CHAPTER II

THE PARADIGMS OF CONFLICT IN H.W. STEN'S
KWAH BYM JU KUT

H.W. Sten's *Kwah Bym Ju Kut* (1981) or *Everlasting Desire* is a powerful novel of quest with a focus on relationships and complexities of life's realities. The novel is a tapestry of psychic landscape where the fabric of life has been displayed prominently. True to his theory of the novel, H.W. Sten displays human life in real circumstances. Conflict, which is part and parcel of human circumstance of life, is powerfully shown, in fact, the most prominent artistic concern of H.W. Sten in this novel is the portrayal of the "psychological battle", a situation, which all the characters "except Venji" undergo at different stages in the development of the novel. Mental conflicts of one kind or another relating to the problems of choice, problems of religious experience,

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3 Sten, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*, p. 147. The full name of "Venji" is "Vengeance". "Venji" is used throughout the novel and, thus, the same is kept in this research. The full name is used only in the conversation between Venji and her mother Becky, and only as information to the daughter.

morality problems, personality problems, existential problems, and problems relating to space and time, exert pressure in the experience of the individuals causing intense pain and suffering especially in the life of Abi who finally closed all life possibilities tragically. The conflict of the main characters is precipitated by the attempt of Pura to link the unlinkable; it is an attempt at integrating different spheres of being and existence: the temporal and the metaphysical, the physical and the spiritual. On the other hand Abi is down to earth — being on the earth and desiring to live long on earth. There is a wide gap of difference between Pura and Abi on account of the unmatchable levels of thinking.

Abi and Pura have lived together for seventeen fruitless years, which did not give fulfilment to the husband-wife relationship in the true sense of the term. To have children was the preoccupied goal in Abi’s life which he had expressed several times on different occasions and even at the age of thirteen long before his marriage as stated by Liza,

“Naduh ba u dang khatlai snem u Abi u ju ëathuh ëa la ki lok ba un shong kurim ëa ka samla kaba don para bad shynrang bad kynthei bad kata kan kha shibun ki khun.”

5 “Abi” is a short form of “Abraham”. “Abi” is used throughout the novel and, thus, the same is kept in this research. Reference to the full name “Abraham” is made only in connection with its significance in the context of the Biblical history.

6 Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p.141.

7 Ibid., p. 43.
("Ever since he was thirteen Abi used to tell his friends that he would love to marry a girl with several brothers and sisters and a girl who would give him many children")

The desire has been emphatically and convincingly reiterated to his wife and in front of others. However, even after seventeen years of married life, the couple remains without a child. On account of unknown reasons (since no scientific experiments were made), the couple has not been blessed with a child, not even a premature baby.\footnote{H.W. Sten, (ed.), "Everlasting Desire", \textit{Khasi Studies}, Vol. IV, No. 4, (January – March 1991), p. 102.} The situation has been viewed differently by Abi and Pura. To a great extent, Pura has resigned to her fate and accepted the reality but Abi has remained unchanged and the situation led to the confrontation between the two.

After years of expectation and discontentment, the latent dynamite finally exploded in the form of a "violent exercise"\footnote{Warpakma, \textit{Ka Pyrshiai 1}, p. 74.} in the evening of Abi’s forty-second birth day and the culmination of the day’s accented and dramatic events in the husband-wife relationship was the eviction of the husband from the house after hot exchanges:

\footnote{H.W. Sten, (ed.), “Everlasting Desire”, \textit{Khasi Studies}, Vol. IV, No. 3, (October – December 1990), p. 75. Note: Translations or equivalent texts, wherever given, are from the English version of the novel as footnoted unless specified.}
“Phin slem. Phet noh,” ka pyrta bad ka wan sha ka kamra ba u shong.

“Nga dei u ksew? Long ban beh īa nga ha kata ka rukom?”

“Nga pat ka ksew lehse. Phet!”

...

“Shim kato”, ka bret noh īa ka synduk thep jaiñ; “kato”, bad hadien sa ka tupia saheb, “kato bad kato”. Haba ka bret īa kawei ka song bad ka kout ba u Abi un phong, ka paw ha u Abi kumba kan troh īa u.

“Ka jia kumne”. U dem bad lum īa baroh ki tiar ba ka Pura ka la bret ha ka sofa.

“Phi kwah ban īoh i khun la i jong, la i jong”. Ka leit kren hajan ka shkor jong u. “Phet kum u nongjop. Leit da katei ka maruti; ...

...

“Wat pynslem shuh! Phet! …”
“La biang!” Khlem ong ‘khublei thiah suk’ lane ‘ngam wan shuh’, u mih bluit bad ki mar ha ki kti baroh ar la kum u kuli shisha.  

("You’ll be late. Go away." She cries out coming closer still.

“Am I a dog? Am I to be kicked out that way?”

“May be I’m a bitch. Go!”

…”

“Take that,” she throws away the suitcase; “that”, now the felt-hat, “that,” and “that”. As she throws a small packed and Abi’s coat. She looks on Abi as if she would scratch his face.

“So that’s it.” He bends and picks up one after another.

“You want to have your own, own child.” She says to his ears. “Go out as a winner. Go with that maruti; …"
“It is enough!” Without saying ‘good night’ or ‘I will never return’ he went out with all the materials in his hands exactly like a coolie).\(^{13}\)

The most violent exchange in the novel resulted in the separation of the husband from the wife. To a great extent, it is difficult to understand how the bond of love, which had been nurtured for 17 years, could have been utterly broken by a crisis that stormed the family in a matter of few hours.\(^{14}\) However, taking the cue from H.W. Sten himself, regarding the mental condition of his characters, it is clear that there had been battles and conflict in the lives of Abi and Pura as is the case of every human being:

In my narration I have not given any hint to battles we have fought everyday, though mentally; but you could see those in the action assigned to most characters, except Venji.\(^{15}\)

The immediate cause of the eruption of the latent dynamite of discontentment\(^{16}\) of Abi as reported by Ena, the witness of the initial development of events on that fateful day, was the mocking content of

\(^{13}\) This part of the translation is by the researcher.


\(^{15}\) Sten, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*, p. 147.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 115. Also, Warpakma, *Ka Pyrshiaw 1*, p. 61.
the letter,17 which was left on his office table. Ena thought that as usual, 
Abi had underlined some words or sentences, which might be of 
importance to his work. However, in the course of the day, it was 
believed that the underlined words specifically caused the storm as they 
ridiculed him and his family:

Ka Ena ka shim ūa ka shithi ba u Abi u ieh ha ka miej bad 
ka buh jingkynmaw ha lade ūa ki kyntien ba la ruid rong 
saw; ... “Ka lah ban long, ka lah ban long ba kito ki kyntien 
ki thaw drama hi.” Ka kren wei briew ...”18

(Ena picks up the letter and marks the underlined sentence 
mentally; ... "It's possible, it's possible that the line made it 
all." She mutters alone ...).19

Ena witnessed the reaction of Abi to the letter, which he read and 
underlined some words at its bottom, soon after he entered his office. 
His action was typical of a confused person:

Ka ūohi shai bha ba u Abi u ūeng na ka shuki, u thaiñ ūa ki 
kti ha ka shadem bad u ūaid na kawei ka dong ka kamra 
sha kawei pat.20

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18 Ibid., p. 64.
(She sees clearly now that Abi stands up, crosses his hands on his chest and starts moving from one corner of the chamber to another.)

Thus, according to Ena, the psychological battle in Abi and his unreasonable action had been provoked by the content of the letter on the table. The cause of the drama was especially the weight of the concluding words of the letter as understood from the telephone conversation between Pura and Ena:

“... sngap, quote ‘with regards to madam and!’ ... Sngap sa tang īa saw kyntien. U saheb u la ruid laĩñ ha trai kine da u let saw. Ki kyntien ki long ‘bad ka jingieit īa ki khun.’ Phi dang sngap?”

“... listen, quote, ‘with regards to madam and!’ ... Listen to only four more words. Mr. Abi had underlined this clause with a red pencil. It says ‘with love to children.’ Do you hear?”

The words “bad ka jingieit īa ki khun” (and with love to children) have stabbed the heart of Abi because they directly point to the heart of his desire, the goal of his quest, the vision of his life. In the midst of life’s

realities, Abi was clear in his vision and philosophy of life. The “EVER LASTING DESIRE” to continue his existence on earth through generations of children, grand children and great grand children was the goal of his life, in the pattern of the Hebrews as he himself stated:

“Nga kwah ba ka pyrthei kan kynmaw ˈa nga lyngba ki khun kumba ki Hebru ki kynmaw ˈa u Elimelech, u Mahlon, u Chilion bad ka Ruth…”

(“I want the world to remember me through my children as a Hebrew remembers Elimelech, Mahlon, Chilion and Ruth …”)

Thus, according to Ena’s diagnosis, the underlying cause of the strange behaviour of Abi is related to the letter on the table. The letter’s concluding greeting before the complimentary close instead of becoming a formula of blessing becomes a curse for Abi. In the context of the quest for “ever lasting life” through children, the words, “with regards to madam and with love to children” have deeply pierced the already wounded heart of Abi because they are empty and a mere insult to him since he has no children and his wife, Pura, is advanced in years.

