

CHAPTER VI

AN OVERVIEW

The examination of the subject matter under study in the previous chapters shows the following ideas:

1. The religious perspective

Funeral rites is part of the complete rite de passage. The religious function of disposal of the dead is a very important one. It helps one to obtain God's forgiveness, to be at peace with one another and finally to assure one a lasting peace in God's house along with all the departed ancestors and ancestresses.

However, the purity of religious rites is much diluted now. Traditional believing Khasis are not sure of their religious rites and practices. They fear to make a mistake. Any incorrect performance will make the spirit of the dead wander around to torment the living members. It also shows that God is still displeased. It therefore impedes one's going to the destined abode in God's house.

Even in thang krei some prayers are said so that God who knows everything will do what is necessary for the departed.

In the Khasi religious practice, there is a preliminary stage called divination (ka shat ka khan) with the breaking of eggs and some other ways for making sure of the reason of the malady. Only after that, there follows a sacrifice of a cock, a goat, a pig and a bull.

Some sort of differentiation has been followed like in the example of thang krei, thang dieng tylli, thang bait-wait and thang lyntang. Each of these involves different degrees of expenditure in preparing the container to keep the corpse. It is also said that it is enough to have just a cock sacrifice and even prayers if one cannot afford to spend more so as to have a solemn religious function.

If this is so, why then, should so rich and complex a religious function as the Khasi religious rites of the dead disappear so nearly totally.

Having reviewed critically what has been described in the funerary rites, one can see in depth the essential belief of the Khasis. It is on the theory of life after death. This is an essential component of their belief system.

Life after death has its derivative from the traditional folklore. The Khasis once communed with God and his saints through the golden ladder (jingkieng ksiar). God descends and ascends through it. Likewise, the seven huts (ki hynniew-trep) communicated with God and the nine families (ki khyndai shajrong) through this means. But an enemy has snapped away this connection. What remains for the seven who were fortunately left on earth is by means of divination and sacrifice.

The Khasis, therefore, have in them this immanent longing: to reach God's house one day. That is their destined abode. Only then they can be happy fully and eternally. Funerary rites of disposal by cremation and bone depositing at cromlech will enable the departed to be together with their ancestors and ancestresses. Their prestine condition is normative of their present life on earth. At death they will also need to be together as one family. That is why members of the same clan will try their best to put all the bones of the deceased together as a symbolic sign of their union with themselves and with God.

The traditionalists believe in God's mercy and pardon as well as in the effectiveness of supplicatory prayers and sacrifice for their departed. That is why they follow the religious ceremonies so meticulously.

It is also an expression that they believe in the living God. Their God is creative and eternal. Otherwise how can there be such a longing in a non-existent one. He is also a good and helping God. He can help one when he is in a difficult condition of life. That is why by means of divination and sacrifice, God accepts the prayers of the living and forgives the deceased so as to give them life eternal. This is the basic element of their belief.

As they believe in the after life, they imagine the departed to have a life similar to those here on earth. It is this conception that makes them treat the dead as if they are alive needing the customary needs of any ordinary human being: food, drink, warding off evil and mutual help.

Moreover as it is said earlier in this chapter, an egg and cock alternatively means the same: the cock of the ancients who has been an expiator and victim for the sake of man in order to bring about a reconciliation with God and to bring the light of his presence and help to man.

As the cock has pleaded on behalf of the whole humanity (the seven huts), he is able also to intercede

by his death so as to obtain mercy and eternal life for the deceased. By his power of intercession, no evil power can hinder the departed from reaching God's abode.

The cock is therefore an important victim of sacrifice in the traditional religion. It is very interesting that the crowing of the cock is good news to man. In the early dawn it awakens man for the great hope of a new day. Thrice it crows. The third time really brings about the sunlight. It must have meant great relief and comfort to the Khasis of old that the light of day is coming, and that he can still continue his daily activity and communion with each other. Calculating from the cock's crow, one can imagine different times of the day. It is indeed very mysterious that this creature can be so informative and helpful to man.

