ANGLO-KHASI RELATIONS AFTER 1919

The Khasi States and the Reformed Constitution (1919) - The Khasi National Durbar 1923 onwards - Resolution of the Khasi National Durbar in 1929 for the formation of the Federation of the Khasi States - Conference of the rulers of the Khasi States in 1932 and their statements - Memorandum to Viceroy Lord Wellington on 3rd October 1933 - The Viceroy's reply - Formation of the Federation of the Khasi States - The Negotiation with the Minority Enquiry Committee - The Khasi States under the Government of India Act 1935 - The Memorandum to Viceroy Linlithgow - Sir Keith Cantlie's view on the Federation of Khasi States - his suggestion - Reunion of Mylliem and Khyrim States - formation of the War Confederacy - regrouping of other states only in three groups - Views of the Khasi National Durbar.

Ever since the twenties of the 20th Century, the Khasi rulers had opened their eyes to the changing constitutional pattern of the whole of India under the Reformed Government. The Khasi states also felt it necessary to know their position and to preserve their identity. Notice was accordingly issued on the 27.7.23.¹ that a Khasi Durbar called "Khasi National Durbar" would be convened from the 4th to 6th September 1923 at the residence...

of Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy, Goalapaty. The notice appealed to the Syiems, the Wahadadars, the Lyngdohs, the Sirdars, the Myntris and the headmen of all Khasi States to come with a spirit of unity to foster and strengthen the customs and traditions of the people, the administration of justice, laws of the land tenure system in Khasi Hills and such others, in conformity with the changing situation of the time. J.J.M. Nichols Roy in his speech on the 12th August 1924 suggested first, that the Khasi rulers must be educated to be in line with the rapid growth of administration in other parts of India. There must be a high sense of justice in the Khasi rulers. Secondly, Khasi rules and laws must be codified. Nichols Roy was of the opinion that the Imperial Government would recognise the laws codified and agreed upon by all the Khasi States. The people felt that this was the time that the Khasi States would be strengthened in their stand, that the Khasi National Durbar would march from strength to strength. It was the duty of one and all to inspire and goad the Khasi rulers to struggle with renewed vigour till the desired objective is reached. Accordingly, the Khasi National Durbar completed the codification of the "Laws of Citizenship in Khasi States" (Ka Aín jinglong-khun-ka-Hima ha ki Hima Khasi), the "Land law in the Khasi
States" (Ka Ain Bri khyndew ha ki Hima Khasi); and the "Law of Inheritance in Khasi States" (Ka Ain hiar bad ioh pateng ha ki hima Khasi) There might be severe criticisms by opponents of the Khasi National Durbar during that time but Sir John Kerr, the Governor said "I have recently read with much interest the proceedings of the Khasi National Durbar which was held in Shillong a few months ago, and if I understand that movement right, its founders and supporters are in favour of developing the national genius of the Khasi races on independent lines".

It was the Khasi National Durbar, according to a comment of a leading Khasi Newspaper of the time "U Lurshai" that Khasi States should stand united - the Khasi States are just a handful in the vast ocean of India.

On the 2nd May 1929, for the first time, a discussion was started on the "Federation of Khasi Native States" (Ka jingsyrdoh lang ki Hima Khasi) by Mr. S.G. Nalle. According to him, the Khasis believed to have a 'common nationality' and "can form a federation among them". This federation, it was further stated, "had no intention to erase Khasi Syiemship or its power in their own respective Khasi States but the aim of the federation is to make it possible for the Khasi States to codify

3. Ibid - 2nd May 1929.
rules and laws which the Khasi Siyem alone could not

do. The Khasi National Durbar was a step ahead in
civilization and the formation of the federation would
be a great advance in the eyes of the world." Resolution was drawn up at the end of the meeting. "It was

proposed and agreed that pamphlets would be printed and
circulated to explain the necessity of the Federation." and the following members -

Rai Saheb Hormu Rai Diengdoh
Mr. Rai Mohan Diengdoh
Mr. Joab Solomon
Mr. S.G. Nalle
Mr. Ajra Singh Khongphai.

were entrusted with the above work. In the meeting at
Khasi National Durbar Hall, Mawkhar on the 18th August
1931, the members were quite conscious of the impending
danger and the necessity of Home Rule, bringing the
unity of the people who speak the same language and have
the same customs and traditions. As a critical observa-
tion, some khasi rulers believed that they have already
enjoyed democracy and home rule. In spite of criticisms
and counter criticisms, the Constitution of the Feder-
tion of the Khasi Native States was brought forward which
runs as follows: -

1. The Federation of Khasi Native States is
formed for the purpose of uniting together
under one Central Government, all the native
States of Khasi Hills.

