A study on the Traditional Political Institution of the Khasi

Noblelyne Nongkynrih, B.E. George Dimitrov
Department of Humanities, St Claret College
Lyneirith83@gmail.com, george1sasy@gmail.com

Abstract- The democratic system of governance and administration among the Khasi existed even before the British colonisation. Collective decision-making is an important aspect in the Khasi society. Village could be identified as the political unit at the grassroots level in the Khasi society. For the maintenance of law and order, the society requires certain rules and persons to enforce them, thus this study attempts to examine the various system of administration of the Khasi.

Keywords: Khasi, Village, Dorbar Shnong, Office-bearers, Committee

INTRODUCTION

Meghalaya is a hilly state of North-Eastern India. Meghalaya, which is a Sanskritised word, literally means the “Abode of Clouds”. It is bounded on the north by Goalpara, Kamrup, Nagoan and Karbi Anglong district of Assam, on the east by the district of Cachar and North Cachar Hills, also of the state of Assam and on the south and west is Bangladesh. Meghalaya lies between 85° 49’ and 92° 52’ East Longitude and between 20° 1’ and 26° 5’ North Latitude. The geographical area is 22, 489 sq. kms approximately. The State has now seven Districts viz., (1) The East Khasi Hills (ii) the West Khasi Hills District (iii) The Jaintia Hills District (iv) The Ri-Bhoi District (v) The East Garo Hills District (vi) The West Garo Hills District and (vii) The South Garo Hills District.

The Khasis, Jaintias and the Garos form the major ethnic group of original inhabitants of the State. There are however, other tribes like the Kochs, the Hajongs, the Rabhas, the Mikirs and other minor tribes who are also the aboriginal of the State (Majumdar and Mark 2003: 7).

In the following discussion our focus is on the Khasi society of East Khasi Hills District. As per 2011 census the population of the Khasi in East Khasi Hills District is 317,618 and an area of 2820 square kms. It occupies 12.57 percent of the total area of the State.

Owing to the absence of written records, not much is known about the past history of the Khasi. Researchers and scholars have attempted to find out the origin of the Khasi race and how they came to settle in these hills. But their findings have been only conjecture without satisfactory answers.

The Khasi are known according to the place they live. Those who inhabit the northern lowlands and foothills are collectively known as Bhoi, those who live in the southern tracts are called War and those inhabiting the tracts adjoining Garo Hills are called Lyngngam (Borah et al. 2010: 8).

Khasi society follows the matrilineal system where descent is traced in the female line. A Khasi takes his clan (Kur) name from the mother and therefore it is more important to know the name of the mother than the father as against the case in the patrilineal societies. Each clan claimed to have been founded by an ancestress called ‘Ka iawbei Tynrai’ or the first grandmother.

They practice matrilocal form of residence. Once married the bridegroom goes and live with his in-laws. However, when the youngest daughter marries, she continues to reside in her mother’s house known as iing khadduh.

The Khasi follows the matrilineal ultimogeniture system of inheritance of property which means the youngest daughter inherits the ancestral property. As per custom she is merely the custodian of the property and has no authority to dispose-off or transfer the ancestral property without the consent of her maternal uncle and brothers.

Though women enjoy more privileges in the Khasi society, the male members too play an important role in the society. As a husband and a father, he has the responsibility of bringing up and providing for his family. Gurdon argued that “It is the father who faces the danger of the jungles and risks his life for his wife and children. The maternal uncle only comes when it is a question of life and death” (Gurdon 1907:78-79).
The Khasi, like other tribes, have their own political institution. The Khasi polity was based on the customs, traditions and usages. The idea of Dorbar (collective decision-making) is central to Khasi political system.

