



The Emergence of Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council

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The Khasi tribe occupied the eastern part of Meghalaya. Like other tribals in the north eastern area, before the advent of the British, the Khasis were organized into different kingdom. They administered themselves based on their customary laws. With the advent of the British, the British took control of the Khasis kingdom. The Khasi Hills was placed Partially Excluded areas under Government of India Act 1935. After India's attained independence from the British, the Khasis were granted autonomy power within the purview of Constitution and established Autonomous District Councils along with other tribals of North East India under Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. The Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India grants autonomy to the tribals within the Sixth Schedule area to administer themselves according to their customs and traditions. It serves as an institution for preserving and protecting their identity.

(Keywords – Tribals, Khasi Hills, Autonomous District Councils, Sixth Schedule)

Origin of Khasi Tribe

Khasi is a generic name given to the people of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Khasi race descended from "Ki Hynniew Trep Ki Hynniew Skum" the Seven Huts of the Seven Nests.ⁱ They believe to have divine origin, believe in one invisible God, who is kind, loving and forgiving, who is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. They believe that they come to this world "ban kamai ia ka Hok" (to earn righteousness). The Khasis have been undoubtedly able to maintain and preserve their democratic way of life. Democracy is moulded and brought into stature by the ancestors in the din mists of antiquity. With this democratic

instinct, the Khasis may be few but sturdy, they may be hard-pressed by time but adventurous, they are ready to sacrifice their lives at the altar of preservation. The evolution of the traditional, social, cultural, ethical, political and economic ideals of the Khasis is interwoven around the origin of the Khasi race.

The Kur is the nucleus, around which all institutions – social, cultural and political revolve.ⁱⁱ Each Kur settled down in a certain place and formed a village. The eldest male members along with other members of the kur exercised influence in social and economic matters. The first and the founding kur would elect a wise, eldest male member to be the ruler of the village. Such a man assumed the office of the Basan. The remaining kurs in the village also elected their own representatives called Ki Tymmen ki San. But in a village founded jointly, the minor kurs would elect tymmen shnong or Headman. There could be one or more headmen in the same village, but all the elected heads whether ki Tymmen ki San or Tymmen Shnong would form a village council with the Basan.ⁱⁱⁱ The Basan is also called the Basan Raid or Basan Shnong. The word 'Lyngdoh' is quite difficult to understand in the real sense of term. On a broader analysis, it may be said that Lyngdoh denotes those who are in charge of "Ka Niam" (Religion). On another hand, there is another Lyndoh in charge of administration of the Raid as well as the religious affairs of the state. With the growth of Kurs, villages, Basans and Lyngdohs, in course of time, the Khasi states were formed as a result of a mutual agreement among the leaders of Basans or Lyngdohs of the Raids. This contract was considered was considered a necessity by the rulers of the different Raids that they should arrive at an agreement to unite for better



understanding, better administration and security from undesirable and external forces. The Shyllong state emerged as a result of an agreement between “Saw Kher” and “Lai Lyngdoh”, that is, the four Raids, each having its own Basan and three Raids, each having its own Lyngdoh.

Pre-colonial period

The Khasis led an autonomy life before the advent of the British. They were sovereign and independent kingdom. They have their own political systems which controlled and managed their land and people. The traditional institutions in Khasi and Jaintia Hills that of the Syiem, Lyngdoh, Sirdar, Wahadadar, Doloi, Pator and Wahah Chnong who looked after and maintained the administration of the syiemship, elaka and villages. The Khasi village managed their own affairs and exercised control over their resources through the Dorbar Shnong. The resources outside the jurisdiction of an individual village were controlled by the apex council consisting of each village headmen in a particular region. The apex council selects a person called the Syiem. The Syiem is the presiding of the apex council called Dorbar Syiem or the Durbar Hima. The Syiem is solely guided by the decisions of the members of the Dorbar in all affairs under the jurisdiction of the Dorbar. The Khasi villages enjoyed a wide autonomy and managed themselves before the advent of the British.

