CHAPTER – III

DEFINITION OF THE PROVERB AND ITS CLASSIFICATION

Before defining the proverb, the meaning of oral literature or verbal art should be understood. Oral literature or verbal art as suggested by W.R. Bascom includes all the spoken, sung and vocal forms of traditional utterances which include the folk narratives or tales and songs which circulate by word of mouth. It also includes proverbs, riddles and charms. These are forms of aesthetic expressions. Strictly speaking verbal means expressed in words but this is subjected to the limitations of the medium and the techniques by which a person manipulates it. The phonetics, vocabulary and grammar of the language in which it is expressed imposes limitations on verbal art and on literature as well. Picturesque speech forms are often a simpler matter of local vocabulary or idiom which involves an aesthetic choice on the part of the narrator within the fixed limit. The narrator of the folktale may be allowed some leeway while, in the same society the effect of a proverb may be lost if it is misquoted and the efficacy of a curse or incantation may be destroyed if it is not used precisely. Verbal art differs from normal speech in the same way that music differs from noise, and choreography differs from walking. The medium of expression in oral or verbal art is the spoken word but the phonetics, vocabulary and grammar of the language in which it is expressed, imposes limitations and works their dynamics – this is what makes verbal art intangible and dynamic. Even when the narrator is expected to repeat a tale as nearly verbatim as he can, there is still the possibility of considerable change over a span of time. The degree
of change that occurs probably depends upon the complexity of the form, and assuming an equal emphasis on exact repetition. Changes can be observed in longer narratives than in proverbs. Moreover, when the narrator is expected to introduce original variations in characters and characterizations, incidents and their sequence, denouement and descriptive details and twist to familiar plots, a tale may vary markedly even from one telling by the same narrator to another. In such cases each telling of a tale must be regarded as a unique event, and in approaching the problem of creativity it is important to distinguish between the variations on a familiar theme introduced by the individual narrator and the origin of the theme, or the tale type itself.\footnote{Bascom, W.R. \textit{Folklore and Anthropology}, Journal of American Folklore, LXVI (1953), 286 – 287.} In the translation of literary works a deliberate attempt is usually made to adhere as faithfully as possible to the original text, but when a folktale spreads verbally by diffusion it may be effectively modified and reinterpreted in the process of adaptation to a new cultural setting.

Oral literature or verbal art differs not only in its method of transmission, but also in the method of creation from the written literature. Materials of folklore originate without writing, whereas literature is composed through the written agency, which means that it is not only possible to edit and even drastically revise and rework a manuscript before it is published, but also that for the writer the audience is largely imaginary and may even be irrelevant. The composition and reading of a novel or a poem are independent acts. From the point of view of the audience, the writer’s creative labors are as little interest as the actual stages in carving a mask or painting a picture,
while the period of creation involves an aesthetic experience for the artist himself. The primary objective is usually the aesthetic experience of his audience when the finished work is seen or read and when the artist himself may not even be present. But in case of verbal art the aesthetic experience of the audience is simultaneous with the creative act and the same is true of unwritten music and the dance, unless private rehearsals are held. The narrator or speaker as in case of proverbs is in face to face contact with his audience, and may modify the development of his tale in accordance with its expressions of approval and interest, either as he goes along or when he retells it later. Where the narrator is permitted a degree of freedom and originality, the audience reaction may become an important factor in the creative process in verbal art.

In verbal art it is only necessary to compare myths, folktales, proverbs and riddles with the direct statements of ordinary speech to see a similar concern with the form of expressions over and above the needs of communication. Among these distinctive features may be the form of statement, the choice of vocabulary and idiom, the use of obsolete words, the imagery of metaphor or simile, the set number of repetitions, the formalized openings and closing, the incorporation of cultural details, conventionalized greetings, or directional orientations and other stylistic features which are absent in ordinary conversation.

From oral literature folklore materials passes to written literature that is as identified by Archer Taylor, literature contains elements borrowed from folklore and writers have imitated folklore, but there are also cases where oral literature imitates
written literature or borrows from written literature. If we look at the Indian scene we find that oral – written continuum has been very much a part of the Indian cultural heritage since very early times. The entente between the two has been an outstanding feature of the Indian cultural milieu through the ages. The oral literature has not only existed side by side with the written literature but the two had together combined even in the remote past to build up a formidable folklore repertory since the Vedic times. As Durga Bhagawat points out, “while studying folklore one cannot neglect the ancient tales, songs riddles etc. which are found in the ancient literature of India”. The continuity of the heterogeneous Indian cultural tradition indeed makes such a study imperative. Not only Indian folklore, but folklore from any part of the world demands a thorough knowledge of the ancient Indian story material. The reason is obvious. The Indian literary story tradition is the oldest in the world. Commenting on this mixture between written and oral material Gaster comments that “the process did not end by the writing down of the oral tale, the written book became in time the starting point of a new set of oral lore”.

Birendra Nath Dutta stated that “one of the earliest Sanskrit works believed to have been composed in the Assam Region is the Hastyaur-veda (5th – 6th century B.C.) by Palakapyamuni who belonged to Lauhityadisha, one of the names by which Assam was known in ancient times. Now the Assam region having been famous for the elephant both wild and tamed, since the remote past, it is a safe guess that at least some oral lore

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had passed into the written work. It is significant that a profusely illustrated Assamese version – not exactly a translation of the work known as the Hastividya-r-nava contains a wealth of folklore material, including myths and legends most probably of oral currency”.$^4$ In Khasi oral literature also there is an entente between oral and written literature especially in the study of proverbs there is an interchange between the two. For example one of the greatest Khasi poet U Soso Tham has a stanza in his Magnum Opus which had been used and reused as proverbs in oral and written form. It runs thus:

1. 
   Sa shisien pat kin win ki khlaw
   Sa shisien pat kin khilh ki maw.$^5$
   
   Once more the forests will clamour
   Once more the stones will tremor.

2. 
   Jingshai ngi wad sawdong pyrthei
   Jingshai ka ri ngim tip ei ei.$^6$
   
   We search for light around the world
   Knowledge of our own land we know nothing at all.

The relationship between written and oral literature appears to be complicated, one thing should be clear cut. Once the folklorist records a folk song or narrative or

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$^4$ Datta, B. *in Anandam*, 1992, p. 137
$^6$ *Ibid* p. 3
proverb it is supposed to have an independent existence in paper as written literature or in sound recording. Afterwards it can be read and heard without the narrator narrating it. It no longer exists in memory, but in printing, writing and recording. However, in many societies it is seen that even after a particular item of folk literature has been recorded and published, it still lives as folklore and is still transmitted orally Bascom succinctly remarks: "Thus we can say that folk literature or verbal art dies when people stop telling it and when they learn it by reading rather than by hearing it told by others." Despite the fact that some sort of metamorphosis of discourse from oral to written and vice versa has taken place, the distinction between the two is a practical necessity. It still exists and will continue to exist. This is perhaps the reason why folk dances and songs recorded and presented through the audio and audio visual media cannot enthrall and inspire us. The Bihu dance of the Assamese, the Nongkrem dance of the Khasi or the Wangala dance of the Garo appear lifeless and dispirited on television but appear full of life and spirit and colour as they are performed by live dancers. So also it is with proverbs, riddles etc. The concept of folklore and oral tradition involves an idea of continuity and change. Garry Alan Fine correctly commented "folklorists should treasure the proverb that the more things change, the more things remain the same".

As human beings interact with each other on a regular basis, they ceaselessly express what they know, think, believe and feel. This is done in various distinguishable and readily understood forms of expression most of which are speech oriented. The

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uttering of proverbial sayings is one of the most easily identifiable means of verbal communication which rely for its authenticity on predecessors and peers as sources. With time and repetition these informally learnt communication tools are conceived as traditions or traditional. They become identified individually or collectively as folklore. When we use an expression in words, to convey a particular message through periods of time, that refined and artistic expression becomes a proverb. While the use of proverbs enhances the sweetness of a statement it also carries the seriousness of a situation. A number of English words such as aphorisms and maxims are in existence which denotes and describes the word proverb.

The Bible has an entire book on proverbs which are attributed to Solomon the son of David, king of Israel. The book is qualified by statements which emphasizes proverbs as “wisdom and instructions: to perceive the words of understanding...to give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear, and will increased learning: and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: to understand a proverb, and the interpretation: the words of the wise”.  

Generally the proverb is said to be a short pithy saying in common use which are some statements earned by experience or observation. Archer Taylor has put forward the definition of proverb as: “the wisdom of many and wit of one”. It ordinarily suggests

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"a cause of action or passes a judgement on a situation".\textsuperscript{11} This is one of the generally accepted definitions of proverb.

It is sometimes a mere statement of fact and sometimes a condensation of didactic experience or a concisely formulated rule as "honesty is the best policy" or "all's well that ends well", which are statements of fact. It may be a metaphor which one applies to the situation such as "look before you leap". There is immense didactic element in proverbs related to medical or legal ideas like "Rain before seven, fire before eleven" or 'Silence gives consent'. Proverbs are the wisdom of a community, the essence of thoughts and philosophy that a group of people acquire through the ages. Sometimes proverbs serve as impersonal vehicles for personal communication. These fragments of wisdom offer many interesting insight into a people's past. Proverbial phrases survive the ruins of empires and civilizations. Proverbs in short reflect the social usage, the time long experience of an age and people, crystallized in brief and short statements which contain a general truth.

\textit{The Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend} states that "a proverb is a terse didactic statement that is current in tradition. They are expressions connected with persons or religious and political movements; they formulate ideas or principles or are calculated to arouse mass emotions for or against a case".\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} ibid  
According to the *Dictionary of English Folklore*, "Proverbs are short, crisply structured sayings widely known in a community, which, convey traditional observations on human nature and natural phenomena, moral judgements, mockery, warnings etc. Though circulating orally, their wording is fairly stable; they generally display formal devices including alliteration, rhyme, assonance, rhythmic phrasing, balanced opposition and parallelism".  

Proverbs are a fixed phrase genre of oral literature. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* a proverb is a "succinct and pithy saying in general use, expressing commonly held ideas and beliefs". Roger D. Abrahams says, "Proverbs are short and witty." He continues: "Traditional expressions that arise as part of everyday discourse as well as in the more highly structured situations of education and judicial proceedings. Each proverb is a full statement of an approach to a recurrent problem. It presents a point of view and strategy that is self-sufficient, needing nothing more than an event of communication to bring it into play. Proverbs are the shortest form of traditional expression that calls attention to themselves as formal artistic entities".

E.B. Tylor, the evolutionist, while appreciating the edifying role played by the proverb, considered it as a product of mythological stage of thought. He says:

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“At the level of European culture in the middle ages, they [proverbs] have indeed a vast importance in popular education, but their period of actual growth seems already at an end. Cervantes raised the proverb-monger’s craft to a pitch it never surpassed; but it must not be forgotten that the incomparable Sancho’s wares were mostly heirlooms; for proverbs were even then sinking to remnants of an earlier condition of society. As such, they survive among ourselves, who go on using much the same relics of ancestral wisdom as came out of the squire’s inexhaustible budget, old saws not to be lightly altered or made anew in our changed modern times. We can collect and use the old proverbs, but making new ones has become a feeble, spiritless imitation, like our attempts to invent new myths or new nursery rhymes” 16

This scholar has reproduced Tylor’s statement with the specific intention of revealing the uncomplimentary persuasion of his argument which was heavily influenced by the evolutionary ideologies of the time. This scholar shall endeavour to prove that it is possible to create new genres to suite new social and cultural requirements.

Herskovits says “Proverbs are used ‘to give point to some well-meaning advice; to rebuke or praise a friend, to put an enemy in his place; to emphasize commendation or affection or ridicule or blame’”.17 Each proverb is a full statement of an approach to a

16 Tylor, E.B. Primitive Culture, p. 89-90.
recurrent problem; proverbs take personal circumstances and embody it in impersonal and witty form.\(^{18}\)

Structurally, binary construction is an important feature of a proverb. This construction is reflected through the relationships between the different elements or segments of a proverb, which may be expressed positively or negatively.\(^{19}\)

The underlying meaning of the proverb is more important as it is said "what is unsaid is much more important than what is said". So in order to understand a proverb properly, it is imperative to know the social situation in which the proverb is used and how meaning is elicited from its rhetorical dimensions.

Arewa points out following Dundes that the study of proverb context has not been given due attention. He stresses the importance of studying actual instances of proverb telling and the necessity of the roots of applying proverbs to life situation.\(^{20}\) Hans-Malfred Militz says that semantic variations in a proverb arise due to their various functions and situations.\(^{21}\)

The proverb is by and large a public genre. Its formation, structure and ability to communicate is informed by the public shared characteristics of acknowledgement,

\(^{18}\) Abrahams, Roger D. *opcit*, p. 124.
\(^{21}\) Militz, H.M., *Proverb - Anti Proverb Wolfgang Mieder's Paremiological Approach to Western Folklore*, Institute of Linguistics at the Academy of Sciences, Berlin, Germany, 1999, p. 27.
application and acceptance. It addresses issues and elicits shared responses in the public sphere. It is used most effectively as a means of communication in debates and discourses, on the air waves, as graffiti and billboard hoardings and in the print and electronic media. The proverb is just as effectively applied as intimate indoor communication because of its highly didactic nature.

From the view point of structuralism, Alan Dundes has advocated a definition of proverb as “a traditional propositional statement consisting of at least one descriptive element, a descriptive element consisting of a topic and a comment”.22 Archer Taylor who is regarded as undisputed pope of paremiology has described “proverb as impersonal vehicles of personal communication”.23

Proverbs are the shortest expression of the long term experience of life. They are central to the human experience and are related to the fundamental behaviour patterns of day to day life of the individual. It is a fact that there is certain uniformity in behaviour patterns within a particular group and proverbs are used to test and critique these behavioural patterns. Confirming with these patterns proverbs current in a society seldom undergo any change unlike other elements of oral literature.

Jean Lois Siran24 has discussed proverbs rhetoric, traditional and communicative aspects and raised a question whether proverbs are living words or dead letters.

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Tradition is not static; it gradually changes and adapts to the change the society undergoes, as a result of scientific and socio-cultural, economic or technological factors. The extinction of some proverbs is quite natural because they have proved to be redundant and have become removed from present realities. There are some proverbs that still persevere even through long passages of time due to the dynamic, malleable and universal qualities inherent in them. They adapt and present themselves in fresher ways.

Proverbs are the most easily observed and collected genres of traditional expressions, yet the least understood. This misunderstanding is due perhaps due to their very familiarity, we tend to take more notes of things exotic or unusual, and proverbs have remained a part of the verbal resources of sophisticated western cultures long after larger oral genres either have been forgotten or have developed into the complex forms of modern literature. In the west proverbs serve as information to be encyclopedically handled and were also educationally useful in two ways as a storehouse of wisdom to be learned by the young courtier, and the other and more important is, as device to be learned and used by aspirant orators.

From the proverb developed the tradition of the literary epigram, the occasional short verse in which the same kind of moral point is made but because of the change in the medium from a face to face to a reading experience, its application to a situation had to be indicated either in the title or within the verse. And this has the influence on the development of the heroic couplet which has in turn provided a number of proverbs in
oral currency. A good example of this is Alexander Pope’s “To err is human, to forgive divine”.

With the growing development of folklore movement in the Nineteenth Century and its strong focus on rural dialects, the study of proverbs received greater impetus and sharper focus. Proverb as a genre of oral folk literature is identified as fixed phrase of genre of folklore used during the course of discussion by creative writers. Proverbs are also expressed in rhyme and these are very short in relation to other genre of folklore. Most of the commonly used proverbs are metaphors of nature or are terse summaries of experience, example. “New brooms sweep clean”. Few proverbs involve an allusion to a particular trade, custom or belief as “There is truth in wine”. Some proverbs like “Sour Grapes” are condensation of familiar tales especially Aesop’s fables. Proverbs use the simple stylistic device of contrast such as “live and learn”. In many proverbs, and characteristically in those dealing with medical or legal ideas or with the weather, the didactic teaching element is a condensation of experience or concisely formulated rule as ‘silence gives consent’.

Many manner of speaking that are found in a tradition and literature is akin to the proverb. A proverbial phrase permits variations in person, number and tense as “To be left at the post”; then a probable comparison ‘As fresh as daisy’ or ‘As red as a rose’ has fixed traditional form but contains no moral advice. A conventional phrase is a formula used in a situation of frequent occurrence. In literature proverbs are often used to
characterize a figure or to summarize neatly a situation. They are often used as titles as in Shakespeare’s ‘All is Well that Ends Well’.

