II

SETTING AND CONTEXT

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the setting of this study and the place of the respondents in their social and work context. It has now been realised that the bureaucratic organisation cannot function in a vacuum but in close interaction with the environment of which it is a part. Thus, to understand the functioning of bureaucracy, it is necessary to understand the socio-economic context in which it functions. And, since, the present study refers to the problems of higher bureaucracy in Meghalaya, it will be pertinent to discuss here the socio-economic conditions of the state in which our respondents function.

Meghalaya came into being by carving out the two hill districts of the former Assam state, namely, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills district and the Garo Hills district on April 2, 1970, as an autonomous state and became a full-fledged state on January 21, 1972. The state is located in the eastern part of India and lies between 25°5" and 26°10" north latitude and between 93°47" and 97°47" east longitude and now consists of five districts: the Jaintia Hills district, the Khasi Hills district, the West Khasi Hills district, the East
Garo Hills district and the East Garo Hills district. It is surrounded by six districts of Assam on three sides except in the south, on which side it has common boundary with Bangladesh. It is surrounded on the north by Goalpara,

Kurup and Nongong districts of Assam, on the east by Goalpara district of Assam and part of Bangladesh, on the south by Cachar district of Assam and Bangladesh and on the east by Bakir Hills and North-Cachar Hills district of Assam. The state has its opening through Assam to the rest of India which is further connected with other parts of the country by a narrow corridor which runs for about fifty kilometres below the foot-hills of Bhutan and Sikkim.

The state covers a land surface of approximately 22,500 sq.kms. consisting mostly of mountainous terrains. According to the census of 1971, the state has a total population of 10,11,699 of which 5,20,367 are male and 4,91,32 are females. Thus, the number of females per 1,000 males stands to be 942 according to 1971 census. The percentage of tribals in the state's population is 80.40 percent and that of Scheduled Castes is 0.39 percent. The rest 19.14 percent are of mixed nature consisting of Assamese, Bengalis, Nepalese, Biharis, Marwars, etc. The growth of population has been at the rate of 2.70 percent per annum during the decade 1961-71. The density of population per square

kilometer according to 1971 census is 45, having risen from 33 in 1961.

The population of the state is predominantly rural. There are six towns in the state with a population of 1,47,170 which constitute approximately 14.50 percent of the state's population according to 1971 census. The rural population consists of about 8,64,529 and account for 85.54 percent of the state's population (1971 census). The number of inhabited villages in the state is 4,583, the average population per village being 106 persons.

Socially, there prevails a matrilineal system in the state. Mother is the head of the family and youngest daughter is the heir of parents. From the point of view of religion, Christianity is the religion of the greater number of population in the state (46.90%) followed by other religions and persuasions (31.45%); Hinduism (18.50%), Islam (2.50%); Buddhism (0.19%); Jainism (0.12%) and Sikhism (0.05%).² Linguistically, it is of mixed type with English as the state language. The percentage of literacy in the state as per 1971 census is 29.49 against the all- India average of 29.45 percent.

Economically, the state is very backward. There is no big and medium

industry in the state. The only industry worth mentioning, viz., the
Cherrapunji Cement Factory, has a total capital investment of approximately
80 crores. The workers' percentage ratio in Meghalaya is 44.82 according to
1971 census. More than 80 percent of the workers are traditionally engaged in
agriculture either as cultivators or agricultural labourers. Most of the
cultivators are small and marginal farmers. The employment opportunity outside
the agricultural sector is low due to the backward economic conditions of the
state and the lack of industrialisation.

Again, the traditional prevailing pattern of agriculture by jhumming
or shifting cultivation in large areas of the state acts as a limiting factor
in the growth of the economy in the rural areas. According to a recent rough
estimate, about 75,000 hectares of land are annually put under this method of
shifting cultivation and about 42 percent of the tribal population of the state
(approximately 3.50 lakhs) is dependent upon shifting cultivation or jhumming.

Communication and transport system, one of the most important pro-

   p.10
Requisites of economic development is very much lacking in Meghalaya. Being a hilly state, there is no rail-road or water transport in the state. The principal means of communication in the state is roads which is again not sufficiently developed. There are a few all weather roads which are also not sufficient. At present, Meghalaya contains 15 kilometres of road per 100 square kilometres compared to the all-India average of 29 kilometres.

Another problem of the state is the development of border areas. This border area comprises about 4,960 square kilometres with a population of approximately 2.30 lakhs according to the 1971 census. Thus, about 22 percent of the total area and 25 percent of the state's rural population are under these areas which, prior to the partition of the country, were totally dependent upon trade with these markets which are now within the jurisdiction of Bangladesh. As a result, the economy of these areas has been ruined with the partition and inspite of the efforts made before the state of Meghalaya came into being, the economy of these areas could not be rehabilitated.

While the entire state is backward on the basis of economic

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6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
indicators, there are areas which are considered to be especially backward
in the state. Again, there are most backward pockets within those especially
backward areas.

