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SHILLONG: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL JOURNEY

Shillong had been initiated as a place and a space, differentiated from other spaces through a mythical event. This began by giving it a primordial identity. Shillong is not a single place. Over the decades it has spread itself out and subsumed many different spaces and identities. These different identities have often attempted and struggled to maintain their selves even as they were being engulfed and homogenized into a unified urban territory. These contestations have resulted in unique configurations and enclaves that have their own negotiated territories even within the territory of the urban collective called Shillong. This is why we do not see a unique and single tale that shows us how Shillong gradually became the urban hub that we see today. This paper will attempt to show some of these identities and configurations that have led to the formation of a space that is not only noted by the surrounding culture of the Khasis, but also by many other such cultures that have made it their own.

A home away from home for the British imbued Shillong with an occidental air which made the inhabitants exclusive. The undulating green hills interspersed with groves of evergreens, speckled with wildflowers and pleasant joyful people, of course, made it a gods' abode. Over the years, different groups of people came to Shillong and, to a great extent, contributed to making this already beautiful hill station more wholesome and cosmopolitan. Nature had already blessed this place with so much beauty and bringing this beauty to the world had occurred because of historical circumstances which today could be underlined by portraying what titillated the tourists, and Shillong had so many varied aspects that it could interest anyone. Of course, the problems of urbanization of a smaller, less accessible place was very visible, but as with all the problems that beset the town over time this, too, was gradually being addressed, as the quantum of need manifested itself on the resident's ethos, through legislations or individual efforts.

Col. Henry Hopkinson, agent to the Governor General, with his team, located an area for the soldiers and staff of the East India Company as a refuge from the sweltering heat of the summers and the incessant rains of

Cherrapunjee. The landscape and the profusion of the familiar flowers like phlox, roses and pansies, reminded them of Devonshire or Sussex. This search was a result of the committee set up to look for a more central and a better location for the British to administer their territories in Assam and East Bengal from. The place chosen was the northern slopes of the Shillong range and the plateau of Iewduh. The *Syiem* (Chief) of Myllem, Melay Singh, ceded 1,626 acres of rent free land and 759 more acres were acquired through cash payment from individual proprietors. The Government, however, felt that it was unfair and unwise to take rent-free land and so in 1963 a revised transfer was made on a transfer of rupees two thousand (Syiemlieh; 1989: 98).

The cantonment was set up at Shillong in 1866. On March 20, 1874 Shillong was made into the Chief Commissioner's headquarters.

The name they had wanted was *Iewduh* but this was discarded because the name of Tokyo then was Yeddo. Initially, the station was known as Laban as that was the first village the people coming from Cherrapunjee noticed and also because that was where the Government Servants' residential buildings were located. The name Shillong gradually took on later, as the importance of the Shyllong God and the associated myth made the name Shillong more viable. The name was derived from the god's name '*U Lei Shyllong*' or '*U Shulong*' (one who came to exist), and was revered by most of the *Syiemships* especially the *Khyriem* and the *Nongkrem Syiemships*, the peak being the tallest in the Khasi and Jaintia lands.

U Lei Shyllong was supposed to have been a still born of a virgin human mother, Ka Lir of Bisei village in the Shillong slopes and the god later came to the mother in his divine form to bless the country with democracy and the rule of justice (Sing, 2002: 37). The myth also related the story of *Shyllong* god's daughter who, while residing in the *Marai* cave, South-East of Shillong peak (Bareh; 1997: 327 also refers to her as *U "Lei Shyllong's* brother). She was spotted by the children and was lured into the society by the Myllem Ngap clan. She was tempted out of her haven by flowers and thus the name *Pah Syntiew*. *Pah Syntiew's* offspring were then established as the first Shillong *Syiem* by the *Myllem Ngap* and other influential clans, who not only gave the *Syiem* counsel but also took over when there was no capable chief at the helm. The Khasi chiefs were referred to as *Syiems*.

The Shillong Kingdom was earlier known as *Ka Hima Sawkher Lai-Sawkher* and the headquarters was located in the South West corner of what is Shillong today, the area opposite Nongkseh. J. N. Choudhury in *The Khasi Canvas* (1998: 258) says this kingdom was called *Ka Hima Shillong*. The Shillong *Syiemship* was an important one and its jurisdiction extended all the way to Beltola and Desh Duimria in Assam. This kingdom had friendly relations with a large number of *Syiems* in the neighbouring regions and the territory extended to the northern Bhoi area. The records show this situation

from 1400-1450 AD, most of the information from the records kept by the Ahom kings. In 1859, the Syiemship was divided into Khyriem and Myllem Syiemships.

The Geography of Space

The British decided to shift from Cherrapunjee as the climate was not conducive to everyday living and a committee was set up in 1862. In December 1863 the British Government bought large tracts of land from the *Syiem* of Myllem and in the year 1864 the district headquarters was transferred to Shillong from Cherapunjee. In the years 1864 to 1866 the Cutchery building and some residential buildings were constructed. The cantonment was established in 1866. All the offices, the Secretariat, the General Post Office, and the Court were envisaged in close proximity. The bungalows of the European officers were clustered round the areas later known as European Quarters as well as many of the other residential buildings at Laban. Col. H. S. Bivar, the Deputy Commissioner, visited in 1866 with the first Khasi Extra Assistant Commissioner U Jeebon Roy, who actually helped him in deciding the place to set up the capital as Shillong.

