

KHASI UNDER BRITISH RULE

(1824—1947)

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Shillong**

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Preface

Dear Readers, perhaps it delights one with satisfaction to write, by way of Preface, after one sees that one's work is at last done. I am tempted, rather, to pour out all what is in my heart, but let me be as brief as possible. I shall not bore you because the "Forward" given by my colleague and the "Inside" of the book have already served the purpose.

"*The Khasis under British rule*" is a revised doctoral dissertation submitted way back in 1979 and the degree being awarded in 1980 by Guwahati University under the supervision of Prof. Emeritus V. V. Rao. I thought it would have been left untouched. Yet, permit me dear readers, shall I tell you how and why I did the work? Yes, tedious and long through the trying years, I was determined that I should finish it, come what may. I know even with all the labour I have put in, I have not been able to insert all the minute details required.

The book is basically on the political and constitutional development rule. But I have added some scraps on the Khasi way of life, migration, Khasi Polity, Laws of Succession, for a clear understanding and perhaps a better insight into the social and political system of the Khasis and the changes which have crept in. I have tried my best to clear some of the misconceptions or doubts hovering around us by being objective as far as possible. The materials used are Archival documents, published and unpublished Primary Sources, discussions with people, young and old alike, and a practical study of Khasi thought through its varied manifestations, social and and political. I hope the Glossary given will be of help to you. I present this book to my readers and I also leave to you to assess.

I owe a deep sense of gratitude to my teachers, Prof. V.V. Rao, Prof. R.S. Lyngdoh and Prof. Hom Choudhury, who have always guided me in my academic pursuit. I thank Mr. R.T. Rymbai for his valuable comments and Mr. L.G. Shullai, the Shillong Records Centre for his constant guidance that I should always strive to achieve the best I thank the North Eastern Hill University for granting me leave which has enabled me to finish the work. I thank Mr. Bimal of Akashi Publishers, Shillong for taking the responsibility of publishing the book within so short a time. I also thank Prof. J.B. Bhattacharjee, Dean, School of Social Sciences, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong who has been so kind to go through

my work and has added more flavour with a foreword, I show my deep appreciation for Mrs. M.R. Mawlong for every help rendered to me and all my friends, near and dear ones who have always inspired me to be always up and doing. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance rendered by all those in the Deputy Commissioner's Record room, Shillong, the National Archives, New Delhi, and some of my Khasi family friends who have been generous in giving me easy access to their private papers and documents. May I recall the 'tender' and 'loving' service of my three children who have always stood by my side in every hour of need.

Thank You

Dr. (Mrs) Helen Giri, Reader,
Department of History,
North Eastern Hill University,
Shillong.

Dated Shillong,
the 6th April, 1989.

Professor J.B. Bhattacharjee

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Foreword

The British Rule in Khasi Hills forms a fascinating Chapter in the history of Modern India. Whereas the rest of the country was by and large divided between two distinct models of administration, viz. British India and the Princely States, the given frame of both the models was brought into operation here, concurrently despite the smallness of the geographical area, although the control of the Deputy Commissioner over the rulers of the native states increased steadily as the British administration matured gradually and inducted a process of ruthless lowering of the corresponding status of the rulers. This want on restructurisation process was inaugurated with the colonisation of the erstwhile independent states in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills when the hill segment of the Jaintia State and a few villages belonging to the Khasi States passed under the direct administration of the British officers and the rest of the Khasi States retained some form of internal autonomy through treaties and engagements with the British Government and it was directly linked with the perpetuation of vested colonial interests in resource of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills and the adjoining areas. In course of time, the Khasi scene provided a model of its own in British India's political structure.

The various aspects of British Administration in the Khasi Hills have been studied by the scholars as segments of larger themes, but a compendium of developments during the British Rule is a much awaited initiative of a historian. Dr (Mrs) Helen Giri's *The Khasis under British Rule* is this welcome attempt to present all major aspects of development in a single volume. It begins with a profile in which the salient features of life and condition of the Khasi-Jaintias and the emergence of the Khasi polity out of its indigenous tribal base as a response to the needs and aspirations of the people over a fairly long period of time before British colonisation have been discussed. The early British contacts, the ascendancy of the British and the Khasi challenge have been described in considerable details chronologically covering the Anglo-Khasi relations ever since the British accession to the Diwani of neighbouring

Bengal down to Anglo-Khasi wars and British annexations and the gallant resistance of the Khasis to colonial expansionism. The role of the Political Agency and the perpetuation of paramountcy bring into focus the pattern of British Administration and the changing status of the Khasi rulers accomplished through an overhauling of the traditional systems and institutions, notwithstanding the professed policy of non-intervention in the indigenous institutions and way of life of the hill people. The book ends with the integration of the Khasi States into Indian Union after the transfer of power under the Instrument of Accession along with host of such States throughout the country and in the process, lucidly narrates the factors and forces of social change, the modernisation of the Khasi society, emergence of middle class, constitutional politics and political development.

I must congratulate Dr. (Mrs) Helen Giri for her excellent work. She has responded to the need of our students for whom a book on this theme was found necessary for quite sometimes, besides conforming to the established norms and standard of historical research. It is the fruit of a sustained and painstaking research over a number of years. I am sure, no researcher in Khasi history can complete his work without a reference to it. Finally, I must thank Kong Helen for the affection shown to a colleague by asking me to write this foreword.

NEHU

The 2nd January, 1989.

(J.B. Bhattacharjee)

Introduction

A. A Profile of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills

Meghalaya, 'the abode of the Clouds' is one of the States of North Eastern India. It is divided into two Administrative Divisions—*West Meghalaya* comprising of two Administrative Districts namely, East Garo Hills District with Williamnagar as the Headquarter and West Garo Hills District with Tura as its Headquarter. *East Meghalaya* comprises of three Administrative Districts, namely, East Khasi Hills District with Shillong as the Headquarter, Jaintia Hills District with Jowai as the Headquarter and West Khasi Hills District with Nongstoin as the Headquarter. Khasi Hills extends over an area of 11,168.1 sq. km.¹ East Khasi Hills is bounded in the north by Kamrup District, on the East by Jaintia Hills District, on the south by Bangladesh and on the West by West Khasi Hills District. West Khasi Hills is bounded on the north by Kamrup District, on the east by East Khasi Hills District, in the south by Bangladesh and in the west by East Garo Hills District.² Jaintia Hills is bounded on the north by Nowgong District and Karbi Anglong, in the east by North Cachar Hills and *Karbi Anglang*, in the south by Bangladesh and Cachar Districts and in the west by East Khasi Hills³.

According to the Census of India, 1981 the population of Khasi and Jaintia Hills is :⁴

| Sl. | | Total | Male | Females |
|-----|------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. | Jaintia Hills | 1,56,402 | 79,052 | 77,350 |
| 2. | East Khasi Hills | 5,11,414 | 2,62,952 | 2,48,462 |
| 3. | West Khasi Hills | 1,61,576 | 82,906 | 78,670 |

1. D.T. Zimba—*Geography of Meghalaya*, Third Edition, Shillong, 1983.

2. L. Shullai—*Ka Geography Khasi*, Revised Edition, Shillong, 1979.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Statistical Hand Book*. Directorate of Economics, Statistics and Evaluation, Shillong, Meghalaya, 1984.

