

**GARD POLITY - A STUDY IN THE PROCESS
OF INTEGRATION**

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DECLARATION

Certified that the material in this dissertation submitted to the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, has not been previously submitted by anyone for any other degree of this or any other University.

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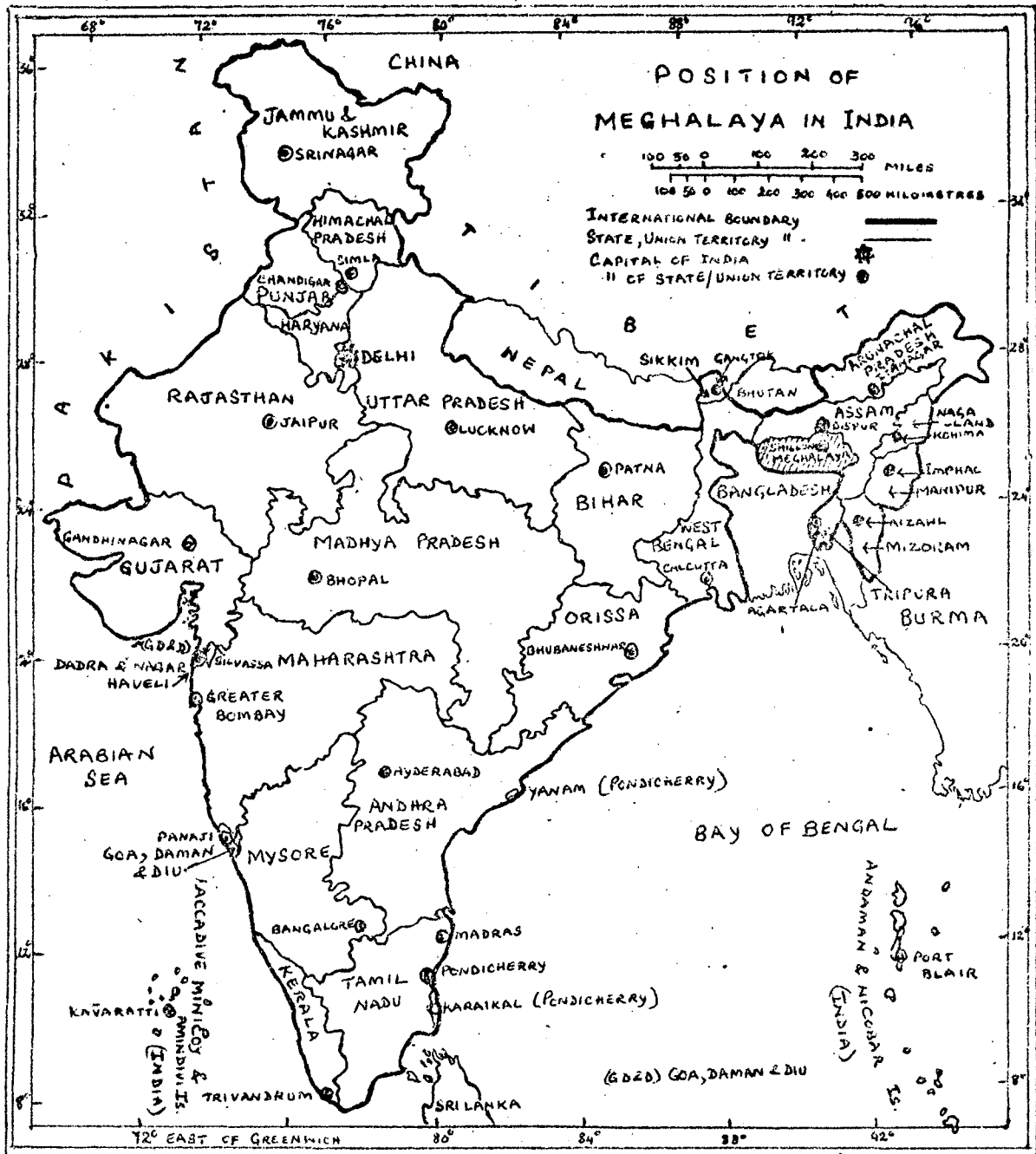
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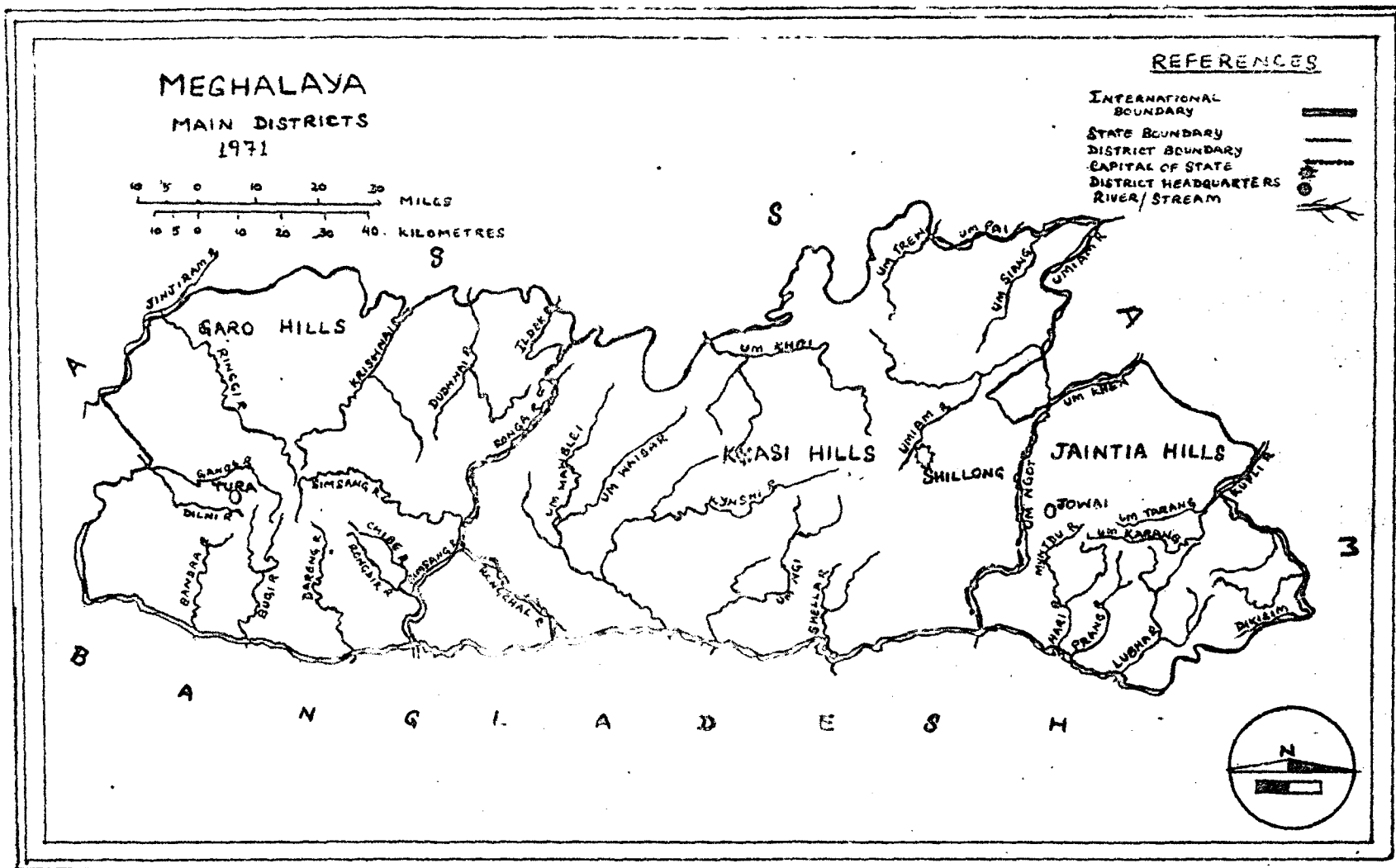
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. APCC - Assam Pradesh Congress Committee.
2. APHLC - All Party Hill Leaders' Conference.
3. CEM - Chief Executive Member.
4. CPI - Communist Party of India.
5. DC - Deputy Commissioner.
6. EITU - East India Tribal Union.
7. EM - Executive Member.
8. GNC - Garo National Council.
9. HSPDP - Hill State People's Democratic Party.
10. INC - Indian National Congress.
11. IND - Independent.
12. JNU - Jaintia National Union.
13. MULF - Meghalaya Union Legislative Front.
14. NEC - North-Eastern Council.
15. PDIC - People's Demand Implementation Committee.
16. SRC - States Reorganisation Commission.



SOURCE: CENSUS OF INDIA 1971 SERIES -13, MEGHALAYA PART IV



SOURCE: CENSUS OF INDIA 1971

SERIES - 13 MEGHALAYA PART X - A & B

PREFACE

The North-Eastern part of India is vital for the country. The Garos form one of the main tribal groups of this region. During the British 'Raj', the Garos lived almost in isolation and their social and cultural structure for a long time remained untouched. With the coming of Christian Missionaries, the situation changed rapidly. With the dawn of independence, the people of this area, who are distinct ethnically from the inhabitants of other parts of India felt the need for autonomy.

The present study attempts at better understanding of the process of integration of the people of Meghalaya in the Union of India. Efforts have been made to see how the process of integration started and took different shapes at different times of history.

The work draws heavily on the available secondary sources. Needless to say, it inevitably profits from the works of many scholars and every care has been taken to acknowledge them. I have also referred to the official documents of the Government of India, available in National Archives in New Delhi.

I owe thanks to many people who have helped me in the preparation and writing of this dissertation. I am extremely grateful to Professor K. Seshadri, my Supervisor, who has taken keen interest in my work and has ensured by his kind persistence, the completion of this dissertation under his

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I have received much help from the Jawaharlal Nehru University Library and the Library of Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi. My thanks are due to the Librarians and the Staff of these libraries for their many courtesies.

I am also much indebted to the various people I have interviewed in Tura, during my field trip, for their willing help in trying to answer my queries.

Finally, I thank all my friends who have time and again inspired and encouraged me in completing my work.

3rd May 1979

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

The problem;

Attempts have been made by both foreign and Indian writers to study the various aspects of the Garos. The previous studies on Garos have dealt mainly with the generalities of their life and culture, and as such, no serious attempt has been made to study the 'polity' of the Garos, how the roots of tradition and other forces have motivated present-day developments.

"Since Indian unity is conceived in terms of conformity and divergence to a great tradition, with its centrality of culture and religion, the integrational crises continues to operate on the attitudinal level."* Since most writers on tribal politics study tribal problems peripherically, their understanding is that 'tribalism' has contributed to stress and strains, uncondusive to the growth of an integrated national polity. Further the growth of detribalisation, according to many, has tended towards political separatism. Still more significant factor is the mention of the role

* Kousar J. Azam: National Integration In India: Some Major Political Aspects. Ph.D. Thesis, Political Science Deptt., Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1972, p.78. (unpublished).

played by Christianity. From an analytical point of view, such generalisation would prove to be a total misunderstanding of the tribal problems and their political attitudes.

In the pre - colonial days when there was hardly any connection with the outer world than the limited 'hat areas', the tribal people felt themselves a separate entity, a people who are distinctly different from their neighbours living in the plains. Tribalism of those days could have been a more appropriate terminology, but, with the spread of education through various agencies, and later, with independence, the process of reorganisation was smooth and fast. Though the tribal culture and social customs were not much disturbed as they were during the British Raj, the people felt their traditional heritage better if a separate State would be granted to them. The very process of the emergence of Meghalaya, is a step in the direction of this integration.

This work is an attempt at presenting greater knowledge and understanding of Meghalaya and its people, particularly of the Garo tribe, by tracing the evolution and emergence of the State within the Indian Federal system and its integrating process. This is possible by preserving their culture and identity and protecting them from economic exploitation.

The study is worked out in five chapters:

Chapter I gives a brief description of the Garos and their homeland, penetration of the British into Garoland, political ecology; Village and Government confederation, effects of British penetration.

Chapter II is devoted to the study of the role of Christianity and education in bringing about changes in Garo society: It's impact and after effects.

Chapter III deals with (A) Participated democracy in Garo Hills: transition from the traditional tribal polity into participatory representative democratic polity. (B) Movement for autonomy: Integration of Meghalaya in the Indian Federal System.

Chapter IV is a study of the political forces of Meghalaya: Party System and Electoral Politics in Meghalaya, 1960-'77.

The concluding chapter deals with questions like - what is the impact of the social, economical and political changes brought about by various factors on the Garos and the people of Meghalaya as a whole? What is their future in the face of expanding communication? What are the measures to be undertaken to safeguard the interests of these people and to ensure their welfare and the autonomy of their social life? These and other aspects of their present and future are discussed in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER I

The Garos and their homelands:

The Garos are a tribe who occupy the District of the State of Meghalaya. The Garos call themselves 'Mande' (man), 'Achik' (hillman). Garo Hills is bounded on the North by the Goalpara District of Assam, on the West by the District of Goalpara and part of Rangpur (Bangladesh), on the South by the Bangladesh District of Mymensingh and on the East by the Khasi Hills District. It is situated between latitude 25°9' and 26° North and 89°47' and 92°2' East, and covers an area of 8,084.8 square kilometres.¹ According to the 1971 Census, the population of Meghalaya is 10,11,699 out of which 4,06,615 lie in the Garo Hills District.²

We find the Garos inhabiting some areas of the adjoining Districts as well. For example, in the South-Western portion of Kamrup District (Assam), the Southern portion of Goalpara District (also in Assam); in the South of the District they extend to the plains of Mymensingh. A number of them form colonies in some areas of the Khasi Hills District and are also found in some scattered patches

1. Meghalaya Basic Facts, Issued by the Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Meghalaya, Shillong, April 1977, p. 2.

2. Ibid.

all over the tea-garden areas of upper Assam.³

There are certain linguistic sub-divisions of the Garos though there is no great cultural difference between them. The main sub-divisions are:

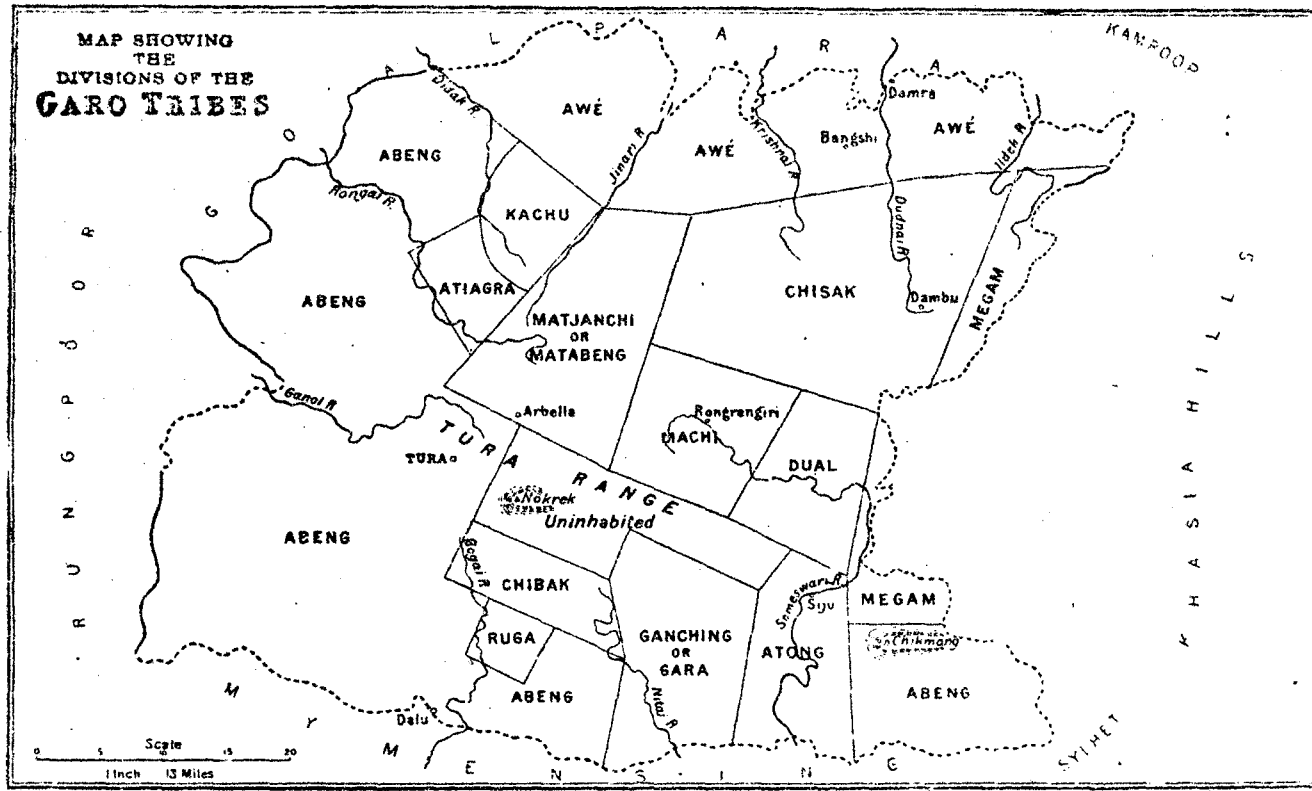
1. The Aues
2. The Chisaks
3. The Matchi-Duale
4. The Ambenge
5. The Atonge
6. The Rugas
7. The Megams.⁴

Major Playfair gives a broader division of the Garos. According to him there are twelve divisions in all. He differentiates the Matchis and the Duals; mention is made of the Matabenge who are found to be a mingling of the Ambenge and Matchis; Kochu is another small division of the tribe in the North-Western hills; South of the Kochus are the Atiagras; to the East of the Ambenge are the Chisaks. He also mentions the existence of the Megams or Lynngams as they are called in the neighbouring District of Khasi Hills.⁵

3. D.N. Majumdar: The Garos: An Account Of The Garos Of The Present Day. Lawyer's Book Stall, Gauhati, Assam, 1956, p. 6.

