Chapter V

Polity.

Meghalaya is the only State in India where the people follow the matrilineal system. To students of the feminist movement, this State should afford an interesting field of study. For generations Khasi and Garo Women have been the custodians of property in whose strength of life and character the men of their clans confide their hopes and aspirations. But till the recent past, the art of Government and politics had been the monopoly of men. In fact, there was a clear concept of the demarcation of position between men and women. Everyone knows, that in the past, men understood that the art of Government and politics were their monopoly whereas the hearth and home were in the hands of women. Essentially, both the Garo and Khasi political systems are based on clanship and inter-clan relationship. But while the Garo political system is simple, but it is more authoritarian than the Khasis which is more matured and democratic. It must be noted that while the person of a Nokma was considered sacred, those of the Khasi rulers are not considered as such.

Garo Polity: On the eve of the British annexation of the Garo Hills, the whole political system of the Garos centered round the village Council and the Nokma. Traditional Garo political system distinguishes itself by the absence of the idea of a king or chief. Their idea is simple. A village polity should centre round the Nokma. It must be mentioned that Garo political system is wholly kinship oriented, i.e., more stress is laid on kinship than on any other aspects of the social organisation. Therefore, a Garo village grows out of some households which are linked up by kinship.
ties which act as a unifying factor in a village. The Nokmas are considered as an outward symbol of that unifying factor.

In the long history of the Garos, four types of Nokmas have been identified: the Gamni Nokma, the Gama or Mithdeimi Nokma, the Kamal Nokma and the A'king Nokma. But Romgmuthu in his book "folk tales of the Garos" has identified three more types: the Balkapaoonim Nokma, the Sorkanini Nokma and the Chalang Nokma. Excepting the A'king Nokma, all the others do not have any authority or power and as such they are not political institutions. The A'king Nokma is the only Nokma whose institution can be considered as a political institution.¹

The custom of succession of Nokmaship is linked up with the land tenure system. Theoretically, the land in a village is owned by a particular lineage and the Nokma is the head of the trustee household of all the land of the village. Therefore, succession to Nokmaship is regarded by customary law of inheritance of trusteeship. Unlike the other tribal law of succession, an A'king Nokma must be succeeded by his son-in-law. But here again there is another very interesting characteristic feature of the law of succession. An A'king Nokma cannot make any son-in-law. But here again there is another very interesting characteristic feature of the law of succession. An A'king Nokma cannot make any son-in-law as his heir-apparent. It is not he alone who must decide the issue. In fact, it is the members of his own clan who must finally decide the question of succession. Normally, an A'king Nokma who has a daughter (Nokma) has the responsibility of looking for his own nephew who must be the son of his sister to be his son-in-law and to be his heir-apparent (Nokrom) to the Nokmaship. In other words, the nephew becomes the heir to the Nokmaship.

trusteeship of property and headship of the village when his maternal uncle (father-in-law) dies. But if he has no daughter, he must adopt one of the daughters of the nearest female relation of his wife as an heiress (Nokma) with the consent of his clan members. This adopted daughter and her husband must inherit the A'king lands when the Nokma dies. There were certain cases, in recent years, where the claim of the widow of the Nokma was preferred to the claim of his daughters and their husbands. All these were possible because of the fact that succession of Nokmaship is usually and finally settled by the members of the clan. Theoretically and practically, they have the right to elect or select any one of the office of Nokmaship. The Government and other authorities simply accept the decision of the members of the clan.

Theoretically, an A'king Nokma can exercise authoritative and autocratic power. He occupies a pre-eminent position in the village community. But in practice, it is not really so. He cannot occupy the position of a Chief or ruler. He cannot claim any superior status. He has no right to perform religious duties which duties are performed by priests. He may be dismissed at any time should he becomes despotic or fail to discharge his functions. He is expected to work like a common villager. The village community do not pay rent to him for cultivating within his territorial jurisdiction. He cannot debar any individual or any household of the village to cultivate in any plot of land within the area of the village. Even disputes are not settled by him alone, but they are settled by the elder members of the

different clans involved in such disputes where the A'king Nokma is expected to function only as an intermediary. The Garo political system does not allow political power to concentrate in the hands of one particular person. Thus, a Nokma cannot wield absolute authority.

On the other hand, irrespective of these restrictions, an A'king Nokma possesses certain number of privileges. In the first place, without the previous permission of an A'king Nokma, no person can perform an expensive Gama Ceremony in order to become a Gama Nokma. Secondly, an A'king Nokma is entitled to have attendants and followers with respective functions to carry out and to enforce the decisions of the village Council within the territorial jurisdiction of the village. Thirdly, according to the common belief of the Garos, a drum is endowed with supernatural powers. Hence, the A'king Nokma alone can possess a Kram or Drum which is used only on some special occasions such as annual ceremony, funerai ceremony and other special occasion. Fourthly, the A'king Nokma alone is entitled to perform A'somgtata which is a ceremony to propitiate all kinds of spirits, especially evil spirits.

There are other social responsibilities which an A'king Nokma must fulfil. It is expected of him that he must be responsible for entertaining visitors to the village. If the visitors have no relations in the village, they have to stay with the Nokma. All marriage and funerai ceremonies and all festivals must be conducted in his presence. In fact, all socio-religious ceremonies must begin from and end in his house. During sacrificial ceremonies, it is the duty of the Nokma to provide sacrificial animals and other necessary accessories required for such sacrifice. On all such occasions, the Nokma must provide food and drink to participants.
and visitors alike.

The greatest advantage that the Nokma enjoys is his power over any outsider who comes to cultivate any plot of land within the jurisdiction of the village. Such a cultivator is required to pay a sum of money to the Nokmas. He also receives fees and share from all forest produces.

He has also some other responsibilities. The A'king Nokma is responsible for the maintenance of peace and good government within the territorial jurisdiction of the village. He must maintain a record and submit the reports on births and deaths, on epidemics and on any unusual occurrence in his village. It is also his duty to regulate jhum cultivation. Before the advent of the British, he was expected to be a leader of his people against any external invasion.

Lastly, although, the disputes are theoretically decided by the elders of the parties involved and that the A'king Nokma is expected to act only as an intermediary; yet, in practice, the Nokma is responsible for the settlement of all disputes that may arise within the territorial jurisdiction of the village.

Laskars: With the advent of the British, new elements were introduced into the body-politic of the Garos. One of the important elements introduced by the British in the Polity of the Garos is the office of Laskar. In 1824, after a successful military demonstrations David Scott entered into agreements with the village headmen along the frontiers and conferred upon them the title of Laskars. According to the agreement imposed upon them by the British, the Laskars were to ensure the punctual payment of a muzzāramah to the British Government in recognition of British Sovereignty. Moreover, the agreement also stipulated the obligation on the part of the Laskars to report all criminal cases occurring...
within their jurisdiction to the police, to assist the police in their investigation of the various cases, to apprehend the criminals, and to suppress head hunting. If they carried out their duties faithfully and loyally, they were paid an allowance.  

The British Government also sought to enhance the power of the Laskars in the agreement executed by them. They were not only made revenue collectors, but they with their village councils were also given the power to try civil and minor criminal cases. They would have the power to impose a fine up to Rs. 50 in accordance with the Act V of 1861 which was later rectified by the Rules for the Administration of Police and Justice for the Garo Hills dated March 29, 1937. Appeals should lay with the Deputy Commissioner. Thus, the position and the administrative and judicial powers of the Nokmas were changed, and most their powers were taken away by the Laskars. In other words, the Nokmas had been surrendering their powers to the Laskars.

The British Government, by and large, recognised the system of indirect election to the office of Laskarship. Normally, the Nokmas proposed and the Government accepted the proposal. Generally, the Laskars were men of influence and were, in practice, the Chief Nokmas of their village.

Since 1952, the power to appoint Laskars has been transferred to the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council. The District Council has brought about a democratic element in the election of the Laskars. The District Council has provided that a reconstituted village Council which shall consist both nominated and elected members shall elect a Laskar and thereafter the District Council shall issue an

Order of appointment of a particular person as Laskar. It is also stipulated that a candidate must have attained 35 years of age, he must possess good character, he must be a man of integrity, he must be well conversant with Garo customs, traditions and usages, and, he must be a person with sound financial footing. In 1964, the District Council decided to hold examination for the selection of Laskars. But so far, no examination has been conducted.

Sardars: Another important element introduced by the British in Garo Polity is the office of Sardars. During the British period, the Sardars were appointed by the Laskars to work under them. A Nokma might be appointed as a Sardar, but there was no bar for a Laskar to appoint anybody whom he liked as a Sardar. The Sardars were paid by the Laskars. They were expected to perform their duties according to the instructions given by the Laskars. Intelligent and reliable Sardars were even given the power to investigate into certain minor crimes and also to settle certain minor cases or disputes.

At present, the Garo Hills District Council pays an honorarium of Rs. 100. They are also given a shirt and a pair of short pants by the District Council. Normally, all Sardars are still appointed by the Laskars. Sardars are usually assistants of a Laskar and therefore, they should perform their duties according to his direction. It must be mentioned here that at present, Laskars are full time servants of the District Council, but Sardarship is a mere part time job.

4. (a) Barooah: N.K. David Scott in North East India pp. 247-54.
   (b) Revenue and Agriculture, file No. 507 of 1907.
   (c) Burling Robbins: Rengsaggri pp. 244-46.
Zimmadar: The Zimmadari System was introduced by the British in 1865. In fact, this system was a mere extension of the Laskar System. At first, the Laskars were responsible for revenue collection whereas the Zimmadars were made responsible for the maintenance of peace in the area. They were also responsible for the administration of justice in accordance with the Garo customary law. The Zimmadars were empowered to try civil and criminal cases, the value of which case did not exceed Rs. 50. They were also expected to perform police duties as well. They should apprehend criminals, prevent persons from other elakas from committing crimes in his area of jurisdiction. For the services rendered, the Zimmadars were paid an allowance by the Government.

The British Government introduced the Zimmadari System with a view of checking the concentration of powers in the hands of Laskars. But within a year, it was discovered that the two institutions could not work effectively. Therefore, in 1866, the two offices were combined together. Slowly the office of Zimmadars died a natural death and modern Garos fail to remember that at one time there was the Zimmadari System in the Garo Hills.

At present, there are the Nokmas, the Laskars and the Sardars in the Garo Hills. There are also other officers concerning with the collection of revenue such as the Mouzadars, the Mumdals and the Konumgos. All these officers are working under the Garo Hills District Council.

The Village Council: As a rule, among the Garos, the village Council is the principal organ of the village administration. Although we have no authentic detailed records about the
village administration in the Garo Hills; yet, it is believed that from the very beginning, the Garos adopted democratic methods combined with lineage of clans for the administration of the village. All disputes, quarrels and complaints were settled by a meeting of the elders of the village, presided over by a Nokma. Their decisions were final and there was no higher authority above it.\(^5\)

Apart from its judicial function, the village council performed other functions as well. The allotment of land to cultivators, the regulation of Jhuming cultivation, the fixation of the dates for the village festivals and sacrifices, the construction and repair of footpath and other functions. The village Council was summoned and presided over by the A'king Nokma. After the coming of the British, all the powers of the village Council were taken away by the Laskars, Zimmadars and Sardars, but they did not cease to exist altogether. At present, the village Councils have once again become prominent.

**Administration of Justice:** The most fascinating feature of Garo Polity is an interesting study of their administration of justice. The Garos had their own method of administering justice which even after the annexation of the hills by the British, the system was not changed or altered. Since no separate courts existed for the administration of justice and since each village community was a self-contained political unit, all disputes were settled by the village Council itself. The decision of the village council was binding on the parties concerned. There were no appeals against the decision of the Council whose decision was final. The most interesting characteristic features of the Administration of Justice were the administration of oaths and the trial by ordeals.

\(^5\) Martin.N. Eastern India. Vol.III.
Oaths: The oath played a great part in all early Garo trials. We must remember two things in this connection. First, trials were conducted by the courts of small communities. The men who formed the courts were neighbours of one another, every man’s character was well known; their business concerns also were simple and well known to each other. Secondly, there was a genuine belief in the constant occurrence of miracles. An oath was an appeal to heaven and such an appeal, if false, was likely to be terribly punished on the spot or later. It was a very hardened reprobate who could take an oath which he knew to be false in the presence of people who knew him well, without betraying by some nervousness, hesitation or change of colour, his sense of awful risk he was consciously taking. If he showed any of these symptoms, or mispronounced the formula of the oath, he lost his case.

