CHAPTER III

REGIONALISM AND NATIONAL PARTIES IN MEGHALAYA
As regionalism strikes root in the socio-political milieu of India and gets entrenched in its heterogeneous polity, the phenomenon evokes varied responses from different quarters. In the present chapter, we propose to examine the responses of major national parties towards the phenomenon of regionalism. One of the key questions proposed to be examined in this connection is - does regionalism pose a threat to national integration irrespective of the views of national parties? A related question is - do national parties accept regionalism as a reality of Indian political life? Since, as we shall see, the question of smaller nationalities is intrinsically connected with regionalism, we would also like to examine as to what is the stand of the national parties on the nationality question. In the context of Meghalaya, the most pertinent question is whether national parties in Meghalaya regard nationalism and regionalism as complementary or contradictory. Since regionalism in Meghalaya is associated with the aspirations of tribals, it will be interesting to examine if national parties in Meghalaya view the interests of tribals as harmonious or conflicting with those of non-tribals.

Broadly, the responses to regionalism are accompanied by two different lines of arguments. One argument is
that the phenomenon of regionalism goes against a well-integrated political system. This approach is based on the assumption that regionalism is a divisive force and hence a threat to national unity because it leads to separatism, parochialism, isolationism and secessionism. In this connection, Paul R. Brass notes that the tendency in the literature on political development and modernisation of late has been to focus upon 'national integration' as a process of state-building and to treat all other loyalties except those to the state as 'parochial' or 'primordial' loyalties divisive in their impact and detrimental to national integration.¹ This tendency noted by Brass is, of course, one trend only. The approach seems to find its echo in the melting pot theory which equates the concept of the state with that of the nation. In this connection, we may refer to the favourite arguments of authoritarian political leaders that even regimes with competitive political parties are dangerous threats to national unity and national integration in multi-ethnic societies because the parties tend to reflect ethnic differences.² Such an

¹. Paul R. Brass, Language, Religion and Politics in North India (Delhi, 1975), p. 5.
attitude aims at imposing homogeneity on essentially heterogeneous societies and embarks on forced integration generating perennial socio-political tensions in these societies. Diametrically opposite to this approach is the view that particularistic identities are necessary for national integration. Lewis P. Fickett Junior subscribes to a similar view when he argues that the politics of regionalism may well constitute a necessary and salutary phase of political development for a society as diverse as that of India.  

The various cultural and ethnic communities inhabiting India have their own distinct cultures and traditions which make them assert their identity as separate nationalities. As A.K. Baruah rightly argues, that this assertion of identity by smaller nationalities need not be construed as a threat to the Indian nation state because it is possible to accept the existence of more than one nationality within a state without expecting them to assimilate with the dominant one of the state concerned or suspecting them as secessionist and leading to the disintegration of the present state.  

This approach distinguishes


4. Apurba Kr. Baruah, Social Tensions in Assam - Middle Class Politics (Guwahati, 1991), p. 4. In fact, in India, we have both the perspectives presented very strongly in contemporary social science literature. See, for instance, In Search of India's Renaissance, Vol. II (New Delhi, 1992), Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, Chandigarh.
between the state and the nation, but most national parties in India do not make this distinction.

It appears that the bogey of nationalism has often been raised to suppress even legitimate regional aspirations. In India, for instance, the political mainstream constituted by the ruling Congress party considers any challenge to the State authority at the Centre as an onslaught on the very existence of the nation-state. In this context, it becomes necessary to examine the nature of nationalism and its relationship with regionalism.

The word 'nation' which is derived from 'natus' connotes the idea of birth or race. E.H. Carr considers nation as a human group and identifies its characteristics as the idea of a common government, closeness of contact between all its individual members, a defined territory, certain characteristics like language distinguishing the nation from other nations, common interests of individual members and so on. 6 Joseph Stalin aims at a more comprehensive definition when he introduces the economic factor as an additional bond to nationhood. According to him, nation


is a historically evolved community having a territory, common economic life and a common psychological make-up, either independent or struggling to be independent. It may be noted that both the scholars view nation as a cultural entity and not as a political unit. While accepting this position, we must emphasize the fact that the terms 'nation' and 'state' are conceptually distinct categories although they are often used interchangeably. The state provides a basis for political and legal jurisdiction in the form of citizenship, whereas the nation promotes an emotional relationship through which the individual gains a sense of cultural identity. Nations and states do not always share the same cultural and territorial boundaries. Hence, the term nation-state has been used by social scientists to denote the gradual fusion that may occur between cultural and political boundaries after prolonged maintenance of political control by a Central authority over a given territory and its inhabitants.

From the above discussion, it may appear that 'nation' is a purely cultural concept with an emphasis on its ethnic dimensions and not a political concept. But as A.K. Baruah points out, all nationalities in the modern

world perceive some national rights and view themselves as political groups. Hence, it is necessary to take into account the political dimension of nationality. Baruah also observes that all nationalities invariably claim a homeland where they can protect their own cultural and economic interests.

Before we take up a conceptual analysis of nationalism, we need to familiarise ourselves with the debate concerning the distinction between nation and nationality. According to E.K. Francis, a sociologist, the term 'nation' has to be reserved for the dominant ethnie in the State. The term 'nationality' describes in his taxonomy an imperfect nation, i.e. an ethnic minority which as a community has acquired some acknowledgement, in the form either of autonomous or of protected status, in a state of another nation. If a cultural nation happens to be divided between several states, Francis speaks of 'multistate ethnic society' evading both 'nation' and 'nationality' in this context. If several nationalities within a state reach a more or less equal footing, then

10. Loc.cit.
Francis terms it as 'multi-ethnic nation state'. This implies that regardless of whatever happens on the ethnic front, Francies always identifies a nation with a state. This, according to Krejci and Velimsky, can hardly help to clarify the terms.\footnote{See Jaroslav Krejci and Vitezslav Velimsky, *Ethnic and Political Nations in Europe* (London, 1981), pp. 35-36.} Since both political and cultural aspects are important in the awareness of being, or belonging to a nation, Krejci and Velimsky propose to proceed in a different way. This approach may be elaborated later in this Chapter.

