INTRODUCTION

Legislatures are representative bodies whose main function is to make law in order to protect the interest of the people and oversee their welfare. In a parliamentary democracy the Government is always responsible to the elected representative legislatures. The members of the legislature as the elected representatives of the people are, therefore, entrusted with the task of ventilating the grievances as well as offering opinions of the people on various issues, sometime the functioning of the Government or the executive on the floor of the legislature and also to enact laws. It is the duty of the legislators to articulate the aspirations and the grievances of the people as well as try to fulfill their expectations and redress their grievances. Parliamentary Government is a Government by Criticisms and a Government by expositions and therefore whatever may be the form of Democratic Governments, it is based on multi-party system. When one party gets a majority of seats, it forms the Government and the remaining parties remain in the Opposition. If no party gets a majority and there are more than three or four parties, two or three parties which together make a majority in the legislature and agree to work together, they form the Government and the remaining parties form the Opposition. The Ruling party or parties have the responsibility of carrying on the Government according to their programme consistent with democratic tradition and practices. The party or


parties which form the minority have the task of forming the Opposition and have a
definite role to perform. In the enactment of legislation, the relationship between the
Government and the Opposition is that the majority proposes whereas the Opposition
generally opposes the proposals or proposes alternative measures.

The word ‘Opposition’ is derived from the Latin word ‘oppositio’ meaning to
oppose. The idea of a parliamentary opposition emerged in the centuries following
1688. During the second half of the last century, the forms and conventions associated
with such opposition took something like their present shape. With the development
of political parties the Opposition has been transformed into a distinct entity. Dictionaries and books on political philosophy define the Opposition mainly as a
party that opposes the Government or party in power. The Grolier International
Dictionary defines it as a political party or organisation opposed to the group, party of
Government in power. The Readers Digest Great Encyclopaedia Dictionary defines
the Opposition as the Chief Parliamentary party opposed to that in office and extends
it to cover any party that is opposed to some proposals. Webster’s Third New
International Dictionary defines it as a political party that actively opposes the party
in power and is prepared to replace it if opportunity offers. Larouse Illustrated
International Encyclopedia and Dictionary defines it the political group or groups in a
democracy opposing the party in power and working to take its place by constitutional
methods. The Universal Dictionary of the English Language defines it to denote a
body of persons holding opinions adverse to a policy or proposal, and as the body of
Members of Parliament who are opposed to the party in office. The New Oxford

5 Desai, Morarji: “Role of Opposition in the Parliament and the State Legislatures” in The
Constitution and the Parliament in India, S.L. Shakhder (Ed.), Lok Sabha Secretariat, New
Delhi, 1976, p.547.

Illustrated Dictionary defines it as Chief Parliamentary Party opposed to that in office. The Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary expresses the same idea without restricting it to the body of Members of Parliament. It defines it as a body of opposers or the party that opposes the Ministry of existing Administration. The Dictionary of American Politics defines it as the members of a party in the Congress, whether in minority or majority politically opposed to the President and his Administration. It further elaborates that in a Parliamentary Government it would mean the members of the party or parties in coalition who oppose the ruling party.

In the special sense of the term the Opposition normally means a coherent group of people, regularly acting together, and able to present themselves collectively to the electorate as an alternative government with an alternative policy.7

The Opposition not only keeps the government on its guard through constant criticisms of its acts of omission and commission but also can provide an alternative government should the ruling party loses its majority. It endeavours to maintain continuous contact with the legislative chamber. Its constructive role as an Opposition is, therefore, essential for the successful working of a representative government. Hence according to Harold J. Laski, “men who are to live together peacefully must be able to argue together peacefully.” This rightly sums up the relationship between the ruling party and the Opposition.8 Thus Parliamentary Opposition is a permanent feature of party government and prevents concentration of power in an individual or group of individuals. It is compelled by the logic of the parliamentary system to adopt a responsible attitude.

There can be no democratic government without an effective opposition, and a responsible opposition is as important as the party in power in a parliamentary system. 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 debates and discussions.

The Opposition today has gained tremendous significance in parliamentary democracies. Several factors have contributed to their growing stature, chief being the temperamental difference among the people. The outcome is that people seek like-minded people and, therefore, organised themselves into groups which later developed into political parties with similar opinions on political questions. Therefore, there may be as many parties as there are opinions.

