CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

A Profile of the Khasi Hills

The Khasi Hills District with an area of 10,319.36 square kilometre lies between 20° 5' and 26° 10' North Latitude. The length of the district from east to west is about 128 kilometre and the maximum breadth is about 102.4 kilometre. It is bounded on the North by the Kamrup and Nowgong districts of Assam, on the west by the Garo Hills (Meghalaya), on the south by the Sylhet district of Bangladesh and on the East by the District of Jaintia Hills (Meghalaya), and Mikir Hills of Assam.

According to 1971 census, Khasi Hills District has a population of 4,91,209. Whereas in 1901, the former K & J Hills had a population of 2,02,250 only. Thus within 70 years the population doubled in the Khasi Hills. The density of population per square kilometre was 44. There were 922 females per 1000 males in 1971 whereas the average for the State of Meghalaya was 942. Thus there is shortage of females. The percentage of literacy

1. Figures supplied by J.P. Singh, Department of Geography, St. Edmund's College, Shillong.
6. Ibid.
in 1971 was 36.60\textsuperscript{7} which compares favourably with the State average of 29.49\textsuperscript{8} and the all-India average of 29.35\textsuperscript{9}.

The whole of the Khasi Hills District is full of hills. On the northern and western borders, these hills take the form of tumbled ranges, which run for the most part north to south, and have a general height of two or three thousand feet. There is a high plateau in the centre of the district, the general level of which decreases in height towards the east and west. From Barapani to the Shillong plateau is a climb of 1800 feet. From Shillong again, there is a further rise of about 700 feet to the central high plateau which stretches from there to the latitude of Dumpep and then gradually declines in height to the edge of the hills at Cherrapunji, Shillong Peak being 6450 feet in height.\textsuperscript{10} Khasi Hills is a plateau generally of rolling grassland interspersed with river valleys, which in the southern portion, take the form of ravines.\textsuperscript{11}

8. Ibid.
10. District Census Hand Book, 1951, P. III.
11. Meghalaya Facts And Figures (Pamphlet), P. 1.
The climate of the District is temperate. The temperature of Shillong seldom rises above 80° F. in the hottest days of summer, and it is generally about 35° F. during the coldest night of winter. The climate of the Central Plateau is neither hot in summer nor very cold in winter, and that is why the people of the district are healthy. At the foothills in the southern slopes as well as in the submontane regions on the north the climate is a bit humid and warm, and that is why these places are sparsely populated. During deep winter in December - January, frost usually falls in the Shillong plateau, but snow is unknown in these hills.12

Khasi Hills district has the highest rainfall in the world. The average rainfall annually comes to 283 inches. But most of the heavy rainfall occurs in the southern half of the district. Cherrapunji used to be called the wettest place of the earth. But that pride of place has now been taken over by another village called Mawsynram which is situated about ten miles west of Cherrapunji. The average rainfall of this place is 577 inches per annum. It thus beats Cherrapunji which used to have an average rainfall 485 inches per year.13

13. Ibid.
Different parts of the Khasi Hills have different quantities of rainfall. Shillong has only about 80" of rain per annum. The northern slopes of the district may have anything from 50" inches to about 80" inches only per annum.\textsuperscript{14}

The principal crops of the district are rice, potato, orange, ginger, tezpata, arecanut, betel leaves, maize, English and Country vegetables. The area under rice cultivation was about 26,000 hectares in 1973-74, whereas production of rice in the same year was about 42,000 tonnes. The area under potato cultivation was about 15,000 hectares in 1973-74, and the production in the same year was about 66,000 tonnes.\textsuperscript{15}

The forests of the district may be classified into three Zones, Viz; (1) the pine Zone covering areas between 2,500' to 6,200' elevation (2) the dry grassy belt covering the lower slopes roughly between 500' to 2,500' elevation which form the ideal ground for graziers; (3) the ever green hardwood Zone which forms a belt along the foothills which contain useful hardwood species of which sal is the most important.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} District Census Hand Book 1961, PP. 10-11.
\textsuperscript{15} Statistical Abstract, Khasi Hills, 1974, P.VIII.
\textsuperscript{16} District Census Hand Book 1961, P. II.
There is an area of about 552.96 square kilometres under Reserve Forest, and an area of about 1280 square kilometres under private ownership and the administration of these forests was transferred to the District Council in 1961.17

The main sources of forest revenue in this district are from timber, limestone, lac, tezpata and elephants. The revenue from these forests in 1960-61 was about Rs. 2 lakhs.18

Since 1934, cinchona plantations have been established along the Gauhati Shillong road. About 600 acres have been planted.19

