

KHASI POETRY : ITS ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

By
H. Warmphaign Sten

Submitted to the North Eastern Hill University
in fulfilment of the requirement of the
Doctorate of Philosophy.

1982
Department of English
.....

OS
895.93
STE

HERO Library
Ac. No. 1.01595
Ac. by Alpha
Class. by _____
Sub. Heading by _____
Case No. _____
Transcribed by _____

I certify that the thesis entitled "Khasi Poetry -
It's Origin and Development" submitted by H. warmphaign Sten
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the North-Eastern
Hill University, Shillong, embodies the record of the
original investigation carried out by him under my supervision.
He has been duly registered and the thesis presented in worthy
of being considered for the award of the Ph.D. Degree. This
work has not been submitted for any Degree of any other
University.

Shillong
The 31st October'82

Sd/- N. HASAN
Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Khasi Literature completes 141 years this year, but no attempt has so far been made to investigate any aspect of its development. Occasional newspaper articles and radio talks both in English and Khasi have been there, but these are by definition skimpy and impressionistic. Hence the need for a systematic and serious appraisal.

There are several difficulties in tracing the origin and development of Khasi Poetry. Many are insurmountable. The Christian Missionaries who first introduced education and literature in these hills left no trace of the dates when the first editions of their books came out; and most of the time, names of authors or composers have been excluded in subsequent editions. What are the ways opened to a research scholar then? I have tried to meet such problems as this in Chapter I of Part II. Apart from these problems, materials relevant to the subject are few and far between. However, I have been able to unearth a sufficient body of evidence details of which are included in the bibliography

2

In this thesis, I have tried to show how Khasi Poetry developed from one decade to another during the first 100 years of its history. I chose this subject because Khasi literature like most literatures started with poetry. The other forms appeared much later. I must add that the thesis does not pretend to be a comprehensive history of Khasi poetry, but aims at exploring the major traditions. Many recent poets have not been discussed because these poets do not stand for a new tradition, or because what they stand for is sufficiently exemplified in the other poets I have discussed.

The history of Khasi poetry is to a great extent the history of the intellectual development of the Khasi society. Because literature is expected to reflect and interpret life, a few questions arise. Who is a Khasi? Whence did his ancestors come? Is linguistic affinity any clue? The first chapter is

devoted primarily to anthropological questions such as these.

The next problem in this study is to trace the beginnings of written poetry. So, who was the first poet in the Khasi language? How far has this literature developed over the years, and what is its general character? I have made an attempt to investigate these areas also. Efforts have also been made to approach the subject through movements, cultural and religious.

The thesis is not about the development of poetry alone. In each chapter I have tried to identify the areas of English and Biblical influences in the works of the Khasi poets, the extent and nature of such influences, and when I felt the necessity I have also examined the reasons for such influences.

31st October, 1982.

H. WARMPHAIGN STEN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was completed under the supervision of Dr. N. Hasan, Ph.D. (Manchester). I am grateful to him for his interest in my work and for all the help and encouragement that I received from him. I should also like to express my gratitude to Prof. A.G. George for his help in the initial stages of this work.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the Librarians and staff of the North-Eastern Hill University and the Regional Centre, Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Shillong for the cooperation extended to me during my research. My thanks are also due to Professor R.S. Lyngdoh who never failed to remind me of the work and who made available copies of journals and papers which I needed during the investigation; to Mr. Thomas Bareh, Mr. Treshon Warjri, Mr. Kynpham Singh and Mr. L.G. Shullai to name only a few, for helping me with the references I needed.

My thanks are due also to Mr. R.K. Bawri and Mr. B. Syiemlieh for helping me in typing the draft. My special thanks go to Mr. I.M. Simon who made available to me the list of Khasi books from the British Museum, London which has been of invaluable help to me especially in respect of the dates of publication of certain titles.

C O N T E N T S

		<u>Page</u>
	ABSTRACT	i - ii
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
	INTRODUCTION	1 - 14
	The Khasi : Some Anthropological Questions	
PART-I	THE MILIEU	
	Chapter-I The Socio-Political Background ...	15 - 32
	Chapter-II Religion and Religious Thoughts ...	33 - 48
	Chapter-III Education and Social Change ...	49 - 73
PART-II	THE ORAL TRADITION IN KHASI LITERATURE	
	Chapter-I The Oral Tradition ...	74 - 83
	Chapter-II The Character of Khasi Literature (1841-1940) ...	84 - 100
PART-III	POETRY	
	Chapter-I The Early Khasi Poetry ...	101 - 119
	Chapter-II The Poetry of John Roberts	120 - 134
	Chapter-III The Poetry of Amjad Ali ...	135 - 153
	Chapter-IV The Cultural Revival ...	154 - 167
	Chapter-V The Religious Awakening ...	168 - 189
	Chapter-VI The Awakening of Imagination	190 - 216
	Chapter-VII The Poetry of Soso Tham	217 - 254
	Chapter-VIII The Monologue	255 - 269
	CONCLUSION ...	270 - 273
	BIBLIOGRAPHY ...	275 - 278

THE KHASIS : SOME ANTHROPOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

1

Before embarking on the main inquiry, it is fitting to devote a few lines to the primary question which comes up whenever we study Khasi language and literature, that is, where did the Khasis come from?

Ethnographically, all the original inhabitants of the present Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills districts of Meghalaya are Khasis. As years rolled by, these people came to be known by the names of the regions they live in. Thus, we have the Pnars inhabiting the mainland of the Jaintia Hills district, the Khyndriams the central part of Khasi Hills, the Bhois on the north, the Lyngngams in the west, and the Wars in the south of both the Khasi and the Jaintia Hills. All are Khasis. Strictly speaking only the children of Khasi parents are Khasis, but the Khasi social custom is flexible enough to include within it children of Khasi mothers and non-Khasi fathers as Khasis, because according to the Khasi customary laws, the children belong to mothers and not to the fathers.¹ There are instances of even children of non-Khasi mothers being regarded as Khasis. People who investigated the origins of clans in Khasi Hills have said that all those clans with "Khar" as the prefix to them trace their original homes to either the Brahmaputra or the Surma valley. A.S. Khongphai gives an instance of the origin of three new Khasi clans. He took the three daughters of Mohon Diengdoh

¹AIR 1958, Assam, 128 Wilson Reade vs C.S. Booth and others.

and Pushpalata, his wife, namely Bani, Rani and Sati and writes "these daughters cannot be Khasis in their life time, not even for years to come, unless they married Khasis, lived as Khasis, followed Khasi custom ...²

For a person to be considered a Khasi presupposes the following - (1) He must marry a Khasi girl; (2) he traces his descent from his mother's side; (3) his dress be like that used by other Khasis; (4) he accepts the Khasi way of life and customs; (5) he speaks one of the Khasi dialects; (6) he embraces Khasi religion or religions professed by many Khasis, and (7) he identifies himself totally as a Khasi. There are several clans among the Khasis which have assimilated themselves to the Khasi society in this way. It is not difficult for the members of such clans to trace their origins and to tell others how their ancestors came to this land, and where their original homes were. It is the original home of the original Khasi tribe which most Khasi poets including Soso Tham, Homiwell Lyngdoh and Primrose Gatphoh, have exercised their imaginations upon.

2

These hills are not the original homes of the Khasis. Every Khasi tells that his ancestors came from some other land where they lived for generations in a sort of a paradise. Khasi poets speak of the Sottijuk or golden age. This was and is used when a Khasi divine speaks or prays to God. Homiwell Lyngdoh wrote that the fore-parents of the Khasis reached these hills

²Principles of Khasi Laws (1974), p. 10.

through Nowgong, Luming and Haflong "which lie beyond the Kupli river."³

If Khasi language and culture have any similarity to those of the people in the eastern part of Assam, a conclusion can be drawn that those and the Khasis belonged to the same race, but the difference between them does not warrant such conclusion. The Khasis first settled in Jaintia Hills and in course of time many of them moved westward to the present Khasi Hills. In Jaintia Hills, elderly persons and divines speak of "Sohphoh Lynrum" as their homeland. "Sohphoh" means Khasi pears, while "Lynrum" ramshackle. Literally the phrase means that in that original home there grew plenty of Khasi pears or pynus granulata. This name is more symbolic than literal. It stands for a group of families that lived together in the same land till they multiplied and spread to other parts of the world, and the Khasi tribe is but one of those symbolic pears from the same tree. The extensive use of symbols in Khasi folk songs and speeches lends credence to this postulation. Primrose Gatphoh refers to this place in "U Sier Lapalang" when he sings of the attempt of that allegorical stag to trace the original home of the Khasis: "And thence he followed to Sohphoh Lynrum/Mark trace which is clear and great in numbers."⁴

Poet Soso Tham devotes one whole poem "Ka Meirilung" to anthropological questions. He seems to have gone through the

³"Jinglamphrang", Ka Niam Khasi (1937 end d. 1970), p. 11.

⁴U Sier Lapalang, st. ix.

Darwinian theory of the descent of man from an ape when he asks whether the ancestors of the Khasi race came from the dens of tigers or bears or any other animal. Other questions he poses in the poem are: Were the ancestors savages? Were they man-eaters? Tham reflects on the ancient culture and political system, the erecting of memorial stones, the construction of meeting and resting places, the digging of lakes and ponds and concludes that they must have come over here from some civilized area.

That homeland is spoken of as lying far away from these hills. It took the Khasi ancestors twelve years to reach here. This calculation of the length of the journey is recorded by Soso Tham who enquires:

And ye, o babes of morning bright,
Ye kites, ye crows, here throw some light.
While fast you fly around the earth,
Where can be our first home and hearth?
If I can fly as fast as ye,
From here upto twelve years' journey.⁵

Where could that home be? Could it be somewhere near Cambodia or Siam? Those states lie far east of the Khasiland. P.R.T. Gurdon maintained that the people came "from the east and not from the west".⁶ It is yet to be examined by experience whether or not it took people twelve years to travel from Cambodia to Kupli in those days. The significance of the phrase "Sohphoh Lynrum" deserves further inquiry. Most western scholars agree that their ancestors were the Aryans. If the Aryans were to be regarded as the fore-parents of the Khasis too, the names

⁵"Ka Meirilung", st. 1 "Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep" (1936).

⁶The Khasis, (1904), p.4.

of seven Aryan branches corresponded well to the "Hynniew Trep" or seven Huts of the Khasis. These branches were (1) the Indians, (2) the Persians, (3) the Slavs, (4) the Teutons, (5) the Greeks, (6) the Kelts and (7) the Romans. These branches lived in the southern steppes of Russia before they moved to different parts of the world. In their movement, the Indians, and Persians moved eastward.⁷ Could the Khasi tribe be a sub-branch of either the Indians or the Persians? The old Persian coins discovered some 15 years ago. in Jowai lend credence to the social intercourse between the Persians and the Khasis, but the history of Money tells us that coins replaced barter system at a much later date than the history of the tribe. The Aryans themselves came to India around 2000 B.C.⁸ They could not therefore be the forefathers of the Khasis.

Homwell Lyngdoh strongly refutes any attempt to regard the Khasis as one of the Aryan branches of people because the appearance, the language and the religious practices of the Khasis do not support such argument. Moreover he claims that the Khasis were older than the Aryans in age and that they were found in the Punjab, in South America and even in New Zealand.⁹ Lyngdoh draws his conclusion from such books as the Hindu Exogamy (1929) by Karandikar and the Bhagabat which referred to the Khasis as the people of ancient India.

⁷L.P. Smith, English Language (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp.66-67.

⁸R.C. Majumdar, Ancient India (Calcutta 1964), pp.29, 119.

⁹Ka Niam Khasi, pp. xvii-xix.

There is, however, no conclusive proof of this. R.C. Majumdar referred to the Khasi warriors as one of the "famous Tribes" in ancient India; the other tribes were the Abhiras, Mallas, Andhras, Vaidehas, and Megadhas. Recording one event about the Khasis, he writes to say that in 1287 the Khasias invaded Nepal from the east and devastated the country.¹⁰

To the east of Nepal lie the modern Sikkim, Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland and Meghalaya. This view corroborates the myth that the Khasis were once warriors who subdued many kingdoms, but it does not offer a clue to the original homes of the Khasis. Majumdar has nowhere mentioned whether the Khasis occupied all the Hills east of Nepal or that they made their way there through Kamarupa. The question is an open one.

3

P.R.T. Gurdon and Peter Schmidt who have attempted tracing the family to which the Khasi language belongs assert that it is a branch of the Mon-Khmer group of language. E. Kunt, who has made a comparative study of the Khasi and Mon-Khmer languages, finds many words in them which carry the same meaning. In his Beitrag zur Sprachenkunde Hinterindiens (1889) he selects many such words in support of his findings.¹¹ The following table of similar words provides interesting information:

¹⁰Majumdar, op cit., p.353.

¹¹Reported by Gurdon in his The Khasis, p. 201.

English	Khasi	Mon	Khmer	Palaung
year	snem	snam	-	-
lightning	leilih	l'li	-	-
stone	maw	k'maw		maw
water	un	-		em
pond	pung	-	ping	-
rice	khaw	-	-	sekao
dog	ksew	-	-	hsao
tiger	khla	-	kla	-
bird	(ka) sim	katsim	-	hsim
crab	(ka) tham	-	ktam	-
woman	briew	brou	-	-
child	khun	-	kun	-
eye	khmat, mat	mat	-	-
hand	kti, ti	-	te	-

It is interesting to note that Palaung "sekao" and "hsao" are similar to the sounds in Jaintia "sakho" and "ksaw", respectively, also "em" to "am" as spoken by the War-Jaintias. In the above fourteen words, the tally of similarity between Khasi and Mon is six, Khasi-Khmer five, Khasi-Palaung five. If more words than those are similar in sound and meaning the findings of Kunt should satisfy a scholar at least about the origin of the Khasi language. But there is an interesting similarity between Khasi and Burmese too. The use of "U" for male is found in both the languages e.g. U Nu, U Thant (Burmese) and U No, U Tan (Khasi), Eeng (Burmese) and Iing (Khasi). This was the influence of Burmese when the Khasis sojourned in their land on the way back to their lost paradise on earth. In the use of morpheme "la" to indicate action in the past time the language bears some similarity with the morpheme "le" in Nepali.¹²

¹²It is perhaps by co-incidence, but a comparative study of the sentence structure of the two languages by competent linguists may reveal an interesting result.

One may hazard saying that when the Khasis were defeated in wars, they were driven eastward till they mixed with the people of Cambodia and Siam. It was in their effort to return to their paradise that they trekked backward and finally reached the present hill fastnesses. A Khasi still laments the loss of that paradise on earth in his songs and prayers.

The paradise of which the Khasis speak has been spoken of as never again to be witnessed on this earth. The fore-fathers of the British also spoke of such a paradise which they believed to be somewhere in central Asia in which their ancestors dwelt five or six thousand years ago "in pastoral and poetic simplicity and plenty."¹³ Coincidentally, such was the nature of the original homeland of the Khasis as sung by the poets. There are differences too. The Khasis speak of that golden age as the age of righteousness, when God spoke directly to man as he spoke to the Jewish patriarchs like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets. More than that, the members of both the animal and the plant kingdoms were able to speak to man in the same language. The bull, the raven, and the bird could converse with man even as the serpent spoke to Eve, and God in the garden of Eden; and as a donkey spoke to prophet Balaam,¹⁴ and that too in one language understood by the whole world. Such is the traditional account of the world of the Khasis when it was young. If we accept the Bible as both historical record and an infallible word of God, we have in it the time when the world was divided into nations and tongues. That was 4226 years ago.¹⁵

¹³Smith, op cit.

¹⁴"Numbers" ch. 22, English Bible.

¹⁵"Genesis" ch. 11, English Bible.

The above account corresponds well with the oral tradition of the Khasis as handed from one generation to another down to the present time. It also meets the contention of Homiwell Lyngdoh that the Khasis have been on this earth over 4000 years ago.

The quest will however be incomplete without examining two popular legends of the Khasis.

4

Two legends are associated with the origin of the Khasis; one of which is repeated more to God in prayer and sacrifice than to man.

The legend says, in the beginning God created sixteen families in heaven. These, were allowed to come down to this earth to cultivate every day and to return to heaven at night when the day's work was over. They climbed up and down according to timing appointed by the Creator through a bridge on top of the Sohpetbneng peak joining heaven and earth. In course of time, seven of these families sinned against God and cut the bridge down to ensure that they did not see his face any more. Ever since that day, man was subjected to pain and death. The cause of the fall was U Ksuid or the Tempter who took the form of a Raven to tempt God's ambassador, the bull, to deliver a perverted message to man. The message God commanded for delivery was to tell mankind to boil for his meal only a handful of rice in the morning and a handful in the evening, and to live healthily and long. The bull forgot the text of the message and delivered that of U Ksuid and asked man to boil one seer of rice in the morning and one seer in the

evening, to suffer and eventually die. Man did so. As time passed, God saw all that had happened to man and took his ambassador to task. He took his golden rod and knocked down all the teeth of the bull in the upper jaw, and also struck him on the right side. The bull lost his upper teeth, and bore the empty space on his side since then. God in his royal anger called for the Raven, and dyed her feathers with a soot from an earthen pot. Since that time all ravens in Khasiland wear black feathers. Most Khasi children till this day utter a triplet condemning the Raven.*

Most Khasis believe that they are descendants of the Seven Huts. Homiwell Lyngdoh has examined the possibility of linking the "Seven" with the seven ancient Indian Rishis. He referred to those as Visvamisra, Jamadagni, Bharadvaja, Gautama, Atri, Vasisthala and Kasyapa. Though "Kasyapa" sounds like "the father of the Khasis" no proof of the assumption is available. Indian literatures do not lend any clue to it. Moreover, those were the Aryan Rishis (wisemen).¹⁶ Because of practical difficulties perhaps, Soso Tham regarded the seven huts as mere symbol or "pharshi syllok"¹⁷ which could not be taken as proof of the origin of the tribe.

Another legend speaks of a great flood in the world as the cause of the arrival of the Khasis to their present homeland.

Gurdon writes:

*Ka tyngab ka thok i'u Blei
Ka shah tah du khiew ranei
Peit ka iong kumtei!

¹⁶Ka Niam Khasi, p. xx

¹⁷"Ki Symboh Ksiar", Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep.

It was on the occasion of this great flood, the legend runs, that the Khasi lost the art of writing, vis-a-vis his book whilst he was swimming at the time of this flood, whereas the Bengali managed to preserve his.¹⁸

The account points out north as the direction from which the Khasis migrated into these hills. The very reference to a Bengali in the passage indicates that the flood mentioned to Gurdon by a storyteller was of a recent origin. The legendary flood spoken of by the Khasis was far older in time than that one. An opinion may be formed that this great flood occurred some 6000 years ago, that is, before the Aryans spread to other parts of the world.

The two legends referred to above, call for a close examination. The first speaks of the ancestors of the Khasis as coming from above (na sha jrong), meaning heaven; the second one associates the arrival of the Khasis with the flood. Which "heaven" and which "flood" were these?

The popular idea of "heaven" was where the hills and the sky seem to meet in the horizon. So the peaks and mountains could as well be heaven for the purpose of this legend. A Khasi who is not so much influenced by education still speaks of the moon, stars, and the sun as having been fixed by the Creator in heaven. In this context the Makashang (Himalayas) could be regarded as the heaven; mount Ararat also a heaven. The original home of the Khasis which was heaven or sha jrong to them is therefore the high mountains. It might be the Himalayas, the Armenian range, Kashmir, Russia or Central Asia. Wherever that place was, one thing should not be lost sight of. The Khasis speak of this world as Ka lingbasa or an Inn to

¹⁸P.R.T. Gurdon, The Khasis, p. 10.

live in for a while. They believe that their eternal home lies somewhere beyond the blue. They call it Ka Iing U Blei which means exactly the Kuriakon of the Greek, the Lord's House. There are indeed certain similarities between the ancient Greek and the Khasis. Both believed in the divine origin of the soul, and that when the man accomplishes his duty on earth he dies, but his soul is immortal and returns to God. Thus they speak of a righteous and upright man; but the soul of the sinner goes to hell. Hell also has as many as nine floors; the worst sinner reaches the ninth floor or circle below.¹⁹ Like the Greeks who believed in the existence of the Supreme Zeus,²⁰ the Khasis too believe that above all deities they worship in their respective villages, U Blei Nongthaw or God the creator reigns supreme.

The Greeks believed in sign from God, as Priam in Book XIV of Iliad believes the Eagle to be a sign from God; the Khasis read the signs in all objects-- including lime container and the intestines of the fowl. Both the Greeks and the Khasis burnt their dead and did not leave it to decay openly for that is a crime. Priam seeks the dead body of Hector to be disposed of according to the Grecian customs, Antigone defies the order of Creon, the Theban King, and ceremoniously disposes of her brother's dead body.

Politically also, there were times in Greece when the people elected their kings as the Khasis elected their rulers from time immemorial. In the heroic ages the Greek king exercised his royalty 'over willing subjects', and himself was both 'a general

¹⁹Sib Charan Roy, Ka Niam-Ki-Khasi (1919, 3rd ed. 1966), p. 10.

²⁰Cf. Homer, Iliad.

and a judge, and had control over religion'.²¹ For all this similarity of beliefs and practices, however, the Greeks and the Khasis are two unmistakably different races.

I therefore propose to return to the seven families which the Khasis regard as their ancestors who first came to the Khasi world. It was possible that they speak of that part of the world which has both day and night in one diurnal revolution of the earth. The main clue is the flood. The greatest flood ever recorded in any book occurred in the time of Noah, in 2349 B.C. It took waters nearly one year to recede to the seas. The belief in 'pastoral and poetic simplicity and plenty' in which the seven huts lived could be supported by the profession of Noah after the flood. Noah "began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard" recorded Moses.²² Though there were three pairs of persons taken by Noah into the Ark, there were not seven families which escaped death. The Bible tells us that all the four families lived in peace because God blessed them and spoke to them directly as there was not any body else through whom he spoke. As years rolled by, the top of Ararat could be the heaven referred to by the Khasis. The seven families were the grand children of Noah from Japhet. They were Gomer, Magog, Midai, Javan, Tubal. Meshech and Tiras. They were seven, and were born after the flood, about 1998 B.C. Incidentally, there is little account of the grand children of Japhet in the Bible, though it records the activities of those who

²¹ Aristotle, Politics, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Carlton House, n.d), p. 158.

²² "Genesis", 4: 1-20.

lived in the west namely the children of Shem and of Ham. The Bible also speaks of Japhet's children as the fathers of the gentiles:

By these were the isles of the gentiles divided in their land; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.²³

It is not impossible also to think that the Rajput kings descended from Japhet, and through a process of evolution and corruption Japhet became 'Rajput' simply; and Gomer Khmer. The 'Sohphoh Lynrum' which has been considered to be a symbolic phrase stands for the seven sons of Japhet and their descendants. That original home is, therefore, in the Central Asia, from which the children of Japhet moved eastward, leaving no other record about their abode except that they are said to have lived in the 'isles' beyond the sea.²⁴

When the eastern plains were under water for long, the hills running from Garo Hills to Burma and as far away as Cambodia and Siam could appear as islands. In their search for fortune the first Khasis moved from place to place, and finally reached their final abode. In any case, they have been here all this time.

²³Ibid., 10:5

²⁴"Jeremiah" 25: 22, cf. 'Psalms' 72:10.

PART I : THE MILIEU

CHAPTER - I

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

1

In this chapter we shall look at the sociological contexts of Khasi literature. Much of the information about the early stages of Khasi literature has to be derived from the records left by the British and other foreign writers. The land was ruled by the traditional rulers known as syiem, lyngdoh and sordar who enjoyed complete independence in their respective states or hima. Jaintia Hills was ruled by a powerful Syiem.

The Khasis came in contact with the British when the erstwhile East India Company expanded its business in the Indian sub-continent and annexed Bengal and Assam one after the other. This company had a free hand in its own affairs in this part of the world because the British Government was not, then, interested in political expansion or in protecting the company's trade in India. The "Company had therefore to defend its factories with sepoy's on its own pay. At first the "Company was wisely careful to avoid quarrels with Indian princes, and had no territorial ambition."¹

¹G.M. Trevelyan, English Social History (Bombay: Orient Longmans Limited, rpt. 1968), pp. 215-216. The Company was incorporated in 1600 with the "power of legislation among its own servants overseas, and by implication the power of making peace and war beyond the Cape of Good Hope." Robert B. Eckles and Richard W. Hale in their Britain : Her Peoples and the Commonwealth (1954) write that the Company lost control over its own soldiers in 1870, and deprived "of all power to rule... Eventually, the Company wound up its business and in 1874 was, dissolved."

101595



The first territory "traversed by an official of the company" was Jaintia Hills. That was in 1824 when David Scott "entered into an agreement with the Jaintia Raja" to the effect of permitting the company's forces to march from Sylhet to Burma through the Jaintia Hills.² The careful nature of the Company's dealings with the local rulers continued for a few years and in 1826 when Scott met Tirot Singh, Syiem of the Nongkhlaw state, the latter agreed to permit Scott "to rent some land in the Brahmaputra valley." Allen writes and adds:

This chief induced the inhabitants of the states to authorise the construction of a road across the hills. Bungalows were erected at Nongkhlao, the work was pushed on under the supervision of Lieutenants Bedingfield and Burlton, and for a time nothing could exceed the harmony of the relations between the Khasis and their visitors. The savage is however, alike treacherous and suspicious, and a chance remark let fall by a chaprasi, threatening the hillmen with taxation,³ is said to have been the spark that fired the mine.

The "spark" Allen refers to was the Anglo-Khasi war which started in 1829 and lasted till 1833. Allen records: "It was impossible for a people, divided as they were, to offer any serious opposition to our troops, and in January 1833 the last of the important seims, Teerut Singh, tendered his submission."⁴ These incidents have been reflected in a play, U Tirot Singh by Victor G. Bareh, and in various poems by modern poets. But both the dramatist and the poets use their imagination so much that they

²B.C. Allen, Gazetteer of the Khasi & Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, Lushai Hills (1905), p.42.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., pp.43-44.

Jaintia Hills was annexed by the British only in 1835.

present Tirot Singh as a symbol of patriotism rather than a concrete historical personality. They take liberty with the facts when they raise the position of Monbhut from chaprasi into myntri, as Bareh and Dlosingh Lyngdoh do.

In this chapter, I propose to record only some important events during 1841-1940 that contribute to the understanding of the literature of the period.

The important centre of foreign activities in these hills was Sohra (Cherrapunji). The Company had its office and military establishment there, and such being its position, Sohra became also the birth-place of Khasi literature. By 1841, the rulers of the Khasi principalities were peaceful; but the people of Jaintia Hills rebelled against the Company in 1860-61 on the house-tax issue. The Anglo-Jaintia War prompted the crown to take over⁵ the administration of the Khasi and Jaintia affairs from the Company in 1858. On the 23rd January 1862 the Jaintias rebelled again, "and it was not till November 1863 that the last of the insurgents had surrendered."⁶ Ever since then, none of the rulers disturbed the administration in these hills. These events too have been reflected in the literature of this century.

Sohra was not a convenient place for the Government to house its various offices. In June 1864 it decided to shift the district headquarters to Shillong. The shifting of offices which

⁵By virtue of the Proclamation of Queen Victoria in November 1858.

⁶Allen, op. cit., p.53

was started in 1866 was completed by 1867. Jeebon Roy⁷ who was associated with the process of shifting wrote this:

Following the Jaintia War, the English Government felt that the headquarters should be shifted to a more central place, equidistant north, south, east and west; and another reason was because of the excessive rainfall in Cherrapunjee.⁸

The shifting of the headquarters told heavily upon the economic life of the Sohra area, and the sentiments of the people living in the area were summed up by way of allusion eighty years later by Soso Tham who queried: 'Shisien ka long ka Persyntiew/Hadien balei ki kiar ki briew.'⁹ D. Ropmay observed that the shifting of the headquarters made Shillong "a dirty place of all kinds of people where drink and gambling were the chief evils."¹⁰ This decision was followed by another. In 1874 the Government created a new province, namely, the Assam and East Bengal Province, and Shillong became the capital of the province.

By this time, the following villages in the Khasi Hills were brought under the direct control of the British Government, and were regarded as the "British Areas": Byrong, Jyrngam, Laitkroh, Laitlyngkot, Lyngkading, Mawbeh, Larkhar, Mawmluh,

⁷Jeebon Roy (1838-1903) was the first Khasi to start his career as Interpreter and ended it as magistrate. He was an influential native and had played an important role in the development of Khasi language and literature.

⁸"Ka Ri Khasi bad Synteng" (1899 trans. by K. Singh) Cf. A Collection of Writings (1979), p. xxi.

⁹"U Lyoh", Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep (1936), 11. 3-4. "When once it was a Paradise, /Why all men shun it in this wise."

¹⁰CHBP (2nd Ed. 1975), p. 25.

Mawpynkyrtiang, Mawthang, Sohkyllung, Marbisu, Myrdon, Mynteng, Nongbah, Nongjri, Nongkroh, Nonglait, Nonglang, Nonglyngkien, Nongpoh, Nongriangsi, Nongriat, Nongshluit, Nongthymmai, Ramdait, Saitsohpen, Sinai, Sinai Mawshynrut, Sohbar, Tmar, Tynring, Tynrong, Tyrna and Umniuh.¹¹

The powers of the Khasi rulers had been curtailed gradually, Kynpham Singh writes that by 1867 a general form of agreement was prescribed, and the opportunity was taken to insert a clause whereby the British "created rights for themselves over mineral and waste-land." The status of the Chiefs was further lowered by subjecting them to the "orders and control of the Deputy Commissioner" of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.¹² This was recorded by B.C. Allen as well. He wrote:

The rulers of the petty states in the Khasi Hills are empowered to try criminal cases in which only their subjects are concerned, and which are not punishable under the Indian Penal Code with imprisonment for five years or some severer penalty. All other cases are referred to the Deputy Commissioner.¹³

The Deputy Commissioner was given powers to award severer penalty, but "capital sentences and sentences for a term of seven years' imprisonment and upwards required however, the confirmation of the Chief Commissioner."¹⁴

¹¹ A Collection of Writings (1978), p. xiv.

¹² B.C. Allen, Gazetteer of the Khasi & Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, Lushai Hills (1905 rpt. 1980) p. 100.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Before coming to the later developments, it would perhaps be proper to place on record the events in the Nongkhlaw and the Sohra states which figured prominently in the press of the period.

The Sohra state was ruled for a long time by Ram Singh. He passed away on the 3rd April 1875. The myntris and the elders of the state chose Bor Singh to be their next ruler; but as Sib Charan Roy records "when Bor Singh refused to renounce Christianity, the twelve clans and the elders elected Hajon Manik as the Syiem."¹⁵ According to the practice in most Khasi states, a Christian could not become Syiem as the office required the syiem to perform sacrifices whenever necessary. The syiems had a three-fold function like the old Druids of England: to rule, to judge and to perform religious duties. The account of Sib Charan Roy was corroborated by D. Ropmay in 1940.¹⁶ The rejection of the highest office of the Sohra state by Bor Singh worried the Christian missionaries greatly. Hugh Roberts, Thomas Jerman Jones and John Roberts conferred with Bor Singh and even asked him to revise his opinion and to consider the loss he would suffer personally by rejecting the office. Because of the popularity of Bor Singh and his rejection of the high office, it took the missionaries one year to admit him into full Church membership.

One year later, a section of the people of Nongkhlaw were working actively to replace Kine Singh in the office of the Syiem

¹⁵U Nongphira, November 1903, p.40.

¹⁶Ka Centenary History ka Balang Presbyterian (1941), p.27.

on the ground that he embraced Christianity like Bor Singh. The Reverend Griffith Hughes was worried about it, and held several discussions with him about the possible loss he would suffer by becoming a Christian. The reply the syiem gave was that he could never sacrifice "the Kingdom of heaven for the Nongkhlaw state."¹⁷

A pertinent question a critic would ask is: why did the missionaries worry so much about the conversion of a ruler into Christianity when their mission was to win more souls to their religion? Available records fail to offer an answer, and the question remains open. Normally, the rulers of bigger states like the Sohra, Myllem, Khyrim, Nongkhlaw and Nongstoin were powerful, and the conversion of rulers could have been welcomed because native converts would be assured of protection from persecution at homes which was a regular feature in those days.¹⁸ The main reason was the fear of the missionaries lest a civil war break out among the Khasis themselves over the conversion of their rulers. Indeed the situation in the Nongkhlaw state was tense for some months till a referendum decided that a Christian also could hold the office of the Syiem.

Another political event which engaged the minds of the Government, the Church and the leaders of public opinion was the civil war of Sohra in which many people sustained injuries, and a few lost their lives. It was the last civil war among the Khasis.

¹⁷G. Angell Jones, Ka History Ka Balang Presbyterian, (1966), p.15.

¹⁸Religious persecution was alluded to in the poetry of Jones.

It bred hatred in the whole state which developed also into a religious hatred because the Presbyterians and the Catholics took sides in the internal affairs of the state. The flare-up originated in the method of electing the successor to Hajon Manik in the office of the syiem of the state. Hajon Manik passed away on the 24th May 1901. There were only two contestants, Chandra Singh and Roba Singh who belonged to the same ruling clan. The war started immediately after the government appointed Roba Singh Acting Syiem. The method was criticised by a section of the people, as according to ancient practice, the syiem was to be elected by the myntris. Among those who criticised the people of Sohra for their division was a poet, Nelson Dkhar, who mourned in "A! Shnong Sohra" (O! Sohra Village):

They came to one durbar and pleaded one-sided,
 They came to another but were divided;
 Their syiem they failed to elect, others gave them one
 And indirectly took their fees for th' action.

(translated).

Upon a complaint lodged by the supporters of Chandra Sing, Henry Cotton, the Chief Commissioner, ordered the dismissal of Roba Singh and the holding of election. The Catholic missionaries supported Chandra Sing while the Presbyterian missionaries led by John Roberts sided with Roba Singh who won the support of the majority of people. The argument of Chandra Sing that the syiem should be elected by an electoral college composing of 12 myntries and 41 representative elders was later found correct by A.N. Dentith,

¹⁹C. Becker, History of the Catholic Mission in North-East India (trans. G. Stadler and S. Karotemprel, 1980), "Discord and quarrels arose among the inhabitants and developed into revolt and clashes. Several people fell victim to these troubles ... the missionary and the Catholics were on the side of the legitimate successor who however, was defeated", p.204.

the new Deputy Commissioner who on the 14th February 1919 ordered that the Syiem would not be elected by the people as was done in the election of Roba Sing. By this order the electoral rights of the people were restored. With the exception of this bitter event, the land was peaceful.

3

The years 1913 to 1940 saw a vigorous movement in India for getting what was popularly known as Home Rule. But public opinion in the Khasiland was not ripe yet for independence of any nature. There were reasons for their keeping almost silent for many years. There were people among the Khasis who held the view that any reform in the constitution of India should not affect them because, they believed, as Sib Charan Roy did that,

It was improper and wrong for us the citizens of the Khasi states to demand for Home Rule from others when we have our own powers from time immemorial till today. . . . And if on the contrary we go and demand from the Government or from the Governor General of India to get the Home Rule, it means that we sell ourselves to become British raj or areas like the Jaintia Land.²⁰

From this opinion which was expressed in 1931 it is clear that the Khasi leaders were divided on the national issue.

The Khasis felt involved directly in the national affairs during the first World War which broke in 1914. The tact with which Lord Hardinge handled the Indian problem yielded dividend for the Crown. The whole country stood by England at the time of crisis. Even Mohondas Karamchand Gandhi supported the Government whole-heartedly:

²⁰U Nongpynim, September 1931, pp.3-8.

So far as help by Indians was concerned, only men like Mahatma Gandhi might have assisted in the war on moral basis for altruistic ends. The general body of Indians gave the unexpected in the war efforts with a view to be awarded in the form of political advancement, if not emancipation.²¹

Though other Indians fought in the war as early as 1915, the Khasis were involved only by the end of 1916 when they knew that the Imperial government decided to raise 2000 young men from their land. The response was encouraging; 700 came out from the Jaintia Hills alone. In April 1917 a batch of 1000 strong left Shillong for Mesopotamia,²² among whom was Primrose Garfield Gatphoh, a young man who would later distinguish himself as a prominent Khasi poet and prose writer. Gatphoh recalls this in three chapters of his Ki Umjer Ksiar (1941) in which he gives an account of his experiences in the war service. While the war²³ was escalating, negotiations among Indian leaders to steer the Home Rule movement went on.

In the mean time, the Government of India Act, 1919 came into force to provide for increasing the association of the Indians in the Indian administration, and "for gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realisation

²¹R.N. Aggarwala, National Movement and Constitutional Development of India, (Delhi: Metropolitan Book Co (P) Ltd. rev. ed. 1969, pp.70-71.

²²G. Angell Jones, Ka History Jong Ka Balang (Shillong: Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod, 1966), p.182.

²³The war had an adverse effect on the Catholic Mission in the Hills as all came from countries at war with Britain. The missionaries left Shillong on the 9th July 1915.

of responsible government in British India as an integral part of the Empire."²⁴ Though Assam had five representatives in the Central Legislative Assembly, no Khasi leader was included in it. It was only when the dyarchy was introduced in Assam on the 1st April 1921 that the Khasis in the British areas felt involved directly in the national political life. The first election in these hills under the Act of 1919 was held in 1921, and only one representative was allotted for the whole district. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy won the election²⁵ to the Legislative Council of the Governor.

Along with the constitutional change in the province, the Imperial government extended several Acts to the British areas of the district, and the steps it took exposed the urban people to a new form of administration. Of those Acts applied in these hills mention may be made of the Indian Electricity Act, 1910 (September 1922),²⁶ the Indian Income Tax Act, 1922 (September 1923) and the Indian Motor Vehicles Act, 1914 (November 1928). The dates of application indicate the change in the social life of the Khasis. An Act which elderly people still remember was the Bengal Municipal Act, 1884 which was extended to Shillong in 1921 for the smooth

²⁴ "Preamble" of the Government of India Act, 1919.

²⁵ Radhon Singh Lyngdoh Nongbri, "Government and Politics in Meghalaya", diss. G.U. 1975, pp. 93-94. Though the Bill was passed by the House, the Governor gave his assent to it only in 1927 when Nichols-Roy pressed for that before he joined the Ministry.

²⁶ Figures within parentheses indicate the years of application. It was a substitute for the Bengal Municipal Act, 1876, which was extended to Shillong in 1913, vide Notification No. 3163 dt. 17.9.1913.

administration of Shillong. Prior to this year the government nominated well-known personalities including officials to the Board.²⁷ The process of nomination continued for several years afterward; but in this year, Shillong witnessed the first election to the Shillong Municipal Board also. Ever since then, election became part of the rate-payers' life from time to time. Excepting that exigencies and public opinion demanded otherwise, elections to the Board were held every three years. The year 1921 could, therefore, be regarded as the beginning of modern democracy in these hills.

Because the Indian leaders were not satisfied with the reforms as embodied in the 1919 Act, the Imperial Government appointed a commission to study the demands. Sir John Simon was the Chairman of the new commission. National leaders resented the exclusion of Indians from the Commission. Some members of the Commission reached Shillong in 1919, and various views were expressed before it, but those could be summed up into two: the one which favoured reform and the other which was against any reform in the Khasi Hills. The debate over the future of these hills continued for years.

Three years before the Commission reached Shillong, another election was held. This time, the name of Macdonald Kongor appeared prominently along with that of Sibnath Datta, a Bengali because they contested for the lone seat, but Nichols-Roy was again elected.

²⁷C. Becker, History of the Catholic Missions in North-East India (Trans. G. Stadler and S. Karotempel, 1980), p.173.

One interesting point to note here was the fact that prominent Assamese leaders of the period did not want the hill areas to be part of, or included in, Assam. Kanak Lal Barua, for instance, pleaded before the Commission that the hills areas "should be administered by the Governor acting as Agent to the Governor General in Council and the cost of administration should be borne by the Central Government." One prominent Bengali leader, Promode Dutta who was not constant in his views, also subscribed to this view. It may be noted here that while the Congress boycotted the Simon Commission, J. J. M. Nichols-Roy did participate in the deposition before it. The Commission submitted its report in 1930, and on its recommendations, the future of these hills till 1948 was almost uncertain. But it formed the basis for another legislation, the Government of India Act, 1935.

The Act came into force immediately, but it was extended into the Provinces, including Assam only on the 1st April 1937, the year which witnessed a political awareness among the Khasis. In 1936 preparation for the election was made briskly in Assam. In August and in December of the same year, leaders of public opinion in the British areas of both Khasi and Jaintia Hills presented a 'Memorial' to the Secretary of State for India protesting against the proposed inclusion of their areas within the new reforms, because they feared that they would lose their "customary individual and communal rights to private and common lands."²⁸ The memorial was forwarded to the Government of India only on the 8th February 1937 for the views of both Assam and India. The then

²⁸Para 2 of the 'Memorial' dated the 18th August, and 28th December 1936.

Divisional Commissioner, Mr. G.D. Walker, however, perceived clearly the existence of what he dubbed as "a vocal few" who were in favour of the Reforms. And he was right, for, on the 28th November 1936 some leaders in the Khasi Hills moved a petition to the Governor pleading that direction be issued to the Returning Officer of the Shillong General Urban Constituency to debar persons from the non-British areas to contest in the elections to the provincial Assembly. They claimed further that they had men fit enough to represent them in the Council. The 'Memorial' was signed by Kanonoy Roy and Holipshon Roy of the Nongjri village in the border area. There was, therefore, a clear lack of aims and purposes in the political and social leadership of the period. Otherwise, as the above facts show, the hill areas of Assam would have become a separate province under the new reforms.

The Imperial Government appeared to be somewhat worried about the peculiar position of the Khasi states that a small district like the Khasi Hills had both government areas and traditional republics. Before the passing of the Government of India Act 1935 three Viceroys visited Shillong. Lord Chelmsford visited it on the 30th October 1920; Lord Reading on the 4th January 1926. Each was received by the leaders of the British areas as well as by the Syiems. Each time, the natives reminded the government of the position of these hills. Indeed, they were very careful to demand that any new reforms should not be allowed to affect them. The visit which inspired literary personalities was that of Earl Willingdon (decorated with P.C., GMSI, GCM, OBE) on the 3rd October 1933. His reply to the reception accorded him was reproduced by local periodicals. Among other things, he said:

There is no place within our Indian Empire where wider diversity is found in the uplands of Assam, where the Siems and princely houses of the Khasis represents, perhaps the oldest, and certainly one of the most interesting of the ancient tribal migrations. It is a proof of the stamina and virility and competence of your people that, when greater empires in the East and West have throughout the ages come and gone, you still maintain in your pleasant hills the freedom of your small Republics, based on the ancient ways and tenets of your race.

Though the reply was aimed at pleasing or taming the syiems it was one of the ideas which moved Soso Tham to sing about the ancient days of the Khasis in his Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep. In an introductory note he writes: "When I study his words critically, I feel that the land shall flourish once more if we are brave, manly and skillful like the ancient. ..." Tham's alludes to this when he opens "Ki Symboh Ksiar" with "Around the world for light we swing;/Of native light we know nothing". He returns to the event in other stanzas as well, and the yearning for the past is clear in this complet also; "And once again the woods shall wake/Again the rocks their silence break."

The people saw Assam's promotion from the Chief Commissioner's province to that of the Lt. Governor and finally to the Governor's province during these years; but because of the lack of the sense of direction and united effort, the Government proceeded with the reform measures. The first election after the application of the 1935 Act was held in 1937. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills District was divided into three constituencies, one for women, two for men. The Reverend J.J.M. Nichols-Roy was elected from the Shillong Urban Constituency, the Reverend Lowell

Gatphoh from Jowai, while Miss Mavis Dunn from the women constituency. The election was confined only to the British areas. These three representatives, it was found, were not united in their political approach. While Nichols-Roy was once convinced that the hills should be kept outside Assam and advocated for that within and without the Assembly,²⁹ Lowell Gatphoh pleaded in the Assembly itself for the inclusion of the district within Assam.

The traditional rulers too organised themselves into a federation, known as the Federation of the Khasi States with the help of leading personalities of the period. The fate of the Khasi states hung in the balance with a lot of confusion and discontent.

In the mean time, the World War II broke out in 1939. The Congress ministries in India, including Assam resigned. The Premier of Assam in that year was Gopinath Bordoloi. With the event, Nichols-Roy also ceased to be minister. He left India for the States only to return after the war. A large number of people from these hills volunteered to help in whatever capacities they could in the war. One reason for the positive response to the war from this region was the fact that Japan joined it against the British Allies and bombed Manipur and Naga Hills. The Government found it difficult to deploy such a large number of volunteers immediately because, as a communique' from the Governor's Secretariat dated the 11th September 1939 says:

²⁹He was one of the authors and founders of the Federation of Khasi Native States, and of the Constitution Making Durbar of the Khasis. His popularity saw him a member of the Assembly till he passed away.

... Time, however, is needed before it will be possible to assess the manifold needs which the resources of the Empire will be called upon to fulfil, and His Excellency hopes that all who have offered their services will wait in patience till we know more clearly what form Assam's contribution should take.

While the whole of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were behind the government in this war, Sib Charan Roy gave the Germans moral support. This would be evident from a perusal of his writings during the period, especially in his monthly, U Nongpynim. On the other hand, the members of the Khasi Literary and Cultural Organisation known as "Ka Seng Jingtip" in their organ gave open support to the Government. It declared:

... We as an organization hereby express that we are prepared to render any help we can so that the use of force against small nations without listening to right and reason shall disappear forthwith from the face of the earth.³⁰

Every war in which a whole nation is involved brings miseries to the people. The first World War was fought far away from India's border and did not have much impact on the social life of the people as had the second one. The second war had its impact on the Khasis as well. Because of the decreased number of cultivators during the war, rice production fell short, and the price of essential commodities like rice, salt, sugar shot up. The Government was fully aware of this, and, as a preventive measure, issued a communiqué warning profiteers of action under the Defence of India Ordinance, 1939.

