Chapter 1

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It is now well-established that the socio-cultural features of a society, particularly the patterns of gender relations, shape, to a considerable extent, the behaviour of the demographic and other related variables (Dyson and Moore, 1983; Basu, 1992). An integral aspect of the overall gender relations has been the female status and autonomy. ‘Status’, commonly referred to as women’s overall position in society is a multi-dimensional entity and it ultimately depends on ‘meeting the expectations set by hierarchy outside oneself (Morris, 1969). Female autonomy, on the other hand, puts emphasis on woman as an individual: her capacity to make her own decisions, to summon resources and her ability to meet her requirements and of those she chooses (Morris, 1969). The commonly known variables, such as total fertility rate (hereafter TFR), female mean age at marriage, female school enrolment, female work participation rate are said to reflect the extent of female autonomy. The female status and autonomy has been termed as the “women’s agency” (Sen, 1999) and since the mid-eighties has been recognised as a key determinant of demographic outcomes such as fertility, infant and adult mortality rates, higher life expectancy, better nutrition and overall demographic transition (Dyson and Moore, 1983; Basu, 1992; Sen, 1999).

The so-called “women’s agency” is often found stronger when the levels of literacy and basic education are high, especially among the females (Maharatna, 2005).

There are systematic disparities in the freedoms that men and women enjoy in different societies to achieve well-being (Sen, 1992). These disparities are often reducible to differences in income, resources, opportunities or choices, that is, choices exercised by the sexes with respect to access to income, a long healthy life, education, a decent standard of living, political freedom, guaranteed human rights and personal self-respect (Sen, 1992). The freedom (or choices) that an individual enjoys depends on the situation he is placed in and his ability to take advantage of the situation. A person’s position in a social arrangement can be judged from two different standpoints, (i) the actual achievement and (ii) the freedom to achieve. ‘Achievement’ refers to what we manage to accomplish and ‘freedom to achieve’ refers to the real opportunity that we have, to accomplish what we value or the effective power that we have to achieve what we would choose (Sen, 1992).
In Sen's view (and what has been subsequently echoed by the Human Development Reports of UNDP, 1990 and 1994) many, especially the deprived in the third world countries lead "constrained" lives: there are important limitations to what they can do or be (Sen, 1992). Inequality in functioning and freedom and thus deprivation generally arise due to asymmetries of personal features, such as class, community, caste, gender and race (Sen, 1992) and relate strongly to extensive disparities in well-being including the freedom that we respectively enjoy to achieve well-being. With respect to females, their autonomy rather than their status is believed to capture better the degree of access, control, and independence in decision-making that they have and their ultimate capability to achieve well-being (Morris, 1969).

The objective of the present study is to analyse the variables that are indicative of the demographic, educational, health, socio-cultural and economic conditions of women in the state of Meghalaya so as to assess the level of general well being of it's women population. The present study evaluates the position of women not in terms of her 'status' but in terms of her 'autonomy'.

We basically seek to answer five sets of questions. The first set of questions relates to the adverse Female-to-male ratio\(^1\) (henceforth FMR). We intend to calculate the number of 'missing' women, identify the age groups that the 'missing' women belonged to, and to assess the survival chances of women at different stages of their lives. We intend to study the contribution of migration to the FMR.

The second set of questions seeks to evaluate the endowments at the disposal of the population of the state in terms of the availability of the basic amenities, holding of assets and employment opportunities.

\(^1\) Conventionally, the term sex ratio is used in India to denote female to male ratio, while internationally it is the other way round (Agnihotri 2000). For the purpose of the present study, we will stick to the international usage of the term 'sex ratio' whereby it will stand for male-to-female ratio and FMR will stand for female-to-male ratio.
The third set of questions seeks to study the entitlements of females (both girl children and adults) with respect to food, nutrition, education, health services (both general and reproductive) and ownership of property.

The fourth set of questions seeks to assess the capabilities of women to benefit from these entitlements.

The fifth set of questions endeavours to ascertain women's bargaining powers at the household and at the community levels.

