A Preliminary Study on the State Formation of 
Hima Mylliem

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Abstract- This paper entitled “A Preliminary Study on the State Formation of Hima Mylliem” is an attempt to examine the process of state formation of one of the Khasi native States called Hima Mylliem. Khasi States designated by the Khasis as Hima have been in existence long before the advent of the Colonial rulers. There is no exact information on the number of Khasi States that existed prior to the Colonial period. Literature reviews revealed that the the Khasi Hills comprised of 30 ‘Himas’ and was traditionally called ‘ka Ri Laiphew Syiem’ and that each Hima was under a titular head called ‘Syiem’. Hima Mylliem is one of the Syiemships or Chiefdom in Khasi Hills with a Syiem or Chief as its administrative head. It is situated in the central plateau of Meghalaya with Hima Khyrim in the east, Hima Mawphlang, Hima Sohiong and Hima Nongkhlaw in the west and Hima Sohra in the south.

This paper is based on an ongoing doctoral research and its content is extracted from actual chapters of the research.

Index Term - Chief (Syiem), Clan (Kur), Commune (Raid), Khasi, State (Hima), State Formation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Khasis are an indigenous tribe of Northeast India. They are found in the eastern part of Meghalaya inhabiting the present districts of East and West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi and Jaintia Hills. They are a group of people identified with the Mon-Khmer linguistic family (Hamlet Bareh, 1964) which is supposed to have its original home in Indo-China and which later on settled in the Assam Valley during their westward migration through the Patkai route and finally encroached upon the Khasi-Jaintia Hills (Jatanta Bhusan B, 1918). The Khasis have their own traditional polity designated as Hima (native State), which falls under the administrative control of a Chief called Syiem, Lyngdoh, Wahadar and Sirdar, which exist till today. Due to the absence of written history, nothing much can be known with accuracy about their past and the exact period of the establishment and evolution of Khasi native States. Much of what we know about them has come down through oral tradition in folktales, legends and songs. Such oral narratives have, therefore, become the only source of information that historians and scholars are compelled to rely on in their attempt to trace and understand the evolution of Khasi native States.

Many anthropologists who had study on the process of state formation had made use of the term ‘early state’ rather than ‘pre-state’ and they have also examined the structure and pattern in which a ‘pre-state’ evolves into a ‘modern state.’ Hence, the study on the process of state formation can be categories into two parts i.e., the study of an early state and the study of a modern state. Referring to the work of Claessen and Skalnik, they explained on the process of state formation by distinguishing early state and modern state. According to them an early state is a “simple non-industrialized states of the pre-capitalistic epoch” whereas a modern state is a “complex, modern industrialized and developing states.” There definition on State suggests the stages of formation that societies have passed through historical process. Hence, their work suggests the fact that the process of transition from an early state into a modern state is an extremely lengthy process. In studying the nature of Modern State Bikhu Parekh (Bikhu Parekh, 1996), in his work has listed some characteristics such as: (1) The state is fixed in space. It is identified with and claims proprietary jurisdiction over a specific territorial area; (2) It is sovereign, i.e., it is an autonomous source of all legal authority
exercised within its territory, no area of social life within its bounds is in principal immune to its jurisdiction; (3) It is formally independent of society; (4) It is a legal institution; (5) It enjoys the monopoly of authority to use physical force; (6) The major institution of the state are professionalized; (7) As an autonomous institution, the state relies on its own institutional resources to perform such functions as the maintenance of order, punishment of crime; (8) It is constituted and run from top downwards as is expected in an organisation that began as an apparatus of ruling under absolute monarchy.

From the above discussion it shows that state slowly and gradually evolve from earlier existing organisational form into a matured and modern form of organisation. Therefore the present work is an attempt to examine the existing native Khasi State called *Hima* Mylliem as a State, based on the characteristic features of divine origin, the three-tire political structure, social stratification and economy or surplus production and to try to examined *Hima* Mylliem as per the characteristic listed by Bikhu Parekh.

II. STATE FORMATION: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

The State formation process of the Khasi native State can be broadly described to have three different stages. However, due to the absence of conventional historical evidences it becomes difficult to delineate these stages clearly. Many scholars who have worked on *Himas*, depending mainly on oral sources, found that the development or formation of *Hima* is not abrupt but underwent a long and tedious process. The formation was more like an evolutionary process which evolved several times before it arrived at a stage where it stopped evolving and began consolidating into a structured entity. The establishment of the Khasi native State took many years of evolution, which begins with the structure and nature of the Khasi community. In examining the political structure of the Khasi society it was found that the first stage of state formation began with the institution of the family called *ing* which is the nuclei of the Khasi polity. The process of Khasi political formation began with the permanent settlement of families as a domestic group in a particular area. The leadership of the families fell on the senior most male member called *u Kni* who is by convention the maternal uncle of the family. He is given the authority to control and to manage the affairs of the families. Due to absence of vernacular source, there are no records as to the identity of the first family or families who migrated to the present hills. Later on, with the passage of time, families of the same lineage, bearing the same name or surname, then merged together to form one Clan called *Kur*. With time, the number of Clans bearing different surnames gradually increased. This led the Khasis to be subdivided into a large number of exogamous Clans with each Clan possessing distinctive religious rites (N. N. Acharya, 1985).

