Chapter XV

Movement for separate Hill State

Genesis of the movement: The wave of political consciousness struck the hills of North-Eastern India soon after India got its Independence. The wave was not lost among the educated and emerging tribal leaders because they quickly picked up the spirit and ideal of the struggle for emancipation of the backward hill tribes, held till independence by the foreign rulers in "excluded" and "partially excluded" areas, isolated from the mainstream of national life.

Soon after the attainment of Independence, the people of the Hills of the then composite State of Assam felt that their only way to progress to help them catch up with the more advanced sections of the people of Assam in particular and of the country in general lay through getting a State of their own which they then loosely termed as a Hill State in Order that they might develop according to their own genius, culture and distinct way of life.

The movement for a separate Hill State first took its roots in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills where leaders preached this idea openly in their public addresses. The movement was first spearheaded by the Khasi National Durbar which commanded the respect of all Khasi. It may be recalled that on 27th June 1952, there was a big demonstration in Shillong against the principle of nomination to the District Council. But in their public speeches, the organisers boldly declared that the goal was the attainment of a separate Hill State. A need for a combined organised appreach was
felt. Hence the Khasi National Durbar took up the leadership. One week before the visit of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to Shillong, the Khasi National Durbar prepared a memorandum to be presented to the Prime Minister. Thus on 19th October 1952, Wilson Reade, President of the Khasi National Durbar, presented a memorandum to the Prime Minister. The memorandum pointed out a number of inadequacies in the Sixth Schedule. But the two most important points raised were: "we opposed the proposal of making Assamese the State language of Assam. As Hill Tribes we are having to learn besides our own vernacular, English and Hindi which is the lingua franca of India; addition of Assamese over and above these will be very heavy to our boys and girls in schools and colleges.

The Hills of Assam are contiguous and the people inhabiting them are most or less of the same stock, having affinity in culture, ways of life, character and in many other respects. They have common understanding, common fear of encroachment and exploitation by major communities. The unification of these hills under one administration and under the Indian Union will, it is hoped, meet the aspirations of all the Tribal people". 1

Immediately, Capt. W.A. Sangma, Chief Executive Member of the Garo Hills District Council, sent a telegram to Wilson Reade on 20th October 1952 thus: "Garos support the stand of the Khasi National Durbar". 2

From that time onwards, the movement for separate Hill State began to gain momentum both in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and in the Garo Hills. Capt. W.A. Sangma then convened a meeting of the representatives of tribal areas at Tura in December 1952 to discuss matters connected with the promotion of Tribal Welfare. That meeting

resolved to form the Assam Hills Tribal Union. The aim of this Tribal Union was the formation of a Hill State which would include all the Hill areas of Assam, the whole of Manipur, the present Nagaland and the tribal belt of Tripura. The Assam Hills Tribal Union held a series of meetings till the name was changed into the Eastern India Tribal Union in its session held at Aizawl in October 1953.

After the Government of India appointed the States Reorganisation Commission the Khasi National Durbar was among the first organisations in the Hill areas to submit a memorandum to the Commission, demanding the creation of a separate Hill State to comprise all the hill areas of Assam. The memorandum was sent on 18th April 1954 and it was signed by Wilson Reade and Hoover Lynniewta as President and Secretary of the Durbar. Once again, Capt. W.A. Sangma, Chairman of the Garo Hills States Reorganisation Committee sent an Express wire to the States Reorganisation Commission thus: "Garo fully support Demand by Khasi National Durbar for formation of separate Hill State Stop Reasons for support being submitted". 3

Two months after, the Members of the Executive Committees of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, Lushai Hills and North-Cachar Hills District Councils met on the 16th and 17th June 1954 at Shillong to discuss things of mutual interest. 4 The Executive Members of the Nikia Hills District Council wired that they could not come due to transport difficulties. B.N. Roy, Chief Executive Member of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council presided over the meeting. In the course of his welcome address, B.N. Roy said: "From the number of points for discussion proposed and submitted separately by you and by us, I find wrongly or

3. Ibid.
4. Proceedings of the meeting of the members of the Executive Committee of the District Councils.
rightly - that they can conveniently be reduced and covered by two common points of interest and supreme importance and those points are: (1) Formation of a separate Hill State, and (2) Amendments of the Sixth Schedule which evidently, you all have found out by experience, does not fully satisfy us because it confer no real autonomy as the word implies and as expected and aspired for............. I feel sure we have now realised that out future destiny is bound up inseparably".

Capt. W.A. Sangma, Chief Executive Member of Garo Hills District Council strongly pleaded for the creation of a separate Hill State. According to him, unless the Hill people would get a State of their own, there would be no safeguard for the preservation of the identity - racial, language and culture of the hill people. He said that the Sixth Schedule did not provide any such safeguard. Further he pointed out that the Sixth Schedule did not provide any such safeguard. Further he pointed out that the Sixth Schedule did not endow the district Councils with adequate powers to safeguard their interest - social, economic and political. He stated that: "On the contrary there are ample loopholes for interference from outside in matters relating to day-to-day administration of their districts". He also apprised the conference that the attitudes of the people of the plains were not conducive to the interest and welfare of the hills people. In support of his contention, he cited the latest resolution adopted by the Assom Jatya Mahasabha which stated that the area or areas which were inimical to the adoption of the Assamese Language as the State Language should be severed from Assam, and such area or areas should be constituted into a centrally administered area. He further said that since nobody from the plains had ever contradicted
or counteracted this attitude, it meant that the people of the plains were behind such a move. Capt. Sangma also cited the speech made by Nilmoni Phukan on the floor of the Assembly in 1948 that Assamese should be the State language and that all the languages of different communities and their culture should be absorbed in Assamese culture. Therefore, Capt. Sangma concluded: "The future of Hills people is at stake. If this attitude of the Assamese brethren continues, there will be no other alternative for the Hills people but to go all out for a separate Part A Hill State which will enable them to preserve their racial identity, language and culture".

Pu Lalsawia, the Chief Executive Member of the Lushai Hills District Council said that "This is the time to demand amendments of the Sixth Schedule and if this is refused, the unity and the cry for the separate Hills State will be strengthened". Mr. Khotlang, Chief Executive Member of the North-Cachar Hills District Council also shared Pu Lalsawia's view. Eventually the meeting unanimously decided to demand the constitution of a separate State for all the Hill Areas of Assam with an area of 27,599 square miles and a population of 11,71,098. The State would be christened as the Eastern Hill State. This State might include any other area or areas, geographically contiguous to the autonomous districts, the areas predominantly inhabited by the tribal people.

