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# **Khasi Folklore: insight that matches The Great Ideas of Western Civilization**

**Leon Miller**

## **Abstract**

This article describes the aspects of Khasi indigenous knowledge that clearly match the principles that shape Western Civilization's intellectual tradition. Thus, they both provide insight into how to resolve some of the most challenging issues humanity faces as the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century draws to a close. The congruence between the foundational concepts and principles shaping Western Civilization's intellectual tradition and Khasi cultural values is especially evident in propositions concerning value rationality; in conceptualizations of the connection between self-formation, social formation, and having an appropriate relationship with the natural order; the essential connection between the self and The Essence of Being, and concerning cardinal principles.

This article contributes to the body of literature stressing the significance that indigenous knowledge has for addressing and resolving some of humanity's most pressing issues: the nature-human and self-other dichotomies, social economic development versus harmony with nature, and individual self-interest versus a value creation model for co-creating social reality.

**Key words and terms:** valuation, logical positivism, natural law, prudence, axiology

## 1. Introduction

The concepts and principles of Khasi folklore represent a cultural belief system that reflects the most cherished wisdom of the world's perennial philosophy (Malngiang 1991). In fact, as this article explains, the wisdom expressed in Khasi folklore clearly matches Western Civilization's core principles thus match it in terms of significance for addressing and resolving the most pressing problems confronting humanity. This includes problems resulting from the dichotomy in philosophy between the perennial insight of indigenous knowledge and philosophical materialism (which ultimately resulted in the problem of Western Dualism and the nature-human dichotomy). Reconciling the problems resulting from the discrepancy between perennial philosophy and materialism is important for effectively addressing and resolving "The most crucial problem of our time — climate change" (see Paris Climate Agreement 2015). In addition, this article explains the congruence between Khasi conceptualizations of valuation and the foundational conceptualizations of valuation in the Western philosophical tradition. The concept of valuation is significant in both Khasi folklore and Western philosophy because it is related to conceptualizations of how to increase the range of beneficial interactions between the self and others and, as well, with the environment — which results in increasing the ability of individuals to experience happiness, well-being, and flourishing (Thangkhiew 2015, 76).

The congruence between the foundational concepts and principles shaping both the Khasi cultural worldview and the foundational philosophical principles of Western Civilization's intellectual tradition are especially relevant for addressing issues related to sustainability and for devising a response to climate change. That is to say that both Khasi cultural principles and the foundational philosophical principles of Western Civilization emphasize that having an appropriate relationship with the natural order is important for individual well-being and social economic flourishing. Perennial philosophy is considered by many to have declined in significance due to being superseded by logical empiricism and philosophical materialism. However, a comparison of the Khasi three cardinal tenets and Western Civilization's foundational conceptualizations for creating the good life will reveal that both provide insight into how to increase the extent to which one enjoys beneficial interactions (Huxley 1947, 1). Consequently, both the philosophical principles prescribed in Khasi folklore and the foundational philosophical wisdom of Western philosophy continue to be relevant for enhancing the human experience — because both depict perennial wisdom describing how to experience the highest good worth achieving (Mawrie 1981, 24-26; & Aristotle 2004, 4-11).

This article contributes to the body of literature stressing the significance that indigenous knowledge has as a foundation for perennial wisdom. Although each culture has developed its own perspective on the nature of existence a careful analysis of the essential aspects of perennial philosophy reveals that it provides insight into what is common to the story of humanity thus common to a culture's struggle to flourish given the challenges imposed by the surrounding environment. This article indicates that an analysis of the congruence between Khasi perennial wisdom and the most cherished ideas of Western Civilization sheds light on how perennial philosophy continues to be a viable guide to the good life and for determining how to have an appropriate relationship with the natural order. That is to say that the insight evident in Khasi indigenous knowledge and the most cherished ideas of Western Civilization address the issues of the nature-human and self-other dichotomies, economic development versus harmony with natural processes, climate change, and individual self-interests versus the value creation model for co-creating social reality.

Section two (the following section) of this article explains how Khasi perennial philosophy is an indication of visionary insight in that it foresaw the necessity of effectively managing the most important issues confronting humanity: climate change, the environmental challenge, and the need for a sustainable approach to planning social economic development. The third section

explains the close connection between Khasi perennial philosophy and Aristotle's explanation of how to address and resolve humanity's social-economic challenges. This is done by comparing the cardinal principles of Khasi culture with Aristotle's prescription for gaining insight into how to experience what is in one's best interest, how to have harmonious social relations, and Aristotle's ideas concerning the significance of knowing how to have a good relationship with the environment. A comprehensive analysis of Khasi folklore and Aristotle's philosophy reveals that there is congruence in their proclamations regarding self-knowledge, the significance of the relationship between the self and The Essence of Being, and there is a similarity in their proposals for reconciling the difference between self-interest and the common good. The conclusion (section four) explains the Khasi and Western notions of valuation — in terms of how the value creation concept promotes co-creating a social reality based on perennial principles and the cardinal tenets of Khasi culture.