Gradually when Clans came to lead a more settled way of life, they collectively organised themselves to form a Commune called *Raid* under the leadership of *u Rangbahlng Raid* or Head of the Commune. Some of the families of particular Clans gradually migrated to other areas or land and began to settle down along with other Clans or families. This settlement gradually led to the formation of a village called *Shnong* headed by *u Rangbahl Shong* or Headman. When the number of families increased, the size of a village also expanded. Eventually, families in such villages came to be divided into a number of lineage groups called *kpoth* or womb which claims descent from the same ancestress. Some of the lineage group migrated to another village leading to the spread of the lineage Clan to other parts of Khasi Hills. In course of time, the number of villages also increased and every village has a Village Council called *ka Dorbar Shnong*. Later, some Clans residing in other villages band together into a Commune or *Raid*. This was done in order to maintain their independent entity. Gradually, other Clans came to associate themselves with the founding or original Clans of a particular Commune. This group of Clans, when settling down in a particular area or land, elect from amongst the first or founding Clan or Clans an eldest male members to be their ruler in order to administer and dispense justice. In this way the office of the *Bakhraw* i.e., nobles or elders of the Clan along with the *Dorbar Raid* or Commune Council came into existence and were subsequently entrusted with powers and functions to administer and conduct the affairs of the Commune and their villages (L. S. Gassah, 1994). The duty of the *Raid* is simply to look after the common welfare of the people and the Commune and to settle matters or problems which have not been settled by the Village Council. Hence, we can say that the Clan or *Kur* was the key factor in the organisation of Khasi political society.

The most important political feature in the Khasi society is the existence of the traditional polity called *Hima* under the administration of a Chief called *Syiem*, which is considered to be the final stage in the process of Khasi State formation (R. S. Lyngdoh, 1996). In the case of Khasi States, it was said that gradually with time all Communes finally decided to merge together to formed one common political unit under the central authority of a Chief called *Syiem*, *Lyngdoh*, *Wahadar*, *Sirdar* along with the elders or nobles of the State i.e., *ki Bakhraw*. In this way the office of the Khasi Chief called *Syiemship*, *Lyndgohship*, *Wahadarship* and *Sirdarship* came to be established along with the State Council called *ka Dorbar Hima* which stands at the apex of the other two Councils i.e., *Dorbar Shnong* and *Dorbar Raid*. The duty of such a Chief and the State Council is to look after the administration and welfare of the people within the territorial limits of the State or *Hima* as a whole.

Thus, the above discussion brings to the fore the role played by the family in the evolutionary process of State Formation. The family subsequently evolved to form a Clan which led to the organisation of a Commune which were sub divided into different villages and finally a State or *Hima*.

