Chapter I

Introductory

Meghalaya was created as an Autonomous State on 2 April, 1970 comprising the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District and the Garo Hills District. The three Wards of the Shillong Municipality, European Ward, the Police Bazar Ward and the Jail Road Ward and the Cantonment Area remained with Assam.¹

Meghalaya was raised to the status of full Statehood on 21 January, 1972.² The new State of Meghalaya comprises the whole of United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District and the Garo Hills District. At a later date Jaintia Hills was constituted into a separate district.³ Therefore, at present, Meghalaya comprises the three districts, the Garo Hills, the Khasi Hills and the Jaintia Hills.

The birth of Meghalaya as the 21st State of the Indian Union marked the beginning of a new era in the history of North-Eastern India. It marked the triumph of peaceful democratic negotiation, mutual understanding and love over violence, intrigue, misery and hatred. While addressing the mammoth crowd at the Garrison Ground in Shillong at the inaugural Function of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya on 2 April, 1970, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said: "Meghalaya is a musical sound

¹. The Assam Reorganization (Meghalaya) Act, 1969.
evoking thoughts of high hills crested with clouds. The inauguration of this frontier State is yet another example of the democratic process which shows that with goodwill, understanding and patience, even the most intractable human problems can be solved amicably".

Meghalaya is a beautiful State, one of the most beautiful in the whole country. Nature has blessed her abundantly with heavy rainfall and clear sunshine, with deep dark forests, high plateaus and deep gorges where the air is pure and invigorating, with tumbling waterfalls and crystal-clear rivers, and dreamy streamlets; and above all, with sturdy, intelligent and virile people. In his inaugural address at the Conference of the Presiding Officers at Shillong on the 5th November, 1974, Dr. G.S. Dhillon, Speaker, the House of the People, depicted the State of Meghalaya in the following words: 4

"Tucked away in the soaring hills of the Eastern Himalayas, Meghalaya, nestling in the clouds, is a brave romantic dream. With its own distinct identity, its own traditions in culture, arts, music and social customs, this dream-child of the hill people is a bright skein in the fabric of Indian polity. Teaming with a flora, perhaps the richest in our Sub-continent, and blessed with Nature's bounty in mineral and forest resources, with a cheerful hospitable and extremely individualistic people, this young State stands as a proud witness as much to the incredible wealth and diversity of our land as to the great resilience of our political system.

Meghalaya is a land of pregnant potentialities awaiting unfoldment. It is a gratifying thought that these sturdy and exceptionally gifted people are now on the road to development on a challenging programme of reconstruction and modernisation, uninhibited by any sense of encroachment on their traditions and style of living. There can be no doubt that this young State now stands poised for a future of great growth and progress.

**Nomenclature:** Meghalaya is a finely appropriate Sanskrit name meaning "Abode of clouds". This State owes its name to Dr. S.P. Chatterjee, Professor Emeritus of Geography, Calcutta University. Dr. S.P. Chatterjee, during his first field work in these hills as early as 1926 could perceive an inherent bond of unity among the natural phenomena through excessive cloud hanging over the region, making it the rainiest area in the world. That idea took deeper root during his subsequent visits to this area during the period 1928-32, and he christened it as "Meghalaya". A doctoral thesis was subsequently submitted by him in Paris University on the "Geographical Analysis of Meghalaya". At a much later date, Dr. Chatterjee popularised the name "Meghalaya", through his writings of the Chapter on physiography for the Gazetteer of India, Vol.I, 1965, which had attracted the attention of the Home Ministry, Government of India, when they were looking for the newly created State of Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills. This name received unanimous acceptance.

**Location:** The State of Meghalaya is situated in the north-east of India, approximately between $90^0$ and $92^045'$ meridians of longitude and $25^015'$ and $26^0$ parallels of latitude. Its extent is
about 300 kilometer in length and 100 kilometer in width. It is bounded on the north by Goalpara, Kamrup and Nowgong districts of Assam, on the east by the Mikir Hills and North-Cachar Hills of Assam, and on the south and west by Bangladesh. Thus, Meghalaya, has international boundaries on two sides.