4. Ibid. p. 3.

5. Major A. Playfair: The Garos. United Publishers, Calcutta, First Reprint, 1975, pp. 59-61.



SOURCE: MAJOR PLAYFAIR'S BOOK "THE GAROS"

The Akawes or Awes can be found inhabiting the whole of the Northern hills, South of Goalpara and facing Kamrup in the East to a short distance of the Jinari river in the West. Contact with the plains people have made them absorb a great amount of the plains Assamese culture. The North-Eastern hills are occupied by the Chisaks, South of the Awes. The Chisaks bear some similarity to the Awes. A small colony of Duales exist to the South of the Chisaks who live close to the banks of the Someswari river. A majority of the Duales are dwellers of the plains and are found mostly in the District of Mymensingh. The Matchis occupy the land West of the Duales in the central valley of the Someswari river. The central part of Garo Hills is inhabited by the Matjanchis or Matabengs, who as written earlier, are to be found a mingling of the Ambeng and Matchi. Major Playfair mentions the existence of the Kochus who are scarcely distinguishable from the Awes. These people inhabit the land West of the Jinari river. However one should not confuse these Kochus with the Koch or Atongs. The Kochus are numerically insignificant because in the first decade of the Twentieth Century, only seven Kochu villages existed.⁶ A small and unimportant section of the Garo tribe, the Atiagrae, live to the South of the Kochus, who have some similarity to the Ambengs. They occupy the whole of the Western hills, a greater part of Garo Hills, as far East as the Bogai river - these are the Ambengs, the most important division among the Garos. A small colony of these migrated Ambengs are also found

6. Ibid.

inhabiting the South-Eastern hills on the border of Khasi Hills. In the vicinity of Dalu reside the Rugas. North of these Rugas are the Chiboks, extending from the upper valley of the Bogai river to the upper valley of the Nitai river. The area which extends from the Nitai river nearly to the Someswari is inhabited by the Garas or Ganchings. To the East an important division, the Atongs, occupy the main valley of the Someswari as far North as Siju. The Megams or the Lynngams as they are called in the neighbouring District of Khasi Hills, are quite distinct from the rest of the Garo tribe. Major Playfair refers to them as a fusion of the Garo and Khasi, and should be looked upon as a hybrid race.⁷ Their dialect has been classified by Dr. Grierson⁸ as Khasi, at the same time, they show close affinity to the Garos in their tribal organisation in that there exist the same exogamous divisions, viz: Sangma and Marak as are found among the Garos.

Rising to a height of 657 metres, the plateau of Garo Hills drops steeply to the Brahmaputra valley on the North and to the Bangladesh plains on the South, and West. The area receives heavy rain and is covered by thick forests. Nokrek is it's highest peak, it's height being 1,417 metres above sea level.

It is the belief of the Garos that their original

7. Ibid.

8. Dr. Grierson: Linguistic Survey Of India. Vol II.

habitation was a province of Tibet.⁹ They left Tibet in the distant past and wandered into the Brahmaputra valley for centuries in search of a permanent home. In the course of migration, the Garos had to face the ordeals of wars and persecution in the hands of the Kings ruling the valley which made them branch out into a number of sub-tribes. A bulk of the tribe finally settled in Garo Hills.

Dr. Grierson, in his Linguistic Survey Of India, has classified the Garos as belonging to the great Bodo race,¹⁰ a branch of the Tibeto-Burman family.

Their method of cultivation is primitive. This method is known as 'shifting' or 'jhum' cultivation. At present terrace cultivation is being introduced by the Indian Government. In the small river valleys the people have taken to permanent wet cultivation.

The Garos are a matrilineal society and this influences much of their organisation. Their legal system is guided by this principle. Inheritance of property is done through the female line. Usually the youngest daughter inherits the parental property. The heiress daughter is called 'Nokna' (literally means for the house) and her husband called the 'Nokkrom' must come to live with her and support her parents.

Relationship is traced in the mother's line and

9. Refer to The Garos by Major Playfair, 1975, pp. 8-11;

'Achik Aro Achik Asonq' by P.C. Kar, 1973, p. 1; 'The Garos And The English' by J.B. Bhattacharjee, 1978, p. 8.

10. Dr. Grierson: Linguistic SURVEY Of India, Vol II pp.1-3.

there exists certain kin-groups called 'machong' or clan. There are larger kin-groups - Sangma, Marak and Momin. Of late new kin-groups have come into existence like 'Shira'. These kin-groups are called 'chatchi'. The 'mahari' is another smaller group within the 'machong'. It consists of males and females of the same 'machong' with whom some sort of relationship could be traced, though this may be a distant relationship. The conduct of any of its members is a joint responsibility of the 'mahari'.

The administration of the Garo customary law is guided by the conception that there is nothing as wrong as against the community in general. A wrong done is taken as against the 'mahari' and usually the case is decided by a meeting of the 'maharies' of the offender and offended. The decision of the 'mahari' meeting is binding and final.

Even though these 'Maharis' have social autonomy and mechanisms for settling disputes, they are, however, a part of an organised village community .

On first acquaintance with the British:

"Earliest British reports indicate that the clans of different areas were in a state of inter-clan feuds and internicine warfare. Taking revenge of an old murder or adultery, or insult was, in most cases, a clan responsibility and an inheriting trait of clan character."¹¹ Head hunting was thus widely practised as a symbol of 'Achik' chivalry so much so

that the skulls possessed of had much marketable value, varying with the social value and position of the owners so beheaded.¹²

The Garo mountain dwellers were a terror to the plains in the early period of British domination. A policy of relative indifference was followed by the British and the estateholders were allowed to hold their estates at a nominal revenue, rather tribute, much the same as in Mughal rule, in return of their services to restrain the frequent Garo incursions into the plains. The British administration was guided primarily by the twin objectives of maintaining peace along its Eastern border inhabited by the turbulent tribal communities and of gradually usurping the trade interests in the areas.¹³

The Garos were the first mountain tribe with whom the British came in contact. Before this, the Garos were an independent group of people living in the hills. In the first half of the Nineteenth Century, there were endless conflicts between the Garos and the zaminders. In 1816, the Garos invaded the territory of the Kariabari Zaminder and burnt his residence. David Scott, the Commissioner of Coch

11. P.C. Kar: British Annexation Of Garo Hills. Nababharat Publishers, Calcutta, 1970, p. 1.

12. Rev. W. Ayerst: Indian Antiquaries, April, 1880.

13. P.C. Kar: op. cit. p. 8.

Behar, was sent by the Government to enquire into the incident. Scott thought that the cause of the raid was the oppressive rule of the Zamindars. He therefore thought that it would be better to separate the Garo territory and bring it under the control of the British. The Governor-General-in-Council accepted the proposal, and the Garo Hills came under the control of the British. Thus the British administration of the outlying areas of Garo Hills started from 1822 onwards. This new form of administration was popularly known as the non-regulated system.¹⁴ It started with the geographical exclusion of Garo Hills from the rest of British dominated India. With a number of Acts and Regulations, the District was insulated by the authorities and the hillmen were kept almost in seclusion in an enclosure of British made enactments. This also resulted in the evasion of the British to take up the responsibility of educating the tribes. This task was left to the Christian Missionaries who educated the Garos and gave them a new religion.

The policy that the British followed towards the tribes in general was one of isolation which aimed at preserving and protecting the tribes. Geographical and administrative isolation of the hill people was responsible to a large extent for the economic backwardness of the hill

14. J.B. Bhattacharjee: The Garos And The English. New Delhi, 1978, p. 70.

areas.¹⁵ Trade was carried on in the pre-British hills largely through the barter system. Monetization of the entire hills took place with the spread of British administration. The British made no attempt at industrialisation of the hills. Although the amenities of modern living reached them, the means of production remained virtually unchanged.

The advent of the British influenced the Garo community by numerous varied factors. There was depreciation of the 'Nokma's' stature of traditional authority, in its place the institution of Laskarship was brought into existence; police raids suppressed their head-hunting ventures; for the first time in their lives, the Garos were made to pay taxes; the enforcement of submission to a central authority and modern judiciary was introduced; finally, since 1947, a modern democratic form of government was imposed.

Political ecology: village and government confederation: There is no detailed account of the early political institutions of the Garos, but democratic methods were adopted for the administration of the villages. A Garo village comprised of "clusters of lineages" representing different areas of the tribe. The total structure of the Garos was what is called by Anthropologists as "segmentary", by which the

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15. Report of the Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam (Pataskar Commission). Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, p . 13.

state of segmentation is continual and at the clan level there is complimentary opposition. Each village had a leader, an influential chief called 'Nokma'. The word 'Nokma' implies a man of wealth. Each village had their own area called 'Akhing'. It is a jhumland owned by a village community. The 'Nokma' holds title to the 'Akhing' land as custodian of it's common use and ownership. In some cases this 'akhing' land covered a few villages. The 'Nokma's' power was repository in character, being regarded as the symbol of his people's joint and several rights, as well as a leader of religious ceremonies.

It was the adult members of the village irrespective of their lineage affiliation that formed the village body politic. The 'Nokma' had no coercive powers in the internal affairs of the village. So there is participation of all adult males in the village administration. The village elders organised common activities such as the clearing of village precincts, construction of new foot-paths, entertainment of guests, and in making such decisions. "the 'Nokma' acted only as a constitutional figurehead."¹⁶

Since the Garos are a matrilineal society, inheritance and succession strictly follow the matrilineal principles. The matrilineal matrix of socio-cultural milieu has been

* 16. M.G. Goswami: The Garos Of Meghalaya And Their Neighbours, in The Tribal People Of India. Publications Division, Govt. of India, 1973, p. 82.

preserved through the ages upto the present day inspite of being surrounded by patrilineal people on all sides. Although modern materialistic culture and civilisation has reached the Garos, the intra-group and intra-personal relations are still tellingly governed by this basic matrilineal principle.

Disputes within the village were not settled by the village politic. Traditionally it is a matter to be settled between the lineages of the disputants, whose decision is final and binding.

There did not exist a higher court of appeal, nor any kind of organised form of government. The institution of tax payment was unknown to the Garos. Instead there existed a reciprocative system of labour exchange.

"A group of families in the same 'chatchi' forms a 'mahari', that is the relation by motherhood."¹⁷ Marriage between the same 'mahari' is strictly prohibited. "In Garo society the 'mahari' plays the most important part in deciding matters like marriage and inheritance."¹⁸

Even though a Garo village consisted of "clusters of local lineages" representing different clans of the tribe, there was relative autonomy in political situations. Socially it

17. Theresa R. Marak: A Study Of The Social And Religious Life Of The Garos Before And After The Coming Of Christianity. B.D. Thesis, Bangalore, 1969, p. 6. (unpublished)

18. Ibid.

was typical of all villages to have different clan autonomy where each clan maintained their identities. But at a higher level, regardless of their clan affiliations in those villages, the tribe remained united against a common enemy, tribes or villages. This was the traditional system of village administration before the advent of the British.

It was David Scott who created the institutions of Sardars, Laskars, Sarbarakars and Mandals. The Sardars were loyal village headmen, confirmed in their respective positions. The Laskars were the chiefs of the passes (also called Duars) and were responsible for maintaining law and order within their respective jurisdictions as well as the collection of public revenue from the Sardars concerned. In return for their services the Government annually paid the Laskars in kind and cash. The Sarbarakar-s were native officers placed above the Laskars. They were entrusted with the duty of supervising the activities of chiefs. To assist the Sardars and Laskars, the institution of Mandal was introduced. The Mandals would report all crimes committed by the mountaineers to the nearest Sardars, who would then attempt to trace and apprehend the offenders.¹⁹

In spite of the new system of government introduced by David Scott, frequent raids and murders of the plains people by the Garos still continued. The failure of the

19. J.B. Bhat tacherjee, op. cit. p. 63.

Sarbarakar to manage the Garo affairs effectively, made Captain H. Rutherford, in the later part of the 1830's to recommend the abolition of the Sarbarakar and "the entire 'Garo country' be placed under a British Officer, vested with wide discretionary powers, who would conduct the administration of the District with the help of his subordinates."²⁰

In the 1860's, the office of the Sarbarakar was restored on account of the repeated outrages and the consequent insecurity of the frontier which compelled the Government of India to arrive at a firm decision. At this time, the Principal Assistant of Goalpara was placed in direct charge of the Garos.

The numerous Garo villages existed independently with the 'Nokmas' as the constitutional heads of each separate 'Akhing' area. It took almost fifty years for the British to subjugate these people completely. Repeated expeditions were carried out to bring the Garos under the British. It was only in January 1873 that "the combined expeditionary forces undertook triumphant operations against the remaining independent villages."²¹ This resulted in the submission of the villages and their acceptance of the terms offered by the Deputy Commissioner, W.J. Williamson. "The unfortunate inter-clanish feuds and geographical isolation had not only prevented the vanquished clans from offering a joint force against the British but the

20. Foreign Department Judicial Proceedings, 24 July, 1839, No. 95

21. J.B. Bhattacharjee, op. cit. p. 178.

security reasons caused by the wrath and vengeance of the stronger rivals actuated innumerable clans to place themselves under colonial domination."²²

Under the new system introduced by the British, all the villages were to pay uniform house rent. Laskars were appointed to collect them from the group of villages or large single villages. The Nokma's position as the traditional clan-head was not disturbed who in turn reconciled themselves with the new system which they found to be considerate and beneficial. The indigenous customs and usages were not interfered with, except the practices of head-hunting and witch-craft or sorcery were regarded objectionable and this, the Nokma, on behalf of the people had to undertake to abandon.²³

The Garo Hills was formed into a full-fledged District and incorporated into the Chief Commissionerhip of Assam since 1874.²⁴ The boundary of Garo Hills was defined by the Garo Hills Act of 1869 as bounded on the North and West by Goalpara, on the South by Mymensingh and on the East by Khasi Hills.

The hereditary Nekmas remained confirmed in their customary authority. Police and revenue duties were exercised by the Laskars or Zimmadars over a group of clans or villages. With the help of Panchayats or Village Councils, the Laskars

22. Ibid. p. 183.

23. Ibid. p. 178.

24. Ibid. p. 183.

were to try criminal cases which were not of a heinous nature and all criminal suits.²⁵ The position of the Laskar was equivalent to the Daloi in Jaintia Hills and Gaonburhas in the Naga Hills who were entrusted with manifold local duties. The Village Council consisted of the leading persons of that particular village.

Following the annexation of Garo Hills in 1873, there was collection of only house tax by the Government. In Garo Hills it was the 'machongs' and 'maharis' who held the land. Thus there was regulation of tenure according to the customary land laws of the Garos, called 'Akhing' Laws. In terms of land revenue, the amount yielded by the Garo Hills to the British treasury was limited. However the large tracts of forests abounded by wild elephants and costly timber were declared reserved by the Government which, in the course of time yielded rich profit.

The British Government kept the Garos isolated mainly to exploit the economic resources of the Hills and for the prevention of encroachment from the border areas. The dependence of the Garos on the 'hats' in the plains continued due to illiteracy, absence of industry, lack of trading centres in the Hills and communication hardships. It was during this time that monetization replaced the barter trade.

