

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

BY

SOLONY BAREH

CENTRE FOR CULTURAL AND CREATIVE STUDIES

SUBMITTED

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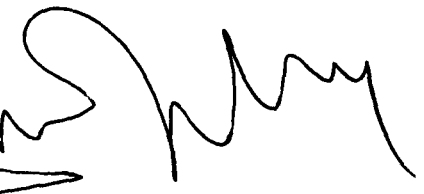
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JULY 2007

I, Solony Bareh hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/institute.

This is being submitted to North-Eastern Hill University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Folkloristics.


(Candidate)


(Supervisor)


(Head) B.A.
Centre for Cultural & Creative Studies
NEHU, Shillong.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As a student of Folklore I realized that there are many areas which await research scholar to study and interpret various fields of folklore genre. Proverb as a constituent of Oral or Verbal literature opens itself bare before us for research studies. So the object of this research is to collect, document, analyze and study proverbs that are current in Khasi society.

First and foremost, I express my sincere gratitude to my guide and supervisor, Dr. Desmond L. Kharmaiphlang whose valuable help and encouragement have led to the completion of this thesis.

I also express my gratitude to all the teachers and staffs of the Centre for Cultural and Creative Studies, North Eastern Hill University especially Bah Fabian and Bah Nongrum for typing the thesis and providing me with important informations.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to my mother who is also my inspiration and my role model, my husband S. Pohchen, my two children Namshwa Duchen and Nisaka and all the other family members and I cannot let go without expressing my sincere gratitude to Bari (B. Khyriem) for all the help and

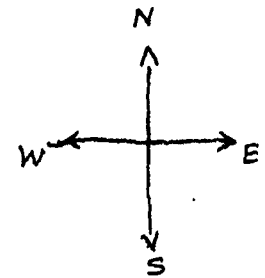
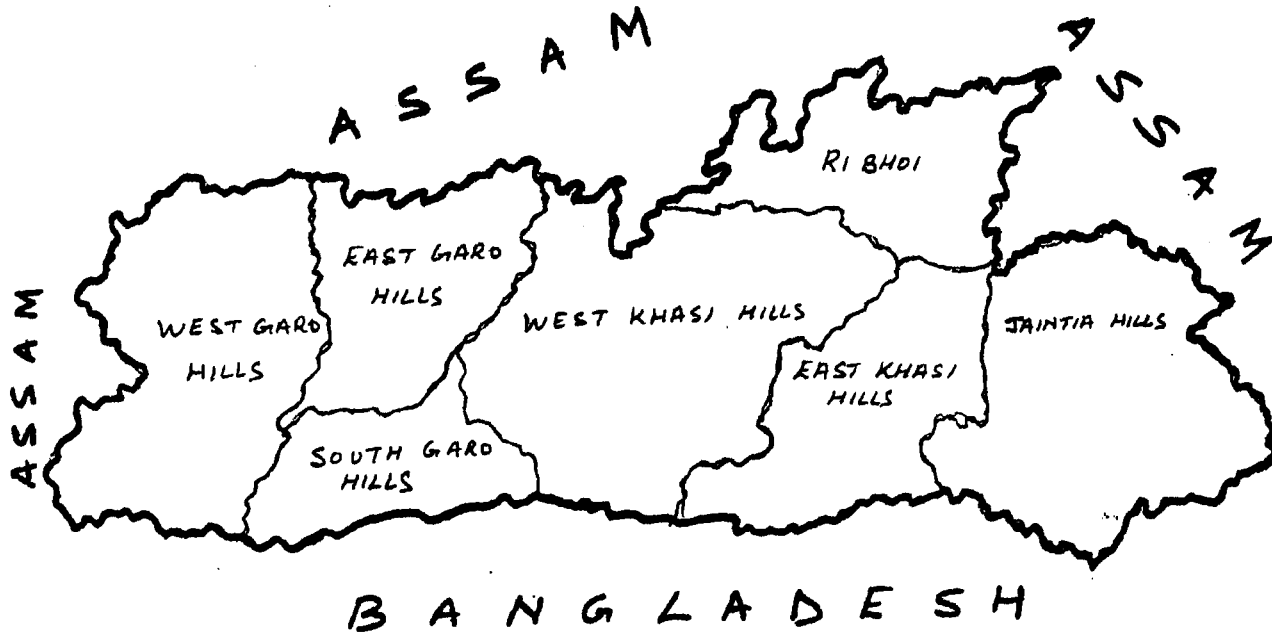
encouragement, and to Mama Ton Kharkongor who always inspire me to do something on Khasi culture and literature.

My gratitude also goes to all the informants and well wishers.

Lastly my deepest gratitude is to the Almighty God who without his guidance nothing is possible.

Solony Bareh

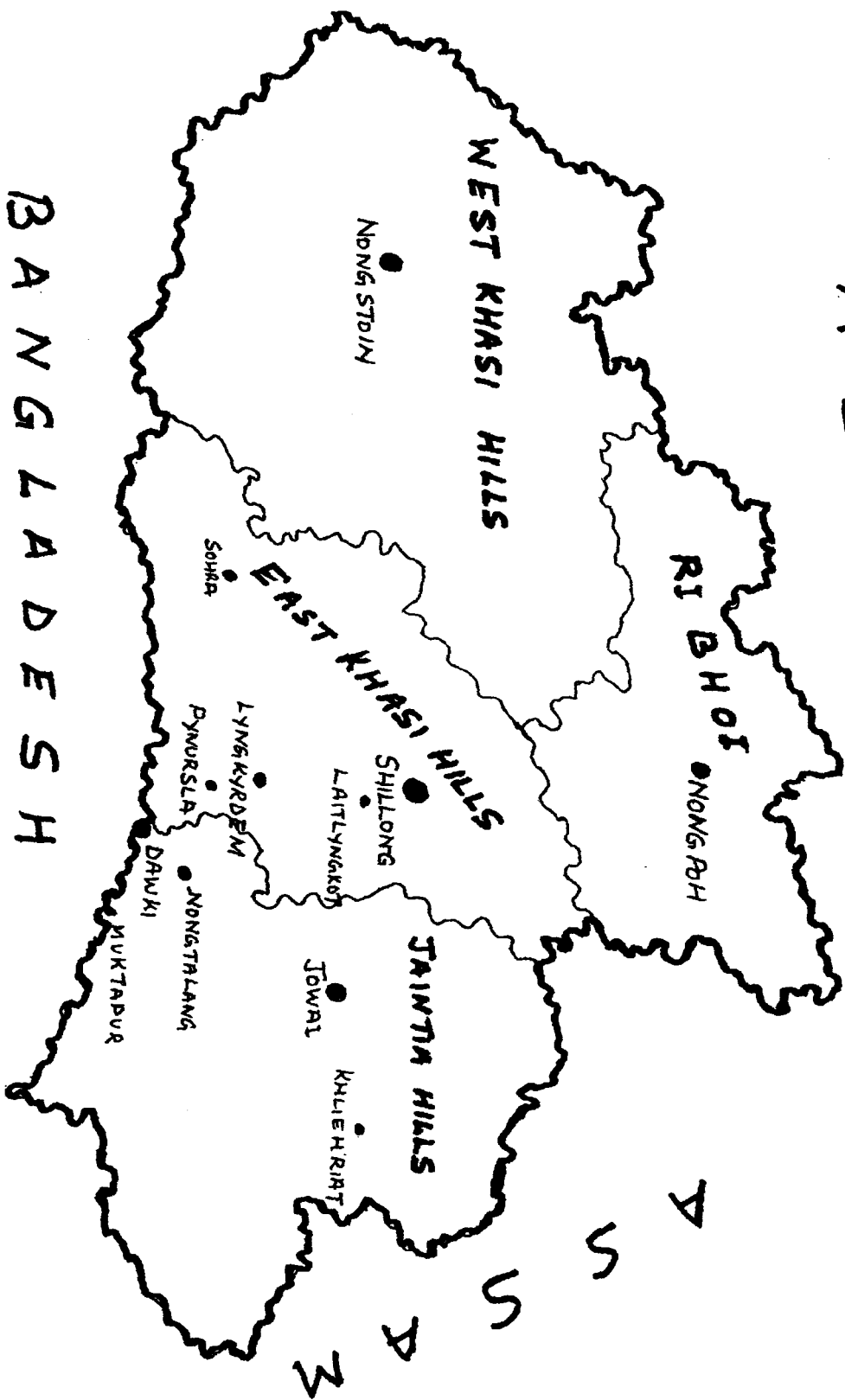
MAP OF MEGHALAYA
SHOWING THE DISTRICTS



MAP OF KHASI AND JAINTHIA HILLS DISTRICTS

ASSAM

GARO HILLS



BANGLADESH

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

The term folklore was suggested by William Thoms, a British Antiquarian, in 1846. Thoms was acutely aware that academic attention has been directed on materials of folkloric nature which was being undertaken under different categories of learning notable among others of which were “Popular Antiquities” and “Popular Literature”. He was convinced that a single label of learning be designated to address this domain of knowledge system so that appropriate inquiry could be conducted. Writing a letter to the *Athenaeum*¹ he suggested “A good Saxon compound Folk-Lore ... the Lore of the people” to replace all other what some cumbersome and even slightly misleading terms.

William Thoms further urges readers of the *Athenaeum* to collect examples of those “manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs etc.” many of which “assume a value that he who first recorded them never dreamed of attributing to them”.²

In so far as identifying and describing the items that, in his mind, constitute folklore, William Thoms was clear and the fact that he was influenced by what the Grimm brothers did in Germany is evident in the letter:

¹ *Athenaeum*. No. 982 (August 22, 1846), p. 862-63.

² *Ibid*

“.....until some James Grimm shall arise who shall do for the Mythology of the British Island the good service which that profound antiquary and philologist has accomplished for the Mythology of Germany. The present century has scarcely produced a more remarkable book, imperfect as its learned author confesses it to be, than the second edition of the “*Deutsche Mythologie*” and, what is it? – a mass of minute facts, many of which, when separately considered, appear trifling and insignificant, - but, when taken in connection with the system in to which his master-mind has woven them, assume a value that he who first recorded them never dreamed of attributing to them.”³

The spirit of Thoms’ exhortation is an obvious reflection of the foreword penned by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm to their *Deutsche Sagen*:

We recommend our book to devotees of German poesie, history, and language and hope that it will be welcome to all as purely German fare. For it is our firm belief that nothing is as edifying or as likely to bring more joy than the products of the Fatherland. Indeed, an apparently insignificant, self-occasioning discovery and endeavor in the study of our own indigenous culture can in the end bring more fruit than the most brilliant discover and cultivation of foreign fields.⁴

³ *Opcit* pp. 862-63

⁴ Ward, Donald. ed. And trans., *The German Legends of the Brothers Grimm* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues), 1981, vol. 1, p. 11.

Thoms' coining of the term folklore, as he himself accepted in the same letter, does not mean, as some people are inclined to believe, that this landmark coinage spurred people's interest and fired scholar's imagination to look for and work on materials of folkloric nature. It has to be mentioned again that this undertaking was ably initiated by the Grimm Brothers, particularly of J. Grimm, whose "household tales"⁵ appeared in 1812, and was recognized by Thoms himself⁶, and which is very often used as evidence by Western scholars to trace the growth of folkloristic studies⁷. Scholarly collections of folklore materials were done in Asia, particularly India and it is to the credit of the great Indian tradition that highly erudite and illuminating works such as the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, *Pañcatantra* or *Jākata* are extant. Without a doubt, these masterpieces are much older works than Grimms'⁸

William J. Thoms was proud of the term he had coined in this letter written under a *nom de plume*, and with prescience of its future consequence in academic discourses, sought to strongly reiterate his singular achievement and responsibility in coining a name of a branch of knowledge with all its implications - "... remember I claim the honour of introducing the epithet Folk-lore, as Disraeli does of introducing Father-Land, into the literature of this country."⁹

⁵ See *Deutsche Kinder Und Hous märchen [Tales for the Children and the Family]* (Berlin, 1912)

⁶ Dundes, Alan. *The Study of Folklore*, New Jersey, 1965, p. 4-6.

⁷ *Ibid* p. 4.

⁸ Handoo, J. *Towards a Theory of National Folklore Planning in Journal of Indian Folkloristics*, vol.3: 516, 1980, p. 24-35.

⁹ *Opcit*

The history of folklore tells us how readily the term gained acceptance, not alone in English-speaking countries but everywhere in the world. As Stith Thompson had phrased it, "It is now as ubiquitous as the Ford car and moves uneasily in Russian and Hungarian texts, not to speak of such familiar literatures as French or German."¹⁰ But it is significant that in this initial statement of the objectives of the discipline to which Thoms gave a name and some of the items he had enumerated, lie implicit that fuzziness in types of data, and those implied and resulting problems of terminological acceptance that have troubled folklorists for a long time to come.

Definitions of folklore are many and varied. The difficulties experienced in defining folklore are legitimate and real. They result from the nature of folklore itself and are rooted in the historical development of the concept. Early definitions of folklore compounded the romantic and exotic and added with the notion of "popular antiquities" for good measure. Thoms sought to replace this concept which hinted broadly at a non-serious orientation of the subject to put it mildly. It was, one can aver, be regarded, by many as something to do as a hobby.

It must be pointed out that, in the tradition, early Greek writers notably Herodotus and Hesiod were aware that the myths they dealt with were not instinctive and idiosyncratic productions, but were actually stories that human beings create and others copy through learning and by repetition. Implicit in these definitions are criteria of the

¹⁰ Folklore and Literature (Publication Modern Language Association), 1940, 55: 866

antiquity of the material, the anonymity or collectiveness of composition, and the simplicity of the folk-all of which are circumstantial and not essential to folklore.

The simplest and the easiest way to describe the concept of folklore is to divide the word 'folklore' into 'folk' and 'lore'. According to Alan Dundes: "The term 'folk' can refer to 'any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is – it could be a common occupation, language or religion – but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own. In theory a group must consist of at least two persons, but generally, most groups consist of many individuals. A member of the group may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of traditions belonging to the group, traditions which help the group to have a sense of group identity".¹¹

It is apparent that Thoms while coining the term folklore had a very clear idea in his mind as to what he meant by it but, it must be understood that he did not expect the storm of controversy his coinage would generate. The fact that we still go back to Thoms indicate that he initiated a healthy dialogue, the parallel of which perhaps is unknown in other recognized disciplines, about the definition, scope, academic parameters and concerns of this novel field of inquiry which straddles between the Humanities and Social Sciences. This, however, does not mean that Thoms presented a definition of folklore in the manner we would have expected him to attempt one,

¹¹ Dundes, Alan. *Essays in Folkloristics*, Folklore Institute, Meerut, 1978, p. 7.

keeping in view our present standards, expectations and controversies. But Thoms certainly had some kind of an itemized view of folklore in mind. His words and phrases such as “manners” “customs” “neglected customs” “fading legends” “fragmentary ballads” etc., do present a rough outline as to what folklore meant to him and also present a picture of his increasing awareness of folklore, which was “closely associated with nineteenth century intellectual currents of romanticism and nationalism”.¹²

William Thoms’ contribution in coining and introducing the term “folklore” had two important consequences for folklore scholarship the world over. It led to the establishment of an academic discipline known as folklore (or folkloristics) in many parts of the world. Pioneers who documented and studied folklore were also virtual pioneering students of culture. They were concerned with phenomena that had the underpinning of a complex system linked to behaviours of human beings through which they create, learn from, teach each other and establish collective social identification commonly called culture. In order to put into perspective the notion of culture as it was defined and drew the attention of early folklorists, let us turn to Edward B. Tylor who considered folklore examples as perfect cultural phenomena:

that complex whole which include knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.¹³

¹² Dundes, Alan. ed. *The Study of Folklore*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965, p. 4.

¹³ Tylor, Edward B. *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, 7th e., vols. In 1 (New York: Brentano’s Publishers), 1924, p. 1.

Against the backdrop of E.B. Tylor's influential and, now, often regarded as sweeping contention, it must be said that folklorists working at that point of time were already conscious of the fact that folklore functions as a reflector of cultural phenomena. Folklorists had, for more than half a century, been offering concrete concepts of folklore examples as aspects of culture while at the same time being aware of the relationships between folklore and cultural phenomena.

They had begun to study the phenomena which they saw had intersections with other aspects of the cultures of which they were a part. Folklore to them provided the key to cultural knowledge and understanding. Thomas Wright writing in 1846, the year marking the watershed in folklore history says:

In these we trace the early formation of nations, their identity or analogy, their changes, as well as the *inner texture of the national character*, more deeply than in any other circumstances, even in language itself.¹⁴

In the same vein J.F. Campbell, writing in another part of the British Isles commented that the stories he collected in Scotland:

can teach us ... about the people, their origin, and their habits, past and present.¹⁵

¹⁴ Wright, Thomas "On Dr. Grimm's German Mythology," in essays on *Subjects Connected with the Literature, Popular Superstitions, and History of England in Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (London: John Russell Smith, 1846), vol. 1 pp. 237-252; reprinted in Dorson, vol. 1, pp 41-51. Quotes are from the reprinted version, pp. 41 and 43.

Folklorists through the quarter century from 1885 to 1910 and after have been testing the conception of folklore as it came to be presented and accepted with the addition and configuration of new information and materials from diverse part of the world as reflected in W.W. Newell, the first editor of the *Journal of American Folklore*, who said in 1898:

It is not many years since the Folk-lore Society officially defined that word to represent only survival of prehistoric usage and belief among races in an advanced stage of culture. On the other hand, it was pointed out in this *JOURNAL* that such limited definitions would render the term of very little use to countries possessing a stock of genuinely savage tradition, and that whatever might have been the original significance, common usage has now determined its employment in a wider sense, namely, as coextensive with oral tradition. Circumstances have so far wrought in favor of this contention, that we now see The Folk-lore Society abandoning the restriction itself had created, and issuing the work in which the term "folk-lore" is made to include the myths, stories, legends, pious beliefs, and religious practices of the most savage African tribes. This authoritative employment of the word will settle the question, and for the future make it agreed that the study and collection of folk-lore means the study and collection of oral traditions of every sort, in all stages of culture with the enveloping

¹⁵ Campbell, J.F. *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, 4 vols. (new edition, London: Alexander Gardner), 1890-93. Quotes are from vol. 1, pp. lxi-lxii.

atmosphere of usage and conduct. The writer of this notice cannot but take a lively gratification in such issue of the argument".¹⁶

Secondly, it also generated a long and unending controversy, perhaps unknown in the history of any other discipline of equal strength, about the definition and, more often than not, about what should and should not be included in the gamut of this new field of inquiry.

Jawaharlal Handoo has offered what he termed a "working" definition of folklore which has been accepted by scholars in the country and abroad for its usefulness in that it addresses pertinent issues and removes irritants which could seriously dampen the enthusiasm and hinder the progress made in the field of folkloristics especially in India. Handoo points out to the fact that there does exist an internationally accepted format which, when modified, can be followed in respect of each culture or nation. The collection, indexing, archiving and analyzing folklore has consistently followed certain guiding parameters the world over. It follows the assumption that there is no known human society which does not possess folklore. All human societies have myths, legends, folktales, folksongs, proverbs, riddles, folk dances, music, and while these genres do not necessarily exhibit traits that are mutually exclusive, in the sense that what is traditionally regarded as epic in one community is regarded as myth in another. A quote from Handoo will serve to demonstrate this point:

¹⁶ Journal of American Folklore, 1898, 11: 302.

...based on my own observations, the Dravidian cultures of southern India seem very rich in the genres of folk dance and drama than the Indo-Aryans of northern parts of the country who seem to have thrived in narrative forms. Moreover, it is also true that diffusion and diverse dissemination of folklore materials result in the mixing up of certain genres or in other words two or more genres may lose the distinction by which they could be separately recognized. This loss may be functional, structural or even both. For instance, in Tamil and Kannada it seems proverbs and riddles are in free variation in certain situations.¹⁷

In another illuminating statement, Handoo affirms:

A folklorist, on the contrary, studies a given item of folklore for its own sake and in doing so he relates the item to the culture as a whole.

And

...a real folklorist nevertheless makes use of the techniques and methods developed within his own field of inquiry for the study of an item of folklore. For example, a folklorist if he is a narrative specialist, studies the structure, language, motifs and style of a narrative; its problems of diffusion, dissemination, aspects of narration and the narrator, besides the factors other scholars sometimes study. It is precisely at this point that a

¹⁷ Handoo, J. *Folklore An Introduction*, Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, 1989, p. 8



folklorist's work becomes different from the work of a literary scholar or a historian. That folklore items need the attention of such scholars as well, besides the folklorist himself, needs hardly to be emphasized. In a country, such as India, this kind of collective scholarly attention gains more prominence in view of the fact that Indian represents the complexities of Indian cultural heritage, history and civilization. This complexity is such that no folklorist can describe it correctly or interpret it accurately without the help of scholars representing other related disciplines.¹⁸

This succinctly reflects Alan Dundes' statement about folkloristics "straddling the Humanities and the Social Sciences".¹⁹ The simplest and easiest way to describe folklore is to divide the word folklore into folk and lore.

One of the main difficulties of folklore studies is the area to which folkloristics should confine itself. Over the years, a serious overlapping of jurisdiction occurred, which is prompted by an interest of scholars of other disciplines in identical fields of investigation, data and material collection. For instance, literature claims a sizeable portion of folkloristics because the study of texts having folk basis is very much a literary practice. Literary scholars regard the study of epics, ballads, myths, songs etc. as strictly falling within the ambits of literature. In the same way, anthropologists demand

¹⁸ Handoo, Jawaharlal. *Theoretical Essays in Indian Folklore*, Zooni Publications, Mysore, 2000, p. 8-9.

¹⁹ Dundes, Alan. *Folklore Matters*, The University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1989, Preface vii.

their due when non-literary items of folklore, such as customs, dance, festivals etc. are considered.

This resulted in the serious infringement of area by both literary scholars and the anthropologists. But a boundary to preserve the sovereignty and uniqueness of folklore is difficult to draw, as talking realistically, folklore concerns many disciplines and should be studied across disciplines. And the uniqueness of folklore study is that the scholar works on, largely, his own field data, which would throw up facts related to, or speaking about a living aspect of tradition of which he himself, frequently, is a part of.

This contention would bring in the question of the dynamism of folklore. Is folklore applicable or operative? To provide an answer to this question, we must go back to tradition. Tradition is intrinsically linked with folklore; indeed it spawns folklore. Tradition sustains the culture of a society, and causes fresher traditions to emanate. But that is not all. Folklore is created even in those developed societies which have abandoned tradition altogether. This is because folklore emanates from the very life of man, his activities and occupations, his creativity. Mazharul Islam, in his book *Folklore, the Pulse of the People*²⁰ cites the example of labourers of big industrial units in U.S.A. or the farmers of agricultural farms of the U.S.S.R. who would sit in small groups at dusk after their day's work and exchange gossip. Such a group, through their banter, creates a new folklore. This is a new trend in folklore and folklorists have willingly conceded to these elements, the right of being called folklore. It can be seen here that a

²⁰ Islam, Mazharul. *Folklore, the Pulse of the People*, 1985, p. 29-30.

new tradition has been created. Folklore is indeed dynamic, adjusting to new changes to suit new situations. An element of folklore can originate any time, and put to the test of time, will prove its worth. A worthy or real element of folklore will prevail, once it is accepted by the folk, which may be composed of a family, a village community, a tribe or nation.

FIELDS OF FOLKLORE AND FOLKLIFE:

There are different fields of folklore and folklife. R.M. Dorson classified the fields of folklore and folk life as follows:-

1. Oral literature or verbal art
2. Physical folklife or material culture
3. Social folk customs
4. Performing folk arts

Oral literature or verbal literature includes all the “spoken, sung and vocal forms of traditional utterances”. It includes the folk narratives or tales and songs which circulate by word of mouth. It also includes the proverbs, riddles and charms.

Under physical folklife or material culture is studied the techniques, skills of the folk in building their homes, making clothes, preparing food, tools and implements etc.

Social custom is another branch of folklore which studies the festivals and celebrations involving the participation of the folk in large numbers. These festivals and celebrations may be either religious or secular. Under this rubric also fall folk religion and folk medicine. Performing folk art concerns primarily with traditional music, dance and drama.

The present study however, concerns itself with proverbs as part of oral literature or verbal art.

FUNCTIONS OF FOLKLORE:

According to W.R. Bascom,²¹ folklore has many functions. The first function of folklore is amusement, through folktales, folksongs, ballads, dances, dramas, riddles, people find amusement. But folklore cannot be discussed as a form of amusement only. It is apparent that beneath a great deal of humour lies a deeper meaning. Folklore reveals man's frustration and psychological escape from the taboos and repression, not only sexual which society imposes upon the individual. The concept of compensation and escape mechanism are fully suggestive when applied to the Cinderella tale. Folklore also reveals man's attempt to escape in fantasy from the conditions of his geographical environment and from his own biological limitation. The same approach is also suggestive when applied to the psychological identification with a trickster who overcomes his more powerful associates by shrewdness and cunning.

²¹ Bascom, W.R. *Four Functions of Folklore*, 1972, p. 420.

The second function of folklore plays a role in validating culture, by justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them. Myth is not explanatory, observed Malinowski but serves as 'a warrant, a charter and often a practical guide', to magic, ceremony, ritual and social structure. When there arises any doubt or skepticism about an accepted pattern there is usually a myth, legend, explanatory tale, novels or a song to do away with the doubt or skepticism.

The third function of folklore is that it plays a major part in education particularly the non-literate societies. The importance of many forms of folklore as pedagogical devices has been documented in many parts of the world. The Ogre tales like the Bogey Man are used in the discipline of very young children, and lullabies are sung to put them in a good humour. There are different fables for the children to inculcate principle, diligence, piety and ridicule laziness and snobbishness. Proverbs are characterized as the distilled wisdom of past generation, riddles serve as a dialectic device to sharpen the wit of young children. The dilemma tales for which there is no correct answer do the same for those who are not mature. As opposed to practical instruction in productive techniques folklore appears to be the principal feature in the general education of the child in non-literate societies. Throughout the world, folklore provides a medium for the transmission of knowledge, values and attitudes from one generation to another and these contribute to the continuity of culture.

The fourth function of folklore fulfils the important but often overlooked functions of maintaining conformity to the accepted patterns of behaviour. Some forms of folklore

are important as means of applying social pressure and excessive social control. It is employed against individuals who attempt to deviate from social conviction with which they are fully familiar.

Folklore also provides a psychological release from the restriction imposed on the individual by society. The other function of folklore is maintaining the continuity and stability of culture. Folklore is related with political field also. So it can be used for the purpose of propaganda and social change.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

In this work this scholar has chosen to study Khasi proverbs. The proverb in Khasi tradition occupies an important place in family and social life. The Khasis, whether educated or not are deeply rooted in their tradition; they make use of a large number of proverbs in their day-to-day conversation, contact situation and social gathering. Some of these proverbs have found place in creative writing but as a student of folklore and with some acquaintance with the peoples' oral tradition in general and proverb in particular this scholar feel that no such specific studies from the folklorist point of view has so far been undertaken. It is from this perspective that the proposed study has been undertaken. The scholar has intentionally proposed to conduct this study from the perspective of analyzing the ethnography of speaking folklore with regard to Khasi proverbs because she is convinced that folklore is a system of communication which includes both the study of lore and the study of the folk.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The objective of this research is to collect, document and study proverbs that are current in Khasi society and analyzing the ethnography of speaking folklore. Folk media such as proverbs and riddles are valuable treasure for a group of people, because the collected wisdom of the people are expressed and cultivated through these genres of folklore. The dynamics of handing down, perpetuating and fertilizing this legacy in folk and non-folk form are also studied.

DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY:

This work has made use of primary and secondary data. The primary data has been generated from surveys, conducted through interview schedules and participant interaction. Secondary sources have been drawn from published books, articles appearing in newspapers, magazines.

From the variety of methods available, the scholar has applied particularly the observation method, interview method and participant observation methods to elicit the required data. These methods are used in collecting samples of conversations at different periods of time where the people use proverbs during conversation and also data are collected from published books and articles. The data are collected at four levels that is, the text, texture, context and performance level. The areas in which the research was

conducted are Shillong city and its suburbs, Jowai and the neighbouring areas, Pynursla, Laitlyngkot, Lyngkyrdem and Nongtalang villages.

After collection, arrangements of the collected material according to the reference typologies are arranged and finally materials are analyzed accordingly.

Folklore is an integral part of human existence. Therefore to document folklore and in this case specifically the proverb, the opportunities to observe, elicit and document it are almost limitless. Proverb using individuals are encountered at work, in village circles and on city streets, at social gatherings and family get together. Proverbs are used during casual conversation and formal addresses.

While opportunities to collect proverbs arise sometimes, spontaneously and unexpectedly, whenever and wherever human beings have an interface, they are also generated at predetermined times or sometimes in pre-designated places. This scholar has experienced exchanges of proverbs taking place in diverse circumstances, ranging from intimate family meetings to the highly public political debates. This scholar has also, during pre-field survey, identified places, groups and individuals, events and activities that presented potential for collecting and documenting textual and contextual data of proverbs. During actual field work, with little modification over extensive contact period with informants and tradition bearers, much data was obtained through interview and questioning. This scholar witnessed events and was successful in testing hypotheses about the past proverbs play in their enactment and perpetuation.

A significant part of the study is based on collection of proverbs in context. At the initial stage of the study this scholar collected proverbs from her own recollection and also from proverb bearers in a formal way. This was followed by extensive work in some libraries, notably among them, K.K. Handique Library, Gauhati University Library, the Departmental library of the Centre for Cultural and Creative Studies, North Eastern-Hill University Central Library and State Central Library, Shillong.

A good part of the research was spent in field work in many villages, small towns, the Shillong suburbs, and within the city itself. The importance of field work in folkloristics cannot be over emphasized as it designate the act of enquiry into the nature of phenomenon by studying them at first hand in the environments in which they naturally exist or occur. This scholar has employed the technique of maintaining written records which as far as possible are verbatim renderings of proverb used and exchanged. As far as possible contextual data has been minutely recorded to provide the very necessary inputs required for this kind of work. The scholar has also made use of the tape recorder as the aural aspects of proverb saying and exchanged can be easily and accurately recorded. Data was collected by employing the participating, observing and interviewing methods, and for this too, the scholar has relied heavily on the tape recorder for documenting the speech-oriented genre of proverbs. In short, inquiry for eliciting information and gathering data was always selective and focus. In certain areas of Khasi Hills and in the villages of Laitlyngkot, Lyngkyrdem and Pynursla specifically, the scholar camped with families for several days in order to conduct

micro-research. This was influenced by the repute of verbosity of the inhabitants of the villages in the exchange of repartees which was a tantalizing piece of information for this scholar. Having been exposed to the art of verbal dueling and the discourse emanating from it, this scholar realized the potential presented by this situation, a situation which could result in a rich harvesting of proverbial nuances of the given dialects used by the village folk.

Clearly, this desired undertaking was not without challenges due to many reasons which are obvious in nature. The initial formal nature of relationship was a major deterrent and the matter was not helped when they realized that their inherent nature of using speech was a subject of curiosity to someone else who would not only record but write about it! Therefore, the scholar had to work in getting accepted by the village community and through several pilot visits, where no documentation was done, she has had to painstakingly explain the importance of the work as a cultural reflector which will only go to illuminate the ingenuity of their age-old and tradition-based skill for specialized verbal usage. Gradually, this scholar was accepted even within family circles and work which began tentatively at first, got better and went on to progress at a very good pace.

