Chapter-III

NATURE OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES IN
MEGHALAYA POLITICS

A political party is an organised group of citizens who profess to share the
same political views and by acting as a political unit, try to control the Government.
Political parties are organised on various issues such as political, social, religious,
etc.\(^1\) Political parties have become an indispensable factor in the working of a
representative Government. It lays down the irrefutable rule that a political party,
whether at the national or regional level, in one form or another is omnipresent. This
phenomenon also signifies that the electorate has to express their confidence by way
of casting their votes either in favour of a national or regional political party. Thus,
citizens' commitment to political parties plays an important role for the maintenance
of a representative system of Government.

India has her own party system with its peculiar characteristics. Some
commentators on Indian party system observed that India has neither a single-party
system that smacks of a totalitarian model nor a bi-party as it prevails in a country like
England. But what is operating in India is a multi-party system as obtaining in many
countries of the world.\(^2\) In a multi-party system, the Opposition comprises of
heterogeneous groups and these groups often fight against each other. Where no
single party is returned in strength to form the Government, shifting alliances lead to
the fall of the Government, and the rise of a new combination which may administer
the State for a brief period until it meets the same fate as the former. This is the case

\(^1\) Fartayal, H.S.: Role of the Opposition in the Indian Parliament, p.8.
\(^2\) Gassah, L.S. (Ed.): Regional Political Parties in North-East India: Introduction, Chand &
with politics in Meghalaya, particularly in the years 1978-1979, which was marked by political instability. Because of the unstable nature of Meghalaya politics, the State witnessed different coalition Governments as well as Opposition groups.\(^3\)

When India gained Independence, it adopted a parliamentary form of Government with the cabinet responsible to the legislature — a party in power and a number of political groups in Opposition.\(^4\) The Federation of Khasi States became independent of British control from the midnight of 14\(^{th}\) August, 1947, and were integrated into the Indian Union. The Indian Independence Act 1947 provided that all parts of the Province should be governed as nearly as might be in line with the spirit of the Government of India Act 1935; the Order-in-Council; and the other instruments there under. After Independence, the same system prevailed though the administration of the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas was transferred to the Government of Assam.\(^5\)

Before 1947, the Garo Hills was represented by two and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills by three members in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Under the Indian Constitution the Garo Hills was given 4 seats and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills 5 seats in the Assam legislature.\(^6\) The members from the areas, however, mostly sat in the Opposition or sometimes boycotted the sessions in the House in protest against measures adopted by the Government in the Assembly which were contrary to their political interests. It was only towards the latter part of 1969-70 that representatives

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from these areas took active participation in the deliberations of the House, realizing the importance of being independent and strove hard to maintain their separate identity from that of Assam. The idea of a separate hill state was born and the demand for a full-fledged state started taking shape and gained momentum as this received the support of the people of these areas. This was realized when the Indian Parliament passed the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act in 1969 even after stiff opposition from the elected representatives as well as other hill districts who were not in favour of merging with the Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills districts.

The passing of the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act 1969 by Parliament resulted in the formation of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya in 1970, within the State of Assam. The Autonomous State was provided with a separate Provisional Legislative Assembly comprising of 38 elected and 3 nominated members bringing its total membership to 41. The hill districts of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills had their first experience of a representative legislative institution of their own, in the form of the Provisional Legislative Assembly in 1970. The members of the Provisional Assembly were elected by the elected members of the two Autonomous District Councils of Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills. In the election of March 1970 to the Provisional Legislative Assembly, 16 seats were returned from Garo Hills; 18 seats from Khasi Hills and 4 seats from Jaintia Hills. The result clearly indicated a clean sweep for the APHLC which won 34 seats, with the remaining 4 being captured by the INC. Three(3) members were nominated by the Governor. Both the members of the INC as well as the nominated members later joined the APHLC paving the way

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7 Pakem, B.: *Coalition Politics in North East India since Independence*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, p.97.

* The details of the names of the members of the Provisional Legislative Assembly is given in Appendix.

for installation of an APHLC ministry. This first legislative set up was marked by the absence of an Opposition.

The Provisional Assembly of the Autonomous State could not satisfy the aspirations of the people as there was bound to be administrative differences between the Autonomous State and Assam. The APHLC was the main regional party which fought relentlessly to create a separate state for the hill districts of Assam. Following these intense political development in these areas, the Autonomous State of Meghalaya was upgraded into a full-fledged State in 1972, thereby fulfilling the political aspirations of the people. The new State comprised of the former three hill districts of Assam – Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills. The first general elections to the newly formed Meghalaya Legislative Assembly were held on March 1972.

The newly formed Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya included members from the regional political parties as well as the national party (INC). Similar to the Provisional Legislative Assembly the APHLC which spearheaded the demand for statehood was the main party which captured power in the first general elections. Another regional party the HSPDP made its maiden entry in the First Assembly though its candidates contested the elections as Independents since the party was not yet recognized by the Election Commission in 1972. The INC, the only national party to have gained a foothold on State politics again retained the number of seats it previously held, also in the new legislature. Later the party consolidated its hold on politics in the State and played an important role in successive Legislative Assemblies.

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In this chapter an attempt is made to analyse the electoral performances and role of the political parties, both regional as well as national, in the three successive Legislative Assemblies. Elections.

The Table-3.1 shows the poll performance of the different political parties in 1972, 1978 and 1983 General Elections to the Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya.

**Table-3.1: Electoral Performance in Meghalaya (1972-1983)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Total No. of Seats</th>
<th>Seats won</th>
<th>% of Seats</th>
<th>Valid votes polled</th>
<th>% of Valid Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A.P.H.L.C.</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35.50</td>
<td>93,851</td>
<td>35.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I.N.C.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>20,274</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>C.P.I.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1,182</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>H.S.P.D.P.*</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32,488</td>
<td>15.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>79,018</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I.N.C.</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30.39</td>
<td>1,09,654</td>
<td>18.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I.N.C.(I)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5,447</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>C.P.I.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>2,361</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>H.S.P.D.C.P.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19.24</td>
<td>92,852</td>
<td>12.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>P.D.I.C.**</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17,938</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>76,032</td>
<td>12.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>I.N.C.(I)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27.68</td>
<td>1,30,958</td>
<td>19.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>J.N.P.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>C.P.I.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>2,442</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>A.P.H.L.C.</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25.06</td>
<td>1,13,593</td>
<td>17.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>H.S.P.D.P.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.31</td>
<td>91,386</td>
<td>13.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>P.D.I.C.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23,253</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,06,378</td>
<td>15.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* H.S.P.D.P. was at that time not recognized as a Political Party but received recognition from the Election commission on 25th January 1978. Its candidates contested as Independents for the General Elections in 1972.

