CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

Human values are values which are fundamental to man’s innate nature of being human. These guide man in the right path, giving him a sense of peace and rightness. As such human values are cherished and sought to be realized throughout the ages. From time immemorial, their meanings are defined and redefined. In the early civilization, Plato explains human values as “the things in the upper world you may take for the upward journey of the soul”. Thus human values enable man to realize the supreme value of human life which Plato further explained as the “essential form of goodness”. For Aristotle, human values through man’s rational power, ensures the attainment of happiness as “the supreme end of life” (Titus and Keeton 1966: 139-140). Man’s innate efforts to express human values in different modes of expression are a testament to his sense of values. Thus, the painter expresses his values in painting, the musician in music, the sculptor in rocks. As a medium of human expression, literature also expresses human values. In the case of fiction, W. H. Hudson is of the opinion that “A general moral philosophy is, therefore, almost always embodied as a more or less distinctly avowed part of their plan”. Therefore, he explains the author’s chief objective: “As he deals with life, he must deal with moral facts and issues everywhere involved in life; and it is upon his moral power and insight”... “that the real greatness of his work very largely depends.”
However, compared with the other modes, the distinction of literature is that it expresses values as found in the living concreteness of real life.

1.1. The subject of the present study

In view of the significance of human values in the life of man and its expression in different modes, the present work proposes to study “Human Values in Selected Khasi Short Stories”. As a literary genre, the speciality of the Short Story is in expressing human life as reflected in the brief incidents and single episodes as unfolded in everyday life. In spite of the intense preoccupation and the rush of modern life, man could not but expressed his sense of values in the numerous situations and incidents faced by him. On this tendency of man, Nicolai Hartman, a leading philosopher on value, aptly observes: “His apprehension is from the first a preferring of one thing to the other. His portion in the coming and going of events is participation with feelings, interest, the sense of value.” The importance of the Short Story is that it captures such value reactions and value expressions in different human situations and human relationships. In the present world of developmental activity and continuous changes, the value emphasis is on materialism, wealth, success and luxury. However, these created loss of faith, doubt and confusion. Therefore, amidst such confusion and fluid situations, Lyold Morris highlighted Anderson’s belief that it is only in moments that we truly live. In the context of Khasi literature, it is noted that the Khasi authors as literary artists, did not miss the value implication found in particular episodes and incidents of man’s life. These are wide ranging and reflected facets and nuances of human values. Their appeal is the immediacy and reality evolving from actual life. Therefore, the choice of
this topic opens a new field of research into Khasi literary attempts to present and interpret life within the confines of the episodic incidents as presented by the Short Story genre.

1.2. The important parameters highlighted

1.2.1. The concept human values

In undertaking the present study, at the outset, it is felt necessary that the basic concept ‘human values’ and the nomenclature ‘Short Story’ be clearly explained. Philosophers, scholars and literary writers have expressed important views on human values. All have agreed on the complex nature of these values. In general meaning, human values are understood to relate to the nature of being human. However, based on researches, scholars and philosophers have focused on the multifaceted nature of human values evolving from the diverse and varied nature of man. Hence, Paul Tillich concluded “Our knowledge of values is identical with the knowledge of man” (Titus and Keeton, 1966:374). This nature of value conveniently fits the variety and diversity of human life. These are expressed in human situations such as the tragic and the comic, the serious, the humorous, the praiseworthy and the repugnant. It is also expressed in the social and the personal and many more possibilities. All these aspects are of human value for while expressing the nature of being human, these sustain and enrich the quality of human life. These facts direct attention to two important conclusions in the study of human values. Firstly, human values reflected the nature of being human. Secondly, human values also relate to the many sidedness of human life manifested in the actual process of living. These different implications in the understanding of human values are projected in Chapter II. However,
in the context of the present study, the projection of the Khasi approach to human values, is of special relevance. Researches have shown that the tribal communities are bound together by shared beliefs and conventions. In the same way, such beliefs and conventions have given rise to the Khasi’s traditional values giving them a distinct identity. As the selected writers are also impacted by these values, the study focuses on the critical analysis of their stories to find out their reflection of human values. This will be discussed in the textual analysis presented in Chapter IV.