The Khasi pine yields an important forest product, resin, which is reported to be the best quality, yielding a high grade oil of turpentine.20

Jhuming is still causing progressive destruction of forest cover and is responsible for soil erosion.21

Khasi Hills is a phaneritic rock from Geological point of view, Limestone was quarried at the foot of the Khasi Hills, especially between Theria and Shella. There are

17. District Census Hand Book 1961, P. II.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
millions of tonnes of limestone in this area.\textsuperscript{22} Production of limestone in 1973 was about 1 lakh tonnes.\textsuperscript{23}

Coal is the most important mineral of the Khasi Hills. It is found at Cherrapunji, Laitryngew, Mawlong, Mawdon, Mawsynram, Thangjinath and Lakadong. Cretaceous coal is found near Mawphlang and the Langrin field on the Judukata river. The main coal fields of the Cherra region lie between Sohparim and Mawmluh near Cherrapunji.\textsuperscript{24} Production of coal in 1973 was about 559 lakhs tonnes.\textsuperscript{25}

There is a Public Sector Cement factory at Cherrapunji, which produces 250 tonnes of cement per day.\textsuperscript{26} Production of cement in 1973-74 is about 54,000 tonnes.\textsuperscript{27}

Sillimanite is found in this District in Nongstoin area in the purest form and is said to be the largest known deposit in the world. The estimated quantity in the area is of the order of 2,50,000 tonnes.\textsuperscript{28}

Apart from these minerals several types of clay are also found in this District.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{22} District Census Hand Book 1961, P. 6.
\textsuperscript{23} Statistical Abstract, Khasi Hills, 1974, P.VIII.
\textsuperscript{24} District Census Hand Book 1961, PP. 6-7.
\textsuperscript{25} Statistical Abstract, Khasi Hills, 1974, P.VIII.
\textsuperscript{26} Meghalaya Some Facts And Figures, P.7.
\textsuperscript{27} Statistical Abstract, Khasi Hills, 1974, P.VIII.
\textsuperscript{28} District Census Hand Book 1961, PP. 7-8.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
The British came in contact with the Khasis after their occupation of Sylhet. The lime quarries in the hills near Cherrapunji attracted the European traders. Some of the disturbances which occurred are ascribed by the Collectors of Sylhet to the injudicious conduct of these traders.30

When the Anglo-Burmese war was imminent, David Scott, the Agent to the Governor General North East Frontier entered into an agreement with the Jaintia Raja. In 1824, he marched from Sylhet into the Brahmaputra Valley across the Jaintia Hills. After the annexation of Assam by the British by the Treaty of Yandabo (1826), the linking up of the Brahmaputra and the Surma Valleys by a road across the Khasi Hills became important. In 1827, Scott entered into an agreement with the Syiem of Nongkhlaw who authorised the construction of a road across the hills. A remark by a peon aroused the suspicion of the Khasis who committed an outrage on the road building party, killing two British officers and their 60 followers. Punitive measures followed quickly in its wake. Troops were hurried up from Sylhet and Assam and the Khasis were defeated. They soon made their submission. By 1833, the last important

30. District Census Hand Book 1951, PP. VI-VII.
Syiem, Tirot Sing, "tendered his submission", and agreements were entered into with the Khasi Chiefs 25 in number.

After the suppression of the Khasi rising in 1833, the headquarters of the hills were located at Cherrapunji. It remained there till 1864. In the same year a committee was set up for the selection of a new site for headquarters. The Committee recommended the drier plateau of Iwduh (Barabazar) at the foot of the Shillong Range.

The civil Station was started between the then existing Khasi villages of Mawkhar and Laitumkhra which became satellites of the new administrative headquarters. In 1874, Assam was separated from Bengal and constituted into a Chief Commissioner's Province and Shillong became the headquarters of the Province. The establishment of the Secretariat and offices of the Heads of Departments gave further impetus to its growth. In 1874, Lord Northbrook, the Viceroy visited Shillong. He ordered that certain tracts in the vicinity of the town be reserved to protect its water supply and to form a fuel reserve. This, in later years, became what is known

32. Allen, B.C. - Assam District Gazettes, 1906, Vol. X.
33. District Census Hand Book, 1951, P. VII.
as the 'Green belt' around the town. In 1875 however Shillong could hardly be called a town. Its population was less than that of Shella, the largest Khasi village. But due to better communications and with the opening of a cart road to Gauhati in 1877, the growth of the town was facilitated.

