

**HUMAN VALUES IN KHASI SHORT STORIES**

**(ABSTRACT)**

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### ABSTRACT

The written Khasi short story may be said to have originated between 1885 to 1896 when John Roberts introduced the short story element in the biblical stories published in his *Khasi Readers*. Needless to say the projected values are the Christian values. Coming to the present study, the selected stories provide not only delightful reading but project wide ranging themes on human values. It is this value preoccupation, which the present scholar found to be of immense literary significance. Therefore, the topic “Human Values in Khasi Short Stories” was chosen for study and research to establish the literary worth of the Khasi Short Stories.

The choice of the topic is also made on the basis that no serious research has been taken up in this area. Therefore, it is hoped that the study projects the parameters in value reflection and as such the potentialities and signposts for future literary endeavour. This will raise the status of the Khasi short stories along accepted standards.

During the preliminary consultation of Khasi texts and scholarly books, certain facts have been observed. These are – (i) the complex nature of human values involving consideration of types of values within its category, (ii) the significance of the Khasi traditional values, and (iii) the projection of more than one value, a fact emphasised by Thomas Gullason in contrary to the single effect criterion propounded by Edgar Allan Poe.

### **The Scope and Limitation of the Study**

The selected stories are confined to the period 1968 to 1990. Two reasons account for this selection. Firstly, the study of human values compared to the study of themes is not limited to a single theme but includes all projected values as part of the author's overall value awareness while narrating the story. Secondly, and more importantly, the period has the credit of a number of stories with significant value projections.

The study in chapter II starts the discussion on the place and meaning of human values in literature as highlighted by Walter Besant, Knickerborger and Andrew Michael Robert. In particular, Besant's emphasis on "the presentation of humanity from any point must stand to the increase of certain virtues-sympathy, pity" is found to meaningfully articulate the place and the meaning of human values in literary expressions. Karen Horney also asserts that being human is "to be associated with basic human qualities as these are values which men are expected to manifest in their lives". However, as per scholarly views, the concept human also implies human strengths, possibilities and weaknesses manifested in types, facets and nuances of human values. Therefore in understanding the nature of being human, three approaches are also considered. These are the Aristotelian view on man's rationality and social nature; the humanist's theory of individual potentialities directing attention to personal traits including wit and humour, man's sensibility and man's baser aspects; and the well-being theory projecting man's ability to survive and the value possibilities refreshing and enriching man's everyday life.

The facts projected by above views explained human values in the moral, ethical, spiritual, social, personal, the prudential, the humorous, the witty and human possibilities. In the light of these aspects, the two approaches theory of Ethics-wide and Ethics-narrow offered by May Edel and Abraham Edel is found relevant to be used as the basis for analyzing the selected stories. Ethics-wide includes wide ranging values for man's good, Ethics-narrow pertains to the moral, sympathetic and spiritual nature of man.

### **Linkage between the Western and Khasi Concept**

The same chapter then examines the Khasi value concepts of '*Tip-Briew, Tip-Blei*' (literally meaning, know-man, know-God) and '*Kamai ia ka hok*' (to earn righteousness). Based on the views of prominent authors as U Sib Charan Roy, R. S. Berry and H.O. Mawrie, the first implies a value condition of being attuned to man's and God's expectation, the second is to act, live, work in such away so as to earn righteousness. Further, traditional values of polite behaviour, kinship values of '*Tip-Kur, Tip-Kha*' (literally meaning, know one's maternal and paternal relatives) and the position of the maternal uncle in the Khasi society are found to be significant in this study.

The third chapter focuses on the values reflection in the short story through its comparison with the folktale and the novel. Whereas the folktale shows the moral reflection in the imaginary, simple and direct mode, the novel and the short story reflect value experiences in a realistic manner. These values are projected through a causal plotting of

the story and character study. The uniqueness of the novel, as aptly noted by Paul J. Hunter is in explaining values in terms of the “varied, circumstantial and individual outcome” and on the fact that “the social and adjustable had to be an important part of any narration”. But each form reflects human values in the moral, social including the humorous and the prudential

Against the full-scale projection of the novel, the distinction of the short story in value reflection has been described by Arthur Waterman as ‘fragments from someone’s life’. In this context, Thomas Gullason states that the stories “closely approximate the reality and truth of everyday life” and therefore pointed out that to writers like Ernest Hemingway, “the novel – not the short story is the artificial form”. The reason is that the short story “captures life as it really is, in process, revealing perceptions and understanding that are only briefly uncovered”. Of significance also is Virginia Elwyn’s observations on the presentation of “significant or even crucial moments” of truth and change. These points are illustrated by references to English and American Short Stories like E.M. Forster’s *The Rock*, Ernest Hemingway’s *Walls Like White Elephant* and Katherine Mansfield’s *The Garden Party*.