(3)
As we trace the process that guides the appointment of the Chief of the State Council, it is bears repeating that the Khasi Chief is called *u Syiem*. There is also another important point to note right at the outset of this discussion that only a Khasi male can become the *Syiem*. *Hima* Mylliem follows a very peculiar tradition for the appointment and succession of Chiefs to the State Council. As per the Khasi customary law, only a male member belonging to the *Syiem* Clan become a *Syiem*. This particular aspect of appointing *Syiem* only from the *Syiem* Clan is said to have its origins in myths or at least in a mythic event. Myths have been said to have played an important role in the process of state formation. R. S. Sharma convincingly established the role of divine origins in the growth and development of a State. In tracing the origin of Mylliem *Syiem* it was found that it was mythological i.e., the *Syiem* of *Hima* Mylliem appears to have a divine ancestry. To further elaborate this concept of divine ancestry in this context, one has to take the help of oral traditions and to trace the genealogy of the *Syiem* family called *ka Jaid Syiem*. This *Syiem* family is believed to have descended from a mystical goddess called *ka* Pah Syntiew. As per oral traditions, *ka* Pah Syntiew is considered to be the progenitress of the first *Syiem* of *Hima* Shyllong. According to the legend, *ka* Pah Syntiew which literally means “the one lured by flowers” was the daughter of the reigning deity of the sacred Peak of Shillong called *u* Lum Shillong, popularly known as *u* ‘Lei Shyllong. *Ka* Pah Syntiew, who was a young and very beautiful damsel, was spotted by children, who were playing outside a cave where she was residing in, and was lured into the open by a man from the Mylliem Ngap Clan, from the village of Nongkseh (Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, 2007). He lured her out of the cave with a bunch of flowers called ‘tiew Jayalngkeng’ and hence named her Pah Syntiew meaning the one who was lured out with a bunch of flowers. Later on, she was married to a handsome youth *u* Kongor Nongiri. Pah Syntiew’s children were regarded as *ki* Khun Blei (God’s Children). Later her offsprings were anointed by the elders of the community or *ki* Bakhrav as the royal family called *ki Jaid Syiem*. Thus, *Hima* Shyllong, one of the earliest Khasi States, was established with them as the first *Syiem* or Chief of the *Hima*. As *Hima* Mylliem was once part of *Hima* Shyllong and hence when tracing the origin of the consecutive *Syiem*s of Mylliem it was found that they have all descended from the same family called *ka Jaid Syiem*. U Narain was the first *Syiem* of the *Hima* and Bor Manik II was the last *Syiem* of *Hima* Shyllong (Hamlet Bareh, 1997), he was incidentally also considered to be the first *Syiem* of *Hima* Mylliem. With time the royal family i.e., *Jaid Syiem* continued to expand. Some members of the royal family migrated and slowly settled down in different parts of the Khasi hills. In this way, the lineage of the royal family or *Jaid Syiem* came to be divided into number of *Kpoh* or Wombs and it is for this reason where we find that *Hima* Mylliem has three *Kpoh* of the same lineage and they are *Kpoh* Mylliem, *Kpoh* Laitkor and *Kpoh* Mawlai. During Colonial period *Hima* Shyllong was bifurcated. Though the State was divided, the rule of succession however, remains the same and only the *Jaid Syiem* can become or elect as the *Syiem* of the *Hima*.

If we analysed the myth or divine origin properly, we found that the role of the *Bakhrav* as the elders of the State is clearly visible especially in the appointment and nomination of *ka Jaid Syiem* and also played a leading role.
in the administration and jurisdiction of the State. Moreover, it also implies that the succession of Chief or Syiem is clearly hereditary and that the appointment of the Syiem can only be done by the Bakhraw and no other. This clearly signifies the existence of social stratification within the Khasi polity.

When discussing on the growth and development of Mylliem as a State it is difficult to give the precise time on the emergence of the State. The formation of Mylliem State is so complex that it is difficult to say precisely as to when and how the State was established. One possible explanation for this can be attained from oral narratives which talks about the internal conflicts amongst the elders i.e., ki Bakhraw of Hima Shyllong. The history of Hima Mylliem goes way back to the period before the emergence of Colonial rule in the Khasi Hills. According to oral tradition, it was said that, before the establishment of Hima Mylliem, the earliest Hima within the Khasi Hills was ka Hima Shyllong and Hima Mylliem was carved out of this particular Hima. Homiwll Lyngdoh, referring to this internal conflict, describes it as a civil war between two lineages of the Syiem Clan or Jaid Syiem of Hima Shyllong where even the elders or Bakhrak of the State were divided in their support to the two lineages. This civil war came to be popularly known as “Ka Thma Saw Kher Lai Lyngdoh” (Homiwell Lyngdoh). However, the author did not mention the year in which this civil war broke out. Though there is no exact date or year to account for the emergence of the State but some historians such as Helen Giri, and L. G. Shullalai considered that the division was around the year 1830 when Bor Manik II, Syiem of Hima Shyllong was arrested by the English East India Company during the Anglo-Khasi war (1829-1830) while others such as Jormanik Syiem considered that the Hima emerged in the year 1853 when Hajar Sing was appointed as the Chief of Hima Mylliem. When Hima Shyllong was bifurcated into Hima Mylliem and Hima Khyrim, some of the Communes or Raids conjugated with Hima Mylliem and the rest with Hima Khyrim. Today Hima Mylliem comprise approximately four hundred villages and eighteen Communes or Raids which falls under East Khasi Hills and Ri Bhoi District. From amongst these eighteen Communes three are located in the central plateau of the East Khasi Hills District. These are Raids Mylliem, Raid San-Shnong and Raid Nongbet. The remaining fifteen are located in the northern slopes and plains of the East Khasi Hills District and Ri Bhoi District. These are Raid Mawbuh, Raid Marwet, Raid Narlein, Raid Nongtluh, Raid Nongbri, Raid Marngar, Raid Kharpatsi, Raid Bhiosla, Raid Mathan, Raid Nongsohbar, Raid Nongkharai, Raid Umwang, Raid Marmain, and Raid Kuswai. Each of the Raids is governed by a Council called ka Dorbar Raid headed by an administrative head called u Syiem Raid, u Lyngdoh Raid and u Bongthe Raid.

