

Literary Criticism And Bhasa Literature

*A Study with Reference to
Khasi Literature*



D.R.L. Nonglait

2005

*This Book
is dedicated to
My Parents*

Mr. Dramwell Sohtun

and

Mrs. Dressina L. Nonglait

*who by their prayers have
pulled my small head, my
humble heart and my feeble
hands together to turn a few of
their dreams into reality.*

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Khasi Literature*

D.R.L. Nonglait, M.A, M.Phil, PGDTE, Ph.D.

2005

The Design (Sketch-maps) on the Front Cover Page contains some ideas for the development of critical thinking and it has no connection with the correctness of states or international boundaries.

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First Edition, 2005
1000 Copies

Published by the author and Printed at SMS Hi-Tech Impression,
G.S. Road, Police Bazar, Shillong - 1.


Foreword

I am thankful to Dr. D.R.L. Nonglait for the opportunity he has given to me to see his valuable contribution to the study of Khasi Literature - "Literary Criticism and *Bhasa* Literature". I have gone through it with a great deal of interest, and I have been impressed by the mark of studious scholarship that is apparent throughout the pages of this valuable study, which has left me with a sense of satisfaction and pleasure. Here I could see that serious concern for the healthy development of Khasi Literature, which itself comprises different genres of creative writing of comparatively recent origin, going back to the early 1840's, though it is also true that the Khasi language has established itself as a recognized language, incidentally, the first one to be so recognized among the tribal languages of North-East India. The importance of Khasi literary studies is obvious.

The role of Criticism in bringing about a conscious growth of literature is clear and indisputable. It has to be acknowledged, however, till very recently we had not seen enough of a critical approach to the study of Khasi Literature, apart from what would appear to have been passing remarks on their own works by the Khasi writers themselves, notably by the acknowledged King of Poetry, U Soso Tham, himself as in the Preface to his *Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep*. The need for a general and more comprehensive study is obvious and in this regard, I feel that Dr. D.R.L. Nonglait's present study serves this purpose at a very relevant point of time. As such the work is a valuable contribution to Khasi Studies and as such it merits the thoughtful attention of serious Khasi writers, teachers and students alike.

Dr. Nonglait has age in his favour, and I trust that in time he will come out with more studies of this type. This is my hope and expectation and I am confident that I shall not be disappointed.

I wish the author of this valuable study all success in the years that lie ahead, and for the personal satisfaction that I have derived from a perusal of his manuscript, I have this Word of Thanks to express : *Khublei!*

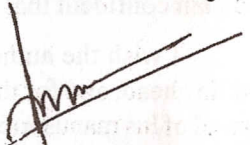

(Prof. I.M. Simon)
Mawlai-Umjaiur,
Shillong - 793 008

On The Book

First of all, I congratulate Dr. D.R.L. Nonglait for bringing out this outstanding book on Literacy Criticism. This book will provide the readers, the ideal step in understanding Literary Criticism and *Bhasa Literature*. Through this book, *Literary Criticism and Bhasa Literature A Study With Reference to Khasi Literature*, Dr. Nonglait a specialist on Khasi Literary Criticism has :

- enlightened the readers about the nature and functions of literary criticism.
- thrown to the readers (particularly students and scholars of Khasi literature) the major approaches to literature which are represented by Literary Criticism.
- shown the general development of criticism in its historical context.
- critiqued the development of Khasi Literary Criticism and focused on the need to develop the 'critical mind'.
- reviewed the Khasi M.A. syllabus on Literary Criticism and emphasized the need to revise and strengthen the present syllabus.

This is an ideal book for anyone who is interested in Literary Criticism in general and on Khasi literature in particular. The author has done an excellent job in bringing the gulf between literature and criticism. I sincerely hope this book will provide us with the basic foundation on the subject.


(Dr. (Mrs.) A. Kharmalki)
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Preface

Critical activities in Khasi had begun in the early decades of the twentieth century in the forms of appreciations, remarks, essays, prefaces, introductions etc. on various genres or books of literature. During the period between the second decade of the twentieth century and the 1960s, Owen Rowie, Soso Tham, H. Elias, D.N.S. Wahlang, Primose Gatphoh and F.M. Pugh were prominent among those who had made such contributions. Although these learned men were capable of critical thinking, a critical study of literature was not felt, as Khasi literature during that time was at its infant stage. Thus, the period may be called a period of pre-critical response. However, the seeds planted by the above few writers in the arable area of literary criticism have now begun to attain greater heights.

