5.00. Spelling and Word Juncture

After the spoken Khasi was reduced into written words it did not take a long time for the natives to pick it up. At the initial stages the Khasis accepted the spelling offered by the Christian missionaries. However, the concern about the correct spelling was expressed only when Hormu Rai Diengdoh launched his *U Khasi Mynta*, a monthly journal, in March, 1896. Those who participated actively in the debate on the need for improving the Khasi spelling system were Jeebon Roy, Radhon Singh Berry and Nelson Dkhar. Kynpham Singh collected the articles which were produced in the 19th Century in *Ka Jingsdang Ka Jingspel Bad Jingthoh Ina Ka Ktien Khasi Da Ki Dak Roman*, published in 1969. The articles are important documents in relation to spelling because they show what the Khasis were aware of in those days.

5.01. Spelling in the 19th Century

The Khasi alphabet we have today have been accepted by all the Khasis in the year 1896. The letters *ì* and *ä* were also accepted, while the letter *w* was pronounced as

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By the year 1900 a number of religious denominations were already active in the Khasi Hills; prominent among them, were, the Welsh mission, the Roman Catholic mission, the Unitarian Church, the Bramo Samaj, the Seng Khasi and the Church of England. The editor of U Khasi Mynta, recorded that a committee to systematise the spelling was needed. He proposed that in such a committee people from different denominations should be included. The editor also blamed the Welsh missionaries for introducing strange spellings in Khasi. Writes he,

The mode of spelling and constructing the Khasi words by our Welsh Missionaries is very strange and misleading for the foreigners and even for the Khasis. Sir Charles Elliot, Chief Commissioner of Assam has passed the following remarks in his Proceeding in June 1884 in connection with the method of their spelling the Khasi words. "The Welsh Missionaries in the Khasi Hills are an old established body, and they have unfortunately proceeded in the wrong tack [sic]. Not only are all the Khasi religious and educational books printed in the Roman character, but the transliteration is so barbarous and uncouth that it requires the reader to learn Welsh in order to know how the words are meant to be pronounced." Though their wrong spelling of the Khasi words had been objected by many enlightened Khasis and it was pointed out in many issues of the "U Khasi Mynta" long ago, yet our Welsh Missionaries are still embracing and

2. Ibid., p. 6.
3. Ibid., p. 29.
defending their own old style and spelling of our Khasi language. But we are glad now that all the independent and enlightened Khasis, the Khasi authors, the German Missionaries and other leaders of other sects and communities in Khasi have adopted a new and phonetic mode of spelling in writing letters, books, tracts, &c. in Khasi language, "a spelling which is going to a right direction" as has been remarked by some learned European gentlemen. And we hope that now is the time that our Welsh Missionaries should be pleased to come round to this "right direction".

Here are a few sample of words which were spelt by the Welsh Missionaries and what the literate Khasis of those days wanted them to be spelt.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spelling by the Welsh Missionaries</th>
<th>As accepted by the literate Khasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lih</td>
<td>lieh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kiw</td>
<td>kiew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jerong</td>
<td>jrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ing</td>
<td>ingle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>niat</td>
<td>ingle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>briw</td>
<td>briew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yrta</td>
<td>rta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>riwai</td>
<td>rwai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ihsih</td>
<td>isih^5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The spelling by the Welsh Missionaries was followed by the members of the church who were educated.

The literate Khasis especially those of the Seng Khasi were aware of the sounds the Khasi words produced and they could identify the wrong pronunciation and wrong spelling of the Missionaries. The forming of the spelling committee to systematise the spelling shows the awareness of the need of co-operation to achieve the target. It also shows the understanding the Khasis have among themselves and with others in those days for the benefit of the language. They were aware of preserving the language especially in spelling as the native Khasis spoke it.

5.02. Spelling in 20th Century

Although in the later part of the 19th Century suggestions were made to systematise Khasi spellings, it took time before the Khasis as well the Missionaries to accept them. Once it was accepted, Khasi literature made a rapid progress and several authors brought out books and contributed articles to newspapers and journals. The real progress in the Khasi literature was from the year 1979. It was remarked,

The year 1979 will go down in the history of our race as a year of positive efforts on the parts of literary leaders to produce
books in our language which the society deserved long ago.  

With the "positive efforts" on the part of the writers to produce books certain type of spellings appeared. The reason being the "modern Khasi writers seem to have their own knowledge (oriented and unoriented) about spelling." The main problem and confusion among the modern writers is in the spelling of words ending either in -d, or -t, whether it is d or t or even j. Realising the problem, Sten, in 1990, wrote an article, "Khasi Spelling". In the article he offered some concrete suggestions in the form of hypothesis.

