Chapter X

STRENGTH AND COMPOSITION OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL

The District Council is not only a statutory local authority, but also a corporate body, having perpetual succession and a common seal with the right to sue and be sued. It consists of representatives elected by adult suffrage to administer the functions, and exercise the powers entrusted to it. It consists of elected and nominated members.

In 1952, both the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council and the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council consisted of twenty-four members each, of whom eighteen were elected and six were nominated. It must be recalled that on the 27th June 1952 when the first United Khasi-Jaintia Hills was inaugurated, there was a strong demonstration in Shillong against the principle of nomination of members to the District Council which culminated in the arrest of forty-two persons. Eventually, the Government of Assam agreed to do away with the principle of nomination in the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Council from the next general election. Thus in 1958, the nominated elements were eliminated in the District Council. But after the formation of Meghalaya, the nominated element was reintroduced in Khasi Hills District. In the 1972 elections, the electorate was called to elect twenty-nine members but one member was nominated by the Governor. But in the Garo Hills, the nominated element has reduced to two in 1964, and again, it was increased to three in 1972 in the Council of thirty members.
The Jowai Autonomous District Council had twelve elected members and four nominated members in 1967. But in 1972, the nominated element was reduced to three in a council of nineteen members.

**Element of nomination:** It is provided in the Rules that the Governor may nominate certain number of persons to represent the minority and the unrepresented communities. So far as the three District Councils of Meghalaya are concerned, the nominated element existed throughout except for the period 1956 to 1972 in the Khasi Hills. In 1952, it was one-fourth of the total strength, but later it was reduced everywhere. At present, there are three nominated members both in the Garo Hills District Council and the Jaintia Hills District Council. But in the Khasi Hills, there is only one nominated member.

The Assam Autonomous District Council Rules were amended in 1967 which laid down that the nominated members would hold office during the pleasure of the Governor. Earlier, the nominated members held office during the life of the Council. Although the Rules laid down that the nominated members shall hold office during the pleasure of the Governor, yet, so far all of them held office for a single term. Further, there is no bar for the Governor to nominate any person for any number of terms. While nominating members, the Governor should bear in mind that he should see that the stability of the District Council is ensured. He should also see that representation should be given to important interests which may fail to secure representation by election.

1. Paragraph 2 of the Sixth Schedule.
It must be borne in mind that there is no single procedure for the nomination of members. At the beginning, after the formation of the first District Council, it depended upon the whims and fancies of the Minister for Tribal Areas Department. Generally, the Chief Executive Member of the District Council concerned made the recommendation. If the relationship between the Minister and the Chief Executive Member was cordial, the former generally accepted the recommendations of the latter; but if the relationship was strained, the Minister might refuse to accept the recommendation of the Chief Executive Member.

Let us now take the case-study to illustrate this point.² The case history of the Garo Hills District Council might be taken as a good example. Immediately after the death of Singdom K. Sangma, a nominated member of the District Council on 24th August, 1953, Captain W.A. Sangma who was then Chief Executive Member recommended either Henry W. Momin or Jefferson Areng to fill up the seat on the plea that both of them were residents of the community development project area of Resubelpara and that such nomination would ensure efficient coordination of the various self-help activities in this area. But, at the instance of his colleague Harrison W. Momin the Chief Executive Member changed his mind and recommended Nandaram K. Sangma from the same area on the ground that he was a more reliable social worker. Again, at the instance of the same colleague, Capt. W.A. Sangma changed his mind and recommended Sudhindra Marak on the plea that Nandaram K. Sangma was unsuitable for the job. The Government refused to accept this recommendation because Sudhindra Marak was not eligible for nomination. He was still a teacher and

² W.A. Sangma papers.
a government servant. The Chief Executive Member then advised Sudhindra Marak to resign his job from the school. Immediately Sudhindra sent a telegram to the Chief Executive Member informing him that he had resigned his job though actually he did not. On the basis of this telegram, Capt. W.A.Sangma requested the Chief Minister, Assam, who was then holding charge of the Tribal Areas Department to nominate Sudhindra Marak. But the Government of Assam learned from its own sources of information that since Sudhindra Marak had not resigned from Government service, his case could not be considered. Further, the Chief Executive Member was requested to state the actual position. Capt. W.A.Sangma then sent a telegram to the Government thus: "Sudhindra Marak resigned previously, but rejoined the post temporarily due to delay in the finalization of nomination at the request of the School Committee. Ready to resign post as soon as nomination is finalised".

