

Literary Criticism And Bhasa Literature

*A Study with Reference to
Khasi Literature*



D.R.L. Nonglait

2005

*This Book
is dedicated to
My Parents*

Mr. Dramwell Sohtun

and

Mrs. Dressina L. Nonglait

*who by their prayers have
pulled my small head, my
humble heart and my feeble
hands together to turn a few of
their dreams into reality.*

Literary Criticism And Bhasa Literature

*A Study with Reference to
Khasi Literature*

D.R.L. Nonglait, M.A, M.Phil, PGDTE, Ph.D.

2005

The Design (Sketch-maps) on the Front Cover Page contains some ideas for the development of critical thinking and it has no connection with the correctness of states or international boundaries.

All rights reserved

First Edition, 2005
1000 Copies

Published by the author and Printed at SMS Hi-Tech Impression,
G.S. Road, Police Bazar, Shillong - 1.


Foreword

I am thankful to Dr. D.R.L. Nonglait for the opportunity he has given to me to see his valuable contribution to the study of Khasi Literature - "Literary Criticism and *Bhasa* Literature". I have gone through it with a great deal of interest, and I have been impressed by the mark of studious scholarship that is apparent throughout the pages of this valuable study, which has left me with a sense of satisfaction and pleasure. Here I could see that serious concern for the healthy development of Khasi Literature, which itself comprises different genres of creative writing of comparatively recent origin, going back to the early 1840's, though it is also true that the Khasi language has established itself as a recognized language, incidentally, the first one to be so recognized among the tribal languages of North-East India. The importance of Khasi literary studies is obvious.

The role of Criticism in bringing about a conscious growth of literature is clear and indisputable. It has to be acknowledged, however, till very recently we had not seen enough of a critical approach to the study of Khasi Literature, apart from what would appear to have been passing remarks on their own works by the Khasi writers themselves, notably by the acknowledged King of Poetry, U Soso Tham, himself as in the Preface to his *Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep*. The need for a general and more comprehensive study is obvious and in this regard, I feel that Dr. D.R.L. Nonglait's present study serves this purpose at a very relevant point of time. As such the work is a valuable contribution to Khasi Studies and as such it merits the thoughtful attention of serious Khasi writers, teachers and students alike.

Dr. Nonglait has age in his favour, and I trust that in time he will come out with more studies of this type. This is my hope and expectation and I am confident that I shall not be disappointed.

I wish the author of this valuable study all success in the years that lie ahead, and for the personal satisfaction that I have derived from a perusal of his manuscript, I have this Word of Thanks to express : *Khublei!*

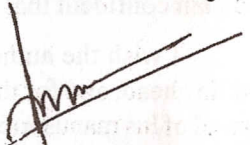

(Prof. I.M. Simon)
Mawlai-Umjaiur,
Shillong - 793 008

On The Book

First of all, I congratulate Dr. D.R.L. Nonglait for bringing out this outstanding book on Literacy Criticism. This book will provide the readers, the ideal step in understanding Literary Criticism and *Bhasa Literature*. Through this book, *Literary Criticism and Bhasa Literature A Study With Reference to Khasi Literature*, Dr. Nonglait a specialist on Khasi Literary Criticism has :

- enlightened the readers about the nature and functions of literary criticism.
- thrown to the readers (particularly students and scholars of Khasi literature) the major approaches to literature which are represented by Literary Criticism.
- shown the general development of criticism in its historical context.
- critiqued the development of Khasi Literary Criticism and focused on the need to develop the 'critical mind'.
- reviewed the Khasi M.A. syllabus on Literary Criticism and emphasized the need to revise and strengthen the present syllabus.

This is an ideal book for anyone who is interested in Literary Criticism in general and on Khasi literature in particular. The author has done an excellent job in bringing the gulf between literature and criticism. I sincerely hope this book will provide us with the basic foundation on the subject.


(Dr. (Mrs.) A. Kharmalki)
Reader
Department of Khasi
N.E.H.U., Shillong.