To this end, we have used FMR and migration as the demographic variables; female literacy (more specifically educational level) rate serves as the basic indicator of educational status; the health related variable is mortality rates; the socio-cultural variables employed are fertility rate and female mean age at marriage; female work participation rate (hereafter FWPR) is the economic indicator. In addition to this, we intend to study kinship as a dichotomous cultural variable (kinship categorised as 'male-centred' versus 'female-friendly') to capture the matrilineal ethos of the society under study. Along with these variables, we have also studied two other variables, monthly per capita expenditure (hereafter MPCE) as the proxy for monthly per capita income of the state's population and the size of the land holding as the proxy for the asset/wealth status of the household.

**Section 2. Some issues concerning the position of women in a society**

'Gender' as a category of analysis is grounded on the central conceptual distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'. While 'sex' refers to the biological or physiological division into male and female, 'gender' is a social or cultural construct referring to the set of socially learned behaviour patterns of the sexes (Oakley, 1981). The ideology of gender determines the construction of roles, relations and identity between the sexes; it thus contains norms and rules regarding the appropriate behaviour and produces a range of beliefs and customs to support these norms and social rules. Thus, Beauvoir (1989) in her celebrated work "The Second Sex" has asserted that, "ONE IS NOT BORN, but rather becomes a woman".
In the sociological literature, the 'position' of women is often used as a synonym for 'status' or 'role' of women. Status, defined as "a relative position; standing, especially, social standing" is a multi-dimensional entity and it ultimately depends on meeting the expectations set by hierarchy outside oneself (Morris, 1969). According to Lowie (1920) status may mean four different things, actual treatment, legal status, opportunity for social participation and the character and extent of work. But all the four may not however, be found to coexist anywhere. They are independent of each other and are not causally related. The correlation among them is not empirical but conceptual (Lowie, 1920).

There is much variability in the position enjoyed by women in different societies. For example, women of affluent families are not compelled to perform the drudgery of a menial yet their position is not consistent with our ideals of human dignity. The Toda women, while well-treated, rank as inferior and are excluded from rituals that occupy the foremost place in Toda culture. The women of Andaman island are virtually on a plane of equality with their husbands, though a somewhat larger share of the work generally may fall upon their shoulders. Thus, great caution is required in determining the status of women in a society (Majumdar and Madan, 1986).

In a social arrangement, the 'relative positioning of the sexes' in terms of the gender roles, relations and identity, is constructed in accordance with culture and it is constructed differently in different cultures (Dubey, 1997).

The gender relations are located within the kinship system. Kinship with its rules, norms and ideology is viewed as providing the organising principles that govern the recruitment of individuals to the social groups (Malinowski, 1944) and their placement in them. Kinship subsumes both ideological (that is, definition and conceptions of gender) and material (that is, relations of production and division of labour) aspects of life. It provides the principles

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2 Culture, according to Robertson (1981) refers to the entire way of life of a society, more specifically to the people's "learned ways of life, which are modified and passed on from one generation to the next.

3 Kinship refers to the reproductive principle of integration or to the relationship by blood and by marriage; this includes institutions such as family, the contract of marriage, rules of descent and laws of domestic organisation. These refer to agglomerations of either individual families under the authority of a patriarch or matriarch, or the formation of so-called classified kinship groups such as clan, sibs, gens or phratry, matrilineal/patrilineal descent, matrilocal/patrilocal marriage, the dual system etc (Malinowski, 1944).
for the formation of the family (which is small yet exceedingly important kinship group) and the household, residence at marriage, configuration of role, relationships and the distribution of resources including inheritance and, the obligations and responsibilities of the members of the group in the business of living. But it is necessary to see where the kinship system is rooted, such as the type of culture (mainstream or tribal), the specific marriage practices, influence of environment and ecology, the pattern of production, encounters with colonialism and powerful capitalist societies (Dube, 1997).

The tribal population of India:
There is no single (globally accepted) definition of tribes, they are ordinarily viewed as those distinctively homogenous (and primitive) groups of peoples who are somewhat outside the mainstream (and modern) civilization. The ‘tribals’ of India are widely known as indigenous and autochthonous⁴ people of the land (Ray, 1972). Compared to the newly invading Aryans, those indigenous people were in a lower stage of development; many were still in a hunting-gathering economy, not knowing the use of metal; they seemed to have settled on isolated settlements, spoke a variety of languages, and belonged ethnically to a variety of physical types; they seemed to have practiced what anthropologists call ‘primitive’ religion, and lived in closed and well-knit, undifferentiated, and homogeneous social units, generally presided over by a headman or a chief (Maharatna, 2005).

