CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 General

The place of man in geography has been significant ever since the inception of the discipline and it is assuming an increasing importance at the present time. The very essence of any geographical study, as of now, centres around population and its distribution over the earth’s surface. Thus, population acts as a master-thread which brings coherence among all the aspects of environmental, social, political and economic issues, particularly in the context of regional geography. The understanding of various characteristics of population is a must for understanding the geographic character of an area, which, in turn helps planning for regional development. This is more so in the areas inhabited mostly by tribal people who are more or less confined within their traditional territories, and thus have very little or no regional development. It is in this backdrop that a geographic study of Khasi tribal population in its urban milieu with an introductory treatment of general population is taken up in the present work to understand the socio-economic characteristics of such populations.

The study of socio-economic character of urban Khasi population in Meghalaya, or for that matter for any other specific social group involves a proper understanding of basic demographic aspects as distribution, density, growth, age-sex
composition; economic variables as working force and participation rate, structure of occupation; and also the social characteristics as literacy and education, language and dialects, religion, etc. Among these aspects, while the demographic ones help understand the present and future trend of population as regards its distribution, growth, migration and age-sex composition; the economic aspects unfold the natural resource base of the state and the prevalent economy and its transformation which also leads to social transformation; and lastly the social attributes reveal various social patterns, their changes over space and time. A study, thus framed, not only analyses the existing socio-economic characteristic of population, but also highlights the problems and prospects of developmental planning for the region. The study, thus holds both subjective and objective importance.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Meghalaya, though one of the constituent units of the northeastern region of India, maintains its own regional identity in respect of both physical and socio-cultural set-up. With an area of 22,429 sq. km., the state is located between 25°05'N -26°41'N latitudes and 89°47'E-92°30'E longitudes. The total population of the state is 17,74,778 with an average density of 78 persons per sq. km. of area. The population, on the whole, is not only overwhelmingly rural (with only 19% urban population), but also predominantly tribal (with only 20% non-tribal population) in character. The overwhelming predominance of tribal population in the state assumes a character which is considerably different
from the general picture prevailing in the country in general.

The tribal population of Meghalaya mostly belong to two important groups of 'Khasis' and 'Garos' who have distinct ethno-linguistic origin. While the Khasis, being austric in origin, belong to the 'Mon-Khmer' group of Indo-Chinese linguistic family; the Garos, on the other hand, being actually a sub-group of Bodos, belong to Tibeto-Burman ethnic family. Both the Khasis and Garos have again a number of sub-tribes, most of them are distributed within their traditional territorial boundaries. The major sub-groups of Khasis are 'Khynriams' or 'Nonglums', 'Fnars' or 'Syntengs', 'Wars-Syntengs', 'Bhois' and Pnar-Bhois, and also 'Lyngams'.

The social systems of all major tribes, although being primarily matrilineal, have their identity and individuality. This has resulted from the varying degree of intermixing among the tribes themselves and the nature and degree of outside contact. Thus, the socio-economic structure and composition of the tribes also tend to be different from one another.

The present structure and composition of Khasi population in the state are largely a product of existing geo-physical and socio-cultural conditions, which bring forth sub regional variations not only spatially (i.e. between the different units as districts, blocks, sub-divisions etc.) but within the social areas as well (i.e. the rural and urban). Such socio-spatial differences can be briefly chalked out as follows.

The urban Khasi population is so distributed in the state that it reflects a considerable intra-state variation in density within the districts and c.d. blocks of their own region.
(Khasi Jaintia districts). But, quite contrary to this, the decadal growth of population maintains more or less a similar trend althroughout the areal units of the state and its constituent districts. However, a sharp difference may be noticed in the growth pattern of the different social groups in the State. In this respect the Khasis, who are of prime consideration in the present study, register the maximum growth among all the tribal groups in the State probably because of the locational advantage enjoyed by them.

The sex ratio of the population under study reflects a trend which is somewhat different from the general trend of the State. While in the case of population in general and of other major tribes (Garos, Hajongs, Kukis and Mikirs), the sex ratios of urban groups are lower than their respective rural sections, the urban Khasis possess a much higher sex ratio. It may be observed from the distribution pattern of general sex ratio of Khasis that though the variation is not much wide within the districts of the Khasi region, the urban sex ratios of them are largely different from one spatial unit to the other.

The total Khasi literates in Meghalaya, though quite high, compared to the national rate, a proper assessment of their literacy can be made by comparing with the literacy rates of other hill tribes in north east India. The distribution of Khasi literates is uneven not only in the districts but also among the urban units of the districts. It is further noticed that though literacy of non-tribals is much higher than that of the tribes, the Khasi literacy rates is almost at per with that of the non-tribals. This is a particular characteristics noticed among the
urban Khasis in the State.