The parties to a particular dispute were required to take the oath. They should speak the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth. There were various kinds of oaths administered by the Garo village Councils. The first type was by making each one of the parties concerned stand on a stone, then they were asked to salute, and then with their hands joined together, they would call upon their God in the most solemn manner to stand witness to the proceedings. Secondly, each person concerned placed a tiger’s bone between his teeth and then gave evidence. Some others would bite the tiger’s tooth and gave evidence. Thirdly, the parties concerned grasped the weapons and swore. Fourthly, oath was also taken by giving some earth in the hands or in the mouths of the persons concerned. Fifthly, oath was also taken by cutting the head of the fowl and then pierced a piece of bamboo from one end to the other.
of the head of a fowl through the eyes. Sixthly, oath was taken also by touching the heads of their children.

Ordeals: In the Garo Hills, the administration of Justice was also carried out by means of ordeals. The ordeal was in theory a formal and solemn appeal to the judgement of heaven in cases where the court was too much in doubt to make a decision, or where a doubt might still linger in a case that was otherwise sure to go against the accused. In the Garo Hills, there were various kinds of ordeals.

The first type was the ordeal of hot iron known as Sil So'a. A piece of iron was taken to the blacksmith who usually charged a small fee for heating it. When he had heated the iron ball to become red hot, he administered an oath to the person concerned. Before administering this ordeal the village blacksmith would inform the person that there would be no harm to touch that red hot iron ball if he had told the truth. He would also warn the person of the worst consequences if he had uttered falsehood. Then the person concerned was asked to stretch one of his hands with palm upturned. The priest then laid upon the palm some pieces of cotton and leaves of a jack fruit tree. A red hot iron ball was then placed over them and the person was told to close his fingers. If the hand was not burnt, the person was declared to be innocent and not guilty of the crime charged against him.

The second type of ordeal was that a tripod would be heated till it became red hot and the accused person would be asked to sit on it. If he was not burnt through that process he was proved to be innocent.

   (b) Playfair: The Garos p. 75.
The third method was that, the village blacksmith would fast the whole of the previous day till the appointed date for the trial. Then, on the appointed day he would heat the metal ball at his forge. If the metal ball became red hot, the accused was declared guilty of the crime. But if it did not become red hot, the person concerned was declared innocent.

The fourth type of ordeal was the ordeal of boiling water known as chokela So'a. After the water was heated to a boiling point, an egg was placed inside the boiling couldron and the accused person would be asked to pick it from the pot. If the hand of the person concerned was not burnt, he was declared not guilty of the crime. In some cases, they used oil instead of water in the pot.

The fifth form of ordeal was also the Chokela So's where a carefully measured amount of water with a fixed quantity of wood would be heated. If the water boiled, the person concerned was considered to be guilty of the crime, but if it did not boil, the person was declared innocent. 7

In this connection, there was an interesting romantic incident that took place not very long ago. The story goes like this. One young man, Kiban Garo fell deeply in love with a certain young girl named Jangsi, the daughter of Gangetta. For some time

(b) Playfair: The Garos p.75.  
(c) Marak: K.R. The Garos and their customary laws and usages p.32.  
(d) Ayerst: Rev: Some Account of the Garos.
they just lived together under the same roof. But after sometime Kiban Garo deserted her completely. It took Jamgsi only a short time to find a new lover. The new lover, Digem Laskar fell in love with her, but the story repeated itself. After co-habiting with her for sometime, he left her. Jamgsi's mother, Gangetta felt very much disgusted with the way how her daughter had experienced. One day, Gangetta who was in deep anger uttered: "You have accepted a sorcerer as your lover". It had been a custom among the Garos in the past that if a person was found guilty of sorcery he would be tried by different kinds of ordeals and then he would be killed eventually. Of course, later on, any person suspected of sorcery was avoided by everybody and no parents would give their daughter in marriage to him.

Somehow or the other, the remark made by Gangetta reached the ears of Kiban Garo, Jamgsi's first lover. Kiban Faro lost no time to enquire from Gangetta personally about the alleged remark, but Gangetta strongly protested against his charge and denied to have made such a serious remark. But Kiban Garo was not convinced with her protestation and denial. He was determined to establish the truth of the whole story. Kiban then challenged whether she would agree to undergo the ordeal of chokela So'a. The challenge was boldly accepted by Gangetta. A new earthen jar was filled with water to the brim and the prescribed quantity of firewood was collected for the purpose of boiling it. When that test was applied, Gangetta maintained that the water did not boil whereas Kiban Garo contended that the water did boil. He demanded compensation of defamation. All efforts on the part of Kheya, the Nokma of Boldamgiri to settle the dispute were of no value whatsoever. Therefore they were taken to Tura to appear before the Deputy Commissioner.
But the Deputy Commissioner advised both parties to go through the ordeal once again in the presence of some other Nokmas. In this case not one ordeal but several tests were applied but to no consequence.

The sixth type of ordeal was that the accused person would be tied to a tree in a dense jungle and he would be left alone there for many nights and days. If the tigers did not devour him he was declared not guilty of the crime. The person concerned was made to appear before the Deputy Commissioner to claim damages from the complainant. This ordeal was later on made more humane. Instead of the accused person; a goat, a bull or a fowl was tied in the forest. If the creature was not killed and devoured by any wild animal, the person concerned was acquitted. Then he might appear before the Deputy Commissioner at Tura to claim compensation for the damages incurred from his adversary. On one occasion, one acquitted person actually appeared before Capt. Maxwell, the Deputy Commissioner, at Tura. But Capt. Maxwell refused to make any decision on the claim for damages. Instead, he warned the participants in such practice, which according to Maxwell, was a barbarous practice. He warned them also that they would be punished severely if they would repeat the same type of ordeal once again.

Another type of ordeal was the Akhrom ordeal. The Akhrom is a spot where at one time or the other a person was killed by a tiger. Generally, the Garos were afraid of visiting the Akhrom alone. In this ordeal, the accused person was ordered by the village elders to sleep on the Akhrom one night. If the person was found alive the next morning without any injury he was declared not guilty of the crime. In a less serious offence, a hen or a goat was tied at the Akhrom for one night by the accused person.
If the creature was not injured or killed, the person concerned was declared **honorably innocent**.  

The last kind of ordeal was that the accused person was put inside a long basket with a cat on his shoulders. One of his hands was left free to enable him to protrude through a hole at the top of the basket. Then the basket was lowered down by a rope into deep water. If the person was able to bring a handful of sand and was not scratched by a cat, he was declared not guilty of the crime.

Ordeals played an important role in the settlement of disputes among the Garos. Generally, ordeals were not applied in civil cases. They were generally applied only in criminal cases. Civil cases were generally settled by the village Councils through the process of taking evidences.

**The Nokpante:** Another interesting feature of the socio-political structure of the Garo Society is the existence of the Nokpante which literally means "a house of bachelors". Nearly every Garo village has its own bachelors' dormitory or Nokpante. In a number of big villages we find Nokpantes belong to the different clans. But in a small hamlet we do not find any Nokpante. Usually, bachelors sleep at home with their parents, but generally they prefer to sleep in houses of old widowers.

The special feature of a Nokpante is that it is well built and much bigger than any ordinary house. Some of the big ones are as high as 20 feet, as broad as 40 feet and as long as 50 feet. In some of these Nokpantes, pig heads and elephants tusks are hung

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from the beams. Inside the building there is a platform or a bamboo machang and at the centre of this machang there is a rectangular hearth where fire is burnt so that the inmates may warm themselves or for the purpose of roasting meats. Different kinds of feathers, horns of animals, gongs and drums which belong to the whole village community are kept inside the Nokpante.

Generally, all young boys after the age of eight and all young bachelors of the village spend their nights in their Nokpante. Usually, they go to the Nokpante after their dinner. Here, they enjoy themselves in singing, dancing, gossiping, talking about love affairs and then sleep. Early morning they go back home.

The institution of Nokpante is also important for many other purposes. It is used also as a Court room. The Nokma and Laskar hold the sitting of the Court in the Nokmante. All important meetings and other public functions of the village are held in their Nokpante.

The Nokpante acts also as an educational institutions. Married men of the village go to the Nokpante not only for making baskets, mats, fishing nets and the like but also to teach the young boys in different arts and crafts. Elderly men instruct the young boys the art of beating the drums, playing the flutes and other musical instruments. The young boys receive instruction in the art of dancing from their seniors. Physical exercises such as wrestling, high jump, long jump and tug-of-war are also taught in Nokpantes. It is here that discipline is taught to the young boys. After sunset, young boys are not allowed to wander about but to spend their time with their Seniors in their Nokpante. Thus, the Nokpante is a community hall where the art and culture of the people are nourished and developed.9

Besides these, the Nokpante is also an inn for visitors and strangers alike. Among the Garos, visitors and strangers are not allowed to spend their nights in family houses. They may have their food with the host, but after sunset, they are taken to the Nokpante where they can spend their time in healthy company and sleep.

Women are never allowed to enter the Nokpante. But, usually, girls are allowed to enter the Nokpante only when they bring food to their lovers living in the Nokpante. But on such occasions, they are not allowed to enter the Nokpante by the front door but by the back door.

At present, Nokpantes have lost much of their charm and importance. Many boys especially Christian boys are living with their parents. However, Nokpantes still continue to exist.

Khari Polity

Exordium: In comparing modern with ancient Governments, the Khasis are proud to compliment themselves on the point of democracy. The 18th century saw the nations of the west, the repositories of modern democracy, fighting their autocratic kings, for the attainment of democratic ideals, and India eclipsed by the coming of the British might. But with the Khasis, the democratic form of Government is no new thing. It is as old as the people themselves. We can push its date many thousands of years till we are lost in the dim mist of antiquity. Perhaps, it was this democratic way of life that gave strength to the Khasis that they were among the last in India to submit to the British might.
True, the Khasis have no history in the narrow sense of the term. But their history has been ingrained in them, is in the blood which runs through their veins, and they can peep into the dim past through their traditions, manners and customs, polity, their culture and religion with certainty and accuracy. It is remarkable that here in their rather isolated hills, the Khasis in their struggle for existence had succeeded in building up for themselves a civilized and democratic way of life that took other much bigger and more advanced nations a much longer time to achieve.

The late Prime Minister Nehru spoke of the Khasis as those who, by their "Stamina, virility and competence still maintain their freedom based on ancient ways and tenets of the race. They are an extremely disciplined people, often more democratic than most of India. Without a (written) Constitution, they function democratically and carry out the decisions made by their elders and representatives without exception." The late Mr. Nehru's cameo must remain one of the choicest of the collections for the Khasi people.

In fact, in Khasi polity, an individual is assured of an equal opportunity in the administration based on native genius and organisation. In brief, the Khasis have developed a four-tier structure with built-in checks and balances to guard against any usurpation of power. There is a "Durbar Kur" (Durbar of the clan) for each clan which looks after the affairs of the kur and which elects representatives to the Raid Durbar and to the Ruler's Durbar.

   (b) Ibid: Speech delivered in Shillong on October 19, 1952.
There is a Durbar at the village level which look after the immediate needs of the village such as sanitation, health, water supply, maintenance of footpaths and lanes and the like. Several villages band together to form a Raid or Commune, and the Durbar Raid normally settles inter-village disputes. It administers justice through customary law or through the laws in force. The highest tier is the Chief's Durbar or Syiem's Durbar (or other heads of elakas) and the Durbar Hima (state or elaka Durbar). ¹¹

Unlike other hereditary chiefs elsewhere, the Syiems, Lyngdohs, Dolois and the like are elected either directly by the people or by an electoral college of "Bakhraws and Basams" (representatives of the Kurs or Clans). Till today, the political system of the Khasis is more democratic than that of the panchayat system that exist in the neighbouring plain areas. When no democracy existed in the plains, the Khasis were ruled by a democratic process. One must go through "The Khasis" by Col. P.R.T. Gurdon, "Notes on Khasi Law" by Keith Cantlie and the different Reports of the British administrators. Gurdon gives a graphic description of the administration of justice among the Khasis. All disputes were referred to the Durbar and the decision of the Durbar had to be executed by the Syiem. A similar system did not exist in any part of the world. ¹²

Socially, Politically and Culturally, the Khasis look upon the "Kur" as a fortress of his ideals. Each Kur is generally a unit within the political and social frame works. It is on this point that the democratic set-up of the Khasis is fundamentally different from that of modern conception of democracy. Secondly,

¹². Ibid.
the Khasi society has always been a casteless and classless society. Excepting political affairs, Khasi women enjoyed as much freedom as men did.\textsuperscript{13}

Before giving a detailed account of Khasi Polity, it is necessary therefore to describe at some length about the Kur system among the Khasis. Unless an account is given on the important cornerstone of the Khasi social and political thought, it will be next to impossible to understand the whole concept of Khasi polity.