³⁰T. Cajee, Ka Syngkhong Jingtip, vol. II, No.4, p.74.

The people saw a large number of soldiers moving towards the eastern side, camping in their land to meet the threat of Japan and of the INA of Subhas Chandra Bose. It was a period when the number of prostitutes and gamblers increased in Shillong. The evils of the period were reflected by Peace Roy Pariat in his play, Ka Shangkhawiah Ki Rang (The Snare for Men).³¹

Over this period some advanced Khasi states like Myllem and Kyriem took steps to raise revenue by introducing the State Land Tax. The Khasis were not happy with it. Taking the judgement dated the 29th August 1874 of the Deputy Commissioner as weapon, Sib Charan Roy warned that the people should be careful to see that it was not right and legal to pay such tax.³² This in effect indicates that the traditional rulers were not free to do whatever they thought best even in those semi-independent states without the approval of the British Government.

The resentment against the increased number of non-Khasi traders in Shillong was first aired in writing during this period. Writes U Lurshai in October 1924:

Wherever we turn today we see only the activities of an outsider, all trading activities coming from outside are in his hands, from clothes to the smallest articles. Even those produced locally are in his hands; so all nooks and corners are full of outsiders, he sucks all the honey and leaves us only a comb.

Poet Soso Tham alluded to this when he sang that "The Comb remains, honey is dry, /Oh God our Maker, hear us cry."

³¹The work was published only in 1979 by R.J. Khongwir.

³²U Nongpynim, October 1936, pp.12-13.

CHAPTER - II

RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHTS

1

Religion and religious thoughts and controversies have played an important role in the growth of the literature of all nations. Religion certainly influenced the Khasi Society and its literature during 1841 - 1940. In this chapter, I propose to discuss religious influences on Khasi life and literature.

Prior to the advent of Hinduism and Christianity the Khasis believed in the existence of gods and goddesses to whom they prayed and offered sacrifices with goats, chickens or whatever the deities asked of them through signs. The relation of those deities has been explained by Rabon Singh who writes:

In the Khasi religion which is called Ka Khein ka Bishar (The religion of accounting and judging) there is one goddess, the law-giver from whom they asked for more gods and goddesses who would support the spirits of the first maternal uncle, first mother and first father of each clan and family and the household gods - that too unless this goddess ordered they could not get them. So they tried to convince this goddess in their accounting as to get many other gods to support them better and to effect more of goodness in the accounting religion.¹

Rabon Singh has not explained the relations of God the Creator with the Goddess the Ruler. It appears on the other hand, that the Khasis worship many deities like the Hindus. Foreign authors and

¹Ka Kitab Niam Khein (1950), pp. 1- ii.

Christian writers have observed that Khasis religion is Animism. Some saw it as an ancestor worship, some others as nature worship, and some as divine worship. Taking what he had seen of the worship in several villages, the Reverend T. Rodborne accepted that all the four definitions are applicable to the Khasi religion.² Alexander B. Lish who worked at Sohra during 1832 - '38 saw this pantheistic conception of God as arising out of ignorance. In one of his letters he said that he "felt sorry for the ignorance and the old belief into which the people have sunk".³ The problem of understanding the faith of the Khasis continued to engage the mind of religious thinkers. Homiwell Lyngdoh explained that in the Khasi tradition, God is regarded as the mother, and he is generally called Goddess; "the reason, it appears, is because a Khasi traces his clan from a woman."⁴

Sib Charan Roy reflects upon the pluralistic conception of God. He asserts like Moses that there is no god but God the Creator. This God is Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient, and is present within man. He cannot change his form, has no sex, and never grows old. He is all powerful, and Him only should man fear and worship. He does not need any sacrifice from the mortals. Roy is very clear in his conception of God, and claims that he represents the Old faith of the Khasis as he learnt it from the ancestors.⁵ Roy discourages

²T. Rodborne, U Khasi (1979), p.135.

³Quoted by D. Ropmay in Ka Centenary History Ka Balang Presbyterian (1940), p.2.

⁴H. Lyngdoh, Ka Niam Khasi (1937), p.6.

⁵S.C. Roy, Ka Niam-Ki-Khasi (1919), pp.i, ii-21. In his last days Roy was under the influence of a new faith which he defended strongly. I shall come into it in this chapter.

the reading of the Bible, the Quran and the Mahabharata by people who could not understand things for themselves because he does not want them to confuse their own religion with the new ones.

In the seventeenth century, the ruler of the Jaintia empire introduced Hinduism in Nartiang, his summer capital, while the Brahmins from Dacca introduced it at Shala in Khasi Hills in the early years of the 19th century,⁶ but it could not spread to other villages in the land. The Khasis worshipped God and other deities according to the old customs, appeasing the gods and goddesses with sacrifices despite the effort of Sib Charan Roy to explain that god does not need sacrifice.

Sacrifices were offered to the deities according to occasion. For instance, the people of the Khyrim state offered chicken and she-goat to god, pigs and cows to their ancestors, a cock to the Shillong god and so on. These sacrifices were in the form of prayer for blessings and thanksgiving. On some other occasions, a Khasi did not offer sacrifices unless he ascertained the causes, especially of ills which befell men or the society as a whole. On the other hand the Khasis believed that all ills -- diseases included -- are effects of certain causes. The cause of any disease was the anger and displeasure of one of those gods or goddesses. The cause was diagnosed by divines through the signs, believed to be revealed by God, in eggs or the intestines of the sacrificials. As soon as the case was ascertained, sacrifices were offered to appease the deity. They did not believe in medical treatment because it might increase

⁶Rodborne, Op. cit., p.140.

the anger of the deities further and aggravate the condition of the patient. Rabon Singh is correct in recording that the people worshipped many deities, because each clan worshipped its own god, and each village had a village deity.

2

This traditional faith came into conflict with the teaching of the Christian missionaries. The first to renounce such belief in the divine nature of disease was Thomas Jones I. A test case was that of Jonkha of Sohra who suffered for a long time without relief from the performance of the religious ceremonies to local gods. Writes G. Angell Jones:

Not long after this, Jonkha was serious, but his relatives did not allow the missionary to administer medicine, they must offer sacrifices according to the tradition, but after reading the signs in many chickens and many baskets of eggs, there was no sign to prove that the disease would retreat, and it became more serious instead. So finally, through necessity, the missionary was allowed to try his medicine, and behold he was made whole.⁷

The efforts of the Welsh, and the German Christian missionaries to educate the natives of the need for cleanliness and of the use of medicines did not find a fertile soil in the heart of the natives. They believed that small-pox should not be cured because it is a deity called commonly as "Ki Ram Thakur". Beckers writes:

⁷Ka History Jong Ka Balang (1966), p.10.

According to the pagan supersitition, for example, small pox is considered as a special deity among the Syntengs. If a family member contracts this disease the relatives rejoice over it and consider it as a great sign of honour. Parents carry their children to victims of small pox in order to be kissed by the goddess which means, to be exposed to infection.⁸

The search for more gods than God the Creator, according to poet Soso Tham happened much later in the history of the Khasis. The people needed those deities after they had fallen from their glory by breaking God's covenant and seeking wealth and pleasure. In "U Lyoh" Them says:

And evil thoughts which none can count
 Within Man's heart a place they found.
 Are all these shadows gods' really?
 The Queen of Bees, O where is she?
 And nights and days he'll seek blindly,
 Goddess of wealth, wher'er she be,

(st.xiii)

Them does not regard those new found deities as 'gods', to him those will one day lead man to hell.⁹ This has been the understanding of "R.I" (possibly, Roberts Evans) when he sings of the Khasiland as a place where sin, satan and ki ksuid ki khrei (evil spirits) reigned supreme for a long time.¹⁰ This is a Christian interpretation of the Khasi faith which also has gained currency over a long period.

⁸Becker, Op. cit., p.258. While it is true that the Jaintias regard pox as ki blai (gods), it is not a female as Becker reported for when they refer to the pox as disease, they call it U niang thyllu, "U" signifies masculinity.

⁹"U Lyoh", st. xvii.

¹⁰"Ka Ktien Jingstad", sts. 2, 5.

Christian missionaries started their work in the Khasi Hills as early as 1813 with the arrival of Krishna Chandra Pal at Pandua from Calcutta. Pal was sent to the Khasi Hills by the Baptist mission headed by the Reverend William Carey. This first Christian mission concentrated its efforts mostly in the Sohra and Shella areas. It closed its work here in 1838 with the departure of Alexander B. Lish for Calcutta. The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission (later Presbyterian Mission) started its work in these hills in 1841. By this time, some natives had already understood the message of Christianity. The Welsh Presbyterian Mission established itself firmly in these hills for nearly fifty years till the 27th February 1890 when Otto Hopfenmueller and Angelus Muenzloher reached Shillong. They were the first Roman Catholic missionaries to come and work in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. This mission is known in history as the Salvatorian Mission. The first Catholic to have made occasional visits to Shillong was the Reverend Father Broi. That was in 1876. He came to administer Church Sacraments to Catholics serving in the Defence and other government departments. The Salvatorian Mission made Laitkynsew its Headquarters.

The arrival of the Catholic mission paved the way for the great religious controversy in the Khasiland. On the one hand, non-Christian writers assailed the alien faith; on the other, the Catholics attacked the Presbyterians and the latter retaliated. The Catholic-Presbyterian controversy was initiated by a Catholic priest Gebbard Abele who criticised a biography of Martin Luther written by John Roberts as a separate chapter in the Khasi Fourth Reader.¹¹

¹¹The copy kept at the British Mission, London, is one which came out in 1895.

The controversy resulted in the publication in 1901 of Ka Jingim bad Ka Jinghikai Jong U Martin (the Life and Teaching of Martin Luther) by the Catholic Mission. It is also a biography from a Catholic view-point. The work denounces Luther for defying the Orders of the Pope. Because the Reader was a text for the upper primary classes, Roberts withdrew the biography in the subsequent edition of the book as a gesture of goodwill. The religious and dogmatic controversy has been recorded by Otto Hopfenmueller who writes:

They attacked the Catholics as usual in their news paper of ~~the~~ 5th June. The Khasi title of the paper is "U Nongkit Khubor". They accused us of adoring Mary, St. Peter, the saints and worshipped holy pictures. They deny the perpetual virginity of Mary. It is imperative that we publish a Khasi paper or at least leaflet to answer their objections.¹²

On March 7, 1897, Hormu Rai Diengdoh entered into the controversy as a third force. The journal lashed on both the Presbyterians and Catholics. Diengdoh was a converted Christian who returned to his old faith. C. Becker writes of him:

The Editor of this publication, without doubt, had some degree of learning and was well read person. He continually insisted and exhorted the Khasis to keep the religion of their fore-fathers. The columns of his were filled with expressions of hatred, ridicule and slenderous expressions about Christ, attacks on the books of the Old and the New Testament. The writings of modern philosophers provided him with plenty of subjects matter. The anti-Christian and atheistic papers of Europe and America carried their poisonous teachings even into tranquil reaches of the Khasi Hills.¹³

¹²Report to the Ludwig Mission Association dt. August 4, 1890 published in Annals of the Propagation of the Faith (Munich 1890), No.6, p.424. The Paper the priests planned to publish made its first appearance in January 1902.

¹³Becker, Op. cit., p.255 ff.

Becker found the first Catholic journal U Nongialam Katholik (first published in January 1902) to be "a Good response to the unwarranted attack of the Methodists" also against the Catholic Church. This organ could not survive long, and soon the Catholics were without a local medium to explain their view-points on the issue raised by the Presbyterians and the non-Christians. By the 1st September 1907, the Catholic Missionaries published a new journal, Ka Ling Khristan and they resumed their counter-attack on both the non-Christians and the Presbyterians.

Newspapers served in those days more the causes of religious philosophy of their organizers than the needs of the reading public. The Presbyterian publications which catered to the need of the believers for rejoinders to the attacks of the other religious camps were Ka Pateng Khristan (Est. 1897), and U Nongialam Khristan (Est. 1902). The two monthly journals added to the misery of the Catholic Mission greatly. Besides those, some native Christian leaders came together into an organization known as "the Christians Volunteer Movement" and started publishing another monthly, U Lurshai in April 1910. One common feature of all these papers was their concern for the development of Khasi language and literature.

The religious controversy has been reflected in Khasi poetry as well as in several pieces of good prose.¹⁴ Roberts Evans who refrained from writing in prose on the controversial issue alludes to the new found ideas of the native writers thus:

¹⁴Treatises on religion published during the period which seek to explain it from different points of views are: Jeebon Roy's Ka Niam Khasi (1899), Rabon Singh's Ka Kitab Niam Khein (1911), Sib Charan Roy's Ka Niam-ki-Khasi (1919), and Homiwell Lyngdoh's Ka Niam Khasi (1937).

Human knowledge before Satan and Sin
 Does lose its ways and force o'er them to win;
 Holy wisdom which is the word of God
 Satan and Sin to her submit their sword.¹⁵

Though Hormu Rai Diengdoh championed the cause of the traditional faith in his articles, he published other materials also in his journal. An example is "The love for Khasi Hills" by a poet who lends only his initials "K.S.". It is a poem of five stanzas which criticizes the panentheistic faith of the natives. The poet longs to see the coming of a day when the thoughts of the Khasis will be directed towards only one God. Stanzas 3 and 5 are translated below:

But what I long very much,
 To drive all devils away
 Whom thou hast worshipped so long,
 All these years, and months and days.

O I long for the day to come!
 To enlighten you O Land,
 That God alone hereafter
 You should worship forever.

The natives who upheld their traditional faith had reasons to be critical of the new religion, that is Christianity, for some priests seemed to have spread a strange teaching which confused even the native Christians. The Catholic Church on the other hand scandalised the Khasis by their view on marriage. Marriage ceremonies were performed by all religions but what irked the natives was the idea the leaders of the Catholic Church sold that marriage could take place in the same clan, meaning that a person can marry his distant blood relations. The Khasi religion regarded such a marriage as a taboo and the couple were rejected socially and religiously. But the Catholic point of view on marriage prevailed. As recently as 1939 the following lines found

¹⁵"Ka Ktien Jingstad", st. 14. (1894).

place in an important publication of the Church.

Of the taboo in marrying in the same clan, we all understand. The difficulty of making the Khasis understand is that as long as they belong to the same clan, it ~~marriage~~ is prohibited -- it is a taboo. The oft repeated reason has been that the parties came from the same mother. This is true, but it is also true that all people in the world descended from the same parents, Adam and Eve. We are all brothers and sisters, hence no marriage can take place at any time. This is not an adequate law, and we are surprised that the Khasi Catholics still regard it as a taboo, against the teaching of the Church.¹⁶

This controversy has been reflected in a poem, "Ka Puriskam", (or Fable) by an anonymous writer. The poet tells that once upon a time the Sun and the Moon were sister and brother. An evil idea occurred to the Moon that he wanted to marry his own sister, Sun. The Sun drove him out and poured ashes on his face. The poet concludes the poem with a bitter attack on the teaching of the Catholic priests and those who supported it, arrainging any body who dared break the custom thus:

Such a devil like this one,
The land does not need to own:
On embracing new religion,
He does not know his position.

Soso Tham urges that a person who does not uphold the clan system in the society should be declared an outcast, and be cast away from home forever.

These are the relations, and those
Of father's side, they knew the law;
Taboo and Danger too they know,
Lest thunder strike and Tiger's eat;
The law-breaker, the sorcerer
They shaved three lines and cast fore'er.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ka Iing Khristan, August 1939.

¹⁷ "Ka Iing I Mei", st. xii.

The feeling of the Khasi religious leaders has been expressed by Sib Charan in these words:

It is forbidden to enter into matrimony within the same clan -- they regard it as shong sang -- that they should not live together nor should their bones [after cremation] be kept in the same cromlec; nor is it legal for them to inherit any thing...¹⁸

What Roy meant is that such a couple should be rejected from the society and should have no right to any inherited property.

Sib Charan Roy figured prominently as a religious thinker from 1919 onwards. With his entry into the controversy, the attack on both sides of the Christian Mission was resumed with full vigour. He was critical of the attempts of the Christians to effect a change in the social life of the Khasis. His contempt of Christianity took its firm roots in the controversy over a plot of land in Jaiaw between him and the Presbyterian Church. The question was decided by the law court in favour of the Church.¹⁹ Roy started writing on religion from 1907 onward. Besides a few treatises on Khasi religion he published U Nongphira, and later, U Nongpynim, where he questioned the authenticity of the Biblical account of the origin of man, and of the creation of the world. He did not believe that man can be redeemed by another person. He assailed the doctrine of redemption through the suffering of Christ. He wrote, "The House of God cannot be reached through sacrifice or through the expiation by anyone for the sins of anyone." Even in his personal letter Roy railed against the Christian doctrine of redemption of man from sins by Christ. In reply to a letter of the Reverend Roberts Evans of the Presbyterian

¹⁸Ka Nian Khasi (1919), p.23.

¹⁹Political Case No. 17 of 1907.

Church, Roy sarcastically advised the missionary to "Learn of God and do your duty righteously and in accordance with truth,..."²⁰ Roy's anti-Christian attitude led him to supporting the Nazis in his writings during the first world war.

In spite of his strong faith in the Khasi traditional religion Sib Charan Roy changed his religious stance from 1928 onwards. In that year, one Dormi Pdah Ka Siej drew a large number of people to his temple at Sohsynnam. They believed in direct conversation of man with the angels, or the nine families the Khasis believed to be still in heaven. All problems of man were answered by the spirits through the mouth of the Mediator and in this case, Mr. Dormi. Sib Charan Roy became an ardent disciple of Dormi. He believed that everyone who spoke on behalf of the spirits (or whose mouth was the medium through which the spirits spoke) is the man of God. Among the spirits who conversed with men and women in those years (1928-1940) were Ram Thakurs, Shritin-tin Koina, Mistidian Koina, Lapubon, Lati Koina. The people who assembled for the conversation with the divine families addressed God as Pablei. The arch Ram Thakur claimed that he "sat side by side with God" and was 3600 years of age in January 1932.²¹ Even after he had found the new cult, the attack on Christianity continued.

Soso Tham saw the new cult as devil worship. All those who spoke through men simply perverted them from the truth as preached by the leaders of Khasi religion or by the Christians. Tham

²⁰Letter dt. 3.6.1915 quoted by R.S. Lyngdoh in U Kritik, Apri 29, 1982.

²¹U Nongpynim (Ed.) S.C. Roy, January 1932, p.17.

reflected the new cult in his poem "U Rngiew" where he devoted five stanzas in attacking it and in censuring Sib Charan Roy and friends for accepting such 'lie'. Tham holds that the end for all those who belonged to the faith is hell. Tham's contention in those five stanzas can be paraphrased as follows.

Tham says that when the spirits like Shritin-tin, Mistidian, Ram Thakur, Lapubon, Lati Koina among numerous others came down to sing and speak through man, the woods in Sohsynnam moved as if there were storm. This is, according to him, the breath of Satan. What these spirits did is pervert the mind of man in order that his soul reaches Hell finally. In stanza xii he alludes directly to Sib Charan Roy and friends who lived at Umsohsun, Shillong, and the poet warns that a day may come when king cobra will swallow the worshippers alive.²²

In so far as the acceptability of the various Christian denominations in Khasi Hills, I prefer to let Fr. Thaddeus Hoffman, a Catholic priest speak. He admits that the "Methodist form of Christianity is far more comfortable and easy than our Catholicism." Hoffman noted that the Presbyterian evangelists took money for their medicines against an "inducement" by the Catholic missionaries who offered free medicines²³ and inspite of that Catholicism did not progress fast. The Catholic missionaries had to struggle against many odds, because their teachings were rather stranger to the native, than those of the Welsh missionaries. Moreover, the Welsh

²²The cult ceased to have followers with the death of Dormi, its founder.

²³Becker, Op. cit., pp. 212, 213, 248.

missionaries groomed the natives right from 1849 for shouldering the responsibility of administering the Church affairs themselves whereas the Catholic priests did not do this. The Welsh missionaries never tried to convert people without making them understand that religion is not an opportunity for material advancement. The Catholic missionaries did the conversion themselves for many years. Even as late as 1922 the conversion work was in the hands of the missionaries. This is evident from an 'Address' of the Catholics in these hills to Mgr. Pisani on his visit to Shillong. The 'Address' said among other things that it was not possible to announce the good news of Salvation to the Khasis for lack of apostolic labourers.²⁴

Over and above the controversy discussed in the foregoing paragraph the Welsh Presbyterian Church had a controversy in its own house. This arose from the spiritual revival in the Church. The people at large viewed it as a strange event. The revival started on the 5th March 1905. The Church leaders were divided on it, though an event of such nature is fully backed by the scripture.²⁵ John Roberts and many others were conservative and were not willing to accept it as the visit of God. Among the native Christians who were sceptical about the nature of the revival was Mondon Bareth then working as Lecturer at the Theological College, Sohra. Bareth later confessed with new light:

²⁴The Catholic Herald of India, January 25, 1922.

²⁵The Book of Joel, Ch. 2, and the Acts Ch. 2.

The writer of these words was very much against the dance which was associated with this revival, but having seen the host of God dancing at Laittyra, he forgot his capacity of fault-finding and remembered only about the dancing of the host of God in heaven...²⁶

The crux of the controversy lies in the "dance"; because all men, women, young and old, even children danced in the church while services were being held. The Reverend E.H. Williams recorded the prayer of one Church elder at Shangpung which alluded to the internal controversy. The prayer reads: "O Lord, grant the missionaries wisdom to enable them to guide us in such a time as this. They might think that we are mad, but we are full of the new wine of the Holy Spirit."²⁷ The conservative attitude of John Roberts and others towards this religious revival did not last long. Along with Mondon Bareh, he too changed his mind. Morkha Joseph recalls this controversy in the Presbyterian Church in his poem "Ka Jinghiar U Mynsiem Ha Ri Khasi" (The Coming of the Spirit in Khasiland).

The glory of Assembly shine
And teachers too with us,
The sparkling crown of Assembly
Is Doctor John Roberts.

In the eight stanza Joseph states the reasons for the controversy. It arises, he says, because the nature of the revival, is not like the "Revival in Wales." Somehow, as days passed by, all the Christians belonging to the Presbyterian Church prayed for the power of the Holy Spirit. This change of mind later, has been summed up by Joseph in the 99th stanza:

²⁶A report on the Revival at Laittyra, reproduced in the Centenary History Ka Balang Presbyterian, p. 94.

²⁷Ibid., p. 107.

O God, pour out thy own spirit
And stay with us longer,
And show the horn of salvation
From Calvary's river.²⁸

From what has been discussed, it can now be established that religion and religious thoughts are important in the study of the development of Khasi literature. Though the controversies are not of much significance politically and culturally, they were the prime causes for self-expression.

²⁸I propose to return to Joseph in a separate chapter.

CHAPTER III

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Khasi Literature has grown to its present stature through education. Prior to the introduction of modern education, written poetry was unthinkable. In the present chapter, I propose to survey the impact of education on Khasi culture and society.

The history of formal education in the Khasi society dates from the early years of the nineteenth century. It was the Brahmins of Bengal who first opened a school at Shala and taught people reading and writing. The Reverend T. Rodborne who has collected information about the school writes that it was intended purely to spread Hinduism. The Hindus were, therefore, the first missionaries who made an attempt to educate the Khasis. The Hindu missionaries chose Bengali and Sanskrit as the medium of instruction. Though they could not extend their activities to other villages, their efforts had an impact on the life of the people who availed themselves of the facilities of learning available to them. This is borne out by the fact that all the documents prepared and signed in those days, including the treaties of 1829 between the East India Company and the Khasi chiefs were written in the old Bengali script.¹ Apart from this fact, quite a good number of families in the Shala area still keep images of Hindu deities and worship those.

Regular schools were however opened first in 1832 at Mawmluh, Mawsmal and Sohra by a Baptist missionary, Alexander B. Lish who was

¹T. Rodborne, U Khasi (1979), pp.140-141.

sent to the Khasiland by the Serampore Baptist Mission headed by the Reverend William Carey. There were "thirty six pupils who attended classes regularly"² in those three schools. Considering the fact that the Khasis were sceptical about education in those days, this number is considerable. Unfortunately, the schools were closed in 1838 with the closure of the Serampore mission in these hills. The reason for the closure, according to Wilson Reade, was the amalgamation of the Serampore mission with the American Baptist mission in that year.³ The new mission was not interested in the Khasis any more. Lish had worked hard and taught his pupils through the Bengali medium. His own mission has not left records of appreciation of his work. The tribute to Lish's part in spreading education among the Khasis comes from G. Angell Jones, a Presbyterian missionary who, while placing on record the speed with which Thomas Jones acquired the knowledge of Khasi language writes that the latter "was assisted by two young men, Duwan Rai and Jungkha who were taught upto a certain standard by Alexander B. Lish, when he was staying at Sohra for a few years. Alexander Lish had to return to Calcutta without seeing the visible fruit of his labour, but what he had sown, Thomas Jones now reaped."⁴

Thomas Jones was the first Welsh Calvinistic Methodist missionary to reach Khasi Hills. He arrived at Sohra on the 22nd June 1841. He was hosted by Captain Thomas Herbert Lewin of the East India Company in the military camp at Saitsohpen. Jones's main

²D. Ropmay, Ka Centenary History Ka Balang Presbyterian (1940), p.2. I shall refer to this work as simply CHBP later.

³Ibid., p.60.

⁴G.A. Jones, Ka History Jong Ka Balang (1966), p.8. I shall refer to this work as simply KHB later.

mission was to preach Christianity among the Khasis, but he realized quickly that preaching alone would be useless unless the people could confirm what they heard through reading and understand the message themselves. Accordingly, he organised teaching in the military camp. At the end of about six months or so, he was satisfied that Larshai, Nising and Jom were qualified to teach young children. In 1842 he opened three schools one each at Mawsmal, Mawmluh and Sohra and posted the young men there. These are the villages where Alexander B. Lish had schools till 1838. Instead of continuing with the Bengali script, Jones introduced the Roman script "for accuracy and simplicity" as Wilson Reade puts it.⁵ Out of Jones's experiment in the military camp came out the first Khasi primer, and the primer made him, as D. Ropmay proposes, "the father of the Khasi Alphabet and the founder of a permanent foundation of Khasi literature."⁶

The first to be attracted by Jones's experiment were men. Men, young and old, became interested in learning. They rallied round the missionary and observed him writing and heard him speaking Khasi. Jidor Singh, the syiem of Nongkhlaw was impressed by the knowledge of the Khasis who received their education from the missionaries, and later deputed his officials to learn from the Christian friends at Sohra. In later years, this chief invited the mission to open schools in his hima (or state).⁷ This attitude of Jidor Singh encouraged the progress of education in the Nongkhlaw state in later years.

⁵CHBP, p.61.

⁶Ibid., p.5.

⁷Ibid., p.66.

Jones had some other qualifications which drew men around him. He brought with him his carpenter's tools and started using them in the construction of his residential quarters. Till his arrival, the natives were accustomed with their traditional tools like daos and axes alone. They were happy to see the new art of cutting logs and converting those into planks. D. Ropmay writes this:

The wonder of the people knew no bounds when they saw the carpenter's tools of the missionary, especially his saw. They never saw such tools in their life time. About 50 to 100 spectators rallied round the missionary as he sawed logs and said several times, "how could he?" but when he finished, they jumped, danced and shouted in excitement like children.⁸

The companionship of those friends inspired the missionary to talk to them on education and the benefits it brought to men. Jones was an enterprising person with a high sense of economy. He taught the people of Sohra how to burn lime with coal instead of firewood,⁹ as coal was available abundantly in the southern belt of the land. The new method of burning lime has been followed by the Khasis since Jones's days.

Jones worked alone for nearly seven months. His burden was relieved greatly by the arrival at Sohra on the 2nd January 1842 of William Lewis and his wife. The new missionaries too learnt the Khasi language in a few months' time. It was no longer difficult for them to do so since Jones had already spoken, and written a book in, Khasi. Ever since that year, education became one of the main jobs of the missionaries. Khasi children of those days were dull in arithmetic,

⁸CHBF, p. 6

⁹Ibid.

and William Lewis experienced great difficulty teaching the subject because the pupils told him that their minds were confused "by the devil who did not like those who knew arithmetic."¹⁰ Captain Lewin was keen to see that more children completed their education so that they could read and write both English and Khasi. He instituted scholarship and awarded it to twelve pupils every year. The scholarship lasted about three years till Capt Lewin's death in December 1846. The money was paid from his pocket. In later years, the missionaries induced the students to study by awarding prizes.¹¹ When William Lewis headed the mission, more primary schools were opened and teachers appointed. By the 16th December 1860 on which date he left for Wales there were schools at Nongwar (1853), Jowai, Shala, Sohbar (1854), Tyrna, Khatsawphra (1857) and Lamin (1859). The last village is in Jaintia Hills. Education in Jaintia Hills was disturbed for two years during the Anglo-Jaintia war (1861-63) and teaching had to be suspended in 1863. The schools were re-opened in 1864. In that year, the primary school at Sohra was upgraded into a Normal School.

The increase in the number of schools had changed the life-style of the people in areas where there were schools. Many learnt the art of reading, writing and singing and helped in stressing the value of cleanliness. This does not mean that the majority of the Khasis re-acted favourably to education. The number of those who were opposed to it was large. T. Rodborne has this to record:

¹⁰ CHEP, p. 9.

¹¹ William Lewis' letter to A.J.M. Mills appended to Report on the Khasi and Jaintia Hills (1853), p. 43.

In those days, in many villages in our land, we heard stories from our grand-mothers that they regarded it a taboo to bring home any kind of paper. If any piece of paper, even a torn one, was found, the house must be purified by driving away ka tyrut ka smer.¹²

There was reason for this attitude. In those days writing was done with quill. The Khasis believed that it was the quill of a cock, and, therefore, they believed too that it was sacrilegious to bring any piece of paper home. The Khasis held the cock as a sacred bird, as a living witness of the covenant between God and man.

Mrs. Lewis too did not have a good time with her pupils. One day when she introduced to them the art of writing, all girls ran away from the classroom in fright¹³ as they too believed as did their parents that it was sacrilegious to use the quill. It took time for the teachers to make people understand that reading without writing would not make them wise. That happened in 1843. In that year most girls discontinued attending classes.

The natives were not favourable to any thing which departed from their tradition. In the same year (1843) they witnessed yet another feature in schools which they considered to be revolutionary. It was the introduction of hair-cut by the Reverend William Lewis. "In the old tradition", writes Wilson Reade, "we allowed hair to grow like the hair of ladies. Hair was never cut for fear of u Thlen."¹⁴

¹²U Khasi (1979), p.140. Ka tyrut ka smer is a female evil spirit.

¹³CHBP, pp. 31-32.

¹⁴Ibid. Thlen is believed to be a spirit which sometimes appears in the form of a snake. Worshippers used to cut some hairs of their victims and offered those hairs to the spirit in lieu of blood. Thlen in turn blessed the worshippers with wealth.

Ramjan, who took the first opportunity of recording the beginning of hair-cut among the Khasis, writes that it was experimented on two students. "The first to have hair-cut were Rijon and Tibon Laitphlang from Sohra."¹⁵ Later on, the people realized that it was more hygienic for men to have a short hair, and in due course, the superstitious belief gave way. Hair-cut had also become a feature of the new life-style of the people.

In most of those villages where schooling facility was available, only boys were sent to school, because, according to Miss Annie W. Thomas, the Khasis regarded the effort of the missionaries to educate their daughters as foolish. Parents laughed at education for girls and prevented them from going to schools.¹⁶ By 1849 when a few people became Christians, the unfavourable attitude towards education became extreme. Parents started thinking that the opening of more schools was only a means to an end, and the end, according to them, was to get more Christians from amongst the natives. They were partially right, because those few who accepted the new religion were former pupils of the missionaries, though not all such former pupils became Christians. When the village elders saw that education had struck roots in the mind of their children, "they became angry and ordered parents to withdraw their children from schools, otherwise sins and many ills would befall" the village as a whole and that the souls of the dead relatives would punish the living ones till they would have no children to succeed them,¹⁷ according to Wilson Reade.

¹⁵Ramjan in U Nongkit Khubor, December 1890.

¹⁶CHBP, pp. 31-32.

¹⁷CHBP, p.64.

In response to the order of the village elders, Reade continues, many parents beat their children who were determined to go to schools, snatched away their dresses to discourage them, but inspite of such barbarous treatment, some children reached schools naked. The opposition to education at Sohra and the neighbouring villages was great for many years. William Lewis writes that the Syiem of Sohra also was the opponent of Education.¹⁸ The worst was in Jaintia Hills where the non-Christians burnt down school buildings also.

Such being the position, Mrs. Lewis had reason to make poetry a propaganda for education, as it appears in her poem, "Shine like Stars" where she sings confidently that those who get knowledge will enlighten their land wherever they be.

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, 1250 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.

Encouraged by the progress made by William Lewis and Thomas Jones the second (for Jones the first left the mission in 1847), the Welsh Mission sent more missionaries to Khasi Hills to help spread both education and Christianity. Griffith Hughes arrived in 1866, Hugh Roberts in 1867, Thomas Jerman Jones in 1870 and John Roberts in 1871.¹⁹ Though their main business was to preach the new religion in

¹⁸Mills, op. cit., p. 43.

¹⁹Many more names are left out in the list. I stop at the last one above, because he had contributed to the development of Khasi literature. A separate chapter would be devoted to his work.

these hills, they did many other things as well. They opened more schools, appointed more teachers, opened more Christian stations, and associated themselves actively with teaching. Hugh Roberts served as headmaster of the English Normal School at Sohra from 1867 to 1870, and then from 1872 to 1876. His salary and that of the second and the third masters was borne by the Government. This was the first involvement of the British Government in education through payment of the salary. The Normal School has since then been a teachers' training centre to produce qualified teachers for the primary and middle English schools.²⁰ John Roberts took over from Hugh Roberts as the headmaster of the school in 1876, and in that year Thomas Jerman Jones started the "minor school" at Shillong. Two other such middle schools, one at Shela and another at Sohra, were opened by the mission in the same year. This marked a change in the social outlook of the people because in those days a boy who completed the minor (i.e. class VI) successfully was qualified for appointment as writer in government office, teacher in primary school, and preacher of the Church. A few of them, like Jarkha, were appointed post-masters also. In the days of John Roberts people in the Shillong and Sohra areas started viewing education as a good means to improve themselves intellectually and economically. The change in the attitude towards education was also partly due to the view taken of it later by Jeebon Roy (1838-1903), a native who figured prominently in the district as a social worker and leader of public opinion. Roy entered

²⁰G. Angell Jones, KHB., pp.46, 50, 54, 58. Cf. CHBP p.71. Dr. H. Barih designated Hugh Roberts as "principal". It is a mistake of fact. It is a mistake again to put him in office in 1861 before his arrival and to overlook his absence from Sohra in 1871, see A Short History of Khasi Literature (1979), p.22.

service as clerk, Interpreter, Sub-Inspector and Inspector of Police, and retired in 1894 as second class magistrate. While still in service Roy fought hard for the establishment of a High School at Shillong, and that was during 1875-76.

Hormu Rai Diengdoh's letter to Bengalee throws some light on the progress of education in Shillong during Jeebon Roy's time, especially on the relations between Jeebon Roy and the missionary over the high school issue. Writes he:

Afterwards the late Rev. T.J. Jones a Welsh Missionary stationed at Mawkhar, Shillong, who was respected by the Khasis and all natives for his piety and equanimity, & etc.; was stimulated to work earnestly towards the opening of a Mission High School at Mawkhar Shillong. And he tried to bring round Babu Jeebon Roy and other supporters of the Government High School. He succeeded in persuading Babu Jeebon Roy to bring his sons and other boys to the Mission High School; . . .

Again some months after, through gross misunderstanding the Union was broken and Babu Jeebon Roy with his friends took away all his school boys and others who were under his influence, and the Government High School was revived.²¹

Though Diengdoh designated the high school as "Government High School", it was not in fact a purely government-managed institution. It was only an aided private school because Diengdoh himself in his speech on the 29th July 1932 recalled that many students left the school and joined the school of T.J. Jones "because at that time Mr. Jeebon Roy had to meet half the expenditure, they were happy that Jerman Jones opened the Entrance School which was financed entirely

²¹Letter dt. 24.9.1902 reproduced by Kynpham Singh in his Ka Jingsdang Ka Jingspel bad Jingthoh ia ka Ktien Khasi da ki Dak Roman (1972), p.22.

by the Mission and the Government . . ." ²² Such was the responsibility shouldered by a native at the time when the majority of the Khasis looked up only to the Welsh Mission and the government to open for them an opportunity for higher studies. A Khasi who closely associated himself with the move of Jeebon Roy for the establishment of a purely government high school at Shillong was u Donrai. ²³

The effort made by Jeebon Roy for getting higher education at home proves that education was good for the people themselves. He tried his best to have Khasi children taught not only their own language and English but also Bengali. He established a Bangla school at Shillong in 1899. The aim was to make the natives fully conversant with Bengali because he longed to see that they go out on business and trade in the plains and progress there. ²⁴ Inter-personal relationship could be improved only through education. Like the missionaries, the non-Christian leaders too felt very strongly that unless the Khasis are educated enough they would not be able to converse with the foreigners nor could they read and write anything. Jeebon Roy and his friends saw too that education helped to record whatever was known about the Khasi culture. Jeebon Roy writes in his Ka Niam Jong Ki Khasi (1897) or Khasi Religion that unless it is placed on record "the people would forget it" once for all. "Poor Khasi religion without any written record might disappear unnoticed . . ." ²⁵ Roy was not the

²²Ibid.

²³U Khasi Mynta, February 1903, (ed.) Hormu Rai Diengdoh.

²⁴Kynpham Singh, Ka Jingim U Babu Jeebon Roy (1972), p.14.

²⁵I shall discuss their works later.

first to see that education is good, and that the more the people can understand themselves the better it would be for them. In fact Rabon Singh was the first to realize this. Jeebon Roy continued the effort that they were followed by Radhon Singh Berry, Sib Charan Roy and others.²⁶ The leaders of Khasi culture and tradition did not look at education as alien to their culture. However, they were sceptical of the courses in schools like Catechism which was part of the curricula in mission schools. Unlike Sib Charan Roy who sought to prevent non-Christian youths from reading Christian and Muslim scriptures, Jeebon Roy advised that the Khasis should be liberal-minded enough to read any religious book. "It is not right for us to confine ourselves only within one hut", he urged.

The apprehension that people would leave their traditional faith and that by getting modern education the gods will be displeased with the people as discussed earlier in this chapter gave way when more and more non-Christian children went to schools, but remained in their own faith and served the society as leaders in various spheres. What clashed with the traditional mores was religion, not education, because teachers in Christian schools, especially those managed by the Catholic mission, made it their duty to teach their religion not only in churches but in schools as well.

The natives came more and more in contact with other people as they understood how to deal with them. This contact with those who came from other parts of the world during the East India Company's days resulted in a change in their views of life also.

²⁶Kynpham Singh, Op. cit., p.15.

Mills saw this changed as early as 1853, and what he saw has found expression in the following words:

The character of the Khasis people is said to have undergone much change. They were formerly described as an upright simple people, but from an association with civilization and wealth have become arrogant, deceitful, and untrustworthy; but however their moral character may have deteriorated, the advantages they have derived and are deriving from their connection with our government are great, and numerous civil wars, which continually distracted the country have been put down.²⁷

The change that Mills saw was not due to education or as he put it "civilization" but to the encouragement the Company officials gave the Khasis in trade and commerce which improved the lot of the natives. As far as education was concerned, all writers of the period (1841-1940) agree that it was useful and good for the people themselves. Jeebon Roy was grateful to the pioneering efforts of the missionaries, and described the pioneers as "kind and philanthropic".²⁸ For English officers like Allen and his friends, the increase in the number of students especially girls in schools was encouraging, and he attributed this to the efforts of the missionaries. In one place he wrote:

Thanks to the efforts of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission, education has made considerable progress, and in 1901, the proportion of literate persons (5.7 per cent) was higher than in any other District of Assam.

In 1904 "there were 348 primary schools and 8 secondary schools and one special school in the district. The number of female scholars

²⁷A.J.M. Mills, Report on the Khasi and Jaintia Hills (1853), p.3.

²⁸Letter to the Chief Commissioner, reproduced by Kynpham Singh in the work cited earlier.

was 2,395."²⁹ The number of boys in all schools in the same year was 5,880. Government officials had to praise and thank the Christian missionaries because the government did not have its own school till 1888 when it started the Pinemount School at Shillong. What it was doing in respect of education was to pay the salary of three teachers at Sohra, and to sanction grant-in-aid to the authorities which managed schools according to the curricula prescribed by it. The Welsh Mission which fell in line with the government policy received Rs.50/- per month from 1854 to 1862 for the running of its schools. The amount was increased to Rs.500/- per month from 1863,³⁰ and by 1939 when the grant was withdrawn from the Welsh Mission to establish a government high school at Jowai. The amount was Rs.20,000/- per year.

For fifty years, the Welsh Mission considered education in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills at its monopoly. This was no longer so since 1890 when Otto Hopfenmueller and Angelus Muenzloher, the first Catholic missionaries to the country, reached Shillong. The Catholic mission too paid attention to education, and opened a few schools in the district. By this time, the government extended its regulation to all schools, with a condition that grant-in-aid would be sanctioned only to the mission or authorities which submitted to the regulation. This was mainly to follow its syllabus. The Catholic Mission did not fall in line with the old mission and tried in vain to stress religious education in its primary schools. Resentment about the partial treatment was aired by Christopher Becker who wrote that the "British

²⁹B.C. Allen et al., Gazetteer of Bengal and North East India (1905), p.493.

³⁰CHBP, p.64.

Government in India had not opened schools in the Khasi Hills. This task was left to the Methodist Mission ... Their schools were treated like government schools and received generous aid from the government schools and received generous aid from the government." Becker added, "The Methodists, therefore, considered the schools in the Khasi Hills as their monopoly and considered the Catholic Mission which came to the scene much later as intruders."³¹ The Catholic missionaries realised later that they could not adopt a different system of education in the same district as that did not attract students nor receive aid from the government, so in 1907 the Prefect Apotolic had to reorganize the Catholic schools according to the regulation of the government, and he admitted that as a result of the re-organization, "the Catholic had the same standard as the existing pagan and Protestant schools." The teaching of religion continued, but that "was done outside the prescribed syllabus."³² The syllabus for the middle English schools then comprised subjects like "English, Khasi, Arithmetic, Geometry, Indian History and Algebra. Besides these subjects there was a period of half an hour for gymnastics exercises and music as optional subjects." The government approved the reorganization and started sanctioning grant-in-aid to the Catholic schools, and this inspired the mission to open elementary schools also.

The first Catholic middle English school (at that time, those schools were called 'upper primary schools') was the St. Anthony's at

³¹C. Becker, The History of the Catholic Mission (trans. 1980), p.261 ff.

³²C. Becker, Op. cit., pp.264-65.

Shillong. It was opened on the 1st May 1908. This was followed by the opening of the Loreto school on the 8th May 1909, while plans to open the present St. Edmund's school were also under way. The Loreto school was recognized by the government in 1912, and soon thereafter the Cambridge University selected it as a centre for examination. This opened an opportunity for girls to study for and pass the junior and senior Cambridge School Examinations without leaving Shillong. The opening of middle English schools by the Catholic mission inspired a competitive spirit among teachers of all such schools in the district; they worked hard to produce better result and achieve better standard in later years. Steps taken by teachers included selection tests. The government of the day did not encourage the step. The following circular issued by the Director of Public Instruction conveys the policy of the government:

It has come to my knowledge that certain Middle Schools in their anxiety to have a high percentage of success hold text Examination before sending up candidates to the Middle School Leaving Certificate and Scholarship Examination. This practice must be discontinued. All pupils of class VI whose attendance has been regular and conduct satisfactory should be presented at the examination as a matter of course.³³

In spite of the increase in the number of schools towards the end of the nineteenth century, the attendance of the natives in the only high school in the district was negligible compared to the attendance recorded by other communities. The apathy of native boys towards higher education has been reflected by Amjad Ali in some of his poems. To him education is the path to fame and knowledge. Only

³³Circular dt. 20.2.1933 to all headmasters and headmistresses of Middle English Schools in Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

a man who studies can know the wonders of the world, can become scientist or philosopher of repute, and get all the knowledge he needs. So, in "Step" (Morning) Ali urges all boys to avail themselves of the benefits of education; and in "Ka Jingstad" (wisdom) he celebrates education as the sure path to wealth and happiness, and calls upon all to "learn, learn of wisdom, /so that you will be happy." Ali reiterates the value of education in "Khasis Arise", too, when he compares ignorance to darkness and asks the Khasis to "rise from their dark abode."

I have earlier in this chapter recorded the unfavourable attitude of the Khasis towards female education. I have also recorded the change in the outlook of most parents in that they sent more girls to schools by the turn of the present century. The first Khasi girl to receive higher education was Anamon Tham who passed the Entrance Examination of the Calcutta University in 1902.³⁴ She was followed by Glorisamon in 1905. Both these girls were prepared by teachers of the Khasi-Jaintia Presbyterian Girls M.E. School and appeared as private candidates because at that time the school was proceeding towards the high school level and recognised only as a middle English School. In the second decade of the present century, qualified Khasi ladies started joining the teaching profession. The first lady graduate to enter service as high school teacher was Enola Khain who joined the Khasi Presbyterian Girls' High School in 1916. She was followed by Lariammon Khongwir in 1920, and Trophila Shulai in 1921. These first Khasi lady teachers were regarded by the Welsh Mission as "respectable

³⁴She was also the first Khasi lady to appear the B.A. Examination. That was in 1906.

elder sisters of the staff" of the said school,³⁵ according to Miss Annie W. Thomas. Towards the middle of the present century, several ladies held Bachelors' degree, and those belonging to the Presbyterian Church alone accounted for 150 matriculates, 100 Nurses and para-medical personnel.³⁶ This proves the increasing acceptance and appreciation of education by the natives.

