CHAPTER – V

INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON THE GENERATION OF PROVERB TYPES:

The Khasis acknowledge that the founding father of their written language and literature was Thomas Jones, a Welshman who traveled some thirteen thousand ocean miles to establish in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Calvinistic Methodists' Mission, which would become the biggest overseas venture ever sustained by the Welsh people. He arrived at Cherrapunjee on 22nd June 1841 with his wife, Ann. A year later, Jones started the first school and he also brought out the first printed Khasi book, making use of the Roman script for the Khasi language. Thomas Jones took the correct step in this direction by first teaching the people reading and writing in their own language and then supplying them with translation. In 1842 he opened three schools one each at Mawsmai, Mawmluh and Sohra and posted three Khasi young men named Larshai, Nising and Jom to carry out teaching. The schools at first attracted men who rallied round the missionary and observed him writing and heard him speaking Khasi. Jidor Singh, the chief of the traditional state of Nongkhlaw was impressed by the knowledge of the Khasis who received their education from the missionaries, and later deputed his officials to learn from the Christian friends at Sohra. In later years, this chief invited the mission to open schools in his state. This attitude of Jidor Singh encouraged the progress of education in the Nongkhlaw state in later years. The works of Thomas Jones was continued by William Lewis who toiled till 1860 and by the time he left schools were established at Nongwar (1853), Jowai, Shala, Sohbar (1854), Tyrna, Khatsawphra (1857) and Lamin
(1859). Besides teaching at schools, the missionaries worked hard on book production. With the advent of Christianity, some of the genre of oral literature had been recorded in written forms, although this effort was sustained only with the intention of drawing upon folk metaphors to serve didactic purposes.

A prominent Khasi scholar R.S. Lyngdoh observed that “Khasi literature was born under the shadow of the church”.¹ The veracity of this statement can be deduced from the effusive and innumerable publications of Bible-based books which were written during the formative years of Khasi literature and the fact that Khasi Christian writers, not counting the missionaries who pioneered writing, far surpassed the number of non-Christian writers.

The spirit of the statement can also be appreciated when one recognizes the fact that the spread of Christianity among the Khasis not only brought conversion but it acted as a catalyst in the spreading of literacy and formal education.

It would be wrong, however, to say that primary education started with the coming of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Presbyterian Missionaries in 1842. This credit goes to four unnamed stalwarts, the four Bakhraw or elected leaders and Elders of the Shella confederacy in the southern extremity of Khasi Hills who resolved to open their own primary school, the Shella Primary School, at Pdia Bazar, Shella in 1823. This school made steady progress till it became an Middle English School in 1839 and by

¹ Lyngdoh R.S. The Contribution of the Salesian to Khasi Literature, Salesian Golden Jubilee, Don Bosco Press, Shillong, 1972, p. 84.
In 1845 it produced forty six students who were taught English, Sanskrit and Bengali after the pattern of schools in East Bengal. This scholar is making a mention of these historical instances in order to demonstrate that by the time Christian missionaries had become firmly ensconced, a formal system of primary education, albeit in a miniscule manner, had already been in operation. This fact is interesting in two ways. One, the school produced a Khasi student, one Laithat who was employed by the British as dubasia or interpreter and it was this very scholar who assisted Thomas Jones in his translation works. Two, the school produced a number of other Khasi scholars, prominent among them, Jeebon Roy Mairom, who brought out *U Lurshai*, one of the first newspapers through his own printing press, Ri Khasi press, also the first of its kind in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills established in August, 1896. J.J.M. Nichols Roy who distinguished himself as a Parliamentarian and Prof. R.R. Thomas who retired as Principal of the prestigious Cotton College, Guwahati. Given the creative minds of many of the scholar products named and unnamed, it would be fair to say that their absorption of pedagogical information through the formal system and their being rooted in the cultural milieu they were born and brought up in would certainly be reflected in their contributions through forms of literary and cultural production. It is crucial to throw light on the strands of intersections between the oral and written traditions and practices that must have come into play under the circumstances. This scholar believes that this intersection has a significant bearing on the formation and perpetuation of the folk and written discourses which, it has been proved, exist side by side. It has been mentioned

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2 Dikhar, E. Weston, *Primary Education in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills*, Seven Hut Enterprise, Shillong, 1993, p. 41-42.
that apart from Khasi and English, Sanskrit and Bengali were taught and it is only to be expected that the learners would be influenced by the literature and texts of these languages. This would have provided space for cultural exchange which is of immense significance to the formation and evolution of folklore material.

