Chapter-II

PARTY ORGANISATION: THEIR ROLE IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Party system is an integral part of the parliamentary form of democracy. Barring a few members who may not be attached to any political party, most members of the legislature have a dual capacity; they represent a constituency and party.\(^1\) Political parties constitute a basic element of democratic institutional apparatus. These perform an essential function in the management of succession of power, as well as in the process of obtaining popular consent to the course of public policy.\(^2\) Political parties perform functions which is essential for the operation of a democratic order. These parties seek to build majority coalitions powerful enough to control the Government. In all they advocate broad views on public policy; designate candidates and once in power they attempt to run the Government in a manner to hold together the coalition that put them in office. The minority party maintains a critical vigil against the day when circumstances will permit it to oust the majority.\(^3\)

In all liberal democracies political parties maintain dual organisation — one outside the legislature and the other inside. A mass organisation achieves effectiveness by formulating adequate policies, selecting candidates for office, raising funds and holding its supporters in line. The organisation of the party in the legislature influences the procedures of the Houses and determines the quantity, quality and speed of business transacted as also the discipline in the Houses.

In the legislature members of the organised parties meet from time to time for deciding party business and removing differences, as far as possible, to enable them to act unitedly at the sessions of the Houses. Both the sides — the Government and the Opposition have their respective leaders that is the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the House is the Chief spokesman on behalf of the Government and he usually keeps the House informed about the intentions of the Government. The Leader of the Opposition is a member in the House of the party in Opposition having the greatest numerical strength in the House. In case of doubt as to the numerical strength of the parties in Opposition or their leaders, the Speaker is generally given the power to give the final decision. The Leader of the Opposition is just as much a part of the constitutional system of Government as the Chief Minister. He is responsible to the members from whom he derives his position. He is under a special obligation to defend the rights and privileges of private members, particularly the right of every member to express his opinion freely on all matters of public policy. He consults the Leader of the House and usually both the leaders — the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition balance each other.¹

One of the consequences of focusing on the concept of ‘power’ in the political process has been the relative neglect of the role of formal structures in the political system. The quest for the ‘power structure’ is a quest for an informal structure of the political process, a structure which is often relatively ephemeral or which evolves as the people operating the system change. This informal structure is, however, limited by a set of rules, procedures and functions which are laid down and constitute a formal organisation or structure.

The creation of a formal structure helps to give several functional needs:

1. The existence of a formal structure helps to give the party credibility within the system. A clear cut organisation can project a public image more easily.

2. Certain ends, e.g. vote-winning can better be achieved consistently by means of people operating within a formal, clearly defined structure.

3. A formal structure plays an important role in determining the pattern of party loyalty.

4. As parties become larger, communication problems appear, the solution of which, requires the creation of permanent communication and organisational channels.

5. Formal structures also provide for some form of balance between leaders and members. Constitution sometimes offer members opportunities to control leaders, for membership usually carries with it certain rights of participation in the affairs of the party.

6. Formal structures in most organizations, while allocating superior power to key individuals (Secretaries, etc.), attempt to a greater or lesser degree to equalize the power wielded by members generally.

In any given political party, a particular structural feature may have arisen in response to any or all of these needs, or to none of them. However, not every structural feature in society has an obvious functional explanation. Changes in the formal structure can occur for a variety of reasons. It may be that there is concern that some of the basic functions of the party are not being performed adequately, or that those operating the structure find certain restrictions hamper their informal arrangements, or that it is felt desirable to limit the informal structure in some way.
Concern and support for the formal structure is often related to the historical role which a party has played in the political system.\(^5\)

**Constitutions**

As the main vehicles of structural delineation let us examine some provisions of the Constitutions of the parties which we are concerned.

**NATIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES**

**The Indian National Congress (Congress-I)**

The INC or later the Congress party is the sole national political party which has been able to penetrate and till today played an active role in the politics of Meghalaya.\(^6\) It is the oldest political party in the country and its inception can be traced to the period during the British rule. The INC which came to power after Independence later face dissensions and splits into different parties under different leaders, and has over the years evolved into its present stage as the Congress(I) under the leadership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi prior to the attainment of the State of Meghalaya. When the INC was spearheading the freedom struggle the leadership from the hill areas were closely associated with the party. Its presence in the north-eastern region was felt from the pre-independence period. After Independence, the leadership in the INC prevailed upon the leaders of these areas to participate in the Assam Government to which they acceded. The situation changed when the ministers from the hill areas resigned over the issue of the Assam Official Language Bill, and spearhead the

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demand for separate State. The INC government at the Centre initially came up with several plans for bringing an amicable solution but short of acceding to the granting of statehood. The leaders from these areas, however, refused to accept these terms and proposals of the Centre and went ahead with their demand for full-fledged State. In 1970, the INC led Government at the Centre and the leaders of the APHLC reached an amicable solution with the creation of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya which attained full-fledged Statehood in 1972. This attainment of Statehood of Meghalaya was, therefore, considered a gift of Indira Gandhi to the people of the hill areas of Meghalaya as she was the Prime Minister and leader of the Congress party during this time. This sentiment was later reflected in the Congress Manifesto and campaign during the first General Elections in 1972. This also helped to narrow the rift between the Congress and the regional political parties in the new State.\(^7\)

The ideology of the party is as follows: "With faith in our people, with pride in our distinctive way of life; with faith in our country toward peace, progress, prosperity and a better tomorrow."\(^8\) The ideology of the party is based on Secularism and Democracy which is imprinted in the party's manifesto.