*It was since the 1970s that literary criticism in Khasi began to take its firm steps. With the exception of F.M. Pugh's publication entitled *Ka Prosodi bad ka Retorik* in 1970 and B.L. Swer's *Katto katne Shaphang ka Sonnett* in 1979, H.W. Sten appeared as a lone influential critic of the period when he brought out four books of criticism including (i) *Ki Poetry u O.M. Wahlang* (1976) (ii) *Ka Poitri u Primose Gatphoh* (1979), (iii) *Ki Sur Khasi Na Ka Duitara Ksiar* (1979) and (iv) *Ka Jingbishar Bniah* (1979). The period between 1970 and 1979 has undoubtedly marked the real beginning of Khasi literary criticism.*

The period between 1980 and 1999 takes another kind of growth. This period witnesses a more rapid growth and development when many writers, teachers and scholars of Khasi literature including women contributed more substantially for the enrichment of Khasi literary criticism. Over 20 critical works have been brought out during this period. Many of these works are critical analyses of literary texts, while some of them are concerned with literary theories on different types of literature. This period may be called a period of critical awakening. The major critics who belonged to this period are H.W. Sten himself, B.L. Swer, S.S. Majaw and J.S. Shangpliang among many others. In the first decade of the twenty first century, literary criticism in Khasi seems to maintain its steady growth when some new and promising writers appeared on the scene.


Khasi is one of the major Indian languages which do not have much affinity with any other famous or more developed languages of the country. However, as of now, it has emerged as one of the developed bhasas. With Shillong as the centre of education in the region since the time of the British rule, one cannot deny the fact that Khasi language has comparatively made good progress over the years. Now when criticism has been growing side by side with creative writings, Khasi language is asserting itself to places held by other developed Indian languages.

This study is a brief survey of the development of literary criticism in Khasi which is one of the new bhasas. Its finding is that, a balanced growth of both creative and critical writings is inevitable. While trying to achieve this goal, this study also suggests that the teaching of language and criticism components at the College and University levels needs to be strengthened.

I am deeply indebted to Prof. I.M. Simon for the pains he has taken in reading the manuscript of this book, for his valuable advice and his words of encouragement and good wishes. I express my gratitude to Dr. (Mrs.) A. Kharmalki for her comment and her words of appreciation that have been contained in this book.*

My sincere gratitude is also due to Prof. K.C. Boral, my teacher and my guide who has rightly suggested to write a book of this kind. Last but not the least, much thanks go to my friend, Andrew Marbaniang for his kind help, without which the publication of this book may not be possible at this point of time.

*Dated Lumdiengjri, Shillong,
The 30th May, 2005.*


(D.R.L. Nonglalt)

CONTENTS

	Pages
Foreword	i
On The Book	ii
Preface	iii - iv
Chapter I Introduction	1 - 5
Chapter II An Overview of the Origin and Development of Criticism	6 - 13
Chapter III Literary Criticism and Bhasa Literature	14 - 23
Chapter IV Education and the Development of Khasi Literature	24 - 29
Chapter V Literary Criticism and Khasi Literature	30 - 42
Chapter VI Conclusion	43 - 44
Appendix A Brief Introduction to Modern Critical Theories	45 - 67
Bibliography	68 - 69

CHAPTER IV

Education and the Development of Khasi Literature

In the absence of their own script, the Khasis in the ancient period had no regular education. Khasi rulers used to adopt the scripts of their neighbours, such as Bengali, Assamese, Devanagari and even Persian and Arabic in preserving land records, maintaining emissary contact and in their relations with the Muslims and other kingdoms. H. Bareh writes:

The Rajahs were supposed to learn one of these languages keeping in view the contemporary influences which served the purpose of reading and writing medium for communication with the outsiders. Tutors were employed to coach them and recording sometimes was done by scribes.¹

Although the scripts of other languages were adopted, the local dialects were used for keeping records. Had the Khasi rulers been willing to use other languages, education among the Khasis would have been started much earlier.