The *Statistical Hand Book* gives the District sex ratio—(19)—1981) as follows : (Female/1000 Males):

| Sl. No. | Year | Jaintais Hills | East Khasi Hills | West Khasi Hills |
|---------|------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1. | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. | 1901 | * | 1080 | * |
| 2. | 1911 | * | 1054 | * |
| 3. | 1921 | * | 1031 | * |
| 4. | 1931 | * | 978 | * |
| 5. | 1941 | * | 960 | * |
| 6. | 1951 | 1066 | * | 923 |
| 7. | 1961 | 1015 | * | 902 |
| 8. | 1971 | 999 | 922 | 957 |
| 9. | 1981 | 978 | 945 | 949 |

The growth of to was for a decade (1971—1981) is shown below :

| Sl. No. | 1971 | 1981 | Percentage of growth rate |
|-------------------------|--------|----------|---------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 1. Shillog Municipality | 87,659 | 1,09,244 | +24.62 |
| 2. Shillong Cantonment | 4,730 | 6,620 | +39.96 |
| 3. Madanriting | — | 6,165 | — |
| 4. Mawlai | 14,260 | 20,405 | +43.09 |
| 5. Nongthymmai | 16,103 | 21,558 | +33.88 |
| 6. Pynthorumkhrab | — | 10,711 | — |
| 7. Sohra | — | 6,079 | — |
| 8. Nongatoin | — | 3,880 | — |
| 9. Jowai | 8,929 | 12,923 | +44.73 |

N.B : *Included in the Then United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District.

Khasi and Jaintia Hills is a plateau of rolling grasslands, meandering rivers, green rolling hills gently sloping towards the plains and valleys with deep gorges and precipitous rivines. It has a unique and fascinating beauty, typical and natural in its own way. Coming down from the plains, one feels delighted and refreshed to pass through the sweet-scented breeze of the whispering pines. Shillong, "The Scotland of the East" has among its attraction a full sized Polo ground and race course, a charming Cricket field, excellent Golf links, splendid rides, long beautiful driving roads and fine breezy downs for a morning gallop, all of which go to make Shillong, perhaps, the most desirable headquarters of all the Local Governments. The caves and hot springs full of wonder, the thrilling wild life, the crystal streams and springs, all add to the inexhaustible stock of natural beauty. It abounds in magnificent cascading waterfalls, fringed with a wide variety of beautiful ferns, moss and orchids. Mention may also be made of the "Sacred Groves", a natural treasure house of plants, beautiful trees of all kinds, rare orchids, rhododendrons and a large number of monoliths, table stones and cromlechs.

The climate is temperate, neither too hot nor too cold with a plentiful supply of rainfall in summer which helps the growth of gorgeous and luxuriant vegetation. > *Sohra* and *Mawsynram* receive the highest rainfall in the world. The Statistical Handbook shows the rainfall in selected centres as follows :—

| Sl. No. | 1981 | 1982 | 1983 |
|---------------------------------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1. Jowai (Jaintia Hills) | 3,375 | 3,305 | 3,212 |
| 2. Sohra (East Khasi Hills) | 9,113 | 10,468 | 9,773 |
| 3. Mawsynram (East Khasi Hills) | 9,739 | 9,246 | 12,168 |
| 4. Nongstoin (West Khasi Hills) | 3,642 | 4,136 | 4,200 |

It is rich in mineral products.⁵ Coal, Limestone and Sillimanite are the three principal minerals in these Hills. In Jaintia Hills the main coal deposits can be found at Bapung, Raliang, Lakadong, Sutnga and others. In Khasi Hills, the main coal deposits can be found at Sohra, Laitryngew, Mawsynram and others. Limestone is found mainly at Sohra, Laitryngew, Pynursla in Khasi Hills. It is found at Lakadong, Nongkhlieh, Sutnga, Nongtalang and Syndai in Jaintia Hills. Sillimanite is found at Mawthengkut near Sonapahar. Kaolin conducive for the supply of China clay is found at *Thadlaskein*, Sung area in the Jaintia Hills and Laitlyngkot and Mawphlang in

5. (a) L. Shullai : Op. cit
(b) D.T. Zimba : Op. cit

the Khasi Hills. The perennial supply of water in these hills also helps in the generation of hydel power. The table below shows the production of minerals in these hills.⁶

Production of Minerals by District, 1983 :

IN TONNES

| Sl. No. | District | Coal | Limestons | Sillimantte Clay |
|---------|------------------|----------|-----------|------------------|
| 1. | Jaintia Hills | 6,59,230 | — | — |
| 2. | East Khasi Hills | 47,000 | 1,88,380 | 640 |
| 3. | West Khasi Hills | — | — | 4,661 |

Agriculture is the main occupation of the people. The principal agricultural products are rice, maize, potatoes, oranges, pineapples, betelnut, pan leaves, tomatoes and others. Lack of preservation of the perishable products, lack of marketing and transport facilities, lack of modern scientific equipments, the complexities of the land system, all these are a great hindrance to the growth of trade and commerce of these agricultural products. Though the hills are not so industrially developed, however, new industrial units have been set up. The Cement Factory at Sohra known as the Mawmluh Cherra Cement Ltd. producing 250 tonnes of cement per day, is in the process of expansion to a production capacity of 930 tonnes per day. Small industrial establishments like saw mills, food processing units, bone mills, cotton ginning, bakeries etc are also found in these hills. Iron smelting is famous in some parts of Khasi Hills, Pottery making is famous at Larnai, Jaintia Hills while home spun traditional cloths are a tribute to the gifted women in these hills. Rehabilitation of the economy of the border areas has also been taken up.

Mention may be made of some of the notable missions established in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills like the Presbyterian Mission, the Roman Catholic Mission, the Rama Krishna Mission, the Church of God Mission, the Church of Christ Mission and others. These Missions not only propagated religion but established health and hospitals and imparted education through their educational institutions. In this context, the year 1841 is memorable for the advent of the *Welsh Calvinistic Mission* into these hills. This Mission reduced the Khasi language to writing and after fitting the English Alphabet to it, opened the first school for the education of the khasis. Their efforts both in evangelisation and

in education were crowned with extraordinary success. In the words of Sir J.B. Fuller

“The humanising effect of Christianity is evident on all sides. The houses of christians can be picked out in a village without a moment’s hesitation in neatness of construction and cleanliness, they stand apart from the others and little flower gardens and rose covered patches indicate a living appreciation of the beautiful. Inside the house the rooms are frequently, nestly panelled and prettily decorated. The people have undoubtedly a natural turn for the artistic, and the children easily learn to draw and colour. But the development of this talent is entirely due to christian influence.”

In short, christianity has developed a spirit of active charity.

Tradition has it that in the “Great Flood” when man had to swim across the overflowing water he “swallowed the book.” The origin of the Khasis is thus lost in obscurity. However, as Gait said, the Khasis are held to be “a remnant of the first Mongolian overflow” from the traditional cradle of the Indo-Chinese race “who established themselves in their present habitat at a very remote period.” Owing primarily to their geographical isolation they succeeded in maintaining their independence until the consolidation of the British rule in these hills. Their language is remarkable as being the only surviving dialect of the *Monkmer* family of languages.

To quote some of the scholars, mention may be made of Hooker, who wrote that the Khasis have a similarity with the Indo-Chinese.⁷ Hunter observes that the physical characteristics of these people indicate that they undoubtedly belong to the Mongolian family.⁸ Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, a notable linguist opines that they appear to have descended from “the earliest Mongoloid immigrants into India who changed their language through contact with Austric speakers, either in Burma or on the soil of India, in pre-historic times.”⁹ A Payre and Cerini observe, “A double stream of immigrants from India flowed into Indo-China, at a very early period, one proceeding from the North, advanced over land through Bengal and Assam along the valleys of the Chingwin, Irrawaddy, Salween and Mekongand established the famous kingdoms in lower Burma, Malay-Peninsula(The Indian colonies in the Far East, Vol. I Edited by R. Majumder).¹⁰

7. Joseph Dalton Hooker (Sir)—Himalayan Journal (1854—Reprint 1894)

8. W.W. Hunter—A Statistical Account of Assam (1879—Reprint 1975)

9. As cited by J.N. Choudbury—*The Khasis Canvas*, Shillong 1978.

10. As cited by G- Costa—The origin of the people *Ka Syngkhong Jingtip*, Vol. II, April, 1959, Shillong.

In this connection, reference may be made to U Bin Iangphar, where report confirms the findings of most of the scholars. According to the report received by Shri Dohory Ropmay, E.A.C. Sohra, U Bin Iangphar was a native of Sohiong village. His father was from Sylhet. He went as a coolie under Colonel Woodthorpe to China (Indo China ?) probably in the 1870's and returned home after a lapse of thirty years or so. According to the report, it was said that there were Khasis in a certain place in China (Indo-China ?). They were Khasis spoke Sohiong dialect and strictly observed Khasi customs and traditions. They had powerful Syiems who had their own soldiers. U Bin Iangphar had four children, Ka Donrimai, Ka Dori, U Bilot and U Alot.¹¹

Generally speaking, "Khasi" is a generic name given to the people of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Having the same customs and traditions, speaking the same language and following a common religious belief, the Khasis of the Eastern Plateau are known as *Pnars* or *Syntengs*, those of the Northern slopes are known as *Bhois*, those of the southern slopes are known as *Wars* and those in the West by North areas as *Lyngngams*. The Khasis of the Western Plateau are known as *Khyriams* to the *Pnars* and as *Nongphlang*s to the *Wars*. There are other groups like the *Labangs*, the *Khyrwangs*, the *Nongtung*s and others but all these are known by the generic name "Khasi".