The presence of the Opposition differentiates between democratic and dictatorial nations. The Opposition acts as a check on the otherwise enormous power exercised by the Government. In the legislature it exposes the Government's omissions and proposes measures in the public interest. Therefore, through constant scrutiny and criticisms of the policies of the Government, the Opposition helps to make the Government a more useful instrument of democracy. "The Opposition", says Jennings, "is at once the alternative Government and a focus for the discontent of the people. Its functions are almost as important as that of the Government. If there be no Opposition then there is no democracy."

The Opposition proposes alternative measures differing from those of the party in power. It ventilates public grievances through various parliamentary methods such as questions, half-an-hour discussion, adjournment motions, etc. and secures discussions particularly on those questions that agitate the public mind and, therefore,

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press the government to solve them. The Opposition then prepares to be the ready-made alternative government. So the object of having an Opposition in a parliamentary democracy emanates from the basic concept of limiting power by power.¹⁰

The political opposition is an inseparable part of every party system. The nature and character of opposition vary from one party system to another. India has chosen the parliamentary form of Government because of ancient tradition and also due to its long association with the British who rule our country for nearly 200 years. Though the British influence is there in our democratic system but it is not a replica of the British system. It is entirely our own system, taken after due deliberation and constitutional thinking by our founding fathers.¹¹ The origin of the Opposition in Indian politics can be stated to have emerged simultaneously with the origin of the Indian National Congress during British rule. After Independence, India adopted a parliamentary form of Government following the British pattern, providing for the emergence of the Ruling and the Opposition party(s) in the Parliament and State Legislatures. Henceforth, the Opposition came to occupy a fundamental position in the legislatures both at the centre and the states. As Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out, "the parliamentary system of work requires not only forcible expression of opinions and views but on essential basis of co-operation between the Opposition and the Government."¹² The Opposition is, therefore, required to play a vital role in the Legislature. It is required to focus attention on certain issues and urge the Government to see these issues from different viewpoints keeping the welfare and progress of the

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people as the ultimate criterion. The Opposition in a parliamentary democracy, therefore, has to play an effective role by performing two basic functions. Firstly, it is required to provide constructive criticism to the programmes and policies of the Government. Secondly, it must be ready to form an alternative government in case the party in power is voted out or goes out of office.13

Situation in Meghalaya

Before the 21st January, 1972, Meghalaya comprising the three districts – Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills were a part of the then composite State of Assam. The transfer of power from the British to the Indians in 1947 brought a number of political and administrative changes in the hill districts of the present State of Meghalaya paving the way for the formation and functioning of representative institutions which led to the development of demand for statehood. The long drawn but peaceful agitation by the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos culminated in the formation of Meghalaya as a full-fledged State on 21st January, 1972. The Meghalaya Legislative Assembly consisting of both the majority and the party(s) in the minority was inaugurated in March 1972 after the First General Elections of 1972 of the new State. Hence, the study of the role and functions of the Opposition in the State with regard to the specified issues – land relations; boundary issues with Assam and the law and order problems especially in Shillong and problem of influx within the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly is undertaken and analysed so as to gain a better understanding of the role of the Opposition in the State Legislature. The study also undertakes to evaluate how far the Opposition party(s) operating during the period 1972-1988 have been able to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of the people of Meghalaya with regard to the issues already

specified and also whether a permanent solution of the issues concerned have been realized or not.

