CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The North-Eastern part of India comprises eight states of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

1.1. The major groups of population in North-East are

(a) Tibeto-Burman including Nagaland Manipur, Mizoram parts of Meghalaya like Garo etc.

(b) The Indo Aryan includes Brahmaputra cachar etc.

(c) And the Mon-Khmer group includes Khasi, Jaintia.

1.2. Austro-Asiatic language family

Nagaraja (1989), mentions that the languages of the Austro-Asiatic family are spoken in India and in south Asian countries. Austro–Asiatic language family consist of four main branches:

1) Munda
2) Mon-Khmer
3) Malacca and
4) Nicobarese

He also mentions that among these four branches Munda and Mon-Khmer branches are spoken in India.

1.3. A brief Profile of Meghalaya

The state of Meghalaya termed as ‘the Abode of Clouds’ belongs to the North-eastern states of India comprising Khasi hills, Jaintia hills and Garo hills. Meghalaya was part of Assam as an autonomous state on 2nd April, 1970 but was declared a fully fledged
state on 21st January, 1972. With Shillong as its capital state, Meghalaya is further divided into seven districts which include the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Headquarters</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. East Khasi Hills District</td>
<td>Shillong.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. West Khasi Hills District</td>
<td>Nongstoin.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Ri-Bhoi District</td>
<td>Nongpoh.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. East Garo Hills District</td>
<td>Williamnagar.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. West Garo Hills District</td>
<td>Tura.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. South Garo Hills District</td>
<td>Baghmara.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Meghalaya is inhabited by Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo tribes along with other different communities. Nearly half of the population of the state depends on agriculture for livelihood; rice being the staple food is cultivated in bountiful. The other agriculture products include maize, potatoes, fruits, areca nuts and betel leaves and different vegetables depending on the altitude of the place. The state also produced minerals like coal, limestone etc; Meghalaya is also rich in forestry and wildlife. The traditional festivals of Meghalaya include

1. *Shad Suk Mynsiem* (Dance of Joyful Heart/ Thanksgiving dance).
2. *Pomblang Nongkrem* is popularly known as *Nongkrem Dance*.
3. *Behdiengkhlam*, this word literally means beating the evil spirit out of their houses.
4. *Wangala Dance*, it is the harvest thanksgiving dance of the Garo.
1.3.1. Khasi

Khasi found and spoken in the khasi and Jaintia hills in the state of Meghalaya falls to the North of the border between India and Bangladesh. In the East, Khasi extend a few kilometers into Bangladesh. In spite of its isolation in linguistically alien territory, in close contact with Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman languages Khasi has retained its grammatical and lexical individuality, amplifying its resources, however with borrowings from Bengali Hindi and English. Apart from the Standard form of the language there are few dialects including Synteng (pnar).

Khasi belongs to the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family. It is spoken by the Khasi and Jaintia tribe of the state of Meghalaya in North-East India. Khasi originally had no script of its own. It is only with the coming of the Welsh-missionary (1842) that the script was introduced and translation works were done in the Standard dialect (Sohra variety). Khasi is the only Mon–Khmer language spoken in India. Grierson (1904) mentions four dialects of Khasi. These are Khasi proper, Pnar or the Synteng, the Lyngngam, and the War dialects. Bareh (1977) lists the following dialects of Khasi depending on the geographical location. The main dialects that he listed are:

- Amwi- in the southern Jaintia Hills
- Shella-in the southern Khasi Hills
- Warding-another dialect of the south of Khasi Hills
- Myriaw, Nongkhaw, Nongspung, Maram, Mawiang-spoken in the mid-western area of Khasi Hills
- Cherra-mid-southern Khasi Hills
- Nongkrem, Myliem, Laitlyngkot, Lyniong-Khasi-spoken in the central parts
- Jowai-Central Jaintia
- Bhoi in north-east, Khasi Hills
Manar, Nongwah, Jirang-north Khasi Hills and Nongstoin and Langrin-western Khasi

Bareh further mentions the characteristics of the dialects on their phonology, syntax and morphology especially on phonology in which they tend to differ not only between the different dialects but also one village to another citing example from English with translations from different dialects of Khasi.

