CHAPTER – IV

EVOLUTION, CURRENCY AND USAGE OF PROVERBS

In every community, proverbs evolve and develop all the time being engendered in the verbal exchanges situation. Though the origin of proverbs is obscure, we must suppose that at some point of time, some individual formulated an idea in words or drew a lesson from a scene but the result was only a sententious remark or an instructive exemplification of a truth until tradition accepted the statement and while accepting it, adapted it in an inimitable fashion. Both the invention and acceptance are essential to make a proverb, and both ordinarily escape our observation. It is difficult to trace the origin of proverbs by the fact that the same theme and even the same formulation of it may occur to more than one person. There is a dynamic transference of usage from context to context such as occupation, age, area and gender specific and sometimes old ones are replaced by new ones.

Proverbs normally come forth in response to a situation in which a person feels called upon to offer a culturally approximate device to another. Proverbs are not part of conscious teachings or learning but they play an important role in socialization and personality formation. Proverbs often suggest what kind of activities one must pursue and what they should not. Proverbs in relation with day-to-day life are abundant in the Khasi society. They are used as admonitions, commands, statements, corrective measures, criticism and metaphors according to the situation and demand.
While it is accepted that proverbs acquire textual status when they are perceived by the community as collective wisdom authored by elders whose identity are not known any more, proverbs must necessarily purport to reflect the collective and anonymous wisdom of the community. There has to be, at least, a suggestion of a degree of antiquity. However, antiquity by itself is not a determining factor in the acceptance of a proverb. New ideas and new items require the creation of new proverbs. It will be the endeavour of this scholar to demonstrate that, as the pervasiveness of folklore is accepted, one should not hesitate to see its ever changing dimensions.

The proverbs that will be dealt with in this chapter are those that have lost many of their traditional contexts and have developed new ones. By developing fresh contexts and contents, they circulate through contemporary times as aspects of folklore. They testify to the continuity of culture. They reflect modern society with a much more varied cultural and educational experience where verbal exchanges are not restricted to established literary and cultural background, and spring from a bewildering variety of media. They are characteristically lively and diverse. They are thoroughly topical and relevant and present an amazing range of variety.

As a comparative subject, folkloristics is not the property of a particular people but of all humanity. In a comparative study of anything human, the important driving issue is to study what is constant and we know that what is constant is human nature and the variability can be attributed to the human potential for creativity. The interface
of these two in a given set of time creates what is recognized as tradition which is the very material of folklore.

This chapter intends to deal with these evolved proverbs which are dramatic, amusing, anecdotal and thoroughly effective as devices of social control. In a book co-authored by Peter J. Claus and Frank J. Korom, these folklorists make a very significant comment on the matter:

"Only if we wrongly conceive of folklore as something incapable of change and adaptability can we imagine that it would disappear".

Let us examine the proverbs:

The clan system among the Khasis is one of extreme importance and the bond of kinship is very strong. The clan takes precedence over all other considerations, and the relationship, especially in matters of life and death, is held almost sacred. However, there are instances or irresponsibility among some members of the clan, and those who take the clan's onus lightly, are denigrated with a proverb. This term evolved after the clans had multiplied and many sub-clans have spread to different areas and villages.

Proverb:

\[ U \text{ kurja, kurdo.} \]

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1 Claus, Peter J. and Korom, Frank J. *Folkloristics and Indian Folklore*, p. 21.
Translation:

Related to the clan only by rice and meat.

This is an obvious reference to members of a clan who remember kinship, and especially, the clan kinship, only in times of feasting. This is a reflection of the closeness of the clan system among the Khasis. It is clear, here, that even if some members of a particular clan default by not mutually sharing the clan responsibility, he or she, cannot be ignored, and has to be involved in any clan event. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that, say, a wedding in an affluent family would involve no less than five thousand people, a third of which are clansmen.

The proverb:

*Kur wah muna* (Pnar dialect)

Translation:

Clan of the hanging bag.

This adage is the equivalent of the standard of *kurja kurdoh*. To elaborate on this, when distant relatives pay a visit, they always bring something in their bags and these bags after their contents emptied are hanged on a nail. When they leave they take back the bag with them. Another point is that when distant relatives pay a visit which may be on a happy or a sad occasion, they always have their bags with them implying that they come from distant places and that their stay in the house where the event takes place is imperative.
Mostly all the proverbs in *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* are traditional, but a section occurring in the collection are found to have evolved from a particular phenomenon. This scholar has detected that the section which is directly attributed to a very important movement in Khasi society called the Seng Khasi movement.