The meeting decided that English would be the official language of the Hill State until it was replaced by Hindi. Some people thought that this decision was meant for the consumption of the Government of India. In fact, since no single tribal language could hope to occupy the status of a State language, the most logical step was to adopt the lingua franca of the country as the State language.
Bishnu Ram Medhi, the then Chief Minister of Assam, informed Prime Minister of the decisions of the meeting of members of the Executive Committees of the District Councils. Pandit Nehru replied thus: "Broadly speaking, I think that our approach (to the tribal areas) should be towards somewhat greater autonomy of these districts within the State of Assam. They have a very definite individuality of their own and they should be allowed to feel that they are looking after themselves. That was the sole object of having these autonomous districts. If we go a little further in that direction, it will help in solving the problems and making them contended members of the State of Assam".

In his reply to the Prime Minister, Chief Minister Medhi stated that it was his considered view as well as his colleagues that the time was not opportune enough to think in terms of greater autonomy to the district councils. He further argued that more autonomy to the district Councils would only strengthen the dis-integrating forces.

The Tura Conference and the States Reorganisation Commission: On the eve of the visit of the members of the States Reorganisation Commission to Shillong, Captain Sangma and others of the Eastern India Tribal Union thought that it would be better that the memorandum to be submitted to the States Reorganisation Commission should stand in the name of the people of the autonomous districts rather than in the name of the Eastern India Tribal Union. Therefore, Capt. W.A. Sangma convened a Conference of the people of the Autonomous Districts at Tura on 6th October 1954. Large number of leaders from

5. Nehru's letter to Chief Minister Bishnu Ram Medhi.
6. Medhi's reply to Prime Minister Nehru.
the Hill Areas attended the Conference. Among the leading leaders present was Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy, Minister of Excise, Jails, etc. Government of Assam. During the session in which Rev. Nichols-Roy was absent, the Conference decided to demand for a separate Hills State. When Rev. Nichols-Roy attended later, he made a statement thus: "I give my moral support to this demand for a Hills State. I feel like weeping when I think of separation, but since that is the desire of the people........... I will give my moral support to this demand on condition that none will speak in a way as to cause a feeling of hatred and enmity against our Assamese brethren." 7

The Tura Conference resolved to submit a memorandum to the States Reorganisation Commission in the name of "The Hills People of the Autonomous Districts in Assam" to be signed by Capt. W.A. Sangma and B.M. Roy as Co-presidents. 8 In fact, the memorandum was drafted by Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy.

Apart from the Tura Conference, there were other organisations like the Khasi National Durbar, the Highlanders' Union, the Hills Union, the Garo National Council and the United Mizo Freedom Organisation which submitted memoranda to the States Reorganisation Commission demanding a Hill State. 9

First of all, let us examine the memorandum submitted by the Tura Conference. 10 The memorandum stated "This demand for a Hill State which will be separate from the State of Assam but will be

8. Proceedings of the Tura Conference held in October 1954.
10. Memorandum of the Hills People of the Autonomous Districts in Assam submitted to the SRC.
inside the Indian Union in our great country, India, is not based on any consideration than on the fundamental feelings of the Hills people who have always felt among themselves that they are one people different from the people of the plain areas in manners and social customs and language. Though there are different languages among them, yet they feel they are one, inseparably bound together. It is true that the psychological feeling was already pervading. But on points of facts, there have been differences among the people of the Hill Areas themselves. For instance, the tribals do not speak the same language, they do not observe the same customs and they do not follow the same religion. The matrilineal system operates among the Khasis and the Garos but not among other tribes. But fundamentally, their attitude towards life is common, their firm belief in social equality is common, their belief in a casteless and classless society is common, and their mores and manners are common. Therefore, despite the fact that they live in ridges absolutely separated from one another, despite the fact that they were not connected with one another by easy communications, yet the feeling of oneness was pervading. It is also true that they are fundamentally different from the people of the plains in almost all respects, yet the differences among themselves are minor.

Secondly, the memorandum pointed out that the autonomy enshrined in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was full of loopholes. The autonomy was not real and substantial.

Thirdly, the memorandum pointed out that there were some people dwelling in the plains of Assam such as the Kacharis, the Lalungs and the Miris which had already accepted the Assamese language.
Therefore their weal and woe were bound up with the plains people of Assam. But this was not the case with the people dwelling in the hills who had their distinct territorial areas and lived in their own territories ruling themselves in their own way until they were brought under the British administration. Even the British rulers did not interfere with their land, customs or their administration. They only acted like supervisors among them.

Fourthly, from the historical point of view there had been no political, cultural or emotional ties between the people of the Hills and of the plains. The major tribes lived politically independent of each other. Their administrative set-up was democratic whereas the people of the plains lived under an autocratic set-up. The memorandum further said that the attitude of the people of the plains towards the people of the hills was one of superiority. Even the word 'tribe' or 'tribal' created a feeling of superiority in the minds of the people of the plains.

Fifthly, the memorandum stated that the Assamese were making every effort to impose their language and culture on the hill people. They were also trying to dominate on the hill people. It pointed out that although the Assamese constituted only fifty percent of the total population, yet they controlled seventy five percent of the seats in the Legislature, ninety percent of the seats in the Cabinet, seventy percent in public services. Further, all the major technical and non-technical institutions were located only in the Brahmaputra valley. In the preparation and implementation of plans, the hills were given scanty treatment. For instance, the essential road communications were not constructed. Hence there was very little economic development.

Sixthly, the memorandum pointed out thus: "It is true that some of our leaders have thought that if the proposed amendments
of the Sixth Schedule, are allowed without any changes, the hills, may to a certain extent, be satisfied with the present set-up; but events move fast, and the feelings among the Hills people are being crystalised that nothing short of a separate Hill State will satisfy them and save them from becoming extinct in time."

Seventhly, it was also pointed out that, the Hill Districts were located in the frontier areas. The memorandum claimed: "To make the Hill Districts... I feel satisfied, is very essential for the whole of Assam and India". The reason given was that "The separate Hill State will be friendly and brotherly to the closest neighbours i.e., the people of the plains of Assam".

The memorandum listed a number of advantages in having a separate Hill State. It would create a sense of responsibility in the representatives of the people; it would enable the hill people to breathe fresh and free air and without being subjected to any race, it would generate enthusiasm to work hard for the progress of the country; it would bring out real leaders of the people; that the common language should be used for the transaction of official and non-official business; that there could be effective planning for the development of the area as well as the effective utilization of the grant-in-aid under Article 275 of the Constitution, that Hindi could become the language of the region; and that the interests of the people in land would be effectively protected.

Further, the Memorandum urged that the sentiments of the people should not be brushed aside. "The Hill people are not in the habit of agitating as the plains people do, and are not in the habit of making processions, crying slogans, but they are used to press their case in a cool and calm manner".