Gurdon (1907) gives a detailed study of the Khasi and its varieties. He describes that the Khasis resides in two districts the Khasi hills and the Jaintia hills districts each with different sub-tribes. The inhabitants of the Khasi and Jaintia hills are divided into the following sections: Khasi, Syntengs, War, Bhoi and Lyngngam; These inhabitants speak different dialects which are either similar or dissimilar or completely unintelligible as compare to the Standard dialect even though they derive their origin from the Khasi root. Gurdon further sub-divided the sections as follows: the Khasi proper include the inhabitants of the central high plateau, Cherra, etc. the Syntengs or Pnars include the Synteng proper, Nongtungs, and Kharwangs: the Wars into War proper and War Pnars: the Bhois who inhabit the low northern part of the district. Gurdon further gave the geographical location of all the tribes and these tribes are called and recognized by their tribes name example the Khasi proper, the Wars, the Lyngngam, the Bhois, the Pnars or Syntengs of Jaintia hills, etc. he discusses on the origin, appearance and complexion, physical and general characteristics of each tribes, also their dress, jewelry, weapons etc. their domestic life which include occupation, villages, furniture and household utensils, agriculture, hunting, fishing, food, drink etc. then he look on the laws and customs which include tribal and state organization, marriage, inheritance, war, etc. he also talk in detailed about the religion and rites followed by the people. Gurdon further talks about the different popular
Khasi folklore, the Khasi method of calculating time. He also gave a brief discussion about the language the lexical differences and similarities on a few words compare to other Mon-Khmer languages and on the grammar and syntax of the language.

1.4. The Wars

War dialect of Khasi is subdivided into two groups i.e. War-Khasi and War-Jaintia. The War dialect of Khasi (i.e. War-Khasi and War-Jaintia) is spoken in the South-East corner of the Khasi and Jaintia hills District respectively.

Gurdon in his book *The Khasis* (1907) has given a detailed description of the Wars; Gurdon talks about the location, the life of the war people, their life, occupations and mainly dealt on their religion. According to Gurdon (1907: 2,21, 34) the Wars inhabit the precipitous slopes and deep valleys to the south of the district of khasi hills extending along the entire southern boundary of the district. War villages nestle on the hill-sides of the southern border. In the villages are observed large groves of arecanut, often twined with the pan creeper and of plantain trees, which much enhance the beauty of the scene. Gurdon says that looking at a War village from the distance a darker shade of green is seen, this is because of the extensive groves of the much celebrated khasi oranges grown in these areas and also prove to be a source profit of the people. Further Gurdon says that in a convenient spot in the village a clear space is to be seen neatly swept and kept free from weeds, and surrounded with stone wall, where the village tribunals sit and the elders meet in solemn conclave. Dances are also held here on festive occasions. In the War culture children inherit both ancestral and acquired property in equal shares, both male and female with the exception that the youngest daughter is given something in addition to her share. Grierson (1904) on the other hand talks on the War dialects which differ from the Standard dialect.
1.4.1. War Nongjri

War Nongjri is one of the varieties of Khasi language which belongs to the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family. War Nongjri is spoken in the Southern part of the East-Khasi hills district.

1.4.1.1 Origin

The village Nongjri is called as the ka elaka Nongjri. Through ancestral stories it is believed that the first inhabitants of Nongjri settled in a place called ŌIAI-SHYNRED which falls East of the elaka of Nongjri it was believed that the dwellers tend to live longer so they migrate to a place called Nongnem ( Nongrim- old village), here they settled for many years; performing rites and rituals dug a well for drinking purpose in which they made a deal that if anyone ever drowned in the well they would leave the place and settle elsewhere. But the people here too did not dwell as long the death of few children who fell into the well caused the people to leave the place and to settle in the present village called Nongjri. Some believed that Nongjri was named after the rubber tree found in the centre of the village where rituals are being performed every festival.