The most significant contribution of the British was the introduction of education among the Garos. With

25. Judicial Department Proceedings, October 1866, Nos. 20-9.

education came Christianity and these brought about radical, economic and political transformation. With the establishment of the headquarters at Tura, it became the trading centre, as well as of education, politics and religion. It affected significant changes in the socio-economic structure as well.

Effects of British penetration:

The indigenous institutions of the Garos were superseded and their political isolation broken with the evolution of the administration structure and the extension of the British colonial rule. The constitution of numerous clans and villages into a District contributed to the rapid emergence of Garo identity.

The power structure of the Nokma changed when they were converted into subordinate chiefs called Sardars or Giris. To supervise the activities of a group of Nokmas, Laakars were appointed. The 'Akhing' areas were cut down to size as roads were constructed, townships were established as well as markets or bazaars, schools, hospitals and Churches. Large areas abounding in elephants and valuable timber were 'reserved' by the Government thus curbing the natural resources of the Hills. Barter trade was slowly replaced by money economy.

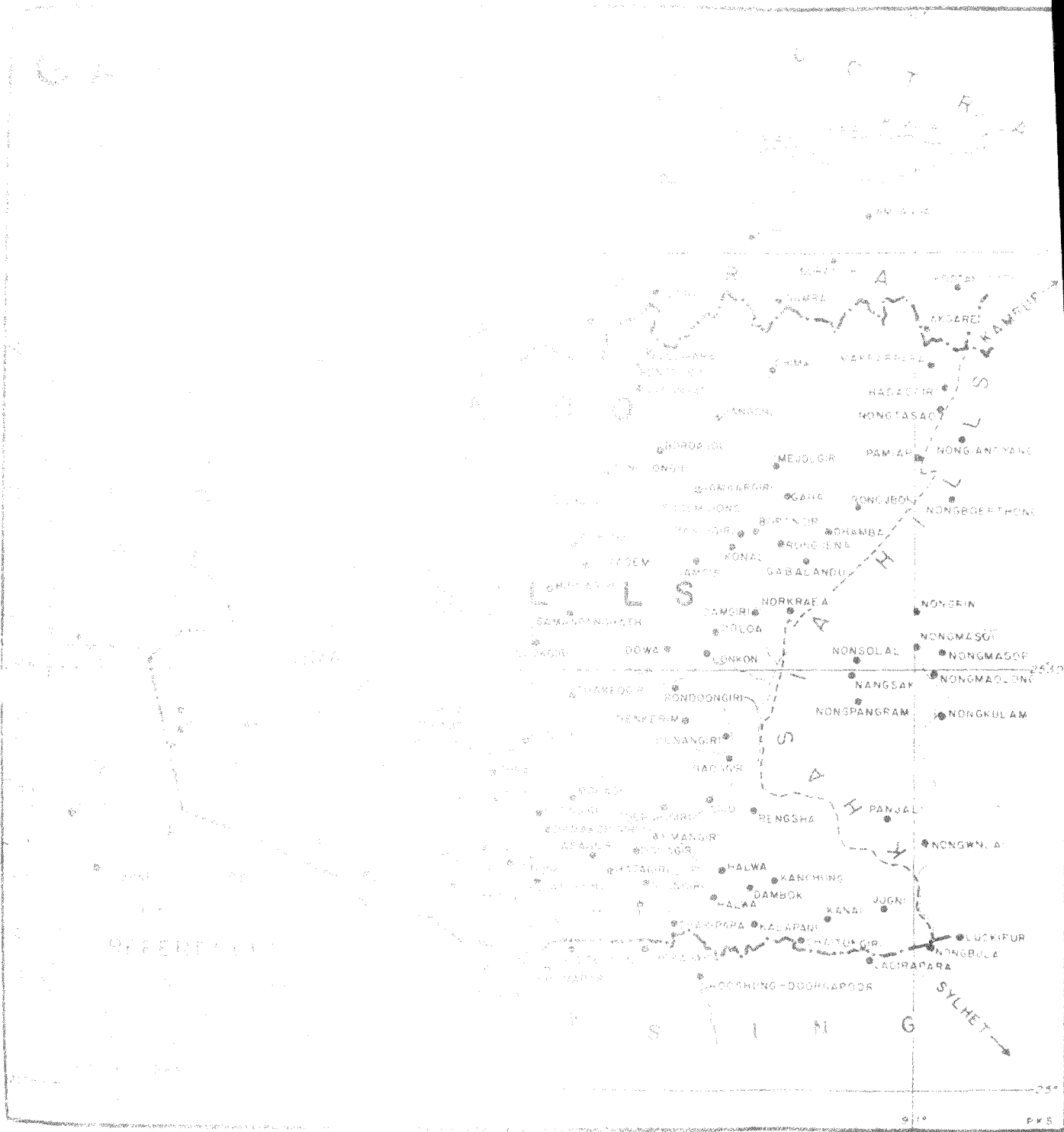
By introducing education, the British not only gave the Garos a new script but also a new religion. This divided the Garos into Christians and non-Christians or 'Songsarehs' (animists). Later on with the coming of the Churches of various denominations, there emerged sectarianism in Garo society by the infusion of group identity according to affiliations.²⁶

The establishment of Tura as the headquarters of the District was the first step towards the introduction of urban life in Garo Hills, effecting significant changes in their socio-economic structure. It became the pivot of the whole Garo community as employment scopes opened with the development of the District in its diverse fields. "The development of the means of communication facilitated the occupational and demographic mobility, and the uninterrupted trade and commerce added to economic advancement."²⁷ With the opening of hospitals the once disease infested place was made a healthier place. Traditional extremities were broken down and the hostile attitude of the people changed into one of friendliness. Infusion of moderations took place and the former practices of head-hunting, preservation of skulls and witch-craft became a myth of the past.

All these led to the emergence of a dominant intellectuals of middle-class origin who were destined to play the role of politics in the future. With the radical change in the economic structure of Garo society, establishment of a modern form of Government, introduction of modern education, modern means of communication and other institutions, there was growth of new social classes and the unleashing of new social forces unique in themselves.

26. J.B. Bhattacharjee. op. cit. p. 239

27. Ibid. p. 240.



SOURCE: J. B. BHATTACHARJEE'S BOOK "THE GARDI AND THE ENGLISH"

CHAPTER IIBeginnings of Christian work in Garo Hills:

In 1783, the East India Company started the salt trade in Assam and a Superintendent was sent to Goalpara. During this time, the political condition in Assam was very unsettled so the salt trade had to be discontinued. It was when the Ahom King sought the help of the British and the latter conceded, that trade was resumed once again. This resulted in the involvement of the East India Company and the Government at Fort William in the political affairs of Assam.¹

There was great opposition to Christian work in India in the British House of Commons. When in 1792, Wilberforce introduced a resolution in the House of Commons which tried to change the East India Company Charter so as to include some religious work in their areas, it met with very strong opposition from the East India Company Directors and the Court of Directors. Thus the resolution was dropped before the third reading.²

Forty years following the Burmese war, 1824-1826, the history of the Garos presented a series of raids, retaliations

1. Rev. Austen John: Beginning Of Christian Work In The Hill Areas Of North-East India Region, in A Common Perspective For North-East India, edited by Pannalal Gupta, Calcutta, 1967, p. 243.

2. Ibid.

of bloodshed, misery and muddle.³ Two courses were open: either non-interference, save some murderous sally necessitated a punitive expedition, or complete annexation and control. The former was a half measure, attended by violence and irritation without adequate advantages; the latter was only a path to permanent prosperity and peace. The former policy was the one persisted in till 1866.⁴

When in 1848, one of the independent clans which had withheld it's tribute for years, committed a number of outrages, defeating two or three parties of troops, the Government moved to take effective measures.⁵ Nine years previously, the proposal for a survey of the Hills and the appointment of a special Officer was put forth by Captain Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam, but the Governor-General of the Council, Sir T.C. Metcalfe, "did not think the Garo race of sufficient importance to call for the service of a special Officer."⁶

It was during this time that David Scott, the Civil Commissioner and the agent of the Governor-General of the whole Brahmaputra valley, felt it necessary to redeem the Garos, whom he termed as "utterly backward". The Government on his

3. Rev. W. Carey: The Garo Jungle Book, Copyright 1919, by Gilbert N. Brink, Secretary, 1966, p. 43.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid. p. 44.

6. Ibid.

recommendation gave a grant to the Baptist Mission to start schools for the Garos. Thus education and Christianity entered Garo Hills almost simultaneously which perhaps explains why all educated Garos are Christians. In fact, Christianity is one of the most dynamic and potent factor in tribal societies, whatever might have been its extent of operation. In a letter to W.B. Bayley, Secretary to the Government, on 27 April, 1825, Scott wrote:

"I am satisfied that nothing permanently good can be obtained by other means, and if we do not interfere on behalf of the poor Garrows, they will soon become Hindoos, or half Hindoos probably and acquiring many of the bad parts of their present and improved creeds. I would greatly prefer two or more Moravian Missionaries of the old school who along with religion would teach the useful arts. If Government would ensure their subsistence only in the case of success or of my death, I would willingly take upon myself the expense in the first instance, £300 per annum would suffice ..., and the great error of the Missionaries appears to me that of directing their attention to polished nations, instead of rude tribes, who are still in that state of national childhood, which enables the priests to act as the Schoolmaster and to teach them what he likes.

There are many instances of success, in cases of the latter description in modern times, but not one by fair means in those of the former, since the age of miracles or very near to it."⁷

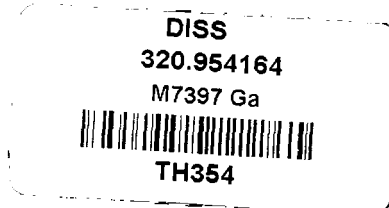
What was the attitude of the British Government towards the Baptist Missionaries? In some cases the British gave some small support to the Mission work, but in most of the other instances, they were either indifferent or were hostile to the work of the Church. The British Government's policy was contrary to the extension of Christian work in certain areas. The various Missions did not get any financial help from the Government. The Governor-General's Agent was keen on Mission work mainly because he wanted them to start schools.

Mr. Mason⁸ in his report sums up the situation thus:

"The Government Officials have at times been in sympathy, at times indifferent, and at times hostile to the idea of educating the Garos, the Government, although necessarily neutral as regards religion, has from the first taken an interest in Garos' education, and besides sustaining at times a few schools

7. Foreign Department Political Proceedings, March 14, 1846, No. 48.

8. Rev. W. Carey. op. cit. p. 241.



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of their own, they have made grants-in-aid to the Mission ... But the Government grant and money received from America never being sufficient to push the work, it was more necessary to appeal for help to the people of the land, as they became able to see the advantages of education and the benefits for themselves."

In course of time, two pioneers of Christianity among the Garos, Dmed and Ramke, started the evangelism of the new religion in 1863, amidst difficulties and very strong opposition from their own people. With their conversion and education, they started many schools in various places of Garo Hills.⁹

At first education was imparted with the use of the Bengalee script to encourage the intercourse between the Garos and the Bengalees and to envisage a scheme for education of the Garo youths "so that the rising generations may mix with the surrounding Bengalee population and may become 'one people with them.'"¹⁰ This script was used upto 1892 and later on the Roman script was adopted.¹¹ This explains why

9. Rev. W. Carey. op. cit. pp. 83-86.

10. J.B. Bhattacharjee: The Garos And The English. New Delhi, 1978, p. 221.

11. Theresa R. Marak: A Study Of The Social And Religious Life Of The Garos Before And After The Coming Of Christianity. B.D. Thesis, Bangalore, 1969, p. 25. (unpublished).

there has been infusion of foreign words in Garo literature.

With the opening of schools, the opportunity came to 'infuse the spirit of Christianity into the villagers both in and out of school.'¹² These students were provided with special privileges in Government services and proved the most helpful instruments for the Christian Mission to teach in the villages; gradually, these schools were recognised by the Government and in order to give encouragement, scholarships were awarded to meritorious students. Some of them were sent to study in other parts of India and even abroad. For example, in 1882, at the expense of Mr. Phillips and Mr. Mason, a Garo lad, Thangkan Sangma, was brought to America, where he made remarkable use of his time in school until 1884, when he returned and took the place of the head teacher for two years.¹³ Gradually the parents took more interest and were less hostile in sending their children to schools. The number of Christians in Garo Hills increased from 1,184 in 1891 to 3,647 in 1901.¹⁴

As Christianity came to be associated in the minds of the tribal people with the conquering British rulers, the number of adherents to the religion began to increase more rapidly. Social inhibitions which usually stand in the way of the plains were also completely absent among the tribe.¹⁵

12.. Rev. W. Carey: op. cit. p. 257.

13. Ibid. p. 246.

14. Rev. P.H. Moore of the Assam, Census of 1901, in Rev. W. Carey's book, op. cit. p. 243.

The Christian Missionaries gave due importance to the work of the school. In fact Christianity and education are the two sides of the same coin. Formal education coupled with Christianity caused many changes in the cultural, social, political and economic life of the Garos. Medical facilities and modern agricultural tools were introduced as well as the plantation of fruit trees and garden vegetables.¹⁶ The British regime thus brought about a certain degree of unity between the various isolated tribal groups and created a cadre of educated persons who became interested in raising the standard of living after the model of the British Officers and the Christian Missionaries.¹⁷ This body of new Christian literates, spread over the hills, had been the active agency of establishing 'composite institutions' containing within them 'a primary school a Church and medical facilities', all centering round the converted Garo teachers.¹⁸

Christian ethics demanded certain moral standards from the people. There was prohibition of many original

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15. B.M. Pugh: Christianity And The Tribes Of North-East India, in Pannalal Gupta's book edited, op. cit. pp. 240-241
16. Rev. W. Carey: op. cit. pp. 256-267.
17. Dr. Surajit Sinha: Social Integration Of The Hill Tribes And The Plainsmen, in Pannalal Gupta's edited book, op. cit. p. xv.
18. P.C. Kar: A Point Of View On The Garos In Transition, in P. Gupta's edited book, op. cit. p. 93.

practices and beliefs that brought about drastic changes in them from the pattern of their old ways.

Social changes:

The socio-economic organisation of the Garos before the advent of British rule and Christianity had a closely-knit democratic set-up and was characterised by the absence of the institution of private property, existence of mutuality in exchange of labour in a village for the growth and maintenance of household properties and agrarian pursuits; an in-born respect for the dignity of labour, agriculture as the avenue of employment, yearly allotment of 'Akhing' land of different households by the 'Nokma' as the custodian of socially owned land, slash and burn method of cultivation with regular cycle of social ceremonies and festivals, absence of any individually-performed sacrifices or worshipping, absence of township in the Garo areas, and above all, by the inheritance from the mother to the chosen daughter. 'Mahari' (or relatives by motherhood) controls the life of the 'machong' (or clan) and the Nokma in his Akhing regulates the village life. The social polity flourished in an atmosphere of cordiality and co-operation in a village or Akhing.¹⁹

The simultaneous development of education and Christianity helped Missionary influence to permeate through the very social fabric of the Garos. There was no attempt to reverse the matriarchal structure of society as the Baptist

* (19. Ibid. pp. 91-92.

Missionaries wanted to avoid tension and repurcussion in the early stages of their expansion. The Christian Garos were allowed to retain the basic tenets of matriarchy though there was a conflict with the 'Songsarek' (non-Christian) Garos attitude towards polygamy, marriage procedures, divorce, funeral functions, adultery, tribal worship and village organisation. Exogamous ux^otrilocal and avunculocal marriages in Garo society influence the laws of inheritance. The original custom requires the proposal to come from the bride and her family. The chosen boy for the 'Nokna' or the heiress was usually brought by force to the bride by her 'chras' (the male relatives of the Garo woman). Following the boy's acceptance of the bride, the marriage is finalised and concluded. This type of marriage is called 'Nokkrom sala'. Among the Christian sections this crude practice is absent, usually they adhere to exogamous form of marriage. The chosen heiress can marry any promising boy, thus the rule that the heiress must marry her father's sister's son is no more regarded as binding and essential. The prevailing custom of the mother-in-law being invested with the preferential right of being the first wife of her domestic son-in-law, that is the husband of the heiress daughter, in the event of death of the former's husband has disappeared in the Christianised exogamous society.²⁰ Another prevailing custom in choosing one's partner is by means of 'chame jika'.

20. Ibid. p. 95.

Lt. K.R. Marak²¹ describes how this takes place:

"At the time of some festivals such as 'Wangala' (harvest dance), pairs of boys and girls may be exchanging wine accompanied by rhythmic utterances of words conveying the idea of asking whether he or she will be willing to be partner for life."

