CHAPTER II
The Setting: Land and the People of Meghalaya

Profile of Meghalaya

On the 30th December 1971, the parliament passed the North Eastern Area (Reorganization) act 1971, conferring full statehood on Meghalaya. Thus Meghalaya emerged as a full-fledged state within the Union of India on 21st January 1972. The state of Meghalaya is situated on the north east of India bordering Bangladesh and it lies between 90°45° meridian of longitude and 25°15° - 26° parallels of latitude. The geographical area of the state covers 22,429 sq.kms. It has predominantly hilly terrain with foothills, plains and flood prone areas. It has about 426 Kms of international borders. The capital of Meghalaya is Shillong.

The state of Meghalaya came into being with administrative machinery oriented towards law and order. Over the years the administration has come to acquire a more significant orientation towards development. The state is divided into seven districts and thirty-nine community development blocks.

Table –2.1 District wise profile of Meghalaya

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the District</th>
<th>Headquarter</th>
<th>Year of creation</th>
<th>Area Sq Km</th>
<th>Population (2001 Census)</th>
<th>Inhabited villages (1998 Eco. Census)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. East Khasi Hills</td>
<td>Shillong</td>
<td>Mid nineteenth century covered entire Khasi &amp; Jaintia Hills</td>
<td>2748</td>
<td>6,60,923</td>
<td>899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. West Khasi Hills</td>
<td>Nongstoin</td>
<td>28.10.1976</td>
<td>5247</td>
<td>2,96,049</td>
<td>914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ri Bhoi</td>
<td>Nongpoh</td>
<td>04.06.1992</td>
<td>2448</td>
<td>1,92,790</td>
<td>570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. East Garo Hills</td>
<td>Williamnagar</td>
<td>22.10.1976</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2,50,582</td>
<td>856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. West Garo Hills</td>
<td>Tura</td>
<td>Mid nineteenth century covered entire Garo Hills</td>
<td>3677</td>
<td>5,18,390</td>
<td>1481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. South Garo Hills</td>
<td>Baghmara</td>
<td>18.06.1992</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>1,00,980</td>
<td>595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>22,429</strong></td>
<td><strong>23,18,822</strong></td>
<td><strong>5780</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About 81 percent of the population of the state live in the rural areas and are dependent on agriculture for livelihood. The state has total of 5780 villages. Table 2.1 shows the different districts, district headquarters, and year of creation, area, population and number of villages in the districts (Government of Meghalaya 1991).

The state has a unicameral legislature, comprising of 60 members. However the local administration of the state is vested in the three Autonomous District Councils set up under the provisions of the 6\textsuperscript{th} Schedule of the Constitution of India. The District Council enjoys legislative, executive and judicial powers mainly over the following items

1. Land, other than reserved forest
2. Forest, other than reserved forest.
3. Use of any land or watercourse for agricultural purposes.
4. Regulation in the practice of \textit{jhum} or other forms of shifting cultivation.
5. Town or village including village or town police and public health and sanitation.
6. Appointment and succession of chiefs and their powers.
7. Establishment of the village and town committees or councils and their powers.
8. Inheritance of property laws and their regulation.

These Councils have executive, legislative and judiciary wings and is under the control of the Governor of the State. It is to be noted that with regards to the implementation of poverty alleviation programme, the district council has little or no role at all, as the state government is implementing these. No mechanism is yet present to involve these institutions participation in the programme for poverty alleviation or women's development programme.
Physical features

Meghalaya plateau, which is a detached block of the Indian peninsula, constitutes a major portion of the state. In the south, the face of the plateau is marked by deep gorges, spurs and abrupt slopes, but the northern portion is dotted with numerous hills, which gradually merge with the Brahmaputra plain. The central portion of the state, being higher in altitude than its peripheral regions, the rivers flow to all directions from this part. The soils of Meghalaya maybe broadly grouped into hill soil and plain alluvium. Physiographically Meghalaya can be broadly classified into the following three parts.

1. Western Meghalaya
2. The central Meghalaya which includes the
   (a) The low Hills of the northern Belt.
   (b) The central upland zone:
   (c) The southern belt:
3. The Eastern Meghalaya

Climate

The climate of Meghalaya is greatly influenced by the southwest monsoons and the northeasterly winds. The climatic conditions may vary from moist sub-humid to humid subtropical. The state also receives heaviest rainfall (varies from 2300 mm to more than 14000 mm; average annual rainfall is 12000 mm) and has a vast potential in exploiting water resources for irrigation, hydropower and fisheries, but its efforts in this direction have been minimal or lukewarm.

