Chapter XXIII

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this thesis to describe the political and constitutional development in the hill areas which comprise the State of Meghalaya. Chapters have been devoted to show how the Khasis and the Garos developed their social and political organisations in the early times. It is really the proof of the stamina and character of these communities that have enabled them to retain their traditional institutions through the vicissitudes of history. During the whole of the British period, there was a long debate over the question whether these hill areas should be included in or excluded from Assam. It was this controversy which brought about the creation of the District Councils after independence. But even after the coming of the District Councils, all traditional and political institutions are still retained.

The formation of the District Councils was the stepping stone towards the formation of the State of Meghalaya. During the period of the struggle, the hill state movement was not fully understood and appreciated by the political leaders of the country. But since the movement was constitutional and peaceful, the leaders of the country gradually understood that the hill people had a just cause to fight for. Eventually, the Government of India consulted eminent social scientists like Dr. N.K. Bose, Dr. Surjit Sinha, Prof. M.N. Srinivas and Dr. B.K. Roy Burman.
Prof. H.X. Bose described the hill state movement as a sub-nationalism which was something negative and separatist in tendency. But, Prof. M.N. Srinivas was of the opinion that the real task for the Government was to identify the real factors which were responsible for the movement. He said: "Blaming the 'rebelliousness', 'inherent separatism', or similar other 'ills' of the North-Eastern Hill Areas tribes upon such favourite whipping horses as the 'legacy of colonialism', 'Conservatism of the tribes', 'ethnic myopia', or 'activities of foreign missionaries', only helps in diverting attention from identifying the real factors responsible for weak integration". He pleaded that the hill state movement would not hamper the process of emotional integration of the country. This is really true because emotional integration is not a one-way process and requires adjustments on the part of both the majority and minority. Integration is a dynamic phenomenon and it grows out of sustained inter-action. The smoother and more understanding this interaction, the quicker the pace of emotional integration.

Dr. B.K. Roy Burman characterised the hill state movement as proto-nationalism which was something positive, constructive and expansive. It was his view which prevailed and which made the Government of India to concede to the demand for statehood. But Dr. Surjit Sinha preferred to remain neutral.

Thus, although the language issue was over-emphasised during the whole period of the struggle for hill state, yet the real cause was the desire of the hill people to get a state of their own so that they could preserve their identity, their culture, their mores and ways of life and their language. It was the urge of the innermost core of their heart which prompted them to move ahead for the fulfillment of their desire so that they
would be in a position to speed up the process of emotional integration with the rest of the country. The language controversy, therefore, was only a pretext which accelerated the movement.

The Hill state movement had a number of peculiarities. First, it was a constitutional movement and at no stage was the movement marred by any untoward incident. Secondly, the State of Meghalaya was brought into existence without much labour pains. Thirdly, no movement for statehood had so many plans conceived, formulated, offered and rejected as in the case of the Hill State movement. Lastly, during the British period, there was a proposal that all the hill areas would be united. Even during the first phase of the Hill State movement, the aim was for the unification of the Hill areas. What has actually resulted? The Nagas fought for independence and got statehood; the Mizos rebelled and got a Union Territory, the Khasis and the Garos struggled for sixteen years successfully for Statehood, but Arunachal Pradesh got a Union Territory without any effort.

It may be recalled that political developments were not at all uniform. Political consciousness was more dominant in the Khasi Hills. In the Garo Hills, political consciousness was dormant. It was only after independence that the Garos became fully politically conscious. Since Shillong was then the capital of Assam, political consciousness came first in the Khasi Hills.

Secondly, the British did not try to exercise full control in any of the Hill areas. Although the Garo Hills and the Jaintia Hills and some small pockets in the Khasi Hills were brought under the direct control of the British administration, the Khasi states were in subsidiary alliance with the British. Nevertheless, nowhere, did the British ever try to uproot the democratic traditions.
traditional institutions of the Garos and the Khasis.

Thirdly, excepting Shillong, neither the Garo Hills nor the Khasi Hills ever had any representation in the Provincial Legislature till 1937. They could have their representation in the Union Parliament only in 1952.

Fourthly, till 1927, there was no tribal minister in the province. So also from the period 1929 to 1937, there was no tribal minister in the Assam Ministry.

Fifthly, although the British Government had introduced the Inner Line Regulation in the other hill areas as early as 1872 and that they are still being continued, yet the Inner Line Regulations were never applied to the Garo Hills and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

Lastly, the real positive political development in the hill areas took place only after independence. The first step was the establishment of the District Councils in 1952. It was the inadequacies of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution which were partly responsible for the movement for Hill State.

Meghalaya came into being with the consent and blessing of the whole nation. Therefore the people of Meghalaya realised that the leaders of the nation are pledged to see that the weaker sections of the country should be raised so that they can march abreast with the rest of the advanced sections for the strength and glory of the country. The people of Meghalaya are a link in the chain, and every link must be whole and strong. No one should be left weak or bruised. But when a section or a community has its own identity which goes to add to its identity set off by the harmony of the whole, it is the wisdom and the true greatness of those who hold the destiny of the country in their hands to ensure that each and every community is helped to develop its identity.
in the interest of the country as a whole.

From the above, it can be asserted, that it lies all the more on the people of Meghalaya to realise their responsibility to work for the unity and cohesion of the country. From 1970 onwards, the people and the leaders of Meghalaya have not rested in their endeavour to lift the state from the cold neglect of the years of foreign domination, and from the slow progress of development under the leaders who could not fully appreciate the hill people's aims and aspirations. Despite their bonafides, they were not conversant with the way of life, the native genius and the distinct culture of the hill people. Within a period of six years, Meghalaya has made quite an appreciable progress.

