

THE IMAGE OF THE SUFFERING WOMAN :
A SELECTIVE STUDY OF THE KHASI NOVELS

[1963 - 1990]

BY

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Abstract

THE IMAGE OF THE SUFFERING WOMAN: A SELECTIVE STUDY OF THE KHASI NOVELS [1963-1990]

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The Khasi novel started in the second half of the Twentieth Century, much later than either Khasi poetry or Khasi Drama. It did indeed have a humble beginning when just two novels were published in the 1960's. Since then it has made a rapid stride in its growth as can be witnessed by the publication of numerous novels particularly after the later part of the 20th century. Literature is said to reflect life, hence human experiences universally encountered by people the world over form much of the basis of all literary works. The novel in particular is an effective mode of interpreting life. It grows out of life, it is fed by life, it reacts upon life. Thus, varied human experiences make up the themes of the novel and the theme of suffering in general and of women's suffering in particular has found an important place in the Khasi novel.

Prominent Khasi novelists have depicted women characters with a pivotal role in their novels and many of these characters are shown to experience different kinds of suffering, some of the personal kind while others are shown to be victims of the society or the social system they found themselves in. This study, therefore, presents an in-depth textual analysis of women's suffering as projected and portrayed by selected novelists in their works.

The Introductory chapter of this study presents a brief discussion on suffering according to traditional Khasi religion and also according to Christian belief. This is considered important, as this discussion will partly form the basis for textual analysis undertaken in the subsequent chapters since many of the Khasi novelists are Christians. Some of these novelists were also greatly influenced by oral tales handed

down through generations by word of mouth. Therefore, a section of this chapter is devoted to a brief discussion on oral tales.

Chapter II is entitled “The Precursors of the Khasi Novel : The suffering of a woman in her quest for romantic love”. Before presenting a textual analysis on the theme of suffering as projected in the novels of the period, it is felt necessary to discuss why this chapter is given the above title.

Even though H.W. Sten considers John Roberts transcreated Bible story “U Moses” as a novelette. Prominent critics such as R. S. Lyngdoh (1994), S. S. Majaw (1999), P. Kharakor (1995), D.R.L. Nonglait (2004) and I . Majaw (2005) are of the view that the full-fledged novel starts in the year 1963 with F.M. Pugh’s *Ka Gulabpi*. It was followed by S.Q. Sumer’s *Ka Hima Ka Jingieit* (1966). Though both the novels were written in Khasi, none of the locations were set anywhere in Khasi and Jaiñtia Hills but in places of North-India and even in faraway cities in England. The characters created were also members of a community of that part of India and or England.

In fact, F.M. Pugh’s *Ka Gulabpi* (1963) depicts an important cultural practice of North – India which places great importance in the matching of the bride’s and the groom’s horoscope for matrimonial arrangements. This practice was not known by the Khasis, especially during the period when this novel was written. S.Q. Sumer’s *Ka Hima Ka Jingieit* (1966) depicted a wide plethora of emotions but the one that stood out is love mingled with pain. The story was set against the backdrop of the Second World War that brought intense suffering for characters.

This chapter then presents a textual analysis of F.M. Pugh’s *Ka Gulabpi*. The suffering of the main female character in this novel is and caused by social practices found in such a culture and society. The novelist’s main focus is on the heroine’s quest for romantic love and her suffering in order to realize her heart’s desire.

Gulabpi the heroine and Surendar Singh the hero of the novel met and fell in love with each other at first sight when Gulabpi was in the city of Agra for a holiday. But along with the joy of discovering their love for each other, trouble started with the

entry of the villain of the piece, Pyrdip Kumar, into the scene for he also had fallen deeply in love with Gulabpi. In an attempt to win over his heart's desire, Pyrdip Kumar first warned Surendar Singh from pursuing Gulabpi. He then approached Gulabpi's father for her hand in marriage, again a practice common in their community.

Gulabpi's father, Raj Bhadur, unaware of his daughter's love for Surendar Singh readily consented to the proposal thinking Pyrdip Kumar was a suitable match for his daughter. Gulabpi was deeply distressed when she learnt that her father had arranged for her betrothal.

Raj Bhadur's action enraged Pyrdip Kumar to such an extent that he planned to kill Surendar Singh and to kidnap Gulabpi in order to force her to marry him. Surendar Singh was wounded and captured by Pyrdip Kumar's henchmen in the desert of Rajasthan and Gulabpi was kidnapped and kept confined in a small dark room. This drastic turn of events in her life led to much physical and mental agony for Gulabpi. Far from her parents, separated from her lover, Gulabpi's suffering became almost unbearable for her.