The whole position became fishy. The Government did not take any action on the recommendation because it was interested in its own candidate a candidate belonging to the Congress Party. The Chief Executive Member then met the Chief Minister to settle the issue. According to the version of Capt. W.A.Sangma, the Chief Minister assured him that the Government would consider only the recommendation made by the District Council. Perhaps, it was on the basis of the assurance given by the Chief Minister which made the Chief Executive Member to write to him thus: "If the Government cannot approve the nomination of Sudhindra Marak, I would request you to kindly let me know immediately in order to enable the Executive Committee to recommend someone else in his place". The Chief Minister, in his reply denied that he had given any assurance to the effect that only the names recommended by the Executive
Committee would be considered. Again, he pointed out that "Sudhindra Marak is still serving in an educational institution and no arrangement has yet been made to replace him in the school which is likely to suffer for want of a teacher. Besides there are certain allegations against Sudhindra Marak and the Government is making certain enquiries into these allegations". Then Capt. W.A. Sangma replied: "Kindly permit me to observe that in this district, it is only the G.N.C. which commands the confidence of the people. As such it claims ............ that it speaks for and represents the majority of the people of the entire district. The Government is requested to kindly take this fact into consideration in deciding the question of the nomination of Sudhindra Marak".

Capt. W.A. Sangma then sent a petition signed by fifteen members of the Garo Hills District Council, pleading that since the name recommended by the Executive Committee could not be accepted by the Government, "We desire that the vacant nominated seat in the Council should not be filled up at all".

On the other hand, the Congress Party which was anxious to weaken the hold of the Garo National Council in that district put pressure on the Chief Minister to nominate Emonsing Sangma a Congress M.L.A. to fill up the vacant nominated seat. The Chief Minister vacillated. Eventually, after two years since the vacancy occurred, the Chief Minister sent a telegram to the Chief Executive Member informing him that Emonsing Sangma was nominated to fill up the vacant seat. The relationship would have been better if the Chief Minister had remained quiet instead of filling up the vacancy.

Capt. W.S. Sangma replied to the Chief Minister thus: "We are deeply disappointed and express our misgivings with regard to the real intention of the Government". Some people think that this
incident was one of the most important factors which was respon­
ble in the change of attitude of Capt. W.A.Sangma towards the
Government of Assam. It may be recalled that while thanking the
members of the Garo Hills District Council for electing him as
Chief Executive Member on 3rd May 1952, Capt. W.A.Sangma said:"We
must feel ourselves as one with the rest of Assam and of India.
Let all of us be guided by the saying - Do unto others as you
yourself would like others to do unto you - ". Similarly, on 7th
May 1952, Capt. W.A.Sangma moved a motion "recording the great
confidence in his (Chief Minister Bishnu Ram Medhi's) capacity,
sincerity and able leadership". But in 1954, this same captain was
destined to lead the Hill State movement and to lead the struggle
for the attainment of the separate State for the Autonomous
Districts of Assam. In fact, Capt. Sangma, inspite of his belief
in the able leadership of Bishnu Ram Medhi, had already built up
an idea that only when the hill people would get a State of their
own would the political problem of North-East India be solved.
It was he who was the first to send a telegram to Wilson Reade,
President of the Khasi National Durbar, congratulating him that
the latter had sent a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, to
demand the creation of a separate State for the Hill areas in 1952.
Therefore, it is wrong to over-emphasise that it was the controversy
over the nomination of Sudhindra Sangma which was responsible for
the change of attitude on the part of Capt. W.A.Sangma.