The use of the cock and other animals for the sacrifice is indicative of the historical stage of life the Khasis were in. They have passed through the period of life called the neolithic age whereby man has learned to domesticate animals for their daily use as food, sacrifice and work. It is also a stage of cultivation. It means that their life has become settled. They have left their wandering stage behind. An exception to this rule cannot, however, be ruled out.

The crowing of the cock brings about sunlight. The sun is creative in its function. It gives warmth and light to all living beings. The sun is feminine in the Khasi mentality. In Khasi folklores, it is described as a beauty. It is wooed by the moon (male) and by the peacock (u klew). The moon is, of course, her own blood brother. It is taboo to marry her. He commits sang (sacrilege) to offer his hand to her for the purpose of marriage. The inherent meaning of this is therefore for preserving and continuing the practice of endogamous exogamy prevailing in Khasi society.

The peacock is married to the sun. But he is unfaithful to her. He leaves her for the yellow blossoms of the fields in the plains. He is deceived by his eyes. But he cannot go back to his beloved. The sun weeps for him. Her tears are the reason of the varied bright hues on the feathers of his wings. This is a lesson of warning against infidelity in married life. It also shows the dignity and sanctity of marriage to which one must promote and preserve at all cost.

The most important of all is the idea that by the sin of man, the sun has hidden herself. The outcome is darkness. In the dark, of course, there is fear for all. Only the wicked roam around to display their might

and whims. The plight of man is beyond imagination. It is the cock who has volunteered to intercede before God on man's behalf so as to allow the sun to appear once again in the world of man. The appearing of the sun is thus the sign of man's reconciliation with God and with his fellowman.

Added to this, there is another important component of belief. Though sacrifices are important, one has to follow the norm of life: call it the code of conduct in order to obtain life with God eternally. This norm is: kamai ia ka hok ba phin dup bam kwai ha iing u Blei (live well and honestly so that you can live happily in the eternal abode with God). Such is an important social and personal code of conduct which helps in their daily social relationship. It also directs one's daily activities: that one must not cheat and treat each other harshly and dishonestly. Again, one is to work honestly and intelligently in order to earn a living and to be a means of help to each other in society. This is a sufficient injunction of conscience which can help the Khasis in their behaviour, attitude and thinking.

The way one lives is also conditional of the type of end he will meet. When one has lived dishonestly and a bad life, he meets a sad end. By this unnatural and

violent end, one is to undergo a purificatory religious rite, otherwise he becomes a wandering spirit that torments and harms the living as he will not be able to reach his destined abode.

Man begins his life here on earth and has his end at death. Hence, to the Khasis, there are the seven steps. They are both religious and social: namely, ka jer ka thoh (naming ceremony), ka pyneh-rngiew (confirmation), ka iasip iabam dkhot (participation at sacrificial portions), ka synjat later (marriage), u lyngdoh nongknia (sacrificer), at time of sickness (haba pang), and at the time of death (haba iap briew). Hence, the Khasi man has to undergo these different stages of life before he attains eternal life with God.

In his religious practice, the maternal uncle (namely, the male member) is the official sacrificer. But the youngest daughter is also the one to provide whatever is necessary for the religious rite and for the expenses. One can easily notice the different division of religious duties. Again, one can see the importance which is given equally to man and to woman. But in spite of all that one can notice that the official religious function is always done only by man (male). Though a Khasi female is highly exalted in position in the matrilineal set-up, yet she has no right in the religious sphere.

It is in this light that funerary rites are the last step in our human life. It concludes it. It is an integral part of it. Without this life will be incomplete.

In the above analysis, one can already see that the traditional Khasis make a clear-cut distinction between the sacred and the profane. It is this sense that even though they do not follow exactly the traditional religious rite of disposal and bone depositing, they, however, display great respect for those places where religious functions have been held. Places like mawshyieng and mawbyinna set-up during religious disposal of the dead are not destroyed. Destruction of them becomes iconoclastic.

2. The social perspective

It easily strikes the eye of a non-Khasi at the big gathering of people at such social event like when somebody dies in the village, locality or family in a Khasi society.