From an analysis of the interactions between nation and state, we may proceed to an enquiry into the nature and dimensions of nationalism as an ideology. In this regard, we propose to classify the available perspectives on nationalism as the Marxian view of nationalism and the non-Marxian perspective. The latter will include the formulations of Ernest Gellner, Paul Brass, Karl Deutsch and Hans Kohn. We shall begin with the non-Marxian perspective.

An important perspective on nationalism emerges from Ernest Gellner. According to him, mankind is irreversibly committed to industrial society and the kind of
cultural homogeneity demanded by nationalism is one of the essential concomitants of industrial society.\textsuperscript{12} He does not agree, however, to Elie Kedourie's view that nationalism imposes homogeneity.\textsuperscript{13} He rather feels that a homogeneity imposed by objective, inescapable imperative eventually appears on the surface in the name of nationalism. The age of transition to industrialism coincided, according to Gellner's model, with a transition to the urge of nationalism.\textsuperscript{14} Gellner, thus, seeks to relate nationalism with industrial development. His main argument is that, "... as the wave of industrialisation and modernisation moves outward, it disrupts the previous political units [which are] generally either small and intimate ... or large but loose and ill-centralised".\textsuperscript{15} The 'two prongs of nationalism', he suggests, 'tend to be a proletariat and an intelligentsia': the former is first uprooted and then gradually incorporated in a new national community, the latter provides new cultural definitions of group membership which are widely diffused with the development of mass literacy and a national educational system which

\textsuperscript{14} Gellner, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 39-40.
industrialisation itself makes necessary.\textsuperscript{16} It must be noted here that this theory of Gellner is obviously concerned mainly with the nationalism of the twentieth century and with what are claimed to be its roots in the social, cultural and political changes which occurred in Western Europe during the 19th Century. But it is evident that the development of the idea of a 'nation' and the formation of nation-states in Europe began at a much earlier time and Gellner's theory cannot be applied to explain the earlier developments.

The next perspective we propose to discuss is, in fact, a combination of two approaches, viz., the subjective and the objective. Krejci and Velimsky, for example, observe five objective factors which can contribute to the identification of a group as a nation: territory, state (or similar political status), language, culture and history. They argue that when positive answers to all of these criteria coincide, there can be little doubt that the respective community or population is a nation.\textsuperscript{17} The objective approach thus seeks to identify nationalism and the nation-state in terms of quantifiable characteristics which, apart from those mentioned by Krejci and Velimsky,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Krejci and Velimsky, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 44.
\end{itemize}
may also include religious uniformity, volume of economic and social communication and so on.\textsuperscript{18} Krejci and Velimsky then go on to add a sixth factor, the subjective criterion, by which they imply the presence of national consciousness.\textsuperscript{19} Broadly speaking, the subjective approach views nationalism and the nation-state as a set of emotional and ideological bonds between an individual and a community.\textsuperscript{20} Subjective and objective definitions can be misleading, however, if they are used separately. For instance, the population on both sides of a political frontier may possess a common national ethnic identity - the objective test and at the same time be politically and legally divided between two or more states, e.g., the overseas Chinese of South East Asia, the Magyar minority of Romania, the Turkish cultural community, whose members are dispersed from the Balkans across Western Asia and into China. Moreover, the problem arises with situations where some, or

\textsuperscript{18.} The objective approach is best represented by the pioneering work of Karl Deutsch. See especially his \textit{Nationalism and Social Communication: An Enquiry Into The Foundations of Nationality}, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1966). Also see his \textit{Nationalism and Its Alternatives} (New York, 1969).

\textsuperscript{19.} Krejci and Velimsky, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 44.

even most of the objective criteria are missing and yet the community feels itself to be a nation. For example, such ethnically heterogeneous states as Belgium and Switzerland exhibit considerable diversity at the objective level, yet subjectively, their citizens have a strong emotional attachment toward the state that provides them with security and enables their heterogeneous society to achieve its goals. Krejci and Velimsky, therefore, assert that the subjective factor of consciousness is the ultimate factor which eventually decides the issue of national identity. According to them, whether the rest of the world are or are not willing to acknowledge the group in question as a separate nation is, in the long run, irrelevant. Without undermining the importance of the subjective feeling of nationhood, it may be argued that a nation requires some amount of international recognition for the fulfilment of its aspirations. Apart from this, a confusing picture emerging from the separate application of subjective and objective tests makes it an unreliable paradigm for the understanding of nationalism.