Preface

Critical activities in Khasi had begun in the early decades of the twentieth century in the forms of appreciations, remarks, essays, prefaces, introductions etc. on various genres or books of literature. During the period between the second decade of the twentieth century and the 1960s, Owen Rowie, Soso Tham, H. Elias, D.N.S. Wahlang, Primose Gatphoh and F.M. Pugh were prominent among those who had made such contributions. Although these learned men were capable of critical thinking, a critical study of literature was not felt, as Khasi literature during that time was at its infant stage. Thus, the period may be called a period of pre-critical response. However, the seeds planted by the above few writers in the arable area of literary criticism have now began to attain greater heights.

*It was since the 1970s that literary criticism in Khasi began to take its firm steps. With the exception of F.M. Pugh's publication entitled *Ka Prosodi bad ka Retorik* in 1970 and B.L. Swer's *Katto katne Shaphang ka Sonnett* in 1979, H.W. Sten appeared as a lone influential critic of the period when he brought out four books of criticism including (i) *Ki Poetry u O.M. Wahlang* (1976) (ii) *Ka Poitri u Primose Gatphoh* (1979), (iii) *Ki Sur Khasi Na Ka Duitara Ksiar* (1979) and (iv) *Ka Jingbishar Bniah* (1979). The period between 1970 and 1979 has undoubtedly marked the real beginning of Khasi literary criticism.*

The period between 1980 and 1999 takes another kind of growth. This period witnesses a more rapid growth and development when many writers, teachers and scholars of Khasi literature including women contributed more substantially for the enrichment of Khasi literary criticism. Over 20 critical works have been brought out during this period. Many of these works are critical analyses of literary texts, while some of them are concerned with literary theories on different types of literature. This period may be called a period of critical awakening. The major critics who belonged to this period are H.W. Sten himself, B.L. Swer, S.S. Majaw and J.S. Shangpliang among many others. In the first decade of the twenty first century, literary criticism in Khasi seems to maintain its steady growth when some new and promising writers appeared on the scene.


Khasi is one of the major Indian languages which do not have much affinity with any other famous or more developed languages of the country. However, as of now, it has emerged as one of the developed bhasas. With Shillong as the centre of education in the region since the time of the British rule, one cannot deny the fact that Khasi language has comparatively made good progress over the years. Now when criticism has been growing side by side with creative writings, Khasi language is asserting itself to places held by other developed Indian languages.

This study is a brief survey of the development of literary criticism in Khasi which is one of the new bhasas. Its finding is that, a balanced growth of both creative and critical writings is inevitable. While trying to achieve this goal, this study also suggests that the teaching of language and criticism components at the College and University levels needs to be strengthened.

I am deeply indebted to Prof. I.M. Simon for the pains he has taken in reading the manuscript of this book, for his valuable advice and his words of encouragement and good wishes. I express my gratitude to Dr. (Mrs.) A. Kharmalki for her comment and her words of appreciation that have been contained in this book.*

My sincere gratitude is also due to Prof. K.C. Boral, my teacher and my guide who has rightly suggested to write a book of this kind. Last but not the least, much thanks go to my friend, Andrew Marbaniang for his kind help, without which the publication of this book may not be possible at this point of time.

*Dated Lumdiengjri, Shillong,
The 30th May, 2005.*


(D.R.L. Nonglalt)

CONTENTS

	Pages
Foreword	i
On The Book	ii
Preface	iii - iv
Chapter I	
Introduction	1 - 5
Chapter II	
An Overview of the Origin and Development of Criticism	6 - 13
Chapter III	
Literary Criticism and Bhasa Literature	14 - 23
Chapter IV	
Education and the Development of Khasi Literature	24 - 29
Chapter V	
Literary Criticism and Khasi Literature	30 - 42
Chapter VI	
Conclusion	43 - 44
Appendix	
A Brief Introduction to Modern Critical Theories	45 - 67
Bibliography	68 - 69

CHAPTER III

Literary Criticism and *Bhasa* Literature

3.1. The emergence of the *Bhasas* :

A knowledge of the native tradition is essential for studying the contemporary *bhasa* literature and criticism. *Bhasa* literature referred to in this study means different literature of modern Indian languages. G. N. Devy who has popularized the idea of *bhasa* literature maintains:

Instead of using the long and cumbersome expression 'literature in the modern Indian languages'. I have used the traditional term *bhasa*. Thus, *bhasa* literature or *bhasa* criticism; but the label merely indicates a manageable group of many different literatures. It should be understood in the same manner as labels like 'European literature' and 'Common literature'.¹

Before the introduction of English literature into the Indian education system, many Indian languages had already had their own literatures. Famous Indian languages like Kannada, Tamil, Marathi, Gujarati and others, already had a long and living literary tradition of literature. It is said that prior to the introduction of English in School and University courses, Indian literatures had had well developed literary forms, such as poetry, drama and prose. Indian literature at the juncture of its encounter with English literature was being written in more than a dozen living languages.³ Most Indian *bhasa* literatures had their origin in the Sanskrit language and literature. Sanskrit had a rich literary tradition

spanning some sixteen centuries – from Vyasa in the fifth century B.C. to Bhoja in the eleventh century A.D. Throughout its long history, Sanskrit literature had developed in various literary forms including creative art as well as literary criticism. Though Sanskrit was an old language to the modern Indians, its methodology and manner were acceptable to the Indian system of education.

At the beginning of the second millenium A.D. there was a movement against the hegemony of Sanskrit. Many regional languages expressed their protest against the monopoly of Sanskrit and had the aspiration to develop their own distinct identity. In the South, a similar movement had occurred with respect to Tamil which gave birth to Kannada, Telegu and Mulayalam. In Maurice Winternitz's book, *History of Indian Literature*, we noticed a number of new *bhasas* or modern Indian languages, which had developed into literary languages after Sankrit. These are - Sindhi, Gujarati, Panjabi and West Hindi in Western India; Garhwali, Kumaoni, Kashmiri and Nepali in North India; Marathi, Tamil, Telegu, Mulayalam and Kannada in the South; Bihari, Bengali, Oriya and Assamese in Eastern India; and Urdu or Hindustani which is Hindi mixed with Persian and Arabic was born in the 12th century in the region around Delhi.³ While discussing their development into literary languages Maurice Winternitz remarks:

We can notice from the 10th century onwards the third stage of development of the Indian, that is, of the Modern Indian Languages. And from the 12th century onwards these languages can show their own literature that is partly independent and partly dependent on Sanskrit literature.⁴

While discussing the tradition of the *bhasas*, the periods during which these languages emerged with their distinct identity need to be noted here. According to G. N. Devy, Kannada had become an independent dialect of Tamil in the fifth century; Tamil and Kannada jointly gave birth to Mulayalam (fourteenth century); the Middle Indo-

Aryan dialect in the East split into Bangla and Oriya (tenth century); Bangla gave birth to Assamiya (thirteenth century). In the North, Kashmiri developed its own identity in the thirteenth century, Sindhi (fifteenth century), Panjabi (fifteenth century), Gujarati and Marathi (eleventh century). Urdu was developed in the thirteenth century. While the Hindi family of dialects developed its autonomy in the fourteenth century.⁵

This account shows that many new languages were emerged and assumed their distinct identity during the period between the eleventh century and the fifteenth century. However, their literary traditions became known after a century or two, assuming a distinct identity. In any case, by the end of the fifteenth century, all *bhasas* mentioned above had become literary languages.

With the emergence of the *bhasas*, Sanskrit ceased to be the popular language of the Indian people and Sanskrit literature had become conventional. The succession of Islamic rulers who brought with them new cultural currents had helped to bring about many social changes and ushered in development of new languages. Since these new literatures coincided with the social change, they also had the resourcefulness to draw the attention of the people, especially from among the low castes. The availability of paper in the thirteenth century had also helped for more rapid and wider circulation of the *bhasa* literatures.