Yet Gulabpi was firm in her determination not to marry Pyrdip Kumar under any circumstances whatsoever.

Gulabpi's suffering ended with the intervention of Raj Bhadur's men who together with Surendar Singh's men came to rescue the captives. Finally, the much-awaited re-union between Surendar Singh and Gulabpi took place bringing about the end of her suffering.

The other novel taken for analysis in this chapter is *Ka Hima Ka Jingieit* (1966) written by S.Q. Sumer. The main focus of the novel is Rosabina's passionate romantic love for Power, an American soldier stationed in England whom she met and fell in love while pursuing her studies in England.

Rosabina, the daughter of Budawan, a dedicated freedom fighter was dearly loved by her father. On the day she left India for England, she was reminded by her

father of her obligation to remember her Indian roots. Budawan was keen to see his obedient, intelligent daughter working for the good of the country and becoming famous one day.

The story of her life took a drastic turn when she met a handsome and dashing American soldier by the name of Power. Major General Power was a distinguished soldier and won many awards while in the Army. For a while their love for each other appeared to reign supreme, able to transcend any social, racial or national barrier. Later on, their different cultural roots and their allegiance towards their respective countries gradually began to jolt and jar their relationship. Their first experience of conflict started when General Power expressed his dislike of her Indian dress.

He, in fact wanted Rosabina to adopt the Western life style totally and completely.

Matters became more complicated when Rosabina had a child. to a son. During that stressful experience she faced the agony of racial discrimination by doctors and nurses who attended on her. She even suffered medical negligence when she was discharged from the Hospital before she was strong enough to do so. She was fully aware that this happened because of the fact that she was not a white person.

Her suffering was intensified when Power had to respond to the call of duty and went to the battlefield, leaving her behind with her small son. Rosabina faced loneliness and financial difficulty for she had no means of livelihood and could not afford even the basic necessities to survive in a foreign land. Having no other alternative, she turned to her father and asked him for help but kept him in the dark about her affair with Power. Her father accepted and welcomed her back home.

The story took a new twist, when Rosabina lied to her father about her child telling him that the boy whom she brought along was not her son. The truth nevertheless came out and Budawan found that his daughter did not complete her studies. The truth was revealed when Rosabina's son asked her about his father. Budawan overheard her telling her son the truth about his father. Then Budawan saw General Power's photograph that the couple had taken before he left for the war. He

was shocked to know that his beloved daughter has betrayed his trust and has destroyed every bit of hope and love for her. Budawan, then went out of the room and out of her life.

After her father left her, Rosabina felt the terrible pain of loneliness, guilt and despair. At that very moment a strange man appeared before her. It was her beloved Power whom she never thought she would ever meet again yet she did not recognize him at all as his physical appearance had almost completely changed. Just when Rosabina was within grasp of her second chance of happiness, her son came running and accidentally pushed his father to the ground and Power was fatally injured in that accident. It was only in his dying moments that he realized he was in the arms of his beloved.

Thus, Rosabina as the main heroine in the novel faced much pain, loneliness and suffering. She somehow tried to overcome them. However, her last and final separation from her beloved Power broke her completely. She knew that she would never recover from her pain.

Chapter III is entitled “The Dawn of the Khasi Novel : Suffering and The One – dimensional Women Characters”. The focus of this chapter was an analysis of the theme of suffering as depicted in the novels of B.C. Jyrwa and K.W. Nongrum. Both these novelists made an important contribution to Khasi Literature by presenting their full-fledged novels written in Khasi language, with Khasi towns and villages as their setting and the characters depicted being Khasi men and women. The themes selected in the novel also represent the Khasi way of life.

B. C. Jyrwa’s novels *U Khaiñ bad Ka Ngen* (1973) and *U Kyrdoh Mawlynnai* (1974) are selected for analysis in this study, since both these novels project very clearly the theme of woman’s suffering. K.W. Nongrum’s novels *Ka Pung Ka Jingieit* (1973) and *U Shanbor bad U Wadbor* (1976) are also selected for analysis, since the novelist has briefly touched on the theme of suffering in his women characters.

In the novel *U Kyrдох Mawlynnai* (1974), an unnamed female character left her new born child in the hospital because her drunken husband had abandoned her and his baby.

The evil effects of alcohol are seen to affect not only one particular individual but the entire family. A drunken husband whose conscience was dead not only abandoned his wife and child in a pitiable condition in the hospital, he even sold whatever precious little things the couple possessed in order to indulge in his passion for alcohol. The poor woman's agony intensified as she went begging from her relatives and friends but without any success. To add to her woes even her husband's family refused to give her any help and sent her away. She then had to consider the heart-wrenching decision of abandoning her child in the hospital. Her heart was torn into pieces at having had to do this.