In the Indian census of 1941, the tribals were defined for the first time, not in terms of their religion or faith, but in terms of their ‘origin’ (that is, as those who had a tribal origin). With the adoption of the Indian Constitution in 1950, the tribal community of India was declared as ‘Scheduled Tribe’ (hereafter ST) (Maharatna, 2005). In India the tribal population is found in the northeastern, Eastern, Central, Western, Northern, Southern regions and in Islands of Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep.

In the Indian social setting, the tribal and the non-tribal population share broadly the same geophysical setting, yet the tribals have a distinctive socio-cultural structure that

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⁴ Autochthonous means one of the primitive inhabitants and aboriginals.
distinguishes them from their non-tribal counterparts (Nathan, 1997; Maharatna, 2000 & 1998).

Regarding women's place in primitive or tribal societies, diametrically opposite views have been expressed. Some of which take the stand that primitive societies generally assign a high status to women, whereas the other viewpoints support the opposite proposition that in primitive societies women are generally a depressed group (Majumdar and Madan, 1986; Lowie, 1920).

The common perception has been that, in a patriarchal society the position of women has been low and depressed, whereas in a matriarchal society they enjoy a high status (Majumdar and Madan, 1986). Matriarchate, according to Radcliffe-Brown (1952) refers to that social system where descent, inheritance and succession are reckoned in the female line; marriage is matrilocal and the mother's relatives wield authority over the children. But it has been pointed out that matrilocal residence is not an invariable concomitant of so-called matriarchal or matrilineal society. Matrilineal descent is found not only with matrilocal (or uxorilocal) residence, but also with patrilocal and viriloclal residence (Gould and Kolb, 1964).

The 'matriarchate' was at one time interpreted to mean that women govern not merely the family but also the primitive equivalent of the state (Lowie, 1920). But the study of some matrilineal tribes in Australia, Melanesia and British Columbia (that is, the Tlingits) have shown that nothing like perfect matriarchate exists in any part of the world (Lowie, 1920). The nearest we come to it are the Iroquois, the Pueblo Indians and the tribal structure in Meghalaya (Lowie, 1920; Majumdar and Madan, 1986).

According to Morgan (1877), the archaic sib was necessarily always matrilineal because marriage between single pairs was unknown in ancient times, rendering paternity doubtful. Affiliation was thus with the mother's group and property was transmitted within the maternal sib, from brother to brother or from maternal uncle to sister's son, but never from father to son. But with increase of property, a natural antagonism arose against this form of
inheritance that excluded the owner’s sons from the legacy and thus necessitated the certainty of fatherhood to be established. This motive was instrumental in the overthrowing of matrilineal descent (and the matriarchal law of inheritance) and the establishment of the father-sib (with the male line of descent and the patriarchal law of inheritance). But contrary to this view, ethnological evidence show that marriages between single pairs were not absent but common among the simplest tribes, such as among the Andaman Islanders ‘conjugal fidelity till death’ has been the rule (Radcliffe-Brown, 1948). Moreover, even in cases where paternity was doubtful, matrilineal descent has not been necessitated. Because there has been a distinction between biological paternity and sociological paternity as among the polyandrous Toda5 (Lowie, 1920).

Lowie (1920) held the view that there is no fixed succession of maternal and paternal descent; sibless tribes may pass directly into the matrilineal or patrilineal condition”. Malinowski (1944) has held the view that the distinction between status and rank, the formation of class and caste, do not occur at the earliest levels of culture, but they occur with the development of wealth, of military power, of conquest and thus of ethnic stratification (race and racial discrimination).

Engels (1942) in his illustrious work “The origin of family, private property and the state” holds that in the process of evolution of the human society, with the emergence of private property, man needed a direct heir to bequeath his property. In the preceding period, when property was communally owned, ‘matriarchy’ or ‘mother-right’6 was the prevailing system wherein descent and inheritance were traced through the mother and the ancestral property passed from the mother to her children so that it can remain in the same matrilineal group. Since the father belonged to a matrilineal group different from that of his children, his property went to his maternal kins after his death. So, matriliny was overthrown and it has to

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5 As per Toda custom, when a man marries a woman, she becomes the wife of his brothers as well, who normally live together; the eldest brother performs a ceremony with a bow an arrow during the pregnancy of the woman, by which his legal fatherhood is established, though all the brothers are considered as the father of the child. If a woman marries several men who are not brothers and live in separate villages then the husband who performs the bow and arrow ceremony establishes his status as the father of not only the first child but of all the subsequent children till another man performs the ceremony.