---

6. Ibid.  
5. Ibid.  
7. U Nongpynim No. 29 Nailur (September) 1931
2. The Federation of Khasi Native States (hereinafter called the Federation) should consist of all Syiemships, Lyngdohships, Sardarships, Wahadadarships, which form the native states of Khasi Hills.

3. There shall be one Central Durbar of the Federation to be called the "Khasi National Durbar" hereinafter called Durbar which shall be constituted as follows:
   (a) Each Chief of a state shall be ex-officio member
   (b) Each state which has a population of 5,000 or less shall get two representatives
   (c) Each state which has a population of over 5,000 to 15,000 shall get three representatives
   (d) Each state which has a population of over 15,000 to 50,000 shall get four representatives
   (e) Five members to be nominated by the Durbar from the subjects of the Khasi States.

4. Five of the members of the Durbar shall form an executive Council and these shall be elected by the Durbar.

5. There shall be a President and Deputy President of the Durbar to be elected by the Durbar.

6. The President shall be elected from among the ruling chiefs.

7. All the members of the Durbar shall hold office for three years.

8. All matters shall be decided by the majority of votes.

9. Twelve of the members of the Durbar shall form a quorum.
10. Those members only may vote who are present in person.

11. The President shall have a casting vote.

12. Twenty days notice shall be given of all meeting ordinary and special.

13. The Durbar shall have powers:
   (a) To make laws which shall be subject to the assent of the Government of Assam.
   (b) To levy taxes for the improvement of the states.
   (c) To frame rules for the conduct of its own meetings and the meeting of the Executive Council.

14. There shall be a paid Secretary to be appointed by the Executive Council and approved by the Durbar.

15. There shall be a Supreme Court of Appeal for appeal from State Durbar.

16. Each state should have a regular Durbar constituted regularly and in accordance with the old custom.

17. This constitution may be amended from time to time as necessity occurs and any alteration or amendment should be made only at the Durbar by a majority of two thirds of the members present.

The idea of a federation of the Khasi States could materialise only in 1933. In presenting the address of welcome to His Excellency, the Viceroy (Lord Willingdon) when he visited Shillong on the 3rd October 1933, the ruling Syfems, Lyngdohs and Wahadadars of Khasi Hills urged...
and expected the Viceroy that with the impending constitutional changes in the whole of India, "the position of the Khasi States which are in subsidiary alliance with the British Government may also be defined and that they may also find a place among the units of the Indian States which may be members of the Federal Legislature". The address also stated the hope of the Khasi States for settling their future relations with the paramount power, according to the report on the Indian Constitutional Reforms placing them in direct relations with the Viceroy through a political agent who would work exclusively for the state.  

In reply to the address of the Khasi States, the Viceroy in the first place, praised the "stamina and virility and competence" of the Khasi people which enabled the small republics based on ancient ways and tenets to be maintained. In this connection, the Viceroy pointed out that the treaties and sunnads have been scrupulously respected in the past, they still would stand as a secure guarantee for the future. Secondly speaking of the representation of the Khasi States along with the other Indian States in the proposed Federal Legislature, the Viceroy said that the total population

8. U Lurshai - November 1933.  
9. Ibid.
of the Khasi States would be very small in comparison with that of the larger states in India, and population must be a factor to be taken into account when determining the rights for such representation. Thus, he advised that the formation of a Federation would be "the first and most useful step which should pave the way towards your entry into the greater federation."

Thirdly in reply to the question that the Khasi States should be placed in direct relations with the Viceroy through a political agent, the Viceroy stated that this would receive the most careful consideration. Lastly, the Viceroy stated, as an answer to the preservation of Khasi ancient customs and usages. "For a hundred years, you have lived protected under the shield of the British Crown and have been loyal to his Majesty, the King Emperor. I may assure you that whatever changes may occur in the constitution of this great country, this shield of His Majesty will continue to cover and safeguard his people in retaining their ancient rights and privileges."