1.2.2. The Khasis’ awareness of human values

As a distinct tribe, the Khasis have manifested an intense awareness of human values. These are expressed in the moral, social and practical contexts and are stipulated by the forefathers and elders since bygone days. Their myths of *U Sohpetbneng* (Mount Sohpetbneng) and *Ka Diengiei* (Diengie tree) are morally and spiritually based. These explained the origin of the Khasis and the causes that lead to the severance of the people’s ties with the Divine. Furthermore, moral precepts (Mawrie, *The Essence*, 1981: 3) such as *Kamai ia ka Hok* (literally meaning to earn righteousness) and *tip-briew tip-Blei* (know-man, know-God) reflect ‘man and man’ and ‘man and God’ relationship. In addition, in human relationship, are social tenets such as *Ka Akor kaba tam* (politeness counts) which guide moral and social conduct. Commenting on the moral, spiritual and social implications of these values, Sujata Miri aptly observes:

> They embody answers to the Khasi’s vision of the good, the ought and the beautiful."
The observation sums up the profound world view of the Khasis and as such brings out the significance of the present study. Therefore, as part of the explanation of human values, the discussion on relevant theories in Chapter II will also focus on the Khasi world view pertaining to the moral, social and practical aspects of traditional values.

1.2.3. The selected Khasi short story writers, their awareness of human values

An important objective of the present study is to examine the authors’ personal awareness of human values as reflected in their works. The study will examine their vision of human values in man’s individual life as well as in the social life of the Khasis. In this regard, two of the selected authors, namely, S. J. Duncan and Paul Lyngdoh have made significant observations on these issues in the prefaces of their short stories. They express their concerns on issues of ‘ka imlang, ka sahlang’ (social life) and man’s life in general. In particular, Lyngdoh’s value consciousness is apparent when on observing the lack of literary values in the Khasi stories being published in the late 1980s, comments: "Ki babun ki dei tang ki kot iew, ki bym shongdor wat tang shidamli ruh na ka liang ka literature" (The majority of the stories are published for making some profit which have no literary value). Efforts have also been made by the researcher to gather all available information on the authors for their views on human values. Therefore, short sketches on the life and works of the selected authors have been highlighted.

S. J. Duncan was born in the late 1897. He completed his schooling in Shillong and thence proceeded to Calcutta in 1915 for
higher studies. At that stage, the Khasi hills were still cut off from outside influence, and as such the author had considerable exposure to the Khasis’ social and cultural values and the Khasi way of life. In his centenary article on Shillong in 1976, Duncan did not reflect much on the Khasi traditional values which he deeply appreciated. However, he drew significant attention to the Khasis’ work values, their simple un-enterprising disposition which made them alienated within their own land. It is perhaps against such characteristic mindset, that the author could perceive the noble values of ‘u kii’ (the maternal uncle) as the one hope for the Khasi survival. The article also reflects the author’s susceptibility to the beauty of nature, hence his pride in the charm and beauty of Khasi hills. Duncan passed away in 1984 leaving behind noteworthy contribution to the granary of Khasi literature.

Hughlet Warjri, passed away in 1996. The researcher was able to interview his family members for information on his life. He was described to be a man of ‘simple living and high thinking’. Keenly conscious of the importance of moral principles and a praiseworthy life, he displayed compassion for the poor and the down trodden. He was actively involved in many social activities for improving social conditions. His literary aspirations were motivated by a desire to uplift the Khasi community to higher heights. This was seen in his literary efforts in biography, novels and short stories. As with many authors, Warjri was deeply troubled by the general degradation of values in the Khasi society.
Wan Kharkrang born in 1949, modestly informed that he had no intention to be a writer. His stories “Ki Khana Biria I Bah JJ” (The Humorous stories of Bah JJ) which started as newspapers articles, were greatly appreciated by many Khasi readers. The encouragement received, resulted in the publication of the first collection ‘Shi Hali ki Khana” (Four Stories) in 1986. This collection has been selected for the present study. As informed by the author most of the stories specially, those of “Bah Ta En series” are based on real life experiences. He displayed sympathy and indignance at the exploitation and ill-treatment of the poor and ignorant sections of the people by the more affluent and powerful section of society. The stories while mostly projecting the funny side of life, also ridicule the superstitious beliefs in society. On the narrative style, the author emphasized that his stories are mostly written in his own humorous style of narrating stories.