**Area** : According to 1941 Census, the total area of the Garo Hills and United Khasi-Jaintia Hills was 24,032.7 square kilometres. But whereas the total areas of Garo Hills District remains unchanged, that of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills has undergone a change.\(^7\)

Under Government of Assam Notification No.TAD/R/31/50/148, dated the 13th April, 1951, a new district known as the United Mikir and North-Cachar Hills was formed by transferring the whole of the North-Cachar Sub-division from Cachar District of Assam and by carving out certain areas from Sibsagar, Nowgong Districts and certain areas from the Jowai Sub-division of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District. The area transferred from Jowai Sub-Division to the United Mikir and North-Cachar Hills was 1543.7 square kilometres. As a result of this development, the total area of Meghalaya is at present 22,489 square kilometres.

**Physiography** : Meghalaya is a plateau generally of rolling grass-lands intersected with river valleys which in the southern portion, takes the form of ravines. This plateau is surrounded on all sides except on the east by densely settled, low-lying plains - the plain of the mighty Brahmaputra river on the north and west and the plain of the Surma river along with its tributaries on the south. Regionally, and not politically or administratively, the Meghalayan plateau continues eastwards beyond the administrative limit of the State, embracing the districts of Mikir Hills and Mikir Hills and North-Cachar Hills of Assam, on the east by the Mikir Hills and North-Cachar Hills of Assam, and on the south and west by Bangladesh. Thus, Meghalaya, has international boundaries on two sides.

\(^7\) Ibid pp.480-82.
North-Cachar Hills including the high Barail Parbat.

Physiographically, the Meghalayan plateau may be divided into three divisions. The valleys of Rongdi, Simsang and Non-shram stand as dividing lines between western Meghalaya and central Meghalaya whereas the deep valleys of Umngot and Sung separate eastern Meghalaya from central Meghalaya.

Situated between longitude 91°2' and 92°5 E and latitude 25°9' and 26° N, central Meghalaya (Khasi Hills) covers an area of about 10500 square kilometres. This area appears as a flat-topped range running east-west about 1400 to 1800 m with a steep face towards the plains of Bangladesh out of which it appears to rise very abruptly. This range rises gently from east to west. It rises to 1953 m in the Shillong peak, the highest point. The general appearance of central Meghalaya is that of a cliffy island rising as if from an ocean. The top of the plateau is formed of horizontally-bedded sandstones and limestones of marine origin and the same beds bend southward forming steep precipices. Magnificent waterfalls can be seen cascading over the cliffs into the valleys.

Western Meghalaya (Garo Hills) situated between longitude 89°47' and 91°2' E covers an area of about 8084 square kilometres. It extends about 90 K.M. east-west and for about the same distance north-south. Its relief ranges generally from 100 m along its northern, western and southern belts to over 1400 M in the central part at the Tura range. The Tura range is not visible because of a wide stretch of low-lying hills intervening the low-lying plain. But the south-eastern part of western Meghalaya, the Kylas-Balpakram-Pendengra range shows some of the characteristic features of central Meghalaya. This range dominates the landscape.
of this region. Topographically there is no marked difference between the Garo Hills and Khasi Hills. A low saddle, a minor watershed or a shallow river basin often mark the boundary line.

Eastern Meghalaya (Jaintia Hills) is limited between longitude 92°6' and 92°50' E. It covers a small area of 3895 square kilometres. The precipitous valley of Umngot runs from the greater part of the boundary between central and eastern Meghalaya. The Sung valley forms a dividing line in the northern part. On either side of Umngot rise structural platforms of about the same height, descending into deep ravines southwards. The Jowai upland forms one such structural platforms on the eastern side, extending right up to the border of Jaintia Hills and southwards in narrow ledges overlooking the plains of Bangladesh. A somewhat horizontal shifting of the southern escarpment is noticeable in this region, which may be attributed to normal faulting with horizontal displacement of rocks. Much dissection of the scarp face has taken place by swift flowing streams in deep gorges. The Eastern plateau rises to a maximum height of 1522 m near Jowai.