As a result of the advice of the Viceroy, the Khasi States met and passed a resolution which runs as follows:

"We, the Chiefs of the Khasi States, the Syiems, the Lyngdohs, the Wahadadars, the Sirdars on behalf of the Khasi States, whom we represent have now associated and made a federation of these states:
Khyrim, Mylliem, Nongkhlaw, Cherra, Nongstoin, Nongspung, Maharam, Mawiang, Myriaw, Mawsynram, Langrin, Rambrai, Nobosophoh, Malaisohmat, Bhowal, Sohiong, Lyngiong, Shella, Mawdon, Nongkwai, Pamsannngut and Dwara Nongtyrnam which will be called the "Federal Khasi States" and a Standing Committee was appointed for the matter. The aims and objectives of the Federated Khasi States were as follows:

1. The Federation represented the United Khasi States. It would discuss and take action on matters of common concern to them;

2. The Federation representing the Khasi States would take legitimate control of affairs common to other districts;

3. The Federation would advise the Government that in its relations to the Indian Native States, the Khasi States having Subsidiary allegiance to the British Crown should be given a special consideration;

4. To put forward a claim for securing greater judicial power and a higher status in view of the progress, advancement of the Khasi States in their own jurisdiction as autonomous bodies;

5. The Federating units should make a closer union in their attempts to improve the welfare and administration of each unit;

6. The Federation would settle inter-state disputes through the chiefs chosen from the parties concerned;

7. To show on all occasions their loyalty and allegiance to the British Crown.

The Federation was formed not to enable the rulers to rule in a discretionary or whimsical manner, but to unite more firmly the Khasi states under their respective states or Lyngdohs, or Sirdars or Wahadadas based on the consent of the people and to bring the Khasi States at par with the other Indian States.

Sir Keith Cantlie who was Deputy Commissioner, during this period gave his views on the federation. First, he suggested the union of Mylliem and Khyrim. The three states under Lyngdohs having 6500 population could be merged with Mylliem and Khyrim. Pamsanngut with 289 population and Nonglwai with 298 people could also join Mylliem and Khyrim. Secondly, Mawdon and Dwara Nongtyrmen having 500 population respectively could be merged with Shella Wahadadarship. But, as pointed out by Cantlie, the difficulty was that Mawdon and Dwara Nongtyrmen lay between Shella and Mawlong and the two (Shella and Mawlong) had been rivals. Thus, Mawlong might object to the formation of this War Confederacy. Thirdly Cantlie suggested that the other remaining states might be grouped as follows:

1. Meharam, Mawsynram, Malai Sohmat and Bhowal.

2. Nongkhlaw, Nongspung, Myriaw, Pambrai, Mawiang and Jirang.


12. Ibid - p.141
13. Ibid - p.143
14. Ibid.
Further, he suggested that the members of these groups might join together to form a state. The last Syiem who survived from any group would rule the whole state. These three states which emerged out of such a union might merge with Mylliem-Khyrim or Shella. Cherra Syiemship would fall in any of these groups. In this way, Cantlie suggested that the federation of states would consist only of six himas or states.

In spite of the suggestion and proposal put forward by Sir Keith Cantlie, it is surprising that the Khasi States did not press their representation in the Federal Legislature in their memorandum to the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow. In a statement of the Conference of the Khasi States, it is stated, "This Conference respectfully beg to urge that in view of these twenty five states being sister states in the same country, inhabited by the same people, having the same usages and customs, being contiguous one to another in territory and the inevitability of their having one common Political Officer together, it is essential from all points of view that they be treated as an inseparable group. It will also open the way for certain villages which originally belonged to a state or commune of these Native States but had for certain domestic reasons separated themselves there from after the British had conquered

15. Ibid - pp 143-144.
the country, to be reconciled gradually to their former relationship with advantage to themselves and to state.\textsuperscript{16}

The Khasi States pressed that they should be placed in direct relations with the Viceroy through the local political Agent or Resident whether with or without the Governor as Agent to the Viceroy \ldots\ldots But such Political Officer needs to be exclusively for the states and not in the provincial Service.\textsuperscript{17}