In order to deal with the problem of socio-economic backwardness of
the state, the government launched in April, 1978, the new medium term plan of
five years from 1978-79 to 1982-83. In the planning process, the methodology of
rolling plan was introduced which means that formulating the five year plan
for the period 1978-83 during the year 1978-79, and after taking note of
development till then, the plan for 1983-84 would be projected. A similar process
would continue and in due time there would be a five year plan.8

The priority sectors in the Draft Proposal of the Annual Plan for
the year 1978-79 were agriculture, development of communication, provision of
drinking water in the rural areas, extension of educational benefits
particularly in the rural areas, integrated development of border areas and
development of small industries based on the utilisation of mineral and
agro-forest resources of the state.9

8. S.K. Kungur, Deputy Chief Minister, Meghalaya, Review of the Implementation
of Development Scheme and Programmes for 1978-79: A supplement to the
The success of such an ambitious plan depends upon the implementing machinery i.e. the administration, for a proper understanding of which it is necessary to know the traditional political institutions and administration in the area which now comprises Meghalaya.

Originally, Meghalaya (the Garo Hills district and the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district) was administered by the traditional chiefs with the help of their associates. In the Garo Hills, Holnesship was the traditional system of administration. But after the British annexation, the office of Loskar was introduced in Garo Hills by David Scott in the year 1824. A Loskar was generally a chief over a group of villages and Holna was the head of the village subordinate to Loskar. Loskar among the Garos performed the function of both rural police and an honorary magistrate. Minor cases could be heard and settled by the Loskar although appeal could be made to the District Magistrate against the decision of the Loskar. However, in 1865, Zimadari system was introduced in the Garo Hills which was only an extension of the Loskar system.

The Khed Si has, at the time of British annexation in 1833, was found to be divided into several states under hereditary chiefs forming a Confederacy. After the British annexation, the Siem or the chiefs administered the Khed Si in subsidiary alliance with the British Crown. The Siem or the chiefs assisted by Darbar (Assembly) conducted the administration under the over-all control and supervision of the Deputy Commissioner of the United Khed Si and Jaintia Hills district. Petty cases could be heard by the Siem. Only heinous offences or the cases in which subjects of the different states were concerned, were tried by the court of Political Agent, and later on, by that of the Deputy Commissioner.

Before the British annexation, the Jaintia Hills was ruled by the Raja who had diplomatic relations with Ahom and Kachari Kings of Assam. Raja was assisted in the administration of the state by Deoloi and Sipser who belonged to special castes and were elected. The Deoloi, in turn, had subordinate officers called Patore, Beerene and Gane to assist him in his

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16. Barakati, op.cit., p.32.  
17. Ibid., p.42.
functioning. The British annexed the Jaintia Hills in 1835, and retained the old system of Doloi ship and Sirardship. The Doloi were empowered to hear all civil cases and criminal complaints not of a serious nature.

It is clear from the preceding discussion that the British did not disturb the traditional administrative system much and allowed the traditional system to function under the suzerainty of the British Empire in India. This was probably because of the fact that it was not possible for the British administrators to comprehend the traditional system of rites and practices and above all, the hilly region was not considered to be beneficial to the British Empire.

Thus, there was a difference in the administration of the Plains and the Hills. In the hill areas there was minimal interference with the powers and functions of the chiefs. However, in 1872-73, it was found to be an urgent necessity to regulate the commercial relations of British subjects with the frontier tribes and accordingly a Regulation framed by the Lt. Governor of Bengal, subsequently approved by the Governor-General-in-Council, empowered the

18. Ibid., p.45.
19. Ibid., p.46.
It. Governor to prescribe a line to be called Inner Line in each tribal area beyond which no British subject and certain classes of foreign residents could pass without a licence or a pass.  

The Montague-Chelmsford Report recommended in 1917 that the typically backward tracts should be excluded from the jurisdiction of the Reformed Council, and no legislation should be enacted in the Legislative Council affecting the areas. Legislation for such areas should be made entirely by means of Regulation made by the Governor-General-in-Council.  

The Government of India Act, 1919, empowered the Governor-General-in-Council to declare any territory in British India to be a backward area. Following this provision, the Governor-General-in-Council declared the Garo Hills and the British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, other than Shillong Municipality and the Cantonment areas, as backward tracts on 3rd January, 1921. It also declared that all laws, provincial or Indian, solely intended for these tracts be applied only as directed by the Governor-General-in-Council and with such modifications as might be made by him. The Governor...

21. Ibid., p.47.
use, further, authorised to apply provincial laws to these areas with or
without modifications.22

Following the recommendations of the Simon Commission, the White
Paper of 1933 proposed the classification of hilly areas of Assam into two:
Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas, and this proposal was contained in the
Government of India Bill, 1935.23 Under the Government of India Act, 1935,
tribal areas were classified into three: Excluded, Partially Excluded and
Frontier Areas, and the Garo Hills and the British portion of Khasi and Jaintia
Hill districts were brought under the Partially Excluded Areas.24 The
administration of Partially Excluded Areas was brought under the Provincial
Government although the Governor was given the discretionary power to modify
or withhold the application of any law passed by the Provincial Legislature.

