it is commonly spoken of, as *ka Pyrthei sha Tbian* or the world below. The other regions are commonly expressed by the Khasis as *ka Pyrthei sha jrong* or the world above. Till today, the traditional Khasis, especially the diviner (*Nongknia*) used to pray to *U Blei* (God) as *U Blei Najrong Na Tbian* which means "Oh! God who dwells in the heaven above and the Earth below". H. Lyngdoh makes some observations on the Khasi prayer at the goat's sacrifice (*Pomblang*) held at Nongkrem as follows:

Oh God, Lord Master, one thousand thanks,
 You are Supreme, Lord command-giver,
 You put human beings in this World,
 Under the heaven above, on the Earth below.¹¹

Let me say a word about Khasi cosmology. The Khasi cosmology is not of one connected narrative. The Khasi people have many creation narratives. Recent Khasi Cosmologists have made an attempt to construct a cosmology by reproducing their traditional cosmological thought. Sib Charan Roy holds the view that *ka Pyrthei* came into being as a result of the combination of several atoms called '*ki Phngit-longdoh*'. G. Costa, H. Elias and D. T. Laloo are of the opinion that *ka Ramew* is a creation of *U Blei* with its implicit order. Human beings are not a creation out of the dust of Earth but products of the heavenly creation sent to Earth. The rest of creation is the product of the divine union of *ka Meiramew* and the sky fathers and deities called *u Basa u Ryngekew*.

Practically speaking, all the Khasi cosmologists recognize the presence of the transcending and operative power of an all-powerful Intelligent Being (*U Blei U Balah U Baiai*). The cosmologists have given various names to this Being. For example, (a) *U Blei Nongbuh Nongthaw* which means God, the Creator and Planner, (b) *U Blei Nongsei Nongpynlong* which means God the Giver and Dispenser of Life, (c) *U Blei Nongthaw Bynriew U*

Nongbuh Bynriew which means God the Creator of mankind and Planner of mankind. (d) *U Blei Trai Kynrad* which means the Lord-God and Master of everything.

All the above mentioned names of God, suggest a theistic account of the role of *U Blei* as Creator of the world. They see *U Blei* as an Intelligent Being (*U Balah U Baiiai*) who produced the Earth (*Ramew*) and disclosed the sky (*bneng*) by his own wisdom and might. Being the one who produced the heaven (*bneng*) and *Ramew* He is the most skillful artisan of all beings. He had the 'desire' to create *ka Pyrthei* exercising His freewill and creativity. Thus He is the bond between the Non-entity and the 'entity'. He was there in the beginning and established the *bneng* and the *ramew*. He created *ka Meiramew, U Basa U Ryngekew* (sky fathers and deities) and placed them in this *ka Pyrthei*.

Thinkers like Sib Charan Roy, G. Costa, H. Elias and D. T. Laloo agree in ascribing the causation of *ka Pyrthei* to an omnipotent intelligent Being though they differ on the mode of description of such causation.

We must note the fact that the Khasi thinkers hold the view that the world is created out of something and not out of nothing. Let me here refer to a *Vedic* poem on creation from a primordial principle which is non-existent. It begins as follows:

There was not the non-existent nor the existent then;
 There was not the air nor the heaven which is beyond.
 What did it contain? Where? In whose protection?
 Was there water, unfathomable, profound?
 There was not death nor immortality then.
 There was not the beacon of night, nor of day.
 That one breathed, windless, by its own power.
 Other than that there was not anything beyond.¹²

This perception of the origin of the world as the evolution of the existent from the non-existent is unacceptable to Sib Charan Roy. Of course there was neither non-entity nor entity that could precede God's existence. There was no atmosphere nor sky above; there were no living beings on the earth (*ramew*) or below because the desire to create had not yet arisen in the Creator's mind. But this does not mean that creation comes out of nothing. Sib Charan Roy writes:

From nothing comes nothing; from something which truly exists, has a body, shape, colour, comes out of what has body, shape, colour.¹³

G. Costa, H. Elias, D. T. Laloo and Soso Tham hold the view that creation can be produced directly by *U Blei* or indirectly through the instrumentality of *ka Hukum* (Command-Giver) or through *ka Meiramew*, that is through her union with *u Basa u Ryngekew* who are the sky fathers and deities of this world. This shows that the Khasi cosmologists agree with the principle that creation is a

product of something. On the other hand, they are against the idea of *Creatio-Ex nihilo* and advocating the notion of the 'Ex nihilo nihil fit'. According to them, before making a table, the idea of tableness is already in the mind of the carpenter. *U Blei* is regarded as the starting point of all phenomenal existence and the root and the source of *ka Pyrthei*.

The Khasis do not consider *U Blei* as a 'cause' and this world (*Pyrthei*) as an 'effect'. To them, *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew*, though they have been created by *U Blei*, yet they are not related to God as a cause and effect because according to them, *ka Pyrthei* (World) and *ka Meiramew* (Mother Earth) are co-existing with God.

In the Upanisads, Brahman is described in two ways, one is *nirguna* Brahman which is formless, transcendental, unconditioned and beyond our reach. The other is *saguna* Brahman which has a form, is immanent, conditioned and accessible. *Saguna* Brahman as God is not a different existence from *nirguna* Brahman as the cause and ruler or governor of the world and accessible to man as the object of worship.¹⁴ *Nirguna* Brahman, on the other hand, being beyond all attributes, cannot respond to the needs and prayers of man. The Upanisads make the distinction between eternity and temporality, *nirguna* Brahman and *saguna* Brahman and the transcendental God and the

immanent God. These distinctions are some of the ways in which the Upanisads try to explain God's relation to the world and human beings.

In the Upanisads 'to create' means to become and becoming is non-different from being. In this connection, becoming is not illusory but the manifestation of being which lies hidden from us. In other words, the manifested form the reality in its phenomenality and the hidden form is its noumenality. In this case, phenomenality and noumenality are not two diametrically opposite concepts but two sides of the same thing. The Upanisads deny the independent status of the world because it cannot exist apart from Brahman. In other words, Brahman stands for the whole reality including the world.¹⁵

As it has been repeatedly asserted, the Upanisadic assertion of the oneness of the ultimate Reality does not necessarily mean denying manyness. It only means 'the one in the many'. In other words, to assert infinity of the ultimate Reality does not necessarily mean to assert finiteness. It means that manyness and finiteness may not be final with regard to their existence because they are a borrowed form of the one ultimate reality.

Radhakrishnan describes this universality of Brahman as the first principle of the universe which is known through *atman*, the inner-self of man. The whole world is

Brahman, the soul of mine which is within the heart is also Brahman. The absoluteness of God is qualified in the *Visistadvaita* of Ramanuja so as to admit of God's existence within the scope of His universal free activity.¹⁶

Ramanuja used an *Upanisadic* type of analogy. He says, our clothes are warm because the body is warm. There is no heat in the clothes but the heat comes from the body within. According to Ramanuja, the life of all the creatures is derived from one source of life behind them. Their life comes from the Giver of Life. Ultimately, God (Brahman) and the world are one. Substantively, this does not mean that God is identical with the world but it means that God is present, active and is within the world. God is related to the world not as an outsider or spectator but as an insider. In fact, God is related to the world as the human soul is related to the body. God is the inner and immortal controller of the world from inside. God is never identified with the world; rather He is distinctly felt and recognized as different from the world which He animates. Ramanuja goes to the extent of saying that since God is formless, He created the world in order that through it His nature may be revealed. In this sense, the world of physical objects is an instrument by which God can make known and reveal His wisdom and greatness. So far Ramanuja's conception of God would be similar to the Khasi conception of *U Blei*. However, while

for Ramanuja, individual souls and the world are real as parts and manifestations of the same Brahman, it is not so for the Khasis. Ramanuja believes in the causal theory of *Parinama-vada*, that is to say, the effect is an actual transformation of the cause as curd is nothing else but the transformed milk. It is the doctrine of the modifiability of the cause.

It is interesting to note that Ramanuja holds the view that God within His all-inclusive and pervasive position transcends both the unconscious matter (*acit*) which is without intelligence and the finite souls or spirits (*cit*) which have certain intelligence in them. According to Ramanuja, *acit* is the source of the material objects called *Prakrti*. It is seen as the root and origin of material things. Here he seems to have been influenced by the *Upanisads*. He believes that the unconscious matter (*acit*) is the body of God and God is the controller from within just as a human body is controlled from within by the soul.

As pointed out earlier, Ramanuja admits three entities, viz., *Isvara*, who is the supreme Reality, *cit* which are the individual souls (*jivas*) and *acit*, the matter. And *Isvara* is the basis (*adhyasa*) of the entire universe. For Ramanuja, the world of multiplicity is the manifestation of Brahman. The evolution of the world from *Prakrti* is real

transformation of God. He criticizes Samkara because he interprets God's manifestation as nothing or unreality.¹⁷

Ramanuja states that the world is not infinite as the ultimate Reality (*Brahman*). It means that the world is real from an empirical standpoint, that is to say, for those who rely on sense experience. But the world appears unreal for those who have trans-empirical consciousness. To Ramanuja, *Brahman* and *Atman* are one, the universal self and the individual self are one, because according to him, *Atmanjnana* is *Brahmanjnana*.

As is well-known, Ramanuja denies the unreality of the world and lays emphasis on Bhakti as a means of salvation (*Moksa*). At times, the Visistadvaita is termed as the religious cult of the Vaisnavaits. For Ramanuja, *Brahman* is the highest reality in spirit but with attributes. *Brahman* also is self-consciousness with knowledge of Himself. Ramanuja's philosophy is called qualified or modified non-dualism (*Visistadvaita*). Ramanuja identifies one and the same reality of God and creation by identifying God with *Brahman*. To Ramanuja, *Brahman* is God with whom souls can enter into personal relationship by love and devotion.

Though the *Upanisads* have many theories of creation, it is commonly asserted that in respect of

substance the world is not radically different from its ultimate source which means God.

Ramanuja takes a positive attitude towards the notion of creation. He regards the created matter as something real and good rather than as an illusory one. He is of the opinion that God (*Brahman*) creates the diverse objects and human beings in the world for experience and self-realization. So also the Khasi myths of creation emphasize God's plan for mankind to dwell on this earth with diverse manifestation of nature in mutual respect.