Viewed from Bangladesh on the south, the whole range of Meghalaya seems to rise so abruptly as if it were the highest mountain range in the world. But when it is viewed from Assam valley on the north, the landscape of Meghalaya appears to be different. Instead of deeply plateau scarred scarp of the south, low isolated hills, gradually rising to higher altitude in the interior are the general landscape feature of the entire Meghalayan range.

**Climate:** The whole of Meghalaya is subject to the Monsoon, but the climate varies with altitude. But, on the whole, from the
point of view of temperature, the climate is temperate, and, even in the lowest altitude, the temperature generally does not rise above 26°C. The climate of Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts is very pleasant and comfortable. It is neither too warm in summer nor too cold in winter. But in the Garo Hills, the climate is warmer, sometimes oppressive except in winter. Some scholars have observed that the climate of Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts is conducive to sustained intellectual work.

Rainfall: A glance at the sky over Meghalaya shows that the sky over southern region seldom remains free of clouds. This region is the rainiest spot on Earth. Rainfall in this region varies from 7000 mm to 13000 mm. The average rainfall in western Meghalaya is about 2689 mm in the north it is between 2500 - 3000 mm and in the south-east 4000 mm. In the central and eastern Meghalaya rainfall is as high as 7,196 mm. There is a great difference in the rainfall within the different regions of Meghalaya especially from south to north. For instance, the rainfall at Cherrapunjee (Sohra) is as high as 12,0033 mm and Mawsynram is higher with 13,923 m, Shillong which is located only at a distance of 50 K.M. from these two places receives only 2296 mm, whereas Jowai in the east receives 3077 mm and Mawphlang at the central plateau receives 3309 mm. 11

Flora and Fauna: Due to heavy rainfall and well-drained terrain, Meghalaya is rich in natural vegetation, both of tree and grass types. This also accounts for an exuberance of wild life. The hills are covered with green vegetation and present a landscape of sylvan beauty. The stately sal trees of Garo Hills, the magnificent evergreen trees of the lower hills, of Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the tall pine trees (Pinus Khasiana) of Shillong and Jowai plateau and the undulating green meadows of Jaintia Hills present an enchanting

11. Ibid p.23.
panorama. The variety of orchids found in the evergreen forests add beauty and value to these forests. By far the greater part of western Meghalaya is clothed with tropical forests of which the dense mixed type occurs in isolated patches. Central Meghalaya, on the other hand, has a varied type of natural vegetation. The uplands here support temperate grass and even alpine meadows occur at the highest elevation. Temperate forests cloth higher elevations decending some 1200 m lower here than in the eastern Himalayas. The flora of eastern Meghalaya resembles that of central Meghalaya, but tropical trees and grasses are rather more predominant in this region. According to Hooker, Khasi flora is the richest in India, in extent, number and variety of flowering plants, some 2000 species of flowering plants and 150 furs could be found within 16 K.M. of Cherrapunjee.

The present estimated forest area in Meghalaya is 8510 square kilometres or 38 per cent of the total area of the State. But, out of this total forest area, the total area under the State Reserved forests is 884 square kilometres only. All the other forests are unclassed forests and they are managed and controlled by the District Councils. In the Khasi Hills some of those unclassed forests are private forests.12

Wild-life in Meghalaya comprises of elephants, bison, tigers, bears, leopards, clouded leopards, golden cats, golden langur, cat bears, gibbon, serow, barking deer and sambhars. The wild birds commonly found are jungle fowls, black pheasant, peacock pheasants, patridges, hill mynahs, hornbills and the like. Wild life in Meghalaya has been considerably depleted by reckless hunting, shooting and capturing. Some of the rare species are facing extinction. The State Government have enacted the Meghalaya Wild Animals and Birds