Documenting in other areas of Khasi hills and Jaintia hills especially in Jowai town proper was not a major impediment because a good section of the informants were aware of the intentions of this scholar and some of them were actually making small collection efforts themselves. Some of the informants mentioned certain

individuals who were endowed with witticism and who were regarded as originators of the many proverbs and aphorisms that were still being used. Some of these aphorisms bear very close affinities to prophetic sayings that have crystallized into proverbs. This scholar believes that this must have occurred because they were coined by venerable old men who were regarded as having had some rare qualities of perception. This shall be illustrated in full detail later on.

At Nongtalang and the surrounding areas where this scholar is based, documentation was comparatively easy but it must be mentioned here that it was a matter of revelation to this scholar, after years of field work and introspection, that the dialect of Nongtalang and its neighbourhood offered a mine of information about dialectical dynamics and how certain phrases and sayings which would not have been considered as proverbs conventionally, assume a proverb-like dimension when taken in the completeness of the context, especially in its use, application and perception, proving that in folklore the seeming appear obvious and vice versa. These characteristics will be highlighted.

This scholar had started field work from October 2000 and it continued till 2004, December. A few students and relatives helped this scholar in collecting proverbs from their own social situations. People's understanding and interpretation of the proverbs and the intentions for which these are used have been noted down.

The proverbs analyzed in the study have been collected by the researcher. For

this study, fieldwork has been done in rural areas as it is assumed that villagers use more proverbs. Areas are selected in the places where the researcher is not a stranger to enable her to collect data by making social visits. Six villages were selected initially.

Proverbs were written down without disturbing the social interactions. Detailed ethnographic information were collected and noted down whenever possible. The collection was made mainly by the method of participant observation. Interview method is one of the major means of data collection. At the time of observation different comments on the issue were mentally noted down. Research participants were interviewed on the meaning of proverbs. Some time discussions were held with them on relevant matters.

SELECTION OF AREA:

The Khasi community has been taken for this study. A general view of the society as a whole is taken into account for background information. However with a view to obtaining specific information the study gives more emphasis in Shillong, Pynursla, Laitlyngkot and Lyngkyrdem and Nongtalang villages.

CHAPTER - II

ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE KHASIS

INTRODUCTION:

Meghalaya or 'The Abode of Clouds' is a state carved out of Assam as an Autonomous State in April 1970 and converted into a full fledged State on 21st January, 1972. It is located in the North Eastern part of the Country between 25^o1'N and 26^oN latitude and 85^o 49'E and 92^o 52'E longitude with the total area of 22, 490 Sq.Kms. and a population of 17,60,926 (1991 Census).

Meghalaya is bounded on the North and East by Assam, to the South and West by Bangladesh.

The State is at present divided into 7 (seven) Districts viz.

1. East Khasi Hills District
2. West Khasi Hills District
3. Jaintia Hills District
4. Ri-Bhoi District
5. East Garo Hills District
6. West Garo Hills District
7. South Garo Hills District.

Meghalaya is predominantly inhabited by the Khasi and Garo tribes. Besides, there are also other tribes such as the Hajong, Rabha, Kachari Koch and immigrants like Assamese, Bangalees, Biharis, Nepalese, Marwaris etc.

The Khasis inhabit the Central and Eastern part of Meghalaya, whereas the Garos inhabit the Western part. Shillong the State capital is sometimes referred to as 'Scotland of the East'. The Khasis as a race have an ancient origin. They stand apart from the rest of the Hill Tribes of North East India from the point of view of their language, culture, dress and physical features. The term 'Khasi' here is inclusive of the so called Khyntiam, Pnar, Bhoi, War and Lyngngam who belong to the same origin and the same tribe commonly known as the 'Hynniew Trep'.

GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION:

The State of Meghalaya has very picturesque landscape and is well known for its natural beauty. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills are situated on a plateau known as the Shillong plateau. This plateau is composed of the oldest rock formation, the Archaean system. The land is rich in mineral resources like coal, limestone, sillimanite, corundum, uranium etc. The terrain in these hills is rather irregular and made up of hills and valleys. Towards the south, the hills fall gently and they gradually slope towards the plains of Assam. In the south, the hills are rather sharp and steep and the valleys are deep and precipitous. They form an excellent natural boundary with the plains of Bangladesh. Among these hills are located the wettest places on earth, Cherrapunji and

Mawsynram with a rainfall of about 14,000 mm annually. Currently the Khasis are found in the four Districts of Meghalaya, namely East and West Khasi Hills, Jaintia and Ri-Bhoi District. However, all these districts when spoken collectively are simply called the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. This region occupies about two-third of the entire State. It lies between the plain of Assam in the north with Goalpara and Kamrup as the bordering district and the plains of Bangladesh in the south. To the eastern side lies the Cachar Hills and to the west is the Garo Hills.

The Khasis comprise of different groups differentiated only by geographical location rather than by racial traits. Those who inhabit the central plateau known as Khasi Hills are called the Khasi or Khyntiam. Those who occupy the eastern part in the Jaintia Hills are known as Pnars. They are also known as the Jaintias or Syntengs. Those who inhabit the southern portions of both Khasi and Jaintia Hills are known as War Khasi and War Jaintia respectively, and those inhabit the northern part i.e. the Ri-Bhoi District are known as Bhoi.

CULTURE:

The term Khasi and Jaintia or Khasi and Pnar is used for convenience sake. Actually they are one and the same tribe. They share the same religion, same standard language, the religious ceremonies and customary activities are the same with very little differences here and there. They have the same clan system in which descent is matrilineal which is traced back to a common ancestress and embraced kindred group

consisting of female descendants of the great grandmother. All these groups have the same eating and cooking habits and rice is the main staple food. They are mostly non-vegetarian and their dress code is also similar.

RELIGION:

The Khasi have their own traditional religion called “Ka Niam Khasi” in standard Khasi, “Niam Tre” in Pnar dialect or “Chnong” in War Jaintia dialect. The Khasi religion is a holistic religion because it has two parts, namely “Ka Niam Im” (Religion for the living) and “Ka Niam Iap” (Religion for the Dead) which is based on the ethics of right living and conduct which the Khasis termed as “Kamai la Ka Hok” (Earn Righteousness). They believe in the existence of one God “U Blei” who is the Supreme Creator. But with the colonization of the Khasi States called Hima and the coming of the Christian Missionaries, many have converted to Christianity. However, at the present time, many Khasis who have not converted to Christianity are coming up together to revive the traditional religion through the agency of the Seng Khasi Movement or Seng Khihlang.

LANGUAGE:

‘Khasi’ is a term that stands for both the tribe and the language spoken by the tribe inhabiting in the Khasi and Jaintia hills districts of Meghalaya. The areas where it is spoken consist of the northern lowlands, the southern slope, the central plateau and

eastern region of Meghalaya. A sizeable number of Khasi speakers are also found in neighboring state of Assam and across the international border in Bangladesh. Khasi speakers are also found in other states of the north-eastern region as well as in other parts of the country. According to the 1991 report, the number of Khasi native speakers in Meghalaya is 879192.

Grierson (1904) identified four major dialects of Khasi. These dialects are:

1. Khasi proper, which is considered to be the standard language is spoken in and around Sohra (Cherrapunji)
2. Synteng is spoken in the Jaintia region
3. Lynggam is spoken in south-west region bordering Garo hills
4. War is spoken in the southern region bordering the Syllhet plains of Bangladesh.

In addition to the four dialects mentioned by Grierson, Acharya (1971) stated that Khasi has several other sub-dialects, such as Bhoi which is spoken in the northern lowlands of Meghalaya. From the study of the literature given by different scholars on the dialects of Khasi, it appears that the Khasi language has many varieties/dialects and sub-varieties/sub-dialects. These varieties of the language can mainly be attributed to regional differences.

Khasi belongs to the Monkhmer branch, a group of Austro-Asiatic language family. Scholars such as Thomas and Headley (1970), Ruhlen (1987) and Diffloth (1992), have classified Khasi under the Monkhmer language family. Therefore, languages spoken in South-East Asia such as Mon, Khmer, Palaung, Wa etc. are found to share many cognate forms with Khasi. They can be considered as cognate languages of Khasi.

Khasi shares some prominent phonological features with other Monkhmer languages of South-East Asia, one being the unexploded stops at final position of a word.

The language is rich in derivational morphology with its prefixes, infixes and suffixes. Clitics are used as articles before nouns as well as agreement markers before adjective, verb, etc. Compounding and reduplication are productive word-formation processes. The basic order of the language is subject verb object (SVO) though some dialects show systematic variations.

The Khasis do not have a script of their own. In the absence of their own script in the past, the Khasi were compelled to adopt the script of their neighbours- Bengali, Assamese and Devnagiri scripts for keeping records. Khasi language was first attempted to be written in Bengali script by the Serampore Baptist Mission when they stayed in Khasi hills from 1813 to 1833. This attempt was however, abandoned by the missionaries after that period. It was in 1841 that the Welsh Calvinistic Mission under

Thomas Jones initiated the process of writing the Khasi language in Roman script. The variety of Khasi spoken in Sohra (Cherrapunjee) at that time was adopted for writing and subsequently became the Standard variety of Khasi.

With the adoption of the script to the language, the foundation for education of the Khasi was laid. Thus, the introduction of the Roman script has brought about manifold blessings to the language. At present, we can find plenty of work done in this language in the field of literature, but in so far as work on language is concerned not much work has been carried out. There now exists a developed literature in the language and for this it owes its origin and initial growth to missionary efforts.

Though written Khasi Literature has its beginning in the 19th century, the Khasis have always had a very rich oral literary tradition. This is specially seen in their traditional poems “Ki phawar” which are used during traditional religions, festive and other important occasions. In addition to these poems, the Khasis also have folktales, legends, myths, proverbs which have been handed down by word of mouth through generations of the people. The successful introduction of the Roman script for writing the language has proved to be a landmark in the history of the Khasis. With the written form at their disposal, the people were able to document and codify their traditional knowledge, folktales, folk poetry, myths, legends, folk customs, practices etc.

Written Khasi literature has made great strides during the twentieth century. All the branches of literature such as poetry, drama and fiction have been immensely enriched by the contribution of gifted and well-read poets, dramatists and fiction writers.

With the establishment of the Post-graduate Department of Khasi at the North-Eastern Hill University in 1981, researchers on the different aspects, themes and cultural projections in Khasi literature were intensified. Scholars such as R.S. Lyngdoh, H.W.Sten and B.L.Swer became pioneers in the path breaking work on Khasi literary theory and criticism. Subsequently research works on Khasi language and Ph.D degrees have raised the status of Khasi language.

Khasi has been used in educational institutions either as a medium of instruction or as a subject. Most local newspapers are written in Khasi and few in English. With regard to Electronic Media, there are 4 private channels catering news to local viewers, out of which only 2 use English as a Media language. Doordarshan Kendra, Shillong, has programmes ranging from news to dramas to songs to documentaries that are telecast both in Khasi as well as English. All India Radio, Shillong broadcasts programmes in English, Hindi, Khasi etc. Media production which include short telefilms, big and small screen movies, videographies (music and films) are found to make use of English, Khasi and even regional dialect (Pnar/Jaintia). Khasi has not been included in the 8th scheduled of the Constitution and thus, it has no status at the national level. At the State level, English is recognized as an official language whereas Khasi is an associate official language. However, for administrative functions, English is mostly

used. At the local levels like village durbars etc, Khasi is widely used. English is extensively used for the purpose of legislature at the state level. At the local level/district level, debates and discussions are conducted in Khasi. Nevertheless, minutes, reports, rules and regulations are recorded and documented in English. For judicial functions, English is used at the state High Court and Districts Courts whereas at the lower level like Lok Adalat , Khasi is widely used. Business administration in small scale industries, cottage industries like fruit, plywood, cement, khadi etc is done in English and Khasi, while sales and services is done in Hindi, English, Khasi, Bengali etc.

CONSONANTAL SOUNDS:

There are 24 phonemic consonants in Khasi. The description of these sounds in terms of their voicing feature, place and manner of articulations are given below in a consonantal chart.

CONSONANTAL CHART OF KHASI

PLACE OF ARTICULATION→ MANNER OF ARTICULATION↓	BILABIAL		ALVEOLAR		PALATAL		VELAR		GLOTTAL	
	-vcd	+vcd	-vcd	+vcd	-vcd	+vcd	-vcd	+vcd	-vcd	+vcd
Stops-Unaspirated	p	b	t	d			k		ʔ	
Aspirated	p ^h	b ^h	t ^h	d ^h			k ^h			
Affricates						j j ^h				
Fricative			s		ʃ				h	
Nasal		m		n		ɲ		ŋ		
Lateral				l						
Trill				r						
Semi-Vowel		w				y				

It may also be mentioned here that these are the sounds which are used in transcribing the words in Khasi.

VOWELS IN KHASI:

The vowels found in the Khasi language are as follows i, I, e, e:, ε, ε:, a, a:, ɔ, ɔ:
o, o: and u . The description in terms of body of the tongue, height of the tongue and position of the lips is given below.

The body of the tongue includes the front part of the tongue, the central part of the tongue: the height of the tongue includes high, mid-high. mid-low and low: the position of the lips includes the unrounded and rounded .

- i – front, high, short, unrounded vowel
- I- front, high, very short, unrounded vowel
- e- front, mid-high, short, unrounded vowel
- e:- front, mid-high, long, unrounded vowel
- ɛ- front, mid-low, short, unrounded vowel
- ɛ: front, mid-low, long, unrounded vowel
- a- front, low, short, unrounded vowel
- a:-front, low, long, unrounded vowel
- ɔ- back, mid-low, short, rounded vowel
- ɔ: back, mid-low, long, rounded vowel
- u- back, high, short, rounded vowel

The vowel chart showing the vowels in terms of the body of the tongue, height of the tongue and position of the lips is given below:

Height of the tongue ↓	Body of the tongue		
	Front	Central	Back
	Unrounded		Rounded
High	i		u
mid high	e e:		o
mid low	ɛ ɛ:		ɔ ɔ:
low	a a:		

KHASI ORAL LITERATURE:

Khasi oral literature is extremely rich and varied and certain genres are characterized with very precise denotations. This reveals that the anonymous creators of Khasi oral traditions were very much aware that they were involved in the creation of traditions which are intangible but which would be grafted in the lore and be accepted and used by the folk. Reflecting this, Desmond L Kharmawphlang says:

The codification of folklore material can be perceived as a regimen that follows the describable and transmissible qualities focusing the expressive forms that present themselves as examples. The more traditional of these examples are the myth, legend, folktale, folk poetry, animal tale, proverb and the riddle. In the Khasi oral discourse, these genres had histories of use before folklore studies even evolved as an organized discipline. Myths are called *Khanatang* or sacred stories, legends *Khana Pateng*, tales are called *parom*, animals tales are commonly referred to as *Paju*. Proverbs, because of their largely didactic traits were attributed to sayings of the old (folk) and the riddle is called *Jingkyntip*. This very act of labeling a folklore example categorizes it by using a template of shared characteristics. What is implied

here is that there is a sense of a lexicon and a set of concepts that are effectively used.¹ Therefore, these words, which enjoy currency in the language, designate the categories of folklore material and provide the frames of reference for its conceptualization and classification. This reiterates the interchangeable use of the two key words, form and genre’.

It is obvious that oral literature subsists on the oral tradition and in the context of Khasi folklore, only a minuscule portion of this material has been written down. However, it must be pointed out that with the writing down of oral literature, Khasi folklore and folklore studies have developed interesting dimensions.

Oral literature plays a very important role among the Khasis. 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. According to the Reverend E.H. Williams the translation was conducted with the help of one maid servant and one young man from Sylhet.² It appears that this translation was cumbersome and was found to be of little use as a form of communication and with the winding up of the Mission’s work in Khasi

¹ Kharmawphlang, D.L. *Collection and Codification of Khasi Oral Literature: The Configuration Discourse*, unpublished Seminar paper, 2005.

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

Hills in 1838 its use was abandoned. To compound to this difficulty, the Serampore Baptist Mission did not evolve any functional primer to help the natives understand the art of reading the work.

The second burst of serious missionary activity was initiated by the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission in the person of Thomas Jones who arrived with his wife at Cherrapunjee on 22nd June 1841.

A major boost to translation work was received through the effort of Dr. John Roberts of the same mission who came to the Khasi hills in 1871. Dr. John Roberts was a scholar and while, he busied himself with religious texts, he also introduced Khasi readers to a wide range of literature borrowed and translated from the occidental, general knowledge and texts that had no Christian intent. Dr. Roberts also translated a good deal of the fables of Aesop and by carefully selecting animals, birds and other creatures which were known by the Khasi listeners and readers, appended to each of these fables a moral value that was intrinsically Khasi. A highly significant work of this indefatigable scholar-missionary is his collection of Khasi folktales, a tribute to his eloquence and objective temper. This book was published in Wales in 1914.

Translation work from the native point of view was started as a movement to counter the proselytizing intentions of Christian missionaries and at the forefront of this significant movement were a host of Khasi scholars and writers who were formally trained in the Western system of education. The prominent names are Jeebon Roy

Mairom, Rabon Sing Kharsuka and Radhon Sing Berry Kharwanlang. These writers were firstly prompted by a genuine apprehension created by what they saw as Christian (and hence alien) incursions into Khasi indigenous life and its disturbing influences especially on the culture. Secondly, they reacted to the missionary as well as colonial portraiture of Khasi culture, which did not hesitate to regard the religious practice as largely associated with demonology.

The first generation of Khasi literary scholars challenged and sought to correct this false presentation. With this agenda, they concerned themselves with putting down in writing customary practices, discourses on the religion, folk narratives and poetry called *Phawar* and copious collections of maxims. In support of the indigenous Khasi faith, one of the stalwarts, Rabon Sing Kharsuka wrote a splendid work representing a detailed exegesis, which is relevant to this day.

It is obvious that these writers tried to create, first, what could be called an energizing atmosphere through a determined collection and publication project and second, an enabling atmosphere through the creation of a systematic poetics, for the appreciation and study of folklore material that was available. This was done to vindicate the position that Khasi oral literature had in the community and to prove that folklore, while being a worthy discourse, also reflected the maturity and cultural advancement of the community. Indeed, these stalwarts' prescribed correct spellings and syntax for the nascent print media then and on the basis of their suggestions, even

Christian hymnbooks had to be rewritten.³ They, in short, laid out the agenda and legitimized Khasi aesthetics.

The oral literature collected and written down by these writers escape the usual problems of translation that accompany such work when the informant and the recorder represent different cultural backgrounds and speak different languages. This generation of writers were also given the opportunity to experiment with the written medium and to develop a style they conceived as being suitable to present their narratives and other oral tradition genres in a written form. To a large extent, collection by these writers was done in an oral culture that was still intact among people born and raised in the Khasi indigenous faith.

This scholar has detailed the above in order to put Khasi oral literature in perspective and to gauge its multifarious dimensions as a consequence of interface with an alien pedagogic system and how it gets reflected in written forms. This will be seen when the scholar undertakes a detailed study of proverbs which have been collected and written down by native writers in the subsequent chapter.

³ Roy, J. (ed.) *U Khasi Mynta*, 1896, March – June.

CHAPTER – III

DEFINITION OF THE PROVERB AND ITS CLASSIFICATION

Before defining the proverb, the meaning of oral literature or verbal art should be understood. Oral literature or verbal art as suggested by W.R. Bascom includes all the spoken, sung and vocal forms of traditional utterances which include the folk narratives or tales and songs which circulate by word of mouth. It also includes proverbs, riddles and charms. These are forms of aesthetic expressions. Strictly speaking verbal means expressed in words but this is subjected to the limitations of the medium and the techniques by which a person manipulates it. The phonetics, vocabulary and grammar of the language in which it is expressed imposes limitations on verbal art and on literature as well. Picturesque speech forms are often a simpler matter of local vocabulary or idiom which involves an aesthetic choice on the part of the narrator within the fixed limit. The narrator of the folktale may be allowed some leeway while, in the same society the effect of a proverb may be lost if it is misquoted and the efficacy of a curse or incantation may be destroyed if it is not used precisely. Verbal art differs from normal speech in the same way that music differs from noise, and choreography differs from walking. The medium of expression in oral or verbal art is the spoken word but the phonetics, vocabulary and grammar of the language in which it is expressed, imposes limitations and works their dynamics – this is what makes verbal art intangible and dynamic. Even when the narrator is expected to repeat a tale as nearly verbatim as he can, there is still the possibility of considerable change over a span of time. The degree

of change that occurs probably depends upon the complexity of the form, and assuming an equal emphasis on exact repetition. Changes can be observed in longer narratives than in proverbs. Moreover, when the narrator is expected to introduce original variations in characters and characterizations, incidents and their sequence, denouement and descriptive details and twist to familiar plots, a tale may vary markedly even from one telling by the same narrator to another. In such cases each telling of a tale must be regarded as a unique event, and in approaching the problem of creativity it is important to distinguish between the variations on a familiar theme introduced by the individual narrator and the origin of the theme, or the tale type itself.¹ In the translation of literary works a deliberate attempt is usually made to adhere as faithfully as possible to the original text, but when a folktale spreads verbally by diffusion it may be effectively modified and reinterpreted in the process of adaptation to a new cultural setting.

Oral literature or verbal art differs not only in its method of transmission, but also in the method of creation from the written literature. Materials of folklore originate without writing, whereas literature is composed through the written agency, which means that it is not only possible to edit and even drastically revise and rework a manuscript before it is published, but also that for the writer the audience is largely imaginary and may even be irrelevant. The composition and reading of a novel or a poem are independent acts. From the point of view of the audience, the writer's creative labors are as little interest as the actual stages in carving a mask or painting a picture,

1 Bascom, W.R. *Folklore and Anthropology*, Journal of American Folklore, LXVI (1953), 286 – 287.

while the period of creation involves an aesthetic experience for the artist himself. The primary objective is usually the aesthetic experience of his audience when the finished work is seen or read and when the artist himself may not even be present. But in case of verbal art the aesthetic experience of the audience is simultaneous with the creative act and the same is true of unwritten music and the dance, unless private rehearsals are held. The narrator or speaker as in case of proverbs is in face to face contact with his audience, and may modify the development of his tale in accordance with its expressions of approval and interest, either as he goes along or when he retells it later. Where the narrator is permitted a degree of freedom and originality, the audience reaction may become an important factor in the creative process in verbal art.

In verbal art it is only necessary to compare myths, folktales, proverbs and riddles with the direct statements of ordinary speech to see a similar concern with the form of expressions over and above the needs of communication. Among these distinctive features may be the form of statement, the choice of vocabulary and idiom, the use of obsolete words, the imagery of metaphor or simile, the set number of repetitions, the formalized openings and closing, the incorporation of cultural details, conventionalized greetings, or directional orientations and other stylistic features which are absent in ordinary conversation.

From oral literature folklore materials passes to written literature that is as identified by Archer Taylor, literature contains elements borrowed from folklore and writers have imitated folklore, but there are also cases where oral literature imitates

written literature or borrows from written literature. If we look at the Indian scene we find that oral – written continuum has been very much a part of the Indian cultural heritage since very early times. The entente between the two has been an outstanding feature of the Indian cultural milieu through the ages. The oral literature has not only existed side by side with the written literature but the two had together combined even in the remote past to build up a formidable folklore repertory since the Vedic times. As Durga Bhagawat points out, “while studying folklore one cannot neglect the ancient tales, songs riddles etc. which are found in the ancient literature of India”. The continuity of the heterogeneous Indian cultural tradition indeed makes such a study imperative. Not only Indian folklore, but folklore from any part of the world demands a thorough knowledge of the ancient Indian story material. The reason is obvious. The Indian literary story tradition is the oldest in the world.² Commenting on this mixture between written and oral material Gaster comments that “the process did not end by the writing down of the oral tale, the written book became in time the starting point of a new set of oral lore”.³

Birendra Nath Dutta stated that “one of the earliest Sanskrit works believed to have been composed in the Assam Region is the Hastya-veda (5th – 6th century B.C.) by Palakapyamuni who belonged to Lauhityadisha, one of the names by which Assam was known in ancient times. Now the Assam region having been famous for the elephant both wild and tamed, since the remote past, it is a safe guess that at least some oral lore

² Bhagawat, Durga. *An Outline of Indian Folklore*, Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1958, p. 13.

³ Gaster in Penzer, N.M. *The Ocean of Story* (Ed) (reprint) Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi, 1968.

had passed into the written work. It is significant that a profusely illustrated Assamese version – not exactly a translation of the work known as the *Hastividyar-nava* contains a wealth of folklore material, including myths and legends most probably of oral currency”.⁴ In Khasi oral literature also there is an entente between oral and written literature especially in the study of proverbs there is an interchange between the two. For example one of the greatest Khasi poet U Soso Tham has a stanza in his *Magnum Opus* which had been used and reused as proverbs in oral and written form. It runs thus:

1. Sa shisien pat kin win ki khlaw

Sa shisien pat kin khih ki maw.⁵

Once more the forests will clamour

Once more the stones will tremor.

2. Jingshai ngi wad sawdong pyrthei

Jingshai ka ri ngim tip ei ei.⁶

We search for light around the world

Knowledge of our own land we know nothing at all.

The relationship between written and oral literature appears to be complicated, one thing should be clear cut. Once the folklorist records a folk song or narrative or

⁴ Datta, B. in *Anandam*, 1992, p. 137

⁵ Tham, Soso. *Ki Sngi Barim U Hymniew Trep*, 1960, p. 37.

⁶ *Ibid* p. 3

proverb it is supposed to have an independent existence in paper as written literature or in sound recording. Afterwards it can be read and heard without the narrator narrating it. It no longer exists in memory, but in printing, writing and recording. However, in many societies it is seen that even after a particular item of folk literature has been recorded and published, it still lives as folklore and is still transmitted orally Bascom succinctly remarks: "Thus we can say that folk literature or verbal art dies when people stop telling it and when they learn it by reading rather than by hearing it told by others"⁷ Despite the fact that some sort of metamorphosis of discourse from oral to written and vice versa has taken place, the distinction between the two is a practical necessity. It still exists and will continue to exist. This is perhaps the reason why folk dances and songs recorded and presented through the audio and audio visual media cannot enthrall and inspire us. The Bihu dance of the Assamese, the Nongkrem dance of the Khasi or the Wangala dance of the Garo appear lifeless and dispirited on television but appear full of life and spirit and colour as they are performed by live dancers. So also it is with proverbs, riddles etc. The concept of folklore and oral tradition involves an idea of continuity and change. Garry Alan Fine correctly commented "folklorists should treasure the proverb that the more things change, the more things remain the same".⁸

As human beings interact with each other on a regular basis, they ceaselessly express what they know, think, believe and feel. This is done in various distinguishable and readily understood forms of expression most of which are speech oriented. The

⁷ Bascom, W.R. *Contributions to Folkloristics*, 1981, p. 74.

⁸ Fine, Gary Alan. *Social Change and Folklore*, 1985, p. 7.

uttering of proverbial sayings is one of the most easily identifiable means of verbal communication which rely for its authenticity on predecessors and peers as sources. With time and repetition these informally learnt communication tools are conceived as traditions or traditional. They become identified individually or collectively as folklore. When we use an expression in words, to convey a particular message through periods of time, that refined and artistic expression becomes a proverb. While the use of proverbs enhances the sweetness of a statement it also carries the seriousness of a situation. A number of English words such as aphorisms and maxims are in existence which denotes and describes the word proverb.

The Bible has an entire book on proverbs which are attributed to Solomon the son of David, king of Israel. The book is qualified by statements which emphasizes proverbs as “wisdom and instructions: to perceive the words of understanding...to give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear, and will increased learning: and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: to understand a proverb, and the interpretation: the words of the wise”.⁹

Generally the proverb is said to be a short pithy saying in common use which are some statements earned by experience or observation. Archer Taylor has put forward the definition of proverb as: “the wisdom of many and wit of one”.¹⁰ It ordinarily suggests

⁹ *The Holy Bible*, London, p. 507.

¹⁰ Taylor, Archer. *Cambridge*. Harvard University Press, 1931, p. 902-905

“a cause of action or passes a judgement on a situation”.¹¹ This is one of the generally accepted definitions of proverb.

It is sometimes a mere statement of fact and sometimes a condensation of didactic experience or a concisely formulated rule as “honesty is the best policy” or “all’s well that ends well”, which are statements of fact. It may be a metaphor which one applies to the situation such as “look before you leap”. There is immense didactic element in proverbs related to medical or legal ideas like “Rain before seven, fire before eleven” or ‘Silence gives consent’. Proverbs are the wisdom of a community, the essence of thoughts and philosophy that a group of people acquire through the ages. Sometimes proverbs serve as impersonal vehicles for personal communication. These fragments of wisdom offer many interesting insight into a people’s past. Proverbial phrases survive the ruins of empires and civilizations. Proverbs in short reflect the social usage, the time long experience of an age and people, crystallized in brief and short statements which contain a general truth.

The Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend states that “a proverb is a terse didactic statement that is current in tradition. They are expressions connected with persons or religious and political movements; they formulate ideas or principles or are calculated to arouse mass emotions for or against a case”.¹²

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² Funk & Wagnalls. *Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend*, 1950, p. 902.

According to the *Dictionary of English Folklore*, “Proverbs are short, crisply structured sayings widely known in a community, which, convey traditional observations on human nature and natural phenomena, moral judgements, mockery, warnings etc. Though circulating orally, their wording is fairly stable; they generally display formal devices including alliteration, rhyme, assonance, rhythmic phrasing, balanced opposition and parallelism”.¹³

Proverbs are a fixed phrase genre of oral literature. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* a proverb is a “succinct and pithy saying in general use, expressing commonly held ideas and beliefs”.¹⁴ Roger D. Abrahams says, “Proverbs are short and witty.” He continues: “Traditional expressions that arise as part of everyday discourse as well as in the more highly structured situations of education and judicial proceedings. Each proverb is a full statement of an approach to a recurrent problem. It presents a point of view and strategy that is self-sufficient, needing nothing more than an event of communication to bring it into play. Proverbs are the shortest form of traditional expression that calls attention to themselves as formal artistic entities”.¹⁵

E.B. Tylor, the evolutionist, while appreciating the edifying role played by the proverb, considered it as a product of mythological stage of thought. He says:

¹³ Simpson, J & Steve, R. *A Dictionary of English Folklore*, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 286.

¹⁴ *The New Encyclopedia Britannica Inc.* 30 Vols., William, Benton Publisher, Auckland/General/London /Manila/Paris/Seoul/Sydney/Tokyo/Toronto. 1973-74, p. 258.

¹⁵ Abrahams, Roger D. *Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions in Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, R.M. Dorson (ed.), Chicago Press, Chicago, 1972, p. 119.

“At the level of European culture in the middle ages, they [proverbs] have indeed a vast importance in popular education, but their period of actual growth seems already at an end. Cervantes raised the proverb-monger’s craft to a pitch it never surpassed; but it must not be forgotten that the incomparable Sancho’s wares were mostly heirlooms; for proverbs were even then sinking to remnants of an earlier condition of society. As such, they survive among ourselves, who go on using much the same relics of ancestral wisdom as came out of the squire’s inexhaustible budget, old saws not to be lightly altered or made anew in our changed modern times. We can collect and use the old proverbs, but making new ones has become a feeble, spiritless imitation, like our attempts to invent new myths or new nursery rhymes”.¹⁶

This scholar has reproduced Tylor’s statement with the specific intention of revealing the uncomplimentary persuasion of his argument which was heavily influenced by the evolutionary ideologies of the time. This scholar shall endeavour to prove that it is possible to create new genres to suite new social and cultural requirements.