The memorandum also said that after the formation of a separate Hill State, Assam would enjoy many advantages. Assam State
would be more homogeneous because Bengalee language was not so
different from Assamese language. Assam would be free from the
burden of the Hills people because the Hill State would be
financially helped by the Central Government. There would, then,
be mutual love and respect between the Hills people and the plains
people. Assam would not be worried about the border areas because
the border areas would be the burden of the Government of India
and of the Hill State.

Finally, the memorandum also stated that the formation of a
separate Hill State would bring many advantages to the Government
of India. The Hill People would feel grateful to the leaders of
India. The Hill people would be more prepared to defend the
frontiers of India in times of external aggression. They would
contribute their services to the armed forces of India. The whole
of India would learn more about equality and secularism from the
Hill people. Thus the move was not for the disintegration of India
but for strengthening the unity of India.

The memorandum gave a sketch of the structure of the Hill
State which would be known as the Eastern Hill State. The Hill
State would comprise of the six Autonomous Districts and the
Tribal Areas of the North Eastern Frontier Agency and any other
areas contiguous to the Autonomous District predominantly inhabited
by the tribal people. The Eastern Hill State would have a Legislative
Assembly of 25 members. It is not understood how the memorialists
contemplated of a State Assembly of 25 members when Article 170 of
the Constitution fixes the minimum number at 60. It would have its
own Governor who might also be in charge of the whole of NEFA
area so that NEFA would form part of the Hill State in future. It
would have its own Ministry and in such ministry all the six
autonomous district would be represented. The Hill State might
have a Common Public Service Commission, a Common University, a common High Court and a Common Accountant General with Assam.

It was suggested that Assam should have its own capital. But until the construction of the capital, Assam might function from Shillong, which would be the capital of the Hill State.

Since the memorandum was essentially intended to be presented by leaders who were members of the Executive Committees of the District Councils, it was provided that the autonomous districts under the Sixth Schedule would remain as they were.

Further, the language of the State and of higher education would be English until replaced by Hindi.

Lastly, the memorandum admitted that the Hill State would, for some time, not be financially viable. But since the area was of strategic importance, any expenditure to be incurred by the Central Government would be a profitable investment.

The memoranda presented by the other organisations in support of a demand for the creation of the Hill State were not so elaborate. But they contained more or less the same arguments as those presented by the Tura Conference.

**Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy's Secret Memorandum of Personal Views**: True to his commitment at the Tura Conference but very untrue to the principle of ministerial collective responsibility, Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy submitted his secret memorandum to the States Reorganisation Commission supporting the demand for the formation of a separate Hill State without the knowledge of the State Government of which he was a Minister for Excise and Jails etc. He contradicted the memorandum submitted by the State Government. In the first paragraph of the memorandum, Rev. Nichols-Roy explained thus: "In regard to the demand for the formation of the Eastern Hill State,
my views are different from those of my colleagues in the Assam Government. I am the only hillman in the Cabinet. For the sake of bringing a peaceful atmosphere in this Eastern Frontier area I wholeheartedly support the demand as put forth in the memorandum submitted by the Presidents of the Tura Conference of the leaders of the Autonomous Districts.

His long experience as legislator and as a Minister enabled Nichols-Roy to marshal facts and figures to reply to all conceivable objections that might be raised against the formation of the Eastern Hill State. In fact, his memorandum fully supplemented the memorandum submitted by the Tura Conference. His memorandum was drafted in the form of objections and replies.

First, to the objection that the demand for a Part A State was unreasonable because the population was small, Rev. Nichols-Roy replied that the Eastern Hill State would be a special State for obvious reasons. He said the proposed Hill State would be bigger in size than the plains districts of Assam. In area and population, it would be bigger than many of the Part C States. The Governor would also deal with the North Eastern Frontier Area as the Agent of the Government of India. The problems of the whole frontier area were different from those existing anywhere in India. Further, being situated in the Frontier area, its importance was great and special.

Secondly, to the objection that the demand for a Governor's State with a small legislature would contravene Article 170 of the Constitution, Rev. Nichols-Roy said that once the importance of the Hill State was conceded to, as a special case, suitable amendment might be brought forward to Article 170 of the Constitution.
Thirdly, it might be argued that the Lushai Hills was not contiguous to the other Autonomous Districts. But Rev. Nichols-Roy pointed out that even the Andaman Islands is separated from the Country by its own sea. North Bengal and West Bengal is intervened by Bihar from West Bengal.

Fourthly, at no time in the History of Assam did the plains people ever rule over the hills of Assam. Even the Ahoms and the Kacharis had never ruled the hills. It is true, Rev. Nichols-Roy said, that in the past, the Khasi kings used to maintain friendly relations with the plains. Hence, the Eastern Hill State would not disturb such happy relationship as neighbours.

Fifthly, it was argued by some that Assamese was the language among the Hills people themselves. Rev. Nichols-Roy admitted that such a claim might be true in the case of the Naga Hills. But the people of the Southern slopes of the Garo, the Khasi-Jaintia and the Lushai Hills used broken Bengalee language. Therefore, this was no argument against the creation of the Hill State.

Sixthly, Rev. Nichols-Roy also said that it would be wrong to think that the formation of a separate Hill State would endanger the unity and solidarity of India. In fact it would strengthen the unity of the country for various reasons. It would cause the hills people to be more firmly rooted in their motherland, India, and it would create a sense of self-respect. It would create a sense of security because they would be able to get rid of the feeling of being dominated by their neighbours. Since the people would be more freedom loving, it would increase their high sense of patriotism and that would strengthen the defence of India. The border area people would be a great bulwark of the Defence force. The creation of a Hill State did not imply that such a Hill State would go outside India but to contribute more towards the unity and solidarity of India.
Seventhly, against the argument of some leaders who said that Assam itself would become small and it might no longer be a Part A State, Rev. Nichols-Roy gave the following counter-arguments. The smallness of the State would not weaken it when it was peaceful. The formation of a Hill State would not destroy the beauty of the Garden of India but it would enhance the beauty. An experiment of a mixed set-up had been made in the last seven years, but instead of developing a cementing feeling, experience had been quite the opposite. Assam minus the autonomous Districts should not worry because it would still be bigger than many Part C States. It would still have an area of 26,497 square miles. Hence, the question of reducing the status of Assam would not arise.