The Seng Khasi was founded on the 23rd November 1899 by the 16 (sixteen) Khasi youths at Mawkhar with the aim to know and come together and to bring development among the Khasi and always to remember God. Another point is to work among the Khasi for the development and prosperity both spiritually and physically and to keep and preserve the Khasi teaching and manners as taught by the forefathers. Rabon Sing was one of the founding members who had written the lines in *Ka Jingsneng Tymmen* to encourage the Khasi to take to agriculture, and handicrafts and not only to work as labourers or servants but to stand on their own feet.

U Hipshon Roy Kharshiing says: “The Seng-Khasi has undertaken various activities of the nature outlined above for the all-round development and welfare of the people as well as to keep the tradition and culture alive. From the days of the British rulers up to these days the Khasis has seen many changes in all spheres of life. Many of the traditional norms and patterns have been affected by the waves of changes and the winds of different civilization have blown over these Hills and yet the Khasi people have been able to retain their traditional customs, manners, social norms and religion. It is the Seng Khasi, under whose auspices untiring efforts have been made by organizers and members to retain their cultural heritage and oppose indiscriminate westernization,
western permissiveness and to the dilution of Khasi religion, tradition, culture and national values from 1899. It has been a hard but rewarding march and struggle for the Seng Khasi. As long as the Khasis love themselves: their religion, tradition, culture and their beautiful Hills and affectionately respect other religions, cultures, traditions, customs and races, the Khasis will remain as a proud race in this corner of this great country with a rich and varied heritage”.

Proverb:

To wat iai imsngi tang ha ka kitmong,
Ba ban pynbeit u star haduh dyngkhong
Wat im jingmut jyndei tang ka bylla,
Ba biecit anna-antu noh khamakha;
Wat sngewbha shong thap bam ha ing ki briew,
Ba jah jait noh de la i jong i rngiew;
Wat leit hap ha ka shong mraw shong shakri
İoh pateng pakit kynnoh pohratti;
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 head strap pressed heavy on your head like the stump
Do not think too much of 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:

Proverb:

To hikai ia la ka khaïï 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;
Proverb:

_Ban kiew ing lieh ing saw._

Translation:

To ascend into the white and red house.

This proverb is used when two contending parties prepare to go for litigation. The white and red house in question is a comparatively recent development which describes a modern day house. These houses, with red roofs and white walls, were built by the British in the first decade of the twentieth century. They were formally called Assam type houses and the structure consisted of tin roofs supported by wooden rafters. The walls were made of quick lime and sand reinforced with small species of bamboo called _kdait_. An informant told this scholar that these structures were developed in the aftermath of the great earthquake of 1897. This earthquake destroyed many parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills and many lives were lost. These structures were largely adopted by the Government for its construction purposes, as they were found suitable and in the event of an earthquake, comparatively safer. Therefore, these red tin roof houses with white walls came to be associated with Governmental authority, legislative, executive as well as legal.

It was also during the British rule that the Khasi traditional court system or dorbar system started to weaken and people became suspicious of traditional authority which to them did not have the legitimacy of enforcement. The reduction of power of authorities such as the syiems and the dolois or heads of traditional institutions, who
were replaced by the political agency of the British Raj, made the people to seek alternative judicial redress in Government courts. These courts were housed in these red roofed buildings with white walls.

A keen observer would notice the contrasting colours of red and white and would immediately apply it to visually describe the opposing contenders who would be pitted against each other through arguments inside the court house. This might have led to the creation of this proverb which artistically, and from the structural construction of the images, a very interesting coinage has come about. As an extension, this scholar has also come across a proverb *u misteri khynniuh jumai* which means the carpenter of the earth tremor. Obviously this is also a new coinage being created after the great earthquake of 1897. The very word *misteri* is derived from Hindi and this shows that non-Khasi labourers were engaged in the construction of Government buildings. These labourers were of the unskilled and semiskilled kinds who were not completely relied upon. Many Khasi men were also recruited in these enterprises and they were also lacking in carpentry and building skills. The proverb is applied with derision to such kind of unskilled labourers, and the earthquake becomes a metaphor which is mentioned as a constant reminder of imminent danger the consequence of which would befall people who rely on unskilled and semiskilled labourers.

