

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.*

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Khasi Literature*

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

2005

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

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Foreword

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

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

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

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

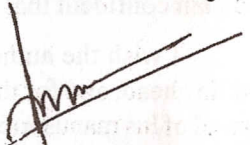

(Prof. I.M. Simon)
Mawlai-Umjaiur,
Shillong - 793 008

On The Book

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

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

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


(Dr. (Mrs.) A. Kharmalki)
Reader
Department of Khasi
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Preface

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

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

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


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

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

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

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

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


(D.R.L. Nonglalt)

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ABRIEFINTRODUCTIONTOMODERNCRITICALTHEORIES

As the title of this book suggests, the study of modern critical theories may not be included as one of its chapters. Nevertheless, a study of the development of criticism, the development of *bhasa* literature and the role of literary criticism in the development of Khasi literature may not provide further scope for critical studies and research unless some of the important modern theories are also introduced. Therefore, it is necessary that a brief discussion on some important modern critical theories may be presented here.

The twentieth century has witnessed an unusual turn in critical activities. The author-text-reader coordinates of criticism have been put to theoretical speculation and critical enquiry. After the waning of New Criticism, literary criticism has taken a theoretical turn and embraced what is called an inter-disciplinary perspective. Before embarking a brief discussion on various critical approaches and new theories, a glimpse of the rise of modern critical theories might merit a little space here. For convenience, let me quote Douglas T. Miller's observation:

The 20th century has been an era of enormous expansion and diversity in literary criticism. Italy, the USSR, and the United States have played increasingly significant roles. Totally new methods have been developed from related disciplines. Marxist criticism, which prevailed in Eastern Europe, found many adherents in the West. Freudian psychoanalysis was applied to literature. Carl Jung's speculations on archetypes in the collective unconscious

inspired a search for myths in all literatures. A new and rigorous stylistic criticism has developed under the influence of modern linguistics. A psychological and anthropological approach has been taken by Northrop Frye, who attempts to trace similarities in the literary patterns of different cultures. In Russia and later Czechoslovakia a new formal study of literature called structuralism has flourished and has had an impact in both France and the United States. A form of philosophical criticism that draws its inspiration from existentialism has had a great impact on spokesmen of Modernism, such as T.S. Eliot in England and Paul Valery in France have profoundly altered taste.¹

At the beginning of Chapter II of this book, mention has been made that there are a number of critical jargons which might sometimes confuse scholars and even teachers of literature and literary criticism. The origin and development of different critical traditions has also been briefly discussed, as well as how critical activity changed and evolved into various theories up to the end of the nineteenth century which might be considered as somewhat traditional. This section also briefly looks into the distinctive features of modern critical theories which have appeared during the last century. This section shall not make a historical survey of the rise of all these theories, but simply attempt to underline the differences in their approaches to the study of literature which may also be useful for developing a new critical language for further interpretation of Khasi literature.

Although the rise of various theories may not be exactly agreed upon, the emergence of different theories at different periods of time during the twentieth century may be noted. M. H. Abrams maintains his account in an approximate chronological order² as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| 1920s and 1930s | Russian Formalism. |
| 1930s and 1940s | Archetypal Criticism. |
| 1940s and 1950s | New Criticism, Phenomenology (as applied to literary criticism); Stylistics. |

1960s	Structuralist criticism; modern forms of feminist criticism.
1970s	Theory of the anxiety of influence; deconstruction, discourse analysis; forms of reader-response criticism, reception-theory; semiotics, speech-act theory.
1980s	Dialogic criticism; new historicism; cultural studies.