It must be noted that the Government of Meghalaya has sincerely made an attempt to implement all national programmes. The Prime Minister's 20 point programme came pat in time for the people of Meghalaya. It has engendered great and unparalleled enthusiasm among the people of the State. Further, Meghalaya has fully participated in the North Eastern Council and its programme.

The interest of the people to make Meghalaya a patch of beauty in the vast canvas of this big country made them feel the necessity of electing their best leaders as their representatives to the State Legislature and to Parliament. One of the representatives of Meghalaya in Parliament has held the post of Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha for the last seven years with distinction. So also is the case of the members of the State Assembly. All the members of the State Legislature are decently educated. They have had their innings in local government activities. They came to the Assembly with a high sense of responsibility. All of them are able to speak in English and as such there is no difficulty in recording the proceedings of the House verbatim. Members of the
legislatures are the elected representatives of the people whose bounden duty is to work for the good of the people they represent. The legislators therefore have an onerous and arduous job to do by way of disciplining themselves to put the needs of their constituencies above their own. They should not allow their personal likes and dislikes to get the better of them. But in recent years some legislators forgot their sacred duty to the constituency and the country. But the members of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly are a notable exception. Irrespective of party affiliation they never did anything which lowered the dignity and prestige of the House. In other words, there were no disorders in the House. They no doubt express their views vigorously. But they do not resort to violence.

It may also be said that all the Ministers, the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker are all decently educated. Most of them took a leading part in the struggle for a separate state, and most of them came to office after long experience in administration. Therefore, there was no vacuum in the leadership even during the interim period. Therefore, Meghalaya has no dearth of leadership in any sphere of activity.

Inspite of the good beginning, Meghalaya has a number of problems ot be solved. First, as stated time and again, Meghalaya is a land of two communities, the Khasis and the Garos. Each of these two communities has its own distinct culture, way of life and language. Educationally and economically, the Garos have not attained the same standard as the Khasis. Therefore, there may be a psychological feeling of inferiority on the part of the Garos. But this problem is superficial. In fact both the Garos and the Khasis follow the matrilineal system, both have similar
economic problems, and both the communities understand that their natural resources are complimentary. Further, there are large number of Garos living in the Khasi Hills. Thirdly, immediately after independence, the Garos and the Khasis have built up a common understanding that one should not be subordinate to the other. Therefore, the prevailing psychological feeling is that they can never be separated from the other in a political and constitutional set-up.

There is yet another problem. The British followed the policy of 'divide and rule' to split the Khasi community into the so-called 'Jaintia' and 'Khasi'. As time went by, this feeling became very great among certain classes of leaders. But the question arises? If this situation is allowed to continue, whether the Khasis from Jaintia Hills will be welcomed in the Khasi Hills. Experience shows that the so-called Jaintia leaders have been elected both from the Khasi Hills and the Jaintia Hills. The Khasis of Jaintia Hills get representation in the Legislature, Cabinet, Government offices, Boards and the Khasi Hills District Council both from the Khasi Hills and from the Jaintia Hills. The people of the Khasi Hills do not have any ill-feeling towards this state of affair. However, if this problem is not solved in time, the unity of the Khasis may be broken by certain vested interest. The Government of Meghalaya may divide the Khasi and Jaintia Hills into a number of districts and sub-divisions, but it should, on no account promote the feeling of parochialism. Khasi language and literature has, no doubt, created a feeling of oneness; but Governmental agencies have been following the British policy. Therefore, it is high time for the Government of Meghalaya to reverse this policy and to substitute it by a positive policy.
to materialise the saying:

"Khynriam or Pnar or Bhol or War
One great people, Khasi we are".

The Second important problem is the question of the preservation of the identity of each community, its language, culture, mores and way of life. In what manner and to what extent will Meghalaya be able to achieve this aim? If all the excess population from the neighbouring populous areas come to Meghalaya, the number of non-tribals may become more than that of the tribal population. Again, if Meghalaya would launch big industrial enterprises, large number of labourers might come from outside the state. This is a real test to the statesmen and leaders of the country. If the Inner Line Regulation is allowed to operate in the other areas of North-Eastern India, similar laws may be allowed to operate in Meghalaya. This is the best guarantee to protect the identity of the hill tribes.

The third problem is the problem of security. Meghalaya is bounded on the South and on the West by Bangladesh. Recent events which have taken place in Bangladesh prove beyond doubt that the political situation in that country is always unpredictable. To keep the border safe and free from any problem is the primary duty of the country. If this problem is not tackled with tack and understanding, Meghalaya may have to face the influx of refugees and the economy of the border area might be totally shattered. A friendly Bangladesh may help to restore the economy of the border area.

The fourth problem that appears to have come into the surface is the lack of supervision on the District Councils. There is a need to improve the relationship between the State Government
and the District Councils. This need was insisted upon both by the S.R.C. and the Pataskar Commission.

Another very important problem is the absence of proper records of customary laws. Both the Garos and the Khasis have a keen desire to see that their customs, ways of life and culture should be retained. Hence, there is a need for the appointment of a high-powered commission to investigate into all customs, usages and practices so that they could be properly codified. Unless codification comes first, no piece-meal legislation on the subject can be effective.

Lastly, Meghalaya is still an economically backward state despite the fact that it has tremendous natural resources. There is a need for a strong and imaginative planning for the exploitation of these resources. There is a need for better means of communication. There is also a need for the solution of the economic problems of the border areas.

If these problems can be solved, there is no doubt that one day Meghalaya will become, as C.G. Swell puts it "a patch of beauty and grace and a shining outpost of India."