Perhaps, it was this controversy which made the Government
of Assam to change its mind. In 1957, all the names recommended by
the Chief Executive Member were accepted by the Government. But in
1964, when the Garo National Council Parliamentary Party suggested
the names of Dalbir Lohar and Shrimati Bishadini Sangma to be
nominated, the Government said that the advice of the District Council in session should be obtained for nomination. Accordingly, the District Council met and promptly approved the names. The Government accepted this recommendation and refused the names of Srimati Roneswari R. Marak and Chatra Bahadur suggested by the Garo Hills District Congress Committee. Since then, this practice has been followed till today.

United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council: In 1952, there was no controversy over the names of nominated Member. Since Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy was then a Minister in the Assam Cabinet, there was no scope for any controversy. All the six nominated members - Josingh Rynjah, Kistobin Rymbai, Srimati Lariam Khongwir, H.P. Barua, Loknath Joshi and H.K. Gupta were nominated by the Government at the instance of Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy.

In 1958 and 1967 there were no nominated members. All the seats were filled up by election. But in 1972, only one member was nominated. The District Council in session recommended A. Alley to be a nominated Member and the Government of Meghalaya accepted the recommendation.

In the Jaintia Hills District Council also, all the names recommended by the District Council in Session were accepted by the Government both in 1967 and 1973.

Generally speaking, the principle of nomination has not been abused by the State Government, whether during the period when these three District Councils were in Assam or after the formation of Meghalaya. Except on one occasion, the persons recommended by the district council were accepted by the Government.

Elections to the District Council: A general survey of the elections to the District Councils in Meghalaya reveals the fact that the
people of this area have been politically matured. All the elections were peaceful and smooth. The people have exercised their franchise democratically. Not only that, the electorate have been conscious of their rights to elect their representatives to the district council.

Garo Hills: The first general election to the Garo Hills District Council was held in 1952. In that year, there were 18 constituencies. There were six uncontested returns. But in all the other 12 constituencies there were contests. In two constituencies there were four candidates each, in one constituency there were three candidates, but in each of the other nine constituencies there was a straight contest. The total number of candidates was only 29. The Garo National Councils set up its candidates in all the constituencies and captured 15 out of the 18 seats available for contest. One interesting feature was that only one out of the fifteen elected candidates of the Garo National Council was elected by a minority vote. Capt. W.A. Sangma had to face three rivals but all of them forfeited their security deposit. There were only two lady members in the first Garo Hills District Council, Surjamoti Momin, an independent candidate who defeated her male rival Jogesh Marak by 614 votes and Roneswari Marak, a nominated member.

The general election to the second District Council was held in 1957. The main characteristics of the election this time can be summarised thus: The elected seats were increased to 22 and the nominated seats were reduced to two, the number of candidates was more than in 1952, and there were only two uncontested returns. In all the 20 constituencies, there were 47 candidates...... In seven constituencies there were three candidates each, but there was a straight contest in all the other 13 constituencies. There was only
one lady candidate. Shrimati Surjamoti Momin who won in 1952 as an independent candidate, had to face two male rivals. But out of 2263 votes polled in her constituency, she polled an absolute majority of votes by securing 1349 votes. This time, Capt. W.A. Sangma had to fight against his life-long political rival Emonsing Sangma, but Emonsing Sangma fared very badly. He polled only 534 votes as against 1534 votes polled by Capt. W.A. Sangma. However, Emonsing Sangma was elected from another constituency by defeating a Garo National Council candidate, Koneri Marak. The other important features of the 1957 election were that excepting one, all the successful candidates were elected by an absolute majority of votes polled. Six candidates forfeited their security deposits; 13 candidates were elected for the second term; and the second district council had only one lady member, the redoubtable Surjamoti Momin who fought as an independent candidate both in 1952 and in 1957.

In 1964 there were 22 constituencies. The seats reserved for nomination by the Governor were the same as in 1957. This time, there were 58 candidates in all; three candidates in each of the seven constituencies, four candidates in each of the four constituencies, one uncontested return, and a straight contest in the other ten constituencies. Among the 58 candidates, four forfeited his security. Seven successful candidates were elected for the third term, five candidates were elected for the second term, and the remaining ten members were new comers to the district council. This time, in a council of 24 members, there was only one lady who was nominated by the Governor, Srimati Bisadini Sangma.