We now propose to introduce an altogether different view of nationalism which neither seeks to quantify the

essential characteristics of nationalism nor does it perceive nationalism in terms of a subjective consciousness. This view emerges from Paul Brass who argues that ethnicity and nationalism are social and political constructions and are not 'givens'. According to him, ethnicity and nationalism are creations of elites, who draw upon, distort and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as for themselves. Brass also argues that ethnicity and nationalism are modern phenomena inseparably connected with the activities of the modern centralizing state. It must be pointed out that the arguments of Brass separate his position from those writers who consider ethnicity and nationalism to be reflections of primordial identities and who have searched the past to find evidence of the existence of ethnic identities and nationalism throughout recorded history. We accept the argument of Brass that nationalism is the product of manipulation of culture by an elite, although it is arguable whether nationalism is a

23. Ibid., p. 8.
recent development completely unknown in the past centuries.

Inadequacies of the non-Marxist views on nationalism bring us to an examination of the Marxist perspective. Karl Marx was the first writer to perceive that nationalism in his time had become the sole ideal of the bourgeoisie. Marx made a crucial distinction between nationalism of an imperialist state and that of a weak and small nation fighting for its independence. His support to the incipient national movement was based on the fact that he saw in the emergence of the nation-state the consolidation of the local bourgeoisie against outmoded feudal forms, which he believed to be a pre-condition for the growth of socialism. The Marxian conception of nationalism is thus an extension of the general Marxist methodology of the ultimate transition to socialism through the stages of feudalism and capitalism.

Following Karl Marx, Stalin also contended that the nation originated in the 'process of elimination of feudalism and the development of capitalism.' Indeed, the

emergence of nations all over Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was brought about with the initiative of the bourgeoisie with an eye to secure the domestic market within the limits of national boundaries. The bourgeoisie unfurled the flag of nationalism because, in the words of Stalin, 'The market is the first school in which the bourgeoisie learns its nationalism'.

Shaibal Gupta argues that in India, scholars like Niharanjan Ray, Partha Chatterjee and Irfan Habib fundamentally subscribed to the theoretical format of Stalin, that the nation was built in Western Europe in the era of capitalism. But Barun De disagrees with this formulation and argues that national consciousness or national movements existed even prior to the era of capitalism.

Another Indian scholar with Marxist orientations, Jayantanuja Bandyopadhaya, argues that the replacement of

27. Loc.cit.
capitalism by some form of socialism is an essential pre-condition for the eradication of the nationalist ideology, although it is not a sufficient condition.\textsuperscript{32} He considers nationalism as a synthetic ideology fabricated by the ruling classes out of certain pre-existing ideologies in order to perpetuate social stratification and prompt their own class interests. This formulation is somewhat similar to the perspective offered by Paul Brass, although Brass does not talk about the replacement of capitalism by socialism for the eradication of nationalism. Bandyopadhaya argues that his general theory of nationalism applies to capitalist, socialist and Third World Societies and comes to the conclusion that while capitalism invariably and inevitably generates nationalism, including its imperialistic and neo-imperialistic manifestations, the socialist form of nationalism is a reversible deviation, caused by historical forces, and not an inevitable by-product of the socialist system itself.\textsuperscript{33} It may be noted that while Marx distinguished between nationalism of an imperialist state and that of an oppressed nation, Bandyopadhaya also makes a subtle distinction between nationalisms of the capitalist and socialist varieties. But his

\textsuperscript{32} See Jayantnuja Bandyopadhaya, \textit{Nationalism Unveiled} (New Delhi, 1990).

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid}. 
basic argument about the eradication of the nationalist ideology through socialism cannot be substantiated by ground realities in the socialist countries like the former USSR, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia where aggressive nationalism of the respective dominant communities like Russians, Slovaks and Serbs unleashed the forces of disintegration because such nationalism threatened the peripheral communities.

Having reviewed the available literature on nationalism, we may proceed to examine the perceptions of major national parties in India about the phenomenon of regionalism. As noted before, most national parties commit a conceptual error when they treat 'state' and 'nation' as synonymous. This misconception seems to have prejudiced the views of national political parties about regionalism. For the purpose of our present analysis of regionalism in Meghalaya, we propose to focus on the positions adopted by the two major national parties, viz., the Congress and the Communist Party of India which are not only distinguished by their ideologies in the political spectrum, but which are also the only national parties of significance operating in Meghalaya. The Indian National Congress contested in 12 out of 60 assembly constituencies in the first Assembly Elections of Meghalaya held in 1972 while the CPI contested
for 2 seats. In the 1978 Elections, the Congress set up 57 candidates with the CPI extending its electoral battle to 4 constituencies. In 1983, the Congress was confident enough to contest in all 60 Assembly constituencies whereas the CPI fielded 7 candidates. In the next Elections of 1988, the CPI went a step forward to put up 9 candidates. Our choice, therefore, automatically falls on the Congress and the CPI which have acquired a measure of prominence in the politics of Meghalaya by their participation in all the Assembly Elections held in the State. The following tables will show the level of participation of the Congress (I) and the CPI in the Assembly Elections in Meghalaya.

Table 1 - Candidates fielded, seats won and percentage of votes polled by Congress (I) in General Elections to the Meghalaya Assembly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of candidates fielded</th>
<th>No. of seats won</th>
<th>Percentage of votes polled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19.21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


35. Ibid., p. 51.
36. Ibid., p. 50.
37. See Meghalaya Election Handbook, February, 1988, p. 84.
Table II - Candidates set up, seats won and percentage of votes polled by CPI in General Elections to the Meghalaya Assembly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of candidates set up</th>
<th>No. of Seats won</th>
<th>Percentage of votes polled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>0.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>0.35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It appears from Table II that the CPI has not been able to achieve any breakthrough in the electoral politics of Meghalaya. Nevertheless, the party has made its presence felt by putting up candidates in all the Assembly Elections.

