

(M. PHIL. DISSERTATION)

SPATIO-TEMPORAL STUDY OF THE POLITICO-
ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS
IN KHASI HILLS

Submitted By :-

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For a Partial Fulfilment of Master of Philosophy
(M. Phil) to the Department of Geography
(School of Environmental Sciences)

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North-Eastern Hill University **COMPUTERISED**
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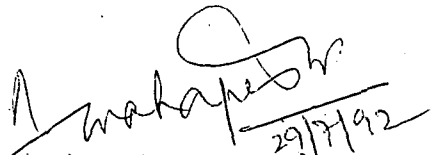
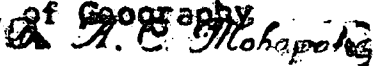
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C E R T I F I C A T E

This is to certify that the dissertation submitted by Shri Michael A. Kharkongor for the degree of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil Course), to the Department of Geography, NEHU, Shillong, entitled "Spatio-Temporal Study of the Politico-Administrative Institutions in Khasi Hills" is a bonafide study of the author to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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Dated, Shillong
the 15th May, 1992


(MICHAEL ANDREW KHARKONGOR)

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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

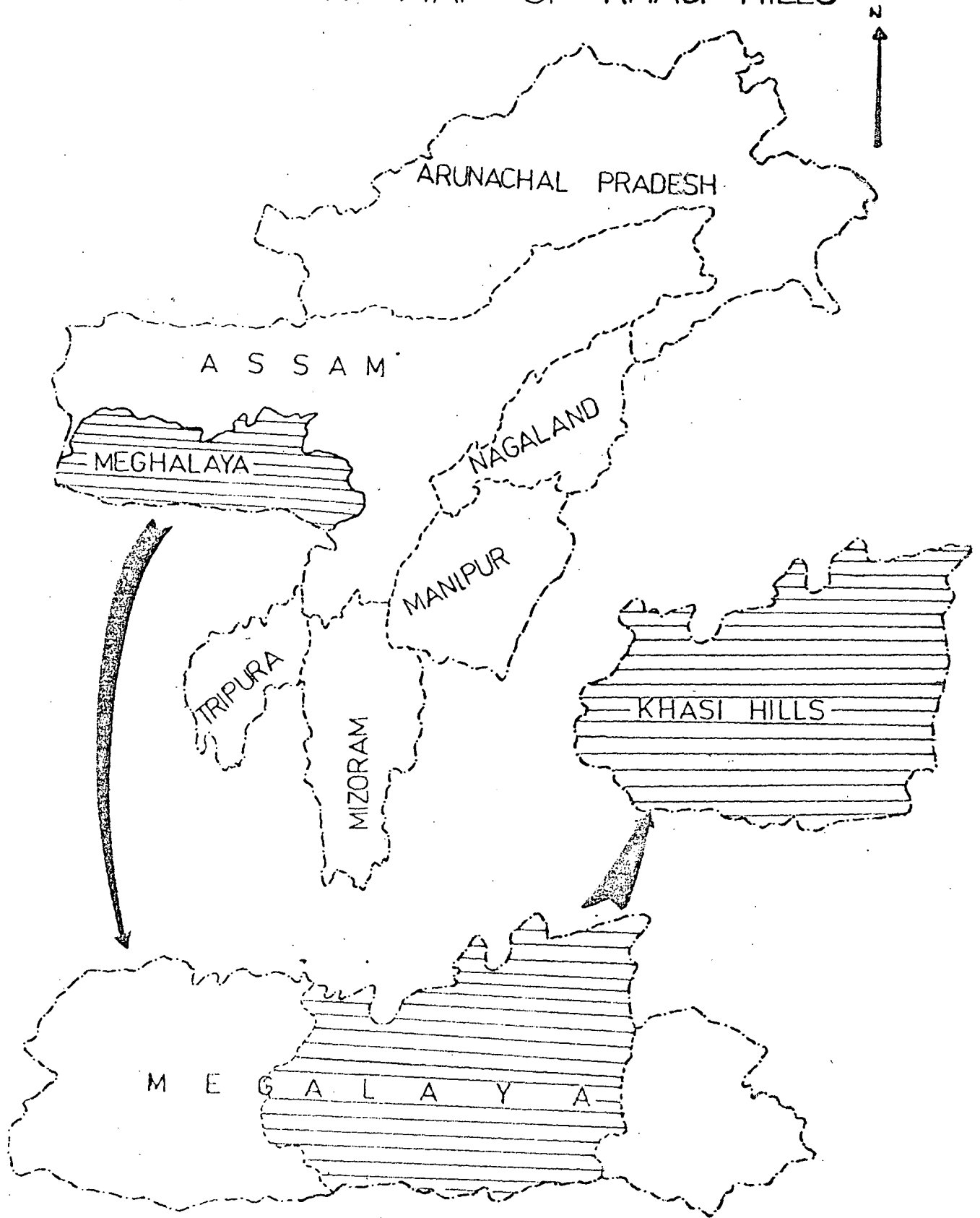
Khasi Hills is located in central part of Meghalaya which was separated from Assam and became an autonomous state in 1972. Khasi Hills is bounded by Kamrup district of Assam in the North, Garo Hills in the west, Bangladesh in the south and Jaintia Hills in the east. It has a total area of 10,443 sq.km. and a total population of 8,74,4620 (according to Census of India, 1991).

Khasi Hills have three major physiographic divisions, the northern undulating hills that includes the central Meghalaya known as the Bhoi region. The central upland zone consist of the grassy region and the rounded hillocks. Shillong is part of the Central Upland, the southern upland are representing the Meghalaya Plateau of Cherrapunjee and the Southern Bangladesh border.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the present study is to develop an understanding of emergence and growth of politico-administrative boundaries of both the traditional and modern institutions of Khasi Hills and to analyse the socio-economic problems arising out of the overlapping nature of the powers and functions of these institutions. It is note-worthy that geographers take special interest in the study of the region

LOCATION MAP OF KHASI HILLS



NOT TO SCALE

FIG-1

and the changes that take place in the region. They also take interest in the study of the different organisations originating in the region and their changes over time. Historical geography as well as political geography also study the origin of the spatio-temporal study of the politico-administrative institutions in the region (Khasi Hills).

In the district with regards to the physical setting of the region, the different administrative institutions has been found to exist in the Khasi Hills. Both traditional administrative system as well as modern political organisations co-exist in the Khasi Hills. The present study is mainly concerned with the evolution of different politico-administrative systems of both traditional i.e. Syiems, Lyngdohs, Sirdars, Village Headmen etc., and modern system i.e. the States, District Council, Municipality, Cantonments etc. alongwith their functions in Khasi Hills.

The Syiems, Myntris, Lyngdohs, Village Headmen still play an important role in administering the Khasi States and villages that fall under their jurisdictions. The Syiem is the head of the Khasi State, and the Durbar/Council to assist the Syiem. The Khasi states are sub-divided into small political units i.e. the Durbar Hima/

State Council, Durbar Shnong/Village Council, and the Durbar Raid/Raid Council, that exist to the present day.

The traditional states present in Khasi Hills under the supervision of the Khasi Syiems are as follows:

- a. Myllem, Khyrim, Cherra.
- b. Nongstoin, Langrin, Maharam, Nobosohphoh, Mawiang.
- c. Rambrai, Myriaw.
- d. Nongkhlaw, Nongspung.
- e. Malaisohmat, Showal, Mawsynram.
- f. Sohiong, Lyliong, Mawphlang.
- g. Mawlong, Nonglwai, Pamsahngut, Dwara-Nongtyrnem, Mawdon, Jirang.
- h. Shella.

These above traditional states has their own Syiems, Myntris, Village Headmen who exercise specific powers over their own jurisdictions.

Apart from the traditional states, the modern states came into existence, with it's different constituencies of Legislative Assembly, District Council, Municipality and Cantonment. The M.L.A (Member of the Legislative Assembly), M.D.C (Member District Council) have powers and functions to exercise in their own constituencies of the District. When both traditional and modern administrative institutions co-exist in the

same region it creates a problem of over-lapping in the administrative system as in the Khasi Hills.

Every politico-administrative institutions, has its own role in the powers and functions of Khasi Hills, as the case of Iewduh (Bara Bazar). The Syiem has full authority over it, so is the case with District Council and Municipality which has either direct or indirect power over the Bara Bazar, this led to confusion and conflict between the two political organisations. This shows the over-lapping nature in the political systems of the Khasi Hills.

Thus, it is required to take into account the study on the historical background of the traditional states as well as the problem of over-lapping of both modern and traditional institutions in the Khasi Hills, that relates to the Spatio-temporal study of the politico-administrative institutions in Khasi Hills.

Survey of Literature

The pioneering work of V.V. Rao, B. Pakem and N. Hazarika, gives a clear idea about the evolution of the Khasi states as well as the changing political systems since the coming of the British. The customs and traditions of the Syiems, Myntris, Village Headmen etc. The evolution of modern states were focussed, but they do not come to the fact of

of over-lapping nature.

In J.B. Bhattacharjee's "Sequences of Development in the North-East India" the continuity and change of the political system in the North East are mentioned. The "Sequence in the Development in Jaintia Hills a study of the tradition continuity and change" by L.S. Gassah has given some light on the evolution of the traditional political systems and the coming of the British as a changing pattern in the Jaintia Hills. In Dhiren Bhagawati's "Tradition and Transition - Centre Aspects of Conflicts between Traditional Forces and Modernising Agencies in Meghalaya", has thrown some light on the conflict and over-lapping nature of political system of both modern and traditional political institutions.

Spiton Kharakor gives a rough sketch map of the traditional Khasi states, which exists even to the present. L.G. Shullai's "U Babu Wilson Reade" and "East Meghalaya - Land of ki Hynniewtrep", mentioned the formation of the Khasi National Durbar/Council and the supreme power of the British in the Khasi states and also mentioned the historical background of the Khasi states with the evolution of the modern political institutions.

MEGHALAYA

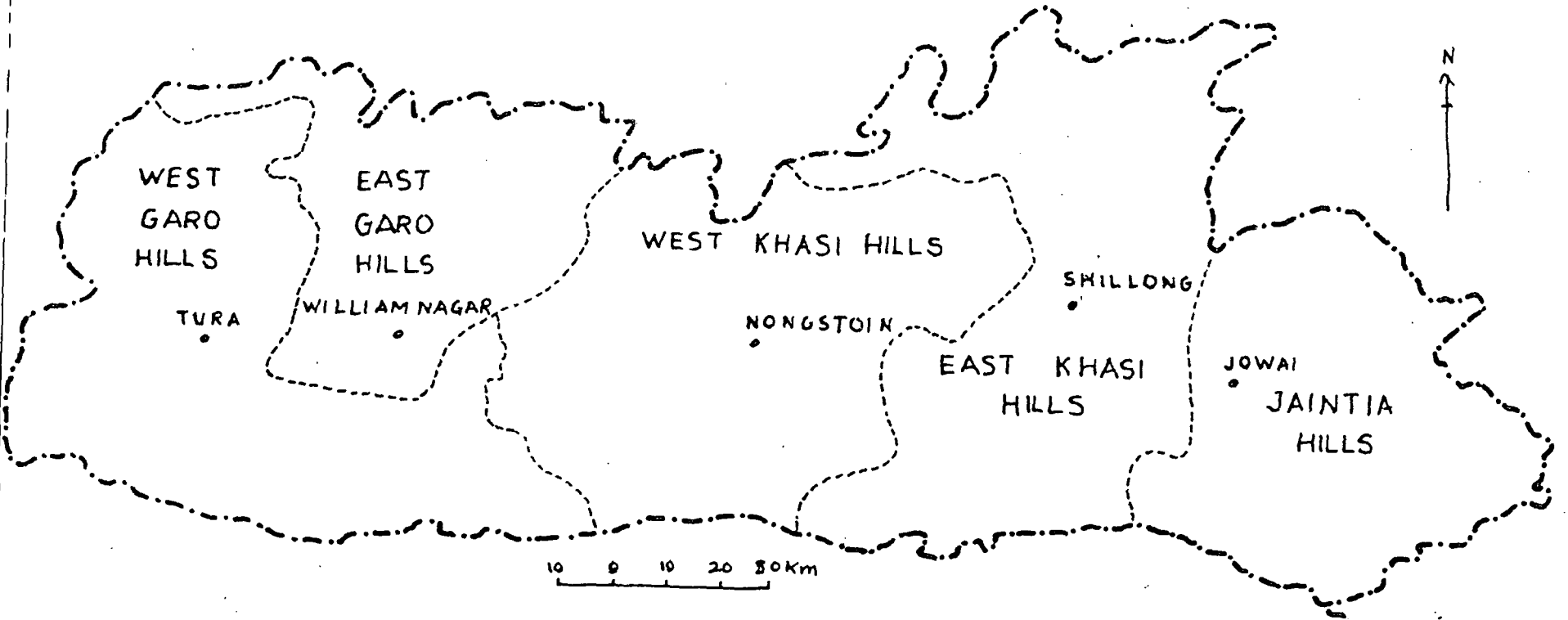


FIG -2

Apart from the survey of literature, most of the authors do not view the over-lapping and co-existence of the traditional and modern political institutions, except Dhiren Bhagawati who put some stress on the over-lapping nature of the political system in Khasi Hills. The different political institutions in Khasi Hills, both traditional and modern have caused a problem of conflict and over-lapping in the political system, where the power and function coincides with each other.

STUDY AREA

For the purpose of study, the area is confined only to Khasi Hills, on which both East and West Khasi Hills is taken into consideration. Khasi Hills lies approximately within $25^{\circ}39'$ and $25^{\circ}55'$ North Latitude and 89° and 92° East Longitude with its total area of 10,443 sq.km. The "Spatio-Temporal study of the politico-administrative institutions in Khasi Hills" is taken into the purpose of study in this context. In Khasi Hills for both the traditional and modern institutions co-exist. Thus, this create a unique set up of the political system of the Khasi Hills.

OBJECTIVE

The basic object of the present study will be included as :

a) To study the development and growth of both traditional and modern politico-administrative institutions of Khasi Hills and their power and functions.

b) To delineate the boundaries of both traditional and modern politico-administrative institutions in Khasi Hills.

c) To ascertain the extent and the basis of the over-lapping of these traditional and modern institutions and to understand the socio-political problem arising out of this over-lapping.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The sources of informations is based on the secondary materials available from the District Census Handbook, State Government Publications and Reports on various aspects of Meghalaya. Apart from these, first hand informations were collected from various departments and personnel concerned in Khasi Hills. For the identification of the various boundaries of the political institutions and spatial patterns, cartographic techniques are represented whenever necessary.

PLAN OF WORK

The entire work of the present study is based on six chapters.

In Chapter I, contains the introduction of the

present study, statement of the problem, the main objectives and hypothesis of the study.

In Chapter II, the physiographic conditions of Khasi Hills is highlighted, as to how it coincides with the traditional and modern boundaries. It's significance on the economy and political system of Khasi Hills. The distribution of population like the major Khasi groups of people, present in Khasi Hills with respect to the Bhoi, Khyntiam and the War, their functions in the spatial physical set up of Khasi Hills. The socio-economic aspects of the people and impact played by the physical setting of Khasi Hills.

In Chapter III, the Khasi traditional political institutions is highlighted, the different administrative units present in Khasi Hills like the Durbar Hima/State Council, Durbar Raid/Raid Council and Durbar Shnong/Village Council, together with the Durbar Kur/Clan's Council. Within these political units of the Khasi States/Syiemships which is maintained by the Syiems, Lyngdohs, Myntris, Sirdars, Waha dadars, Village Headmen and Clan's Elders is focussed on their various aspects of powers and functions of the Khasi traditional states.

In Chapter IV, the emergence of the modern political


institutions of the Khasi Hills and its various political units like the District Council, Community Development Blocks, Cantonment, Municipality is highlighted. The aspects of functions and powers of the modern institutions and their area of operation is focussed.

In Chapter V, the conflicts and over-lapping of both the traditional and modern political institutions is focussed, the co-existence of both the political institutions and the area of operation led to the over-lapping of powers and functions of the institutions. The conflict arising between the modern institutions is also highlighted in the undefined boundaries of functions.

In Chapter VI, the summary and conclusion of the entire study on the political institutions in Khasi Hills, its remedies and suggestions are stated.