Traditional approaches emphasize the importance of the author and consider his intention important in interpreting a text. Even today, this method of interpretation of a literary work is still applied by some critics. However, the contemporary critics opine that in traditional approaches “the work of art frequently appeared to be of secondary importance, something that merely illustrated background, such an approach often led to the study of literature as essentially biography, history, or some other branch of learning, rather than as art.”³ In contrast to the traditional approaches, a new kind of critical analysis began to surface at the beginning of the twentieth century where the literary work became the main concern of scholars. Wilfred L. Guerin and his collaborators observed:

The new critics as the proponents of this position were called, insisted that scholars concentrated on the work itself, on the text examining it as art. This method revolutionized the study of literature. It frequently divided critics and teachers into opposing factions: those of the older school for whom literature provided primarily an opportunity for exercising what they perceived to be the really relevant scholarly and cultural disciplines (for example, history, linguistic and biography) and the new critics who maintained that literature had an intrinsic worth, that it was not just one of the means of transmitting biography and history.⁴

However, these critics do not rule out the fact that literature is a creation by some one at sometime in history and cannot be disembodied from experience, ideas or issues that have human relevance. There is

another view to the whole issue that “many literary classics are admittedly autobiographical, propagandistic or typical.”⁵ The central feature which marked the radical change of critical approaches during the twentieth century was the rise of multiple new theories which are more focused on the text rather than on the author. John Peck and Martin Coyle rightly observe:

Twentieth century criticism as a whole can be characterized as displaying a shift on the author to an emphasis on the text, and then a shift from the text to the reader. It is the second of these – the shift from the text to the reader, showing how the reader might collude with the assumption of the text or impose meanings on it, or find what he or she wants to find in it – that much modern criticism, starting with structuralism, concentrates upon. In a lot of modern criticism there is a questioning of all the strategies by which meaning itself is produced, a questioning of all the conditions that surround the production of literature.⁶

They further add: “Such criticism can lead to an important discussion about how society is structured, about our place in society and in more general terms, about how, as human beings, we are organized and can make sense of the world.”⁷ Modern criticism takes a closer view of how the writer derives his ideas from the society and his milieu. Literature as an academic discipline draws the attention of the readers to the text and the search for meaning in the text becomes more significant. The readers are more concerned of what the author writes, rather than the author’s life. “The focus became the exploration of the meaning and significance of the text through a close and sustained analysis of the words on the page.”⁸

Nevertheless, to whatever extent the modern critics are trying to give more attention to the text and the reader, they cannot ignore the role of the author completely. Critical appreciation of a text and its aesthetic aspects may be possible without taking the author into account; conversely, while looking into the meaning of what the author has said in

a text, his thoughts and ideas on issues concerning the people and the society may not be fully understood without considering the experience of the author, the events during his time and his views on a host of issues. "These are, in fact the central to one of the most recent theoretical approaches – the new historicism."⁹ Hence traditional approaches cannot be assumed as entirely invalid in the study of literature, although the rise of modern criticism has also essentially added a number of new assumptions, ideas, concepts and approaches. Therefore, in the course of time, the unintellectual conventions and practices are substituted by some more refined and more exhaustive investigation of new theories. John Peck and Martin Coyle who seemed to have done a thorough appraisal on the development of critical theories during the twentieth century maintain:

Contemporary criticism, however, has drawn attention to the way in which critics such as Leavis and the 'New Critics' did, in fact, approach literature with a number of assumptions: they appeared to be focusing on the text itself, but they also had preconceptions about what mattered in a text. They admired complexity, but they also expected to find a coherent moral view in a text, as if the author was managing to impose some kind of pattern on life and as if the text made some kind of positive overall statement. We are not saying such an approach is wrong, but the fact is that more recent criticism has tended to take a step back and detach itself from the way in which traditional critics have found a scheme of values and a coherent statement in texts. Contemporary criticism has tended to emphasize the contradictions and uncertainties in texts, and the way in which criticism itself can, productively, be equally uncertain and undecided.¹⁰

A number of new theories have emerged after the First World War and have continued to be in force until recently. However, it may not be possible to indicate an accurate period when the 'old' was replaced by the 'new'. Raman Selden says, "Until the 1960s modern criticism has had its roots in the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth

and early nineteenth centuries."¹¹ Selden like other critics sees the tendency of the new critics to divert their focus from the writer to the text. Nevertheless, he does not rule out the presence of the writer in his work, when he writes:

The new critics address their 'objective' gaze at the poem not the poet, but manage to preserve the special sensibility of the poet in the form of the poem's unique linguistic form. It remained for the modern theories of structuralism, marxism, feminism and poststructuralism to effect a true break with the Romantic inheritance.¹²

In this discussion, some of the modern theories which may be applicable and useful in the critical process in Khasi will be considered briefly. The intention for that is to provide some insights into the ideas and principles gained from these modern approaches that could enhance the critical thinking in Khasi.