Herskovits says “Proverbs are used 'to give point to some well- meaning advice; to rebuke or praise a friend, to put an enemy in his place; to emphasize commendation or affection or ridicule or blame’”.¹⁷ Each proverb is a full statement of an approach to a

¹⁶ Tylor, E.B. *Primitive Culture*, p. 89-90.

¹⁷ Bascom, W. R. *Contributions to Folkloristics*, Archana Publication, Meerut, 1995, p. 61-62.

recurrent problem; proverbs take personal circumstances and embody it in impersonal and witty form.¹⁸

Structurally, binary construction is an important feature of a proverb. This construction is reflected through the relationships between the different elements or segments of a proverb, which may be expressed positively or negatively.¹⁹

The underlying meaning of the proverb is more important as it is said “what is unsaid is much more important than what is said”. So in order to understand a proverb properly, it is imperative to know the social situation in which the proverb is used and how meaning is elicited from its rhetorical dimensions.

Arewa points out following Dundes that the study of proverb context has not been given due attention. He stresses the importance of studying actual instances of proverb telling and the necessity of the roots of applying proverbs to life situation.²⁰ Hans-Malfred Miltz says that semantic variations in a proverb arise due to their various functions and situations.²¹

The proverb is by and large a public genre. Its formation, structure and ability to communicate is informed by the public shared characteristics of acknowledgement,

¹⁸ Abrahams, Roger D. *opcit*, p. 124.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 114 -115.

²⁰ Arewa, E.O. & Dundes, A., *Proverbs And Ethnography of Speaking Folklore*, American Anthropologist. No. 66., 1964, p. 4-13

²¹ Miltz, H.M., *Proverb – Anti Proverb Wolfgang Mieder’s Paremiological Approach to Western Folklore*, Institute of Linguistics at the Academy of Sciences, Berlin, Germany, 1999, p. 27.

application and acceptance. It addresses issues and elicits shared responses in the public sphere. It is used most effectively as a means of communication in debates and discourses, on the air waves, as graffiti and billboard hoardings and in the print and electronic media. The proverb is just as effectively applied as intimate indoor communication because of its highly didactic nature.

From the view point of structuralism, Alan Dundes has advocated a definition of proverb as “a traditional propositional statement consisting of at least one descriptive element, a descriptive element consisting of a topic and a comment”.²² Archer Taylor who is regarded as undisputed pope of paremiology has described “proverb as impersonal vehicles of personal communication”.²³

Proverbs are the shortest expression of the long term experience of life. They are central to the human experience and are related to the fundamental behaviour patterns of day to day life of the individual. It is a fact that there is certain uniformity in behaviour patterns within a particular group and proverbs are used to test and critique these behavioural patterns. Confirming with these patterns proverbs current in a society seldom undergo any change unlike other elements of oral literature.

Jean Lois Siran²⁴ has discussed proverbs rhetoric, traditional and communicative aspects and raised a question whether proverbs are living words or dead letters.

²² Dundes, Alan. *Analytic Essays in Folklore*, Morton Publication, The Hague, Paris New York, 1975, p. 115.

²³ Siran, J.L. *Rhetoric, tradition and communication*, Man Vol. 28, No. 2., 1993, p. 228-229.

²⁴ Siran, J.L., *OpCit* p.229-231.

Tradition is not static; it gradually changes and adapts to the change the society undergoes, as a result of scientific and socio-cultural, economic or technological factors. The extinction of some proverbs is quite natural because they have proved to be redundant and have become removed from present realities. There are some proverbs that still persevere even through long passages of time due to the dynamic, malleable and universal qualities inherent in them. They adapt and present themselves in fresher ways.

Proverbs are the most easily observed and collected genres of traditional expressions, yet the least understood. This misunderstanding is due perhaps due to their very familiarity, we tend to take more notes of things exotic or unusual, and proverbs have remained a part of the verbal resources of sophisticated western cultures long after larger oral genres either have been forgotten or have developed into the complex forms of modern literature. In the west proverbs serve as information to be encyclopedically handled and were also educationally useful in two ways as a storehouse of wisdom to be learned by the young courtier, and the other and more important is, as device to be learned and used by aspirant orators.

From the proverb developed the tradition of the literary epigram, the occasional short verse in which the same kind of moral point is made but because of the change in the medium from a face to face to a reading experience, its application to a situation had to be indicated either in the title or within the verse. And this has the influence on the development of the heroic couplet which has in turn provided a number of proverbs in

oral currency. A good example of this is Alexander Pope's "To err is human, to forgive divine".

With the growing development of folklore movement in the Nineteenth Century and its strong focus on rural dialects, the study of proverbs received greater impetus and sharper focus. Proverb as a genre of oral folk literature is identified as fixed phrase of genre of folklore used during the course of discussion by creative writers. Proverbs are also expressed in rhyme and these are very short in relation to other genre of folklore. Most of the commonly used proverbs are metaphors of nature or are terse summaries of experience, example. "New brooms sweep clean". Few proverbs involve an allusion to a particular trade, custom or belief as "There is truth in wine". Some proverbs like "Sour Grapes" are condensation of familiar tales especially Aesop's fables. Proverbs use the simple stylistic device of contrast such as "live and learn". In many proverbs, and characteristically in those dealing with medical or legal ideas or with the weather, the didactic teaching element is a condensation of experience or concisely formulated rule as 'silence gives consent'.

Many manner of speaking that are found in a tradition and literature is akin to the proverb. A proverbial phrase permits variations in person, number and tense as "To be left at the post"; then a probable comparison 'As fresh as daisy' or 'As red as a rose' has fixed traditional form but contains no moral advice. A conventional phrase is a formula used in a situation of frequent occurrence. In literature proverbs are often used to

characterize a figure or to summarize neatly a situation. They are often used as titles as in Shakespeare's 'All is Well that Ends Well'.

Examining the published collections, it would not be wrong to consider that, in the Khasi language, after the narratives, proverbs constitute the most important folklore genre. Collections made by early folklore researchers point to their importance at home, around the hearth, in the market place and in public speeches. Collectors have applied themselves assiduously to the task of harvesting hundreds of these brief, memorable and relatively accessible sentences and phrases. These statements are interpreted to reveal aspects of Khasi philosophy, to illustrate linguistic usages and to infer traits of societal character. One crucial issue that this investigation will seek to address is throwing light on the proverbs, their users and speakers, occasions, situations and contexts. Following the experiments of Penfield in conducting studies of the proverbs among the Owerri Igbo of Nigeria where he applies the excellent proverb theory of Jan Mukarvonsky, this scholar shall attempt to demonstrate how proverb properties are shared in oral discourse and even in print. Proverbs depersonalize a message that would otherwise be too personal. Their foreignness to the interaction situation draws a hearer's attention. They resonate with the authority of the ancients, they refer to shared social norms and ideals, and they bring prestige to the man or woman who used them well. The uses of proverbs suggest that in the Khasi context, as in the case of the Igbo of Nigeria, "conflicts are managed in 'speech events' which may seem less formalized than the court system in the western world but which nevertheless have traditional rules and regulations

specified, by the culture informally”.²⁵ The data that this scholar shall define the genre and look at the history of collecting, and by analyzing the sentences, shall show that a corpus of Khasi proverbs, seemingly mono-logic, are at the same time a kind of dialogue.

Khasi proverbs comfortably fall into categories familiar to the folklorist. There are literal proverbs or aphorisms and literal imperatives not to do something. There are folk similes or proverbial comparisons. Some of these kinds contain slurs of various kinds. There are folk metaphors or proverbial phrases and of course there are hundreds of what is regarded by folklorists as proverbs-grammatically complete sentence often metrical which users and speakers apply as metaphors to situation of social interaction.

Khasi proverb collections that have been published reveal certain defining characteristics: antiquity, fixity of phrasing and didacticism. Proverbs are always attributed to earlier originators, whose use of these statements are fixed in phrasing and transmitted so accurately through time that they represent an earlier stage of culture. Following the same line of perpetuation and circulation the proverb expresses authoritative and axiomatic tracts and conscious attempts, at least in some cases, have been made to bring these sayings to bear so as to systematize them into aspects of Khasi philosophy. Considerable debate has been devoted to the English word “proverb’ and how appropriate or inappropriate it is to describe non-western genres. While some

²⁵ Penfield, Joyce *Communicating with Quotes: The Igbo case Contributions in Intercultural and Comparative Studies*, 8. West port: Greenwood Press, 1983.

scholars feel that the translation is misleading, others have readily accepted it as generally denotative. English dictionaries, it is obvious, can tell us precious little about Khasi oral traditions and narratives for cultural reasons. For instance, the popular Khasi term associated with proverbs is *Ka Jingsneng* which is translated as didactic saying. A further qualifying trait is the word ‘*tymmen*’ which means “old folk” or “the elderly”. A combination of these two words, “*Jingsneng Tymmen*” appears to function as the key term to describe the proverb and it has been used as book titles for the two volumes of a well-documented publication of proverbs collected by Radhon Singh Berry. This two volume book is titled *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* and subtitled *Shaphang Ka Akor Khasi ha ka rukom Rwai Phawar* or About Khasi etiquette in the manner of *Phawar* singing. The sub-title is highly significant in that it clearly sets out the parameters of the conception of the book and the method to be followed in giving articulation to the proverbs contained therein. The author introduces another highly structural Khasi literary folk genre when he mentions the *Phawar*.

It is important to remember that the strength of the proverb is intrinsically linked to the issue of the corresponding pervasiveness of orality in a given society. In the Khasi context, while admitting the significant role that literacy is playing in changing the socio-cultural contours, orality cannot also be summarily dismissed. Even in urban centres where formal systems of education are firmly in place, the oral discourse is relied upon for social intercourse. The word *Jingsneng Tymmen* clearly exemplifies the

attributes for proverbs by emphasizing that they speak directly, they operate by means of desubjectivization and community acceptance and they receive respect.

The Khasi social structure is extremely well-built and kinship is taken very seriously. There is a marked closeness between siblings and the connection with relations of the mother (as first cousin) and of the father (as cross cousins) is maintained very assiduously. This folk group of relations is an excellent arena for the generation and circulation of proverbs with the added dimension that each one in the group is expected, at the very least, to be bound by the parameters laid out by these shared proverbial sayings. This will be demonstrated through the reproduction, whenever and wherever the phenomenon has been observed by this scholar during field work. Valerie Bonstein²⁶ analytically discussed the importance of family proverb use. In this context, it can be argued that a contextual study of the use of proverb in family life could help to understand the role of proverbs in family. It would also provide an insight into the character of the genre itself.

This researcher is going to, as a first step, use this most extensively collected and published work, the two-volume *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* for detailed analysis.

The subtitle of this thesis - analyzing the ethnography of speaking folklore- points to the intention of this scholar to consider the proverb as a genre' which relates language use to social life. The scholar is also convinced that the proverb presents itself

²⁶ Bonstein, V. *Studies of Proverbs in Family Use: A Case Study and Analysis of Family Proverbs Use*, Proverbium 8, 1991, p. 19-28.

as a genre' through a range of speaking activities operating in the Khasi society. Speech behaviours are important segments of ethnographical detail which reveal the dynamics of patterns and functions of speaking within specific cultural context. Speech behaviours can be determined taking into consideration a speech community or a group of people sharing a common language governed by a set of rules and using these for conducting and interpreting speech activities. As far as possible, this scholar will try to put into place the various factors through which data will be analysed for presenting an acceptable picture of Khasi ethnography of speaking folklore, using proverbs as the variable template. Following Hymes, the determining factors are settings, participants, ends, act sequence, key (tone), instrumentalities (communication channels), norms of interaction and interpretation and genre.²⁷

This scholar hastens to add that it is not always possible to have ideal situations all the time for collection of data. Extensive field work has yielded a good measure of data which has been subjected to the rigours of the method. In the case of proverbs which have been collected from written published sources, detailed explanation of context have been provided along with reconstruction of delivery and use of the particular proverb.

²⁷ Hymes, D. *Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life, Directions in Sociolinguistics*, 1972, pp. 35-71.

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF PROVERBS

STUDY OF THE ORIGIN OF PROVERBS:

Proverbs gives us a glimpse into the mind of the people. But the origin of the proverb is obscure, we must suppose that some individual formulated an idea in words or drew a lesson from a scene but the result was only a sententious remarks or the instructive exemplification of a truth until tradition accepted the statement and while accepting it, it adapted it, if necessary in an inimitable fashion, both the invention and the acceptance are essential to make a proverb, and both ordinarily escape our observation. The effort to arrive at the origin of proverbs is complicated by the fact that the same theme and even the same formulation of it may occur to more than one person.

Proverb are often made on the models of already existing types, “the nearer the church the farther from God’ or “the nearer the bone the sweeter the meat”. Also proverbs use the simple stylistic devices of contrast as “look before you leap” or “man proposes God disposes”. Perhaps the most characteristic feature of proverbial style is the use of contrast as in “better late than never” or “out of sight out of mind”.

Proverbs has many traditional variations which are of equal authority such as “a bird in hand is better than a hundred in the jungle”.

The systematic study of proverbs has had an early history with Archer Taylor taking the leadership in the last century. He was followed by Wolfgang Mieder. Matti

Kussi contributed his share by editing a proverb journal called "*Proverbium*". The Historical-Geographical study of the proverb which was a favourite method followed by scholars who applied the rigours laid down by Kaarle Krohn of Finland and his followers involved the identification of the normal-form, the archetype and typesets. This labourious academic exercise unearthed data that revealed the passing into and diffusion of proverbs across languages and cultures.

According to Perumal, "to study the origin of proverbs is not easy. It remains obscure. Yet the origin of a proverb can be traced to the chronological (age), geographical, and situational (circumstances) factors. Chronological proverbs originate from history, ruling dynasties and historical personages. Geographical proverbs are related to places, cities, towns and villages, forts, hills, rivers and rivulets. Situational proverbs reflect society as well as home, referring to the characteristics of the various, communities, the virtues and vices of the people and patterns of social behaviour"²⁸.

The Indian tradition of proverb creation has a preponderance of establishing the relational connectedness of these genres to God. Though it is difficult to say when and by whom the proverbs were created, certain folklorists believe that in India, they were created during the time of Panini, the grammarian (400 B.C.). But instances are also seen in some '*Cantos*', or '*Sukta*' of the Veda and Upanishada. It can be safely presumed that these are the creations of folk poets who lived in the Vedic times much before Panini.

²⁸ Perumal, V. *A Comparative Study of Proverbs Examples from Tamil and English Literature*, Folklore, Vol. 27, No. 4 Whole No. 310, 1986, p. 61-62.

(The same can be said to be true of the aphorisms and maxims contained in the Book of Proverbs of the Bible which are believed to have been created by anonymous sages although the book itself is attributed to Solomon). Thus gradually keeping the tradition intact, proverbs were created in Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit and a host of other Indian languages. It must be borne in mind that religious treatises and texts were heavily laden with proverbs, some of which have persisted through important translation efforts. Talking about the classic Buddhist text, The *Dhammapada*, which is a source of many ancient proverbs, Juan Mascaro who translated it from the original Pali script writes:

In the Dhammapada we can hear the voice of Buddha. This gospel of light and love is amongst the greatest spiritual works of man. Each verse is like a small star and the whole has the radiance of eternity.²⁹

FUNCTIONAL STUDY OF PROVERBS:

The functional approach to the study of folklore has been advocated by William Bascom. Amplifying the view point presented by Bronislaw Malinowski in *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926), Bascom articulates that proverbs serve as “pedagogic devices”³⁰ which are designed to ensure cultural stability. He goes on further to say that “proverbs are highly effective in exercising social control. Because they express the morals or ethics of the group, they are convenient standards for appraising behavior in terms of the approved norms. Because they are pungently, wittily and sententiously

²⁹ Mascaro, Juan. *The Dhammapada*, Penguin Books, 1973 p. 32.

³⁰ Bascom, W.R. *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 67, No. 266, 1954, pp. 333-349.

stated, they are ideally suited for commenting on the behavior of others. They are used to express social approval and disapproval; praise for those who conform to accepted social conventions and criticism or ridicule of those who deviate; warning, defiance or derision of a rival or enemy and advice, counsel or warning to a friend when either contemplates action which may lead to social friction, open hostilities, or direct punishment by society.³¹

Proverbs perform diversified functions. It is used to coping with stressful situation or as a way of giving advice. The proverb also depersonalizes the stressful situation by placing the problem as common problem. Peter Seitel argues that to grasp the complete understanding of a proverb, one must look at not only the general meaning of the proverb but also at a context in which the proverb is used.³²

In the family context, the proverb has certain functions. Firstly, proverbs within a family not only depersonalize a situation by placing it as a general problem, but it keeps the authoritative weight by locating the situation within a specific context connected with the past experience within the family's history. Secondly, habitual use of a proverb by certain members of the family gradually helps to establish a hierarchy of authority within the family unit.³³

³¹ *Ibid* p. 61.

³² Seitel, P. *Proverbs: A Social Use of Metaphor Genre 2.*, Proverbium, 1963, p. 123.

³³ Abrahams, Roger D. *Op.cit.* p. 124-125.

STRUCTURAL STUDY OF PROVERBS

Structural study is another method to have knowledge and understanding of proverbs. Though functional study gives some ideas about the genre, it is not adequate to know about the form of proverbs without structural analysis of proverbs. In the year 1947, Kimmerie tried to classify proverbs based on linguistic and syntactic formula. But her analysis was more of surface structure than of the deep structure.

Vladimir Propp and Levi Strauss have advocated two types of structural analysis. Proppian analysis deals with form whereas Levi Strauss structuralism deals with both form and content. Levi-Strauss takes the help of the linguistic theory developed by Saussure, Trobatzkoy and Jacobson.

In the year 1969 G.B. Milner attempted to define proverbs on the basis of quadripartite structure. According to his theory, the four quarter (minor segments) of a proverb are grouped into two halves (Major segment), which match and balance each other. The opening half is termed as head while the second half is as tail.³⁴ Milner then examines the word or words in each quarter and determines whether it has a plus or minus value. Thus in the English proverb 'soon ripe, soon rotten' the value is assigned by Milner as follows: Soon ripe (which means the head is +) and soon rotten (which means the tail is -). He has tried to analyse proverbs which concentrate upon content rather than form. Alan Dundes also analysed the structure of proverbs on the basis of

³⁴ Dundes, A. *Analytic Essays in Folklore*, Mouton Publication, The Hague, Paris, New York, 1975, p.105.

descriptive elements which consist of a topic and a comment. This means that proverbs must have two topics or comments. Proverbs which consist of a single descriptive element are non oppositional. Proverbs with two or more descriptive elements may be either oppositional or non-oppositional. "Like father, like son" is an example.

A multi descriptive element proverb which is non-oppositional; "Man works from sun to sun but woman's work is never done": is an example of multi descriptive element proverb which is oppositional (man/woman; finite work/infinite and endless work). Non-oppositional multi descriptive element proverbs emphasize identical features, often in the form of equation or series of equal terms; oppositional proverbs emphasize constructive features often in the form of negative or a series of term in complementary distribution.³⁵

CONTEXTUAL STUDY OF PROVERBS:

Once, folklore study was confined only to the collection of folklore materials. However, this position changed when the significance of contextual study was realized. Peter J Claus and Frank J Korom point out: "The evolutionist theories of the nineteenth century colonists saw folklore as a survival of earlier stages of mental and culture development. They saw little need to record and document information regarding the present context of folklore. The carriers of folklore (the folk) were of lesser importance than their lore. Today, the performers and the context have gained their rightful place in

³⁵ Dundes, Alan. *Op cit.* p. 115.

the study of folklore.³⁶

In general, anthropology has been concerned with the relationship between the text as a repository of value, cognitive structures and cultural content and the whole society in which it functions. The discussions have been phrased in terms of 'text' and 'context'. The socio linguistic concern especially in the current phase as 'performance theory' has viewed them as a medium through which a process of communication takes place, has defined the ritualization in terms of 'speaker and listener', 'addresser and addressee' or 'sender or receiver', with the text being the intermediary 'language' or 'code' through which the speaker communicates our intended meaning to the listener.³⁷

While studying folklore Alan Dundes advocates three levels for the analysis of folklore. Any given item of folklore may rightly be analyzed on the basis of text, texture and context Dan Ben Amos observes – "The locus of conventional marking the boundaries between folklore and non-folklore is in its text, texture and context of the forms, to apply Dundes' three levels for the analysis of folklore in somewhat modified form".³⁸ The text of an item of folklore is essentially a version or single telling of a tale, a recitation of a proverb. The texture of an item of folklore is essentially the linguistic features of the text. The textual features of a proverb, according to Dundes are its rhyme and alliteration. The context is considered as the most important level for the analysis of proverbs. It is called a special social situation under which a particular item of folklore is

³⁶ Claus, Peter & Korom, J. *Folkloristics and Indian Folklore*, 1991, p. 13.

³⁷ Schomer, K. *Theoretical Approach to the Study of Folklore*, Folklore, 1983, Vol. 24. No. 4.71.

³⁸ Dundes, Alan. *Text, Texture and Context*, Southern Folklore Quarterly, 28, 1964, p 251 – 265.

performed. Folklorists all over the world today, firmly believe in the effectiveness of the contextual study of folklore which requires the scholar to focus attention on the context of a particular item of folklore because information about that aspect can be obtained from the actual social situation. The details that this data generates are to be extrapolated for study. The advocates of this method are Roger D Abrahams, Dan Ben Amos, Alan Dundes, Robert Georges and Kenneth Goldstein.

Dundes is of the opinion that folklorists have so long been contented to publish the texts of proverbs only. Similarly, anthropologists have remained satisfied with the functions of the same. But they fail to provide the actual context of the proverbs. The need and importance of collection of context is absolutely essential to have the proper meaning of a proverb. A proverb without its context is meaningless.

PROVERBS AND THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF SPEAKING FOLKLORE:

The study of proverbs has fascinated a host of scholars from across disciplines. At the beginning, the study of proverb was confined only to the collection of proverbs per se and small studies were made from literary and historical standpoints.

In the twentieth century, with the shift of emphasis from the lore to the folk, from the text to people creating these texts, studies on the proverb underwent a transformation. Further, with the gradual realization that field work is of pre-eminent significance for a complete study of folklore, the collection of data became more

oriented towards the context including what Dundes called oral literary criticism.³⁹ And attempts have been made for detailed field investigations of specific proverbs. Folklore and the use of certain folklore genres can be seen primarily as a means of communication which opens up a rich field for study. This has a significant bearing on the difference which becomes obvious and critical between the recording of texts and the recording the use of texts. In order to study the ethnography of speaking folklore it is imperative to also have data on the context in order to test the efficacy of the text. While one can aver that a proverb sums up a situation, passes judgement, or recommends a course of action, it will be difficult to point out with exactness what the function is and to what particular situation the proverb is best applied. All this requires accurate and detailed reporting of the contextual data. The critical point here is that the ethnography of speaking folklore precisely tells us how a folklore genre or item works and this is wholly dependent on the identification of rules which can be found when one observes and does recording of actual instances of individuals using folklore in real life situations.

This scholar has attempted to the best of her ability to observe and record instances of actual proverb using situations in the places covered during the field work. Informants who were found to be knowledgeable and reliable about proverbs were asked to construct what they deem to be the most accurate and typical context for individual proverbs and recall such situations as best as they can. This scholar has also tried to collect as many variant of proverbs and the contexts in which they have been originated.

³⁹ Dundes, Alan. *The Monist*, 50 (1966), 505-516.

The scholar has also attempted to collect informant's comments and critiques about particular proverbs in order to obtain the interpretation of the proverb by the user and by the person for whom it is used or directed to. The scholar has intentionally proposed to conduct this study from the perspective of analyzing the ethnography of speaking folklore with relation to Khasi proverbs because she is convinced that folklore is a system of communication which includes both the study of lore and the study of the folk. Archer Taylor found it difficult to clearly define the genre but his work on proverbs is regarded as groundbreaking. Finnish scholar Mati Kuusi also observes that the message or referential aspect of the proverb is not tied to the image employed when made to study proverbs in context rather than text.⁴⁰

Melville Herskovits has developed the "hypothetical situation method" as a generally useful methodology for all types of field work. Without explaining the method at this point of time, he called for the employment of a system which broadly involves the ethnography of speaking during his work among the Kru.⁴¹ Oja Arewa and Alan Dundes have made discussions on proverbs from cultural and linguistic points of view in their article "Proverbs and Ethnography of Speaking Folklore". Abrahams has stated "Conversation rather than creation is the most common milieu for both proverb and intensifiers."⁴²

Proverbs are transmitted by speech. Hence the media communication of the

⁴⁰ Dundes, Alan. *Op cit* p. 103

⁴¹ Herskovits, Melville J. *Kru Proverbs*. *Journal of American Folklore*, 1930 Vol. 43, p. 225-293.

⁴² Abrahams, Roger D., *Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions in Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, R.M. Dorson ed., Chicago Press, Chicago, 1972, p. 123.

proverb is language. To understand the inner meaning of a proverb, the knowledge of that language is essential, because the apparent meaning of a proverb is not always the true meaning. This issue has been discussed by western folklorists.

In 1929, Roman Jakobson, in a joint essay with P. Bagatyrev, noted since folklore and language were in certain ways, analogous, both being collective social phenomena characterized by definite regularities of pattern. This type of conceptual framework opened the way for the study of folklore as a systematic code. If it can be reliably contended that language could be studied structurally, the same also goes for folklore. While folklorists have not been as quick as the linguists to apply this theoretical orientation to their own material, the analysis of folklore as code which was cogently stated in 1929, began to become popular and is a discourse widely followed now.

Jakobson and Bagatyrev had suggested that in folklore, there was an analogue to speech (*la parole*) as well as language (*la language*). In 1962, Dell Hymes had mentioned that the study of linguistic structure must be added to the study of the structure of acts of speech. The study of the structure of language is also an attempt to discover exactly how language is used in specific situations. Moreover, the conception of the structure of language is extended to include the sequential structure of form of message, wherever such linguist 'routine' appears. This very

approach to the study of language in culture, according to Hymes, is 'Ethnography of Speaking'. Here importance is given not only to the rules of language, but also to the rules for the use of language.⁴³

Dell Hymes gives emphasis on the fact that a speech act is social interaction and speech acts engage speakers with their intentions in a linguistic event. Unless the above-mentioned dimensions are taken into account, the circle of understanding language is not 'completed. He stresses that linguistic performances are to be regarded as situated events and ethnographic description of the structure of situated event is important for understanding the use of language. The understanding of the complex use of rules enables a researcher to look at the creative dimensions of a language.⁴⁴ As folkloristic communication is analogous to linguistic communication, similar complexities are also involved in the case of the latter. Dell Hymes has discussed the method of application of ethnography of communication in the study of folklore.

INTERNATIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF PROVERBS:

Proverbs have been classified into various categories from time to time considering the various characteristics inherent in them. Scholars in their writings have made a number of classifications of proverbs. Funk & Wagnall's *Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend* provides a comprehensive and workable classification

⁴³ Arewa, E.O. and Dundes, Alan. *Proverbs and Ethnography of Speaking Folklore*. American Anthropologist, 1964, No. 66 p.71.

⁴⁴ Hymes, Dell. (Ed.) *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971, p. 70-85.

of proverbs which has evolved through folklore scholarship over the decades. While the classificatory parameters are not absolutely perfect, they outline, in general terms, the ways in which a proverb is recognized, explained and gauged for its applicability to a particular situation. This scholar has utilized this classification mode in order to largely address the issue of organizing part of the data.

- I. Moral Proverbs.
- II. Social Proverbs.
- III. Philosophical Proverbs.
- IV. Weather Proverbs.
- V. Miscellaneous Proverbs.

Archer Taylor has divided proverbs in his index as follows:

- I. Proverbial Apothegm
- II. Metaphorical Proverbs
- III. Proverbial Type
- IV. Proverbs based on narratives

V. Translated Proverbs

VI. Biblical Proverbs

VII. Classical Proverbs

Abrahams discusses four common types of proverbs which are mainly based on time factor:

I. Positive equivalence:

Like – Time is money.

II. Negative equivalence

Like – Time is not everything.

III. Positive Causational

Like – Haste makes waste

IV. Negative causational

Like – two wrongs do not make a right.

Matt Kussi proposed an international classification based on materials available

from many countries. Matti Kussi has discussed the principle of organization of proverbs collected by him. His macro-structure was based on "either a variant or a group of variants of proverbs connected with each other by idea and/or formula and/or variants Kernet".⁴⁵ He further proposes a logico-thematic classification material. He also notes that structural analysis and binary opposition most coherent principles of classification which can solve the difficulties created by the national and regional collections. He says "Every proverb can be interpreted as a selection between two alternative responses" (He again suggested a number of international types and raised the of their inner complexities).⁴⁶

Areas in which this scholar has done field work includes Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills, Ri Bhoi and West Khasi Hills. Meghalaya has a population of 231822 of which 299108 is in Jaintia Hills, 660923 is in Khasi Hills, 192790 is in Ri Bhoi and 296049 is in West Khasi Hills. According to the 1991 census there are 879192 Khasi speakers that is 49.50% to total population. The area investigated falls under 3819 Sq. km. in Jaintia Hills, 2748 Sq. km. in Khasi Hills, 2448 Sq. km. in Ri-Bhoi and 5247 Sq. km. in West Khasi Hills.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS:

At the time of analysis primary importance has been given to ethnographic data,

⁴⁵ Kussi, Matti. *Towards an International Type-System of Proverbs*, FF Communications No. 211. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1972, p. 4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid* p. 1-41.

verbal dexterity and oral commentaries. The analytical methods of the context-driven ethnographers and performance theorists have been applied to understand the use, delivery and application of Khasi proverbs. In simple words, the major critical focus is on the understanding of proverbs from the social, cultural, literary and performance perspectives and the community acceptance of these usages.

RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY:

Proverbs are expressions imbued with sagacious intent and are strengthened by the process of reiteration. These sayings are usually employed through the skillful use of metaphors although they can also exist and many a time used as literal statements. Proverbs add colour to a particular language and ordinary and banal statements gets elevated to highly artistic utterances.

The study of proverbs helps us to understand some valuable aspects of life. For instance, proverbs bring before us a clear picture of the social life. A proverb is a perfect medium to impart and disseminate wise thoughts or ideas. Proverbs are the natural repository of people's age-old experience. Proverbs are effective tools for the exchange of legal opinions which in some societies in Africa carry the weight of time-honoured convention and completely binding as tribal law.

Many wise sayings from around the world testify to the precision, authenticity and correctness of the proverbs. A few are indicated below:

- I. A proverb does not tell a lie (Estonian).
- II. A proverb never lies (German)
- III. A Proverb does not lie (Russian).
- IV. If there is a falsity in a proverb, then milk can turn sour (Malayalam).
- V. Proverbs are all old; if they are new, they're not proverbs (English).
- VI. Proverbs are the daughters of daily experience (Dutch).
- VII. A Proverb is a brief saying that presents a truth or some bit of useful wisdom (Dutch).
- VIII. Proverbs of the common people are like salt to speech (Arabic).