Ramanuja's view is *vishistadvaita* or non-dualism qualified by difference. The Absolute is an organic unity, an identity which is qualified by diversity. It is a concrete whole (*vishista*) which consists of the inter-related and inter-dependent subordinate elements which are called '*vishesanas*' and the immanent and controlling spirit which is called '*vishesya*'. Unity means realization of being a vital member of this organic whole. God or the Absolute is this whole. He is the immanent inner controller, the Supreme Reality who holds together in unity the dependent matter and individual souls as His body. Ramanuja recognizes three things as ultimate and real (*tattva-traya*). These are matter (*achit*), souls (*chit*) and God (*Ishvara*). Though all are equally real, the first two are absolutely dependent on God. Though they are substances in

themselves, yet in relation to God, they become His attributes. They are the body of God who is their soul. God is the soul of nature. God is also the soul of souls. Our souls are souls in relation to our bodies, but in relation to God, they become His body and He is their soul. The relation between the soul and the body is that of inner inseparability (*aprthaksiddhi*). This is also the relation between substance and attribute. *Aprthak-siddhi* is the relation between the body and the soul, between a substance and its attributes, between parts and whole and may be between one substance and another. It is an inner, inseparable, vital and organic relation. God is qualified by matter and souls.¹⁸

They form His body and are inseparable from and utterly dependent on Him. Ramanuja defines a body as that which is controlled, supported and utilized for its purposes by a soul. Matter and souls are called attributes (*prakara*) of God; they are the controlled (*niyamiya*), the supported (*dharya*), the parts (*amsha*) and the accessory means (*shesa*), while God is their substance (*prakari*), controller (*niyanta*), support (*adhara*), the whole (*amshi*) and the principal end (*shesi*). They are eternal with God, but are not external to him. God is free from all external differences – homogeneous (*saja-tiya*) as well as heterogeneous (*vijatiya*), since there is nothing either similar or dissimilar which is external to or other than

Him. But He possesses internal differences (*svagata bheda*) as His organic body is made of real and diverse elements like matter and souls. His relation with them is natural (*svabhavika*) and eternal (*sanatana*). God is both the material and the instrumental cause of the world. He is the immanent as well as the transcendent ground of the world. He is immanent in the whole world as its inner controller (*antaryami*) and yet in His essence He transcends the world. His is a perfect personality. He is full of all good qualities – Existence, Knowledge and Bliss; Truth, Goodness and Beauty; Lustre, Love and Power ¹⁹

Ramanuja finds justification for his doctrine of the Absolute as a Triune Unity in the following Upanisadic passages. The Shvetashvatara says: There are three ultimate existences – the eternal and all-knowing and all-powerful God, the eternal powerless soul and the eternal matter, and these three constitute the Absolute. The same *Upanisad* further tells us:

This alone need be known and there is nothing else to be known that there are three entities, the enjoyer (*bhokta*), the enjoyed (*bhogyā*) and the mover (*prerita*), which constitute the Absolute. If a man knows these three he knows Brahman. The same *Upanisad* goes on. The One God who runs through all beings, who is all-pervasive and who is the immanent inner controller of all beings is the

Supreme Reality. There is nothing greater than He, there is nothing external to Him, He fills the whole universe. The *Taittiriya* Upanisad tells us that all beings arise from, live in and return to this Brahman. God is the soul of Nature and also the soul of souls. He is immanent and yet He is transcendent. The *Brhadaranyaka* Upanisad describes Him as the running thread (*sutra*) which binds together all the worlds and all the souls. He is the immanent inner controller (*antaryami*) of all. He is present in matter and yet He is different from matter; matter does not know Him; matter forms His body; He controls matter from within; He is the Supreme Soul, the *Antaryami*, the Immortal. Just as the spokes are bound together within the wheel, so also all the elements and all the souls are bound together within this *Atman*. He is like fire; they are like sparks. They are real; He is their reality. They are true; He is their truth. Hence He is called the Truest of the true.²⁰

In Ramanuja's account of God, we may notice three points of importance. First, God is identified with the Absolute. He is Brahman and Brahman must be a *savishesa* or a qualified unity. God stands for the whole universe and matter and souls form His body, He being their soul. As the Absolute, the ultimate unity-in-and-through-trinity, the concrete Whole, God may be viewed through two stages - as cause and as effect. During the state of dissolution (*pralaya*), God remains as the cause with subtle matter and

unembodied souls form His body. The whole universe lies latent in Him. During the state of creation (*srsti*), the subtle matter becomes gross and the unembodied souls (except the *nitya* and *mukta* souls) become embodied according to their *karmas*. In this effect-state the universe becomes manifest. The former state is called the causal state (*karanavastha*) of Brahman, while the latter state is the effect-state (*karyavastha*) of Brahman. Secondly, God is considered as the immanent inner controller (*antaryami*), the qualified substance (*vishesya* or *prakari*) who is in Himself changeless and is the unmoved Mover of this world-process. In His essence He does not suffer change which is said to fall to the lot of His attributes or modes only. Ramanuja makes no distinction between an attribute and a mode.²¹

Matter and souls may be called either attributes or modes (*prakara*). They are absolutely dependent on God and are inseparable from Him. They are His body and He is their soul. Just as in the case of an ordinary individual, only the body undergoes change while the soul is changeless. Similarly it is only the body of God, that is, matter and the individual souls, that undergo changes and not God himself who is their soul. Hence God is the unchanging controller of all changes and the limitations of matter as well as the miseries and the imperfections of the finite souls do not affect the essence of God. Thirdly, God

is also transcendent. He is the perfect personality. He has a Divine body (*aprakrtadehavishista*). Embodiment is not the cause of bondage. It is karma which is the cause of bondage. Hence God, though embodied, is not bound, for He is the Lord of Karma. The first two points about God are derived from the interpretation of the *Upanisads*, while this point which is theistic in character is the result of the *Bhagavata* influence on Ramanuja. According to scholars, Ramanuja tries to fuse the immanent *Upanisadic* Absolute with the transcendent God of the *Pancharatra* or *Bhagavata* theism. God, as the perfect personality, is devoid of all demerits and possesses all merits. He has infinite knowledge and bliss. He has a Divine body and is the creator, preserver and destroyer of this universe. He has His consort *Laksmi*, the symbol of power and mercy. He is called *Narayana* or *Vasudeva*. He lives in His citadel *Vaikuntha* which is made of Pure *Sattva* (*shuddha sattva*) or *Nityavibhuti*. His qualities like knowledge, power and mercy etc. are eternal, infinite, numberless, unlimited, undefiled and matchless. He is knowledge to the ignorant, power to the powerless, mercy to the guilty, grace to the afflicted, parental affection to the impure, perennial attachment to those who fear separation, nearness to those who pine to see Him, and kindness to all. Though One in Himself, He manifests Himself in five forms in order to help His devotees. As the immanent soul of the universe,

He is *Antaryami* (first form). As the transcendent personal Lord, *Narayana* or *Vasudeva*, He is *Para* or Supreme (second form). As the creator, preserver and destroyer.²²

God reveals Himself through four-fold *Vyuha* (third form). His manifestation as the Lord is called *Vasudeva* (this should be distinguished from the *Para Vasudeva* of whom this is the first manifestation). His manifestation as the ruler of the cognitive aspect of the souls (*buddhitattva* or *jivatattva*) and as the creator of this universe is called *Pradyumna*. His manifestation as the ruler of the volitional aspect of the souls (*ahankaratattva*) and as the preserver of this universe is called *Aniruddha*. All these four manifestations are called *Vyuha* and they are the partial and incomplete manifestations of the Supreme Lord (*Para*). When God descends down on this earth in the human or the animal form, He is called *Vibhava* or *Avatara* (incarnation) (fourth form). He does so in order to protect the good, punish the wicked and restore the *dharma*, the Law. *Vibhava* is of two kinds primary (*mukhya*) when the Lord Himself descends, like in *Krsna*, and secondary (*gauna*) when the souls are inspired by the Lord, like Shiva, Buddha etc. Of these only the former is to be worshipped by the seekers for liberation. The fifth and the last form of God is when out of His extreme mercy He takes the form of the holy idols (*archavatara*) enshrined in

the recognized temples like *Shrirangam* so that His devotees might get opportunities to serve Him physically.²³

Creation, according to Ramanuja, is absolutely real. The world and souls are as real as God Himself. They are neither created nor are they destroyed. Ramanuja believes in *Parinama-Vada*, the theory that the effect necessarily pre-exists in its material cause. Creation, therefore, like that in *Sankhya*, means only explicit manifestation of the effect which was already implicitly contained in its material cause and destruction means only the return of the effect in the bosom of its material cause. Ramanuja believes in the *parinamavada* form of *satkaryavada* which means that the material cause really changes itself in the form of its effect. The effect is a real transformation of its material cause, just as curd is a real transformation of milk or a gold ornament is of gold or an earthen pot is of earth. Change is not apparent but real. His view is known as *Brahmaparinamavada* because according to it the entire universe including the material world and the individual souls is a real modification of Brahman. Though Ramanuja, like *Sankhya*, believes in *Prakrti*, unlike it, he makes *Prakrti* absolutely dependent on God and controlled by God from within just as the body is controlled from within by the soul. The world of matter and the souls, as stated above, are as real as God. Independence, according to Ramanuja, does not constitute the essence of reality. A

thing in order to be real need not be independent. The material world and the souls are absolutely real though they are absolutely dependent on God. Though substances in themselves, in relation to God they are merely His attributes or modes. They always qualify God and form His body and He is their soul. They are organically related to Him and are not external to Him.²⁴

God is All-inclusive and includes matter and souls within Himself as His body controls them both from within. Matter and souls are different from each other and are also different from God, the controller, though they are not external to Him. They are co-eternal with Him. God neither creates them nor destroys them. Creation means that the subtle matter called *Prakrti* evolves into gross elements and the immaterialized souls become housed in gross bodies according to their *karmas*. The process of creation starts in order to enable the souls to reap the fruits of their past deeds and this process is said to be beginningless so that there ever remains the possibility of past deeds. The law of Karma, therefore, necessitates creation. And yet Ramanuja says that creation and dissolution of the world are due to the sweet will of God; they are His *lila* or sport. The contradiction has to be reconciled by supposing that the Law of Karma represents the will of God. God is self-determined and Karma is the

expression of His self-determined will. The charges of tyranny, cruelty and partiality are thus ruled out.

The similarities between Ramanuja conception of God and creation and the Khasi conception of God (*U Blei*) and creation may be briefly shown as follows:

Ramanuja's Views of God and Creation

- Non-dualistic
- There is a substantive unity of God and creation.
- This world is the manifestation of God.
- What is non-God is the mode or attribute of God.
- This world is finite and God is infinite.
- Knowledge of creation leads to the knowledge of God.

Khasi View of God and Creation

- Non-dualistic in substance
- There is a substantive oneness between *U Blei* and *ka Pyrthei*.
- This world is created by God for His manifestation.
- Whatever is non-God is the work of God.
- This world is finite and God is infinite.
- To know a man or a tree in its correct perspective is to know God.

- God is the creator and inner controller of this world (*antaryami*).
 - God is different from the world in form and function and not in substance.
 - God (*Brahman*) is both transcendent and immanent.
 - Creation is absolutely real.
 - The world is the body of God.
 - Brahman is the cause and
- God is the creator and preserver of this world. He controls it from within.
- God is the creator of this world and this world is His creation. Ultimately, the world goes back to God at the time of dissolution.
- God exists everywhere. He is both transcendent and immanent.
- Creation is real. This world is not an illusion. It has a distinct existence.
- The world is the body of the goddess called *ka Meiramew* who co-exists with God.
- U Blei* created *ka Pyrthei*

When the Khasis regard God as formless, they once again come very close to the Visistadvaita of Ramanuja. He created the world with the purpose of making it an instrument where He can manifest His nature and character. As said earlier, for Ramanuja, the world is related to God (Brahman) like the relation of the human body to the soul. For the Khasis the presence of *U Blei* could be felt everywhere in the world.

According to Soso Tham, *ka Pyrthei* is divinely created by *U Blei* and therefore, it is sacred. He emphasizes this notion of sacredness as follows:

East, West, South, North
Is the Land the gods live.²⁵

When all over the world
Is surrounded by God²⁶

It is for this reason that the Khasis do not construct temples or churches to worship *U Blei*. They hold the view that God can be worshipped anywhere and at any time. Hence, we may safely conclude that the Khasi world view has a lot of affinity to Ramanuja's Visistadvaita in their conception of the relation between the world and God.

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CHAPTER IV

THE CONCEPT OF *KA MEIRAMEW*

The Khasis, since time immemorial, have perceived *ka Meiramew* as a living entity having a distinct and real existence. She is also conceived as the active goddess of the Earth. Like E. Bars, Phrikshon Lyngdoh describes *ka Meiramew* as the active goddess of the earth. He writes:

As the living creatures increased upon the surface of the earth, it was the duty of the mother earth to meet the needs of everything that lived and moved. As God had bestowed all the powers on her, it was her responsibility to approach God so that she could provide all the requirements that dwell on her. Khasis in the days of old, when they encounter any danger, they would call upon the mother earth, in response the mother earth comes to rescue....¹

Ka Meiramew has a significant role to play in the relation between *U Blei* and creation for she serves as a link between the visible world and the invisible world. Fr. G. Costa says: "In the beginning God created the heaven and Mother Earth."²

Another Khasi writer Donbok T. Laloo holds a similar view. Laloo explains that *ka Hukum* is one of the names of God. He says: "In the beginning God created the Mother Earth."³

Both these scholars emphasize the view that *ka Meiramew* is the first product of creation. All the celestial bodies of heaven and all

the living beings who live on the surface of the earth came into existence out of the joint efforts of *U Blei* the supreme God, *ka Meiramew* and *u Basa u Ryngekew*.