Proverb:

*Sting u khulom ia u mohkhiew.*
Translation:

The pen is lighter than the spade.

*U mohkhiew* is the Khasi spade used for agricultural operations. The spade is triangular in shape and to those who are not used to wielding it, the implement can prove to be heavy. To the Khasis it is a glaring symbol of agriculture and at one point of time, it was the official symbol of a political party that had its strong hold among cultivators. In the last thirty years or so there has been a heavy decline in agricultural activities in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills due to urbanization. Massive migration from villages to Shillong city has been observed and agricultural lands are lying fallow. Another factor that has contributed to this is the spread of formal education. Now most villages have at least a primary school where parents struggle to send their children to. There is a conception among school going children in villages that to pursue agricultural labours is demeaning and unrewarding. They are influenced by information and news from towns and cities about how after receiving school and college education, there are innumerable employment opportunities in Government offices and elsewhere. These jobs are exciting, more paying and more importantly, physically less taxing. These jobs do not require one to work in the mud and soil, or to bear inclement weather. In fact, this scholar has heard snatches of lyrics from which the above proverb has come into circulation. This scholar has also come across a reverse type of the same during field work at Laitlyngkot. It was school time when this scholar visited one of the informant's house. His school going son about 13 years old was present at home. On enquiring
from his father about the boy’s presence at home, his father replied “what can I do? My son thinks that the spade is lighter than the pen. This is a complete reverse of the former as in this the subject shows an inclination for the very things that were abhorrent in the first.

Proverb:

*La shong jhieh la ñeng kynduh*

Translation:

When one sits one gets wet, when one stands the head strikes the ceiling.

This is used to describe a predicament faced when an individual is presented with two options, both of them being difficult. It is very much similar to the English between the devil and the deep blue sea. This usage was first used by the celebrated Khasi writer U Soso Tham who borrowed the idea from the *Aesop’s Fables* which the writer translated in the year 1936.

Proverb:

*U ksew bna lat.*

Translation:

The festival knowing dog.

This proverb is used to describe a person who always seems to possess information about festivities and unerringly use to be present in them. *Lat* can be
described as a village festival which is community based and usually held on an annual basis. Much feasting and merrymaking used to take place in such events. In modern day use this proverb is applied with some modifications, the word *Lat* being replaced by *Lad*. *Lad* in Khasi means a busy thoroughfare which is understood only in the context of a comparatively bigger area of settlement such as a town or a city. This goes to show that the concept of a thoroughfare with its association of heavy traffic, human and vehicular, is obviously a creation of the modern day especially with the development and growth of small towns. *Lad* while meaning thoroughfare also carries with it a slightly pejorative association because it represents a public space which in conventional Khasi thinking should be conceived as opposed to the private. The Khasi society is conceived as being close knit where the private and the public are kept as far away as possible from each other. Conventionally a person who has the time to linger on the streets is considered to be a wastrel and a laggard with no concern for himself or his family. In addition to this thinking, it was only when urbanization started in the early decades of the twentieth century that roads were developed in Shillong. Like elsewhere, the roads became a space for the formation and display of human traits. People started congregating on streets and this led to the display of communication between people in public. This tendency of parading human characteristics in public arenas is frowned upon by more traditional members of the community and the word *Lad* became associated with the irreverent. Till today a loafer is called *khynnah ieng lad* or the *lad* haunting youth, this last because it is perceived to be a juvenile pastime. Thus it
can be appreciated how the evolution of the proverb has taken place due to the interplay of historical and socio-cultural dynamics.

Proverb:

_Uksew kyndit suloi._

Translation:

'The dog that wakes up from slumber at the sound of a gun'.