The reaction of the Congress to the growth of regional consciousness seems to have been conditioned to a great extent by the appreciation of its own role as the upholder of national integration. In fact, at one stage, the party started identifying itself with the nation and considered criticism of its leaders and its policies as anti-national and unpatriotic. It went to such an extent that the prospects of democracy in India were linked with the prospects of the Congress as a party in the country. The party started abrogating to itself the right of being
the only national body. In a circular issued to its members, it exhorted them not to permit the opposition parties to criticise it and directed them that a 'positive stand against the criticism about the Prime Minister should be taken. It must be emphasized that those who criticise him are traitors.'\textsuperscript{38} The Congress intolerance towards opposition of all kind clearly indicates that the party's response to regionalism cannot be a favourable one.

Since its inception, the Congress had been professing the unity of India as its ultimate goal. This implied, according to Kousar J. Azam, an incorporation of divergence within the pattern of unity, for, without a convergence of the divergence towards the goals of freedom, there could be no unity.\textsuperscript{39} In his first presidential address, W. C. Bonnerjee gave a call for unity. He emphasized that the first task before the Congress was "the eradication, by direct friendly intercourse of all possible racial, creedal or provincial prejudices amongst all lovers of our country and the fuller development and consolidation of ... sentiments of national unity."\textsuperscript{40} But the Congress conception of

\textsuperscript{38} For historical details, see S.P. Aiyar and Srinivasan (eds.), \textit{Studies in Indian Democracy}, (Bombay, 1965), See Introduction, p. XXX.


\textsuperscript{40} W.C. Bonnerjee, cited in R.P. Dua, \textit{Social Factors in the Birth and Growth of Indian National Congress Movement} (Delhi, 1967), p. 27.
national unity embracing racial, cultural and regional diversities under its own umbrella appears to be an unattainable ideal as different ethnic and regional groups in India have sought to preserve their distinct identities by putting up strong resistance against the forced assimilation process. Such assertions of the smaller nationalities to protect their identity have come to be viewed as major threats to the state of India although prevalence of this phenomenon during the British period led the Indian National Congress to resort to linguistic reorganisation which helped it to derive support from different regions.\textsuperscript{41}

There was, however, a change in the attitude of the Congress Party in the post-independence period and this became clear in the J.V.P. Committee (1949) report which viewed linguistic reorganisation as a threat to the political and economic stability of the country.\textsuperscript{42} In this connection, A.K. Baruah argues that the champions of 'Indian Nationalism' could not realise that appreciation of the aspirations of the smaller nationalities specially in respect of linguistic cultural identity would in fact strengthen political integration.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} See Shankar Ghosh, Political Ideas and Movements in India (Bombay, 1975), p. 200.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{43} For details, see A.K. Baruah, op.cit., p. 10.
The failure and reluctance of the Congress to grasp the reality of a basically pluralistic Indian polity has led the party to adopt policies such as nationalization of political issues, political destruction of the state political supremos resulting in disintegration of the Congress organization in the districts and the selection of Chief Ministers in the States who lack independent bases of power and can, therefore, be counted upon to follow the directives of the Central Government.\textsuperscript{44} The party's preference for centralization is also evident in its Manifesto for the 1980 elections which specifically stressed that 'the planning process' would 'once again' be used 'to reorganise the national economy' and that the state governments would be persuaded to implement national, uniform policies on subjects included in the 'State List' under the Constitution.\textsuperscript{45} Brass argues that the precise purpose for which the 'State List' was inserted in the Indian Constitution was to allow the states independent powers of legislation on certain subjects exclusively concerning the states. According to him, deliberate

\textsuperscript{44} Paul R. Brass, "Pluralism, Regionalism and Decentralizing Tendencies in Contemporary Indian Politics" in A.J. Wilson and Denis Dalton (eds.) The States of South Asia: Problems of National Integration (New Delhi, 1982), p. 255.

\textsuperscript{45} Indian National Congress (I) Election Manifesto, 1980 (New Delhi: All India Congress Committee (I), 1979).
interference of the Congress with the state's legitimate jurisdiction and attempts to lower the prestige of the state leaders have encouraged state autonomy movements and the growth of regional feelings throughout India. Another factor fomenting discontent and tensions in a multicultural society like India noted by A.K. Baruah is that except for the regional parties and a small section of the left, the dominant political opinion in India today represented by the Congress views India as one nation and perceives the concept of the state as inseparable from the idea of nation. Refusal to recognise small communities as nationalities breeds discontent among the smaller nationalities inciting some aggressive sections to propagate anti-Indian ideas. Unless this trend is reversed, warns Baruah, there may be an acute crisis in the Indian political community.

As Paul R. Brass has noted that every state in India had a distinctive group of land-owning castes who continue to control the countryside. Where the Congress had lost support among such groups, these groups remain available to be organized by state-level politicians and regional parties. Linguistic and cultural differences also continue to provide strong support for regional political parties.

46. Paul R. Brass, op.cit.
47. For details, see A.K. Baruah, op.cit., pp. 2-8.
and generate persistent pressures for cultural pluralism and demands for regional autonomy in the states.\textsuperscript{48} It appears that the Congress Party views the regional movements with dismay and regards these as a threat to its own authoritarian mode of functioning. To Mrs. Indira Gandhi, regionalism was as poisonous as casteism or communalism: 'a very serious threat to the development, progress, and unity of the country'.\textsuperscript{49} But compulsions of political expediency have led the Congress to seek alignments with powerful regional parties. Thus, the Congress had entered into electoral alliances with the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu and with the National Conference of Dr. Farooq Abdullah in Kashmir. In Punjab, however, the essence of the Congress policy has been the marginalisation of the Akali Dal. The offshoots of this policy have been the fragmentation of the Akali Dal into numerous factions, the growth of religious fundamentalism and the political subjugation of the Akali Dal by the militant supporters of Khalistan.\textsuperscript{50} Thus, some

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{48} See Paul R. Brass, "Pluralism, Regionalism etc.", \textit{op.cit.}, p. 256.
\item \textsuperscript{49} \textit{Selected Speeches of Indira Gandhi, January 1966 - August 1969}, (New Delhi, 1971), p. 85.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Balraj Puri argues that the ruling party (implying the Congress) found in terrorists an excellent instrument in breaking the back of the Akali Dal which was its principal rival in the field of elections and tussle for power in Punjab. See Balraj Puri, "Punjab Accord and After: Opportunity to go into Roots of Problem" in Asghar Ali Engineer (ed.), \textit{Ethnic Conflict in South Asia} (Delhi, 1987), p. 100.
\end{itemize}
of the grave crises that India faces today seem to owe their origin from the Congress (I)'s attitude towards the regional parties.