It is accepted that the Bible is the most widely read book in the world and that it is the one single book that has had the most influence on mankind. In the Khasi context also the same is true. Since the early 1840s missionaries opened Bible Schools mainly to facilitate the reading of the Bible and since then till the second decade of the twentieth century, the Bible was part of the school syllabus.

It was an accepted reality that schools supported by Christian missions held regular religious education (RE) classes although in principles, the above classes did not figure in the prescribed timetables. Yet the classes were compulsory and these instructions were indiscriminately given to students of both Christian and non-Christian persuasions. The establishment of printing presses to disseminate religious information and discourses was an important factor which made especially the Bible easily available to the people. The Bible Society of India in Bangalore had facilitated the printing of John Roberts' *Ka Ktin U Blei* or Word of God and this publication has, in many cases, been made available free of cost. These factors coupled with the constant exposure to Biblical material in print and audio-visual formats had exerted a tremendous influence in the minds of the people, young and old.
The *Book of Proverbs* of the Bible was first translated by a group of scholars headed by the highly erudite Welsh missionary Dr. John Roberts and it was included in *Ka Testament Barim III* as a preparation for the first golden jubilee of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Foreign Mission to commemorate its fiftieth year of service in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In the group of scholars entrusted with this work were three Khasis named Rev. Khnong, Rev. Ksankin and Sympot Singh.³

After the attempt to establish a historical background it is necessary to examine the socio-cultural dynamics inherent in the title of the chapter which is influence of Christianity on the Generation of Proverb Types.

*The Webster’s New World Dictionary* defines influence as the power of persons and things to affect others and the effect that such powers have in the process of moulding behaviour by imparting religious, philosophical social, political and economic values and even policies of persons or societies that are being directly or indirectly influenced. Influence also implies interaction between those who influence and those who are influenced; it implies that there exists a force, a value, a standard, a norm that result in a transformation and identity formation between persons and nations, between the teacher and the taught. There is a process of exchange because of influence.

Influence rules out force, coercion, tension, conflict and intimidation. It suggests respect, empathy, creativity and change. Ordinarily, the discourse of influence is linked

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to learning and the formation of character. In the extreme, influence would connote conversion and total change-over to a new system of behaviour, values, beliefs and principles..... of the various types of influence, it is the general (influence) that is more prevalent and it is this kind that has diffused Christian literary and historical material into the oral genre of the Khasis. However, it must be remembered that in the oral-written continuum, there is a fluidity which makes the two positions difficult to be given a precise fixity.

Like all great works of literature the Bible is for all ages and as the chief dissemination document of Christianity has proved to be extremely successful in exerting influence over people's lives including their belief, values, philosophies and behaviour. The Biblical influence is actually the influence of Christianity because the sum total of a Christian's life finds perfection in the Bible. The poetic and proverbial qualities of the qualities of the Bible are not only to be found in the Book of Proverbs. The Bible is a work which is shot through and through with proverbial sayings, aphorisms, quotations and didactic one liners. In order to demonstrate this scholar shall reproduce a few in the original Khasi with transcription for accuracy of pronounciation and also to show how close they are to the Khasi mind. It is for these reasons that these sayings are used to express native Khasi situations and predicaments and their effectiveness is demonstrated by the fact that they are accepted by the people. At certain points of time it is even difficult to distinguish between the Biblical and the local and to the less informed the lines of distribution are blurred.
Students of folklore are often confronted with the oral and written expressions as two distinct categories. There may be differences in the process of creation and transmission of the oral and written texts, but there certainly exists a two way traffic between the two. Archer Taylor has postulated three kinds of relationship between the oral and written literature. These are:

i) Folklore (oral literature) in many cultures is indistinguishable from literature.

ii) Literature (written) contains elements borrowed from folklore.

iii) Writers have initiated folklore. 4

In folklore and literary genres the oral and written exist and interplay with each other and in many cases where both the traditions co-exist, it is very difficult to distinguish between the two. In the Indian context this characteristic has been succinctly explained by Blackburn and Ramanujan:

"The written form is only a part of the history of the texts, one phase in the cycle of transmission... Transmission includes, of course, re-composition, and many kinds of change... A tale, for instance, might originate orally, then be written down by a collector, the written version might then disseminate the tale to an oral teller, who in turn might give rise to new written or oral versions. A writing, until recently, meant...

