

# Literary Criticism And Bhasa Literature

*A Study with Reference to  
Khasi Literature*

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*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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### 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!*

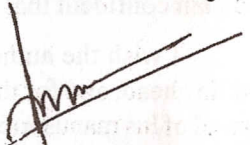
  
(Prof. I.M. Simon)  
Mawlai-Umjaiur,  
Shillong - 793 008

## 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)  
Reader  
Department of Khasi  
N.E.H.U., Shillong.

## 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 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2005.*

  
(D.R.L. Nonglalt)

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## CHAPTER VI

### Conclusion

Having discussed the Khasi oral tradition, the beginning and development of Khasi literature in its written form and also the stature of literary criticism in Khasi, it is found that Khasi literature has made rapid development in almost all important genres. Many among the Khasi writers think that Khasi literature has grown up to a mature stage, may be comparable to other major Indian literatures. It is high time that Khasi literature should no longer remain exclusive from other major Indian languages, so as to ascertain its position. It will be good also if some of the important Khasi texts are translated into English or other world languages.

Although, literary criticism in Khasi is only three and half decades old and still remains in its developing stage, however, its role in developing different forms of creative works is very significant. Obviously, there is an urgent need for the conscious Khasi writers and critics to give due attention to this new area. Creative works in Khasi literature can attain higher positions only if critical activity develops towards the standard of other important literatures of the world. Considering the role of criticism in the development of the world's famous literatures, Matthew Arnold maintains:

Of the literature of France and Germany, and of the intellect of Europe in general, the main effort, for now many years, has been a critical effort; the endeavour in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is.<sup>1</sup>

Expressing the need of critical activity in English he further says: "Almost the last thing for which one should come to English literature is just that very thing which now Europe most desires – criticism".<sup>2</sup> What Arnold had said of the need of criticism in English literature is also applicable to Khasi literature. From the discussions in the previous chapters, one may understand that literary criticism in Khasi did not develop into a serious activity between 1919 to 1960s. From 1970s onwards, various other factors including the starting of a university department and serious attempt by Khasi writers to make their literature equal in standard and depth that offered a new impetus to critical activity.

The study of western theories has proved beneficial. Besides, the development of Khasi literature was also due to the rich source of Indian cultural and literary traditions. Although Khasi has no linguistic relation with any other developed *bhasa* literature, yet as it has emerged as one of the developing modern Indian languages, it should find the right place among other *bhasa* literature. Further, since Khasi language and literature has grown up to heights as it is today, it is high time that it should be given the right direction for attaining its national recognition before growing up to the stature of world-class literature.

### References :

1. Matthew Arnold. "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" in Noel Annan, *Matthew Arnold Selected Essays*, (Oxford University Press, London, 1964), p. 12
2. *Ibid.*