CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Literature is said to reflect human life, hence human experiences are usually the central theme of literature. Commenting on this, noted literary critic Owen Rowie wrote in his essay:

"Ka Literature" namar kata ka iasnoh bad ka jingim
jong ngi ki briew ha kane ka pyrthei

[Literature, therefore, is based on the life of people on earth.]

More than other branches of literature, the novel perhaps reflects and imitates human life and human experience very closely. S.S. Majaw, another noted Khasi critic is of the view that:

"Ka novel bad ka pyrthei shu thaw ka syriem thik ia ka iit khmih kaba pynphalang shai ia ka pyrthei bashisha".

[The novel with its world of make-belief is like a mirror which reflects real life].

While maintaining the theory of imitation, prominent literary critic H.W. Sten mentioned that:

"Ka novel ka long ka jingpyrthuh ia ka jingim briew"

[The novel imitates human life.]

Since literature reflects life, human experiences universally encountered by people the world over will surely find a place in literary works. One of such

2. S.S. Majaw, Ki Syrwet Jingshai, 1982, p.100
experiences is that of suffering. The theme of suffering and of women's suffering in particular is found to be interwoven with the central themes in written Khasi literature and in oral folktales as well.

These folktales with deep ethical lessons are full of adventures and noble deeds; they are narrated and handed down by word of mouth from one generation to another. In the past, sitting around the family hearth, children learned about these tales from their elders who narrated them by singing, to the soothing tune of “Ka Duitara”. Since the Khasis did not have a script in the remote past, it is impossible to say by whom these tales and myths were originally composed.(4) Nevertheless, they have come to us out of the dim and distant past by word of mouth. It was only after the written form was made available to the Khasis that these tales were documented and transcreated by Khasi authors into different literary genres during the last one hundred and sixty five years or so.

The theme of suffering forms a very important part in many of these Khasi oral tales. Women's suffering in particular was the focus of many of these tales. The famous Noh-Ka-Likai Falls in Cherrapunjee derives its name from one such tale. U Rabon Singh(5) and H. Elias(6) put in writing the tragic and moving story of a woman named Likai and her only child, a small daughter. Nothing much was said about the girl's father but what was narrated was that the mother re-married thinking perhaps to provide her little girl with a father. However, the girl's stepfather was a cruel and wicked man. He hated his stepdaughter and ill-treated her in the most inhuman manner. One evening, after returning home from work, Likai found that her daughter was not at home. After washing herself Likai fell very hungry and was very happy to find that her husband had prepared a very tasty meal. She ate the rice and meat curry to her heart's content. After her meal, she took a small betel-nut basket known as Shangkwai to have a piece of betel nut. To her shock and horror, Likai found the fingers of her dear little girl in the Shangkwai. She then realized that she had eaten

5. Rabon Singh, Ka Kitab Jingphawar. (Sixteen edition) 1987, p.49
the body parts of her own little girl whom her cruel and evil husband had murdered. Wailing in hysteria, Likai ran towards a nearby waterfall and in her despair plunged herself into the cascading waterfall. To this day, this famous waterfall is known as Kshaid Nohkalikai or Nohkalikai Falls. This tragic tale depicts the suffering of a woman as a mother.

The story of U Sier Lapalang narrates the suffering of a mother at the loss of her only child. According to P.G. Gatphoh, the mother deer (Ka Kmie Sier) out of concern pleaded with her son not to be wayward and not to venture beyond their territory. But the young stag did not listen to his mother’s caution. He left home and during the course of his adventure, he reached various places and finally came to enjoy the scenic beauty of the slopes of Khasi Hills. Then, U Khyndai Bah Rypsyte (Male Khasi hunters) saw the stag at the foot-hills of Shillong Peak and with the help of their hounds chased and killed it with their bows and arrows. The story tells about a son’s disobedience and rebellion that led to his destruction, ultimately causing deep pain and immense suffering to his mother.