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'writing down' as a mnemonic and text preserving device, the written text does not interrupt or intercept, but actually furthers the oral tradition".5

By and large, this observation can be applied with accuracy to the proverbs and sayings which are traced to Christian influenced texts such as Biblical and liturgical literature and which have passed into the oral discourse of the Khasis. This scholar shall try to list out those proverbs which have been directly derived from Biblical texts which have been accepted in everyday Khasi oral communication and whose penetration into the Khasi milieu is so complete that it is almost impossible to distinguish them from the traditional proverbs. The movement of these Biblical proverbs in the oral and written discourse of the Khasis is characterized by an ease that is observed only in vernacular verbal and textual usages.

The proverbs along with their English original are listed below:

Proverb:
Respect your father and mother (Kолосia 3:20).

Translation:

Burom ia u kpa bad ka kmie.

Transcription:

burɔm ya u kpa bat ka kme

Proverb:

Judge not others, that you be not judged (Matthew 7:1).

Translation:

Wat bishar ia kiwei naba yn ym bishar ia phi.

Transcription:

wat bi.ca:r ya kiwei naba en cm bi.ca:r ya p'i

Proverb:

No one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

Translation:

Ym don ba lah ban shakri arngut ki kynrad.

Transcription:

cm don ba la? ban jakri arngut ki kinra:d

Proverb:

Ask and it will be given, seek and you shall find knock and it will be opened to you (Matthew 7:7).

Translation:

Pan bad yn sa ai, wad bad phin sa shem, tied bad yn sa plie.

Transcription:

pan bat en sa ai, wa:t bat phin sa lem, ted bat en sa ple

Proverb:

[(Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravenous wolves (Matthew 7:15)].
Wolf in sheep’s clothing.

Translation:

*Suri kup sneh langbrot.*

Proverb:

Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16).

Translation:

*Sian kum ki bseîn jemnuq kum ki paro.*

Proverb:

For each tree is known by its own fruit (Luke 6:44).

Translation:

*Namar ia u dieng baroh yn ithuh na u soh jong u hi.*

Proverb:

Love thy neighbour as thyself (Matthew 19:19).

Translation:

*Ieid ia la u paramarjan kumba ialade.*
Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. (Proverb 16:18).

Translation:

Ka jingsarong ka iaid ha shwa ka jingjot.

Transcription:

ka jinsarong ka yaid ha fwa ka jingjot

A soft answer turneth away wrath (Proverb 15:1).

Translation:

Ka jingphai ktien bajem ka beh noh ia ka jingbitar.

Transcription:

ka jinp'ai ktien bajem ka be? no? ya ka jingbitar

[He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes (Proverb 13:24)]

Spare the rod, spoil the child.

Translation:

Tyngkai ia u dieng sympat, pynjot ia u khynnah.

Transcription:

tiŋkai ya u den simpat, pîŋjot ya u k'înna?
Proverb:

As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country (Proverb 25:25).

Translation:

*Kum ka umpjah ia u ba sliang, ka long ka khubor ba bha na jngai.*

Transcription:

kum ka umpja? ya u baslian ka lʒŋ ka kʰubor babʰa naŋai:

Proverb:

[As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly (Proverb 25:11)]

Do not swallow your vomit like a dog.

Translation:

*Wat nguid la ka prie kumba nguid u ksew.*

Transcription:

wat njoid la ka pre kumba njoid u kseu.

Proverb:

[To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven (Ecclesiastes 3:1)]

There is a time for everything.

Translation:

*Ka don ka por ia kie kie baroh.*

Transcription:

ka don ka por ya kie kie baroh?
Proverb:

[As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry in his hands (Proverb 5:15)]

We have come naked, we will return naked.

Translation:

Ngi wan lyngkhuit, ngin leit ruh lyngkhuit.

Transcription:

ŋi wan lŋkhuit, ŋin leit ruŋ lŋkhuit

Proverb:

Cast not ye pearl before swine (Matthew 7:6).