A lucid picture of the belief system of the folk can be obtained from proverbial sayings. The character of a nation, its cultural identity and the moral assertion of its people are reflected in the proverbs which are distilled and crystallized forms of expression. The use of proverbs in family life deals with emotional, educative and character-moulding qualities which lead to the promotion of community ideals of good citizenry.

An ethnographic study like this is expected to throw light on the patterns of proverb use in a family. Moreover, the sociological dimension of proverb- using will be thoroughly dealt with in this work. Negligible work on the contextual study of folklore genres of the Khasis has been done and this particular work will be the first of its kind to delve into the system of communication that exists between a traditionally oriented genre and the ever changing community it (the proverb) seeks to critique through a performance medium of the ethnography of speaking folklore.

KHASI PROVERBS:

Proverbs in Khasi oral tradition occupies an important place both in the family and social life. The Khasi people whether educated or not are deeply rooted in their tradition. They make use of a large number of proverbs in their day-to-day conversations, contact situations and social gatherings. Many Khasi proverbs have found place in creating writings such as folktales, myths, legends, poetry, drama and other forms of literature. But as a student of folklore and with some acquaintance with the Khasi oral tradition in general and proverb in particular, the scholar feels that no such scientific study of the proverbs and their role in social education have been undertaken. It is from this perspective that the proposed study has been undertaken.

There is no specific term for proverb in Khasi. Many scholars have given different terms for proverbs such as '*Ki Ktien Tymmen*', '*Ki Ktien Sneng*', '*Ki Jingsneng Tymmen*', '*Ki Phawer*', '*Ki Ktien Pharshi*' and so on. As there is no specific term the

scholar prefers using the term '*Ki Ktien Sneng Pharshi*' or 'The Wise Saying of the Folk' in which parable, allegory, simile, comparison, aphorism, maxims and others are included.

This chapter will be devoted to the analysis of what can be considered as traditional proverbs in the sense that they have been in circulation for a long period of time and by which they have become anonymous. They are proverbs which are set in character and which are applied and understood in a frozen context without having gone or having the need to undergo mutation. They have passed from the oral to the written domain and vice-versa unchanged exhibiting characteristics which are pervasive and easily recognized by addresser and addressee. They are traditional in this respect because they express meanings and universals which are grasped immediately and also in retrospection. They carry within them the same power of delivery now as they did scores of decades ago.

The Khasi society, like any other in the world, can boast of a huge repertoire of proverbs which have been in existence since time immemorial. One of the very first comprehensive collections of Khasi proverbs was made by R.S. Berry who is considered one of the pioneers in the field of folklore studies in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In his *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen*, a two volume collection of sayings attributed to the elder which contains a total of two hundred and four lines. The writer declares in the foreword to Book I:

“I collect and write these sayings of instructions of the Khasi which have been spawn and produced through the generations to address every boy and girl of the land right from the days of old so as to remember and wake up, as it appears that we are forgetting the respectable ways, in the hypnotism effected by alien cunning of today”.⁴⁷
(translation of the scholar).

It is obvious from the above that R.S. Berry (Kharwanlang) had an agenda to pursue that is to combat the incursion of Christianity and Westernization which are described as the ‘hypnotism effected by alien cunning of today’. It is a well known fact that folklore has been used for such purposes and while the precise intention of the user is achieved, as a consequence, oral tradition and in this case oral literature gets salvaged and restored to a new form.

The proverbs collected in *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* are related mostly to social life. They have an impact on the audience or readers as corrective measures and admonitions.

The book is structured in a very interesting manner in that the passages containing the proverbs address various social issues ranging from meal etiquette to conversation moderation, for receiving a guest to regulating demeanour for social acceptance. The scholar shall reproduce below a few choice passages under their functional categories to illustrate the point:

⁴⁷ Berry, Radhon Sing. *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen – I*. Ri Khasi Press, Shillong, 1993 (Rep), p.

Proverbs dealing with meal/food etiquette: -

Wat ju lalot wat ju kangar jyndei,

Ba ioh phi ioh pang lane ioh khrew ei;

Wat ju bam seh wat ia ka ja hi ruh,

Ba ioh raid noh phim khlaiñ santer shuh;

Lada phi lalot lane kangar than,

Ki briew baroh kin isih pynban;

I/III.

Translation:

Never be greedy or gluttonous

You will invite illness, your health deteriorating

Even with rice do not over indulge

You will be stunted and will not grow much

If greed you shamelessly display

People's loathing you will invite.

This proverb teaches one to eat moderately and not to eat in excess. In the dialect (Nongtalang) a very greedy person is referred by this proverb *U Bhoh Jynroh* meaning a greedy person and only the stomach is big whereas he cannot grow much in height. Even this scholar's daughter of two years of age uses this term when someone asks her to part

with a food item she is enjoying. Since she did not want to share what she eats she scolds them “*Hew, Bhoh enloh*” (*Jynroh*) meaning thus go away you greedy person.

Haba ki tyrwa jingbam ei ei,
Da kham tyngkan wat jham madei;
Haba ia bam pai ne bam soh,
Lane kino ma ki jingbam baroh;
Wat ju iehnoh sohkhaw ne snep hajuh,
Da tam noh bin wat ia kiba phret ruh;
Leit bret ne leit theh shabar ba theh ñiut,

I/XVI.

Translation:

When you are offered something to eat
Restrain, don't say yes too soon
When you partake of fruit or whatever food,
Don't drop or litter grain nor peel,
Remove every crumb, every trace
Throw in the waste bin placed outside

Ka bamja khlieh khiew dei lano lano,
Jong ki rangbah ka üng jongno jongno;
Ka ia knieh bamja khlieh da ki kynthei,

Īa ki rangbah shoh tyndep ka pyrthei.

II/XXIV.

Translation:

Rice obtained at the pothead

Belongs to man no matter who

Woman should restrain from a helping

Lest the world be confounded

The above proverb is to teach the manner of respecting male members in the family. The top portion of the rice pot is reserved exclusively for men and it is implied that only when he has eaten, the rest of the family may follow suit. This is a symbolic manner in which respect is shown. Some households still appropriate the first scoop of rice from the pot for men especially in the evening when family members use to eat together. But in the morning this is not quite possible to observe especially in families where women also go out to work. There is no fixed time who eats first or last. As social life changes so also family life adapt to new changes and environment.

Haba bamja wat ju ĩania ĩamai,

Para ĩing ne bad ki riewjan riewjngai;

Ba sang, u sohkaw ruh u tim ryngkat,

Ba long ruh kumba ĩa dait 'sew jynlat;

II/XXXV.

Translation:

While eating never fight never argue
Amongst your family members or others
It is a taboo the rice grain will curse
For it is like dogs at a feast grabbing over leftovers

If one quarrel or fight while eating it is considered disrespect to the food which sustain us and also to God the provider. This proverb is used to warn especially the children when they quarrel or fight while eating.

This phrase “the rice grain will curse” is not a simplistic utterance and should be seen as encapsulating a whole cultural dimension of a society that had, in the past, revealed traces of deification or rice which is known, especially in the Ri-Bhoi area as *Lukhmi*. Elaborate ceremonies called *Ka Kroh Lukhmi* used to be held testifying to this. In fact, rice assumes a “from the cradle-to-the-grave” significance not only as an edible item but as symbolic metaphor for rituals, as a reckoner of fortune, prosperity and health.

Another interesting proverb teaches one how to sit and behave while eating: -

Haba bamja wat mlien shong pyang,
La mano mano kynthei ne shynrang;
Haba bamja wat shong jyrtieng kjat,

*La ha rieh ki brieve ne la ha khmat;
Wat ju shong pied khohsiew haba bamja,
Kumba shong riam miaw tuh ja tuh dohkha;*

II/XXXVI.

Translation:

While eating don't sit with your legs apart
Anyone women or men
While eating don't sit with your leg outstretched
Alone or with others
Do not also sit crouched up and knees apart
Just like setting to trap the stealer cat.

Sitting posture while eating should be respectful. Sitting outstretched or legs apart is considered as being in bad taste and a misdemeanour. If anyone sits in that way they are compared to laying trap for the cat.

*Haba pdiang ja lane haba ai ja,
Wat ju ai suh ia ka pliang ba'm ju bha;
Da rah pynjem mian ia ka pliang sa ai,
I'u mai u Trai ba long kumba dud skai.*

II/XXXVII.

Translation:

Whenever you are taking or serving food

Don't slide the plate for it is rude

Lift it with grace then give

Or God will scold, at it is like sending away the bewitched

Conversation:

R.S. Berry has also documented and put into writing sets of adages which are meant to guide ways in which conversation and social interaction ought to be carried out:

Wat ju kren ki ktien sniew ho hep basang

I/XXII

Translation:

Do not spout foul words young one, for it is taboo.

This proverb is often used by mother and elders

In a visit this scholar made to Bah Ton's, a neighbour's house, who is also incidentally a very resourceful informant at Nongthymmai, Shillong, while we were sitting on the verandah his seven years old nephew Ricky was playing marbles with his two friends. The boy suddenly became angry and uttered two unmentionable words. Bah

Ton stood up and called him inside, scolded him at first, and then calmed him down and then he uttered this proverb.

'Wat ju kren ki ktien sniew ho Ricky, basang'

This proverb is applicable to children mostly.

For adults something which is applicable to adults can also be found in *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen*:

Wat ju mlien ki ktien pohrati,

Ba ioh ki brieve ki kynshi ki kdew kti;

Wat ju mlien ho ka ktien tim ktien tla,

Ba ioh phi sah ei sa ka thuh khana;

Wat ju nang ju shait, ka ktien kiat tien smai,

Ba ka sang ha khmat U Blei u Trai.

I/XXII.

Translation:

Do not accustom yourself with bad words

People will sneer and point finger at you

Do not abuse, curse or castigate

For you will earn bad reputation

Refrain from taking oaths and swearing

For it is a taboo in front of God.

Another proverb related to this is:

Īa ki ktien khlemraiñ kham buhrieh pyngngen,

La ki long ki badei ruh wat kham kren

II/XXIII.

Translation:

Scandal and embarrassing words conceal

Even if they are true do not reveal

Another proverb related to conversation is:

Wat ju marmlen lamler lambaid ka ktien,

Ī'u sei ki briew ĩ'u thylliej shisien;

Wat ju lamler ĩ'u hap ĩa ring saiphla,

Ī'u pawraiñ madan ruh kha ma kha;

II/XIV.

Translation:

Never be untruthful and lie

Or your tongue will be plucked out

Never tell lies, lest you be dragged to face eyewitnesses

Shame and dishonour will befall on you there and then

Wat ju lamler lambait haei haei,

Īoh kylla kum 'ab ĩong tap lup khiew ranei;

II/XXI.

Translation:

Do not be untruthful, refrain from lying

For you will be likened to the black crow

A liar is compared to a black crow. Lies and liars are objects of censure everywhere. The adage “ab ĩong tap lup khiew ranei” (a black crow covered by black earthen pot) is derived from an etiological narrative which seeks to explain why the crow is black.

The tale runs thus:

After the creation of the earth ‘God gave all creatures their own places to stay. At that time the bull was allowed to stay with God. God was very fond of the human being, so he sent the bull to the earth to man, to tell him that God wishes him well and that it is his command that man should possess good health and be prosperous, and for that he will not have to work hard to appease his thirst and hunger, as he will have to keep only one grain of rice in a pot big or small and the pot will be full.

So the bull set on its journey to man, on the way the crow (white at that time) stoop on it and pecked at the insects on her back, after that she asked the bull the

purpose of its journey. The bull was very pleased with the crow, and so he told everything about the command of God. The crow was jealous of man and so she told the bull not to tell the God's commands but instead he should curse him so that man becomes sick and full of miseries and he should eat more and work hard and never become satisfy. The bull then forgot God's command and when he met the man he delivered what the crow asked him to say. When he returned to God, God was very angry with him for neglecting his command and for obeying the crow. God took up his stick and poked his mouth so all the upper molars fell down. Then again with the stick he pushed the bulls' ribs, and ordered that from now on he should serve man to lessen his miseries and be man's beast of burden. So from that time the bull came and stayed with man, and from that day it had no upper teeth and its left rib is always depressed.

As for the crow God took a black earthen pot with a lid and put the crow inside. From that time the crow obtained its black colour.

Till now when children see the crow they used to call out using this rhyme:

Tyngab ba beiñ ia u Blei

Shah tap d'u khiew ranei

Translation:

O mocking crow, you deceive God

You are put inside a soot-black pot

The person who tells lies is always warned with this proverb:

'Peit ioh kylla ab 'iong tap lup khiew ranei'.

Proverbs about truthfulness and the value of keeping one's word are also found in the *Jingsneng Tymmen*:

Wat ju mlien kylla shuh la ka juban,

Wei la kren pyndep la eh ne la tan;

II/XXI.

Translation:

Never go back on your promise, your word

Once spoken, fulfill it, whether its easy or difficult

With the Khasis, 'Ka hok ka juban lak' or righteousness and promise are very important and once word is given it should be accomplished.

Then again:

Wat ju ñuh ju thom la ka kular,

Ha ban da ngam u kynphad per u nar.

II/XXI.

Translation:

Do not vilify and go back on your word,
Till cotton sinks and iron floats.

This means that one should always keep one's word and not try to change what has been promised because if one tries to do so, it is like trying to make possible the impossible. The seriousness of the keeping one's word is adroitly conveyed through the use of the metaphor which of juxtapositions the physical qualities of iron and cotton.

Khasis used proverbs while teaching the children on how to welcome their guests or visitors. One should welcome their guests in their house by offering them seat such as the bamboo mat or wooden stool and when the guests are seated offer them betel nut and betel leaves.

The combination of betel nut and betel leaves occupy a central position in the socio-cultural and religious life of the Khasis. Its use is pervasive and, effectively, no religious ceremony or ritual is complete without it. It is no exaggeration that it symbolizes the *rites de passage* in the life of a Khasi. It is used as the easiest and most available offering to welcome guests, to greet them and also to bid farewell.

There is a very well-known myth that talks about the origin of betel nut and leaves, the outline of which goes:

Once upon a time, there were two men who were the best of friends. They were U Shing who was a poor man and U Nik Mahajon a rich man. Shing was married to Ka Lak. Shing used to visit his friend's house very often and his friend always gave him food to eat whenever he paid his visit. One day U Shing invited Nik to his house as he had not paid any visit after Shing's marriage and Nik also agreed. On the appointed day he came to Shing's house. Shing and his wife were overjoyed by their friend's visit, so Shing told his wife to prepare a special meal for his friend. But out of sorrow his wife told him that there was no rice to cook, Shing told her to borrow from the neighbours but she returned empty handed. U Shing was delirious with grief and shame as he had nothing to offer his best friend on his visits. Then he grabbed the kitchen knife and stabbed himself to death. His wife stunned with grief took the same knife and killed herself.

Nik was sitting alone in the drawing room but when no one came for quite a long time he went inside the kitchen to enquire but was shocked to see the dead bodies of his friend and Ka Lak. After recovering from the shock he examined the situation and then saw the empty rice pot on the hearth with the boiling water in it. He realized the situation his friend was in, that his friend had killed himself because he had no rice to cook and offer him. Out of grief and regret that his visit was the cause of his friend's death he took the same knife and stabbed himself to death.

That night, it so happened that a thief chased by a mob took shelter in that dark house. Fatigued because of running he fell into a deep slumber in one corner of the

house, when he awoke, dawn was breaking he was about to sneak out when to his horror he noticed the three dead bodies. He knew it was too late to escape unnoticed and he also knew that the blame would fall on him as the thief and the murderer and no one would believe his plea of innocence. As a way out, he too took that knife and killed himself.

Ka Lei Synshar or the reigning goddess viewed this event with sorrow and concern. She decided to solve this problem of welcoming and offering food for guests by introducing betel nut, betel leaves, lime and tobacco as the items of offering guests in every home whether rich or poor. Through her powers, the corpse of U Nik transformed into betel nut, betel leaf sprung from the corpse of U Shing, lime from the corpse of Ka Lak. Certain traditions also aver that tobacco sprung from the thief.

There are other proverbs relating to betel nut and leaves and how it is to be used:

Haba wankai ki riewtymmen ha la iing,

Wat pynleit thylli iarong ba ki kieng;

To da pynthep bad u kwai u tympew,

Ban ioh jingkyrkhu ban man-spah man-pheu;

II/XVI.

Translation: -

Whenever elders comes visiting

Their bags shouldn't be empty while returning

Fill them with betel nut and leaves

You'll be blessed and praised and rewarded

It is tempting to point out here that a faithful adherence to these sayings nowadays would not be practical. Betel nut and leaves are now expensive items and city-dwellers could ill afford the luxury of their free dispensation. This might be applicable perhaps only in the War areas where betel nut and leaves grow abundantly. So what we can do is offer them to eat but filling the bag is not possible.

Jingsneng Tymmen also has a number of proverbs dealing with household chores:

Hikai ba phin khie dangstep phyrngap,

Pynmlien ban khie dang riew ka tyngab,

Lane khie noh dang riew u 'iar nyngkong,

Kynthei shynrang khmih la jingtrei lajong;

Phi tang shu khie thiah sliew la ka ding.

Īa la ka kti ka kjat ruh to pynsting,

To khmih to iit la ka iing bad to sar;

Baroh kaba napoh lane ha bar,

Sa thet la ki kti bad bta la ki khmat,

Ba ka Syiem Lukhimai kan bud ryngkat;

Īa khiew shet khiew tiew wat ju ktah shuti,

Phi khlem da sum da sait la kjat la kti;

Sa shet la ka ja, shet la ka jyntah,

Wat ju mlien ban shu bam da ka ja jah;

I/VIII.

Translation:

Make a habit to rise early in the morning
In fact, just when the crow is cawing
Or get up when the rooster, the first time crows
Boys and girls be at your work and toil
As soon as you're up light the fire
Be smart, be active, do not malingering
Look after your home, sweep tidy it up,
Inside outside clean it and scrup;
Then wash your hands and faces too,
The Goddess Lukhimai will be with you
Don't touch your pots and pans
Without washing your legs and hands
Then cook your rice and curry
Don't ever eat cold rice.

Haba la kynih u syiar lai sien,

Wei phi la khreh to wat ju kylla dien;

*To leit tong la ka um tong la ka wah,
Da khlieng la khiew la pliang wat shu tong sah;
Phi wat ju shong kli kti syaid ding pynlat,
Ioh sin ei ki briew kum ka miaw ñiangmat;*

I/IX.

Translation:

After the third crowing of the rooster
Start at once for your work do not linger,
Go fetch your water
Do clean your vessels not just fill it
Don't laze around the fire side
People will taunt you, call you ailing cat.

*Wat ju pynmien ban pyrsad ding kynsan,
Ba ioh sied peiseh ia ki ba hajan;
Wat mlien biah pashait haei haei,
Ba ioh ka leit sied pynban ia kiwei;*

I/XX.

Translation:

Do not kindle the fire abruptly
In case the ashes will soot those sitting near by
Never ever spit just anywhere,

In case it falls on someone there.

The Khasis are very particular about every action. There are many instructive ways on how one should sit and posture oneself whether at home or outside.

The proverbs:

Wat mlien shong lynggeit ba kylla jaituh,

Ha ka leit ka wan ruh kylla khatduh;

Wat ju pynmlie ban bamja pynsuki,

Ha ban da leit jingleit ruh ba ioh lap sngi;

I/X.

Translation:

Don't always sit on your rump for you'll become lazy

Wherever you go and come you'll be late

Whenever you eat don't be extra slow

Because wherever you go you'll be late.

Slow risers and slow eaters are never appreciated in Khasi society.

Wat ju shim ju ai da lyndet ba sang,

Ba long kum ka kam snaiap niam lyndang;

Wat ju ai shim khap shynriah ti,

Ba ïoh kha kap ne kha khun ar tylli.

I/X.

Translation:

Do not take or give anything from behind

Because it is like the ghost's work who had no last rites

Don't take or give anything between your fingers

Or you may get twins (one boy one girl)

It is a Khasi belief that having twins is not very auspicious especially if one is a boy and another is a girl, a phenomenon called *kha kap* because they are considered to be husband and wife. In the olden times if the twins are of different sexes they had to separate them i.e. not allow them to stay in the same place. One should be sent far away either with relatives or friends. Nowadays, this practice has changed.

Wat ju marmlien ka kti ban shin kynthet,

Kumba leh ka matti shrieh i sait met,

Baroh ïa ki kynja jingbuh jing sat,

Da lei lei wat ju mlien ñiad da ka kjat;

Wat ju mlien ruh de ban shu jam khyllad,

Ïa kiei kiei kum ka akor mrad.

Ïa ki briew ha ba ïaid wat ju ryngkang,

Ba khlem akor, ba sang ïoh ki ïoh pang;



*Wat ju ai wat ju shim da ka diang,
Ba ka akor ka sniew ne mangkariang.*

I/XI.

Translation:

Do not ever snatch things with your hands,
As the monkey is wont to, it is ill mannered
Things that may be strewn around
Should not be gathered by feet
Do not ever step over objects
This reveals animal-like behaviour
While walking don't step over others
Sickness like discourtesy may befall
Never give or offer with your left hand
A sure display of grudging giving.

*Haba phi i ba don ki briew ha jan,
Wat ju mar mlien ban ieng ban iaid kynsan;
Haba ki shong lane ki ieng ki briew,
Wat ju mar mlien iaid na khmat ba i sniew;
Wat ju mlien iaid kawut jaiñkup jaiñsem,
Da kham syndong ia ki sa iaid kham dem;
Haba phi iaid wat da byllud tdong miaw,*

Haba phi ieng ruh wat da ksoh jylliaw;

I/XIII.

Translation:

Whenever you see people near you
Don't suddenly get up and walk
When other people are sitting or standing
Don't pass by them casting a shade
Wave not your clothes, they are no flags
Hold them bend a little and walk
While walking rub not like the cat's tail
Be quick to relinquish your seat to your betters.

This scholar was present during the use of the above when she was attending the naming ceremony of her friend's daughter at Madanrting. As part of the rituals, boys and girls were busy distributing rice powder, and this scholar was sitting with Mina whose daughter Jani, a fifteen year old girl was also taken up by this activity. She was unmindful of the way her shawl and jaiñkyrshah or traditional Khasi apron was in disarray. When she came to offer powdered rice to the group of women with whom this scholar was, her mother uttered the above.

'Jani wat iaid kawut jaiñkup jaiñsem

Da syndong sa iaid kham dem'.

Meaning that the cloth should sheath and cover properly not letting it fly asunder and also that she should bend a little while walking in front of others.

Another proverb:

Wat ïaid ïapeit khling khling khlang khlang ba pher

Ba sin ei ki briew ka langtuh kper.

II/III.

Translation:

Do not walk with eyes switching here and there

Folk will call you plant – stealing goat.

The implication of this verbal usage is a caution to walk without casting covetous eyes here and there and is reinforced by the image of the goat who before entering to maraud a compound to eat plants, always look hither thither, checking, as it were, if the coast was clear.

Visiting is a very important social activity which facilitates a close interaction between relatives and friends. It facilitates the exchange of news the inquiry and confirmation of good health and deepens family ties. The Khasi society is a close knit one and the practice of the social visit is almost mandatory with a regularity that is seldom found in other communities. When kith and kin do not visit then it is believed that something serious is amiss. Social visits again like other social practices find their

place in the Jingsneng Tymmen and certain principles are uncertain guiding principle are enumerated which are required to be followed:

Haba phi leit kai ha iing kiwei

Mynshwa ba phin kiew ha iing ne nengpei;

Da ñiad ki kjat ha bar ne dieng tyngkong;

Wat pat rung kylli shwa nyngkong;

Don briew ha iing ne em, ap kin da kren,

Sa rung lada donkam ne shongkai myllen;

I/XV.

Translation:

Whenever occasion calls for a visit

Before you enter the house through the entrance

Wipe your feet clean on the porch

Precede your entry with a hail to the house

Wait upon a word, upon the answer

Then go forth to transact business or seek leisure.

This passage is aimed at inculcating respect for privacy. The person who enters another's house without seeking and obtaining permission by knocking is considered ill mannered.

While visiting one should not over stay their welcome. This is also taught by the use of proverbs:

Wat shongkai slem ha iing ki briew borabor,

Ba ioh ki sin ñiangbulot khlem akor;

I/XVII.

Translation:

When in somebody's house, linger not

Like the irksome ñiangbulot fly, buzzing non-stop.

After the visit is over, one still has to observe an etiquette:

Haba mih noh na iing jongno jongno,

Da ong ia ki trai yn leit noh ho;

Wat shu mih lyndet kyndam kum ba syam,

Kum akor mrad ne akor ksuid sniew tam;

I/XVIII.

Translation:

When the visit you are ready to end

Be sure to tell your host that you're going

Don't disappear like the sulking spirit

To be gone without a human trace

We carry out our day to day social intercourse through conversations. A lively and dynamic society sustains itself through dialogue which is the basis of conversation. This very important social trait is given a treatment in *Ki Jingsneng Tymmen*. Khasis believe that conversations are grounds upon which character is based and judged, and therefore one must be careful about how one conducts oneself in these situations. A person who laughs too loud without any genuine reason is usually called a “*Lang shngaiñ ñiuhmoh*”. This proverb is used to caution such a person:

Wat ju shait eh jyndei ka rkhie tahoh;

Kumba rwai ia rkhie ka 'lang shngaiñ ñiuhmoh;

I/XXI.

Translation:

Laugh not in the habit of the vulgar

Like the ribald song of the bearded goat

The above proverb is derived, it can obviously be noted, from the folk tale of the Bearded Goat.

At the time when the animals could speak and understand one another, the mighty tiger wished to eat the goat. But whenever the tiger tried to go near the goat, he always felt scared of the he-goat's beard and the way the goat would move its head, swaying its beard and stamping its feet. The tiger's desire to feast on it could not be fulfilled. But the goat was foolish and instead of being grateful for the deception he had

manage to create, started bragging and taunting the tiger. Furious the tiger decided to actually test the strength and bravery of the he-goat. One day while it was coming from the market the goat was singing and laughing loudly making fun of the tiger, and that the tiger was afraid of its beard and appearance whereas the goat had no strength against the might of the tiger. The tiger heard this and immediately lay in wait for the he-goat. As soon as the goat passed by the tiger pounced from his hiding and quickly finish it. From that time onwards, the he-goat usually falls easy prey to the tiger. This folktale serves to teach us that we should not take things lightly and to always contemplate the consequences before taking any action. The proverb is also a homily on the virtue of silence and discretion which implies the benefit of not opening our mouths when it is not needed lest our words land us in trouble.

Īa ki ktien khlem rain buhrieh pynngen,

La ki long ki badei wat kham kren;

Wat ju mlien ban nang ban shait ka lorni,

Ba ioh ka shongsang ka long atlukhi;

Wat ju mlien ban kren sa ne ban leh sa.

Ba ka duh bor noh ka akor ba bha;

I/XXIII.

Translation:

Shade words of shame, concealed them,

Even if they ring true do not pronounced;

Make not a habit of gossip mongering

For this takes root inauspiciousness
Departs from sulky ways and actions
Lest civility is weakened.

Rabon Sing also collected proverbs to encourage the Khasi to take to agriculture, and handicrafts not only to work as labourers or servants but to stand on their own feet.

The proverbs:

To wat iai imsngi tang ha ka kitmong,
Ba ban pynbeit u star haduh dyngkhong;
Wat im jingmut jyndei tang ka bylla,
Ba bieit anna-antu noh khamakha;
Wat sngewbha shong thap bam ha ing ki briew,
Ba jah jait noh de la i jong i rngiew;
Wat leit hap ha ka shong mraw shong shakri,
Ioh pateng pakit kynnoh pohrati;
To sumar la ka jong ka rep ka ri,
To nangroi nang pa la spah ka jingshna,
Ban sei la ka jingmut bad ban ban man bha.

I/XXXVII.

Translation:

Measure not the span of day only carrying loads on your back
The headstrap pressed heavy on your head like the stump
Do not dwell much on labourers' toil,
Reduced to stupidity you will be
Do not relish the food others give,
Self respect and demeanour you will forfeit
Do not get used slaving in other's house
You cast your progeny in bad light
Tend to your land, your flock
Work, manufacture with hands and skills
Make your own wealth, increase it
The mind becomes fertile and life prospers.

To encourage the people to take to business the following proverb is used:

To hikai ia la ka khai ka pateng,

Khun Khasi, khun War, khun Bhoi, khun Synteng;

Lada 'm bun baiseng ruh na lade hi,

Tangba iai minot kan roi suki;

Ka jingminot la mynno mynno ruh,

Iala ka bam ka dih kam ju pynduh;

I/XXXVIII.

Translation:

Learn to do your own business
All Khasi, War, Bhoi, or Synteng,
Even if capital is not at first sufficient
By hard work it will accrue,
Devotion to work is the answer,
Work will provide your foodstuff.

*To khmih thuh wat na ki nongwei nongar,
Da kumno ban wan jia ka kem ka lar;
Da khalai biang ha la ka jingmut,
Kan biang thik ka long brieve na kut sha kut.*

I/XXXVIII.

Translation:

Do watch and learn even from outsiders
The way the divination shells fall
Apply your mind, play accordingly,
Prosperity will follow from beginning to end.

There are proverbs which contain gems of information about the traditional systems of measurement. This scholar also feels that these figure in the collection because the collector was acutely aware that these traditional reckoners would slip into oblivion as a result of the introduction of the metric system brought in by the colonial administration:

Proverb:

*Haba die ba thied wat ju thew pap,
Da ka pylla ne ka jingdiang jingap;
Ba 'm ju neh ka kamai la phi iohnong,
Ba ka shet ka phon lade da khongpong.
La phi thew phi wet da ka pruh ka tda,
La phi niew da ka hali ka kynda;
La phi die laka ha ka khiew, ka ktang;
La phi die lyngbung ha ka kria ha shang,
To leh hok to leh beit ha rieh ha paw,
I'u bamsap l'i pyrthei, iu duh soh khau.*

II/XXXIII.

Translation:

When buying and selling use honest weights
Whether it is the scales or plate
Dishonest profit will not endure

It deceives and devours itself
If you measure by hand or by finger
If you count in fours or fourths
If you sell in pot or bamboo vessel
If you sell in bulk by the basket
Be honest whether in the open or in the dark
Lest you lose all you have and starve.

Dress code and behaviour also comes in for comment through these adages. Let us examine a few:

To lekhuid ryntih ia ka met bad ka riam,
To leh beit ryntih ka kam bad ka niam;
Naba haba tngit ka met ne ka riam,
Īa jingmut jinglong ka kjor ka kliam.
Naba haba wat ka kam ne ka niam,
Ka jingim bad ka jingsuk ruh ki siam,
Haba khuid synlar ka met bad da ka riam,
Haba beit shida ka kam bad ka niam;
Ju long khiah krat pynggad nabar hapoh,
Ju poi hok poi blei ha ki kam baroh.

II/LX.

Translation:

Be equally clean in your body and attire,
Equally particular in work and worship
For if body and attire are dirty,
The mind becomes dirty and weak.
For when the work and worship are weak
Life and happiness do not root deep
When body and attire are clean
When work and worship are straight
One will be healthy inside outside,
Blessings will be there in every work.