6 It was Bachofen (as quoted in Engel 1942) who coined the term ‘mother-right’ to denote the exclusive recognition of descent through the mother and Engel (1942) retained the term.
yield its place to patriliny (and patriarchy). But unfortunately, in this changed scenario, women also came to be regarded as the property of men and the very foundation of her subjugation and subordination was laid. Engels (1942) termed this development as the ‘world historical defeat of the female sex’.

Matriliny in India:
In India, though the majority of mainstream population practices patriarchy (and patriliny), people living in the states of Kerala, Meghalaya and Lakshadweep islands are found to adhere to matriliny. Let us now have a glimpse of matriliny as it prevails in these two states and in the union territory.

Matriliny in the present state of Kerala (formed by uniting the princely states of Travancore, Cochin and the former Malabar province of the British Presidency of Madras) is practiced by a large number of people, upper and lower castes among the Hindus, tribes as well as a small number of Christians and Muslims. It is the Nayars, the Thiyyas or Ezhavas and the Mappilas of Malabar who formed the great bulk of the people, along with a few Muslims living in the villages of Varkala in Trivandrum district and Neendakara in Quilon district in Travancore and a few Christians in Neyyattinkara taluk in Trivandrum district who have been found to follow this system in its ‘pure, unadulterated form’. While Kshatriyas followed matriliny, Nambutiri adopted certain customs of the Nayars in the matter of family management while continuing to follow patriliny (Joseph, 1918; Aiyar, 1922; Saradamoni, 1999). Thus, matriliny in Kerala was not restricted to the Nayars. Many other communities also practiced it, though the system did not follow a uniform pattern. Still most of the writers were drawn towards the numerically strong (14.2 percent) and socially visible Nayar community and their practices (Fuller, 1976; Fawcett, 1985).

According to historical evidence, probably in the ninth and tenth centuries A.D, some Hindu settlers from the Kerala coast migrated and settled in the ten islands of the Lakshadweep group of islands (except the island of Minicoy) and after about four centuries there was an en masse conversion to Islam brought about by Arab traders. These people are Sunni Muslims but the special form of matriliny, which these migrants had brought, has survived
to this day. They have been included in the list of Scheduled Caste by the Government of India. Thus, the matriliny practiced in Lakshadweep under the rubric of Islam is an extension of that in Kerala (Dube, 1994).

The three basic institutions of the Nayar matriliny have been the 'Taravad', the marriage system which is reported to have permitted polyandry\(^7\) and polygamy\(^8\), divorce and remarriage, and where descent and inheritance were through the female line. One’s social identity was derived from one’s taravad. A taravad or a Nayar joint family consisted of a group of women and men, all tracing descent from a common ancestress (female links alone were recognised for membership of a matrilineal group and for a right to it’s resources) living under the control and management of the eldest male, who was called the ‘Karanavan’. A taravad, in the simplest form would consist of a mother and her children with their maternal uncle and in it’s complex form it would include a mother, her children both sons and daughters, the latter’s children and their descendants however distant. Thus, the taravad was a matrilineal exogamous descent group, (the women mother formed the stock of the descent and kinship) which entitled it’s members to an inalienable right to a share in it’s property; landed property being the main support system of Nayar matriliny, taravad states were being held in trust to support women and her descendants, from which individual partition could neither be claimed nor could be individually disposed of by either the male or female members; the taravad property was thus supposed to remain within the taravad and it used to be under the control and management by the Karanavan (Logan, 1951). Karanavan usually used to be the oldest woman’s uncle, brother or son and he used to be the head of the household and legal guardian of it’s members (Gough, 1973). There was the practice of women setting up separate households (known as tavazhi) in areas where taravad had properties. But the members of such taravads continued to belong to the original and same taravad at least for a few generations partaking in the rituals. Nayar women entered into matriliny with men of their caste or castes above others. Children born to the women lived with their mother and her matrilineal kin and belonged to their taravad where they had the right to maintenance. Marriage, which used to be affected by mutual consent, could be

\(^7\) It refers to the system of having more than one husband at a time.

