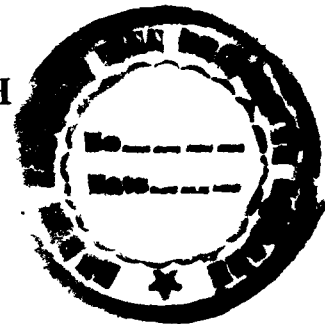


**KA NIAM (KHASI RELIGION) AND THE
CONCEPT OF *DHARMA*:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

BY

NIDARIS LYNGDOH



**A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN PHILOSOPHY**

TO

**NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
SHILLONG 793 022**

2002

NEHU LIBRARY
Acc. No. 103295
Ac. by KA
Date 9/10/02
Class by
Scribble by
Dated by
Transcribed by

**NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
SHILLONG 793 022**

DECLARATION

I, **Nidaris Lyngdoh** hereby declare that the subject matter of the thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis of award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institution.

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

N Lyngdoh
3/5/02

(Nidaris Lyngdoh)
Candidate

Forwarded

C. R. Agera
3.5.02

(Prof. C. R. Agera)
Professor & Head
Department of Philosophy
NEHU, Shillong
HEAD
Department of Philosophy
NEHU Campus, Shillong-22

Sujata Miri
3/5/02

(Prof. (Mrs.) Sujata Miri)
Supervisor
Department of Philosophy
NEHU, Shillong
Department of Philosophy
NEHU Campus, Shillong-22

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

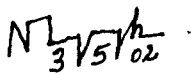
I owe my gratitude to my research guide Prof. (Mrs). Sujata Miri, Department of Philosophy, NEHU, for her guidance. This work would not have been possible without her gentle and wise guidance whose availability is admirable and to her I say a big ' Thank you ' .

I am indebted to the Head and other Professors of the Department of Philosophy, NEHU, Shillong for their help and cooperation during my course work.

On completion of this work, I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude and thanks to a number of persons who have been the constant source of help and guidance to me. I convey my special thank to my brother-in-law A. Sun for his assistance and encouragement. I am also thankful to Mr. Joseph F. Khongbuh for neat typing of the dissertation.

Lastly, my affectionate thanks go to my parents, brothers and sister who have been sources of inspiration and constant encouragement in accomplishing this task.

SHILLONG
THE ...^{3rd}..... MAY, 2002


(NIDARIS LYNGDOH)

CONTENTS

	Pages
Acknowledgement	i
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1-18
CHAPTER II THE CONCEPT OF <i>KA NIAM</i> (KHASI RELIGION) AND THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION	19-37
CHAPTER III <i>KA HOK</i> (RIGHTEOUSNESS) AND <i>KA SOT</i> (RIGHTEOUSNESS IN LIFE AND ACTION)	38-65
CHAPTER IV <i>RTA</i> AND <i>DHARMA</i> (MORALITY AND COSMIC ORDER)	66-93
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION	94-116
BIBLIOGRAPHY	117-120

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times the necessity for an integral and universal philosophy of life has become imperative. We need to look towards our great spiritual traditions and to try to understand its inner spirit in the form of a collective wisdom passed on from one generation to another by our forefathers and by the Gurus or the Saints. This is the only way that can direct man towards his destiny and solve the most complicated questions lying hidden in the horizon of life.

The aim of my dissertation is to bring out a comparative study between *Ka Niam* (Khasi religion) and the concept of *Dharma* (Hindu religion). The comparison is done not with the purpose of judging anyone's inferiority or superiority but to create a sense of completeness, brotherhood, love, respect and to help people to develop a feeling of respect for other religions.

Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal? Wherein is the cause of quarrelling?¹

I have tried in the beginning of my dissertation to describe the deeper meanings of *Ka Niam* and 'religion' as both have a direct bearing on man's destiny.

1. Hingorani Anand T. *Encyclopaedia of Gandhian Thought*, p. 24.

Ka Niam has been defined as a living and dynamic force. It is the origin, source foundation, base, purpose and end of all reality, ~~source foundation, base, purpose and end of all reality~~. It is that "Raison d'être" that is at the base of all reality. It means that eternally living relationship between God and his creatures, the human race included. The *Hynniewtreps* say that God gave them their religion when he sent their first forebears, *Ki Hynniewtrep* (the seven families or units) from heaven to live on earth.² According to the Khasi world view, *Ka Niam* is the overall plan and design of the Creator Himself. *Ka Niam is Ka Nia ka Jutang*. It is a living covenant that exists and lives forever and ever. It is the base of that eternal relationship between God and man. Because of this, according to the Khasi way of thinking, man belongs entirely to God and manifests this total belonging to God by executing *Ka Hukum* of God, and in particular by *Kamai ia ka 'Ka Hok'* (earning righteousness). Therefore, *Ka Hok*, according to the *Hynniewtreps*, is not a way of life in accordance with laws and customs as is usually meant by the word righteousness. *Ka Hok* is God Himself who though invisible is really present and working incessantly for the well-being of His creatures, particularly of humans.³ *Ka Hukum* means God Himself as manifested in this created universe, that is so well governed and directed. Corresponds to the "Cosmos" of the Greeks.

-
2. R. T. Rymbai, *Some Aspects of the Religion of the Khasi Pnars*. Quoted in *Khasi Heritage*, p. 110.
 3. Sylvanus Sngi Lyngdoh, *The Hynniewtreps World View: A Sociological Study of the Khasis of Meghalaya*, quoted in *Mission A Service of Love*, pp. 333-34.

In the second chapter, I try to show that *Ka Niam* is not synonymous with the term 'Religion' but it transcends it in many respects. The term used to express adequately the concept of the relationship of man with God and with the universe is *Ka Niam*, or *Ka Niam tipbriew tipblei*, *ka Niam tiphok tipsot*, *Ka Niam tipkur tipkha*. This is how the Khasis profess their living relationship with God and the universe, that is, their living relationship with the totality of reality.

As mentioned above *Ka Niam* is characterized as *Ka Niam tipbriew tipblei*, that is, the religion of knowing man and knowing God. Man must behave well with his fellowmen so that he may do God's will.⁴ For the Khasis, this implies having both the intellectual and experiential knowledge. It means that to understand who human beings are, we must accept them as they are and to deal with them in accordance with this knowledge. Acceptance of and a positive attitude towards human beings are the stepping stones towards their relationship with God, the Creator. So *Ka Niam tipbriew* is a condition *sine-qua-non* of *Ka Niam tipblei*. Now *Ka Niam tipblei* means, not only that intellectual knowledge of God, but his acceptance as the Creator and a life of communion with Him.

As pointed out earlier *Ka Hok* means God Himself who governs and rules the world in an invisible but effective manner. So *Ban tiphok* means to recognize God's intervention, God's work and his good government of the universe and of the human race. It means to recognize

4. R. T. Rymbai, *Some Aspects of Khasi Culture and Religion*, quoted in Ki Symboh Pyrkhat Na Ka Seng Kut Snem, p. 31.

the manner in which God acts and then to model our human conduct on God's way of dealing with the world. God's action must be the exemplar of all human actions. This is the source and fountain-head of the morality of human society, which is described as *Ka Sot*. *Ka Sot* is that perfect moral behaviour of man. It means 'righteous life' in society that includes love and recognition of the human person, respect, equity and justice. Hence, good moral life, that is life according to *Ka Sot* is conditioned by a life according to *Ka Hok*. According to the Khasi concept, man's moral life begins with his fellow human beings, but it does not stop there; it springs up and conditions man's life of communion with God; this again does not stop there, but descends to human beings. Hence, we have this cycle; man to God and God back to man. This explains what the Khasis means by *Ka Niam tipbriew tiplei* and *Ka Niam tiphok-tipsot*.

The third characteristic of *Ka Niam* is *Ka Niam tipkur tipkha* is that it is a religion which demands knowing of our maternal and paternal relationships. *Ka Niam* emphasized the sanctity of the clan and inter-clan relationship which is the basis of cohesiveness in the society. *Kur* means maternal relations, *Kha* means paternal relations. This has the force of a customary law and is a basic tenet of the Khasi religion. Khasi society is a matrilineal society and the children take their surname from the mother. The Khasis take their descends from the mother and marriage between members of the same clan is forbidden. *Ka Niam tipkur tipkha* focuses on kinship code and it also concerned with the extension of the clan and the tribe.

According to some scholars, *Ka Niam* is also described as *Ka Niam Ap-Jingong*,⁵ which means 'A waiting *Niam*', that is, *Ka Niam* is not static but dynamic. It means *Ka Niam* that moves on and develops as time passes, but homogeneously without losing its roots in the Khasi world view.

Another characteristic of *Ka Niam* is *Ka Jingkhein Jingbishar* or *Ka Niam Khein Ka Niam Bishar*. *Ka Jingkhein Jingbishar* stresses the importance of reason. The Khasis believe that all events and happenings have causes behind them. Nothing happens without a cause. It is in finding out the causes of events that reason plays a very important role in *Ka Niam* of the Khasis. This fact shows also the Khasi belief that man is a rational being endowed with a keen intellect, a guiding will and operating faculties.

Ka Khein ka Bishar is the religious norms and rites which the Khasis perform whenever they pray to God in order to know the causes of the events.⁶

This fact shows also that the Khasis believe that man is a rational being endowed with a keen intellect, a guiding will and operating faculties. Hence, the Khasis never tackle a problem caused by some events without

6. Sylvanus Sngi Lyngdoh, *Ka Khubor Babha U Jisu Khrist Katkum U Ioannis*, Vendrame Missiological Institute, 1999, p. 655.

7. H. Lyngdoh, *Ka Niam Khasi*, Ri Khasi Press, Shillong, 1937, p. 30.

knowing first of all the causes of those events. It is this aspect of *Ka Niam* that helps the Khasis to make a right decision and guides them on the right path of life.

Reasons plays a very important role in *Ka Niam*, “A Khasi in his religion never goes to God without a reason and God Himself would not listen to man if man has no reason.”⁷ They believe that life must be conducted rationally and reasonably by observing and following the religious rites and norms.

The Khasi religion is also characterized as *Ka Niam ka Rukom* which means the religion of correct observance of norms and rites.

For the Khasis *Ka Niam* (religion) necessarily complements *Ka rukom* (rites); hence the phrase *ka Niam ka rukom: Ka rukom* indicates the ceremonial aspects of religious observance which must be according to the norms laid down in *Ka Niam*.⁸

Though the norms and rites are many and differ from place to place, the religion, however, is the same. These norms and rites are performed according to needs and times.

The concept of *Ka Niam* is central in the understanding of Khasi culture. It permeates all spheres of life, socio-cultural, political-economic and religious life of the people. It is the very essence of the Khasi

7. H. O. Mawrie, *The Essence of Khasi Religion*, p. 37.

8. H. O. Mawrie, *The Khasi Milieu*, p. 33.

identity. Mr. C. Lyngdoh, a learned District Judge, in one of his judicial observation had this to say:

Now a Khasi is a Khasi because of his religion (*Niam*) more than anything else. This a great fact. To understand him, therefore, one has to go deep down into the very root of his religion. It is religion in the sense of his '*Niam*', which regulates all his thoughts and activities. Forget his religion and you will never understand a Khasi.⁹

Ka Niam reigns supreme in the entire life of the Khasis. It moulds his social, moral and political thought and convictions. It affects the whole life of a person from the cradle to the grave. The Khasis way of belief, thinking doing and expressing is in accordance with his basic principles of *Ka Niam*.

The Khasis love nature in the sense that nature is the manifestation of God Himself. God cannot be seen but he can be seen in all his creations, not only human beings but in plants, animals and all material things. Because of this reason, they believe in the unity, divine origin, equality and dignity of human life.

I have tried to describe the concept of 'religion' in a general way. As we know throughout the history of the human race, religion acts as a powerful urge in human life. It rules and regulates the conduct of man, because morality is central to religion.

9. Hipshon Roy. *The Land Where Women are Women and Men are Men*. Quoted in Ki Symboh Pyrkhat Na Ka Seng Kut Snem, 1988, p. 36.

Literally speaking, 'religion' is a belief, practice, faith and conduct of people. In the words of Radhakrishnan:

Religion is not the acceptance of academic abstractions of ceremonies but a kind of life to experience. This experience is not an emotional thrill or a subjective fancy, but it is a response of the whole personality, the integral self, the central reality. Religion is a specific attitude of the self, itself and no other, though it is mixed up generally with the intellectual and aesthetic form and moral valuations.¹⁰

Religion is not only a kind of belief or faith, but it is a kind of life to be lived, practiced and experienced in our daily life. Spirituality is the core of religion. A true religion is the one that helps man to understand fully the meaning of life in reality. The *Raison d'etre* of religion is to lead man to his fulfillment or salvation. From the very root meaning of religion, we come to know that religion is the binding force which binds us together with God by respecting, loving and serving each other. In this respect, we may say that religion is like a bridge or a ladder which communicates man's life with God. From this, we see that religion shapes the whole personality of the individual and becomes the integral part of human life that changes human character.

In the third chapter, I have tried to describe the concepts of '*Ka Hok* and '*Ka Sot*' in great detail. *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* are the central concepts in the Khasi world view and way of life. These two concepts are related to each other, they are like the two sides of a coin that cannot be

10. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 13.

separated. Yet they do not convey one and the same meaning. While *Ka Hok* is righteousness or morality, *Ka Sot* is the righteous life. Moral life or the righteous life, that is, *Ka Sot*, is conditioned by a life lined according to *Ka Hok*.

Ka Hok is prior to creation. It is the origin and the source of everything. It is the ultimate reality and the basic underlying principle. It is the right, order and the law of the universe. Everything that is right and has order has got *Ka Hok* as its basic principle. But, *Ka Hok* is not only the cosmic order but it is also the moral law and the natural law of the universe.

The phrase '*Ka Hok katkum ka Hukum*' means 'Right Order'. As I had pointed out earlier *Ka Hok* means God Himself in His invisible aspect, God is present and operative in the universe and in history, and *Ka Hukum* is the outward manifestation of *Ka Hok*. God created the whole universe according to *Ka Hok katkum ka Hukum*. *Ka Hok* is the eternal law which governs the whole nature and has to be followed not only by man but also by animals, plants and nature as well. *Ka Hukum* is the outward manifestation of *Ka Hok*, which is God Himself as perceived and seen in creation. Hence *Ka Hukum* pervades the whole gamut of man's life and he cannot possibly escape from it. Consequently, every human being is under *Ka Hukum*. Man does everything by *Ka Hok* in accordance with the direction given by *Ka Hukum*. According to the Khasis, this is the reason why 'Right Order' is the characteristic of their life and actions. Because of this fact, they can always *Kamai ia ka Hok*, that is, they have always the possibility of 'Earning Righteousness' if

they wish to. “So, ‘*ban kamai ia ka hok*’, really means to earn God himself and to make God, one’s own whole and entire.” Earning righteousness means to have and to live the life of God Himself on earth. Consequently, man can think always ‘Righteously’ and act also ‘Righteously’. Because of this ‘Earning Righteousness’, the Khasis believe that they can become worthy of a life of communion with God after death.

In the fourth chapter, I discuss the concepts of *Dharma* and *Rta*, in order to be able to contrast the Khasi conception of *Ka Niam* with the concept of *Dharma*. *Dharma* has been described as morality, religion, duty etc. It is the foundation and law of everything. It means that which holds all things and maintains them in being. The root meaning of ‘*dharma*’ is ‘to hold’. It sustains human society and the world. Every form of life, every group of men has its *Dharma*, since *Dharma* is the foundation and law of its being.

I have tried to understand the concept of *Dharma* as an extension of the Vedic Idea of *Rta*. *Rta* is commonly said to stand for the cosmic and moral order in the universe.

It stands for law and order. It literally means the course of things; it denotes the order of the world. Everything that is ordered in the universe has *Rta* for its principles. The world of experience is a shadow or reflection of the *Rta*, the permanent reality which is utterly unchanged. *Rta* exists before the manifestations of all phenomena. It is an eternal law and Varuna is the custodian of the law.

Whatever the etymology of Varuna's name may be, however, he is a decidedly personal deity in the Rig-Veda: he is the conserver of *Rta*, cosmic law and truth. *Rta* is the Vedic equivalent of the later *dharma* and is equally difficult to define in any precise terms. It is the law that governs the universe, the law that operates in ritual and sacrifice, and finally the moral law that with equal impartiality regulates the conduct of men. 'Sin' (*enas, agas*) is an infringement of the law, and may be either a mistake in the ritual or a 'mistake' in the moral order. In either case it is regarded as an offence against Varuna.¹¹

Rta regulates the cosmos as well as the individual. It functions as the moral law governing the actions of men. It is the sublime moral order which is inviolable.

Moreover the term *Rta* means something more than the cosmic order. It means also 'sacred customs', 'sacrifices', moral and ethical laws that regulate the moral actions of man. *Rta* has the power to forbid and to command human actions. Hence, it can be considered as the natural law and the moral law. As such it is not so different from *Dharma* as is seen in the works of scholars who have worked on Vedic *Rta*.

Dharma is a central concept in the Hindu thought, belief and practice. It is one of the important virtues in the theory of Purusarthas (four important values or human goal). According to Hindu thought, these four goals are *dharma*, *artha*, *Kama* and *Moksa*. "*Dharma* is the first of the four goals, because it is the most comprehensive and is valid

11. R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 30.

throughout the life of human being.”¹² *Dharma* is an integral part of human life, it embraces all aspects of human activities. Our natural desires, instincts and the senses should be gratified by *Dharma*. Therefore, Plato says that the enjoyment of pleasures without any principle virtually results in pain, therefore, the best way in which maximum pleasures can be had is by enjoying them according to a principle.¹³ *Kama* or pleasure or desire should be moderated and regulated by reason in balance and effective way. *Artha* or wealth should be acquired and utilized in accordance with the broad principles of *dharma*. These two, *Kama* and *Artha* have to be pursued with righteousness. On the other hand, *dharma* leads to *Moksa* or the fulfillment of the ideal of self-realization and self-perfection. Hence a truly integrated personality and an essential full life are possible by the proper correlation of these four ends of man, by so regulating one’s natural desires and one’s material welfare by the righteous principles of *dharma* that these are subordinated to the ultimate end of liberation. *Dharma* is eternal as it is the morality that make a man live in righteousness.

Also *Dharma* is a distinctive power that distinguishes man from animals, and enables man to live by the power of reasoning rather by instinct. The theory of *Karma* is very important because it helps man to

-
12. K. S. Murty, *The Indian Spirit*, Andhra University Press, 1965, p. 219.
 13. Madan Prasad Singh, *The Ethical Philosophy of the Gita (A Comparative and Critical Study of the Interpretations of Tilak and Ramanuja)*, Punthi, Pustak, Calcutta, 1996, p. 33.

understand himself and his place in this world. The theory of *Karma* recognizes the rules of law not only in outward nature, but also in the world of mind and morals. The theory of *Karma* states that everything that happens to us is due to our past deeds; it also follows that we are the makers of our future by the way we act at present.

Linked closely to the concept of *Dharma* is the law of *Karma*. The law of *Karma* implies that if man commits bad deeds in his present life he will be born into a lower and still lower life in the next life or lives. It is also known as the theory of the transmigration of Soul. But the Law of *Karma* does not annihilate man's being with the fear of the past, it makes him to have consciousness and concern for the others.