Several Khasi young men achieved distinction in higher education from the second decade of the present century. Rojen Roy Thomas made a landmark in the history of the Khasis in 1921 when he passed the master degree examination of the Calcutta University standing second in the first class. He later won the Premchand Roy Scholarship. He was also the first among the Khasis to become a college teacher.

Having surveyed the development of education in the Khasi society it would be relevant to examine the relation between education and Khasi literature. It is a fact that written Khasi literature has grown along with the progress of education as without the ability to write, and a knowledge of the concept of literature none can produce a poem, a novel or a play. Incidentally, all the natives who produced literary works had had the benefit of education though they were not so highly educated. I have cited Amjad Ali as a champion of education who urged people to study. Mrs. Lewis and John Roberts who wrote before Ali produced poems to fill the vacuum in the school

³⁵ A.W. Thomas in CHBP, pp.46-48.

³⁶ Ibid.

syllabus, meaning to meet the need of the period in which they lived. Later writers, including Morkha Joseph, Tham and Primrose Gatphoh stress the good value of education at different times; but this does not mean that Khasi literature is a direct product of literacy or education. What the authors urge is the need to educate all children of the land for the good of the society as a whole. When they refer to higher education, each Khasi author has his own view to offer.

Hewett Singh Pariat saw that the natives who had higher education changed their outlook of life unfavourably. They were clean and tidy; but at the same time they looked down upon a farmer. Pariat lets the steam off in the lone extant poem of his, "U Nongrep" (The Farmer) where he sings:

And now in this civilized world,
 "Go thou, dirty fellow!"
 It knows not that he is master,
 Majestic and serious.

In spite of the high posture of an educated man, he had to depend on the products of the farmer, Singh Pariat observes. The so-called educated on the one hand do not like to mix with the rustic farmer; on the other, he wants to win the latter's favour to get fresh vegetable, perhaps, as presents.

To a romantic poet like Primrose Gatphoh, a true and complete education consists in the ability to learn from nature. He has expressed this not once, but several times. Nature, he writes, is the only impartial teacher.³⁷ She gives a sufficient reward to the

³⁷ Ki Phawar Sara (1928), p.2.

poor and the rich alike, if they only study her every day. In 1932 Gatphoh made his characters speak on natural education. Mahet in "Ka Lukhimai" says:

I have pondered over this for a long time; to tour the world as long as we're physically strong, to gather wisdom from nature around and widen our knowledge of lands and states outside our own circle.

In reply to Mahet, the Prince says that even the smallest of creatures knows that "nature teaches" man wisdom. Gatphoh reiterated this in 1937 and again in 1961. Referring to the limited knowledge man gained from school, and the hesitation of the natives to study other books than those prescribed for examination, Gatphoh wrote: "Besides that our fellow Khasi, Pnar, Bhoi or War does not have taste for and does not value study; he is satisfied with the knowledge gained from school, and knows only that much till he grows old."³⁸ This lends credence to the apprehension that the education one gets within the four walls of the classroom is incomplete unless a man perfects himself through reading of more books and gains personal knowledge as he matures in age.

Soso Tham once felt a vacuum in his mind because the education he had at high school did not give him any critical help. That was in the years 1920-23 when he made up his mind to compose Khasi poems. At that time, he recalled, he never knew what poetry or art is because none had ever taught him the art of making poetry. He recalled too that "the foot, the metre, the rhyme and the idea"³⁹ which are necessary in the making of poetry were then to him cow bones

³⁸ "Shi Kyntien", Ki Khanatang bad U Sier Lapalang (1937), p.iv.

³⁹ "Ka Jingpynshai", Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep (1936), p.iv.

in pasture, which could be used to enrich Khasi literature. This shows that each person viewed education from his own need and understanding. It means also that thinkers like Tham desired in those days that the courses of study be designed in such a manner as would help the native genius apply the knowledge he gained to the benefit of his society. Tham's concern was for the disciplined growth of Khasi poetry. He was not, however, handicapped by the absence of such a course in school as from his own study for three years, he discovered what he had lacked before, and by 1936 he became a mature poet. His poetry reflects his understanding of the craft of poetry. In his poem "Ki Symboh Ksjar" Tham, like Hewett Singh Pariat, has a dig at the attitude of the so-called educated natives towards the tradition and history of their own tribe. Twice he refers to the increasing interest of the Khasis in the search of knowledge in its various branches. He wishes that such people used their knowledge for the benefit of the future generations. He laments, "The light we seek around the world: / Light of our own we know nothing." Here also, as in his personal experience in his poetic career, Tham wants that the knowledge earned from universities should be utilized for focussing things valued most by the Khasis like traditional culture, and the socio-political system of the ancient times.

Rabon Singh and Radhon Singh Berry were concerned very much with the revival of Khasi culture. I have discussed their works in a separate chapter, but it is appropriate to state that their concern was not so much with the controversy between education and culture. They were worried lest the spread of Christianity result in the neglect of the cherished virtues and values of Khasi culture,

Towards the middle of this century, the editors of U Nongialam Khristan (The Christian Leader) saw that the increase of matriculates and the dropouts would create unemployment because the competition would be more. The editors, in advising students to plan their career right from high school, saw the inadequacy of general education. They wrote of unemployments:

It has been so even here in Shillong. For four posts of sub-inspectors of Excise, about 120 candidates appeared in the examination. From now on it seems very difficult to get clerical jobs. Our students must plan before hand the kind of job they hope to get after school so that they do not have to sleep idly in looking for a job.⁴⁰

From the above piece of evidence, we get a general idea that almost all those who studied till they completed the high school course did not have the intention of going back to their traditional profession, agriculture. They sought for government or white-collar job. Because of such a tendency, I believe, Hewett Singh Pariat concludes the poem referred to earlier with a determination that all must go to agriculture to make the land a garden of fruits and of flowers; and Soso Tham considers the life of a village farmer the crown of life in his "Kynjai Ha La Ri". If education was inadequate, it was so not because the people thought it bad but because it was not sensitive enough to the deepest needs and aspirations of a culture. I wonder if it is better today.

Education and literature are complementary of each other. Educational institutions for higher learning cannot teach a literature which has not attained the standard they expect; and it is through education that literature can be appreciated in a correct

⁴⁰U Nongialam Khristan, May 1935.

perspective. Till 1897, Khasi literature was a subject only upto the middle school standard; but that year marked a turning point in the relations between education and literature of the Khasis when the Calcutta University prescribed it as a "vernacular" for the female candidates upto the Entrance examination. The pieces selected were those passages translated from English into Khasi and a few original ones in addition to grammar and composition. All those were contained in Hugh Roberts' Grammar of the Khassia Language. The educated among the Khasis were not happy with the spelling of quite a good number of words printed in the book. The first critic of the text was Hormu Rai Diengdoh who, while appreciating the effort of the author, regretted that the book was written in Wales far away from Roberts' Khasi friends who could advise in the spelling of words and in the translation of passages from English into Khasi. Diengdoh observed: "Were teachers not well-versed in selecting the correct and rejecting the wrong words, spelling and sentences, it would have been better not to prescribe such a text which is frustratingly full of errors" ⁴¹

Diengdoh was guided more by religious sentiment than by a sincere concern for accuracy. He failed to realize that as of the year 1897, Roberts' was the only book available for that standard of study. He failed too to see that had it not been for the publication of the book in question, the Calcutta University would not have been in a position to include Khasi in its syllabus for the Entrance Examination. Prior to 1897, the language taught at school in lieu of the "vernacular" was Latin. In 1900, Latin was

⁴¹U Khasi Mynta, January 1897.

replaced by Khasi for the both male and female candidates. In that year, the government appointed a Khasi language teacher in the Government High School at Shillong. In the academic session 1902-04 when the first batch of eleven Khasi students⁴² proceeded to Calcutta for higher studies at different colleges, the University introduced Khasi literature as a subject at the Intermediate level. It appears further than the university recognized Khasi as a subject for the degree examination in the academic sessions beginning 1904, because the exclusion or omission of the subject from the list of Indian languages caused concern in the Khasi Hills. Leaders of public opinion and educationists met at Shillong on the 5th May 1908 under the chairmanship of Dohory Ropmay, and on the 24th June they submitted a petition to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Shillong, urging the retention of Khasi as a subject in the University. The third paragraph of the petition reads:

During the past years, no less than 45 of our young people have passed the Entrance Examination of whom 18 passed the F.A and 6 the B.A. Examination. Two girls passed the Entrance Examination. Now that our people are just beginning to appreciate the advantage of higher education, we feel it a great hardship that a barrier of this kind should be placed in our way. We cannot help thinking that the encouragement of backward races should form part of the policy of our beneficent government.⁴³

Though Khasi literature has been a subject for the university examinations, the following account shows that no attention was paid to it for many years by college authorities. Wilson Reade wrote:

⁴²U Nongialam Khristan, August 1902.

⁴³The petition was signed by D. Roymay, Chairman, Alexander Khonglah and Chandra Nath Roy, Secretaries.

Though Khasi vernacular was prescribed as a subject in university examinations, there has not been in any college, as far as we know, a class or teacher for this. The students have to struggle with it themselves, be it right or wrong, there is no means at all to get any help.⁴⁴

That was in 1929. Reade urged the college authorities to consider finding ways and means to help Khasi students for better knowledge of Khasi literature before they were presented for the university degree examinations. Even after the plea, neither the government nor the college authorities attached importance to the teaching of Khasi literature; and R.T. Rymbai who studied in college in the academic sessions 1932-36 recalled: "And in college we studied the books ourselves. There was not a single class anywhere in which any tribal vernacular was taught."⁴⁵ Though there were no language teachers in the colleges in those years, the texts were stiff enough for one paper. They were Radhon Singh Berry's Ka Jingsneng Tymmen Parts I and II, Rabon Singh's Ka Kitab Niam Khein Ki Khasi, the Book of Job and the Book of Isaiah from the Bible, and B.K. Sarma Roy's Ka History Jong Ka Ri Khasi bad Khyndiat Kiba Markhap. Rymbai added with a mild indignation:

Had there been teachers to guide, to broaden our mind as school and college students in those days, to search actively the mind of the ancestors, we would have learnt and understood precious things of our own better, and value them more than we did others' But because of the absence of teachers to open the gate of our mind . . . we read just to pass the examination.⁴⁶

⁴⁴U Lurshai, November 1929.

⁴⁵140 Years of Khasi Literature in Roman Script, September 1981, (ed.) H.W. Sten, p.35.

⁴⁶Ibid., p.36.

Soso Tham, on the other hand, had lost sight of the problem the students faced in schools and colleges when in 1936 he wrote that unless a text is forced upon the students in school and in Church, they were not interested in reading a Khasi book howsoever good it might be.⁴⁷ It was of course true that there was virtually no informed readership for poetry.

In conclusion it could be said that secular education did not interfere with the culture of the people but it helped them understand themselves better. Religious education or an attempt to force Christian teachings upon the pupils in the primary schools was what the natives thought was wrong; and the reaction to such teaching had made the government restrict the sanction of grant-in-aid to such schools, especially those managed by the Catholic mission, and resulted in a uniform standard for all. On the other hand, education had helped the Khasis to see opportunities before them, - business, government service, literary career, and even political leadership which was impossible without education. These new experiences obviously extended the frontiers of Khasi literature as well.

⁴⁷"Ha Ki Nongpule", Ka Duitara Ksiar (3rd ed., 1936), p.ii.

PART - II

CHAPTER I

THE ORAL TRADITION

Prior to the advent of Christianity there was no literary tradition in the Khasi language. Khasi words and forms of speech were put into writing only in 1813 when Krishna Chandra Pal translated the New Testament into the Shala dialect of Khasi language; but that was done in Bengali script. The present written form was introduced at Sohra after 1841 by Thomas Jones of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission. What the people had before the years 1813-1841 was oral literature.

Khasi oral tradition found expression in the phawar or rimed couplet, folk tales, stories and homilies. There was a branch of this tradition which is known as puriskam or fables, and parom or stories. The paroms are of two categories: the short one like short stories, and the lengthy ones like the novel. The lengthy parom could take a teller as long as one night's telling, or as short as three hours' sitting with him. Sometimes stories were sung by bards to the accompaniment of an harp. and sometimes told by elderly persons round the fire-place. While elements of the novel and modern poetry are there in the oral tradition, Drama was not known among the Khasis in those early days. This is borne out by the fact that the language has no accepted term for 'drama'.¹

¹It was only in 1937 that H. Elias proposed the word sawangka for drama. It is inappropriate in many respects as he could not distinguish the different forms of a drama. Moreover, written language follows the usage, and therefore what a Khasi understands is the word "drama" itself as the English introduced it.

The absence of written literature in the early period of the history of a race is a universal phenomenon. Advanced as the English are today, written literature was first made available to them only when Beowulf was composed and made available to the reading public in the eighth century anno domini. Ritchie Girvan puts the date of Beowulf between 680 and 700 A.D.² Even then it was brought to England by the Angles. It so happened that the first formal literature of England is all about the Scandinavians and not about the English as such.³ In every society of the world written literature could be dated with the first writer, but oral tradition is as old as the age of that society itself. The Khasis who had no written literature before the advent of the Christian missionaries have a myth about how they lost their literature. Some maintain that the Khasis lost their literature at the time when their scholar crossing the sea under difficult circumstance dropped it into the sea. Some, including Soso Tham, maintain that the Khasi scholar ate and swallowed the book. Because of that calamity, the younger generations were deprived of the privilege of having their own script and literature. Tham alludes to that myth in one of his poems:

The words of man still had value.
 They let the bird to peck rice too;
 They did work hard from dawn to dark,
 And packed the book in their stomach
 From which our Fables well did grow;
 From which good story grew also.⁴

For the sake of argument one may ask: how a man who had a literature could have forgotten the art of writing simply because he could not

²Beowulf and the Seventeenth Century (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1971), p.25.

³Ifor Evans, "Before the Conquest," A Short History of English Literature (London: ELBS, 1970).

⁴"Ki Symboh Ksiar", st. iii.

see the written words? It is an impossible proposition, and therefore, the story of the lost literature is a myth. There is, however, one general tendency among the Khasis. They cherish to keep to themselves anything they value most, and they never disclose their knowledge even to their children. Some do so when they are on death-bed. It is a selfish tendency. Such being their attitude towards knowledge only those arts and techniques which cannot be practised alone such as iron-smelting, gun-making and the like have been inherited by the new generation. The ancient art of healing with the use of indigenous herbs and the treatment of certain ailments mentally is nearly lost to the present generation because those who had it passed to them from the ancients declined to share it with others lest the new ones surpass them!

The absence of written literature was responsible for the loss of many folk songs, lyrics and tales in the land. The efforts to write whatever was in the air was made in the nineteenth century by Rabon Singh, Singh resumed the work in the early part of the present century; but much remained to be recorded. Soso Tham, Primrose Gatphoh, Mondon Bareh, H. Elias and others have recorded several fables and stories about animals, birds and men but they too felt that there are many more besides.

The oral tradition in writing speaks about the acts of heroes and heroines of the primitive times. It also speaks of animals, rocks, water and other natural objects which spoke like man and understood one another. A person who wanted to learn those for himself had, in those pre-literary days, to find a bard to sing or a story-teller to tell his stories, and also occasions for them to do so.

The occasions were social events like weddings or funerals when men sat all night and told, or listened to, stories. Elderly persons in the rural areas of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills still speak of people who recited their stories or sang their songs while working in the fields, for example, in the weeding season when all workers got to work, someone told stories to delight his friends. Alternatively, all the weeders joined in singing folk-songs. On such occasions, people used to take the parts of either real or imaginary persons presumably engaging in some debate when one side sang to criticise or defeat the points put forward by another. In the Jaintia Hills, they call such folk songs as ñiaw laho, and in the Khasi Hills, phawar. In any case, those are either short couplets or lyrics or crude ballads. Much of the oral tradition that is lost or recorded belongs to one of or all those categories. Oral poems and fables which have been handed down from one generation to the next are those associated with religious functions, hunting, arrow-shooting and the like. Some of these have been written down by poets and other writers including Bronath Thangkhiew,

2

Khasi poetry evolves from oral lyrics composed spontaneously on occasions. Those embody the feelings of the composers, and the action of the characters, as well as warnings of what may happen to the listeners themselves. This oral poetry is subjective in nature and it tells of what the singers themselves think about life or a particular event. It evolves therefore from the way an ancient man looked at the world around him and the way he felt about all its manifestations.

The themes of these oral poems include love, war, deeds of prowess, fighting, and satires. What William Henry Hudson records of the themes of English oral poetry, namely, that "love, hatred, pity, and the simpler interests of the domestic lot, receive a full share of attention"⁵ holds true of Khasi oral poetry as well. Among the oldest nursery couplets still extant is one which does not appear to be Khasi at all, but curiously enough it is recited even in the remotest Khasi village. It is difficult to guess the meaning of this old couplet, but I reproduce it below from the book of Primrose Gathphoh. It reads:

Amal-dum mal-pa-ra khe,
Sotti ma-ha-de,
Kol-ka-ti-dum, tha!
Ra-phi-pum ma nga, Raja.⁶

This couplet shows that the Khasis were acquainted with riming since the early days. In fact, poems recited in shooting competition which are known as phawar iasiat are all rimed couplets. In such phawars, the words are believed to have some magical power to direct the arrows right to the target. Believe as the Khasis do in ka nia ka jutang or verbal magic, their songs are oriented towards winning certain goals in life. Thus in this respect, couplets recited at competition are like the mantras.

In method and style, the oral poems are crude and irregular. It is a unique invention of the earliest Khasi poets. Interestingly, the method is employed throughout the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. It is

⁵An Introduction to the Study of Literature, p. 104.

⁶Ki Phawar Sana (rev. ed., 1970), p. 20.

Hopewell Elias has recorded 12 such oral poems associated with social functions in his Ka Hamsaia Ki Por (1937). Crude though the oral poems are, they exhibit that they have rime and rhythm. The rime is achieved at the end of every foot in the line. While oral poems of the Jaintias are mostly iambic, those of the Khasis are irregular in the stress pattern.

Apart from this, there are poems which spring out of the religious themes. They are in fact 'sacred' in the sense that a divine or a priest addresses his words to someone higher than himself; the addressee may be God the Creator, or any deity known to him. The deity may be male or female as it is revealed to him through his divination. Those sacred poems differ from the ones used in social functions in that each line conveys something very clear to the hearers. A person may address himself to God when he is in trouble for revealing the cause of his trouble. Like the ancient Greeks, the Khasis too are seekers of the cause.⁸ They believe that everything which happens to them is the effect of the cause, and once the cause is known its effect could also be overcome. Religious poems are direct and colloquial in style. They are preserved not in monasteries or temples but in the tablets of the heart. A would-be divine or nongkam has to listen attentively and carefully to the one in active service. He should be a man respected by the society, but the most important qualification he must have is knowledge of the art of saying his words because religious poems or cantations are argumentative in nature. Below are a few lines from what Rabon Singh records in the

⁸Cf. Introduction.

book referred to above⁹:

Ko Lengsam/ khun ka blei/ ko banang/ ko balah/
ko baiai.

Nga pynthiah/ nga pyndem
Halor/ ka diengshat/ ka diengkhein/ ka duwan
ka dupat.

Ah kynrad/ ngan kylli/ ngan tohkit:
Katne long/ ka shitom/ ka lanot,
Ka shoh,/ka ther,/ ka shit,/ ka syang,
Ka pisa/ ka lynga/ ia ka met/ u Donsing.

In chanting this, some knowledge of rhythm is important. Generally religious cantations have no rime and they form a basis for free verses. Apart from rhythm, music plays an important part in speaking the words.

3

The words and meaning of the oral poems are of special interest to the modern readers and critics of Khasi poetry. In this section, I propose to undertake a short excursion into this aspect of the subject.

The makers of social couplets selected such words for their first lines as would rime with those in the second lines. The words in the first line of a couplet as used by those living in the Jaintia Hills make a sense parallel to the one in the second line. Besides, the meaning in the first line has no relevance to the one in the second. Take the lullaby of a baby-sitter entreating the baby to behave well till her mother comes:

⁹I arrange the lines in a manner I consider they should have been to demonstrate the feet in each line.

Rice powder, water weed, a basket made by a bird;
Move your head backward and limp single-footed.

An otter, and orchid, a wild fruit four units:
All dancers should follow as your leader would show.

The translation nearly spoils the beauty of the original because we miss the rime at the end of every line; but a poet who wants to use the old form need not bother about the original meaning of the first line at all so long as he could select words which rime at each foot, after all, words in the first line have no meaning. Therefore, the second couplet above could be re-written thus:

An otter/ in the snow/ and a pea/ for a crow,
All dancers/ should follow/ as your lea/der would show,

and continue in this way for all couplets meant for social functions.

On the other hand, each word for the religious poems or chantings is well selected to dignify the prayer, and each word conveys a clear meaning to both God and man. A Khasi believes that only words chosen carefully should be used in prayer to please God and make him respond to the need of mankind.

The elements of oral tradition appear in a few short poems of Amjad Ali; Soso Tham's "Ka Biria U Bieit", and Bronath Thangkhiew's "U Nongtem Duitara". In fact, Thangkhiew seems to provide a link between the oral tradition and the written Khasi poetry.

The oral tradition had helped in the development of written couplets and other genres of Khasi poetry.

CHAPTER II

THE CHARACTER OF KHASI LITERATURE (1841 - 1940)

In this chapter I propose to make a general survey of Khasi literature and the character it assumed during the years 1941-1940. Since poetry will be treated separately in Part III, we shall here have a look at Khasi literature in general.

Anything that grows must have a beginning somewhere. It might be with the seed or the root. Khasi literature too has grown to its present stature from Ca Citab Ban Hicai Ca Citien Cassia, a primer by Thomas Jones I. It was the first booklet in Roman script written and published in the Khasi language from which all other Khasi books have come out. The primer was a seed for the Khasi literature to grow. The primary aim of Jones was to provide teaching material for the three schools he opened in the Sohra area. The seed was then sown in 1842. From that humble beginning, Mr. C.K. Hodson, the Principal Assistant Commissioner found that there were 32 books in the Khasi language in 1858 of which two were "secular school books."¹ A perusal of the list of books brought out in the first decade of the history of Khasi literature shows that many of those were translations either from English or from Welsh and were intended for use in public worships.

From the beginning, Khasi literature owed much to translation; and translation has been an important factor in the development of Khasi literature. Through translation the Khasi writers acquired notions of art forms and literary style.

¹W. J. Allen, Report on the Administration of the Cossya and Jynteah Hills (1858) as quoted by Kynpham Singh in A Collection of Writings (1979), p. xviii.

The history of translation into the Khasi language dates from 1831 when the Serampore Baptist Mission published its translation of the New Testament. The mission used the Bengali script. The language too is not easily comprehensible to a Khasi because it is a strange hybrid of Khasi and Bengali words. The Reverend E.H. Williams had thrown some light on the work. He says that the translation was conducted with the help of one maid servant and one young man from Sylhet.² This translation has not been of much help to the growth of Khasi literature or of Khasi thought because of the imperfect handling of the language and of the winding up of the Mission's work in Khasi Hills in 1838. Added to those factors was the absence of a primer to help the natives understand the art of reading the work.

Thomas Jones took the correct step in this direction by first teaching the people reading and writing in their own language; and then supplying them with translation. He, William Lewis and his wife translated books on catechism into Khasi for the use in schools and in the Church. When Jones left the mission in 1847, the work fell heavily on the Reverend William Lewis and his wife. Besides teaching at schools, both the missionaries worked hard on book production. The husband published the Four Gospel and the Acts of the Apostle in one volume in 1856, and the wife published her translation of the first part of John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress in 1857.

The New Testament upto the "Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon" was published in 1868. It was a direct translation from Greek into Khasi. The major work was undertaken by the Reverend Hugh Roberts

²The Khasi Jaintia Synod Report, 1941 as quoted by T. Rodborne in U Khasi (1979), p. 142.

The title the translators gave the translated work was Ka Jiwtang Ka Bathymmai Ka Jong U IIsous Khristos. Though it shows a great improvement upon the translation of the Baptist Mission, the manner of spelling quite a large number of words created confusion in the mind of readers. The reason was the frequent use of extra consonants and of accented vowels which are absent in the Alphabetical Chart and the text book of the period. The missionaries realized the problems too soon, and the work underwent several revisions since then. In the revised edition of 1885 the title was modified into Ka Testament Ka Bathymmai Ka Jong U Jisu Khrist. The most commendable achievement in the field of translation was the publication of the whole Bible in Khasi in 1891 under the supervision of John Roberts. Several other translators, foreign and native, devoted themselves to the work. Those people who translated the Bible were, as Douglas Bush has said of the translators of the Bible into English,³ "raised above themselves by the consciousness of their responsibility for making the divine word clear and persuasive to the 'very vulgar'". The translators gave names to the people of the Bible, especially of the new Testament, in a way which is different from the names they bear in the English Bible. For example, John becomes Ioannis, Matthew becomes Mathaios, Luke Loukas, and even Jesus becomes Jisu from 1885 onwards. The language used in the Bible befits the solemn occasion it was intended to be used for. On the other hand it is rather the rendering of the Bible in Khasi words than in Khasi idiom. The

³English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century (London: Oxford University Press, 2nd rev. ed., 1962), p.67.

translation has been revised several times in the present century replacing words which have grown dim by infrequent usage. Even then, there seems to be a need for more revisions which will restore the poetic nature of the books of Job, the Psalms, the Songs of Solomon and the Lamentation of Jeremiah in translation as well.

The Bible has a wide appeal to the reading public and a strong influence upon Khasi authors in the last and the present centuries.⁴

Equally useful in the translation of the Pilgrim's Progress. The allegory of Bunyan has been a major influence on Khasi literature. No doubt, all the authors who produced books upto the first half of the present century had read the translation, and made use of allegory as an effective form of literary expression. The latest edition of the Progress was revised largely by John Roberts. It is a polished translation.

By the last decade of the 19th century, the Catholic Mission also published several religious and theological works translated into Khasi for the benefit of the Catholics. Along with those, each religious denomination in later years translated books which are of use to them in their respective public worship services. Since those cannot be regarded as literature in the strict sense, a reference to the titles which have appeared during the first 100 years of the literary history is of no relevance at all.

The translation of a few fables attributed to Aesop was undertaken by John Roberts. This gave a new dimension to the

⁴Cf. Chapter I in Part III.

development of Khasi Prose. Roberts translated 18 pieces and got them published along with his Khasi Third Reader (1884). Roberts selected animals, birds and other creatures which were known to and heard of by the Khasis and appended to each fable a moral lesson. Soso Tham was the first among the Khasis to discover the literary and moral value of the fables. In 1920 he published his own translation of Aesop's Fables after the style of his teacher, John Roberts. In the hands of Roberts and Tham the author of the Fables lost something of his individual character because the translation was so real to Khasi life as to make a less informed reader fancy that Aesop was a man who had lived in their land in the distant past. Both Roberts and Tham were Christian humanists with a mission, namely, their zeal for the enrichment of the Khasi mind through literature. As a literature of conduct and courtesy, the Fables as translated by Tham has no equal in the flow of language and the clarity of style. A few modern writers have brought out books modelled after the Fables, but their impact on the Khasi reading public is yet to be felt. Another translation by Soso Tham is The Life of Our Lord by Charles Dickens. The translation was published in 1936. With the publication of this work, the natives were made more keenly aware of the need for more reading materials for children and they saw, too, that there was scope for literature in novelistic form to grow in their own language.

Next to translation comes adaptation and transcreation. The first finds expression in prose while the second in poetry (which I shall discuss in Part III). The leader in adaptation was John Roberts. He started with his "Abraham" and "Joseph" and published those pieces in The Khasi Third Reader. The stories were taken from the Bible.

Roberts designed the plot for each of these stories and treated them in a novelistic form, with characters and action proper for a novel, except the length. The two stories can be regarded as the first novelettes in the Khasi language. While "Abraham" ends in the happiness of the main hero in his submission to Jehovah's will, thereby becoming the father of the chosen race; Joseph passes through crises like the ill-treatment by his elder brothers, his being sold and carried away to Egypt, and through the machinations of Potiphar's wife against him. In all those, Joseph trusts in God. The story ends when Joseph is worshipped like a ruler by his own brothers. The third adaptation by Roberts is Jonathan Swift's The Vision of Mirza. This was printed along with other chapters in the Khasi Fourth Reader (1895). Roberts abridged the work, but so deftly that no essential **points were left out.**

The first native to follow the path led by Roberts was Jeebon Roy. Roy's efforts were to present Hindu legends and myths to the Khasis in an engaging manner. In 1898-99 he adapted the accounts in Hit Upodesa. The work contains stories about Hindu kings and general legendary events in India before the advent of the Muslim rule. Roy's Ka Ramayan and Ka Kitab Chaitanya were adapted from Indian books of the same titles. The adapter was near to being a translator because he retained the main characters and their action as in the original, but his works are not faithful translation, because he selected the events as he thought were similar to Khasi ideas only; but the text as we have it now shows that he favoured the Brahma Samaj's philosophy.

Third in the list of adapters is Haricharan.. Roy, son of Jeebon Roy. Haricharan Roy adapted one story from the Mahabharata, and brought it out in 1915 with U Kausik as the title. The author's inclination to project traditional virtues like hard work, honesty and godliness is evidenced in the parts played by his main character, Kausik. Though it ranks as the first fiction by a native, the work lacks artistic treatment. Another fictional work /is Mondon Bareh's U Alauddin Bad Ka Sharak Jadu (1926-27). Bareh adapted the story of Alauddin and the magic lamp from the Arabian tales. The idea of the author was to entertain the readers with the adventures of his characters.

It must be noted that no complete novel had ever been published in the Khasi language during the period of study. This does not mean that the Khasi reading public were less interested in this genre. The reason behind the delay in the appearance of the novel was the unfavourable attitude shown towards it by leaders of public opinion. Sib Charan Roy, one of the founders of the Seng Khasi School of thought, had this to say about fiction:

I would add only a little. To be good and righteous persons, and to reach the House of God in this age, we should not read or allow [others] to read all types of "Novel" (the story about sex) because they do not improve upon the tranquil nature of man. On the other hand they tempt [a reader] to bond towards evils.⁵

Sonder S. Majaw finds that Sib Charan Roy erred in making such a generalization of a novel as to call for a ban on the reading

⁵Ka Niam-Ki-Khasi (1915), p.xv.

of any. Majaw writes:

. . . it is not denying the fact that there are bad novels and there are also good ones. Not all are bad and not all are good. In a large market of books, there are novels which contribute to knowledge, mould the mode of thinking, the way of life in the society and things which are right.⁶

Sib Charan Roy's conception of a novel is simplistic; it is simply "the story about sex." Roy was wrong in equating the novel with pornography which is likely to corrupt the mind of young people. Apart from this, it must be said that Roy represented a section of old guards of moral virtues; but Majaw observes correctly when he adds that Roy was afraid lest the Khasis sink down morally into foreign culture through the reading of novels.⁷ What Roy said might have been taken as a non-Christian view of the novel. Christian leaders also were not favourable to the genre. One of them, Seint Singh, an influential evangelist of his time warned that the interest shown by the natives in fiction may result in the erosion of moral standard and spiritual life. Singh viewed fiction as a story "about love affairs". This is an improved view upon the one held by Sib Charan Roy. Singh's firm view against the novel had been recorded in one journal in the following words:

Mr. Seint Singh, Evangelist, has stated that books which contained fiction about love affairs are immoral "that we should not give to young people who are really young mentally, because these will doubtlessly spoil them. We have seen in the whole world that persons who delight in Novels do not care anything about the preciousness of their life, and finally they ruin themselves in immoral life."⁸

⁶Ki Syrwet Jingshai (1982), p.68.

⁷Ibid., p.69.

⁸U Nongialam Khristan, October 1934, p.110.

It is not clear, however, whether the Evangelist referred to Khasi fiction or to English fiction which he found to be immoral because it took love as its theme. By 1934 when his view was recorded, the copies of Primrose Gatphoh's Sawdong Ka Lyngwiar Doel (1933) had circulated in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. This book contains four novelettes with love and adventure as its theme.⁹ Whatever be the case, it is clear that both Roy and Singh who sought to ban and censure the novel respectively were moralists like Plato whose aim was to impose moral discipline on the Khasi society.

2

In spite of the dissenting voices about the novel, time had come for prose work to flourish. This included fiction. The years 1915-1940 marked indeed the flowering season of Khasi literature in all its forms. After the prose works of John Roberts and the translations referred to above, there was a lull in the history of Khasi literature till a Catholic priest, the Reverend Joseph Bacchiarello came out in 1930 with his Ki Dienjat U Longshuwa (Footprints of the Ancients). Bacchiarello included in this work two tales, one fable and one short story. The tales were a record of what the author heard from the oral tradition and both the tales centre round the Khasi version of the beginning of mankind in this world. The effort of this missionary seems to be to search for a synthesis of the creation story as recorded in the Bible and the one according to the Khasi oral tradition. He started with the coming

⁹I shall come to these works later in this chapter.

of the first seven pairs of people from heaven to live in this world. In due course, these holy, honest and righteous people who represent man were tempted by a devil, Iakjakor by name. Man was overcome by the Tempter and sinned against God. As a result of the fall from divine grace, all ills befell him. The author continued the tale in "U Syiar Khraw Jutang" or "The Great Reasoning Cock". This is a search for atonement from sin. Because of the sinful nature of man, the story goes, the Sun disappeared from the sky by day, and the Moon failed to give her light by night. In such a circumstance, all creatures: man, animals and birds met in a great council to find some one from amongst themselves to intercede for man before God. In the end, the Cock agreed to plead with Sun for light and to become a sacrificial when man offered sacrifice to God. Bacchiarello did not show much action in the tales. It was Primrose Gatphoh in his "Ka Krem Lamet Latang" who gave a complete account of it. This account reminds the reader of Adam and Eve, their simple life, their fall from grace as well as the Christian doctrine of redemption of man from sin. The other pieces are simple narratives meant to entertain young readers.

Primrose Gatphoh (1900-1976) appears as a prince of Khasi story-tellers. The language he used in his eight short stories, four novelettes, and 13 tales flows smoothly; and the thoughts and words he put into the mouths of his characters are clear. These he packed in one book, Sawdong Ka Lyngwiar Dpei. In his hand, both the plot and characterization got the treatment they deserve. He began all his stories where they should begin, moved into the conflict in the mind of his characters or into their trying times, and

endeavoured to unravel the complication for smooth ending, whatever the ending might be. In stories like "The Golden Dove", "Ka Shwar", "The Fox and the Kaviraj", Gatphoh created villain-heroes and made them symbols of evils working against truth, honesty and hard-work. Though at times he allowed readers to remain in suspense as they think about the fate of the heroes or heroines, Gatphoh revealed the villain-heroes through an intricate process and made truth and righteousness triumph over vice. His heroes were endowed with wisdom, courage, power and blessed with the ready assistance of the gods. His characters moved, talked and acted like living persons. Like the earlier writers Gatphoh too subscribed to the taste of the age, namely, that literature should instruct and delight the readers. Laziness, carelessness, pride in prosperity were to him evils; and wherever he personified those, the characters he thus created ended in shame. Shwar who, out of jealousy, pushed the queen down the cleft died at the end, and the dead queen came back to life. In the "Golden Dove", the thief was put to shame, and nowhere had Gatphoh allowed vices to triumph over virtues.

In another collection, Ki Khanatang bad U Sier Lapalang (1937) Primrose Gatphoh included more short stories and a few fables. One of these "U Lum Raitong bad Ki Shken Khongpong" takes love as its theme. Raitong is a place where the action takes place. It is a story of one Manik, a poor man and an expert in flute piping. It so happens that the king stays on a foreign tour for three years, and his queen, Makaw by name, falls in love with Manik and gets a son from him. Meanwhile the king returns and discovers that adultery has been committed against him. The council which the king summons to

decide the issue, after much investigation discovers that the poor man, Manik is the father of the son. Manik is condemned to die, but he asks for burning himself alive. The pyre is now ready, Manik pipes his flute and goes round the burning flame thrice and jumps into the pyre. Makaw too follows from behind and jumps into the fire. Both die a tragic death. In this story Gatphoh shows that death which can separate the persons fails to do so, because love proves stronger than it. Gatphoh's other stories concern themselves with people believed to have lived in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and elsewhere, their ideas and deeds which have become part of the living Khasi tradition.

Gatphoh gave the supernatural a free hand in determining the action and the end of his stories as he was to do in his poems. Those stories offer a key to the understanding of his treatment of nature when we examine his poems later. The dominant trait of Gatphoh's stories is that of the chivalric, courtly, and the romance which tradition - like the Greek and the English medieval literature - gives importance to love and adventures.

The same tradition is to be observed in his novelettes also. Adadak is a romantic hero who passes on from one adventure to another and spends his time helping those who need his help with the rare strength and courage; but when his adventures come to an end we find Adadak a married man who cares much for the welfare of his mother, his wife and of the society as a whole. In all his adventures, Adadak is helped by the Supernatural. In "Ka Lukhimai" too we find the adventures of Mahet and the Prince who, too, had to

overcome several hurdles before they decide to have families. In the Khasi society where the Church and Science are yet to change the belief of a majority of the people in the supernatural powers and even in that of witchcraft, Gatphoh's stories and novelettes are still useful in quenching people's appetite. His novelettes and short stories have cleared the path for the emergence of a full-length novel on native themes in years to come.

In 1937 the Reverend Brother (later Father) Hopewell Elias (1908-1966) published his Ki Khanatang U Barim (Tales of the Ancients). In the same year, a writer of lesser importance, Nalak Singh Iangblah published his fables of 39 pages on the Fox. Elias had a clear idea of what he was doing. Unlike Gatphoh who wrote to entertain, inform, and indirectly to instruct the readers through his creation, Elias set another goal for himself. He wrote in the Preface to the second impression of the Tales thus:

Indeed, tales are always tales, but it is mostly in them that the History of any nation takes its foundation. Do not famous kingdoms of the world -- Greece, Rome and India -- base their origins from tales?

Though Elias entitled his 248-page book as Tales, it contains only eleven tales, the rest are fables which have been told by Rabon Singh and Gatphoh. Quite a number of them are the enlargement of Aesop's fables which were translated by Roberts and Tham earlier. But as his preface says, Elias attempts to tell stories about the evolution of Shillong, Sutnga and other states and the causes for the downfall of the Madur state. These serve as a good source-material for literary creation be it prose fiction or poetry, or drama. As a basis for historical investigation, the tales are found wanting

because they lack dates and other details which could be of help to historians. The style is lucid and literary. Though the work might have failed to achieve the aim the author had, the readers are compensated by the reflection of the life and characters of great men of the past for the benefit of the new authors.

3

Poetry which is by far the most important literary achievement of the Khasis will be discussed later in the following chapters. Of the essays which appeared along with other genres I want to say that most of them were meant to serve as specimens for school students. Literary essays of certain length and standard were written by H. Elias and Owen Rowie. Elias discussed the meaning, nature and ~~function~~, and the forms of poetry. He attempted to trace the origin of Khasi poetry which led him to the conclusion that it came from God, the source of Beauty and Truth. Owen Rowie wrote a fairly long literary essay on the meaning of Literature. Both these works were published in Ka Syngkhong Jingtip, a journal of the erstwhile Khasi Literary and Cultural Organization, in 1937.

As with the novel, so with the drama, We have heard of dramatic performances or ialehke to have been popular in the different localities of Jowai, and the occasional performances by Christian teachers and their pupils in the evening of either the Christmas Day or the New Year Day, but none of such plays have been published in book form, and it is possible that the manuscripts are lost. The first to experiment in this genre was John Roberts. It was his translation of one of the Acts of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

The translation was incorporated in the Khasi Fourth Reader (1895). The aim of Roberts appeared to be to set an example for the natives to produce more plays. The choice of Shakespeare's and not those of any other playwrights was evidence of the esteem in which Roberts held that great English dramatist of the Elizabethan age. The Khasi drama cannot be said to have been created in the nineteenth century or with the translation of Roberts. It was only in the second decade of the present century that the first play was published. The first to come out in print is Ka Savitri (1910) by Hari Charan Roy. Roy discloses in the preface to the play that he borrows the story from the Mahabharata without changing the spirit of the original. He finds that the story "has good aim to give good counsel and to broaden the mind of the people, and that they should live circumspectly in the world holding fast righteousness and truth." Thirteen of the characters bear the stamp of the original, but his literary faculty prompts him to create characters with Khasi names, perhaps, to give the work a native flavour and relevance. The play was originally intended for the stage, and the stage direction has also been printed along with the text. It could be successful because the author was careful in the selection of events which could be presented on the stage. The play takes devotion to duty, honesty and good conduct as its theme. The heroine, Savitri, is a devout Hindu lady who loves her husband and is devoted to him. It is essentially a morality play.

Savitri was followed by Sromotimai (1912). The alternative title this second play bears is Ka Hok (Righteousness). The third one is U Tipsngi (1924) by Dino Nath Roy. The playwrights were brothers, and both were sons of Jeebon Roy. In the first one, Dino

Nath divides the sequences into scenes only, but in the second play, Tipsngi he divides the story into acts and scenes. Both follow a simple plot and the simple theme, i.e., to live honestly in this world. Dino Nath selects the local setting and local characters for Tipsngi, and this can therefore be regarded as the first Khasi drama.

One fact has to be borne in mind. All the three plays were composed for the stage of the Seng Khasi at Shillong, and the creative and imaginative powers of the authors also were controlled by the stage at their disposal. Being morality plays, these works demand a greater attention to the spoken words than to the scenery and action. They mark a considerable advance in the progress towards the modern drama.

4

These men who laid down the foundation of Khasi literature had not tried to live by their pens. The translators of the Bible into Khasi including John Roberts who adapted the stories as discussed above had their careers in the Church and in teaching. They were not also associated with political powers, though they were connected with the government officers at least in the framing of school syllabi. H. Elias too had a life long career in the Church, and all his literary contributions became the property of the Catholic Church in these Hills. Were Elias an author outside the Church order he could have earned his living by his pen. Primrose Gatphoh was a school teacher. On his retirement from service, he devoted his time to the production of school books, and in one way, he alone can be said to

have earned his livelihood from writing. Hari Charan Roy and Dino Nath Roy wrote their plays with a mission : a concern for the traditional values of the Khasis.

The distinctive features of the Khasi literature of the first one hundred years are the stress it puts directly and indirectly on the good life and on condemnation of laziness, ignorance all other social and moral vices. In this sense, the Khasi social life and literature can be said to have complemented each other, as Gatphoh once wrote "the land has started reading books and we have received several requests for sending books to friends living outside the Khasi and Jaintia Hills district, . . . This shows that people love their own land tenderly."¹⁰ Through short stories and tales about the ancients, the readers started appreciating their own cultural heritage. In this respect, we can say that literature has had its impact on the mind of the people; and we can also say that the authors had seen the effect of literature on Khasi men and on the evolution of a self-aware Khasi Society.

¹⁰ Preface to Sawdong Ka Lyngwiar Dpei.

PART - III
POETRY

CHAPTER - I

THE EARLY KHASI POETRY

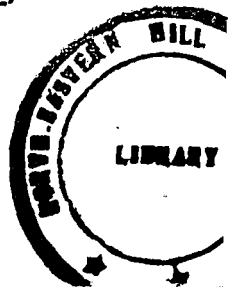
Early Khasi poetry was mostly in the form of sermons and moral lessons in verse and translation of the metrical psalms and hymns from the Welsh and English languages into Khasi. The hymns and semiseular poems were first used in schools and worship services. Such poems may be considered as Christian didactic poetry.

The first collection of hymns was published in 1845 by Thomas Jones, according to William Pryse; and in 1850 William Lewis published the verses he prepared along with those of Thomas Jones. A revised and enlarged edition came out in 1860, according to the information furnished by Wilson Reade.¹ The bigger one with 242 numbers and published in 1876. Writing about books available in the Khasi language in 1853, W.J. Allen wrote that "the other Cossyah books consist of catechism, 32 Christian humns and a translation of four Gospels."² Which one was composed first and which next, and also who did the work are questions which confuse the critic because the editors of the Hymn Book had not recorded the different editions the work had undergone over the years. The critic is left without dates and data. The practice of re-arranging the hymns according to themes as new numbers were incorporated complicates the matter further.

¹Ka Centenary History Ka Balang Presbyterian, p. 74.

Contemporary estimate which puts the date of the first edition as 1876 needs rectification. A record maintained in Wales shows that in 1855 also another edition came out.

²Quoted by Kynpham Singh in A Collection of Writings, p. xviii.



It is safe to begin the study of Christian poetry with Thomas Jones and William Lewis. Jones was quick to acquire the working knowledge of Khasi language so that within "7 or 8 months he knew enough of Khasi to preach among the Khasis in their own language People came from different places to listen to him reading Khasi and to observe him writing Khasi."³ Along with William Lewis and Mrs. Lewis Jones translated and transcreated a few hymns into Khasi for use in primary schools and in public worship. Jones's poem "Ki Lok Jong Nga Ki La Leit Noh" (My Friends Have Gone on Before) had been rated by William Pryse as the "best specimen, perhaps, of Khasia poetry."⁴ This poem has been sung at the funeral services of the Christians over the years. The occasion for translation as it appears to me, was the death of the Reverend Daniel Jones and of Capt. Thomas Herbert Lewin in 1846 at Sohra. They were the first Christians who died in the Khasi Hills. The poem has three movements like an Horatian ode. In the first stanza the poet sings of friends who had just passed away from this world. The departed friends had experienced the various difficulties of this life, but their faith in God upheld them, and they did no longer fear death when it comes. In the second movement, the poet speculates the journey of the departed soul to heaven, and he addresses God directly to guide the soul to heavenly rest, taking away the sting of death from it. He is worrying about the remaining days of his life, and prays for divine comfort and support. In the last movement, the departed soul bids farewell to all the dear and near ones on earth.

³D. Ropmay, CHBP, p.6.

⁴"Selection from Translations", An Introduction to the Study of Khasia Language (1855).