CHAPTER II

GEOGRAPHY OF KHASI HILLS:

Khasi Hills comprises  of the East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills districts and a new district which is likely to come into existence is the Bhoi Area district. Physiographically, Khasi Hills is a rugged plateau that has a senile topography. The plateau is characterised by great diversities of relief. Shillong plateau varies from 3500 ft. to 4500 ft. from the mean sea-level. It is marked by highly dissected and irregular terrain on the northern and western parts, steep and regular sloped on the southern sides. The northern Khasi Hills is marked by a gradual slope that merges with the Brahmaputra valley from the submontane area called the 'Ri-Bhoi Area'. The most important physiographic unit of the plateau is the central Khasi Hills, consisting of rolling uplands intersected by rivers and dotted with rounded hills and hillocks. The steepest part of the region is the southern Khasi Hills, a vast structural platform which is built of dipping sandstones of cretaceous age on the edge of which platform stands an escarpment. It's surface has been deeply eroded by the agents of denudation and processes of fluvial erosion resulting from heavy rainfall. Cherrapunjee and Mawsynram fall in the southern Khasi Hills and are well-known for heaviest recorded rainfall in the world. This changed the physical setting of the Ri-War Area which is characterised by swift streams, rivers

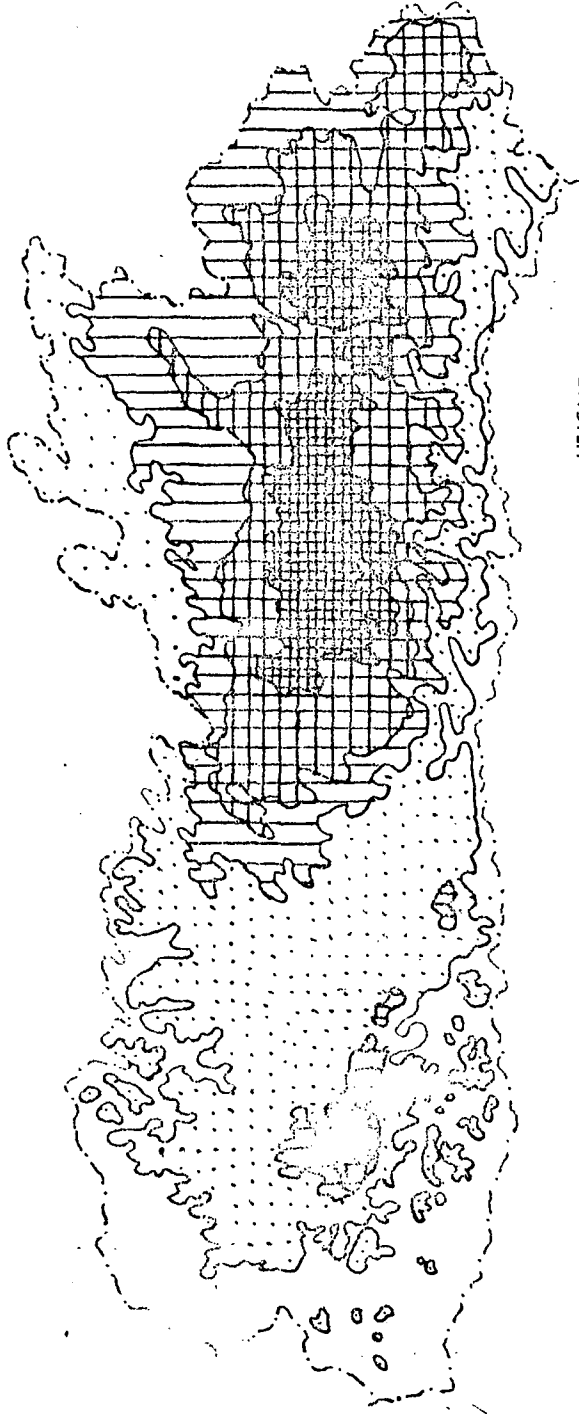
and waterfalls, deep valleys and gorges which have moulded the plateau into rugged topography and irregular types of land-forms. Khasi Hills has variations in soil types, where sand, red soil, black soil etc. are commonly found. Rocks like sedimentary, igneous, granitic rocks are some of the multi-geomorphic topography of the Khasi Hills, which gives a clear picture of the physiography of the Khasi Hills. The hot-spring present in Mawkyrwat is another multi-geomorphic topography found in Khasi Hills. Most part of the Khasi Hills is composed of slaty and gneissic rocks, presenting for most parts a highly complex character through the presence of veins of granite here and there by dykes and bursts of greenstone. The rocks stretch from westerly to the easterly portion of the hills, with some slight interruption. This covers the Kyllang rocks (where a great mass of granite is exposed prominently) and near Mawphlang they are covered by sandstone ^{extend} even to the Shillong Hills.¹

Northwards from Cherrapunjee to Mawphlang, old rocks are concealed by sandstones associated with quartzites and micaceous layers. The Cherrapunjee region is covered by sandstones, and in these beds remains of plants, stems very rudely preserved occur in the region.² Limestones in Cherrapunjee

1. Oldham, T.; Geology, Meteorology and Ethnology of Meghalaya, 1856, p. 10 - 11.

2. Op. cit. No.1. p. 13

PHYSICAL MAP
OF
MEGHALAYA



HEIGHT IN METRES

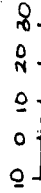
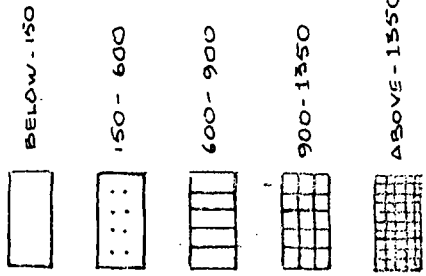


FIG - 3

region are about 80 ft. thick, separated by eight to ten feet of sandstones and shales. Coal occur in the region, but is almost exhausted.

The sandstones stretches from Cherrapunjee to Mawphlang and to the north of Khasi Hills in the Ri-Bhoi region. It retains a nearly horizontal alignment. The igneous and granitic rocks occur in Myllem, Nongkrem, Mawreng, Laitkor, Laitlyngkot and in parts of the Shillong Peak. In the south, similar topographic features like the Khoh Ramhah Rock, are found. Mawsynrut (Sonapahar) and Nongkhlaw in the west have corresponding features of the igneous or granitic topography.

The geological structure of the Khasi Hills is marked by multi-geomorphic structures where sedimentary metamorphic granitic rocks occur throughout the Khasi Hills. Clayey sandstones, shale and coal are other characteristics present in the Khasi Hills with mixed topographic features.

RELIEF OF THE KHASI HILLS :

The Khasi Hills occupy an area of 10,443 sq.km. and physiographically the area can be classed into three major divisions, viz :-

- (1) The Northern Undulating Hills that consist parts of the Central Upland known as the Ri-Bhoi Area;

(2) The Central Upland Zone consisting of the grassy region, rounded hills of both West and East Khasi Hills; and

(3) The Southern escarpment or the Ri-War Area.

1. The Northern Undulating Hills:

In this physiographic sub-division of Khasi Hills, traditional states like Jirang, half of Nongkhlaw state, northern part of Rambrai, two-thirds of Myllem in the northern part and, lastly, the Khyriem state occupy the northern part.³ In the modern context, besides having northern parts of the West and East Districts and the newly formed Bhoi district, we have the Community Development Block like Nongpoh that covers the states of Myllem, Jirang, Rambrai and Nongkhlaw, Mairang and Bhoi area C.D. Blocks occupy the region.

This region gradually slopes towards the Brahmaputra Valley, with an elevation of not more than 2000 ft. Small hills and rounded hillocks with an average height of 2000-3000 ft. dominate the region. Some of the hills are covered with dense forests, while some are barren showing traces of deforestation. Rivers like Umran, Byrni-Umtrew, Khri, Digaru and other small streams flow towards the north to join the river Brahmaputra, by a succession of sharply undulating hills and ridges that stretch from Umiam river. There are many glens and water courses

which penetrate the hills on either flank. The size of these glens are almost invariably thickly and beautifully clothes with woods; this ceases abruptly at the top.

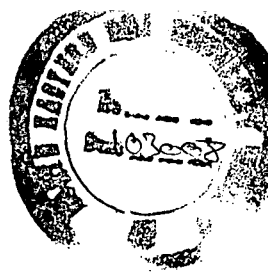
The southern part of the Northern Undulating Hills is the grassland belt of the Ri Bhoi Area. The topography of the Ri Bhoi Area is dominated by the hills and ridges as well as rivers like Umran, Umiam and their numerous tributaries. The Diengiei Hill (6072 ft.) and Sohpetbneng Hill (4432 ft.) which are legends in the Khasi religious customs are some of the prominent geomorphic features of the Ri Bhoi Area.

2. Central Upland Zone :

The traditional Khasi states that fall in this physiographic zone are Myriaw, half of Nongstoin, south of Rambrai, Mawreng, half of Nobosohphoh, Nongspung, Mawphlang, Sohiong, half of Nongkhlaw, south of Myllem and the central part of Khyriem state.⁴ Community Development Blocks like Mawshynrut in the west, central-northern part of Nongstoin, Mairang, northern Mawkyrwat, Mawphlang, Myllem, Mawryngkneng, north of Pynursla and north of Mawkyrnrew^{are} all in the study area.

Within this region, rounded hills of West Khasi Hills with an average height of 3500 ft. to 4500 ft. from the tableland region of Meghalaya. Hills of higher elevation are Kyllang

4. Op. cit. No. 3. p.13.



Rock (5820 ft.) and Symper Hill (6827 ft.). Soil is mostly clayey and sandy on which vegetal cover is sparse. Trees are scanty except small scrubs and bushes, on the eastern part of the West Khasi Hill. However, few dense forest are found in the eastern part. Umkhri, Khyshi rivers and other small streams are the main drainage channels in the West-Central Upland zone. Metamorphic rock is found in Sonapahar or Mawshynrut and is known for sillimanite deposits and production of grinding stones.

The Central Upland or the Ri Lum region lies in the Shillong region with an elevation that abruptly increases from all sides, with an average height varying between 5000 - 6000 ft. The Central Upland Zone is a grassy land, the entire area is an undulating terrain sometimes dipping into river valleys and sometime rising into rocks covered with grass. The highest tableland^{4b} situated in the form of the Mawphlang upland on the west as far as the south.⁵ The highest mountain in the region is the Shillong Peak (6,441 ft.) situated in the heart of the Khasi Hills. It also acts as a watershed region.

The eastern-most part of the Central Upland Zone is a continuous chain of hills and ridges from the West Khasi Hills with an average height of 5000 to 6000 ft. On the east of the Central Upland Zone, are the sub-divisions like Mawryngkneng,

5. Bareh, H.; History and Culture of the Khasi People. 1967, p.8.

Mawkyntrew. Rivers like Umngot and Umiew are the main drainage of Khyriem and Mylliem regions. Similarly, hills and hillocks dominate the topographic features of the region.

3. Southern Escarpment :

The zone consists of Nongstoin, Langrin, Nobonsohphoh, Mawsynram, Shella, Pamsangut, Lynciong, Cherra, Mawlong and southern Khyriem states in the traditional context.⁶ The C.D. Blocks include ^{core} southern Nongstoin, Mawkyrwat, Mawsynram, Shella-Bholaganj and Pynursla.

The multi-geomorphic landscape is also present in this region, with its escarpments, deep ridges and waterfalls. The average height averages between 4000 - 6000 ft. Cherra, Mawlong and Shella have deep valleys and waterfalls. Nohsngi-thiang falls, Nohkalikai falls and Mawsmai falls are the predominant geomorphic features. Rivers like Jaduhuta, Umngi, Ranikor and Shella rivers which flow south from the south escarpment zone. Caves like the Mawsmai cave and some other small caves are found in Cherra and its surrounding areas. Coal and limestone are the prominent mineral deposits found in the Southern Escarpment. The Cherra platform has a number of small, rounded limestone hills which contain caves and narrow underground tunnels, stalagmites, stalactites, etc., that characterizes

6. Bhakta, G.P.; Geography of Meghalaya, p.13 - 14.

the KARST features. Towards the Bangladesh plains, the border of the plateau at many places are characterized by deep precipices caused by abrupt slopes.

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE KHASIS :

The traditional Khasi states comprise different ethnic groups. However, migration of the different groups of people in the Khasi states seem to have occurred during different periods. The resultant interaction between the people has significantly influenced the developmental activities. This shows a distinct variation in the patterns of interactions in which they also exhibit micro-differences between each other. The major population groups which constitute the Khasi states are the Bhoi, Khyriem and the War people.

The Bhoi Area constitutes the northern Khasi Hills. It includes the Khasi States like Jirang, northern half of Nongkhlaw, half of Myllem and northern Khyriem. The Bhoi people have their own dialect but it forms a part of the Khasi language. The Bhoi people also follow similar rituals and customs as followed by other Khasis in the Khasi Hills. The religious ceremonies and other customary activities are more or less similar except for a few differences like the dialect and the way they speak during the performance of religious ceremonies.

It is clear that in the traditional system, land was distributed and re-distributed in the Ri Baid (which is dominant in the Bhoi Area). In this case, the traditional system followed by the Bhoi people is that the land-holder even though he inherits the land through the agreement or the Sanad given to him by the Syiem, yet, it is found that even to the present day, if the land holder leaves the land without proper maintenance of safeguards, others can take away the land by cultivating and using the land at his own convenience. The landowner who does nothing or does not make use of the land is automatically no more the land owner. This happens even in the present day where other landowners who buy the land in the Bhoi Area are unaware of the practices and the land which they bought is later known not to be theirs. This information regarding the land system in the Bhoi Area is done through the research work and interview with the people residing in the Bhoi Area.

In the Bhoi Area, the population of the clans and sub-clans which are present in the region are about 2 lakhs (1981 census) and it was found that most of the inhabitants in the Bhoi Area migrated from other Khasi states. Clans like the Bhoi Nongbri, Lapang and Sangkli are the few clans originally belonging to the Bhoi Area,⁸ while others are found to

⁸. Kharakor, S. Ki Khun Ki Ksiew U Hynniewtrep, p. 8 - 44.

have been intermixed with each other and through migration in the past from the other Khasi states. These are the prominent inhabitants of the Bhoi Area. This was partly encouraged by the availability of cultivable land in the Bhoi Area. It has also attracted other settlers from the state to settle down.

Another group of people found in the Khasi Hills are the Khyriam who occupy an area of almost all the central region i.e. in west and the East Khasi Hills. The approximate population of the Khyriam people about 3 lakhs (1981 census). The main dialects of the Khyriam area are the Maharam, Mawsynram, Sohra, Myllem and the Nongkrem dialects. In all the states of the Khasi Hills, the dialects and languages spoken may have slight differences from each other. The Sohra dialect has been taken as the main Khasi language for communicating with each other between the Bhoi, Khyriam and War. States like Nongstoin, Myriaw, Rambrai, Mawiong, Langrin, Nobosohphoh, Maharam, Sohiong, Myllem, Cherra and Khyriem fall within the Khyriam area.

Within this Khyriam area, different clans are found, and they may be the land-holders and tenants. Clans like Lyngdoh Mawnai, Lyngdoh Nongkseh, Lyngdoh Nonglait, Lyngdoh Jarain, Lyngdoh Lyngkholi, Kharkongor, Kharkrang, Khardohling, Kharsyntiew, Kharlukhi, Dkhar, Jyrwa, Thabah, Kurbah, Rapsang, Nongbri, and the Syiem clan of every state are some of the few

clans found in the Khyriam area.⁹ The Ri-Lum area (hill area) of Shillong is also part of the Khyriam area. In the Khyriam area, Sirdars, Lyngdohs, village headmen are the heads of the villages under the supervision of the Syiem of the state. The Lyngdoh (priest) performs religious ceremonies when necessary and during times of religious festivals of the particular state. This is where the people gather together from every area, like the "Shad Suk Mynsiem" held once a year. On the occasion, the Khasis wear costly dresses and are adorned with gold and silver to show their hard labour and the merry-making mood during the festival. The land system of the Khyriam area is the same with other states of the Bhoi Area and War Area. The unauthorised occupation of the land by any settlers without the permission of the Syiem, Lyngdoh or the village headman are not discouraged in these areas. While buying any part of the land, a person is to have prior permission from the Syiem and the land owner, which is also known as the "Pata". This acts as the license for selling and buying of land.

The War area is the home of the third major group of people of the Khasi Hills, with a total population of about 1.5 lakhs. This area occupies the southern escarpment of the Khasi Hills below Cherra, and includes states like Bhowal,

9. Op. cit. No. 3. p. 8 - 44.

Melaisohmet, Duara-Nongtynrem, Shella and Mawlong. The War Area comprises of the War people, clans like Warjri, War Nongbri, War Shabong, War Wahksing, War Sadew, Lyngwi, Warshong, War-sneimih, Wartde, War Nongjri, Wanswet, Wanshong are some of the clans of the War Area.

In Shella the political affairs of the state are under the control of the Wahadadars, after the death of Gangkta Singh. The British then reduced the number of Wahadadars to six which was later reduced to just one Wahadadar.¹⁰ The other War areas have the Syiem, Lyngdoh, Sirdar, village headmen, and Basan to control over the political affairs of the state. The administering of the state is the same as in other states of the Bhoi Areas and Khyriam areas. The area has got its own jurisdiction like in the other states in respect of political control and administration.

The three major areas of Ri Bhoi, Khyriam, and the War areas, though they speak with accents, there is no difference between the three major groups of people; they are from the same family of the "Hynniew Trep" (Seven Huts), and they all come from the same group of people, the Khasis.