**Constitution of the Party**

The objective of the Congress party in Meghalaya is the well being and advancement of the people of Meghalaya and the establishment in Meghalaya peaceful and constitutional means, of a Socialist State based on parliamentary democracy in which there is equality of opportunity and of political, economic and


\(^8\) Congress Manifesto, Meghalaya Elections, 1988, p.2.
social rights and which aims at national peace and fellowship. Towards this end the party called itself a national party with a regional outlook.

The Congress party or INC fought the election on national platform but taking into consideration the regional aspects which is reflected in its manifesto.

1. The Indian National Congress is the biggest democratic organisation and the largest mass based political party in the world, commanding the confidence of all regions, communities and religious groups. The Congress stated that it struggled for the emancipation of the country and achieved India’s freedom and since then it is taking the country forward towards unity, peace and prosperity based on democracy socialism and secularism.

2. The Congress appealed to the sentiment of the people of Meghalaya in stating that the party had given to the Meghalaya people an honourable place in the country by granting them a statehood with special safeguards and provisions for the preservation and promotion of unique tribal culture of Meghalaya. The supreme task of managing the affairs of the State rests with the people of Meghalaya.9

In the socio-economic sphere the main objectives of the party are as follows:

a) To increase agricultural production in the State.

b) To promote and encourage large scale rubber plantation through assistance from the Central Rubber Board, a well as coffee plantation through the Central Coffee Board.

c) The party strove to achieve physical targets in road construction by undertaking an ambitious scheme for the construction of “Link roads” to connect every village to the existing road network.

d) To improve health facilities in the State.

e) The party will strive to improve the water supply and sewerage and to provide drinking water to all.

f) To develop sports and youth welfare activities in the State.

g) To generate employment for the youth of the State by generating self-employment schemes for the educated unemployed.

h) To eradicate illiteracy and bringing about a quantitative and qualitative education.

i) The party championed the cause of the other tribes in Meghalaya.

j) The party also stated its commitment and future programme for rapid economic progress, industrialisation of the State and scientific and technological development. In this clause is included the solution of the inter-state boundary by democratic, legal and constitutional means.

k) The improvement of the lot of the common man and the raising of his standard of living.

l) The continuous attempt to banish want and to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor.

The objective of the party is to achieve peace; continuous progress, prosperity, stability and unity based on secularism, socialism and democracy.  

Constitutional Structure

The Executive Committee of the party, i.e., the PCC consists of the President, one Vice-President, Treasurer and 21 members from amongst its members and from amongst the members of the Executive, the President shall appoint not more than 2 General Secretaries. The President may also appoint other office bearers such as the

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10 Congress Manifesto, pp.6-18.
Secretaries and Joint Secretaries from amongst PCC members such office bearers need not necessarily be members of the Executive Committee. The heads of Frontal Organisations are the ex-officio permanent invitees of the Executive Committee.

The organisation of the Congress party is as follows:

1. The Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee.
2. The Executive Committee.
3. The District/City Congress Committees.
4. Committees subordinate to the District Congress Committees like Block or Constituency Congress Committee and other subordinate Committee to be determined by the Pradesh Congress Committee concerned.*

The District Congress Committee is constituted in all the districts of the State of Meghalaya and also include Shillong city and Tura city. These are as follows:

**District Congress Committees:**

1. East Khasi Hills.
2. Shillong City Congress.
4. Ri-Bhoi District Congress Committee.
5. West Khasi Hills District Congress Committee.
6. East Garo Hills District Congress Committee.
7. West Garo Hills District Congress Committee.
8. South Garo Hills District Congress Committee.
9. Tura City District Congress Committee.

* In this Constitution wherever the word “Pradesh”, the word “District” will occur include “City” as required by the context.
The Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee also consists of the 60(sixty) Block Congress Committees which falls under the jurisdiction of their own District Congress Committees.

The Pradesh Congress Committee which is the Central body of the party consists of the members elected by the Block Congress Committee, active members of the party, Ex-presidents of the PCC, AICC members who reside in the Pradesh, members elected by the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) and members co-opted by the PCC Executive. All the members of the Pradesh Congress Committee are delegates to the Indian National Congress.\(^\text{11}\)

After the creation of Meghalaya, the Congress party could increase progressively their influence in the Hills. The Youth Congress was formed and the DCC was made active. Though the party was present even prior to the formation of the State, but was overshadowed by the influence of the APHLC. In 1972 General Elections, the Congress and the APHLC had an electoral adjustment and this ensured 9 seats to the Congress.\(^\text{12}\) The Congress experienced phenomenal rise since November 1976 when the Congress and APHLC merged under the leadership of Capt. Sangma. Since then the Congress organisation in Meghalaya was in a state of slow but steady growth but with the installation of the Congress Government the organisation ramified itself in every direction. Initially, the Congress never had grassroot support among the hill people. Rather, it was often alleged that it was a party for the interests of the non-tribals. It is, therefore, interesting to note how far the Congress could reconcile the interests of the tribals and non-tribals. As long as the party was in the opposition it had to play the role of a reconciliator in the conflict of interests between

\(^{11}\) Constitution of Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee and Rules, 2000, pp.2-3.

the tribal and non-tribals. In the Autonomous State the APHLC Government had to enact a law providing restrictions on transfer of land from tribals to the non-tribals because the existing law on the subject was set aside by the Supreme Court. The INC (Congress) members in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly were so much opposed to the Bill that they moved a motion against the Bill and refused to withdraw it. The full-fledged State immediately did not bring any changes in the role of the Congress (INC). The Residential Permit Bill brought by the APHLC Government in 1973 raised severe objection and criticisms from the party, and this was a major factor that ultimately killed the Bill.