The last verse is translated below :

Farewell ye all I used to love
 Whose fellowship I delight;
 The love of heart cannot surpass,
 The power of the dark grave;
 When death is come we'll have to part,
 Good for me that I have God;
 He's Friend to escort me in death,
 Him alone on earth to have.⁵

Thomas Jones was a strict observant of Sunday. To him it is a Sabbath on which Christians should rest from their economic and other activities and worship God. In one of his letters home he expressed satisfaction when he found "that one shop in this country closed every Sunday according to the commandment of God."⁶ Taking this as a clue and until future research proves otherwise, I venture to attribute "Ka Sngi U Trai" (The Lord's Day), and "Ka Sngi Shongthaid" (The Day of Rest) to Jones. In the first poem he stresses, as he did in practice, the sanctification of Sunday, and holds that God also rested on that day. Therefore, all Christians must rest from their work and go to Church to worship God. Jones is not correct in imposing his teaching about the observance of Sunday in so far as he holds that God too rested from his creation on that day; because according to the Book of Genesis, God rested on the Sabbath Day which coincides with Saturday in the eastern hemisphere. In "The Day of Rest", the meaning of resting on Sunday is further elaborated. He awakens his soul to go to Church and to meditate upon things in heaven where he sings, there is a permanent Sabbath for a righteous man. Both these Christian poems are sermons. They were sung by early Christians almost every Sunday

⁵Ka Kot Jingrwai, No.371. The translation takes into consideration the meaning, the syllable and the foot of the original only.

⁶G.A. Jones, Ka History Jong Ka Balang Presbyterian (1966), p.17.

morning to remind themselves of their religious duty. Two other poems which form parts of the Hymn Book and which reflect Jones's personal experiences at Sohra are "U Mawsiang U Khristan" (The Rock of the Christian), and "Ka Nongrim Jong ka Jingim" (The Foundation of Life). In "The Rock of the Christian" the effort of the relatives of one Jonkha Diengdoh to appease the deities with sacrifices for Jonkha's recovery⁷ is reflected in two lines. The poem was composed in English by A.M. Toplady, and the original does not refer to the sacrifice at all. One stanza in the original reads:

Not the labour of my hands,
Can fulfill thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know.
Could my tears for ever flow;
All for sin could not atone,
Thou must save, and thou alone.

Jones' version when retranslated into English would read :

And all the good works of my hands
Cann't fulfill thy law's demands;
I sacrifice untired though,
And my tears forever flow;
All have failed to meet God's decree,
Thou who saves, now save me free.

The following lines also refer to the same occasion :

Don Blei hagdeng ki blei
Ba kum U Blei jong ngi?
Uba sngewbang ban map ei,⁸
Ba sngewbrai iam jong ngi

The language used in these hymns is more polished than it is in the other old hymns. This could be so because Jones was helped by two Khasis, U Duwan Rai and Jungkha (Jonkha). All these hymns which I

⁷Cf. Chapter I, Part I.

⁸Is there a god amongst gods
Like unto our God?
Who delights in forgiveness
And listens to our cries.

earlier attributed to Jones are also sermons. Jones may have translated and transcreated some other hymns, but since there is no definitive evidence, I am inclined to conclude that the other poems in the first Hymn book belong to William Lewis and his wife or to some prominent converts during the period. Lewis was the lone missionary and school teacher (for boys) in those early days. He had by 1844 acquired the knowledge of Khasi as an additional language. The editors of the new Khasi Hymn Book attribute only one hymn to Lewis and that is now numbered 200. In it the missionary thanks God for the Gospel of Christ. The hymn by Lewis contains only four lines, but it is an anthem. Records show that Lewis translated or composed other hymns also. The style of Lewis remains unchanged, even in the latest (1977) edition of the Hymn Book. It would be worth while examining a few of those old hymns to see the process of the development of Khasi poetry. I propose to examine those hymns as reflecting the personal experiences of William Lewis in these hills specially at Sohra.

Seven other hymns which belonged to the early period bear evidence of Lewis' experiences at Sohra and must have been composed by no other missionary than himself. The first of those is "Ka Jingjop Ka Gospel" (The Triumph of the Gospel). The poem speaks of the preaching of the Gospel of Christ in Greenland, India, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Africa, and the salvation of mankind through faith in Jesus Christ. It predicts the future extension of Christian work on earth. The name of Lewis was associated with the poem by William Pryse in 1855.

⁹Pryse, loc. cit. I.M. Simon referred to the Poem when he traced the evolution of spelling Khasi words from those days till 1977 vide Dr. Homiwell Lyngdoh (1977), p.66.

Lewis did not associate his name with works he translated or trans-created. "U Blei U Nongiarap" (God the Helper) which remains unamended till date belongs to Lewis' time. The diction, style and phrasing of the poem do not belong to later periods of writing. I reproduce below six lines from the poem as a sample :

Me ju pyndap byneng bakhraw
Sawdong pyrthei Me long bapaw;
Pyni ka khmat isnei, Ko Pa,
Tang kata lah pynshngain ia nga.

Ka khmat jong Me, ha pulit rieh,
Bunsien mynshuwa la iohi.¹⁰

Literal translation, as I have tried, fails to reveal what the original means to a Khasi. The reason was lack of proper understanding of the language especially when he attempted to put riming words.

The Khasi Hymn Book contains two hymns which are as old as the date of the first edition itself. Those were and are still sung at baptism. It was possible that Lewis taught his students the words and tune before baptizing the early converts. Though Jones arrived before him, he did not baptize any one for fear of the natives' unfavourable re-action. Even Lewis had to wait for years. The first poem in the series is "The Commandment of the Lord". It was set in uniform measure of four feet riming aabb. It is the prayer of the Church for blessing upon the fulfilment of the sacrament and for God's help and guidance towards perfect religious life. In another,

¹⁰Thou uses to fill the great heaven,
Around the world thou art famous;
Just show thy gracious face, Father,
That alone can satisfy me.

Thy countenance in mansion hide,
Of times before it was seen.

"The Act of Baptism" the thought was not arranged properly. This poem has an external purpose. As the title shows, the writer wanted to impress upon the converts that Baptism is important because it is one of the sacraments of the Church. At the back of his mind, especially when he wrote that "The Lord commands the customs hold," Lewis had the words of Christ to his disciples in mind. Christ asked his disciples to go into the world "and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (St. Matthew 28 : 19). The writer interrupted the theme with the use of instant apostrophe, like directing of his mind to God in prayer which distracts the attention of a reader from the main theme. Consider the following stanza as an instance:

U Trai u ong, ka rukom bat,
 Ka synjat jong ka jingim;
 To phah na jutang suk, Ah Trai,
 Ia ka jingalei u Mynsiem.

There are two speakers in the same stanza. The poet, the Lord, again the poet. I take the liberty of translating it below:

The Lord commands, the custom hold,
 'Tis the signet of life;
 And send from they sweet promise, Lord,
 The Holy Spirit's gift.

The phrase "The Lord commands" and the last two lines are the words of the poet, while "the custom hold, / 'Tis the signet of life" are words spoken by God. The poet directed himself first to men and then to God.

Under the theme "The Lord's Supper", Lewis composed four hymns one of which is "The Dearness of Redemption" wherein he reflected on his own conviction that the suffering and death of

Christ was an atonement for sin and that the blood of Christ had cleansed all mankind from sin. He addressed Sin directly, thus:

Oh Sin! besides this what canst thou,
The Son of God to death thou sent?
Seem though it be that thou hath won,
But in the end, thee, he had bound.

In this poem the writer used the figure of speech known as metonymy in which a poet changes the name of the character for the act it performs. Pop or Sin in the whole poem refers to Satan. Because of the old enmity between Satan and God, Satan dragged man to sin which, according to Christian doctrine, made man a captive. Man can be set free from Sin's bondage only through the acceptance that the death of Christ was a salvation for him. The personification of Sin as a male character points to that end. Otherwise, Sin is a female character according to Khasi usage. Again, to make the point as part of the central theme, namely, the observance of the Lord's supper in memory of Christ's passion, the poet goes on imagining that it was also Satan who was first responsible for sending Christ to death. The poet also fancied that Satan had been conquered already and is now under fetters.

In the hymn "A Christian amidst Tempest" Lewis adopted a conversational method of presentation in which the speaker's soul longs to escape from this world, and prays to God that he may grant it confidence to continue in his service, as well as to enable it to leave all sins and troubles in life. God is made to answer in a reassuring voice that he would always be with the seeker of truth, and the soul in turn expresses confidence in God. The hymn reflects the personal experiences of Lewis clearly.

From D. Ropmay's essay on "The Beginning of Christianity" we learn that this missionary worked for 12 years without visiting Wales and alone and faced "difficulties and trials, dangers and worries which deteriorated his health and mental strength."¹¹ This has been corroborated by G. Angell Jones who wrote that had it not been for "the sympathy from all sides" Mr. and Mrs. Lewis would have sunk into "hopelessness and ~~desp~~airs."¹²

Linking the hymns with the events enables us to identify other numbers composed and used during the period of study. The other old hymns I would now attribute to William Lewis are those believed to have been sung at the funeral services when Christians died at Sohra during the early history of the Christian Church in Khasi Hills.

The Church in Khasi Hills suffered loss in the death of Nimor, Stephan, and Ribon in 1852, and a great loss in the death of Nabon in 1857. The death of Nimor and Ribon resulted in the open hostility of their parents towards the Christians. The relatives of the departed souls demanded their bodies to be delivered to them for cremation according to the local custom of disposal of the dead bodies, but the Christians paid no heed to the demand and went on with the burial after due ceremony.¹³ All those were persecuted for their faith. The hymns "The Shortness of Life" and "Death is Near" were beyond doubt composed by Lewis himself. Nabon was the first lady teacher among the Khasis. She

¹¹CHBP, p. 24

¹²CHBP, p. 22

¹³CHBP, p. 112

was teaching at Shala when she was married to u Luh in 1856, and death cut her life short, one year after the marriage was solemnized. On her death, the members of the nine years' old Church were justified in singing:

Ka jingsngewtynnad mynta,
 Lashai ka sngewsia long;
 Bad kaba nga khein shisha,
 Ka jingiap kan sa rong;
 Ka jingiewbih u syntiew,
 Ia nga bunsien ka phon;
 Shapoh u mih u shiah,
 Khlem shiah ym ju don.

or

The delight of the present,
 Is sorrow tomorrow;
 And all that I count as real,
 Death itself shall carry;
 The fragrance of the flower,
 Betrayed me often times,
 Inside the leaves grows a thorn,
 And thornless ne'er was it.

This poem might have been composed by Mrs. Lewis as the natural imagery in it is similar to the one found in the nursery rimes believed to have been used in her class-rooms, and which later on formed part of the Hymn Book (in a section meant for Christian endeavour services). The whole poem is subjective in nature and coherent in style. Seeing the departure of his friends, a Christian analyses life in this and in the other world. Life on this earth is short and those who do evil will be punished after death. In the second stanza reproduced above the writer likens youth to a flower, but then death comes and plucks it away while it is blooming. The poetess speaks of herself as a weak pilgrim here on earth and prays for the power to abide in the love of God. Finally she sings of the judgment day and holds the belief that this world and its elements will be dissolved with fire; only the righteous will escape death.

Another hymn which appears to have been sung first at the funeral service of Nabon is "Rest in Death". Nabon knew no rest. Her soul longed to serve her saviour. She suffered the maximum persecution in the hands of her parents and relatives for accepting the new religion. Miss A.W. Thomas who had gone through old records maintained by the Mission wrote that Nabon was one of the students gifted with sharp intelligence who "could read both Khasi and English." When Nabon was once locked inside her mother's house she overheard people speaking outside that "it is better to kill her" so that the question of her going back to the missionaries at Nongsawlia should not arise any more. Her parents, however, decided to send her away to Sylhet, but the intervention of the Political Agent of the East India Company saved her. Nabon was tried in the Court, but being minor, the Court asked her only one main question : whether she would like to stay with her parents or with the fellow Christian friends, to which Nabon replied that she would stay with the Christians.¹⁴ She was allowed by the Court to live with her missionary and Christian friends. She was later posted as teacher at Shala. There also she faced great difficulties both as Christian and teacher. People railed at her for her religion. Nabon could not find rest while she was alive, but she found rest only when she died. On the death of such a person, whom Christians remembered for her sufferings, the Church in the Khasi Hills was justified in singing "Rest in Death" which is translated below, and which reflects the religious persecution prevailing in those early days of Christianity in these hills, and alludes to the sorrow, pain, enmity, oppression, which many converts experienced for their faith. The poem, in translation, reads:

¹⁴CHBP, p. 39 ff.

O! how happy to die in faith,
 In Jesus our Saviour;
 Their fame is like costly perfume
 They die to die no more.

After all sorrows and all pains,
 This world and enmity;
 Away from those now in the grave,
 They rest eternally.

Words of oppressors cannot prick,
 Make them cry as of yore;
 Bitter temptation or sickness,
 Can grieve them now no more.

I am inclined to attribute the poem to Laithat who served as Interpreter to Colonel Lister when Nabon was tried in the Court. He too suffered at the hands of his relatives for his faith. The nobility and courage with which Nabon stood for her faith inspired him to become a Christian. Laithat helped Nabon in organizing a school at Shala in 1854.

The persecution theme returns in later Christian writers as well. John Roberts¹⁵ and John Ceredig Evans turned to the theme with the aim of strengthening the native converts in their new faith. In "Ka jingsngewskhem u Khristan" (The Confidence of a Christian) Roberts enumerated the many obstacles standing in the way of fire, swelling flood, and the cross; he also names physical afflictions and mental agony. A persecuted Christian, is cheerful and decides with his friends to continue steadfastly in their faith because they are confident that they will be rewarded by God in the world to come. In this confidence, the Christian challenges personal afflictions to come and fight against him as they like for he knows those cannot lay hold of his soul :

¹⁵I shall discuss his poetical works in the next chapter.

O tribulations, come from all directions,
 I'll stand in the midst, without fear and regret;
 Come and touch my soul as freely as you like,
 My Lord has removed all your stings from my soul.

(translated)

Roberts returns to the theme in two other short poems, "Ka Jingduwai ha ka Khuslai" (The Prayer in Affliction), and "Ka Jingsting ka Jing-jynjar" (The lightness of Tribulations). In the first one, the poet sees that to become a Christian means to face afflictions of various kinds at home and in the society in which one lives. Everywhere a Christian goes he has enemies around him. Roberts alludes to the condition prevailing at Sohra which deprived a convert of his right to enter any high office of the state no matter how deserving he might be of such office. In despair, therefore, a Christian sings:

What do I have in the world
 But an unending trouble;
 Enemies round about me,
 To torture me day and night.

John Ceredig Evans also records a fact of history in "Kynmaw Trai Ia Nga" (Lord, Remember Me) when he depicts the despair of a Christian amidst the antagonists of the new faith. In Evans' the Christian confesses that he is weak and dejected because the nongshun barunar eh or "the wicked enemies" advance towards him every moment. In spite of that, the soul of the persecuted person turns to God for protection, and prays that God may not neglect it. The text of what has been summarized reads:

Alone here I am weak,
 Ashamed and I am frail,
 My wicked enemies,
 'Gainst me they rush and rail.
 Against these guard me all the way,
 Remember me, dear Lord, I pray.

In "The Lightness of Tribulations", John Roberts sees as John Bunyan does in his Pilgrim's Progress that the burden a Christian bears upon himself cannot trouble him for long, for God will one day remove the burden away along with all the temporal tribulations. When life's journey on earth ends, a reward is awaiting a Christian in heaven. The poem contains five stanzas. In the first two, the poet sings of the presence of dangers in this world, but hopes that they will end because they cannot touch the soul. So, in the third stanza he decides to climb the mountain howsoever difficult the journey be till he finds the house of peace and joy where he will rest eternally and rejoice with his Lord and Master forever. Below is the translation of the poem :

Though our temporal sufferings,
 Must remain here forever;
 In heaven we'll have no sorrow,
 They'll end, -- for joy will be there.

Though much of heat strikes on us here, --
 Voices of praise will rise there;
 Glory eternal there we'll get,
 And trouble ends forever.

We'll climb the mount without delay
 The house of joy we shall find;
 There on top of refreshing hill,
 Seeking the country of Hope.

Weak and frail Soul, there, will find rest,
 And free from tribulations;
 When the burning heat too shall end,
 It shall find peace in God's House.

And there, God will gladly sweeten
 Bitter waters of Marah;
 They will be turned into sweet wine,
 For the sons of Jehovah.

The poet is influenced by the events in the progress of Bunyan's Christian who proceeds in his pilgrimage through many difficulties to reach the house of God. The refreshing hill of Roberts is like

the refreshing hill where Christian finds the shepherds. The sweet waters which the children of Jehovah can drink when their pilgrimage ends resemble the water of which Christian and the Faithful drink in the field of fruits and lilies! they are the waters of Life. Upto Roberts Christian poetry treats this world as a temporary place for man to life in, and heaven as the permanent home of the human spirit.

Among these Christian writers is Larsingh Khongwir. He composes two poems now numbered 202 and 203 in the Kot Jingrwai Khasi used for public worship by the Presbyterian Church in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The title of the first one when translated is, "The Preaching about Christ", and the second one, "The Extension of Christ's kingdom". Khongwir happens to be the first native poet to include the word "Khasi" in a poem meant for public worship. He does this in his first poem. In it he prophesies about the preaching of the Gospel of Christ in the plains of India and all over the Khasiland. He admits that Christianity came to the Khasis first from the West (Wales); but curiously enough he predicts that the Christian gospel will one day be preached in the West, "And it will go the West,/Hallelujah" Khongwir foresees the coming of an age in the history of Christianity when preachers from the east, including the Khasis, will go to the west and preach there. He also introduces a new element in Christian poetry in that he relates what may happen according to the law of probability, as Aristotle would like the poet to relate. Larsingh Khongwir's name appears in only the first poem; but from the style of presentation, and the similarity of phrases between numbers 202 and 203, I come to the conclusion that both have been composed by him. In the second poem, "The Extension of Christ's Kingdom", he reinforces the points mentioned in the first. Thus, the phrase ba kin iaseng (worship together) in the first one is referred to as kin wan kyrhai (they'll

come in large number) in the poem; and Ban pynkhrav i'U Syiem byneng (To glorify the heavenly king) becomes Kin pynkhrav i'u Khun U Blei (They'll glorify the Son of God) in the second one. These are simply specimens. The theme is the same, evangelization, the spread of Christianity through different ways. Though there is no conclusive evidence, the possibility of Khongwir having contributed more than two songs to the Khasi Hymn Book cannot be ruled out. The problem is that the editors of the book have not been able to ascertain the authors of several hymns even today.

It is interesting to note that Khongwir's entry into this branch of Khasi poetry has set a new tradition. Unlike the missionaries who treat this world as a temporary place for man to live and suffer, he does not want to escape from it. On the other hand, the second stanza of the "Extension" speaks of the coming of the kingdom of God from heaven down to earth, and the whole world shall worship God. He sings of the kingdom of God on earth thus:

Higher than the world's mountains,
 In the glory.
 Is the kingdom of our God
 Forever more;
 And they all shall see his House,
 All the nations;
 Above the mounts it shall rise,
 The raised one.

So instead of directing the readers to eternal rest and glory in heaven, he speaks of the coming of Christ once again into this world as prophesied in the New Testament. A man, in Khongwir's poems, need not escape from this temporal world but he should wait patiently for God to come down and establish his kingdom here on earth.

I have earlier in this chapter attributed just one poem to Mrs. Lewis. A close study of events in the history of the Presbyterian

Church in Khasi Hills shows that she may have been the authoress of some more poems. Some of those categorized as children songs and later appended to the Khasi Hymn Book fit well with the profession of Mrs. Lewis, namely, teaching. At least five of those speak mainly of the care of God for little children. These are semi-secular poems. They appear to have been used every day in her school. The first one, "Jesus Likes little Children" speaks of the tender care of Jesus for all children. In the second stanza of the same poem, the poetess sings as a child who knows that Jesus died for her. In the fourth stanza, the child is confident that Jesus listens to all prayers, especially those offered by little children. In "Shine like the Stars", Mrs. Lewis compares school children to shining stars which give light at night wherever they are. It is a group song, and all the children in a school participate, and are made to determine through this song that they too shall shine always and shall not turn to evil because they are "pearls" unto God in this world. "God Loves Me" is perhaps the best poem of this category. It is argumentative in style. In the first sentence, God is Love itself; but since he loves little birds so that none dies without his knowledge, the conclusion is that God must love little children too. In the third and the fourth stanzas, the poetess turns to natural objects like the lily and the red rose which are loved by God, and since he loves even those flowers, the children are sure that he loves them all the more. The poem "Children of Jerusalem" is a translation from English. It has a moral lesson and catechism. The last poem which I attribute to Mrs. Lewis is "The Loving Care of God." It resembles "God Loves Me" in style and in the employment of natural objects to illustrate the points made. In this, "play" and "work" are also included. It is in brief the prayer offered by the child to Jesus. The child praises Jesus for sending forth light to drive away

the darkness of the night; and thanks God for the sun which gives light to the world and plants and flowers. The poem refers to singing birds, and finally we hear the prayer asking God to send his Holy Spirit to the child to make her meek, and bless her so that she may grow up under the loving care of God whether she be at work or play.

I have stated above that the five poems are semi-secular; but there is yet another aspect to those poems. As Larsingh Khongwir's poetry is different from those of Jones and Lewis, Mrs. Lewis' poetry too is different from both the traditions. The difference lies in the fact that she introduces a non-theological and non-evangelical ideal of good life. All the five poems are short and easy to commit to memory especially so when the reader knows the tune. Their movement is rapid like the ballad, and befits the temperament of little children. Another point of departure from the earlier Christian poetry is the use of natural imagery : the stars, the flowers and birds represent school children trained in discipline and cleanliness. The authoress wants her children to be like flowers which emit pungent and fragrant smell in the land in which they live. The stress is, similar to that of John Roberts, on the value of patriotism. Mrs. Lewis' metaphor of light and stars stands for Christian gospel and education; but she does not believe that the land will be better unless people learn to work for their livelihood and have regular exercises for their health; hence the accent on "work" and "play". This has been borne out by the account of Miss Annie W. Thomas who records that while in this land Mrs. Lewis taught grown up pupils tailoring, sewing and knitting in addition to reading and writing.¹⁶ It appears, therefore, that Mrs. Lewis makes use of poetry as a medium to project her ideal of the good life through labour.

¹⁶ CHBP, p. 32.

On the whole, all the Christian poems discussed above have one thing in common : they interpret life as it is lived in a certain period of time. Jones, Lewis and Roberts adopt for themselves the method of applying historical events to the life of a Christian. Their aim is to teach a reader his duty as a citizen of his country, that is, to live honestly, to inspire a Christian to greater fortitude for he will get his reward in the life beyond the grave. The missionaries' obsession with the idea of a permanent home beyond the blue is not, after all, alien to the Khasi traditional faith which also believes that the soul of the righteous reaches the Gate of God, whereas the soul of the evil-doers the gate of Hell or nurok ka ksew.¹⁷ In brief, Larsingh Khongwir wants, as we have seen, to make this world a place fit for God to live among men, and he awaits for the second coming of Christ. He has a scriptural backing for his view because St. Matthew recorded the prophecy of Christ about the second coming thus:

And then shall appear the sign in heaven : and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.¹⁸

Khongwir gets the idea of this earth as a place where peace shall ultimately dwell from the last two chapters of the Book of Revelation wherein St. John wrote that God shall come and dwell among men and he shall be their God, and they his children.

Some of these characteristics of Christian poetry have been assimilated by later poets like Soso Tham and Victor G. Barih who believe that the final home of man is heaven whence he came. The use of nature imagery also continues in later poetry. I shall discuss this when I examine individual poets.

¹⁷Sib Charan Roy, Ka Niam ki Khasi, p.

¹⁸St. Matthew, ch. 24:30.

CHAPTER - II

THE POETRY OF JOHN ROBERTS

1

John Roberts is regarded by several Khasi scholars as one of the founders of Khasi literature. Professor R.S. Lyngdoh on the other hand ranks him as "The father of Khasi literature."¹ Roberts has been assigned such an important place in the history of Khasi literature, because he experimented with diverse literary forms - Translation, Poetry, Fiction, Drama and Essay, thereby laying a sound foundation for Khasi literature to grow. Before we examine his poetical works, it would be appropriate to know something about him.

John Roberts was born at Corris, Meirionethshire, North Wales on the 16th February 1842. Because his father passed away while John was young, he had to work in a marble mine to support his mother and himself, and at the same time he studied privately at home. His hard work and intelligence was noticed by the Church leaders, and in 1866 he was sent to Bala to study theology. He completed the course in 1870 successfully. In 1871 Roberts was deputed to study a condensed course of one year in the Liverpool University.² Roberts reached Sohra in September 1871, and after he gained some knowledge of Khasi language, he was posted at Shala in the foothill of the district. In 1876 he took over as the headmaster of the English Normal School at Sohra where he taught theology, English and Khasi literature. Roberts took

¹Soso Tham Birth Centenary Celebrations Souvenir, 1973. p.49

²We have no information about the content of that course, but it is possible to consider it as a Master degree, because in 1896 he went to study at the Ripon University, Wisconsin, U.S.A. and was awarded the degree of the Doctor of Divinity.

a keen interest in Khasi language, and his mastery over it was praised by poet Soso Tham who wrote : "Besides teaching Theology, Dr. John Roberts taught English Literature and Khasi language. He rebuked us always for not knowing our own language."³ Tham was Roberts' student in the Normal School during 1892-93. Besides teaching and preaching, Roberts revised the translation of books on Catechism by Jones, Lewis and Mrs. Lewis, and translated three books from the Old Testament namely, Numbers, Samuel and Ezekiel, according to P.C. Khongwir.⁴

Roberts did not limit his works to teaching and preaching alone. When Hugh Roberts left for Wales he revised the Primer of Thomas Jones and gave it a new title, Ka Khasi First Reader. The primer was revised by Hugh Roberts in 1875 and added a second part to it. The title given to the work was A New Khasi Primer (2 parts). The second part was meant for Class II in the mission schools. John Roberts took the second part as the basis and brought out a new text, Khasi Second Reader. Many Writers, including Professor Lyngdoh believe that it was published in 1891. Writes Lyngdoh: "In this same year (1891) he brought out four readers for school children and these are Ka Khasi First Reader, Ka Khasi Third Reader, and Ka Khasi Fourth Reader."⁵ The date has gained currency and other writers too have taken Lyngdoh as an authority and accepted it without questioning. It is, however, logical that the Second Reader should come out before the Third and the Fourth; and if this logic holds good, the second one must have come out before 1884 because this was the year when the Khasi Third Reader came out and not in 1891. Roberts, in the mean time, continued working on the Fourth

³Ka Pateng Khristan, Feb. 1929, p.23, cf. M.G. Lyngdoh, in Ka Thiar Ki Nongthoh (1980), p.85.

⁴Ibid., March 1962. Khongwir has not quoted any source to support his report.

⁵Ka History Ka Thoh Ka Tar (3rd imp, 1982), p.49

Reader and revising the second one along with the revision of the Pilgrim's Progress translated by Mrs. Lewis. The copy maintained by the British Museum, London, bears 1895 as the date of publication and not 1891. The revised or new second Reader was published after Roberts' death in 1910 by E.H. Williams. Viewed from this distant date, the contents of the last two Readers seem so high in literary merit for classes III and IV, but they were texts for those classes till by a notification of 1952 issued by the Government of Assam, the books were replaced by new ones.

John Roberts died on the 23rd July 1908 in the midst of a cholera which broke out in 1907 while actively helping to save life in and around the Sohra area.⁶

2

It would be better to study John Roberts' poetry in three divisions: poetry with a purpose, poetry which is free from purpose and translation.

Poetry with a purpose : John Roberts translated and composed seventy seven hymns meant exclusively for public worship. At this stage of study, I propose to exclude those, and consider only such poems as appear to me to be secular, but have an external purpose. The first one is "Mynstep Ka Sngi Ka Saw" (In Morn the Sun is Red). This poem has been divided into three stanzas, each containing a statement of fact as the poet sees it, and an indication of his ultimate aim. The fact he states in the first stanza is that the Sun rises every day in the morning and sets at night; the aim is to

⁶I have referred to his Other Works in Ch. I of this part.

tell a reader that this phenomenon is seen only in this world because in heaven, the sun never sets: "There is a land far far away, / The sun in it fore'er does stay". The fact in the second stanza is that Spring brings forth beautiful flowers and makes the world appear freshly formed while Autumn makes both leaves and flowers fall on the ground as this is a natural law on earth, but the hidden aim of the poet is to profess that "There is a land we've never seen / Where trees and leaves are ever-green." Similarly, in the third stanza Roberts states the fact that Birds sing sweetly in sunshine and cease their melodious songs when rain comes. The birds here prefigure the angels in heaven, and in the last couplet he sings that "The angels in heav'n never stop / Their songs on harps to God above." From this analysis we see that the aim of the poem is to direct the minds of the reader from what he sees and knows to the unseen and the unknown, heaven, a place where death and decay are unknown. In projecting his ultimate aim, Roberts allows Christian tenets and the Biblical account of the heavenly abode of the soul to influence him. It was St. John who described heaven or the new Jerusalem as a place where people should long to reach. St. John wrote: "And the gates of it shall not be shut by day for there shall be no night there ... and they need no candle neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light."⁷

Over and above St. John's image of heaven, Roberts derived a romantic idea of heaven from E. Page's "Beulah Land," especially from the following eight lines:

⁷The Book of Revelation, chs. 21 & 22. In Chapter 19 of the same book, the angels are said to sing and praise God continually.

A sweet perfume upon the breeze
 Is borne from ever-vernal trees;
 And flow'rs that, never fading, grow
 where streams of life forever flow.

The Zephyrs seem to float to me,
 Sweet sounds of heaven's melody,
 As angels with the white-robed throng,
 Join in the sweet redemption song.

In "Ka Babeh ia ki Nongshun" (Driving of the Enemies) Roberts' purpose is to inspire young people to fight against laziness, hot temper and lie which he personifies as great enemies of man, and to be masters of their own destiny. He introduces the poem with a brief note: "In this poem Laziness, hot Temper and Lie are likened unto evil men and we do not allow them to befriend us."⁸ When a man has overcome these enemies which pull him down everywhere, he will have attained a happy life. The poet assumes a persona to speak for him in the last stanza where he calls upon all in the Khasiland to rise up and drive the enemies away so that the land will be happy and prosperous. At the same time, we see in this poem the reminiscence of the "angry forties" in Wales when many youths including the poet himself were forced by natural calamity to work for their livelihood, and when only hardworking and diligent ones could shine in studies which they did in their spare time.⁹ In addition to this background, Roberts echoes St. Paul who condemned laziness and hot temper in his letters to the Collosians and the Corinthians.¹⁰

In "The Dawn" (La dang saw ka Tyngab), Roberts, as Ali was to do later in his "Morning", exhorts the children to arise early in the morning, wash themselves, light the fire, clean the rooms and assist

⁸Khasi Third Reader, p. 21.

⁹G.A. Jones, KHBP, p. 85

¹⁰Collosians ch. 3, and Corinthians, ch. 11

their lessons diligently for God blesses those who study. The element of disciplined labour in this poem recalls the accent in the "Driving of Enemies", but the purpose here is to induce the young people to study.

The last set of poems which have a purpose are those he interpolates in his translation of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Roberts interpolates as many as twenty poems in the text. The English version of the Progress contains only a few rhimed lines inside. On the other hand, he has not translated the prologue and epilogue of Bunyan. Bunyan himself had a purpose when he wrote the Progress -- to explain Christian life, through allegories. In the first poem, Christian in Roberts' translation sings with a sincere desire that someone is needed to open to him the gate to Mount Sion, and plans to sing songs of Praise and anthem on reaching there. The gate is narrow and the path is full of danger. What he wants to tell is that the path to holy life is not an easy one, and that a Christian ought to follow his path without turning back. In the second poem Roberts makes Christian thank the Interpreter for explaining to him more about the course of the journey to heaven, and says that what he has been shown helps him in his determination to press on in his journey. When Christian reaches the mount of difficulty, Roberts makes him sing again recounting briefly what he has met in the journey he has completed, and then starts him on an upward course with a firm resolve to climb up the mount. He would crawl on knees because he knows that he has chosen the right path no matter how risky and dangerous it is. He knows, too, that the easy path leads to everlasting damnation. After each important event in the progress, the Christian is made to sing. The poems are well wrought pieces of literature, and when taken out of the Progress would appear to a reader as if they are connected with other themes because their messages could be applied to any occasion in the life of a Christian or of any man who strives for perfection.

John Roberts summarizes the epilogue of Bunyan at the end of the first part of the Pilgrim's Progress into two stanzas of 14 lines each. If the primary characteristics of a sonnet -- any sonnet, Italian or English -- namely, the rime scheme, the theme, and structure alone are taken into consideration, these poems would pass for sonnets. But the subject matter is not love; the art is narrative, and nowhere has the translator - poet expressed his personal feeling about the Pilgrim. But the transcreated epilogue has a purpose, which is to encourage the readers to brave any difficulty in this world, and to ensure them of a reward hereafter.

Poetry without Purpose : Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the time when Roberts was active on the literary scene, the number of people who could read and write had increased. This was due to the fact that more middle English schools and one high school had been established in the district. Didactic literature, or literature with a palpable design upon the reader was no longer appreciated. Roberts resorted to translating of a few English poems, besides composing his own (I shall refer to his translation later in this chapter).

The first in this series is "Ri Khasi" (Khasiland). It may be called a transitory poem between didactic poetry and the other. Roberts still retains a veiled purpose in this poem which is to awaken in the natives a keen patriotism. Till the middle of this century, the poem was used by the Khasis as their national anthem. It is set to the tune of the Welsh national anthem, "The Land of My Fathers.". In this poem Roberts identifies himself with the land, and treasures happy memories of ancient Khasis whom he can no longer see. He even attempts bit of the political history of the Khasis and talks about their

traditional life-style. The poem includes such details as battles fought with bows, arrows, spears and swords. He learns this from the people themselves and from the accounts left by foreign authors, including Mills who claimed that "numerous civil wars, which continually distracted the country, have been put down" by the English.¹¹

In renewing the myth of how the first Khasis fell from divine grace through Satan's temptation. Roberts is under the influence of the Biblical account of the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Satan, who tempted Eve is at once U Ksuid and U Soitan in the poem. The same devil beguiled the first parents of the Khasis, and brought darkness into the Khasi World. Again, darkness is treated as a symbol of Sin, as we find it referred to in the New Testament. Christ spoke of Satan as the prince of darkness. St. Paul and others referred to darkness to mean living in sinful life and ignorance. This use of darkness as a symbol of sin and ignorance has been copied out by later Khasi poets also. In stanza 5 Roberts sings:

Khasiland, Khasiland, the light has come,
 God remembered us, and leaves us never;
 And peace reigns supreme, knowledge has come,
 And now the whole land shall prosper.
 (trans.)

The implication of the lines is that God the giver of all good gifts had sent teachers to Khasi Hills to teach the people, and now that many of them had accepted the light of the gospel, and given up their pagan ways, peace had been established and the whole land shall prosper with the use of modern knowledge.

¹¹A.J.M. Mills, Report on the Khasi and Jaintia Hills 1853, p.3

Moreover, the English were not the only people who came to the land. Along with them dkhar or the Indians also had come up to the hills, and helped to enlighten the natives in various ways. He alludes to this in the last stanza:

The English have arrived, the Indians too;
 Khasiland is happy, it will shine brightly;
 Ignorance shall flee, darkness is no more,
 The flowers of knowledge shall bloom.

Roberts sees that the other Indians who had come to stay shall always be there with the Khasis, and in this stanza he tries to inculcate a sense of brotherhood among all peoples in the Khasi Hills. This may be read together with his appeals to parents to send children to schools with books and writing apparatus so that they could be useful in the society when they grew through preparation for the future responsibility.

He writes :

In former times when you lived alone before the advent of the British or the coming up of the Indians, whether you learnt or you did not it did not matter much because you lived among your fellow ignorant persons. But now it is no longer so; many non-Khasis have come up to your land, whether you like it or not he is here and shall stay here. You too have started going down to the plain to serve, to do trading, and to study. And when you face the world in this way, you must train yourselves in that social intercourse, you will gird your loins well, because the competition is not easy. You can see this in Laban in most of these offices. How does the non-Khasi push the Khasi out? Now the Khasi must equip himself till he reaches the position when none can or dare push him out.¹²

He sees that the Khasis will be the wiser by mixing with other people and living with them happily. The poem has been viewed by many as a radical attempt to justify the coming of Christianity and the non-tribals to these hills. The critics think so because

¹²U Nongialam Khristan, May 1904.

they identify the word phareng with the Christian missionaries and the dkhar with fortune-seekers. They fail to respond to the poet's view of a dynamic Khasi society and his concern about its future.

"Khasiland" is a patriotic poem. It has a refrain which all can sing, and in it he created an awareness among the natives that they ought to love their own land; and if they love it so, they should not fight civil wars among themselves but work hard in all spheres of life so that they can continue to be masters over their own affairs. So in the poem he chooses the plural 'we' to include himself as one of the natives, and the refrain speaks with determination: "We'll rise higher, we'll march forward / The Spring of knowledge we shall drink."

Roberts could be sentimental at times. In a three-stanza poem on Joseph he goes beyond the betrayal of Joseph by his brothers -- which is the climax of their envy of him, and expresses sympathy with Joseph. He uses pathos throughout, and finally prays to God to protect his character, Joseph, from further danger.

In the Khasi Fourth Reader John Roberts inserted some translations from English into Khasi. The latest edition (1949) published by Edwin Adam shows some adaptations and several new poems. In the absence of a prefatorial note to indicate names of the composers, or the claim for authorship by the natives, it would perhaps be safe to attribute those to Roberts himself. How Adam came by those poems, I have no clue at all. Had there been a claim by the Khasis that they submitted these to Adam, the question would not arise now. The possibility that Roberts left those in the files in his office at Sohra cannot be ruled out. The first of the original poems is 'Iing La Jong' (My Own Home). Here too Roberts sings of Khasiland as his own home. He draws a contrast between life in Khasi land (his Home)

and abroad and cherishes the former because in it he feels he gets all the blessings and love he needs. "Ri La Jong" (My Own Land) is an elaboration of "Khasiland" (discussed above). Here the poet sings of the natural beauty of the hills and refers to it as a place full of fruits and sugar-cane, fresh air, and clear water which distinguish it above other lands. The imagery is vital. His command of the Khasi language which makes him think in Khasi when he writes Khasi makes it difficult to capture the beauty of the original in translation. Let us consider the second stanza for instance:

Ka lum jong ka dap tang ka 'erpyngngad,
 Ri la ka jong, ri baieit.
 Ki um basngur khmih ki tuid bad ki wah,
 Ri la ka jong, ri baieit,
 Napoh ka them ka mih tang marwei hi,
 Ka ieng ha suin ban khublei ia ka sngi,
 Ka ring jingieit wat ia nongwei shisngi,
 Ri la jong, ri baieit.

or

Her hills and mounts are full of balmy breeze,
 Land of my own, lovely land;
 Crystal waters, look they flow in rivers,
 Land of my own, lovely land
 Out of the valley she rises up alone,
 She stands above to greet the rising sun,
 She wins the love e'en of a foreigner,
 Land of my own, lovely land.

Though the theme of these poems is patriotism, they thrive on a full use of nature imagery and the unbridled imaginative expressions of the poet.

The "Autumn" depicts nature as seen in the Sohra¹³ area during Autumn is a season of joy because the land is full of fresh woods,

¹³This is borne out by the fact that in the mainland of the district trees do not wear fresh leaves in Autumn because of cold, but in the southern belt, they still look fresh till winter comes, cf. p.4. above.

birds which sing melodiously, and bees humming in the wood. The season has been sung about later in more detail by Soso Tham, L. Lewis and others. In "The Dews" the poet describes how dew falls on the leaves of the tree, and on flowers early in the morning. It is the wind, he imagines, which brings the dew at night when the whole plant kingdom is fast asleep. He admires the sparkling colour of the dew and compares them to pearls. Nature, he sings, is full of wealth:

Nature and its own wealth,
A man to please well,
Multicoloured in form
To mesmerise some.

The poem had a lasting effect on Soso Tham who later composed "Ki Mawlynnai" and compared the life of man to the dew he saw in the grass. Roberts treats of nature locally and universally. It is treated locally in "Autumn" where he confines himself to the natural objects in the Sohra area; and universally in "The Dews" in which he projects his philosophy of life in an imaginative manner to say that life on earth is not everlasting for just like dew which appears in the morning and disappears in the heat of the sun, man's soul too shall leave the body and return to God whence it came.

Translation: Besides writing Christian poetry, John Roberts translated a few standard poems from English into Khasi of which mention may be made of "The Psalm of Life" by H.W. Longfellow, and "the Burial of Moses" by Mrs. C.F. Alexander. In each of these Roberts' skill as a poet is evident. A study of the above two poems along with the translation shows that the poet is very careful in the choice of words and phrases which convey a clear meaning to the readers and listeners. He keeps the themes and the sequence of events as in the original, and whenever a word for word rendering proves futile, Roberts takes

recourse to modification of the word order to convey the original idea. His translation of Mrs. Felicia Hemans' "Casabianca" is the best example of the meeting of the translator and the poet in the same man.

The original poem contains ten stanzas, but the translation has eleven in all. Though he manages to focus all the events in the story, the translator modifies the original slightly to convey the meaning better than does the original and to meet the demand of rime, foot, and metre in poetry. We can appreciate this point better by comparing the opening stanza of the original with that in translation.

The boy stood on the burning deck,
Whence all but him had fled;
The flame that lit the battle's reck,
Shone round him o'er the dead.

Translated into English, Roberts' first stanza reads:

The ship is burning and the troop
Had fled, but he remains,
The flame rolls up towards the roof,
The hope for escape feigns.

Roberts chooses the "present" at the time of the action and carries it through to the end. The limitation poetic translation imposes on a translator is also evident in this poem. Roberts cannot accommodate the word "below" in the third stanza to tell the reader that the father and the son are separated by space and are not in the same floor of the ship; but he allows the reader to know of the distance in the subsequent stanzas when Casabianca "shouts and cries loudly". Roberts expands the third and the fourth stanzas into three stanzas and brings in the soldiers and the friends of the father as participants in the battle. The battle of which Mrs. Hemans sings was the one fought in the Nile in Egypt, Roberts uses the word duriaw twice, and this means "ocean". He is clear however of his purpose, for the first

duriaw refers to the sea of death into which Casabianca's father is swimming and therefore cannot hear his son's cry. This idea is absent in the original. It is his occasional interruption in this manner which makes his translation surpass the original. Moreover, Roberts' translation gains in effectiveness he narrates as an eye-witness and a participant in the story of the fateful events which Hemans has not done. Roberts' involvement in the story produces pathos. I shall translate back into English those stanzas which speak of the translator's involvement.

The flame breathes on his hands and face,
 And all. O God help him!
 Art thou hungry, o icy death?
 Thou wait'st to finish him?

As we go on to the climax of the events we feel as if we see the translator pointing his hand at Casabianca, and urging the boy to leave the ship asking "O boy doest thou not fear?". Further, when the boy refuses to flee, we feel that the translator leaves him alone. When the fire ceases, the translator revisits the ship in search of the boy:

Ha sngap la mih ka jingbthei,
 Bariew kum u pyrthat
 U khynnah, Wa! ngam shem u shaei?
 La lehnohei ban wad.

or

Oh hark! explosion with its sound
 Like thunderbolt it bursts;
 The boy but Oh! I find him not,
 'Tis meaningless to search.

In incorporating fresh ideas in the translation, Roberts arouses pity, sympathy and nostalgia in the mind of the readers as he concentrates on the fate of the faithful boy.

On the whole, the pieces Roberts has translated have become parts of Khasi poetry. His success in effecting the original rime scheme, and in retaining the sequence of events through masterly use of the Khasi language is noteworthy. Roberts stands as a great poet and translator in Khasi literature. His translation has helped later writers to see the richness of the Khasi language and has supplied a model for modern Khasi poetry. The period in which Roberts lived was an age when authors looked to England and endeavoured to imitate the English writers. Roberts has thus laid down a sound foundation for the creative adaptation of the elements of English literature by Khasi literature.

CHAPTER - III

THE POETRY OF AMJAD ALI

We have seen in the preceding chapters that the development of Khasi poetry upto John Roberts has been more or less a reflection of change and development in ^{the} Khasi society, and of the increasing number of schools and the raising of the standard of education in these hills in particular. The poetry we have examined reflects the condition of the people around the poets, and life as the poets saw it with their own eyes. The Christian poetry was very largely a response to the liturgical needs of the Church while secular poetry served as a handmaid of elementary education. The influence of Christianity was to continue for some time and even in the mature poetry of Sheikh Muhamad Amjad Ali, the Platonic stress on moral virtues betrays the christian influence.

Amjad Ali was born at Sylhet about 1868. He had his high school education in Shillong and passed the entrance examination in 1887. Thereafter, he studied at Calcutta whence he took his degree in Law in 1892. In those days when jobs awaited local graduates, it was not difficult for Ali to get himself a government job. He was first appointed Clerk but by the time he retired in 1920, he was Assistant Inspector General of Prisons. Due to his devotion to duty he was honoured with the titles of Khan Bahadur and Khan Sahib by the British Government. These titles were reserved for the Muslims, as the ones conferred on the Khasis and the Nepalis were Rai Sahib and Rai Bahadur. Even after his retirement from service, Amjad Ali figured prominently as a social worker and lawyer. He was Legal Adviser to the Syiem of Myllem, was elected Commissioner of the Shillong Municipal Board, and a member of

the Legislative Council of Assam in 1923. He passed away on the 14th of January 1926.¹

So much of Ali, the man who lived among the Khasis, identified himself with them and died in their land. What is of special interest to us in this study is his poetry. Ali, it appears to me, composed Khasi poems while he was at school because his collection came out from Calcutta in 1888. The title of the work is Ka Myntoi which means "Profit", and this was the first poetical work in the language to come out in book form. Ali gave it a sub-title, Ka Kot Boit (Poetry) Ka Ba Nyngkong. In calling poetry Boit, the poet appears to have been guided by those Western epic and other poets who believed that poetry comes only when a poet is inspired by the Muse; for Boit means "fairy". Homer and Hesiod believed so, and invoked the Muse to aid them in their poetic creation. Plato had denied such poets the power of invention and poetic creation, because what they uttered was a form of madness, he held:

For the poet is light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him : when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and unable to utter his oracles.²

Some English poets including William Blake and John Milton believed in inspiration, and this might have led Amjad Ali to calling poetry itself, Boit or Muse, or Fairy.