While natural science says that man is a product of natural evolution, the law of *Karma* asks man to take conscious charge of the greater adventure of his own evolution, the evolution of his moral and spiritual consciousness which is greater than the Physio-biological evolution of "structure and function" that has taken place so far; for, whatever might have been the past the future is new and the future could be left to take care of itself if we take care of the present.¹⁴

The concept of *Karma* is related to *Dharma* because it is concerned with the fruit of action. *Dharma*, I point out is much more than the concept of *Karma*. It is not only the tendency due to past and present work, but also the divine tendency hidden in the innermost being of man,

14. N. A. Nikam, *Some Concepts of Indian Cultures*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, pp. 19, 31.

which unfolds in the future. The law of *Karma* binds us to the effects of our actions while *Dharma* implies freedom from the bondage of life.

Dharma as duty is assigned to the different stages of life and different classes of people. In each stage of life a person had to perform in accordance with his duties that is relevant and entrusted to him at that particular stage of life.

Asrama-dharma is the *dharma* of the four stages of life. The first stage is the *Brahmacarya* or student life. The student must dedicate himself in attainment of education. The young man is expected to spend his time and energy to the teaching of the qualified teachers or the gurus and to observe sexual abstinence. Next is *Garhasthya* or householder stage, in which a person marries, raises a good family and he must concern also for the welfare of the society. Once this is completed, an individual moves to *Vanaprastha* stage in which he gradually brings himself to detach himself from worldly activity. This is the stage to concentrate upon the study of scriptures and meditational practice. Finally, an individual became a *sannyasin* or ascetic by renouncing the world and concentrate exclusively upon the spiritual quest. *Sva-dharma* is the *dharma* of the individual that manifest itself in the limitations of his former life and previous deeds.

In the concluding chapter, I compare the Khasi conception of *Ka Niam* with the concept of *Dharma*. Of the various concepts it is the concept of *Ka Hok*, which is the main focus in this discussion, because *Ka Hok* is central in the Khasi way of life. *Ka Hok* is the beginning and source of everything. It is the cosmic law and inviolable, because of this

reason, we call it the Eternal law. *Ka Hok* is prior to creation, God creates the world in *Ka Hok* according to *Ka Hukum* or '*ha ka Hok katkum ka Hukum*'. *Ka Hok katkum ka Hukum* is the right order of the universe. Literally speaking, we can compare the concept of *Ka Hok* with *Rta*, the origin and the source of everything, the cosmic and the moral law. However, the difference lies in the real meaning of these concepts. While *Ka Hok* stands for God Himself in his invisible aspect, *Rta* is understood as the moral law, which is guarded by Varuna, one of the Vedic Gods.

The concept of *Ka Sot*, the righteous life or righteousness in action can be compared with *Dharma*, whether we translate it as morality or righteousness. It directs the life of man here on earth. It is also a law and a duty that must be practiced, followed and obeyed not only in our secular but also in our spiritual life. Just as *Dharma* is the extension of the Vedic idea of *rta*, the Khasi concept of *Ka Sot* is conditioned by a life according to *Ka Hok*.

Ka Niam, like *Dharma*, is not only ethical conduct or a way to liberation, but means much more. It includes the moral and spiritual order of the universe. This is the opinion of almost all the Khasi intellectuals, who identify *Ka Hok* with God Himself in His invisible aspect and *Ka Hukum* with the outward manifestation of God's plan and design.

I have tried to show that though both *Ka Hok* and *Dharma* have come to stand for the word 'religion' as understood in modern Indian languages, yet their classical and traditional meaning points to a wider direction. Translating the two terms as 'religion' reduces the significance



of both these terms, especially in the light of the modern scientific understanding of the concept of religion.

I have stressed the concept and place of God, both in the Khasi and Hindu belief, their way of thought and life. God has got a prominent place in the Khasi way of life and thought. The Khasi believes that their entire life belongs to God and as long as they live here on earth, their purpose is '*Ban kamai ia ka Hok*' (to earn righteousness). To earn righteousness means to earn God Himself in their life and in their relationship with human society and the world. They live a life according to the design and plan of God.

The Khasis believe that there is one God only. God is the Creator, Master and Designer of this world. He is Omnipresent, Omniscient and Omnipotent. They used to address God by different names and called him in the form of singular or plural or gender base, like *Ki blei* (gods), *U Blei* (God), or '*Ka Blei ka Nonghukum*' (mother goddess) because they experience God as the Father or Mother or they feel the effects of the fatherhood and motherhood of God in their life. To him belongs the beginning and the end of all things.

From Him emerges the beginning of all things and in Him lies the end of all things. Therefore, whether we call *U Blei* (masculine) or *Ka Blei* (feminine) it makes the same sense.¹⁵

15. H. O. Mawrie, *The Khasi Milieu*, p. 28.

The Khasis believe that this world is a temporal world and eternity lies only in God. This world is a place for them to earn righteousness and to live righteously because *Ka Hok* only can lead them one day to the House of God. Because of this purpose, they observe and follow the rules and regulations of *Ka Niam* and they believe that God will punish and reward them on the basis of *Ka Hok*.

The Vedas represent different phases of religious thought. During Rig Vedic age, there are different gods. The gods are supernatural and super human powers, and endowed with spiritual qualities. The different gods are personifications of the different powers of nature. They are the deities presiding over the diverse phenomena of nature. The gods are gradually related to one another as the major and the minor, as dependent and generating one another.

But these different gods are the different deities because the Rig Veda says that there is only one Reality which is manifested in diverse ways; and sages call it by various names. The average Hindus believe that God has:

Three aspects within him – the creative, the preservative and the destructive. His creative aspect is personified as Brahma, the preservative aspect as Visnu and the destructive aspect as Shiva. These three aspects are so often taken as the three deities, although within the one supreme Lord-Brahma, Visnu and Shiva (Mahesh) therefore constitute what may be called the Hindu Trinity.¹⁶

16. K. N. Tiwari, *Comparative Religion*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1983, pp. 15, 16.

I have tried to bring the concept of God both in the Khasi and Hindu-thought, so that we can understand the different roles of God which shows the similarities and difference between *Ka Niam* and the concept of *Dharma*. For the Khasis, God manifests himself in *Ka Hok* according to *Ka Hukum* while in Hinduism he manifests Himself in *Rta* and *Dharma*.

When I speak here about *Ka Niam Khasi* (Khasi religion) I mean the people as such who are called '*U Paid Khasi Baiar*' which includes the seven major tribes of the Khasis, i.e., U Nongphlang, U Pnar, U Bhoi, U War, U Maram, U Lyngngam and U Dyko. All are one and are in one religion, though the religious rites and rituals, ceremonies and observances will differ from place to place or from clan to clan.

CHAPTER II

THE CONCEPT OF *KA NIAM* (KHASI RELIGION) AND THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION

The concept of *Ka Niam* is central in the understanding of Khasi culture. "The word religion in Khasi is *Niam*, a combination of two words, '*Nia*' which means 'Reason', and '*Im*' which means 'living'. So '*Niam*' means 'living reason'.¹ '*Ka Nia*' is a word pregnant with various meanings. It may mean origin, source, foundation base, purpose and end. Hence, '*Ka Niam*' is that something that pervades the whole of reality, which, exists; and is what it is precisely because of '*Ka Nia*', according to all Khasi thinkers, is that '*Raison d'etre*' that is on the basis of all reality. According to the Khasi world view, it is the overall plan and design of the Creator Himself. Hence, it is the most fundamental relationship that cannot possibly cease to exist, happen what may. The word '*Im*' means living, alive, existing perpetually. From these two words is derived the term *Ka Niam*, which, therefore, means 'The Living *Raison d'etre*' of reality; it means that eternally living relationship between God, his creatures and the human race.

Because '*Ka Nia*' is a living relationship between God and the human race, it is concretely manifested in God's word and in man's response, '*Ka Jutang*' means a solemn word given between two persons or two groups of people. In this context, '*Ka Nia*' or '*Ka Niam*' or '*Ka Nia ka Jutang*' means a covenant that exist and lives. It is, therefore, a living covenant. Hence, we have the Khasi phrase or saying '*Ka Nia-im*',

1. R. T. Rymbai, *Some Aspects of Khasi Culture and Religion*, p. 31.

that is, it is the covenantal relationship between 'U Blei' (God) and 'U Briew' (man). Consequently, 'Ka Nia' or 'Ka Niam' or 'Ka Nia ka Jutang' is at the base of that eternal relationship between God and man. "The Khasis strongly believe that their religion is *ka Jutang* (living covenant) between them and God from times immemorial."² Because of this, according to the Khasi way of thinking:

Man belongs entirely to God and manifests this total belonging to God by executing 'Ka Hukum' of God, and in particular by 'Kamai ia ka Hok' (earning righteousness): 'Ka Hok ka Hukum, ka Hok katkum ka Hukum' is another phrase; it means that on the basis of *Ka Hok*, *ka Hukum* follows. *Ka Hok* is therefore the underlying reality, the foundation stone of everything else."³

Ka Hok means God Himself in His invisible aspect and *Ka Hukum* means God Himself as manifested in this created universe, that is so well governed and directed.

The Khasis say that their religion which is called 'Niam' is directly given and instituted for them by God Himself and is not something that is invented by man. Rabon Singh, one of the earliest writers on Khasi religion has explained that: "Khasi religion is the religion which all the Khasis believe is given by God himself to the Hynniewtrep Hynniewskum (the seven families), according to the stories handed from one generation to another by the elders."

2. H. Lyngdoh, *Ka Niam Khasi*, p. 1.

3. Sngi Lyngdoh, As quoted in *The Khasi World View*, 1988, p. 43.

This also appears in the prayers that the Khasis utter before any sacrifice is performed. He prays:

O God, Lord and Master,
Oh Designer who has given
The religion and its rites to me,
The Khasi ...

The Khasis believe that God gave them their religion when he sent their first forebears, Ki Hynniew Trep (the seven huts) from Heaven to live on earth.

The Hynniewtreps' creation account narrates that, after creating the whole universe with its teeming creatures, God was not completely satisfied. He wanted some creatures, not only to exist, but to live and work with Him. In order to achieve this aim and purpose, God created sixteen families or units and divided them into two distinct groups. The nine and the seven. They are so called because the first group consisted of nine units or families and the second group of seven. These numbers are not to be taken literally; they are symbolic, particularly the number seven, which means a group of beings complete, capable of functioning according to their nature and progress in life ... that their fundamental and elementary function should be, '*Ban kamai ia ka Hok*.'⁴

In order to fully realize the plan of God, the nine families will stay in heaven and the seven will come down to earth to administer it with loving kindness and justice.

According to Khasi oral tradition, an appeal went up to heaven

4. Sngi Lyngdoh, A Sociological Study of the Khasis of Meghalaya, (An article), quoted in *Mission A Service of Love*, pp. 332-333.

from mother earth requesting God to send down capable governors and rulers and administrators to put order among the various categories of creatures because the whole universe was in a state of confusion and disorder. God accepted mother Earth's appeal. He immediately summoned *Ka Dorbar Blei kaba myngkong* (the first Divine Assembly) in heaven. In this Assembly it was decided that the seven would come down to the earth as rulers and administrators in their capacity as sharers and partners of the divine life.

To enable the seven families to come down to the earth, God provided them with a golden ladder known as *Ka Jingkieng Kstar Sohpet Bneng*. This ladder serves as a linkage between heaven and earth. God also promised the children of the Seven Huts that as long as they kept *Ka Hukum* (the commandment) to earn righteousness, they could climb up to heaven and climb down to the earth whenever they wanted. God sent them along with *Ka Hukum* (commandment) in which their elementary and fundamental function is '*Ban Kamai ia ka Hok*' (to earn righteousness).

The Hynniewtreps found it difficult to control the different creatures, the mother earth once again requested God to assign to each of the creatures their proper function, so there would be peace and harmony on earth. God accepted this request and once again He summoned another Divine Council which is known as *Ka Dorbar Blei kaba ar* (The Second Divine Assembly). It was held on earth at the base of *U Lum Sohpetbneng* (Sohpetbneng peak). Along with *ka Hukum* (right order), God gave the different creatures their shares according to their wishes

and the children of seven families chose their share "*Ban kamai ia ka Hok*" (to earn righteousness).

For sometime, peace and harmony prevailed in the world and it is known as "*Ka Aiom Ksiar*" (the golden age), when "*Ka Hok*" only regulated human life and the whole universe. Man worshipped God only and he knew no evil; he obeyed and followed the commandment of God. But this peace of the golden era did not last long.

Then came U Thlen (a devil) who is one of the creatures on earth, he felt jealous of man because man obeyed the Commandment of God by subordinating and surrendering his life to God. He tried hard to convince man to follow his footsteps.⁵

He tried his best to convince man by tempting him to gain his wealth through false means and violate the command of earning righteousness. As a consequence man started going astray from God and lived no more according to *Ki Hukum* (Commandments) of God. As a result of this, the ladder was disconnected, and man could no longer meet and talk with God face to face because of the sin that he had committed and could not rule the earth with loving kindness and justice.

As the ladder was disconnected, suddenly there grew a gigantic tree (U Diengiei) which covered up the whole surface of the earth with total darkness.

5. H. Lyngdoh, *Ka Niam Khasi*, p. 3.

This darkness signifies man's spiritual crisis. The more he groped into the dark the more he stumbled and the more he advanced, the more he got lost and finally he turned to God in repentance.⁶

Because of the sin that man has committed, he no longer lived in *Ka Hok* according to *Ka Hukum*, then *Ka Hok* (righteousness) returned back to God and darkness covered human life. Man in such a terrible and helpless state began to realize his faults, turned up to God once again and requested for his mercy and forgiveness.

In the darkness, the Assembly was held in order to select the fittest person who would go to plead before God for his divine mercy, and to remove away the darkness from them. Among all living creatures, it was decided that the most honest and capable one here on earth was the cock. The cock without any hesitation agreed to sacrifice itself for the good of mankind, to take away the sin that man has committed so as to please God and call for his attention once again. It was believed by the Khasis that God was pleased with the sacrifice offered by man but for a short course of time, because the cock had agreed to the contract for a short period of time. Because of this agreement *Ka Niam* of the Khasis is also called "*Ka Niam ap jingong*". Hence the Khasi religion dynamically looks towards the future by keeping on waiting for God's intervention to send down another capable mediator who will bring peace and harmony to man and the whole universe once again.

6. H. O. Mawrie, God and Man. Article in *Khasi Heritage*, p. 87.

Since that very time, according to the parable told by the ancestors, whenever the cock crows early in the morning, the sun begins to rise. The sun here means light of God which comes after the darkness which is the sin that covered mankind. Therefore, the cock plays a great role in the Khasi religion.

In spite of man's fall into sin, God did not abandon him, but continued to care for him. God, with His mercy and loving kindness for mankind, felt compassion for man. He is ready and willing to accept the sinners if they make a reconciliation and return to Him. God forgave man and once again He summoned "*Ka Dorbar Blei kaba lai*" (the third Divine Assembly) at the foothill of Sohpetbneng peak. In this assembly, *Ka Nia* (reason) and *ka Jutang* (covenant) was established between *U Blei* (God) and *U Briew* (man). In this assembly, '*Ka Niam*' (religion) of the Khasis was established according to *Ka Nia* (reason) and *Ka Jutang* (covenant). The word '*Ka Niam*' is derived from the two words '*Ka Nia*' and '*im*' which means *Ka Nia kaba im* or the living reason. This living reason is just like the living covenant by which man can communicate with God only through '*Ka Niam*', so in this assembly, God has promised them, as long as man upholds *Ka Jutang* (covenant) and lives according to '*Ka Nia*' (reason), '*Ka Hok*' (righteousness) will abide with him.

In order that everything will be in peace and order, there is a covenant (*jutang*) and the promise (*ka juban-lak*) between God and man in the *Dorbar Blei kaba saw* (the fourth divine assembly) at the foothill of Sohpetbneng peak.

For the Khasis, it is on the basis of *Ka Hok* that man is different from animals and man has the faculty of reasoning, the intellect, intuition, imagination etc.

'*Ka Niam*' (religion) of the Khasis was established according to '*Ka Nia*' (reason) and '*Ka Jutang*' (covenant).⁷ Closely lined to these is the concept of '*Ka Hukum*'. '*Ka Hukum*' is the outward manifestation of God in the universe and '*Ka Hukum*' manifests itself when we say that '*Ka Niam*' of the Khasi is *Ka Niam Tip Hok Tip Sot* (religion of righteousness and righteous life), *Ka Niam Tipbriew Tipblei* (religion of knowing man and knowing God), *Ka Niam Tipkur Tipkha* (religion of knowing maternal and paternal relationship). The term used to express adequately the concept of the relationship of man with God and with the universe is '*Ka Niam*'. This is why the Khasis profess their living relationship with God and the universe, that is, their living relationship with the totality of reality. From this description of '*Ka Niam*' it is evident that '*Ka Niam*' is not synonymous with the term 'Religion' but it transcends it.

Ka Niam Tip Hok Tip Sot involves a detailed study of the Khasi concept. '*Ka Hok*' means God Himself who governs and rules the world in an invisible but effective manner. So, '*Ban tip hok*' means to recognize God's intervention, God's work and his good government of the universe and of the human race. It means to recognize the manner in which God acts and then to model our human conduct to God's way of dealing with

7. H. O. Mawrie, *U Khasi bad la ka Niam*, p. 53.

the world. God's action must be the exemplar of all our human actions. This is the source and fountainhead of the morality of human beings and of society, which is described as '*Ka Sot*', '*Ka Sot*' is that perfect moral behaviour of man. It means 'righteous life' in society, that includes love and recognition of the human person, respect, equity and justice.

'*Ka Niam tipbriew*' leads to '*Ka Niam tipblei*'. '*Ka Niam tipbriew*' is more important as it affects the people existentially in their everyday life. '*Ka Niam tipbriew*' means that total relationship among humans. The term '*tipbriew*' means 'knowing man'. For the Khasis 'to know' does not mean only to have an intellectual knowledge, but an experiential knowledge. First of all, it means to understand fully who human beings are, then to accept them as they are and to deal with them in accordance with this knowledge and acceptance. For the Khasis, this knowledge, acceptance and positive attitude as regards human beings are the stepping stones towards their relationship with God, the Creator. So '*Ka Niam tipblei*' means, not only that intellectual knowledge of God, but his acceptance as the Creator and a life of communion with him.

Ka Niam tipkur tipkha. The religion of the Khasis is also known as the religion of knowing paternal and maternal relationship. The foundation of Khasi society is based on the concept of *Kur* and *Kha*. '*Kur*' is from the mother's kith and kin and '*Kha*' is from the father's kith and kin from his mother side. A Khasi must know and be true to his *Kur* and *Kha*, he must love and respect them as they are the progenitor of the clan.

Each clan has its triad – *Ka Iawbei*, the ancestral mother, the progenitrix; *U Thawlang*, the ancestral father, the progenitor, the founder of the clan and the institutor of the clan's religious rituals, the builder and consecrator of the clan's great Ossuary (*Mawbuh*); and *U Suitnia*, the eldest son of *ka Iawbei*, the ancestral maternal uncle of the clan, the one who intercedes on behalf of the members of his clan before the creator for their misdeeds and sins of omission and commission.⁸

“*Ka Niam* of Khasi teaches that all human beings are *U Kur* and *U Kha*. All human beings are equal before God and religion.”⁹ Khasi religion does not look at other religions as inferior or superior, because it believes that every religion has its own uniqueness and freedom. ‘*Ka Niam*’ (religion teaches that all men are equal and believes in unity of mankind or in the universal brotherhood of men).

