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## Tribal's Perception on Governance of Village Council (Dorbar) System: A Case Study of West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya State

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### *Abstract*

The traditional local governance system is as old as the history of humanity but only recently it has entered into the broad academic discourse due to different societal setting exist in different societies. The author tries to argue that due to the presence of illiteracy, poverty, inaccessibility of communication facilities, the so called tribal elites are governing the society as according to their own will and at the same devoid of traditional customary laws. Therefore, the author tries to address the issues and at the same time provide the suggestive measures for reform in order to have a better governance at the Village council (Dorbar) system in the State of Meghalaya.

*Key Words: Governance, Traditional Political institutions, Village Dorbar*

### **1.0: Introduction**

The concept of traditional local governance system is as old as the history of humanity but only recently it has entered into the broad academic discourse. Therefore, the social scientists such as Anthropologists, Historians, Sociologists and Political Scientists have no unanimous decision regarding to define traditional institutions within the realm of social, cultural and economic systems since tradition in any given society is a composite whole. As a passive process, traditions stand for time honored customs and respected beliefs. It is seen as an ideal type construct and a satisfying force that engendered and enforced cultural homogeneity. It refers to

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the collective social inheritance of a particular people, culture, society, group, or collectively and as such, stands as the referent of its collective identity. In this sense, tradition is generally conceived of as the aggregate mass of cultural forms-cast as knowledge, beliefs, practical routines, or texts that are the constituent elements of a culture, handed down from one generation to the next<sup>3</sup>. These classical conceptions of tradition correspond to the conservative Burkean perception of society which views tradition as the accumulated wisdom of the past. In short, traditions have been generally viewed as a force in preventing change, an attitude opposed to progress, innovation, growth and creativity. Andrew Heywood maintains that tradition stands for absence of change<sup>4</sup>; they are frozen in time and cannot be modified.

However, many scholars have criticized the view that tradition is a passive process and stated that the adherents of tradition and traditional institutions often questioned and modified it over time to make it dynamic. Those views that perceive tradition as unchanging and posed against modernity, were already challenged in the 1960s when Reinhard Bendix argued that the idea that the more there is of modernity, the less there is of tradition, was the result of a very exclusivist perception of society<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, Alasdair McIntyre pointed out that a tradition that is living is always an embodiment of continuous conflicts: 'Indeed when a tradition becomes Burkean, it is always dying or dead'<sup>6</sup>. Tradition therefore needs to be seen not in terms of modernity and change, but in the light of certain virtues grasped which have possibilities for the future drawing upon the past<sup>7</sup>. Social Scientists such as Eric Hobsbawm have argued that traditions can actually be invented and constructed, and that what sometimes have been passed off as very ancient tradition, are in fact of quite recent origin<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, traditions, like ceremonials, rituals, and even like nations are not handed down as inert 'rock of ages'; they are activated and reactivated by contemporaries, even invented on occasions for quite novel purposes<sup>9</sup>. Thus, traditions or traditional institutions need not be very old and exist from time

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<sup>3</sup> R. Bauman, "Tradition, Anthropology of", *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, Vol. 23, Elsevier, New York, 2001, p. 15819.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Heywood, *Key Concepts in Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2005, p. 150.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Manorama Sharma, *Critically Assessing Tradition: The Case of Meghalaya, Crisis States Programme*, NEIDS, Shillong, India, 2004

<sup>6</sup> Manorama Sharma, 2004, *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Manorama Sharma, 2004, *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> See E. Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", in Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> E.A. Tiryakians, "Traditions in Sociology", *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, Vol. 23, Elsevier, New York, 2001, p. 15824



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immemorial but can be invented at any historical point of time according to the exigencies of the situation. It can undergo some modifications over time in response to changing circumstances. These changes may be recognized or unrecognized<sup>10</sup>.

In this context, Talcott Parsons defines that the institutions are generalized pattern of norms of prescribed, permitted and prohibited behavior in social relationship for people in interaction with each other as members of the society and its various sub-systems and groups<sup>11</sup>. In the broader sense, institutions are simply rules. As such, they are a foundation for all political behaviour. Some are formal as in constitutional rules and some are informal as in cultural norms but without institutions there could be no organized politics. Indeed in the absence of institutions there could be no organisation at all<sup>12</sup>. Thus in the most general meaning of the term, institutions are defined as constraints or rules that induce stability in human interactions. In this sense, it includes customs, usages, conventions and age old practices of formal and informal social norms. All human societies have developed a variety of institutions which deal with recurrent basic problems in social life. An institution can thus be conceived to be the set of constraints or rules which determine the opportunities and incentives of the relevant actors in a given situation<sup>13</sup>. Thus the scholars unanimously consider institutions as formal bodies articulated and enforced through numerous traditional values which have been universally accepted by the groups. Institutions according to these writers are functional bodies which regulate the socio-political communication among the group for an ideal state of affairs<sup>14</sup>. In short, institutions are the product of needs and experiences of the people as the basis for the systematized form of social life. Moreover, it implies that institutions are valuable human constructs that embody deeply held ideas about right and wrong and about appropriate and inappropriate public behaviour. Institutions are efficient and effective only in so far as citizens comply with their rules and their decisions. Hence, only those institutions that are deeply rooted within a particular society reflect

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<sup>10</sup>Andrey Cantlie, “ *The Concept of Tradition*”, in Moore, R.J, (ed.), *Tradition and Politics in South Asia*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt.Ltd., New Delhi,1979,p.12

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in P.V.Rao, *Institutional Framework for Tribal development*, inter India Publication, Delhi, 1986, p.25.

<sup>12</sup>T.R. Voss, “*Institutions* “, International Encyclopedia of the social and behavioural Sciences, Vol. 11, Elsevier, new York, 2001, p.7554.

<sup>13</sup>T.R. Voss, *Ibid*,2001, p.7561.

<sup>14</sup>John H. Sema, “ *Traditional and Modern Political Institutions of Sumi Naga*”, Ph.D. Thesis, NEHU, Shillong, 2001,p.4



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and embody widely held notions of legitimate authority that can command allegiance and attract compliance<sup>15</sup>.

Further it is necessary to deeply elaborate the functions of institutions which have a close resemblance to those of the traditions. According to Kingsley Davies, institutions are a set of interwoven folkways, mores and laws built around one or more functions. Similarly, Hertzler defines institutions as great clusters established, accepted and implemented ways of behaving socially. W.H.Hamilton opines that institution connotes a way of thought or action of some relevance and permanence which is embedded in the habit of a group or the custom of the people. Institutions fix the confines of and impose forms upon the activities of human beings<sup>16</sup>. From the above observation, it is reflected that traditions give stability and an essential rationality to many institutions. This coherence comes from the value permeated character of traditions<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, institutions may change without affecting the tradition of a set of people and at the same time, traditions reflect a definite value-orientation of a set of people where as institutions are merely functional in character<sup>18</sup>.