Natural Vegetation

Meghalaya is endowed with a great variety of natural vegetation ranging from sub-tropical to tropical type. Forest covers are about 37 percent of the total area; however much of it is privately forest managed. The state government controls only areas under the reserved forest, which is about 4 percent of the forest areas. There have been reports of large felling of trees in recent years leading to consequential problems of livelihood and environmental degradation with fall out on natural conservation. Currently under the directions of the
Supreme Court of India, felling and movement of timber is restricted and banned. The state also had rich mineral resources and much of it is unscientifically exploited as most of it is under private ownership (GoM 1992).

Population characteristics

The statistics of the 2001 Census reveal that Meghalaya, had a population of 23,18,822 out of which 18,64,711 were in the rural areas and 4,54,111 in the urban areas. As on 2001, the density of population is 103 per sq kms compared to 45 per sq kms in 1971. With regard to the sex ratio, the number of females per one thousand males in the State is 975 in 2001 as against 947 in 1991 in comparison to the national figures of 929 per thousand males in 1991 and 934 per thousand males in 1981.

The population of Meghalaya is predominantly tribal. The main tribes are the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo people besides plain tribes such as Koch, Rabhas and Bodos etc. The Khasi, Jaintia, the Bhoi and the War people also called the 'Hynniewtrep' predominantly inhabit the districts of east Meghalaya. The Garo and Khasi and Jaintia society has a matrilineal system. Meghalaya is basically a tribal state. According to the 2001 Census, the population of scheduled tribe was 19,92,862, persons while the scheduled caste population stood at 11,139 persons. However there is a marked variation in the concentration of the tribal population from one district to the other.

Literacy

The percentage of literate persons in the state is higher than the national average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Khasi Hills</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>74.8</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ri Bhoi</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Khasi Hills</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaintia Hills</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Garo Hills</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Garo Hills</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Garo Hills</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 2001, Meghalaya
The average percentage of literate persons in the state is 60.73 percent compared to the national average of 62 percent. (Source: 2001 Census). Table 2.2 shows the literacy rates in the state.

Religious and linguistic groups

There are many religious groups in the state. A little more than half of the population is Christians. Hindus form the second largest religious groups. Meghalaya is a multilingual state. The principal languages are Khasi and Garo with English as the official language in the state.

Working population

According to the 2001 Census, the total workers in the state were 9,70,146. Out of this cultivators numbered at 4,67,010 agricultural labourers were 1,71,694, workers in the household industries were 21,225 and other workers numbered at 3,10,217. About 2,13,135 persons are involved as marginal workers, non-workers make up about 13,48,676 and the main workers were 7,57,011 persons.

Power

The state is rich in both renewable and non-renewable resources. Meghalaya though blessed with so much power potential is still far behind in power generation. The power sector recorded an achievement where the installed capacity was increase to 185.20 MW in 2001-2002 with a generation of 675.59 MKWH. As regards the electrification of villages only 2580 were electrified up to March 2002 constituting 47.05 percent of the total villages in the state. The population covered under such villages is 57.40 percent.

Mineral resources

Coal, limestone, silimanite and clay are the important minerals in the state that are subject to commercial exploitation. Besides this, the state has also exhibited potential for having exploitable reserves of atomic minerals, iron ore, gypsum, quartz, feldspar, copper, lead, zinc and phosphate. Mining is done by open cast (surface mining) method. Block clay is another important mineral of the
state occurring mostly in the Shella-Bhollaganj and the Mawphlang community development block.

**Transport and communication**

Lack of proper transport network is an important factor accounting for the economic backwardness of the state. According to the available statistics the total road length of the state in 2001-2002 was 7598 kms. The state accounts for only 0.02 percent of the total road lengths existing in the country and 3.78 percent of the total roads length in the northeastern region. Meghalaya does not have a railway line or commercially viable waterways within its territory. The state has only one small airport at Umroi near Shillong. The nearest railhead is at Guwahati 103 kms away.

**Industrial development**

Meghalaya with its difficult terrain and predominantly agrarian setting is industrially one of the most backward states of the country. Two areas in the state have been declared industrial areas. They are Byrnihat and Khwan in east Khasi Hills and Ri Bhoi district. Some small-scale industries have already been established in these areas. Among the important industrial units in the state is the cement factory at Cherrapunjee and the Meghalaya plywood factory at Byrnihat and the meter factory at Shillong. Cottage industry (mainly agricultural and handloom) play quite an important role in providing subsidiary income to the rural population.