Examining the published collections, it would not be wrong to consider that, in the Khasi language, after the narratives, proverbs constitute the most important folklore genre. Collections made by early folklore researchers point to their importance at home, around the hearth, in the market place and in public speeches. Collectors have applied themselves assiduously to the task of harvesting hundreds of these brief, memorable and relatively accessible sentences and phrases. These statements are interpreted to reveal aspects of Khasi philosophy, to illustrate linguistic usages and to infer traits of societal character. One crucial issue that this investigation will seek to address is throwing light on the proverbs, their users and speakers, occasions, situations and contexts. Following the experiments of Penfield in conducting studies of the proverbs among the Owerri Igbo of Nigeria where he applies the excellent proverb theory of Jan Mukarvonsky, this scholar shall attempt to demonstrate how proverb properties are shared in oral discourse and even in print. Proverbs depersonalize a message that would otherwise be too personal. Their foreignness to the interaction situation draws a hearer’s attention. They resonate with the authority of the ancients, they refer to shared social norms and ideals, and they bring prestige to the man or woman who used them well. The uses of proverbs suggest that in the Khasi context, as in the case of the Igbo of Nigeria, “conflicts are managed in ‘speech events’ which may seem less formalized than the court system in the western world but which nevertheless have traditional rules and regulations
specified, by the culture informally". The data that this scholar shall define the genre and look at the history of collecting, and by analyzing the sentences, shall show that a corpus of Khasi proverbs, seemingly mono-logic, are at the same time a kind of dialogue.

Khasi proverbs comfortably fall into categories familiar to the folklorist. There are literal proverbs or aphorisms and literal imperatives not to do something. There are folk similes or proverbial comparisons. Some of these kinds contain slurs of various kinds. There are folk metaphors or proverbial phrases and of course there are hundreds of what is regarded by folklorists as proverbs-grammatically complete sentence often metrical which users and speakers apply as metaphors to situation of social interaction.

Khasi proverb collections that have been published reveal certain defining characteristics: antiquity, fixity of phrasing and didacticism. Proverbs are always attributed to earlier originators, whose use of these statements are fixed in phrasing and transmitted so accurately through time that they represent an earlier stage of culture. Following the same line of perpetuation and circulation the proverb expresses authoritative and axiomatic tracts and conscious attempts, at least in some cases, have been made to bring these sayings to bear so as to systematize them into aspects of Khasi philosophy. Considerable debate has been devoted to the English word “proverb” and how appropriate or inappropriate it is to describe non-western genres. While some

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scholars feel that the translation is misleading, others have readily accepted it as generally denotative. English dictionaries, it is obvious, can tell us precious little about Khasi oral traditions and narratives for cultural reasons. For instance, the popular Khasi term associated with proverbs is Ka Jingsneng which is translated as didactic saying. A further qualifying trait is the word ‘tymmen’ which means “old folk” or “the elderly”. A combination of these two words, “Jingsneng Tymmen” appears to function as the key term to describe the proverb and it has been used as book titles for the two volumes of a well-documented publication of proverbs collected by Radhon Singh Berry. This two volume book is titled Ka Jingsneng Tymmen and subtitled Shaphang Ka Akor Khasi ha ka rukom Rwai Phawar or About Khasi etiquette in the manner of Phawar singing. The sub-title is highly significant in that it clearly sets out the parameters of the conception of the book and the method to be followed in giving articulation to the proverbs contained therein. The author introduces another highly structural Khasi literary folk genre when he mentions the Phawar.

It is important to remember that the strength of the proverb is intrinsically linked to the issue of the corresponding pervasiveness of orality in a given society. In the Khasi context, while admitting the significant role that literacy is playing in changing the socio-cultural contours, orality cannot also be summarily dismissed. Even in urban centres where formal systems of education are firmly in place, the oral discourse is relied upon for social intercourse. The word Jingsneng Tymmen clearly exemplifies the
attributes for proverbs by emphasizing that they speak directly, they operate by means of desubjectivization and community acceptance and they receive respect.

The Khasi social structure is extremely well-built and kinship is taken very seriously. There is a marked closeness between siblings and the connection with relations of the mother (as first cousin) and of the father (as cross cousins) is maintained very assiduously. This folk group of relations is an excellent arena for the generation and circulation of proverbs with the added dimension that each one in the group is expected, at the very least, to be bound by the parameters laid out by these shared proverbial sayings. This will be demonstrated through the reproduction, whenever and wherever the phenomenon has been observed by this scholar during field work. Valerie Bonstein\textsuperscript{26} analytically discussed the importance of family proverb use. In this context, it can be argued that a contextual study of the use of proverb in family life could help to understand the role of proverbs in family. It would also provide an insight into the character of the genre itself.

This researcher is going to, as a first step, use this most extensively collected and published work, the two-volume \textit{Ka Jingsneng Tymmen} for detailed analysis.

The subtitle of this thesis - analyzing the ethnography of speaking folklore-points to the intention of this scholar to consider the proverb as a genre’ which relates language use to social life. The scholar is also convinced that the proverb presents itself

as a genre’ through a range of speaking activities operating in the Khasi society. Speech behaviours are important segments of ethnographical detail which reveal the dynamics of patterns and functions of speaking within specific cultural context. Speech behaviours can be determined taking into consideration a speech community or a group of people sharing a common language governed by a set of rules and using these for conducting and interpreting speech activities. As far as possible, this scholar will try to put into place the various factors through which data will be analysed for presenting an acceptable picture of Khasi ethnography of speaking folklore, using proverbs as the variable template. Following Hymes, the determining factors are settings, participants, ends, act sequence, key (tone), instrumentalities (communication channels), norms of interaction and interpretation and genre.27

This scholar hastens to add that it is not always possible to have ideal situations all the time for collection of data. Extensive field work has yielded a good measure of data which has been subjected to the rigours of the method. In the case of proverbs which have been collected from written published sources, detailed explanation of context have been provided along with reconstruction of delivery and use of the particular proverb.

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF PROVERBS

STUDY OF THE ORIGIN OF PROVERBS:

Proverbs gives us a glimpse into the mind of the people. But the origin of the proverb is obscure, we must suppose that some individual formulated an idea in words or drew a lesson from a scene but the result was only a sententious remarks or the instructive exemplification of a truth until tradition accepted the statement and while accepting it, it adapted it, if necessary in an inimitable fashion, both the invention and the acceptance are essential to make a proverb, and both ordinarily escape our observation. The effort to arrive at the origin of proverbs is complicated by the fact that the same theme and even the same formulation of it may occur to more than one person.

Proverbs are often made on the models of already existing types, “the nearer the church the farther from God” or “the nearer the bone the sweeter the meat”. Also proverbs use the simple stylistic devices of contrast as “look before you leap” or “man proposes God disposes”. Perhaps the most characteristic feature of proverbial style is the use of contrast as in “better late than never” or “out of sight out of mind”.

Proverbs has many traditional variations which are of equal authority such as “a bird in hand is better than a hundred in the jungle”.

The systematic study of proverbs has had an early history with Archer Taylor taking the leadership in the last century. He was followed by Wolfgang Mieder. Matti
Kussi contributed his share by editing a proverb journal called "Proverbium". The Historical-Geographical study of the proverb which was a favourite method followed by scholars who applied the rigours laid down by Kaarle Krohn of Finland and his followers involved the identification of the normal-form, the archetype and typesets. This labourious academic exercise unearthed data that revealed the passing into and diffusion of proverbs across languages and cultures.

According to Perumal, "to study the origin of proverbs is not easy. It remains obscure. Yet the origin of a proverb can be traced to the chronological (age), geographical, and situational (circumstances) factors. Chronological proverbs originate from history, ruling dynasties and historical personages. Geographical proverbs are related to places, cities, towns and villages, forts, hills, rivers and rivulets. Situational proverbs reflect society as well as home, referring to the characteristics of the various, communities, the virtues and vices of the people and patterns of social behaviour".\(^\text{28}\)

The Indian tradition of proverb creation has a preponderance of establishing the relational connectedness of these genres to God. Though it is difficult to say when and by whom the proverbs were created, certain folklorists believe that in India, they were created during the time of Panini, the grammarian (400 B.C.). But instances are also seen in some 'Cantos', or 'Sukta' of the Veda and Upanishada. It can be safely presumed that these are the creations of folk poets who lived in the Vedic times much before Panini.

\(^{28}\) Perumal, V. *A Comparative Study of Proverbs Examples from Tamil and English Literature*, Folklore, Vol. 27, No. 4 Whole No. 310, 1986, p. 61-62.
(The same can be said to be true of the aphorisms and maxims contained in the Book of Proverbs of the Bible which are believed to have been created by anonymous sages although the book itself is attributed to Solomon). Thus gradually keeping the tradition intact, proverbs were created in Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit and a host of other Indian languages. It must be borne in mind that religious treatises and texts were heavily laden with proverbs, some of which have persisted through important translation efforts. Talking about the classic Buddhist text, The Dhammapada, which is a source of many ancient proverbs, Juan Mascaro who translated it from the original Pali script writes:

In the Dhammapada we can hear the voice of Buddha. This gospel of light and love is amongst the greatest spiritual works of man. Each verse is like a small star and the whole has the radiance of eternity. 29

FUNCTIONAL STUDY OF PROVERBS:

The functional approach to the study of folklore has been advocated by William Bascom. Amplifying the viewpoint presented by Bronislaw Malinowski in Myth in Primitive Psychology (1926), Bascom articulates that proverbs serve as "pedagogic devices" 30 which are designed to ensure cultural stability. He goes on further to say that "proverbs are highly effective in exercising social control. Because they express the morals or ethics of the group, they are convenient standards for appraising behavior in terms of the approved norms. Because they are pungently, wittily and sententiously


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stated, they are ideally suited for commenting on the behavior of others. They are used to express social approval and disapproval; praise for those who conform to accepted social conventions and criticism or ridicule of those who deviate; warning, defiance or derision of a rival or enemy and advice, counsel or warning to a friend when either contemplates action which may lead to social friction, open hostilities, or direct punishment by society.  

Proverbs perform diversified functions. It is used to coping with stressful situation or as a way of giving advice. The proverb also depersonalizes the stressful situation by placing the problem as common problem. Peter Seitel argues that to grasp the complete understanding of a proverb, one must look at not only the general meaning of the proverb but also at a context in which the proverb is used.

In the family context, the proverb has certain functions. Firstly, proverbs within a family not only depersonalize a situation by placing it as a general problem, but it keeps the authoritative weight by locating the situation within a specific context connected with the past experience within the family's history. Secondly, habitual use of a proverb by certain members of the family gradually helps to establish a hierarchy of authority within the family unit.

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31 Ibid p. 61.
Structural Study of Proverbs

Structural study is another method to have knowledge and understanding of proverbs. Though functional study gives some ideas about the genre, it is not adequate to know about the form of proverbs without structural analysis of proverbs. In the year 1947, Kimmerie tried to classify proverbs based on linguistic and syntactic formula. But her analysis was more of surface structure than of the deep structure.

Vladimir Propp and Levi Strauss have advocated two types of structural analysis. Proppian analysis deals with form whereas Levi Strauss structuralism deals with both form and content. Levi-Strauss takes the help of the linguistic theory developed by Saussure, Trohatzko and Jacobson.

In the year 1969 G.B. Milner attempted to define proverbs on the basis of quadripartite structure. According to his theory, the four quarter (minor segments) of a proverb are grouped into two halves (Major segment), which match and balance each other. The opening half is termed as head while the second half is as tail. Milner then examines the word or words in each quarter and determines whether it has a plus or minus value. Thus in the English proverb 'soon ripe, soon rotten' the value is assigned by Milner as follows: Soon ripe (which means the head is +) and soon rotten (which means the tail is -). He has tried to analyse proverbs which concentrate upon content rather than form. Alan Dundes also analysed the structure of proverbs on the basis of

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descriptive elements which consist of a topic and a comment. This means that proverbs must have two topics or comments. Proverbs which consist of a single descriptive element are non-oppositional. Proverbs with two or more descriptive elements may be either oppositional or non-oppositional. “Like father, like son” is an example.

A multi descriptive element proverb which is non-oppositional; “Man works from sun to sun but woman’s work is never done”: is an example of multi descriptive element proverb which is oppositional (man/woman; finite work/infinite and endless work). Non-oppositional multi descriptive element proverbs emphasize identical features, often in the form of equation or series of equal terms; oppositional proverbs emphasize constructive features often in the form of negative or a series of term in complementary distribution.\(^{35}\)

**CONTEXTUAL STUDY OF PROVERBS:**

Once, folklore study was confined only to the collection of folklore materials. However, this position changed when the significance of contextual study was realized. Peter J Claus and Frank J Korom point out: “The evolutionist theories of the nineteenth century colonists saw folklore as a survival of earlier stages of mental and culture development. They saw little need to record and document information regarding the present context of folklore. The carriers of folklore (the folk) were of lesser importance than their lore. Today, the performers and the context have gained their rightful place in

\[^{35}\text{Dundes, Alan. } Op cit. p. 115.\]
the study of folklore.\textsuperscript{36}

In general, anthropology has been concerned with the relationship between the text as a repository of value, cognitive structures and cultural content and the whole society in which it functions. The discussions have been phrased in terms of ‘text’ and ‘context’. The socio linguistic concern especially in the current phase as ‘performance theory’ has viewed them as a medium through which a process of communication takes place, has defined the ritualization in terms of ‘speaker and listener’, ‘addresser and addressee’ or ‘render or receiver’, with the text being the intermediary ‘language’ or ‘code’ through which the speaker communicates our intended meaning to the listener.\textsuperscript{37}

While studying folklore Alan Dundes advocates three levels for the analysis of folklore. Any given item of folklore may rightly be analyzed on the basis of text, texture and context Dan Ben Amos observes – “The locus of conventional marking the boundaries between folklore and non-folklore is in its text, texture and context of the forms, to apply Dundes’ three levels for the analysis of folklore in somewhat modified form”\textsuperscript{38}. The text of an item of folklore is essentially a version or single telling of a tale, a recitation of a proverb. The texture of an item of folklore is essentially the linguistic features of the text. The textual features of a proverb, according to Dundes are its rhyme and alliteration. The context is considered as the most important level for the analysis of proverbs. It is called a special social situation under which a particular item of folklore is

\textsuperscript{36} Claus, Peter & Korom, J. \textit{Folkloristics and Indian Folklore}, 1991, p. 13.
performed. Folklorists all over the world today, firmly believe in the effectiveness of the contextual study of folklore which requires the scholar to focus attention on the context of a particular item of folklore because information about that aspect can be obtained from the actual social situation. The details that this data generates are to be extrapolated for study. The advocates of this method are Roger D Abrahams, Dan Ben Amos, Alan Dundes, Robert Georges and Kenneth Goldstein.

Dundes is of the opinion that folklorists have so long been contended to publish the texts of proverbs only. Similarly, anthropologists have remained satisfied with the functions of the same. But they fail to provide the actual context of the proverbs. The need and importance of collection of context is absolutely essential to have the proper meaning of a proverb. A proverb without its context is meaningless.

PROVERBS AND THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF SPEAKING FOLKLORE:

The study of proverbs has fascinated a host of scholars from across disciplines. At the beginning, the study of proverb was confined only to the collection of proverbs per se and small studies were made from literary and historical standpoints.

In the twentieth century, with the shift of emphasis from the lore to the folk, from the text to people creating these texts, studies on the proverb underwent a transformation. Further, with the gradual realization that field work is of pre-eminent significance for a complete study of folklore, the collection of data became more
oriented towards the context including what Dundes called oral literary criticism. And attempts have been made for detailed field investigations of specific proverbs. Folklore and the use of certain folklore genres can be seen primarily as a means of communication which opens up a rich field for study. This has a significant bearing on the difference which becomes obvious and critical between the recording of texts and the recording the use of texts. In order to study the ethnography of speaking folklore it is imperative to also have data on the context in order to test the efficacy of the text. While one can aver that a proverb sums up a situation, passes judgement, or recommends a course of action, it will be difficult to point out with exactness what the function is and to what particular situation the proverb is best applied. All this requires accurate and detailed reporting of the contextual data. The critical point here is that the ethnography of speaking folklore precisely tells us how a folklore genre or item works and this is wholly dependent on the identification of rules which can be found when one observes and does recording of actual instances of individuals using folklore in real life situations.

This scholar has attempted to the best of her ability to observe and record instances of actual proverb using situations in the places covered during the field work. Informants who were found to be knowledgeable and reliable about proverbs were asked to construct what they deem to be the most accurate and typical context for individual proverbs and recall such situations as best as they can. This scholar has also tried to collect as many variant of proverbs and the contexts in which they have been originated.