Russian Formalism:

While starting a discussion of modern literary criticism, it is found that a major turn in criticism may have been started by the Russian Formalism, a group of critics in Russia at the time of 1917 Revolution. The formalistic approach considered language and the meaning of the words central in a text. As a special kind of language, literary language is self-focused. Victor Shklovsky, a prominent member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle published his essay entitled "Art as Technique" (1917) in which he introduced the concept of defamiliarization. His idea is to make the reader see in literature, things or objects around them in different ways. Thus, he writes:

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects '*unfamiliar*', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and the length of

perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.¹³

M. H. Abrams while discussing the function of Russian Formalism says:

Its function is not to make extrinsic reference, but to offer as a special mode of experience by drawing attention to its own "formal" features that is to interrelationship among the linguistic signs themselves. The linguistics of literature differs from the linguistics of practical discourse, because its laws are oriented towards producing the distinctive features that formalists call literariness.¹⁴

In this, it is seen that Russian Formalism is linked to the scientific study of language in literature, focusing on the style and technical design of a literary text where "An author is said to transform the raw materials of a story in a literary plot by the use of variety of devices that violates sequence and deform and defamiliarize the story elements."¹⁵ Hence a literary plot, "the artful, subversive rearrangement" does not need to follow the chronological sequence of events as in short and simple narratives, but it "estranges, prolongs, or complicates perception"¹⁶ of events in a story. It was also suggested that, rather than presenting a picture of the world, art 'defamiliarizes' or 'make strange', a form described by Victor Shklovsky. In doing so, "literary writing disrupts ordinary language looking at the world in a strange way. What the reader notices is not the picture of reality, but the peculiarity of the writing itself. Literature in that is seen as a self-conscious medium."¹⁷ John Peck and Martin Coyle observed that "The central concept that Formalism introduces is the idea that the language in literary text is very unusual, that the text cannot simply be worked through in order to appreciate a picture of life."¹⁸ Another influential member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle, Mikhail Bakhtin also developed theories of language in literature such as his concept of *dialogic* which in the 1970s and 1980s became popularly known in the West as Dialogues or Dialogic criticism.

Bakhtin emphasizes the relationship between the writer and the readers or the speaker and the listener. In his essay on "Discourse in the Novel" (1934-35), Bakhtin writes:

Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside moral ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward.¹⁹

While discussing Bakhtin's concept of the *dialogic*, Roger Webster refers to the above by saying:

Bakhtin's general view of language is as a field of struggle between what he calls the 'centripetal' or *monologic* forces which strive to impose a singular, fixed meaning and the 'centrifugal' or *dialogic* forces which contest or fragment the singular into plural or multiple meanings.²⁰

Bakhtin shows special interest in the novel and wants that the novelist should not override the characters in his novel, instead the characters should be allowed to voice their feelings and thoughts freely. In a novel, therefore, there is a multiplicity of voices, the voice of the novelist himself and the voices of the characters, drawing from different social and economic levels and also from different communities. As novels tend to be polyphonic, some critics observe: "Bakhtin has become very important to critics of many literatures and has been found to be especially appropriate to the many-voiced, open-ended American novels."²¹ His theories would be very useful for both the creative writers and the critics of Khasi literature as well, since the Khasi novels are mostly monologic while a few of them may be called dialogic.