## **2. Effectively Managing Environmental Challenges, Climate Change, and Sustainability**

Cultural knowledge is a normative prescription for creating beneficial interactions with others and with the environment. In this respect cultural knowledge depicts a particular perspective on

social psychology, ontology (i.e. the nature of existence), and on principles for enhancing the human experience. Cultural knowledge reflects a unique perspective on the laws of nature, expresses a perspective on how the culture's experience with nature can provide nourishment and flourishing plus explains the essential connection between the individual and The Essence of Being. Such knowledge shapes the worldview of a culture and continues to be cherished in the form of perennial philosophy. Perennial philosophy is described as the foundation of knowledge, knowledge concerning natural philosophy, as a prescription for how to experience "the good life," and insight into First Principles (Aristotle 2012, 4-7). Because cultural knowledge anchors perennial philosophy with experiential knowledge and insight proven to be effective for helping a culture experience complementary interactions with the forces shaping reality perennial philosophy has gained universal appeal, provides stability, and continues to be an inexhaustible source of wisdom (Sullivan 1957, chap. 7).

A cultural worldview can be described as a particular conceptualization of how to transform the dialectic (yin-yang type) dynamics of existence into an ability to perceive and experience harmonious relations. Khasi culture, in particular, does this by explaining "The continuum between individuals, nature, and [The Essence of Being]" which makes them essentially interconnected (Lyngdoh 2015, 123). From the perspective of Khasi culture human perception is not just a matter of recognizing tangible materiality. When one perceives in accordance with the intuitive insight prescribed by culture perception involves the sensing of the very nature of things. Thus, Khasi culture prescribes a means for realizing the harmonious connection between the self and the Essence of Being by which the perceiver (*aisthêtikon*) realizes that he or she is a reflection of the perceptible object (*aisthêton*) and as such as it is (Mawrie 1981, 10 & 22; also see Aristotle 2002, 25). In this way Khasi culture prescribes a perspective from which individuals can maximize the enjoyment of and find meaningful fulfillment in their encounters with others and with nature. Such principles shape the perception of and the perspective from which adherents of Khasi cultural values experience social relations and their day-by-day encounter with nature. Thus, Khasi culture has developed viable environmental ethics, an epistemologically sound conceptualization of the ontological nature of existence, and an insightful explanation of why a harmonious relationship between individuals and the environment is important to well-being and social flourishing.

Although the Khasi belief system (*Ka Niam-Khasi*) dates back to primordial times the founding elders developed a body of perennial wisdom that included foreseeing that one of the greatest challenges of the culture would be effectively managing the increasing schism between nature and humanity. The founding elders envisioned that the problem would come about due to a failure to live in accordance with what is ordained by the natural order (i.e. what has been ordained by *Ka Dubar Blei*). This failure has consequences that are detrimental to individual happiness, well-being, and social harmony plus has a disastrous effect on nature

(Dkhar 1999, 7). In short, Khasi folklore proclaims that during a time when the rich resources of the earth grew in abundance a group of colonizers began to cultivate them for profit. Unfortunately, greed and a lust for pelf and power dominated the motivation of certain influential members of the initial cultivators/colonizers. Consequently, *hynñiew trep hynñiew skum* (the initial group engaged in the cultivation) failed to live in accordance with the principles that would guarantee perpetual happiness, peace, and prosperity. In the Khasi tradition individual well-being and social flourishing are grounded upon three cardinal principles. The first principle is *Tip Briew Tip Blei* (knowledge regarding humanity's ontological nature and the nature of existence or, in other words, self-knowledge/higher consciousness and an understanding of the connection between the self and the Essence of Being). The second is *Tip Kur–Tip Kha* (is knowledge of kith and kin, knowledge of social relations, or, in other words, knowledge of how to exist in unity and solidarity). The third principle is *Kamai Ia Ka Hok* (the belief that the primary purpose of life is earning righteousness or, in other words, the principle reflects Virtue Ethics and advocates acting on the basis of such ethics in one's interactions (Nongkynrih 2007, 4-5; also see Rafy 1920, 7-9).

Subsequently, the failure to manage the rich supply of natural resources and to manage social relations according to principles prescribed for having harmonious relations with others and with the environment created problems in the nature-human relationship and, in addition, environmental problems resulted. In terms of social conditions individuals began to engage in power struggles in attempts to exert control over others and over the limited available natural resources. Those exercising power and influence proposed an ideological movement in which perennial wisdom was designated as less reliable than human ingenuity. That is to say that in the pursuit of self-interests humanity began to place greater value on instrumental means rather than on intrinsic value ends. In other words anxiety resulting from efforts to maximize material satisfaction, competition over material resources, and the effort to satisfy self-interests overshadowed adherence to the perennial principles emphasizing the pursuit of higher order human values (Thangkhiew 2015, 75; also see Aristotle 1998, 15-18 for an explanation of how the insatiable demands of greed accompany a breach with the natural order).

