



**The Evolution of  
Khasi Music:  
A Study of the  
Classical Content**

**Lapynshai Syiem**

# THE EVOLUTION OF KHASI MUSIC: A STUDY OF THE CLASSICAL CONTENT

By  
**Dr. Lapynshai Syiem**  
Shillong, Meghalaya

## **Foreword**

*Dr. Shanno Khurana*

Fellow of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi  
Member, Board of Research Studies  
Department of Music, Delhi University



*Regency Publications*  
New Delhi

781.6295930954164

SY1



© 2005 Author

*No part of this book may be reproduced, except for reviews, without written permission from the publisher.*

ISBN 81-89233-13-0

*Published by Regency Publications, 20/36-G, Old Market, West Patel Nagar, New Delhi 110 008 and printed at Radiant Printers, New Delhi, Phone: 5248 4101, 2588 4571; Telefax: 2588 4571.*

*Email: [info@regency-books.com](mailto:info@regency-books.com) • website: [www.regency-books.com](http://www.regency-books.com)*

## **FOREWORD**

**The Evolution of Khasi Music : A Study of the Classical Content** is a major breakthrough into the regional music of our country, especially the North-east region. Not many people have delved into the subject. Lapyunshai Syiem has not only discovered some of the virgin areas of the music, but has very systematically traced the history of Khasi Music, going into the Traditional Religious Music and Traditional Non-Religious Music and it is here where lies the exploration of the classical content.

I have read with special interest the development of Khasi Traditional Music from Khasi Folk Music. The study of the musical instruments is very interesting going into many details.

I am sure the book will reveal the much needed awareness on the subject and pave the way for further research by other scholars as well.

C-42, Defence Colony, New Delhi-110024  
(INDIA)

### **Dr. Shanno Khurana**

Fellow of the Sangeet Natak Akademi,  
New Delhi

Member, Board of Research Studies,  
Dept. of Music, Delhi University

## PREFACE

In an attempt to explore the classical content of Khasi Music, I deem it necessary to first explain on the nature of the work. There may be some who are still bewildered by the term 'classical' or 'classical content', as to how and why Khasi Music is classical and by what yardstick Khasi Music is gauged to become classical. Indeed, this very aspect forms the core of the study of the classical content in Khasi Music. This book attempts to highlight the fact that it is the ingredients within Khasi Traditional Music itself that form the classical content, without therefore losing the indigenous flavour in it.

The elements of classicism are examined in the local context, without of course undermining varied arguments, ideas and corroborations brought forward by many writers and musicologists and Ethno-musicologists as well. In trying to employ the yardstick, I have been drawn towards the Indian Classical Music system. In this light, I have not attempted to draw a similarity, rather I have utilized certain arguments to support and explain more on the concept of the 'classical content' of Khasi Traditional Music. Here again, the term 'Traditional' is carefully examined to further unfold the idea of the classical content. In the process of bringing Khasi Traditional Music from the oral to the written (notation) form, I readily accept the confusion which some may face in understanding the difference between the framework of a particular drum beat and the insertions that come therein. For this reason, certain units of drums like *Ka Ksing Shad Wait*, *Ka Ksing Lynti (Niam)* etc., have been notated with variations depending on the skill of the performers and the style they choose. This book is an expansion of my Ph.D. Thesis with more variations which I think in the fitness of things will cater to the needs of the society in the realm of Khasi Traditional Music.

Khasi Traditional Music is part of the 'Tradition' (*Ka Riti Ka Hok*) of the society. From this, it is not wrong to say that Khasi Traditional Music is deeply ancient and bears much antiquity in it. One will gradually be introduced in the following pages to the factors which have contributed towards the formation of the classical content. To add more appropriateness to the nature of the work, I am making an attempt to notate and organize beats and their variations by using Khasi drum syllables as laid down by the society from the dim mists of antiquity. I have also attempted to introduce local musical terms which have been found to be appropriate in the context of this work.

Statistics, Maps, Stills and Sketches are being given for a clear understanding of the different aspects of this new venture. A short Glossary and Select Bibliography have also been incorporated.

It is to be noted that the full form of the drum syllables like **Kdun, Thang**, etc. is given and used in the book to avoid any confusion and inconvenience. However, the abbreviated form of these drum syllables can be given as follows :

**Dun** - **Dn**

**Thang** - **Th**

**Kdun** - **Kd**

**Kuk** - **Kk**

(This drum syllable is different from the sign **Kk** which indicates the first accented beat)

**Krud** - **Kr**

**Kynjah** - **Kh**

**Khop** - **Kp**

As I present this book to my dear readers, I crave their indulgence and at the same time, entreat them to bear with shortcomings of the book in any form.

**Dr. Lapynshai Syiem**  
Shillong, Meghalaya

## CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	v
<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
Chapter 1 : Profile of Hima Shyllong	1
Chapter 2 : Folk-Music : The Mother of Other Forms of Khasi Music	21
Chapter 3 : Growth and Development of Traditional Music : Stages of State Formation Process : Evolution of Sur Shnong (Village Music), Sur Raid (Music at the Level of the Raid) and Sur Hima (Music at the Level of the Native State)	48
Chapter 4 : Khasi Musical Instruments : Their Influence on the Evolution of Khasi Music	78
Chapter 5 : The Classical Content : Khasi Beats and Tunes which Give the Essence of the Classical Content	113
Chapter 6 : Towards Classicism	180
<i>Glossary</i>	182
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	185
<i>Index</i>	190

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My gratitude goes to all those people whose assistance, encouragement and contribution, both direct and indirect, have made this work possible.

I acknowledge all those writers whose books I have consulted and quoted.

Among those who deserve credit is my father-composer under whose guidance I was introduced to the first musical notes of Khasi Folk Music. My background in Khasi Folk Music has tremendously helped me in understanding the other forms of music. I owe a debt to him for the patient hours he spent composing songs for me to instill in me the love for music.

I thank my mother who was always with me in all my field trips, and who was at the same time, persisting me to complete the work and get it published. The publication of this book is a sure pride for her for she was constantly on the move to give 'disciplined direction' to my talent, the work that I do and to the labour that I put it.

I am deeply thankful to **Dr. Balajied Syiem** (*Syiem of Hima Khyrim*), who spared his time for interviews and discussions. I also thank **Mr. Grosswell Myllemngap** (*Lyngskor of Hima Khyrim*), **Mr. Phrikshon Lyngdoh** (*Lyngdoh of Raid Nongkrem*), **Mrs. Batriti Syiem** (*Syiem Sad of Hima Khyrim*) and **Mr. Charles Marbaniang** (*Lyngdoh of Raid Myllem*), for their invaluable suggestions through interviews and discussions.

I must acknowledge with gratitude the *Duhalias* (Traditional Musicians) for their relentless effort in guiding and teaching me to comprehend the various aspects of Khasi Rhythmic Pattern. Among the *Duhalias*, I am particularly indebted to **Mr. Komik Khongjirem**, the leading exponent of Khasi Traditional Music (Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardee, New Delhi, 2001) and **Mr. Rojet Buhphang**, who discussed with me at length, on the style, the technique and the system of Khasi rhythm. My gratitude goes also to **Mr. Nokot Khriam**, the Master Craftsman of Musical Instruments (Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardee, New Delhi, 1998) for the discussion had with him on the crafting of Membrane Instruments.

I thank the various scholars and music experts whom I interviewed and had discussed with to substantiate my views, opinions and observation. Among them, I am indebted to **Prof. Komal Kothari**, Rajasthan, who was, despite his old age, so prompt and helpful that the interaction had with him left an indelible mark; **Dr. Shanno Khurana**, New Delhi (I am

particularly indebted to her for being kind enough to give the Foreword of the book without a grudge); **Professor J. Handoo**, Mysore; **Mr. Bhaskar Chandavarkar**, Pune; **Dr. Aban E. Mistry**, Mumbai; **Dr. Suneera Kasliwal**, Delhi University; **Professor Birendranath Dutta**, Guwahati; **Mrs. Shikha Dutta**, Assam Music College, Guwahati and **Mr. Sudip Chakraborty**, Principal, Shillong Music College, Shillong.

Last but not the least, I am grateful to (Late) **Professor B.L. Swer** under whose guidance I worked for my Ph.D. He was extremely generous with his time and gave me much independence as a scholar which has allowed me to discern the nature of my work to the best of my ability. I also thank **Dr. Sharayu Kalekar** (who was my Joint Supervisor) for her meticulous examination of the technical and musical part of this work.

My sincere thanks also goes to those whose names I cannot mention here individually, but whose kind help and support have genuinely contributed towards the completion of this book.