**Review of Literature**

Taking the above propositions into account, the present study endeavours to examine and analyse the role and functioning of the national and the regional political parties as Opposition party(s) in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly which had remained unexplored so far. Several books have been written on Meghalaya, though, this particular field of study and research has not been undertaken. Earlier studies have not properly examined the role of the Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. Most of the studies conducted so far are general in character focusing on a wide range of topics. The book *Hill Politics in North East India* by S.K. Chaube dealt mostly with the politics in the hill areas of North East India with reference to various factors leading to the formation of Meghalaya. *A Century of Tribal Politics (1894-1974)* by V.V. Rao delved in detail on the political set up in the entire North Eastern region during the British rule and also on the gradual changes that had taken shape in the region. H. Bareh's *Meghalaya* dealt extensively on the State of Meghalaya in general and on the cultural aspects of the people in particular. *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol.II, Meghalaya, (1874-1983)* jointly edited by V.V. Rao, Niru Hazarika and B. Pakem gave a detailed account of Meghalaya, though the main focus is on the evolution of electoral process of the members of the various representative institutions in operation during this period. *Coalition Politics in North East India* by B. Pakem, a recent publication mainly focuses on the processes and practices of coalition of different political parties, an emerging trend in the politics of the North Eastern States over the past few years.
The present study is an attempt to make a thorough study and research on the various aspects of the role of the Opposition within the ambit of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly on the basis of the three issues already specified as this field has remained virtually untouched. Since not much research has so far been conducted on this area, the collection of data is, therefore, mainly based on primary sources – Reports of the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly from 1970-1988 and the relevant Official Records and Documents and Legislative Assembly Debates. The secondary sources are drawn from the publications of the Government of Meghalaya and the Assembly Secretariat; books, research articles and seminar proceedings; journals, pamphlets and manifesto(s) of different political parties and also the constitutions of political parties have been made use for this study. Most of the source materials, both primary and secondary, are available in the office and library of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, the Library of the North Eastern Hill University at Shillong, and efforts have been made to consult the relevant materials available with the past and present members of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. The private collections and libraries of the members are of great help when preparing the research work.

The study, which is on the role of the Opposition covered the period from the inception of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1972 upto 1988 the last session of the Third Assembly. This study traces the emergence of representative institutions in Meghalaya beginning with the formation of the Autonomous State, and to examine their nature in terms of membership pattern, party affiliations and role in Government formation. It also traces the emergence and nature of Opposition parties in Meghalaya. The focus of this study is on the role of the Opposition in ventilating of
public grievances as well as criticism of the Government’s policies relating to issues such as:

i. Boundary problems between Meghalaya and Assam.

ii. Land Tenure and Land Relations.

iii. Law and Order problems especially in the State Capital, and

iv. The Problem of Influx.

Chapter Organisation

This study is divided into six chapters. In Chapter-I, the study traces the emergence of representative institutions in Meghalaya. It focuses on the historical administrative development that took place in the hill areas of North East India in general and Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills in particular. It traces how representative institutions evolved from the British period to the time when Autonomous State was granted and the realization of movement for Hill State culminating in the formation of the State of Meghalaya.

Chapter-II studies the organisation of the different political parties in operation in the State during this period – both national and regional political parties. It traces and analyses the constitutions of the different political parties as well as their aims and objectives. Analysis of the composition and structure of the political parties as well as success of these parties in their performance based on their objectives is attempted to be studied as well as their position in the politics of the State.

In Chapter-III of this study, attempts to study the formation and nature of the Opposition parties in Meghalaya is carried out. This chapter also deals with the electoral performance and poll prospects of the different political parties and their position in State politics within the period 1972-1988.
Chapter-IV deals with the roles of the Opposition with regard to three issues through debates and discussion within the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly – the Boundary Issue between Meghalaya and Assam, Influx and Law and Order problems especially in the State Capital, Shillong. In this chapter, the role of the Opposition in articulating and taking appropriate responsive measures to these issues in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly is being studied and analysed.

In Chapter-V, an attempt is made to analyse the role of the Opposition with regard to Land Problems and Land Relations in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. The articulation and response of the members of the Opposition on these issues is being studied in this chapter. An attempt in this chapter to bring out the various devices and procedures made use by the Opposition in articulating and raising these issues for discussion in the House is carried out.

Chapter-VI is the concluding chapter. In this chapter the study tries to sum up the major findings of the entire research work.

PROFILE OF MEGHALAYA

Meghalaya, the twenty-first State of the Indian Union was first coined by the Geographer, Dr. S.P. Chatterjee in reference to these areas in his work in 1936. Megha (clouds) and Alaya (abode) gave birth to the name Meghalaya which when translated means “the abode of the clouds” because of the clouds which seem to always hover over the central plateau. This name was officially adopted by the APHLC (All Party Hills Leaders’ Conference) a party that is synonymous with the demand for statehood which culminated in the passing of the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Bill, 1969 and this becoming an act in December 1969, whereby the
Autonomous State was inaugurated on 2\(^{nd}\) April, 1970. Further developments occurred paving the way for passing of the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Bill 1971 on October. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Shillong on 20\(^{th}\) January, 1972 to inaugurate Meghalaya as a full-fledged State of the Indian Union on 21\(^{st}\) January, 1972.