It is also interesting to note that most of the writers of this period were saints and their literatures were generally known as *bhakti* (devotional) literature. Many of these writers were from low castes. Besides, there were many women writers also. The writers revolted against the Brahmanical monopoly over all forms of knowledge, scriptures, religious establishment and social norms. They tried to assert their regional aspirations and to uplift the social status of the weaker sections of society. The *bhakti* literature, obviously was literature for the oppressed classes. They wrote with an intense devotion about god-man relationship and they did not care much for the literary theory

developed through Sanskrit. The *bhakti* movement did not attempt to produce any critical theory, but it had its own philosophy which had been fundamentally related to social life. So the period between the twelfth and the nineteenth century was marked by an amazing development in Indian literature.

When the British political domination was well established in India in the nineteenth century, the colonial officers adopted a new education system introducing English as one of the subjects for Indian students. By the time India encountered British literature, the new *bhasas* already had strong literary traditions, with well developed literary genres. However, since English literature was introduced by the rulers, its role soon become very significant in the country. Traditionally, the Indian people loved literature, so when English language and literature were initially introduced to Indian students, there was a large response, where many people felt the need to learn the language and literature of the rulers. Besides, literary bilingualism has been a regular phenomenon in India, when Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic were used by many Indian writers. So, during the British colonial rule, many Indians started writing in English as well.

Since the study of English language and literature flourished very fast in the country, the western literary theories influenced and shaped the mind of the Indian critics. They realized that the *bhasas* had managed without any critical theory for nearly six and seven centuries, whereas English critical texts which were circulated in England and America were also available in India. Although the *bhasas* had their strong literary traditions, the search for more literary theories from the English texts created a tendency among the Indian writers to neglect their own traditions.

With the influence of western theories, the *bhasas* moved away from Sanskrit poetics and adopted western literary concepts. This attitude had developed a sense of inferiority among the Indian intellectuals, about

the literary history of Indian languages. The *bhakti* movement was particularly considered as a period of steady decline of Indian literature. The native traditions were gradually neglected and forgotten. Recounting the damaging impact of colonialism, G. N. Devy writes:

Colonialism creates a cultural demoralization... And as a combined result of amnesia and disorientation, *bhasa* literatures with literary histories ranging from five to ten centuries seemed to suffer damage from what it obviously an acute crisis in Indian literary criticism.⁶

During colonialism, acquisition of English education was marked by social and economic advancement of the learners. The so-called social and economic upward mobility also coincided with western cultural and literary values where western culture and literature were being considered superior to Indian literature and most Indians thought that knowledge of the critical concepts from English literary discourse is an intellectual capital of high value that should be used for the development of native literatures. Thus, the critical activity in Indian languages which developed during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries were largely the imitation of Western literary theories.

In the post-colonial period, more and more regional languages have emerged as independent literary languages, such as Khasi, Garo, Mizo etc. The influence of western theories in these new *bhasas* which are recognized as literary languages in the recent past was very strong. These languages have no inherent link with other major Indian languages. Moreover, since these languages assumed the status of literary languages in a very recent past, they are lacking behind in regard to an indigenous critical tradition. So most of the important critical concepts are borrowed from the English tradition. In view of this situation, the influence of Western ideas in these languages seem to continue a long way. The more significant *bhasas*, like Marathi and Gujarati on the other hand, have made considerable efforts to revive the Sanskrit poetics. In these languages,

Sanskrit poetics is generally included in the University syllabus for criticism courses. This revivalist tendency will help the Indian critics to overcome the loss of cultural memory, and to escape the influence of western thoughts. The critical sensibility of the Indian critics at the present time seems to maintain a dual trend. There are elements of westernization which are considered useful for the development of *bhasa* literature and criticism, and also an alertness about the Indian critical tradition. This attitude shows that the sense of inferiority has been removed from the minds of the Indian scholars and the critical thinking is moulded with more nativist awareness. G. N. Devy rightly says:

If literary criticism does not grow organically from the native soil, or take root in it when it is of alien origin it will fail to function as criticism, even though it may have that outward linguistic form. Perceiving this fundamental truth, literary criticism in Indian languages is gradually turning to Nativism, a more alert historical awareness of tradition.⁷

Another critic, John Oliver Perry also expressed his view on criticism at the present situation in India in the following words:

With a variety of traditions that draw strength from multiple indigenous and foreign sources – ancient, medieval, modern, post modern – Indian Criticism can boast of being very lively these days with a fairly free flowing mix of movements, directions, possibilities, occasions, productive encounters.⁸

In recent years, we cannot deny the fact that there is a kind of cultural awakening among the Khasi authors as well. For example, S. S. Majaw in one of his critical essays entitled “*Ka Jingroi Jingsan Ka Novel Khasi*” (Development and Growth of the Khasi Novel) considers the stature of a Khasi novel after taking into account the length prescribed by J. A. Cuddon, E. M. Forster, Lee T. Lemon, as well as those of J. S. Shangpliang and H. W. Sten. He attempts to express his own critical thinking, a kind of nativist awareness saying – “To me, the

English yard-stick has got no right to measure appropriately over that of the Khasi yard-stick.”⁹ What Majaw means in his essay is that the norms suggested by the English critics may not always be the just criteria by which to judge the stature and form of the Khasi novel, since the Khasi writers have to consider the inherent Khasi thought and tradition. His essay reflects the idea of trying to infuse the inherent thought of the Khasis in the minds of other Khasi authors and critics. At the same time he does not deny the fact that it is necessary for the Khasi novelists to try to attain higher stature as suggested by different critics of the world. At this point, that there is a need to emphasize that no literature or literary theory can remain in isolation from other languages, including those of the ancient, medieval and modern periods as well as those of the East and of the West. On the other hand, no literature can just imitate the pattern of the foreign literature or accept all their principles and concepts without considering its own tradition from which the very literary culture has developed. Literature deals with the lives of human beings in this world, while literary criticism is concerned with all genres of literature, as well as the issues pertaining to the thoughts and practices of an individual and the society in any country or in the world at large. Hence, what is required now is a healthy negotiation between the local and the global.

3.2. The Emergence of Khasi Literature:

Khasi written literature is not very old. The literature of the Khasis for most part till the middle of the nineteenth century was mostly oral. This oral tradition, however, recounts that at a very ancient time, there was a script, but unfortunately, the script was lost. Some writers maintained that it was lost in fire, some says it was lost in the floods, while others say that in the floods, one Khasi accidentally swallowed the book that he was holding it in his mouth. These stories are not true but they have been part of the oral tradition. One may ask how can a community who had a literature could have forgotten the art of writing simply because it had lost the book? H. W. Sten concludes, “it is an

impossible proposition and therefore the story of the lost literature is a myth”.¹⁰ So prior to the advent of Christianity, what the people had was oral literature.

Khasi oral tradition found expressions in the ‘*phawars*’ or rhymed couplets, folktales, stories and homilies. There were also the ‘*puriskams*’ or fables and ‘*paroms*’ or stories. The ‘*paroms*’ are of two categories – the short ones like short stories and the lengthy ones like the novels. A lengthy *parom* could take a teller as long as one night’s telling or as short as a few hours. In the Khasi oral traditions, there are elements of the novels in the ‘*paroms*’ and elements of poetry in the ‘*phawars*’. There were also dramatic performances which are known as ‘*ialehkai*’ in some Khasi dialects. The absence of written literature was responsible for the loss of many folk songs, lyrics and tales of the Khasi tribe.

