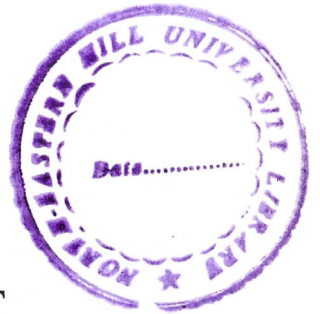


**LITERARY CRITICISM AND
FICTION IN KHASI**

(ABSTRACT)

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LITERARY CRITICISM AND FICTION IN KHASI

(ABSTRACT)

Literary criticism is a broad term which is concerned with the systematic study of literature as a work of art. Broad in its scope and operation, it has come to function as an academic study of literature. As a discipline throughout the centuries, literary criticism has been attempting to improve its apparatus in searching and interpreting the meanings of a work of creative literature.

In the introductory chapter of this study, I have attempted to explain the meaning of literary criticism, the function of a critic, his knowledge and his qualifications. Critics of different persuasions or schools of thought from time to time have attempted at defining literary criticism. While presenting a systematic study on the meaning of literary criticism, I have taken into consideration the definitions given by eminent scholars. For example, A. M. Macdonald defines criticism as a "critical judgement or observation",¹ while M. H. Abrams says, "criticism is the overall term for studies concerned with defining, classifying, analysing, interpreting and evaluating works of literature."² Roger Fowler, on the other hand, maintains that "to criticize", 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 I. A. Richards goes a little deeper when he states that "criticism is the endeavour to discriminate between

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1. A. M. Macdonald, *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1983, p. 308.
 2. M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, (Sixth Edition, Prism Books Pvt. Ltd., Bangalore, India, 1993, p. 308.
 3. Roger Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, London & Boston, 1973, p. 42.
 4. J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Clarion Books, G. T. Road, Sandra, Delhi, Revised Edition, 1980, p. 166.

experiences and to evaluate them. We cannot do this without some understanding of the nature of experience or without theories of valuation and communication".⁵ Richards is right when he maintains that such principles as applied in criticism are fundamental. However, it might be wrong to assume that all other critical principles are arbitrary. W. H. Hudson defines criticism in clear terms, which makes it easy for anyone to understand its meaning when he states. "In its strict sense the word criticism means judgement, criticism deals with poetry, drama, novel, even with criticism itself".⁶

A prominent Indian writer, G. N. Devy, being well aware of the hegemonic influence of the western literary criticism expresses his native critical thinking and defines criticism in the following lines:

Literary criticism is not a set of abstract values, techniques, standards and notions. If literary criticism does not grow organically from the native sort, or take root in it when it is of alien origin, it will fail to function as criticism ...⁷

Khasi authors have also tried to define criticism. H. W. Sten, among others, seems to be deeply influenced by W. H. Hudson when he writes, "Thus when we read any book which speaks about another book, we understand that it is a writing which examines and pronounces one's opinion/judgement on another writing".⁸ He further elaborates, "criticism searches for nobleness, the value of a literary art, be it a poem or a drama or any other creative work".⁹ J. S. Shangpliang similarly opines that this "branch of study refers to a critical work that a critic examines with close

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5. I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, Universal Book Stall, New Delhi, Reprint, 1996, Preface.
 6. W. H. Hudson, *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*, New Impression Reset, pp. 260-61.
 7. G. N. Devy, *In Another Tongue: Essay on Indian English Literature*, Macmillan India Ltd., Madras, 1995, p. 54.
 8. H. W. Sten, *Ka Jingbishar Bniah*, 1979, p. 2.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

scrutiny, any writing which relates to a work of literature or an art".¹⁰

Western literary theories are taken seriously by Khasi authors in their efforts to develop literary criticism. However, considering the critical discourse in Khasi, it has been mostly an effort of producing reading materials and the development seems to continue as imitative.