Eighthly, Rev. Nichols-Roy uttered his sense of surprise that some leaders advanced their arguments that in the Eastern Hill State, the Christian block would take the lead and hence it should not be allowed. He said that such question should not have been raised at all by any one who loved India. Those who raised were religious communalists at heart. Such objection was against the spirit of secularism enshrined in the great Indian constitution. There was nothing wrong if Christians should take the lead. The hills people themselves made no difference between Christians and people professing other faiths. In the movement for hill State many non-christians had taken the lead. He cited A.S.Khongphai,B.L. (Advocate) who was a Khasi and a non-christian but who was one of the sponsors of the Tura Conference. He further said that in the Hill areas there was no communal virus.

To the objection that the Eastern Hill State would become the field for foreign missionaries, Rev. Nichols-Roy strongly refuted as follows. The Control of Foreign Missionaries has been and will be in the hand of the Government of India. Again, the
Eastern Hill State would be very enthusiastic for keeping any part of India within India and would not brook any anti-Indian tendency anywhere. All the citizens would look to the interest of the motherland. Further, he pointed out that all religions would be respected in the Eastern Hill State as enjoined by the Constitution of India and would be practised to the fullest extent. He admitted that he himself, in his Christian religious work, had not been connected financially with any foreign missionary society. Many Indian Christians including the hills Christians had developed such a mentality. Rev. Nichols-Roy also said that the movement for a Hill State was not prompted by missionaries.

Then again, Rev. Nichols-Roy said that there were some leaders in Assam who alleged that the movement was like the movement for Pakistan. Rev. Nichols-Roy replied that none of the hill leaders had ever cherished an idea of a separate State outside the Indian Union.

Further, he refuted all allegations that the tribal people would fight one another in a Hill State by saying that such an argument was merely a pessimistic view.

Lastly, as regards, finance the people of the hills had full confidence that the Government of India would not leave the frontier districts to themselves financially.

In order to conform with his proposals, Rev. Nichols-Roy also suggested suitable amendments to relevant Articles of the Constitution as well as suitable amendments to the relevant paragraphs of the Sixth Schedule.

It must be recalled that the Mikir Hills and the North-Cachar Hills District Councils did not ask for a separate Hill State. The
Mikir National Council expressed itself against the idea of the Hill State. It simply demanded greater autonomy and greater financial power to the District Council. The North Cachar Hills District Council was non-committal in this matter.

Proposals of the Government of Assam: The Government of Assam was totally opposed to the formation of a Hill State. On the other hand, curiously and remarkably enough, the Government of Assam pleaded for greater Assam which might comprise the whole of Eastern Himalaya Sub-region. In other words, the Government of Assam was in favour of creating a State which might comprise Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Sikkim, the Districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar in West Bengal, North East Frontier Agency and all the autonomous Hill Districts including Naga Hills. There was no doubt that this area consisted of most varied mixture of races and tribes, yet it had certain common features. All the areas proposed to be included were still under-developed. So also, geographically all the areas were important.

Definitely, the Government of Assam was not serious when it made such a proposal. It knew fully well that it would be opposed by all concerned. However, the Government of Assam argued that there was close contact between Assam and Cooch Behar, which formed part of Assam even during the 13th century. Further, since the Nepalese of Darjeeling had agitated for a separate State, Assam proposed that Darjeeling, Duars and Cooch Behar should be integrated with Assam. The Government of Assam further stated that Manipur and Tripura could form part of Assam provided the finance for development came from the Centre. It appears that the Government of Assam proposed

12. Memorandum of the Govt. of Assam to the SRC.
an impossible formula in order to show its opposition to the formation of a separate Hill State.

Recommendations of the States Re-organisation Commission: 13

A close study of the approach made by the States Reorganisation regarding the demand for the formation of a separate Hill State clearly reveals that the members studied the case with a prejudiced mind. The Commission said that "the problem of the hill areas at this stage is at least as much psychological as political. There is no denying the fact that the demand for a hill state partly reflects the separatist pull of the extremist elements". This is not a fact. The first memorandum to the Prime Minister for the creation of a Hill State was submitted by Wilson Reade, President of the Khasi National Durbar. Reade was the most respected teacher in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. He served as a teacher for a record period of more than sixty years and died at the age of ninety four, after getting many kinds of awards including the National Award for his services for the cause of education. He was respected by people of all communities. Politically, he was most non-controversial figure. He was a true nationalist. He was one of the most important advisers to have exercised his influence on the rulers of the Khasi States to accede to the Indian Union. Hence to brand him as an extremist is most unfair. The same thing can be said of the sponsors of the Tura Conference. W.A.Sangma who later on took a leading role in the struggle for a separate Hill State, is essentially a democrat, a nationalist, a compromiser, a conciliator and a moderator. By temperament, training and conviction he is a constitutionalist. The same thing can be said of

B.M. Roy who was always an ardent believer in the great heritage and unity of India. Other leaders of the Tura Conference were all democrats, nationalists and constitutionalists. The members of the Commission should have realised the fact that even Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy, one of the senior-most legislators and ministers in Assam at that time supported Hill State. There might be some extremist elements here and there, but their number was insignificant. Such elements can be found all over the country.

The Commission thought that the demands "reflect what has sometimes been labelled the "national Park approach". The members of the Commission thought that the Hill State movement was the outcome of the Inner Line policy of the Government of India. It appears that the Commission was misled by the repeated arguments advanced by the politicians of the plains. The Commission ignored the point that there is a line system in Assam devised by the people of the plains. The inner line was demanded and is still demanded by the hill people themselves. If there had been no Inner Line policy the situation in the hill areas would have been explosive.

The Recommendation of the States Reorganisation Commission was also self contradictory. On the one hand, it recommended that special attention should be paid to the development of the Hill Areas. It also realised the potentiality of exploiting the extensive natural resources. But on the other hand, it thought that individually or collectively the hill districts would not be able to command the resources, money, material man power needed to implement the development programmes.

There were actually only two considerations which induced the S.R.C. not to recommend for the formation of a Hill State. First, it did not like to encourage the formation of small States.
Secondly, it appears that it was suspicious of the high patriotism of the hills people when it said that the security of the frontiers should not be affected.