Though the policy of the Congress benefitted the non-tribals, the aversion of the tribals towards the party grew deeper. Exploiting this sentiment, in 1978, the regional parties set to govern the State and isolate the Congress in the hills but due to infighting amongst themselves were unable to stand united for long and were not able to prevent the Congress from coming to power which it retained under a Coalition Government that lasted until the 1983 elections.

The Congress leadership being affronted at the allegations that it was a party of the non-tribals oscillated its position to ensure that it can win tribal votes. Its members in the Assembly retreated from their earlier opposition to the land reforms in the Khasi Hills and withdrew from the House during the discussion on the subject. When the party captured power after the merger of the APHLC with it, the State Government clarified its stand on land transfer and other tribal interests to remove misgivings among the tribal people. Alliance of the Congress with the APHLC and the HSPDP to capture power in 1979 gave a tribal orientation to the policies of the Congress. In this period the PCC demanded more autonomy both for the organisation and the Government and adopted a more regional outlook. The change of the policies
of the party in the hills could be attributed to the merger of the APHLC with the Congress and the dominance of the tribal leadership in the State Congress. In the three successive Assemblies from 1972-1988 the party was able to consolidate its position particularly in the Garo Hills district. In 1972, the party captured 9 seats and by 1983 General Elections the party maximised its innings by capturing 25 seats emerging as the single largest party. After the fall of the coalition Government comprising of the regional parties, the Congress formed the Government which completed its five-year term. The above indicated that the party had slowly but steadily made inroads into the politics of Meghalaya and is the sole national party which had remained in State politics. The Congress in Meghalaya stated itself to be a national party with a regional outlook and orientation.

The Congress, though being a national party, preferred to use the term "a national party with a regional outlook", which can be found in its earlier manifesto and Constitution. This was aimed at appealing to both tribal and non-tribal voters. Being a national party the objectives were basically broad and general in character. However, one of its objectives specifically dealt with the State of Meghalaya which refers to the finding of a solution of the inter-state boundary through democratic, legal and constitutional means. It may, however, be stated that the party hardly sat in the Opposition and whenever the party was in the Opposition, it was for a brief period. In such a situation, members of the party hardly raised or brought this issue for discussion in the House.

Other National Political Parties such as the Communist Party of India (CPI) and Janata Party entered the political arena during 1972-1988 but were unsuccessful.

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14 Ibid., p.115.
The CPI projected an economic programme and had a well knit organisation but was not able to capitalise on this image and was unsuccessful in capturing any seats in the 1978 and 1983 General Elections to the State Legislature. These parties were confined mostly in the urban areas where the population of the non-tribals was quite significant. Their sphere of influence was too weak to have any considerable impact on the political life of the State or on electoral politics.¹⁵

Regional Political Parties

In the beginning the idea of regional political parties in India emerged as an alternative to the attempts of other weak national political parties to oppose one political party hegemony over the States. With reference to North-East India, it may be pointed out that many of the regional political parties at the initial stage were set up only as pressure groups. In general the aims of such groups were mainly to achieve social and economic goals and welfare of the people. Their initial formation was also because of the need that was felt necessary to protect and preserve the customs, traditions, customary laws, language, religion and the distinct identity of their own section of the society. In the hill areas, in some cases, a common feature that prevailed was that the pressure groups acted as the voice of the common people to protest against the exploitation of traditional chiefs or the colonial rulers. Subsequently, these pressure groups were converted into political parties. Some of them managed to survive as political parties and run the state administration with a commanding

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¹⁵ Dutta, P.S.: Ibid., p.79.
majority, but still many such groups disappeared as soon as they form themselves into a political party.\textsuperscript{16}

In Meghalaya, however, the growth of regional political parties originated from the Hill State Movement for the preservation and protection of the separate identity and culture of the hill people. On the basis of the above, we propose to analyse in our study the following regional political parties in Meghalaya.\textsuperscript{17}

REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES

All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC)

The APHLC is the oldest regional political party in Meghalaya. Its genesis can be traced to the period prior to the formation of the State. The APHLC was born under compelling circumstances. On 22\textsuperscript{nd} April, 1960, the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee directed the Chief Minister of Assam to take immediate steps for making Assamese the State language. The immediate reaction to this was the meeting of the leaders of the Hill Areas of Assam at Tura under the chairmanship of B.M. Pugh. The Conference unanimously resolved to oppose the official language bill. It also resolved to form the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference – APHLC which was destined to play a vital role in the formation of Meghalaya.\textsuperscript{18}

In the beginning, the APHLC was formed mainly for the purpose of opposing the introduction of the Assam Official Language Bill. It was only at the third Conference held at Haflong that the APHLC demanded the formation of a separate Hill State. It had to fight for separation for eight long years. The Government of India

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] \textit{Ibid.}, p.103.
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proposed a series of plans for the reorganisation of Assam but the APHLC consistently demanded a separate State and ultimately succeeded in its aim. At the twenty first session of the party, the APHLC resolved to accept the Autonomous State Plan. But at its twenty second session it enumerated the various difficulties encountered in the working of the Autonomous State Plan and stated that the Plan would not work. It prevailed upon the Government of India to take immediate steps for the grant of statehood to Meghalaya. The Government of India accepted the arguments of the APHLC and an announcement was made on 10th October, 1970 that Meghalaya would be a State. Thus, after ten years long struggle, the APHLC was able to achieve its aim. The party is, therefore, accredited with the attainment of statehood and was able to generate spectacular performance in the 1972 polls.

Constitution of the Party

The aims and objectives of the party is comprised of both national and state programmes.