Although some members of the human society tried to maintain the pristine conditions of nature-human interactions prescribed by indigenous knowledge many began to believe that the alteration of nature (based on applying human ingenuity to natural processes) is better for progressing civilization and that the progression of civilization offers greater material benefits. Increasingly some relegated the type of perennial wisdom reflected in indigenous knowledge, Khasi folklore for example, to myth (at best) and mere superstitious folklore (at worst). The tendency to rely on human ingenuity in pursuit of instrumental self-interest became so pervasive that it even began to be evident amongst Khasi people — even though it was clearly contrary to Khasi principles, is contrary to what promotes the common good, and is contrary to what protects “the commons.”

The primordial wisdom of Khasi culture explains that this approach resulted in a period of U Kyllang (i.e. what the Khasi refer to as "ka siar" or, in other words, social, political, and economic decisions that resulted in gloom or created undesired social conditions). Perennial philosophies in general and Khasi perennial philosophy in particular warned that a breach with what is ordained by the natural order would have disastrous effects on individual well-being, social relations and on the human relationship with nature. However, the trend continued right up to today (see Rousseau 1997, 159-174 for an explanation of the dire results of a breach with what is ordained by the natural order). In fact, the damaging effects of the nature-human schism became so threatening that it resulted in Dualism — which created individual fragmentation, social disharmony, disastrous environmental conditions, and climate change. Subsequently, according to Khasi visionary belief, at the founding of their tradition elders predicted that such conditions would necessitate a great council to address what would become the most crucial issue of our time! Consequently, there is widespread acknowledgement that there is value in indigenous knowledge, its significance for establishing a model of sustainability and Eco-leadership, and, as well, a relevant insight prescribed in perennial philosophy.

Khasi principles teach that humanity is unequivocally and inescapably bound to nature. Thus, Khasi folklore admonishes that the human experience is at its best when there is a harmonious relationship with nature. Although through much of history civilization progressed with the belief that the domination and exploitation of nature is good for economic development, generating wealth, and the progression of civilization there is now widespread recognition that this basic premise of Modernity has placed humanity on a path of destruction. In other words, there is widespread recognition that after having passed through an era of gloom the culture realized that the original position of sustainability and harmony with nature is preferable. Thus, prudence admonishes adhering to the three cardinal tenets (i.e. or the three Khasi Principles) that prescribe how to restore sustainable social economic conditions, how to restore the state of existence that is preferred in terms of Khasi cultural values, and as well principles upon which Khasi culture establishes a model of Eco-leadership.

### **3. Principles for Cultural Well-being and Sustainable Prosperity**

The founders of the Khasi cultural belief system envisioned that the profiteering approach to development would result in disastrous climate/environmental conditions (i.e. conditions that the Khasi refer to as '*U Diengiei*') which would compel humanity to come together in a united effort to find a solution to an overwhelming and increasing gloom. That is to say that Khasi folklore envisioned a period of time when the increasing alarm felt over a rise in floods, atmospheric problems, and climate change would spark recognition that a failure to live in accordance with the foundational principles ordained by the natural order has disastrous consequences. To resolve the problem and reverse the disaster there was agreement to come together to form a united council (*A Great Durbar*) to determine how to escape the impending gloom. The council agreed that the way forward requires reviving the uncanny perennial insight evident in Khasi folklore. This is because the Khasi original position reflected a model of sustainability, the '*U Diengiei*' period was a movement away from sustainability and now environmental and climate conditions compel a move back to the sustainability model or, in other words — back to the Khasi original position).

There is a Khasi belief that prudence (i.e. *Ka jingsneng* or the principles of Khasi Virtue Ethics) reconciles the tension between natural inclinations and moral reasoning. Prudence inclines the pursuit of instrumental means toward realizing intrinsic ends (see Nongkinrih 2002,136 for a comparative analysis of Virtue Ethics and the Khasi concept *Ka jingsneng*; also see Aristotle 2004, 107-108 & 115-118; plus, Saint Thomas Aquinas 2002, 76-79 & 198-199). In other words, Khasi culture prescribes principles by which individuals can fulfill their material needs in a way that results in realizing both the individual's highest good and the common good while, at the same time, in a way that protects "the commons." Consequently, Khasi people are beginning to realize that their essential values are not merely based on myth or folklore but are indeed future oriented — and provide essential insight into how to shape their current social reality in accordance with Khasi principles.