The aftermath of the SRC Reports: Although the States Reorganisation Commission did not recommend the creation of a Hill State, yet there was an interesting debate on the subject in the Assam Legislative Assembly where the majority of the M.L.As. from the autonomous Hill Districts supported the demand for Hill State. Only very few of them were not in favour of such a State.¹⁴

Under the banner of the Eastern India Tribal Union, the Hill State movement spread like wild fire from one corner to the other and from one autonomous hill district to another. The Eastern India Tribal Union, the Garo National Council and the United Mizo Freedom Organisation were acting in concert to strengthen the movement. The 1957 elections to the Lok Sabha, to the Legislative Assembly and to the many District Councils were fought on the issue of Hill State. For Parliamentary Seat, the Lushai Hills was tagged with one of the Constituencies in Cachar and Garo Hills was still tagged with Dhubri seat. Hence there was only one Parliamentary seat for the autonomous Districts. But Hoover Hyhniwta, a candidate set up by the EITU defeated his nearest Congress rival, G.G.Swell by a comfortable majority. The EITU, the GNC and the UMFO together captured ten out of the fifteen seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly. The Congress Party set up ten candidates but won only one seat in the Mikir Hills. Thus the Hills Congress which fought against Hill State was badly beaten in the Hill areas. The tremendous success of the three combined hill State parties at the polls, gave a momentum to the movement for a separate hill State. In the District Councils' elections also, the Hill State leaders met with tremendous success.

¹⁴. Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, 17.11.1955.
Rev. Nichols-Roy's second thought: 

In spite of the success of the protagonists of hill State in the 1957 elections, the movement was to face with some stiff hurdles. Rev. Nichols-Roy who fought the 1957 elections as an independent candidate in favour of Hill State changed his mind. Immediately after he was elected, he became opposed to the formation of a separate Hill State. This time, he said that the hill State would be very expensive. Then he put forward a new formula.

His new plan was for a Hill Ministry. According to this new scheme, each autonomous district should have a Minister or a Deputy Minister in the Council of Ministers of Assam. The Hill Ministers should be appointed by the Governor in his discretion. The Governor should preside over the meetings of the Hill Ministers for the disposal of matters relating to the District Councils, who would act as the Agent of the President of India. For the administration of the hill areas, there should be a separate secretariat under the control of the Hill Ministry. The Hill Ministry should form part of the Assam Cabinet for the administration of common subjects. The portfolios of the Hill Ministers should be allotted by the Governor in his own discretion. But the Reverend did not visualise the inherent difficulties of the principle of collective responsibility. If the Governor was to allot portfolios to the Hill Ministers, if the Governor was to preside over the meetings of the Hill Ministry, then who would be held responsible in the legislature? The Chief Minister of Assam would not take the responsibility of what would be done in the Hill Ministry. Did the Reverend conceive of two Chief Ministers? The problem was in the dark. If the Assam Cabinet was

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voted out of office, would the Hill Ministers resign? Again, the Hill Ministers were to be selected by the Governor, and as such, they were to serve during the pleasure of the Governor. What would happen if the ruling party would come from the plains whereas all elected members elected from the hill districts belonged to the opposition? - Would the members representing the hill areas be willing to work under the ruling party? In a word, the scheme formulated by Rev. Nichols-Roy went against the very roots of Parliamentary democracy.

Another reason which induced Rev. Nichols-Roy to oppose the creation of a separate Hill State was that, according to him, the District Councils would disappear with the formation of the Hill State. He said that if the District Council would disappear, the non-tribals would be able to acquire land in the hill Districts and they would push out the original inhabitants from their ancestral landed property. He also said, that Assam might shift the capital from Shillong and in that case the economy of the Khasis would be seriously hampered. Lastly, he expressed his fear that the Government of the Hill State might fall into the hands of non-tribals.

Inspite of the opposition of Rev. Nichols-Roy, the Hills' Congress, the Khasi-Jaintia Federated State Conference, and other splinter groups against the formation of the Hill State, the movement for a separate hill state became stronger day by day. The Eastern India Tribal Union then made an attempt to bring about an amalgamation of all political parties in the hill areas to strengthen the movement for a hill State. In its fifth Conference held on 30th May and 1st June 1957, the EITU adopted the following resolution: "Resolved that with reference to the amalgamation of Tribal political parties in the autonomous districts, the conference
records with gratification the decision taken by the Khasi political parties to merge into one unit under the Eastern India Tribal Union and the unanimous consent of the Garo National Council in this Session to amalgamate itself with the Union".  

This momentous decision was the starting point of the ultimate formation of the powerful All-Party Hill Leaders' Conference which successfully carried on the relentless struggle for the Hill State. Attempts were also made to get the North Cachar Hills and the Mizo Hills into the fold. Therefore, the Conference resolved to depute Rev. B.M. Pugh, Capt. W.A. Sangma and T. Cajee to go to Aizawl in order to bring about the amalgamation of the United Mizo Freedom Organisation and the Mizo Union into one district Branch of the EITU and that the same Committee along with Pu. Lalmawia should also go to North-Cachar Hills to start a branch of the EITU as indicated in a letter received from Hamdhan Mohan Kaphlongbar, M.L.A.  

During the same session, the EITU also realise the need of forming the All-India Tribal Union. Hence, it adopted a resolution thus: "Resolved that we ask Mr. B.M. Pugh to write to Mr. Jaipal Singh, M.P. and Tribal leader of Jharkhand Party in Bihar, to explore the possibilities of forming an All-India Tribal Union".  

This aim, however, remained elusive. But the Tribal leaders of the North-Eastern Hill Areas moved ahead. Making a start straight from grass roots, the emergent political force of the Garo Hills and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, bound by a complete unity of purpose, moved onwards for the achievement of the goal.  

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16. Resolution of the meeting of the EITU, 1.6.1957.
17. Proceedings of the EITU meeting, 1.6.1957.
18. Ibid.
In these circumstances, the Prime Minister requested his Home Minister Pandit G.B. Pant to visit Assam in October 1957. Once again, the Eastern India Tribal Union submitted a memorandum to the Home Minister urging for the early formation of a Hill State. But Pandit Pant flatly refused to concede the demand. Pandit Pant however suggested that a new arrangement might be made at the state level in which the hill people of the autonomous districts would be able to participate in decision making and in the shaping of policies of the State in general and of the autonomous district in particular. The EITU representatives agreed to examine the possibility of such an arrangement at the State level.

Meanwhile, there was a strong feeling among the members of the Congress Parliamentary Party for a change of leadership. The general elections of 1957 clearly demonstrated beyond doubt that Chief Minister Bishnu Ram Medhi did not command the confidence of the minorities particularly the people of the hill areas. Further, he did not command the full confidence of the Congress Parliamentary Party. Pressure mounted up for replacing B.R. Medhi by another leader. The Prime Minister visited the State to solve the problems. He succeeded in persuading Bishnu Ram Medhi to resign honourably. Consequently he resigned for reasons of health. Pandit Nehru also succeeded in bringing B.P. Chaliha as the new leader of the Parliamentary Party. B.P. Chaliha was sworn in as Chief Minister of Assam on 28th December 1957. Pandit Nehru also persuaded the EITU leaders to participate in the administration of the State.