Consequently, traditional institutions may be perceived as establishments based on customs and traditions. They are upheld, revered and respected more often than not, especially in the case of indigenous people, for symbolizing the cultural identity of the community they serve. Customs, conventions and values rather than the written word of law are often the driving forces behind actions of these traditional institutions. Values, acceptable and practiced by society, in turn enforce these forces<sup>19</sup>. In other words, traditional institutions include all forms of human institutions which have moral sanctions behind them and are recognised by the society. But it is believed that many of these moral sanctions are often flexible and adaptable in the context of change. S.C. Dube indicates that several traditional institutions are flexible enough to adapt themselves for new purposes with slight structural modifications<sup>20</sup>. Thus political tradition may be understood as a set of convictions and beliefs concerning the political community including

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<sup>15</sup>Anirudh Krishna, "Global Truth and Local Realities: Traditional Institutions in a Modern World", in Surjit Singh and Varsha Joshi (eds.), *Institutions and Social Change*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p.27.

<sup>16</sup>S.N. Ganguly, *Tradition, Modernity and Development: A study in Contemporary Indian Society*, the Macmillan Company of India Limited, Delhi, 1977, p.48.

<sup>17</sup>S.N. Ganguly, 1977, *Ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>18</sup>S.N. Ganguly, 1977, *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>19</sup>Toki Blah, "Traditional Institutions and Urban Governance", *The Shillong Times*, Vol. LIX, No.258, The Shillong Times Press, Shillong 3<sup>rd</sup>& 4<sup>th</sup> May, 2004.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted in P.V.Rao, *op.cit.*, p. 27



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the behaviour of men as a political entity. Political tradition defines how rules ought to be conducted and how the ruled behave towards their rulers<sup>21</sup>.

After explaining the conceptual framework on traditional institution, now it is necessary to examine the governance system. The term 'governance' is an umbrella concept that covers a wide range of phenomena<sup>22</sup>. It refers to a more or less polycentric system in which a variety of actors are engaged in the local public decision – making processes<sup>23</sup>. Many researchers are characterised about the local governance in the field of local public decision<sup>24</sup>, public participation<sup>25</sup> and political role are more varied than they are at the central government level'. Therefore they argued that the local affairs 'are more within reach of the citizen's mind than others' and their involvement may be seen as 'a very important factor in "making democracy work"<sup>26</sup>. From the above discussion of how the traditional political institutions functioned it can be observed that the Khasi traditional political institutions manifest a blend of partial democracy and limited monarchy. It is partial democracy because it encourages the participation of only adult males in the political affairs of the state. This trend is strictly adhered to even today where Khasi states, especially in rural areas are reluctant to allow women to participate in state affairs. Secondly, it is a limited monarchy because the *Syiem's* (chief) powers are to a large extent circumscribed (Gurdon, 1990). He performs important acts only after consulting and getting the *dorbar's* (Council) approval. As such the *Syiem* was not a territorial ruler but was and still is a functionary of his state, his duty being to put into action decisions of the council<sup>27</sup>.

After analyzing the traditional political institution and its governance system, the present paragraph explains about the village administrative system that functions as per Khasi customary laws. The term village administrative system popularly known as Village *Dorbar* is one of the

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<sup>21</sup>R.Bauman, "Tradition, Anthropology of", *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, Vol. 23, Elsevier, New York, 2001,p.15819

<sup>22</sup>Pierre and Peters, *Governance, Politics and the State*, St. Martin's Press, 2000, p. 14

<sup>23</sup>GerryStoker, *The New Politics of British Local Governance*, St. Martin's Press, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup>L. J. Sharpe, 'Theories and Values of Local Government', *Political Studies*, Volume 18, Issue 2, 1970, pp. 41-65.

<sup>25</sup> Wilson and Game, *Local Government in the United Kingdom*, Macmillan, London, 1994, pp. 36-8.

<sup>26</sup> De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Volume 1, Vintage Classics, 1990, p. 68.

<sup>27</sup> Singh, Kynpham, "The Khasi Law on Property", Chattopadhyay, S.K. (ed.), *Tribal Institutions of Meghalaya*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1985, p. 45.



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traditional institutions for the purpose of the present study would mean the age-old socio-political institutions prevalent among the Khasis for maintaining law and order in the society, settling disputes and administering the villages. According to the Khasi tradition, the institution of the *Rangbah Kur* or clan leader has been maintained as the old institution<sup>28</sup>. The Khasi have distinct traditional political institutions, which have evolved from clan based units into village based units and finally to the apex level of polity evolution, that is, *Hima* or state.<sup>29</sup> Khasi polity consisted of a three-tier democratic system of governance with *dorbar shnongs* or village councils at the bottom, *raids* or communes in the middle and *dorbar hima* or state council at the top. The village council looks after the immediate needs of the village and is headed by a village headman, the *raid* or commune is headed by a commune representative designated in different communes by various names and the *dorbar hima* or state council is headed by a representative designated in different states (*hima*) by different names, i.e., *Syiem*, *Lyngdoh*, *Sirdars* and *Wahadadars*<sup>30</sup>.

The *durbars* or councils have no written law relating to composition or functioning but functioned purely on uncodified customary laws and practices, which were more or less binding on all members of the village. The written history of the Khasi people indicates that they had their own traditional political Institutions. The arrival of the British into this region and the subsequent establishment of their system of administration had left practically untouched the traditional administrative institutions of these people from where a fair idea of how they functioned can be inferred. According to Simon (1991:2) the entire geographical area inhabited by the Khasis was called *Ka RiLaiphewSyiem* meaning 'Land of thirty kings' (The Khasi term for *laiphew* means thirty). However, today it is generally understood and accepted that the term *laiphew* does not necessarily mean thirty but rather denotes many. British records indicate that there were as many as 25 petty states at the time of their occupation of the Khasi Hills. These 25 states varied in size and population. Each state was under a traditional head called a *Syiem*, *Lyngdoh*, *Sirdar* and *Wahadadar*.

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<sup>28</sup>[Http://ncrwc.nic.in](http://ncrwc.nic.in) (National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, consultation papers on Empowering and Strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institution/ Autonomous District Council/ Traditional Tribal Governing Institutions in Northeast India, December, 2001).

<sup>29</sup>Kezhaleno Kha Tso, Khasi Women and Electoral Politics; A Study of the Greater Shillong Area, submitted in fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology of North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, 2004, pp. 46-47.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.* p. 47.



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In Khasi society, the *kur* or clan formed the nucleus of all traditional socio-political institutions<sup>31</sup>. The art of politics and governance takes shape at this level when clan matters were entrusted in the hands of an eldest maternal uncle to be addressed. The Khasis developed a distinctive four-tier form of governance with the *hima* (state) at the top, *raids* (communes) at the middle, the *shnong* (village) and the *kur* or the clan at the base<sup>32</sup>. The *durbars* or councils were the highest decision making bodies in the khasi political and administrative set-up. The *dorbars* or councils have no written law or composition or functioning but functioned purely on uncodified customary laws and practices, which were more or less binding on all members of the village. In the present age changes have been seen where in some *dorbarshongs* or village councils have their own written constitutions, rules and regulations<sup>33</sup>. Every stage of administration, from the village to the state, has its own *dorbar* or council. The *dobar* or council was a sacred institution and was called *KaDorbarBlei* or God's council, because it was believed that God Himself was Present in the *dorbar* or council<sup>34</sup>. The Khasi *Dorbar* (council) is conducted very solemnly and decisions are taken unanimously.