One of the informant’s daughters at Lyngkyrdem finished her graduation in 2001 but she was not in a hurry to secure a job. She was very choosy and did not want to serve in the rural areas where she got appointment. Her neighbour, a retired army personnel on observing this lackadaisical attitude of this young woman who, when even she was eventually offered a job, remarked: “now you are not in a hurry but when you cross 25 years old you will be like the dog that wakes up from slumber at the sound of a gun’. This is an interesting proverb which has its history in the mid 1970s. During this period, the Shillong Municipality, because of the menace created by rabid dogs made it mandatory for dogs to be injected with anti rabies shots. After this has been done, the Municipal gives out medals that were required to be attached to the dog’s collar. Dogs that do not show these medals, which were called tickets at that time, were shot by a rifle carrying employee of the Municipality. It is needless to say that many a stray dogs fell at the hands of this individual who was named Ram Bahadur Lohar. This scholar still remembers this person who had on blue uniform prowling the streets with a gun and bandoliers criss-crossing his shoulders. The implication of this usage is very obvious as
a very common scene observed then was an unwary dog would suddenly be startled by the sound of the gun and would try to run away only to fall down dead. The young woman in question would soon attain the age of 25 years by which time she would become ineligible for Government employment. It would be futile to set about trying to get jobs then. *U ksew khlem tiket* or the dog without ticket has a reference to stray dogs in the context of the above explained proverb. The two verbal usages are connected, the second, *U ksew khlem tiket* referring to a person whose main occupation is to loiter here and there without any purpose.

The proverb *Ka Phok tkut lot poh* (in Nongtalong dialect) or a kite with a broken thread which refers to a lazy woman who appears to have no work while she roams around from one house to another. Whereas for the male the adage in the same dialect *tesham ksia beh mesew* or a dog that runs after the cows.

Proverb:

*Kynih ka 'iar kynthei u shynrang u kha pylleng.*

Translation:

The hen crows while the rooster lays an egg.

This proverb is applied to a situation when gender roles are reversed. The spirit of the proverb goes against the reversal of natural law and therefore it is used as a caustic commentary. It is an extension of the traditional proverb which goes *haba kynthei ka 'iar kynthei la jot ka pyrthei* which is translated as when the hen starts crowing, the
world is heading for disaster. The crowing of the rooster is a very significantly fixed symbol which connotes activities associated exclusively with males. Of these, participation in governance is a primary example. Women are debarred from participating in the highly traditional system of governance such as *Ka Dorbar Hima*, *Ka Dorbar Raid* and *Ka Dorbar Shnong*. These are different councils governing the corporate life of the Khasis. In fact there is a belief that only those with moustache are allowed to participate in the meeting of these councils. Nowadays this belief and practice is regarded as sexist and in the urban scenario, circumstances have changed so much that today one can see the participation of women in these councils also. However, the bias still remain as can be seen from the above proverb.

Proverb:

*Ke tin khlem ba* (dialect)

Translation:

A tin without food.

This proverb is used while referring to a female who used to speak good of and praised herself too much where as actually she does not have any qualities worth to be praised. The equivalent of this in English is “empty vessels make more sound”. The use of the word tin implies a container which is usually made of tin and this goes to show that it is an adage of recent origin which appears to be an evolution of the more traditional *U Phiang uba thylli u sawa jam*. The translation of this is the empty bronze pot sounds loudest. The *Phiang* which is the traditional big bronze pot is very much part
of the Khasi kitchen used for water storage in some houses till today. While it is tempting to see how similar this adage is to the English ‘empty vessels make more sound’, the fact remains that folklore is concerned largely with versions and this scholar would not like to discount the fact that this adage is firmly rooted in Khasi culture also. The differences in the metaphor used show a degree of originality which through use and over a period of time ‘bronze’ becomes ‘tin’. This reveals the change of metallic vessels for home use.

Independent tendencies, especially, among men, are often the subject of social attention. Such a person is described by an adage.

The adage:

Khla khatar shnong OR Khla khatar lama

Translation:

The tiger of twelve villages OR The tiger with twelve flags

A tiger is very much admired for his prowess, grace and beauty. A man possessing these qualities is likewise admired. Traditionally, a person who makes a mark is referred to as a tiger, and obviously, this reference hints at a deeply-seated admiration for a person who is able to have more than one wife. The adage suggests that a man, whether single or married, is free and is always eligible. The twelve flags refer to his standards or colours which he changes every time he enters a new village with the object of winning a hand in marriage.
A dark-skinned man who marries a fair-skinned woman is chided with a proverb.

Proverb:

\[ Kum \ u \ khak \ hingki \ u \ kie \ ha \ pleit. \]

Translation:

Like the \textit{hingki} fish he floats in an enamel plate.