However, to understand what is truly of value one must loop back and revive the perennial wisdom that laid the foundation for the Khasi Golden Age (i.e. Khasi folklore describes the *Original Position* of social cultural existence as a Golden Age when the culture lived on the basis its three cardinal tenets/principles). Then, on the basis of the principle that prescribe how the Khasi can experience their most desired social reality, proceed in accordance with those principles to shape the future (see Ting-Toomey 1999, 61-63 for an explanation of a past-present-future time orientation for indigenous cultures). By doing so the full vitality of the culture that was experienced in the original position will be reflected in a 21<sup>st</sup> century Khasi model of Eco-leadership. The key to enjoying the full benefits of the original position and for creating sustainable peace and harmony in the 21<sup>st</sup> century continues to be adherence to the three cardinal tenets or the three *Khasi Principles*.

The first of the three cardinal Khasi precepts addresses what, from an existential perspective, is the most fundamental issue in human existence. The first tenet admonishes the individual to

gain insight into the type of knowledge that within itself provides a person with an understanding of life's most worthwhile pursuit. Such knowledge is tantamount to realizing that each individual is essentially interconnected with and interdependent upon fellow humans and, as well, realizing that one's biological nature is a reflection of the biological nature of the natural order (Mawrie 1981, 9-10; also see Aristotle 2002, 8-10). The first principle in the Khasi language is composed of three concepts each of which indicates an aspect of the Khasi faith. The first term *Tip* is translated as to know, to be aware of, to understand, and to realize. The second term *Briew* ranges in meaning from consciousness to awareness of oneself to viewing the self as interconnected with others and awareness of the self as essentially related with the Divine force that is manifest as creation. The third term *Blei* refers to the Divine force from which all things are manifest (Nongkinrih 2002, 133-135).

According to the Khasi first principle self-knowledge (i.e. self-actualization or higher consciousness) is the realization of the essence of one's own being and that the essence of one's being is that vital life force or creative life giving force that generated creation (see Saint John 17: 21-23). The Khasi belief system also stresses that there is an essential and complementary interconnectedness between the self and other members of the society plus with the environment. Thus, the self, others in the society, and "All that is in Nature [are regarded as manifestations] of one supreme God, *U Blei*" (Nongkynrih 2002, 19). The first Khasi principle — *Tip Briew Tip Blei* — is, in fact, congruent with the Western philosophical proposition that the outcome of self-knowledge is the realization of the essence of one's own being. In addition the Khasi first principle is connected with insight into First Principles, and results in the Holistic development of the person's full potential (Aristotle 2004, 61-65, & 78-80); also see Aristotle 2002, 103-108). According to Khasi culture's most cherished beliefs and the foundational principles of Western Civilization (both of which prescribe how to enhance the human experience) there is a complementary connection between self-knowledge (the Holistic well-being of one's neurobiological nature, social flourishing, and living in accordance with the principles that shape the biological nature of the natural order. This is because self-knowledge provides the realization that the individual is a composite of the elements of nature. Any act that diminishes the quality of those elements upon which one is dependent for well-being diminishes the quality of one's own being (this includes interactions with the others in one's social environment as well as the interchange a person has with those things in the natural environment (Miller 2011, 134-136).

The second tenet *Tip Kur–Tip Kha* is a principle that applies to everyday social interactions in Khasi culture. *Tip Kur–Tip Kha* can be described as the second essential tenet while, at the same time, it also provides insight into the Khasi worldview, Khasi cultural values and norms, and the Khasi sense of the connection between individual identity, the clan lineage, and clan heritage. The term means knowing one's kith and kin but, in addition, has connotations related to maintaining cordial relations and adhering to the normative codes for social relations (Rani 2016, 54). As a concept it can also mean knowledge of how to exist in unity and solidarity. As a principle that promotes unity and solidarity it has social psychological significance in that it also denotes *mutuality* — as in know the etiquette of life and know how to respect (*Tip Burom–Tip Akor*). Therefore, interacting on the basis of the second Khasi normative principle involves engaging other members of the society with true mutually heartfelt benevolence: well-wishing, kindness, charity, goodwill, and desiring what is in the best interest of the other (see Saint Thomas Aquinas 2007, 944 for his explanation of the role of mutuality and *agape* in social relations).

Mutuality in this sense means engaging each other with mutual respect, being authentic, and being sincere. There is also a connection between mutuality and the principle of reciprocity. Both principles propose interactions where individuals engage each other in a way that indicates mutual sensitivity to the feelings of the other plus in a way that is dignified and honorable. Interacting in this way brings out the best in the other or another way of saying this is that it brings out the best in each other thus is a means of elevating the culture. Khasi indigenous knowledge, as is true for perennial philosophy in general, proposes that the concept of mutuality is akin to cosmic law — which is understood to be an enactment in social relations what is ordained by Higher Authority. Thus, the principle of mutuality has

great teleological significance in regards to one's relations with kith and kin, one's social encounters, the normative obligations of etiquette, and the reverence for nature in that they are all reflections of "The way things in sheer actuality are, plus a concept of nature, of self, and of society" (Geertz 1973, 127 & 367).