Khasi Mythology relates that the Khasi race descended from "Ki Hynniew Trep, Ki Hynniew Skum" the Seven Huts or the Seven Nests. Almost every Khasi believes that they came from Heaven, that their rites and ceremonies were delivered by God Himself to "Ki Hynniew Trep." To quote David Roy,

"The Seven Nests or Roots were seven pairs of virgin women and man created by God to marry and they formed seven houses (families) and from them the country was filled up and rites and ceremonies were obtained."¹²

The *Seven Huts* on earth and the *Nine Huts* in Heaven were connected by a golden ladder called "*U Sohpet Bneng*". When *kap ka sang* (sin) crept and covered the earth, the golden bridge or ladder was broken, the sun refused to shine, she hid herself (Among the Khasis the sun is referred to in the feminine gender) in a cave called *Ka Krem Lamet ka Krem Latang*. Man and beasts were in the horns of a dilemma, a large *Dorbar* was convened calling forth who would be ready to pay the price, who would go to call back the

11. Letter issued : Donory Ropmay, E.A.C., Sub-Inspector of Police, No. 101 dated 22.1.1908.
12. David Roy: Principles of Khasis Culture (off print from Folk Lore Vol. XLII December 1936 Collectanes).

sun from ka Krem Lamet ka Krem Latang. The strong and the swift who volunteered and made the attempt failed to bring back the sun because of their vanity. They ate and drank and bragged at the Sun's cavern, when they were feasted by her. They forgot their mission in their drunkenness. When man and beasts were totally in dark despair they found that there was one bird which never attended the Durbar. That was a little featherless cock. When they asked why it did not come to attend the Durbar, it said that it was to insignificant, having neither a fit dress to appear before the sun nor the persuasive tongue to convince her to return. But they forced the little cock to go as every attempt must be made to bring back the sun. The cock had to go perforce. It reached the sun. The sun offered it food and drink. It refused to take. The sun offered it a place to stay. It refused to stay. It was asked why. It replied that it had come to request the sun to come back and until it condescended to do so, it had no right to take food or shelter. The sun asked how it would come back. The cock said it would crow three times as a call for it to come out of its cave. Khasi religion was born with the cock as the mediator between God and man.¹⁸

In short, the Khasis believe to have a divine origin, they believe in one invisible God, who is kind, loving and forgiving, who is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. They believe in the fundamental doctrine, "Ka Niam tip briew tip Blei" (A religion which knows man knows God). They also believe that they come to this world "Ban Kamai ia ka Hok" (to earn righteousness). R.T. Rymbai observes,

"A Khasi is a deeply religious persons, who nevertheless has an intense love of life. This may sound paradoxical as we have been wont to associate the religious with the ascetic..... a Khasi believes that life is God's greatest gift to man herebelow, and man has to account for it again to the Giver hereafter. Therefore, man's supreme duty is to preserve this life on earth as good and beautiful as he can. But he finds that difficult, he sickens and dies, soon too soon. For bare existence he has to earn his livelihood by the unrelenting sweat of his brow. Nature which smiles on him through her verdant hills and fruitful valleys, also frowns on him with her darkling forests and shady pools. Evil spirit which haunt these dark places come out too often to plague his life. These same spirits twist and torture his mind with sordid-ambition and soul killing jealousy. He

-
13. (a) Soso Tham : *Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep*, Shillong, 1936.
 - (b) H. Lyngdoh : *Ka Niam Khasi*, Shillong, 1937.
 - (c) Jeebon Roy : *Ka Niam Khasi*, Shillong 1898.
 - (d) Sibcharan Roy : *Ka Niam Tip briew tip Blei*, Shillong, 1966.
 - (e) H.U. Mawrie : *U Khasi ha la ka Niam*, Shilloag, 1973.

believes that the evil around him is much too strong for him to resist alone. So, he turns to his nearest kith and kin (ki kur, ki kha, ki man) to form a united front against his enemies, seen and unseen, and above all to his God for his omnipotent help.....A Khasi believes in a God who is good and kind and who would not fail him. He also believes that gratitude is the highest form of virtue and God desires him to live his life fully.....¹⁴.

The Khasis form a matrilineal society which is casteless and classless and which gives the woman a rightful place in the home and in the community. It is a society where the line of descent is traced through the 'Mother', it is not a society with an all powerful woman or women who dominate the mental and material life of the people in the society. A Khasi always says, "From the woman springs the kind (species) from the father comes the stature (person)". But it is paradoxical why some scholars have misinterpreted the custom and tradition of the Khasi people by saying that a Khasi man has no "place or position whatsoever in the society." In fact, the man has a double role, as father to his children, and uncle to his nieces and nephews on the maternal line. To quote David Roy again,

"It is true that the 'kni' or mother's eldest brother is the head of the house, but the father is the executive head of the new home, where after children have been born to him, his wife and children live with him. It is he who faces the dangers of the jungles and risks his life for his wife and children. In his wife's clan, he occupies a very high place, he is second to none but, 'U Kai' while in his own family circle as father and husband, is nearer to his children and his wife than U Kni."

Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem or the dancing arena explains the roots of the whole being of a Khasi. The sword he holds in his right hand symbolises defence for his self, his home, his kith and his motherland. The *Symphiah* (fly flap) on his left hand symbolises the soft and warm advice and counsel to his sisters and brothers, nieces, and nephews. The young maidens or virgins with downcast eyes tell of the modesty, obedience and submission of a Khasi woman, the crown on her head bears the dignity and respect that is given to a woman, the *Lasubon* (flower of fine light yellow texture) attached to the crown stands for purity and beauty, the slow movement of her feet to the accompaniment of drums, cymbals and flute synchronises the fact that she must follow the man for love, shelter and protection. The gold and silver displayed in the dancing arena is the symbol of hard work. Young and old men surrounding the maidens show the sacred duty of the man to lay down his life in guarding the honour, purity

14. R.T. Rymbai—"*The Festivals of a Khasi and their influence in his life*". Khasi Heritage (hereinafter KH), Shillong, 1969.

and chastity of the woman. Thus "man is the defender of the woman and the woman is the keeper of his trust."

A remarkable feature of the people is their love for music which may be said to be in their blood. Whether in the fields or round the fire-place, in joy or sorrow, a Khasi sings. When a Khasi is happy he sings, laughs and dances, when he is sad he sings mournful songs. J.N. Choudhury in *The Khasi Canvas* writes,

"Among all the hill people of India's North East region and perhaps elsewhere, the Khasis are undoubtedly the most musical race. Their sensibility to musical sounds is so great that they can readily pick up any tune and melody whether indigenous or foreign. They can handle any musical instrument however, complicated, with little training and practice."