For the Khasi, Dorbar was considered as a sacred institution and often called ‘Ka Dorbar Blei’ (‘Blei’ is the Khasi word for God) because they believed that God himself was present in the Dorbar. The Khasi believed that this assembly or Dorbar was extremely powerful and ought to be respected. Bareh affirmed that during the Dorbar meetings, the participants conformed to fixed disciplinary rules of conduct since vociferous and irrelevant exclamations were prohibited. Treating the Dorbar with contempt resulted in excommunication (Bareh 1985:256). In the Dorbar the sovereign will of the people at large held the highest position in the political set up.

In the Khasi society village is known as Shnong. Shnong consists of several domestic groups living in a definite territorial area. These domestic groups belong to different clans. Life in Khasi villages is regulated through norms and a set of rules. Traditionally, every village has sets of rules and regulations to maintain discipline and harmony amongst the residents. Violation of these rules is determined collectively in the Dorbar Shnong. Day-to-day problems in the village are looked into by a group of members selected by the Dorbar Shnong who constitute a council.

The Dorbar Shnong is a very important political institution for the Khasi and Jaintia tribes of Meghalaya. Each Khasi village has its own Dorbar Shnong headed by Rangbah Shnong (headman) and his subordinates and they carry out the day-to-day administration and welfare of the village. The administrative system of the Dorbar Shnong varies from one village to another. Any socio-economic matter of the village is based on the collective wisdom of the members.

Our concern in the present work has been with one such institution in the tribal societies which is the political institution. Members of society enter into different types of relations with each other while acting in different situations. As the situations are socially defined so are the relationships and these are regulated by the norms of the society. These norms are legitimised by the members of the society collectively and collectively they ensure that these norms are adhered to. Non-adherence of these norms become problematic in the society as it threatens the peace in the society. This calls into action the force of the collectivities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature, presented in the following paragraphs deals with the works of sociologists, social anthropologists, scholars from other social science disciplines on the political institution in tribal societies in general and tribal societies in India in particular.

Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940:5) made a distinction between the state and the stateless political systems in Africa. The former was characterised by centralised authority, administrative machinery, judicial institutions and the cleavages of wealth, privilege and status corresponding to the distribution of power and authority. Stateless societies on the other hand, lacked centralised authority, administrative machinery and constituted judicial institutions; and there was no sharp division of rank, status or wealth. They maintained that in both these societies kinship and domestic ties had an important role in the lives of individuals but their relation to the political system was of a secondary order and that only lineage ties establish corporate units with political functions.

Das (1941) in his study of the Maring of Manipur opined that territory, kinship and age provided the three most important bases for groupings of the Manipur social structure. The village (khul) was the local territorial unit in the Maring society and operated as a political unit. According to him the Maring society was an amalgam of a structure of authority based on the succession of generations and principles of seniority defined by an individual’s position in terms of genealogical strata. He observed that the Maring social structure was based upon kin groups and social relations among them centre around kinship.

Sangma (1979) examined the political history and culture of the Garo tribe of Meghalaya and observed that each Garo village was an autonomous political unit. According to him the Nokma was the head and held his office through the right of the a’king which theoretically belong to his wife and her clan. The Nokma played the leading role as a central figure in village activities and represented the village externally. He maintained that the Nokma of the Garo cannot be compared to a chief who exercised his political authority with various social and economic advantages. Structurally the Nokma’s status does not confer on him any distinguishable social rank.
Dutta (2002) maintained that every Khasi Village had its own local tribal assembly called the Village Dorbar. All the adult male inhabitants of the village were required to attend the sessions of the Dorbar. The Dorbar was also responsible for protecting and strengthening the morale of the community.

The review of the various works presented above shows that the villages in the tribal societies were autonomous in looking after their own affairs. They had their own political systems which may vary from tribe to tribe. It is through these systems that the inter-personal relations in the villages were governed and the cases of disputes between individuals were settled.