Shillong was constituted into a Station on November 28, 1878 under the Bengal Municipal Act of 1876 and a station committee came into existence, consisting of 12 members presided over by the Deputy Commissioner. Five of the members were ex-officio members; and the remaining seven were nominated by the Chief Commissioner. The Station Committee in its first meeting held on 6th January, 1879, resolved that an application be made to the Chief Commissioner to obtain the sanction of the Government of India for the inclusion of Shillong Cantonment within the limits of the Station, on the ground that the inhabitants of the Cantonments area were benefitted by the improvements effected in the neighbouring areas of Laban, Mawkhar and the Police Bazar. But the Government did not agree

34. Cajee, T - The Transition From The Village To The Town - unpublished seminar paper, Courtesy, Anthropological Survey of India, Shillong Station.
35. Rao, V.V. - A Hundred Years of Local Self Governance In Assam, 1965, P. 67.
to the proposal and the Cantonment area remained outside the Municipal area.

In October 1879 the Syiem of Mylliem conceded to the Station Committee control over the Water Supply of the Grinoline and Rifle Range Falls. 38

The Government policy in the early 1880's was the gradual expansion of the administrative area of the Committee. In July, 1880 the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, enquired from the Deputy Commissioner, K & J Hills, whether the Syiem of Mylliem had given his consent to the inclusion of Col. Bivar's estate (Lachammiere) within the station limits, and whether he was prepared, to permit the enforcement of the bye-laws therein, and the collection of taxes which might be imposed on its inhabitants 39 for the maintenance of sanitary conditions.

In 1883 the Government of Assam wanted to control the lands in and around Shillong so that the sanitary condition of the town might be improved. But the Deputy Commissioner, K & J Hills pointed out the extravagant terms demanded by the land owners. 40 However, some lands 41 on the hill slope, west of the cantonment, water catchment area and between it

39. Letter No.2704 dated 14.8.1880 from the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Assam.
and the bed of the Umjashai, under the Act X of 1870. This was done for prohibiting jhuming and protection of Catchment area of water supply.\textsuperscript{42}

In 1884, the Chief Commissioner took personal interest in extending the jurisdiction of the Station Committee over certain land lying south of the Umshirpi stream, east of the Umjashai stream, west of village Laban and north of the slopes of the Shillong Ridge, since most of the available sites were appropriated, and since land for building purposes has become scarce.\textsuperscript{43}

The Station Committee, in its meeting held in August, 1884 appointed a sub-committee consisting of six members including the Syiem of Mylliem and Jeebon Roy, E.A.C. as its chairman to examine the inclusion of suburbs of Mawkhar and Laban within the boundaries of Shillong town.\textsuperscript{44} But the committee did not submit a report and therefore no action was taken.

In March 1893, Major Gray, Deputy Commissioner, K & J Hills suggested to the Government the inclusion of extensions of Mawkhar and Laban into the Shillong Station.\textsuperscript{45} Hence there was no deviation from the earlier

\textsuperscript{42} File No.97G of 1884.
\textsuperscript{43} No.1-4, Rev & Agri A July 1884.
\textsuperscript{44} Letter No.34 of 29.8.1884 from the Deputy Commissioner, K & J Hills.
\textsuperscript{45} Letter No.721 of 21.3.1893 from the Deputy Commissioner, K & J Hills.
policy of gradual expansion of the boundary.

In 1895, the Deputy Commissioner Arbuthnott, pointed out to the Government about the anomaly in the extension of water supply to the Assam Bengal Railway Offices situated in the Lachammiere outside the Shillong station boundary line. He further observed that his predecessor Gray permitted the railway authorities to take water from the municipal main free of tax. Therefore, to regularise this irregularity he suggested the inclusion of the Lachammiere estate in the Shillong Station. 46 The Syiem of Mylliem, however, expressed his helplessness - as the people of the area were against the proposal. 47 The Government was not convinced of the reasons advanced by the Syiem. The Syiem called for a Durbar which decided in favour of inclusion of Lachammiere within the municipal limits. 48 In January 1896 the Deputy Commissioner was instructed to submit a draft notification including the Lachammiere estate and also the villages of Laban and Mawkhar within the municipal limits. He was further instructed that the boundaries of


47. Nos. 8-20, Home A January 1896.

48. Ibid.
these villages need not be specifically prescribed as they might be extended in future. Accordingly the southern boundary of Laban and the western boundary of Mawkhar were not stated, so as to facilitate their extension in future. Thus, the policy of the Government was to keep Shillong Municipal boundaries vague to accommodate further extensions.