**Dr. Lapynshai Syiem**  
Shillong, Meghalaya

## CHAPTER I

### PROFILE OF HIMA SHYLLONG

It is but half complete to study the evolution of any type of music without considering the background of the concerned society. This chapter is therefore an attempt to wipe out the sense of futility in the quest of researching Khasi Music and the classical content. It digs out the very antiquity of the Khasi race and the music prevalent in the society. It certainly gives the background to the type of music which contains the classical content in it. In this context, the growth of Khasi Music is considered to be as old and antique as the race itself. The music which evolved from *Hima Shyllong* is definitely old and tenable. *Hima Shyllong\** is considered to be one of the oldest native states. The music that developed from this Hima (Native State) has attained uniqueness and uniformity in terms of classification and authenticity for over a period of decades and centuries together. This can be further explained by the fact that the Khasi race had existed for many years past and its music has developed into different stages. Speaking of the term Khasi, Edwin T. Atkinson observes that the Khasi people are the descendants of the famous *Khasa* tribe of pre-historic age.<sup>1</sup> He further adds that the *Khasa Tribes* are often described as *Khasia*, a word exactly the same with which the inhabitants of the Khasi hills are generally called over.<sup>2</sup> It may not be wrong to say that the Khasi race is very old. Pratima Choudhury asserts,

The word *Khasa* is often found in different writings to denote a tribe inhabiting in the Himalayan mountainous region including the eastern most part of the ranges specially mentioning the name of Kamarupa. This nomenclature of the aforesaid tribe mainly '*Khasa*' is obviously very much similar to the word '*Khasi*', the inhabitants of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.<sup>3</sup>

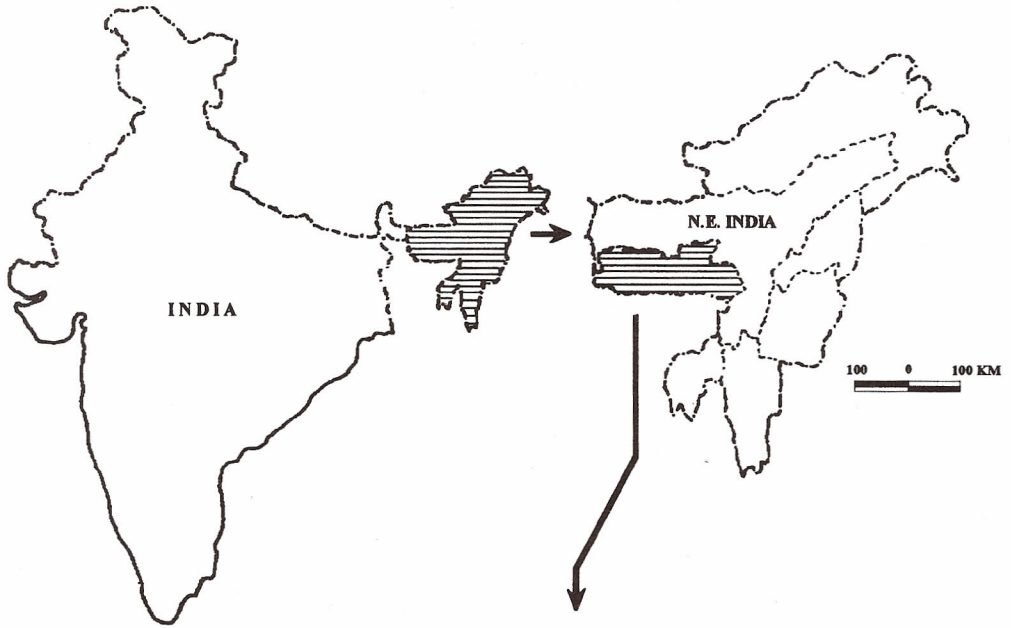
1. Edwin T. Atkinson, *The Himalayan Gazetteer*, Vol. II, Part I, Cosmo Publication, Delhi, 1973, p. 375.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 439.

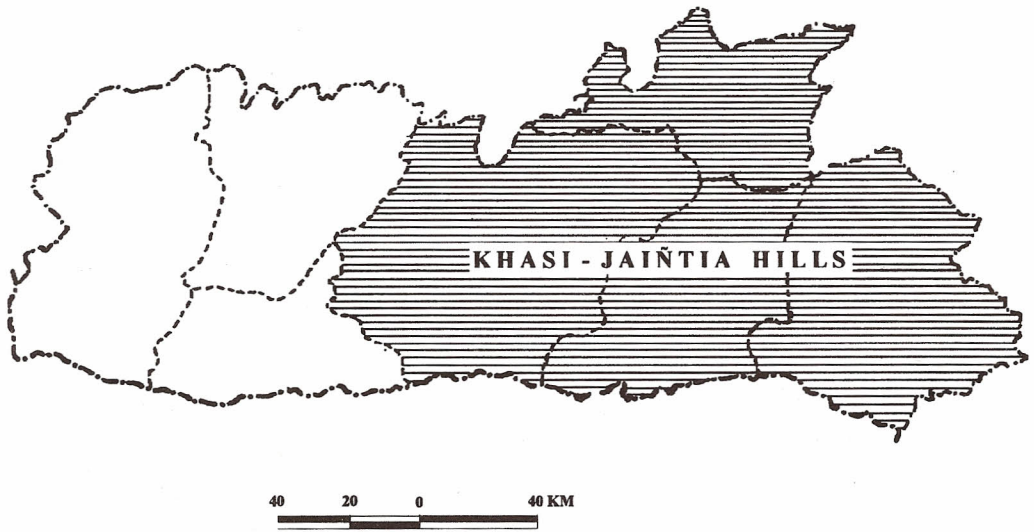
3. Pratima Choudhury, *The Antiquity of Khasi-Jaintia People*, Self Employment Bureau Publications, Calcutta, 1998, p. 13.

\* There is no English equivalent for the word *Hima*. It can be referred to as "native state". In Khasi polity, the final shape of state formation process takes place with the foundation of the *Hima*. "Native state" is however not to be understood in the context of the modern state system. It rather existed from before till today on the basis of a mutual agreement to be under one common administration. Some writers have referred to *Hima* as "Kingdom" and Syiem as 'King' which is indeed very misleading. *Shyllong* actually stands for Shillong. The use of the alphabet "y" indicates the local connotation assigned to it.

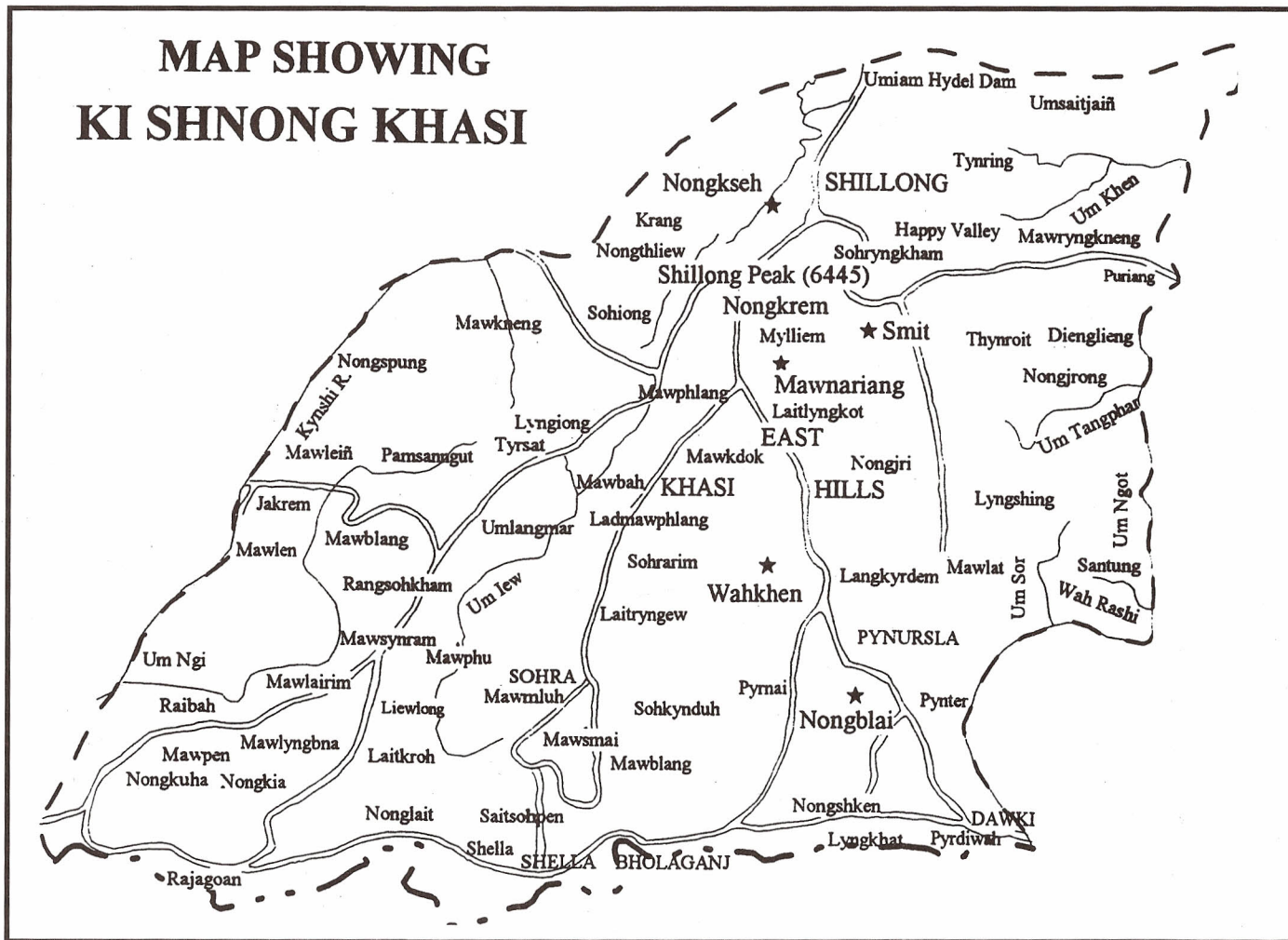
### LOCATION MAP OF KHASI - JAIÑTIA HILLS : MEGHALAYA