In view of the above, the present study is carried out in Riatsamthiah village. The village was located in the city of Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya. Though Riatsamthiah in one way could be considered as part of the city of Shillong and part of the Shillong Municipal Board yet traditionally it had always been considered as a village. It is a peculiar feature of the administration in the state that many localities in the urban setting of a city were governed as a village also. The village was part of the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya as well as part of the traditional political institution of Hima Mylliem.

Objectives of the Study:
(i) To understand the structure of the traditional tribal political institution in the villages
(ii) To understand the functions of the Dorbar Shnong

Methodology of Data Collection:
The present work was based on data collected from two sources - primary and secondary. Primary data were collected from the field by the researcher herself. Schedule and interview guide were used as instruments of data collection from the field.

For the secondary sources, the review of relevant literature and collecting of all available published and unpublished books, doctoral theses were consulted.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure:
Sample consisted of 96 respondents (48 males and 48 females) from among the residents. Since the village was divided into a number of localities (Riatsamthiah was divided into 6 ‘blocks’) area sampling technique had been adopted by the researcher in the study. Technique of random sampling was adopted to draw the samples.

Since the number of office-bearers was large the responses were collected from a sample of 14 office-bearers from the village respectively.

This is a descriptive study and the data obtained were analysed and presented in tabular form.

Dorbar Shnong Village Riatsamthiah
Like other Khasi villages, Riatsamthiah also has a village council known as the Dorbar Shnong. The Dorbar Shnong has the responsibility of regulating the conduct of the inhabitants and settling of any disputes arising in the village.

Riatsamthiah consists of the population spread over six localities or blocks. The unity of these blocks was expressed at the level of the village. The Dorbar Shnong consists of all the residents of the village (males and females) who were above 14 years of age. These members sit in a general assembly and deliberate over issues of common concern.

General Assembly:
Normally, the general assembly was convened annually or biannually. Ten days before the expiry of the term of the sitting Council the general secretary convened the general assembly. The agenda for the meeting was prepared by the General Secretary and circulated to every household before the commencement.

The meeting was presided over by the Rangbah Shnong. In such meeting the members enjoyed freedom of speech and expression; they could give suggestions and views and could also ask questions and clarifications relating to financial matters. Decisions on administrative matters were taken collectively after long and detailed deliberations.

Before the selection of new office-bearers, the Rangbah Shnong would leave the chair and the assembly would then select someone from among themselves to preside over the proceedings. A Nomination Committee of five members would present a panel of names for the various posts (Rangbah Shnong; three Assistant Rangbah Shnong; General Secretary; two Assistant General Secretaries; Treasurer;
and two Advisors) before the assembly for its consideration. This nomination committee was constituted by
the outgoing Council before convening the general assembly for this purpose. Two of its members were
from the Council while the remaining three members were elderly people from the village who had the
reputation of being experienced and ‘efficient’. Free and frank discussion was permitted till a consensus
emerged on one of the names in the panel for each post.

These ten office-bearers along with twenty other persons (one Block-leaders; one representative’s
one from each of the six blocks; two representatives from the women’s organisation; two representatives
from the youth organisation; two representatives from the sports and cultural club; two Co-opted members
of the Dorbar Shnong) constitute the Council.

The general assembly also selects a Working Committee consisting of Rangbah Shnong, three
Assistant Rangbah Shnong, General Secretary, two Assistant General Secretaries, Treasurer, and two
Advisors. The Working Committee was lower in status than the Council. However, the tenure of the
members of the Council and the Working Committee is coterminous i.e., three years.

The general members voluntarily came forward to be office-bearers, council members, committee
members and members of organisations and no persuasions had to be made on them.

Meetings of the Council
The Council meeting was held once in four months but it could be held more often whenever the
need arose. The meeting was convened by the General Secretary and presided over by the Rangbah Shnong.
All matters relating to the welfare and administration, law and order concerning the village were discussed
in the Council meeting before it was brought to the meeting of the Dorbar Shnong. It also deliberated on
matters relating to the working of different committees and the organisations in the village.

