

FROM MATERNAL UNCLE TO FATHER
An Anthropological Study on
Changing Patriarchy in Khasi Society

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Thesis submitted to the North Eastern Hill University
For partial fulfillment of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

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From Uncle to Father: An Anthropological Study on Changing Patriarchy in Khasi Society

ABSTRACT

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Khasi society is changing fast. The influence of changes brought about by education and modernization has had a decisive impact on the life and culture of the people. One of the most prominent cultural traditions of the Khasis is the institution of the maternal uncle (*u kñi*). *U kñi* has been, since time immemorial, a central figure in Khasi society. If he is the *kñi rangbah* (chief uncle) of the clan (*kur*) then he wields great authority among his clan members. He functions as the chairperson of the *Dorbar-kur* (Assembly of the *Kur*). A *kñi* of the *kpoh* (descendants of a single ancestress) instead exercises his authority only among the members of the *kpoh*. However, today we witness the gradual decline of the role of *U Kñi* among the Khasis especially at the level of the *kur*. His traditional role has gradually been taken over by the father of the family. This transition has in turn transformed Khasi society considerably in the recent years. It is the importance and significance of this transition that has prompted me to undertake this study.

Actually, almost every married man in the Khasi society is both a *kñi* (uncle) and a *kpa* (father) simultaneously. He is a *kñi* in his sisters' or in his cousins' families while he is a *kpa* in his children's family.¹ However, the role of man as *kñi* has always dominated the

¹ Cf. H. O. Mawrie, *Ka Longing Longsem u Khun Khasi Khara*. Shillong: Tmissilda Soh, 1983, 93.

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Khasi society in the past. The *kpa*-ship was to a great extent played down. In fact, the father is usually referred to as “*u nongai khun*” (one who begets children).

The changing role from the *kñi* to the father of the family in Khasi society has a tremendous significance for the family and for the society at large. It is not merely a change of role, but also a change of cultural paradigm. This change is bound to affect the life style, value system and behaviour of the Khasis. The transition has to a great extent also affected the identity of the Khasis. Hence the proposed research is significant for the Khasis of the present generation in particular.

This research hinges upon the central concept of patriarchy. Hence, I may briefly explain the concept as it is perceived for the purpose of this study. Patriarchy refers to an institutionalized domination of women by men. Most societies in the world exhibit some form of patriarchy in their social stratification.² Even the Khasi social system, although matrilineal in nature, has a unique form of patriarchy where the *kñi* (maternal uncle) exercised authority over the family members. He acted as the adviser, mediator, a disciplinarian and a helper in times of need.³ The maternal uncle was by tradition the centre of authority and economy, the pivot of the whole family or the clan. He had control over his sisters' children and he safeguarded the well-being and integrity of the clan.⁴ In the last few decades some changes are seen in the Khasi social system whereby the patriarchal role traditionally held by the *kñi* is gradually being assumed by the father of the family.

² Richard A. Dello Buono, “Patriarchy versus Matriarchy”, in Frank H. Magill (ed.) *International Encyclopedia of Sociology*, vol. 2. New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd., 2000, 923.

³ J. War, “The Khasi Concept of Family: Changes in Structure and Function”, in P. M. Chacko (ed.) *Matriliny in Meghalaya: Tradition and Change*. New Delhi: Regency Publications, 1998.

⁴ S. Sngi. Lyngdoh, “The Khasi Matriliny: Its Past and Its Future”, in P. M. Chacko (ed.) *Matriliny in Meghalaya: Tradition and Change*.

Although the institution of *kni* still exists its role and status are expected to be no longer what it used to be in the past.

2. JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

After a long period of contact with the British administration and with Christianity in particular, the Khasi society has undergone tremendous socio-cultural and economic changes. This is seen in the changes in dress patterns, housing, food habits and life style in general.⁵ With the establishment of Shillong as the premier capital of Northeast India, the process of migration from the rural areas was set in motion. This in turn has affected the traditional family system among the Khasis. The processes of urbanization and Christianization have been greatly responsible for the weakening of the traditional roles of the *kñi* as the ultimate male authority and of the *khatduh* as the custodian of family religion. The power of the *kñi* has now been toned down to a great extent.⁶ The adoption of Christianity as a new religion has greatly affected the cultural life of the Khasis. The traditional cultural practices like erecting megaliths, household and community celebrations and festivals have been largely abandoned. The cultural practices related to marriage, funeral, house building etc have become almost extinct.⁷ Although some basic elements of culture like matriliney, traditional polity, inheritance etc, have survived yet many other aspects of culture and tradition have disappeared. For this reason this study is considered opportune and important:

⁵ Cf. H. Barih, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1997, 404.

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 405.

a) Since the Khasi society is undergoing a great socio-cultural transformation due to reasons cited above, it is necessary that a scientific study be undertaken in order to understand the process. Understanding the various factors of changes and their dynamics may enable the people concerned to adapt themselves more effectively to these changes.

b) Socio-cultural changes and transitions should not be taken incognito but they should become a subject of serious study and reflection. Taking these things for granted will spell the doom of a culture. Great civilizations in the world have always made significant studies and reflections on their cultural changes and transitions. Therefore in the face of such a serious cultural transition of family and clan structure, the Khasis need to undertake an elaborate study of the same.

c) It is always important to ascertain the impact and significance of any cultural change in a society to enable a better comprehension of the situation. Such knowledge can be obtained only through a scientific study of the problem. Consequently, this study bears substantial importance and significance in the context of the Khasi society.

d) Knowledge of the socio-cultural situation in one's society has both a preventive and corrective value. It can help the community to prevent certain factors from affecting the culture adversely or it can also correct certain faults which if left untended may corrode the cultural wealth of the people.

e) This study may also contribute towards formulating future policies regarding Khasi family system which the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) or the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC), undertakes from time to time. From the perspective of policy making, this study therefore is necessary and significant.

3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The present study deals with an important aspect of Khasi family structure, namely, the roles of the *kñi* (uncle) and the *kpa* (father). There is a gradual transition of roles between these two traditional institutions. So far no extensive study has been made on this particular development in Khasi society.

The data collected from the two sample localities and from other independent sources, will form the basis of this study. The study will also try to understand the factors (endogenous and exogenous) responsible for such transition. Further, the study will examine the impact the transition has on Khasi family and clan in particular and on Khasi society in general.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

a) To study the changing patriarchy from *kñi* (maternal uncle) to the father (*kpa*) in the Khasi society. This is a socio-cultural phenomenon that is taking place today especially in urban and semi-urban areas.

b) To understand the process of this transformation as it is being seen and felt today. To identify both the endogenous and the exogenous factors that are facilitating such transformations.

5. METHODOLOGY OF THE PRESENT STUDY

To study the specific problem selected for this particular research on Khasi society, we have identified two villages as sample. To represent the rural Khasi population, Marbisu village has been identified while Mawlai-Mawroh has been chosen to represent the urban Khasi population. Marbisu has been deliberately chosen because of its sizable number of Khasis who still uphold the traditional religion. Mawroh on the other hand has been chosen to represent the urban Khasi population.

5.1. The Population

For collection of data different parameters are considered, namely: (i) age, (ii) sex, (iii) religion, (iv) education and (v) socio-economic status.

Questionnaires were served on a total of 500 persons in Marbisu and 300 in Mawroh. However, only 397 (that is 79.4%) responded from Marbisu and 205 (that is 68.3%) from Mawroh. Therefore the total number of respondents for the present study is 602.

5.2. Tools used

In pursuing the research and in collecting the required data, the following tools were employed by the investigator:

- 1) Questionnaire (Consisting of 64 questions grouped into 6 sub titles)
- 2) Interview schedule (Consisting of 22 questions)

6. CHAPTERIZATION AND CHAPTER CONTENT

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 entitled “Introduction” describes the rationale, the objectives, the methodology and scope of the study. This chapter also contains a review of basic literature on the subject. Chapter 2 entitled “The Socio-cultural Fabric of Khasi Society” provides a theoretical framework for the study as it describes the nature of Khasi society, their origin, their culture, community and family structures. Chapter 3 which is entitled “Traditional Role of the *Kñi* (maternal uncle) among the Khasis”, on the other hand, gives us a deeper understanding of the traditional status and role of *kñi*-ship in Khasi society. This chapter provides us a further theoretical framework for the study in connection with the present investigation on the current status and role of the *kñi*. Chapter 4 which is entitled “Decline of *Kñi*-ship in Khasi Society” provides a critical analysis of *kñi*-ship today and shows how this traditional institution is on a gradual decline. The data collected from field study are analyzed to support this finding. Chapter 5 entitled “Rise of *Kpa*-ship in Khasi Society” discusses about *kpa*-ship and how this institution is gaining importance day by day. Data collected from field study are used to support this finding. The analysis clearly indicates that *kpa*-ship is gaining more importance in Khasi society today. Chapter 6 which is entitled “Summary and Conclusion” is a concluding chapter and it states the findings of the study and their implications on Khasi society today.

7. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This study has brought to light many aspects of change in the institutions of *kñi*-ship and *kpa*-ship among the Khasis today. It has demonstrated that while conceptually the

institution of *kñi*-ship is still unaffected, the actual exercise of the *kñi*'s role has changed considerably. *Kñi*-ship is gradually turning into an ideology of the past and *kpa*-ship that of the present.

First, the study shows that due to many socio-cultural and economic factors, the traditional role of the *kñi* has been affected adversely. Christianity has been a major influence on the Khasi society. By adopting this new religion, many of the cultural traditions in the family have been affected. The law of inheritance enacted by the British government has practically given the right of ownership of ancestral property to the *khatduh*. In this manner the *kñi* who used to be the traditional administrator of the ancestral property has lost much of his authority over his clan members.⁸ Because of these factors *kñi*-ship in particular has been adversely affected while *kpa*-ship has gained more importance. Today the *kñi* as the present study has shown, does not wield as much authority and influence over his *kur/kpoh/ing* members as he used to do in the past. In general, his authority is gradually waning away and has become nominal.

Second, the study has shown that the influence of the *kñi* over his nephews and nieces is diminishing due to his inability to exercise his traditional role of being regularly present in his sister's house and to supervise the affairs related to the *kur/kpoh/ing* or to admonish his nephews and nieces. Physical absence has been responsible to a large extent for the diminution of his authority and at times it has led to weakening of kinship bond especially with the younger generation as familiarity between the *kñi* and his nephews and nieces is on the decline.

⁸ Cf. P. Passah, "Changes in the matrilineal system of Khasi-Jaintia Family", in *Matriliney in Meghalaya*, 76.

Third, the study shows that while a Khasi man's role as a *kñi* in his sister's house is diminishing his role as a *kpa* in his conjugal family is on the rise. This is clearly seen in the quality time that he spends with his children than with his nephews and nieces. His growing absence from his nephews and nieces implies an increased presence with his wife and children. This consequently has strengthened *kpa*-ship in Khasi society today. In fact, the traditional role as 'biological' (as begetter only) father has practically given way to his role as 'social' (nourisher) father. Thus a Khasi man today has become less an uncle in his family of origin and more a social father in his conjugal family.⁹

Fourth, the study shows that many Khasis today are of strong opinion that the *kpa* should assume more authority and responsibility in his children's house than the *kñi*. It is the feeling of many that the *kpa* is the natural guardian and disciplinarian of his children on account of his consanguinal relationship with his children. Laxity in exercising their roles on the part of the *kñi* today and the influence of Christian teaching on paternal responsibility are some of the factors that have accelerated this type of thinking.

Fifth, the study reveals that in reality the process of transition in Khasi patriarchy is already in motion and it is gaining momentum with the passage of time. There is a gradual transition from patriarchy traditionally held by the *kñi* to the present form of patriarchy centred around the father of the family. This phenomenon is equally prevalent both in the urban and rural areas and across all sections of Khasi people.

Sixth, this particular study also reveals that more Khasis today are of the opinion that the *kpa* should formally assume the role of the *kñi* with regard to the affairs of the family except those related to the *kur/kpoh/ing* where the *kñi* is still considered the

⁹ Cf. R. Kharkrang, *Matriliny on the March*. Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 2012, 97.

authority. The verdict is that the *kpa* should replace the role of the *kñi* in the affairs of the *ing-tnat* (nuclear family).

Seventh, the study shows that the image of the *kpa* is gaining more respect and recognition and the *kpa* himself is beginning to assume all responsibilities related to the family. He is no longer a nominal head but *de facto* the head and supervisor of his own family.¹⁰

Hence the present study clearly demonstrates that there is a change in patriarchy in the Khasi family, namely, that there is a gradual transition of roles from the maternal uncle to the father of the family.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

This research has confirmed the main thesis about the transition in patriarchy from the *kñi* to the *kpa* in Khasi society today. This may have the following implications for the Khasi society in near future:

a) The image of the *kpa* will be perceived in a better light. His role and status will be better accepted and appreciated. The *kpa* will be seen as a natural substitute of the *kñi* in matters related to the family. With a better recognition of his status and authority, the *kpa* is expected to exercise more authority and accept more responsibilities towards his family.

¹⁰ However, it must be said here that in cases of a man marrying the heiress, the husband is often controlled by the in-laws. The grand-mother or the brother-in-law (uncle) becomes a hindrance to his exercise of authority. Yet a lot of change is also seen in these cases where at times the husband of the heiress commands the affairs of the family. This depends very much on the personality of the man or his ability to shoulder responsibility.

b) The rise in status of the *kpa* is likely to affect the image of the *kñi* further. In fact, the present study has indicated that the status and role of the *kñi* are experiencing a down-sliding movement. In many cases the *kñi* has become a stranger to his nephews and nieces. The bipolar tension of roles between a *kñi* and *kpa* in a Khasi man has tilted in favour of the latter.

c) The changing patriarchy in Khasi families will probably be perceived as one decisive step in the elaborate process of socio-cultural transformation of the society itself. In the long run the possibility of change in the lineage system cannot be ruled out. However, such a change in the existing system calls for internal debate and deeper understanding of the Khasi culture and identity.

9. CONCLUSION

This particular study is a critical analysis of the present socio-cultural transformation that is being witnessed in Khasi society. Evidently, the transformation is taking a natural course on the whole. Socio-cultural, economic and religious factors are at play at different levels and in different degrees in this transformation. Khasi society today is exposed to the influence of a global culture and interculturality has become a day-to-day reality. Therefore such socio-cultural transformation is bound to take place and as such there is need to accommodate such changes. This is in keeping with the characteristic dynamism of human cultures.

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DECLARATION

I, **Barnes L. Mawrie**, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis entitled “From Maternal Uncle to Father: An Anthropological Study on Changing Patriarchy in Khasi Society”, is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the 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/Institute.

This is being submitted to the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology.


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CERTIFICATE

I certify that the thesis entitled “From Maternal Uncle to Father: An Anthropological Study on Changing Patriarchy in Khasi Society”, is submitted by Barnes L. Mawrie in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. It is based on first hand investigation carried out under my supervision.

He has been duly registered and the thesis presented is worthy of being considered for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology. This work has not been submitted for any degree of any other university.

Date: 12.04.2013


Supervisor
Professor T. B. Subba

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It has been my long cherished desire to make a critical study of the Khasi family structure especially the institution of *kñi*-ship which is gradually undergoing a transformation with the change of time. With the weakening of *kñi*-ship the role of the *kpa* (father) is gaining more importance. This theme appears to be very interesting because of its relevance and significance for the Khasi society today.

Undertaking this research “From Maternal Uncle to Father: An Anthropological Study on Changing Patriarchy in Khasi Society”, was a daunting project for me. By no means, I would have been able to complete this study had it not been for a number of persons who assisted me in different ways and capacities.

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Shillong

Barnes L. Mawrie

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ABBREVIATIONS

DBCIC	Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Cultures
FKJGP	Federation of Khasi Jaiñtia and Garo People
ICSSR-NERC	Indian Council of Social Science Research – North Eastern Regional Centre
IFP	Imphal Free Press
KHADC	Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council
KSU	Khasi Students' Union
MPT	Movement for Positive Thinking
MSM	<i>Mait Shaphrang Movement</i>
SIL	<i>Seng Iktiar Longbriew-manbriew</i>
SRT	<i>Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai</i>
VIP	Vendrame Institute Publications

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Khasi society is changing fast. The influence of changes brought about by education and modernization has had a decisive impact on the life and culture of the people. One of the most prominent cultural traditions of the Khasis is the institution of the maternal uncle (*u kñi*). *U kñi* has been, since time immemorial, a central figure in Khasi society. If he is the *kñi rangbah* (chief uncle) of the clan (*kur*), then he wields great authority among his clan members. He functions as the chairperson of the *Dorbar-kur* (Assembly of the *Kur*). A *kñi* of the *kpoh* (descendants of a single ancestress) instead exercises his authority only among the members of the *kpoh*. However, today we witness the gradual decline of the role of *U Kñi* among the Khasis especially at the level of the *kur*. His traditional role has gradually been taken over by the father of the family. This transition has in turn transformed Khasi society considerably in the recent years. It is the importance and significance of this transition that has prompted me to undertake this study.

Actually, almost every married man in the Khasi society is both a *kñi* (uncle) and a *kpa* (father) simultaneously. He is a *kñi* in his sisters' or in his cousins' families while

he is a *kpa* in his children's family.¹ However, the role of man as *kñi* has always dominated the Khasi society in the past. The *kpa*-ship was to a great extent played down. In fact, the father is usually referred to as “*u nongai khun*” (one who begets children).

The changing role from the *kñi* to the father of the family in Khasi society has a tremendous significance for the family and for the society at large. It is not merely a change of role, but also a change of cultural paradigm. This change is bound to affect the lifestyle, value system and behaviour of the Khasis. The transition has to a great extent also affected the identity of the Khasis. Hence the proposed research is significant for the Khasis of the present generation in particular.

This research hinges upon the central concept of patriarchy. Hence, I may briefly explain the concept as it is perceived for the purpose of this study. Patriarchy refers to an institutionalized domination of women by men. Most societies in the world exhibit some form of patriarchy in their social stratification.² Even the Khasi social system, although matrilineal in nature, has a unique form of patriarchy where the *kñi* (maternal uncle) exercised authority over the family members. He acted as the adviser, mediator, a disciplinarian and a helper in times of need.³ The maternal uncle was by tradition the centre of authority and economy, the pivot of the whole family or the clan. He had control over his sisters' children and he safeguarded the well-being and integrity of the clan.⁴ In the last few decades some changes are seen in the Khasi social system whereby the patriarchal role traditionally held by the *kñi* is gradually being assumed by the father of the family. Although the institution of *kni* still exists its role and status are expected to be no longer what it used to be in the past.

1.2. JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

After a long period of contact with the British administration and with Christianity in particular, the Khasi society has undergone tremendous socio-cultural and economic changes. This is seen in the changes in dress patterns, housing, food habits and life style in general.⁵ With the establishment of Shillong as the premier capital of Northeast India, the process of migration from the rural areas was set in motion. This in turn has affected the traditional family system among the Khasis. The processes of urbanization and Christianization have been greatly responsible for the weakening of the traditional roles of the *kñi* as the ultimate male authority and of the *khatduh* as the custodian of family religion. The power of the *kñi* has now been toned down to a great extent.⁶ The adoption of Christianity as a new religion has greatly affected the cultural life of the Khasis. The traditional cultural practices like erecting megaliths, household and community celebrations and festivals have been largely abandoned. The cultural practices related to marriage, funeral, house building etc have become almost extinct.⁷ Although some basic elements of culture like matriliney, traditional polity, inheritance etc, have survived yet many other aspects of culture and tradition have disappeared. For this reason this study is considered opportune and important:

a) Since the Khasi society is undergoing a great socio-cultural transformation due to reasons cited above, it is necessary that a scientific study be undertaken in order to understand the process. Understanding the various factors of changes and their dynamics may enable the people concerned to adapt themselves more effectively to these changes.

b) Socio-cultural changes and transitions should not be taken incognito but they should become a subject of serious study and reflection. Taking these things for granted will spell the doom of a culture. Great civilizations in the world have always made significant studies and reflections on their cultural changes and transitions. Therefore in the face of such a serious cultural transition of family and clan structure, the Khasis need to undertake an elaborate study of the same.

c) It is always important to ascertain the impact and significance of any cultural change in a society to enable a better comprehension of the situation. Such knowledge can be obtained only through a scientific study of the problem. Consequently, this study bears substantial importance and significance in the context of the Khasi society.

d) Knowledge of the socio-cultural situation in one's society has both a preventive and corrective value. It can help the community to prevent certain factors from affecting the culture adversely or it can also correct certain faults which if left untended may corrode the cultural wealth of the people.

e) This study may also contribute towards formulating future policies regarding Khasi family system which the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) or the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC), undertakes from time to time. From the perspective of policy making, this study therefore is necessary and significant.

1.3. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS USED

Before we go deep into the study of the problem, it is necessary to understand some of the most basic terms that are being used in the study.

Kur: The concept of *kur* (clan) is very central in Khasi society. *Kur* refers to a cluster of *kpoh* (families) who bear the same surname and who trace their origin to a common distant primeval ancestress. The origin of a clan is often shrouded in mystery and many were perhaps born due to the process of migration.⁸ The concepts of *kur* and *kpoh* are very fundamental in understanding the socio-cultural structure of Khasi society.

Kpoh: This term refers to a sub clan among the Khasis. A *kpoh* is a consanguinal group of families who descend from a single ancestress. The size of the *kpoh* therefore depends on the chronological distance of the ancestress which will in turn determine the number of generations.

Ka Ing: This term refers to a family unit within the *kpoh* (sub-clan). It is the smallest social unit. It consists of the father, mother and their children.

Kñi: This term will be often repeated during the study. It is a Khasi terminology for the maternal uncle. There are two levels of *kñi*-ship among the Khasis. One is known as *kñi-rangbah* (major uncle, usually addressed as *ma-heh* or *ma-rangbah*) who is the eldest brother of the *kpoh* (family) and the others are the *kñi-khynnah* or *kñi-synrop*, the younger brothers. The *kñi-rangbah* exercises greater authority and plays a greater role than other brothers in the affairs of the family.

Kpa: This term refers to the father of the family. He is the executive head of the family and his life is linked to his wife and children. He is second only to the *kñi* in terms of authority in the family.⁹ While he is loved and respected by his wife and children as *u kpa u balah u baiai* (one who guides and provides), yet it is the *kñi* who is *de facto* controller of the family.

Kñi-synrop: This term is used for classificatory uncles, namely, the younger brothers of the *kñi* if he has any. Classificatory uncles are also termed in Khasi as *kñi-khynnah* (young uncles). They do have some influence on their nephews and nieces.

Kpa-synrop: The term is used to indicate the classificatory fathers, namely, the elder or younger brother/s of the father of a family. In Khasi there is a title for each of them: *Pa-heh* (eldest brother), *Pa-deng* (middle brother), *Pa-khynnah* (younger brother) and *Pa-duh* (youngest brother). They also have some influence on the family although not as much as the classificatory uncles.

Patriarchy and matriliney: Patriarchy refers to the system where the father or some other male acts as head of the family and takes all important decisions on behalf of his family. In Khasi society it refers to the authority and control of the *kñi* (mother's brother) over his *kur/kpoh* members and that of the *kpa* in his family. Matriliney is a form of kinship structure where family trees are organized around females with all children becoming members of their mother's descent group.¹⁰

1.4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The present study deals with an important aspect of Khasi family structure, namely, the roles of the *kñi* (uncle) and the *kpa* (father). There is a gradual transition of roles between these two traditional institutions. So far no extensive study has been made on this particular development in Khasi society.

The data collected from the two sample localities and from other independent sources, will form the basis of this study. The study will also try to understand the factors (endogenous and exogenous) responsible for such transition. Further, the study will examine the impact the transition has on Khasi family and clan in particular and on Khasi society in general.

1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

- a) To study the changing patriarchy from *kñi* (maternal uncle) to the father (*kpa*) in the Khasi society. This is a socio-cultural phenomenon that is taking place today especially in urban and semi-urban areas.
- b) To understand the process of this transformation as it is being seen and felt today. To identify both the endogenous and the exogenous factors that are facilitating such transformations.

1.6. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Before we undertake an investigation into the problem of this research, it is necessary to have a review of literature. As far as the knowledge of the present researcher goes, no serious study till date has been done on patriarchy in the matrilineal Khasi society. This is evident from the following review of literature on this society. However, as far as cultural movements are concerned, there have been quite a few significant ones in the past few decades. For this reason, we need to review these movements and their objectives as well so as to have a complete picture of the problem in hand.

1.6.1. Scholarly Works

McLennan (1865) proposes a theory that matriarchy was a primitive system in society due to the practice of what he termed “rude polyandry” wherein it was easier to establish kinship systems from blood relationships traced through women.

According to Maine (1906), patriarchy was the starting point of every social system. His defense of *patria potestas* was based on his theory that male dominance was a characteristic of any society.

Nakane’s (1967) study is perhaps one of the earliest scholarly research on matriliney in Meghalaya. Her study throws a lot of light on the unique family systems of the Garos and the Khasis. Her study on Khasi matriliney shows that the status of a man who marries the youngest daughter, that is the heiress, is rather weak because in such cases the management of property and all economic activities are controlled by the

maternal uncle (*kñi*) or the wife's brother. Even his works are under constant supervision of this authority. If the *kñi* resides in the same family, the children appear to be more attached and obedient to him than to their father.¹¹ The man (father) in this kind of family situation lives in constant relational tension with his in-laws.¹² On the other hand the status of a man who marries a non-heiress, is stable and better established and his parental authority is stable.¹³ Men who marry non-heiress are able to establish new *ing* (house) and are not dependent on natal *ing*. As such, the maternal uncles (*kñi*) do not usually meddle in their family affairs. Thus the husbands in such families enjoy more independence and authority.¹⁴

Gurdon (1975) speaks of the father in Khasi family as one who is addressed as *U Thawlang* or one who creates together. Even after his death he is revered by the family as *U Thawlang* and propitiation is offered to him.

Mawrie (1981) opines that the matrilineal system has been practised by the Khasis since time immemorial. According to him lineage is traced through women because God himself created the ancestress to expand the Khasi race.¹⁵ Secondly, the Khasi ancestress is considered as complementing the Godhead and in prayers she is always mentioned next to God.¹⁶ Thirdly, since men were often engaged in wars and had no time to look after the family affairs, so the women were endowed with the right to lineage and the management of the families.¹⁷ The Khasi man when he enters into marriage always seeks for offspring. He considers this as a proof of his virility and a favourable sign from God.¹⁸ It is a strong Khasi custom that the child or children of a woman pay a traditional homage to their *meikha* (mother of the husband). This brings

joy and honour to the parents of the man. This custom is known as *ka nguh meikha pakha*. Thus when the couple has no children it is a cause of sorrow for the *meikha* and this is looked upon as a sort of curse from God.

Mawrie (1983) also writes about the origin of family, clan, religion and culture. In a section on the Khasi institutions of uncle and father,¹⁹ the author throws important insights into the origin of family, but the discussion on concepts of *kñi* and *kpa* is very skeletal. Regarding the *kñi*'s role, it is simply said that he is responsible for his clan members from their birth to their death.

Das Gupta (1989) is of the opinion that the Khasi man does not enjoy the same status that his wife enjoys in the family.²⁰ He is usually considered only as a begetter (*shongkha*). If he happens to marry the last daughter of the family (*khatduh*), his status and role is even less. The author comments on the better position of the husband in War Khasi areas where the man wields greater authority over his wife and children.²¹

Nongrum (1989) writes about the traditional image and authority of the *kñi* in his own clan. In fact, a married man visits his children's house only at night while during the day he resides in his mother's house and he works and earns for his clan members.²² Among his clan members he exercises great authority and commands respect. He is the administrator of the ancestral property. He is also the priest of his family and his clan and is hence responsible for the rituals of the clan.²³ The *kñi* acts as a disciplinarian of his nephews and nieces. He counsels them and at times punishes them for their faults.²⁴ The author also speaks about the socio-cultural dilemma because the present day *kñi* has lost his status and authority on account of his own fault.²⁵ The author writes at length

about the traditional image and authority of the *kpa* among the Khasis. He is referred to as *u thawlang* (procreator) and *uba buh ka longshynrang longkynthei* (one who determines the sexes of children).²⁶

Sen (1992) brings together some scholarly articles on Khasi family structure as mentioned here below:

a) "Status of women in traditional Khasi culture" by Juanita War, where the author writes about the status and role of women especially the *khatduh* in Khasi family. The privileged role and authority of the *kñi* is also referred to here. He is the one who the author thinks makes the final decisions in family affairs.²⁷

b) "Women in Khasi Society" by I. M. Syiem deals with the privileged status of women in the Khasi matrilineal society. It points out that the position of authority and control rests in the hands of the maternal uncles and the fathers.²⁸ The article refers to the *kñi*'s role as the one responsible for the family/clan rituals.

According to Kuper (1994) with the growth of property and the practice of sons succeeding as heirs to their fathers' estates, gradually the system of kinship through males came into existence. Thus patriarchy became a common phenomenon in most groups of people.

Bareh (1997) in his elaborate study on Khasi culture gives a general view of family organization, marriage, inheritance etc, and has a small section on *kñi* and *kpa*.²⁹ According to the author, the *kñi* is the one who plays an important role in family affairs like the marriage of the clan members in Khasi family.

Chacko (1998) also brings together a collection of scholarly articles on the Khasi family system which throw abundant light on this issue. The following are the most important articles which deal with this subject:

a) "The Khasi Concept of Family: Changes in structure and function" by War throws light on the Khasi concept of family and family structure. It explains elaborately the units of Khasi society from the micro unit of *ing* to the macro unit of *kur*.³⁰ Further, it explores the on-going changes in the Khasi family structure and functions due to modern development and its influencing factors.³¹

b) "The Khasi Matriline: Its Past and its Future" by Lyngdoh makes an enlightening reading on the traditional status and role of the *kñi* in Khasi society.³² There is a discussion on the changing Khasi family and the factors that effect such changes like Christianity and modernization. According to the author Christianity has not effected any significant change in Khasi matriline.³³ The article also deals with various socio-cultural movements that want to bring about some changes in the present family system.

c) "Some aspects of Change in the Family System of the Khasis" by Mawlong has great significance for the present research. The article is based on a simple survey in Shillong. The study shows that there is a strong desire for change in the present family system. It reveals that men and women feel that the *kpa* should become the head of the family.³⁴ The study also shows that most Khasis are opposed to changing matriline and that matriline does not undermine the role of the *kpa*. It also shows that *kñi*-ship today has become more of a symbolic than a decisive institution.³⁵ Today Khasi society in both rural and urban settings is experiencing a lot of changes. Modernization, education,

urbanization, and Christianization have greatly influenced the Khasi family system. The roles of the *Khatduh* have also changed considerably.

d) “Changes in the matrilineal system of Khasi-Jaiñtia Family” by Passah explores the traditional roles of the youngest daughter and the uncle in the Khasi-Jaiñtia family.³⁶ There is also a discussion on the origin and history of different cultural movements to change the present Khasi family system.³⁷

e) “The impact of Christianity on the Khasi-Jaiñtia matrilineal family” by Snaitang examines the traditional roles of the *kñi* and the *kpa* in Khasi society, where the former wields tremendous authority while the latter becomes insignificant, “*u khun ki briew*” (someone else’s son).³⁸ The article also deals at length with the cultural changes on Khasi family system brought about by factors like British rule and Christianity. However, it is seen that these factors have not brought about radical changes in traditional matriliney, inheritance and system of village administration.³⁹

“In-law conflicts”, Women’s reproductive lives and the roles of their mothers and husbands among the matrilineal Khasi”, by Leonetti et al (2007) shows that the presence of the grandmother (i.e., the mother-in-law) in the household keeps the husband at the periphery while the status of the father is enhanced by the absence/dead status of the grandmother. The study reveals that while the mother-in-law takes a protective stance the husband takes an exploitative stance with regard to the reproductive woman.⁴⁰ The co-residence with her mother gives economic security to the woman and protects her from her husband’s reproductive exploitation but it also increases divorce. Death of the mother leads to greater dependence and acceptance of

husband as household head. However access to mother's resources may weaken such dependence.⁴¹

Rapthap (2005) writes about the Khasi hereditary custom. Some sections of the book, deal with the *kñi* and his declining role and authority. According to the author, the causes of the decline of *kñi*-ship are the following:

a) The emergence of the practice of *kamai inglok* (earning for the wife) and the gradual disappearance of *kamai ingkur* (earning for the *kur/kpoh/ing*). Because he does not bring his earnings to his mother's family, the *kñi* has gradually lost his authority over the members of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.⁴²

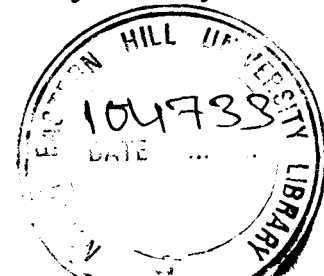
b) Since *kñi*-ship is closely linked to the practice of the traditional religion wherein the *kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing*, therefore with the conversion to Christianity the role of the *kñi* has been curtailed.

c) Lastly the author argues that the enactment of the Law of Inheritance by the British government in 1918 has dealt a blow to the authority of the *kñi*. Earlier the *kñi* had a great say in the administration of ancestral property, but the 1918 law has given the right to property to the *khatduh* (last daughter).⁴³

d) The book also deals with the changing role of the *kpa* in Khasi society. According to him, the *kpa* today displays a greater responsibility towards his children's upbringing. Consequently, he exercises more authority and influence among his children than their *kñi* does. Further he suggests that the authority of the *kñi* should be transferred to the *kpa*.⁴⁴

Kharkrang (2012) gives an elaborate description of Khasi matrilineal system and its quintessence. At the same time he discusses what he calls “the winds of change” in the Khasi family system.⁴⁵ He discusses the declining image of the *kñi* and the emerging figure of the *kpa* in today’s Khasi family.

As seen above, the studies of McLennan, Maine and Kuper provide a theoretical backdrop to the family system in human history and the emergence of matriarchy and patriarchy in society. This theoretical backdrop is essential for a better understanding of these basic concepts in the present study. In most other studies indicated above, the discussion is centered around the traditional status and authority of the *kñi* in contrast to that of the *kpa* and also about the matrilineal system of the Khasis. These serve as the context to this particular study. Such knowledge is essential before we discuss the present changes. However, some studies need special mention as they relate directly to the present research. Nakane’s study on matriliney is one such study. Her reference to a man marrying a non-heiress as having a better status as a *kpa* is perhaps true. However, the position of a man marrying an heiress has quite changed from the way she describes. The educational and economic status of the Khasi man today has brought about a tremendous change of his image in the family. Leonetti et al’s study similarly shows that a man who marries an heiress, where the grandmother is alive, is in a disadvantageous position because she controls her daughter’s reproductive agenda. Death of the grandmother enables the husband to take a more exploitative stance with regard to his wife. In cases where the husband commits his full income to his children he is likely to solicit more allegiance from the wife and exercise more authority. A study done by



Mawlong (1998) is more directly related to my study. Mawlong's study has indicated that many Khasis are inclined to accept the changing patriarchy, that is, from the maternal uncle to the father. Although this is not an exhaustive study, it serves as an inspiration for the present research. The latest study done by Kharkrang (2012) on Khasi matriliney where he discusses the emerging status and role of the *kpa* in the present Khasi family, provides further inspiration to my present research. This particular study is quite an exhaustive discussion on the changing concept of patriarchy. As such it provides a perfect background to the present study.

1.6.2. Novels

The cultural discourse on patriarchy in Khasi society has found conflicting voice in Khasi literature. While the Khasi society is patriarchal, many prominent Khasi novelists have indicated a precarious position of men in Khasi society. This is seen in the following novels and dramas.

Tiewsoh (1975) depicts the ideal image of a Khasi father of the family, one who commands respect and love through his good character and devotion, in the novel *Kam Kalbut* in the character of U Melkhan. He is a father who laboured hard for his family. He even adopts the role of his children's *kñi* in the engagement of his daughter Ritila.⁴⁶

Nongrum (1988) depicts the less privileged position of male children in a Khasi family. The story shows how the parents of Lurstep coerced him to discontinue his education in order to make him work in the field while his sister Soni is being pampered by her parents.⁴⁷ We also see a typical Khasi father, Shemphang, who has no control

over the situation. However, in volume II of the novel we see Lurstep as an ideal *kñi* who wanted to safeguard the well being of his sister.⁴⁸ He also proves himself to be an ideal father who is responsible and industrious.

Synrem (1986) shows the father of Pynnehmon as a man of integrity, one who loves his family and acts responsibly. He cares for his children and admonishes them regularly.⁴⁹ However, he is gradually depreciated by his wife till the point of being sent back to his clan members. At the same time Pynnehmon, the *khatduh*, tries to get rid of her eldest brother (*kñi*) from her house.⁵⁰ The novel shows that the Khasi father undergoes tremendous psychological stress on account of being ignored and being deprived of his proper status and role in the family. He develops an inferiority complex when he sees that his children do not care for him as much as they do for their mother.

Sten (1989) shows that if there is no offspring marriage breaks off for the husband is not easily satisfied with adopted children. This is well depicted in the novel *Kwah Bymjukut* where U Abi becomes disenchanted with his wife Ka Pura because she is barren.⁵¹

Pde (1991) shows how a Khasi father is capable of being responsible and dutiful towards his family. Bianglang, the father of Wandashisha, continues to look after his daughter even after his wife's death. He remains a widower in order to bring her up with utmost care.⁵²

1.6.3. Plays

Jala (2010) depicts the struggle for control of the family between the *kñi* (maternal uncle) and the father of the family, which characterizes the Khasi society today in the drama *Haba ka Kupar jot ka Dawa* where the father U Ksan Umteng comes at loggerheads with his son Jwain over his authority in the family.⁵³

Pde (1987) shows that given the chance a Khasi father is capable of showing great devotion and responsibility towards his family. He has great concern for his children's welfare as is seen in the drama *Yn Map?* where the father U Kyrshan displays great devotion to his two sons, U Donbor and U Wanbor.⁵⁴

Dkhar's (2002) drama tells the tragic story of Banlum as an HIV/AIDS patient who unknowingly infected his wife and child with his disease. He is however shown as someone who in spite of odds has love for his family and an urge to bring up his children in a proper way. He feels remorse for his past sins and the fate he has brought upon his family.⁵⁵

In general Khasi literature tries to depict a positive image of the father. However, there is conscious attempt to indicate the weak position of a Khasi father in his family. The bipolar tension between him and the *kñi* is often depicted as a great disadvantage for the family.

1.6.4. Contemporary Movements

The post-British period saw a few socio-cultural movements among the Khasis. In the beginning it was more of a reaction against the cultural depreciation under the colonial

rule. Of late, movements have emerged which attempt to address the challenges of socio-cultural changes in the society especially the one related to patriarchy.

a) *Seng Iktiar Longbriew-manbriew* (1961)

Ka Seng Iktiar Longbriew-Manbriew (SIL) was actually started in Sohra in 1939. Their constitution published in 1961, states:

a) That the *kpa* should have full authority in his family and that the wife should only be his help-mate.

b) That in the absence of the *kpa* the eldest son should assume authority and if he is no longer alive then the second son takes over and then the third and so on.

c) That if there are no sons, the eldest daughter should step into the *kpa*'s shoes.

d) That parents should have the power to make wills for their children.

e) That laws should be enacted to regulate marriages towards orderly family and social life.⁵⁶

The constitution provides for a radical change in Khasi lineage system and the right of inheritance. The movement however could not make much headway. In the course of time, some of its members wanted a change only in the right of inheritance and not in lineage.⁵⁷

b) *Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai* (1990)

The issue of the role of the father in Khasi family has not remained in books or in the academic circles, but has also caught the attention of the society at large. It has assumed

a lot of social, political and cultural importance in modern Khasi society. In 1990 a group of enlightened Khasis came together to form an organization called *Ka Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai* (New Family System). This is a movement for change from matriliney to patriliney.

The constitution of *Ka Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai* has the following objectives.

- i) To empower the father of the family to be the head of his own wife and children and that his wife should be his strong support.
- ii) That the lineage of the family should henceforth be from the father's side and no longer from the mother.
- iii) That the family property be equally divided among the sons and daughters.
However, the daughter will lose her share of the property if she marries a non-Khasi.
- iv) That the eldest son of the family will assume the responsibility of looking after the parents.
- v) If the wife is harassed and persecuted by her husband the woman's parents or brothers and sisters have the right to recall her. She has the right to be protected by her relatives.
- vi) Any man who leaves his wife has the obligation to look after her well being until she is married to another person and has her own family.⁵⁸

The preamble to its constitution says, "to unite the people for generations to come...the role of the man is very vital in the family. Therefore we have to empower the father of the family and give him full responsibility over his wife, his children, his

family, family property and lineage so that there is uniformity among people and the country may be united”.

Today more and more Khasis have become conscious of the need of such changes in the family. This movement is becoming popular and gaining support.

c) *Mait Shaphrang* Movement (MSM)

This is a socio-cultural movement of some literate Khasis whose objective is to reform the society on the basis of the modern development. This group has spearheaded the movement for reform and rejuvenation of Khasi culture and tradition especially those connected with family life. In recent years the MSM has pressurized the government to consider the introduction of two bills, namely, *Registration of Marriage Act* and *Equitable Distribution of Self Acquired and Ancestral Property Act*. The first Act would help regularize marriages and become a deterrent for divorces while the second Act would empower male children and enable them to cope with the challenges of life.⁵⁹

1.6.5. *Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) Acts/Bills*

The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) was created on 26th January 1950 under the provision of the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Its objective is to safeguard the traditions and customs of the Khasi people and to uphold their traditional democratic system. For the last many decades this institution has been playing a major role in the socio-cultural life of the Khasi people. The KHADC has been

able to formulate many policies on behalf of the people. Some of the policies which have a great influence on the life of the Khasi people are discussed below:

a) *Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act of 1997*

This Bill was passed by the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) on 13th March 1997 and it received the assent of the Governor on 23rd February 2005. It was then published as an Act in the Gazette of Meghalaya on 25th February 2005. The Act is significant as it deals with important issues related to the Khasi society and culture, viz;

a) Definition of who a Khasi is by tradition and law. This clarifies the identity of a Khasi as differentiated from other people.⁶⁰

b) The Act also specifies the concept and practice of *Tang-jait* and the role of the *kñi* in this traditional ceremony.⁶¹

c) This Act clarifies the criteria for a Khasi lineage like being born of a Khasi mother and following the Khasi custom and tradition. Observing the matrilineal system is considered as an indispensable criterion for a person to be considered a Khasi. In fact, the Act also mentions the criteria leading to the loss of Khasi status.⁶²

This Act is of great value and significance with respect to the preservation of the Khasi matrilineal system which is at the core of Khasi culture itself. The stability of this system ensures the relevance of the different traditional institutions like *kñi*-ship. Moreover, it also clearly defines the status and role of the *kñi* and *kpa* in a Khasi family.

b) *Village Administration Bill, 2011*

This was placed for discussion in the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) in 2011 but is yet to become an Act in order to become operative. The Bill as the name suggests, is meant to safeguard the traditional democratic administration of Khasi villages. The foreword to the Bill speaks about the value-based Khasi administrative system in contrast to the post-modern materialistic governance.⁶³ Some important and relevant aspects of the Bill are:

i) The Bill speaks about *Dorbar-shnong* (village council) and specifies the traditional role, powers and responsibilities of this council.⁶⁴

ii) In the section on election and nomination of the *rangbah-shnong* (headman), the Bill has made provisions to ensure that only Khasis are eligible to this post. In clause 7(b) it makes provision for a *kñi* or prominent member of a clan to assume the office of *rangbah-shnong*.⁶⁵

iii) The Bill has adequately specified the status, authority and responsibilities of the *rangbah-shnong*, *dorbar shnong* (village council) and the village development council.⁶⁶

This Bill in itself has got many positive aspects with regard to the status and authority of a Khasi man in society. By upholding the traditional role of the village democratic system, the Bill indirectly empowers the Khasi males who would either be a *kñi* or a *kpa* or both in any Khasi family or clan. This Bill which could become law in the near future, would have tremendous impact on the status and authority of the Khasi

males. It would at the same time safeguard the traditional patriarchal dimension of Khasi social system.

The above review of literature gives a bird's eye view of the problem under investigation. It is evident that the socio-cultural changes that the Khasi society is experiencing, especially the arrival of Christianity, modernization and the interaction with other cultures, has caused a lot of conflict between tradition and change.

1.7. METHODOLOGY OF THE PRESENT STUDY

To study the specific problem selected for this particular research on Khasi society, we have identified two villages as sample. To represent the rural Khasi population, Marbisu village has been identified while Mawlai-Mawroh has been chosen to represent the urban Khasi population. Marbisu has been deliberately chosen because of its sizable number of Khasis who still uphold the traditional religion. Mawroh on the other hand has been chosen to represent the urban Khasi population.