### MEGHALAYA



# MAP SHOWING KI SHNONG KHASI



She further adds that in Sanskrit literature the tribal people are often described by the name “*Kirata*”, “*Mleccha*”, “*Kimpurusa*”, etc. and sometimes they were described specifically by the tribe-names like “*Khasa*”, “*Paundra*” and so on.<sup>4</sup>

In this light again, Hima *Shyllong* as one of the oldest native states could have had a lot of contact with the adjoining areas. As Lakshmi Devi writes,

From the chronicles of the Ahoms it appears that the Ahom government had relations with the state of *Khyrim*, which like those with the state of *Jayantia*, were mainly of commercial nature. *Khyrim* is still one of the *Khasi* states ruled by a *Siem*, who is called a *Raja* by the plains people. The *Siem* of *Khyrim* resides at *Nokshee*.<sup>\*5</sup>

H. Lyngdoh is of the opinion that the native rulers of the *Shyllong* native state were often referred to as *Ki Syiem Khyntiam* by the *Syiems* of Hima Sutnga. The plains people have also referred to them as *Khairam* or *Khyrim*. He asserts that the two most prominent Khasi rulers during the period of AD 1563, were the *Syiems* of *Hima Sutnga* and *Hima Khyrim* or *Hima Shyllong*. In the annals of the Koch King Narnarayana, most notably in the *Bansabali* reference is made to Chilarai, the brother of the Koch king who is alleged to have defeated and slain the *Syiem* of *Sutnga*.<sup>6</sup> In this connection, J.N. Choudhury mentions that even the *Syiem* of *Khyrim* or *Hima Shyllong* at this time also submitted and undertook to pay an annual tribute to Narnarayana at 15 thousand silver coins, 9 hundred gold coins, 50 horses and 30 elephants. The *Syiem* of *Khyrim* was also prohibited to mint coins in his own name.<sup>7</sup>

Against this background, it is indeed pertinent to delve into the profile of *Hima Shyllong* (*Shyllong* Native State) to understand its structure and foundation. The *Hima* or native state had been in existence from before till today within the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Each *Hima* has its own native chief or native ruler called *Syiem*. The native states are composed of the administrative units called the *Raid* which are either under the *Lyngdoh Raid* or the *Syiem Raid*. The concept of the *Lyngdoh*, the *Basan* and the *Syiem Raid* goes back to the period of “non-Syiemship Organisation”.<sup>8</sup> This was a period of time before the evolution of Syiemship had taken place. At the level of the *Raid*, it is the *Lyngdoh* or the *Syiem Raid* who looks after the administration. On a broader analysis, it may be said that *Lyngdoh*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

5. Lakshmi Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations (A Political Study)*, Lawyer’s Book Stall, Guwahati, 1992 (2nd Edn.), p. 176.

6. Homiwell Lyngdoh, *Ki Syiem Khasi Bad Synteng*, Shillong, 1938, p. 90.

7. J.N. Choudhury, *The Khasi Canvas*, Shillong, 1978, p. 223.

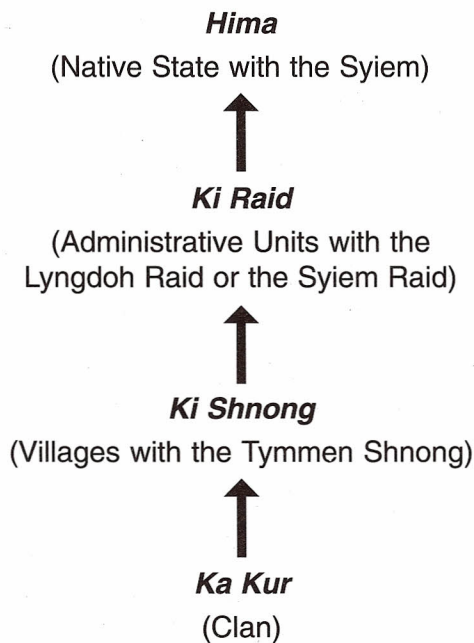
8. Hamlet Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Shillong, 1984 (Revised Edition), p. 39.

\* “Nokshee” is “Nongkseh”. It may be noted that the first capital of *Hima Shyllong* was *Nongkseh*. Hence the reference to *Khyrim* was actually *Hima Shyllong*, but since the *Syiems* of *Hima Shyllong* were also denoted as “*Ki Syiem Khyntiam*”, the word *Khairam* or *Khyrim* has been used.

denotes those who are in charge of *Ka Niam* (Religion). The *Raid* is composed of several villages which are under local headmen called *Tymmen Shnong*. As Helen Giri observes,

First, as the villages grew in size and population, the people found it necessary to be under one common administration.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the *Hima* (Native State) gradually evolved out of this necessity with the *Syiem* (Native Ruler as a guide and protector of his people. It is very clear that the evolution of Syiemship and the *Hima* began from the village level, nay, it goes downward to the foundation of *Ka Kur* (clan) which is the nucleus of all political development. In brief, the clan, the family and the hearth is the foundation of a village which in turn evolves as a *Raid* political unit) and ultimately into a *Hima* (Native State). This can be illustrated as follows :



It is with this concept that the role of the *Bakhraw*, which literally means 'Elder', is very significant. The *Bakhraw* emerged from the *Kur* (Clan). He is a representative of *Ka Kur Ka Jait Bakhraw* (Clan or family of Repute). The *Bakhraw* (Elder) is considered as the "Syiem-maker" and the "maker" of the *Hima* (Native State). Yet, he is always guided by the principles of democratic spirit. In a word, he cannot arrive at any decision alone although his role in the *Hima* is crucial. In fine, all policy matters are decided by the *Dorbar Hima* (native state Durbar).

Traditions have it that the first *Syiem* who figured in the annals of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills were the *Syiems* of *Madur Maskut* or the *Malngiang Syiems*, the *Syiems* of *Shyllong*

9. Helen Giri, *The Khasis under British Rule (1824–1947)*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 1998, p. 19.

(Native Rulers of *Hima Shyllong*) and the *Syiem Synteng* or the *Syiems of Sutnga*. These *Jaid Syiem*\* have their own story to tell of their origin based on Khasi tradition. Almost all Khasi writers corroborate to the popular beliefs of their descent. In the first instance, *Sutnga*, *Madur-Maskut* and *Shyllong* regarded their *Syiems* as *Ki Syiem Ki Blei* (Divine Syiem). In other words, till today, there is a belief that they have a divine origin. *Sutnga* is believed to have come out of *Ka Li Dohkha* and *U Luh Ryndi*. *Ka Li Dohkha* was a fish from Umwi water which later turned into a human form and married *U Luh Ryndi*. The native rulers of *Madur Maskut* or *Malngiang Syiems* are believed to have come out from the pig and one of their native rulers *U Kyllong Raja Syiem* has been called *U Syiem Sait Snier* (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 Syiem* (Native rulers of *Hima Sutnga*) conquered the whole of *Madur Maskut*. On this aspect, Hamlet Bareh writes,

One peculiarity is that *Madur Maskut* did not seem to be a Khasi term. Sanskritised as *Madhur-Masvut*, it meant strong and beautiful. It would appear that it applied to strong fortifications and towers of stockades around it. Moreover the rulers from this dynasty were called *Rajahs* and not *Syiems* as official titles.<sup>10</sup>

Speaking of the *Shyllong* native state, it is believed that a mermaid called *Ka Pah Syntiew* (enticed by a flower) is the Root-Ancestress of the *Syiem Shyllong* (*Khyrim* and *Mylliem* clans). She was 'lured by a flower' (hence *Ka Pah Syntiew*) from *Ka Krem Marai* (Marai Cave) by a man from the *Mylliem Ngap Clan*, *U Sati Mylliem Ngap*. It has therefore been wrongly observed by some writers that the myths of Synteng people of Meghalaya often recall their popular legendary couple *U thlen* and *Ka Pah Syntiew*.