So far as the inclusion of Laitumkhra was concerned, the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner observed on 15th April, 1896, that "it is a pity that Hopkinson's wood would not be included within municipal limits. On that hill the Roman Catholic Mission have their buildings, the chapel is 6 feet from the main road, I saw six weeks ago the graves of four Native Christians who had been buried there. The Civil Surgeon reported the matter to the Deputy Commissioner, who has, prohibited further burials." It is clear from the above that the Secretary was anxious for the inclusion of Laitumkhra within the Station limits for the improvement of health and hygiene of that locality. But the idea did not materialise until 1910.

49. Letter No.216 MUCPL - 81J of 9.1.1896 from the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Assam.
In 1904, the Government purchased 87 acres of land situated in the slope of Shillong Range near Riat Laban in order to preserve the beauty of the town.52

The Shillong Station Committee resolved in December, 1905 that Government should be requested to include the new suburb of Haneng Umkhrah within the boundaries of the Shillong Station because the duty of providing for sanitation, lighting and watch and ward of that suburb was imposed on the Station Committee by Government. The Committee thought that by including the suburb within the municipal limits it would be able to levy and collect rates53 and provide sanitary amenities. The proposal was accepted by the Government and the suburb was included in the municipality.54

In June 1907 the Shillong Station Committee resolved that immediate steps should be taken to include Laitumkhra and the Nongthymmai springs within municipal limits. The inclusion of Laitumkhra was urgently necessary to control building operations in that quarter. The inclusion of Nongthymmai was suggested to control the sources of water supply.55 But no decision was arrived at. Therefore the Station Committee in

53. Nos.4-8 MUNCPL - A. June, 1906.
November 1908 urged the Government the urgency of including Laitumkhra and Malki village within the Station limits. But the Finance Secretary L.J. Kersaw was opposed to the proposal.

The Shillong Station Committee resolved on 20th March 1909 that the Station should be converted into a Municipality under the Bengal Municipal Act of 1884. But the Finance Secretary L.J. Kersaw pointed out to the Lt. Governor L. Hare that there were special difficulties in the way of the conversion of Shillong into a municipality such as the existence of a native territory, proposals for the extension of boundaries, the need for taking fresh agreements from the Syiem of Mylliem in regard to the introduction of Municipal administration in his territory. In view of the above facts the Government took about two years for the conversion of the Station into a municipality. On 15 November 1910 the final notification converting Shillong into a municipality was issued.

58. Ibid.
Several factors were responsible for the delay in the conversion of the Shillong Station Committee into a municipality. The Syiem of Mylliem always stated that he had no personal objection, but that objections were raised by the residents of the area concerned on the ground that they would not be able to pay taxes. But L.O. Clarke, the Deputy Commissioner, thought that the petitioners were well-to-do and their plea that they were too poor to pay municipal taxes was absurd. He also said that the poor people would be exempted from municipal taxation under section 106 of the Municipal Act 1884. The Syiem of Mylliem objected to the inclusion of his territory in the municipal area on the ground that he might be deprived of Barabazar. Loss of Barabazar would affect the financial position of the Syiem. The Syiem also thought that valuable lands would be taken away by the municipal board. Some of the residents also feared that the inclusion of their villages in the municipality would deprive them of their existing system of village government and the prevalent customs. But the Deputy Commissioner, Clarke assured the Syiem that such fears were groundless. He also said that the people of these villages derived a greater

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part of their earnings from the town, and the conversion of the Station into a municipality would develop the economic condition of these areas.

As a result of the Partition of Bengal in 1905 and the formation of the new Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam - the development of the Shillong town received a set-back with the shifting of capital from Shillong to Dacca in 1910. The Partition was annulled in 1912. Assam was reconstituted into a Chief Commissioner's Province with headquarters at Shillong. Since then, there has been continuous development.

As already mentioned the Station Committee was converted into a municipality in 1910 under the Bengal Municipal Act of 1884. A municipality was established on 1 January, 1911 with a population of 11,128. The urban population in the district is more than one tenth of the total population of Meghalaya.

At present, the Municipal area is divided into 27 single member constituencies, whereas in 1910, the

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Municipality was divided into 10 single member wards. Another very interesting feature is that the communal representation was never introduced in the Municipality, although it was a dominant feature of municipal boards all over India. Originally the franchise was enjoyed by those residents only who had either some specific income or held property of specific value within the Municipal limits. In the first election held on the 23rd June 1921 under section 14 of the Bengal Municipal Act, 1884, ten Commissioners were elected from 10 wards. Although the Assam Municipal Act, 1923, came into force on 1st April, 1924, and the Board subsequently came under the Assam Municipal Act, 1956, the nominated official chairmanship was abolished in 1964, by amending the Act of 1956.