Ka Jingkhein Jingbishar or *Ka Niam khein ka Niam Bishar* – *Ka jingkhein jingbishar* stresses the importance of reason. The Khasis believe that all events and happenings have causes behind them. Nothing happens without a cause. It is in finding out the causes of events that reason plays a very important role in ‘*Ka Niam*’ of the Khasis. This fact shows also that the Khasis believe that man is a rational being endowed with a keen intellect, a guiding will, and operating faculties. Hence, the Khasis never tackle a problem caused by some events without knowing first of all the causes of those events. It is this aspect of ‘*Ka Niam*’ that

8. Singh Kynpham, Khasi and Jaintia Religion, (An article) in *Khasi Heritage*, p. 95.

9. Roy Sib Charan, *Ka Niam Ki Khasi Ka Niam tip-Blei tip-briew*, p. 6.

helps the Khasis to make always a right decision and guides them on the right moral path of life.

'*Ka Hukum*' (order) and '*Ka daw*' (reason) go side by side, because when man upholds '*Ka Hukum*' he also upholds '*Ka daw*' (reason). '*Ka Hukum*', therefore, produces two kinds of reasons according to the ability and possibility of man. "These are: reason to success and reason to failure".¹⁰ Since there is no effect without a cause, when a person's life is smooth one can infer that he is one who upholds '*Ka Hukum*' with '*ka daw*'. So also when misfortune falls on him, it can safely be interpreted that his reason has failed him.

When man upholds '*Ka Daw*' and '*Ka Hukum*', he is gifted with the loving kindness and blessings of God. He enjoys health and is not seized by the evil forces or by dreadful diseases, for God has given him a full life and supplies all his needs and wants; when man goes astray from '*Ka Hukum*' of God, the evil forces will overpower him and this will affects even his *rngiew* (the very essence of being).

Man comes to this world along with '*Ka Hukum*' and '*Ka Daw*', and life has a divine purpose. God creates the universe and all the living things that come into existence because of '*Ka Daw*'. The living and the non-living things can serve one another and depend on each other. Their noble thoughts and ideals make the Khasis to worship God and honour Him in their very heart. They see God and recognize Him in other human beings, in the creatures, and in nature because they are the manifestation

10. H. O. Mawrie, *U Khasi bad la ka Niam*, p. 38.

of God. That is why, the Khasis have no churches or temples, they can worship God anywhere or everywhere they are.

Also '*Ka Niam*' of the Khasis gives freedom to each and every individual, since they believe that all persons can distinguish between good and bad. Man has the freedom of choosing and he is the architect of his own fate. If man commits bad deeds, he is the one to suffer. Man can hide nothing from God, and every cause whether in the form of action, thought, wish and feeling, will inevitably give rise to an effect one day.

Religion is popularly understood as a way of life which includes one's beliefs, conduct and practice. In this sense, *Ka Niam* comes close to the concept of religion for it influences all spheres of man's activities throughout his life.

The root meaning of religion is that 'to bind':

The word is originally from the Latin 'religio'. Hence religion, is the bond that unites us to the Creator Himself, with nothing coming between Him and our mind by which we know Him as Father, and the Truth, that is the inner light through which we know Him.¹¹

Religion is the only power that binds man to God and man to man. It is the bond that unites the life of man in communion with God and in his relationship with his fellow beings and the universe. Hence, religion is the principle of unification and harmonization that binds us together

11. Wilfred Cant Well Smith. *Meaning and End of Religion*, pp. 19, 30.

and keeps unity with the very foundation of our being. It is not merely a belief, conviction and faith but it involves the totality of human behaviour, conduct, activity and personality. It controls and directs the life of man on earth to achieve his destiny. It is the realization of God within ourselves and the way of righteousness to achieve salvation.

Kant Immanuel says that religion is “the recognition of our duties as divine command.” Durkheim Emile, defines religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred things”. Hegel George defines religion as “the knowledge possessed by the finite mind of its nature and absolute mind”. Ninian Smart says that religion is:

a set of institutionalized rituals with a tradition and expressing and or evoking sacred sentiments directed at a divine or trans-divine focus seen in the context of the human phenomenological environment and at least partially described by myths or by myths and doctrines.¹²

For Gandhi:

The ultimate definition of religion may be said to be obedience to the Law of God. God and His Law are synonymous terms. Therefore, God signifies an unchanging and living law.¹³

Whatever may we define religion we can safely conclude that religion is meant to elevate man, to give him an aim and purpose in life

12. Hexltam Irving, *Concise Dictionary of Religion*, Intervarsity Press, Downess George Illinois, 1993, pp. 186, 187.

13. M. K. Gandhi, *Young India*, August 25, 1940.

and to assure him that life is not without a meaning.

Contemporary thought regards religious faith as personal. It is a personality of which we see many sorts of expressions:

Faith is an attitude of will, the energy of soul, the response of the entire self. In faith we believe not only with our brain or intellect but with our whole soul and body. The idea is not merely thought out but grows from the very deepest layers of life and mind.¹⁴

Religion can be expressed not merely as having emotional implications but also in the wide range of our behaviour and actions. Religion we must experience through faith. But practice is an integral part of faith; faith is of no use without practice. Faith without practice cannot make a person really faithful. The way we express to others that we are faithful is only through practice. For instance, every one should ask himself if he experiences God within himself or not. To experience God means to have a loving attitude towards others by sharing the grief and suffering of people; this is the only way to gain complete freedom of the soul. Religion offers us a complete freedom in which our spirit is lifted high. We must have faith in ourselves and faith in the world, that we will do something good and meaningful to the world by liberating ourselves from all evil things. Unlike this understanding of religion, *Ka Niam* stresses the importance of reason. Of course reason is not man made but is given by God to man. God gave *Ka Niam* to bring peace to man in order to bring peace, harmony and order in the universe. We must

14. S. Radhakrishnan, *East and West in Religion*, p. 93.

remember that without *Ka Niam, Ka Hok* which is God himself cannot remain any longer on earth.

Furthermore spirituality if spirituality alone is regarded as central to religion and forms the core of all religions, it gives a very narrow meaning and a limited sphere to religion.

Religion is the cultivation of interior life. It is the attainment of spiritual freedom, and is essentially the private achievement of the individual won by hard effort in solitude and monasteries.¹⁵

Spirituality cannot be separated altogether from the material and the temporal realities of life. As we need food for our body and knowledge to enrich our intellect so also we need spirituality to refine our soul with spiritual perfection. This spirituality that comes from within must be expressed outside through our way of thinking and in relation to the whole world.

Religion can be characterized as a belief and practice which involves doctrines, myths, ethical and social beliefs, which urge man to follow the rules and conduct. Morality forms the core of every religion, though the detailed moral codes given by various religions may be different from one another. Religion emphasizes the moral consciousness of man. It assigns beliefs and values which urge man to follow the rules and conduct and to practice the virtue.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

True religion is, in fact, identical with morality. There is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness.¹⁶

It directs man to the highest idea of human good. It changes and cultivates the character of human life and urges people to strive towards what is good and true. It tries to help man in his growth and development as a moral being distinct from animals because man has the power of understanding of the profound depths of his own nature and the faculty of reasoning and thinking. In the words of Toynbee, to have religion is one of those distinctively human characteristics of mankind that differentiate us from our non-human fellow animals on the face of this planet; this assumption implies that every human being has religion; in fact, no one can be human without having it in some form. Religion tries to help man in his growth and development as a moral being, distinct from animals. *Ka Niam* however does not debar animals and other forces of nature from the moral realm. Animals, mountains and rivers are also guided by moral consciousness.

Gandhi says that God is truth or truth is God; this implies that by living in truth we can have the realization of God within ourselves or we have God within ourselves. A person must be true to himself as well as to others also. One cannot be true to others unless he is just and true to himself. We express to others what type of a person we are through our character, behaviour and personality. Hence, religion has a very important role to play in this respect. It affects the everyday life of the

16. M. K. Gandhi, *Ethical Religion*, p. 49.

people existentially. For instance, we want to know each other's culture and religion, so that we can trace what type of character we belong to, because religion is an integral to our individual and socio-cultural life. So religion helps man to practice the virtues of conduct and directs him to live in a righteous way, to be true and fair in his dealing with others.

Religion is universal and essential to man integral development because it aims at the balanced manner of spiritual, intellectual and emotional growth of man as it is a spiritual and personal experience that guides us from within us. This only can make man have fear of committing the bad things in life and get rid away of misthinking, misbehaviour and misconduct.

The root of religion lies deep in society. It is an organic principle which gives form and shape to societies. It assigns certain laws and social duties to man's life in his relation to his fellow-men. It prescribes certain norms, virtues and obligations to each and every individual. These are the foundations of man's personal and social work. This enables man to understand himself and his duties in his relation with others in the society. In the words of Peter Singer, "the most meaningful life is outward looking, expresses concerns for other."¹⁷ To apprehend the reality within us is to have a spiritual outward looking and to be freed from ego-centredness. To live a meaningful life is to share with others their sufferings and burdens. A true religious person does not feel

17. Peter Singer, *The Philosophical Review in an Age of Self-Interest*, in *Journal The Philosophical*, Vol. 106, No. 1 (Jan. 1997), p. 125.

contented when he sees others suffer; he wants to uplift them and bring them into life and hope.

The advancement in science and technology has brought about great changes in different spheres of human life. People are more fascinated with the materialistic world which offers anything at any moment and at any cost. However, in spite of all these developments we still lead a miserable life. Almost in every society there is disorder and confusion which drives away peace and harmony from the society.

It is religion which inspires the sense of unity, brotherhood and equality in which we must love one another as brothers and sisters and in which there is no feeling of superiority and inferiority because all men are equal before God and reward and punishment will be given according to man's actions and whether he leads a good life.

Since religion is part and parcel of life, we cannot divorce it from other spheres of life. It has also a great role to play in the economic and political life of a person. Religion also affects the socio-economic life by shaping and fostering the social and political justice. In order to regulate inter-personal and inter-group human relationship, political life must not be divorced from religion because politics without religion cannot ensure collective human welfare.

The state is an institution under God for the negative restraint of wrong-doing and the positive furthering of conditions which favour rather than hinder the living of a good life. In this vein, one could also highlight the relevance of religion

for various problems ... as well as for social movement for human rights, women, environment, peace etc.¹⁸

18. Surendra Nath Das Gupta. *Philosophical Essays*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1982, p. 151.

CHAPTER III

KA HOK (RIGHTEOUSNESS) AND KA SOT (RIGHTEOUSNESS IN LIFE AND ACTION)

Ka Hok and *Ka Sot* constitute the Reality, that underlies all realities and govern all life and actions of every human being. They are the force behind all the moral and virtuous actions. They are also the two most important tenets of the Khasi religion. The Khasis firmly believe that their '*Niam*' (religion) was given to them by God as a 'Covenant', that is, a covenant between God and human beings. Hence '*Ka Niam*' (religion) is the external manifestation of the living covenant between God and man. Now in order that the Khasis may live up to their religion and then covenant with God, they have to live according to *Ka Hok Ka Sot*. Accordingly, as long as man lives in *Ka Hok* and in *Ka Sot*, he keeps perfectly his covenant with God and in consequence of this covenant, God never forgets and abandons him, that is, the two live in close communion with each other.

Most people understand these two terms, *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* as meaning one and the same thing. They think the term *Ka Sot* is a word that follows the term *Ka Hok* in order to complete its meaning. But in my opinion, this is a misunderstanding of the two terms. As a matter of fact, these two terms have their own deeper meanings. These meanings show the important role that they have to play in the Khasi World View and in the Hynniewtrep Society.

Let me first look to the definition of the term '*Ka Hok*'. This term is so pregnant with meaning that it is very difficult to find a single word that adequately can convey its various meanings, not only in English but

in other languages too. The word in English that comes very close to it seems to be 'Righteousness'. Most scholars regard the Khasi term *Ka Hok* as a dynamic term, capable of many meanings and nuances. It can mean 'goodness', 'right', 'justice', 'virtue', 'moral conduct', 'good behaviour' in society, 'righteousness' and 'reality'. It can also simply mean God Himself, who is invisible, but constantly at work in history.

That the term '*Ka Hok*' means God Himself is clear from the various ways in which the term is used in Khasi language. It is said *Ka Hok Ka Im*, which means that *Ka Hok* is immortal: it simply lives and never dies. Hence, life and eternal life is its chief characteristic. Looked at from this point of view, '*Ka Hok*' exists prior to creation. It is the origin and fountainhead of everything that exists. It is invisible and transcends time and space. Hence, it is the ultimate reality and the cause of everything, itself being uncaused.

Then it is also said "*Ka Hok ka bud dien bad ka siew bainong (Ka Hok follows and rewards).*" By this, the Khasis mean that '*Ka Hok*' is the Eternal Law, a cosmic moral order that binds human beings and the whole of creation. Nothing can escape its firm grasp and rule.

Therefore, '*Ka Hok*', according to the Hynniewtreps, is not a way of life in accordance with laws and customs as is usually meant by the word righteousness.¹

-
1. Sngi Lyngdoh, *The Hynniewtreps' World View: A Sociological Study of the Khasis of Meghalaya, Mission: A Service of Love*, Edited by Francis Fernandez and Jose Varickasseril, 1998, pp. 333-334.

As mentioned above '*Ka Hok*' is immortal. It is God Himself who through invisible aspect is really present and working incessantly for the well being of man. So the Khasis' concept of *Ka Hok* is similar to the Vedic concept of the term *Rta*, which is commonly said to stand for the cosmic and moral order in the universe; it simply means the whole world order, the cosmos of the Greeks. As such, it is a permanent reality and exists before the manifestation of all phenomena. It is nothing else but the Eternal Law of the universe.

Hence '*Ka Hok*' is commonly used in a variety of senses and can be expressed in different ways in Khasi, such as "*Ka Hok U Blei*" (righteousness is God), "*Ka Hok Ka Hukum*" (righteousness according to Commandments), "*Ka Hok Ka Riti*" (righteousness, my personal property) and "*Ka Hok Ka Sol*" (righteousness and righteous life).

Ka Hok Ka Hukum or *Ka Hok Katkum Ka Hukum* which means *Ka Hok* according to *Ka Hukum*, is the outward manifestation of God Himself. God never appears, only *Ka Hukum* appears.² '*Hukum*' means 'Law or Commandments'. So, *Ka Hok Katkum Ka Hukum* means that *Ka Hok* manifests itself through *Ka Hukum*. Hence, it is only through *Ka Hukum* that (being). It is therefore, clear that '*Ka Hukum*' means the perfect order that exists in the 'uni-being' is the law or moral order, that has to be observed if human beings want to reach their destiny.

2. R. S. Lyngdoh, as quoted in *Khasi World Views: A Conceptual Exploration* by Sujata Miri, p. 44.

As pointed out earlier '*Ka Hok*' refers to God himself who though invisible is present and active in history. We have seen too that *Ka Hok* means Righteousness. So, *Ka Hok* does mean god, who is righteousness in its invisible form. Now '*Ka Sot*' is the external manifestation of '*Ka Hok*'. Evidently, '*Ka Sot*' cannot but mean 'God as Righteousness' in His visible aspect in the whole moral order and good human behaviour. Yes, a person cannot claim to be righteous unless he lives in accordance with Law and the Moral Order. So to live the life of '*Ka Hok*' is to live according to '*Ka Hukum*', which is the manifestation of *Ka Sot*, which is visible, audible and palpable too through the life of virtues and moral conduct. Hence, *Ka Sot* is the real and eminent character of a perfect human being in a perfect moral order.

The Khasis believe that man belongs entirely to God. Man manifests his total belonging to God by executing his *Ka Hukum*, particularly by *Kamai ia ka Hok* or earning righteousness. The phrase *Ka Hok* according to *Ka Hukum* means the 'Perfect Right and Moral Order'. The Khasis believe that man comes into this world by and for *Ka Hukum*. Hence *Ka Hukum* pervades the whole gamut of man's life. Man cannot possibly escape from *Ka Hukum*, since he comes into this world through it, lives by It and acts for It. Such being the case, a human person is completely under *Ka Hukum* and through *Ka Hukum* under *Ka Hok*, that is, man lives and acts in accordance with the direction given to him by *Ka Hukum*. The Khasis, in fact, believe that *Ka Hukum* is nothing else but *Ka Hok* in its visible aspect. Hence, *Ka Hok Katkum Ka Hukum* (righteousness and order) is the chief characteristic of man's life and

action in history, a characteristic that is so dynamic that it infallibly leads man to his fulfillment and makes him reach his appointed destiny.

Ka Hukum governs and regulates all the aspects of man's life, intellect, will and operative faculties, so that a person, who is completely under *Ka Hukum* has his will (*Ka Niabriew*) in total and complete harmony with God's will (*Ka Nia Blei*). Because of this, the Khasis believe that the action of a person who is under *Ka Hukum* is simply the-
andric (God-man action) in nature and in character. When this happens, then man truly earns righteousness. From this, it follows that, when a person does something outside *Ka Hukum*, that action has no value whatsoever, nay, it is simply immoral and sinful. It is totally incompatible with God's will. As such, therefore, God rejects it. This is the reason why the Khasis believe that *Ka Hukum* is entirely clothed, so to say, in the perfect form of God's will and law. Therefore, a person, who is under *Ka Hukum*, has his intellect truly enlightened, his will thoroughly strengthened and his operative faculties well directed. Now when this happens, the Khasi believe that they have *Ka Hok Ka Sot*. Hence, outside *Ka Hok Ka Sot* man fails in his purpose and perishes. Like ancient philosophers, such as Thomas Aquinas, the Khasis believe that the greatest evil of all is the turning away from God, from His will and from His Law. Because of this, a person, who lives and acts outside *Ka Hok Ka Sot*, loses his human freedom, so to say. He becomes a slave and degrades himself. This degradation, in its turn, brings in the so called *Ka Jem Rngiew* (the weakening of man's personality). Its opposite is what is known as *Ka Eh Rngiew*. The term '*Rngiew*' means in English 'Man's full-fledged personality in all its aspects'.

Wherefore, a person, who has *Ka Eh Rngiew* is a full-fledged person, endowed with an enlightened intellect, a strong indomitable will and constancy of character. Nothing can possibly subdue and conquer him; he is a true master in his own right. On the other hand, a person under the grip of *Ka Jem Rngiew*, which is the bitterest fruit of being outside *Ka Hok Ka Sot*, is not a person in the fullest sense of the term. He is subject to all sorts of evil. His intellect gropes in darkness, so to say, his will is weakened and his power of action is blunted. All this is the result of being outside *Ka Hok Ka Sot*.

The Khasi Creation Narrative has it that God created the whole material universe. But God could not live a common life with those creatures of His. He wanted to have some creatures, who could live in common with Him. Of course, God does not need any creature in order to be completely happy. It was a unilateral move on the part of God. So 16 groups or families of intelligent beings were created by God in order that they might live in common with Him in Heaven itself in happiness and joy. These 16 families were divided into two big groups. The first group had nine families, called the "*Khyndai*", and the second group has seven groups or families, called the '*Seven Treps Seven Skums*' (the seven families). These 16 families shared with Him everything. From time to time, when need arose, God would call a *Dorbar* (Assembly) to discuss problems with them; so much did God esteem them. In his governance of Heaven, God took the 16 families into confidence and consulted them on important issues and matters.