In hypothesis 1, he is aware that it is not a consonant which can prolong the sound of a word. It is a vowel. Sten also suggests the use of a cute on top of a long vowel in order to differentiate it from a long and a short vowel. Holding that view Sten holds that the Khasi language have the following vowels.

a as in ai ō as in bâm ā as in lâ/lâ/ e as in tep ē as in pér i as in tip

Such a system of marking will help to a great extent the proper pronunciation and proper spelling of Khasi words.

In hypothesis 2, Sten is aware of the need to use the letters ăng and ñ in all the places they are needed. The letter ṭ was used as early as 1849 by William Robinson, while ñ was proposed to be used by Horinu Rai Diengdoh in 1896. The Khasis of the 19th Century paid particular attention to the use of the two letters but at present little attention is given to them. Books, newspapers and magazines in Khasi rarely use them. Students at schools, colleges and university are aware that they are needed but they do not make a conscious effort to use them in their writings. There are many reasons why the two letters are not used in printed books and newspapers but there are no excuses when they are not used in hand written script. The reasons are as follows:

1. The non-availability of the typewriters having the two letters.

2. The non-availability of the letters in most printing presses in and around Shillong.

(3) The carelessness of many writers who reconciled themselves with the non-availability of the letters in printing press.

(4) Most writers do not themselves realise the awkwardness of the Khasi words requiring ō and ū.

(5) Teachers, especially at lower classes, do not make a conscious effort of stressing the need of the letters in those words in which they are needed.

We could offer a few solutions to the problem.

(1) Writers should try to avoid those presses which do not have the two letters so that they will make a positive effort of acquiring them.

(2) Writers should be aware that they have a duty of imparting correct information and not to mislead the future generations.

(3) Teachers should make a conscious effort of stressing the need of the two letters in our spelling system.

In the mean time while writing, students, writers, officials should use the two letters as faithfully as E. Bars used them in his Anglo-Khasi Dictionary.
In hypothesis 3, Sten is aware that spoken language is different from literary language, we must not spell words as we actually pronounce them at home, perhaps, wrongly. Spoken language is always different from literary language because in spoken language one who uses words from the dialect he knows, Khasi, is the literary language, while at home it may be a dialect or creole. There is possibility that our own dialect may influence the literary language especially in spelling. Hence, a conscious effort is required from the people to avoid spelling which are not generally accepted as proper and correct. Native speakers should themselves respect the literary language and teach others to do the same.

In hypothesis 4, Sten is aware of the voiceless letters, he found them to be useless and proposed that they must be ignored. It is a fact that the Khasi language has a number of words with voiceless letter in them. In words like niut, niew, niom and nier, the letter /i/ appears to be mere decoration; if the letters are thrown out the words will be spelt as nut, new, nom and ner. Although the proposal sounds logical, it is not proper to accept it until the phonetic sounds of all our vowels are tested in the laboratory. It is premature to conclude that they are useless, they have their own part to play and this awareness hopefully will open a
new scope of analysing the vowels and consonants of Khasi in
the language laboratory.

In hypothesis 5, Sten is aware that no consensus
have been arrived at regarding the final d/j/t, in Khasi
words. The word *ieit*, is spelt differently by different
people, some used *ieid*, others *ieij* and other *ieit*. Sten
suggests a way of solving the problem, that is, to take the
words having the final d/j/t, and pronounced them with
another word at a fast speed. The examples he gave are:

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>ieit eh</em></td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ieit bha</em></td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ieit palat</em></td>
<td>J</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ieit leh</em></td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ieit jong</em></td>
<td>J</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>bieit eh</em></td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>bieit jong</em></td>
<td>J</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>bieit doh</em></td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>bieit tyngka</em></td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>buit jong</em></td>
<td>J</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>buit bam</em></td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>buit dih</em></td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>sieij lung</em></td>
<td>J</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>sieij heh</em></td>
<td>J</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>sieij rit</em></td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
He also suggested another method. Writes he,

_iaeideh/iaeijeh/ieiteh_. If a scholar repeats each word fifty times over, he will come to a conclusion and satisfy himself and he hears T. Then T must be used when we spell _ieit_ or _lit_.

What Sten suggests is practical experience which may or may not work in all cases. If it is to work, it requires certain conditions: a scholar must be well versed in phonetics; he should record the pronunciation in tape recorders. Mere repetition over fifty times is not a solution. Therefore, what we are aware now is that for our proper spelling we need the laboratory to establish facts about our vowels and consonants.