In 1812, the Serampore Mission of the Baptist Church sent Krishna Chandra Pal from Bengal to preach Christianity in the southern Khasi foothills bordering the present Bangladesh. The Mission decided to take up the translation of the Gospel of St. Mathew of the Bible into Khasi and to make use of the Bengali alphabet. The translation of the Gospel of St. Mathew was completed in 1816 and had been distributed

among those Khasis who could read and write the Bengali script. The need was felt for more translation works and with the help of a few converts the translation of the New Testament of the Bible entitled *Khashee New Testament* was published in 1831. In 1832, the Serampore Mission opened schools at Mawsmmai, Mawmluh and Sohra. However, the Mission abandoned the Khasi area in 1838, for reasons which are not clearly known.

The educational efforts by the Serampore Mission and the introduction of the Bengali script were short lived. It was assumed that the Bengali script was not suitable for the Khasi dialect, and it might be for this reason that after the amalgamation of the Serampore mission with the American Baptist mission in that year the new mission was not interested in the Khasi Hills any more, and the mission work was abandoned.

In 1841, the Welsh Presbyterian Mission started its mission work in the Khasi Hills with Thomas Jones and his wife as the first missionaries. The two missionaries arrived at Sohra on the 22nd June 1841, and were hosted by Captain Thomas Herbert Lewin in the military camp at Saitsohpen. Their mission was to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ among the Khasis, but Thomas Jones soon realized that unless the people were literate, they would not understand his message. Within a few months, Thomas Jones had acquired a working knowledge of the Sohra dialect and put it in writing by adopting the Roman alphabet. He organized teaching in the military camp at Saitsohpen, where a few young men attended classes regularly. The Roman alphabet in its more legible and simple type was found to be more suitable for the Sohra dialect. Moreover, it was easy for him to work with the script he already knew. At the end of about six to seven months, three young men including Larshai, Nising and Jom were qualified to teach young children. The year 1842 marked the real beginning of formal education among the Khasis when the three schools were re-opened by Thomas Jones at Mawsmmai, Mawmluh and Sohra, where the three young men were

posted. In order to provide teaching material for the three schools, Thomas Jones published the first Khasi primer, *Ca Citab Ban Hicai Ca Citien Cassia*. This was the first Khasi booklet in the Roman script from which Khasi literature has evolved and grown up to what it is today. It was for this reason that Thomas Jones came to be known as the Father of the Khasi Alphabet and the founder of Khasi literature. In fact, he was also the founder of education in the Khasi Hills.

The Welsh Presbyterian Mission subsequently sent two more missionaries, William Lewis and his wife. They arrived at Sohra on the 2nd January 1842, and with their arrival, the burden of Thomas Jones was greatly relieved while the number of school children increased, but this does not mean that the native people reacted favourably towards education. The increase in the number of those who could read and write changed the life style of the people. In 1949, when a few natives became Christians, the parents began to suspect that the opening of more schools by the missionaries was only a means of converting the native people to Christianity. The opposition to education at Sohra and other villages was great, and many village elders ordered parents not to send their children to schools. There were parents who beat their children who were determined to go to schools. The worst was in Jaintia Hills where the non-Christians also burnt down school buildings. In spite of such strong opposition and harsh treatment to the school children, the number of school children kept on increasing. H. W. Sten maintains:

From the humble beginning of three schools in 1842 with only 14 pupils, the number of mission schools rose to 65 with about 2000 pupils in 1866, 2250 in 1871, 2666 in 1881, 4625 in 1891, and by the end of 1940, only 1500 villages in the district remained without schooling facilities according to the mission's report.²

Inspired by the progress of the schools, the Welsh Presbyterian Mission sent more and more missionaries to spread both education and Christianity in Khasi Hills. The mission opened more schools, appointed

more teachers, opened more Christian stations and teaching was actively undertaken and supervised by the missionaries. In 1867, the British Government had borne the salary of teachers of the English Normal at Sohra, which marked the first involvement of the British Government in education through the payment of salary. The Government had also sanctioned grant-in-aid to the authorities which managed schools according to the curricula prescribed by it. The Welsh Presbyterian Mission which fell in line with the government policy received grant-in-aid every month and the amount was increased from time to time.