Translation:

Wat bret ia u mawlynnai ha khmat ki sniang.

Transcription:

wat břet ya u mawlInnai ha kʰmat ki sniŋ

Proverb:

[A wise man, which build his house upon a rock (Matthew 7:24)]

Build your house on the rock.

Translation:

Tei la ka ɪŋ ᵁlɔɾ u mausían.

Transcription:

tei la ka yeŋ ᵁlɔɾ u mausiaŋ
Proverb:

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for the rich man to enter into the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:24).

Translation:

*Kham suk ia ka ut ban rung hyngba thliew thyrnia ban ia u riewspah ban rung hima bneng.*

Transcription:

khamsuk ya ka ut ban runj Iŋba t⁶leu t⁶Tmia ban ya u reuspa? ban runj hima bnŋ

Proverb:

The last shall be first and the first shall be last (Matthew 20:16).

Translation:

*U ba khotduh un long nyngkong, u ba nyngkong un long khotduh.*

Transcription:

u ba k⁷atdu? un lŋ nŋkŋŋ, u ba nŋkŋŋ un lŋ k⁷atdu?.

Proverb:

Many he called, but few chosen (Matthew 20:16).

Translation:

*Shibun la khot khyndiat la jied.*

Transcription:
Proverb:

Render therefore unto Ceasar the things which are Ceasar's and unto God the things that are God's. (Matthew 22:21).

Translation:

Ai ha u Kaisar ka ba dei ka jong u Kaisar.

Proverb:

Wealth hastily gotten will dwindle, but he who gathers little by little will increase it (Proverb 13:11).

Translation:

Ka spah ka ba wan kum ka umsaw ka leit ruh kum ka umsaw.

Proverb:

Do unto others as you wish others to do unto you.

Translation:

Leh ia kiwei kumba phi kwah ba kiwei kin leh ia phi.
Proverb:

Better a poor and healthy person than a rich and ailing person (Sirak 30:23).

Translation:

*Kham lah u riewduk u ba shait ba khlañ ban ia u riewspah u ba tang ka pang.*

Translation:

*For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap (Galatians 6:7).*

As you sow, so you shall reap.

Translation:

*Kumba phi bet kumta phin ot.*

Translation:

*God gave and God had taken away (Job 1:21).*

Translation:

*U Blei uba ai, U Blei uba shim.*

The following are Biblical derivatives but are used as proverbs in Khasi.
Proverb:

Manna from heaven

Translation:

Ka mana na bneng.

Transcription:

ka mana na bneng.

Proverb:

As traitorous as Judas.

Translation:

Ba Shukor kum u Judas.

Transcription:

ba jukor kum u judas

Proverb:

Be not like a prodigal son.

Translation:

wat long khun sarong awria.

Transcription:

wat long khun sarong awria.

Proverb:

To be nailed on the cross.
Translation:

_Ban shah sahnarpna._

Transcription:

ban Ja' sañarp'na

Proverb:

To eat forbidden fruit.

Translation:

_Ban bam sohadong._

Transcription:

ban ba:m so? adøŋ.

Proverb:

The land of milk and honey.

Translation:

_Ka ri jong ka dud bad ka ngap (kannan)._ 

Transcription:

ka ri jøŋ ka dut bad ka njap.

_Folklore as an expressive form of cultural documentation phenomenon has, time and again, reflected socio-psychological dynamics inherent in religion persuasions. Religion is a powerful arena which provides space for discourse especially that of the contesting kind. There is a tendency to use its very ideals in order to create critical
positions and this same has been detected by this scholar in the practice and regard of contemporary Christianity among the Khasis by Christians themselves and non-Christians also.

To criticize unchristian behaviour detected in a Christian the following proverb is often used:

Proverb:

Christian in name Satan in deeds.

Translation:

*Kristan ka nam soitan ka kam.*

Transcription:

kristan ka na:m soitan ka ka:m.

An interesting usage which has come about with the growth of somewhat aggressive fund-raising drives of certain Christian denominations is:

Proverb:

We praise the Lord we grab the money.

Translation:

*İa u trai nging iaroh, ıa ka pisa nging iaroh.*

Transcription:

ya u tra:i ɲin iarọ? ya ka pisa ɲin ya trọ?.