The scholar has also attempted to collect informant's comments and critiques about particular proverbs in order to obtain the interpretation of the proverb by the user and by the person for whom it is used or directed to. The scholar has intentionally proposed to conduct this study from the perspective of analyzing the ethnography of speaking folklore with relation to Khasi proverbs because she is convinced that folklore is a system of communication which includes both the study of lore and the study of the folk. Archer Taylor found it difficult to clearly define the genre but his work on proverbs is regarded as groundbreaking. Finnish scholar Mati Kuusi also observes that the message or referential aspect of the proverb is not tied to the image employed when made to study proverbs in context rather than text. 40

Melville Herskovits has developed the "hypothetical situation method" as a generally useful methodology for all types of field work. Without explaining the method at this point of time, he called for the employment of a system which broadly involves the ethnography of speaking during his work among the Kru. 41 Oja Arewa and Alan Dundes have made discussions on proverbs from cultural and linguistic points of view in their article "Proverbs and Ethnography of Speaking Folklore". Abrahams has stated "Conversation rather than creation is the most common milieu for both proverb and intensifiers. 42

Proverbs are transmitted by speech. Hence the media communication of the

40 Dundes, Alan. Op cit p. 103
proverb is language. To understand the inner meaning of a proverb, the knowledge of that language is essential, because the apparent meaning of a proverb is not always the true meaning. This issue has been discussed by western folklorists.

In 1929, Roman Jakabson, in a joint essay with P. Bagatyrev, noted since folklore and language were in certain ways, analogous, both being collective social phenomena characterized by definite regularities of pattern. This type of conceptual framework opened the way for the study of folklore as a systematic code. If it can be reliably contended that language could be studied structurally, the same also goes for folklore. While folklorists have not been as quick as the linguists to apply this theoretical orientation to their own material, the analysis of folklore as code which was cogently stated in 1929, began to become popular and is a discourse widely followed now.

Jakabson and Bagatyrev had suggested that in folklore, there was an analogue to speech (la parole) as well as language (la language). In 1962, Dell Hymes had mentioned that the study of linguistic structure must be added to the study of the structure of acts of speech. The study of the structure of language is also an attempt to discover exactly how language is used in specific situations. Moreover, the conception of the structure of language is extended to include the sequential structure of form of message, wherever such linguist ‘routine’ appears. This very
approach to the study of language in culture, according to Hymes, is ‘Ethnography of Speaking’. Here importance is given not only to the rules of language, but also to the rules for the use of language.\(^{43}\)

Dell Hymes gives emphasis on the fact that a speech act is social interaction and speech acts engage speakers with their intensions in a linguistic event. Unless the above-mentioned dimensions are taken into account, the circle of understanding language is not ‘completed. He stresses that linguistic performances are to be regarded as situated events and ethnographic description of the structure of situated event is important for understanding the use of language. The understanding of the complex use of rules enables a researcher to look at the creative dimensions of a language.\(^{44}\) As folkloristic communication is analogous to linguistic communication, similar complexities are also involved in the case of the latter. Dell Hymes has discussed the method of application of ethnography of communication in the study of folklore.

**INTERNATIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF PROVERBS:**

Proverbs have been classified into various categories from time to time considering the various characteristics inherent in them. Scholars in their writings have made a number of classifications of proverbs. Funk & Wagnall’s Standard *Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend* provides a comprehensive and workable classification


of proverbs which has evolved through folklore scholarship over the decades. While the
classificatory parameters are not absolutely perfect, they outline, in general terms, the
ways in which a proverb is recognized, explained and gauged for its applicability to a
particular situation. This scholar has utilized this classification mode in order to largely
address the issue of organizing part of the data.

I. Moral Proverbs.

II. Social Proverbs.

III. Philosophical Proverbs.

IV. Weather Proverbs.

V. Miscellaneous Proverbs.

Archer Taylor has divided proverbs in his index as follows:

I. Proverbial Apothegm

II. Metaphorical Proverbs

III. Proverbial Type

IV. Proverbs based on narratives
Abrahams discusses four common types of proverbs which are mainly based on time factor:

I. Positive equivalence:
   
   Like – Time is money.

II. Negative equivalence
    
    Like – Time is not everything.

III. Positive Causational
    
    Like – Haste makes waste

IV. Negative causational
    
    Like – two wrongs do not make a right.

Matt Kussi proposed an international classification based on materials available
from many countries. Matti Kussi has discussed the principle of organization of proverbs collected by him. His macro-structure was based on “either a variant or a group of variants of proverbs connected with each other by idea and/or formula and/or variants Kemet”.\textsuperscript{45} He further proposes a logico-thematic classification material. He also notes that structural analysis and binary opposition most coherent principles of classification which can solve the difficulties created by the national and regional collections. He says “Every proverb can be interpreted as a selection between two alternative responses” (He again suggested a number of international types and raised the of their inner complexities).\textsuperscript{46}

Areas in which this scholar has done field work includes Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills, Ri Bhoi and West Khasi Hills. Meghalaya has a population of 231822 of which 299108 is in Jaintia Hills, 660923 is in Khasi Hills, 192790 is in Ri Bhoi and 296049 is in West Khasi Hills. According to the 1991 census there are 879192 Khasi speakers that is 49.50% to total population. The area investigated falls under 3819 Sq. km. in Jaintia Hills, 2748 Sq. km. in Khasi Hills, 2448 Sq. km. in Ri-Bhoi and 5247 Sq. km. in West Khasi Hills.

**METHODS OF ANALYSIS:**

At the time of analysis primary importance has been given to ethnographic data, 

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid p. 1-41.
verbal dexterity and oral commentaries. The analytical methods of the context-driven ethnographers and performance theorists have been applied to understand the use, delivery and application of Khasi proverbs. In simple words, the major critical focus is on the understanding of proverbs from the social, cultural, literary and performance perspectives and the community acceptance of these usages.

**Relevance of the Study:**

Proverbs are expressions imbued with sagacious intent and are strengthened by the process of reiteration. These sayings are usually employed through the skillful use of metaphors although they can also exist and many a time used as literal statements. Proverbs add colour to a particular language and ordinary and banal statements gets elevated to highly artistic utterances.

The study of proverbs helps us to understand some valuable aspects of life. For instance, proverbs bring before us a clear picture of the social life. A proverb is a perfect medium to impart and disseminate wise thoughts or ideas. Proverbs are the natural repository of people's age-old experience. Proverbs are effective tools for the exchange of legal opinions which in some societies in Africa carry the weight of time-honoured convention and completely binding as tribal law.

Many wise sayings from around the world testify to the precision, authenticity and correctness of the proverbs. A few are indicated below:
I. A proverb does not tell a lie (Estonian).

II. A proverb never lies (German).

III. A Proverb does not lie (Russian).

IV. If there is a falsity in a proverb, then milk can turn sour (Malayalam).

V. Proverbs are all old; if they are new, they’re not proverbs (English).

VI. Proverbs are the daughters of daily experience (Dutch).

VII. A Proverb is a brief saying that presents a truth or some bit of useful wisdom (Dutch).

VIII. Proverbs of the common people are like salt to speech (Arabic).

A lucid picture of the belief system of the folk can be obtained from proverbial sayings. The character of a nation, its cultural identity and the moral assertion of its people are reflected in the proverbs which are distilled and crystallized forms of expression. The use of proverbs in family life deals with emotional, educative and character-moulding qualities which lead to the promotion of community ideals of good citizenry.
An ethnographic study like this is expected to throw light on the patterns of proverb use in a family. Moreover, the sociological dimension of proverb-using will be thoroughly dealt with in this work. Negligible work on the contextual study of folklore genres of the Khasis has been done and this particular work will be the first of its kind to delve into the system of communication that exists between a traditionally oriented genre and the ever changing community it (the proverb) seeks to critique through a performance medium of the ethnography of speaking folklore.

**Khasi Proverbs:**

Proverbs in Khasi oral tradition occupies an important place both in the family and social life. The Khasi people whether educated or not are deeply rooted in their tradition. They make use of a large number of proverbs in their day-to-day conversations, contact situations and social gatherings. Many Khasi proverbs have found place in creating writings such as folktales, myths, legends, poetry, drama and other forms of literature. But as a student of folklore and with some acquaintance with the Khasi oral tradition in general and proverb in particular, the scholar feels that no such scientific study of the proverbs and their role in social education have been undertaken. It is form this perspective that the proposed study has been undertaken.

There is no specific term for proverb in Khasi. Many scholars have given different terms for proverbs such a ‘Ki Ktien Tymmen’, ‘Ki Ktien Sneng’, ‘Ki Jingsneng Tymmen’, ‘Ki Phawer’, ‘Ki Ktien Pharshi’ and so on. As there is no specific term the
scholar prefers using the term 'Ki Ktien Sneng Pharshi' or 'The Wise Saying of the Folk' in which parable, allegory, simile, comparision, aphorism, maxims and others are included.

This chapter will be devoted to the analysis of what can be considered as traditional proverbs in the sense that they have been in circulation for a long period of time and by which they have become anonymous. They are proverbs which are set in character and which are applied and understood in a frozen context without having gone or having the need to undergo mutation. They have passed from the oral to the written domain and vice-versa unchanged exhibiting characteristics which are pervasive and easily recognized by addresser and addressee. They are traditional in this respect because they express meanings and universals which are grasped immediately and also in retrospection. They carry within them the same power of delivery now as they did scores of decades ago.

The Khasi society, like any other in the world, can boast of a huge repertoire of proverbs which have been in existence since time immemorial. One of the very first comprehensive collections of Khasi proverbs was made by R.S. Berry who is considered one of the pioneers in the field of folklore studies in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In his Ka Jingsneng Tymmen, a two volume collection of sayings attributed to the elder which contains a total of two hundred and four lines. The writer declares in the foreword to Book I:
“I collect and write these sayings of instructions of the Khasi which have been spawn and produced through the generations to address every boy and girl of the land right from the days of old so as to remember and wake up, as it appears that we are forgetting the respectable ways, in the hypnotism effected by alien cunning of today”. 47 (translation of the scholar).

It is obvious from the above that R.S. Berry (Kharwanlang) had an agenda to pursue that is to combat the incursion of Christianity and Westernization which are described as the ‘hypnotism effected by alien cunning of today’. It is a well known fact that folklore has been used for such purposes and while the precise intention of the user is achieved, as a consequence, oral tradition and in this case oral literature gets salvaged and restored to a new form.

The proverbs collected in Ka Jingsneng Tymmen are related mostly to social life. They have an impact on the audience or readers as corrective measures and admonitions.

The book is structured in a very interesting manner in that the passages containing the proverbs address various social issues ranging from meal etiquette to conversation moderation, for receiving a guest to regulating demeanour for social acceptance. The scholar shall reproduce below a few choice passages under their functional categories to illustrate the point:

Proverbs dealing with meal/food etiquette:

- Wat ju lalot wat ju kangar jyndei,
- Ba ioh phi ioh pang lane ioh khrew ei;
- Wat ju bam seh wat ia ka ja hi ruh,
- Ba ioh raid noh phim khlañ santer shuh;
- Lada phi lalot lane kangar than,
- Ki briew baroh kin isih pynban;

Translation:

Never be greedy or gluttonous
You will invite illness, your health deteriorating
Even with rice do not over indulge
You will be stunted and will not grow much
If greed you shamelessly display
People's loathing you will invite.

This proverb teaches one to eat moderately and not to eat in excess. In the dialect (Nongtalang) a very greedy person is referred by this proverb U Bhoh Jynroh meaning a greedy person and only the stomach is big whereas he cannot grow much in height. Even this scholar's daughter of two years of age uses this term when someone asks her to part
with a food item she is enjoying. Since she did not want to share what she eats she scolds them “Hew, Bhoh enloh” (Jynroh) meaning thus go away you greedy person.

Haba ki tyrwa jingbam ei ei,
Da kham tyngkan wat jham madei;
Haba ia bam pai ne bam soh,
Lane kino ma ki jingbam baroh;
Wat ju iehnok sohhkaw ne snep hajuh,
Da tam noh bin wat ia kiba phret ruh;
Leit bret ne leit teh shabar ba teh niut,

Translation:

When you are offered something to eat
Restrain, don’t say yes too soon
When you partake of fruit or whatever food,
Don’t drop or litter grain nor peel,
Remove every crumb, every trace
Throw in the waste bin placed outside

Ka bamja khlieh khiew dei lano lano,
Jong ki rangbah ka iing jongno jongno;
Ka ia knieh bamja khlieh da ki kynthei,
la ki rangbah  shoh tyndep ka pyrthei.         II/XXIV.

Translation:

Rice obtained at the pothead
Belongs to man no matter who
Woman should restrain from a helping
Lest the world be confounded

The above proverb is to teach the manner of respecting male members in the family. The top portion of the rice pot is reserved exclusively for men and it is implied that only when he has eaten, the rest of the family may follow suit. This is a symbolic manner in which respect is shown. Some households still approportion the first scoop of rice from the pot for men especially in the evening when family members use to eat together. But in the morning this is not quite possible to observe especially in families where women also go out to work. There is no fixed time who eats first or last. As social life changes so also family life adapt to new changes and environment.

Haba bamja wat ju ënia ëmai,
Para ëng ne bad ki riewjan riewjngai;
Ba sang, u sohkhw ruh u tim ryngkat,
Ba long ruh kumba ië dait 'sew jynlat;                      II/XXXV.

85
Translation:

While eating never fight never argue
Amongst your family members or others
It is a taboo the rice grain will curse
For it is like dogs at a feast grabbing over leftovers

If one quarrel or fight while eating it is considered disrespect to the food which sustain us and also to God the provider. This proverb is used to warn especially the children when they quarrel or fight while eating.

This phrase “the rice grain will curse” is not a simplistic utterance and should be seen as encapsulating a whole cultural dimension of a society that had, in the past, revealed traces of deification or rice which is known, especially in the Ri-Bhoi area as Lukhmi. Elaborate ceremonies called *Ka Kroh Lukhmi* used to be held testifying to this. In fact, rice assumes a “from the cradle-to-the-grave” significance not only as an edible item but as symbolic metaphor for rituals, as a reckoner of fortune, prosperity and health.

Another interesting proverb teaches one how to sit and behave while eating:

*Haba bamja wat mlien shong pyang,*

*La mano mano kynthei ne shynrang;*

*Haba bamja wat shong jyrtieng kjat,*
La ha rieh ki briew ne la ha khmat;
Wat ju shong pied khohsiew haba bamja,
Kumba shong riam miaw tuh ja tuh dohkha;

Translation:

While eating don’t sit with your legs apart
Anyone women or men
While eating don’t sit with your leg outstretched
Alone or with others
Do not also sit crouched up and knees apart
Just like setting to trap the stealer cat.

Sitting posture while eating should be respectful. Sitting outstretched or legs apart is considered as being in bad taste and a misdemeanour. If anyone sits in that way they are compared to laying trap for the cat.

Haba pdiang ja lane haba ai ja,
Wat ju ai suh ia ka pliang ba 'm ju bha;
Da rah pynjem mian ia ka pliang sa ai,
I'u mai u Trai ba long kumba dud skai.

II/XXXVII.
Translation:

Whenever you are taking or serving food
Don’t slide the plate for it is rude
Lift it with grace then give
Or God will scold, at it is like sending away the bewitched

Conversation:

R.S. Berry has also documented and put into writing sets of adages which are meant to guide ways in which conversation and social interaction ought to be carried out:

Wat ju kren ki ktien sniew ho hep basang

Translation:

Do not spout foul words young one, for it is taboo.

This proverb is often used by mother and elders.

In a visit this scholar made to Bah Ton’s, a neighbour’s house, who is also incidentally a very resourceful informant at Nongthymmai, Shillong, while we were sitting on the verandah his seven years old nephew Ricky was playing marbles with his two friends. The boy suddenly became angry and uttered two unmentionable words. Bah
Ton stood up and called him inside, scolded him at first, and then calmed him down and then he uttered this proverb.

‘Wat ju kren ki ktien sniew ho Ricky, basang’

This proverb is applicable to children mostly.

For adults something which is applicable to adults can also be found in Ka Jingsneng Tymmen:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wat ju mlien ki ktien pohrati,} \\
\text{Ba ioh ki briew ki kynshi ki kdeu kti;} \\
\text{Wat ju mlien ho ka ktien tim ktien tla,} \\
\text{Ba ioh phi sah ei sa ka thuh khana;} \\
\text{Wat ju nang ju shait, ka ktien kiat tien smai,} \\
\text{Ba ka sang ha khmat U Blei u Trai.}
\end{align*}
\]

Translation:

Do not accustom yourself with bad words
People will sneer and point finger at you
Do not abuse, curse or castigate
For you will earn bad reputation
Refrain from taking oaths and swearing
For it is a taboo in front of God.