**Land use**

The State of Meghalaya has extreme relief features varying from plain low lands of very low altitude (150 meters) to high hills where climate natural vegetation, soil etc vary to a great extent. Therefore the land use patterns in different areas of the state also vary with the topography. However with the change in time and technology, people are shifting their type of economic activity from one type of economic activity to the other, which results in the change in the land use pattern.
Table 2.3 Land utilization in Meghalaya

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Actual area (hectares)</th>
<th>Percent of reporting area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Geographical Area</td>
<td>2,242,900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Reporting Area for Land Utilization Statistics</td>
<td>2,240,900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>937,282</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not available for cultivation</td>
<td>229,457</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Other uncultivated land excluding fallow land</td>
<td>636,613</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fallow Land</td>
<td>231,071</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Net Area Sown</td>
<td>206,477</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Area Sown more than once</td>
<td>40,936</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Total Cropped Area</td>
<td>247,413</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agriculture

In Meghalaya, 80 percent of their total population depends entirely on agriculture for their livelihood. Moreover due to the rugged and rocky terrain, vast tracts of land are not suitable for permanent cultivation. The pressure on land has increased tremendously in the state in the last few decades due to high growth of population. This has resulted in the diversification of agricultural activities viz, horticulture, pisciculture, animal husbandry and the vast use of multi-cropping system. Agriculture in the state is predominantly the shifting cultivation called jhum in regional parlance. The percentage of households practicing jhum cultivation to the total number of households greatly differs from one district to another. In the West Garo Hills it is as high as 40.28 percent while it is only 7.01 percent in the East Khasi Hills district (Census 1987).

The total cropped area in the State has increased by about 42 per cent during the last twenty-five years. Food grain production sector covers an area of over 60 per cent of the total crop area. With the introduction of different crops of high yielding varieties in the mid-seventies, remarkable increase in food grain production has been made.

Besides the major food crops of rice and maize, the state is also renowned for its horticultural crops like orange, lemon, pineapple, guava, litchi, banana, jackfruits and temperate fruits such as plum, pear, peach etc. Potato, ginger,
turmeric, black pepper, arecanut, tezpata, betelvine, short-staple cotton, jute, mesta, mustard and rapeseed etc. are some of the important cash crops in the state. Apart from the above the state have achieved signal success in the cultivation of non-traditional crops like tea, cashewnutt, oilseeds, tomato, mushroom, wheat, etc. A number of small and medium size fruit preservation and canning units have been set up in the state. These units produce squash, jelly juice and canned fruits.

Animal husbandry

Livestock is one of the main components of the primary sector, which can improve the economic status of the people of the state, and Meghalaya has a potential for the development of livestock and poultry. According to the livestock Census (1972), the state of Meghalaya had a livestock population of only 7,59,826, which rose to 14,21,351 in 1997, and the poultry population, which stood at 9,75,313 in 1972, recorded an increase of 121 percent in 1974. In 2000-2001, the state had 64 numbers of veterinary dispensaries and 180 veterinary doctors and surgeons corresponding to 31 and 43 in 1972 and 1973 respectively Cattle, poultry, pigs, goats and buffaloes and sheep are important livestock of Meghalaya.

Profile of the Districts

The East Garo Hills district was created on 22nd October 1976 and has a total population of 2,50,582 persons living in 856 villages. The district has an area of 2603 sq.kms occupying almost 8.62 percent of the total geographical area of Meghalaya. Williamnagar is the district headquarters. It has five community development blocks, which include Resubelpara, Ronjeng, Samanda, Songsak, and Kharkutta blocks. Most of the regions of the district are hilly where the level of poverty is higher than those in the plains. Out of the four blocks only Resubelpara has considerable areas of plain (over 70 percent) where permanent cultivation is on. Paddy growing areas are in Rongjeng block. Roughly about 30 percent, of Songsak and Samanda blocks are mainly covered by hills.
The percentage of literacy is 60.6 percent. The Garo mainly inhabits the district and main occupation is *jhum* or shifting cultivation. The district is very backward except the plains of Resubelpara and Rongjeng block. There are huge unexplored deposits of clay, kaolin and coal forming source of export to Bangladesh or the rest of the country. Approximately 40 percent of the land is covered with forest i.e. 122917 ha where sal and teak trees are available.

Roadways form the main means of communication. The network of 18 commercial banks, branches and 4 cooperative bank branches provide banking service to the district. There are daily markets in block and district headquarters. There are 6 Public Health Centres (PHC), 6 dispensaries and one hospital to provide medical care for the people of the district. The economy is primarily agrarian with 94 percent of the population engaged in agriculture and its allied activities. The land tenure system is distinct, as the entire district has been divided into 4 *mousas* under the *nokmasship* system. All land within the A'king land belongs to a particular *mahari* as a custodian. The *nokma* distributes *jhum* land to the members of the *mahari* for cultivation/settlement. Cultivation goes on permanently in the northern part of the district where it has large plain areas. About 70 percent of Resubelpara block and about 30 percent of Rongjeng block are under permanent cultivation. The soil conditions is favourable for the cultivation of cereals like paddy, wheat, maize etc. and other crops like jute, mesta, cotton, cashew nut etc. Horticultural crops like bananas, pineapple and oranges are grown and they have a considerable good market especially in Assam. Most of the animals reared in the district are mainly to meet the domestic market and measures have been taken to introduce animal husbandry on commercial lines. Cane and bamboo, furniture making, blacksmithy, plywood and brick making etc. are some of the industrial activities to be seen in the district. Commodities exported are mainly ginger, horticulture products like banana, pineapple, citrus fruits and minerals like coal etc.