**Legendry Background**

Whatever the Social Scientists may say about the origin of the Khasis, whatever different theories they might have advanced about their migration to their present homeland, and, whatever different routes they might have indicated about the mass migration of the Khasis from Inner Mongolia to their present abodes; the fact remains that the Khasis have their own theory about their origin. There is no denying the fact that the Khasis have a firm belief that they are the chosen people of God. According to legends, at the beginning there were sixteen families known as "Ki Khadhynriew-Trep Khadhynriew Skum" - The Sixteen Huts the Sixteen Roots - in heaven.\textsuperscript{14} But out of these sixteen families, seven families known as "Ki Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum" - The Seven Huts the Seven Roots - were sent down by God to make their abodes on the surface of the earth. Each family formed the nucleus of the rudimentary form of

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} (a) Tham, Soso : Ki Sngi Barim u Hynniew Trep.
(b) Lyngdoh, Dr. H.: Ka Niam Khasi.
(c) Roy, Jeebon : Ka Niam Khasi.
(d) Roy, Sib Charan : Ka Niam Tip-briew Tip-Blei.
(e) Singh, Rabon : Ka Kitab niam khein ki Khasi.
(f) Roy, David : Principles of Khasi Culture.
each Khasi clan known as "Kur". Through inter-marriage of the members of different clans, the number of families and people were slowly multiplied. They have a firm belief that God had handed over a Commandment that it is not only an act of sacrilege but also an unpardonable sin if a person should marry within his own clan. That is the reason why, till today, to which ever religion they may profess, any Khasi will get a nightmare if he is being tutored to believe any other theory of the origin of mankind, which might become detrimental to the rule of consanguinity founded at the beginning of creation. The question whether the "Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum" first settled down in their present homeland or in any other place is still buried in obscurity. But according to oral accounts which have been handed down to us by our ancestors from generation to generation, it appears that the original home of the Khasis was somewhere else. One of the accounts says that the Khasis came from "Khadar Snem Lynti". This phrase indicates that the Khasis came to these Hills from a place which would have taken twelve long years for a horde of people to march on foot. Another account says that the Khasis came to these Hills after swimming across a great flood and that they lost all the records of past civilization during that great flood. Whatever may be the case, each and every Khasi believes that the "Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum" were the progenitors of the Khasi race.

15. Tham, Soso : Ki Sagi Barim u Hynniew Trep. Chapter VIII, verse I.
16. (a) Bareh, H : The History and culture of the Khasi people, Sec.II.
    (b) Lyngdoh, H : Kha Nim Khasi.
    (c) Roy, David : Principles of Khasi Culture.
The Three Corner Stones of Khasi Culture and Khasi Polity:
Khasi Culture and Khasi Polity are based on three great foundations. It has the belief in matriliney, a belief in the sanctity of clanship and inter-clan relationship and a belief in Khasi religion. The texture is so delicately and beautifully interwoven and intertwined in such an intricate and complicated manner that it becomes difficult for any non-Khasi either to appreciate or understand it. A person who will try to have only a partial look by studying only one or two of the three corner-stones will fail miserably in his attempt to understand Khasi Culture and Khasi Polity in their fullness.

The Matrilinieal System: Many great Social Scientists, both foreign and Indian and even some Khasi authors who have made a partial study on the Khasi Social System have made a mistake by coming to the conclusion that the Khasi Society is Matriarchal in nature. According to the "Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary" and other English Dictionaries, the word "matriarchy" is described as "Government by a mother or mothers". The word "matriarchy", therefore, presupposes a society where a mother or mothers are all in all. It presupposes of an all-powerful woman or women who dominate the mental and material life of the people in the society. But this is not the case with the Khasi Society. Although descent is traced through the mother, yet the father is the head of the family. While the father is the main earner for the family's income, the mother is the mere keeper of all earnings. While the mother is expected to nurse and bring up the children in the correct manner, it is from the father that the children will expect to get the most correct advice and decision regarding their future. As Mr. David Roy most
correctly puts it: "From the woman sprang the kind, species; it is the father who gives the stature (person)". While both mother and father along with their children are the joint owners and partners of all the properties that they may have jointly or collectively earned since the day of their marriage ceremony, it is the father who is expected to be the defender of the family and the family's property. A mother or father has no power to sell or mortgage any part of the property without their joint consent. This is true in the case of the couples who have enjoyed a happy family life. The question arises: What will happen to the fate of a father in a broken home? There are stray cases of couples who experience bitterness and anger for some reasons or the other, and in some cases a couple will be separated by a divorce. The children will stay with the mother because they belong to the mother's clan. The mother will remain the keeper of all earnings and properties which as husband and wife they must have earned. Will the father of a family turn out to be a tramp, a homeless wanderer, or a refugee, without any more hopes and aspirations? No. The father will return to his own mother's home, a place where he had pooled his earnings while he was still a bachelor, a real place where he actually belongs - body and soul, bones and ashes. If his mother is not alive, then he will return to his youngest sister's home, because his youngest sister succeeds to the office of his mother. Once again, he will stay and pool his earnings in this home so long he has not reconciled with his wife, or so long he has not married a second wife. Even after having separated from his wife, he still possesses the power to control the affairs of his

children. He can still visit and meet them frequently. Without his consent, his wife will be incapable to do at her own will regarding the earning and properties which they have jointly earned. Even after separation, a sensible father still has the moral and social obligations to look after the children by helping them according to his ability. He will continue to do so, so long the wife remains single. In case he fails to perform his duties, then it becomes an extra burden to his mother, brothers and sisters who, out of moral obligation, will have to subscribe in order to help his children. This is because of the fact that they also look upon his children as their own. They called his children "Ki khaum Kha" who have also a part in their family's religious ceremony. 18

Today, there is a novel theory of an all powerful youngest daughter in the Khasi Society. This is due partly to the wrong understanding of the word "inheritance" borrowed from English law and partly to the wrong decisions and interpretations of Khasi customary laws made by the Courts and lawyers during the British regime. 19 In order to have a correct understanding about the Khasi customary law regarding property, it is better to analyse it properly. In each family or clan, property is divided into two parts: ancestral property and self acquired property. Ancestral property is that part of the property of a clan or a family which has been handed down from generations to generations from the first mother of a clan or family. This property originates from the first mother, then it passes on to her youngest daughter - then to the youngest grand daughter and so on, down to the present youngest daughter of a clan or family. The youngest daughter is not the sole heiress, but she is a mere custodian.

19. Ibid.
of ancestral property. She succeeds to the office of custodianship and not the office of proprietary rights from her mother. She alone is not in a position to do at her own sweet will regarding ancestral property. Ancestral property cannot be sold or mortgaged without the consent of all members of the clan or family. It is the male members of the clan or her family - her maternal uncles, her brothers, her sons and sisters' sons if they have come to age - who have the right to give a final verdict regarding the fate of ancestral property. It is true that the youngest daughter enjoys the maximum benefits out of the income of such property. There are two strong reasons for this. The first reason is that the youngest daughter has to bear the maximum, or even the full amount of expenditure incurred during religious ceremonies of a clan or family. Secondly, the house is considered as "Ka Iing Seng", which means the religious and common house of all the members - male and female - of the clan or the family. The youngest daughter has the sacred responsibility of meeting the heavy expenditure, of looking after the unfortunate orphans, helpless widows or even the unfortunate male members who have been forsaken by their wives and children. It is a place of shelter for all members of the clan or family. This is true in the case of a rich clan or family. But in the case of poor clan or family, the youngest daughter has to bear all the burden.  

Self-acquired property of the family is that part of property which the father and mother of the family have jointly acquired. It is further expanded by the earnings of their grown children who pooled their earnings so long they have not got married. There can be no self-acquired property for a clan.

20. Ibid.
Self-acquired property can be managed or disposed of by the common consent of father and mother. Usually, if they have acquired big property, they divide that property among their daughters, and they even give capital investments to their sons. After the next generation, this property becomes ancestral property of each family. But in certain number of villages in the War country, both ancestral and self-acquired property can be divided equally among the children, both males and females.

The Role of a Khasi Man:

The Khasi man plays a pivotal role in the Khasi matrilineal society. Primarily and fundamentally, the Khasi man, or for that matter, all children belong to the mother and the mother belongs to her mother and this family through mothers to the common ancestress. Hence, no Khasi child can be the illegitimate child whether the mother bore that child from the husband with whom she has gone through formal ceremony or not. The Khasi man belongs to this clan not only by its name by which he is distinguished, but in flesh and blood. He is of the clan in life and in death. After his death, his children have to return to his mother or to his relatives the bones and ashes of the man, with something tangible to preserve his person or "Rugiew" in that family - his full dress and ornaments if he had these and something of his earning. If the wife wishes to keep these she would take a vow of remaining a widow for life. Failure on her part to keep a vow is a great act of sacrilege called "Sang" which entails punishment of stripping her of all the property by the relatives of the man. It should be borne in mind the very person or "Rugiew" of the man is re-claimed by his clan, after his death, even from distant places from where his bones and ashes cannot be reclaimed. This is done by a
ceremony by throwing up of cowries to reclaim the bones and ashes of such dead persons. This is due to the fact that the man belongs to the clan of his mother where he has pooled his earnings in that family before marriage, and as "U Kni" (maternal uncle), he has always played a key role as defender of the clan and the "Niam" (Religion), and as guide, Philosopher caretaker, and maker of decisions in the affairs of the clan.

When the son marries and lives with his wife he becomes the child of the new family or "U Khum Ki Briew". But he is also the father of the new family through his wife. The Khasi man is the executive head of his wife's family. His position in the family is an honoured one. He is the bread earner and the protector of the person of his mother, his sisters and their young daughters and young sons. He is "U Kni" (maternal uncle) in his own clan and "U Kpa" (father) in his wife's family without whom family worship and religion would be an act of sacrilege. David Roy in his paper entitled "Principles of Khasi Custom" writes: "It is true that the 'Kai' or mother's eldest brother, is the head of the house, but the father is the executive head of the new home, where, after children have been born to him, his wife and children live with him. It is he who faces the dangers of the jungles and risks his life for wife and children. In his wife's clan he occupies a very high place, he is second to none but u Kni, while in his own family circle as father and husband is nearer to his children and his wife than u Kni." 22

21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
The Khasi man stands as a perpetual link between his mother's clan and his wife's clan. All the children, grand children, great grand children and so on will continue to look upon his and his mother's clan as "Ki Meikha Pakha", and his and his mother's clan will look upon them as "Ki Khum Kha".