After leaving her son in the hospital the poor mother never had any peace within herself. She took the decision to leave her child out of total despair and in utter hopelessness. The baby was later adopted by a rich couple, Bah Sbun and Kong Hajar. Traditionally, adoption of a baby born of unknown parents was very rare among the Khasis. Eminent writers like G. Costa and P. Kharakor pointed out that traditionally, a childless couple usually adopt a relative belonging from a same clan. This child is known as '**Rap – iing**'. The child usually belongs to the woman's clan and will be the caretaker and keeper of the adoptive parents property. Sweetymon Rynjah mentions that only a child belonging to a woman's clan can be adopted by any family, that also preferably a child closely related to the woman.

In this novel, contrary to the traditional practice of the Khasis the abandoned child was adopted by the rich childless couple. He was appropriately christened Bhakupar (Good Fortune) by his adopted parents. Though the son may have incurred good fortune with his new wealthy parents, the poor mother never had any peace within herself. She continued to suffer in silence for not many people knew about her guilt and her agony for she kept the painful secret buried deep inside her heart. Her aching love for her son never left her. Many times, she was almost driven madness by what she had done. She had to resist the urge to go and get him back.

At the end of the novel, the novelist brought about the happy re-union between Bhakupar and his biological mother. This happened when she was brought into the hospital where he was working as a doctor. The novelist appears to put a very strong emphasis on the strength of blood ties. The message of the novel is that after a dark period of pain comes the joy of re-union between mother and son.

The novel *U Khaiñ bad ka Ngen* (1973) appears to be based on the Khasi folktale, **Ka Sohlyngngem** where the heart of a young woman was torn between obedience to her parents and her love for her lover. Author such as Rabon Singh Kharsuka and poets like P.G. Gatphoh and Oscar M. Wahlang have chosen the suffering of Ka Sohlyngngem in their works. H.W. Sten, an eminent Khasi critic points to the fact that although Ka Sohlyngngem respected and loved her mother to the extent of breaking off the relationship with her beloved but in her heart of hearts she could never forget him and this led her to groan and to cry for him for the rest of her life.

In the novel, B.C. Jyrwa depicts the theme of suffering in Ngen who like Ka Sohlyngngem had to bow down to her mother's wishes break off her relationship with her beloved Khaiñ. As in the case of Ka Sohlyngngem, Ngen's parents also were very upset when she told them about Khaiñ. They felt that since he came from a very rich family, he would not treat their daughter with respect. Although they were not as strongly opposed to their relationship as Khaiñ's parents, they tried to discourage her from continuing with the relationship. She also had to face stiff opposition from Khaiñ's family. When Khaiñ told his parents about Ngen, they expressed their deep unhappiness with his choice of a prospective bride because Ngen came from a very poor family. They felt that their wealth would be squandered if their son married a girl like Ngen. Khaiñ's mother was almost brutal in her opposition to such an alliance. Khaiñ's parents went to the extent of sending him to look after their property in far away Ri War in order to prevent him from meeting Ngen in the future. She knew she would suffer alone and in silence throughout her life because there would never be room in her heart for anyone else but Khaiñ.

Another novelist whose novels are selected for analysis in this chapter is K. W. Nongrum. His first novel *Ka Pung Ka Jingieit* (1973) deals with the theme of idealistic love between his main characters. His technique of presentation is rather simplistic and idealistic. Therefore, the theme of suffering depicted by the novelist is very limited.

In this novel, Darihun lost her mother at a very early age. Her father remarried but there was always love and closeness between father and daughter. While she was in college in Shillong, Darihun met Phrangngi who was visiting his brother Donsngi. Darihun later completed her studies and got a job as a school teacher in a village nearby Phrangngi's village and when they met again the second time, their love for each other began to take root.

Unfortunately, dark clouds cast a shadow over the couple when Darihun's father did not approve of Phrangngi as his daughter's choice because he was not as well-educated as Darihun. However, her suffering was short-lived for in the end her father, because of his tender love towards his daughter, relented and gave his approval and his blessing to her and her beloved Phrangngi.

Nongrum's novel *U Shanbor bad U Wadbor* (1976), revolves around the relationship between two pairs of lovers : one between Shanbor and Rupamon and the other between Wadbor and Wanpli. Initially, Shanbor's parents wanted their eldest son to marry Wanpli, yet they did not force their wishes on him when Shanbor expressed his love for Rupamon. They eventually led a happy married life.

The other couple in the novel, Wadbor and Wanpli had a difficult time because Wanpli's father disliked Wadbor. Later on Wanpli's father bowed down to her wishes and allowed her to marry the man of her choice.