Last but not the least, perhaps it may be important to examine the impact of Geography on the history of these hills. All through the ravages of history, the Khasis have been able to preserve their history and the democratic ideals uncontaminated and unadulterated because of the compactness of the physical environment. The steep hills, the valleys and the ravines, the caves and dense forests, all these have contributed in creating the defence mechanism for their land. With their bows and arrows and their crude war implements, the Khasis adopted guerilla tactics in times of external aggression. The bracing climate of the hills made the people strong, brave and sturdy to adopt such natural defence techniques as enabled them to maintain their Independence amidst the multifarious odds. The Earl of Willingdon on his visit to *Shillong* said :

"It is a proof of the stamina and virility and competence of your people, that, when greater empires in the east and west have throughout the ages come and gone, you still maintain in your pleasant hills the freedom of your small republics based on your ancient ways and tenets of your race."

Sir J.B. Fuller made a similar remarks when he said :

"Not without courageous fighting and there is much to the credit of your nation in the record of the long struggle which however, lamentably commenced, exhibited the bravery and endurance of Tirok Sing of Nongkhlaw. So also in the incidents of the protracted military operations which took place in Jaintia Hills....."

The serenity of free nature amidst the hills breathes an air of freedom and love of democracy and local autonomy which remain a living symbol till today. These are the people with whom the British came into contact, who, inspite of their eventual failure offered a stiff resistance to the foreign invader to defend their freedom. It is no wonder therefore that when the British colonised India, the Khasi people were the last to submit to British Imperialism.

B. Khasi Polity

The Khasis have no written history but it is engraved in their veins. They can read their history from their customs and traditions, their folklore and festivals, their culture and religion, their manners and ways of life. They have undoubtedly been able to preserve and maintain their democratic way of life. Democracy, to the Khasis, is the ideal shaped, moulded and brought into stature by the ancestors in the dim mists of antiquity. Colonial Herbert remarked, "The Khasis are a singularly progressive and intelligent race with democratic tendencies."¹⁵

With this democratic tendency, the Khasis may be few but sturdy, they may be hard-pressed by time but adventurous, they are ready to sacrifice their lives at the altar of preservation. On his visit to Shillong in 1952, the late Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru remarked of the Khasis as those who "by their stamina, virility and competence still maintain their freedom based on ancient ways and tenets of the race. They are an extremely disciplined people, often more democratic than most of India. Without a (written) constitution they function democratically and carry out the decisions made by their elders and representatives without exception."

The evolution of the traditional social cultural and political ideals of the Khasi is interwoven round the origin of the Khasi race. Based on the belief that the *Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum* were the progenitors of the Khasi race, the Khasis look upon the "trep" as a "Kur". There was inter-marriage among the different Kurses and as a result, those Kurses or Clans were multiplied in course of time. A Kur traced its descent to "*Ka Iawbei Tynrai*" or Root Ancestress. With the multiplication of Kur and growth of population, the members of some Kurses migrated in search of new lands for agriculture, better means of livelihood and other facilities. This led to the formation of "*Ka Jaid*". The Jaid claims to have descended from the common but younger ancestress in the Kur, called *Ka Iawbei Tymmen* or Old Ancestress. A Kur is thus divided into a number of jaid. A jaid is again sub-divided into "*Ka Kpoh*" which claims descent from '*Ka Iawbei Khynew*' or Young Ancestress.¹⁶ Each kpoh is sub-divided into *Iings* (Houses or Families). Through migration, the jaid may be known by a new name but belongs to the same ancestry and the same Kur. A jaid can also be integrated in the same Kur with another jaid through act of kindness done by one jaid to the other. The following list gives an idea of the different jaid belonging to the same kur.¹⁷ Khonglah and

15. D. Herbert : *Succession to the Syiemship in the Khasi States* (No. 3541).

16. (a) R.T. Gurbon : *The Khasis* (1914).

(b) H. Lyngdoh : *Ka Niam Khasi* (1937).

17. *Khasi Students Association Magazine* 1962-63 (KSA), p. 23.

Khongwir, Nongrum, Rymbai, Rumnong, Nengnong and Nongneng, Basaiawmoit, Majaw and Hynniewta, Sun and Lamare, Paswett, Lytan, Lanong, Lakiang, Liwait, Gatphon, Kynjing, Pakyntein, Nikhla, Niangphoh, Rangat, Syngkon, Kma, Lipon, Pyrdiang, Mytyen and Syngbud, Tariang (War) and Tariang (Khyriam), Swer (Pnar) and Swer (Khyriam Blah Pnar) and Blah (Khyriam).

Marriage is strictly exgamous, that is, outside the kur. Among the Khasis, there is no sin which is as great as marrying within one's own clan. It is not only an act of sacrilege but an unpardonable sin. Such a person is denied the solace of religion. No rite of ceremony can be performed for them, and when they die their ashes have no place in the cairns of the Kur.¹⁸ Khasi Christians or Khasis who profess their own religion still observe the Khasi customary laws of consanguinity and this is the sacred of the continuance of the Khasis as a race.¹⁹ It is *Ka Sang ka Ma* (unpardonable sin) to marry one's sister-in-law or mother-in-law which is called *Ka Shong Sang Synri*. It is a sin to marry the children of one's father's brother (*Ka Sang Sohpet Kha*) or father's sister or their grand children *Ka Sang Syngken Kha*.¹⁰

A Khasi can marry his cousin (bakha) that is, daughter of his uncle but he cannot, however, marry the daughter of his paternal aunt (Niakha) as it tantamounts to a taboo called *Ai Khaw Kylliang*, which is an insult to the father, because it means a return of bread and luck and the person of his father to his own clan²¹.

To the Khasis, marriage is a sacred bond between a man and a woman. It is believed to be ordained by God (*ba la phah hi da u Blei*) or sent by God. After marriage the man goes to the woman's house and became "*U Khun ki brieu*" (the son of other people). Though the line of descent is taken from the mother and she is expected to train and mould her children in accordance with Khasi norms and ways of life, yet the father is the pivot round which the whole family revolves. He is the connecting link between his mother's clan and his wife's clan. The children look to their father's mother as *Mei Kha* (born of a mother) and his sisters and brothers as *Niakha Pakha* (paternal aunts and uncles) and his children are *Khunkha* (children born from paternal aunts and uncles) to his mother's clan. The *Meikha* is held in high esteem in Khasi Society.²²

18. R.T. Rymbai: "*Certain custom of the Pnars and their changing patterns*" in Hipshon Roy (ed) (KH), Shillong 1979, p. 77.

19. Helen Giri: "*Evolution of the traditional social and political ideals of the Khasis and the Impact of British rule on these Ideals*" Proceedings of the North East India History Association, Shillong 1980, p. 93.

20. *Ibid*

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

Traditions tells that the Khasis, whether *Khyriam* or *Pnar Bhoir* or *War Limpogam* or *Nongtung* etc. belong to one race. If we examine the language, social life, religious belief, customs and traditions they all prove that they are one race. Tradition also tells that the Khasis migrated from east to west. David Roy explains and goes back to oral tradition,²³ which is still prevalent till today that *Sajar Niangli*, a leader of many clans and families in the Sutnga in the east migrated slowly to the west. We still find relics of the westward migration of *Sajar Niangli* and his people. The *Syiemlieh* from *Khadsawpra* believe that they belong to the same Kur with the *Syiem Synteng*; The *Khatar Lyngdoh Ri Nongpoh* and the *Jirang Ri Mynnar* are similar in language and ways of thinking with the Pnars. We also find in *Pomshala*, there is a reference to *U, Khag, USahei, U Khrang* and *U Ben*, the leaders of the people of *Mustoh* and *Shella*. They migrated and fled from *Pomshala*, a place on the west of *Mawpat* hill near Shillong, thereafter they moved downwards to *Shella*. In this connection, the dress of the women of the *Shella* villages is similar to that of the *Pnar Women*.