Another tale that has left an indelible mark on many Khasi authors is one about Ka Sohlyngngem. This oral tale depicting the suffering of a woman over a broken love affair was first documented by Rabon Singh. It was a tale about Ka Sohlyngngem and U Ryniau, a pair of lovers who were deeply in love with each other. These two came from very different backgrounds. Ryniau hailed from a very rich family while Sohlyngngem came from an extremely poor family. Sohlyngngem’s parents were very hard working. They toiled hard for their daily meal, but they lived happily as a family. One day Sohlyngngem’s mother came to know that her daughter was in love with Ryniau. She was very unhappy about this love affair because she knew beforehand that her daughter would face many difficulties if she were to marry a rich and only son from an affluent family. As a mother deeply concerned for the happiness of her daughter, she was afraid and worried that a rich man would look down on them and would ill-treat her daughter later on. When Sohlyngngem told

8. Rabon Singh, op. cit. p.50
Rynniaw about her mother’s feelings, he at once decided to break off his relationship with her. He then left her in despair and returned no more. Lyngngem in deep sorrow went about the forest moaning without ceasing in pain.\(^9\)

This story has inspired many poets to transcreate it into poetry. P.G. Gatphoh\(^{10}\) highlights the suffering of Sohlyngngem when her lover left her for good. He said that the **Golden Cup** was broken which would be interpreted as a heart that was broken or a life that was shattered. H.O. Mawrie\(^{11}\) uses the word **Ksiar** (Gold) to indicate the loss of something extremely precious and priceless to Sohlyngngem. This folktale depicts the suffering of a lover-lorn maiden who was left in the lurch by her lover. It also provides the basis for one of the novels taken for analysis in this study, B.C. Jyrwa’s, *U Khaiñ bad Ka Ngen*.

Another popular tale among the Khasis is that of **U Klew** (Peacock) and **Ka Sngi** (the Sun), an etiological tale which attempts to explain why there are bright spots on the Peacock’s feathers. The story tells of the love and loyalty that **Ka Sngi** had for her husband. However, from their happy abode in the sky he saw what he thought was a lovely maiden on the earth. He became so obsessed with his infatuation that he would not be deterred from his wish of meeting what he thought was an enchanting beauty. His wife out of concern begged her husband not to leave their happy home. His pride and obsession would not allow him to listen to his wife. She told him, with a broken heart but in no uncertain terms that once he left her, he would never be able to come back to her. In the end he left her. Rabon Singh\(^{12}\) and B.C. Jyrwa\(^{13}\) projects the character of Klew as a proud and impulsive man who did not much care for his wife’s feelings. Ka Sngi, the faithful and loving wife who had experienced a happy married life, had to face intense suffering and shame at the uncaring and cruel act of her husband. Of course Klew plunged down to earth to meet his ‘beautiful love’ only to find a field of mustard flowers. He deeply regretted his folly and wanted to

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9. Ibid., p.51  
return back to his wife in her heavenly home in the sky but could never do so. It was said that the tears streaming down the cheeks of the heartbroken wife left their marks in the peacock’s tail. This folktale depicts the suffering of an abandoned wife.

Thus, the concept of suffering, particularly the suffering of a woman, is seen to be prevalent in many of the oral tales of the Khasis. These tales form the basis of some of the Khasi novels written during the 20th century.

The Khasi novel started much later than either Poetry or Drama. Prior to this period, some narratives appeared in the form of a short story. H.W.T. Sten considers some of John Roberts’ transcreated Bible stories such as a “U Moses” as a novelette. But another prominent critic, R.S. Lyngdoh was of the opinion that with these stories, John Roberts introduced the short story genre in Khasi. Other prominent critics such as P. Kharakor, S.S. Majaw, D.R.L. Nonglait and I. Majaw are of the view that the novel starts in the year 1963. What is usually considered to be the first full-fledged novel written in Khasi language was F.M. Pugh’s *Ka Gulabpi*, which was published in 1963. After a gap of three years, S.Q. Sumer brought out his novel *Ka Hima Ka Jingiet* in 1966. Two decades after that, the Khasi novel began to flourish and these days, one can see the prolific and steady stream of new novels in Khasi being published. However, this study will be limited to an analysis of selected novels published between 1963 – 1990.

Khasi novelists have always chosen themes that reflect human emotions and experiences such as love, suffering, faith, etc. For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on the theme of suffering, especially the suffering of women characters as depicted by major novelists selected for this study.

Before presenting an analysis on woman’s suffering in the selected Khasi novels, it is felt necessary to first give a short discussion on what is generally meant by suffering in literature. Furthermore, since many of the Khasi novelists are Christians, it is felt necessary to also briefly discuss the theme of suffering as reflected in Christian religion and in traditional Khasi thought.