A look at the 1984 Election Manifesto of the Congress (I) shows the party's determination to fight with all its strength those elements and forces which are trying to reverse the historical processes which have led to the unification of India. The party also claims to transcend narrow religious, linguistic, regional and parochial affiliations. This clearly reflects the Congress (I)'s antagonism to regional loyalties which the party treats at par with parochial affiliations. The Congress (I) has gone to the extent of promoting the theory that the same party should rule at the Centre and in the states. The party's propaganda that regional parties are a threat to national unity had been criticized by late Mr. N.T. Rama Rao, the Telegu Desam leader, as an insult to public opinion. The forum of thirteen non-Congress (I) regional parties criticised the Congress (I) leader Rajiv Gandhi for an intemperate and irresponsible attack on opposition parties, especially regional parties and calling them anti-national. Dubbing the democratic aspirations of the people of several states as anti-national

51. Election Manifesto of the INC (I), 1984, pp. 4-5.
was itself a gross anti-national act and in no way served the cause of national unity.\textsuperscript{52}

Thus, the Congress (I)'s disregard for regional sentiments seems to have taken an extreme form and such panic in the wake of regional assertions may have originated from a sense of insecurity in its leadership. After all, the Congress faces a very real threat to its domination over the State governments due to a mushroom growth of regional parties and rise in their popularity and widening of their power bases. Again, as we have seen in Chapter I, it has been argued by Kousar J. Azam that regional parties emerge partly because of the failure of national parties to cater to the interests of regional constituencies and partly as a reaction to monolithic and authoritarian tendencies of the government at the Centre.\textsuperscript{53} The policies followed by the Congress (I) give some credence to such a view.

As far as the Meghalaya Pradesh Congress (I) Committee's response to regionalism in Meghalaya is,


\textsuperscript{53} For details on the emergence of regional parties, see Chapter I. Also see Kousar J. Azam, Political Aspects of National Integration (Meerut, 1981).
concerned, the party claims to have championed all along the cause of the tribal people and the weaker sections and promises to ensure that their identity and culture are retained.\textsuperscript{54} Congress leaders in the North East blame the forces of regionalism for retarding the pace of unity and development in the North Eastern part of the country.\textsuperscript{55} These leaders are of the opinion that the task of bringing all the areas of North East India into the mainstream of national life has become difficult in view of the policies pursued by the forces of regionalism in the region.\textsuperscript{56} It may be noted that the MPCC (I)’s claim of championing the cause of the tribal people is based merely on the fact that it was the Congress Government at the Centre which conceded the demand for the formation of Meghalaya. The party’s attitude towards regionalism is not much different from that of the national body. In fact, the party considers regional forces as nothing but the manifestation of selfish vested interests.\textsuperscript{57} By adopting this stance, the MPCC (I)

\textsuperscript{54} Election Manifesto of the Indian National Congress (I) in Meghalaya, 1983, pp. 1-2.

\textsuperscript{55} See Hokishe Sema, "National Integration and North Eastern Region" in North Eastern Cultural Forum Souvenir (Dimapur, April 11, 1981), p. 64.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 63.

\textsuperscript{57} For details, see Congress (I) Manifesto, Meghalaya Elections, 1988, p. 3.
fails to take cognizance of the fact that some measure of autonomy for regional forces will act as a safety valve for discontent and strengthen the forces of integration in the long run.

While expressing his party's views on regionalism, Mr. D.D. Lapang, President of the Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCCI) states that the party regards regionalism as the organized expression of a people's concern for the well-being of their own region which assumes a narrow dimension when viewed from the national context. The Congress (I) denounces the regional parties in Meghalaya as having no specific ideology, plan, programme, policy or doctrines which thrive by rousing communal passions and by raising slogans for survival and other issues that reflect a negative attitude. According to the Congress (I), the regional parties earn popularity by propagating the identity of certain communities. However, the party asserts that regional parties cannot serve the interests of their people without a national outlook. The MPCC(I), therefore, regards regionalism as a narrow ideology which is sustained by communal consciousness and is incompatible with the national consciousness. In this

respect, the MPCC(I)'s stand fully conforms to the party's national posture.

Denying categorically that the national parties have failed to protect regional interests, the Congress (I) emphasizes that the national parties are fully competent to ensure the survival of regional groups and ethnic communities. In this regard, the MPCC(I) President points out that Meghalaya could not have been brought into existence without the backing and support of the national parties and adds that the national parties of Meghalaya have already indicated their concern for safeguarding the identity of the indigenous tribals. The MPCC(I) takes pride in the fact that it was at the instance of the national parties that certain special facilities for the tribals were enshrined in the Constitution of India. To illustrate this point, the party cites the inclusion of Section 475 providing for encouragement of tribal students through special scholarship in educational activities. It may be noted, however, that in spite of the Congress (I)'s claim of championing the tribal cause, the party continues to be identified as a non-tribal organization in Meghalaya. The

59. Ibid.

60. It may be noted that in the Assembly Election of 1983, the Khasi and Jaintia voters opted for the regional parties, although the Garos voted for the Congress (I). For analysis, see Khiren Roy, "Meghalaya: Eight Months to Polls" in The Assam Tribune, June 8, 1987, p. 4.
party's attempts to absorb regional parties within its fold have also added to popular suspicion about the party's real intentions.