The religious composition of Khasis in Meghalaya reveals that people mostly belong to Christianity. The other religions practised by them are the Tribal religion (also known as Khasi religion), Hinduism and Islam. The Christians, however, form the major group followed by Tribal religions. The distribution of these groups within the spatial units of Khasi region is not only uneven, but also maintain individual pattern. Thus, while the West Khasi Hills has a maximum concentration of Christians, Other Religion and Persuasion groups are maximum in the Jaintia Hills district.

The Khasi workers in the state comprise a share of total population, which is quite high compared to the national rate. The female participation is also conspicuously higher than the national average. However, the total participation and the female participation rates are so distributed that the urban participation appears to be much lower than that of the rural al throughout the Khasi Jaintia region. Though, the tribals have a high rate of participation than the non-tribals in Meghalaya, it is interestingly noticed that the Khasis exhibit a work participation rate which is slightly lower compared to the Garos, the second significant tribal group; and also to other lesser tribes.

The occupational structure of Khasi workers in Meghalaya reflects their overwhelming concentration in primary sectors of economy. The distribution is quiet uneven within the districts with West Khasi Hills district taking the major share of this group of workers. The industrial workers constitute a very small
proportion of the total workers and they are mostly concentrated in the East Khasi Hills district. The tertiary workers, however, have relatively larger share, most of them being concentrated in the urban areas of the state, and this is particularly noticed in the East Khasi Hills district.

1.3 Objectives and Hypotheses

The main objectives of the present study are:

(i) to examine the present patterns of population distribution and density of urban Khasis and to find out the factors influencing such patterns;

(ii) to study the pattern of population growth and its spatio-temporal variations and to find out the causes of present growth pattern,

(iii) to assess the major migration patterns in the state, analysing their causes and consequences upon demographic, economic and socio-cultural composition of Khasi population.

(iv) to understand the composition of urban Khasis in terms of age, sex, literacy and educational level, religion, language, and to find out the salient characteristics in these aspects,

(v) to evaluate the resource base of the state in terms of land, forest, agriculture, etc., and find out the existing man-land ratios, and dependency ratio of population in the state.

(vi) to study the work participation rate, occupational characteristics and types of economies of the selected group of people and find out their transformations, if there is any.

In fulfilling these above mentioned objectives, stress is given to understand the characteristics of the Khasi group of people with the specific aim to understand the conditions associated with the urban Khasis, emphasising on Shillong urban agglomeration.

In view of the above objectives, the following hypotheses are proposed to be tested in the course of the present work:

(i) The population distribution and density of the urban Khasis in the state reflect a complex relationship between both permissive and restrictive elements of physical environment on one hand, and the socio-cultural environment on the other.

(ii) The population group considered in the present study, though is essentially tribal, their intermingling with non-tribals (though small in proportion), at least in certain areas, adds a new dimension in the population character.
The growth of population, which is taking place at an accelerating rate, is posing serious threat to the existing physical resource base and thus aggravating the man-land ratios.

The migration of indigenous people within the state is attributed to the available educational and occupational opportunities. These being available only in certain urban localities regulate particularly the rural-urban migration of the people.

The literacy rate is quite high when compared to other tribal groups in the country, but it is much below the level of expectations in a state which has been frequently intervened by Christian Missionaries, who brought renovations and improvements in the educational spheres. The difference is quite marked when compared to the population groups of identical situations as the Mizos in Mizoram.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of the present study lies in understanding the population characters of the most important group of people of Meghalaya, which is largely affected by the locational and physiographic factors and socio-economic features of their habitat. Though some works have been done by geographers, anthropologists and sociologists to deal with the tribal population and some of their socio-economic characteristics, no attempt has so far been made to take up a comprehensive and systematic study of population of a particular tribal group in the state with special emphasis to the urban section of such group. Thus, such type of study would be helpful to understand the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of a tribal group of people and the ways they differ from those of the general population in the state on one hand, and the other tribal groups on the other. The gradual transformation of the tribes from their traditional way of life to modernity is also highlighted through this study. It is thus natural that, the present work would be of considerable help to assess the present state of regional development and suggest further improvements.
required in this respect. The study is also expected to help the students who would be interested to take up further research in this field or any related field—dealing with population character. Besides geographers, the study is expected to be useful for economists, social scientists, demographers and also politicians, who are also involved in the tasks of developmental planning for the state, especially those who are particularly involved in Tribal Area Development Planning within Meghalaya.