National Programmes

The APHLC is a regional party with a national outlook. It stated that its candidates when elected will work and co-operate with the democratic forces in Parliament for the firm establishment of democracy in the country under which every citizen will have full liberty and freedom of religion, culture and language and the freedom of the press. The party stated that it will cooperate in the implementation of

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national programme for the advancement and welfare of the people.\textsuperscript{21} It also promises to bring into existence an egalitarian society — a society in which everyone would get enough to eat and enough to clothe.\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{State Programmes}

The APHLC stated that it will run the administration democratically and will stand firm to maintain the State autonomy in substance and practice as envisaged in the Constitution.

The party will continue all efforts for the peaceful settlement of outstanding boundary disputes with the sister State of Assam. The APHLC also reiterates its resolve to negotiate for the transfer into Meghalaya certain contiguous areas predominantly inhabited by the people belonging to the Scheduled Tribes. In these matters the good office of the Government of India will be sought, if necessary.

The APHLC being specially concerned with the welfare of the people inhabiting the areas bordering with Bangladesh will make every possible effort for the economic rehabilitation and upliftment of these Border people.

The APHLC stands for providing minimum wages to workers and the rights of farmers, industrial workers and the Government employees to organise and form associations for their welfare and protection.

In the social and political sphere the APHLC will strive to maintain the unique peace, harmony and tranquility among all sections and communities as existed both during the period of struggle for a separate State.

In the economic sphere the objectives of the party are as follows:

a) to make all efforts towards self-sufficiency in food through increased agricultural output by encouraging farmers to take to modern methods of cultivation and by providing them with all possible assistance and incentives in the matter of irrigation, land reclamation and procurement of seeds, fertilizers, etc.;

b) to enrich the State and its people through a judicious and scientific exploitation of the mineral and other natural resources;

c) to eradicate illiteracy and to bring about a change in the system of education so as to ensure for the youth of the State a more useful and meaningful course of studies in the school and colleges;

d) to expand and improve the social services in the State so as to enable the people to live a richer and fuller life;

e) to create employment opportunities for the people of the State by tapping all available resources and promoting industrial undertaking;

f) to promote a healthy social and moral life by eradicating various types of social evils.

g) to undertake special schemes such as Border Area Rehabilitation programme including the re-grouping of villages in the border areas of Garo Hills, border road schemes and the like;

h) to undertake urban development schemes;

i) to do every other thing possible to make Meghalaya a boon to the people and an asset to the nation.
The aims and objectives of the APHLC was, therefore, ambitious. Being a party which is accredited with the attainment of statehood, the APHLC strove to achieve lofty ideals for the State.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{Constitutional Structure of the APHLC}

The Executive Committee of the party consisted of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, a General Secretary, Joint Secretaries, a Treasurer and Eleven Executive Members. Later on the Chairman was designated as President. At first there were two Vice-Chairmen but later on the number was increased to four Vice-Presidents. So also the post of Joint Secretaries were increased from two to three. The party's High Command, therefore, consists of all executive members and some permanent invitees.

There were three district branches at the district level and two constituent unit. The two constituent units were the All Garo National Council and the Garo District National Council. The main organs of each District level are the General Conference, the Executive Committee and the Working Committee. Each district is divided into a number of circles and each circle has similar organs. At the lowest level there are units. A village or a group of villages form a unit and each unit has similar organs like the circles.\textsuperscript{24}

At first the Central APHLC consisted of all the members of the District and Regional Councils, five representatives from each political party in the Autonomous Hill Districts which subscribed to the aims and aspirations of the APHLC, five additional delegates from the host district, one representative from each newspaper of the Autonomous Districts which subscribed to the objectives of the APHLC, five

representatives from each of the district branches and two invitees of each of the
Chief Executive Members, and all MLAs and MPs who belonged to the APHLC.

In course of time, some of the political parties like the Congress and the Mizo
Union left the APHLC. On the other hand, some political parties like the Eastern
India Tribal Union and the Khasi Jaintia Federated State Conference preferred to
merge themselves completely with the APHLC. At first, all the Autonomous Districts
except the Naga Hills were represented in all the bodies of the APHLC. But by 1971,
when the Autonomous State of Meghalaya was formed, the APHLC was confined
only to Meghalaya.25

The rise of the APHLC since 1960 was phenomenal. It played a significant
role in the Hill State Movement and has been accredited with the achievement of a
full-fledged State of Meghalaya. The party achieved a spectacular innings in the first
General Elections to the State, and formed the Government in the first Legislative
Assembly. As a ruling party in the State for almost seven years, i.e., from April 1970
to November 1976, the APHLC has a proud record of achievements, progress,
political stability and administrative efficiency.26 But after 1975, the story of the
APHLC was one of disintegration and disunity. The process of disintegration of the
party was not an overnight event. Since on closer examination the process of
disintegration had started prior to the attainment of statehood. On 3rd December, 1971,
the question of dissolution of the APHLC came up in the wake of the achievement of
statehood of Meghalaya. But the party thought that it should continue to function, and
should not be dissolved. At the same time, it said that it would support the policies
and programmes of the INC.