** P.D.I.C. was also not recognized as a Political Party until September 1978. Its candidates contested as Independents (1978).

From this table it can be seen that some parties, the INC, in particular indicated its rising trend. Another party showing its consolidating power is the HSPDP. The APHLC, however, which had shown spectacular performance in the
1970 and 1972 General Elections, showed degenerating features at a rapid pace. These three parties proved to be the major players in the State politics in the period 1972-1988. Other national parties also entered the political fray but with minimal results with the exception of the INC, which later became the Congress Party. This party showed an upward swing from 1972 onwards and consolidated its position in Meghalaya, though its support base was confined mostly to Garo Hills. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills witnessed the power play between the regional parties — the APHLC, the HSPDP and PDIC. These parties on the other hand did not show spectacular results with the exception of the APHLC though it was for a brief period in the 1972 General Elections. Thereafter it started declining rapidly as indicated by its performance in the 1978 and 1983 General Elections. The other main regional party, the HSPDP, could not enhance its poll performance and remained static for the two consecutive elections of 1978 and 1983. The PDIC, another regional party garner 2 seats in the 1983 Legislative Assembly after entering state politics in 1983 itself.

From the configuration showed in Table-3.1, the Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya witnessed the power play among the three main political parties of the State — the APHLC, the INC and the HSPDP. As a result of this, the Assembly experienced frequent changes of Government particularly in 1978-1979, as defections from one party to another was rampant. Moreover, the regional parties due to political rivalry among themselves were not able to provide a formidable challenge to the Congress party and even members of these regional parties were not averse to aligning themselves with the Congress and identifying with its policies and programmes. Their role were, therefore, limited by the turn of events.
The Indian National Congress (INC)/Congress

Table-3.2: Poll Prospects of the Congress Party (INC) in Meghalaya

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Elections</th>
<th>Khasi &amp; Jaintia Hills</th>
<th>Garo Hills</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East Khasi Hills</td>
<td>West Khasi Hills</td>
<td>Ri Bhoi Sub-division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>3-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the 1972 General Elections held in the new State, the Congress(I) had poll alliances with the APHLC, and riding on the victorious wave of that party, it secured 9 seats mainly in dominantly non-tribal constituencies. The Congress(I) as the second largest party in the Assembly is designated as the main Opposition, but due to the poll alliances it entered with the APHLC the party remained on the side of the ruling party. A decisive major turning point for the party occurred in 1976, following the split in the APHLC, where one group merged with the Congress and adding significantly to the strength of the party. This move made it possible for the formation of a Congress Government after the dissolution of the APHLC Government. From 1976 onwards to the next General Elections in 1978 the Congress(I) remained in power in the State. Henceforth its strength continued to swing upwards making the party to be able to make more inroads into state politics in particular in the Garo Hills which later proved to be the strong bastion of the party in the successive elections.

In the Second General Elections in 1978, the party enhanced its performance securing 20 seats in the House of 60 members, thereby emerging as the single largest party in the Second Assembly. This time round, the party remained in the Opposition, allowing the regional parties to form successive coalition Governments but without
much success. The State faced a period of political instability during 1978-1979. It was only during the later phase of the Assembly that the Congress(I) took a shot at Government formation with a coalition Government between Congress(I) and APHLC led by B.B. Lyngdoh. This Government ensured stability back to the State which lasted until the State went to the polls.

The 1983 elections showed that the Congress(I) had again improved its performance by winning 25 seats, five more seats than the last elections. Majority of the seats were from Garo Hills; whereas the party secured only 3 seats from Khasi and Jaintia Hills. This clearly indicated that the party's hold in these areas was beginning to wane whereas its hold in the Garo Hills was gaining strength. Though emerging as the single largest party in the State, the Congress(I) chose not to stake its claim to form the Government but instead allow the other parties to stake their claim, while choosing to sit in the Opposition itself. The coalition Government cobbled up by the regional parties remained in power for 30 days only as a result of rivalry and infighting among its members. The Congress party then staked claim to form the Government and retained power completing its term until the general elections.

The Congress party has proven that it is the only national party that has been able to make inroads into State politics. It significantly improved its poll performance ever since it entered the politics of the State. "After the creation of Meghalaya, the Congress party could increase progressively its influence in the Hills and helped in extending congress influence in these areas." This was largely influenced by the fact that it identified itself as a party that will safeguard the interests and unique tribal culture as stated in its manifesto. The party also capitalize on the image that it projected that it was the Congress party which granted statehood to Meghalaya under

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the leadership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. This was projected in its election manifesto and campaign slogan during 1972 and 1978 General Elections. But the past legacy of its association with non tribal interests in particular during the First Assembly when it opposed the proposed Land Reform measures and this together with the imposed merger with the APHLC a party that was largely identified with the Khasis, damaged the prospects of political participation in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In the first General Elections in 1972, the party gained its foothold on the politics of Meghalaya and fared slightly better than in the successive years in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In this election it secured 4 seats in Khasi Hills but drew a blank in Jaintia Hills. This was partly because of its pre-poll alliance with the APHLC — a party synonymous with the achievement of statehood and partly due to its campaign slogan — ‘the attainment of statehood being a gift from Indira Gandhi’, leader of the Congress party and Prime Minister of India during this period. The party slightly improved its performance in the next General Elections (1978) securing 9 seats from both Khasi and Jaintia Hills. This was a reflection of the political stability that the Congress party was able to ensure in the State from 1976-78, thus enhancing the credibility of the party. In the elections held in 1983 the Congress lost its hold in some areas of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The party was able to bag only 7 seats from these two major districts of Meghalaya.

In the Garo Hills the party enjoyed a slight edge over the regional parties ensuring that this region became the strong bastion of the Congress party. The Congress made its presence felt in this area with 4 seats in the first General Elections in 1972. Its being in the Government from 1976-78, enhanced its poll innings. The party generated significant inroads in the Garo Hills and continued to retain its power

\[11\] Ibid., pp.50-51.
base in the successive years. In 1978 General Elections to the Second Assembly, the number of seats captured by the party rose to 11, greatly enhancing its performance here and paving the way for the establishment of a strong base. The party increases its area of influence with 17 seats which it secured in the third General Elections in 1983.