1.5 Limits of the Study

The scope of population geography at recent times, has a wide coverage of population characteristics. In the case of geographical studies of urban Khasi population in Meghalaya, the entire field of the subject can be made use of, since very few works in this field have been done so far. But, keeping in mind the time limit, a single research work cannot cover all the aspects of population, and thus, one is forced to be selective. There are certain basic constraints which restrict the researcher from being ambitious. Firstly, there is a general dearth of data regarding Meghalaya's population, either in the form of Government reports, monographs, bulletins or books and literature. Secondly, the vital statistics, which is a must in population study, are not always readily available and for certain social as well as spatial groups, they are not available at all. There is also a deficiency of usable information regarding social, economic, and cultural aspects of people. Thirdly, the unfriendly terrain and non-availability of good
transport system, restrict the researcher from conducting an extensive field work. Fourthly, the problem of language restricting communication with the tribal population on the part of the researchers and lack of information due to illiteracy on the part of the informants and respondents, together affect the quality of field work. Finally, even if these limits are overcome, it is not practicable for a single researcher to cover all the characteristics and attributes of population within a limited period of time. It is all these limitations, which together streamline the present study, and set the scope of the work. However, an attempt is made, even working out with these constraints, to make the study academically significant and socially relevant.

1.6 Data Base and Methodology

The primary concern of the work being population characteristics, collection of data from both primary and secondary sources is a must. Data collection for the present work has been conducted in three stages. In the first stage, the researcher undertook library works, and consulted books, journals, periodicals, monographs, administrative reports as gazetteer and research articles to obtain relevant literature. These not only helped to frame the scope of the work but also aided to build up the theoretical background for the study. In the second stage, census reports of Meghalaya were consulted and data collected from them regarding various attributes of population. Besides census, other published documents were also consulted for this purpose. Though the present work should have been primarily based
on 1991 data, in certain situations non-availability of them, particularly those concerned with the specific population group undertaken in the study, has compelled the researcher to use 1981 census. In order to understand the trend of certain population aspects, data from 1901 census onward has been consulted, since information prior to 1901 are not readily easily available for the State. To obtain a detailed picture of population aspects of micro-level, the C.D. Blocks have been considered as the smallest areal unit for analysis purpose.

In the third stage, field work was conducted by researcher to collect primary data. For this purpose, keeping in mind the scope of the work, three localities were selected within Shillong urban agglomeration on the basis of their distance from city centre and on the basis of relative concentration of Khasi population. Data in this stage was collected through household schedules which covered the basic and essential demographic and socio-economic aspects. Household schedules were supplemented in several instances by interview of individuals or groups. The researcher also made direct observation of population characteristics as economy, tribal way of life, prevailing social facilities or prejudices, etc.

After collecting data from both secondary and primary sources, they were classified and tabulated, and thus were kept ready for further analysis and interpretation. A set of quantitative techniques thought suitable, were used for carrying out analysis on the one hand, and for comparison of the tables on the other. The results of such analysis and comparisons were then cartographically represented with the help of maps.
Finally, a systematic analysis have been made on the observed patterns, trends and manners of these population aspects. While analysing, different sets of quantitative techniques, which were found suitable, have been used by the researcher. A synthesis of the facts have been prepared at the end of the analysis, basing on previous findings on patterns and trends.

1.7 Organisation of Chapters.

The contents of the present work has been organised in nine chapters belonging to three different parts. The first part deals with the general background of the study which incorporates four chapters. The first chapter introduces the work with a statement of the problem and mentioning the objectives, significance, scope and methodology of the study. The second chapter deals with a critical review of some relevant works done on characteristics of population in international, national, regional and local levels. This chapter provides with the theoretical background of the work, which the researcher has frequently relied on while analysing the observed facts. The third chapter deals with the general geographical background of the study area, incorporating physiographical and socio-economic aspects of the state which affect population characters. In the fourth chapter, an account of the emergence, migration, tribal organisation, early settlements and state formation of Khasis is attempted with a separate treatment about the locational pattern, population growth and settlement pattern of Khasis in Shillong. This is in
accordance with the scope of the present work.

The second part of the work deals with the analytical section which comprises of four chapters from the fifth to the eighth. In the fifth chapter the demographic characteristics as distribution, density and growth are dealt with. Analysis in this chapter is so arranged that a prelude is given in each section regarding the distribution, density and growth of population in general which is then followed by a detail treatment of the urban Khasis. In chapter six, the patterns of population movement in the state have been discussed. Due to a general deficiency of data related to migration, analysis in this chapter has been kept limited incorporating only broad types of migrations in the state. The various compositions of population right from physical, socio-cultural and economic aspects have been dealt with in the seventh chapter. In this chapter again, composition and characteristics of total population is attempted briefly as a necessary precondition which helps understand the characteristics of urban Khasis as regards their social and economic aspects. The eighth chapter deals with the case study of urban Khasis based on three localities of Shillong town, which are predominantly settled by Khasis. All the usual attributes of population study included in the main section are also included in this chapter.

In the third part, a synthesis of the work is attempted which includes one chapter. It is in this ninth chapter that, initially a synthesis of facts and findings is made by summarising the earlier chapters and the significant findings of the study as they emerge from the summary, have been listed. A humble attempt is taken to propose a programme for regional and
economic development, which would suite the ethos of this particular tribal group. A select bibliography is produced at the end of the work. The Appendix includes tables dealing with demography and socio economic aspect of general population in Meghalaya.