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25 Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p. 80.
and apparently there is no hope that she will conceive and bear a child. The conclusion of the letter is an act of direct insult, keeping in mind the reality of the situations of life. The letter is in the mind of Abi for the whole day, as he clearly remembers the haunting words during the meeting of the Board:

“Ngi la ā-im suk, kumba phi ṭōhi; hynrei tang i khun khalor ruh em.” U Abi u kynmaw mynta ba u la pule ā ka shithi hynne mynstēp bad u la ruid dak da ka rong saw.28

(“We have lived a happy married life, you know; as happy as you people would view it; but she did not get even a premature baby.” Abi remembers now that he has read something this morning which he has underlined with a red pencil.)29

While from Ena’s point of view, the letter is the immediate cause of Abi’s irrational behaviour and confusion, keeping in mind his desire and expressed goal in life as underlined below the table glass, Ena herself has been another cause, which precipitated the battle in his mind and externalised it in his actions. All the incidents happened on the day on which she rejoined her duty as office assistant after her maternity leave. The circumstantial experience on the part of Ena on that day when she

28 Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, pp. 61 – 62.
rejoined her duty assumes significance in the context of what was about to happen on that fateful day. Every thing in the office environment looked new to her. She went through battling moments of mental conflicts whether she would be still relevant and needed in the present set up. She had been an efficient and dutiful staff, who found fulfilment in her work so much so that in spite of her qualification she never sought promotion or competition in work,

Kaba sumar kyndiang 'a ki kot bym dei ban tip paidbah dei ka Ena. Ka la pass 'a ka B.A. jong ka Gauhati University; hynrei kam ju ñaknieh 'a ki kam B.D.O., S.D.C. ne kano kano ka kam ophisar. Ka hun ban trei ha ophis u Abi. 30

(One who keeps all confidential papers is Ena. She holds the bachelor degree of Gauhati University; but she never competed with others for a higher position like that of the BDO’s or SDC’s. She is satisfied in her present job.) 31

In spite of her positive attachment and loyalty to her work she experienced turbulent reflexes of emotions in the face of so many changes. To a certain extent, her three months leave appeared to have been too long to be able to adjust to the new dispensation.

The storm in the mind of Ena symbolically signifies the movement towards a change which is about to take place in the life of Abi as he takes the drastic steps on that day. However, the most important significance is the change which is a repercussion of the event that has taken place in the life of Ena with the birth of her child. It is a moment of re-awakening in the life of Abi who has taken note of her presence and the change which has taken place in her life. As soon as he entered, he talked to her, "Ena, nga sngew shngaiñ ba phi la wan trei. I khun thymmai I long kumno?"32 ("Good morning, Ena! I'm glad you're back. How's baby?").33 However, as it turned out to be, the warm good morning greeting to Ena became a bad omen as it marked the final starting point of the pilgrimage of Abi towards realising his goal. When he encountered Ena he was perplexed because he was face to face with the reality of existence for which she emphatically symbolised with the birth of her child at the age of forty-three. The experience created shock waves in his mind and intensified his longing. Her presence in the office physically though silently reminded Abi of his long cherished unfulfilled dream of having a complete family with at least a child.34 Intense stirrings of intrapsychic conflict passed through the mind of Abi as he

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32 Sten, Kwh Bym Ju Kut, pp. 10 – 11.
34 Sten, Kwh Bym Ju Kut, pp. 91 – 92.
made a mental comparison and reference to Pura and the experience tickled, pinched and irritated the ire of his discontentment with a strong feeling that he has been deprived of the legitimate opportunity of having a child or children born to his wife.

The facts of life stared Abi straight in the face because with Pura at the age of forty-two,\(^{35}\) “it is too late” to have a child because of her unwillingness to co-operate to “try” or “work together”\(^ {36}\) (ban ˈa trei lang)\(^ {37}\) to see the doctor before the “estrogen” becomes inactive. In the past seventeen years, she did not have even a miscarriage or “a premature baby”\(^ {38}\). Thus, Abi’s lamenting cry “too late, too late”\(^ {39}\) was the cry of a desperate man who had counted the remaining part of his life on his fingers an action which was actually done by Abi.

\[\text{U Abi u ŋiew la ki shynriah kti baroh shi phew u sdang biang bad u sangeh ynda dap khathynriew. Don wei ar ha ri Khasi kiba ŋiew kumta shwa ba kin ĭap: ka mut ka jingbun ki sngi shwa ba kin leit ĭarwai khorus sha bneng}\]


\(^{39}\) Ibid., p. 109. Also, Sten, \textit{Kwah Bym Ju Kut}, p. 74.
kumba ong ki Khristan lane leit thung shriew sha shnong ka lawpaw.40

(Abi counts his fingers, and Pura notes carefully that he stops at sixteen. One or two in the Khasi land did so before they breathed their last: meaning the number of days before they kick the bucket as some say, or joining the heavenly choir as some Christians say).41

Abi’s action was an ironical act of counting the chances and possibilities of the fulfilment of his dreams of a complete family. As Abi reviewed the past and peeped into the future through the window of life’s experience he found that emptiness characterised his future. His reaction on the morning of his forty-second birthday was the result of a long time of unfulfilled expectation that did not seem to give him hope for any future fulfilment either; he grew desperate and discouraged altogether.

The spark that had been rekindled in his heart at the office in the morning hours of that fateful day came to be ignited under the roof of his house to which he had returned unconsciously in a spontaneous and habitual action of taking shelter as he said, “Ka shu jia hi, khlem khreh;

40 Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p. 76.
kam dei ka biria.\textsuperscript{42} ("it just happened, unplanned; it's not a joke.")\textsuperscript{43} In the encounter between husband and wife, the spark grew into a fire, which at first torched the heart before it consumed the knot of relationship between them.

Ka kynmaw mynta ba u dei ban poi sha ka miting, te ka pynlyngkot katba ka lah da kaba kylli, "Phi la klet ei ei ne?"

Khlem da peit sha la ka tnga, u Abi u jubab shai mynta, "Ei ei ruh em. Nga kynmaw lut mynta."\textsuperscript{44}

(Pura remembers now that he has to reach for the meeting on time, so she cut it short by asking, "What have you forgotten?"

Without even looking on his wife's face, Abi now answers clearly, clear for him, of course, "Nothing. I now remember all").\textsuperscript{45}

In the course of the conversation, there was noticeably an unmatchable gap of difference of the philosophy of life and understanding of ordinary matters between Abi and Pura. Abi gave

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p. 74.
\item Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p. 22.
\end{itemize}
abrupt answers to Pura who actually showed an extraordinary attitude of love and care for him:

“Jia ei ei ha lynti?” Ka tnga kaba phikir kum ka Pura ka kwah shisha ban tip la ka lah ban iarap ia la u tnga.

…

Namar ba u Abi u dang pyrkhat ia kaba u dei ban leh, u shu jubab lyngkut, “Ym shym jia ei ei.” … Hadien ba ka jingmut jong u ka la wan kai na lyngkha ka bor kynmaw, u Abi u kren noh mynsiem kum uba la duh jingkyrmen. “Ka la slem palat.”

…

Ka Pura ka lyngngoh ia ka rukom leh. Ka peit beit ha ki khmat u Abi bad kylli, “La jia aiu? Iathuh la ngi duna ei ei. Tang shi kyntien ngan leh.” La u tnga u leh jyndat kumta, ka Pura, la kum ka nongjop iaiei re ka kylli, “Ngam lah ban ai ia phi?”… Ka khmat ba i thylli u Abi ka phuh biang. “Hoooid”, u jubab ia ka Pura bad u mih sha bar u da peit sha ka kali.46

(“Anything happened in the way?” A careful wife like Pura sincerely wants to know if she could be of any service to her husband.

Abi, whose mind still engages itself in the problem, replies abruptly, “Nothing happened.” … After Abi has undertaken a mental excursion, he sighs in despair, “It’s too late!”

Pura is surprised with the gesture. She looks straight on his face and asks, “What’s happened? Just tell me if we lack anything. Just a word, it shall be done.” In spite of the rude behaviour of Abi, she looks like a victor. “Can I not give you?” ... Abi’s blank face wears an active look now. “Yes”, he says and proceeds outside directing his eyes to the car.)

Abi unconsciously returned home in an act symbolic of seeking the cooperation of his wife to work together to achieve the goal but the after shock action did not yield any good result since Pura failed to do her part.

When Abi answered Pura, “Ym shym jia ei ei” (Nothing happened), he was stating facts, that “nothing has happened when he went to office and when he came back.” However, symbolically, it communicates a strong message of emptiness, non-existence, meaninglessness in the love relationship between Abi and Pura in the seventeen years of their married life. The reply of Abi to the materialist question of Pura about giving is far from being an answer to her question. It is a statement of existential nothingness. While materialistic Pura asked about ‘giving’

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48 Ibid., p. 49.
49 Warpakma, Ka Pyrshiai, p. 71.
something, Abi thought about ‘being’ and, thus, the reply “Yes” is an answer to the actuality of being of Pura – that she has failed to be a being who is fulfilled. That is, when Abi answered “Yes” to Pura, he actually meant what he said in reply to Pura that she could not give what he wanted. The unexpected “Yes” had electrified Pura who thought that her husband had sarcastically answered her.

The morning’s home return of Abi has a remarkable significance as it marked the beginning of the decisive steps to be taken by him. After the conversation with Pura, he set his face towards the car with his back to the house. The posture is symbolic of his resolute determination, after the “mental excursion”, to undertake the journey of a pilgrim to the promised land of his dream alone and at all cost and to continue his quest for everlasting life on earth away from home. He expressed it at the hotel room when he sang the Christian chorus which flashed his mind, “Ngan ym phai dien, ngan ym phai dien” ("No turning back, no turning back"). The thought of “no turning back” from his cherished goal had been in his mind more powerfully than ever after the confrontation with Pura on that fateful day which happened to be his birthday and ironically the birthday was set to be the birth of the final decision. The conversation, which, on the part of Pura, had the sincere touch of tender

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affection, had been a hollow show to Abi who longed for the visible outcome of the wife-husband relationship.

Just as the day marked the birth of a new realisation for Abi, it was a day of change and transformation for Pura too as reflected in her perception of the attitude of flowers:

Dang hynne mynstep ka lap kumba ki pdiang sngewbha ūa ka; bad ba baroh ki koit ki khiah ha ka jingbishar jong ka: la jia aiu ūa ki mo tang hapoh ar kynta lane lai? Ka Pura ka kylli ūa lade. La ka la khap ūa ki sla ba la stem, ka ūohi shuh ba ki kulab da ki kyrtenh bun jait ki long kumba lyngngoh. Ka kynmaw ba uwei u nongrep u la ūathuh ūa ka lang bad u Abi ha u Julai ba la dep ba u kba ruh u pyni dak kaba ūajan bad ka jinglong ka jingmut u trai ba sumar ūa u.\(^{51}\)

(This morning she found them most welcoming, and full of vigour: but what has happened to them within these few hours? Pura asks herself. Though she removed the yellow leaves, the roses of various names look puzzled. She remembers that a Khasi cultivator once told her in Abi’s presence last July that even paddy responds to his master’s mood and action).\(^{52}\)

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Pura's transformation was quick and sudden, having been struck by the sting of Abi's answers, "Nothing" and "Yes". The change in her heart is reflected in the rose-garden. Abi had tried to make her agree to "work together" but the effort had failed for the last seventeen years but his "Yes" had evoked a sea change in her mind and particularly it had been the immediate cause of the wife-husband conflict on the evening of the day as Abi had sensed it from the reaction of Pura in the course of the conversation during the day.