In this chapter, some questions have also been raised – who is a critic? What are his duties and qualifications? Writers of different periods, as well as the common readers of different genres of literature may understand the name ‘critic’ differently. According to R. A. Scott James, a critic is the listener who understands what is said to him, the reader who has to put himself as nearly as possible where the writer stands. The critic is also the appreciator, the judge and the censor.¹¹ Scott James is one among the western critics who has influenced Khasi writers. However, he fails to discriminate his view from that of other critics when he concludes his discussion with the words of Johnson, “To judge of poets is only the faculty of poets”,¹² which might lead one to interpret that only a poet can be a critic of poetry or only a creative writer can be a critic of a creative work. W. H. Hudson’s view has also exerted a great deal of influence upon Khasi writers. Hudson opines: He further added: “The critic often gives us an entirely fresh point of view; ... He is sometimes a pathfinder, breaking new ground, sometimes a friendly companion, indicating hitherto unperceived aspect of even the most familiar things we pass together by the way”.¹³

On the other hand, I. A. Richards, the advocate of the theory of values, compares a critic to a doctor who is concerned with the health of the mind and

10. J. S. Shangpliang, *Ki Snap Ka Novel*, 1995, p. 37.

11. R. A. Scott James, *The Making of Literature*, Allied Publishers Ltd., New Delhi, 1993, p. 387.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 387.

13. *Op.cit.*, p. 261.

says: "To set up as a critic is to set up as a judge of values".¹⁴ Richards considers value as an ultimate idea of literary criticism.

H. W. Sten in his *Ka Jingbishar Bniah* (Literary Criticism) has succeeded to draw his conclusion to our socio-cultural surroundings. Sten writes:

We may conclude that he (the critic) is the flambeau bearer to guide the readers of the tract that the writer has chosen to follow. He is a star, which shines in the darkness of the night, giving light to a wondering explorer in the deep jungle of literature.¹⁵

Since written Khasi literature is young in age and does not have close links with any developed Indian language, it is not easy for Khasi writers to perceive the meaning of literary terms and theories as used in other Indian literature. Literature is therefore as deep as a new ground covered with a thick forest. By the way, Sten happens to be the first among the Khasi authors to pioneer seriously into critical activities in Khasi. When he uses the words 'flambeau bearer' (*nongrah prew*), 'tract' (*ka lynti*), 'Star' (*u khlur bashai mynmiet*), 'explorer' (*u nongiaidwir ba prong lynti*), 'deep jungle' (*khlawbah*), it is clearly understood that he maintains a trend by following the western theories very closely and also by drawing his understanding from the indigenous Khasi way of life and tradition.

Since a critic can also interpret and judge the works of other critics, Hudson stresses on the need to increase his knowledge and to broaden his experience. On this point he writes:

In the systematic study of the work of any critic there are thus several points to be kept in view. We have to inquire into his personal qualities and equipment, we have to watch for every indication of bias, and to consider both its sources and its bearings; we have to examine the foundations of his

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 46.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

judgements and the standard to which, expressly or by implication, he makes an appeal. Nor must we overlook the important question of the general spirit of his work.¹⁶

The chapter also highlights the segment of periods where the initial attempt of fiction writing was started and how it has grown into various forms. The kind of recent development of literature and the need of literary criticism are also discussed.

Chapter II discusses the origin and development of traditional criticism and the rise of modern theories of criticism. It also presents a brief account of the Indian critical tradition and its revivalist tendency. For convenience, this chapter is divided into three sections.

In the first section, a brief discussion is given on the various forms, types and approaches adopted by some eminent critics. While doing so, it is found that the types, forms and approaches of literary criticism are presented or classified differently by different critics of different periods or even among the contemporary critics. There are critics who, while discussing the function of criticism mentioned its forms such as Legislative Criticism, Aesthetic Criticism and Descriptive Criticism. Other critics write about Historical-Biographical and Moral-Philosophical approaches, while some others prefer the terms Practical Criticism or Applied Criticism which is sometimes distinguished from Impressionistic Criticism and Judicial Criticism. We also frequently come across terms such as Textual Criticism, Theoretical Criticism, Formalistic Criticism, Marxist Criticism, Sociological Criticism etc. However, there are terms which sound distinctive from one another, but which in practice are difficult to make a clear distinction. There are also terms which sound very similar but which in practice are not the same. The use of various critical terms having different or similar meaning or practice, instead of confusing the function of criticism has in some ways added the meaning

16. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

interpretation. 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, text, author and the reader. However, these disputes instead of weakening the business of criticism have expanded its horizons of expectations. There are two aspects, primarily of a critical tradition, which are: (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 literature. However, their methods of enquiry are universal and possibly could be applicable to other literatures as well. Oscar Cargill rightly argues:

I have always held that any method which could produce the meaning of a work of literature was a legitimate method ... The critic's task was to procure a viable meaning appropriate to the critic's time and place. Practically, this meant employing not any one method in interpreting a work of art but every method which might prove efficient.¹⁷

Section 2 of this chapter discusses the rise of modern theories. Since it is neither possible to make a detailed discussion of the several phases or periods nor to examine the theories developed by different critics in the long history of about twenty four centuries, the discussion here is prefatory in nature. Nevertheless, this chapter is essential as a base to understand the development of traditional theories and how the ancient theories have influenced modern theories and Indian literary tradition including Khasi literature. A brief discussion of different traditions such as Greek, Roman and English traditions is then given followed by the discussion of Renaissance Criticism, the movement which actually stimulated the critical mind to the English scholars. Neoclassicism, Romantic and Victorian periods were also

17. Quoted from W. L. Guerin, E. Labor, L. Morgan, J. C. Rees, J. R. Willingham, *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, Fourth Edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 17.

surveyed. The rise of modern theories was briefly looked into and the main characteristics of modern theories such as Russian Formalism, New Criticism, Archetypal Criticism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Structuralist Criticism, Deconstruction, Post Structuralism, New Historicism were also discussed.

The last section of Chapter II is an account of Indian critical tradition. Khasi language has emerged as one of the literary regional languages in India in the early post-colonial period. Since, Khasi has no affinity with other popular languages of the country, the study of its literature has been mostly kept apart from other Indian languages. If Khasi language is to attain a national significance, a knowledge of other Indian literature is also important. 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 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 'Commonwealth literature'.¹⁸

It is said that prior to the introduction of English in School and University courses, Indian literatures such as Tamil, Kannada, Marathi etc., have had well-developed literary forms, in 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.¹⁹ Most Indian bhasa literatures had their origin in the Sanskrit language and literature which had a rich literary tradition spanning some sixteen centuries from Vyasa in the fifth century B.C. to Bhoja in the seventh century A.D.

At the beginning of the last millenium, there was a movement against the hegemony of Sanskrit and any regional languages attempted to develop their own

18. G. N. Devy, *After Amnesia Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism*, Orient Longman Ltd., Bombay, 1992, p. 3.

19. G. N. Devy, *In Another Tongue*, Macmillan India Ltd., Madras, 1995, p. 1

distinct identity. While discussing the tradition and emergence of many other modern Indian languages and literature or Bhasa literature, G. N. Devy, in his book, *After Amnesia* writes:

The new Bhasas expressed regional and heterodox aspirations in protest against the hegemony of Sanskrit and the culture developed through that language, Sanskriti.²⁰

Many new languages slowly emerged and assumed their distinct identity during the period between the eleventh century A.D. and the fifteenth century A.D. However, their literary traditions become known a century or two after assuming their own distinct identity. In any case, by the end of the fifteenth century, all Bhasas had become literary languages.

By the time India encountered British literature, the bhasas already had strong literary traditions, with well-developed literary genres. Besides, literary bilingualism has been a regular practice 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. Western culture and literature were considered superior to Indian literature and most Indians thought that knowledge of the critical concepts from English is an intellectual capital of high value, that should be used for the development of native literatures. Thus, the critical activity in Indian languages 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 languages which are recognized as literary languages in the recent past was very strong. 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 seems to have had a very strong

20. *Ibid.*

impact in their development. 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 is meant to help Indian critics to overcome the loss of cultural memory, and to escape the total influence of western thoughts. G. N. Devy rightly says:

Literary criticism in Indian languages is gradually turning to Nativism, a more alert historical awareness of tradition.²¹

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 movement, directions, possibilities, occasions, productive encounters.²²

Chapter III ^{starts with a discussion} in its first section, on fiction, where the definitions on the term ‘fiction’ offered by M. H. Abrams, W. H. Hudson, Lee T. Lemon, E. M. Forster, Kelley Griffith, Steven Cohan and Linda M. Shires besides others were taken into consideration. Thus, the researcher can conclude that literary narratives such as fable, parable, folk tale, fairy tale, myth, legend, short story, novelette, novel and romance fall in the domain of fiction. Before investigating the beginning of fiction writing in Khasi, I have also highlighted various forms of narratives in some detail tracing their beginnings to the oldest form of fiction. From the numerous simple narrative, Fiction as an art, as its latest development has added numerous types of novels. Such have also been discussed briefly in this chapter.