As mentioned earlier, the *kur* or clan forms the core of Khasi political institutions. Each *kur* or clan is generally a unit within the political and social framework<sup>35</sup>. Each clan has its own *dorbarkur* (clan council) which is presided over by the *rangbahkur* (clan headman). The *rangbahkur* (clan headman) was elected by the male members of his clan and was also called the *knirangbah* (head uncle) as he was the eldest male member of the clan. At the lowest level, the *kur* or the clan council functioned as an organized political unit<sup>36</sup>. The *RangbahKur* (clan headman) was the spokesman of his clan and together with the *DorbarKur* (Clan Council) managed all internal affairs of the clan. The *DorbarKur* (Clan Council) performs the important

<sup>31</sup>H.Giri, 'Evolution of The Traditional Social and Political Ideals of The Khasi and The Impact of British Rule on The Ideal', Proceeding of the North East India History Association, Shillong, 1980, p. 93.

<sup>32</sup>M.P.R.Lyngdoh, *The Festivals in The History and Culture of The Khasi*, Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1996, p. 78.

<sup>33</sup>War, Juanita, "Status of Women in Traditional Culture", Sen, Soumen (ed.), *Women in Meghalaya*, Daya Publishing House, New Delhi, 1998, p. 76.

<sup>34</sup>HamletBareh, "Ancient Khasi Polity" in Jayanta sarkar & B. Datta Ray (eds.), social and political institutions of the Hill people of north east India, Anthropological survey of India, Calcutta, 1990, p. 76.

<sup>35</sup>M.P.R.Lyngdoh, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>36</sup>Juanita War, 1998, *op.cit.*, p. 21



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function of selecting clan delegates to represent the clan in the electoral college of the *hima* or state. Though the functions and powers of the *DorbarKur* (Clan Council) are limited, it plays a moderately effective role in the political affairs<sup>37</sup>.

Every Khasi village has its own *DorbarShnong* (village council) which plays a pivotal role in the village administration and is presided by the *rangbah/tymmenshnong*, that is, the village headman, who is elected by the adult male members of the village. The village administration is run according to local customs and traditions. A significant feature of a Khasi village administration is that the village headman alone cannot decide on any issue, and that it is only after long deliberations and discussions on all issues before the *dorbar* or council that consensus is arrived at<sup>38</sup>. The welfare of the village such as water supply, health, roads, education etc., is looked after by the village headman and the village council. The village headman looks after law and order of the village and as such performs the dual role of magistrate and police officer in the village administration besides seeing to the payment of tributes to the chiefs or the territorial headman by the villagers<sup>39</sup>.

The largest political unit under a *Hima* or state over which the Khasis wield political authority is the raid or commune. It is a political unit which is a confederacy of villagers that federate into a political system for the purpose of social control and harmonious civil and judicial administration. The raids or communes have their *dorbarraid* or commune council which may be called territorial tribal councils<sup>40</sup>. The *dorbar raid* (commune council) elected its head who is known as the *rangbah raid* (head of commune). Members of the *dorbar raid* consisted of all village headman with additional representatives whenever necessary<sup>41</sup>. The *dorbar raid* looked after all internal affairs of the villages under its jurisdiction but in matters of serious crimes the *Syiem's* (chief) authority was called upon.

The highest traditional political authority of the Khasis is the *syiem* or chief. Several raids or communes form the *hima* or state with an elected chief called the *syiem*. The *syiem* along with other elected officials ruled the Khasi state under the overall supervision of the *dorbar hima*

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<sup>37</sup> P.R.G. Mathur, *Khasi Of Meghalaya – Study in Tribalism and Religion*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1979, p. 67.

<sup>38</sup> I.M. Simon, *Meghalaya District Gazetteers, Khasi Hills District*, Government of Meghalaya Arts and Culture Department, Shillong, 1991, p. 89.

<sup>39</sup> P.R.G. Mathur, 1979, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>40</sup> P.R.G. Mathur, 1979, *ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>41</sup> Juanita War, *op.cit.*, 1998, p. 78.



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(state council). Besides presiding over the *dorbar hima* he also presided over his own council, that is, the *syiem's dorbar* or *dorbar myntri* or council of ministers<sup>42</sup>. Members of the *dorbar myntri* consisted of all elected clan officials like the *myntris*, *lyngskors*, *basans* and *lyngdohs* and were collectively called *kibakhraw* or noblemen<sup>43</sup>. The *syiem* or chief is elected by an electoral college that comprised of the *bakhraws* and *basans* or representatives of clans<sup>44</sup>. In general the *syiem* was elected from a pre-ordained royal clan, the *syiem* clan and hiership to the office of the *syiem* is in all cases traced through the female offspring. In the cases the *syiem* was succeeded by the eldest of his uterine sisters<sup>45</sup>. In the present age changes have been seen where in some *durbars Shnongs* or village councils have developed their own written constitutions, rules and regulations at present days the functioning of these traditional political institutions remain the same with little modifications.<sup>46</sup>

### 1.1: Rationale of Study

In the last five decades, Khasi society has faced a number of challenges, which has led to serious public debates about the role of traditional institutions and its governance system. The debates are not only political in nature but are also rooted in the issue of equity. Traditional institutions face four main challenges:

- The succession to the political office of chieftainship is a major source of conflict among groups belonging to the same clan. The clan council selects an adult male from among themselves as Chief. Due to internal conflicts, there is often more than one claimant to the position, and the ADCs are not able to confirm anyone. The political vacuum at the top has led to confusion in the administration at the local level. In such situations, the ADC usually appoints an acting chief, not necessarily from the particular clan. However, there have been serious allegations about acting chiefs misusing authority by permitting timber contractors to cut trees from community forests, and selling off community lands with rich mineral

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<sup>42</sup>Das, Gurudas (1995): The Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in Transition, Published by Vikas Publishing House. Delhi, p. 98.

<sup>43</sup>H. O.Mawrie, *The Essence of the Khasi Region*, Shillong Ri Khasi Press, 1981, p. 34.

<sup>44</sup>Lyngdoh, 1996, *op.cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>45</sup>Bareh, 1985, *op.cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>46</sup>Bareh, 1985, *Ibid.* p. 52



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resources. This has resulted in conflicts between traditional institutions and ADCs on the succession and confirmation of chiefs, headmen and royalty rights.

- Second, there are cases where chiefs of Hima, in collusion with politicians and timber merchants, have converted large tracts of community forests into private property without the consent of the people of the Hima. These forestlands are registered in the revenue department of the state government, which legitimizes the conversion into private ownership. Further, personal benefits received by those who hold power in the traditional authority pose a threat to the equity of community forestry.
- Parliamentary politics and development schemes of the state are changing political behaviour. Traditional institutions are based on customs and the decision making process is based on consensus. The party-based politics of electing MLAs and ADCs is creating divisions and political factionalism in traditional institutions. MLAs have power over development programmes, and ADCs have control over traditional institutions. Both bodies are legal authorities and have tremendous influence over people in general and traditional institutions in particular. People feel that the leaders of traditional institutions have been politicized and their decisions are no longer fair. In the process, the poor are increasingly becoming marginalised. It is also causing unscrupulous use of natural resources by new emerging elites from the community.
- The excessive interference of the pressure groups in both traditional and modern governance system further weaken and dilute the system of administration at the grass root level.
- Most parts of West Khasi Hills District are isolated and marginalized further day by day due to lack of transport and communication, poor connectivity in electricity and telephone, poor education and health care facility which is the primary duty of the Village Council to carry on but it failed to do that.