It was in 1874 that Assam was declared as a Chief Commissioner's province and Shillong, its headquarters and capital. Shillong, including the villages of Mawkhara and Laban, was constituted into a station in 1878 with the area of European quarters, Police Bazaar, Jail road and Cantonment taken on perpetual lease from the *Syiem* of *Myllem*. Rilbung and Kenche's Trace being *Ri Raid* (community land), these lands were called British administered areas. Lachumiere was included within the municipality in 1896. The boundary of Shillong was fixed as Laithumkhrah village to the East, Cantonment and the village of Mawkhara to the West, in the North the Umkhrah river from its junction with the Pondngiem stream through north of Haneng Umkhrah to the point in the river where Mawlai and Mawkhara crosses it. To the South the boundary was made up of the village of Malki, the Government forest and the village of Laban. Outside the municipal area of Shillong there were other Government lands like Risa Colony and Motinagar formerly known as Wahdienglieng and Lumsophoh, respectively, which were to constitute protected forests around Shillong. These were given as settlements to Government servants after Independence.

These tracts were allocated on the advice of the Viceroy Lord Northbrooke who had visited in 1874 and was so impressed by the beauty of Shillong that he ordered that certain tracts be preserved as the green belt to form a fuel reserve for the future and also form the water catchment area. The area below the Shillong peak actually is the source of nine streams, Umiew, Umkhen, Umngot, Umjlieng, Umshyrpi, Umjasai, Um Deingleing, Umtong Syiem and Um Shyllong.

The area known as Lachumiere Hill which was owned by the Nawab of Dacca, was included in 1895. In 1906, the village of Haneng Umkhrach (literally, the short round forest), the newly formed clerical village was included as a part of Shillong station. In 1910, Shillong became a municipality with 10 wards, Laithumkhrach, European Quarters, Jail road and Haveng Umkhrach, Police Bazar, Mawkhar, Mission Compound and Jaiaw, Quallaputty and Southern Mawkhar, Jhalupara Mawprem, Laban and Malki. Laithumkhrach included Hopkinson estate also known as 'priest hill', land to the East of the Government house and St Edmund's Hill (Goswami 1979: 70). In 1931, the Shillong municipality consisted of 12 wards with slight variations in the earlier wards and inclusion of Kench's Trace, Lumparing and Madan Laban. In 1934, Rilbung was included within Shillong Municipality.

The two areas which formed the backbone of the establishment of Shillong was Iewduh, the main market, and the peak area which was established as the cantonment area. There were three villages existing around these two areas, Laban, Laithumkhrach and Nongthymai. The then *Syiem of Myllem, U Melay Sing* ceded lands to the British extending from *Um Jasai* stream flowing round Lumparing slopes from the Shillong peak range between the Red Cross Complex and Garrison ground joining *Um Shyrpi* stream. The *Um Shyrpi* forms the western boundary starting at the Eastern Air Command Complex at Shillong Peak Range towards Elephant Falls and then round Nongkseh and the villages therein. Thus, Shillong lies between 23p 52 N and 91p 54E with an altitude of 1050 to 1990 m above sea level.

The area around the *Wah Risa* stream, East of the *Um Jasai* formed the agricultural complex, with fruit trees, fruit processing unit, seed nursery and flowers and also a Fish Dale watered by this river, existed with slight variations from British times. The *Wah Risa* flowed out to Malki and then the aqueduct bisects, one channel flowing towards the Anjali Cinema Hall and another flowing besides All Saints' Church to the Raj Bhavan estate, this channel being known as *Wah Pomdngiem* emerging around the *Lum Pyngad* sloping between the government dignitaries' bungalows to empty into the *Wah Umkhrach* at Polo Ground.

Another stream starting at the Military hospital complex flows down marking a boundary between the military complex and *Iewduh* running through *Iew Mawlong* and Sweeper's Colony, joining the other stream which also starts at General's Point, and becomes the *Umsohsun* stream below Dreamland Cinema. This stream also empties into the *Wah Umkhrach* at *Wahingdoh*.

The Shillong peak at 1961m lies to the South of Shillong, the Diengei range West of Shillong, the Mawphlang upland and Cherrapunjee on the West and Ri Bhoi district to the North. While Malki, Laban Lumparing-Madan Laban, Kenche's Trace-Rilbung are situated mainly in the northern slopes of

the Shillong range and partly the Umshyrpi valley, Laithumkhrach, European Ward, Police Bazar, Mawkhar, part of Jail Road, Jaiaw-Mission Compound and Mawprem are situated on the Laithumkhrach-Mawkhar upland and lies between 1,430 and 1,450m above sea level. Parts of Jail Road and Mawkhar are on the *Umkhrach* valley and the Umkhrach-Umshiing divide. Nongthymmai is spread out between the *Wah Demthring*, *Wah Nongthymmai* and the *Umkhrach*, while the Shillong Cantonment spreads over the two sides of the *Umshyrpi*.

Shillong has had its share of disasters which nearly broke it, but evolved despite them. There was a plague in 1879 which led to the migration of many people back to rural areas. The earthquake of 1897 was devastating to Shillong, especially remembered since the lake overflowed, the Government Press and many buildings collapsed; there was 48 hours of rain and overall devastation.

The Peopling of the Spaces

Before the coming of the British, the Khasi were living in small villages, consisting of not more than 500 people, practicing agriculture of the slash-and-burn type in the hill areas and wet paddy cultivation on the banks of the Umkhrach river. They also practiced hunting and fishing and also some trading with the people of Sylhet via Cherrapunjee and Langkyrding. The civil station of Shillong was established around Iewduh instead of the slopes of Shillong Peak. The administrative area was the Secretariat Hill overlooking the Ward Lake and the bungalows of the European officials were located in the area encircled by the Bivar road, the area known as the European quarters. The Government House, which is the Governor's House or Raj Bhawan was built in 1903. Surrounding this area were the sparsely populated villages of Mawlai, Laithumkhrach, Mawkhar and Laban which had scattered hutments.