The change in the leadership in Assam, the persuasion of Pandit Nehru and Pandit Pant, the attitude of the Central leaders against the formation of the Hill State and other factors made the EITU leaders to reconsider the case. This issue was placed before the EITU Conference held in Shillong. Two divergent views were
expressed. The majority of leaders from the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were against such proposal on the ground that by associating itself with the Congress Parliamentary Party, the EITU might forfeit the Confidence that the people had reposed in the party. Secondly, such an association might give the impression to the outside world that the EITU had bid goodbye to the Hill State movement. But the majority of the delegates from the Garo Hills and the Mizo Hills were in favour of giving the new arrangement a fair trial. They said that the Hill State movement should be strengthened. Since the new scheme was not going to work out satisfactorily, they would be in a stronger position to demand a separate Hill State after the failure of the new arrangement. Thus, in order to satisfy the wishes of the Prime Minister, the Conference decided to accept the proposal by a majority vote. Thus, Capt.W.A. Sangma was appointed as Minister for Tribal Areas Department of Cabinet rank, Lalmawia was also taken into the Ministry.

The association of the Eastern India Tribal Union with the Congress Parliamentary Party brought about repercussions in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The people blamed the leaders that they had abandoned the Hill State Movement. Thus, in the bye-election held to the District Council held in 1958, the EITU candidate, Rostanwell War who was elected in 1957, was badly defeated by an independent candidate, Ocs.Syiemlieh who forfeited his deposit in 1957 from Mawlong constituency. The same story repeated itself in the Bye election to the Assam Legislative Assembly from the Nongpoh constituency when the EITU candidate Wilson Reade was defeated by Jormanick Syiem, an independent candidate. So also, consequent upon the death of Rev. J.J.M.Nichols-Roy, the EITU candidate, T.Cajee lost to a Congress candidate Maham Singh who in 1957 contested merely
on principle from Cherrapunjee constituency. Maham Singh defeated both T. Cajee and D. D. Pugh an independent candidate. So also, pressure mounted up in the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council to remove Rev. B. M. Pugh and Henry Cotton from the Executive Committee because they supported the association of the EITU and the Congress. In a word, there was confusion in the minds of the people for about two years regarding the Hill State movement.

As a Minister for Tribal Areas Department, Capt. W. A. Sangma was given a free hand in the solution of many problems relating to the tribal areas. He brought into existence the Tribal Affairs Advisory Council. He sincerely tried to solve the problems of the border areas. The relations between Capt. Sangma and B. P. Chaliha appeared to be most cordial. For a time, it is evident that Capt. W. A. Sangma had given up the idea of the formation of a separate Hill State, though he was still a strong advocate for the amendment of the Sixth Schedule. When the Government of India decided to create Nagaland as a separate State, Capt. Sangma wrote to Chief Minister Chaliha thus: "The recent decision of the Government of India to create a new State for Nagaland is bound to lead to far-reaching repercussions in other hill districts unless the amendment of the Sixth Schedule as recommended by the Advisory Council can be taken up at a very early date". Thus, had it not been for the language policy of the Government of Assam, it would be difficult to say whether the Hill State movement would ever raise its head again. But something happened in 1960 which accelerated the movement for a separate Hill State. It was the language policy of the Government of Assam which shortened the honey-moon between the Eastern India Tribal Union and the Assam Congress Parliamentary Party.

Why should there be a demand for the formation of the Hills State?

Let us now first examine the various reasons which were advanced for the formation of a separate Hill State. First of all, the hill people complained that attempts were being made by the Assamese to impose their language on the hills people. Assamese was being used in many meetings which the tribals could not understand. In the Legislative Assembly also, many Assamese members expressed themselves in Assamese. As a result, the members from the hill areas had to sit like Egyptian mummies. The hills people said that in the Hill State, English would be the State language until replaced by Hindi, the lingua franca of India.

But the Government of Assam denied these allegations. The Government of Assam pointed out that English was spoken by a very small minority in the hill areas. Instead of English, they spoke Assamese. It was also argued that it was not a fact that most of the members of the Assam Legislative Assembly spoke in Assamese. In fact, only very few of them spoke in Assamese. The Ministers invariably spoke in English. Further, the Government of Assam admitted that as regards language, it was a fact that provision was made for teaching Assamese in a limited way as an optional subject in some of the High Schools in the Hill Areas. This was because Assamese was the traditional lingua franca of the hill people. But, it pointed out that it had never been the policy of the Government to impose Assamese on the non-Assamese population. The Government further pointed out that arrangements were made for learning the tribal languages in some schools of the plains districts. In order to give more importance to tribal languages, the passing of language test in the major hill languages was made compulsory for any officer posted in the hill district. Lastly the Government said that English would continue for all time to come and each
District Council was free to prescribe any language as the language of the district.

Secondly, the tribal leaders complained that the policy of the Government of Assam had been to enable the Assamese and other non-tribal to acquire vast tracts of land in the Hill areas. As a result of such a policy, year after year the tribal people were pushed out of their lands into the interior. In the municipal areas of Shillong, certain localities were named after some Ministers or others from the plains such as Motinagar, Bishnupur and the like. In reply, the Government of Assam said that due to the shortage of accommodation facilities, the Government land outside the Autonomous District and also from lands purchased from the non-tribals and that not an inch of land belonging to tribals was utilised for this purpose. However, the Government admitted that tribal lands were acquired for the settlement of the displaced persons from East Bengal. The Government of Assam evaded the fact that large areas of Lachumiere, Bishnupur, Motinagar and other localities in Shillong which fall within the autonomous district were settled to non-tribals. The Government did not answer the accusation that lands in the Khasi Hills and the Garo Hills were allotted to the people of the plains. It must be admitted that tribals were sensitive so far as land was concerned because they realised the fact that once land went into the hands of non-tribals, their means of livelihood was gone forever.

The Hill State leaders also pointed out that land belonging to the tribals were acquired for the purpose of constructing Hydro-electric projects for the benefit of the people of the plains. The Government of Assam replied that land was acquired for the construction of dams, power houses, administrative buildings and staff quarters only after proper negotiations with the local people.
Agreements were secured both for acquisition and for payment of compensation. It further said that such projects would not only benefit the people of the plains, but in the long run the tribal people also.