There are other strong reasons to believe that the Khasis first settled in the east and that with the increase of population and the search for more lands for cultivation and other purposes, the migration took place from east to west. To explain this further, first, the five poonjees, *Jymmang, Lyngkadiang, Tynriang, Umniuh-Tmar* and *Nongjri* are part of the Pnars in feeling, emotion, way of thinking and polity.²⁴

Secondly, if we observe the orange groves, they lead from Sutnga to *Mawkaiew, Mawpdang, Mawroh* and *Mawtawar*. From Sutnga in the east, the orange groves among the *War Synteng* and *War Khasi* lead on the land of the *Shella*, this shows that the migration was from east to west.²⁵

Thirdly, if we judge at the boundary, demarcation of land, separating the land of one Kur from that of another, we will find that this demarcation leads from the east to the west.²⁶

Fourthly, most of the clans and kurns of Khasi Hills claim that they belong to the same origin though they migrated from Pnar area. The list will give us an idea :

Diengdoh Bah, Diengdoh Kylla, Diengdoh Shngain Lang, Pariong (Khyriam) belong to the same kur with the Laloo (Pnar) ;

23. David Roy : "*Shano U Sajar U leit*", Syngkhong Jingtíp, 10th June, 1937.

24. *Ibid.*

25. David Roy : "*Ka Jaka U Khasi Ha ka Pyrthei*", Syngkhong Jingtíp, 10th September, 1937, p. 7.

26. *Ibid.*

Shabong, Mukhim and Khyriem (Khyriam) belong to the same kur with the Shallam (Pnar) ;

Thangkhiw (Khyriam) belongs to the same kur with the Slong (Pnar) ;

Shylla, Pariat and Pde (Pnar). Lyngdoh Nongbri, Lyngdoh Nongkynrih (Khyriam) belong to the same kur with the Shadap and Passah (Pnar).²⁷

Fifthly, Nongkhlaw and Nongaspung claim descent from the Sutnga ruling family. *Mawsynram* and *Sohra* claim descent from the Malngiang ruling family, the original state of which extended from Umkhen river to Myntdu river.²⁸

Lastly, it is the *War* Amwi and Lakadong dialect and not *Sohra* dialect which has a close affinity with the Monkhmer form of speech, which changes gradually to Jowai, War Mawshai (Nongkrem dialect), Swer and finally *Sohra* dialect. The single sentence below will explain that the Khasi language had its origin in *War* Amwi which gradually changed as people migrated and moved westward.²⁹

U. Amwi. Ah u mi U. Juprew, u e oh arbai (arbei) i hun tyrmai.

U. Jirang. Ah de-i-mi u karo u ah irbei ki hun hun tyrmei.

U. Jowai. Em uwi u bru uwa em arngut ki khon shynrang.

U. Nongjri. La em uwei met u brew uba la em arngut ki phan shynrang.

U. Nongkrem. La don uwei u briew uba la don arngut ki khon shynrang.

U. Sohra. La don uwei u briew uba la don arngut ki khun shynrang.

Khasi tradition suggests that "The state was founded on religion" and religion starts within the Kur. U Cromlyn Lyngdoh, a former Judge of the U.K. and J Hills District Council, wrote in 1938.

"A Khasi is khasi because of his religion.....It is the religion in the sense of his 'Niam' which regulates all his thoughts and activities. Forget his religion and you will never understand a khasi....."

The *Kur* is the nucleus round which all institutions social, cultural and political, revolve.³⁰ The Khasis have no pagodas,

27. *K.S.A.* 1962-63, p. 12.

28. *H. Lyngdoh : Ki Syiem Khasi bad Synteng*, Shillong, 1938.

29. David Roy : *Ka Jaka U Khasi ha ka pyrthei*, Syngkhong Jingtip 1937, p. 8.

30. Helen Gire : *Op. cit.*

mosques, temples or organised church,³¹ the religious rites and ceremonies are performed by the kur and the Khasis have nothing that can be called a special form of worship because they believe in a Creator of the world, all good and powerful and so good and kind that he needs no proper time in the way of worship or offering. A Khasi offers thanks and gratitude to His God, in his heart. When each kur settled down in a certain place the members formed a village. The eldest male members along with other members of the kur exercised influence in social and economic matters. The village society could assimilate the members of other kurs as well who might settle down in the village. The male members of the kur sometimes brought their wives from other kurs to stay in the village, thus increasing the member of kurs in the village. Further, in times of war and trade, the Khasi men married women from the plains carried off in the raid made by the Khasis in Assam and Sylhet.³² In this way, a number of kurs came to stay in a village that initially began with only one Kur. The first or founding kur would elect a wise, eldest male member to be the ruler of the village. Such a man assumed the office of the Basan.³³ The remaining kurs in the village also elected their own representatives called *Ki tymmen ki san* but in a village founded jointly, the minor kurs would elect *tymmen shnong* or *Headmen*. There would be one or more headmen in the same village, but all the elected heads whether *Ki Tymmen ki San* or *Tymmen Shnong* would form a village Council with the Basan.³⁴ The Basan is also called the *Basan Raid* or *Basan Shnong*.³⁵ It may be mentioned here however, that the 'Basan' emerged from the Raid but the 'Bakhrav' emerged from the kur. The name of the whole raid would sometimes be called after the name of the village of the founding kur. As a single instance, the *Raid Nongkseh* in Myllem Syiemship has been coined after Nongkseh village. It includes Thangkhwiew, Rumnong and Lyngdoh Nongkseh clans. The representatives from Raid Nongkseh in the Dorbar Hima is the Basan Nongkseh from Thangkhwiew clan.³⁶

It may be quite difficult to comprehend or understand the word "*Lyngdoh*" in the real sense of the term. *Lyngdoh* is a word used mostly in Bhoi and War areas. On a broader analysis, it may be said that *Lyngdoh* denotes those who are in charge of *ka Niam* (Religion). Such a *Lyngdoh*, who comes from the *Lyngdoh* clan is appointed for the purpose and he is called "*U Sohblei*". On the other

31. Hipshon Roy : "*My Faith*," KH, pp. 119-23.

32. H. Lyngdoh : Op. cit.

33. (a) H.D. Mawrie : *Ka Pyrkhath U Khasi*, Shillong, 1973 p. 69.

(b) Gurdon : Op. cit.

34. H. Lyngdoh : *Ka Niam Khasi*, Shillong, 1970. p. 259.

35. H.O. Mawrie : Op. cit. p. 69.

36. H. Lyngdoh : *Ki Syiem Khasi bad Synteng*, Shillong 1938.

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hand, there is another Lyngdoh in charge of administration of the *Raid* as well as the religious affairs of the state. He is the Lyngdoh Synshar or Lyngdoh *Raid* like the Lyngdoh Mawphlang, Lyngdoh Sohion, and others. The Lyngskor may be regarded as the Syiem's Deputy for the purpose of governing a collection or number of villages, he is appointed by the Syiem with the approval of the adult males of the villages over which he is appointed. In Jainita Hills, there are the Dolois. In the words of J.B. Shadwell, a *doloi* is an officer who acknowledged allegiance to the Jynteah Raja until the whole tract of country was annexed by the British Government.