The second tenet has deep sentimental significance for Khasi people in that it encompasses the entire basis of social economic life, governance, and the Khasi social order. The second principle is connected with notions of the relationship between the Khasi identity and the surrounding environment of each Khasi *kur* (i.e. *kur* is a designation of the kinship ties that shape social relations). Thus, ultimately, its meaning is rooted in the Khasi understanding of management of the surrounding environment and its resources as well as their understanding of the connection between lineage, interconnectedness with the earth and their connection with cosmic forces. The second tenet has implications related to the meaning of valuable property, regarding Khasi sentiments toward their common clan lineage, and is related to the Khasi notion of sustainability (e.g. sustainability in terms of proper management of valuable property, of natural resources, and sustaining the vitality of the clan/culture).

Thus, in many respects, the second essential cardinal tenet or the second of the three Khasi Principles expresses insight that is foundational to the world's perennial philosophical tradition. For example, precepts describing the essential mutuality between the members of a clan — which are expressed in terms of normative principles regarding social relations, cultural precepts regarding relations with the natural order, and tenets regarding relations with the cosmic order — all of which are fundamental to perennial philosophy. In this respect, the foundational principles of perennial philosophy concur with the conviction expressed in the indigenous knowledge of Khasi culture. They both assert that by conducting social relations in accordance with what is ordained by natural law or Higher Authority individuals are empowered to realize their highest good and cultures enjoy a greater degree of social-economic flourishing. The highest good of each individual is realized as the outcome of the society's material pursuits, in the effort to maintain cultural integrity in spite of challenges, and in terms of endeavors to engage in sustainable approaches to the use of "the commons."

In this respect the connection between kinship, mutuality, and natural law can be described as "mutual recognition" of the "I-Thou" nature of intra-clan relations (Buber 2008, 39 & 54-56; Kierkegaard 1949, 7-12 & 302-310; also see Husserl 1990, 190-195). Natural law can be described as perennial insight/knowledge into the teleological aspect of existence. It is also regarded as insight into the "bonum faciendum est" of existence (*bonum faciendum est* meaning insight into the guiding principles promoting both higher consciousness and how to act in accordance with what is ordained by the forces shaping the natural order) (Aquinas 1947, 639). Viewing clan relations from the perspective of the principle of mutuality sparks awareness of the essential interconnectedness between the present temporal clan that is observable and the perpetual spiritual community that is an inherent cultural force. Awareness of the interconnectedness between what is manifest on the observable level and what is perpetual results from adhering to the cardinal tenets thus to natural law and Higher Authority (Buber 2008, 50 & 57).

The third cardinal Khasi tenet, *Kamai Ia Ka Hok*, is literally translated as to earn righteousness, to act righteously, earn in a way that promotes self-reliance (i.e. independence), to be a person of integrity, and to strive for justice. However, because of the moral connotations the tenet can also simply be described as Virtue Ethics (*Ka jingsneng*) — the Khasi notion of ethos and the Khasi conception of goodness. This tenet reminds each Khasi individual to strive for what is truly of ultimate value in life. In this sense it places the emphasis on working to achieve higher order values as the primary aim of one's practical pursuits in life. With this focus in mind the individual, the clan, and the culture are able to generate and sustain *an emanating quality, vital force, or potency (i.e. rngiew)*. Adherence to the cardinal tenet *Kamai Ia Ka Hok* generates a numinous power which perennial philosophers refer to as *Genius*. *Genius* is an inherent inner guiding force or illuminating quality that is evident in individuals and cultures (Syiem 2013, 190). Perennial philosophers equate the concept *Genius* — *divinum ingenium* — with a quality that is generated from the



essence of one's being (Saint Augustine 2000, 220; also see Cicero 1877, 35-37). Thus, one's Genius coincides with both self-knowledge and the development of one's character (Aristotle 2004, 12 equates one's Genius with Virtue Ethics and the "activity of the *psuche* [soul] in accordance with the rational principle"):

The Khasi individual believes that the sole purpose of his or her life on earth is *Kamai Ia Ka Hok* (to earn righteousness). On the one hand, developing the character traits that enables a person to live righteously is a natural outcome of the Khasi upbringing and moral training. For the folklore and cultural values are the child's earliest lessons in life (i.e. are taught around the family hearth — *ki mawbyrsiew* — which can represent the strength and unity of the family and society). In this way the child grows to conceive of righteousness (*Ka Hok*) as constituting the ontological and teleological nature of reality. However, on the other hand, Khasi believe that conscientious effort is required to develop one's character to the point of reflecting the illuminating quality of *rngiew*. To develop one's character to the point of emanating the quality of *rngiew* requires conscientiously developing character to the point of manifesting *Ka Hok* in all of one's practical affairs and interactions.