21. *Op.cit.*, p. 54.

22. John Oliver Perry, “Criticism in India Now: In Some Useful Work to be Done?: in *Interpretation of Texts, Text, Meaning and Interpretation*, Edited by K. C. Baral, Pencraft International: Delhi, 2002, p. 65.

Section 2 of the chapter deals with the Khasi oral tradition and the advent of colonial rule in these hills. Khasi oral tradition was handed down to younger generations through folktales, stories, fables, homilies and various traditional rhymes or poems called '*Phawar*'. The stories which are called '*Parom*' are of many categories. The short ones like anecdotes, fables, and short stories and the lengthy ones like the novels. In the Khasi oral tradition, there are elements of the short stories, novels and romance in the '*Parom*' and elements of poetry in the '*Phawar*'. In such a way, elders handed down the oral tales to younger generations, such as those on creation and the divine origin of the Khasi race, their religion and belief, their custom and tradition, their folk beliefs, myths, legends, fables, parables and various stories.

The Khasis had their own political system and a democratic way of governance under the '*Syiems*', '*Lyngdohs*' and '*Sirdars*', where a group of clans comprising some villages or hamlets, organized their independent states under the headship of the '*Syiems*', '*Lyngdohs*' or '*Sirdars*'.

The last section of the chapter deals with the advent of written literature and progress of Education in Khasi-Jaintia Hills. The Khasi '*Syiems*' had previously adopted the scripts of their neighbours, such as Bengali, Assamese, Devanagiri and even Persian and Arabic to preserve land records, maintaining emissary contact and in keeping relations with the Muslims and other Kingdoms, prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries. Nonetheless, the British had given a lasting heritage to the Khasis when they devised the Roman script for putting Khasi language into writing. Krishna Chandra Pal who was the first missionary to Khasi Hills then put the Shella dialect into writing by using Bengali script. But the real beginning was made by Thomas Jones, who introduced the Roman script for Sohra dialect. The year 1842 marked the beginning of formal education when the three schools at Mawsmal, Mawmluh and Sohra were reopened.

Written Khasi literature started with Jones' translation of the Bible and other Christian writings, gradually began to emerge. Semi-secular and secular types also began to appear especially when Khasi writers began to make their contribution to Khasi literature.

Chapter IV makes a thorough investigation into the beginning and the growth of written Khasi fiction, which is divided into three phases. The early phase covers the period from 1867-1959 where the growth of fiction was found mostly in the forms of fables, tales, legends, myths, anecdotes and short stories. John Roberts, Soso Tham and Primrose Gatphoh were the major contributors during this period. A polished translation of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, entitled *Ka Jingiaid U Pilgrim* which was published in 1910 may be considered as the first work of fiction in Khasi.

The middle phase covers the period from 1960-1985 which witnessed a steady growth of various forms of fiction including the novel. The seed of fiction which were found scattering here and there in the beginning of written Khasi literature have during this period multiplied in number and more importantly have blossomed into full-fledged novels. Eminent Khasi writers on Khasi fiction including F. M. Pugh, D. S. Khongdup, S. J. Duncan, W. Tiewsoh, H. W. Sten are among the many others who have contributed substantially to the development of fiction during this period.

The last part of this chapter is an attempt to examine the kind of contemporary development during the period from 1986-2000. The growth and development of fiction during the period between 1867 and 1959 was rather too slow, the period between 1960 and 1985 witnessed a kind of steady growth while the period from 1986 to 2000 manifested a prolific kind of growth. Considering the trend of its growth during the last one and a half decades, it has been observed that there are authors who produced many books but which literary quality leaves much to be desired. Nevertheless, there are also many books which are valuable

contributions by which the stature of Khasi fiction may be said to have attained greater heights.