Women's suffering in K.W. Nongrum's novels is caused by matters of the heart when a woman character had to face difficulties in her relationship with the man she loved. In both the novels, Nongrum presents an ideal romantic love between lovers but one where hurdles were placed by the girl's family. The girl's father disapproved of the love affair between his daughter and the man of her choice, not so much

because the suitor was disagreeable or unsuitable but because of his concern that his daughter should have the best in her life. In the end, the lovers prevailed and any suffering was removed and both the novels have a happy ending.

As indicated by the title of this chapter, the women characters of both Jyrwa's and Nongrum's novels are mainly one-dimensional. But the depiction of the theme of suffering by the two novelists is vastly different. While Nongrum's women characters suffer in their quest for love yet their suffering was lighter and did not last long. Jyrwa's women characters, on the other hand suffered intensely whether as a mother or as a lover and their suffering left a lasting scar in their lives.

Chapter IV is entitled "The Coming of Age of the Khasi Novel : Suffering and the Multi-faceted Women Characters". In this chapter, the works of five major Khasi novelists published before 1980 were selected for analysis, namely, L.H. Pde, W. Tiewsoh, D.T. Laloo, K. Kharlukhi and H.W. Sten. Firstly, this chapter discusses the reason why the researcher has considered the works of the selected novelists indicate "the coming of age" of the Khasi novel. Scholars and critics on the novel have pointed out that the work of these novelists are more comprehensive, more creative in their character portrayal and in the projection of their themes. They are stated to have depicted a more realistic picture of the Khasi society and the Khasi way of life.

The first novelist whose works are taken for analysis in this chapter was L.H. Pde. The suffering of women characters has a very important part in his novels. In *U Raimon bad Ka Dashisha* (1980), Pde reveals the difficulties that a woman faces when male relatives who are supposed to protect and help her, instead, took advantage of their position in the family. In this novel, Jngen lost her husband and hence she lived only with her daughter, Dashisha. In consonance with traditional practices, Jngen trusted her brother Arbor to help take care of all her property but was shattered when she found out that he had secretly sold off portions of her land at the behest of his wife. The shock of her brother's betrayal and the brutal words he uttered to her at their last meeting made her angry and extremely sad. Attempting to justify his own action, he blamed his dead mother for what he had done and he shouted to Jngen with anger.

Jngen felt so deeply wounded by her brother's argument which she knew was just a lame excuse for his dastardly action. She left his house in a daze, trying to reach the refuge of her home, but unfortunately she met with a fatal car accident and was severely injured. She later died leaving her daughter an orphan and vulnerable to her uncle's manipulation of her wealth and property. Before Jngen closed her eyes for the last time, she was able to warn her daughter against Arbor. Dashisha, after the death of her mother, immediately registered all her landed property in the concerned government department, which totally enraged her uncle. He even tried to kill her in order to grab all her property. L.H. Pde in this novel has highlighted the vulnerability of women even in a system where women have certain privileges and where inheritance passes from mother to daughter. She further noted that in this novel, even the revered maternal; uncle, **Kñi** who was supposed to protect his female clan members tried to harm his own niece because of his greed. Arbor then a sorcerer to make Dashisha insane. She probably would have lost all her possession and even her life had it not been for Raimon, a young man who fell in love with her and who helped her in her plight. But before Raimon arrived in the scene Dashisha had already suffered the traumatic experience of trying to fight against her uncle physically as well as emotionally.

In his other novel, *Tang Ma Phi Khun Baieit* (1984), Pde reveals the corrupt life – style of the people of urban Shillong in the 1980's. Balari a family friend of a married couple, Bianglang and Melamon, was secretly madly in love with Bianglang. Giving full reins to her passion, she in the end murdered Melamon with the help of the villainous Pradip. Bianglang, after his wife's death, turned to Balari for help, especially in taking care of his small daughter and his house. His feelings towards Balari were those of a healthy and normal young man toward a beautiful young woman and he never had any suspicion that Balari in anyway was unworthy of his trust. Later on he joined politics and won an election as Member of the Legislative Assembly on a regional party ticket. Balari was always at his side and driven by euphoria on the night of his success, she was ready to accept him as her lover and to spend the night with him.

However, Balari's guilty conscience always nagged her and on that particular night while in Bianglang's arms she suddenly saw Melamon coming down from the wedding photograph toward her. She screamed with terror and fainted. Bianglang, totally drunk also found himself in his wife's grave instead of Balari's arms. Later on, Balari was in a quandary as Pradip had her letter of confession of her crime in his custody. He used her letter to blackmail her and tried to put pressure on Balari to give in to his lustful desire.