Throughout the ages the Khasis have lived in a casteless and classless society where every kind of labour is respected. Men and women work and talk together freely. Everyone knows that he or she is equal with others in the society. In the past, Khasi men knew that the art of government and politics were their monopoly whereas the hearth and homes was in the hands of women. As pointed out by David Roy "Man is the defender of the woman, and the woman is the keeper of his trust".²³ Apart from this, the relationship between the man and the woman is independent of one another. Yet the fact remains that the Khasis have such a sacred reverence for marriage because their idea of marriage is the spiritual bond. The Khasi woman is no mere chattel of the family of men. No feminist movement is required to free her from bondage. She is the glorified person, free to act, yet she is the partner of the man. This is the reason why in nearly all Khasi homes we find one man is the husband of one wife, and they have lived to see children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

²³. Ibid.
Clanship and Inter-Clan Relationship:

The clan organisation and the inter-clan relationship are based on the original Seven families who were the progenitors of the whole Khasi race. Out of inter-marriage, each family was multiplied into a number of families. But whatever may be the increase in the number of families, the members of the families know that so long they can trace their origin to the common ancestress, they belong to the same "Kur". But the question arises: why are there hundreds and thousands of Khasi clans today when at the beginning there were only seven families? The answer to this question is as follows:

When each "Kur" was further multiplied, migration took place from one place to another, first in search of more cultivable lands, and later on, in search of iron ore. When these families were divided by great distance, the religious ceremony of the "Kur" could no longer be performed at convenient time and place. Hence the kur was divided into a number of "Jaids" or sub-clans and each jaid could have its own religious ceremony. Thus the number of jaids became vastly multiplied. 24

The second factor which was responsible for the increase of "Kurs" and "Jaids" was the coming of outsiders. During the war time, the Khasi warriors would bring a number of women from the plains. When these women were married to Khasi men, their children adopted Khasi manners, customs, culture, ways of life and Khasi religion and they chose to be recognised as Khasis. Hence each of them became the ancestress of a new clan. During peace time, Khasi

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24. Lyngdoh, H : Ka Niam Khasi Chapter X.
traders would also bring some women from the plains. 25

Dr. Homiwell Lyngdoh Nonglait, in his book "Ka Niam Khasi" gives an exhaustive description about the clan and sub-clan organisations. According to him, the word "Kur" included all members of the different "Jaid" who are the descendants of the same common First Ancestress called "Ka Iawbei Tymrai" (The first mother). Each Kur is further sub-divided into a number of "Jaids". The members of each "Jaid" claim that they are descended from the same common but younger ancestress called "Ka Iawbei Tymmen". Each "Jaid" is still further sub-divided into a number of branches called "Kpohs" whose members claim descent from a still younger ancestress called "Ka Iawbei Khynraw". Each "Kpoh" is further sub-divided into a number of families. Whatever may be the divisions or sub-divisions, so long as they know that they belong to the same Kur, they cannot think of an inter-marriage. 26 A man belonging to a "Jaid Shadap" cannot think of marrying a woman belong to a "jaid Lyngdoh Nongkyraih" because they belong to the same Kur. To give some illustrations: Lyngdoh Nongbri, Lyngdoh Nangkyrih, Lyngdoh Kyanshi, Shadap, and Passah belong to the same Kur. Hynniewta, Basaiawmoit, Kurbah, Majaw and Syngkli belong to the same Kur. Laloo, Diengdoh-bah, Diengdoh Kylla, Diengdoh-Shugainlang and Pariong belong to the same Kur. There is another process of how one "Jaid" can become of the same Kur with another "Jaid" without having the common ancestress. In days of yore, some members of one particular "Jaid" might have done some acts of kindness to some member of another "Jaid" might have done some acts of kindness to some member of another "Jaid". Out of that act of love and charity, they

25. (a) Ibid.
    (b) Gurdon, P.R.T.: The Khasis.
26. Ibid.
performed a ceremony that henceforth the two clans should not enter into a marriage alliance, because they have become more or less members of the same "Kur". For instance, out of the act of kindness shown by some members of the "Warjri" clan to some members of the "Kharbuli" clan, these two clans claim today that they belong to the same "Kur".

All members of a particular clan, whether Kur, Jaid, Kpoh or family look upon all the members of the families, Kpohs, Jaids or Kurs of all those men who have been married to the female members as "Ki Meikha Pakha" - the one who gives bread, luck and stature to the children of the "Kur". At the same time, they look upon all the children, grand children, great grand children and so on of the male members of their Kur as "Ki khun Kha", the ones to whom they have given bread, luck and stature. As a result, of this inter-clan relationship, the whole Khasi race is today bound by the bond of kinship. Each Khasi man is related and inter-related to nearly all the clans through different clans and inter-clan relationship.

The Khasi concept of the cycle of consanguinity is difficult and complicated. Unless he has lived among the Khasis for many years, a foreigner will be at a loss if he tries to understand it in a single day. No one can marry a member of his or her own Kur because it is an unpardonable sin - they call it "Ka Sang Ka Ma". No one can marry his "Meikha" (father's mother) or his father's sister and grand niece because they are his "Niakha". So also a daughter cannot marry her father's brothers or grand nephews because they are her "Pakha". A father's sister is "Ka Niakha", her daughters or sons are "Ki Bakha", her grand daughters or sons are "Ki Niakha".

27. Roy, David: Ka Jaka u Khasi ka ka pyrthei.
and "Pakha". This goes on in alternate order. If they marry within the ambit of "Niakha" and "Pakha" they commit another sin called "Ka Samg Sohpet kha". But any one is free to marry his or her own "Bakha". But even then the Khasis avoid to marry the nieces or nephews of the first generation. A person will avoid to marry his or her own "Bakha" of the third generations also during the life time of the father because they say it is a case of "Ai Khaw Kylliam" which is an insult to the father, because it tantamounts to a return of bread and luck and the person of the father to his own clan.

In the same manner, no one can marry his brother’s mother-in-law and sister-in-law, his maternal uncle’s mother-in-law or sister-in-law because they believe that there is a sin called "Ka Samg Shong Synri". 28

No one can marry the grand children of his or her maternal uncle or the children of his or her brother because there is "Ka Sang Syngken Kha". The relationship in this line is also counted as "Khunkha" and "Bakha" in alternate order. The same rule applies as to the relationship from the father’s side. If there has been no relationship before between one clan and another, intermarriage is free at the beginning, but it becomes complicated after getting children and grand children. 29

Khali Religions:

Like all communities of the human race, the Khasis, though small in numbers, believe that they form a distinct race of mankind. They strongly believe that they are the chosen people of God. They believe that at the beginning they were the children of God as

28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
as members of the "Khadhynriew Trep Khadhynriew Skum". On close study of the legends and mythologies it is found out that from time to time, the Khasi race has not failed to produce wise men, holy sages, great seers and prophets who have been able to give definite shape to Khasi religion called "Ka Niamb Khasi". But it is unfortunate that their names have been forgotten due to the absence of written literature and the absence of written recorded history. From time immemorial, throughout the ages, the Khasis have developed a definite idea about God and man, about the existence of heaven, earth and hell, about the existence of the body and the soul, about the subjective and objective values, about the relationship between man and man, and all values, and God. They have their own belief in the beginning of all things and their belief in the beginning of creation.

The Khasis believe in one God called "U Blei", who can manifest himself in all forms and values. Sib Charan Roy in his "Ka Niamb Tip-briew Tip-Blei" explains the various phrases by which God is described by the Khasi in their incantations or their prayers such as: U Blei Trai Kynrad (God the Infinite), U Blei majong ha thiam (God the Omnipresent), U Blei U Nowguk bynta U Nongsam bynta (God the Distributor of human fate, life and pre-destination), and U Blei Shihajar nguk (God the Omnipotent).

Like the Biblical Stories, or stores found in the Ramayana, the Mahabharatta, the Jatakas and other Scriptures, there are a number of stories in Khasi legends which relate that at certain periods of time, God manifested himself in the form of natural

30. Roy, Sib Charan : Ka Niamb Khasi - Ka Niamb Tip-briew Tip-Blei Chapter I.
forces to protect His chosen people from some certain calamities. Hence among the Khasis, God sometimes manifested Himself in the form of a storm or fire, in the form of mountains and rivers and the like. Therefore, till today there are still in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills a number of sacred groves, sacred forests, sacred hillocks, sacred peaks and sacred rivers. These places and objects are held in high reverence as places where God at one time or other had manifested Himself. They have become places of worship. These places and objects are known as "Ki Pham Ki Kyrpad" and "Ki 'lei Khyrdop ki 'lei duwan". A person who has made a partial study of "Ka Niam Khasi" is apt to make a mistake by coming to the conclusion that the Khasis look upon these places and objects as gods and goddesses. It is this aspect of the Khasi religion which has made many foreigners like Col. Gurdon, Sir George Grierson and others to describe Khasi religion as animistic. It is most surprising that E.H. Pakyntein (a Khasi himself) in his census report 1961 describes the Khasis as the animists. Even Dr. Hamlet Bareh makes a serious mistake by asserting that "Khasi religion is both theistic and animistic though in the beginning it was apparently monotheistic". Perhaps, Dr. Bareh has been under the spell of foreign writers for a long time. I maintain that Khasi religion stands in its own right and it does not fit in or does not correspond with any known 'ism' of the present day world.

On examination of the Khasi concept of God, many Hindu writers think that Khasi religion is a branch of Hinduism, whereas Christian writers think that Khasi religion is nearest to Christianity. Unlike the Hindus, Khasi religion does not believe in
caste system, idol worship, transmigration of souls, rebirth, monopoly of religious rites by Brahmins and the like. Even in religion, the Khasis believe in equality, in the present life and in the eternal abodes in the House of God. Unlike Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, Khasi religion has no Church or Gurudwara, Mosque or Temple or Pagodas, no order of monks and nuns. But they organise themselves within their Kur. Religious ceremonies are the affairs of the Kur. They can never mix up with members of other Kurs. That is why even the father of a family has no part in the religious functions in his wife's family or Kur. He has his part in his mother's Kur. Christians and Muslims fix one day a week and certain days of a year to be observed for religious functions. Hindus will fix the dates according to their astrological and numerical studies. Other religions have their own systems to fix the dates for religious functions. But the Khasis always fix the date only after getting "Ka Hukum" (Commandment) from God. Any day is good enough for them. The Khasis have their own methods to ascertain that "Hukum" from God.  

Khaski religion believes in the individuality of man, as one of the members of his own "Kur", as he defender of the "Niam" of his "Kur" as well as one of the glorified creature of God. It believes in the present existence of the flesh and soul and of man's strivings to achieve the final goal - to gain a place in the house of God. It has a clear conception of the finite existence in this world and the infinite abodes of the soul in heaven. It has also a clear conception of all kinds of relationship between man and man, man and the world, man and God.  

Khasi religion is based on the principle of "Ka Tip briew - Tip Blei" (the knowledge of man and God). To discover oneself is the first step to know man. To know man is to discover one-self and to know all kinds of intricate and complicated relationships between him and his Kur; and, between him and his kur on the one side and "Ki Kha Ki Man" (other clans which have been connected by inter-marriage) on the other side. He knows that if he commits "Ka Sang Ka Ma" within his own Kur; and the other "Sang" with other Kur then his sin will inflict upon him heavy punishment. His punishment while alive will be that he will be an outcast for all practical purposes. His status will be looked upon as the status of a beast. After death his bones and ashes will never enter the Kur's Mawbah (A place where the bones and ashes of dead members of the Kur are kept). His soul will go to "Ka ñyāgkoi U Jom" - hell - a place of abodes for all evil spirits. But when he has perfected his individuality and performed his duties as required by the "Kur", other relatives, and other human beings through noble deeds and good words; then a person is fit to be the defender of religion because he has known God. His or her first primary duty is to enhance the wealth, prestige and glory of his or her own Kur then he must start the duties to other people.  

There is a saying in Khasi religion "Ngi wan long briew sha pyrthei ban kamai ia ka Hōk" (we come to this world to earn eternal truth). There is another saying which says: "Ka pyrthei shong basa" (The world is only a temporary abode). These two sayings presuppose that each and everyone must perform all kinds of good works and

33. (a) Roy, David : Contact of Peoples.  
(b) Ibid : Khasi Religion.
speak noble words in order to realise the meaning of eternal truth so that one can gain a place in the eternal abode in heaven. In this respect, philosophically and theologically this belief corresponds to one of the sayings found in the Upanishad which runs: "Know thyself first and then thou shalt know the world, and, then thou hast known the world, thou hast known God".  

As stated earlier, the Khasis organise themselves, for religious performances on the basis of "Jaid" or "Kur". Within the religious ambit of a "Jaid" or "Kur" the concept of sins, failings and righteousness are defined and understood. Since the souls of those members of the Kurs who have performed the duty of "Kamai ia ka hok" will join all the souls of all dead members who are already in heaven, their bones and ashes are safely placed at the Mawbah of the Kur during religious ceremony of the "Kur". But the bones and ashes of those members who have committed pardonable failings will be placed at a separate "Mawshyieng" (a place where the bones of individual is temporarily kept). In the same manner the bones and ashes of "U Iap lor Iap Kap" (Those who die before birth or just at birth) for the sins of their parents or grand ancestors and ancestresses called "Ka Raibi" are also kept temporarily in separate "Mawshyiengs". So also the bones and ashes of those who died of "Ka Tyrut KaSmer" such as by accident, murder and the like are kept temporarily in separate "Mawshyiengs". This is based on the Khasi belief that God does not intend to make a person "ban iap shiteng rta" (to die without coming to real age). Those who die in ripe old age are believed to have died because of "ba la dkut u

34. (a) Iyngdoh, H : Ka Niam Khasi. Chapter XVI.  
(b) Singh, Rabon : Ka Kitab Niam Khein ki Khasi. Chapter XVI.
sai hukum" (the predestination of God Almighty). When the Kur has received "Ka Hukum" to perform the ceremony by which all the bones and ashes are to be collected from different "Hawshyiemgs" to be placed at the common "Mawbah", known as "Ka Thep Mawbah", the bones and ashes of those three categories of persons have to undergo through purgatory. It is only after a ceremony is performed that the bones and ashes will be washed in "Ka Umkoi Umsham", and then they will be placed at the common "Mawbah" which is afterwards finalised by "Ka Tanding" or "sealed by fire". The Khasi belief in purgatory does not resemble that purgatory system of the christian churches isasmuch as the Khari religion does not believe in generalisation. On the other hand, a Khari will first particularise and then perform the ceremony. Another difference is that the Khasis believe that those who have committed "Ka Sang ka Ha" cannot be pardoned, and hence no purgatory is necessary for them.