¹Reference to his poetical works have been made by me in Ka Jingpule Kyrpang (1980), by Beven L. Swer and D.S. Khongdup in Ka Thiar Ki Nongthoh (1981) and by R.S. Lyngdoh in Ka Histori Ka Thoh Ka Tar (1979).

²Dialogues as translated by Benjamin Howett and quoted by William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks in Literary Criticism : A Short History (New Delhi : Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. 4th rpt., 1970), p.6:

Like his fore-runners in Khasi poetry whom we have discussed in the preceding chapter, Amjad Ali too had some aim in the publication of his book. This has been stated in the "Preface" as follows :

The want of an elementary poetical work in Khasi for the use of Khasi children has long been felt.

There are, doubtless, many persons more qualified than myself to supply the want, but as none of them have come forward, I thought it best to lead the way by printing the following few pages which are the first of the series intended for the purpose.

The above lines promise that he had a prolific plan of writing poetry. It is possible that some of his poems remained in manuscripts which are lost.

Amjad Ali found Khasi language capable of serving as a means of communication of ideas both through prose and poetry, but because, as he has stated, none of the educated men had produced a book of poetical works he led the way. Ali's poetry shows a departure from the oral tradition and at the same time a desire to maintain a link between the old and the new forms of poetic creation. In most of his poems Ali introduces the rime in the middle of the lines which is a marked feature of oral poetry. Ali accepts defeat only in word-sounds when the ones he needs do not come to his mind readily. Again, he does not attempt to inculcate in Khasi all the refinement he saw in English poetry which he had studied as part of the high school course; but as we shall soon see he borrows fruitfully from English poetry.

In the second chapter of Part II, I have referred to those poems and portions of poems which reflect Ali's passion for learning and where he conveys his views directly. I shall, in this section, examine the remaining poems many of which invite comparison with English poems.

I shall first consider his "Lobli". This poem is impregnated with Mrs. Felicia Hemans' "Casabianca". Hemans' poem has been popular among high school children since Ali's time. Casabianca was a boy of 13 years who was with his father, a naval officer, when the war broke out in the Nile of Egypt. Hemans explores the quality of the boy's character : his courage, fortitude and faithfulness. The crew fled away when the ship was attacked, the officer died of wound. Casabianca remained in the ship because he had not received any word from his father whether or not he should abandon the ship and flee for life. Casabianca and his father were on different storeys of the ship and the son could not see his father face to face to know of his condition nor did he suspect him dead. So Hemans sings :

Upon his brow he felt their breath,
 And in his waving hair;
 And looked from that lone post of death,
 In still, yet brave despair.

And shouted but once more aloud,
 'My father! Must I stay?"
 While o'er him fast, through sail and shroud
 The wreathing fires made way.

Ali is not a translator like Roberts who had earlier translated the above poem into Khasi. What he does in "Lobli" is borrow the theme and genre from Hemans and give the borrowed theme an original

treatment. Ali's Lobli is the son of a Khasi warrior whose age is only seven. At this age a boy would not understand that his father is sleeping a sleep that knows no awakening; whereas a boy of 13 years like Casabianca is expected to have some notion that the father who did not answer the shouts might be dead already. At the age of 13 a boy can somehow distinguish sleep from death.

In "Lobli" the father has just returned from a battle on land. The battle sounds real to the Khasi ears because the ancient Khasis used to fight battles among themselves using daos, bows and arrows. Moreover there is no sea or navigable river in the Khasi Hills which can help readers understand what a sea battle looks like. The father of Lobli has been wounded in the leg and cannot walk or run. After the father has entered his house, the fire comes suddenly and consumes the house too. Lobli is sitting near his wounded father. When Lobli sees that the fire is threatening their lives he awakens his father from sleep. Like Casabianca who shouted thrice to get a word from his father, Lobli too shouts thrice. Because, he does not know that his father is dead, Lobli dies inside the house with his father.

Ali learns from Hemans the structure, the rime scheme and the pathos of the incidents. The hidden aim of both the writers is to stress the value of filial love even unto death. Hemans' influence is evident in another poem, "Topu" in which Ali makes a dog by that name obey his mistress as does Lobli his father.

Topu is a dog tamed by an old Khasi lady in the Laban locality of Shillong. Topu's character impresses the poet much : Topu watches

the house, prevents thieves from coming near the house, responds when the lady calls him by name; and the most important distinction Topy has is his peace-producing intervention with warring birds. Topy is a pacifist. Ali's additional aim in this poem is to project the advantage of peace and harmony in the social life, and that could be achieved if there are leaders who want peace and work for it like Topy; but Ali leaves it to the reader to draw whatever conclusions he would from the poem. "Topy" anticipates Soso Tham "U.Trot", and S.J. Duncan's "Khynraw".

In "Tai and the Poorman" Ali sings of the beauty of self-reliance and the dignity of labour. In this poem, Ali creates two main characters : Hatim Tai and the Poorman. Tai is a rich king who is ready to feed the poor and the needy in his palace. Some of Tai's men meet the Poorman in the wood and ask him to report to the king. The Poorman replies that he would use his own hands and legs and eat the fruits of his own labour. Tai, when he receives the report says that the Poorman is greater than he was because he (the Poorman) refuses to receive dole from the government. In this poem Ali recalls Charles Mackay's "Miller of the Dee" which has been anthologised in school text-books since the 19th century. To appreciate Mackay's influence, it is perhaps appropriate to summarize the story which the poem conveys. Mackay takes two characters : King Hal and the Miller. Hal meets the Miller at work beside the river Dee. The Miller has till then been believing that nobody in Britain ever envied him as he was not envious of any; so he sings and thanks the river for turning his mill. He however realizes now that he was wrong in his conclusion because the King himself is envious of his happy lot. The

King wants to have the happy life of the miller and equates the miller's "mealy cap" with the crown and the mill with the revenue of England. The concept and form of this poem have been transmuted by Ali into his "Tai and the Poorman" in which Tai acknowledges the Poorman as the greatest man of his time. What makes the Poorman greater than the King is simply his refusal to live at the mercy of other people. The Poorman says:

As long as I have hands and legs,
 Long as I can labour,
 I feel ashamed and very mean
 To beg and eat from him.
 (translated)

Like Mackay's Miller who is contented with the river and his own mill, Ali's Poorman also is happy with his limbs and the forests which help him earn his living from day to day.

In "Reign England" Amjad Ali eulogizes the British government for its victory over different principalities of the world and wishes England to reign the world over; but with honesty and truth. In the poet's reference to honesty and truth. In the poet's reference to honesty and truth one sees a warning that if that foreign power forgets those two virtues, its strength shall wax and wane. When this is read along with anti-Imperialist poems "Khasis Arise", and "Rule Khasis" we discover Amjad Ali's political ambivalence. In the former poem he praises England; and in the latter two he raises the Khasis somewhat over the nation he has just blessed. Let us look into the anti-Imperialist poems.

In "Rule Khasis" the poet exhorts the natives to rule over themselves without depending likeslaves and weaklings upon England

to provide them everything or waiting for that country to ask them what to do. The poet invokes God's blessing upon the natives; but the blessings is conditional upon four factors ; the natives should turn their faces to God, praise him, unite among themselves, and cooperate with one another; but if they adopt foreign culture neglecting their own, and if they betray one another for personal comfort, God's blessing would not be theirs. Ali envisions a way to moral strength and self-reliance and urges that the natives should "Seek Khasi religion, wisdom / And seek a Khasi peace."³ What is "Khasi Peace"? The poet does not elaborate the idea in the poem leaving it perhaps purposely vague. He seems to be reacting against alien religions like Christianity, Islam and Hinduism which have come to the Khasis each preaching a new way of salvation, and peace of life beyond the grave. The poet does not want the natives to seek peace through an alien religion, but discover in their own native faith a way to God or duwar U Blei. Peace can be experienced socially and collectively also. If the semi-independent rulers could unite among themselves, if the people are brave and can cultivate the spirit of self-control, Ali says they experience "real peace" in their own land. This, as far as I understand the poem, is what the poet means by "Khasi peace". The spirit of this poem runs parallel to that of "Reign England". A poet who has exalted and blessed England wishing that she should reign over all the principalities it conquered eternally showers the same blessing upon the Khasis. It appears to me that the poet inspires the natives to revolt against the British

³Of Khasi religion, I have made mention in "Religion and Religious Thoughts" above, p.41ff.

government, and that the pro-Imperialist poem is only a cover for his political philosophy because the natives cannot have a 'Khasi peace' under the imperial yoke. It is only when they submit themselves to the genius of their race that they shall be truly happy. However, Ali could be exonerated from any blame of fomenting trouble if we take the fact of history into consideration. The Khasi Hills were practically divided into "British Areas" which were under the direct control of the British Government, and the "Khasi States" which were semi-independent. The area under the direct control of the British Government comprised a few villages only.⁴ The Myllem State in which Ali lived was semi-independent. It is possible, therefore, that in this poem Ali addresses the Khasis of the semi-independent states only. In the concluding lines he advises the Khasis not to go outside, but to stay within their own circle; meaning thereby that they ought to uphold their own culture and tradition which alone distinguish them from other people.

"In Khasis Arise" or "Ieng 'Riw Khasi", as examined earlier, he calls upon the natives to seek knowledge without forgetting Righteousness, Truth, their own Religion, goodness, diligence and good habits which together can make them great. In this poem, the poet comes under the influence of two minds : Alexander Pope and St. Paul whom he had studied, Pope sang of wisdom as the "Pierean Spring":

A little learning is a dangerous thing;
 Drink deep, or taste not the Pierean spring;
 These shallow drafts intoxicate the brain,
 And drinking largely sobers us again.

⁴For a list of villages within the "British Areas", please see chapter I of Part I above.

Ali borrows the idea and urges the Khasis "To drink of wisdom's spring" fully to understand the better way of life.

It is interesting to note that Ali fully absorbs St. Paul's advice to the Ephesians, and uses the advice in "Khasis Arise." Concluding his Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul wrote :

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. . . . Stand therefore having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.⁵

In "Khasis Arise" Ali exhorts the Khasis to fight against ignorance and illiteracy. The armour he prescribes for them is more or less the self-same weapons prescribed by St. Paul. Ali asks the natives to girt their loins about with righteousness, make mercy and truth their turban; dress themselves with meakness; and instead of using "the word of God" their sword, as advised by Paul, Ali asks the natives to make Goodness their sword, Experience for their bows, and above all to hold fast their traditional faith, What we notice here is an effort to localize the metaphors of St. Paul. This is evident from the reference to the bows, arrows, and spears as well as the deliberate change of "helmet" into "turban" which tends to make the mental war an easier one. The turban cannot be as effective a

⁵Ephesians, 6:16-17, I refer to the King James version of the English Bible.

protective weapon as the helmet; but the adaptation suited the Khasis of those days well for they hardly knew the utility of the helmet.

Ali was born and brought up in a Muslim family, but he nowhere in his poems preaches Islam as Christian poetry preaches christianity. His poem, "Religion" does not speak of any particular religion, and does not tell a Khasi reader which of the several religions he should embrace. Here is a translation of Ali's 'Religion'.

Religion

The right of life, worldly wealth,
That is but religion;
That points and leads man to God.
But here too it is useful --
It makes us friends with good men
And warms the cold spirit,
It raises the spirit high.
You will get freedom from it,
Friendship and compromise,
You'll be rich spiritually,
Though you're poor materially.
Laziness, Meddling, Pride, Envy,
Lie, Theft and Cheating
Cannot find the path to reach
Near him who has true religion.

In the opening lines we notice that wealth also is part of religion and is the "right of life", and this helps to lead "man to God." A truly religious man, according to Ali, is one who shuns the company of bad persons because religion separates such a man from such persons. In a true religion there is no place for vices like those Ali enumerates in the poem. By implication, therefore, it means that any person who works diligently for his daily bread, who deals honestly with his friends, will find God here on earth and the peace a truly religious man gets is here in this world because he can experience his soul being lifted higher and higher every day, and

above all, this "true religion" makes a man free and rich spiritually. The time during which Ali composed his poems was one when no one was aware of spiritual poverty. When Ali assures a reader that "you'll be rich spiritually, / Though you're poor materially" he is also reacting to the sermon on the Mount in which Jesus Christ preached: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of God."⁶

A critical interpretation of this gospel message could mean that Christ wanted only people with humble and contrite heart to come to him, people in need of forgiveness and salvation from sin which cannot be purchased with money. The sermon does not explain whether a man who accepts God is rich or poor, high or low according to social status. On the other hand, citizenship of the kingdom of heaven is guaranteed to a rich man also if he humbles himself before God when he is convinced that he lacks the right to live in God's kingdom. St. Paul too stressed that "kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness" and other virtues must be cultivated and achieved by Christians,⁷ which also means that a man who comes to God need not be materially poor. The "true religion" of which Ali sings is a personal religion of man be he rich or poor. If a man is free from those vices Ali names in the poem, he is free from the anxiety of worldly life because he trusts in God, the giver of all good gifts. The poet has reason to warn a potential religious man of physical poverty because he must have read the advice Christ gave his disciples before the passion: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation."⁸

⁶St. Matthew, 5:2

⁷Colosians 3:12-13

⁸St. John, 16:33

In the poem "Heaven", Ali does not attempt a description of heaven. It is enough for him to know that it is the dwelling place of God and the eternal home of the soul. I shall return to this later. The poet sings about God also in "U Blei" (God). A reader who expects Ali to speculate about the attributes and the nature of God would be disappointed because Ali does not do that as would a theologian. Ali's God is great and is always delighted in seeing men live honestly, worship and remember him daily. God is the Creator of all that man can see.

Ali's "U Tiew Pathai Khubor" (Fragrant Flower) resembles a metaphysical poem which does not convey its significance on first reading. This is due partly to syntax and punctuation and partly to the buried meaning of the poem. The poet picks up two characters: Sarong and Pathai Khubor. Sarong represents Pride and Pathai Khubor, Humility. The poet addresses them both. First he asks Sarong why she does not come near the flower as she loves the friendship of many others, and when Sarong confesses that she has tried much to go near Pathai Khubor but failed, the poet praises the latter and says that he has heard of him even in a distant place. He eulogizes Pathai Khubor so much as wise, resourceful, true, kind, rich and modest. Pathai Khubor conducts himself as if he had and knows nothing. The poet appreciates the virtues of Pathai Khubor: "This is indeed true greatness / And a lovely conduct." Ali does not mean simply to tell the story of Sarong and the Flower. The poem is to a great extent an allegory. Sarong has been given a literal name meaning, Pride, but Humility and Wisdom are represented by the Fragrant Flower. Ali appears to have somebody in mind at the

time of writing, but in the absence of record it is difficult to ascertain this because it is risky to speculate. One thing is however sure. Ali does not refer to himself (because as of 1888 he was at Calcutta studying the First Arts Course). What he means in the poem is that a well-educated man or a truly wise man is one who has humility in his heart and not a proud one. Pride is to Ali a sign of foolishness.

In those days when English was a major subject of study even at the school level, students could acquaint themselves with various English poets. I have been told by Thomas Bareh (76) that even during his father's (Mondon Bareh's) time many of the Renaissance poets were studied including John Milton's Paradise Lost. Allegory was one of the favourite forms of expression in the Renaissance period exemplified by Edmund Spenser's Fairie Queene. Amjad Ali, it appears to me, borrows the art of personifying abstract ideas from Spenser who personifies virtues like Truth and wisdom (Una) Holiness (Redcross Knight) as well as evils in the persons of Duesa and Orgolio among a long list of characters in the Fairie Queene.⁹ Ali does not make the scene supernumerary as that would not produce the effect he plans to achieve in this short poem. Spenser's Duesa impersonates herself but Ali's Sarong does not do so.

What Ali's Sarong wants to achieve is complete destruction of the coveted position of Wisdom. The idea Ali conveys is clear and a reader who attaches importance to moral virtue, and wants that virtues must triumph over vices, is happy to find the end of Pride's plan. Ali does not show much action in the poem, but asserts the

⁹FQ Books I and II.

victory of Wisdom without a battle. In short, it may be concluded that the influence of Spenser on Ali is one of idea and not of style and art; it is literary and impersonal.

In "Jingruai Ia Khlad" or "Parting Song" Amjad Ali comes under the influence of an Irish poet, Thomas Moore (1779-1882). Moore's poem which casts a spell on Ali is "The Last Rose of Summer," one of the pieces prescribed for a high school course till recently. Soso Tham (1873-1940) read it and later taught and translated it into Khasi. In that poem Moore sings of death of the body as a means to reach heaven. The last lines read:

So soon may I follow
 When friendship decay.
 And from Love's shining circle
 The gems drop away;
 When true hearts lie withered,
 And fond ones are flown
 O! who would inhabit
 This black world alone?

This stanza has a strong impact on Ali. He too thinks of death and bids his beloved friend to walk courageously to the happy land. Curiously, the poet promises to follow his friend "tomorrow" itself and he shall not wait till "friendship decay" as his model has done. I reproduce below the translated portion from Ali's to facilitate a study of Moore's influence on him:

Go now, go now oh beloved friend,
 That I too am coming,
 Walk on, walk on to our sweet land
 That I too am coming,
 Returning home don't be afraid
 That I too am near you;
 I'll come tomorrow, now you go
 That I too am coming.

.....

In that sweet land we'll meet again,
 Pleasant and blessed land,
 Walk on, walk on the drum's sounded
 That I too am coming.

Unlike Moore who wants to escape from this world because it is bleak and friendless, Ali accepts the universal fact that death is the end of life, and that he need not long to escape life prematurely; but he too shall follow the same path his friend has now trodden when the time comes. The effect in both Moore's and Ali's poems is the same -- they feel lonesome at the time of parting with their beloved ones and both hope to meet their friends again in heaven.

Man in Ali's poetry is the architect of his own destiny, and God is there to bless man's good efforts or to punish evil motive and deeds. This view has been explicitly illustrated in "The Merchant and the Barbar" in which the merchant chooses to lose all in order to gain more hereafter. The merchant is rewarded with gold while on earth; while the Barbar who plans to get more of gold than the merchant lands himself in trouble. Ali views covetousness with contempt and rails at the Barbar for his avarice as he concludes the poem.

Ali does not propound any theory of nature. Nature is colourful and beautiful, and he rejoices in her ordinary manifestations, and experiences poetic extasy in her beauty. Indeed the poet exclaims sincerely in his "Byneng" : "What an inexplicable beauty!" as he looks up to the sky when the sun rises, and again after sunset, and adds, "I wonder why I can't ponder.". The Christian writers before Ali used the natural imagery, but it is in Ali that we have sensual apprehension of nature. In "Step" we see through the poet's eyes the meadows, the flowers, the singing birds, the diligent bees humming

as they toil, the retreating clouds in the sky, the shining sun, the waxing moon and the fading stars which together bring joy and hope to man. In this poem, Ali conceives of man as a part of nature, a creature who takes advantage of her bounty. Man is not passive or restless but a co-worker for the general welfare of all. In "Byneng" Ali offers a philosophical interpretation of nature when he treats all manifestations as the expression of divine beings. Indeed natural objects express the glory and majesty of God and perform their duties according to God's laws.

Ali finds personification of celestial bodies useful in his interpretation of the work of God. It is in this quality of his creative power that we find his imagination warm and lively. The sun is to him a "fairy child" who pipes a pipe when he rises from the east, and a child who being tired at play the whole day wants to go to bed in the west. The Sun is to our poet a queen ruling her kingdom by day. The Moon is at once a gentleman and a king ruling the world by night together with his ministers, the stars. The evening Star is designated as the General, while a comet is a hot tempered and proud person who "smokes tobacco alone." The Morning Star is the prime minister of the Moon to advise and aid him in his duties. It is interesting to note that while the Moon is honoured with ministers, the Sun is made to rule alone. We can appreciate Ali's imaginative power better if we consider that the Moon and the Stars rarely shine when the Sun shines. In spite of such beauty, Nature does frighten all living beings with occasional hailstorm, thunder and lightening as if heaven were at war with the earth. The poet is happy that after such fearful noises, and frightening signs in the sky, the rainbow appears to express the glory and love of God.

The sense of wonder, the mystic rapport, and the sympathy with a variety of living things beyond the reach of our clear intelligence, which are some of the elements of Romanticism, are absorbed by Ali in the above poems. He owes the idea of nature as an expression of the divine being to William Wordsworth, the prophet of English Romanticism who celebrates "A presence that disturbs" him "with joy":¹⁰

3

In most of Ali's poems, the style is prosaic and resembles a Free Verse. He is careful of rime, but not so of metre and rhythm. He does not adopt uniform number of syllables per line. The rhythm is that of prose as a loud reading of his "Parting Song", "Merchant and the Barbar", and "Truth" would immediately reveal. Ali involves himself directly in poems on political and social themes, and his voice is the voice of a teacher and prophet. We often hear the lesson he imparts clearly, and he must be heard when he teaches. When he conveys his message he does so as a witness to human nature with interest but without emotion, inveighing self-indulgence. He wants to transform the Khasi society from servitude to independence, from passivity to participation; but he does not want the Khasis to ape an alien culture.

Though his book of poems appeared as early as 1888, Ali's poetry was not taken seriously until recently. Ka Myntoi was reprinted by the Khasi Authors' Society only in 1980. There must

¹⁰"Immortality Ode".

be reasons for this. The Christian missionaries were influential in those days. By virtue of their having the largest number of schools, any book they selected for schools had to be approved by the Government of the day, so there was no place for Ali since the Mission at work published its own books. Another reason for the cold reception of Ali's poetry was the increasing influence of John Roberts on the Khasi literary movement. By 1888 Roberts' books had become texts.

Though Ali's poetry could not find acceptance in the last century, Ali is a true poet : a poet who offers an interpretation of life through his work, who treats the facts, experiences and problems of life through imagination and feeling; and therefore deserves a place in the history of Khasi poetry.

CHAPTER - IV

THE CULTURAL REVIVAL

Culture, as E.B. Tylor observes is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".¹ Culture, therefore, concerns itself more with the intrinsic values than with the extrinsic ones and is less susceptible to change and development. This is particularly true of tribal cultures. With the spread of Christianity the traditional Khasi beliefs and forms of life were somewhat eclipsed and forgotten. The native Christians were aping Western Culture so much so that they nearly forgot even what was good in their own. In the midst of this Amjad Ali published his Ka Myntoi (1888) an elementary book of poetry. In two poems "Synshar Riw Khasi" and "Ieng Riw Khasi" Ali exhorts the natives to uphold what is their own: like knowledge, belief, morals and customs. From amongst the Khasis appeared Rabon Singh, Jeebon Roy, and Radhon Singh Berry as the leaders of the Khasi Cultural revival. These three were followed by later writers including Sib Charan Roy, Homiwell Lyngdoh, and Soso Tham.

Rabon Singh and Radhon Singh Berry were once Christians, but

¹Primitive Culture (Brecon, Wales: John Murray 1871) as quoted by J. Sanyal and K.N. Mallick in their Social Philosophy, p.166

²cf. Preceding Chapter.

later renounced Christianity. Rabon Singh³ was a good teacher, leader, and evangelist. He resigned his government job to devote himself fully to his religious mission. He was for sometime divided between his allegiance to Christianity and his natural propensity to native mores and customs. On the one hand he desired to be a good worker for his master; on the other, he resented the neglect of the old values by the Christians. This, he discovered, was due to the absence of written books on Khasi culture and religion. Rabon Singh then collected whatever accounts he got from elderly people and put those into writing. In this venture, he was encouraged by the editors of the first Khasi periodical, U Nongkit Khubor (The Messenger) where his treatise on Khasi religious practices was serialized. In the January 1894 issue of the journal his ten line poem was published. The poem is a recitation by an imaginary Khasi divine while offering the thanksgiving sacrifice. In this poem Singh recaptures the rhythm used by the divines perfectly and he calls attention to the native culture and mores of the Khasis. From that year on, Rabon Singh devoted himself to writing the oral Khasi couplets, and in 1899 published them in the book, Ka Kitab Jingphawar.⁴ This work is still the best collection of oral couplets

³Rabon Singh Kharsuka was born at Mawmluh about 1850. He had his education at Sohra. He joined government office but resigned from it to serve as teacher of a mission primary school at Mawmluh. In December 1884 and January 1885 he was deputed to accompany Sir J. Herbert Roberts, M.P., Herbert Lewis and Henry Rees who came from Wales in their tour of the Khasi Hills. By this time he was already an evangelist having completed the course of study in 1883, the year he was elected Elder of the Presbyterian Church at Mawkhar. He wrote and published Ka Kitab Jingphawar (1899), Ka Jingsiathuh Khana Puriskam (1908), and Ka Kitab Niam Khein Ki Khasi. He died in 1910, and his last work was published by the Ri Khasi Press in 1911. References to his life and works are to be found in the Soso Tham Birth Centenary Souvenir (1975); Ka Thiar ki Nongthoh, and in Sondar S. Majaw's Ki Syrwet Jingshai (1982).

⁴cf. "The Oral Tradition" 60 ff above

in the language. In the same year, a poem, "Ka Puriskam" (or Fable) appeared in U Khasi Mynta (February 1899). Rabon Singh must have been the composer of this poem, because the idea and the phrases, plot and story, used in it are similar to those which he uses in one chapter of the book referred to above.⁵ I have discussed the religious attitudes of the poem in the preceding chapter, and particularly reaction against marriage between blood relations which is prohibited by the Khasi religion and custom. Surely, Singh has a dig at the attempt of some Christian missionaries to pervert the marriage custom of the Khasis. An important social practice among the Khasis was to entertain their friends or guests with a home-brewed rice beer. This drink has been traditionally used by the Khasis on many social occasions. Singh reacted against the Christian taboo on this drink. In "Ka Jingduwai Knia" (sacrificial prayer) he complains against the prohibition imposed by the Church. Because of the prohibition, and because he is a Christian, he cannot drink "even a bottle of rice beer / To wish one another well-being", as was the custom of the natives. In the same poem he criticises the mechanical adoption of modern forms of life by the natives. Rabon Singh laments the degeneration of social values in the two other poems "Ki Daw-Lum ha Ri Khasi" and "Ka Khein Khasi". He sees that the family which used to be a uniting force among its members could no longer knit parents and children together because after marriage the boy was to live with his wife and start a new family, sometimes the village of his wife being far away from his own. In this way,

⁵The initials "K.S." given at the end of the poem seems to me to be a typographical error. In place of 'K' it should have been 'R' for there was no writer in those days with the initial of 'K'.

the respect of the members of a clan for their great maternal uncle or kni waned gradually, resulting in the lack of seriousness in tracing the descendance and blood relationship. In the fifth stanza of "Ka Khein Khasi" he talks about the indifference of the Khasis to their custom and tradition, and warns, "If clan system is lost / Then identity too is lost."

The poet appears to have noticed certain deviation in the custom of electing a syiem or traditional ruler too. In the second stanza of the same poem he recalls that in former times the Khasis never elected a person who was not mature in age and had no distinctive personality as their chief. Singh sees that this ancient custom too is neglected. Joseph Bacchiarello too writes: "The blind, the deaf and one without moustache was never elected" to such a high office of the state.⁶ Singh urges that the people should uphold this tradition lest the Khasi society go to ruin.

The next to figure prominently in this cultural revival is Radhon Singh Berry. Like Rabon Singh, he too was born at Mawmluh about 1853. He started his literary activities by contributing regularly to U Khasi Mynta (The Khasi Today). Berry's contributions includes articles and views on the spelling of Khasi words, and poems. It is in his poems that we see him as an agent of the cultural revival. From June 1896, his short rimed verses appeared frequently in the journal cited above. In "Ko Ri Khasi Ri Synteng" (Oh Khasiland and Jaintialand) Berry alludes to the coming of education from the

⁶Ki Dienjat Jong Ki Longshuwa (1930, rpt. 1979), p.100

missionaries is nothing more than a preparation of the young people for teaching, government and church services and not very helpful in making the people aware of their distinct identity. In "Ka Jingstad" (or Wisdom) Berry urges that the natives should be able to recognize what is wrong and reject it; and what is right and useful and accept that gladly. This is the true aim of education, and not to make the learners slaves of foreign cultures. In all other such poems which Berry devotes to cultural revival, he criticises the apathetic attitude of the Khasis towards their own values. To him, as to Rabon Singh, poetry becomes a medium to restore the Khasis to their own culture and tradition.

Unpublished extant manuscripts show that Berry was planning to publish a book of poems, but the only work which has been in circulation is Ka Jingsneng Tymmen (or Khasi Proverbs). The work has been divided into two parts, but designed to achieve one goal: to revive Khasi ethical and social standards which, he found, were waxing and waning with the growing popularity of Christian teachings. A perusal of the general character of Khasi literature in the late 19th century and the early period of the 20th century shows that the preference of the age was for a reading material which conveyed moral lessons. And Berry knew the taste and it is there also that the secret of his success lies.

The two books of Ka Jingsneng Tymmen discuss three main topics: social etiquette, ethical standards, and man's relationship with his Creator. Sundry duties of a member of the Khasi society are also touched upon wherever the poet finds it convenient to do so.

Berry is conscious of the theme he is writing because in the 'Preface' to the first book he stresses the benefit of cultivating good manners, and of upholding traditional values. Good manners, he urges, ought to be practised at home till they become part of man's nature, thereby enabling man to show those to others through behaviour and conversation. Berry urges the children not to curse one another, but to behave and address one another politely. His tone is like that of the Proverbs of Solomon and the Ten Commandments of Moses in the Old Testament. There is indeed a Sunday school atmosphere about his poetry. Take a few examples: Berry teaches readers to love one another, to be meek, and such other moral lessons which he holds very strongly.

In his relationship with the Creator, man, according to Berry, ought to praise and worship God. Prayers are to be offered to him every morning (st i.v.). In order to please God, man ought to speak to his friends what he understands and use only good words. God, according to Berry, does not delight in abusive language, in any swearing by man, in adultery and all such immoral acts; for God is pleased only with righteousness, truth, goodness, and simplicity. It does not matter to which religion a man belongs. Berry sings:

Although you uphold your own religion
 When you are not righteous or true;
 Though you know God and pray him,
 When you reject good principle;
 Though you are famous in the world,
 When you don't aim, speak, and do godly things,
 How would you be free from God's curse?⁷

⁷Book I. xxxv. The translation overlooks rime.

Berry has no faith in the Christian doctrine of redemption from sin through the death of Christ, and in the last stanza of Book II of his Ka Jingsneng Tymmen he frankly criticises the Christian concept of redemption through Christ. He concludes:

Anyone of you ladies or gentlemen,
 Don't bear on yourself the sin of others;
 Anyone of you ladies or gentlemen,
 Don't even throw your sin on others.
 If you do it also it shall not serve
 You will be rejected in the last day;
 Never do it, for God created you
 In your own right, stand steadfastly
 When you hold fast your own tradition.
 Blessings you will get from earth and heaven.

The style of Berry's rimed verses is prosaic. It lacks metre and rhythm appropriate to even Khasi poetry in its rudimentary stage. On the other hand, his work is characterised by the natural appearance of an imagery which belongs to the Khasi spoken language and quite lost in translation. Apart from this, Berry chooses words carrying the same meaning and this increases the difficulty of a translator. I am taking one stanza by way of illustration, and translating it into English. It may be noted that Berry's rimed verses have deca-syllables in each line:

Ha sngap khun pyrsa ngan nieu khmat khyndiat
 Kum ia kine to kiar ban bha ban miat;
 Ia u brieu u bymton u tmain shyntur,
 Kum ka main shynrang u ba'm sieng ka dur.(1)
 Ia ka ba'm don reng ka masi kynthei,
 Ka ba'm biang dur kumba ju don kynrei.(2)
 Ia ki thei-iap-tnga khlem khun sah iapieng,
 La ioh nam sotti, kum ka 'si khein reng.(3)
 Ia kiba khlem khun lane long lyngki,
 La ki la pateng lane long sotti.(4)
 Ia u khiew suda ba xit leit tong um,
 La phiang, klong, ktang, lwa, kum, baroh lyllum(5)
 Ia kiba anna-antu ki dkhot met,

La ia briew ia mrad ruh wat ju klet.(6)
 Ia kmie hynriew jinglong ju kyndiah,
 Ha ka niam, ka synshar ym shoh sabiah.

(BK II, st. vii)

Listen children, nephews, I'll outline a little
 Such as these ones shun to do well;
 A man who has no moustache,
 Like manly personality is not complete in shape.(1)
 A cow which has no horn
 Which is not complete as we see elsewhere.(2)
 The widows and childless, dry while standing
 Wins the credit of being a virgin like a hornless
 cow.(3)

The childless and the barren,
 Though they have experienced or are virgins.(4)
 The empty pot carried to fetch water,
 Pot, gourd, bamboo container, rubber-bottle, earthen
 pot and the like(5)

The physically handicapped
 Be they men or animals don't forget (6)
 All these six characters they used to shun,
 In the religion, administration, they won't allow at all.

We miss the similes and have only a little of imagery, rime, and fixed syllables of the original in the translation. Besides these, the line-wise syllables also have undergone a change. If all the features are to be fitted in English, the original meaning will be considerably distorted.

Berry's works are not good literature, but their value lies in their cultural relevance. He is fully aware of this because he writes in the preface that he collects and writes all he has heard about the nuances of Khasi etiquette and manners so that "we can remember and be awake because we seem to have neglected many of the good and respected manners in the influences of strange tricks of today." What Berry saw in the 19th century of the invasion of Khasi culture by external forces is true even today. In his time external influence was felt chiefly through education, and christianity.

Today, there are subtler and more numerous ways of cultural invasion. Berry's works have a particular importance therefore for they are records of ^avanished way of life.

Though Berry claims to have collected all his information from the elderly Khasis, the influence of the Bible on his works is also clear. In stanza xii of Book II Berry speaks of alms to the poor and the needy:

When you give alms to anybody
Do not expect that you will get it back;
The reward man never lost
For God always reserves it for you.

This is the effect of Berry's reading of the New Testament. In his sermon on the mount Christ preached:

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right doeth: That thine alms may be seen in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.⁸

At another place when Christ spoke of the feast, he advised the people to call the poor because the latter cannot repay what has been given them. "But when thou makest a feast call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they

⁸St. Matthew, 6. 1-4, English Bible King James Version.

cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just".⁹ Berry speaks of the reservation of the reward for the giver by God and because he does no longer believe in the resurrection of the dead, he avoids using the word 'resurrection'.

Berry echoes the ninth commandment of Moses in stanza xiv of the second Book. The commandment reads: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour"¹⁰ and Berry advises that none ought to speak ill or give false evidence against anyone because the Khasis regard it as sin. Speaking about the ancient morals, Soso Tham too writes that the Khasis did not know false witness, and lie because they knew only righteousness.¹¹

In the Proverbs of Solomon, there are references to ill-gotten wealth. The first one reads: "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing"¹² and the second one: "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase."¹³ Berry asks the readers not to rejoice in any property which is received freely because it will slowly drain even the hard-earned one (Bk II, xix). Berry, in his counsel that a Khasi should not greet or salute anybody on the street echoes two passages from the Bible. The first reads: "If thou meet any man, salute him not, and if any salute thee, answer him not again."¹⁴ The second one is from the New Testament. When Jesus sent his seventy other disciples to preach he commanded: "go your ways:

⁹St. Luke 14: 13-14

¹⁰Exodus, 20:16

¹¹"Pyrthei Mariang", st. x

¹²Proverbs 10:2

¹³Ibid., 13:11

¹⁴2 Kings, 4:29

carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way." Both these injunctions are conditional upon the nature of the commission the agents or messengers were to perform. Berry too appears to have an implied condition when he asks the readers so. "Do not ever salute anyone / Unless it is proper, it becomes a curse" (st. xxi). In the next stanza the writer echoes the tenth commandment of Moses. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife ... nor anything that is thy neighbour's".¹⁵ Berry commands: "Do not covet anybody, / Without knowing the clan to which she belongs" (st. xxii).

The last area of clear Biblical influence on Berry's scepticism about women.

Do not tolerate ladies too much,
They do not know the reasons of the world,
That they degrade their womanhood,
And they dare to argue foolishly.

It was St. Paul who advised the Corinthians to ensure strictly that ladies should not speak in religious meetings. Paul wrote: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak."¹⁶

A critical study of all the verses of Berry boils down to one conclusion, that he longs to see that everything is done decently and in order. What he wants to convey to the Khasis was put succinctly by St. Paul: "Let things be done decently and in order."¹⁷

¹⁵Exodus

¹⁶I Corinthians, 14:34

¹⁷I Corinthians, 14:40

Nelson Dkhar in "A! Shnong Sohra" (Oh. Sohra, 1904) sees another aspect of the Khasi culture which the people have neglected or ignored. Nelson laments the lack of unity among the Khasis and dissensions in the choice of a ruler. In former times, there was always unanimity about the choice of a Syiem but now there are instances of divided allegiance as in Sohra in 1904 where two parallel durbars were held. Even in the same durban there are factions and conflicts:

They came to the council and pleaded one sided,
 They held two councils the same is the case;
 They failed to choose the Syiem, others appointed one
 The reward for that they know how to get.

Rash Mohon Roy Nongrum knows the reason why the Khasis neglect their own culture and therefore need a revival. In his "Ka Sneng Khasi" (Khasi Counsel, 1907) he probes the degradation of the Khasi ways of life, which is partly due to the people themselves.

Old culture we have thus neglected
 Old religion has been cornered,
 The sons of the land do not care,
 Thus we are all in a trap.

Another reason for the neglect of old values, according to Nongrum, is the passing away of great leaders. Nevertheless, he urges that the younger generations should seek knowledge wherever it can be found and hopes that "Right faith and culture will stay / Through it the land will see the day."

Soso Tham¹⁸ too contributes to this revival. His method is more polished and poetic. In Ka Duita Ksiar (1925) he includes

¹⁸I shall examine his other poems in a separate chapter later.

one poem which he devotes to the Khasi way of life. In his fourteen stanza-poem "Ki Sngi U Hynniew Trep" (The Days of the Seven Huts), Tham tells a story in the Bardic tradition. In the beginning of time, he sings, all creatures of God - man, animals and even snake spoke the same language, and worshipped only one god. He calls that age the "Golden Age". The ancient Khasis did not know money and were not materialistic. They knew not the tricks of trade and commerce. They founded their religion on the Cock who waited for the covenant of God to be fulfilled. When a leader of the clan died, they beat their drums, and performed all the rites due to the dead in order to please them and to be true to their tradition. The ancients did not quarrel over their land, and they led a united and harmonious life. They observed blood relations very strictly and believed that whosoever broke the taboo would be killed by thunder and a tiger (st. 7). They respected their own ruler (st. 8). They were primarily cultivators. They reared cattle, and grew paddy, vegetables, maize and all kinds of fruits (9, 10). Though they worked hard during the day, they had time to visit girls at night with their musical instruments, and played and sang the whole night till before the dawn when it was time for them to return home (11, 12).

Having stated what the ancients did and how they managed their affairs, Tham returns to the present:

Would it to darkness sink and rot
 The sun and moon of seven huts?
 Thus lived our uncles and fathers;
 They ruled the world, and kingdom found
 When Cock began to Crow at dawn,
 Of Golden age they talked and planned,
 We live and strive in other days
 What shall we do for our own land?

The foregoing account shows that Khasi poetry of every hue - Christian as well as Pagan - was intensely aware of the genius of the Khasi race and often sounded a clarion call to the people to be true to themselves and their distinct cultural heritage. It may be stated here that the modern Khasis are proud of their cultural heritage because of authors like Rabon Singh, Radhon Singh, Berry, and Soso Tham who made them self-aware.

CHAPTER - V

THE RELIGIOUS AWAKENING

Alongside the movement for the revival of Khasi Culture and tradition a group of poets concerned themselves with religious beliefs, and their movement influenced the generations of poets following them. It was Methodism which was the principal form of this awakening. Christian missionaries gave up text-book writing as the number of educated Khasis increased. In a sense this group of poets had no leader, and each worked on his own, always falling back on the style of John Roberts and Mrs. William Lewis.

In January 1894 the Reverend Amirkha Khain adapted the song of Moses into a poem. The song of praise to God is recorded in the Book of Exodus. Arranged in octo-syllabic rimes, God is praised as the Warrior or Nongialeh-thma, and a ruler who shall rule forever so that all who believe in him shall live happily. The poem has an epic flavour but it was concluded in only the fourth stanza. Khain's manuscripts are lost, and this last one survives because it was published in U Nongkit Khubor in January, 1894. In April the same year, Joel Gatphoh's lyric "Ka Bor bad ka Burom U Blei" (the Power and Glory of God) was published in the same journal. It is the first traceable poem by a Khasi which admires Nature as the poet saw it near the Bishop's falls at Shillong. The spectacle of the fall, the hills and landscape which appeared before him, the gorges on either side of the stream, the wild flowers filled him with an awesome wonder. What he saw led his mind to God, and he decides in the last two stanzas to submit himself to him and to continue

preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, his Lord and Master, and to explain God's power to others.

Robert Evans left two poetical works. "The Word of Wisdom" and "Is it True that there is Cholera at Mawkhar?"¹ In the first he decries the spread of social evils in Shillong along with the expansion of the town. People were gradually drawn towards worldly wisdom forgetting their duties to God. He is pleading as a true Christian preacher that the real knowledge a man should have is the knowledge of God which alone can defeat Satan and Sin, and by this he means the knowledge according to Christianity and not the traditional values which he calls Jingstad badum or dark knowledge. In the second poem, "Cholera at Mawkhar", Evans does not preach. He criticises and ridicules the residents of the Mawkhar-Jaiaw locality for leaving their homes and hearts for fear of the cholera like fools instead of making an effort to save one another. Evans does not spare even church workers who also fled for life instead of visiting "helpless patients" and "With Word of God to comfort and soothe them." He praises only two Christian leaders, Babu Barnabas and Thomas Jerman Jones who devoted themselves to serving the victims.

Several names have appeared in print in these years but their works do not have much poetic quality for they are to a modern critic mere historical records of events and impressions recorded in rime.

¹Published in U Nongkit Khubor, July 1894, and May 1896, and May 1896 respectively. Evans was a Missionary from Wales.

The most outstanding personality among Khasi poets upto 1910 was Morkha Joseph.² Like Roberts, his teacher, Joseph too devoted a great deal of time to convincing the parents to send their children to school. His efforts found expression in two poems, "Ka Maian shongskul" (The mystery of school-days) and "Ka spah Barieh" (Hidden Treasure). The first poem stresses the value of going to School. Knowledge should be acquired at the earliest available opportunity without waiting for time. He also urges that the lesson should be crammed "Like a snake who swallows the cow alive." Joseph prescribes two ways for the acquisition of knowledge: (1) learning and memorizing, and (2) diligence, "Be diligent, ever so study and really hard." He refutes the popular contention that education belongs only to the well-to-do, and stresses through several images that it could be had by all who have the will to shine, because all are God's creatures, created after his own image. In this poem he echoes what the Bible says. In the book of Genesis, Moses wrote: "So God created man in His Own image; in the image of God created he him."³

²Morkha Joseph (b ? - 1921). Born in the Shala area, Morkha Joseph was educated at Sohra. Served at Nongrmai in the Nongkhlaw state as teacher and evangelist, ordained pastor on the 4th March (Saturday) 1900, till about 1908 when he was dismissed for non-compliance with the transfer order. Wrote and published Ka Kitab Nyngkong (1883, 1907) Ka Lynti ka Hok (1902) and composed poems which now appears in a collection entitled Ka Ryngkap. He died on the 6th October, 1921. References to his works are Soso Tham Birth Centenary Souvenir (1973), Ka Thiar Ki Nongthoh Vol.III (1981) and my Ka Jingpule Kyrpang (1981. 2nd ed).

³Gen. 1: 27.

In the "Hidden Treasure"; Joseph preaches of the value of hard work and diligence; and good service to others in the society without waiting for an immediate reward, for:

Poor and wretched though you be,
Haste not that he should pay
Ah let your grave demand one day,
The debt from all mankind.

The effect of his reading the sermon on the Mount and his own translation of Thomas Gray's "Elegy written in a country Churchyard" is very clear in this poem. In the lines translated above Joseph echoes Gray's lines, 'E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries, / E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires."⁴

In "Ka Jingkha ia U Jisu Khrist" the evangelist-poet reflects on the social life of the Khasis in the early years of the Christian mission in these hills when, through education, the mission introduced the Gospel of Christ to enlighten the people. Joseph, like Larsing Khongwir⁵ predicts that a day will come when the whole World will acknowledge Christ as its Saviour.

"Ka jingdemjngoh phylla ki Angel" (Wonderful visitation of the Angels) is an adaptation into poem of the description of the "new heaven and new earth" by St. John in the Book of Revelation.⁶ It is the effect of Joseph's meditation on the reward for honest Christians after death. He sings of them as a people who suffer tribulations on earth for the sake of their faith in salvation through the death of Christ. The angels on

⁴Stanza 23 of the Elegy

⁵Cf Chapter 1 of this part

⁶Ch. 7:9-17.

the other hand, are only spectators of the events on earth for they are not assigned any role to play either as protectors of the saints or as powers to bring sufferings to man. They transcend the world and simply wait to welcome the saints to the house of God and receive their reward.