Ethics are central to Khasi culture and, as well, shape the individual's sentiments toward and approach to life, shapes the individual conscious (inner moral guidance system), plus shapes the individual's perception of and perspective toward life, thus is the basis of how a person acts. Ethical thinking in the Khasi tradition is thought of as the way in which individuals conceptualize the perennial insight inherent in Khasi cultural knowledge. How the Khasi individuals acts in relationship to others and nature can be described as putting "the wisdom of the elders" into practice. Because of the axiological nature of the third cardinal tenet it is an expression of the Khasi perspective on the interpenetration between the personal, social, and transcendental dimensions of the culture.

Khasi perennial insight addresses not only what is good in terms of how individuals act in relationship to each other but also their perceptions of nature plus conceptions of they act towards nature. That is to say that because ethics shapes the way in which the Khasi individual views reality and because the Khasi perspective is eco-theandric the notion of sustainability is basic the Khasi cultural values, their sense of how to increase the cultural quality of *rngiew*, thus their sense of survival. From an eco-theandric viewpoint all of creation is interconnected with each part effecting the other. The eco-theandric ethical perspective of the nature-human relationship is tantamount to the Khasi vision of how to shape reality in accordance to cultural values. Valuation in this respect is a fundamental conceptualization of the Khasi viewpoint on teleology/purpose (i.e. see Mawrie 1981b, 3 for an explanation of how the terms *nqi wan sha k.ane ka pyrthei da ka daw* and/or *Ka Hukum, nqi wan, sha kane ka pyrthei da ka hokum* depict Khasi conceptualizations of teleology and ontology). Thus, the Khasi understanding of the third cardinal principle shapes their belief regarding the nature of reality, how Khasi view reality, the Khasi understanding of what is required for gaining righteousness, and shapes the Khasi perspective of "the ground of being".

#### **4. Conclusion: A Khasi Perspective on "Co-creating Value and Sustainability"**

Khasi folklore is a clearly structured far-sighted system of perennial wisdom that provides insight into the social-psychological and economic factors necessary for creating a 21<sup>st</sup> century model of social harmony, economic prosperity, and sustainability. In this respect Khasi cultural values are indicative of principles that are viable for creating a 21<sup>st</sup> century model of the human conditions that existed in the period when sustainability was naturally the dominant paradigm. That is to say, those advocating a future based on the Khasi cardinal principles point out that the culture's *Original Position* was sustainability. A movement away from that preferred state of existence increasingly resulted in a deterioration of social, economic, and environmental conditions. Thus, there is widespread agreement that the best possible future is a return to sustainability.

Scholars of *The Sociology of Knowledge* refer to the wisdom expressed in Khasi folklore as knowledge of how to institute the preferable social-economic conditions that were prevalent

in the Khasi original *Original Positon*. Historians of the Sociology of Knowledge refer to the understanding of how to establish such nature-human and social-economic ideals as *noetic* knowledge (i.e. *noetic* knowledge is the intuitive insight generated when the *nous*/intellect integrates the transcendental wisdom of a culture's tradition into planning its current social reality). However, when used in connection with Khasi folklore the term *noetic* knowledge applies to the Khasi culture's collective awareness of transcendental truths ("*Sub specie aeternitatis*"). The Transcendental Philosophical tradition proposes that *noetic* knowledge results from integrating the cognitive capacity (that philosophical materialism left isolated from nature, from a Holistic sense of self, and from the Essence of Being) with intuitive insight into the ground of Being — which raises cognition to a level of creative genius (Kant 1987, 174-189).

*Noetic* knowledge is the realization that above private representations there is a world of type-ideas to which a culture has to regulate its social, economic, and governance activities; a whole intellectual world in which the culture participates but is greater (Durkheim 1995, 437-438). However, in terms of planning how to co-create value *noetic* knowledge is manifest as the integration of transcendental wisdom with Khasi pragmatic knowledge of how to increase the range of beneficial interactions between stakeholders plus knowledge of what is reliable belief (see Peirce 1955, 5-22 founder of Pragmatism for an explanation of reliable belief). Khasi people believe that the ability to experience the values they prefer results from adhering to the transcendental truths that were established as the principles regulating the natural order (i.e. what in perennial philosophy is called adherence to natural law).