The formation of the state of Meghalaya was the result of a long struggled by the people of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills. The demand for the separation of areas occupied by the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos was spearheaded by the All Party Hills Leaders’ Conference (APHLC).

During the years of struggle and demand for a separate State a number of proposals and schemes were offered by the Central Government to the leaders of the APHLC which were rejected one after the other either by the Assam Government or the APHLC. Finally, the proposals of the Government of India on the 11\(^{th}\) September, 1969, for the Autonomous Hills State Plan resulting from the announcement of a plan for the reorganisation of Assam was accepted by the political leaders of that time, with the exception of a few leaders. The reorganisation scheme effected the formation of the Autonomous State which was inaugurated on the 2\(^{nd}\) April, 1970 at Shillong and named Meghalaya. Its jurisdiction will be over the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills Districts. The Autonomous State was set to have a Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers. With this the demand for a full-fledged State gained momentum. In its sitting on the 30\(^{th}\) September, 1970, the Provisional Legislative Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution requesting the Government of India to grant full-fledged statehood to Meghalaya. When the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act 1971 was enacted by Parliament it set in motion the demands of the people of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya. On receiving the assent and
signature of the President of India on 30th December, 1971; it marked the culmination of the demands of the said people. This legislation generated the formation of the State of Meghalaya consisting the territories within the Autonomous State together with the territories within the Cantonment areas and municipality of Shillong which had earlier not been under the jurisdiction of the Autonomous State.

The State of Meghalaya shares a long international boundary with Bangladesh on its southern area, and an inter-state boundary on its northern side with the State of Assam. It covers an area of 22,489 sq. km. with a population of 23,06,069 (according to the 2001 Census). The Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos form the major ethnic groups of original inhabitants and other minor tribes make up 85 per cent whereas 15 per cent comprise the non-tribals. The capital of the new State is Shillong.

The State of Meghalaya started functioning with two Districts under its jurisdiction that is the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills Districts. These two Districts were formerly under the then composite State of Assam. These were detached from Assam after the passing of the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act 1969 to be part of the territories of the newly formed State of Meghalaya. Over the years, the Government of Meghalaya created new districts and sub-divisions by bifurcating the two original districts and carving out five more districts. At present the State has seven districts. United Khasi and Jaintia Hills was bifurcated to form a separate Jaintia Hills District with its headquarters at Jowai, and inaugurated on 22nd February, 1972. Subsequently, more districts were created in order to bring the administration closer to the people.

The new districts along with the headquarters and date of inauguration are shown below:
The creation of new districts gradually paved the way for the opening up of more Civil Subdivisions. In order to accelerate the over all pace of development in addition to the districts and district administration the State administration is further organised into 15(fifteen) Civil Subdivisions to meet and serve the development needs of the rural areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former Districts</th>
<th>Name of New Districts</th>
<th>Name of Headquarters</th>
<th>Date of Creation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Khasi &amp; Jaintia Hills</td>
<td>Jaintia Hills</td>
<td>Jowai</td>
<td>21st February, 1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East Khasi Hills</td>
<td>Shillong</td>
<td>28th October, 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>West Khasi Hills</td>
<td>Nongstoin</td>
<td>28th October, 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ri Bhoi</td>
<td>Nongpoh</td>
<td>4th October, 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garo Hills</td>
<td>East Garo Hills</td>
<td>Williamnagar</td>
<td>23rd October, 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>West Garo Hills</td>
<td>Tura</td>
<td>23rd October, 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Garo Hills</td>
<td>Baghmara</td>
<td>18th June, 1992</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to bring about an integrated development of rural area covering all social, cultural and economic aspects of the community through various programmes, the Government realised that the 24(twenty-four) initially existing Development Blocks would not be possible to ensure that development percolates down to the grass root level of administration. This is due mainly to difficult terrain and transportation hurdles in the rural areas which prevent easy access from villages to block
headquarters. Therefore new Community and Rural Blocks were opened up by carving out of those existing Development Blocks so that inaccessible areas could be covered for administrative convenience and efficient functions. At present the State is covered by 39 (thirty-nine) Community Developments.