"Hooid?" Ka kylli ha ka sur kob, kat kum ka jingsngewthuh u Abi.53

... 

Kaba u Abi u sngewthuh shai mynta ka long ba u dei ban pynshai ïa kaba kam sngewthuh. Na ka rukom ïaid bad rukom leh jong ka u syier ba mynta ka miet ka lah ban kham jrong ban ïa kiwei pat ki miet.54

... 

... Ka Pura ka rai ba la dei por ban weng noh ïa u lyoh ba sniew shwa ban sep ka sngi; namar ha khyndiat ki ïing Khristan ha

54 Ibid., p. 70.
Meghalaya u tnga bad ka tnga kum ju shah ìa ka jingdom jong ki ban sah ha ka jingmut haduh ba kin kiew ha jingthiah.55

("Yes?" she asks in a particular way which Abi understands to mean a challenge.56

... What Abi understands clearly now is that he has to clarify to her anything which she has not understood. From her strange gesture, he suspects that the night will be somewhat lengthy.57

... Pura thinks that it is time to get the ominous clouds cleared before sunset; because in a few good Christian homes in Meghalaya married couples do not let their anger follow them to beds.58

Pura tried to sort out the causes of the unpleasant exchanges before the sun set but it was a complex matter and the solution to the differences would not be so simple as the actual root causes of the conflict were many and were traceable to the personality issues of Abi and Pura which resulted in what psychologists would call

55 Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, pp. 73 – 74.
58 Ibid., p. 109.
“incompatibility”.59 After the separation, Pura accepted the personality differences in what she called a “life of two poles apart.”60

During the heated confrontation, thoughts of various kinds criss-cross the minds of both Abi and Pura with each trying to assert individuality and integrity. To Abi the “one flesh” concept of marriage is neither practical nor convenient. He turned sceptical in the context of the un-agreeable juxtaposition of the two. When Pura asserts, “Phin long hi u tnga jong nga”61 (“YOU’LL BE STILL MY HUSBAND”),62 Abi protests, “Mano ba ong kumta? ... shi sien ba nga la mih, nga long u jong kawei pat”63 (“who says so? ... Once I’m out, I belong to another”)64 The exchanges led to the clear demarcation of space between husband and wife after making a fundamental option with the ejection of Abi from the roof of Pura whose comfort zone did not yield any fruitful result.

61 Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p. 102.
63 Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p. 102.
Significantly, on that day, when "Abi simply walked out of his room" it was ‘walking’ out of his smug comfortable position in the prevailing circumstances of both home and office to the open space of possibilities. The urgency of the matter of achieving the goal at this point of time was heightened by many factors which precipitated the strange reaction of Abi. His forty-second birthday was marked by fresh awareness, new reawakening, new vision, and new stirrings, which prompted him to make decisive decision and action. Abi’s answer to Pura, “Nothing. I remember all” was a statement of his double vision of the reality of existence and non-existence. For the past seventeen years he had been nurturing his desire for everlasting life hoping that his wife would play a positive role towards achieving the goal. The new awakening of his consciousness came at a point when his vision of the past, the present and the future confronted one another and created waves of revival of the powerful and legitimate desires in him all at one time. The particular moment, which pressed itself so violently in the consciousness of Abi, could be described as a moment of timelessness when the past, the present and the future merged together and time stood still. In a moment of experience, Abi had a glimpse of time and eternity with the result, that in the present state of affairs, there was very little hope of his

\[\text{Warpakma, Ka Pyrshiaw 2, p. 15.}\]
dream becoming real. He had, therefore, to set out on the journey whether alone or in the company of others.

The past and the present merged together in the consciousness of Ena who served as an extension of Abi’s consciousness as she shared a close relationship with him in the work place. Abi is observed by her to have been absorbed and preoccupied in his mind, that is, he has something which obsessed him and is externally manifested in his behaviour. “Phi i, ngam pat ìoìi ba u Abi u khia jingpyrkhat kumba nga ìoìi mynhynne. Phi ìoìi ia kata, Liza?” (“I’ve never seen Abi with a heavy thought as he looked this morning. Have you marked it, Liza?”). On the issue of the preoccupied mind of Abi, Liza, in a manner of counselling, doned the garb of a psychologist and dug out, though bluntly and unskillfully, the reason of the strange behaviour of Abi with the question whether Pura and Abi had known each other long enough before marriage. Though Pura did not realise it, her answer ironically pointed to the crux of the matter:

“Phi i, ngi īasan lang; ngi ju īakren iwei īa iwei; hynrei ngim ju tip ban īaieit tat haduh ba ngi la san. Kumba phi ong, u

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You see, we grew together; saw each other; talked to each other; but we never as much as loved each other till we grew up. He might, as you said, have his ambition; but he might, as well have forgotten it or given it up. A hard working person like him cannot find time to think again of the old ambition")

Pura herself narrated that five years before, when they were at Golva beach, Abi was struck by the sight of happy children playing and he even remarked that he wanted children because 'marriage without children is meaningless', “U īathuh īa nga ba u kwah khun namar khlem khun, u ong, ka kam shong-kurim kam don jingmut ei ei.” Though she said that, Pura thought that it was insignificant, as Abi would have forgotten any old ambition or desire after many years. The artistic skill of H.W. Sten comes to the fore, as this is a case where art is integrated into the fabric of life. He exploits the mental disposition of “memory” in his technique to give an edge to the plot and artistic

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70 Sten, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*, p. 43.
73 Sten, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*, p. 43.
sharpness of his novel. Pura is plagued by her remembrance of the past, which flashed into the mind like the crowding of the bees. In the process of recollecting the past, Pura's mental conflict is intensified – the bombardment of the excruciating pain of reconciling the past and the present with Abi's consciousness being connected like a hot line all at one time, to the past, the present and the future.

The psychological battle in the novel is “centred around the motif of finity and infinity” and the conflict of various forces is uppermost and most serious when issues are linked to life and the length of life. Being an educated person, Abi is a thinker who, to a great extent, approaches life and existence in the Kantian way, as a philosopher who sees contradiction as a reality and who tries to resolve the antimony connected with the limitation in space and time. For Abi the reality of the mutual incompatibility of the limitation of life and the quest for everlasting life causes the greatest amount of pressure and mental conflict, which reverberates to the surrounding atmosphere with a very powerful impact.

The idea infinity and finity has a philosophical background from the Isha Upanishad in Indian thought to western mind which derived its tradition from Aristotle to the philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, George Berkeley, John Locke, Immanuel Kant and others. The concept of infinity and finity is applied to Abi’s idea of continuity on earth. On account of space and time, human experience is finite and limited. One way to overcome the defect and to achieve infinity is continuity through one’s children in the Hebrew pattern. In short, the idea of finity is that which has an end while infinity is linked to whatever is endless. The term ‘infinity’ has also a tinge of mathematics at least in the idea of endlessness of primes. Webpage: www.uni-tuebingen.de/uni/ans. Also, webpage: http://en.wikipedia.org. Also, Warpakma, Ka Pyrshiaw I, p. 61. As described by The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1993), p. 954, “finity” is the late seventeenth century noun form of “finite” which is a late Middle English term meaning ‘having bounds, ends, or limits, i.e. not infinite'.
Applied to family life, Abi is plagued by the reality of things with his vision to live forever through the life of children and grand children dashed to the ground especially in the context of the age of his wife who did not cooperate with him earlier in life. As if it is part and parcel of life, mutual incompatibility surrounds the life and relationship of the husband and wife, Abi and Pura. There has been maladjustment and pseudo-happiness in their married life, which is mainly the result of the conflicting vision of life and personality inadaptability. The formation of the philosopher in Abi has caught him early in life when even at the age of thirteen, he has made an observation, which remained valid till the end of his life, that his first preference for choice of marriage would be for a woman from a big family of brothers and sisters. Abi is a philosopher who philosophises life and love. Questing towards an ideal life has led him to be more of a thinking being who made even his wife an object of philosophising when finally from philosophy the journey crossed over to the realm of physiology where the fertility of Pura was examined in absentia with the conclusion that "ka la kut hangta! Ka Pura kam ïoh khun shuh"\(^{75}\) ("it ends there! Pura won't bear a child any more").\(^{76}\) The crux of the matter is "everlasting desire" and it is uppermost in the whole of Abi's being and existence. It is the pivotal

\(^{75}\) Sten, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*, p. 63.

point of his problems and life experience. Abi's "philosophy of being and existence transcends space and time but he is trapped in the net of the materialist philosophy of Pura." In trying to reach the unreachable forgetting his limitation, Abi trespasses his status as a human being. At the philosophical level, Pura is the wife but not a mother; she is a conservative woman who did not yield to any pressure from outside; she is materialist yet religious minded — strange combination in itself. Pura has every thing, but they are material things that did not satisfy the deepest and legitimate human longings of Abi. It is a conflict of interest of Pura and of Abi which fermented the conflict which erupted into the violent action that finally separated the two.