The real beginning of the Khasi literature was initiated with Thomas Jones’s first publication of *Ca Citab ban hica ka Citien Cassia* (1842). This was the beginning of the Roman script being in use for the Khasi language and the same has continued till date. From a humble beginning, Khasi literature over the years witnessed a steady growth. But till the later part of the nineteenth century, most of the publications were related to the religious teaching of the Welsh Presbyterian Church, which were mostly translations by the missionaries from the books of the Bible. In 1891, John Roberts began to write different genres like poetry, essays and short stories. It was only in 1897 that a native Khasi writer, Jeebon Roy took a firm step when he published two of his works – (1) *Ka Niam Jong Ki Khasi* or “The Khasi Religion” (1897), and (2) *Ka Kot Shaphang Uwei U Blei* or “The Book about the Oneness of God” (1897). Contrary to the initiative of the missionaries, Jeebon Roy took on himself the translation of Indian classics like *Hitopodesa* (1898) and *Ramayana* (1900) into Khasi language.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, many Khasi writers had come up, of which in this context a few of their works are worth mentioning such as R.S. Berry's *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* Part I (1902) and *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* Part II (1905). His *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen*, in English, may be called "The Precepts of Maturity"; Rabon Sing's *Ka Kitab Jingphawar* or "The Book of Rhymed Couplets" (1905), *Ka Jingiathuh Khana Puriskam* (1908), wherein he includes many short stories and fables; Hari Charan Roy's *Ka Bhagavad Gita* (1903) which was his translation work; *Ka Savitri* (1910), the first Khasi drama and *U Kausik* (1915) the first novelette written by the Khasi author. Sib Charan Roy's *Ka Jingpyini Ka Kmie Bad Ki Khun* (1911); *Ka Niam Khasi* or "The Khasi Religion" (1919). J. Amirkha's *Ka Lynti Hok* or "The Holy Path" (1919). Soso Tham's *Ki Phawar U Aesop* or "Aesop's Fables" (1920). Although *Ki Phawar U Aesop* was only a translation work, in the hands of Soso Tham it turned out to be something more than translation and became more one of beauty and felicity as it originally written in Khasi. Prior to 1897 the inherent life style and thought of the Khasis were almost neglected by the Anglo-Khasi writers, but the period from Jeebon Roy to Soso Tham had allowed the native writers to rediscover themselves, yet the stature of Khasi literature may be said to be in its infant stage.

In this booklet, it is not appropriate to present a detailed survey of the growth and development of Khasi literature after the second decade of its emergence in a written form. R.S. Lyngdoh and H. Bareh who are prominent Khasi authors have done their job well in this regard. However, I may well be right to state that the growth of Khasi literature from its third decade and onwards is highly commendable. During the period between the beginning of the third decade of the twentieth century till the time of India's independence, Khasi literature began to attain greater heights. This period may be called the Green Age of Khasi literature. Prominent authors of this period were Dr. H. Lyngdoh, Primrose Gatphoh, Fr. H. Elias, Fr. G. Costa who immensely contributed towards the development of Khasi literature in the form of recording

traditional religion, values, customs and cultural practices. They also produced historical writing in recording the background of the Khasi states.

The post-independence period witnessed a balanced growth of the three main branches of literature i.e., poetry, fiction and drama. More creative writers appeared on the scene taking literary practice to greater heights. The important poets of this period are Primrose Gatphoh, H. Elias, V. G. Bareh and B. C. Jyrwa besides many others. Important story writers and novelists are D. S. Khongdup, W. Tiewsoh, H. W. Sten. V. G. Bareh, S. J. Duncan and F. M. Pugh have through their writings enriched Khasi literature, however, in the last fifteen to twenty years there has been a prolific growth of the Khasi novel where many story writers including women were coming up. Khasi poetry maintains its steady growth with more young poets contributing substantially, whereas Khasi drama on the other hand has been left behind.

References :

1. G.N. Devy. *After Amnesia*, (Orient Longman, Bombay, 1992), p. 3.
2. G.N. Devy., *In Another Tongue*, (Macmillan India Limited, Madras, 1995), p. 1.
3. Maurice Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, Volume I (A New Authoritative Translation from Original German by V. Srinibasa Varma, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, Reprinted, 1987), pp. 42-43.
4. *Ibid.* p. 42.
5. G.N. Devy. *After Amnesia*, (Orient Longman, Bombay, 1992), p. 7.
6. *Ibid.* p. 10.
7. G.N. Devy. *Op.cit.*, p. 54.
8. John Oliver Perry, "Criticism in India Now: Is Some Useful Work to be Done?" in *Interpretation of Tex: Text, Meaning and Interpretation*, (Pencraft International, Delhi, 2002), p. 68.
9. K.A.S., *Ka thiar ki Nongthoh* (Vol. VII), (1999), p. 37
10. H.W. Sten, *Khasi Poetry: Origin and Development*, (Mittal Publications Ltd., Delhi, 1990), p.68.