The formalistic approach was also developed by English and American critics in the 1930s of what came to be called as the *new criticism*. Its distinctive procedure followed by the new critics is

close reading of the words, figures of speech, the organic form of a text, the voice of the author and the experience of the readers, the point of view of the narrator that may be the author's or any one among the characters. The new critics such as Cleanth Brooks, Roger Bredsdley, Blackmur and others, influenced by T.S. Eliot and I. A. Richards have shown special interest in lyric poems. M. H. Abrams argues:

American New criticism, although it developed independently, is some time called "formalist" because like European formalism it stresses the analysis of the literary work as a self-sufficient verbal entity, independent of reference either to the state of mind of the author or to the "external" world.²²

However, the new criticism did not always adopt the same principles as applied by the Russian formalists. It does not emphasize on the work as constituted by linguistic devices for achieving literary effects but on the complex interplay within a work of ironic, paradoxical and metaphoric aspects around a humanly important "theme". M. H. Abrams further observed: "The main influence of Russian and Czech formalism on American criticism has been on the development of stylistics, as well as narratology."²³ Considering both Russian and American types of formalism, Raman Selden points out that the Formalists look for three important features: (1) The deformation of ordinary language. (2) The poetic devices which defamiliarizes automatized conventions or perceptions, and (3) The tensions, ambiguities, or paradoxes, with which the poet grasps the complexity of experience.²⁴

The formalistic approach was no doubt very influential and subsequently led to structuralism. On the other hand, its limitation lies in the fact that it ignores all historical background and sociological concerns which may provide useful information in the search for meaning in a given work.

Psychoanalytic Criticism :

Psychoanalytic Criticism also appeared as one of the major new forms of modern criticism. Some contemporary critics are of the view that "Of all the critical approaches to literature, this has been one of the most controversial, the most abused, and – for many readers – the least appreciated. Yet, for all the difficulties involved in its proper application to interpretive analysis, the psychological approach can be fascinating and rewarding."²⁵ Students of literature can trace back the psychological aspect in their critical study right from the fourth B.C. when Aristotle explained the emotions of pity and fear in a tragedy. The Renaissance and the Romantic critics such as Sir Philip Sidney, William Wordsworth, S. T. Coleridge and others were also aware of the psychological concern in literature which may be seen when they speak about moral effects of poetry and in their speculations of imagination. But, it was only since the 1920s that psychoanalytic criticism began to gain strong foundation with the contribution of Sigmund Freud, an Austrian-born-Jewish psychoanalyst. M. H. Abrams writes:

Freud had developed the dynamic form of psychology that he called psychoanalysis as a means of therapy for neuroses, but soon expanded it to account for many developments in the history of civilization, including warfare, mythology and religion as well as literature and the other arts.²⁶

Freud speculates that the human mind possesses three psychic zones – the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego*. The *id* is the reservoir of libido or sexual energy which is entirely unconscious and possesses the primary driving force of man's personality. The ego is the rational regulating agent of the psyche which controls the instinctual behaviour of a person. Freud describes superego as the representative of all moral restrictions, the advocate of the impulse towards perfection, in short, it is as much as we have been able to apprehend psychological of what people call the 'higher' things in human life".²⁷ W. L. Guerin and his

colleagues are of the view that "the id is dominated by the pleasure principle and the ego by the reality principle, the superego is dominated by the morality principle."²⁸

The psychological approach to literature is nowadays considered useful, since "literature and the other arts", as Jaques Lacan maintains: "like dreams and the neurotic systems, consist of the imagined or fantasized, fulfilment of wishes that are denied by reality or are prohibited by the social standards of morality and propriety."²⁹ If literature deals with life, one has to study the real world as well as the human mind, and what happens in the mind of the author and the people he creates in his work. M. H. Abrams observes the function of the psychoanalytic critic in the following lines:

The chief enterprise of the psychoanalytic critic, in a way that parallels the enterprise of the psychoanalyst as a therapist, is to reveal the true content and also to explain the effect on the reader, of a literary work by translating its manifest elements into the unconscious determinants that constitute their suppressed meanings.³⁰

While following the Freudian Theory which laid much emphasis on sexuality, Martin Coyle and John Peck are of the view that in all psychoanalytic criticism, "there must be an accounting of sexuality in the text Where the work is read as the symptom of the author who produced it or as analogous to the relationship between the dreamer and his or her dream, as if the work is a symptomatic reproduction of the author's infantile and forbidden wishes."³¹

Another prominent psychoanalytic critic, Carl G. Jung, in contrast to his predecessor stresses on the "collective unconscious" which is common to all individuals and cultures, "rather than looking at the text for neurotic symptoms of its author's repressed desire."³² Jungian criticism instead of looking at the individual unconscious of the writer explores the text for its revelation of the images, myths and

symbols of past cultures and tries to see a common quest motif in works of literature. His archetypal insights are briefly discussed later in this section.