Agreement of both will lead to marriage.

The wedding ceremony is regarded as sacred in both the Christian and non-Christian societies, although the marriage rite is completely different. Among the 'Songsarek' or animistic Garos, the marriage rite is performed by means of 'Doasia' (literally means killing a fowl). The village priest, after invoking the blessing of gods, kills a fowl. The bride and the groom are smited with the fowl three times each on their backs, thus smearing the blood on the couple. This is followed by feasting and merrymaking.

Among the Christian converts, marriages take place in the Church as in Western Christian countries. Unlike other societies, the groom leaves his house and dwells with his wife and in-laws. The marriage expenses are borne by the woman's family and her maternal relatives. There does not exist any form of dowry system. Divorce is not common. The man and woman enjoys equal status in Garo society.

There have been visible and remarkable changes in the

21. Lt. K.R. Marak: The Garos And Their Customary Laws And Usages. Tura, Garo Hills, 1964, p. 27.

village set-up. Usually a non-Christian village consists of one 'mahari' or more, not many, and in every village can be found a 'nokpante' (Bachelor's House). Here all the adolescent bachelors stay, sleep and participate in corporate life. It is also associated with all religious festivals and socio-political activities. The custom does not prevail in Christian villages or among the Christian sections in Songsarek areas. Bachelor sons are allowed to stay under one parental roof. In these areas instead of the common 'nokpante', school-cum-Church institutions can be found. In many instances there have been transformation of the teachers' houses into centres of their religious, cultural and socio-political activities. This has led to the usurpation of the original authority of the Nokma by pastors and religious leaders, who also lead in cultural activities. Thus a new form of disintegration in the social fabric of the Garos is visible. Christian villages are cosmopolitan in character, very unlike the 'Songsareks', as Christian families of various 'mahari' origin live together, evidently in all new settlements and town and developing areas.

Conversion to Christianity made the denial of many crude customs and traditions of the old society necessary - this was a very difficult task often leading to the failure of the Christian section in adapting themselves to the changed order of things perfectly. Thus tensions in the minds of the people were constantly created. Boal²² has stated that "in the realm of Christian ethics, circumstances within the daily experience of the individual create constant tensions." This

implies that while the Christian section is in a state of thaw, Christian principle and tradition are not fully and perfectly accepted, at the same time, old habits and practices have not been discarded readily. Drinking is still widespread in Christian society, although drinking of tea and other beverages have, to some extent, helped in lessening the drinking of wine.

The wealthier Garos living in the urban areas usually have land for permanent wet cultivation. In 'Bongsarek' areas, it is the Nokma who allots a plot of land yearly to the family concerned on the basis of the custom of holding land for social uses only and not for individual household ownership. In the new educated and Christian society, individual household ownership of land has replaced social ownership.

Occupational diversification grew up when Christian Missionary movement gained impetus from 1863, and many people were helped through educational institutions, medical institutions, and provided with better living conditions and opportunities for economic development. This gave way to a new stratification along lines of economic class. Due to rapid structural differentiation, educated Christian tribals have an ascendancy over their non-convert brethren, who continue to live in their traditional moorings.

Cultural*changes:

The Garos have a rich cultural heritage.

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22. Barbara M* Boal: The Churches In The Kond Hills: An Encounter With Animism. Nagpur, 1963, p. 137.

Dance, music and sports reflect their way of life. Religion plays a very important role among the 'Songsarek' or animistic Garos, because in every walk of their life, supernatural power is constantly felt and feared. Religious ceremonies attend the life of every individual, both male and female, from birth to death.²³ The Supreme Being is identified in different phenomenal objects like (i) 'Susmema' 'Sangkildoma' (goddess of moon), (ii) 'Salgra' (sun god), (iii) 'Silme-Donse-Nore-Chire' (goddess of rain), (iv) 'Goera' (god of lightning), (v) 'Katchi Rangsi' (god of family), (vi) 'Rokkime' (goddess of blessing).²⁴ According to their belief, 'Katchi Rangsi' stays in the house of the 'Nokma', usually this god is believed to dwell in the Nokma's gong, shield, drum and so on. Thus Garos develop a fear in touching these things. The rest of the names are associated with the agricultural life of the people. Superstitious by nature, the Garos believe in the immortality of the soul and re-birth of persons.²⁵ The centre of worship for the Garos is sacrifice. Carey describes how "worship consists of bloody and cruel sacrifices".²⁶ In ancient times, on the death of chiefs, there was human sacrifice, so that he might have people to help him in his life after death.

Festivals provide the social need of the community,

23. Theresa R. Marak: op. cit. p. 15.

24. Ibid. p. 10.

25. Ibid. p. 12 .

26. Rev. W. Carey: op. cit. p. 27.

leisure and merrymaking to the people. The most important ones are 'Wangala', 'Rongchu-gala', 'Aha-oea', 'Mangona or 'Delang Soa'.

Being agriculturists, 'Wangala' is celebrated as the harvest festival to enjoy the fruits of the field. It usually takes place in the month of October or November, after harvesting is done, and lasts about a week.²⁷ This is one of the most important festivals. Fruits and vegetables from the fields are eaten after the Wangala festival. Various dances take place and liquor is served in plenty.

In the 'Rongchu-gala' festival, half-ripened paddy is made into flattened rice called 'rongchu'. A portion of this is offered to the god of harvest along with the blood of the sacrificed animal. This performance is followed by the eating of fried rice and certain fruits and vegetables.²⁸

'Aha-oea' is the festival whereby there is offering of fruits and vegetables to god. Animals are sacrificed, like fowls and ducks. Following this ceremony, all kinds of fruits and vegetables can be eaten without any objection.²⁹

The 'Mangona' or 'Delang Soa' ceremony is held once a year, generally in the month of December or January, for the final cremation of the dead. After burning the dead, the ashes are preserved and buried in a place in front of the house. Timber

27. For details, refer to Theresa R. Marak: op cit. p. 19.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid. p. 20.

is carved to represent the dead in the shape of a person, called 'Kima'. In this ceremony, the ashes are dug out and there is much mourning and wailing for the dead.

"For a rich family specially in the Northern side of the District it was a big occasion when pitchers of the country liquor and twenty to thirty bulls were killed and consumed. These bulls and pitchers of liquor were brought by relatives from far and near. It lasted for three or four days, at the end of which the urn will be finally buried."³⁰

Thus music, dance and feasting are associated with every special occasion of life of the Garos.

A great measure of cultural change is visible in the Christian section of Garo society. The Christian Garos have abandoned all aspects of the old culture, related to traditional religion, music, dancing, wood-carving, festivals, functions and sacrifices for supplication of spirits and natural forces. In short, modernism has replaced animism. Christian hymns have replaced traditional music, folk community dances have been replaced by Western dances, and modern medicines have replaced sacrifice as a means of curing diseases. The original custom of Garo menfolk keeping long hair has disappeared among the Christian section, many of the non-Christian 'Songsareks' are also following this fashion. Wealthier sections wear western

30. Lt. K.R. Marak: op. cit. p. 34.

dresses, many of the young girls wear woven clothes called 'dakmanda', while men wear trousers and shirts.

Christianity has sapped the tribal traditional culture thus loosening the convert's mental and social roots. But it would be wrong to consider that the people of the hills are merely tools in the hands of the foreign Missionaries. Socio logical studies in some of the hill areas show that even though the hillmen have adopted Christianity, there is a continuous interaction between the tenets of the Church and the local traditions. When traditional culture was often subjected to external forces, the Garos were very receptive and at the same time , 'adaptive. The customs never having been codified, there have been slight changes in the customs and practices with the passing of time. Still, the distinctive customs and usages are preserved. However, such influences or changes should not give the impression that tribal culture has been destroyed. Social workers, public leaders and educated section of society are conscious of the need of preserving their customs and are now trying to promote their culture.

Economic changes:

The mainstay of the hillmen, the Garos, has been agriculture. In the pre-British period the tribe had limited contact with the plains. Money became a nexus with the coming of the British, formerly trade was carried on through barter system.³¹ The 'Hat' areas, frequented by the hill people, served as the centre for carrying on short term business between the former and the plains. No long term business existed,

rather it was sporadic and seasonal. The main commodities brought for sale by the Garos were usually the produce of the season like cotton, and edible goods like ginger, chilli, tapioca, etc. For a long time, the Garos were kept rigidly isolated from the rest of the country by the British. It blocked not only contact, but, what is more important, resulted in the neglect of the development of the area. The British policy of isolation resulted in exploitation, when, inevitably, the hillmen were gradually exposed to outside forces, like money-lenders and contractors and middlemen.

Shifting cultivation practised by the hillmen is uneconomic and a menace to forest wealth. It is well known that two things are of greatest significance to the tribal, that is, land and forest. The programme of conservation and preservation of forests and the coming in of the contractor, who carried away the profits of forest produce, eventually led to dislocation of tribal economy and consequent frustration in the tribal mind.

The Bengalee merchants reaped a bountiful harvest in the early days in matters of business and trade. These shop

31. Most probably money was introduced in Garo Hills between the years 1866-'70, because it was in the year 1866 that Captain Williamson came to Tura (headquarter of Garo Hills) to proclaim the supremacy of the British.

merchants practised "every art, strategem and roguery to impose upon the unsuspecting Garos."³² "A maund of cotton (eighty-two^{pounds}) would buy five pounds of rice, or one of tobacco; it would also sometimes buy a bull."³³ For twenty pounds of cotton, "a fowl could be purchased, perhaps even a small puppy, or a sucking pig."³⁴ Business those days were transacted by looks and signs, often there were a few interpreters.

Great changes have taken place since those early days, as economic consciousness on the whole emerged slowly. For so long no effort on large scale to effect an economic regeneration in the interest of the larger masses had been done by both social leaders and chieftains, rather they lacked effort in creating new patterns of economic consciousness to improve their people's lot. With independence, the border trade came to an abrupt end after the partition, thus it made it necessary for the hill people to attempt to make themselves self-sufficient in foodgrains. Shortage of commodities such as salt, mustard oil, sugar, etc., makes a dent in tribal self-sufficiency.

Following these conditions prevalent all over the country, illicit trade, smuggling, hoarding and other corrupt practices have sporadically been detected in these confines also, which badly reflect the moral degradation of the tribals.

32, 33, 34, Rev. W. Carey: op. cit. p. 32.

This also led to the growth of class development in the hill people as marked by the appearance of a small section the society who have learnt the ways of the contractors and the money-lenders. A great portion of the qualified men have been absorbed in Government service, a good number have joined the Church in it's various fields of social service, and a small number have entered service in private firms and institutions. A few have also set up private business enterprises of thier own.

There is a gulf of difference between the educated and Christianised section and uneducated and village folk. A new vested interest by a small section of educated hill people is visible, to exploit the ignorance and poverty of the unsophisticated hill people.

Many of the Garos, mostly Christians are now resorting to wet cultivation in the wet valleys and plain areas. In some areas terrace-cultivation is practised, but this has not gained much popularity mainly because it involves a change of season for sowing, transplanting, harvesting and winnowing, and it contrasts technically with jhumming. To accept this method means getting accustomed to an altogether different system from the traditional one and it also brings in surreptitious changes in tribal attitudes and ways of life. Jhum cultivation and activities correspond to the seasons of cyclic festivals. These festivals are denied to those adopting wet cultivation.

The change in the techniques of cultivation has resulted in the steady growth of cosmopolitan villages of diverse 'mahari' origins having no traditional clan bonds amongst the inhabitants.³⁴ This has helped in developing a broader outlook and wider perspective of rapidly changing order of things.

Widening marketing facilities have given an incentive to both the Christian and non-Christian Garos to develop extensive orchards of oranges, pineapples, arecanuts, cashewnuts and bananas. This necessitates permanent use of land for the respective purposes, which leads to ^{cen}contraction of ownership of land.

Earlier, Christianity and education were responsible ~~were responsible~~ for prompting technical changes and occupational pattern. This has been later reinforced by Government developmental expenditure. The old basketry and pottery have been replaced by modern utensils, belt looms by hand looms, houses built of bamboos and wood with thin bamboo strips without metal nails or wooden pegs by Assam type buildings and Bengal type huts and very recently by R.C.C. type of buildings, labour-intensive cultivation almost without money capital, by plough and bullock cultivation with use of manure. All these have been initiated mostly by Christian Garos.

Evidently, the new forces released by the changing

34: P.C. Kar in Pannanal Gupta's edited book, op. cit. p. 97.

order of things and values have created conditions where it is necessary for these people to take to various avocations and professions of modern life to face the challenge of the struggle for existence.

The 'Songsasek' Garos cannot comprehend all these trends well, nor realise the implications of these changes. A great number of the vast illiterate mass who had so long been employed in agricultural pursuits are gradually being reduced to the status of landless daily wage-earners. The steady reduction of fertility and consequential falling productivity due to evil primitive jhumming has been the main cause. Another factor is the growth of population leading to scarcity of land.

The avenue of developing one's economic condition to a better standard among the educated Christian society in non-agricultural sectors has weakened female predominance and there appears in the new society, symptoms of masculine predominance.

Political changes:

Unity and political awakening was brought partly by Christianity and education, it was not brought by the Indian struggle for independence, or by Satyagraha, or by any political party in India. The early political institutions that existed in Garo Hills has already been discussed in the first Chapter. The advent of Christianity brought about marked changes - it gave the people education and with it, new ideas, new understanding and rapid structural differentiation. To

quote from the joint report of the tribal-sub-committees:

"The Christian section of the tribals, though small in number...is educationally and economically far in advance of the non-Christian tribals...The Christians again appear to be much better organised and vocal and they are found to take prominent part in local political organisations."³⁵

The departure of the British brought in new political awareness of the dangers involved thereafter. It created fear in the minds of the people of being placed under the domination of India, motivated by the dislike of lowlanders and the fear that land, natural resources, customary laws and religion would be exploited, and this became intensified. Mingled with these fears and suspicions, there dawned an awareness of their uniqueness and apartness in terms of language, customs and physical appearance from the lowlanders. There was appreciative growth of indigenous culture in which they took pride, resulting in their quest for self-identity. There emerged a strong determination to safeguard their way of life.

35. A.V. Thakkar: Excluded And Partially Excluded Areas (Other than Assam) Sub-Committee Final Report, p. 184.

This consciousness is present only among the educated Christian Garos. The 'Songsarek' Garos neither understand or realise the implications of the trends and changes taking place. The urge for political self-expression took a long time to take shape. The first regional political party of the District was formed after independence, namely, the Garo National Council. Following this there emerged a new phase of 'nationalistic' organisation among the tribe.

Wider education and conversion has led towards Christian Western-oriented leadership. "They essentially come from that class of tribal elite who have emerged recently through their education and through it's privileges which the Constitution has granted to the tribal people."³⁶ Very often allegiance to a party can be said to be decided more by crisis of personal ambition or personal rivalry among emerging leaders. So far, no non-Christian has ever emerged as a leader.

Conclusion: The fact that there is a tendency to entertain suspicion about the role of Christianity in the hill areas is not unnatural, the reason being that, during the British Raj, while the hill areas were restricted for the people of the plains, the foreign Missionaries were allowed to function in those areas. One cannot ignore the fact that

36. Kousar J. Azam: National Integration In India: Some Major Political Aspects. Ph.D.Thesis, Pol. Sc. Deptt.

Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1972, pp. 450-451. (unpublished)

there was very close association between the hill people and the foreign Government. The feeling of affinity of the tribal societies with the Western people has often given rise to contempt of Indian social behaviour or culture.

Christianity should not be blamed solely as a denationalising agency. It arose out of historical reason when it had followed the British political forces as a supplementary process and as a force to complete the subjugation of the turbulent Garos. Christianity is as much a result of imperialist policy and national apathy as it is a partial cause of differences and suspicion between the Garos and non-Garos.

The national society can achieve it's goals only through the differential participation of diverse elements, each contributing to the achievement of the goal in it's own unique manner.

CHAPTER III

(A)

Participated democracy in Garo Hills: transition from the Traditional tribal polity into participatory representative Democratic polity:

Under the Government of India Act of 1935, the tribal areas of North-East India were classified ~~as~~ into three: Excluded, Partially Excluded and Frontier Areas.¹ Garo Hills and the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills were included in the Partially Excluded Areas. These areas were administered by the Provincial Government subject to withhold or apply laws of the Provincial legislature with or without modifications.² This geographical and administrative isolation of the hill people "was responsible to a large extent for the economic backwardness of the hill areas".³

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1. Excluded Areas included the Naga Hills, the Lushai Hills and the North Cachar Hills. Garo Hills, the Mikir Hills and the British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were under the Partially Excluded Areas. The Frontier tracts were Balipara, Sadya, and Lakhimpur tracts. From V.V. Rao's book; A Century Of Tribal Politics. New Delhi, 1976, p. 143.
 2. Ibid. p. 145.
 3. Report Of The Commission On The Hill Areas Of Assam (Pataskar Commission). Ministry Of Home Affairs, Government of India, p. 13.