This social sense is mutual. It has now reached such an extent that if anyone happens to occasionally shun such vital events of need, then his neighbours and friends will avoid him when he is in need. This feeling of responsibility for each other is still in vogue in the villages. Unless something is unavoidable, everyone will try to attend such family in need.

It is an embodiment of etiquette and a sense of belonging and service that a family in such straits should inform the village headman so that he can send the announcers to inform the villagers to come to the rescue of the bereaved family. The menfolk will see to the preparation of the cremation site and the bier, and in the cutting of meat and cooking. The womenfolk will be busy with preparing of kwai and its distribution to invitees, to serve food to them, to wash the dishes, to clean the rice-grains, to decorate the bier and to prepare flower-bouquets. In earlier times, they help pound the rice for a special bread called u pu-rynsi, pu-japha, pu-syep and pu-khlein.

Perhaps it is due to this social sanction that prevails for such occasions of need that friends feel morally and practically obliged to participate in order to help the family in need. This sort of help goes round in turn from one family to another.

Apart from this obligation, it is naturally inscribed in the mentality of the Khasis to spontaneously come to the aid of people in need. Perhaps it is the modern mentality such infused by the influence of non-Khasis who are not so inclined to be of help that they have become a little reserved. Though this influence is great, their sociability is still noticeable to any outside spectator.

It is a pity that such social awareness and attitude should gradually vanish from the Khasi society and mentality.

With the onset of modernity, new job opportunities, need of migrating to far distant places for work and better standard of living, there is a gradual change in the means of earning. More people work in government offices and in private enterprises like business, workshops, carpentry and other skilled labour away from the land and fields. A sense of profitability has entered the mind of the people. They compare and contrast seeing the pros and cons. Where there is more profit, there they would put in more attention. Such an attitude has adversely affected the social sense of togetherness and cooperation among the Khasis to a great extent. A restrained reaction prevails when someone dies in any neighbouring family. Individualism becomes the new rule of one's behaviour, attitude and life-style.

A difference in religious practice and belief systems has also affected to a great degree the feeling of belonging and helping each other in need. There can be cases when neighbours and blood relatives who profess different religious beliefs rejoice at the misfortune of others.

Only an urgent social need that affects everybody can awaken one's social sense and mutual need. Recent cases of social upheaval against stringent measures of the Government or of one ethnic group against another, have brought together the indigenous population. Differences of religion, geographical distance and high cost of living do not hamper them.

Whatever may be the case, the occasion of death and funeral rites have indeed brought the Khasis together irrespective of their professing any religious belief. One is still at heart a relative or a friend to another. It is an opportunity for people to come to know each other and to learn of their kinship ties to one another. It is also an opportune time for expressing their social sense and solidarity.

The modern spirit has no doubt disturbed the above social sense. Apart from what has been written earlier in this perspective, a little more can be dwelt upon this subject for clearer understanding of the situation.

The British raj has affected the peaceful existence of the local Khasis. They go for education and become qualified for a job. They are posted to different areas of work. Such situation has hampered them greatly from

the easy and convenient fulfilment of social obligation and religious duties. It becomes difficult, at times impossible for them to carry out the various demands of disposal for the dead and bone depositing. The least that they can do is to attend the funeral rites of their relatives.

With the rise of new form of government and administration, influence of education, influence of other people having different social and religious customs and practices, new fashions and eating habits, new housing styles, new outlook, new avenues of work and business, the local population have been immensely influenced. The traditionalist Khasi are likewise captivated like every one else by the spirit of modern ideas and new life-style. Such new influence has greatly done away with whatever is traditionally followed in the manner of dress, eating, housing, behaviour and social relationship. In certain respects, there is something good to add to the traditional one and something detrimental as well.

The Pocket Oxford Dictionary gives the connotation of modernisation as (1) an adaptation to modern needs and habits; and (2) as an adoption of modern ways and views. As part of the process of growth and development, every tribe and people on earth do take up to this new

spirit of living. They cannot remain completely isolated from others. The process of change may be slow or fast. But the certainty of it is there. No one can escape it. One can also be influenced by what is formative or deformative to one's growth and development.

It is this new spirit of freedom of thinking and way of life which can affect adversely one's belief and practice. It is this which has also affected the traditional believing Khasis. By this influence, they are much watered down in their religious belief and practice.