Another proverb related to this is:

\[ \text{La ki ktien khlemraiñ kham buhrie̱h pyngngen,} \]
\[ \text{La ki long ki badei ruh wat kham kren} \]

Translation:

Scandal and embarrassing words conceal
Even if they are true do not reveal

Another proverb related to conversation is:

\[ \text{Wat ju marmlien lamler lambaid ka ktien,} \]
\[ \text{I' u sei ki briew i' u thylliej shisien;} \]
\[ \text{Wat ju lamler i' u hap i' a ring saiphla,} \]
\[ \text{I' u pawraiñ madan ruh kha ma kha;} \]

Translation:

Never be untruthful and lie
Or your tongue will be plucked out
Never tell lies, lest you be dragged to face eyewitnesses
Shame and dishonour will befall on you there and then
Do not be untruthful, refrain from lying
For you will be likened to the black crow

A liar is compared to a black crow. Lies and liars are objects of censure everywhere. The adage “ab ūng taplup khiew ranei” (a black crow covered by black earthen pot) is derived from an etiological narrative which seeks to explain why the crow is black.

The tale runs thus:

After the creation of the earth God gave all creatures their own places to stay. At that time the bull was allowed to stay with God. God was very fond of the human being, so he sent the bull to the earth to man, to tell him that God wishes him well and that it is his command that man should possess good health and be prosperous, and for that he will not have to work hard to appease his thirst and hunger, as he will have to keep only one grain of rice in a pot big or small and the pot will be full.

So the bull set on its journey to man, on the way the crow (white at that time) stoop on it and pecked at the insects on her back, after that she asked the bull the
purpose of its journey. The bull was very pleased with the crow, and so he told everything about the command of God. The crow was jealous of man and so she told the bull not to tell the God’s commands but instead he should curse him so that man becomes sick and full of miseries and he should eat more and work hard and never become satisfy. The bull then forgot God’s command and when he met the man he delivered what the crow asked him to say. When he returned to God, God was very angry with him for neglecting his command and for obeying the crow. God took up his stick and poked his mouth so all the upper molars fell down. Then again with the stick he pushed the bulls’ ribs, and ordered that from now on he should serve man to lessen his miseries and be man’s beast of burden. So from that time the bull came and stayed with man, and from that day it had no upper teeth and its left rib is always depressed.

As for the crow God took a black earthen pot with a lid and put the crow inside. From that time the crow obtained its black colour.

Till now when children see the crow they used to call out using this rhyme:

Tyngab ba beiĩ iãu Blei
Shah tap d’u khiew ranei

Translation:

O mocking crow, you deceive God
You are put inside a soot-black pot
The person who tells lies is always warned with this proverb:

'Peit ioh kylla ab 'long tap lup khiew ranei'.

Proverbs about truthfulness and the value of keeping one's word are also found in the *Jingsneng Tymmen*:

*Watju mlien kylla shuh la ka juban,*

*Wei la kren pyndep la eh ne la tan;*  

Translation:

Never go back on your promise, your word

Once spoken, fulfill it, whether its easy or difficult

With the Khasis, 'Ka hok ka juban lak’ or righteousness and promise are very important and once word is given it should be accomplished.

Then again:

*Watju tuh ju thom la ka kular,*

*Ha ban da ngam u kynphad per u nar.*  

II/XXI.
Translation:

Do not vilify and go back on your word,
Till cotton sinks and iron floats.

This means that one should always keep one’s word and not try to change what has been promised because if one tries to do so, it is like trying to make possible the impossible. The seriousness of the keeping one’s word is adroitly conveyed through the use of the metaphor which juxtaposities the physical qualities of iron and cotton.

Khasis used proverbs while teaching the children on how to welcome their guests or visitors. One should welcome their guests in their house by offering them seat such as the bamboo mat or wooden stool and when the guests are seated offer them betel nut and betel leaves.

The combination of betel nut and betel leaves occupy a central position in the socio-cultural and religious life of the Khasis. Its use is pervasive and, effectively, no religious ceremony or ritual is complete without it. It is no exaggeration that it symbolizes the rites de passage in the life of a Khasi. It is used as the easiest and most available offering to welcome guests, to greet them and also to bid farewell.

There is a very well-known myth that talks about the origin of betel nut and leaves, the outline of which goes:
Once upon a time, there were two men who were the best of friends. They were U Shing who was a poor man and U Nik Mahajon a rich man. Shing was married to Ka Lak. Shing used to visit his friend's house very often and his friend always gave him food to eat whenever he paid his visit. One day U Shing invited Nik to his house as he had not paid any visit after Shing's marriage and Nik also agreed. On the appointed day he came to Shing's house. Shing and his wife were overjoyed by their friend's visit, so Shing told his wife to prepare a special meal for his friend. But out of sorrow his wife told him that there was no rice to cook, Shing told her to borrow from the neighbours but she returned empty handed. U Shing was delirious with grief and shame as he had nothing to offer his best friend on his visits. Then he grabbed the kitchen knife and stabbed himself to death. His wife stunned with grief took the same knife and killed herself.

Nik was sitting alone in the drawing room but when no one came for quite a long time he went inside the kitchen to enquire but was shocked to see the dead bodies of his friend and Ka Lak. After recovering from the shock he examined the situation and then saw the empty rice pot on the hearth with the boiling water in it. He realized the situation his friend was in, that his friend had killed himself because he had no rice to cook and offer him. Out of grief and regret that his visit was the cause of his friend's death he took the same knife and stabbed himself to death.

That night, it so happened that a thief chased by a mob took shelter in that dark house. Fatigued because of running he fell into a deep slumber in one corner of the
house, when he awoke, dawn was breaking he was about to sneak out when to his horror he noticed the three dead bodies. He knew it was too late to escape unnoticed and he also knew that the blame would fall on him as the thief and the murderer and no one would believe his plea of innocence. As a way out, he too took that knife and killed himself.

Ka Lei Synshar or the reigning goddess viewed this event with sorrow and concern. She decided to solve this problem of welcoming and offering food for guests by introducing betel nut, betel leaves, lime and tobacco as the items of offering guests in every home whether rich or poor. Through her powers, the corpse of U Nik transformed into betel nut, betel leaf sprung from the corpse of U Shing, lime from the corpse of Ka Lak. Certain traditions also aver that tobacco sprung from the thief.

There are other proverbs relating to betel nut and leaves and how it is to be used:

\[ Haba wankai ki riewtymmen ha la iing, \]
\[ Wat pynleit thylli iarong ba ki kieng; \]
\[ To da pyntheb bad u kwai u tympew, \]
\[ Ban ioh jingkyrkhu ban man-spah man-pheu; \]

Translation: -

Whenever elders comes visiting
Their bags shouldn’t be empty while returning
Fill them with betel nut and leaves
You'll be blessed and praised and rewarded

It is tempting to point out here that a faithful adherence to these sayings nowadays would not be practical. Betel nut and leaves are now expensive items and city-dwellers could ill afford the luxury of their free dispensation. This might be applicable perhaps only in the War areas where betel nut and leaves grow abundantly. So what we can do is offer them to eat but filling the bag is not possible.

_Jingsneng Tymmen_ also has a number of proverbs dealing with household chores:

*Hikai ba phin khie dangstep phyrngap,*

*Pymmlien ban khie dang riew ka tyngab;*

*Lane khie noh dang riew u 'iar nyngkong,*

*Kynthei shynrang khmih la jingtrei lajong;*

*Phi tang shu khie thiah s/iew la ka ding. *

*Īa la ka kti ka kjat ruh to pynsting,*

*To khmih to āt la ka āing bad to sar;*

*Baroh kaba napoh lane ha bar,*

*Sa thet la ki kti bad bta la ki khmat,*

*Ba ka Syiem Lukhimai kan bud ryngkat;*

*Īa khiew shet khiew tiew wat ju ktah shuti,*
Translation:

Make a habit to rise early in the morning
In fact, just when the crow is cawing
Or get up when the rooster, the first time crows
Boys and girls be at your work and toil
As soon as you’re up light the fire
Be smart, be active, do not malinger
Look after your home, sweep tidy it up,
Inside outside clean it and scrup;
Then wash your hands and faces too,
The Goddess Lukhaimai will be with you
Don’t touch your pots and pans
Without washing your legs and hands
Then cook your rice and curry
Don’t ever eat cold rice.

Haba la kynih u siyar lai sien,
Wei phi la khreh to wat ju kylla dien;
To leit tong la ka um tong la ka wah,
Da khlieng la khiew la pliang wat shu tong sah,
Phi wat ju shong kli kti syaid ding pynlat,
Joh sin ei ki briew kum ka miaw ñiangmat;  

Translation:

After the third crowing of the rooster
Start at once for your work do not linger,
Go fetch your water
Do clean your vessels not just fill it
Don’t laze around the fire side
People will taunt you, call you ailing cat.

Wat ju pynmlien ban pyrsad ding kynsan,
Ba ioh sied peiseh ia ki ba hajan;
Wat mlien biah pashait haei haei,
Ba ioh ka leit sied pymban ia kiwet;  

Translation:

Do not kindle the fire abruptly
In case the ashes will soot those sitting near by
Never ever spit just anywhere,
In case it falls on someone there.

The Khasis are very particular about every action. There are many instructive ways on how one should sit and posture oneself whether at home or outside.

The proverbs:

- Wat mlien shong lyngngeit ba kylla jattuh,
- Ha ka leit ka wan ruh kylla khatduh;
- Wat ju pynmlien ban bamja pymsuki,
- Ha ban da leit jingleitt ruh ba ‘oh lap sngi;  

Translation:

- Don’t always sit on your rump for you’ll become lazy
- Wherever you go and come you’ll be late
- Whenever you eat don’t be extra slow
- Because wherever you go you’ll be late.

Slow risers and slow eaters are never appreciated in Khasi society.

- Wat ju shim ju ai da lyndet ba sang,
- Ba long kum ka kam snaïap niam lyndang;
- Wat ju ai shim khap shynriah ti,
Ba ioh kha kap ne kha khun ar tylli.

Translation:

Do not take or give anything from behind
Because it is like the ghost’s work who had no last rites
Don’t take or give anything between your fingers
Or you may get twins (one boy one girl)

It is a Khasi belief that having twins is not very auspicious especially if one is a boy and another is a girl, a phenomenon called kha kap because they are considered to be husband and wife. In the olden times if the twins are of different sexes they had to separate them i.e. not allow them to stay in the same place. One should be sent far away either with relatives or friends. Nowadays, this practice has changed.

Wat ju marmlien ka kti ban shin kynthet,
Kumba leh ka matti shrieh i sait met;
Baroh ia ki kynja jingbuh jing sat,
Da lei lei wat ju mlien riad da ka kjat;
Wat ju mlien ruh de ban shu jam khyllad,
Ja kiei kiei kum ka akor mrad.
Ja ki briew ha ba iaid wat ju ryngkang,
Ba khlem akor, ba sang ioh ki ioh pang;
Do not ever snatch things with your hands,
As the monkey is wont to, it is ill mannered
Things that may be strewn around
Should not be gathered by feet
Do not ever step over objects
This reveals animal-like behaviour
While walking don’t step over others
Sickness like discourtesy may befall
Never give or offer with your left hand
A sure display of grudging giving.

Translation:

*Wat ju ai wat ju shim da ka diang.*

*Ba ka akor ka sniew ne mangkariang.*

102
Whenever you see people near you
Don’t suddenly get up and walk
When other people are sitting or standing
Don’t pass by them casting a shade
Wave not your clothes, they are no flags
Hold them bend a little and walk
While walking rub not like the cat’s tail
Be quick to relinquish your seat to your betters.

This scholar was present during the use of the above when she was attending the naming ceremony of her friend’s daughter at Madanrting. As part of the rituals, boys and girls were busy distributing rice powder, and this scholar was sitting with Mina whose daughter Jani, a fifteen year old girl was also taken up by this activity. She was unmindful of the way her shawl and jaiñkyrshah or traditional Khasi apron was in disarray. When she came to offer powdered rice to the group of women with whom this scholar was, her mother uttered the above.

'Jani wat iaid kawut jaiñkup jaiñsem
Da syndong sa iaid kham dem'.
Meaning that the cloth should sheath and cover properly not letting it fly asunder and also that she should bend a little while walking in front of others.

Another proverb:

\[ \textit{Wat ia}di \textit{taperit khling khling khlang khlang ba pher} \]
\[ \textit{Ba sin ei ki briew ka langtuh kper.} \]

\textit{II/III.}

Translation:

Do not walk with eyes switching here and there

Folk will call you plant – stealing goat.

The implication of this verbal usage is a caution to walk without casting covetous eyes here and there and is reinforced by the image of the goat who before entering to maraud a compound to eat plants, always look hither thither, checking, as it were, if the coast was clear.

Visiting is a very important social activity which facilitates a close interaction between relatives and friends. It facilitates the exchange of news the inquiry and confirmation of good health and deepens family ties. The Khasi society is a close knit one and the practice of the social visit is almost mandatory with a regularity that is seldom found in other communities. When kith and kin do not visit then it is believed that something serious is amiss. Social visits again like other social practices find their
place in the Jingsneng Tymmen and certain principles are uncertain guiding principle are enumerated which are required to be followed:

*Haba phi leit kai ha ūng kiwei*

*Mynshwa ba phin kiew ha ūng ne nengpei;*

*Da ŋiad ki kiat ha bar ne dieng tyngkong;*

*Wat pat rung kylli shwa nyngkong;*

*Don briew ha ūng ne em, ap kin da kren,*

*Sa rung lada donkam ne shongkai myllen;* I/XV.

Translation:

Whenever occasion calls for a visit

Before you enter the house through the entrance

Wipe your feet clean on the porch

Precede your entry with a hail to the house

Wait upon a word, upon the answer

Then go forth to transact business or seek leisure.

This passage is aimed at inculcating respect for privacy. The person who enters another’s house without seeking and obtaining permission by knocking is considered ill mannered.

105
While visiting one should not over stay their welcome. This is also taught by the use of proverbs:

*Wat shongkai slem ha ūing ki briew borabor,*

*Ba ūoh ki sin ūiangbulot khlem akor;*  \[\text{I/XVII.}\]

Translation:

When in somebody’s house, linger not
Like the irksome ūiangbulot fly, buzzing non-stop.

After the visit is over, one still has to observe an etiquette:

*Haba mih noh na ūing jongno jongno,*

*Da ong ia ki trai yn leit noh ho;*

*Wat shu mih lyndet kyndam kum ba syam,*

*Kum akor mrad ne akor ksuid sniew tam;*  \[\text{I/XVIII.}\]

Translation:

When the visit you are ready to end
Be sure to tell your host that you’re going
Don’t disappear like the sulking spirit
To be gone without a human trace
We carry out our day to day social intercourse through conversations. A lively and dynamic society sustains itself through dialogue which is the basis of conversation. This very important social trait is given a treatment in *Ki Jingsneng Tymmen*. Khasis believe that conversations are grounds upon which character is based and judged, and therefore one must be careful about how one conducts oneself in these situations. A person who laughs too loud without any genuine reason is usually called a "Lang shngaiň ńiuhmoh". This proverb is used to caution such a person:

\[
\begin{align*}
Wat & \ ju \ shait \ eh \ jyn\text{-}dei \ ka \ rk\text{-}hie \ tahoh; \\
Kumba & \ rwai \ ia \ rk\text{-}hie \ ka \ 'lang \ shngaiň \ ńiuhmoh; \\
\end{align*}
\]

Translation:

Laugh not in the habit of the vulgar

Like the ribald song of the bearded goat

The above proverb is derived, it can obviously be noted, from the folk tale of the Bearded Goat.

At the time when the animals could speak and understand one another, the mighty tiger wished to eat the goat. But whenever the tiger tried to go near the goat, he always felt scared of the he-goat’s beard and the way the goat would move its head, swaying its beard and stamping its feet. The tiger’s desire to feast on it could not be fulfilled. But the goat was foolish and instead of being grateful for the deception he had
manage to create, started bragging and taunting the tiger. Furious the tiger decided to actually test the strength and bravery of the he-goat. One day while it was coming from the market the goat was singing and laughing loudly making fun of the tiger, and that the tiger was afraid of its beard and appearance whereas the goat had no strength against the might of the tiger. The tiger heard this and immediately lay in wait for the he-goat. As soon as the goat passed by the tiger pounced from his hiding and quickly finish it. From that time onwards, the he-goat usually falls easy prey to the tiger. This folktale serves to teach us that we should not take things lightly and to always contemplate the consequences before taking any action. The proverb is also a homily on the virtue of silence and discretion which implies the benefit of not opening our mouths when it is not needed lest our words land us in trouble.

La ki ktien khlem rain buhrieh pyinngn,
La ki long ki badei wat kham kren;
Wat ju mlien ban nang ban shait ka lorni,
Ba ioh ka shongsang ka long aitukhi;
Wat ju mlien ban kren sa ne ban leh sa.
Ba ka duh bor noh ka akor ba bha;

Translation:
Shade words of shame, concealed them,
Even if they ring true do not pronounced;
Make not a habit of gossip mongering
For this takes root inauspiciousness
Departs from sulky ways and actions
Lest civility is weakened.

Rabon Sing also collected proverbs to encourage the Khasi to take to agriculture, and handicrafts not only to work as labourers or servants but to stand on their own feet.