The *Jingsneng Tymmen* as have been illustrated contains a wide range of topics which are being dealt with through proverbs, adages and proverbial sayings. While the effort that went into the collection of these verbal usages is indeed of stupendous significance, it must be pointed out that there are some of these which are not relevant and acceptable any more at the present day. Some have completely outlived their usefulness and many others have become fossilized due to their sheer impracticality. Let us look at some of these:

Proverb:

Haba shem nyngkong myndang mih na iing,

Ia ki bym biang ka main phi dei ban tieng.

Bad to pdam leit noh ha kata ka sngi

Ba sang lane ba duh ioh nong ioh ni.

Ym tang basing neb a duh nong duh ni,

I'u hap ka pang ka iap ha ka lynti.

II/VII.

Translation:

When you leave your house and accost one,

A person who lacks in human fullness,

Abandon your journey

It augurs ill and bound to imperil

Countenanced in a calling for loss

Ill health or worse befalls then I say.

Clearly one can discern the impractical nature of the adage not to speak of being politically incorrect with regard to persons with special abilities.

Ia ki kynthei wat ai huspai jyndei,

Ba kim tip satia ia ki nia pyrthei;

*Ba ki sniew noh ka akor long kynthei,
Ba ki iaunud ban said thala madei;
Ia ka iap ka im kim lap kot pyrkhath,
Kim tip hangno ka pung hangno ka mat;
Long sang long pap ban ai lan bieñ ia ki,
Ba kin die tad noh la ka jing tip sngi.*

II/XLII.

Translation:

Be reserved with liberties to women
For worldly wise they can never become
The womanly grace will degenerate.
For they will unreasonably argue and castigate;
They won't dwell on seriousness of life.
They won't know what is right and what is wrong;
It is a curse to give them too much liberty
They may be wont to sell their dignity.

This particular passage contains the strongest overtones of male chauvinism and is without a doubt unacceptable. The Khasi society is one in which the woman enjoys more privileges than in any other ostensibly because of the matrilineal system. Gender parity is very much in existence and women are doing as well as men in many professional fields.

The retention of posture and the art of composing oneself in the face of adversity and opposition is a quality that needs to be cultivated because it is only through a calm demeanour that one is able to overcome obstacles. Anger and irascibility is denigrated while maintaining of composure is praised. Let us consider the following passage:

Wat ju mlien khong khong wat ju mlien iriang.

Ba ioh shun ei u kamon kadiang;

To long jemnud to long ba pasiang,

Ba kiwei ruh ia phi kin long kylliang;

Ha ka ktien ha ka kam wat ju laplah,

Ioh ba hangta shen kum kylla prah;

I/XXIV.

Translation:

Do not be irritable and easily ired

Else you find an enemy to your right and left

Be gentle and good natured

Others will pay you in kind

In words and deeds don't rush unchecked

Lest the winnowing basket be overturned.

The last line is imbued with a folk metaphor which uses the image of a traditional item used in agricultural operations. The item in question is *U Prah* or the

winnowing basket which in the Khasi folk context is understood as the equivalent of the cornucopia symbolizing plenty, the overturning of which is considered to be inauspicious.

Avarice also comes in for castigation:

Wat ju leit rhah ia ka jong kiwei,

Ba ioh ka daiñ dong ei la ka pyrthei;

Wat ju mlien bishni ia kiwei ki briew,

Ba ioh pakhuh ei ia la ka khohsiew;

Wat ju pynmlien khapnap khapbit jyndei,

Ba ioh khangdong lade ei ka pyrthei;

I/XXV.

Translation:

Do not long for others fortune

You'll wreak and ruin your life

Do not be jealous of other people

Lest it it turns back to your own knee

Do not be too stingy

You might spoil your destiny

Wat ju peit shin eh ia ka spah ki briew,

Ba ha ka jingmut wan shoh ka basniew;

Īa ka spah kiwei wat ju ĩai ialap,

Ba ĩ'u kylla tuh, kylla nongpyniap.

Wat shukor wat thok ba long-pap long-sang,

Ha u Blei ha u briew, kynthei shynrang,

II/XVIII.

Translation:

Do not cast beady eyes on people's wealth

Wrong ideas may grow from this

Talk not of others' wealth

Lest words turn to looting and murdering

Don't lie and betray for it is wrong

In front of God in front of man, women and men

Excess comes in for censure in every society and in this case, the excess of activities of amusement and recreation are singled out for caution. Therefore, angling, bird trapping, gathering honey and hunting are mentioned as detrimental if they are pursued to excess.

Wat ju nap jyndei tang ha ka leit khwai,

Īoh duh khaw noh la ĩoh jyntah ban ai;

Wat ju smat jyndei tang ha ka riam sim,

*Īoh man symphiah la jaiñ thymmai jaiñ rim;
Wat ju imsngi than tang ha ka wad ngap,
Ba ĩoh poi kynsha man ka lum man ka khap;
Wat ju ĩai jyndei tang ka beh mrad,
Ba shem kynsha eh ki briew man ka lad;*

I/XXVI.

Translation:

Do not get addicted to fishing and angling
You'll not have rice even though curry
Don't be too fond of trapping birds
Clothes will be tattered
Don't get habituated to searching for honey
Dangerous hills and dales you'll chance upon, unwary
Don't get too used to hunting wild game,
People will frequently meet you in every path

*Wat ju ai huspai ĩa ka kiad ban bang,
Ba ha ka ka um ka ding ki don lang,
Wat ju leh khlaiñ eh ĩa ka um ka ding,
Ba ĩoh phi hap pat lyndang pat pyrshing.
Wat bam wat dih aphin, shandu, mudot,
Ba ka met ka sdot, ka rta ka lyngkot.*

*Wat ju marmlien ka syat iakhalai,
Ba don ha ka ka ñiamra ring swai;
Wat ju marmlien ka ñaid awria awman,
Ba sniew ka met bad wir spah noh pynban;*

I/XXVII.

Translation:

Don't ever desire to taste alcohol
For it has in it both water and fire
Don't dare to face against water and fire
Lest you'll fall on your back on your side (get drunk)
Don't take opium and other strong drugs
The body will languish and life shortened
Don't ever make gambling a habit
In it there is sucking bottomless pit
Do not habituated yourself with licentious life style
Lest your health and wealth will be ruined

Marriage is sacred to the Khasi, It is a bond which united not only the two but also the relationship of the two families. Proverbs are also used to counsel the young on the institution of marriage.

To caution those who have not attained marriageable age:

Wat ju ia poikha lyngngoh thamula,

Ka dei ban da tip da u kñi u kpa;

Wat ju ia poikha bad ki jait bym bha,

Hynrei para ba iabiang pylla;

I/XXIX.

Translation:

Do not get married in a hurry

Inform your uncles, your father

Don't marry into families which are suspect

Choose someone who's equal in every respect

Wat ia poi kha bad ki bym dei kynsi

Ba long ka ba eh ka sang ka synri

Wat ju iajan khah bad ki ba'm ia dei,

Ioh kumno re shoh tyndep ka pyrthei;

Ioh poi pynban sa da ka sang ka ma,

Ioh sah jit kynshi, shi junom bura

I/XXX.

Translation:

Do not marry those forbidden by custom

It is a sacrilege beyond compare
Intimately do not mixes with those not allow to marry.
For you might succumb to temptation
For it may lead to sacrilege
For your reputation will be begrimed.

Wat ju ïai ïa kajia shi tnga shi khun
Kumba ïa shong samsia para nongshun
Ba ka lukhimai kam ju bud ryngkat
Ka atlukhi te ka bud ha kti ha kjat

II/XIX.

Translation:

Don't bicker and fight within the family
It's like living with enemies
The goddess of wealth (Lukhimai) will not stay together
Rancor instead will follow and take hold

Wat ju peit itynnad ïano ïano
Khlem da tip i kur i jait jongno;
Da kylli bha i'i kur bad ka ïasang
Ïa kren ka ktien da thew kynthei shynrang

II/XXII.

Translation:

Do not woo any one
Without finding what clan he/she comes from
Inquire with care in case the match is taboo
Speak with respect and regard female or male

Before you appreciate and like the opposite sex you should first enquire about the clan the person belongs to because if one desire to marry, knowledge of the clan and relationship should be examine as for the Khasi marrying within the same clan is a sacrilege and un-forgiven. If that happens both male and female will be outcaste. So consideration and calculations of relationship before the match is a must.

*Haba ki kum iamai iania shi inga,
Wat ju leit pynshah shkor ki kmie ki kpa.
Lada kmie ne kpa shynrang ne kynthei,
Wei rap ktien rap bor hangta la bthei.*

II/XL

Translation:

When couple have a misunderstanding,
Parent's shouldn't be interfering,
Parents of either boy or girl,
If they interfere it will get worse

This proverb is used to caution the parents not to interfere when their married children quarrel with their spouses, because if they do so things become worse.

The Khasi women are held in high esteem in the society and family. So the proverb:

*Ka kynthei ka long kum ka Lukhimai,
Ka nongri iing, nonglum khih lum kamai;
Ka kynthei ka long kum ka ram-ew iing,
Ka nongpdang kynthup ia ka doh ka shyieng;
Ka kynthei ka long kum ka kiaw u ngap,
Ka nangiewbih da kaba ka shu sngap;
Ka kynthei ka long ka burom ka sngi,
Ka nangtyngshain ha ka jinglong sotti;
Ka kynthei ka long kum ka muhor ksiar,
Bad ka long kum ka jingkynshew dap thiar:
Ka tang shu pyrshang kynih 'iar ryngkuh,
Ka ijot jong ka ka la sep jynduh;
Ka iing ka sem ruh ka jot khamakha,
I kur, i jait ruh jynjar na kata.*

I/XLIII.

Translation:

The woman is like the goddess Lukhimai
She keeps the earnings of the family
The woman is like the foundation of the home
She accepts both the body and the bone;
The woman is like the mother bee
She is more fragrance by keeping serene
The woman is the glory the sun
She glows in her purity
The woman is like the golden seal
And she is like the Treasury
When she tries to crows like a cock
Her honour is destroyed completely
The home too is destroyed ...
The kith and kin also suffer.

Though the woman is held in high esteemed yet there are limitation to her
freedom.

Proverb:

Ko kynthei haba kren iano iano,

*Wat ju mlien rkhie shri pynpaw bniat ho;
Kat bym pat da shoh ka nia ia kren slem,
Ia ka rkhie shri makdoid phe dei ban tem;
Ba ka sting-thew noh ka kun long kynthei,
U kamon kadiang un thuhkhana ei;*

II/XLI.

Translation:

Lady when you converse with any one
Do not smile by displaying your teeth
As long as you don't know the person
Excessive laughter you should suppress
For it will cheapen your womanliness

PHILOSOPHICAL PROVERBS:

The Khasis believe in the existence of one God the creator and it is the belief of the Khasis that he comes to this world to earn righteousness as the often quoted proverbs goes:

Ngi wan sha pyrthei ban kamai ia ka hok.

Translation:

We come to this world to earn righteousness.

Another proverb which is central to the Khasi belief and teaching is:

To ieit ialade, burom ia kiwei,

Ba phin suk ha pyrthei, phin suk h 'u Blei;

I/XXXI.

Translation:

Love thyself and respect others

Peace you will find on earth and with God.

This could be seen in the light of a cardinal teaching of the Bible:

To ieit ia la u paramarjan kumba ialade

Translation:

Love thy neighbour as you love thyself⁴⁸

Another proverb:

U Blei u pynmih kawei ka jutang,

Batang ia u marwei kin mane lang;

⁴⁸ Mathew, *The Bible*, 19:18.

Kumta ma phi baroh shynrang kynthei,

Kynmaw ban mane beit tang ia U Blei;

II/LI.

Translation:

God has one rule ordained,

Only Him, must worship all;

So all you male and female,

Remember you must worship only God;

This scholar shall now take up for discussion proverbs which can be considered traditional in the sense that they are used and applied in their didactic sense or as censures, criticisms and reproach. Another aspect of this study is the attempt to analyse them and to gauge their interactive linkages with the cultural dimensions, mental, organic or social, in whence they have emanated. These proverbs will be detailed and their poetic and aesthetic qualities duly highlighted. The textual and contextual matter will be elicited and thoroughly explained.

Like most proverbs current all over the world, Khasi proverbs are metaphors drawn from daily life or the observation of nature or are terse summaries of experience. Khasi proverbs are often made on the models of already existing types, and like all folklore material, has many traditional variations, which are aimed at the summing up of

everyday experience in getting on in the world as it is. Inherent in many Khasi proverbs, is the counsel to avoid excess.

Proverbs are very effective in exercising social control in most societies, and their applicability can be traced in the 'from the cradle to the grave' span of any human. This is also true of the role of proverbs among the Khasis.

This researcher is fortunate, in one sense, to be working on Khasi folk literary traditions, because being Khasi herself, the language is native to her, and the risk of misinterpreting its usages is virtually non-existent, whether dealing with tales, myths, proverbs, songs, legends, slangs or colloquial speech. There have been many instances of collectors of folklore succumbing to an ethnocentrism, by explaining a proverb in one culture through the citation of a, supposedly, equivalent proverb from their own. This leads to an almost criminal distortion and misinterpretation of texts, rendering the meanings unclear and vague.

The study of Khasi proverbs that the scholar has made has not merely been the recording of texts, but the investigation of the contexts, documentation of informer's valuations, assessing the appropriateness of occasion and place, and marking the intensity of user - addressee relationship by testing the tensional variances. Among the Khasis, proverbs are used as admonitions, commands, lessons and corrective measures.

A particular family in Upper Shillong with which the scholar stayed was a fairly large one in which there was one middle aged unmarried man who was staying with the owner of the house who was his youngest sister. One evening after meal while sitting warming ourselves by the fire, this scholar engaged in a conversation with the hostess and the topic of discussion led to her brother, the man in his mid fifties. Also present were an elderly aunt of the hostess who described the unmarried man as *Patloi khlem syrwing* which means a pot with no ring. A *Patloi* is a big earthen pot designed to store water and it is placed on a *syrwiang* which is the ring made of woven bamboo slivers. Without the *syrwiang* there is every chance that the *patloi* would topple over and cause the water to spill. In that sense, it does not only position the pot and stabilizes it but also lessens the friction that the bottom of the pot would have with the surface on which it is placed. This is a highly imaginative use of kitchenware to describe human traits, the *patloi* symbolizing man and in this case the hostess' brother who is unmarried and who has remained so because he has not been able to find the *syrwiang* which is the ring. It goes without saying that the round *syrwiang* has Freudian overtones which fits the description very aptly. The *syrwiang* conceived as the female would provide stability and keep the pot in an upright position so that its purpose for holding water is served. It also would have acted as a buffer which will cause less friction between the *patloi* or the pot and the surface which in this respect can be seen as the society and its norms. This proverb is comparable to the English A Rolling Stone Gathers No Moss.

Another very interesting proverb which emerged the same situation with the same gentleman as a reference is *U 'Iarryngkuh Kynting Mawria*. The translation of the proverb is the Pebble Tossing Rooster this was used again by the elderly aunt of the family to describe the individual. When the scholar enquires as to the significant of the proverb the old woman replied by saying: "have you ever seen a rooster strutting about in the barn yard especially when there are hens nearby?" Then the import of this verbal usage occurred to this scholar. The rooster would often be seen scratching the gravel in the barn yard and he would do this with considerable force causing small stones to come loose from the soil. This will be followed by the rooster pecking at the soil and this would attract the hens to come near him. This phenomenon must have struck discerning human beings who would then construe the picture as if the rooster is trying to lure the hens with the supposed morsels of food he has scratched out of the ground but in reality what the rooster scratched out was only a small stones and pebbles. Hence the proverb. The informant went on to elaborate the gentleman in question is given to such behaviour by pretending to be well to do while his natural indolence has landed for him only seasonal jobs.

On the use and application of the same proverb this scholar has queried other informants about the accuracy of the explanation given by the man's sister and these individuals also agree to it by and large although one informant says that the adage could refer to the children's game of pebble tossing. Pebble tossing is a children's game, which involves the tossing of an assorted five pebbles in the air, and catching them, one

by one, in the palm of the hand. It then progresses to the next stage, where the player is required to catch all the pebbles tossed, on the back of the hand. A count is, then, made. The adage ridicules the person, who, generally, wastes his time, dressing up and being conscious only about his appearance. He is regarded as only good in playing children's games, instead of taking on a man's responsibility. The comparison with the cock is striking. The cock conveys the image of strutting about as he scratches the soil for food. While doing so, he kicks up a lot of dirt. This image is seized upon by the folk, and placed in the context of the adage, as "pebble tossing", reinforcing the idea of such a person's juvenile behaviour.

In these villages this scholar also came across proverbs which are literal statements of unknown coinage that are used to suit a range of situations. Examples of injustice are keenly observed everywhere and during her stay, this scholar was presented with the opportunity to witness a Dorbar Shnong meeting which had specially been convened in response to an accusation made by a person against another. The sum of the matter was that the accused, a needy father of five had borrowed large stocks of food from the shopkeeper, the man who lodged the complaint with the headman or rangbah shnong and the poor man could not repay his debt. While the matter was settled through the intervention of the village youth group, yet many people gave vent to their feelings by using many expression, one of which this scholar found very apt for its proverb – like quality. It goes:

Ka ain ka tban ia u duk u suk u riewspah u thom ia ka ain.

Translation:

The law hounds the poor while the rich hounds the law.

Good character is revered, above all, by the Khasis. The character of a person finds expression in his work, language, dress and attitude towards other persons. The proverbs of the Khasis are reflections of this reverence for good character as a considerable number of proverbs will certify. Very often, situations having social, legendary, mythological and historical bases are drawn, as comparisons, to reflect a particular quality of a person, whether good or bad. A good number of comparisons are drawn from the natural world and used with striking effect in the human context. There is a lot of didacticism in these proverbs, and this is used to the maximum, in which vices are portrayed and their consequences elucidated. The sayings take erring persons to task for abrogating social and moral norms and etiquette.

Proverb:

U ksan rympei rem dorbar

Translation:

One who talks big near the hearth, while being silent in the council of elders.

This implies that one has to be as good as his boast. It is common to hear people airing their views presumptuously in the privacy of their own houses, especially, in front of a surrounding to which he is able to dominate, for example, children, junior relatives, lackeys or admirers but once in the company of their superiors or even peers, the vaunt becomes empty, as he is unable to even open his mouth. The sheer wisdom, eloquence or astuteness of the council of elders, overwhelms the braggart into silence. In this proverb, superficiality, hollowness and short-sightedness, is ridiculed. An equivalent of this in the Nongtalang dialect is *Chutang Pohkyndur* or debate inside the corridor.

Proverb:

Thang ktung ruh ym pat nang, u lah sdang wad khyrrow.

Translation:

He cannot even roast dry fish, yet he has started looking for a sweetheart.

The youngster is overly anxious to find a partner in life and get tied in wedlock. However, he is cautioned against his rashness and is appropriately put to a test. He is given some cured fish to roast over an open fire. As expected, he over-roasts the fish so that it burns and he is immediately termed as inexperienced. The process of roasting fish calls for skill and training, which does not immediately come to those who are still young. It is also a pre-warning to the youngster about the travails of a married life, which an unprepared boy would find most unpleasant. The roasting of a fish is a

symbolic projection of the test of experience, and once a young man qualifies by successfully prosecuting it, he is deemed fit for the nuptials.

Proverb:

Wat leh biej pyrthei sian mynsiem.

Translation:

Ignorant outside cunning inside.

An equivalent in English is *simple in face and dangerous in heart*. A person who pretends and acts as if he knows nothing of the world and seems to be very innocent, but in reality he is very cunning and cruel. This proverb also leads to the evolution of the new proverb commonly used nowadays '*biej samla shalak kurim*' or ignorant of boyfriend/girlfriend but expert in spouse searching.

While this scholar was traveling by City Bus from Īewduh to Nongthymmai, two college going girls were sitting at the back seat. They were talking loudly that the scholar can not help but listen to their conversation. They were talking about another friend who was not with them and it seems that, that friend had eloped with someone. From their conversation it is understood that their friend was very innocent and a shy person, it seems that they never knew that she had a boyfriend. So this news of her elopement came as a shock, and one of them expressed '*kato te ei, ka dei ka biej samla*

shalak kurim’ meaning that she is really an ‘ignorances in matters of boyfriends but on spouse smart’.

Being late or dallying is a source of irritation to people. Women who have the habit of dallying are reprimanded with a proverb.

Proverb:

Wat long tiew lalyngi pep shad

Translation:

Do not be like the *lalyngi* flower who missed the dance

This has a reference to a folktale where Lalyngi, a variety of orchid, was invited to a great dance of the beasts and men after the *Diengiei* tree was felled, restoring light to the world. Ka Lalyngi was so obsessed with beautifying herself that she completely lost track of the time. When she reached the dance arena, she saw that the place was empty, the dance having concluded. This term can be considered to be synonymous with the English Late Kate, in usage only, the context, being entirely different.

One proverb which is directed against those having delusions of grandeur or having false pride is:

U ba jngi dien jat masi.

Translation:

He who swims in the imprints of a cow's step.

The significance is that a man having delusions of grandeur feel as if he is swimming in a great lake when he is actually wading in the water which fills up the imprints of a cow's step. While the whole world is having a laugh at the man's expense, he is blissfully unaware of that, lost in his own world of self - aggrandisement.

A closely related proverb is:

Wat kiew dieng sohmynken

Translation :

Do not climb the chilli plant.

This proverb addresses a common issue, and more or less, mean the same thing. A little elaboration is necessary here. The chilli plant is small, averaging three feet in height and the idea of a man climbing it, strikes us as ridiculous, since it is not possible.

However, the covert meaning is directed to those having false pride. It is a wallop on self-importance.

A rash person is cautioned with the adage:

Wat bam ja khloid.

Translation:

Do not eat hot rice

A person before acting has to reflect and weigh the pros and cons of his actions - he has to anticipate the consequences. The rash man would act without contemplating about the implications of his actions. He is only interested in get a thing done or getting his way. The two opposing forces of rashness and sobriety are linked in a binary process, inherent in the question of end result, or consequence. This is very close to “look before you leap” in the European context. The Khasi folk uses an immediately available item to underscore the validity of the proverb - rice, an item of food which is common. A person, who is rash enough to act thoughtlessly, is likely to attract grave consequences as a result. Just as a man who eats hot rice hurriedly ends up with a scalded mouth, so does a rash person find himself in an unpleasant situation.

Philandering and sexual prosmiscuity also attract social censure. A philanderer is castigated with the adage:

Proverb:

Wat long phiang phiang bam sih.

Translation:

Do not act like the *phiang phiang* bird.

Phiang phiang is a type of bird which feeds on filth and decomposed matter.

Interestingly, this proverb is exclusively applied to men.

All societies have their share of wastrels and pleasure-seekers. Such people are severely castigated, and among the Khasis, the proverb used to chastise them, is this:

Proverb:

Wat long puit Tangkuli kynjih mawsiang

Translation:

Do not be like the rock - leaping locust

Thus, a pleasure-seeker is termed as *U Puit Tangkuli Kynjih Mawsiang*, or the rock - leaping locust. This type of person does nothing but attend feasts, musical and pleasure meetings without giving a thought to his means of livelihood.

A woman of loose character is termed *Ka Kha Ujai* or the egg-spattering fish, a variety of fish which is always sold at cheap rates in the market.

Extreme sensitivity of character, which makes one tend to give in to breaking down easily and crying, is reflected in the comparison made of such a person to the *lang-iam baid*, a type of plant which folds up immediately, upon contact with a foreign object. The plant/grass gives the impression of effecting an emotional breakdown in the act of folding up, and closing upon itself.

Proverb:

La khie lung ka dieng dyngkhong.

Translation:

Greening of the stump.

This proverb is a direct reference to an old person usually female who goes out of her way to look and act young. This adage is applied with a sense of derision and it occurs several times in literary works where we find a character or characters behaving accordingly. It may be through dress, behaviour or action. A mode of behaviour which is common is when the person in question seeks and sometime is rewarded with the company of a man. An equivalent of this proverb in the Nongtalang dialect is *Derew a diar* or youthful for the second time.

A widow or a divorcee is referred to by a highly metaphorical adage.

Ka Kha ĩap Saw.

Translation:

A half-dried fish.

This reference needs a detailed elaboration. This preparation of fish is very common. It is severed, exactly from the middle and hung to dry in the sun. However, the fish cannot be preserved for a long time as it might get spoilt. The very act of splitting or severing the fish from the middle suggests the act of coitus or sexual penetration. Often is the caution to bachelors to stay away from the *kha ĩap saw*, who are thought to be adroit in attracting and ensnaring males. This variety of dried fish is, truly, a delicacy, requiring time to prepare.

A widower is, likewise, referred to by an adage of Piscean association.

The adage:

U kha thli tyrkhong

Translation:

Dried eel.

It does not require a lot of imagination to see that the eel is a distinct phallic symbol. Further, the dried eel never putrifies or spoils, even after it has been kept for a long time. It is, undoubtedly, very tasty and served at meals as a delicacy. The overt

insinuation is that a widower is regarded as matured and seasoned, and therefore, is endowed with a skill, matching virility, possessed by the experienced in sexual matters.

Tragic lovers, whose parents are hostile and indifferent to their children's love partners of choice are found all over the world, the most celebrated, perhaps, being Romeo and Juliet. Among the Khasis, such lovers are referred to by an adage.

The adage :

Ka Sohlyngem, U Sim Rynniaw

Translation:

The wild green pigeon, the long - tailed drongo.

The *Sohlyngem* is a large green pigeon dwelling in the darkest parts of the jungles and *U Sim rynniaw* is the drongo, with a long, drooping tail. According to a tale, the wild green pigeon was in love with the drongo, but the parents of both the lovers were opposed to it. Finally, due to parental pressure, they had to break up and separate, the wild green pigeon flying away to the darkest parts of the jungles, while the drongo forlornly cries for his lover. The wild green pigeon is seldom seen where the jungle is sparse. Only her cries are heard from the darker parts of the jungles.

A woman separated from her spouse, and who expects him to return to her, deluding herself all the while, is addressed to with an adage.

The adage:

Pha lah long kum Ka Pashandi dem lor khah

Translation:

You are like the water cane-dwelling turtle.

This adage owes its origin to a folktale, which goes like this:

Once there was a young she-turtle whose name was Panshandi. She was very lazy. She spent all her time swimming in a pool without giving a thought to work. At night, the moon used to come down and bathe in the pool. He met the turtle and they got married. He made her rich and dressed her up in fineries. He was fond of her but did not like her indolent ways. He repeatedly told her to mend her ways and asked her to busy herself doing some productive work. However, his advice was ignored. Tired of her laziness, he gathered up all the wealth, clothes and fineries, he had heaped on her, and departed for the skies, leaving her behind. Panshandi, realising that the moon was serious about his intention to leave her, pleaded with him, to no avail. Finally, she found herself all alone, and was left with no other alternative, but to lay among the water reeds, and furtively, peer upwards whenever the moon passes across the skies. As a folklore scholar this tale is especially striking because it can be studied as a version of the star-husband tale cycle.

A wise and upright man who tries to avoid mixing with the common and the uncouth is called: *u tiew knup Mawiang* or the lady slipper orchid. This orchid is found in isolation, and in the clear spaces of a tree or branch.

Great and venerable people are referred to by the adage *Lur Mangakara* or bright and luminous stars, while handsome men are referred to by the adage *Nai Khatsaw Synnia* or moon of fourteen nights, meaning a full moon. *Tiew Pathai Khubor* or a good scented flower also has a reference of a good and respectable person.

To a Khasi honour and good character is very important and it is considered that once it is lost, life ceases to have any value.

Proverb:

Wei la duh ka burom, la duh ka jingim

Translation:

Once honour is lost, life is lost.

Some people are born with the gift of the gab, articulating sweetly, without meaning a word they say. They are able to sway opinions by their persuasiveness and characteristic volubility. Such people are censured with a proverb.

Proverb:

Wat leit long khlein la thang, jwat la bam.

Translation:

Do not be like the meat which oozes fat when roasted, but tough when chewed.

The metaphorical construction of this proverb is excellent. In fact, in the original version, meat is nowhere mentioned, but the implication is strong. Words mouthed by such persons convey the impression of being highly palatable, but has no substance as the person does not mean a thing he says. Here, the words are depicted as meat which is tough to chew and is unpalatable. This proverb is widely applied to politicians and men of public affairs, and is used freely and most advantageously. A similar proverb in the War Jaintia dialect is *Cheke tiat ran jong trai* translated as the prawn that moves backwards.

A person who tries to justify his wrong doings is reprimanded with a proverb:

Proverb:

Ka miaw ka ju mlien ban tap la ka eit

Translation:

The cat will always bury its excrement.

This caution, in the form of a proverb, draws example from the habit of the cat to bury its own excrement. This proverb is striking because it brings into focus the wayward behaviour of the person, which is symbolised by the excrement, with all its unpleasant odours. Having committed the mistake, such a person tries to cover it up by justifying his/her action (s).

Proverb:

Wat bam hati kit kulai

Translation:

Do not eat like an elephant and work like a horse.

This adage is used as a caution against living beyond one's means.

To complain about one's lot is a common human characteristic. People who are given to this tendency are also censured with a proverb.

Proverb:

Ka ud kum ka tlai nili khat synrum

Translation:

The trash - carrying palm leaves are forever complaining about its lot.

Broomsticks are made of palm leaves. Though regarded as inconsequential, broomsticks are one of the most useful household items. They are generally placed in a corner of the house, and often hidden from sight. They are brought out in the open only when the house needs to be swept. In contrast to the very important task it is being used to perform, it is neglected, and relegated to an insignificant position. Clearly, certain individuals, whose contribution to a family is regarded as negligible, have no other way of expressing their resentment over the slight, but to complain endlessly.

The above proverb is akin to the adage used to describe a person who endures pain and illtreatment quietly. Such a person is called a *diengshaindoh*, which means a block of wood, upon which meat is minced.

The equivalent of this in the Nongtalang dialect which goes by the adage *U Musiang Nohkrah* or a rock where weeds are thrown when they are cleared from the betel nut groves. Such a person who earns this sobriquet endures all the pain and blame even if all these were not his fault.

An interesting proverb is used to describe a man who feels proud because of the false interest females' show in him.

Proverb:

Wat sngew kum u diengbyllan

Translation:

Do not feel like a *byllan* stick.

U Diengbyllan or a *byllan* is a rounded length of wood tucked under huge stones to facilitate their movement from place to place. These stones are brought over huge distances to be erected as monoliths. Appreciating the natural sentiment of the Khasis for megalithic culture, one can divine the meaning of this verbal usage. Megaliths are erected to commemorate great events, and are used to mark funerary and sacerdotal ceremonies. The very stones are revered. Therefore, it is concluded, that the *diengbyllan* takes pride in being able to contribute, in such events by helping to transport the stones, little realising, that it is only being exploited, and that after it has outlived its usefulness, it is no longer needed, and is thrown away. In other parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, this same aphorism is used to describe a scapegoat. In this case also, the comparison is obvious, but far less creative.

This scholar would like to point out that the tree and wood metaphors are widely used in the construction of proverbs. However, positive qualities are denoted by tree as a living entity while negative qualities are often depicted through the used of the wood metaphor, wood as obtained from the tree and understood as lifeless and only good for use a commodity. To prove this, let us consider the term used to describe a determined man. Such a person is referred to as *U Diengsning* or the oak tree. Here, the adage assumes a religious connotation, as the *diengsning* is central to some aspects of Khasi

religious ceremonies and is used as the central support for the *ling Sad* or the ceremonial house. This scholar is aware that the *Diengsning* used as the support of the ceremonial house is obtained from a living tree and would like to point out that even as a support it is considered to be living.