In hypothesis 6, Sten is aware about the traditional Gender in Khasi and he firmly believes that they should not be substituted. In Khasi, we are aware that all things in nature are divided into male and female. Thus, we have ka _sngi_ (sun), _u bnai_ (moon), _u khlur_ (star), _ka bainong_

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10. Ibid., p. 32.
(salary), ka snem (year), and others. This is the nature of the Khasi language and we have to preserve it because it reveals the way the native speakers view the things in nature.

We have seen that the Khasis of the 19th Century though educationally were backward when compared to the British, yet they were able to impress that they are the masters of their language. They exerted their authority because they are the native speakers. What they achieved are useful to the users of the language at large. In their own capacity they did what they could. When Sten took up the issue, no rejoinder or criticism has come out. The users could be passive observers. In his own capacity Sten, put forward some concrete suggestions so that the Khasi scholars could examine them. What he did is great but insufficient. It is time for the Khasi linguists to wake up from deep slumber and take up the issue themselves. If in 1902 there was a spelling committee why not today? We have all the means at our disposal and the development made in the field of science especially computers is a positive sign for a better future. In the mean time, let each writer be aware that he needs to adopt a spelling system that is common and avoid creating confusion. The letters á and ō should be used wherever they are needed. A sense of respect and love for
the mother tongue and to preserve it, as it is found, should be inculcated in the minds of the younger generation.

5.03. Word Juncture

Sentences in any language are formed of words. While juncture, is a system of dividing one word from another so that a reader can describe each word in a sentence; a correct juncture will enable quicker classification of words used in writing. Juncture is traditionally regarded as part of the spelling system. The Khasi language is making a rapid progress and one of the major challenges it faces today is a proper word juncture. Sten is aware of the problem which is rather complicated. Writes he,

The most chaotic phenomenon in Khasi writing today is word juncture. Some writers ignore it; readers, including our students, follow them. The result has been poor performance of Khasi candidates in Khasi language.

We are aware that most teachers at schools and colleges and even at the university levels, insist from their students, but the students did what they wrongly believed to be right from their point of view. The study of juncture is important because it tells the speaker and writer the particular class

13. Ibid.
to which the word belongs. There can be no study of Class Structure Grammar, Phrase Structure Grammar, Functional Structure Grammar or Clause Structure Grammar without a proper word juncture. Sten was aware of the need of a proper word juncture and he put forward his suggestions. Given below are a few specimens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some Write</th>
<th>Logical One</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) aium</td>
<td>ai um</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) kala</td>
<td>ka la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) dalade</td>
<td>da lade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) ngala</td>
<td>nga la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) haling</td>
<td>ha iing. 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We shall examine the logical one. In (1) ai is a verb, um is a noun, in (2) ka is a determiner, la is an auxiliary, in (3) da is a preposition, lade is a reflexive pronoun, in (4) nga is a pronoun, la is an auxiliary, while in (5) ha is a preposition, iing is a noun. Hence it is logical that the two words should not be joined together because they belong to different classes and they have their own functions in a sentence of a language.

Sten is also aware that any Khasi word beginning

14. Ibid.
with jing + verb or jing + Adjective, that word is an abstract noun.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{jing} + \text{Verb} & \quad \text{jing} + \text{Adjective} \\
\text{jing} + \text{bam} & = \text{jingbam} & \text{jing} + \text{bha} & = \text{jingbha} \\
& \text{(food)} & & \text{(goodness)}
\end{align*}
\]

He is also aware that a verb preceded by ia is a reciprocal verb, a verb preceded by pyn- is a causative verb, a verb preceded by iapyn- is a recipro-causative verb; while a verb preceded by pynia- is a causa-reciprocal verb.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ia} + \text{Verb} & \quad \text{pyn} + \text{Verb} \\
\text{ia} + \text{kren} & = \text{iakren (RV)} & \text{pyn} + \text{kren} & = \text{pynkren (CV)} \\
\text{iapyn} + \text{Verb} & \quad \text{pynia} + \text{Verb} \\
\text{iapyn} + \text{kren} & = \text{pyniakren} & \text{iapynkren} & = \text{(RCV)}
\end{align*}
\]

The teachers who are teaching Khasi should be given compulsory courses in Khasi word juncture by a competent authority. The old grammar books of the 19th Century should be replaced with new ones so that we can take into consideration of the latest development. We cannot achieve everything overnight we have to wait, time and awareness together with seriousness will bear fruit.