There is a popular belief of *Ki Laiphew Syiem Ki Khatar Dolois*.\*\* Hence, early written records differ one from the other on the number of native states which existed then. W.W. Hunter writes that "there were 19 (nineteen) semi-independent Khasi States or Democracies. These 19 semi-independent Khasi States or Democracies as shown in the Assam Administration Report for 1875-76 are the following :

10. Hamlet Bareh, op. cit., p. 33.

\* This implies the clan name.

\*\* *Laiphew Syiem*, means "thirty *Syiems*". In Khasi, the term *Laiphew* also connotes 'many', 'innumerable' and 'plenty'. *Khatar Dolois* implies 12 (twelve) *Dolois*. In 1835, Jayantia Parganas were tagged to Sylhet district with the British policy of annexation. The *Syiem* of *Sutnga* native state, who also ruled over the plains area of Jayantia Parganas refused to be *Syiem* over the hills subjects alone on the ground that the British had "snatched away his rice-bowl". He retired with a pension of Rs. 500/- per month. Jaintia Hills became a British territory. However, the *Dolois* remained as administrative heads. The British Order limiting the authority of the *Dolois* was passed in 1841 and triennial elections were directed in 1850. The Land of the 12 *Dolois* signifies the twelve administrative units.

1. Bhawal or Warbah
2. Cherra or Sohra
3. Shella
4. Khyrim or Nongkrem
5. Mylim or Myllem
6. Langrin or Lyngkin
7. Maharam
8. Maoyang or Mao-iong
9. Maosynram
10. Malai-Sohmat or Malai Chamat
11. Mariaio
12. Nobosophoh or Nongsophoh
13. Nongklao
14. Nongspung
15. Nongstain
16. Rambrai
17. Jirang
18. Dwara Nongtyrmen
19. Mao-Don.<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, Helen Giri observes that on the eve of India's Independence there were about 25 (twenty-five) Khasi native states ruled by *Syiems*, *Wahadadars*, *Lyngdohs* and *Sirdars* which are in treaty relationship with the British Crown.<sup>12</sup> The number of native states might have increased from time to time, but the fact remains that they were in existence and still exist even today. This can be further substantiated by the fact that many scholars have written extensively on the structure of the social and polity formations in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Surajit Sinha observes,

The standard consitutional units of tribal society make up a progressively inclusive series of groups : families are joined in local lineages, lineages in village communities,

11. W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1975 (Reprint), pp. 248-250.

12. Helen Giri, op. cit., p. 224.

villages in regional confederacies; the latter making up the tribe or 'people'. They may form a segmentary hierarchy. A tribe tends to remain egalitarian in that no one of the families is politically superior or more powerful in hereditary rank than any other.<sup>13</sup>

To go back to the profile of the *Shyllong* native state, with the myths and legends surrounding it, we are drawn towards the other oral sources, told and retold over the years. These oral sources have formed one of the most prominent sources which have helped in the construction of the history of the *Shyllong* native state. The *Shyllong* native state has a story and history of its own based on myths and legends. The origin of the word "*Shyllong*" has been attributed to myths and legends by many writers. E.W. Chyne<sup>14</sup> observes that according to a legend from *War Shella*, there lived a young beautiful girl named *Lir* at a place called *Bisi* which is near *Mylliem*. *Lir* was a lazy girl and only loved to roam about in the fields and the sloping hills to while away her time. One day as she was lying on one of the rocks near River Umiew, a leaf called *U Dieng Sla Kdait* pierced her rectum. *Lir* was unaware of this and came home. From that day onwards, she felt something strange in her. Her relatives realized that she was pregnant. They were overwhelmed with shame because of the stigma *Lir* had brought to the family. Tired and disgraced, *Lir* left her home and wandered far away from her kith and kin and settled alone in a place called *Rngi Shyllong*. It was here that she gave birth to a son who died soon after. She buried him in the garden and planted pumpkin seed on top of it. *Lir* began to lead a lonely life at this place by making a small hut for herself and ploughing the fields for cultivation. One particular night as she was lying in her hut, *Lir* heard a strange noise outside which frightened her. She went outside her hut and saw a handsome young lad tending her fields and sowing the seeds. Afraid and trembling, she asked him who he was and why he had come to take away her fields. The lad replied that he was her son and that his father was *U Pyrthat* (Lightning). He also asked her to go to the village and call all her relatives and tell them about him. When the relatives and the villagers came, they were amazed at this divine spectacle. They asked who he was; one of them said *U Blei Uba Shu Long*.<sup>\*</sup> The young lad further said that henceforth, he shall be their guide, their protector from misfortune and danger, if they prayed and invoked his name. People gradually began to call him *U 'Lei Shu Long* who was eventually called *U 'Lei Shyllong*.<sup>\*\*</sup> Till today we find *U Lum Shyllong* (Shillong Peak) situated about 9 (nine) kilometers south of Shillong city. Almost all the Khasi writers corroborate the belief that *U 'Lei Shyllong* is the father of *Ka Pah Syntiew*,

13. **Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-Colonial Eastern and North Eastern India**, Edited Surajit Sinha, K.P. Bagchi & Company, Calcutta, New Delhi, 1987, pp. x-xi.

14. E.W. Chyne, **Na Ki Hamsaia Ka Mynnor**, Chapter 1, Shillong, 1994.

\* *Blei* is 'God', *Uba Shu Long* means who has come into existence "naturally" or "by oneself".

\*\* *Lei* or *Blei* means 'God'. *Shyllong* has been used to denote the place from where this human transfiguration had taken place. *U 'Lei Shyllong* here can be described as one of the attributes of God in the traditional religious practices of the Khasis.

the Root-Ancestress of the *Syiem Shyllong* clan. The affinity between *U Lum Shyllong* and the foundation of *Hima Shyllong* has also been referred to by R.T. Rymbai, another renowned local writer. According to him *U Lum Shyllong* (Shillong Peak) is the abode of *U'Lei Shyllong*. He further asserts,

*U Lum Shyllong* is the highest peak in Meghalaya and is held sacred being the source of the nine revered rivers of Khasi Hills known as *Ki Khyndai Umdih*, *Khyndai Umtong* (the nine living waters).<sup>15</sup>

The nine revered waters from *U Lum Shyllong* (Shillong Peak) are **Um Shyllong** which originates from Forest *Sang Mein*, and flows to *Umdingpun* to Elephant Falls; **UmJasai** which originates from *Riat Tynrah*, and flows through *Law Sohtun* to meet *Umshyrpi*; **UmShyrpi** which originates from *Wah Dienglieng*, and flows through Malki and Laban, **UmDienglieng** which originates from *Lawjynriew*, and flows to *Umkaliar*; **Umkhen** which originates from the east of Laitkor; **Umngot** which originates from *Kynton U Mon*, and flows to Pammura and Mawryngkneng; **Umiew** which originates from Pamnakrai, and flows through *Umphrup* to meet *Umtyngngar*; **Um tong Syiem** which originates from the side of *U Lum Shyllong*, and flows to *Pasil* to meet *Mawsawa Madan ling Syiem*; it also meets *Wah Umjlieng* and *Wah Umiew* to become *Umiam Mawphlang*; **Umjlieng** which originates from the side of *U Lum Shyllong* near Mawkhan, and flows through Lyngkien and Baniun and meets *Wah Umiew*.

Referring to the legend of *U'Lei Shyllong* Henry D. Ropmay writes,

The name of that wonderful youth was *U Shyllong* (*Shu-long*) which means one who grows naturally or one who comes in existence by himself. Ever since that time, the name *Shyllong* or Shillong as we spell it today, has been a great and awful name, a name to conjure with.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed in this context, some local writers like Shortimai Syiem, have linked this belief with the fact that *U Sati Mylliemngap* had used pumpkin flowers to entice *Ka Pah Syntiew*. The analogy drawn from the pumpkin seed sown by *Lir* and the pumpkin flowers used by *U Sati Mylliemngap* explains the mythical background of the *Shyllong* native state. It may be unthinkable that a young girl thought to be a mermaid could be the daughter of the Shillong peak; but all this transfiguration was something God had pre-destined. It is not

15. R.T. Rymbai, "Shillong and its Land System", **Shillong Centenary Celebration (Souvenir)**, Ed. Souvenir Sub-Committee, 1976, p. 28.

16. Henry D. Ropmay, "A Legend of Shillong" from **Shillong Centenary Celebration (Souvenir)**, Ed. Souvenir Sub-Committee, 1976, p. 60.

surprising then that this legend is popular in *War Shella* because as E.W. Chyne asserts it in the same book that the *War Shellas* have been annointed by the *Syiem*s of *Hima Shyllong*. In fact, this story which began as a myth has become a popular belief among the Khasi people. The Khasis believe in the saying *ba la phah hi da u Blei* (sent by God) and the events or spectacles are therefore no longer questionable. Suffice to speak about *U 'Lei Shyllong*, we now turn our attention to the legend of *Ka Pah Syntiew*, the Root Ancestress of the *Syiem Shyllong* clan. H. Lyngdoh writes that *Hima Shyllong* has a divine origin and the *Syiem* clan of this *Hima* are referred to as *Ki Syiem Ki Blei* (Divine Syiem). Their root ancestress is said to have emerged from a cave called *Ka Krem Marai*.<sup>17</sup> Varied narratives have been put forward to explain the origin of *Ka Pah Syntiew*. It is desirable again to refer to the views given by H. Lyngdoh in the same book. He says that young cowherds from the village of *Bisi* used to graze their cattle near the River Umiew, which is situated between *Pamnakrai* and *Nongkrem*. They would often see a beautiful maiden who lived at a cave nearby called *Ka Krem Marai*. They were completely bewildered by the beauty of this maiden who would however disappear in to the cave as soon as they tried to go near her. One brave man from the *Mylliemngap* clan decided to catch her by enticing her with a flower. He plucked a bunch of flowers called '*Tiew Jalyngkteng* and went towards the cave. The maiden stretched her hand to get them, but as she did so, the *Mylliemngap* caught her by the hand. He then took her home and reared her up as his own daughter. She was named *Pah Syntiew* which literally means "enticed by a flower". At the age of twelve, *Ka Pah Syntiew* was given in marriage to *U Kongor Nong jri*. The children of *Ka Pah Syntiew* are called *Ki Khun Blei* (God's children). Later *Ka Pah Syntiew* went back to the cave leaving her husband and children. Her children were annointed by the *Bakhras* (Elders) to be the *Syiem* of *Hima Shyllong*. *U Sati Mylliemngap* assumed himself as the maternal uncle\* and he is also the *Lyngskor* which literally means the *Syiem's* deputy. H. Lyngdoh further adds that *Ka Pah Syntiew* was probably the daughter of *U 'Lei Shyllong* because they emerged from almost the same area. To strengthen these views, we may also refer to the version of *Shortimai Syiem* who propounds that *Ka Pah Syntiew* emerged not from a cave but from a hill called *U Lum Marai*.<sup>18</sup> She observes that from *U Lum Marai*, a young beautiful girl used to come out to play and dance on the rocks by tapping her feet rhythmically. Many people thought of her as a fairy, but one brave man from the *Mylliemngap* clan was determined to capture her. She writes that he found the Khasi pumpkin flowers in the fields, plucked a bunch of them and tied them with a long stick. He lured the maiden away from inside the cave by a bunch of the Khasi pumpkin flowers.<sup>19</sup> This version of *Shortimai Syiem* agrees with what E.W. Chyne asserts that Lir planted pumpkin seeds in her courtyard. H. Lyngdoh also contends that *Ka Pah Syntiew* and *U 'Lei Shyllong* emerged from almost

17. H. Lyngdoh, op. cit., p. 81.

18. Shortimai Syiem, **Ka Jingtuhkhana Pateng Shaphang Ka Hima Shillong**, Ri Khasi Enterprise, Shillong, 2003, p. 1.

19. Ibid., p. 4.

\* The maternal uncle or *U Kni* has an important role to play within the Khasi society. He has a vital part to play in decision-making as uncle to his nieces and nephews in his mother's clan.

the same areas of Bisi, River Umiew, Rngi Shyllong, Pamnakrai and Nongkrem. Shortimai Syiem further opines that the *Mylliemngap* clan has been forbidden to eat pumpkin as a mark of respect for *U Sati Mylliemngap* who lured the maiden away from the cave. The *Rumnong clan*\* and the *Mawroh clan*\*\* have also been forbidden to eat pumpkin as they are involved in the religious practices of the *Hima*. This means that rituals indicate the essence of allegiance and respect to the ancestors and ancestresses. Till today the *Mylliem Ngap* clan cannot enter into marriage with the *Syiem Shyllong* clan (*Khyrim* and *Mylliem*).<sup>20</sup> It may be referred to here that some writers have wrongly observed that the *Syiems* of *Hima Khyrim* alone traced their origin and descent from *Ka Pah Syntiew*, leaving aside *Hima Mylliem* which was also part of *Hima Shyllong* during the pre-colonial period.

*Ka Pah Syntiew* is said to have taught little children how to sing and dance. Her dance at *U Lum Marai* and the tapping of her feet has introduced to the people the meaning of rhythm. Traditions have it that the Khasis first learnt the art of the female dance from her. *Shortimai Syiem* further asserts that the Khasi female dance is symbolic of the dance of *Ka Pah Syntiew* on the rocks of *U Lum Marai*. It is from her that the Khasis first derived the art of the female dance.<sup>21</sup>

If we turn our attention to the political structure of *Hima Shyllong*, we will find that it first began to take shape with the emergence of *Ki Syiem Blei* (*Divine Syiem*). The children of *Ka Pah Syntiew* were annointed the first *Syiem* of *Hima Shyllong*. It is said that *Ka Pah Syntiew* gave birth to three children, two sons and a daughter. M.P.R. Lyngdoh also writes,

*Ka Pah Syntiew* was given in marriage to a young man from *Nongjri* who was a warrior and statesman. They lived happily, and she bore him two sons and one daughter who grew up to be strong, healthy and wise.<sup>22</sup>

Hamlet Bareh also asserts that *Ka Pah Syntiew* bore two sons and one daughter.<sup>23</sup> Shortimai Syiem is of the opinion that *Ka Pah Syntiew* had two children, a daughter and a son.<sup>24</sup> When *Ka Pah Syntiew* went back to the cave, her daughter was annointed the *Syiem* by the *Bakhraws* at the *Dorbar Hima* (Native State *Durbar*) in the presence of the *Lyngskor*. However, it was soon realized that a woman could not wield the rod of administration. A woman is considered among the Khasis to be *Ka Shibor*,# while a man is

20. Ibid., p. 22.

21. Ibid., p. 9.

22. M.P.R. Lyngdoh, **The Festivals in the History and Culture of the Khasis**, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1991, p.-97.

23. Hamlet Bareh, op. cit., p. 67.

24. Shortimai Syiem, op. cit., p. 12.

\* The chief priests called *Sohblei* in *Hima Khyrim* are from the *Rumnong clan* and the *Mawroh* clan. The *Sohblei* from the *Rumnong* clan is the one who performs the rituals and completes all religious practices of the *Hima*.

\*\* The *Sohblei Mawroh* has a special role to play during the marriage ceremony of the ruling *Syiem* clan.

# Literally meaning having 'one power only'.



IING SAD (Religious House) at SMIT, Hima Khyrim  
Photograph of the (almost) 80-year old religious house built during the time of Olim Sing Syiem in 1923. This is today dismantled for renovation (2004)



The Basan Nongkseh prepares for the Nongkrem Festival, SMIT

*U Khatar Bor*.<sup>\*</sup> Hence it was decided at the *Dorbar* that her brother be annointed *Syiem* and she would be the *Syiem Sad* (*Syiem Mother*). From that time onwards, the concept of *Ka Sad Ka Sunon* (the seat of sovereignty) began with the emergence of the *Syiem Sad*. She is the one who takes care of all the preparations of the religious rites and ceremonies of the *Hima*. Without her, no religious practices can be done. The mother of the ruling *Syiem* becomes the *Syiem Sad*, failing her, the eldest sister of the *Syiem* succeeds, but not the younger sister, since it relates to *Ka Niam* (Religion) of the *Hima*. Till today this belief has stayed and has become part of the tradition. *Hima Khyrim* still retains *Ka Niam* and the religious beats even after the bifurcation because *Hima Khyrim* customarily descends from the eldest sister and *Hima Myllichem* descends customarily from the younger sister and has retained only the non-religious beats. On this aspect, R.T. Rymbai observes,

Not long after the occupation of the Khasi Hills by the British the state of *Sawkher-Lai Lyngdoh* was divided into two dependent states known as *Khyrim* and *Myllichem*. The former is, of course, the parent state. But, like other freaks of history, Shillong became part of *Myllichem*, not of *Khyrim*.<sup>25</sup>

Again, D. Herbert writes,

In the *Khyrim* State there is a *Siem-priestess*, called *Ka Siem-Sad*, the ruling *Siems* are descended from the *Siem-priestesses*.....  
..... A *Siem-priestess* is succeeded by her eldest surviving daughters; failing daughter, by the eldest daughter, of her eldest daughter, failing daughters of her eldest daughter, by the eldest daughter of her second daughter, and so on.<sup>26</sup>

The son of *Ka Pah Syntiew* who was annointed *Syiem*, became the first *Syiem* of *Hima Shyllong*. He is known as *U Suid nia Long Syiem*.<sup>\*\*</sup>

According to H. Lyngdoh, the *Myllichemngap* clan for some reasons could no longer take care of the *Syiem Shyllong* clan and handed this responsibility to the *Basan Nongkseh* from *Thangkhiw* clan.<sup>27</sup> This was also due to the fact that the *Myllichemngap* clan wanted to

25. R.T. Rymbai, op. cit., p. 29.

26. D. Herbert, **Report on Succession to Syiemships in the Khasi States**, Shillong, 1903, p. 7.

27. H. Lyngdoh, op. cit., pp. 89-90.

\* Literally meaning having 'twelve powers'; *Khatar* means 'twelve' and *bor* is 'power'.