The Council granted permission to those organisations that wished to organise programmes in the
village. It also sanctioned funds to these organisations for organising programmes in the village.

A council member who failed to attend the Council meeting for three consecutive times without
valid reasons could be removed from the office.

Meetings of the Working Committee
The meeting of the Working Committee could be convened whenever any emergency arose in the
village. All emergency matters that required immediate decision were taken care of by the Working
Committee and reported to the Council.

Structure and function of the Dorbar Shnong
Each office-bearer of the Dorbar Shnong was entrusted with various duties for the smooth
functioning of the village. They were responsible for the welfare of the village as a whole. It may be
mentioned that all the office-bearers performed their tasks voluntarily.

Rangbah Shnong
The Rangbah Shnong was overall in-charge of the administration of the village. He was responsible
for the general well-being of the people in the village. After his selection by the general assembly he was
issued a sanad of recognition by the Syiem of Hima Mylliem (this village fell under the jurisdiction of Hima
Mylleim) which was followed by his appointment as the Village Headman by the Khasi Hills Autonomous
District Council (KHADC). Issue of the sanad by the Syiem gave him legitimacy under the customary laws
of the Khasi society while his appointment by the KHADC legitimised his position by the State under the
provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

The Rangbah Shnong presided over the meetings of the Council as well as of the general assembly
of the Dorbar Shnong. Maintenance of law and order in the village was one of his main duties. He was
responsible of issuing certificates of residence as well as ‘no objection’ certificate to a person who shifted
residence to another village.

Transaction of any private or public property in the village could be carried out only through his
consent and prior knowledge. No public event could be organised in the village without his permission.

Assistant Rangbah Shnong
There are three posts of Assistant Rangbah Shnong in the Council, each representing two of the six
blocks. It was important that each Assistant Rangbah Shnong was a resident of either of the two blocks
represented by him. Each Assistant Rangbah Shnong was a chairman of one of the committees of the Dorbar
Shnong. They assisted the Rangbah Shnong in the discharge of his duties. It was their duty to ensure peace and order in the blocks represented by them. In case of dispute between the residents of the block the Assistant Rangbah Shnong in-charge of the block had the first responsibility of settling the matter immediately.

They had the responsibility of ensuring that all house owners in the village registered their tenants and no one could rent out premises without their permission. Such tenants had to produce a certificate issued by the village they had shifted from. A house owner failing to register the name of his tenant was liable to pay a fine of Rs. 500 to the Dorbar Shnong.

**General Secretary**

Meetings of the Council and the general assembly were convened by the General Secretary and the agenda for discussion in the meeting of the Dorbar Shnong was prepared by him. He kept record of the proceedings of these meetings. All the documents and the records concerning the administration of the village were kept under his custody. He had to present the annual reports on the activities of the Dorbar Shnong in the meetings of the general assembly.

The General Secretary had to liaison with the various departments of the state government as well as those of the District Council. He had to apply for development funds to the governmental agencies and the elected representatives of the Legislative Assembly and the District Council and receive the funds on behalf of the village.

He had to represent the interests of the village in the meetings called by the state government and report to the Council about the business transacted in such meetings. It was his duty to be present whenever any inspection of the village was conducted by the state government officials.

**Assistant General Secretary**

There were two Assistant General Secretaries to assist the General Secretary. They had the responsibility of helping the General Secretary in all matters relating to the welfare of the village. The General Secretary could also assign them duties during his absence.

**Treasurer**

The Treasurer maintained all the accounts of the Dorbar Shnong. All monthly subscriptions collected from each household were handed over to him by the block-leaders. The main purpose of the monthly subscription was to meet the expenses with regard to development works and for organising programmes in the village. The Treasurer had the responsibility of maintaining the receipts and expenditures of the Dorbar Shnong. He, by no means, could give money to any member or organisation for the purchase of commodities or for any other purpose without the approval of the Council. All reports on financial matters were given by him in the general assembly of the village.