The Khasis believe that as the members of each Kur are united in this world, so they will be united as members of the same Kur "ha Dwar U Blei" (which means the eternal abodes in the house of God). That is the reason why every Khari has the ambition that he must "pynkhraw la ka kur ka jaid" (to enhance the glory and prestige of the Kur).

Basically, there are three general types of religious performances. The first is to diagnose the causes of the illness of a person. This can be done by "Ka Khan", "Ka shat ka kheia" and "Ka Khad"."Ka khan" can be performed by means of pieces of cowries or maize, a stone or eggs and other materials. "Ka Shat" is performed by the breaking of eggs. "Ka Khad" is performed by

35. (a) Lyngdoh, H : Ka Niam Khasi. Chapter XVI.
   (b) Singh, Rabon : Ka Kitab Niam Kheia ki Khasi. Chapter XVI.
sacrificing a cock. In all these, the findings are determined according to what a performer will have asked the number, the heaviness, the shapes, the size, the movements, the symptoms and the like of the various instruments of ceremonies. If it is found out that a person is suffering from "Ka daw iing" (family causes or sins), then the performer will offer prayer to God Almighty for forgiveness and for the restoration of health to a person. If it is found out that a person suffers from "Ka daw lum" (outside causes), then the performer will further perform another ceremony by taking one of the above means. If it is found out that one of the demons or evil spirits has punished a person then the performer will drive the demon or evil spirit by means of sacrificing a black hen. If a person suffers from "Ka raibi" or "Ka Tyrut ka Smer" then he will "mait" (chase) them by means of cutting the egg. Only the eggs of hens and not other eggs are used by Khasis.

The second category is called "Ka Niam im" (ceremony for the living) which are of different types. The first is "Ka jer khun" (naming ceremony). But if after sometime the child suffers because a particular name does not suit him or her, then they will perform "Ka Tap Lubri" (ceremony to give the second name to the child). If a person suffers due to the fact that he is lacking in individuality and personality of a person, then they will perform a ceremony called "Ka Ksan Rngiew" (To bring back the personality and individuality to a person). If a person suffers from ill-luck, then they will perform one of the two ceremonies: "Ka Tap rwiang" and "Ka tap ksaw" (to bring back good luck to a person). When a woman becomes pregnant, they will perform a ceremony called "Ka Tap Kpoh" (to give luck and health to the mother and child).

36. Iyngdoh, H: Ka Niam Whasi. Chapter II-V.
37. Ibid.
The third category is called "Ka Niam iap" (ceremony for the dead). There are a number of stages in performing "Ka niam iap". When a person dies, they will place one egg below the pillow of the dead body. On the day fixed for cremation, they will wash the dead body by clean water, then when the body is brought outside, they will perform a cock sacrifice known as "Ka Kmia 'yiari syngkhong" (to drive all evil spirit that might prevent the soul of a person to go to heaven). Sometimes, this sacrifice is followed by a pig sacrifice as a second line of defence. Then the body is taken to the funeral pyre. As soon as they light the pyre, they will perform a bow and arrow sacrifice known as "Ka siat nam tymepm". They will shoot one arrow to the north, one to the west, and the third to the south. This is followed by another cock sacrifice called "Ka k mia 'yiari padat". The purpose of both ceremonies is that when the mortal remains return back to earth, no evil spirits and demons will ever prevent the soul of a dead man to go to the eternal abode. Then they will take the egg which was placed under the pillow called "Leng Kpoh" to break it on the pyre. When the body is converted to earth, they will collect the bones and ashes and these are placed in a separate "Mawshyien" where they will remain till the time comes for the final ceremony called "Ka Thep I-Iawbah".  

When the different "Khun ICha" have returned the bones and ashes of the male members to their own Kur, the elders of the Kur, after ascertaining "Ka hukum" from God fix the date for performing "Ka Thep Iawbah". They make two effigies, one female which stands for ka "Ka Iawbei" and one male which stands for "U Suidnia" (the

38. Ibid.
first maternal uncle) to receive all members of the Kur including those who have been returned by "Ki khun kha". After bringing all the bones and ashes of the dead "Kurs", both from "Mawshyiengs" and from "Ki khun kha", and after collecting the bones and ashes and after the purgatory ceremony of those persons who did not die of age is over, they will bring all bones and ashes to "Ka Iing Seng Iing Khadduk". At dead of night they will perform a ceremony called "Ka pyngrei" (a marriage of those dead members who died while they remained single). This is followed by a ceremony called "Ka Beh Tympe" (to chase the evil spirits and demons). Thus the road is clear for the dead to join all the earlier dead members of the kur in the same "Mawbah" so that their souls also will join them in heaven. 39

In the good old days, it was usually the practice that on the final day when the bones and ashes of the dead members of the family were brought out from "Ka Iing Seng" to be taken to "Ka Mawbah," many pre-arrangements were made. In order to make the journey of the dead easier, many solid stone bridges were constructed and many resting places supported and surrounded by walls were also erected. At a certain place, on the way to ka mawbah, stone monoliths, standing in a row of three, five, seven or nine were planted. The tallest monolith in the middle stands for the first maternal uncle, and therefore, is called "Mawkni", whereas others are known as "maw pyrsa" which stand for his nephews. In front of this row, a big solid stone slab called "Haw kynthei" was placed. 40 When the procession reached this place, the oldest keeper of the youngest family of the kur sat. It was here that she received homage.

39. Ibid.
40. Ibid. Chapter XVII.
in words, cash and kind from "Ki khun kha", starting from the oldest line of the dead male members to the youngest. Each time dancers from her "kur" and from "Ki khun kha" paid homage by dancing to the accompaniment of drums, flute and cymbals. After the ceremony was over, the procession of all "Kurs", "Khun kha", mourners, dancers musicians, relatives and friends proceeded to "Ka Nawbah". On reaching the place, one of the chanters shouted by calling "Ka Iawbei" and "U Suidnia" to receive the new entrants. After placing all the bones and ashes in that eternal resting place, a ceremony of fire called "Ka Tam ding" was performed to seal their bones and ashes in the confines of "Ka Nawbah". By doing so, it is believed that their souls will remain in heaven forever.

After a month, or after three months, or after one year, and at certain period of time, the member at the kur would perform memorial ceremony in honour of the dead by sacrificing a goat, a pig, a bull and the like. Only the members of the kur can participate in taking a bit of "u dkhot u dkhai" which may be three, five, seven, or nine in number, taken out of the internal organs of the sacrificical animal. The intention is to unite the living in this world and the dead who are in heaven.41

There are other ceremonies which are of late or of recent origin. They are believed to be the inventions of a few families and remain confined with them. Since they are the inventions of men, they are called "Ka thaw bynriew buh bynriew" - the phrase carries the meaning of human inventions and innovations. These few families invented a belief in "Ki phan ki Kyrpad" (supporters to man). There are "Ki Phan ling" (family supporters) such as "Ka Lei khuri", "Ka

41. Ibid. Chapter XVI.
Lei duwan", "Ka Lei Synshar", "Ka Lei Longspah", "Ka Phan Kynthei" and some others. There are "Ki phan lum phan uah" (deities living in hillocks and streams). Hence a ceremony to pay homage to different hillocks, peaks, rivers, streams and the like was invented. But most of these ceremonies and the belief itself are obsolete now. There are some other less important ceremonies which are needless to be discussed now because they do not form part of Khasi religion in general. 42

Out of the religious ceremonies of the Kurs, many other festivals began to spring, such as family ceremony, village festivals and even state festivals. But the only State festivals which can still stand the test of time are "Ka Pomblang Syiem Khyrim", "Ka Phur Sohbar", "Ka Phur Nongjri", the six Behdein Khlam festivals of the Pnars and a few others. All these festivals are accompanied by religious ceremonies.

The most important characteristic of Khasi religion is that, although the number of ceremonies are numerous and although the method of performing sacrifices is elaborate, yet in Khasi religion no "Kur" will ever offer animal sacrifices to God Almighty. This is the most distinctive feature of Khasi religion, especially if we consider the background of all other religions, which at the most original form believed in offering animal sacrifices to appease God Almighty at the conclusion of each ceremony. The third distinctive feature is that the Khasis organise their religion for the purpose of ceremonies and sacrifices only among the members of each "Kur". It can never be converted into a communal or national or

42. Ibid. Chapter II.
universal religion. Fourthly, another very important characteristic of Khasi religion - philosophically, theologically, ethically and morally speaking is that its teachings contain the most important gems which have universal appeal and applicability.

Fifthly, Khasi religion never denounce, condemn or look down upon other religions. The Khasis believe that if Khasi religion is good for the Khasis for the salvation of the soul, other religions are good for other peoples according to their historical background, social organisation and moral outlook. In this respect, Khasi religion is one of the most liberal, broad minded, and flexible religion of the world. Sixthly, Khasi religion does not believe in the order of priests; in monastaries, in temples, pagodas, gurudwaras, Churches and mosques; in the monopoly of religious ceremonies by a particular clan, caste, or individual. Each and every Khasi man is expected not only to act as defender of his own "Kur" and his wife's family. But he is more expected to undergo training by oral instructions under his senior "Kur" member to be not only a priest of his "Kur" but also to be a defender of his "Niam". A Khasi man is a defender and priest of the "Niam" of his kur; but a Khasi woman is the keeper, preserver and maintainer of that "Niam". Lastly, other religions believe in the existence of the body and soul only, but Khasi religion believes in the existence of "Ka Ragiew" (mysterious presence of a person in this world whether he is still alive or he is dead). When a Khasi dies, his body will turn back to dust and ashes, the soul will go to heaven, but "Ka Ragiew" will remain forever with the members of his or her kur in this world.

The basis of Khasi religion finds its explanation in
the most notable legend which can be summarised as follows:

When the "Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum" settled down on the surface of the Earth, they were living in peace with God and in harmony with nature. They could still communicate with all creatures and they could still communicate directly with God. The "Hynniew Trep Hynniew Skum" on Earth and the "Kkyndai Trep Khyndai Skum" in heaven could make regular visits through "Sohpet Bneng" peak which connected heaven and Earth by means of a ladder called "Ka Jingkieng Ksiar Sohpet Bneng". The bull was then the messenger of God who used to bring messages from God to human beings on Earth. That was the period of the golden age which is variously known as "Ka Aiom Ksiar" or "Ka Sotti Juk" or "Ka Juk u Sohpet Bneng".

One day, while the bull was coming down with a message from God that man should not work too hard for the sake of power and wealth, he was obstructed by an evil spirit in the form of a crow which misguided the bull. On reaching the Earth, the bull gave a message to man as tutored by the crow. That was the beginning of how man began to know how to cheat and to commit sins. Out of anger God disconnected the ladder and thus man could no longer go to heaven and come back. They said "La dktu ka jingkieng ksiar Sohpet bneng" (the direct way to heaven is no longer in existence).

From that time another tree suddenly grew up at Diengiei peak. Within a short time, it grew up into a gigantic tree whose branches covered the whole surface of the Earth. Large number of men with their axes and other instruments attended their duty every day to cut down the tree, but every next morning they found that the

43. Tham, Soso : Ki Sngi barim u Hynniew Trep.
tree remained as it was before without any sign of damage. But the ever merciful God sent a message through a small bird called "Ka Phreit" to tell the men the secrets of the mystery. It was soon learnt that every night an evil spirit in the form of a tiger came to lick the part of the tree where there was the cutting mark and that was how the cutting portion was filled up every next morning. Henceforth, after cutting all day the cutters would place axes and other instruments, and when the tiger came to lick, its tongue got injured. That was how the Diengiei Tree was cut down. That period came to be known as "Ka Kuli Juk" or "Ka Juk u Diengiei" which means the period of sin. Since that time every Khasi was expecting the coming of the period that Sohpet b Meng Peak would rise to glory again.