One day an appeal came from Mother Earth to God to send rulers on this earth because all the creatures were quarelling and fighting one another. God listened to Mother Earth's appeal and immediately called the 16 families to a special *Dorbar* to discuss this problem, to choose the best among them and to send them down to earth in order to govern, to rule and to administer the world, that is, to put order among the other creatures. The *Dorbar* lasted many days and the discussions were deep and thorough. As the result of this long deliberation, the seven families were chosen for these reasons: first, these seven families could increase and multiply since they were a mixed society of men and women; secondly, they were endowed with the gifts of intuition, intellect, reason, will and operative faculties. Accordingly, God proclaimed the decision of the *Dorbar*, *Hynniewtreps* (you the seven families), go down to earth to govern, to rule and to administer by earning righteousness (*da kaba kamai ia ka Hok ka Sot!*). Righteousness, in the fullest sense of the term, includes *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* as well, since *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* go always hand in hand together. Where *Ka Hok* truly exists, *Ka Sot* cannot be possibly absent; vice versa, here *Ka Sot* operates, *Ka Hok* cannot but be present. So the *Hynniewtreps* were sent to earth to govern, to rule and to administer by earning *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*. Without *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*, the *Hynniewtreps* could not possibly govern, rule and administer. The *Hynniewtreps* could govern, rule and become masters of creation precisely because of *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*. Remove *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* from them, they would become powerless and useless.

It is, therefore, clear that the *Hynniewtreps* became masters over the whole of created reality because and only because of *Ka Hok* and *Ka*

Sot. To convince them of this truth, God continued in proclaiming the decision of the *Dorbar* in these words: In order that you may govern rule and administer by earning Righteousness (*Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*), we give you '*Ka Sad ka Sunon*' (sovereignty) and '*Ka Iktiar*' (legitimate power)'. So, the *Hymniewtreps* became 'sovereigns' endowed with legitimate power to govern, to rule and to administer precisely because of *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*, since sovereignty (*Ka Sad ka Sunon*) and legitimate power (*Iktiar*) were given for the perfect earning of Righteousness (*Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*). Clearly, therefore, Sovereignty and Legitimate Power depend on *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*.

After some time, Mother Earth discovered that her children (animals, plants etc. etc.) lived peacefully with one another but in a disorderly way since they were not sure of their own share and portions in life, since they, as distinct groups, did not know where to live, what to eat and what to do as well. So, Mother Earth appealed to God once more to help her in making her children behave in an orderly way. God agreed and came down through the Golden Bridge. He proclaimed the second Divine *Dorbar* to be held in Rangmen Valley, in the east of Mount Sohpetbneng. God himself presided over the *Dorbar*. All came to the *Dorbar*: humans and the rest of creation. God was pleased with their prompt obedience. After welcoming and blessing them, God said, "Now go back and think well what kind of share and portion you would like to have. We give you nine days." All the creatures of the world retired from Mount Sohpetbneng in order to meditate and think well what they should ask from God. All the creatures, except humans, were very anxious to get their shares and portions as soon as possible. So after three or four days,

they returned all together to Mount Sophebneng, where God was staying. Instead of being angry or displeased, God was pleased with their eagerness to get as soon as possible their shares and portions. Hence God began to give whatever they asked.

But the Khasis or the *Hymiewtreps* were not so eager like the other creatures. So, they waited till the ninth day as fixed by God. When they arrived, God pleasantly said, “Well, We have given all the shares and portions to all the other creatures. But you too have a right to ask according to our decision and will. So, what do you want us to give to you?” The Khasis or the *Hymiewtreps* replied, “Almighty God, we are quite happy and contented with the share and portion You have given us, that is, to earn righteousness (*Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*). Hence we do not want anything else; we are quite satisfied with earning Righteousness (*Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot!*).”

God, the Khasi Creation Narrative says, was greatly surprised that the Khasi or Hymiewtreps asked only to earn Righteousness! Yes, God was surprised, but at the same time He was exceedingly pleased and delighted that they had asked only to earn Righteousness! So in a joyous voice, God proclaimed, “Because you have asked only to earn Righteousness, We will give you all the possible shares and portions of the other creatures! You will have and possess everything!”

But according to the Khasi Creation Narrative, a terrible setback took place: Sin and sinfulness entered in the world. It took place at the end of the Second Divine Dorbar. Sin and sinfulness came into the world through the refusal of “Thlen” to ask for his share and portion in life from

God. “Thlen”, an intelligent being, gave to himself his own share and portion, namely, “To earn wealth and destroy human life, (*Ban kamai ia ka longspah bad ban bam ia ka longbriew*)”. By this proclamation ‘U Thlen’ rebelled against God and ushered in a long period of Darkness, of Sin and Sinfulness, of pain and of untold misery. Unfortunately, the Khasis or Hynniewtreps too hopelessly fell into sin. Life became unbearable. “*Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*” fled to a region where sin had not yet entered. With the disappearance of *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*, darkness came over the Khasis or Hynniewtreps. Here the Khasi Creation Narrative takes the ‘Sun’ as the symbol of *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*. So there was utter darkness in the world, from which all sorts of evils came out and tormented the Khasis. But unfortunately, the Cock, the only creature free from sin, brought back the Sun with its light, that is, *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*. It was a true liberation because *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* came back to earth and restored the Khasis to their pristine life in righteousness.

Stung by the sufferings during that sinful period of darkness precisely because of the disappearance of *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* from among the Khasis, the Third Divine *Dorbar* in Sumer Valley felt the need of keeping *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* in the world at any cost. All agreed that the Sun, the symbol of *Ka Hok ka Sot*, should not be allowed to disappear any more. All creatures, humans, animals and inanimate creatures too, resolved to retain *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* so that terrible darkness, the source of all evils and troubles, might not return to earth. Here we see that the absence of *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* is darkness and the presence of *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* is light, which is the source of everything that is good in the world.

Accordingly, the Khasi Creation Narrative says that the Third *Dorbar* appealed to God to help His creatures to keep forever with them *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*. God accepted their request and proposed to the Khasis or Hynniewtreps the means, the only means, to keep *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* in the world: *Ka Nia ka Jutang, ka Nia kaba im*, that is *Ka Niam* (a covenant, a living covenant, that is religion). So according to the Khasi world view, religion is not an end but a means only in order to keep forever in the world *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*. *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*, therefore, are the end and purpose of religion. Evidently, religion is at the service of *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*. Religion exists because of *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* and for *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*. Take away *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*, religion has no meaning and no purpose according to the Khasis or Hynniewtreps' belief.

In conclusion, therefore, we can affirm that *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* are the beginning and the end of the Khasis' life on earth, that is, their whole life in history revolves round *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*. This has been, is and will ever be the reason why, in ancient times in particular, the Khasi or Hynniewtreps used to repeat, day in and day out, this piece of advice, live and do all things in *Ka Hok Ka Sot* according to the *Hukum*. *Ka Hukum* here means *Ka Hok Ka Sot* itself as it appears in Law and Order in life in history on earth. But 'Law' here does not mean a written code of laws; likewise order does not mean order as prescribed in statutes and regulations. Hence, it is not so much a way of life as determined by written laws, statutes and regulations, as the Re-enactment of a person's life and action that is, God Himself, who is invisible but really present and working incessantly for the well-being of all His creatures, particularly of human beings or the human race.

To recapitulate, *Ka Sot* is the true image and manifestation of *Ka Hok* in actual life on earth. So, *Ka Sot* is not something in the abstract, but something real and concrete, that can be seen with human eyes, something that can be heard with human ears and touched with human hands.

Wherefore, *Ka Sot* exists actually, when *Ka Hok* exists and operates. Vice versa, when *Ka Sot* does exist and manifests itself in concrete and moral actions, *Ka Hok* cannot be possibly absent. Yes, one cannot stay without the other. As we cannot have 'water' without its two essential elements 'H₂' and 'O', so also *Ka Hok* cannot possibly exist without *Ka Sot*. They are so indispensable that one cannot possibly exist without the other.

Sib Charan Roy in his book *Ka Niam Ki Khasi – Ka Niam Tip-Blei Tip-Briew* says that *Ka Sot* is Truth itself, which can never be subject to change. It is the ultimate Truth and Reality, since *Ka Sot* is the external manifestation of *Ka Hok*, which is God Himself in His invisible aspect. Hence, *Ka Sot* is God Himself in His visible aspect in the actions of human beings in particular. Such being the case, *Ka Sot* controls, directs and regulates man's integral life on earth so that he may arrive at his final goal, namely, to live a righteous life in perfect relationship with God and the world. This concept of *Ka Sot* appears clearly in this Khasi proverb, *Ha ka Hok ka Shikyntien*, which means, word of honour given in *Ka Hok Ka Sot*, or the Truth uttered in *Ka Hok Ka Sot*. This is a true insight into the nature of the word of honour uttered or given in *Ka Hok Ka Sot*. Hence, it is clear that anything spoken in *Ka Hok Ka Sot* is bound to be

true. In the same way anything uttered outside the ambient of *Ka Hok Ka Sot* is false and hence a lie. Once again we see here the value given by the Khasis to *Ka Hok Ka Sot* for without it there is no truth.

The term '*Ka Sot*' may be linked to the Sanskrit word '*Sat*', which means something real and true. It is the Truth in itself. Ethically the term means 'the Good' that which cannot be destroyed and in its epistemological meaning it stands for truth as the opposite to falsehood. "Thus *Sat*, the being, is not only real but good and true as well or whatever exists is true and good."³

As said earlier, '*Ka Hok*' means 'God Himself in His invisible aspect', that very same God, who governs and rules the world in an invisible but effective manner for the good of mankind. Now '*Ka Sot*' is the external manifestation of *Ka Hok*, that is, God in His invisible aspect. Hence, according to the Khasis or Hynniewtreps, *Ka Sot* is God's veritable intervention in history, God's work and good government of the universe and of the human race. So *Ka Sot* is the perfect reflection of God's way of dealing with the human race and the world. This means that God's action is the exemplar of all human behaviour and actions in society. Now this is precisely the meaning of *Ka Sot* in its widest sense for it includes love, recognition of the human person, respect and esteem, equity and justice. Hence, *ka Sot* is the source and condition in history of a truly good moral life according to *Ka Hok*, which is God Himself.

3. Khan, Benjamin. *The Concept of Dharma in Valmiki Ramayana*, p. 51.

I have stressed that *Ka Hok* cannot be possibly separated from *Ka Sot*. The two go hand in hand. From this principle in the Khasi world view, the Khasi firmly believe that no man is good unless and until he shows his goodness outwardly in actions. Mere words, “I am a good man”, have no meaning for the ancient Khasis. If a man says, “I love my poor neighbours”, but he sits quietly in his house without doing anything, the ancient Khasis would brand him as a liar. The ancient Khasis held firmly this principle, “We live in deeds and not in years!” But these deeds, which are nothing else but *Ka Sot*, must have, as their ultimate source and fountainhead, *Ka Hok* which is invisible but real. By this the ancient Khasis meant that man must be good interiorly and exteriorly. Consequently, hypocrisy is banished for good from man’s life. ‘Sincerity of purpose’, therefore, used to be the slogan of those ancient Khasis who believed that *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* were inseparable, that is, goodness of heart must be verified by goodness in conduct and actions.

Because of this conviction of the ancient Khasis that *Ka Hok* has to be made visible in *Ka Sot*, that is, in good moral conduct and righteous actions, they were dead sure what they should do and what they should not do and what they should not do. They would summarize all the aspects of a good moral life on earth in these four clear precepts:

1. To live by earning Righteousness (*Ban kamai ia Ka Hok*).
2. To live by knowing Man and God (*Ban im Tipbriew Tipblei*).
3. To live by knowing the maternal and paternal relations (*Ban im Tipkur Tipkha*).

As we have seen above, *Ka Hok Ka Sot* (*Ban im Tiphok Tipsot*) is one of the boldest statements of the ancient Khasis. 'Righteousness' is the translation of the technical term *Ka Hok*. To earn Righteousness means to earn God Himself as He is. The verb 'to earn' is the exact rendering of the Khasi verb '*Ban kamai*'. Now, when a person earns something really, that something becomes his own personal, total and private property. As regards what he has earned, man can say, "This is my own! This belongs to me entirely. It is mine and mine only!" Hence, according to the Khasi world view, God becomes man's own possession whole and entire. And because God becomes man's personal possession, and, because what has become man's truly personal possession, affects his whole personality, the ancient Khasis believed that God permeates and pervades the whole of man himself, in his intellect, in his will and in his actions. If such is the case, then man becomes God's true reflection and image. And because a true reflection and image of a being form, so to say, his very replica, man, as he is, manifests God in life and history, that is, man truly re-enacts God in his life and actions. Therefore, 'to earn righteousness' (*ban kamai ia ka Hok*) means that man re-enacts God in his whole life from the beginning till the end of his existence here on earth. And this is that perfect conformity with what God is and with His will. Consequently, this is that right relationship with God. So, in short, to earn Righteousness means to be 'At Right' with God in his essence and nature as *Ka Hok*, that is invisible, in His manifestation as *Ka Hukum*, which is this orderly governance of the universe as the so-called 'cosmos' that I have described above, and in His interventions in every man's life as *Ka Sot*, which is nothing else but the whole moral life and conduct of man on earth.

Because *Ka Sot* is the concrete manifestation of *Ka Hok* in man's good moral conduct and actions. *Ka Hok*, which is God Himself in His invisible aspect, man, therefore, is 'de facto' God's reflection and image in the true sense of the term. Hence, if there is anything, in which God can be seen and experienced in history on earth, that thing or Being is decidedly Man according to the Khasi world view. This means that knowledge of, and relationship with, God depends or follows the knowledge of, and relationship with, man. So, in history man cannot know God without knowing first his own fellow human beings; in history man cannot be really related to God without being related first to his fellow human beings. From this fact the Khasis derive their important principle of life and actions: To live by knowing man and God (*Ban im Tipbriew Tipblei*). The ancient Khasis believed that God could not be known without knowing man first, no relationship in history was possible with God without relationship with man first and God could not be loved without loving man first. Looked at from this point of view, it seems that, according to the Khasi world view, man is the centre and link between God and the rest of creation. Man's centrality is stressed in the principle: To know Man and to Know God.

We have translated the Khasi verb '*Ban tip*' with the English verb 'to know'. According to our opinion, the translation is inadequate. But we have rendered '*Ban tip*' with 'To know' because it seems to be the closest in meaning to Khasi verb '*Ban tip*'. Hence, '*Ban tip*' in Khasi does not refer so much to that intellectual knowledge in the abstract as to that concrete practical knowledge, which we call 'recognition of man as he is in his nature' and his 'acceptance' simply because he is man. So, to

'know man' means to recognize him because he is man as such, and to 'accept' him in as much as he is man as such. In short, to fully recognize the value and the dignity of the human person. And the ultimate reason for this attitude towards man is that he is the reflection and image of God in as much as he is the proprietor of *Ka Hok* since he really earns it, and the master of *Ka Sot* since it is the manifestation of *Ka Hok* through man's action and good moral conduct. The ancient Khasis believed that he, who really earns *Ka Hok* (righteousness) and masters *Ka Sot* by his life and good moral actions, deserved this unique recognition and was worthy of this whole hearted acceptance.

Again this deserved recognition of man and his whole-hearted acceptance are not to be taken in the abstract, but in our concrete human life in history. Consequently, recognition and acceptance include in themselves, first of all, respect for life, for property, liberty and freedom. They enjoin on all the duty of avoiding murder and killing, adultery and fornication incest and rape, theft and brigandage, burning peoples' houses, destroying people's crops, witchcraft, lying, false accusation, evil thoughts and actions, the avoidance of unjust court cases, violence and aggression, exploitation and ill treatment, defamation, quarelling and fighting, wounding and hurting people. Socially, this recognition and acceptance of man as he is enjoins on all the duty of having and cultivating that much needed 'civic sense', which manifests itself in the respect and veneration for sacred groves as sources of a perennial supply of water. It manifests itself also in the respect shown to public monuments, sacred pillars and monoliths as memorials of persons and events in history. Finally, this civic sense manifests itself in the esteem

for *Dorbars* and public meetings, which the ancient Khasis never failed to attend, unless physically impeded. *Dorbars* and public meetings were considered sacred and their decisions binding on all. Violation of the *Dorbars'* rules, regulations and good conduct as instituted by the *Dorbars* was always condemned and deprecated by the ancient Khasis.

From what we have said above, we can now clearly see that human code of conduct, which everyone is expected to scrupulously observe at all times and in all places, is a code of conduct that is exhaustively contained in *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*. Evidently, it is this code of conduct that puts man at right with God, at right with his fellowmen and at right with nature. Hence, the violation of this code of conduct leads to the disturbance in this harmonious right relationship with God the Creator, with man and with nature. When this right relationship with God, with man and with nature is disturbed, human beings miserably fail in their onward march to their human fulfillment and this calls for a deserved sanction in history and beyond it as well. Hence, the eternal piece of advice of the Khasis, 'Live in *Ka Hok* according to *Ka Hukum*'.

Let us now turn to the concept of *Ka Hukum*. Literally, *Ka Hukum* means commandment that binds at all times and in all places. There is no holiday from *Ka Hukum*. Hence, according to the Khasi philosophy of life, no person can possibly live in *Ka Hok Ka Sot* unless he or she obeys *Ka Hukum*. It is intimately linked and connected with *Ka Hok Ka Sot*. *Ka Hukum* is some sort of an agreement between God and man, how to live an act in their mutual relationship with each other. Hence, we may translate it into English as a living covenant, that binds God and man

inseparably, in consequence of which man is made capable of living and acting in *Ka Hok Ka Sot*. The Khasis consider *Ka Hukum* as *Ka Nia Ka Jutang*. Hence, it is binding and mandatory.

The outward manifestation of *Ka Hok* in *Ka Sot* has to take place in accordance with *Ka Hukum*. Hence, *Ka Sot* is truly the outward manifestation of *Ka Hok* according to the dictates of *Ka Hukum*. So according to the ancient Khasis, to live and behave in accordance with the dictates of *Ka Hukum* includes the following principles of life as mentioned above already.

1. To know man and to know God (*Ban tipbriew ban tipblei*).
2. To earn righteousness (*Ban kamai ia ka Hok*).
3. To be at right relationship with one's clan and the clan of one's father (*Ban tipkur ban tipkha*).

These are the foundations of the Khasi philosophy of life, they are the principles or religious thoughts that build and mould the Khasis' social, moral and political life in all its aspects, that is, it covers the whole gamut of human life on earth.

We have fully elucidated the meaning of *Ban kamai ia ka Hok*. We would like now to substantiate our statements with some quotations from well-known Khasi authors. As regards *Ban kamai ia ka Hok*, R. T. Rymbai has this to say:

To live a righteous life man must not only speak the truth and act fairly and justly in all his dealings with his fellowmen, but should be honest in his very thoughts and wishes as well.⁴

Evidently, according to R. T. Rymbai, to live a righteous life, which is nothing else but *Ka Sot*, does not mean only to speak the truth and to do good according to justice to others, but it means also to be honest in thoughts, wishes and feelings. This is evidently *Ka Hok*, since it refers primarily to man's interior sense of honesty and justice. Consequently, man should live honestly, not only in the presence of his fellowmen, but he is bound to be honest when he is alone also.

Now this is impossible to achieve if a person does not live his life on earth according to *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*. Evidently, *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* go hand in hand, that is, they are inseparable: one cannot stand without the other. Hence, according to the Khasi philosophy of life, *Ka Hok* alone does not and cannot lead man to God's house, that is, to heaven. He needs *Ka Sot*. However such a person may boast that he is good, generous and kind, his boast is just empty air if he does not show outwardly his loving kindness to his suffering and needy neighbours. If he is outwardly selfish, cruel, insensitive to people's dire needs and unwilling to help them, it means the *Ka Hok* does not exist in him, for *Ka Hok* invariably blooms and bears fruits in *Ka Sot*. So for the Khasis, only that person, who lives in *Ka Hok* and at the same time in *Ka Sot*

4. R. T. Rymbai, *Some Aspects of the Religion of the Khasis-Pnars. Khasi Heritage*, Ri Khasi Press, Shillong, 1979, p. 111.

possesses a perfect moral life and order. Only on this condition a man may be considered as a righteous person.