Culturally and politically the people follow the same customs and rituals practiced in the Khasi Hills, except

10. Rao, V.V. (et. al); A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India, Vol.2. 1989. p.77.

RESOURCE MAP
OF
MEGHALAYA

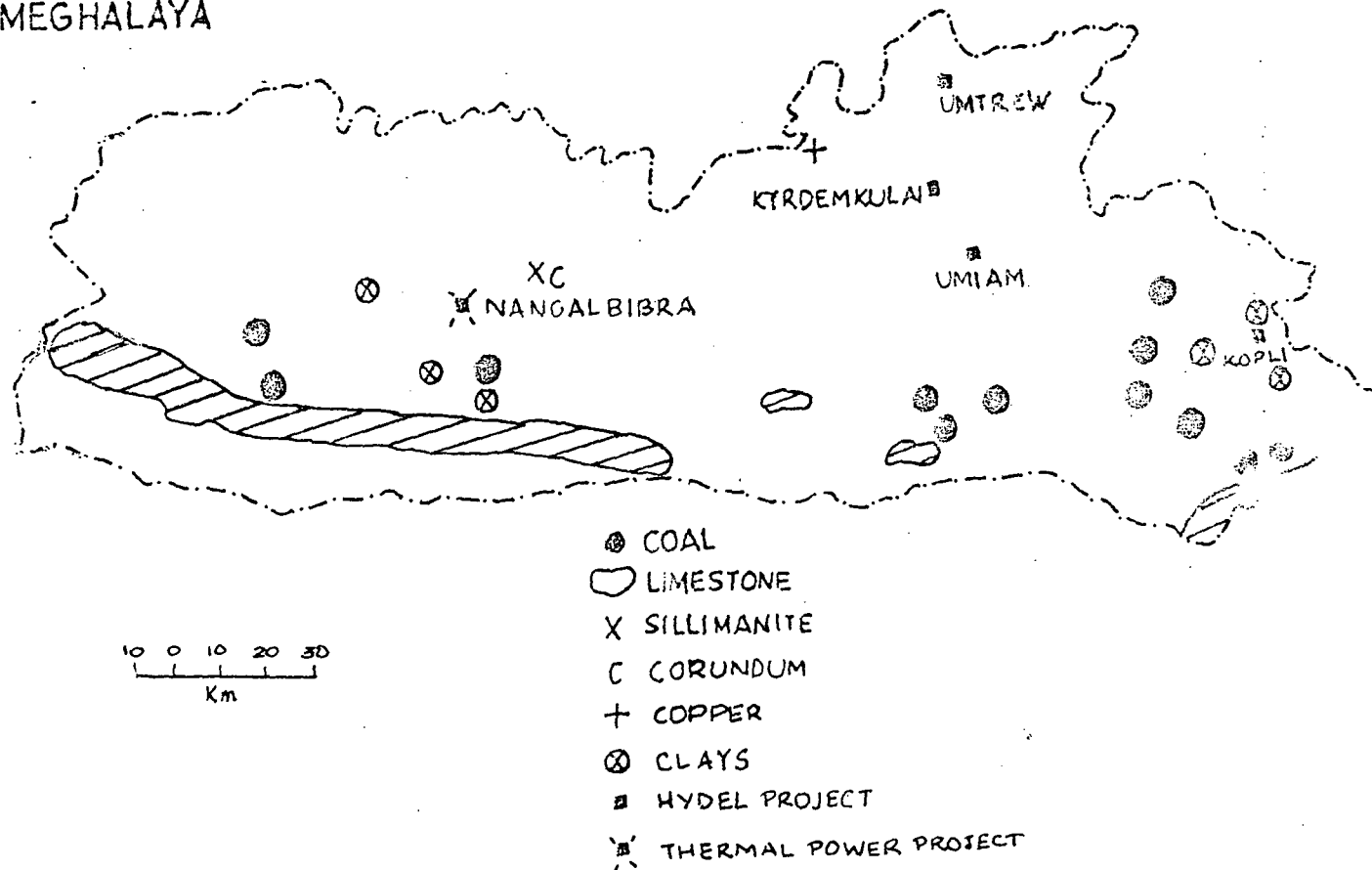


FIG - 4

for slight changes in political affairs. Some rules and regulations practiced in some parts have some variations in the administration of the state.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE KHASI HILLS :

The economic aspects of the Khasi Hills can be taken into consideration, but however, before going into the economy and economic activities of the Khasis, the study of the land system of the Khasi Hills is undertaken and the land tenure system of the Khasi Hills is focussed upon.

Land Tenure:

The Khasis have a classified land tenure system, where the land is divided according to the administration system of the Durbar Hima which is the highest authority in the Khasi Hills. The land system of the Khasis is divided into several divisions, such as :

- *1) The Communal land or public land called the 'Raid' which falls under the control of the local authority or a group of clans;
- 2) The 'Rikynti' or 'Ri Kur' which is the private land which is under private holding;
- 3) The reserved land or sacred grooves.

* Barih, H.: The History and Culture of the Khasi People, 1967.
p. 287 - 289.

The 'Ri Raid' is occupied by the group of clans or families who are the original settlers. These are exempted from taxation, under the chieftains of the clans and rights held by their descendents. The 'Ri Kynti' and 'Ri Kur' are the private lands of the clan. The land is inherited by the female members of the family. Selling of such land is prohibited except with the consent of the maternal uncle and mother of the family. The youngest daughter is the keeper of the land according to the traditional laws and customs.

In the case of the Syiems, Lyngdohs, Myntiris, Basans, etc., they possess the reserved lands. The 'Khyndew Lyngdoh' belongs to the priest and is under his maintenance. The sacred grooves or reserved land like the 'Law Kyntang' or 'Law Adong' are the lands or forests from which people are prohibited to collect fire-woods or timbers, or to extract natural resources from such lands.

* In 1925, the Khasi National Durbar imposed another law on the land system of the Khasi Hills by which they were again classed and re-organised as follows :

- 1) The 'Ri Kynti' is the private land belonging to clans, families and private owners;
- 2) The inherited land from predecessors that remain undivided or undisturbed among the clans is the 'Ri Seng'.

* Barih, H.: The History and Culture of the Khasi People, 1967.
p. 287 - 289.

- 3) The land belonging to liable inheritance is the 'Ri Kur';
- 4) The land occupied by the village community is the 'Ri Shnong';
- 5) The land cultivated by the owners was called 'Ri Khain';
- 6) The land and parts of territories occupied by the clans of community is the 'Ri Raid';
- 7) The land owned by the Syiem and the priest was called the 'Ri Lyngdoh' ;
- 8) The royal clan and family of the Syiem own a land which is managed and maintained by his clan was called the 'Ri Syiem';
- 9) The reserved forests for religious ceremonies and sacrificial purposes is known as the 'Law Kyntang';
- 10) The 'Law Adong' is the forest reserved for the public and not for immediate use without the consent of the Lyngdohs, Sirdars and village headmen;
- 11) The sacred forest which nobody is allowed to use is the 'Law Lyngdoh';
- 12) The 'Raid' is also the division of the state;
- 13) The land which is left by extinct families and no claimants for the land is taken over by the Syiem, whether to keep it or dispose it, and such land was called 'Ri Iepduh';
- 14) The state which is under the Lyngdoh, Syiem or Sirdar is called the 'Hime'.

These new concepts have been adopted by the Khasi National Durbar as a land system apart from the traditional systems.

ECONOMY AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF THE KHASIS :

The Khasis do not depend entirely on agriculture for their livelihood. Economic activities like timber cutting, house making, gold washing, iron smelting, cattle rearing, weaving, mining and ammunition making are the other occupations of the Khasis in the recent decades.

The Khasis engaged themselves in agriculture by planting and cultivating crops and plants like vegetables and fruits. Terrace and Jhum (shifting) methods of cultivation was extensively carried out in the past, where fallow land was present in the region. People still practice this type of cultivation and thus, results in low agricultural productivity.

Rice is the main staple food of the Khasis and the cultivation is done in almost every part of the Khasi Hills. Yet, it is required to import rice from the neighbouring states of India in modern times, largely due to the making of liquor in the villages. In the Bhoi Area where the land is fertile and suitable for cultivation, the area is the main agricultural area of the Khasi Hills. The Khasis from the other parts of the hills come and settle in the Bhoi Area for cultivation.

The Bhoi Area is known for the growing ginger, oil seeds, onions, rice, chillies, and fruits like pineapple, bananas, plums, pears, peaches, grapes. The Khyriam area of Khasi Hills is found to have limited agricultural activity (in the West Khasi Hills,) while in the East Khasi Hills of the Khyriam region, agriculture thrives in the hill slopes of Myllem, Nongkrem, Nongspung, Mawphlang, while Sehiong produces potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, and other types of vegetables. Fruits like pears, plums, oranges, peaches are also grown here. The War Area is famous for areca-nuts (betel nuts) and betel leaves, and pepper. On the hill slopes of Sohbar-Pynursia area, tezpatta is grown and exported. Fruits like oranges of good quality, jack-fruits, lemon and other types of fruits are the produce of the War Area.

Apart from agriculture, economic activities of the Khasis are of various kinds. It is said that gold washing is done in the Mawphlang-Umiam river in the past. Mining is done in Cherre, Mawlang, Langrin, which produce coal and limestone and which has helped the economy tremendously. Iron-smelting and iron making was carried on in Myllem till a few decades ago, while at present, blacksmithy is the occupation of the people of Myllem where tools like spade, hammer, chisel, spears, arrows, hoes, knives and other household implements are made. In the past, the Khasis had luxurious items like diamonds, gold beads, pearl pincelets and gold earrings which indicate that

mining took place in the past for such raw materials to make such items. The Bhoi Area is also suitable for the growth of sericulture. The manufacture of silk was well known.

Handicraft is another economic activity. The Khasis engage themselves in making bamboo products such as, baskets, bamboo seats, bamboo cone or 'knoh' for carrying goods, bamboo rain shields (knop), arrows, fishing rods, musical instruments and various other bamboo products. Clay vessels, pots, water vessels, flower pots and other pottery works were carried in the Khasi Hills. Sonapahar is famous for the manufacture of grinding stones and the production of sillimanite. In the past, it is said that brass products were produced in the Khasi Hills besides other households implements such as plates, spoons, pots, cups and saucers, and other brass implements used for religious ceremonies.

It may be mentioned that the Khasis have their own calendar having eight days, these determined the market days. The market day is observed in every part of the Khasi state once a week, and the names of the markets are mentioned in the calendar, such as, Shillong Hat, Pamtuh Hat, Umni Hat, Iewduh Hat, Lynka Hat, Nongkrem Hat, Mawlong Hat and Rynhep Hat which are the eight market days of the Khasis. Apart from the eight market days when economic transactions was carried out in the Khasi states, there were other numerous Irewrit (small market) days in the villages coinciding with the main market days.¹¹

The Khasis from the various parts of the Khasi Hills come for marketing during the market held in a particular place, for example, if the market day falls on the Iewduh Hat, the market takes place in Iewduh (Bara Bazar) where people from every parts of the hills come for marketing. This is how buying and selling of the Khasis is done, alongwith other economic transactions take place. It is during the market day that goods and other products are sold in the market. Almost all the Khasis are non-vegetarian and, thus, meat like beef, pork etc. from the bulk of the items sold on market days.

The Syiems, Lyngdohs, Sirdars have full control over the market, and the maintenance and safety of transactions are looked after by them. Markets are the main sources of revenue of the states. The Syiem charges reasonable taxes from the sellers of goods. However, the original landholder of the villages are exempted from such taxes. Taxes are collected by the Myntris, Sirdars, Wahadadars and the village headmen of the particular state. A special tax is taken during times of ceremonies and festivals. The income from such taxes is used for the maintenance of the market places and other functions. The surplus money is shared between the Syiem, Myntris, Lyndohs, and Wahadadars of the particular state. Taxes are also collected by the "Shakri Syiem" or 'Servants of the Syiem'.

MODERN INSTITUTIONS IN THE KHASI HILLS :

In the physical setting of the Khasi Hills, modern political institutions came into existence, where the states and Districts are the main political institutions. The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council was established in 1952¹² by the Act of 1935. There are two districts, namely, the East Khasi Hills District and the West Khasi Hills District. From the two major districts, other political institutions like the community Development Blocks, Municipality, Cantonments, and villages came into existence.

Community Development Blocks comprise of thirteen blocks, namely, Mawshyarut, Nongstoin, Mawkyrwat, Mairang, Nongpoh, Mawsynram, Bhoi Area, Mawphlang, Shella-Bholaganj, Myllem, Mawryngkneng, Mawkynrew, and Pynursla. Under the Shillong Municipality Board there are divisions of wards like Laitumkhrak, European, Police Bazar, Jail Road, Mawkhar, Jaiaw, S.E. Mawkhar, Mawprem, Kendi's Trace, Laban, Malki and Lumparing. As for the cantonments, information is not available and, therefore, study of the cantonments was not undertaken. Within the states and districts, villages came into existence in large numbers, all under the control and supervision of the village headmen.

IMPACT OF PHYSIOGRAPHY :

The rugged physiographic nature of the Khasi Hills has various significant impact on the determination of the

12. Syiem, J.M.; Ka Jingtathuh Khana-Pateng Shaphang ki Syiem
Jong Ka Hima Myllem(1880-1960), NEHU, Shillong.

Khasi traditional states. The boundaries of the Khasi states are not properly marked except by drawing imaginary lines according to the number of villages present. Villages are found to be scattered in the Khasi Hills, mainly due to the hilly nature. This has largely caused the uneven distribution of population in the Khasi Hills. People are found to be scattered in different villages in the Khasi Hills, though economic interactions are not unknown. Owing to the rugged terrain, terrace and shifting cultivation are practiced side by side in the Khasi Hills, and this has been responsible for the low agricultural productivity. Further, the economy of the Khasi Hills has been largely affected by the bad road connections. The construction of roadways involves huge financial costs as hills and mountains have to be cut or levelled, which make the progress slow and, therefore, have an undesirable impact on the Khasi economy.

The physical setting of the Khasi Hills has, yet, another significance. The names of some villages have been given after the physical features prominently present in the village or state. For instance, Nongkrem literally means the "Village of Caves", and the word "Maw" which occurs as a prefix to the name of the village stands for "stone". The village Mawbah means the village of "Bigstone", Mawsaw is "red stone", Mawphiang is "grass-covered stone" and, Dewsaw stands for "red soil". There are many other names given to villages which signify the physical

conditions of the place or village also. Such names throw light on the physical setting of the Khasi Hills. As such, the different states and villages have their own physical peculiarities and characteristics signifying the physical nature and attributes of the Khasi Hills.

When the British came, annexed, and ruled the Khasi Hills, they found that the land was similar to that of Scotland and so named it the "Scotland of the East". During the British rule, the Khasi Syiems came under the control of the British and the political system of the Khasis changed tremendously; the Syiems had to administer their respective states on the supervision of the British Commissioner. The Shella state came under full control of the British owing to the absence of any Syiem, except the Wahadadars who were brought under the British control.

Lastly, it may be mentioned that under the British rule, roads were constructed and the Dawki-Shillong road with its suspension bridge over the Dawki river was the first major achievement of the British. A roadway from Nongkhlaw to Bangladesh was proposed, but it met with a strong opposition from the Nongkhlaw durbar headed by the Syiem, Tirot Singh. However, the British gradually constructed many roadways in various places, and thus, brought about tremendous changes in the physical setting of the Khasi Hills.

CHAPTER III

TRADITIONAL POLITICO-ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTION OF KHASI HILLS

The traditional institutions of Khasi Hills like the Syiems, Myntris, Lyngdohs, Sirdars, Wahaders and village headmen constitute the Khasi political institutions. These are taken into account as they form the main focus of the present study. Till today, the traditional institution continue to exercise their influence over the various activities. Powers and functions are controlled and are exercised in such a way that had maintained the role of traditional institutions. In this context, the main concern of the study is to examine the nature and aspects of the development of powers and functions of the traditional institutions.

DEVELOPMENT, FUNCTIONS AND POWERS :

To study or trace out the development, functions and powers of the traditional political institutions of the Khasi Hills, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the area of operations and how the system operates within different political administrative units of the Khasi Hills along with the jurisdictions and boundaries of the different Khasi states, how they operate and how the states were divided into several villages and raids. In the Khasi political system there are slight discrepancy as to who may be the main authority of the state and its jurisdiction and when at a village


level who may be the head and his jurisdiction. In fact, by studying the political system of the Khasis, it is found that all the political functions are subordinate to the respective Syiem or Durbar Hima.

However, the study of the different political units of the Khasis, boundaries and jurisdictions of the Khasi states are taken into consideration. The study of the political boundaries of the traditional Khasi states is to have some knowledge on the origin of the Khasi states. It may be mentioned that, in the olden days the expansion of the Khasi states was brought about by wars with other states or countries (e.g. Bangladesh). This is how the Khasi state expanded. Thus, in order to have a proper understanding of the state boundaries, a special study of boundaries and territories is essential for the spatial distribution of states and its people as well as the sole authority upon its own jurisdictions. (This requires a separate study).

The nature and role of boundaries ^{in brief} has changed through times because their functions have also changed and coincided with the increase in population and human settlements, the rights and obligations of the administration increased in complexity. It became necessary to define the boundaries between the constituent units and entities.¹

1. Pounds, N.J.G. Political Geography, p.66 (1963).

The traditional people, have simple ideas and concepts. A no-man's land is usually a land that separates one tribe with the other. It may be a frontier in a strict sense a border zone, unclaimed, unsettled and unutilised, into which people of both sides may at times intrude, over which no one exercises or claims exclusive control. This concept of boundaries may be simple, but this concept was adhered and applied in some remote and thinly populated developing areas of the world. A large tract of land often separated one tribe from the other, the boundary is generally clear, for the fact that it set limits for not more than rights to hunt game or fish.²

Adjustment and readjustment of the historical boundaries in  long settled areas may be due to the facts of cultural geography. This process is gradually defined and delimited. The demarcation is never complete. Under these circumstances the boundary, ideally separates different cultures. So that no problem arises by splitting up of the traditional areas of activity. It is worth mentioning that, if the boundary had any value as a line of military defence, it may be regarded as doubly successful. It may also be stated that no boundary anywhere in the world combines all the qualities. Each, however, to some degree may be compromised, on which

2. Opp. cit. No.1., p.67.

the result of conflicting pressures brought upon to bear not only by the states directly concerned but it may also be with their allies and their enemies.³

In Khasi Hills, however, (see the map of the Khasi states) the boundaries are undefined and are indefinite.* The line separating different traditional states were vague but were recognised by the participants. As the case may be, a Khasi state is identified and frequently distinguished by number of villages present in the each state; the boundary is taken from a village level upwards of the state. Every village has a Lyngdoh, a Sirdar, a Headman etc., as the functionaries of the village; they demarcate their own jurisdiction under the particular Syiem of the villages. It is through the outer perimeter of the village jurisdiction that the Syiem or 'Hima' demarcates their respective territories and boundaries. This acceptance of separate zones has a long tradition that is recognised by respective people. It is found out that no bamboo fencing, mud or stone walls or distinct geographical features demarcate the state boundaries. At lower level, i.e. with the traditional states, it is through mutual understanding between the functionaries of the villages (the Lyngdohs, Sirdars, Headman) that a common understanding is arrived at to delimit their respective territories. Thus, the Khasi

3. Opp. cit. No.1. p.70.

* As such there has been no detailed study of the boundaries of the traditional Khasi states. The Literature that are available, have simply delineated the boundaries or the basis of traditions and Folk lores.

state is clearly identified by each number of villages it has; where in each village has its own distinct outer limits, which collectively form the traditional state.

DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS:

Tracing the origin of the Khasi state is not possible, for genuine facts and evidences as to how the origin of the kingdom came into existence, are not adequately documented. There are no evidences except by words passed from one generation to another by folk tales and folk songs about the wars fought by the Khasi kings to expand their own states and territories. Through folk tales, it has come to our knowledge that some kings were ruling some provinces of the present Assam state and Bangladesh. The wars which were fought by the different kings were known, but it could not help in tracing the origin of the Khasi kingdoms or Khasi states.

It was only after the British India entry into the region, that evidences and documents were available about the Khasi kingdoms. This was from 1822 onwards, upon this basis, then it is found that before the British came to the Khasi Hills, all the Khasi states were independent and free from external domination. The Khasi states present at that time are (1) Bhowal, (2) Dwara-Nongtyrnem, (3) Jirang, (4) Khatsawphra (Nongkhlaw), (5) Langrin, (6) Lyliong, (7) Myllem, (8) Maharam, (9) Mawsynram, (10) Mawphiang, (11) Myriaw, (12) Mawiong, (13) Malaisohmat, (14) Mawdon, (15) Mawlong, (16) Nongspung, (17) Nongkrem

(Khyrim), (18) Nonglwai, (19) Pamsangut, (20) Rambrai, (21) Cherra, (22) Shella and (23) Sohiong.⁴

These Khasi kingdoms or states are the known entities which exist in Khasi Hills even to these days. The Khasi state is composed of a number of villages present in the jurisdictions of a particular state. In each state or kingdom or the Syiemships there are several villages which are under the jurisdiction of Sirdars, Lyngdohs, villages and wahadadars. These functionaries of the villages are directed by the Syiems of that state in matters of development administration. The villages under the supervision of the Sirdars, Basans maintain the administrative affairs of the (Shnong) or village. The villages have their own durbar (council) which is comprised of Basans, Lyngdohs and headmen or Sirdars. They look into minor cases and other small village affairs. The village headman, Sirdar, Basan etc. go according to the sanads given by the Syiem, this is an agreement between the two and has a signature of the Syiem. The sanad is an agreement which contain the rules and regulations for the headman in order to maintain the village affair under the Syiem's supervision.

The second category is the state that falls under the total control of the Syiems. All villages that are in the jurisdiction of the Syiem of a particular state are under his control.

4. Kharakor, S. Ki Khun Ki Ksiew U Hymniestrep, 1981.p.96-97.

The Durbar Hima (Or state council) is the supreme authority where major issues are dealt. The Durbar of the Syiem or Durbar Hima is the supreme body that takes care of issues on land reforms, taxes and revenues of the state and the affairs of the state. It is a law-making body; laws of the state are decided by the Durbar-Hima.

The political systems of the Khasis is a unique one. It has no dictatorship. The Syiem or Chief of the clan or Khasi state is the head of the state or clan; his power lies with the decision of the 'Durbar' - The Durbar consist of the Council of Ministers. It comprises of Lyngdohs (Ministers), Sirdars, head of the clan, headmen, Wahadadars and so on. In short, they are the advisers who form the essential part of the policy making bodies.

The election of the Syiem or chief is another features, unlike other hereditary systems of the kings, the Khasi Chief is elected from the first nephew of the Chief, i.e. the first son of his eldest sister. The Lyngdohs are elected from the Lyngdoh clan itself, on which the people have the right to vote any candidate which the clan has produced. Headman, Sirdar and Wahadadar were openly elected by the people of the state/locality.

The political systems of the Khasis is a democratic political system in which we find that every individual

has right to participate in the Durbar except women. The powers and functions of the Syem/Chief is exercised with the assistance of the Durbar. Though the Chief has a supreme power, he has to go according to the decisions of the Durbar or Council.

This is how the development of the Khasi political system, with the composition of the Chief, Durbar like Lyngdohs, Sirdars, Headmen, Wahadadars and head of the clans emerged and formed a unique political democratic state of Khasi Hills. In this context, the powers and functions of the Khasi traditional political institutions is undertaken of the purpose of studying both the modern and traditional institutions of Khasis which still exist even to the present day.

POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION :

The formation of Syiemship is composed of a combination of Basans and Lyngdohs of a particular state or territory who formed a voluntary association to institute Syiemship as the upper or supreme power of the institution. The Khasi customary system should be remembered that the political and social organisation possessed matrilineal laws of succession which varies and distinguishes from other races of the world. Thus, the Khasis have a unique system in the political and social system that sets it apart from social and traditional activities of

the other races of the world.⁵

In this context, for the purpose of studying and examining the powers and functions of the Khasi traditional political institutions under the Khasi Sylemship or Durbar of the state, the different Khasi political institutions is undertaken. This is common to all the Khasi states, (though there might be slight changes in the powers and functions of the individual states in the Khasi Hills). These institutions also highlight the powers and functions of the various political groups of the Khasis. In this context a summary of the system is given below before discussing the functions.

1. CLAN COUNCIL :

For further understanding of the Khasi clans and its authority in Khasi Hills, a particular clan is taken into consideration for the purpose of the study. It is said that the clan has its own authority and functions within the clan's affairs and not outside which may concern the village. The clan has its own jurisdictions which may be restricted only to the clan itself. All internal affairs of the clan are looked and controlled by the head of the clan and elders.

5. Shullai, L.C. Ki Hima Khasi, 1975. p.1.

In this context, the Lyngdoh clan can be taken into consideration for the clan itself has some complications. One may take that the Lyngdoh clan is one clan but it is not so, for the Lyngdohs are found in every Khasi states and have their own identity. The Lyngdohs may be different with their different divisions of the Lyngdohs. The Lyngdoh acts as a major title but however, the Lyngdohs in every Khasi states have their own proper title which may be secondary. The Lyngdoh or Syiem clan are almost the same, for sub-title or surname is the secondary. The Lyngdohs have a sub-title division like, Lyngdoh Mawlong, Lyngdoh Mawphlang, Lyngdoh Sohlong, Lyngdoh Myriaw and so on, like the case of the Syiem Syiemlieh, Syiemlong etc. Thus, the Lyngdoh has its various clans within itself. In the case of Lyngdoh, Lyngdoh Mawlong can be taken as one clan. According to the Khasi customs, marriage between the same clan or closer relative is not allowed, however, in the Lyngdoh's case; marriage between the divisions of Lyngdoh is allowed when they are no more close relative and of the same clan. Therefore, the Lyngdohs may some how or the other have some relations between the clan or may have no relationship at all.

In this case the Lyngdoh Mawphlang can be taken as one clan. Though, in the present days clan may not play a significant role in the development of society or village, but in

the past as mentioned, clan has its own role and contribution to the development of the society or village. Where the clan has its own council to maintain and manage the internal affairs of the clan. The clan has its different family and together forms one group of clan, with the Rangbah Kur as the head of the clan and together with the elders and male members of the clan constituted the clan's council.

The head of the Lyngach Mawphlang see to the development, preserve and promote the clan's ancestral properties and customs. He is responsible for the safety and harmony of the clan when any family of the clan is in trouble it is his duty to solve the problem of the particular family. It is according to the Khasi customs that every member should honour and respect the head of the clan and the elders. Thus, the head of the clan is the authority together with the elders, that forms the supreme authority of the clan.

Another important aspects of functions of the head of the clan is to see against unauthorised settlement of outsiders in the clan's property or land, and also to safeguard the clan's property from damages. Allocation of the clan's land to each family and where they can cultivate and plough the land for agriculture. Cases like disputes over land and quarrels between families, adultery, theft, etc within the clan is resolved by the clan's Council.

It is worth mentioning that Christianity has created many confusion between the clan and disintegration. For some of the family has been converted to christianity and they, do not follow the old-age customs of the clan and therefore, misunderstanding between the member of clans have surfaced where several age-old customs of the Khasis are forgotten and are left behind. Some may not recognise the head of the clan and maintain their own family. Christianity has made deep inroads in the clan structure in the Khasi society. But in some cases, however, clan is still popular even to the present day and its internal affairs is still carried out and maintained by the head of the clan.

The different Khasi clans have their own Durbar known as the 'Durbar Kur' (Clan Council). The council of the clan is presided by the head of the clan. He is the head of the clan from the female side, and he is known to the family as 'kni' or 'ma' (uncle). In the council of the clan he is known as the "Rangbah Kur" or elder of the clan. He is elected by the male members of the clan. The clan council is composed of the elders and Basans of which they are elected by the clan's headman, clan elders or Basans and other male members of the clan. The clan council is usually held in the house of the youngest daughter of the clan (ling khadduh", house of the youngest female) on important occasions to settle disputes among the members of the clan and other cases like

adultery, trespassing, damage to clan property, theft etc., and other domestic affairs of the clan. Every internal affairs of the family within the clan is sorted out by the clan council under the supervision of the clan's elders and the Rangbah Kur. All members of the clan fall under the particular clan's jurisdictions with Rangbah Kur as the head. He maintains and manages the affairs of the clan by allocating land for cultivation and residence. He is the main spokesman of the clan, and is responsible for the clan, even to see that the members of the clan obey the orders of the village headman and the Syiem. In certain occasions, the Rangbah Kur performs religious ceremonies on behalf of the clan. The Rangbah Kur in most cases is assisted by the clan's elders and members.⁶

The succession of his office (Rangbah Kur) is from the female line. His brother or elders of the clan become the Rangbah Kur or may be automatically replaced by his brother if he is present, he is elected by the clan council. The political affair of the clan is done within the clan itself. Serious cases like murder, rape, etc. are referred to the village durbar/council. Even though powers and functions of the clan is limited, yet, it plays an effective role and contributes to the developmental affair of the state.

6. Mathur, P.A.G. ; Khasis in Meghalaya, 1978. p.61

7. Op. cit. No.6 p. 65-66

2. VILLAGE COUNCIL :

The villages of the Khasis had their own durbar or council called the 'Village Durbar' or 'Durbar Shnong'. The village durbar consists of the male members of the village, the village elders or Sasans. The head of the village council is the village headman, sirdar or wahadadar who presides over the village council. His main function is to see the welfare of the villagers, sanitation, water supply, health, roads, and schools which are under the village jurisdiction. The village durbar sees to the strengthening and protecting the age-old customs of the villagers and the Khasis as a whole. Cases like disputes, theft, rape, assault etc. are settled in the village council. Law and order is enforced and handled by the village headman. In this aspect, cases which may be complicated or serious are referred to the 'Durbar Hima' or State Council of the Syiems. The village priest or Lyngdoh who is superior to the village headman, during his absence the village headman officiates as the priest for prayer and religious ceremonies.⁸

It is the responsibility of the village headman to see to the payment of taxes and tributes to the Chief or Syiem by the village community. In case of filing of an important issue or case by the villagers in the Durbar Hima, they are

8. Op. cit. No. 6. p.66

accompanied by the village headman who is the main spokesman in the Durbar Hima. Any order or message sent by the Syiem is passed to the villagers through the village headman.

The village headman, sirdar etc. is succeeded by any male members of the village from among the elders or Basans of the village. The village headman is openly elected in the council and he must be authorised by the Syiem when he is elected by the village council, and he is to exercise power according to the rules and regulations of the Syiem or the Durbar Hima and with the advice of the village council.

3. RAID COUNCIL :

Apart from the village council, the Raid is another political unit of the Khasis. It is composed of a number of villages and clans on which the elected headman, Lyngdoh and four other myntris manage and control the Ri Raid. The Raid Council is presided by any of the above mentioned members of the Council. It's main powers and functions are to look after social welfare, civil and judicial administration. The Raid is the largest political unit of the state and it manages the internal affairs within its jurisdiction. Other functions of the Raid are to settle boundary disputes between villages, and control and maintain village property, land and forests. It also check unauthorised occupation of the land safeguards the

Khasi laws and customs. It may, however, be mentioned that the Syiem is the head of the Durbar Raid.

4. THE SYIEM AND DURBAR :

A number of villages and Raids present in the Khasi Hills form the state or Syiemship with an elected Chief. The Chief is elected by an electoral college consisting of Lyngdohs, Basans, Sirdars, Headman and the leading clans.

The powers exercised by the different Syiems vary only in degree. All are said to look after the welfare of their subjects. Syiems have the overall superintendence of the affairs of the states with the assistance of the Raid Durbars, his own officials and Myntrists.

Payment of presents and tributes by the people of the village and Raids to the Syiem is an indication of their total allegiance to the ruler. This kind of allegiance is also expressed on the occasion of the state annual religious festivals and dances. He also exercises his power on crimes like murder, homicide, treason, etc. He derives his income mainly from markets and crown land.

The Syiem does not interfere with the internal affairs of the village and Raid which are autonomous. The Syiem is the head of the State Durbars. The Syiem Durbar has

powers to legislate, adjudicate and execute the laws. The Durbar is the supreme authority of the Khasi state which is called Durbar Pyllun or Durbar Hima. Crimes such as violation of the laws enacted by the Syiem's Durbar, rape, assault, homicide, sorcery, thefts, adultery, etc., are always tried in public. ⁹

The Raid Durbar acts as the 'high court' while the Syiem Durbar is the supreme court. Cases that cannot be settled by the high court or Raid Durbar are taken to the Syiem Durbar or Supreme Court. The political units have to settle only their own internal matters but the final authority rests with the Syiem and his Durbar. On occasions of emergency, such as war, revolt etc., the Syiem convenes his Durbar at which all male members of the tribe are present. He usually consults the headman of the raid and villages, but may sometimes summon all the male members of the state to a meeting of the Syiem Durbar where the matter will be thrashed out.

The overall matters and cases are looked upon by the supreme judicial officer of the Syiemship. Without the Syiems's sanctions the Durbar Raid cannot be convened for the trial of serious offences. Generally, serious cases are presided over by the Syiem's Durbar itself. The custom of the

Khasis is such that no man is allowed in the Durbar, one who does not have a healthy and sound physical fitness and should be free from disease and other ailments. He should also have a moustache for proving his manliness. Drunkards are not allowed in the Durbar. The Durbar of the Khasis is very much honoured by the people and any decision taken by the Durbar becomes law and authority, which nobody can change or misuse. The village has to abide by the laws and regulations decided in the Durbar. Action to be taken against any person breaking the laws is decided at the Durbar and his punishment will be according to the decision of the Durbar. Most laws and regulations of the Durbars in the past were not handwritten but passed on through generations by word and these are kept in mind by all the people of the state.¹⁰

The role of the villages depend entirely on the judicial powers of the headmen, sirdars and wahadadars. All internal affairs of the village were looked after by the above authorised persons who worked under the directions of the Syiem or chief of the state.

The Headman has to go according to the laws, rules and regulations of the Syiem in the Sanad which has been duly signed by the Headman on his agreement and countersigned by

10. Op. cit. No. 6. pp. 69 - 70.

the Syiem or Lyngdoh of the particular village of the state. The sanad given to the Headman, Sirdar may differ slightly with other Khasi states under different chiefs.

According to the Sanad, the Headmen or Sirdars have to see to the welfare to the village, such as 1) to restore peace and harmony in the village; 2) to see that the Ri-Raid and Ri-Kynti or 'Land of the Clan' is free from intrusion by outsiders; 3) settlement of the people without any permission of the Syiem or Lyngdoh; 4) to safeguard village properties like forests, land and illegal selling of trees and village properties; 5) to see that no one is allowed to register land or forest in the village without the consent of the Syiem; 6) to see the village boundaries or jurisdiction with the agreement or consent of the Syiem; 7) to see that trees are not destroyed during times of death in the village or to use for making of tools. The making of churches, schools or community buildings should be discussed with the Syiem and the Durbar; 8) to see the making of houses without proper permission in the village, and it depends on the headmen to refuse or accept such making of houses. To see that no illegal selling and paying in the village takes place; 9) to see that village forest, water for drinking, and crematorial ground; school and playground do not come under private

ownership; 10) to have a 'village durbar' or village meeting at least once in a year; 11) to elect a new headman depends on the village durbar, as to whether the same headmen should continue or a new one be elected; 12) to honour and respect the laws of the Durbar of the Syiem; 13) to go according to the Durbar of the Syiem and not against it; 14) breaking of the laws above, in the maintaining of the village, the Durbar of the Syiem hears the grievances of the village durbar and if comes are genuine the Durbar of the Syiem can dethrone the village headman.¹¹

The above is an extract from the sanad of Syiem of Myllicem. Certain rules and regulations were put forward in order that the village headman has to maintain the village affairs and if he breaks the rules of the Sanad he might be dethroned from his headmanship. It is found out that the village headman can maintain his office even till the day he dies, for no terms and conditions for the duration of his ruling is given, and unless some misdeeds are committed against the village and if the village people dislike the headman, he can be dethroned from his headmanship. At present, the village headman also acts as the local magistrate of the locality he operates.