Thereafter, a great celebration was held in the form of a dancing festival in which every creature, from animate to inanimate objects participated. But the last comers were the Sun and her brother the Moon who came to have the last dance (According to Khasi belief the Sun is female and the moon is male). Since they came too late, they were laughed at. Realising that love of power, wealth and prestige still ruled the world and after realising that sin still prevailed in the human heart, the sun and the moon went into hiding to a place called "Ka Krem Lamet Krem Latamg". Within a split of a second there was nothing but darkness in this world. Once again, all creatures were full of remorse and repentance for their sins. Once again, they asked in silent prayers for forgiveness from God. The ever-merciful God gave a commandment that all creatures met at a great assembly to discover a creature without sins to persuade the Sun and the Moon to return back to their original position.
A great Assembly was held called "Ka Dorbar Bmeng". One creature after another failed to persuade the Sun and the Moon to return back to where they used to be. When all attempts had failed, man asked the Assembly: "Is there any one who is absent"? After careful thought an answer came from the midst of the Assembly. "There is only one half naked or a featherless creature, a cock, called 'U Khun Lymboit Lymbiamb' who is not fit to attend the Assembly". Since every creature had to attend, a cock was summoned. As soon as he arrived, it was discovered that he was the only creature who was still free from sins. With all humility he pleaded successfully at "Krem Lamet Krem Latang" that the sun and the moon returned back to their usual duties and position after the cock crew thrice. Since then "U Khun Lymboit Lymbiamb" came to be known as "Rang 'Yiar Khad Khraw Jutang" (A Cook with inspiring divine words of power). Thereafter an altar was erected where a Cock had to be sacrificed. But still the "Jingkieng Sohpet bmeng" could not be rebuilt. Since that time, it has been customary for every Khasi family or kur to expect that a son will be born who can once again rebuild "Ka jingkieng Sohpet bmeng".

Now, about half of the Khasis have become Christians. The question arises whether the Christians believe in the fundamentals of Khasi religion. The cardinal norms of the Khasi religion will ever remain in tact among the whole Khasi race if only the Christians accept Jesus Christ as the one who is responsible to connect heaven and Earth. To accept his resurrection as the re-connection of "Ka jingkieng Ksiar Sohpet bmeng" is the basic answer for any Khasi Christian if he is to accept all the other tenets of Khasi religion. Otherwise Khasi culture and Khasi Polity will fall into nothingness, and Khasi race may disappear if all
Khasis become Christians and if they do not accept Christ as "Ka Jingkieng Ksar Sohpet bneng". This is the test for the Khasi race if it were to exist on the surface of the Earth as a distinct race.

Religion has played an important role in the development of Khasi political thought. As the great Khasi Poet, Soso Tham sang: "Upon religion, they founded a State". 44

Political evolution: Against this background, it will be possible to examine the Khasi polity, both in theory and practice. As stated earlier, the Kur or clan is the political Unit in the Khasi political organisation. From all oral accounts handed down through centuries, we are told that the Khasi migration to their present homeland, had been in the nature of the members of each Kur migrated together from the east to the west. Again, oral tradition says that the Khasis, first settled down in the Eastern part of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. But as the race multiplied the elder branches of the different Kurs migrated to the western, northern and southern areas, possibly in search of more fertile lands and also in search of iron ore. 45

The history of one U Sajar Laskor, the leader of a vast horde of clans and families from the Sutnga state in the east, is still current as tradition amongst the Khasis, especially among the people of Nongpoh. Thus one finds, the Nonkhlaw and the Nonspung Syiems claiming relationship with the ruling family of Sutnga. There is a connection in the history of the Khadar

44. Ibid. Chapter X. verse VI.
45. Roy, David: Shano U Sajar u leit?.

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178.
Lyngdoh of Nongpoh with the people of Khadsaw-phra. The people of Jirang still speak a dialect similar with that of the Amwi villages of the Pnar country. There is also the history of the Shella people being those families led by U Khang, U Ben, U Khrang and U Shaihei from Pom Skala, a place on the west of the Mawpat hill of Shillong, and who from there moved downwards to Shella. We see similarity in the dress of women in the Shella villages with that of the Pnar women.  

Apart from traditions, there are many other strong evidences which go to prove that the Khasis first settled down in the east and then moved westward. First, if we judge the orange groves we will find that the direction leads from the east to the west. From Sutnga the line of orange groves goes to Mawkadew then to Raliang-Mynso, westward up to Mawpdang, Mawroh and Mawtawar. It must also be borne in mind that the Shella people fled away from Pomshala. Again, from Sutnga downwards to the War areas, then the line followed westward along the slopes to the five villages known also as Paunch Punjee up to the westernmost part of the southern slopes. The Paunch Punjee, viz., Lyngkading, Tymriang, Ummiuh, Tmar and Nongjri, and even Mukertila of Kayrim are still part and parcel of the Pnar people in their manners, customs, ways of life, village administration, and even in their inner conviction.  

Secondly, if we judge the alignment of boundary pillars, be it in the case of making demarcation for separating the land of one Kur, clan, family and the others; be it in the demarcation between one village and another; be it in the boundary pillars

47. Roy, David: Shado U Sajar u leit?
between the different States, the direction of lines runs from east to west. 48

Thirdly, the majority of the ruling clans and the most important kurs in the whole of the Khasi Hills District claim to have migrated from the Pnar area. Let us take some representative illustrations: 49

(1) Diengdoh Bah, Diengdoh Kylla, Diengdoh Shnainlang and Pariong clans belong to the same kur with the Lalu clan of the Pnar area.

(2) Skabong, Mukhim, Khyriem clans belong to the same kur with the Shallam clan of the Pnar area.

(3) Thangkhiev clan belongs to the same kur with the Slon, Skylla, Pariat and Pde clans of the Pnar area whereas the Blah clan which belongs to the same kur with these clans are found both in the Pnar area as well as in the central Khasi Hills.

(4) Lyngdoh Nomhri and Lyngdoh Nomkynrhi belong to the same kur with the Shadap and Passah clans of the Pnar area.

(5) Khongwir clan of Khyrim and Sohra belong to the same Kur with the Khongelah clan of the war area of the Jaintia Hills District.

(6) Sun clan belongs to the same kur with the Lameare clan of Pnar area.

Further more, the ruling families of Nongkhlaw and Nongspumg claim descent from the Sutna ruling family. So also the ruling clans of Lawsynram and Sohra claim descent from the Malugiang ruling family.

It must not be forgotten that the original State of the Malugiang family extended from Umkhren river to Lyntdu river.

48. Ibid.
Lastly, the evolution of Khasi language was started at Sohra. But on closer scrutiny we will find that the process started in the Amwi villages. Let us take an example of one sentence only to illustrate that Khasi language had its origin in Amwi, then it gradually changed as the people moved westward.

Amwi: Ak u-mi u juprew, u e ah arbai i-nua tyrmai arbei
Jirang: Ah imi u kar o ah irbei ji hun hun tyrmei
Jowai: Em uwi u bru uwa em arragut ki khon shynrang
Mairang: U en uwayi u bru u bi en arragut yi khon shynrang
Umkreng: U ah u mi u japrew u ah u arbai ki hun turma
Mongstein: U en uwayi u bru uba en arragut ki khon shynrang
Umsning: E uwayi u bru uba e arragut ki khon shynrang
Nongjri: La en u weimet u brow uba la em arragut ki pham shynrang
Nongkrem: La don uwayi u brow uba don arragut ki khon shynrang
Sohra: La don uwayi u briew uba don arragut ki khun shynrang.

From this example, it is clear that it is the Khasi form of speech that is spoken by the people of War Amwi and Lakadong and not the form of speech spoken at Sohra which has the closest affinity with the Mon-Khmer forms of speech which is the parent language of the Khasi language and all the other variations found among the Khasi form of speech.

At the beginning, each Kur settled down permanently in a particular area to form a village. In such a village, the eldest male member of the Kur assumed the role of the leader of the Kur who in consultations with the other grown up male members of the Kur

50. (a) Roy, David: Shano U Sajar u leit.
   (b) Khasi Students' Association Magazine, 1964.
exercised tremendous social, political, religious and administrative influence. In course of time, such a village became expanded mainly due to two factors. The first factor was inter-marriage with other kars of other villages. Some of the male members of the kur got married outside the village, each one would bring his wife to his own village. Thus, members of other kars came to settle down in such a particular village. Similarly elder female members of that kar might shift their habitations to the villages of their respective husbands. Thus, in no time, none of the villages would consist members of one kar only. The second factor which led to the expansion of the village was the gesture of goodwill on the part of the founding kar. Usually the elders of the founding kar would invite members of other Kurs to come and settle down in the village and to share in the bounty of nature.  

Generally, though not universally, the founding kar elected the most capable and usually the eldest male member to be the ruler of the village. Such a person assumed upon himself the title of Lyngdoh while in some other case, such persons assumed the little of Basans, whereas the other smaller kars would elect from among their kars other functionaries known as "Ki Tymme ni San" who with the Lyngdoh or Basan as the case might be formed the village council. But in a village where a number of kars jointly founded a village, the male members of the whole village elected a ruler known as Rangbak Shmang or Headman. There were some villages which had only one headman whereas some other villages would elect more than one headman.  

52. Lyngdoh, Dr. H. I. ka Niam Khasi. Chapter XVIII.  
53. Ibid.
The next stage of the political and administrative evolution among the Khasis was the union or confederacy of villages. This process was brought about by a number of factors. First, after the passing of years, a village might have more population in such a manner that there were not enough fertile lands for all the villagers to cultivate. Therefore the elder female members of the different kurs along with their husbands and children migrated to some other areas where plenty of fertile lands were still available. Through this process a number of villages grew up. In these new villages also similar pattern of administration was introduced. But these new villages did not break their relationship with the parent village. Hence the former Lyngdoh Shnong or Basam Shnong of the parent village became known as Lyngdoh Raid or Basam Raid as the case might be for the whole group of villages including the parent village because such a group of villages was still a distinct entity. Such confederacy of villages came to be known as Raid or Commune. The elected leaders of the most important kurs came to be known as Mytris, Dolois, Matabors as the case might be. Secondly, a Raid was formed also through contractual process among the neighbouring villages. Thirdly, a Raid was also formed through the process of conquest by a powerful village. But when the people of a particular Raid conquered a particular territory, such a territory became known as Shnats. The Durbar Raid or council administered the Shnats through the Basans of the Raids and the people of the Shnats did not have any right in the Durbar Raid.  

The final stage in the Khasi political evolution was the formation of the Khasi States under the Syiem called "Ka It ka Hima". The Khasi States proper were formed by means of contractual agreement 

54. Ibid.
among the leaders of the different ruling clans who had already occupied the position of rulers in different Raids or villages. For instance, the Khyrim or "Sawkher Lai Lyngdoh" State was formed by the mutual agreement among the three Lyngdoh clans and the four Basam clans. So also, the Sutnga State was formed by the mutual agreement among the Lyngdoh Clans and the Dolai clans. The Sohra State was formed by the leaders of the twelve clans or kurs. The Nongkhla or Kaadsaw Phra State was formed by mutual agreement among the ruling kurs of the fourteen and the eight villages.55

The earliest among the Khasi States were the Sutnga State, the Ladur-Maskur State and the Khyrim or Sawkher-Lai Lyngdoh State. But there were a number of Raids which did not want to have a Syiem and which did not want to combine with other Raids. They remained contented with a Lyngdoh, Wakadadars or headmen as their heads. Lawphlang, Lyniong, Sohiong, Sheila, Hawllong are the examples. So also there were a number of villages which preferred to remain independent and continued to have headmen as their rulers. After the British took possession of 31 villages and styled their headmen as Sirdars, the headmen of the other Khasi villages preferred to style themselves as Sirdars. Pamsamgut, Dwara-Nongtyrmen are the examples.