Post Colonial period

The British came in contact with the Khasis when the East India Company obtained the Diwani Rights from the Diwani of Bengal in 1765.^{iv} The East India Company immediately realised the rich mineral potentialities and other items of trade that Khasi provide. There was an abundant supply of lime, silk, wax, honey, ivory, iron, oranges and other items of trade. The East India Company adopted every possible method to bring the hills of the Khasis under their control. Through negotiations, offering military assistance to some Khasi States from attacks by neighbouring States, the British were permitted to set up headquarters first at Cherrapunji later shifted to the present capital of Shillong to run the administration of the undivided province of Assam and Sylhet (now under Bangladesh).^v In the post 1826, the Khasi society and its territories were subjugated under the British administration after the Khasi were defeated in the Anglo-Khasi War of 1829-1933. According to Gilbert Shullai, when the British consolidated their positions in the Khasi Hills, independent Khasi States were listed as (1) Bhowal (2) Dwara Nongtyrnem (3) Jirang (4) Khatsawphra

(Nongkhlaw) (5) Langrin (6) Lyngiong (7) Myllem (8) Muharam (9) Mawsynram (10) Mawphlang (11) Myriaw (12) Mawiang (13) Malaisohmat (14) Mawdon (15) Mawlong (16) Muliang (17) Nongkrem (18) Nongstoin (19) Nobosohphoh (20) Nongspung (21) Nongpoh (22) Nonglwai (23) Pamsanngut (24) Rambrai (25) Sohbar (26) Sutnga (27) Sohra (Mawsmi) (28) Shella (29) Sohniong.^{vi}

Four of these states (Sutnga, Muliang, Nongpoh and Sohbar) became British areas while the remaining 25 states were known as Khasi States. The twenty five Khasi States were given greater power during the British, both political and judicial because they had entered into Agreement with the British. The other British areas are (1) Byriong (2) Laitlyngkot (3) Laitkroh (4) Lakading (5) Myrdon (6) Mawmluh (7) Mawbhah Larkhar (8) Marbisu (9) Mawthang Sohkhylung (10) Mawsmi Nongthymmai (11) Mynthang (12) Nongbah (13) Nongkroh (14) Nongjri (15) Nongriat (16) Nongshluid (17) Nonglyngkein (18) Nonglait (19) Ramdiat (20) Saitsohpen (21) Synnei (22) Sinai Mawsynrut (23) Tmar (24) Tyrna (25) Tynrong (26) Tynriang (27) Umniuh (28) Shillong (British area). British areas are called Khasi and Jaintia Hills.^{vii} Under the colonial administration, the Khasi-Jaintia Hills were categorised as ‘Backward Tract’ by the Government of India Act, 1919.^{viii} Political development took place during the British rule in Khasi Hills. In 1923, the Khasi National Durbar was formed to preserve the customs and traditions and to bring about social and political consciousness. From 1932 attempts have been made to establish a Federation of Khasi States to protect the rights, tradition, interest and usages of the people. The Federation of Khasi States consisting of 25 states out of which sixteen were ruled by Syiem, three by Lyngdoh, one Wahadadar of Shella and five Sirdars. The Federation of Khasi States could not achieve their objectives so in 1945-46 the leaders resolved to revive the Khasi State Federation.^{ix} Meanwhile in 1935, the Government of India Act, 1935 categories British states of Khasis into Partially Excluded Area. The Partially Excluded Area came under the control of the Governor and were subjected to ministerial administration, but the Governor can exercise his discretion power. No Federal or Provincial legislature could be directly applied to the area unless the Governor directs it. In 1946, the Khasi Jaintia Federated State National Conference was formed under the leadership of Rev. J.J.M Nichols Roy, a public meeting was held on 2nd August, 1946, at Students field, Jaiaw. The meeting resolved that the Khasi States and the British areas should be united under one administration.



