

# A Preliminary Study on the State Formation of *Hima Myllem*

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**Abstract-** This paper entitled “A Preliminary Study on the State Formation of *Hima Myllem*” is an attempt to examine the process of state formation of one of the Khasi native States called *Hima Myllem*. 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 Myllem* 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 west-ward 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.

evolution of native States or Chiefdoms from their most primitive forms to their evolution into institutionalized organisations. Many scholars and researchers, especially anthropologists, have even gone on to specialize in this subject and have, consequently, propounded various theories and concepts in the context of state formations. It has been observed that any attempt to study the process of formation of native states have in one way or the other necessitated the grounding of the study in the histories of the people and the society that they live in. No doubt that the evolution of native states from primitive forms to an institutions have been discovered even in the north-eastern region of India particularly in the state of Meghalaya when we find that till date there exist many native Khasi States commonly known as *Hima*.

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

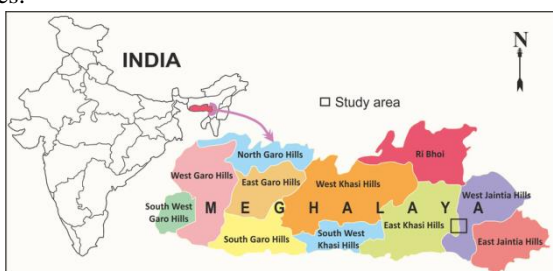


Fig. 1. Map of Meghalaya,

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Studies on the process of state formation have become a distinct area of research which has attracted many scholars. State formation studies trace the formation and

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 constructed 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 Myllem* 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 examine *Hima Myllem* as per the characteristic listed by Bikhu Parekh.

## II. STATE FORMATION: A PRILIMINARY 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 *iing* 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 live, they collectively organised themselves to form a Commune called *Raid* under the leadership of *u Rangbah 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 Rangbah 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 *kpoh* 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 *Bakhrav* 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 Bakhrav*. In this way the office of the Khasi Chief called *Syiemship*, *Lyngdohship*, *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*. (Fig. 3)

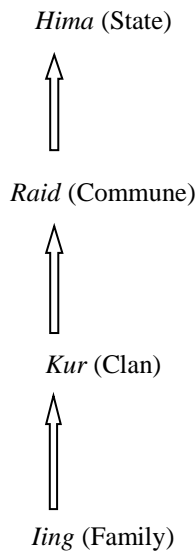


Fig. 2.

### III. STATE FORMATION OF HIMA MYLLIEM

In order to understand the formation of Myllem State, one has to examine the traditional institutions of the State. *Hima Myllem* comprised a three-tier system of administration. At the bottom stands the village council called *ka Dorbar Shnong* headed by *u Rangbah Shnong* or Village Headman, in the middle comes the Commune Council called *ka Dorbar Raid* headed by *u Syiem Raid*, *Lyndoh Raid* or *Bongthe Raid* and at the top rests the State Council called *Dorbar Hima* headed by the *Syiem* (Fig. 4). Though each council is independent of one another they all, however, fall under the jurisdiction of the state or of the Chief and his *Bakhraw*. For instance, in case of disputes or problems related to land or resources faced by the people of a particular village, it is the duty of the village council to settle the issue. However, when the village council fails to do so, the villagers could approach the State Council i.e., *Dorbar Hima* for the resolution of their problems. In case of villages falling within the territory of a Commune it is the Commune Council's duty to address any issues or matters pertaining to the villages. However, should the Commune Council feel inadequate to solve the matters placed before it appropriately it has the right to forward the matter or to direct the villages to the State Council or the *Dorbar Hima*. The decision taken by the State Council in such cases is considered binding and final. In such a situation the State Council or the *Dorbar Hima* performs the role of the Supreme Court for the villages.

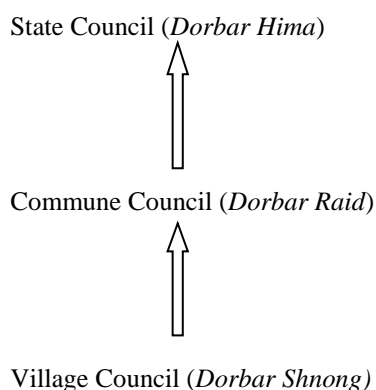


Fig. 3: The Three-tier Structure

As we trace the process that guides the appointment of the Chief of the State Council, it 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 Myllem* 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*s 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 Myllem *Syiem* it was found that it was mythological i.e., the *Syiem* of *Hima Myllem* 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 Myllem 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 Jalyngkteng' 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 Nongjri*. *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 Bakhraw* 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 Myllem* was once part of *Hima Shyllong* and hence when tracing the origin of the consecutive *Syiem*s of Myllem 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 Myllem*. 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 Myllem* has three *Kpoh* of the same lineage and they are *Kpoh Myllem*, *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 *Bakhraw* 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 *Bakhrav* and no other. This clearly signifies the existence of social stratification within the Khasi polity.

When discussing on the growth and development of Myllem as a State it is difficult to give the precise time on the emergence of the State. The formation of Myllem 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 Bakhrav* of *Hima Shyllong*. The history of *Hima Myllem* 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 Myllem*, the earliest *Hima* within the Khasi Hills was *ka Hima Shyllong* and *Hima Myllem* was carved out of this particular *Hima*. Homiwell 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 *Bakhrav* 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. Shullai considered that the division was around the year 1830 when Bor Manik II,<sup>1</sup> *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 Myllem*. When *Hima Shyllong* was bifurcated into *Hima Myllem* and *Hima Khyrim*, some of the Communes or *Raids* conjugated with *Hima Myllem* and the rest with *Hima Khyrim*. Today *Hima Myllem* 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 *Raid Myllem*, *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 Kharpati*, *Raid Bhiolasa*, *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*.



Fig.4: Map of *Hima Myllem*,

[https://www.academia.edu/3835888/Jingkyrmaw\\_memories\\_written\\_in\\_stone](https://www.academia.edu/3835888/Jingkyrmaw_memories_written_in_stone)

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 Myllem State does not get any revenue from land because the *Syiem* does not have authority over lands. Hence, the main source of

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 *Syiem*. Furthermore, the Myllem 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 *Bakhraw* and is used mainly for the development of the State if needed. At present, *Hima Myllem* has six traditional markets called *Iew* and they are *Iew Umsning*, *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 Myllem* as per the characteristic listed by *Bikhu Parekh*. On the basis of the above discussion it is observed that *Hima Myllem* 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 *Myllem* 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 Myllem* 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

<sup>1</sup>When *Bor Manik II* was arrested he was reinstated in his ancestral position i.e., *Myllem* 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.

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