The fourth chapter is a crucial chapter in the study as it presents the textual analysis of the stories in value reflection. A sizeable number of stories are considered. These include those of S. J. Duncan, Hughlet Warjri, Wan Kharkrang and Paul Lyngdoh. While the most important values found to be projected are moral, ethical and social, there are

remarkable samples of the humorous, the witty, the prudential not ignoring the value possibilities of the uncommon and the adventurous.

Firstly, in order to avoid confusion, the scholar focuses on the general meaning of moral and ethical values. As clarified by Paul Roubiczek and John Dewey, moral values pertain to man's innate moral sense involving his will power, while ethical values are principles of 'ought' and 'ought not' guiding man's moral life.

In the moral context, altruistic values of sympathy, compassion, concern, love and kindness are manifested by all authors. In Duncan's "*U Khyrrow*" (The Youth), the moral compulsion of deep concern and sympathy is sharply projected by details of sympathy and kindness of the boy to the wounded dog, in contrast to the cruel treatment of his neighbours. Further, it is noted that the presentation of the tragic end of the dog rendered with exquisite dramatic effect, meaningfully illustrates the universal nature of compassion and kindness. In Warjri's "*Ka Jingbha ia ki Briew Baroh*" (Goodness to All Men), feelings of compassion and consideration are thrown into relief when Mietshai defies his mother's displeasure by showing kindness to the poor family of Kong Sian. Paul Lyngdoh's lyrical portrayal of human suffering in "*U Biej*" (The Fool) influences sympathetic attitude, while Kharkrang's projection of the helplessness of the weak and ignorant against the heartless and corrupted government officials conveyed moral indignance. Of significance also is the moral consciousness affected through the depiction of negative tendencies such as envy in Duncan's and Warjri's powerful character projections. A value finding is the

authors' keen insight into man's innate moral sense in which characters with baser traits of envy, greed, self-centredness and pride are shown as undergoing a change of heart during moments of self-realization. Though evident in all the authors, such moments are more explicit in Duncan and Kharkrang.

In the projection of social values, the analysis clearly brought out the expressed concerns of S. J. Duncan and Paul Lyngdoh on issues of "*Ka imlang ka sahlang*" (social life of the Khasis). In Duncan's story "*Ki Mad ia ka Shillong*" (The experience Shillong), the author highlights the corruption of social values of hard work and responsibility by the negative attraction of city life. Presenting the progressive corruption of the lives of young Kyrhai and Rimai, the story also gives a bird's eye view of social evils affecting Khasi society, due to winds of change. Paul Lyngdoh's observation in "*Ka Khmat ba Phuh Samrkhie*" (A smiling face) focuses on the corruption of family values of love and security through family infidelity leading to alcoholism and broken homes. Here the details of '*U khyllah jait*' (a popular derogatory reference to a non-Khasi) in the mother's immoral relationship points to the negative impact of social changes. Paul Lyngdoh's contribution is particularly significant in the context of modern vices displayed in "*Ka Ri ki Jingphohsniew*" (The land of dreams). It projects the moral corruption of young boys through viewing of immoral films. The important place assigned to children and young people clearly brought out the author's deep concerns for the present and the future of the Khasi society.

A significant value expression in the reflection of social values is the sense of social responsibility for which Kharkrang earned special credit. This is through his exposure of the blatant flouting of ethical norms in public services in his stories “*Ki Jingiakynduh Jong U Bah Ta En*” (The Experiences of Bah Ta En). His choice selection of doctors, savers of men’s lives, and policemen, guardians of law, testified to the conscious use of his skill for desired results. In addition, the projection of the shameless oppression perpetrated on the weak and helpless persons like Bah Ta En, confirms the moral value of social ethics in a materialistic society. A departure from these trends is the depiction of social foibles manifested in the social behaviour of the Khasis. In a realistic manner, Duncan directs attention to the negative and dangerous consequences of gossiping and spreading false rumours. The stories “*Nga kyrteng u Skei! Sa Lei!*” (Shat if my names a Deer!) and “*Phim Ngeit I*” (Don’t You Believe I) enhance the values of rationality, temperance and prudence for a quality social life.