The Political Officer of Khasi States informed the Heads of the Khasi States on 21st June 1947, that the Governor, Agent to the Crown Representative would hold a Darbar at Government House, Shillong, for all the heads of the Khasi States on 14th and 15th July 1947. The meeting could not resolve anything. The Heads of the Khasi State had a separate meeting. On the following day another round of talk was held and as a stop-gap agreement, the Khasi States agreed that with effect from 15th August 1947, all existing administrative arrangements between the Province of Assam and the Indian Union on the one hand and the Khasi States on the other hand shall, with the exceptions noted in the Stand Still Agreement continue in force for a period of two years or until a new or modified arrangements have arrived at between the respective authorities concerned.^x

Federation signed a Stand Still Agreement with the Governor of Assam in July, 1947.^{xi} The twenty five Khasi States signed the Instrument of Accession together with the Annexed Agreement between December 1947 to July 1948. The Khasi States constituted the Khasi States Constitution Making Durbar and it was inaugurated on 29th April, 1949 at Dinam Hall. It was presided over by the Dominion Agent Khasi States and the Governor of Assam delivered a speech.^{xii} A resolution was passed by the Khasi States Constitution Making Durbar on 21st July, 1949, by which they expressed their desire, besides other things, to have the Khasi Jaintia Hills District and the Khasi States to have one administration. The resolution was sent to the drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly.

On the other hand, as per the recommendation of the Cabinet Mission Plan, the Advisory Committee set up three sub-committees which are as follows:

1. North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Area Committee
2. North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan Tribal and Excluded Area Committee
3. Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas in the provinces other than Assam.

The North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Area Committee under the Chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi the then Chief Minister of Assam, which is commonly known as Bordoloi Committee tactfully toured and studied the demands and status of the tribals of undivided Assam. Unfortunately, the Committee could not visit Garo Hills and Jowai Sub-division of Khasi Hills due to bad weather. Rev. J.J.M Nichols Roy submitted a memorandum to the Cabinet Mission, demanding the creation of a political set up where the tribals's would be able to govern themselves. He also

convinced Dr. B.R Ambedkar and Bordoloi the need of autonomy administration. He had enormously contributed in the genesis of sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.^{xiii} The provision of Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India in the initial stage listed the tribal areas as follows:

Part A

1. United Khasi- Jaintia Hills District
2. Garo Hills
3. Lushai Hills
4. Naga Hills
5. North Cachar Hills
6. Mikir Hills

Part B

1. North East Frontier Tract (Balipara Frontier Tract, Tirap Frontier Tract, Abor Hills District and Mishmi Hill District.
2. Naga Tribal areas.^{xiv}

The United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District highlighted in Paragraph 20 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, the Khasi states were not included, but it appears from the discussion in the Constituent Assembly that paragraph 20 was substituted by the following paragraph:

“The United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District shall comprise the territories which before the commencement of the Constitution were known as the Khasi States and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, excluding any areas for the time being comprised within the Cantonment and Municipality areas of Shillong, as formed part of the Khasi State of Myllem”^{xv}

By such amendments the Khasi states become part of Assam. The rulers of the Khasi states did not signed the instrument of Merger but they were being merged within Assam. After the Constitution was adopted on 26th November 1949, the Khasi states unlike other Indian states did not issue proclamation that they have accepted the Constitution of India since they could not reconcile with the provision of Sixth Schedule. They were not merged to form a part of the province of Assam immediately before the commencement of the Constitution of India as they did not sign the ‘Instrument of Merger’. On the other hand, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills also was not merged to form a part of the Federation of Khasi states as visualised in paragraph 4 of the Annexed Agreement which formed a part of the Instrument of Accession signed by the Khasi states. However the Khasi states were pushed inside the framework of the Sixth Schedule to form a part of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District. With the coming into force of the Constitution of India, the Khasi states along with the ‘Khasi and Jaintia Hills District’ were



constituted into a separate autonomous district known as “United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (UK-JHADC)”. Thus by the Constitution, the Khasi States were merged in the state of Assam.^{xvi}