The elders of the state and village gathered together for the need to have a central body of the Syiems, Lyngdohs,

11. Ha Ka Dor U Syiem Myllicem, Mawkhar, Shillong "Ka Sanad Pynskem Rangbah Shnong".

Wahadadars and Headmen and other prominent persons. It was felt that the state and village authority is not a centralised body and assembles only in order to communicate with every state in the Khasi Durbar.

It was a consensus of seven elders who called upon all the Khasi Chiefs, Lyngdohs, Wahadadars and other elders of the villages and clans, on 27th July, 1923 to form a Reformed Government of the Khasi states. This idea led to the formation of a centralised body or Durbar of the Khasis which had a total strength of 300 members that includes the Chiefs, Lyngdohs, Wahadadars, Headmen and elders of the villages and clans. It was through this Durbar that the Khasi council came into existence in 1923.

On 4th September, 1923 the central body came into existence which was named the "Khasi National Durbar" or Borbar Hima Khasi which means "Durbar of the Khasi States". The main office is at Mawkhar, Shillong. The function of the Durbar is to safeguard the Khasi states from the encroachment of foreigners who may disturb the peace of the Khasi states, and to protect the rights of the Khasi people as well as age-old customs, laws, usages of state properties such as forests, markets, rivers, etc.

The composition of the Durbar, however, is simple in nature, where they have the President (who is elected from

among the members to preside over certain issues), the Vice-President, General Secretary, Assistant Secretary and Treasurer.¹²

POWERS AND FUNCTIONS :

The powers and functions mainly depend on the Durbar to take decisions upon certain issues and the President finally takes decisions and concludes the Durbar. The Khasi National Dorbar is a law-making body, and makes rules and regulations for every state and village. In the Khasi states, when there is any dispute these were decided upon by the Khasi National Dorbar.

The Dorbar makes laws or acts to adjudicate upon:

- 1) Land Act or Land Dispute and Intrusion, 2) Laws on Citizenship, 3) Hereditary Laws of the Clan or Village, and 4) Forest and Property Act.

ASPECTS OF FUNCTIONS :

Having examined the powers and functions of the Khasi Syiemship, it is found out that many other aspects of functions are performed by the different political units of the Khasis. From the village level to the state level, every political affairs are exercised whether at village or state level. Starting from the clan or Durbar Kur which maintains its own law and regulations in the clan, with the Rangbah Kur (Clan Elder) as the

12. Kharakor, S.: *Ki Khun Ki Ksiew U Hynniew Trep*, 1981.
p. 70 - 73.

head, the clan has to obey his orders. The Durbar Kur meets at the "iing Khadduh" (house of the youngest female) on issues, to settle disputes among the members of the clan and cases like adultery, trespassing, damage to property, theft, etc. The clan manages its own internal affairs under the supervision and control of its elders. The clan has links with the village durbar or council where cases of major issues are taken up.¹³

Secondly, the village council/durbar is another political unit of the Khasis. The village durbar is headed by the village priest (Lyngdoh), Sirdar, or village headman. These are the heads of the village durbar who exercises their powers in the village. These heads of the village see to the welfare of the villagers, village sanitation, water-supply, health, roads and schools that fall under the jurisdiction of the Durbar. The village durbar is also responsible for protecting and strengthening the morale of the community. Petty quarrels and disputes are amicably settled by the village headman in consultation with the village elders.¹⁴ Major cases are referred to the Durbar Hima of the Syiem of the state.

13. Op. cit. No. 6. p. 65.

14. Op. Cit. No. 6. p. 66.

Thirdly, the Durbar Raid or Raid Council is another political unit comprising of a number of adjacent villages. This is the largest political unit under the state or Syiemship over which the Khasis wield political authority. The Raid Durbar is generally headed by one Lyngdoh and four Myntris. The internal affairs, both civil and judicial, are settled by the Raid. The Raid Durbars also have authority over boundary disputes between villages, looks after the land and forests within the Raid. It also prevents unauthorised occupation of lands. The disputes which cannot be settled at the Raid level are adjudicated by the Syiems Durbar.

Lastly, the Durbar Hima or the Durbar of the Syiem is the highest political body in the Khasi Hills. The Durbar consists of the Lyngdohs, Myntris, Basans, Sirdars, headmen of the leading clans, Lynskors, and village headmen of the state. All major cases of the clan, Raid and village councils are taken to the Durbar Hima for judgement. The Syiem and his durbar protect and safeguard the age-old customs, laws, usages and rights of the people, manage and administer the state properties like forests, markets, rivers. Cases like rape, assault, homicide, sorcery, thefts, adultery, etc. are also taken up by the Durbar of the Syiem. Wars and revolts are directly dealt by the Syiems and their durbars.

The different forms of local authority are subordinate to a central one giving the administration a hierar-

chical structure. It has been stated that the clan elder or Rangbah Kur owes allegiance to the village headman or Rangbah Shnong, who in turn is subordinate to the headman of the Raid or sub-Raid. The Rangbah Shnong is ultimately responsible to the Syiem. In the Raids, the headmen, sirdars or basans as the case may be, either directly or through his village headman is subordinate to the Syiem. It is worth mentioning that the Syiem is not a dictator, but the Durbar is the supreme authority either at the state level or at the lowest political unit level.¹⁵

The aspect of functions of the Khasi durbars is found to have been divided among the different durbars from the clan's durbar is the Syiem's durbar or Durbar Hima in order to administer under different heads. Each one is dealt at a village level and other major cases at a Durbar Hima level. This causes conflict between the traditional and modern political institutions.

The traditional institutions of the Khasis has its own uniqueness where several development measures are done by it. The main aspect while initiating development activities is to preserve and promote its age-old customs and traditions which remain even to the present day. The traditional political

15. Op. cit. No.6. p. 69 - 71.

institutions have greatly contributed to the development of roadways which may be mentioned that they may not be automobile roads but bullock cart roads and footpaths, yet, this greatly helped in the communication between one state and another. Forests were strictly preserved even to the present day like the law Kyntang and Law Adong. Sanitation and water supply is maintained in a proper way and no scarcity of water or lack of proper sanitation is found in the traditional system. The state is securely protected from outsiders and intruders and also from unauthorised dwellers or settlers. These are its main functions of development's process, other aspects of development is to promote and protect its cultural heritage.

Once again it may be mentioned that revenue is generated from several sources such as market which the Syiem has full authority over it. Other sources of income are exploitation of natural resources such as limestone and coal, and other minerals of the state where royalty is taken. Income from penalties and fines which are paid by the wrongdoers and people who trespass upon any area of the prohibited land and property. Traders and merchants from outside the state and from other countries are heavily taxed. This is how income and revenue of the Khasi states were generated.

In the traditional political system, the main power

lies with the Syiem who is the head of the state, yet, priority should be taken at a village level, where the main activities and functions originate. It is at the village level that several aspects came into existence except major cases which are taken up at the Hima or state level. Most developmental aspects were carried out in the village under the control of the village Headman, Sirdar and Wahadadars.

CHAPTER IV

MODERN ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS : ESTABLISHMENT, FUNCTIONS AND POWERS :

The year 1826 brought a significant change in the political system of Khasi Hills. Since the coming of the British, the traditional political setup of the Khasi states came under the control of the British dominion. Every Syiem of the Khasi state had to go according to the advice and supervision of the Deputy Commissioner of Bengal.¹ The Khasi states come under the British and gradually lost their powers even though they had control over their own states.

When India got its independence, modern state came into existence, and changed the political system of the Khasi Hills. The announcement of 11th September, 1968 contemplated the establishment of an autonomous state of Meghalaya with jurisdiction over two hill districts, the Khasi & Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills districts. The autonomous districts of Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hills were given the option to join the autonomous state of Meghalaya provided a resolution was adopted by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of the district councils before the prescribed date.²

1. Aitchison, C.U. A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and neighbouring countries, 1929, p. 179.

2. Rao, Venkata V. (et al); A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India, Vo. 2, p. 61.

The Autonomous State would have a legislature assembly and a Council of Ministers. All the subjects in the State List, except a few, would be transferred to the control of the Autonomous State. The Autonomous State would have the power to collect taxes such as land revenue, agricultural income tax, excise duty, taxes on minerals, taxes on goods and passengers and, entertainment tax.³

Before 1972, Meghalaya was a part of Assam. It was not represented in the Assam Legislative Council under Dyarchy because it was a backward area. Still, one Garo, Jaggin Sangma Laskar, was nominated to the Legislative Council. Since he could not follow the proceedings in the Council he resigned his membership. Later on, a Welsh missionary of Shillong was nominated to represent the interests of the tribals. After his term was over, another Indian missionary was nominated to the Legislative Council. Besides the lone nominated member, there was a ^{Member} Khasi, Rev. Nichols Roy, who was elected to the Legislative Council from the British portion of the Khasi Hills.⁴

On the 21st January, 1972, Meghalaya, (after the Hill State Movement), attained its own statehood with its own

3. Ibid. No. 2. p. 61.

4. Op.cit. No. 2. p. 93.

political institutions which came into existence, in 1972. The Meghalaya State Legislative Assembly consisted of 60 members was formed. All of them were elected by adult franchise.⁶ Apart from the Legislative Assembly, other administrative branches like District Council, C.D. Block, Municipality, etc. also came into existence.

In this context, the main concern of the study is to see the functions of these different political institutions in the Khasi Hills and their area of operations.

The Meghalaya State Legislative Assembly has 60 members who are elected by the people every five years. Out these 60 members, 18 are elected from the Khasi Hills. These are allotted different branches in the political jurisdiction to see to the development of the constituencies, with the Chief Minister as the head of the state. Different branches like Industries, Coal Mining, Agriculture, Irrigation, Power, Forestry, Supply department, etc., were allotted to the different members of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. These are under the supervision of the Cabinet, and the Chief Minister oversees the development through these different departments.

Khasi Hills comprises of two districts in which recently another district is likely to come into existence

6. Op. cit. No.2. p.94.

which is the Bhoi Area. Within these defined boundaries of the districts, the members of the Legislative Assembly are allotted to the different departments for the development of the different districts.

FUNCTIONS:

By allocating different departments to the members, they are made to see to the development of the departments under their supervision. The Forest Department works under the supervision and guidance of the Forest Minister. He has to take various steps to see to the improvement and growth of forest areas and forest products in the state. The Law Minister has to see that rules and regulations are performed by the Police Department and other branches under guidance of the Law Department. The Agriculture Minister is concerned with the development and improvement of Agriculture and to see that measures are adopted to improve agriculture by giving inputs loans or subsidies to the farmers of the State. The Power Minister is the authority to see that new Power projects are taken up in the state in order to uplift the economy of the state. The main functions of the Education Minister are to see that educational institutions are set up in remote areas. This will, in turn, help to increase the literacy rate of the state and grants and loans are to be given for improvement and in order to meet the requirements

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCKS OF KHASI HILLS

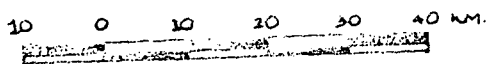
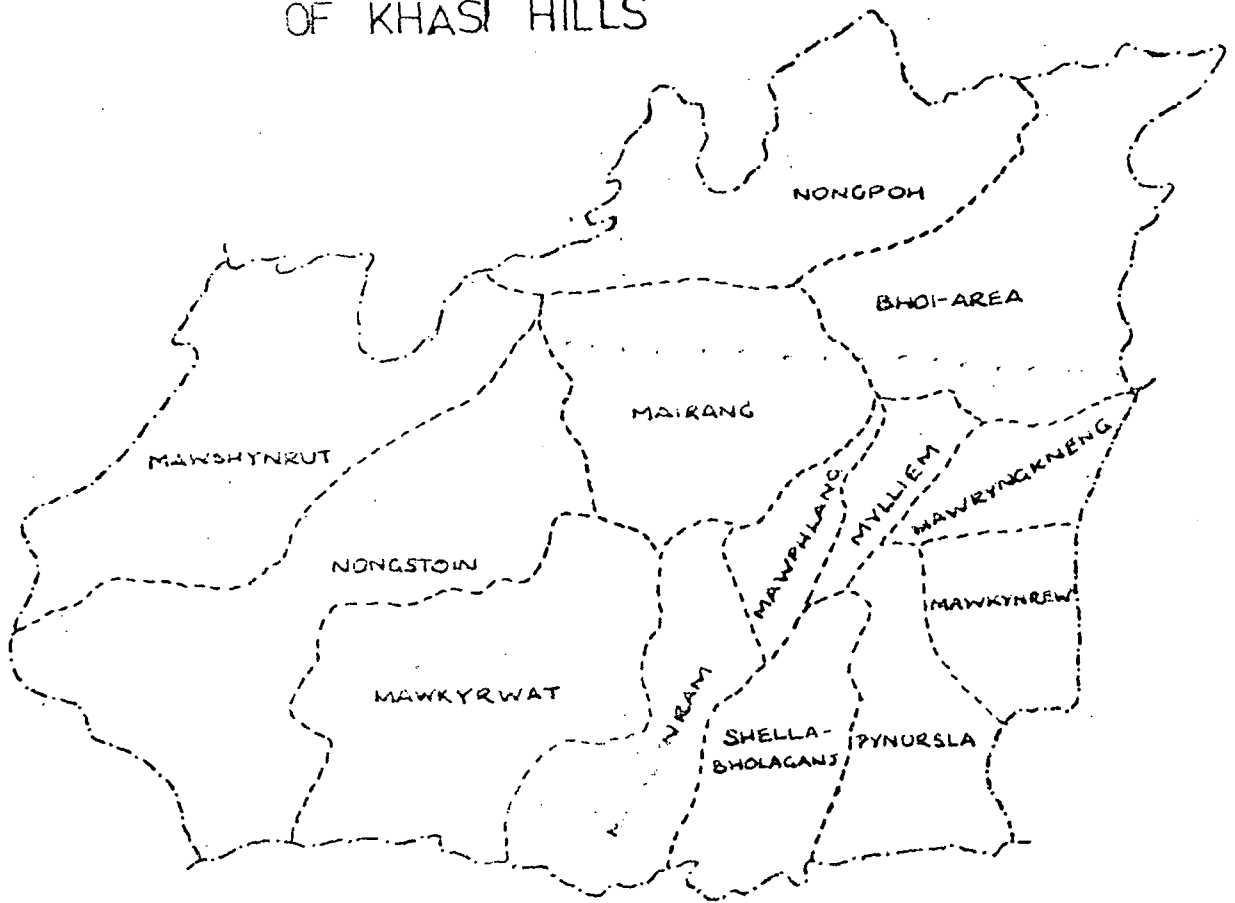


Fig-6

of the institutions. The same responsibilities are given to the other ministers not mentioned above.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK :


In the Khasi Hills, the C.D. Block is another division which has its own defined boundaries and jurisdiction. They are Mawshynrat, Nongstoin, Mawkyrwat, Mairang, Mawsynram, Mawphlang, Myllem, Shella-Bholaganj, Pynursla, Mawkynrew, Mawryngkneng, Bhoi area and Nongpoh. The C.D. Block is headed by the Block Development Officer. He sees to the development of his own block. Development issues in agriculture, IRDP, small-scale industries like handloom, weaving, carpentry, etc., are very much under the functions of the C.D. Block.

FUNCTIONS :

The main functions of the C.D. Block are to give loans and grants to the village farmers as well as the educated unemployed youth. Seeds and agricultural implements like power tillers, tractors, pumps for irrigating the cultivated land, etc., are given to the farmers with a subsidised loan. These are all government aids given to the farmers and cultivators for the development of agriculture. The Agriculture Department of the Khasi Hills works hand in hand and in collaboration with the C.D. Block.

The C.D. Block, by the very nature of its functions, has become a branch which deals entirely with the development of agriculture ~~and associated~~ activities in the Khasi Hills.

VILLAGE ASSEMBLY :

The Village Assembly exists even to the present day, such as the "Raid". The village headmen exercise their powers within the respective localities or villages. The Raid or village also sees to the development of the village under the supervision of the village headman or Sirdar. Preservation of forests, roads, age-old Khasi customs are looked after by the village headman. The village headman in modern times has powers  a Third class Magistrate. No policeman or other authorities can enter the village without his consent. Cases like murder, theft, assault, etc., that occur in the village are dealt with by the village headman unless it is a serious case in which case it is referred to the police.

Thus, the village headman still has some powers to exercise in the village even though the Law Department has its powers and functions in the village also. All cases are settled in the village by the village headman, including cases such as dispute between the people residing in the village, assault, theft and so on, which are tried in public by the village headman and the Village Assembly. It is a known fact that these are done at the village level and such cases are not taken to the authorities like the Police Department. The Village Assembly has its own powers to exercise in the village even to the present day.

DISTRICT COUNCIL :

The District Council came into existence in the year 1952⁶. The Khasis said that the Syiems of the Khasi Hills and the Dolois of Jaintia Hills should form a Federation and become a part of the province of Assam. The Khasi Federated State would be represented in the Assam Legislative Council by four members. The Assam Legislative Assembly shall not have the power to legislate on all the subjects for the Federated state. The Federated State shall have a National Council of 29 members of whom four shall be women. The members shall be elected on the basis of Adult Franchise.⁷

The District Council is a corporate body, having perpetual succession and a common seal with the right to sue and be sued. The Bordoloi Committee considered that various representations made by the tribals and observed, firstly, that there should be no assimilation of the tribals by the people of the plains because it may result in the break-up of the existing tribal institutions. Changes must take place, no doubt, but all changes must come from the tribals themselves. They should not be imposed from without.⁸ The District Council

6. Syiem Jor Manik Ka Jingsiathuh Khana : Pateng Shaphang Ki
Syiem Jong Ka Hima Mylliem.

7. Op. cit. No.2. p160.

8. Op. cit. No.2. p. 161.

is vested with power to make laws, enforce its laws and provide further decision on disputes. In other words, the District Council is an autonomous body.