\(^8\) It refers to the system of having more than one husband or wife at a time.
terminated at the will of either party (Saradamoni, 1999). Regarding the residence of women after marriage, writers (Gough, 1973; Fuller, 1976) had mentioned about regional variations. The widely accepted view is that the Nayar women continued to live in their own taravad and their husbands visited them. Husbands did have some responsibility towards their wife and children and had an important position. The traditional pattern of marital residence was duolocal, the husband being a nightly visitor to his wife's house (Dube, 1994).

Matriliny in Meghalaya:
Let us now consider the nature of matriliny as it exists in Meghalaya. The state is the homeland of three tribes - the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos, who practice matriliny in matters of their descent and inheritance. During the period from 1961 to 2001, the proportion of ST population to total population of India has risen from 6.90% to 8.2% in 2001 (Maharatna, 2005, pp. 18 & PCA, Census 2001). The proportion of the tribal population in the northeastern region (the region has housed 12% of the total tribal population of the country in 1991) to the total population of the region has also risen from 22.95 in 1961 to 25.8% in 1991. In Meghalaya that has housed less than 3% of the tribal population of the country in 1991, the proportion of tribal population to the total population of the state has risen from 83.07% in 1961 to 85.53% in 1991 (Maharatna, 2005, pp. 31).

In the Khasi-Jaintia matrilineal structure, the three common features are evident. These are the descent, which is through the mother; the matrilocal or uxorilocal residence9; and the inheritance of property is through the female line. The genesis of the Khasi matrilineal system can be traced to the fact that this small tribe was constantly at war with the neighbouring plainsmen that caused their absence from home. Women were the ones who nurtured not only the young but the invalid and the old as well as looked after the property (Gurdon, 1914). Thus, the matriarch, her youngest daughter (who was the last to be married off) and the matriarch's old brothers (who were perhaps too old to be warriors) managed the domestic affairs. The youngest daughter (i.e., Ka Khadduh) was appointed the custodian (not the owner) of the family (or ancestral) property. The responsibility of looking after her

9 That is, the husband lives at the residence of his wife or he stays both at his mother's place as well as at his wife's residence.
ageing parents and the parental home fell on her. The ancestral house (iing Khadduh) served as a hub centre for religious activities and other social affairs of the family. The youngest daughter is, in fact, a symbol of unity among the members of the clan (Kpoh or the Kur). Thus, Khasi matriliny is said to be based on the institution of the ‘Ka Khadduh’. The ancestral home or property, invested with a sanctity, did not permit its disposal. Alienation of inheritance was out of question. The Khasi husband, particularly married to the ‘Khadduh’ or heiress is scrupulously kept out of the decision-making body of his wife’s house. But in case of a non-heiress, when she sets up a separate or neo-local household, the husband, if competent, exercises control and authority (Bareh, 1997).

The Garo society is organised into matrilineal groups that are known as ‘Ma-chongs’ (motherhood or clan). The Garos trace their origin back to the great common ancestress. Descent and inheritance are always traced through the mother and it is restricted to the female line only. All property belongs to the woman, remains within her motherhood and is passed on to her daughter and never to a son. Men do not inherit property and can lay claim only to his self-acquired property. If there is no female issue to inherit the property, another woman of the clan is selected to bequeath it. All the daughters of a family do not equally inherit the property. The best of all the daughters of a couple and generally the youngest is selected as the ‘Nokkrom’ (that is, the heiress or the inheritor) of the property. The ‘Nokkrom’ generally marries a person (known as ‘Nokna’) who belongs to her father’s Ma-chong (or clan). Usually he is the son of her father’s sister. In case of his uncle’s death, the ‘Nokkrom’ marries his uncle’s widow, and supports the family. If such a man is not available, then a man from her father’s clan is selected. The Garo custom makes it binding on the heiress and her husband to reside with her parents in their old age or when they are invalid or incapable of earning for themselves (Choudhury, 1958). According to the Garo customary law, the Chra and Pante (nearest male relatives of the wife’s side) have absolute authority over the family properties of the motherhood. They have the power to veto the decision of the parents and individuals in a family, if he thinks such a decision is against the interest of the whole motherhood. Other male relatives are to follow his instructions. He has the full responsibility to look after the welfare of the families of his mother, sister and niece. The ancestral property may be disposed off in consultation with and with his permission.
The position of a husband in the Garo society is high and respectable. There is no interference from his wife’s relatives (e.g., Chra) as long as his actions are in the interest of the family (Marak, 2002).