The \textit{hingki} is a black type of fish, and a dark-skinned man is likened to it. His wife, a fair woman is likened to an enamel plate which, usually, comes in white shades. The man’s dark complexion is countered by the fairness of the woman, just as a black fish would be countered in the whiteness of an enamel plate. A psychoanalytical explanation is also possible. The black fish here would represent a phallic symbol and the plate a vulvic one. Erich Fromm has catalogued Freudian symbols ranging from sticks, trees, umbrellas, knives, pencils and hammers as depicting the male genital, and caves, bottles, jewel boxes, doors, gardens, cases, and flowers, as depicting the female genital.\textsuperscript{68}

Perhaps, this usage is imbued with similar meanings. This proverb, as can be understood, is of a recent origin, since the enamel plate was introduced by the British only scores of years ago in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. A similar one, also on the lighter side, refers to the couple as \textit{Sohphlang te bad u nei} or Grass fruit and \textit{Sesam}: \textit{Sohphlang} is a variety of edible root which is white and sweet-tasting, and in order to

\textsuperscript{68} Fromm, Erich. \textit{The Forgotten Language, an Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales, and Myths} (New York, 1951).
have a palatable combination, it is taken with pounded sesame seeds, which is black in colour.

Proverb:

\textit{Ka khaiong bam shipai.}

Translation:

The black fish that eats army personnel.

This adage evolved during the 2\textsuperscript{nd} World War when Khasi Hills become the main route of armed personnel when they moved from the mainstream India to Burma (Myanmar). It was during those times that prostitution became part of the public domain in these hills. Many women provided sexual service to these armed personnel. They were called the \textit{khaiong bam shipai}. ‘\textit{Khaiong}’ refers to the rotten fish, which is symbolic of the profession.

The role of matchmakers, in any society, is interesting. Among the Khasis, the position and role of the matchmaker is unique. Matchmakers are referred to by a very colourful adage.

The adage:

\textit{Ka Men Suh Syntiew,}

Translation:

The old woman embroiderer.
The term is used to describe a matchmaker, a mediator, or a go-between in love affairs. However, it must be strictly born in mind that this position is not officially recognised, as, say, that of the ksiang. The ksiang is an officially nominated liaison for arranging a marriage, and the appointment is made by the intending boy’s family. The coming of this term into common use among the folk can be attributed to the following situation which I have traced and tried to reconstruct.

A very popular meeting place of the village folk is the house of Ka Men Suh Syntiew, the woman who embroiders the village girls’ apparels with flowers and beautiful designs. The embroidery-expert sometimes invites men to her house where they will be able to meet the females of the village. Then, when interest is shown by any man in any other woman, the embroiderer goes about arranging, match-making and, generally, officiating as a liaison. In the course of her work, as she embroiders, she engages interested parties in discussion, supplying a detailed background of the man or woman concerned. In fact, the very act of embroidering flowers is significant as it relates to weaving the texture of a love affair with the same care and dexterity. It may mean that a chance visit by some men at the house will lead to an inquiry as to whose clothes she is presently embroidering, and when is it expected to be ready. Possessing the information that the embroiderer has supplied, a man may make his appearance again, when the owner comes to collect it. This encounter, by the skillful machinations of the embroiderer, may develop into a relationship which (it has been recorded till thirty years ago) often leads to marriage. The role of the men suh syntiew here, whether
deliberate or circumstantial, is regarded significant. Despite the unflattering association of the term applied, it is done so with mild and not unhealthy sarcasm.

There are adages which owe their origin to historical incidents.

The adage:

_U Thlia Mawiang_

Translation:

_The fastidious Mawiang._

This is a reference to the people of the Hima Mawiang, or the traditional state of Mawiang.