A guilty conscience and a cruel blackmailer finally pushed her to the edge, and Balari was in total despair, as she saw no glimpse of happiness in the future. She saw no reason to carry on living and she finally ended her life by consuming the remaining poison with which she killed Melamon.

Balari's suffering is brought about by her own weaknesses and short-comings. The novelist's view at the end shows that when a woman rebels against the accepted social norms and violates the sacredness of human life, frustration, rash decisions and tragedy follow, thus leading to her unbearable suffering and finally to her death.

In his other novel, *U Mooiong* (1987), Pde depicts the suffering of his women characters due to different circumstances. Kalpana, a Bengali girl fell in love with Raplang and left her parents to marry him. She was disowned by her family and was greatly hurt when her parents to acknowledge her existence any more. She did not live long and died soon after giving birth to her daughter.

In this novel, Pde particularly depicts the suffering of the main female character, Dianghun. She was the only child of Emhi and Datne. Emhi was a rich woman who had many coal mines in Jaintia Hills. She had to bear the heavy responsibility of her family, because her husband Datne was a very irresponsible man. Therefore, she had to work hard with the coal business in order to provide for her family. In doing so however, she had to neglect to take proper care of her young daughter Dianghun. The poor girl did not get love nor affection from her parents for her father was always drunk and her mother was always busy amassing wealth. It was

not surprising that in her teens she became romantically involved with a non-Khasi labourer and later had a son by him. Unfortunately, he left her and her young son. When she met and married Raplang she was very happy for a while. Later on, however, she had to face much sadness because of the intoxicating effects of the 'black gold' on Raplang's life-style.

Dianghun's suffering was compounded by her loneliness during her pregnancy and the delivery of her baby. This was the time that she needed and wanted her husband to be with her and her baby. But Raplang was always after the bright city lights of Shillong and Dianghun was left to her own devices at Bapung.

In her desperate attempt to bring her husband back to his senses, she took a drastic step of leaving her newly born infant at Bapung and disappeared from home. It was a heart - breaking and painful course of action for any mother to take. The suffering of Dianghun at this juncture was terrible, as her newly born baby was still in need of its mother's milk.

In the novel, Pde depicted the suffering of Dianghun in different ways and at different stages of her life. Her parents, her mother in particular, became obsessed only with the coal business and the wealth it brought, that she forgot totally her responsibility of caring for her daughter. Due to her parents' neglect, Dianghun was taken advantage of by an unscrupulous man and had to face the predicament of being an unwed mother at a very young age. But her suffering at the neglect and uncaring attitude of her husband almost destroyed her. Finally, her mother-in-law's support helped her win back her husband's love.

Pde being a contemporary novelist, perhaps observed the actual life style of the society where almost all his heroines are objects of suffering. His women characters suffered immensely, some like Balari in *Tang Ma Phi Khun Baieid* for faults of her own making while others like Dianghun through exploitation and neglect by the men in her life.

W. Tiewsoh set his novel *Kam Kalbut* (1975) against the backdrop of the beauty and the humdrum daily life of the people of Ri War Shella during the Second

World War. The relationship between the main characters of the novel U Mel and Ka Noli started with a particular scene where the pair was caught in a stormy heavy rain and at a loss on how to cross the roaring waters of the Umsong river. However, being children of Ri War, they both managed to cross the river simply by knotting a tall bamboo with cane creepers to make a bridge. Mel had to physically carry her half-naked wet body on his shoulders to make across the gushing currents cross the river. This physical contact awakened feelings of love and passion in Mel, something, which he had never experienced before.

Complications in the relationship immediately arose since Noli's family adhered to and practiced the traditional Khasi religion while Mel was a Christian. Besides the fact that Mel was a Christian while she belonged to a family that still practiced traditional Khasi religion, her father Along intensely disliked Mel and blamed him for inciting the villagers to vote against Along's candidate in the Wadar election.

Noli went against the wishes of her father by running away from home to stay with Mel. She left home because she could no longer bear the harsh treatment of her father. Her rash decision led the couple to much pain and suffering. Mel immediately lost his job as a school teacher because he did not adhere to the Christian rites of marriage and therefore he was excommunicated from the church. Poverty started to set in and the couple faced a lot of hardship to make ends meet. More seriously the conflict of personality between Mel and Noli's powerful father who was the headman of the village made life very difficult for the couple. After giving birth to a child, she tried to reconcile with her father but he chased her away along with her child.