12. Ibid.
Protection Act to check wanton destruction of wild life. Some of them have been declared as protected animals and birds.\textsuperscript{13}

**Minerals:** Meghalaya is rich in mineral resources. But, the economic exploitation of these minerals has been hindered by a number of bottlenecks such as poor transport communication, non-availability of cheap power, non-availability of cheap labour, lack of capital, lack of local talents and the like. So far, only coal, limestone and sillimanite have been exploited commercially. The most important mineral resources of Meghalaya are the followings:\textsuperscript{14}

**Coal:** Coal is essentially found along the southern plateau from east to west. The total recorded reserves of coal in the State are 1190 million tonnes of which approximately 30 million tons are estimated reserves in Khasi and Jaintia Hills districts and 1160 million tons in Garo Hills.\textsuperscript{15}

**Limestone:** The southern region of Meghalaya is also rich in Limestone. The total known reserves are estimated at around 2100 million tons.\textsuperscript{16}

**Sillimanite:** Meghalaya is the only State in India which possesses this rare mineral. A total reserve of over five lakh tons of sillimanite is estimated to occur at Sona Pahar - Nongper - Nongbali area of Khasi Hills.\textsuperscript{17}

**Clay:** The largest deposits of clay occur at Nangalbibra (about 3.5 million tons) and at Rongchugiri - Khera (about 3 million tons) in the Garo Hills. It is also found at Cherrapunjee, Mahadeo, Tura and Songsak-Damgiri Khobal - Dobo Nengkhra areas. The total deposit in the State is estimated around 10 million tons.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Meghalaya Chronicle.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
**Kaolin**: Kaolin which is suitable for the manufacture of China Clay and Porcelain products occur at Thadlaskein area in the Jaintia Hills and at Mawphlang area in the Khasi Hills. Estimated reserves are 45,000 tonnes and 540,000 tonnes respectively.

**Feldspar and Quartz**: These minerals are found in Athiabari - Tyngur area in Khasi Hills and at Tura area in Garo Hills. Reserves of Feldspar are estimated at 25,000 tonnes in the former and 1700 tonnes in the latter. So also Quarts are estimated at 20,000 tonnes in the former and 7000 tonnes in the latter.

**Glass Sands**: About 2 million tonnes of glass stones are estimated at Laitryngew area of Khasi Hills alone.

**Economy**: Meghalaya is still an under-developed State. The bulk of economy is agriculture. About 84 per cent of the working population are engaged in agricultural activities. In Western Meghalaya about 94 per cent are involved in agriculture. Thus, agriculture is the backbone of Meghalaya's economy. Approximately 1,37,695 hectares of areas is under plough. This area forms only about 7 per cent of the State's total area.

The principal agricultural crops of Meghalaya are rice, maize, cotton, jute, potatoes, oranges, pineapples, pulses, oilseeds, tapioca and bananas. Like any other hill area, Meghalaya is facing great problems to increase agricultural productions as the plain areas. The main problems of agriculture in Meghalaya are; lack of uniformity in soil condition, jhumming or practice of shifting cultivation, difficulties to undertake irrigation projects, lack of adequate marketing facilities, complexities of the land tenure system and the like.  

19. Ibid.  
20. Ibid.  
21. Ibid.
Economically, the people living in the areas bordering Bangladesh have had to find non-traditional outlets for their produce. Before partition, the border trade with Sylhet and Mymensing sustained the border economy. This was shattered with the emergence of Pakistan. It was hoped that a friendly Bangladesh could reverse the trend, but impediments have cropped up in the form of political instability in that country which have not improved the situation.

In spite of these hurdles, the State has other economic potentialities. Meghalaya, a veritable darling of nature, abounds in mineral, forest and Hydel resources. There is a great future for the construction of many Hydel projects, and for the growth of mineral-based and forest-based industries.