\*\* He is one of the divine attributes invoked at the annual native state religious festival of *Khyrim* till today. He is also considered to be the first *Syiem* of *Hima Shyllong* and also the first maternal uncle of the *Syiem Shyllong* clan.

institute *Syiemship* on the line of divine origin and tradition with *Ka Pah Syntiew* as the Root-Ancestress. *Hima Shyllong* was created by the amalgamation of the *Sawkher-Lai Lyngdoh*, a fact which has been corroborated by almost all writers. It is this amalgamation which gives the historical validity to the mythical background of the *Hima*. Hamlet Bareh is of the opinion that this could have taken place sometime in the 14th century AD.<sup>28</sup> It has already been mentioned in the previous pages that sometime in AD 1563, the *Shyllong Syiems* had a contact with the Koch rulers which strengthens this historical validity. According to H. Lyngdoh, this amalgamation was the foundation of the *Shyllong* native state itself and he does not refer to a particular year or date.<sup>29</sup> The *Sawkher-Lai Lyngdoh* connotes the four *Basan* clans and three *Lyngdoh* clans respectively, that is, the four *Raids* having its own *Basan* and the three *Raids* having its own *Lyngdoh* respectively. H. Lyngdoh further adds that *Raid Sawkher* includes *Nongkseh*, *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 Synrem*, the *Myntri* of *Marbisu* from *Sun* clan, the *Myntri* of *Sadew* from *Pathaw* clan, *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 the five villages (*San Shnong*) were warriors of great courage among the *Sawkher* and they were called *Khyndai Bah Ryntieh* (Nine Bow Wielders). The *Lai Lyngdoh Raids* include *Mylliem*, *Nongbri* and *Pongrup* or *Nongbet* and they also include the *San Kur* (five *kurs*) that is, *Mylliemngap*, *Sohtun*, *Kurkalang*, *Nongkhlaw* and *Rynjah* or *Kharkongor*. Representatives to the *Dorbar Hima* from these *Raids* are the *Lyngdoh* of *Mylliem* from *Lyngdoh Mylliem* clan, the *Lyngdoh* of *Nongbet* from the *Pongrup* clan, the *Lyngskor* from *Mylliemngap* clan, the *Myntri* of *Nongkhlaw* from the *Nongkhlaw* clan and the *Rynjah Myntri* from the *Rynjah* clan or *Kharkongor Myntri* from the *Kharkongor* clan. The *Hynniew Raid* (Seven Raids) that is, the *Sawkher - Lai Lyngdoh* and the *San Kur San Shnong* (five *Kurs* five villages) which formed the *Shyllong* native 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 *Raid Mylliem*, *Raid Nongkrem* and *Raid San Kur*; the *Basan Khrum* in charge of *Raid Nongkseh*, *Raid Nongumlong*, *Raid Synrem* or *Mawlieh Mawshai* and *San Shnong* (five villages); the *Basan Swer* in charge of *Raid War Khatar Shnong* and *Khatar Blang*. The first capital of *Hima Shyllong* was at *Nongkseh*. The *Syiems* of *Hima Shyllong* went from *Bisi* to settle at *Nongkseh* and also built the *ling Sad* (Religious House) there. Religious rites and ceremonies of the *Hima* were henceforth performed annually at *Nongkseh*.

*Ka Thma Sawkher Lai Lyngdoh* (The *Sawkher - Lai Lyngdoh War*) marks a turning point in the re-making and re-organisation of the *Shyllong* native state. The issues that led to the war were trifling; it was clear that it was a conspiracy to put an end to *Syiemship* and

28. Hamlet Bareh, op. cit., p. 40.

29. H. Lyngdoh, op. cit., p. 87.

proclaim the rule of the *Basans*. Hamlet Bereh refers to it as a “civil war”.<sup>30</sup> The major role in the conspiracy was played by the *Basans* and *Bakhraws* of *Mylliem* and *Nongkrem*, whereupon the conspirators besieged the royal residence at *Nongkseh* and set it to fire. In the heat of the war, the *Basan Nongkseh* from *Thangkhiew* clan\* and some men of the *San Shnong* (five villages) managed to rescue and take away a female member of the *Syiem* clan, *Ka Jat Kiri* to a place called *Nongkhlaw*. When the *ling Sad* (Religious House) was burnt down, the *Basan Swer* was proclaimed the ruler. On hearing this, the *Basan Nongkseh* immediately called the *Dorbar Hima* and brought to its notice that one of the daughters of the *Syiem Shyllong* clan, *Ka Jat Kiri*, was still alive. She was in hiding at a place called *Rmen* near *Nongkhlaw*. The *Basan Nongkseh* proclaimed thus, “How can we annoint *Ki Syiem Briew* (The Non-Divine *Syiem*s) when we still have *Ki Syiem Blei* (The Divine *Syiem*) ?”<sup>31</sup> *Ka Jat Kiri* or *Ka Jat Rmen*, as she was then called was brought back to *Nongkseh*. She had married the *Syiem Khyannah* (Junior *Syiem*) of *Hima Khadsaw phra* during her stay at *Rmen* and had four children *U Shon Manik*, *U Shanrai I*, *Ka Pein Kiri* or *Pein Rmen* and *Ka Pah I*. According to *Shortimai Syiem*, it was not *Ka Jat Kiri* but *Ka Wan Kiri* who fled with the *Bakhraws* to *Hima Khadsawphra* during the *Sawkher-Lai Lyngdoh War*.<sup>32</sup> Till date the exact name of the female member of the *Syiem Shyllong* clan who survived the war has not been identified, but tradition has it that the war took place and the capital was also shifted. It was from that time onwards that other smaller native states emerged which were recognized by the *Syiem*s of *Hima Shyllong*. The present *Syiem* of *Hima Khyrim*, Balajied S. *Syiem* explains that the burning of the *ling Sad* at *Nongkseh* is still recalled with resentment amongst the people within the *Hima*. *Raid Nongkrem* today cannot take part in the religious rites and ceremonies of *Hima Khyrim*. This *Raid* is also debarred from participating in the *Bujai Blang*\*\* which means an offering of goats from each *Raid* of the *Hima*. Similarly, the *Lyngdoh* from the *Marbaniang* clan of *Raid Mylliem* cannot take part in the religious practices at *Hima Khyrim* because the *Bakhraws* of this *Raid* had taken part in the conspiracy. The *Syiem* further adds that after the bifurcation of *Hima Shyllong* during the colonial period, the *ling Sad* built at *Nongkrem* caught fire, an event which remains shrouded in mystery. The *ling Sad* was immediately shifted to *Smit*, a place situated near *Nongkrem*, and from the 1870’s onwards, *Ka Sad Ka Sunon* of the *Hima* has remained at *Smit*.<sup>33</sup>

*Hima Shyllong* was bifurcated during the British period. There is however no exact date of the bifurcation and no official declaration was actually given. Helen Giri observes,

30. Hamlet Bereh, op. cit., p. 70.

31. H. Lyngdoh, op. cit., p. 94.

32. Shortimai Syiem, op. cit., p. 31.

33. Interview had with the present Syiem of Khyrim, Dr. Balajied S. Syiem.

\* The *Basan Nongkseh* (*Basan* actually means ‘Elder’ and *Nongkseh* is the name of a village) till today holds a special place during the religious practices because the *Basan Nongkseh* of *Thangkhiew* clan had saved the female member of the *Syiem Shyllong* clan from whom the ruling *Syiem*s should descend. Today, during *Ka Shad Mastieh* for preparation of the festival at *Khyrim*, the *Basan Nongkseh* dances along with the *Syiem*.

\*\* *Bujai* means ‘to give’ and *Blang* means ‘goat’.