With the establishment of the administrative capital, the sacred land of the Khasis gradually became a cosmopolitan hub. The local Khasis had their own residences scattered all over the whole township. Their tribal neighbours who migrated in were concentrated in certain areas, the people from Nongkrem in Malki, from Mawsynram in Wahingdoh, Mairang in Jaiaw Laitdom, from Cherrapunjee in Raitsamthiah and the Jowai people in Quallapatty (Dkhar; 1981: 76).

The British brought Bengalis from Sylhet and Dacca districts and from Calcutta to assist them in administration, keeping them at the clerical and middle levels while the higher posts were manned by the British. In 1881, the total number of non-Khasis in the district was 2,225 persons out of the total population of 27,522. The non-Khasi population consisted of the members of the regiment, the members of the police force and the administrative staff and what J. P. Singh (1979: 78) calls "other services".

Shillong became a cosmopolitan town with a local population, European administrators, tea planters and those who settled there at retirement. The British in the early years exclusively brought in non-tribal people. Later, more Bengalis, mostly from East Bengal migrated into Shillong. Most were working with the administration, those from West Bengal were mostly in business, Nepalis brought their cattle as graziers and also worked as coolies, Marwaris and small numbers of other business communities came in later waves. The Assamese came as government officials, but mostly they came after Independence.

At the time of the Partition of Bengal, Shillong had become an important commercial center connecting the resource base of the interior of the North-East to that of Assam, through which the ports of Dacca (Dhaka) and Calcutta (Kolkata) could easily be reached. The commercial area of Shillong was Police Bazaar or as the Khasis called it '*Dukan U Pulit*'. The shops were primarily stationary shops run by Gulam Hyder and Sons, Abdul Gaffur and Co., B. N. Dey and Co. and B. K. Bhattacharjee and Sons (who ran the Kamala Book agency which was the only place selling books/magazines and periodicals). The only tea house was run by A. V. Morello. Today Police Bazaar is also called Khyndai Lad (junction of nine roads).

At the time of the Bengal Census of 1872, the population of Shillong was 1,363. The total number of households in the year 1878 was 106 and the population was 2,149 (Saha; 1979: 9). The population recorded in the 1881 census was 4,288 persons (2,225 persons in a total population of 27,522), and in 1891 it was 6,720. In 1901, the population rose to 9,621, in 1911 it was 13,639.

By 1912, when the Partition of Bengal was annulled, Assam was made into a province with Shillong as its capital and more offices were established. The infrastructure improved in terms of bungalows for officers, more medical facilities like the Welsh Mission Hospital, Pasteur Institute, and a Sanatorium, as well as the Legislative Council office. The fruit garden came up under the supervision of C. H. Holder which furthered habitations around the fruit garden and Dhankheti area and at the same time the military lines extended to the 2nd mile along the Shillong Cherrapunjee road causing habitations around that area like that of Umlyngka, Nongkseh and Lummawbah to grow. By 1921, the population of the municipality and cantonment was 17,203, in 1931 it was 26,236. It is thus a surprise to many that the population of Shillong in 1991 became 223,366.

After the Independence of India, there was a large scale migration, mainly from East Pakistan. There was also expansion of residential buildings, vacant lands in Laithumkhrah, Laban and Malki being occupied. The Shillong Municipality and the cantonment area comprising 12 km was already bursting at the seams and post-Independence this growth gathered greater momentum.

By 1961, Mawlai and Nongthymmai had developed and formed two census towns.

The Assamese settlements were found mostly in Bishnupur, Kenche's trace, Motinagar, Forest colony and some scattered settlements in Laithumkhrah, Lachumiere, Nongrim hills and the fruit gardens. The Nepalese, Tibetans and Bhutanese settled at Mawprem and Baarapathar area while the Mizos at Madanriting and Happy Valley. There were the Chinese who were running the restaurants, shoe shops and dentist shops, all concentrated in Barabazar and Police Bazaar. The Sindhis who came mostly got into the readymade garments business, while the Marwaris were wholesale cloth merchants, and also owned oil mills, saw mills, timber trade, plywood industries, flour and rice mills and settled mostly at Bara Bazaar and Police Bazaar with residences at their business outlets itself.

Some Bengalis also were in business and while residing in and around Police Bazaar and Jail road ran grocery shops, departmental stores, selling watches, clothing, medicinal materials, books and running restaurants.

Rilbong was a reserve forest till late 1927, at which time it was with the cantonment authority. In 1928, the Government took over the areas and distributed residential plots to its employees, mostly to the Bengalis. Umpling was a forest area belonging to the Kharkongor clan which was acquired by the then Assam government around 1960 and distributed to the Bengali refugees post the India-Pakistan Partition. Displaced Bengalis settled in the Bhagyakul and New Colony area, too, which belonged to the Kharmawphlang clan (Saha 1979: 20). Small groups of other communities too settled in different areas of Shillong. The Biharis who were mostly cobblers, washermen, butchers, mattress makers, barbers settled in Bara Bazaar, Garikhana, Paltan bazaar, Jhalupara and Laithumkhrah. The Nepalis who were mostly grazers and soldiers also scattered all through Shillong setting up their own establishment.

The cleaners of the town associated with the Municipal Board have been residing in certain fixed areas of the town, Gora Line Colony in Laithumkhrah, Barabazar sweepers' colony and the Quarters of the Cantonment Board. The sweepers were mostly from Punjab, supposed to have migrated as sweepers into the British army as far back as when the capital was Cherrapunjee. Many Punjabis also came as goldsmiths. Much later, people from the Southern parts of India came in as nurses and teachers.

Rabindranath Tagore visited Shillong for the first time in 1919 staying at the Brookside cottage in Rilbong. He came and stayed here with friends after he had lost his wife and needed to find solace in a serene place. He came to Shillong again in 1923 when he stayed at Jeetbhoom, Rilbong, and the last time in 1927 when he stayed as a guest of the Sidli Raja at Laithumkhrah,

Upland Road. He composed his masterpieces- the romantic novel *Sesher Kabita – The Last Ballad*, the play *Raktakarabi – The Red Oleanders* in Shillong.