The third very important accusation made by the tribal leaders was against the intention of the Government of Assam to extend its jurisdiction over Shillong. On 2nd November 1950, a Commission was appointed to consider the exclusion of Shillong town and its neighbourhood from the jurisdiction of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council. In fact the District Council had not yet come into existence. It must be recalled that according to paragraph 20 of the Six Schedule, excepting European ward, police bazar ward, the greater part of Jail Road ward and the Cantonment area, all the other areas are under Mylliem Syiemship which falls under the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District. The State Government wanted to take away all areas in Shillong which form a part of Mylliem Syiemship. There were protests by the Khasi people of Shillong, by the United Khasi-Jaintia Federated State Conference, and by the Advisory Council of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council. Rev. Nichols-Roy who was then a Cabinet Minister in Assam also disagreed with the proposal. Some people went to see Chief Minister Medhi to protest against the proposal of the Government. It appears that the Chief Minister did not treat them cordially. These people returned and started a campaign for Hill State. Eventually, the proposal was dropped after damaging the relations between the Khasis and the Government of Assam.

Fourthly, personal factor also played an important part for strengthening the movement for a hill State. It is an admitted fact that Gopinath Bardoloi and Rev. Nichols-Roy were the main
architects of the Sixth Schedule. It was but natural for Rev. Nichols-Roy to expect that he would be allotted the portfolio of Tribal Areas Department. But that was not the case. According to B.R.Nedhi, since Rev. Nichols-Roy was elected by a particular constituency, he did not represent all the tribals and hence as Chief Minister he should be in charge of the Tribal Areas Department. This argument is illogical. Even the Chief Minister was elected by a particular constituency and not by the whole State. So also, any Minister was expected to hold charge of any major Department. Since Rev. Nichols-Roy and B.R.Nedhi did not see eye to eye, Rev. Nichols-Roy drifted away from the Congress and contested the 1957 general election as an independent candidate on the Hill State issue.

The same story repeated itself in the relationship of B.R.Nedhi and Capt. Sangma. At first, Sangma praised the leadership of B.R.Nedhi as Chief Minister. But a conflict arose between the two over the question of the nomination to the Garo Hills District Council. Instead of accepting the decision of the District Council, the Chief Minister nominated a Congress man to fill up the vacant post. Further, the Tribal Areas Department did not follow a rational principle. Instead, it interfered frequently with the internal affairs of the District Councils and this caused misgivings among the hill people.

Fifthly, the press and platform in the plains adopted an attitude of superiority towards the tribal people. They demanded the introduction of Assamese language as the medium of instruction in the schools in the Hill Areas. They demanded that all tribal cultures should be merged with the Assamese culture. They demanded that the NEFA should be brought under the control of Assam. This attitude created an impression that the plains people were adopting
Sixthly, another great factor which led to the demand for a separate Hill State was economic factor. It was argued that the economic development of the hill areas could have been better. Sufficient funds were placed by the Government of India at the disposal of the State Government for economic development. But till 1954, communications were not developed. As a result of this, border trade was at a standstill. Before 1947, the Khasis and the Garos had prosperous trade relations with Sylhet and Mymensingh. But after partition, the border markets were closed. Thus the economic conditions of the people were seriously affected. The Dhebar Commission reported that the Assam Government failed to discharge its constitutional obligations towards the hill people. They were not given superior services. Funds allotted for the promotion of Tribal Welfare was either not spent on them or mis-spent. Even when it was spent, it was used for the benefit of the relatively advanced tribes. Thus, the bulk of the tribal population remained unaffected by the development activity. The Hill State leaders blamed the Government of Assam that it was not able to spend all the money allotted for the development of the Hill Areas because it was not at all interested in the development of the Hill Areas. The State Government admitted that grant-in-aid from the Government of India could not be utilised for obvious reasons. The reasons given by the State Government were late receipt of the grant, lack of effective machinery for the execution of certain schemes, shortage of technical personnel, shortage of essential materials and shortage of labour. Hence, the progress was slow. All these arguments were baseless. If the State Government could make progress in the plains, it could have done the same thing in the Hill Areas.
Seventhly, some of the actions of the Government of Assam were high handed. For instance, one interesting incident was the suspension of the Syiem of Mylliem. The Chief Minister requested Rev. Nichols-Roy to talk to the Syiem of Mylliem about the accusations labelled against him. But without waiting for the result from such a proposed talk, and guided by his own advisers, the Chief Minister ordered the suspension of the Syiem of Mylliem by the Executive Committee of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council. About five thousand women surrounded the Council Hall while it was in session. The situation became delicate, but it was tactfully dealt with by the Deputy Commissioner to save the situation. This action clearly demonstrated the fact that Chief Minister Medhi did no longer have faith in Rev. Nichols-Roy.

The Hill State leaders claimed that the amount of autonomy given to the District Councils was not substantial. They pointed out that whereas the draft constitution did not provide the assent of the Governor to all legislations passed by the District Council, but in its final form, the constitution has such a provision. This argument is really not valid because even the laws passed by the State Legislature require the assent of the Governor. Even the laws passed by the two houses of Parliament must receive the assent of the President.

Again, it was pointed out that the Draft Constitution did not authorise the Governor to apply any legislation, State or Union without the consent of the District Council. But the Constituent Assembly provided that the Governor might apply any legislation to the autonomous district. The Governor means the State Government. Thus, the Government of Assam applied many legislations to the Autonomous Hill Districts. However, such laws were also extended
in the past by the British Government. Of course, in relation to the erstwhile Khasi States, such legislations were applied with the consent of the rulers.

Further, the Hill State leaders pointed out that the Draft Constitution provided that no licence or lease should be granted by the Government of Assam for the purpose of the extraction of mineral resources in the autonomous Districts save in consultation with the District Council concerned. But this provision was deleted by the Constituent Assembly thereby enabled the Government of Assam to grant licences to any one to extract mineral resources within the autonomous districts without consulting the District Councils.

Further, the Constitution provides that the Governor may by public notification unite two or more autonomous districts or part thereof so as to form one autonomous district and to define the boundaries of any autonomous district. These provisions did not appear in the Draft Constitution. Thus, the Government of Assam was given a sledge hammer in these matters. It is due to these provisions that a part of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District was snatched away in order to form the new Autonomous District of Mikir Hills without the consent of the District Council which was yet to be formed.

Again, the Draft Constitution provided that the exclusion and the diminution of any area of any District Council should be done only with the consent of the District Council concerned. But the Constituent Assembly deleted this provision and thereby enabled the State Government to exclude or diminish the administrative area of any autonomous district, without assigning any reason.

Eighthly, the hill leaders said that they had not been given the share in decision making and in the preparation of the Five-
Year Plans. They were simply asked to approve the schemes prepared by the Tribal Areas Department. They argued that in a Hill State they would have the full opportunity in preparing the Five-Year Plans themselves. The Government of Assam explained that it was its policy to associate the Hills MLAs. in the preparation of schemes for the development of the hill areas. The State Government also admitted that all the proposals made by the representatives from the hill areas could not be accepted because of the paucity of funds. Hence, priority had to be given only to certain more important schemes.