Of special interest is the unique distinction of the stories in reflecting the Khasi world view of “Know-man, Know-God”. Duncan’s stories “*Ka Akor kaba Tam*” (Politeness is the Best), “*U Men Mali*” (The Old Gardener), “*Ki Mad ia ka Shillong*” (They Experienced Shillong) are found as exquisite examples in interpreting traditional values. The first gives insight into the Khasi polite behaviour through a comparative presentation of the materialistic buyers and the well-behaved Kpa u Bor (Bor’s Father) thereby underlining precepts of ‘know-man’. Its prudential edge is subtly suggested in the wife’s artfulness in dealing with people. While “*U Men Mali*” (The Old Gardener) is significant for

capturing kinship values incorporated in the status and position of the Khasi '*kni*' or maternal uncle. Personified in the disciplined and confident character of the old gardener, its intrinsic value is brought out in the moral passion of his commitment in carrying out his duties at all costs. Its added interest is the projection of the uncle's humanity manifested by the fact that his principled stand in not selling ancestral lands, does in no way lessen his love and concern for his clan. This is evident in the heart-rending songs at the memory of his estranged relatives. Indeed in the projection of his stand, the author emphatically underlines the unique value in the Khasi social fabric. The last story "*Ki Mad ia ka Shillong*" (The Experienced Shillong) expressed R. S. Berry's approved social tenets through their presentation of the Khasi way of life before the onslaughts of the winds of change on the society as a whole.

In addition, are significant expressions of '*Tip-Kur, Tip-Kha*' (Know one's relatives) in Paul Lyngdoh's "*A! Blei*" (Oh! God), virtues of '*Tip-Briew, Tip-Blei*' (Know-man, Know-God) in Kharkrang's projection of Bah Rang's character in "*U Blei U Iohi ia kiei kiei Baroh*" (God sees All Things) and Warjri's projection of the poor but honest young brothers in "*Ka Bek Pisa*" (The Wallet). However, in the traditional context, the scholar found the value significance of the stories not only on in the reflection of values but also their awareness of the relevance of traditional beliefs and practices in the light of change development. Therefore, in the authors' scale of values, Wan Kharkrang questioned the rationality of having a feast on the occasion of death in spite of poverty and hardships and Duncan pinpoints the validity and

seriousness of the naming ceremony when conducted by a drunken elder, resulting in a ridiculous name. Paul Lyngdoh's deep concern is at the social prejudices and superstitious belief in "*U Thlen*" (the Khasi demon worship). These led to tragic and traumatic consequences as experienced by the young daughter Wanda Jingkmen.

The textual analysis also significantly established the stories' capacity in projecting diverse themes of human values ranging from the religious, the personal to the humorous and prudential. In the religious context, Christian values prominently featured the Christian spirit of God's love, mercy and salvation associated with Christmas message. Duncan's "*Ka Jingiathuh Khana Krismas I*" (The Christmas Story I) and Warjri's "*Ka Jingbha ia ki Briew Baroh*" (Goodness to all Men) manifested these values through the projection of an atmosphere of peace and joy during Christmas time. It inspires faith and hope in the sick and dying daughter of the poor widow and dispels pride and hatred in the shallow-hearted mother of Mietshai. As highlighted, the spiritual experience on Christmas day leads to spiritual growth in the poor family and changed the proud mother into a better human being.

But while religious values upholds man's spirit in life's testing circumstance, Paul Lyngdoh's "*Ka Rong Jong Ka Jingkmen*" (The Colour of Joy) insightfully highlights the unique personal attitude of Bah Enfield towards the stifling effect of the stereo office routines. Its value effect is in sensitizing the readers to the triumph of the human soul to retain his humanity against the de-humanizing forces of modern life.

The significance of man's well being is appreciably highlighted by the value of humour in man's life. The human significance of humour is convincingly conveyed by the authors' knack in displaying the incongruities and oddities in human nature in a humorous light. This is discernable in the fickle mindedness of Warjri's labour boy who landed with cheaper quality pants and became poorer by twenty rupees. In Paul Lyngdoh, "*Ki Jingpyrkhat I*" (Thoughts I), it is the unexpected turning of tables on the angry wife when the habitual late coming husband more in fright than in anger, rains an outpour of abuses on the unsuspecting wife, when he arrived home in the middle of the night. It is also the satiric digs through the victorious war song of a sick but heavily drunk officer coming down the mountain, after offering rituals for his sickness in Kharkrang's "*Ha Ranap U Sohpetbneng*" (On the Slopes of Mount Sohpetbneng). The power of laughter is also in the portrayal of the mean and the unkind, redeemed and purged by the infectious sense of humour. This is in Duncan's "*Nga Kyrteng u Skei! Sa Lei!*" (So what if my name's a Deer!). Duncan's humorous stories are significant for demonstrating the khasi mode of ka 'biria rai' and ka 'ka biria bangja'. These stories delight while exposing the unsavory and the petty. In all The messages of the humorous stories are values of tolerance in the face of human pettiness and incongruities. Humour smoothens the rough edges of life, but in the practical realities of actual living, prudence and practical sense certainly have their values. This is seen in Warjri's "*Sian Kum Ki Bsein*" (Be Clever as Snakes).

In addition to humour, the facts of Kharkrang's questioning of feast on death occasion and Duncan's exposure of the ridiculously polite behaviour of u Kpa u Bor (Bor's Father) showed the authors' realistic value approach in the practical context. These projections illustrate the human significance propounded by the humanist and well-being theorists.