The period under which the novel was set was during the Second World War. Every family in their village was required to provide a porter to carry head-loads along the steep hills and slopes of Ri War area. Should any family fail to fulfill this requirement, they would be penalized, that is, they would have to pay a hefty fine of Rs.50/- (Rupees fifty), which was a huge sum during those days. When it was her family's turn to carry the head – loads for the British soldiers, Mel was down with fever and was very sick. In desperation Noli went to meet her father and begged him

to allow her family time to fulfill their duty. She promised that Mel would report for duty as soon as he recovered from his sickness. Her father, however, was adamant and instead went to the extent of asking her to pay the fine if she could not comply with his order. Noli had no alternative but to physically force herself to carry the heavy load. This happened at a time when she had just given birth to her third child and was in no physical condition to undertake such a cruel task.

Nature also seemed to conspire to bring more suffering to Noli. The day she left her village it started raining and the sky was overcast with dark clouds. It was altogether a very unpleasant weather. There was also a chilling wind blowing against her bones. By the time she reached Cherrapunjee she was shivering with fever from head to toe. When Noli started back from Cherrapunjee with her head load, the army sergeant had to help her because she was drained of all strength. By the time she reached home her appearance was completely changed, her health was deteriorating rapidly with the fever severely high. Noli could not survive any longer, she died tragically because of her father's heartless action.

In the novel *Kam Kalbut*, the woman's suffering as portrayed by the novelist was caused mainly by male domination over female members of the family. In the end, Noli became the target in the battle of will between Mel and Along and she suffered a tragic life which ended in a tragic death.

In *Ka Jingkwah U Kpa* (1976), Tiewsoh highlighted the suffering of his women characters, Nilima and Sandhya which is of a different kind. This novel depicts the traditions and customs of the Bengalees settled in Silchar particularly in the form of dress and in performing various ceremonies during Puja and also the practice entrusting responsibilities to the eldest child of a family, even if that child happens to be a female.

Nilima had to forego her own happiness because of such customs. She met and fell in love with a young Khasi man, Sonny and she knew that he also felt the same way about her. She however knew that any chance of happiness with Sonny was not possible because being the eldest amongst the four sisters, she had to see to the needs

of all her younger sisters and until such time that they were independent and settled down she would not be able to get married. She tried to convince Sonny to understand her position when she rejected his proposal of marriage.

This particular incident in the novel shows how certain traditional beliefs have a place even among those who had embraced Christianity. In retaliation to her rejection of his marriage proposal, Sonny turned to her younger sister Sandhya for love.

The novelist depicts the short-lived life of the unhappy Nilima as she died in a plane crash while she was on the way to Silchar to attend the All India Women's Social Conference. Then it was the turn for Sandhya to suffer as Sonny had a very bad accident while he was in Bangladesh. Poor Sandhya was made to suffer intensely because Sonny's family had the conviction that the strange events of Nilima's violent death and Sonny's accident was due to **Ka Daw iing** caused by the engagement of their son to Sandhya.

The girl's long-suffering nature was tested even more when Sonny became lame and did not want to continue with the engagement. His bitterness and resentment towards life made her more depressed. It was only at the end of the novel when Sonny fully recovered from his accident that he had a change of heart and began to appreciate Sandhya's love and sacrifice.

Thus, the novelist in this novel portrays the suffering of his women characters mainly because of their love and loyalty to the family. The traditions of a society in which they lived also played an important part in bringing about much of their suffering.

The novel *La Bakla* (1987) shows Tiewsoh's skilful handling of a very sensitive social issue prevailing among the Khasis, that is the conflict of religious convictions in the lives of his characters and how this brought about much suffering to them.



Lambor, the central male character of the novel was brought up in the rigidity of indigenous Khasi religion practiced by his father though the young man yearned to become a Christian even before he met the girl who won his heart. Meeting Shondra in the huge gathering of a Presbytery church service in Mawlai, he instantly fell deeply in love with her. He, therefore, went against his father's wishes when he started his relationship with Shondra which his father termed as **Ka Sang**.

Shondra belonged to the Arti clan while Prophulo was of the Nidan clan. The real reason was, of course, Prophulo's unreasonable dislike of Shondra. He did all he could to harass and trouble Shondra to make her end her relationship with his son, Lambor.

Shondra had to face many obstacles and hardships in her life. Firstly, she was humiliated by Lambor's father who looked down on her. Even more painful was her experience at the hands of those involved in the flesh trade when she was kidnapped and tortured beyond limits when she refused to enter into prostitution. It was the cruel plan of Prophulo and the cunning scheming of Brinola, that Shondra was kidnapped to a brothel in Bhutan where she was sold to serve in a house of ill-fame. When Shondra resisted, she was beaten and severely punished for being stubborn and uncooperative.