Attempts to reach the unattainable also come in for criticism in a maxim:

Wat long kyndang kwah

Translation:

Do not be a *kyndang kwah*

U Kyndang kwah is the name given to a person who desires and pines for the impossible. The maxim owes its origin to a practice of the Khasis, especially in the rural areas, to purchase meat using a length of reed to string the pieces of meat with. This kind of transaction was resorted to long ago due to the non-existence of the accepted and standardised metrology. As a girl, I saw it being used in the, then, remote village of Rangthylliang (in Pynursla), in the precipitous *War* country, in South East Khasi hills. The transaction is based on the factor of how much of the meat can be accommodated in a reedstring. One can, then, imagine this kind of transaction taking place, resting, as it were, on a very loosely-defined kind of metrology. It can be further imagined that some precedents of conflicting measurement might have taken place, involving a buyer who

might have wanted more than the standard dole, which abrogated the accepted and followed practice. Hence, the evolution of the adage.

One who is fond of interrupting in conversations he knows nothing about is cautioned with a proverb:

Proverb:

U thylliej kum ka blang jliah sla mluh.

Translation:

The long tongue of the salt-licking goat

The goat, with its long tongue, grazing indiscriminately, certainly evokes the picture of a person meddling with his unwanted commentaries.

An inquisitive person is reprimanded with an adage.

The adage:

Kum ka sim lai dieng

Translation:

A bird of three trees she is.

Sim-lai-dieng, literally means, a bird of three trees. This is a reference to persons who go about the village gossiping and rumour-mongering. The comparison to a bird, hopping from one tree to another tree, chirping away does, actually, convey the

picture of an individual, who is never at home, and is always busy elsewhere keeping the rumour mills churning without stop.

Every society has its share of those unpleasant characters who are involved in stirring up trouble and inciting people with the object of causing animosity. The Khasis call such a person U *Kohsiang pynshad thma* or, the war-causing old man fox. *Pynshad* is not a happy translation of causing for the simple reason that the word, literally, means to cause a dance. Perhaps, the association of dance is used in the adage to bring out the effect the machination of old man fox to cause animosity, and the tremendous pleasure he derives out of it. This proverb is based on the tale of how the fox brought about the enmity between the tiger and the wild boar. The outline of the tale is this: the fox is a trickster figure known to the Khasis as Old Man Fox. One day he went to the tiger and drops hints that the boar was speaking ill about the tiger, but that he (old man fox), being too much of a gentleman would not repeat the very words as they were too unpleasant. Angered, the tiger throttled the fox and made him confess everything to which old man fox did in the foulest tongue, saying that all those insults came from the boar. Taking this to be true, the tiger roared and asked old man fox to fix a day for a fight to the finish with the boar. Gleefully, old man fox went to the boar, and again, after the usual pleasantries, sighed heavily and told the boar that the tiger had been calling the boar a coward in front of everyone, and that if he dared, should face him on an appointed day. The boar was furious and the day was set. Watched by old man fox, the tiger and the boar fought savagely until the boar managed to kill the tiger. Thereupon, old man fox

started insulting the tiger, calling him a braggart and proceeded to fawn and pet the boar whom now, he respectfully calls uncle. When the boar had departed, old man fox feasted on the tiger, mocking him all the while.

A person who annoys people by lingering on and on at someone's house is castigated with a very colourful proverb:

Proverb:

Wat leit long lang sahkut um.

Translation:

Do not be a goat left behind on a river bank.

There is no greater annoyance than the person who overstays his welcome. There are many such people who ignore certain social etiquette, without giving a thought to people's occasional need for privacy. Such people are likened to the goat which has strayed away from the flock, in his foraging for food. During sudden downpours of rain, the river gets swollen, and while the flock has crossed over, guided by the goatherd, this particular goat is left behind, on the other side of the bank, being unable to cross it now, because of high waters.

Proverb:

U muid U shu ang um

Translation:

The water buffalo with mouth wide open

A person who always depends on others for help and never tries to do or achieve anything by himself or herself is referred to by this adage. This is due to the common belief that the water buffalo never takes water even if it is thirsty.

This researcher conducted field work in the Muktapur village of Jaintia hills district during September 2005. The idea was to get additional data from villages surrounding Nongtalang. The former place i.e. Muktapur has areas which are virtual enclaves having mixed populations of Khasis and Bangladeshis. While the larger section of the Khasis settled there maintain that they are Indians, yet there is a section that are flexible in their attitude in respect of their nationality. They do not choose to make their positions clear as to whether they are Bangladeshis or Indians. This is because some of them enjoy financial benefits from both the countries. This section would exploit maximum benefits from both governments and this would earn them the proverbial censure: *Tuta Ba A Kheloi* or the two container/bowl pecking parrot.

This is a descriptive way of explaining away the conduct of someone, in the case, a group who, while maintaining a divided loyalty to two authorities, utilize benefits derived from both to the maximum. The figure of the parrot used here is a deliberate design purported to convey the idea that the parrot will mouth with routine obedience whatever the keeper and feeder wants it to. This has a relation to the European turn of

phrase “to parrot” which means to repeat the words or imitate the actions of another without thought or understanding. The parrot, as a pet is usually tied to a wooden or bamboo frame to which *two maloi* or containers, one containing food and the other water, are attached. The image of the parrot alternatively dipping its beak into the containers could have inspired the proverb.

Proverb:

Peit ioh me long 'si samkhumut.

Translation:

Be careful lest you become an ox with a nose ring.

This adage is aimed as a warning to a man who always runs after rich girls with the hope of marrying into her family, obviously to have an easy life. The warning is that he should not show too much of eagerness lest he becomes a henpecked husband.

Proverb:

U sohjew um ju thiang.

Translation:

Lemon will never become sweet.

We can infer, from the above, that it is impossible to make lemon sweet, or to expect it to be sweet. The covert implication is that the unredeemable remains

unredeemable, despite attempts made or hopes nourished to effect some change in the person concerned. It is very close to the European “a leopard will never change his spots”.

Drunkenness and alcoholism is a universal social evil and is widely prevalent among the Khasis. It has wrecked the lives of many. Like everywhere, the drunk is severely castigated in the Khasi society also. The general admonition against drunkenness is a proverb very much current in the villages, as well as the city.

Proverb:

Wat long lwa pei

Translation:

Do not be a punctured pot.

The metaphorical significance is obvious. No matter how much water you pour into a pot with a hole in it, it never fills up.

A ready-witted man with a gift for sharp repartees is likened to *U Peh Sylli* or a bamboo spike. The *sylli* is a variety of bamboo found in the southern slopes of the Khasi Hills. In all probability, the reference to this type of bamboo, as a comparison to quick-tongued persons, is reflective of the fact that people hailing from these areas are

regarded as resourceful in the way they translate their ideas and feelings in the spoken form.

A speaker or singer who is able to mesmerise people by his forceful speech and sweet voice is termed *U Jalyeit*, referring to a small green bird, dwelling near streams and rivulets, and gifted with a shrill, melodious voice.

The last born in the family is called *khun khlieng kpoh* or, the womb- rinsing-child. This implies that, with the birth of this child, the mother's womb is finally washed and rinsed, a suggestion that she would be unable to bear children again.

A rumour-monger and one who invites himself or herself to people's houses, with the intention of gossiping about people's affairs, is termed *balia siang sdieh* or the frying ladle. The symbolism can be understood when we consider the degree of activity involved and the noise generated, in the process of frying a food item in sizzling oil. The ladle is seen as the catalyst of such activity and noise. An extension of the image is also seen, in that, the person finds the subjects and topics under discussion, thoroughly savoury to her inquisitive nature. This termed is usually applied to women.

Parasitic children, who, despite having secured means of livelihood for themselves, and yet, who depend on their parent's support, are severely castigated with a proverb:

Wat long khun jynrein, mih na ka doh, dait ia ka doh

Translation:

Do not be vermins, coming out of the flesh, and eating it.

An unruly child who threatens to assault his parents is cautioned with a proverb.

Wat long khun kbeit shapuloit

Translation:

Do not be like the sparrow hawk cuckoo of the tit.

The reference to the birds in this proverb is interesting. The tit is a small bird which hatches the eggs of the sparrow hawk cuckoo. It also feeds the young hawks. While doing this, the tit just hovers over the nest to drop the food into their open beaks, because it fears the young hawks. This is because young hawks often show signs of aggression, reacting naturally to their predatory instincts. The analogy provided by the proverb is drawn from a natural setting, and it is seen to be very apt.

Lazy children who finish up their parents resources are called *Ki khun tham* or crab children. The comparison is drawn from the practice of young crabs which cling on to the mother crab's body, and eat it, until only the shell remains. Then only they venture out.

A boy who has dissipated his youth early in his life is likened to *U siej liar ngot*, which means a broken or stunted young bamboo. This needs no elaboration, but the imagery to convey the allusion is poetic.

A subtype of the proverb genre which this scholar has identified are those which are loosely called weather proverbs relating to general climatic and weather conditions, especially those having a direct bearing on the agricultural practice of the people. There are proverbs which are a direct spin off of the climatic conditions and significantly, they relate to one singular natural phenomenon – rain. The Khasi Hills boast of two places, Cherrapunji and Mawsynram which hold the record for being the wettest place on earth due to the highest incidence of annual rainfall. The Khasi word for rain is *slap* which is obviously anomatopoeia and there are scores of suffixes to the word *slap* or rain that describes the different kinds of rain, ranging from rain content to rain impact and so on.

Let us consider the first one:

Ther Ther lapbah lapsan

Ban dup pait ka dieng ka maw

Ban shong shit ka shmong ka thaw

Ban dup bha u kba u khaw

I collected this four line verse from a group of children of Pynursla and strictly speaking, they understood this as a song with a well-defined tune. I have analysed this

verse and I see that it is a well-constructed proverb with metaphorical statements interwoven into straight statements.

Translation:

Strike great rain, strike big rain
Let the stone break, let the tree cleave,
Let the village rejoice and exult
Let paddy, let rice thrive.

To give adjectives such as great and big to rain comes only natural to natives of Meghalaya who experience rain which is connotative of force strong enough to “break” stones and “cleave” trees. The verse informs us that the village is expectant of the burst of monsoon so that their agricultural calendar can fruitfully begin and thus ensure for them a bountiful year. Let us go back to the verse. *Slap* or rain in Khasi is masculine and so is stone and tree. These words are preceded by *U* the masculine determiner. However, in the verse ‘maw’ and ‘dieng’ or stone and tree are understood as female qualified by the feminine determiner ‘ka’. Rain is supposed to ‘break’ and ‘cleave’ the stone and tree, actions that requires *u tyrnem* and *u sdie* or the hammer and axe, two very masculine implements. In fact, these two implements are pseudonyms of the penis. The fact that what the actions that are naturally and usually attributed to them are applied to rain indicates the sexual intent expected of rain that is to impregnate so that the paddy becomes big which naturally would produce enthusiasm in the village as would an auspicious event such as a wedding or child birth.

While this scholar collected this verse from children of Pynursla village, the scholar must add that this verse is not unknown to her because when she was a young girl also, she had heard snatches of it. After collecting and verifying the lyrical content, she conducted a phone survey calling ten individuals of different age groups to get them to reproduce the verse on phone. Some of them, while pleading having forgotten some of the lyrics, volunteered to sing into the phone and all, this scholar repeats all, mouthed “ka maw” or stone (feminine) and “ka dieng” or tree (feminine) totally deviating from “u maw” or stone (masculine) and “u dieng” or tree (masculine) as they would have done in ordinary conversation.

That the verse is highly metaphorical and is made up of, at least, a couple of proverbs is without doubt, as it functions thus, in its application to situations. For instance, this scholar have heard people asking “is it raining outside?” and when the answer has been “ka ther!” or “it strikes!” to which another query would follow, “How?” and the reply would come, “Enough to break the stone, cleave the tree!”.

During the rainy season, it is sometimes possible to observe heavy shower of rain falling on a bright sunny day. This phenomenon is called *slap praw* and considered to be inauspicious which involves death through accident or murder. While some may write this off as superstition but occurrence is used as an example of the uncanny shows the proverb quality it has. For example the epithet as sinister as u (s)*lap praw*, with its simile last, is used to describe a person or situation of unnatural disposition. Interestingly, I have come across a *slap praw* like situation having a causation origin of involving the

marriage of old man fox and mother-in-law quail. This is a spin off of a popular trickster tale, the outline of which goes thus – *Slap Khyndai Miet Khyndai Sngi* literally Rain of Nine Nights and Nine Days is the torrential kind experienced during the month of June which incidentally goes by the name *Jylliew* or the deep month. This indicates that during this period of the year water bodies attain great depth. This differentiated from the *Slap Hynñiew Sngi Hynñiew Miet* literally Rain of Seven Nights and Seven Days by a comparison.

The observant cannot fail to notice the Khasi penchant for the odd numbers, nine and seven being at the centre of the Khasi myth of origin.

Another strange appellation of rain is *slap boi ksi* or the rain that breeds lice. This kind of rain is the very fine drizzle. Children especially young girls are cautioned to stay out of this shower. I have heard an urban wit refer to this kind as *slap sexy* which is purported to arouse amorous desire and in this it bears resemblance to a couple of western country songs this scholar has heard such as *Listen to the pourin' rain* and *I love a rainy night* by Jose Feliciano and Eddie Rabbit respectively.

A person who is inclined to raise his voice with the intention of producing favourable action but actually does not elicit suitable response is asked not to behave like *U pyrthat rkhiang*. *Pyrthat Rkhiang* literally means Dry Thunder that is thunder that does not bring rain.

Carrying the discussion on inclement weather let us turn our attention to some other aspects. The Khasis call April *U Īaiong* or the black month. This becomes clear when one has seen the annual stormy conditions unleashed during this period unfailingly. This is attributed to *U Kyllang* a deity in the form of a towering single rock the size of a small mountain. The Kyllang rock is situated in the West Khasi Hills and, till today, rituals are performed to appease the deity. The belief is that *U Kyllang* goes to visit his wife, the *Umngot* river, once a year and always in April and in his haste to meet her, he wreaks destruction on whoever lays on his path. Therefore, every year, there will be reports of villages and houses decimated by cyclonic winds. This year, 2007, the victims are the village of Ler Khla, Laban Saro, Nongthliew and a few other villages in West Khasi Hills District.

April or Īaiong is called the black month in Khasi Hills where marriages are forbidden, the buying or laying of house foundation is studiously avoided. However, in the War-Jaiñtia areas of Meghalaya where this scholar comes from, these taboos are not observed during April. One of the causes would be because the people of those areas have their own name for April which is *Pnui Ria* and there is no association of *U Kyllang* the deity with the month at all. But what they believe is that during the month of July or *Pnui Hynthlai* marriages or any religious ceremonies should not be performed as it is the month in which the animals mate. It is also believed that the bite of a dog or snake during this month is very dangerous if immediate precaution is not taken.

A person who is quick to anger is likened to U Kyllang. By extension, someone who is always in haste is cautioned not to be like the *Langthari*. Langthari is possibly a derivative of Kyllang and Langthari specifically refers to stormy winds.

A person with a pleasant personality is referred to as *Er batemon batesi* which means a breeze.

A person who has been through rough times in his or her life is called *dieng khyrwait lyer* or the storm twisted tree signifying obviously the trials and tribulations he or she has had to contend with.

Lunar phenomena also provide good examples for proverbs. A handsome man is called '*Nai Khatsaw Synñia* or Moon of Fourteen Nights referring to the full moon. It is on such days that the cultivator religiously avoids planting and sowing.

When an individual is sorrow stricken his fate is described as *ba ngen u bnai* or the moon has entered referring to the last stage of sky illumination before the moon disappears. The phrase the moon has entered is very interesting and much reminiscent of the discourse of solar mythologists.

Meghalaya is the Abode of Clouds and clouds have been perceived in various ways. The tourism industry has in the past, used clouds to market the states tourism potential through one advertisement saying "Meghalaya where the clouds come home".

Indeed, I have come across tourists especially from other parts of the country who travel to Meghalaya and Cherrapunji specifically to observe clouds.

Khasis generally call cloud *lyoh* but use different names for different kinds of clouds. *U Lyput* is the very dark cloud that presages rain while *lyoh iong* is rain-filled clouds. I have been informed that in the Bhoi areas of Khasi Hills black cloud is called *Kynjang* and this is also used to describe sinister looking individuals.

On certain sunny days we obtain a sky filled with small tufts of clouds scattered all over which in climatology is a phenomenon called cirrocumulus. When this happens, people say the cat is ploughing the sky. This has a reflection in a lullaby which goes:

Ab Jon Ab Jon thung saru ka miaw

Han thung ka ileh, Han thung ka ileh

Noh lut sha khyndaw

Translation:

The cat is sowing Job's tears

To what end, I say to what end?

They all fall to the ground.

An analysis of this song at this point is needed. The song is addressed to a child who is asked to look at the sky and an explanation is given. The singer, an older

matronly woman obviously brings in an element of logic destroying the fantasy she at first introduces by pointing to the futility of the action since maize seeds will fall back to the earth. This is the inverted world of folklore inhabited by a ploughing cat and sky as an arable tract. There is a subtle suggestion that moisture is needed for a successful sowing because cloud has to condense to rain and that Job's tears can grow only in soil.

An interesting extension of the rain proverbs has to do with flash floods which are caused by torrential rains. Flash floods called *Umsaw* (literally red water) occur suddenly and are extremely dangerous. Their destructive powers are especially heightened by the mountainous terrain of the Khasi Hills. *Umsaw* or flash floods are used to describe the sudden accumulation of wealth by the individuals. Such persons attract derision with a proverb – *Khie spah kum ka umsaw* or wealth is raised like a flash flood. The verb raised is significant because it marks the rise in level just as the level of a river or stream.

While in the area this scholar came across another proverb used as a chant by a group of children who directed this uttered censure at a girl who was one of them:

Īong pali, ĩong ngar

Ha ka ĩong, ha ka runar

Translation:

Black face, blacky black

Once black, twice naughty.

It was a fact that the girl, the object of censure was rather dark-complexioned but as to her naughtiness, this scholar cannot say for certain. What the scholar found interesting was the use of phrasal adjective “black face, blacky black”. Such descriptions are very common in Khasi the words blacky black being denoted by the onomatopoeia *ngar*. The onomatopoeia *ngar* qualifies the degree or shade of black and its application is possible only when facial complexion is conceived. This is different from the other black onomatopoeia descriptions such as *iong ngaiñ* or *iong ngit* whose application will be tenable only to nightfall and weather conditions respectively.

The proverbial censure has, perhaps its origin in another chant also popular among children. When a crow is sighted children, even in urban areas, chant:

Ka tyngab ba beiñ ia u Blei

Ka shah tap d'u khiew ranei.

Translation:

O mocking crow, you deceive God

You are put inside a soot-black pot.

This chant is a direct spin off of an incident in a Khasi myth. It must be mentioned that the crow was originally a white bird but after this incident its feathers all turn black till this day. The suggestion of the change in colour from white to black is of

course, a symbolic action which depicts the corruption which takes over the bird and this fits a stereotype found in folk imagination everywhere. This stereotype is also diffused into community psychology traces of which are found in literatures all over the world.

Black is mainly associated with evil and the belief has created its own repertoire of usages such as black magic, black arts, black mail and the historical infamous black hole tragedy of Calcutta where hundreds of people died as a result of being shut in a small confined place. There are however, attempts to redeem the black pejorative metaphor and these exercises have been largely political in America as a result of post Abolitionist reconciliation efforts. The phrase “black is beautiful” was coined to resist this stereotype. Coming back to the incident of the crow it must be pointed out that the crow is put in the pot not for the purpose that is usually associated with that particular vessel, that means, there was no intention of cooking the crow and it appears that the punishment meted out to the crow was deemed sufficient to mark it as a creature that had violated divine decree and it was also part of the punishment that this mark of transgression depicted by the colour black be borne by the bird to posterity. The fact that when even children learnt to associate the crow with lying shows the depth of level that this psychological construct has in the community. Strangely there is also a saying of, most probably American usage, in the English language which is “eating crow” which implies admitting being wrong. Among the Khasis it is generally held that crow meat is unpalatable and despite the Khasi fondness for meat especially bird meat the eating of crow meat is almost unknown.

Khasi society is matrilineal, with clans tracing their descent from the *Iawbei Tynrai* or grandmother of the root (i.e. the root of the tree, of the clan), and the descendants are called *Kur* or clan. The Khasi religion, as well as the society, is a family and clan-oriented one. Not having any formal or institutional structure, it does not expand beyond the confines of close familial observance. The kinship structure is marked by a clear distinction that is made between the clan of the mother and the father which obviously is another one. One is said related by blood when one is under the clan of the same name. Therefore, in order to express this closeness of blood related by which signifies belonging to the same clan the adhere phrase

Ka snam te ka snam

Ka ksuit te ka ksuit.

Translation:

Blood will be blood

Pus will be pus.

The reference is obviously to point out the purity of connection by blood as opposed to the purported impurity of connection by pus, a bodily fluid associated with disease and ailment. This usage is not unknown to this scholar although the Jirang area where field work was conducted gave, her the opportunity to hear it being used in

relation and response to an actual occurrence in the village where issues of family loyalty were raised.

Another example of this kind which is a straight forward statement shorn of any metaphorical adornment or import is *Ka Lalot ka ialam sha ka Lanot* which is translated as greed leads to grief. What makes this usage quotable is obviously the rhyme scheme of the two determinants of the statement *Lalot* and *Lanot* in the Khasi language.

In the second phase of field work this scholar covered the villages of Laitlyngkot, Lyngkyrdem and Pynursla. In these places also the scholar has tried to study the context of proverbs use and of their function with reference to users. Therefore capturing almost a real life situation for documentation of data is central to the idea of contextual study. Market places and village plazas are very useful arenas for the conduct of such investigation and many are the days and evenings when this scholar collected some proverbs from such situations also.

Proverb:

Bah Sohphan mano bit thit shano

Translation:

One eats jackfruit while birdlime sticks to another.

The implication of this adage is that while one commits a mistake, the blame falls on another person. During field work at Pynursla market, the scholar was sitting with two ladies who were selling betel leaves. They were discussing about the non-

payment of their money by a woman from Shillong. One was blaming the other for the trust both the vendors placed on the unknown person. When their altercation became more heated another woman came and enquired as to the cause of all that row. At that time one of the two quarreling women said to the newcomer “You are also to be blamed, because you talked with that *nongsor* (person from Shillong) and therefore we thought you knew her and gave her the betel leaves without getting the full payment”. To this the woman replied, “*Wa! Bam sohphan mano bit thit pat shano, ngam ithuh hynrei nga shu kren ia ka*”, implies that she did not know the Shillong woman but only spoke to her on some other matter which had nothing at all to do with the transaction which had taken place between the two betel leaf vendors and the woman from Shillong. She felt that she was not a part of that scene and it was not her business at all.

An interesting proverb that the scholar collected from Dawki market which is in the War-Jaintia dialect is *Khliā hoh airah* which is translated as top of the basket. This refers to the practice of traders to keep the best quality products on top of the basket in order to attract customers. This does not mean that the seller is trying to pass off the item of sale in the basket through deceit. The basket would always contain good quality products but it is topped with the best of the crop. The adage used is to suggest that the perceived item is an indication of the good quality of what lies below unseen. It is aimed at encouraging the would-be buyer to be assured that he or she would be given their money's worth. This is very effectively used to describe a person of character.

In folklore it can be observed find that animals vie with humans in securing positions of consequence through the device of assuming certain suitable characteristics. While history and literature are replete with examples of human beings using animal names directly or through denotations, in order to qualify his or her affinity to such an animal, folklore has made available a special space for the animal world to be appropriated by humans in order to establish a sense of family kinship with certain animal figures. Khasi folklore provides this connection by extended the application of human kinship terms or terms of endearment brought about by at purported family relationship.

The female bear is very often referred to as *Mei Ngiem Lalu Bam Khun* or the “child devouring Mother Bear” the devouring part being a trick played by a boy leading to that disaster. An interesting oppositional father figure is found in the squirrel who is termed “*Pa Risang Bylla Bah Khun*” which means “the child-back carrying father squirrel”. This requires amplification which necessitates the reproduction and explanation of a folk chant sung by children attributed to an exchange between a hen and a squirrel:

Ku Ku a sang

Ko pa Risang

Ale bylla bah khun,

Ko 'yar puh khun phan ai aiü?

Ngan ai sohriew bam tlang

Hangno uta u sohriew bam tlang?

La puh lut ka Tyngab

Hangno kata ka Tyngab?

La siat da u khnam.

Hangno u ta u khnam?

La thang hapoh ding.

Hangno kata ka ding?

La suit da ka um.

Hangno kata ka um?

Katei ... katei ... katei ... katei ...

Translation:

Ku ku a sang

O father squirrel

Come and carry my child (for hire)

O mother hen what will you give?

I'll give Job's Tears to save for the winter.

Where are those winter Job's Tears?

The crow had eaten them

Where is that crow?

Shot by an arrow.

Where is that arrow?

Burnt in the fire.

Where is that fire?

Doused by water.

Where is that water?

There ... there ... there ... there ...

Let us go to the action of the play song. The mother sits on the ground and places the baby on her feet with the baby facing toward the mother. The mother then moves her body, alternating between bending backwards against the floor and rising up to waist length and all the while, the baby is positioned on her feet with its back against the instep and the toes of the mother. This acts like a support for the baby. A rocking motion involving the feet of the mother which is alternated with her leaning back and straightening up is effected. The chant is sung in accompaniment to this motion and the combination of both, that is the movement and the play song produces mirth in the child especially in the last line of the song which is “there ... there ... there ... there ...” because as the mother mouths these words she looks up to the sky causing the baby to also follow suit and when this happens, the mother tickles the child’s throat. This causes even more mirth on the part of the baby.

Going to the details of the play song we see the hen addressing the squirrel as “Ku Ku a sang O father squirrel”. This is not at all strange since the Khasis use tekonomy, a system of naming by avoiding given names. Till date a father is seldom called by his given name but effectively called father of ... (using the name of the child).

This manner of speaking is widely prevalent and even the wife of the man uses this form of address. Some scholars have opined that the system of tekonomy was resorted to by certain communities due to specific reasons, and in the case of the Khasis it is “for fear of attracting the notice of evil spirits”⁴⁹.

This scholar ventures to say that this is due to the sacrosanct nature of the “*jerkhun*” or naming ceremony where an elaborate divination is conducted to obtain a suitable name which is agreeable to the divine forces. Combined with the regard the Khasis have for the spoken word, the frequent and sometimes callous and inauspicious use of the name would undermine its significance.

To come back to the chant, the hen says “come, I’ll hire you to carry my children”. The key word here is “hire” which indicates that the squirrel is not genetically the father of the off springs of the hen who asks him to help her. The hen is presented as a potential employer who offers wages of Job’s Tears as payment. When the squirrel asks the whereabouts of the Job’s Tears he is told that the same has been eaten by the crow. Once again we see that the crow is being shown in a poor light and this time we see it as a thief. To the question that he poses next, “where is the crow?”, the squirrel is told that the bird has been shut by an arrow. Here we see the intervention of man, and this can be emphatically stated because in Khasi tradition the bow and arrow are weapons, the use and skill of which is known only to human. To the next question which the squirrel poses he is informed that the arrow is burnt in the fire but the

⁴⁹ Gordon, P.R. *The Khasi*. Cosmo Publication, New Delhi, (Rep) 1975, p. 188.

song does not tell us who was responsible for this act or whether the crow was burnt along with the arrow. When the squirrel asks about the fire, he was told that it has been doused by water and further when the next logical question was put the hen's reply was vague because it is possible to be vague about water, water being an element that can exist every where and any where. The hen which is the potential employee then triggers a chain of questions which actually is an attempt to establish the remuneration he seeks. However, we can detect a hesitancy or tendency to avoid the issue on the part of the hen who, in response to the chain of questions, launches a chain of responses. At the end of the chant we see the issue unresolved and ended on metaphor of futility.

It is interesting to take note of the various facets of community life which exists in chronological order of the play song:

Family(arrow), food gathering(arrow), hunting... .(arrow), fire (element)(arrow), water (element)(arrow).

The discerning scholar can recognize the development of community life, community institutions and community responsibilities in the play song. The rudiments of jhum cultivation can also be detected. Another aspect is that the play song is a reflection of the hoarding nature of the squirrel through the mention of winter Job's Tears. The song is also a commentary on the agrarian practice of many parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills where till not very long ago people in the villages work for a good part

of the year in order to stock up food supplies during the winter months. Therefore, till today, when a villager, especially in the Western parts Khasi Hills is asked:

“How is the harvest?”

The usual reply would be: “sufficient enough to see through the winter months”. This is what this scholar has observed and recorded as data during the work in West Khasi Hills.

To come back to the proverb father squirrel hired to carry babies is used to men who do not have children of their own but are made to shoulder the responsibility of caring for the children of others. This term is also used to denote a surrogate father. It should be mentioned at this point that the concept of “*bylla bah khun*” or hired to carry child is very much in existence and this scholar has obtained this information from individuals who had actually been engaged in this job when they were in their teens. As a point of bringing in additional interest in this study, the scholar, through an opinion poll conducted among urban children between the ages of three to six, can say with confidence that most children consider the squirrel as a friendly animal which could assume the place of the Teddy Bear in the psyche of Khasi children.

Like anywhere, parents are concerned about their children performance in educational pursuits. They never fail to remind them about sound preparation before examinations. At Laitlyngkot village during field work while staying with a family, I

over heard the mother of the house, Mrs. Stia Nongkynrih, aged forty two, grumbling about her children lack of seriousness regarding studies by using a highly effective proverb:

“pynsngaid ia u sniang ha ka miet sngi Iew”

Translation:

Fattening the pig on the eve of market day.

Village markets are small and they are held once a week. Given the nature of village economy, a great major part of the week is spent in directing and consolidating efforts to be able to bear to the market the best produce which will fetch income. This proverb illustrated above is the complete negation of this principle as it implies that the person realizes only at the last moment to fatten the pig which intends to sell in the market. Attempts at fattening the animal will not produce the desired result in relation to the context this scholar encountered, the proverb is used to denigrate the practice, which it may be assumed was adopted by the woman’s children of cramming.

This proverb shares common traits with the English term “at the eleventh hour” which implies a realization that comes too late. Again, it must be said that this term is a spinoff of the legends of Faust.

Men in the Khasi family/society have a respectable position as the father in their wife's house and as uncles in their sister's house. The responsibilities are dual in nature and this trait is intrinsic to the matrilineal system followed by the Khasis. An adage which reflects this finds a place in *Ki Jingsneng Tymmen*: -

U Kpa u balah uba ïai

U Kñi uba tip ïa ka ïap ka im

Translation:

Father the provider

Maternal uncle the ceremony keeper.

Collection of *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* was done by Radhon Sing Berry to a large extent was done in an oral culture that was still intact among the Khasis of the indigenous faith. The next section of the proverbs in this chapter was collected by the scholar in the traditional form. One may find that many proverbs mentioned above found place in the written form also. This is because proverb use is dynamic and not static.