1.7.1. The Population

For collection of data different parameters are considered, namely: (i) age, (ii) sex, (iii) religion, (iv) education (v) socio-economic status.

Questionnaires were served on a total of 500 persons in Marbisu and 300 in Mawroh. However, only 397 (that is 79.4%) responded from Marbisu and 205 (that is

68.3%) from Mawroh. Therefore the total number of respondents for the present study is 602.

1.7.2. Profile of the Respondents

In order to secure the required results of the analysis, the profile of the respondents chosen for this study consists of the following:

a) Men-women distribution

Table 1.1 below provides us the man-woman distribution of respondents in both Marbisu and Mawroh. It is evident that the women respondents are more than the men respondents. In Marbisu out of the total of 397, 239 (60.2%) are women and 158 (39.8%) are men. In Mawroh out of the total 205 respondents, 133 (64.9%) are women while 72 (35.1%) are men. Thus, of the total sample population of 602 respondents, 372 (that is 61.8% of the total percentage) are women and 230 (that is 38.2% of the total percentage) are men.

Table 1.1 - Marbisu/Mawroh - Gender distribution of respondents

Villages	To whom the questionnaires were served		Men-women who responded to the questionnaire	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Marbisu	245 49.0	255 51.0	158 39.8	239 60.2
Mawroh	146 48.7	154 51.3	72 35.1	133 68.9
Total	391 48.9	409 51.1	230 38.2	372 61.8

b) Age

Table 1.2 gives us the age groups of the respondents. The respondents have been grouped under (i) 15 to 35, (ii) 36 to 55 and (iii) 56 and more. As the table indicates most of the respondents fall under the first age group. Thus of the total 602 respondents in both villages, 414 (68.8%) belong to the first age group, 128 (21.3%) belong to the second age group while 60 (9.9%) belong to the third age group.

Table 1.2 - Marbisu/Mawroh - Age of respondents

Villages	Age of respondents		
	15 - 35	36 - 55	56 and more
Marbisu	250 63.0	107 27.0	40 10.0
Mawroh	164 80.0	21 10.2	20 9.8
Total	414 68.8	128 21.3	60 9.9

c) Religion

Table 1.3 indicates the religious affinity of the respondents in both the localities. In both majority of the respondents are Christians, in Marbisu 325 (81.9%) are Christians and only 72 (18.1%) profess the traditional Khasi religion. In Mawroh instead, 191 (93.2%) are Christians and only 14 (6.8%) belong to the traditional religion. Thus of the total sample group of 602 respondents, 516 (85.7%) are Christians and 86 (14.3%) profess the traditional religion.

Table 1.3 - Marbisu/Mawroh - Religion of respondents

Villages	Religion of respondents	
	Christian	Traditional religion
Marbisu	325 81.9	72 18.1
Mawroh	191 93.2	14 6.8
Total	516 85.7	86 14.3

d) Education

Table 1.4 indicates the educational background of the respondents. The table shows that literacy is higher in Mawroh than in Marbisu. While post graduates and graduates of the total sample stands at 112 (28.2%), most of the respondents are in the category of higher secondary.

Table 1.4 - Marbisu/Mawroh - Educational qualifications of respondents

Villages	Educational Qualification of respondent					
	Post Graduation	Graduation	XI-XII	V-X	I-IV	Illiterate
Marbisu	8 2.0	69 17.4	85 21.4	135 34.0	68 17.1	32 8.1
Mawroh	10 4.9	26 12.7	108 52.7	44 21.5	8 3.9	9 4.4
Total	17 2.8	95 15.8	193 32.1	179 29.8	76 12.6	41 6.8

e) Occupation

Table 1.5 indicates the occupations of the respondents in both localities. The total number of government employees is 54 (9.0%), those engaged in business are 58 (9.6%), the farmers number 56 (9.3%). Those engaged in other types of work form the majority of the respondents, 434 persons (72.1%).⁶⁷

Table 1.5 - Marbisu/Mawroh - Occupation of respondents

Villages	Occupation of the respondents			
	Govt. Employee	Business	Farmer	Others
Marbisu	31 7.8	54 13.6	39 9.8	273 68.8
Mawroh	23 11.2	4 2.0	17 8.3	161 78.5
Total	54 9.0	58 9.6	56 9.3	434 72.1

1.7.3. Tools used

In pursuing the research and in collecting the required data, the following tools were employed by the investigator:

- 1) Questionnaire
- 2) Interview schedule

1.7.4. Data Collection

Step I – Formulating the first draft of the Questionnaire

In formulating the questionnaire, first of all, the researcher had recourse to an open blue sky method wherein questions were noted at random keeping in mind the theme of the research. After this, they were grouped together under various sub-themes. This was followed by the process of shortlisting wherein inappropriate questions were rejected. Finally, 64 questions were selected and were grouped under 6 sub titles. The sub-titles which are as follows:

- I. Biodata (7 questions)
- II. Image of the *kñi* among the Khasis (12 questions)
- III. Status of the *kñi* today (15 questions)
- IV. Role of the *kñi* today (9 questions)
- V. Status of the *kpa* today (14 questions)
- VI. Role of the *kpa* today (7 questions)

Each question had options for respondents. Sections II, III and V had three response options (Agree, Disagree and Can't Say). Sections IV and VI had three response options (Always, Seldom, Never). Therefore the questionnaire was a closed-ended one. The questionnaire was prepared in Khasi to enable all respondents to understand it properly.

Step II – Seeking experts’ opinion on the Questionnaire

When the first draft of the questionnaire was prepared as described above, it was given to three experts to obtain their opinions. The feedback in general was positive but it was suggested to reduce the number of questions from 64 to 58. As per this suggestion, the questions in each section were reduced as follows:

- I. Biodata (7 questions)
- II. Image of the *kñi* among the Khasis (11 questions)
- III. Status of the *kñi* today (14 questions)
- IV. Role of the *kñi* today (8 questions)
- V. Status of the *kpa* today (12 questions)
- VI. Role of the *kpa* today (6 questions)

This second draft was then approved by the research guide and the final draft was prepared for use.

Step III – Trial of the Questionnaire

This second draft of the questionnaire was then used on a trial basis. It was served to 20 persons (10 in Marbisu and 10 in Mawroh). The trial was meant to ascertain the validity, comprehensibility and relevance of the questionnaire. The result indicated that all the three criteria were satisfactorily met. The responses indicated that they understood the questions accurately.

Step IV – Final draft of the Questionnaire

Based on the outcome of the trial round, the questionnaire was finalized. Four questions were found to be redundant and so they were deleted from the list. The final questionnaire had 54 questions as follow:

- I. Biodata (7 questions)
- II. Image of the *kñi* among the Khasis (10 questions)
- III. Status of the *kñi* today (13 questions)
- IV. Role of the *kñi* today (7 questions)
- V. Status of the *kpa* today (11 questions)
- VI. Role of the *kpa* today (6 questions)

ii) Interview Schedule

Regarding the interview schedule, the investigator had prepared a schedule consisting of 22 questions. The details of the schedule are given in Table 1.6 below:

Table 1.6 – Category of Questions

Category of questions	Number
1. Questions on <i>Kñi</i>	7
2. Questions on <i>Kñi synrop</i> (classificatory uncles)	5
3. Questions on <i>Kpa</i> (father)	6
4. Questions on <i>Kpa synrop</i> (classificatory fathers)	4
Total no. of Questions	22

The interview schedule was prepared both in Khasi and English. It was intended for oral as well as written responses.

1.8. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

a) Since the problem under investigation is an on-going socio-cultural reality, it is impossible to reach at a definitive conclusion. Therefore, this study cannot claim to make a final call on the issue. However, it throws sufficient light on this cultural phenomenon that the Khasi society is going through.

b) The study is limited to two sample localities, Marbisu and Mawlai-Mawroh, a few selected Khasi eminent persons, a few indigenous cultural movements: *Seng Khasi*, *Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai* and *Maitshaphrang Movement* and also the legal documents on issues related to Khasi family lineage and inheritance procured from the *Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC)*.

c) Since this problem has not been dealt extensively by anyone so far, except for a few indirect references to it, there is a limitation of available resources which could have helped to deepen our understanding of the issue. Therefore, much of the data collected have come from field research by way of responses to questionnaires and interviews.

NOTES

- ¹ Cf. H. O. Mawrie, *Ka Longing Longsem u Khun Khasi Khara*. Shillong: Tmissilda Soh, 1983, 93.
- ² Richard A. Dello Buono, "Patriarchy versus Matriarchy", in Frank H. Magill (ed.) *International Encyclopedia of Sociology*, vol. 2. New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd., 2000, 923.
- ³ J. War, "The Khasi Concept of Family: Changes in Structure and Function", in P. M. Chacko (ed.) *Matriliny in Meghalaya: Tradition and Change*. New Delhi: Regency Publications, 1998.
- ⁴ S. Sngi Lyngdoh, "The Khasi Matriline: Its Past and Its Future", in P. M. Chacko (ed.) *Matriliny in Meghalaya: Tradition and Change*.
- ⁵ Cf. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1997, 404.
- ⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*
- ⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 405.
- ⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 286.
- ⁹ Cf. P. R. T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1975, 78-79.
- ¹⁰ Dello Buono, "Patriarchy versus Matriarchy", in Frank H. Magill (ed.) *International Encyclopedia of Sociology*, vol. 2, 923.
- ¹¹ Cf. C. Nakane, *Garo and Khasi: A Comparative Study in Matrilineal Systems*. Paris: Mouton & Co., 1967, 125.
- ¹² Cf. *Ibid.*, 126.
- ¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 129.
- ¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 130.
- ¹⁵ Cf. H.O. Mawrie, *Khasi Millieu* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1981) p. 70.
- ¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 71.
- ¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 72.
- ¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 65.
- ¹⁹ Cf. H. O. Mawrie, *Ka Longing Longsem u Khun Khasi Khara*. Nongkrem: Tmissilda Soh, 1983, 93-95.
- ²⁰ Cf. P. Das Gupta, *Life and Culture of Marilineal Tribe of Meghalaya*, 81.
- ²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 84.
- ²² Cf. Norbert N. Nongrum, *Ka Maiñ u Shynrang Khasi*. Mawkyrwat: Nativity Parish, 1989, 5.
- ²³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 6.
- ²⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 10.
- ²⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 18.
- ²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 27.
- ²⁷ Cf. J. War, "Status of women in traditional Khasi culture", in S. Sen (ed.) *Women in Meghalaya*. Delhi: Daya Publishing House, 1992, 16.
- ²⁸ Cf. I. M. Syiem, "Women in Khasi Society", in S. Sen (ed.) *Women in Meghalaya*, 23.
- ²⁹ Cf. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, 301-302.
- ³⁰ Cf. J. War, "The Khasi Concept of Family: Changes in structure and function" in P. M. Chacko (ed.) *Matriliny in Meghalaya: Tradition and Change*, 18-25.
- ³¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-29.
- ³² Cf. S. Sngi Lyngdoh, "The Khasi Matriline: Its Past and its Future", in *Matriliny in Meghalaya*, 32-34.
- ³³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 41.
- ³⁴ Cf. A. Mawlong, "Some aspects of Change in the Family System of the Khasis", in *Matriliny in Meghalaya*, 85-86.
- ³⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.
- ³⁶ Cf. P. Passah, "Changes in the matrilineal system of Khasi-Jaintia Family", in *Matriliny in Meghalaya*, 74-75.
- ³⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 76-78.
- ³⁸ Cf. O. L. Snaitang, "The impact of Christianity on the Khasi-Jaintia matrilineal family", in *Matriliny in Meghalaya*, 55-58.
- ³⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 67.
- ⁴⁰ Cf. Donna L. Leonetti, D. C. Nath & N. S. Hemam., "In-law conflicts", Women's reproductive lives and the roles of their mothers and husbands among the matrilineal Khasi", in *Current Anthropology*, 48(2007), 863.
- ⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 864.
- ⁴² Cf. K. Rapphap, *Ka jingbymneh spah bad ka Kheijijait*. Shillong: Khasi Book Parlour, 2005, 53.
- ⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 45-47.

⁴⁵ R. Kharkrang, *Matriliny on the March: A closer look at the family system, past and present of the Khasis in Meghalaya*. Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 2012, 96.

⁴⁶ Cf. W. Tiewsoh, *Kam Kalbut*. Shillong: Ri-Khasi Book Agency, 2009, 6.

⁴⁷ Cf. K. W. Nongrum, *Balei Tang Ia I Thei?* Vol. I. Shillong: K.W. Nongrum, 1988, 4-6.

⁴⁸ Cf. K. W. Nongrum, *Balei Tang Ia I Thei?* Vol. II. Shillong: K.W. Nongrum, 1988, 73.

⁴⁹ Cf. S. Synrem, *Ki Palong ka Jingbiej*. Shillong: Ri Khasi Book Agency, 1986, 10.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 58-59.

⁵¹ Cf. Sten, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut.*, Shillong: H. W. Sten, 1989, 20-21.

⁵² Cf. L. H. Pde, *Tang maphi khun baieid*. Shillong: L. H. Pde, 1991, 113-114.

⁵³ Cf. A. Jala, *Haba ka kupar-jot ka dawa*. Shillong: Ri Khasi Book Agency, 2010, 39-42.

⁵⁴ Cf. L. H. Pde, *Yn Map?*. Shillong: L. H. Pde, 1987, 2-4.

⁵⁵ S. Dkhar, *U Banlum bad ka Baia*. Shillong: J. S. Dkhar, 2002, 69/

⁵⁶ Cited in R. Kharkrang, *Matriliny on the March*, 131-132.

⁵⁷ Cf. P. Passah, "Changes in the matrilineal system of Khasi-Jaintia family", in *Matriliny in Meghalaya*, 77.

⁵⁸ Cf. Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai, *Constitution of the Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai*. Shillong: SRT, 1990, 2-3.

⁵⁹ cf. "Dawa ka Mait Shaphrang na ki MLA ban wanrah aia shongkha shongman", in *Mawphor* (November 27, 2009),

3.

⁶⁰ Cf. KHADC, *Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act 1997* in *The Gazette of Meghalaya*, no. 22 (Shillong, February 25, 2005), 4.

⁶¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶³ Cf. Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC), "Foreword" to the Draft of *The Village Administration Bill*, 2011. Shillong: KHADC, 2011, 2.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 5-11.

⁶⁷ This group consists of persons employed as teachers and daily wagers like masons, building workers, cleaners etc.

CHAPTER 2

The Socio-Cultural Fabric of Khasi Society

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The Khasis¹ form one of the predominant tribes of Northeast India. They are found in the eastern portion of the state of Meghalaya, in the present districts of East and West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi and Jaiñtia Hills. They are a group of people who belong to the Mon-Khmer linguistic family. They migrated to the present location hundreds of years ago. Due to the absence of written history, nothing is known with accuracy about their past life. Much of what we know about them has come down through oral tradition in folktales, legends and songs.

The Khasis, as an ethnic group, differ in many aspects from the other tribes of Northeast India. R. T. Rymbai, a well-known Khasi author, says that “the Khasis are an island by themselves”.² Their language, culture, dress and physical features are quite distinct from other tribes in the region. They are by nature a mountainous tribe and they live in isolated pockets of the region. As a consequence of this geographical isolation, a number of dialects were created among them. They have a religion of their own known as *Ka Niam Khasi* (Khasi Religion). The history of their religion and culture is surrounded by numerous legends, myths and folk-tales. These legends were handed down from one generation to the next through oral tradition until the second half of the 19th century when they adopted the Roman script and began to preserve their cultural heritage in black and white.³ One of the notable aspects of the Khasis is their political life which is intricately woven into their socio-cultural and

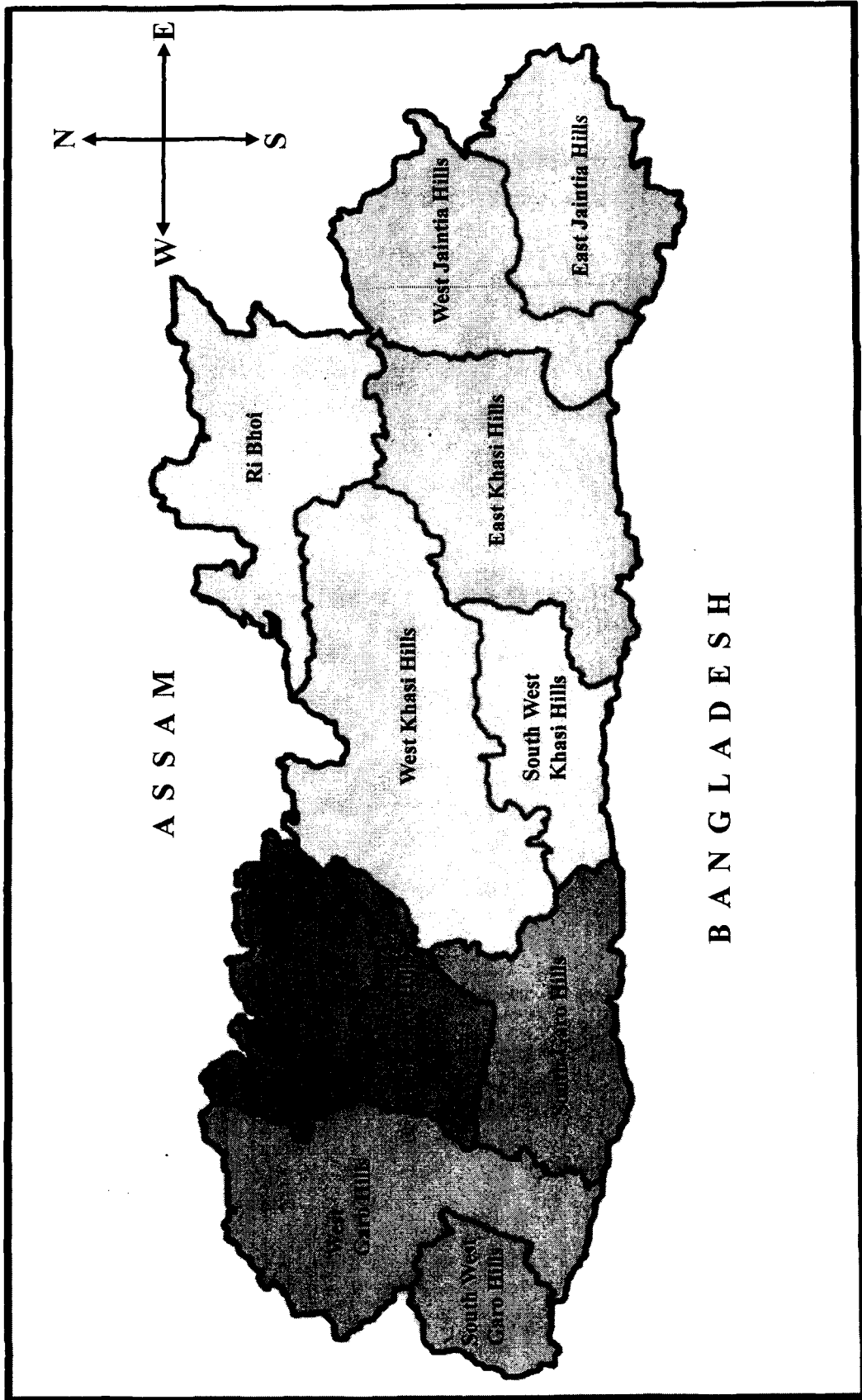
religious life. This has helped them to preserve their own political system up to this day.⁴

2.2. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

The Khasi and Jaiñtia Hills districts together occupy an area of 14,117 sq. km, that is about two thirds of the entire state of Meghalaya.⁵ To the North of Khasi and Jaiñtia Hills lie the plains of Assam, in the West lie the Garo Hills and in the South lies Bangladesh. To the East of Jaiñtia Hills lie Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam. This region is characterized by a wide variety of terrain. In the southern part, the hills are high and they form deep gorges which act as a natural boundary with Bangladesh. This region is usually referred to as the War area. In the central part is situated the Shillong plateau composed of the oldest Archean rock formation.⁶ This part is referred to as the Nongphlang (grassland) region. Towards the north, the hills ebb away into the plains of Assam. This region forms the so-called Bhoi region which has a climate similar to that of the plains of Assam. The summers are very warm while the winters are severe.

The western region of the Khasi Hills is popularly known as the Maharam (Maram) and Lyngngam region. The Jaiñtia Hills district is situated in the eastern part and it is still the largest district. The whole region of Khasi and Jaiñtia Hills has a network of rivers and rivulets which criss-cross between hills and valleys. Almost all these rivers have their origin in the central plateau. Most of them flow to Bangladesh in the south while others flow to the north and join the great Brahmaputra in Assam. Some of the biggest, well known and legendary rivers are:

Fig. 2.1 - DISTRICT MAP OF MEGHALAYA



Ka Umiam, Ka Umngot, Ka Umkhen, Ka Kynshi, Ka Umkhen in Khasi Hills and Ka Myntdu, Ka Kupli in the Jaiñtia Hills.⁷

Besides their traditional habitat in the Khasi and Jaiñtia Hills, there are some pockets of Khasi settlement in the state of Assam and also along the Bangladesh border. The Khasi population found in the four districts of East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi and Jaiñtia Hills districts, is approximately 1.5 million. The largest part of the population is found in East Khasi Hills district especially in the urban area of Shillong and its periphery.

According to the census of 2011, the population in the four districts is as shown in the following table:⁸

Table 2.1 – Population Distribution in Khasi & Jaintia Hills

Districts	Area	Male		Female		Total
		Pop	%	Pop	%	
East Khasi Hills	2820 sq. km	410360	49.8	413699	50.2	824059
West Khasi Hills	5247 sq. km	194628	50.5	190973	49.5	385601
Jaiñtia Hills	3819 sq. km	195641	49.8	197211	50.2	392852
Ri Bhoi	2448 sq. km	132445	51.3	125935	48.7	258380

2.3. KHASIS AND THEIR SUB-GROUPS

The Khasis as a tribe is composed of many sub-groups, divided principally on ground of geographical factors. In the past, each group lived almost independently

from the rest. The absence of a common language also added to this sense of dependence and cultural isolation. Today with the influence of education and globalization a great sense of unity and common identity has emerged. However, these sub-groups still exist. These sub-groups are the following:

a) The Nongphlang or Khyntiam

This sub-group of Khasis is found in the central region of the Khasi Hills in the Shillong plateau region. A large portion of this population is concentrated in the city of Shillong. They speak Khasi.⁹ Their main occupation is cultivation¹⁰ although in the urban area many are employed in government offices or in other urban-based occupations.

b) The Marams and Lyngngams

These sub-groups of Khasis are found in the western part of the Khasi Hills. The Marams live in the old Maharam kingdom. The Lyngngams on the other hand are a little distinct from the Marams. They are a sub-group of Khasis who have been influenced to a great extent, by the Garos in both their language and culture.¹¹

c) The Bhois

This sub-group of Khasis inhabit the northern part of the Khasi Hills in the region of Nongpoh, Umsning, Mawbri, Byrnihat, Umkador etc. This region is adjacent to the plains of Assam and the climate is warmer than in the central plateau of Khasi and

Jaintia Hills.¹² The people speak a dialect of their own called 'Bhoi dialect' which has many elements of Pnar dialect and they have their own socio-cultural practices.¹³ The Bhois in the early years were nomadic in character and they loved to shift their habitation from place to place.¹⁴ In the Bhoi area there is another sub-group known as the Marngar who have tried to associate themselves with the Khasis. They are actually a hybrid group resulting from mixed marriages between the Bhois and the Rabhas.¹⁵

d) The Jaiñtias or Pnars

They are found in the Jaiñtia Hills district. According to some legends, the Pnars migrated from Bhoi region.¹⁶ This group has maximum influence from the people of the plains. This is seen in the elements of their religion, in their dresses and in their customs. They speak a dialect called Pnar or Synteng.¹⁷ Their main occupation is agriculture.¹⁸ However, in the last few decades, coal mining has become a major occupation for many of them.

e) The War

Among the War people, the Khasis make a distinction between the War of Khasi Hills and those of Jaiñtia Hills. The former group is generally called War Khasi, while the latter group is referred to as War Synteng. The Wars are found mainly in the southern part of both Khasi and Jaiñtia Hills along the border of Bangladesh. They have assimilated a lot of elements from the plains. They speak a dialect of their own which is rather difficult to understand for other sub-groups of Khasis. They live

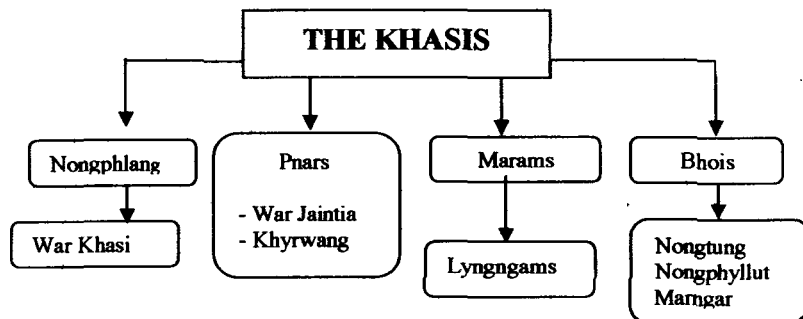
by plantations of areca nut, betel leaf, spices, fruits etc and also by trading with Bangladesh.

f) The Nongtung, Nongphyllut and Khyrwang

The Nongtung are found mostly in the northern part of Ri Bhoi bordering the Assam district of Karbi Anglong. The other two groups are found mostly in North Jaiñtia bordering Karbi Anglong. Some villages fall under Block I, Block II areas constituted after Independence and they are still under Assam today.¹⁹ Of late, two such villages have been discovered in the Tamenglong district of Manipur.²⁰ The people there live by cultivation, plantation, timber lumbering as well as by trade.

Fig. 2.2 below gives us a clearer idea about the various sub-groups of the Khasi people. As indicated the Nongphlang, Pnars, Marams and the Bhois form the principal sub-groups. Among the War people, those of Khasi Hills are to be differentiated from those of Jaiñtia Hills.

Figure 2.2 - The Khasis and their Sub-Groups



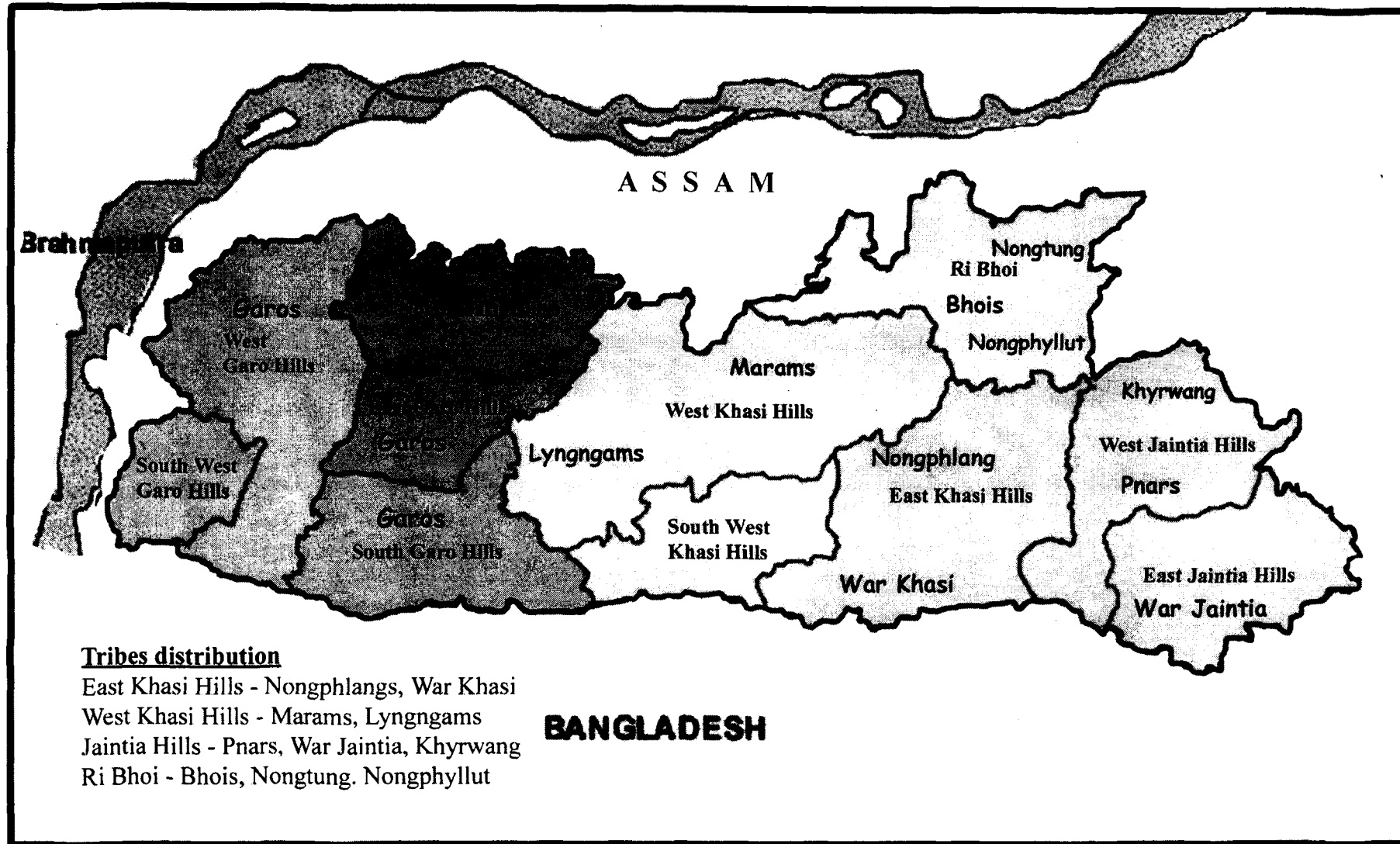
Some authors like Hamlet Bareh have mentioned only four sub-groups, namely, the Khyriams, Pnars, Bhois and the Wars.²¹ This division is however too simple and generic. The term Khyriam actually is a generic name given to people residing in the Khasi Hills (East, West Khasi Hills and Ri Bhoi). The common identity of these groups is traditionally associated with their common origin, namely, that they belong to the family of U Hynñiew-trep hynñiew-skum (the seven families). The most evident attempt at separation has been between the Khasis of Khasi Hills district and the Pnars of Jaintia Hills. Today however, some enlightened people have come out to sort out such misconceived differences and to emphasize their common identity.²²

It is the opinion of many scholars that the term Khasi is applicable to all sub-groups mentioned above. The distinction is only territorial. The differences in dialects, economy, social usage and political organization are due to ecological and politico-historical conditions of the groups. However, they share the same origin, language, social structure and culture.²³

2.4. ORIGIN OF THE KHASIS

The Khasis as a people do not quite know about their history except for the popular legends that have been passed on. In fact, nothing is known about their history prior to the arrival of the British. Their political history was known only from around 1500 AD and that too written by the British colonialists.²⁴ The Modern ethnologists and anthropologists are quite perplexed about the origin of this people. According to

Fig. 2.3 - Anthropological Map of Meghalaya



many contemporary scholars, the Khasis seemed to have reached these hills hundreds of years ago. However, their origin is actually shrouded in mystery.

The reason for this is the fact that they have no written history about themselves. The absence of a written script has made them dependent on oral tradition for centuries in the past.²⁵ Many of the facts that we come to know about them have come to us through oral tradition. Much of the historical facts about the people have been buried in myths and folk stories. Today one needs to go deep into their mythology and folklore in order to establish certain historical data about the people. It is commonly affirmed by scholars that cultural elements of a group, such as their folklore, contain certain historical data about their existence in the past. If we are able to piece together these stories and folktales, we may be able to build up a rather comprehensive history of the people.²⁶ The foremost Khasi poet and philosopher, U Soso Tham has rightly pointed out in his poem “Ki Symboh Ksiar” (Golden Grains), that much of Khasi history can be gathered from their stories and legends embodied in nature.²⁷

2.4.1. Theory of Divine Origin of the Khasis

Although not much credibility can be placed on this theory, yet it is still the most popular theory among the people themselves. Every Khasi believes that he or she has been put by God Himself on these hills and that it is part of the divine plan and not a matter of chance, that he/she has come into this world. The legend or myth connected with this has been handed down to them since time immemorial and it has become an important part of the people’s creed.²⁸ Khasi religious tradition holds that the

Khathynriew-trep khathynriew-skum (sixteen families=symbolic of mankind), were created by God in heaven and not anywhere on earth.²⁹ The popular myth that is connected with this belief is given below.

Myth of the Ki Hynñiew-trep Hynñiew-skum (Seven families)

The most popular myth about the origin of the Khasis, is one that tells us about the existence of a golden ladder (*Jingkieng ksiar*) on the peak of Sohpet Bneng (heaven's navel).³⁰ It is said that in the beginning there were no human beings on the earth. However there existed sixteen families in heaven. At the request of Mother Earth to send someone to look after her and the whole creation, God finally decided to send seven of those families (*Hynñiew-trep*) to earth while the other nine remained on in heaven.³¹ He planted a giant tree on Sohpet Bneng peak which acted as a ladder between heaven and earth.³² Every day the seven families would descend down the tree and cultivate the land. In the evening they would ascend the tree and go back to their heavenly abode. These seven families are said to be the ancestors of the Khasis. For this reason the Khasis are also known as the *Hynñiew-trep Hynñiew-skum* (seven huts). Finally the seven families chose to remain on earth once and for all and God appointed them stewards over the whole earth.³³

Although this account of the origin of the Khasis is only a popular legend, yet it has some socio-cultural values in it. Socio-culturally this legend would imply that the Khasis had been put on these hills by God Himself to live together as a single family. The seven huts (*hynñiew-trep hynñiew-skum*) came down to earth as a family to live and work together, to share the same belief and aspirations and to follow the

same customs and social behaviour. This would therefore explain why there exists, among the Khasis, a very strong social bond and a deep sense of community. The eschatological belief of the Khasis is also based on this belief of divine origin from the sixteen huts. Therefore at death, they believe that the person goes back to his/her heavenly abode from where he/she originated and joined the other nine huts (*khyndai-trep khyndai-skum*).³⁴

Besides the above, there are some theological significances in this story. Theologically, it points to the fact that the Khasis originated from God Himself and that they did not appear here on earth by chance. It also shows that the Khasis see themselves as children of the Almighty from the beginning of creation and that human beings were created first in heaven and not on earth. It also tells us that it is God's design that they should remain here on earth to be the keepers of his creation. Thus stewardship is seen here as a divine mandate.

This theory of origin may not be scientifically explainable, however it still remains a popular theory among the Khasis. The fact that ancient remains on Sohpet Bneng peak, like foot prints on stones and the existence of an ancient altar of stones, indicate that it was a frequented place from time immemorial. This must have been the reason why origin of the people is traced to this sacred peak. Besides this, such divine origin stories are common among most people like the myth of the Eden Garden for the Jews. More than just indicating their origin, such stories are fabricated to create a sense of awe and sacredness around the community which is important for enhancing the identity and integrity of the group.

2.4.2. Contemporary Theories of Origin of the Khasis

Since the beginning of the 19th century there have been a lot of researches done on the origin of the Khasis from scientific and historical perspectives. Such initiatives were taken by the British scholars like Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, P. R. T. Gurdon and many others. Many of those scholars have come out with their findings which seem to offer some kind of answer to the myth of origin of the Khasis. For the sake of convenience, we may group these theories under three categories according to the concurrences of opinions:

a) Theory of Migration: Khasi-Mon Khmer connection

Many scholars affirm that the Khasis originated from Southeast Asia, more specifically from southern China.³⁵ They arrived here via the Patkoi range in Burma (modern Myanmar). The first person to make such an observation was Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, an eminent Botanist, who happened to be the first European to travel into the interior parts of Khasi Hills in 1852. His immediate observation was that the Khasis show a close affinity to the Indo-Chinese family and that their speech has all the similarities of the Indo-Chinese languages especially that of the Mon Khmer.³⁶ Other scholars like J. R. Logan and P. Schmidt opine that linguistically the Khasis can be linked to the great Mon Khmer family in the East and to the Mundari speaking family in the West.³⁷ Another opinion holds that the Khasis came from Southeast Asia and first settled down in the Sylhet plains of Bangladesh. However due to the constant floods and natural calamities, they gradually moved up to the hills to their present domain.³⁸ Another current opinion holds that the Khasis came from

Burma. Due to some political reasons, the Khasis fled from Burma through the Patkoi range and finally reached these hills.³⁹ The political connection with Burma was still maintained for many years after, whereby the Khasi kings would send an annual tribute to the Burmese kings in the form of an axe. This was a sign of their submission to the authority of the latter and to the political connection that existed between them.⁴⁰

Some of the well-known writers and scholars like P. R. T. Gurdon, J. R. Logan, Dr. Grierson and J. A. Anderson subscribed to the view that the Khasis originated from somewhere in Southeast Asia from the region of Cambodia. According to them the Khasis belong to the Mon-Khmer people of Cambodia. They asserted that many features of the Khasis - the physical appearance, language and customs - bear great resemblance to those of the *Khmer* people.⁴¹ However, regarding the migration of the Khasis to these hills, no historical evidence is available. Thus J. A. Anderson holds the opinion that the Khasis were the first groups of Mon-Khmer race to have reached this region.⁴²

This Mon-Khmer connection theory has been in circulation for many years since the beginning of the 20th century. It is still the most acceptable theory of origin of the Khasis among the people today. Further researches are being undertaken by scholars to confirm this aspect of Khasi history.

b) Theory of Khasi-Munda Connection

This theory was first propagated by Walter G. Griffith. The theory holds that the Khasis have affinities with the Mundas of the Chotanagpur plateau.⁴³ According to

Griffith, the Mundas were the original settlers in central India. However, when the Dravidian and Aryan invasions took place some of them were forced to disperse to places as far as the Northeast and they settled down in the plains of Assam. The Khasis are a branch from this group who gradually moved up to the hills, to their present habitat. According to Griffith there are linguistic affinities between the two groups.⁴⁴ This theory was supported by the research of P. Schmidt who put the Khasis and the Mundas in the same Austro-Asiatic family.⁴⁵ Other modern scholars have discovered many other similarities between the two. The funeral ceremonies, the veneration of the dead, the use of stone monuments and the interment of the bones of both the groups are very much similar.⁴⁶ Some DNA studies in 2007 done in collaboration with the Department of Anthropology of North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), have confirmed the same ethnic origin of the Khasis and the Mundas. The studies also show that the Khasis have a common paternal heritage with the other Austroasiatic populations of Southeast Asia. Going by their conclusions, the Khasis therefore reached these hills in the pre-historic age.⁴⁷

This theory has generated much interest in the field of research among many modern anthropologists and social scientists. As for now, nothing for certain has been established regarding the common origin of the Khasis. However, this question is still open to further research and study.

c) Other theories

This section consists of a collection of theories which differ from the above two. Thus, according to Gait, the Khasis have so many unique aspects in their language

and culture that they do not find any similarity with their neighbouring cultures. In his opinion, the Khasis reached these hills as early as the pre-historic time. Homiwell Lyngdoh, a well-known Khasi scholar, is of the opinion that the Khasis migrated from the north and not from the south. According to him, the Khasis came from western China through the Himalayas and settled down in Nowgong, Lumding and Haflong. The fact that the Khasis have their own name for the Himalayas which they call *Ki Makashang*, according to him, indicates that they were settlers at the foot of these mountains long before they migrated to their present habitat.⁴⁸ Trombetti opines that the Khasis were originally Negroids nearer to the Dravidians, but due to Mongolian strains some racial transformations took place.⁴⁹

Khasi written history started only as late as the 19th century, when the Roman script was given to them by the renowned Methodist missionary, Rev. Thomas Jones around the year 1842.⁵⁰ From this period onward, books in the Khasi language were written and cultural heritage (folklore, stories and legends, historical events etc) began to be preserved in writing. However, some historical facts about Khasi kingdoms can also be found in the written history of the Koch and Ahom kingdoms of Assam. One fact that remains undisputed among the scholars today is the historical indication that the Khasis arrived on these hills very early in history, long before the appearance of the Ahoms. According to some scholars, the Khasis were the earliest inhabitants in this region after the complete disappearance of the Negrito race which seemed to have occupied this region earlier.⁵¹ Much of Khasi history lies in their oral tradition. According to the great Khasi poet, U Soso Tham, this history can be unravelled from the oral tradition of the people.⁵²

2.5. SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Socio-politically the Khasis are quite advanced in comparison to some other tribes. They possess a very distinctive political system which is highly democratic and federalistic in its character. They have a very strong democratic sense since centuries past. Their socio-political organization can be termed as a “democratic monarchy”. This implies that the Khasis are ruled by kings (Syiems) who actually function as democratic heads and never as absolute monarchs. This socio-political heritage is still being zealously preserved today.

The political institution of the Khasis clearly demonstrates that it is a patriarchal society where men take control of the affairs of the village or state and women are confined to domestic roles. It is important to understand this aspect in the context of the present study which deals with the changing roles of the *kñi* and the *kpa* in Khasi society.

2.5.1. Political Institutions of Authority

Khasi democratic organization can be described as simple but functional. Khasi democracy can be described in two phases, namely, early democracy and the contemporary democracy.

a) Early Democratic Institution

In the early Khasi society, there was no monarchy. It was in the *Dorbar-blei Balai* (Third Divine Assembly) at Sumer valley, west of Sohpet Bneng, that this political

institution was established. This was the original political system of the Khasis as we shall discuss below.

i) *Tymmen-shnong* (Village Elders)

In the beginning the Khasi villages were governed by the *Tymmen-shnong*. By tradition these elders would act as the administrators of law and order in the villages on behalf of the people.⁵³ These *Tymmen-shnong* were dispensers of justice in their own little villages. However, they ruled the people by words and arguments (*ka ktien* or *ka nia*) and never by force or might.⁵⁴ The source of their authority lay in their wisdom and in their moral ascendancy.

ii) *Lyngdoh-synshar* (Ruling Priests)

In the course of history many villages through the principle of social contract, came together to form the so-called *Hima Lyngdoh* (Realm of Priests). The *Lyngdoh-synshar* (ruling priests) were elected to rule over these territories.⁵⁵ The *Lyngdoh-synshar* issued rules which were considered *ki hukum* (commandments) and which were adhered to meticulously. There was great order, peace and prosperity and so there was no need of *U Tangon-U Lymban* (police) and no *phatok* or *along* (jails). There was no such thing as a physical punishment. The *Lyngdoh-synshar* ruled over the *Hima* and he was assisted by his *Dorbar* (council) and *Ki Bakhraw-batri* (noble men).

iii) *Ki syiem* or *Raja* (kings)

In many cases in the past when there were many criminals to be punished since the *Lyngdoh-bishar* would not like to inflict physical punishment on their people, they invited strong men from the plains (*ki dkhar*) to do this job on their behalf. These were the first *tangon-lymban* (police) among the Khasis. They were invested with the noble title *Ki Syiem* or *ki Raja* (kings). While the *Lyngdoh-bishar* were the real rulers of the *Hima* (territory), the *Syiems* (kings) were the ones administering order and discipline in the *Hima*. It is for this reason that among the Khasis, the *Syiem* has no right over the life or property of their subjects.⁵⁶

2.5.2. Contemporary Democratic Institution

From the eleventh century onward, kingship gradually became a popular form of political organization. With the arrival of the British, this political system of the plains gained dominance. The present political system of the Khasis is a blend of foreign elements with the traditional Khasi system.

a) The *Syiem* (Kings or Chiefs of the kingdoms)

The Khasi Jaiñtia Hills consisted of many kingdoms ruled by kings or chiefs. In the beginning there was only one king, U Mailong Raja, who stayed at Madur Maskut. His kingdom included the whole of Khasi and Jaiñtia Hills and extended into the plains. For better administration, Mailong Raja appointed his brother, U Niang Raja as the ruler of the plains. The Khasi and Jaiñtia Hills were ruled by the *Syiem*

Shillong (Shillong Kingdom) and Syiem Synteng (Jaiñtia kingdom) respectively. These kings were subjugated to Madur Maskut.⁵⁷ Each of these kingdoms traced their origin to some divine or totemic elements. For this reason these *Syiems* (kings) are known as *Syiem-Blei* (divine kings) on account of their unnatural origins.⁵⁸ The Madur Maskut kings traced their origin from a pig. Their most legendary king was U Kyllong Raja. He is said to have had divine power so that no one could kill him until finally his wife betrayed him. The Jaiñtia kings instead traced their origin from a fish-fairy called Ka Li Dohkha.⁵⁹ The Shillong kings on the other hand traced their origin to a divine ancestress named Ka Pah Syntiew (one enticed by flowers) who was the daughter of U 'Lei Shillong (Shillong deity).⁶⁰

On account of the dispute regarding succession, the Shillong Syiemship was split into two kingdoms in 1858, the Khyrim Syiemship which has control over the central region and the Myllem Syiemship which controls some parts of central Khasi Hills. Shillong Syiemship is probably the most well-known kingdom in Khasi and Jaiñtia Hills.⁶¹ In Jaiñtia Hills, the Jaiñtia Syiemship included the whole of Jaiñtia Hills and some places in the border of Assam and Bangladesh.