Therefore, the tribal communities need a holistic approach to address the problems that affect the people at the grass root level.

## **1.2: Review of Literature**

The researcher tries to study the role of the Village Council and its functioning under the aegis of Khasi customary laws in the traditional political Institutions. There are a number of books written on the traditional political institutions by local as well as non-local scholars from where a fair idea of how these institutions functioned in the past and how they are functioning



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today can be inferred. P.R.T Gurdon's work on *The Khasi*<sup>47</sup> discusses about the socio-political institutions in a sketchy manner but did not explain in detail. Similarly, J. N. Chowdhury's book, *The Khasi Canvas*<sup>48</sup>, presented in different aspects of the Khasi people but has discussed very little about traditional political institutions. Further H. Bareh, in his book on *History and Culture of the Khasi People*<sup>49</sup>, has explained about the traditional institutions functioning since time immemorial but at the same time, he also narrates about the different aspects of the lives of the Khasi. Therefore, the researcher realised that the author did not deal elaborately with the traditional political institutions. In another study on *Khasi Democracy*<sup>50</sup>, has discussed about the evolution of *Syiemship*, the working of *durbar Shnong* (Village Councils, and Hima (State Council). important position held by the chief of the states. However, though the British government retained these traditional heads yet they were required to abide by the advice and directions of the government. Further H. Bareh in his another article, "*Ancient Khasi Polity*"<sup>51</sup> has focused on the traditional political institutions of the Khasi which was based on a strong federal set-up, the *Syiem* being the federal agency, the communes and villages being the federating units. The state came into being as a result of agreements, covenants and contracts entered by the various heads of the communes and units who consented to place the *Syiem* at the top of the union. The final authority thus lies with the *Syiem's* court. Here the author has focused on the powers and functions of the *Syiem*, the role and function of the *durbar* and its impact on imparting and training the art of self-government and creative citizenship to the people.

L. S. Gassahin the book '*Traditional Institutions of Meghalaya: A Case study of Doloi and his administration*'<sup>52</sup> explained that the Jaintia society is a society in transition. In between this transitional period the society still keeps its tradition, its traditional social and political institutions, its culture, usages and such other varied institutions that exist since time immemorial. Today the emergence of new power structure has radically reduced the power of the chief and moreover in many occasions there have tussle between the traditional elite represented by the chiefs and headmen and the modern elites represented by the popular elected MDCs. Further, H. G. Joshi, In his article '*Traditional Institutions and Leadership in*

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<sup>47</sup> P.R.T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, Cosmo Publications, Delhi, 1975.

<sup>48</sup> J.N. Chowdhury, *The Khasi Canvas*, Jaya Chowdhury, Shillong, 1978.

<sup>49</sup> H. Bareh, *History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1997.

<sup>50</sup> H. Bareh, *Khasi Democracy*, Ri Khasi Press, Shillong, 1964.

<sup>51</sup> H. Bareh, "*Ancient Khasi Polity*", in Jayanta Sarkar and B. Datta Ray (Eds.), *Social and Political Institutions of the Hill People of North-East India*, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, 1990.

<sup>52</sup> L.S. Gassah, *Traditional institutions in Meghalaya: A Study of Doloi and His Administration*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 1998.



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*Transition*<sup>53</sup> argued that due to oncoming forces of new administrative set up and modernization process in the field of constitutional administration, the old traditional institutions were in severe stress and strain. These changes had brought immense effects on the power and functions of the traditional institutions and the traditional chiefs. The old traditional values are being replaced by the modern democratic values and ultimately they are being pushed away under the overall control and supervision of the District Council.

A.K. Nongkynrih, in the book, '*Khasi Society of Meghalaya; A Sociological understanding*<sup>54</sup>', presented the micro perspective of various institutions at the village level like kinship relation, economic, political and religious. The author argued that the village council is functioning based on the customary laws which are not codified and its decision is not effective due to the lack of rigidity of the council, lack of proper utilization of developmental grants and lack of accountability.

Erbanoris Jyrwa, in the book; '*Administration of Justice in the Khasi Hills*<sup>55</sup>' (2006), argued that the traditional judicial system was gradually fading away due to the existence of the District Council which is created under the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution.

P. Malngiang in an article, '*The Traditional Durbar System in the Khasi Hills*<sup>56</sup>', mentions about the changing patterns of the Khasi traditional *durbar* system where women and youth are also permitted to take part in the village council or *durbar shmong* in the present time. A.K. Baruah in his paper, '*Ethnic Conflicts and Traditional Self-governing Institutions: A Study of Laitumkhrah Dorbar*<sup>57</sup>', discusses the changing patterns of the traditional political institutions of the Khasi where the representation of women and youth organizations as members of the

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<sup>53</sup> H. G. Joshi, In his article '*Traditional Institutions and Leadership in Transition*', A Mittal Publication, Delhi, 2013.

<sup>54</sup> A.K. Nongkynrih, '*Khasi Society of Meghalaya: A Sociological Understanding*', Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2002

<sup>55</sup> Jyrwa Erbanoris, '*Administration of Justice in the Khasi Hills*', Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2006.

<sup>56</sup> P. Malngiang in an article, '*The Traditional Durbar System in the Khasi Hills*', in A.K. Baruah (Ed.), '*Proceedings of the North East India Political Science Association*', (Fifth Annual Conference, Union Christian College, Barapani), NEIPSA, Shillong, December, 1995.

<sup>57</sup> A.K. Baruah, '*Ethnic Conflicts and Traditional Self-governing Institutions: A Study of Laitumkhrah Dorbar*', Crisis States Programme, Working Paper No. 39, LSE, London, 2004.



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executive committee of the *durbar shnong* exists though this is strictly against the traditional practices. The author has argued about the conflict of values between traditional and modern politics where traditional values are under pressure to accommodate constitutional norms and practices of Indian Democracy.

P.N. Dutta's book, *Impact of the West on Khasi and Jaintias*,<sup>58</sup> and Gurudas Das's article, "Social Change and Traditional Tribal Political System in Meghalaya",<sup>59</sup> have discussed about the impact of British rule on the traditional political institutions of the Khasi where the powers of these traditional heads completely lost their external sovereignty as well as certain internal administrative and judicial powers to the colonial British rulers. The British policies towards the Khasi-jaintia states have resulted in the extinction of *Syiemship* in Jaintia Hills and submission of certain powers of the Khasi chiefs to the British authorities which finally led to the lost of their ancient status. Similarly, S.K. Chaube's work, *Hill Politics in North East India*,<sup>60</sup> deals mainly with the emergence of hill politics and the creation of the District Council in North East India which brought the traditional institutions and their chiefs under the supervision of the modern democratic institutions. With the advent of new modern institutions, the powers and functions of the traditional chiefs were threatened and for this reason, the Autonomous District Councils were never welcomed.