The reason for this deep conviction of the Khasis is the firm belief that man comes into this world by God's righteousness (*Da ka Hok Blei*) and by God's decree (*Ka Hukum Blei*). It is this fact that imposes on man the duty of having a good moral conduct, that will make him fulfill the mandate of earning righteousness (*ban kamai ia ka Hok*). This means that man has to live righteously interiorly and to act righteously outwardly in order that he may earn righteousness. This is one of the aspects of human life, and it is an integral part of the Khasis' way of thinking, of living and of acting. It is precisely this that makes them live in right relationship, that is, in peace, with God, with their fellow human beings and with nature. "This means that man has to be true to himself, true to God, true to his fellowmen and true to nature."⁵

There is another aspect of the Khasis' world view, namely, their firm belief that their life after death depends on their '*Ka HokKa Sot*' on earth. The Khasis' believe that their life after death is quite different from the Hindu Karma or transmigration of the human soul. Moreover, the Khasis' concept of the human soul is not quite the same as that of the Hindus and of the Greeks. When we carefully examine the various sayings of the Khasis about life after death, it seems that there is no dichotomy in man; man is one integrated whole. To be an integral man,

5. H. O. Mawrie, *God and Man*, in *Khasi Heritage*, Ri Khasi Press, Shillong, 1979, p. 58.

according to the Khasis, two elements are needed, two inseparable elements. These two elements are: the soul and the body. Let us take an example from nature: in order that water may continue to exist as water, two co-existing and inseparable elements are needed: H_2 and O . If these two elements are separated, then water ceases to exist as water. In like manner, in order that man may exist as man, two co-existing and inseparable elements are needed.

This concept of man flows from the concepts of *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot*. So we can express this concept in this mathematical formula: *Ka Hok Ka Sot*, the Soul the Body. Just as *Ka Hok* is the invisible aspect of *Ka Sot* and *Ka Sot* is the visible and outward aspect of *Ka Hok*. So also for the Khasis the soul is the invisible aspect of the body, and the body is the visible and outward aspect of the soul. As *Ka Hok* cannot exist without *Ka Sot* and *Ka Sot* does not exist without *Ka Hok*, so also, according to the Khasis, the soul cannot exist in man without the body, and the body cannot exist without the soul.

To substantiate our statement that there is no dichotomy in man according to the Khasi world view, let us take and examine a few Khasi popular sayings. When someone dies, the Khasis never say, 'so and so has died or is dead'. But they always say, 'so and so has gone away', or 'so and so has departed', or 'so and so is no more'. That is the whole man has gone away, the whole man has departed and the whole man is no more. Speaking of their first ancestress, the Khasis say, live according to *Ka Hok ka Sot* so that our *Blei Iawbei* (first ancestress) may not be displeased. They say, 'our *Blei Iawbei*' and not 'the soul of our *Blei*

Iawbei'. So, they speak of her as a person, and not as part of a person. Hence, it is the person as such that goes to heaven or to the House of God and not just the soul or part of the person.

But these days educated Khasis in towns and cities speak like the Greeks of old, saying that in man there are two heterogeneous elements: the soul, which they call '*Moina*', that is the *Moina* bird, and the body which they name as '*Ka Ruh*', that is a cage, into which the soul, by some misfortune comes to be set up for the time being. According to me, this is not the original concept of man according to traditional Khasis. It seems to have come from the British, who were half Greeks in their way of thinking. Hence, to say that at death the soul as the *Moina* bird escapes fortunately from the body as the cage, is not Khasi in our opinion. This is evident from the way the Khasis wish the dead well, '*Bam Kwai ha Iing U Blei*' (please eat betel nut and pan in God's House).

Because of this belief that man is one integrated whole and that there is no dichotomy in him, the Khasis believe that man carries with him, ~~the Khasis believe that man carries with him~~ to heaven or to God's House his good action done.

Ka tipbriew and *Ka tipblei* are the two important hinges, to which the whole moral life and behaviour of the Khasis is firmly tied so to say. These two dimensions of human beings go hand in hand and are inseparable; the horizontal dimension, which is nothing else but *ka tipbriew* (knowledge of man) and the vertical dimension, which is *ka tipblei* (knowledge of God). Hence, the whole moral fabric of the Khasis

depends on them taken jointly. Such being the case, right relationship with man leads the Khasis to their right relationship with God.

To know God does not mean just to know Him intellectually, but to know Him in His relationship with man and the world. First of all, knowledge of God means to know God as He is in Himself: the Creator and Master of all creatures, who depend absolutely on Him. The Khasis believe that God is the one, who governs, rules and administers the whole universe (the cosmos of the Greeks).

We have also explained above the meaning of 'knowing man and knowing God'. Also as we have seen that 'to know man' does not mean to have just an intellectual knowledge of man, but an experiential one in our concrete human life. First of all, it means to understand and take man as he is in his concrete existence, then to accept him as he is without condition and to deal, act and behave with him accordingly. Hence to know man implies three things: Knowledge, Acceptance and Good behaviour. These three attitudes are absolutely necessary in order to know man. Without this correct knowledge of man as he is in his concrete situation without this acceptance of man, without condition and without this good behaviour, there is no *ka tipbriew* according to the Khasis' philosophy of life.

Now this *ka tipbriew* (knowledge of man) starts from one's own clan, or as they say, love, respect and justice begin at home. This aspect of *ka tipbriew* is called in Khasi *ka tipkur* (knowledge of the clan). Hence, the Khasis are centred around the clan, the family and the hearth (*rympei*). Three virtues govern this *ka Tipkur*: Esteem, respect and

reverence. Hence, in order to safeguard this sense of *Ka Tipkur* with its accompanying virtues, the law as regards 'incest' was enacted, by which this crime was declared as an unpardonable sacrilege, deserving of the severest punishment possible. Hence, marriage among persons from the mother side is strictly forbidden among the Khasis.

In our opinion, the matrilineal family system in its original form fits in well with this concept of *Ka Tipkur*. According to the matrilineal family system, the constitutive elements of a Khasi family were the following: (1) The uncle, (2) the uncle's sister, and (3) Her children, the nephews and nieces of the uncle. The father was the procreator only; hence, he was outside the family and the clan. All authority was vested in the uncle: he was the one, who governed, who ruled and who administered in all matters concerning the family. He was the bread-earner of the family: Everyone depended on him and on him alone. The uncle's sister was the custodian, the sacred custodian of the whole family and not its owner. We can call her the 'sacrosanct chowkidari' under the governance, the rule and the administration of the uncle. The uncle too was not the absolute master and owner of the family and its property. The uncle, his sister and her children were the owners and masters of the family, but under the governance, the rule and the administration of the uncle and the custodianship of his sister, the mother of the children.⁶

What about the father? As said above, the father was only the procreator and not a member of the family. He was not the constitutive

6. Pynshai Bor Syiemlieh, *The Khasis and their Matrilineal System*, p. iv-viii cfr.

element of the family. He never worked for the family, he never stayed in the family, he did not eat in the family. All these things he did in his mother's or sister's house as the uncle. This may seem strange to those who are not Khasis and many of them do think that the Khasis do not give due respect to the father.

But this is not true. The father was duly respected in the matrilineal family system. He was lovingly called the '*Thawlang*' of the family, that is, 'the co-creator' of the family and 'the procreator' from the part of God. Hence, he was surrounded, so to say, with respect and honour and crowned with an aureola that is truly divine. The father's mother was so honoured among the Khasis that outsiders, who did not know our world view, thought that the Khasis worshipped the father's mother as a goddess. This is far from the truth. The Khasis never worshipped anyone or anything except God the Creator.

Now this respect and honour paid to the father and his mother as *Ka Meikha*, which does not mean grandmother but the mother that truly gives birth is the root of another manifestation of *Ka Hok* in *Ka Sot* called *Ka Tipkha*, which means the due recognition of all those whose contribution to the family through procreation. So, *Ka Tipkha* embraces all male members of the Hynniewtreps and all the male members of the whole human race without any distinction and discrimination whatsoever. Of course, the male members of the clan (*Kur*) are absolutely excluded from becoming the procreators of the clan or family as this practice is an abomination and a horrible sacrilege for the Khasis; nay, it is the sin that cannot be pardoned in this life and in the next as

well according to the philosophy of life of the Khasis. Except the male members of the clan, all the male members of the other clans and of the whole human race can become the procreators of the family.

Therefore, this *Tipkha* is a veritable wide door or channel, through which new blood from outside can flow into any Khasis clan or family. It clearly shows that openness of mind and heart of the Khasis for others without any discrimination. And this is clearly seen in the possibility of any male member of other clans and of the whole race to marry a Khasi woman. In the Khasi world view, there is no taboo that is utterly inhuman and unreasonable as the taboo that restricts intermarriages to one clan or a few clans. The Khasis believe that human nature is the same all over the world and that humans are all equal. Hence, a Khasi man will find no difficulty in marrying a Harijan woman or a Negro woman or an Eskimo woman. Likewise, a Khasi woman will never feel any repugnance in marrying a Harijan man from the Punjab, from U.P., from Bihar, from Bengal, from Orissa, from Andhra Pradesh, from Tamil Nadu, from Kerala, from Karnatak, from Maharashtra, and so on and so on, because she believes that he is a human being with equal dignity with all the rest. This is, in our opinion, that true openness of mind and heart towards all humans! This is in our opinion, that true love of neighbour. This is, in our opinion that true acceptance of all human beings.

In conclusion, from all that has been said above, it is clear that the Khasis believe that to live in *Ka Hok Ka Sot* means to follow the above described moral conduct in their life and actions. It means to abstain from every form of *Ka Pap Ka Sang*, that is, sin, which harms others. Hence,

Ban kamai ta ka Hok, Ban Tipbriew Ban Tiplei and Ban Tipkur Ban Tipkha can be considered as the constitutive elements of the Khasi religion, which is nothing else in the reality of life but that *Ka Hok Ka Sot*, that is, the human moral conduct in right relationship with God, with the human race as such and with nature.

CHAPTER IV

RTA AND DHARMA (MORALITY AND COSMIC ORDER)

Ka Hok Ka Sot can be rightly compared with the *Dharma*, which is the source of everything that sustains human society and the world. It is the right action in history. The reason is this: *Ka Hok* means God Himself in His invisible aspect, God as the ultimate cause of all things. Hence *Ka Hok* is the cause, the course and order of all things in the universe. It is an eternal law of the whole cosmos. This eternal law binds on everyone and should be observed and followed by all human beings by doing righteous actions as demanded by *Ka Sot*. *Ka Sot*, therefore, is the outward and visible manifestation of *Ka Hok*. Hence, *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* together constitute the perfect moral conduct and behaviour of humans by transforming into and by manifesting, *Ka Hok Ka Sot*. Like *Dharma*, therefore, *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* hold and keep all living beings in a harmonious order.

The concept of *Dharma* is unique to Indian culture and philosophy. It is one of the most powerful and influential term in Indian thought and society. It is the all supporting principle making for integrity and harmony in every context. It is also described as established order, usage, institution, custom, rules, dignity, virtue, moral spirit, right justice, law etc. *Dharma* governs cosmic and human existence and as such it could be considered an equivalent of the natural law. Every being, through its natural constitution, has its *dharma* or function. It maintains the cosmic order and moral harmony.

The origin of *Dharma* is to be seen in the Vedas. Scholars believe that the Vedas have played an important role in the formation of the concept of *Rta*.

Here, I shall try to understand *Dharma* as an extension of the Vedic idea of *Rta*. *Rta* is commonly said to stand for the cosmic and moral order in the universe. It is the revelation of God in the universe and it manifests itself in man and society as *dharma*, moral law, and social order.

Rta means true, proper, right and honest in an ordinary sense. In the Vedas it has various meanings. It stands for truth, eternal laws, cosmic order, water and *yajna* etc. The great Vedicist, Dayananda Saraswati interpreted the word in the sense of; true knowledge; eternal cause; what stands in conformity to cosmic order, the Veda, the eight proofs of reasoning, the practice of adepts, one's own experience and conscientiousness; water; true justice, moral order; God; time, sun; air; atoms and perseverance.¹

The word *Rta* occurs frequently in the Mantras.

This word which etymologically stands for 'course' originally meant the uniformity of nature or cosmic order, the maintenance of which was regarded as the essential function of all the gods worshipped in that age.²

-
1. Nagendra, K. R. Singh, *Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*, Vol. 15, 1997, pp. 4356-4357.
 2. M. Hiriyana, *Indian Conception of Values*, p. 150.

Rta means the course of things; it denotes the order of the world. Everything that is ordered in the universe has *Rta* for its principle. *Rta* is the principle which makes the world a universe and a cosmos. The maintenance of this principle is the necessary act of the gods for which they are worshipped through ceremonial rites. *Rta* is divine in nature, it is the source of both natural and moral law. *Rta* originally was understood in the sense of cosmic order and was later extended to the social and moral order. It provides the relation between the world of facts and the world of values in the form of 'right' as physical order and 'right' as moral rectitude.

The word *Rta* has been derived from the Sanskrit root, to go, to change. *Rta* plainly means the immanent dynamic order or inner balance of the cosmic manifestations themselves.³

It combines aspects of our ideas of rhythm, norm, order, energy and existence. According to the Rigveda, the rhythm of day and night, the succession of the season, and the cycles of birth, growth, decay and regeneration proceed from *Rta*. *Rta* made the rivers flow, they go their own way to *rta*, the dawns repeat themselves at their hour, the sun shines according to the *rta*, and through the night the moon moves on in splendour. By it rains fall, winds blow, plants grow and animals reproduce. All organized bodies or physical objects, animals and inanimate things of the world need *rta* for their existence, origination and function.

3. Benjamin Khan, *The Concept of Dharma in Valmiki Ramayana*, p. 25.

Rta is the dynamic principle of all movement and change, from it flow the various rhythms of existence.

It is *rta* that directs emergence, dissolution and re-emergence of existence at the cosmic level and that gives to each thing and even its own structure and nature. *Rta* is both the basic ordering principle of the universe and the ground of whatever is well ordered. Without it there would be only chaos instead of existence.⁴

Rta as the principle of the order of the world, of regularity, of cosmic phenomena, has existed before the manifestation of all phenomena. Heaven and earth as well as all the worldly objects are born in conformity with the *rta*. So *Rta* as the cosmic order or the law of the universe regulates and brings the uniformity of nature.

Rta is a universal moral order. In man's activity the *rta* manifests itself as a moral law because it functions as the moral law governing the actions of men. *Rta* is an intelligent principle that regulates the cosmos as well as the individual.

It is the law which pervades the whole world, which all gods and men must obey.⁵

Rta has great ethical and metaphysical significance. It is conceived as the law that governs not only the cosmos but also the world of the gods and

4. Nagendra, K.R. Singh. *Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*, Vol. II, pp. 3169-3170.

5. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, p. 109.

men. It represents the sublime moral order which is inviolable, even the gods has to obey it. The inviolability of *Rta* makes it superior to the gods and cosmic ethics on the one hand and individual human beings on the other, because *Rta* works throughout the cosmos inevitably, and justly. This fact implies that even in the case of individual actions, *Rta*, the eternal moral law, is responsible for the apportionment of reward and punishment.

Rta is defined as an eternal law that governs the universe and Varuna is the custodian of this law and the divinity of moral order, who consistently acts in accordance with the law. 'Varuna' is the God of the sky. The name is derived from the root 'Var' to 'cover or encompass'.⁶ Varuna is regarded as the founder and the guide of all lawfulness in nature and in the life of human being. He is the guardian of the natural order that heaven and earth, the sun, the moon and the stars follow in their course. He upholds the moral order and regulates all activities in this world.

In many of the earlier hymns of the Rg-Veda, Varuna appears as the chief god. He sits in a fine hall or palace in heaven, from which he watches the world below with the help of his spies (spas), who travel throughout the cosmos and bring back news to him. He punishes sinners, first with disease and then with incarceration in the House of Clay, which seems to have had much in common with the Hades of the Greeks and the Sheol of the Jews – gloomy, cavernous place below the earth, where the shades of the

6. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

dead remain in a kind of half life for an indefinite period or forever.⁷

That is why, prayers for forgiveness of sins are addressed to him.

The action of *Rta* anticipated the doctrine of *Karma*. *Karma* means primary 'deed' or 'work'. It also means both the results of a particular deed and the chain of causes and effects that links various deeds together. *Karma* is not merely the result of what we did in some past existence but the cause of what we shall do in another.

The law of *Karma* is derived from the Rg Vedic concept of *Rta*. The concept of *Karma* also means that there is a uniform moral law governing the actions of men and that the rewards and punishments are appropriate to such actions. It implies that every action will inevitably lead to its own consequences, good or bad, desirable or undesirable. It also implies that action determines man's character since right conduct will shape one's character and affect the circumstances in which one finds oneself. It is the recognition of truth.

The law of *Karma* determines birth and rebirth. If man lives a good present life, he will be born again to a higher life. Man's happiness or sorrow, his abilities and talents, his birth in the given family with its prosperous or adverse conditions and social status, are consequences of his actions in a previous life. The doctrine of *Karma* asserts that every action has its own inevitable re-action. It assumes that the conditions of

7. A. L. Basham, *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, pp. 11-12.

the present life determine the future.

The theory of *Karma* recognizes the rule of law not only in outward nature, but also in the world of mind and morals. *Rta* manifests equally in nature and in human society.⁸

The action of *Rta* anticipates the doctrine of Karma because the law of *Rta* pervades the whole universe; all men are subject to it. Even the gods must obey that universal law. This law has no respect of persons and is inexorable in the way it functions. Actions always produce an effect and according to this law effects will always bear fruit either in this life or in the next. Man will be born again and again as long as he is subject to *Karma*. A man who has done evil has to pay for it and thus moral evil is only provisional. This law is said to provide mankind with a standard of morality since it expresses the universal essence and the truth of things.

Rta in its social sense is the fundamental moral law which imposes order and symmetry on the life and character of man and produces ethical form or goodness. Here it takes by the hand the closely kindered idea of truth, *Satya*; untruth on the other hand, in *anrta*. The *rta* and truth form a lasting bond. Often the *anrta* which is not the *rta*, is used as an opposite of truth. It is sin and untruth.

Rg Veda lists bad intentions, swearing, falsehood, gambling, debt, egoistic enjoyment, cruelty, adultery and theft as vicious and sinful acts. The Rg Veda and the Atharvaveda command honesty, rectitude,

8. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 52.

truthfulness, fellow feeling, charity, non-violence, celibacy and faith as important virtue.

Rta is the law which imposes truth on the straight path, which runs through the whole realm of nature. When we apply it to the moral law on which our life is founded, the eternal law of right and reason, which makes for righteousness both within us and without, is the most important law that underlies everything, and we hear it within us with the divine voice of conscience, so that we can choose what is right and true. Conscience guides one always on the right path, it gives clear cut and definite decision devoid of all sorts of ambiguity in consequence of the dictates of absolute path. Conscience implies freedom of the self, that is, the self is free to act and free to will, so that it could be held responsible for its actions.

Rta was conceived as also weaving its path through the souls of men, being present to the individual as a kind of throb at the depth of his self, which, duly attended to demonstrates his oneness with universe.

Rta, in the social field implies moral order. The concept of *Rta* denotes both harmony and order. Rudolf Otto expresses the social aspect of *Rta*, that *Rta* regulates and arranges the social life, the life of the clan, of the tribe and of the family. It is the binding order of morals, customs, laws and manners in the constitution of the social classes and of the labour communities; in contracts and oaths, in marriage in the relations of individuals, of clans and tribes, in public law and in private conduct. It appeared in social life as the continuation, the consequence and reflection of the cosmic binding order.