The proverbs:

To wat iai imsngi tang ha ka kitmong,
Ba ban pynbeit u star haduh dyngkhong;
Wat im jingmut jyndei tang ka bylla,
Ba bieit anna-antu noh khamakha;
Wat sngewbha shong thap bam ha ìng ki briew,
Ba jah jait noh de la i jong i rmsgew;
Wat leit hap ha ka shong mraw shong shakri,
Tôh pateng pakit kynnoh pohrati;
To sumar la ka jong ka rep ka ri,
To nangroi nang pa la spah ka jingshna,
Ban sei la ka jingmut bad ban ban man bha.
Translation:

Measure not the span of day only carrying loads on your back
The headstrap pressed heavy on your head like the stump
Do not dwell much on labourers' toil,
Reduced to stupidity you will be
Do not relish the food others give,
Self respect and demeanour you will forfeit
Do not get used slaving in other's house
You cast your progeny in bad light
Tend to your land, your flock
Work, manufacture with hands and skills
Make your own wealth, increase it
The mind becomes fertile and life prospers.

To encourage the people to take to business the following proverb is used:

To hikai ia la ka khaïi ka pateng,
Khun Khasi, khun War, khun Bhoi, khun Synteng;
Lada 'm bun baiseng ruh na lade hi,
Tangba iai minot kan roi suki;
Ka jingminot la mynno mynno ruh,
Iala ka bam ka dih kam ju pynduh;

Translation:

Learn to do your own business

All Khasi, War, Bhoi, or Synteng,

Even if capital is not at first sufficient

By hard work it will accrue,

Devotion to work is the answer,

Work will provide your foodstuff.

To khmih thuh wat na ki nongwei nongar,

Da kumno ban wan jia ka kem ka lar;

Da khalai biang ha la ka jingmut,

Kan biang thik ka long briew na kut sha kut.

Translation:

Do watch and learn even from outsiders

The way the divination shells fall

Apply your mind, play accordingly,

Prosperity will follow from beginning to end.
There are proverbs which contain gems of information about the traditional systems of measurement. This scholar also feels that these figure in the collection because the collector was acutely aware that these traditional reckoners would slip into oblivion as a result of the introduction of the metric system brought in by the colonial administration:

Proverb:

Haba die ba thied wat ju thew pap,
Da ka pylla ne ka jingdiang jingap;
Ba'm ju neh ka kamai la phi iohnong,
Ba ka shet ka phon lade da khongpong.
La phi thew phi wet da ka pruh ka tda,
La phi niew da ka hali ka kynda;
La phi die laka ha ka khiew, ka ktang;
La phi die lyngbung ha ka kriah ka shang;
To leh hok to leh beit ha rieh ha paw,
I'u bamsap l'i pyrthei, iu duh soh khau.

Translation:

When buying and selling use honest weights
Whether it is the scales or plate
Dishonest profit will not endure
It deceives and devours itself
If you measure by hand or by finger
If you count in fours or fourths
If you sell in pot or bamboo vessel
If you sell in bulk by the basket
Be honest whether in the open or in the dark
Lest you lose all you have and starve.

Dress code and behaviour also comes in for comment through these adages. Let us examine a few:

To lehkhuid ryntih ia ka met bad ka riam,
To leh beit ryntih ka kam bad ka niam;
Naba haba tngit ka met ne ka riam,
Ja jingmut jinglong ka kjor ka kliam.
Naba haba wat ka kam ne ka niam,
Ka jingim bad ka jingsuk ruh ki siam,
Haba khuid synlar ka met bad da ka riam,
Haba beit shida ka kam bad ka niam;
Ju long khiah krat pyngngad nabar hapoh,
Ju poi hok poi blei ha ki kam baroh.
Translation:

Be equally clean in your body and attire,
Equally particular in work and worship
For if body and attire are dirty,
The mind becomes dirty and weak.
For when the work and worship are weak
Life and happiness do not root deep
When body and attire are clean
When work and worship are straight
One will be healthy inside outside,
Blessings will be there in every work.

The *Jingsneng Tymmen* as have been illustrated contains a wide range of topics which are being dealt with through proverbs, adages and proverbial sayings. While the effort that went into the collection of these verbal usages is indeed of stupendous significance, it must be pointed out that there are some of these which are not relevant and acceptable any more at the present day. Some have completely outlived their usefulness and many others have become fossilized due to their sheer impracticality. Let us look at some of these:
Proverb:

Haba shem nyngkong myndang mih na üng,
Ia ki bym biang ka main phi dei ban tieng.
Bad to pdam leit noh ha kata ka sngi
Ba sang lane ba duh ioh nong ioh ni.
Ym tang basing neb a duh nong duh ni,
I'u hap ka pang ka iap ha ka lynti.

Translation:

When you leave your house and accost one,
A person who lacks in human fullness,
Abandon your journey
It augurs ill and bound to imperil
Countenanced in a calling for loss
Ill health or worse befalls then I say.

Clearly one can discern the impractical nature of the adage not to speak of being politically incorrect with regard to persons with special abilities.

Ia ki kynthei wat ai huspai jyndei,
Ba kim tip satia ia ki nia pyrthei;
Ba ki sniew noh ka akor long kynthei,
Ba ki i'aumud ban said thala madei;
Ia ka iap ka im kim lap kot pyrkhät,
Kim tip hangno ka pung hangno ka mat;
Long sang long pap ban ai lan biěñ ia ki,
Ba kin die tad noh la ka jing tip sngi.  

Translation:

Be reserved with liberties to women
For worldly wise they can never become
The womanly grace will degenerate.
For they will unreasonably argue and castigate;
They won't dwell on seriousness of life.
They won't know what is right and what is wrong;
It is a curse to give them too much liberty
They may be wont to sell their dignity.

This particular passage contains the strongest overtones of male chaunivism and is without a doubt unacceptable. The Khasi society is one in which the woman enjoys more privileges than in any other ostensibly because of the matrilineal system. Gender parity is very much in existence and women are doing as well as men in many professional fields.
The retention of posture and the art of composing oneself in the face of adversity and opposition is a quality that needs to be cultivated because it is only through a calm demeanour that one is able to overcome obstacles. Anger and irascibility is denigrated while maintaining of composure is praised. Let us consider the following passage:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Wat ju mlien khong khong wat ju mlien iriang.} \\
&\text{Ba ioh shun ei u kamon kadiang;} \\
&\text{To long jemnud to long ba pasiang,} \\
&\text{Ba kiwei ruh ia phi kin long kylliang;} \\
&\text{Ha ka ktien ha ka kam wat ju laplah,} \\
&\text{Ioh ba hangta shen kum kylla prah;} \\
&\text{Ioh ba hangta shen kum kylla prah;}
\end{align*}
\]

I/XXIV.

Translation:

- Do not be irritable and easily ired
- Else you find an enemy to your right and left
- Be gentle and good natured
- Others will pay you in kind
- In words and deeds don’t rush unchecked
- Lest the winnowing basket be overturned.

The last line is imbued with a folk metaphor which uses the image of a traditional item used in agricultural operations. The item in question is \textit{U Prah} or the
winnowing basket which in the Khasi folk context is understood as the equivalent of the cornucopia symbolizing plenty, the overturning of which is considered to be inauspicious.

Avarice also comes in for castigation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wat ju leit rhah ìa ka jong kiwei,} \\
\text{Ba ìoh ka daiñ dong ei la ka pyrthei;} \\
\text{Wat ju mlien bishni ìa kiwei ki briew,} \\
\text{Ba ìoh pakhuh ei ìa la ka khohsiew;} \\
\text{Wat ju pymlien khapnap khapbit jyndeí,} \\
\text{Ba ìoh khangdong lade ei ka pyrthei;} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Translation:

Do not long for others fortune
You’ll wreak and ruin your life
Do not be jealous of other people
Lest it it turns back to your own knee
Do not be too stingy
You might spoil your destiny

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wat ju peit shin eh ìa ka spah ki briew,} \\
\text{Ba ha ka jingmut wan shoh ka basniew;}
\end{align*}
\]
la ka spah kiwei wat ju iai ijalap,

Ba i'U kylla tuh, kylla nongpynpiap.

Wat shukor wat thok ba long-pap long-sang,

Ha u Blei ha u briew, kynthei shynrang, II/XVIII.

Translation:

Do not cast beady eyes on people's wealth
Wrong ideas may grow from this
Talk not of others' wealth
Lest words turn to looting and murdering
Don't lie and betray for it is wrong
In front of God in front of man, women and men

Excess comes in for censure in every society and in this case, the excess of activities of amusement and recreation are singled out for caution. Therefore, angling, bird trapping, gathering honey and hunting are mentioned as detrimental if they are pursued to excess.
Io(h) man symphiah la jaiñ thymmai jaiñ rim;
Wat ju imsgii than tang ha ka wad ngap,
Ba io(h) poi kynsha man ka lum man ka khap;
Wat ju iai jyndei tang ka beh mrad,
Ba shem kynsha eh ki briew man ka lad;

Translation:

Do not get addicted to fishing and angling
You’ll not have rice even though curry
Don’t be too fond of trapping birds
Clothes will be tattered
Don’t get habituated to searching for honey
Dangerous hills and dales you’ll chance upon, unwary
Don’t get too used to hunting wild game,
People will frequently meet you in every path

Wat ju ai huspai ia ka kiad ban bang,
Ba ha ka ka um ka ding ki don lang,
Wat ju leh khlaïñ eh ia ka um ka ding,
Ba io(h) phi hap pat lyndang pat pyrshing.
Wat bam wat dih aphin, shandu, mudot,
Ba ka met ka sdot, ka rta ka lyngkot.

I/XXVI.
Translation:

Don’t ever desire to taste alcohol
For it has in it both water and fire
Don’t dare to face against water and fire
Lest you’ll fall on your back on your side (get drunk)
Don’t take opium and other strong drugs
The body will languish and life shortened
Don’t ever make gambling a habit
In it there is sucking bottomless pit
Do not habituated yourself with licentious life style
Lest your health and wealth will be ruined

Marriage is sacred to the Khasi. It is a bond which united not only the two but also the relationship of the two families. Proverbs are also used to counsel the young on the institution of marriage.
To caution those who have not attained marriageable age:

\[\text{Wat ju \(\ddagger\) poikha lyngngoh thamula,}\]
\[\text{Ka dei ban da tip da u k\(\ddagger\)i u kpa;}\]
\[\text{Wat ju \(\ddagger\) poikha bad ki jait bym bha,}\]
\[\text{Hynrei para ba \(\ddagger\)abiang pylla;}\]

Translation:

Do not get married in a hurry
Inform your uncles, your father
Don’t marry into families which are suspect
Choose someone who’s equal in every respect

\[\text{Wat \(\ddagger\)a poi kha bad ki bym dei kynsi}\]
\[\text{Ba long ka ba eh ka sang ka synri}\]
\[\text{Wat ju \(\ddagger\)ajan khah bad ki ba \(\ddagger\)m \(\ddagger\)a dei,}\]
\[\text{Ioh kumno re shoh tyndep ka pyrthei;}\]
\[\text{Ioh poi pynban sa da ka sang ka ma,}\]
\[\text{Ioh sah jit kynshi, shi junom bura}\]

Translation:

Do not marry those forbidden by custom

122
It is a sacrilege beyond compare
Intimately do not mix with those not allow to marry.
For you might succumb to temptation
For it may lead to sacrilege
For your reputation will be begrimed.

Wat ju ūai ūa kajia shi lāng sa khun
Kumba ūa shong samsia para nongshun
Ba ka lukhimai kam ju bud rynkat
Ka atlukhi te ka bud ha kti ha kjat

Translation:

Don’t bicker and fight within the family
It’s like living with enemies
The goddess of wealth (Lukhimai) will not stay together
Rancor instead will follow and take hold

Wat ju peit itynad įano įano
Khlem da tip i kur i jait jongno;
Da kylli bha įi kur bad ka įasang
Īa kren ka ktiem da thew kyntrei shyrangs

123
Translation:

Do not woo any one
Without finding what clan he/she comes from
Inquire with care in case the match is taboo
Speak with respect and regard female or male

Before you appreciate and like the opposite sex you should first enquire about the clan the person belongs to because if one desire to marry, knowledge of the clan and relationship should be examine as for the Khasi marrying within the same clan is a sacrilege and un-forgiven. If that happens both male and female will be outcaste. So consideration and calculations of relationship before the match is a must.

_Haba ki kum tamai iania shi tnga,_

_Wat ju leit pynshah shkor ki kmie ki kpa._

_Lada kmie ne kpa shynrang ne kynthei,_

_Wei rap ktien rap bor hangta la bhei._

Translation:

When couple have a misunderstanding,
Parent’s shouldn’t be interfering;
Parents of either boy or girl,
If they interfere it will get worse
This proverb is used to caution the parents not to interfere when their married children quarrel with their spouses, because if they do so things become worse.

The Khasi women are held in high esteem in the society and family. So the proverb:

\[
\text{Ka kynthei ka long kum ka Lukhimai}, \\
\text{Ka nongri ūng, nonglum khīh lum kamai}; \\
\text{Ka kynthei ka long kum ka ram-ew ūng}, \\
\text{Ka nongpdiang kynthup ka ka doh ka shyeng}; \\
\text{Ka kynthei ka long kum ka kiaw u ngap}, \\
\text{Ka nangiewbih da kaba ka shu sngap}; \\
\text{Ka kynthei ka long ka buom ka sngi}, \\
\text{Ka nangtyngshain ha ka jinglong sotti}; \\
\text{Ka kynthei ka long kum ka muhor ksiar}, \\
\text{Bad ka long kum ka jingkynshew dap thiar}; \\
\text{Ka tang shu pyrishang kynih 'iar rynküh}, \\
\text{Ka ijot jong ka ka la sep jynduh}; \\
\text{Ka ūng ka sem rhù ka jot khamakha}, \\
\text{I kur, i jait rhù jynjar na kata.} \\
\]
Translation:

The woman is like the goddess Lukhimai
She keeps the earnings of the family
The woman is like the foundation of the home
She accepts both the body and the bone;
The woman is like the mother bee
She is more fragrance by keeping serene
The woman is the glory the sun
She glows in her purity
The woman is like the golden seal
And she is like the .... Treasury
When she tries to crows like a cock
Her honour is destroyed completely
The home too is destroyed …
The kith and kin also suffer.

Though the woman is held in high esteemed yet there are limitation to her freedom.

Proverb:

Ko kynthei haba kren iano iano,
Lady when you converse with any one
Do not smile by displaying your teeth
As long as you don’t know the person
Excessive laughter you should suppress
For it will cheapen your womanliness

**PHILOSOPHICAL PROVERBS:**

The Khasis believe in the existence of one God the creator and it is the belief of the Khasis that he comes to this world to earn righteousness as the often quoted proverbs goes:

\[ \text{Ngi wan sha pyrthei ban kamai ia ka hok.} \]
We come to this world to earn righteousness.

Another proverb which is central to the Khasi belief and teaching is:

To iëit ialade, burom iala kiwei,
Ba phin suk ha pyrthei, phin suk h 'u Blei;

Translation:

Love thyself and respect others
Peace you will find on earth and with God.
This could be seen in the light of a cardinal teaching of the Bible:

To iëit iala u paramarjan kumba ialade

Translation:

Love thy neighbour as you love thyself.

Another proverb:

U Blei u pynmih kawei ka jutang,
Batang iala u marwei kin mane lang;

Kumta ma phi baroh shynrang kynthei,
Kynmaw ban mane beit tang ia U Blei;

Translation:

God has one rule ordained,
Only Him, must worship all;
So all you male and female,
Remember you must worship only God;

This scholar shall now take up for discussion proverbs which can be considered traditional in the sense that they are used and applied in their didactic sense or as censures, criticisms and reproach. Another aspect of this study is the attempt to analyse them and to gauge their interactive linkages with the cultural dimensions, mental, organic or social, in whence they have emanated. These proverbs will be detailed and their poetic and aesthetic qualities duly highlighted. The textual and contextual matter will be elicited and thoroughly explained.

Like most proverbs current all over the world, Khasi proverbs are metaphors drawn from daily life or the observation of nature or are terse summaries of experience. Khasi proverbs are often made on the models of already existing types, and like all folklore material, has many traditional variations, which are aimed at the summing up of
everyday experience in getting on in the world as it is. Inherent in many Khasi proverbs, is the counsel to avoid excess.

Proverbs are very effective in exercising social control in most societies, and their applicability can be traced in the 'from the cradle to the grave' span of any human. This is also true of the role of proverbs among the Khasis.

This researcher is fortunate, in one sense, to be working on Khasi folk literary traditions, because being Khasi herself, the language is native to her, and the risk of misinterpreting its usages is virtually non-existent, whether dealing with tales, myths, proverbs, songs, legends, slangs or colloquial speech. There have been many instances of collectors of folklore succumbing to an ethnocentrism, by explaining a proverb in one culture through the citation of a, supposedly, equivalent proverb from their own. This leads to an almost criminal distortion and misinterpretation of texts, rendering the meanings unclear and vague.