*Bor Manick* may be the last *Syiem* of *Shyllong* state and the first *Syiem* of *Mylliem* state.<sup>34</sup>

*Bor Manick*, the *Syiem* of *Hima Shyllong* played a vital role in the Khasi Resistance Movement, of AD 1829. If the bifurcation took place during his time, the date could be after AD 1829 H. Lyngdoh opines that this break-up occurred in AD 1853.<sup>35</sup> *Hima Shyllong* was bifurcated into *Hima Khyrim* and *Hima Mylliem* under two different *Syiemships*. As pointed out earlier, *Khyrim* descends customarily from the eldest sister and she retains the religious rites and practices and the religious beats till today.\* *Mylliem* descends customarily from the younger sister and has only the non-religious beats, in a word, it retains the socio-cultural beats. However the historical validity on the formation of the erstwhile *Hima Shyllong* can be further strengthened by the fact that the two divine pillars signifying *Saw Kher* and *Lai Lyngdoh*, still stand today at the *ling Sad* (Religious House of the *Hima*) at *Smit* under *Khyrim Syiemship*. These pillars are held in high respect till date because they symbolize the historical evolution of the *Shyllong* Native State. Coming from *U Lum Pomblang*\*\* and before entering the *ling Sad*, the musicians will enter first and also play the drum beat called *Ka Ksing Rung ling*.# The Head Musician along with the rest of the musicians will pay homage to *U Saw Kher Lai Lyngdoh* with folded hands to symbolize the undivided *Shyllong Native State*. *U Saw Kher Lai Lyngdoh* is considered *U Nongpynlong* literally meaning the 'maker' of the *Shyllong* Native State.

*Hima Khyrim* today consists of the following *Raids* :

1. *Raid Nongkrem*
2. *Raid Nongbri*
3. *Raid Mawlieh*
4. *Raid Mawshai*
5. *Raid Lawai*
6. *Raid Nongkynrih*.

Despite this structure that is prevalent in the *Hima*, the people are always guided by the democratic spirit which they have inherited from their forefathers. Again, in the above structure, the role of the *Bakhrav* (Elder) is very important because he also takes part in the administration of the *Raid*. It is here that *Ka Synshar Raid* (administration at the level of the *Raid*) under the *Bakhravs* evolved. Further, pairing of the *Raid* or *Raids* explains the protocol of each *Raid*, as for example *Nongkrem-Nongbri*, or *Lawai-Nongkynrih*, and so on. The first *Raid* has a better placed position within the *Hima*.

34. Helen Giri, op. cit., p. 71.

35. H. Lyngdoh, op. cit., p. 103.

\* The eldest is the custodian of the religious rites and ceremonies, because "she first sees the light of the day".

\*\* *Lum* means 'hill or mountain or peak'. *Pomblang* means 'cutting of the goat'.

# *Ksing* means 'Drum', *Rung* means 'to enter' and *ling* means 'House'.

In the *Bhoi* areas (northern region) of *Khyrim* native state, there exists *Ki Syiem Raid*, the *Basan* and the *Lyngdoh* who are in charge of the administration of the *Raids*. The existence of the *Syiem Raid* raises certain questions as to the role of the *Syiem Hima* and that of the *Syiem Raid*. The *Syiem Raid* is however very independent within his *Raid* and takes part in the *Bujai Blang*. As Hamlet Bareh writes,

There were three such subsidiary *Syiem*s on the northern region, the *Bhoi Syiem*s of *lapngar*, *Nongtham* and *Thaiang*. The paramount *Syiem* ruler paid a visit to their areas at least once a year.<sup>36</sup>

The present *Syiem* of *Khyrim* explains that the existence of these *Syiem Raid* is due to the fact that for many years past, some areas had existed as *Ki Hima Rit* (small Native States) and had their own *Syiem*s or native rulers. During the onslaught of the *Syiem Synteng*, they were practically subdued. Owing to the help given by the *Syiem*s of *Hima Shyllong*, they survived and willingly came to form a kind of a loose confederacy with *Hima Shyllong*. Today they form part of *Hima Khyrim* and come under *Raid Mawshai*. *Raid Mawshai* also has sub-*Raids* within it called *Ki Shnat Raid*. These include *Raid lapngar*, *Raid Nongtham*, *Raid Thaiang*, *Nongtaring*, *Nongkhap*, *Maiong*, *Sakra*, *Nakdoh*, *Lymphuit*, *Amjong* and *Namsha*. *Maiong*, *Sakra*, *Nakdoh*, *Lymphuit* and *Amjong* are areas where the *Lalungs* pre-dominate. At *Raid lapngar*, *Raid Nongtham* and *Raid Thaiang*, there is a *Syiem Raid* along with the *Basan* (Elder) and the *Lyngdoh*. The headquarter of *lapngar* is at *Liarkhla*, that of *Nongtham* is at *Pamlaban* and that of *Thaiang* is at *Umtyrkhang*. Ceremonial practices are still being performed at these *Raids*. Till 1992, it has been found that *Raid Nongtham* still observes *Ka Pomblang* (Goat Sacrifice) which resembles the state religious practice performed at *Smit*. At *Thaiang*, *Ka Krud Ksing*, a harvest dance which is accompanied by drum beats is still being performed. When the *Syiem* of the *Hima* pays a visit to these areas, ceremonial acknowledgement takes place which is a mark of respect and tribute to him. At *Nongtaring* and *Namsha*, there is the *Basan*, the *Lyngdoh* and the *Sangot* who look after the administration. According to my finds through field research, it has been found that in *lapngar* and *Nongtham*, the dialect spoken by the people resembles that of the *Pnars* of Jaintia Hills. Perhaps this is due to the influx of the *Synteng*s or *Pnars* during the attack of their *Syiem*. Even folk songs from *lapngar* are reproduced and sung in this dialect which most probably explains the migration process of the *Pnars* from Jaintia Hills to the *Bhoi* areas.

The villages of *Wahkhen\** and *Nongblai\*\** under *Raid Mawlieh* (East Khasi Hills District) from *Khyrim Syiemship* have been specifically identified. *Wahkhen* is significant because of its traditional musicians or the *Duhalias*. *Wahkhen* is a village surrounded by

36. Hamlet Bareh, op. cit., p. 69.

\* *Wah* means 'River' and *Khen*, in the local dialect implies 'Big' and 'Wide'.

\*\* *Nong* comes from the word *Shnong* which means 'Locality' or 'Place' and *Blai* is a local dialect for 'God'.

mountainous terrain which overlooks Bangladesh. It still produces leading traditional musicians and one of them is Komik Khongjirem, the leading exponent of Khasi Traditional Music and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardee 2001. Nongblai is significant in this study because of the crafting of musical instruments. Nokot Khriam, the Master Craftsman and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardee 1998, hails from Nongblai. The village of Mawnariang under *Raid Myllem* (East Khasi Hills District) from *Hima Myllem* has been identified for the study. Mawnariang is significant because of the presence of the *ling Sad* of the *Lyngdoh* and the *Lyngdoh Sad* under the *Raid*. Some religious ceremonies take place at Mawnariang once in a year in front of the *ling Sad*. Some of the drum beats are also still retained by this village under the tutelage of the *Lyngdoh Raid*. The present *Lyngdoh* of *Raid Myllem*, Charles Marbaniang, says that this *Raid* is formed by the *San Kur Khatwei Kur* (Five Clans and Eleven Clans). These Five Clans include *Lyngdoh Clan*, *Kharkongor Clan*, *Sohtun Clan*, *Kurkalang Clan* and *Nongkhaw Clan*. At the *Dorbar Raid* (Durbar of the *Raid*), *Ki San Kur Bad Khatwei Kur* play a significant role. The Eleven Clans assist the Five *Kurs* or Clans. The Five *Kurs* are the custodian of the religious rites and practices of the *Raid* along with the *Lyngdoh Raid*.<sup>37</sup> It is also important to note the role of the *Bakhraw* within the *Raid* as the maker of *Ka It Ka Hima* (Native State). The *Bakhraw* annoints the *Lyngdoh* and takes part in the administration of the *Raid*. *Raid Myllem* plays a prominent role in the making of the *Hima* (*Myllem* Native State). Some of the religious beats and practices are still being retained under this *Raid*. It is here that the concept of the *Lyngdoh Sad* still prevails. *Ka Lyngdoh Sad* is the one who prepares for the religious practices. She is the keeper of *Ka Niam* (Religion) at the level of the *Raid*. The *Lyngdoh Sad* is the mother of the *Lyngdoh*, failing her, the niece or the younger sister of the *Lyngdoh* succeeds but not the elder sister.\* It may be noted that the *Lyngdoh* of *Raid Myllem* is annointed by the *Bakhraw* at a place called *Ka Madan ling Syiem* (*Madan* means 'field', *ling* means 'house' and *Syiem* is 'native ruler'). Mawnariang is a small village situated near *U Lum Shyllong* (*Shyllong* Peak). The *ling Sad* of the *Raid* is still being preserved in this village. Before reaching this small hamlet, we pass through the village of Pamnakrai via Mawsing and then take a small turn down the road leading to another village Mawpynthih. From the turning to the right side of the road stands the village of Mawnariang under *Raid Myllem* (*Myllem* Native State).