The achievements of the Congress party in the Garo Hills can be attributed to the fact that the party had strong personalities in its camp in the presence of (L) Capt. W.A. Sangma whom many considered as the founder of the Congress in Meghalaya particularly in the Garo Hills, though the Congress had been in existence in the Hills prior to the formation of the State of Meghalaya. Moreover, politics in this State mostly revolve around personalities and not on principles. Even though the merger of the APHLC with the Congress in 1976 was not without revolt from the old members of the Congress, the leadership of the party was able to perform well in the successive elections. In the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, however, it could not generate the same level of performance and fared badly in the polls. This can be attributed to the manner in which the leadership of the Congress effected the merger of the APHLC with the Congress even after stiff resistance from a section of the APHLC, the party definitely lost much of its image in these areas and lost what ever hold it had here. The Congress party never had any strong roots in Khasi and Jaintia Hills, even though eminent personalities such as Maham Singh and J.E. Tariang were nursing it from a very long time. They could never achieve what Capt. Sangma was able to generate in the Garo Hills. Though the entry of Capt. Sangma in 1976 brought dissension both in the Garo as well as Khasi and Jaintia Hills but this had a negative impact more in the latter than in the former. This is because Capt. Sangma had emerged as the undisputed leader of the Garo people, whereas the Khasis and Jaintias had prominent leaders such as B.B.
Lyngdoh, D.D. Pugh and others who were popular and were well accepted by the people.

Another factor is that the Congress went to the polls with built-in advantages. Being the ruling party at the Centre as well as the State had certain advantages, even if the Congress could not use all levers of powers at its command.\footnote{Ibid., pp.60-62.}

In a State which is increasingly being dominated by regional parties and where national parties have so far had to exist at the sufferance of regional ones, the growth of the Congress party has proven to be very interesting and will be an interest to study.

The All Party Hill Leaders’ Conference (APHLC)

Table-3.3: Poll Prospects of the All Party Hill Leaders’ Conference (APHLC) in Meghalaya

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Elections</th>
<th>Khasi &amp; Jaintia Hills</th>
<th>Garo Hills</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East Khasi Hills</td>
<td>West Khasi Hills</td>
<td>Ri Bhoi Sub-division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>11-</td>
<td>1-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>6-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>8-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Source: Meghalaya Election Handbook, February 1983.}

The APHLC is the main regional party of the State. Its existence was prior to the formation of Meghalaya and, in fact, its formation was the result of the consensus arrived at by the leaders of the hill areas when they spear-headed the demand for a State for these areas. Therefore, its involvement in State Politics was much longer than the other regional parties which came up later. It is the party which entered the new legislature of Meghalaya with an overwhelming majority which no other party till date has achieved.
In the newly formed Meghalaya Legislative Assembly of 1972, the APHLC dominated the House with 32 members and formed the Government with its ally, the INC. In the 60 member House, the ruling party with 41 members totally dominated the proceedings in the Assembly leaving no scope for a strong Opposition. On November 1976, a new political situation emerged in Meghalaya as a result of the Mendipathar Conference, when the APHLC under the leadership of Capt. Sangma merged with the Congress (INC). This proved to be a major turning point for politics in Meghalaya with disastrous consequences for the APHLC. The APHLC which had dominated the Provisional Legislative Assembly as well as the First Assembly of Meghalaya lost power, leading to a split in the party. Then came the verdict of the Election Commission in de-recognising the party and freezing its symbol 'Flower'. Some of its loyalists under the leadership of B.B. Lyngdoh, revived the party with the intention of regaining its past glory but with little success. The party had lost the confidence of the public especially in the rural areas and it fared badly in the forthcoming polls.\(^{13}\)

In the elections of 1978, the APHLC was not able to achieve the same level of success as in the previous elections. Rather it can be said to be a dismal performance, as it secured only 16 seats in the 60-member House. Its performance was better in the East Khasi Hills and West Garo Hills where it retained the seats from its previous elections, but it totally lost in the other districts. The party instead of consolidating its position started declining rapidly. This speeded up the entire process of political disintegration and finally of political oblivion of the APHLC from State politics. The APHLC could no longer dominate the Second Assembly as it had done in the First Assembly. Though the party did not emerge as the dominant party, still the party took

\(^{13}\) *Ibid.*, pp.54-55.
a shot at forming the coalition Government with other regional parties (HSPDP and PDIC). The coalition Government could not remain stable, as due to political differences and infighting between the leaders, the Government collapsed. The APHLC under the leadership of D.D. Pugh formed the Government and lasted for a short time. Then B.B. Lyngdoh, another prominent leader of the APHLC, with some of his colleagues broke away from the party leading to the collapse of the D.D. Pugh Government. He made an alliance with the Congress and formed the Government which lasted until the General Elections. In the Second Assembly, the party had enjoyed a brief stint as an Opposition as for the most part, it was in the ruling coalition.\textsuperscript{14}

The APHLC, though being a part of the ruling coalition, was not able to capitalize on its position — that of being the main and foremost regional party in the State, and the first ruling party in the Assembly, and fared badly at the polls in the General Elections of 1983. The party could not retain its hold in the Garo Hills and lost some seats in this district, reducing its strength to 15 seats from the 55 it contested. This indicated clearly that the APHLC was losing its hold on State politics at a rapid rate. However, the party formed the coalition Government with the HSPDP and PDIC under the banner of the Meghalaya United Parliamentary Party (MUPP) which lasted for less than a month due to political defections.

In 1984, before the Lok Sabha Elections, the APHLC and HSPDP resolved to formally form the new political party and accepted the Constitution of the Hill People Union (HPU). The HPU failed to win the parliamentary seat for which it was formed. Later a section of the HSPDP left the HPU and revived their old party. The APHLC

was then totally submerged into the HPU and disappeared from the politics of Meghalaya.\textsuperscript{15}

The APHLC which had strong support base in the whole of Meghalaya, gradually lost its hold leading to oblivion of the party from State politics. This support base was eroded when the party merged with the Congress on November 1976. The rise of the Congress proved to be disastrous to the poll prospects of the APHLC. As a ruling party in the State for almost seven years, i.e., from April 1970 to November 1976, the party has a proud record of achievements, progress, political stability and administrative efficiency. Problems developed when the Party merged with the Congress in 1976 leading to a split, as some loyalists revived the APHLC.