Besides the above Syiem-blei, there are also what are known as *ki Syiem-briew* (human kings) and *ki Syiem-mraw* (slave kings). The former are so called because they became kings after being elected by the people and not by inheritance. Examples of such kings are Ki Syiem Sohra (Sohra kings), Ki Syiem Nongkhlaw (Nongkhlaw kings) etc. Ki Syiem Mraw (slave kings) are so called not because they were slaves, but because they were people brought from other places and made kings. Most of these kings were Dkhar (non Khasis) from the plains or Khasi brought from other kingdoms. The Mawiang kings have originated in this manner.

The king in Khasi society is democratically elected by the people usually from the royal clans.⁶² He is *de facto* nominal head of the state vested with limited political, juridical and administrative powers. The Khasi king is never an absolute monarch or a dictator. He cannot levy taxes on people's land or property since land is the absolute property of certain clans, villages or individuals.⁶³ Democracy is above a ruler and everything that has to be decided has to be done democratically. The Khasi kings, unlike other rulers, have no need of a standing army because every male subject in his kingdom is a potential warrior.⁶⁴ They do not accumulate wealth for themselves, because whatever they need their subjects provide them with.⁶⁵ The King is assisted by a council of ministers called the *Myntri* (ministers).⁶⁶ These *myntris* traditionally come from particular clans who assume the right of inheritance to such a political status.

b) The *Lyngdoh-synshar*⁶⁷/*Doloi* (Governing Priests)

In spite of the prevalence of Kingship, the traditional Hima Lyngdoh still exists in some regions. The *Lyngdoh-synshar* in Khasi Hills or the *Doloi* in Jaiñtia Hills, continue to be rulers of these political regions. These rulers usually belong to particular clans and succeed to the post by heredity. The selection of these rulers is not known to us for it dates back to history. However, it is assumed that they had been selected by a popular agreement, may be because of certain feats that the members of their clans had performed. According to the 1876 census, the Khasi states of Lynthong, Mawphlang, Nonglwai and Sohiong were presided over by the *Lyngdoh-synshar*.⁶⁸ In Jaiñtia Hills, instead, there are twelve *Dolois* who rule over

twelve regions. These act as administrative and juridical heads of the *Ilaka* (region).⁶⁹ Thus Jaiñtia Hills is known as “*ka Ri Khatar Doloï*” (land of 12 *Dolois*). Sajar Niangli, the great Jaiñtia army general who dug the Thadlaskein lake on the way to Jowai, was the *Doloï* of Raliang.⁷⁰ He was the most well-known and the most powerful *Doloï* that ever reigned in the Jaiñtia Hills.

c) The *Sordar/Lyngshkor/Pator or Basan* (Regional Administrators)

Every Khasi estate is usually divided according to administrative units called *Raid* (regions). Each *Raid* consists of a number of villages within the same region. The administrative head over each *Raid* is called *Sordar/Lyngshkor/Basan* in Khasi Hills and *Pator* in Jaiñtia Hills.⁷¹ He is in turn assisted by some collaborators. *Lyngshkor*-ship is not a hereditary post but he is elected by the body of *Rangbah-shnong* (village headmen) on the basis of qualifications and experience. The *Sordars/Lyngshkors/Pators* or *Basans* are not only administrative heads in their *raid*, but they are also juridical heads. They decide and pronounce judgements on legal cases presented before them. They are also competent to administer internal affairs both civil and juridical. They are often engaged in resolving disputes regarding boundaries between villages.⁷² Usually when a difficult case cannot be resolved by the village *dorbar* (village assembly), it is brought before the *Sordar/Lyngshkor/Pator* or *Basan* and his council. If such cases are beyond their competence, then they proceed to the king and his ministers who act as the supreme court of justice.

d) The *Rangbah-shnong* (Village headman)

Each Khasi village is a juridical body by itself. The administrative head of the village is known as the *Rangbah-shnong* (headman of the village). He is elected by the people through the village general assembly (*dorbar shnong*) presided over by the *Sordar*. The *Rangbah-shnong*, like the *Sordar*, is both an administrative and a juridical head. He decides cases brought before him and passes judgement over them and his verdicts are unequivocal and binding on the villagers.⁷³ He is also assisted by the village council. His task is to see to the security, discipline and well being of the village. He maintains a political link with the *sordar*, with the king and in the present context, with the District Council and the government. In the absence of a presiding *Lyngdoh-niam* (ritual priest) in the village, the *Rangbah-shnong* takes his place and officiates at prayers and ceremonies to be performed by the village.⁷⁴

e) *U Sangot* (A Clarion)

In every traditional Khasi village there is a person who acts as the official communicator for the village council. He is known as *Sangot*. In modern terminology this would be equivalent to a publicity officer. Whenever a village *dorbar* is to be convened, the *Sangot* with a chosen group of youngsters would go round the village in the evening to make the announcement. This is usually done with the beating of drums and the traditional cry "Hoi Kiv".

f) *U Lyngdoh-niam* (Ritual Priest)

A Khasi village usually has an official *Lyngdoh-niam* (priest) who holds a position of respect equal to that of *U Rangbah-shnong*. He is the one who performs the annual thanksgiving sacrifice to God on behalf of the village. He is also sought after by people for prayers, intercessions and spiritual interpretations in times of calamities.

g) The *Rangbah-dong* (Hamlet headman)

Each Khasi village has hamlets with specific names. In a bigger village there may be many such hamlets. Each of them has a *Rangbah-dong* who is also elected by the general assembly (*dorbar*) of the village. These persons assist the *Rangbah-shnong* (village headmen) in matters related to the village administration. Together with the *Rangbah-shnong* they also form the governing body of the whole village.

2.5.3. Khasi *Dorbar*: Its Nature, Levels and Authority

The Khasi *dorbar* is a legislative, administrative and a juridical body in any unit of the Khasi community. It is the point of reference of all politics among the Khasis.⁷⁵ Although a democratic institution where everyone has the right of expression and opinion, the Khasi *dorbar* is traditionally reserved only for men. They believe in a traditional principle that legislation and administration are a man's duties and not a woman's. The Khasi *dorbar* is also considered as a sacred institution and therefore the decision taken here are considered binding on the whole society. The Khasi often speak of the *Dorbar Blei* (Divine assemblies) where God established a covenant with men.⁷⁶ This is said to be the origin and model of every Khasi *dorbar*. In a Khasi

dorbar, the participants are grouped as follows: Those between 25 and 50 years of age are called *ki samla-samhoi* (youth); those between 50 and 70 years are called *ki tymmen-ki san* (adults) and those who have crossed 74 years are called *ki tymmen-ki kro* (elders).⁷⁷ The Khasi *dorbars* are found at four levels based on their political radius, their status and authority, these are:

a) *Dorbar Hima* (The State Council)

This is the highest legislative, administrative and juridical body in the Khasi kingdom.⁷⁸ It consists of the King as the Head, his ministers and the *Sordars* (Heads of regions) as its members.⁷⁹ This *dorbar* is the law making body in every matter of the state. It is also the administrative enforcer in the affairs of the kingdom. This is as well the highest court of appeal for any legal suit within the kingdom.

b) *Dorbar Raid*⁸⁰ (Regional Council)

This is also a legislative, administrative and juridical body in a *Raid* (region). The *Sordar/Lyngshkor/Pator or Basan* is the head of the *Dorbar* and he is assisted by his council of *Myntris* (ministers), usually four of them. This body acts as a link between the villages and the King. The *Dorbar Raid* has both civil and juridical powers. It is also responsible for the maintenance of forests and lands belonging to the *Raid*. It settles arguments regarding boundaries between villages. The election of a *Sordar/Lyngshkor/Pator or Basan* is by the body of *Rangbah-shnong* (village headmen) who elect a *sordar* from among themselves. The election is then confirmed by the King.

c) *Dorbar Shnong* (Village council)

In every Khasi village there is an administrative council called *Ka Dorbar Shnong* (Village council). The *Rangbah-Shnong* (village head man), the *Lyngdoh-niam* (priest), the *Sangot* (Clarion) and the *Rangbah-dong* (heads of local units) constitute the village *Dorbar*. The village *Dorbar* is also a legislative, administrative and juridical body in matters pertaining to the welfare of the village.⁸¹ As an administrative body, the *Dorbar Shnong* is also concerned with matters of security in the village.⁸² It organizes its own police system consisting of young volunteers, to guard the village. The election of a *Rangbah-shnong* (village headman) is done democratically in a general assembly of the whole village. The meeting is sometimes chaired by the king himself or by a *Sordar*.

d) *Dorbar Kur* (Clan council)

Among the Khasis, the clans constitute very important components of society. Each clan has its own internal political, juridical and administrative system. This council is headed by the *Rangbah-kur* (Head of the clan) who is elected by the male members of the clan from the richest or most influential family.⁸³ He holds office till death, but his office is not hereditary.⁸⁴ He is assisted by a few other *Rangbah-kurs* of the clan. He also allocates land belonging to the clan to each member for purposes of settlement and cultivation.⁸⁵ In matters of discipline he functions as a judge who pronounces judgement on the behaviour of the members. His words and decisions are binding on all.⁸⁶ He is the legal representative of the clan in front of the *State Dorbar*.⁸⁷ The *Rangbah-kur* is also the presiding priest of the clan. He is responsible

for the annual religious ceremonies (prayers and sacrifices) which the clan has to perform.

2.5.4. Characteristics of a *Khasi Dorbar*

A *Khasi dorbar* is a unique institution which has received attention from many scholars. Its origin goes back to the distant past and with some slight changes, the institution has remained intact till now. Some notable characteristics of the *dorbar* are:

First of all, a *Khasi dorbar* is a moral and religious institution besides being a socio-political and cultural assembly. It occupies a sanctimonious status and this characteristic is preserved. It is referred to as “ka Dorbar-blei” (Divine Assembly).⁸⁸ Thus everyone who comes to the *dorbar* must do so with a pure mind and a sincere heart without any hidden agenda or evil design.⁸⁹

It is a democratic assembly where every participant who qualifies himself from moral aspects, has the right to raise questions and express opinions. Even the *Syiem* (king) himself during the *Dorbar-pyllun* (General assembly) does not dominate the others. He only acts as a silent listener to the cases brought before him or the issues raised. He merely makes a concluding judgement or an exhortation at the end of the hearing.⁹⁰ Thus in a *dorbar* there is no first or last, great or small. All are equal and have the same rights to express their opinions. The *Syiem* (king) is considered as a type of *primus inter pares* (first among equals) and not a superior person.

Since the ancient days, it has been a tradition upheld strictly, that no man who is physically handicapped (a sign of imperfection in a person and also looked upon as a sort of curse by God) or without moustache (a sign of immaturity) could participate in the *dorbar*. This implies that only the adults and men matured in age and wisdom could take part in such assemblies. Today this rule has been overridden for some practical reasons.⁹¹

Traditionally, in any Khasi *dorbar* no women or girls are allowed to take part. There was no question of discrimination about this for the Khasi women have high status in Khasi society, but it was presumed that the *dorbar* was essentially a man's affair.⁹²

Any decision taken in the *dorbar* was considered binding on all citizens. Since decisions are taken unanimously, there is no question of misunderstanding or disgruntlement. Because a Khasi *dorbar* is founded on religious beliefs and practices, the decisions made by it are considered sacred and inviolable. A participant in the *dorbar* who no longer has a family, relatives or kinsmen, is never permitted to speak. The reason for this is that such a person could utter any blasphemy or nonsense without fear of any divine retribution on his family.⁹³ The elders or the older people (*Ki Riew tymmen*), have a special place of importance in a Khasi *dorbar*. They are respected for their age and experience and their words are heeded to by all. They are sought after for counsels especially in difficult situations.

Every Khasi *dorbar* that is to take place is made known to the public through the *Sangot* (the clarion). Usually a group of young men together with the *Sangot*, go around the village at night and together with the drumbeats and the shouting of "hoi kiw", the announcement is made.

A Khasi *dorbar* is always considered a sacred place. For this reason absolute respect and discipline is required of every participant. No shouting, quarrelling or pointing fingers at each other is allowed in the *dorbar*.⁹⁴ An atmosphere of tranquility prevails in such assemblies. To prove the above affirmation, here is what David Scott observed about the Khasi *dorbar*:

I was struck with astonishment at the order and decorum which characterised these debates. No shouts of exultations or indecent attempts to put down the orator of the opposite party, on the contrary, every speaker was fairly heard out. I have often witnessed the debates in St. Stephen's chapel, but those of the Cossayah (Khasis) parliament appeared to be conducted with more dignity and manners.⁹⁵

This aspect of the Khasi *dorbar* has been recognised by many scholars today. The peculiar democratic spirit that animates this *dorbar* is a precious heritage of the Khasi culture. It reflects the high level of civilization that the people has had since time immemorial. It is a civic value that has been passed on from one generation to the next and it is still preserved today. The efficacy of Khasi *dorbar* as a political institution cannot be doubted. It has played and continues to play a major role in shaping the socio-cultural and political life of the Khasis, both individually and collectively.

2.6. SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE

Social life is the crux of Khasi culture and existence. The importance of this aspect can be seen in the predominance of laws and regulations pertaining to social

relationships among them. Here below are some of the essential elements of Khasi social fabric.

2.6.1. *Ka Shim-jait shim-khong* (Matrilineal System)

The Khasis are one of those few groups of people who trace their succession from the mother's side.⁹⁶ According to E. Adamson Hoebel, a patrilineal descent affiliates an individual with a group of kinsmen related to him/her through males only, while matrilineal descent, on the other hand, assigns an individual to a group consisting exclusively of relatives through females.⁹⁷ The Khasis therefore reckon their descent through the female line. Thus the mother-child bond is the strongest kin tie. The children consequently take the mother's name and become members of her clan and live in the mother's social group.⁹⁸

Little is known regarding the origin of such a peculiar system. It is difficult to pin point a time in history when such a system started. Anthropologists in general agree that there is a close relationship between the descent system and the economy of a society. According to Hammond, a noted anthropologist, matrilineal descent is generally associated with primitive farming where women do the work.⁹⁹ Thus matrilineal system is characteristic of a semi-agriculturist society where female labour is a prime factor.¹⁰⁰ In an environment where most of the neighbouring cultures follow a patrilineal system, it is difficult to explain why the Khasis chose to adopt this system.¹⁰¹ Some Khasi scholars today offer a rather convincing explanation to this. According to them, at one time when the Khasis were at war with their enemies, the men were never sure of returning home. Thus in order to preserve

their identity and their tribe they entrusted to the women their property and the lineage as well.¹⁰² Another explanation offered is that when the Khasi ancestors weighed the right over the child between that of the father and the mother, the balance tilted on the mother's side. She is the one who bears all the pains of child-birth and the burden of child-rearing. This was how matriliney got its sanction.¹⁰³ It was this practice that gradually led to the importance of women in society until it was finally unanimously decided that the succession of children should be from the mother's side.¹⁰⁴

2.6.2. *Ka Kheĩ-kur Kheĩ-jait* (kinship system)

The kinship bond is perhaps the most fundamental of all social bonds because of the biological factor associated with it.¹⁰⁵ The Khasis as a tribe, consider kinship bond as sacred. The Khasis are composed of different clans each one with a name and with their unique history. *Ka Kur ka Jait* (a clan) is a line of families traced out from a single *Ĵawbei* (ancestress). Usually all bear the same surname inherited from the first ancestress. Relationship among the clan members is zealously guarded and marriage between clan members is never contemplated. Clan exogamy is sacred, that is, marriage within the clan, however distant they may be, is always considered as an incest (*ka sang*) and those who commit this, are ostracized from the clan. Persons guilty of the sacrilege “are outcasted, and have their heads shaved in three patches, branding them thereby with a mark of shame to become fugitives and vagabonds, not daring to show their faces before others...”¹⁰⁶

Anthropologists like Robin Fox argue that kinship is not merely biological but it is also about social relationships.¹⁰⁷ This aspect of kinship other than consanguinity is common among the Khasis. There is a system called *Ka Jingiateh-kur* (inter-clans covenant), which is a covenant of relationship made between two or more clans.¹⁰⁸ Members of such clans are always forbidden to intermarry. The term *shikur* (related clan) is common among the Khasis signifying the relatedness of two or more clans. For example the Jait Lyngdoh Nongkrem is related to Khongblah, Khonglyngka, Khongpdah, Khongtyngkut, Khyriem Basalakhra, Mapsharoh, Muthoh, Nongtawar and Pyngrope.¹⁰⁹ At times a single clan breaks itself up and assumes for itself another name according to the region they inhabit. Thus clans like Majaw, Basaiawmoit and Hynñiewta are actually branches of a single *Kur* (clan). So also are War, Warjri and Warshong originally of one *Kur* (clan).

Since time immemorial the Khasis have had the practice of *Tang-kur Tang-jait*. This takes place when a Khasi man marries a non-Khasi woman. In this case through a religious ritual known as *Tang-kur* a new clan is formed and the woman becomes the first ancestress of the clan.¹¹⁰ Thus the Khasi surnames which begin with the prefix "Khar" were formed in this manner. Here "Khar" signifies that the first ancestress was a non-Khasi. Some such surnames are Kharlyngdoh, Kharmawphlang, Kharbuli, Khar-rani, Kharkamni etc. At times a new surname is also created. Besides *Tang-kur*, there is another way of establishing clan relationship which is known as *Kam-kur*. This happens when a Khasi man marries a non-Khasi woman, his children assume his surname while his wife is known as Iawbeisynrop.¹¹¹

2.6.3. *Ka Aiñ ioh Nongkynti (Law of Inheritance)*

First of all, the distinction between the *Nongtymmen* (ancestral property) and the *Nongkhynraw* (self-acquired property) should be made. *Ka Nongkhynraw* does not pertain to the ancestral property but it belongs to the one who acquires it. Among the Khasis, the *khatduh* (last daughter) inherits the ancestral property.¹¹² However, this does not imply that other children do not get anything. When the parents' economic status is good, shares are also given to other children either in cash or in kind.¹¹³ The *Khatduh* (the youngest daughter) however, gets more share. This is because she has the duty as *ka Nongri Nongsumar* (caretaker) of the ancestral property and the family religion. She is also referred to as *Ka Nongkit Nongbah* (supporter), because she looks after her aged parents till their death. She holds a status of significance as she represents an embodiment of the enduring and sacred heritage of the clan. Her house is the ancestral home and therefore it is a place of sanctity.¹¹⁴ It is the house of the *Khatduh* that becomes the centre of every socio-cultural and religious activities of the *Kpoh*.¹¹⁵ *U kñi* (the uncle) who is the eldest brother in the family, acts as the guardian of this family. The other daughters of the family move away from the parents' house at the time of their marriages and establish their own *ing* (family units). In turn their youngest daughters become the *Khatduh* or the inheritors of their properties.

2.6.4. *Ka Poikha poiman (Marriage Customs)*

The Khasis, as has been said above, are very conscious about their clan relationship. They follow a clan exogamy, that is prohibition of intra-clan marriage. Therefore

marriage is permitted only between members of different clans. If those clans are related by the covenant of relationship (*iateh-kur*) then marriage is not permitted among them. It is forbidden for a Khasi to marry his maternal uncle's daughter, at least during the life time of his uncle. According to Gurdon, this was due to the fact that the maternal uncle is looked upon as the father of the family than a mere uncle.¹¹⁶ Similarly, no marriage is contemplated with the daughter of his father's sister. Therefore cross-cousin marriages among the Khasis are not favoured and are almost forbidden. Any marriage that takes place within these restrictions is considered *ka shong-sang* (incest) and is punishable by ostracization from the clan and even exile from the society.

At the same time, the Khasis followed a strict village endogamy in the past.¹¹⁷ According to S. Sngi Lyngdoh, a well-known Khasi scholar, in the past the Khasis made a sort of social contract or covenant that whenever they would start a new village or town they would make sure that there are equal number of cognates (*kur*) and agnates (*kha*) residing in them. Thus marriages would take place within the village itself. This system helped in maintaining the stability of the matrilineal system.¹¹⁸

By marriage laws, the husband is supposed to take his residence in his wife's house. In the case of marriage with the *Khatduh* (youngest daughter) of the family, then residence in her house is obligatory for she is the inheritor of her parents' property as well as the keeper of the religion and custom of the *Kur* (clan).¹¹⁹

2.6.5. Dances and Festivals

The socio-cultural life of the Khasis is punctuated with periodical festivals throughout the year. These festivals form an important part of Khasi culture. Khasi festivals are connected with some natural events (like spring and autumn) or with some religious events. Examples of the former type of festivals are: Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem or Shad Weiking (Spring Festival) which takes place usually in the month of April. In the *Bhoi* area there is a famous dance festival called Ka Sajer of the Raid Nonglyngdoh (Nonglyngdoh region). This is a sort of thanksgiving festival in the month of December, January or February after the harvesting has been completed. The people thank God the Creator for the good crop and the staple food He provided them with. This is a typical agricultural dance of this area.¹²⁰

Examples of the latter type of festival, namely, the religious festivals, are: Ka Pomblang Syiem or Ka Shad Nongkrem (Nongkrem religious festival), which takes place in the month of October or November at Smit.¹²¹ This is an important religious festival in the Khyrim Syiemship. In the Jaiñtia Hills the most important religious festival is Ka Beh-deiñkhlam,¹²² an annual religious festival to pray for well being and a good harvest.¹²³ This festival is preceded by a sacrifice called Ka Kñia Dih So Pen performed by the *Doloi*, *Pator* and the *Basan*.¹²⁴ This is a religious ceremony to chase away the *Khlam* (plague) and every sort of evil from among the people. Another religious festival that is found in the Iapngar area of the Ri Bhoi district, is Ka Lukhmi festival which implores the blessing of Lukhmi, the deity of rice and agriculture.¹²⁵ Besides these, there are numerous other festivals and dances proper to each region or group of people. Dances and festivals therefore form a very vital

ingredient of Khasi culture. They are faithfully observed in the annual calendar and their celebrations draw a large crowd of people and foster a great sense of joy and unity among them.

2.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a general picture of the Khasi society and its socio-cultural fabric. The Khasis as a group of people who came to these hills have always distinguished themselves by their unique socio-cultural traditions. Their customs and traditions have always been valued and preserved throughout their history. Their matrilineal system, for example, has been kept up to this day in spite of the fact that they are surrounded by societies who follow patriliney.

Throughout their history, the Khasis have also preserved the sacredness of the *kur* (matrikin) and *kha* (patrikin). Even today, members of the *kur* make sure that no incest (*shong-sang*) takes place. No marriage is permitted between persons of the same clan (*kur*) at any degree whatsoever. Today with the resurgence of the Seng Khasi and other cultural groups, Khasi cultural tradition like festivals, folk art and customary laws are being promoted. Much more interest in preserving the Khasi cultural heritage is generated among all sections of people.

Another notable socio-cultural tradition held scrupulously by them is the institution of *kñi*-ship (maternal uncle). Although *kñi*-ship has passed the test of time in the past centuries, today however, we see a gradual deterioration of this institution. Many factors are at play in effecting this change. In the succeeding chapters we shall

deal at length with these factors of change and the general effect that they have on *kñi-ship* among the Khasis.

NOTES

¹ The name Khasi has many other variations like Kahasi, Khasiyas, Khuchia, Kassi, Khasa, Khasiare. They are known by these names in different parts of the country and in Bangladesh.

² R. T. Rymbai, "Foreword", in J. N. Chowdhury, *Ki Khun Khasi-Khara (The Khasi People)*. Shillong: Shrimati Jaya Chowdhury, 1996, vi.

³ Rev. Thomas Jones was the person who gave the Khasis the Roman script in c. 1842. Since then Khasi literature has grown and multiplied. This script has also succeeded in creating a common language which in turn has led to the unification of all sub-tribes into one people.

⁴ The Church has never destroyed this unique feature of tribal society. In fact it has encouraged it through more empowerment to the lay people [Cf. D. Jala, "Contribution of the Catholic Church to the Cultures of Northeast India", in S. Karotemprel (ed.) *The Catholic Church in Northeast India 1890-1990*. Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1993, 390].

⁵ Cf. "Meghalaya", in K. M. Mathew (C. ed.) *Panorama Year Book 2002*. Kottayam: Malayala Manorama, 2002, 665.

⁶ Cf. R. Gopalakrishnan, *Meghalaya: Land and People*. New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1995, 1.

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸ Cf. Census of India 2011, *Provisional Population Totals – Meghalaya Series 18*, Paper 2, Volume 2. Shillong: Directorate of Census Operations Meghalaya, 2011, 18.

⁹ With the establishment of Cherrapunjee as the head quarter of the East India Company in Assam and the coming of Christianity, the language of Cherrapunjee gained more importance and acceptance among the rest. It then became the official medium of communication in offices and educational institutions. It is referred to as *Ka Ktien Sohra* (language of Sohra). Thus in the course of time, the entire *Nongphlang* region has adopted this as the official language. Today it has become the *lingua franca* of the whole Khasi community, an official language in the state and in the process of being recognized as one of the major languages of India.

¹⁰ Cf. P. Kharakor, *Ka Kolshor Khasi katlam ba ka paw ha ka Litereshor Khasi (1930-1940)*. Shillong: St. Mary's College, 1988, 32.

¹¹ This group of Khasis have been co-existing for centuries with the Garos whom they call the *Dikos*. This name has featured in many Khasi legends and stories - Cf. P. G. Gatphoh, *Sawdong ka Lyngwiar Dpei*. Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, 1982, 99.

¹² Cf. O. L. Snaikang, *Christianity and Social Change in Northeast India*. Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1993, 11.

¹³ This phenomenon can be explained by the facts of history. It seemed that during the reign of a certain *Jaiñtia* King, many of his subjects left the kingdom due to persecution. Some of these came to the *Bhoi* region and this explains the *Pnar* influence on the *Bhoi* dialect.

¹⁴ Cf. P. Bonardi, "Una Settimana in Missione tra i Bhoi dell'Assam", *Bollettino Salesiano*, n. 7 (July 1923), 183-185. For a more elaborate information about the socio-cultural tradition of the Bhois, [see S. Sngi Lyngdoh, *Ki Riti-Khyndew ba la buh u Longshuwa-Manshuwa jong ka Ri Bhoi*. Shillong: Don Bosco Press, 1965].

¹⁵ Their inclusion into the Khasi community is much debated today. There is currently a lot of opposition from the Khasi groups against the government attempt to ascribe to them the ST status.

¹⁶ Cf. E. Tome, "Un Cenno di Storia sui Synteng", *Gioventù Missionaria*, n. 2 (February 1930), 44-45.

¹⁷ The *Pnars* are not to be considered a separate tribe. They belong to the same Khasi tribe although because of geographical isolation, they have developed certain unique customs and practices. Due to their constant social interaction with the people of the plains along their borders, they have assimilated also some Hindu customs. However, they are to be called Khasis in the general term of the word. Legends tell us that these people separated from the main Khasi tribe in search of a better place. They crossed the Kupli river and reached their present habitation. Today there are more efforts made to realize the common identity, origin and culture of both the Khasis and the *Pnars* [Cf. R. S. Lyngdoh, "Ka Sad ka Sunon", in S. K. Chattopadhyay (ed.) *Tribal Institutions of Meghalaya*. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1985, 2].

¹⁸ Cf. Kharakor, *Ka Kolshor Khasi*, 32.

¹⁹ Cf. R. T. Rymbai, "Foreword", in Chowdhury, *Ki Khun Khasi-Khara*, p. iii. Since years back there has been lot of contention between the Meghalaya government and the Assam government regarding this disputed area. The inhabitants of these areas had always wanted to be part of Meghalaya, but the Assam government has always been reluctant. Till today, bilateral talks between the two governments have been conducted but no compromise

has been reached at. Of late the inhabitants have organized a series of strikes and protests and presented a number of memoranda. See also R. T. Rymbai, "Evolution of Modern Khasi Society", in *Khasi Heritage*. Shillong: Seng Khasi, 1979, 57.

²⁰ Cf. IFP, "Two Khasi villages make homes away from home in Manipur", in *Kangla* (November 28, 2002), 1. The names of the two villages are Kamaranga and Makha Basti lukung. No historical accounts are available concerning the origin of these villages.

²¹ Cf. H. Bareh, *Meghalaya*. Shillong: NE India News & Feature Service, 1974, 68-69. This division is rather generic. The author does not speak of the *marams* as a sub group. Theoretically such a broad division may be sufficient, however, *de facto* we know that the division can be broader as indicated above.

²² In recent time there has been a lot of public discussion on this issue. Lately the *Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo People* (FKJGP) and the *Khasi Students Union* (KSU) had organised two separate discussions on the topic "Unity of the Khasi Society" at Shillong, where eminent scholars exposed their views on the issue. It was a general feeling that the common origin should be preserved and that symptoms of separatism should be overcome - Cf. "Are Pnars, Khyrnriams part of Khasi Race?", in *The Shillong Times* (July 17, 2001), 1; see also "Need for Unity of Khasi Race Stressed", in *The Shillong Times* (July 18, 2001), 1.

²³ Cf. S. H. M. Rizvi & Shibani Roy, *Khasi Tribe of Meghalaya*. Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 2006, 12.

²⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁵ Khasi legend tells us that the Khasis lost their written script during the great deluge in the plains. While swimming across the waters, both the *dkhar* (plain's man) and the Khasi had their scripts in their mouths. Unfortunately, the Khasi accidentally swallowed up the script, while the *dkhar* managed to keep it. The swallowed script thus became part and parcel of the Khasis and from here was born the oral tradition among them - Cf. E. Sanna, "Il Libro Perduto", *Gioventù Missionaria*, n. 10 (October 1927), 192-193; H. Bareh, *A Short History of Khasi Literature*. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1997, p. 21.

²⁶ Cf. S. Sen, *Social and State Formation in Khasi Jaintia Hills*. New Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1985, 8.

²⁷ Cf. S. Tham, "Ki Symboh Ksiar", in *Ki Sngi Barim u Hynniew Trep*. Shillong: Primrose Gathphoh, 1976, 3.

²⁸ The belief in divine origin of man is a common phenomenon among many tribes and communities of people all over the world. The Jews themselves speak about the creation of man by God in the book of Genesis. Most of the tribes in Northeast India have legends concerning their divine origin.

²⁹ Cf. *Interview with Rev. Fr. Sylvanus S. Lyngdoh* (Kolkata: October 27, 2002).

³⁰ This legendary peak is situated on a mountain range about 15 km north of Shillong city. It is considered a sacred spot for all the Khasis since time immemorial. An annual sacrifice is held here under the auspicious of the Seng Khasi. Crowds of people flock to this spot on such occasions. There is a stone altar which dates back to hundreds of years before. It is on this altar that the sacrifices are performed by the priests of the indigenous religion.

³¹ Cf. H. Lyngdoh, *Ka Niam Khasi*. Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, 1937, 2-3; P. R. G. Mathur, *The Khasi of Meghalaya*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1979, 62.

³² Cf. O. Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands: The Story of the Archdiocese of Shillong-Guwahati, 1934-1984*. Shillong: VIP, 1987, 25.

³³ Cf. J. Bacchiarello, *Ki Dienjat jong ki Longshuwa*. Shillong: Don Bosco Book Depot, 1977, 17. Another version of this legend says that one member of the *Hynniew-trep* voluntarily cut off the tree because he wanted complete independence from God [Cf. Raby, *Khasi Folk Tales*. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1985, 8-9].

³⁴ Cf. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1997, 376.

³⁵ Cf. Fuchs, "The Races of Northeast India", in *The Catholic Church in Northeast India 1890-1990*, 363.

³⁶ Cf. Chowdhury, *Ki Khun Khasi Khara*, 1.

³⁷ Cf. J. N. Chowdhury, "The Khasi: Conjectures about their origin", in S. Karotemprel (ed.) *The Tribes of Northeast India*. Shillong: Centre for Indigenous Cultures, 1998, 68.

³⁸ Cf. P. R. T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1975, 10.

³⁹ According to J. H. Hutton the similarity of the Khasi funerary urns to those found in Burma, Minahassa, Celebes and Prome proves the affinity between these tribes (Cf. J. H. Hutton, *Proceedings of the National Institute of Sciences of India*, vol. I, n. 2, 103-105).

⁴⁰ Cf. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, p. 10; Bareh, *A Short History of Khasi Literature*, 10-11.

⁴¹ Dr. Grierson has classified Mon-Khmer language into five groups and he places Khasi language as one among the five (Cf. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, 16-17).

⁴² Cf. J. N. Chowdhury, "The Khasis: Conjectures about Their Origin", in S. Karotemprel (ed.) *The Tribes of Northeast India*, 71.

⁴³ Cf. Fuchs, "The Tribes of Northeast India", in *The Catholic Church in Northeast India 1890-1990*, p. 363. This same theory was propagated by Prof. Ernst Kuhm around the years 1883-1889 [Cf. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, 15].

⁴⁴ Cf. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, xxi-xxii.

⁴⁵ Cf. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, 16.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁷ Cf. I. Mohendra Singh. "How did the Khasis of Meghalaya come from Africa", in <http://kanglaonline.com/2012/02/how-did-the-khasis-of-meghalaya-come-from-africa> (accessed on Jan 10, 2013).

⁴⁸ Cf. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, 12-13.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁰ Cf. S. Lamare, "Khasi Language as a written Language", in *Khasi Language-The Beginning*, <http://www.khasilit.com/khasi.htm> (April 9, 2003), 1.

⁵¹ According to J. H. Hutton, the *Negrito* Race was either exterminated by immigrants who came after them or it was assimilated by other groups (Cf. S. Fuchs, "The Races of Northeast India", 363-364).

⁵² Cf. Tham, *Ki Sngi Barim u Hynniw Trep*, 3.

⁵³ Cf. S. Sngi Lyngdoh, "The Tribal Value System and the Impact of Christianity on it", in J. Puthenpurakal (ed.) *Impact of Christianity on North East India*, 217.

⁵⁴ For this reason there exists among the Khasis the axiom "ka nia kaba tam", that is, reason and dialogue are the best way to rule and govern (Cf. *Ibid.*, 208).

⁵⁵ Cf. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, 74.

⁵⁶ Interview with Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh (Kolkata, October 27, 2002), 400. All the syiems among the Khasis, except those of *Hima Sohra*, are descendants of *dkhars* who were incorporated into the Khasi society centuries ago. In the opinion of H. Bareh, the *Syiemship* emerged as a form of centralized administration through a consensus among the territorial heads, necessitated by the expansion and complexity of society (Cf. H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, 41). In whichever case, the influence of the plains' monarchy cannot be ruled out.

⁵⁷ Cf. S. C. Roy, "Ki Khasi Hyndai", in *U Nongphira*, n. 4 (Risaw 1903), 25-26.

⁵⁸ By "divine kings" it does not mean that they are appointed by God directly, but because God made use of his divine agents, like the *ki puri* (good fairies) or his earthly creatures to give birth to these lines of kings (Cf. P. Kharakor, *Ka Kolshor Khasi*, 62). Although such divine origin is accepted, the Khasis never consider such kings as divine nor are they worshipped as such.

⁵⁹ According to the *Jaiñtia* legend, a certain man called *U Woh Ryndi* caught a strange fish from *Myntdu* river. The fish became a fairy whom he later on married and begot children. The children of *Ka Li Dohkha* (that was the name of the fairy) and *U Woh Ryndi* constitute the royal line in the *Jaiñtia* kingdom (Cf. P. Kharakor, *Ka Kolshor Khasi*, 63).

⁶⁰ Cf. Ruffy, *Khasi Folk Tales*, 23. A popular legend tells us that a certain man called *U Sati Mylliemngap* saw the beautiful damsel coming out of the cave known as *Krem Marai* and wanted to catch her. By means of a bouquet of beautiful flowers, he was able to entice the girl to his side. Having trapped her he took her to his home and reared her as his daughter. She was wise and intelligent and was able to counsel the people. So the people called her *Ka Syiem* (queen) and when she grew up into a woman, she was married to *U Kongor Nongjri*. It is from her that the kings of *Shillong syiemship* traced their origin - Cf. E. Tome, "Il Dio Shillong", *Gioventu Missionaria*, n. 6 (Giungno 1927), 119-120.

⁶¹ The *Khyrim* and *Jaiñtia* syiemships have found a mention in the history of the Koch Kingdom of Assam in the 16th century. They appeared to have minted coins by themselves to commemorate some important events in history (Cf. J. N. Chowdhury, *Ki Khun Khasi-Khara*, 110).

⁶² Cf. P. R. Kyndiah, *Meghalaya Yesterday and Today*. New Delhi: Vikash Publishing House Pvt Ltd., 1990, 97. The King for the Khasis is a benevolent figure rather than a dictator. The Khasi akin word of *U Syiem* (king) is *U Kmie* (mother). This therefore reveals the characteristic personality that every Khasi king is supposed to project to his subjects. The subjects approach their king without fear and trepidation. They are always cordially welcomed and well treated by their ruler who seeks to redress their injuries like a mother.

⁶³ Cf. M. P. R. Lyngdoh, *The Festivals in the History and Culture of the Khasi*. Shillong: Har-Anand Publications, 1991, 34.

⁶⁴ Cf. S. C. Roy, "Khasi Hyndai", in *U Nongphira*, n. 7 (Nohprah 1903), 45.

⁶⁵ Cf. U Riewtymmen, "U Syiem Khasi Mynhyndai" in *U Nongphira*, n. 61 (Kyllalyngkot 1907), 1-2. The author of this article cites the example of *U Jidor*, syiem of *Khadsawphra*, who for the well being of his people became a beggar himself. The people however came to his aid. *U Singmanik*, syiem of *Lyngkyrdem* had an elephant advanced in age which could not serve him anymore. The people of the kingdom themselves having come to know about this, gifted him with a young elephant.

⁶⁶ This title is probably adopted from the political organization found in the plains. It must have entered the Khasi political system at the same time when kingship was introduced.

⁶⁷ Among the Khasis there are two classes of *Lyngdohs* (priests). One class is known as *Lyngdoh-synshar* (secular administrative priests) and the other class is known as *Lyngdoh-niam* (religious priests).

⁶⁸ Cf. U. Bhattacharjya, "Syiemship", in *Tribal Institutions of Meghalaya*, 52.

⁶⁹ Cf. N. N., "Il 'Doloi'", *Gioventu Missionaria*, n. 3 (Maggio 1931), 87-88. Each *Doloi* has his own *durbar* consisting of officials and some important members. The members are either elected or nominated to the *durbar* (Cf. S. K. Chattopadhyaya, *The Jaintias*. New Delhi, Cosmo Publications, 1988, 115).

⁷⁰ Cf. L. Ravalico, "Thadlaskein", *Gioventù Missionaria*, n. 7 (Luglio 1933), 162-63. The authority of the *Doloi* in Jaiñtia Hills, is more pronounced than their counterparts, the *Lyngshkor/Sordar/basan* in Khasi Hills. Most of these *Dolois* rule like kings in their own *Raid* and their authority is revered by their subjects.

⁷¹ Cf. S. Sen, *Social and State Formation in Khasi-Jaiñtia Hills*, 146. In Jaiñtia Hills, the *pators* are directly under the *Doloi* and they collaborate with him and in his absence they perform his duties (Cf. P. Kharakor, *Ka Kolshor Khasi*, 68).

⁷² Cf. P. R. G. Mathur, *The Khasi of Meghalaya*, 67.

⁷³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 66.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷⁵ Cf. P. Kharakor, *Ka Kolshor Khasi*, 68. The Khasis consider their *dorbar* (assembly) as something sacred. They always associate its origin to that *Dorbar-blei* (divine assembly) of the age of innocence at the beginning of creation. Therefore all efforts to preserve the purity of their present *dorbar*, is in fact to reflect at least some aspects of that divine *dorbar*.

⁷⁶ According to Khasi Tradition there were four *Dorbar Blei* (divine assemblies). The First was in heaven where it was decided that the *Hymniew-trep* should inhabit the earth. The Second was in Rangmen valley (east of Sohpet Bneng peak) where mankind pledged to follow the path of righteousness. The Third was in Sumer valley (west of Sohpet Bneng) where the living creatures came together to solve the spiritual crisis caused by sin. The Fourth *dorbar* took place at Umrynnong (*Mawhati*) after the great chaos at Iewluri-lura (market of the animals) – Cf. *Interview with Rev. Fr. Sylvanus Sngi* (Kolkata, October 27, 2002), 400.

⁷⁷ Cf. J. Bacchiarello, *Ki Dienjat jong ki Longshurwa*, 91-95.

⁷⁸ Cf. "Ka Dorbar Ka Dorsha ki Khasi Hyndai", in *U Nongialam Katholik*, n. 2 (Rymphang 1903), 29.

⁷⁹ Cf. P. R. T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, pp. 68-69; S. K. Chattopadhyay, *Tribal Institutions of Meghalaya*, 32.

⁸⁰ A *Raid* is a confederation of a number of villages within the region (Cf. P. R. G. Mathur, *The Khasi of Meghalaya*, 67).

⁸¹ Cf. P. R. G. Mathur, *The Khasi of Meghalaya*, p. 66. The Khasi village *dorbar* is a unique democratic political body. Every adult male who is a resident of the village, is obliged to attend the *dorbar* whenever it is convened. Those who fail to do so are expected to pay a fine.

⁸² Cf. O. L. Snaitang, *Christianity and Social Change*, 17. Today all the urban localities have the so called *Village Defence Party* (VDP) who co-operate with the police of the state in matters of security and defence. In rural areas, the village defence parties often assume the law in their own hands.

⁸³ Cf. P. R. G. Mathur, *The Khasi of Meghalaya*, 65.

⁸⁴ Cf. O. L. Snaitang, *Christianity and Social Change*, 15.

⁸⁵ Cf. P. R. G. Mathur, *The Khasi of Meghalaya*, 65.

⁸⁶ Cf. S. Tham, *Ki Sngi Barim u Hymniew Trep*, 31.

⁸⁷ Cf. O. L. Snaitang, *Christianity and Social Change*, 15.

⁸⁸ Cf. P. Kharakor, *Ka Kolshor Khasi*, 70. Khasi tradition speaks of the four *Dorbar Blei* (Divine assemblies) where God presided over this great assembly of all living creatures. Dr. R. S. Lyngdoh instead opined that there were more than four although he never specified them in his writings.

⁸⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 69.

⁹⁰ Cf. G. Costa, *Ka Riti Jong ka Ri Laiphew Syiem*, vol. 1, 3.

⁹¹ Cf. J. Bacchiarello, *Ki Dienjat Jong ki Longshurwa*, 91-95.

⁹² Therefore the misconception that men have no say in Khasi society as has been expressed by some non-Khasi writers, is totally unfoundational. The phenomenon of the *dorbar* clearly shows that men do exercise important decision making that affect society at large. Women in general, are considered not capable of such serious activity (Cf. M. P. R. Lyngdoh, *The Festivals in the History and Culture of the Khasi*, 33).

⁹³ Cf. P. Kharakor, *Ka Kolshor Khasi*, 69.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹⁵ Cited in M. P. R. Lyngdoh, *The Festivals in the History and Culture of the Khasi*, 37.

⁹⁶ In Northeast India, the Garos like the Khasi, have a matrilineal system. According to legends, the Garos seemed to have accepted matrilineal system as a covenant with the Khasi on Kamakhya hill (Cf. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, 313). However, this is not a unique phenomenon for there are some groups of people in other parts of the world who follow this system. Some of the tribes in Africa like the Wolof and Baganda follow a sort of bilateral system of family lineage. They maintain a patrilineal system in the common society, but they keep a matrilineal system in the line of nobility and royalty. The Tuaregs tribe instead follow the opposite, that is, high offices come from the father while inheritance comes from the mother (Cf. A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology*. New Delhi: Oxford IBH Publishing Co., 1976², 252). In India this system is also found in the taravad of the Nayar caste of Malabar who trace their lineage from the mother. She only has rights *in rem* over her children and not her husband [Cf. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, 36, 42].

⁹⁷ Cf. E. A. Hoebel, *Anthropology: The Study of Man*. New Delhi: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1949, 123; M. J. Herskovits, *Cultural Anthropology*. Calcutta: Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., 1958, 168.

⁹⁸ Cf. T. Nongbri, "Problems of Matriliney: A Short review of the Khasi kinship structure", 334.

- ⁹⁹ Cf. P. B. Hammond, *An Introduction to Cultural and Social Anthropology*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1971, 175.
- ¹⁰⁰ Cf. W. A. Haviland, *Anthropology*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974, 381.
- ¹⁰¹ The place of importance that a *Khasi* woman occupies in *Khasi* society, is no doubt an envious one. Some old traditions that come from the plains, tell about the existence of a "woman's kingdom" that was found among the *Khasi*. The king of Kashmir, Lalitaditya (714-750) tried to invade the *Jaiñtia* kingdoms known as *Stri Rajya* (woman's kingdom) but was repelled by them. If this is true, there is no reason to doubt the prominence of *Khasi* women in a society (See M. P. R. Lyngdoh, *The Festivals in the History and Culture of the Khasi*, 31)
- ¹⁰² Cf. P. B. Syiemlieh, *The Khasis and Their Matrilineal System*. Shillong: P. B. Syiemlieh, 1994, 8.
- ¹⁰³ Cf. Mawric, *The Khasi Milieu*, 72.
- ¹⁰⁴ It is notable to see that in spite of the patrilineal system that is all around them, and the coming of Christianity and its influence on *Khasi* culture as such, this social system has not in the least been affected. In fact, the missionaries have always respected this system among the *Khasi*. Thus even under the influence of the western culture, it has remained permanent and unaffected (Cf. Chowdhury, *Ki Khun Khasi Khara*, 203-204).
- ¹⁰⁵ Cf. R. Fox, *Encounter with Anthropology*. Auckland: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973, 82.
- ¹⁰⁶ Rymbai, "Some Aspects of the Religion of the *Khasi* Pnars", 112.
- ¹⁰⁷ Cf. R. Fox, *Encounter with Anthropology*, 83.
- ¹⁰⁸ In the olden days it used to happen that one clan was patronised and supported in times of trouble, by another clan and so a covenant of relationship was made among them. At other times, a member or members of one clan happened to be adopted and brought up by another clan and so a covenant of relationship or a bond developed among them. Such a social process is known among the *Khasi* as *ka jingiateh kur*.
- ¹⁰⁹ Cf. Chowdhury, *Ki Khun Khasi-Khara*, 15.
- ¹¹⁰ In the past, the *Khasi* warriors often used to attack the villages in the plains either for extending their kingdoms or for looting. They would also capture plains women and would marry them for the sake of increasing the *Khasi* population.
- ¹¹¹ Interview with Rev. Fr. Sylvanus Sngi Lyngdoh (Mawlai: August 9, 2008).
- ¹¹² Cf. This does not however mean that the male members are without any property. According to Cantlie, a male member is entitled to his self-acquired property (*nongkynraw*) and in some circumstances, even to ancestral property (*nongtymmen*) [Cf. K. Cantlie, *Notes on Khasi Law*. Aberdeen: Henry Munro Ltd., 1934, 23].
- ¹¹³ Cf. A. Mawlong, "Some Aspects of Change in the Family System of the *Khasis*", in Chacko (ed.) *Matriliney in Meghalaya*, 89.
- ¹¹⁴ Cf. M. P. R. Lyngdoh, *The Festivals in the History and Culture of the Khasi*, 33.
- ¹¹⁵ *Kpoh* is a smaller unit of a clan. It is usually used to refer to a group of families descended from a single *Īwbei* (first grandmother), up to three or four generations - Cf. Chowdhury, *Ki Khun Khasi Khara*, 211; see also T. Nongbri, "Problems of Matriliney: A Short Review of the *Khasi* Kinship Structure", in J. S. Bhandari (ed.) *Kinship and Family in the North-east*, vol. 2. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1996, 333.
- ¹¹⁶ Cf. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, 78.
- ¹¹⁷ Cf. Nakane, *Garō and Khasi: A comparative Study of Matrilineal Systems*, 105.
- ¹¹⁸ Cf. S. Sngi Lyngdoh, "The *Khasi* Matriliney: Its Past and Its Future", p. 38. In fact, today one of the principal reasons for the crisis in *Khasi* society is the imbalance between cognates and agnates in a village or town which leads to marriages of clan members outside their villages. This in turn creates problem in the exercise of their roles by the *kñi*.
- ¹¹⁹ Cf. Kharakor, *Ka Kolshor Khasi*, 101.
- ¹²⁰ Cf. M. P. R. Lyngdoh, *The Festivals in the History and Culture of the Khasi*, 72.
- ¹²¹ Cf. "Nongkrem Dance: Shad bad Pomblang ka Hima Khyrim", in *Home Page* (November 7, 2002) <http://www.khasilit.com/meghalaya.htm>. 1. Nongkrem Dance festival is celebrated every autumn at Smit, the cultural seat of *Ri Hynñiewtrep*. It is a priceless heritage, reflecting the spiritual belief, religious rites and ceremonies, the mythological, legendary and historical aspects. The dance expressions form the mosaic of the cultural texture and fabric of the *Hynñiewtrep*
- ¹²² Cf. Rymbai, "Behdein Khlam", in Roy, *Khasi Heritage*, 139-145.
- ¹²³ Cf. E. Tome, "Feste e Riti Religiosi dei Synteng: Il Dieng Klam", *Gioventù Missionaria*, no. 7 (July 1930), 156.
- ¹²⁴ Cf. Kharakor, *Ka Kolshor Khasi*, 179-180. This particular religious festival, has great similarity to the *Hindu Rath Yatra*. This may be due to the fact that in past history, the *Jaiñtia* people had profound interaction with the people of the plains who were mainly *Hindus*. Some aesthetical aspects of their *pujas* (religious ceremonies) must have been incorporated into this *Jaiñtia* festival.
- ¹²⁵ Cf. M. P. R. Lyngdoh, *The Festivals in the History and Culture of the Khasi*, 71.

CHAPTER 3

Traditional Role of the *Kñi* (maternal uncle) among the Khasis

3.1. INTRODUCTION

One of the common misconceptions about the Khasis is that a man has no authority in this matrilineal society. It is true that a woman holds a privileged position, yet it is equally true that a man is the ultimate authority at the family, clan and societal levels. The maternal uncle known as *kñi* holds such power. He is the final authority within the *Kpoh* (sub-clan) while the *kñi -rangbah* is the authority within the clan. In the Khasi traditional society such social structure is zealously kept up.

Today, however, due to many endogenous and exogenous factors, the traditional role of the *kñi* is weakening or is often under-exercised. Physical distance of the *kñi* from his clan members is increased by such modern phenomena as urbanization and clan dispersion. As a consequence, the *kñi* loses his control over the clan members.

3.2. U SUITNIA IN THE INSTITUTION OF *KÑI*-SHIP

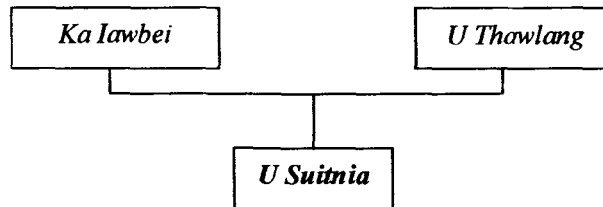
The institution of kinship among the Khasis is traced back to the primeval ancestral triad, U Thawlang (Father), Ka Iawbei (Mother) and U Suitnia (eldest son). Of these three, U Suitnia is considered the primary model of all the *kñis*. The primeval Suitnia

is also the head of the *hynniew-trep*. By nature of his status, he is the protector of the whole Khasi tribe. He is ready to sacrifice his life for the well being of others.

Every clan (*Kur*) has also its own ancestral triad, and it is to the Suitnia, the eldest son of the the ancestral couple, that all the *kñis* of the clan look up to for inspiration and emulation. He has the power that is endowed on him by tradition. Although U Thawlang is the legal head of the family, yet this power has been delegated to U Suitnia. Thus U Suitnia is the one who governs the whole clan. He contains the roots of two words, namely, “suit” from *suit-shor* which means to pour out libation during a sacrifice. This term indicates that he has a priestly character and role. The second root “nia” is derived from *said-nia said-jutang* which means to intercede or to argue. He is the one who intercedes with God on behalf of the whole clan.¹ In any matter of life and death, he is there to advice and find solutions. As the head of the clan, he is looked up to by other members of the clan as the model of a perfect person. He teaches most with his good example. All the members of the clan seek to emulate him.

U Suitnia as the great uncle in the tribe is also the high priest of the tribe. He has the duty of offering sacrifices to God on behalf of the whole tribe. Thus the sacrifices that are offered today by the *Kñi* (maternal uncles of clans) are being done in the name of U Suitnia. He is the one who answers for the mistakes of his clan members before God. According to tradition U Suitnia (whom tradition calls *U Khasi*) was the son of U Thawlang and Ka Iawbei: He was the one who saved the people from the clutches of U Thlen (devil).² He intercedes with God on behalf of his clan members for their sins of omission and commission.³

Figure 3.1 – The Primeval Triad



3.3. BASIC STRUCTURE OF KHASI SOCIETY

Before we discuss the levels of *kñi*-ship in Khasi society, it is expedient to look into the basic structure of Khasi society within which *kñi*-ship has its role. Generally speaking, Khasi society consists of a conglomerate of *ing* which form a *kpoh* and a conglomerate of *kpoh* which constitute a *kur* and the conglomerate of *kur* which finally constitute the Khasi race. It may be better to explain the social structure from downward:

3.3.1. *Ing-tnat* (nuclear family)

Ka ing-tnat consists of the father, mother and their children. Since the sense of kinship is predominant in Khasi culture, often *ka ing-tnat* does not carry much significance in itself. In fact, its identity itself is always linked to the *kur/kpoh/ing*.

3.3.2. *Ing* (family)

Ka ing is the smallest unit of the social structure. It consists of a group of families with a common *meirad tymmen* (great grand mother) or a *mei-ieid* (grand mother).⁴ All the married sisters and cousin sisters on the mother's side with their families

together with the *ing-seng* or *ing-khatduh* constitute *ka ing*. The size of *ka ing* depends on the number of children and grand children the ancestress has. The number increases with the chronological distance from the ancestress. According to Pakyntein a *ing* extends up to five generations.⁵ In Khasi reckoning this would extend up to the *khun khnai* (great great grand children). However, this reckoning of generations remains still an issue of contention.

Therefore *ka ing* can be defined as an extended family without the members being co-residential. The characteristics that define *ka ing* are: (i) a common grand mother or great grand mother, (ii) the number of households within a specific matrilineal descent group and all members included herein, (iii) a common ancestor cult, (iv) a common household deity and religion, (v) a common family priest who is usually the eldest maternal uncle (*kñi rangbah*), (vi) a common *ing-seng* or *ing-niam* which serves as a sanctuary for rituals and (vii) a common ancestral property (if there is).⁶

3.3.3. *Kpoh* (Lineage)

Ka kpoh is the second level of social structure among the Khasis. This would be close to what anthropologists usually term 'lineage' where the members could still trace actual descent from a known ancestress.⁷ According to Nakane *kpoh* is a group of matrilineal kin usually confined to one domestic family or group of households, linked by direct extension of the main household. She also sees *kpoh* as a religious and ritual unit with a common household religion and a common grandmother or

great grandmother.⁸ According to Pakyntein, a Khasi scholar, a *kpoh* extends up to ten generations while a *ing* is up to five generations.⁹

3.3.4. *Kur* (Clan)

This is an inner relationship based on blood relationship. The *Kur* is composed of a number of *Kpoh* (sub clans). *Kpoh* is defined by Nakane as a group of matrilineal kins usually confined to one domestic family or group of households, linked by direct extension of the main household and sharing one household religion as well as a common grand mother or great grand mother.¹⁰ The above description of *Kpoh* fits into the concept of Khasi *Ing*.

The Khasis consider as *Kur* only those directly related to the mother's side and having the same primeval ancestress. The uniqueness of the *Kur* is indicated by its name (surname). Each *Kur* has its own legend and tradition which recounts its origin and history. For example, Kur Malngiang recounts its origin in the legend of the Malngiang king. Kharumnuid on the other hand has a legend that their primeval ancestress was suckled by a female pig until she grew up. For this reason, till today they refrain from eating pork. The origin of the *Kur* could be traced back to the first ancestress who gave birth to the first or the primeval *Ing* (family). From her female children many more families emerged and thus the *Kpoh* was formed. From the one *Kpoh* many more *Kpoh* were born in the course of history. Thus a number of these constitute a larger family which is known as *Kur ka Jait* (clan).¹¹

In every *Kur* there is great reverence for the primeval ancestors, U Thawlang (progenitor), Ka Iawbei (ancestress) and U Suitnia (primeval *Kñi* or uncle). Although

ancestor worship is not a strong practice among the Khasis, yet these are highly respected and moreover they assume a divine status and are prayed to for favours and protection. The relationship within the *Kur* is upheld as sacred among the Khasis and mutual sensitivity is maintained.

There are three ways in which a *kur* is formed as per the age-old Khasi tradition, they are:

i) Those member of the *ing*, *kpoh* or *jait* whose descent can be traced back to the first founding mother or ancestress who is usually called Ka Iawbei-tyndrai (root ancestress or primordial ancestress).¹² These members usually bear the same surname although in some cases some *kpoh* may assume another surname. Any member born through the female line of the *kur* naturally belongs to the *kur*.

ii) There is another process of *kur* formation which is known as *iateh-kur* (*kur* bonding). In this case two or more *kurs* who do not share a common ancestress decide to bind themselves together through a covenant. Such a covenant does not occur without a significant reason. In most cases it was because of a timely help or a good deed done that led to such covenants (*iateh-kur*). In general members of such bonded *kurs* cannot intermarry for it is considered *ka sang* (taboo). This social bonding process was common in the past, but today it is not heard of anymore.

iii) Another way of forming a *kur* is through the process of *tang-kur* or *tang-jait* (ordaining *kur*). This happens when a Khasi man marries a non-Khasi woman and a new *kur* (clan) is made through *tang-kur*. In this case the woman becomes the Iawbei-tyndrai or Iawbei-tyndmen of the newly formed *kur*. The husband then becomes the Thawlang of the *kur*. The name of such a *kur* is usually derived from the woman's first name and then suffixed with the word "*dkhar*" (plains woman).¹³ The

letter 'D' is left out and the word is abbreviated to "*Khar*". There are many clans among the Khasis who are formed through this process like Kharkongor, Kharbuli, Kharkamni, Kharrani etc.¹⁴ This ceremony is still being done today for Khasi men who marry non-Khasi women. The Seng Khasi does it from time to time and so too Rev. Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh.¹⁵

iv) There is another process by which *kur* members are acquired and that is by a traditional method of *Rap-ing*. This happens when a particular Khasi family does not have female children who would continue the *kur*. In such cases, the family would adopt one girl from their own *kur* or *kpoh*. She becomes then the heiress of the ancestral property and the keeper of the customs and traditions of the *kur*.

v) Another popular practice among the Khasis of widening or strengthening their *kur* is through the process called *kam-kur*. In this case, the son of a family where there are no daughters, marries a non-Khasi woman and their daughter continues the lineage of the grandmother. For all practical purposes, she becomes the rightful heiress.¹⁶ This practice is still being upheld from time to time as the need arises.

There are some Khasi scholars who speak of *jait* as another division in the family structure. *Jait* is considered as the next largest division after *kur*.¹⁷ However, many other scholars consider *jait* as merely a colloquial term used when enquiring about the other person's clan. In other words, it is a sort of synonym for *kur*.

3.4. LEVELS OF *KŊI*-SHIP AMONG THE KHASIS

There is a need to clarify at this juncture the different levels of *kŋi-ship* present among the Khasis. Not all *kŋis* are of the same degree in importance and authority. As per tradition, the level of *kŋi-ship* is usually based on seniority of age within the *kur*, *kpoh* or *ing*.

3.4.1. *U Kŋi rangbah* (Eldest uncle of the clan)

U Kŋi rangbah (maternal uncle of a clan) is usually the eldest male member of the entire clan.¹⁸ *U Kŋi rangbah* is respected and obeyed by all in matters pertaining to the welfare of the clan. In cases involving decisions affecting the entire clan, he is the presiding judge. He has authority in matters relating to the life and death of his clan members.¹⁹

By Khasi convention *U Kŋi rangbah* is the ex-officio priest in his own clan.²⁰ It is his obligation to offer an annual sacrifice to God and uphold the religious practices of the clan. As an upkeeper of the law and an enforcer of discipline, he reprovcs and corrects the wrong doings of the members of the clan. At times he even punishes them severely. In cases of *ka sang* (ignominious crimes) committed by clan members, he can ostracize them from the clan altogether. Therefore the role of *U Kŋi rangbah* is a very important and decisive one in the socio-cultural and religious formation of the young members.²¹

The superior authority of the eldest *kŋi* over the younger *kŋis* is confirmed by the result of the survey as indicated below:

a) **The elder *kñi* exercises more authority than the younger *kñi*** (Rural-urban perspective)

Table 3.1 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on the question that the elder *kñi* has more authority than the younger ones.

Table 3.1 – The elder *kñi* has more authority than the younger *kñi*

Villages	The eldest <i>kñi</i> exercises more power			Total	
		Agree	Disagree		Can't say
Marbisu	N	294	77	26	397
	%	74.1	19.4	6.5	100.0
Mawroh	N	160	27	18	205
	%	78.0	13.2	8.8	100.0
Total	N	454	104	44	602
	%	75.4	17.3	7.3	100.0

Table 3.1 above shows that irrespective of the rural-urban settings, a huge majority of the respondents agree that the eldest *kñi* exercises more authority over the members of the *kur/kpoh/ing* than the younger *kñis*.

b) **The elder *kñi* exercises more authority than the younger *kñi*** (Gender perspective)

Table 3.2 below provides a gender perspective of the respondents on the question that the elder *kñi* has more authority than the younger ones.

**Table 3.2 – The elder *kñi* has more authority than the younger *kñi*
(Gender perspective)**

Gender of Respondents	The eldest <i>kñi</i> exercises more power				Total
		Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Men	N	176	35	19	230
	%	76.5	15.2	8.3	100.0
Women	N	278	69	25	372
	%	74.7	18.5	6.7	100.0
Total	N	454	104	44	602
	%	75.4	17.3	7.3	100.0

Table 3.2 above shows that in general, irrespective of gender, most of the respondents agree that the eldest *kñi* exercises more authority. Men however show greater agreement (76.5%) to this view than women (74.7%).

c) The elder *kñi* exercises more authority than the younger *kñi* (Age perspective)

Table 3.3 below provides us age perspective of the respondents on the question that the elder *kñi* has more authority than the younger ones.

**Table 3.3 – The elder *kñi* has more authority than the younger *kñi*
(Age perspective)**

Age of Respondents	The eldest <i>kñi</i> exercises more power				Total
		Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
15 - 35	N	321	54	39	414
	%	77.5	13	9.4	100.0
36 - 55	N	89	35	4	128
	%	69.5	27.3	3.1	100.0
56 and more	N	44	15	1	60
	%	73.3	25	1.7	100.0
Total	N	454	104	44	602
	%	75.4	17.3	7.3	100.0

Table 3.3 above shows that a large majority of the respondents agree that the eldest *kñi* wields more authority. Significantly, the younger and the older respondents are more agreeable to this than the middle aged.

3.4.2. *U Kñi khynnah* (Young Uncle of the *ing/kpoh/kur*)

In the case of the death or absence of *U Kñi rangbah* the next eldest male member of the clan assumes the role of the *kñi*. However, if the person is comparatively young and lacks experience, he is generally called *u kñi khynnah* and never called *u kñi rangbah*.²² This is because the Khasis believe that a person's wisdom and psychological maturity go hand in hand with years of experience. Therefore, only an elderly person who has gone through such experiences can be considered "u rangbah" (elder). A young person, even though intelligent, is by no means believed to possess as much wisdom as an elderly person. What *U Kñi rangbah* is for the entire clan, *U Kñi* is for the smaller unit known as *kpoh* where he assumes full authority over others. As regards moral education of the young members of the clan, the *kñi* is looked upon as the chief instructor and enforcer of discipline. He makes sure that his nephews and nieces are well formed morally and are well informed in matters of religion and culture.

3.4.3. *Kñi-synrop* (Classificatory uncles)

Kñi-synrop (classificatory uncles) refers to younger brothers of the *kñi* and the brothers of the *kpa*. The eldest maternal *kni* is addressed as *ma-heh* or *ma-rangbah* (the word "ma" is the abbreviation of "mama" which means uncle), the

classificatory uncles are addressed as *ma-deng* (middle uncle), *ma-khynnah* (young uncle) and *ma-duh* (youngest uncle).²³ On the father's side the classificatory uncles are called "pa" (father). Thus the eldest paternal uncle would be called *paheh* or *pasan*, the younger ones would be called *padeng*, *pakhynnah*, *parit* or *paduh*. The number of *kñi-synrop* therefore depends on the number of male children of the *ing/kpoh/kur* of both the father and mother. In general the *kñi-synrop* are respected and looked up to for counsel and advice. According to Robin Fox, all ego's cognates to a certain degree are accepted as having some duties towards him/her. Their influence increases when situations demand.²⁴ The classificatory uncles are the closest cognates to the ego and consequently they exercise significant influence on the members of their *kur/kpoh/ing*. In some cases a *kñi-synrop* may command more love and respect especially if he is a person of great integrity or if the *kñi* does not fulfil his duties satisfactorily.²⁵ However, in all cases of important decision making, the *kñi* always has the ultimate authority. The *kñi-synrop* can only offer advice and solidarity.

3.5. IMPORTANCE OF KNI-SHIP

Kñi-ship among the Khasis is such an important and deep-rooted institution that it has persisted for centuries in spite of on-going evolution of Khasi society. Our research has indicated that *kñi-ship* as a traditional institution is still perceived by people as a relevant constituent of Khasi culture. In the survey, the first statement of the questionnaire that has been put to the respondents was: "*Kñi-ship* is essential in Khasi society". The analysis of the responses has been done from different

perspectives based on the given variables. Here below are the results derived from the survey.

a) *Kñi-ship* is essential in Khasi society (Urban-rural perspective)

The first question in part I of the questionnaire states: “*Kñi-ship* is essential in Khasi society”. From a rural-urban perspective Table 3.4 below indicates the response given to the first statement regarding the general perception of the Khasi people on the essentiality of *kñi-ship* in the society today.

Table 3.4 - *Kni* is essential (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	Kñi is important				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Marbisu	281 70.8	66 16.6	49 12.3	1 0.3	397 100.0
Mawroh	155 75.6	27 13.2	23 11.2	-	205 100.0
Total	436 72.4	93 15.4	72 12.0	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.4 above reveals that irrespective of rural-urban settings, most of the respondents agree that *kñi-ship* is essential in Khasi society. It is interesting to note that the urban area (Mawroh) records a slightly higher percentage of agreement than the rural area.

b) *Kñi-ship* is essential in Khasi society (Age perspective)

Table 3.5 below provides an age perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is essential in Khasi society.

Table 3.5 - *Kni* is essential (Age perspective)

Age of respondents	Kñi is important			No response	Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say		
15 - 35	297 71.7	60 14.5	56 13.5	1 0.2	414 100.0
36 - 55	85 66.4	29 22.7	14 10.9	-	128 100.0
56 and more	54 90	4 6.7	2 3.3	-	60 100.0
Total	436 72.4	93 15.4	72 12.0	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.5 above shows that most of the younger respondents agree that *kñi-ship* is still important while a significant number of them either disagree or remain neutral to this issue. On the other hand, almost all elderly persons uphold that *kñi-ship* is still important.

The analysis shows that the elderly people show more attachment to the institution of *kñi-ship* and feel that it should be maintained. Their overwhelming positive response indicates their attachment to this institution. The younger people instead show a gradual lack of knowledge and interest in this traditional institution. The glaring absence of the *kñi* today is probably the reason why the younger people are beginning to lose touch with this traditional institution.

c) ***Kñi*-ship is essential in Khasi society (Gender perspective)**

Table 3.6 below provides a gender perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is essential in Khasi society.

Table 3.6 - *Kni* is essential (Gender perspective)

Gender of respondents	Kñi is important				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Men	164 71.3	39 17.0	26 11.3	1 0.4	230 100.0
Women	272 73.1	54 14.5	46 12.4	-	372 100.0
Total	436 72.4	93 15.4	72 12.0	1 0.2	602 100.0

The table above indicates that most men and women agree that *kñi*-ship is still essential in Khasi society. However, 15.4% and 12% disagree and are neutral respectively. This shows a downward tendency in people's attitude towards *kñi*-ship in general.

d). ***Kñi*-ship is essential in Khasi society (Religious groups' perspective)**

Table 3.7 below provides a religious group's perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is essential in Khasi society.

Table 3.7 – *Kñi* is essential (Religious group's perspective)

Religion of the respondents	<i>Kñi</i> is important				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Christian	380 73.6	78 15.1	57 11.0	1 0.2	230 100.0
Traditional religion	56 65.1	15 17.4	15 17.4		372 100.0
Total	436 72.4	93 15.4	72 12.0	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.7 above shows that majority of Christians agree that *kñi-ship* is essential in Khasi society. Most of those who profess the traditional religion too opine the same. On the whole almost three fourth of the respondents feel that the *kñi* is essential. What is revealing in this analysis is that Christians' opinion is more positive than that of the non-christian Khasis. Interestingly 15.4% disagree on the importance of *kñi-ship*. This is another indication of the gradual loss of importance of *kñi-ship* among the Khasis today.

e) *Kñi-ship* is essential in Khasi society (Educational perspective)

Table 3.8 below provides an educational perspective on the same question.

Table 3.8 – *Kñi* is essential (Educational perspective)

Educational qualification	Kñi is important			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Post graduate	12 70.6	3 17.6	2 11.8	17 100.0
Graduate	68 71.6	17 17.9	10 10.5	95 100.0
Classes XI - XII	143 74.1	31 16.1	19 9.8	193 100.0
V - X	127 70.9	22 12.3	30 16.8	179 100.0
I - IV	56 73.7	11 14.5	9 11.8	76 100.0
Illiterate	30 71.4	9 21.4	3 7.2	42 100.0
Total	436 72.4	93 15.5	73 12.1	602 100.0

Table 3.8 above indicates that there is a similar degree of opinion among respondents of different qualifications. Most of the highly qualified as well as the least qualified agree that *kñi*-ship is essential. Even majority of the illiterate agree. Thus educational qualification does not seem to be a factor that affects opinion about this issue.

f) *Kñi*-ship is essential in Khasi society (Occupational perspective)

Table 3.9 below provides an occupational perspective on the same question.

Table 3.9 – *Kñi* is essential (Occupational perspective)

Occupation of respondents	Kñi is important				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Government employees	43 79.6	6 11.1	5 9.3		54 100.0
Business	38 65.5	12 20.7	8 13.8		372 100.0
Farmers	46 82.1	8 14.3	2 3.6		
Others	309 71.2	67 15.4	57 13.2	1 0.2	434 100.0
Total	436 72.4	93 15.4	72 12.0	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.9 above indicates that the opinion on the issue from the perspective of occupations of the respondents does not differ much. Majority of them agree that *kñi*-ship is essential. The persons engaged in business seem to agree slightly lesser than others. This is probably due to the fact that they are in control of family affairs, being the sole bread earners of the family. So there is less feeling for the importance of the *kñi*. Sometimes the *kñi* may be seen as an interferer in family matters.

3.6. *KNI* AS A PERSON OF AUTHORITY

In general the authority of the *kñi* is still recognized and respected. Theoretically, the *kñi* is still perceived as someone wielding tremendous power over his *kur/kpoh/ing* members although in reality he has lost much of his powers. In most affairs related directly to the *kur/kpoh/ing*, the *kñi* still exercises his authority with regard to decision making. The survey conducted shows that in general the Khasis still accept *kñi*-ship as an institution of authority.

a) ***Kñi* has authority over his family members (Rural-urban perspective)**

Table 3.10 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* exercises authority over his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

Table 3.10 – *Kñi* has authority (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	Kñi has authority over family			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	344 86.6	40 10.1	13 3.3	397 100.0
Mawroh	180 87.8	12 5.9	13 6.3	205 100.0
Total	524 87.0	52 8.7	26 4.3	602 100.0

Table 3.10 above shows that irrespective of rural-urban setting, most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* has authority over his *kur/kpoh/ing* members. Very few respondents disagree with this.

b) ***Kñi* has authority in the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Age perspective)**

Table 3.11 below provides an age perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* exercises authority over his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

Table 3.11 – *Kñi* has authority (Age perspective)

Age of correspondents	Kñi has authority over family			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
15 - 35	363 87.7	30 7.2	21 5.1	414 100.0
36 - 55	105 82.0	19 14.8	4 3.1	128 100.0
56 and more	56 93.3	3 5.0	1 1.7	60 100.0
Total	524 87.0	52 8.7	26 4.3	602 100.0

Table 3.11 above indicates that majority of the respondents irrespective of age agree that the *kñi* has authority over his family members. Very few of them disagree with this. The analysis shows that more elderly persons more strongly agree with this aspect of tradition than the younger ones.

c) *Kñi* has authority in the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Gender perspective)

Table 3.12 below provides a gender perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* exercises authority over his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

Table 3.12 – *Kñi* has authority (Gender perspective)

Gender of correspondents	Kñi has authority over family			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Men	197 85.7	21 9.1	12 5.2	230 100.0
Women	327 87.9	31 8.3	14 3.8	372 100.0
Total	524 87.0	52 8.7	26 4.3	602 100.0

Table 3.12 above shows that majority both of men and women agree that the *kñi* has authority over his family members. Only a small number of respondents disagree. This analysis indicates clearly that most Khasis still believe that the *kñi* has authority over his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

d) **Kñi has authority in the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Religious perspective)**

Table 3.13 below provides a religion perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* exercises authority over his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

Table 3.13 – *Kñi* has authority (Religious perspective)

Religion of correspondents	Kñi has authority over family			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Christian	446 86.4	49 9.5	21 4.1	516 100.0
Traditional religion	78 90.7	3 3.5	5 5.8	86 100.0
Total	524 87.0	52 8.7	26 4.3	602 100.0

Table 3.13 above shows that majority of the respondents among both Christians and those who profess the Khasi traditional religion still feel that the *kñi* has authority over his *kur/kpoh/ing* members. Very few of them disagree with this. The analysis indicates that the latter group (traditional religion followers) has a stronger opinion on this issue. This is evident from the fact that the *kñi*'s role in non-Christian *kpoh/ing* is more defined than those in Christian *kpoh/ing*.

e) *Kñi* has authority in the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Educational perspective)

Table 3.14 below provides an analysis from an educational perspective on whether the *kñi* exercises authority over his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

Table 3.14 – *Kñi* has authority (Educational perspective)

Educational qualifications	Kñi has authority over family			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Post graduate	15 88.2	2 11.8	-	17 100.0
Graduate	83 87.4	12 12.6	-	95 100.0
Classes XI - XII	175 90.7	8 4.1	10 5.2	193 100.0
V - X	152 84.9	60 8.9	11 6.1	179 100.0
I - IV	65 85.5	9 11.9	2 2.6	76 100.0
Illiterate	33 80.5	5 12.2	3 7.3	42 100.0
Total	523 87.0	52 8.7	26 4.3	602 100.0

Table 3.14 above indicates that irrespective of the level of qualifications, majority of the respondents agree that the *kñi* exercises his authority in the *kur/kpoh/ing*. However, it is significant that a small number of respondents both qualified and illiterate persons disagree or are neutral. Thus in general education seems to be an important factor in determining the authority of the *kñi*.

f) *Kñi* has authority in the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Occupational perspective)

Table 3.15 below provides an occupational perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* exercises authority over his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

Table 3.15 – *Kñi* has authority (Occupational perspective)

Occupation of respondents	<i>Kñi</i> has authority over family			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Government employees	48 88.9	5 9.3	1 1.8	54 100.0
Business	50 86.2	6 10.3	2 3.4	58 100.0
Farmers	54 96.4	1 1.8	1 1.8	56 100.0
Others	372 85.7	40 9.2	22 5.1	434 100.0
Total	524 87.0	52 8.7	26 4.3	602 100.0

Table 3.15 above shows that irrespective of their occupations, most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* has authority. However it could be noted that those engaged in agriculture have a greater number who agree to this than those who disagree.

3.7. RELIGIOUS FUNCTIONS OF THE *KÑI*

As per the age-old tradition of the Khasis, the *kñi* is also considered the priest of the family. He carries out the religious rituals and ceremonies related to his family's religious tradition. The *kñi* acts as a medium between U Blei (God) and his family

members. He ensures that God's blessings continue to flow to the *kpoh* members. He also acts as a presiding priest at the marriages of his family members. He conducts the marriage ceremonies and imparts blessing to the newly wedded couple.²⁶

3.7.1. The *Kñi* as the presiding priest of the *Kur* or *Kpoh* (lineage)

Among the Khasis the *kñi rangbah* (seniormost uncle) acts as the presiding priest in religious matters of the *kur* or *kpoh* while it is the duty of the *khatduh* to prepare all the requirements for the rites and rituals.²⁷ Among the Pnars in Jaiñtia Hills, the *kñi* even though he may be a little boy, has to perform the religious duties of his *kur* (clan) or his *kpoh* (sub-clan).²⁸ The *kñi* is considered as the defender of religion and without him a family worship is considered sacrilegious.²⁹ The religious functions that a *kñi* traditionally performs are the following:

1. Presiding over *ka jer ka thoh* (naming ceremony) of the child. Usually when a male child is born, it is the *kñi* who performs the naming rite of the child and he implores God's blessing upon the child so as to be able to grow into a mature and effective man till his old age.³⁰

2. Presiding over *ka shongkha shongman* (marriage ceremony) of his nephews or nieces. The marriage is a socio-religious affair and has to be done with the proper agreement between the parents of the boy and the girl and above all of their *Kñis*. The maternal and paternal *kñis* of the boy are the ones who see to the arrangement and engagement of the boy.³¹ Before any engagement is to be done both parties seek to uncover all inauspicious circumstances lest the union should lead to a

displeasure of *Ka Dawing*.³² If per chance there is any trace of kinship from the mother's side (*kur*) or from the father's side (*kha*), then marriage would never be contemplated for that would amount to *ka sang* (taboo). In a marriage ceremony the *kñis* of both parties preside over the function in the presence of the parents and relatives of both families.³³ In fact, no engagement or marriage could take place without the knowledge and decision of the *kñi*.³⁴

3. Performing the rituals of *ka iap ka sa* (rituals for the deceased members). When a member of his clan or *kpoh* dies, it is the *kñi* who performs the last rites. He undertakes the washing and dressing of the deceased person and conducts the funeral ceremonies.³⁵ After the cremation he collects the bones of the deceased and brings them to the house of the *khatduh* to be preserved there till the day of transference to the clan ossuary during the ceremony called *ka phur-ka siang*.

4. Performing the annual sacrifice of the clan. The Khasis maintain a family or clan religion (*niam-ing* and *niam-kur*).³⁶ It is the duty of the *kñi* to perform the annual or periodic sacrifice on behalf of all his clan or family members. There are some clans who are entrusted with the care of *lawkyntang* (sacred groves) or market places. In such cases the *kñis* of these clans have the duty to offer sacrifices in such places.

The survey related to this particular role of the *kñi* indicates that his traditional status as a priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing* is still accepted and respected though in many cases it is no longer functional as he himself or his *kur/kpoh* members have converted to Christianity or other religions.

a) *Kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Rural-urban perspective)

The fourth statement of Part I of the questionnaire states: “*U kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing*”. Table 3.16 below analyzes the response from a rural-urban perspective.

Table 3.16 - *Kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	<i>Kñi</i> is a priest of the <i>kur/kpoh</i>				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Marbisu	245 61.7	77 19.4	74 18.6	1 0.3	397 100.0
Mawroh	130 63.4	20 9.8	55 26.8	-	205 100.0
Total	375 62.3	97 16.1	129 21.4	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.16 above shows that irrespective of rural or urban settings, most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the priest of the family. Only a small number of them disagree with this. There is a significant number who remain quite ignorant about this aspect of tradition. This phenomenon occurs more in the urban than in the rural areas. This is probably because the absence of the *kñi* is more evident in urban than in rural areas.

b) *Kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Age perspective)

Table 3.17 below provides an age perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is the priest of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.



Table 3.17 – *Kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Age perspective)

Age of respondents	<i>Kñi</i> is a priest of the <i>kur/kpoh</i>				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
15 - 35	251 60.6	59 14.3	103 24.9	1 0.2	414 100.0
36 - 55	80 62.5	26 20.3	22 17.2	-	128 100.0
56 and more	44 73.3	12 20.0	4 6.7	-	60 100.0
Total	375 62.3	97 16.1	129 21.4	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.17 above shows that in general most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. Significantly the older people have a higher percentage of agreement than the younger generations. It is also note worthy to observe that the level of ignorance about this aspect of *kñi*-ship is higher among the younger people. This is expected as *kñi*-ship in Khasi society is less evident today than in the past.

c) *Kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Gender perspective)

Table 3.18 below provides a gender perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is the priest of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 3.18 – *Kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Gender perspective)

Gender of respondents	<i>Kñi</i> is a priest of the <i>kur/kpoh</i>				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Men	140 60.9	47 20.4	42 18.3	1 0.4	230 100.0
Women	235 63.2	50 13.4	87 23.4	-	372 100.0
Total	375 62.3	97 16.1	129 21.4	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.18 above indicates that irrespective of gender most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. However 21.4% have no views about it.

d) *Kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Religious perspective)

Table 3.19 below provides a religious perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is the priest of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 3.19 – *Kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Religious perspective)

Religion of respondents	<i>Kñi</i> is a priest of the <i>kur/kpoh</i>				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Christian	314 60.9	81 15.7	120 23.3	1 0.2	516 100.0
Traditional religion	61 70.9	16 18.6	9 10.5	-	86 100.0
Total	375 62.3	97 16.1	129 21.4	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.19 above shows that irrespective of religion most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. However, significantly those who

still uphold the traditional Khasi religion have a higher percentage of agreement than their christian counterparts. Lack of opinion about this tradition is also higher among Christians than among those who still uphold the traditional religion.

e) *Kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Educational perspective)

Table 3.20 below provides an analysis from a perspective of qualification of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is the priest of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 3.20 – *Kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Educational perspective)

Educational qualification	<i>Kñi</i> is a priest of the <i>kur/kpoh</i>				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Post graduate	12 70.6	5 29.4		-	17 100.0
Graduate	51 53.7	25 26.3	19 20.0	-	95 100.0
XI - XII	130 67.4	20 10.4	43 22.2	-	193 100.0
V - X	104 58.1	23 12.8	51 28.5	1 0.6	179 100.0
I - IV	53 69.7	12 15.8	11 14.5	-	76 100.0
Illiterate	25 59.5	12 28.6	5 11.9	-	42 100.0
Total	375 62.3	97 16.1	129 21.4	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.20 above shows that most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. However, it is significant to note that the number of those who disagree or are neutral is not too small either. The more educated persons seem to be more agreeable to this statement.

f) *Kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Occupational perspective)

Table 3.21 below provides an occupational perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is the priest of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 3.21 - *Kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Occupational perspective)

Occupation of the respondents	Kñi is a priest of the <i>kur/kpoh</i>			No response	Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say		
Government employee	30 55.6	18 33.3	6 11.1	-	54 100.0
Business	43 74.2	6 10.3	9 15.5	-	58 100.0
Farmer	47 83.9	6 10.7	3 5.4	-	56 100.0
Others	25 12.2	67 32.9	111 54.4	1 0.5	204 100.0
Total	375 62.3	97 16.1	129 21.4	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.21 above indicates that most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. It should be noted however that more farmers agree to this than government employees. The number of those who disagree among the government employees is rather high. The number of those who are not sure about this aspect of *kñi*-ship is also quite high which indicates that there is a growing ignorance about this role of the *kñi* today.

3.7.2. The *Kñi* is the mediator of the clan

Another important role that the *kñi* holds is that of being a mediator between God and his clan members. For example, if a member gets sick, he is the one who performs divination by cutting a cock or breaking an egg in order to discover the cause of a sickness. If the cause is internal which the Khasis call *ka daw-ing*, then the culprit has to confess to the *kñi* who would in turn intercede for him with God so as to obtain pardon.³⁷

The *kñi* is also the mediator between the ancestors and the members of his *ing/kpoh/kur*. Considering the fact that ancestor cult is so sacred and important for the Khasis, this particular role of the *kñi* is of particular significance. Since the *kñi* acts as a de facto priest and leader of the *ing/kpoh/kur*, he is directly responsible for the well being of his clan members. He is the link between the dead ancestors (*u Thawlang*, *ka Iawbei* and *u Suitnia*) and the living members of his *ing/kpoh/kur*. This is clearly demonstrated in his prayers during a religious rite. He invokes the intervention of the ancestors in times of difficulty or asks for their blessings for the members of his *ing/kpoh/kur*.

a) *Kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Rural-urban perspective)

The third statement of Part I states: “*U kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing*”. The tables below give the responses from different perspectives.

Table 3.22 - *Kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	<i>Kñi</i> is a the mediator of the <i>kur/kpoh</i>			No response	Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say		
Marbisu	354 89.2	29 7.3	13 3.3	1 0.2	397 100.0
Mawroh	168 82.0	6 2.9	31 15.1	-	205 100.0
Total	522 86.7	35 5.8	44 7.3	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.22 above indicates that vast majority of the respondents agree with the traditional concept of the *kñi* as the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. Only a small number of them disagree with this. This shows that in general the people still uphold this role of the *kñi* in the society especially in the rural areas.

b) *Kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Age perspective)

Table 3.23 below provides us an age perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is the mediator of his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

Table 3.23 – *Kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Age perspective)

Age of respondents	<i>Kñi</i> is the mediator of the <i>kur/kpoh</i>			No response	Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say		
15 - 35	348 84.1	28 6.8	37 8.9	1 0.2	414 100.0
36 - 55	118 92.2	5 3.9	5 3.9	-	128 100.0
56 and more	56 93.4	2 3.3	2 3.3	-	60 100.0
Total	522 86.7	35 5.8	44 7.3	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.23 above shows that the older generations agree with this more than the younger respondents do. This indicates that the older people are more attached to this institution than the younger ones. In general the analysis shows that most people still theoretically uphold this.

c) *Kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Gender perspective)

Table 3.24 below provides a gender perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is the mediator of his *kur/kpoh/ing* members..

Table 3.24 – *Kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Gender perspective)

Gender of respondents	<i>Kñi</i> is the mediator of the <i>kur/kpoh</i>			No response	Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say		
Men	197 85.7	16 7.0	16 7.0	1 0.4	230 100.0
Women	325 87.4	19 5.1	28 7.5		372 100.0
Total	522 86.7	35 5.8	44 7.3	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.24 above indicates that majority of the respondents irrespective of gender agree that the *kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. Slightly more women seem to agree with this than men.

d) *Kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Religious perspective)

Table 3.25 below provides a religious perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is the mediator of his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

Table 3.25 – *Kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Religious perspective)

Religion of respondents	<i>Kñi</i> is the mediator of the <i>kur/kpoh</i>			No response	Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say		
Christian	449 87.0	26 5.0	40 7.8	1 0.2	516 100.0
Traditional religion	73 84.9	9 10.5	4 4.6	-	86 100.0
Total	522 86.7	35 5.8	44 7.3	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.25 above indicates that irrespective of religion majority of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. Quite a significant number either disagree or remain neutral. There is no perceptible difference of opinion between Christians and those who uphold the Khasi religion on this issue.

e) ***Kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Educational perspective)**

Table 3.26 below provides an educational perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is the mediator of his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

Table 3.26 – *Kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Educational perspective)

Educational qualification of respondents	<i>Kñi</i> is the mediator of the <i>kur/kpoh</i>				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Post-graduate	16 94.1	1 5.9		-	17 100.0
Graduate	81 85.3	10 10.5	4 4.2	-	95 100.0
XI - XII	170 88.1	5 2.6	18 9.3	-	193 100.0
V - X	150 83.8	13 7.3	15 8.4	1 0.5	179 100.0
I - IV	68 89.5	3 3.9	5 6.6	-	76 100.0
Illiterate	37 90.2	3 7.3	1 2.4	-	41 100.0
Total	522 86.7	35 5.8	44 7.3	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.26 above shows that majority of the respondents at all levels of education agree that the *kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. A very small number of the respondents, irrespective of educational qualifications, disagree or are neutral about this statement. Thus the perception of the *kñi* as a mediator is still considered relevant for society.

f) *Kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Occupational perspective)

Table 3.27 below provides an occupational perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is the mediator of his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

Table 3.27 – *Kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Occupational perspective)

Occupation of the respondents	<i>Kñi</i> is the mediator of the <i>kur/kpoh</i>			No response	Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say		
Government employee	47 87.0	3 5.6	4 7.4	-	54 100.0
Business	51 87.9	4 6.9	3 5.2	-	58 100.0
Farmer	52 92.8	2 3.6	2 3.6	-	56 100.0
Others	372 85.7	26 6.0	35 8.0	1 0.2	434 100.0
Total	522 86.7	35 5.8	44 7.3	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.27 above reveals that irrespective of occupations, most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. However the number of the farmers who agree supersedes that of others. This reveals that the role of the *kñi* as mediator is probably more evident in the rural families.

3.7.3. The *Kñi* as the religious educator of the young

Since the Khasis maintain a clan or a family religion, the role of the *kñi* extends to the religious sphere as well. Thus he is not only an ex-officio priest of the clan or *kpoh* but he is also a religious educator of the young. It is his duty to instruct the younger generation about religion and about religious norms and values. He would teach them first of all the basic religious moral norms of the Khasis, namely, *kamai ia ka hok* (earn righteousness), *tipbriew-tipblei* (love God, love neighbour) as well as *tipkur-tipkha* (know your relatives). These triple commandments are so basic

to life that the *kñi* as well as the parents would impress them upon the young. On these three the whole Khasi religion stands.

3.8. SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS OF THE *KÑI*

Among the Khasis, *kñi*-ship is an overarching institution which has a secular as well as a religious basis and implications. This implies that it extends to every sphere of life, socio-political, cultural and religious. We have already discussed the religious functions of the *kñi* above. In the following section we will discuss how *kñi* among the Khasis wields control over socio-cultural and economic decisions and activities which concern his *ing*, *kpoh* or *kur*.

3.8.1. *Kñi*-ship as a political institution

Among the Khasis, the clans constitute very important components of society. Each clan has its own internal political, juridical and administrative system. It is headed by the *Rangbah-kur* (head of the clan) who is elected by the male members of the clan from the richest or most influential family.³⁸ He holds office till death, but his office is not hereditary.³⁹ He is assisted by a few other *Rangbah-kurs* of the clan. He also allocates land belonging to the clan to each member for purposes of settlement and cultivation.⁴⁰ In matters of discipline he functions as a judge who pronounces judgment on the behaviour of the members. His words and decisions are binding on all.⁴¹ He is the legal representative of the clan in front of the State *Dorbar*.⁴² The *Rangbah-kur* is also the presiding priest of the clan. He is responsible for the annual religious ceremonies (prayers and sacrifices) which the clan has to perform.

3.8.2. *Kñi*-ship as a socio-cultural institution

As per the Khasi tradition, the *kñi* exercises great power in society among his clan members. He is the head of the clan or of his *kpoh*.⁴³ *Kñi*-ship is the product of a socio-cultural tradition. *Kñi*-ship in fact signifies the patriarchal aspect of Khasi society. It shows that in any socio-cultural activity it is the men who assume control and not the females.⁴⁴ At the same time, a *kñi* in Khasi society is the one who upholds the culture and tradition of the clan. Therefore it is his duty to provide cultural education to the younger members of his *kpoh/kur*. The *kñi* also acts as the protector and provisioner of the female members of his family. The consanguineous relationship and the establishment of incest taboo according to Robin Fox, is what prevents him from becoming the father of his sister's children in such family structures.⁴⁵ This traditional role of the *kñi* is still prevalent in many Pnar villages.

The survey conducted reveals that *kñi*-ship still has relevance in Khasi society today. Although every *kñi* is respected to a great extent, there are other socio-cultural factors that determine their greater acceptance, authority and influence. Here below are the results of the analysis on these aspects.

a) *Kñis* who hold important positions command more respect

Table 3.28 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether or not the *kñis* who hold important positions in society command more respect.

Table 3.28 – *Kñis* who hold important positions command more respect (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	<i>Kñis</i> with better social status have more respect and influence			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	202 50.9	256 39.3	39 9.8	397 100.0
Mawroh	91 44.4	85 41.5	29 14.1	205 100.0
Total	293 48.7	241 40.0	68 11.3	602 100.0

Table 3.28 above reveals that irrespective of rural-urban settings, not many respondents agree that the *kñis* who have important social status command more respect or influence. It is significant that the number of those who disagree is high. In this case too, the rural people seem to agree more to this than the urban people.

b) *Kñis* who hold important positions command more respect (Gender perspective)

Table 3.29 below provides a gender perspective of the respondents on whether or not the *kñis* who hold important positions in society command more respect.

Table 3.29 – *Kñis* who hold important positions command more respect (Gender perspective)

Gender of the respondents	<i>Kñis</i> with better social status have more respect and influence			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Men	125 54.3	85 37.0	20 8.7	230 100.0
Women	168 45.2	156 41.9	48 12.9	372 100.0
Total	293 48.7	241 40.0	68 11.3	602 100.0

Table 3.29 above shows that in general not many irrespective of gender, agree that *kñis* with better social status command more respect. However, more men respondents tend to agree with this than their women counterparts.

c) *Kñi* upholds the cultural heritage of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Rural-urban perspective)

The fourth statement of Part I states: “*U kñi* upholds the cultural heritage of the *kur/kpoh/ing*”. The tables below show the responses from different perspectives.

Table 3.30 - *Kñi* upholds the cultural heritage of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	<i>Kñi</i> upholds cultural heritage			No response	Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say		
Marbisu	297 74.8	47 11.8	52 13.1	1 0.3	397 100.0
Mawroh	159 77.6	16 7.8	30 14.6	-	205 100.0
Total	456 75.7	63 10.5	82 13.6	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.30 above shows that most of the respondents are of the opinion that *kñi* is the upholder of the cultural heritage. However, 13.6% of them appear to be ignorant about this aspect of *kñi*-ship.

d) *Kñi* upholds the cultural heritage of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Age perspective)

Table 3.31 below provides an age perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* upholds the cultural heritage of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 3.31 – *Kñi* upholds the cultural heritage (Age perspective)

Age of respondents	<i>Kñi</i> upholds cultural heritage			No response	Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say		
15 - 35	304 73.4	41 9.9	68 16.4	1 0.2	414 100.0
36 - 55	102 79.7	16 12.5	10 7.8	-	128 100.0
56 and more	50 83.3	6 10.0	4 6.7	-	60 100.0
Total	456 75.7	63 10.5	82 13.6	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.31 above indicates that irrespective of age, most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the one who upholds the cultural heritage of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. However, it is significant that the elderly people are more agreeable to this than the younger ones.

e) *Kñi* upholds the cultural heritage of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Gender perspective)

Table 3.32 below provides a gender perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* upholds the cultural heritage of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 3.32 – *Kñi* upholds the cultural heritage (Gender perspective)

Gender of respondents	<i>Kñi</i> upholds cultural heritage			No response	Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say		
Men	172 74.8	25 10.9	32 13.9	1 0.4	230 100.0
Women	284 76.3	38 10.2	50 13.4		372 100.0
Total	456 75.7	63 10.5	82 13.6	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.32 above shows that irrespective of gender, majority of the respondents agree that *kñi* is the one who upholds the cultural heritage. However, the number of those who disagree or are neutral is not negligible. It indicates that the *kñi* today is gradually losing hold of this traditional role in society.

f) *Kñi* upholds the cultural heritage of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Religious perspective)

Table 3.33 below provides a religious perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* upholds the cultural heritage of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 3.33 – *Kñi* upholds the cultural heritage (Religious perspective)

Religion of respondents	<i>Kñi</i> upholds cultural heritage				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Christian	390 75.6	51 9.9	74 14.3	1 0.2	516 100.0
Traditional religion	66 76.7	12 14.0	8 9.3	-	86 100.0
Total	456 75.7	63 10.5	82 13.6	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.33 above indicates that irrespective of religion most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the one who upholds the cultural heritage of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. A sizable percentage of Christians is quite ignorant about this aspect of *kñi*-ship in comparison to those who uphold the traditional religion. However, when it comes to disagreement, more of those who uphold the Khasi religion disagree than the Christians. Probably this change is felt more by those who profess the traditional

religion on account of their proximity to the culture and tradition than the Christians who have less contact with their culture.

g) ***Kɔ̃i* upholds the cultural heritage of the *kur/kpoh/ing*** (Educational perspective)

Table 3.34 below provides an educational perspective of the respondents on whether the *kɔ̃i* upholds the cultural heritage of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 3.34 – *Kɔ̃i* upholds the cultural heritage (Educational perspective)

Educational qualification	<i>Kɔ̃i</i> upholds cultural heritage				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Post-graduate	14 82.4	1 5.9	2 11.8	-	17 100.0
Graduate	66 69.5	17 17.9	12 12.6	-	95 100.0
XI - XII	151 78.2	14 7.3	28 14.5	-	193 100.0
V - X	133 74.3	19 10.6	26 14.5	1 0.6	179 100.0
I - IV	60 78.9	6 7.9	10 13.2	-	76 100.0
Illiterate	32 76.2	6 14.3	4 9.5	-	42 100.0
Total	456 75.7	63 10.5	82 13.6	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.34 above indicates that irrespective of educational qualification most of the respondents agree that the *kɔ̃i* is the person who upholds the cultural heritage of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. However, the number of those who disagree or are neutral is rather high.

h) *Kñi* upholds the cultural heritage of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Occupational perspective)

Table 3.35 below provides an occupational perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* upholds the cultural heritage of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 3.35 – *Kñi* upholds the cultural heritage (Occupational perspective)

Occupation of the respondents	<i>Kñi</i> upholds cultural heritage			No response	Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say		
Government employee	37 68.5	12 22.2	5 9.3	-	54 100.0
Business	47 81.0	5 8.6	6 10.3	-	58 100.0
Farmer	46 82.1	1 1.8	9 16.1	-	56 100.0
Others	326 75.1	45 10.4	62 14.3	1 0.2	434 100.0
Total	456 75.7	63 10.5	82 13.6	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.35 above shows that irrespective of their occupations most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the one who upholds the cultural heritage. Significantly, the farmers have a larger percentage who agree.

3.8.3. The economic function of the *kñi*

As per the Khasi tradition, the *kñi* used to be the administrator of all goods (moveable and immoveable) of the *ing/kpoh* or of the whole *kur*. Thus there was no question of division of property or sale of land without the *kñi*'s knowledge and permission. According to the tradition, although the *khatduh* inherits and looks after the ancestral property, it is the *kñi* who actually administers the property. The *kñi*

usually is the chief earner of his *ing/kpoh/kur*. He administers principally the products of his hard work and enterprises.⁴⁶ The *kñi* is considered the centre of economy and all members of the *ing/kpoh/kur* have to work and do their part satisfactorily.

3.8.4. Role of the *Kñi* vis-a-vis *Ki kmie ki kpa* (parents)

The place of the parents in the family and their role in the moral education of their children is un-refutable. They are closest to their children and they are the first teachers in every sense of the word. Although in Khasi social system, *U Kñi* (the maternal uncle) is the sole authority, yet *de facto* it is the parents who are obliged to educate their children. However in serious matters they would always appeal to *U Kñi* (the maternal uncle) for his final decision. In matters of discipline and moral upbringing of the children, the *Kñi* is more responsible than the parents in carrying out this duty. In the past there used to be a saying “the uncle has said so or decided so” and that was the last word. At times the mother would warn her wayward children “I will inform your uncle”. These words would be enough to put fear in the minds of the children.⁴⁷

The mother of the family in a very special manner plays a very important role in the education of her children. In a matrilineal society like that of the Khasis, the place of the mother is undisputable. She is referred to as *Ka Kmie kaba pun kaba kha* (one who conceives and gives birth), *Kaba pynheh pynsan* (one who brings up). She is revered by her children and her words are considered precious and binding. Her

image in the family is one of a person characterized by love, care and tenderness.⁴⁸ She nourishes her children not merely with food but with her wisdom and example.

The father in the traditional Khasi family does not have any decisive role to play in the life of his children other than earning to feed and cloth them.⁴⁹ He is the “executive head” in his family although he is second in status to the *Kñi* (uncle).⁵⁰ The father on the other hand would be the *Kñi* (an uncle) in his own clan and would have his rights and obligations there.⁵¹ With the passage of time and the transformation of society, the role of the father in the family has gained more importance and clarity. While the role of the uncle is gradually diminishing, the authority of the father has been increasing. In modern Khasi families, the father has emerged as a substitute of the maternal uncle in his role and authority as a disciplinarian and educator of the children and his advice is sought after in family matters.⁵²

3.8.5. *Ki Tymmen ki San* (elders in society) vis-a-vis the *Kñi*

In Khasi society *Ki Tymmen ki San* (the elders) occupy a privileged position. They are considered the philosophers and the wise people of the society. There is a sense of reverence for such people. In families, the elderly people receive special attention and care. It was unthinkable for the Khasis to send the old people to the old aged homes.⁵³ Every family considered it a privilege to have elderly people residing in them. Among the Khasis there are popular sayings known as *Ki Jingsneng Tymmen* (wise sayings of the old people).⁵⁴ These are still preserved today in books and being read by the younger generation in schools and colleges. This indicates that the elders

in society have a great moral authority in Khasi society. It is generally believed that rebelling against the advice and counsels of the elders would bring a curse and God's punishment on those responsible. The elders are looked up as people of rich experience, as those who have seen the past and have acquired an extensive knowledge. Younger generation usually seeks the advice of the elders in matters of social, cultural and religious life and in any Khasi *dorbar* (assembly), the counsels of the elders are given an important attention.

In most cases the *Kñi* is an elder himself and as such he is looked up as a person of great knowledge and experience. For this reason, his words are considered as wise and inspiring and they are adhered to by the youth.

3.9. MORAL FUNCTIONS OF U KÑI

U kñi in the Khasi society is the primary up-keeper of morality among his clan members. He often acts as a moral policeman and a disciplinarian. In this aspect, the *kñi* performs three roles in his clan as described below.

3.9.1. Instruction

In ensuring a sound moral conduct of his clan members, the *kñi* first of all takes upon himself the task of instructing the younger members of his clan especially the male members.⁵⁵ In fact, as per tradition, the *kñi* is the one who provides intellectual, moral and religious instruction to his nephews and nieces so as to equip them with the necessary qualities to encounter the world outside.⁵⁶ Since time immemorial the *kñi* has always done this orally. In his regular visits to the families, he would gather

around him his nephews and nieces as well as his younger sisters and brothers and he would instruct them. Often this used to be done in the evening after dinner. Through this regular instruction the nephews and nieces were reminded about their family, social and religious duties.⁵⁷ They would sit around the family hearth and then he would begin his instruction. The Khasis have a narrative tradition and so most of the moral lessons are communicated through interesting legends and folktales or through songs and ballads. In cases where the *kñi* happened to be a musician, he would use his *duitara* to teach moral lessons to the young ones. In the olden days, the *kñi* was very faithful in carrying out this duty of moral instruction to his clan members.

The present study clearly indicates that in general the Khasis still recognize this role of the *kñi* in the society.

a) *Kñi* is the instructor and educator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Age perspective)

Table 3.36 below provides an age perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is the instructor and educator of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 3.36 – *Kñi* is the instructor and educator (Age perspective)

Age of the respondents	<i>Kñi</i> is an instructor and educator				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
15 - 35	364 87.9	35 8.5	14 3.4	1 0.2	414 100.0
36 - 55	100 78.1	22 17.2	6 4.7	-	128 100.0
56 and more	58 96.7	2 3.3		-	60 100.0
Total	522 86.7	59 9.8	20 3.3	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.36 above shows that irrespective of age difference most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the instructor and educator of the younger members of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. As expected the older people are more agreeable to this. The younger people seem less agreeable to this than the younger ones probably because the latter begin to perceive their fathers as the actual instructor and educator.

b) *Kñi* is the instructor and educator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Gender perspective)

Table 3.37 below provides a gender perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is the instructor and educator of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 3.37 – *Kñi* is the instructor and educator (Gender perspective)

Gender of the respondents	<i>Kñi</i> is an instructor and educator				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Men	201 87.4	21 9.1	7 3.0	1 0.4	230 100.0
Women	321 86.3	38 10.2	13 3.5	-	372 100.0
Total	522 86.7	59 9.8	20 3.3	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.37 above indicates that irrespective of gender majority of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the instructor and educator in *kur/kpoh/ing*.

c) *Kɔ̃i* is the instructor and educator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Religious perspective)

Table 3.38 below provides a religious perspective of the respondents on whether the *kɔ̃i* is the instructor and educator of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 3.38 – *Kɔ̃i* is the instructor and educator (Religious perspective)

Religion of the respondents	<i>Kɔ̃i</i> is an instructor and educator			No response	Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say		
Christian	451 87.4	47 9.1	17 3.3	1 0.2	516 100.0
Traditional religion	71 82.6	12 14.0	3 3.5	-	86 100.0
Total	522 86.7	59 9.8	20 3.3	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.38 above shows that irrespective of religions most of the respondents agree that the *kɔ̃i* is the instructor and educator of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. Very few respondents seem to disagree or to be neutral on this issue. This indicates that this role of the *kɔ̃i* is still important.

d) *Kɔ̃i* is the instructor and educator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Educational perspective)

Table 3.39 below provides an educational perspective of the respondents on whether the *kɔ̃i* is the instructor and educator of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 3.39 – *Kñi* is the instructor and educator (Educational perspective)

Educational qualification	<i>Kñi</i> is an instructor and educator				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Post-graduate	16 94.1	1 5.9	-	-	17 100.0
Graduate	78 82.1	12 12.6	5 5.3	-	95 100.0
XI - XII	182 94.3	6 3.1	5 2.6	-	193 100.0
V - X	147 82.1	24 13.4	7 3.9	1 0.6	179 100.0
I - IV	63 82.9	11 14.5	2 2.6	-	76 100.0
Illiterate	35 85.4	5 12.2	1 2.4	-	41 100.0
Total	522 86.7	59 9.8	20 3.3	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.39 above indicates that irrespective of their educational qualifications, most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the instructor and educator of the *kur/kpoh/ing*. The number of those who disagree is rather small.

e) *Kñi* is the instructor and educator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Occupational perspective)

Table 3.40 below provides an occupational perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* is the instructor and educator of his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 3.40 – *Kñi* is the instructor and educator (Occupational perspective)

Occupation of respondents	<i>Kñi</i> is an instructor and educator				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Government employee	48 88.9	5 9.3	1 1.8	-	54 100.0
Business	48 82.7	7 12.1	3 5.2	-	58 100.0
Farmer	52 92.8	2 3.6	2 3.6	-	56 100.0
Others	374 86.2	45 10.3	14 3.3	1 0.2	434 100.0
Total	522 86.7	59 9.8	20 3.3	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 3.40 above shows that most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* is the instructor and educator in the *kur/kpoh/ing*. It is significant that the number of farmers who agree is higher than those who disagree or have no views.

3.9.2. Enforcement of moral norms

The *kñi* not only instructs but also has the power to enforce the moral values. According to Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh, “a *kñi* in the Khasi tradition is the centre of authority”.⁵⁸ It is his duty to see that the members of the clan or *ka kpoh*, observe scrupulously the rules and norms concerning religion, ethics and cultural tradition. He keeps reminding his clan members about these things and he monitors their behaviours to see that they comply with these traditional set of norms.⁵⁹ His frequent visits to his sisters’ families is to achieve this purpose. He commands respect and reverence from the younger members of his clan. There is an honest fear of the *kñi*

which motivates the clan members to respect and adhere to the socio-cultural norms and tradition.

3.9.3. Rewards and Punishments

The *kñi* in the olden days was rather strict with his clan members, especially the younger ones. He also acted as judge to reward those who complied and punish those who broke the laws. The *kñi* was considered by tradition to possess a divine sanction in exercising these powers. In cases of incest (*shong-sang*) or any anti-social crimes committed by a member of the *kur*, the *kñi* was the one who awarded the punishment to the erring member. Ostracization (*tait-kur*) from the clan was usually the punishment imposed for grave crimes. It is said that in certain cases in the past, the *kñi* could beat his erring nephew or niece to death especially when it was a case of incest. This was done because he had to safeguard the purity of his clan.⁶⁰

3.10. CONCLUSION

The institution of *kñi*-ship among the Khasis is still considered a very important and significant one. Although such an institution is common among other groups of people, yet for the Khasis who maintain a matrilineal system, a *kñi* is someone who wields tremendous authority and influence. He represents the patriarchal system of Khasi society. Although *kñi*-ship has weakened considerably in the last few decades, it has never become irrelevant as the present study demonstrates. A *kñi* is still considered an influencing figure in the life of the Khasi society at least in important

matters related to the *kur/kpoh/ing*. His counsels are still sought for and his decisions are still respected to a great extent.

NOTES

¹ Cf. J. War, "Family Structures, Customary Laws and Christianity: The Khasi Context", in *Impact of Christianity on North East India*. Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 1996, 229. In fact, in Khasi culture, if anyone wants to present a case before the king or the *dorbar*, he/she has to do so only through the *Kñi* (maternal uncle) of his/her clan, for the latter is recognized as the legal representative by Khasi tradition.

² Cf. G. Costa, *Ka Riti Jong ka Ri Ki Laiphew Syiem*, vol. 1, 14-17.

³ Cf. B. S. Rana, *The People of Meghalaya: Study of the People and their Religio-cultural Life*. Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1989, 111.

⁴ Cf. J. War, "The Khasi concept of family: Changes in structure and function", in P. M. Chacko (ed.) *Matriliney in Meghalaya: Tradition and Change*. New Delhi: Regency Publications, 1998, 19.

⁵ Cf. V. Pakyntein, "The Khasi Clan: Changing Religion and its Effect", in J. S. Bhandari (ed.) *Kinship and Family in North-East India*. New Delhi: Cosmos Publications, 1996, 351.

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷ Cf. R. Fox, *Encounter with Anthropology*, 87.

⁸ Cf. C. Nakane, *Garo and Khasi: A Comparative Study in Matrilineal Systems* (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1967).

⁹ Cf. V. Pakyntein, "The Khasi Clan: Changing Religion and its Effect", in *Kinship and Family in North-East India*, p.

¹⁰ Cf. Nakane, *Garo and Khasi, A Comparative Study in Matrilineal Systems*, 106.

¹¹ Cf. Barih, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, 291.

¹² Cf. J. War, "The Khasi concept of family: Changes in structure and function", 24.

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.* In 1997 the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) passed the Bill on "Khasi Social Custom of Lineage which has now become a law. In this Act the ceremony of *Tang-jait* is recognized and certain conditions and procedures are laid down distinctly - See KHADC, Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act 1997 in *The Gazette of Meghalaya*, no. 22 (Shillong: February 25, 2005), 3

¹⁴ This was a sound method by which the early Khasi men were able to enlarge the Khasi tribe. The Khasi warriors who plundered the surrounding plains would often carry along with them plains women. They would then marry them and create new clans through the process of *tang-kur*.

¹⁵ Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh till date has performed this ceremony of *tangkur* over 15 couples and so he has created 15 new *kur* among the Khasis.

¹⁶ *Interview with Rev. Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh* (Mawlai: July 12, 2011).

¹⁷ Cf. H. Giri, "Social institutions among the Khasis with special reference to kinship, marriage, family life and divorce", in S. K. Chattopadhyay (ed.) *Tribal Institutions of Meghalaya*. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1985, 159.

¹⁸ In many cases as it happens today, where the clan is big and the population of the clan members is large, a *kñi rangbah* is not easily determinable. In such situation, the common practice is to elect someone elderly and one who commands respect from all, as a leader of the clan. He is usually known as *rangbah kur* (clan leader). To a great extent, he acts almost like the *kñi rangbah* of the clan.

¹⁹ Cf. M. P. R. Lyngdoh, *The Festivals in the History and Culture of the Khasi*, 33.

²⁰ Cf. Snaitang, *Christianity and Social Change*, 35.

²¹ Modern Khasi society is experiencing a phenomenon of urbanization. This has led to the loss of the traditional social bond which exists in a rural setting. Many clans are disintegrated due to this process. As a consequence the role of the maternal uncle in a clan has been diminished to a great extent. The present degeneration among the young people, can be ascribed to a great extent to the loss of control of the maternal uncle over them. The maternal uncle (*Kñi*) has always been an institution of discipline and good education in Khasi society in the past.

²² *An Interview with Rev. Fr. S. Sngi Lyngdoh* (Shillong: Sacred Heart Th. College, May 2, 2009).

²³ Cf. J. War, "The Khasi concept of Family: Changes in structure and function", 20.

²⁴ Cf. Fox, *Kinship and marriage*. London: Pelican Books, 1966, 167.

²⁵ *Interview with Mrs. Philomena Dkhar* (Marbisu: November 27, 2011).

²⁶ Cf. H. K. Synrem, *Revivalism in Khasi Society*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1992, 27.

²⁷ Cf. J. War, "The Khasi concept of Family: Changes in structure and function", p. 21.

- ²⁸ Cf. L. S. Gassah, "Ka kyrdan u rangbah ha ka imlang sahlang bad ka longing longsem", presented at a seminar on Family & Family related issues, organized by Ka Lympung ki Seng Kynthei, Laitumkhuh-Shillong: December 10th, 1994.
- ²⁹ Cf. K. Kantlie, *Notes on Khasi Law*, 92.
- ³⁰ Cf. Gassah, "Ka kyrdan u rangbah ha ka imlang sahlang bad ka longing longsem", 2.
- ³¹ Cf. Giri, "Social institutions among the Khasis with special reference to kinship, marriage, family life and divorce", 163.
- ³² Cf. Mawrie, *The Khasi Milieu*, 60.
- ³³ Cf. Mawrie, *Ka longing longsem u Khun Khasi Khara*, 94-95.
- ³⁴ Cf. C. R. Khongwir, "Ka kyrdan u rangbah Khasi", in *Dongmusa* (October 24, 1991), 7.
- ³⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ The Khasis practice their day to day religion within their family (*kpoh*) and the house of the youngest daughter is considered *ka ing-niam* (religious house). The *kñi* exercises his religious duties in this house. When the *kur* (clan) is small the *kñi* of the clan exercises his duties on behalf of the entire clan. However, when the *kur* is large, the *kñi* usually does this only on behalf of his *kpoh* (sub-clan).
- ³⁷ Cf. S. Sngi Lyngdoh, "The Khasi Matriline: Its Past and its Future", in P. M. Chacko (ed.) *Matriliney in Meghalaya*, 34.
- ³⁸ Cf. P. R. G. Mathur, *The Khasi of Meghalaya*, 65.
- ³⁹ Cf. O. L. Snaitang, *Christianity and Social Change*, 15.
- ⁴⁰ Cf. Mathur, *The Khasis of Meghalaya*, 65.
- ⁴¹ Cf. S. Tham, *Ki Sngi Barim u Hynniew Trep*, 31.
- ⁴² Cf. O. L. Snaitang, *Christianity and Social Change*, 15.
- ⁴³ Cf. L. H. Pde, "Ka jingshim jait na ka kmie", presented at a seminar How the matrilineal system affects the Khasi family, organized by the Khasi Department, NEHU and sponsored by ICSSR-NERC, Shillong: May 27-28, 1988.
- ⁴⁴ In fact this has been the most misunderstood aspect of Khasi society by the non-Khasis. They often misconceive Khasi society as matriarchal while in truth it is patriarchal.
- ⁴⁵ Cf. Fox, *Encounter with Anthropology*, 77.
- ⁴⁶ Cf. S. Sngi Lyngdoh, "The Khasi Matriline: Its Past and its Future", 33.
- ⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ Cf. H. Roy, "The Land where Women are Women and Men are Men", in *Sneng Khasi* (Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, 1986), 6.
- ⁴⁹ Cf. Kharakor, *Ka Kolshor Khasi*, 39.
- ⁵⁰ Cf. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, pp. 78-79; Cf. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, 323; Cf. J. N. Chowdhury, *Khasi Canvas: A Cultural and Political History*. Shillong: Shrimati Jaya Chowdhury, 1978, 145.
- ⁵¹ In many rural areas of Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the father still acts only as a procreator in his family. He spends most of his time with his nephews and nieces in their families. Even the earnings he makes are directed to them rather than to his children.
- ⁵² Cf. P. R. Kyndiah, *Journey of Words*. New Delhi, Sanchar Publishing House, 1993, 64; Cf. S. Sen, *The Tribes of Meghalaya*. Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1985, 74.
- ⁵³ Today the younger generation is displaying less respect towards the elders and the old people. The presence of a number of Khasi aged men and women in Mercy Home, Nongthymmai, bears evidence to this. However, in general this respect and concern for the old is still upheld in most families.
- ⁵⁴ Cf. R. S. Berry, *Ki Jingsneng Tymmen I & II*. Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, 1903. These two volumes contain a series of moral counsels of the elders to the younger generation. These sayings are well known among the Khasi and they are highly treasured by all.
- ⁵⁵ Cf. Gassah, "Ka kyrdan u rangbah ha ka imlang sahlang bad ka longing longsem", 2..
- ⁵⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁷ Cf. S. Sngi Lyngdoh, "The Tribal value system and the impact of Christianity on it", in *Impact of Christianity on North East India*, 217.
- ⁵⁸ *An Interview with Rev. Fr. S. Sngi Lyngdoh* (Shillong: Sacred Heart Th. College, May 2, 2009).
- ⁵⁹ Cf. H. O. Mawrie, *Ka longing longsem u khun Khasi Khara*. Shillong: Tmissilda Soh, 1983, 93.
- ⁶⁰ Cf. S. Sngi Lyngdoh, "The Khasi Matriline: Its Past and its Future", 33.

CHAPTER 4

Decline of *Kñi*-ship in Khasi Society

4.1. INTRODUCTION

One of the frequently discussed topics in Khasi society today is the fading role of the *kñi*. The intensity of *kñi*-ship that had existed in the last century is no more prevalent today. Many Khasis today see this decline of *kñi*-ship as an imminent danger to the existence of the community itself. However, considering the change of time and the unavoidable influences of post-modernity, we are not surprised by the cultural transformation that is taking place among the Khasis. Culture is in fact dynamic and it is bound to evolve in time.

Kñi-ship is still upheld today although it has lost its primeval dignity, sacredness and popularity. In the rural areas where clan members still maintain a close relationship, *kñis* still function quite effectively. In the urban areas, their role is limited to visits now and then especially during some significant events like the death of a clan member or marriages.

4.2. DECLINING STATUS OF *KNI*

The institution of *kñi*-ship among the Khasis has witnessed a gradual decline in its status and authority.

a) **Status of the *kñi* has diminished (Rural-urban perspective)**

Table 4.1 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the status of the *kñi* has diminished.

Table 4.1 –Status of the *kñi* has diminished (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	Status of the <i>kñi</i> has diminished			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	286 72.0	87 21.9	24 6.0	397 100.0
Mawroh	134 65.4	45 21.9	26 12.7	205 100.0
Total	420 69.8	132 21.9	50 8.3	602 100.0

Table 4.1 above reveals that in both places (Marbisu and Mawroh) most of the respondents agree that the status of the *kñi* has diminished considerably. It is interesting to note that in rural area (Marbisu) this phenomenon is felt even more than in the urban area. This is probably due to the fact that the traditional role of the *kñi* used to be more evident in rural communities. Thus the diminishing status of the *kñi* is felt more acutely in the rural setting than in the city.

b) **Status of the *kñi* has diminished (Gender perspective)**

Table 4.2 below provides a gender perspective of the respondents on whether the status of the *kñi* has diminished.

Table 4.2 – Status of the *kñi* has diminished (Gender perspective)

Gender of the respondents	Status of the <i>kñi</i> has diminished			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Men	158 68.7	53 23.0	19 8.3	230 100.0
Women	262 70.4	79 21.2	31 8.3	372 100.0
Total	420 69.8	132 21.9	50 8.3	602 100.0

Table 4.2 above reveals that most of the respondents, both men and women, agree that the status of the *kñi* has gone down. It is interesting to note that more women agree with this than the men do. This difference is normal as the women feel more the diminishing role of their brother or uncle from their families more especially in the case of the *khatduh*'s family. The *kñi* in general visits his sisters' families and seldom his brothers' families.

c) Status of the *kñi* has diminished (Religious perspective)

Table 4.3 below provides religious perspective of the respondents on whether the status of the *kñi* has diminished.

Table 4.3 – Status of the *kñi* has diminished (Religious perspective)

Religion of the respondents	Status of the <i>kñi</i> has diminished			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Christian	362 70.2	109 21.1	45 8.7	516 100.0
Traditional religion	58 67.4	23 26.7	5 5.8	86 100.0
Total	420 69.8	132 21.9	50 8.3	602 100.0

Table 4.3 above shows that Christian respondents are more inclined to believe that the status of the *kñi* has diminished today than those who profess the traditional religion. Probably, the *kñis* in families professing Khasi religion, still perform a lot of the traditional rituals and customs.

4.2. CAUSES OF THE DECLINE OF *KÑI*-SHIP

There are many causes for the decline of *kñi*-ship in Khasi society. These causes are mostly connected to changes in the socio-political and cultural scenes. Putting these causes together, we may discuss them under the two following categories:

4.2.1. Exogenous factors

There are many external factors that have affected the institution of *kñi*-ship among the Khasis. Perhaps the greatest impact came from modernization which has caused social

upheavals among the tribal people in general thereby leading to crisis of identity.¹

Among the most significant factors are the following:

4.2.1.1. Urbanization

In the early years, the Khasis usually lived together as members of the same clan (*kur*) and also the *kha* almost as extended families. A village would always consist of families belonging to *kur* and *kha*. This was to enable marriages among them while at the same time not to disperse the family members.² This kind of cultural practice enabled the *kñi* to meet his nephews and nieces as often as he wanted. Thus he was able to admonish and guide his clan members more effectively. In fact in the traditional system, the *kñi* becomes the sole authority among his sisters, nephews and nieces. His role was not only to admonish but to feed and nurture them as well. His word was a command for all.³

However, the trend of urbanization which started in the early 1960s has led to the migration of a huge population from the rural areas to the city of Shillong in particular in search of better education and jobs. This has led to the disintegration of the *kur* or *kpoh* members.⁴ With the rise in the percentage of educated youth, the number of Khasi youths who went outside the region either for higher studies or for employment, has risen considerably. This phenomenon has resulted in a physical distance between members of the clan or even of the family. Consequently, it has become impossible for the *kñis* to make frequent visits to the members of their *kur/kpoh/ing* in order to counsel them.⁵ In the interviews conducted almost all agree that the physical distance of the *kñi* due to dispersion of clan members is one of the reasons for the decline of influence of

the *kñi* over his *kur/kpoh/ing*. City life facilitates the emergence of nuclear families wherein the *kñi* loses much of his influence while the *kpa* gains in importance and authority.

4.2.1.2. Christian religion

Another reason for the decline of *kñi-ship* among the Khasis is the arrival of Christianity. Being a religion from the West where patriarchy prevails, Christian teaching on family life emphasizes greatly on the role of the father. Missionaries from Europe who were ill-informed about the traditional institution of *kñi-ship*, tended to belittle such a traditional institution.

Moreover, with the majority of the Khasi families becoming Christians, the role of the *kñi* seems to have become redundant. Before the arrival of Christianity, the *kñi* had many roles to play especially those of religious nature. He was the presiding priest of the clan or the *kpoh* in any of the religious ceremonies.⁶ However, with the adoption of Christianity as a new religion, the Christian *kñi* can no longer exercise those roles since the new religion forbids adherence to these traditional practices especially those related to sacrifices and rituals. Some of the adverse consequences on Khasi traditional religious practices caused by the advent of Christianity are:

a) Today, the marriage ban has become a church prerogative. In the olden days there would have been no need of such ban announcement in churches because the *kñis* of both parties would have ensured that no *shong-sang* (sacrilegious marriage) would take place. The *kñis* of both parties were the ones who initiated marriage proceedings

and arrangements for their boys and girls.⁷ In most cases marriages would take place only after the *kñis* of both parties reached mutual agreement and understanding.

b) When most Khasis became Christians, family religion also ceased to exist and with it the traditional family religious rituals like the periodic sacrifices, the ancestor cult, the ritual for internment of bones of the deceased person into the clan ossuary (*Thep mawshiang/mawbah*). There also emerged a conflict between Christianity and the old religion regarding the disposal of the dead. Whereas the former practiced burial the latter upholds cremation.⁸ The annual sacrifice usually offered by a particular clan in sacred groves (*lawkyntang*) or market places was largely affected.

c) Through education, Christianity has helped in the transformation of the tribal society from being a simple to a complex one.⁹ This aspect has facilitated and quickened the process of modernization among the Khasis. This has indirectly affected the institution of *kñi*-ship as it has led to a more critical acceptance of this traditional authority especially among the younger generations.

The coming of Christianity as the new religion of the Khasis has put into disarray the socio-cultural structure and religious beliefs of the Khasis.¹⁰ Therefore Christianity has been responsible for the declining role of the *kñi* in the society. Consequently, the image of the *kñi* has deteriorated to a great extent. Christianity instead emphasizes the figure of the *kpa* (father) as head of the family.¹¹

4.2.1.3. Influence of British rule

British rule in general has brought about a lot of significant cultural changes in Indian society.¹² The Khasi society, isolated as it was, suffered great cultural shock with the arrival of the western culture and religion.¹³ Perhaps one of the adverse effects on Khasi society brought by British rule was on land ownership system. In the past, immovable property was always a common property among the Khasis. They would always refer to a house, land or forest as “our property” and never “my property”. The British introduced the Law of Inheritance in 1918 which delinked inheritance from religious duties. As a consequence of this law the *khatduh* gained more power while the *kñi*'s authority diminished.¹⁴ The British government ordered that land and other property had to be registered in the owner's name. From then on, the concept of private property came into practice and the land was registered in the name of the *khatduh*.¹⁵ Such a policy gradually led to a misconception that the common property of the *kpoh/kur* belongs to an individual alone. Thus we have cases where the *khatduh* appropriate to themselves such property.¹⁶ Commenting on this, a Khasi columnist as early as 1921 remarked: “court decisions over inheritance to properties depending on evidence not based on informed and thorough knowledge of genuine customs, are intrusions (on customs) through jungle paths”.¹⁷ According to a recent report from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Meghalaya has the highest percentage of landless tribals (5.5%) in the country.¹⁸ This is true among the Khasis today where much of the community land has turned into private properties. Moreover, the absence of land ceiling law has enabled rich individuals to own unlimited

amount of land while the poorer people are left landless. This was not so in the past when land was always a community property.

Besides the above law, the British administration had also affected the juridical and legislative powers of the institution of *kñi*-ship and of the traditional village government. The setting up of judicial courts of justice for trying civil and criminal cases has had its impact on Khasi society.¹⁹ These courts to a great extent have curtailed the traditional powers of the *kñi* in juridical affairs related to their clan members.

4.2.1.4. Changing economy

Since the beginning of the 20th century, Khasi society has undergone tremendous changes in terms of its economy. From a slash-and-burn and production for subsistence economy the society has moved to a competitive and market economy.²⁰ Economy to a great extent influences family system. Thus an agrarian economy favours a joint-family system. On the other hand an urban-based economy today is more centered on individual skill and qualification. Subsistence economy is usually for family consumption while market economy is for profit. This profit dimension leads to competition for personal proprietorship especially of the most valuable yet limited resource which is land.²¹ This change in the economy system has consequently transformed the Khasi family.

According to one social scientist:

A change from production for subsistence to production for exchange is accompanied by the advent of competition for scarce resources, which militates against the wide distribution characteristic of matriliney...; this inevitably leads to the emergence of the

individual family as the key kinship group with respect to residence, economic co-operation, legal responsibility and socialization.²²

Dispersion of clan members, urbanization and a changing economy all together have contributed to the emergence of nuclear families among the Khasis. In a nuclear family the bond between the husband and wife and their children is stronger than kinship bond. Thus according to Schneider: “the institutionalization of very strong, lasting or intense bonds between husband and wife is not compatible with matriliney”.²³ Consequently, *kñi*-ship which is so connected to matriliney has been greatly affected in the Khasi society.

4.2.1.5. Influence of Western individualism and Liberalism

The contact with outside cultures (western and Indian) has had a weakening effect on Khasi matriliney in general which has negatively impacted *kñi*-ship.²⁴ One of the adverse influences of western culture on the Khasi society is the propagation of individualism and liberalism. The sense of personal freedom and the emphasis on individual person which are so characteristic of western society, have gradually entered Khasi society. The traditional social virtues of community sense and solidarity are fast disappearing or diminishing. This phenomenon is more prevalent in urban areas where people are more concerned about individual well being and personal freedom. Although in certain occasions communal sense and solidarity are still manifested yet in general these values are diminishing.²⁵

This attitude has led to a great sense of independence on the part of family or clan members among the Khasis. As a consequence they gradually feel less need for the advice and guidance of the *kñi* especially in family matters. In fact, many decisions are taken by the families themselves and they only inform the *kñi*.²⁶ This was never so in the olden days when the *kñi* had a say even in the family affairs of his nephews and nieces. Today such a thing would be frowned upon and considered as meddling in private matters. Even the *kñis* themselves have become more individualistic and they care less for their clan members. Most of them are more worried about their children's welfare than that of their clan members.²⁷

4.2.1.6. Impact of western secularism

One of the most significant influences of western culture on the tribal communities in general and the Khasis in particular, is secularism. For the Khasis, as for any tribal community, the sense of the sacred is very strong. This is the reason why they perceive the presence of the spirits in their natural environment. For them everything in their natural environment is sacred because it is the abode of God or his spirits. This sense of the sacred pervades every sphere of their socio-cultural life. Thus, for the Khasis, a family or a clan is a religious institution and even a *durbar* has divine sanction. Thus, *kñi*-ship used to be considered as a sacred institution as it was believed to have divine sanction in it. This is the reason why, in olden days, the *kñi* commanded respect and obedience from every member of the family or clan.

Secularism from the west has however demythologized many of the tribal beliefs. The spread of secularism especially through the media (written and audio/visual) has been very damaging to the religious ethos of the Khasis. Thus a secular attitude is gradually being absorbed by the Khasis. As a result *kñi*-ship is less and less considered as a religious institution and disrespect or disobedience to the *kñi* is no longer perceived as *ka sang* (great crime) as it used to be earlier.

4.2.2. Endogenous factors

Besides the exogenous factors, there are also endogenous factors that have had a decisive impact on the Khasi institution of *kñi*-ship. Some of these factors have impacted the society more than others.

4.2.2.1. Dispersion of Clan members

Perhaps the most direct impact of modern civilization on Khasi society is the dispersion of clan and family members due to migration to cities in search of jobs and other opportunities. Traditionally what kept the clan members together was the land where they cultivated and shared the produce. However, with modern education and occupations, Khasi men and women are holding important jobs which have given them a sense of independence and self reliance. Such independence, as A. Mawlong opines, comes into “constant conflict with clan solidarity” for they no longer depend on common land.²⁸

The phenomenon of clan dispersion is on the increase and there are many villages today whose population has been decimated due to migration of youth in particular to Shillong in search of better education and employment. Thus a Khasi man could not be expected to remain in his village or get married there. Often he had to go out of his village or away from his clan members. Thus as a *kñi* it was impossible for him to visit his sisters' families often and to admonish his nephews and nieces.²⁹ This physical distance created an emotional gap in their relationship. Thus the *kñis* today have less knowledge and familiarity with their nephews and nieces.

4.2.2.2. Changes in the institution of *Khatduh*

Traditionally the Khasis consider the youngest daughter of the family (*khatduh*) as the guardian of ancestral property, moveable and immoveable. The reason why the ancestors chose the *khatduh* for this privilege, is not easy to find. According to Cantlie, the *khatduh* "indeed is often the least suitable (manager of the property) having the least experience".³⁰ Other scholars like David Roy argue that the *khatduh* is chosen because she is the last person to keep the house. According to Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh, she is chosen on compassionate ground being the weakest member of the family.³¹ Nevertheless these arguments do not offer us a valid answer to the question. As per tradition, the *khatduh* is only the guardian and never the proprietor of ancestral property. The Land Reforms Commission clearly says "the women of a family by themselves, much less the *khatduh*, cannot, without the approval of the uncles or the brothers dispose of any landed property".³² The *khatduh* is entrusted with the ancestral property because she is the

guardian of the family religion and as such she has the duty of arranging and providing for all the essentials of religious rituals.³³ The *kñi* however is the presiding priest who performs all the rituals. In cases of cremation the *khatduh* is the one who gathers the bones of the deceased *kur/kpoh* member and keeps them in her house till the day of internment (*ka phur-ka siang*) into the clan ossuary. She is also the one who looks after the aged parents till their death. Besides these, she has also the obligation to look after her unmarried brothers and sisters.³⁴

However, in the past few decades the institution of *khatduh* has undergone transformation. It started with the misconception about the status and function of the *khatduh* among the British officers who could not understand or appreciate the nuances of the Khasi system.³⁵ Moreover, the British officers misunderstood the Khasi term of *nongpateng* for the English word inheritance. Thus according to David Roy there was already a tendency to consider the *khatduh* as the sole inheritor of ancestral property.³⁶ According to A. Mawlong, “with the conversion to Christianity, the institution of *Ka Khatduh* which is closely connected to the Khasi religion has lost its true meaning in the present day context”.³⁷ As it is now, with the gradual disappearance of *ka niam* in the family, people begin to forget that the *khatduh* is only the custodian of ancestral property but they tend to regard her as the sole proprietor. This in turn has got a damaging effect on the role and status of the *kñi* in the Khasi society.