For a while, hope seemed to appear in her life as she was rescued before her physical body was violated sexually. She was hopeful that she would still have a future with her beloved Lambor. She was shattered and in despair when she realized that this could never be. Just as she thought her troubles were behind her, Lambor's father visited her and taunted her on her tainted reputation and gave her a stern warning that she should stop her relationship with his son. Shondra was engulfed in total despair and found neither comfort nor solace in her life. Trying to lead a normal life after her return from Bhutan, she painfully realized that many in the society questioned her innocence. The pain of rejection was too much for her to bear and she finally decided to find peace in death by jumping into the cold waters of **Nanpolok**.

W. Tiewsoh has successfully created female characters that were seen to experience intense physical, emotional and mental suffering in their futile struggle to find love and happiness in their lives.

Another prominent Khasi novelist who has contributed to the field of Khasi Literature is D.T. Laloo. His novel *Ka Lasubon* (1987) is selected for analysis in this study. His novel is fully interspersed with elements of folk beliefs and practices. At the same time the author has creatively depicted the image of the suffering woman in the central character Lasubon where traditional beliefs and practices as well as contemporary social issues are integrated in a smooth flow of narration. Lasubon faced many unusual obstacles and difficulties in her life because her family were **Ki Nongri Thlen** (u thlen keepers). Interestingly, her family were also members of a Christian church.

According to Khasi traditional belief **U Thlen** is a kind of evil spirit or demon that some people worship in order to gain wealth and prosperity. **U Thlen** cult was practiced to amass wealth by sacrificing human lives. Those who reared **U Thlen** always hired killers known as the dreaded **Nongshohnoh**. These **Nongshohnoh** would be given a special liquor called **Kiad Tang Sneng** to have a hallucinating effect where people appear as butterflies for the **Nongshohnoh** to kill. Stories abound that certain families who kept **U Thlen** became rich overnight. Many writers such as H.O. Mawrie (1979), G. Costa, S.C. (Rpt,1989), U Nissor Singh (Rpt.2001) are of the view that **U Thlen** is the most ferocious of all evil spirits.

Lasubon's mother was the keeper of **U Thlen**. But though Lasubon belonged to such a family, she did not know anything about her mother's dark secret. Lasubon only came to know that her mother was a **Thlen** keeper when she overheard a conversation between her mother and her **nongshohnoh** Prem. This came at a time when Lasubon was in love with a young man named Rymphang. She was horrified and shocked to hear Prem threatening her mother to give Lasubon as a bride to him.

The thoughts that tortured her mind after hearing this horrible truth about her mother haunted her night and day. Her fear of Prem and her horror of **U Thlen** made

her physically ill. Lasubon felt uneasy and helpless and living in fear to the extent that she did not want to remain inside her own house any longer. She pleaded with her mother to move to some other house, but her mother was not willing to do so.

Lasubon, on one occasion, had a nightmare-like experience which she recounted to Rymphang, as if in a hallucination, she saw a snake licking her feet and her feet were burning as if they were on fire. The novelist uses this episode to reflect the traditional belief in which, as H.O. Mawrie (1979) pointed out, **U Thlen** sucked the life out of a keeper's family member if they fail to appease him with human sacrifice.

Lasubon was, therefore, slowly being destroyed by that evil spirit. She tried to find solace and comfort in Rymphang's love but did not really understand the danger she was in. Rymphang who still adhered to and practiced the traditional Khasi religion, was immediately suspicious of the true state of affairs in Lasubon's family. He was already aware of the significance of the dark room in the middle of the house. When Lasubon recounted to him the incident of the snake licking the soles of her feet, he understood at once that Lasubon's mother was the keeper of **U Thlen** and Lasubon would be its victim.

Lasubon's mother too suffered immensely, when her daughter was licked by **U Thlen**, knowing that her daughter would be the main target if she could not satisfy and please him. Her inability to do the job of finding victims herself put her at Prem's mercy.

Lasubon was filled with hope that she would be free from the bondage of **U Thlen** with Rymphang's help. But, circumstances did not allow her that deliverance. In his fight with Lasubon's mother, Prem locked Lasubon inside her bedroom while grappling. Tragically, their house caught fire and the flames of the smoke overwhelmed and finally killed Lasubon.

Thus, D.T. Laloo in this novel portrays the suffering of his women characters due to the evil **U Thlen**. Lasubon, had to suffer because of her mother's lust for wealth. Lasubon's mother too, suffered deeply because of the fate that awaited her

daughter. Consequently, she was tormented by Prem's threat for he knew the dreaded secret of her family. She had no peace of mind and she was physically tortured and died an awful death when she was throttled and poisoned by Prem.