It is observed that the life of the people in these villages is always influenced by the drum beats, the melody of the *Tangmuri* (flageolet) and the tonal beauty added by *Ka Kynshaw* (cymbals). It may not be wrong to say that the religious drum beats have been greatly shaped and moulded by the milieu of these three villages of Wahkhen, Nongblai and Mawnariang.

37. Interview had with the present *Lyngdoh* of *Raid Myllem*, Charles Marbaniang.

\* This corresponds to the earlier observation made that *Myllem* descends from the younger sister. The *Lyngdoh Sad* need not necessarily be the elder or eldest sister of the *Lyngdoh*.



The Duhalias (Traditional Musicians) of Raid Myllem, at Mawnariang

## AREA AND POPULATION

**Table No. 1**

Blockwise ..... of the State of Meghalaya : 2001

District/C.D. Block	Population
Meghalaya (22429 sq.km.).	2306069
East Khasi Hills District (2748 sq.km.)	660994

### BLOCKS

1.	Mawphlang (290 sq.km.)	55617
2.	Mylliem (204 sq.km.)	366626
3.	Mawryngkneng (293 sq.km.)	49180
4.	Mawkynrew (355 sq.km.)	34122
5.	Mawsynram (523 sq.km.)	45003
6.	Shella Bholaganj (578 sq.km.)	54099
7.	Pynursla (505 sq.km.)	56347

*Source* : District Level Statistics, 2002, Government of Meghalaya, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Meghalaya, Shillong.

*Note* : The three villages identified for this study are Mawnariang which falls under Mylliem C.D. Block (No. 2), Wahkhen and Nongblai fall under Pynursla C.D. Block (No. 7).

This book is the first work of its kind where an attempt is being made to bring *Khasi* Traditional Music from the oral to the written notation form. It highlights the ingredients prevalent in the *Khasi* Rhythmic Pattern, the organization, the uniformity, the rigidity and the aesthetics, which throw light on the "Classicism" that *Khasi* Traditional Music can attain. Against the background of the concept of *Khasi* state formation process, the book tries to focus on Khyrim Native State and the music that still prevails therein today.

Photograph of *Ka Krem Marai* or *Marai Cave* from where *KA Pah Syntiew*, the Root Ancestress of the *Syiem Shyllong* clan, is said to have emerged, can be seen on the cover of the book.

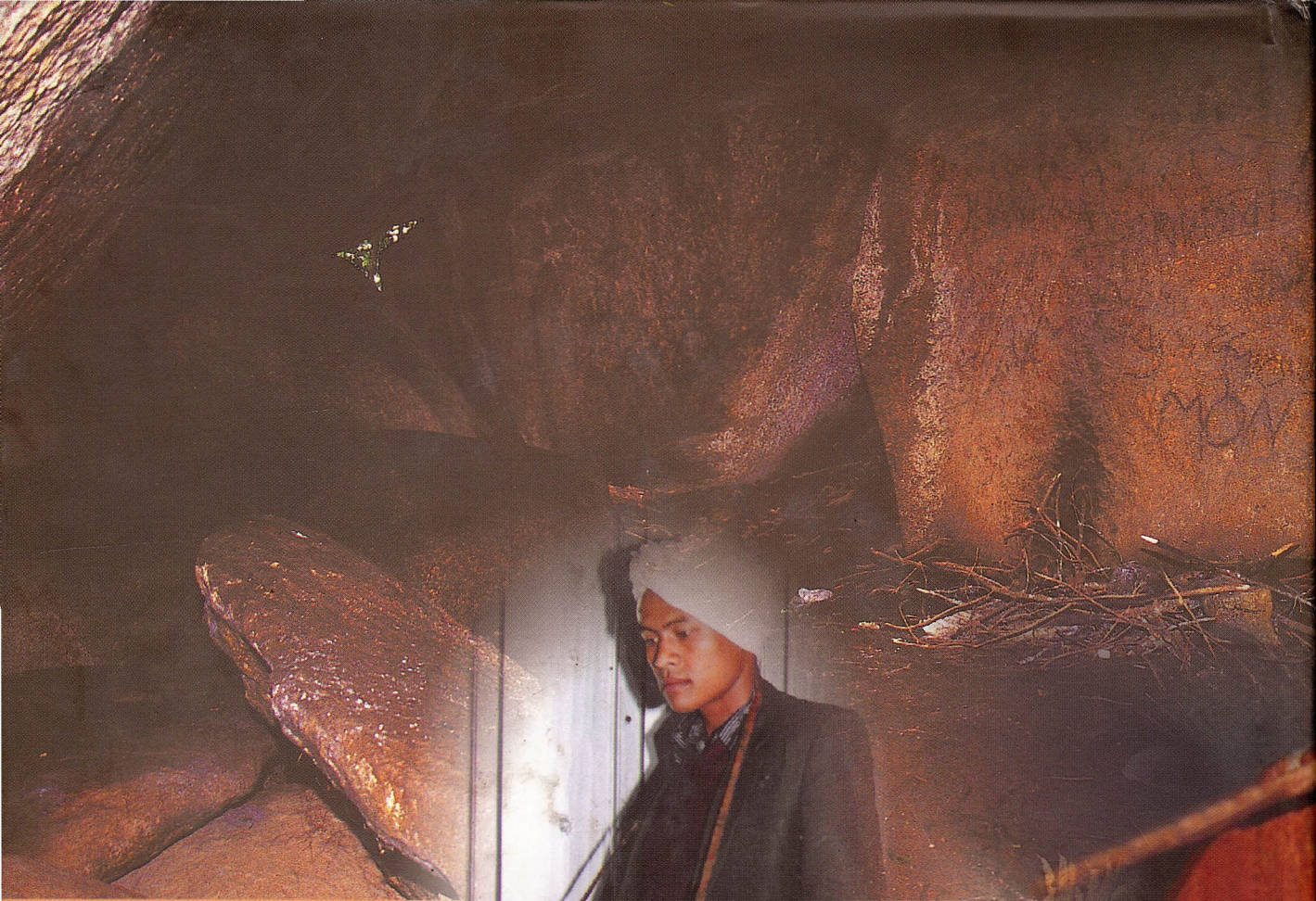
Contents include:

- Profile of Hima Shyllong
- Folk-Music: The Mother of other Forms of Khasi Music
- Growth and Development of Traditional Music: Stages of State Formation Process: Evolution of Sur Shnong (Village Music), Sur Raid (Music at the Level of the Raid) and Sur Hima (Music at the Level of the Native State)
- Khasi Musical Instruments: Their influence on the Evolution of Khasi Music
- The Classical Content : Khasi Beats and Tunes which give the Essence of the Classical Content
- Towards Classicism
- *Glossary*
- *Bibliography*

Rs. 1375/-  
US \$ 135/-

**Dr. Lapynshai Syiem** is the first scholar from the region to unearth the rich music tradition of the *Khasis*. She has reputation in the academic field as well as in the music field. She admirably combines academic excellence as a Post Graduate in History and having high talent as a musician. She has acquired her Doctoral Degree on the classicism of *Khasi* Traditional Music, an area hitherto unexplored by any scholar. She is the first *Khasi* to have passed various music exams from Bhatkhande Sangeet Vidyapith, Lucknow, in Indian Classical Music (Vocal). She has received many awards, honours and recognition for her excellent endeavour both in the academics and music. She is trying in the best possible way to share and disseminate the concept of *Khasi* Rhythmic Pattern through various forums and is also nurturing the growth and understanding of Indian Classical Music amongst local boys and girls. Her on-going research is on the different rhythmic patterns of the *Khasi* Native States and the Raids (Administrative Units). She is notating them on the basis of *Khasi* Rhythmic Pattern. She is presently working as Lecturer in Music in the Creative Arts, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. She teaches Indian Classical Music and *Khasi* Traditional Music.

ISBN 81-89233-13-0



## **Regency Publications**

20/36-G, Old Market, West Patel Nagar  
New Delhi-110 008

Sales Showroom: 4772/23, Bharat Ram Road  
Darya Ganj, New Delhi-110 002

Phones: 2588 4571, 5248 4101 • 2325 1405

e-mail: [info@regency-books.com](mailto:info@regency-books.com)

[www.regency-books.com](http://www.regency-books.com)

ISBN 81-89233-13-0



9 788189 233136