Rta as moral law is a dominant idea in the Vedas. Ideal sages are described as people who praise *Rta* and think straight, men are asked to think of wealth and strive to win it by *Rta* and worship. Man and wife are asked in the Atharva Veda to enjoy good fortune by observing and bearing themselves according to *Rta*. The Veda says that those, who live in *Rta* as a moral form, also participate in *Rta* as aesthetic form. Good life is made happy by Nature's beauty and benignity.⁹

From the social perspective *Rta* is the moral order that regulates human life to have the sense of friendliness in harmonious relationship among men. It is the movement of the underlying wholeness of reality.

Rta is the cosmic and sacred order, the ultimate dynamic and structure of reality and *Rta* manifests itself equally in nature and in human society. *Rta* is regarded as fully present and operative at the deepest levels of reality. Ultimately, *Rta* provides the basis for the being and function of all existence and "this world" can continue to exist only to the extent that it is supported by *Rta* which functions fully not only at the deeper level of unmanifested reality.¹⁰

Rta as the eternal law removes all the prohibited sins. It is the introspection of the misdeeds committed by some one. It imparts knowledge and purifies the undertakings of life.

In the Rgveda along with *Rta* there is another concept that of 'Svadha'.

9. G. H. Mees, *Dharma and Society*, 1980, p. 10.

10. S. Radhakrishnan, and Moore C.A. (eds.). *A Source Book of Indian Philosophy*, 1973, p. 25.

This means either nature or conformity to nature, *Svadha* is implicitly present in things and is responsible for their development. Whether it is a living being, an inanimate thing or God – each has its own *Svadha*.¹¹

The rules ordained for specific purposes which are variable and by which are guided the conducts of men are derived from *Rta*. The Veda calls them *Vratas* and due performance of *Vrata* constitutes justice ... *Svadha* and *Vrata* represent the social aspects of *Rta*.¹²

The business of the government to preserve justice so that every individual may remain in his sphere of duties, determined by the country, religion, caste, and family to which he naturally belongs. There must be justice in which the concept of punishment is very important.

Since *Rta* is the support of the cosmos, the same *Rta* must be reproduced in the form of ceremonial sacrifice to preserve the order of the world, *Rta* stands for due order of sacrifice when we apply it to *Yajna*. True aspect of religion is the observation of *Rta*. The study of *Rta* makes one competent for embracing truth and renouncing untruth. It enables a man to achieve material prosperity along with spiritual welfare. It places before us a balanced view of human life. Men are asked to think of wealth and strive to win it by *Rta* and by worship.

Sacrifice is central to *Rta*, *Agni* is the God who is refulgent with *Rta* in human and cosmic terms. He is kindled for the sacrifice. He is the

11. K. S. Murty, *The Indian Spirit*, p. 218.

12. See, *Ibid.*, p. 219.

messenger of the gods and is central to the order of *Yajna*. He is the true representative of *Rta* in its full sense. He is the next divine companion of human life and the supervisor of the statutes of moral order.

As a friend of the dark, as one who banishes and consumes in fire evil demons, he also burns alive the human evil doers, the offenders of the orders of Varuna and Mitra; and as such he is the champion of law and order.¹³

Yajna is the very condition of existence. It constitutes the central Vedic mode of knowing – acting.

Yajna is seen as the symbolic correspondent of *Rta*, providing a ritual way for humans to open this ordinary manifested existence to the deeper powers and reality of that unmanifested existence, thereby transforming ordinary existence into something profound and extraordinary.¹⁴

Life is sustained and renewed through the *Yajna* participation in *Rta* and thus immortal seats in heaven could be achieved.

So *Rta* was a prior concept, the law of cosmic harmony.

As *rta* is not created, *rta* is prior to creation; *rta* is order that comprehends order: serial order, causal order, regulative order, hierarchial order, order of sequence and order of coexistence. The Vedic Chant of the hymns is also order, and the *Yajna* 'Sacrifice' symbolises *rta*. As *rta* is not what is created or made, *rta* is what is, what has been, what exists

13. Herman Oldenberg, *The Religion of the Veda*, p. 104.

14. Nagendra, K.R. Singh, *Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*, Vol. II, p. 3170.

in itself or what subsists. As *unrta* is what is untrue or false, *rta* is truth or what is true; therefore *rta* is the same as *Satya*; and *rta* that is world-order manifests itself in man and society as *dharma*, moral law and social order; therefore *rta* is natural order and moral order, both rooted in divine order; *Rta* is a conception which unifies Science, Philosophy and Religion.¹⁵

In the course of time the word *Rta* gradually yields its place to *dharma* and the latter gains increasing importance in Hindu scriptures.

Now *Dharma*, as has already been said, is the counter part of the Vedic idea of *Rta*, and *Rta*, that is world-order, manifests itself in man and society as *dharma*, moral law and social order. In the Rig Veda, *Rta* is the right order of the universe. As time passed, the old *Rta* was reborn in *Dharma* which is right action. *Dharma* is the higher and better principle that maintains the social and moral order.

Etymologically, '*dharma*' is derived from Sanskrit root '*Dhr*' which means to be made to exist, to be maintained or to be preserved. *Dharma* is that which sustains human society and the world. It also means that which holds all things and maintains them in being. Every form of life, every group of men has its *Dharma*, since *Dharma* is the foundation and law of its being. In matters of conduct, *Dharma* emerged as the higher principle to signify the sense of right and wrong, which is inherent in the nature of man and society.

15. N. A. Nikam, *Some Concepts of Indian Culture*, p. 5.

But *Dharma* is not to be confined to the needs of social interaction alone. It stands for law operating in every phenomenon, natural, biological, psychological, social and spiritual. It permeates the whole universe. It holds together the different orders of life, such as the mineral, the plant, the animal, the human and the superhuman; the different stages of physical, vital, mental and spiritual evolution of an individual; the different levels of consciousness, such as waking, sleep, dream and dreamless; the different social groups, such as those of teacher, public servants, merchants and manual workers; the different levels of values for different groups in different climes and countries. All those modes of human activity derive their meaning and significance only when integrated into a meaningful pattern, which is *dharma*.¹⁶

Being a supplement to Vedic texts, there is a systematic arrangement of *Dharmasastras*, which are Hindu law books, and this term is particularly applied to the Law of *Manu* or *Manusmṛti*. One of the *Vedāṅga* is *Kalpa Sūtra*, which has three sections. *Srauta*, *Grhya*, and *Dharma*. The *Srauta-Sastras* deal with the performances of the Vedic rites. The *Grhya-Sūtras* treat of the numerous ceremonies applicable to the domestic life of a man and his family from birth to death. The Cardinal teaching of the *Dharmasastras* is on *dharma*, which comprises both secular and religious laws. *Dharma-Sūtras* regulates the conduct of the individual and pushes forward the ritualistic life strictly on pure moral basis. Each school of the Vedas has its own *Dharma Sūtra*, which often diverges from the rest, in matters of detail. Their theme is threefold: rules of conduct (*Ācāra*), performances (*prāyas' citta*) and law (*Vyavahāra*). They may thus be said to deal with morality, religion and civil law.¹⁷

17. Kewal Motwani, *Manu Dharma Sastras*, pp. 24-25.

Combination of the *Dharma Sutras* and *Smritis* is known as *Dharma-Sastras*.

The evolution of *Dharma* – literally reaches its maturity, historically, in the formation and codification of *Manusmṛiti* by which is meant the Laws of Manu. Manu is the founder of the social and moral order, who first settled the *Dharma*. He compiled a moral code which already existed in the sources of the Vedic oral traditions and practised in the moral life of the members of the Aryan society:

Manu uses the same term *Dharma* to mean law, duty, sacred institutes, justice, eternal ordinance, the rule of conduct and transcendental law.¹⁸

Manu mentioned the four sources of *Dharma* and they are the Vedas, tradition, conduct of virtuous men and individual conscience.

Dharma is the key concept in the ethical theory of Manu. It covers a wide range of meanings in usage from the qualities and characteristics of things to the highest virtue and spiritual effort of man, this is *Dharma* as the world order. It maintains human society, from it comes human law. The theory of *Dharma* as developed in the *Manu Samhita* includes all that pertains to the civil, religious, spiritual, moral and hygienic rules of behaviour, as well as rules of good manners and civil consciousness. Generally speaking, *Dharma* is characterized as righteousness and law,

18. *Manusmṛiti*, 1:2; 81-82; 108-110; II: 1:6; 10; 13; VIII: 14-16; XII: 50, quoted in *Dharma according to Manu and Moses* by FTM Manickam, p. 201.

but it emphasizes duty above all, that implies right action.

Just as there are four levels in the social scheme of Manu, there are also four levels of value in the moral plane. The traditional nomenclature of these four value – levels is *purusasthas*:

According to the accepted tradition, the *purusarthas* are four in number: *Artha*, *Kama*, *Dharma*, and *Moksa*.¹⁹

All these are important values of which only the last one is the ultimate good or *Summun bonum*. The other three are values meant for a happy life.

The theory of *purusarthas* is one of the basic themes of classical Indian philosophy. As the theories of human values, they define those ultimate goals of human life which give meaning and significance to it.

Originally, there was only a *trivarga* theory (three members sets) of *purusarthas*, which consisted of *Artha*, *Kama* and *Dharma* and the concept of *Moksa* was a later addition to the three. The *caturvarga* theory (four member sets) finds mention in the later works.

Artha denotes all kinds of material possession, including all types of material things irrespective of their potentiality for rightful or wrongful uses. It includes the material means for the performance of religious, social, legal and moral duties, as well as those required for normal living and sustenance.²⁰

19. Rajendra Prasad, The Theory of Purusarthas, *Journal of Dharma*, Vol. X, No. 1, Jan-March, 1985, p. 50.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

Kama means desire and it denotes pleasure and agreeable feeling. In the theory of *Purusarthas dharma*, it denotes the complete system of morality or of moral obligations and values that enables man to function properly as social being and is regarded as the distinctive feature of human beings.²¹

Moksa is a latter addition to the *trivarga* theory of *Purusarthas* and this four value system is the highest *purusartha*. *Moksa* is treated as an end while *dharma* is treated as a means. Human being naturally seek not only social goals but personal peace or satisfaction also. *Moksa* is translated as:

Freedom, liberation, salvation, release from bondage etc. It is the freedom from Karma (action), freedom from attachment to the objects of desire, discriminative knowledge that the self is completely different from the not-self, eternal bliss, propinquity with God etc.²²

In the *Advaita* thought it implies the identity of the self with *Brahman*.

Moksa is not only the emancipation or liberation from turmoil and suffering and freedom from rebirth, but it is also the positive achievement of a richer and fuller life and the attainment of infinite bliss. A person attains a mental and spiritual superiority to worldly values and is never enslaved by them. He lives without any sense of attachment to the things of the world and without selfish motives.

-
21. Daya Krishna. The Myth of Purusarthas. *Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, by D. P. Chattopadhyaya, Vol. 4, Nov. 12, 1986, p. 2.
 22. Rajendra Prasad, The Theory of Purusarthas, *Journal of Dharma*, Vol. X, No. 1, Jan-March, 1985, p. 52.

The addition of *Moksa* to the three sets (*trivarga*) of *Purusarthas* makes complete the theory of human values. To some scholars the addition of *Moksa* to the three (*trivarga*) is not acceptable, because *Moksa* is a personal goal and the *trivarga* theory deals with social goal.

The Vedic injunction in regard to *Kama* clearly states, '*Svarga tanyajeta*', that is, one, who desires heaven should perform the required sacrifices. *Svarga* is the object of *Kama* for the Vedic seers. *Svarga* is the object par excellence of Vedic sacrifices.

Kama is related to *Artha*, *Dharma* and *Moksa*. There is a proper relationship of *Kama* with *Dharma* and *Artha*. *Dharma* is known as the regulator of *Kama* in the sense that it does not go against or conflict with *Dharma*.

Artha on the other hand, is a necessary condition for the acquisition of *Kama*. Making *Kama* subject to the regulation of *Dharma* or dependent on *Artha* can be genuinely relevant only to a desire the fulfillment (or non-fulfillment) of which is going to have some impact... of the desires whose fulfillment is categorized as the purusarthas of *Kama*.²³

Artha, *Kama* and *Dharma* are, therefore, according to the *trivarga* theory, the social goals which must be sought by each and every human being. Among them, *Dharma* plays an important role in determining which *Kama* is worth pursuing. It is an important factor in the maintenance of social life, stability and harmony. It provides a set of

23. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

rules and norms to be observed by every individual human being as necessary condition for the attainment of *Moksa*. *Dharma* is observed in virtue of its being a necessary condition of social stability and harmony and for the pursuit of *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksa*.

The pursuit of *Artha* and *Kama* without *Dharma*, though it makes life successful, does not have all the excellence of the good life.

The desired, and the good, are not to be opposed to each other but integrated in an enlarged moral responsibility.²⁴

So the pursuit of *Artha* and *Kama* must be in accordance with the laws and norms of *Dharma*, because *Dharma* is not only one of the constituents of the good life, but one which heightens the value of *Artha* and that of *Kama*.

Dharma or righteousness or morality is a principle according to which sensuous pleasures have to be enjoyed. *Artha* is the means for the fulfillment or enjoyment of *Kama* or desires, and both can be designated as values. *Artha* and *Kama* are always required to be tempered or to be made moderate by righteousness. Indian philosophy insists on the moderation and regulation of *Artha* and *Kama* by reason, so that they can give pleasure in the only manner that is possible. It is *dharma* alone that can bring us the fulfillment of *artha* and *Kama*.

24. T. N. Madan, *Non-Remunciation Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture*, p. 102.

Dharma is not only a guide to *Artha* and *Kama*, but also leads to *Moksa* or the fulfillment of the ideal of self-realization and self-perfection. According to the *Bhagavadgita*, one obtains perfection if one does one's duty in the proper spirit of non-attachment.

Dharma in the Gita stands for the duties we have to perform selflessly so that the dross or impurities of the lower self may be melted in the fire of self-knowledge. When the mind is thus purified the knowledge of the self is automatically brought about. But the person who thus becomes a knower of his self, not only becomes free himself but is spontaneously devoted to the welfare of all mankind.²⁵

The goal or purpose to be achieved by the practice of *dharma* or our duties is self-purification and self-realization. Self-realization is the highest of *Dharma*.

Dharma gives coherence and direction to the different activities of life. It is not religious creed or cult imposing an ethical or social rule. It is the complete rule of life, the harmony of the whole man who finds a right and just law as a guide to living. Each man and group, each activity of soul, mind, life and body has its *dharma*. The purpose of *Dharma* is to uplift man from this physical plane and make him function at higher level. This *Dharma* is governed by the four ends of life or aims of human endeavour, called the *purusarthas*.

25. Madan Prasad Singh. *The Ethical Philosophy of the Gita : A Comparative and Critical Study of the Interpretation of Tilak and Ramanuja*, Punthi-Pustak, Calcutta, 1996, p. 3.

According to the laws of Manu, man always acts as he thinks. It is the action of the past that determines the future. The previous deeds determine the future birth whether in the highest, the middle or the lowest birth. So we see that the theory of *Karma* plays a very great role in the concept of *Dharma*.

Dharma and *adharma* are together designated as *Karma*, 'deed', because their essence consist in doing. It signifies that nothing can happen without a sufficient cause in the moral as in the physical world, that each life with all its pains and pleasure is the necessary result of the actions of past lives and becomes in its turn the cause, through its own activities of future birth.²⁶

Dharma as moral law, which is eternal and imperishable, bestows on us pleasures and inflicts pains in accordance with our virtues and vices. Moral law must be practised not by selfish desire, fear and greed.

Men of virtuous conduct, who follows righteousness, will get a blessed long life but men of bad conduct will be cursed and constantly suffer misfortunes. For Manu, unrighteousness as practised in this world does not at once produce its fruits, but advances slowly, wicked persons prosper for a while through unrighteousness but in the end they perish in a dreadful condition. If he does not himself suffer the punishment, it falls on his sons, grandsons etc. A man must keep these three fold control; of mind, body and speech, with respect to all created beings.²⁷

26. M. Hiriyana, *Indian Conception of Values*, p. 169.

27. Radhakrishnan, S. and Moore, C.A. *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, 1975, p. 174.

Dharma is also known as the social order and duties of each and every member of society. According to Manu, the tenfold law must be carefully obeyed. Contentment, forgiveness, self-control, abstention from unrighteously appropriating anything, obedience to the rules of purification, coercion of the organs, control of the senses, wisdom, knowledge of the supreme self, truthfulness and abstention from anger, from the tenfold law.

Dharma as the central concept of Hindu ethics, is of the compendium of virtues, which flow from human nature and social duties and obligations, depending on one's disposition and peculiarities.

The caste system supported by the Karma doctrine gives people an integrated metaphysically satisfying cosmology which gives each individual a sense of belonging to the social and cosmic orders with clearly defined duties and responsibilities.

From this ethical cosmology followed that every human being has his own law of action (*Svadharmā*), which is dependent upon one's authentic innate character (*Svabhava*). *Svadharmā* should thus be a movement which is evolved by an individual from within, in harmony with one's own being and its natural way of evolution. A man's life and work should express his own being, his *Svabhava* and should not be something imposed from outside, as that will thwart him from reaching his full spiritual status.²⁸

As human beings we have a common behaviour, but individually we have different peculiarities of temperament and character. So due to

28. K. S. Murty, *The Indian Spirit*, p. 195.

these differences, different kinds of duties should be performed in the society which are proper to each one. *Dharma* means those duties and obligations which follow from one station in society (*Varnasrama dharma*).

The basis of Hindu way of life was *Varnasrama dharma*, the *dharma* of class and the stages of life. Hindu society was divided into the four great classes only, and membership of them was hereditary. The four principal castes, viz., *Brahmans*, *Ksatriyas*, *Vaisyas* and *Sudras*, constitute the social set up.²⁹

The Brahman's duties are purely religious and should have the qualities of spiritual wisdom and intellectual sustenance to society. Kshatriya's duty was to be warriors and kings.

The king's first duty is to protect his subjects, but he has also the duty to expand his kingdom by fair means or foul, if necessary by war.³⁰

The duty of the ordinary *Kshatriya* is to take part in war. *Kshatriya* must have the character of heroism, leadership and firm will. Therefore, their *dharma* is to rule the nation and to defend it against aggression. The *Vaisyas* are known as the farmers and traders and their character finds its natural expression in agriculture and commerce, in arts and crafts. The *Sudras'* duty was to serve the other classes and they engage themselves in manual labour of all types.

29. Suresh Chandra Banerji, *Dharma-Sutras: A Study*, 1962, p. 126.

30. R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, p. 110.

According to Manu, the social duties of man depend also on the individual duties which are derived from the fourfold stages (*asrama-dharma*). These fourfold stages of life or *Asrama-dharma* is introduced in Indian culture to nurture the individual for the realization of the higher good of life, that is, self-realization. These are the stages in the journey of life in order to prepare the means to attain liberation.

From birth to death the individual's social and spiritual development passes through the four stages of *Brahmacharya*, *Grihastha*, *Vanaprastha* and *Sannyasa*.³¹

In the theory of *dharma*, *Brahmacharya* is the student stage, it is the period of education to acquire knowledge of the Vedas and other pertinent *Smṛti* literature. *Grihastha* is a time for the practical application of *dharma* in the pursuit of *Artha* and *Kama*; and the last two are for the application of *dharma* to the pursuit of *Moksa*.