Soso Tham, who is a Khasi poet, holds almost the same view. According to Tham, the Spirit of God is always at work in the world. In the beginning, it is the Spirit of God which created a conducive atmosphere for the creation to come into existence. Tham says: "The Spirit of God moves in the Heart of the seas and out of which the earth comes into existence."⁴

The three scholars mentioned above emphasize the view that *ka Meiramew* has a dual nature. It has both, a material aspect as well as an immaterial aspect. While *ka Meiramew* can be perceived as a goddess, she can also be seen as holding all living beings on her lap. Though *ka Meiramew* is said to have arisen from chaos. She becomes a common and impersonal mother of all living beings: the humans, the gods, the elements like earth, fire, water, air etc. She gives birth to the sky and everything living on the surface of the earth and under the earth. It seems that the Khasis have a belief that *U Blei* after creating the heaven on high and the earth below, has given the creative power to *ka Meiramew* to complete the creative process by creating and recreating the remaining part of creation. G. Costa says:

In the beginning God created the heaven and Mother Earth. Mother Earth gave birth to the five children namely: the Moon, Sun, Water, Wind and Fire. The Moon and the Sun begot all kinds of stars in the firmament with their own glory and honour. The Wind, Water and Fire begot all things on the surface of the

earth beginning from a big tree to the small grass, all kinds of animals, insects and all those who live on earth. When all these things were there, the Earth appeared greenery and beautiful.⁵

Ka Meiramew seems to have numerous affairs and functions which resulted in the births of various other creations. However, the Khasi mythologies present *ka Meiramew* as a devoted mother who helps her children to maintain their continued existence. She is said to have nurtured and protected humanity and other living beings for thousands, even millions of years. She has patiently endured our hatred for one another and our disregard for the delicate balance of her nature. She has also endured our reckless manipulation of her body for selfish purposes. Despite our ignorance and indifference to *ka Meiramew* she continues to protect us from the perils of outer space by providing us with a home suited to our needs.

G. Costa and D. T. Laloo in their account hold the view that *ka Meiramew* had fervently and repeatedly requested *U Blei Nonghukum* (God who is the law-giver) to send down to Earth a ruler to rule it with a sense of stewardship and responsibility. The task of the earth's ruler is to look after and promote the harmonious relationship among the created beings who are living on the lap of the Mother Earth. The ruler is meant to rule justly on behalf of God and to protect *ka Meiramew* from degradation.

As the story goes, in responding to *ka Meiramew's* request, *U Blei* convened *ka Dorbar Blei kaba nyngkong* which means the first divine council of God held in heaven. The council decided that the

earth's ruler should be sent from amongst the members of *ki Khathynriew Bynriew* which means the members of the sixteen families in heaven. Out of the sixteen huts or families, the members of the seven huts or families known in Khasi local language as *ki Hymniew Trep* were selected to go down to earth and be the rulers of *ka Meiramew* and all the living beings

At this point of discussion, I want to refer to some Khasi myths which describe the relationship between *ka Meiramew* and other sacred forces and also the relationship between the human beings who lived in *ka Bneng* up above known as *ki Khyndai Trep* which means the members of the nine families and the members of *ki Hymniew Trep* or the members of the seven families who lived on earth below.

(a) U Solpethneng Myth (Refer Appendix D)

The phrase '*U Solpethneng*' means the navel of heaven. This myth explains the arrival of human beings on earth and how they lived on the lap of *ka Meiramew*. According to this myth the members of the nine families who lived in heaven could easily meet their counterparts who are the members of the seven families who lived on earth below. At that particular period of time, there was a huge navel string provided by God in the form of a golden ladder where the members of the nine huts or families who lived in heaven and the members of the seven huts or families who lived on earth could easily go up to heaven and come down to earth as they wished.

H.O. Mawrie is of the opinion that *u Solpetbneng* or navel of heaven is symbolic of a healthy relationship between man and God and man with other living beings. H. O. Mawrie says:

The central idea of the parable of *u Solpetbneng* is 'Peace between God and Man'. In the context of this parable, God is imagined as a Personal God (anthropomorphized) who has a personal relation with Man. On the top of *U Solpetbneng* Peak there grew a tree which served as a ladder of communication between God and Man. That was then the Golden Age after the Creation. But this happy state of things had its end for in the course of time Man i.e., *U Hymiew Trep U Hymiew Skum*, the ancestors of the Khasi Race, drifted away from God to choose his own way and thus the Golden Bridge had to collapse. This parable speaks of one thing and that is Man's transgression and Man's fall.⁶

S. S. Majaw however disagrees with Mawrie. He says, "*u Solpetbneng* is a symbol of Light because darkness was unknown at that period of time. It is also a symbol of covenantal relationship between God and Man. Man was a law abider of *Kamai ia ka Hok* which means the Law of Righteousness and the universal principle of Righteousness. Perhaps at that time, there was neither sunrise nor sunset".⁷ One of the reasons for disconnection and separation of the navel string that connected *ka bneng* (sky) and *ka Meiramew* (Mother Earth) was that man did not abide by the Law of *Kamai ia ka Hok* which is the universal law and the essential principle of Righteousness.

Till today, the Khasi people, especially the traditional Khasis regard *u Lum Solpetbneng* as a sacred hill attached to the navel string

of heaven. It is believed that this particular hill is situated at Ri Bhoi.

As Sumer Singh Sawian writes:

Lum Sohpetbneng Peak is shrouded in an aura of sacredness and sanctity being the repository of ancient wisdom and the fountain head of deep religious philosophy, zealously guarding the spiritual belief, the territorial integrity and cultural heritage of the *Hymniew Trep* people.⁸

Then again, on the occasion of the Seng Khasi he states that a pilgrimage to Lum Sohpetbneng Peak signifies:

An awakening to understand the depths of the deep rooted Khasi Philosophy and Religious belief which is believed to have been bestowed upon the Hymniewtrep families, according to a covenant reached with God the Creator, upon the three stones of respecting fellow beings, while maintaining self dignity and respect, and continuous and spiritual communion with the Creator, *Tip Briew Tip Blei*, to settle on earth, having strong bonds of kinship both between the matrilineal bloodline and lineage and close patrilineal ties, *Tip Kur Tip Kha*, and earning of righteousness *Kamai ia ka Hok*.⁹

The traditional Khasis believe that *U Blei* reveals or manifests Himself on Sohpetbneng Peak which is part and parcel of *ka Meiramew*. But most of the Christian-Khasis regard the creation narrative associated with Sohpetbneng Peak just as a narrative technique used by the ancient Khasi thinkers to explain the vital relationship between God and man or between the Mother Earth and man. According to Fr. Barnes Mawrie, "This mythology explains the arrival of man into this world."¹⁰

Hence there are two different views regarding the concept of *ka Meiramew* held by the Khasis. While the traditional Khasis regard *ka Meiramew* as a sacred mother, nourisher and provider of their needs, the Christian-Khasis do not regard *ka Meiramew* as a sacred mother.

(b) The Diengiei Peak Myth (Refer Appendix II)

‘Ka Diengiei’ is a gigantic tree which symbolizes the fall of man in general, and the people of *Hynniew Trep* race in particular. It is a symbol of darkness. It is the biggest gigantic tree ever grown on the laps of *ka Meiramew*. H.O. Mawrie writes:

The collapse of ‘The Golden Bridge’ on the top of U Lum Sohpetbneng marks the end of the Golden Age of U Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum and ushers in another which may be termed ‘The Dark Age’ as symbolized by ‘U Diengiei’. The Diengiei Peak is another peak lying just a few kilometres to the south-west of U Sohpetbneng Peak. The story goes that after the fall of U Sohpetbneng Tree which symbolizes the Fall of U Hynniew Trep U Hynniew Skum there grows on the top of U Lum Diengiei another tree which is so big and tall as one could imagine. The branches of the Tree are so overspread and the leaves so intertwined as to overcast the Earth with darkness.¹¹

It is believed that the *Diengiei* (tree) overcast the earth with dark shadows everywhere. Man had a tremendous sense of fear. He had a fear that under the dark cover of the *Diengiei* tree all kinds of wild and ferocious animals will come to kill him as their prey. Finally, man cut the *Diengiei* tree and consequently, there was no light in the entire world

(c) **The Krem Lamet Latang Myth (Refer Appendix III)**

When the Sun failed to give light the whole world of *U Hymiew Trep* (people of seven huts) was totally in darkness. H.O. Mawrie writes:

A day was fixed for the Dance Festival and all living creatures turned up in their grand costumes. They danced throughout the day until they were tired and towards evening when they were about to depart, there arrived the Sun and the Moon, a sister and a brother and they too danced. Every one booed at them mockingly saying that it was evil that a brother and a sister should dance together... In anger the Sun went off to hide herself inside one cave called '*Ka Krem Lamet ka Krem Latang*'. With her withdrawal to the cave the Earth was enveloped with total darkness. Finally a Cock was used as a Messenger and its crowing the Sun reappeared and there was light again.¹²

This myth symbolizes a broken relationship among the members of God's creation reminding one of the traditional Khasi belief that the World was originally just one unit. If there is any disorder of the things above or the things below it will consequently affect other members. The Khasi view of *ka Pyrthei* is thus a holistic view. This particular myth reminds us of the fact that sunlight is very essential for the living beings who live on the lap of *ka Meiramew* and caring of each other is another important aspect of social life.

First of all, a mother is a female parent of a child. This is a relative term which presupposes a relationship of love and care between the mother and the child. The concept *ka Meiramew* is an

attributive concept. It is so, because the term *ka Meiramew* in the Khasi language is not used in a literal sense but in an attributive sense. *Ka Meiramew* is a relational expression which shows the close relationship between the humans and the *Ramew*. According to Phrikshon Lyngdoh (Nongkrem), the term *Meiramew* includes, stone, soil, fire, water, earthquake, thunder, sun, moon, wind, etc. He says, *ka Meiramew* is a living entity and all the living things on *ka Meiramew* can grow.¹³

In other words, if *ka Meiramew* is lifeless or dead, then the plants, vegetables etc., will not be able to grow. As a pregnant mother feeds and gives growth to the unborn child through the umbilical chord, so also *ka Meiramew* (Mother Earth) gives some sort of life substances. D. T. Laloo, G. Costa, H. Elias and R. S. Lyngdoh hold the view that human beings came to live on *ka Meiramew* (Mother Earth) from Heaven much later. This gives us an idea that the ancient Khasi thinkers have the notion that *ka Meiramew* was not livable in the beginning. May be it was too hot or its atmosphere was smoky or even poisonous at some stage.

To reiterate, for the Khasis *ka Meiramew* is not just the earth in its geological sense but a living entity which has a cosmic soul. They personified *ka Meiramew* as a female being who has a soul. As a human being cannot live without a soul or spirit, so also *ka Meiramew* can live or become a living entity only because it has some sort of spirit or soul. In other words, it means that the spirit of God works in *ka Meiramew*.

At times, the concept *ka Meiramew* has been used loosely by some people as a translation of the word 'nature'. But the concept *ka Meiramew* in the traditional Khasi thought refers to a metaphysical principle of great importance. It is also known as the principle of matter. The later use of *ka Meiramew* in the Khasi mythology as an epithet of the various goddesses, makes some scholars to identify *ka Meiramew* as a female principle.