Thus, there appears to be enough of uniformity among the matrilineal structures as it prevails in the three societies discussed above and in all of them a good amount of ‘authority is vested in men’ (Gould and Kolb, 1964; Schneider and Gough, 1961).

Section 3. Theoretical framework, Sources of data and Methodology

Theoretical framework of the study:
The theoretical orientation of the present study is drawn mainly from Agnihotri’s (2000) classic work on gender disparities in the Indian population wherein he has modified Amartya Sen’s three seminal contributions: the entitlements framework (Sen, 1981), the capabilities approach (Sen, 1987) to well being and the cooperative-conflict model (Sen, 1987a) of the allocational behaviour within a household.

Sources of data:
The present study is based on the secondary data spanning over a period of twenty-one years available in mainly five sources: these are, the Census of India data for the years 1981, 1991 and 2001; the National Sample Survey Organisation (hereafter NSSO) data of the four quinquennial\(^\text{10}\) rounds that is, the 38\(^\text{th}\) (January-December 1983), 43\(^\text{rd}\) (July 1987-June 1988), 50\(^\text{th}\) (July 1993-June 1994) and 55\(^\text{th}\) (July 1999-June 2000); the Sample Registration System (henceforth SRS) data for the years from 1990 (the year from which SRS started generating data on Meghalaya) to 2001; the data generated by the National Family Health Surveys (hereafter NFHS) 1& 2 conducted during the years 1992-3 and 1998-9 and the data generated by the All-India Educational Surveys conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (hereafter NCERT) in it’s three surveys, the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth conducted during the years 1978, 1986 and 1999. A noteworthy feature of the 43\(^\text{rd}\) round of NSSO was that the sample size (on India and it’s constituent states) for this round was larger and some changes in the sample design had been incorporated. For the 38\(^\text{th}\)

\(^{10}\) It refers to large sample surveys conducted once in 5 years.
round, the size of the sample on Meghalaya has been the smallest as compared to those of the other rounds (for the state). With respect to the data on monthly per capita expenditure (hereafter MPCE) provided by NSSO, usually 12 MPCE classes are formed from a table giving estimated cumulative percentage frequency distribution of persons by MPCE. These MPCE classes are objectively formulated and revised on the basis of trial tabulation of the quinquennial round data. These classes are different for the rural and urban areas.

Apart from these five main sources, we have also used data generated by the three surveys on 'The level and pattern of nutritional intake in India' conducted by the NSSO during the period from 1983 to 2000. Of these three surveys, the first one in 1983 had not provided data on a small state like Meghalaya, because of non-availability of survey data on large proportions of sample villages/blocks, though the latter two covered Meghalaya as well and the data so provided have been analysed by us. We have also used data on health and Family Planning (District Level Household Survey) and Reproductive and Child Health, generated by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt of India.

**Methodology:**

The study is interdisciplinary in nature. The data used is state-level data. Regarding the unit of analysis in the context of a study of demographic variables, it has been pointed out that analyses of variations in the FMR patterns mostly use state-level data despite the fact that some of the Indian states are larger in size than some of the nation states of the world and they are marked by substantial ecological, cultural and social diversity (Bose, 1994). Thus, in using state-level data, there is a danger of over-aggregating patterns. The use of district-level data is said to provide a suitable level of aggregation (Kishor, 1993). In case of the present study, the use of state-level data may be justified on the ground that, the state under study is one of the smallest states of the Indian union and has a fairly high degree of socio-economic homogeneity. For the small states of India's northeast, published demographic statistics are deficient as compared to other states. On some variables such as, births, deaths, life expectancy and Infant mortality rate (hereafter IMR), data on the state as a whole or on every district are not available and these are available only for the sixteen major states. The data for a small state like Meghalaya are not made available on the ground that the sample
size is too small to be a proper representative of the population. This inadequacy is true also of the Census of India, the NSSO and the SRS data for some variables. With respect to the data on births and deaths on the state, data on all the seven districts of the state are not available (there is also large-scale non-reporting of births and deaths). Such data are available for the full length of the study period (1981-2001), only on the Shillong Municipal Area (hereafter SMA), which accounts for about ten percent of the total population of the state. Thus, we have used the data on SMA as a proxy for the state. Even in case of SRS data, while data on other northeastern states are available, unfortunately, it is absent in case of Meghalaya as the state failed to file the reports.