The tribal areas in North-East India were practically devoid of the membership of a legislature during the period 1874-1937. The first elected member to the Assam Legislative Council was a Khasi, Rev. J.J.H. Nichols Roy, from the British portion of the Khasi Hills, from 1920-1937. Janggin Laskar, a Garo, was also nominated by the Governor but due to his inefficiency he had to resign and in his place, Rev. Evans, a Welsh Missionary, was nominated. But the latter's experience being limited to the Khasi Hills, there was practically no representation of the Hill Areas of North-East India.

Representative democracy did not exist in the real sense prior to 1935 in Garo Hills. Being declared as a partially Excluded Area in 1935, Garo Hills was represented for the first time in the Assam Legislative Assembly, the number of seats being two. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills were represented in the Assam Legislative Assembly by three members, one seat for women (Shillong).

The first election in Garo Hills to the Assam Legislative Assembly was held in February 1937. There were five candidates in all. Garo Hills was then divided into two constituencies - North and South Garo Hills. Benjamin Momin and Janggin Laskar had a straight contest in North Garo Hills whilst in the South there were three candidates, Jobang Marak, Muniram Marak and Ramsing Sangma. Benjamin Momin from North Garo Hills and Jobang Marak from South Garo Hills were elected and they represented their District in the Assam

Legislative Assembly during the period 1937 to 1945. Franchise for this election was limited to Gaonburas and to those that passed the Middle School examination. In North Garo Hills there were 539 registered voters, ^{out} of which 422 exercised their right to vote. In South Garo Hills out of 767 registered voters, 552 exercised their franchise.⁴

	Name of Constituencies	No. of Regd Voters	Name of Candidates	Votes Polled	
1.	NORTH GARO HILLS	559 Voters	1. Benjamin Momin	242	ELECTED
			2. Janggin Laskar	180	
2.	SOUTH GARO HILLS	767 Voters	1. Jobang Marak	276	ELECTED
			2. Puniram Marak	164	
			3. Ransing Sangma	112	

Election Results 1937, to the Assam Legislative Assembly.

On what basis were the two representatives elected? Previously, the Garos had no experience regarding elections because there did not exist a municipal or local board in Garo Hills.⁵ Very few understood the significance of elected representatives. All the candidates were independent ones, there was no political party, hence no political ideology or programme.

4. V.V. Rao: op. cit. p p. 470-471.

Where such conditions existed, the criteria for winning votes depended on the amount of influence wielded by the individual candidates. This included wealth, education, one's capability, leadership qualities, very often religion and the promises they made.⁶ Besides these, the clan system with strong kinship ties played a very important role.

Due to the Second World War, the second general election to the Assam Legislative Assembly was held in 1945-'46 instead of 1942. There were ten contestants for two seats. In North Garo Hills, there were five candidates. Mody Marak was elected by a minority vote thereby defeating the former representative Benjamin Momin. The other three candidates were Aaron Sangma, Janggin Laskar and Bronson Momin. There was an enormous increase in the number of electors, from 539 to 1,383 but the percentage of poll was not much, only 46%.⁷

In South Garo Hills also there were five candidates. Here we find a political party candidate named Phukan Sangma who was set up by the Congress. All the other candidates were Independents. In this election, Muniram Marak was elected,

5. Ibid. p. 88.

6. From an interview with Mr. Donsing Marak, Gaonbura of Nidanpur village, Goalpara District, Assam, December 16th, 1978.

7. V.V. Rao: op. cit. pp. 470-471.

thereby avenging the defeat he suffered at the hands of Jobang Marak who also contested for the second time. Out of 794 votes polled, Muniram Marak secured 330 votes⁸ - a minority vote.

	Name of Constituencies	No. of Regd Voters	Congress Party	Independent	Candidates Elected
1	NORTH GARO HILLS	1,383 Voters	Nil	5	Mody Marak Independent
2	SOUTH GARO HILLS	794 Voters	1	4	Muniram Marak Independent

Election Results 1945, to the Assam Legislative Assembly:

Beginnings of new political consciousness:

The second general election of 1945 marked the beginning of a new political consciousness among the people. It was for the first time that a National political party, or rather, a political party entered the District. It may have been perhaps one of the reasons which generated political consciousness in the Garos, as it was during this time that the first political party of Garo Hills was taking shape. The people felt the need for some political organisation to agitate for the provision of essential services like good roads, efficient medical facilities and protection of the Garo language. With

8. Ibid.

this end in view, after independence, the Garo National Council was formed. Mody Marak, the then representative to the Assam Legislative Assembly, was its first President. Emonsing Sangma succeeded him. He was succeeded by Capt. Williamson Sangma. The G.N.C. played an important role in shaping the future of Garo Hills. The party controlled the District Council since 1852. In 1960, it decided to fight for a separate Hill State. It became a constituent part of the A.P.H.L.C. in 1962.

It was during this time that the Second World War broke out. Many of the local people were enlisted in the Labour Corps and about 800 were taken to France, about 17 to Mesopotamia (in Iraq)*, and more than 2000 were taken to Burma.⁹ Many died on the way, some died on the battlefield and

9. From an interview with Mr. Aron Sangma of Damalgre village, Garo Hills, Meghalaya, who also went to France, aged 104, 1st February, 1979. There were two trips to France. The first trip consisted of 600 Garos and the second trip consisted of 200. Mr. Aron Sangma's group was under the command of one Captain Crystal and they first landed by ship at Marseilles. No official record is available about the exact figures. The figures given here are on the basis of personal interview with Mr. Aron Sangma.

*The 17 who went to Mesopotamia, most probably went during the First World War, thus the number is very less.

very few returned safely to their native place. They narrated their various experiences to their fellowmen and this might have helped in promoting political consciousness among the people in the sense that they might have given a certain degree of inspiration by communication of new hopes and ideas. But this consciousness in the Garos of their own identity can be attributed to a number of factors combined together.

Education and the growth of a new class of teacher-leaders in Garo Hills associated with Church societies, the infusion of a sense of unity in the people by the Christian religion, social transition and transformation, political and economic neglect by the Government of Assam, inadequate tribal representation in the State Cabinet of Assam - all these led to the growth of political awareness among the tribal people which compelled them to think in terms of greater tribal unity and cohesion.

One of the reasons why tribal leadership has been forced to take an exclusionistic and separatistic attitude has been its exclusion from the power process. At the same time this implies the desire of the tribal people for political participation and integration rather than that of secession. A strong awareness of their distinct identity from the collective identity of the rest of the Indian polity, manifested itself into a desire for perpetuation of this separate identity through the channel of a well-defined political status. This shows their desire for greater autonomy, determination for political organisation and their quest for a definite political identity of their own.

Mention must be made of the formation in 1952 of the East India Tribal Union. It was the outcome of a meeting convened in Tura by Capt. Sangma, (the then Chief Executive Member of the Garo Hills District Council), of the representatives of the tribal areas to discuss matters connected with the promotion of tribal welfare. It aimed at the formation of a North-Eastern Tribal State which would include the whole of Manipur, the present Nagaland, and all the tribal areas of Assam and the tribal belt of Tripura. The E.I.T.U. fought for a separate state for the Hill Areas. It co-operated with the Chaliha Ministry (Assam), when it's nominee, Captain Sangma was appointed as Cabinet Minister and Lalmaia as Minister of State. In 1960, after the Assam Official Language Act was passed, it joined forces with and became a constituent part of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC)¹⁰.

Participation in the District level:

The creation of the District Council in 1952, brought stability and peace so far as local administration is concerned. The main aim of the District Council's creation was to maintain law and order. The Hill District Councils are autonomous in the sphere of general administration having powers to legislate with the sanction of the Governor of Assam. In short, "the District Council is a corporate body, having perpetual succession and a common seal with the right to sue and be sued. The Council consists of representatives elected by adult franchise to administer the functions, and

exercise the powers entrusted to it."¹¹

The strength and composition of the District Council: Elected as well as nominated members form the District Councils, the number of elected and nominated elements differing from one District to the other.

Year	Khasi and Jaintia Hills,		Garo Hills	
	Elect	Nom	Elect	Nom
1952	18	6	18	6
1957	24	2	22	2
1962	24	-	22	2
1970	27	-	27	3

Number of elected and nominated members- District Councils.¹²

The nominated element was completely eliminated in 1957 in Khasi ^{and Jaintia} Hills District Council because there was the nomination of a non-tribal to the Council by the Government. In Garo Hills the nominated element was reduced to two, and again increased to three in 1970.

In 1965, the Jaintia Hills District Council was constituted and it consisted of elected and nominated members.

Elections to the District Council: The Garo Hills District

10. V.V. Rao: op. cit. p. 516.

11. Ibid. p. 216.

12. Ibid.

Council first met to elect their Chairman on May 2, 1952. Rangam G. Momin was elected unanimously for the office of the Chairman and Mohan Sangma was elected as Deputy Chairman. These two continued in holding the office for two successive terms. Captain Sangma was the first Chief Executive Member of the Garo Hills District Council.

In all the 18 constituencies, the GNC set up its candidates and won 15 seats, the rest being won by Independents. There were two women members, Surjamoti Momin, an Independent contestant and a member nominated by the Governor, Roneswari Marak. There were six uncontested returns with 29 candidates for the 12 seats.

The second general election to the District Council was held in 1957. There were 22 seats for contest and the nominated element was reduced to 2. This time there were only 2 uncontested returns, so for 20 seats, there were 47 candidates. Surjamoti Momin was the only female member this time, elected again as an Independent candidate. Of the 22 candidates, 13 were elected for a second term. Captain Sangma was again elected as C.E.M. till 1958, when he resigned to join the Chaliha Ministry as Minister-in-charge of Tribal Affairs. In his place, Rody K. Marak was elected as the C.E.M. till 1964. Sangma resigned two years later from the Chaliha Cabinet over the language issue and turned to Garo politics. In 1964, he was again elected as C.E.M.

The next election took place in 1964 instead of 1962

because of the Chinese aggression. There were 22 seats available for contest and the number of nominated seats was 2. This time there was only one uncontested return. Thus for 21 seats there were 58 candidates. Out of the 22 successful candidates, 7 were elected for a third term, 5 for a second term and the rest were elected for the first time. Again there was only a single female member, Bisadini Sangma, nominated by the Governor.

In 1970, when the autonomous state of Meghalaya came into being, Capt. Sangma became the Chief Minister of the new state. In his place Mody K. Marak was re-elected as the C.E.M., Bronson Momin became the Chairman with Merson Sangma as the Deputy Chairman.

In 1972, since the GNC had become a constituent part of the APHLC, it was the latter that contested the election. The number of seats available for contest was 27, there were five uncontested returns and all the candidates belonged to the APHLC. In all, there were 64 candidates for 27 seats. The nominated element was increased to 3. In this election, APHLC won 21 seats, Congress won 3 seats and the rest by Independents. The nominated members all belonged to the APHLC. Mody K. Marak was elected for the third term as the C.E.M.

In a place like Garo Hills, where ladies play a significant role in the social and economic life of the

13. Ibid. pp. 201-203 and 225-229.

community, no member of the fair sex became a member of the seven political offices: one Chairman, a Deputy Chairman, one C.E.M., two E.M.s and two Deputy E.M.s. For all practical purposes, the Garo Hills District Council has so far been an all male Assembly.

What are the powers of the District Council?

The District Council is endowed with four main powers and functions.

The legislative powers of the District Council include the power to make laws on the allotment of land excepting reserved forests, for purposes likely to promote the inhabitants of any village or town, that is, for agricultural, grazing, residential purposes and others. The Council manages any forest in the District provided the State Government does not declare it as reserved. Canal or water-course used for agricultural purposes is their management, as well as the regulation of the practice of jhum or other forms of shifting cultivation. It has power to establish town or village councils and to determine their powers and functions. It can make laws on other matters relating to village or town administration, including town or village police, public health and sanitation. It can appoint the successor of the chief or headman; it can make laws on inheritance of property, marriage or divorce, social customs, money-lending and trading by persons other than scheduled tribes.

As far as the executive powers of the District

Council is concerned, it has power to establish, construct and manage primary schools, markets, dispensaries, cattle pounds, fisheries, ferries, roads and waterways. Within its jurisdiction the District Council has power to determine the language and the manner in which primary education should be imparted in primary schools.

The District Council has powers of taxation. As such it is empowered to assess and collect revenue, levy a tax on land and buildings, professions, callings and employment, trades and the entry of goods into the market for sale and also for the maintenance of schools, dispensaries, or roads. It has power also to levy tolls on persons residing within the District, on passengers and goods carried in ferries, licenses or leases for the purpose of prospecting or for extracting minerals. If the State Government derives royalties from licenses or leases granted for the purpose of prospecting or for the extraction of minerals, the District Council has also a right for a share, the rate being mutually agreed to by the parties concerned.

The District Council has judicial powers. It can constitute village courts to try suits and cases in which both the parties are tribals. Suitable persons may be appointed by the District Council as members of village courts, as well as Officers to execute laws made by it. Cases tried by the Village Council can be appealed to the District Council as it is the Court of Appeal. Excepting the High Court and Supreme Court of India, no other court has jurisdiction over such

suits and cases.¹⁴

Thus slowly but surely transition took place from the traditional tribal polity into participatory representative democratic polity.

(8)

Movement for autonomy: Integration of Meghalaya in the Indian Federal System:

Whereas various factors contributed to the formation of the Indian federation, the forces of regional autonomy came into the limelight in this region of India as early as the 1950s. The factors that contributed to the growth of these forces include the internal diversities in language, economic status class, religion, etc., that only if there is complete regional autonomy can self-government be achieved; different ethnic and cultural groups attempting to grow independently and the geographical dispersion.

"Both co-divergence and cohesion seek an ideological foundation to achieve horizontal linkages and in the process influence the conception of unity that a society attempts to seek to consolidate its identity. The problem of integration, ideologically speaking, centres round the nature and conception

14. For details, refer to The Garo Hills Autonomous District Council: Acts, Rules and Regulations as amended upto 31st December, 1968. First Edition, December 1968, Tura.

of this unity which has fundamental consequences, both from a system-building as well as a nation-building point of view. The norms and goals of social and political action as well as its boundaries are cautioned by it.¹⁵

Prior to the independence of India, the problem of reorganisation of North-East India had been discussed by various Officials like Hutton and Parry, the DCs of the Naga Hills and the Lushai Hills (Mizoram), Sir Robert Reid, the Governor of Assam, J.P. Mills, Advisor to the Governor for Tribal Affairs and various suggestions were made without arriving at any consensus.

The Bardoloi^{Sub-} Committee and the Sixth Schedule

The Cabinet Mission suggested that there should be an Advisory Committee on the Rights of Citizens, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas. Sir Stafford Cripps said that an influential Committee should be set up to make proposals for the administration of the Tribal Areas. Accordingly, the Constituent Assembly set up an Advisory Committee in terms of the Cabinet Mission Statement of 24th January, 1947. This Committee appointed a Sub-Committee known as the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Committee with Gopinath Bordoloi as its Chairman.¹⁶

15. Kousar J. Azam: National Integration in India: Some Major Political Aspects, Ph.D. Thesis, Pol. Sc. Deptt., Osmania University, Hyderabad, November 1972, p. 64. (unpublished).

16. V.V.Rao: op. cit. p. 157.

The famous anthropologist Dr. Guha, assisted the Bardoloi Committee in the process of discussion made by several tribes. He maintained that there should not be any attempt at assimilation because it may result in the break-up of the existing tribal institutions. There should be evolution on the old foundations and this evolution should come from the tribe itself, while at the same time, contact with the outside world should be maintained. Until change occurs in the way of life of the tribesmen, some of the tribal systems should be retained. This view was accepted by the Bardoloi Committee.