What can be noticed is also the Khasis' social, egalitarian and democratic spirit. This is an important contribution to social relationship. It is normative to one's behaviour and attitude. It is this democratic and egalitarian spirit which has attracted the attention of many great Indian leaders. They applaud the local population in this respect. They also imitate and modify it according to the needs of the country.

3. The political perspective

Death of an ordinary man may not affect the social situation of a society. But if an influential and public person dies, it does create a vacuum and even loss to the social framework. Everybody feels the loss of his

absence. It means that an important person does play an important and vital role to social well-being and life. Such is also occurring in the Khasi society. When a local king dies, it is a big loss if the person has done well, and they feel relieved if he has been a problem to them.

Another aspect is the problem of succession. Who will succeed the deceased ruler. The Khasi traditional custom as it is observed in Sohra kingdom is matrilineal in form. The nephew follows the maternal uncle. But to do so, political intrigues are involved. Each party will desire their own choice.

Some local Syiemship however do not have the above successional form. When an incumbent dies, the public can select any fit person. It is not necessary that he must be a kin of the deceased. Political tactics are also at play in this respect.

What is discussed above has shown that death does play a political role. It gives an occasion for the living to fight for the man of their own liking.

The successional system in Sohra Syiemship is peculiar indeed. The one who will succeed must be both fit and capable. He must be fit, that is, he must belong to a proper family which has successional rights. He must

also have intelligence and is capable in administration and rule. He must also be capable, that is, he must be able to expedite the funeral rites and ceremonies for the deceased king with due pomp and solemnity, according to the rules and regulations laid down from of old. Such a person only can succeed.

Marbisu Sirdarship has certain conditions at play. One must be a member of the Kurbah clan, the Langstieh clan and the Sun clan. He then can have the right to stand for an election. This event of electing a new Sirdar occurs when the previous one has died. It is based on a life term.

Sirdarship on the whole in Khasi Hills is by free election. Any one can stand for the post of Sirdar upon the demise of the previous one. Sirdarship can be for life or for a term.

The post as is said above can be for a term or two after which one has no right to seek for a third one. But usually it is for life. It means that as long as a ruler lives and is capable to perform his duty he continues to rule. Only his old age and death can prevent him from ruling. Another successor comes in according to set rules of succession.

The event of death has enabled candidates to succeed to different ranks of ruling. The Sohra Syiemship has set-rules that the newly elect king must perform the funerary rites before he can be able to reign the kingdom. In the latter part, one can notice the close relationship between the social, political and religious aspect. One can attain politically to the highest social rank as a ruler or basan only if he can perform with due pomp and solemnity the funeral rites and practices befitting the deceased king. The correlation is sine qua non. The act of religious function is consequential to one's being crowned a king. Yet one can be crowned a king only because he is able to perform such religious rites as solemn as possible. One cannot be without the other. One cannot be a king without performing the religious rites of disposal. But at the same time, one cannot perform the religious duties without being crowned a king.

The political perspective takes place in a social milieu. The king is not only to be able. He must be fit. He has to fit in according to the traditions set up by a society. Normally a maternal nephew will succeed to the post left vacant by the deceased maternal uncle. Of course the personal qualities of head and heart are also included in this choice. It means that such a ruler can

also be beneficial to the welfare of the subjects. Such is an ideal which a Khasi chief is supposed to perform. He must be someone fully concerned for the needs of his subjects. His important concern is for proper and just rule. Yet he has also to pay attention to the material needs of his poor subjects. The needy and the down-trodden as well as those who are without kith and kin will find solace, refuge and help from the king. The traditional phrase for such a sympathetic king is u dei u syiem u kmie (he is the king who behaves like a mother to his subjects).

When a king has died, the relatives will preserve his body in their house by soaking in lime and honey. When a suitable person has been found who is fit and able will dispose the body as it is mentioned earlier. This time of preservation is unique and original to the Sohra Syiemship.