**Block-Leaders and Assistant Block Leaders**

The Block-Leaders along with the Assistant Block Leaders were under the supervision of the Assistant Rangbah Shnong. They were responsible for maintaining peace and order in their respective blocks. They had the responsibility of informing the Assistant Rangbah Shnong and the Secretary of the respective Committee whenever problem arose in a particular block.

Block Leaders, with the approval of the Council organise programmes like community feasts, music concerts, competitions, etc., in their respective blocks. One Block-Leader said that apart from these activities, he had taken the initiative of collecting donations from each household of the block to help the poor and the sick. However, a prior approval of the Council was necessary for such fund-collection drives.

**Role of the Committees**

There were three committees in the village viz., Sanitation and Development Committee, Vigilance Committee, and Bereavement Committee and their secretaries were appointed by the Working Committee. Each Committee was vested with some specific responsibilities.

**Sanitation and Development Committee**

This Committee was responsible for the maintenance of roads, water sources, sanitation and electricity in the village. Any matters relating to public welfare such as construction and repairing of footpath, drains, streetlight etc, the Sanitation and Development Committee had to inform the General Secretary about the work required to be done in the village. An assessment of the nature and volume of the work had to be submitted while seeking the funds for the work. The General Secretary would in turn forward the letter to the Council for permission and if the assessed expenditure was within the capacity of the Dorbar...
then funds would be granted for the work. In case of shortage of water, damage to streetlights, blockage of public drains and cleaning of the village roads, the members of the village would inform the Secretary of the Committee to look into these problems.

The committee was responsible for ensuring sanitary conditions in and around the village. The Committee made sure that the village roads were swept regularly and the domestic waste was carted out of the village to a disposal place. The Committee along with the Dorbar Shnong conducted a cleaning drive once every year in which all the residents of the village would participate. This kind of collective labour for cleaning the village was called ‘Ka Pynkhuid Shnong’. On this particular day all shops would remain closed and vehicles would not be allowed entry in the village. This practice was known as ‘Ka Khang Shnong’. Participation of at least one member from each household in such activities was compulsory. In the evening all the participants in this exercise were treated to a community feast in each block.

Vigilance Committee

Vigilance Committee was responsible for maintaining peace and order in the village. All matters relating to conflicts and disputes in the village were referred to this committee. Residents of the village were supposed to inform the Secretary of the Committee any case of disputes or conflicts between individuals or group of individuals in order to settle the matters immediately. A resident of the village involved in any such case was let go in the first instance with a warning. But such a person was summoned by the Committee for explanation in case the act was repeated. The committee would examine the act involved and if his reasons were still acceptable the person would be given a chance after the accused tendered an apology but if the reasons were not justified the guilty was liable to pay a fine of Rs. 500 to the Dorbar Shnong. A habitual offender could be expelled from the village by the Dorbar Shnong.

Restrictions were put on certain types of behaviour of the residents e.g., noise-making on the streets at night, gathering in groups, hanging around the street corners and consumption of alcohol in public. The Committee could punish anyone found violating these rules.

Bereavement Committee

Whenever a death occurred in the village the Bereavement Committee was responsible for making arrangements for the funeral of the deceased and to assist the bereaved family during the period of mourning. It was important for the relatives of the deceased to inform the respective Block-leader who would in turn inform the Secretary of this Committee to make public announcement in the village in this connection. The Bereavement Committee was responsible for providing the bereaved family all the necessary commodities like chairs, benches, cooking pots, water, etc., required for the smooth conduct of the funeral ceremony.

The Committee would arrange for the digging of the grave and help in making other arrangements in the graveyard. The Committee would also collect donations from each household with the help of the Block-Leaders. Of course, those who went from door-to-door for collecting donations were remunerated by the Committee. For immediate expenses, however, the Committee would draw an advance from the Village funds and refund the same after the donations were collected.