The Mawiang chiefdom was the outcome of a general unification of several confederacies under the Lyngdoh Nonglait clan. At one point of time, the men of Mawiang, a place situated very close to the Bangladesh, raided the plains and occupied Nolikhata. The Lyngdoh Nonglait extorted tribute from the subjects of Sylhet and its surrounding areas. However, they later found it difficult to conduct both sacerdotal and administrative affairs. The imperative need of a Syiem or Chief was felt but no one was willing to take it up. Traditions also speak emphatically about the fastidiousness of the Mawiang people, and their failure to arrive at a common consensus in the choice of a chief. This and several factors led the leaders of the _Hima_ to offer the position of the chief to aliens. In this case, the position of chief was given, in succession, to four...
Muslims, three brothers and a sister, who were captured during the raids and brought to the hills. The three aliens and their sister adopted Khasi customs and the men were made chiefs in the chronological order of 1. Byrtap Khan, 2. Puna Khan, 3. Jibhor Khan. A tradition maintains that U Byrtap Khan was also called Khan Bahadur which in the opinion of Dr. H. Bareh suggested that 'he was a commissioned collector of the Mawiang chiefs in their dominion in the plains'.67 Interestingly, the Mawiang chiefs or Syiem is often called U Syiem U Mraw or the Chief, the Slave. This has a direct reference to the tradition which relates about the capturing of four alien slaves in a raid by the Mawiang warriors, on the adjoining plain areas. These captives were later made chiefs. From this historical base evolved the expression U Thlia Mawiang and is applied to a fastidious or choosy person, who is likened to the people of Mawiang, who were unresolved about choosing their own chief, not being satisfied with the numerous offers made, till at last, some aliens had to be brought to satisfy the various factions.

Proverb:

_U Lang sain papi

Translation:

The goat that washes the sins.

The Khasis used animals, notably the goat to offer as sacrifice during religious ceremonies. While this scholar has not come across any direct mention of the goat as the

67 Bareh, H. The History and Culture of the Khasis. 1997.
goat that washes sins in ritual language use, the above proverb can be regarded as being closer to the Christian perspective about Christ who is called the Lamb of God in pre-communion part of the Mass. It has come into circulation this scholar feels, more because of this factor. An analogy can also be drawn with the etymology of the English word scapegoat.

Proverb:

\[ \text{l仍是khor} \]

Translation:

To die of alcohol

During the field trip to Laitlyngkot in May 2006, in Mr. Kyrshan’s house there were only his wife and his two children. On enquiring about his whereabouts, his wife informed that he had gone to his nephew’s funeral at Umtli. This scholar was surprised as Mr. Kyrshan’s nephew was very young. On inquiry as to the cause of his death the woman replied using the adage \[ U \text{Joh te } \text{l仍是khor, num u niang jawa u dih naduh dangstep haduh da miet} \] (Joh died due to alcohol, like a swine he drank from morning till night).

We know that from oral literature folklore materials pass to written literature. But this law is not absolute. From the written domain, folklore materials re-emerge as part of the oral discourse either transformed or disguised but always reinforced.
In Khasi folklore the entente between oral and written literature especially in the study of proverbs is very much significant. It has resulted in the creation of a dynamic exchange in whole texts, genres, metaphors, coinages and cants. In some cases, the intersections are so dense that lines of delineations are difficult to distinguish. For example one of the greatest Khasi poet U Soso Tham had written a stanza in his poem which had been used and reused as proverbs in oral and written form. It runs thus:

Proverb:

Sa shisien pat kin win ki khlaw
Sa shisien pat kin khih ki maw.³

Translation:

Once more the forests will tremour
Once more the stones will clamour

Proverb:

Jingshai ngi wad sawdong pyrthei
Jingshai ka ri ngim tip ei ei.⁴

Translation:

We search for light around the world
Knowledge of our own land we know nothing at all.

³ Tham Soso, 1960, *Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep*, p. 37
⁴ Ibid p. 3
Proverb:
Baroh u briew bastad,
Mano ba lah ban len;
La khlem da plie ka lad,
Kumno un lait ban kren

Translation:
All the men are wise
No one can deny it
But without giving a chance
How can he prove it (scholar’s translation)

Another new proverb in the form of a joke evolved from the above original proverb:

Proverb:
Baroh u briew bastad
Mano ba lah ban len
La khlem shi klat ka kyiad
Kumno un lait ban kren

Translation:
All the men are wise
No one can deny it

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But without a glass of liquor
How can he be able to speak (scholar's translation)

Proverb:
Ka lynti ka kylluid
Ka mon ka laitluid
La me kwah ban long briew
Ne me kwah ban long ksuid

Translation:
The path is wide
The will is free
Whether you wish to be a human
Or you wish to be a Satan (scholar's translation)

Proverb:
Im ka kyrteng sah ka nam

Translation:
The name lives on and fame last.