A question may arise. Why should they wait for so long a time for disposal of the deceased ruler. Can they not follow just anyhow. At least they can perform the religious part without giving full weight to the social and economic aspects. To provide eggs, cocks, goats, pigs and bulls for the religious rites of disposal will not be so difficult. But to provide food and drink to all

attendants is really difficult. Somehow this aspect seems to escape their attention and thinking. Tradition has given it this way. It must be observed.

With respect to giving of surname, inheritance and religious belief, Khasis in general are slow to change and to adapt to new ways of life and thinking. Even with the great influence by people having different social customs and practices, they still linger on to the old social set-up.

To conclude, one may not side-track this issue of politics with regard to the event of death of certain persons. It is, however, a universal issue. It is being observed and followed in other peoples as well. The difference is in the way of succession. It may be through dictatorship, by free election, or by hereditary rights of succession as British kings and Sohra Syiemship.

4. The economic perspective

On the vital occasion of death of a member in the family, whether an adult, baby, male or female, rich or poor, high or low, something has to be spent for the purpose of religious ceremonies and for feeding of relatives and friends. The difference is only in the extent of spending. A stranger to the Khasi society will immediately notice this characteristic.

At times, one out of deference to human respect and appreciation, is obliged to exceed his means. Others, fearing the huge expenditure, feel inclined to do away with the necessary religious ceremonies, though this may not be the only reason. Perhaps another intrinsic reason is that the official sacrificer does not know any longer what he is supposed to fulfil. Fearing repercussion to his incorrect and inappropriate performance, he declines to oblige for the necessary religious rites of disposal. That is why thang krei has become the present common phenomenon. However even though the exact religious ceremonies of old are not carried out at present, spending is still unavoidable.

It is a custom for Khasis to spend on such occasion. This is a unique feature which can be easily noticed. There does not seem to be any effort at lessening of this spending spree. They may go to such extent as to borrow money to save the honour of the family for the above occasion. In this way, it has brought great hardship to many Khasi families for repayment of the debt. They may have to sell whatever they have: land and belonging. Thus they are often reduced to poverty.

Some invitees take advantage of the above occasion at the expense of the relatives of the deceased. At times

such feeding may lead to spread of infectious diseases when proper precaution and care is not taken. There are instances of sickness and death to participants at such events.

Another factor which encourages the Khasis to spend and to celebrate is their belief in the after-life for the dead. They 'feast' as they believe that their departed ones will reach a new life: to be for ever in God's house with their ancestors and ancestresses. That is their true abode which is destined for every Khasi. They celebrate as the departed ones leave this world of misery and a temporary one as well. Their philosophy is thus: u moina ba la lait na ka ruh-bynda (the mina which has been set free from the cage). The world is to them a temporary dwelling place (ka pyrthei shongbasa).

The problem of expenditure is thus discussed. There is something to add to this. The Khasis believe that serving food will please the departed relatives. The latter will bless the living relatives to prosper, to increase in population and to be free from any danger. Moreover, it is their expression of appreciation and etiquette to the attendants. And if they do not do so they offend the dead.

One may discuss that the family is not alone in the spending. Other married brothers and sisters, uncles and aunties as well as friends may also help the bereaved family.

Apart from the question of spending at the time of death and disposal and during the bone depositing ceremony, there is also another economic consideration. It is the area of inheritance to ancestral and self-acquired property of father, mother or maternal uncle who have succumbed to death. This is also generally effected with the event of death.

The Khasi customary law of inheritance has favoured the youngest daughter as the rightful heiress to ancestral property. The first reason is that she is the rightful custodian of all religious duties in the disposal of the dead and the bone depositing. Secondly, she has to take care of her aged father and mother, uncles and aunties, brothers and sisters and close relatives who have suffered from any misfortune: sickness, orphaned, or poverty. They all come to her house. It is her duty to help them. Hence, the youngest daughter of the family and clan receives the largest part of the above property from her parents. The other sisters will also receive but of a smaller share.

Even though it is shown above that the youngest daughter gets the largest share: ancestral property (land and the ancestral house) and ornaments, yet she is not entitled to dispose of such property as she wishes. She will need to consult her maternal uncles, brothers and sisters. Upon their consent only she can dispose of a part or all of the property upon a valid reason.