The hill areas of the Garo Hills were always a traditional home of the APHLC and GNC (an ally of APHLC). After 1976, the party no longer retained its hold in this area. This can be attributed to the fact that the party lost one of its eminent personality, Capt. W.A. Sangma to the Congress. The hold of the APHLC on the youths from Garo Hills waned after 1972. The APHLC had sponsored a students' forum during the days of the struggle for a Hill State. Later on after the achievement of Meghalaya State, the students' community felt neglected by Capt. Sangma's inability to fulfill their demands of regional interests. This led to many student leaders leaving the fold of the APHLC. The party lost the support of the youth and this had an impact on its poll performance in the Garo Hills. Another decisive factor for the dismal performance of the party was the constant in-fighting and rivalry among the leaders that considerably weakened the APHLC.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{flushright}

\end{flushright}
In Khasi and Jaintia Hills the presence of the party was felt more in the former than in the latter. In Khasi Hills the sway of the APHLC was strong particularly in the urban areas but after 1976 the party lost the confidence of the public especially in the rural areas. The failure of the APHLC Government from 1970-76 to initiate programme for economic reconstruction antagonize the rural voters. This was taken advantage by the other regional political parties (HSPDP and PDIC) to consolidate their position leading to the erosion of the support base of the APHLC. The public in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills did not fully accept the merger of this influential party with the Congress party and this merger proved disastrous for the APHLC.

The power of the APHLC began to decline since 1973 when Prof. G.G. Swell, MP elected on the APHLC ticket and a strong leader was suspended from the party. He later formed the PDIC and contributed much in undoing the work of the APHLC in the rural areas of Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

The APHLC as a party was characterized by the presence of strong and eminent personalities of the same calibre. Eminently, there was bound to be clash of interests and this lead to intense infighting among the leadership of the party. These took turn for the worse when these infighting on the leadership issue led to another split in the already weakened party.

The APHLC being the oldest regional party of the State, whose presence was felt not only in Meghalaya, but whose area of influence initially extended to the other hill areas of the region should have emerged as a strong regional party to be reckoned with in the politics of the State. Yet within a short span of time after the emergence of
Meghalaya as a State, it went through a spate of disintegration till finally it went into political oblivion and completely disappeared from State politics.  

Hill State Peoples’ Democratic Party (HSPDP)

Table-3.4: Poll Prospects of the Hill State Peoples’ Democratic Party (HSPDP) in Meghalaya

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Elections</th>
<th>Khasi &amp; Jaintia Hills</th>
<th>Garo Hills</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East Khasi Hills</td>
<td>West Khasi Hills</td>
<td>Ri Bhoi Sub-division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Hill State Peoples’ Democratic Party (HSPDP) was founded at a time when the APHLC had accepted the proposed formation of an autonomous State of Meghalaya within the State of Assam. The main plank for which the party stood for, was the demand for full-fledged state for the hill people where the traditional democracy of these people would remain intact. The party stands for territorial reorganisation of Meghalaya and make it the homeland of all tribals in the contiguous areas of the State.

The party after its organisation in 1968, had to face elections in 1971. Even though the party was not yet recognized by the Election Commission, it decided to field its candidate as an Independent in the Fifth Lok Sabha General Election, with quite a promising outcome for the party.

In 1972, First General Election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, the HSPDP returned 9 candidates in the House of 60 members, though its candidates

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17 Ibid., pp.62-65.
again contested as Independents, the party as yet not recognized by the Election Commission. The 9 seats included 1 from Jaintia Hills, 6 from West Khasi Hills and 2 from East Khasi Hills. This indicated that the party had won the confidence of the rural voters of West Khasi Hills which remained its strong bastion till date. In the same year it captured 11 seats in the Khasi Hills District Council Election. But as neither the APHLC nor the Congress could form the Executive Committee, the HSPDP took over the Executive Committee supported by nominated members and the Congress MDCs. This helped the party to have grassroots contact with the people thus consolidating its position considerably. The HSPDP with 9 members in the Legislative Assembly was the first political party to sit in the Opposition together with some Independent members who did not join the ruling coalition. Due to political defections the number of members was reduced to 4 MLAs by the end of the term. The party had made some inroads into Khasi and Jaintia Hills but drew a blank in Garo Hills.¹⁸

The Second General Election to the Legislative Assembly was held in February 1978. The party fared slightly better at the polls by capitalizing its position in all the 3 districts – East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills. The total number of seats won by the HSPDP in this election was 14; 3 seats from East Khasi Hills, 8 from West Khasi Hills and 3 from Jaintia Hills proving that it had consolidated its position considerably. This time the party did not sit in the Opposition but was a part of the ruling coalition comprising all the regional parties (HSPDP, APHLC, PDIC). The party, however, showed no favourable sign from the Garo Hills district as again it drew a blank at the polls. The Coalition Government did not last long and in 1979 the HSPDP partners were thrown out. The members of the HSPDP

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.63-64.
joined the ranks of the Opposition but this too was brief. The HSPDP was again made a partner in the third Coalition Government comprising the Congress, APHLC led by B.B. Lyngdoh and the HSPDP. In the Second Legislative Assembly, the party enjoyed a dual performance. From 1978-79, it was part of a ruling coalition. Then it had a brief stint as an Opposition from February-April 1979. Again it was made a ruling partner which lasted until General Elections were held in 1983.

In the 1983 General Elections the HSPDP fielded candidates in all the districts of Meghalaya. Its performance was the same as the previous elections with the exception that it added 1 more seat to its number. In this election, the party generated better performance in East Khasi Hills and Ri Bhoi subdivision, bagging 7 seats as compared to 3 in the previous elections. However, its performance in West Khasi Hills, once considered its strong base went down slightly. It retained its 3 seats in Jaintia Hills. Again there was no return from the Garo Hills. This clearly indicated that the Garo people consider the party as representing the Khasi people only. As in 1978, after elections, the HSPDP and other regional parties came together and formed a coalition Government. This coalition lasted less than a month and collapsed as a result of political defections. After the collapse of this Government, the remaining members of the HSPDP as well as those of other regional parties sat in the Opposition till the completion of the term in 1988.19

The HSPDP as the new party emerging after Meghalaya attained statehood represented the new awareness of the people. It initially seeks to represent an alternative and new trend to the older parties in the State. Because of its main aim which is integration of all areas which comprises Khasi and Jaintia Hills. District which is reflected in its constitution it gained immediate acceptance in rural Khasi

society which is traditional bound. The party could generate significant performances in West Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills and could retain its hold on these areas for three consecutive elections from 1972-1983. On its entry into State politics the party made huge inroads in West Khasi Hills bagging all the constituencies from this area. This can be attributed to the fact that its founder and President H.S. Lyngdoh hails from this district. He could maintain his magnetic hold over his people. Being a leader whose firm roots is in the rural interior, he has been able to consolidate his party's position in this district comprising mainly of the rural areas. The party had grassroots appeal and received tremendous support from the masses. Since these areas had generally accepted the leadership of H.S. Lyngdoh as the undisputed leader of the party, the HSPDP was able to play a pivotal role in State politics and emerge as an alternative to the APHLC and Congress.