The people of Meghalaya is the homeland of two communities, the Garos and the Khasis. The Garos have their homeland in the Garo Hills or western Meghalaya and the Khasis have theirs in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills or central and eastern Meghalaya. The Garos belong to the Bodo-Kachari Group of the Tibeto-Burman family. But the Khasis belong to the Austro-Asiatic race and their language belongs to the Mon-Khmer family. The term "Khasi" is a general name given to the people of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills districts. They have the same common language, common customs, traditions and usages. They have the same way of life, the same mores and manners with the same common belief. Popularly speaking, the Khasis of the eastern plateau are known as Pnars or Syntengs, those of the southern slopes are known as Wars, those of the low-lying hills in the northern area are known as Bhois, and those in the west-by-north area as Lyngngam; the Khasis of the western plateau are known as Khynriams to the Pnars,
and as Nongphlangs to the Wars. There are some other groups of people known as Labangs, Khyrwangs, Nongtungs and others, but all of them are known by the generic name Khasi. The Lyngngams are known as Megams to the Garos. Their area is west-by-north of Khasi Hills and east-by-north of Garo Hills. After the coming of the British, people of different communities of India, Nepal and Bangladesh have also come to settle in Meghalaya. 22

The matrilineal society of the Garos and the Khasis should not be confused with any matriarchal society. In popular language, it is understood that in matriarchal society, women play a more important role than men in the material and mental life of the people. But in the matrilineal society like that of the Khasis and the Garos we find that although descent is traced through the mother, in fact, it is the father who plays a more important role in the material and spiritual matter of the people. While refering to the Khasi society, David Roy wrote "A man is the defender of the women, and the women, the keeper of his trust". 23

Population: According to the 1971 Census, the total population of Meghalaya is 1,011,699 with 520,967 males and 490,732 females. The unique feature in the sex-ratio in Meghalaya is that the number of females dwindled steadily from 1901 to 1961, but it rose a little in 1971. The following figures show the changes in the proportion of sexes, i.e. females per 1000 males from 1901 to 1971:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Females/1000 Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>1,036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>942</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the rural areas the sex-ratio fell from 104-7 in 1901 to 958 in 1971. But, in the urban areas, there was an increase from 764 in 1961 to 853 in 1971. It is interesting to note that in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, there were more females than males from 1901 to 1921. Since 1931, the ratio fell down from 978 in 1931 to 936 in 1971. But the over-all sex-ratio in the State is higher than the sex-ratio in the country which stands at 930.24

The density of population in the State varies from place to place. Meghalaya has a low density of 45 persons per square kilometre. The density of population is 39 persons per square kilometre in rural area and 3852 persons per square kilometre in urban areas. The Garo Hills show a heavier density of 50 persons per square kilometre, whereas the urban density is heavier in Khasi and Jaintia Hills with 4525 persons per square kilometre. The over-all density of the State is among the lowest in India.25

The process of urbanisation was very slow in Meghalaya from 1901 to 1951, but it jumped up suddenly from 1951 to 1961. In 1951, there were only two towns in Meghalaya, but in 1961 it rose to 6. In the Census Report of 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, 1941 and 1951, there were only two towns, but in the 1961 and 1971 Census Reports, the number of towns is shown as six. The following is the list of towns according to 1971 Census classification.26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Town</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Shillong</td>
<td>Municipality</td>
<td>87,659</td>
<td>Class II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Nongthymmai</td>
<td>Non-Municipality</td>
<td>16,103</td>
<td>Class IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tura</td>
<td>Town Committee</td>
<td>15,489</td>
<td>Class IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mawlai</td>
<td>Non-Municipality</td>
<td>14,260</td>
<td>Class IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Jowai</td>
<td>Non-Municipality</td>
<td>8,929</td>
<td>Class V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Shillong</td>
<td>Cantonment</td>
<td>4,730</td>
<td>Class VI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26. Ibid.
In Meghalaya, there is no town having a population of one lakh and over. But on closer scrutiny, it is found that (1) Shillong Cantonment is geographically part of Shillong itself, (2) Nongthymmai and Mawlai towns are the results of the expansion of Shillong. Therefore Greater Shillong has a population of 12,2752. The increase in the number of population is therefore confined mostly in Greater Shillong. If we take Greater Shillong as one single entity, the only town which has come up after 1951 is Jowai, and as such the increase in the number of towns from 1901 to 1961 is only one. The total number of urban population is 138241 which constitutes only 11.58 per cent of the population of the State.27