25 ibid., pp.488-489.
On 19th June 1973, the merger of the APHLC with the INC was again discussed. Sangma informed the party that there is no difference between the INC and the APHLC so far as the programme of action was concerned. Therefore, he suggested the merger of the APHLC with the INC(R). The Khasi leadership in the party was strongly opposed to the idea. So the party resolved to retain its identity and at the same time support the INC at the centre. Indira Gandhi was, however, anxious for the merger of the APHLC with the INC. Sangma was pressed by Mrs. Gandhi to secure the merger of the APHLC with the INC. He agreed and persuaded his colleagues in the party to accede to the request of Mrs. Gandhi. He called for a general special conference of the APHLC at Mendipathar on 16th November, 1976. The conference attended by 121 of the 145 members decided to dissolve the APHLC and join the INC. Some of the Khasi leaders did not attend the Mendipathar Conference. Since the APHLC was dissolved, its symbol ‘Flower’ was frozen by the Election Commission. Sangma submitted the resignation of the APHLC Government on the 27th November, 1976, and formed the INC Government. Four Khasi leaders of his APHLC Government, B.B. Lyngdoh, P.R. Kyndiah, D.D. Pugh and S.D.D. Nichols Roy resigned from his Government. The dissidents filed a suit in the Supreme Court against the decision of the Election Commission for freezing the symbol allotted to the APHLC. The Supreme Court restored the symbol to the APHLC. The merger considerably weakened the party and speeded the process of disintegration of the party. Another split of the party occurred when D.D. Pugh formed the Second Coalition Government in 1978-1979 and differences cropped up between the two prominent leaders of the APHLC (D.D. Pugh and B.B. Lyngdoh) leading to emergence of the two factions in the party. Efforts were made to bring the two

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factions together but they were not able to reconcile their differences and continued to exist as two groups within the same party. The group led by B.B. Lyngdoh formed a coalition Government with the Congress and ruled the State until the Third Assembly Elections in 1983, while the group led by D.D. Pugh remained out of office. Several committees were set up to bring about unity in the party but did not succeed in ending the feud. On June 1982, Pugh and Lyngdoh finally parted company. As a result Pugh’s following in the Assembly dwindled to six and that of Lyngdoh increased to fourteen. In 1983, both the factions came together and fought the elections. Pugh did not contest. The party was led by B.B.Lyngdoh in the election battle. But the party fared badly in the polls. The APHLC managed to capture 15 seats, whereas its main rival, the Congress, secured 25(twenty-five) seats and another regional party, the HSPDP captured 15(fifteen) seats and PDIC 2(two). The APHLC formed the coalition ministry with the other regional parties with B.B. Lyngdoh as its head. It existed for 29 days. After the fall of this ministry some of its members defected to the ruling Meghalaya Democratic Front (MDF) led by Capt. Sangma (Congress). Before the 1988 General Elections to the State Assembly, there was the 1984 General Elections to the Lok Sabha. With the announcement for the 1984 elections and five weeks before the polling, the regional Opposition parties (APHLC and HSPDP) made an attempt for an Opposition Coalition or alliance to the ruling party’s candidate. Both the APHLC and the HSPDP after prolonged discussions came to the decision to unite the two parties under the banner of the Hill People Union (HPU) on November 1984. The HPU after being defeated in the Lok Sabha polls again became a divided house with the HSPDP claiming a separate existence. Similarly, there was another faction of the dissolved APHLC which claimed a separate existence of the APHLC and was

28 Rao, V.V. et al., Ibid., pp.203-204.
later on recognised by the Election Commission as the APHLC(A) with Armison Marak as its leader. This APHLC(A) existed in the Garo Hills and made its presence felt in 1988 and 1993 General Elections to the State Assembly securing two and three seats respectively.\(^{29}\)

The APHLC referred itself as a regional party with a national outlook by stating in its Constitution that the party would work and cooperate with the democratic forces in Parliament to ensure firm establishment of democracy in India. With this view, it had broadened its political activities into national and state programmes.

Under the state programmes, one of the objectives of the party concerns the solution of the interstate boundary between Meghalaya and Assam through peaceful settlement. Further, it resolves to negotiate the transfer to Meghalaya certain contiguous areas considered to be predominantly inhabited by the people belonging to Schedule tribes from Assam. However, the party has not given a credible performance with regard to this issue either when in power or as an Opposition. As an Opposition, the APHLC can hardly be credited with raising this issue to be discussed in the House. Moreover, it had not shown any indication of having extended support to any members of the Opposition whenever the issue was raised in the House.

The APHLC as one of the oldest and strong regional parties of the State prior to the emergence of Meghalaya as a State gradually went into political oblivion and finally disappeared from State politics. It had strong support base in the whole of Meghalaya but because of factions and defections, these factors weakened the party and forced the APHLC to disappear from Meghalaya politics.

The Hill State People's Democratic Party (HSPDP)

The HSPDP is an off-shoot of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC) which was spearheading the Hill State Movement in Assam during the 1960's. The APHLC had a Volunteers Wing called the Non-Violent Direct Action-Volunteers (NVDAV). The volunteers consisting of men and women were given intensive training on the basic principles and techniques of the movement such as hartals, demonstrations and the like.

The role of the Volunteers in the Hill State Movement reached its zenith on 10th September, 1968, when they picketed the Secretariat buildings in response to the call of the APHLC. The main objective of the picketing was to realise the fulfillment of the hill peoples' objective for the creation of a separate Hill State. The peaceful picketing was deemed a great success for, on the following day, that is, 11th September, 1968, the Government of India announced the creation of the Autonomous Hill state of Meghalaya which was accepted by the political wing of the APHLC. This decision of the political wing of the APHLC was met with stiff resistance from the Volunteers Wing who immediately formed the Hill State Volunteers' Adhoc Committee (HSVAC) to strongly oppose the Autonomous State Plan and carry on the struggle for a full-fledged Hill State. The growing dissent of the HSVAC had then penetrated a section of the political leaders. These leaders refused to associate themselves with the decision taken by the APHLC with regard to the Autonomous State Plan. Among these leaders H.S. Lyngdoh the MLA from West Khasi Hills was the most prominent. His association with the HSVAC resulted in his expulsion from the APHLC. The leaders of the HSVAC then invited him to join their group and continue to struggle for a full-fledged Hill State. All the dissidents met together in Shillong on November 8th, 1968 and formally formed a political party
under the name of the HSPDP with H.S. Lyngdoh as the President, and A. Basaiawmoit as General Secretary.