Furthermore, the authors' skill in characterization meaningfully brought out the desired human values in the life of men. In this respect, S. J. Duncan showed special ability through the projection of intensely individual and memorable characters. Nevertheless, the characters of the other authors also produced life-like effects for communicating their view. An important finding in this respect is that the representative characters such as those of Wan Kharkrang apart from being interesting, affects an authoritative note to the author's value statement.

Chapter V highlights the language and also the narrative style and literary techniques used for projecting value perceptions. Important examples are in the use of diction in which words such as '*pongding kharai*' in "*Ka Akor Kaba Tam*" (Politeness is the Best), indicating a fat man with bulging stomach achieves to create a mental image of greed and insensitiveness to people's feelings. In Paul Lyngdoh the use of '*Khura*' in "*U Bieij*" (The Fool) articulated the mental havoc impacted by the tragic accidents in the life of the fool. The authors also achieved telling effects through sentence arrangement. This is displayed in the slow cadence in Duncan's description of sweet revenge savoured by the envious mind of Worsing, the hero of "*Wat ai Nishan ia Kiwei*" (Do not

Falsely Accuse Others). In “*Ka Jingbha ia ki Briew Baroh*” (Goodness to All Men), the mother’s tempestuous emotions of anger and hatred against the poor family is vocally communicated through the galloping pace of the mother’s bitter outpour. In addition, are the uses of similes and metaphors. Of these, Duncan’s metaphorical definition of men as the ‘Two-footed animals’; Kharkrang’s simile describing the pointing mustache of heartless policemen to be “as sharp as the forget-me-not thorn” and Lyngdoh’s comparison of the gambling mother reduced to poverty “as a feathered Crow” lid up the meaning of the author’s views.

In the narrative style, the achievement of the authors is clearly evident in the use of even difficult narrative styles such as the first persons plural, the dramatic narrator and the authors’ combinations of a variety of styles for expressive effects. The scholar found these projections as the fulfillment of the objectives “the manner and extent in reflecting human values in the stories” and “the styles and techniques used by the authors to express the value perceptions” in the expression of varied human values.

### **Conclusion**

The study and investigation of human values in the selected stories established beyond doubt their literary value. The selected stories are remarkable for their wide-ranging human values. Of these, the reflection of the moral, social and spiritual are found insightful and genuine in articulating their values to man as a human being. Further the analysis while projecting the objective approach in the presentation of the tradition, also brought out the unique capacity in reflecting more

than one effect. In addition, the reflection of facets, degrees and nuances of human values testified to the potentialities of the Khasi Short Stories. These facts point to an advanced stage of development and a literary achievement of the selected stories.

The second unique literary value of the stories is their capacity in expressing the values of their age. In spite of the brevity constraints, the stories have attained a niche in the Khasi literature in view of their breadth of vision in projecting the strengths and weaknesses of their age. Two eras are projected. The Duncan era, which includes S. J. Duncan and Hughlet Warjri, presents the age of respectability and decorum, human considerateness as enshrined in the Khasi world view. The second is the post Duncan era represented by Wan Kharkrang and Paul Lyngdoh. It presents a world of eroded values, of greed, selfishness and human depravity at its most loathsome.

These broad trends of the respective periods significantly influence the authors' overall attitude to life and impacted their style and mode of presentation. This is seen in the use of language and character projection. Whereas Duncan's language is characterised by a tone of politeness and tolerance, wit and good-natured humour, Warjri's language impressed us with a moral note. On the other hand the style and language is satiric and unsparing and at times bordering on the distasteful whereas that of Paul Lyngdoh surfaces in poetic expression conveying the sense of nostalgia at the loss of values. Similar findings are noted in characterization. Duncan's treatment is marked for its basic humanity, in which even the petty and the unkind are projected with

tolerance, understanding wit and humour. In the younger authors the portrait of the debased characters is harsh and appeared almost beyond redemption. Interestingly, in Duncan also the dark characters, mostly non-Khasis, are shown as being totally devoid of moral values, which indicates the uncompromising stand of the author where evil is concerned.

From the literary point Duncan's stories obviously excelled that of the other authors selected in this study. The important merits are the exquisite dramatic effects, which is evidently lesser in the other authors. Secondly, S. J. Duncan's objective approach achieved through the use of the first person plural and the dramatic narrator, gave an elegance and poise, which other authors are yet to achieve. In comparison, in the younger authors, there is a pronounced intrusive element resulting from their increase use of the summary and commentary and the use of the first person style. These are certainly the signposts for future writers.

Therefore, it is obvious that the Khasi Short Stories within the brevity constraints of its form deserved due recognition as a credible form of literary endeavour.