INTRODUCTION

1.1 MEGHALAYA: AN OVERVIEW

Meghalaya, the 21st State of India, emerged as a full-fledged State on the 21st January 1972. It is a hilly State located in the north-eastern part of India. The term 'Meghalaya' literally means the abode of clouds. It is located between the latitudes 25°47’N and 26°10’N and longitudes 89°45’E and 92°37’E. Meghalaya is bounded by Nowgong, Kamrup and Goalpara districts of Assam on the north, Mikir and North Cachar Hill districts of Assam on the east, and Bangladesh on the south and west. The international border runs for about 496 kms. Meghalaya has a total geographical area of 22,429 sq. kms. and a total population of 13,23,143. The average density of population is 59 per sq. km. (Government of Meghalaya, Census of India, 1981a).

Meghalaya may be physiographically divided as follows:

(a) The Western Meghalaya or the Garo hills (East and West Garo Hills Districts);

(b) The Central Meghalaya or the Khasi Hills (East and West Khasi Hills Districts);
(c) The Eastern Meghalaya or the Jaintia Hills (Jaintia Hills District).

(A map of Meghalaya is provided in Figure-I).

The Khasi Hills is a plateau gradually descending towards the Jaintia and Garo Hills. Towards the South of Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills, the hills come to an abrupt halt with their sudden steeps and gorges. The Garo Hills region is composed of hill and plain areas. The hills descend slowly towards the Bangladesh and Goalpara district of Assam.

The climate of Meghalaya is cool in the regions with higher altitudes of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills (near the Central portions), while it is very hot (especially in the summer) as one goes down towards the slopes of the north side of Khasi Hills bordering Assam and towards the south of Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills bordering Bangladesh. The central portion of Garo Hills is hot and the heat and humidity increases as one descends towards the plains. The whole of Meghalaya receives moderate to very heavy rainfall in its different parts. Cherrapunjee (Sohra), in the Khasi Hills area, with about 400 inches of annual rainfall is one of the heaviest rainfall regions in the world. Due to diverse topography,
climate, and rainfall, Meghalaya is endowed with rich natural vegetation. The State is also rich in mineral resources. Because of its topography, the transport and communication network in the State is poor. Till the date there is no rail-route in any part of the State. The road communication also is not available to some places, when it is only by walk one can reach them.

Meghalaya is the home of the tribes the Khasis, the Jaintias (also called Syntens or Pnars), and the Garos (also called Achiks). The Khasis are those people belonging to the Khasi Hills (East and West), the Jaintias to the Jaintia Hills and the Garos to the Garo Hills (East and West). All the three tribes follow the matrilineal social system where the family lineage is taken from the mother's side. Each of the tribes has got several groups among itself, the grouping being related to a particular geographical region, or to a particular political systemship ('Syiem's are the ex-rulers of the different parts of the region). Each of these groups speaks a dialect of its own.

As already pointed out Meghalaya is rich in its natural resources. Even then, due to predominance of rural and tribal population, the State is socio-economically backward. Of the total population, 7 - 8 out
of 10 persons earn their living by cultivation (Mawthoh, 1980). The jhum as well as shifting cultivation is still adopted by the cultivators.

The literacy in the State, according to 1981 census, is 33.35 per cent which compares favourably with all India average of 36.12 per cent. But a closer look into the picture reveals that there is a wide disparity in the literacy status between the rural and the urban areas and between the different districts of the State. The picture is presented in greater details in a later chapter (Chapter III). The literacy percentage gets inflated because of the high literacy rates in and around some towns, though the vast majority of the rural population remains illiterate.

1.2 NEED FOR THE STUDY

Article 45 of the Constitution states that,

"The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children till they attain the age of fourteen years."

Universalization of elementary education is a constitutional commitment. As the responsibilities of different agencies in the development of education as a whole are
delineated, it is made clear that the States should take under their wings the free and universal primary education.

India entered the planning era in 1951, with the First Five Year Plan (1951-56) getting launched soon after the adoption of the Constitution. As a part of it, programmes to investigate, develop and improve teaching and learning process were taken up. The second Plan (1956-61) realized the need for larger resources for the continuation and expansion of schemes already taken up during the First Plan period.

The constitutional commitment should have been fulfilled in 1960 but it is well-known that we are still lagging behind the desired goal. The failure became evident as early as 1956 when the Second Plan was adopted which showed that the enrolment would go upto 61 per cent of the children in the age group 6-10 while only 23 per cent in the age group 11-13. The question was examined thoroughly by the education panel of the Planning Commission in 1958. It was observed and recommended by the Planning Commission that the idea of treating education for the age group 6-14 as an integrated whole might be given up and divided this period of eight years into two, viz.,
primary education of 5 years for the age group of 6-10, and middle school education of 3 years for the age group 11-13. It further recommended that universal compulsory primary education should be provided by the end of 1965-66 and similarly the middle school stage be provided by the end of 1975-76. To attain the goals, during the Third Five Year Plan (1961-66) the following policies were conceived, namely, to promote enrolment of girls and appointment of women teachers, to provide for schooling facilities within a walking distance of every child, to expand teacher training programme, and to supply free text books to disadvantaged children. But still the day has not yet come to say that India has achieved the desired goals.