As far as its assessment of regionalism and regional parties is concerned, the MPCC(I)'s observation seems to be that regionalism cannot survive on its own. In this connection, the MPCC(I) President comments that regionalism can serve a good purpose if the regional parties can project the desire, anxiety, hopes and problems of the people of the region. But in the long run, he argues, the problems of the region can only be solved in the national context. 61 MPCC(I) declares,

... notwithstanding what the protagonists of "regionalism" and "regional or state parties" for selfish vested interests of a few individuals may say, the fact remains that it has all along been leaders with selfless National vision, initially the members of the Constituent Assembly who, having fully and carefully comprehended the needs, the fears and the aspirations of the tribals and other weaker sections of the society, provided for adequate constitutional safeguards.... 62

However, in spite of its attempt to underplay the role of regional parties, the MPCC(I) does not consider

61. Ibid.
regionalism as contradictory to nationalism. While articulating the party's position in this regard, the MPCC(I) President affirms that the intentions of the regional parties of Meghalaya are good, although they have failed to implement them through concrete actions. According to the Congress (I), the regional parties lack the national outlook, but are helpless without the cooperation of the national parties. The party acknowledges the role of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference in the struggle for the Hill State, but goes on to add that immediately after the formation of Meghalaya, the APHLC had to turn to the Congress for seat adjustments and decided to work with the Congress at all levels. It has been noted before that the MPCC(I) has sought to enhance its electoral appeal by citing the support and cooperation rendered by the Congress RULED Centre in the achievement of Statehood. On the other hand, from the point of view of regional parties, the APHLC's pragmatic decision to work with the Congress seems to have been influenced by the desire to extract concessions from the Centre which has become more or less synonymous with the Congress Party by virtue of its remaining in power at the Centre almost uninterruptedly except for short intervals.

63. See Appendix (I), op.cit.
On the issue of Centre-State relations, the MPCC(I) almost echoes the voice of the Party High Command when it envisages a strong Centre to guide the States in India. In this regard, the official position of the Indian National Congress (I) is that,

the States should be strong to effectively discharge their obligations to the people for social, economic and cultural development.... At the same time a strong Centre is required to safeguard the country's unity and integrity, to ensure the success of the planning process and to direct the nation's endeavour for a social and economic order based on socialism. There is no contradiction between a strong Centre and strong States. The two reinforce each other.... 64

In spite of its plea for making the states strong, the Congress (I)'s centripetal bias is too evident to be ignored. The MPCC(I) follows the same perspective when it asserts that a firm central government is in a position to discipline any recalcitrant state or party. The party visualises total chaos and collapse of law and order in the absence of Central guidance. The party concedes, however, that the Central government should consider decentralisation of power at certain levels. According to the MPCC(I), the Centre should leave the States alone in the matter of collection of revenues, extraction of minerals etc. While

there should be some financial and administrative autonomy for the states, the Centre should retain overall authority to supervise state affairs and to rectify the acts of omission and commission on the part of the state governments.\(^65\) As a state unit of the Congress (I), the MPCC (I) has expressed its concern for state autonomy, but one wonders whether this is a genuine concern for decentralisation or whether the party pays only lip service to deprive the regional parties of propaganda advantage in this regard.

As far as the interests of non-tribal minorities in Meghalaya are concerned, the MPCC (I) promises to ensure that minorities in the State are protected and they get their due shares. The party also proposes to set up a formal mechanism to consider their grievances, if necessary. The party even claims that it would like the minorities in the State to feel that they are equal partners in the development of the State.\(^66\) The MPCC (I) accords full recognition to the role of non-tribals since the pre-independence days.\(^67\)

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65. See Appendix (I), op.cit.
67. Appendix (I), op.cit.
of the contribution of non-tribals seems to have led to an identification of the Congress as a party of non-tribals. In reality, however, the Congress (I) in Meghalaya played a less than commendable role in protecting non-tribal minorities during the ethnic disturbances in 1987 and 1992 when the party happened to be in power. Perhaps the party was anxious to dilute the popular perception of the Congress as a non-tribal party and took a lenient attitude towards dealing with violent ethnic clashes in 1992. The Meghalaya Guardian commented thus, "... the authorities can create legislations or relevant system to help the locals get their due share of economic benefits; but the Government cannot just remain as a passive onlooker to such serious ethnic violence and bloodshed...."68 In spite of its passive role during ethnic disturbances, the MPCC(I) expresses its concern about the erosion of communal harmony and an ever deepening hatred among different communities of the State. The party seems to share the views of regional parties when it traces the roots of communal tension from the phenomenon of influx. But in reality, non-fulfilment of popular expectations after the achievement of statehood is one of the important factors which seems to have led to communal riots in Meghalaya. It appears from our analysis

68. See the editorial titled "A Suicidal Course" in the Meghalaya Guardian, Shillong, Friday, October 9, 1992, p. 4.
of the role of the educated elite in Chapter II that the elite not only raised the demand for statehood, but they were also likely to be the beneficiaries in a separate state. Statehood was neither a popular demand nor was it likely to usher in an improvement in the lot of the common man. But while raising the demand for a separate state, the elite sought to carry the masses behind them by arousing popular expectations about a new political arrangement. When the new state was formed, the elite gained a lot in terms of political power and economic benefits. But expectations of an average tribal were belied under the new arrangement. Grievances accumulated with the passage of time and seem to have found an outlet in ethnic outburst at regular intervals. To this was added influx from across the border and the local tribals now perceived a very real threat to their identity. It appears that the issue of influx from neighbouring countries has served as a cover for the hostile attitude to non-tribals in general.