Loukham Devarani in her article on 'Customary Laws for Sustainable Community Development: Descriptive Analysis of the *Khasis* of Rural Meghalaya'<sup>61</sup> argued that the age old customary laws that was practiced by the Khasis since ages are agents for sustainable livelihood and natural resource management due to land and resources belonged to the community and clans. However, with the forces of modernisation and commercialization, the concept of privatization of resources started. The Village Dorbars were not efficient enough to run the

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<sup>58</sup> P.N. Dutta, *Impact of the West on Khasi and Jaintias*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1982.

<sup>59</sup> Gurudas Das article, "Social Change and Traditional Tribal Political System in Meghalaya", in M.N. Karna, L.S. Gassah and C.J. Thomas (Eds.), *Power to People in Meghalaya*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 1998.

<sup>60</sup> S.K. Chaube's work, *Hill Politics in North East India*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1999.

<sup>61</sup> Loukham Devarani in her article on 'Customary Laws for Sustainable Community Development: Descriptive Analysis of the *Khasis* of Rural Meghalaya', presented in International Conference on Agriculture, Food Science, Natural Resource Management and Environmental Dynamics: The Technology, People and Sustainable Development, in March, 2019



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village with active people's participation or conserve the age old customary practices. It is no doubt that these institutions are the storehouse of solutions to many modern day problems. The need of the hour is certain reformations in its functioning as well as capacity building of the people in general and headman in particular so as to enable them to meet the changing needs of the people and function in bureaucratic setting It is then more a question of transforming these institutions. The traditional leaders need to show more leadership in matters related to agricultural innovations, empowerment and capacity building of women and the marginal and landless farmers and safeguarding the rights of the villagers through commercial exploitation of their traditional knowledge, using customary decision making process and laws as far as possible.

Vanhangpui Khobung<sup>62</sup>, in his article 'Local Self-Governing Institutions of the Tribal in North-East India: A Study of the Village Authority/Council' described that in the wake of India's independence from British rule, the tribal's were allowed to have institutions in accordance with their traditional-customary laws and practices. This was done to preserve their cultural identities, interests and allay their fears of exploitation at the hands of the non-tribals. Hence, a variety of institutions dominated by the traditional tribal culture with semi-autonomous and self-managing indigenous local institutions at different level exist. In most cases, these changes have been introduced in response to the administrative needs for the various developmental policies of the state. Village Council plays an important part in economic planning and implementations of policy programs at the grass-root level. However, the author also stated that since time immemorial the women folks are not given opportunity to participate in the functioning of village governments and till date such discrimination continues to exist in the Village Authority/Council. Therefore, in order to effectively pursue the various powers and functions of Local Self-governing Institutions, there is an urgent need to include women in such institutions through amending the existing laws.

Younis Ahmad Sheikh<sup>63</sup>, in the article, 'People's Participation in Local Governance in India' describes about the importance of decentralized governance which have the potentiality that can lead to more flexible, innovative and creative administrative setup. Democratic decentralization is the process of developing functions and resources of state from the centre to

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<sup>62</sup> Vanhangpui Khobung, 'Local Self-Governing Institutions of the Tribal in North-East India: A Study of the Village Authority/ Council', 2nd International Conference on Social Science and Humanity IPEDR vol.31 (2012), IACSIT Press, Singapore, pp.222-225.

<sup>63</sup> Younis Ahmad Sheikh, 'People's Participation in Local Governance in India', Review of Research, Volume 3, Issue 9, June 2014, pp. 1-6.



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the elected representatives at the lower level, so as to facilitate greater participation of people in governance. Such people-centered grassroots level development process not only needs devolution of powers to the rural masses but also involves sensitizing them, particularly the leaders, towards activating them for their own common will, but the major drawback of Indian democracy has been that the participation of citizens in governance was more or less limited to periodic exercise or franchise to elected representatives to the centre and state government. Therefore, decentralized governance is a strategy for all people to enjoy equal rights and is an instrument for building the capacity for economic development as seen in different nations or regions of the world, national governments are following decentralized governance as a strategy to strengthen accountability, political skills and national integration and bringing government closer to the people. In India majority of population resides in villages and a type of environment is required which make this large section involve in the process of rural development and democracy. Again, the author stated that attention should be given to the people's participation in the political and development process at grassroots level which can bring authorities closer to the people and increases transparency and accountability. They felt that there is the need of sensitizing elected representatives at the local level. The 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment has widened the democratic base of the Indian polity. Dr. D Rajasekhar<sup>64</sup>, in the article, '*Local Self-government in India: An Overview*', the author discusses the problems about the disadvantaged groups of women and households belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). To address these problems, large quantities of resources are spent at the local level and several schemes/programmes with considerable budgetary allocations are implemented. However, these programmes have not fully succeeded to take benefits of development to the poor. An important contributing factor for this problem is the non-involvement of the people for whom the programmes are meant. Therefore, the need for micro-level institutions involving the people in formulation, implementation and monitoring of the programmes has been stressed and the introduction of decentralized local self-government in India through 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992 is one or the other way to solve this problem. Thus the decentralized government has the potentiality to bring people centered for rural development but it requires changes at two levels i.e., reform of state agencies towards decentralized local governance, improved responsiveness and participation and another is the rural people, including the poor, need to seize the new opportunities provided.

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<sup>64</sup> Dr. D Rajasekhar, '*Local Self-government in India: An Overview*', *NITTE Management review*; Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore.pp.43-50.



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Ushnata Priya Thapa<sup>65</sup> in the article 'Analysis of Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institution in Sikkim' tried to discuss about the changes took place in the society where women have gained immense position in Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) in the State of Sikkim and suggested various strategies for women empowerment. The author also stated that empowering women through decentralization and 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act is effective and crucial indicator that leads good governance and promotes equality in political system which is taken to be good thing. Rationally decentralization makes government's policy more transparent and foster more accountability at the grass root level. Again the author tries to understand how political power has influence the people of Sikkim that have brought changes in their socio-economic and political status. The author revealed that through the policy of reservation women of Sikkim has made a significant beginning and they are able to address the issues raised by the public which is commendable. This shows that a large number of women are effectively participating, making decisions and taking responsibilities in Panchayat activities. They derive immense support from the family and community members valuable so that the women can be motivated to play the greater role for the betterment of society and enhance their interest, executing with positive action.

Marfo Samuel & Musah Halidu<sup>66</sup> in their article, 'Examining the Position of the Chieftaincy Institution in Modern Political System of Ghana' describes the position of the chieftaincy in Ghana during the pre-colonial period, in which the chieftaincy institution was the main system of governance and adjudication of justice. However, with the advent of modern political system of governance in Ghana and its administration of justice, the chieftaincy institution now plays a subordinating role to the modern state. With this change, some people are of the opinion that the institution has become an anachronistic in contemporary Ghanaian political discourse because the institution at present times is ripped with a number of violent conflicts.

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<sup>65</sup>Ushnata Priya Thapa, 'Analysis of Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institution in Sikkim', International Journal of Social Science and Economics Invention, Published 31 March 2019, pp. 8-12.