1.4.1.2. Location

Nongjri is located in the South-Eastern part of Khasi hills district; the village falls to the East of Pynursla. Nongjri is around 80kms from Shillong and 30kms from Pynursla. Nongjri situated in the border areas of Bangladesh and Surrounded by the following villages Mawkliauw in the North, Umniuh in the East, Sohbar in the West and Bangladesh in the South and surrounded by the rivers Wah Rew and Wah Maw Kylla. The village is divided into three localities Nongjri-Tluh, Nongjri-Nongbah and Nongjri-War which falls under the elaka Nongjri or Nongjri sirdar ship. These localities have two Sordars to take care of the localities; the Sordar Raid who takes
care of the law and order and maintenance in the localities and the Sordar Niam who takes care of rites and rituals in the village.

1.4.1.3. Population

The total number of the population of Nongjri is 3000 approximately and 1000 houses; the female population seems to be larger than the male population.

1.4.1.4. Occupation

Agriculture is the main occupation and livelihood of the people. The people live on cultivation in which they have their own plantation area or what they called bri. The people cultivate areca-nut, betel-leaf, broom, black-pepper and citrus fruits, which they export to Shillong, Bangladesh and also neighboring villages on market days, the people also cultivate vegetables during the winter season. Some of the educated choose a different occupation like the white collar job.

1.4.1.5. Dress, ornaments and food habits

The dresses of women differ from the men; in the olden days the men wear a head turban a dhoti, earrings which they called khoila but this has changed in the modern days people tends to move to a newer way of dressing with the exception of festivals; like all the Khasi women the women of Nongjri also use ornaments either of silver or gold the dress pattern of the women also with the exception of festivals is very simple which consist of skirt, blouse or either a frock accompanied with an apron called rad-shikot like the Khasi apron. The use of the apron rad-shikot is considered to be strictly important as it shows decency of the women which is rarely found to be strict in other parts of Khasi. Rice is the staple food of the people, also yam, meat and other vegetables. The people drink rice-beer during festivals and ceremonies.

The people used simple tools for cultivation and everyday used tools like machete, knife, a cone bamboo basket, etc. The people also used weapons like bows, arrows,
guns for hunting unlike the olden days when the people engaged themselves in wars and battles with the neighboring villages especially inter-kingdom feuds. To mention few of the feuds fought are the ‘thma kharai’ with the Khatar shnong; with the king of Sohra in 1923 and the king of Synteng (Jaintia) after the coming of David Scott.

1.4.1.6. Religion and Culture

60% of the total population follows the traditional religion or what can be called as ka niam tynrai. The people are the faithful followers of their religion they perform rites and ceremonies in any important occasion especially during festivals. The rituals are performed twice in a year i.e., the first i.e. the summer festival starts during the month of April and ends by June and the second i.e. the winter festival starts from October through November. The War of Nongjri worship u lei lyngdoh, the tutelary deity of the village, under the spreading roots of a large rubber tree; the rituals is performed by a village priest (lyngdoh or Sordarniam ) at stated intervals, or whenever it is considered necessary. The other ritual is the pujer (naming of a child) which is performed as soon as the child is born. Customs in connection with the death, the dead body is placed on a bier near the door of the house, a turban being tied about the head; the face being left bare and turned towards the door the rituals performed for the death is called the phor. Apart from the traditional religion with the advent of the missionaries in the Khasi Hills Christianity also spread to Nongjri; one can find different religious denomination of Christianity like Presbyterian, Catholic, Church of God (Ecclessia) and Fellowship.

1.4.1.7. Literacy and development

Approximately 90% of the total population is educated and compare to the male female are more in literacy rate; there are few drop-outs. The village consist of five schools are either run by the Government, or by religious institution. The schools
have both English and Khasi sections and the medium of instruction is the Standard Khasi and English in the English sections schools, there are times when the local dialect is also used. For higher studies people move out to Shillong etc. There is rapid development in roads, education, etc.

1.4.1.8. Language

Nongjri though a variety of Khasi, shows a great deal of linguistic variation from the standard Khasi, especially in terms of phonological and lexical words.

The people maintain their own dialect though with the new generation trying to shift or switch for easier lexical words as compared to the old ones. Standard Khasi and English are the other means of communication apart from the local dialect. The people also use Bengali to communicate with the Bangladeshi as in trade and commerce.