While stating the party position on the relationship between tribals and non-tribals in Meghalaya, the MPCC (I) President makes a comparative analysis between the performance and achievements of both in various fields, including the economic field. The party notes that local tribals who are lagging far behind, allege exploitation at
the hands of non-tribals. According to the MPCC (I), unemployment among the local youth as well as corrupt and unfair practices like the operation of the 'benami system' provided the ideal scenario for the occurrence of communal clashes. The party regrets that the concerned authorities, viz., the District Council could have regulated the conduct of trade and business through proper licensing from the very beginning. It needs to be pointed out in this connection that except for short intervals, when regional parties formed the Government in Meghalaya, the Congress (I) has been the main ruling party in the State. It seems rather unfair on the part of the Congress (I) to blame other parties for the persistence of the 'benami' system because the party itself has failed to put a stop to such practices during its tenure of office. The contrast drawn by the Congress (I) in the achievements of tribals and non-tribals appears to be an attempt to apply the 'relative deprivation' argument in the context of Meghalaya. But ground realities present an altogether different picture. As a matter of fact, local tribals are fast catching up with the non-tribals and even outdoing them in several fields. We propose to take up an analysis of the emergence of the tribal elite to substantiate this point. We have conducted a statistical survey of the growth of this elite since 1970. Our samples include Gazetted Officers (Class I

69. See Appendix (I), op.cit.
...and II), Lecturers, Doctors, Lawyers, Supply Contractors and P.W.D. Contractors. Beginning from 1970, we have observed the growth of these sections of the elite during 1970, 1972, 1980, 1985, 1990 and 1995. We propose to start with the list of gazetted officers.

Table III - Percentage of Khasi Gazetted Officers since 1970.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the categories</th>
<th>Total No. of persons</th>
<th>No. of Khasis</th>
<th>Percentage of Khasis</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class I Officers</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II Officers</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class I Officers</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>16.68</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II Officers</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>31.75</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class I Officers</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>71.79</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II Officers</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>81.82</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class I Officers</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>85.19</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II Officers</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>71.01</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class I Officers</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>61.54</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II Officers</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>84.12</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class I Officers</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55.55</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II Officers</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>69.12</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It is significant to note that after the achievement of statehood, there has been a steady increase in the number of Khasis as far as recruitment to Class I and Class II gazetted posts is concerned. The percentage of Khasis in the Class I category was as low as 2.42% in 1970, but the percentage rose to 85.19% in 1985. In the Class II category, the Khasis constituted 3.05% of the officers recruited in 1970. However, the percentage shot up to 84.12% in 1990. Some fluctuations in the percentage of Khasis may be noticed during 1985 when there was a comparative decline in the percentage of Khasi Class II officers as against their percentage in 1980. In 1990, the percentage of Khasis in the Class I category declined although there was a rise in the Class II category. In 1995, the decline can be perceived in both the categories of officers. A probable explanation for the perceived
fluctuations lies in the fact that data was collected from the available copies of Meghalaya Gazettes only and hence, the list of officers is not a comprehensive one. But in spite of the fluctuations, it may be observed that the ratio of Khasis vis-a-vis total number of officers has multiplied substantially over the years following the creation of Meghalaya.

We may now proceed to explore the number of registered P.W.D. contractors as well as supply contractors to examine our observation in Chapter II that a vested interest has developed in this sector.

Table IV - Percentage of Khasi Supply Contractors during 1980-1995.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of Firms approved for supply of various items</th>
<th>No. of Khasi firms</th>
<th>Percentage of Khasi firms</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.63</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>57.57</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figures not available</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>64.92</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table V - Percentage of Khasi registered PWD Contractors (1980-1996).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Categories</th>
<th>Total No. of persons recruited</th>
<th>No. of Khasi contractors</th>
<th>Percentage of Khasi contractors</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class I Contractors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(East Khasi Hills &amp; Jaintia Hills)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>1980-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II Contractors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Jaintia Hills)</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>1980-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class I Contractors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills)</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>99.3</td>
<td>1984-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II Contractors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Except Garo Hills)</td>
<td>1067</td>
<td>1052</td>
<td>98.59</td>
<td>1984-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class I Contractors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Except Garo Hills)</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>97.52</td>
<td>1990-91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II Contractors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Except Garo Hills)</td>
<td>964</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>97.71</td>
<td>1990-91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class I Contractors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Except Garo Hills)</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>98.75</td>
<td>1995-96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II Contractors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Except Garo Hills)</td>
<td>2073</td>
<td>2034</td>
<td>98.11</td>
<td>1995-96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statements issued by the Office of the Superintending Engineer, PWD (Roads), Jowai Circle, Jowai (1980-81 to 1995-96), by the Office of the Superintending Engineer, PWD (Roads), Eastern Shillong Circle, Shillong (1981-82 upto 1995-96) and by the Office of the Superintending Engineer, PWD (Roads), West Khasi Hills (1984-85 upto 1995-96), showing the list of Class I and Class II Contractors. The number of Khasi Contractors has been worked out by the scholar in terms of their percentage vis-a-vis total number of Contractors in each circle as mentioned by Shri M.K. Dey, Under Secretary (Works), PWD (Road and Building), Meghalaya.
The percentage of supply contractors in Table IV shows the monopoly of Khasi firms in this field. As far as the Class I PWD contractors are concerned, it is interesting to observe from Table V that their percentage has varied from 97.5% to 99.3% during 1980-82 to 1995-96. The percentage of Class II contractors reflects a higher representation of Khasis and ranges from 97.71% to 100%. According to information obtained from the Under Secretary, PWD, Meghalaya, the Khasis constitute cent per cent of registered contractors in Jaintia Hills and West Khasi Hills. In view of the available figures regarding the number of gazetted officers which also includes lecturers and doctors, it may be argued that not only has an educated elite emerged in Meghalaya, but there has also been a steady growth in their ranks after statehood. The Khasis have also left the non-tribals far behind by grabbing the bulk of contracts for road construction and supply of goods to various Government Departments.