<sup>66</sup>Marfo Samuel & Musah Halidu (2018), 'Examining the Position of the Chieftaincy Institution in Modern Political System of Ghana', Journal of Sociology and Social Work June, Vol. 6, No. 1, Published by American Research Institute for Policy Development, pp. 64-72.



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Khaikhohauh Gangte, Mangcha Touthang, Easwaran Kanagaraj<sup>67</sup>, in their article, 'Kuki Traditional Institutions and Development: Role of Village Chiefs in Manipur', discusses about the 'Housa' (Chieftainship) is the oldest form of tribal administration that still works among the Kuki tribes of Manipur. Though in many tribal areas of northeast, it was abolished and replaced by Village Council, Chieftainship still functions as the system of local self government in the Kuki villages of Manipur. In order to deal with them effectively it is necessary to strengthen and empowers chief system, allocation of more funds for development of Kuki areas, special financial assistance for the chief and inclusion of chiefs in the district and state administration. However, it is argued that this system needs to be replaced with more democratic and responsible local governance system similar to that of the Panchayati raj institutions functioning in the rural India. Therefore, the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India should be reviewed at the earliest and the traditional institution of chieftainship should be restricted to ceremonial purposes and to democratize the Kuki society Panchayati Raj institutions with at least a two tier system needs to be introduced. All the efforts should be made to promote awareness among the Kuki people on democratic decentralization and people's participation in development.

Minakshi Keeni<sup>1</sup> et al. (2018)<sup>68</sup> in their article 'Women's Issues in Meghalaya: Role of the Government, NGOs, and the Village Leadership' describes about the conditions of women's living in matrilineal society of Meghalaya State. The authors argued that although the NGOs contribute immensely towards creating the awareness programmes about the various developmental programmes by providing basic education, vocational training for self-employment, legal aids, protection of woman at the grassroots level in remote areas for empowering women. Further, it was found that there may be different perceptions of opinions between the village leaders, government, and NGOs in regard to the eradication of social and women's issues. In order to overcome these problems, the authors argued that there is need about women's representation in the local governance system. The NGOs, SHGs and other pressure groups while conducting awareness programmes on developmental issues and at the same time should give importance to the women being a part of the village councils. In the end, the authors recommended for the inclusion of both men and women in the developmental programmes in order to educate and encourage women.

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<sup>67</sup> Khaikhohauh Gangte, Mangcha Touthang, Easwaran Kanagaraj (2014), 'Kuki Traditional Institutions and Development: Role of Village Chiefs in Manipur', Social Work Journal (Bi-Annual) ISSN 0976-54845 (2) July–December, pp. 46–65.

<sup>68</sup> Minakshi Keeni<sup>1</sup> et al. (2018): 'Women's Issues in Meghalaya: Role of the Government, NGOs, and the Village Leadership', published in International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies, Vol. 6, No. 2, December, pp. 98-107



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From the survey of literature mentioned above it is seen that though there are a number of works on traditional institutions yet no study has been conducted on the traditional institution of West Khasi Hills District in general and village council in West Khasi Hills District in particular.

### 1.3: Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the traditional governance system as it exists in various villages and how it affects the tribal people in West Khasi Hills District.
- To suggest measures towards improvement of an effective governance system at the village level.

### 1.4: Research Questions

- The elite class dominates the positions of headmen and members of executive committee within the village council that hinder the active participation of the common villagers at the village council.
- . The performance of traditional village administration system in West Khasi Hills District is fading out due to the lack of knowledge about culture and traditional practices which eroded the traditional system of the Village Council.
- The traditional governance systems played a significant role in life of the tribal people in West Khasi Hills District; however the modern governance systems also bring many constructive changes in the tribal society.

### 1.5: Research Methodology

The researcher adopted qualitative approach based on Case Study method for understanding the different issues address in the village governance system in West Khasi hills Dsitrict of Meghalaya State. The total 13 participants participated in the study from different backgrounds such as Village Headmen, NGO's Leaders, and Leaders of women organizations and One MDC of District Council.

### 1.6: Analysis based on Case Study

The researcher analyzed the case study on the basis of themes of governance system.

- **Issue Relating to Gender:** The first agenda is about the Gender issue which is one of the important issues now days in India and particularly in the State of Meghalaya. There is an evidence of gender bias exists in our society in terms of role, status, economic, social and



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political activities performed by the various institutions and organizations. Shri Gabriel Wahlang, honourable Member of District Council, Nongstoin Constituency, Shaining Kharbani, Headman Dilingim Village, Nasar Syiem Jahnoh, Sirdar, Jyrngam Sirdarship are unanimously agreed that as per the customary laws, politics is considered as a male domain only, therefore the women are not allowed to become as headman and executive members and also to discuss any issues confronting the village matters at the Dorbar level. They also expressed their views that in the modern times, women are at par with the men in all spheres of life; therefore the customary laws need to modify in order to make our society balance on the basis of consensus. Similarly, various NGO leaders such as Shri Dispetal Sunn, President, West Khasi Student Union, Franklin Roy Syiemiong, President, Khasi Student Union, Nongstoin Circle, Rishot Skhembor Kharbani, General Secretary, Khasi Student Union, West Khasi Hills District, Jestarland Lyngkhoh, President, FKJGP, Rambrai Circle, Shanbor Nongphud, Secretary, FKJGP, Rambrai Circle, Lumlang Kharsyiemieli, President, HYC, West Khasi Hills District, Ready Fernandy Sunn, Secretary, HYC, Nongstoin Circle are unanimously agreed that gender norms and stereotypes of jobs can affect the roles that women occupy in the society. They are often facing bias and discrimination in all spheres of their life. Therefore, the involvement of women in political and civic participation is to make our society gender equality and also to remove all the barriers that disproportionately affect women for the sustainable development of our society. In the end, women organization leaders such as Smt. Pill Byrsat, President Senglongkmie New Nongstoin, and Smt. Mombalynti Lyngkhoh, President, Senglongkmie Nondein are argued that gender inequality is often create inequality in egalitarian tribal society, may rise of rape and crime, and create single motherhood family etc. In order to tackle all the problems in the society, women should allow holding power in the village dorbar. The constitution and Government of India had given equal power both men and women in the political sphere starting from the parliament to the grass root level. Reservation policy for women in the political institutions should strictly adhere so that all types of exploitation and atrocities can be controlled in the society otherwise, the women will not emancipate and empower rather exploitation will continue in the society.