The psychoanalytic criticism started to make more significant impact with the influential contributions of Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst who reinterpreted Freudian Theory in the light of the development of linguistic theories. Lacan argues that Freud emphasized too much on the controlling ego or the real self, as separate from the id, the repressed impulses of the unconscious. He is of the view that the unconscious is structured like language. Roger Webster describes Lacan's view of the unconscious in brief as follows:

He sees the unconscious as structured by language, but consisting of language only at the level of the signifier, not the signified. In this respect, the unconscious allows for the free play of language as sign before it is trained into specific, fixed meaning or signified through conscious process.³³

According to Lacan's interpretation, the 'self' cannot always remain apart from the 'other,' for he sees the self as pertaining to life in a society. In this way, Lacan moves from the structure of the self to the structure of the society which is thought as patriarchal and phallogocentric. Considering the changes and developments in critical thinking from one psychoanalyst to another we can see the possibility that critics may omit some meaning or add more meaning or meanings in their reading of a text. Lacan's reformulation of Freudian Theory has given new direction and created significant impact in the realms of Structuralism, Deconstruction and Feminism in the 1970s and 1980s.

Archetypal Criticism :

Another important development in the twentieth century is the archetypal patterns in the study of literature which was initially demonstrated by a group of anthropologists at Cambridge University.

The most prominent figure was James George Frazer who published his voluminous book *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915). Frazer established the identity of "elemental patterns of myth and ritual that, it claimed, recur in the legends and ceremonials of many diverse and far-flung cultures."³⁴ Archetypal approach was also expounded by Carl Gustav Jung's theory of "collective unconscious", through which the experience, knowledge and civilization of the ancients are "expressed in myths, religion, dreams and private fantasies, as well as in works of literature."³⁵ But it was in the 1950s that archetypal criticism was seen to have flourished and made greater impact in the study of literature. Northrop Frye's brilliant essay "The Archetypes of Literature" (1951) and his influential books namely, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) and *The Stubborn Structure* (1970) besides his other publications, have made him an important figure among many archetypal critics. Besides dealing with symbols and images, Frye also speaks of the archetypes of genres. In his *Anatomy of Criticism*, he conforms the types or genres of literature to the four seasons in the cycle of nature, resembling comedy as the mythos of spring; while romance, tragedy and irony or satire as the correspondening genres of summer, autumn and winter.

There is obviously a close link between the mythological approach and the psychological approach in the study of literature. However, the differences of the degrees and of affinities between the two approaches are also pointed out. W. G. Guerin and his colleagues write – "Psychology tends to be experimental and diagnostic ... Mythology tends to be speculative and philosophical; its affinities are with religion, anthropology and cultural history."³⁶ These writers further elaborate:

The two approaches are distinct, and mythology is wider in its scope than psychology. For example, what psychoanalysis attempts to disclose about the individual personality, the study of myths reveals about the mind and

character of a people. And just as dreams reflect the unconscious desires and anxieties of the individual, so myths are the symbolic projections of a people's hopes, values, fears and aspiration.³⁷

Since mythology is universal in its scope, it may well be said that this approach will be very useful in the study of Khasi literature, including the critical analysis since a large component of Khasi literature is drawn from the oral tradition. Hence, it is necessary to have a look at the archetypal patterns of myths in this brief discussion. Different people living in different places have different mythical stories of origin of their own tribes or nations, their beliefs and religions, their migrations and settlements, their survival in times of difficulties and how their civilizations developed during different periods of history. In such human experiences, there are motifs, images and symbols which are universally ascribed to similar or common meaning, "such motifs and images are called *archtypes*."³⁸ For example, a few such patterns to which different people may assign common or similar meanings are the symbols of light, darkness, river, sea, garden, tree, serpent, eagle etc. Frye writes:

Our survey of literary techniques has taken us as far as literary history. Total literary history moves from the primitive to the sophisticated, and here we glimpse the possibility of seeing literature as a complication of a relatively restricted and simple group of formulas that can be studied in primitive culture. If so, then the search for archetypes is a kind of literary anthropology. Concern with the way that literature is informed by pre-literary categories such as ritual, myth and folk tale.³⁹

In recent years, archetypal criticism is given exceptional importance by many critics. In the words of Guerin and his collaborators we can see how Myth Criticism is different from other critical approaches as discussed in the preceding pages:

The task of the myth critic is a special one. Unlike the traditional critic, who relies heavily on history and the biography of the writer, the myth critic is interested more in prehistory and the biographies of the gods. Unlike the formalistic critic, who concentrates on the shape and symmetry of the work itself, the myth critic probes for the inner spirit which gives that form its vitality and its enduring appeal. And unlike the Freudian critic who is prone to look on the artifact as the product of some sexual neurosis, the myth critic sees the work historically, as the manifestation of vitalizing, integrative forces arising from the depths of human kind's collective psyche.⁴⁰

Furthermore, they add:

No other critical approach possesses quite the same combination of breadth and depth. As we have seen, an application of myth criticism takes us far beyond the historical and aesthetic realms of literary study back to the beginning of human kind's oldest rituals and beliefs and deep into our own hearts.⁴¹

At the same time, these critics see some of the inherent limitations of the mythological approach and opine that the "myth critics tend to forget that literature is more than a vehicle for archetypes and ritual pattern"; and that "they forget that literature is, above all else, art."⁴² However, the fact remains that no critical theory can claim its supremacy over all other theories. Moreover, no critical tool can be used for all types of critical analysis in a vast and complex area of criticism.

Structuralism and Post-Structuralism :

Structuralism and Post-Structuralism are also important critical developments in the twentieth century. Structuralism had its origin in the classroom lectures of Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure at the University of Geneva between 1906 and 1911, who developed his theory of language systems. Saussure introduced his concepts of *Langue* and

Parole by which he distinguishes the rules of language and its application or performance. The following illustration gives a clear meaning of the terms *langue* and *parole*:

Saussure's theory of language systems distinguishes between *la langue* (language, the system possessed and used by all members of a particular language community – English, French, Urdu etc.) and *la parole* (word; by extension, speech event or any specific applications of *la langue* in speech or writing). The *parole* is impossible without the support – the structural validity, generation, meaning – conferred upon it by the *langue*, the source of grammar, phonetics, morphology, syntax and semantics. As Saussure explained, *paroles* appear as phonetic and semantic signs (phonemes and morphemes). A linguistic sign joins a *signifier* (a conventional sound construction) to a signification (semantic values, meaning).⁴³

Saussure's theory of the sign is generally considered important on literary works. He views language as a systematic combination of words or signs which may be verbal or visual and which convey some meaning. He uses the terms *signifier* and *signified*; their distinctions are illustrated by Roger Webster to make it clearer:

The signifier is the particular sound or phonetic configuration which produces the word 'dog', and the signified the concept or image associated with it. Language is thus a system of differences; as Saussure said in language there are only differences. It is this structure of differences in terms of sounds and their related meanings which for Saussure constitutes the way that we know and understand the world, and which appealed to later theories, in particular those which are generally labeled as structuralists and post structuralists.⁴⁴

Saussure's theory of language which was initially confined to linguistics only began to flourish as structuralism in other fields of study. Claude Levi Strauss, the French anthropologist applied Saussure's theory

in the study of human cultures, myths and the relationship of different social groups. He opens up a wider scope for structuralist approach, drawing from Saussure's underlying structures of language to the underlying structures of all human cultures. Martin Coyle and John Peck observe, "traditionally anthropologists have looked at particular tribes or groups, but Levi Strauss was more concerned with the structures that underlie all societies."⁴⁵ While Roger Webster writes:

Levi Strauss was applying Saussure's distinction between parole and langue in language to a much wider field of human activity, trying to establish that particular instances of behaviour or myths were manifestations of a universal underlying structure. He saw common structures inhering in myths, mainly binary oppositions, which become the fundamental way in which meaning is constructed, through similarity or difference. Hence according to this view a society and its culture can be reduced to various oppositional components, both abstract and concrete, such as good/bad, man/woman, parent/child, white/black and so on.⁴⁶

Levi Strauss who may be considered as the first major structuralist critic was followed by Roland Barthes. Barthes developed Saussure's concepts of "signifier" and "signified" which he calls "primary signification" into a second level of signification. He sees that the primary signification may produce the secondary signification, "where the signified in turn becomes a secondary signifier suggesting a meaning beyond its literal one."⁴⁷ Roger Webster offers the following example:

An example of this from the realm of popular culture would be the set of signifiers which produce the signified of a brand of soap powder, but the soap powder in turn signifies qualities of whiteness, healthiness, purity and prestige.⁴⁸

Thus, the conceptual meaning of whiteness, healthiness, purity and prestige may again connote other things. Working in this way the *signifieds* may transcend or continue to acquire new meanings. Barthes'

theory of a second level of signification shows the possibility that signifiers in their turn may become new signifiers, the level at which meaning may change. It is here that Barthes moves further from Saussure's idea of a fixed relationship between the signifier and the signified when he refers to something else which may link or correspond to the signified. Raman Selden rightly says, "Barthes understandably tends to favour texts which allow the maximum possible freedom for the signifier and to disfavour those texts which try to limit its freedom."⁴⁹ His writings and those of his contemporary critics like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault may be considered important in the development of poststructuralism.

Poststructuralism, as the term itself suggests, is a development from Structuralism. Deconstruction is one of the approaches within poststructuralist criticism. Some critics observed, "Deconstruction arises out of the structuralism of Roland Barthes as a reaction against the certainties of structuralism."⁵⁰ The most prominent figure of poststructuralism, the French critic Jacques Derrida, is the father of theory of deconstruction. In developing his theory of deconstruction, he has interrogated the logocentrism of Western culture. Derrida in his "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" (1966) argues that in Western science and philosophy, forms of knowledge are structured around a centre, and that this structuring process does not normally draw attentions to itself; it has become naturalized. Discourse or knowledge usually refers to a centre, to 'a point of presence, a fixed origin'. He terms this process as *logocentrism*. While trying to overthrow this traditional belief, Derrida uses the term dissemination suggesting that "meaning is never in fact single or fixed, but constantly proliferating and shifting or slipping, whether it be in spoken or written language."⁵¹ The most important concept, Derrida introduces what he calls *différance*⁵² through which in an indefinite chain of words, the meanings are defined by their difference from other words, and are endlessly deferred as each word leads us to another word in the signifying system. So a text is seen with words in sentences pointing to a number of other words, where the ultimate meanings cannot be contained.

Deconstruction seems to be very controversial and even disturbing in its approach to literature, although it has drawn the attention of many critics. Martin Coyle and John Peck remarked – “the story of criticism and theory in the last decade of the twentieth century was, in part, a rejection of a reaction against deconstruction, but at the same time an absorption of and a working forward from deconstruction.”⁵³ They further add:

Whether one likes it or not, it simply has to be accepted that western society in recent times has been endlessly engaged in a re-examination of its past, of the values it has inherited, and of the cultural and political orders, in particular the order of black and white, male and female, Western and Eastern that have prevailed and continue to prevail.⁵⁴

Debate among critics will continue in favour of or against deconstruction. Nevertheless, this approach has virtually opened new methods in critical practices. Structuralism and deconstruction have influenced Marxist, Feminist, Psychoanalytic, and Reader Response Criticism in various ways.