15. R.S. Lyngdoh, *Ka Histori Ka Thoh Ka Tar Bynta II*, 1994, p.73
Suffering is often defined as a state of “anguish or pain, the bearing of pain, misery or loss also, the pain thus borne; distress, injury, misery”. (16)

Suffering in its most basic sense, therefore, refers to the pain of the body, of the heart or of the mind. It is a feeling of pain, unhappiness, sorrow and discomfort. Suffering forms an important part of human life and its nature is both complex and universal. It may result from separation or loss of loved ones, from prolonged and usually debilitating diseases or from other painful circumstances. One example that stands out in the Bible is that of Job’s suffering where he lost his children and all his possession. Job then suffered from boils, only partly because they did not go away but mostly because he felt that the boils were undeserved by him. Indeed to call pain ‘suffering’ is to imply that it is undeserved, although that may be obscured by complications arising from the meaning of ‘suffering’, now largely archaic, in which it means merely ‘to undergo’, or ‘to allow’, so that one can also ‘suffer one’s punishment’ where it is deserved. This other meaning of ‘suffering’ is clearly in mind when it is a term for some painful experience. In this sense, suffering is undeserved. The criminal, serving his sentence in jail, is not normally said to be suffering unless it is being suggested that punishment is unusually harsh.

Suffering is awful to bear, but to some, bearing it is glorious. We can consider Western symbols of suffering such as Job, Sisuphus, Francesca da Ramini and of course Jesus Christ. Although with an apologetic laugh, it is the cultural legacy of the West that one cannot have really lived, as it is put, unless one has suffered.

The world indeed is full of suffering. But it is so obviously so that we do not need the wisdom of Buddha or Socrates to tell us that it is not so. Not everything is experientially suffering, yes, there are moments of happiness, things of joy and moods of ecstasy. There is also love, pleasure and beauty in life. But we can hardly question the universality of suffering in human life.

Generally, there are different kinds of suffering: bodily or physical, environmental and mental, and usually they are consequences of a cause. If that cause

can be removed, suffering can be alleviated or removed, even if not permanently. From the torment of three-fold misery arises the enquiry into the means of terminating it; if it be said that it is fruitless the means being obvious to us, we reply no, since in such means there is no certainty or finality.

What causes suffering? - has been the question that torments the human mind throughout the ages. One view is that man is completely under the influence of ignorance; ignorance of the true nature of his ‘self’, and it is this ignorance that leads to the attachments and obsessions of everyday life, causing immeasurable hardships and miseries. Suffering can be ended only when each person so disciplines herself that she ceases to be a producer of evil and suffering by ceasing to do evil and always doing good.

This view is expressed by philosophers such as Schopenhauer who stresses that the chief source of the evils which befall men is man himself. It was the individual and his ideas that were the cause of the sufferings of life. Accordingly to him, life in itself is bad; though we can somewhat alleviate ourselves from suffering by detachment and asceticism.

Thus suffering, pain, or distress is considered one of the most persistent of all human problems. Even those who experience relatively minor suffering in their own lives are constantly confronted either with the suffering of others within their own families, among their acquaintances, or even those in distant lands.

Suffering takes many forms: physical pain, frustrated hopes, depression, isolation, loneliness, grief, anxiety, spiritual crises and much more. Such unpleasantness comes to good religious people, too. Certainly, great people in the Bible struggled with the presence of suffering in their lives and sought ways to understand it and cope with it that could include their belief in both God’s power and God’s goodness. Since the concept of suffering is universally philosophised upon by different creeds and religions, it is also very much focused upon by prominent thinkers of Khasi traditional belief. It is, therefore, felt necessary to discuss the concept of suffering from the point of view of traditional Khasi thought and also from the point of
view of Christian belief. This is because some of the Khasi novelists are found to have projected suffering from these viewpoints in their novels.