The United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council came into existence on 27th June 1952. It was inaugurated by the Governor of Assam, Jairamdas Daulatram at the Dinam Hall, Jaiaw, Shillong, of undivided Assam for the establishment.^{xvii} On this day people protested against the State Government’s nomination of six members to the District Council which included three non-tribal members. Mr. F. War and Mr. Josingh Rynjah were elected as Chairman and CEM respectively by the newly constituted District Council.^{xviii}

Prior to 1964, Khasi Hills and Jaintia hills were constituted under one administrative unit and also under United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council. However the Jaintias had their own Kings since long and even when they were annexed by the British, they had their own administrative arrangement.^{xix} The movement for the creation of a separate Autonomous District Council for the then Jowai sub-division can be traced back to the time when the Bordoloi committee considered the future administrative set-up of the Hill areas for the establishment of Autonomous District Council. The Jaintias raised the demand of separate Autonomous District for keeping the Jaintia Hills separate from the Khasi states.^{xx} The Jaintias considered that they can better manage their own affairs in all respects if a separate District Council is granted. They also believed that the existing dissension have hampered the smooth functioning of the District Council administration. Beside this the overall majority of Members of the District Council from Khasi Hills (18 from Khasi Hills and from Jowai-sub-division) made it impossible for the Jaintias to protect their own interest.^{xxi} A memorandum was submitted on 1st November 1957 to Shri. Govind Ballabh Pant Union Home Minister, by the Members of the District Council and others representing the people of the Jaintia Hills from the Jowai sub-division of the UK-JHADC on various grounds asking for a separate District Council for Jowai sub-division. Subsequently, another memorandum was submitted to the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru on 30th December 1957 highlighting the advantages of having a separate District Council and the disadvantages of being included in UK-JHADC.^{xxii} Another memorandum was submitted on 8th July, 1961 to the Governor of Assam by the Secretary of the Jaintia Durbar, demanding the immediate

creation of separate District Council for Jowai sub-division. The result of this persistent demand for the need to restructure the administrative set-up for the Jowai sub-division was the appointment of a Commission by the Assam Government known as United Khasi Jaintia Autonomous District Commission, under the chairmanship of G.P. Jarman which is commonly known as Jarman Commission.^{xxiii}

The Jarman Commission after going through 43 memoranda received from various organizations, groups and individuals, recommended the creation of a new Autonomous District Council for the Jowai Sub-Division of UK-JHADC. The commission admitted that there was no good ground to conclude that the people of Jowai sub-division and the Shillong sub-division of the United Khasi – Jaintia Hills District belonged to two separate communities. The commission recommended the creation of a separate Autonomous District. Accordingly, on the 23rd November 1964, vide Notification No.TAD/R/50/64, the Governor of Assam in accordance with the memorandum, which had been placed before the Legislative Assembly of Assam approved to create a new Autonomous District to be called the Jowai District by excluding the Jowai sub-division of the United Khasi Jaintia Hills District with effect from 1st December 1964 and that the boundaries of the Jowai District shall be the boundaries of the Jowai sub-division of the United Khasi Jaintia Hills District. The Governor by an order, No.DCA/1/72.11 dated 14th June 1973 renamed the two Districts as The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council and The Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council.