The East Khasi Hills district covers a total area of 2748 sq.kms and is divided into two civil sub-divisions and 8 community and rural development...
blocks. The population of the district as per the Census of 2001 is 6,60,923. It has the highest literacy percentage of 76.1 percent and is rich in various kinds of natural resources. The major mineral resources found in the district are coal, limestone, clay and glass-sand. Timber, another major natural resource is also available and an area of 38 percent is reported to be under forest.

The district is well connected by roads only. However the interior villages are poorly connected and hence the farmers are compelled to sell their produce in small village/semi urban weekly markets at low price. The lack of network acts as a disincentive to adoption of modern agro technology. It also allows middlemen to exploit farmers by often buying standing crops at low prices. Hence only small quantities of saleable surpluses are created. This also leads to large-scale import of food articles to Shillong urban market centre that is the single largest retail market centre in the state. The factors affecting the district economy and the development are communication, land tenure system. The lands in the district are under the control of the kinship, which technically own land on behalf of the community and clan. The sordar is empowered by the Autonomous District Council to distribute lands on lease/tenancy basis amongst the clan men for carrying out cultivation and for other purposes. The individual farmers have no land of their own and take this activity on land leased from the community. Distribution of land in the district show that 94 percent of the households possess 5 ha of land or less.

The most important economic activities of the district in rural areas are agriculture and animal husbandry while small business is carried out in urban areas. The major crops grown are tezpatta, areca nut, bananas, apple, citrus fruits, paddy, potatoes, ginger and paddy. Horticulture products like oranges, bananas, plums, pears, peaches and pineapples dairy units have come up in the district, particularly in Mylliem block and also in around Shillong city. Pig rearing is also popular. Handloom and handicraft also forms a major economic activity.
The major flow of credit in the district is to the government sponsored subsidy linked programme. Financing outside such schemes has not taken off for various reasons. The innovative areas that have potential in the district are floriculturist, mushroom production and processing. Good potential exist for flowers like orchids in domestic markets.

The West Khasi Hills district was carved out on 28th October 1976 and spreads over an area of 5,247 sq.km having a total number of 914 villages. The administrative head quarter is at Nongstoin. It is the biggest district in Meghalaya and economically also the most backwards and poverty ridden district, where people are living under a feudal system of land being owned by a few rich people belong to the ruling clans. The rest of the population comprises poor peasants who farm as tenant on lease held land. West Khasi Hills also had the biggest stretch of forestland under it until massive exploitation over the year has turned it largely barren. The district is famous for silimanite and coal limestone deposits. About 34 percent of the total geographical area of the district is under forest. Most of the forests are either privately owned or under the control of district council. The district is divided into six community and rural development blocks, viz Nongstoin, Mairang, Mawkyrwat Mawshynrut, Ranikor and Mawthadraishan. The district is within the overall administrative supervision and control of the Deputy Commissioner.

The population of the district is 2,96,049 (Census: 2001). The total literacy percentage is 65.1 percent with 66.5 percent for males and 63.7 percent for females. It has 3 community health centres (CHC), 10 PHC and 66 sub centres. The district is landlocked and because of the hilly terrain. The nearest railhead and the airport are at Guwahati and Umroi (Shillong), respectively. At present the district gets its supply of power from Umiam hydroelectric project situated at Umiam.

About 5 percent of the total geographical area constitutes the net cultivated area. Of this 40 percent is under shifting cultivation and 34 percent is under
The major crops and plants grown are paddy, maize, potato and minor crops are sweet potato, tapioca, kuchu, pepper, turmeric, and vegetables. The horticulture crops grown are oranges, pineapple, pear, banana, etc. Allied agricultural activities like dairy, piggery, poultry etc. are practiced widely on a domestic scale. Fishery, sericulture marketing of agricultural and other produce is still under developed. There are 5 markets in the district of which none is regulated.

The Jaintia Hills district was created on the 21st February 1972 and covers an area of 3819 Km², which is 17.03 percent of the total area of the state. The headquarters is Jowai. It has four community development blocks viz. Thadlaskein, Laskein, Amlarem, Khliehriat and Shangpung. There are altogether 465 villages in the district inhabited mainly by the Pnars tribe. The total size of the population is 2,99,108 persons (Census: 2001). The district is rich in coal, clay and limestone deposits, which is commercially exploited. About 37.68 percent of the geographical areas fall under forestlands. The district possesses immense potentialities for generating power on large scale based on water, natural gas and coal. The literacy rate in the district is 51.9 percent.