The above right is given to the youngest daughter according to traditional custom. The title is however conditional. If she remains in her traditional religion. If she has not joined a new religion. If she has behaved well. If her parents are pleased with her behaviour. If she has not committed any crime like sang. As she can provide the necessary religious needs, she can rightfully claim for the use of the ancestral property.

So before a mother dies, she can already allot or express her wish to divide her ancestral property to her daughters. She can give something to her sons so as to start a new family life. The latter will have to return such property upon their demise. This is done by his wife and children. The father can likewise do so with regard to his self-acquired property (nongkhynraw when he earns during his youth, or what he has earned in his married life). The children usually abide by the expressed will

of their parents. It is an offence if they fail to do so. Any one who breaks the promise given by the parents will not be blessed by the deceased and will be a laughing stock in public.

Though it looks smooth in the division of property, it is not always so. Intrigues and self-interest may arise so as to get the property to oneself. The customary law is however flexible and unwritten. On the question of disputes, a council of all married brothers and sisters with their uncles and aunties is required. Even then the solution may not be found. Some may enter upon law-suit in order to obtain one's ambition. However the flexibility of the property issue helps to arrive to some amicable solution.

There are attempts to entitle the man for inheritance. But the traditionalists are afraid to do so. They fear that a man may become powerful. He may not think for his own kith and kin. He may dispose of all his property and earning to his own wife and children. But the trend is set at present. The father is becoming more responsible for the welfare of his own family. He is taking less interest of his relatives however close they may be. At the point of sickness and misfortune, he does not need to go back to his own maternal relatives. His wife and children will take care of him.

The modality of allotment of property is gradually changing. Certain property which requires skill and management is given to sons to manage. Some families give shares to all children irrespective of sons and daughters. The bill of self-acquired property of the Autonomous Khasi Hills District Council has not been passed. But its spirit has penetrated into the minds of some families.

The Khasi society is not different from any human society. Death is a determining factor on the economic issue. Some human societies may not be so extravagant with regard to the disposal of the dead rites and ceremonies nor with giving of food and drink. Certain sophisticated societies hand over this responsibility to an agency. One needs only to pay them. It depends upon what type of burial one desires that one has to pay accordingly. The Agency will follow his direction. This itself has become a new direction and way of behaviour in the spending on the occasion of death of any member of the family.

As the Khasis still have great respect for their dead, they try to enhance the occasion as far as they can financially. The economy of death is a reality. It is an important issue. It can be a uniting or a dividing means for the living family members. When each living relative has thought and concern, then everything runs

smoothly and each feels united to one another. If this is not so, the family members become estranged from one another.

5. The impact of traditional religion

One important aspect arising from the funeral rites and practices is the normative code of conduct. It is this which determines one's behaviour and attitude in life. It is this which also in a way formulates the future: what he will attain in the next. If one has not led a good life, he cannot expect to attain a happy one in the next. Hence, the Khasi philosophical code of conduct is: kamai ia ka hok ba phin dup leit bam kwai ha iing u Blei. Such code of conduct can give a right direction in one's behaviour and attitude. It leads to a person's good conscience. This is a universal principle. The traditional Khasi religion has contributed immensely to human society by this directive. If anyone irrespective of sex, caste or creed, race and nation, acknowledges this principle in one's life and practices it, the human social dealing and relationship will be much better off.

Christians have taken this stand as an immediate step to the teaching of Christ who has come to make perfect whatever is good and valuable in any human society. The traditional religion is thus not looked down upon. Rather it is appreciated for its sound teaching.

Added to this, no doubt there is in any human society the sense of sin and culpability. There is a need to expiate for them. There is an expiator for that. Prayers and sacrifice are necessary so as to obtain God's mercy and forgiveness. The cock is an important created agent to serve the purpose of the Khasis in the area of his faults and shortcoming.

This is also an important contribution to human society. It is common knowledge that no one is perfect. Everyone has faults and mistakes in some degree. By means of this shortcoming, one offends God and the neighbour. One needs the forgiveness of the neighbour and of God. Prayers and sacrifice are the right means to attain mercy, forgiveness and help of God. The traditional Khasis acknowledge this human frailty and know that there is a way out for this.