Within a short time the HSPDP was able to penetrate into the Jaintia Hills and created a strong base here. The main issue which the party took up in the Jaintia Hills was the boundary dispute with Assam in relation with the Mikir Hills. It was also able to have eminent personalities from this area within its fold. These helped the party in consolidating its position in this area.

In the Khasi Hills the party's performance was not the same as in the other two districts. It was confined only to certain pockets. The HSPDP was not able to provide strong challenge to the APHLC which dominated this area. This can be attributed to the fact that the APHLC was then at the peak of its power. However, even after the power of the APHLC waned, still the HSPDP could not capitalize on this development. Another factor was that there were few opinion leaders joining the party. Though the party made a strong base in certain areas of Khasi Hills it could not

consolidate its position and gradually the support base of the party was eroded particularly when the party merged with the APHLC to form the HPU.

In the Garo Hills the HSPDP could not make any inroads into the political scene. Both the first and second general elections saw the party with no returns to the Legislative Assembly. This is because the Garos in general consider the party as representing the Khasis only, as the main issues taken up by the HSPDP were specifically meant for the Khasis and Jaintias. This trend changed after the party secured the Shillong Parliamentary seat in 1977 and when the party secured a berth in the Coalition Government of the State in 1978. There was some organisations of the party in Garo Hills. But this presence generated by it in Garo Hills was short-lived when all the HSPDP members from Garo Hills joined the HPU in 1984 and presently the party ceases to exist in this area.

The existence of the HSPDP in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills slowly eroded and in particular from West Khasi Hills once considered its stronghold. This is because the party did not have a strong organisational basis. The main problem which hindered it from expanding its area of influence can be attributed to its weak organisation and resources which gradually hastened its dwindling performances in successive elections. As a result of this it could not have firm hold on its members. Coupled with this, factional politics was also rampant within the party which makes it ineffective in tackling critical issues within the party. The failure of the party to achieve its main objectives as stated in its constitution also contributed to the erosion of its vote bank in the Jaintia Hills and to some extent in the West Khasi Hills district. Presently, the top leaders of the party are ageing and are isolated between tradition and modernity in their political outlook which had an effect on the performance of the party especially in the urban areas. Its influence had so much declined to the extent
that by 1988 the party was confined only to certain pockets even in West Khasi Hills apart from certain constituencies of East Khasi Hills which had returned six elected representatives to the State Assembly more on personal rather than party considerations.\textsuperscript{21}

**Public Demand Implementation Convention (PDIC)**

**Table-3.5: Poll Prospects of the Public Demand Implementation Convention (PDIC)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Elections</th>
<th>Khasi &amp; Jaintia Hills</th>
<th>Garo Hills</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East Khasi Hills</td>
<td>West Khasi Hills</td>
<td>Ri Bhoi Sub-division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The PDIC did not contest the General Elections of Meghalaya during 1972 and 1978.

Initially, the Public Demand Implementation Convention (PDIC) was founded not as a political party but as an organisation representing a section of society which is the ‘Farmers’ Movement’. The main aim of the party was to air the needs and aspirations of the farmers. This organisation included in its demands some of the vital issues affecting the farmers, potato growers, etc. and carried some demonstrations. Gradually, it developed political leanings as these demands seemed to be only for the purpose of gaining popularity among the Wars for achieving electoral gains.\textsuperscript{22}

In 1978, when the party was revived, M.N. Majaw became the President. In the 1978 General Elections the party made its maiden entry into the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly by winning 2 seats although its candidates contested the


\textsuperscript{22} *Ibid.*, p.100.
elections as Independents since the party was not recognized as a State Party. The PDIC was not able to play a significant role in Government formation since it had only 2 members in the 60 member House. The PDIC was made a partner in the ruling coalition made up by the regional parties of the State. This coalition did not last long as due to political differences among the coalition partners the coalition collapsed and the PDIC had to sit in the Opposition and remained so until General Elections were held.

In the 1983 General Elections held on February, the PDIC again secured only 2 seats being unable to consolidate its position even in Khasi and Jaintia Hills though setting up 22 candidates in the fray. It did not set up any candidate in Garo Hills. The party President was also defeated and was held responsible for this debacle. The two MLAs joined the ministry of Sangma when the Congress Government was formed. Some of the prominent members of the PDIC left the party and this considerably weakened the party.

The PDIC is the least popular of the regional parties that were in operation in this period. It could not make much inroads into State Politics. The party was not able to consolidate its position in Khasi and Jaintia Hills with the exception of 2 seats it secured from the time it emerged into the political scene. It could not make its presence felt in the Garo Hills. The victory of the party in these 2 constituencies can be attributed to the members who were able to gain the confidence and acceptance of the people through personal contacts with the electorates. This can be seen from the electorates’ preference of electing the party’s candidates in the two successive elections of 1978 and 1983. Another factor is that the area of influence of the PDIC are rural areas where the majority of the people are agriculturists and so the issues and
programmes for which the PDIC stood for gained wide acceptance and sent these two representatives to the Legislative Assembly.

Though, the PDIC had dynamic leadership in G.G. Swell and later M.N. Majaw who became the President of the party, still the party was not able to fare better in the State Politics and were not able to consolidate their position. The party stood for the farmers community but it was unable to garner the support of the rural voters. This may be because apart from these two leaders, there was no other leaders who could effectively carry these issues to the people. Another factor may be the dominance of the other two regional parties — APHLC and HSPDP on politics of the State. The party lacked strong organisational structure and leadership at the grass root level. Therefore it could not provide a strong alternative to the dominant parties in the State.²³

**Hill People Union (HPU)**

The Hill People Union (HPU) appeared in Meghalaya prior to the Lok Sabha elections in 1984. This party came into being because of political compulsions generated by Congress hegemony in Meghalaya politics. This necessitated the leadership of both the main regional parties during this time, to sink their differences and come together on the same platform, to present a strong alternative to the electorates. In their endeavour to keep the Congress out of power, the two combined parties — APHLC and HSPDP have been going all out to bring about this unity move. The leaders of these two political parties experienced that in the the past it has shown that fragmentation has only frustrated the concept and reality of a mass based political loyalties in the State. However, this unity move apparently ended only in

electoral adjustment of seats to be contested by the parties involved in the ensuing District Councils elections to be held in the State. This experiment was a failure as the two parties failed to dislodge the Congress in the two districts of Jaintia and Garo Hills. It did, however, perform slightly better in Khasi Hills. Many of the prominent leaders of the two parties were disillusioned with the results but the results in the Khasi Hills gave an impetus and hope to the parties to press forward in cementing the unification.24

The first comprehensive and substantial ground work of the long ensuring unity move of the two regional parties was the electoral agreement arrived at during the Jaintia Hills District Council elections in 1983. Subsequently, in a joint meeting the two parties held in Shillong, they formed the Constitution Drafting Committee for the proposed new regional political party. The approval for the final Draft was accorded after subsequent meetings involving the leaders of the two parties. Finally, on the 16th November 1984, the APHLC and HSPDP formally accepted the Draft Constitution and the new political party, the Hill People Union (HPU) came into being.