Another novelist whose work is taken for analysis is K.K. Kharlukhi. His *Ka Melody* (1989) depicts the main woman character who suffered physically because one of her relatives wrongly administered medicine in her eyes and that caused her permanent blindness in both eyes. That in itself was a horrific and traumatic experience that this character had to undergo.

Melody, inspite of her blindness, represented an ideal woman able to retain the good in life in contrast to that which was evil. She was pretty, charming, intelligent and sensitive. One evening as she was taken out by her relatives to Damsite, a young man, Kitlang saw her first at **Ryndang Briew** and then the two met each other on the bank of the reservoir. Kitlang fell in love with her at first sight. He offered his friendship, something which touched her immensely but one which also made her very apprehensive. Melody understood her own position in life where her dark world was vastly different from that of normal human beings.

Melody suffered because of the prejudice usually faced by handicapped people in the society. She did not have any friend of her age. Her only friends were the handicapped children at a Home in Laitumkrah, which was run by a missionary sister.

As days passed by Kitlang felt very close to Melody but his relatives did not approve of this relationship.

Inspite of all these obstacles Kitlang refused to give her up for he had grown to really love her. Kitlang had a childhood friend named Kiki who was also his neighbour. After Kitlang met Melody, he discontinued his friendship with Kiki who was madly in love with him. She became very jealous of Melody and planned to harm her if given the chance. In the end Melody died defending Kitlang from the hand of Kiki who tried to kill Kitlang by stabbing him. Melody put herself in front of him where the knife was plunged into her heart and she was killed.

The suffering of Melody started when someone's careless hand made her blind. She died a tragic death defending the man she loved from a deranged woman.

Another novelist whose work was taken for analysis in this study is H.W. Sten. His novel *Ka Samla Nongkyndong* (1981) was a transcreated work from the book of Ruth of the Old Testament in the *Holy Bible*.

The novelist has creatively depicted the suffering of his women characters, particularly that of Naomi, the wife of Elimelech. Elimelech's family left their country, Bethlehem – Judah because of a famine and they moved and settled in Moab. Not long after that Elimelech died in that foreign land. This was the first bitter experience and grief that Naomi tasted.

The dark cloud of pain did not abate and Naomi's suffering continued when her sons, Mahlon and Chillion also fell sick. She had already suffered as a mother when she had to shoulder the responsibility of the family after losing her husband. When Mahlon fell sick and his health started deteriorating day by day she became more worried.

It was not long before Mahlon also passed away, and Naomi had to suffer the loss of her beloved son. After a while Chillion too fell sick and his health worsened day by day and tragically Chillion also died just three months and a week after his brother's death.

Another woman character portrayed by the novelist is Ruth a Moabite girl who married Mahlon, a Jew. Ruth was full of joy and happiness when she married Mahlon. As with most happy couples, their dreams did come true for a short while. However, things took a turn for the worse when Mahlon, Ruth's husband fell sick. She had to go through so much pain and grief as she watched her husband struggle with his illness and finally died. A tender and lovable young woman, far from her parents, her grief and pain struck her and in great despair.

In this novel H.W. Sten uses death as a tool to bring about suffering to his women characters. The novelist successfully portrayed the mental conflict and emotional suffering in his prominent women characters.

The last Chapter is the conclusion, which summarises the analyses on the theme of suffering as projected by the novelists in their works. The chapter also highlights the novelist's perception of suffering. Some of the novelists are deeply influenced by the Christian idea of suffering. Balari's suffering in Pde's *Tang Ma Phi Khun Baieit* was not undeserving. She reaped what she sowed when she, in the end, consumed the remaining poison with which she killed Melamon.

Sten's *Ka Samla Nongkyndong* which was transcreated from the Biblical story of "Ka Ruth" carried Biblical undertones. Naomi's and Ruth's suffering was for the good of their own future life and also for that of the whole nation of Israel.

B.C. Jyrwa's *U Khaiñ Bad Ka Ngen*, on the other hand, was based on the folktale on **U Rynniaw** and **Ka Sohlyngngem**. Like the **Ka Sohlyngngem**, Ngen had to give up her relationship with her beloved in order to obey her parents. Again like **Ka Sohlyngngem**, she knew she would never get over her lover come what may in the future.

D. T. Laloo's *Ka Lasubon* is focused on the pervading evil influence of **U Thlen** on the life of his women characters. In accordance with Khasi traditional belief, **U Thlen** turned to Lasubon when her mother failed to appease him with human sacrifice. The dreadful role of Prem, **U Nongshohnoh** (the hired killer) was the means of bringing suffering and death to Lasubon and her mother.

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