Joseph is at his best in three poems, "U Jumai Bah ha Ri Khasi" (The Great Earthquake in Khasiland). "Ka Jingwan Hiar u Mynsiem Bakhuid ha ri Khasi" (The Coming of the Holy Spirit in Khasiland), and "U Sirlapalang" (The Stag). The two are based on historical events⁷ while the other on a Khasi fable.

Earthquake is a natural calamity in every nation and when the destruction is great, it leaves a lasting terror in the mind of the people concerned because such a calamity may recur time and again. In "The Great Earthquake" a fairly long poem, the poet interprets life as it was lived in the late 19th century. The poem brings several facts to the knowledge of posterity. The Government was not prepared to meet such an eventuality and the poet ridicules this, and because animals and birds show presentiment of the impending danger, the Government must be stupider than animals:

The beasts already knew of quake, it seems,
Chirping of birds where will you hear again
Cattle play truant at home and outside
When cometh the greatest and fearful day.⁸
But a man, oh no, nothing hath he planned

The poet responds imaginatively to a historical fact. The

⁷Cf Ch.II, Part I. For easy reading, I am using the English titles for these poems in my analysis hereafter, and the quotations will also be translated into English.

⁸Sts. 5,6.

devastation of property and life has been vividly recorded throughout the poem. All man-made things; houses, cromlecs and dolmens in the Southern belt of the land have been destroyed. People ^{were} wounded and killed - many inside coalmines; women and children were without supporters; the foodstuff got mixed up with dust. Even the richest among them "became beggars" overnight. They had to sell their precious ornaments at a throw-away price for some food to eat. Here he takes up the Christian teachings that earthly wealth is not indeed meaningful to man even on Earth because it could be destroyed any day. Joseph at times uses the epic similes of Homer and Milton to explain what has happened. The Earthquake, he describes, changes the face of the earth, removes hills and mountains and blocks the courses of rivers and streams-- all these happen in a few minutes' time. He dramatizes the event as far as to say that some people thought that rocks were fastened to the ground, and therefore, the safest place to lean upon, but, "They climbing the rock, it tosses, 'bout to roll". The earth is described as opening its mouth to swallow whatever comes to it. His imaginative power is great all through. He enters into the confused mind of the survivors and sings of what they believe about themselves and about the quake.

His personal feeling about it all are strong enough. The poem is the first elegy⁹ in the Khasi Language. In his religious fervour, Joseph compares the nature of the Khasis in general to those of Sodom, and Ninebe in the Old Testament of the Bible and alludes to Abraham who warned the people against the destruction

⁹Until future research proves otherwise, because it was composed soon after the quake.

of Sodom, and to Jonah who warned the people of Ninebe against the anger of God; and therefore they should repent of their sins. He fancies that someone must preach Christ in Bhutan so that the people can learn about the shapes of things to come.

In spite of how the scientists might explain the cause of the Earthquake, Joseph takes it to be the "fire of God", and the plan of God to turn men unto himself. There were indeed several hundreds of people who joined the Presbyterian church after the great quake.

G.A. Jones writes:

The dark year in the furnace of problems, was also a year when many from outside proposed to join the church. In this 'earthquake year' alone 2,373 souls were admitted to church membership.¹⁰

Hormurai Diengdoh who composed another poem on the earthquake¹¹ of 1897 holds the same opinion as Joseph that the cause of the quake was God's own hand: " 'Tis not the work of any man, / But it's God's own workings from the depth". Diengdoh records the condition of life in town, while Joseph in the rural areas; but both discounted the causes of the quake as being this or that as man was capable of thinking or imagining. While Joseph makes his a means to profess his faith in Jesus Christ; Diengdoh makes it a historical record to mock at the laziness of the people. Apart from what he sings in the poem, he writes clearly in prose also:

¹⁰ Ka History Jong ka Balang (1966), p. 79

¹¹ "Ka Jingrwai Jumai", pub. U Khasi Mynta, December 1897. The poet appears to have started the composition after June that year because he saw the attitude of the people to work and to life itself in the post earthquake days.

One hateful attitude is the service of the daily labourers in Shillong town. They are so tricky that an house which could be dismantled by ten men, in earthquake year more than ten do the work. The daily labourers are not sincere, many are lazy . . . of carpenters too once a person holds dao, hammer, flat files and saw he is passed of as carpenter up to an extent that school students and others who never acquainted with carpentry call themselves carpenters.¹²

Joseph has left all these details to the imagination of the readers, he mourned the destruction of the land. In the "Earthquake poem", Joseph has assimilated the English form of elegy allowing Khasi words to be fitted into the foreign form pleasantly, though not exactly metrically. Gray's influence in this work is in form, style, and effect. The pathos Joseph achieves in "Earthquake" echoes the elegy of his model. On the other hand it appears that he is paying homage to Gray. He adopts the decasyllabic rimes throughout the poem, and movingly refers to the loss of life in the earthquake.

Joseph composed this poem immediately after he had translated Thomas Gray's "Elegy on a Country Churchyard." From Gray's poem Joseph learns the feeling of loss. The atmospheric setting of the day when the earthquake occurred is calm and quiet. Joseph describes this in the first six lines of his poem. He borrows the idea from Gray :

The breezy call of incense - breathing morn
The swallow twitlering from the straw - built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, on the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

¹²Cf. J. Bacchiarello, Ki Dienjat Jong Ki Longshwa pp.15-16, Diengdoh's indignation of the slow progress and laziness of the people in reconstruction work appears in the poem itself.

Joseph's openings are translated below :

Quiet and calm blew the breeze on that day
 The sky ~~was~~ clear and silent ~~was~~ the earth;
 Slowly flowed the streams in all the foothills
 All ~~was~~ quiet as sun ~~went~~ to his hearth.

People who seek glory on earth find in Gray that the paths to it "lead but to the grave". Joseph finds that the people in the col coalmines who work for their livelihood and for wealth find that the mines are but their grave when landslides occur. The pathos of the survivors' frantic longing for the dead is poignantly expressed by Joseph :

After a while they came from their own fields,
 They cried, they sought, they called and they shouted.
 And all as could not be found around and near,
 They were no more alive, they must be dead.

Gray expresses the sense of loss in the death of all good people who have been buried in the Churchyard because he can no more meet them in life and in stanza 28 of the Elegy he moves the reader when he talks of "dirges" and the "sad array". Joseph makes full use of the sense of loss in the death of coal-miners, the children and the infirm, the destruction to property which reduced the well-to-do to a position of beggars, the changing face of nature due to heavy landslide everywhere, and he mourns the devastation of the border areas when all fruits and horticultural crops were destroyed within a few minutes. Joseph is fully aware of the greatness of his model, though he has not succeeded as much as Gray in style and technique.

"The coming of the Holy Spirit in Khasiland" is a narrative poem on the religious revival in the land beginning in 1905. It contains 99 stanzas and is Joseph's longest poem. The insertion of the year along with the title of the poem shows that it was composed in 1906 by which date the Reverend Dr. John Roberts and other who were sceptical of the event in the beginning had accepted the revival as coming from God even as promised by Christ to his disciples.¹³ Joseph hints at this in the third stanza of the poem wherein he sings that "The sparkling crown of Assembly / Is Doctor John Roberts." The controversy over this revival arose because of the dance associated with it. A Khasi sceptic writes this to correct himself.

The author of these words was very much against this dancing which is associated with the Revival, but when he saw that men of God danced at Laittyra, he forgot his fault-finding power and thought only of the dancing of the hosts of God in heaven.¹⁴

Mondon Bareh was one of the many Christians who questioned the nature of the revival. Joseph was unhappy with what he saw as the hardness of their hearts, and censured them in strong words in the poem.¹⁵ His faith in the revival or the coming of the Spirit of God is simple. He accepts the prophecy of prophet Joel totally and applies it to the features of the revival:

¹³St. John, Chapter 14.

¹⁴Mondon Bareh in Centenary History Ka Balang Presbyterian (1940), p.94.

¹⁵Sts. 8, 47, 48, 76-79, 82-85.

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see vision; and also upon the servants and upon handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.¹⁶

Though a pastor, Joseph accepts that those who went through the revival have messages for others :

Those who get message from the Lord;
 Would speak and would not spare.
 If they ignore and reject it
 To others would ~~be~~ give.¹⁷

Because of his sincere belief in the message as coming from God he himself defied the transfer order served on him by the Church, and ultimately lost his office.¹⁸

The poem which marks Joseph's poetic achievement in certain direction is "The Stag" or "U Sirlapalang".¹⁹ It is a romance with an allegorical dress. The story goes as follows :

There are two stags - a mother and a son. They live in the northern slopes of the Khasiland bordering Assam. The mother was very careful all along; but time now comes in the life of the young animal when he should have his own way of facing the unknown future. His mother bids him now to follow her wherever she leads, because, she claims that she knows better than he does. The young stag who

¹⁶Joel, 2: 28-29.

¹⁷St. 59.

¹⁸Jismot Chyne, "Katto katne shaphang u Rev. Morkha Joseph," Ka Ryngkap (1967). I shall discuss his conception of Godhead later in this Chapter.

¹⁹Primrose Gatphoh too composed a poem on the same topic and I propose to examine the second one in the next chapter, wherein the similarity and the difference between the two poems shall also be examined briefly.

wants to experience life in the upland gives reasons for his journey and proceeds on. Even though the mother has premonition of the danger which they are going to face she follows him closely. In spite of a favourable atmosphere in the Bhoi area, the stag makes up his mind now to attend the animals' Fare or Iew Luri Lura. There begin actions which determine his future. Among other animals, the Hound appears and offers fomented soyabean or tungrymbai for sale. The smell of this Khasi chutney incurs the displeasure of all animals and make them stamp a basketful of the tungrymbai. Among all animals, the Stag destroys most. As a last resort, the Hound seeks justice from mankind. The Hound assures man that she is going to trace the Stag from the smell of the chutney he has just stamped. Man seeks signs from Gods, and finds that the gods of Shillong too decree that the Stag should die for his wrongdoing. Men and the Hound follow the stag and finally the arrow hits the stag and he dies.

The poem contains 378 lines and is set in ballad metres. I.M. Simon considers it as a lyric,²⁰ a poem in which the poet expresses his own sentiment and emotion; but I find it difficult to agree with him. This is a poem where the poet narrates the events in the life of the stag, and does so mainly through the monologue of the mother stag. It is not a Khasi elegy either as Dr. Hamlet Bareth thinks,²¹ because in an elegy we read the lamentation of the poet himself over the loss either of a friend or of the glory of the village or society and not the dirge of an animal or birds. It is a romance which like a fable permits animals and all other natural objects to speak, think and act like men.

²⁰"Shikyntien - Arkyntien", Ka Ryngkap (2nd ed. 1978), p.xxii.

²¹A Short History of Khasi Literature (3rd ed. 1979), p.25.

The main interest of the poem is allegorical. Professor R.S. Lyngdoh associates the occasion for the poem with an age in which people from other parts of the country came over to these hills to live here permanently, and do whatever they thought best²² and hence the young stag represents a non-Khasi, an outsider who comes over to this land for fortune. The interpretation cannot meet the critical questions the poem presents before the critics because Lyngdoh has not explained the allegory of the tragic death of the main hero - the stag. If the poet intends the poem to have a political import, he would have chosen some other methods to present the sequence of events. If we take Professor Lyngdoh's interpretation, the conclusion would be that all outsiders are disobedient sons of their mothers, and would come to grief in these hills like the allegorical stag, but history has no proof of this. Furthermore, the poet says in his introduction that the Khasis learnt the art of lamentation from the mother-stag, meaning from an outsider. This would mean again that prior to the advent of outsiders, the Khasis were emotionless - they did not mourn, weep, or lament over the death of their dear and near ones.²³ Morkha Joseph does not appear to have such meaning in mind. He is, as Wilson Reade observes, "a religious man".²³ The poem can therefore be better appreciated if seen as a social and a religious allegory.

In the first instance, the mother - stag stands for a Khasi mother who cares much for her children, and finds ways and means to guide them to a good and respectable life. According to Khasi

²²U Kritik, April 8, 1982, p.2.

²³"Umpohliaw Na Mihsngithiang", Ka Ryngkap, p.vii.

tradition, it is the mother's responsibility to counsel her children. The Stag in the poem is the only child of his mother, such a child gets spoilt because he gets whatever he wants. The mother - stag continues to advise and teach her son the good and safe way to live in future; that is by remaining in their own habitat and abandoning the adventurous ideas of experiencing life in an alien's territory. But because of the firm determination of the son to leave the safe place, his life ends in a tragedy and this makes the mother lament over his death. The Stag represents any Khasi youth who longs to experience life in new places thoughtless of other relatives at home; one who has no sense of the past and is oriented towards the future. He does not listen to the advice of the mother because it is outdated for him. At the prime of his youth he does not understand that his physical power and intelligence have a limit. So he leaves his home and comes over to the Shillong region where, as his mother anticipates, he meets death. The aim of the poet is to warn young people not to ignore the counsel of their parents and traditional wisdom.

The above interpretation of the allegory is limited by one fact: it cannot be stretched out to accommodate other events to the satisfaction of the critics. It would be proper to accept the fact, as Wilson Reade observes, that Joseph "is a religious man, and his business is [his] religion" and his mind naturally lends itself to that business.²⁴ This calls for a theological interpretation.

The mother - stag represents the Christian Church in the nineteenth century, especially during Joseph's active service as preacher and teacher. It was his ambition to bring many souls to

²⁴ Reade, loc. cit.

the Church as is the moral duty of every Christian pastor. The people of the Nongkhlaw state were not quite receptive to direct ~~sermon~~ and they were not happy also with the conversion of distinguished people.²⁵ The Presbyterian Church was opposed to worldly pleasures and luxuries.²⁶ It called every one, young and old to follow its teachings even as the mother - stag calls her son to follow her wherever she leads and not to waste time in adventures which do not help the spiritual life. The Mother calls her son:

"Oh come, follow me even now,
I'll lead the way, follow.
Lonesome and strange, and full of fear,
For I alone must know."

(St.8)

The theological design is clear in these lines. The way to ever-lasting life is not smooth. It is lonesome, strange and full of fear, for "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."²⁷ In the Mother's call the poet echoes the call Simon Peter heard besides the Galilean sea after the resurrection of Christ. Christ had warned him of the type of death he (Peter) must suffer for his faith, and now called him, "follow thou me."²⁸

Thus the young stag represents many people who refused to respond to the call of the Church through its workers; who instead of

²⁵Cf. Ch. I pt. I above.

²⁶Cf. Ch. IV above.

²⁷St. Matthew, 7:14.

²⁸St. John, 21:22.

listening to the gospel of salvation, had their own way of life even as the young stag does in the poem. In such an adventure, people wallow themselves in places of Sin as the Stag does in the animals' fare. The fare represents this world, and Hell at the same time. The Hound represents sin; the fomented soyabean represents the sting of death which sticks to the sinners to remind them of their past deeds. The supernatural forces which the poet employs to determine the fate of his hero represent God and his angelic hosts who will judge every man according as his works be. In this way, the tender fodder and Jangew - Jathang (a vegetable of bitter taste) stands for the lusts of the flesh which tempts man to continue in sin. The men who hunt the Stag are allegorical figures for Satan and his hosts. U Rangiarkhat or Cock pre-figures Christ whom the poet worships as his redeemer, Saviour, and the way to peace beyond the grave. When the poet makes his mother - stag invoke the Lyer batesi batemon (a Healing Wind) to wipe out all sorrows and pains from her he has the Holy Spirit of Christian theology in mind; because the Holy Spirit is spoken of as Comforter of men in sorrow and a divine guide to perfect life.²⁹

That in this poem the poet preaches a sermon to the Khasis as pastor of the Church is evident from the use of Christian doctrine of life beyond the grave, and the final destruction of Death by Jesus Christ. A man who responds to the call of the Church will rise again on the day of resurrection; the mother Stag is given a knowledge of this when she uses a simile :

²⁹St. John, 14:16, 26.

A black - hair worm dies in a cocoon
 Comes out a butterfly.
 Over a man, death can't prevail
 For e'en nine times he'll rise.
 An animal just like poor me,
 There's no more hope to live,
 Once dead, is dead. Where else to live?

(st. 30)

The hope of the Christians that they will one day meet their loved ones after the resurrection is also reflected in the poem, when the mother - stag says:

Ah blest are those who always hope
 One day to meet again;
 With those they love and value most
 To live eternally.

(St. 33)

Death is the final enemy of man and all living beings, but death shall be destroyed one day. At that time not man alone will live forever but animals too, since death will no longer have the power to touch any life. This philosophy, is put into the mouth of the Stag when she concludes her dirge:

The son of God shall bind and wring
 All joints he'll break, away.
 He'll break the teeth, and take out sting
 And eyes of death one day.
 Ever a man will thank the LORD
 In all the world over.

(St. 38)

This, I believe, is the interpretation that the poet expects, because he does not even allude to any political event in the poem. His sources are biblical but he goes beyond what the Bible speaks of the destruction of death in the above stanza. St. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians says that "that last enemy that shall be destroyed is death",³⁰ but has not explained how death will be destroyed. In the Book of Revelation³¹ St. John, after seeing the vision writes that "death and hell were cast into the lake of fire." Joseph combines the two accounts by the two writers and explains the mode of destruction, and it must give some relief to all who fear death.

The dirge of the mother-stag is the **first** monologue in Khasi Poetry, it takes 21 of the 38 stanzas and it is mainly through this part of the poem that the reader knows much of the past history of the stag, as well as the poet's philosophy of life; that is, to live is to suffer. Even love, as the love of the mother for her son, brings, suffering to the lover; but the loving mother is allowed to survive and to return to her original habitat.

Like all allegories, Joseph's "Stag", too has a moral lesson: obedience to the parents, the church, and submission of the self to God's will.

One characteristic which marks Joseph's poetry is its persuasive quality. In almost all the poems, the personality and the force

³⁰I Corinthians, 15:26

³¹Chapter 20:14

of the poet is felt by the reader. In the "Mystery of School life" a reader feels as if the poet addresses him directly. In the "Earthquake", and "The Stag" the listener would feel that the stories and the allusions are meant for him.

I now propose to examine briefly the speculative theology of Joseph. Joseph accepts the Christian view of God as God in three persons, - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. All the three persons existed of themselves before the heaven and earth were created. He refers to the second person in Godhead as U Khun U Blei or the Son of God in the "Stag" and this person of Godhead will destroy death eternally. It is in the same poem also (as discuss above) that he projects the Holy Spirit as the healing wind, to take the place of Christ after his ascension to heaven. His concept of godhead offers an interesting point. He sings of Christ in the "Birth of Jesus Christ" as "the very Jehovah". In this he propounds his own doctrine, because neither the Bible nor the Christian confession of faith, nor the Apostle's creed ever says so. In "The Coming of the Holy Spirit" in 1905, the poet sings that those people who received the renewal of their faith, saw in their vision the God who died on the Cross:

Calvary's anthem rent the sky,
 In sweet and saddest mode.
 It raised awe and perplex thought
 Of day on which God died.

(St. 32)

Joseph has not offered any argument to prove that his God has died along with the death of Christ. And, therefore, we do not get any answer to the question: who ruled the heaven and earth for two days and three nights during which God died and lay in the grave? His trinity God was at work again when God the Son rose from the grave and ascended into the heaven of heavens or the 'Holy of the holies' as St. John describes it in the Book of Revelation. In this case, Joseph's theology does not clarify whether God transcends the world he created or is immanent in it; because in the coming of the Holy Spirit, it appears that God is a God who both transcends the world and is immanent in it. But one thing is clear. God is the source of all knowledge and man must seek him every day.

Joseph's conception of man's nature is interesting. First, man is an embodiment of the flesh, mind and spirit. The flesh grows along with age and ends in the grave; the mind is a receptacle of all things good or bad. This he propounds in "The mystery of School Life." The mind can acquire knowledge quickly while young, and slowly when a man grows old. Men are divided by him into good and bad. Good men are humble, hard-working, God-fearing and honest: while the bad ones are proud, foolish and reckless like the stag, and those in his "Earthquake." In this poem, men are helpless in the eyes of God; Joseph reduces them to a position lower than that of the animals because they did not know that the Earthquake would occur as did the animals. According to Joseph, true immortality can be achieved only through strict adherence to Christian beliefs and by an acceptance of the sovereignty of Christ. Whatever the nature of man, he needs God for his existence.

He is not much interested in nature. In this respect, Ali's nature is more beautiful than Joseph's. In the "Stag" we see that his idea of nature is that of an innocent child who believes everything he learns from an elderly man; that it is manifested in the hills, the waters, the trees, the rocks, rain and wind, and is one of the ways through which God expresses himself; and man must accept his fate whatever it may be. He is happy if God blesses him, and he suffers because living means suffering.

2

The use of poetry as a platform to preach abstract ideas continued. In 1903, Mondon Bareh exercised his mind on "Truth" or Ka Jingshisha.³² He sings of the supremacy of Truth over all other virtues. It is changeless in nature and is a sure foundation for all good deeds. Truth is permanent and cannot die, for heaven and earth shall pass away but Truth shall remain forever, he urges. To Bareh anything which does not last is no Truth at all. Here we can ask; what about an event like the birth of a baby one day, and its death a day or a week later? Is it not truth that it was born and that it died? Bareh has not thought of such truth as permanent because what he has in mind is that God alone is Truth, and that his word is Truth. Whatever he predicted must come to pass. He learns about the permanence of truth from Christ who once said that heaven and earth shall pass away but his word shall remain forever.³³ According to

³²

Published in U Nongialam Khristan

³³St. Matthew, 5:18

Mondon Barih God always reminds man of Truth through death, judgement, and life which tell man that his permanent abode is beyond the blue, and therefore man must accept the word of God and live upto it.

Morkha Joseph and Mondon Barih were aware of the cultural movement disussed in the preceding chapter but were determined to champion Christianity. The cultural and religious movements together gave rise to a new tradition in Khasi poetry.

CHAPTER - VI

THE AWAKENING OF IMIGATION

The years 1913-1940 marked the advent of a new age in the history of Khasi literature with a new inspiration in poetical works. Imagination was allowed free play in poetic creation, and the feeling for nature assumed the importance of a central theme. Romantic melancholy found expression in the works of the new poets; most memorably in the poetry of Soso Tham and Primrose Gatphoh. Instinctive and ordinary experiences became the subject-matter of their poetry. With most of them, subjectivity is the hall-mark of the new poetry.

The inaugurator of the new poetry was L. Lewis. This poet remained obscure so long because he had not published his poem in book form. What we have today are the four poems¹ on the four seasons of the year which were published in a Khasi monthly, U Lurshai in 1913 and 1914. The poems are "Ka Pyrem" (Spring), "Ka Lyiur" (Summer), "Ka Synrai" (Autumn), and "Ka Tlang" (Winter). In style and versification, the poetry of Lewis is not radically different from the poetry of the past. Its importance lies in the interest it shows in nature and life. Though religiously inclined, Lewis has given nature a prominent place in Khasi poetry. His emotive treatment of nature springs from his heart, grows through his observation of natural objects and manifests itself in his

¹The poems have now been published by the Khasi Authors' Society in a collection entitled Na Ka Thiar Ki Longshuwa (1981). Not much is known about this poet. At the time he composed the four poems, he was serving as the headmaster of the Welsh Presbyterian M.E. School at Jowai.

descriptive skill. In his poetry all natural objects have a role to play and sometimes think, hear and act like human beings. His sense of natural beauty prompts him to hail Spring as the daughter of the nobles bringing with it many blessings to the land. Excepting the coming of showers with hailstones, Spring is to Lewis the most loved of the seasons, and in its advent he sees the earth rising up from slumber and dryness to open itself to it (Spring). The glory of this season is reflected in the clothing of the land with tender grass and the trees with new leaves and flowers. The farmers are busy preparing the land for the sowing of seeds, and the cattle rejoice in the field. In this way, L. Lewis makes poetry a medium to interpret life as he sees it lived during the time of composition.

In "Summer", nature is no longer kind because it has destructive elements. Though his heart rejoices in the blooming of flowers, he does not see life as a bed of roses. The season brings heavy rainfall which sometimes makes it impossible for the daily wage-earners to go for work; and there is a clear recognition of poverty. Besides this, fleas which suck human blood increase to add misery to man in rural areas. The cattle which rejoice in Spring are now disturbed by flies and other insects; trees and flowers are also disturbed because storm comes and uproots some of them. The poet does not like to see those destructive elements of nature. He is happy again when Autumn comes after Summer. He sees in this season a sign of happiness. Autumn is a season of redemption for a farmer because it is a season of ripeness in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Poverty which hits the poor in the Summer is no longer there because paddy and other crops are ripe and harvested. The poet fancies that

many people go out for a walk or for sport to get fresh air. Lewis is not happy with Winter either. He compares the season to a ruler with an iron rod in his hand to whip all in Khasiland regardless of their social status, "Without mercy she whips and whips" with cold. His heart goes out again to the cattle for it is a season when fodder becomes dry in the main land, and they have to migrate to other lands:

Winter is time elsewhere to live,--
 on hills 'tis hard, the grass is dead; --
 With cattle there five months to stay;
 Until sowing season returns.

(trans.)

The poet feelingly depicts the desolations of Winter. In a voice charged with emotion, and in a melancholic strain he addresses the dry and barren land thus:

O defoliate yellowish earth,
 Be no amazed and dejected,
 Like peacock clad with new vesture;
 You too shall dress in costly clothes.

(trans.)

His sympathy with the land and life prompts him to sigh as he sings that only God knows the advantage of having such a cold season like Winter.

Lewis inaugurates a new tradition in Khasi poetry. Contemporaries like Soso Tham, D. Nihon Singh Wahlang, and Bronath Thangkhiw were writing poems for U Lurshai, and those were published in book form. H. Elias ~~started~~ showing interest in poetry about the same time.

We came across a few poems by him in Ka Syngkhong Jingtip, a literary journal. The first to come out with a new book of poetry was Tham, but I propose to examine Wahlang first.

Wahlang was fully aware of the influence of the English Romantic poets on his way of thinking and poetic creation because he alluded to their works in the preface to his Khasi Poems (1930). What he feels and thinks of poetry is evidenced from the following lines:

Some facts of life are written in verse with the belief that "Poetry appeals to, exercises and strengthens, the feeling of the human heart." Poetry may indeed be defined as the "fit expression of the fit emotion." The noble [sic] emotion follows on, and is the outcome of the deepest thought and the truthful view of things.

It is William Wordsworth's view that a poet "must think long and deeply"² Wahlang echoes the wordsworthian idea, but he urges that a poet "must see clearly and feel deeply, so that he may be able to express his feelings in such a way that the same emotions rise in the heart of others."

Wahlang started his poetic career by translating a few English poems and those translations were published in U Lurshai. He owes his initiation as a poet to Sir Walter Scott whose "Patriotism" he translated faithfully and exactly. He was conscious of the fact that in translating Scott and a few other English poets he was disciplining himself in the art of poetry. Indeed, the ideas

2

Preface to the Lyrical Ballads.

and the satirical elements in Scott's "Patriotism" have been assimilated by Wahlang in his "U Batriem" or "The Terrible" in which he sings of a man who loves his own ego, cares only for himself as a mister know-all looking upon all around him as foolish and hopeless and ignoring their ideas and opinions howsoever reasonable those might be. Seeing the behaviour of such a man, others shun him. The poet urges that such a one as the "Terrible" must be left alone. One thing must be said of this poem. It appears to me that Wahlang composed it as his re-action to the so-called translation of Scott's "Patriotism" by Soso Tham where the latter nearly created a new poem in place of Scott's by incorporating his own idea into the translation.³ Wahlang seems to have wanted to show that translation should be carried out as faithfully as possible, and that if a translator derives a new idea from translating, he should compose a new poem after the model. Hence "The Terrible" which is the outcome of his translating Scott.

As against the terrible person, Wahlang depicts another character whom he calls "Cosmopolitan." This is very much like the poet himself -- a busy town-dweller, a social worker and a sort of a leader in his own locality whom other people long to meet frequently for help. Hundreds of people are always waiting their turn to see him. In spite of the heavy engagement, the poet sees that the mind of his Cosmopolitan is calm. In this poem, Wahlang alludes to the changes in the social life of the people in Shillong which involved leading personalities of the state referred to earlier.⁴

³More of Tham's translation shall be discussed in the next chapter.

⁴I have discussed those changes in chapter I of Part, I, Section 3.

Wahlang is chiefly a nature poet expressing a felt experience of nature, beginning with "U Khun B'la Khlad Noh". "Nohsngithiang" is saturated with nature. Nohsngithiang is the name of a fall near Mawsmi. Nature is depicted as the source of poetry too. Nature is to Wahlang, as it is to Gatphoh, an impartial friend who welcomes everyone and blesses the seeker of beauty and truth with knowledge.

3

The new type of poetry takes a definite shape in the hands of Soso Tham and his son Primrose Gatphoh. In this section, I shall examine Gatphoh's poetry.

According to Gatphoh⁵ poetry is "the song of the whole nature"⁶ In this statement we find the key to his poetry. He urges that a poet listens to the music of nature, observes natural objects and contemplates this great feast till he is moved to poetic expression. Only those impressions which affect the heart should be expressed, he urges.

In this wide and wonderful world and in the sky of the Eternal God, there are discipline and beauty of all things which impress the mind and affect the heart of the poet and he expresses all his emotions to the public through his songs and words.⁷

⁵Primrose Garfield Gatphoh was born on the 1st May 1900. Studied at the Shillong Government High School but had to leave education in 1917 to join the first world war as clerk. He returned from the war service and served as clerk in the same school from which he appeared and passed the matriculation as private candidate. When Soso Tham retired from service, Gatphoh was appointed "vernacular" ~~teacher~~ against the vacant post. In 1932-33 he was called to the inspecting staff, but returned to teaching in 1933 till he retired in 1959. His works include Ki Phawar Sara (1929), Sawdong Ka Lyngwiar Dpei (1933) Ki Khanatang bad U Sier Lapalang (1937), and Ki Umjer Ksiar (1941).

⁶"Balei Ba Ngi Dei ban Pule Ia Ka Poetry".

⁷ Ibid.

In most of his early poems Gatphoh attaches importance to the order and discipline he finds in nature, and urges that man should learn from nature to live an ordered and disciplined life. This is the spirit of his lyric, "Ko Khynnah Baieit" (O Beloved Children). In this world no man can find only order and discipline. As such nature produces different modes of music for man according as he experiences his life; but Gatphoh does not mean that a poet should ignore those aspects of life. Even melancholy has its own melody to a poet who loves nature and life. This is so with Gatphoh. In his "Lukhimai" he makes one of his characters, Mahet, decide "to gather wisdom from nature" and to widen his "knowledge about the lands and kingdoms outside"⁸ his ken because nature alone is truth. Gatphoh's own view of nature remains unchanged throughout his poetic career. In one place he writes:

Observe Nature which is around you.
It is the greatest University for the
young and the old alike. There is in it
a quarry of knowledge packed and hidden
from time immemorial. This university
which is tough and which rubs its own
students has produced many wise and won-
derful men from different huts and nests
of all nations under the sky. Nature does
not take side with any one; it gives equal
wages for the poor and the rich alike,
if they only love and study it every day.⁹

In theorizing about the place of nature in the making of a perfect man, Gatphoh is influenced by the English Romantics. It is Wordsworth who claims in "Tintern Abbey" that he is a worshipper

⁸Sawdong Ka Lyngwiar Dpei, pp. 66-67

⁹"Preface" to Ki Phawar Sara (1929, rpt. 1941).

of nature. It is Wordsworth who sings of an impartial nature as well as a nature which teaches or informs. Addressing his sister Dorothy, wordsworth sings:

Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts. . . .¹⁰

Primrose Gatphoh is not so much a worshipper, a priest of Nature as is Wordsworth; but he is its lover. Nevertheless he learns as much from its quietness and beauty. Quietness produces its own music, for Gatphoh writes that "quietness also has its own tongue which is different and which can speak only in the hearts" of those who seek to learn from nature.¹¹ In another passage, the poet speaks of both quietness and melancholy and of a "language not unwelcome to sick hearts" as Wordsworth sings in the Prelude.¹² Gatphoh seeks to explain this through his romantic character Adadak:

O lady, you live in a glassy palace
like this in a world which is so beautiful.
You see the fourteen-night Moon which is
tender and slow. His unheard music must
have touched your heart many times because
he speaks of the quietness and melancholy
of this life in the nature which sleeps in
the lulling of his tender rays.¹³

This is partly reminiscent of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" which speaks of the sweetness of unheard melodies :

¹⁰ "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey".

¹¹ Sawdong Ka Lyngwiar Dpei, p. 68

¹² Cf. 11.708-716

¹³ Sawdong Ka Lyngwiar Dpei, p.57

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
 Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
 Not to the sensual ear, but more endear'd
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone.

Unheard music is sweet to Gatphoh too because it appeals directly to the mind and not to the ear. While Gatphoh's nature open its doors "night and day for all those who are willing to enter into it without sparing their lives and spirits"¹⁴ it also invites its lover to all kinds of melodies, including sad ones.

Primrose Gatphoh sees that nature is multi-faceted. Above him is the sky with the sun, the moon and the stars according to their timings; then there are wind, rain, and cloud which come from their own places. On the earth's surface, nature embraces all : animals, birds, trees, flowers and insects which produce their own melodies. Above these in man who is also part of nature, and is subject to natural laws like all other living beings. It is those natural objects which a man should read, and listen with his mental ears to enable him to express what he sees and hears in his poetic creation.¹⁵ For Gatphoh, poetry expresses this sense of nature. He writes, "Poetry expresses the beauty of nature better than any other means we have to express it". It enables readers to share in the tender emotions and feelings expressed by poets as well as the sorrows, sadness, hopes and joys which a man experiences in his daily life. Such sharing of experiences

¹⁴P. Gatphoh in Ka Thymmei (1961).

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

is not possible in prose, claims Gatphoh.¹⁶

4

I now propose to examine Gatphoh's poetry thematically. His major poems are "Ka Sohlyngngem", "Ka Per Tyrso", and "J Sier Lapalang". Each has a theme of its own.

Love-Obedience-Conflict. This is the theme of "Ka Sohlyngngem". The poem is a ballad based on the oral tradition as recorded by Rabon Singh in Ka Kitab Jingphawar (1899). "Sohlyngngem" literally means the Imperial Pigeon found in the Khasi Hills. The bird is personified in this poem so as to possess the qualities of man. Sohlyngngem is the only daughter of her parents. She is depicted as modest and correct till she meets Rynniaw (a black bird with long feather) with whom she falls in love. Both the young birds love each other and go steady for some time. Occasionally they visit quiet places where they share their secrets and decide to get married some day. As a docile daughter, Sohlyngngem tells her mother of her plan to marry her boy-friend. Neither of her parents is happy that their daughter should marry a son of rich parents lest he ill-treat her later. This breaks the heart of the daughter and makes her cry. One day she tells this to her beloved. The boy takes a decision quickly which is that he does not like to displease the girl's parents. They kiss each other, and the boy flies upward proudly announcing what he has done with the girl.

¹⁶P. Gatphoh in Ka Thymmei (1961)

The poet uses the fable only as a means to present the conflicts in the Khasi society of those days. It is the conflict between love and obedience. It is also the conflict between the old values and the new. The old value demands that a girl should marry only her equal, not richer, nor poorer than she is. Parents in those times preferred a poor and diligent boy to a rich one for their daughter. They feared, as the mother of Sohlyngngem does, that boys coming from well-to-do families when united into matrimony with poor girls will ill-treat their wives later and finally leave them in distress. Modern life does not uphold such a view of married life because love and mutual understanding have become the main consideration. The young lovers seem to understand themselves better than do their parents. The poet sings:

Sacred language of love they speak,
 Alone they get engaged:
 To king or slave this does not leak,
 For none is there to wait.

The girl becomes a victim of the conflict between her love for the boy and obedience to her parents. Both are important to her. When she struggles to get away with one, she finds that she misses both. She mourns because the young man does not like to face the problem of life. Nevertheless, he says:-

"Oh! is it so? I too don't like!
 And why should you displease!
 But o sweetheart grant that I might
 Kiss you but once - Farewell!"

The poet does not tell directly whether or not Sohlyngngem loses her virginity in the prolonged embracing and kissing, but he makes the boy, Rynniaw announce:

'Tis broke, 'tis broke! a Golden Cup,
'Tis o'er, oh fragrant flo'er.

In these lines the "golden cup" which is broken is a metaphor for virginity. In another line, the poet uses another metaphor, "thei iap saw". Both indicate that the girl has lost her virginity.

What the poet does here and in the next poem is reflecting and interpreting the changes in the Khasi society; the conflict between love and obedience, between the old values and the new which affect the life of the young people. In early days, marriages were arranged by parents. What was necessary was the agreement of the parents on both sides. Love marriages too took place but seldom because obedience to parents prevailed. Later generations of Khasi youth did not accept a pre-arranged marriage. Young people felt free to choose their life-partners. Sohlyngngem is the product of the new generation who thinks that love should take a firm root first before marriage can take place; unfortunately it does not work in her case. The defect in Sohlyngngem in this poem is her failure to do as most modern Khasi girls do. Instead of taking her boy home and introducing him to her parents she prefers to meet him on the sly. The tragic end of love-tie could have been prevented had she taken care of the future. But her parents too have not tried to reconcile themselves to the changing circumstances. They stick to their old-time practice of finding a boy for their daughter themselves, and the traditional belief that boys coming from a rich family are no match for a poor girl. Thus, when obedience to parents prevails, a plan for love marriage fails.

Something must be said of Gatphoh's design in "Ka Sohlyngngem". In the beginning we find a calm atmosphere at home as if everything is going on very well with the family. The calm atmosphere develops into something else when Rynniaw sings serenades to the girl. Not long after that, we find both the young people in outings to quiet places where we find only love ruling their hearts. The day, her parents know of their secret engagement, the house-hold atmosphere is changed with anger of the mother and the cry of the girl. The last day the couple meet is also a lousy day, full of noises. In all these stages, the poet involves his readers with the action. The readers are witnesses to the events as much as the poet is. They sympathize with Sohlyngngem, because her misfortune is the misfortune of many a young girl of this type in the Khasi society today.

Love and Lust Conflict. In "Ka Per Tyrso", Gatphoh takes love and lust as his theme. The characters of this drama are Sngi and Klew. They are wife and husband. The structure of this poem deserves special attention. In it Gatphoh experiments in constructing a tragic plot, and in pathos. When we talk of plot, it is helpful to refer to Aristotle. That Greek philosopher said that the plot should have a beginning, the middle and the end.¹⁷ In chapter XVIII of the Poetics he spoke of two other parts of a tragic plot, namely, the Complication and the Denouement. Gatphoh in "Ka Per Tyrso" designs a plot which has five parts. I feel I must clarify these parts for

¹⁷Poetics, trans. S.H. Butcher.

better appreciation of my statement.

- PART I The beginning. Here we are allowed to see the childless couple live peacefully in their palace high above the earth and a little below heaven.
- PART II The complication. The husband, Klew, becomes restless and expresses his desire to leave his wife and to marry the girl he has seen lately. He tells also that such a one alone can match him in pomp and grandeur.
- PART III The middle. Sngi dissuades Klew from being tempted by new things. We see the action. The wife holds her husband with her hand weeping in advance for the consequence of his action. Klew does not listen.
- PART IV The Denouement. Klew decides to leave, and flies down to earth as he could not resist the temptation, only to discover that the object he has so long taken for a girl is only a mustard flower.
- PART V The end. Here we see the suffering of Klew. He repents but he cannot return to his wife.

Klew is a tragic hero with all the qualities Aristotle prescribed for such a hero. This hero is placed in high position. That he is so is revealed from the height of his abode -- half the distance between heaven and earth. According to the Khasi custom, when a husband marries a rich wife, he is also rich. The fortune of his wife is his fortune also. In this poem too Klew has no worries because his wife, Sngi, is rich. This is supported by the words of Sngi who, after she has observed for many days that her husband has become restless, asks like one in authority over her property, "And what else do you lack?" The tragic flaw of Klew is sexual lust. His fortune changes suddenly on his reaching the earth

because he discovers his serious fault. He suffers for his own conduct.

The poet's sympathy goes with Sngi; but he does not seem to be prepared for a psycho-analytical investigation of the causes of Klew's fall. It is perhaps relevant here to say that most Khasi husbands feel that life is empty without children to succeed them. Someone who is not constrained by religion or age could very well think like Klew of trying his luck on another woman. There is also scope to look at the cause of Klew's fall from another angle. The wife who has been blessed by the poet with premonition of the catastrophe which her husband is soon to meet contributes to its fulfilment. As mentioned above, she is proud of her property and seems to think that luxury of life and personal comfort are all that husbands need. Besides this, she irks Klew by condemning the girl before seeing her personally, and blaming Satan for tempting her husband. These reasons seem sufficient for the husband to rush into darkness and to his tragic suffering.

Klew's love for his wife is unquestionable, because he does not ask rashly or speak inconsistently. He does say that he would return after meeting the girl. But in the end, lust prevails and hence the suffering.

I have said earlier that both the above poems are ballads. They are indeed serious literary ballads. They are not intended for singing round fireplaces simply to entertain the readers occasionally. Though Gathphoh chooses traditional themes and stories for the poems his treatment is highly literary. He is very careful

of the ballad convention. In the first instance, he adapts the four-foot iambic for the first and the third lines, and the three-foot iambic for the second and the fourth lines. Secondly, Gatphoh makes his poems "Ka Sohlynggem" and "Ka Per Tyrso" rime abab uniformly.

Ballads arise from folk literature. Gatphoh takes folk literature as sources, and treats the deeds rather than thoughts of his characters as subject-matters of the poems. The treatment is impersonal, and Gatphoh does not identify himself with any of his characters. Like most literary balladists, Gatphoh too does not attempt to describe in detail the time and place of action but lays stress on the story and action. In each case, he brings the supernatural in to determine the course of action (I shall come to this a little later).

Obligation and Ambition: In "U Sier Lapalang", Primrose Gatphoh takes social obligation and brings it in conflict with the ambition of a young man for fame and fortune. This is the theme of Gatphoh's Stag Poem.¹⁸ "U Sier Lapalang" is a metrical romance-allegory. It is also partly an exercise in a comparative study of some aspects of the Jewish religious practice with that of the Khasis. The gist of the poem may be stated briefly before it is examined further.

There are two stags, the mother and her son. They live in the plains of East Bengal and sometimes they come to the foothill of

¹⁸We have in the last chapter examined one Stag poem by Morkha Joseph. While the first is a double allegory, the present one has its own angle of approach.

Khasi Hills to a village named Lapalang from which the young stag derives his name, "Sier Lapalang" or Lapalang stag. As a careful mother, the Stag counsels her son not to be ambitious of fame and glory for there is danger awaiting such characters. The young Stag does not listen. He leaves the mother alone and climbs the Khasi Hills to experience life. In the course of his adventure he reaches many places -- awful and fearful as well as places which inspire him to go ahead. One day he reaches the animals' fare or iew luri-lura where the dog sells tungtoh (fomented soyabean). Because of its foul smell, the young Stag and other animals stamp it under their feet, and the smell of it sticks in their hoof forever. The dog seeks justice from the King of animals, the Tiger, perhaps because there is no Lion in the district. In the judgement the Stag is justified fully and is set free, but the dog and his wife seek justice from man and promise to serve him for life if he only agrees to take revenge on the Stag. Man agrees, and along with his friends, hunts the Stag and kills him. In the mean time the mother who has been searching for her son arrives and finds that he is already dead and his body is on the bier ready to be carried to the hut of man. When the hunters see the courage of the mother-stag to come near her dead son, they lower the bier down and leave it there. The place the poet chooses is Shillong peak. The mother laments over the lot of her son and prays to the Shillong god for mercy. God hears her prayer and turns both the stags into springs.

I have said earlier that the poem is a metrical romance. Indeed it has several elements of Romance. The hero of a Romance needs

training to help the weak and the helpless and to fight if necessary. In this poem, Lapalang's mother is one of the teachers. She teaches him to be humble and not to despise women. She asks him, "And how would you run from a mother who bore!" She expects him to be her defender now that he is grown up. Lapalang does not think that the instruction is enough for him so he gets the best of training from Nature through experiences. It is to nature's call that he responds and because of that too he leaves his own mother. This is suggestive also of the ambition of the poet himself to venture on a new type of poetry as against the didacticism of the old.

The hero of a romance needs training in the art of handling his weapons. The weapons Lapalang has are his antlers. Nature teaches him how to use his weapons because the poet says, "he barks, and he snores, he bears his antlers." In a romance, the weak run for life and need the protection of the powerful. In this poem too the dog and his wife seek the help of man, the most powerful creature on earth. There is justification for these characters to do so because the dog has been condemned in the judgement by the King of the animals. There is a religious ceremony also. The medieval Knight had to remain one night near the altar to pray for God's blessings in his venture. He had to do that alone. Lapalang makes the Rableng peak the place where he can dedicate himself to the new task. The poet has that intention because he calls the place 'lavkyntang' which means sacred grove. It is in this place that the Stag says to himself, "Surely in this world I'll forget you never" when he remembers the counsel of his mother. It is here also that he prays

to God: "Leilum o Leithor, in peace I shall go / O hear and listen,
Leishnong leimuluk". The sacred oath of the stag is that he would
 not go back because:

My mind has prepared -- the land far away:
 Forward I must step to Fame's pinnacle,
 Though blood must be shed, you too must not cry.

In a romance, there is sometimes a woman in sorrow or someone
 despised or ill-treated without a cause. If a woman, she is not
 satisfied until she finds the thing she seeks. This has been
 portrayed by Gatphoh in the person of the mother Stag. She has been
 in distress ever since the son left her alone. Nevertheless, she
 searches for him now with tears, eating nothing till she finds him,
 but alas he is dead already!

The main theme of a romance is either battle or love, or adven-
 ture. Gatphoh combines the love of fame and adventure. In fact he
 highlights the conflict of the hero in his effort to reconcile his
 feeling about his aged mother to his personal ambitions. He fulfills
 the latter and dies a tragic death. But we must note one point: the
 poet allows him to die because there is nothing more for Lapalang to
 do.