1.4.2. Linguistic Classification

There are two main ways of classification of languages. The best known way of classifying languages is in terms of their genetic relatedness and the other way is in terms of areal shared properties or typological classification.

1.4.2.1. Genetic classification

Diffloth (2005) uses the term ‘Khasian’ (for Khasi) and he places Khasi an under Khasi-Khmuic branch. This has been shown in the following figure. 1; p, 10
Fig 1

- **Munda**
  - Remo
  - Savara
  - Kharian–Juang
    - Korku
    - Kherwarian

- **Khasi–Khmuic**
  - Khmuic
    - Pakanic
    - Palaungic
  - Khasian
    - Vietic
      - [5]
    - Katuic
    - Bahnaric
      - Khmer
      - Pearic
    - Nicobarese
    - Aslian
    - Monic

- **Asiatic**
1.4.2.2. Typological classification of War Nongjri

1.4.2.2.1. Morphological typology

Morphology of War Nongjri like Khasi is also mostly isolating in which each word would consist of just one morpheme and partly agglutinating in which words do change to show different morphological categories. For example

Isolating:

1) ḫi ɲa ɲa
   eat  rice 1SG
   ‘I eat food’

Agglutinating:

2) pin-tian
   Cause-feed
   ‘Feed’

1.4.2.2.2. Word order typology

1.4.2.2.2.1. Word order

The basic word order of War Nongjri is SVO but it also exhibit alternative word orders like VOS and VSO as illustrate in the following examples:

3) ka lin ṭ⁴ə? kɔt ka
   3SGF lin write book 3SGF
   ‘Lin writes a book’

(4) ṭ⁴ə? kɔt ɲa
   write book 1SG
   ‘I write a book’

5) u-ɲa ṭ⁴ə? kɔt ɲa
   NOM-1SG write Book 1SG
   ‘I write a book’
6) ⁿ³?  ka  lin  sa  ka  kôt
Write  3SGF  lin  ACC  3SGF  book
‘Lin writes a book’

7) ⁿ³?  ᶊ  sa  ka  kôt
Write  1SG  ACC  3SGF  Book
‘I write a book’

1.4.2.2.2. The order of DO-IO

The direct object precedes or follows the indirect object

8) ⁿ³?  ᶘⁱⁿ  ᶊ  sa  ka  mëri
write  letter  1SG  ACC  3SGF  mary
‘I write a letter to mary’

9)  ᶊ  ka  mëri  ᶘ³?  ᶘⁱⁿ  ᶊ
ACC  3SGF  Mary  write  letter  1SG
‘I write a letter to mary’

1.4.2.2.3. Order of adpositions

Nongjri shows prepositions

10)  ka  miaw  ᵐᵉʳ  tîrun  ka
    3SGF  cat  PREP-top  roof  3SGF
‘The cat is on the roof top’

1.4.2.2.4. Order of genitive

Genitive follows the head noun or the governing noun.

11)  ka  kôt  ᶙ่น  u  ᶙⁿ
    3SGF  book  GEN  3SGM  John
‘John’s book’

12)  ka  kôt  ᶙᵃ  ka
    3SGF  book  GEN  3SGF
‘Her book’
1.4.2.2.2.5. Adjective follows the head noun

13) u brəw ba hiam
   3SGM person ADJ good
   ‘A good man’

14) ka yiŋ ba he?
   3SGF house ADJ big
   ‘A big house’

1.4.2.2.2.6. The comparative marker precedes the adjective

15) kʰam sindia? ka meri sa u jon
   COMP young 3SGF mary ACC 3SGM John
   ‘Mary is younger than john’

1.4.2.2.2.7. The superlative marker follows the adjective

16) u jon u-ba jaŋ tam
   3SGM John 3SGM-ADJ tall SUP
   ‘John is tallest’

1.4.2.2.2.8. Order of Numerals

1.4.2.2.2.8.1. Cardinal numerals usually precedes the head noun; two types or cardinal numerals marked for human and non-human, i.e., nút and tillī