The general causes which have impeded the progress of primary education have been diagnosed from time to time by different commissions and researchers. These causes include the unprecedented growth of population, the inability to raise the financial resources needed to support the massive programme, the apathy of the illiterate masses to education, the traditional resistance to education of girls, the existence of backward groups such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, poverty of the parents which compels them to use the
labour of children at home or outside, existence of small and scattered habitations, existence of large forests and inaccessible areas, and absence of a suitable machinery to enforce compulsory attendance. Taken together, these physical, social, cultural, economic and administrative handicaps have made the problem of providing universal primary education extremely difficult and costly. The Education Commission (1964-66) looked into the problems and observed that the three Plans stressed only on the educational expansion and equilization of educational opportunities. It recommended the emphasis on the qualitative improvement of education also.

The Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-74) accepted and attempted to incorporate many of the recommendations of the Education Commission (1964-66). The Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79) followed the policies of the earlier plans. It accorded higher priority to primary education. In 1977 the government reviewed the National Educational Policy. The State Education ministers discussed the policy and identified new direction for action. It was accepted on consensus that the Constitutional directives to be realized by the end of the Sixth Plan Period (1980-85), and that every child shall continue to learn
in the age group 6-14 on a full-time basis and if necessary, on a part-time basis. On the whole, primary education was given top priority.

Working Group on Universalization of Elementary Education was set up in 1978 under the chairmanship of Sri P. Sabanayagam, Education Secretary, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Government of India. The Working Group reviewed the progress of elementary education till the end of the Fifth Five Year Plan and suggested measures about priorities and approaches for universalization of elementary education during the Sixth Five Year Plan period. A very high priority was given to the programme of universalization of primary education in the Sixth Five Year Plan. Keeping in view the objectives and policies of the central government, efforts are being made by the States and Union territories to universalize primary education.

Meghalaya, a new state born after twenty-five years of independence, first became an autonomous State within the State of Assam in 1970. It attained its full statehood on the 21st of January 1972. Meghalaya has several problems and peculiarities of its own. Geographically it represents a remarkable variation in
its topography, with hills, rivers, forests covering almost the entire length and breadth of the State. Hail storms and heavy rains are regular features. All these have made some parts of the State not easily accessible. For the same reason, the set up of villages is also not uniform, ranging from scattered thinly populated villages to thickly populated big villages. Added to these is the problem of transport and communication, which has become a great obstacle to all types of developmental programmes including education. It is thus evident that the topography of Meghalaya poses greater challenges for the accomplishment of the goal of universalization of primary education. This is in addition to the other problems related to poverty, backwardness and lack of social awareness to education of people.

Even with the various problems as indicated above, attempts are made and being made to universalize primary education in Meghalaya in accordance with the guidelines of the national plan. Since the inception of the State, the main thrust has been extension of educational facilities in the backward areas and the enrolment of out of school children. The Revised Master Plan for Elementary Education (1980-83) observed that the unenrolled children are mainly from the rural areas of the state.
where there are no schooling facilities. Though with the efforts of the authorities there has been an increase in the enrolment of out of school children, the imbalances have not yet been removed. The educational facilities have not fully reached the backward areas of the State and the enrolment has been upset with a high rate of drop-outs.

There is an administrative consideration with regard to the primary education in Meghalaya which is a State populated mostly by tribals. According to Paragraph 6 of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, the responsibility of primary schools in the State rests with the District Councils, except of those schools which are situated within the Schillong Municipal and Cantonment areas. The latter schools fall under the administrative jurisdiction of the Government of Meghalaya. This two-pronged structure is to be carefully kept in view when one studies any aspect of primary education in Meghalaya.

Various developmental programmes have been launched in the State to universalize primary education, to arrest dropout and stagnation, and to attract children to attend school at the primary level. These programmes are being launched in a way to bring in quantitative
as well as qualitative development of education. It is past a decade since Meghalaya is formed and it is apt at this juncture to look back at these programmes so that they could be dropped, continued, or strengthened as the utilisation of these programmes indicates. It is with this view that the present study is undertaken.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The title of the problem under investigation is "A Critical Study of the Developmental Plans and Programmes in Primary Education in the State of Meghalaya since Independence."

The study attempts to cover all the developmental plans and programmes which include the incentives introduced by the Government to bring about quantitative and qualitative changes in respect of primary education in the State.

The term 'primary education' refers to the education of children for the first five years of schooling, namely, classes A, B, I, II and III (the age of entry to class A is 4 years). Primary schools in Meghalaya cater to these classes.
1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of the investigation:

(i) to trace the development of primary education in Meghalaya;

(ii) to study the developmental plans and programmes launched by the Government of Meghalaya for the promotion of primary education in the State;

(iii) to find out the present position of the implementation of the developmental plans and programmes launched by the Government of Meghalaya in the field of primary education; and

(iv) to make suitable suggestions on the basis of the findings for the further improvement of the primary education in the State.

1.5 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

For the purpose of collection of data with regard to the implementation of developmental programmes, the study is delimited to two out of five districts of the State. These two districts are East Khasi Hills District (including municipal and cantonment areas of Shillong) and West Khasi Hills District. (The rationale for it is given under Caption 3.1, 3.2.1)