Authors such as B. C. Jyrwa, D. T. Laloo, K. W. Nongrum, K. K. Kharlukhi, F. S. Lyngdoh, K. Lartang, P. Kharshiing and others have published a number of novels, from which some can be considered good quality novels. Some women novelists such as Minimon Laloo and Phidalia Toi have also emerged during the period to contribute to the enrichment of Khasi fiction. H. W. Sten and W. Tiewsoh are considered to be more prominent Khasi novelists of the later part of the twentieth century. The causes for the prolific growth of Khasi fiction during the contemporary period are also examined critically.

Chapter V deals with the beginning of critical activity and development of critical works on the novel where prominent Khasi critics on the novel were considered at greater length. The aim in the first section of this chapter is not to examine the critical works of different authors. I have restricted myself only to highlighting their attempt in developing literary criticism in Khasi.

A beginning in literary criticism in Khasi was initiated in 1919, when Sib Charan Roy reacted against reading a novel. He also expressed his unfavourable attitude towards reading the *Bible*, the *Mahabharat* and the *Koran*. In 1925, Edrenel Chyne shows his critical insights on poetry in his “*Ka Jingai Khmat*” (Foreword) to Soso Tham’s *Ki Poetry Khasi* (1925), where he explained the functions of poetry. M. B. Jyrwa who has tried to go to the root of critical activity in Khasi in her *Ki Nongrim Literature bad ka Jingbishar Bniah* (2002) mentioned an article “*Ka Poetry*” which she located in the Khasi newspaper *U Woh* (October, 1929), the author of which was not known. She has also identified Sydney Evans as one who has shown his critical understanding on the measurement of poetry when he wrote his article “*Ka Mitar*” in *U Nongialam Khristan* (Sept., 1931). In 1934, Seint Sing, an evangelist by profession warns Church elders and parents about the evil influence of novels. The remarkable Khasi poet, Soso Tham himself

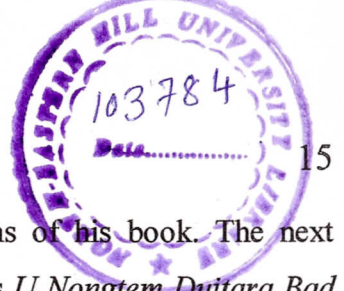
in 1935-36 ventured to define poetry. To him, poetry is a spirit, a musical instrument and a two-edged sword. In 1937, Owen Rowie wrote his essay "Ka Literature" which states that literature should represent the real and the ideal which are valuable for the spiritual growth of human beings. In the same year H. Elias contributed to critical activity by writing his essay "Kaei Ka Poitri?" which was published in a magazine *Ka Syngkhong Jingtíp*. D. N. S. Wahlang published his radio speech "Ki Nongthoh Poetry bad ki Kam Jong ki" in his "Ka Tien Lamphrang" (Preface) to *Ki Sur Khasi* (1954). Another Khasi poet, Primrose Gatphoh in 1928, wrote his essay "Balei Ngi Dei Ban Pule Poetry?" (Why is it necessary to read poetry?). But this essay was published only in 1961 in his book *Ki Umjer Ksiar*. S. Khongsit published his essay "Kaei Ka Poetry" (What is poetry) in his *Ki Sur Ha La Ri* brought out in the year 1966. F. M. Pugh, an eminent Khasi writer, besides his contribution of a number of textbooks for school and college curriculum spared his precious time to write his "Ka Jingkynthoh" (comment) in V. G. Bareh's *Ka Drama U Tirot Singh* published in 1966. His "Introduction" in S. Khongsit's *Ki Sur Na La Ri* (1963) reveals his critical understanding of poetry. Pugh writes his preface "Sha Ki Nongpule" (To the Readers) in his *Ka Sawangka Ki Sawngut Ba Iap Mynsaw* (1967) which contains his critical reflection on the drama. D. S. Khongdup's *Ka Drama U Baieit Donshkor* published in 1968 also includes another Pugh's critical comments.