1.1 Suffering According to Traditional Khasi Thought:

In the traditional Khasi thought it is believed that the concept of suffering originated from U Diengiei which depicted the growth of iniquity, greed and sin (Ka pop). Tradition says that U Diengiei is a gigantic tree whose branches overshadowed the earth after the Golden Age (U Sohpetbneng) faded away. According to the Khasi concept of creation, Ka Jingkieng Ksiar (The Golden Ladder) at Sohpetbneng Peak was the ladder through which the progenitors of the Khasis could ascend and descend from heaven to earth daily. Interpretations given by H.O. Mawrie, M.G. Lyngdoh and B.L. Swer propound that U Sohpetbneng depicts the close relationship between God and man. It signifies the age of peace, righteousness, the days when only the Creator was worshipped and when God’s guidance was sought earnestly by all U Khat-Hynniew-Trep Khat-Hynniew-Skum. The end of the Golden Age and the severance of the golden ladder at U Sohpetbneng ushered in Ka Kuli Juk. According to Soso Tham, the darkness which befalls man was due to his own action. The main purport of U Diengiei is to explain about the dark age when U Hynniewtrep faced a deep spiritual crisis and suffering.

Referring to the darkness caused by U Diengiei, Barnes L. Mawrie stated that:

“The Diengiei with its wide spreading branches and rich foliage, is taken to symbolize the reign of evil. It covered the sunlight of God’s goodness from man.”

Soso Tham in his poem sings that before the branches of U Diengiei covered the earth, no wicked persons were found. But later on, darkness in the form of a cloud

17. H.O. Mawrie, Ka Theology Ka Niam Khasi, 1991, p.31
18. M.G. Lyngdoh, Ki Parom Barim U Khun Khasi Khara, 1982, p.3
19. B.L. Swer, Ka Mationg Ki Khanatang, 1995, p.51
20. Soso Tham, Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep, 1976, p.11
overcast the sky until the sun was no longer visible and so, God moved far away from man. (22)

The myth of U Diengiei also reflects upon the arrogance of man who walks in his own will and feels that he can live on his own. So on account of his own waywardness, man gropes in the dark as he has missed the divine peace, comfort and consolation which only his Maker can give. (23)

The concept of suffering is also interweaved in the myth of Ka Krem Lamet Latang because after man bypassed God, disaster and suffering came upon man because God has turned away from him. This myth not only depicts moral and spiritual darkness and suffering which left man in a confused state of mind, but, it also reflects the deep chasm between man and God. At this stage man utters a forlorn cry:

“Uba ngi ieit u don haei.” (24)

[Where is He, the One we love.]

The Khasi believed that there are different kinds of evil spirit and demons that some people worship. One of the demons that people are said to worship and appease in order to fill their lives with wealth is U Thlen. H.O. Mawrie says:

“Uba shyrkhei tam na baroh ki phan ki kyrpad u dei u Thlen.” (25)

[The most ferocious of all evil spirits is u Thlen]

This ferocious evil spirit arouses terror and is believed to bring suffering and even death to people.

It is the myth of Ka Daiñthlen that narrates the existence of an evil spirit known as U Thlen which engulfs the life of U Hynniewtrep Hynniewskum into darkness. The darkness which exists in Ka Daiñthlen is more severe than that which occurs during the age of U Diengiei and Ka Krem Lamet Latang.

22. op. cit., “U Lyoh”, verse III, p.10
25. H.O. Mawrie, Ka Pyrkhat U Khasi”, 1979, p.23
As the entire universe began to flourish, **Ka Hukum** convened the second ‘dorbar’ known as **Ka Dorbar Blei** in order to bestow certain powers to **U Hynniew-Trep** (Mankind) and **U Laiphew Jingthaw** (all other creatures). According to D.T. Laloo, **Ka Hukum** asked **U Hynniew-Trep** how they would like to live. The reply which came from them was:

Ngan im da kaba kamai ia ka hok.” (26)

[We will live by earning righteousness.]

Among **U Laiphew Jingthaw** was **U Thlen** the extra-ordinary demon. On being asked the same question by **Ka Hukum**, **U Thlen** answered:

“Ka bam jong nga dei da ka longbriew bad ka kamai
jong nga dei da ka long spah.” (27)

[My sustainance shall be human life and my earning shall be wealth.]