Ka Meiramew is also understood widely as the productive principle, the substratum of *ka Pyrthei*. The Khasis in the olden times have the understanding that *ka Meiramew* is the source and power from which the things of the world are produced. It is perhaps, for this reason that some thinkers identify *ka Meiramew* with *ka Mariang* or Nature. In the other words, it means that *ka Meiramew* is also the material principle.

To recapitulate, the term *ka Meiramew* has a cluster of meanings in the traditional Khasi thought. It means, (i) the original state and the archetype, (ii) the material cause, (iii) the producer of effects, and (iv) the generative principle or the ultimate material principle. It also means the birth-giver or producer which is associated with goddesses and females beings. A pluralistic understanding of *ka Meiramew* would include the 'principles', the 'constituents' the 'parts' or the 'components' of *ka Pyrthei*.

It will be interesting at this juncture to compare *ka Meiramew* with the concept of *Prakriti* and the concept of *Purusa* with *U Basa U Ryngekew*.

Samkhya, as is well known, is one of the philosophical systems of India. The founder of this system is Kapila. The *Samkhya* system deals with the existence of the two principles namely, *Prakrti* and *Purusa*. From the interaction or the interplay of these two principles, all varieties of life and matter are produced. This goes to say that every atom of matter is *prakrti* ensouled by an individual *purusa* which is the manifesting activity and life. In this fashion the entire phenomena of the universe is accounted for.

The *Samkhya* presents *Purusa* as a male principle. According to *Samkhya*, *Purusa* is eternal and absolute in its own sphere. It is absolutely independent. It does not depend on any one for its existence. The system treats *Purusa* as 'ultimately real'.

In the *Samkhya* system of thought *Purusa* is regarded as 'self' in the sense that it is pure consciousness which exists independently and apart from *Prakrti*. It is noted that according to *Samkhya Karika* there are many *Purusas*. However, *Purusa* is not to be regarded as 'self' in the sense of ego or mind. *Purusa* is the presupposition of individual consciousness.¹⁴ It is by the mere presence of the pure consciousness called *Purusa* that, the unconscious *Prakrti* can become intelligible. Again, it is the proximity of *Prakrti* with the pure consciousness *Purusa* that can lead to the emergence of self-awareness in the *Prakrti*.

It is said in the *Samkhya Karika* that the purpose of the coming together of *Purusa* and *Prakrti* and the resultant creation is two-fold. Firstly, it is for the enjoyment of *Purusa*. Secondly, it is for the

liberation of *Purusa*.¹⁵ In the process of coming together of *Purusa* and *Prakrti*, *Purusa* provides consciousness which makes creation possible and *Prakrti* by means of its first evolute, *buddhi* (intelligence), provides the knowledge which enables the realization that *Purusa* is different from *Prakrti*. This realization of the absolute distinction between *Purusa* and *Prakrti* is the precondition for isolation (*Kaivalya*) or release (*Moksa*) of *Purusa* from *Prakrti*.¹⁶

Though *Purusa* and *Prakrti* are thought to be separated or unconnected, they have mutual interaction for the purpose of bringing about the process of creation, self-awareness and enlightenment.

Prakrti is also known as nature while *Purusa* is known as soul. *Purusa* is a still and silent witness of whatever *Prakrti* chooses to create. It does not interfere with her work. *Prakrti*, on the other hand, is restlessly creating, acting and effecting for the pleasure of *Purusa*. In the *Samkhya Karika*, *Purusa* is often described as a pure witness. *Purusa* is also regarded as the subjective counterpart of *Prakrti* (Primordial stuff) which is the material basis of the world. In the reproduction of the world, *Purusa* plays the role of an efficient cause.

Purusa is not only the great principle but also a force whose presence is necessary to awake the creative energy of *Prakrti* and to lead her into different evolutes. *Purusa* himself does not execute but he upholds *Prakrti* in her action and allows her to express her energy. He contains the action of *Prakrti* with his consciousness and enjoys it. It is he who gives the sanction to the work of *Prakrti* and she works out just what is sanctioned by *Purusa* for his pleasure and delight.¹⁷

It may be noted that *Purusa* is not the surface ego but a silent self. He is a source of power and the original receiver of knowledge behind the ego. *Purusa* is the supporting consciousness, the cause, the recipient and support of all the works of *Prakrti*. According to *Samkhya Karika*, *Purusa* by nature is the witnessing soul which is isolated, neutral, inactive and perceptive.¹⁸

The main aim of the evolution of *Prakrti* is for the production of a world of infinite form which serves as bodies for the *Purusa*. A wise man who identifies himself with *Purusa* can escape suffering by neglecting his relationship with the body which is a product of *Prakrti*.

The other of the two co-present co-eternal realities of *Samkhya* is the *Purusa*, the principle of pure Consciousness. *Purusa* is the soul, the self, the spirit, the subject, the knower. It is neither body nor senses nor brain nor mind (*manas*) nor ego (*ahankara*) nor intellect (*buddhi*). It is not a substance which possesses the quality of Consciousness. Consciousness is its essence. It is itself pure and transcendental Consciousness. It is the ultimate knower which is the foundation of all knowledge. It is the pure subject and as such can never become an object of knowledge. It is the silent witness; the emancipated alone, the neutral seer, the peaceful eternal. It is beyond time and space, beyond change and activity. It is self-luminous and self-proved. It is uncaused, eternal and all-pervading. It is the indubitable real, the postulate of knowledge, and all doubts and denials presuppose its existence. It is called *nistraigunya*, *udasina*, *akarta*, *kevala*, *madhyastha*, *saksi*, *drasta*, *sadaprakashasvarupa*, and *jnata*.¹⁹

Chandradhar Sharma says, *Samkhya* gives the following five proofs for the existence of the *Purusa*:

- a. All compound objects exist for the sake of the *Purusa*. The body, the senses, the mind and the intellect are all means to realize the end of the *Purusa*. The three *gunas*, the *Prakrti*, the subtle body – all are said to serve the purpose of the self. Evolution is teleological or purposive. *Prakrti* evolves itself in order to serve the *Purusa*'s ends. This proof is teleological (*sanghatapararthatvat*).²⁰
- b. All objects are composed of the three *gunas* and therefore logically presuppose the existence of the *Purusa* who is the witness of these *gunas* and is himself beyond them. The three *gunas* imply the conception of a *nistraigunya* – that which is beyond them. This proof is logical (*trigunadiviparyayat*).²¹
- c. There must be a transcendental synthetic unity of pure Consciousness to coordinate all experiences. All knowledge necessarily presupposes the existence of the self. The self is the foundation (*adhishthana*), the fundamental postulate of all empirical knowledge. All affirmations and all negations equally presuppose it. Without it, experience would not become experience. This proof is ontological (*adhishthanat*).²²
- d. Non-intelligent *Prakrti* cannot experience its products. So there must be an intelligent principle to experience the worldly products of *Prakrti*. *Prakrti* is the enjoyed (*bhogyā*) and so

there must be an enjoyer (*bhokta*). All objects of the world have the characteristics of producing pleasure, pain and bewilderment. But pleasure, pain and bewilderment have meaning only when there is a conscious principle to experience them. Hence *Purusa* must exist. This argument is ethical (*bhoktrbhavat*).²³

- e. There are persons who try to attain release from the sufferings of the world. The desire for liberation and emancipation implies the existence of a person who can try for and obtain liberation. Aspiration presupposes the aspirant. This proof is mystical or religious (*kaivalyartham pravrtteh*).²⁴

Then again, *Samkhya* gives the following three arguments for proving the plurality of the *Purusas*. According to *Samkhya Karika*, *prakrti* is one but there is a plurality of *purusas* (*Karika XVIII*).

- a. The souls have different sensory and motor organs and undergo separate births and deaths. Had there been only one *Purusa*, the birth or death of one should have meant the birth or death of all and any particular experience of pleasure, pain or indifference by one should have been equally shared by all. Hence the souls must be many.²⁵
- b. If the self were one, bondage of one should have meant bondage of all and liberation of one should have meant liberation of all. The activity of one should have made all persons active and the sleep of one should have lulled into sleep all other persons.²⁶

- c. Though the emancipated souls are all alike and differ only in number as they are all beyond the three *gunas*, yet the bound souls relatively differ in qualities also, since in some *sattva* predominates, while in others *rajas*, and in still others *tamas*. Hence their difference.²⁷

Now, I want to just highlight the Khasi conception of *u Basa*. According to the traditional Khasi thought, *u Basa* is a male principle which co-exists with *u Blei* (God). It is eternal and absolutely independent from any female principle. It is also absolutely real. It is one of the basic concepts in the Khasi world view. There is a plurality of *u Basa*. Before the arrival of Christianity in Khasi Hills, almost all the Khasi villages had their own '*u Basa*' (male principle and deity) who as they believe, protect them, their villages and their properties. According to Phrikshon Lyngdoh,²⁸ *u Basa* is the husband of *ka Meiramew*.

U Basa does not need to be liberated because it was never in bondage or captivity of any one. *U Basa* is the silent witness and protector of creation living and existing on the lap of *ka Meiramew*. According to the Khasi philosophical thought, all existent beings except human beings are composed of *u Basa* and *ka Meiramew*. Both *u Basa* and *ka Meiramew* are equally active. They cooperate with each other as husband and wife for the production of the world of objects. Their works and interactions are not for their own sake but for the sake of fulfilling of the divine plan of *U Blei* that is to produce creation in the universe.

The Khasis do not give proofs for the existence of *u Basa*, but believe in its existence nevertheless. The reasons, which are purely descriptive and historical that make them believe in the existence of *u Basa* are as follows:

- a. Their ancestors traditionally and orally educated them to believe in the existence of *u Basa* as a divine being who along with *ka Meiramew* carried out *ka Hukum u Blei* or divine command of God to continue His creation process. Through their divine marriage the world of objects will be brought into existence or into being.
- b. In Khasi Hills, there are many sacred groves called '*Ki Khlaw Kyntang*' and each of these is believed to be the dwelling-place of *u Basa*.
- c. L. H. Pde and other thinkers hold the view that *u Basa* is the protector and custodian of sacred forests or sacred groves (*ki Khlaw Kyntang Khlaw Niam*). *U Basa* will punish those who destroy the sacred forests by making them fall sick or appearing before them in the form of a tiger or a snake.²⁹
- d. The traditional Khasis (non-Christians) even today offer annual sacrifices to *u Basa*.
- e. In the days before the arrival of Christianity, almost all the Khasis used to ask the help of *u Basa* in their fighting against their external enemies. Even the Christian-Khasis believe in the

existence of *u Basa* as an entity which is existing and operating in the world.

It is noteworthy to mention that '*u Ryngekew*' is another name of *u Basa*. At times, *u Basa* is called '*u Basa u Ryngekew*'.

According to Phrikshon Lyngdoh,³⁰ *u Basa* is the first husband of *ka Lisan* which is another name of *ka Meiramew*. It is for this reason that in the previous chapters, *u Basa u Ryngekew* has been translated as 'the sky fathers and deities'. This simply means that *u Basa* has different names and there is a plurality of *u Basa*. But whatever may be the case, *u Basa* or *u Ryngekew* stands for a male principle or divine being created by God and co-existing with Him.