The Christian moral norm is as follows: Do what is right and avoid what is evil. In this way, one's way of life and action is guided by do's and dont's: positive and negative commands. In one respect, they are clear-cut. At the same time, they seem to curtail one's human freedom of action and thought. All what one needs to do is to abide the mid-path. He cannot get outside of this periphery.

The traditional religious norm is positive. There is no indication of the negative. Perhaps, the only implicit meaning is that one may not reach God's abode if he does not follow the command: kamai ia ka hok ba phin dup leit bam kwai ha iing u Blei (live honestly and righteously so that you may reach God's eternal abode).

Comparing the two different commands: one can notice, the Christian moral code seems to be down-to-earth, while that of the traditional religion of the Khasis is from 'earth to heaven', or from this 'worldly to the after-life.'

The traditional religion has contributed also in the sphere of sin. Its concept of sin is however moralistic than religious. It is more social-oriented. For instance, shong sang (cohabitation and marriage within the same clan) is more socially-oriented. The social norm of matrilineal system directs one's way of life and behaviour. From this social sphere, the religious sphere is also affected. Because of breaking of the social taboo, one displeases God. The latter will not be able to forgive such shortcoming.

Those who have fallen into the above shortcoming can be cleansed through prayers, sacrifices and washing

of bones at the umkoi. In this way, it seems to imply that one's faults and mistakes can be ritually purified, viz., mechanically. The personal sorrow and resolution does not seem necessary. The personal aspect like one being truly sorry from the depth of his own heart seems to be absent.

The traditional art and culture have made a dent into the life-style and religious rites of Christians. This is in the area of language and dance. This is another important contribution from the traditionalists. It is this aspect which preserves one's identity and projects it likewise to the world. It is the common trend to promote one's custom and culture. It is also hurting the ethnic emotion if the unique art and culture of a people is spited upon. Wars and conflicts may set in just because others do not respect the art and culture of others. It is also the spirit of modern age to respect the integrity of art and culture of others. It is a spirit of freedom and of 'let live'. It becomes undemocratic if one interferes and curtails them in others.

The modality of funerary rites and practices is also a unique art and culture of a specific ethnic group which one must respect even if he does not promote it. So the way Khasis bathe the dead, dressing them up after

that, putting food and egg and sacrifice of a cock, goat, pig or bull is also art and culture. The way that they deposit the bones at mawshyieng, mawhew and mawbah is also a unique Khasi expression.

6. The impact of Christianity

Christ is the greatest expiator to a Christian. He replaces the cock and all animal victims of sacrifice. The latter are not so efficacious as Christ. He is both victim and sacrificer. Animal victims are not sacrificer. He has proved his topmost superiority. His death on the Cross has washed away the sins of humankind. One needs only to acknowledge this new reality and must lead a new, good life. Then he can obtain God's help and blessing and be reconciled with him. He is looked up as God-incarnated into the truly human reality and situation. He is like us in everything except sin. Such a proposition is considered superior. This impact has gone deep into the lives of converts into Christianity. They leave the traditional one in order to embrace the new one as projected by the Christians.

Many are much influenced by the Christian moral code of do's and dont's. They are clear-cut. They look simplistic. They seem to deny one's full freedom to speak, think and act. In the ordinary affairs of the day, tradi-

tional Khasis and others as well follow this guideline. Let alone moral norms and religious sanctions, one may even notice this influence in economics, games and sports and in every sphere of life.

To a Christian, marriage is to be enacted through a religious function. The religious norm like first and second degree of consanguinity is directive to one's invalid marriage. This is an impediment which is looked as God-given. There is no such prohibition for one to marry within the clan, provided that the relationship is distant in degree of relationship. However Christianity is a great respecter of art and culture of every race and nation. It does the same towards the culture and social system of the Khasis. Even though it does not see any difficulty for marriage within the same clan, it however respects the sentiments of the local populace.