Subsequently, the words uttered by **U Thlen** are stated to have become true. The first instance of the influence of evil is found in the tale about the crow, which duped the cow to lie about the message to mankind sent by God. God told the cow to go and tell mankind that he needs to cook just a grain of rice and that would fill up a large or a small pot. The cooked rice would be sufficient for a large or a small family. God also said that if mankind would follow this instruction, peace would always prevail. Unfortunately, the cow met the crow which deceived him into saying that God instructed mankind to cook one or two seers of rice grain in order to get enough food to eat. The cow obeyed the crow and was punished for its disobedience. The crow too was punished for his evil deeds. Here depravity began to set in and to spread all over the world from the highest to the lowest creatures.

After this **Dorbar**, **U Thlen** fled into a cave because of his disregard to God. This cave is situated at a place not far from Rangjyrteh near Cherrapunjee. Though nobody is sure of the physical form of **U Thlen**, he is often thought to be a serpent-

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27. Ibid., p.1
like creature, a kind of monster having the form of a snake and the characteristics of a
vampire. \(^{28}\) Tradition has it that \textbf{U Thlen} can manifest himself to humans in various
shapes such as that of a python, a dog, a fish, a cat, a mouse, a leech and even as
inanimate objects such as a big black kettle. In addition to being fierce-looking,
tradition says that \textbf{U Thlen} harassed all passersby walking on a path near the cave. He
usually attacked and swallowed passerby on their way to their market place when they
walked in an odd number such as three, five, seven etc.

Tradition also has it that \textbf{U Syiem Sormoh} or \textbf{Suidnoh}, who is also called
‘Law Suidnoh’, \(^{29}\) (literally translated as ‘spirit of the forest’) was sent by God to
deliver man from \textbf{U Thlen}. He was advised to feed \textbf{U Thlen} everyday. In this way, \textbf{U
Thlen} became friendly with \textbf{U Syiem Sormoh}. Later on, Sormoh built a smelting hut
and made an iron rod known as ‘narliang’. With this weapon in hand, Sormoh went to
the cave where \textbf{U Thlen} resided and said :

\begin{quote}
“Ang um, ang! Kane ka kshong nga wan thied ia phi na iew.”\(^{30}\)
\end{quote}

[Open your mouth brother! Here is some meat I
bought for you from the market.]

Believing the words of \textbf{U Sormoh}, \textbf{U Thlen} opened his mouth and at that very
moment, \textbf{U Sormoh} inserted the red hot iron rod inside the demon. \textbf{U Thlen} in his
death throes shook the earth tremendously and caused an earthquake. P. G. Gatphoh
describes the story thus:

\begin{quote}
Da ka jingkhih lympat une u ksuid, twa ka riat Mawiew jong ka ri
Sohra haduh Sohryngkew, na khmat Riat Ksing bad ha khmat u
Duba.\(^{31}\)
\end{quote}

\(^{28}\) K. U. Rafy, \textit{Khasi Folk Tales}, 1985, p.8  
\(^{29}\) Hamlet Bareh, \textit{The History And Culture of The Khasi People}. 1997, p.342  
\(^{30}\) P.G. Gatphoh, op. cit., p.3  
\(^{31}\) Ibid., p.3
[The death throes and tremendous tremor caused by this demon made the Mawiew cliff of Sohra till Sohryngkew, the anterior portion of ksing cliff and Duba to cave in.]

Later on, a ‘dorbar’ was held which decided to have a feast of the ‘doh thlen’ (thlen meat) and that all present, Khasis and non-Khasis alike, should have an equal share of its meat. Not a single morsel of the meat should be left lest U Thlen would return to life again. Tradition tells that the non-Khasis consumed their entire share but an old Khasi woman preserved a morsel of meat for her grandchild. She carried the meat home and left it on Ka Tyngier (a platform suspended above the hearth in a Khasi house). But soon she forgot all about it. One fine day, she heard a voice demanding for U Langthoh Khlieh (literally meaning, a goat with stripes on the head). Thinking that he wanted a goat with stripes on the head, the old woman brought one home but to her dismay the voice told her to bring someone who exactly resembled her. She obeyed and from then on, she began to prosper. Thus, U Thlen was brought back to life again.

The myth of Ka Daiñhlen says that U Thlen promised the old woman an increase in her wealth if she could meet his demand to be provided with human blood. Thus, it is believed that U Thlen can only be appeased by human sacrifice. Since the keepers of U Thlen keep it in their household, they are regarded as ‘nongri thlen’ or keeper of U Thlen; and those that perform evil acts of murdering human beings they are termed ‘nongshohnoh’, meaning, ‘hired killers’.