Subhash Chandra Bose's visit in 1938 resulted in the opening of a branch of the All India Students Federation.

Shillong through history was always looked at as a retreat and all through history the famous and the ordinary tourists sought out its beautiful environment and serenity. The neighbours with whom the Khasis had trade relations also considered Shillong a healthy and pleasing retreat and its people friendly and welcoming.

Connectivity Equations

To get to Shillong from Guwahati, either one had to walk up the steps or walk along Scot Road and the other alternative was to be carried in a conical cane basket fixed by a strap on the head of the local residents. In 1877, with the permission of the *Syiem* of *Mylliem*, a cart road to Guwahati was opened and in 1888 horse drawn *tongas* began plying with a fare of Rs 3 per person for the whole day. The *tonga* service covered 64 miles in a single day. There were 12 stables on the way at a distance of 5 to 6 miles and horses were changed on the way for speed. In 1905, a motorable road was made and motor services and Alvin Cars was the first vehicular traffic in these roads. Between 1878-79 there existed provincial roads connecting Shillong to Guwahati and to Therriaghal, and also District roads to Jowai and Jaintiapur and Nongkhlaw, Moirrapur to Guwahati and another to Symper. There were also two fair-weather roads from *Shillong* to *Nongstoin* and *Shillong* via *Liallynkot* to *Sohrar*. The Guwahati-Shillong road was nationalized in 1949 and was placed under the jurisdiction of the then Assam State Transport Corporation and then Meghalaya State Transport Corporation. The road one way and it was in the early 1960's that it became double-laned. City bus services are a joint private undertaking, the Shillong City Bus Syndicate.

The city is connected to the rest of the country by an airport at Umroi, about 30 Km from Shillong functional from the mid-1970's, though set up in the mid-1960's.

Services and Facilities

The city of Shillong was woven around the market place called Iewduh – the eighth in the Khasi calendar. Chota bazaar 'Iewpamtiah' was set up later to be a prelude to Iewduh, this was held on the 6th day of the week, 2 days before the *Bara Bazaar* or 'large market'. By the time the *tonga* services were introduced and functioning, trade had increased and the two bazaars were amalgamated, though held on their assigned days. The Laban market was set up in 1898 and the market of Laithumkhras was set up in 1930 (Directorate of Arts and Culture 1991: 277).

The Shillong electricity needs were supplied by the Shillong Hydro-electric Co. Ltd., functioning from Bidhan Bhavan opposite the Meghalaya Secretariat with electricity derived from the hydro-electric project situated at the Bishop Beadon Falls. The electricity supply started with 100KW units in 1922. The Umtru Hydel power project was installed in 1957 and in 1965 the Umiam Hydel project came up to generate hydro-electric power to the people of Meghalaya. It was in 1977 power supply was taken over by the state by the Meghalaya State Electricity Board which was formed in 1975. Today the state also sells power to other North Eastern states.

The first piped water supply from 1883 was tapped from the water sources in the areas between the Laitkor and Shillong Peak. Sanitation and water supply was looked after by, firstly by Public Works Department, then the Shillong Municipality in 1923 and the Municipality in combination with Public Health Engineering since 1960 with the PHE taking on most of the responsibility for water supply. The dam on the Umiam-Mawphlang river system is presently the main water supply system of Shillong.

The history of the Office of the Accountant General, Meghalaya, dates back to 1910 when the Office of the Comptroller, Assam, was established at Shillong. It gained the status of an Accountant General's office in 1952 and functioned as a composite Audit and Accounts Office of the then undivided State of Assam. This office has probably been responsible for the greatest cross-section of the Indian population having settled in Shillong.

The hotels and restaurants (like Pinewood, Eee Cee, New India) had been the older ones and now Center-point, Polo Towers, Monsoon Hotel, Broadway, Prakash Hotel, Yalana hotel, Tripura Castle Heritage hotel, and many others have come up. In the last few years more hotels and guest houses have mushroomed with the more liberal tourism policies.

Sacred Spaces

In keeping with the newly-acquired British world, the world-view also underwent a change and Christianity became the new fashion. Babu Donrai Deingdoh was the first Khasi Christian in Shillong where, due to a misunderstanding with the Welsh Mission Church, set up a chapel at *Umsohsun*. However, The Mawkhar Church was set up in 1874. In 1904, the Legislative Assembly decided to open an English service at Police Bazaar. The All Saints' Church was started in 1876 and was relocated in its present site opposite the State Museum in 1902.

All Saint's Church was set up in 1876 and in the present site in 1902 while the Laban Church was set up in 1905.

The German Catholic Priests started their mission from a small cottage near Crinoline falls, which was called 'Villa of Good Hope', which was the

precursor to the Catholic Church with the buying of the plot of land for Rs 5,000. This piece of land was known to the local people as *U Lum Tynkong* and to the English as the Marion Hill and the Hopkinson Forest, named after its proprietor General Hopkinson, and it had the village of Laithumkhrach to its East. The Cathedral Church of Mary Help of Christians, the seat of the Bishop, the principal place of worship of the Catholics of the Shillong was set up by the first Catholics, the Salvatorians of Germany in 1891.

The Nepali Church at the Laithumkhrach (police) beat house on the junction on the way to Lummawrie was established in the year 1947 by two missionaries Ms. Beth Alinger and Ms. Eliane Crane. This is a fully independent Nepali Church for the minority Nepali Christian living in Shillong.

The Presbyterian Church at Laithumkhrach beat house is on the way to Fire Brigade opposite which is the Laithumkhrach Presbyterian School. At Fire Brigade, tucked between the road leading off to the Nongrim hills and a side road to Nongthymmai, is situated the Seventh Day Adventist Church and School.

The *Seng Khasi* had been the sole socio-cultural platform for the Khasis since 1899. This Association was named '*Ka Seng Samla Khasi*' (the Khasi Youngmen's Association) and was made with the purpose of developing the fellow Khasis in mind, body and spirit. In 1901, the *Seng Samla Khasi* came to be known simply as *Seng Khasi*, the Seng Khasi hall serving as the Church came up in the same year.

Muslims have a place of worship in Police Bazar which was initially destroyed in the 1897 earthquake. Soon after, it was set up at Thana Road which still functions. The Laban *idgah* came up, too, and in 1905 the Muslim Union was formed.

The Ramakrishna Mission started functioning by 1929 from a rented building in Police Bazar and in 1934 a plot was bought at Laithumkhrach and it has since developed as an important landmark in Laithumkhrach, today seen opposite Shri P. G. Marbaniang's house.

In 1886, the Mawkhar Mission of the Brahma Samaj was set up and in 1889 the Brahma Samaj bought a place at Police Bazaar which even today functions as a school, library and temple right at the start of the Police Bazaar, the central plaza of Shillong.

The Shillong Buddhist Temple, in the Polo Ground area, was formally inaugurated on May 4, 1947. It was established on 8 November 1874, soon after the formation of the Chief Commissionership of Assam in Shillong. Initially, the Brahmos numbered around 25, most of them well-placed government servants who hailed from Sylhet and neighbouring districts in Bengal. In later years, Brahmos in Shillong had members such as Leela Roy, Sharada Manjari Dutta, Suvarna Prava Das – then the second woman

graduate of Assam, being instrumental in helping to establish the Jail Road Girls School, as early as 1886, the Lady Keane Girls School and College (shifted from its first premises on Jail Road), Laban Bengali Girls School, Rammohun Mahila Samity and a library run by ladies of the Khasi Brahmo Samaj, Laban.

Mahadev Khola is a famous Hindu shrine dedicated to God Shiva. Situated in upper Shillong this cave shrine is believed to have been revealed to a *Subedar Major* of the 2nd Battalion of the 8th Gurkha Rifles in a dream. Another important religious spot for the Hindus is the Shani temple at the police bazaar G. S. Road.

The existence of such varied religious establishments does showcase the cosmopolitan nature of the place but what is of note is that except for rare occurrences there is the participation of a large cross-section in the religious festivities and a sense of respect for each others' faiths.

Nature's Endowment

Nearly every corner of Shillong and its neighborhood has a beautiful site to show, whether a waterfall or a brook, a lake or just a green spot. On way to Shillong in the southern side is the Umiam Lake formed by the Hydrel project dam set up by damming the river Umiam descending from the Shillong hills. Many of the residents feel that they have arrived home once they reach this point on the road and feel the loss of leaving after they cross this area. It has also become an important tourist site, with a new park having been developed at one spot, besides the view points and the boating spots. More or less diagonally opposite is the *Lum Sohpetbneng*, a hill top held in reverence by the Khasi as the 'Navel of the Earth' or the spot which connected heaven and earth. Soon after leaving Umiam Lake to ascend to Shillong, the area known as Mawlai (three stones) to the right, one comes across the twin waterfalls Beadon (*Kshaid Umhyrpi*) and Bishop (*Kshaid Sunapani*) Falls which has housed the Shillong hydro-electric project. Soon after crossing the main center of Police bazaar is the Ward's Lake (*Nan Polok*). Near the Shillong peak lie the three-rung Elephant Falls (*Kshaid Um Deingpun*). Close to Laithumkhrah is the Spread Eagle Falls thundering into the pool known as ('*Wei Ka Liar*'). On the other side, close to the Happy Valley, in a precarious drop are the Sweet (*Kshaid Wei Tdem*) Falls.

These are mere common scenic locations, a leisurely stroll across most of Shillong reveals picturesque spots, though gradually they really need a dispassionate and discerning eye to locate them. In the hurried world today where many of these spots are covered by the latest developments in town infrastructure, it works more on nostalgia rather than as actual places where people of the town aggregate for leisure.

Learning Spaces

The first Government High school was set up in the year 1878 after U Jeebon Roy, a retired civil servant, deposited a sum of Rs 900 as security for setting it up, the Mission Minor School set up by the Welsh Missionaries in 1891 was converted to a high School and the two were amalgamated under the name Shillong Government High School. The first High School for Girls, the Welsh Presbyterian Girls' High School, was started by the Welsh Missionaries in 1886. This school was later renamed as Khasi-Jaintia Presbyterian School.

St. Anthony's Higher Secondary School, Shillong, was established as an orphanage in 1901 by the Salvatorian Missionaries. The orphanage was taken over by the Jesuit Fathers in 1915. St Anthony's English Medium School started on 1 May 1908 and later shifted to a more spacious building on the 15 August 1911. In 1922, the Salesians of Don Bosco took over the school from the Jesuits and St. Anthony's became a full-fledged High School and in 1932 received recognition from the Authorities. The Loreto Sisters started a school on 1 May 1909 and St Edmund's School started in 1916.

An interesting feature of Shillong is that specific areas had vernacular schools. The Jail Road Boys and Girls School were the earliest more or less at par with the earliest schools of the area. The Laban Bengali Boys' School was set up in 1925, the Girls' School in 1896 and in the present building in 1906. There was also a Bengali Girls' School in New Colony set up in 1957 and also both Boys' and Girls' Schools in Umpling. There was also an Assamese School at Moti Nagar and a Nepali School at Laithumkhrah.

Schooling in Shillong was always considered very good and people would send their children from great distances there. Shillong schools catered to the Tea Garden officer and owners and all the moneyed people of the region. This industry gradually became so lucrative that it became a 'cottage industry' with schools opening up in every cottage. The need for facilitating the students who emerged from these schools was realized with the emergence of many private and semi-private colleges.

St Mary's was established in 1913 by the German Missionaries who were recalled due to the outbreak of the World War and in 1915 it was taken over by the R.N.D.N. Sisters. St Anne's Workroom established in 1916, where young girls were being trained in needle-work was also part of this institution. The Don Bosco Technical School was set up in 1922. The colleges that were started were St Edmund's in 1924, St Anthony's 1934 and St Mary's in 1937. Lady Keane College was the first women's college and it was established in the year 1935 and Synod College in 1965 while the Seng Khasi College was started in 1973. Shillong College was inaugurated on 15th of August, 1956, the Union Christian College in 1952, Sankardev in 1962, Shillong Law College in 1962, and the Post-Graduate Training College in 1964. The St Paul's Minor

Seminary came up in 1962 and the Christ King College Major Seminary was built in 1970. The Shillong Polytechnic was established in October, 1965 under the composite State of Assam.

NEHU was established on the 19 July 1973 at the palace of the Mayurbhanj King, at Nongthymmai. There was another campus at the Bijni palace at Bhagyakul. In 1983, the new NEHU campus at Umshing was inaugurated and presently it is this picturesque site which is the permanent location.

The Indira Gandhi National Open University Regional Centre Shillong was established in the year 1988 initially having the jurisdiction of the entire North East Region of the country. The Indian Institute of Management started in what was the earlier NEHU Mayurbhanj Campus at Nongthymmai in 2008.

Health Care

Medical facilities for the indoor patients were available at the Medical Department since 1881 and this Civil Hospital functioned for treatment and surgery ever since then. The establishment of the Welsh Mission Hospital in 1922 drew most of the people there. The smoking chimney of the boiler unit of the 'Roberts Hospital' as this hospital was commonly known, was the most familiar site in the Western part of the city and Dr Hugh (Gordon Roberts), the creator and developer of the hospital (the name of his successor was also Dr. Arthur R. Hughes), a common household name.

The Pasteur Institute building was completed in 1917 and was one of the first three centers for anti-rabies treatment and mass vaccine production in the whole country.

The Lady Kerr Welfare Centre, set up in 1920's upgraded into a maternity home in 1951 is managed by the Meghalaya branch of the Indian Red Cross Society. Its neighbour the Civil Hospital functioned as a facility for treating in-door patients by the Medical Department of the government since 1881 and it was only in 1964 when it was commissioned and raised to a status of a self-sufficient major hospital.

Ganesh Das Hospital was set up by the Goenka family in 1935 and is still functioning as one of the most frequented maternity hospitals. The same family also set up the Jeevan Ram Goenka Memorial Hospital at the cantonment area.

The Nazareth Hospital was set up in 1959 and has made an immense impact on the medical facility in the Laithumkhrah, Nongthymmai, Dhankheti and Malki areas. In Laithumkhrah, another frequented medical facility is the Ramakrishna Mission Dispensary which has been giving many facilities at subsidized rates.

North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute for Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS) at Mawdiangdiang was set up in 1987 by the Government of India as a premier medical institute to rival the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi.

Presently many hospitals and clinics like the Woodland Hospital in Dhankheti, Bethany Hospital at Fire Brigade, Bethesda Nursing Home in Bishnupur hills, Supercare Nursing Home at Laithumkhrach Beat House, to name just a few, are facilitating the medical care of the ever burgeoning Shillong population,

Recreation and the World of Entertainment

Though the missionaries were linked with the common people, the bureaucracy maintained their exclusivity and did not at all mix with the common people. This is evidenced from statements like, “the upper hierarchy of the administration was British and there was not a dark face to be seen in the Station Club” (Rustomji 1983: 76 in Syiemlieh 1989: 174).

The Indian Tea Association was set up to oversee the interests of the tea industry in the Assam region and having its headquarters in Shillong and the people from the tea industry would be spending their summers here. The other businessmen from Assam and Calcutta would set up residences in Shillong during the unbearable summers of their own areas. Also, the native princes and Zamindars of many an area like, Mayurbhanj, Charkari, Tripura, Bijni, Sidli and Dacca had set up a summer residence in Shillong.

In the British times, the most important entertainment, was the rides. There was the Fuller Ride which started at the short round road near Golf-view cottage which ended near Phudmawrie Bridge covering a distance of about 6 to 7 km. The other was known as the Elliot Ride beginning at McCabe road near the Ridge range.

Drives are still important today and more so with many tourist spots being developed and the older ones being done up for tourists.

Golf, another important pastime, saw its fructification in the beautiful Golf course. The Golf Club was an 18 hole, 70 par golf course which was set up in 1925 in a natural green area near the Polo Grounds.

The music, dancing and socializing found its platform in Shillong Club which was established in 1878. The Club is still functioning as an important socialising hub. Another important hub was the Pasteur Institute Tennis Court and Quinton Hall tennis hall. The other noted socializing hub was the Assam Club of Laban. In each of the localities, the *Durbar* house of the locality served as the social club for the tribals predominantly. Nearly every community had their own cultural centers which gradually became a cultural center for the public, examples of this are the Hari Sabha at Laban, Opera Hall at Thana

Road and Quinton Memorial Hall at the end of Quinton road. These were centers began catering to the Bengali community and of which the last is no longer functioning. A number of Namghars catering to the Assamese community functioned as a club house for the community and platform for the talented within the community. These halls served as spaces for social gatherings, academic pursuits in the form of libraries, recreation hubs as well as for religious festivals and ceremonies, too. The defence areas had some outlets for the Nepali community as a lot of Nepalis were employed in defence. The other recreation hubs were the hotels, restaurants and private clubs, like Eee Cee, etc.

The oldest cinema hall was Kelvin, set up in 1921 by an Anglo-Indian called Mr. Unger. Later halls like Singhanian Talkies, Anjali Hall, Bijou Hall and Dreamland Hall functioned to packed crowds. Still later came the Payal Cinema Hall and many video parlours and gradually the internet cafés.

The AIR, Shillong station was inaugurated on 1 July 1948 by the Governor of Assam Sir Akbar Hydari in the presence of the Chief Minister of Assam Shri Gopinath Bordoloi.

The Butterfly Museum is an important visiting spot. The private collection, which was started in the 1930's by Mr. Sikdar, a pioneer entomologist, comprises displays of butterflies and insects collected from different parts of the world.

Another Shillong group which is making a name outside Meghalaya is the *Lajong* (our own) football club which was set up in 1983. The very fact that this club is making a name for itself is a fitting tribute as football was always a passion among the people of Shillong and earlier nearly every locality had a football field and young boys playing the game was a familiar sight in the evenings. Another game which was very popular was archery, locally known as *tir*, which was very important in Khasi tradition, but it took on the lucrative dimension of gambling and that is how it mostly prevails today. Tiny shops selling the tickets which generally have a slate put up with the results etched on it is a familiar sight in Shillong.

The 'Feel' of Shillong

About 80 miles from Guwahati, as the air starts getting more bracing, one comes across the beautiful Umiam Lake, formed by damming the Umiam river and then onwards, the air lightens and the feeling of fresh hill air comes through. The modern pollution, of course, had started to make its presence in the form of traffic jams and dusty/muddy roads all the way from Guwahati, what with Government six-laning projects and road repairs. However, a sad and ominous tale is told by a pervasive dump stench wafting in at the entrance of Shillong, where official dumpsters exist. This is a dump for everything from household waste to dead bodies, one hears, and if the stench is an indicator, it is a fact. The issue of defective waste management hits you hard and early.

One then enters Mawlai, one of the oldest villages of the Shillong clusters where the quaintness manifests itself in the utterly traditional patterns in buildings and clothes interspersed with the 'haute couture', mostly western, but Indian too, nowadays. If the vehicle carries on down the main National Highway one sees the Roberts Hospital chimney to the left and soon the new Khasi Hills District Council (KHADC) office and the breaking up of the road, one besides the KHADC building leading to Mawprem, Jhalupara through the Hindu Mission temple and orphanage, to the left through the Jeep stand and Quallapatty to Motphran leading to Police Bazaar, on the one hand, and Bara Bazar, on the other. Continuing through the national highway, after the KHADC building to the right one gets to the Hanuman Mandir again to the right, the Marwari zone and then the New Durga Mandir and Iewduh to the left. The road then intersects the road which to the right climbs to the 101 Air Force area and Upper Shillong and to the left through the Military Hospital complex with the Anjali Movie Hall, Bus Stand and Iewduh to the left and the Military Area, the Garrison ground and Civil Hospital to the right. Two roads to the right make loops to Laban, Rilbong, Kenches Trace, Madan Laban, Lumparing, these places set on the hill side with the Upper Shillong range set as a background.

On getting to Civil Hospital a bifurcation to the left again leads off to Police Bazar one through Keating road, other touching the All Saints' Church complex, at the end of which a road to the right careens off to the Governor's House and the European wards area and the Ward's Lake. The straight road meanders through the offices of the Inspector-General of police, the Secretariat, the Courts, the Shillong Club, the Presbyterian Church and joining Police Bazaar next to the old Assembly at Khyndailad point, at which point, as the name suggests, there are roads to the right leading to Jail Road, through Quinton road to Thana Road and Police Reserve, the Sanatorium and Ward's Lake doubling back to the Governor's house. The other road from the Civil hospital follows a straight path through Barik offices, Lady Hydari Park, Malki, Lachumiere and Dhankheti, where it bifurcates, one leading through Assam House, St Peters' School, St Edmunds' School and College, the Fruit Garden complex, while the other leads through the Cathedral, St Anthony's School, Don Bosco, the Laithumkhrah commercial areas, Nazareth Hospital, Presbyterian School and Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church and School to join up with the other road at the Fire Brigade ground. Here, while minor roads move off to the left to the Nongrim hills, Poksheh, Rynjah, Umpling, etc and to the right to Motinagar. The main G. S. Road (Guwahati-Shillong Road) then lumbers up through Nongthymmai, Madanrting to Upper Shillong. At Nongthymmai, the roads leads off to the left to Poksheh and Umpling, while another leads to the largely Defence area called Happy Valley, while to the right a small road leads up to the palace of the Mayurbhanj royalty, what today houses the IIM and earlier NEHU.

Shillong Today: Changes and Problems

Shillong, the capital town with a population of 354,324 (Provisional Population Totals 2011) is the only Class I city in the state of Meghalaya. Shillong's urban agglomeration has witnessed about 20% increase in population during 1991-2001. The growth rate is lower than the small towns of the state. Within the Shillong city (urban agglomeration) area, there is a differential growth, Madanriting is the fastest (85.82% increase) growing area followed by Pynthorumkhrah (61.58% increase). The Shillong municipality area is growing at the slowest rate (0.88%) (Government of Meghalaya; 2005: 24).

As is true of all hill stations, overcrowding has become a besetting problem affecting traffic, causing massive traffic snarls, pollution in every realm. Shillong in all its majesty has largely been able to absorb the problems yet. The very variegated nature of this place itself works out its checks and balances. The very strong community feelings among the local Khasis, minimal division of labour, the hands on interactions used to be a means of maintaining the rules, like the case of the Urban affairs Minister who personally policed an unauthorized dustbin (Mukhim; 2011: 4).