The question arises - how did the Syiem clans come into existence?. The answer to this question is not difficult to find. Let us now examine the three famous sayings current among the Khasis. In former days, the people of Sutnga, Ladur-Maskut and

55. Lyngdoh, Dr.H : Ki Syiem Khasi bad Synteny. Chapters I-VIII.
Khyrim States used to say "Ki Syiem-ki blei" which literally means "The Syiems-the-gods". Among the people of Sohra State the saying goes like this: "U Syiem u kmie" which literally means "The Syiem-the-mother". But among the people of Kawiang State the saying is "U Syiem u mraw" which literally means "the syiem-the slave". The origin of these sayings is closely connected with the nature of the origin of the various Syiem clans. The legend about the origin of the Syiem clan of Sutnga is said to have a divine origin. The first mother is said to have come in the form of a mermaid. Thus the leading ruling kurs agreed to form a State and to anoint her children as Syiem clan of the State. The first mother of the Syiem clan of Khyrim State is believed to be a niece of a deity called Shyllong. She was discovered by U Sati Mylliemngap in a cave of Marai. Thus, the three Lyngdoks and the four Basans agreed to form a State. They anointed the children of this beautiful fairy known as "Ka Pahsyntiev" or "flower enticed" as Syiem clan. They also decided to raise the Mylliemngap clan to a high position. This clan should henceforth elect a Lyngskor to be the leader of the State in times of war and peace. The Syiem clan of Madur-Maskut known as Malagiang clan is said to have been preserved through the grace of God. Their first mother is said to have survived, when she was a child by sucking the milk of a wild female bear. The first mother of the Syiem clan of Nongstoin is said to have a stag as her father. In fact, they came from Simsong - Durgapur in Iymensing. It is believed that all these Syiem clans have powers to destroy evil spirit like Iklen, Taro, Shwar, and the life.  

56. Ibid.
But in Sohra State, the first ruler and the first mother of the Syiem clan were fugitives. They are believed to belong to the Malngiang Syiem clan. But since the Basam Swer who led the other twelve kurs to form a new State had agreed that the fugitives and the Swer clan should be considered as kurs, the Syiem came to be styled as "U syiem u kmie". The ruling clans of Malngiang brought the institution of Syiemship by a different means altogether. They captured four Muslims from Punatit in Sylhet and annointed them as Syiem clan. Hence the saying "u syiem u mrav". 57

It is curious to note that the three syiem clans of Sutnga, Nadur-Maskut and Khyrim supplied syiems to the majority of the Khasi States. The syiem clans of Sohra and Kawsynoram belong to the same kur as the Malngiang Syiem clan. The Syiem clans of Nongkhla, Hongspung and Noboschoyphoh belong to the same kur as the Sutnga syiem clan. The Syiem clans of Hyliem, Maharam, Rambrai and the extinct syiem clan of Bhowal belong to the same kur as the Syiem clan of Khyrim. Even the syiem clans of Halai-sohmat and Lemrim are believed to have descended from the Syiem clan of Khyrim. All these Syiem clans were annointed to their respective Syiemships by the respective ruling clans of the various States.

Among the sixteen Khasi States which existed on the eve of India's independence, only two States did not have Syiem clans proper. After the extinction of the Syiem clan prosper, each syiem of Bhowal was elected from the Handah clan. The syiem of Jirang was elected from the Wailang clan. All the other fourteen States had their properly annointed Syiem clans. 58

57. Ibid.
58. Herbert, Capt.D: Report on successions to Syiemship in the Khasi and Jaintia States.
The Khasi States, therefore, were formed through a slow historical process of evolution. They were brought into existence at the last stage by a variety of reasons. First, there was a need for a stronger and larger defence organisation. Secondly, there was a need for the expansion of territories both in the hills and plains. Thirdly, the ruling clans believed that it was a taboo for them to handle the rod of punishment to other fellow-men. Hence, that duty was handed over to the Syiem. Fourthly, since the Syiem clans were fully annointed, they were believed to possess the mysterious powers to destroy any evil spirit. Lastly, since all the ruling clans were equal in status, there was a need for an institution as head of State. Thus, of all the tribes, the Khasis had the most developed political institutions.

In his Report on the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, A.J. Moffat Hills wrongly enumerated a list of 24 Khasi chieftains, although there were 25. But Mills' Report does not contain the correct list of States. In Jaintia Hills, there were 23 Dollois and Sardars. But by then, the whole of Jaintia Hills had already become a British territory.

**Form of Government:** According to Robertson, the form of society and Government, existing among the Khasis was the absence of any recognised organ of supreme power. "The nation or horde presents the appearance of a congregation of little oligarchical Republics subject to no common superior, yet of which each member is amenable, in some degree, to the control of his confederates". Writing way back in 1853, Rev. William Lewis gave a different picture when he observed thus: "It is difficult to say what form of Government prevails in the country. I think the most proper definition would
be to call it a mixed government. The chief is mostly controlled by the character of the people over which he is the head. His propensity is to be despotic, hence the government prevailing in most parts of the hills presents the features of an absolute chieftainship, but even in that same territory the same chief in some larger villages, owing to the independency and force of character of the inhabitants, has to descend to a limited chieftainship. But Rev. Lewis contradicted himself when he wrote: "The Government presents the features of that of a democratic one". Alexander Mackenzie's view was similar to that of Robertson when he wrote: "The constitution of the States is democratic, the chiefs being in no sense political sovereigns, but merely elected heads of village confederacies."

In fact, the form of government prevailing among the Khasi States was democratic in a broader sense of the word. The Syiems and other rulers were elected and they were subjected always to the will of the people. But Khasi democracy was limited by a number of factors. First, it was the kur and not the individuals which formed the political unit. Secondly, the election of Syiem was limited to the Syiem clan only. Thirdly the smaller kurs had no voice in the election of the Syiem. Lastly, women had no share in the whole political and administrative structure.

60. Ibid.
Succession: W.J. Allen in his Report on the Administration of the Cossyah and Jynteah Hills territory in 1858 described the succession of Khasi Syiemships as follows: "The Chieftainships of the Semi-independent and dependent States have always been considered, under certain restrictions, to be hereditary in all the Cossyah States with the exception of Cheyla Poonjee and Hawlong Punjee, where the Bengal custom of inheritance obtains. A deceased Cossyah Chieftain is succeeded by his brother, and if he has no brother by his eldest sister's eldest son, provided he is not considered disqualified for the office by the village Durbar. Successions to those offices appear to have been regularly reported to the principal Assistant Commissioner by the Claimants, the deceased chieftains "Huntees" and officers, and by the Sirdars and heads of villages; but only successions to the Cherra Raj have been reported to the Government."\(^6^2\)

The above description of Allen gives us some idea about the rule of succession. But Allen's account was too brief. Hence it is necessary to discuss the rule of succession in greater details. Among all the Khasi States, Chyrim is the best example of a state which had been able to retain the most original custom and such custom seemed to have stood the test of time. Hima Chyrim is not only the biggest of all the Khasi Himas or Elakas, but it is the only one which can still retain all the customs, usages, traditions and conventions. It will not be possible for any outsider to understand the rule of succession in this hima unless one enters into the complexity of the institution of Syiemship in this hima.\(^6^3\)

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63. "Hima" means State.
In Hima Khyrin as in the other ancient States of Sutnga and Ladur-Kaskut, the ruler, Syiem is always referred to in a plural form. The people do not call him "U Syiem", but they call him "Xi Syiem". This fact indicates that there are some other institutions which stand behind the power of the Syiem. The first and most important institution is the existence of an impersonal institution known as "Ka sad ka sunon". This institution symbolises many things. In the past, it symbolised the symbol of sovereignty. Secondly, till today it stands as a symbol of the unity of the State. Thirdly, it symbolises justice with impartiality. Fourthly, it symbolises peace, harmony and prosperity. Lastly, it symbolises the highest ideals of Khasi religion. In its material form, this institution exists in the form of a house known as "Ka Iingsad Iingsunon" which is constructed by the people of the whole hima. In ancient times before the secession of Sohra, Shella and Lylliem this house stood at Nongkse' n. Then it was shifted to Lyngkyrdem and from Lyngkyrdem it was shifted to Nongkrem then to Smit where it stands till today. It is this "Iingsad" which is the seat of all power.

The first mother of the Syiem clan was appointed as custodian of Ka Iingsad and also as the keeper of the State religious ceremonies. Since then, without any break, the eldest female member of the eldest line of the Syiem clan has occupied that position, and such a person is known as "Ka Syiem Sad". P.R.T. Gurdon, Capt. D. Herbert and many other earlier authors described the Syiemsad as a Syiem Priestess. There is a misconception to describe her as such.

64. Lyngdok, Dr. H : Ka Pomblang Nongkrem bad ka Thang Syiem Sohra.
Kkasi religion does not allow any woman to perform any religious ceremony, and, hence she is not a priestess. A close examination of the annual religious festival of this hima clearly indicates that she is a custodian and keeper of ka lingsad and religious ceremonies. It is she who makes all elaborate arrangements and preparations of the annual religious festival. The person who performs the sacrifices is a priest known as "Sokblei" who is usually selected from the Rumrong clan. He is assisted by another priest from the Nalwok clan. There are nine other assistant priests who are selected every year.

The Syiamsad, her husband and her children live in this house. She is looked upon as the mother of all people of the hima and hence she is called "Mei 'iem". That is the reason why the people of the hima will go to the lingsad to seek peace and harmony. Large number of compromises are usually made at the lingsad. It is the Syiamsad who will at all time give counsells and advice to the people to settle their compoundable disputes. Thus the Syiamsad effects more compromises than the ruling Syiem and his Durbar. In fact, she holds a moral sanction behind the power and authority of the Syiem and his Durbar.

Apart from the fact that the major portion of the annual five-day religious festival takes place at this house, all important functions of the hima are held here. With the exception of the administration of justice, all durbars of highest importance are held at the lingsad. For instance, any new syiem or new Syiamsad must assume office at the lingsad.

65. Herbert, D: Succession to Syiemship.
So far as the rule of succession is concerned, a Syiemsad is succeeded by her eldest surviving daughter; failing daughters, by the eldest daughter of her eldest daughter; failing daughters of her eldest daughter, by the eldest daughter of her second daughter and so on. Failing daughters and grand daughters, a Syiemsad is succeeded by her eldest uterine sister and so on.66

Unless the electors disqualified a successor Syiemsad, succession is hereditary. A rightful successor Syiemsad may be disqualified from succession for various grounds such as marriage within her own clan, adultery, change of religion, marriage without religious ceremony, criminal charges and the like. Generally, the electors will have no voice when the rightful person is not found guilty of such disqualification. There are many subtleties in this matter which cannot be described in full. Generally, succession to this office is usually settled during the lifetime of a Syiemsad. She would always ask her eldest daughter to assist her in all the elaborate arrangements for the annual religious ceremony. If none of the electors find her guilty of any of the tests, she succeeds her mother automatically after her death.

In Khyrim, the ruling syiems are descended from the Syiemsad. Unless disqualified, a ruling Syiem is succeeded by his second brother; failing brothers, he is succeeded by the eldest son of the Syiemsad, failing sons of the Syiemsad the eldest son of the Syiemsad's eldest sister; and so on. Failing all heirs, the Syiemsad will perform the functions of the Syiem till a son in the Syiem clan is born and comes to age.67

66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
The electors may disqualify the heir to the Syiemship for any of these reasons: change of religion, bad character, permanent illness, or infirmity which incapacitates the heir from running the affairs of the hima (State). If the first heir is disqualified, the next in line becomes Syiem. Capt D. Herbert made a mistake by writing that "no heir apparent used to be recognised in this State". In fact, it is during the annual religious festival again, that the Syiem delegates to the rightful person the duty of handling the sword to cut the sacrificial goats. If the electors raise no objection, such a person usually succeeds to the Syiemship, after the death of the ruling Syiem. The so-called election by the electors is usually taken as a mere formal affair. Such person is considered as an heir-apparent and he is styled as "Syiem Khymnah" or Deputy Syiem. Usually, the Syiem delegates some administrative powers to him. He is usually the link between the Syiem and the Syiemsad. It must also be recalled that in Khyrim, the apparent families live at Smit whereas the presumptuous families live at Lyngkyrdem.

Since kima Khyrim has six Raids, all the six Lyangdohs of the Raids and all the twenty four myntris of the six Raids are electors. These thirty electors along with a Lyangskor form the electoral college. It is customary that on the death of any Syiem, Syiemsad or Syiem Khymnah, it is the Lyangskor who proposes the name. Usually, the proposal is merely a formal affair and as such the proposal becomes an announcement. 68

Let us now examine the rule of succession in Mylliem. It must be borne in mind that Mylliem seceded from Khyrim only after 68. Ibid.
the advent of the British. In a word, the rule of succession in Mylliem was evolved only during the British period. During that period the electoral college consisted of 24 electors: two Lyngdohs, four lyntris, eleven matobors, two Basans and five heads of the other five major clans. But at present, twenty three other clans have been added with one elector each. Thus the present electoral college consists of forty seven electors.