Funerary rites and practices are simpler and less meticulous than that of the indigenous religion. Yet its promise is much realistic. By the blood and promise of Christ especially his words: 'I go to prepare a place for you', the Christians are more hopeful of life eternal with God. The cock's promise of expiation may be realistic but his action is less meritorious. The latter is far less worthy as he is lower in rank, status and being than

Christ is. Such promise has indeed captivated many traditionalists that they change to a new religious belief. They see in this new religion a better promise of their intrinsic longing. Here is a fulfilment of their long-awaited expectation.

The Christian concept of sin is more integral and total. It is a deliberate and conscious commission and omission of God's command of a good life. Infraction of it brings about a distortion and break-away of relationship with God and man. The fall is personal. It is a doing away with right personal relationship. Yet one can attain pardon and blessing if he is sorry for it and is resolved not to do it again. Some Christian denominations stop just like that so as to obtain God's forgiveness and blessing. Others feel the need of a clear sign of forgiveness through one who has been empowered to do so by a religious function. By means of this power, a believer is forgiven of all his sins before his end. By so doing, he believes that he is reconciled with God and man, for the God's representative here amidst humankind absolves in the name of God and of his religious community. He is put at peace to reach God's dwelling place in heaven. There he will live happily for ever, praising God with all the saints. The traditionalists find once again a fulfilment of his

long-awaited longing by means of this concept of sin and its solution.

While in traditional religion, the dead are remembered after the funerary rites of disposal after a month and a year, the Christians remember their dead relatives all the time by praying for them and by renouncing oneself as a sort of mortification and penance of whatever is lawfully alright in one's daily action like in food and drink, in dress, etc. Instead of one being extravagant, he saves. Whatever he saves he gives to the poor and the hungry. By doing so, he believes he is doing a good act which becomes meritorious for the departed relatives. This attitude is also a great fulfilment of whatever has been found in the traditional religion.

The revivalist group Seng Khasi has realized the tremendous impact of Christianity. That is why it is reacting to this impelling force. As the Christians have set prayers and hymns in their religious services, the group also has prayers and hymns. Christians have houses of formation for their own members. The Seng Khasi is also now having a special school to teach one how to divine and to make sacrifices.

Christian religion is universal. Everyone is accepted into its fold irrespective of sex, caste or race and

creed. All become brothers and sisters in one belief, in Christ and in one baptism. The brotherhood is a universal one. It is a huge family of faith. The departed of this community are remembered by any one irrespective of caste and race. This is unlike in traditional Khasi religion. The latter remembers only the members of their own clan. But the clan is a very small community in comparison to that of the Christians. The latter is thus far superior in its perspective and ambit. It creates a strong impact among the traditionalists. They do not become any longer an isolated community. They become members of a bigger community. While being so, they do not at the same time lose their identity and uniqueness. They can become simultaneously particular and universal. In their particularity, they are unique and identical in their art and culture. Yet they are universal, as they become brothers and sisters in the world-wide community of believers of the same faith and practice. They are like the multi-coloured flowers in a beautiful garden of fraternity and fellowship. As they are united in one faith here on earth with God as their father, they are also united as brothers and sisters in the next.

The maternal uncle of traditional religion is the official priest. The one who has been empowered by

religious action is the 'uncle' to perform the religious functions. He can belong to any tribe, race and nation. There is no limit for his functions. Such insight has made a great impact on the local populace. While the traditional one is very much limited, that of the Christians is much broadened. The official priest of the Christians can perform religious functions for any one who belongs to this same faith.

The Christian position gives a broader outlook. One can become a Christian without losing his ethnic identity. For instance, he can become a Christian and a true Khasi at the same time. This proposition and standpoint has given them a new identity, sense of purpose and outlook. Its impact is greater than that of the traditional religious outlook of the Khasis. The latter's religion is limited only to the family and clan.

Funerary rites and practices in the Khasi mainland has given to an inquirer deep insights in religious belief, in social dealing, treatment of economy, politics and the mutual impact with Christianity and modernism.

The subject matter is vast, intricate, complex and interesting. It is up to the inquirer to prove the worth of this finding.

If this paper has served the purpose of inquiry and truth, then the person who has studied and prepared it feels truly satisfied.

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