CHAPTER 7

Main Findings and Conclusion
Our study has been focussed on identifying the determining relationship among educational investment, educational attainment (literacy) and income (earning capacity) of the adult population of Meghalaya. We have discussed the growth in literacy rate across the districts of Meghalaya over the years, the budgetary allocation of the state and the central government on education, and the per capita income and sample income of the people. Both time-series of secondary data and cross-sections of primary field data we gathered during the period between August 2009 and February 2010, from the six blocks spread over three districts selected to adequately represent the multi-tribal population of Meghalaya, formed the basis of our study. The aggregate secondary data sourced from published materials, journals and government reports also formed the basis of this study. This methodology of two-way analysis, using our sample field data along with published aggregate secondary data was very helpful in our study, particularly in arriving at broad based conclusions regarding expenditures, attainment of literacy, employment and earnings.

Attempt was made to contextualize our study on the rural and semi-urban setting. However, the smaller semi-urban centres that were covered in our study area showed little variation from the rural areas in terms of their socio-economic profile. With our primary focus on public financing of education and literacy attainment at the school level, we have not adequately analysed the impact of investment in college and university level higher studies, or on specialized technical studies on employability, and the consequential enhancement in the prospect of earning an income by individuals and households in Meghalaya. This, therefore, may be an area that could be taken up for future research as they may yield vital understanding of the effectiveness and validity of huge public funding that is involved and show how much they impact employment and
earnings in Meghalaya. In analysing the public as well as private investment pattern in education in Meghalaya and its influence on the income generation and the prospect of earning a livelihood, their employment prospects, and on the process of income generation, we have tried to look into the hitherto uncovered aspects of the interrelations between educational and economic variables in the rural and semi-urban contexts of Meghalaya.

The main thrust of our theoretical, empirical and descriptive research, analysing the impact of investment in education on the income of the people of Meghalaya, with its focus on basic school education, have been threefold:

5. exploring and analysing the correlation between investment in education, literacy and income/employment prospects,
6. examining the consequence of different levels of literacy on earning capacity of individuals, and
7. probing the causes for the severe regional imbalance in educational opportunities and the differences in individual literacy and employment in Meghalaya.

To carry out the main thrust and its focus in our research, the filed study for this work covered all the three natural regions of Meghalaya namely, the Garo Hills, the Khasi Hills and the Jaintia Hills. Purposive, stratified sampling technique was adopted in the selection of the three districts. Random selection of one hundred adult members as sample representatives from each of these blocks provided us with a cross-section primary data in Meghalaya. We have already clarified the methodology and the conceptual design in the introduction of the thesis.
It is clear from the analysis advanced in the thesis that Meghalaya has made considerable progress on all spheres in the last forty years. Despite this, the state is characterised by poverty, unemployment, economic backwardness and poor quality of life. The widening gap in income between the ‘have’ and the ‘have nots’ have grown over the years. In matters of human resource development, the state continues to lag behind. A large section of the rural poor continues to be in the grip of discriminating poverty and unemployment with no access to affordable quality education. In other words, the distribution of opportunities for education has been uneven across social classes in the state. The commendable progress made on several educational fronts since the inception of the state has not been uniform and widespread. Much of the major achievements made in terms of quantity, coverage, proximity and increase in enrolment rates in the schools are greatly overshadowed by glaring and unacceptable failures in terms of quality, equality and the distressing phenomenon of low retention and high drop-out rates. One-fourth of the population of the state still remain illiterate. This is what is revealed by state-wide time series of aggregate data of Meghalaya. The educational system with its dualism that allows distinct standards for the elite and the poor continues to be inequitable as it has benefited the privileged urban population much more than it has profited the rural population that constituted about 80 percent of the total population of the state. This has probably resulted in the unacceptable prospect of much of the benefit of the educational development being appropriated by the former. It is corroborated by published secondary literature on Meghalaya.

What is found in our analysis is that public investment in education sector has continued to grow over the years, particularly after 1972. This has been complemented
by increasing private investment made by individuals and households in schooling their children. People have spent money on school fees, purchase of uniforms, books, stationery, and transporting children to schools. As the public and private investments have increased, the number of schools and other educational institutions in the state has also shown an increasing trend. All these are reflected in corresponding increase in the literacy rate of both male and female in the state. It has been elaborated in one of the chapters of the present thesis. This is not surprising considering the significant role played by the Christian missionaries in creating awareness among the tribal people on the importance of education and in the establishment of private Christian schools throughout the state. However, the attainment in male and female literacy and numeracy and consequently the degree of human development has been not uniform across regions, tribes, genders and income groups in the state. We have undertaken an extensive analysis of this phenomenon in our thesis. Six decades of independence and the enormous efforts to promote primary and elementary education through private and public schools have not brought about much improvement in the lives of a large section of the people, particularly in the rural areas of Meghalaya where illiteracy, poverty and unemployment are still rampant. We have elaborated on rural illiteracy and rural unemployment in Meghalaya in our thesis.

It is this realization of the existence of such unacceptable disparities in both economic and educational development in the state even after six decades of independence (despite the enormous efforts to promote education) in addition to the fact that there has been very little initiative so far to study the causes of these dissimilarities is what prompted us to undertake this study. Our research has attempted to fill the void that exists in the study of economic and educational inequalities present in the state of
Meghalaya and provide better understanding of the existing socio-economic realities of the state, particularly related to investment in education and the way it impacts the employment pattern and the earning capacity. The findings could be useful to the policy makers to understand the inadequacies of the policies and programmes they pursue and help them to look at the need for new priorities and structural changes required in utilising the resources better.

Our main findings of the study have six dimensions based on aggregate published government data and four dimensions based on our sample primary data. The ten findings are as follows:

a) **Asymmetry exists in literacy attainment, not only across the rural and urban divide but also across the genders and regions in Meghalaya.** The published government data shows that, between Umsining and Amalarem there is a 27 percent difference in the number of illiterates; and in the case of sample data of rural and semi-urban blocks we find a 25 percent difference among the respondents who have only up to middle school level education. Khliehriat has about 30 percent of its respondents with senior secondary or graduate level education while Resubelpara and Umling have only 5 percent each of the respondents who have studied beyond secondary school level. Likewise, as against 11.25 percent urban male, 28.18 percent urban female are illiterate. As per 2001 Census data, urban literacy in the state was 73.48 percent, while it was only 44.20 percent in rural areas. Such asymmetry has serious implications on the socio-economic and political progress of the people, and can lead to unwanted ethnic and political strife, especially in a state like Meghalaya with its multi-
ethnic, multi-tribal community. This asymmetry can further lower the income earning capabilities of the rural and other backward regions as it can severely limit the degree to which the disadvantaged can avail of the limited opportunities for progress and development that are available. Such asymmetries can eventually undermine development, polarize societies and can bring about untold harm leading to social disintegration.

b) **Unevenness exists in the distribution of educational institutions and infrastructure across districts and rural/urban divide.** The secondary aggregate data shows that in Meghalaya, East Khasi Hills district has 30 of the 74 higher secondary schools in the state in 2005, while South Garo Hills district, Ri-Bhoi, East Garo Hills district, and West Khasi Hills have only 2, 3, 7 and 10 schools respectively. Likewise, out of the 558 secondary schools in the state in 2002, 160 are located in East Khasi Hills district, 145 in West Garo Hills while there are only 29 such schools in South Garo Hills, 30 in Ri-Bhoi, and 49 in Jaintia Hills district. Many villages continue to remain neglected without adequate schooling facilities, leave alone having quality institutions. In South Garo Hills and Ri-Bhoi districts, only about half of the total number of habitations have a primary school within the boundaries of habitation itself; while more than 70 percent of the habitations in all other districts have a primary school within them. In 2005, East Khasi Hills district with 904 villages, 8 towns and 28.66 percent of the total population of the state have only 1553 schools, while Jaintia Hills district with 480 villages supporting 12.82 percent population of the state have 852 schools. With 30 higher secondary schools, most of them situated in the urban and semi-urban centres, East Khasi Hills district have the highest number of schools.
in this category, while West Garo Hills district have only eleven higher secondary schools. Such disparities exist in other districts too. Wrong strategies of uniformly committing scarce resources without proper, need-based and rational planning, inadequate delivery mechanism, ineffectiveness of policies and their implementation are among the major reasons for such unevenness. Besides indefensible wastage of resources, such unevenness also leads to discrimination against the poor and politically and socially marginalized sections.

c) All the districts have not been attaining literacy at the same rate. Some districts lag behind in literacy rate over the others. As per published government data, West Garo Hills district has only 51.03 percent literacy as against 76.98 percent literacy in East Khasi hills district as per 2001 Census data. Jaintia Hills district has 53 percent literacy as against the 66.07 percent literacy rate of Ri-Bhoi, 65.64 percent literacy rate of West Khasi Hills district. A cursory look at the published secondary data shows that the districts that have the lower literacy attainment rate are also among the districts with lower per capita income.

d) Inequality exists in the literacy rate of major scheduled tribes in the state. While Khasi tribe has a literacy rate of 66.1 percent, while the Koch tribe has only 42.7 percent literacy. This is established by the government published data pertaining to the whole state. Likewise, as against 61.5 and 55.2 percent literacy rate of Synteng tribe Garo tribe respectively, Hajong tribe and Raba tribe respectively has 48.2 and 52.4 percent literacy rate.
e) **The state-wide problem of drop-out of students from schools continues as a worrisome phenomenon.** Among the sample respondents, 35 percent had discontinued their schooling at the primary school level itself in 2009-2010. Only 24 percent of the sample respondents of the six blocks of Meghalaya continued with their schooling beyond the secondary school level. An analysis of the main reasons for this disturbing trend shows that 53.8 percent of all the respondents in our study that numbered 600 adult individuals have given up their studies due to financial difficulties. Lack of educational facilities in the neighbourhood caused 6.1 percent of the respondents to drop-out from school, while 16.7 percent cited ‘no interest in studies’ as the reason for discontinuing their studies. Marriage forced 9.9 percent of the respondents to give up their formal education and 13.4 percent dropped-out due to various other reasons. Among the ones who dropped out of school due to financial difficulties 49.4 percent were from rural areas and 50.6 percent were from urban areas, suggesting that finance factor is a major concern, not only in rural areas, but even in urban areas of the state of Meghalaya in northeast India.

f) **Aggregate unemployment rate in the state, particularly among the educated, continues to grow with little or no employment generation taking place in the state.** Employment generation in the state has not kept pace with the number of educated persons, leaving many unemployed wasting away resources that would have profitably contributed to the overall growth. Among the 600 sample respondents from the six blocks in 2009-2010 who are unemployed, 28.6 percent are persons who have had no formal education, while 35.6 percent had primary level education. Among the unemployed, 7.1 percent have pre-university level
education and 2.7 percent are graduates. Various reasons have been cited by the respondents for their unemployment. While weather related factors force many to be out of work for a substantial part of the year, for others the poor pay conditions, family problems, lack of suitable work and lack of education are the major reasons for unemployment. Such large scale unemployment gives rise to significant variations in the per capita incomes of the people of the different regions in the state as evident from the secondary data. These variations in per capita income are indeed a matter of concern.

g) There is inequality in the sample per-capita income across blocks. The annual earnings of the sample respondents taken as a proxy for the earning capacity of the people of the six blocks shows some degree of variation. Dambo Rongjeng with an average annual earning of rupees 26205 and Umling with rupees 27466 are at the bottom of the table among the six sampled blocks, while Khliehriat with rupees 38860 and Umsining with rupees 36825 tops the table as the blocks with the lowest and highest per capita income.

h) Inequality in income dispersion among the sample shows variations across the sample blocks in Meghalaya. Lorenz Curve constructed and the Gini Coefficient calculated for all the six blocks which we studied showed variations in the annual earnings of the respondents. While Umsining showed a Gini Coefficient of 0.28 which is an optimal case as per accepted norms, Khliehriat and Dambo Rongjeng showed a Gini Coefficient of 0.34 which as per accepted norms is a normal state.
i) The monthly earnings of the sample respondents are positively correlated with the level of one’s education. In analysing the variations in the monthly earnings of the sample respondents of six blocks of Meghalaya in 2009-2010, it was found that educational attainment plays a reasonably significant role. Among those sample respondents who had a monthly earning of rupees 9000 or more, 61.11 percent had more than 10 years of formal schooling while only 33.34 percent of the respondents in this monthly earning slab were with no formal schooling or only primary school level education. This trend prevailed in other slabs as well, with those having higher educational qualifications constituting higher percentage in each slab, compared to those with lower educational attainments.

j) Variations in annual earnings of sample respondents are due to difference in educational attainment. The regression analysis we have carried out established that at least 67 percent of the variations in annual income could be explained by variations in literacy rates. It further established that the educational level of the respondent and the course of study in college have a positive role in determining the earning capacity of individuals in our sample area in Meghalaya. Besides these, it was also ascertained that parents’ educational status has also a positive impact on the earning capacity of the people of Meghalaya.

CONCLUSION

In the context of the small northeastern tribal state of Meghalaya, existence of several disparities related to access and quality of education are among the most significant
constraints to educational outcomes and monthly earnings. In this state, the inequalities in educational outcomes across different regions, districts, groups and sub-groups and between and rural and urban inhabitants continue to restrict considerably the benefit of (public) investment in education from reaching all, particularly the rural masses. The existence of a dualist system, where the urban centres have the advantage of good quality education compared to the rural areas where schools lack even basic amenities like proper class rooms, adequate furniture, toilets, drinking water and above all dedicated and qualified teachers. Besides being extremely unjust, the extent of this disparity is such that the rural students have to deal with forbidding disadvantages compared to their urban counterparts. As we have seen earlier, statistics reveal that in the distribution of schools certain districts have definite edge over the others.

It is clear that there are at least two significant socio-economic constraints of development in Meghalaya: phenomena of school drop-outs, and that of adult educated unemployment. These two constraints affect the potential of earning an income for survival and livelihood by the tribal as well as non-tribal population in Meghalaya. The continuing phenomena of large percentage of ‘drop-outs’ from schools entails huge wastage of resources. Children who discontinue their studies without having any substantial educational attainment cannot contribute significantly to the society or to themselves. Though such ‘drop-out cases’ could marginally raise the literacy rate in the state, they may not garner any of the benefits of education. Besides these, this phenomenon could leave a large number of young persons unfit for any credible work-employment which may lead to major unemployment problems in the state, especially considering the fact that Meghalaya has one of the highest birth rates in the country. With a school drop-out rate of 6 percent, Meghalaya ranks second among the states in
northeast India, with Arunachal Pradesh at the top with 9.1 drop-out rate. More than half the respondents (53.8 percent) who had discontinued their studies cited financial difficulties as the reason for doing so.

Unemployment too remains a serious problem in the state, though there was a marginal decrease in unemployment rate from 1.42 percent in 1983 to 0.62 percent in 2004-5. The number of educated applicants on the ‘live register’ of Employment Exchange in the state shows that the number of applicants have increased considerably from 6386 in 1972 to 37396 in 2005. Considering the fact that the actual number of educated unemployed could be much more, as many do not register with the Employment Exchange, the magnitude of the problem could be quite severe. The percentage of educated job seekers has grown 99.17 percent during the last three decades. It is also worth noting that during the four years from 2003 to 2006, the average placements were only 23.5. In 2006 itself there were only 10 placements. Many reasons such as the increasing literacy rate, and the low rate of employment generation in the state could be attributed to the growing unemployment problem. The nature of the prevailing education system that does not prepare people with job oriented, skills enhancing education could all be cited as the cause for this phenomenon.