Among the defeated candidates were Emerson Momin and Nalindma Sangma who were elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1962 as candidates of the Garo National Council, which had by then become a component unit of the All-Party Hill Leaders' Conference.
Since, the two gentlemen did not resign from the Assam Legislative Assembly along with the other M.L.As belonging to the APHLC, and as such, did not abide by the mandate of the party, they were rejected by the people in the 1964 election to the Garo Hills District Council. Nalindra Sangma polled only 439 votes whereas Emerson Momin polled just 163 votes. Emerson Momin forfeited his security deposit.

The election to the fourth district council which was due in 1969 had to be postponed due to the constitutional changes which were likely to take place in the hill areas. Thus the term of the Council was extended by three years. The election to the Garo Hills District Council was held in 1972. In accordance with the North Eastern Areas Reorganisation Act, 1971, the number of members of this District Council was increased from 24 to 30.

In the 1972 general election, there were 27 constituencies. The number of seats reserved for nomination by the Governor was three. This time, the Garo National Council, as a constituent unit of the APHLC adopted a policy of one person one office and no double membership. That is to say that no person belonging to the party should contest the District Council seat and the Assembly seat at one and the same time. This decision was not welcomed by some members of the party. Bronson Momin and Mohan Sangma, for instance, defied the decision of the party and contested both for the State Assembly as well as for the District Council, but both were defeated.

Out of the 27 constituencies, five APHLC members were returned uncontested. Out of the remaining 22 constituencies, the APHLC captured 16 seats. Three were won by the Congress and three by the Independents. The three nominated members belonged to the APHLC.
Never before there were as many as 64 candidates as in 1972. In one constituency there were five candidates, in five constituencies there were four candidates in each, in six constituencies there were three candidates in each, and in the remaining ten constituencies there were two candidates in each. Out of the 64 candidates, eight lost their security deposit. The most important leaders who were defeated in the 1972 elections were Bronson Komin, Akrammozaman and Mohan Sangma.

Again, out of the 27 elected members, Lohindra Sangma and Kody K. Marak were elected for the fourth term consecutively, two were elected for the third term, four for the second term, and the rest of the members were new comers to the District Council. The younger elements were given the opportunity to share the responsibility in the affairs of the District Council. Out of the 22 constituencies where there were contests, nine were elected by a minority vote.

A survey of the elections to the Garo Hills District council reveals one peculiar characteristics. The fair sex was not adequately represented because they were not very keen to contest the elections. In 1964 only one lady, Ewince Marak contested the elections, but she had to face three male rivals and she was defeated. She polled only 17 percent of the votes polled. Since there was no lady member in the Council, the Governor had to nominate Srimati Bishadini Sangma to the Council. In 1972 election also, there was only one lady candidate, Evangeline Shira who contested as an independent candidate, but she was defeated by a male candidate belonging to the APHLC.

United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District: A general survey of the 1952 elections shows that none of the national parties took
part in the election to the District Council. In 1952, there were 18 constituencies. Two regional parties - the Khasi-Jaintia Federated State Conference and the Khasi-Jaintia Durbar fielded their candidates from 16 constituencies. There were 2 uncontested returns. In five constituencies there were four candidates in each, in four constituencies there were three candidates in each, and in seven constituencies there were straight contests. As many as seven candidates forfeited their deposits and all of them were independents. The Khasi-Jaintia Federated States Conference captured 8 seats whereas the Khasi-Jaintia Durbar captured 4 seats. The rest of the seats were captured by the independents. But the six nominated members were pro-Congress and pro-Khasi-Jaintia Federated State Conference. The most prominent casualties were G.G. Swell who contested as a candidate of the Khasi-Jaintia Durbar and T. Cajee who contested as a candidate of the Khasi-Jaintia Federated State Conference.