The witnesses that appeared before the Bardoloi Committee suggested various means of reorganisation of the Tribal Areas. Taking into consideration the demand of the Hills people and various other proposals, the Bardoloi Committee framed the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. "It was hoped that the provision in the Sixth Schedule would give the people of the hill areas adequate administrative autonomy to develop according to their genius, follow their traditional way of life and protect their interest from outside influence."¹⁷

The District Councils as envisaged in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution were set up in 1952. It was during this time that the first echoes of demand from a section of the people living in the autonomous Districts was made for an amendment

17. The Problem Of Reorganisation Of Assam, November 1967,

of the Sixth Schedule on the plea that the provision of the Schedule did not fully satisfy the aspirations of the hill people. This originated due to the nomination of non-tribals into the District Councils by the Indian Government. The tribal people resented this act and believed that it would hinder proper functioning of the administration of the District Councils. This nominated element was eliminated in Khasi Hills District Council but was retained in Garo Hills, the number being reduced from 6 to 2. Later on it was increased from 2 to 3. Nevertheless the demand for autonomy still continued.

The States Reorganisation Commission And The Tribal Demand: When the States Reorganisation Commission (1953) looked into the matter, a section of the hill leaders of the autonomous Districts met in a conference in 1954 at Tura and resolved to submit a memorandum to it demanding a Hill State. The memorandum stressed the fact that the sentiment of the people in the hill areas was not in favour of one State both for the hills and the plains. It also sketched briefly the structure of the Hill State. The SRC considered the memorandum and held that the formation of the Hill State was neither feasible nor in the interest of the tribal people.¹⁸ The Commission considered that the demand for a separate Hill State partly reflected the separatist pull of extremist elements.

18. Ibid. p. 6.

Two considerations weighed with the SRC when it did not recommend the formation of a Hill State. First, small states should not be created. Second, the security of the frontiers should not be affected.¹⁹ The Commission in an overall consideration of all points of view came to the conclusion that the hill Districts should continue to form a part of Assam and no major changes should be made in their present constitutional pattern.²⁰

Thus the demand for the formation of a Hill State was not accepted and recommended by the SRC, but the agitation continued to gain strength. The hill people felt that the autonomy granted to them was not enough. They resented the inadequate representation in the State Cabinet of Assam and the political and economic neglect by the Government of Assam. The 1957 elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly was fought on the issue of the Hill State.

According to Kamalashwar Sinha, "it was a grave situation which needed prompt action and the Centre rose to the occasion."²¹ The Home Minister Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant,

19. V.V. Rao: *op. cit.* p. 347.

20. The Problem Of Reorganisation Of Assam. Nov. 1957, p. 6.

21. Kamalashwar Sinha: Meghalaya. Publications Division, (ISSD), Delhi, 1970, p. 36.

rushed to Assam and the leaders agreed to a tentative plan for reconciliation. To contain the resulting discontent "Pantji manoeuvred and succeeded in bringing in Mr. Bimal Prasad Chaliha to replace Mr. Medhi as Chief Minister. He also created a ministry for Tribal Affairs and Captain Sangma, who later became one of the members of the APHLC and a leader became Minister-in-Charge."²²

Assam Official Language Act, 1960: The separate Statehood demand was revived in 1960 in the wake of the decision of the Government of Assam to make Assamese the official language of the State. This was followed by the organisation which the hill people constituted called the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference at Shillong on July 6 and 7 in 1960, with a view to opposing the Official Language Act. On August 21, 1960, a memorandum was submitted to the President of India by the Council of Action of the APHLC, which emphasized that the separation of the hill Districts from Assam was the only way out of the situation. The APHLC delegation also met Nehru and the then Home Minister and urged them to create an Eastern Frontier State which it considered was desolutely essential for accelerating the pace of development for the hill areas and for satisfying the legitimate aspirations of the hill people. It was pointed out by Nehru that this proposal for

22. Ashok Chanda: Under The Indian Sky, Nachiketa, Bombay, 1971, 206.p.

separate Statehood of these hill Districts of Assam was unpracticable and would lead to complex problems. The points of argument against the formation of such a State were geography, communications and economic considerations.

The Proposal For a Scottish Plan: Although Nehru rejected the demand for a separate Statehood, he suggested that the powers of the autonomous Districts could be enlarged. He suggested the formation of a Committee by the elected MLAs from the autonomous Districts which would especially deal with legislation and like matters relating to the hill Districts which came up before the Assembly and their decisions should prevail after the pattern of the Committee for Scotland in the British House of Commons. A separate Cabinet Minister in the Assam Government should be created, who would be assisted by one or more Deputy Ministers, who would deal with these matters and especially development plans for the autonomous Districts. These tentative plans were rejected by the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference in its session held from 29 June to 1 July, 1961, because of two reasons - the language issue and the proposed arrangement would increase rather than decrease the constant friction between the hills and the plains people. Thus the proposal was dropped.

Pataker Commission: In the middle of 1963, the hill leaders in their discussion with the Governor of Assam explained that while they adhered to the demand for a separate Hill State, the impressions that they had gathered in the course

of their discussions with Nehru, showed his willingness to concede complete autonomy to the hill areas. But how much autonomy could they expect without the creation of a separate State? An answer to this question was the appointment of the Pataskar Commission, intended to recommend a detailed scheme for reorganising the administrative set-up of the Hill Areas with a view to conferring on them a full measure of autonomy subject to the preservation of the unity of the State, the continuance of a common legislature for the whole State and the maintenance of the Cabinet Government of the accepted form functioning on the basis of collective and joint responsibility to the State Assembly.

After a thorough enquiry, the Commission recommended certain schemes which were more or less on the pattern of the 'Nehru Plan'. The Commission submitted its report by 31 March 1966, but its recommendations obviously fell short of the demand of the hill people, notably of the APHLC, for complete autonomy for the hill areas or a clear cut separation from Assam.

Government of India's decision to reorganise Assam

Before any decision on the recommendations of the Commission was announced by the Government of India, the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi who visited Shillong on 27th December, 1966, in the course of a public address declared that there would be some suitable reorganisation of the State consistent with the essential links of overall unity at the top.

State within State: The Prime Minister and the Home Minister had detailed discussions with the leaders of the APHLC following which a communique was issued by the Union Home Ministry on 13 January 1967, purporting to be a proposal for the creation of federating units of equal status within the then State of Assam. The press note said - "Bearing in mind the geography and the imperative needs of security and coordinated development of this region as a whole, the Home Minister discussed with the APHLC leaders the proposal that a federal structure composed of federating units having equal status not subordinate to one another should provide the basis for this reorganisation. Under this arrangement a limited number of essential subjects of common interest would be assigned to the regional federation leaving the rest of the State functions to the federating units which will have their own Legislative Assemblies, Councils of Ministers, etc."

Details of the scheme including the subjects to be allocated to the regional federation would be worked out within six months by a Committee on which all concerned interests would be represented. At a later stage other administrative units in the Eastern region may also join ^{the} regional federation."²³

23. From the text of the Statement issued by the Home Ministry, Government of India, on 13 January 1967, at the conclusion of the discussion with the APHLC delegation.

While taking a total view of the problem of territorial organisation in the Indian Federal System, four objectives required primacy:²⁴

(i) Maintenance of the sovereign integrity and security of the country;

(ii) Stabilisation of the structure of the democratic functioning to assure demand articulation and fulfilment through legitimised processes of politics;

(iii) Promotion of social change and economic development on the principle of inter-regional balance and growth, respecting the values of social justice and social welfare;

(iv) Reconciliation of vital national interest (or security, growth, welfare, etc.), with specific segmentative interest (socio-cultural, linguistic and economic) of the component regions constituting the federal polity.

The nebulous form of the federal structure contained in the Home Ministry's statement of 13 January 1967 was susceptible to various interpretations and left the door open for constitution of many more smaller States in other parts of India. This scheme of reorganisation on the basis of federal structure raised a spate of demands for separate units or states

24. Rasheedudin Khan: The Regional Dimension. Seminar 164, 1973.

of the population in the plains and the hills.

Asoka Mehta Committee's Recommendations: On 22 July 1967, a Committee was appointed with Asoka Mehta, the then Minister of India for Petroleum and Chemicals and Social Welfare as Chairman. The Committee ultimately worked out a scheme for reorganisation of the state and arrived at the following decisions:

1. Federal structure should not be on the basis of reorganisation of the present state of Assam;

2. While the Committee considers the unity and integrity of the present State of Assam as essential for the interests of the plains and the hills, it recommends the maximum autonomy to the hill areas.

3. As the various hill areas differ from one to another in the matter of development, social customs, ethnic origin, language, inheritance etc., they should be given maximum possible autonomy with the right to merge with other autonomous areas after a resolution is passed in their respective legislatures by a two-thirds majority of the total membership of each of the legislatures;

4. In the event of this scheme being acceptable, the present District Councils will cease to exist.

Representing the Communist Party of India, Mr. Phani Bora said that in his view, autonomy might be extended upto the point of conceding the right to form an autonomous State or States by the hill areas.

The APHLC which boycotted the deliberations of the Committee however rejected the recommendations on the ground that nothing short of a reorganisation on the basis of federal structure or a separate Hill State would satisfy their political aspirations.

Further discussions were held between the Government of India and the hill leaders. The Union Government then referred the issue to the "national forum". The Government finally decided to go ahead with the State Plan but it was first necessary to seek a consensus within the Parliamentary Party of Congress. In the teeth of opposition from the colleagues, the Prime Minister and the Home Minister forcefully pleaded for an autonomous State for the hill areas.

Creation of Meghalaya as an autonomous State: On September 11, 1968, the Government of India announced the autonomous State Plan ending uncertainties, fears and speculations. The Government specially kept in view the fact that the North-Eastern region as a whole occupies an important and vital position which calls for an integrated and well co-ordinated approach towards the development as well as the security of the nation. It was the decision of the Government to undertake legislation to constitute an autonomous State within the State of Assam comprising the autonomous Districts of the Garo Hills, the Khasi Hills and the Jaintia Hills. It also provided for the setting up of a high-level Advisory Council for the North-East region as a whole to be designated

as the North-Eastern Council with a view to encouraging an integrated approach to the security and development of this region.

With the creation of the autonomous State of Meghalaya, the Constitution as envisaged in the announcement was amended by a bill introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 10, 1968. The Constitution (22nd Amendment) Bill aimed at adding a new Article (244A) in the Constitution to confer the necessary legislative power on Parliament to enact a law for constituting an autonomous Hill State within Assam and to provide a new State with a legislature and a Council of Ministers.

Following the procedural delays and reintroduction the bill was passed by the Lok Sabha on April 15, 1969, by 309 votes to 28. Only Jana Sangh members opposed it. The Rajya Sabha approved it by 175 votes to 8 on 30 April.

What is an autonomous State? A new concept was introduced into Indian politics and in the Constitutional framework of the country when Meghalaya was born. The formation or admission of new States within the Indian Union had been envisaged by the Constitution makers and there was no provision for an 'autonomous State' in the Indian Constitution. So for its temporary creation the Constitution had to be amended (22nd Amendment).

The autonomous State would have a Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers. Under this arrangement, except for a few subjects of common interest, all other subjects of the State list would be transferred to the autonomous State.

The autonomous State would also have taxation powers in respect of the subjects assigned to it including land revenue and agricultural income tax, excise duty, taxes on mineral rights, taxes on goods and passenger and entertainment tax. The autonomous State would also be assigned it's relatable share out of the sales tax.

Detailed provisions had been made regarding the division of assets and liabilities between the autonomous State and the Parent State (Assam) in the third Schedule to the Meghalaya Act.

The second Schedule of the Meghalaya Act enumerated in detail the matters in respect of which the autonomous State had exclusive and concurrent jurisdiction.

Meghalaya gets full Statehood: The demand for full Statehood gathered momentum as Manipur and Tripura clamoured for it. The Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi, announced in the Lok Sabha on November 10, 1970, the acceptance in principle by the Government of India of Meghalaya's demand for full Statehood.

CHAPTER IVParty System and Electoral Politics in Meghalaya,1960 - 1977:

Background: The Party System in India has during the last quarter century, developed on lines quite dissimilar to those which obtained in Western democracies. The main trends noticeable in India are (i) absence of polarisation or the lack of a powerful opposition; (ii) a cleavage of parties on national and state bases and (iii) endless proliferation.¹

Instead of polarising at the national level into ruling and opposition parties, another sort of polarisation took place at the national and state levels. It is yet unexplainable why political parties tend to multiply in India at such prodigious rates. During the 30 years that have elapsed, the country has seen a proliferation of political parties, such as no country in the world has witnessed. A rough tally yields a hundred political parties of all hues that have come into existence since independence.

It was within this background that party politics in Meghalaya, a small state in North-East India came into existence. The year 1960 ushered in the broad-based political party called the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC).

1. Manorama Year Book, Political Parties, 1976, p. 404.

which was organised with the main aim of intensifying the demand for a separate state outside Assam. Its constituents at that time were: The East India Tribal Union, the Khasi - Jaintia Hills Conference, the Undivided Congress, the Jaintia Durbar, the Garo National Council, the Nepali League (of Garo Hills), the Moslem League (also of Garo Hills) and the Swatantra Party. The Congress group broke away in 1962 when the Congressmen accepted the Scottish Pattern of Administration. The party is still a unit of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC).

A retrospect outlining the existing party system and electoral politics from 1968 - '70: It was in 1954 that the Union Government deputed the State Reorganisation Commission to find out whether the creation of an Eastern Frontier State was feasible or not. This was not considered feasible by the Commission. Thus the Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU) came into being almost immediately. During the general elections of 1957, the EITU swept the polls in both the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills, but the party disintegrated in 1958 when the leaders joined the Assam Congress Ministry, under B.P. Chaliha.

In 1960, the Government of Assam wanted to pass an Act declaring Assamese as the sole official language of the State. As a result, political parties in the hills became united and formed the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC) for a counter-action. The Hill- State movement took

a new and threatening turn from then onwards, when Capt. Sangma and his associates resigned from the Chaliha Ministry and organised the APHLC united front.

Towards the end of 1960, the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru came forward with the first offer to the hill leaders. The offer is popularly known as the "Scottish Pattern Of Administration." The Hills Congress Committee hastened to accept it and left the APHLC for good: but the remaining constituents of the front having decided to be separated from Assam rejected the offer outright. Thus the general election of 1962 saw the Congress Party fighting against the APHLC. The latter swept the polls with a landslide majority.

In the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the APHLC won all the five seats. In Garo Hills, out of the four seats it lost one for the Congress. For the first time the Congress was

	District	Total No. of seats	*INC	*CPI	*APHLC	*IND	Total No of Candidates
1	United Khasi & Jaintia Hills	5	Nil	Nil	5	Nil	5
2	Garo Hills	4	1	Nil	3	Nil	4
	Total	9	1	Nil	8	Nil	9

Results of the General Election to the Assam Legislative Assembly, 1962. Seats gained.²

2. V.V. Rao: A Century Of Tribal Politics. New Delhi, 1976, pp. 473-474 and 481-482.

able to obtain a foothold in Garo Hills. These elections reflected the formidable popularity of the APHLC leadership as the party had contested the Assembly election on the issue of the Hill State. Since the demand for the Hill State was not conceded to, six out of nine MLAs resigned to mark the popular feelings of the people. Out of the three MLAs who did not resign were the Congress candidate Emoneing Sangma and two other APHLC candidates from Garo Hills. Only Captain Sangma resigned from Garo Hills.

During a short interregnum some of the leaders went deep into the Gandhian philosophy of expressing grievances and decided to launch a non-violent direct action early in 1963. In the meantime the bye-elections to fill the vacant seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly caused by the resignation of the APHLC MLAs took place and once again the party swept the polls.

In 1964, the APHLC accepted to give the Nehru Plan a fair trial to please the ailing Prime Minister. This held good for some months. One year later, the Government of India appointed a Commission with late Dr. H.V. Pataskar as Chairman who submitted his recommendations in 1966 March. The Nehru conception of full autonomy was reversed to nothing better than the existing arrangement. The hill people behind the APHLC rejected the plan as it fell short of the assurance of the Prime Minister.

Immediately after this the APHLC leaders were invited to New Delhi for talks. After prolonged discussion, a Sub-State plan was offered to the leaders. Under the new plan, the hill areas would have a separate legislature and Council of Ministers but would continue to remain within Assam. The APHLC did not accept this proposal and decided to boycott the general election of 1967. The crisis was averted when the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Shillong and gave an assurance of granting autonomy. After further talks in New Delhi between the Government of India and the APHLC leaders, a plan for full autonomy was announced by the Home Ministry, which is popularly known as the "Federal Structure", seeking to organise Assam into federating units having "equal status, not subordinate to one another".³

Contesting Candidates According To Parties

Seats Contested 1967.⁴

Districts	Total No. of Seats	National Parties				Total No. of Candidates
		INC	CPI	APHLC	IND	
1. United Khasi & Jaintia Hills	5	Nil	Nil	5	4	9
2. Garo Hills	4	4	2	4	4	14
Total	9	4	2	9	8	23

The issue on which the 1967 elections were fought was highly emotional and records show that the APHLC won all the nine seats in both the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and the Garo Hills.