While discussing the functioning of the Dorbar Shnong and various Committees it was evident that under various situations the residents of the village interacted with their members. We wanted to find out the experiences of the residents in this regard. Tables I - III discuss the responses of our respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>89.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>99.99</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

89.58 percent of the respondents (ordinary members) had approached the functionaries of the Dorbar Shnong and various Committees in different connections. 10.41 percent of the respondents had never approached any functionary for any kind of work. The respondents in this category did not themselves meet any functionary but this does not mean that no one from their household had ever met any functionary for
anything. As a matter of fact, some member or the other from every household did meet the functionaries for some work or the other on behalf of the household.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Nature of work</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>02.32</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1+2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1+3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>02.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1+4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>09.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1+5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>04.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1+6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>02.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1+2+3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1+2+4</td>
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<td>1+2+3+5</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>1+2+4+7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>02.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>99.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Note: The numerals in column “Nature of Work” stand for the following: 1 = issue of residential certificate; 2 = sanitation work; 3 = for introducing the tenants; 4 = disciplinary matters; 5 = seeking permission for construction/renovation of the house; 6 = seeking permission for piling of construction of materials on the road outside the house; 7 = in the event of death in the household].

Majority of the respondents (90.70%) met the Rangbah Shnong to obtain certificates of residence in the village; some respondents (25.58%) met the Assistant Rangbah Shnong and Block leaders for introducing their tenants; some others (39.53%) met the Secretary of Sanitation and Development Committee in connection with new water-supply connections, cleaning of drains, repair of damaged streetlights and construction of septic tanks; 02.32 percent of the respondents sought permission for piling construction materials on the roadside outside the house; some others (04.65%) met the Rangbah Shnong and General Secretary to seek permission for the construction and renovation of their houses; some respondents (18.60%) had informed the Block leader and the Secretary of Vigilance Committee whenever there was nuisance committed in their localities or in the event of any disputes arising in the village; 02.32 percent respondents met the Secretary of Bereavement Committee to inform the occurrence of death in their household (Table 43). It means that the residents were meeting with the various functionaries from time to time for various requirements and purposes. However, in the case of the five remaining cases there was no first-hand experience with the functionaries and that is why their number is not reflected in the total number of respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Easily approachable</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>88.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Difficult to approach</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>99.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

88.37 percent of the respondents (ordinary members) had found the functionaries of the Dorbar Shnong easily approachable. 11.62 percent of the respondents informed that the functionaries were not approachable as they were not available whenever they tried to meet them and they had to make repeated visits to get their work done (Table 44). However, on pursuing the questions it was found that they could meet the functionaries after couple of efforts. However, in the case of the five remaining cases there was no first-hand
experience with the functionaries and that is why their number is not reflected in the total number of respondents.

**Role of the Organisations**

The village has three organisations set up for specific purposes: (i) a women’s organisation known as the Riatsamthiah Women Social Welfare Organisation (RWSWO), (ii) a youth organisation known as the Seng Samla Riatsamthiah (SSR), and (iii) a sports and cultural club known as the Riatsamthiah Sports and Cultural Club (RSCC).

**Riatsamthiah Women Social Welfare Organisation (RWSWO)**

Riatsamthiah Women Social Welfare Organisation came into being in 1978. The organisation was run by an Executive Committee which held the office for a period of two years. The Executive Committee comprised of the President, Vice-President, General Secretary, Assistant General Secretary, Organising Secretary, Assistant Organising Secretary, Publicity Secretary, Assistant Publicity Secretary, Treasurer, two Advisors, two executive members, and three associate executive members of each block. All office-bearers were elected by the female adults of the village in the general meeting of the organisation.

This organisation established a pre-primary school for the children above two and a half years of age. A female teacher hired by the organisation was paid the salary from the fund. It also established a crèche for the children of working mothers of the village and about twenty children used to go there when we conducted the fieldwork. The monthly salary for these female workers was disbursed from the fee collected by the crèche and also by the Social Welfare Department.