The difficulties have left a mark in the life and worldview of Shillong. The community relations between tribals and non-tribals which were always slightly strained gradually became more soured and many ethnic riots happened since the late 1970's. The fact of economics surely does play an important role with many vocations being dominated by non-tribals and the feeling of being totally subsumed by the non-tribals became very real. The issues were brought into focus by various groups, some emphasizing their distinctiveness as differentiated from the rest of the Indian population. Then, again, they being a princely state, their accession was questionable. The differences were being fanned at different levels and it was felt that outsiders were causing the most pollution (Mukhim; 2011: 4, Ryder; 2011: 4).

Non-violent manifestation was seen in the form of changing the names of the localities and streets with Khasi names instead of the older names. Sometimes even Khasi names had taken on very non-tribal connotations but this was slowly happening. Development strategies suffered due to lack of coordination between local tribals and the non-tribals, the latest casualty being the Community Participation Bill 2011 which, because it was promoting municipal elections, was seen as undermining the Sixth Schedule and local tribal interests, (Staff Reporter; 2011: 1, 3) a point asserted by Ms Mukhim (op. cit.), too.

The need for connectivity with the outside world was felt but the issues of too much of non-Khasi influx was always seen as a threat and any more connectivity was seen as means of more influx. Ever since the 1980s there have been plans but these were always scuttled. Even today more exploitation of natural resources and pollution and influx of course is a real fear (Majaw and Saio; 2011: 4).

Today the pressure of the population is seeing Shillong expanding again with a new project making a connection to the Umroi airport expected to ease the traffic. This project is also seen as a means of easing the housing congestion with the newly-envisaged housing project of New Shillong on the route. This New Shillong project seems to be an expression of the felt need of the times.

Again the new Shillongites have forgotten to walk and therefore are not familiar with many parts of Shillong, the less polluted areas. The complaint of course is, too much traffic—I rest my case! The leisurely pace is of course all but gone but along with the conspicuous consumption the ‘show’ carries on.

Conclusions

Initially, the British envisaged Shillong as a holiday resort and then it was thought of as an effective administrative centre having physical advantage. This situation set the foundation for a gradual multi-ethnic multi-layering of the Khasi world. In the initial stages the non-tribal population especially those who were in administration under the British, lived in their enclaves mostly fixed at Jail Road, Laban, European ward, bits of Laithumkhrach, Jhalupara, Mawprem and Rilbong. As the work spaces were delinked from each other, with the local population more or less focused on the traditional occupations like agriculture and trading and the non-tribals working in various services, a collective identity did not manifest itself initially. Sporadic marital alliances were formed, of course, mostly manifest in establishing business ventures. Post-Independence, the scenario changed and many Khasis got into administration and services and the worlds merged, with hiccups of adjustments on both sides.

The competition for the resources in terms of land and jobs became a reality. This gradually took on bigger dimensions and manifested itself as discontent and violence which erupted in the late 1970's and 1980's. The non-tribal locales became ghettos. Many non-tribal children of the earlier generation found themselves without services with the Government which used to be their mainstay. Others like Nepalese and Biharis who more or less held the monopoly over occupations like dairy farming, found themselves in the downside in the competition from the local tribals. Many found that their cozy worlds were shaken and they started leaving the town. Many shifted because their exclusive domains being infiltrated, like the domain of bakery which was very ‘British’ and now as being transferred to the common realm. One of the best-known bakeries in Shillong “Guidetti Bakery” at Laithumkhrach was formed after Giorgio went in World War I to Bombay to join the Taj Hotel after which he reached Shillong and met Morello, a well-known baker. He found that Morello needed extra hands and thus Giorgio joined him. New spaces started evolving with new orientations to the earlier work. Today, people

who had made money in the neighbouring coal areas were buying property in Shillong. This, the older 'Shillongites' look at as the sign of destruction of the original Shillong ethos.

The world of conspicuous consumption without the development of the infrastructure has caused marginalization and has increased polarization. Areas have developed into slums which were a novel concept in an egalitarian society and in their stead a business community grew who then was in friendly competition with the local business community, which earlier was touched only tangentially by questionable marriage alliances. As people of different communities have formed enclaves in the city, goods and amenities required by them like newspapers, books and food items are found in localized markets near the enclaves so formed.

The essential character of the city is that local shops have a unique character, for example a grocery shop may be selling vegetables, a combination not found in any other city. Traditional food here is majorly non-vegetarian, except for a few groups like the Marwaris and Jains, as a result one can see rows of shops selling chicken, mutton, pork and beef with their choicest wares displayed for all to see. Small corner shops selling an eclectic variety ranging from dried fish, dried Thai fruits, local herbs to baby clothes and hovering in the background a comfortable cat.

For many Shillong is a symbol of what one remembers Shillong as, rather than what it is today. These remembered spaces are imposed on the Shillong of today in a nostalgic mode in writing, in conversation, and wistfully as a possible future. This symbolic orientation often illuminates the comments made by many prominent citizens as they enumerate the problems of Shillong today. Thus, a symbolic and idealized Shillong of the past exists in the hearts and minds of many who are from Shillong. This forces Shillong to live in different times and thus its policies of the future are sometimes based on the thoughts of its past.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have to note my immense gratitude to Late Mr. M. C. Das Talukdar and Mrs Amita Das Talukdar who honed my feeling for Shillong and clarified impressions through the years. The following individuals gave me much important information, Mr. P. Chakraborty, Mrs. Anita Dutta, Ms Geeta Mazumdar, Mrs. S. Roy and Mrs. Monideepa Sen. I must note my gratitude to Dr. Abhik Ghosh who helped me look at Shillong more objectively than I was doing.

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