In the study of state formation, the economy of the state in question is considered an important feature which provides a window to other aspects of the state and of its formation. Surajit Sinha in his work has identified ‘surplus generation, extraction and distribution’ to be the common factor of state formation, hence, for any state to grow and developed into a well established political organisation, it has to have a good surplus production in terms of goods and commodities and subsequently of markets that ultimately bring in the finances to support the various functions of the State. As per traditional customs, the Khasis do not have land revenue. This is because the Khasis believed that land is freely given to them by God. Therefore, it is found that within the Khasi community, land is divided or classified into two categories namely, Ri-Kynti (Land that one inherits from one’s own family) and Ri-Raid (Land that is the common property of the Commune). This shows that land essentially belongs only to the people and not to the royal family or to the lineages. As per the work of David Roy, it was pointed out that the origin of private property among the Khasis can be traced back to the time when the founding families first came to occupy Khasi Hills, claiming proprietary rights over the land. Thus land came to be recognised as Ri-Kynti and Ri-Raid. He further mentioned that Ri-Kynti and Ri-Raid together constitute ka Hima or State. Ri-Raid is mainly for the members of the Clans and people of the village or villages. Such type of land is under the control or care of the Village Council or Commune council which has the authority to allot any portion of the land to villagers or clan members or to any person for various purposes such as cultivation, construction of building or houses and so on. However, it is to be noted that the person to whom a portion of Commune land is given to do not have any proprietary rights over it. The occupant may sell the produce from the land but cannot sell the land as such. In case the occupant has left or leaves the land unused for three consecutive years then the land will automatically go back to the Raid. Apart from this, the Raid can also set apart a plot of land particularly for the ruling family i.e., the Syiem’s family. This type of land is called ka Ri-Syiem or Ri-Bam Syiem. Such type of land is kept especially for the maintenance of the Syiem family. Any produce from this land will go to the family of the Syiem but like the rest of the clan the Syiem does not have proprietary right over the land and hence he cannot sell it. The fact that Ri-Syiem are gifted by the Raid to the Syiem and that land belong to the Raid is a clear sign that the Syiemship institution was created after the classification of the land. For this reason, the Mylliem State does not get any revenue from land because the Syiem does not have authority over lands. Hence, the main source of

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Fig.4: Map of Hima Mylliem,
https://www.academia.edu/3835888/Jingkynmaw_memories_written_in_stone

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revenue collection for the State is the market. The market becomes the principal sources of revenue collection for running the affairs of the State as well as for supporting the Community. Furthermore, the Mylliem State collects revenue from the market tolls, court fees, excise and judicial fines. Market tolls were levied as per the commodities of shopkeepers or as per the stall from weekly markets. This revenue is shared amongst the Syiem and his Bakhrav and is used mainly for the development of the State if needed. At present, *Hima* Mylliem has six traditional markets called *Iew* and they are *Iew* Umshing, *Iew* Mawlong, *Iew* Umroi, *Iew* Umden, *Iew* Masi and *Iew* Duh. Here it is important to point out that except for *Iew* Duh the rest of the markets falls under the boundary of various Raids. For example, *Iew* Umroi falls within the boundary of Raid Mawbuh, *Iew* Mawlong within Raid Marngar, *Iew* Umden within Raid Nongtluh, and *Iew* Masi within Raid Marwet. This implies that the markets were part of the Ri-Raid and it was the Raid who gave a portion of the lands to the State to setup markets for the betterment of the people. Thus the above discussion emphasized that land was also the key factor and that the evolution from a small society into a State emerged when land became an economic property.

IV. CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, the main objective of the paper is to examine the State formation of *Hima* Mylliem as per the characteristic listed by Bikhu Parekh. On the basis of the above discussion it is observed that *Hima* Mylliem may have some of the characteristics enumerated by Parekh for a political structure to be considered a State. To reiterate, the Khasi native state has a fixed territorial boundary and it is a legal institution which is recognized both by the people and the Autonomous District Council of the Khasi Hills. The State also depends on its own resources in terms of state revenue and maintains law and order within the State as a whole. Further, we have also seen how Mylliem emerged as a State through the process of bifurcation and disintegration among the various Communes and how this has contributed to the creation of a new State or *Hima*. Today *Hima* Mylliem is considered as one of the most important Khasi States and continues to exist under the administration of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council.

ENDNOTES

1When Bor Manik II was arrested he was reinstated in his ancestral position i.e., Mylliem with diminished powers and possessions and was forced to enter into an agreement with the East India Company on 15 January 1830 in which he agreed to acknowledge the supremacy of the Company.

REFERENCES: