CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Though the problem of poverty in the country is not a new phenomenon, it was not till the seventies that the economists and other social scientists undertook to study the problem on a large scale. Since then, there has been a growing response from the scholars to study further the problem of poverty in the country. These studies have not only attempted to ascertain the numbers of the poor and their variation over the years both in the country as a whole and in the different States, but have also provided recommendations of policies and programmes to eradicate poverty in the country. Though these studies did provide general guidelines for anti-poverty policies and programmes at a national level, yet it is felt that in a big country like ours, with diverse regional identities and more complex cultural and ethnic varieties, these studies which are based on national and State level data, are of little help for specific anti-poverty policies and programmes at micro level. This is more true in the case of North-Eastern Hill Region of our country where more than 200 different tribes lived in relative isolation for a very long period of time, and as such, each trib
has its own way of living and standard of life. These tribal societies "have by tradition control of and access to rich resources, but they are not well off. They are conscious of the fact that their level of living is not satisfactory, but it is difficult to say that they perceive themselves as poor. More frequently they perceive themselves as cordoned off from the benefits of their resources". Further, the data on which these studies were based give little or no information at all on the problem of poverty in the hill region of North-East India. Again, the micro level studies in the region are very scanty and therefore, not much is known about the problem of poverty in the region. In fact there is very limited information on the characteristics of the people who live below the poverty line in the region. Hence, this study is attempted in a far remote village in the border areas of Khasi Hills - an area which is relatively more backward in the state of Meghalaya, and it is expected that the study will throw sufficient light on the problem of poverty in the area.

In this introductory chapter, we first give a rationale for selection of the villages in Section I, followed by setting out the objectives in Section II. In Section III we give the hypothesis. Sources of data and the sampling design are present in Section IV and V respectively. Finally, scope and limitation of the study are given in Section VI.
Selection of the Villages

One of the most important demographic characteristics in the border areas of Khami Hills at present is the presence of two major groups of inhabitants, viz., the Khasis who are the indigenous inhabitants and the non-Khasis who migrated from across the border and elsewhere. The Khasis, being the indigenous inhabitants, occupy and control all land property and other natural resources in the area. The non-Khasis, on the other hand, were considered as outsiders, and therefore, not entitled to the rights enjoyed by the Khasis. Customarily, they (non-Khasis) are not entitled to own land asset, which is the only important productive asset in the rural areas. Hence, they depend much on the mercy of the few well off land owners in the area. Most of them are employed as share-croppers and labourers of a few landed households. Again, the settlement pattern shows that the Khasis concentrated in the slopes or foot of the slopes, whereas the non-Khasis occupy the plain tract areas adjacent with the international border with Bangladesh. Therefore, socially and economically, these two groups of inhabitants differ from each other.
In order to have a good understanding on the problem of poverty among these two groups of inhabitants, a village known as Shella, which is itself a cluster of 21 census villages (or as we call them hamlets), is purposively selected. This is because, from whatever information we could get, it is the most representative as it adequately represent the two major groups of inhabitants in the area (see chapter 4). However, it may be mentioned that there are other reasons as well for which we may consider this cluster of villages or hamlets as the representative ones in the border areas of Khasi Hills. The reasons are:

1. Historically, the villages in and around Shella were believed to be the most affluent villages in the border areas of Khasi Hills before the great earthquake of 1897. Their economy was destroyed by the earthquake and deteriorated further by the partition of the country in 1947.

2. The villages are located very close to the international border with Bangladesh.

3. Located as they are far away from the urban centres, the villages seem to be free from urban influences.

4. Taking the infrastructural facilities available in the border areas of Khasi Hills, these villages or hamlets may be considered neither developed nor backward.
v. Lastly, like any other villages in the border areas, the villages selected for our study depend much on border trade with Bangladesh.