People believe that *U Basa* manifests itself in two forms of a snake or a tiger. Snake is signal for danger and it appears only when people have done something wrong. Such snakes are quite different from normal snakes. The tiger appears to protect people from harm. In anticipation of any danger or epidemic, *Lyngdoh* (Priest) may offer prayers. Although these days the *Lyngdoh* is a Christian, he observes these rituals. Now-a-days no sacrifices are made inside the forest but the same is to be done elsewhere. But the sacrificed animals (chicken or goat) are brought to the forest as token of offering to the *Basa*. People say that the sacred forest at Mawphlang is very old. They relate a number of instances indicating the power of *U Basa*.³¹

Once a lady from Mawphlang was on her way to visit her sick brother at Lynkien, a village which is a few kilometers away from Mawphlang. As she was walking

towards this village a snake appeared in front of her way. She was scared and called upon *U Basa* to help her. She spoke to the snake saying “if you are the *Basa* and wish to bring good news/luck please slip aside and let me proceed.” The snake did not move. She pleaded with it over and over again but the snake continued to block her way. Then it dawned upon her that the snake was a bad omen. She realized that the snake had come to tell her that her brother, whom she was going to visit had done something wrong. She asked the snake to permit her to go to her brother saying that she would convince her brother who was ill to seek his forgiveness through the *Lyngdoh*. The snake moved aside and the lady hurried to her brother’s house. There she asked her brother if he had desecrated the *Law Kvyntang* in anyway. He admitted that he had cut down a few trees and had sold them. He then realized that he was sick on account of his action in the sacred forest. Realizing this he rushed to the *Lyngdoh* and confessed what he had done and appealed to him to seek forgiveness from *Basa* on his behalf. After this incident her brother slowly recovered.³²

In this story a close knit character of the Khasi society is clearly indicated. It was the brother who had cut trees of the sacred forest. He was sick but he never realized his mistake. His sister was reminded by the snake about the mistake committed by her brother. The actions of a person have their repercussion on the close kin. Therefore, they compel the wrong doer to realize his mistakes and seek forgiveness.³³

Another story popular in the village is that once an army unit had come to Mawphlang for some training. After their training was complete they entered the sacred forest, cut some trees, and loaded them in their trucks despite protests from the local people. As they were about to leave most of the army men suffered epileptic

fits. Later on it was learnt that some of them had become very sick. People thought that *Basa* intervened and punished the army people for their doings in the sacred forest.³⁴

A comparison between *Samkhya* concept of *Purusa* and the Khasi concept of *u Basa* would help to understand the status of *u Basa* in the Khasi traditional thought.

Samkhya Concept of Purusa

- *Purusa* is known as ‘self’ in the sense of pure conscious-ness
- *Purusa* is absolutely separate and independent of *Prakrti*.
- *Purusa* is not dynamic but static, knowing neither change of place nor of form.
- *Purusa* is also known as conscious soul.
- *Purusa* suffers from pain; it needs liberation.

Khasi Concept of U Basa U Ryngkew

- U Basa u Ryngkew* is the divine ‘Being’ and God’s Agent.
- U Basa u Ryngkew* always has an independent existence from *ka Meiramew*
- U Basa u Ryngkew* is dynamic and changeable. It can change its place and form.
- U Basa u Ryngkew* is also known as divine soul.
- U Basa u Ryngkew* does not suffer pain and does not need

liberation.

- *Purusa* and *Prakrti* come together for the causation of creation. *U Basa u Ryngkew* come together in the form of divine marriage for the purpose of making creation possible.
- There are many *Purusas*. There is a plurality of *u Basa u Ryngkew*.
- *Purusa* and *Prakrti* are eternal realities. *U Basa u Ryngkew* co-exist with *U Blei*.
- *Purusa* is the silent witness of whatever *Prakrti* chooses to create. *U Basa u Ryngkew* is the silent protector of creation, like sacred groves, etc.
- *Purusa* is the efficient cause of creation. *U Basa u Ryngkew* along with *ka Meiramew* continues the process of creation.

In the Samkhya system, *prakrti* is eternal and absolute in its own sphere. It has an independent existence. It does not depend on any other for its existence. This system treats *prakrti* as ‘ultimately real’. *Prakrti* is, that from which this material universe with all its varieties has been evolved. According to *Samkhya*, this material

world including the human beings are the products of a 'single substance' called *prakṛti*. It is assumed to be complex and all-pervasive.³⁵ *Prakṛti* is regarded as the primordial stuff of the entire world (manifest and unmanifest). In other words, *prakṛti* is the name given to an entity from which this physical world has been evolved. According to Sāṃkhya, *prakṛti* is independent and ultimate. Its principle is 'spiritual'. It can be known by means of true knowledge or cognition. Davies John writes:

Nature (*Prakṛti*), is the root (of material forms), is not produced. The Great One (*Mahat Buddhi* or intellect) and the rest (which spring from it) are (substances), producing and produced.³⁶

It is noted in the *Sāṃkhya Kārika* that there is only one *Prakṛti*. *Prakṛti* is an unconscious entity which implicitly contains the possibilities of all thought and substance. *Prakṛti* can become intelligible. In the *Sāṃkhya* system, *Prakṛti* is more of a pure potentiality rather than a perceptible substance. It is composed of three strands of energy called *Guna*. These three strands of energy are *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Kapila holds the view that all objects of the world possess the three *Gunas* of producing pleasure, pain and indifference. In the *Sāṃkhya* system, *sattva* is marked by pleasure and knowledge. *Rajas* is marked by the tendency of activity. It is the principle of movement, pain and mobility. *Tamas* is marked by indifference, bewilderment and heaviness. It is responsible for confusion. These *Gunas* are present in everything in the world. The pure potentiality of *Prakṛti* can cause physical and psychical

happenings like pleasure, pain, indifference, etc.³⁷ In the primordial matter (*Prakṛti*), these three strands of energy are in equilibrium. As long as this equilibrium is undisturbed, no actual manifestation can occur.

Prakṛti by means of its first evolute, *buddhi* (intelligence) provides the knowledge which makes realization possible. *Prakṛti* is thought to be separated or independent yet it has mutual interaction with *Puruṣa* for the purpose of bringing about creation. This system of thought is devoted to the achievement of absolute independence of man's spirit from the phenomenality of *Prakṛti* (matter).³⁸ According to the system of Kapila, existence is composed of *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa*. *Prakṛti* is also known as nature. It is *Prakṛti* who chooses to create. She is restlessly creating, acting and effecting. *Prakṛti* (primordial stuff) is the material basis of the world. In the reproduction of the world, *Prakṛti* plays the role of an efficient cause.

She stands for female principle and no male can replace her either formally or functionally. This shows that *Prakṛti* as female principle is required for making creation possible.

The *Saṃkhya* divides existence into twenty five categories (*Kārika XXII*). Twenty four of these are evolutes of *Prakṛti*. They are subject to modification and change.

When *Prakṛti* chooses to create, there is no one who can interfere with her work. *Prakṛti* is restlessly creating, acting, forming and effecting things

The theory that causation means a real transformation of the material cause leads to the concept of *Prakṛti* as the root cause of the world of objects. All worldly effects are latent in this uncaused cause. As the first principle of this Universe, it is called *Pradhana*; as the unmanifested state of all effects, it is known as *Avyakta*; as the extremely subtle and imperceptible thing which is only inferred from its products, it is called *Anumana*; as the unintelligent and unconscious principle, it is called *Jada*; and as the ever-active unlimited power, it is called *Shakti*. The products are caused, dependent, relative, many and temporary as they are subject to birth and death or to production and destruction; but *Prakṛti* is uncaused, independent, absolute, one and eternal, being beyond production and destruction. The extreme subtleness of *Prakṛti* makes it unmanifest and imperceptible; we infer its existence through its products. Motion is inherent in it in the form of *Rajas*. As the source of the inanimate world, it is unconscious. The entire world of objects is implicit in the bosom of *Prakṛti*. Evolution is the explicit manifestation of this world of objects, while dissolution is the returning of this world to *Prakṛti*.³⁹

Samkhya gives five proofs for the existence of *Prakṛti* which are as follows:

- i. All individual things in this world are limited, dependent, conditional and finite. The finite cannot be the cause of the universe. Logically we have to proceed from the finite to the infinite, from the limited to the unlimited, from the *peros* to the *aperos*, from the temporary to the permanent, from the many to

the one. And it is this infinite, unlimited, eternal and all-pervading *Prakrti* which is the source of this universe (*bhedanam parimanat*).⁴⁰

- ii. All worldly things possess certain common characteristics by which they are capable of producing pleasure, pain and indifference. Hence there must be a common source composed of three *Gunas*, from which all worldly things arise (*samanvayat*).⁴¹
- iii. All effects arise from the activity of the potent cause. Evolution means the manifestation of the hitherto implicit as the explicit. The activity which generates evolution must be inherent in the world-cause. And this cause is *Prakrti* (*karyatah pravrttescha*).
- iv. The effect differs from the cause and hence the limited effect cannot be regarded as its own cause. The effect is the explicit and the cause is the implicit state of the same process. The effects, therefore, point to a world-cause where they are potentially contained (*karanakaryavibhagat*).¹²
- v. The unity of the universe points to a single cause. And this cause is *Prakrti* (*avibhagat vaishvarupyasya*).¹³

‘We bow to *Prakrti*’, says Ishvarakrsna, ‘the red-white-dark, the unborn mother and “nurse and receptacle of all generation”’. Such is the conception of *Prakrti* in Samkhya.⁴⁴

This reads very alike the Khasis vision of *ka Meiramew*. Like the *Sankhya's prakrti*, for the Khasis *ka Meiramew* has an independent existence in the sense that it does not depend for its existence on *u Basa u Ryngekew* or any male principle at all. On the one hand, *ka Meiramew* is the first product of God, but on the other hand, it has an eternal existence because it co-exists with God. As discussed earlier, the Khasis also regard *ka Meiramew* as the primordial stuff of the entire material world (manifest and unmanifest).

The Khasis believe that the physical world come into existence, partly as a result of direct creation of God by His act of initial creation. But the rest of creation is a result of indirect creation in the sense that the variety of the world of objects come into existence or into being out of the mutual interaction of *ka Meiramew* with *u Basa u Ryngekew*. This process of creation is to fulfill the divine will and plan of God. P. Malngiang writes:

The Khasi believes that everything in the universe is created by God both directly and indirectly. The Khasi maintains that in the evolutionary process, God is always the efficient and final cause. According to the Khasi thought, the nucleus of the universe comes from God and not through an act of emanation. Basically there was an act of initial creation... In the beginning of time, God, who is also known as *ka Hukum* (Command) created *Ka Ramew* (Earth or terra firma) and from *Ramew*, He created *Ka Sngi u Bnai* (Sun and Moon), *ka Mariang* (nature), *Ka Lver* (Air), *ka Um* (Water) and *ka Ding* (Fire). *Ka Ramew* which is attributed with the notion of Mother Earth married *u Ryngekew* (land) and from this union, *U Maw* (the stone) and the *Khyndew* (the soil)

came into being. All these primordial elements worked hand in hand according to the design of God, the creator and Supreme Command. From *Ka Ramew* (Earth), there were born the green vegetation, trees and life that inhabit the earth.¹⁵

The following points of differences and similarities between *Prakrti* and *Ka Meiramew* may be noted at this juncture.

The Samkhya Concept of Prakrti

- Non-conscious
- Primordial stuff of the world
- Active and ever forming the cycles of evolution.
- Object.
- Ultimately real.
- Complex and all-pervasive.
- Eternal and self-existing.
- Exists independently.

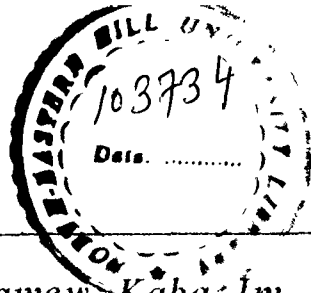
The Khasi Concept of Ka Meiramew

- Conscious
- Primordial stuff of the world and goddess of the earth.
- Active and caused the birth of creation.
- Object and subject.
- Ultimately real.
- Complex and pervasive.
- Its substance is eternal and it co-exists with *U Blei*.
- Co-exists with God and functions dependently.