The agreement to form a new political party was postponed for sometime to avoid any unnecessary misunderstanding of the party's stand in the District Councils elections by the electorates. However, the parties resolved to first make poll adjustments of seats in the ensuing Khasi Hills District Council elections, and also publishing a joint Manifesto. The results of the elections went in favour of the combined regional parties. This further strengthened the move for unity.

The unity move of the two regional parties received slight set back over the question of whether the parties should retain their own separate identities or to totally

submerged themselves to the new party. On the one hand, the HSPDP was against submerging their identity whereas the APHLC was in favour to achieve unity by dissolving the two concerned parties. The two parties were trying to create a common platform without sinking their identities through protracted meetings which went on for a year. But this fluid situation suddenly took a new turn, with the announcement of the Lok Sabha elections. The two parties, therefore, decided to renew their efforts for forging unity.

Five weeks before the Lok Sabha elections the APHLC and HSPDP decided to form the new party — the HPU, and fielded candidate for both Lok Sabha seats in Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills. The joint meeting of the two parties on 16th November, 1984, formally decided to form the new political party — HPU and accept the new Constitution of the new party. The party was recognized by the Election Commission as a State party on 10th September 1986.

The acid test for the HPU as a new regional political party in the State of Meghalaya came when the Lok Sabha elections were held. These elections were crucial in the sense that it would prove the acceptance of the party by the electorates. Moreover, out of the two seats in Meghalaya, the most prestigious was the Shillong seat. It was a foregone conclusion that the Tura seat was in favour of the Congress as Garo Hills was a bastion of the Congress party. Whereas the Shillong Parliamentary seat is a different story. This seat had never been captured by any national party, not even the Congress. It was a seat won by the regional party, the APHLC and for one term the HSPDP since regional parties have always enjoyed huge support from the electorates in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. For the first time, after the creation of Meghalaya, the Shillong Parliamentary seat was won by the Congress. The Tura seat too went in favour of the Congress. So both the two Parliamentary seats from
Meghalaya went in favour of the national party for the first time in the history of the State. This indicated that the concerted effort of the regional parties to challenge the national party had proved unsuccessful.

Even though the HPU failed to win this election, the result did not discourage the leaders to go ahead with the programme and policies of the party. However, though the HPU was a new party and yet untested in the Assembly Elections, the party was already facing political differences and defections by eminent members, who switched allegiance to the victorious party — the Congress. This proved that the regional parties were never free from infighting and these parties were always under the saga of political defections which had a demoralizing effect on the party. But inspite of these problems plaguing the new formed party, those who remain loyal to the HPU went further ahead even after the election debacle to strengthen the party. 25

Though the party’s performance in the Lok Sabha Elections was poor, but it had proved to be the strongest regional force able to take on the might of the Congress which ruled the State. The party was formally recognized as the principal Opposition in the Assembly during the Budget session in 1986. This add a new dimension to the role of the HPU in the state politics. The real test for the party as an alternative to the ruling Congress was its performance in the General Elections to the State Legislative Assembly in 1988. However, the analysis of the party’s performance in this election has not been incorporated in this work as it does not fall within the purview of the years covered by this study.

"Regional political parties, it has been stated, grow out of a reaction to the local problems of the region." 26 This statement seemed to be true of the regional

26 Ibid., p.11.
parties in Meghalaya. These parties had emerged as a reaction to the problems plaguing Meghalaya both prior and after the attainment of statehood. However, these parties have not been able to consolidate their positions, and have disappeared from the political scene within a short period of their emergence. The regional parties in Meghalaya have a common feature, i.e., the central demand for maintaining the "Tribal identity". The Congress which is a national party also voiced the same demands. The actual differences between the regional parties and the Congress is not clear. This has led to acceptance and merger of these parties with the Congress as the case when the APHLC merged with the national party as soon as the identity of the hill tribes were accepted by the National Government in the form of Meghalaya. Moreover, the Congress with immense resources at its command could win over people and also the MLAs elected on opposition party tickets to run the State. The regional parties were, therefore, not able to present a united front to the power of the Congress, as these parties are often plagued by political differences and infighting among their leaders. This trend often led to floor crossings and splits within the party which finally led to their political demise. Movement of the Opposition parties (regional parties) to fight against the Congress seems to be a regular feature in the State, because elections are fought not on the basis of any concrete policy and programme, but on personality basis and extent of resources at the disposal of the respective parties, but these attempts by and large remain unsuccessful. The Congress even though failing to gain an absolute majority in the election always manages to rule the state with defections or coalition with splinter groups which is evident from the period (1972-1988) covered in this study.27

The regional parties were mostly confined to Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Even here the parties fight was mostly amongst themselves rather than against the Congress. Whereas the Congress had carved a strong bastion in the Garo Hills and the regional parties could not penetrate into this district. This also had an influence on their electoral performance and was taken advantage by the Congress in Government formation after successive elections. The regional parties were marked by fragmentation and so could not present a united front to the Congress in the State. However, efforts were made by these parties to present a united front against the Congress which is reflected when the HPU was formed just before the 1987 General Elections. It remains to be seen whether this effort will succeed. This study is, however, outside the period covered by this work. It can, therefore, be summarized that the role of regional political parties in Meghalaya, are limited to the extent that they are short-term politics.