Gatphoh's Stag poem differs from the one by Morkha Joseph in
 certain respects. Gatphoh chooses the four-foot metre for all the
 lines except for the seventh stanza when he makes a transition from
 the beginning to the middle of the story where he chooses a different
 metre; whereas the one by Joseph is not uniform in this respect.
 Joseph's stag comes from the north, while this one by Gatphoh from
 the south of Khasi Hills. To readers who attach importance to the

political implications of the poems, which none of the poets has in mind, the Stag coming from the north is identified with an outsider coming from Assam, while the one coming up from the south is a Bengali. I do not subscribe to such an interpretation. Joseph makes his poem serve, through its double allegory, more purposes than one. Gatphoh's allegory is aimed at involving every person in the Khasi society. The stag is any one of us: one with ambition and with the will to do good to his parents; but when higher call comes in his life, he leaves behind all obligations to be capable of responding to the call. Joseph's Stag is condemned by the gods and by the poet himself; whereas Gatphoh's is an ambitious young character. The conflict Gatphoh's stag faces is between duty to his mother or obligation and his love of fame. Finally, he decides in favour of fame. He is brave and courageous, but not bad. We admire him as his reasoning power matures. The determination and ambition of this Stag are parts of Gatphoh's own: he wants to know even the origin of the Khasis and so he follows the footprints and traces of the way the Khasis followed to reach this place -- through monolith and cromlechs he finds in these hills, he comes to the conclusion that the ancestors of the Khasi must have come from "Sohphoh Lynrum". This Stag continues his journey like a hero. When he reaches the animals' fare, he along with other animals stamps the chutney of the dog. Unlike Joseph's stag who is condemned, Gatphoh's is justified by the Council of the animals and comes out a real hero from the fare.

Like the experiment in "Ka Per Tyrso", here too Gatphoh depicts his Lapalang more or less as a tragic hero with certain good

qualities in him. Because he has been vindicated by the animals' council, Lapalang has no fear, nor does he suspect mischief being planned against him by anyone. He proceeds till he reaches the Shillong peak. This peak is the highest in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and Lapalang's reaching there marks his attainment to fame. He has his flaw. He takes the judgment of other animals to be final, and he has every right to think so because the council or durbar is the supreme authority. Secondly, when he finds the ladies working in the slope of the Shillong peak disappearing, he does not suspect any ill luck facing him. A few minutes later, he sees the hunters with the very dog whose chutney he had stamped! He realizes his flaw, but there is no time to do anything about it. He dies, but remains a character who has accomplished what he planned.

The Supernatural. What makes Gathphoh's poetry different from that of his contemporaries is his employment of the Supernatural. He gets this idea from the English Romantics. Coleridge, recalling the occasion for the Lyrical Ballads (1798) writes:

In this idea originate the plan of the Lyrical Ballads; in which it was agreed that my endeavour should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief, which constitute poetic faith.¹⁹

In "Ka Sohlyngngem", the supernatural has been given a minor role to play. The poet uses what he calls ka Lei Iapmat (the goddess

¹⁹S.T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, (Ed.) George Watson (London: Everyman's Library, rpt. 1967), pp. 168-69.

of blind love) to witness the love of Sohlyngngem and Rynniaw. As the youth give their solemn promise to each other, this goddess smiles on them. This smile of the supernatural is ironic and ambiguous : she might admire the couple for their love; she might also be smiling because she knows what is going to happen. The events which follow the smile are however not pleasant to the girl. Therefore, the smile of the supernatural is ironic, a forewarning of what is to follow. From the very moment we see the presence of the goddess of blind love, we feel that the entire course of events in the life and experience of the couple is controlled by the supernatural. In "Ka Per Tyrso", Gatphoh shows his power of using the supernatural fully. Klew is tempted in many ways by u ksuid, or Satan who leads him to decide in favour of leaving his wife. The Supernatural first touches the eyes of Klew. He looks down from the window of the palatial building and sees first figures like Thlen (a devil who sometimes takes the form of serpent); then an animal, a snake, and finally a young girl. The more Klew applies his mind and imagination to the newfound beauty, the more helpless he becomes. Suggestion from his wife, howsoever good it might be is of no value at all. Sngi, his wife, represents the element of divine force; but when her husband can no longer accept her plea, the good effort fails. The evil forces are given four names : u thlen, u ksuid, Lei Puri and Lei Rango. It is the second devil who goes up to the palatial building and tempts Klew to think of the young girl down below. U Ksuid's function resembles that of Milton's Beelzebub who tempts even his leader Satan; while Rango's resembles the function of Sin in Paradise Lost. Gatphoh is very careful in assigning roles to the

Supernatural. It is not enough for this power to win the soul of a good man through seeing alone. It needs hearing and seeing to be convinced for the new idea. Klew falls from grace because of his own flaw, but his flaw as well as his action is determined by the Supernatural.

The role of the Supernatural in "U Sier Lapalang" also is important. The divine power and the evil forces are working actively throughout the poem. The presence of the Supernatural is hinted by Gatphoh from the second stanza where he introduces u ksuid, Tyrut (the demoness who brings misfortune, especially violent death), and God the creator. Then the poet goes on cataloguing those powers working against God. Besides the above-named devils, he brings in Rango, Thlen, rakot, rngai, lyngkhuh, suid tynjang, jymhong and several other devils (known to the Khasis) to have their role in determining the fate of Lapalang. Occasionally, the hero is allowed to see the shadows of these evil powers as well as to appreciate God's handiwork as manifested in nature. But he does not like to return to his mother. Again, the hunters who shoot Lapalang do not do it without consulting the Supernatural. The first seek a sign from the gods in their small lime-container, and the sign shows that the Stag is to die on Shillong peak, and at the same time the sign shows that there is a divine sanction to the killing of Lapalang. At this point, we see that both the good and the evil forces of the Supernatural work against Lapalang. The mother, however, keeps on praying to God for the safety of her son, but when she later finds him dead, she too longs for death. The mother's last words embody

the invocation to the divine power for intervention:

My head in the earth for e'er I shall hide,
And now oh listen, set free undefiled!
Cover now on Earth! Oh floor of the world!
The hell of the dog! arrow of the Bow!

The God of Shillong hears her prayer, and appears in the form of smoke from the Marai Cave and with the touch of his golden staff, the stags are changed into nine springs.

Gatphoh does not want the ambitious Stag to end in death, for death in the body does not mean death of the soul as well. He does not have any redemption for Klew but he redeems his Stag by changing him into Spring. He also shows that though man and gods allow his Stag to die, the Almighty of his own power forgives him and grants him everlasting life.

Biblical Influence. Gatphoh was a Christian, and an elder of the Presbyterian Church at Jaiaw, Shillong. As such, he was steeped in the Bible. There is, therefore, scope to examine the influence of the Bible and of Christian thought on his poetry. In bringing the God who dwells in the Shillong peak and the sacrifices offered him by the Khasis, Gatphoh seems to have offered a parallel of Jehovah in the Old Testament. In the Bible, Jehovah commanded Moses to mix salt to the thanksgiving sacrifice.²⁰ The Shillong God delights in saltless meat offering, for "The meat without salt they boil and they roast", says Gatphoh. Against this parallelism, there are also similarities. Jehovah was pleased to meet his people in

²⁰Leviticus 2:13

the sacred grove of mount Horab²¹ and sanctified the grove as 'holy' where Moses and Aaron were asked to go barefooted. Jehovah forbade Moses to take home the remains from the meat and bread used in sacrifice and asked that the whole remainder should be collected and burnt.²² Gatphoh sings of a Khasi practice similar to this in that the worshippers of the Shillong God do not take home the pieces of meat which they cannot eat on top of the Shillong peak for "They pick from the ground and burn those in flame." The people of Shillong offer an annual thanks-giving sacrifice to the Shillong God in the same manner as the children of Israel did to Jehovah. It appears, therefore, that Gatphoh is aware of the Biblical tradition.

The Christian teaching that children ought to honour their parents is reflected in "Ka Sohlyngngem" and "U Sier Lapalang". Gatphoh makes Sohlyngngem submit to her parents' will and part with her boy friend. Lapalang, though he leaves his mother in favour of fame, thinks that it is a temporary separation and that he will one day return with honour and fame to take care of his old mother. The idea of redeeming Lapalang, as we have already discussed above, is Christian in nature but Gatphoh knows that there is no doctrine that an animal should have life after death, so he designs the end of his hero the way he does. Christianity does not favour Lust, and is against adultery. So Klew could not be redeemed, and he suffers.

²¹Exodus 3:5.

²²Leviticus 7:17 and 8:32.

In most of his poems Gatphoh uses the animal and bird imagery to interpret life. He gives his animal characters mind, heart, feeling, emotion, passion, and the capacity to think and act like man. His imagination is compulsively anthropomorphic.

Man in Gatphoh's poetry is not a simple being. He is a synthesis of contraries. He wants to live peacefully and lead a disciplined life. That is possible when he is young and when he still remains unexposed to the problems of life. The moment he encounters those problems, he finds himself a being who wants to exercise his individual freedom, a being whose mind is full of ambition, anxiety, and tension. Man's mind is a battle-field for conflicting ideas. His success or failure depends partly on his own conduct and partly on the divine will and the natural forces.

Man is a member of the society. Each society has its own tradition and customary laws to which man is tied down; but man as a rational being wants to be his ownself. He longs to exercise his individual freedom and energy regardless of consequence. This longing for freedom is the hall-mark of Gatphoh's philosophy of life. In the poem "Tuta Ai Khaw" the Parrot sings that she longs to go out of the cage to the jungle and lead a natural life. She does not feel happy with food being given her without struggling. The same longing for freedom has been reflected in "I Sim Barit", too, in which a little bird kept in a cage tells the boy:

I long to fly freely
And sing sweet melody
I yearn for clear water
Falling below the rocks.

A slave I am hither
 In cage, -- my soul grows thin
 Among my friends thither
 Freely, -- I rule, a queen

Klew struggles to break the social tie which marriage imposes on him. His failure is due to his own doings. Lapalang wants to be natural, and to be the master of his own destiny. Though he dies, he lives like a character in a Romance.

All those main characters represent the nature of a modern man who finds that the precarious nature of the peace and pleasure he experiences, and a man who finds that life is full of complexities and that at the bottom of everything lies frustration and finally tragedy.

In bringing in the Supernatural in the action of his major poems, Gatphoh expresses a religious view. Though life is a complexed whole, God does bless those who turn to him with a contrite heart as he blesses the mother stag. Gatphoh shows, through his characters, a concern for man's spiritual destiny. Because he takes nature as the creation of God, he seems to plead as he does in "Tuta Ai Khaw" and "I Sim Barit" for man's submission to natural laws. Demonstrably, Gatphoh draws upon the naturalism of the English Romantics.

Gatphoh's view of life has a strong influence on later poets, evidently on Oscar M. Wahlang. Gatphoh's is now dead, but like his Lapalang, who takes a new form of life, he too is alive in the Khasi society through his poetry.

CHAPTER VII

THE POETRY OF SOSO THAM

The study of Khasi literature of the first one hundred years of its history will be incomplete without Soso Tham. Tham is a genius whose poetry merits serious attention. His poetry has exercised the widest influence on the reading public and has served as a model of a careful art for most modern Khasi poets.

Tham did not have much formal education. He retired as a teacher of the Shillong Government High School. Born at Sohra in 1873, Soso Tham had his early education at Nongsawlia, an important station of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission in the Khasi Hills. He came to Shillong about 1889-1890 and read up to the seventh class only. Since then he had to move from place to place as a school teacher till 1893 when he was appointed headmaster of the erstwhile upper primary school at Shangpung in the Jaintia Hills. About 1903 he left the job and began practice as a petty lawyer in the court of the sub-divisional officer at Jowai, then a sub-division of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District. He was appointed teacher in the Shillong Government High School in 1905 by the Chief Commissioner of Assam and joined the post on the 15th October that year. He retired from service on the 30th June 1931.¹ This new job brought him face to face with the dearth of reading materials in the Khasi language. Tham became restive. From his own account, it is clear that the

¹The date of his retirement prompts me to estimate that he was born on the 1st July 1873 for June 30, 1931, he must have completed 58 years of age, due for retirement in those days. Works on his life and literary career include the Soso Tham Birth Centenary Celebration Souvenir (1973); Ki Sur Na Ka Duitara Ksiar (1967, 1979) and Na Ka Hundai Sha Ka Lawei (1980) by me; U Soso Tham Bad Ki Jingtrei Jong U (1980) by H. Warjri.

books taught at the seventh class were repeated year after year till the students completed their high school course. He wrote:

When I was fully fed up with teaching the self-same books for years together, and the ears of the experts (missionaries and natives) were fed up with my repeated plea for the production of new books, someone whispered in my ears at the cleft of Sunapani "do it yourself! . . . "There are two ways", said I, "either I should resign this job or take the dao and start for a more paying business which has not been assigned by the university."²

Tham began his poetic career with translation beginning with W.E. Hickson's "Drive the Nail aright" to counsel and exhort students to work hard with perseverance. Tham confessed that it was not easy to translate the simple poem into Khasi. He wrote: "And on this atom -- Drive the nail -- three years have I laboured and waited before I felt that it worked. I myself regard it as a mustard seed from which -- together with others -- slowly grows up to the branches and leaves of Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep".³ The "others" he refers to above included Jane Taylor's "Little Star", Ann Taylor's "My Mother," William Shakespeare's "Passionate Pilgrim", William Wordsworth's "Lucy Poems", "Cuckoo", "Solitary Reaper", Walter Scott's "Patriotism", Thomas Moore's "Last Rose of Summer", George Gordon Byron's "The Destruction of Senecharib", and William Cowper's "The Diverting Story of John Gilpin". Tham appeared to have surveyed several ballads of Wordsworth and a few more poems of the Romantic poets for possible translation, and did work also on Milton's

²"Ka Jìngpynshai", Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep (1936), pp. x-xi.

³Ibid.

Paradise Lost before he began writing poetry himself. Besides translating poems, he translated the Aesop's Fables (1920) after the model set by John Roberts; and Charles Dickens' The Life of our Lord (1936) into Khasi. His mastery of the Khasi language and his wit have made many common readers fancy that the characters in Tham's translation had roamed about the Khasiland and accomplished their works here. The first principle Tham adopted was to explore the full cultural context of the original and find its equivalents in his own language. Whenever possible he looked for corresponding symbols in the two languages. He nearly disclosed what he did when he wrote :

To me, therefore, the Sohpetbneng peak
is Bethel. Shillong Peak is Parnasus. Latara
or Kurimai differs not from Helen or Penelope,
and the chirping of dajor in the morning and that
the Aolian Harp is marynthing.⁴

The second principle Tham adopted in translating was analysing was analysing the grammar of the source language and of the target language before he actually translated lines of poetry; for grammatical analysis alone gives a translator an insight into the differences of semantics in different languages. Because there can be a word-for-word correspondence in any two languages,⁵ Tham exercised a great care in the choice of translation equivalents. Besides these he took recourse to modification of the original ideas and addition of his own in the process of translating poetry. Modification of the order of words or of verse is permissible when the idea remains unaffected, but modification by means of addition and importation is, however, frowned upon by most critics. Dudley Fitts argues that a

translator of poems must be a poet as well as an interpreter because, in his view, "interpretation must be an act of poetry." Fitts adds that it goes without saying that the translator "must be at least poet enough to make a new poem in place of the other."⁶ Tham did not live long enough to find a defender in Fitts. Another step Tham took in his translation was omission. He excluded four stanzas from Ann Taylor's "My Mother". Frank M. Pugh tried to justify⁷ the omission of the first two stanzas because the words do not suit the Khasi sensibility. The fifth stanza was omitted, maintained Pugh, because it relates exclusively to the habit of girls; while the last one simply repeats the idea in the tenth stanza. Tham himself had not explained the reason for the omission. However, the Reverend John Ceredic Evans advertised in U Nongialam Khristan (July 1924) that he would award a prize for the best translation of the poem into Khasi. Along with the advertisement, Evans printed seven of the eleven stanzas omitting four. It so happens that the four stanzas omitted by Evans were also omitted by Tham. From this information it could now safely be concluded that Tham's selection was conditioned by the requirement of the advertisement in the above monthly.⁸ All Tham's translated pieces continue to delight the reading public for the style, the scheme, the metres and rhythm he used.

By translating the works of other writers, Soso Tham learnt the art of poetic creation. His early poems which appeared in 1925

⁶Dudley Fitts, "The Poetic Nuance", On Translation, pp. 34, 46.

⁷Ka Jingiarap Ia Ki Kot B.A. Khasi, Part II (1965) pp. 6-7.

⁸The advertiser did not announce the prize-winner, but it was possible that Tham's translation satisfied him. Incidentally, the poem was published in Ki Poetry Khasi (1925).

show that he had varied literary interests. Tham happened to be the first Khasi poet to sing of erotic love with deep understanding. He understood human life and passions, and reflected on those through his poetry. Enthusiastic as he was in poetic creation, he discovered eleven years after the publication of the first collection of his poems that the reading public in the Khasi society was microscopic. He discovered too that Khasi books were read because they were texts. He deplored the absence of the reading habit among the Khasis of his time and their apathy towards their own literature. He wrote:

But a modern Khasi does not read unless
he is forced to in school and in church. And
Khasi youth do not read a Khasi book howsoever
good it is, unless it is a text book. Is there
a darker blindness than this?⁹

Tham wanted the Khasis to read books in their own language, thereby learning to love their own society. He believed that unless people read books, they would not know even their own culture and tradition; they would not know what was good for them and what was not.

A Christian by birth, Soso Tham belonged to the Presbyterian Church and contributed to its glory in various ways. He was an active member of the Church, and of the erstwhile Christian Volunteer Movement which sought to project Christian virtues through its organ, U Lurshai. His personal gratitude to the Welsh Mission found expression in one of his prefaces. Tham wrote :

⁹"Ha Ki Nongpule", Ka Duitara Ksiar (1936), p. ii. cf. Ch.II Part II above.

How grateful we are to the Welsh Mission for all it had done. This is a great fact which the whole country must ponder. Whose kingdoms are ours? Whose citizens are we? What have the Syiems and the Khasi states done to drive away this darkness? The Christian community has exercised its power by establishing khaw kham schools in these 30 years. . . . The Mission had led the way; like a tusker, it has trampled the difficulties without counting the cost, poured forth its own wealth and the best of its people for over one hundred years. . . .¹⁰

Though a presbyter for the best part of his life, Tham became a member of the Anglican Church in his last days. According to his son, Primrose Gatphoh, whom I interviewed in 1976, Tham joined the Anglican Church out of gratitude for one Matron in the Welsh Mission Hospital, one Miss Bullock, for the services she rendered to him. But according to others, his second marriage at an old age was criticised by a few elders of the Presbyterian Church in Shillong, which certainly affected his religious allegiance. Tham died on the 18th December 1940.

2

Khasi poets before Soso Tham had not attempted to explain their poetics. Soso Tham did not initially have a poetics. In one place he wrote that his poetry is self-explanatory, and that the melody it produces "gives colourings which do not occur in the dream of the compositor."¹¹ It was in 1935-36 that Tham attempted a poetics of sorts in two prefaces.

¹⁰"Ha ki Nongpule", Ka Duitara Ksiar (1936), p.ii cf. Ch.II Part II above.

¹¹Ibid.

He knew what poetry is, but he had not hitherto offered a straightforward account. To him, poetry is a spirit which enables a poet to express life, and to present righteousness and truth to the world. Being a spirit, poetry took Tham back to the beginning of the world according to the Khasi **conception to see** for himself through imagination the lives of his ancestors. He needed poetry to be a spirit as he worked on Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep (The Primal Days of the Seven Families). This means in effect that a poet writes the history of his race through poetry as Tham himself tried. Spirit is immortal, but the spirit in Soso Tham's definition is Imagination which plays a key-role in the making of his poetry; an imagination which could be invoked as he had done in "Ka Pyrthei Mariang," and "U Lyoh" to carry him to different lands and different ages.

Poetry is also a musical instrument, a harp on which the poet plays to recapture ancient spirits. Tham wrote: "Thence I play on this harp so that the Echo of the ancestors' spiritual power may resound, the generations to come may awake and understand this."¹² As the harp has body, strings and other parts to produce melody, Tham wanted poetry, too, to wear all its ornaments - foot, metre, rime, rhythm, and idea, and most importantly, melody. Tham tried to follow his theory, and his poetry flows smoothly in proper cadence when read aloud. He had written that a teacher who cannot read any poem aloud is retarding the mental development of the students; whereas one who can "need not explain much. The sweet melody of his art of reading explains the poem. It pierces through and sinks into

¹²"Ka Jingpynshai".

the mind of the hearers, and they understand it."¹³

Next, Tham maintained that "the Poetry of Truth is a two-edged sword;" The phrase "two-edged sword" was used in 64 A.D. by the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews:

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing assunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints, and marrow, and it is a discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart.¹⁴

Tham did not intend to level Poetry with the Bible which Christians regard as the word of God because he was a Christian, and he knew too that the word of God is "sharper" than the two-edged sword; but by choosing the metaphor he meant to assert that poetry too is the word of God, and a poet needs revelation to produce it. This definition raised the status of a poet to that a prophet waiting for revelation and inspiration to come from God before he utters his oracles. It also takes the reader to Tham's philosophy of poetry. Tham traced the origin of poetry to be sometimes God. He wrote:

God, the Father of Lights from the very beginning, as unto the Jews or other nations, so also unto our Great Argumentators and Great Thinkers at sundry times and in diverse manners spake by parable which are shadows of things to come.¹⁵

¹³"Ha Ki Nongpule". Most teachers and critics will disagree with him, but a few of his students I met confirmed that he did exactly so. My personal experience should not count because I ran down a teacher who could not explain the philosophy, the technique and the meaning of the poem to me. I want to know the genre, the theme, and the occasion for a poem. Then, I would like them to tell me the style employed in a poem, and the relevance of the idea in the present context if any.

¹⁴"Epistle to the Hebrews", English Bible.

¹⁵"Ka Jingpynshai".

According to the religious tradition of the Khasis, God is believed to have revealed himself to man through parables, signs and symbols, dreams and the sacrificials. This act of revelation was done by the Spirit of God. "The Spirit of God moved the Deep of Darkness long ago to bring the earth forth."¹⁶ Explaining the process of revelation to a poet, Tham added: "From the heart itself, as from a flint stone stricken with a steel of Truth, it sparked off -- line by line a little here a little there - the shining sparkles like stars." The Steel of Truth is the Spirit of God, and hence poetry comes out only when the heart of the poet is touched by God.

In a fable "Ka Du Ka Tang bad Ka Rem" Tham found it expedient to add a paragraph which indicates that his interest was not in the fable and folklore alone but very much in the beauty of nature as he once saw it. "Dear Readers," he wrote, "go and see for yourselves the green paddy in summer, the flowers and the ripening paddy which waves in the gentle breeze of autumn in the dry fields and paddy fields along these rivers, then you will understand the beauty of that [Jaintia] country, and the smartness of the people of those villages."¹⁷ In Tham's view a beast-like Cobra also admires the beauty of natural objects, especially flowers. In "Ka Tiew Lalyngngi" he named several flowers coming to a place for dancing with the animals, and concluded the piece with a note that the ancient Khasis told tales such as that one throughout the year and made "the coldness of the winter, the beauty of spring, the heavy rain of the summer, and the sweetness of autumn" the starting point for tales.

¹⁶"Ka Jingpynshai"

¹⁷The piece was published in 1941 by his son in Ki Umjer Ksiar, p.61.

Tham believed that poetry has a function. He wrote that "Poetry enlarges the thoughts and strengthens the heart. Poetry expresses life."¹⁸ He wanted poetry to delight the reader.

3

Soso Tham left a total output of fifty three poems which he published in two volumes. His poetry may be studied thematically.

Personal Experiences - In his effort to make poetry interpret life, Tham sings of the hopes and fears, love and solitude of man. He says that "deep or shallow wherever there is human heart, there is poetry".¹⁹ Human heart is an easy prey to erotic love. Tham pays tribute to love as he experienced it in his life. The first in the series is "Ki Er Pynggad ki "Aw" (The Breeze of 'Aw'). The poet amuses his readers, young and old, with the invented word 'aw' because there is no noun in the Khasi vocabulary like aw. It is a poem on love, and according to the poet every one is in some way or another a victim of love which comes as a breeze,²⁰ and every one wants to get married:

For luck to rise and bloom further,
Let each boy show his face;
Except a few some here and there,
We all shall win the race.

'Aw' is a short form Tham coins for Kiaw (mother-in-law), and kthaw

¹⁸"Ha Ki Nongpule", but he has not elaborate the way it does so.

¹⁹"Ka Jingpynshai"

²⁰In the 1931-edition of Poetry Khasi, the title of this poem is simply "Ki 'Aw'". The breeze was then the whirlwind which does not come from outside but arises from within the man's heart itself.

(father-in-law) whom every boy, he fancies, would like to have. By implication, every boy instinctively feels the urge to have a wife. Taking this implication alone, a common reader is delighted is the art of the poet to entertain him; but the term is also a short form for khaw (rice) and when he refers to rice in the fifth and eighth and twelfth stanzas, the poet indicates that along with the thought of having a wife, a young man ought to plan how to feed her, for love alone is not enough in a Khasi family.

"U Tiew Pathaw" or Pomkin Flower²¹ is another love poem. In this, the couple in love pour forth the secrets of their hearts to each other. They ignore the possible problems of married life. The couple meet in a place convenient for them. The girl tells the boy that she is determined to go anywhere, even "beyond the sea" to seek him. The boy, in reply, says that he too is prepared to live with her no matter how poor she be:

I'll follow wherever you go,
 No matter where you move;
 In portshed rice you cook, what though,
 But in the Pen of dove.

What the young people in love consider most important is true love. That gives them the power to think, speak and act what they consider best for themselves. Here is a shifting emphasis - from thinking about the future to surrendering to fate.

In "U Tiew Pathai" (A Fragrant Flower) and "Ka Lyer Ka Dang

²¹A pomkin flower never produces any fruit. It appears, blooms and fades out. Originally, the title of this poem was "Ka Kie Ka Dohnud", meaning, "the heart melts away".

Sieng" (The Breeze Emits Scent), Tham expresses his own melancholy and solitude as he recalls the sweet experience he had with, and the happy memories of his wife. The poems are in some way an autobiography of his soul. His wife, Kerila Gatphoh died early. In both the poems Tham recalls his happy days as a young man and later as a husband, when he was prepared to live wherever his beloved lived, and when he was with her he could not understand how time passed; but now that she is no more with him, he is left with a harvest of memories not too deep for tears. The poem, "U Tiew Pathai" echoes the Luisa poems of William Wordsworth in the use of passion and pathos. The waterfalls of Wordsworth cast their shadow over the Flower of Tham. Wordsworth sang of the half-hidden appearance of "A Violet" to which he compared his Lucy, and ended the poem with a solitary note in the phrase "The difference to me". The relevant lines which influenced Tham read:

Take all that's mine, 'beneath the moon',
 If I with her but half a noon
 May sit beneath the walls
 Of some old cave, or mossy nook
 When up she winds along the brook
 To hunt the waterfalls.

Wordsworth's longing to sit by his object of love anywhere seems to serve as the model for Tham's longing to do the same with his beloved. Tham's melancholic note after the death of his wife is more definite than the difference the death of Lucy made to Wordsworth. Tham sings:

E'en like a fall covered with smoke,
 She hides her face divine;
 And back to bygone days I look
 Alone to weep and pine.

In singing of the personal experiences, Tham touched on the problems of human suffering also. Most of his early poems depict life as full of misery. Each action is associated with obstacles. A man who seeks honour in "Ki Mawlynnai" finds thorns in his way. He suffers and sheds tears. Tham succeeds in involving the reader emotionally with his own passions; because every seeker of the highest good, be it fortune or fame, experiences certain problems which may be similar to those experienced by his protagonist.

Tears are important in the understanding of Tham's poetry. They come to him and his characters readily. In "Green Turf" where he sings of the difficulty in his own poetic career, he subtly engages our sympathy. He compares himself, without any direct reference, to a rock-creeping flower which grows among weeds, or silently besides the brooks, yet remains ever-green throughout the year. The poet predicts that such a flower will emit fragrance only when it becomes dry. It grows quietly and subtly among all sorts of difficulties, and finally retires in the grave beneath a green turf. The note of pathos is struck in the concluding lines:

He lives silently and he goes,
Through path so hard so rough;
And silent in the grave he'll lie, --
Beneath a greensome turf.

Tears of sad experiences are recalled in "Ka Duitara Ksian" where the poet compares himself to a dry fern who "alone he wails and moans" over his sad lot, and wishes that nature could produce a melody which could help him forget those sweet days of his. The melody he hears from nature calls forth his tears again when he thinks of the

Tears of sad experiences are recalled in "Ka Duitara Ksiar" where the poet compares himself to a dry fern who "alone he wails and moans" over his sad lot, and wishes that nature could produce a melody which could help him forget those sweet days of his. The melody he hears from nature calls forth his tears again when he thinks of the fate of the Khasiland. In "Sandy" and "Nam" the poet achieves the pathos through fine conclusion. Sandy suffers physically and mentally. He and his brother Ruby are orphans. Sandy meets an accident on the way. After a few hours of searching Ruby, the youngest brother of Sandy, reports to the poet about the accident. The language Tham puts in the mouth of the Orphan communicates to the reader both the agony of the victim and the pathetic lot of Ruby himself who states, "Father and mother we have none".

The poet follows Ruby with a lamp in his hand and finds Sandy in great agony.

I find poor Sandy there he lays
 Over carpenter's straw;
 Inside a small and forlorn room
 Alone he fidgets so.

Amidst agony one he knows
 And of Ruby alone,
 "Ruby", saith he, "I'm going now, --
 Who will take care of you?".

In the midst of suffering, calmness comes. In "Sandy" too, the agony of Sandy's soul vanishes when the poet assures him that he would take care of Ruby, and soon after that Sandy departs calmly as if to another world where neither sorrow nor pain can touch him.

"Thank you," saith he, "and fare you well!"
 His face beams bright and clear;
 And off the stars from him banish,
 And Sandy is no more!

Tears of love, tears of loss, and tears of concern for the future are used quite frequently in his later poems also. Tham seems to find, like Milton, "Sometimes sweet bitterness even in tears."²²

Tears come readily to Soso Tham whenever he sings. In Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep too they find their places. The reason for tears to come to the poet in this later work could be understood better from his own statement in "Ka Jingpynshai" :

I must speak of what I see because
 I write here of the politics of the ancients
 as well, how they shoulder the affairs of
 the world together. Shall the syiems and
 the nobles stop this way, or shall they awake
 and protect their ignorant people from the
 wolves: . . . ?

The socio-political life of the ancient Khasis is a central concern of the poet throughout the book, sometimes directly as in "Ka Per Syntiew" and "Pyrthei Mariang" when he uses poetry to serve as the medium to narrate the history of the ancient Khasi society. The poet's tears come easily because he longs to return to the past when, according to him, honesty and simplicity were the main characteristics of every Khasi. In such a condition, the poet sees in his imagination the pristine beauty of nature, and tears of joy flow down his cheeks especially when he ponders upon the possibility of God's walking hand in hand with man. Tham's heart is heavy with thought and concern

²²Elegy I

over the future of the Khasi race in "U Lyoh" and "U Rngiew" because he finds that the people have become more materialistic in outlook than before, and have lost their own tradition. The rulers do not seem concerned about the welfare of the people they rule, and do not protect them from exploitation by outsiders even though they have sufficient fund to do that. So in "Ki Aiom Ksiar", his last poem, we find in him the tears of a weeping prophet who laments over the lost glory of his own land.

Over the hills, under the shade,
To breathe fresh air alone I tread.
O tell me now, O land of mine,
Why oftentimes alone I pine.
Around myself I turn and gaze;
Why do my tears flow down my face?

In the poems of personal experiences, Tham quite often expresses himself clearly when he allows his sentiment and religious background a free play in his poetic creation. He believes that above this earth is heaven; but he sings of two kinds of heaven. The popular conception of heaven is one in which God dwells and rules over his own creation. It is to this heaven that he refers in the last stanza of "Ka Lyer Ka Dang Sieng". It is the heaven where the soul of his wife reaches after death. In this poem, heaven is depicted as a colourless abode of the blessed, as he does not show any activity there. In "The Escaped Bird" or "U Sim Ba La Lait", a poem he dedicates to the memory of his daughter, heaven is like earth, full of activities and those who have reached there sing and praise God. Tham sings of this :

It happened when I slept, from a far away land
I heard a song which sang loud and clear;
It all became clear -- a voice in a sweet strand
Of one who has gone, and my only daughter.

Heaven is a place where people can recognize one another, and the poet is sure that when he too reaches there, he will still recognize his own mother, and he sings, "When I'll have reached the house of God / Query I'll make of Mother's cot." This is a place from where those who have reached do not want to return to this world. He sings of this in "U Trot".

The second heaven to which he refers several times in his early poetry is a symbol of peace. It is a heaven which all people can experience here on earth. Tham sings of this heaven on earth in "Ka Duitara Ksiar" and he finds that heaven is in his heart when he experiences peace and satisfaction in life. In "Pomkin Flower" he finds that heaven lies in the beauty and love which every one experiences like the boy in the poem who finds heaven in the union with his beloved. A character he calls "Tiew lyngskaw" opens his heart to his beloved and tells her that he seeks her everywhere because he knows that the heaven is in her. This points to the thrill of a consummated married life. The poet himself has experienced this with his wife, for in "Ka Lyer Ka Dang Sieng" he sings:

O'er my mother I love
 Because the name is sweet;
 It was with her on earth
 That heaven did I taste.

This heaven on earth is Eden before the fall. Singing of the sweetness of love experienced by young people, Tham says in "Ka Biria U Bieit" or "The Comedy of Bieit":

If there is heav'n on earth's surface,
 In hut or in palace, --
 It is in Eden of the two
 That love and peace they taste.

The difference between Tham's heavens is that the former is everlasting whereas the latter is ephemeral. So long as sincere love, mutual understanding, satisfaction of mind, and peace reign supreme, this world resembles the heaven of God. By the same analogy, the world can also be hell when the above features of heaven are absent. Whether he speaks of the heaven of God or of the heaven of man, the poet leaves the readers in a mood which is both nostalgic and melancholic. S.K. Bhuyan observes perhaps correctly that Tham's "poems have the naivette of ballads, and hence they have been sung by the educated and the uneducated alike. They have a catchiness which the reader or hearer can scarcely resist. They represent Khasi life and manner and depict their sorrows and sufferings, with all the pathos of the short and simple annals of the poor."²³

Tham's Speculative Theology - As discussed earlier²⁴ the Khasis have their own conception of God and man. Tham's conception of God and the nature of man reflects his speculative theology. God does not exist for himself because the poet sings of him always in terms of his relationship with man, his own creature. The theology he speculates is necessarily Christian in character; but he makes use of ancient Khasi traditions regarding the origin of man as the creation of God. Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep is devoted partly to speculative theology: the nature of man from the primal days to the

²³"Introduction", Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep, p. vii.

²⁴"Religion and Religious Thought"

fall, and his relation with God. The reference and allusions to other topics are only parts of the whole scheme of his poetic creation.

In Tham's poetry the nature of man is to be studied through the nature of the seven families which came, according to Khasi tradition, from heaven. The purpose of man's coming to this world was to cultivate it and convert it into persoh persyntiew or fruit and flower garden, and finally into the land fit for man to live.²⁵ Every night, the first people went up to sleep in heaven through a golden bridge on the top of the Sohpetbneng peak. They lived in pastoral simplicity, "And God amidst the flow'r garden / Came down from heav'n to live with men".²⁶ The original man of Tham was like Adam in the Biblical story. Adam and Eve fell due partly to the weakness of the flesh, and partly to the curiosity to know what was good and what was bad for them. Such being the nature of man, it was easy for Satan or u Ksuid to tempt them to commit sin against God the Creator. Satan is the author of the fall of man in Tham's poetry too. The first act of Satan's resistance against God was the cutting away of the golden chain which joined heaven and earth. For some generations after that great event, the people cooperated among themselves in various community works, and worshipped only one God. Slowly as man's knowledge increased, his needs also multiplied, and it was at that time that the devil had a larger role to play in this

²⁵"Ka Persyntiew", sts. iv, v.

²⁶"Pyrthei Mariang", st. vi. For my view on this, see "Introduction".

world. Man, in "U Lyoh" and "U Rngiew", became materialistic in outlook, and this change in him culminated in the worship of Thlen, the god of wealth. Tham takes Thlen too to be the devil who fell from heaven down to Pamdalo, a place in the border area of the Khasi Hills. The love of wealth, the love of power, and the instinctive urge to find a seemingly better way of life are responsible for the degeneration of man in Tham's poetry. Man then groped in darkness -- in sin as symbolized by the Diengiei, a giant tree whose branches and leaves were said to cover the whole world.²⁷ Even though man had turned away from God, God in his divine mercy devised a means by which man could be redeemed. To convey the secret of long life, God sent Bull, his ambassador to advise man how to cook and eat rice. Satan, this time, assumed the form of a Crow and tempted the Bull to convey a contrary message. As a result, man suffered and his sufferings are inherited today by all men. This was the worst time in the history of man in Tham's view. Man worshipped any spirit as his god in his quest for happiness in this world.

The process of man's degeneration was gradual. It started with the love of wealth and climaxed in his becoming himself a devil. At this stage Tham censures the many manifestations of evils and sins he finds in the Khasi society. In a satirical vein, he attacks the new Khasi cult, known as the Dormi Cult²⁸ in "U Rngiew" which he holds will end in hell. The poet prophesies that all those who worship the devil in any form including that of Thlen, will one day

²⁷"U Lyoh"

²⁸"U Rngiew". The cult was founded in 1933, and ended with the death of Dormi Jait Pdah ka Siej in 1940.

be destroyed by God.

Man was capable of reasoning. When he realized as in "U Simpyllieng" that he has sinned against God, he tried to find the reasons for all his ailments, and also the way to reconnect heaven and earth, meaning to have communion with God once again.

And when the Prince of Darkness reigned,
The universe to Hell had changed.
A man struggles for light elsewhere
To have the Golden Bridge repair'd.
From out of Darkness Light may flow
Within his heart Poetry may glow.

(st. viii, "U Simpyllieng").

This was a repentant man, one who longed to see the face of God once more. The Khasi divines have from time immemorial been speaking of the coming of the redeemer of man; and Tham in stanza xiii of the same poems sees that the long-awaited Redeemer had come in the person of Christ. He makes the Cock foretell that :

From Lamet Latang Cave they said,
The Sacred Cock and Advocate,
"All right, "saith he, "till He appears,
Your sin I bear; now wipe your tears."

When man turns back to God, he will be restored to his lost glory, and the golden age will come back to the world. This is Tham's view of man in the last chapter of Ki Sngi Barim.

Tham's view of the nature of man relates to his conception of the nature of God. God is holy. He is the law-giver, the creator of the world and all finite beings. He is supreme and accepts worship and praise from man. The poet's god is a person, like the God of Milton in Paradise Lost, and is the friend of man. "And God

amidst the flow'r garden / Came down from heav'n to walk with men."
 Such a God is not entirely immanent in the world, and in the finite
 beings he has created. He is a monotheistic God because once he is on
 earth he is absent from heaven. "When all people on earth's surface,
 /One God guarded around with grace."²⁹

In speculating God's nature and attributes, Tham appears to
 have been in a serious conflict of mind. When he sings of God who
 walks with, and guards, man, he is also a Spirit who can dwell in the
 heart of man; but the conflict is an old conflict between Deism and
 Pantheism. God, according to Tham's view, is not ubiquitous at all times.
 This same God becomes more glorious after the fall of man, and he
 transcends the world. He was in this world before man broke his
 covenant, but he did not guide or assist the unwilling man to overcome
 the temptation. He did not fight against Satan. On the other hand,
 he preferred to leave man at the mercy of the natural and secondary
 causes to influence his life : for he (God) ascended into the heaven
 of heavens to sit securely on his throne, and there from his high
 prospect he beholds man as a passive spectator³⁰ and wonders how he
 could survive in this world without his help. Although Tham's God
 is in heaven, he has not forgotten the world completely. He made a
 new covenant with the fallen man in the person of a Cock who fore-
 shadowed Christ's redemptive work. But though the redeemer had come
 and the repentant man forgiven, man can no longer return to heaven
 physically. Only his soul can return to God. Tham is specific about

²⁹"Ka Pyrthei Mariang", st. x.

³⁰"U Lyoh", sts. iii and viii.

this because he explains it in prose that man can go to heaven only through faith in the redemptive powers of Christ. He writes, "therefore he is the way -- the Sohpet Bneng". He underscores his thesis by quoting St. John who wrote : 'Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending upon the Son of man.'³¹

Tham's conception of God is a mixture of pantheism, theism and deism; but when God favours man later by devising ways and means to save him, he is more a God according to Christian theology than the God of the traditional Khasi religion.

4

Soso Tham spent many years in the study of English poetry before he started composing his own poems. He had also studied critical works to find what poetry really is : 'Many years have I spent, -- what poetry is,'³² he writes cryptically. Such being his confession, the translations which he undertook in 1910-'24 were part of his study. Tham studied the poetical works of Shakespeare whose "Passionate Pilgrim" he translated into Khasi. He also studied Milton and the Romantic poets. He laboured hard to translate Milton's Paradise Lost into Khasi, but abandoned the project owing to ill-health according to his son Primrose Gatphoh (whom I interviewed in 1976).³³ The attempt, as far as I can ascertain resulted in the writing of Ki Sngi Barim. Let us now examine the influence of two major English poets on Soso Tham.

³¹"Ka Jingpynshai", Cf. St. John 1:51.

³²"Ka Jingpynshai" p. xii.

³³Part of the interview has been summarized by me in my Na Ka Hyndai Sha Ka Lawei (1980), p. 17.

Milton and Them - In Sonnet XIX or "On His Blindness" Milton sings of his blindness which deprives him of sight and of service to God. But he ends with the voice of patience which says, "They also serve who only stand and wait." In the invocation to Light in Book III or Paradise Lost Milton presents a seasoned argument in favour of himself. The invocation is poignantly autobiographical. Milton complains :

Thee I revisit safe,
And feel thy sovraïn vital lamp; but thou
Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain
To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn;
So thick a drop serene hath quenched their orbs,
Or dim suffusion veiled.

Milton ends his formal invocation on an optimistic note, knowing fully well that his eye-sight is lost permanently. He asks Light to Shine inwardly to him, on his mind so that he "may see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight." Them pities his model, and makes use of blindness as a poetic strategy in his ballad "U Sib." This poem is a monologue of a blind man, Sib.³⁴ His character is made to sing of the inward light of Milton and other masters who were blind. Sib sings:

Though sun and moon I cannot see,
Because the eyes are blind;
Both day and night so calm on me,
In 'nother wise they shine.

In his "Natural non pati senium" Milton sings of the beauty and the perfect sequence of natural objects because, he holds, nature does not grow old. Asks Milton, "Shall then the face of nature be

³⁴I shall return to it in the next chapter.

furrowed with wrinkles and whither? Shall the common mother of things contract her all-creating womb and grow barren with age?"³⁵ This idea of an ageless nature has been used by Soso Tham in his "Ka Duitara Ksiar" in which he compares her to a girl who "remains ever young." In spite of that celebration, Tham sheds tears at the end of the poem for he sees that there is an end even to the beauty and vitality of nature:

Under an Oak I too can see
Through other sets of eyes;
The sure danger which lies only
Farther than starry tears.

His perception of the changeful and precarious beauties of nature too echoes Milton's concluding lines in the poem referred to above. Prose rendering of the same by Bush reads:

So, in brief, the perfect sequence of things will go on forever, until the last conflagration shall destroy the universe, enveloping the poles and the summits of vast heaven, and in a monstrous pyre the fabric of the world shall be consumed.³⁶

Tham recalls Milton in the evocation of his departed wife in poetry. Milton in "Sonnet XXIII" gives, as Bush observes, "a very moving expression of devoted love"³⁷ for his second wife, Katha Woodcock. Milton is sure that though his wife had died, she lives and he trusts "to have / Full sight of her in heaven without restraint." Tham too sings that his wife Kerila Gatphoh who died in 1908 is now in heaven but, unlike Milton, he has not expressed the hope of meeting her again.

³⁵ Milton: Poetical Works, (ed.) Douglas Bush (London: OUP, 1974), p.52.

³⁶ Ibid., p.53.

³⁷ Ibid., p.200.

Tham owes to Milton more in his Ki Sngi Barim than in his early poems. It is Paradise Lost which influences him most, and he is aware of the greatness of his model for he quotes a line from Satan's speeches in the Book, "Awake, arise or be forever fallen." Tham quotes this in "Ka Jingpynshai"; and in the same place he also writes, "I do not err if I say that there are here already, the elements of an epic poetry of the future". Tham speaks of the epic elements only, for he did not have the training to be able to produce an epic in his own language. The epic elements he claims to have used in Ki Sngi Barim are limited. They are: statement of the theme, invocations to the muses, the use of the supernatural powers, the cataloguing of the characters as done in all epic poems, and the implied moral lesson.