CHAPTER – IV

EVOLUTION, CURRENCY AND USAGE OF PROVERBS

In every community, proverbs evolve and develop all the time being engendered in the verbal exchanges situation. Though the origin of proverbs is obscure, we must suppose that at some point of time, some individual formulated an idea in words or drew a lesson from a scene but the result was only a sententious remark or an instructive exemplification of a truth until tradition accepted the statement and while accepting it, adapted it in an inimitable fashion. Both the invention and acceptance are essential to make a proverb, and both ordinarily escape our observation. It is difficult to trace the origin of proverbs by the fact that the same theme and even the same formulation of it may occur to more than one person. There is a dynamic transference of usage from context to context such as occupation, age, area and gender specific and sometimes old ones are replaced by new ones.

Proverbs normally come forth in response to a situation in which a person feels called upon to offer a culturally approximate device to another. Proverbs are not part of conscious teachings or learning but they play an important role in socialization and personality formation. Proverbs often suggest what kind of activities one must pursue and what they should not. Proverbs in relation with day-to-day life are abundant in the Khasi society. They are used as admonitions, commands, statements, corrective measures, criticism and metaphors according to the situation and demand.

While it is accepted that proverbs acquire textual status when they are perceived by the community as collective wisdom authored by elders whose identity are not known any more, proverbs must necessarily purport to reflect the collective and anonymous wisdom of the community. There has to be, at least, a suggestion of a degree of antiquity. However, antiquity by itself is not a determining factor in the acceptance of a proverb. New ideas and new items require the creation of new proverbs. It will be the endeavour of this scholar to demonstrate that, as the pervasiveness of folklore is accepted, one should not hesitate to see its ever changing dimensions.

The proverbs that will be dealt with in this chapter are those that have lost many of their traditional contexts and have developed new ones. By developing fresh contexts and contents, they circulate through contemporary times as aspects of folklore. They testify to the continuity of culture. They reflect modern society with a much more varied cultural and educational experience where verbal exchanges are not restricted to established literary and cultural background, and spring from a bewildering variety of media. They are characteristically lively and diverse. They are thoroughly topical and relevant and present an amazing range of variety.

As a comparative subject, folkloristics is not the property of a particular people but of all humanity. In a comparative study of anything human, the important driving issue is to study what is constant and we know that what is constant is human nature and the variability can be attributed to the human potential for creativity. The interface

of these two in a given set of time creates what is recognized as tradition which is the very material of folklore.

This chapter intends to deal with these evolved proverbs which are dramatic, amusing, anecdotal and thoroughly effective as devices of social control. In a book co-authored by Peter J. Claus and Frank J. Korom, these folklorists make a very significant comment on the matter:

“Only if we wrongly conceive of folklore as something incapable of change and adaptability can we imagine that it would disappear”¹.

Let us examine the proverbs:

The clan system among the Khasis is one of extreme importance and the bond of kinship is very strong. The clan takes precedence over all other considerations, and the relationship, especially in matters of life and death, is held almost sacred. However, there are instances of irresponsibility among some members of the clan, and those who take the clan's onus lightly, are denigrated with a proverb. This term evolved after the clans had multiplied and many sub-clans have spread to different areas and villages.

Proverb:

U kurja , kurdoh.

¹ Claus, Peter J. and Korom, Frank J. *Folkloristics and Indian Folklore*, p. 21.

Translation:

Related to the clan only by rice and meat.

This is an obvious reference to members of a clan who remember kinship, and especially, the clan kinship, only in times of feasting. This is a reflection of the closeness of the clan system among the Khasis. It is clear, here, that even if some members of a particular clan default by not mutually sharing the clan responsibility, he or she, cannot be ignored, and has to be involved in any clan event. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that, say, a wedding in an affluent family would involve no less than five thousand people, a third of which are clansmen.

The proverb:

Kur wah muna (Pnar dialect)

Translation:

Clan of the hanging bag.

This adage is the equivalent of the standard of *kurja kurdoh*. To elaborate on this, when distant relatives pay a visit, they always bring something in their bags and these bags after their contents emptied are hanged on a nail. When they leave they take back the bag with them. Another point is that when distant relatives pay a visit which may be on a happy or a sad occasion, they always have their bags with them implying that they come from distant places and that their stay in the house where the event takes place is imperative.

Mostly all the proverbs in *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* are traditional , but a section occurring in the collection are found to have evolved from a particular phenomenon. This scholar has detected that the section which is directly attributed to a very important movement in Khasi society called the Seng Khasi movement.

The Seng Khasi was founded on the 23rd November 1899 by the 16 (sixteen) Khasi youths at Mawkhar with the aim to know and come together and to bring development among the Khasi and always to remember God. Another point is to work among the Khasi for the development and prosperity both spiritually and physically and to keep and preserve the Khasi teaching and manners as taught by the forefathers. Rabon Sing was one of the founding members who had written the lines in *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* to encourage the Khasi to take to agriculture, and handicrafts and not only to work as labourers or servants but to stand on their own feet.

U Hipshon Roy Kharshiing says: “The Seng-Khasi has undertaken various activities of the nature outlined above for the all-round development and welfare of the people as well as to keep the tradition and culture alive. From the days of the British rulers up to these days the Khasis has seen many changes in all spheres of life. Many of the traditional norms and patterns have been affected by the waves of changes and the winds of different civilization have blown over these Hills and yet the Khasi people have been able to retain their traditional customs, manners, social norms and religion. It is the Seng Khasi, under whose auspices untiring efforts have been made by organizers and members to retain their cultural heritage and oppose indiscriminate westernization,

western permissiveness and to the dilution of Khasi religion, tradition, culture and national values from 1899. It has been a hard but rewarding march and struggle for the Seng Khasi. As long as the Khasis love themselves: their religion, tradition, culture and their beautiful Hills and affectionately respect other religions, cultures, traditions, customs and races, the Khasis will remain as a proud race in this corner of this great country with a rich and varied heritage”.²

Proverb:

To wat iai imsngi tang ha ka kitnong,

Ba ban pynbeit u star haduh dyngkhong

Wat im jingmut jyndei tang ka bylla,

Ba bieit anna-antu noh khamakha,

Wat sngewbha shong thap bam ha ing ki briew,

Ba jah jait noh de la i jong i rngiew;

Wat leit hap ha ka shong mraw shong shakri

loh pateng pakit kynnoh pohrati;

To sumar la ka jong ka rep ka ri,

To nangroi nang pa la spah ka jingshna,

Ban sei la ka jingmut bad ban ban man bha.

I/XXXVII.

² Kharshiing, Hipshon Roy. *Introduction: Khasi Heritage*. Seng Khasi, Shillong, 1979. p. i-ii.

Translation:

Measure not the span of day only carrying loads on your back
The head strap pressed heavy on your head like the stump
Do not think too much of labourers' toil,
Reduced to stupidity you will be
Do not relish the food others give,
Self respect and demeanour you will forfeit
Do not get used slaving in other's house
You cast your progeny in bad light
Tend to your land, your flock
Work, manufacture with hands and skills
Make your own wealth, increase it
The mind becomes fertile and life prospers.

To encourage the people to take to business the following proverb is used:

Proverb:

*To hikai ia la ka khaiï ka pateng,
Khun Khasi, khun War, khun Bhoi, khun Synteng
Lada 'm bun baiseng ruh na lade hi,
Tangba ïai minot kan roi suki
Ka jingminot la mynno mynno ruh,
Iala ka bam ka dih kam ju pynduh;*

I/XXXVIII.

Proverb:

Ban kiew ñng lieh ñng saw.

Translation:

To ascend into the white and red house.

This proverb is used when two contending parties prepare to go for litigation. The white and red house in question is a comparatively recent development which describes a modern day house. These houses, with red roofs and white walls, were built by the British in the first decade of the twentieth century. They were formally called Assam type houses and the structure consisted of tin roofs supported by wooden rafters. The walls were made of quick lime and sand reinforced with small species of bamboo called *kdait*. An informant told this scholar that these structures were developed in the aftermath of the great earthquake of 1897. This earthquake destroyed many parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills and many lives were lost. These structures were largely adopted by the Government for its construction purposes, as they were found suitable and in the event of an earthquake, comparatively safer. Therefore, these red tin roof houses with white walls came to be associated with Governmental authority, legislative, executive as well as legal.

It was also during the British rule that the Khasi traditional court system or *dorbar* system started to weaken and people became suspicious of traditional authority which to them did not have the legitimacy of enforcement. The reduction of power of authorities such as the *syiems* and the *dolois* or heads of traditional institutions, who

were replaced by the political agency of the British Raj, made the people to seek alternative judicial redress in Government courts. These courts were housed in these red roofed buildings with white walls.

A keen observer would notice the contrasting colours of red and white and would immediately apply it to visually describe the opposing contenders who would be pitted against each other through arguments inside the court house. This might have led to the creation of this proverb which artistically, and from the structural construction of the images, a very interesting coinage has come about. As an extension, this scholar has also come across a proverb *u mister i khynniuh jumai* which means the carpenter of the earth tremor. Obviously this is also a new coinage being created after the great earthquake of 1897. The very word *mister i* is derived from Hindi and this shows that non-Khasi labourers were engaged in the construction of Government buildings. These labourers were of the unskilled and semiskilled kinds who were not completely relied upon. Many Khasi men were also recruited in these enterprises and they were also lacking in carpentry and building skills. The proverb is applied with derision to such kind of unskilled labourers, and the earthquake becomes a metaphor which is mentioned as a constant reminder of imminent danger the consequence of which would befall people who rely on unskilled and semiskilled labourers.

Proverb:

Sting u khulom ia u mohkhiew.

Translation:

The pen is lighter than the spade.

U mohkhiew is the Khasi spade used for agricultural operations. The spade is triangular in shape and to those who are not used to wielding it, the implement can prove to be heavy. To the Khasis it is a glaring symbol of agriculture and at one point of time, it was the official symbol of a political party that had its strong hold among cultivators. In the last thirty years or so there has been a heavy decline in agricultural activities in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills due to urbanization. Massive migration from villages to Shillong city has been observed and agricultural lands are lying fallow. Another factor that has contributed to this is the spread of formal education. Now most villages have at least a primary school where parents struggle to send their children to. There is a conception among school going children in villages that to pursue agricultural labours is demeaning and unrewarding. They are influenced by information and news from towns and cities about how after receiving school and college education, there are innumerable employment opportunities in Government offices and elsewhere. These jobs are exciting, more paying and more importantly, physically less taxing. These jobs do not require one to work in the mud and soil, or to bear inclement weather. In fact, this scholar has heard snatches of lyrics from which the above proverb has come into circulation. This scholar has also come across a reverse type of the same during field work at Laitlyngkot. It was school time when this scholar visited one of the informant's house. His school going son about 13 years old was present at home. On enquiring

from his father about the boy's presence at home, his father replied "what can I do? My son thinks that *the spade is lighter than the pen*. This is a complete reverse of the former as in this the subject shows an inclination for the very things that were abhorrent in the first.

Proverb:

La shong jhieh la ieng kynduh

Translation:

When one sits one gets wet, when one stands the head strikes the ceiling.

This is used to describe a predicament faced when an individual is presented with two options, both of them being difficult. It is very much similar to the English between the devil and the deep blue sea. This usage was first used by the celebrated Khasi writer U Soso Tham who borrowed the idea from the *Aesop's Fables* which the writer translated in the year 1936.

Proverb:

U ksew bna lat.

Translation:

The festival knowing dog.

This proverb is used to describe a person who always seems to possess information about festivities and unerringly use to be present in them. *Lat* can be

described as a village festival which is community based and usually held on an annual basis. Much feasting and merrymaking used to take place in such events. In modern day use this proverb is applied with some modifications, the word *Lat* being replaced by *Lad*. *Lad* in Khasi means a busy thoroughfare which is understood only in the context of a comparatively bigger area of settlement such as a town or a city. This goes to show that the concept of a thoroughfare with its association of heavy traffic, human and vehicular, is obviously a creation of the modern day especially with the development and growth of small towns. *Lad* while meaning thoroughfare also carries with it a slightly pejorative association because it represents a public space which in conventional Khasi thinking should be conceived as opposed to the private. The Khasi society is conceived as being close knit where the private and the public are kept as far away as possible from each other. Conventionally a person who has the time to linger on the streets is considered to be a wastrel and a laggard with no concern for himself or his family. In addition to this thinking, it was only when urbanization started in the early decades of the twentieth century that roads were developed in Shillong. Like elsewhere, the roads became a space for the formation and display of human traits. People started congregating on streets and this led to the display of communication between people in public. This tendency of parading human characteristics in public arenas is frowned upon by more traditional members of the community and the word *Lad* became associated with the irreverent. Till today a loafer is called *khynnah ieng lad* or the *lad* haunting youth, this last because it is perceived to be a juvenile pastime. Thus it

can be appreciated how the evolution of the proverb has taken place due to the interplay of historical and socio-cultural dynamics.

Proverb:

U ksew kyndit suloi.

Translation:

‘The dog that wakes up from slumber at the sound of a gun’.

One of the informant’s daughters at Lyngkyrdem finished her graduation in 2001 but she was not in a hurry to secure a job. She was very choosy and did not want to serve in the rural areas where she got appointment. Her neighbour, a retired army personnel on observing this lackadaisical attitude of this young woman who, when even she was eventually offered a job, remarked : “now you are not in a hurry but when you cross 25 years old you will be like the dog that wakes up from slumber at the sound of a gun’. This is an interesting proverb which has its history in the mid 1970s. During this period, the Shillong Municipality, because of the menace created by rabid dogs made it mandatory for dogs to be injected with anti rabies shots. After this has been done, the Municipal gives out medals that were required to be attached to the dog’s collar. Dogs that do not show these medals, which were called tickets at that time, were shot by a rifle carrying employee of the Municipality. It is needless to say that many a stray dogs fell at the hands of this individual who was named Ram Bahadur Lohar. This scholar still remembers this person who had on blue uniform prowling the streets with a gun and bandoliers criss-crossing his shoulders. The implication of this usage is very obvious as

a very common scene observed then was an unwary dog would suddenly be startled by the sound of the gun and would try to run away only to fall down dead. The young woman in question would soon attain the age of 25 years by which time she would become ineligible for Government employment. It would be futile to set about trying to get jobs then. *U ksew khlem tiket* or the dog without ticket has a reference to stray dogs in the context of the above explained proverb. The two verbal usages are connected, the second, *U ksew khlem tiket* referring to a person whose main occupation is to loiter here and there without any purpose.

The proverb *Ka Phok tkut lot poh* (in Nongtalang dialect) or a kite with a broken thread which refers to a lazy woman who appears to have no work while she roams around from one house to another. Whereas for the male the adage in the same dialect *tesham ksia beh mesew* or a dog that runs after the cows.

Proverb:

Kynih ka 'iar kynthei u shynrang u kha pylleng.

Translation:

The hen crows while the rooster lays an egg.

This proverb is applied to a situation when gender roles are reversed. The spirit of the proverb goes against the reversal of natural law and therefore it is used as a caustic commentary. It is an extension of the traditional proverb which goes *haba kynih ka 'iar kynthei la jot ka pyrthei* which is translated as when the hen starts crowing, the

world is heading for disaster. The crowing of the rooster is a very significantly fixed symbol which connotes activities associated exclusively with males. Of these, participation in governance is a primary example. Women are debarred from participating in the highly traditional system of governance such as *Ka Dorbar Hima*, *Ka Dorbar Raid* and *Ka Dorbar Shmong*. These are different councils governing the corporate life of the Khasis. In fact there is a belief that only those with moustache are allowed to participate in the meeting of these councils. Nowadays this belief and practice is regarded as sexist and in the urban scenario, circumstances have changed so much that today one can see the participation of women in these councils also. However, the bias still remain as can be seen from the above proverb.

Proverb:

Ke tin khlem ba (dialect)

Translation:

A tin without food.

This proverb is used while referring to a female who used to speak good of and praised herself too much where as actually she does not have any qualities worth to be praised. The equivalent of this in English is “empty vessels make more sound”. The use of the word tin implies a container which is usually made of tin and this goes to show that it is an adage of recent origin which appears to be an evolution of the more traditional *U Phiang uba thylli u sawa jam*. The translation of this is the empty bronze pot sounds loudest. The *Phiang* which is the traditional big bronze pot is very much part

of the Khasi kitchen used for water storage in some houses till today. While it is tempting to see how similar this adage is to the English 'empty vessels make more sound', the fact remains that folklore is concerned largely with versions and this scholar would not like to discount the fact that this adage is firmly rooted in Khasi culture also. The differences in the metaphor used show a degree of originality which through use and over a period of time 'bronze' becomes 'tin'. This reveals the change of metallic vessels for home use.

Independent tendencies, especially, among men, are often the subject of social attention. Such a person is described by an adage.

The adage:

Khla khatar shmong OR Khla khatar lama

Translation:

The tiger of twelve villages OR The tiger with twelve flags

A tiger is very much admired for his prowess, grace and beauty. A man possessing these qualities is likewise admired. Traditionally, a person who makes a mark is referred to as a tiger, and obviously, this reference hints at a deeply-seated admiration for a person who is able to have more than one wife. The adage suggests that a man, whether single or married, is free and is always eligible. The twelve flags refer to his standards or colours which he changes every time he enters a new village with the object of winning a hand in marriage.

A dark-skinned man who marries a fair-skinned woman is chided with a proverb.

Proverb:

Kum u kha hingki u kie ha pleit.

Translation:

Like the *hingki* fish he floats in an enamel plate.

The *hingki* is a black type of fish, and a dark-skinned man is likened to it. His wife, a fair woman is likened to an enamel plate which, usually, comes in white shades. The man's dark complexion is countered by the fairness of the woman, just as a black fish would be countered in the whiteness of an enamel plate. A psychoanalytical explanation is also possible. The black fish here would represent a phallic symbol and the plate a vulvic one. Erich Fromm has catalogued Freudian symbols ranging from sticks, trees, umbrellas, knives, pencils and hammers as depicting the male genital, and caves, bottles, jewel boxes, doors, gardens, cases, and flowers, as depicting the female genital.⁶⁸ Perhaps, this usage is imbued with similar meanings. This proverb, as can be understood, is of a recent origin, since the enamel plate was introduced by the British only scores of years ago in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. A similar one, also on the lighter side, refers to the couple as *Sohphlang te bad u nei* or Grass fruit and Sesame. *Sohphlang* is a variety of edible root which is white and sweet-tasting, and in order to

⁶⁸ Fromm, Erich. *The Forgotten Language, an Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales, and Myths* (New York, 1951).

have a palatable combination, it is taken with pounded sesame seeds, which is black in colour.

Proverb:

Ka khaiong bam shipai.

Translation:

The black fish that eats army personnel.

This adage evolved during the 2nd World War when Khasi Hills become the main route of armed personnel when they moved from the mainstream India to Burma (Myanmar). It was during those times that prostitution became part of the public domain in these hills. Many women provided sexual service to these armed personnel. They were called the *khaiong bam shipai*. 'Khaiong' refers to the rotten fish, which is symbolic of the profession.

The role of matchmakers, in any society, is interesting. Among the Khasis, the position and role of the matchmaker is unique. Matchmakers are referred to by a very colourful adage.

The adage:

Ka Men Suh Syntiew,

Translation:

The old woman embroiderer.

The term is used to describe a matchmaker, a mediator, or a go-between in love affairs. However, it must be strictly born in mind that this position is not officially recognised, as, say, that of the *ksiang*. The *ksiang* is an officially nominated liaison for arranging a marriage, and the appointment is made by the intending boy's family. The coming of this term into common use among the folk can be attributed to the following situation which I have traced and tried to reconstruct.

A very popular meeting place of the village folk is the house of *Ka Men Suh Syntiew*, the woman who embroiders the village girls' apparels with flowers and beautiful designs. The embroidery-expert sometimes invites men to her house where they will be able to meet the females of the village. Then, when interest is shown by any man in any other woman, the embroiderer goes about arranging, match-making and, generally, officiating as a liaison. In the course of her work, as she embroiders, she engages interested parties in discussion, supplying a detailed background of the man or woman concerned. In fact, the very act of embroidering flowers is significant as it relates to weaving the texture of a love affair with the same care and dexterity. It may mean that a chance visit by some men at the house will lead to an inquiry as to whose clothes she is presently embroidering, and when is it expected to be ready. Possessing the information that the embroiderer has supplied, a man may make his appearance again, when the owner comes to collect it. This encounter, by the skillful machinations of the embroiderer, may develop into a relationship which (it has been recorded till thirty years ago) often leads to marriage. The role of the *men suh syntiew* here, whether

deliberate or circumstantial, is regarded significant. Despite the unflattering association of the term applied, it is done so with mild and not unhealthy sarcasm.

There are adages which owe their origin to historical incidents.

The adage:

U Thlia Mawiang

Translation:

The fastidious Mawiang.

This is a reference to the people of the Hima Mawiang , or the traditional state of Mawiang.

The Mawiang chiefdom was the outcome of a general unification of several confederacies under the Lyngdoh Nonglait clan. At one point of time, the men of Mawiang, a place situated very close to the Bangladesh, raided the plains and occupied Nolikhata. The Lyngdoh Nonglait extorted tribute from the subjects of Sylhet and its surrounding areas. However, they later found it difficult to conduct both sacerdotal and administrative affairs. The imperative need of a Syiem or Chief was felt but no one was willing to take it up. Traditions also speak emphatically about the fastidiousness of the Mawiang people, and their failure to arrive at a common consensus in the choice of a chief. This and several factors led the leaders of the *Hima* to offer the position of the chief to aliens. In this case, the position of chief was given, in succession, to four

Muslims, three brothers and a sister, who were captured during the raids and brought to the hills. The three aliens and their sister adopted Khasi customs and the men were made chiefs in the chronological order of 1. Byrtap Khan, 2. Puna Khan, 3. Jibhor Khan. A tradition maintains that U Byrtap Khan was also called Khan Bahadur which in the opinion of Dr. H. Barih suggested that 'he was a commissioned collector of the Mawiang chiefs in their dominion in the plains'.⁶⁷ Interestingly, the Mawiang chiefs or Syiem is often called *U Syiem U Mraw* or the Chief, the Slave. This has a direct reference to the tradition which relates about the capturing of four alien slaves in a raid by the Mawiang warriors, on the adjoining plain areas. These captives were later made chiefs. From this historical base evolved the expression U Thlia Mawiang and is applied to a fastidious or choosy person, who is likened to the people of Mawiang, who were unresolved about choosing their own chief, not being satisfied with the numerous offers made, till at last, some aliens had to be brought to satisfy the various factions.

Proverb:

U Lang sait pap

Translation:

The goat that washes the sins.

The Khasis used animals, notably the goat to offer as sacrifice during religious ceremonies. While this scholar has not come across any direct mention of the goat as the

⁶⁷ Barih, H. *The History and Culture of the Khasis*. 1997.

goat that washes sins in ritual language use, the above proverb can be regarded as being closer to the Christian perspective about Christ who is called the Lamb of God in pre-communion part of the Mass. It has come into circulation this scholar feels, more because of this factor. An analogy can also be drawn with the etymology of the English word scapegoat.

Proverb:

Īap dih khor

Translation:

To die of alcohol

During the field trip to Laitlyngkot in May 2006, in Mr. Kyrshan's house there were only his wife and his two children. On enquiring about his whereabouts, his wife informed that he had gone to his nephew's funeral at Umthli. This scholar was surprised as Mr. Kyrshan's nephew was very young. On inquiry as to the cause of his death the woman replied using the adage *U Joh te u ĩap dih khor, kum u niang jawa u dih naduh dangstep haduh da miet* (Joh died due to alcohol, like a swine he drank from morning till night).

We know that from oral literature folklore materials pass to written literature. But this law is not absolute. From the written domain, folklore materials re-emerge as part of the oral discourse either transformed or disguised but always reinforced.

In Khasi folklore the entente between oral and written literature especially in the study of proverbs is very much significant. It has resulted in the creation of a dynamic exchange in whole texts, genres, metaphors, coinages and cants. In some cases, the intersections are so dense that lines of delineations are difficult to distinguish. For example one of the greatest Khasi poet U Soso Tham had written a stanza in his poem which had been used and reused as proverbs in oral and written form. It runs thus:

Proverb:

Sa shisien pat kin win ki khlaw

Sa shisien pat kin khih ki maw.³

Translation:

Once more the forests will tremour

Once more the stones will clamour

Proverb:

Jingshai ngi wad sawdong pyrthei

Jingshai ka ri ngim tip ei ei.⁴

Translation:

We search for light around the world

Knowledge of our own land we know nothing at all.

³ Tham Soso, 1960, *Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep*, p. 37

⁴ *Ibid* p. 3

Proverb:

Baroh u briew bastad,
Mano ba lah ban len;
La khlem da plie ka lad,
Kumno un lait ban kren⁵

Translation:

All the men are wise
No one can deny it
But without giving a chance
How can he prove it (scholar's translation)

Another new proverb in the form of a joke evolved from the above original

proverb:

Proverb:

Baroh u briew bastad
Mano ba lah ban len
La khlem shi klat ka kyiad
Kumno un lait ban kren

Translation:

All the men are wise
No one can deny it

⁵ Tham, Soso. *U Diengbilat*. Ka Duitara Ksiar. Shillong, 1972 (Rep), p. 11.

But without a glass of liquor

How can he be able to speak (scholar's translation)

Proverb:

Ka lynti ka kylluid

Ka mon ka laitluid

La me kwah ban long brierw

Ne me kwah ban long ksuid⁶

Translation:

The path is wide

The will is free

Whether you wish to be a human

Or you wish to be a Satan (scholar's translation)

Proverb:

Im ka kyrteng sah ka nam⁷

Translation:

The name lives on and fame last.

Proverb:

Ingkhong shyllangmat⁸

⁶ *Ibid Kyntang ĩawai* p. 102.

⁷ *Ibid U Khur* p.13.

⁸ *Ibid* p. 86-87.

Translation:

He of the singe forehead

This aphorism is used to describe an ingrate and was introduced in literature by Soso Tham in his translation of *Breathes there the Man* by Sir Walter Scott. Tham uses the ancient Khasi practice of singeing the hair and forehead of an individual who is afterwards ostracized for having committed an act or acts of unpardonable nature. Thams' poetic craftsmanship renders the person much more despicable than Walter Scott's original especially when he talks about the ostracized individual's death ceremony which is performed not with religious solemnity but attended by vultures, crows and flies. Nothing is more horrifying and condemning to a Khasi than not to have a proper funeral ceremony because the belief is that this prevents the soul from reunited with its clan kindred.

The usage *Ingkhong Shyllangmat*, while fully conveying the meaning of an ingrate, has in the last fifty years or more, come to assume a more pointed political meaning. In the parlance of Khasi *realpolitik* it has come to mean a traitor and this connotation has gained acceptance especially in the media.

Proverb:

U Hati dang ha khlaw, ka bniat lah tyrwa die.

Translation:

You are making offers for ivory, while the elephant is still in the jungle.

This proverb is used to put a boastful man in his place. It is derived from the Aesop's fables translated by U Soso Tham.

This means that one must have the ivory in hand before making offers for its sale. It is only when one is absolutely sure that he will achieve something that he can openly talk about it. The two opposing forces are the boastful hunter and the ivory, and they are linked by the question of real achievement. The elephant, obviously, represents nature, with all its connotations of the untamed, the elusive and the fearful. The hunter, by being presumptuous, is made to look ridiculous if he does not get what he sets out for. In the deep structure of this proverb, some home truths as the one equivalent to the English "counting the chicken before they are hatched", or even another Khasi one about "fish is still in the stream, while he has already prepared the spices", are elucidated.

Proverb:

Ka Shanghawiah ki rang

Translation:

The snare to trap the male

This adage is used to describe a loose woman who uses her wiles to trap men. This statement is derived from the title of the play of the same name written by Peace Roy Pariat a popular dramatist of the 1940s.

B. Hedronelle Nonglait was a prolific composer of songs and poetry right from the 1920s onwards. It is not difficult to imagine that B. Hedro Nelle Nonglait, as a Christian, was influence by the poetic quality and didacticism of sayings in of the Bible. But more of this in the next chapter. As a Khasi song writer with an ear for music and the haunting refrain of the *Phawar*, it was tempting for him to attempt coining sayings which he organized according to their topically. Doubtless, he was influenced by the Biblical sayings but the coinages which here can be regarded as secular, are striking for their individuality. First published in U Nongkit Khubor in January of 1935 as *Ki Ktien Lyngkot Ban Pyrkhath* and *Ki Ktien Phawar Khleh*, the compilation contains the following topics:

WEALTH:

Proverb:

Ka long kaba jem ban lum tyngka

Hynrei kham jem pat ban pynlut ia ka

Translation:

It is easy to hoard money

But it is even easier to spend it

Proverb:

U thied bah ka jingieit dei ka tyngka

Bad kumjuh ruh u long ka thma

Translation:

The main artery of love is money

It is also the root vein of strife

Proverb:

Ka jingduk ka long ka nonglehbeiñ, lada phi tieng, em kong em bah

Hynrei ka nongsneng-nongkraw lada phi tur kum u Ramhah.

Translation:

Poverty persecutes if of it you fear

It counsels, if against it you dare

Proverb:

Ka jingriewspah kaba dang biang, Ìa phi kan kit kan bah,

Ka tang shu palat te kylliang, Ha phi pat kan phah bah.

Translation:

Sensible wealth will support you

More than this, it turns into a burden

Proverb:

Dei da ki jingpynlut barit

Ba u saipan u synjap kyndit.

Translation:

No matter how minutely you spend
The money belt will always slacken

FRIENDSHIP:

Proverb:

*U lok u dei uto uba iarap khlem bynnud,
Ym dei uto uba isynei narud.*

Translation:

A friend is he who helps selflessly
It is not he who offers only pity

Proverb:

*Ka jingialang lok ba shu kynsan
Tang khuk-khak ruh kan kynran.*

Translation:

A friendship that forms in haste
Is the kind that never stays

Proverb:

*Ha ka niam ne ka jingialang lok,
Kito kiba shirhem eh dei pynban ki ban thok.*

Translation:

In matters of religion or friendship
Pretended devotion is always false.

Proverb:

*Hapdeng artylli ki miaw, tang kawei ka 'tungtap;
La iasuk katno – katno, shisien te kin iaiap*

Translation:

Between two peaceful cats, one fermented fish
Though at peace now, soon they will fight to the finish.

DEATH:

Proverb:

*Man la ki jingkhang ki don shi kad ar kad,
Hynrei ka jingiäp ka don tang u shawkad*

Translation:

Every door has one or two sides
But death has only one threshold.

Proverb:

*Da kaba bam dawai, ia ka jingim ngin pynjrong,
Hynrei kumno ia u doctor ruh ka jingiap ka rong.*

Translation:

By taking medicine, we believe life we prolong
Yet even he who dispenses it, death claims.

Proverb:

*Ka jingim ka long kaba muja ia uba pyrkhath,
Bad kaba saja ia uba pyrkhath palat.*

Translation:

Life is pleasant for those who think,
Burdensome it is for those who think too much.

Proverb:

*Ka jingiap ka pynkut – pynwai baroh ki kam,
Ka jingiap ka pyndep, pynkhuid baroh ki ram.*

Translation:

Death concludes all activities
Death clears all debts.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Proverb:

*U briew u lah ban lait na ka shitom,
Hynrei um lah ban sait ia ka jahburom*

Translation:

A man may escape punishment
But cannot wash away dishonour

Proverb:

*Uba duk ba u wad jingbam u ud,
U riwspah namar ba um lah ban nguid.*

Translation:

The poor laments in his search for food,
The rich laments not able to swallow it.