The study of Khasi proverbs that the scholar has made has not merely been the recording of texts, but the investigation of the contexts, documentation of informer's valuations, assessing the appropriateness of occasion and place, and marking the intensity of user - addressee relationship by testing the tensional variances. Among the Khasis, proverbs are used as admonitions, commands, lessons and corrective measures.
A particular family in Upper Shillong with which the scholar stayed was a fairly large one in which there was one middle aged unmarried man who was staying with the owner of the house who was his youngest sister. One evening after meal while sitting warming ourselves by the fire, this scholar engaged in a conversation with the hostess and the topic of discussion let to her brother, the man in his mid fifties. Also presents were an elderly aunt of the hostess who described the unmarried man as Patloi khlem syrwing which means a pot with no ring. A Patloi is a big earthen pot designed to store water and it is placed on a syrwiang which is the ring made of woven bamboo slivers. Without the syrwiang there is every chance that the patloi would topple over and cause the water to spill. In that sense, it does not only position the pot and stabilizes it but also lessen the friction that the bottom of the pot would have with the surface on which it is placed. This is a highly imaginative use of kitchenware to describe human traits, the patlois symbolizing man and in this case the hostess’ brother who is unmarried and who has remained so because he has not been able to find the syrwiang which is the ring. It goes without saying that the round syrwiang has Freudian overtones which fits the description very aptly. The syrwiang conceived as the female would provide stability and keep the pot in an upright position so that it purpose for holding water is served. It also would have acted as a buffer which will cause less friction between the patloi or the pot and the surface which in this respect can be seen as the society and its norms. This proverb is comparable to the English A Rolling Stone Gathers No Moss.
Another very interesting proverb which emerged the same situation with the same gentleman as a reference is *U 'larryngkuh Kynting Mawria*. The translation of the proverb is the Pebble Tossing Rooster this was used again by the elderly aunt of the family to describe the individual. When the scholar enquires as to the significant of the proverb the old woman replied by saying: “have you ever seen a rooster strutting about in the barn yard especially when there are hens nearby?” Then the import of this verbal usage occurred to this scholar. The rooster would often be seen scratching the gravel in the barn yard and he would do this with considerable force causing small stones to come loose from the soil. This will be followed by the rooster pecking at the soil and this would attract the hens to come near him. This phenomenon must have struck discerning human beings who would then construe the picture as if the rooster is trying to lure the hens with the supposed morsels of food he has scratched out of the ground but in reality what the rooster scratched out was only a small stones and pebbles. Hence the proverb.

The informant went on to elaborate the gentleman in question is given to such behaviour by pretending to be well to do while his natural indolence has landed for him only seasonal jobs.

On the use and application of the same proverb this scholar has queried other informants about the accuracy of the explanation given by the man’s sister and these individuals also agree to it by and large although one informant says that the adage could refer to the children’s game of pebble tossing. Pebble tossing is a children’s game, which involves the tossing of an assorted five pebbles in the air, and catching them, one
by one, in the palm of the hand. It then progresses to the next stage, where the player is required to catch all the pebbles tossed, on the back of the hand. A count is, then, made. The adage ridicules the person, who, generally, wastes his time, dressing up and being conscious only about his appearance. He is regarded as only good in playing children’s games, instead of taking on a man’s responsibility. The comparison with the cock is striking. The cock conveys the image of strutting about as he scratches the soil for food. While doing so, he kicks up a lot of dirt. This image is seized upon by the folk, and placed in the context of the adage, as “pebble tossing “, reinforcing the idea of such a person’s juvenile behaviour.

In these villages this scholar also came across proverbs which are literal statements of unknown coinage that are used to suit a range of situations. Examples of injustice are keenly observed everywhere and during her stay, this scholar was presented with the opportunity to witness a Dorbar Shnong meeting which had specially been convened in response to an accusation made by a person against another. The sum of the matter was that the accused, a needy father of five had borrowed large stocks of food from the shopkeeper, the man who lodged the complaint with the headman or rangbah shnong and the poor man could not repay his debt. While the matter was settled through the intervention of the village youth group, yet many people gave vent to their feelings by using many expression, one of which this scholar found very apt for its proverb – like quality. It goes:

*Ka ain ka tban ia u duk u suk u riewspah u thom ia ka ain.*
The law hounds the poor while the rich hounds the law.

Good character is revered, above all, by the Khasis. The character of a person finds expression in his work, language, dress and attitude towards other persons. The proverbs of the Khasis are reflections of this reverence for good character as a considerable number of proverbs will certify. Very often, situations having social, legendary, mythological and historical bases are drawn, as comparisons, to reflect a particular quality of a person, whether good or bad. A good number of comparisons are drawn from the natural world and used with striking effect in the human context. There is a lot of didacticism in these proverbs, and this is used to the maximum, in which vices are portrayed and their consequences elucidated. The sayings take erring persons to task for abrogating social and moral norms and etiquette.

Proverb:

Uksan rympei rem dorbar

Translation:

One who talks big near the hearth, while being silent in the council of elders.
This implies that one has to be as good as his boast. It is common to hear people airing their views presumptuously in the privacy of their own houses, especially, in front of a surrounding to which he is able to dominate, for example, children, junior relatives, lackeys or admirers but once in the company of their superiors or even peers, the vaunt becomes empty, as he is unable to even open his mouth. The sheer wisdom, eloquence or astuteness of the council of elders, overwhelms the braggart into silence. In this proverb, superficiality, hollowness and short-sightedness, is ridiculed. An equivalent of this in the Nongtalang dialect is *Chutang Pohkynndur* or debate inside the corridor.

Proverb:

*Thang ktung ruh ym pat nang, u lah sdang wad khynraw.*

Translation:

He cannot even roast dry fish, yet he has started looking for a sweetheart.

The youngster is overly anxious to find a partner in life and get tied in wedlock. However, he is cautioned against his rashness and is appropriately put to a test. He is given some cured fish to roast over an open fire. As expected, he over-roasts the fish so that it burns and he is immediately termed as inexperienced. The process of roasting fish calls for skill and training, which does not immediately come to those who are still young. It is also a pre-warning to the youngster about the travails of a married life, which an unprepared boy would find most unpleasant. The roasting of a fish is a
symbolic projection of the test of experience, and once a young man qualifies by successfully prosecuting it, he is deemed fit for the nuptails.

Proverb:

*Wat leh biej pyrthei sian mynsiem.*

Translation:

Ignorant outside cunning inside.

An equivalent in English is *simple in face and dangerous in heart.* A person who pretends and acts as if he knows nothing of the world and seems to be very innocent, but in reality he is very cunning and cruel. This proverb also leads to the evolution of the new proverb commonly used nowadays 'biej samla shalak kurim' or ignorant of boyfriend/girlfriend but expert in spouse searching.

While this scholar was traveling by City Bus from Iewduh to Nongthymmai, two college going girls were sitting at the back seat. They were talking loudly that the scholar can not help but listen to their conversation. They were talking about another friend who was not with them and it seems that, that friend had eloped with someone. From their conversation it is understood that their friend was very innocent and a shy person, it seems that they never knew that she had a boyfriend. So this news of her elopement came as a shock, and one of them expressed 'kato te ei, ka dei ka biej samla
shalak kurim’ meaning that she is really an ‘ignorances in matters of boyfriends but on spouse smart’.

Being late or dallying is a source of irritation to people. Women who have the habit of dallying are reprimanded with a proverb.

Proverb:

*Wat long tiew lalyngi pep shad*

Translation:

Do not be like the *lalyngi* flower who missed the dance

This has a reference to a folktale where Lalyngi, a variety of orchid, was invited to a great dance of the beasts and men after the *Diengiet* tree was felled, restoring light to the world. Ka Lalyngi was so obsessed with beautifying herself that she completely lost track of the time. When she reached the dance arena, she saw that the place was empty, the dance having concluded. This term can be considered to be synonymous with the English Late Kate, in usage only, the context, being entirely different.

One proverb which is directed against those having delusions of grandeur or having false pride is:

*U ba jnɡi dien jat masi.*
Translation:

He who swims in the imprints of a cow’s step.

The significance is that a man having delusions of grandeur feel as if he is swimming in a great lake when he is actually wading in the water which fills up the imprints of a cow’s step. While the whole world is having a laugh at the man’s expense, he is blissfully unaware of that, lost in his own world of self-aggrandisement.

A closely related proverb is:

Wat kiew dieng sohmynken

Translation:

Do not climb the chilly plant.

This proverb addresses a common issue, and more or less, mean the same thing. A little elaboration is necessary here. The chilly plant is small, averaging three feet in height and the idea of a man climbing it, strikes us as ridiculous, since it is not possible.

However, the covert meaning is directed to those having false pride. It is a wallop on self-importance.

A rash person is cautioned with the adage:
Wat bam ja khluid.

Translation:

Do not eat hot rice

A person before acting has to reflect and weigh the pros and cons of his actions - he has to anticipate the consequences. The rash man would act without contemplating about the implications of his actions. He is only interested in getting a thing done or getting his way. The two opposing forces of rashness and sobriety are linked in a binary process, inherent in the question of end result, or consequence. This is very close to “look before you leap” in the European context. The Khasi folk uses an immediately available item to underscore the validity of the proverb - rice, an item of food which is common. A person, who is rash enough to act thoughtlessly, is likely to attract grave consequences as a result. Just as a man who eats hot rice hurriedly ends up with a scalded mouth, so does a rash person find himself in an unpleasant situation.

Philandering and sexual promiscuity also attract social censure. A philanderer is castigated with the adage:

Proverb:

Wat long phiang phiang bam sih.
Translation:

Do not act like the _phiang phiang_ bird.

_Phiang phiang_ is a type of bird which feeds on filth and decomposed matter. Interestingly, this proverb is exclusively applied to men.

All societies have their share of wastrels and pleasure-seekers. Such people are severely castigated, and among the Khasis, the proverb used to chastise them, is this:

Proverb:

_Wat long puit Tangkuli kynjih mawsiang_

Translation:

Do not be like the rock - leaping locust

Thus, a pleasure-seeker is termed as _U Puit Tangkuli Kynjih Mawsiang_, or the rock - leaping locust. This type of person does nothing but attend feasts, musical and pleasure meetings without giving a thought to his means of livelihood.

A woman of loose character is termed _Ka Kha Ujai_ or the egg-spattering fish, a variety of fish which is always sold at cheap rates in the market.
Extreme sensitivity of character, which makes one tend to give in to breaking down easily and crying, is reflected in the comparison made of such a person to the *lang-iam baid*, a type of plant which folds up immediately, upon contact with a foreign object. The plant/grass gives the impression of effecting an emotional breakdown in the act of folding up, and closing upon itself.

Proverb:

*Lakhie lung ka dieng dyngkhong.*

Translation:

Greening of the stump.

This proverb is a direct reference to an old person usually female who goes out of her way to look and act young. This adage is applied with a sense of derision and it occurs several times in literary works where we find a character or characters behaving accordingly. It may be through dress, behaviour or action. A mode of behaviour which is common is when the person in question seeks and sometime is rewarded with the company of a man. An equivalent of this proverb in the Nongtalang dialect is *Derew a diar* or youthful for the second time.

A widow or a divorcee is referred to by a highly metaphorical adage.
Ka Kha İap Saw.

Translation:

A half-dried fish.

This reference needs a detailed elaboration. This preparation of fish is very common. It is severed, exactly from the middle and hung to dry in the sun. However, the fish cannot be preserved for a long time as it might get spoilt. The very act of splitting or severing the fish from the middle suggests the act of coitus or sexual penetration. Often is the caution to bachelors to stay away from the kha İap saw, who are thought to be adroit in attracting and ensnaring males. This variety of dried fish is, truly, a delicacy, requiring time to prepare.

A widower is, likewise, referred to by an adage of Piscean association.

The adage:

U kha thli tyrkhong

Translation:

Dried eel.

It does not require a lot of imagination to see that the eel is a distinct phallic symbol. Further, the dried eel never putrefies or spoils, even after it has been kept for a long time. It is, undoubtedly, very tasty and served at meals as a delicacy. The overt
insinuation is that a widower is regarded as matured and seasoned, and therefore, is endowed with a skill, matching virility, possessed by the experienced in sexual matters.

Tragic lovers, whose parents are hostile and indifferent to their children's love partners of choice are found all over the world, the most celebrated, perhaps, being Romeo and Juliet. Among the Khasis, such lovers are referred to by an adage.

The adage:

*Ka Sohlyngem, U Sim Rynniaw*

Translation:

The wild green pigeon, the long-tailed drongo.

The *Sohlyngem* is a large green pigeon dwelling in the darkest parts of the jungles and *U Sim rynniaw* is the drongo, with a long, drooping tail. According to a tale, the wild green pigeon was in love with the drongo, but the parents of both the lovers were opposed to it. Finally, due to parental pressure, they had to break up and separate, the wild green pigeon flying away to the darkest parts of the jungles, while the drongo forlornly cries for his lover. The wild green pigeon is seldom seen where the jungle is sparse. Only her cries are heard from the darker parts of the jungles.

A woman separated from her spouse, and who expects him to return to her, deluding herself all the while, is addressed to with an adage.
The adage:

*Pha lah long kum Ka Pashandi dem lor khah*

Translation:

You are like the water cane-dwelling turtle.

This adage owes its origin to a folktale, which goes like this:

Once there was a young she-turtle whose name was Panshandi. She was very lazy. She spent all her time swimming in a pool without giving a thought to work. At night, the moon used to come down and bathe in the pool. He met the turtle and they got married. He made her rich and dressed her up in fineries. He was fond of her but did not like her indolent ways. He repeatedly told her to mend her ways and asked her to busy herself doing some productive work. However, his advice was ignored. Tired of her laziness, he gathered up all the wealth, clothes and fineries, he had heaped on her, and departed for the skies, leaving her behind. Panshandi, realising that the moon was serious about his intention to leave her, pleaded with him, to no avail. Finally, she found herself all alone, and was left with no other alternative, but to lay among the water reeds, and furtively, peer upwards whenever the moon passes across the skies. As a folklore scholar this tale is especially striking because it can be studied as a version of the star-husband tale cycle.
A wise and upright man who tries to avoid mixing with the common and the uncouth is called: *u tiew knup Mawiang* or the lady slipper orchid. This orchid is found in isolation, and in the clear spaces of a tree or branch.

Great and venerable people are referred to by the adage *Lur Mangakara* or bright and luminous stars, while handsome men are referred to by the adage *Nai Khatsaw Synnia* or moon of fourteen nights, meaning a full moon. *Tiew Pathai Khubor* or a good scented flower also has a reference of a good and respectable person.

To a Khasi honour and good character is very important and it is considered that once it is lost, life ceases to have any value.

Proverb:

*Wei la duh ka burom, la duh ka jingim*

Translation:

Once honour is lost, life is lost.

Some people are born with the gift of the gab, articulating sweetly, without meaning a word they say. They are able to sway opinions by their persuasiveness and characteristic volubility. Such people are censured with a proverb.
Proverb:

*Wat leit long khlein la thang, jwat la bam.*

Translation:

Do not be like the meat which oozes fat when roasted, but tough when chewed.

The metaphorical construction of this proverb is excellent. In fact, in the original version, meat is nowhere mentioned, but the implication is strong. Words mouthed by such persons convey the impression of being highly palatable, but has no substance as the person does not mean a thing he says. Here, the words are depicted as meat which is tough to chew and is unpalatable. This proverb is widely applied to politicians and men of public affairs, and is used freely and most advantageously. A similar proverb in the War Jaintia dialect is *Cheke tiat ran jong trai* translated as the prawn that moves backwards.

A person who tries to justify his wrong doings is reprimanded with a proverb:

Proverb:

*Ka miaw ka ju mlien ban tap la ka eit*

Translation:

*The cat will always bury its excrement.*
This caution, in the form of a proverb, draws example from the habit of the cat to bury its own excrement. This proverb is striking because it brings into focus the wayward behaviour of the person, which is symbolised by the excrement, with all its unpleasant odours. Having committed the mistake, such a person tries to cover it up by justifying his/her action(s).

Proverb:

*Wat bam hati kit kulai*

Translation:

Do not eat like an elephant and work like a horse.

This adage is used as a caution against living beyond one’s means.

To complain about one’s lot is a common human characteristic. People who are given to this tendency are also censured with a proverb.

Proverb:

*Ka ud kum ka tlaì nili khat synrum*

Translation:

The trash - carrying palm leaves are forever complaining about its lot.
Broomsticks are made of palm leaves. Though regarded as inconsequential, broomsticks are one of the most useful household items. They are generally placed in a corner of the house, and often hidden from sight. They are brought out in the open only when the house needs to be swept. In contrast to the very important task it is being used to perform, it is neglected, and relegated to an insignificant position. Clearly, certain individuals, whose contribution to a family is regarded as negligible, have no other way of expressing their resentment over the slight, but to complain endlessly.