Before independence, when the political future of India was being
discussed, the question of the administration of tribal areas came up before
different committees and sub-committees. Following the suggestion of the

22. Ibid., p.52.
23. Ibid., pp.55-61.
Cabinet Mission, the Constituent Assembly appointed a sub-committee called the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Committee with Gopinath Bardoloi as its Chairman (commonly the committee came to be known as Bardoloi Committee). The Bardoloi Committee, being influenced by the ideas of social anthropologists of non-assimilation, recommended the establishment of both autonomous and non-autonomous District Councils for looking after the administration of tribal affairs. Despite vehement opposition by some members, the recommendation of the Bardoloi Committee was accepted by the Constituent Assembly on the ground that the tribes of North-East India had a separate culture distinct from the tribes of the rest of India, the preservation of which required separate administrative arrangements.

Accordingly, in 1952, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council and the Garo Hills District Council came into being. Later on, in 1964, the Jaintia Hills was separated from the Khasi Hills and constituted into a District with a District Council of its own.

Thus, at present there are three District Councils in Meghalaya: the

26. Ibid., pp.176-182.
27. Ibid., pp.182-186.
28. Ibid., p.199.
Khela Hills District Council, the Jaintia Hills District Council and the Garo Hills District Council. The District Councils dealt with the allocation, occupation or use of both agricultural and non-agricultural land other than reserved forests and are responsible for the management of forests other than reserved forests; the use of canal or water courses for the purposes of agriculture and to control, prohibit or permit jhumming or other forms of shifting cultivation. The District Council has also the power to make laws regarding the appointment of chiefs or headmen, their succession, inheritance of property, marriage and other social customs. Further, the District Council has the power to establish or manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, cattle-pounds, ferries, etc. For the execution of its laws, the District Council has a Executive Committee with the Chief Executive Member (C.E.M.) at the head and two other members. The Chief Executive Member is elected by the District Council and the other members of the Committee are appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of the Chief Executive Member.

The District Council has its own court for hearing minor cases, though appeals can be made against its decision. The District Council has its own administrative staff for the management of its affairs.
Though on paper it appears that the District Council is an autonomous body, in practice, its autonomy is considerably eroded. The District Council is virtually a body subordinate to the State Government because it has to function under the supervision of the Governor who acts generally in accordance with the advice of the Council of Ministers, though he has discretionary powers in this regard. The Governor is authorised to suspend or dissolve or supersede a District Council. Further, the creation of the State of Meghalaya dealt a serious blow to the power and prestige of the District Council.

Before the creation of the state, tribal sentiments found expression through the platform of the District Councils, which can now be expressed from a more important platform, the platform of the State Cabinet and the State Legislative Assembly.

However, the administration in Meghalaya is carried on by both the District Council and the State Government. The District Council looks after matters which are more traditional and customary in nature and the rest are managed by the State Government. In other words, a major burden of administration falls upon the State Government except the administration which is of customary nature.
For carrying on the administration of the state, the Meghalaya Government had a total of 16,556 employees in the year ending 1975, of which 14,577 were male and 1,979 were female.²⁹ Out of these 16,556 employees, 789 are gazetted, 10,644 are non-gazetted and 5,123 are Grade IV employees.³⁰ A caste and tribe-wise break-up of the employees shows that Scheduled Tribe is the most dominant group which accounts for 59.39 percent (Hills Tribe, 55.41 percent and Plains Tribe, 1.98 percent) of the total employees followed by others (i.e. the general category which constitutes 22.79 percent), other backward classes (14.06 percent) and Scheduled Castes (4.74 percent).³¹ (For distribution of State Government employees according to castes/tribes and status as on 31st March, 1975, see table 2:1).

Against this universe of 16,556 employees, the sample of the present study enlists only 110 employees. Since this study deals with the higher bureaucracy in Meghalaya, all the respondents in this sample are gazetted class I employees of the State Government. This sample of 110 bureaucrats constitutes about 13.94 percent of a total of 789 gazetted employees of the State Government.

³⁰. Ibid., p.91.
³¹. Ibid., p.92.
Originally, this sample had 130 bureaucrats. But 20 of them either did not return the questionnaire or could not be contacted. Numerical strength of the employees in the sample, according to their service, stands as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indian Administrative Service</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam Civil Service</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghalaya Civil Service</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghalaya Health Service</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghalaya Engineering Service</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **TOTAL**                         | **110**

The respondents in this sample belong to all the major departments—those of Home, Industry, Agriculture, Health, Education, Social Welfare, Community Development, Construction, Engineering, Border Areas Development, Forests, Road Transport Communication, etc. Vertically, the sample includes low, middle and high position bureaucrats. Horizontally, both the Headquarters and Field Officers are included in the sample—from the Secretary to the Community Development Department down to the B.D.O., from the Secretary to the Home Department down to the Extra-Assistant Commissioner in the District, and from the Secretary to the Department of Health down to the Medical Officer.