Proverb:

*Haba ki lok ki la shim lut ia kaba ngi lah ban ai,
Kum ia ngi kita ki jiw kiar na jngai na jngai.*

Translation:

When friends have taken whatever we can offer
They avoid us even from afar.

Proverb:

Dei ynda la iap bun ki shipai

Ba ki hima ki ia shong suk jai.

Translation:

Only after soldiers in multitudes die

There is peace among kingdoms.

This scholar has also detected verbal usages having proverbial characteristics which display a dynamic transference of usage from context to context being influenced by factors of occupation, age, area and gender specific and sometimes old ones are replaced by new ones. This is especially true in sayings of non-formal construction for which the possibility of addition and mutation exists. To cite an example let us consider the following:

Proverb:

Da tba la ka lyngthohdoh

Translation:

Do touch the nape of your neck before you judge others.

is replaced by:

Proverb:

Wat bishar ia kiwei namar yn sa bishar ia phi

Translation:

Do not judge others lest you be judged

Proverb:

Īap dih kyiad

Translation:

To die of alcoholic excess

is replaced by:

Proverb:

Īap dih khor

Translation:

Coarse (drink) induced death

is again replaced by:

Proverb:

Īap shah dung bilor

Translation:

To die of bottle inflicted wound

is again replaced by:

Proverb:

Īap shah dung plastic

Translation:

To die of plastic inflicted wound

Proverb:

Pang dih kyiad

Translation:

Alcohol related ailment

is replaced by:

Proverb:

Pang sngewbha

Translation:

Pleasurable ailment.

What strikes as interesting to this scholar is the transference of meanings based on currency of use employing conventional gestures (such as touching the nape of ones neck) in the first instance of the proverb and the complete absence of this gesture in the application of the second instance of the proverb. Further, this essentially traditional saying has been replaced by the less complex and widely diffused model that the Bible provides. In the other proverb the employing of things which are commonly recognized for their utility value (such as bottle and plastic) has transferred the emphasis of the proverb making it more acceptable in modern day situation.

Folklore is dynamics and this is also the case with oral literature as a component of folklore. When oral or verbal literature are written and recorded it changes into written literature and as this is not static there are instances where written literature changes into oral literature that is, when elements of written literature are borrowed and use as oral or are transmitted orally. This is one of the creative quality that proverb has. It is transmitted orally, it may be recorded or written, but again some elements of proverbs which are introduced in written form are taken and used orally. So there is an inter change from oral to written and from written to oral.

CHAPTER – V

INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON THE GENERATION OF PROVERB TYPES:

The Khasis acknowledge that the founding father of their written language and literature was Thomas Jones, a Welshman who traveled some thirteen thousand ocean miles to establish in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Calvinistic Methodists' Mission, which would become the biggest overseas venture ever sustained by the Welsh people. He arrived at Cherrapunjee on 22nd June 1841 with his wife, Ann. A year later, Jones started the first school and he also brought out the first printed Khasi book, making use of the Roman script for the Khasi language. 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. In 1842 he opened three schools one each at Mawsmat, Mawmluh and Sohra and posted three Khasi young men named Larshai, Nising and Jom to carry out teaching. The schools at first attracted men who rallied round the missionary and observed him writing and heard him speaking Khasi. Jidor Singh, the chief of the traditional state 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 state. This attitude of Jidor Singh encouraged the progress of education in the Nongkhlaw state in later years. The works of Thomas Jones was continued by William Lewis who toiled till 1860 and by the time he left schools were established at Nongwar (1853), Jowai, Shala, Sohbar (1854), Tyrna, Khatsawphra (1857) and Lamin

(1859). Besides teaching at schools, the missionaries worked hard on book production. With the advent of Christianity, some of the genre of oral literature had been recorded in written forms, although this effort was sustained only with the intention of drawing upon folk metaphors to serve didactic purposes.

A prominent Khasi scholar R.S. Lyngdoh observed that “Khasi literature was born under the shadow of the church”.¹ The veracity of this statement can be deduced from the effusive and innumerable publications of Bible-based books which were written during the formative years of Khasi literature and the fact that Khasi Christian writers, not counting the missionaries who pioneered writing, far surpassed the number of non-Christian writers.

The spirit of the statement can also be appreciated when one recognizes the fact that the spread of Christianity among the Khasis not only brought conversion but it acted as a catalyst in the spreading of literacy and formal education.

It would be wrong, however, to say that primary education started with the coming of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Presbyterian Missionaries in 1842. This credit goes to four unnamed stalwarts, the four Bakhraw or elected leaders and Elders of the Shella confederacy in the southern extremity of Khasi Hills who resolved to open their own primary school, the Shella Primary School, at Pdia Bazar, Shella in 1823. This school made steady progress till it became an Middle English School in 1839 and by

¹ Lyngdoh R.S. *The Contribution of the Salesian to Khasi Literature*, Salesian Golden Jubilee, Don Bosco Press, Shillong, 1972, p. 84.

1845 it produced forty six students who were taught English, Sanskrit and Bengali after the pattern of schools in East Bengal.² This scholar is making a mention of these historical instances in order to demonstrate that by the time Christian missionaries had become firmly ensconced, a formal system of primary education, albeit in a miniscule manner, had already been in operation. This fact is interesting in two ways. One, the school produced a Khasi student, one Laithat who was employed by the British as *dubasia* or interpreter and it was this very scholar who assisted Thomas Jones in his translation works. Two, the school produced a number of other Khasi scholars, prominent among them, Jeebon Roy Mairom, who brought out *U Lurshai*, one of the first newspapers through his own printing press, Ri Khasi press, also the first of its kind in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills established in August, 1896, J.J.M. Nichols Roy who distinguished himself as a Parliamentarian and Prof. R.R. Thomas who retired as Principal of the prestigious Cotton College, Guwahati. Given the creative minds of many of the scholar products named and unnamed, it would be fair to say that their absorption of pedagogical information through the formal system and their being rooted in the cultural milieu they were born and brought up in would certainly be reflected in their contributions through forms of literary and cultural production. It is crucial to throw light on the strands of intersections between the oral and written traditions and practices that must have come into play under the circumstances. This scholar believes that this intersection has a significant bearing on the formation and perpetuation of the folk and written discourses which, it has been proved, exist side by side. It has been mentioned

² Dkhar, E. Weston, *Primary Education in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills*, Seven Hut Enterprise, Shillong, 1993, p. 41-42.

that apart from Khasi and English, Sanskrit and Bengali were taught and it is only to be expected that the learners would be influenced by the literature and texts of these languages. This would have provided space for cultural exchange which is of immense significance to the formation and evolution of folklore material.

It is accepted that the Bible is the most widely read book in the world and that it is the one single book that has had the most influence on mankind. In the Khasi context also the same is true. Since the early 1840s missionaries opened Bible Schools mainly to facilitate the reading of the Bible and since then till the second decade of the twentieth century, the Bible was part of the school syllabus.

It was an accepted reality that schools supported by Christian missions held regular religious education (RE) classes although in principles, the above classes did not figure in the prescribed timetables. Yet the classes were compulsory and these instructions were indiscriminately given to students of both Christian and non-Christian persuasions. The establishment of printing presses to disseminate religious information and discourses was an important factor which made especially the Bible easily available to the people. The Bible Society of India in Bangalore had facilitated the printing of John Roberts' *Ka Ktin U Blei* or Word of God and this publication has, in many cases, been made available free of cost. These factors coupled with the constant exposure to Biblical material in print and audio-visual formats had exerted a tremendous influence in the minds of the people, young and old.

The *Book of Proverbs* of the Bible was first translated by a group of scholars headed by the highly erudite Welsh missionary Dr. John Roberts and it was included in *Ka Testament Barim III* as a preparation for the first golden jubilee of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Foreign Mission to commemorate its fiftieth year of service in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In the group of scholars entrusted with this work were three Khasis named Rev. Khnong, Rev. Ksankin and Sympot Singh.³

After the attempt to establish a historical background it is necessary to examine the socio-cultural dynamics inherent in the title of the chapter which is influence of Christianity on the Generation of Proverb Types.

The Webster's New World Dictionary defines influence as the power of persons and things to affect others and the effect that such powers have in the process of moulding behaviour by imparting religious, philosophical social, political and economic values and even policies of persons or societies that are being directly or indirectly influenced. Influence also implies interaction between those who influence and those who are influenced; it implies that there exists a force, a value, a standard, a norm that result in a transformation and identity formation between persons and nations, between the teacher and the taught. There is a process of exchange because of influence.

Influence rules out force, coercion, tension, conflict and intimidation. It suggests respect, empathy, creativity and change. Ordinarily, the discourse of influence is linked

³ Lyngdoh, R.S. *Ka History Ka Thoh Ka Tar Book I*, Scorpio Printer, 1981, p. 51.

to learning and the formation of character. In the extreme, influence would connote conversion and total change-over to a new system of behaviour, values, beliefs and principles..... of the various types of influence, it is the general (influence) that is more prevalent and it is this kind that has diffused Christian literary and historical material into the oral genre of the Khasis. However, it must be remembered that in the oral-written continuum, there is a fluidity which makes the two positions difficult to be given a precise fixity.

Like all great works of literature the Bible is for all ages and as the chief dissemination document of Christianity has proved to be extremely successful in exerting influence over people's lives including their belief, values, philosophies and behaviour. The Biblical influence is actually the influence of Christianity because the sum total of a Christian's life finds perfection in the Bible. The poetic and proverbial qualities of the qualities of the Bible are not only to be found in the Book of Proverbs. The Bible is a work which is shot through and through with proverbial sayings, aphorisms, quotations and didactic one liners. In order to demonstrate this scholar shall reproduce a few in the original Khasi with transcription for accuracy of pronunciation and also to show how close they are to the Khasi mind. It is for these reasons that these sayings are used to express native Khasi situations and predicaments and their effectiveness is demonstrated by the fact that they are accepted by the people. At certain points of time it is even difficult to distinguish between the Biblical and the local and to the less informed the lines of distribution are blurred.

Students of folklore are often confronted with the oral and written expressions as two distinct categories. There may be differences in the process of creation and transmission of the oral and written texts, but there certainly exists a two way traffic between the two. Archer Taylor has postulated three kinds of relationship between the oral and written literature. These are:

- i) Folklore (oral literature) in many cultures is indistinguishable from literature.
- ii) Literature (written) contains elements borrowed from folklore.
- iii) Writers have initiated folklore.⁴

In folklore and literary genres the oral and written exist and interplay with each other and in many cases where both the traditions co-exist, it is very difficult to distinguish between the two. In the Indian context this characteristic has been succinctly explained by Blackburn and Ramanujan:

“The written form is only a part of the history of the texts, one phase in the cycle of transmission... Transmission includes, of course, re-composition, and many kinds of change... A tale, for instance, might originate orally, then be written down by a collector, the written version might then disseminate the tale to an oral teller, who in turn might give rise to new written or oral versions. A writing, until recently, meant

⁴ Dundes, Alan.(ed.) *The Study of Folklore*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1965, p. 34 - 42

‘writing down’ as a mnemonic and text preserving device, the written text does not interrupt or intercept, but actually furthers the oral tradition”.⁵

By and large, this observation can be applied with accuracy to the proverbs and sayings which are traced to Christian influenced texts such as Biblical and liturgical literature and which have passed into the oral discourse of the Khasis. This scholar shall try to list out those proverbs which have been directly derived from Biblical texts which have been accepted in everyday Khasi oral communication and whose penetration into the Khasi milieu is so complete that it is almost impossible to distinguish them from the traditional proverbs. The movement of these Biblical proverbs in the oral and written discourse of the Khasis is characterized by an ease that is observed only in vernacular verbal and textual usages.

The proverbs along with their English original are listed below:

Proverb:

Respect your father and mother (Kolosia 3:20).

Translation:

Burom ia u kpa bad ka kmie.

Transcription:

burom ya u kpa bat ka kme

⁵ Blackburn, Stuart and Ramanujan, A.K. (eds) *Another Harmony, New Essays on the Folklore of India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, p. 4-5.

Proverb:

Judge not others, that you be not judged (Matthew 7:1).

Translation:

Wat bishar ia kiwei naba yn ym bishar ia phi.

Transcription:

wat bifa:r ya kiwei naba en om bifa:r ya p^hi

Proverb:

No one can serve two masters (Matthew 6: 24).

Translation:

Ym don ba lah ban shakri arngut ki kynrad.

Transcription:

om don ba la? ban fakri arnut ki kinra:d

Proverb:

Ask and it will be given, seek and you shall find knock and it will be opened to you (Matthew 7: 7).

Translation:

Pan bad yn sa ai, wad bad phin sa shem, tied bad yn sa plie.

Transcription:

pan bat en sa ai, wa:t bat phin sa jem, ted ba:t en sa ple

Proverb:

[(Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravenous wolves (Matthew 7: 15)].

Wolf in sheep's clothing.

Translation:

Suri kup snieh langbrot.

Transcription:

suri kup sneʔ laŋbrɔt

Proverb:

Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matthew 10: 16).

Translation:

Sian kum ki bseiñ jemnud kum ki paro.

Transcription:

sian kum ki bseɲ jɛmnɔd kum ki paro

Proverb:

For each tree is known by its own fruit (Luke 6:44).

Translation:

Namar ia u dieng baroh yn ithuh na u soh jong u hi.

Transcription:

namar ya u deŋ barɔʔ ɔn itʰoʔ na u soʔ ʧɔŋ u hi

Proverb:

Love thy neighbour as thyself (Matthew 19:19).

Translation:

Ieid ia la u paramarjan kumba ialade.

Transcription:

eic ya la u paramarjan kumba yalade

Proverb:

Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. (Proverb 16:18).

Translation:

Ka jingsarong ka ïaid ha shwa ka jingjot.

Transcription:

ka jɪŋsarɔŋ ka yaɪd ha ʃwa ka ʃɪŋʒɔt

Proverb:

A soft answer turneth away wrath (Proverb 15:1).

Translation:

Ka jingphai ktien bajem ka beh noh ïa ka jingbitar.

Transcription:

ka ʃɪŋp^hai ktien baʒɛm ka bɛʔ nɔʔ ya ka ʃɪŋbitar

Proverb:

[He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes (Proverb 13:24)]

Spare the rod, spoil the child.

Translation:

Tyngkai ïa u dieng sympat, pynjot ïa u khynnah.

Transcription:

tɪŋkai ya u deŋ sɪmpat, pɪŋʒɔt ya u k^hɪnnaʔ

Proverb:

As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country (Proverb 25:25).

Translation:

Kum ka umpjah ia u ba sliang, ka long ka khubor ba bha na jngai.

Transcription:

kum ka um pja? ya u basliang ka lon ka k^hubor bab^ha naŋŋai

Proverb:

[As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly (Proverb 25:11)]

Do not swallow your vomit like a dog.

Translation:

Wat nguid la ka prie kumba nguid u ksew.

Transcription:

wat ŋoid la ka pre kumba ŋoid u kseu.

Proverb:

[To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven (Ecclesiastes 3:1)]

There is a time for everything.

Translation:

Ka don ka por ia kiei kiei baroh.

Transcription:

ka don ka por ya kiei kiei baro?

Proverb:

[As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry in his hands (Proverb 5:15)]

We have come naked, we will return naked.

Translation:

Ngi wan lyngkhuit, ngin leit ruh lyngkhuit.

Transcription:

ngi wan lɪŋkhuit, ŋin leit ru? lɪŋkhuit

Proverb:

Cast not ye pearl before swine (Matthew 7:6).

Translation:

Wat bret ia u mawlynnai ha khmat ki sniang.

Transcription:

wat bret ya u mawlɪnna:i ha k^hmat ki sniaŋ

Proverb:

[A wise man, which build his house upon a rock (Matthew 7:24)]

Build your house on the rock.

Translation:

Tei la ka ïng halor u mawsiang.

Transcription:

tei la ka yeŋ halɔr u mausiaŋ

Proverb:

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for the rich man to enter into the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:24).

Translation:

Kham suk ia ka ut ban rung lyngba thliw thyrnia ban ia u riewspah ban rung hima bneng.

Transcription:

k^hamsuk ya ka ut ban run ꠘꠗba t^hleu t^hIrnia ban ya u reuspa? ban run
hima bneng

Proverb:

The last shall be first and the first shall be last (Matthew 20:16).

Translation:

U ba khatduh un long nyngkong, u ba nyngkong un long khatduh.

Transcription:

u ba k^hatdo? un lon nIkon, u ba nIkon un lon k^hatdu?

Proverb:

Many he called, but few chosen (Matthew 20:16).

Translation:

Shibun la khot khyndiat la jied.

Transcription:

ʃibon la khɔt khIndiat la ʃed.

Proverb:

Render therefore unto Ceasar the things which are Ceasar's and unto God the things that are God's. (Matthew 22:21).

Translation:

Ai ha u Kaisar ka ba dei ka jong u Kaisar.

Transcription:

a:i ha u kaisa:r ka ba:dei ka ʃɔŋ u kaisa:r.

Proverb:

Wealth hastily gotten will dwindle, but he who gathers little by little will increase it (Proverb 13:11).

Translation:

Ka spah ka ba wan kum ka umsaw ka leit ruh kum ka umsaw.

Transcription:

ka spaʔ ka ba wan kum ka umsau ka leit ruʔ kum ka umsau

Proverb:

Do unto others as you wish others to do unto you.

Translation:

Leh ia kiwei kumba phi kwah ba kiwei kin leh ia phi.

Transcription:

leʔ ya kiwei kumba p^hi kwaʔ ba kiwei kin leʔ ya p^hi.

Proverb:

Better a poor and healthy person than a rich and ailing person (Sirak 30:23).

Translation:

Kham lah u riwduk u ba shait ba khlain ban ia u riwspah u ba tang ka pang.

Transcription:

k^hamla? u reuduk u ba jait ba khlain ban ya u reuspa? u ba tan ka pan

Proverb:

[For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap (Galatians 6:7)].

As you sow, so you shall reap.

Translation:

Kumba phi bet kumta phin ot.

Transcription:

kumba p^hi bet kumta p^hin ot

Proverb:

God gave and God had taken away (Job 1: 21.).

Translation:

U Blei uba ai, U Blei uba shim.

Transcription:

u blei uba ai, u blei uba shim.

The following are Biblical derivatives but are used as proverbs in Khasi.

Proverb:

Manna from heaven

Translation:

Ka mana na bneng.

Transcription:

ka mana na bneŋ.

Proverb:

As traitorous as Judas.

Translation:

Ba Shukor kum u Judas.

Transcription:

ba ʃukɔːr kum u ʃudas

Proverb:

Be not like a prodigal son.

Translation:

wat long khun sarong awria.

Transcription:

wat loŋ k^hon sarɔŋ a:uria.

Proverb:

To be nailed on the cross.

Translation:

Ban shah sahnarphna.

Transcription:

ban jaʔ saʔnarph^hna

Proverb:

To eat forbidden fruit.

Translation:

Ban bam sohadong.

Transcription:

ban ba:m saʔ adɔŋ.

Proverb:

The land of milk and honey.

Translation:

Ka ri jong ka dud bad ka ngap (kannan).

Transcription:

ka ri ʃɔŋ ka dut bad ka ŋa:p.

Folklore as an expressive form of cultural documentation phenomenon has, time and again, reflected socio-psychological dynamics inherent in religion persuasions. Religion is a powerful arena which provides space for discourse especially that of the contesting kind. There is a tendency to use its very ideals in order to create critical

positions and this same has been detected by this scholar in the practice and regard of contemporary Christianity among the Khasis by Christians themselves and non-Christians also.

To criticize unchristian behaviour detected in a Christian the following proverb is often used:

Proverb:

Christian in name Satan in deeds.

Translation:

Kristan ka nam soitan ka kam.

Transcription:

kristan ka na:m soitan ka ka:m.

An interesting usage which has come about with the growth of somewhat aggressive fund-raising drives of certain Christian denominations is:

Proverb:

We praise the Lord we grab the money.

Translation:

Īa u trai ngin ĩaroh, ĩa ka pisa ngin ĩatroh.

Transcription:

ya u tra:i ŋin yarɔʔ ya ka pisa ŋin ya trɔʔ.

Proverb:

Xerox Christian or duplicate Christian.

Translation:

Serok khristan.

Transcription:

serok kristan.

There are also proverbs which have undergone processes of recreation in the hands of creative writers. This phenomenon can be observed especially in the aftermath of movements which were generated by the literary outbursts of the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century. Among the creative writers of the time, whose transcreation work of biblical text and especially of the Book of proverbs of the Bible, the name of B. Hedronelle Nonglait deserves mention. B. Hedronelle Nonglait was a prolific composer of songs and poetry right from the 1920s onwards. His songs were recorded in Calcutta as early as 1946 by the HMV Company. As far as his literary work is concerned, he devoted his mastery of the English language to producing translation works of sections of the Bible and because of his being partial to poetry, he adopted a poetic form by taking the original biblical proverbs and creating a highly stylized diction of Khasi versions of the original proverbs making changes to suit the readership of the day. In addition, as a Khasi he was deeply influenced by the tradition of *Phawar* chanting which can be regarded as a central culture marker of the Khasis, and he employed the technique of *phawar* composition in re-writing the biblical

proverbs. This exercise produced a series of transcreated biblical proverbs which have to some extent, impacted Christian written literature. It is not difficult to imagine that this effort also affected spoken discourses of Khasi Christianity.

At this point of time it would be proper to briefly discuss the *Phawar* as a literary genre so as through some light on the literary exercises of B. Hedro Nelle Nonglait and assess its contribution to liturgical literature.

The Khasi from the ancient times have evolved and developed their own indigenous poetic creations called *Ki Phawar* which are often employed in story-telling. The *phawar* is used in festivals, community work and gatherings, hunting and fishing expeditions, games and archery. According to Desmond L. Kharmawphlang: “the freshness and power of the *phawar* are marked by this trait. This is an example of verbal virtuosity combining what Samuel Johnson called “strength of thought” and “happiness of language”.⁶ The *phawar* are couplets, following elaborate rhyme schemes and while the couplets are not always necessarily complementary to each other, they agree in articulating meaning. The composition is complex and they are recited and composed spontaneously.

This scholar is aware that the above description is too general to effectively convey the actual meaning and functioning of the *phawar*. However, to go beyond that would take up too much time and space. Therefore, the above explanation will serve as a

⁶ Kharmawphlang, D.L. *Poetry, Lore and Language: The Khasi Phawar Tradition*, in M.D. Muthukumaraswamy (ed) *Folklore as Discourse*, National Folklore Support Centre, 2006, p. 95.

working definition of the *phawar*. These works were first published in U Nongkit Khubor in January 1935.

Let us look at a few samples from the collection: in *Ka Thiar U Longshuwa* which features mixed proverbs and the Proverbs of Solomon. The rhyme scheme aa bb, aa bb of 64 lines and this work was published by U Nongkit Khubor in November 1935. some of the commonly used proverbs are:

Ko khun sngap ia ki jinghikai u Kpa jong me

*Wat lyndet ia ki hukum ka kmie jong me*⁷

Translation:

My son hear the instruction of thy father,
And forsake not the law of thy mother.

Proverb:

Kumba ki thung kumta ruh kin bam soh,

Bad kum la ki buit la bainong kin ia ioh

Translation:

Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way,
And be filled with their own devices.

⁷ Khasi Authors' Society. *Na Ka Thiar Ki Longshuwa: Ki Proberb U Solomon U Khun U David*. 1993, Ri Khasi Press, Umsohsun, Shillong, p. 92

Proverb:

Hynrei uba sheptieng ia nga ko bynriew,

Un shongsuk un shongsaiñ khlem tieng ia ka sniew.

Translation:

But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely,

And shall be quiet from fear of evil.

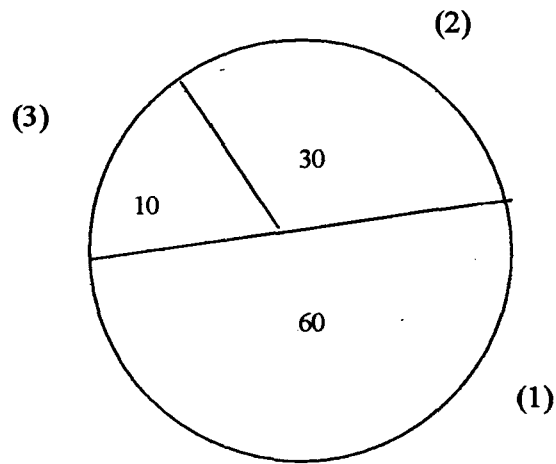
Simple Random Sampling was conducted between 11 – 15 September, 2006 in respect of School and College in Nongtalang village viz. Nongtalang Govt. Secondary School and Nongtalang College and a School and College in Shillong viz. Auxilium Convent, Nongthymmai and Morning Star College, Nongthymmai, Shillong in order to gauge the students' awareness about proverbs they are familiar with being used in their homes and environment and to which source they attribute these verbal usages.

Data elicited from the respondents' state that the sample proverbs provided were:

1. Heard used by elders and peers represented by 60%.
2. Heard while growing up represented by 30%.
3. Heard used in Church meetings represented by 10%.

The social unit of the chosen universe for conducting this sample was schools and colleges which are arenas of secular and religious contact.

The following diagram demonstrates this fact.



CHAPTER – VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

The proverb is a very important constituent of folk literature. There is a general inclination to consider the proverb as an oral entity and this study sufficiently devotes a sizeable portion of the thesis to demonstrating this. However, the written nature of the proverb cannot be ignored especially in the light of the changes that have taken place through the intervention of literacy and its subsequent impact. Some of these proverbs have found a place in different genres of creative writing and the study of these examples have paid rich dividends in terms of unearthing folklore data.

CHAPTER – I

The chapter dwells at length on the definition, concept and nature of folklore. In this chapter, survey of literature, objective of the study, data collection and methodology are included.

CHAPTER – II

The chapter is a brief excursion into the ethnography of the Khasis . Therefore, this chapter deals with a brief ethnographic description of the Khasi people, their culture, religion, language and their folklore.

CHAPTER – III

This chapter includes the general introduction of the proverb, its definition and classification of proverbs. The abiding concern of the research is analyzing the ethnography of speaking folklore which reveals the dynamics of patterns and functions of speaking within a specific cultural context. In the study of proverb as an ethnography of speaking folklore one cannot do without text and context; and this yield many questions as to who can use proverbs, on what occasion, in what places, with whom, what channel to use, the relationship between speaker and addressee and many other such related questions. In this chapter the scholar has tried to analyse and apply all the above.

First part of this chapter deals with *Ki Jingsneng Tymmen Part I and II* as a written sources. In the second part other proverbs such as those dealing with society, family, human relationship, weather etc. are included, studied and analyzed accordingly.

CHAPTER – IV

This chapter deals with evolution, currency and usage of proverbs. Invention and acceptance of ideas are an important source for the evolution of proverbs. In this chapter, proverbs that have lost many of their traditional context and have developed new ones are studied by developing fresh context and contents. These proverbs are found to have circulated through contemporary times as aspects of folklore and they

provide excellent examples testify to the continuity of culture. Some of these proverbs evolve due to the formulation of new ideas, some due to new happenings and others have been found to have originated in the written paradigm before becoming oral.

CHAPTER – V

This chapter deals with proverbs which have evolved due to the influence of Christianity, Christian teachings and behaviour. It is found that when one use some of the proverbs which originate from the Bible one is not aware of their originality but are taken to be traditional. It is here that one finds it difficult to differentiate between the oral and written the original and borrowed. This oral written continuum is exhibited here.

To conclude, proverbs are used strategic communication at the time of social interaction. In Khasi society, proverbs are used by the young and old alike. They are used as instruments of criticism, admonition and they play an educative role as moral and ethical code providers. Proverbs serve as corrective measures of interpersonal behaviour which have multiple meanings and which can be interpreted according to one's thought and feelings.

Lastly, it is found that as many items of folklore are changing, proverbs also change. The old ones are dying out giving way for new and modern one. They record the ebb and flow of the sea of tradition.

APPENDICES

FORMAT FOR PARTICULARS OF THE CANDIDATE

Name of Candidate : **SOLONY BAREH**

Degree : **Doctor of Philosophy**

Department : **Centre of Cultural and Creative Studies**

Title of Dissertation : **Khasi Proverbs: Analysing the
Ethnography of Speaking Folklore.**

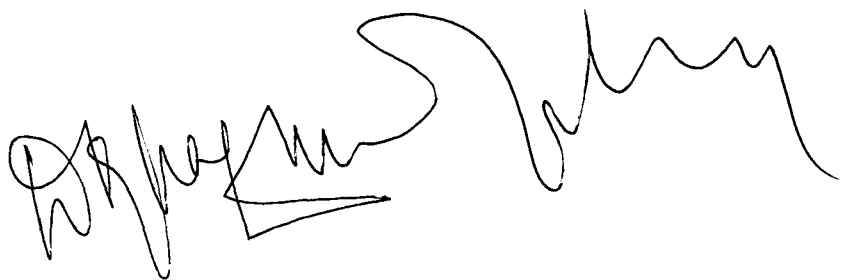
Date of Admission : 16.09.03.

Approval of Research Proposal:

1. B.P.G.S. 10.05.2004
2. School Board 20.05.2004

Registration No. & Date : **834 of 20.5.2004.**

Extension (If any) : **Nil.**



Head
Department of Centre for Cultural & Creative Studies.

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Interviews and interaction with informants.

Empirical study of the folklore of the Khasi people with an in-depth survey on the Proverbs used.

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Yule, George. *The Study of Language: An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995.

BIO – DATA

Name	...	Solony Bareh
Date of birth	...	28 th December 1968
Occupation	...	Lecturer, Nongtalang College, Nongtalang, Jaiñtia Hills, Meghalaya.
Educational qualification	...	B.Ed; MA.(Khasi),MA.(Linguistics),NEHU, Shillong; M.Phil(Folklore), Gauhati University, Guwahati.
Additional qualification	...	Passed Certificate Course in Textile Technology, Assam Textile Institute, Guwahati. Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship Awardee. Passed National Eligibility Test for Lectureship (NET).
Address	...	Khamary Cottage, Golden Estate, Lawjynriew, Nongthymmai, Shillong – 793 014.

Publication:

Amtyrngui River an academic paper in *Ka Mer Ka Sdad, Conference – Confluence*, published by National Museum of Man, Bhopal.

Other activities:

1. Participated in 'HOPE '95' organized by North East Zone Cultural Centre, Dimapur at Mokokchung in 1995.
2. Participated in the 2nd *International Conference of South Asian Languages* organized by Department of Anthropological Linguistics and Punjabi Language, Punjabi University, Patiala in January, 1999.
3. Participated in the *National Seminar on Folklore and Oral History* at Gauhati University, Guwahati in 2001.

4. Participated in the *Modular Training Workshops in Folklore Research* organized by Programme of Folklore Research and Archive, NEHU, Shillong held in 2001 and 2002 at NEHU.
5. Participated in the *National Seminar on Folklore cum 25th Conference of the Indian Folklore Congress* held on November 2002 at NEHU, Shillong.
6. *Founding Member and Chairperson* of the Indigenous Music School, Nongtalang run by War Jaiñtia Youth Welfare Organisation, HQ. Shillong, 2003 till date.
7. *Academic Counsellor*, Block Resource Centre, Amlarem under Sarva Siksha Abhiyan.
8. Is *Member* of Indian Folklore Congress.

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