The above proverb is akin to the adage used to describe a person who endures pain and illtreatment quietly. Such a person is called a *diengshaindoh*, which means a block of wood, upon which meat is minced.

The equivalent of this in the Nongtalang dialect which goes by the adage *U Musiang Nohkrah* or a rock where weeds are thrown when they are cleared from the betel nut groves. Such a person who earns this sobriquet endures all the pain and blame even if all these were not his fault.

An interesting proverb is used to describe a man who feels proud because of the false interest females' show in him.

Proverb:

*Wat sngew kum u diengbyllan*
Translation:

Do not feel like a byllan stick.

_U Diengbyllan_ or a byllan is a rounded length of wood tucked under huge stones to facilitate their movement from place to place. These stones are brought over huge distances to be erected as monoliths. Appreciating the natural sentiment of the Khasis for megalithic culture, one can divine the meaning of this verbal usage. Megaliths are erected to commemorate great events, and are used to mark funerary and sacerdotal ceremonies. The very stones are revered. Therefore, it is concluded, that the _diengbyllan_ takes pride in being able to contribute, in such events by helping to transport the stones, little realising, that it is only being exploited, and that after it has outlived its usefulness, it is no longer needed, and is thrown away. In other parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, this same aphorism is used to describe a scapegoat. In this case also, the comparison is obvious, but far less creative.

This scholar would like to point out that the tree and wood metaphors are widely used in the construction of proverbs. However, positive qualities are denoted by tree as a living entity while negative qualities are often depicted through the used of the wood metaphor, wood as obtained from the tree and understood as lifeless and only good for use a commodity. To prove this, let us consider the term used to describe a determined man. Such a person is referred to as U Diengsning or the oak tree. Here, the adage assumes a religious connotation, as the _diengsning_ is central to some aspects of Khasi
religious ceremonies and is used as the central support for the Íing Sad or the ceremonial house. This scholar is aware that the Diensning used as the support of the ceremonial house is obtained from a living tree and would like to point out that even as a support it is considered to be living.

Attempts to reach the unattainable also come in for criticism in a maxim:

Wat long kyndang kwah

Translation:

Do not be a kyndang kwah

*U Kyndang kwah* is the name given to a person who desires and pines for the impossible. The maxim owes its origin to a practice of the Khasis, especially in the rural areas, to purchase meat using a length of reed to string the pieces of meat with. This kind of transaction was resorted to long ago due to the non-existence of the accepted and standardised metrology. As a girl, I saw it being used in the, then, remote village of Rangthylliang (in Pynursla), in the precipitous *War* country, in South East Khasi hills. The transaction is based on the factor of how much of the meat can be accommodated in a reedstring. One can, then, imagine this kind of transaction taking place, resting, as it were, on a very loosely-defined kind of metrology. It can be further imagined that some precedents of conflicting measurement might have taken place, involving a buyer who
might have wanted more than the standard dole, which abrogated the accepted and followed practice. Hence, the evolution of the adage.

One who is fond of interrupting in conversations he knows nothing about is cautioned with a proverb:

Proverb:

\[U\text{ thyllie } kum \text{ ka } blang \text{ jiah } sla \text{ mluh}.
\]

Translation:

The long tongue of the salt-licking goat

The goat, with its long tongue, grazing indiscriminately, certainly evokes the picture of a person meddling with his unwanted commentaries.

An inquisitive person is reprimanded with an adage.

The adage:

\[ Kum \text{ ka sim lai dieng} \]

Translation:

A bird of three trees she is.

\[Sim-lai-dieng,\] literally means, a bird of three trees. This is a reference to persons who go about the village gossiping and rumour-mongering. The comparison to a bird, hopping from one tree to another tree, chirping away does, actually, convey the
Every society has its share of those unpleasant characters who are involved in stirring up trouble and inciting people with the object of causing animosity. The Khasis call such a person *U Kohsiang pynshad thma* or, the war-causing old man fox. *Pynshad* is not a happy translation of causing for the simple reason that the word, literally, means to cause a dance. Perhaps, the association of dance is used in the adage to bring out the effect the machination of old man fox to cause animosity, and the tremendous pleasure he derives out of it. This proverb is based on the tale of how the fox brought about the enmity between the tiger and the wild boar. The outline of the tale is this: the fox is a trickster figure known to the Khasis as Old Man Fox. One day he went to the tiger and drops hints that the boar was speaking ill about the tiger, but that he (old man fox), being too much of a gentleman would not repeat the very words as they were too unpleasant. Angered, the tiger throttled the fox and made him confess everything to which old man fox did in the foulest tongue, saying that all those insults came from the boar. Taking this to be true, the tiger roared and asked old man fox to fix a day for a fight to the finish with the boar. Gleefully, old man fox went to the boar, and again, after the usual pleasantries, sighed heavily and told the boar that the tiger had been calling the boar a coward in front of everyone, and that if he dared, should face him on an appointed day. The boar was furious and the day was set. Watched by old man fox, the tiger and the boar fought savagely until the boar managed to kill the tiger. Thereupon, old man fox
started insulting the tiger, calling him a braggart and proceeded to fawn and pet the boar whom now, he respectfully calls uncle. When the boar had departed, old man fox feasted on the tiger, mocking him all the while.

A person who annoys people by lingering on and on at someone’s house is castigated with a very colourful proverb:

Proverb:

Wat leit long lang sahkut um.

Translation:

Do not be a goat left behind on a river bank.

There is no greater annoyance than the person who overstay his welcome. There are many such people who ignore certain social etiquette, without giving a thought to people’s occasional need for privacy. Such people are likened to the goat which has strayed away from the flock, in his foraging for food. During sudden downpours of rain, the river gets swollen, and while the flock has crossed over, guided by the goatherd, this particular goat is left behind, on the other side of the bank, being unable to cross it now, because of high waters.

Proverb:

U muid U shu ang um
The water buffalo with mouth wide open

A person who always depends on others for help and never tries to do or achieve anything by himself or herself is referred to by this adage. This is due to the common belief that the water buffalo never takes water even if it is thirsty.

This researcher conducted field work in the Muktapur village of Jaintia hills district during September 2005. The idea was to get additional data from villages surrounding Nongtalang. The former place i.e. Muktapur has areas which are virtual enclaves having mixed populations of Khasis and Bangladeshis. While the larger section of the Khasis settled there maintain that they are Indians, yet there is a section that are flexible in their attitude in respect of their nationality. They do not choose to make their positions clear as to whether they are Bangladeshis or Indians. This is because some of them enjoy financial benefits from both the countries. This section would exploit maximum benefits from both governments and this would earn them the proverbial censure: *Tuta Ba A Kheloi* or the two container/bowl pecking parrot.

This is a descriptive way of explaining away the conduct of someone, in the case, a group who, while maintaining a divided loyalty to two authorities, utilize benefits derived from both to the maximum. The figure of the parrot used here is a deliberate design purported to convey the idea that the parrot will mouth with routine obedience whatever the keeper and feeder wants it to. This has a relation to the European turn of
phrase "to parrot" which means to repeat the words or imitate the actions of another
without thought or understanding. The parrot, as a pet is usually tied to a wooden or
bamboo frame to which two maloi or containers, one containing food and the other
water, are attached. The image of the parrot alternatively dipping its beak into the
containers could have inspired the proverb.

Proverb:

*Peit ioh me long 'si samkhmut.*

Translation:

Be careful lest you become an ox with a nose ring.

This adage is aimed as a warning to a man who always runs after rich girls with
the hope of marrying into her family, obviously to have an easy life. The warning is
that he should not show too much of eagerness lest he becomes a henpecked husband.

Proverb:

*U sohjew um ju thiang.*

Translation:

Lemon will never become sweet.

We can infer, from the above, that it is impossible to make lemon sweet, or to
expect it to be sweet. The covert implication is that the unredeemable remains
unredeemable, despite attempts made or hopes nourished to effect some change in the person concerned. It is very close to the European “a leopard will never change his spots”.

Drunkenness and alcoholism is a universal social evil and is widely prevalent among the Khasis. It has wrecked the lives of many. Like everywhere, the drunk is severely castigated in the Khasi society also. The general admonition against drunkenness is a proverb very much current in the villages, as well as the city.

Proverb:

\[ \text{Wat long hwa pei} \]

Translation:

Do not be a punctured pot.

The metaphorical significance is obvious. No matter how much water you pour into a pot with a hole in it, it never fills up.

A ready-witted man with a gift for sharp repartees is likened to \textit{U Peh Sylli} or a bamboo spike. The sylli is a variety of bamboo found in the southern slopes of the Khasi Hills. In all probability, the reference to this type of bamboo, as a comparison to quick-tongued persons, is reflective of the fact that people hailing from these areas are
regarded as resourceful in the way they translate their ideas and feelings in the spoken form.

A speaker or singer who is able to mesmerise people by his forceful speech and sweet voice is termed *U Jalyeit*, referring to a small green bird, dwelling near streams and rivulets, and gifted with a shrill, melodious voice.

The last born in the family is called *khun khlieng kpoh* or, the womb-rinsing-child. This implies that, with the birth of this child, the mother’s womb is finally washed and rinsed, a suggestion that she would be unable to bear children again.

A rumour-monger and one who invites himself or herself to people’s houses, with the intention of gossiping about people’s affairs, is termed *balia siang sdieh* or the frying ladle. The symbolism can be understood when we consider the degree of activity involved and the noise generated, in the process of frying a food item in sizzling oil. The ladle is seen as the catalyst of such activity and noise. An extension of the image is also seen, in that, the person finds the subjects and topics under discussion, thoroughly savoury to her inquisitive nature. This termed is usually applied to women.

Parasitic children, who, despite having secured means of livelihood for themselves, and yet, who depend on their parent’s support, are severely castigated with a proverb:

*Wat long khun jynrein, mih na ka doh, dait ia ka doh*

Translation:
Do not be vermins, coming out of the flesh, and eating it.

An unruly child who threatens to assault his parents is cautioned with a proverb.

*Wat long khun kbeit shapuloit*

Translation:

Do not be like the sparrow hawk cuckoo of the tit.

The reference to the birds in this proverb is interesting. The tit is a small bird which hatches the eggs of the sparrow hawk cuckoo. It also feeds the young hawks. While doing this, the tit just hovers over the nest to drop the food into their open beaks, because it fears the young hawks. This is because young hawks often show signs of aggression, reacting naturally to their predatory instincts. The analogy provided by the proverb is drawn from a natural setting, and it is seen to be very apt.

Lazy children who finish up their parents resources are called *Ki khun tham* or crab children. The comparison is drawn from the practice of young crabs which cling on to the mother crab’s body, and eat it, until only the shell remains. Then only they venture out.
A boy who has dissipated his youth early in his life is likened to U siej liar ngot, which means a broken or stunted young bamboo. This needs no elaboration, but the imagery to convey the allusion is poetic.

A subtype of the proverb genre which this scholar has identified are those which are loosely called weather proverbs relating to general climatic and weather conditions, especially those having a direct bearing on the agricultural practice of the people. There are proverbs which are a direct spin off of the climatic conditions and significantly, they relate to one singular natural phenomenon – rain. The Khasi Hills boast of two places, Cherrapunji and Mawsynram which hold the record for being the wettest place on earth due to the highest incidence of annual rainfall. The Khasi word for rain is slap which is obviously anomatopeie and there are scores of suffixes to the word slap or rain that describes the different kinds of rain, ranging from rain content to rain impact and so on.

Let us consider the first one:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ther Ther lapbah lapsan} \\
\text{Ban dup pait ka dieng ka maw} \\
\text{Ban shong shit ka shnong ka thaw} \\
\text{Ban dup bha u kba u khaw}
\end{align*}
\]

I collected this four line verse from a group of children of Pynursla and strictly speaking, they understood this as a song with a well-defined tune. I have analysed this
verse and I see that it is a well-constructed proverb with metaphorical statements interwoven into straight statements.

Translation:

Strike great rain, strike big rain

Let the stone break, let the tree cleave,

Let the village rejoice and exult

Let paddy, let rice thrive.

To give adjectives such as great and big to rain comes only natural to natives of Meghalaya who experience rain which is connotative of force strong enough to “break” stones and “cleave” trees. The verse informs us that the village is expectant of the burst of monsoon so that their agricultural calendar can fruitfully begin and thus ensure for them a bountiful year. Let us go back to the verse. Slap or rain in Khasi is masculine and so is stone and tree. These words are preceded by $U$ the masculine determinant. However, in the verse ‘maw’ and ‘dieng’ or stone and tree are understood as female qualified by the feminine determinant ‘ka’. Rain is supposed to ‘break’ and ‘cleave’ the stone and tree, actions that requires $u$ tyrnem and $u$ sdie or the hammer and axe, two very masculine implements. In fact, there two implements are pseudonyms of the penis. The fact that what the actions that are naturally and usually attributed them are applied to rain indicates the sexual intent expected of rain that is to impregnate so that the paddy becomes big which naturally would produce enthusiasm in the village as would an auspicious event such as a wedding or child birth.
While this scholar collected this verse from children of Pynursla village, the scholar must add that this verse is not unknown to her because when she was a young girl also, she had heard snatches of it. After collecting and verifying the lyrical content, she conducted a phone survey calling ten individuals of different age groups to get them to reproduce the verse on phone. Some of them, while pleading having forgotten some of the lyrics, volunteered to sing into the phone and all, this scholar repeats all, mouthed "ka maw" or stone (feminine) and "ka dieng" or tree (feminine) totally deviating from "u maw" or stone (masculine) and "u dieng" or tree (masculine) as they would have done in ordinary conversation.

That the verse is highly metaphorical and is made up of, at least, a couple of proverbs is without doubt, as it functions thus, in its application to situations. For instance, this scholar have heard people asking "is it raining outside?" and when the answer has been "ka ther!" or "it strikes!" to which another query would follow, "How?" and the reply would come, "Enough to break the stone, cleave the tree!".

During the rainy season, it is sometimes possible to observe heavy shower of rain falling on a bright sunny day. This phenomenon is called slap praw and considered to be inauspicious which involves death through accident or murder. While some may write this off as superstition but occurrence is used as an example of the uncanny shows the proverb quality it has. For example the epithet as sinister as u (s)lap praw, with its simile last, is used to describe a person or situation of unnatural disposition. Interestingly, I have come across a slap praw like situation having a causation origin of involving the
marriage of old man fox and mother-in-law quail. This is a spin off of a popular trickster tale, the outline of which goes thus – *Slap Khyndai Miet Khyndai Sngi* literally Rain of Nine Nights and Nine Days is the torrential kind experienced during the month of June which incidentally goes by the name *Jylliew* or the deep month. This indicates that during this period of the year water bodies attain great depth. This differentiated from the *Slap Hynñiew Sngi Hynñiew Miet* literally Rain of Seven Nights and Seven Days by a comparison.

The observant cannot fail to notice the Khasi penchant for the odd numbers, nine and seven being at the centre of the Khasi myth of origin.

Another strange appellation of rain is *slap boi ksi* or the rain that breeds lice. This kind of rain is the very fine drizzle. Children especially young girls are cautioned to stay out of this shower. I have heard an urban wit refer to this kind as *slap sexy* which is purported to arouse amorous desire and in this it bears resemblance to a couple of western country songs this scholar has heard such as *Listen to the pourin’ rain* and *I love a rainy night* by Jose Feliciano and Eddie Rabbit respectively.

A person who is inclined to raise his voice with the intention of producing favourable action but actually does not elicit suitable response is asked not to behave like *U pyrthat rkhiang*. Pyrthat Rkhiang literally means Dry Thunder that is thunder that does not bring rain.
Carrying the discussion on inclement weather let us turn our attention to some other aspects. The Khasis call April *U laiong* or the black month. This becomes clear when one has seen the annual stormy conditions unleashed during this period unfailingly. This is attributed to *U Kyllang* a deity in the form of a towering single rock the size of a small mountain. The Kyllang rock is situated in the West Khasi Hills and, till today, rituals are performed to appease the deity. The belief is that U Kyllang goes to visit his wife, the *Umngot* river, once a year and always in April and in his haste to meet her, he wreaks destruction on whoever lays on his path. Therefore, every year, there will be reports of villages and houses decimated by cyclonic winds. This year, 2007, the victims are the village of Ler Khla, Laban Saro, Nongthliew and a few other villages in West Khasi Hills District.

April or *laiong* is called the black month in Khasi Hills where marriages are forbidden, the buying or laying of house foundation is studiously avoided. However, in the War-Jaiñtia areas of Meghalaya where this scholar comes from, these taboos are not observed during April. One of the causes would be because the people of those areas have their own name for April which is *Pnui Ria* and there is no association of U Kyllang the deity with the month at all. But what they believe is that during the month of July or *Pnui Hynthlai* marriages or any religious ceremonies should not be performed as it is the month in which the animals mate. It is also believed that the bite of a dog or snake during this month is very dangerous if immediate precaution is not taken.
A person who is quick to anger is likened to U Kyllang. By extension, someone who is always in haste is cautioned not to be like the Langthari. Langthari is possibly a derivative of Kyllang and Langthari specifically refers to stormy winds.

A person with a pleasant personality is referred to as Er batemon batesi which means a breeze.

A person who has been through rough times in his or her life is called dieng khrwert lyer or the storm twisted tree signifying obviously the trials and tribulations he or she has had to contend with.

Lunar phenomena also provide good examples for proverbs. A handsome man is called ‘Nai Khatsaw Synnia or Moon of Fourteen Nights referring to the full moon. It is on such days that the cultivator religiously avoids planting and sowing.

When an individual is sorrow stricken his fate is described as ba ngen u lnai or the moon has entered referring to the last stage of sky illumination before the moon disappears. The phrase the moon has entered is very interesting and much reminiscent of the discourse of solar mythologists.

Meghalaya is the Abode of Clouds and clouds have been perceived in various ways. The tourism industry has in the past, used clouds to market the states tourism potential through one advertisement saying “Meghalaya where the clouds come home”.

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Indeed, I have come across tourists especially from other parts of the country who travel to Meghalaya and Cherrapunji specifically to observe clouds.

Khasis generally call cloud lyoh but use different names for different kinds of clouds. U Lyput is the very dark cloud that presages rain while lyoh iong is rain-filled clouds. I have been informed that in the Bhoi areas of Khasi Hills black cloud is called Kynjiang and this is also used to describe sinister looking individuals.

On certain sunny days we obtain a sky filled with small tufts of clouds scattered all over which in climatology is a phenomenon called cirrocumulus. When this happens, people say the cat is ploughing the sky. This has a reflection in a lullaby which goes:

\[
\begin{align*}
Ab \ Jon \ Ab \ Jon \ & \text{thung saru ka miaw} \\
Han \ thung \ & \text{ka ileh, Han thung ka ileh} \\
Noh \ lut \ & \text{sha khyndaw}
\end{align*}
\]

Translation:

The cat is sowing Job’s tears
To what end, I say to what end?
They all fall to the ground.

An analysis of this song at this point is needed. The song is addressed to a child who is asked to look at the sky and an explanation is given. The singer, an older
matronly woman obviously brings in an element of logic destroying the fantasy she at first introduces by pointing to the futility of the action since maize seeds will fall back to the earth. This is the inverted world of folklore inhabited by a ploughing cat and sky as an arable tract. There is a subtle suggestion that moisture is needed for a successful sowing because cloud has to condense to rain and that Job’s tears can grow only in soil.

An interesting extension of the rain proverbs has to do with flash floods which are caused by torrential rains. Flash floods called *Umsaw* (literally red water) occur suddenly and are extremely dangerous. Their destructive powers are especially heightened by the mountainous terrain of the Khasi Hills. *Umsaw* or flash floods are used to describe the sudden accumulation of wealth by the individuals. Such persons attract derision with a proverb – *Khie spah kum ka umsaw* or wealth is raised like a flash flood. The verb raised is significant because it marks the rise in level just as the level of a river or stream.

While in the area this scholar came across another proverb used as a chant by a group of children who directed this uttered censure at a girl who was one of them:

*lóng pali, lóng ngar*

*Ha ka lóng, ha ka runar*

Translation:

Black face, blacky black
Once black, twice naughty.

It was a fact that the girl, the object of censure was rather dark-complexioned but as to her naughtiness, this scholar cannot say for certain. What the scholar found interesting was the use of phrasal adjective “black face, blacky black”. Such descriptions are very common in Khasi the words blacky black being denoted by the onomatopoeia ngar. The onomatopoeia ngar qualifies the degree or shade of black and its application is possible only when facial complexion is conceived. This is different from the other black onomatopoeia descriptions such as long ngaiñ or long ngii whose application will be tenable only to nightfall and weather conditions respectively.

The proverbial censure has, perhaps its origin in another chant also popular among children. When a crow is sighted children, even in urban areas, chant:

*Ka tyngab ba beiñ ña u Blei*

*Ka shah tap d' u khiew ranei.*

Translation:

O mocking crow, you deceive God

You are put inside a soot-black pot.

This chant is a direct spin off of an incident in a Khasi myth. It must be mentioned that the crow was originally a white bird but after this incident its feathers all turn black till this day. The suggestion of the change in colour from white to black is of
course, a symbolic action which depicts the corruption which takes over the bird and this fits a stereotype found in folk imagination everywhere. This stereotype is also diffused into community psychology traces of which are found in literatures all over the world.

Black is mainly associated with evil and the belief has created its own repertoire of usages such as black magic, black arts, black mail and the historical infamous black hole tragedy of Calcutta where hundreds of people died as a result of being shut in a small confined place. There are however, attempts to redeem the black pejorative metaphor and these exercises have been largely political in America as a result of post Abolitionist reconciliation efforts. The phrase “black is beautiful” was coined to resist this stereotype. Coming back to the incident of the crow it must be pointed out that the crow in put in the pot not for the purpose that is usually associated with that particular vessel, that means, there was no intention of cooking the crow and it appears that the punishment meated out to the crow was deem sufficient to marked it as a creature that had violated divine decree and it was also part of the punishment that this mark of transgression depicted by the colour black be borne by the bird to posterity. The fact that when even children learnt to associate the crow with lying shows the depth of level that this psychological construct has in the community. Strangely there is also a saying of, most probably American usage, in the English language which is “eating crow” which implies admitting being wrong. Among the Khasis it is generally held that crow meat is unpalatable and despite the Khasi fondness for meat especially bird meat the eating of crow meat is almost unknown.
Khasi society is matrilineal, with clans tracing their descent from the *Iawbei Tynrai* or grandmother of the root (i.e. the root of the tree, of the clan), and the descendants are called *Kur* or clan. The Khasi religion, as well as the society, is a family and clan-oriented one. Not having any formal or institutional structure, it does not expand beyond the confines of close familial observance. The kinship structure is marked by a clear distinction that is made between the clan of the mother and the father which obviously is another one. One is said related by blood when one is under the clan of the same name. Therefore, in order to express this closeness of blood related by which signifies belonging to the same clan the adhere phrase

*Ka snam te ka snam*

*Ka ksuit te ka ksuit.*

Translation:

Blood will be blood

Pus will be pus.

The reference is obviously to point out the purity of connection by blood as opposed to the purported impurity of connection by pus, a bodily fluid associated with disease and ailment. This usage is not unknown to this scholar although the Jirang area where field work was conducted gave, her the opportunity to hear it being used in
relation and response to an actual occurrence in the village where issues of family
loyalty were raised.

Another example of this kind which is a straightforward statement shorn of any
metaphorical adornment or import is Ka Lalot ka ialam sha ka Lanot which is translated
as greed leads to grief. What makes this usage quotable is obviously the rhyme scheme
of the two determinants of the statement Lalot and Lanot in the Khasi language.

In the second phase of field work this scholar covered the villages of
Laitlyngkot, Lyngkyrdem and Pynursla. In these places also the scholar has tried to
study the context of proverbs use and of their function with reference to users.
Therefore capturing almost a real life situation for documentation of data is central to the
idea of contextual study. Market places and village plazas are very useful arenas for the
conduct of such investigation and many are the days and evenings when this scholar
collected some proverbs from such situations also.

Proverb:

*Bah Sohphan mano bit thit shano*

Translation:

One eats jackfruit while birdlime sticks to another.

The implication of this adage is that while one commits a mistake, the blame
falls on another person. During field work at Pynursla market, the scholar was sitting
with two ladies who were selling betel leaves. They were discussing about the non-
payment of their money by a woman from Shillong. One was blaming the other for the trust both the vendors placed on the unknown person. When their altercation became more heated another woman came and enquired as to the cause of all that row. At that time one of the two quarreling women said to the newcomer “You are also to be blamed, because you talked with that nongsor (person from Shillong) and therefore we thought you knew her and gave her the betel leaves without getting the full payment”. To this the woman replied, “Wa! Bam sohphan mano bit thit pat shano, ngam ithuh hynrei nga shu kren ia ka”, implies that she did not know the Shillong woman but only spoke to her on some other matter which had nothing at all to do with the transaction which had taken place between the two betel leaf vendors and the woman from Shillong. She felt that she was not a part of that scene and it was not her business at all.

An interesting proverb that the scholar collected from Dawki market which is in the War-Jaintia dialect is Khlia hoh airah which is translated as top of the basket. This refers to the practice of traders to keep the best quality products on top of the basket in order to attract customers. This does not mean that the seller is trying to pass off the item of sale in the basket through deceit. The basket would always contain good quality products but it is topped with the best of the crop. The adage used is to suggest that the perceived item is an indication of the good quality of what lies below unseen. It is aimed at encouraging the would-be buyer to be assured that he or she would be given their money’s worth. This is very effectively used to describe a person of character.
In folklore it can be observed find that animals vie with humans in securing positions of consequence through the device of assuming certain suitable characteristics. While history and literature are replete with examples of human beings using animal names directly or through denotations, in order to qualify his or her affinity to such an animal, folklore has made available a special space for the animal world to be appropriated by humans in order to establish a sense of family kinship with certain animal figures. Khasi folklore provides this connection by extended the application of human kinship terms or terms of endearment brought about by at purported family relationship.

The female bear is very often referred to as Mei Ngiem Lalu Bam Khun or the "child devouring Mother Bear" the devouring part being a trick played by a boy leading to that disaster. An interesting oppositional father figure is found in the squirrel who is termed "Pa Risang Bylla Bah Khun" which means "the child-back carrying father squirrel". This requires amplification which necessitates the reproduction and explanation of a folk chant sung by children attributed to an exchange between a hen and a squirrel:

*Ku Ku a sang
Ko pa Risang
Ale bylla bah khun,
Ko 'yi ar puh khun phan ai aii?
Ngan ai sohriew bam tlang*
Hangno uta u sohriew bam tlang?
La puh lut ka Tyngab
Hangno kata ka Tyngab?
La siat da u khnam.
Hangno u ta u khnam?
La thang hapoh ding.
Hangno kata ka ding?
La suit da ka um.
Hangno kata ka um?
Katei ... katei ... katei ... katei ...

Translation:

Ku ku a sang
O father squirrel
Come and carry my child (for hire)
O mother hen what will you give?
I'll give Job's Tears to save for the winter.
Where are those winter Job's Tears?
The crow had eaten them
Where is that crow?
Shot by an arrow.
Where is that arrow?
Burnt in the fire.
Where is that fire?
Doused by water.
Where is that water?
There ... there ... there ... there ...

Let us go to the action of the play song. The mother sits on the ground and places the baby on her feet with the baby facing toward the mother. The mother then moves her body, alternating between bending backwards against the floor and rising up to waist length and all the while, the baby is positioned on her feet with its back against the instep and the toes of the mother. This acts like a support for the baby. A rocking motion involving the feet of the mother which is alternated with her leaning back and straightening up is effected. The chant is sung in accompaniment to this motion and the combination of both, that is the movement and the play song produces mirth in the child especially in the last line of the song which is “there ... there ... there ... there ...” because as the mother mouths these words she looks up to the sky causing the baby to also follow suit and when this happens, the mother tickles the child’s throat. This causes even more mirth on the part of the baby.

Going to the details of the play song we see the hen addressing the squirrel as “Ku Ku a sang O father squirrel”. This is not at all strange since the Khasis use teknonomy, a system of naming by avoiding given names. Till date a father is seldom called by his given name but effectively called father of ... (using the name of the child).
This manner of speaking is widely prevalent and even the wife of the man uses this form of address. Some scholars have opined that the system of teknonomy was resorted to by certain communities due to specific reasons, and in the case of the Khasis it is “for fear of attracting the notice of evil spirits.”

This scholar ventures to say that this is due to the sacrosanct nature of the “jerkhun” or naming ceremony where an elaborate divination is conducted to obtain a suitable name which is agreeable to the divine forces. Combined with the regard the Khasis have for the spoken word, the frequent and sometimes callous and inauspicious use of the name would undermine its significance.

To come back to the chant, the hen says “come, I’ll hire you to carry my children”. The key word here is “hire” which indicates that the squirrel is not genetically the father of the off springs of the hen who asks him to help her. The hen is presented as a potential employer who offers wages of Job’s Tears as payment. When the squirrel asks the whereabouts of the Job’s Tears he is told that the same has been eaten by the crow. Once again we see that the crow is being shown in a poor light and this time we see it as a thief. To the question that he poses next, “where is the crow?”, the squirrel is told that the bird has been shut by an arrow. Here we see the intervention of man, and this can be emphatically stated because in Khasi tradition the bow and arrow are weapons, the use and skill of which is known only to human. To the next question which the squirrel poses he is informed that the arrow is burnt in the fire but the

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*Gordon, P.R. The Khasi. Cosmo Publication, New Delhi, (Rep) 1975, p. 188.*
song does not tell us who was responsible for this act or whether the crow was burnt along with the arrow. When the squirrel asks about the fire, he was told that it has been doused by water and further when the next logical question was put the hen’s reply was vague because it is possible to be vague about water, water being an element that can exist everywhere and anywhere. The hen which is the potential employee then triggers a chain of questions which actually is an attempt to establish the remuneration he seeks. However, we can detect a hesitancy or tendency to avoid the issue on the part of the hen who, in response to the chain of questions, launches a chain of responses. At the end of the chant we see the issue unresolved and ended on metaphor of futility.

It is interesting to take note of the various facets of community life which exists in chronological order of the play song:

Family ...(arrow), food gathering ...(arrow), hunting... (arrow), fire (element) ...(arrow), water (element) ...(arrow).

The discerning scholar can recognize the development of community life, community institutions and community responsibilities in the play song. The rudiments of jhum cultivation can also be detected. Another aspect is that the play song is a reflection of the hoarding nature of the squirrel through the mention of winter Job’s Tears. The song is also a commentary on the agrarian practice of many parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills where till not very long ago people in the villages work for a good part
of the year in order to stock up food supplies during the winter months. Therefore, till today, when a villager, especially in the Western parts Khasi Hills is asked:

“How is the harvest?”

The usual reply would be: “sufficient enough to see through the winter months”. This is what this scholar has observed and recorded as data during the work in West Khasi Hills.

To come back to the proverb father squirrel hired to carry babies is used to men who do not have children of their own but are made to shoulder the responsibility of caring for the children of others. This term is also used to denote a surrogate father. It should be mentioned at this point that the concept of “bylla bah khun” or hired to carry child is very much in existence and this scholar has obtained this information from individuals who had actually been engaged in this job when they were in their teens. As a point of bringing in additional interest in this study, the scholar, through an opinion poll conducted among urban children between the ages of three to six, can say with confidence that most children consider the squirrel as a friendly animal which could assume the place of the Teddy Bear in the psyche of Khasi children.

Like anywhere, parents are concerned about their children performance in educational pursuits. They never fail to remind them about sound preparation before examinations. At Laitlyngkot village during field work while staying with a family, I
over heard the mother of the house, Mrs. Stia Nongkynrih, aged forty two, grumbling about her children lack of seriousness regarding studies by using a highly effective proverb:

"pynsngaid ia u sniang ha ka miet sngi lew"

Translation:

Fattening the pig on the eve of market day.

Village markets are small and they are held once a week. Given the nature of village economy, a great major part of the week is spent in directing and consolidating efforts to be able to bear to the market the best produce which will fetch income. This proverb illustrated above is the complete negation of this principle as it implies that the person realizes only at the last moment to fatten the pig which intends to sell in the market. Attempts at fattening the animal will not produce the desired result in relation to the context this scholar encountered, the proverb is used to denigrate the practice, which it may be assumed was adopted by the woman’s children of cramming.

This proverb shares common traits with the English term “at the eleventh hour” which implies a realization that comes too late. Again, it must be said that this term is a spinoff of the legends of Faust.
Men in the Khasi family/society have a respectable position as the father in their wife's house and as uncles in their sister's house. The responsibilities are dual in nature and this trait is intrinsic to the matrilineal system followed by the Khasis. An adage which reflects this finds a place in *Ki Jingsneng Tymmen*: -

*U Kpa u balah uba iai*

*U Kñi uba tip ia ka iap ka im*

Translation:

Father the provider

Maternal uncle the ceremony keeper.

Collection of *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* was done by Radhon Sing Berry to a large extent was done in an oral culture that was still intact among the Khasis of the indigenous faith. The next section of the proverbs in this chapter was collected by the scholar in the traditional form. One may find that many proverbs mentioned above found place in the written form also. This is because proverb use is dynamic and not static.