Proverb:
Inghkong shyllangma"
Translation:

He of the singe forehead

This aphorism is used to describe an ingrate and was introduced in literature by Soso Tham in his translation of *Breathes there the Man* by Sir Walter Scott. Tham uses the ancient Khasi practice of singeing the hair and forehead of an individual who is afterwards ostracized for having committed an act or acts of unpardonable nature. Tham's poetic craftsmanship renders the person much more despicable than Walter Scott’s original especially when he talks about the ostracized individual’s death ceremony which is performed not with religious solemnity but attended by vultures, crows and flies. Nothing is more horrifying and condemning to a Khasi than not to have a proper funeral ceremony because the belief is that this prevents the soul from reunited with its clan kindred.

The usage *Ingkhong Shyllangmat*, while fully conveying the meaning of an ingrate, has in the last fifty years or more, come to assume a more pointed political meaning. In the parlance of Khasi *realpolitik* it has come to mean a traitor and this connotation has gained acceptance especially in the media.

Proverb:

*U Hati dang ha khlaw, ka bniat lah tyrwa die.*
Translation:

You are making offers for ivory, while the elephant is still in the jungle.

This proverb is used to put a boastful man in his place. It is derived from the Aesop’s fables translated by U Soso Tham.

This means that one must have the ivory in hand before making offers for its sale. It is only when one is absolutely sure that he will achieve something that he can openly talk about it. The two opposing forces are the boastful hunter and the ivory, and they are linked by the question of real achievement. The elephant, obviously, represents nature, with all its connotations of the untamed, the elusive and the fearful. The hunter, by being presumptuous, is made to look ridiculous if he does not get what he sets out for. In the deep structure of this proverb, some home truths as the one equivalent to the English “counting the chicken before they are hatched”, or even another Khasi one about “fish is still in the stream, while he has already prepared the spices”, are elucidated.

Proverb:

*Ka Shangkhawiah ki rang*

Translation:

The snare to trap the male
This adage is used to describe a loose woman who uses her wiles to trap men. This statement is derived from the title of the play of the same name written by Peace Roy Pariat a popular dramatist of the 1940s.

B. Hedronelle Nonglait was a prolific composer of songs and poetry right from the 1920s onwards. It is not difficult to imagine that B. Hedro Nelle Nonglait, as a Christian, was influenced by the poetic quality and didacticism of sayings in the Bible. But more of this in the next chapter. As a Khasi song writer with an ear for music and the haunting refrain of the Phawar, it was tempting for him to attempt coining sayings which he organized according to their topically. Doubtless, he was influenced by the Biblical sayings but the coinages which here can be regarded as secular, are striking for their individuality. First published in U Nongkit Khubor in January of 1935 as Ki Ktien Lyngkot Ban Pyrkhat and Ki Ktien Phawar Khleh, the compilation contains the following topics:

**WEALTH:**

Proverb:

Ka long kaba jem ban lum tyngka

Hynrei kham jem pat ban pynlut ia ka

Translation:

It is easy to hoard money

But it is even easier to spend it
Proverb:

U thied bah ka jingieit det ka tyngka
Bad kumjuh ruh u long ka thma

Translation:

The main artery of love is money
It is also the root vein of strife

Proverb:

Ka jingduk ka long ka nongkhehei, lada phi tieng, em kong em bah
Hynrei ka nongsneng-nongkraw lada phi tur kum u Ramhah.

Translation:

Poverty persecutes if of it you fear
It counsels, if against it you dare

Proverb:

Ka jingriewspah kaba dang biang, la phi kan kit kan bah,
Ka tang shu palat te kylliang, Ha phi pat kan phah bah.

Translation:

Sensible wealth will support you
More than this, it turns into a burden
Dei da ki jingpynhut barit
Ba u saipan u synjap kyndit.

Translation:
No matter how minutely you spend
The money belt will always slacken

FRIENDSHIP:

Proverb:
U lok u dei uto uba iarap khlem bynnud,
Ym dei uto uba isynei narud.
Translation:
A friend is he who helps selflessly
It is not he who offers only pity

Proverb:
Ka jingtalang lok ba shu kynsan
Tang khuk-khak ruh kan kynran.
Translation:
A friendship that forms in haste
Is the kind that never stays
Proverb:

Ha ka ni am ne ka jingkalang lok,
Kito kiba shirhem eh dei pyn ban ki ban thok.