Electoral politics in Meghalaya do not project any clear cut political preference based on programme and policy. Parties choose their candidates on the bases of their personality and local popularity to ensure victory. Such candidates often lack any strong conviction to any policy and programme of the party concern. Elections in Meghalaya is apolitical and therefore, manipulations, maneuvering and money power play the dominant role in patching together a majority for ministry making and the poll verdict is rendered rather irrelevant. Because of little differences amongst the parties often the spectacle of floor crossing is being witnessed in this state affecting the stability of any ministry.²⁸

Composition of Opposition Parties in Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1972-1983

The word “Opposition” is derived from the Latin word *oppositio* which means ‘to oppose’. As such, the main function of the Opposition is to oppose any policy of the ruling party which is in contradiction to the will of the people. It is the alternative Government and focus of the discontent of the people.30

The Opposition is a fundamental part of the legislature which functions mainly on the basis of a parliamentary or cabinet form of Government. If the ruling party is needed to take decisions and run the Government, the Opposition is needed to ensure that the decisions are reached through proper debate and discussion.31 Prof. Ronald Butt has said that, “the Opposition itself participates in the process of governing because it helps to condition the contemporary climate of opinion through which the Government of the day is itself influenced in the production of its policies. He further observes that apart from the real if indirect effect it has on the evolution of Government policy, the Opposition can also by a carefully fought and reasoned campaign get the details of legislation amended.32

The electoral results give authority to a certain party or group of parties to form the Government and other party or parties which represent the minority opinions functions as the Opposition. The Opposition tries to win the support of the people by

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exposing the defects, loopholes and blunders of that Government. It is always a readymade alternative Government.\textsuperscript{33}

There were traces of democracy in India, but the opposition as such was not a distinct institution. The origin of an opposition in India can be stated to have emerged simultaneously with the origin of the Indian national congress during the British period as this party was formed by some Indian leaders to opposed the British and later this evolved into a party for the national movement in India to secure independence from the British rule. Independent India adopted a parliamentary form of government following the British pattern which is the existence of the Ruling as well as the Opposition parties in Parliament as well as in the States.

The first Opposition in Independent India was formed in 1950 under the leadership of Prof. K.T. Shah. This Opposition had only 14 members. Its main purpose was simply to take corrective measures with regard to policies of the Government. Though its leanings was towards the Left parties but it had no basic differences with the Congress party. The real Opposition to the Congress party which had remained unchallenged for long emerged in 1952 after the 1952 General Elections under the new Constitution.\textsuperscript{34}

**Opposition Parties in Meghalaya Legislative Assembly**

The concept of the Opposition is not new to the State politics of Meghalaya as a semblance of Opposition had emerged when Meghalaya was not a State but were districts within the State of Assam. The birth of the State was the result of the Opposition of the leaders of the hill areas to the decision of the Assam Government to


\textsuperscript{34} *Ibid*. p.211.
introduce the Assam Official Language Bill in the Assam Legislative Assembly to make Assamese the official state language. This was vehemently opposed by the people from the hill areas which led to the spearheading of the demand for statehood, culminating in the formation of Meghalaya as a State. The main regional parties of the State also owed their origin and existence to their opposition on certain issues that had developed in the state politics. The emergence of Opposition is not a new development, rather it was the result of oppositional developments of the political set up of the State.

The newly formed Meghalaya Legislative Assembly is a 60-member House. For a brief period from 1972-1976, the House was dominated by the ruling party (APHLC) which had emerged as the single largest party in the 1972 General Elections. From 1976 onwards, however, coalition governments were the order of the day, and the House witnessed the overlapping and continuous shifting of Opposition parties generated by engineered defections in the power play exercised by different political parties. The General Elections of 1972 saw the complete dominance of the APHLC. The parties which were in the minority were the Congress with 9 members, HSPDP 8 and Independents with 3 members. These parties together constituted the politically minority groups in the Legislative Assembly and were destined to perform the role of Opposition to the APHLC led ruling party. Because of the poll alliance of the APHLC and Congress, the Congress automatically became a part of the ruling party leaving the HSPDP to don the role of the main Opposition party. The HSPDP was the first official Opposition party in the State, that lasted until 1976. The political scene took a new turn after the Mendipathar Conference which saw the merger of the APHLC with the Congress. This led to a split in the APHLC wherein a section decided to revive the APHLC. These members made a decision to stay in the
Opposition and so the numbers of the Opposition had increased with the addition of the members of the revived APHLC. The Opposition parties from 1976-1978 included the HSPDP and the APHLC and some Independents. The HSPDP was led by H.S. Lyngdoh and the leader of the APHLC was B.B. Lyngdoh. These parties did not form a united Opposition party but functioned as individual opposition groups. In the first half of the tenure of the First Legislative Assembly, the ruling party totally dominated the proceedings of the House as the Opposition (HSPDP) was numerically weak. But in the second half (1976-1978) the strength of the Opposition rose, when the APHLC joined the ranks of the Opposition.

The Second General Elections 1978 did not give a clear majority to any political party. The Congress (INC) emerged as the single largest party with 20 elected members but it did not form the government as the regional parties came together in one banner, the Meghalaya United Legislature Party (MULP) and formed the Government. The Congress became the Opposition party in the Legislative Assembly under the leadership of Capt. Sangma together with 6 Independent members under the name Meghalaya United Legislature Front (MULF). The coalition of the regional parties was short-lived as political differences emerged leading to the expulsion of the members of the HSPDP members, leaving the APHLC and PDIC to remain in the Coalition Government. The HSPDP joined the Opposition parties with the Congress and Independent members. The Opposition had grown in strength as it comprised of 20 Congress, 15 HSPDP and some (6) Independent members. The main Opposition was made up by the MULF (Congress and Independents) and the HSPDP formed another opposition group. This time the Opposition were able to make their presence felt and this enabled them to play a constructive role in the Assembly. This period, however, was characterized by political instability which had started emerging
in State Politics. This term was marked by frequent change of Government and the configuration of both the ruling and Opposition parties frequently changes. The Two-Party (APHLC and PDIC) Coalition Government did not survive for the remaining period of the second term due to contentious issue for leadership of the Government. This led to a political crisis which culminated in the split of the APHLC to two groups — one led by D.D. Pugh and another by B.B. Lyngdoh. The APHLC under the leadership of B.B. Lyngdoh aligned itself with the Congress (Capt. Sangma). These two parties together with the HSPDP (H.S. Lyngdoh) formed the United Meghalaya Peoples' Democratic Front (UMPDF) and staked claim to form the Government. The APHLC led by D.D. Pugh and the PDIC and some Independents formed the Opposition parties. The strength of the Opposition had considerably dwindled and, therefore, these parties could not provide a strong and viable opposition to the ruling coalition. The strength of the Opposition alternated between an upward and downward trend depending on the role played by the political parties that constituted the Second Legislative Assembly. This House had its first taste of political instability in the State which was engineered by defections of members of the political parties. It also witnessed the power play between the parties in the State. The Congress (INC), a national party, emerged as the single largest party but initially sat in the Opposition. But the frequent changes in the political scenario as a result of different political alignment made matters more confusing in which both the national party as well as the regional parties had their stints as ruling and Opposition parties. The initial term of the Second Legislative Assembly witnessed a strong Opposition Congress 20 and Independent members in terms of numerical strength, whereas the latter part of the term witnessed a weak Opposition comprising PDIC (2) and some APHLC members. The Opposition parties were not united and functioned as loose political units and so
were not able to provide a strong and viable Opposition to the dominant ruling coalition.