From 1919 till 1968, critical activity in Khasi had appeared scatteredly in various forms of essays, prefaces, introductions and forewords to different books of literature. It was only when F. M. Pugh undertook a more serious and indepth study on poetry and drama in his work *Ka Prosody bad ka Retorik* (1970) that literary criticism started to come of age. H. W. Sten, another important critic published his first critical work, *Ki Poetry U O.M. Wahlang* in 1976. In 1979, he published three important critical works, namely, *Ka Poitry U Primrose Gatphoh*, *Ki Sur Na Ka Duitara Ksiar* which is a study of Soso Tham's poetry, and *Ka Jingbishar Bniah* where he discussed the meaning and forms of criticism. B. L. Swer had also worked in this field and made his contribution through his book

Katto Katne Shaphang Ka Sonnet which he published in 1978. In 1980, H. W. Sten published another critical work on Soso Tham's *Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep* entitled *Na Ka Hyndai Sha Ka Lawei*. Another Khasi scholar R. S. Lyngdoh published his book *U Sier Lapalang Kumba Paw ha ki Nongthoh Bapher* in 1981. In that year B. L. Swer contributed another critical work through his book *Katto Katne Shaphang Ka Lyric*. With this book he is placed as one of the eminent Khasi critics on poetry.

H. W. Sten who took the lead among the critics published his important book, *Shaphang Ka Novel* in 1982. His book will be examined in more detail in the section that follows. In the same year, S. S. Majaw brought out his first critical work *Ki Syrwet Jingshai* where he critically studied some of the poems of Soso Tham and V. G. Bareh. H. R. Bareh figured himself in the list of Khasi critics when he published his work, *F. M. Pugh: A Study of Plot and Character* in 1983. Laborius Nongrum published his *Ka Jingbishar Bniah ia ka Literature Khasi* in the year 1984. M. S. Kharsyntiew's *Ki Khyndai Jylla* was also published in 1984. His is a critical work on H. W. Sten's poetry *Ka Burom Ba La Jah*. In 1985, H. W. Sten, B. L. Swer and B. War published their critical essays in a booklet *Ki Snap Ka Bishar Bniah*. Another noted Khasi writer, J. S. Shangpliang brought out his book *Leslie Harding Pde As A Novelist* (1988) in which he critically examined the techniques used by Pde in his four novelettes. This is one of the selected works chosen for a detailed analysis in Chapter VI. In 1989, Rajjesh K. Lyngdoh published his *Ka Jingpynshai Ia U Kynjri Ksiar*. This is a textual criticism on B. C. Jyrwa's novel. Lyngdoh finds that in many of its aspects, the author of the given text could not meet the norms. However, the critic maintains that B. C. Jyrwa's two best novels, namely, *U Kynjri Ksiar* and *U Kyrdoh Mawlynnai* rank equally with "those of the world".²³ The question arises, which world does the critic refer to. In his conclusion, R. K. Lyngdoh tries to elevate these works to heights which

23. R. K. Lyngdoh, *Ka Jingpynshai Ia U Kynjri Ksiar*, (1979), p. 52.



he himself has denied the novelist in previous sections of his book. The next publication on Khasi literary criticism was S. S. Majaw's *U Nongtem Duitara Bad Ka Jingpynshai* (1990). Another important work of H. W. Sten is *Khasi Poetry: Origin and Development* published in 1990. H. W. Sten, J. S. Shangpliang and D. Mawroh brought out another book *Na Kiwei Bad Na Lade Bad Ki Snap Ka Novel*, in 1991. Critical studies on drama were obviously lacking behind, B. L. Swer took the initiative and published in 1994, *Na Pneh Ka Ryngsan*, a work on dramatic criticism. H. W. Sten's book, *An Introduction to Aristotle's Poetics* also appeared in the same year.

The year 1998 also marked another significant achievement when two women scholars, Streamlet Dkhar and M. B. Jyrwa appeared on the scene. Streamlet Dkhar published her *Ka Jingbishar Bniyah Ia Ka Shangkawiah Ki Rang*, while M. B. Jyrwa brought out her critical study on H. W. Sten's poetry *Ka Burom Ba La Jah Bynta I*. In the year 2000, I. Warpakma brought out in his book *Ka Pyrshiw*, three essays on H. W. Sten's novel, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut* (Everlasting Desire). The titles of his essays are: "Haunting *Hoooid* in H. W. Sten's *Kwah Bymjukut*", "Living after Death – Art and Life – A tribute to H. W. Sten", "The psychological battle in H. W. Sten's *Everlasting Desire*". Although the critic has mainly focused only on the psychological aspect of the novel, it is clear that War Pakma, as a critic has contributed much in exploring new methods of critical study on the novel. In his analysis, the critic shows a more discernment of certain aspects of Sten's novel.

The last section of this chapter considers the selected works of prominent Khasi critics on the novel. Two books on literary theory and criticism by prominent critics, namely H. W. Sten and J. S. Shangpliang were considered at greater length. These are H. W. Sten's *Shaphang Ka Novel* (1982), and J. S. Shangpliang's *Ki Snap Ka Novel* (1995). H. W. Sten discusses the theme of the novel, its various types, functions and its structure. According to H. W. Sten, the structure of the novel comprises the plot, the story, the characters and their actions.

H. W. Sten has elaborately and critically explained each of these important elements of the novel such as the plot, the art of characterization, the narrative art, etc. Each one of those are examined critically in this study. It may be concluded that Sten's insights into the novel make him one of the most noted critic on Khasi fiction.

J. S. Shangpliang is another major Khasi critic on the novel. This section also critically examined his book, *Ki Snap Ka Novel* (1991) in which he has ventured to identify the differences between the two sisters of fiction, the 'novel' and the 'romance'. Regarding the important elements of the novel, besides mentioning the plot, characterization and the narrative art which almost all previous critics of the novel have dealt with, he has also ventured to examine other parts which he considers important for a successful novel. These are the setting, the role of supernatural elements, dreams and visions, as well as other novelistic techniques such as nature and letters. While investigating his works and the manner in which he treats those important elements, he comes very close to H. W. Sten as a critic who has made a thorough study on the art of the novel.

Chapter VI presents a brief discussion on 'text', 'meaning' and 'interpretation'. Since criticism is a discourse about texts, the critical study of literature has raised important questions on the meaning of text, the methods of searching the meaning in the text and the rules concerned with interpretation of the meaning in a text. While defining a text, D. C. Greethams writes:

It is a place inhabited only by a sole, creative author And it is also a place constructed wholly out of social negotiation over transmission and reception.²⁴

In view of this definition it is understood that the author draws his understanding from the people and the society. He derives his materials from the situations that

24. D. C. Greethams, *Theories of Text*, New York: Oxford University Press, First Published, 1999, p. 63.

occurred around him. Hiran Gohain says, "Literary text today are also notoriously becoming a battle ground of conflicting interpretation. Again the situation is as much a better of theoretical as of social developments".²⁵ One might think a text is constructed and brought out in the form of a word, sentence or a book by the author, however, the existence of such text is felt only when it is read or interpreted. Hence, a text cannot be kept in isolation from the readers, or else it will cease from its being. Some modern writers considered "that texts are virtually constructed by readers following certain conventions of meaning".²⁶ Therefore, a literary text does not belong to the writer alone. It belongs to the readers and the society also.

In the search or quest for meaning, Andrew Milner is of the opinion that the relevant meaning was that intended, either consciously or unconsciously by the author of a literary text.²⁷

Now, in consideration of the meaning of interpretation which is a very important function of a critic, it is also necessary to understand the meaning of 'hermeneutics'. John Peck and Martin Coyle writes:

When we look at a text we interpret what it means. Interpretation is concerned with clarifying the meaning of the work by analyzing its language and commenting on it ... Hermeneutics, by contrast, refers to the general theory of interpretation, the procedures and principles involved in getting at the meaning of text. What we say about the text depends to a large extent upon our ideas about what we are to look for.²⁸

The methods of interpretation varies according to different theories and approaches. So also is a matter of interpretation. K. C. Baral writes:

25. *Op.cit.*, p. 18.

26. *Ibid.*, p.

27. Andrew Milner, *Literature, Culture and Society*, UCL Press Ltd., London, First published, 1996, p. 29.

28. John Peck and Martin Coyle, *Literary Terms and Criticism*, Palgrave Study Guides Literature, New York, 3rd Edition, 2002, pp. 156-57.