While the individual and the social sides of *Karma* are inseparably intertwined, the theory of *Varna* or Caste emphasizes the social aspect, and that of *asrama* or stages of life, the individual aspect.³²

The first period is that of training and discipline of body and mind. The student mind is moulded to a life of duty. The student is required to live in the house of the teacher for a six period of time. Arts and sciences were taught, which are useful for the future life of the students. Women

31. G. S. Bhatt, *Indian Thought An Introduction*, Edited by D. H. Bishop

32. S. Radhakrishnan, *Hindu View of Life*, p. 59.

were also given the training to enable them to take up the function of the caste in the emergencies of life. Vedic study was very restricted for the women from other custom and caste.

The second stage is that of the householder or ~~the householder or~~ the *grhastha*. The student, after the completion of his studies, gets married and enters the next stage of life. Manu regards the stage of householder as the most essential since all the other *asramas* are dependent on this *asrama* for their support, and men of all orders find protection with the householder. Householder must be keen and kind to every human being.

In this second stage, restriction on marriage is very important. Marriage in this stage is known as virtue. Only failure in life avoids occasion for virtue, therefore one should not run back from marriage. To resort to divorce is to own defeat.

While the life of the householder is the source of joy, it also brings sorrow and if one deviates from the path of dharma, it could also lead to way to perdition.³³

The misfits and the maladjustments are failures that lead to the destruction and ill beings of social life. Thus the householder must live by the morality of *purusartha*, as given in the values (*trivarga*) of *dharma*, *artha* and *Karma*.

33. T. N. Madan, *Non-Remunciation Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture*, 1987, p. 46.

The third stage is the stage of the forest dweller or *Vanaprastha*. This third stage arises after leading the life of a householder for a considerable period of time and having discharged all the responsibilities of home. This is the stage to prepare for the true life of the spirit through intensive study and contemplation. It involves severe penances conducive to his spiritual well-being and progress.

The last stage is the stage of the hermit. After the stage of *Vanaprastha* comes the stage of *Samnyasa*. Manu points out that one should take to this *asrama* only after having fulfilled three debts in his life. The debt to the great sages, to the ancestors and to the gods.

The aim of Samnyasin is not to free himself from the cares of outward life, but to attain a state of spiritual freedom when he is not tempted by riches or honour, and is not elated by success or depressed by failure.³⁴

At this stage, a *Samnyasin* should practise *Ahimsa*, the great moral discipline. A *Samnyasin* is the one that is free from personal attachments or private ambitions but he rises above the body and sensual pleasures and strive for spiritual fulfillment and joy.

The four *asramas* stress the integrated and balanced growth of an individual. This scheme provides a proper balancing of the four aims of life, *artha*, *Kama*, *dharma* and *Moksa*, every state is necessary and one should pass from stage to stage gradually and live according to these

34. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 64.

stages of life, for the well integrated and balance personality of a person. Socially, *dharma* is the virtue of righteousness.

Dharma is also a dynamic power which furthers the growth from one stage to another. Hence it is instinctively connected with the Karma or action performance of every individuated being.³⁵

Both the individual and the social sides of *Karma* are related to each other, one cannot exist without the other. The theory of *Varna* or caste emphasizes the social aspect and that of *asrama* or stages of life the individual aspect. The doctrine of *Karma* teaches rebirth according to one's actions in life. The ultimate goal is *Moksa* which can be attained by the practice of the teachings of the sacred texts. Man cannot live by indulging himself to the worldly things only, but he needs spiritual fulfillment and freedom. The whole world cannot satisfy the spirit of man but *Moksa* only gives ultimate satisfaction, and all other activities should be directed towards the realization of this end. So the theory of *Karma*, which was generally regarded as the basis of all ethical values.

Dharma as duty is the obligation on the part of every individual towards other members of the society in which he is placed, without any attachment to its fruits. *Dharma* as virtue is universal and eternal.

Dharma is also known as the theory of reality which guided our life to what is real and true. *Dharma* as the way of life prescribes the rules and obligations which every individual must observe according to

35. *The Brhadaranyaka Upanisad*, Vol. I, p. 190.

his own *dharma*, because no one can escape from *dharma*, it is the very law of human beings. But the notion of *dharma* is not restricted to man only, but it extends to all beings and to all their state of manifestation.

Dharma is also known as social justice when applied to the political and economic contexts. The political and economic life of the community is expected to derive its inspiration from the spiritual. This principle makes the sovereign power to be identified with the interests of the people at large, and to secure for all the conditions under which the best life can be developed. *Dharma* is the sacred duty to fight against the forces of injustice, oppression and exploitation.

The *Dharma* must be carefully practised by act, by heart and by words. Even what is enjoined by scriptures should not be practised if opposed to public opinion (I. 156).³⁶

S. Radhakrishnan, in his book, *The Hindu View of Life* says that, “We ought not to banish spiritual values from life.” The spirituality is the only source of empowerment for social justice.

In *Dharmasastra*, justice plays a very important role, in which the *dharma* or the duty of the king was to be good and kind with his people. It is his duty to inquire and to judge what is just and unjust.

Dharma is also known as benevolence, and benevolence means desiring and working for the good of others, serving them. This service consists in loving one another and in sharing one another’s grief and

36. B. N. Mani, *Laws of Dharmasastras*, p. 22.

sorrow and in helping the poor and the needy. *Dharma* as reality must be practised in this life not in the next life. *Dharma* cannot reveal itself in the theoretical plain only. *Dharma* needs to be practised; it is the one we can see in the world of reality not in the world of illusion or mere belief. *Dharma* depends on our actions. Men practise either *Dharma* or *Adharma* throughout their life. All sorrows are due to unrighteous acts and that eternal bliss can only come out of good acts.

Thus, the two concepts, *Rta* and *Dharma* enable us to grasp the truth about Indian tradition. *Rta* which is cosmic and moral order the ultimate dynamic and harmonic structures of reality manifests itself into action as *Dharma*. *Dharma* is the sustaining principle. It shapes the character of man both, as an individual and as a member of society. It is the divine tendency and the principle of freedom that helps for the realization of self with a spiritual end. Therefore, *Dharma* is not merely religion but it is called '*Sanatana-dharma*' is both eternal and universal as belonging to all humanity and all time of existence.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation was to show that *Ka Niam* (Khasi religion) and the concept of *Dharma* are, in their essence, complementary particularly in their pursuit of the supreme ideals of life. Hence the two can harmoniously work together in order to complement each other.

Now each religion is a product of its own conditions and culture; each has its own standards. Of course, all religions have a common objective, that is, the ultimate well-being of man so that he may transcend himself and reach his human fulfillment. Looked at from this point of view, the cooperation between the two is a natural corollary, nay, a sine-quantum. This is so because what we really need at this hour of crisis is the spiritual and moral regeneration so as to reach infallibly, that fast developing spirit of harmony and universal brotherhood among various religious communities. This is what a scientific study or a comparative study aims to achieve, namely, to understand the religion, the world view, and the culture of people so that every religious group may understand its strength and its weakness; and this self-understanding will help all the religious groups to prepare a common ground to fight against immorality, exploitation and other such social evils.

In this concluding chapter, I shall refer to the similarities between these two concepts, *Ka Niam* and *Dharma*.

Let me first start with ~~the~~ concept of God in the Khasi and Hindu thought, beliefs and practices.

Discussion, on the concept of God has been a perennial past-time in the arena of philosophy. Both in the Oriental and in the Occidental systems of thought; the discussion about God has occupied a prominent place. Even though practi-centric systems have challenged, not only the concept of God, but also the very validity and justification of religion, there is no reason to think that interest in the discussion of the concept of God has declined in recent time. Positivistic and materialistic criticism notwithstanding, philosophy of religion still constitutes an important section of the discipline, and it is worthwhile taking a close look at the shape of things in this field of study in these days of the triumphant march of science.¹

But science has not replaced religion because religion continues to function as an important human phenomenon.

In every religion there is a divine element and the ultimate goal of every religion is to lead men to one God and to brotherhood. Though our beliefs and practices are different, yet they are all directed towards the same goal, that is, to reach salvation, in which everyone can unite himself with God, who is the ultimate Truth and Reality.

It is not good to feel that one's own religion alone is true and all the others false. God is only one and not two. Different religions call Him by different names, such as God, Jehovah, Allah, Krishna, Siva, Vishnu and Brahman. Each religion, in its real essence, is a path leading to God. The Truth is one though it is called by different names. All men try to

1. S. P. Banerjee, *God, Nothing and the Ultimate: A Hindu Perspective*, p. 139. *God, the Self and Nothingness* by Robert E. Carter, Paragon House, New York. 1990.

seek the same Truth; the difference is only in the accidents and in the accretions in history. Therefore, different religions address the same Reality and Truth. People, who follow their right conscience, truly worship God according to their knowledge and circumstances.

The Khasis believe that there is one God only, whom they call *U Blei*. They believe in one supreme God, who is the Lord, Master and Creator of the whole universe. They are not fond of arguing whether God exists or not, but they have a very clear understanding that God has ever existed even before the creation of the earth. He is always there from eternity. He is the ultimate cause of everything, the beginning and the end of everything.

From Him emerge the beginning of all things. Therefore, whether we call *U Blei* (masculine) or *Ka Blei* (feminine) it makes the same sense.²

For the Khasis, God is the origin and source of all things and He is the end and goal of all things because the Khasis believe that they have been conceived and born with the blessing of God, that after death and earthly life they will return to the House of God in heaven, if they earn *Ka Hok* (righteousness) during their life on earth, *Ka Hok* here means God Himself in his invisible aspect, to earn righteousness means to earn God Himself in day to day life. The Khasis believe that everyone must search and find God within himself, through truth, beauty and goodness.

2. H.O. Mawrie, *The Khasi Milieu*, p. 28.

It is the truth that God cannot be seen with these eyes we have got, but with our soul, we understand that He is He and only He, who is all powerful and truthful.³

God for the Khasis not only exists, but is present in the heart of every individual human being, though many of us are not conscious of the divine presence within ourselves, but our own spirit, which is self-revealing and self-testifying reveals to us the self-luminous being of God.

The Khasi-Pnars, living in various groups and different parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, have different expressions for God. '*U Blei*' is the name they give to God. He is the creator and sustainer of this universe. He is almighty and all powerful, omniscient and omnipresent. Being all in all, He is above gender, so they may call Him *U Blei* or *Ka Blei*.⁴

Though the Khasi-Pnars' expression of God is varied, they believe in one Supreme God only. They give him different names in the different spheres of His creation.

As creator and designer or planner, they call him '*U Nongbuh U Nongthaw*'. As maker of man He is '*U Nongthaw-byuriew Nongbuh-byuriew*', as the protector and guardian of their *iing* (house). He is '*Lei longiing Lei longsem* or *Ka Blei iing*' and of their *Kur* their *Jait*. He is '*U Lei longkur Lei longjait*'. As the mainstay; of their economic welfare, He is their '*Lei longspah Lei longphew*', as

-
3. Jeebon Roy, *Ka Kitab Ba Batai Pynshymna Shaphang Uwei U Blei*, p. 15.
 4. H.O. Mawrie, God and Man, in Hipshon Roy (ed.) *Khasi Heritage*, pp. 83-85.

defender of the village, territory and state, He is '*Lei khyrdop Lei kharai*', '*Lei muluk Lei jaka*' and '*Lei Hima Lei Sima*'.⁵

Therefore, we see that in all spheres of the Khasi Pnars' life and in all aspects of creation, He is there with a name; though there is only one God, they call Him by different names.

God, according to the Khasi Pnars is:⁶

1. *U Blei U Trai Kynrad*; God the Lord and Master of the universe.
2. *U Blei Nongthaw Nongbuh*; God the Creator and the cosmic force.
3. *U Blei Na-jrong Na-tbian*; God all encompassing, filling the heaven and earth.
4. *U Blei U Nongsei ia ka rnyieng ka rta*; God the giver and determiner of life.
5. *U Blei U Nongsam bynta Nongbuh bynta*; God the dispenser.
6. God is ethereal and formless; He is in us and around us. He is infinite.
7. God is indivisible and, He is one.
8. God is ever-seeing and ever-vigilant.

5. H.O. Mawrie, God and Man in *Apphira*, Daily News, Shillong, Ri Khasi Press, Nov. 23, 1994, p. 4.

6. Kynpham Singh, *Khasi Religion and Khasi Society*, Shillong, Ri Khasi Press, 1980, p. 46.

9. God is like a father to whom we may cry and ask for forgiveness for our sins and mistakes.

God to the Khasi is neither blind, deaf nor dumb, because if he is so, he will not be able to manifest himself to the people in any form. For the Khasis, God reveals himself in three different forms, i.e. (i) By his power, (ii) By his righteousness, (iii) By His words.⁷

God manifests himself by His power through the nature. The Khasis believe that nature is the manifestation of God, it is the Divine creation of God. Hence, the Khasis have no temples or churches, they can worship God anywhere and everywhere because they believe that God is inside us; we cannot see him but we meet him in day to day life through righteous living. God can be seen in our own fellow beings and in beauty, peace and order of the universe.

The Khasis believe that God is all powerful. We can see him in different forms and we can meet him through our own experience. They did not believe in his supremacy that he can do all things either reward or punish us according to our actions. For example, in case of any natural calamities, the Khasis strongly believe that due to human sin, God shows his anger through many events like earthquake, volcano, cyclone, storm, heavy rainfall which brings about havoc to the cultivation, draught etc. But all these can be prevented by prayer and contemplation. The Khasis try to find the reason why such things happen by performing religious sacrifice and asking the forgiveness of God, because man becomes

7. H. O. Mawrie, *Ka Pyrkhath U Khasi*, p. 5.

Helpless in the hands of nature. For Freud, it is because of the helplessness of man that he seeks the protection of supernatural power.

There are the elements, which seem to mock at all human control; the earth, which quakes and is torn a part and buries all human life and its works; water, which deluges and drowns everything in a turmoil; storms, which blow everything before them; there are diseases, which we have only recently recognized as attacks by other organisms; and finally there is the painful riddle of death, against which no medicine has yet been found, nor probably will be with these forces nature rises up against us, majestic, cruel and inexorable; she brings to our mind once more our weakness and helplessness, which we thought to escape through the work of civilization.⁸

But man's helpless remains and along with it his longing for his father, and the gods.⁹

Secondly, God manifests himself to man by his righteousness. The Khasis believe that God alone is perfect and just. God alone is infinite but all human beings are finite due to their shortcomings. God is impartial, he sees and knows all the works and deeds of man on earth. He already knows the plan of man; there is nothing hidden from the eyes of God; in the night as in the day, he sees every act of man. He does justice to all by giving rewards and punishments according to the demand of their actions. The righteousness of God appears to a person who always does good things in his life and who lives a righteous life; he will receive the

8. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion: Civilization and its Discontents*, translated by James Strachey, Vol. XXI (1927-1931). London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

blessing of God from above. But the man, who goes astray from God, will be caught by the evil forces, that will not fail to influence him adversely.

Ka Hok, which is commonly known as righteousness, is the ultimate reality. It is the basic principle and foundation of all things. By righteousness, God creates the whole universe and by the righteousness of God man comes to the world; and the purpose of his life on earth means to earn righteousness. In the sense that *Ka Hok* means God himself in his invisible aspect, we cannot see it. For instance, astronauts went to space on their space craft travelling round and round but they did not find God there; so they returned back to this earth disappointed and concluded that there was no God. But God has accompanied them throughout their journey and thus they returned safely. Therefore, I would like to express my conviction that God is in our heart or within us, if we search for him faithfully and honestly. We will definitely meet him and experience his presence and peace in our heart.

Thirdly, God manifests himself by his words which he speaks through signs and symbols at the time of religious rites. The word of God is the living word or the living covenant between himself and man. *Ka Niam* of the Khasis does not mean religion only, but it includes the whole gamut of man's life. According to the Khasis, when man fell into sin, the whole world became totally dark, because the sun refused to give its light and heat to the whole world. It hid itself inside the *Krem lamet Krem latang* (mythological cave). The sun here means *Ka Hok* (righteousness). Because of the sin of man *Ka Hok* returned to God and man was in a

dangerous and desperate state. He repented and asked the forgiveness of God. As a sign of forgiveness, God gave the Khasis *Ka Niam* and their religion and rites. Therefore *Ka Niam* is the living covenant between *U Blei* and *U Briew* and as long as man obeys the Commandments of God, *Ka Hok* will abide with them and they can communicate with God through signs and symbols which appear in the intestines of the cock at the time of divination.

Let me now turn to ~~the~~ place of God in Hindu belief and religion. The Vedas claim there is one supreme Reality and many ways to approach it. The Divine can be realized not only through an expression of consciousness but can be met by each individual soul in itself, for the individual and the universal are essentially the same. The Vedic people picture the Divine as the one in many and the many in one. Though it appears that the Vedic Rsis used to offer their worship and homage to many Gods but as found in the hymns of the Rigveda, it is clear that they worshipped these powers of nature not as different gods, but as the different aspects of one Supreme God.

In this way they worshipped the various powers of nature, because without their help they could not proceed in their every day life. And though they worshipped those natural phenomena, it was not really the phenomena to which they did offer their adorations but to the inherent powers – the energy underlying those manifestations. It is not the rays of the sun, the shower of the sky, the fire of the hearth, the water of the river and the light of the moon that the Vedic Aryans worshipped but the energy underlying them – the

power that moves them to action, the supreme power in whom all move and have their being.¹⁰

This supreme power which they called by various names are Surya, Angi, Indra etc. Surya is the agent of the sun, Agni, God of fire and Indra is the agent of the atmosphere in its change between light and darkness, the giver of rain.

According to the Vedic hymns, all these powers of nature have been severally identified with the supreme God. Agni, Surya, Indra and others are not all minor gods under the suzerainty of one supreme God, but they are the energies of the powers of one Almighty God, through whose will they are manifested to humanity, who seek their assistance severally as they are called upon to do so according to the needs of men. They are the agents of God or the messenger of gods and men. Thus different religions worship God in different forms, it seems that they worship different gods.

The gods are many in form but in spirit they are all one, for they are the powers and personifications of the one Supreme Being. Vedic religion is an expression of this vision of truth.¹¹

The Vedic vision of Reality and God is also one of beauty and splendour. He is the shining one as well as *Satya dharman*, the one for

10. Raja Rammohan Rai, *The Vedas*, Nag Publishers, Delhi, 1977, pp. 43-44.

11. Donal H. Bishop (ed.), *Indian Thought: An Introduction*, New Delhi, Wiley Eastern Pvt. Ltd., 1975. *The Vedas* by V. Madhusudan Reddy, p. 33.

whom truth is the law of being.

According to the Vedas, the supreme reveals Himself as Rita, the Eternal order. This oneness of the Divine is also presented by the Vedas as a spiritual essence as in the statement.¹²

Thus the one Divine Being can be called by many names and can be described as the All God, the one Being understood essentially and metaphysically. He is the one who pervades all, and the Vedic description in the neuter singular, in masculine and feminine, or in dual and plural do not contradict each other. There is only one reality which pervades everything and in which all things in the universe can be united together, by understanding clearly the idea in the Rigveda. "He is the one, the one alone. In Him all deities become one alone" and in the hymns of Rigveda, "Agni is one but kindled in many a place. One is Surya shining over all. One is Usas illumining everything that which is one has become this All."

According to the Upanisads, the Ultimate Reality is called Brahman. The word is derived from the root 'Brh' which means to grow or to evolve. In the beginning it meant sacrifice, then prayer and then it acquired its present meaning of ultimate reality which evolves itself as this world. Brahman is that which spontaneously bursts forth as nature and soul. It is the ultimate cause of this universe. In the Chandogya, it is cryptically described as '*Tajalān*' – as that (*tat*) from which the world arises (*ja*), into which it returns (*la*), and by which it is supported and it lives (*an*). In the Taittiriya, Brahman is defined as that from which all

there beings are born, by which they live, and into which they are reabsorbed.¹³

Brahman pervades all, He is all in all and supports the whole world. Brahman is the highest, the self-luminous and the immortal. But human beings are mortal. Matter is the body. He is their soul. He holds the self and not-self together which are equally his own manifestation and yet in his own nature He transcends both.