Translation:

In matters of religion or friendship
Pretended devotion is always false.

Proverb:

Hapdeng artyli ki miaw, tang kawei ka 'tungtap;
La iasuk katno - katno, shisien te kin iaiap

Translation:

Between two peaceful cats, one fermented fish
Though at peace now, soon they will fight to the finish.

DEATH:

Proverb:

Man la ki jingkhang ki don shi kad ar kad,
Hynrei ka jingiap ka don tang u shawkad

Translation:

Every door has one or two sides
But death has only one threshold.
Proverb:

Da kaba bam dawai, üa ka jingim ngin pynjrong,
Hynrei kumno üa u doctor ruh ka jingiap ka rong.

Translation:

By taking medicine, we believe life we prolong
Yet even he who dispenses it, death claims.

Proverb:

Ka jingim ka long kaba muja üa uba pyrkhat,
Bad kaba saja üa uba pyrkhat palat.

Translation:

Life is pleasant for those who think,
Burdensome it is for those who think too much.

Proverb:

Ka jingiap ka pynkut – pynwai baroh ki kam,
Ka jingiap ka pyndep, pynkhuid baroh ki ram.

Translation:

Death concludes all activities
Death clears all debts.
MISCELLANEOUS:

Proverb:

U briew u lah ban lait na ka shitom,
Hynrei um lah ban sait ta ka jahburom

Translation:

A man may escape punishment
But cannot wash away dishonour

Proverb:

Uba duk ba u wad jingbam u ud,
U riewspah namar ba um lah ban nguid.

Translation:

The poor laments in his search for food,
The rich laments not able to swallow it.

Proverb:

Haba ki lok ki la shim lut ta kaba nga lah ban ai,
Kum ta nga kita ki jiw kiar na jngai na jngai.

Translation:

When friends have taken whatever we can offer
They avoid us even from afar.
Proverb:

*Dei ynda la hap bun ki shipai*

*Ba ki hima ki ia shong suk jai.*

Translation:

Only after soldiers in multitudes die

There is peace among kingdoms.

This scholar has also detected verbal usages having proverbial characteristics which display a dynamic transference of usage from context to context being influenced by factors of occupation, age, area and gender specific and sometimes old ones are replaced by new ones. This is especially true in sayings of non-formal construction for which the possibility of addition and mutation exists. To cite an example let us consider the following:

Proverb:

*Da tba la ka lyngthohdoh*

Translation:

Do touch the nape of your neck before you judge others.

is replaced by:
Proverb:

Wat bishar ia kiwei namar yn sa bishar ia phi

Translation:

Do not judge others lest you be judged

Proverb:

lap dih kyiad

Translation:

To die of alcoholic excess

is replaced by:

Proverb:

lap dih khor

Translation:

Coarse (drink) induced death

is again replaced by:

Proverb:

lap shah dung bilor
Translation:

To die of bottle inflicted wound

is again replaced by:

Proverb:

İap shah dung plastic

Translation:

To die of plastic inflicted wound

Proverb:

Pang dih kyiad

Translation:

Alcohol related ailment

is replaced by:

Proverb:

Pang sngewbha

Translation:

Pleasurable ailment.
What strikes as interesting to this scholar is the transference of meanings based on currency of use employing conventional gestures (such as touching the nape of one's neck) in the first instance of the proverb and the complete absence of this gesture in the application of the second instance of the proverb. Further, this essentially traditional saying has been replaced by the less complex and widely diffused model that the Bible provides. In the other proverb the employing of things which are commonly recognized for their utility value (such as bottle and plastic) has transferred the emphasis of the proverb making it more acceptable in modern day situation.

Folklore is dynamics and this is also the case with oral literature as a component of folklore. When oral or verbal literature are written and recorded it changes into written literature and as this is not static there are instances where written literature changes into oral literature that is, when elements of written literature are borrowed and use as oral or are transmitted orally. This is one of the creative quality that proverb has. It is transmitted orally, it may be recorded or written, but again some elements of proverbs which are introduced in written form are taken and used orally. So there is an inter change from oral to written and from written to oral.