No. of Seats gained by the various Parties in the 1967
General Election.⁵

	Districts	Total No. of Seats	INC	CPI	APHLC	IND	Total No. of Candidates Elected.
1	United Khasi & Jaintia Hills	5	NIL	NIL	5	NIL	5
2	Garo Hills	4	NIL	NIL	4	NIL	4
	Total	9	NIL	NIL	9	NIL	9

Since the issue on which the elections were fought was highly emotional the Congress Party did not like to contest against the APHLC candidates in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Even the CPI which entered Garo Hills for the first time came out unsuccessful. The Congress also lost its seat in the Garo

3. From the text of the Statement issued by the Home Ministry, Government of India, on 13 January, 1967, at the conclusion of the discussion with the APHLC delegation.

4. V.V. Rao: *op. cit.* pp. 474-475, and 482-483.

5. Ibid., pp. 474-476 and 482-483.

Hills which it had formerly won.

The rejoicing of the hill people at the prospect of either a federation plan or a clear-cut State degenerated into dejection because the Union Government neither implemented the federation, nor granted the clear-cut State for the people.

The split in the APHLC: At this stage, the Union Government held diplomatic dialogues in Delhi with the APCC and a few leaders of the APHLC in order to get away from its own momentous declaration of January 13, 1967. The protracted dialogues between the APHLC, the APCC and the Union Govt., and the imminent sacrificing of the federal plan or a clear-cut Hill-State for an autonomous State, made a group of other leaders sever from the APHLC and to form themselves into a body, which was then known as the Hill State Volunteers' Adhoc Committee.

On September 11, 1968, the Union Government made the announcement for an autonomous State for the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills within the State of Assam.

In order to mobilise public support, and to strengthen the opposition to the creation of an autonomous State within Assam, the Hill State Volunteers' Adhoc Committee was constituted into a full-fledged party known as the Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party (HSPDP) with the basic objective of continuing the struggle for the ultimate attainment of a clear-cut Hill State within the Indian Union.

By constitutional means and methods.

The election of the Provisional Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya, 1970: The Meghalaya sub-State was ceremoniously inaugurated on April 2, 1970, by the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi, and the Governor of Assam administered oaths of allegiance to the Provincial Ministers (APHLC leaders). In the same year, the autonomous State of Meghalaya was formed with a legislature of its own. The election of the Provincial Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya was indirect. The existing District Councils were constituted as electoral colleges and they elected members to the Meghalaya Autonomous State Legislative Assembly. The total strength of the House was 41, of whom 18 were from the Khasi Hills, 4 from the Jaintia Hills, 16 from the Garo Hills and 3 nominated represent minorities. The APHLC was able to win 34 of the 41 seats and thus came to power within ten years after its formation. The three nominated members represented three communities, Bengali, Assamese and Nepali.⁶

The main parties that exist in Meghalaya after attaining full Statehood: their origins, ideologies, programmes:

Only two national parties exist in Meghalaya - the Indian National Congress and the Communist Party of India. The rest are all regional political parties, namely, the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference, the Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party and very recently a number of new political parties have come into existence.

(A) The APHLC:

It's origin: It was in the year 1960, when the Chaliha Ministry declared that Assamese would be the State language that Sangma, who was unhappy at this decision convened a meeting of the leaders of all the political parties in the autonomous Districts on 6th July, 1960 that the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference came into existence, which was destined to play a vital role in the formation of Meghalaya.

It's Constitution: Though the APHLC originated in 1960, it's written Constitution was published only in the year 1977, 1st October. According to it's Constitution, the party shall operate in the State of Meghalaya and in such other areas as may be decided upon by the party.

The objects of the party shall be:⁷

(a) the well-being and advancement of the people of Meghalaya and the establishment in the country, by peaceful and constitutional means, of a welfare state based on parliamentary democracy;

(b) the preservation of the identity of the tribal people and the development of their democratic institutions, languages, customs and culture;

6. Ibid. p. 483.

7. Constitution of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference. Shillong, October 1977, p. 1., Article III.

(c) to protect political, economic, social and religious rights of the people;

(d) to play a constructive role in the affairs of the nation.

It's constituents consist of (a) District units or branches and (b) Affiliated political parties.

The organs through which the party functions at it's various levels are (a) Plenary Session; (b) Executive Committee; (c) Working Committee.

As regards the Party fund, there is no fixed source but the subscription fees collected by the Party is proportioned among the Party's Committees in the following ratio:⁸

(a) Central - 10%

(b) District - 30%

(c) Circle - 20%

(d) Primary - 40%

Manifestoes of the APHLC: A study of the programmes of the APHLC shows that it is realistic and not revolutionary. In 1962,⁹ the APHLC aimed at making every effort for the North-Eastern State; it promised that in schools and colleges, English would be the medium of instruction and would be the Official language of the State until it would be replaced by Hindi. The continuation of the District Councils was also one

8. Ibid. p. 6.

9. Election manifesto of the APHLC, 1962.

of it's promises. It would increase the standard of life of the individual and assured the protection of minorities living in the tribal areas.

In 1967,¹⁰ the hill people were promised that the Hill State would be laid on firm foundation. It would aim at promoting the solidarity of the people of the Hill State; the minorities in the tribal areas would be given protection; agriculturally the Party would make the Hill State self-sufficient; a better system of education for the children of the State would be provided for; democratic decentralisation would be introduced; a planned and scientific exploitation of the mineral resources of the region would be brought into existence.

We find in the 1972¹¹ election manifesto an improvement over the previous ones, in all respects. The Party promised that it would make an all out effort to be self-sufficient in food by encouraging the farmer to take modern methods of cultivation. It promised to give financial assistance and incentives in irrigation, land reclamation and a change in the system of cultivation by procuring good seeds and fertilizers. By judicious and scientific exploitation of mineral resources, it aimed at enriching the State. Illiteracy would be eradicated and a healthy, useful and meaningful course of studies for the children of the State was assured. It

10 & 11. Election manifesto of the APHLC, 1967 & 1972.

promised to eradicate social evils and promote a healthy social life. The Party promised to undertake new schemes for the development of border areas. Schemes for the development of urban areas would be formulated, in particular, Shillong, Jowai and Tura. Finally the minorities would be protected.

On November 16, 1976, some of the leaders of the APHLC merged with the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Captain M.A. Sangma and made an attempt to dissolve the Party and freeze its symbol 'flower'¹² which was later on restored.

The election manifesto of 1978 contains 18 promises.¹³ Should the APHLC win the election, it would adopt democratic methods of governing the State. It would attempt to stop the influx of outsiders and exploitation of the tribals. There are tribal people living outside Meghalaya - this would be one of the important issues that the APHLC would deal with, to bring them also under the State of Meghalaya. Ways for economic improvement would be provided for the people living near the borders of Bangladesh; it promised marketing facilities for a better livelihood and to remind the Union Government of the same. The District Councils would continue to exist as before. There would be wider opportunities for employment as it would encourage cottage and small-scale industries. To help

12. The emblem of the APHLC was originally a red rose with green leaves against a white background.

the farmers increase production, new agricultural equipments, better seeds, etc., would be provided; grants would be given to schools and colleges to uplift the standard of education; it assured regular pay to the school and college teachers, at the same time improving the system of education. The standard of living would be improved, social evils would be eradicated and an attempt would be made to bring peace among the different people living in the State.

A study of the above manifestoes reveal that though the APHLC is regional in character, it has a national outlook. It's programme promises an egalitarian society and does not make an appeal to parochial feelings and narrow prejudices. The APHLC again took a leading part in the establishment of the North-Eastern Hill University with English as the medium of instruction. It's doors are open to all in this region. This Hill University is a step towards bringing about a national outlook in the people of this region and develop a common consciousness of a common end.

(B) The HSPDP:

It's origin: HSPDP stands for the Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party. It's origin can be traced back to the year 1970, it's main aim at that time being to ceaselessly struggle for the ultimate attainment of a clear-cut

and full-fledged Hill State within the Indian Union; and for the achievement of political, social and economic freedom for the Hill people.

It's policy: At present the HSPDP has no written constitution. According to the manifesto of 1971, the policy of the HSPDP is spelled out thus:¹⁴

The HSPDP believes in Democratic Socialism where the aim is to eradicate poverty, illiteracy and sickness. The Party aims at achieving social, political and economic justice to all the hill people and so it will work assiduously towards this end. The Party will strive to see that the proposed Hill State should be speedily developed through good programmes conceived to suit the genius and the present condition of the people and the geography of the area, and implemented with firmness and sincerity so that they may reach the level of other developed areas of the country within the shortest possible time. The Party will ceaselessly endeavour to foster the unity and solidarity of the Hill people. The Party assures the protection of the rights and privileges of all persons residing within the jurisdiction of the proposed Hill State as guaranteed by the Constitution of India.

It's programme: The aim of the Party is to serve the people socially, economically and politically. The programme

14. Election manifesto of the HSPDP, 1971.

of the HSPDP is spelled out as follows:

It would maintain the existing District Councils which would be re-oriented according to its needs. To meet the basic needs of the people, the Party would give it priority in their development plans. They would seek to solve unemployment problem by labour-intensive and job-oriented development schemes. So, first priority would go towards improving agriculture and roads for better marketing of agricultural and industrial products. Food self-sufficiency would be the main target as well as intensification of cash crops. It would gradually exploit the material resources and economic potentialities of the Hill State to the full for the common good of all the Hill people and the country at large. Quality production at competitive prices would be the main aim of development.

Medium and small industries in the public and private sectors would be given encouragement by giving of grants or loans. The existing land tenure system would be recognised and maintained. The Party would seriously impress upon the Government of India regarding the border problems. Illiteracy would be eradicated and education intensified. Research in respect of all tribal cultures of the State would be encouraged and given financial help. Through education and propaganda, social evils would be sought to be eradicated as well as through legislative measures. Depending on the ability

of the State, medical facilities would be made available to the people. It would make an effort to ensure the availability of drinking water to the people. It would aim at intensification and extension of town and country planning.

Electoral participation: Although the HSPDP was born on 1970 it did not contest the election in 1972. For the first time in Meghalaya the HSPDP officially contested the general elections of 1977 to membership in Parliament and also in 1978 to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. The Party set up 35 candidates in the Jaintia Hills District and 28 candidates in the Khasi Hills District. There were no HSPDP candidates in Garo Hills.¹⁵

(C) The INC:

The Indian National Congress had come to stay in Meghalaya when it was still a part of Assam. It was one of the constituents of the APHLC when the latter was formed in 1960. In the same year, the INC left the APHLC for good, following its acceptance of the Scottish Pattern of Administration. Thus the INC became an opposition Party in Meghalaya against the APHLC.¹⁶

The electoral performance of the INC in

15. Meghalaya Election Handbook, February 1978, Meghalaya.

16. From an interview with Mr. Emonaing Sangma, a former Congress Party member in Garo Hills.

Meghalaya has been very poor. In the 1962 elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly, for the first time, it's candidate Emonsing Sangma won the election thereby getting a foothold, but it lost again in the next general election.

Merging of the APHLC leaders with the INC: As mentioned earlier, some of the leaders of the APHLC merged with the INC in 1976, November 16, under the leadership of the then Chief Minister Captain W.A. Sangma, who stated that "The APHLC has joined the Congress, not out of fear or because of any bribery or pressure." It was done because the realisation that "the tribals cannot proceed alone in their march to progress. They cannot live in isolation but also with the whole country."¹⁷ This occurred when the country was under the declaration of emergency. This was followed by an attempt to dissolve the APHLC and it's symbol 'flower', which was later on restored. Thus the INC became powerful till the next general election. In 1977, there was election to the membership in Parliament. Hopingstone Lyngdoh, an HSPDP candidate was elected from the Khasi Hills. In Garo Hills, Purno Sangma, an INC candidate was elected. In the 1978 general election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, there was competition between the INC Vs. INC (I), the APHLC and the HSPDP. This aspect is dealt with later in detail.

17. All India News Services Division, December 20, 1976.

(D) The CPI:

Looking at the electoral performance of the CPI right from the beginning ~~on~~ upto ^{the} present day, we find that it is completely nil - it has failed to win a single seat during so many elections that have taken place. This shows the CPI's role as a political party in Meghalaya as very poor.¹⁸

Although the Communist Party of India has reframed its policy to accommodate popular democratic ideas, like individual liberty, freedom of speech, the freedom of Press and freedom of association, in the conditions prevailing in India today,¹⁹ it has been unable to draw support and sympathy from the people of Meghalaya. This is the result of varied factors. The regional political parties existing in the State gets its sustenance from regional tribal loyalties and affinities. Even for that matter the INC has also failed to gain popularity in the tribal areas, except for a brief period during the emergency. The very word 'communism' generates fear in the minds of the tribal people, because to them it implies 'suppression' and curbing of all liberties. Here again religion has played a role. It is the educated Christian elite group of people who reject communism. Christianity and its teachings

18. Refer to pp. 71, 73, 74

19. Constitution of the Communist Party of India, October 1976,

have been responsible for it as well as the propaganda against the Communist countries by the other Western powers have added to its unpopularity. The common illiterate man is ignorant of any political term, hence they follow what their leaders say. The revolutionary spirit of Marxism - Leninism as advocated by the Communist Party has failed to reach the tribal masses. Another reason is that the tribal areas have been excluded from the nation-wide revolution that was going on before independence because this national movement did not reach them. As a result, the tribal areas have become more regionalistic politically and they cohere and diverge in quest of self-images that satisfy their material and psychological goals and aspirations.

(E) Other Parties: Besides the main political parties mentioned above, there are new ones which have originated recently.

The MULF or the Meghalaya United Legislative Front was the new name which was proposed to replace the INC (led by Reddy). Its followers were the former members of the INC with Captain Sangma as their leader. By the end of 1978, this same party had merged with Mrs. Indira Gandhi's Party.

The JNU or Jaintia National Union is also a new formed Party. Its formation is based on community identity, mainly, the Jaintias, one of the three tribes of Meghalaya.

Neither the MULF nor the JNU participated in the

last general election on their respective panels.

A new party that has recently come to exist official is the PDIC or the People's Demand Implementation Committee, led by G.G. Swell, the former Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

Dominant personalities in Meghalaya politics: Many personalities have played important roles before and after Meghalaya attained its Statehood. Prior to 1970, the one dominant party that existed in this State was the APHLC. Capt. W.A. Sangma was the force and strength behind the party, and as its leader, he maintained the APHLC as a well-knit political party. He was a moderate and a constitutionalist, at the same time, he was the only leader in the APHLC who had previous administrative experience.

When the autonomous State of Meghalaya was formed, Sangma naturally became the leader of the existing major party, and so, it was his duty to select his colleagues to form the Government. Stanley D.D. Nichols Roy was one of them. He was the General Secretary of the party continuously throughout the period of the struggle for the Hill State. B.B. Lyngdoh was the second one. It was he who supplied the sinews of political warfare to the party. Both Stanley Nichols Roy and B.B. Lyngdoh were Khasis. Edwingson Barez was taken as Cabinet Minister from the Jaintia Hills and Sandford Marak from the Garo Hills. Captain Sangma himself comes from the Garo Hills. Besides the above mentioned personalities, R.S. Lyngdoh from Khasi Hills

became the Speaker of the House and Grohosing Marak from Garo Hills was selected for the post of Deputy Speakership. D.D. Pugh was taken as Minister of the State.

Following the birth of the HSPDP, which became the main opposition party of the APHLC, there emerged leaders like Hoover Hynniewta, Martin Narayan Majaw, J.E. Taring and Hopingstone Lyngdoh. In 1974, Captain Sangma expanded the Ministry due to certain difficulties. C.R. Myndiah was taken into the Cabinet. D.D. Pugh and G.S. Marak who were Ministers of State were promoted to the Cabinet rank. Sangma then took the Ministers of State, one from each of the Districts: P.G. Marbanlang from the Khasi Hills, B.S. Shallam from the Jaintia District and Saleang Marak from Garo Hills.²⁰

After the general elections of 1977-'78, there have been changes in the political arena of Meghalaya. One can find new parties in existence and new personalities. The real location of portfolios among the Ministers of Meghalaya is given below:²¹

1. Shri D.D. Pugh - Chief Minister-Personnel and Administrative Reforms, Political, Home (including Passport and Jails), Elections, Re-organisation, Cabinet Affairs, General Administration, Education, Youth and Sports.