- **Issue Relating to Social issue:** The second agenda of the discussion is about the social issues. The participants are broadly discussed about the important social issues that the society is challenging now a day. These issues are drug and alcohol addiction, poverty, corruption, unemployment, education, sexual harassment in public places, early marriage and broken family. Shri Gabriel Wahlang, honourable Member of District Council, Nongstoin Constituency opined that the Village council is the most powerful institution to tackle the social problems and at the same time to solve socio-economic and



educational and other related social problems that exists in the society. Therefore, there is need to follow stringently both the customary laws and the laws of India for the betterment of our society. Similarly, Shaining Kharbani and Nasar Syiem Jahnoh expressed that the Village Defend Party as constituted by the village dorbar as the main body to maintain harmony in the villages, to control the anti-social elements and to arrest drug & Alcohol addicts and also drug and alcohol sellers in order to tackle these problems in the villages. Further, Shri Franklin Roy Syiemiong argued that the village council has the responsibility to govern and to exercise judicial power to ensure peace and harmony in the village, to uplift the economy standards and also to ensure the economic rights of the people through governmental schemes so that many social problems can solve in our society. Thus, there is a need to conduct awareness campaigns on how to grow and to teach their children in a proper way so that many social problems can be controlled as expressed by the Shri Jestarland Lyngkhoi. Shri Shanbor Nongphud goes extent to say that the village *dorbar* should make stringent laws to control drug and alcohol related problems and issues relating to broken families so that there will peace and tranquility in the society. In the end, the parents should play a vital role to be the role model to socialize their children in a proper manner so that many social problems can be controlled in the village viewed by Smt. Mombalynti Lyngkhoi.

- **Issue Relating to Migration:** Migration is one of the important problems in the society. In the state of Meghalaya, It is necessary to control the migration problem by the village Dorbar. Shri Dispetal Sunn and Shri Franklin Roy Syiemiong expressed that Village council need to follow according to the administrative rule of the Hima 2006. Besides, the village council should respect the rules and regulations to control the migration of the people. Shri. Nasar Syiem Jahnoh opined in this context that the Non- Khasi people are not allowed to migrate from other states to the state of Meghalaya but for Khasi people there is no restriction to migrating from one area to other areas for Job and business. In this context, Smt. Mombalynti Lyngkhoi opined that if any Khasi who wants to migrate they have to produce their residential and character certificate from the previous village and they have to pay the entry fees according to the rate fixes by the village council and the office of Syiem. According to Shri Gabriel Wahlang, under the Sixth Schedule there is a provision for the protection of tribal people, the Non-Khasi people who came to our state for both Business and work, they require labour permit and trading license from the district council, so that they can work in any part of Meghalaya provided that they should furnish their license certificate along with other relevant documents for the permission into any village for work or doing business. Therefore, it requires a universal rule for all the village council should abide by the order of the



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District Council. The NGO's and the pressure groups should not create any sorts of hurdle in this regard.

- **Issue Relating to Developmental Matters:** According to R.Sunn, the village council is responsible to implement the holistic developmental schemes such as, like road, foot path, construction of school building, washing place, construction of Village Dorbar, playground etc. either from the MDC or MLA or from any government departmental scheme. In this context, Shri Gabriel Wahlang explains that the village dorbar should see the optimum utilization of their resources for the development of villages apart from the funds received either from Centre, State and District Council.
- **Issue Relating to the District Council:** In regard to relation with District Council, the members expressed their unanimous views with the following issues:
  - After the village council elected their new headman, the council has to send to the office of Syiem for recommendation.
  - The Syiem recommends and can remove the village headman. If there is vacancy for the post of the headman, it is the Syiem who will look after until the new headman was elected.
  - There should be close relation between the village council and the District Council for the creation of the village council and the headman with due consent or approval from the Office of Syiem.
  - Too much abuse of power politics in district council will disturb the smooth functioning of the village council, therefore, the village administrative bill are needed for uniform implementation of the rules.
  - The headman along the executive member of the village council should know the rules and regulations of the district council in matters pertaining to the village council. On approval of the headman, the villages should elect their new headman and refer to the office of the Sirdar and followed by the district council for its recommendation. To create new village from the original village, there should have the resolution to give permission or no objection certificate to the one who want to create a new village, then the district council will approve with official notification and will be recognized by the government and will enter into the census of the government of India in order to avail schemes. If there is any misunderstanding between the village and office of the Syiem, it is the district council to solve the issues.
- **Issue Relating to Syiemship:**



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In regard to relation with Syiemship, the members expressed their unanimous views with the following issues:

- Although the Village Council is the subordinate body of the office of Syiem but loosely follow the codified administrative rule of the office of Syiem.
- Village Council sometime by pass the rule of the Syiem which will affect their relationship.
- It is the office of the Syiem who authorize for the creation of the new village with proper territory and functions.
- Now a day the Syiem do not have time to visit the village frequently and this lead to the decline of values of the office Syiem.
- Of course the office of the Syiem use to hold the Dorbar Hima once in year but it requires calling for worship to discuss about the rules and regulations of the Syiem.

- **Issue Relating to area of Conflict of Traditional Vs Modern System of Administration:**

Another important agenda of the discussion is about the Conflict of traditional VS modern system of administration. The members are suggested the valuable points under discussion as mentioned below:

- The traditional administrative system should cope-up with the new administrative system without losing its significance.
- The traditional administrative system has less political unlike in the modern administrative system.
- Traditionally, the village council strictly follows religious sanction but not today.
- There is a blend of traditional and modern system of administration is working in West Khasi Hills District without conflict of interest.
- Regarding the mode of election of the headman, most of the villages have adopted the modern method i.e. voting by secret ballot system.
- No fair election in the village council under traditional institution but in modern political system, there is free and fair election. Traditional administrative systems are more independent than the modern system.
- Traditionally the people respect and fear of the village council and even to the member of the village council but now the people are no longer respect and fear of the village unlike modern political institution.

- **Issue Relating to the Promotion of Rural Tourism**



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The second last agenda of discussion is relating to the promotion of village tourism. The members have suggested the following points as mentioned below:

- Villages having tourist spots, the dorbar should seek financial assistance from the government so that it can provide jobs.
- Village council is responsible to develop and maintain the tourist spots by collecting entry fees.
- Both Central and State Governments should provide financial assistance to the village dorbar for setting up rural tourism and also at the same time to modernize the existing tourist places in order to attract tourists outside of the state.
- There is need to promote community tourism because most of the tourist places are having private property of either clan or individual.
- The village dorbar needs to preserve the heritage which exists in the village and try to convert into the tourism village.
- The village dorbar, office of Syiem, District Council and the State Government should create awareness programme for preservation and promotion of tourist places.
- Extending MGNREGS Scheme for Promotion of Rural Tourist Spots.

#### • Issue Relating to the Introduction of Inner Line Permit

The British Government introduced 'Inner Line Permit' on the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act (BEFR), 1873. It is a special permit required by "outsiders" from other regions of the country to enter the three states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram in North-East India. It is a travel document required by outsiders, including people from other states of the country while visiting to these three states. Recently, the Central government decided to extend the ILP to Manipur state in December, 2019 to allay fears of the people of the northeastern state after the introduction of Citizens Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019. In reaction to the fear of implementation of CAA and also with fear that the Central government will soon implement the National Residents Act (NRA), almost all the pressure groups under the banner of 'Confederation of Meghalaya Social Organisations' (CoMSO) are demanded the implementation of 'Inner Line Permit' in the State of Meghalaya. As a result, the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance under the leadership of Shri Congrad Sangma had passed resolution in the Assembly on December 19, 2019 in consultation with the various Stake holders and the same had submitted to the Central Government for its approval. There is a different viewpoint from the central government in regard to the implementation of ILP Act that the Meghalaya state is a transit state to other North Eastern States and at the same time, its economy is heavily depends on tourism as a main source of its revenue. In reaction to the delay of the Central Government nod to ILP, the

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MDA government passed the modified 'Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act-2016' and Setting up of 'entry-exit points' for restricting entry of outsiders to the state in order to control influx and illegal migration. The Act made a provision for compulsory registration of people such as tourists, labourers, business, education and other purposes before entering to the State of Meghalaya. The provisions of the act will not apply to employees of the centre, state and district councils. In case of violation, the offender will be liable to be punished under the section of 176 or 177 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) 1860. After through discussion, some of the participants argued that it may lead to compromise of peace and security in the state and also affect the fragile demographic imbalance of the state and at the same time adversely impact employment opportunities of the local people. Similarly, the various pressure groups raised their voice that it is necessary to protect the identity and rights of its indigenous people and at the same time to control influx and illegal migration.