In 1957, the nominated elements were abolished in the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council. Therefore, in the 1957 elections there were 24 seats. The Eastern India Tribal Union set up candidates from all the constituencies and captured 14 seats whereas the Congress and the Khasi-Jaintia Federated State combined won only four seats. The other six seats were captured by the independents. The most important features of the 1957 elections were that there were more candidates in 1957 than in 1952, there were greater number of independent candidates and the majority of them forfeited their deposit. There was only one uncontested return. Some of the sitting members like Brojo Roy, Jerlie E. Tariang, Atiar Singh and Jormanick Syiem were defeated. Other prominent casualties were A.S. Khongphai, Alexander Warjri, Aaron
Alley and B.B.Iyngdoh. There was an interesting result from the Mawlong constituency in which Rostanwell War of the EITU got equal number of votes with B.B.Iyngdoh of the Khasi-Jaintia Federated State Conference. The other two candidates forfeited their security deposit. Before the Returning Officer applied the toss of coin as provided in the Rules, the two candidates came to a gentlemen's agreement that whosoever luck favoured, he would resign. Luck went in favour of Rostanwell War. As per gentlemen's agreement, Rostanwell War resigned. In the bye election that was held in 1958, B.B.Iyngdoh did not contest. But, Rostanwell War was defeated by O.Cs. Syiemlieh who in 1957 lost his deposit.

The life of the District Council was extended from time to time. The election which was due to be held in 1962 was not held, but it was held only in 1967, after the Jowai Sub-division was created into a separate Autonomous District. There were 24 seats for the Khasi Hills District Council. There were as many as 64 candidates who entered the field of whom 24 belonged to the AFHLC, 10 belonged to the Congress, and 30 were independents. There were 4 uncontested returns. The Congress which fought on the issue of Khasi and Jaintia State was totally beaten. The AFHLC which fought on the issue of Hill State captured all the seats except one. The only one seat in which the AFHLC was defeated was won by an independent candidate. Even Neandar Syiem who returned uncontested in 1952 and 1957 was miserably defeated by an AFHLC candidate.

In 1972 the seats were increased to thirty, 29 elected and one nominated. For the 29 constituencies, there were as many as 110 candidates. There was one uncontested return, there was a straight contest in each of the five constituencies, there were three candidates in each of the six constituencies, there were four
candidates in each of the eleven constituencies, there were five candidates in one constituency, there were six candidates in each of the three constituencies, there were seven candidates in one constituency, and there were eight candidates in one constituency, the APHLC captured only 12 seats, the HSPDP won 11 seats, the Congress captured 4 seats, and the other two seats went to the independents. The most important features of the 1972 elections were: first the electorate rejected all the four sitting M.L.As. including S.D.D.Nichols-Roy who was a Minister in the Sangma Cabinet. Secondly, for the first time, two women were elected to the District Council. Thirdly, there was the maximum number of independent candidates. Fourthly, the APHLC which was responsible for the formation of Meghalaya could not get the chance to control the Khasi Hills District Council. Fifthly, most of the veterans like A.S. Khongphai and B.M.Pugh were miserably defeated. Lastly, most of the elected candidates were elected by minority votes. The only one nominated member belonged to the HSPDP.

Jaintia Hills: The first election to the Jowai Autonomous District Council was held in 1967. The election to the District Council was a tame affair. The APHLC won ten of the twelve elected seats, and all the three nominated members belonged to the APHLC. There were as many as 35 candidates who contested for the 12 available seats. There was no uncontested return, there were four candidates in each of the four constituencies, there were three candidates in each of the three constituencies, and in each of the five constituencies there was a straight contest. Out of the 35 candidates, 8 lost their deposit, and all of them were independents. Out of the 12 elected members, four were elected by a minority vote, three APHLC members and one independent. Humphrey Hadem who had
been elected continuously since 1952 narrowly escaped by defeating his rival by a margin of three votes. The second election was held not in 1972 but in 1973. The number of elected seats was increased to sixteen. For the 16 seats, there were as many as 47 candidates, a majority of them were independents. There was no uncontested return. There was a straight contest in six constituencies, there were three candidates in each of the seven constituencies, there were four candidates in one constituency and there were five candidates in each of the two constituencies. As many as 9 candidates forfeited their security deposit, and all of them were independents. The APHLC captured 9 seats, the HSPDP three seats and independents four. Among the successful candidates as many as 6 were elected by a minority vote. All the nominated members belonged to the APHLC. Later, one member belonging to the HSPDP and another independent member joined the APHLC. Thus the APHLC commanded a comfortable majority in the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council.