Milton's theme for Paradise Lost is to "assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to man." He achieves his goal through a successful design. The poet treats of man's first disobedience to God by eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree, the immediate consequence of the disobedience, the fall from divine grace, and the prophecy for the redemption of the fallen man. Though he states that his theme is to recapture the simple life-style of the Khasis of old, in Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep, Tham recaptures the same theme as Milton's for Paradise Lost. He sings of the pristine glory of man and the reign of righteousness, the temptation of man by Satan in different forms, the fall of man, and the prophecy for his redemption from sin. The fall of man in Milton is brought about by Satan who seeks to rebel against God after he was cast down to Hell. We see the plan of Satan and his infernal hosts to win over man

through fraud or guile, and finally when he finds his way to Eden he has achieved his purpose. Tham's Satan also came to this world from without. In one place, the poet says that Thlen, another form which the devil took, fell from heaven and alighted in the Khasi Hills at a place called Pamdaloi, near the Dainthlen Fall and slowly came to be worshipped by man as the god of wealth

From heav'n on Pamdaloi he fell,
 Later he spied around the world, --
 He pawled to get inside men's cot,
 And there they put him in the pot.
 In him they put their confidence,
 Like King he reigns in every sense.³⁸

This god of wealth is Mammon in Milton's epic. Tham uses this name in "U Lyoh" and the duty he assigns to Mammon is to draw man away from God towards materialism. Tham gets the functions of this devil from his model where we also find that Mammon looks always downward, admires the wealth of heaven and finally teaches men to dig the "bowels of their mother earth / For treasures better hid."³⁹

Tham studied the changes in the appearance of Satan in Paradise Lost and he too allows Satan to change likewise. In his description of the mental state of Satan immediately after he was cast away from heaven, Milton allows him to retain his brightness, but uses the image of an eclipsed sun that sheds its twilight on half the nation.⁴⁰ Upto this point, Satan still retains something of his original nature; Milton allows him to degenerate slowly and look like

³⁸"U Rngiew", st. 22.

³⁹PL I, 684-88.

⁴⁰PL I, 594-99.

an eclipsed moon with less brightness later.⁴¹ Milton does this to justify the difference between a character in glory and the one without it. Tham borrows this, and because he equates man with Satan, he applies the images to man; but he compresses the description of Milton to exactly eight words, "And both the Sun and Moon eclipsed."⁴²

Of the other characters Tham borrows from his model, I propose to consider Sin. Sin claims in Paradise Lost that she is the daughter of Satan. She is placed at the gate of Hell where Satan meets her. Of her appearance, Milton says :

The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair
 But ended foul in many a scaly fold,
 Voluminous and vast -- a serpent armed
 With mortal sting.⁴³

Sin as a character appears twice in Tham's poems also. Her appearance is again a compressed composition of Milton's description : "Below -- she coils a real serpent, / Above -- a dame, mother of Thlen."⁴⁴

Milton's Satan knows that he has a daughter and wife in one person only when he reaches the gates of the lower circle of Hell. The news is not quite welcome to him, and we hear him say : "so strange thy outcry, and thy words so strange."⁴⁵ He knows then that from the incest he and Sin had, a son, Death, was born to them; and

⁴¹PL II, 665.

⁴²"U Lyoh", vii.

⁴³PL II, 650-54.

⁴⁴"U Lyoh"

⁴⁵PL II, 737.

that Death marries his own mother and begets "yelling monsters" who "howl and gnaw" ceaselessly. Tham transposes this strange discovery of Satan in "U Rngiew" where he sings of Satan's travail with the knowledge that he has a son, "Thither alone he will travail". He also borrows the noises in Hell and the roaring of thunders, the lightning, the brandished sword of God, as well as the pity God has for man from Milton.

Milton is famous for his use of the epic similes also. Similes are used by poets for decorative purposes -- to give colour to poetic description. They are also used for suggestive or illustrative purposes to enable a reader to have an insight into what has been or is going to be described. But when a poet compares his characters with something else and does so elaborately, the similes assume an interpretative character. There is another category of similes. Their function is to anticipate the immediate future : what is going to happen afterwards in the narrative.⁴⁶

We have then epic or Homeric similes, simple similes, complex similes, and anticipatory similes. One specimen of the epic similes used by Milton is the comparison of the fallen angels to the fallen leaves which seem as "Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks / In Valombrosa . . ." ⁴⁷ In another place, the anticipatory similes are expressed thus:

⁴⁶ Alan Rudrum, Milton : Paradise Lost (London : Macmillan, 1966), p. 75.

⁴⁷ PL I, 302-303.

As bees

In spring-time, when the Sun with Taurus rides,
 Pour forth their populous youth about the hive
 In cluster; . . .

. . . ; so thick the aery crowd
 Swarmed and were restrained; . . .⁴⁸

Soso Tham uses epic similes in quite a few places in Ki Sngi Barim, especially in "U Lyoh" and "U Rngiew". What he does when describing the golden chain joining heaven and earth on top of the Sohpetbneng peak is compare it to a bridge joining one rock with another across the river. He compares the flight of his King Eagle or pukni syiem from place to place with a bee, a simile found in Milton: "As bee alone he flies, queenless / And blind, in space and wilderness."

Milton is such a model and master to Soso Tham that even his use of the anticipatory similes has been assimilated in Khasi. This simile, when pressed into service, tends to give a momentary holiday to a reader who feels withdrawn at times from the real points at issue into the complexities of elaborate comparison. An example of this is the description of the Leviathan in Book II of the Paradise Lost. This technique is employed by Tham especially in "U Lyoh" and "U Rngiew". To sum up, the influence of Milton on Soso Tham includes : the influence of his style of using appropriate words, of theme, images, metaphor and similes.

Wordsworth and Tham. The poetry of William Wordsworth has also exercised great influence on Soso Tham. This is more evident in Tham's early poems, published in Ka Duitara Ksiar. I shall try to

⁴⁸Op cit., 768-776.

identify certain areas where Wordsworth's influence is perceptible. Wordsworth composed three poems on dogs in 1805 : "Incident", "Tribute", and "Fidelity". In "Incident" an unnamed Master has no friends,

And, for silence or for talk,
He had comrades in his walk;
Four dogs, each pair of different breed
Distinguished two for scent, and two for speed.

Wordsworth names those dogs as Dart, Prince, Swallow and Music. The Master takes them wherever he goes. One day, the dogs see a hare jumping before them. All run after her. Dart who tries first to cross the river fails because of cold while Prince and Swallow cross it and follow the hare. In the mean time, Music too arrives. She does not cross the river or attempt to do so, because she finds that her friend, Dart is struggling for life. She stretches her paws trying to save him for :

Him alone she sees and hear, --
Makes efforts with complainings; nor gives o'er,
Until her fellow sinks to re-appear no more.

Owing to severe cold, Music too passes away. The Master arrives on the bank of the river and finds her dead. He buries her under an oak and as it was not a custom for man to erect a stone in honour of an animal, he leaves her there, and says :

Hence, if we wept, it was not done ashame;
Our tears from passion and from reason came,
And, therefore, shalt thou be an honoured name!
(Tribute)

In "Fidelity" Wordsworth sings of a faithful dog who waited on the dead body of his beloved master for three months in an

awful place. The master had fallen from "abrupt and perilous rocks", His dog barks and moans in an unusual way. One Shepherd hears it and follows the wailing dog till he reaches the place where the skeleton of the master lies. The dog's fidelity is an ironic reminder of man's indifference to man.

Tham combines the good qualities of Wordsworth's dogs in those three poems and gives them to Trot. Trot is a faithful dog of a poor Khasi farmer. The master, while alive used to play with Trot and like the master of the four dogs in Wordsworth's, the farmer in Tham's "U Trot" too has only his dog as his friend. Trot could run as fast as the hare even in waters and in difficult and awful places. He caught birds also in the bush, Such had been the happy days Trot had with his beloved master. But things changed rapidly. His poor master passed away leaving behind him his wife, his children and poor Trot, Tham succeeds in achieving an intensity of pathos comparable to Wordsworth's. What happens in the case of Trot is the fidelity of the dog in Wordsworth. The last scene in Tham's poem is moving. When the pall-bearers take the coffin of the master, Trot follows the coffin closely, and this attracts the attention of all who join the funeral procession. In the grave-yard too, Trot attempts to jump into the grave where the remains of his mater lay. From this day on, Trot is no longer active. He is sorrowful and gloomy. The moanings of the dog arouse a fresh awareness in the poet.

Other generations shall rise,
 Memorial stones they'll raise.
 Will not some people here and there
 Remember good poor Trot?

Wordsworth's influence is more pronounced in the early poems of Tham. In Wordsworth, Tham finds a poet who can direct his vision into the heart and nature of man; a poet who sees as Tham does himself that the world is full of misery and pain, sickness, sorrow and death which touch the human heart; a poet who sings of the passions of the common man and in whose view of nature, there is much to attract and stimulate the imagination of a poet of Tham's background and susceptibilities. In poems like "Ka Nam", "Ka Duitara Ksiar", "Ki Khun Ka Mariang", and "U Sim Ba La Lait" Tham achieves an almost Wordsworthian sensitiveness to the mighty world of "eye and ear". The "malcholic strain" which overflows the "vale profound" in Wordsworth's "Solitary Reaper" turns out to suit well Nature's song in Tham's "Ka Duitara Ksiar" where he says :

She sings under the thick pine trees
 In different moving strains,
 In times when no one hears or sees,
 They're blowing in the wind.

Nature is compared by Tham to a maid who lives "Besides the many springs" and a maid who is fair, and "remains ever young." This is an echo of Wordsworth's Lucy who dwells "besides the Dove, / A Maid whom there were none to praise / And very few to love." Tham listens to the music of nature spellbound. He sings :

Thither I often walk alone,
 Always I bend my ears,
 How would she sing so that I may
 Forget the bye-gone years!

These lines remind us of the nostalgia experienced by Wordsworth in his "Solitary Reaper" which is actually at the back of Tham's mind :

I listened, motionless and still;
 And as I mounted up the hill.
 The music in my heart I bore
 Long after it was heard no more.

Tham draws his idea, material and rhetoric in "Ka Duitara Ksiar" from another poem of Wordsworth, "The Fountain". The scenes which Wordsworth depicts in the poem, and the sentiments he pours forth suit Tham on every count because these are echoed by him in his poetic creation. The spring which flows beneath the tree unchecked with a gurgling murmur as Matthew sees and hears it, is at once the Jasai stream to Soso Tham. The Oak, the tears, the wood, and all the other features in his model are also used by Tham imaginatively. At one place, however, the sentiment expressed by Tham is deeper than the one found in "The Fountain". Matthew is made to say:

My eyes are dim with childish tears,
 My heart is idly stirred,
 For the same sound is in my ears
 Which in those days I heard.

Thus far it still in our decay :
 And yet the wiser mind
 Mourn less for what age takes away
 Than what it leaves behind!

Tham takes the sentiment of Matthew in the above lines and transposes it into his own as he sings :

And once I heard and I listened
 I heard it very clear;
 I felt in that self-same moment
 That I was in a trance.

The self-same words which I cherish
 And music love so dear;
 They sink far deeper than the deep
 Of all the bitter tears.

Tham's "Sandy" and "Lum Shyllong" startle a reader with many a Wordsworthian echo. Though he imitates Keats, Scott, Tennyson and Ann Taylor in some short poems, he may be said to have discovered himself in Wordsworth.

5

S.K. Bhuyan, in his "Introduction" to Ki Poetry Khasi (1931) writes :

It is a well-known fact that there has been no regular Khasi poetry before Mr. Tham. His services in its foundation have been far more difficult than one can conceive. There was no prosody in Khasi; and Mr. Tham, after studying the metrical laws of English poetry, had to evolve a law for himself.

What Tham borrows from the English are the themes, ideas and the art. He is not the only artist who has done so for western poets too borrowed from their models. Horace, a Roman poet-critic had an occasion of advising his country-men in Ars Poetica thus :

Do not, as our early schools did, suppose that you can become the rivals or the successors of the Greek writers by reproducing their matter. What you ought to imitate is their principles. In artistry and technique learn all you can from them; but in theme emulate their noble example and be (a) national and (b) original.

What Tham does in his poetic creation is imitating and learning all he can of the artistry and technique of the English masters. He is otherwise national and original in his stories and treatment. His 'nationality' is, of course, limited only to the boundary of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. He happens to be the first

among Khasi poets who sings of the common man's experiences in all walks of life with a deep understanding of the human situation. His poetry appeals to all readers because in it they find that their own passions are reflected. Tham's poetry entertains the readers, and instructs while it delights.

In his last poetical works, Tham's intention is to record also whatever he has heard about the socio-political life of the ancient Khasi society, and to awaken the new generations from slumber and self-forgetfulness. He has acquired historical knowledge from all available accounts and presents those in a persuasive poetic language. Homiwell Lyngdoh expresses the popular response to Tham's works when he says that the "Hynniew Trep" poems of Soso Tham take him back to the bye-gone ages because, he says, "in these poems there are traces and signs which point to the fact that the ancient Khasi must have descended from a tribe which had full knowledge of God, human understanding, and political philosophy."⁴⁹

In "Ka Meirilung" Tham does postulate the distinguished origin of the Khasis. He affirms that they came from a far away home which took them twelve years to reach their present abode. Charles Darwin's theory of the descent of man is also at the back of Tham's mind. In stanzas ii-vii of the poem he wonders whether the ancient Khasis descended from animals like tigers and bears, and says "If we are strong and brave like them / We'd better come from dens of bears." Nevertheless, he longs to see that the people uphold their rich

⁴⁹"Ka Thymmeiri U Hynniew Trep".

cultural heritage. Tham's poetry is read and quoted by those who understand him and those who do not because it is so seductive.

His stray thoughts on the political life of the degenerated man is fresh for all times. His sympathy with the poor and the needy continues to interest the readers. He is not cruel to the people in power though he is critical of their attitude towards their own people. What he tries to do when he is critical is to correct the wrong he finds in the administration of the affairs of the Khasi states.

To Tham, life is a battlefield of the good and evil forces which are warring against each other for supremacy over man; but those evil forces though they triumph today will be destroyed at last when the people turn to God and worship him only. This view is very much Christian in spirit. Tham does indeed wait patiently as a faithful Christian for the second coming of Jesus Christ when Satan, Sin, Death and all the lusts of the flesh will be destroyed once for all.

The character and rhythm of Tham's poetry are fixed by some inner laws prompted, accentuated and controlled by the cadence of English verses. In the use of subtle techniques, as well as in originality and poetic elegance, Tham has no rival among his contemporaries. His greatness lies in his intuitive understanding of human hopes and fears and of the universal nature of man.

He lived only four years after the publication of his last poems, but those years were sufficient for him to see that he had influenced poets like Bronath Thangkhiew and Hopewell Elias. Indeed,

with the exception of "U Nongtem Duitara" all other poems of Thangkhiew bear the stamp of Soso Tham. Elias' Saron Ksiar, a section of six poems based on the same theme Tham chooses for his Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep bears testimony to Tham's influence on Elias. His influence on the present-day poets, especially Bajubon R. Kharlukhi and E. Weston Dkhar is great.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MONOLOGUE

Before I conclude this investigation, I feel that one genre deserves a separate chapter. This is the monologue; but before I proceed further, it is relevant first to settle what I mean here by 'monologue'.

I do not mean to claim that Khasi poetry has seen its Browning or Tennyson. For the purpose of this chapter any poem -- dramatic or non-dramatic -- spoken by a first person speaker who is not the poet himself is a monologue. I only expect the speaker to address a silent auditor. Such auditor may be the poet himself, the crowd or some other character than the speaker. I do not intend to include interior monologues and soliloquies within this meaning because in such means of poetic expression, no auditor is required. I do also expect the speaker to reveal his view of life and even to criticise something he does not like. I agree with Sinfield that the meaning of the monologue may be broadened to mean sometimes that the speaker may as well be the poet himself.¹

Poets who choose dramatic monologue as a medium of poetic creation may have certain aims in mind. They may wish to draw the auditors' attention to the evils they see in the society and to appeal to them to do good; they may also wish to attract the auditors' sympathy with the plight of the speaker or to arouse

¹Alan Sinfield, Dramatic Monologue (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd. 1977) p.9.

concern for the oppressed and less fortunate members of the society. They may also wish to make dramatic monologue "a strategy by which a thought is given force by being proposed from the point of view of a speaker for whom it has special significance."² A poet may also use dramatic monologue³ as a medium for his own philosophy.

I shall now proceed with the examination of the Khasi dramatic monologues as have appeared before 1940 with the above backgrounds in mind.

2

A survey of the origin and development of Khasi poetry reveals that ~~So~~ Tham was the first dramatic monologist among the Khasis. In Ka Duitara Ksiar I find two monologues. These are "U Dieng Bilat High School" or "The High School Eucalyptus" and "U Sib" or "Sib".

In the first monologue the speaker is a personified tree by that name. The readers know the name of the speaker from the title of the poem because it does not disclose its name. The auditors are the populace of Shillong. In the second one, the speaker is Sib, a blind man, and the auditors are the people he meets.

In the "Eucalyptus" the tree tells that it suffers the heat of the sun and the fury of the wind which might have once broken its branch. Besides this, it stands alone in the compound of the high

²Op cit., p.14.

³W.H. Hudson, An Introduction to the Study of Literature (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1910, rpt. 1970), p.113.

school as there are no other trees nearby. The speaker does not complain against the elements of nature for being unkind to it. It simply states the fact of its suffering. What the tree wants the auditors to know is its own philosophy of a successful life. It tells that though the elements of nature are unfavourable, it stands there firmly and proudly with its branches shooting skyward and its roots piercing deep into the earth. It does not mind being alone because it has many ideas in its mind waiting for an opportunity to be expressed:

Howsoe'er wise a man,
 Nobody can deny;
 Without giving a chance,
 How can he make a try?

Though the thought conveyed by the lines is universal in its appeal, it takes us back to the milieu of the first two decades of the twentieth century when school syllabus-making was largely in the hands of the Christian missionaries to whom the natives looked up for text books. It so happened that Tham found himself fed up with teaching the same Khasi texts right from the seventh to the tenth classes for years together. He pleaded with the educated men to produce more books; but the plea went off unheeded. He had to venture it himself beginning from translating Aesop's Fables in 1920 and in publishing his own poems in 1925. When he put his hand in the plough he realized that a poet too needs an opening to continue in his calling. Viewed from this angle, the voice of the speaker in the poem is the voice of human reason. If an intelligent auditor is moved by his sympathy for the Eucalyptus, he will soon realize that he makes a mistake because he has to take that sympathy from the speaker and transfer it to the poet.

In the second movement of the poem, the speaker draws the attention of the auditors to his view of an ideal leader. Such a leader is a trustworthy gentleman. He is concerned for the welfare of the people, and the latter in turn love him. Such an ideal leader, the speaker finds, has a strong will power. Like the wind which as the speaker hints, once broke its branch, destructive elements in the society may attempt to dislodge the leader from the social status he enjoys; but those adversaries would find that their attempt is futile because the ideal leader enjoys the confidence of the masses. Finally, the speaker decides firmly to follow the example of such a gentleman no matter if his conviction leads to a fall for it knows that the fall will shock the entire locality.

In "U Sib" Tham makes his speaker reveal himself twice by his own name. Sib sings about his own lot, profession, health and life. In this poem we see the dramatic effect at each stage of development. Sib is a blind man. He wears rags, and moves about from place to place to sing and beg. He acknowledges the reward he gets for his songs. We really feel for Sib. He might have tumbled at anything several times while moving from one place to another. He cannot see and enjoy the beauty of nature as we can; he cannot see his own dress though through senses he knows that he wears rags. We pity him that he has to beg when we recall that the Khasis of old never encouraged their relatives to go a-begging. He might not have relatives even to take care of him. The sense of solitude pervades the atmosphere because we hear that he roams about alone. He is no Teiresia to be led by a boy. He is no blinded Gloucester to be led by an old man and a beggar-noble. Sib treads the dreary paths of this world alone!

In both the poems, however, the auditors' sympathy with the speakers for the limitations which circumscribe them turns into one of relief and satisfaction. They have no reason to feel anything against the sun and wind which beat the Eucalyptus nor do they against God for being unfair to Sib. The tree does not complain against anything nor does Sib against his Creator. Both maintain the same philosophy of life : reconciliation with their fate and acceptance of the stark reality of life. The Eucalyptus determines to stand upright though alone and press forward towards a goal in life. Sib is happy with his own condition. He tells us that the "wind of sorrow" never blows over him. He is satisfied with the reward he gets for his songs. Sib is a man who continues to be cheerful in life. Though he cannot see the light of the sun by day and of the moon by night, he claims that both the celestial bodies shine on him in another way. He tells too that in the world of his own people have a different social life.

Though sun and moon I cannot see
 Because the eyes are blind;
 Both day and night so calm on me,
 In 'nother wise they shine.

People appear in diff'rent shades,
 Diff'rent are their customs;
 Like other village and hamlet,
 Like crowd alone I roam.

What Sib claims in the above stanzas is impregnated with Romanticism and a force which tempts readers to venture to undertake a trip to such a world as described by Sib. Because Sib accepts his fate gladly, he sings loud and clear and claims that he has many friends to enjoy his songs.

Furthermore, both the speakers suffer, but their suffering is the suffering of humanity. Both have faith in the power of moral courage. The Eucalyptus tells the auditors that itself is a wood, and Sib too claims that he is a crowd himself. They believe as does the poet with S.J. Duncan that "strength lies not in a majority".⁴ This world-view of Tham finds expression in his "U Khlur" (Star), "Hippocrene", and "Ka Biria U Bieit" (the Comedy of Bieit) also. The speakers' suffering is intermingled with joy and pleasure in which the auditors too can share.

As a dramatic monologue "U Sib" is technically superior to "U Dieng Bilat High School". It invites us to listen faithfully and rapturously to the speaker because it does not contain any autobiographical element. But both shows that Tham makes dramatic monologue a medium for his own philosophy : the power of moral courage.

3

Next in line comes Bronath Thangkiew. In 1936 he published a collection of his fiftyseven poems with Ka 'Tienrwai Khasi (Khasi Poetry) as the title. One of those poems, "U Nongtem Duitara" or "The Harpist" is a dramatic monologue. It is the longest poem of the genre containing 504 lines. The speaker in this poem is the harpist and the auditors are people of different walks of life. The theme of the poem is the changes in the Khasi society. The aim of the speaker is to draw the attention of the auditors to the various evils which have cropped up in the society, to warn the people of the danger of neglecting their own traditional values, and to tender sound

⁴"Ka Mynsiem Ba Shynrang", Ka Duitara Ksjar.

advices to the younger generations. By proposing to give force to his thought from the point of view of the harpist, Thangkhiew could speak freely on all the aspects of life he has chosen to focus.

The style the poet chooses is oral but not prosaic. It would appear archaic to a reader who considers the poem simply as poem; but the difficulty if any, in understanding the style and the meaning gives way the moment the reader considers it as a song sung by the harpist who is not the poet himself. The most important point to consider is that the poem is a link between oral poetry and the written one. Because the poet makes his speaker touch on several topics, a critic would find that the poem lacks thematic unity. Indeed, as I shall discuss below, the speaker directs his attention now to himself, now to a young girl, to a boy, to a family, and finally to the Khasi society as a whole. He does not stick to one single action.

In the first stanza the speaker announces his presence and his intention to sing of whatever comes to his mind. He states too that being a man he would not hesitate visiting as many houses as he could and singing to the accompaniment of his harp; but he apologizes in advance that just in case his song hurts anyone, the bad elements in it may be forgotten and the good ones treasured.

The first character which attracts his attention is a girl whose beauty he admires. He compares her to a fragrant flower which he likes to smell upto "fifty times". He finds no defect in her dress or in her conduct. What he does here is simply admiring the

girls against whom he has nothing to say. She should be an example to be emulated.

In the third stanza the speaker addresses an unattractive man who, not knowing that he is so, ventures to frequent his visits to young girls. The speaker criticizes the long nose and the ugly forehead of his auditor and finally asks him to leave the place, cover himself with a blanket and sleep in the corner of the house lest beautiful girls get frightened of him. The speaker is unkind to his auditor because he seems to be firmly holding the view that man should first know himself before he ventures to offer his love to any girl. What is the harm if such a one is blessed with a wealthy and beautiful wife? The poem has no answer to this question.

From the fourth stanza down to the last, the speaker takes the various unfavourable social changes in the Khasi society as his topics. The first which comes to his mind is the power of money which he says, can buy everything, including right. He who has money has power and honour; but he who has not is honourless. The speaker decries such a change in the moral standard of the people and warns that in the end, whatever a moneyed man thinks of himself today, right will be right and wrong, wrong. As he lashes at the evil of wealth, the speaker's memory flashes quickly to remind him of the scene of a Khasi dance. He praises the virgins who participate in the dance.

The changes in the people's outlook is so great that even men have learnt to paint themselves. An example of this is a character who paints his moustache to be acceptable, perhaps, to young girls.

The speaker warns all young girls to be careful in their dealing with such men especially so at night:

It does not matter, sisters, if you find delight,
 But mark him well when th' morn return after the night;
 Trust not the face you see at night, listen to me,
 It might attract you well because it's paint you see.
 (11. 91-94).

In the seventh stanza the speaker addresses another girl. This address is similar in tone to the one directed to the first girls, but he refrains himself from fixing a date with her because he is not sure whether or not she is a virgin. Here the speaker reflects the moral corruption in the life of a few modern girls. He next turns himself to a much matured, black and fat maid who has of late been aping foreign culture. He counsels her to uphold steadfastly the culture, tradition and religion of the ancestors. He repeats this counsel in the 15th and the 17th stanzas also.

In the next movement the speaker turns himself to a minor girl. He chides and warns her that if she continues to push herself too much to men of any character, the chance is that she is going to have children without a father and care-taker. On the other hand in the depth of this address one sees the danger of too much liberty enjoyed by girls in the Khasi society. The monologue has an appeal to both children and parents.

In the tenth stanza the speaker draws the attention of a Khasi young man to a well-dressed and well-behaved girl whose beauty might have engaged the auditor's attention. He tells the auditor that there are girls who pretend to be virgins and innocent; but the

fact is that they have given their first love to some others who have left them. The speaker feels relief that he has done his duty of telling his auditor of what he knows and leaves him to judge things for himself.

Breach of marriage contracts is not a new phenomenon in the Khasi society. It was there in the past and may continue to happen in future too; but the speaker has not ignored the awkwardness of such an event. This time he directs his weapon against a husband who has just broken his marriage contract with his wife. That apart, the husband is in search of a new one now. The speaker wants to know the reason for the breach. There is no scope for a reply in the dramatic monologue, so here too, we do not have to demand for a reply from the auditor. But as usual, the speaker warns the husband that time may come when he will return to his first love; but by then she may not have any love to return to him. Later in the thirteenth stanza, the speaker seems to return to the same man only to find that his prediction has happened already.

The speaker makes a scathing remarks on the private life of one illiterate lady of whom he has heard from many people. He says that he finds the fact now himself and that she looks high and dry with the cheekbones standing high on her face. The reason for such a condition is physical exhaustion. The reference to her dirty frock suggests that the lady is a whore! He does not condemn her for good because he advises her to think also of a life hereinafter.

The social evils reach the climax in the degeneration of the family life. In as many as eighty-eight lines the speaker whips modern daughters who do not respect and honour their own parents. In the relationship between the mother and the daughter, the speaker finds that the society has reached the edge of the cliff when the daughter does no longer consider it a taboo to sue her mother in the court of law or to speak irreverently of her. Such ingrateful daughters will not prosper in life.

A brief summary of the poem shows that it is in itself a series of monologues most of which aim at reviving the traditional values. The speaker in the poem is the mouthpiece of the poet. Viewed the poem this way, the conclusion is that Bronath Thangkhiew is a revivalist, a patriot, and a social critic who longs to see that people of all walks of life live circumspectly upholding all what they claim to be their own.

The year 1937 saw the publication of Hopewell Elias Sohliya's Ka Pansngiat Ksiar Ki Saw Aiom (The Golden Crown of the Four Seasons). The book is divided into four sections. The first is a treatise on poetry the first chapter of which is largely adapted from William Henry Hudson's An Introduction to the Study of Literature; the second is a collection of oral poetry; the third contains the poet's major poems; and the last is a collection of his simple poems. It is in the third section -- which has since 1963 been printed along with the first and the second sections with Ka Hamsaia Ki Por (The Musing of Times) as the common title -- he included his four dramatic monologues.

The monologues are preceded by a prologue and followed by an epilogue where the poet speaks in his own person. In spite of these, he has not succeeded in losing his identity in the monologues because his participation, though simply to introduce the names of the speakers, is clear. Elias knows that in dramatic poetry the poet does not reveal himself and all actions, including speeches, are expressed through the characters.⁵ He could have safely withdrawn himself from the monologue by (1) telling the speakers' names in the prologue, or (2) allowing the speakers to disclose their identities as Tham did in "U Sib", or (3) telling the speakers' names in the titles of the poems.

In each monologue the poet uses an ancient king to speak to his subjects. Because some events in the history are focussed in the speech, each speaker is a prophet par excellence when he speaks of the political events which are to happen in his kingdom. Because of the allusions to actual historical events also that the poet fails on several counts as he has not taken enough care to verify his source materials before he allows imagination to have a free play in his poetic creation. Each monologue is, therefore, an imperfect socio-political history of the ancient Sutnga, Shillong, Sohra and the Madur-Maskut empires. I refer to the 'source materials' because a perusal of the four monologues shows that where the poet has more information about the past he makes his speakers deliver long speeches as in "Na Waikhyri", "Ka Dymmlaw-Ryngngi" and "U Lum Lawbah";

⁵Ka Hamsaia Ki Por (Shillong : St. Anthony's College, 1963), p. 19.

but when records are few and far between the speaker also makes a short speech as in "U Lapongnai-Ksiar" which contains only sixty lines.

Ambiguity has its place in two chapters. A reader who knows that the erstwhile Jaintia or Sutnga empire had two kings by the same name -- Ram Singh I (died 1708 A.D) and Ram Singh II (died 1832) -- does not know which one is intended by the poet. A reader is at a loss too which Buh Singh the poet has in mind in another poem as there were two Buh Singhs who ruled over the Sohra kingdom long ago. Buh Singh I belonged to the Swer clan while Buh Singh II belonged to one of the Sutnga ruling clans. His original name was Don Singh.

A critic who considers the prologue and the epilogue as parts of the entire scheme would be encountered with a serious question. The poet tells in the prologue that he was sitting alone on a peak, and saw a vision of the Durbar of the thrity ancient kings in a great field. It is relevant to consider all the four monologues as the speeches delivered in the same meeting because in the epilogue he again tells that all what he has seen and heard disappear when a strong wind coming from afar awakens him. The major defect of the scheme lies in the selection of the speakers. The first king of the undivided Shillong kingdom can never be brought to the durbar where Ram Singh, Mailong, and Buh Singh who lived in different centuries are made to speak. Again, I doubt if a reference to Jaintiapur by the speaker in "Ka Dymmiew-Ryngngi" is relevant because the village (now in Bangladesh) might not have been known by that name in that ancient time. It is equally doubtful if the Jaintias of the past

were familiar with the Diengiei peak because in none of the religious chantings by the Jaintia divines has the name of the peak ever occurred. The use of historical events in the poems is so inaccurate that any serious attempt to examine the monologues from the historical aspect would mean dislodging Elias from the position he has been enjoying as one of the major Khasi poets. A reader would enjoy the monologues if he considers them as the product of the interaction of the poet's historical sense and creative imagination.

Elias devised the same structure for all the four monologues. Each speaker begins with eulogising the achievements made by his predecessors or by himself; and each speaks of the glory, pomp and prowess of the ancients which emanated from the unity and a high sense of responsibility for the common welfare. The pride of each speaker soon yields to pessimism as he envisions the future when the people will bend towards materialism and self-interest which will destroy their own strength. In the process of changes, the people will worship new gods, as the speaker in the first monologue says, and will be in good terms with the devils including Ren and Jom as the speakers in the other three monologues foresee. These show that the moral strength of man has degenerated from time to time. In spite of the degeneration, the commemorative works of the ancients like lakes, ponds, monoliths, the rivers and mountains as well as the beauty of nature will stand as living witnesses of the glorious past of the Khasis.

The sympathy and concern of the readers go not with the speakers, but with the fate of the kingdoms. Viewed from the date of

publication of the poems, the anger of the readers is stirred against people who were responsible for the complete downfall of the Madur-Maskut kingdom, and the division of the erstwhile Shillong kingdom. The readers would find too that they are partly or wholly responsible for further degeneration if they remain content with being passive spectators of the events.

The theme for all the four monologues is patriotism, and this theme reveals the stamp of the poet. Elias too makes dramatic monologue a medium for his own view.

5

The foregoing analysis shows that all the three poets make dramatic monologue a medium for their own philosophy. While Thangkhiew and Elias concern themselves directly with the Khasi society and make their first person speakers preach direct sermons, Tham makes his speak about themselves. Tham's monologues end with a pleasurable relief, while those of the other two engage the mind of the readers with some pessimistic note. Tham is, therefore, a better monologist than Thangkhiew and Elias. But all have shown the way how a poet can withdraw himself from his poems, if he so desires.

Khasi poetry has gone through an interesting process of change and development in the hundred years or so since its beginnings. The pioneers of written poetry, namely, the Christian missionaries wrote for a specific purpose and limited readership. Their readers were mostly school children and a few converts. As we have seen, Jones and Lewis made an effort to teach people reading and writing so that they could understand the principles of Christianity in their own tongue. Songs were part of the school curricula, but had to be good and inspiring so that the learners took interest in them. Because the early missionaries had evangelization as their ultimate aim, the poems set in music too have a palpable Christian intention. That is why I have classified them as Christian poetry. The early Khasi poetry, is, therefore, obviously didactic, but not entirely devoid of varied patterns of tone and emphasis within a broad religious stereotype. It shows in a variety of ways that this world is a temporary abode for man and his permanent home is heaven. Most of the early poems are songs of praises, and prayers to God. Hopewell Elias observes that in such poetry we discover aspirations of the human heart, "there are supplications asking for forgiveness, there are bitter and deep lamentations coming out of a lonesome and convicted heart."¹

Later poets like Amjad Ali, Morkha Joseph, Soso Tham, Primrose Gatphoh, Bronath Thangkhiew, D. Nihon Singh Wahlang, and Hopewell Elias have often made poetry a platform to propagate education and promote moral virtues. In their poetry we have the

¹Ka Hamsala Ki Por (1963), p.24.

second variety of didacticism. The third variety of the mode is reflected in the poems of Mrs. Lewis, John Roberts and Primrose Gatphoh which stress the value of hard work and diligence in any good undertaking. The style of this poetry is like that of an elevated sermon.

As against the unworldliness of the poetry of Jones, Lewis and others, Larsingh Khongwir stresses the importance of this world, this life. It is to him a place where man shall live peacefully. Like St. John in the Book of Revelation Khongwir waits for a day when God himself shall come down from heaven and rule the world in peace. Mrs. Lewis on the other hand introduces a non-theological and non-evangelical ideal of good life. This marks a major shift of ideas and orientation in Khasi poetry.

We have in the period covered poets who interpret life from various points of view. Soso Tham is nostalgic about the past, criticises the present, and looks forward expectantly to the future. In this sense, Tham's poetry can be regarded, to use Arnold Toynbee's terms, as both 'archaic' and 'futuristic'. Futuristic elements in Khasi poetry are present right from the poems of Roberts and Anjad Ali, poems primed by their faith in an immense future awaiting Khasi culture and society. Tham in his last poetical works envisions the coming of a golden age in the Khasi society symbolized by a Rainbow, which will prosper with a new awareness of a common good. This is seen in his "U Simpyllieng" and "Ka Aiom Ksiar". In Gatphoh's poetry, there is no polarisation between past and present. His poetry of those 'natural sorrow, loss, or

pain, / That has been, and may be again'. Gatphoh sees life in all its recurrent complexities.

Bronath Thangkhiew is a poet of the ordinary forms of life in his society. He evokes the rhythms of life in a rural community and contrasts those with the vanity and corruption of the towns. He is a revivalist and a social critic.

The patriotic note struck by Roberts has been echoed by other poets. The poetry of Roberts, Ali, Tham, Gatphoh, Thangkhiew and Elias is deeply imbued with a sense of Khasi patriotism. This has influenced later poets especially Victor G. Bareh, Simon Jenkin Duncan and B. Chedrack Jyrwa. This concern with the special destiny of the Khasi peoples continues in Khasi poetry to this day. The theme of many a major or minor Khasi poem is "Whither we Khasis?"

The treatment of nature in Khasi poetry has varied from one decade to another. To Mrs. Lewis, nature and the natural objects serve as good illustrations of the manifest love of God for man; Roberts finds that nature has a message; Amjad Ali sees in it a strange divinity; to Gatphoh nature is a university, and to Tham it is a library which man can consult for meaning. Morkha Joseph and L. Lewis see nature, as Alfred Tennyson sees it 'red in tooth and claws'. This is what we find in Joseph's "U Jumai" and in the Summer and Winter poems of L. Lewis, and upto a point Tham too sees the cruelty and mutability of nature. But Khasi poetry, on the whole, takes a Romantic-Christian rather than a scientific - Darwinian view of nature.

The variety of form and style in Khasi poetry is quite interesting too. Allegory as a form of poetic expression has been used by Roberts, Ali, Joseph and Gatphoh. However, it is their fable-like quality that most uniquely differentiates most Khasi poems.

The themes too vary. Some poets have chosen topical and local themes while others have discovered the universal in the local and have thus made a contribution to the universal metaphors of the human situation. Roberts' "The Driving away of the Enemies"; Ali's "The Merchant and the Barbar" and "Tai and the Poorman"; Joseph's "Earthquake"; Tham's "U Lyoh" and "U Rngiew" and Gatphoh's major poems for example, are all metaphors of man in relation to his 'circumbient universe', as D.H. Lawrence puts it. Khasi poetry can lay any claim to greatness only in such enduring metaphors as these.

The poetry covered by this thesis mirrors the development of an ancient tribal culture. It is the story of a civilization as well as a method of discourse about, and release of, the personal feelings of various poets.

Admittedly, Khasi poetry upto 1940 has achieved greatness only occasionally. Most of it is didactic and annalistic, not a free play of the mind issuing in enduring images of life, but a forum for religious and social propoganda. Tham and Gatphoh, however, are great poets. They are the true founders of a poetic tradition in the Khasi language, that poets of today and tomorrow will do well to turn to them for a sense of direction.

Bibliography

(A) Primary Sources

- Aggarwala, A. National Movement and Constitutional Development of India, Delhi: Metropolitan Book Co. (P) Ltd., 1967.
- Allen, B.C. Gazetteer of Bengal and North East India, 1905.
- . Gazetteer of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, Lushai Hills, 1905, rpt. Gian Publications, Delhi, 1980.
- Amjad Ali, S.M. Ka Myntoi, Calcutta, 1888.
- Aristotle. Poetics, trans. S.H. Butcher.
- . Poetics, trans. Benjamin Howett, New York: Carlton House, New Delhi.
- Bacchiarello, J. Ki Dienjat Jong Ki Longshuwa, Shillong: Don Bosco 1930, rpt. 1979.
- Bareh, Hamlet. A Short History of Khasi Literature, Shillong, 1979.
- Bareh, Mondon. Ka Puriskam Kaba Phylla Shaphang U Aladdin, 1926.
- . (Ed.). Ka Jingshisha, 1903.
- Becker, Christopher. History of the Catholic Missions in North East India, Trans. G. Stadler and S. Karotempel, Shillong: Vendrame Missiological Institute, 1980.
- Berry, Radhon Singh. Ka Jingsneng Tymmen, Part I, 1902.
- . Ka Jingsneng Tymmen, Part II, 1903.
- Brower, A. (Ed.). On Translation, New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Bush, Douglas. English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, London: Oxford University Press, rev. ed. 1962.
- Butcher, S.H. Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art. Ludhiana: Kalyani Publishers, 3rd Indian rpt. 1972.
- Cajee, Theodore (Ed.). Ka Syngkhong Jingtip. (1939).
- Coleridge, S.T. Biographia Literaria. (Ed.) George Watson, London: Everyman's Library, rpt. 1967.
- Diengdoh, Hormu Rai (Ed.). U Khasi Mynta. (1897-1903).

- Eckles, Robert B. & Hale, Richard W. Britain : Her Peoples and the Commonwealth. Bombay : Allied Pacific Private Limited, 1962.
- Elias, Hopewell. Ka Pansngiat Ksiar Ki Saw Aiom, 1937.
- _____ . Ki Khanatang U Barim, 1938.
- _____ . Ka Hamsaia Ki Por, 1963.
- Evans, Ifor. A Short History of English Literature, London: English Language Book Society, 1970.
- Gatphoh, Primrose Garfield. Ki Phawar Sara, 1929-
- _____ . Sawdong Ka Lyngwiar Dpei, 1933.
- _____ . Ki Khanatang Bad U Sier Lapalang, 1937.
- _____ . Ki Umjer Ksiar, 1941.
- Government of India. The Government of India Act, 1919.
- Girvan, Ritche. Beowulf and the Seventeenth Century, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1971.
- Homer. Iliad, Trans.
- Hudson, William Henry. An Introduction to the Study of Literature. London : George H. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1970.
- Jones, G. Angell. Ka History Ka Balang Presbyterian, 1966.
- Joseph, Morkha. Ka Ryngkap. pub. by H. James Tham, 1967.
- Keats, John. Poetical Works, Ed. W.W. Garrod. London: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Khasi Authors' Society. Ka Thiar Ki Nongthoh, Vol. I, 1980.
- _____ . Ka Thiar Ki Nongthoh, Vol. II, 1981.
- _____ . Ka Thiar Ki Nongthoh, Vol. III, 1981.
- _____ . Na Ka Thiar Ki Longshuwa, 1981.
- Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod. Khasi Hymn Book, 1907.
- _____ . Khasi Hymn Book, 1924.
- _____ . Khasi Hymn Book, 1945.
- _____ . Khasi Hymn Book, 1948.
- _____ . Ka Kot Jingrwai Khasi, 1977.

- Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod. Ka Pateng Khristan (1937-1982).
 _____, Ka Centenary History Ka Balang
 Presbyterian, 1941, 1975.
 _____, Ka Synod Report, 1941.
- Khongphai, Ajra Singh. Principles of Khasi Laws, 1974.
- Lyngdoh, Homiwell. Ka Niam Khasi, 1937,
 _____, "Ka Thymmeini U Hynniew Trep", 1935.
- Lyngdoh, R. Shemphanglin (ed.). Ka Thymmei (1961).
- Lyngdoh, Radhon Singh. "Government and Politics in Meghalaya", Diss.
 Gauhati University, 1975.
 _____, Ka Histori Ka Thoh Ka Tar, 1979.
- Majaw, Sondar S. Ki Syrwet Jingshai, 1982.
- Majumdar, R.C. Ancient India, Calcutta, 1964.
- Mills, A.J.M. Report on the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, 1853.
- Milton, John. Poetical Works (Ed.) D. Bush, London : Oxford Univer-
 sity Press, 1974.
- Pugh, Frank M. Ka Jingiarap Ia Ki Kot B.A. Khasi, Part II, 1965.
- Reade, Wilson (Ed.). U Lurshai, (1910-1930).
- Roberts, John (Co-ed.). U Nongialam Khristan.
 _____, Khasi Third Reader, 1884.
 _____, Khasi Fourth Reader, 1895.
 _____, Ka Jingiaid U Pilgrim, 1910.
- Rodborne, T. U Khasi, 1979.
- Roy, Dino Nath. U Tipsngi, Shillong : Ri Khasi Press, 1924.
- Roy, Hari Charan. Ka Savitri, Shillong : Ri Khasi Press, 1910.
 _____, Ka Srommotimai, Shillong : Ri Khasi Press, 1912.
- Roy, Jeebon. Ka Ri Khasi Bad Synteng, Shillong Ri Khasi Press, 1899.
 _____, Ka Niam Ki Khasi, Shillong : Ri Khasi Press, 1899.

- Roy, Kanonoy & Roy, Holipshon. "Memorial" to the Secretary of State for India, 1937.
- Roy, Sib Charan. Ka Niam-Ki-Khasi, 1919.
- . (Ed.). U Nongphira.
- . (Ed.). U Nongpynim.
- Rudrum, Allan. Milton : Paradise Lost, London : Macmillan, 1966.
- Singh, Rabon. Ka Kitab Jingphawar, 1899.
- . Ka Kitab Niam Khein Ki Khasi, 1911.
- Smith, Logan Pearsal. English Language, London : Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Sten, H. Warmphaign. Ka Poitri U Primrose Gatphoh, 1978.
- . Ka Sur Na Ka Duitara Ksiar, 1979.
- . Na Ka Hyndai Sha Ka Lawei, 1980.
- . Ka Jingpule Kyrpang, 1980.
- (ed.). 140 Years of Khasi Literature in Roman Script, 1981.
- (ed.). U Kritik.
- Tham, Soso. Ka Duitara Ksiar, 1936.
- . Ki Phawar U Aesop, 1920.
- . Ka Jingim U Trai Jong Ngi, 1936.
- . Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep, 1936.
- . Personal File of, at Government High School, Shillong.
- Thangkhiew, Bronath. Ka 'Tienrwai Khasi, 1936.
- Trevelyan, G.M. English Social History, Bombay : Orient Longmans Ltd. 1968.
- Tylor, E.B. Primitive Culture, Brecon, Wales: John Murray, 1871.
- Wordsworth, William. Preface to the Lyrical Ballads.

(B) Secondary Sources

British Foreign Bible Society, English Bible, King James Version.

Hutchinson, T. (Ed.). Wordsworth : Poetical Works, Revised by
E. de Selcourt, London : Oxford University Press, 1967.

Jyrwa, B.C. (Ed.). Soso Them Birth Centenary Celebrations Souvenir
(1973).

Ka Ing Kristan (August 1939) by Catholic Mission.

Roberts, John & Evans, J.C. (eds.). U Nongialam Khristan.

Synyal, J. & Malick, K.M. Social Philosophy, Calcutta.

Singh, Kynpham. A Collection of Writings, Shillong: Ri Khasi Press,
1979.

Ka Jingsdang Ka Jingspel bad Jingthoh ia ka Ktien
Khasi da k Dak Roman, 1972.

Williams, William (Ed.). U Nongkit Khubor.

Wimsatt, W.K. & Greer, Cleanth. Literary Criticism : A Short History.
New Delhi : Oxford & I B H Publishing Co., 1970.

MEMV Library
Acc. No. 121595
Acc. by... *Project*
Class by _____
Bnd. Binding by _____
Date b _____
Purchased by _____