### **1.7: Suggestions**

The gender biased social relationship describes the roles of tribal women, their responsibilities and status. The tribal women are perceived as lacking in certain faculties, which explains the role of women being grounded in the domestic spheres, and in turn maintaining male dominated leadership and control in political affairs. These women readily acknowledge an absence of social and communication skills, basic reading and writing skills and social exposure to alternative public activity and political participation. They lack decision making power within their prescribed social roles which ultimately has led to the decision making power in the hands of their own men. Since the state follows matrilineal family system, it is still visible that the rules governing appropriate spheres of activity are prescribed by men, and these tribal women fall in line with these mandates. This perspective demonstrates the social construction of female and male roles that are performed according to existing social norms.

Political activity at the village level seems to fall outside the boundaries of social customary laws and socially acceptable activities for women. Low levels of political socialization by women are in part explained by traditional political institutions where in politics is considered as a male domain. The women are not allowed to discuss any issues confronting the village at the Dorbar level. Lack of access to formal education and restricted social interaction are products of their limited social mobility and it seems to translate directly into their inability to have their voices heard in political sphere. The electoral campaigns also have less influence on women than men. The voting decisions of these tribal women are often counseled. Therefore it is suggested by the investigator that extension education is needed for women to participate in politics. It is necessary to give them training and knowledge, so that they can know what is



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happening in our country. The knowledge is essential for tribal women to be able to participate effectively in political activities and thus enhancing the level of their political socialization.

Earning a livelihood is a priority and women in traditional Khasi society face work related or time constraints in participating in political activities. They often don't attend the meetings at the village level even it is for developmental programmes of the community. They also don't join any organisations at the community level. Thus unless these women are granted more freedom, women's access to political activities will be limited to participation in meeting or participate in community organisation or even in governmental programmes. So it is necessary for them to overcome household dynamics that hinders their political and social activities.

Support and encouragement of the family members is essential to enable these tribal women to participate in political activities. Households that value mutual understanding, respect for others, well raised children, proper education, good social relations and free social interactions can help in increasing women's political socialisation. A free environment of love and support in the family would further the cause of healthy discussions and liberty to express thoughts which will be a mile stone in the political socialisation process.

The women's voting behaviour is strongly affected by their lack of mobility. When the freedom of movement is limited, their ability to make informed decisions is also hindered. They often do not have access to wider and accurate information. This has resulted in spillover effect in terms of their confidence, lack of opinions and solidarity, and access to formal education. Thus the researcher suggests that the desire of these women in social involvement in the community affairs should be respected and encouraged.

Inequitable power relations with respect to political activity have resulted in restrictions on women's opportunities to engage themselves in the public sphere particularly with respect to political activity. The barriers to their participation are rooted in the social norms, perceptions and realities that are deeply embedded in their way of living and knowing. Therefore training, skill acquisition and literacy are indispensable blocks to these tribal women's political socialization and it calls for education to address the gender issues in politics.

To further mobilize the women's opportunities in the political sphere, it is important that the policy makers and NGOs recognise the restrictions on women's lives and encourage more accurate perceptions and expressions of valuing, validating and facilitating women's multiple contribution to society as well their potential for further meaningful and distinctive involvement in the public sphere. More progressive programmes for women's autonomy and improved



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political awareness need to be advocated for women through public policies and NGO interventions.

Apart from, the following suggestions have come after discussion to tackle all these problems as summarized below:

- There is a need for creation of awareness and sensitization programmes with young people to reduce gender inequality reduce gender-based violence, drug and alcohol related issues and rising of broken families and increasing of single motherhood.
- Law need to review and reform in order to strengthen gender equality and to eliminate gender-based violence and discrimination.
- Legal support services and Legal Literacy with theme 'know your rights' campaigns is necessary to educate women, young girls and other vulnerable populations about their legal rights and to create avenues for redress for human rights violations.
- The state should strictly adhere equal wages for both man and woman in all forms of occupation and services available in both public and private sectors.
- Inner Line Permit is the shield to protect the rights of the indigenous people of the West Khasi Hills District and also in the state as whole.
- If all villages uniformly implement the administrative rule or act of the Syiemship and Sirdarship, there is no need to introduce the inner line permit.
- The village council needs to support the inner line permit in order to protect the dominant of the outsider in all sphere of life.
- It requires the co-operation of the village council to strengthen the ILP.
- It is a dilemma but it is good to protect and to preserve the culture and customs of our people.

## 1.8: Conclusion

Village *Dorbar* is expected to function in accordance to the Codified Customary laws set by the traditional *Nongstoin Hima*. They are the agents for enforcement of customary laws, which were set in such a manner that all were treated equally and that people judiciously utilize the natural resources on which they depend. But, it was when population was less and resources like land and forest used to belong to the community and clans. With time, people have moved away from many of these practices. Changes in land relations and commercialization of agriculture have left the *Dorbar* with limited control over private properties. Weak enforcement, outdated regulations and insensitivity of tribals have weakened the system. The demand for recognition and empowerment of the traditional institutions in part is linked to the poor



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performance of modern institutions of governance. The leaders lack of education and appropriate skills to function in bureaucratic setting and hence could not protect the tribal people from being exploited by the bureaucrats and the relatively well-offs. The need of the hour is certain reformations in its functioning as well as capacity building of the tribal people in general and Village headman in particular so as to enable them to meet the changing needs of the people and function in bureaucratic setting.

As far as Constitutional provisions are concerned, however, there is scarcely any contradiction between the intent in the Sixth Schedule and in the PRI system. In comparison to formal provisions in the Constitution for relatively modern PRIs with a well-defined structure, traditional institutions have an amorphous appearance. This attribute allows them to permeate into the social fabric, often making them indistinguishable from observed social customs. Often, these are quite effective in inculcating certain morals and ethics while keeping incidences of infringement to a minimum, and causing speedy conclusion of trials. The challenge in designing local planning approaches in Meghalaya lies in harmonising the functions and rights of traditional tribal self-governing village institutions with constitutionally approved institutional mechanisms designed for modern development and service delivery. Appropriate changes should be weaved in to make the traditional institutions forward looking, and give them the capacity to address the needs of today's development. Maximising self-governance is critical to empowering people, which will require strengthening of the institutions of governance, and planning at the village level. Therefore, the traditional systems of governance in Meghalaya need to be included in development planning and service delivery, and given specific roles and responsibilities.

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