According to Khali customary practice, a Syiem is succeeded by his eldest of his uterine brothers; failing such brothers, by the eldest of the sons of his sisters; failing such nephew, by the eldest of the sons of the eldest daughter of his sisters and so on. But history has shown that this custom has not been respected in hima Mylliem. On many occasions, the electors had the upper hand. The procedure that has been followed is like this. On the death of a Syiem, the electors would assemble in a durbar and discuss who would be Syiem. When the electors had decided, they published their decision throughout the hima. Any majority of the electors is sufficient for the election of a Syiem. But when they are evenly divided, a properly qualified candidate with best claim according to the order of succession should be appointed.

In hima Kongstoin, the electoral college consists of one Lyngskor, two myntris, one basan, thirty-one Lyngdohs and twenty five sirdars. The procedure followed is more or less the same as that of Mylliem.

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69. Ibid.
71-72. (a) Herbert, D: Report on successions to Syiemship.
(b) Gurdon, P.R.T.: The Khasis. Section III.
In hima Honglchlaw, although popular election was held in the past, yet in the majority of cases, succession was decided by an electoral college. Generally, the Khari custom of succession is expected to be followed, but after the advent of the British, succession has never been peaceful. At first the electoral college consisted of three Lyngdohs and two heads of two clans. But at present, the electoral college consists of four Lyngdohs and one myntri.  

In hima Sohra, the heads of the twelve kurs or clans constituted an electoral college but later on it was increased to forty eight which included the Sirdars of thirty six important villages.

In Khasrem, the electoral college consists of seventy two electors - namely, eight Lyngdohs, fifty myntris, thirteen sirdars and one Basan. In Lya, the four Lyngdohs constitutes an electoral college. In Rambrai, the electoral college consists of three Lyngdohs two Myntris and fifteen Sirdars of villages. In Nongspung, it consists of five Basans. In Nobosohphoh or Nongsohphoh, it consists of four Lyngdohs. In Bawsynram, it consists of the four heads of four chief clans of the hima. In Langrin, it consists of all the adult males of the hima. In Bawal, it consists of the heads of the eight major clans of the hima. In Walaisohmat, it consists of the heads of the six major clans of the hima. In Jirang, a syiem is elected by the male adults of the Walang clan.

In Salung, Lawphlang and Lynong, the Lyngdohs are elected from the Lyngdoh clans by all the adult males. But there were instances that they were elected only by their myntris.

73-76. (a) Herbert, J : Report on successions to Syiemship.
(b) Curdon, P.R.T.: The Khasis. Section III.
In Naklong, the Sirdar, the Lyngdoh and the Daloi were elected by adult males of the hima. But at present, there is only a Sirdar who is elected by all the adult males of the hima.\textsuperscript{77}

In Shella, the four Wahadaders were elected by the people for a term of three years. But at present, there is only one Wahadadar who is elected by the people.\textsuperscript{78}

In Nonglvei, Jawdon, Pumsangut and Dware-Nongtyrmen, the Sirdars are elected by the people for a limited period. But, at present, they hold office as long as they hold the confidence of the people.\textsuperscript{79}

In Jaintia Hills, all the Dollos are elected by the people.\textsuperscript{80}

Before independence, all the 25 rulers exercised limited powers. In some States, the succession of Sylieship appears to be hereditary, but in most States, the chiefs or rulers by whatever name he was known, was elected either by an electoral college or by all adult males. The election, in many cases was confined to the members of the ruling families. The electoral college in most cases consisted of representatives of the major kurs or clans. Whatever the mode of election, the recognition by the British Government was necessary. This was conveyed by the granting of Sanads to the Sylies and Parvamas to other chiefs. The British Government reserved to itself the right to remove the chief in case of oppression, misconduct or dereliction of duty. But before taking such an action the wishes of the Durbar were consulted. At first, the chiefs were under the control of the Political agent. Later on they were controlled by the Deputy Commissioner, and much later, by

\textsuperscript{77-80} Gurdon, P.K.T.: The Khasis. Section III.
At present, the Chiefs are controlled by the District Councils. But whereas sub-paragraph 1(g) of Paragraph 3 of the Sixth Schedule of the constitution provides that the District Council shall have power to make laws with respect to "the appointment or succession of Chiefs or Headmen", the District Councils have not made any law of "succession". Instead, they have made a law regarding "the appointment and succession of Chiefs and headmen". 31

It must be further noted that the rule of succession is more or less the same in all the Syiemships. The qualifications and disqualifications seem to be similar. But while the British Government made a distinction between the Syiem and other Chiefs, the District Councils, at present has done away with all types of distinction.

Administration and administrative units: Bigger himas like Khym and Mylliem have a number of administrative Units whereas smaller himas like Malaischmat and Pamsarngut have no administrative Units. A bigger hima has a number of Raids. Each Raid has a Lyngdoh or a Basam as the head. They are assisted by Councils of Lyntris or Katabors. This council has both administrative and juridical powers. Each Raid is divided into a number of villages, and each village elects its own sirdar and headmen. A Raid which any hima might have got by means of conquest is known as "Raid Umsnam". But a territory which the people of one or more raids might have occupied through the process of migration is known as a "Skat". For instance the

"Mawshai-Lei Shnat" of Khyrim were occupied by the people of the Raids of Nongkrem and Nongbri. For the purpose of administration each Raid appoints three Basans to look after the affairs of that area. But in judicial matters, the appeals from the villages within a shnat goes to the joint sitting of the Lymgdohs and myntris of both Raids, and it is presided over by a Lymskor.

The Syiem or any other chief is assisted by two Durbers. The first Durbar consists of all Lymgdohs, Myntris, Basans, Lynskor and other functionaries who are known as "Bakhraw". This council is known as "U Syiem bad ka Durbar". It is both an executive council and a court with the Syiem or any chief as its President. Every act of the Chief must be approved by this Durbar. The second Durbar is "Ka Durbar Hima" or General Assembly. This Assembly is usually summoned to deliberate on any matter of great importance. All male adults from the Raids and villages have the right to attend. But in the past the people of the shnats were not allowed to participate in the Durbar Hima.

Administration of justice: During the last 150 years great changes have come over the customary system of judicial administration. In the old days when any one came to lodge a complaint before a Syiem or Headman, he or she was asked to go and inform his or her maternal uncles or parents if they had no objection to the complaint. If so, they themselves would come to prefer it. When the uncles or parents came to make the complaint, then the chief or headman would ask if the complainant had any kinship with the accused because a "sang" would be the result of a litigation between blood relations and in such cases the complainant was asked to go and settle amicably with the accused at the first instance. If there was no relationship, the accused was summoned to attend with his
or her maternal uncles and parents. An attempt was always made to bring about a compromise between the contending parties. If the case could not be settled amicably, the Chief would try the case in his Durbar where the uncles of the two parties would plead their respective cases. There were no paid lawyers. 22

Rev. William Lewis who spent several years among the Khasis during the forties and fifties of the 19th century says that the procedure for the settlement of disputes was ultra-democratic. According to him, if a compromise could not be effected, the Sangot in the evening after all the inhabitants returned to the village from their daily work, yelled as follows: 23

"Kaw! thou, a fellow villager;
thou, a fellow creature;
thou, an old man;
thou, who art grown up;
thou, who art young;
thou, a boy;
thou, a child;
thou, an infant;
thou, who art little;
thou, who art great.
Hei! in his own village,
in his own place.
Hei! in his prohibition,
in his own interdictions.
Hei! in his own drawing of water.
Hei! in his own drinking of water.
Hei! that there is a quarrel.

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Hei! because there is a contest
Hei! for the cause to sit together.
Hei! for the cause to wait together.
Hei! for the cause to deliberate.
Hei! for to give intelligence together.
Hei! about to assemble in durbar,
Hei! for to listen attentively.
Hei! Ye are forbidden
Hei! Ye are stopped to draw water then,
not to cut firewood then; no,
Hei! to go as coolies then; no,
Hei! to go to work then; no
Hei! to go a journey then; no,
Hei! to descend to valley then; no,
Hei! he who is in company with the pouch
Hei! he who is in company with the bag.
Hei! Now come forth
Hei! Now do appear
Hei! the hearing then is to be all in company
Hei! the listening attentively then is to be all together.
Hei! for his own king
Hei! for his own master,
lest the destruction has come;
lest piercing has overtaken us.

Kaw: Come forth now fellow mates"

The proclamation was called "khang shneng". Attendance at the Durbar was compulsory. Absence was punishable with a fine. In fact, only the adult males had the right to attend the Durbar.
The Durbar ground was always an open space. Flat stones served as seats for the Durbaris. When all had assembled, one of the headmen opened the proceedings with a long speech. Then others made short speeches. Thereafter, the parties to the dispute threw on the ground turbans or a bag containing betel, pepper leaves and lime in front of the Durbar indicating their readiness to accept the decision of the Durbar. The Durbar was presided over by the Siyaem. He was the judge and the Durbar was the jury. Witnesses were examined on oath. The oath was administered on a pinch of salt placed on a sword. Sometimes the Durbar went on for several days. At the end, the Siyaem summed up the case and the Durbar gave the verdict. The punishment was generally a fine in money and the presentation of a pig which was eaten up by the Siyaem and the Durbaris.

"If it was a case in which the evidences given by contending parties were contradictory, the Chief or headman would first look for a 'Saiphla'. The Durbar would call for witnesses. U Saiphla was a person known to both parties as one who was the eye witness of the occurrence and knew about it. U Saiphla was also summoned with his relations, uncles or parents; he could not come alone. When he came, he was warned in the presence of his relations that he should speak the truth about the case, that he should not fabricate or tell a lie, otherwise the family would incur the displeasure of God. U Saiphla had to take an oath before he gave his evidence. He was not free to speak anything like the parties to the case. He was given time to give the evidence in order to check his memory about each incident of the occurrence, dispute or quarrel".  

34. Roy, Sid Charem : U Mampira, July 1903.
But when all these means could not bring out any result, the Durbar took resort to the application of water ordeal, known as "ka Ngam am". The ordeals were of two kinds. The first was "Ka Ngam Kaik". By this method, the two disputants in the case would each of them fix a spear under water in a deep pond. They should dive and hold the spear. The man who remained longest under water was adjudged by the Jyiem and his Durbar to have won the case. Another form of this ordeal was to place two pots, each containing a piece of gold and a piece of silver under water. The two parties were directed to plunge their hands into the pot and pick a packet. The person who brought the packet containing gold was adjudged as innocent of the crime. If both the persons brought the gold pieces or both brought the silver pieces, the case was compromised. 85

Today, these forms of judicial proceedings are no longer in vogue or practiced. The Khasi chiefs have been divested of their powers to try persons living in other himas, if they were non-khasis or even if they were khasis and petitioned the Deputy Commissioner that they were not "U khua u hajar" (citizen) of that hima where they lived and the occurrence took place. As Alexander Mackenzie puts it: "The judicial customs, which prevailed among the tribe, previous to the establishment of our supremacy, continue to be observed with such occasional modifications as experience proves necessary". 86

85. Costa, G : Ka Niti jomka Ri Leipheu Syiem, Part II, Chapter XVI.
During the British regime, the powers of the Chiefs and their Durbars were gradually reduced. In the beginning they had full powers, both in criminal and civil justice. Later, their powers of criminal justice were reduced. The administration of justice under the Rules for the Administration of Justice and Police in Khasi and Jaintia Hills as prescribed and laid down by the British Government limit the powers of the Chiefs in many respects. Immediately after independence, with the establishment of the Federation of Khasi States, the administration of justice in the Khasi States was also slightly changed when the Federation was given powers to have a judge of its own to be the appellate authority against the decisions of the Chiefs and their Durbars. On the eve of the coming into force of the Constitution of India, the Khasi Syiemships (Administration of Justice) Order, 1950 was promulgated and enforced. With the formation of the District Councils, the administration of justice was brought under an enactment passed by the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Administration of Justice Rules, 1953. Today, the Chiefs and their Durbars in both the Districts function as Additional Sub-ordinate Courts of their respective District Councils Courts.