With the growth of Kurs, villages, Basans and Lyngdohs, in course of time, the Khasi states were formed as a result of a mutual agreement among the leaders or Basans or Lyngdohs of the raids. Perhaps this contract was considered a necessity by the rulers of the different raids that they should arrive at an agreement to unite for better understanding, better administration and security from undesirable and external forces. The *Sutnga* state emerged as a result of an agreement between the *Saw kher* and *Lai Lyngdoh* (four Basan clans and three lyngdoh clans) that is, the four raids, each having its own Basan and three raids, each having its own Lyngdoh. To clarify this further, Dr. Lyngdoh states that the *Raid Saw kher* includes Nongksehs, Nongumlong, Swer and Synrem or Mawlieh Mawshai, it also includes the *San Shnong* (five villages) of Marbisu, Sadew, Markhan, Mawshanlang Nongbsap each having its own Tymmen Shnong or Headman. The Representatives to the Dorbar Hima from these Raids are Basan Nongkseh from Thangkhiew clan, Basan Nongumlong from Nongngeng clan, Basan Swer from Swer clan, Basan Synrem, from Myntri of Marbisu from Sun clan, the Myntri of Sadew from Pathaw clan, the Myntri of Markhan from Rapsang clan, the Myntri of Mawshanlang from Majaw clan and the Lyngdoh of Nongbsap from the Nongbsap clan. The men of Five villages (*San Shnong*) were warriors of great courage among the *Sawkher* and they come to be known as *Khyndai Bah Ryntieh* (The Nine Bow Wielders). The *Lai Lyngdoh Raids* are Myllem, Nongbri and Pongrup or Nongbet and they include the *San Kur* (Five Kurs) that is, the Myllem Ngap, Sohtun, Kurkalang, Nonghlaw and Rynjah or Kharkongor. Representatives to the Dorbar Hima from these raids are the Lyngdoh of Myllem from Lyngdoh Myllem clan, the Lyngdoh of Nongbet from the Pongrup, the Lyngskor from Myllem Ngap clan, the Myntri of Nongkhlaw from the Nongkhlaw clan and the Rynjah Myntri from the Rynjah clan or Kharkongor myntri from the Kharkongngor clan. The *Hynniew Raid* (Seven Raids) and the *Snn Kur San Shnong* (Five Kurs Five villages) which formed the Shillong state were also known as *Lai Basan* (three Basans) that is the raids under the three basans, which include the *Basan Tyngkong*, in charge of raids *Myllem*, *Nongkrem* and *Sankur*; the *Basan Khrum* in charge of raids *Nongkseh*, *Nongumlong*, *Synrem* or *Mawlieh Mawshai* and *San Shnong* (five villages), the *Basan Swer* in charge of raids *War*

Khatar Shnong and *Khatar Blang*. In this connection, some raids joined with the other *raids* while some other raids did not. In any case, some Khasi states come under the administration of the *Syiem* or the *Lyngdohs* or the *Wahadadar* or the Sirdar as the case may be.

The final stage in the growth, development and evolution of Khasi polity was the foundation of the Khasi states under the *Syiems* called *Ka It ka Hima*. A combination of factors led to the emergence of Khasi States under the Syiems. First, as the villages grew in size and population, the people found it necessary to be under one common administration. The *Syiem* is there not to dictate but to be their philosopher and guide, he would be the mediator between the people and the *Dorbar Hima*. In short, the Khasi Syiem rules but does not reign. Secondly, it is a popular belief that it is a taboo for the people to administer justice or be in charge of "*Ka nar ka bili*" or "*U Tangon u lymban*", "*Saikhum Saitoh*", hence, the necessity of the *Syiem*. Thirdly, it is a popular belief that the *Syiem*, who was ordained by God to come to the earth, has certain super powers to decide between right and wrong, to take charge of *Ka Niam Im ka Niam Iap* (religion for the living and the dead) of the *Bakhraws* or the people, to collect or impose fines or gather the wealth and belongings of *ka Taro, u Thlen* or *ka Shwar*, which the *Bakhraws* or the people would regard as a taboo or a religious impurity to be brought within their hearth or their clan. Fourthly, as the Khasi states grew in strength, power and influence, there was also every likelihood that they would fall a prey to foreign invasion. The question of defence therefore, demanded the entity of *Syiemship*. Fifthly, the *Basan* of the *Raids* or ruling clans had equal status, there was therefore the necessity of evolving an institution as head of the state.

We may, however, observe that among the different nations of the world, the strong and mighty made themselves kings and emperors. But among the *Khasis*, any person, however strong he might be, could not take the title of *Syiem* or establish a state. The *Basan*, the *Lyngdohs* and the leaders of the *Raids* (collectively called the *Bakhraws*) who, with the full consent of the founding *kur* or *kurs* of the village would anoint a particular *jaid* or clan as *Jaid Syiem*.³⁷ All the '*Jaid Syiem*' do not descend from the same common ancestress, they may be anointed in their own raids in accordance with the norms of their respective raids. As such, they do not belong to 'the same *Kur*' except in the case of *Jaid Syiem Myllem*, *Syiem Laitkor*, *Syiem Khyrim*, *Syiem Mawpdang* which claim to belong to the same *kur* since they descended from the common ancestress, *Ka Pah Syntiew*.

The *Jaid Syiem* has its own story to tell of its origin based on Khasi tradition. Almost all Khasi writers corroborate on the popular

37. H. Lyngdoh : *Ka Niam*, Shillong 1970, p. 266.

belief. In the first instance, Sutnga, Madur Maskut and Shyllong regarded their Syiem as *Ki Syiem Ki Blei* (The Syiem The God). It is believed that they have a divine origin; Sutnga is believed to have come out of—*Ka Li Bohkha* (A Fish) and *U Luh Ryndi*, whose children are Ka Raputong, Ka Rapunga, U Syngkhlein Am, U Bania Am and U Tetiaksaw—from Raputong sprang the Syiem Sutong and from Rapunga, the Syiem Sutnga.³⁸ *Madur Maskut* is believed to have come out from the pig and U Kyllong Raja Syiem has been called “U Syiem Saitsnier” (The Syiem who washed his intestines). Oral tradition tells that he was killed treacherously by his enemies, through a woman, who jilted him and led him to his doom. Since that time, the Sutnga or Syiem Synteng conquered the whole of Madur Maskut. The Malngiang Syiemship spreads to the four corners of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Mawsynram and Sohra states claim to have descended from the Malngiang clan.³⁹ Speaking of Shyllong state, it is believed that there was a *Mermaid*, who was the niece of the Shyllong deity, who is regarded to be the first mother or Root Ancestress of the Jaid Syiem Shyllong (the present Khyrim and Myllem clans). She was lured or enticed by a flower (hence “*Ka Pah Syntiew*” by a man from the Myllem Ngap clan. She was given in marriage, when she was of age, to *U Kongor Nongjri*. The children of Ka Pah Syntiew are called *Ki Khun Blei* (God’s children). Till today Myllem Ngap clan regards it a taboo enter into marriage with the Syiem Shyllong clan (Khyrim or Myllem) because Ka Pah Syntiew was taken care of by U Myllem Ngap. Secondly, the people of Sohra regard their Syiems as *U Syiem U Kmie* (The Syiem The mother). According to this story, there were four brothers and sisters—*U. Buhsing, U. Sadang, Ka Shan* and *Ka Jah* who wandered to Swer from Sumer (Synteng or Jaintia) and U Basan Swer who was the Basan of Khatar Shnong Khatar Blang gave them shelter and took care of them. They were loved and respected by the people for their good behaviour. Basan Swer went to tell this to the Syiem Shyllong and he was given the power by the Shyllong Syiem to anoint them as *Syiems*. From that time, the four sisters and brothers who came to Swer claimed to belong to the same clan with the Swer clan, under whose maternal care they were brought up—hence U. Syiem U. Kmie (The Syiem the Mother).⁴⁰ Lastly, the people of *Mawiang* regard their Syiem as “*U Syiem U Mraw*” (The Syiem the Slave) because during the time when the Pariong clan ruled over Raid Mawiang, it is probable that their territorial sway stretched to Sunamganj (Sylhet). But in the war with Maram state, they lost all these territories. It happened that during this period, the ruling clans of *Mawiang* captured four *Muslims* three men and one woman from Punatit and anointed them as Syiems. Till today, the Muslim

38. H. Lyngdoh : *Ki Syiem Khasi bad Synteng*, Shillong, 1938.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

family at Punatit (Sunamganj) still call their children "Khasia Raja".⁴¹

The land of the Khasis is always referred to as "*Ka Ri Umsnam*" (The land where blood has been shed). There may be a possibility that the forefathers must have got this land through hard struggle and shedding of blood or must have defended it at the cost of their blood. A Khasi is sensitive, he loves his land so dearly, because he has bought it or has been able to retain it through his own blood. Thus, after he inherited it, he feels, it should not belong to one person or one group only but every Khasi has the right to it, there is *Ka Hok Ka Riti* (The truth, the tradition) to govern it. On this ground, Syiemship, Doloiship, Wahadadership or Sirdarship emerged not by arbitration but by the will and consent of *Ki Khun Ka Hajar* (Children of the soil) of the state concerned and the basis of Khasi customs and traditions. Herein, lies the foundation of the "*democratic instinct*" of the Khasis. Dr. R.S. Lyngdoh rightly points out in his welcome address at the Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India (5th November, 1974).