4.2.2.3. Cross-cultural marriages

The growing phenomenon of cross-cultural marriages among the Khasis, especially women, has resulted in a serious breakdown of tradition especially that related to the role of the *kñi*. Such marriages bring cultural tension within the family wherein the *kñi* finds himself in a complex situation. Often the non-Khasi husband who comes from a patrilineal and patriarchal culture does not understand the role of the *kñi*. Such marriages bring tension within the family with regard to economic rights of male and female as prescribed by tradition.³⁸ According to Jayanta Bhusan the non-Khasi husband does not cause any structural change in the Khasi family since the children adopt the mother's *kur*.³⁹ But this is not always a reality especially today as many more Khasi women yield to the patrilineal system of their non-Khasi husbands. In fact, according to S. D. Kahit in such cross-cultural marriages "Khasi women are increasingly prone to giving in to a substantial change in the family system, i.e., from matriliney to patriliney".⁴⁰ In such a situation, tensions between the outsider-male and the male members of the wife's clan (the *kñi*) are always expected.⁴¹ Moreover, the role of the *kñi* in such families gradually fades away or at best it is tolerated.

4.2.2.4. Educational disparity

There is another emerging factor which is responsible for the decline of *kñi-ship* among the Khasis which is the educational disparity between the *kñi* and his subordinates. It is often seen that while the nephews and nieces may be highly educated, the *kñi* instead is

illiterate.⁴² This situation is even more prevalent in rural areas. It is an undeniable fact that the younger generation today are progressively qualified in many areas of education (formal or vocational). On the other hand it is equally true that most of the *kñis* still remain illiterate or at the elementary education. This factor widens the generation gap between the two. In such cases, the *kñi* is bound to suffer from inferiority complex which consequently leads to shying away from his traditional duties. At times, the youth tend to lose respect for their *kñi* on account of their high education.

The result of the survey conducted related to this aspect of *kñi*-ship reveals clearly the educational deficit of the *kñis* in general. Here below is the analysis of the collected data.

a) **Many *kñis* are illiterate (Rural-urban perspective)**

Table 4.4 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on if many *kñis* are illiterate.

Table 4.4 – Many *kñis* are illiterate (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	Many <i>kñis</i> are illiterate				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	No response	
Marbisu	265 66.7	100 25.2	32 8.1	-	397 100.0
Mawroh	93 45.3	68 33.2	41 20.0	3 1.5	205 100.0
Total	358 59.5	168 27.9	73 12.1	3 0.5	602 100.0

Table 4.4 above indicates that in general there is a sizable number of respondents who agree that many *kñis* are illiterate. As expected again, this phenomenon seems to be more prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas.

b) Many *kñis* are illiterate (Religious perspective)

Table 4.5 below provides a religious perspective of the respondents on if many *kñis* are illiterate.

Table 4.5 – Many *kñis* are illiterate (Religious perspective)

Religion of the respondents	Many <i>kñis</i> are illiterate				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	Missing response	
Christian	303 58.7	144 27.9	66 12.8	3 0.6	516 100.0
Traditional religion	55 64.0	24 27.9	7 8.1	-	86 100.0
Total	358 59.5	168 27.9	73 12.1	3 0.5	602 100.0

Table 4.5 above reveals that a majority of respondents agree that many *kñis* are illiterate. However, the level of illiteracy of the *kñis* seems to be higher among those of the traditional religion than among the Christians. This is probably because educational opportunities are much higher for Christians than for others.

c) *Kñis* who are educated wield more influence (Rural-urban perspective)

The survey also demonstrates that an educated *kñi* is in general more influential with the members of his *kur/kpoh/ing* than the illiterate one. Table 4.6 below provides us a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on the question if *kñis* who are educated wield more influence.

Table 4.6 – *Kñis* who are educated wield more influence (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	Educated <i>kñis</i> wield more influence			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	220 55.4	146 36.8	31 7.8	397 100.0
Mawroh	100 48.8	89 43.4	16 7.8	205 100.0
Total	320 53.2	235 39.0	47 7.8	602 100.0

Table 4.6 above reveals that in general there is not a majority agreement among respondents to this question. There seems to be a general feeling that education is not a decisive factor. However, the percentage of agreement is higher in rural than in urban areas. Probably, the image of an educated person is more prominent in rural areas than in cities.

d) *Kñis* who are educated wield more influence (Gender perspective)

Table 4.7 below provides a gender perspective of the respondents on if *kñis* who are educated wield more influence.

Table 4.7 – *Kñis* who are educated wield more influence (Gender perspective)

Gender of the respondents	Educated <i>kñis</i> wield more influence			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Men	134 58.3	81 35.2	15 6.5	230 100.0
Women	186 50.0	154 41.4	32 8.6	372 100.0
Total	320 53.2	235 39.0	47 7.8	602 100.0

Table 4.7 above reveals that irrespective of gender, a majority of respondents agree that educated *kñi* wield more influence. It is interesting however, to note that a good number of them disagree with this. So education does not seem to be a major deciding factor for the authority of the *kñi*.

4.2.2.5. Economic disparity

The present Khasi families are no longer homogenous in terms of economic power as it used to be in the past. In the early days homogeneity in economic status was a notable characteristic of Khasi society. A king was equal to any ordinary citizen and he was merely a “syntai hapdeng ki para kyrtyong” (*primus inter pares*). He and his family were

sustained by his own subjects. Moreover, the concept of *res-publica* (community goods) and the practice of solidarity were predominant in the early Khasi society. Today, however, Khasi society is experiencing a growing economic disparity. Because of this phenomenon a sort of implicit class system of haves and have-nots is created in the Khasi community. The adverse impact of this on the cultural system is the inferiority complex suffered by the have-nots. Consequently, the *kñi* who is economically poor feels less inclined to visit his family or clan members who are economically well off.⁴³ There are cases where he is made to feel unwelcome in such families. A poorer *kñi* would feel ashamed to visit his nephews and nieces if he has no gifts to offer them.⁴⁴

The survey related to this question does not however indicate a majority opinion on this. The opinion is rather balanced between those who agree and those who disagree. However, there is a greater tendency towards agreement than otherwise.

a) The *kñi* who is economically better off has more influence (Rural-urban)

Table 4.8 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on if the *kñi* who is economically better off are more influential.

**Table 4.8 – The *kñi* who are economically better off has more influence
(Rural-urban perspective)**

Villages	<i>Kñis</i> who are well off command more respect and influence			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	199 50.1	158 39.8	40 10.1	397 100.0
Mawroh	72 35.1	109 53.2	24 11.7	205 100.0
Total	271 45.0	267 44.4	64 10.6	602 100.0

Table 4.8 above indicates that, irrespective of rural-urban settings, not many respondents agree that the *kñi* who is economically better off exercises more influence in his *kur/kpoh/ing*. However, those who are in rural areas agree more with this compared to those in urban areas. Probably economic well being in rural areas is more equated with power and influence than in urban areas where other factors are in play.

b) The *kñi* who is economically better off has more influence (Gender perspective)

Table 4.9 below provides us a gender perspective of the respondents on if the *kñi* who is economically better off are more influential.

**Table 4.9 – The *kñi* who are economically better off has more influence
(Gender perspective)**

Gender of respondents	<i>Kñis</i> who are well off command more respect and influence			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Men	114 49.5	94 40.9	22 9.6	230 100.0
Women	157 42.2	173 46.5	42 11.3	372 100.0
Total	271 45.0	267 44.4	64 10.6	602 100.0

Table 4.9 above reveals that irrespective of gender not many respondents agree that economic well-being gives greater influence to the *kñi*. Nevertheless the men tend to agree more than the women. It is highly significant that many persons disagree with this idea. This shows that this is not a decisive factor in determining the status of the *kñi*.

4.2.2.6. Diversity in Religious creed

The advent of Christianity has brought about a division within the same family. The multiplication of Christian denominations has worsened the situation. As a consequence there may be as many as four to five religious affiliations within a single family. This diversity in religious creed has weakened family bond. In this situation, the *kñi* is unable to guide his family members with one and the same religious creed as it was before the advent of Christianity.⁴⁵

4.2.2.7. Laxity in assuming their roles

It is felt that one of the causes of the down-sliding of *kñi*-ship is the lack of responsibility on their own part. They no longer take seriously their roles and moreover they do not find time anymore to visit their *kur/kpoh/ing* members.⁴⁶ In the olden times, the *kñis* faithfully carried out their duties towards their *kur/kpoh/ing*. Today however, most of the *kñis* concentrate their attention on their own families.⁴⁷ In general it is felt that most of the *kñis* today exhibit less and less sense of responsibility towards the members of their *kur/kpoh/ing*.⁴⁸ While in the past the *kñi* would often visit his clan members and would counsel and discipline his nephews and nieces, today it is felt that most of them do not care to perform this duty anymore.⁴⁹ The results of the survey related to the diminishing role of the *kñi* indicate that this is a growing cultural phenomenon.

a) Many *kñis* today do not know their roles anymore (Rural-urban)

Table 4.10 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on if there are many *kñis* today who do not know their roles anymore.

Table 4.10 – Many *kñis* today do not know their roles anymore (Rural-urban)

Villages	Many <i>kñis</i> do not know their roles anymore			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	306 77.1	73 18.4	18 4.5	397 100.0
Mawroh	133 64.9	47 22.9	25 12.2	205 100.0
Total	439 72.9	120 19.9	43 7.2	602 100.0

Table 4.10 above shows that a majority of the respondents in both urban and rural areas agree that many *kñis* today do not know their roles anymore. It is interesting to note that the rural people (Marbisu) ascribe to this more than the urban respondents. Probably this shortcoming of the *kñi* is more evident and felt in the rural than in the urban society. It is also significant to see that more people in the urban area (12.2%) seem more unfamiliar about this than in rural areas.

b) Many *kñis* today do not know their roles anymore (Religious perspective)

Table 4.11 below provides a religious perspective of the respondents on if there are many *kñis* today who do not know their roles anymore.

Table 4.11 – Many *kñis* today do not know their roles anymore (Religious perspective)

Religion of the respondents	Many <i>kñis</i> do not know their roles anymore			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Christian	377 73.1	98 19.0	41 7.9	516 100.0
Traditional religion	62 72.1	22 25.6	2 2.3	86 100.0
Total	439 72.9	120 19.9	43 7.2	602 100.0

Table 4.11 above shows that irrespective of religion, most respondents agree that many *kñis* today do not know their proper roles anymore. In fact, in this regard there is no significant difference of opinion between Christians and non-Christians. This indicates that this general feeling about the *kñi* is prevalent in the entire Khasi society.

c) *Kñi* visits his *kur/kpoh/ing* (Rural-urban perspective)

Table 4.12 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on if whether the *kñi* often visits them.

Table 4.12 – *Kñi* visits his *kur/kpoh/ing* (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	<i>U kñi</i> visits his family members			Total
	Always	Seldom	Never	
Marbisu	129 32.5	239 60.2	29 7.3	397 100.0
Mawroh	72 35.1	123 60.0	10 4.9	205 100.0
Total	201 33.4	362 60.1	39 6.5	602 100.0

Table 4.12 above reveals that in both settings (rural and urban) majority of the respondents agree that the *kñis* seldom visit them. The number of those who feel that the *kñis* regularly visit them is rather small.⁵⁰ Therefore it is evident that the *kñi* today has shown laxity in exercising this particular role.

d) *Kñi* visits his *kur/kpoh/ing* (Religious perspective)

Table 4.13 below provides a religious perspective of the respondents on if whether the *kñi* often visits them.

Table 4.13 – *Kñi* visits his *kur/kpoh/ing* (Religious perspective)

Religion of respondents	<i>U kñi</i> visits his family members			Total
	Always	Seldom	Never	
Christian	169 32.8	312 60.5	35 6.7	516 100.0
Traditional religion	32 37.2	50 58.1	4 4.7	86 100.0
Total	201 33.4	362 60.1	39 6.5	602 100.0

Table 4.13 above reveals that in general very few respondents agree that the *kñi* visits them frequently. A greater number of them say that the *kñi* seldom visits them. However, the *kñis* of those who are still in the traditional religion seem to visit their members more frequently than those who are Christians. This is quite natural as the *kñi* is more visible in the families who still uphold the traditional religion.

Table 4.15 – U kñi admonishes his kur/kpoh/ing members (Religious perspective)

Religion of the respondents	U kñi admonishes his clan members			Total
	Always	Seldom	Never	
Christian	239 46.3	221 42.8	56 10.9	516 100.0
Traditional religion	47 54.6	33 38.4	6 7.0	86 100.0
Total	286 47.5	254 42.2	62 10.3	602 100.0

Table 4.15 above reveals that in general not many feel that the *kñi* always admonishes them. Significantly, those who are in the traditional religion agree that the *kñi* admonishes them more frequently than those who are Christians. Presumably, this is because the *kñi*'s role is more evident in the former group than in the latter.

g) The *kñi* takes decisions in family matters (Rural-urban perspective)

Table 4.16 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* takes decisions in matters related to *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 4.16 – Kñi takes decisions in family matters (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	U Kñi takes decisions in family matters				Total
	Always	Seldom	Never	Missing response	
Marbisu	222 55.9	98 24.7	76 19.1	1 0.3	397 100.0
Mawroh	85 41.5	83 40.5	37 18.0		205 100.0
Total	307 51.0	181 30.1	113 18.8	1 0.2	602 100.0

e) **The *kñi* admonishes his *kur/kpoh/ing* members (Rural-urban perspective)**

Table 4.14 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* admonishes his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

Table 4.14 – *Kñi* admonishes his *kur/kpoh/ing* members (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	<i>U kñi</i> admonishes his clan members			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	184 46.3	166 41.8	47 11.8	397 100.0
Mawroh	102 49.8	88 42.9	15 7.3	205 100.0
Total	286 47.5	254 42.2	62 10.3	602 100.0

Table 4.14 above reveals that irrespective of the rural-urban setting, not many respondents report that the *kñi* always admonishes them. An almost equal number of them say that the *kñi* seldom does so.

f) **The *kñi* admonishes his *kur/kpoh/ing* members (Religious perspective)**

Table 4.15 below provides a religious perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* admonishes his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

Table 4.16 above reveals that in general a majority of respondents say that the *kñi* always makes decisions in matters related to the *kur/kpoh/ing*. In rural areas the *kñi* seems to be more engaged in decision making than in urban areas. It is highly significant that a good number of respondents say that the *kñi* seldom makes such decisions and a sizeable number say he never takes such decisions.

h) The *kñi* takes decisions in family matters (Religious perspective)

Table 4.17 below provides a religious perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* takes decisions in matters related to *kur/kpoh/ing*.

Table 4.17 – *Kñi* takes decisions in family matters (Religious perspective)

Religion of respondents	U <i>Kñi</i> takes decisions in family matters				Total
	Always	Seldom	Never	Missing response	
Christian	252 48.8	163 31.6	100 19.4	1 0.2	516 100.0
Traditional religion	55 64.0	18 20.9	13 15.1		86 100.0
Total	307 51.0	181 30.1	113 18.8	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 4.17 above shows that those who still maintain the traditional religion tend to agree more that the *kñi* makes decisions in family matters, than those who are Christians. This indicates that, in families which still uphold the Khasi religion, the *kñi* is still relevant and visible. Significantly, a good number of respondents already disagree with this which indicates that the *kñi* is gradually losing this role.

i) **The *kñi* supervises marriages of his *kur/kpoh/ing* members** (Rural-urban perspective)

Table 4.18 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* still supervises marriages of his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

Table 4.18 – *Kñi* supervises marriages of his *kur/kpoh/ing* members
(Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	<i>U kñi</i> supervises marriages of clan members			Total
	Always	Seldom	Never	
Marbisu	230 57.9	86 21.7	81 20.4	397 100.0
Mawroh	141 68.8	38 18.5	26 12.7	205 100.0
Total	371 61.6	124 20.6	107 17.8	602 100.0

Table 4.18 above indicates that, irrespective of the rural-urban settings, most respondents say that the *kñi* always supervises marriages of his *kur/kpoh/ing* members. It is interesting to note that the *kñis* in urban areas score higher in this aspect than those in rural areas. However, the number of those who seldom do it or never do it is quite large.

j) **The *kñi* supervises marriages of his *kur/kpoh/ing* members** (Religious perspective)

Table 4.19 below provides a religious perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* still supervises marriages of his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

**Table 4.19 – *Kñi* supervises marriages of his *kur/kpoh/ing* members
(Religious perspective)**

Religion of respondents	<i>U kñi</i> supervises marriages of clan members			Total
	Always	Seldom	Never	
Christian	319 61.8	105 20.3	92 17.8	516 100.0
Traditional religion	52 60.5	19 22.1	15 17.4	86 100.0
Total	371 61.6	124 20.6	107 17.8	602 100.0

Table 4.19 above reveals that, irrespective of religion, most of the respondents agree that the *kñi* always supervises the marriages of his *kur/kpoh/ing* members. However there is a fairly large number of those who opine that the *kñi* seldom or never perform this role.

k) The *kñi* reconciles all feuds within the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Rural-urban perspective)

Table 4.20 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* acts as a reconciling agent in feuds within his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

**Table 4.20 – *U kñi* reconciles all feuds within the *kur/kpoh/ing*
(Rural-urban perspective)**

Villages	<i>U Kñi</i> reconciles all feuds within the clan				Total
	Always	Seldom	Never	Missing response	
Marbisu	252 63.5	101 25.4	44 11.1		397 100.0
Mawroh	105 51.2	79 38.5	20 9.8	1 0.5	205 100.0
Total	357 59.3	180 29.9	64 10.6	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 4.20 above reveals that not many respondents say that the *kñi* always reconciles feuds within the *kur/kpoh/ing*. However, in this aspect the *kñi* in rural areas seem to perform more than those in urban areas. Many say that the *kñi* seldom does this function. A number of them also say that he never performs this task. This probably indicates that the *kñis* today take less initiative and interest in resolving conflicts within the *kur* or *kpoh*.

1) The *kñi* reconciles all feuds within the *kur/kpoh/ing* (Religious perspective)

Table 4.21 below provides a religious perspective of the respondents on whether the *kñi* acts as a reconciling agent in feuds within his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

**Table 4.21 – *U kñi* reconciles all feuds within the *kur/kpoh/ing*
(Religious perspective)**

Religion of respondents	<i>U Kñi</i> reconciles all feuds within the clan				Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	Missing response	
Christian	298 57.8	159 30.8	58 11.2	1 0.2	516 100.0
Traditional religion	59 68.6	21 24.4	6 7.0		86 100.0
Total	357 59.3	180 29.9	64 10.6	1 0.2	602 100.0

Table 4.21 above reveals that, many respondents agree that the *kñi* always resolves the feuds within the *kur/kpoh/ing*. However, it is evident that such role of the *kñi* is more common among those who are still in the Khasi religion than among those who are already Christians. Perhaps this could be because Christians often have recourse to church authorities to resolve such problems.

4.3. DIMINISHING ROLE OF THE *KÑI*: A GENEALOGICAL STUDY

In our investigation of the problem, we have used a genealogical study to supplement the survey and interview methods. In this method we have selected to study the genealogies of four families (2 in Marbisu and 2 in Mawroh). The results of this genealogical study similarly reveals the diminishing role of the *kñi* today. The *kñi* today does not exercise his role as actively as the *kñi* in the past.

4.3.1. Marbisu Study

a) In the study of the genealogy of the *kpoh* Dkhar in Marbisu the investigator was able to trace up to four generations of *kñi* spanning to a chronological period of over a hundred years. The first generation *kñi* was Jedon Dkhar and the *kñi-synrop* (classificatory uncles) of this generation were Mudon and Hormu. The second generation *kñi* was Jomer Dkhar. The third generation *kñi* is Astar Dkhar and the *kñi-synrop* of this generation are Blanstar, Dronstar and Dlanstar. The fourth generation *kñi* is Andrew Dkhar and the *kñi-synrop* of this generation are Hubert, John, Rosario and Peter. From a critical study based on the interview with the family, it is found that the quality and intensity of role-play of the *kñis* in the past and those of the present has differed considerably. The earlier *kñis*, Jedon and Jomer used to visit their *kur* members on a regular basis. They would even spend days with their nephews and nieces. They also performed their duty of counselling and disciplining their younger members. The later *kñis*, Astar and Andrew spent their time more with their children than with their nephews and nieces. Their visits to the *kur* are less frequent.

b) In the study of the genealogy of the *kpoh* Kurbah in Marbisu, the investigator was able to trace back to three generations of *kñi*. The first generation *kñi* that the present family members still remember was Slen Kurbah. The second generation *kñi* was Khlanshon Kurbah and the *kñi-synrop* (classificatory uncles) of this generation were Tanshon, Akshon, Apshon, Skolin, Paleimon and Tarsingh. The third generation *kñi* is Flystar and the *kñi-synrop* is Dmestar. Again in this case, it is found that the *kñi* in the past Slen and Khlanshon were closer to their sisters, nephews and nieces than those of

Fig. 4.1 - GENEALOGY OF KNI (KPOH DKHAR)

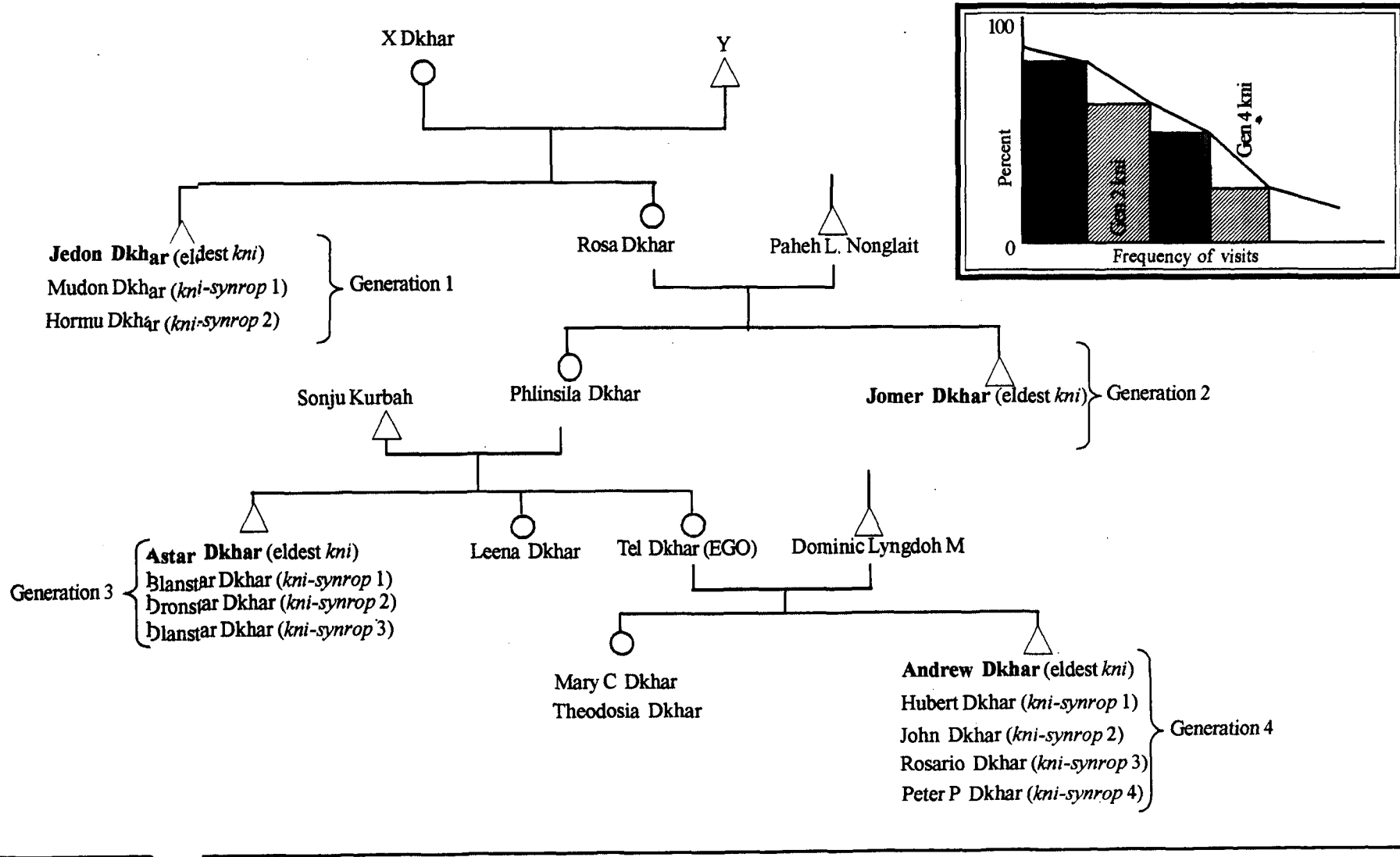
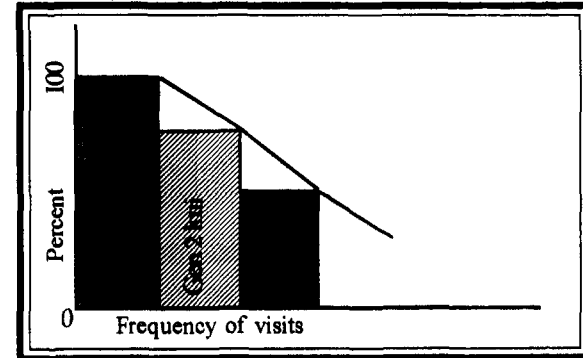
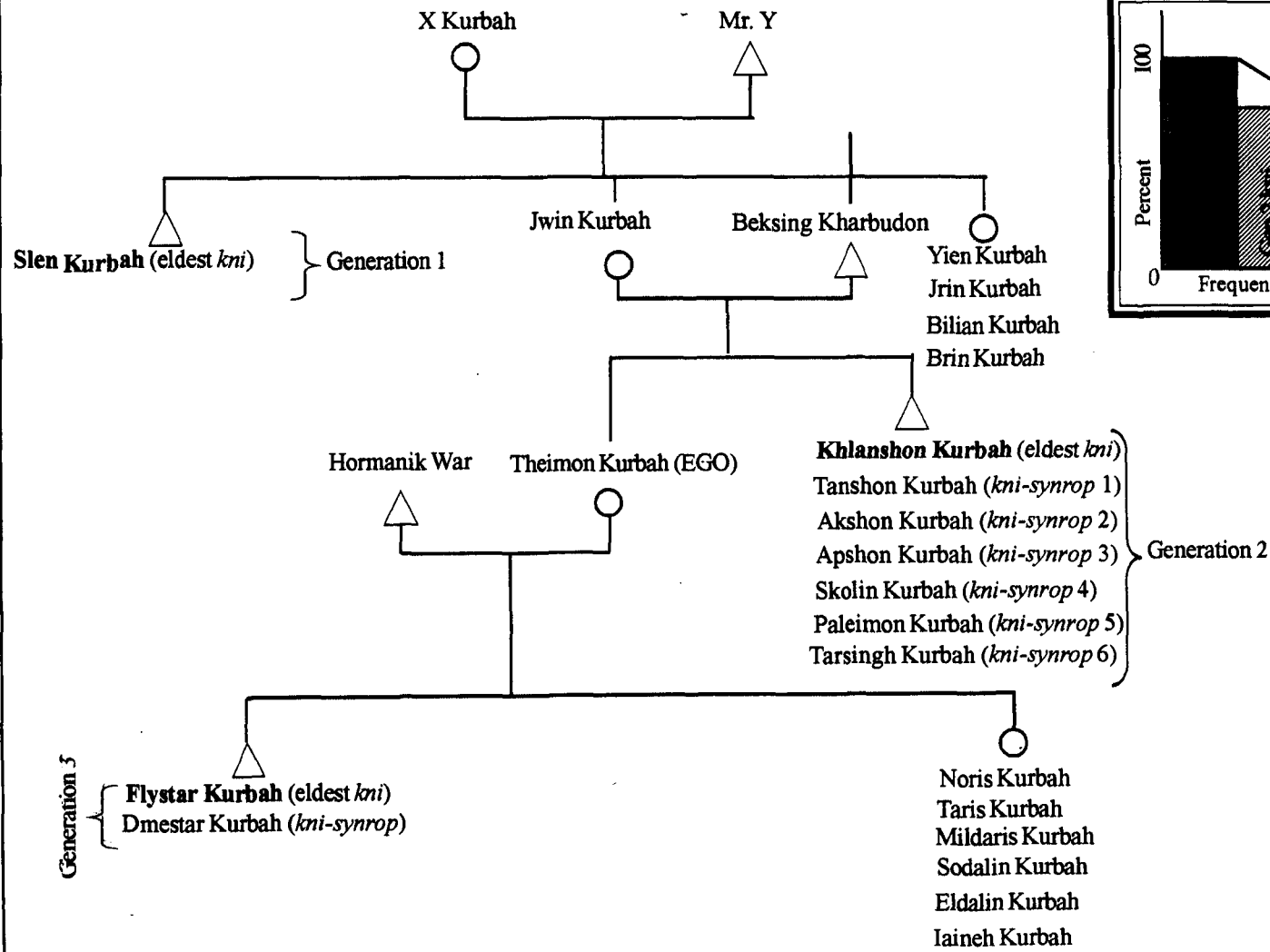


Fig. 4.2 - GENEALOGY OF KNI (KPOH KURBAH)



the present. Their visits were more frequent and they exercise their roles more decisively. They had a great influence and authority over their members.

4.3.2. Mawroh Study

a) In the study of genealogy of *kpoh* Nongspung in Mawroh, the investigator was able to cover up to four generations of *kñi*. The first generation *kñi* was known as Bahdeng Nongspung (exact name could not be recalled). The second generation *kñi* was Protasius Nongspung. There were no *kñi-synrop* in both generations. The third generation *kñi* is Albinus Nongspung. The *kñi-synrop* of this generation are Alando and Felix. The fourth generation *kñi* is Aiban with Dereck as the *kñi-synrop*. In this case too, the opinion is that the earlier *kñis* were closer to their *kpoh* members. Their role as *kñi* was very much felt by all. They also displayed a lot of concern for the younger members. The present *kñis*, however, are closer to their own children's families. They seldom visit their *kpoh* members. The children of the fourth generation are more attached to their *kpa* than to their *kñi*. The *kpa* wields more authority and influence on the children and he disciplines them.

b) In the study of the genealogy of *kpoh* Warjri in Mawroh, the investigator was able to gather information up to four generations of *kñi*. The first generation *kñi* was called Symbur Warjri. There were no *kñi-synrop* in this generation. The second generation *kñi* is Sodwin Warjri. There are three *kñi-synrop* in this generation; Moren, Soren and Bung Warjri. The third generation *kñi* is Dorich Warjri and the *kñi-synrop* are

Fig. 4.3 - GENEALOGY OF KNI (KPOH NONGSPUNG)

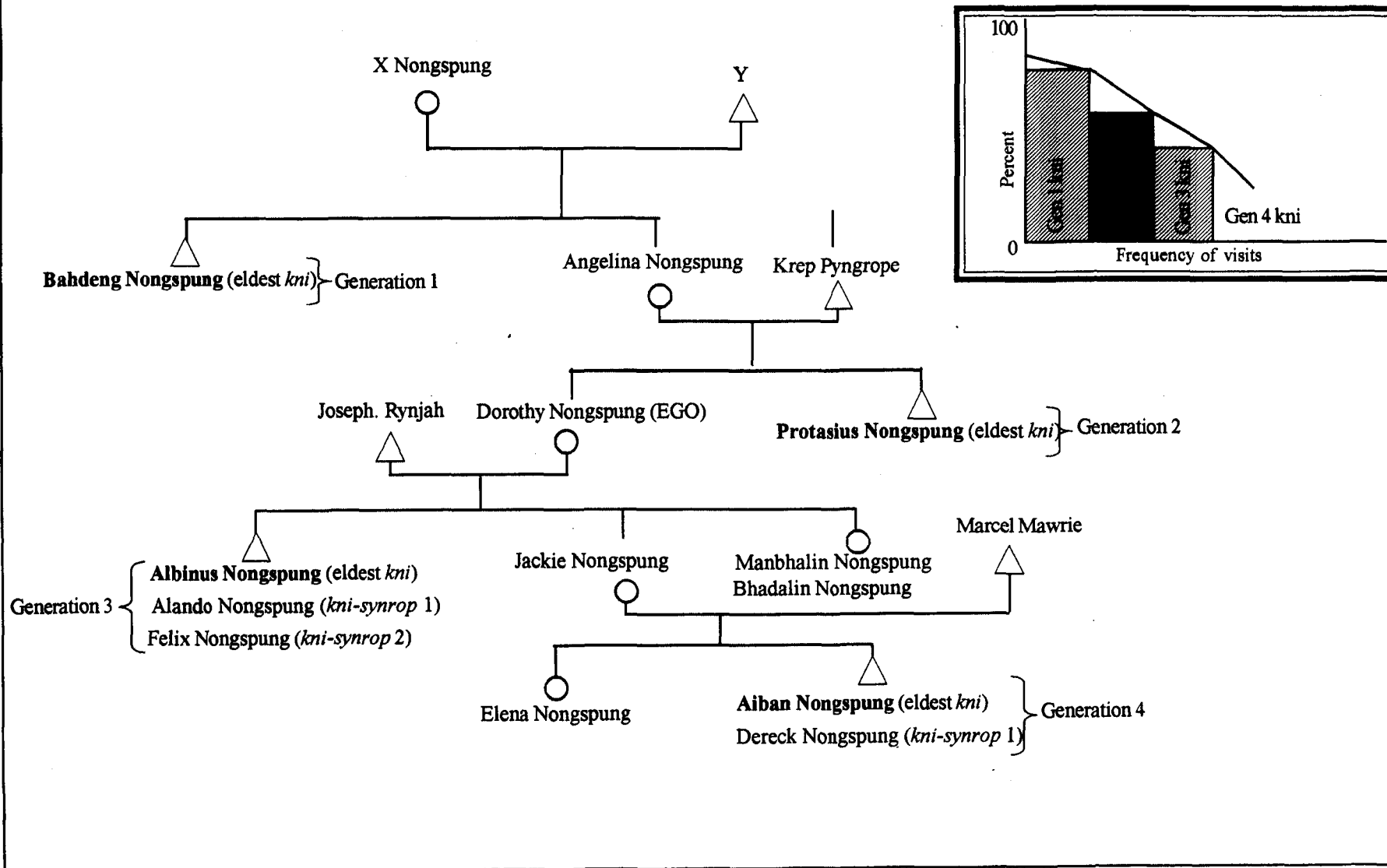
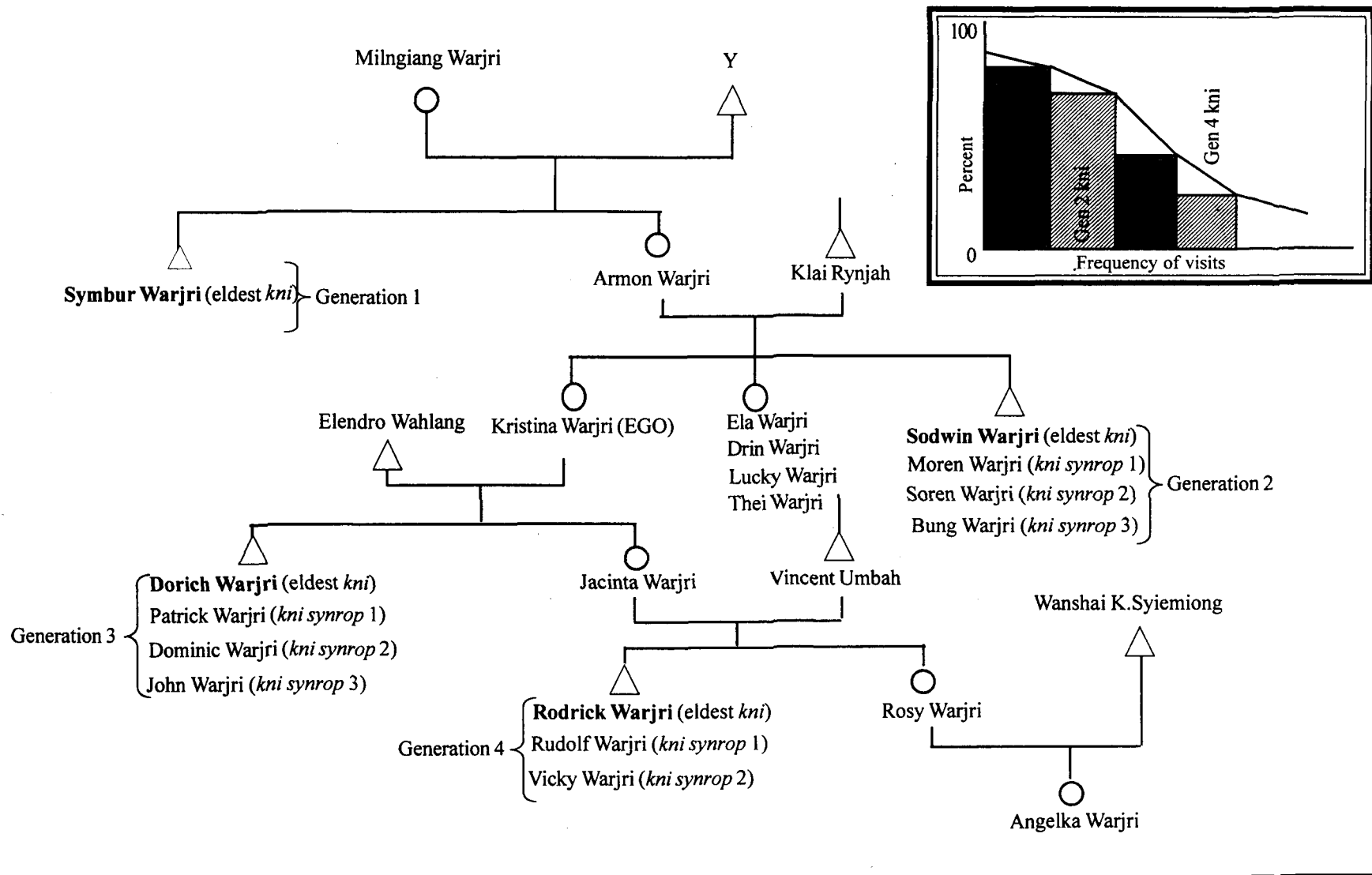


Fig. 4.4 - GENEALOGY OF KNI (KPOH WARJRI)



Patrick, Dominic and John Warjri. The fourth generation *kñi* is Rodrick Warjri and the *kñi-synrop* are Rudolf and Vicky Warjri. In the case of the *kpoh* Warjri too, it is felt that the *kñi* and *kñi-synrop* of the first and second generations were closer to their *kpoh* members and their visits were more frequent and their authority more felt. In the third generation *kñi*, although Dorich is the *kñi*, yet the first *kñi-synrop* Patrick exercises more influence and authority over his *kpoh* members. This is because he is a bachelor and a priest. His status as a bachelor enables him to be more present in the family of his sister and his position as a priest gives him more respect and authority over others.

4.3.3. Analysis of the genealogical study

The above genealogical study of the four *kpoh* in the given two villages offers some interesting insights related to the problem we are investigating, namely:

a) There is a significant difference in the degree of attachment, role-play and commitment of the *kñi* towards their *kpoh/kur* members between those of the earlier generations and the present.⁵¹ The earlier *kñis* showed more attachment and exercised their roles more faithfully. The difference in the frequency of their visits to their *kpoh/kur* members is indicative of this trend.⁵²

b) The bachelor *kñi* who continues to stay in his mother's house becomes more influential and exercises more authority over his sisters, nephews and nieces. This aspect has also been proven by Nakane in her study on Khasi matriliney.⁵³ It is also found that a *kñi-synrop* who lives in his mother's house often has more influence on his younger siblings, nephews and nieces than the true *kñi* who does not live in the mother's house.

However, in matters of decision regarding important affairs related to the *kpoh* or *kur*, the *kñi* is still the authority and no one challenges him.

c) This genealogical study also reveals that while the *kñis* in the earlier days spent more time in their sister's house and in the company of their nephews and nieces, the present *kñis* spend more time with their children. They only pay seldom visits to their *kpoh/kur* members. This fact proves that the Khasi men have become more conscious of their role as *kpa* in their own families. The double roles that a Khasi man plays, that of being *kñi* and *kpa* simultaneously, has tilted towards the latter role.

4.4. REPERCUSSIONS ON KHASI SOCIETY

This fall of *kñi*-ship has its own repercussions on the Khasi society. Being an important and significant institution, it is bound to affect the society in many ways. We shall analyze a few of such effects here below.

4.4.1. Gradual disappearance of a point of reference

The diminishing role of the *kñi* has first of all created a kind of gap within the clan or *kpoh* members. Usually the *kñi* used to be a point of reference for every member of the clan, *kpoh* or *ing*. He is the unifying agent and maintains the unity and integrity of the clan, *kpoh* or *ing*. However, with the declining role of the *kñi* today, this point of reference and centre of unity has become more and more obscure. It is generally felt that the *kñi* today appears only on some rare occasions like funerals or marriages. Apart from

these occasions he remains almost invisible.⁵⁴ This is creating a serious problem in relationship especially at the clan and *kpoh* levels. At the *ing* level the *kñi*'s presence is usually still visible and his authority is still being felt.

4.4.2. Growing ignorance about culture and tradition

Another negative consequence of the decline of *kñi*-ship on the Khasi society is the growing ignorance about culture and tradition among the younger generations. The *kñi* in the past used to be the principal instructor of the young regarding culture, religion and etiquette. His frequent visits to the members of his clan, *kpoh* or *ing* would ensure that proper and adequate knowledge of tradition and culture is passed on to the young. Today with the decline of role due to factors discussed earlier, the *kñi* is no longer in a position to provide regular instruction to his young members. As a result we see a lot of ignorance regarding culture and tradition among the Khasi youth today. With the conversion to Christianity, the *kñi* no longer exercises his traditional religious duties. This in turn has resulted in greater ignorance about culture and tradition since Khasi culture is closely bound to religious beliefs and practices.

4.4.3. Gradual absence of a disciplinary institution

As per the Khasi tradition, the *kñi* is usually the disciplinarian among the members of his *kur*, *kpoh* or *ing*. In the past the *kñi*'s visits to his *kur/kpoh/ing* members were frequent, sometimes on a daily basis. In this manner, he was able to educate and

discipline his younger members.⁵⁵ There used to be a great feeling of awe around the *kñi* which gave him a great moral ascendancy over his younger members. His words were final and his counsels were taken seriously. Today there is indiscipline in general among the Khasi youth. They defy their parents' and elders' words and fall into many evils.⁵⁶

Earlier, in cases of misbehaviours by members of the *kur/kpoh/ing*, it would be the *kñi* who acted as a judge. When there is a case of incest the *kñi* usually would take a strong action against such erring members. Ostracization from the clan was the usual punishment for such offenders. Today, however, such disciplinary actions by the *kñi* are seldom heard of.

4.4.4. Weakening of ethical life

The weakening of *kñi*-ship has got its repercussions on the Khasi society in terms of its ethical life. Dr. Balajied S. Syiem, king of Hima Khyrim, laments the fact of Khasi youth today who lack interest in adhering to the traditional values and culture.⁵⁷ Traditionally, the *kñi* who is a point of reference for ethical life of the *ing/kpoh/kur*, is the one who guarantees that every member of his *ing/kpoh/kur* lives a righteous life according to the Khasi ethical norm "*kamai ia ka hok*" (earn righteousness). Therefore with the diminishing role and influence of the *kñi* in the family, the ethical life of the younger generation is bound to be affected if the *kpa* does not replace his role. In general there is a weakening of value system. This is not because the Khasi value system has been affected but because the *kñi* who represents an institution that enforces such a value system is gradually weakening.⁵⁸

4.4.5. Weakening of kinship bond and respect for elders

Another negative aspect of the weakening of *kñi*-ship among the Khasis is the weakening of the kinship bond itself. Due to clan dispersion and the inability of the *kñi* to make frequent visits to his mother's or sister's house, it is not uncommon to find *kñis* today who do not know their nephews and nieces. This phenomenon becomes even more evident with their residences away from their *ing/kpoh/kur* members.⁵⁹ Besides this, the advent of education has also created a class of intelligentsia among the Khasis who have become symbols of status and power.⁶⁰ As a consequence traditional leaders and traditional institution like *kñi-ship* has suffered considerably in terms of its traditional importance and relevance.

The present study clearly shows that there is a growing disconnect between the young members of the *kur/kpoh/ing* and their own *kñis*.

a) There are many young members who do not know their *kñi* anymore today
(Rural-urban perspective)

Table 4.22 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on if there are many young persons today who do not know their *kñi* anymore.