Texts are objects and entities of interpretation. However, the concept of interpretation has changed in a substantial way starting from Aristotelian rhetoric to contemporary enquiry ... In this process interpretation occupies the status of a constant deferral like the text that is not stable and undergoes constant shifts in re-de-textualization of the presence/absence or multiplicity of meanings.²⁹

In the light of the above discussion, I feel, it is necessary to approach texts with a wider frame of mind, knowledge and experience, drawing from relevant theories ancient or modern and taking into consideration the moral and social values which may be acceptable by different communities at different periods of time and places.

After a brief discussion of text, meaning and interpretation, the purpose of this chapter is to review the critical analysis and interpretation given on some Khasi novelettes/novels. J. S. Shangpliang's work *Leslie Harding Pde As A Novelist* has been selected for this purpose. I have critically studied the selective work mentioned above. My approach in this study is drawn from the theories which have influenced J. S. Shangpliang as well as from the recent theories which I find applicable in this work. I have also considered the critic's viewpoints in the light of our own culture, moral virtues, social customs and practices. The norms and criteria adopted and proposed by the critic have also been critically analyzed while doing so, the analysis of the critic on important points or aspects such as the title, theme and sub-themes, the plot, characterization, settings, the story and the telling of the story were discussed accordingly.

The contents of Shangpliang's *Leslie Harding Pde As A Novelist* (1998), contained the background of the novelist (L. H. Pde), his narrative art, his men and women, the role of nature, the supernatural elements, dreams and visions,

29. K. C. Baral, "Introduction" in *Interpretation of Texts: Text, Meaning and Interpretation*, edited by K. C. Baral and Published by Pencraft International, Delhi, 2002, pp. 13-14.

novelistic techniques and a critical review, each of which the critic has given a full separate chapter. The background of the author which is the first chapter indicates that the critic focuses his study entirely on the author, and gives little attention to the readers of the novel. His discussion on Pde's narrative art gives much praise to the novelist. Shangpliang's view that "As works of arts, Pde's novels rank high among novels in Khasi literature" and that "His selection of modern themes makes his works more superior than others and attracts the attention of more readers",³⁰ appears biased in the novelist's favour. Regarding the plot in Pde's novels he says, "Having thus, examined his art of plot construction in all the four novels, we can conclude that Pde is a master of plot maker".³¹ Further, he says, about the novelist "As a creator of men and women in the world of novel, Pde excels most of the novelists, both of his time and those proceeding him".³² Other critics may not arrive at a consensus on what Shangpliang determines Pde's position, since a comparative study of Pde's novels and those of his contemporaries or of his predecessors were nowhere presented. Scholars may also find it hard to agree that Pde's art "excels" that of H. W. Sten's or that of W. Tiewsoh's. It is in this chapter that he talks about the theme, the plot, characterization and the high place of Pde's novels as well. Yet, the discussion about narrative art was not given enough space.

Regarding his analysis of men and women in Pde's novels, the critic is right to conclude that Pde is a creator of women than of men since women appear more prominently in almost all of Pde's novels. His discussion on the role of nature, the use of supernatural element, visions and dreams and other techniques in the selected texts show his deep insight into the art of the novel. he seemed to have done well as a critic. Shangpliang in his critical review is also right when he states that, "Pde is a realist. His stories are based on facts".³³ Here, it seems that

30. J. S. Shangpliang, *Leslie Harding Pde As A Novelist*, Akashi Book Depot, Shillong, 1988, pp. 21-22.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Shangpliang found in Pde's works or texts that the author developed his creativity "out of social negotiation" as Greethams maintains. Shangpliang earns the credit for the courage and initiative to publish a book of this kind which is the first in Khasi literature. He also stands apart as a critic who has made valued judgement on the importance of Khasi traditional beliefs, customs and practices in the making of a novel.

After having dealt with all the components under the scope of this research, it is felt necessary to present an overall conclusion in just a few lines that much of the growth of the Khasi novel at present does not show a healthy trend, because of lack of quality novels. However, with the impact of an enlightened society this trend is expected to change, because literature and society can never be kept separately. The fact that many research scholars are currently analyzing the different aspects, themes and techniques of the Khasi novel will, no doubt, raise the standards of the novel in particular and of Khasi Literature in general in the near future.