The composition of the District Council is said to have an Executive Committee with the Chief Executive Member as the head and two members to execute the laws passed by the District Council. The C.E.M. is elected by the District Council and the other members of the Committee are appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of the C.E.M. from among the members of the District Council. The Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of the District Council are not eligible to hold office of the C.E.M. or the E.M. when the C.E.M. ceases to hold office, the other members of the Executive Committee automatically cease to be members of the Executive Committee. This is the rule framed under the Sixth Schedule which provides for a Cabinet System of government.⁹

The District Council has the power of legislation over the occupation and use of land other than land comprising reserved forests. But the provincial government need not pay for the occupation of vacant land for public purposes and must have the power to acquire private land for public purposes on

9. Rao, V.V. ; A Century of Politics in North-East India, 1975.

payment of compensation. The control of jhuming should be left to the District Councils. Similarly, the administration of justice should be left to the District Councils with few exceptions. Again, the management of dispensaries and such other institutions. The use of land, the management of village forests, regulation of agriculture, etc., should be entrusted to the District Council. The District Council should have the power of taxation on certain subjects. ¹⁰

To prevent the exploitation of the tribals by the sophisticated folk of the plains, the District Councils should have the power of licensing the money-lenders and traders from the plains. The management of minerals resources of the hill areas should be in the hands of the state government, subject to the condition that the District Councils shall have a share in the revenue from the mineral resources and mines. Further, licenses/leases shall be granted in consultation with the District Council concerned. ¹¹

The functions of the District Councils have been taken into consideration in this present study.

FUNCTIONS OF THE DISTRICT COUNCILS :

The powers and functions of the District Councils

10. Op. cit. No.2, p. 161.

11. Op. cit. No.2, p. 162.

are of four kinds, namely, legislative, executive, financial and judicial. The District Council has the power to make laws on certain subjects only, which are enumerated in the Sixth Schedule, such as the power to make laws on the allotment, occupation, or use of or the setting apart of land, other than reserved forests for the purpose of agriculture, grazing, residential or other non-agricultural purposes; the management of any forest not being a state reserved forest; the regulation of the practice of jhum or other forms of shifting cultivation; the establishment of town and village councils and the determination of their powers and functions; village police; public health and sanitation; the appointment or succession of chiefs or headmen; money-lending and trading by persons other than the scheduled tribes; the inheritance of property; marriage and divorce; social customs, and so on.¹²

As regards the executive powers, the District Council has the power to establish, construct or manage primary and middle schools, dispensaries, markets, cattle panels, forests, roads, waterways, and determine the language and the manner in which primary education should be imparted in the primary

12. Op. cit. , No. 2, p. 179.

schools within its jurisdiction.¹³

The District Council also has the powers of taxation, to assess and collect land revenue, levy tax on land, buildings, tolls on persons residing within the district, on professions and trades, callings and employment, tax on the entry of goods carried in ferries, taxes on the maintenance of schools, dispensaries, and roads and the granting of license/leases for the purpose of prospecting or for extracting minerals.

The District Council also has the right for a share of the royalties derived by the State Government from licenses or leases granted for the purpose of prospecting or for extracting minerals. The rate of sharing depends on the mutual agreement between the parties concerned.¹⁴

The District Council has the power to constitute village courts for the trial of cases in which both the parties are tribals. It may appoint suitable persons to be the members of the village courts. It may also appoint officers, if necessary, to carry out the laws made by the District Council.

13. Rao, V.V. ; A Century of Tribal Politics in North-East India, 1975. p. 282.

14. Op. cit. No. 2. p. 282.

The District Council is a court of appeal in respect of all suits and cases triable by the village council. No other court, except the High Courts and the Supreme Court of India, has jurisdiction over such cases.

The District Council has also the power to make rules. The Council, with the prior approval of the Government, can make rules and regulations to constitute village councils, village courts and the powers to be exercised by these laws, the procedure to be followed by the District Councils or the courts constituted by it in appeals and other proceedings, the enforcement of decisions and orders of such councils and courts and all other matters ancillary for the carrying out of the above mentioned provisions.

The District Council also exercises certain delegated powers and functions. For example, the Governor may authorise the District Council or any other court constituted by it to try cases punishable with death, transportation for life, imprisonment for a term of five years or so, under the Indian Penal Code or any other law for the time being in force.¹⁵

In the year 1971, more powers were entrusted to the District Council together with finance and personnel required for their management. They were not delegated functions

15. Op. cit. No.2. p. 283.

but entrusted functions, i.e. if a District Council does not exercise these functions properly, they may be taken away by the Government. It may be noted here that the District Council has no power to make laws on the entrusted functions. In carrying out these functions, the District Council acts as the agent of the State Government. Again, the State Government cannot entrust any function without the consent of the District Council.¹⁶ The District Council was at the liberty to take over all the development functions transferred, or some or no functions. In the final analysis, it was on the consent of the District Councils that the development functions were entrusted to them.

The development departments transferred to the control of the District Councils are agriculture, public works, flood control and irrigation, soil conservation, animal husbandry, veterinary services, fisheries, forests, Panchayat Raj, Community Development, cottage industries, roads and buildings, education upto middle school, health and family planning, and planning and development.

The officers and staff of the entrusted departments are under the administrative control of the District Councils, but they are appointed and disciplined by the State Government.

16. Op. cit. No.2. p. 180

The district level officers are responsible to the State Government for implementing schemes which were entrusted to the District Councils.

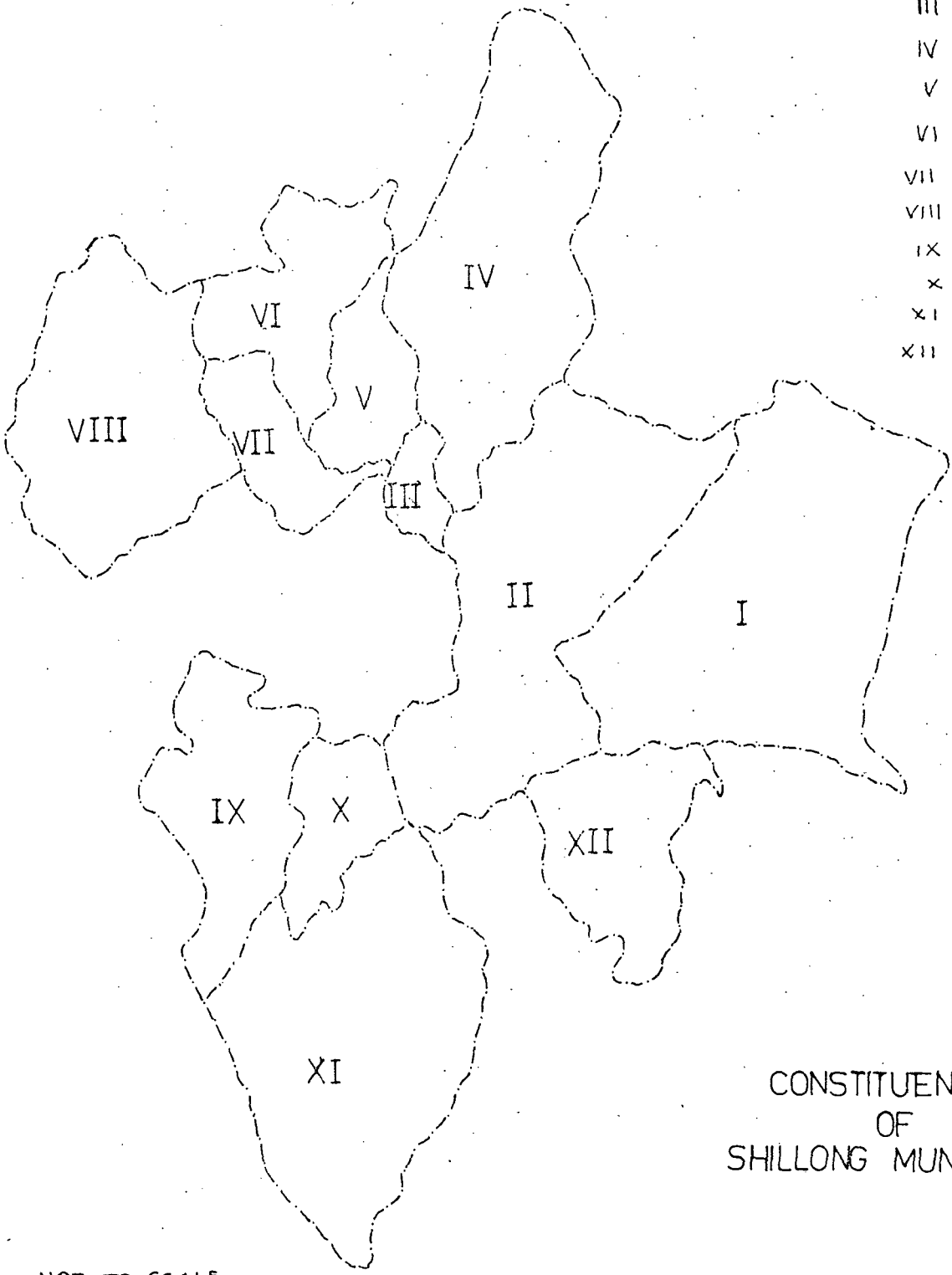
The District Council has the power to constitute committees both ad-hoc and standing, but the composition, powers and functions and other matters are determined by the District Council itself.

SOURCES OF INCOME :

The income of the District Council is said to be derived from sources like land revenue, forests, taxes on animals, vehicles, boats and administration of law and justice, taxes from occupations of land, government grants, loans and advances from the government, market taxes and other schemes. A bulk of the income comes from forests and forest products sold in the market.

There are two kinds of functions of the District Council, i.e., statutory and entrusted functions. Statutory functions are found in the Sixth Schedule. The entrusted functions are the state functions which are transferred to the District Council with personnel and finance. It is found out that the District Council does not exercise all the functions entrusted to it.

- WARD I LAITUMKHAH
- II EUROPEAN
- III POLICE BAZAR
- IV JAIL ROAD
- V MAWKHAR
- VI JAI AW
- VII S.E. MAWKHAR
- VIII MAWPREM
- IX KENCH'S TRACE
- X LABAN
- XI LUMPARING
- XII MALKI



CONSTITUENT WARDS
OF
SHILLONG MUNICIPALITY

NOT TO SCALE

Fig -7

It can impose laws on land and land revenue. if the land is held by a person for more than ten years by paying revenue to the Government. Again, it can impose laws on agricultural lands or land allotted for the construction of houses. Abother act is that penalties are paid by those who try to destroy fish by dynamite or poisoning.

Since most of the reports on finance of the District Council are not available, the study of its functions and research work cannot be easily traced. Therefore, the functions of the District Council which are mentioned above are the only sources available for the purpose of this study. The functions and powers are the main purpose of this study.

MUNICIPALITY :

The Shillong Municipality was established in the year 1866¹⁷. The Municipal Area was established when Lord North Brooke, the Viceroy of Bengal, visited Shillong and saw the need to protect the water supply to form fuel reserve. It was said that the age-old name "Iewduh" was to be given to the Shillong Municipality, yet, due to some reasons Shillong was named after the peak " Lum Shillong".

17. Bhattacharjee, U. Local Government in Khasi Hills, 1940.
p.34.

The Municipality was comprised of wards and no specific boundaries were available to determine the Shillong Municipal ward. In 1896¹⁸, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, for the first time, notified the Shillong station boundaries. In the Committee of 1910, Shillong was converted into Municipality where we have wards such as :

East - The Nongthymmai river from Lymiablot, Jiengkieng to the river Umkhrah.

West - From Umshyrpi and Wahumkhrah river to the Cantonment boundary. On the east of the Cantonment to the Laban bridge, from the Umshyrpi river to Umjasai river, from Umjasai to Ummawlong river then from the Ummawlong river to the forest of Raiatlaban and part of the Shillong Ridge.

North - The Umkhrah river runs upto the Jail Road stream below Polo Bridge, Haneng Umkhrah village, then from Mawkhar to Mawlai crosses the stream and from which Umkhrah to the Umshyrpi river.

South - The Laitlynkot Road to the Laitkor forest then the hill slopes of the Umshyrpi river that meets the Malki village then from Malki along the Jowai road to where it crosses the Nongthymmai river.¹⁹

18. Ibid. No. 17. p. 35.

19. Op. cit. No. 17. p. 36.

The Shillong Municipality Area has 12 wards.²⁰

Ward No. 1	= Laitumkhrak
Ward No. 2	= European Quarters
Ward No. 3	= Jail Road
Ward No. 4	= Police Bazar
Ward No. 5	= Mawkhar
Ward No. 6	= Jaiaw
Ward No. 7	= South East Mawkhar
Ward No. 8	= Mawprem
Ward No. 9	= Kenche's Trace
Ward No. 10	= Laban
Ward No. 11	= Malki
Ward No. 12	= Lumparing

The Wards mentioned above were under the control of the Shillong Municipality. The different functions of the Municipality take place in these above wards, the maintenance of roads, drainage, water-supply, lighting, hospitals, vaccination and immunisation facilities.

* These various functions of the Shillong Municipality are taken into consideration within their respective jurisdictions.

20. Op. cit. No. 17. p. 105 - 118

* Op. cit. No. 17. p. 105 - 118.

FUNCTIONS OF THE SHILLONG MUNICIPALITY :

Firstly, its main function is to provide elementary education, libraries and cultural activities, but the Municipal cannot construct any school, library or other cultural facilities for the ward. This might be due to the government pressure. The Government has already established government schools, the State Central Library and cultural clubs. In this context, no loans or grants are given by the municipality and thus, shows a downward trend in this regard.

Secondly, the roads are very much under the functions and working of the municipality, but most of the roads under the Shillong Municipality were undertaken by the Public Works Department. In this respect, footpaths in some places were taken up by the Municipal.

Thirdly, regulation of the building activity is very much under the Municipal Act. Any construction or extension of buildings should be sanctioned by the Board, yet, the Board has limited powers to check unauthorised construction of buildings.

Fourthly, the public buildings are constructed by the Shillong Municipal Board, like the shops in Laitumkhrah market and quarters for the Municipal Sweepers and cleaners at Laitumkhrah. All the sweepers were not provided with quarters

though another improper quarters were provided in the Bazaar area or Iewduhr.

Fifthly, the Shillong Municipality has signed a contract with the Shillong Hydro Electric Company for the lighting of the street-lights. The lighting system of the street lights is very poor for the payment of the lighting charges is very low while the company's rate is quite high.

Sixthly, medical facilities of the Shillong Municipality are not present, for the Civil Hospital and Mission Hospital. There are also a military hospital and other private dispensaries which the Board is free from. It is found that vaccination is also taken up by the Board under the supervision of the Director of Health Services which is of little help in the Municipal Areas.

Seventhly, the Board has a sanitation and sewage scheme for the disposal of rubbish and nightsoil, construction of drains and public dustbins in every ward. This is the main effort of the Board. Special sanctions made for the Shillong water supply. The construction of water tanks and proper sewages are taken up by the Board for which it received special grants and loans from the Government. The Board also takes steps in the purification of the public drinking water and thereby freeing the people from the dangers of

poisoning by consumption of contaminated open aqueduct water.