It may be mentioned here, however, that the formation of the federated Khasi States might not be fulfilled to the maximum extent because so far, no Khasi Syiem could have shown a generous spirit beyond the bounds of his hima or state. Mylliem and Khyrim, which claimed to belong to the same ancestress and which were once united, would not come to an agreement to unite together, not to speak of the other Khasi States which never dreamed of such a union or confederacy. Of course, the will of the people would count but there were certain impediments which hindered the practical evolution of a federation - the absence of public service in the Khasi States, the financial demarcation of the Syiems' finance from the Hima's finances, renewal of the election of members of the Dorbar Syiem (Durbar of the Syiem) and the Dorbar Hima (Durbar of the Hima) and the renewal of

\textsuperscript{16} Statement of the Conference of the Khasi States - 1932.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
the custom of appointing or electing a Syiem. But it should not be forgotten that the British came as Foreign administrators. They failed to understand that the Khasis were and are federalists by nature. As part of Khasi polity, the Syiem represents the people of the Hima. Within this entity, there are several localities, having their own Tymmen Shnong or headman, who in collaboration with the Durbar Shnong of that locality decide the vital issues of that area. But the various localities within any hima or sylemship would definitely join hands or federate themselves for the common cause. Thus, the formation of a federation among the Khasis is not a new thing. Unity, co-operation, political consciousness are the essence of Khasi political thought. The formation of the Federation during this period under review, was just an outlet during British rule to foster more the growth of political understanding of the Khasis during this period of change in the whole of India. It might, therefore, seem unfruitful as to the impediments obstructing the formation of the Federation of Khasi States, but the long standing effect of this is the awakening spirit among the rulers and the people to be united to face the forces of the time.

18. Cojee, T: Ka ain u Khasi - Ka Jingkynthoh - pp. 149-150.
The Khasi States under the Government of India Act 1935:

Under the operation of the Government of India Act 1935, the areas of North Eastern India were classified into four areas - Excluded Areas, Partially Excluded Area, the Frontier Areas and the Khasi States, twenty five in number which were in subsidiary alliance with the British. The Khasi States were in the dark as to their status, which was not definitely defined by the Act of 1935. In spite of the advice given by the British to form a Federation of Khasi States, yet the said act did not give any chance to the Federation of Khasi States to be represented in the Chamber of princes or to combine with the other small Indian States to send a common representative to the Chamber of Princes. The request of the Khasi States to the British Government that their direct relationship with the Viceroy would be through the Political Agent was not granted, except for the Deputy Commissioner, Khasi and Jaintia Hills who was to act as Political Agent in relation to the Khasi States. The British also wanted to work out the proposal of Sir Keith Cantlie.

Again, according to Section 3 of the Government of India Act, 1935, the Crown Representative who could exercise his authority over the states, gave his decision

on the Mylliem State in 1942, during the Syiemship of Sati Raja. This decision, according to the Khasi National Durbar, was based on two grounds. First, that U Sati Raja Syiem and his Myntris were found unfit and inefficient thereby, the Syiem and his Myntris should be suspended and the administration should be entrusted to a Dewan. Secondly, the decision also stated to adopt a method for the union of Mylliem and Khyrim. The Khasi National Durbar very much resented the suspension of U Sati Raja as this was a breach of the customs and traditions of the people. The Durbar opined that if the Syiem was found unfit and inefficient, in accordance with the 'riti' (custom and tradition) another Syiem could be elected or appointed by the hima. It, therefore requested the Crown Representative to withdraw or end the suspension and the administration of the Dewan. Over the re-union of Mylliem and Khyrim, the Khasi National Durbar expressed its goodwill to the Crown Representative for this advice but the Durbar also expressed its desire of a federation not only of Mylliem and Khyrim but of all Khasi States.

It may be concluded that the Khasi National Durbar was born out of a Political consciousness for the preservation of the social, cultural, political and mental growth

of the Khasi people. It might be that the goal was too far to be achieved but it sowed the seed of unity and co-operation among the Khasi rulers to fight back the forces of the British, this same seed, may in future, be able to preserve Khasi culture, Khasi polity and Khasi way of life.