20. W.V. Rao: op. cit. pp. 535 - 538.

21. The Gazette of Meghalaya (Extraordinary)? published by authority, Shillong, April 19, 1978.

General Co-ordination of all Departments and matters not allotted to any other Minister.

2. Shri S.D. Khongwir - Deputy Chief Minister - Planning, Finance, (including taxation) and Food and Civil Supplies.

3. Shri M.N. Majaw - Minister - Law, Parliamentary Affairs, Revenue and Community Development.

4. Shri P.R. Kyndiah - Minister - Industries (including Small and Cottage Industries), Co-operation and Municipal Administration.

5. Shri B. Pakem - Minister - Agriculture (including Irrigation and Animal Husbandry).

6. Shri J.D. Pohrmen - Minister - Health and Family Welfare, Public Health Engineering, Border Areas Development and Trade (including Border Trade).

7. Shri B.W. Momin - Minister - Fisheries and Transport

8. Shri Y. Fuller Lyngdoh - Minister - Public Works (Roads and Buildings) and Embankment and Drainage.

9. Shri H. Hadem - Minister - Power, Mining, Geology, and Excise.

10. Shri E. Iawphniaw - Minister - Soil Conservation, Tourism, Weights and Measures and Communications.

11. Shri Jackman Marak - Minister - Relief and Rehabilitation of displaced persons, District Council Affairs, Town and Country Planning.

12. Shri Jenden Ch. Marak - Minister - Sericulture and Weaving, Labour, Social Welfare, Civil Defence and Home Guards.

13. Shri R. Lyngdoh - Minister - Forest, Printing and Stationery, Public Relations, Registration and Stamp.

General elections to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly:

Contesting Candidates according to Parties, 1972²²

District	Total No. of seats	National Parties		State Party	IND	Total No of Candidates
		INC	CPI	APHLC		
1 Jaintia Hills	6	2	Nil	6	11	19
2 Khasi Hills	30	4	1	25	90	120
3 Garo Hills	24	6	1	18	34	59
Total	60	12	2	49	135	198

A - Seats contested by political parties and independent candidates

District	Total No. of seats	National Parties		State P.		Total No of candidates
		INC	CPI	APHLC	IND	
1 Jaintia Hills	6	Nil	Nil	2	4	6
2 Khasi Hills	30	4	Nil	13	13	30
3 Garo Hills	24	5	Nil	17	2	24
Total	60	9	Nil	32	19	60

B - Seats gained by political parties and independent candidates.

District	Total Electorate	Total Votes Polled	Total valid votes polled	Total Votes rejected	Percentage of Col. 5 to Col. 3.
1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Jaintia Hills	55,039	39,962 (72.60)	39,161 (71.15)	801	2.04
2 Khasi Hills	2,15,168	1,21,975 (56.67)	1,18,098 (54.42)	3,877	3.17
3 Garo Hills	1,48,286	53,814 (36.28)	40,753 (33.56)	4,061	7.54
Total	4,18,493	2,15,751 (51.55)	2,07,012 (49.46)	8,739	4.05

Analysis of the total votes polled in the State, valid votes polled and votes rejected with percentage thereof.

District	Total valid votes polled	No. & percentage of valid votes polled			
		National Parties		State P.	
		INC	CPI	APHLC	INDEPENDENTS
1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Jaintia Hills	39,161	3,565 (9.10)	Nil (-)	16,914 (43.19)	18,682 (47.70)
2 Khasi Hills	1,18,098	7,081 (5.99)	715 (0.60)	37,374 (31.64)	72,928 (61.75)
3 Garo Hills	49,754	9,828 (19.75)	467 (0.94)	19,563 (39.32)	19,896 (39.98)
Total	2,07,013	20,474 (9.87)	1,182 (0.57)	73,851 (35.67)	1,11,506 (53.86)

Analysis of valid votes polled in favour of political parties and independent candidates.

General elections to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, 1978:²³ In the general election of 1978, the number of Districts in Meghalaya had been increased to five, the number of subdivisions into three and the number of Assembly constituencies remained sixty as before.

Contesting candidates according to parties:

District	No of seats	Candidates sponsored by					IND	Total
		INC	INC(I)	CPI	APRLC	HSPDP		
1 JAINTIA HILLS	7	7	-	-	6	7	12	32
2 E. KHASI HILLS								
A Shillong Subdiv.	17	15	5	2	15	15	41	94
B Ri Bhoi Subdiv.	4	3	1	1	4	4	9	22
3 W. KHASI HILLS								
A Nongstoin Subdiv.	5	5	-	-	5	5	6	21
B Mairang Subdiv.	3	3	-	-	2	3	4	12
4 W. GARO HILLS								
A Tura Subdiv.	15	15	2	1	11	-	23	52
B Bagmara Subdiv.	2	2	-	-	2	-	2	6
E. GARO HILLS	7	7	1	-	7	-	8	23
TOTAL	60	57	9	4	52	35	105	262

A - Seats contested by political parties and independent candidates.

	Districts	Total	INC	INC(I)	CPI	APHLC	HSPDP	IND	Total
1	Jaintia Hills	7	-	-	-	2	3	2	7
2	East & West Khasi Hills	29	9	-	-	6	11	3	29
3	East & West Garo Hills	24	11	-	-	8	-	5	24
	Total	60	20	-	-	16	14	10	60

B - Seats gained by political parties and independent candidates.

Meghalaya Electorate (1977):

	Districts	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1	Jaintia Hills	39,392	39,911	79,303
2	East Khasi Hills	1,01,445	1,00,255	2,01,700
A	Shillong Subdiv.	81,049	81,009	1,62,058
B	Ri Bhoi Subdiv.	20,396	19,246	39,642
3	West ^{Khasi} Hills	46,132	46,875	93,007
A	Mairang Subdiv.	16,704	17,429	34,133
B	Nongstoin Subdiv.	29,428	29,446	58,874
4	West Garo Hills	77,620	78,670	1,56,290
A	Baghmara Subdiv.	8,613	8,703	17,316
B	Tura Subdiv.	69,007	69,967	1,38,974
5	East Garo Hills	27,518	27,205	54,723
	GRAND TOTAL	2,92,107	2,92,916	5,85,023

22. Meghalaya Election Handbook, 1972

23. Ibid Meghalaya Election Handbook, February 1978

CHAPTER V

Conclusion:

In India, tribal politics reveals two processes - (a) the discovery of their identity by primordial communities and (b) a process whereby it is sharpened and projected against the onslaughts of the new universalism. This leads to the exhibition in a microcosm the possibility that could be a reconciliation of the claims of parochialism with universalism in a traditionally closed but transitional society. This reconciliation is particularly relevant in the Indian context for, in a society like India, there is a high degree of primordiality and it is ultimately the ability of the system to contain this primordiality within the framework of it's new polity that will decide it's integrative capacity.

The fathers of the Indian Constitution sought a formula "which would protect economic interests of the tribals, safeguard their way of life and ensure their development so that they might take their legitimate place in the general life of the country." ¹ Let us see how much has been achieved so far.

Political developments in North-East India as a whole were not uniform. In Meghalaya, when the Khasi and Jaintia

1. Government of India, Report of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission: Vol. I, New Delhi, Manager of the Government of India Press, 1961, p. 33.

Hills and Garo Hills were a part of Assam, there was rapid development in the former District because of the location of the capital of Assam in the Khasi Hills. The level of political consciousness in these places were uneven - while it was dominant in the Khasi Hills, it was dormant in the Garo Hills.

Prior to 1927, no tribal was appointed as Minister. Nichols Roy was the first tribal to be included in the Council of Ministers in Assam.² Since 1937, tribals are included in all Ministries in North-East India. But the first step in political developments was the establishment of the District Councils in 1952. The main aim of these District Councils was to protect the characteristically tribal political systems.

Some integrational problems: The tribal areas in North-East India pose a number of problems. First of all, this region has strategic importance having common frontiers with four political communities: China in the North, Bhutan in the North-West, Bangladesh in the South and Burma in the East. To protect these frontier areas is the first problem.

Meghalaya is composed of three main races : Khasi, Jaintia and Garo. Apart from their matriarchal system, these three tribes have immense diversity in many respects, racial, linguistic, cultural and political. There is linguistic

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2. Refer to Chapter III, p. 43.

diversity, the total numbers of another tongues being mainly three. Again, while the language of the Garos belong to the Tibeto-Burman family, Khasi and Jaintia languages belong to the Mon-Khmer origin.

The density of population in Meghalaya is much less than the national average, being 45 per square kilometre.³ As a result of the low density of population, it creates an inviting atmosphere to the overpopulated neighbours to cast their covetous glances upon this region.

Ethnologically, culturally, linguistically, the frontier people of the North-East are not very different from the Mongoloids. The growth of a new phase of 'nationalistic organisation' has often been in opposition to the re-organisation taking place among the non-tribal population, instead of being complementary to it. With wise guidance, this 'nationalism' or 'sub-nationalism' may help to strengthen the cause of India's national integration instead of weakening it.

Like communalism, tribalism has been an inherited problem from the colonial regime. Tribal communities have always revealed their secessionistic trends. There is a reason behind this. During the nation-wide freedom struggle, most of the tribal people and tribal areas remained communicationally

3. Meghalaya Basic Facts, issued by the Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Meghalaya, Shillong, 1977, p. 26.

cut-off from it thus failing to fall into the consensual process. The conception of loyalty to the nation does not exist among most of the tribal people. Thus, only by sustained effort can the spirit of patriotism be infused in the people of this area.

In a State like Meghalaya, there is no common language. English has been adopted as the official language. The percentage of literacy in the State is 29.49,⁴ which compares favourably with the all India average of 29.46 per cent. The language issue as we have seen, is a very sensitive issue for all tribal communities. Imposition of language will lead to resentment, antagonism, tension and increasing alienation of each from the other, and instead of coming closer to achieving political integration it will result in just the contrary.

How to solve these problems? It has been pointed out by Deutsch that the modernisation process is one in which "major clusters of old social economic and psychological commitments are eroded or broken, and people become available for new patterns of socialisation and behaviour."⁵ The process

4. Census Report, 1971, in Meghalaya Basic Facts, op. cit. p. 18.

5. Karl W. Deutsch & William J. Foltz (eds): Nation Building And National Development, (New York, Atherton Press) 1963, pp. 206 - 207.

of nation building implies as Deutch suggests, "An alignment of large number of individuals from the middle and lower classes linked to regional centres and leading ^{social} groups by channels of social communications and economic intercourse, both directly from link to link, and directly with the centre."⁶

National integration will imply, as William N. Chambers has pointed out, "a process of incorporating various parts of a society into a functioning whole (a process)---- (towards) the reduction of barriers between the various parts of the whole, the opening of communications, and ultimately the toleration of differences within unity, the emergence of faith in the political system and the emergence of shared values and perspectives or consensus"⁷ Azam gives a tentative definition of national integration as⁸ "that point of dynamic

6. Deutch: Social Mobilisation And Political Development, American Political Science Review?, 55:3 (September 1961) pp. 7 - 8.

7. William N. Chambers, in Myron Weiner: India - The Two Political Cultures. Lucian Pye and Sydney Verbe (eds) : Political Parties And Political Development? New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1965 p. 98.

8. Kousar J. Azam: National Integration: Some Major Political Aspects, 1972, Hyderabad (Ph.D. Thesis, Osmania University, unpublished) p. 726.

equilibrium or balance that a society is able to achieve in the process of change."

The problem, as Weiner points out is to find out, "what is it which holds a society and a political system together."⁹ To bring these people closer to the mainstream of Indian life, steps should be taken to solve the problems ~~now~~ mentioned above. This can be achieved either through integration efforts or through assimilation. These two terms are often regarded as synonymous by Social Scientists but in fact there is a vast difference between them. Assimilation process will involve a total loss of cultural life and the identity of the assimilated group and its absorption on the terms of the dominant group. Thus it generates fear in the minds of minorities and a feeling of alienation is enhanced which serves as a stumbling ~~to~~ block in the building of a strong nation. To strengthen national integration, it is not necessary to pay attention to eliminate the cultural identities of the groups, rather emphasis should be laid on the encouragement of economic interdependence, thereby encouraging economic development.

Parochialism will give way to universal interests

9. Myron Weiner: Political Integration and Political Development, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, Vol. 358, March 1965 p. 54.

to suffer defeat in the hands of the Chinese in 1962, and one of the factors responsible for it was lack of perfect communications. In India, the situation in tribal areas is hardly understood by rulers at New Delhi. By introducing railways in this part of the country, emotional integration can be achieved. At present there is very poor communication in Meghalaya. If one wants to travel from the Garo Hills to the Khasi Hills, he must pass through the Kamrup District of Assam. This is true also for the citizens of Nagaland and Mizoram.

Educational institutions should be established for undertaking fundamental research in all spheres and Agro-Economic research should be given top priority. Majority of the people are agriculturists and the region is rich and fertile in soil, and there is abundance of water resources, thus irrigation scope is great. As we have already seen in the first Chapter, the people of this region have since time immemorial been practising shifting cultivation. Better methods of cultivation and better seeds for richer yield, in other words, introduction of scientific horticulture and agriculture will not only result in the production of more fruits, vegetables and food crops for the State but also for export. The Indian Government is doing well in awarding Scholarships and Fellowships to students and research scholars, in order to encourage education, the release of more awards of this kind

will go a long way in uplifting the educational level of the people of this region.

As regards the common language for the whole country, the three language formula is found to be most suitable by the writer. By this formula, a student will learn the language of the region, the language of the Union and an International language. In Meghalaya, the medium of instruction in educational institutions has been English till today. Though the Indian Government's policy to implement Hindi language is not altogether ruled out by these people, it's acceptance and learning is taking place very gradually. Already sensitive on this issue as can be seen by the people of Meghalaya reacting strongly against the Assam Official Language Act of 1960, it will be wise on the part of the present Government to try to understand these tribals more and not impose on them the impossible. Instead of coming closer to national integration, disintegration will take it's place.

Another problem of political integration has been caused by the absence of national political parties in this region, which has kept tribal leadership excluded from the nation-building process. Introduction of national political parties in this region is one of the best means for nationalisation of the tribals. The short-sightedness of the State leaders in this respect has been callous.

Once these barriers can be transcended, slowly but surely, these tribal groups will integrate both socially and

will go a long way in uplifting the educational level of the people of this region.

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Once these barriers can be transcended, slowly but surely, these tribal groups will integrate both socially and

politically. It is the degree of participation - constructive and creative that will ultimately decide the degree of national integration in a given polity. As Claude puts it, national integration will remain unattainable unless "there is a progressive development among members of a political system a deep and unambiguous sense of identity with the State and other members of the civic body."¹⁰

In North-East India, the movement for more autonomy is because of long neglect and isolation in the past and this has made the tribal mind suspicious of the outsider and in the atmosphere of misgivings and skepticism, the tribal people want to control their development activities themselves.

India with its Federal Polity has always had to bear the strains existing in the system. Adversities are present when any kind of development takes place, because side by side the activity of that particular area is increased and its regional consciousness aroused.

Evidently, tribal separatism, just like casteism and regionalism, has become a part of Indian politics. Unless it gets submerged in Indian nationalism, it will go on existing.

10. Claude Ake: Political Integration and Political Stability.

A Hypothesis. World Politics. XIX:3 (April 1967) p. 487.

This will depend on how the diverse regional sub-cultures is reconciled in the new pattern of Indian unity. Already the process is taking place. It only needs to be accelerated so that the goal of achieving national integration may be reached as soon as possible.

GLOSSARY

- Achik - hill
- Akhing - clan's land; territory
- Chatchi - a kin-group
- Chra - male relatives of the Gare woman
- Chu - rice beer
- Dalois - Chief of an administrative division in Jaintia Hills
- Dosia - Marriage ceremony of the Songearek Garos
- Gaonburhas-Headman of a village in ^{Naga} Hills
- Hat - periodical market
- Laekar - a civil revenue officer; a chief of a group of village
- Machong - a cohesive kin-group; clan
- Mahari - household organisation of a closely related
matrilineal group
- Mande - man
- Nokkrom - husband of the Nokna
- Nokma - Head or chief of a clan
- Nokna - heiress; literally means 'for the house'
- Nokpante - bachelor's house
- Sarbarakar-Superintendent; a native officer entrusted with the
maintenance of law and order
- Sardar - A village headman
- Songsarek- one who believes in traditional religious usages

Zamindar - a land-lord; an estate-holder; a hereditary collector of revenue

Zimmadar - a custodian; an officer responsible for the arrest of offenders in a special area

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