Roadways are the only means of transportation in the district. The interior villages are poorly connected. The Jowai towns along with some other market centres like Khliehriat, Lad Rymbai has expanded considerably due to large-scale exploitation of coal during the last decade. The most important economic activity in the district is agriculture and animal husbandry with small business activities being carried out in urban areas. Cash crops like tobacco, sweet potato, kadhu, pepper, turmeric, ginger and vegetables betelnut, pan leaf, pepper, turmeric and fruits like oranges, pineapple and jackfruits are grown are cultivated. The major crops grown in the district are paddy, maize, potato, turmeric and horticulture crops are pine apple, orange, betel-vine, arecanut etc. The peculiar land tenure system was the major impediment for the development of these activities on commercial lines. A major portion of bank finance of the district is for agricultural term loans sectors of government-sponsored programmes. The areas for
innovation in district are floriculture, mushroom production, and turmeric agro processing unit with small private turmeric processing units being set up. Due to lack of technical know how, poor marketing facilities, communication, the scope for export oriented units remain low.

The Ri Bhoi district was created on the 4th June 1992 with its headquarters at Nongpoh. It covers an area of 2448 sq.kms and has a population of 192,790 persons (Census 2001). The district has three community and rural development blocks Umling, Umsning and Jirang covering a total of 570 villages. The total number of families living below the poverty line is 11,286. The percentage of literacy in the district is 65.7 percent and the total area under forest is 24.1 percent. The principal forest products are timber, bamboo, charcoal, broomstick, thatch and medicinal herbs and plants.

The national highway connects the district headquarter Nongpoh by an all weather road. Roads elsewhere in the district are not well developed. The only airship at Umroi is about 45 kms away from Nongpoh. The nearest railhead is at Guwahati, a distance of 55 Kms. The Umiam hydroelectric project situated at Barapani is located in the district. The district has two colleges, 24 high schools (HS), 70 Middle English (ME) schools, and 249 lower primary (LP) schools. It has 3 CHC, 8 PHC and 18 sub-centres. The average population per bank office is 10,172 with the banks' network of 18 branches. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) at Umroi has started an important research project to study various means for developing agriculture in the state suitable to its peculiar topography.

Agriculture is the principal occupation and the major crops grown are paddy, ginger, banana, and pineapple. A single fruit-processing unit is located at Byrniihat. The unit presently manufactures jams, jellies, and pickles. Other activities carried out on an appropriate scale are animal husbandry, fishery sericulture small-scale industries.
The present West Garo Hills district was created on the 22nd October 1976. The district is divided into 8 community and rural development blocks i.e., Betasing, Dadengiri, Selsella, Tikrikilla, Rongram, Zigzag, Dalu and Gambegre comprising of 1481 villages. Ampati and Dadengiri are the two sub-divisions. The district headquarters is at Tura. The district comprises of hills and plains and has a tropical climate. The total area of the district is about 3677 sq.km. having a total population of about 5,18,390 persons (Census 2001). The total literacy rate in the district is 50.7 percent. Coal, limestone, silimanite and fireclay are found in plenty in the district. The total area under forest is 167602 ha. Roads are the only means of communication in the district. The important economic activities in the rural areas of the district are agriculture, animal husbandry, handloom and handicrafts are popular activities among the women folks. In the semi-urban areas, the major economic activities are small road transport operators animal husbandry such as diary, poultry farming and pig rearing, small industries business and trade.

Land tenure system in the district has created obstacles to bank financing and long-term investment initiatives. The major food crops grown are paddy, wheat, maize, tapioca and sweet potato. The main spices grown are ginger, turmeric, and chilies. The important fruit crops are oranges, pineapple, banana and jackfruit. Among the plantation crops popular in the district are arecanut, betel vine, cashewnut, tea and rubber.

Development issues in Meghalaya

Meghalaya emerged as a state in 1972 from two hill districts namely the Khasi and Jaintia Hills districts and the Garo Hills district of Assam, which has been the manifestation of ethnic and specific local aspirations of tribes inhabiting these Hills. Meghalaya is very diverse and differentiated in terms of ethnic, geo-ecological responses. In the past people in the Hills lived in isolation, entrenched in tradition and identity. The march towards progress has not been without difficulty. Meghalaya like other North Eastern States has witnessed major changes in the years for which it was not prepared and which have been too rapid
and far reaching for it to absorb without creating undue tension. These tensions are reflected in the sense of alienation from the rest of the India, which characterizes the state.

The main problems in real life for the majority of people living in Meghalaya are issues of food security and basic needs, poverty mitigation, shelter, health, education. The tribal way of life in Meghalaya rural settings is a traditional way of life far from the commercialized approach.