At the base of the conflict is that the two live together with different visions of life and existence and with different approaches to life's reality. Abi's is a total vision of the past, the present and the future with a desire to integrate them all and with a desire to link the points, as in a straight line, to infinity in his posterity. However, it is only an infinity of desire. At the age of forty-two, Abi links the present to the past — to the experience at Golva Beach, and even farther, to the point of time when he was only thirteen years of age when even at that young age, he had already formed a vision for the future which has far reaching impact on his life

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77 Warpakma, *Ka Pyrshiaw I*, p. 64.
78 Ibid., p. 64.
programme. Even at such an early age, Abi was caught in a philosophy of 'regretism' due to non-acceptance of the self and reality of life on account of which his future was due to have problems. The determination to pursue his own goal left him alone to himself in such a way that loneliness factor was intense even when he was in the midst of a crowd. He was like a possible winner, who after succeeding through many challenges, was caught up in an attitude of surrendering in spite of the long awaited victory.

Linked to the vision of life, the mental conflict is also due to the personality problems of Abi which arose as a result of his immature maladjustment to the realities of life beginning with non acceptance of his family background and family situation. When confronted by the dilemma of anthropological and sociological realities, Abi hid his hybrid face of Anglo-Khasi reality and opted for half-truth identification and, defying life history he created disharmony. In spite of being the only son of an English father and Khasi mother, Abi does not accept the fact and wants to be referred to only as a Khasi. However much he tried to change the opinion of all, the fact remains forever that he is of hybrid nature. The inability to accept the reality of life is the root of all unhappiness as it precipitated other negative personality disorders.

80 Ibid., p. 63.
Moreover, the unresolved balance of immaturity has been brought forward to the new family with the result that living with Pura is far from being happy. On the other hand, Pura was in contradiction with her own self in her vision of the present life and the future. While being deeply religious minded, she was also grossly materialistic. It is in the process of the effort to integrate the two worlds that the biggest disintegration in her life occurred which proves that the two worlds are poles apart and integrating the opposites is an impossible task. The co-existence of contradictory and incompatible situations is a reality of life where attitudes, moods, ideas and viewpoints do not promote an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity. *Kwah Bym Ju Kut* is a battleground which exhibits a gripping effect of the struggle and agony arising from the underground\(^1\) vis a vis the realities of life of the characters. In respect of Abi there is a war within and a friction outside which was ignited on account of many years of expectation, unfulfilled desire and hurt feelings. It is because of the maladjustment to the situations of life that pseudo happiness resulted in married life.

In the midst of contradiction and incompatibility, the tension and conflict is heightened by Abi’s personality problem and maladjustment to the circumstances of life. Much of the battle in his life is linked to his

\(^1\) Warpakma, *Ka Pyrshiaw I*, p. 62.
behavioural pattern of suppression. By marrying Pura the lone child of her parents, Abi had suppressed his genuine desire for a big family and went against his own principle and conviction. In as much as it is an act of suppression, the brushing aside of the desire to be wedded to a big family is, as explained by Sigmund Freud, “a conscious mechanism intended to eliminate undesirable content from the consciousness.” To the extent that suppression is an act of the will, it is a positive action. However, Abi returned with regret to the suppressed aspiration again and again and, thus, the act of suppression in his case is a negative response to the reality of life and eventually caused a personality disorder which finally made him a tragic hero. Having formed a conviction of desire to marry a lady from a big family, he set aside the principle and married a lady who was devoid of all the factors of his expectation. There is no clear reason to justify whatever reason there has been for the marriage. H.W. Sten has not directly stated or hinted at the reason of Abi’s choice for marrying Pura. However, taking into account the way and the standard of living of the two, the reason is connected to the sociological and anthropological constraints which have pushed Abi to look for “status” and “wealth”. Pura, being the only child of her parents inherited all the properties of the family both

82 Warpakma, Ka Pyrshiaw 2, p. 12.
84 Warpakma, Ka Pyrshiaw 1, pp. 63 – 64.
hereditary and acquired. Secondly, she is of the same Anglo-Khasi background as he is.

Apparently, Abi's decision to marry Pura is a conscious act of suppression of the idea of marrying someone with a big family which took place after an exercise of weighing choices. According to psychoanalysts, suppression is a "conscious and voluntary" act which is less harmful in human dynamism. However, the idea of everlasting desire has sunk so deep into his being that it has entered into his unconscious that it has manifested itself, to a great extent, in the various circumstances that Abi was in. This is in agreement with the view of the psychologist, Dr. Krishna Prasad Sreedhar, who says that suppressed and repressed thoughts do not lie dormant in the mind forever. They often try to come out. The threat of these surfacing creates tension and anxiety to the person concerned. The re-emergence of these suppressed and repressed materials can also shape itself into other disorders ... because the repressed material is always liable to return in a distorted form, in symptoms, dreams, slips of the tongue, etc.  

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86 Web page: www.psychology4all.com/catharsis.htm - 7k -
The evil effect of suppression and repression is unavoidable as opined by the celebrated Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud in the most quoted statement: "Our entire neurotic, psychotic and psychosomatic disorders are due to suppression and repression." Thus, Abi's life choices had been influenced by a force beyond his consciousness.

The problem of choice is a motif that H.W. Sten has been fond of and he clearly advocates a situation of the problem of choice in the novel. Abi has been dragged into the problem of choices and finally on account of circumstantial reasons decided to marry Pura an action which eventually aggravated personal and interpersonal conflict. In principle, Pura had been rejected right from the beginning - it is rejection at the root. It is naturally sceptical whether any thing good could be expected from such a union. Abi's power of choosing was immobilised at the hotel room when once again he faced the problem of choice and left it to Venji to decide for him even for a simple thing such as selecting items from

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87 Web page: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_repression. The most fundamental concept of psychoanalysis is the notion of the unconscious mind as a reservoir for repressed memories of traumatic events which continuously influence conscious thought and behavior. The scientific evidence for this notion of unconscious repression is lacking, though there is ample evidence that conscious thought and behavior are influenced by nonconscious memories and processes. According to Sigmund Freud the father of psychoanalysis, suppression and repression are the causes of neurosis.

88 Warpakma, *Ka Pyrshiaw 1*, p. 40.
Abi grappled with himself to coordinate his physical action with the surge of inner psychic activity. The journey from his office to his house is a cross section of the lack of coordination of the mind and the body. Ena noticed that first he walked up and down in the office room with his hands crossed on his chess then the journey extended beyond, to the location of his house where generally there is acceptance, affection, peace and harmony. The journey significantly symbolises the quest of Abi for security, peace of mind and harmony in life. Moreover, he is searching for meaning in life both as a man and husband through the fulfilment of the marital goal.

The search for meaning in life is fundamental in human beings as Victor E. Frankl says:

Man’s search for meaning is a primary force in his life and not a ‘secondary rationalisation’ of instinctual drives. This

meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone.\(^1\)

In the midst of all odds, man continues to look for an answer to the many \textit{whys} of life and as Nietzsche says, “he who has a \textit{why} to live can bear with almost any \textit{how}.”\(^2\) According to Victor Frankl, “what matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general, but rather the specific meaning of a person’s life at a given moment.”\(^3\) Abi searched for a specific meaning in life as Pura has reported:

“Nga kynmaw. Nga kynmaw. Ka dei ha Goa. Katba ngi ìaïd nalor u shyiap ba jem ka Golva Beach, u Abi u sangeh kynsan haba u ìohi ìa ki khynnah rit ba ki ìaleh kai ... U ìathuh ìa nga ba u kwah khun namar khlem khun, u ong, ka kam shong kurim kam don jingmut ei ei.”\(^4\)

(“Oh, yes, yes! I remember. I remember. It was in Goa. As we walked on the soft sand of the Golva Beach, Abi stopped suddenly when he saw children playing and making pattern on the sand. He told me he wished to have

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\(^3\) Viktor E. Frankl, op. cit., p. 99.
\(^4\) Sten, \textit{Kwah Bym Ju Kut}, p. 43.
children because without children, he said, marriage is meaningless. That was five years ago\textsuperscript{95}.

It is a symbolic action of searching for meaning in life when Abi searches something inside his pants pockets but did not find any thing because there is nothing in life that he can look for; every thing is empty. His emphatic statement repeated many times, "\textit{\textit{ka la slem palat}}\textsuperscript{96} ("it is too late,"\textsuperscript{97}) is the result of the collision between the vision and the reality where the ideal and the real meet together as he projects his vision of the role of the man and the husband for himself. The vision of meaninglessness brings pain and conflict to his mind as he fails to see himself as a complete man, that is, a person whose married life has been blessed with the birth of a child. Abi has attempted several times to recreate and undo what Pura has done but the act has not been reciprocated and as such what remains is complete emptiness. Moreover, the day's circumstances have pointed to a bleak future for him. Abi's action when he reached home on that eventful day is symbolic of his mental condition at that point of time:


\textsuperscript{96} Sten, \textit{Kwah Bym Ju Kut}, p. 75.

Ka wiat bad ong, "Phi kham phyrnai mynta ban ía kaba nga íohi hynne mynstep, ieit!" ka da khmih lynti ía ka jubab.

U Abi u law ía u syrwiah ryndang ar rong: kawei kaba saw, kawei kaba lam jyrngam kiba hiar na ka diang sha ka mon. Ha ka jaka ban ai ha ka Pura u kyllaiñ ha ryndang la jong. Um shym jubab ía ka tnga la jong la ka ai mynsiem ía u.98

(She smiles and compliments him. “You look brighter now than you did this morning, darling!” and looks on him for a response.

Abi takes out his checked necktie but rolls it around his neck; he does not reciprocate the inspiration his wife has given him).99

Discouragement on account of the vision of the non-fulfilment of his everlasting desire led Abi to an attitude of estrangement and alienation even from life as shown in symptoms of suicidal tendency “displayed in the sign language of rolling the tie around the neck”100 which signifies

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98 Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p. 72.
100 Warpakma, Ka Pyrshiaw 2, p. 22.
the act of hanging with a rope. The negative significance of the tie is further explained by its appearance to Pura,

Uta u syrwiah u ju paw ha ka teng teng kum u kpieng ksiar ba ka ju deng teng khat. Kiba nang ba tip ki lah ban batai ba kata ka jingiohi ka long haba ka jingieit ka synshar. Ha khmat ka Pura mynta ka janmiet uta u syrwiah u paw kum u sieñtong rit.\(^{101}\)

(The tie used to appear to her sometimes like a golden necklace she loved to wear. That was when love and mutual understanding prevailed. This evening, the tie looks to Pura very much like a young cobra).\(^{102}\)

Pura is unclear about her past, present and future. It is only Liza who finally brought her to some senses of the past; she lives her present in the material things without having joy and happiness; her vision of the future is far beyond what is practical. She lacks integration of the past, the present and the future; she lacks integration of the temporal and the spiritual. Pura misses the linear and chronological progression of time.

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\(^{101}\) Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p. 91.

and confuses the temporal and the metaphysical in an effort to integrate the physical and the spiritual. In contrast to the vision of Pura, Abi walks on two fronts symbolised by his walking “on foot” while his mind is travelling faster than he could have possibly thought. Abi progressively journeys in two fronts: physically, he is journeying to the closure of his desire for everlasting life here on earth. Secondly, the pilgrim in him is progressively being emptied and transformed towards a clearer realisation of the reality of life. Time stands still when Abi sees both the past and the present with the eyes of a pilgrim as symbolised by the picture of Venji who “stands still like a living doll”. Golva Beach comes back to the mind of Abi with a power that shakes like the waves of the sea. Time becomes meaningless in the face of void and emptiness caused by vacuum and non-existence which resulted from the unfruitful Abi-Pura’s relationship.

The comic reliefs presented by different characters and situations including comical names Batmar (iron holder, for one who deals with money), Rishot (pillar) function as interludes leading to tense moments in the lives of individuals, e.g. the discussion of the Board in Abi’s office has been oriented in such a way that it finally leads, as mentioned

103 Warpakma, *Ka Pyrshiaw* 2, p. 23.
104 Ibid., p. 24.
106 Ibid., p. 28.
earlier, to the much tensed conclusion of Abi, “ka la kut hangta! Ka Pura kam ioh khun shuh”\textsuperscript{107} (“So it ends there! Pura won’t bear a child any more”).\textsuperscript{108} Apart from the psychological battle of the main characters, others even minor characters too, suffered in their own way. Ena, the office assistant-in-charge of confidential matters, is a person who found fulfilment in her life and work that, though qualified for promotion to the rank of officer, she never competed with others. Her sense of personal fulfilment has been beautifully certified by the author in these words: ‘Ka hun ban trei ha ophis u Abi’\textsuperscript{109} (‘she is satisfied with her present job’).\textsuperscript{110} On her return to work after maternity leave, she was confronted with changes in her office which caused tension in her mind:

Mynta te ka dei ka sngi thymmai i a ka Ena. Kat shaba ka peit ka iohi i a ki tiar thymmai kiba kam ju phohsniew ban don hangta. Ka artatien la ka dang bit ne em ban trei i a ka kam ba ka ju trei.\textsuperscript{111}

Kano kano ka jingkylla ha ka stail ka jingim ka dei kaba thymmai. Ka jingkylla ba ka Ena ka iohi ruh ka dei kaba thymmai.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{107} Sten, Kwh Bym Ju Kut, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{109} Sten, Kwh Bym Ju Kut, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{111} Sten, Kwh Bym Ju Kut, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p. 11.
Ki jingkylla ha ka kamra trei ki pynmih ia ka jingkylli ha ka la ka dang lar kam ne em ha ophis.\footnote{Sten, Kwa\textit{h bym ju Kut}, p. 12.}

\textit{(Today is a new day for Ena. Wherever she turns inside her room she sees new things she never dreamt of. She wonders if she is still qualified for her job.)}\footnote{H.W. Sten, (ed.), "Everlasting Desire", \textit{Khasi Studies, Vol. IV, No. 1}, (April – June 1990), p. 19.}

\textit{Any change of any life-style is new, so is the change that Ena now experiences.}\footnote{Ibid., p. 19. The translation has been taken from the English version of the novel. The researcher is aware of the minor difference that the Khasi version has two sentences while the English version is only one. Since the translation is from the text written by the author of the novel, the researcher prefers to keep the version as it is without any change in translation.}

\textit{A lady has her own worry, and Ena’s worry is the question of whether or not she is still useful in her office.}\footnote{H.W. Sten, (ed.), "Everlasting Desire", \textit{Khasi Studies, Vol. IV, No. 1}, (April – June 1990), p. 20. The translation is kept as it is in the English version.}

From the quoted texts above, it is clear that Ena had undergone moments of mental agony in the midst of the changes that took place. The surrounding has changed, signifying the tremendous transition and improvement of life. Ena hesitated whether she would be able to catch up with the development and fit into the new dispensation and whether her service would be required or not. The undercurrents of worry and
emotional reaction which are surging in her mind plagued her. Memory, self respect and sense of duty danced in her mind and brought her intense mental pain.

Apart from the worry that was connected with herself, Ena was also preoccupied with the well-being of her officer, Abi. His strange behaviour on the day she rejoined duty caused tension in her mind and was reflected in the way she conducted herself and the panicky phone conversation with Pura. She regretted that she had forgotten even the residential phone number of Abi after a short leave of three months:

Katba ka trud la ka khlieh, ka kren marwei: “A Blei, nga la klet lut haba nga dang sawphew lai.”

“Ka Ena, kong, ka Ena ... Hooid. Ka khubor ba kyrkieh ... Ki pion ki ìathuh ba i bah i la leit sha ïing ... Ki ìathuh ba i ïaid ha ka rukom ba kham pher ... ïaid?

Ka Ena ka sngew suk mynsiem ba ka la ìathuh ìa ka Pura, ka tnga u Abi, ìa kaba ka la ìõhi; hynrei ka jingkhuslai ka wan biang. Hato dei ma ka ka daw?\(^{117}\)

(As she scratches her head, she says, “Only forty three, I’ve forgotten every thing, oh God!”)

\(^{117}\) Sten, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*, pp. 16 - 17.
“Ena, madam, Ena ... Yes. Urgent message for you....
Peon said that mister Abi’s returned home ... They said he walked in a strange manner ... Walk?

Ena is happy that she informed Pura about it; but she is worried. Is she the cause?)

Throughout the morning, Ena was preoccupied and undergoing mental stress. After informing Pura about Abi’s strange behaviour, she experienced temporary relief from mental conflict for having done the good action. On a random examination of the possible causes, it is found that Ena’s conscience was touched to the core on account of her concern for Abi that she even questioned herself whether she was the cause of Abi’s behaviour.

Closely connected with the family life of Pura and Abi is Liza the domestic worker. Perplexed at Abi’s haunting “Hooid” (Yes), Pura called out desperately, “Liza, o Liza” without any meaning,

Ha ka jingmut ka Pura hi ka hooid u Abi ka dang trei kam khyllah. Kam da don kam ia ka Liza; hynrei kum ka trai iing ka lah ban khot katba mon. Kam don hi kano kano ka kam

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119 Ibid., p. 23.
120 A detailed comment on the word, “Hooid” (Yes) has been done in I. Warpakma’s Ka Pyrshiau I, pp. 13 – 19.

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kypang ban pynieng sah i a ka Liza bad ka. “O, leit weng i a kito ki syntiew na ka kamra jong i. Im ju kwah iohi syntiew ha ka kamra hadien san baje.” Kumta ka Pura ka bthah khlem wiat i a ka Liza. Ka Liza ruh ka trei kam ha ka jinglyngngoh mynta ka sngi kumba long ka Pura. Baroh ar ngut ki khia jingmut.\(^{121}\)

(Pura is in fact engaged with the ‘Yes’ of Abi. She does not need Liza; but being the governess of the house, she somehow manages to keep Liza engaged. She has nothing in particular to have Liza near her. “O, go and remove the flowers from his room. He does not like flower after five.” She instructs without even smiling back on Liza. Liza too is as much in the dark as is Pura. Both have problems of their own.)\(^{122}\)

Liza shares the problem of Pura’s family and was worried about the well-being of every one.

Ka Liza ka iohi na ka shyllang khmat ka Pura i a ka dak khuslai, ka dak ba i kordit kumno re. “Ka kynthei ba don akor kum katei”, ka Liza ka kren marwei. “U Abi u leit leh aiiu mo i a ka?” ... Ym don hajan ka Liza ba lah ban pule i a ka jingmut ba ka lah ban iasyllok; lada don ka kwah kei n ban lap i a kum uta.\(^{123}\)

\(^{121}\) Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p. 26.
\(^{123}\) Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p. 33.
(Liza notices that some worry is writ large on Pura’s forehead: a look of worry, a look of woe. “Such a nice lady” she mutters, “what could Abi have done to her?” she asks herself audibly. ... There is no psychiatrist or psychologist nearby with whom Liza can confer; otherwise she would do it).\(^{124}\)

Following the action of Abi who came home walking both Pura and Liza shared their worries about him. While Pura was concerned about the conduct of his work in the office, Liza went further to the core of his being and existence:

“Phi la ithuh bha ía u Abi shwa ba phin ía-shong?”

…

“U lah ban don ka jingang nud ía ka jingim-im; hynrei um pat-at poi sha ka thong.

…

“U kwah khun u Abi bapli.”\(^{125}\)

(“Did you know Abi long enough before marriage?”

…

“He might have a certain ambition in life-aif; but he’s not-ot achieved.”

…”


"He wants children, poor Abi!"\textsuperscript{126}

Liza's mental conflict was directed to the person of Abi. Having known him quite well, she advocated his longing and desire. Liza cried to express her sorrow that Abi had left his wife,

Ka Liza ruh ka ñiad ummat lang; ki jong ka ki dei ki ummat sngewlem. Kam ju tip ba u kynrad ba ka la shakri naduh dang rit un ïai beh sha ka thong jong u ha ka jingim.\textsuperscript{127}

(Liza too wipes out her tears: hers are tears of pity mingled with anger because she never knew that her young maestro would have such a view of life).\textsuperscript{128}

Still focussed on the well-being of Abi, Liza spoke to Pura,

"İa ngin ìawad ïa u. Phi dei ban nguḥ let, em nga mut, ban pan map. Ki saheb rangbah ba kum u Abi kin map kloi bad klet kloi ïa ka jingbakla ba la leh ïa ki."

... 

"İeng, ïa ngin leit wad ïa u Abi."\textsuperscript{129}


\textsuperscript{129} Sten, \textit{Kwah Bym Ju Kut}, pp. 116 - 117.
("Let's seek for him. you have to apologize, no, to beg for forgiveness. High officials like Abi would readily forgive and forget the wrong done to them."

... 

"Rise up, and let's find Abi.")\textsuperscript{130}

Opposed to Liza's approach, Pura's proud attitude was to justifiably stick to her action of having chased Abi.

"Liza! Um wan shuh. Phi i, um wan. Ai un jah thait hangta."\textsuperscript{131}

("Liza! He won't come back. You see, he'll not. Let'm rest there.")\textsuperscript{132}

While Liza believed in the possibility of reconciling conflict, Pura sealed the fate with a wish 'let him rest there' which is similar to the Catholic prayer for the dead, 'may he or she rest in peace' or R.I.P.\textsuperscript{133} In a way, Abi is considered as dead to Pura. Ironically, considering the fact of his quest for ever lasting life here on earth through generations of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{131} Sten, \textit{Kwah Rym Ju Kut}, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{133} Translated from Latin, "Requiescat in pace" and abbreviated to "R.I.P." the writing is generally found engraved in tombstones. It is a formula of the Catholic prayer for the dead. Web page: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Requiescat_in_pace. Also, web page: http://www.yourdictionary.com/requiescat-in-pace
\end{flushright}
issues of children, grand children and great grand children, the absence of a child seals the fate of the desire – Abi is dead.

The aspect of psychological experience of the Board members others than Abi was shown in a limited manner. However, they share in the aspect of psychological battle in as much as it is pertaining to their work and families. The constraint of work coupled with the unnecessary interference from outsiders like politicians caused mental tension in Mr. Shankar, Mr. Ferris, Mr. Roy and Mr. Batmar. However, what is most significant is the reference to the career of the sons of Mr. Shankar and Mr. Roy. The choice of careers by their sons caused tension in their minds in as much as they were concerned about their future. However, the discussion had a far-reaching significance in the life of Abi who remarked thus:

"Phi baroh phi ñadon khun. La kyrkhu ña phi napdeng ki shynrang. Kum ña nga?" ... Baroh kine ki snem nga shu shong bad ka tnga. Ngam lah da ka hok ban khot ña ka kmie haba ngim don khun."

... 
"Ngi la ñaim suk, kumba phi ñohi; hynrei tang i khun khalor ruñ em."\(^{134}\)

\(^{134}\) Sten, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*, p. 61.
("You all have children. You're blessed among men. As for me ... I'm all these years with my wife. I can't even call her kmie or mother when we have no children."

... "We have lived a happy married life, you know; as happy as you people would view it; but she did not get even a premature baby").\(^{135}\)

Roy who acted like a physiologist made the following comment regarding the prospect of child bearing by a woman:

"Ka rta ka tnga ruh hap ban kheiñi. ... Lada ka la tam sawphew, ha ri jong ngi kham ñiar ki kynthei kiban pun bad kha khun. Lada ka la kha lpa tang iwei ka lah ban kha haduh ban palat ña kata ka rta ruh."\(^{136}\)

("The age of the wife is also a factor to be reckoned with.... If she's crossed forty, it is rare that our ladies get a child. If she's already one, it may still be all right to hope.")\(^{137}\)

The remark of Roy sealed the hope of Abi for the arrival of a child in his family.


Reference is made to Bekky as one with whom Abi was friendly but did not marry on account of her poverty "... ka duk ha ki hynmen bad para"\(^{138}\) ("not rich in brothers and sisters"). The novel hints that Bekky too had suffered heartbreak when Abi did not marry her. It is evident from the intention of giving the name Vengeance, shortened to Venji, to her daughter, who ironically had an opportunity to take revenge on Abi in the hotel room.

The three minor characters peon Rishot Bhadur and two others served mainly as players who brought comic relief. However, to some extent, it is the next senior most peon who had a desire to take the place of Rishot Bhadur after the latter's retirement, who was in a state of mental tension in view of his capability to perform his duties. Though the minor characters share in the mental conflict and heartache, the person on the centre stage is Abi. Focussing on the person of Abi, it is found that the battle raged furiously because of the conflict confronting himself, between Abi the idealist and Abi the realist. The philosopher in Abi always looked for the best part of things while at the same time, he had to face the reality of life as a human being. The difficulty to bridge the gap between the real and the ideal in him caused psychic tension, which

\(^{138}\) Sten, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*, p. 46.

surfaced in interpersonal conflict. To a great extent, Abi was a person of split personality in a state of identity crisis. With reference to his milieu, Abi was caught in the middle of a crisis of identification – in relation to his realisation of the self as a man and husband, and as a man and pilgrim. The personality of being a man and husband touched the core of his being because he had not been able to realise it through the gift of a child; the personality of a man and pilgrim was at the level of on-going development. The facts of life stared him straight in the face but the pilgrim-philosopher in him does not give up or accept the facts as they are that he cannot have children from Pura. In the case of Abraham of the Biblical book of Genesis, he still believes, “hoping against hope, that there is something that can still be done in order to achieve the goal ...” However, the issue is whether he would be like the Abi (Abi is a short form for Abraham) of the Bible whose wife Sarah gave birth to a son even after she had passed the age of child bearing, as the Bible shows:

Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety." (Gen. 17:17)

In the face of the identity crisis, he looked for a new identity for himself which will purge away the old self which had been defeated. The quest for identity nearly came to fulfilment in the hotel room when the merging of two personalities which had been split nearly came to its pinnacle but it was only a momentary act of wish fulfilment since the old self in Abi took the better of him.

As mentioned earlier, after considering the pros and cons of his life's experience, and having heard from the wisdom of the board members, Abi made the eternal conclusion, "Kumta ka la kut hangta! Ka pura kam 'oh khun shuh" ("So, it ends there! Pura won't have a child any more") which had come to him as enlightenment with specific information of knowledge that had sealed the possibility of realising his

142 The Biblical quotation is from The Full Life Study Bible – New International Version, (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), p. 32. The central character in H.W. Sten’s Kwah Bym Ju Kut is named ‘Abi’ which is a short form of ‘Abraham’ just like ‘Tom’ for ‘Thomas’. The name, Abi, has been purposely given to the central character of the novel by H.W. Sten to contrast him with Abraham, the Abi of the Bible. At the age of 100, Abraham, who longed to have a son from his lawful wife, Sarah, who was 90 years old and had passed the normal age of conception and child bearing, hoped against hope in the promise of God for the fulfillment of his most cherished desire and it happened. H.W. Sten ironically named his hero, Abi, to pose a challenge, ‘whether a miracle will occur for Abi the hero of his Kwah Bym Ju Kut, as it had happened to the Biblical Abi!’

143 Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p. 59.

dream. The vision in the presence of the board members was a moment of “bright darkness” for him for every thing was clear but it was a revelation of a dark future and the end of his hope. He also answered Pura without even looking on his wife’s face, that every thing was clear for him, “Nothing. I now remember all.”^145

On the other hand, for Pura, too, things became clearer in her vision of the reality of things after the counselling session by Liza who applied a skill similar to the peeling of an onion. Liza peeled off the smug confidence of Pura and brought her down to earth from her pedestal of false glory till she finally recalled her past including the events of long ago like the scene of Golva Beach in Goa.

The flash back technique of H.W. Sten heightens the mental conflict of the characters as they journey back to the experience of past years of life. Pura finally experienced agonising pain as she glances at the pages of her life with and without Abi.

Ki bniat ka jingbabe ki ktha ïa baroh teng teng; hynrei ka Pura ka sngew ba ïa mynta hi kumba kita ki bniat ki dait bad ktha tang ïa ka marwei. Balei mo? Ka shim ïa ka album na ka mieij rit ba ka ju buh ha khap ki shuki bad ka

bishar 'ia ki dur kynthup kaba ka shon haba u Abi u sam
mit mit ha phyllaw ka 'iingmane ba la ai kyrte ng ST.
CATHERINE.\textsuperscript{146}

(The pang of regret could be excruciating at times; but
why? She pulls the album from a side table, and
examines the photographs one of which shows Abi
distributing sweets to children in the compound of
St. Catherine's).\textsuperscript{147}

Memory or remembering the past is what accelerates the atmosphere
of tension and conflict in the novel. Another aspect that H.W. Sten uses
in his technique is mental obsession of one or a few characters. He
clearly stated that he used "obsession" as a tool in his novel\textsuperscript{148} and this
aspect intensifies the tension and conflict at different movements of the
novel. The formation of such an attitude in Abi was a gradual process,
which began early in life. The primary obsession which filled every
aspect of Abi's mind is the desire to be remembered forever through his
children in the way the Hebrews remember Elimelech, Mahlon, Chilion
and Ruth\textsuperscript{149} as mentioned earlier. He is obsessed with this 'ego-ideal'\textsuperscript{150}
that once the intensity of the moment grips him, he is immobilised into

\textsuperscript{146} Sten, \textit{Kwah Bym Ju Kut}, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{147} H.W. Sten, (ed.), "Everlasting Desire", \textit{Khosi Studies, Vol. IV, No. 3}, (October – December
1990), p. 76.
\textsuperscript{149} H.W. Sten, (ed.), "Everlasting Desire", \textit{Khosi Studies, Vol. IV, No. 3}, (October – December
1990), p. 113.
\textsuperscript{150} Warpakma, \textit{Ka Pyrshiaw 1}, p. 64.
spontaneous action beyond his control. Having been caught up in the net of the 'ego-ideal' Abi's sub-conscious mind has been controlled – he folded his hands on his chest unconsciously; he walks up and down mechanically. In sign language, the actions symbolise negativity, confusion, narrow-mindedness, closed up mentality and discouragement.151

According to the famous psychiatrist, Michael A. Fauman, obsessions are "recurrent, intrusive, and anxiety-provoking thoughts, impulses, or images"152 Abi's life experience is full of obsessions of thoughts and images. The thought of having ever lasting life here on earth through his issues has dominated the domain of his consciousness. His life and behavioural patterns have been unconsciously controlled by the dominant thought of living long after he is gone from this earth.

The ideal presents itself in the form of images that are directly and indirectly linked to the quest for the goal. Thus, at the Golva beach, Abi saw the image in the visible form of a happy family with children playing. The image of a family with children returned vehemently to the consciousness of Abi on the day Ena rejoined her duty in the office after

her maternity leave. Coincidentally, on the same day, Abi received a letter
on whose few sentences he underlined. Later on, as it came to be
known from Ena’s information about the possible connection of the
“drama” with that letter, it was found that the letter referred to a wish for
happiness to Abi and his family. The obsession of Abi involved him in
one particular “overt repetitive behaviour” of crossing his hands over
his chest and walking up and down across the room. The obsession in
Abi became more persistent and intensive as he and his wife were
advancing in age.

Further, complication arose in interpersonal relationship between Abi
and Pura because of personality incompatibility on account of which
arose contradiction of attitude and behaviour and uncompromising
viewpoints and philosophy. The battling conflict between husband and
wife is intense but lies submerged as an undercurrent which finally
destroyed the family unity. The clash was intensified further because the
unlikely materialist Pura spiritualised things to justify her stand. When
her human wisdom has failed, she appealed to the metaphysical realm
to push forward and justify her argument. When Abi was with passion at
the intense height of his quest for ‘everlasting life’ on earth, Pura

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insensitively and ruthlessly waters it down with her pious spiritual rejoinder,

"Baieit, shu ngeit ha ka jingsiewspah Kalbari ka bneng ka dei ka jong phi, ka jingim bym ju kut ka long ka jong phi."\(^{155}\)

("Darling, just believe in the redemption of our sins at Calvary’s cross, heaven will be yours: everlasting life will be yours").\(^{156}\)

The bitterness of the spiritual pill of Pura is such that Abi was forced to respond with an equally harsh statement:

"Haduh hangta te nga mon jur; hynrei nalor kaba kohnguh i’a la u tnga kumba ha u Trai i’a kaba phim shym la leh; phim dei keiñ ban klet ba ka jingngeit khlem ka jingleh ka long kaba la ñap lypa. Phi kynmaw?\(^{157}\)

("You are right up to that point; but beside submitting as unto the Lord which you have not done; don’t forget that faith without deeds is dead also. Do you remember?")\(^{158}\)

Pura is intelligent enough and is well aware of Abi’s goal and objective but she ignored his point and continued to sermonise in her

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\(^{155}\) Sten, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*, p. 78.


\(^{157}\) Sten, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*, p. 78.

effort to brainwash him from his obsession as he seemed to have forgotten his longing. She tried to push her argument since "she knew already through reading that after forty the estrogens are either dead or inactive; and that at 42 even if she bears a baby, chance of getting a defective one is great".\textsuperscript{159}

With a rather sluggish nature and stubborn attitude, Pura was a thorn in the flesh of the forward-looking Abi which disturbs the equilibrium of the apparently happy family. Conservative in approach, Pura was contented with the state of affairs prevailing in her existing circumstance with the look of smug happiness and neither going forward nor backward; she lived but did not have expectation or aspiration. "For her every thing is at a stand still and there is no need to go forward. In a word, she is in a state of living death because one of the essences of life is movement; her life is only in the flowers and 'their seeds' (KSt. IV. 48) which are only at the lower level of existence. There is stagnancy and inflexibility in the whole world of Pura."\textsuperscript{160}

On the other hand, Abi was full of zest and was a strong exponent of life and existence as exemplified by his interest and quest for life, which


\textsuperscript{160} Warpakma, \textit{Ka Pyrshiaw 1}, p. 67.
is cradled through family life in the hearth of relationship of husband and wife bonded by the knot of love. He lived a life of an enlightened philosopher who considered that life is meaningful and worth living only “if ‘he’ can ‘live’ long after he is gone from this life.” That is why he stuck to his supreme goal, ‘everlasting life’. The novel, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*, starts with a dramatic note of quest for life and in the process of the journey, love which is the foundation of family life wanes correspondingly as the desire for life grows in the consciousness of the protagonist. H.W. Sten uses musical terms to signify the diminishing pattern of progression in the psyche of the couple. The invisible shrinking of Abi’s love is understood by the symbolic use of the musical terms “diminuendo” during his conversation with Pura. In the process of the discussion, his voice first “touches diminuendo” when he choked as he expressed to his wife about the time of begetting children, that since she did not cooperate, “it is already too late, too late!” “Diminuendo” is a musical term which means a gradual decrease in loudness. The musical term signifies Abi’s emotional state. It is significant because Abi wanes in his warmth of heart for Pura on account of her failure to

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163 Ibid., p. 109.
cooperate with him in his quest for everlasting life. Her bragging that she can provide all failed miserably leading to the decrease of enthusiasm for love in her husband. Her air of fullness or completeness is empty. She lacked even the essentials of life. During the squabble Abi "reaches diminuendo"\textsuperscript{165} as he expressed his emotions when he saw the bleak future of the possibility of living on earth in the pattern of the known violinist, Mr. Filgin, who "Abi believes, he still lives through his children and grand children".\textsuperscript{166} In the course of the conversation, it is noticed that at one moment Pura's voice "reaches the crescendo"\textsuperscript{167} as she expressed her mind. "Crescendo" is a musical term which means a gradual and steady increase in loudness.\textsuperscript{168} The musical term signifies the increase of the temper and the noise of Pura as she realized that her husband was not reconciled to the fact that they would not have any child of their own. It is when Abi's emotional state was at its lowest ebb that Pura raised her voice to its highest pitch understandably on account of difference in opinions. The action was to bring far-reaching effects on the family. She was used to the pattern of behaviour of patronising even her husband to whom she was always giving and, thus, could not accept

the accusation of not being cooperative with him in his quest for everlasting life, that is why she shouted at him in a voice that reaches 'crescendo', "Phi sngew bang ban kynnoh tang ūa nga"\textsuperscript{169} ("You cherish in blaming me alone,")\textsuperscript{170} It is in the atmosphere of blame and accusation that conflict is inevitable.

The music turns diminuendo, signifying the diminishing progression of the state of love between husband and wife. Significantly, it is the music of Abi's heart of love which strums in a diminishing mode. H.W. Sten effectively employs different means to enhance his captivating technique. Besides being dramatic, he captures the reader's mind by appealing to the sensibility of emotions. The novel moves in a series of winding patterns which depict the complexity of relationship and human life. The pattern of alienation\textsuperscript{171} which is actually experienced with reference to circumstances is felt in Abi's psyche:

U sngew kum u nongwei ha ka ūing ka Pura, mynta.\textsuperscript{172}

(He felt like an alien in Pura's house, now).\textsuperscript{173}

\textsuperscript{169} Sten, \textit{Kwah Bym Ju Kut}, p. 96.
\textsuperscript{171} Warpakma, \textit{Ka Pyrshiaw 1}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{172} Sten, \textit{Kwah Bym Ju Kut}, p. 100.
\textsuperscript{173} A literal translation of the Khasi version has been applied.
The meeting point of the ‘diminuendo’ and ‘crescendo’ between Abi and Pura is when Abi spoke out his mind about the failure of Pura to listen to him ‘to submit ... as unto the Lord’ and even if she wanted to, it was “too late already ... to listen to Paulus”.\(^*\) It is a moment of saturation point, that when Abi’s desire for the goal has reached its crescendo, his attachment to Pura reached its diminuendo and when Pura’s ego has reached its crescendo, Abi is out of ‘her’ house. The ending of the song “The answer my friend is blowing in the wind”\(^*\) symbolises the futility of all relationship, aspiration, expectation, hope, love, etc. All have come to an end.

In the evening of the day when Abi returned home on foot, the wife and the husband tried to settle matters, but the way in which the two approached each other on that fateful day, was so antagonising that conflict was inevitable. Abi’s attitude was that of an unconvinced husband while Pura approached him as a victor; she even sounds satanic\(^*\) in proposing to be able to supply all that Abi would need:

“La jia ațu? Ïathuh la ngi duna eī ei. Tang shi kyntien ngan leh ... Ngam lah ban ai īa phi?”\(^\\*\)

\(^*\) Ibid., p. 110.
\(^*\) Warpakma, *Ka Pyrshiaw 2*, p. 11.
"Kaei kata kaba ngam lah ban ai, lane baroh ar ngut ngim lah ban iatrei lang ban ioh i'a ka?"\textsuperscript{178}

("What's happened? Just tell me if we lack anything. Just a word, it shall be done ... Can I not give you?\textsuperscript{179}

"What is it that I cannot afford to give it you or that both of us cannot work together to achieve it?\textsuperscript{180}

The overreaching nature in Abi's wife has connection to her name, "Pura". According to E. Bars, in his \textit{Khasi – English Dictionary}, "Pura" in Khasi, means "complete", "full", "sufficient".\textsuperscript{181} Given the name, she was believed to be full, complete and sufficient, being the only daughter of a rich family with wealth and beauty. True to her name, Pura's attitude was as one who lacked nothing and, thus, she promised to provide anything and all that Abi could want and need. Contrary to the implication of her name, she had nothing to offer which would fulfil the aspiration of her husband. Her approach to his needs is materialistic and would not match his metaphysical and meta-materialistic need.

\textsuperscript{178} Sten, \textit{Kwah Bym Ju Kut}, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{181} E. Bars, \textit{Khasi – English Dictionary}, (Shillong: Don Bosco, 1973), 713.
From another angle, Pura too is metaphysical, but her philosophy is tinged with religious and spiritual colours and she confidently hoped to attain heavenly everlasting life. On the other hand, Abi is humanist, tolerant and universal and, as such, opposed to the thought pattern of Pura. On account of the conflict of interest which is beyond reconciliation and compromise, tension between the two was inevitable. Though they had differences in vision and world view, there had been efforts to support each other in daily life. Abi was even treated like a spoiled child which he resented:

"Wat klet Abi! Nga la pyrshang katba lah ban pynhun īa phi; hynrei phim hun. Ynda la poi ki transistor, nga thied kawei īa phi. Ynda la wan poi sa ka refrijeretor, nga thied īa kata ruh. Haba ki kor TV ki poi sha Shillong ha ka snem 1984 nga la thied kawei; hynrei phim ju peit. Haba kiwei ki īap bieit īa ka maruti, nga la thied īa phi kawei.\(^{182}\)

("Don't forget Abi! I did my best to make you happy; but you aren't. When transistor radio was the fashion, I got you one. When refrigerator was, I got it too. When TV set came to town in 1984 I got one; but you never watch. When maruti was the craze of some, I got it too.")\(^{183}\)

\(^{182}\) Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p. 99.
Besides resenting the way he was treated by his wife, her offer was never appealing to him, his quest being an everlasting desire. Her life was in the things she had but his was beyond material things. To all intents and purposes, Pura had lost sensitivity in her dealings with her husband – she “lost all sensibility for genuine emotions and warm feelings for life”\(^{184}\) being immersed in a materialist pattern of life through a process of substitution.\(^{185}\) She was not able to understand Abi even when he was reeling in agony and suffering.\(^{186}\) To the genuine and agonising emotional outburst of Abi, “too late, it’s too late” she indifferently responded, “Ka la slem palat ìa mynta hi, hynrei ka stet palat ban ìa ka lashai”\(^{187}\) (“It is too late for today, but it’s too early for the morrow”).\(^{188}\) Circumstances probably had made Pura a different person. As it appeared she was an affectionate, caring and warm-hearted person. However, she shifted her focus to material things, as it is clear from her argument to Abi, as a matter of substitution. The lack of children had been substituted by adopting flowers and other ‘things’.

\(^{184}\) Warpakma, *Ka Pyrshiaw I*, p. 69.

\(^{185}\) ‘Substitution’ is the act or process of putting one thing in place of another. In psychoanalysis, it is a defense mechanism whereby an unattainable or unacceptable instinctual object or emotion is replaced by one that is more accessible or tolerable.


\(^{186}\) Warpakma, *Ka Pyrshiaw I*, pp. 69 – 70.

\(^{187}\) Sten, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*, p. 75.

Pura treated flowers as her children, addressing them, “Kulab jong nga! Nga khuslai ïa ka hoid u tnga jong nga. Wat ïakhuslai bad nga. Nga ieit ïa phi”\(^{169}\) ("My roses! I’m worried about my husband’s Yes. Please don’t share in my worry. I love you").\(^{190}\) Her life is focussed on ‘things’ and she has lost sensibility in dealing with human beings. She has closed not only the door of her womb but the door of her heart as well and can not see the pain and suffering of her husband even when he is really reeling in agony. To his emotional outburst, “too late, it’s too late,” she reacted indifferently.

In the midst of unfavourable circumstances, looking for an answer even from the wind, Abi closed the door to all possibilities with the thunderous shout “Pura”\(^{191}\) which never received any answer but remained an empty expression of an empty life. In looking for an “ideal” Pura, Abi has rejected his wife who had failed to co-operate with him in his quest for everlasting life. Moreover, the real Pura with whom Abi was living failed to match the ideal Pura whom he was looking for. The clash between the real and the ideal both in reality and in abstract ideation is externalised in the conflict which bitterly separated the husband from the

\(^{169}\) Sten, *Kwah Bym Ju Kut*, p. 34.


wife. When Abi left his wife, it is an act of returning to his principle of wanting to marry a woman from a big family. Still in quest for such an ideal woman, Pura was finally rejected.

Abi waged a war within himself too, to reconcile many ideals in his mind. In his quest for everlasting life, the ideal Pura to whom he took recourse and called out never answered though the answer was expected to be 'blowing in the wind' and there was no answer from the neighbours either. From yet another point of view, the clash in Abi's life is between allegiance to himself and fidelity to his convinced faith and philosophy. As a Christian he was bound by his faith as a professed catholic follower who could not bypass the philosophy and traditional teachings of his Church. At the same time he had his own personal understanding of life and religion. In the midst of opposing morals and principles he had to journey alone and as a pilgrim.

Abi underwent a violent exercise because of the clash of many opposites. His educational, social and religious background became both a boon and a curse. While being able to be flexible in attitude he is bound by conscience till the last when he finally closed his door to all possibilities in spite of his everlasting desire,

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192 Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p. 141.
Kum u dkhon ka balang Katholik, u Abi um lah ban pynlait ìa ka Pura; hynrei kum u Khasi u lah ban leh ìa kata ha kano kano ka sngi. Um ju pdiang ìa ka nongrim kaba pynlong ìa ki shi tnga haduh ba ka jingïap hi kan pynklad ìa ki. U dei ban im lyngba ki rta na ka jinghia pateng ha ki khun ki ksiew.\textsuperscript{193}

(“As a Catholic Christian, Abi cannot divorce Pura; but as a Khasi he could at any time. He is far beyond thinking of death that can do them part. He must live forever through children.”)\textsuperscript{194}

In the midst of conflicting pros and cons, Abi was unnerved at important points of his journey of life as a pilgrim of everlasting life. The quest became the supreme and only good for him and all other considerations became unnecessary, undesirable, and irrelevant. “Abi’s ticklish longing for everlasting life on earth pricks his psyche to such an extent that his vision of the reality became blurred and unstable\textsuperscript{195} and in a way, his state of mind was cramped because his mental battle was grippingly intense. At certain moments he was in a state of complete loss and discouragement. Obsessed with his goal in life, he advanced to the stage of no return to the acceptance of the realities of life which finally made him a tragic hero. Though he did not die a physical death,

\textsuperscript{193} Sten, \textit{Kwah Bym Ju Kut}, pp. 109 – 110.
\textsuperscript{195} Warpakma, \textit{Ka Pyrshiaw I}, p. 76.
his end was a complete closure to life. His was a "death in life" which did not have any promise of rebirth or renewal as the novel ends:

Kumta u Abi u kren bad u khang la ka dwar sha ka pyrthei.¹⁹⁶

(So said Abi and he closed the door to the world).¹⁹⁷

Contrary to Venji’s good wishes "cheers ... to the success of your pilgrimage,"¹⁹⁸ Abi turned inward and closed the door to all possibilities. The "good evening" wish was never fulfilled and the time became a bad evening. The "cheers" turned into jeer as the pilgrimage became totally unfulfilled and unfinished.

Advancing from the habit of being a perfectionist to the garb of a philosopher Abi ended as a confused moralist who found that in every thing and to everywhere he was late and finally ended in a cry of agony and despair: “too late” ... “its too late.” The escape into the hotel, which favoured the wishful marriage to Venji, became an occasion of failure which accelerated the pace of the pilgrim’s journey to his end. Venji takes a new role when she chased the pilgrim to his last corner in the process of self-emptying where he could see the reality better. Her action assumes importance when she “moves to the chimney to make

¹⁹⁶ Sten, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, p. 141.
¹⁹⁷ A literal translation of the line from the Khasi version of the novel.
the room warmer. As she shoves the coal, smoke and smell of it come out of the chimney.” Similar to the smoking of rats from a hole, smoke assumes a significant symbol in the pilgrimage of Abi. Venji’s action is to smoke him from his rat hole of smug happiness in a make believe world of pilgrimage to the reality of existence whether he accepted it or not.

In conclusion, it can be reiterated that H.W. Sten’s psychological novel, Kwah Bym Ju Kut, is, as he has termed it, an “exercise in psychological battle” where the universal experiences of life in factual realities are powerfully depicted. The novel displays the complexity of human relationship wherein the idiosyncrasy of every character is showcased in the backdrop of the multi-dimensional reality of being and existence.

The co-existence of contradictory and incompatible situations is a reality of life where attitudes, moods, ideas and viewpoints do not promote an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity. Kwah Bym Ju Kut is a battleground which exhibits a gripping effect of the struggle and agony arising from the underground vis a vis the realities of life of the characters. In respect of Abi there is a war within and a friction outside

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which was ignited on account of many years of expectation, unfulfilled
dream, hurt feelings and un-resolved issues. Maladjustment to the
situations of life resulted in pseudo happiness in married life.

The journey motif is an artistic technique which the author has
adopted to unfold the plot of the novel. The metaphor of life as a journey
has been beautifully treated during which the characters are shown their
true colours as every one is challenged to learn and unlearn from the
experiences of life. A process of metamorphosis takes place in every
character as a result of the innate characteristics which are in the human
system.

Abi, the central character, embarks on a pilgrimage to eternity in an
act of expression of his being and existence with a desire to transcend
space and time in the continuity of his line of existence through his
children and grand children. The unfitness of Pura the wife, turns things
upside down with his hope of everlasting life dashed to the ground in
spite of hoping against hope that matters may change in a U-turn of
events in the pattern of the happenings in the life of the Biblical Abi
(Abraham). The sudden surge of the psychic currents in the brain of
Pura and her hysteric reaction on the forty-second birthday of Abi sparks
out to his space and the result of the invasion is the clear demarcation of
space with a no-man's land between husband and wife. After failing to make right choices in life, the tragic hero closes his door and dies a living death becoming non-existent in his family with no hope even after the tryst with destiny in the hotel room. Thus, in spite of attempts to create an atmosphere of harmony through life's biochemistry of relationships in the complex process of integrating opposites of moods and feelings to destroy the ripples of deconstruction, the hero journeys alone as a pilgrim to his empty eternity and failed to achieve the goal.

The novel, as a work of art, can be described as a fabric of linguistic painting where life's reality of ups and downs is treated with utmost care to present a fine finished product. The author has delved deep into the psyche of each and every individual in his treatment of plot and character where action and poetry are converged. Being a linguist and critic, H.W. Sten has taken much pain to make the language of the novel beautifully sharp, artistic, economical, lucid, calculative and effective. Sten has weighed his language whether in narration or in conversation and both in the Khasi and the English versions. An example of the efficiency of the language is the ability of the reader to identify the characters from the way they speak. Art and life are beautifully integrated through symbolism the use of which gives an edge to the novel.