The youngest author, Paul Lyngdoh as indicated in the preface of his short stories collection, started his literary career in 1989, at a very young age when he was awaiting results on his school leaving examination. In an interview, the author informed that some of the stories are based on real incidents and some are general observations on social situations. As explained by him, this makes the theme of social concerns a common thread that pieces his stories together. In particular, he noted that “the sense of socio-cultural uprootedness and alienation pervades a number of stories”. In other words, he referred to “the loss of identity and culture, the continuing alienation of the Khasis from the soil, which strikes a deep note of pain in him”. But further added that “the
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subtle note of sadness at the inevitability of change and its concomitants: yet he does not indulge in unmitigated despair”.

On his feelings towards the Khasi community, the author appreciated the innate traits of honesty, simplicity and community spirit of the people which are regrettably on the decline. These, he concluded, are due to what he referred as the ‘tug-of-war” between the past and the present, the social transformation. On his choice of humorous stories and the expression of the individual sense of value, the author explained these as parts of the variety of life which the writer should not miss. On the narrative style, the author expressed ignorance as at the age that he was penning his stories he had no knowledge of literary styles and techniques.

The above information show that all the four selected authors are keenly aware of issues of human values relating to the moral, the ethical, the social, the traditional and the survival of the Khasi community. This awareness gives a sincere note to the themes selected in their stories. These are highlighted in the textual analysis of the stories in Chapter IV while the study of styles and techniques will be discussed in Chapter V.

1.3 The short story as a literary genre in the reflection of human values

In the present study, a clear understanding of the characteristics of the short story is also highly essential. This is important to highlight its capacity and potentialities as a literary genre in value reflection and against which the selected Khasi short stories may be studied. To achieve
this, the discussion proposes firstly to make a brief comparison between the short story with the folktale and then also with the novel. This study is taken up in Chapter III. Further, in this connection, following relevant aspects are sought to be highlighted in Chapter III.

1.3.1. The difference between the concepts theme and human values

In order to remove the obvious confusion between the meaning of ‘theme’ and ‘human values’ as part of the study of human values, it is felt necessary to project the difference between the two terms. This will ensure the basic approach and guide the study with desirable clarity. This projection is also highlighted in Chapter III which precedes the textual analysis in Chapter IV. Its immediate placing will help project clarity in the reflection of human values. The main emphasis in this respect is the difference in the mode of expression between theme and human values.

1.3.2. The objectives of the study

In order to present the study on a sound and logical manner, it is considered essential to project the objectives of the study. Based on the projections on the concept of human values and the characteristics of the short story, four objectives are proposed. The objectives are also taken up in Chapter III as it precedes textual analysis. Lastly, the scope and limitation of the study is also highlighted.

1.4. The Scope and Limitation of the Study

The present study covers a period from 1968 to 1989. The stories selected are of a sizable number which include those of S. J. Duncan, Hughlet Warjri, Wan Kharkrang and Paul Lyngdoh. Two reasons account
for the short period selected. Firstly, compared to the study of theme which is generally limited to the central meaning of the story, the study of human values covers a wider spectrum. Based on the views of Thomas Gullason, A. K. Ridout and Jesse Stuart, the reflection of human values projects the reflection of more than one value. In other words, this includes all values perceived by the author during the course of his creative narration. For this reason, the number of stories had to be limited so as to fully project the reflected values of the selected stories.

The second reason is that the period span of study is of twenty years. This period presents a transition between the early and the modern period of creative short story writing by Khasi authors. As such the period presents a marked distinction between old generation writers and younger generation writers. The older period is presented by S. J. Duncan and Hughlet Warjri, while the latter period by Wan Kharkrang and Paul Lyngdoh. In addition to other values, these authors significantly reflect the human values of their age. In view of the Khasi awareness of human values, the authors’ personal awareness and the important changes during the period; the choice of the topic “Human values in selected short stories” offers ample scope for study and research.
End Notes

1. Titus, Harold H and Keeton, Morris T. Comp. *The Ranges of Ethics*, containing excerpts from Plato “The Vision of the Good” New Delhi, Affiliated East West, 1966, p.136. (The book includes excerpts from many philosophers and psychologists and has been extensively quoted, therefore future references to the book will be under *Titus and Keeton 1966*).