The vast mass of the population live in the villages which has grown in number. In 1901, the number of villages was 2865, but in 1971 it has increased to 4583.28 Percentage of literacy is 29.48 and this figure compares well with the all-India average of 29.35 percent. But the percentage of literacy in the urban area is as high as 64.68 per cent whereas in the rural areas, the percentage is as low as 25.32 percent. Nevertheless, the percentage of literacy is higher among the males than among the female. It is much higher in the Khasis and Jaintia Hills and much lower in the Garo Hills.29

Communications : Communication is considered to be the blood vessel of a country’s economy. Judged by any standard, it is the primary infra-structure for the economic development. Hemmed by a foreign country on the south and on the west, Meghalaya is connected along with the whole of North-Eastern region with rest of the Country through a narrow corridor between the mighty Himalayas on the one side and Bangladesh on the other. Before, 1947, more than 60 percent of trade was carried on through the Surma Valley by means of Road,

27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
Rail and River Communications. But after Independence, the whole bulk of trade has been carried on through Gauhati, the hub of trade in North-eastern region. Geography has created major impediments for establishing rail and water transport facilities. Therefore, Meghalaya has to depend solely on road communication. But in hill terrains like Meghalaya, there are great difficulties in speeding up the construction of roads. Nevertheless, the development of road is the most important precondition for an economic break-through in Meghalaya.  

When Meghalaya came into existence as an Autonomous State in 1970, it had only 2639 kilometres of roads of which only 721 K.Ms. were surfaced. In other words, it had only 12 K.M. of roads per square kilometres which is among the lowest in the country and which falls far short of the national average. At present, however, Meghalaya has more than 3200 K.Ms. of roads. Apart from the development of roads, Meghalaya needs a railhead and a network of rope-ways to ease the manifold problems facing the State. It is hoped that in the near future, these dreams will come true.  

Last, but not the least, Meghalaya is situated in a strategic area. The problem of security of the State is intimately interlinked and intertwined with the whole of the north-eastern region. The whole region has international boundaries nearly on all sides. On the west, there is the silent Burma; on the south and the west, there is an unpredictable Bangladesh; and on the north, there is an unfriendly China. Before 1950, the Himalayas were regarded as the safest defence for North-Eastern India. But, what was the position then? We had a friendly Tibet which acted as a bulwark.

30. Meghalaya: Meghalaya Public Information Service.
31. Ibid.
between India and China. The Chinese were still in great domestic troubles. A divided China could not pose any problem to us. But after 1950, the Chinese became united and strong especially after they had swallowed Tibet. The Chinese had become so strong that even a powerful country like the U.S.A. was forced to negotiate for friendly relationship. Had it not been for their strength, it would have been next to impossible for the U.S.A. to forget all the hatred that it bore for the Chinese.

Moreover, China has raised a strong and disciplined army which has humbled the Americans in Korea and Vietnam. The Chinese have been following the philosophy of Mao which can be summed up as follows; "settle everything by discussion but keep a million bayonets behind, Power grows out of a barrel of a gun". Further, China has also developed nuclear weapons and missile bases. The present position is such that neither the snows nor the unscalable heights of the Himalayas can defend our frontiers in the North-Eastern India any longer. Above all, there are many followers of Maoism in our country who may betray their own country for the sake of an Ism. India has recorded a number of infidel sons at the most critical period of the country's history.

The safety of North-Eastern India is the safety of the country. Unless this problem is tackled with understanding and reason and wisdom, North-Eastern India may become an eastern Panipat on a large scale.