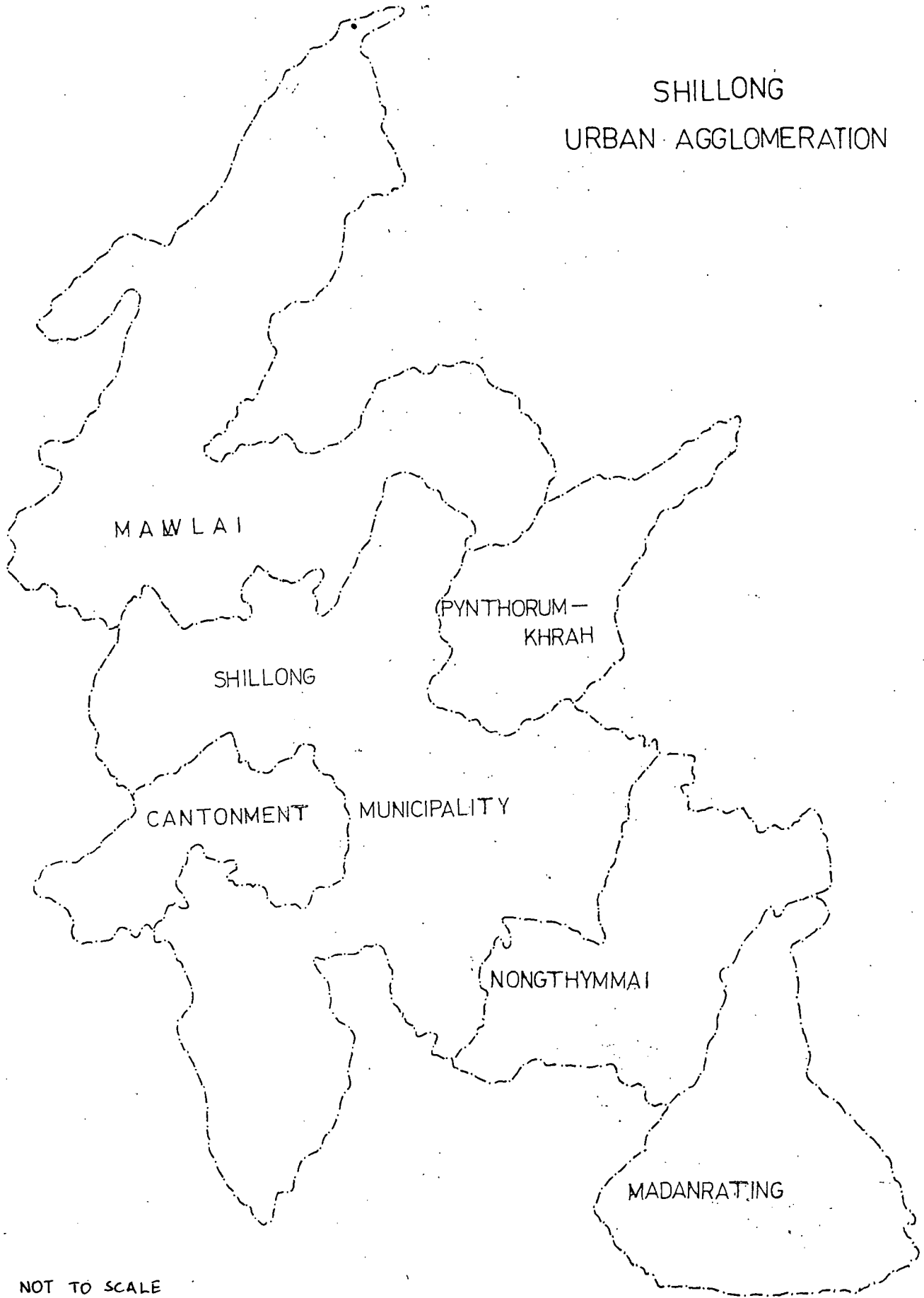
Lastly, the markets areas are mostly under the control of the Board. The Laitumkhrah Bazar, Bara Bazar (Mawlonghat) and the Betel-nut market near Bara Bazar, the Polo Bazar and Jail Road Bazar are maintained by the Board. The Bara Bazar area, however, is under the control and management of the Syiem or Mylliem. The revenue that the Board is earning from these markets is almost three to four lakhs annually.*

It may also be mentioned that registration of birth is introduced by the Board in the latter parts of the 19th century, when registration is done by the vaccinator.

The Shillong Municipality Board is another political institution which has contributed to the development of the localities or wards under its jurisdiction. Going through its powers and functions, the maintenance of public places and public water supply are the main functions of the Shillong Municipal Board. Even though, according to the Municipal Act, several provisions are given to the Board to exercise its powers and functions. Provisions like education, public hospitals, roads and street lighting are not undertaken by the Shillong Municipal Board. It may be mentioned that loans and grants were given by the Government for implementing these various developmental provisions. Therefore, it is well-known fact that the

* Op.cit. p.12.

SHILLONG
URBAN AGGLOMERATION



NOT TO SCALE

FIG- 8

main functions of the Board are mainly water-supply, drainage and sanitation.

CANTONMENT :

The Cantonment is a military area which is operating in the border areas of Shillong. It is a known fact that the Cantonment has got its powers and functions in its own jurisdiction. Several developmental activities are undertaken by the military themselves. The study of the military cantonment is vague, thus, no information is available in regard to the study of the powers and functions of the cantonment. The Cantonment area has not been taken into consideration for the purpose of this study.

ASPECTS AND AREA OF OPERATION :

Going through the study of the different political institutions in the Khasi Hills, the area of operation and their aspects are taken into consideration. These institutions such as the state, C.D. Blocks, Village Assemblies, District Councils, Municipality and Cantonment with their various powers and functions that sometimes coincide with each other, it is clear that these various institutions operate in the same jurisdiction. All these institutions are contributing to the development of their own areas where they operate.

It is worth mentioning that with all the political units and institutions existing in the same area of operation can create chaos and confusion which will be studied in the next chapter.

SPATIAL PARAMETERS :

By taking the functions and powers of the different political institutions it is very clear that each political unit has its own characteristics in the development process of each unit or the area in which they operate. Every institution is contributing to the development of the area where they operate, and it is interesting to note that the Government is providing loans and grants to each department or political institution existing in the state.

Taking the case of the M.L.As who see to the development of their own constituencies, these were allotted with various departments which cover almost all the areas of operation taken by other political institutions. Apart from the State, we have the Community Development Block which has contributed to the development in agriculture and other small scale industries. Then came the Village Assemblies which still exist even to this day with its development activities such as preservation of forests, village properties and to restore peace and harmony and also to safeguard the village land from being occupied by unauthorised people. Next we have

the District Council which acts as the licensing authority and has control over land, forests, occupations, taxes and preservation of the age-old Khasi customs, construction of schools, dispensaries, markets, roads, etc. Lastly, we have the Shillong Municipality Board which has its own characteristics on the developmental process within its own jurisdiction. Water-supply, public sanitation and other public activities are taken up by the Shillong Municipal Board.

Thus, it may be worth mentioning that every department operating in the same area, that is, the Khasi Hills, is found to have caused some confusion in the developmental process where every institution is taking crucial steps in the development of the Khasi Hills. The characteristics of each institution will be again taken into consideration for the purpose of the study in order to have a clear understanding of the powers and functions that exist in the same spatial area of operation.

CHAPTER - V

CONFLICTS OF TRADITIONAL AND MODERN INSTITUTIONS:

Taking into account the functions and powers of the traditional and modern institutions present in the Khasi Hills, where both the institutions undertake the same developmental activities in the politico-administrative systems and operate in the same administrative area has created a conflict between the two institutions. It may, however, be mentioned that the British did not substantially contribute to the development of the Khasi Hills. Even though roads were constructed, it was for their own interest. After independence, new arrangements were made whereby modern institutions like the District Council came into force in order to replace the traditional institutions of the Syiems, Sirdars, Lyngdohs and Village Headmen, and facilitated participation of tribals for developmental activities. The modern institutions or modernization may have replaced and accommodated the traditional political institution. Yet, the traditional go hand in hand with the modern institutions, operating within their own defined boundary. Both exist and exercise their powers and functions in the Khasi Hills. In this present study, the powers and functions are taken into consideration in order to have a better understanding of the conflict and over-lapping nature of the institutions in the Khasi Hills. In the modern context, it is found that the elite of the national political parties dominated the District Council before it came into existence.

This, however, also reduced the position of the Syiems, who were considered as mere administrative heads.¹

The first session of the Provisional Assembly, 1970, in which the Government assured the house that certain administrative functioning of the state Government is entrusted to the District Council and the Chief Minister also assured that the District Council would preserve and promote the local and traditional customary institutions.²

Thus, with the state provision of Meghalaya, the traditional institutions were preserved and promoted in the Khasi Hills districts. It was through this state provision of 1970 that the Syiems and their Durbars still have some powers in administering their own states which remain even to this day. This has caused confusion and conflict between the modern and traditional institutions in the Khasi Hills. It may again be mentioned that after the emergence of the state from Assam, the Supre Court in 1960 held that the Khasi Chiefs lost all their erstwhile powers and authority in the state.³ But, the Syiems still have some powers and authority under the protection of the District Council.

1. Bhattacharjee, J.B. Sequences of Development in North-East India, 1989. p. 186 - 187.

2. Ibid. p. 187

3. Op.cit. No.1. p. 190

The present study is to examine the nature of conflict and overlapping of the traditional sources of power and functions and the modern political institutions in the Khasi Hills. To examine the conflicting nature of both institutions in respect of their powers and functions and their various aspects in the developmental activities undertaken by the institutions in the Khasi Hills. The following aspects of powers and functions have been taken into consideration for the purpose of examining the conflicting nature of these institutions.

TRADITIONAL VERSUS MODERN INSTITUTIONS :

In the same area of the traditional states which exist even to the present day, modern institutions with defined boundaries have come into existence. Since the British time, the Syiems, Sirdars, Myntris have lost their powers, yet, when India attained its independence, the traditional institutions were again revived with some powers to be exercised within their own states or jurisdiction. As mentioned earlier, the leaders of the modern institutions are trying to preserve and promote the age-old customs and administrative powers of the Syiems, Myntris, Village headmen, etc. and some powers were given to them to control the Khasi state. So is the case with the modern political institutions which exercise powers and functions within the same area of the Khasi

state, where there are districts, C.D. Blocks, and Municipalities which led to conflicts between them. Nongstoin C.D. Block coincides with the Nongstoin traditional state that has its own Syiem and its various village headmen and Sirdars. This nature prevails in the Khasi Hills where the boundaries and jurisdiction coincide with each other. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, the traditional and modern institutions have their powers and functions over the same area of operation. These institutions exercise and execute their own powers - executive, judicial, administrative, and operate in their well-defined boundaries. The Syiem still have their powers even though they have lost their popularity in the modern days, but what has been found is that in almost all Khasi Hill states they still have their own Syiems, village headmen, and Sirdars who still have some authority within their own respective states and villages. The traditional authority however, does not have any representation to the Legislative Assembly and they are only given some powers and traditional authority to be exercised within their own jurisdiction.

The land system of the Khasis usually belongs to the clan and landowner, the raid and the Syiem. At present, the land system of the Khasi Hills has changed since the District Council became the licensing authority for settlement and selling of land to outsiders and, so is the same with the

Syiems, clans and landowners who also give license known as "patta", on which the buyers have to pay taxes according to the agreement made regarding the amount and term of payment of the tax. However, the "patta" has been abolished in the present day, though in some remote areas this is still in practice. The District Council levies taxes on the users of land for settlement or buyers of land which may be another source of income. The Municipality also has its own wards or areas in Shillong where taxes are levied on the settlers of the wards. It is worth mentioning that the Syiem-owned land is private and not outsiders are allowed to chop wood or gather other items for domestic purposes. Areas like the 'Law Kyntang' which solely belong to the village or shnong, the 'Law Adong' and 'Law Lyngdoh' or 'Law Syiem' upon which at present, even the government cannot interfere on such type of land which is under the control and authority of the Syiems, village headmen or Sirdars, for these are meant for religious purposes and age-old customs and ceremonies of the Khasis. The District Council has the authority of licensing/leasing and levying taxes in a manner similar to the Syiem's "Patta" where taxes are paid for renting by the tenant. Forests and forest resources of the Khasi Hills are another vital function of control of the District Council, and the forests and forest products are checked by the District Council, upon which at present the conflicts arise with the traditional institutions as well as the Forest Department of Meghalaya who also contribute to the development of forests in

Meghalaya.⁴

The clans and landowners who are the sole land holders in the Khasi Hills under the maintenance and control of the 'Rangbah Kur' (clan elder) who, according to the 'Durbar Kur' (Clan's Council), can retain or sell the land according to the wish of the clan. The clan council can reject the selling of land without its consent and no buyers, especially outsiders, can buy any part of the land without its consent and authorisation. This systems still remains even to the present day, where the District Council or the Syiems cannot interfere with the clan's affairs.

Any exploitation of mineral resources like coal, limestone, sillimanite, etc., are within the control of the District Council as well as the Syiems, Sirdars, village Headmen. At present, minerals like coal are taxed by the local durbar according to the quantity produced, whereas, the same is the case with the District Council that levies taxes and gives licenses or leases if the mines are rented by outsiders. It is worth mentioning that with the uranium exploitation at Domiasiat in West Khasi Hills, conflict started between the Government and the local people. Some part of the mine is owned by the clan and, thus, exploitation process is not undertaken because the payment of royalty by the Government is not

4. Rao, V.V. (et. al): A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India, 1989. p. 161.

according to what has been agreed, which may be the same with the local authorities. The District Council has its connections with the exploitation of uranium in order to preserve and protect the resources of the state. In this case, however, no information is available on the function of the District Council towards the exploitation of uranium in West Khasi Hills.

The state Government together with the District Council has to see to the development of road networks in order to have a smooth and swift transportation and communication systems. This solely depends on the Government and the District Council. At present, heavy loaded trucks running for twenty-four hours need a wide and spacious road, and this entirely depends upon the state Government for the rapid development in communication network. At present, the local traditional institutions also play a vital role in making village and local roads network where 'kuchcha' roads connecting one village with another have been constructed. In such cases, even the Government authorities have to seek the permission of the local traditional authorities for the construction of new roads. The site given to the Government for the construction of roads is done with the permission of the local durbar. The Municipality Board is very much in the development of road networks in its own jurisdiction, yet, the construction of roads in the Municipal areas is mainly done by the Public Works Department and no development process is taken up by the Municipality Board in this context.

The town water-supply scheme is mainly under the control of the District Council and Government undertaking. However, the Municipal Board came into the picture, where the water-supply is done by the Board in its own wards. The District Council, as well as the Community Development Board, is found to operate mostly in the rural water-supply scheme. This is mainly for the development in agriculture where pumps are provided by the District Council and C.D. Blocks to farmers in the rural areas, which coincide with the activities of the local authorities like the village water-supply done by the village headman, Sirdar, etc. Different sources and watersheds belong to the local authority or the village. For instance the Shillong Water Supply Scheme is found to have its sources and watersheds which are under the control of the village headmen. Apart from the Municipality, District Council and local authority, the Government has its own department, i.e. the Public Health Engineering (P.H.E) which takes vital steps in providing the town as well as rural water supply.

Market is another aspect of functions and powers of both institutions. The main sources of revenue are derived by these institutions through taxes levied on shops and departmental stores located in the markets. As mentioned earlier, the Municipality markets situated in the town areas fall

entirely under the Board. The District Council is another political institution that has a full-fledged power over markets in the Khasi Hills. Maintenance, sanitation and cleaning of the markets are done by these two institutions. This creates another confusion when it comes to the traditional institutions where the Syiems also have full control over the markets under their jurisdiction. In the Iewduh (Bara Bazar) there exists a conflict between the Municipality and the District Council who have full authority over the market. The maintenance of the market is taken care of by, firstly, the Syiem who is the sole authority for the market taxes levied on outsiders and those who are not permanent settlers. Secondly, the District Council also is another institution that has an authority as that of the Syiemship; thirdly, the Municipality Board in the town area has sole authority over the small markets like Polo Bazar, Jail Road Bazar, Laitumkhräh Bazar, Laban Bazar and also with Iewduh (Bara Bazar),⁵ thus, the maintenance and tax collection is done by the Board itself. In the rural markets, the authority lies with the Syiems and the District Council. The local markets are looked after by the village headmen, Sirdars, Wahadars, etc., who control and maintain the market and revenue is collected by them even to the present day.

5. Bhattacharjee, U.; Local Government in Khasi Hills, 1940

Cases like theft, assault, disputes over land and private properties, and disputes between members of the village are tried within the village itself under the supervision of the local durbaz with the Headman, Sirdar or Wahadadar as the head. It may be also mentioned that cases like murder, rape and other serious offences are not taken to the Syiem or Durbar Hima as it was done before, yet, in the modern context, these serious cases are referred to the District Court with the permission of the local headman, sirdar etc. The District Council has powers over the cases mentioned above. Some minor cases are taken up by the District Council while major cases are referred to the District Judiciary Court for trial. At present, most judicial cases are taken up by the District Judiciary Branch. Major cases that cannot be handled by the Branch Court are referred to the Gauhati High Court (Shillong Bench) or may be to the Supreme Court. However, at the village level, cases like theft, robbery, assault, etc. are taken up by the Village Assembly. It may be mentioned that in the rural areas, cases like murder, rape, assault, and other major cases are taken up by the local Headman, Sirdar, Wahadedars. Law enforcement agencies, such as the police and judicial persons cannot interfere with the cases in such areas and the cases are left without any investigation for which the power lies with the local authority - this is practiced even to the present day, in the remote areas of the state. The Municipality Board

has some judicial powers like settling disputes between people within its areas and the payment of taxes to the Board, yet, its judicial power is confined to a very limited area of jurisdiction.

Both the District Council and the traditional institutions contribute to the development and promotion of integrity among the tribal communities residing in the state. The promotion and preservation of the age-old customs of the tribals (Khasis) are the vital role played by the two institutions. At present, it may be said that in this regard, the District Council does not promote or preserve the integrity and entity of the Khasis and exploitation of the tribals are not looked after by the District Council.⁶ Illegal selling of land and exploitation of mineral resources, forest resources and other products of the state are not taken care of by the District Council. This may be the cause of self-interest and corruption prevailing in the present day. It may be mentioned that the traditional institutions which have very less powers and functions in their own state because of the emergence of the District Council, are now trying their best to preserve and promote their age-old customs and prevention of exploitation of the Khasis by outsiders. Both the institutions took vital

6. Rao, V.V. (et. al); A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India, 1989. p. 162.

steps in protecting the rivers and the unruly damages done to the fishes by poisoning or by bombing with dynamites. In this regard, heavy fines are levied on the concerned culprits. Preservation of trees and forest resources are taken up by both the institutions. The District Council is commissioned by the Government to preserve and safeguard the forests and forest resources. However, due to corruption and self-benefit, the safeguarding of the forests in the Khasi Hills has been considerably neglected. The cutting of trees and illegal selling of forest produces is practiced everywhere in the state, for no effort is made by the District Council to safeguard and protect the forest resources whereas it has full authority to do so.

After examining the conflict between the modern and traditional institutions under their powers and functions in the Khasi Hills, the most important point to be noted is the revenue of the Khasi Hills which creates confusion between both the institutions, for in the present day as mentioned earlier, both the institutions go hand in hand with their own developmental programmes and procedures. In this regard, revenue which is the vital source of income for both the institutions creates enormous chaos and confusions in the maintenance and administration of the State. The sole authority regarding the exercise of powers and functions led to a conflict in the

distribution of revenue between the institutions. It is seen that taxes are levied by both the institutions as mentioned earlier, wherein the income is being highly diverted and this creates less efficiency in the developmental process of the Khasi Hills.