The major factors that have shaped the current complexion of Meghalaya today are varied. They include the influx of outsiders, political and administrative changes after independence and the impact of the Christian missionaries bringing literacy and education but also disturbing traditional tribal values. Added to this was the impact of the Second World War, which brought a new spatial consciousness, and awareness of modern technology to a hitherto isolated backward and unexposed people. The advent of the new countries led to the closure of the borders disrupting the traditional trade flows with Myanmar and Bangladesh (Chittagong had been the main export port) and cutting of communities from their kinsmen. All these factors together with the inability to meet the basic needs in a changed economic environment, have contributed to the feelings of discontent, which underlie the continuing insurgency movement. The feelings have been exacerbated by the feeling that whatever assistance has been received from Delhi has not been appropriate.

On the economic front, development in Meghalaya has lagged behind from the rest of India with a very low per capita income as compared to the national average. The growth that has taken place in recent years has largely been due to the growth in the government sector, ancillary trade and service sectors which has affected urban areas. The benefits have largely accrued to 'outsiders', whilst the vast majority of the rural population has remained largely untouched, widening the gap between urban and rural incomes.
Notwithstanding its immense potential, Meghalaya represents the classic paradox of 'poverty in the midst of plenty'. Stagnation in the rural economy stems from the fact that whilst Meghalaya enjoys a rich natural resource base, climate, soils etc, the resources of the state are not being harnessed adequately or effectively to generate wealth and as a result the region remains economically backward. This is evident in the continued pursuit of low productivity agriculture, particularly jhum cultivation. Notwithstanding its large overall resource base, Meghalaya has a low ratio of usable land to population with a major portion of the land unsuitable for raising crops as compared to the whole country. This highlights the need to maximize the use of the available useable land to meet the needs of the growing population.

Other factors contributing to low development include the lack of commercial orientation of the indigenous entrepreneurship within tribal communities. This has allowed non-tribal traders and businessmen to infiltrate and to drain wealth away from the region further inflaming the feelings of resentment against 'outsiders'. In addition, the institutional framework in terms of extension, inputs supply credit; training etc provides adequate support to farmers. Efforts to promote development also have to face the higher wage rate expectations, which undermine the competitiveness of enterprise.

The tribals of Meghalaya have always felt themselves to be on the periphery of socio economic development because of their geographical, cultural and political distance from the mainstream of developmental changes in India. The centre has however tried to give the people of Meghalaya a new deal and there has been a substantial flow of funds into the state over the past twenty years, but much of the assistance, which has flowed, has not been felt to be appropriate and has fueled disillusionment with government sponsored development efforts. Past development initiatives in Meghalaya have highlighted the following constraints.

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An essentially top down approach to programme implementation with little genuine involvement like lack of the necessary services, facilities such as credit, extension, inputs supply and marketing required to sustain development is a regular feature. It has left farmers feeling that schemes are imposed on them and hence they have little sense of commitment or of ownership of the scheme. The subsidized 'handout' approach to development coupled with the top-down approach has created a dependency mentality.

Lack of interdepartmental coordination has prevented the promotion of coherent development strategies. This has largely been responsible for the inadequate technical support to farmers in the management of their new developments. Top-down approach of research programme and the remoteness of the research staff from the physical and social constraints affecting jhum households has resulted in inappropriate models, which are too complex. Low motivation of government staff and excessive bureaucracy in the line department has hampered action-oriented programme and timely delivery of inputs and services to farmers. Production rather than market led approach to crop selection has resulted in the promotion of crops with limited marketing opportunities resulting in disillusionment on the part of farmers.

Meghalaya thus represents a unique socio-cultural framework and faces a unique set of problems. These factors have not always been taken into account in the design and the implementation of development programme within the state and the region as a whole. As a result, the impact of development initiatives has generally fallen short of expectations. Rural countryside stagnation and low productivity jhum cultivation continue on a wide scale. The shortening of the jhum cycle (down to 3-5 years for many communities) with its impact on declining fertility has resulted in encroachment on the forest resources and progressive land degradation. The environmental consequences in an area renowned for its rich bio diversity are severe. Most families recognize that jhum cultivation is no longer a sustainable livelihood system but they lack knowledge and conviction of alternative development options and the means to adopt them. Against the
backdrop of failed initiatives and the general air of distrust and disillusionment in Meghalaya, there is a need for a new approach, which is technically appropriate, culturally sensitive and institutionally effective. This will undoubtedly require the genuine partnership between the communities, government and other interveners such as NGOs and research institutes. It calls for intervention which is demand driven and client oriented and for which the indigenous knowledge and capabilities of the communities will be accorded due recognition.