"In fact, in Khasi polity, an individual is assured of an equal opportunity in the administration based on native genius, an organisation unlike other hereditary chiefs elsewhere the Syiems were elected Chiefs, chosen by an electoral college of "*Bakhraws and Basans*" who were themselves the elected representatives of the people. Till today, the political system of the Khasis is more democratic than that of the Panchayats system that exists in the plains. When no democracy existed in the plains, the Khasis were ruled by a democratic process

In a petition to the Governor of Assam, there is an explanation which explains the office of the Syiem as follows :

"The office of the Syiem is a sacred institution entrusted with the protection and preservation of the rights and regulation of duties of every citizen of the Syiemship, which the Founder Clans along with the Dorbars of villages called "*Dorbar Shnong*" and "*Dorbar Raj*" have appointed unto themselves by a covenant or oath, the Syiem as symbol of unity of all villages and group of villages comprising the Syiemship."⁴²

The *Syiem* is referred to as Pa-Iem (Father-Syiem), the women of the Syiem Clan as Mei-Iem (Mother-Syiem) and the citizens (Khasis) as *Ki Khun Hajar* (Children of the Hima). H.O. Mawrie observes that the Syiem is to act like a mother to take care of the

41. *Ibid.*

42. To General S.M. Srinagesh, Governor of Assam, Shillong, from H. Kharkongor, G.M. Roy Kharkongor, Shara Lyngdoh, Niha Singh Myntri and others, 26th November, 1959.

orphans and widows, the deserted and destitute, the sick and the poor, and those whose clan has become extinct. "*Ka Sad Ka Sunon*", which is still in existence in Khyrim State, is also another institution. There is no equivalent in any English Dictionary. It stands for the ruling Syiem, the Bakhraws of the state and Ki Khun Ki Hajar. It is the seat of power, justice, religion, unity and harmony. The Syiem is only the representative of the female Syiem in the Dorbar or in the battlefield. He brings all the produce of the Hima to the Syiem Kynthei and he cannot spend it without proper consultation with the Syiem Kynthei. This does not mean that the Syiem Kynthei is above the ruling Syiem but everyone, be the Syiem Kynthei or the ruling Syiem or the Syiem Sad work harmoniously for the good of the whole Hima.⁴³

The Khasis had developed a three-tier system with built in checks and balances to guard against any usurpation of power. There was the *Village Dorbar* or *Dorbar Shnong* to look after the social affairs of the village or locality. several villages then joined together to form the *Raid* with the *Dorbar Raid* to take care of disputes between the villages, the judgement and verdict of which, should be according to the prevailing tradition. Till today at the apex there is the *Syiem bad ka Dorbar* and *Ka Korbar Hima*. (For all practical purposes, the Syiem is assisted by two dorbars—*U Syiem bad ka Dorbar*, which consists of the Myntris, the Basans, the Lyngskors, the Lyngdohs collectively called the "*Bakhraws*" and the *Dorbar Hima* or the Council of the People, where every adult would be represented and where matters of great importance are to be discussed and decisions taken upon. T. Cajee observes that there is the *Hima* with the *Syiem*, the *Lyngdohs*, Myntris, the *Basans* and the Headmen or Sordars. In Sohra, there is the Syiem and the twelve Kurs, in Khyrim the Syiem and the Six Lyngdohs and so on. Every political institution should be in accordance with the established norms of each Hima. Each major clan has its own Lyngdoh or Bakhraw. As the Hima expands by embracing new villages, the *Dorbar Hima* would have more representatives. The Syiem can do nothing without the will and consent of the *Dorbar Hima*. This *Dorbar Hima* elects or dethrones the Syiem, it promulgates laws and by laws, it gives its assent to the appointment of Myntris or Lyngdohs or Basans, it decides war and peace and lastly gives its final decision to any suit.⁴⁴

The Khasi political systems which existed from unrecorded time gave room to the British administrators and writers to give various analysis of the Khasi Himas with their Syiems or Lyngdohs Sirdars Wahadadars. Mr. Robert son, the Commissioner after David Scott wrote of the Khasi Hima :

43. H. Lyngdoh : *Ki Syiem Khasi bad Synteng*, Jinglamphrang VII.

44. T. Cajee : "*Ka History jong ka Jingsynshar ka Ri Khasi bad Jaintia*", Syngkhong Jingtip, 1937.

"Among many peculiarities apparent in the form of society and Government, existing, among the Cosayahs, the absence of any recognised organ of supreme power is very remarkable. The nation or horde presents the appearance of a congregation of little oligarchical republics, subject to no common superior, yet of which each member is amenable in some degree to the control of his confederates."

Ten years after this, Yule wrote. "They show no particular courtesy of bearing towards their Rajas. Indeed the latter do not seem to have much power." Rev. Lewis described the form of Government in 1853 as a mixed one where the Syiems were mostly controlled by "the Character of the People". The Syiem was absolute by nature but in some places he exercised limited powers because the people controlled him. Nevertheless, all Syiems were easily accessible to the people.⁴⁵ Gurdon wrote on the nature of the Khasi States that the Syiem "can perform no act of any importance without first consulting and obtaining the approval of the Durbar upon which the Myntris, the Dolois, the Sordars, the Lyngdohs sat ...". He also observed, "The Syiem in matters judicial acts as Judge, the whole body of the Durbar being the Jury." In short, the Syiem or the Lyngdoh or the Sirdar is the elected ruler on democratic principles. He is the instrument to carry out the decision of the Dorbar. He cannot act on his own.

In spite of certain changes introduced by the British, the Khasi State functioned with a high sense of justice. As the State was founded on religion, justice would be administered with as much care as possible in conformity with the norms and tradition of the people. If there is any kind of dispute among the members in the family or the Kpoh or the Kur, the first suggestion to be given to them would be to settle amicably. If it cannot be settled, it is then brought to the notice of the Durbar Kur. The Dorbar is constituted of "the elders of the family Ka Ing of the branch of clan (ka kpoh) or of the clan itself as a whole (ka hur)" depending upon whether the dispute is between members of a family, or members of a branch of clan or members of the branches constituting the clan. They are known as *Dorbar ling*, *Dorbar Kpoh* or *Dorbar Kur* respectively. The co-efficiency of the Dorbar ling or Dorbar Kpoh or Dorbar Kur is that there is always a fear and bad omen which may be fall if there is no amicable settlement within the family, kpoh or clan as the case may be.

Taking a dispute to a village Dorbar or the Court (Ka Inglieh-Ing saw) creates a "Sang" against the party which does so. The traditional village dorbar is now replaced by a village council or village court set up by the District Council under the Khasi and

45. Report on Khasi and Jaintia Hills 1853 (popularly known as Mills' Report).

Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Administration of Justice Act/
Rules.⁴⁶

In the first instance, when the person lodged a complaint against another person to the Syiem or Headman, the complainant would be asked if he had any uncle or not, because the complaint should be lodged by them. Secondly, the complainant would be asked if he had any relationship with the accused because if they belonged to the same kur or had any clan relationship, it would involve "Ka Sang" or a Taboo. They would then be asked to settle the dispute amicably. If this could not be done, the accused would be asked to appear before the Syiem with his/her maternal uncles and families as there were no lawyers, the maternal uncles would plead for the complainant and the accused respectively.⁴⁷ Gurdon observes that the ostensible object would be "to bring about a compromise between the parties." If they could not reconcile, the Dorbar Shnong would be convened. (In the evening when everybody would be back home from the day's work, a *Sangot* or *Crier* would be sent to call the people or make a public announcement that everyone should assemble the next morning for the *Dorbar Shnong*. The *Sangot* would yell at the top of his voice as follows.⁴⁸