During 1969, the newly formed HPDP was busy organising an ‘Action’ Plan for the attainment of a Hill State separate from Assam. The party was involved in different agitational programmes for realising their aim during 1969-1971. But the party was not satisfied merely with demonstrations. It had to enter itself into the regular political arena as well. Accordingly, it contested from both the parliamentary seats of Shillong and Tura in 1971 but lost. Though the party lost the elections but it was able to create an impact in the State. Immediately after the Lok Sabha elections, the HSPDP had to face the First General Elections to the State Assembly in early 1972, wherein its candidates contested the elections as Independents since the party was not yet recognised by the Election Commission.30

**Constitution of the Party**

From its inception, the HSPDP set its aim for attaining a full-fledged separate State for the hill people and also how to run it when it is achieved. The following aims and objectives were envisaged in its Constitution.

A) To demand and struggle for attainment of separate Ri Khasi-Jaintia State under Article 371 of the Constitution of India, the territory of which, comprises the then Khasi and Jaintia Hills District and the erstwhile Khasi States.

B) To strive for social and political justice and speedy attainment of education and economic uplift of the tribal people in particular and of the State in general.

C) To safeguard the rights and interest of the tribal people in respect of land and forest, and to encourage and improve traditional arts and culture and to strive for the development of the tribal people according to their own genius.

D) To run the Government in the State and the District level for the achievement of the above aims and objectives.  

In addition to the above the party also mentioned setting up of definite boundaries for the State as well. It also stated that it is ever opposed to the influx of outsiders from other parts of India and on this issue it had even urged upon the highest authority of the Government of India for the prevention of the influx of outside people into Meghalaya. The party stated that it did not have any special programme for any other section of people in Meghalaya. But it claimed that it could not be regarded as communal, although it was opposed to the influx of outsiders from other parts of India to Meghalaya. This is all reflected in subsequent manifestos and other election appeals which appeared only in Khasi.

The constitutional set up of the HSPDP are as follows: The Central Executive Committee of the party consists of the President, Vice-Presidents, the General Secretary, the Joint Secretaries, the Finance Secretary, the Treasurer, the Auditors of the party, all MPs, MLAs and MDCs. In addition, it also consist of the Chairman and Secretary of the Central Working Committee of the party, the President and General Secretary of the Women’s Wing and the Youth Wing and the Presidents and Secretaries of the District Committees.

The District Committees will function at the district level and will consist of the above mentioned functionaries but these are at the district level, as well as MLAs

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31 Constitution of the Hill State People Democratic Party, p.3.
and MDCs of the constituencies falling within that district and not less than 2 and not 
more than 20 other members to be nominated by the District Committee. 33

So far as the party organisation is concerned, Article 4 of the party constitution 
provided:

a) General Council is the highest body with a Central Executive Committee to be 
elected by the General Council.

b) District Committees in every district, the membership of which, has been 
mentioned. But the members would be elected by the primary units. Every 
District Committee would elect the District Executive Committee.

c) Primary units were at the bottom of the organisation. They covered an area which 
could be a village, a cluster of villages, or a section of the big villages or towns. 
These units acted through a unit committee which would elect a unite Executive 
Committee. 34

From the beginning the HSPDP's activities were meant to struggle for 
achieving its aims and objectives for the benefit of the hill people. During the year 
1969, 1970 and 1971 several programmes of agitation were launched in which 
thousands of volunteers along with the leaders were arrested and put in jail when they 
struggled for a separate State. After the attainment of statehood, the party did not rest 
but continued with agitating for the right and justice of the people. The party 
contested all the elections from 1972 onwards. The performance of the party was not 
as spectacular as that of the APHLC in the 1972 General Elections, but was able to 
consolidate its position in the subsequent elections in 1978 and 1983. The HSPDP sat 
in the Opposition in the First Assembly (1972-1978). In 1978, after the General

Election to the State Legislature, a coalition Government was formed where the HSPDP was also one of the partners. Again in 1983, a Coalition Government was formed since no party could command a majority after the elections, and the HSPDP was again made one of the coalition partners. But this coalition survived for a short period due to the defection of some of its members. The above were instances showing how the party had grown since its inception.\textsuperscript{35} The HSPDP, however, similar to the APHLC was dogged by political differences among its prominent leaders which weakens the party and nearly led to political oblivion of the party. These differences within the party reared up after the 1972 General Elections when the party was in the Opposition, other centres of power struggle within the party began to emerge. Some leaders within the party question the leadership of the party President, but were unable to put up a united faction and so did not pose a threat to the party. The factional politics in the HSPDP began after the Second General Elections in 1978, when the party was one of the partners in the Coalition Government. This was reflected in the inner conflict between its members who were ministers in the Government. The conflict was solved through the intervention of the party leadership. Ever since the incident, the party was plagued by a series of internal strives and squabbles on different issues. The party was plagued by defections and the defections of 3 of its members to the Congress led to the downfall of the Coalition Government in 1983 which comprised of all the regional political parties.\textsuperscript{36} The final setback to the party came in 1985 when some members again defected from the party to form the Hill People Union (HPU) with a section of APHLC members. This event had adverse

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p.121.

impact on the party leading to setback in its performance in the General Elections of 1988 where it bagged only 6 seats in the 60 member Legislative Assembly.\(^{37}\)

The Constitution of the HSPDP differs from the other two regional political parties — the APHLC and the PDIC. The party identifies itself with promulgating the interest of the tribal people in particular the Khasis and the Jaintias. Towards achieving this aim, the HSPDP from time to time raised the issue relating to the demand for a separate State for the Khasis and the Jaintias. This indicates that the party showed more preference for regionalism unlike the APHLC.