The Third General Elections 1983 again saw the emergence of the Congress as the single largest party with 25 elected members. But no party gained absolute majority to ensure smooth installation of the next Government, as well as political stability. The State witnessed political instability prior to the formation of the Government by the regional parties and this continued for the duration of the coalition government made up by the regional parties, named the Meghalaya United Parliamentary Party (MUPP). The Congress with some Independent members became the Opposition. This Government lasted a month as due to dissidence and defections by its members, it lost the vote of confidence sponsored by the Opposition (Congress). This proved that the Opposition could engineer defections in the ruling party and win members to its side. This led to the formation of another coalition by the Congress with Independents and some members who had defected to its camp leading to the installation of the Congress led government, the Meghalaya Democratic Front (MDF). The Opposition was now made up by the regional parties. For the first time in the history of Meghalaya politics, the regional parties (APHLC, HSPDP, PDIC) came together to form an Opposition to the Congress Government. However, these parties could not form a United Opposition, rather it was a fragmented Opposition as most of the members of the regional parties had defected to the ruling coalition thereby reducing the numerical strength of the regional parties. Initially, after the installation of the Congress Government, the Opposition parties comprising of the regional parties was quite sizeable with the exception of a few members who had defected to the Congress and voted in favour of the No-Confidence Motion sponsored by the Congress. Gradually, this configuration of the Opposition parties
was reduced following the defection of more members to the ruling party. The regional political parties were unable to present a united front as an Opposition, on the contrary they were characterized by disunity and, therefore, could not dislodge the Congress from power for the remaining tenure of the Assembly. However, the regional parties united under a common platform during the 1984 Lok Sabha Elections when they sponsored a consensus candidate for the elections. Prior to the Lok Sabha Elections, the two main Opposition parties merged and formed the Hill People Union (HPU) and fielded a common candidate for the ensuing elections. The party, however, did not generate a good performance at the polls and this had a demoralizing effect on a section of the members of the party. This created a rift in the party resulting in some members of the HSPDP to leave the party and revived their old party (HSPDP), while another group of the APHLC led by Armison Marak revived back the APHLC to be known as the APHLC(A).35

From the above, it can be seen that the Congress though being in the Opposition yet it was able to project itself as an alternative Government and was successful in its main objective of toppling the ruling coalition of the regional political parties. Whereas the regional parties failed to present themselves as an alternative to the ruling party as there was no unity among themselves and they remained a fragmented political parties. But whether it was the Congress in Opposition or the non-Congress parties (regional parties) in the Opposition none of them ever settled down to fulfill this vital function in a democratic polity. Their orientation is how to capture the Treasury benches as soon as possible, how to retain them by any means possible, and this has led to the spate of defections and floor crossings by political parties which has in turn generate political instability in the

State particularly after each General Elections and in particular during 1978-79.\textsuperscript{36} Therefore, in such situations both the structure of authority and the structure of Opposition are found to be amorphous and fragmented. Consequently, there are no clear lines between Government and the Opposition and both seem to dissolve into the ruling class. This also makes the lines between Government and the Opposition party difficult to draw.

Therefore, we can see that the Opposition parties have made several attempts to unite but have failed to provide a stable alternative to the ruling party for the most part, the Congress.\textsuperscript{37} The efforts of the Opposition parties towards a single Opposition party based on one flag, one programme and one leadership as in England failed to materialize in the wake of the leadership aspiration and the quest for keeping a separate entity of each of the constituent party as is the case with the HPU. This makes it impossible for these parties to come together to demonstrate their firm belief in the Opposition unity. Even the poll accords that Opposition parties' alliances forged on the eve of General Elections to the Legislative Assembly were inadequate and insignificant and lacked sincerity and commitment to the poll pacts due to defections and floor crossings. Subsequently, they hardly lasted after the elections are over and the race for capturing political power begins.

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\textsuperscript{36} Ram D. Sundar (Ed): \textit{Indian Democracy Prospects and Retrospects}, Kanishka Publishers and Distributors p.231.

\textsuperscript{37} Ram D. Sundar (Ed): \textit{Readings in the Indian Parliamentary Opposition}, Kanishka Publishers and Distributors p. 221.
List of Configuration of the Members of the Opposition Parties and the Leaders of the Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly (1972-1978)

Table-3.6: Configuration of Opposition Parties (1972-1988)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Legislative Assembly 1972-1988</th>
<th>Opposition Parties</th>
<th>Total No. of the Members of the Opposition</th>
<th>Period Effective from 1972-1988</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Table 3.7: Configuration of Leaders of Opposition Parties (1970-1988)

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<th>Chain of Events</th>
<th>Leader of the Opposition</th>
<th>Opposition Parties</th>
<th>Period Effective from 1970-1988</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Autonomous State of Meghalaya</td>
<td>Shri Akramozzaman</td>
<td>INC and Independents</td>
<td>2.1.70 – 21.1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-fledged State of Meghalaya (Interim Govt.)</td>
<td>Shri Akramozzaman</td>
<td>INC and Independents</td>
<td>21.1.72 – 18.3.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FIRST GENERAL ELECTIONS 1972</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Legislative Assembly 1972</td>
<td>H.S. Lyngdoh</td>
<td>HSPDP</td>
<td>18.3.72 – 21.11.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changeover of Ruling Party from APHLC to Cong.(I)</td>
<td>B.B. Lyngdoh</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mendipathar Conference)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SECOND GENERAL ELECTIONS 1978</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd Legislative Assembly 1978 (Coalition Govt. under 3 Flags)</td>
<td>Capt. W.A. Sangma</td>
<td>MULF – Cong(I) Independents</td>
<td>10.3.78 – 21.2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition Govt. under 2 Flags</td>
<td>Capt. W.A. Sangma</td>
<td>Cong(I) &amp; HSPDP</td>
<td>21.2.79 – 6.5.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Meghalaya Parliamentary Democratic Forum (UMPDF)</td>
<td>P.R. Kyndiah</td>
<td>APHLC; PDIC; Janata and Independents</td>
<td>6.5.79 – 24.2.83</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>THIRD GENERAL ELECTIONS 1983</strong></td>
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<td>Cong(I) and Independents</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of Ruling Party MUPP to MDF (Meghalaya Democratic Front)</td>
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<td>31.3.83 – 2.4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B.B. Lyngdoh</td>
<td>HPU; HSPDP; APLHC(A) and Independents (RDF)**</td>
<td>2.4.86 – 5.2.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* MULF – Meghalaya United Legislative Front;
** RDF – Regional Democratic Front.