The Municipality is divided into two wings, deliberative and administrative. The deliberative wing consisted of 13 elected and 2 nominated members upto June 30, 1973. They elected a chairman and a vice-chairman from among themselves. It has the power to decide policies to

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70. Young India, 6.7.1973.
be followed by the Board. The administrative wing since 1958, is headed by an Executive Officer, who is assisted by a Head Clerk, one Waterworks Superintendent, a Health Officer, Municipal Sub-Engineer and a number of subordinate officers.

The powers and functions of the Municipality are determined by the Assam Municipal Act, 1956, but now the Meghalaya Municipal (Amendment) Act, 1973 has been passed. The new Act has made no modifications in the existing law except some slight changes in section 177(1) & (2) of the Act of 1956, i.e. rate of imposition of penalties for unauthorised constructions has been raised.

The Government control over the Municipality is quite comprehensive. The appointment of the Chairman, the C.E.O. and all technical officers require the approval of the State Government. The Deputy Commissioner has been empowered to suspend any resolution of the Board. He is also endowed with emergency powers to order for the execution of any work or the doing of any act which the Municipality is empowered to execute or do under the cover of service or safety of the public. In the matter of personnel, the State Government has the right to ask the Board


to suspend, warn or fine any of its employees whom it finds neglecting official duties, or is abusing his powers or position.

In the heart of the town the Cantonment area lies, but there is no co-ordination between these two bodies.

Another interesting feature of Shillong Municipal politics is that unlike the Gauhati Municipal Corporation party politics are absent in the Municipality. But groupism or group politics however exists.

Finally, regarding the overall performance of the Board under the earlier democratic set-up and under the existing bureaucratic control - the opinions expressed by some former members and some citizens are contradictory. Most of the former members interviewed, expressed concern about the present undemocratic Municipal Government at Shillong, but they deliberately avoided the question of the present performance of the Board - whereas some citizens expressed the view that the performance of the Municipality is better after the dissolution of the Board in July, 1973. But press reports are highly critical about postponement of Shillong civic elections by the Government since 1971 thus depriving the citizens of their basic democratic rights. 73

73. Young India, 5.4.1973.
Let us come back to the Syiemship. As mentioned at the outset when the British came in contact with Khasi Hills, the territory was divided into 25 Klakas headed by the Chiefs; of which 16 were Syiemships, the Chiefs of 3 were known as Lyngdohs and another 5 as Sirdars and a confederacy known as Shella Confederacy, under 4 elected officers called Wahadadars. The Chiefs were elected according to the customs prevalent in their respective Klakas. The election of the Chief had to be recognised by the British Government. The Chiefs were in Subsidiary Alliance with the British Government. Therefore their relationships with the British were governed by treaties and engagements entered into by the Chiefs with the British Government. It may be noted here that the Chiefs were not territorial sovereigns but elected democratic chiefs whose authority extended over their subjects and not over their lands, and their jurisdiction extended over villages the boundaries of which were determined. The people governed themselves through their elected rulers, who were responsible to their respective Durbars or councils. When the British assumed sovereignty they retained the indigenous local organisations and their authority to administer the Klakas by recognising the same through sanads granted to the Chiefs.
After Independence the Chiefs entered into an agreement with the Government of India and Instruments of Accession were executed on 17th August, 1948. The Instrument of Accession empowered the Dominion Legislature to make laws for the Khasi states in respect of any matter. These states were finally merged with the K & J Hills district on the 26th January, 1950.

The Constitution of India introduced radical changes in the Khasi Hills District. A District Council with wide powers for managing the internal affairs of the tribes, was established. The members of the District Council were elected by universal adult franchise. The first elected District Council came into existence in 1952. The District Council is the Executive Legislative and judicial authority in respect of certain matters provided in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. It has jurisdiction over such areas which comprised the territories which before the commencement of the Constitution were known as the Khasi States and the K & J Hills District excluding any areas for the time being comprised within the Cantonment and Municipality of Shillong; but including so much of area comprised within the Municipality of Shillong as formed part of the Khasi States of Mymensingh, provided that for certain purposes mentioned therein.

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no part of the area comprised within the Shillong Municipality shall be deemed to be within the autonomous district. It will appear from the above that the jurisdiction of the autonomous District Council; i.e.; excepting the British Portion of Shillong Municipality and the Cantonment Areas of Shillong, the other areas formed part of the K & J Hills autonomous district. Thus the Police Bazar ward, the European ward and a major portion of the Jail Road ward were British areas; but a portion of the area near the Polo Ground which was tagged with the Jail Road ward, however, formed part of the Khasi States of Mylliem.

The Sixth Schedule, provides Governmental machinery for the Tribal Areas. It safe guards the interests of the tribals in the tribal areas. It allows tribals to manage their own affairs according to their own genius.