In the modern context, another area of conflict is found between the State Government and the District Council, wherein discrimination by the State Government towards the District Council and by the ruling parties against the opposition parties in the state has caused unequal distribution of financial assistance due to failures in sanctioning funds in time.⁷ Another important aspect of conflict is the shifting of the power status from one centre to the other. The revenue from excise are found to be divided between the Government and the District Council. The Syiems, however, still continue to enjoy certain administrative powers under the control of the District Council and this resulted in clashes with the State administration on several occasions.⁸

It is worth mentioning that there are conflicts between the modern institutions themselves which create further chaos and confusion in the revenue administration of the state.

7, Bhattacharjee, J.B. ; Sequences of Development in North-East India, 1989. p. 188.

8. Ibid. p. 188 - 189.

The various developmental aspects like road construction where several heads control over it causes confusions in the developmental aspect. It is found out that in this regard, the District Council, the Municipality Board and the P.W.D. contribute to the development of roadways in the Khasi Hills. Another aspect of confusion is regarding water supply wherein the Municipality Board, the District Council and the Public Health Engineering are together contributing in the water supply scheme. Dispensaries and hospitals create another confusion between the Directorate of Health services and the District Council both of which have full authority in the promotion of health care in the Khasi Hills. Regarding educational facilities such as schools which are under the control of the District Council for the promotion of education in the Khasi Hills, the Directorate of Public Instruction also plays a vital role in the development of educational facilities. Another aspect of conflict is between the District Council and the Transport Department in which road taxes are collected by both the institutions. Lastly, the Village Assembly has its local authority in the village where no Government authorities can enter the village for any judicial cases without the consent of the village headman, Sirdar or Wahadadar. Such cases as mentioned earlier cannot be taken up by the police or other Government authorities without the consent of the village

headman, and this causes conflict between the modern administration and the local panchayat. These above conflicts prevail in the Khasi Hills even to the present day and have created chaos and confusion even between the modern institutions themselves.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The spatio temporal study of the traditional and modern institutions has been made in order to clarify their respective roles, interactions and possible conflict situations that has directly or indirectly influenced the development in the Khasi Hills. This co-existence of the two different of institutions as noted earlier, has enabled the multiplication of functions and duplication of efforts. This has resulted in marginal gains. It has been the understanding of the author that this co-existence of different institutions set ups could have been effectively channelised for effective development of Khasi Hills, if efforts were made to establish a functional rapport between the two; for in letter and spirit, the dual existence would have ensured smooth transition and encouraged the building up of infrastructure and related facilities for social and economic development of the hills in particular as well as of the state in general.

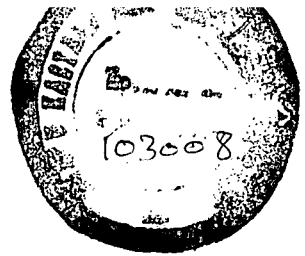
The Khasi Hills, was one of the first territories in North-East to have come under effective British India administrative political influences - say from 1836 onwards. The expansion of British India in the region coincided with stable relations between British Indian administrators and

the rulers of the 25 Khasi states, expanded activities of the missionaries who in their gambit encouraged the development of educational and welfare facilities, concentration of administrative and commercial functions and so on. All these have been stated here to denote and emphasize the fact that the Khasi Hills territory was in a fairly better position to take advantages of innovations that was introduced by the administrators. In other words, with a early exposure to and greater adaptability and understanding of the modern systems of political relations, the perception and response of the inhabitants of the Khasi Hills became attuned to change. To a people who had traditions of democratic functioning, these changes in the territorial control and management provided adequate basis for an understanding of the emerging politico-geographical relationship in the Khasi Hills. The topographic constraints, limited accessibility conditions, limited potentials of known resources, primacy of shifting cultivations and so on, brought in home the facts of the need to develop alternatives to encourage social and economic development. The traditional institutions were adept to these changes and to an substantial extent geared themselves to meet the situation. These directly and indirectly enabled the inhabitants to effectively participate in the political and administrative activities. The resultant transformations provided the scope

and identified the alternatives. These could be interpreted to suggest that while the existence of traditional structures enabled the inhabitants to maintain their identity and aspects of social relations, the presence of modern institutions enabled the inhabitants to expand their scope of participation and representation.

Even after independence till the mid 1960's, these were maintained. These were partly reinforced by the constitutional provisions and recognition of traditional set ups. Some have argued that the latter are purely transitory arrangements till these territories acquired suitable political status within the natural framework. However the continued existence of these structures alongwith the modern system of administration has frequently raised questions on territorial extent and jurisdictional patterns between the two different set up as well as on the policy formulations and implementations, evolution of development perspectives and so on. Moreover, the absence of clear demarcation of functions between the two made it difficult to understand the priorities and interests, control and management and respective sphere of influences. This gradually took firm roots and eroded the credibility of the existence of dual set up of institutions. For example, the traditional and modern political administrative systems,

ive more or less similar economic functions, i.e., to perpetuate development. Both identify areas and sections as well as allocate resources for development. In the changed circumstances of the rising aspirations of the people, the limited resources of the hills had impeded the resource mobilisation and resource allocation for development. The mechanisms of traditional institutions were geared to cater to a point of time and now had to depend on allocations from the state. Likewise, the state through its agencies had to cooperate with the former for effective implementation of development programmes. Political relations and the role of pressure groups played an important part in this transition of development. The frequent overlapping of these aspects, has encouraged conflict situations to emerge frequently. Under these circumstances, the traditional institutions have assumed envious positions of not only maintaining their position but also their role in the development of the hills. They had also the onerous task to secure alternatives for development of the territory they represent. This then suggests that both sets of institutions have definite role to play : one to ensure the social-cultural milieu and the other to initiate economic development with political relations as a bridge between the two. A viable equilibrium between the two will ensure stability and growth. It is with this background that the present study has been taken up.



The spatio-temporal study of the traditional and modern political institutions of the Khasi Hills, has been made to clarify their respective roles and functions in the development of the state. In the Khasi Hills, the traditional customs, matriliney and other associated features persists even to the present day (where the Lyngdoh (priest) still performs his duty in the religious ceremonies). The Syiem still has his authority and power over his own states. This is pronounced in the remote areas of Khasi Hills especially in the rural areas as well as in the urban centres. Even though, the Syiem and his darbar have lost some of the powers during the British period, it may be noted that they still exercise their powers and functions over their particular states. Modern systems while ensuring uniformity at the regional and national level have assumed a more dominant position over the age-old traditional political institutions of the Syiem. However, both these institutions go hand in hand in the Khasi Hills.

The present study is primarily concerned with the spatial aspects of political institutions present in the Khasi Hills. Contemporary events have indicated frequent instances of over-lapping of functions and jurisdiction. This has created confusions as to how both traditional and modern political institutions can operate simultaneously.

Each of them operate near independent of the other nad have their own power, functions and jurisdiction to exercise and control. The major problem was the implementation of policies and programmes. Ideology interests and power both traditional and contemporaries directly or indirectly created a situation whereby overlapping was frequent. This complicated the conflict resolutions.

The physical setting of the hills has its own role in determining the boundaries and jurisdictions of both the institutions. This is particularly so when their extent is not either properly demarcated or defined. Boundaries of the Khasi states are approximate as to the villages that falls under jurisdiction of the respective Khasi state. In modern context the administrative districts are properly delimited alongwith definitions and demarcation of community/Development Blocks.

The physical conditions of the Khasi Hills has encouraged shifting cultivation. This is widely practised in the Hills. Though there are limited 30%^{to} (approx.)^{of} areas of settled agriculture, this practice of shifting cultivation has exerted its considerable impact on the socio-political relations of the inhabitants. Besides this,

minerals such as coal, limestone, silliminite, uranium, etc. are found in substantial quantity in the hills, and have immense development potential. The development of communication system and transport network has been slow. This was largely due to the rugged topography of the Hills.

As far as the traditional political institution of Khasi Hills are concerned it can be summed up as the Syiemship has considerably lost its effectiveness and authority in the modern context. By studying the powers and functions in the traditional point of view, the Durbar Hima is the major political instrument of the Khasis in the past where the Syiem is the head of the state. The Durbar together with the Syiem exercise their powers of administration, executive and judicial functions in their respective states. Every member of the state followed the rules and conditions of the Khasi Syiemship. The Syiem Myntis, Lyngdohs, Sirdars, Wahadadar and village headmen were the sole authority of the Raid, village and the Khasi state, they managed and controlled under the supreme head or authority of the Durbar Hima and the Syiem. Every decision lie within the purview of the Hima Durbar of the respective states Developmental measure and judiciary are taken up by these institutions of the Khasi state.

However, the powers and functions of the Khasi Syiemship, gradually declined with the coming of British, the power and authority of the Syiemship was subject to the advice and supervision of the British Commissioner of Bengal, later transferred to Assam. Besides the Khasi state, another political body that came into existence in 1923 was the Khasi National Durbar/Council, where all the Khasi Syiems were members of the Council. The Council's main aim was to promote and safeguard the traditions of the people, encourage the development of resources and exercise such controls as to help the people. The post 1947 period saw many central institutions open up their branches in the Khasi Hills. This was assumed as to indirectly challenge the traditional set up. These were reflected through the emergence of elites and pressure groups who had extra-territorial support. However, there still exist the continued dependence on the traditional bases. The elites and counter elites continued to bank on the traditional bases for support and mobilisation, thereby reinforcing these institutions. This become all the more important when power and functions that are entrusted upon the Syiem and his Durbar are considered.

Modernisation of the political system brought about several changes in Khasi Hills. Several political units came into existence, the state and Districts are the main areas of

operation. Institutions like the state government, District Council, Municipality and Cantonments gradually made their impact felt. Among which several other branches and departments of the state came into force, to exercise and administer the powers and functions entrusted upon them for promotion and betterment of the state. The state government has over-all authority over the state. Its powers and functions however, was divided and sub-divided in order to put into task its political administration and development. Apart from the state government, the Meghalaya Autonomous District Council came into existence. The District Council is another entity which exercises its powers. Certain powers were vested upon it, that it has its own jurisdiction to administer. It has several powers and functions such as control over forest, land tenure, resources, licensing etc. The Shillong Municipality Board is another entity which had specific areas in the Shillong agglomeration. Water Supply, sanitation, roadways, schools etc. are within its purview. The development of the towns and market place is under its jurisdiction.

Both the District Council and Municipality have the power of taxation, where forests and minerals are under the District Council's purview, while items like settlement, water supply, sanitation, road etc. lies within the Municipality jurisdiction were taxed upon the people by both these entities.

The District Council also preserves and promotes the Khasi customs and traditions and took measures to restrict the influx of immigrants, it also takes measures to prevent encroachments. It may be summed up that, these entities gradually assumed administrative and development functions. These entities also provided alternatives to the traditional set ups. In more than one way these replaced the functions of the earlier as the same branches or aspects set ups and introduced new equations and new scenario which had strains of older set ups engrained in it.

The Syiemship and village assembly still have their powers to exercise within their own jurisdictions. As mentioned earlier the village headman acts as lower class Magistrate particularly in cases of theft, assault, disputes etc. The police authority cannot enter the village without the consent of the headman. This is practiced even at present, which shows that the headman still retained his importance in the modern context, and retains his power over the village. The Syiem has got his own authority in the Khasi State, he issues license such as 'Patta' in the buying, selling and suggestion of land. Forest and forest production in some areas of Khasi Hills is within his jurisdiction and control. Markets and other resources are still under his control even though,

the District Council has its sole authority over its own land. In other words each of the constituent part of the institution exercise their authority over their respective traditional jurisdictions.

As both political institutions co-exist in Khasi Hills, this may inevitably cause conflicts in the powers and functions of the state. The sole authority in some areas lies on the traditional institutions, in some, on the modern institutions and in other cases both overlap and coincide with each other. The traditional power is found to operate mostly in the remote and rural areas while the modern institutions have their over-all authority over the state and in urban centres. This led to difficulties in identifying the divisions of powers, for both operate on the same aspect of functions and sections of development. Like wise, the revenue collected by these institutions are to be noted also. There exists an overlap between the District Council and the State Government, the District Council with the Shillong Municipality and the District Council with other governmental branches. This has created conflict through lack of divisions of sphere of influence and identification of the territorial jurisdiction under control.

As a result a general apathy to change and stagnation in development has become the common place. It also suggest

that there is a plane in which the political-geographical process operate and instability that conforms to the changing political equations in these entities.

Viewing the traditional political institutions with its various political units, it is a known fact, that the Syiem and his durbar are the supreme authority, they control and maintain the affairs of the respective states. Complicated issues with broader implications are undertaken by the Durbar Hima of the Syiem. Apart from the Durbar Hima, the village Durbar and Durbar Raid are other entities which controls and administers political, social and economic affairs of the village or Raid. These entities Units have their own deferred powers and functions at the lower level of the scale, i.e. the village level. They also take into account some important issues of the village. These issues form important aspects of considerations of the village and Durbar-Raid. This has indirectly led to a conflict between the Durbar Hima on the one side and the village and Raid Durbar in the other; for both deal with similar issues the entities like safeguarding of forests, land, village property and drinking water. Thus the conflict within the traditional entities are treated to be resolved through mutual negotiations, understanding and agreements between the Syiems, headmen, etc.

Traditional political institutions continue to retain their importance. They have provided the inhabitants with a

strong base through which they assert themselves while providing for their interest - pressure groups to mobilise and find expression through participation and representations in the new set-up. This, at times of crisis, stretches the role of the traditional institutions where line of demarcation becomes difficult to recognise. This is the fear that prevails at present. Several interest groups used the traditional set up as an instrument to further their cause; thereby, possibly casting a primary political role for these institutions rather than one of safeguarding the social and economic features. These ambivalences and contradictions created an atmosphere of confusion. Increasing challenges and consequences of modern political administration has, in more than one way, compelled a review of the traditional entities. This retreat coincided with re-assertion of identity and ideology that is worth taking into consideration.

As mentioned earlier, legal provisions were available that safeguarded the traditional institutions. This enabled them to function independently but with time they seem to have become subsidiary to state. Thus, the traditional political institutions, co-existed together with the modern political institutions, theoretically their roles and powers within its own territory and jurisdiction of traditional Khasi state was deferred. It is felt, that other states of India (in the present

day context) traditional system in one form or the other continues. It continues to perform its functions in keeping the territorial group cohesive and maintains their traditions. They form an important component at the village level (homogenous) and regional level or state level.

It is a known fact, that changes in the political relations have significantly influenced the traditional system of the Khasi society. The modern political institutions replaced many of the functions of the traditional political institutions. New systems of administering the political affairs was introduced. Several independent departments were created for the development of the Hills. They transacted important issues of the state and its regions, and, directed efforts to resolve these problems. It also took several developmental issues, individually and collectively for promoting industries, education, agriculture, transport and communication system etc. as well as safeguarding the rights of the people and promotion of developmental activities, and lastly to preserve the culture and age-old customs of the Khasis, Garos and Jaintias. The state government has broader aspects of powers and functions. It was able to attract aids, grants and loans from the Central government; this enabled the government to accelerate the pace of development in the state. In other words, it was

able to raise the resources for accelerated development -social cultural and economic fields. In its effort the state government came into conflict with the District Councils which are autonomous bodies with legal guarantees.

The conflict or overlapping nature of functions is found between the modern institutions and the traditional institutions at the different scales (like the District Council, Municipality Board, Cantonment Boards, C.D. Blocks) or between the various departments of the state government and within the traditional institutions itself in the modern context. These are more or less similar to those that existed between villages, Raids and the States in the traditional systems. In this regard, it can be said that in the traditional system, their democratic functioning enabled certain broad consensus to emerge and which later was implemented. In the present systems, though there is a common ideology and priorities, there is difficulty in arriving at a instances, there were efforts to maintain stability at all levels of scale. Issues were settled amicably. However the role of the pressure groups and elites cannot be underestimated or in both type of institutions and needs a separate study altogether.

There is adequate scope for the Syiem to pressurise the government. The modern institutions however cannot deny the traditional institutions the means of support and

help for the support rendered by them in the normal functioning of the systems as well as in various aspects of the political affairs of the state. In this aspects, the traditional institutions acts as a buffer that absorbs much of the impact. In fact, empirically speaking the traditional set up should so react as to further development and stability in the state.

Lastly, a serious problem arises out of the conflict, (the causes as mentioned earlier) is that there are too many set ups with authority controlling a single territorial unit. This directly and/or indirectly affect the relationships between these entities. Resourcewise the allocation to these set ups reduced the efficacy of development programmes of the state and development stagnated with heavy administrative overheads. Multiplicity of political parties have also added their shares in this, by dividing the people on issues and to an extent exerted adverse effects on the traditional set up or against the ruling parties. Issues like uranium exploitation in Meghalaya were taken up as an issue against the ruling party and it was only as a opposition party that the problem of uranium exploitation was taken as a political issue. This in no way indicated the consequence of such an exploitation on the environment of the area concerned. However, the

traditional institutions have remained silent on this.

The present discussion, then, highlights the need for further studies on the following broad issues. These are as follows :

1. Vital issues containing the welfare of the population of the hills and the role of traditional institutions.
2. Vital issues concerning the welfare of the population of the hills in the role of the state.
3. Social, economic and political perspectives of these institutions and the inhabitants of the hills in a rapidly changing situation.
4. Changing perception of politico-administrative and politico-geographical process by these two institutions in hills.

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