Ninethly, the hill leaders claimed that they had their own culture and ways of life, their own distinct area and had lived in those areas, ruling themselves in their own way until they were brought under the control of the British. Therefore they should be separated from Assam. In denial of this claim, the State Government pointed out that at no period of History had the people of the Hills and Plains lived in water-tight compartments. Both had contributed to build up the composite culture of Assam. At no time did the hill people rule themselves. But all the claims made by the State Government were against the facts of history. Of course, there had been cordial relationship in the past when the Hill people were still independent.

Finally, the hill leaders claimed that the hill people of the autonomous districts were one and they were fundamentally different from the plains. Hence, they were entitled to have a State of their own within the great Indian Republic.

Opposition to the Hill State: The antagonists of the Hill State movement put forward a number of reasons against the formation of the Hill State. According to them the proposed Hill State would
not be territorially compact. But the protagonists of the Hill State pointed out that even North and West Bengal are separated by Bihar.

The Government of Assam said that if the Hill State was formed, there would be difficulty in the maintenance of the existing communications. It would also hamper the ambitious plan prepared for the development of communication. This argument was not valid because all the National Highways are the concern of the Central Government. If communications are important from the point of defence, they would be financed and executed by the Defence Ministry. Further, the Frontier Areas were already outside the jurisdiction of the Government of Assam.

Again, the antagonists argued that the hill people would suffer economically if they were separated from Assam because many of them had to depend on the plains for all essential commodities. This argument is not reasonable. Assam itself is dependent on other States for the supply of essential commodities, technical personnel and labour. Even if a Hill State was formed, trade would always continue in its natural course.

Further, it was said that the formation of the Hill State would seriously affect Planning. But even Pandit Nehru assured that the representatives from the Hill Areas would be invited to the National Development Council. In fact, the hill people will be in a better position to participate in the formation of plans and it can prepare its own plan and submit it to the planning Commission for inclusion in the National Plan.

Then again, it was pointed out that the Hills are the source of rivers, and as such, the source of water power. It was argued that if the Hills were separated, there would not be any proper
scheme for flood control because the source should be controlled. But the Government of Assam forgot the fact that the greatest source of floods is the Brahmaputra, the source of which, is in a foreign country. None of the rivers flowing from the Autonomous Hill Districts had ever proved a menace to the plains of Assam. India gets only the middle, whereas both the upper and lower reaches of the Brahmaputra river are not available to us because they are in foreign countries.

The State Government pointed out the necessity of preserving and maintaining forest wealth. The efficient management would require an expensive machinery and technical staff. It also said that careless exploitation of forests or the lack of proper conservation of those forests would endanger the future well-being both of the hills and the plains people. The State Government was working under the conception that in a Hill State, the people would not take interest in preserving forest wealth. It appears as if the Government of Assam thought that the hill people were not capable of thinking in the right direction.

Further, the State Government said that cheap power was necessary for the rapid industrialization of the State. Such Hydro-Electric projects could be easily constructed in the hill areas. If there is a single State it would be more convenient for the generation of power. But the State Government forgot the fact that the Hill State would also get the same rights from the planning commission and that Assam would get the power from the Hill State. The other alternative would be to have a joint Board or Corporation like the Damodar Valley Corporation.
It was also argued that each Autonomous District is not homogeneous in race, dialects and religions. In fact even Assam itself, and for that matter, even India is not homogeneous. At least, in Assam, once in ten years there is language conflict and this is yet to be solved.

The antagonists of Hill State said that although the Hill Districts might be able to provide people for general administrative services and other subordinate services, but they would not be able to provide people for the higher posts such as Heads of the Departments. There would also be the difficulty of getting trained and qualified persons for technical services. That was the position of Assam itself before 1950. But that did not prevent Assam to get a State of its own. Equality of opportunity is the spirit of the constitution. The transitional difficulty is always faced by any State or any Country.

One of the most unreasonable arguments advanced against the formation of the Hill State was security reasons. It appears as if the antagonists suspected the hill people that they might betray the country. It was really something of adding wounds to injury to think that the hill people were not patriotic. Secondly, it is really difficult to understand this argument. The defence of the country is the subject of the Central Government. It depends on the number of divisions, radar stations, missile bases and other basic defence organisation that it keeps in the North East for the defence of the Country's Frontiers.

Again, it was argued that the population of the Hill State would be smaller than the population of other States. But the Hill State leaders replied that there are some states in the U.S.A. which have less than one million population. But in area a Hill State would be bigger with 27,599 square miles than Assam with
26,497 square miles. According to Rev. Nichols-Roy, the Hill State would be a special State with special problems.

The Assamese feared that Assam would become a small State and its status would be reduced. This is not a reasonable argument. The status of the State depends on the character of the people and the quantum of real contribution that it makes for the country's progress. A small country like U.K. or Japan is respected because of the contribution that the people of those countries have made to human civilazation.

The Government of Assam also claimed that the formation of the Hill State would strike at the roots of the unity of the country. It is true that the unity of Assam would be lost, but definitely the unity of the country would not be jeopardised by the formation of the Hill State. The hill people, in fact feel that they are as loyal to the country as other Indians if not more.

The Government of Assam blamed the foreign missionaries for the movement for Hill State. This is really a ridiculous argument. Had it not been for the fact that the Hill people are Indians, they would have accepted the British overture to convert the hill areas into a British Protectorate as early as 1945. The Khasi States would have remained independent or they might have acceded to Pakistan. The foreign missionaries were not responsible for the demand for Ahom Tai or for a Purbachal Pradesh. They were not responsible in breaking Hyderabad which existed for 170 years. Therefore, the contention that the Christian Missionaries were responsible for a hill state movement was baseless.

The antagonists also said that the Inner Line policy of the British Government was responsible for keeping the hill people away from the plains. But the Inner Line regulation was imposed as far
back as 1872. It was intended to protect the tribals from being exploited by the traders and money lenders of the plains. If there would have been no Inner Line Regulations, the tribal would have become landless proletariat. What had happened in Tripura where there was no Inner Line Regulation?. The Tribals were uprooted. The fact remains that the people of the plains considered the tribal as inferior to them and did not like to mix up with them socially.

Lastly, the Opponents of Hill State stated that there was closest economic, cultural and political relations between the people of the hills and the people of the plains. These Opponents forgot the fact that the Andhras and Tamilians lived for centuries together but both wanted separation. Historically, it is not a fact that the hills people and the plains people were in closest relation with one another. In fact, there had been no attempt to build up a composite culture due to differences of attitudes towards culture. Thus all the arguments against the formation of the Hill State advanced from many quarters are not tenable. The real question was the question of policy on the part of the Government of India.