With the linkages between education and poverty much more clear today than ever before, the reasons for the continuance of gruelling poverty is not far to seek. In the ranking of states in India on the basis of the percentage of population living below poverty line Meghalaya was placed at the 21st place. In 1999-2000, about 48.9 percent of the household in the state was found to be living below poverty line. In the case of the number of people living below poverty line too there is considerable variations
among districts with the highest incidence of poverty at 56 percent in East Garo Hills while in Jaintia Hills district it was only 40 percent. Obvious inequalities are also evident between rural and urban centres as well as between genders. The urban centric nature of development is evident from the fact that the two districts that have a higher human development index have the two main urban centres of Shillong and Tura located in them, while the other five districts have an index value of less than 0.5 only. The gender inequality still remains a major concern in the state, though it is lower than in most other states in the country.

Our thesis has established that there are positive correlation between the educational status of the respondent, total number of years of study in school and the type of school the respondent attended in determining the earning capacity of individuals in our sample area in Meghalaya. This being the reality, the substantial gaps that we see existing in the state as per our analysis of the micro-level data pertaining to literacy and the spread of education, particularly elementary, secondary and senior secondary level, cause great concern.

**Policy Prescription**

In India, the successive five year plans rightly laid great emphasis on eradication of illiteracy and poverty, universalization of primary education, creation of jobs and attainment of economic equality and social justice. The picture that emerges from Meghalaya, however, shows that much has not been realized in all these vital areas. Large divergence that is seen among the population across districts and groups call for appropriate action, sooner than later, so as to ensure that no one is excluded from
enjoying the fruits of development. What is required, therefore, is to reorient and reprioritise the development strategy. Uniform policies adopted by the government across regions and districts, without realistically assessing the relevance and practicality can only result in unwanted wastage of resource as they will never yield the result that they were intended to yield.

Having ascertained the existence of a positive correlation between the education and the decisive role it plays in determining the employment potential and earning capacity of individuals in the context of Meghalaya, the possible explanation for the existence of wide-spread poverty and unemployment that is prevailing in the state may be that the huge public investment undertaken by the government on development of education and human development has not adequately reached the people, especially in the rural areas. This is also an affirmation of our third hypothesis that in Meghalaya the effects of investment in education have not translated into increasing the earning capacity of the people adequately. Considering the fact that about 80 percent of the population of the state is rural based, the unjustified concentration of educational facilities in the urban centres is indefensible and flawed. In a multi-ethnic and multi-tribal society, marked variations in educational attainment leading to disadvantages in areas of employment opportunities and inequality in terms of per capita income can lead to serious socio-political problems besides affecting growth economic growth.

Financial considerations were cited as the main reason by our sampled respondents that forced them to discontinue their studies. Possibility of finding adequate financial backing in the form of interest free loans, even to school going children with adequate guarantees to get them repaid subsequently would be a major policy initiative that could
revolutionize the school attendance pattern and reduce the incidence of students discontinuing their studies.

The delivery and accountability mechanism needs to be strengthened to ensure that crucial investment reaches the intended, calls for urgent attention. Besides providing the expected result, this would ensure that the resources are not wasted. Optimal utilisation of the huge public investments, with a sustained focus on rural areas of the state where educational inequalities continue to deny access and equality, needs urgent attention of the policy makers.

The findings of our study make it possible for us to call for a new approach towards educational investment in the state. Investment of resources must be based on the need and urgency rather than on any other consideration. Backward and needier regions need sensitive and fair approach. The principle of following uniform policies for the state as a whole in matters of educational development is flawed and unhealthy.