Traditionally, it is believed that if the keeper does not satisfy U Thlen, he will put them into shame by coming out of its abode at some distance from the house or climbing upon the roof to expose its rearer’s failure to feed it but it hurts no one who happens to pass by.\(^{32}\)

The Khasis also believe in the presence of other spirits and demons and they are afraid of these and dislike them considerably. Noted Khasi writers and

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32. Hamlet Bareh, op. cit. p.358
philosophers Rabon Singh\(^{(33)}\) and H.O. Mawrie\(^{(34)}\) pointed out that evil spirits and demons pervade the world of man and always wait for an opportunity to bring trouble, pain, suffering to him – physically, mentally and even spiritually. When man gets enslaved and bounded by these evil spirits and demons, he has to find the cause for such suffering and there after offer propitiation, prayers and rituals to God so that the Creator will deliver him from such bondage.

Some of these evil spirits are named **Lyngkhuh Pakhuh** (water spirits and mountain spirits which cause sickness). Other more common ones are **U Rih** (the devil that causes malaria),\(^{(35)}\) **U Syngkhong Kynta Maram** (which resides in places where a corpse is left unburied or uncremated), **U Trongbah U Rwaibah** (which resides in the sky and causes headache), **Ka Niangriang** (which resides in places where a corpse is left unburied or uncremated), **U Suid Um** and **Ka Thapbalong** (which also live under water and cause deafness and can cripple the fingers) and **Ka Puri Ka Diaw** (which lives under water and affects the mental health of its victims human being).

H.O. Mawrie also describes other ferocious and deadly evil spirits and demons that people worship and invoke such as **Ka Shwar** and **Ka Bih.**\(^{(36)}\) **Ka Shwar** tortures a human being by throwing the sufferer into contortions and convulsions. **Ka Bih** is said to be of many kinds. Each kind has its own power to destroy and to bring about death on human beings according to the bond agreed upon between the evil spirit and the person who is the keeper of **Ka Bih.** These evil spirits are said to be the cause of much of man’s suffering and misery.

In the Khasi worldview, therefore, the concept of suffering and the reasons that cause suffering are part of their traditional belief system.

1.2. **Suffering According to Christian Faith:**

The theme of all Christian doctrines of atonement is encapsulated in the

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33. Rabon Sing - *Ka Kitab Niam-Kheiñ Ki Khasi*, p.52  
34. H.O. Mawrie, op. cit., p.23  
36. H.O. Mawrie, op. cit.p.22
sentence: Christ died for the sins of the world. From the very beginning of the Church, the Cross of Christ is understood as a vicarious suffering. According to the records of the Gospels, Christ himself has interpreted suffering in such a way that his death on the Cross is one which He anticipated with certainty. His interpretation of the Messiah is expressed in terms of Isaianic conception of the Suffering Servant and the manner in which He instituted the Last Supper indicated this probability. After the crucifixion, His followers were persuaded by their experiences of His resurrection that His death was not just a triumph over sin and death but also a sacrifice by which all sacrifices to God ended. This conviction was triumphant because they made sure that God had triumphed in the suffering of Christ His Son. Thus, Apostle Paul could declare that on Christ, God had reconciled the world unto Himself. He believed that by the grace of God, Christ had brought men free from the slavery to the dominions and powers, particularly of the law, sin and death.

1.2.1 **Suffering as a result of Human Sin:**

The Bible says that the beginning of suffering in the world is the consequence of sinful actions of human beings. The first three chapters of Genesis state that the world was intended to be a good and perfect place but that the disobedience of the first man and woman (by the deception of the serpent) introduced suffering into the world.

The Bible mentions that:

"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."(40)

No longer is the world the way God intended it to be. All the descendants of the first parents are born into a sinful world where there is a potential for disaster. All

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are vulnerable to suffering in their lives. The mere fact of being human and living in a world where people hurt each other and themselves can account for much of what is called suffering.

Each individual will be rewarded or punished according to their own deeds and not because of what their parents have done and that:

"The soul who sins is the one who will die."[41]

Many verses from the Book of Proverbs teach that the one who leads a good life will be more successful and less likely to suffer than the one who defies God.