1. East Khasi Hills - 8 Community Development Blocks
2. West Khasi Hills - 6 Community Development Blocks
3. Ri Bhoi - 3 Community Development Blocks
4. Jaintia Hills - 5 Community Development Blocks
5. East Garo Hills - 5 Community Development Blocks
6. West Garo Hills - 8 Community Development Blocks
7. South Garo Hills - 4 Community Development Blocks.

Another significant aspect of district administration is the traditional institutions of administration that had existed over a long period of time in the form of Syiemship, Doloiship, Wahadadarship in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and the traditional institution of Nokmanship and Laskership (this was a creation of the British administration) in the Garo Hills. With India's independence and the creation of the Autonomous District Councils in 1952 under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, these traditional institutions by law became part of the District Councils and were subordinate to the administration of these Councils. Today, the number of Councils in Meghalaya is the same which is three Autonomous District Councils in the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills Districts of Meghalaya.
In March 1970, there was an indirect election to the provisional Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya. The total strength of the Legislative Assembly was 41, of whom 18 were from the Khasi Hills, 16 from the Garo Hills and 4 from Jaintia Hills. The Assembly comprised of 38 elected members and 3 members were nominated by the Governor as the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act 1969 had provided for the setting up of a separate Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers. The Provisional Legislative Assembly was inaugurated on 14th April, 1971 in Tura (Garo Hills District).

With the coming of Meghalaya into statehood on 21st January, 1972, the Provisional Assembly became the legislature of the new State. The members of the Provisional Legislative Assembly became the members of the new Legislative Assembly until elections were held in February, 1972. The elections to the new Assembly occurred shortly after. In the final arrangement by the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act 1971, 60 seats was provided for the Meghalaya Legislative

* Today, it is the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC).
Assembly — 50 out of 60 seats of the Assembly was reserved for Scheduled Tribes (Garo, Khasi and Jaintia) and 10 seats for open contest — Khasi Hills 29; Garo Hills 24; Jaintia Hills 7. In 1978, Meghalaya was reorganised for administrative purposes wherein new districts and new sub-divisions were created and seats or constituencies were allotted as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Khasi Hills: 29</th>
<th>Jaintia Hills: 7</th>
<th>Garo Hills: 24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. West Khasi Hills – 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. West Garo Hills – 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All constituencies are single member constituencies. At present the total number of constituencies remained 60(sixty), out of which, 55(fifty-five) seats are reserved for Scheduled tribes (ST) and 5 in the general category. There are at present 3(three) in Khasi Hills, namely, Pynthorumkhrah, Mawprem and Laban and two general constituencies in Garo Hills, namely, Phulbari and Mahendraganj. Recently, there is a new proposal for delineation of constituencies in the entire State of Meghalaya. This issue is not discussed here as it is beyond the purview of the study.

The North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act 1971 assigned one Reserved Seat for the Scheduled Tribes of the State in the Rajya Sabha and 2(two) Reserved Seats in the Lok Sabha — the Shillong Parliamentary seat and the Tura Parliamentary seat. The first election for the Shillong Parliamentary seat was in 1971 mid term election whereas the Tura (ST) Parliamentary election was held on February 1972. The election for the Rajya Sabha seat was also held in 1972.

From its inception as a State in the Indian Union, Meghalaya has gone to the polls 7(seven) times with the 8th(eighth) General Elections scheduled in the year 2008. The first General Elections to the State Legislative Assembly were conducted on
9th March, 1972. February 1978 was the year the second polls were held. The third General Elections were held on 17th February, 1983. The 2nd February, 1988 was the year the fourth General Elections were conducted. The General Elections to the fifth Legislative Assembly were held on 15th February, 1993. The sixth General Elections were held on 16th February, 1998 and the seventh General Elections were conducted on the 26th February, 2003. The Meghalaya Legislative Assembly consisted of 60 members.