**Table 4.22 – Younger people do not know their *kñi* anymore
(Rural-urban perspective)**

Villages	Younger generation know less about their <i>kñis</i>			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	225 56.7	158 39.8	14 3.5	397 100.0
Mawroh	100 48.8	90 43.9	15 7.3	205 100.0
Total	325 54.0	248 41.2	29 4.8	602 100.0

Table 4.22 above reveals that irrespective of urban-rural setting, there is a significant number of people who feel that the younger generation today do not know their *kñi* anymore. Significantly, the phenomenon seems to affect the rural areas more than the urban areas. This could be due to the huge migration of rural youth to the cities for reasons of education or employment which consequently reduces their contact with their *kñis*.

**b) There are many young members who do not know their *kñi* anymore today
(Religious perspective)**

Table 4.23 below provides a religious perspective of the respondents on if there are many young persons today who do not know their *kñi* anymore.

Table 4.23 – Younger people do not know their *kñi* anymore (Religious perspective)

Religion of respondents	Younger generation know less about their <i>kñis</i>			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Christian	287 55.6	207 40.1	22 4.3	516 100.0
Traditional religion	38 44.2	41 47.7	7 8.1	86 100.0
Total	325 54.0	248 41.2	29 4.8	602 100.0

Table 4.23 above reveals that the Christian respondents tend to agree more than those who profess the Khasi religion that many of the younger generation do not know their *kñi* anymore. Therefore this phenomenon seems to be more rampant among Christians.

4.5. CONCLUSION

As has been discussed above, there are many factors that have led to the declining influence of the *kñi* in Khasi society today. What is true of the *kñi* is equally true of the *kñi-synrop* (classificatory uncles). On the whole the institution of *kñi*-ship is undergoing a gradual transition. The transition is however a shift of emphasis in roles assumed by the same person for the *kñi* is generally simultaneously the *kpa* in his own children's family. While in the past a Khasi man placed more emphasis on his role as *kñi*, today however, he gives more attention to his role as the *kpa* of his children. Thus the allegiance is gradually shifting from the nephews and nieces to his own wife and

children. Moreover, the traditional practice of *kamai ingkur* (taking his earnings to the mother's house) is no longer widely practiced. So the *kpa's* earnings are used for the upbringing of his children.⁶¹

NOTES

- ¹ Cf. T. Bhattacharjee, "Merits of traditional tribal institutions", in *The Meghalaya Guardian* (Dec 11, 1998), 4.
- ² *An Interview with Rev. Fr. S. Sngi Lyngdoh* (Shillong: Sacred Heart Th. College, May 2, 2009).
- ³ Cf. W. S. Hynniewta, "Hangno ka nongrim u shynrang rangbah Khasi", in *Mawphor* (October 3, 1997), 2.
- ⁴ Cf. A. Mawlong, "Some aspects of change in the family system of the Khasis", 83
- ⁵ Cf. K. Rapphap, *Ka Jingbymneh spah bad ka Kheinjait*. Shillong: Khasi Book Parlour, 2005, 55.
- ⁶ *Interview with Mr. Denis Tynsiar* (Mawroh: June 12, 2010).
- ⁷ Cf. O. L. Snaitang, "The Impact of Christianity on the Khasi-Jaintia Matrilineal Family", in P. M. Chacko (ed.) *Matriliny in Meghalaya: Tradition and Change*. New Delhi: Regency Publications, 1998, 56.
- ⁸ Cf. N. Natarajan, *Missionaries among the Khasis*. Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt., Ltd., 1977, 154-157.
- ⁹ Cf. P. M. Chacko, "Christianity and Urbanization in North East India", in J. Puthenpurakal (ed.) *Impact of Christianity on North East India*. Shillong: VIP, 1996, 418.
- ¹⁰ Cf. Mawrie, *Ka longing longsem u khun Khasi Khara*. Shillong: Tmissilda Soh, 1983, 95.
- ¹¹ This aspect of Christianity has come under much criticism for it has failed to acculturate itself to the Khasi custom and tradition. Perhaps Christianity could have adapted its doctrine to accommodate the institution of *kñi-ship*. Instead with the importance given to the father, Christianity has dealt a mortal blow to *kñi-ship* among the Khasis.
- ¹² Cf. I. M. Syiem, "Some observations on the problem of change in Khasi matrilineal system" presented at a seminar on How the matrilineal system affects the Khasi family, organized by the Khasi Department, NEHU and sponsored by ICSSR-NERC, Shillong: May 27-28, 1988.
- ¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 2.
- ¹⁴ Cf. K. Rapphap, *Ka Jingbymneh spah bad ka Kheinjait*, 55.
- ¹⁵ Cf. A. S. Kynjing, "U shynrang Khasi u phong artylli ki pansngiat", 2.
- ¹⁶ Cf. S. S. Lyngdoh, "The Khasi Matriline: Its Past and Its Future", 39.
- ¹⁷ Cited in *Report of The Land Reforms Commission for The Khasi Hills* (Shillong: 1974), 40.
- ¹⁸ ST Correspondent, "Meghalaya has highest number of landless tribals in the country", in *The Shillong Times* (November 24, 2012), 1.
- ¹⁹ Cf. O. L. Snaitang, "Impact of Christianity on the Khasi-Jaintia", in B. K. Medhi et al. (eds.) *Tribes of North-East India: Issues and Challenges*. New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 2009, 272.
- ²⁰ Cf. Kharkrang, *Matriliny on the March*, 103.
- ²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 110.
- ²² Ladislav Holy, *Strategies and Norms in a Changing Matrilineal Society* (1986), 1.
- ²³ David M. Schneider & K. Gough (eds.), *Matrilineal Kinship*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961, 16.
- ²⁴ Cf. P. R. G. Mathur, *The Khasi of Meghalaya*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1979, 13.
- ²⁵ In occasions like a *durbar*, village cleanliness campaign or the death of someone, Khasis even in urban areas still exhibit their community sense and solidarity. But apart from these occasions very few of them keep up relationships with their fellow citizens in the neighbourhood.
- ²⁶ Interview with Mr. K Marbaniang (Marbisu: May 12, 2010), 1.
- ²⁷ Interview with Larisa Nongspung (Mawroh: June 12, 2010).
- ²⁸ A. Mawlong, "Some aspects of change in the family system of the Khasis", 83.
- ²⁹ Cf. Kynjing, "U shynrang Khasi u phong artylli ki pansngiat", 2.

- ³⁰ K. Cantlie, *Notes on Khasi Law*. Shillong: A. S. Khongphai, 1974, 29.
- ³¹ Cf. Kharkrang, *Matriliny on the March*, 72.
- ³² *Report of the Land Reforms Commission*, 35.
- ³³ Cf. J. War, "The Khasi concept of family: Changes in structure and function", 21.
- ³⁴ Cf. Cantlie, *Notes on Khasi Law*, 26.
- ³⁵ Cf. Report of the Land Reforms Commission, 35.
- ³⁶ Cf. Cantlie, *Notes on Khasi Law*, 92.
- ³⁷ A. Mawlong, "Some aspects of change in the family system of the Khasis", 82.
- ³⁸ Cf. I. M. Syiem, "Religion and Matriliny in Khasi Society: Some Observations", in P. M. Chacko (ed.) *Matriliny in Meghalaya: Tradition and Change*, 47.
- ³⁹ Cf. Jayanta Bhusan, "The Changing Khasis: An historical account", in S. Karotemprel (ed.) *The Tribes of Northeast India*. Shillong: Centre for Indigenous Cultures, 1998, 334.
- ⁴⁰ S. D. Kahit, Letter to the Editor, in *U Nongprat Lynti* (Shillong: June 19, 1978), 3.
- ⁴¹ Cf. P. M. Chacko, "Matrilineal System: Some structural implications", in ID., *Matriliny in Meghalaya: Tradition and Change*. New Delhi: Regency Publications, 1998, 12.
- ⁴² Interview with Mr. John T. Lyngdoh (Mawroh: June 12, 2010).
- ⁴³ Interview with Mrs. Kharshiing (Marbisu: May 12, 2010), 1.
- ⁴⁴ Interview with Mr. Peter Lamare (Mawroh: June 20, 2010).
- ⁴⁵ Cf. A. S. Kynjing, "U shynrang Khasi u phong artylli ki pansngiat", in *Rupang* (December 12, 1997), 2.
- ⁴⁶ Interview with Mr. K. Marbaniang (Marbisu: May 12, 2010), 2.
- ⁴⁷ Interview with Mrs. Kharshiing (Marbisu: May 12, 2010), 1.
- ⁴⁸ Interview with Ms. Juliana M. Kharsohnoh (Mawroh: June 12, 2010).
- ⁴⁹ Interview with Mrs. Agnes Mawlong (Mawroh: June 20, 2010).
- ⁵⁰ In general the visits of the *kñii* is still frequent to their *ing* members, that is the families of their immediate sisters. The frequency of visits diminishes with the *kpoh* members and it becomes almost nil when it comes to *kur* members except in cases where the *kur* is small and live in nearby places. All interviewees are unanimous with the fact that in the case of the *kur*, the *kñii* comes only on occasions like death or marriage.
- ⁵¹ Interview with Dr. Streamlet Dkhar (Khasi Department NEHU, Shillong: May 15, 2011), 1.
- ⁵² In all interviews conducted by the investigator on this particular issue, the opinion has been the same, that the *kñii* today has less time for his *kur/kpoh/ing* members. He is more busy in his children's house.
- ⁵³ Cf. C. Nakane, *Garo and Khasi: A Comparative Study in Matrilineal Systems*, 125.
- ⁵⁴ Interview with Mr. John T. Lyngdoh (Mawroh: June 12, 2010).
- ⁵⁵ Interview with Mr. Peter Lamare (Mawroh: June 20, 2011).
- ⁵⁶ Cf. S. Sngi Lyngdoh. "The Khasi Matriliny: Its Past and Its Future", 42.
- ⁵⁷ Cf. "Youth no longer adhere to traditional values", in *The Shillong Times* (March 12, 2012), 3.
- ⁵⁸ Cf. S. Sngi Lyngdoh, "The tribal value system and the impact of Christianity on it", 221.
- ⁵⁹ Interview with Mrs. Judith Kharshiing (Malki: November 12, 2011).
- ⁶⁰ Cf. P. N. Das, *Impact of the West on Khasis and Jaintias*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1982, 202.
- ⁶¹ In some remote areas of Jaintia Hills the practice of *kamai ingkur* is still found. However, even in those areas changes are setting in and this traditional custom is gradually losing its popularity and relevance.

CHAPTER 5

Rise of *Kpa*-ship in Khasi Society

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The Khasis are one among the few groups of people in the world who follow matrilineal system. Although they are matrilineal in descent they are not matriarchal in practice. In the old traditional Khasi family, the *kñi* wielded great power and influence among his clan or *kpoh* members. He is the centre of authority and governance. The role of the *kpa* (father) on the other hand has always been cast in the shadow of uncertainty. Yet what a man lacked in his children's house as *kpa*, he had it in his mother's house as *kñi*.

In the past few decades however we have witnessed a cultural transformation in the institutions of *kñi*-ship and *kpa*-ship among the Khasis. In particular there is a decline in *kñi*-ship and a resurgence of *kpa*-ship like we have never experienced before. There are many factors that have contributed to such a transformation which we shall discuss in the course of this chapter.

5.2. The traditional role of the father in Khasi families

The father (*u kpa*) in a Khasi family holds a respectable position. In fact, he is called “*u kpa uba lah uba iai*” (the father who upholds everything).¹ According to Gurdon:

The father is the executive head of the new home. It is he who faces the danger of the jungles and risks his life for his wife and children. It is the father who bears the heat and burden of the day. The maternal uncle only comes when it is a question of life and death. The Khasi father is revered not only when living but also after death as u Thawlang and special ceremonies are performed to propitiate his shade".²

The *kur* of the father is highly respected and honoured by his wife and children. His mother is lovingly addressed as *meikha* and she is treated by his children as a goddess. When the first child is born, it is the *meikha's* prerogative to name the child. The annual visit of the children to their *meikha* is done with pomp and ceremony. There is a special ceremony at the death of the paternal grandmother known as *Ka nguh meikha pakha* which is basically an obeisance made by the grand children.³ Besides this, the brothers and sisters of the father are also held in great esteem by his wife and children. The father's eldest sister is addressed as *kha-rangbah* (eldest aunt), the middle aunt is called *kha-deng*. Her younger sister is called *kha-rit* while the youngest one is known as *kha-duh*.⁴ The father's brothers or the classificatory fathers are similarly known as *pa-san* (eldest uncle), *pa-deng* (middle uncle), *pa-rit* (younger uncle) and *pa-duh* (youngest uncle).

The issue of the traditional status of the father in a family among the Khasis is rather complex. At times there are contrasting views regarding the position of the father. On one hand he is considered as father of his children, one who provides for his family and ensures the growth of his children.⁵ On the other hand, a father in Khasi society is looked upon as a "someone else's son" (*u khun ki briew*). He is considered as a mere

progenitor (*u nongai khun* or *u nongpynkha*). He gave his earnings to his mother's family for it was his duty as the *kñi* to look after his brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces.⁶ In fact, he would return to his children's house only at night. In his children's house he had no real authority and remains always at the periphery. Thus when divorce takes place, he has to return empty handed to his *kur*.⁷ In cases where the man marries the *khatduh* (heiress) of the family, his authority is even less. He becomes almost like an additional member of the household and even his children show more attachment to their uncle than to him.⁸ In these cases, the man wields more authority in his sister's house as brother and uncle than in his own children's house.⁹ The position of a man who marries a non-heiress, is however much better of. Here the *kpa* enjoys more independence from the influence of his in-laws. He is more respected and his position as a husband and a father is rather stable.¹⁰ According to Nakane, paternal authority is more established and marriage is more stable in this type of family.¹¹

Traditionally, a father of the family was also a warrior and in times of war or threat from the enemies, he would leave his family in order to go and fight in defense of his family and his people.¹²

5.3. THE KHASI MAN AS MATERNAL UNCLE AND AS FATHER

It is true that every individual plays multiple roles in his clan but for a Khasi man the double role in society is distinctly laid out. He is a father in his children's family and he is an uncle among his clan members. Thus the Khasi phrase runs : "u kpa ha ñgkhun, u kñi ha ñngkur" (a father in his children's house and an uncle in his clan). Similar

observation has been made by Robin Fox in his book *Kinship and Marriage* where he says:

“(a man) is of course caught in a dilemma, for on the one hand he is a husband and father and wants to have his wife around, while on the other hand he is a maternal uncle with lineage responsibilities to his maternal nephews and hence needs to keep some control over them and their mother, his sister”.¹³

Kynjing, a Khasi social thinker describes a Khasi male as a person who wears two crowns, the crown of being a *kñi* among his clan members and the crown of being a father in his children’s house. According to the Khasi tradition, land or forest property was always of the *kur* and not of any individual person or family. The *kñi* used to have a great control over these properties. He is like the overseer of these. At the same time, a man as a *kñi* and a *kpa* had the right to cultivate the land in order to generate food and income for his children as well as for his mother’s family.¹⁴ In this manner, he earns the respect and obedience of both his children and his nephews and nieces.

5.4. CHANGING CONCEPT OF KPA TODAY

The decline of *kñi*-ship in Khasi society has led to a sort of cultural vacuum which has naturally resulted in the emerging role of the *kpa*. Moreover, the saying that a Khasi man wears two crowns, that of being a *kñi* and a *kpa* simultaneously, has become quite nominal today. In reality today the role of *kñi* is gradually giving way to *kpa*-ship. A Khasi man is assuming fatherhood on a greater degree today than ever before.

Many Khasis today accept the fact that the image of the *kpa* has changed considerably. Today the *kpa* is perceived as having more influence and authority in his children's family. He feels more attached to his children than to his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.¹⁵ In a research done by Madhumita Das it is discovered that many Khasi women themselves below 30 years have opined that matrilocal system does not help the position of a husband because the presence of the in-laws hinders the exercise of the husband's role.¹⁶

In the interview conducted in the two villages on the image and status of the *kpa*, the following is the outcome:

a) He is considered the actual head of the family, a bread earner, a caretaker and a disciplinarian of his children. He is also considered as the pillar of the family.

b) The interview also reveals that most of the interviewees agree that today the age of *kpa* has come and he must take control of his family and not the *kñi*. The *kñi* today has less time to visit his *kur/kpoh/ing* members while the *kpa* displays more sense of belonging to his family.

d) Another revealing fact of the interview were the reasons given for the *kpa* to take over control of his family, namely, his constant presence in the family, his personal integrity and his ability to shoulder the responsibility of his family.¹⁷ The father is also the procreator of his children and he feels closer to them than their *kñi*.¹⁸ Since the *kpa* is the one who earns for the family, he has a right to authority over his children.¹⁹ Moreover, in today's context the *kpa* is the one who oversees the needs of the family and

also settles problems within.²⁰ It is felt that the *kpa* is the one who carries the burden of the family in times of hardship and sickness.²¹

5.5. RISE OF *KPA*-SHIP IN KHASI SOCIETY

Today more and more Khasis have become aware of the need to empower the father of the family. The diminishing role of the *kñi* due to many factors mentioned earlier, has necessitated this change over. There are socio-cultural groups who have tried to create awareness on this issue. The first attempt was made by Ka Seng Iktiar Longbriew-Manbriew (SIL) which was initiated by a group of Khasi luminaries in Sohra in 1939. In 1961 they brought out the constitution where they reasoned out that the traditional family customs are responsible for robbing off the manliness of Khasi men. In their objectives they stated that: a) the *kpa* should have full authority in his family and the wife should only be his help-mate; b) that in the absence of the *kpa* the eldest son should assume authority, in his absence the second, the third and so on and so forth; c) that if there are no sons, the eldest daughter should step into the *kpa*'s shoes; d) that parents should have the power to make wills; e) that laws should be enacted to regulate marriages towards orderly family and social life.²²

Following the footsteps of the above movement, another cultural group known as Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai (SRT) was initiated. This group calls for a radical change in family system, namely from matriliney to patriliney. They also advocate that there should be equal distribution of family wealth both among male and female children.²³ More fathers today have assumed the responsibility of furnishing and providing for their

children's growth and well-being.²⁴ According to Hynñiewta, a Khasi social thinker, the present Khasi family system follows three ways:

i) There are those who consider the woman as the head of the family (Such thinking is more prevalent in rural areas and in cases where the woman is the *khatduh* or the heiress).

ii) There are few families who still maintain the *kñi* as the head of their families, where the man takes his earnings to his mother's house (*kamai ñngkur*). This practice is still prevalent in some parts of Jaiñtia Hills.²⁵

iii) There are more and more families today who consider the father as the head of the family. This is more common in urban areas and in families where the man has a higher status in society on account of his possession, his qualification, his social status or his family lineage. There is a gradual transition from the concept of *kamai ñngkur* (earning for mother's family) to *kamai ñngkhun* (earning for children's family). In fact, in today's context the *kpa* invests almost all of his income on his wife and children and hardly makes any substantial investment in his sister's family.²⁶

The present study shows that there is a steady increase in the authority and role of the *kpa* today. His status is being recognized by his children and by the Khasi society at large. The study also indicates that the *kpa* today displays a greater sense of belonging and responsibility towards his family than towards his *kur/kpoh/ing*.

a) **Children respect and obey their *kpas*** (Rural-urban perspective)

Table 5.1 below provides rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the children today respect and obey their fathers.

Table 5.1 – Children respect and obey their *kpa* (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	Children respect and obey their fathers			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	311 78.3	75 18.9	11 2.8	397 100.0
Mawroh	165 80.5	31 15.1	9 4.4	205 100.0
Total	476 79.1	106 17.6	20 3.3	602 100.0

Table 5.1 above reveals that irrespective of rural-urban settings, most respondents agree that children today respect and obey their *kpas*. Again as expected, the percentage of agreement is higher in urban areas than in rural areas. This is probably on account of a more nuclear characteristic of an urban family. Another probable reason could be the better possibilities in terms of education, earnings and upward social mobility that urban society offers to individuals as contrasted to those living in rural areas. Quite a small number of respondents disagree with this.

b) **Children respect and obey their *kpas* (Educational perspective)**

Table 5.2 below provides educational perspective of the respondents on whether the children today respect and obey their fathers.

Table 5.2 – Children respect and obey their *kpas* (Educational perspective)

Educational qualification of the respondents	Children respect and obey their fathers			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Post-graduate	17 100.0			17 100.0
Graduate	74 77.9	16 16.8	5 5.3	95 100.0
XI - XII	151 78.2	35 18.1	7 3.6	193 100.0
V - X	138 76.7	35 19.4	7 3.9	180 100.0
I - IV	65 85.5	11 14.5		76 100.0
Illiterate	31 75.6	9 22.0	1 2.4	41 100.0
Total	476 79.1	106 17.6	20 3.3	602 100.0

Table 5.2 above shows that the more qualified respondents agree more that the children obey the *kpas*. However in general a majority of respondents agree with this statement. Significantly enough a sizable number of illiterate respondents disagree with this. Probably the illiterate fathers are in a more disadvantageous position in their families. This is even more evident in families where the children are educated and their fathers are illiterate.

c) **Children respect and obey their *kpas* (Occupational perspective)**

Table 5.3 below provides occupational perspective of the respondents on whether the children today respect and obey their *kpas*.

Table 5.3 – Children respect and obey their *kpas* (Occupational perspective)

Occupation of the respondents	Children respect and obey their fathers			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Government employee	44 81.4	7 13.0	3 5.6	54 100.0
Business	49 84.5	9 15.5	-	58 100.0
Farmer	49 87.5	6 10.7	1 1.8	56 100.0
Others	334 76.9	84 19.4	16 3.7	434 100.0
Total	476 79.1	106 17.6	2 3.3	602 100.0

Table 5.3 above reveals that irrespective of occupation, majority of the respondents agree that the children obey their *kpas*. There are few who disagree with this. Therefore it is evident that more children obey their fathers who earn for their maintenance irrespective of the jobs they perform.

d) **A father is closer to his children than the *kñi* (Rural-urban perspective)**

Table 5.4 below provides rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the father is closer to his children than the *kñi*.

Table 5.4 – A *kpa* is closer to his children than the *kñi* (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	A father is closer to his children than their <i>kñi</i> is			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	357 89.9	34 8.6	6 1.5	397 100.0
Mawroh	187 91.2	6 2.9	12 5.9	205 100.0
Total	544 90.4	40 6.6	18 3.0	602 100.0

Table 5.4 above reveals that in both rural and urban settings, almost all respondents agree that the *kpa* is closer to his children than their *kñi* is. A negligible number of them disagree with this. This is very interesting considering the fact that in the past the *kñi* used to be the one closer to his nephews and nieces. This vindicates the popular view that the Khasi man today is becoming more a *kpa* and less of a *kñi*.

e) A father is closer to his children than the *kñi* (Gender perspective)

Table 5.5 below provides gender perspective of the respondents on whether the father is closer to his children than the *kñi*.

Table 5.5 – A *kpa* is closer to his children than the *kñi* (Gender perspective)

Gender of the respondent	A father is closer to his children than their <i>kñi</i> is			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Men	210 91.3	13 5.7	7 3.0	230 100.0
Women	334 89.7	27 7.3	11 3.0	372 100.0
Total	544 90.4	40 6.6	18 3.0	602 100.0

Table 5.5 above reveals that most of the respondents agree that the *kpa* is closer to his children than their *kñi*. As expected, a greater number of men than women agree with this.

f) A father is closer to his children than the *kñi* (Religious perspective)

Table 5.6 below provides religious perspective of the respondents on whether the father is closer to his children than the *kñi*.

Table 5.6 – A *kpa* is closer to his children than the *kñi* (Religious perspective)

Religion of the respondent	A father is closer to his children than their <i>kñi</i> is			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Christian	472 91.5	30 5.8	14 2.7	516 100.0
Traditional religion	72 83.7	10 11.6	4 4.7	86 100.0
Total	544 90.4	40 6.6	18 3.0	602 100.0

Table 5.6 above reveals that in general majority of the respondents agree that the *kpa* is closer to his children than the *kñi*. Significantly, there are more Christians who agree with this than the non-Christians. This can be explained by the fact that Christian religion gives greater emphasis on the status and role of the father than the maternal uncle in his family. Thus the image of the *kpa* is better perceived in a Christian than in a non-christian family. The number of those who disagree with this opinion is very negligible.

g) A *kpa* wields more authority in his children's house than in his mother's house
(Rural-urban perspective)

Table 5.7 below provides rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpa* wields more authority in his children's house than in his mother's house.

Table 5.7 – A *kpa* wields more authority in his children's house
(Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	A father has more authority in his children's house			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	339 85.4	42 10.6	16 4.0	397 100.0
Mawroh	163 79.5	22 10.7	20 9.8	205 100.0
Total	502 83.4	64 10.6	36 6.0	602 100.0

Table 5.7 above indicates that, irrespective of rural-urban settings, a great majority of the respondents agree that the *kpa* has more authority in his children's house than in his mother's house. Significantly more people in the rural areas agree with this than those in urban areas.

h) A *kpa* wields more authority in his children's house than in his mother's house
(Gender perspective)

Table 5.8 below provides rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpa* wields more authority in his children's house than in his mother's house.

Table 5.8 – A *kpa* wields more authority in his children's house (Gender perspective)

Gender of the respondents	A father has more authority in his children's house			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Men	189 82.2	29 12.6	12 5.2	230 100.0
Women	313 84.1	35 9.4	24 6.5	372 100.0
Total	502 83.4	64 10.6	36 6.0	602 100.0

Table 5.8 above reveals that, irrespective of gender, majority of the respondents agree that the *kpa* wields more authority in his children's house than in his mother's house today. Significantly, the perception of women regarding this is slightly higher

than that of the men. In general there seems to be a growing consciousness of the authority of the *kpa* over his children.

i) **A *kpa* wields more authority in his children's house than in his mother's house**
(Educational perspective)

Table 5.9 below provides educational perspective on whether the *kpa* wields more authority in his children's house than in his mother's house.

Table 5.9 – A *kpa* wields more authority in his children's house
(Educational perspective)

Qualification of the respondents	A father has more authority in his children's house			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Post-graduate	15 88.2		2 11.8	17 100.0
Graduate	81 85.3	10 10.5	4 4.2	95 100.0
XI - XII	158 81.9	24 12.4	11 5.7	193 100.0
V - X	147 81.7	18 10.0	15 8.3	180 100.0
I - IV	65 85.5	8 10.5	3 3.9	76 100.0
Illiterate	36 87.8	4 9.8	1 2.4	41 100.0
Total	502 83.4	64 10.6	36 6.0	602 100.0

Table 5.9 above reveals that irrespective of different qualifications of the respondents, most of them agree that the *kpa* wields more authority in his children's

house today. Even the illiterate mostly agree with this. The percentage of those who disagree is rather small.

j) **The status of the *kpa* has gone up today** (Rural-urban perspective)

Table 5.10 below provides rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the present status of the *kpa* has gone up or not.

Table 5.10 – Present status of the *kpa* has gone up (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	A father's status has increased today			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	210 52.9	150 37.8	37 9.3	397 100.0
Mawroh	117 57.1	49 23.9	39 19.0	205 100.0
Total	327 54.3	199 33.1	76 12.6	602 100.0

Table 5.10 above reveals that irrespective of rural-urban settings, a majority of respondents agree that the present status of the *kpa* (father) has gone up. As expected, this phenomenon is more felt in urban areas than in rural areas. This can be explained by the fact that the *kpa* in urban area in most cases is in a better situation educationally and economically than his counterpart in the rural setting. Significantly, the number of those who disagree is comparatively high. This indicates that the socio-cultural transition is gradual and there are still a good number who are critical about it.

k) The status of the *kpa* has gone up today (Age perspective)

Table 5.11 below provides a perspective of the respondents based on their age groups on whether the present status of the *kpa* has gone up or not.

Table 5.11 – Present status of the *kpa* has gone up (Age perspective)

Age of respondents	A father's status has increased today			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
15 - 35	220 53.1	132 31.9	62 15.0	414 100.0
36 - 55	67 52.3	52 40.6	9 7.0	128 100.0
56 and more	40 66.7	15 25.0	5 8.3	60 100.0
Total	327 54.3	199 33.1	76 12.6	602 100.0

Table 5.11 above reveals that a majority of the respondents agree that the status of the father has gone up. It is significant that more of the elderly people agree with this. This is probably due to the fact that the elderly people have seen the transition of *kpa-ship* from the past to the present much better than the younger generation. However, about one third of the respondents disagree with this opinion.

l) The status of the *kpa* has gone up today (Gender perspective)

Table 5.12 below provides gender perspective of the respondents on whether the present status of the *kpa* has gone up or not.

Table 5.12 – Present status of the *kpa* has gone up (Gender perspective)

Gender of respondents	A father's status has increased today			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Men	133 57.8	75 32.6	22 9.6	230 100.0
Women	194 52.2	124 33.3	54 14.5	372 100.0
Total	327 54.3	199 33.1	76 12.6	602 100.0

Table 5.12 above shows that there is not much difference in the response although men respondents has a higher number than women. This indicates that men in general see themselves in a much better position today than in the past. However, there are many who are still critical about this social transition.

m) The status of the *kpa* has gone up today (Religious perspective)

Table 5.13 below provides religious perspective of the respondents on whether the present status of the *kpa* has gone up or not.

Table 5.13 – Present status of the *kpa* has gone up (Religious perspective)

Religion of the respondents	A father's status has increased today			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Christian	281 54.5	170 32.9	65 12.6	516 100.0
Traditional religion	46 53.5	29 33.7	11 12.8	86 100.0
Total	327 54.3	199 33.1	76 12.6	602 100.0

Table 5.13 above indicates that a little more than half agree that the father's status has improved today. Those who disagree form about one third. In general, same opinion is held by both Christians and those of the indigenous religion regarding this issue. This indicates that there is a growing opinion that the status of the *kpa* has improved today.

n) The status of the *kpa* has gone up today (Educational perspective)

Table 5.14 below provides educational perspective on whether the present status of the *kpa* has gone up or not.

**Table 5.14 – Present status of the *kpa* has gone up
(Educational perspective)**

Qualification of the respondents	A father's status has increased today			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Post-graduate	12 70.6	5 29.4	-	17 100.0
Graduate	58 61.1	31 32.6	6 6.3	95 100.0
XI - XII	101 52.3	61 31.6	31 16.1	193 100.0
V - X	99 55.0	53 29.4	28 15.6	180 100.0
I - IV	37 48.7	32 42.1	7 9.2	76 100.0
Illiterate	20 48.8	17 41.5	4 9.8	41 100.0
Total	327 54.3	199 33.1	76 12.6	602 100.0

Table 5.14 above reveals that there is more agreement on this among the better qualified than the less qualified. This result indicates that better qualified the father is better is his chance of being more respected. Thus education is seen as a factor that increases the status of the person.

o) The status of the *kpa* has gone up today (Occupational perspective)

Table 5.15 below provides occupational perspective of the respondents on whether the present status of the *kpa* has gone up or not.

Table 5.15 – Present status of the *kpa* has gone up (Occupational perspective)

Occupation of the respondents	A father's status has increased today			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Government employee	37 68.5	15 27.8	2 3.7	54 100.0
Business	31 53.4	23 39.7	4 6.9	58 100.0
Farmer	26 46.4	18 32.1	12 21.4	56 100.0
Others	233 53.7	143 32.9	58 13.4	434 100.0
Total	327 54.3	199 33.1	76 12.6	602 100.0

Table 5.15 above reveals that respondents with government jobs are more agreeable to the statement that the father's status today has gone up. This group is followed by others who are engaged in business or other professions. The farmers however record a lower level of agreement.

5.6. FACTORS FAVOURING THE RISE OF *KPA*-SHIP TODAY

There are some important exogenous and endogenous factors which have contributed to the steady rise of *kpa*-ship among the Khasis. Here below we enumerate a few of them:

i) Perhaps the least talked about factor of change is the arrival of the British people and along with them Indian employees of the Company. After the defeat of Tirok Sing in 1834 and that of Kiang Nangbah in 1862, the flow of outsiders became a phenomenon that had its impact on the Khasis. It was the first encounter *en masse* with the outside world. It was as well the first encounter with patrilineal societies. The different social system of the outsiders undoubtedly had its impact on the minds of the Khasis. Moreover, the consequent inter-marriages of Khasi women with outsiders led to the emergence of patrilineal pattern within the Khasi society.²⁷ Thus the Khasi society was able to witness a different model of social system which they unconsciously compared and contrasted with their own. It is such comparison that has led many to think of the advantages of empowering the *kpa*.

ii) Another prominent factor that has contributed to the rise of *kpa*-ship in Khasi society is the adoption of Christianity as a new religion. Christian teaching lays great emphasis on the responsibility of the *kpa* towards his children and family.²⁸ The role of the *kñi* instead is ignored or not given due attention. In a Christian marriage ceremony, it is the *kpa* who is given a prominent role while the *kñi*'s role is seldom mentioned.²⁹ The *kpa* is the one who accompanies his son or daughter to the altars.

iii) Education is yet another decisive factor in the rise of *kpa*-ship among the Khasis. Due to education most of the *kpas* have more respect and self confidence which

enable them to assume greater control over their families. The analysis of the data related to this aspect of the *kpa* today demonstrates that education is an important factor responsible for the rise of the image of the *kpa* in Khasi society.

a) **More *kpas* (fathers) are educated today (Rural-urban perspective)**

Table 5.16 below provides rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpas* (fathers) are more educated today than earlier.

Table 5.16 – More *kpas* are educated today (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	More fathers are educated today			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	245 61.7	121 30.7	30 7.6	397 100.0
Mawroh	162 79.0	16 7.8	27 13.2	205 100.0
Total	407 67.6	137 22.9	57 9.5	602 100.0

Table 5.16 above indicates that most of the respondents agree that the *kpas* (fathers) today are more educated. As expected, there are more educated *kpas* in urban areas than in rural areas. Access to better educational facilities in urban areas is a decisive factor in this regard.

b) **Educated *kpas* exercise greater influence on their families** (Rural-urban perspective)

Table 5.17 below provides rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the educated *kpas* have more influence over their families.

Table 5.17 – Educated *kpas* exercise greater influence on their families
(Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	Educated fathers exercise more authority over the family			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	206 51.9	158 39.8	33 8.3	397 100.0
Mawroh	94 45.9	97 47.3	14 6.8	205 100.0
Total	300 49.8	255 42.4	47 7.8	602 100.0

Table 5.17 above indicates that not half the respondents agree that an educated *kpa* wields more authority in the family. Quite a good number of them disagree with this. Significantly, the people in rural areas agree more with this than those in urban areas. This is probably due to the higher esteem for an educated person in the rural than in the urban areas. In general, an educated father in a rural family would command greater advantages than the father in a city family.

c) Educated *kpas* exercise greater influence on their families (Educational perspective)

Table 5.18 below provides educational perspective on whether the educated *kpas* have more influence over their families.

Table 5.18 – Educated *kpas* exercise greater influence on their families (Educational perspective)

Qualification of the respondents	Educated fathers exercise more authority over the family			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Post-graduate	7 41.2	10 58.8		17 100.0
Graduate	48 50.5	42 44.2	5 5.3	95 100.0
XI - XII	81 42.0	97 50.2	15 7.8	193 100.0
V - X	100 55.6	58 32.2	22 12.2	180 100.0
I - IV	42 55.2	30 39.5	4 5.3	76 100.0
Illiterate	22 53.7	18 43.9	1 2.4	41 100.0
Total	300 49.8	255 42.4	47 7.8	602 100.0

Table 5.18 above reveals that half the respondents agree that the educated *kpas* exercise more authority in their families. It is important to note that a great number of them disagree with this. It is also noted that the more educated do not seem to agree more with this. On the other hand, the illiterate and the less educated seem to agree more

with this. Probably the less educated and the illiterate tend to consider educational qualification as a decisive factor in gaining status in the family.

d) The study also indicates the importance of the economic well being and better earning jobs of the *kpa* today.³⁰ This leads to more respect for the *kpa* by his in-laws as well as by his own wife and children. Consequently, the *kpa* begins to exercise more authority over his family and he takes control of the discipline of his children.³¹ Moreover, many feel that the *kpa* today has to assume authority over his children.³²

a) **Greater earning *kpas* have more influence on their families** (Rural-urban perspective)

Table 5.19 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpas* who have greater earnings have more influence over their families.

Table 5.19 – Greater earning *kpas* have more influence
(Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	Fathers with greater earnings have more power and influence			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	188 47.4	168 42.3	41 10.3	397 100.0
Mawroh	79 38.5	106 51.7	20 9.8	205 100.0
Total	267 44.4	274 45.5	61 10.1	602 100.0

Table 5.19 above indicates that a little less than half of the respondents agree that the *kpas* with more earning have more influence in his family. On the other hand an equal number of them disagree with this. However, there is a greater agreement in rural areas than in urban areas. It is evident that there is no necessary connection between higher earnings and increase in power and status as popularly believed.

b) Greater earning *kpas* have more influence on their families (Occupational perspective)

Table 5.20 below provides occupational perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpas* who have greater earnings have more influence over their families.

**Table 5.20 – Greater earning *kpas* have more influence
(Occupational perspective)**

Occupation of the respondents	Fathers with greater earnings have more power and influence			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Government employee	18 33.3	36 66.7		54 100.0
Business	20 34.5	33 56.9	5 8.6	58 100.0
Farmer	34 60.7	20 35.7	2 3.6	56 100.0
Others	195 44.9	185 42.7	54 12.4	434 100.0
Total	267 44.4	274 45.5	61 10.1	602 100.0

Table 5.20 above reveals that a little less than half of the respondents agree that the greater earning *kpas* have more influence in their families. It is however strange to

note that respondents with better salaried jobs are less agreeable to this. On the other hand the farmers seem to have a positive response. It is clear therefore that earning does not necessarily determine the status and power of the father in the family.

c) *Kpas* hailing from rich and influential families have greater influence on their families (Gender perspective)

Table 5.21 below provides a gender perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpas* who hail from rich and influential families have more influence over their families.

Table 5.21 – *Kpas* hailing from rich and influential families have greater influence (Gender perspective)

Gender of respondents	Fathers from rich and influential families command more respect and authority			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Men	94 40.9	111 48.2	25 10.9	230 100.0
Women	109 29.3	217 58.3	46 12.4	372 100.0
Total	203 33.7	328 54.5	71 11.8	602 100.0

Table 5.21 above reveals that, irrespective of gender, one third of the respondents in general agree that *kpas* from rich and influential families wield more influence in their children's houses. The women seem less convinced about this for a majority of them disagree with this. It is evident that the status and authority of the *kpa* does not

necessarily flow from his family's social status but there are other factors beyond this consideration.

5.7. KPA SHOULD REPLACE THE KNI TODAY

The image of the *kñi* today has been affected by factors mentioned earlier. Some of the factors which are responsible for a diminishing influence of the *kñi* are poverty and his inability to make frequent visits to his siter's family.³³ Poverty at times becomes a hindrance for an economically poorer *kñi* to visit his nephews and nieces for he is unable to offer them anything. The *kñi* today unlike those of the past, seem to have less time and less interest to visit their *kpoh/kur* members.³⁴ Consequently, the image of the *kpa* emerges strongly in such situations and he is perceived as the right person to take over the role of the *kñi* in his family. The findings of the present study clearly indicate a growing opinion that the *kpa* should assume the role of the *kñi* in his children's family. However, as the same man generally exercises both roles of *kñi* and *kpa*. Thus every married Khasi man would in some sense forego some authority and control in his *kur/kpoh* which he would make up in his children's family. Thus it may be considered as a win-win situation.

a). The *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today (Rural-urban perspective)

Table 5.22 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpa* should replace the role of the *kñi* today.

Table 5.22 – The *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	The father should replace the <i>kñi</i> today			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Marbisu	270 68.0	91 22.9	36 9.1	397 100.0
Mawroh	104 50.7	62 30.2	39 19.0	205 100.0
Total	374 62.1	153 25.4	75 12.5	602 100.0

Table 5.22 above reveals that majority of the respondents agree that the *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today. However, there is still a sizable number who disagree with this idea. It is interesting to note that more people in rural areas agree with this idea than those in urban areas. This is probably due to the fact that the erosion of *kñi*-ship is more felt in rural areas than in the urban settings.

b) The *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today (Age perspective)

Table 5.23 below provides an age perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpa* should replace the role of the *kñi* today.

Table 5.23 – The *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today (Age perspective)

Age of respondents	The father should replace the <i>kñi</i> today			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
15 - 35	243 58.7	108 26.1	63 15.2	414 100.0
36 - 55	89 69.5	31 24.2	8 6.3	128 100.0
56 and more	42 70.0	14 23.3	4 6.7	60 100.0
Total	374 62.1	153 25.4	75 12.5	602 100.0

Table 5.23 above indicates that a majority of the respondents are of the opinion that the *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today. It is significant to note that the older respondents seem to agree more with this idea than the younger ones. This can be explained by the fact that older people have witnessed and experienced the process of change and probably are more convinced about the need and benefit of such a change.

c) The *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today (Gender perspective)

Table 5.24 below provides a gender perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpa* should replace the role of the *kñi* today.

Table 5.24 – The *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today (Gender perspective)

Gender of the respondents	The father should replace the <i>kñi</i> today			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Men	135 58.7	60 26.1	35 15.2	230 100.0
Women	239 64.2	93 25.0	40 10.8	372 100.0
Total	374 62.1	153 25.4	75 12.5	602 100.0

Table 5.24 above reveals that, irrespective of gender, majority of the respondents agree that the *kpa* should replace the *kñi* in their roles. It is important to note that there are slightly more women who agree with this than the men. The women are usually at the receiving end of a weak and powerless *kpa* on one side and a non-performing *kñi* on the other. Therefore it is reasonable that they would desire for a stronger and more responsible *kpa* in the families. This explains why their percentage of agreement is higher than that of the men.

d) The *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today (Religious perspective)

Table 5.25 below provides a religious perspective of the respondents on the question whether the *kpa* should replace the role of the *kñi* today.

Table 5.25 – The *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today (Religious perspective)

Religion of the respondents	The father should replace the <i>kñi</i> today			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Christian	321 62.2	130 25.2	65 12.6	516 100.0
Traditional religion	53 61.6	23 26.8	10 11.6	86 100.0
Total	374 62.1	153 25.4	75 12.5	602 100.0

Table 5.25 above shows that, irrespective of religion, majority of the respondents agree that the *kpa* should replace the *kñi* in today's Khasi society. There is no perceptible difference of opinion between the Christians and non-Christians. There is however still a good number of people who disagree with such a change. This indicates that such a socio-cultural change is a slow.

e) The *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today (Educational perspective)

Table 5.26 below provides educational perspective on whether the *kpa* should replace the role of the *kñi* today.

**Table 5.26 – The *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today
(Educational perspective)**

Qualification of the respondents	The father should replace the <i>kñi</i> today			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Post-graduate	12 70.6	3 17.6	2 11.8	17 100.0
Graduate	64 67.4	26 27.4	5 5.2	95 100.0
XI - XII	103 53.4	62 32.1	28 14.5	193 100.0
V - X	118 65.6	35 19.4	27 15.0	180 100.0
I - IV	54 71.0	16 21.1	6 7.9	76 100.0
Illiterate	23 56.1	11 26.8	7 17.1	41 100.0
Total	374 62.1	153 25.4	75 12.5	602 100.0

Table 5.26 above reveals that more qualified respondents tend to agree with this more than the illiterates. This can be explained by the fact that educated persons consider this change as important and timely on account of their ability to critically evaluate the current socio-cultural condition of the Khasi society. This is evident from the emergence of a number of socio-cultural movements of educated Khasis who are harping on this theme.

f) The *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today (Occupational perspective)

Table 5.27 below provides an occupational perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpa* should replace the role of the *kñi* today.

Table 5.27 – The *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today (Occupational perspective)

Occupation of the respondents	The father should replace the <i>kñi</i> today			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Can't say	
Government employee	35 64.8	15 27.8	4 7.4	54 100.0
Business	42 72.4	14 24.1	2 3.4	58 100.0
Farmer	31 55.3	17 30.4	8 14.3	56 100.0
Others	266 61.4	107 24.6	61 14.0	434 100.0
Total	374 62.1	153 25.4	75 12.5	602 100.0

Table 5.27 above reveals that most of the respondents agree that the *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today. It is significant to note that respondents with better jobs tend to agree more with this than those without such jobs. This is probably because they feel more self confident and able to look after their families.