Conceptualizations of valuation are central to the Khasi worldview, for the Khasi perspective on how to create the good life, and for creating knowledge of how to have an appropriate relationship with the natural order. The concept valuation refers to philosophical insight into axiology. The Khasi value theory (i.e. the Khasi perspective on axiology) is knowledge of life's most worthwhile pursuit, knowledge of what has intrinsic worth, and knowledge of what aims or *ends* are worth pursuing because they result in what is the highest good for the individual and for society (Pohlong 2004, xviii & xxi; also see Aristotle 1998, 8 & 12–18). In the Khasi tradition — and for perennial philosophy in general — value is created by a dialectic process to determine how to put principles into action in order to increase the individual's and clan's ability to experience desired value outcomes (Miller 2016, 4). Putting Khasi value theory into action means institutionalizing traditional beliefs, normative values, and customary practices (i.e. *Ka riti*) (Nongkynrih 2006, 50). Thus, value creation is the process of transforming the principles of the Khasi cultural worldview into practices for managing natural resources and into a vision of future sustainable social and economic development (Mahanty et al. 2006, 1).

By institutionalizing traditional beliefs, normative values, and customary practices they become the basis of a value-based approach to co-creating social reality — because the cultural lore represents what is still an "Intact genius of tribal wisdom that regards life, nature, and culture as undivided functions of a wholeness" (Bareh 1989, 97). Maintaining reverence for the normative values that shape the Khasi worldview is the means by which the culture generates (or regenerates) the quality of *potency or vitality (rngiew)*. Thus, the Khasi envision that their desired future occurs by transforming the values inherent in tradition into a sustainable, peaceful, and prosperous future reality thus demonstrating that the values inherent in the culture are the basis of a Khasi model of Eco-leadership. In this respect, co-creating value involves collaboratively planning the means by which the fundamental principles of "Holism, connectivity, spirituality and interconnectedness" shape the Khasi future (Mawlong 2016, 7).

The co-creation of value in the Khasi context is a modern enactment of the ancient Khasi practice of participatory democracy. Participatory democracy is a deliberative process undertaken with the intention to co-create sustainable approaches to social economic development by "instituting the precepts of the past" (Lyngdoh 2016, 34). In the Khasi tradition, "Power belongs to the people— to the *ki Khun ki Hajar*." Sustainability is one of the primary concerns of this democratic body of people. For the Khasi body politic sustainability

planning involves cooperative management of the *Ri Kur* and *Raid/Raj* natural resources of the clan — in accordance with the traditional principles of the Khasi belief system (Bareh 1964, 37-39 & 46; also see Shangpliang 2010, xvi). Thus, the Khasi concept of co-creating value involves the united voice and will of the people (i.e. *Ka Ktien U Paidbah*) manifest in a way that applies cultural principles to current social-economic and politic challenges.

The Khasi decision-making process occurs by deliberations taking place within each village council (i.e. *ka dorbar shnong*). However, the increasing need to address region-wide concerns and to respond effectively to challenges imposed by external forces resulted in the local councils merging into a larger body called *Ko Hima* (i.e. a voluntary association of villages or, in other words, a United Autonomous District Council) (Bareh 1985, 50-52; also see Bareh 1964, 36). Open pre deliberation — usually around the hearth — takes place before a formal deliberation in the *Hima* (an autonomous territorial and political unit of several villages). The council is the institutionalization of the spirit of reciprocity and a consolidation of intimate relations amongst the people making up their units. (Bareh 1985, 41).

The Khasi democratic process (i.e. or the Khasi practice of deliberative democracy) reflects ideals that are amongst the most cherished of the Western philosophical tradition. The similarity between Khasi ideals and those of Western Civilization is particularly evident in connection with the notion that nature-human relations is the basis a discourse to determine the responsibility that individuals have to perennial values and ethics, towards each other, towards the environment, and toward the forces that ordained the principles of the natural order. The Khasi tradition and the most cherished ideas of Western Liberalism concur in that both admonish that adherence to *Natura Daedala Rerum* guarantees the perpetual peace, well-being, and prosperity of individuals and social units. “*Natura Daedala Rerum* is nature’s purposiveness in the course of the world [or] the underlying wisdom of a higher cause which is directed toward the objective final end of the human species, this plan is called *Providence*” (Kant 2006, 85).

Unfortunately, for a prolonged period there was a failure to adhere to the wisdom found in indigenous knowledge and perennial philosophy (as was envisioned by Khasi perennial insight). The failure created obvious consequences that threaten human existence (e.g. climate change and environmental deterioration). Consequently, there is increasingly widespread acknowledgement that enacting the principles found in indigenous knowledge, perennial philosophy, and in the Western foundational ideals is the basis of a sustainable approach to the future. In addition, there is acknowledgment that mutuality and reciprocity (i.e. Human Rights and natural law) are the means for gaining collective security, and for promoting perpetual peace. The sustainability discourse, in particular, is the platform for deliberation on how to address and resolve humanity’s most pressing issues. The sustainability discourse is also a platform in which individuals can network to co-create value that is beneficial for all stakeholders. It is in this respect that by holding true to perennial values Khasi culture can become a model of how to overcome the dichotomy between higher order values and material values.

