

Study Tour Report (Smit 2024)

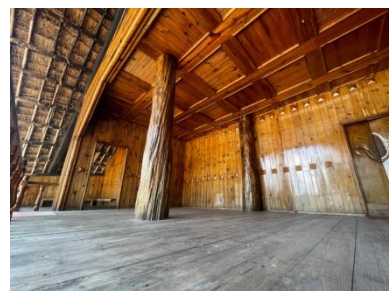
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VIth Semester Students (2024) of the Political Science Department who had been longing to learn something more about the Traditional Political Institution of the Khasis, other than what we were taught inside the four walls of Room 76, finally got the chance to do so on 3rd May, 2024, when a field trip to the '**iing sad**' in Smit (15 km away from the College) was arranged.

The main objective of the field trip was to help in the expansion of the students' knowledge about the Traditional Political Institutions of the Khasis which is a part of the NEHU Under-graduate (B.A.) Syllabus in Political Science (Paper VII).

On 3rd May, 2024, students who had been waiting in bated breath, started to arrive at the college as early as 7:30 in the morning. After what felt like a long wait for the two buses which would take us to Smit to arrive, the students along with the teachers of the Political Science Department left the College at around 9 a.m. We arrived in Smit, a calm and beautiful village, at around 10:50 a.m. Upon entering the grounds of the '**iing sad**', we were first greeted by Sir H. Nongdhar of the Mathematics Department who is a local resident of Smit and who also helped the Department of Political Science in the planning of the field trip. **Kongor A. Diengdoh**, the caretaker of the '**iing sad**' also greeted and welcomed us at the '**tyngkhong**' or the front verandah. Kongor A. Diengdoh who acted as our guide, gave a very interesting and detailed account about the '**iing sad**' and also about the administration of the '**Hima Khyrim**'.

The '**iing sad**' which looks beautiful, is a **divine house** of the Queen Mother of the '**Hima Khyrim**'. The '**iing sad**' of the '**Hima Khyrim**' had been relocated from Nongkseh to Nongkhlieng, from Nongkhlieng to Langkyrdem, from Langkyrdem to Nongkrem and finally from Nongkrem to Smit. As Smit is centrally located, the '**iing sad**' has not been relocated for many years. The '**iing sad**' in Smit was built in 1867. It has been built with the wood of *Pinus khasiana* or the Khasi Pine Tree. No nails were used in the construction of the '**iing sad**' to prevent rusting and damage and also to prevent the entry of evil spirits into the '**iing sad**'. Instead, wooden pegs which are long-lasting were used. There is an oak pillar at the centre of the '**tyngkhong**'. The '**iing sad**' is covered with a thatched roof made of straw which is replaced every year before the festivals take place. Sir Diengdoh also mentions that when the new roof is finished, the very next day, the musicians come to stay in the '**iing sad**' to practice in order to avoid any mistake during the festival as there are 27 beats of drums according to which the dances and rituals are performed.



The most interesting thing we saw at the 'tyngkhong' was the '**kyrwoh**' which is probably the earliest form of encrypted communication or message. The 'kyrwoh' is made of dried bamboo threads which have been encrypted with messages and then twisted to form ringlets. It is interesting to know that the 'kyrwoh' bears a resemblance to the symbol in the red war flags of the Romans in the ancient days. The main person decoding the 'kyrwoh' is the 'Lyngdoh Raid' who in turn gives it to his administrative unit. Upon receiving it, each 'Raid' has to send representatives who are to reach Smit on the same day or same night in which it was sent and they are to carry along with them a white goat or lamb (which signifies purity) for sacrifice on the next day. It is also interesting to know that some museums in Assam have the almost replicas of the 'kyrwoh'.



On the main door, a **corn** or **maize** is crafted which is the insignia or '**ka muhor**' of the 'iing sad'. The corn symbolizes the true beauty of a woman as the beauty of the corn lies inside and is not seen unless the husk is removed, so also the true beauty of a woman lies inside her and not on her physical appearance. The corn represents the purity, dignity, prosperity and collectiveness of women. While dancing, the men circle around the women which signify protection for the women. The main ritual is also performed by the Queen Mother who is a woman. Therefore, women are highly respected and given a high status in the festivals.



As soon as we entered inside the 'iing sad', just near the door, on the right wall, several **white marks** can be seen. Each white mark represents a white goat or lamb which had been brought by each 'Raid' for sacrifice in the previous year.



Sir Diengdoh also took us to the main hall or 'ka shlur' which is the main hall for dance, ritual and praying. It is also the hall where the dances and rituals which are not shown to the public take place. At the front of the hall, there is a very significant oak pillar which is also called the 'Rishot Blei' or God's Pillar. The pillar is covered with a bamboo mat for symbolic purposes only. This pillar is believed to be the means through which the prayers reach God (direct link to God) and only one of the priests and the Queen Mother can touch the pillar.



According to Sir Diengdoh, the kitchen is the '*sanctum sanctorum*' where rituals are prepared at the time of festival. It is in the kitchen where the main ritual which is performed by the Queen Mother takes place. The Queen Mother, in the kitchen, prepares the rituals which are to be handed over to the 'Lyngdoh' or the Priest during the festival.

The Syiemship is a three-tier traditional political institution which consists of the Headman or the 'Rangbah Shnong' at the Village level, the 'Lyngdoh' at the 'Raid' level and the 'Syiem' at the 'Hima' level. The 'Lyngdoh' and the 'Syiem' are selected by the 'Dorbar'. The 'Rangbah Shnong' was also selected, but he is now elected because of political intervention. Only small crimes like petty theft, small disputes, drunkards who create chaos and people who create nonsense in the village which are brought to by the villages and Raids to the court of the 'Syiem' are tried by the him. Mild punishments like cleaning the

whole village for a time period is given to the offender. However, there is also a small jail on the grounds of the 'iing sad' in Smit.

When asked about how modernity and the introduction of the Autonomous District Councils have affected the Syiemship, Sir Diengdoh replied that there had been no affects on the powers and functions of the 'Syiem' and the administration of the Syiemship in the 'Hima Khyrim' because there is a strict adherence to the rules, traditions and customs in the 'Hima Khyrim'. Unlike other Himas, the 'Hima Khyrim' is still intact because there is direct lineage from the mother's side and because identity is preserved.

We have learnt a lot of things about the administration of the Syiemship, the culture, customs and traditions of the Khasis which have not yet been codified from this visit to the 'iing sad'. Thus, the trip was very significant for each and every student, not only for academic and examination purposes, but it is very important for our general knowledge as well, especially for the tribals as the things that we had learnt from Sir Diengdoh cannot be found even in books.

After leaving the 'iing sad', we headed to the Laitlum Canyons to have our lunch. After resting and enjoying the beautiful view painted by God's own hands, we left for the Rapleng hills to have some snacks and juice. An unexpected situation arose when one of the buses broke down and we had to wait until the mechanic arrived to fix the bus which resulted in our late departure from Rapleng. We finally left Rapleng at dusk after the bus was fixed. We were further delayed by the bad and never-ending traffic jam of Shillong, but we all enjoyed ourselves by singing our hearts out and dancing in the bus. Our trip was concluded when we reached the College at around 7:00 p.m.