Another objective of the HSPDP which is of importance in this study is the interest generated towards the issue of land, which till date, eludes a solution. Towards this end, the party had strived to raise this issue time and again in the House, but its efforts remained unsuccessful. As an Opposition, it was unable to convince the Government in power to bring about a solution to the problem created by land relations.

In its Constitution, the party has included the setting up of definite boundaries between Meghalaya and Assam as one of the objectives to be achieved. Members of the party had voiced their concern in the case of any reference to this issue and it was accorded top priority by the party. As members of the Opposition whenever any situation or development occurred, the party had made strong protests and voiced their concern and even taken the Government to task over this issue. Because of its least numerical strength, it could not prevail upon the Government to accept its proposal.

The problem of influx is another issue in which the HSPDP showed its deep concern. The party had voiced strong opposition to the influx of people from outside

the State. In this regard, the party had strove to convince not only the Government of Meghalaya but the Government of India as well to set up preventive measures to check influx into the State.

As an Opposition, the HSPDP can be stated to have been the sole party to have keenly followed any developments on the issues specified above. The party was able to exert pressures on the Government by ensuring that these issues be debated and discussed in the House.

Hill People Union (HPU)

The Hill People Union (HPU) is the result of the amalgamation of two strong regional parties — the APHLC and the HSPDP. Between these two parties, the APHLC was the original and the oldest party in the State, while the HSPDP was formed in 1968 following a split in the former.

As a prelude to the formation of the new political party, the APHLC and HSPDP formed a ‘Joint Action Committee’ whose main aim was to achieve ‘tribal solidarity and unity.’ The Committee was empowered to undertake such programmes of action for mobilising public opinion in favour of amalgamation of the two major state-based parties. The main thrust of the action was to launch a vigorous campaign against the Congress for being responsible in engineering defections by fraudulent means. Moreover, the leaders of the two parties have been trying to rouse the people’s consciousness about the ‘paramount importance’ of the tribal unity which they deemed could be achieved only through the regional political parties in the State. However, it should also be noted that the ‘unity move’ by these political parties was felt urgently necessary in the wake of the elections to the three District Councils in the State — the Khasi Hills, the Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills Autonomous District
Councils scheduled to be held in 1983-84 with the primary objectives to capture the reins of power in these Councils.\textsuperscript{38} The HPU was formed with the concerted effort of the leaders of the APHLC and HSPDP to provide a strong challenge to the Congress which was continually on the upswing by capturing power in the Legislative Assembly. It was a concerted effort by those who sat in the Opposition to generate an alternative to the ruling Congress party in the Lok Sabha Elections 1984.

**Constitution of the Party**

The aims and objectives of the HPU are:

1. To safeguard and preserve the identity of the tribal people and to protect their interests especially in respect of land, their democratic institutions, language, customs and culture.

2. To ensure the territorial integrity of the State of Meghalaya and to restore the State the rightful areas and those contiguous areas predominantly inhabited by the tribal people.

3. To promote the economic development of the tribal people in particular and of the State in general.

4. To ensure social justice and democratic freedom in the State.\textsuperscript{39}

In addition to the above, the HPU also strives to work for clean and efficient administration, prevent influx of outsiders to the State, and with regard to the urban areas the party wanted to prevent expansion of military cantonments and restore the lands to the people under the cantonments' control and ease congestion in Shillong city. These objectives were aimed at appealing to voters in the urban areas where the party hoped to fare better since the former APHLC was generally accepted by the


\textsuperscript{39} *Constitution of the Hill People Union*, p.1.
urban areas. The former objectives were taken from the constitution of the HSPDP and these were aimed at the supporters of the former HSPDP.40

The constitutional set up of the HPU are:

A) The General Council was the supreme body of the party consisting of all members of the Central Executive Committee: Presidents and Secretaries of all circle units; not more than 10(ten) members to be nominated by the Presidents and the Secretaries of the respective District branch.

B) District Branches where each civil district shall have a District Branch of the party. It should have the following organs: A District General Council; An Executive Committee Circle Units and Primary Units.

C) Circle Units. In each District Branch there shall be Circle Units of the party, each shall ordinarily correspond to an MLA constituency.

D) Primary Units. Under each Circle Units there shall be Primary Units. Not more than one Primary Unit will be organised in each village and two or more villages may be organised under one Primary Unit.41

The HPU being a party formed by the amalgamation of two parties with constitution of their own has incorporated both the aims and objectives of the two constitutions. The APHLC being the party which ushered in the new State, had many ambitions which it sought to fulfill. It laid greater stress on system of administration, economic development and development of the urban areas as reflected in the latter part of the constitution of the HPU. Whereas the HSPDP whose ground root support remains in the rural areas strove to achieve the objectives which had an appeal to

traditional society as reflected in the first part of the objectives of the constitution of the HPU.

The election appeals of the HPU cover a wide range of important and strategic areas which really needed an urgent attention by the Government both at the Centre and the State. The party performed badly in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections, but the result did not dampen the spirit of the party leaders to forge ahead with their programmes and policies. The party suffered another setback when many political leaders, some of whom were eminent HPU members before the elections left the party and joined the Congress. Another setback for the party occurred when a section of the members of the former HSPDP left the HPU to revive their party. Despite these setbacks, those who remain loyal to the HPU went further ahead even after the election debacle to strengthen the hands of the party.

On the issues and objectives such as provisions to protect the interest of land and maintenance of territorial integrity, there was no scope for the party to raise these issues in the House as there were hardly any situations or developments arising on the specified issue during the period from 1984-1988.