The absolute of the Upanisads manifests itself as the subject as well as the object and transcends them both. The Absolute is as certain as the Ātman and also as infinite as the Brahman.¹⁴

This Brahman is described in two ways in the Upanisads as cosmic Brahman and acosmic Brahman.

The cosmic Brahman is regarded as the cause of production, maintenance and destruction of this universe. All beings arise from Him, live in Him and are absorbed in Him.¹⁵

The Upanisads regards all things in the universe as the body of God; earth, water, fire, air, ether, the sun, the moon, the stars, the sky, the quarters, the rivers, the mountains, all beings, all creatures, all life, all senses, all speeches, all minds, belong to God. These are both the visible and invisible aspects of God.

13. Chandraraj Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, p. 24.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

The acosmic Brahman is the transcendental Absolute or the Indescribable. It is the foundational consciousness, the fundamental postulate of all knowledge. It holds the subjective and the objective world in a transcendental unity.

Śankara, the great Hindu philosopher and theologian, argues that all forms contain an element of untruth and the Real is beyond all forms.

He emphasizes the reality of the unconditioned and unqualified (*nirguna*) Brahman, and regards God, the individual souls and the world as appearances due to an indefinable principle called cosmic nescience (*Māyā*) which is neither real nor unreal, but indefinable. Brahman associated with *Māyā* in his excellent aspect. The empirical self is Brahman associated, with *Māyā* (*avidya*) in his inferior aspect ... Samkara admits the empirical reality of God, the individual selves and the world-appearance. But he admits the ontological reality of Brahman only.¹⁶

Śankara regards God as the material cause and the efficient cause of the world and God is Brahman conditioned by *maya* with its pure Sattva as its limiting adjunct.

For Rāmānuja,

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 soul form His body, He being their soul. As the absolute, the ultimate

16. J. Sinha, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, pp. 364-365.

unity-in-and through – trinity, the concrete whole, God may be viewed through two stages as cause and as effect.¹⁷

Secondly, he viewed God as the immanent inner controller, and mode; matter and souls are inseparable from him, they absolutely are dependent on God. Thirdly, God is also transcendent. He is perfect and has a Divine body. He is the Lord of Karma. He has got the qualities of knowledge, power and mercy etc.

For Rāmānuja, God manifests Himself in five forms in order to help his devotees. As the immanent soul of the universe, He is *Antaryāmi* (first form). As the transcendent personal Lord, Nārāyana or Vasudeva, He is *Para* or supreme (second form). As the creator, preserver and destroyer. He reveals Himself through the four-fold *Vyūha* (third form). His manifestation as the Lord is called Vāsudeva. His manifestation as the ruler of the cognitive aspect of the souls and as the creator of this universe is called *pradyumna*. His manifestation as the ruler of the volitional aspect of the souls and as the preserver of this universe is called Aniruddha. All these four manifestations are called *Vyūha* and they are the partial and incomplete manifestations of the supreme Lord (*para*).

For Rāmānuja, God descends down on this earth in the human or the animal form. He is called Vibhava or Avatara.

17. Chandradhar Sharma, *Critical Study of Indian Philosophy*, p. 348.

He does so in order to protect the good, punish the wicked and restore the *dharma*, the Law ... The fifth and the last form of God is when out of His extreme mercy. He takes the form of the holy idols enshrined in the recognized temples like Shri Rangam so that His devotees might get opportunities to serve him physically.¹⁸

Hence God is the Creator and source of goodness and truth. Human life should be dedicated wholly to God. The belief in oneness of reality is the most profound and significant concept in the Vedas. Brahman and Atman are one. Man is the divine creation of God and he is one with God. All men are brothers under Brahman and there is unity and oneness among mankind. Therefore, there must be an integral oneness of all reality.

It was generally recognized that God is a being with whom one seeks union. This union is man's goal, attainable in various ways, all requiring self sacrifice and discipline. Added to the ritualistic sacrifices, there must be a sacrifice of self. One must offer oneself to God inwardly as well as outwardly. Self discipline leads to self purification which is a prerequisite to a vision of and union with God.

Therefore, one who constantly thinks of God can know His real nature; he alone knows that God reveals Himself to seekers in various forms and aspects. People of all faiths will certainly realize God if they are earnest and sincere. Dogmatism which is the attitude that my religion

18. *Ibid.*, p. 349.

alone is true, and the religions of others are false, is a bad attitude. God can be reached by different paths.

Thus we see that both in the Khasi and Hindu religion God is one only. There is one supreme God only but the people call him by different names according to his manifestations and his place in creation. For the Khasis, God manifests himself to man through his power, words and righteousness. He can never take the form of one of his creature. But for the Hindus God's manifestation is in different ways and forms. He can take the form of human or animal and he intervenes himself in the form of the holy idols.

I have tried to show that religion is not only a kind of belief, dogma and faith but it is also a kind of practice to be lived and experienced in day to day life. It pervades the whole gamut of human life, cultural, social, political and individual. "Religion is not only a means of union between man and God but also between man and man."¹⁹

In my second chapter, I have shown that *Ka Niam* (Khasi religion) is much more than religion, because if we simply translate the word *Ka Niam* as religion, it will reduce the very significance and meaning of *Ka Niam*. *Ka Niam* is said to be given by God to the great forefathers of the seven families. The original meaning of *Ka Niam* is the living reason, as this word *Niam* is derived from the two words *Ka Nia* and *im*, which mean the living reason, while the original or the root meaning of religion is 'to bind', it binds man to God and man to man.

19. Ramjee Singh, *Dimensions of Indian Thought And Culture*, p. 25.

Ka Niam (Khasi religion) is *Ka Nia Ka Jutang* or the living covenant which is made between God and man.

The relationship between God (*U Blei*) and man is based on *ka Jutang*, the covenant which made between them. The command which was made in *Ka Jutang*, becomes *ki hukum* (the laws). It is for this reason that for the Khasis God becomes the supreme commander and the ruler.²⁰

H. O. Mawrie said that the relationship between God and man is depicted in a number of the stories. It is impossible to narrate all the stories. There are three stories which are literary creations in a narrative form and which have been handed down to the Khasi-Pnar people from age to age. They are:²¹

- 1) The parable of 'Lum Sohpetbneng' (the navel of heaven).
- 2) The parable of 'Lum Diengiei'.
- 3) The parable of 'Krem Lamet Krem Latang'.

The central theme of Lum Sohpetbneng is peace between God and man. The Khasi-Pnars believe that there was a tree on the top of the hill which served them as a golden ladder, and from there they could communicate with God directly.²²

After the fall, there grew on the top of the Diengiei peak another tree which was so big and tall, and its over-spreading branches and leaves become so thick as to overshadow the earth with darkness. This darkness

20. H. O. Mawrie, *Ka Pyrkhath U Khasi*, p. 8.

21. H. O. Mawrie, God and Man in *Apphira*, Nov. 23, 1994, p. 4.

22. *Ibid.*

signifies man's spiritual crisis. Finally man turned to God in repentance and thus that God-man relationship was restored. In this episode the people see God's unfailing and forgiving love for man.

In the parable of *Ka Krem Lamet Ka Krem Latang*, the central truth is about man's reconciliation with God. Due to the sin of man, the sun went off to hide herself inside a cave called *Ka Krem Lamet Ka Krem Latang*, and there was a total darkness over the earth and man had to coax her to come back.

The cock was used as a messenger, and with her appearance, light came again, and man's reconciliation with God was effected and re-established.²³

Ka Niam (Khasi religion) abounds in such stories, and those who are spiritually prepared can see the spiritual truth that underlies them. In these stories we see that God gives freedom to man, he has free will and the power of choice of his own; so it depends on man to choose what is true and good.

Therefore, *Ka Niam* is that eternal relationship between God and man and it originates due to man's helplessness and desperate state. Man suffered because of his sins and there was no other way to escape. He asked God for forgiveness and *Ka Niam* originated as the forgiveness of God for man; and this living kindness of God for man will never end as

23. Mary Pristila Rina Lyngdoh, *The Festivals of the History and Culture of the Khasi*, pp. 12-14.

long as man obeys *Ki Hukum* or commandments of God and accomplishes his religious rites and duties.

Ka Niam (Khasi religion) like other great religions of the world believes that all men and women are brothers and sisters and believes in the Fatherhood of God. The Khasis believe that the best way to serve God is to serve mankind. This is seen clearly when we describe, *Ka Niam* as *Ka Niam tiphok tipsot* (religion of recognizing God's intervention, God's work and his good government of the universe and of the human race). *Ka Niam tipbriew tiplei* (religion of knowing man and knowing God) and *Ka Niam tipkur tipkha* (religion of knowing paternal and maternal relationship).

Hence, *Ka Niam* is an integral part of the Khasis life, it includes all the areas of their life; and one of the basic tenets of the Khasis religion is *Ka Hok* as pointed out in Chapter III. Though *Ka Hok* was translated as righteousness, for the Khasis *Ka Hok*, means God Himself in his invisible aspect, God who is the prime mover of the universe and the guiding agent of its Right Order as a whole. *Ka Hok* is prior to creation, it is the source and origin of everything, in which every living and non-living things must follow and obey this right order. God creates the whole universe on the basis of *Ka Hok* according to *Ka Hukum*, in which *Ka Hukum* is the outward manifestation of *Ka Hok* which is God Himself as perceived and seen in creation. Everyone must obey *Ka Hukum*, no one can escape from it. Man does everything by *Ka Hok* in accordance with the direction given by *Ka Hukum*. According to the Khasis, this is the reason why Right Order is the characteristic of their life and actions. Because of this

fact, they can always *Kamai ia ka Hok* (earning righteousness). Earning righteousness means to live a life of God Himself on earth. By earning righteousness, the Khasis believe that they can become worthy of a life of communion with God after death. But a man who does not earn righteousness on earth, after death, his soul will go to *Ka Nurok ka Ksew* or to *Ki Khyndai Pateng Nianra* which means hell.

But *Ka Hok*, which is righteousness, is incomplete without *Ka Sot* which is righteous life. *Ka Sot* is the manifestation of *Ka Hok* because *Ka Sot* as our righteous life shows to others that we are righteous persons; by making others see our good deeds and actions, our life becomes a good example to others, one thus can follow our footsteps.

In this way we can compare *Ka Hok* (righteousness) with the Vedic idea of *Rta* (refer chapter IV).

Rta is the physical order. It governs the uniformities of nature. *Rta* reigns every where, in the sky, in the sun, in the mountain, in the sacrifices, and in the truth. It is the natural order. The sacrifices should conform to *Rta* which is the law of rites. It is the law of truth, right, and justice. It is the moral law, Varuna is the custodian of the moral law or *Rta*. He adheres to the right, and punishes sins. The gods follow the laws of *Rta*. It is the physical order and the moral order. It points to the existence of one supreme God, whose law is unalterable and inviolable.²⁴

Ka Hok, as the cosmic and moral order of the universe, can be compared with *Rta* which is the natural and moral order of the universe.

24. Jadunath Sinha, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, p. 20.

Ka Hok is the eternal law and inviolable and no one can escape from it; it punishes and rewards adequately. Everyone must follow and obey it and God is the guiding agent of this right order. *Ka Hok* as virtue is equivalent with *Rta* which is the law of truth, right and justice; not only human beings must obey it, but even the gods follow it. Varuna brings punishment to the sinners and blessings to the righteous people. The term Brahman has various senses and some of them are; truth, sun, fire, universe, eye, mind, God and the act which enables one to enjoy inwardly freedom and happiness. *Rta* denotes the order of the world; without it there would be only chaos instead of existence. The law of *Karma* originates from it because it is responsible for the apportionment of rewards and punishments. Likewise *Ka Hok* also bring peace and order in the universe; without it the world is in a state of chaos and disorder.

Rta is the revelation of God in the universe. It is the eternal law and the knowledge of the universe and it manifests itself in man and society as *dharma*, moral law and social order. Therefore, *Dharma* is an extension of the Vedic idea of *Rta*. The word *Dharma* cannot be translated as religion only because it comprises varied meanings. From its root meaning it means to make, to exist, to be maintained or preserved. *Dharma* is that which sustains human society and the world, it unites all things together. *Dharma* is the law and foundation of every being; therefore, every form of life and every group of men has its own *Dharma*.

Ka Sot for the Khasis which is the righteous life can be compared with *Dharma* which is the *dharma* of each and every individual and it

assigns duties and rights according to one's own *dharma*. *Dharma* is not only law, right, righteousness but it is also a duty which each and every individual, must live, practice and experience. But for the Khasis *Ka Hok* and *Ka Sot* assign duty not according to the classes or social status of the people but it assigns duty and responsibility to each and every individual to follow and obey the right order by being righteous and live a righteous life.

The Indians regard *Dharma* as a theory of Reality that guides our life. *Dharma*, is therefore, the law of life, the way of life that links us with the very foundation of our being. Every human being has his own *dharma*, the dominant note of his being, which distinguishes him from the rest of his fellowmen. The Khasis also believe that man comes to this world by the righteousness of God or by *Ka Hok Blei*. *Ka Hok* is the foundation of every living being, that distinguishes them from animals and from their fellow human beings.

For the Khasis, *Ka Hok* (righteousness) is God Himself in his visible aspect. The Upanisad say that Brahman is *Dharma* or Righteousness. He is the truth and exists as truthfulness. He is in man individually and in mankind collectively. *Dharma* is said to be originated from the *Smritis*. "It is the recollection handed down by the Rishis, or sages of antiquity, of the precepts of God."²⁵

The concept of *Dharma* is unique to Indian culture and philosophy.

25. D. F. Mulla, *Principal of Hindu Law*, p. 75.

It is a dynamic principle, it leads to *Moksa* because man lives by his life of spiritual realization according to *Dharma* which is the law of right living. The life of a Hindu is regulated in a very detailed manner by the laws of *dharma*. His fasts and feast, his social and family ties, his personal habits and tastes are all conditioned by it.

So also *Ka Niam* of the Khasis is dynamic in character, that is looking towards the future and directs human life and destiny. *Ka Niam* therefore is central to the Khasi way of life and thought. *Ka Hok* influences all the spheres and all aspects of their life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Banerji, Sures chandra. *Dharma-Sutras: A Study*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1962.
- Basham, A. L. *The Origin and Development of Classi-Hinduism*, New Delhi, 1990.
- Bishop, Donald H. (ed.). *Indian Thought An Introduction*, New Delhi: Wiley Eastern, 1975.
- Bloomfield, Maurice. *Religion of the Veda*, Delhi: Indological Book House, 1972.
- Carter, Robert E. *God, the Self and Nothingness*, New York: Paragon House, 1990.
- Chattopadhyaya, D. P. *Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, Vol. 4, November 12, 1986.
- De Bary, W. M. Theodore (ed.). *Sources of Indian Tradition*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1958.
- Durkheim, Emile. *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1915.
- Fernandez, Francis and Varickasseril, Jone. *Mission: A Service of Love*, Shillong: Don Bosco Publication, 1998.
- Gandhi, M. K. *Ethical Religion*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1968.
- Gandhi, M. K. *Harijan*, April 7, 1946.
- Gupta, Surrendra Nath Das. *Philosophical Essays*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982.
- Hingorani, Anand T. *Encyclopaedia of Gandhian Thought*, New Delhi: AICC, 1985.

- Hiriyana, M. *Indian Conception of Values*, Mysore: Kavyalaya Publishers, 1975.
- Khan, Benjamin. *The Concept of Dharma in Valmiki Ramayana*, Delhi: Munshi Ram Monohar Lal, 1965.
- Kharshiing, Hipshon Roy. *Ki Symbol Pyrkhath Na Ka Seng Kut Snem*, Shillong: Ri Khasi Offset Printers, Shillong, 1988.
- Lyngdoh, H. *Ka Niam Khasi*, Shillong: Shillong Printing Works, 1970.
- Lyngdoh, Sylvanus Sngi. *Ka Khubor Babha U Jisu Krist Katkum U lionis*, Part I, Book 56, Shillong: Vendrame Missiological Institute, 1999.
- Macher, Friedrich Schleier ~~Macher~~. *On Religion Speeches to its Culture Despise*, London: Harper and Rew Publications, 1958.
- Madan, T. N. *Non-Renunciation Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Manickam, T. M. *Dharma According to Manu and Moses*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1977.
- Mawric, H. O. *Essence of Khasi Religion*, Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, 1984.
- Mawrie, H. O. *Khasi Milieu*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1981.
- Mawrie, H. O. *U Khasi bad la ka Niam*, Shillong: The Author, 1973.
- Mees, G. H. *Dharma and Society*, Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1986.
- Miri, Sujata. *Khasi World View: A Conceptual Exploration*, Chandigarh: CRRIO Publication, March, 1988.
- Motwani, Kewal. *Manu Dharma Sastras: A Sociological and Historical Study*. Madras: Ganesh & Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1948.

- Mulla, D. F. *Principles of Hindu Law*, Bombay: N. M. Tripathi Private Limited Law Publishers, 12th Edition, 1960.
- Murty, K. S. *The Indian Spirit*, Andhra University Press, 1975.
- Nikam, N.A. Some Concepts of Indian Cultures: An Analytical Interpretation, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2nd Edition, 1973.
- Oldenberg, Herman. *The Religion of the Veda*, Translated into English by Shridhar B. Shrotri, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1st Edition, 1988.
- Prasad, Rajendra. The Theory of Purusarthas, in *Journal of Dharma*, Vol. X, No. 1, Jan-March, 1985.
- Radhakrishnan, S. *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, London: George Allen & Unwin, 9th Impression, 1971.
- Radhakrishnan, S. *The Hindu View of Life*, George Allen and Unwin (India) Pvt. Ltd., Reprinted, 1971.
- Rai, Raja Rammohan. *The Vedas*, Delhi: Nag Publishers, Jawaharnagar, 1977.
- Ranganathada, Swami. *Eternal Values for a Changing Society*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1958.
- Roy, Jeebon. *Ka Kitab Ba Batai Pynshynna Shaphang Uwei U Blei*, Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, Reprinted, 1981.
- Roy, Sib Charan. *Ka Niam Ki Khasi Ka Niam Tip-Briew Tip-Blei*, Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, 1911.
- Sharma, Chandradhar. *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1987.

- Singh, Harbans. *Approaches to the Study of Religion*, Patiala: Guru Gobind Singh, Department of Religious Studies, Punjabi University.
- Singh, Karan. *Hinduism*, New Delhi: Criterion Publications, 1987.
- Singh, Madan Prasad. *The Ethical Philosophy of the Gita: A Comparative and Critical Study of the Interpretations of Tilak and Ramnuja*, Calcutta: Punthi, Pustak, 1996.
- Singh, Nagendra K. R. *Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*, Vol. II, New Delhi: Amol Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1997.
- Singh, Ramjee. *Dimensions of Indian Thought and Culture*, Manak Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1998.
- Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religion Traditions of Mankind*, New York: New American Library, 1963.
- Tiwari, K. N. *Comparative Religion*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983.
- Toynbee, Arnold J. *Study of History*, Abridgement by D. C. Samervell, London: Oxford University Press, 1946-57.
- Zaehner, R. C. *Hinduism*, Oxford University Press, 1972.

NEHU LIBRARY
 Acc. No. 103295
 Acc. by. AP
 Date. 9/10/02
 Class by
 Sub. Heading by
 Date. by
 Referred by