In many respects, the Khasi approach to making decision-based, on the participatory approach to co-creating value, is an attempt to resolve the dichotomy between a perspective on existence based on indigenous knowledge (i.e. the Khasi perspective when looking back at its heritage) and the need to adjust to pressures imposed on the culture by external forces. On the one hand, the deliberative approach to co-creating value — which begins at the hearth and is confirmed in the Khasi institutional units — works ideally when the both stakeholders and designated leaders adhere to core values and principles. However, on the other hand, the pristine nature of the Khasi society has been confronted with some of the same factors of reality mentioned earlier that cause disruption of indigenous cultures: colonialism, the profiteering approach to development, environmental crisis, and ultimately climate change. Such challenges result in pressure to adapt to national and international influences. That is to say that Khasi culture finds itself confronted with the pressure to modernize (or what otherwise can be called the pressures of Modernity).

Modernization processes create an increase in materialism and commercialism, and an increase in diversity (demanding a greater extent of tolerance for pluralism and ethnic/cultural differences). These processes have compounded the challenges indigenous cultures face in adopting to Modernity. Equally important is the impact that calls for gender and minority inclusion have on decision-making and policy-making processes. Effectively responding to these historic and contemporary challenges requires careful consideration of what it means to co-create value in a liberal democracy in a way that results in promoting the best interest of each individual, what is best in terms of creating the common good, and what is best for managing natural resources. In light of the historic and contemporary challenges, the notion of collaboratively co-creating value takes on an entirely new meaning.

To underestimate the significance of identity, special interests, ethnicity, religion, and cultural values in the co-creation of social reality would indicate a lack of understanding of both the nature of identity and the nature of democracy. The question concerning the Khasi context is how can the co-creation of value concept work to reconcile the dichotomy between Khasi culture values and the demands of pluralism to create a Khasi democracy that is truly liberal and participatory? Another equally important question is can ethnic loyalties and traditionalism be compatible with democratic inclusiveness and secularism (secularism is defined as the separation of religion from matters of governance). In a true liberal democracy that operates on the basis of participatory political communication no individual is discriminated against because of ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or other distinguishing identity characteristics.

On the one hand, the Khasi represent a unique ethnic group who defend The Universal Declaration of Human Rights believing that it promotes their right as an ethnic community to enjoy the provisions for autonomy allotted to *Scheduled* cultures (*Scheduled* tribes have special constitutional designations in India). In this respect the Khasi represent a civic body who defend certain rights and principles that are democratic because, at the same time, such principles promote their tribal rights. In sum Khasi people stand for the right as a *Scheduled* tribal group to co-create a social reality that reflects their value for mutuality, participatory deliberation, and natural rights — in the terms prescribed by the precepts of the Khasi tradition. On the other hand, the way forward lies in reconciling the difference between the Khasi traditional participatory processes for co-creating social reality (e.g. the Khasi traditional institutions with its three-level arrangement of governance) and the demands of the state/nation to allow for pluralism and diversity. The Khasi context exemplifies how an ethnically diverse state like India ensures that each individual and each communal group experiences their Human Rights.

In the Khasi communal context contributing to co-creating the means to actualize the values that are unique to that particular communal context is not merely a matter of kinship relations nor of ethnicity but is matter of a commitment to enacting principles and values. In this respect being a member of any communal context demands defending the cultural values and norms that shape the social life of that community. In terms of Khasi communal life in particular being a part of that community cannot merely be a desire to live in such a pristine setting, the desire to escape less desirable social-economic conditions, and certainly not the desire to increase one's social economic opportunities.

Being a member of any communal culture involves actively endeavoring to contribute to creating a social reality that is based on the principles and values of that communal culture. Whether a person is born from a Khasi mother, married into a Khasi kinship group, from another ethnic background but living within the Khasi cultural context peaceful coexistence calls for participatory deliberation to determine how to live in accordance with the value ideals of the culture. This article has stressed that Khasi perennial insight is an extensive treatise describing how individuals, clans, those related by marriage, and those living in the region without clan nor marriage relations can address and resolve some of the most pressing issues confronting humanity. At every level of society from the macro down to the micro members of a society must live in accordance with certain principles and traditions. Each generation is challenged with discerning how to put those principles into practice in the

current context. However, according to the well-known expert on intercultural relations, Edward Hall, culture (i.e. normative principles, worldview, values, etc.) determine the boundaries of a communal unity (Hall 1981, 16). The renowned scholar of the history of governance, the late Ram Sharan Sharma in India claimed that co-creating value in India today is a matter of collaboratively reframing the traditional values that shape communal normative principles (especially to avoid the problem of tradition seemingly creating rigidity). “The root of the tensions and conflicts in Meghalaya can be traced back to this reframing of traditions. If today there is a rigid stand taken by the traditional authorities, and if that rigidity is leading to problems of governance, then it is necessary to go back to tradition and understand that tradition” (Sharma, 1996).

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