17) ar nút ki brəw
   two CLF 3PL people
   ‘Two people’

18) saw-tillī ki mīaw
   four-CLF 3PL cat
   ‘Four cats’

1.4.2.2.2.8.2. Ordinal numeral follows the noun

19) u fan niŋkəŋ
   3SGM child CLF
   ‘First son’
1.4.2.2.9 Order of determiner: determiner precedes the head noun

20) kane ka kot
    DEM 3SGF book
    ‘This book’

21) kine ki kot
    DEM 3PL book
    ‘These books’

1.4.2.2.10. Complementizer precedes the embedded sentence

22) une u let uba ai ka meri
    DEM 3SGM pencil RLP give 3SGF mary
    This is the pencil that mary gave’

1.4.2.2.11. Relative Clause

The marker of the relative clause ba occurs to the right of the head noun.

23) u brown u-ba jaŋ ha-linti dei u jon
    3SGM man 3SM-ADJ Sit PRPE-road AUX 3SGM John
    ‘The man who is sitting on the road is john’

1.4.2.2.12. Interrogative can either follow or precedes the head noun.

24) laŋ pʰi kʰimmon
    AUX 2SG INT
    ‘How are you?’

25) uno u kʰulom pʰi
    INT 3SGM Pen 2SG
    ‘Which is your pen?’

Yes/no question

26) la? dep ji ja pʰi
    PRF finish Eat food 2SG
    ‘Have you taken food?’
27) ʾem ʾpʰi ʰa-yiŋ
   AUX  2SG  LOC-house
   ‘Are you at home?’

1.4.2.2.13 Negation

Nongjri shows double negation in which the negative particles ma occurs before the verb and tam usually occur after the verb as is shown in sentence (28) below.

28  ma  da  tam  ḷa
   NEG  go  NEG  1SG
   ‘I will not go’

Negative declarative is distinguished from negative imperative as in 29 and 30.

29)  ma  da  tam  ḷa
   NEG  go  NEG  1SG
   ‘I will not go’

30)  eʔ  da  kinjat  e  sa  u  kʃu
   IMP  NEG  kick  IMP  ACC  3SGM  dog
   ‘Don’t kick the dog’

1.4.2.2.14. Adverbs

31)  u  ʃɔn  θeɾ  u  suki suki
    3SGM  john  run  3SGM  slow  slow
    ‘John runs slowly’

1.4.2.2.15. Time adverbials follow as well as precede place adverbials

32)  da  i  ha  laban  minreid
    go  1PL  LOC  shillong  ADV
    ‘We will go to shillong tomorrow’

33)  da  i  minreid  ha  laban
    go  1PL  ADV  LOC  Shillong
    ‘We will go to shillong tomorrow’
1.5. Objectives

The following are the main objectives of this research.

• To analyze and describe the structures of Noun Phrase and Verb Phrase in War – Khasi (Nongjri), and

• To give an account of the different position of occurrence of syntactic elements, for example: noun modifiers in relation to the head noun in the Noun Phrase and verbal syntactic elements in the Verb Phrase.

1.6. Methodology

This research is descriptive in nature. A Ri-War-Khasi village i.e., Nongjri has purposely been selected for this present study. The village is located 80kms from the State capital Shillong bordering Bangladesh. It is inhabited only by the War- Khasis. Though Nongjri is a remote village developments can be seen in many ways like education, transportation etc. it is a variety of Khasi where no linguistic work has been done so it has high scope for research work.

The technique applied in this present study is non-participation observation technique. So interview has been carried from among the informants with different age group who has vast knowledge on the language.

For further information secondary data has also been applied like books, journals, internet, etc.

1.7. Limitations of study

War Nongjri variety has no available written literature. Therefore, this work relies only on the first hand information collected from the native speakers of the variety. There is little available literature on the other varieties of War-Khasi (e.g. Lyngngam and Amwi War-Jaintia dialect Nagaraja (1996)), but no such work has been done on Nongjri. Therefore, this work will be the first linguistics researches on this particular
variety of War-Khasi which will henceforth be refer to as War Nongjri in the following chapters.