



**KHASI PROVERBS:
ANALYSING THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF
SPEAKING FOLKLORE**

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An Abstract

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As a student of folklore and a Khasi native speaker I believe that there was a need for doing more research work on folklore. Having completed my M.Phil dissertation on Khasi proverbs, I realize the need of further developing my arguments in establishing the importance of proverbs as a means of folk communication. The topic chosen for my PhD is Khasi Proverbs – Analysing the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore.

Collection of data was started from December 2003 and by 20th May 2004 I had worked on the definition, concept and nature of folklore with an emphasis on the function of folklore and its impact on folk-life through observation, interview and participant observation methods in eliciting the required data. These methods have been used in collecting samples of conversation in different periods of time where people used proverbs during conversation with friends and relatives, while circulating in market places, colleges, social gatherings etc. and also from published books, newspapers and articles.

After collecting the samples I made a list of all the samples collected then according to their functions, relevance and meaning arranged and analyzed them.

In the study of Khasi folklore, proverbs have not been analytically studied and this gives scope to a tremendous area of investigation and selection of the area have to be done with proper understanding of the socio-cultural dimensions of the people and the language a dialects they are using in order to sustain this tradition. Proverbs occupy an important place in the social life of the people and some of them have found place in the different genres of creative writing.

Before studying proverbs one cannot do without a proper understanding of what folklore is. Therefore, in Chapter – I dwelt at length on the definition, concept and nature of folklore. In this chapter survey of literature, objective of the study, data collection and methodology are included. Also in this chapter I have tried to give a brief outline of the fields of folklore and folklife and the functions of folklore. For data collection I have made use of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources have been generated from surveys conducted through interview schedules and participant interaction. As part for selection of the area, the Khasi community has been taken for this study. Secondary sources have been drawn from published books, articles appearing in newspaper and magazines. A good part of the research was spent in field work in many villages of both Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the Shillong suburbs and also within the city. The study gives more emphasis in Shillong, Nongtalang, Laitlyngkot, Lyngkyrdem and Pynursla villages.

The study of the ethnography of the community where research is done is very important. Therefore, chapter – II deals mainly with the ethnography of the Khasi community. Monographic details pertaining to geographical location, cultural, religious, linguistics and social traits have been outlined and studied.

As the title of the thesis is Khasi Proverbs – Analysing the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore, Chapter – III deals with the definition and classification of proverbs. I have explained the meaning of verbal art, or oral literature and also the definition and classification given by different folklorists.

In the study of proverbs as an ethnography of speaking folklore one cannot do without text and context; and this yield many questions as to who can use proverbs, on what occasion, in what places, with whom, what channel and the relationship between speaker and addressee and many other such related questions. Therefore, in this chapter I have tried to study and analyzed the selected lines from R.S. Berry, *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen Part I and II* and other traditional proverbs.

Chapter – IV deals with evolution, currency and usage of proverbs. In this chapter proverbs that have lost many of their traditional contexts and have developed new one are studied. These proverbs are found to have circulated through contemporary times as aspects of folklore and they provide excellent examples testifying to the continuity of culture. Some evolved due to formation of new ideas, some due to new

happenings and others have been found to have originated in the written paradigm before becoming oral.

The colonial period ushered in tremendous change in Khasi society and perhaps the most important one was the exposure the community had to Christianity and the resultant system of education. Chapter – V dealt with proverbs which have evolved due to the influence of Christianity, Christian teachings and behavior. It is found that when one use some of the proverbs which originated from the Bible, one is not aware of their originality but are taken to be traditional. It is here that one finds it different to differentiate between the oral and written, the original and borrowed.

Lastly, proverbs in Khasi serves as an instrument of criticism, admonition, as moral and ethical code provider and corrective measures of interpersonal behavior. As many items of folklore are changing so also it is with proverbs as it has been observed that as old one are dying out giving way for new and modern one.