The performance of the party as a unified Opposition and presenting itself as an alternative, to the Congress party, on the eve of the Lok Sabha polls was unsuccessful and proved short lived. The unity of the Opposition (regional parties) was loosened with the defection of some members who joined the ruling party (Congress) and some of them specifically left the unity fold in order to revive the HSPDP to which they originally belonged.
Public Demand Implementation Convention (PDIC)

The Public Demand Implementation Convention (PDIC) is another regional party which appeared during the period under study. In comparison to the two major regional parties — APHLC and HSPDP, the PDIC is a late entrant into state politics. It entered the political arena of Meghalaya in 1973, two years after Meghalaya had achieved statehood. The emergence of the PDIC was a result of the political differences which its founder and President G.G. Swell, Lok Sabha MP, had with his parent party, the APHLC, which led to his being suspended from the party. After his suspension he quit the party and made the decision to float the PDIC as a party. Initially, the PDIC was founded not as a political party but rather as a non-partisan organisation of the Farmers' Movement whose main aim was to cater to the needs and aspirations of this particular group. However, soon it developed its own political leanings. This party too can be considered to be an offshoot of the APHLC as its founder G.G. Swell was a member of the APHLC and also the APHLC MP from Khasi and Jaintia Hills. After the PDIC was founded in 1973, G.G. Swell contested the 1977 Lok Sabha Elections as a candidate of the PDIC, but he was not successful. Swell was later appointed to a diplomatic post and the party he had founded became virtually defunct. In 1978, the PDIC was revived and M.N. Majaw became its President, and the party set up candidates for the ensuing General Elections 1978, though they contested as Independents as the party was not yet recognised by the Election Commission.42

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Constitution of the Party

The PDIC identifies itself as a party that would work to meet the demands of the people and its boundary would extend to the whole of Meghalaya.

The aims and objectives of the party are:

A) To uplift the country, the people and the State with a clean, honest, responsible, strong, knowledgeable wise means of administration.

B) To maintain and improve the culture and to respect the religions of all the tribals.

C) To develop the economy of the people by securing for them, through the Government, adequate prices for the various agricultural produce like potato, ginger, orange, betel nut and leaf, tezpata, pepper, broom and other products that can be expected.

D) To see that the aids granted by the Government are used for the benefit of the people not only through the Government offices, but also through the village durbar, welfare associations or religious organisations that can get the confidence of the people and the Government.

Similar to the other regional political parties operating in the State, the constitutional set up of the PDIC also consists of the Central Executive Committee, the District Executive Committee and the Primary Unit of the village.

The Central Executive Committee is the apex body which consisted of not more than 100 members, with office bearers from each and every District Committee of the Party.

The office bearers of the party are as follows:

1. President – 1.
2. Senior Vice-President – 1.
3. Vice-Presidents – 5.
4. General Secretary – 1.
5. Assistant General Secretary – 1.
7. Assistant Chief Organiser – 1.

The party further states that all the activities of the PDIC shall be carried out in accordance with the Constitution of India. This constitution came into force on August 1982 as confirmed in the convention of the PDIC.\\(^{43}\)

The PDIC initially was formed in 1971 with the objective to gather the people of the State and functioned as a non partisan organisation, seeking instead to fulfill mostly the economic and social aspirations of the people. Its attempt to function as a non party organisation was not successful to eliminate the party feeling of the people and it, therefore, evolved into a political party when it fielded a candidate for the Lok Sabha elections in 1977. On its maiden entry it managed to secure 21 per cent of valid votes making the PDIC eligible to be recognised as a political party. From among the regional political parties operating in the politics of Meghalaya from 1972-1988, the PDIC can be considered to be the last entrant in state politics.

The PDIC sought to consider itself as having a national outlook when reference is made in the first objective that is to uplift the country but its regional outlook dominated, when stress is laid out on maintenance and improvement of culture and religion of the tribals who inhabit the State. As a non party organisation when it was first formed to support the Farmers' movement, this found reflection in

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the third objective of the Constitution which laid stress on economic development through enhancement of agricultural products. Thus, the party identifies itself with the farmers' community and strove to improve the plight of farmers through successive election manifestoes which laid stress on improvement of agriculturalists of the State.

The party though it identifies with the sons of the soil were unable to make much inroads into the rural areas with the exception of Nongkrem, Sohryngkham and Mawhati constituencies in the Khasi Hills. The PDIC as a regional political party could not scale the heights of the APHLC, HSPDP and HPU the main regional political parties in the State. The party entered the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly with two legislators but were unable to increase the number of legislators in successive Assemblies. Though it professed to stand for the plight and sought to achieve the improvement of the farmers' community, the party was unable to convince this community in other constituencies, and thus could not achieve electoral success as the other political parties in the State.

The PDIC as a regional political party was unable to attract or induce eminent personality to its side, with the exception of its founder and leader G.G. Swell and M.N. Majaw, who were vocal on several issues concerning the State. The PDIC was, therefore, a political party that could not achieve spectacular success at the polls but remained dominant only in the few constituencies who remained loyal to the causes it espoused.

Having studied and analysed the Constitutions and Manifestoes of the different regional political parties, it can be stated that there is a similarity of objectives attempted to be achieved by each party. This would have rendered the task easier for a unified Opposition to the dominance of the Congress party. Unfortunately, these regional political parties were adamant in maintaining their individual identity
Any move for unity is defeated as they could never agree in sinking their differences. They remain in groups and maintaining their own individual party identity. This is one of the reasons which hampers their effectiveness irrespective of whether the regional political parties were members of the Government or the Opposition.

It is paradox that even after a decade of achievement of a separate Hill State, the APHLC and HSPDP continue to exist as loose platform rather than true political parties. Electoral politics in Meghalaya is mainly centred round some generalisations and influenced by personalities rather than any political or economic programme.

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