5.8. THE GROWING ROLE ASSUMPTION OF THE *KPA* TODAY

One indicator of the emerging authority of the *kpa* in the Khasi society today is the active role that he plays in his family and the assuming of responsibility towards his children. In the past, the *kpa* was usually considered “u nongai symbai” (giver of seed) or u “nongai khun” (progenitor) or “u nongai rynieng-ryniot” (giver of human well being). It was customary for the husband to visit his wife and his children only at night while the whole day he would remain and work in his mother’s house (*ingkur*). His

nephews and nieces were closer to him than his own children who would seldom see him. Today however, the *kpa* is becoming more attached to his children than to his *ing/kpoh/kur* members. He exercises more responsibility towards his wife and children than towards his *ing/kpoh/kur*. With the emergence of nuclear families the authority of the father has become more distinct. As Kharkrang opines: “he is the head as husband to his wife and father to his sons and daughters”.³⁵ The following results of the survey clearly demonstrates this cultural shift of roles.

5.8.1. The *kpa* nurtures his children

Table 5.28 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpa* provides and nurtures his children.

Table 5.28 – The *kpa* nurtures his children (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	The father nurtures his children			Total
	Always	Seldom	Never	
Marbisu	346 87.2	20 5.0	31 7.8	397 100.0
Mawroh	175 85.3	27 13.2	3 1.5	205 100.0
Total	521 86.5	47 7.8	34 5.7	602 100.0

Table 5.28 above reveals that irrespective of rural-urban settings, a great majority of the respondents agree that the *kpa* always nurtures his children. A very small number say that he does so seldom.

5.8.2. The *kpa* admonishes his children (Rural-urban perspective)

Table 5.29 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpa* discipline and admonishes his children.

Table 5.29 – The *kpa* disciplines and admonishes his children (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	The father admonishes his children			Total
	Always	Seldom	Never	
Marbisu	332 83.6	35 8.8	30 7.6	397 100.0
Mawroh	175 85.4	28 13.6	2 1.0	205 100.0
Total	507 84.2	63 10.5	32 5.3	602 100.0

Table 5.29 above shows that in both rural and urban settings, a vast majority of the respondents agree that the *kpa* always disciplines and admonishes his children today. A comparatively small number say that he does so seldom.

5.8.3. The *kpa* supervises family affairs (Rural-urban perspective)

Table 5.30 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpa* supervises the family affairs.

Table 5.30 – The *kpa* supervises family affairs (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	The father today oversees the family affairs			Total
	Always	Seldom	Never	
Marbisu	300 75.6	50 12.6	47 11.8	397 100.0
Mawroh	149 72.7	42 20.5	14 6.8	205 100.0
Total	449 74.6	92 15.3	61 10.1	602 100.0

Table 5.30 above reveals that irrespective of rural-urban settings majority of the respondents agree that the *kpa* always supervises the affairs of his family. However, there are few who say that he does so seldom or never.

5.8.4. The *kpa* takes decisions in family matters

Table 5.31 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpa* takes decisions in family matters.

Table 5.31 – The *kpa* takes decisions in family matters (Rural-urban perspective)

Villages	The father takes decisions in family affairs			Total
	Always	Seldom	Never	
Marbisu	264 66.5	73 18.4	60 15.1	397 100.0
Mawroh	137 66.8	48 23.4	20 9.8	205 100.0
Total	401 66.6	121 20.1	80 13.3	602 100.0

Table 5.31 reveals that, irrespective of rural-urban settings, majority of the respondents agree that the *kpa* always takes decision in matter related to his family. However, there is still a sizable number who say he seldom does so. There are also some who say that he never does so.

5.8.5. The *kpa* visits his *kur/kpoh/ing* members (Rural-urban perspective)

Table 5.32 below provides a rural-urban perspective of the respondents on whether the *kpa* use to visit his *kur/kpoh/ing* members.

**Table 5.32 – The *kpa* visits his *kur/kpoh/ing* members
(Rural-urban perspective)**

Villages	The father visits his clan/family members			Total
	Always	Seldom	Never	
Marbisu	149 37.5	235 59.2	13 3.3	397 100.0
Mawroh	86 42.0	114 55.6	5 2.4	205 100.0
Total	235 39.0	349 58.0	18 3.0	602 100.0

Table 5.32 above reveals that in both rural and urban settings, not many respondents say that the *kpa* always visits his *kur/kpoh/ing*. A greater number of respondents say that the father seldom visits his *kur/kpoh/ing*. This indicates that the role of the Khasi man as *kni* is actually declining while his responsibility as *kpa* is gradually increasing.

5.9. MOVEMENTS TOWARDS STRENGTHENING *KPA*-SHIP

Khasi culture and tradition seems to be in a state of transition. There are many indications today that point to a kind of cultural turmoil in the Khasi society. Perhaps the cultural tension between the institutions of *kñi*-ship and *kpa*-ship is the most prominent. In this regard there has been some sort of what the sociologists call “social moment”. According to the renowned Indian sociologist, T. K. Oommen:

Social moment occurs when a fairly large number of people are bound together in order to alter or support some position of existing culture or social order... Social movements are not just about tangible political results; they are attempts to place issues on the agenda...and contest hegemonic ways of seeing the world by propounding an alternate interpretation of social reality.³⁶

Accordingly, there have been efforts to guide the Khasi people towards a desired destination, having read the signs of the time and deciphered the road map.³⁷ In the last few decades we have seen the resurgence of a lot of socio-cultural movements in Khasi society who try to address this burning issue. The most notable among them are the following:

5.9.1. Ka Seng Iktiar Longbriew-manbriew (SIL)

It was in 1961 that a few enlightened Khasi men decided to make public the idea of proposing a change in the Khasi family system. The movement was initiated by Dr. A. Lyngwi who became the first president of SIL, Mr. J. Darnington Lyngdoh who was its vice president and a few others. In 1964 this group held a public debate in Sohra on the

theme “Khasi customs and traditions for the Khasi people”. It was here that the sensitive issue of family lineage was debated vehemently. However, there was a strong protest from the women which compelled the organizers to end the debate abruptly.³⁸ Thus the first attempt made by SIL to herald a socio-cultural change in the Khasi society failed. However, many believe that the beginning had been made and the society’s conscience had been pricked.³⁹

5.9.2. Ka Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai (SRT)

The SRT has its genesis in the movement called Ka Seng Iktiar Longbriew-manbriew (SIL). It was officially founded on 14th April 1990. Mr. Darningstone Lyngdoh who was the co-founder of SIL more than thirty years ago, became its advisor. The SRT can be termed revitalistic social movement as it is a collective attempt to construct a more satisfying culture. A report in the *Sunday* magazine in 1995 has this to say “young Khasi men find all this difficult to bear and have reacted by starting a movement that may well be described as ‘men’s lib’. The movement is being led by the Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai”.⁴⁰ The ideas and proposals of this group are basically those formulated by the Seng Iktiar Longbriew-manbriew.⁴¹ This movement aims at changing the Khasi matrilineal into a patrilineal system. Thirty years after the failure of SIL, the understanding of people has ripened and the proposals of SRT are gradually gaining ground among the Khasis.

5.9.3. Movement for Positive Thinking (MPT)

There are many socio-cultural groups today who advocate the need to empower the father of the family. The Movement for Positive Thinking (MPT) at its meeting held in 1999, had impressed upon the government to formulate laws that will provide equal share of family inheritance to the male children. This is seen as an important process towards empowering men in their families. Another recommendation was to formulate laws regarding marriage which will ensure the integrity of a family.⁴²

5.9.4. Interventions of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC)

The KHADC has been instituted by the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitutions in order to safeguard the interests of the Khasi people. In keeping with this objective the KHADC has been actively engaged in the preservation and promotion of Khasi culture and traditions. It has enacted laws related to many issues like land and property, lineage, village administration etc. The Lineage Act of 1997 and the Village Administration Bill of 2011 may be mentioned in detail here as they are relevant to the study of our problem.

a) Through the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act, 1997, the KHADC has been able to enact a law that will guarantee the permanency of the Khasi matrilineal system which is under constant threat due to inter-community marriages and adoption of other religions. By preserving the matrilineal system, many other cultural institutions are expected to be upheld like the status and role of the *khatduh* (heiress), the tradition of inheritance of ancestral property and the identity of the Khasis themselves.⁴³ The

preservation of matriliney also implies the permanency of the institution of *kñi*-ship. The two in fact go hand in hand and one impinges on the other.

b) Secondly, this particular Act also upholds some traditional practices like the *Tang-jait* or *Tang-kur* and the *Rap-ing* wherein a family without a daughter adopts a female child and endows on her the mother's *kur* and also the ancestral property of the family or clan.⁴⁴ In all these traditional practices the role of the *kñi* is irreplaceable. Therefore by upholding these traditions *kñi*-ship is being affirmed.

c) By upholding that matriliney and the observation of Khasi customs as criteria for being a Khasi, the law protects the Khasi society from an invasion of patriliney brought about by inter-cultural marriages.⁴⁵ Consequently, the institution of *kñi*-ship is being preserved.

d) The Bill on Village Administration 2011, which has been introduced in KHADC, is another step taken for the preservation of Khasi traditional institutions. The Bill if it becomes law, will greatly help to boost up the image of village administration among the Khasis. The Bill provides that only a Khasi who has attained the age of 25 is eligible to be a *rangbah-shnong* thereby safeguarding the traditional character of the institution.⁴⁶ There is an elaborate section on the composition, powers and functions of the *dorbar-shnong* (village council).⁴⁷ Through the endorsement of *ka teh-rangbah* ceremony, the Bill upholds the traditional law that only men take part in the *dorbar*.⁴⁸ By affirming the authority and role of the *dorbar-shnong*, the Bill is indirectly affirming the status and authority of men in Khasi society as they are the protagonists in every

dorbar. This consequently is an affirmation of the status of the *kñi* or *kpa* for in almost all cases they are the participants of this institution.

5.10. **KPA-SYNROP (CLASSIFICATORY FATHERS)**

Kpa-synrop (classificatory fathers) are the elder and younger brothers of the *kpa* (father). In Khasi kinship system, they are addressed as “*pa*” (father). The classificatory fathers who are elder to the *kpa* are called “*pa-san*” or “*pa-heh*” (eldest). The middle one is addressed as “*pa-deng*” while the younger brother is called “*pa-duh*” or “*pa-khynnah*”.

5.10.1. Status of the *Kpa-synrop*

The fact that the classificatory fathers are addressed as “*pa*” (father) indicates that the Khasis consider them on an equal level with the *kpa*. In general there is respect towards them displayed by their nephews and nieces. Their advice is adhered to by them when it is meant for their good.⁴⁹

5.10.2. Functions and role of the *kpa-synrop*

The *kpa-synrop* (classificatory fathers) do not usually bring their earnings to their married brother’s family although there are some exceptional cases of this. For example, if they are orphans and unmarried and they live in the family of their married brothers. In general the functions of the classificatory fathers are mainly the following:

a) *Maintain a good relationship with their brother and his family, ñng or kpoh.*

The Khasi social norm of *tipkur-tipkha* (know your cognates and agnates), is considered an important norm to be conscientiously followed. Therefore maintaining a good relationship with their married brother and his family, is an important duty of the *kpa-synrop*.

b) *To counsel and discipline their nephews and nieces.* Like the *kpa* whose duty is to discipline and counsel his children, the *kpa-synrop* too perform this duty although in a lesser degree. In the interviews most of the persons agree that the *kpa-synrop* do visit them but only on rare occasions.⁵⁰ When they come some of them counsel their nephews and nieces and they generally listen to them.⁵¹

c) *To support them in times of need.* It is a tradition among the Khasis that the *kpa-synrop* are well respected by their nephews and nieces. The kinship tie with their brother keeps them close to his children. Thus in times of need it is expected that they come to the aid of their brother and his family.

5.10.3. Declining role of the *kpa-synrop* today

Usually the *kpa-synrop*'s relationship with his nephews and nieces depends greatly on his personal relationship with his sibling brother. When there are differences between them then the *kpa-synrop* would refrain from visiting his nephews and nieces.⁵² Often the death of their sibling brother would also affect the relationship with their brother's family. When relationship is good and when there is physical proximity the *kpa-synrop* would generally play a more active role. However, the role of the *kpa-synrop* today

towards his nephews and nieces is on the decline. In urban areas where busy schedule and individualism have crept in, the *kpa-synrop* would seldom find time to perform such social acts. Moreover, they themselves being fathers of their own families are more concerned about their families' welfare.

5.11. CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, the decline of *kñi*-ship and the rise of *kpa*-ship are related issues because they are concerned with the same individual who plays a double role. As has been enumerated above, there are many factors that have led to the growing influence of the *kpa* in Khasi families. Moreover, this transition of roles from *kñi* to *kpa* is a natural consequence of cultural transformation that the Khasi society is experiencing today in the wider context of globalization. As in the case of the Nayers in Kerala whose transition from matriliney (*marukakkathayam*) to patriliney in the 19th century was due to education, social mobility, market oriented economy and the enforcement of many social legislations,⁵³ the Khasi society is bound to experience the same movement of transformation.

NOTES

- ¹ Cf. J. War, "The Khasi Concept of Family: Changes in Structure and Function", in P. M. Chacko (ed.) *Matriliny in Meghalaya: Tradition and Change*. New Delhi, Regency Publications, 1998, 19.
- ² Gurdon, *The Khasis*, 78-79. It is actually a misconception to think of the father as playing the second fiddle in the Khasi family. Whenever a man proves his worth by hard work and good character, he commands the respect and obedience of his children, except the husband of the *khatduh* (heiress) who is usually dominated by his wife and his in-laws.
- ³ Cf. H. Elias, *Ka Hamsaia ki Por*. Shillong, St. Anthony's College, 1976, 45.
- ⁴ Cf. Mawrie, *The Khasi Milieu*, 55.
- ⁵ Cf. M. P. R. Lyngdoh, "Ka kyrdan u rangbah Khasi ha ka imlang-sahlang", presented at Ka Seminar jong ka Seng Samla Nongrimbah, organized by Ka Seng Samla Week, Shillong: December 18th, 1989.
- ⁶ Cf. K. Rapphap, "Ka nongrim u shynrang rangbah Khasi", in *Batemon*, vol. 1, issue 4 (October 1988), 9.
- ⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*
- ⁸ Cf. C. Nakane, *Garo and Khasi: A Comparative Study in Matrilineal Systems* (Parish: Mouton, 1967), 125.
- ⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 127.
- ¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 129.
- ¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*
- ¹² Cf. Lyngdoh, "Ka kyrdan u rangbah Khasi ha ka imlang-sahlang", 1.
- ¹³ R. Fox, *Kinship and Marriage*. London: Penguin Books, 1966, 108.
- ¹⁴ Cf. A. S. Kynjing, "U shynrang Khasi u phong artylli ki pansngiat", in *Rupang* (December 12, 1997), 2.
- ¹⁵ Interview with Mr. Peter Lamare (Mawroh: June 20, 2010).
- ¹⁶ Cf. Madhumita Das, *Changing Family System among a Matrilineal Group in India* (Mumbai: International Institute for Population Sciences), 18, in http://www.iussp.org/Brazil2001/s10/S12_04_Das.pdf (accessed on March 5, 2012).
- ¹⁷ Interview with Mr. Fulgensius (Marbisu: November 27, 2011).
- ¹⁸ Interview with Mr. F. A. Kurbah (Marbisu: November 29, 2011).
- ¹⁹ Interview with Mr. P. Kurbah (Marbisu: November 29, 2011).
- ²⁰ Interview with Mrs. Amrika Kurbah (Marbisu: November 27, 2011).
- ²¹ Interview with Mrs. Diana Kurbah (Marbisu: November 27, 2011).
- ²² Cited in R. Kharkrang, *Matriliny on the March*. Shillong: VIP, 2012, 131-132.
- ²³ Cf. A. Basaiawmoit, "Ka iktiar u rangbah ha ka longing Khasi jong ka juk mynta", in *U Nongsaiñ Hima* (February 26, 2008), 4.
- ²⁴ Cf. K. Rapphap, "Hato u kpa u long u khlieh ka ing?" in *Dongmusa* (August 22, 1991), 11.
- ²⁵ Cf. W. S. Hynniewta, "Hangno ka nongrim u shynrang rangbah Khasi", in *Mawphor* (October 3, 1997), 2.
- ²⁶ Cf. O. L. Snaitang, "The Impact of Christianity on the Khasi-Jaintia Matrilineal Family", 70.
- ²⁷ Cf. Snaitang, "The Impact of Christianity on the Khasi-Jaintia Matrilineal Family", 65.
- ²⁸ Cf. Interview with Mr. C. Kharlyngdoh (Marbisu: November 27, 2011).
- ²⁹ Cf. S. S. Lyngdoh, "The Khasi Matriliny: Its Past and Its Future", 41.
- ³⁰ Interview with Mr. Fulgensius (Marbisu: November 27, 2011); *Interview with Mr. S. Charles Khyriem* (Marbisu: November 27, 2011).
- ³¹ Cf. S. S. Lyngdoh, "The Khasi Matriliny: Its Past and Its Future", 42. However, there are still some *kpas* today who in spite of their education and better salaried jobs, behave irresponsibly towards their families. In such cases, they lose their authority and influence over their wives and children and they lose respect of the in-laws.
- ³² Interview with Mrs. Felicity Sunn (Marbisu: November 27, 2011).
- ³³ Interview with Mrs. Blesi M. Kurbah (Marbisu: November 27, 2011).
- ³⁴ Interview with Mrs. Landoris Lyngdoh Mawphlang (Marbisu: November 27, 2011); Interview with Mr. Anthony Jana (Marbisu: November 27, 2011).
- ³⁵ Kharkrang, *Matriliny on the March*, 114.
- ³⁶ T. Oommen, *Protests and Change: Studies in Social Movements*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990, 30.
- ³⁷ Cf. R. Kharkrang, *Matriliny on the March*. Shillong: VIP, 2012, 124.
- ³⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 126.
- ³⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 133.
- ⁴⁰ R. Karmakar, "War of the sexes", in *Sunday*, vol. 22, issue 16 (16-22 April, 1995), 48.
- ⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*
- ⁴² Cf. "Ka jingkitkhlieh jong u kpa ia ka ing la iakren", in *Rupang* (April 26, 1999), 4.

⁴³ Cf. KHADC, Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act 1997 in *The Gazette of Meghalaya*, no. 22 (Shillong: February 25, 2005), 4.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 4-5. *Tang-jait* is an ancient cultural practice. When a Khasi man marries a non-Khasi woman through *tang-jait* a new *kur* is created. The woman becomes the first ancestress (*iawbei*) of the new *kur*. Even today this tradition is being maintained.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁶ Cf. KHADC, *Draft of Village Administration Bill* (Shillong: KHADC, 2011), 8.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 4-6.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁴⁹ Interview with Mr. Benedict Kurbah (Mawroh, June 20, 2010); Interview with Mr. Joseph Nongkynrih (Mawroh, June 20, 2010)

⁵⁰ Interview with Mr. P. Kurbah (Marbisu, November 27, 2011).

⁵¹ Interview with Mr. Joseph Nongkynrih (Mawroh, June 20, 2010).

⁵² Interview with Dr. Baphershisha Kharjana (Mawprem: November 12, 2011).

⁵³ Cf. "Conclusion" <http://search.mywebsearch.com/mywebsearch/GGmain.jhtml?searchfor=from+matriliney+to+patriliney+in+nayar+society> (accessed on March 3, 2012), 4.

CHAPTER 6

Summary and Conclusion

6.1. INTRODUCTION

We shall group them under the following themes:

- a) Image of the *kñi* (uncle) in Khasi society
- b) Authority of the *kñi* today
- c) The present role of the *kñi*
- d) Status of the *kpa* (father) today
- e) Authority of the father today

6.2. IMAGE OF THE *KÑI* IN KHASI SOCIETY

On the image of the *kñi* in Khasi society as perceived by the people today, we have arrived at the following generalizations.

a) First, the traditional institution of *kñi*-ship is still considered important by the majority. There is still an emotional attachment to this age-old institution. All Khasis irrespective of age groups, gender, levels of educational qualification, religious creed or occupation, still believe that *kñi*-ship is still a significant institution in Khasi society. There is however a gradual tendency among all sections of Khasis to consider this institution as no more essential. The level of ignorance about this traditional institution

is also quite high among the younger generation. The agrarian community seems to have a better familiarity with this institution and they are more positive towards it than the urban respondents.

The study reveals that the popular presumption that rural areas are more favourable to *kñi*-ship than the urban areas is mistaken. The analysis shows clearly that the urban setting scores a little higher in this aspect. In fact, with regard to the diminishing status of the *kñi*, the rural area seems to have been more affected as indicated in Table 4.1. Rural area records a higher percentage of agreement with regard to the issue of the *kpa* replacing the *kñi* than urban areas as seen in Tables 5.22 and 5.23.

The study also indicates that the general presumption that the adherents of the traditional religion are more orthodox believers of this institution is also wrong. In general, there is no perceptible difference between Christians and adherents of Khasi religion in their perception of the *kñi*-ship. Table 4.3 clearly indicates that the difference is minimal. When it comes to the question of the *kpa* replacing the *kñi*, the difference of opinion between adherents of the two religions is not much at all as seen in Tables 5.27 and 5.28.

b) Secondly, regarding the authority of the *kñi* over his *kur/kpoh/ing* members, the study shows that still a large majority of the people believe that the *kñi* still exercises his authority. Tables 3.10-3.15 reveal that irrespective of gender, religion, educational qualification or occupation, there is agreement on this question.

c) Thirdly, concerning the *kñi* as the priest of the *kur/kpoh/ing*, Table 3.17 reveals that elderly persons subscribe to this idea more than the younger ones. As seen in

Table 3.19 that those who profess the traditional religion uphold this role of the *kñi* more than the Christians. This is not surprising because in traditional religion the priestly role of the *kñi* is still relevant and in practice. Among Christians, however, there is no more family religion or family cult. So this particular role of the *kñi* has become redundant.

d) Fourthly, regarding the *kñi* as the mediator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* there is general agreement among all about this role of the *kñi* as indicated in Tables 3.22-3.27. Table 3.23 shows that elderly persons believe in this more than the younger ones. The agrarian people also display a higher degree of agreement on this issue than those from the urban areas.

e) Fifthly, concerning the role of the *kñi* as the one who upholds the cultural heritage of the *kur/kpoh/ing* the elderly persons are in general more agreeable to this as clearly indicated in Table 3.31. There is a greater degree of ignorance about this aspect among the younger people than among the elderly ones.

f) Sixthly, concerning the role of the *kñi* as the instructor and educator of the *kur/kpoh/ing* members, Table 3.36 reveals that the elderly people are more inclined to agree with this than the younger people. Presumably they are the ones who have had more experience of this particular role of the *kñi* for some of them would have been *kñis* themselves. However, the study reveals that within the age group 36 to 55 many disagree. This is probably because many of the Khasi fathers today have begun to assume the role of being instructor and educator of their children.

The traditional image and functions of the *kñi* is by and large positive. There is general agreement about the role and authority of the *kñi* in society. Therefore it is

evident that theoretically the general perception of the *kñi* remains traditional. Most Khasis still perceive *kñi*-ship as a significant institution and there is doubtlessly a sentimental attachment to this age-old institution. However, judging by the significant number of respondents who do not seem familiar about this traditional institution, it is equally evident that *kñi*-ship as a cultural institution is less known today than earlier.

6.3. AUTHORITY OF THE *KÑI* TODAY

On the authority of the *kñi* in present day Khasi society as perceived by the people today, the present study shows the following.

a) Concerning the down-sliding status of the *kñi* today, the study reveals that the *kñi* today has lost much of his status that he had before. It is interesting to note that the rural respondents feel this changing phenomenon more than the urban respondents. The reason is probably because the rural people experience more dispersion of the *kur/kpoh/ing* members which affects more tangibly the role of the *kñi*. Again the women seem to feel such a phenomenon more than the men as seen in Table 4.2. Table 4.3 also shows that Christians in general feel the weakening status of the *kñi* more than those who still profess the traditional Khasi religion. This is probably because the role of the *kñi* in Christian families is considerably diminished especially in matters related to religious rituals. For example, even if the *kñi* still upholds the traditional religion, he would not be able to exercise his religious role in the families of his *kur/kpoh/ing* if they are Christians. But this is a normal practice if the families of his *kur/kpoh/ing* are still upholding the Khasi religion.

b) When it comes to the relationship between the *kñi* and the younger members of the *kur/kpoh/ing* the analysis shows that there is a growing number of young people who do not know much about their *kñi* anymore. Again this phenomenon seems to have affected the rural areas more than the urban ones. Presumably the dispersion of the *kur/kpoh/ing* members, for reasons of work, education etc, has led to the estrangement of the young people from their *kñis*. Often, they would meet the *kñis* only on rare occasions like the death of someone and a wedding. Significantly, the Christians seem to have been more affected by this than the traditional religion followers.

c) On why many *kñis* today do not know their roles anymore, Table 4.10 clearly shows that most Khasis agree with this. This makes a *kñi* merely a nominal figure without any sense of responsibility towards his *kur/kpoh/ing* members. In the rural areas this phenomenon is felt more than in the urban setting.

d) Concerning the educational qualifications of the *kñi*, Table 4.4 shows that there is a consensus among all sections of Khasis that many *kñis* are illiterate or poorly educated. This phenomenon is more acutely felt in the rural areas. In general male literacy is lower in the rural than in the urban areas of Khasi-Jaiñtia Hills. This consequently leads to generations of illiterate *kñis* in different *kur/kpoh/ing*. As Table 4.5 indicates the situation seems to be better among Christians probably because of the Church's contribution towards the education of its members.¹

e) Concerning whether the *kñi* who is more educated wields more influence, not many ascribe to this opinion as Table 4.6 indicates. However, an educated *kñi* in the rural area is probably more influential than the one who is in the urban area. This is

reasonable because an educated person in the rural area is looked upon with more respect and honour.

g) Tables 3.28 and 3.29 also reveal that a *kñi* who holds a high position in the society need not necessarily be more respected or more influential. However, such opinion seems to be more acceptable for people in the rural areas and among men than in the urban areas and among women.

h) Concerning whether the *kñi* who is economically better off commands more respect and influence, Tables 4.8 and 4.9 show that not many ascribe to this view. Such *kñis* in rural areas seem to have more respect and authority than in urban areas. As it usually happens, the rich *kñis* in villages become benefactors of the poorer members of their *kur/kpoh/ing* especially in times of need. Consequently they earn the love and respect of their members.

i) Regarding whether the eldest *kñi* has more authority than the younger *kñis* or the *kñi-synrop* (classificatory uncles), Tables 3.1-3.3 indicate that majority subscribe to this opinion. By tradition among the Khasis, this has always been observed. There is more spontaneous respect and obeisance shown to the eldest *kñi* than to the *kñi-synrop*.

Evidently, with regard to the authority of the *kñi* today, the study indicates that there is a significant decline. This situation varies according to settings (rural-urban), religion (Christians, traditional religion believers), educational qualifications etc. In general the role of the *kñi* has diminished significantly in urban areas than in rural areas and among Christians than among believers of traditional Khasi religion. On the other

hand, educational qualification is also playing a great role in influencing the image and authority of the *kñi* today.

6.4. PRESENT ROLE OF THE *KÑI*

On the role of the *kñi* in Khasi society, the findings are as follows:

a) Table 4.12 reveals that most of the *kñis* seldom visit their *kur/kpoh/ing* members. Very few of them do so frequently. What is interesting to note is that this phenomenon is common in both urban and rural areas. However, the situation seems better among those who uphold the traditional religion than the Christians. In general the *kñis* today do not visit their *kur/kpoh/ing* members as frequently as they used to do before.

b) One of the principal roles of the *kñi* in Khasi society is to admonish or counsel the members of his *kur/kpoh/ing*, especially the younger ones. Table 4.14 indicates that this role is weakening among the *kñis* today. Undoubtedly there is a connection between this and the frequency of visits the *kñi* makes. This role appears to be more evident among those who still profess the traditional religion than the Christians.

c) Regarding the role of decision-making in important matters in the *kur/kpoh/ing*, Tables 4.16 and 4.17 reveal that the *kñis* in rural areas and those who belong to the traditional religion play more active role than those in the urban areas or those who are Christians.

d) Concerning the issue of the *kñi* presiding over marriages of his *kur/kpoh/ing* members, Table 4.18 reveals that this particular role of the *kñi* is still largely practiced

more in rural areas than in urban areas. It is interesting however to note that this practice is almost equally present among Christian and followers of the traditional religion. However, the intensity of presence of the *kñi* is different between the two groups. His role is more prominent in marriages of members who still uphold Khasi religion because he is the presiding priest. In Christian marriages, however, the *kñi* has a peripheral role of being merely a witness.

e) The study further shows that in matters of feuds within the *kur/kpoh/ing*, the *kñi*'s role as a mediator of reconciliation is more prominent in rural areas and also among those who still belong to the traditional religion than their counterparts.² However, his role is still largely felt among members of his *kur/kpoh/ing* irrespective of place and religion.

f) With regard to the *kñi-synrop* the study reveals that there is still great respect for them.³ Their influence however depends very much on their proximity to their nephews and nieces. But there is a tendency among them to distance themselves from their *kpoh/ing* members after the death of their immediate sisters.⁴

g) Theoretically, the concept of *kñi*-ship is still tenable and relevant. This is evident from the positive opinion regarding this traditional institution at the perception level. However, when it comes to the practical or experiential level there is a critical outlook at *kñi*-ship today.

With regard to the exercise of his traditional role, the *kñi* today has become less aware of his duty. The conflict of roles in a Khasi man between being a *kñi* and being a *kpa* is evident. There is a gradual tendency towards being a *kpa* more than being a *kñi*. In

this transition there are many contributing factors like Christianity, education, migration to the cities and influence of other cultures. Christianity proves to be a major influence in this change because of its emphasis on the role of the father than of the uncle. In fact, in any Christian ritual the presence of the father is obligatory and not that of the uncle. Moreover, the growing social interactions with other cultures who follow patriliney has had a gradual impact on the psyche of the Khasi people.

6.5. STATUS OF THE *KPA* (FATHER) TODAY

On the present status of the *kpa* (father) in Khasi society, the study has the following findings:

a) The status of the *kpa* among the Khasis in general has gone up. His importance and role are being recognized. Table 5.10 reveals that the status of the *kpa* is much higher in urban areas and particularly among the more educated (Table 5.14) and those who have better employment (Table 5.15). This shows the general perception today that the *kpa* has become a more influential person in the family.

b) Table 5.16 reveals that the number of educated *kpas* is on the rise both in the urban and rural areas. In the urban areas the percentage of educated *kpas* is higher than in the rural areas. The rise in education of the *kpas* is closely related to the rise in their status and importance in the families and society at large.

c) Regarding whether the children obey their fathers, Table 5.1 shows a positive tendency. Today it is evident that children show more respect and obedience to their fathers. The *kpas* in urban areas (Table 5.1) and those who are more educated (Table

5.2) and better placed in society (Table 5.3), command more obedience from their children. With the declining influence of the *kñi*, the *kpa* seems to have substituted his place in the family.

d) Concerning whether the *kpa* is closer to his children than the *kñi*, Table 5.4 reveals that a vast majority of people agree that today the *kpa* is closer to his children than their *kñi* is.⁵ This phenomenon is experienced more in urban areas (Table 5.4) and among Christians (Table 5.6). Probably as indicated earlier, the *kñi* in Christian families does not have much role as he has in families of the traditional religion. This explains why the position of the *kpa* is stronger in Christian families.⁶

e) On whether the *kpa* has more authority in his children's house than in his mother's house, Tables 5.7-5.9 show that a vast majority of Khasis today agree with it. This vindicates the growing image of the *kpa* in Khasi families today.

f) Concerning the vital question regarding if the *kpa* should replace the *kñi* today in their roles, Tables 5.22-5.30 indicate that many of the Khasis feel that this is right. Such opinion is even more positive in rural areas (Table 5.22), among elderly (Table 5.24), among Christians (Table 5.27)⁷ and among more educated people (Table 5.29). Interestingly, the women support this idea more than the men (Table 5.25). Probably the women are the most affected by the responsible or irresponsible behaviours of their husbands. Naturally they feel that when the *kpa* assumes more responsibility towards the family, the family situation will improve.

g) Regarding whether the educated *kpa* exercises more influence on the family, Table 5.17 reveals that not many believe this as an influencing factor. However, people

in rural areas and those who are less educated or illiterate (Table 5.18) tend to believe in this more than the others. Probably education is still a major factor in rural areas and educated persons are still held in high regard which may not be the reality in urban areas.

h) Concerning whether the *kpa* hailing from rich and influential families have greater influence, Table 5.21 shows that not many ascribe to this opinion. However, such belief seems to be more applicable to rural areas. Interestingly, less women subscribe to this opinion than men.

i) Concerning whether greater earning *kpas* exercise more influence in the families, Tables 5.19 and 5.20 reveal that this too is not accepted opinion by many. Nevertheless, the people in rural areas seem to subscribe to this more than those in urban areas.

The study clearly shows the growing image, importance and influence of the *kpa* in Khasi families. Education and better employment are among the primary factors contributing to the growing image of the *kpa*. The role of Christianity cannot be ruled out. In fact the emphasis that Christian teachings give to the father as head of the family is largely responsible for the rise of *kpa*-ship in Khasi society. There is at the same time a growing shift of allegiance of the Khasi man from his *kur* to his children. This is evidently a cultural transition keeping in mind the fact that in the past the Khasi man was closer to his clan members than to his children.

6.6. EXERCISE OF AUTHORITY/ROLE OF THE *KPA* TODAY

The following generalizations can be drawn on the present exercise of authority/role of the *kpa* (father) in Khasi society.

a) With regard to whether the *kpa* today cares and nurtures his children, Table 5.31 reveals a very positive response. It is evident that the role of the *kpa* today as the one who nurtures his children is well accepted. So the traditional concept of the *kpa* as the one who merely begets children (*u nongai khun*), is gradually disappearing. Instead the *kpa* is seen as someone who assumes full responsibility for his children.

b) Concerning whether the *kpa* is the one who admonishes his children, Table 5.32 shows that most Khasis today have accepted this fact. This further proves the growing influence of the *kpa* in his children's house. This is a significant cultural transition considering the fact that in the past it used to be the *kñi* who exercised such role. The study however reveals that most of the *kñis* or *kñi-synrop* still admonish their nephews and nieces but on rarer occasions. In cases of the *khatduh*'s family where the bachelor *kñi* still resides in his mother's house, the *kñi* then plays an active role in disciplining the younger members of his *kur/kpoh/ing*. In such a situation, the *kpa*'s role is limited to a great extent.⁸

c) Concerning whether the *kpa* is the one who supervises family affairs, Table 5.33 is very positive. It is evident that most Khasis today believe that the *kpa* and not the *kñi* should be the one to supervise matters related to his children's family.

d) With regard to whether the *kpa* is the one who makes decisions in family matters, Table 5.34 reveals that most Khasis today accept such view. Irrespective of any

setting, it is clear that the role of the *kpa* as the one who makes decisions in his family affairs is gaining strength from day to day. In the genealogical study of a few families, it is seen that the present generation of *kpas* do exercise their authority in decision making in their family affairs. Only in matters connected with the *kur/kpoh/ing* the *kñi* continues to exercise his authority even today.

e) Concerning whether the *kpa* today visits his *kur/kpoh/ing* members, Table 5.35 shows the decline in the frequency of such visits. Most people agree that such visits are seldom made. This would not have been the situation a few decades ago. So it is evident that the bond of men to their children's families is growing stronger from time to time. The obligation of men towards their matrikins as *kñis* is becoming weaker while the obligation towards their children is gaining importance.

f) Regarding the *kpa-synrop* (classificatory fathers), the study shows that there is respect for them from their nephews and nieces. However, their visits are often restricted to a few occasions.⁹ The degree of relationship is often conditioned by their relationship which they maintain with their sibling brother.¹⁰

The study confirms the well accepted idea today that the *kpa* has begun to assume a greater responsibility in the family today. First of all, it is evident that the Khasi father today remains more with his children than in the past and he exercises more conscientiously his role as the father more than the *kñi* now does. Secondly, it is seen that the *kpa* today, in the growing absence of the *kñi*, has taken upon himself the role of being a bread earner, a disciplinarian and an administrator of the family affairs. Thirdly, it is seen that the *kpa* today plays a greater role in decision making on matters related to

his family. Therefore we see a growing authority of the *kpa* in the Khasi family today. There is a general feeling that the *kpa* today must assume the role played by the *kñi* in the past with regard to his own family and children. He has to fill in the vacuum left by the *kñi*. This transition of role between the *kpa* and the *kñi* is taking place gradually and it is bound to lead to greater changes in the Khasi society.

6.7. INTERPRETATION OF THE GENEALOGICAL STUDY

The genealogical data from four *kpohs* (2 in Marbisu and 2 in Mawroh) based on interviews with the eldest members of the lineages have yielded some interesting results which are as follows:

a) There are distinctive differences between the earlier generation *kñis* and the present one. The difference is seen especially in the quality of roles they played earlier and do now.

b) The *kñis* of the earlier generations, as far as they could recollect, were more conscious about their traditional responsibilities. They maintained a close relationship with the members of the *kpoh* through visits almost on daily basis. The earlier *kñis* had a great sense of attachment to their sisters' families especially that of the *khatduh*.

c) The succeeding generations of *kñis* tend to make their visits to the family members of their *kur/kpoh* less frequent or even occasional. Consequently the sense of attachment and responsibility of the *kñis* towards their *kur/kpoh* have diminished with the passage of time.

d) In cases where the *kñis* are still bachelors or divorced from their wives, they remain in the *khatduhs*' houses even otherwise the frequency of their visits increases.

e) The study also shows that in the past a Khasi man's roles of being a *kñi* and a *kpa* simultaneously always tilted towards the former while in the present generation, the emphasis has shifted towards *kpa*-ship. With more emergence of nuclear families this tendency is likely to be more favourable for *kpa*-ship.

f) The random graphs depicted as inset figures in the genealogical charts are based on the descriptive data provided by the respondents to the investigator during the interviews. These graphs clearly reveal a common phenomenon, namely, the diminishing role of the *kñi* in the Khasi society down the line of generations.

The genealogical study has thrown a lot of light on the traditional institution of *kñi*-ship as it was practised then and is practised now. The result of the interviews with the oldest members of each of these *kpohs* has shown that there is a significant difference between the *kñis* of the past and the present *kñis* in terms of image, authority and influence.

6.8. SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

The previous chapters have demonstrated that while conceptually the institution of *kñi*-ship is still unaffected, the actual exercise of the *kñi*'s role has changed considerably. *Kñi*-ship is gradually turning into an ideology of the past and *kpa*-ship that of the present.

First, the study shows that due to many socio-cultural and economic factors, the traditional role of the *kñi* has been affected adversely. Christianity has been a major influence on the Khasi society. By adopting this new religion, many of the cultural traditions in the family have been affected. The law of inheritance enacted by the British government has practically given the right of ownership of ancestral property to the *khatduh*. In this manner the *kñi* who used to be the traditional administrator of the ancestral property has lost much of his authority over his clan members.¹¹ Because of these factors *kñi*-ship in particular has been adversely affected while *kpa*-ship has gained more importance. Today the *kñi* as the present study has shown, does not wield as much authority and influence over his *kur/kpoh/ing* members as he used to do in the past. In general, his authority is gradually waning away and has become nominal.

Second, the study has shown that the influence of the *kñi* over his nephews and nieces is diminishing due to his inability to exercise his traditional role of being regularly present in his sister's house and to supervise the affairs related to the *kur/kpoh/ing* or to admonish his nephews and nieces. Physical absence has been responsible to a large extent for the diminution of his authority and at times it has led to weakening of kinship bond especially with the younger generation as familiarity between the *kñi* and his nephews and nieces is on the decline.

Third, the study shows that while a Khasi man's role as a *kñi* in his sister's house is diminishing his role as a *kpa* in his conjugal family is on the rise. This is clearly seen in the quality time that he spends with his children than with his nephews and nieces. His growing absence from his nephews and nieces implies an increased presence with

his wife and children. This consequently has strengthened *kpa*-ship in Khasi society today. In fact, the traditional role as 'biological' (as begetter only) father has practically given way to his role as 'social' (nourisher) father. Thus a Khasi man today has become less an uncle in his family of origin and more a social father in his conjugal family.¹²

Fourth, the study shows that many Khasis today are of strong opinion that the *kpa* should assume more authority and responsibility in his children's house than the *kñi*. It is the feeling of many that the *kpa* is the natural guardian and disciplinarian of his children on account of his consanguinal relationship with his children. Laxity in exercising their roles on the part of the *kñi* today and the influence of Christian teaching on paternal responsibility are some of the factors that have accelerated this type of thinking.

Fifth, the study reveals that in reality the process of transition in Khasi patriarchy is already in motion and it is gaining momentum with the passage of time. There is a gradual transition from patriarchy traditionally held by the *kñi* to the present form of patriarchy centred around the father of the family. This phenomenon is equally prevalent both in the urban and rural areas and across all sections of Khasi people.

Sixth, this particular study also reveals that more Khasis today are of the opinion that the *kpa* should formally assume the role of the *kñi* with regard to the affairs of the family except those related to the *kur/kpoh/ing* where the *kñi* is still considered the authority. The verdict is that the *kpa* should replace the role of the *kñi* in the affairs of the *ing-tnat* (nuclear family).

Seventh, the study shows that the image of the *kpa* is gaining more respect and recognition and the *kpa* himself is beginning to assume all responsibilities related to the family. He is no longer a nominal head but de facto the head and supervisor of his own family.¹³

Hence the present study clearly demonstrates that there is a change in patriarchy in the Khasi family, namely, that there is a gradual transition of roles from the maternal uncle to the father of the family.

6.9. IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

This research has confirmed the main thesis about the transition in patriarchy from the *kñi* to the *kpa* in Khasi society today. This may have the following implications for the Khasi society in near future:

a) The image of the *kpa* will be perceived in a better light. His role and status will be better accepted and appreciated. The *kpa* will be seen as a natural substitute of the *kñi* in matters related to the family. With a better recognition of his status and authority, the *kpa* is expected to exercise more authority and accept more responsibilities towards his family.

b) The rise in status of the *kpa* is likely to affect the image of the *kñi* further. In fact, the present study has indicated that the status and role of the *kñi* are experiencing a down-sliding movement. In many cases the *kñi* has become a stranger to his nephews and nieces. The bipolar tension of roles between a *kñi* and *kpa* in a Khasi man has tilted in favour of the latter.

c) The changing patriarchy in Khasi families will probably be perceived as one decisive step in the elaborate process of socio-cultural transformation of the society itself. In the long run

the possibility of change in the lineage system cannot be ruled out. However, such a change in the existing system calls for internal debate and deeper understanding of the Khasi culture and identity.

NOTES

¹ This is not surprising because we see that in the history of education among the Khasis, the Christians were the first beneficiaries of it. In fact most of the Khasi luminaries in the early history were Christians. This proves the great contribution that Christianity has made towards education of the Khasis.

² Probably the Khasi Christians often have recourse to priests or pastors in order to resolve their disputes and quarrels other than their *kñis*. Moreover, their religious doctrines teach about reconciliation more than other religions do.

³ Interview with B. Lyngdoh (Upp. Shillong: November 12, 2011).

⁴ Interview with Dr. Baphershisha Kharjana (Mawprem: November 12, 2011).

⁵ The interviews conducted by the investigator with many persons also reveal that almost all of them agree that the father today is closer to his children than their uncle. The father lives with his children and he assumes responsibility to bring them up.

⁶ Moreover, Christianity is a male-centred religion and the emphasis on family life has been on the central figure of the father. Paternal responsibility towards the children is an important teaching of this religion. The father is also considered a family priest.

⁷ It is common knowledge that fathers in the rural areas enjoy less authority, respect and influence than their counterparts in urban areas. This is probably the reason why the people in rural areas feel that the *kpa* should replace the *kñi* and assume more authority in families.

⁸ This fact has been established by C. Nakane in her study on Matriliney among the Khasis. However, one cannot generalize on this aspect for when the *kpa* is a responsible person and a man of integrity, he can still exert his authority and so he is respected by his wife and in-laws. So even if it is the *khatduh's* family, he can still command respect and authority with regard to his family and children.

⁹ Interview with B. Lyngdoh (Upp. Shillong: November 12, 2011).

¹⁰ Interview with Dr. Baphershisha Kharjana (Mawprem: November 12, 2011).

¹¹ Cf. P. Passah, "Changes in the matrilineal system of Khasi-Jaintia Family", in *Matriliney in Meghalaya*, 76.

¹² Cf. R. Kharkrang, *Matriliney on the March*, 97.

¹³ However, it must be said here that in cases of a man marrying the heiress, the husband is often controlled by the in-laws. The grand-mother or the brother-in-law (uncle) becomes a hindrance to his exercise of authority. Yet a lot of change is also seen in these cases where at times the husband of the heiress commands the affairs of the family. This depends very much on the personality of the man or his ability to shoulder responsibility.

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