Since the study makes use of data from five published sources, there no doubt arises a question - how to make these data from diverse sources compatible. While the Census of India provides decennial data on demographic and other socio-economic variables at the national, state and the district levels, in many cases even at lower levels of disaggregation such as towns and wards (in urban areas) and blocks and villages (in rural areas), the NSSO, which provides information on income, household consumption and poverty does not sample from every district in the country but does so at the level of the NSSO region (which is termed as the sub-state level), which is an intermediate unit between a district and a state. However, the sample sizes are reasonably large at the level of the NSSO region and thus Census and NSS data can be linked. In case of (smaller) northeastern states and Union Territories, the entire state has been treated as the NSSO region (Murthi and others, 2001). Furthermore, the sample sizes of the data collected for the states of the northeastern region including Meghalaya by Govt. agencies, such as the NSSO and SRS also happen to be reasonably small, and needs to be regarded with more than the usual degree of caution. Thus, we have supplemented, compared and crosschecked such data with those generated by the Census of India.

We have used census data on migration by place of last residence to arrive at the number of in-migrants and out migrants, with the duration of residence being 0-9 years so as to capture the movement into and out of the state during the inter-censal period. The census data for the year 2001 at the state-level are not yet completely available.
The present study as mentioned above is based on an analysis of aggregate-level data from secondary sources. After analysing this data, we have statistically analysed the individual-level data generated by the NFHS-2 to validate the findings. The statistical analysis has been done with the SPSS software version 10.0. We have constructed correlation matrix with the variables relevant to our study and on the basis of the values of the coefficient of correlation between the variables we have constructed cross tabulations for a deeper understanding of the data. But the cross tabulations have not shown any significant result. Moreover, since the values of the correlation coefficient, though statistically significant at 1% and 5% levels of significance have been found to be quite small, we did not deem it necessary to run multivariate regression with the said variables.

The thesis comprises six chapters (including the introduction). The rest of the thesis is structured according to the following scheme:

Each chapter will begin with an introductory section wherein we will introduce the problem to be analysed. This will be followed by a review of the relevant literature; there after we will specify the focus of our discussion, analyse the problem and finally conclude the chapter with a brief gist of the analysis. In each chapter, we have made (wherever available data permitted) a comparative study of the sexes, of the rural and urban female residents, of women with different levels of education and of women belonging to different standards of living and that between matriliny (as represented by Meghalaya) and patriliny (as represented by the mainstream Indian life). We have also made comparisons between the situations of women as it exists in Meghalaya and those prevailing in the region and in the country, with respect to the relevant parameters, whenever data permitted. We produce below an overview of each of the chapters:

In the second chapter, we begin with a brief introduction to the state, it's principal geophysical features and a brief history of the indigenous tribal population. We then proceed to analyse the trend in the FMR over the last two decades in terms of it's vital components that
is, sex differentials at birth, in mortality and in migration. The chapter concludes with the calculation of the number of ‘missing women’.

The third chapter begins with the definition of the concept of ‘endowment’. It then makes an evaluation of the endowments at the disposal of the entire population of the state in terms of existing provision of basic amenities, the poverty line, the pattern of consumption expenditure, nutritional adequacy of the food intake and the wealth status.

The fourth chapter introduces the concept of ‘entitlements’. It makes an assessment of the entitlements of females (both girl children and adults) with respect to food, nutrition, education, health (both general and reproductive) and the ownership of property.

The fifth chapter has been divided into two sections. Section-1 relates to the capabilities of women and Section-2 relates to the bargaining position of women. The chapter begins by defining the concept of ‘capabilities’, analyses the extent to which females have been capable of benefiting from the entitlements in spheres of food, nutrition, education, health (general and reproductive) and property rights. Section-2 starts with a definition of the term ‘bargaining power of women’ and then makes an assessment of the same in terms of their entitlements and capabilities.

The sixth and the last chapter puts together the findings of all the foregoing chapters, analyses it and presents the concluding observations of the study.