Programmes such as fete, food festival, etc. were also organised by this organisation in the village for fund raising. Children’s Day was celebrated on the 14th November every year for all the children below the age of 14 years. They felicitated students who passed their Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) and Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate (HSSLC) examinations. They also took part in night patrolling whenever the Dorbar Shnong required their services.

**Seng Samla Riatsamthiah (SSR)**

The youth organisation or the ‘Seng Samla Riatsamthiah’(SSR) played an important role in the village. Their main objective was to unite the youth of the village and to maintain law and order in the village. The motto of this organisation was ‘Tehsong’ (unity), ‘Kyntiew’ (uplift) and ‘Tyngshain’ (shine). The Executive Committee of the SSR consisted of President, Vice-President, General Secretary, two Assistant General Secretaries, Organising Secretary, Assistant Organising Secretary, Publicity Secretary, Assistant Publicity Secretary, Treasurer, Advisor and some other executive members. The office-bearers held office for a period of two years. The youth of the village elected the office-bearers in the general meeting of the organisation.

Many programmes were organised by this organisation in the village in order to bring about unity among the youth of the village. It also organised fund-raising programmes for the poor members of the village. Games and sports such as football, basketball, and marathon were organised by the SSR in collaboration with the Sport Club, competitions such as singing and dancing under various categories for children, youth and elders were also organised and prizes were distributed to all winners.

SSR usually received its funds from various sources e.g., from the Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), Member of the District Council (MDC), Directorate of Art and Culture, Intensive Sports and Youth Programmes (ISYP) and also from the Dorbar Shnong.

**Riatsamthiah Sports and Cultural Club (RSCC)**

The main intention of the Riatsamthiah Sports and Cultural Club (RSCC) was to encourage, motivate and to protect the youth of the village from all social evils such as alcohol, drugs, gambling etc. The office-bearers of the Club consisted of the President, Vice-President, General Secretary, Treasurer and Advisors. All Block Leaders and 7 co-opted members were the executive members of this Club. The office-bearers of this club held the post for a period of two years. The election of office-bearers was carried out in the general meeting of the Club and all the members of the village elected the office-bearers. The club had various sub-committees which comprised of the Football Committee, Cricket Committee, Basketball Committee and Indoor Games Committee. Each committee had a Secretary in it.

The Club organised indoor games such as badminton, table tennis, carom and outdoor games such as marathon, football, cricket, volleyball and basketball. All indoor games were organised in the Community Hall or ‘Ka ling Dorbar’ of the village and outdoor games were carried out in the field outside the village.
Riatsamthiah week was organised by the Club and all the members of the village took part in the different activities.

Apart from sports, cultural programmes such as debate, singing, dancing, drawing, fancy dress and skit competition were also organised. Prizes were distributed to the winners in these competitions.

The Club received its funds from the Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), Member of the District Council (MDC), Directorate of Art and Culture, Intensive Sports and Youth Programmes (ISYP), Sports Department, Dorbar Shnong and the special donors.

Conclusion

The idea of collective decision-making is very important in Khasi society. It can be seen in the kinship institution and also in the political institution. In the kinship institution it is seen at the level of the lineage and in the political institution it is seen at the level of the village or a conglomeration of villages. Our concern, of course, was not with the kinship institution *per se* but with the political institution. Village could be identified as the political unit at the grassroots level in the Khasi society.

Decisions were taken collectively in a general assembly (*Dorbar Shnong*) of the male adult population in the Khasi society. Traditionally women were not allowed to be members of the *Dorbar Shnong* in Khasi villages. *Dorbar Shnong* was concerned with maintaining peace in the village by resolving disputes among the people and ensuring the observance of norms, traditions, and customs of the society. Protection of the boundaries and natural resources of the village was also a major concern.

REFERENCES