- The material cause of the universe. The material cause of the universe.
- Uncaused and imperceivable. The first product of God's creation is both perceivable and imperceivable.
- *Prakriti* is only one *Ka Meiramew* is only one.
- Female principles Female principle
- *Prakriti* is not produced. *Ka Meiramew* is produced and God dwells in her.
- *Prakriti* is the efficient cause of creation God (*U Blei*) is the final cause of creation.
- *Prakriti* is composed of the three *gunas*. *Ka Meiramew* is composed of innumerable elements and sacred forces.
- Twenty four categories of existence belong to *Prakriti*. Existence is not limited just to twenty five categories. It is full of complexities.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As pointed out earlier the Khasis see man (*u brierw*) as created by *U Blei* having initially lived with *U Blei* in heaven. He is viewed as endowed with a body (*ka met*) and a soul (*ka mynsiem*) (Refer Chapter III). He is the creature who possesses *ka rngiew* which means the rational power which adds personality and dignity to him.

U Blei gave man some moral commandments at the time of creation of this world to be followed while living on earth. These moral commandments are:

A. *Kamai ia ka Hok*

Kamai ia ka Hok which means to earn Righteousness. It is believed that *ka Hok* has both intrinsic and extrinsic values. It is intrinsic in the sense that the word *Hok* can be translated as 'right'. It has value in itself. As what is right has value, therefore, *ka Hok* also has value in itself. The word *Hok* can also be translated as Righteousness. It means that those who do the right thing will be rewarded for their act of righteous deed. In this connection, *ka Hok* has also an extrinsic value.

The first command, *Kamai ia ka Hok*, is that we must live justly, that whatever we do should be for the cause of righteousness; that we must not

be actuated by consideration of gain irrespective of right or wrong. Indeed, we must be honest and true not only in our words and actions but in our very thoughts too.¹

Ka Hok is regarded as the greatest of all the Khasi moral Laws and ethical Principles. It has an eternal value. The Khasis used to say *Ka Hok kaba tam ha ka Pyrthei* which means Righteousness is the most essential element. *Ka Hok* is like the Hindu *dharma*. It means that a human action will not go unrewarded. In order to get the reward of *ka Hok* man has to have right speech, right action and right thought.

B. *Tipbriew Tiplei*

Tipbriew Tiplei which means knowing man, knowing God. The Khasis believe that charity begins at home. If one says that he loves God whom he cannot see with his physical eyes and hates his family members and friends whom he can see with his physical eyes, then his love has no value. It is just a pretension or a false claim. Before we come to know God, we first come to know and experience our own family members and our neighbours. Man has been conditioned by God to live with other fellow-men. The Khasis regard this world as a testing place for man's goodness and moral character. For instance, the act of killing another shows that one does not know the

goodness of God or he does not have the fear of God. To the Khasis to know man in its right perspective is to know God.

Tipbriew Tiphlei, is that if we are to be God-conscious and serve Him and His will as we must: He, our Maker and Creator who sent us down to earth at our wish with love and care, we must know and realize the needs, difficulties and problems of our fellowmen and help them to the best we can. In short, to serve God is to serve man.

The Khasi word '*Tip*' in this particular context may be translated into English as 'knowledge'. Negatively, the word '*Tip*' means the absence of ignorance and positively, '*Tip*' means the present of knowledge. Man is a superior being who has been entrusted by God with the power of rationality and morality. Animals are lower beings compared to man, who do things by means of their natural instincts but man has a thinking mind and can make moral judgements of rightness and wrongness.

C. *Tipkur Tipkha*

Tipkur Tipkha which means knowing of the maternal and paternal relatives.

Tipkur Tipkha, is an emphasis on our duties and obligations to our relations by lineal descent. This needs a little elaboration as it is the rock on which the social structure of the people is built and in withal the fountain head of their moral

precepts. Being a matrilineal society the kinship from the womb of the first ancestress from time immemorial continues down the ages. These are the *kurs*. They must invariably come to the help and rescue of one another, especially in times of calamity, death, misfortune, trouble or abuse or oppression at the hands of others.³

The Khasis regarded the three commandments, *Kamai ia ka Hok*, *Tipbriew Tipblei* and *Tipkur Tipkha* as the sacred rules of life which can lead man to the way of truthfulness, happiness and prosperity.

Man with his fellow creatures, including animals should live together on the lap of *ka Meiramew*. *U Blei* does not expect man to conquer or subdue mother earth but to love and have mutual relation with it. *Ka Meiramew* feeds man like a mother feeding her child. Man is not at all the master of mother earth. He should perform all his actions in accordance with the natural Laws. He should not destroy the natural environment that sustains him.

In the traditional Khasi thought, the concepts *U Blei* and *Kyntang* (sacred) match closely. Most of the Khasi villages have sacred forests called *ki khlaw kyntang*. They are regarded as special dwelling places of *U Blei* or gods (*ki blei*) who will protect and bless the villagers. These forests are also a reminder to man of *U Blei*'s sustaining and unifying power. *U Blei* expects man to fulfill His divine plans in the world.

U Blei created everything with a specific purpose. Man, trees, mountains, hills, rivers, forests, animals, etc., are all the respectable members of the cosmic community. Any violation of the sacred duties and obligations which the living beings have been assigned by God will affect their cosmic community. All species big or small exist not in a complete isolation but they are interrelated with each other.

This understanding of environment as sacred springs from the Khasi understanding that the entire natural order is sacred.

Man, animal, nature, the earth, the sun, and the moon belong to the continuum and form a natural if cosmic moral community which they must all sustain. Moral obligation springs neither from subjective compulsions nor from utility to man's life and his well-being; nor indeed from any deontological status of the moral rights. It springs rather from the sacredness of the entire natural order. Man, animal, trees, mountains, forests, rivers are equal members of a community with inalienable because sacred obligations, duties to one another.⁴

The Khasis regarded land as sacred not in an instrumental sense i.e., because of its utility to man's life, but rather in the sense of 'givenness'. In other words, they believed that their land known as *ka Bri Hymniew Trep* (land of seven families) was given by *U Blei* to their

forefathers. Till today, the non-Christian Khasis believe that their mountains, hills, rivers, etc., are the sacred dwelling places of the gods and goddesses. Another reason that led the Khasis to the consideration of the sacredness of the environment is grounded in their belief that *U Blei* is conceived as both a transcendent and immanent being. In other words, it means that God dwells in the heaven above and also on the earth below.

... we also have the Khasis who, in accordance with their indigenous religion, have been inspired towards environmental preservation. Sacred groves, hills, lakes and rivers are conferred protection under religious sanction. Such protection has conserved bio-diversity that otherwise might have been lost.⁵

U Blei does not relate with *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* as does a cause to an effect, because He is not an outsider or strange to *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew*. In fact, He resides in *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew*. This explains why *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* are regarded as having close relations with the divine. We may note here that Khasi thinkers practically draw no dichotomy between sacred and secular. According to them, *U Blei* operates in the World (*Pyrthei*) in different ways

The Khasi religion laid great emphasis on respecting the harmony between man and nature, especially on minimum destruction of living and non-living resources to

satisfy their basic and human needs for survival. They are against the exploitation of nature for the sake of meeting our own ends. To them *U Blei* is the fundamental reality along with Mother Earth (*Meiramew*) and man (*u brieu*). Their interlinkages have been discussed and recorded in *ka Niam Khasi* (Khasi religion) in the form of legends, songs, rituals, etc.

In chapter II, I have argued that *ka Meiramew* is not just the earth but the goddess of the earth and also the female principle as well.

According to the Khasi, man is placed at the centre between *U Blei*, the Creator and Mother earth (*Ka Meiramew*). We can safely say that *U Blei*, man and mother earth are the basis of all creation. *U Blei* produces all things, earth nourishes them and man completes them.⁶

According to H.O. Mawrie, nature which is part of *ka Meiramew* is very much alive and can inspire man in many ways.

Nature for a Khasi is like a book. The teaching and wisdom he derives from it, he makes use of in his daily life. He examines meticulously, and with great care the objects around him. He cares for and treasures all he sees and observes so that they could be of help to him in all his needs. Nature is also like a big hospital on whose threshold all types of medicines are to be found which can heal all bodily ailments. Medicine and reason complement one another and a Khasi is not thus helpless. He lives peacefully in his own land and enjoys the embrace of nature.⁷

Some of the mountain peaks and rivers have played a major role in the ancient Khasi life. There is a well-known legend related to the Shillong peak. It runs as follows:

On the foothill of Shillong Peak, there is a cave called Krem Marai. In this cave lived the Daughter of the god of Shillong and her name was unknown. She grew and became a beautiful young girl. Every day she used to come out of the cave to pluck some flowers. One day a young man of Nongkseh named Sati Myllem Ngap caught the Daughter of Shillong's god forcibly while plucking flowers outside the cave. Later, Sati gave her the name 'Pahsyntiew' which means wooing with flowers. Later Sati married Pahsyntiew and raised some children. One day Pahsyntiew went to Krem Marai and never returned home. Since that time the children of a Sati and ka Pahsyntiew became the traditional rulers as Kings and Queen of Hima Shillong. In the course of time the Hima Shillong split into two himas (kingdoms) came to be known as Hima Myllem and Hima Khyrim of Nongkrem.⁸

It is very interesting to note that till today, in the Hima Khyrim (Khyrim Kingdom), the *Lyngshkor* (Minister) from the clan of Myllem Ngap would go to fetch water from the cave (krem) Marai for the anointing ceremony of the *Syiem* (King) and *Syiem Sad* (Queen) of Hima Khyrim. Phrikshon Lyngdoh of Nongkrem narrates that the god of Shillong blessed the children and grand children of ka Pahsyntiew with the nine fetched water sources, namely: (i) ka Pasir, (ii) ka Umtlieng, (iii) ka Sangmein (Umdiengpun), (iv) ka Umjasai, (v) ka Um Risa, (vi) ka

Umshyrpi, (vii) ka Um Kaliar. (viii) ka Um Rynthong, (ix) ka Umdih.⁹

To reiterate, Khasi religion teaches that only *U Blei* has absolute sovereignty over all creatures including human beings. Man has no dominion over his own life and non-human life. In other words, man cannot act as the viceroy of God over the planet. He has no right to take his own life or the life of his fellowmen. Man can kill the animals just to meet his basic needs but should not kill them mercilessly. This means that man should not kill any of the animal species without adequate justification because humans and non-humans are valuable and have the right of existence.

I have tried to show in Chapter II that, Mother Earth is a component of the world and is closely interlinked with the world as is a part to the whole. This world is a place where man is able to display his talents, skills and to live in accordance with the direction of *ka Hukum* of *U Blei*. Man is the creature whom *U Blei* expects to be with in the next world. There is a link between this world (*kane ka pyrthei*) with the other world (*kawei pat ka pyrthei*) because *ka bneng* is regarded as man's true home. This present *pyrthei* is only the temporal home. Death is neither a loss nor a destruction but a way to go back to the original home.

In chapter III, I have hinted that man has been placed by *U Blei* to live in this *Pyrthei* to fulfill *u Blei's* purposes.

It is for this reason that *U Blei* gives man *ki Hukum* as directive principles that will help man to fulfill his duties.

I have also shown the similarities between Ramanuja's conception of the world with the Khasi conception of *ka Pyrthei*. God dwells in nature which is part of *ka Pyrthei*. Ramanuja and the Khasis have a non-dualistic and non-materialistic view of *ka Pyrthei*. They see God as the inner guide or ruler (*Antaryamin*) of both *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew*.

As already pointed out earlier, most of the Khasis have been converted to Christianity and ^{they have} accepted it as their new religion. In this chapter, I wish to briefly examine, how the Christian conception of the sacred is similar or different from the Khasi conception of the sacred. As we know, the word 'sacred' is derived from the Latin word 'sacrum' (its plural form is 'sacra') which means 'holy' or 'divine'. Both Christianity and the Khasi Religion (*Ka Niam Khasi*) identify God (*U Blei*) as the 'sacred' or a thing related to God. At this point, I want to discuss the Christian conception of God (the sacred Being) and compare it with the Khasi conception of *U Blei*.

The Bible is the Christian Scripture. It consists of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Bible states that creation is an act of God. The Book of Genesis 1:1 says that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the

earth". Again, Genesis 1:27 says "And God created man in His own image". We also find in the same book, Genesis 2:7: "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of Life and man became a living soul". This shows that man's body is part of the earth and this world where man spends his earthly life is divinely or sacredly created by God. The ultimate lordship of the earth is God. In fact, the Old Testament speaks of God as the ultimate Being, the sovereign Lord and the basis of all things visible and invisible. Everything exists by His will. Like the Khasis the people of the Old Testament (Israelites) do not question the existence of God. To them, God is the ground of our being and the first cause of everything. They believe that God always exists and manifests Himself in the world. They do not feel the need to give proofs for the existence of God. Only a fool can say in his heart "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1).

For the people of the Old Testament, their knowledge of God is their sense of awareness of divine reality and God can be found everywhere. Not only Israel but people of other nations also know and praise God in their own way. According to them, everything proclaims God's existence and his power. It is to be noted that for the Israelites, even sin proclaims God's existence by contrasting it, either by revolting against God or by

deserting God in the sense that a sinner is a man who turns away from God. Both in the Old Testament and the Khasi Religion, we find that God is eternally present, that is, to say that God exists from all eternity and manifests Himself in various forms. The Israelites of the Old Testament like the Khasis do not believe in the evolution of God. According to them, God exists from eternity to eternity. He is not limited by time or space

According to the Old Testament, God is one and He is known by different names. Deuteronomy 6:4 says, "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one LORD". 'Yahweh' is one of the names of God, He is one who gives life and the source of everything. "As Yahweh (Lord) lives who made our souls" (Jeremiah 38:16). The soul is known in the Hebrew language as 'Nephesh'. The Israelites regard God (Yahweh) as the author and sustainer of life. To them, the goal of divine action of God is to create life. He manifests Himself in the world and controls it from within. The Israelites regard Yahweh as their national God, who will protect and save their nation.

In the New Testament times, the conception of God has been transformed into the Christian conception of God. Like the Old Testament, the New Testament speaks of God as the creator of man and the world. But the Christians see God in the person and works of Christ who after His

Resurrection ascended to heaven which is viewed as separate from the secular world. There is a sharp distinction between heaven and our world in the Christian conception of God. St. John's Gospel 1:1-9 speaks of the pre-existence of Jesus Christ, that is to say, before his incarnation, he exists in heaven with God the Father and after his resurrection, he has ascended to heaven (Luke 24:50-51).

The 'Divine Trinity' is another notion^{which} appears in the New Testament. "By the divine Trinity is meant the union of the three persons, Father (God the Father), Son (God the Son and Spirit) (God the Spirit) in one Godhead".¹⁰ This Christian idea of three persons in one Godhead is peculiar to the religion of the New Testament. The Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) states, "Jesus Christ is the foundation of all true Christian faith. Without it, there is no true revelation of God in Jesus. Without it, the Christian doctrine of salvation is undermined".¹¹ This shows that the notion of sacredness of the Old Testament is different from the notion of sacredness of the New Testament because the Yahweh, the God of the Israelites in the Old Testament time, has been replaced by Christ.

With the Christian conception of God, the national God of Israel (Yahweh) becomes the democratic God of the Christian, that is, the God of all. The God of the Christians is Jesus Christ who cannot

do the works done by the God of Israel in the Old Testament. He only loves and forgives. Consequently, the evil or the unpleasant experiences of life have been kept aside from the providence of God of the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is the agent of creator-God. "In the beginning was the word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made and without him nothing was made that has been made" (John's Gospel 1:1-3). In other words, it means that God willed it and the world came into existence. The Christian-Khasis relocated their notion of sacredness from *ka Pyrthei* and *ka Meiramew* as the manifestations of *U Blei* to the sacredness of the Person and works of Christ. And as I have hinted earlier, this must be the precise reason for the disinterest in the preservation of environment as shown by the modern Khasis.

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8. H. Elias, *Ki Khanatang Uba Rim*, Shillong: Don Bosco Press, 1972 (reprint), pp.229-234.
9. Phrikson Lyngdoh, "Water and Its Significance in Khasi Belief and Faith", *Ka Mer Ka Sdad: Conference, Confluence*, Shillong, NEHU Publications, 2002, p.84.
10. Russell R. Byrum, *Christian Theology*, Indiana: Gospel Trumpet Company, 1950, p.206.

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APPENDIX – I

THE SOHPETBNENG PEAK MYTH

U Blei, the Creator, in the beginning created sixteen families.¹ All of them lived in heaven. Heaven was the original home of man. *U Blei* responded positively to the request of *ka Meiramew* to send from heaven to this earth, a ruler. *U Blei* convened a divine council in heaven. The sixteen families attended the council. The council unanimously decided to send seven families out of the sixteen families to come down and settle on earth. The members of the seven families are identified as *ki Hymniew Trep Hymniew Skum*² (People of seven huts, seven nests). They were accompanied by a divine being called *u Syiem Lakriah*³ (King of Lakriah). They landed on, *u Lum Sohpetbneng* (Mount navel of heaven) located at Ri-Bhoi, East Khasi Hills. Their main purpose of coming down from heaven to settle down on earth was to till and cultivate the land and to abide by the *Hukum* (command/order) of *U Blei*. Creation was in perfect harmony during this era.

On top of *u Lum Sohpetbneng*⁴ (Mount navel of heaven) there was *ka Jingkieng Ksiar* which joined the heaven above and the earth below. This *Jingkieng Ksiar* was provided by *U Blei*. It was called *u Sohpetbneng* (Navel of heaven/Umbilical cord). *U Sohpetbneng* was a divine umbilical cord which connected the heaven above and the

earth below. At that time, the seven families below kept on contacting the nine families above through *ka Jingkieng Ksiar*. The members of the seven families lived a happy and peaceful life. They were in good relationship with God and other creatures. They obeyed God and observed His commandments: (i) *Kamai ia ka Hok* (To earn righteousness), (ii) *Tipbriew Tiplei* (Man-knowing; God-knowing), (iii) *Tipkur Tipkha* (Knowing of maternal and paternal relatives). It was on *u Lum Sohpetbneng* that *U Blei* gave the commandments through *u Syiem Lakriah* who was God's agent.

The Devil came to this earth in the form of *u Thlen* (Snake/Serpent) and some other forms. He cunningly tempted man to go against the commandments of *U Blei*. *U Thlen* (Snake) rebelled against *U Blei* and said "*Ka bam jong nga dei da ka longbriew bad ka kamai jong nga dei da ka longspah*" (My food is human being and I will earn riches). Many men being tempted by the Devil turned away from *U Blei* and the golden ladder provided by God was broken. The God-man relationship was also broken. From that time onwards, the seven families could no longer contact the nine families above. It marks the end of the golden era of perfect peace and happiness. It ushered in a new era of broken relationship. It was the beginning of evil age. Evil things started to take place in this world.

More evil spirits came and tempted man in different ways. They took full advantage of man's weaknesses. The seven families (*Hynniew Trep*) called the golden ladder (*Jingkieng Ksiar*) which joined heaven and earth, *u Sohpetbneng* which can be translated also as the umbilical cord. The hill where *u Sohpetbneng* stands is called *Lum Sohpetbneng* (Sohpetbneng Peak). To cite the words of Hamlet Bareh:

U Sohpetbneng is called after the ladder, linking heaven and earth at one time over its top. The peak commemorates the incident when the seven families (ancestors of the Khasi race) were cut off from the nine celestial families (counterpart of the seven families) by a human being who worked under a devil's influence. This little story throws light on the divine origin of the Khasis.⁵

Human suffering begins in this world with the breaking of the golden ladder (*Jingkieng Sohpetbneng*). Human suffering began to take place in the form of poverty, ignorance, illness, misery and all sorts of worries and anxieties. It was a paradise lost for man. The two forces good and evil began to operate in this world at different levels. Man lost his original relationship with God and other beings.

This myth shows that the original God-man relationship was broken. It also indicates that man who lived on the lap of *ka Meiramew*⁶ can have his relationship with God and other living beings living in the space above

us. Above all, this myth speaks of man's agricultural life and his close relationship with *ka Meiramew*. This myth also discusses that man maintained good relationship with *U Blei* and *Ka Meiramew* during the period of the Golden Age.

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2. Soso Tham, *Ki Sngi Barim U Hymniew Trep*. Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, 1936, p.1.
3. D. T. Laloo, *Ka Rongbiria U Hymniew Trep*. Shillong: Don Bosco Press. 1978, p.5
4. U Lum Sohpetbneng is actually a peak situated at Ri Bhoi District, East Khasi Hills of the State of Meghalaya. This peak is believed to be a sacred peak because the Khasis believed that when the ancestors came to earth from heaven, they first landed on U Lum Sohpetbneng (Sohpetbneng peak). This peak is around 10 kilometres away from Shillong.
5. Hamlet Bareh, *A Short History of Khasi Literature*, Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1979, p.8.
6. The term '*Meiramew*' is commonly translated into English as 'Mother Earth'. According to the Khasis, '*Meiramew*' has two aspects of nature. One aspect, *Meiramew* means the fruit bearing soil. This is the material aspect of *Meiramew*. Another aspect which is

immaterial is that *Meiramew* is also believed to be the goddess of the earth.

APPENDIX – II

THE DIENGLIEI PEAK MYTH

After the breaking down of the golden ladder on *Solpetbneng* Peak, a gigantic tree grew there called *ka Diengiei*.¹ The Peak where the *Diengiei* tree grew is called *Lum Diengiei* which means *Diengiei* Peak. The *Diengiei* tree grew so big that its leaves and branches spread so wide. It overshadowed the earth. There was no sun light on the earth but only darkness. Man was afraid of the wild animals and he could not carry out his normal activities.

The people of the seven families decided to cut and destroy the *Diengiei* tree as soon as possible. They started cutting this tree from morning till evening for many days. They were very surprised when something very strange happened. When they went back home in the evening as they could not cut the tree in one day's time, by the next morning they found that the tree had no cutting marks at all. All the cutting marks strangely disappeared. The people were very much worried because every time they cut the tree, they could not finish the job in one day. Whenever they came in the next morning they found no cutting marks at all on the tree.

While the people were thinking of a possible remedy, a very small bird called in Khasi, *ka Phreit* came and told

the people of the secret happenings to the tree in the night time. *Ka Phreit*² told the people that a tiger came every night and licked all the parts of the tree which they had cut and the cutting marks disappeared. The tree even grew bigger and bigger. Having come to know of what happened to the tree in the night time the men did not take to their homes the axes and other cutting tools. They placed all the axes and knives upwards on the parts which they had cut. As usual the tiger came in the night and licked the cut marks of the tree. The sharp edges of the axes and knives cut the tiger's tongue very badly while licking the cutting edges of the tree. The tiger never came again. The men managed to cut the *Diengiei* successfully. Finally it fell down and light appeared once again in the world like before. To cite the words of H. O. Mawric:

In one sense, the Diengiei Age may be termed 'The Age of Discipline'. Things that fashion a man is his spiritual doubts and misgivings. At work in him is the creative energy and the descriptive force. It is generally the pervading sense of helplessness and the paralysing sense of despair that bring in a new climate of thought to foster a new deposition to remould the environment in order that we may create a new society. There is a saying that Man's experience is his greatest teacher and it teaches him at his own mistakes. Life itself consists in the alternate process of learning and unlearning and how often it is wiser to unlearn than to learn. At the foot of U Diengiei Tree U Hynniew Trep U Hynniew Skum teaches himself to unlearn what he has learned in his Fall. It is this that drives

him to fell down the Diengiei Tree in order to reconcile himself with God.³

This myth reminds us that man has to struggle in his life. All living beings big or small are equally useful and valuable. They can help man in some way or the other. A small bird like *ka Phreit* can help man to solve his problems and to meet his needs. This myth also shows that we are all living on the lap of *ka Meiramew* and we are in need of each other. Above all, this myth shows the beginning of the Dark Age in the life of man. Human suffering and misery started since that time.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Ka Diengiei is a legendary gigantic tree grew on u Lum Dieingiei (Diengiei Peak) once upon a time. The tree grew up so big that it could block the sunlight coming to the earth. It caused darkness, fear, pain or suffering to man. This tree was an enemy to man and other living beings on earth. This myth shows that all living beings need sunlight for their survival. The Diengiei Peak is situated at Shiliang Um of East Khasi Hills. It is around 20 kilometres away from Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya.
2. Ka Phreit is a small bird which helped man to find out the secret of why and how? the Diengiei (gigantic tree) had no cutting marks though they had cut it for so many days. This myth also shows that tiger is an enemy to man while birds big or small are friends of man.
3. H. O. Mawrie, *The Essence of the Khasi Religion*, Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, 1981, p. 27.

APPENDIX -- III

KA KREM LAMET LATANG MYTH

A day was fixed for a dance festival where all the living creatures were invited to participate.¹ Almost all the living creatures big and small turned up in their colourful costumes. They danced from morning till evening. Towards the evening they were very tired. They wanted to close the festive event and go home. Suddenly *ka Sngi* (Sun-Sister) and *u Bnai* (Moon-Brother) arrived and they expressed that they wanted to participate in the dancing. Quickly, they proceeded to the dancing ground and started dancing. Their dance was considered to be offensive and immoral by most of the spectators. With anger, they shouted at them mockingly. They said that it was embarrassing and unethical that a sister and a brother danced together as husband and wife. The Sun (*ka Sngi*) was angry and full of shame. She stopped dancing and immediately went to hide herself in a cave known as *ka Krem Lamet Latang*.

Consequently, the world was in darkness. Man sent some animals and birds to go and meet *ka Sngi* and to request her to come out of her hiding place but they could not succeed. At last, man requested *u Sviar* (Cock) to go to the *Krem Lamet Latang* (cave *Lamet Latang*) and to humbly request *ka Sngi* to come back

and continue to give its light to *ka Pyrthei*. Man promised *u Syiar* a colourful dress and other needs. Finally, *u Syiar* agreed to fulfill man's request and was ready to go and meet *ka Sngi*. H. O. Mawrie writes:

The story of '*Ka Krem Lamet Ka Krem Latang*' confirms that of U Lum Sohpetbneng that God is merciful and loving. God's reaction to Man's Fall has no touch of revenge. This is clearly indicated by "*Ka Phai Lyndet U Blei*". '*Phai*' means 'turn' and '*lyndet*' means 'the back' and therefore '*Phai lyndet U Blei*' means that God turns His back on Man. That God should face Man again it is the duty and responsibility of Man to '*ieng rangbah*' that is, to play the man or to stand and again act like a man.²

In their meeting, *ka Sngi* told *u Syiar* that she was publicly humiliated and put into shame by her fellow-creatures and friends. *U Syiar* assured *ka Sngi* that there will be no more humiliation and bad treatment to her by anyone in the future. Finally, *ka Sngi* agreed to come back and reappear again with the condition that *u Syiar* must give a green signal to her by crowing thrice early morning before dawn. *U Syiar* agreed to *ka Sngi's* request. Since that time the cock holds a very important and sacred place in the life of the Khasis. G. Costa writes:

Man sent the Cock to go and meet the Sun to request her to come out of her hiding place and to be in her usual dwelling place and to give sunlight to the world. The Sun finally agreed.

Since that time the cock becomes a sacrificial object to bring peace and reconciliation between God and man or between man and other sacred forces.³

This myth shows that living beings and plants need along with *ka Meiramew* Sunlight for various reasons. All the living beings, humans and non-humans will suffer without sunlight.

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2. *Ibid.*, p.36.
3. G. Costa, *Ka Riti Jong Ka Ri Laiphew Syiem*, Shillong: Don Bosco Press, 1936, p.11.

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GLOSSARY

<i>Aiom</i>	- Age or era or season.
<i>Aiom Ksiar</i>	- Golden age or golden era.
<i>Ba</i>	- Which.
<i>Basa</i>	- Name of the first husband of mother earth.
<i>Blei</i>	- God.
<i>Baroh</i>	- All or everything.
<i>Briew</i>	- Person or human being. <i>U briew</i> means a man while <i>ka briew</i> means a woman.
<i>Bnai</i>	- Moon.
<i>Bam Hynroh ka Sngi</i>	- Solar eclipse.
<i>Bam Hynroh u Bnai</i>	- Lunar eclipse.
<i>Diengiei</i>	- A gigantic tree grew on the Diengiei peak.
<i>Ding</i>	- Fire.
<i>Dorbar</i>	- Council.
<i>Dorbar Blei</i>	- Council summoned by God.
<i>Dorbar Blei ba nyngkong</i>	- First divine council summoned by God.
<i>'Ew</i>	- Abbreviation of <i>khyndew</i> which means soil.

- Hawhaw* - Atmospheric region or space.
- Hok* - Right. *Kamai ia ka Hok* means to earn righteousness.
- Hukum* - Command or Order. *Ka Hukum* means the command-giver which is another name given to God.
- Hymiew Trep* - Seven families. To be more precise, it means that the members of the seven families it is believed by the Khasis to have first lived with God in heaven and later came down from heaven to live on Earth. The Khasis regard themselves as descendants of the seven families who have been sent by God from heaven to come and live in this world.
- Hima Khyrim* - Khyrim kingdom.
- ling* - House.
- ling U Blei* - House of God.
- ling-shong-basa* - Temporal house.
- ling-shong-neh* - Permanent or eternal house.
- Jingkieng* - Bridge, ladder.
- Jingkieng Ksiar* - Golden bridge which is in the form of a ladder.
- Jumai* - Earthquake.

- Kamai ia ka Hok* - Earn righteousness.
- Krem Lamet Latang* - Mythical cave where the Sun is said to have hidden herself. One day the cock called her to come out from her hiding place.
- Khasi* - Local person of Khasi Hills of the State of Meghalaya. The plural form of Khasi is Khasis.
- Ka* - An article using for a person or thing which belongs to the feminine gender.
- Ki* - An article using in plural form.
- Ksiar* - Gold.
- Khlaw* - Forest.
- Kyntang* - Sacred.
- Ki Khlaw Kyntang* - Sacred forests or sacred groves.
- Ki Myllung Khasi* - Khasi poets.
- Kholram* - A thing which is not smooth at all.
- Kamram* - Duty.
- Khyndai Pateng Niamra* - Underworld of nine layers.
- Khyndew* - Earth, soil, land, etc.
- Khathynriew* - First sixteen families who lived in heaven with God and later seven families out of the sixteen families came down to live on earth.
- Ki Phngit-longdoh* - Atomic elements.

- Ka Hukum* - Command-giver.
- Khathynriew Bynriew* - First sixteen families who lived in heaven with God. The Khasis believe that they are their first ancestors.
- Khyndai Trep* - Nine families. The Khasis believe that God sent only seven families out of the sixteen families to come down from heaven to live on earth. But the members of the nine families continued to live in heaven with God.
- Ki Khyndai Trep* - Nine families who live in heaven.
- Ki Khlaw kyntang ki khlaw niam* - Sacred forests which are associated with religious beliefs.
- Ka Hok kaba tam ha ka pyrthei* - Righteousness is the most essential element in the world.
- Ka Bri Hymiew Trep* - Land of the seven families.
- Kane ka pyrthei* - Present world.
- Kawei pat ka pyrthei* - Other world or the world beyond.
- Ki Hukum* - Commandments.
- Ka Niam Khasi* - Khasi religion.
- Lum* - Hill or peak.
- Lum Diengiei* - Diengiei peak.
- Lyer* - Air or wind.
- Lisan* - Primal earth.

<i>Lum Shyllong</i>	- Shillong peak.
<i>Lyngdoh</i>	- Priest.
<i>Lyngshkor</i>	- Senior Minister.
<i>Lum Sohpetbneng</i>	- Sohpetbneng peak.
<i>Meiramew</i>	- Mother earth.
<i>Met</i>	- Body
<i>Mynsiem</i>	- Soul or spirit.
<i>Mariang</i>	- Nature.
<i>Mei</i>	- Mother.
<i>Maw</i>	- Stone
<i>Maian</i>	- Mystery. A reality which is indescribable.
<i>Niam</i>	- Religion.
<i>Niam Khasi</i>	- Khasi religion.
<i>Nyngkong</i>	- First.
<i>Naitung</i>	- Literally means smell month. It is a name given for the month of July.
<i>Nongknia</i>	- Diviner who performs sacrifices.
<i>Pyrthei</i>	- World.
<i>Pyrthei shonghasa</i>	- Present world or an empirical world which is not permanent. Its existence is mutable and temporal.
<i>Phreit</i>	- A small bird who told man the secret how to cut the gigantic tree which grew on Lum Diengiei peak.
<i>Pyrthat</i>	- Thunder

<i>Pyrthuh</i>	- Imitate.
<i>Pyrshang</i>	- Attempt or try.
<i>Pyrthei-mariang</i>	- World and its nature.
<i>Phngit-longdoh</i>	- Atomic element.
<i>Pyrthei ba tang shipor</i>	- Finite world.
<i>Pyrthei sha thian</i>	- World below the sky.
<i>Pyrthei sha jrong</i>	- World above the sky or heaven.
<i>Pomblang</i>	- Goat's sacrifice.
<i>Ramew</i>	- Earth.
<i>Rngiew</i>	- Rational and divine power of man which adds personality and dignity to him.
<i>Riew pyrthei</i>	- Secular man or a non-religious man.
<i>Rām</i>	- Debt.
<i>Repram</i>	- <i>Jhuning</i> cultivation.
<i>Ryngkew</i>	- Dry land. It is also believed by the Khasis that <i>U Ryngkew</i> is the name of the second husband of mother earth.
<i>Shongbasa</i>	- Living temporally.
<i>Shongneh</i>	- Living permanently or forever or eternally.
<i>Solpet</i>	- Navel or an umbilical cord.
<i>Solpetbneng</i>	- Mythical navel of heaven which joined the space or sky above and

	the mother earth below.
<i>Suk pyrthei</i>	- Universal peace.
<i>Shityllup</i>	- All over.
<i>Shityllup ka pyrthei</i>	- All over the world.
<i>Sngi</i>	- Sun.
<i>Seng Khasi</i>	- Khasi association.
<i>Syiem</i>	- King or chief.
<i>Syiem Sad</i>	- Queen.
<i>Syiem Lakriah</i>	- King of Lakriah. It is the divine being who is believed to have accompanied the seven families while coming down from heaven to settle down on earth.
<i>Tip</i>	- Knowledge or knowing.
<i>Tipbriew Tiplei</i>	- Knowing man; knowing God.
<i>Tipkur Tipkha</i>	- Knowing of the maternal and paternal relatives. This means to maintain good relationship with the relatives of the mother's side as well as the relatives of the father's side.
<i>I/</i>	- An article using for a person or thing which belongs to the masculine gender
<i>U Blei</i>	- God.
<i>Um</i>	- Water.

- U Basa u Ryngekew* - Husband of mother earth who is also the protector of land and people.
- U Blei balah baiai* - God who is the intelligent Being.
- U Blei Nongbuh Nongthaw* - God who is the Creator and Planner of everything.
- U Blei Nongsei Nongpynlong* - God who is the giver and dispenser of life.
- U Blei Nongthaw Bynriew U Nongbuh Bynriew* - God who is the Creator and Planner of mankind.
- U Blei Trai Kynrad* - Lord-God and Master of everything.
- U Blei Nonghlukum* - God the command-giver.
- U Hymniew Trep U Hymniew Skum* - A collective name given to the members of the seven families who today are identified as the Khasis.
- U briew* - Man.
- U Syiar* - Cock.

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