New Historicism :

As a reaction to the ahistorical approach of deconstruction, a new kind of approach known as New Historicism was developed by a group of poststructuralist critics in the early 1980s. This approach deals with the historical context and cultural practices in the study of literature. It has its roots from diverse disciplines, as H. Aram Veaser says, “It brackets together literature, ethnography, anthropology, art history and other disciplines and sciences.”⁵⁵ The emergence and the condition of its relationship with other approaches may be understood in the words of Martin Coyle and John Peck:

The term was coined by the American critic Stephen Greenblatt and refers to a revived interest, initially amongst

American critics in the early 1980 in looking at literary works in their historical and political context. In part the new movement was a reaction against deconstruction which took an ahistorical approach, but at the same time it built upon the new kinds of approaches, particularly to language, associated with structuralism and deconstruction. New Historicism also overlaps with feminism and Marxist criticism in taking a questioning view of the past, looking at the production, consumption and status of literary texts.⁵⁶

New Historicism develops alongside the British cultural studies and cultural materialism which started a few decades before its introduction. An eminent British Marxist critic, Raymond Williams figured prominently in the movement of Cultural Materialism. Both the new historicists and the cultural materialists share a common interest influenced by the theory of the French philosopher Michel Foucault. Foucault who speaks of truth, knowledge and power in a historical context maintains:

Western history cannot be dissociated from the way ‘truth’ is produced and inscribes its effects. We live in a society which to a large extent marches in time with truth – What I mean by that is that ours is a society which produces and circulates discourses with a truth function, discourse which possess for the truth and holds specific powers.⁵⁷

As New Historicists, cultural materialists also are concerned with cultural sources and set of practices in history. W. L. Guerin and his collaborators write:

Arising amidst the turmoil of the 1960s, cultural studies is composed of elements of Marxism, new historicism, feminism, gender studies, anthropology, studies of race and ethnicity, film theory, sociology, urban studies, public policy studies, popular culture studies and post-colonial studies: those fields that focus on social and cultural forces that either create community or cause division and alienation.⁵⁸

There are some differences between the two movements in their procedures and methods of studying literature and history, but, as Martin Coyle and John Peck write, "Both forms of criticism are interested in power relations in the Foucauldian sense; that they are interested in the way that power is distributed through a whole series of networks and channels."⁵⁹ These new approaches have provided an opportunity for the critics to judge literature and other arts from various angles that a given work may offer. Therefore, these have opened up scopes for scholars and critics to re-read and re-examine literatures of different periods of history. M. H. Abrams notes:

In the course of the 1980s, the viewpoints and practices of new historicism spread rapidly to all period of literary study and were increasingly represented, described, and debated in conferences, books, and periodicals ... In the 1990s it seems clear, new historicism has displaced deconstruction as the reigning form of *avant-garde* critical theory and practices.⁶⁰

Despite the fact that cultural studies and New Historicism have widely spread internationally during the last two decades of the twentieth century, W. L. Guerin and others argue that:

It is ironic that the weaknesses of cultural studies lie in its defining strengths, particularly its emphasis on diversity of approach and subject matter. Cultural studies can become merely an intellectual smorgasbord in which a critic blithely combines fascinating texts and objects in response to other texts and objects without adequately researching and explaining what makes a "culture" in the first place. That is cultural studies is not always accompanied by the kind of "hard" research that historians do to establish "culture."⁶¹

Nevertheless, they do not deny the fact that cultural studies have much to offer when it is not taken as the only means of understanding ourselves, art and literature.

These theories are briefly discussed with the aim to understand the important terms and concepts introduced by eminent critics and philosophers which have underpinned different theories and approaches of the twentieth century. Most of the theories discussed have not been included at the college and university syllabi in Khasi. It is therefore not easy for the students of Khasi literature, particularly those at the lower level, to grasp the meanings and values of these theories. There is, therefore, a need to undertake a critical study on all important theories including the contemporary ones, so that Khasi literature can keep pace with other world literatures.

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