II

The Objectives

The main purpose of the present study is to explore the important issues related with the problem of poverty between the two major groups of inhabitants, viz., the Khasis and non-Khasis, in the border areas. Hence, its main objectives may be stated as follows:—

i. to study the economic, social and demographic characteristic of the area under study;

ii. to estimate the extent of poverty in the area and examine the association between poverty and other socio-economic characteristics; and,

iii. to suggest policy directions suitable to local condition for amelioration of poverty.
III

The Hypothesis

The Second Five Year Plan states that "the pattern of development and the structure of socio-economic relations should be so planned that they result not only in appreciable increase in national income and employment but also in greater equality in income and wealth. The benefits of economic development must accrue more and more to the relatively less privileged of society, and there should be a progressive reduction of the concentration of incomes, wealth and economic power." To achieve this objective, several policies and programmes have been formulated and initiated in the country to uplift the economic position of the 'relatively less privileged'. However, it is observed that these policies and programmes have not succeeded in making a serious dent on the problem. The relatively economically backward and socially oppressed people, in both developed and backward regions seem to have
derived little or no gain at all from these policies and programmes. The bulk of the fruits of these programmes appear to have passed more to the already developed regions, and further, within such regions benefits accrued proportionately more to the already rich and powerful, whereas the less previledged of our society are still struggling for their survival. The border areas of Meghalaya, as we shall see in Chapter 4, is a relatively a backward area. The agricultural practice is primitive, and the basic amenities are still lacking. Further, the sectoral allocation of funds (by the government) on important sectors like agriculture and allied sectors seems to have received insufficient attention. Against this background, the following set of hypotheses have been formulated:

1. A sizeable proportion of population in the border areas of Khasi is in poverty.

2. Between the two major groups of inhabitants in the area, poverty is more severe among the non-indigenous population (non-Khasis) who by customary rights were not entitled to own land which is the only important productive asset in the area.
IV

The Data

For economic, social and demographic characteristics of the area under study, data available from the Census Volumes, Government Publications, Field Investigations and other sources have been utilised. However, while analysing the various issues of poverty in the area, we have depended solely on primary data which were collected by canvassing the detailed Questionnaire to households selected at random. The information contained in the Questionnaire could be categorised as follows:-

i. **Demographic data**: Details were recorded about the age and sex composition, literacy and educational level, religion and caste/tribe affiliation, and other related information of each member of household.

ii. **Occupation**: Following the definition and concept of worker as adopted in the 1981 census, information was collected on the industrial distribution and activity status of each individual worker.

iii. **Employment**: Included information on the number of days of employment of each individual member of household on self-employed occupation, wage occupation, etc.

*The source of the tables throughout the study, unless otherwise mentioned, is based on our field investigation data.*
iv. **Assets:** Information was collected on the various assets owned by the household. Of the various assets, land is the most important productive asset. Therefore, detailed information were collected on the amount of land owned, leased-in and leased-out by the household.

v. **Income:** Information was collected on the different sources of income derived by the household. These sources include income from self-employment in agricultural works and non-agricultural works, wage income from agricultural and non-agricultural works, rent, and other sources of income.

vi. **Dietary composition and household expenditure:** It included information on the quantity and value of each variety of cereals, pulses, milk and milk products, edible oils, sugar vegetables, fish, meat and other items of food consumption by the household during the reference period. Besides these items, it also included information regarding expenses on fuels, light, etc. incurred by the household during the reference period.

The above information was collected on a recall basis and the maximum period of recall was one year, except in the case of dietary composition of household where the recall period
was only one month. This is being done to minimise errors which are liable to arise because of the difficulty of the respondents to recall the quantities of different varieties of food-items as well as expenses incurred by the households during the recall period.

It is also to be mentioned that during the tabulation stage, some cases have been found where the answers to the queries in the scheduled could not be considered as reliable due to inconsistency. In such cases we have tried to capture correct and reliable information through verification and cross-checking from the village elders and headmen.

v

**Sampling Design**

In selecting the sample households, first the village hamlets were stratified into two groups, viz., Group-A Hamlets and Group-B Hamlets. The stratification is on the basis of demographic characteristics in the village, that is, in Group-A Hamlets we included all those hamlets which are inhabited by the Khasis and Group-B Hamlets included all those hamlets which are predominantly inhabited by the non-Khasis. In other words, Group-A Hamlets represent the indigenous population group, whereas Group-B Hamlets represent the non-indigenous population group. As such, each of these two groups
may be considered to be socially and economically homogeneous within their own right. Again, because of time and cost constraints, a two-stage sampling is adopted in selecting the sample households. That is, in the first stage, 50 per cent of the hamlets are randomly selected from each hamlet group, followed at the second stage by the selection of sample households from within the randomly selected hamlets. However, in selecting the sample households from the selected hamlets it is ensured that:

1. if the selected hamlet consists of less than 25 households, 100 per cent of the households will form the sample;

ii. if the selected hamlet consists of more than 25 but less than 50 households, 50 per cent of the households will be included in the sample;

iii. if the selected hamlet consists of more than 50 but less than 100 households, 25 per cent of the households will be included in the sample; and,

iv. if the selected hamlet is more than 100 households, then only 15 per cent of the households will be included in the sample.

Having determined the sample size from each selected hamlet by following the above criteria, the sample households are independently selected from each hamlet, by using simple random sampling method.
Reference period and Time-frame for Field Investigations: The reference period of this study is January, 1983 - December, 1983, which happens to be a normal year in the whole of the border area. While choosing the time-frame for field investigation, we had taken into consideration the effects of fluctuation in employment opportunities, availability of local produce, and wages on the level of poverty in the area. Therefore, two rounds of field investigation were conducted. The first round was conducted during the month of June - August, 1983, which is relatively a slack season in the area, and the second round was conducted during the months of October - December, 1983, which is relatively a busy season in the area.

The main purpose of repeating the survey was to capture the seasonal variations in food-intake, if any resulting from the seasonal variations in employment, income and other variables in the area. Further, it was decided that the same households which formed our sample in the first round of survey would also form our sample during the second round. But it is regretted that out of the 187 households surveyed during the first round, 6 households could not be included in the second round due to unavoidable circumstances.

The number of sample households and population during the first and second rounds are given in table 1.1.
Table 1.1: Sample Households and Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hamlet Group</th>
<th>First Round of Survey</th>
<th>Second Round of Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Household Population</td>
<td>Household Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A + B)</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VI

The Scope and Limitations of the Study

Although the present study deals with the various issues of poverty in the area, its scope is subjected to two important limitations:

i. Due to the non-availability of any other sources of information on the incidence of poverty in the area, the scope of the present study had to be confined only to the period covered by the field investigation period. That is, the study is confined to the period January - December, 1983.

ii. The present study is, strictly speaking, confined to an area which is a cluster of several census villages. Therefore, too much generalisation could not be made from the study. Whatever conclusions are made, they are restricted to the study area only. However, since the villages selected are
considered as representative villages in the border area of Khasi Hills, it is postulated that the situation in group of villages cannot be so radically different from other villages in the border areas. Therefore, the conclusions (or data) could be taken as trends prevailing elsewhere in the border areas of Khasi Hills.
APPENDIX TABLE TO

CHAPTER 1
Table 1.A: The Selected Hamlets, Number of Existing Households and the Sample Size from each Selected Hamlets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hamlet group</th>
<th>Selected hamlets</th>
<th>Existing number of households</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Percentage of sample to total hhs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 A</td>
<td>1. Nongrum</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Mawryngkhong</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Jasir</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Duba</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Sohlap</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total 5 hamlets | 195 | 87 | 44.62 |

| B              | 1. Kalatek       | 140                           | 21          | 15.00                             |
|                | 2. Umkhabaw      | 165                           | 25          | 15.00                             |
|                | 3. Umtham        | 57                            | 14          | 24.56                             |
|                | 4. Khahsyndha    | 47                            | 24          | 51.06                             |
|                | 5. Khahmo hi     | 32                            | 16          | 50.00                             |

| Total 5 hamlets | 441 | 100 | 22.68 |

(A + B) 10 hamlets | 636 | 187 | 29.40 |

Note: Existing number of households is given as on the date of survey.
Notes and References


2. India, Government of (1956), Second Five Year Plan, Planning Commission, New Delhi, p.22

3. The definitions and methodologies of computing household income, calorie intake of each households, etc. are given in relevant chapters.

4. Since the number of hamlets in the Shella Village and the number of households in each hamlet is not of considerable size, the selection of hamlets and of households has been done by following the lottery method, rather than using random numbers.