

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!*

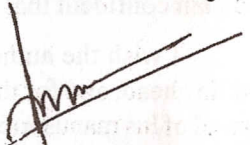

(Prof. I.M. Simon)
Mawlai-Umjaiur,
Shillong - 793 008

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
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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 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)

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

No creative literature develops without a strong critical tradition of its own. Literary criticism as a discipline of thought over centuries has been a multi-disciplinary art, always attempting to refine its methodological apparatus. Although it has been accorded a secondary status to creative writing,¹ the critical act has its value for in its absence a creative work will remain silent or voiceless. Each creative act is an attempt to communicate. Simply put critical activity, in the first place, facilitates communication in attempting to answer the whys and whats of a work of literature. In Kant's understanding the genesis of criticism is to be found in aesthetic pleasure which is disinterested, unintellectual, universal and is not to be confused with the pleasure of the senses or of ordinary emotions. A work of art having a unique ontology produces a unique impression. With such assumptions, the 'meaning of meaning' was interpreted to reveal the peculiar identity and integrity of a work. The aim of the critic was to elucidate this meaning by examining the organisation of the words in a text, their arrangement, patterning of varying stresses and tensions so as to repose the density and wholeness of the structure. The critic's business then is to scrutinize, explore, replicate and interpret the text to help the reader to understand and enjoy it. Besides, the literary critic from time to time speculates about the nature, character and organisation of a literary work. From this it follows that the centre of attraction is the literary work which appears, as it were, to have an independent existence as an object - a product of language, imagination and having some sense of beauty.

The so called critical practice also has its own tradition. Competing schools of thought from the classical period to the modern period underline strong difference on issues such as creativity, author and the reader. However, these disputes instead of weakening the business of criticism have expanded its horizons of expectation. There are two aspects, primarily, of a critical tradition, i.e.: (i) that it is historical, and (ii) that it evolves like its object of study literature from the socio-cultural milieu. It is for this reason that we have Greek, Latin, English and Indian critical traditions. Each one of these critical traditions is self-reflexive to its own literature. However, their methods of enquiry are universal and possibly could be applicable to other literatures as well.

Although literary criticism is very broad in its scope and operation, it has come to function mostly as academic study of literature. However, critics of different persuasions from time to time have attempted to define literary criticism. A. M. Macdonald defines criticism as "critical judgement or observation",² while Roger Fowler maintains that "to criticise" etymologically means "to analyze" and later "to judge".³ Another scholar, J.A. Cuddon is of the view that "the art or science of literary criticism is devoted to the comparison and analysis, to the interpretation and evaluation of works of literature".⁴ W. H. Hudson writes, "In its strict sense the word criticism means judgement.... Criticism deals with poetry, drama, novel, even with criticism itself".⁵ Roger Webster also writes, "We can say that literary criticism involves the reading, interpretation of and commentary on a specific text or texts which have been designated as literature".⁶ Whereas Mathew Arnold defines criticism as "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world and that to establish a current of fresh and true ideas".⁷ Another critic R.A. Scott James says of the critic that he "must have some knowledge of that tract of life from which the creative writer starts".⁸ H. W. Sten, a noted Khasi critic has carefully considered the function of Criticism when he writes :

Criticism searches to find the nobleness, the value of a literary art, be it a poem or a drama or any other creative work. It is an interpretation by reasoning of what a critic has analyzed and compared all aspects of a given/written text/work. It does not aim at condemning the author as a foe or to deride him for the limitations in his book. It does not also mean to praise him when his work is not worth appreciating, since criticism helps the readers to understand and enjoy the book or any published work. It illuminates the theme of the text, it appraises the quality and aesthetic aspect and points out its defect.⁹

Considering the definitions quoted above, criticism or literary criticism is a broad term which is concerned with a systematic study of any work of literature. While judging the aspects and techniques of any work of art, a critic should draw its understanding from life itself and test it by the standard of the best ideas which are acceptable by the society and by the world at large.

India has a strong critical tradition. However, this tradition has been for long put to disuse after the overwhelming and hegemonic presence of colonialism. Although some of the classical Sanskrit Indian critical tradition is present in Bhasa literary criticism, it is no longer functioning as a mainstream critical discourse. What is interesting is that, except few literatures outside the Prakrit and Dravid origin, there is a pan-Indian critical practice heavily loaded with Western critical concepts and methods. Although Indian literary criticism in Sanskrit had started many centuries ago, unfortunately, there is no reliable literary history. While Marathi literature had flourished since the thirteenth century, literary criticism in Marathi assumed significance only in the mid nineteenth century. While literary tradition in Gujarati had begun with the works of Hemacandra in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, its critical tradition can be traced back only up to the nineteenth century. G. N. Devy critically remarks:

It is quite inconceivable that the bhasas produced great literature for half a millenium or more without developing literary criticism in however crude a form. Or, is that Indian literary history has been insensitive to that development?¹⁰

There are a number of Indian writers who write criticism in their native languages and in English as well. It is obvious that bilingualism both in critical and creative works has become a common practice in many Indian languages. This has given rise to a new kind of critical activity which we may appropriately term as Indian English criticism. In this way most of the Bhasa criticism cannot escape the influence of English thought. The new literatures like Khasi, Garo, Mizo etc. which neither have any linguistic affinity with each other nor with any one of the major Indian languages, do not have a strong critical tradition, because these literatures in their written form are not very old. However, in the curricula of these literatures at graduation and post-graduation level, courses in criticism are offered. There are some courses in criticism that are simply picked up from English literature courses. Other courses on criticism are duplication of more or less the same material written in Khasi or Mizo. If this is the situation with courses on criticism, the status of literary criticism in these languages may continue to be propelled with only a sense of appreciation of Western critical practice. Moreover, when the theories of other languages are accepted without proper critical investigation, the sense of taste and judgement is often missing. In the light of the above discussion, the present study proposes to examine the status of literary criticism in Khasi literature, wherein the Khasi M.A. Syllabus will be critically looked into in the later part of this book.

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