"Kaw, thou, a fellow villager,
thou, a fellow creature,
thou, an old man,
thou, who had grown up
thou, who art young
thou, a boy
thou, a child
thou, an infant
thou, who art little
thou, who art great

Hei ! because there is a contest
Hei ! for to cause to sit together.
Hei ! for the cause to deliberate
Hei ! for to give intelligence together
Hei ! about to assemble in durbar
Hei ! for to listen attentively
Hei ! ye are forbidden

46. Report of the Land Reforms Commission for the Khasi Hills, 1974, p. 44.

47. G. Costa : *Ka Ritt Jong Ka Ri Laipnew Sylem*, Shillong, 1938.

48. P. R. Gurdon : *op. cit.* pp. 91—92.

Hei ! ye are stopped to draw water thou not to cut firewood
then

Hei ! to go as coolies then

Hei ! to go work then

Hei ! to go to journey then

Hei ! to descent to the valley then

Hei ! he who has a pouch

Hei ! he who has a bag

Hei ! now come forth

Hei ! now appear

Hei ! the hearing then is to be all in company

Hei ! the listening attentively then is to be all together

Hei ! for his own king

Hei ! for his own lord, lest destruction has come,
lest wearing away has overtaken us :

Kaw ! come forth now fellow mates."

(This is called "*Khang Shnorg*" which means, no one is allowed to go and work. One male adult at least should come to the Durbar Hima. Those who refused to attend would be fined.)

(Gardon observes again that in the Dorbar ground, there are flat stones arranged irregularly for the people to sit. The Headman would open the meeting with a long speech, others made short speeches too "touching upon all sorts of irrelevant matters but throwing out hints now and then, bearing on the subject of accusation. Slowly, they came nearer to the point. Then the complainant and the defendant would throw their Iarong (a bag of pan, betelnut, lime) in front of the Dorbar as a sign or a token that they would agree to the proceedings of the Syiem and the Dorbar, the Syiem being the judge and the Dorbar being the jury. Witnesses were examined on oath usually on a pinch of salt placed on a sword. Sometimes, the oath was sworn on "*U Klong*" (a hallow gourd containing liquor). It is believed that if a person swore falsely by *U Klong U Skaw*, he or the family or clan he represents will die. According to this ordeal there would be *U Klong* (Gourd) containing Sapho (rice) and a feathered arrow with a barbed iron head which would be planted in the fermented rice. The person who took the oath would give this Klong to the person or Judge of the case. He would invoke the Goddess as follows :

"Come down and bear witness, thou Goddess who reignest above and below, who create who placeth him (on earth), who judgeth the right and the wrong, who giveth him being and stature (*i.e.*) life. Thou Goddess of the state, thou Goddess of the place, who preserveth the village, who preserveth the State, come down and judge. If this man's cause be unrighteous, then shall he lose his stature (being) he shall lose his age (life) he:

shall lose his clan, he shall lose his wife and children : only the post of his house shall remain, he shall be afflicted with colic, he shall be racked with excruciating pains, he shall fall on the lacetaring arrow, his dead body shall be carried off by the kites, it shall be carried off by the crows, his family and his clan shall not find it ; he shall become a dog, he shall become a cat, he shall creep in dung, he shall creep in urine, and he shall receive punishment at they hands, on, Goddess and at the hands of a man. If on the other hand, his cause be righteous (lada U kren hok) he shall be well, he shall be prosperous, he shall live a defender and preserver of his clan, he shall be a master of tens and a master of hundreds (very rich) and all the world shall see it. Hear oh : Goddess, thou who judgeth."

U Klong is next invoked as follows :

"Thou U klong, which whose assistance-according to one religion and one custom, a man when he is born into the world is named-hear and judge. If he speaks falsely, his name shall be cut off (by the) and he shall surely die.

The Fermented Rice is then invoked as follows :

"Thou yeast, thou charcoal thou rice of the plough, thou rice of the yoke, thou too, hear and judge. If he speaks falsely, eat off his tongue, eat away his mouth.

Last of all the *arrow* is invoked as follows :

"Thou piercing and lacerating arrow as thou hast been ordained by the Goddest, who creates man, who appoints man to occupy a prominent place in war and in controversy do thou hear and judge. If he (*i.e.*) the man taking the oath) speaks falsely, let him fall upon thee, let him be cut and be torn and let him be afflicted with shooting pricking pains."

The man then takes the *Klong* and holds it on his head uttering the same invocation. The *Klong* is then given to the *Syiem* or the *Sirdar* as the case may be. The person who undergoes this ordeal, is the winner, the production is evidence being unnecessary. However, this ordeal by *U klong* or *U klong U khnam* would be regarded to be the most serious ordeal by the *Khasi*. As such, the *Syiem* or the *Dorbar* would not propose such an ordeal but would be proposed by one party and accepted by the other party. However, the oath taken on *U klong U khnam* or any time of oath taken, testifies to the true *khasi* religion "*Ka Niam Tip Briew Tip Blei*" (a religion which knows man knows God) a religion which teaches man to respect *Ka Juban Lak* or the solemn pledge or a pledged word to speak the truth and nothing but the truth.⁴⁹ In a word the 'gourd' stand for the covenant between God and man.

49. Sub Charan Roy : *Ka Niam Khasi* p. 20

If the case could not be decided, the Dorbar would continue for days together. When the verdict was pronounced, a fine of money would be imposed along with the presentation of a pig to be given by the losing party, supposed to be sacrificed to *Ka 'Lai'* (*synshar* (sovereign Goddess)). It is, however, eaten by the syiem and the Dorbaris.⁵⁰

If the Syiem and the Dorbar found that the evidence by both the parties were unsatisfactory, they would call a witness called *U. Saiphla*, a person of repute who would speak the truth irrespective of the two parties concerned. He would be asked to attend the Dorbar. G. Costa narrates that *U Saiphla* would be examined on an oath and the oath would be regarded by the Khasis as *Ka smai hakhmat U Blei*, (the oath before God). Again, according to the tradition of the Khasis, the *Saiphla* must not be a '*Khalijan*' or '*Iapduh*'. They say '*Ka Khun ka duh jait ka lah ban kren katba ka mon*' being a *Iapduh* or *duhjait* (one who has lost the line of descent, since there is no female relative), could say whatever comes to his mind without thinking for his kur. But the *Saiphla* who has his kur or children or near relatives would not dare to speak falsely. It is believed there would be no untruthfulness in the *Saiphla*, and normally, the decision would be taken accordingly. Decision of disputes is also decided by *Water Ordeals*.⁵¹ Each party, had its own man called *U Ksih*. Such a water ordeal is called *Ka Niam Ksih*. The Syiem, the Basans or the Tymmen Shnong would come to the appointed place prepared for this purpose. The Syiem gave the order and the two *Ksihs* dived into the water, any *ksih* who could remain longer inside the water-his party won the case. Another water ordeal is by placing two pots-one pot containing a piece of gold and the other pot a piece of silver. They would be asked to dip their hands into the water and any person who got the piece of gold would be adjudged as the winner of the dispute.

Mackenzie wrote, "The judicial customs which prevail among the tribes, previous to the establishment of our supremacy continue to be observed with such occasional modification as experience proves necessary." (Though we do rarely find such practice in vogue among the Khasis and the age-old customs seem to slip away into oblivion, yet, whatever might be the cases whatever might be the situation, whatever might be the forces at work to steam roller the customs and traditions, yet, the Khasis still cling to the truth, they still believe that God sees the truth but waits. We can still find the Dorbar Shnong, Ka Khang Shnong, Ka Pyrta Shnong, they play a vital role in the social and political life of the people. The sentiment of the people for the preservation of all the traditional and cultural customs can best be seen whenever they are made to come into contact with any outside threat, or influence. The love of one's own tradition is still alive.)

50. P.R. G urdon-op, cit p. 93.

51. G C o s t a : op. cit.