The independent views and aspirations of the people of the region, and the breakdown of social and traditional leadership under new power structures emerging in society have generated several calls from various corners in the region and also in the state. New situations emerge when the traditional leadership has passed into the educated minority. The literate few then dominate not only the political scene, but also the traditional chief who are under their control. They also dominate the local press and make the people more perplexed with their news items. Social movement are now beginning to dominate the scene in the state which is a product of transition and tumult that is often faced by the traditional societies in the age of technological advancements and economic change emphasized by tribal identity contributing to the 'We' (tribal) and 'They' (non-tribal) distinctions with interest articulations and aggregations (Dube 1997:1-7).

**Problems and constraints of development in Meghalaya**

A study by the National council of Applied Economic Research (1988 quoted by IFAD 1995) based on a set of weights and indicators indicated that the NER including Meghalaya lag about 30 percent behind the rest of the country in development. IFAD (1995) further mentions that *the benefits of the growth whatsoever have been restricted to the urban incomes and stagnation in the economy is owing to inadequate efforts to harness resources for effective utilization of its productive capacities*. This has also been acknowledged in the plan document of Meghalaya, reflecting the need for improvement in basic facilities, and living conditions including income.
Besides the macro economic constraints, the draft Ninth Plan document of the Planning Department, (GOM 1997) indicates the following as 'Handicaps of the State':

- Constraints such as terrain and topography; deficiency in infrastructure support; lagging legacy of development in historical terms; historical isolation; unbalanced economic growth; non-replenishable use of natural resources, inadequate delivery of social services such as health, education, less productive and competitive agriculture with inadequate forward and backward linkages;

- Combination of above lead to stagnation of economy and continued backwardness; rapid urbanization in the district having the state capital; uneven distribution of backwardness between urban and rural areas, or between the different regions of the state;

- In the matters of literacy, practice of Jhum cultivation, rural electrification, distribution of road network, there exist levels of differential regional trends;

- Skewed distribution of financial institutions (majority of 179 bank branches are in urban centres) and poor extension and coverage of credit; Low level of industrialization, lack of entrepreneurship; and increasing unemployment.

**Perceived problems by people in the state**

The problems as perceived by a majority of the population in the state broadly include the psychological fear of losing identity due to influx and immigration. The disruption of law and order, insurgency, the vicious circle of economic stagnation together, with the lack of an integrated vision for progress and development is perceived as a handicap for development. In addition to this, the severance of its natural markets across eastern and southern and to some extent northern borders has created difficulty in the economic scenario. The people have felt the need to restructure the institutional arrangements and
infrastructure associated with the policy-making decisions in the NER. The primitive agricultural economy, shifting cultivation, low productivity, and lack of market linkages have created a negative trend in agricultural development.

On the other hand the absence of genuine and fruitful productive exercise – a condition of inaction or slow action or absence of work culture adds to the problem of development. Moreover the development agenda does not match the social structure coupled with the lack of genuine participation in planning, policy and decision-making. The policy for development of the state lacks a proper understanding of the society, culture and polity and cannot provide specific responses which will lead to a sustainable development. As we have seen from the preceding pages that 80 percent of the population of Meghalaya is dependent on agriculture and living in rural areas. Many think that in Meghalaya poverty is comparatively less but fact of the matter is that almost 45 percent of its population is below the poverty line. While poverty dropped by 6.7 percent in between 1987-88 to 1993-94 in India, it increased from 40 to 46 percent in the northeast (Roy 1999).

Planning in the context of Meghalaya

Meghalaya follows a pattern of centralized planning, though professing to follow decentralized planning. Different departments of government prepare sector wise plan projections, which is compiled at the state level. The state as 'special category states', receives grants to the tune of 90 percent of its plan allocations from the centre due to its weak internal resource base. The resource and plan discussion at New Delhi becomes key to central planning exercise and everything follows from these in reality. There is a planning board in the state, serviced by the Planning Department and a few staff of its own. The recommendation of the planning board is mainly advisory. The cabinet approves approach and details of the plan. Theoretically, the plan document should incorporate the district plans prepared by the district planning and development committee headed by a cabinet rank minister of the district. There are other notified people's representatives both elected and otherwise, besides the district
heads of line departments. The Chief Executive Member of the District Council concerned and the Deputy Commissioner (administrative head in the district) is the Vice-Chairman. The District Planning officer as Secretary serves the committee. The planning set up at the district level is also weak and poorly staffed.

Experiences indicate a lackluster and disjoined approach in planning, as it is not linked organically following a bottom-up approach. Such exercise in planning at the district level merely becomes an instrument of highlighting constraints in approval, sanction and implementation. Till recent years, due to resource constraints, all delegated powers of even the heads of administrative departments remained ineffectual.