Since 1890, the Catholic missionaries too reached Shillong and started opening up a few schools, adopting a different system of education in the hills with greater stress on religious teaching in their schools. Later on, the Catholic mission discovered that it could no longer adopt a different system of education, as that did not attract students nor did it help for receiving aid from the government. Since 1907, the Catholic mission also followed the regulations prescribed by the government. The government approved their reorganization and started extending financial grants to the Catholic schools as well.

The efforts made by the Welsh Presbyterian Mission and the Catholic Mission in spreading education with the help of the Government achieved considerable progress, when in 1901 the proportion of literate people in Khasi and Jaintia Hills District was higher than in any other District of Assam. In the early decades of this present century several young men and women received higher education. Rojen Roy Thomas made a landmark in the history of the Khasis when he passed the master's degree examination in Philosophy of the Calcutta University in 1921, standing Second in the first class.

Formal education ushered in a new era for the development of Khasi language and literature. Till 1897, Khasi literature was a subject only up to the middle school standard. It was only in that year that the Calcutta University prescribed Khasi literature as a vernacular subject

up to the Entrance Examination. The pieces selected were those passages translated from English into Khasi. Prior to that year, the language taught at school in lieu of the vernacular was Latin. In 1900, the Government appointed a Khasi language teacher in the Government High School in Shillong and then after Latin was replaced by Khasi. When more Khasi students proceeded to Calcutta for higher education at different colleges, it appears that the University introduced Khasi literature as a subject at the Intermediate level in the academic session of 1902-04, and for the degree examination in the academic sessions beginning in 1904.³ But the unfortunate reality was that the college authorities did not appoint any teacher for the subject. It seems that neither the college authorities nor the government attached importance to the teaching of Khasi literature and the students had to struggle with the subject themselves. The University prescribed the following texts for the Khasi vernacular: (1) R. S. Berry's *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* Parts I & II, Rabon Sing's *Ka Kitab Niam Kheih Ki Khasi*, (3) *The Book of Job* and the *Book of Isaiah* from the Bible, and (4) B. K. Sarma Roy's *Ka History Jong Ka Ri Khasi bad Khyndiat Kiba Markhap*. H. W. Sten maintains that, "though there were no language teacher in the colleges in those years, the texts were stiff enough for one paper".⁴ However, it should be noted that there was no criticism component in the course. Had there been some critical pieces since those days, the students of Khasi literature would have developed more critical awareness of their own literature.

Up to the 1930s only a few colleges, including St. Anthony's, St. Edmund's, Lady Keane and St. Mary's were opened in Shillong. Even in these colleges, there were neither regular classes nor teachers appointed to teach Khasi. It was only after 1947 that a serious attempt was made by the College authorities to teach Khasi properly in colleges. Teachers for the subject were appointed from among the graduates and postgraduates having preference for those who were creative writers among them. In the 1960s, more colleges were opened including Shillong College, Synod College, the Union Christian College, Sankar Dev

College etc. With the progress of college education, the Khasi writers had also strived hard to develop Khasi literature, to be a subject taught at the college level where a certain standard had to be maintained.

It was only in the 1960s that the importance of Khasi literature was given due recognition by the University authorities. In 1961, Khasi was recognized as a major language by the Gauhati University which had assumed the authority of the Calcutta University in higher education in North-Eastern India. Later in 1976, it was given recognition as an Honours subject by the North Eastern Hill University. Gradually, the University opened a postgraduate department in Khasi. Now that a full fledged department with research facilities is taking care of Khasi literature, it is high time to look at the course components and the study materials which Khasi literature needs to be strengthened. Besides, since a number of scholars are registering themselves for a Ph.D Programme every year, there is an urgent need for augmenting the strength of the teaching staff in the department. While taking the present situation into account, the department and its scholars have a lot to suffer owing to shortage of teachers and lack of specialisation which are necessary in the teaching of different genres of literature, especially at the higher level. Considering the need of the situation, the department with the help of the University, it is hoped, will take appropriate steps to make its own position higher and stronger than what it is today, so as to make the students of Khasi literature in particular and the entire Khasi tribe in general realise that they are not neglected.

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 62.