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Proverb:

Xerox Christian or duplicate Christian.

Translation:

Serok khristan.

Transcription:

serok kristan.

There are also proverbs which have undergone processes of recreation in the hands of creative writers. This phenomenon can be observed especially in the aftermath of movements which were generated by the literary outbursts of the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century. Among the creative writers of the time, whose transcreation work of biblical text and especially of the Book of proverbs of the Bible, the name of B. Hedronelle Nonglait deserves mention. B. Hedronelle Nonglait was a prolific composer of songs and poetry right from the 1920s onwards. His songs were recorded in Calcutta as early as 1946 by the HMV Company. As far as his literary work is concerned, he devoted his mastery of the English language to producing translation works of sections of the Bible and because of his being partial to poetry, he adopted a poetic form by taking the original biblical proverbs and creating a highly stylized diction of Khasi versions of the original proverbs making changes to suit the readership of the day. In addition, as a Khasi he was deeply influenced by the tradition of Phawar chanting which can be regarded as a central culture marker of the Khasis, and he employed the technique of phawar composition in re-writing the biblical
proverbs. This exercise produced a series of transcreated biblical proverbs which have to some extent, impacted Christian written literature. It is not difficult to imagine that this effort also affected spoken discourses of Khasi Christianity.

At this point of time it would be proper to briefly discuss the *Phawar* as a literary genre so as through some light on the literary exercises of B. Hedro Nelle Nonglait and assess its contribution to liturgical literature.

The Khasi from the ancient times have evolved and developed their own indigenous poetic creations called *Ki Phawar* which are often employed in story-telling. The *phawar* is used in festivals, community work and gatherings, hunting and fishing expeditions, games and archery. According to Desmond L. Kharmawphlang: "the freshness and power of the *phawar* are marked by this trait. This is an example of verbal virtuosity combining what Samuel Johnson called "strength of thought" and "happiness of language"."6 The *phawar* are couplets, following elaborate rhyme schemes and while the couplets are not always necessarily complementary to each other, they agree in articulating meaning. The composition is complex and they are recited and composed spontaneously.

This scholar is aware that the above description is too general to effectively convey the actual meaning and functioning of the *phawar*. However, to go beyond that would take up too much time and space. Therefore, the above explanation will serve as a

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working definition of the *phawar*. These works were first published in U Nongkit Khubor in January 1935.

Let us look at a few samples from the collection: in *Ka Thiar U Longshuwa* which features mixed proverbs and the Proverbs of Solomon. The rhyme scheme aa bb, aa bb ............ of 64 lines and this work was published by U Nongkit Khubor in November 1935. some of the commonly used proverbs are:

*Ko khun sngap ia ki jinghikai u Kpa jong me*

*Wat lyndet ia ki hukum ka kmie jong me*7

Translation:

My son hear the instruction of thy father,
And forsake not the law of thy mother.

Proverb:

*Kumba ki thung kumta ruh kin bainong soh, *

*Bad Kum la ki buit la bainong kin ia ioh *

Translation:

Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way,
And be filled with their own devices.

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7 Khasi Authors' Society. *Na Ka Thiar Ki Longshuwa: Ki Proverb U Solomon U Khun U David*. 1993, Ri Khasi Press, Umsohsun, Shillong, p. 92
Proverb:

*Hynrei uba sheptieng ia nga ko hynriew,*

*Un shongsuk un shongsaiñ khlem tieng ia ka sniew.*

Translation:

But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely,
And shall be quiet from fear of evil.

Simple Random Sampling was conducted between 11 – 15 September, 2006 in respect of School and College in Nongtalang village viz. Nongtalang Govt. Secondary School and Nongtalang College and a School and College in Shillong viz. Auxilium Convent, Nongthymmai and Morning Star College, Nongthymmai, Shillong in order to gauge the students' awareness about proverbs they are familiar with being used in their homes and environment and to which source they attribute these verbal usages.

Data elicited from the respondents’ state that the sample proverbs provided were:

1. Heard used by elders and peers represented by 60%.
2. Heard while growing up represented by 30%.
3. Heard used in Church meetings represented by 10%.

The social unit of the chosen universe for conducting this sample was schools and colleges which are arenas of secular and religious contact.
The following diagram demonstrates this fact.