**Problems of planning in Meghalaya**

Planning in India and particularly Meghalaya is essentially *top-down* and remote; constrained by a poor and unreliable database, which affects meaningful monitoring and evaluation. It has attracted criticism mostly emanating from implementation and also from absence of participation in evolving consensus. Developmental problems are not well defined and vary from context to location to spatial differentiation. The weakness and problems of planning are related to poor data of resources, ignoring indigenous knowledge. Separating planning from management, results in putting blame on each other. Planning in the state lacks the participation of the beneficiary. It is conventional planning, which is *top-down* comprising of a centralized, pre-designed *blueprint*, and *handout* *delivery* *handover* resulted in a host of implementation problems. Planning and developmental methodologies attempted to ignore the realities of project identification, selection, approval and implementation in which local political and social interests would play a vital role are also seen to the reflected in the case of planning in Meghalaya (GoM 1995).

The strategies and priorities in the state government of Meghalaya are listed in the ninth plan document (GoM 1997). It contains an assessment of
infrastructure and basic minimum services gaps in the state and the nature of the task that lies ahead in this direction. A look at the strategies indicates the clear absence of involvement of people in planning and development. Though rational natural resource management is the professed aim, the strategy has not moved ahead significantly in the last 25 years of statehood. A comprehensive natural resources inventory and plan including land and land-use are yet to be achieved. This also impedes the regional or district resources inventory and plan preparation.

A high level commission appointed for the northeastern states in 1996 (GoM 1997) submitted its report entitled 'Transforming the North East' (Government of India 1999). It may be worthwhile to indicate the projections, to understand, at least in financial terms, the challenges that lie ahead as far as Meghalaya is concerned. The state of Meghalaya projected Rs 1444.40 crores for the shortfalls in basic minimum services. However the commission recommended only Rs 433.79 crores. In respect of the infrastructure the commission recommended a composite amount of Rs 9461.01 crores for the entire northeastern states though the Government of Meghalaya had projected a requirement of Rs 2143.42 crores.

Other problems that have plagued the development scenario in Meghalaya stems from the lack of consensus among diverse interest groups on many issues related to livelihood concerns. Development in Meghalaya is entrenched in an environment of cautious approach of governance, which may mean inaction or slow action, or weighed action sometimes vested or interested action. Again the process of consultation are non-institutional, for that are mainly personality based consultations resulting in mushrooming of floating organizations and assertions each trying to outdo or overdo others, alienation of traditional systems from decision making and governance. The technologies introduced are inappropriate and investments in the state in economic pursuits are inadequate. The lack of backward and forward linkages, absence of location specific solutions in view of diversity, centralized planning and lack of meaningful experimentation also add to
the problems of development in the state. Added to these are the problems of the emergence of an exploitative and pervasive culture, spread of western consumerist lifestyles and aspirations. Middlemen in power and market centres control the market economy.

In conclusion it may be mentioned that planning and implementation for development of the state has suffered due to the following reasons. Firstly, there has been an inadequate analysis of available information during programme formulation resulting in the application of standard cost of schemes/projects per unit at the stage of formulation. The number of programme are too many and confusing. They are target oriented in approach and implementation. The findings of monitoring and evaluation are either non-existent or hardly put to use. There is lack of accountability of the implementing agencies either to the government or to the people, which could be a major factor for the diversion of funds in development programme. Some programmes have abnormally high operational cost owing to the redundant and ineffective administration and other inadequacies in planning and implementation. Many of the social sector programmes were formulated without addressing the question of sustainability of benefits. In the present plan regime, the failure to ensure timely and adequate flow of funds to the implementing agencies have been distressing and de motivating.

The way of life of the people of Meghalaya is rooted in tradition, which has been caught up in the dilemma of development and torn apart by the pace of development. The economy has been traditional and agriculture based. The state has rich natural resources largely owned by people with complex tenure arrangements marking its limitations. It may also be mentioned that the traditional way of life as one found in Meghalaya is one that is highly dependent on nature. Expectations exist from the state in providing the goods and services. Thus there is a pervasive sense of dependence on government for all goods and services while the internal resources are not limited and not geared to meet aspirations. The economic calculations have not attained the centre stage, nor has
commercialization invaded the vast countryside. Some hold the non-tax regime coupled with subsidy and grant system responsible for increasing the dependency on the state. Even house taxes in urban areas are hardly charges or collected.

It may also be stated that the democratic set-up has generated new centres of power and consequential dynamics, which need to be harmonized with traditional broad based grassroots in order to understand and expand the quest of development of the state as a whole and the women in particular. The issues in such contextual diversity throws open challenges for all levels of administrators, development planners, implementers, social and political leaders as stated by Agrawal (Online 1). 'Some hold that the problems of the North East (including Meghalaya) are really problems of development. Others see them as problems of cultural spacing and readjustment with the newly emerging consciousness of modernity of India in the context of global transformation.

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