With the creation of new Autonomous District Council i.e the Jaintia Autonomous District Council and the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, the jurisdiction of KHADC extends to four districts of Meghalaya i.e East Khasi Hills District, West Khasi Hills District, South West Khasi Hills District and Ri Bhoi District. It covers an area of 10443 sq.kms and 2387 villages reside within the jurisdiction. Under KHADC there are 54 Traditional institutes locally known as Hima/Elakas which are the administrative units with thousands of villages having their own administrative and judicial functions. These units are more or less parallel of the Panchayati Raj system prevailing in other parts of India.^{xxiv}

The Autonomous District Council brings the traditional administration into a modern form of administration where the Khasis blend their tradition with the modern system of administration. The Sixth



Schedule to the Constitution of India provides a compact mechanism for the tribal to administer themselves according to their customary practices and traditions while safeguarding their rights and protect and preserve their identities. The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Councils regulate and oversees the tribal traditional political institutions and their activities as well as the economic activities which affect the interest of the Khasis. The Constitution empowers the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Councils various subjects like land, forest, agriculture, village administration, education till primary level, health facilities, connectivity and trade. The District Council is like a mini government with three organs viz. legislative, executive and judiciary. The legislative legislate the laws as per provided in the provision of Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. The executive execute and enforce the laws while the judiciary upholds the laws within the jurisdiction. It is noteworthy that the existence of Autonomous District Council for the Khasi serves as an institution for preserving and protecting their identity and traditions till today. Had not the Autonomous District Council came into existence, many customs and traditions of the Khasis might not be practiced till today. Therefore, the emergence of Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council is a tool to preserve the identity and culture of the Khasis and the Council stands for the welfare of the people.

ⁱ Helen Giri, *Evolution of the traditional social and political ideals of the Khasis and the impact of British rule on these ideals, Proceedings of the North East India History Association*, Shillong, 1980, p. 90

ⁱⁱ *Ibid* p. 93

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid* p.17

^{iv} *Ibid*

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https://khadc.nic.in/archive/historical_background.html retrieved on 21st March 2025

^{vi} Giri, Helen *Op Cit* p 157

^{vii} *Ibid* p 157

^{viii} Nongkynrih, A.K., *Khasi Society of Meghalaya (A Sociological Understanding)*, Galaxy Book Centre: Shillong, 2018. p.121

^{ix} Lyngdoh, M.P.R., *The Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Councils and the Sixth Schedule : Some Critical perceptions* in L. S. Gassah (ed) Autonomous District Council, Omsons Publications : Delhi, 1998. P 181

^x Jyrwa, E., *The Khasi and Jaintia Hills District and the Khasi States within the Framework of the Sixth*

Schedule in L. S. Gassah (ed) Autonomous District Council, Omsons Publications : Delhi, 1998. P 194

^{xi} Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. IX, New Delhi, 1947. P.1008

^{xii} *Ibid* p.184

^{xiii} Doungel, Jangkhongam., *Evolution and Functioning of the Sixth Schedule* in Chaudhury, Suman Kalyan, Sarkar, Sukanta (ed) Autonomous District Council and Tribal Welfare, Delhi : Kalpaz Publication. 2014 p 33

^{xiv} Doungel, Jangkhongam *Op Cit*. p 33-34

^{xv} Constituent Assembly debates, Vol. IX, pp. 1056 - 57

^{xvi} Gassah, L.S *Op Cit* p 202-204

^{xvii} Pariat, Rika Deimaya., *Emergence of the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council* in Jangkhongam Doungel (ed) *Autonomy and Sixth Schedule in North East India*, Delhi: Spectrum Publication 2016 p113

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https://khadc.nic.in/archive/down_memory_lane.html retrieved on 27th March 2025

^{xix} Pariat, Rika Deimaya *Op Cit* p.115

^{xx} Gassah, L.S., *Traditional and Emerging, Leadership Pattern in Khasi Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya* in B.C Bhuyan Political Development of the North east, Part II. Omson Publication, New Delhi, 1992. Pp.61-63

^{xxi} Karna, M.N., L.S. Gassah and C.J. Thomas., *Power to people in Meghalaya*, Regency Publications new Delhi, 1998, p. 121

^{xxii} Pariat, Rika Deimaya., *Op. Cit* p116

^{xxiii} Pariat, Rika Deimaya *ibid* p 117

^{xxiv}

<https://www.khadc.nic.in/archieve/introductory.html> retrieved on 27th March 2025