This theory about the origin of suffering may work fairly well as a general statement about the state of the human-race or even to account for the suffering of a decadent society. It becomes more and more suspect, however, as a way to differentiate why one individual suffers and another does not. There are too many examples of the innocent having had to suffer and wicked people who prospered, for this view to be pushed as a universal explanation for an individual’s suffering. Many sufferers who have read the texts and see suffering as punishment, need to know that other biblical passages argue against the simple-minded and heavy-handed universalizing of the retribution doctrine. The Book of Job shows that the counselors are wrong and Job, as he said, was an innocent sufferer.

The value of suffering as a mode of discipline is one of the major themes in the Bible. Sinners suffer as a punishment for their sins, but saint must bear affliction as the design of an inscrutable providence to test and strengthen the quality of their faith.

1.2.2 Suffering Leading to Some Greater Good:

In the Holy Bible, Christ corrects the mistaken interpretation of suffering as if it is the consequence of someone’s sins. In the apocalyptic frame of mind, it is actually more likely that the good people will suffer more rather than the evil ones.[42]

Although suffering is by definition a very undesirable experience, in Christian

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41. The Book of Ezekiel, chapter 18:4, The Holy Bible
faith it is shown to lead to some greater good. As terrible as it may seem at the time of suffering, one may look back on it and find satisfaction for it leads to some greater good.

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those for who have been trained by it." (43)

Many have found this to be a helpful way to find meaning in their suffering. It avoids pre-occupation with suffering as punishment, with God as the judge, and turns the sufferer toward the future and the possibilities that God will work something good from what seems so bad.

In the Bible, suffering is shown to be of benefit to other people and even to a nation or country. Joseph suffered greatly at the hands of his brothers, who sold him into slavery. At this end of his life, however, Joseph looked back at his life and saw that his family (indeed his nation) were saved by his suffering. (44) Joseph was put in the right place to help his people during the famine. He would not have been there if his brothers had not done evil toward him, but God used their wickedness and Joseph’s suffering to bring about a greater good. (45) It was, however, only with considerable hindsight that Joseph was able to come to this conclusion.

The ultimate example of suffering for the sake of good is seen the Passion of Christ. His final suffering at the cross is to benefit and to save the whole human race. His death was brought about by human beings who acted out of wicked motives but He allowed it to happen as part of the divine eternal plan for man’s salvation.

Another variation of biblical understanding of suffering is the idea that a person’s own suffering is to benefit and save others from condemnation. In the Holy Bible, it is stated:

45. The Book of Genesis, chapter 50:15-21, The Holy Bible
"My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in." 

The quotation describes suffering as the expanded discipline of a loving parent to a wayward child, an idea picked up and expanded in the New Testament. In fact, Christians are exhorted to rejoice in their suffering because it will help produce endurance, character and hope in them. Such words as these have often been comforting to sufferers, though only if this is a conclusion of their own and not an answer imposed on them by someone who seems callous to the reality of their present hardship.

1.2.3 Suffering Caused by Demonic Forces:

The first view attributes suffering due to man’s suffering, either, collectively or individually. Another possibility is that the cause of suffering is neither the consequences of human sinfulness nor of God’s action but because of super-natural forces evil and hostile to both God and humans. These are too powerful for humans to withstand on their own but which are no matches for the Almighty.

In the Holy Bible of the New Testament, suffering is often ascribed to the presence of demons, evil spirit, Satan, or the Devil. Psychological, physical and spiritual suffering may be caused by these evils forces and are not due to human sin or God’s execution of justice.

Suffering, as stated at the outset of this chapter, is very much a part of human-life. Both Khasi traditional thought and Christianity have their own views on what is suffering, what causes suffering and what is to be gained through suffering.

As also stated in the beginning of this chapter, literature is the mirror of life and thus reflects all the varied experiences of human-life. Suffering, being a universal human experience, runs as a theme through much of literature.

48. Ibid. chapter 13:12, The Holy Bible
49. Ibid. chapter 13:16, The Holy Bible
This study is aimed at analyzing the theme of suffering, particularly the suffering, of women as projected in the selected Khasi novels. The novelists’ viewpoints on suffering, whether it is caused by the women characters’ errant ways or whether it is caused by powers beyond their control, will be projected through a detailed and in-depth analysis of the selected novels.