We have also conducted a survey regarding the percentage of Khasi lecturers in two private colleges of Shillong. The following table will show the position.
Table VI - Percentage of Khasi Lecturers in Private Colleges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of College</th>
<th>Total No. of Lecturers</th>
<th>No. of Khasis</th>
<th>Percentage of Khasis</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Edmund's College</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.33</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.66</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.66</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23.61</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lady Keane Girls' College</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.23</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.69</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18.75</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21.13</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26.25</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The above table shows a steady increase in the percentage of Khasi Lecturers in both the colleges that were surveyed. The only deviation can be noticed in St. Edmund's College where the number of Lecturers increased from 45 in 1972 to 50 in 1980, but the number of Khasis remained static at 5 which actually led to a fall in the percentage of Khasi Lecturers. It may also be noted that very few Khasis have been recruited as Lecturers in the Science faculty. In Lady Keane College, for instance, there was only one Khasi Lecturer in the Science faculty in 1985. The number increased to 4 in 1990 and remained static in
1995. The reason for this phenomenon perhaps lies in the fact that very few Khasis were enrolled as students in the Science Departments of the North-Eastern Hill University. During 1986-87, e.g., a total of 20 tribal students were enrolled in the Science Faculties out of a total of 102 students. Thus, the share of tribal students stood at a mere 19.6% and the Khasis must have constituted an even smaller percentage.\(^{70}\) During 1987-88, there was an increase in the number of tribal students. Out of a total of 63 students, tribal enrolment was 31. This amounted to 50% of total enrolled students.\(^{71}\)

We propose to conclude our statistical analysis of the emerging Khasi elite with some data on the number of Khasi lawyers of the Shillong Court.

**Table VII - Percentage of Khasi Lawyers of Shillong Court.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total No. of Lawyers registered</th>
<th>No. of Khasis</th>
<th>Percentage of Khasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972-1980</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1995</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-1996</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Vakalatnama* of 1995 obtained from Shri S.R. Sen, Advocate, Shillong Court.

\(^{70}\) See NEHU 13th Annual Report (1986-1987), Shillong, pp. 51-102. The break-up of Khasi enrolment was not given in the report.

The above figures show the steady growth in the number of Khasi lawyers which goes further to substantiate our argument about the emergence of a Khasi elite which has been successful in articulating regional demands in a forceful manner.

Coming back to our analysis of the views of MPCC(I) on various issues, it may be mentioned that protection of tribal ethos is a favourite catchword for all political parties in Meghalaya, whether regional or national. The MPCC(I) also promises to take all necessary steps to maintain the population structure of the State with the cooperation of the local democratic institutions like the Syiemship, Lyngdohship, Nokmaship, Doloiship, Laskarship, Wahadadarship and other village institutions\(^\text{72}\) and to make efforts to vest them with statutory authority in certain spheres so that these institutions are made responsible in planning and implementing socio-economic programmes for the benefits of the people in these local areas.\(^\text{73}\)

In this connection, it is necessary to examine the character of these traditional institutions and see whether they can be called democratic. It may be noted that only

\(^{72}\) Congress (I) Manifesto of 1988, op.cit., p. 12.  
\(^{73}\) MPCC (I) Election Manifesto, February 1993, op.cit., p. 11.
the male adults of the village participate in the election of the Syiem and there are no voting rights for women.\textsuperscript{74} The same rule also applies to institutions like Wahadadar-ship.\textsuperscript{75} This clearly shows their undemocratic character and raises the question as to how these undemocratic institutions can be expected to protect the interests of the people. It appears, therefore, that the MPCC(I)'s claim to maintain the demographic balance in the State with the help of these political institutions does not carry much weight. The Congress (I) also claims to stand for special protection of identity of the tribes of Meghalaya and pledges to uphold Article 371(A) of the Constitution for the preservation of their traditions, culture, customs and usages, religious practices, land and its resources.\textsuperscript{76} Speaking on his party's stand on the protection of tribal ethos, the Meghalaya Pradesh Congress President, Mr. D.D. Lapang delcares that his party seeks to promote justice and equality and to ensure that every section of the population should find a place in India and be allowed to survive and thrive according to its own genius. The party refers to Constitutional safeguards for the protection of minorities.

\textsuperscript{74} Hamlet Bareh, \textit{History of the Khasi People}, (Shillong, 1967), p. 270.

\textsuperscript{75} For details, see P.N. Dutta, "Wahadadarship of Shella: Origin and Rise" in S.K. Chattopadhyay (ed.) \textit{Tribal Institutions of Meghalaya} (Guwahati, 1985), pp. 81-96.

and weak sections of the people and endorses such provisions. The MPCC(I), however, notes with regret that the provisions of the Sixth Schedule as instruments for emancipation of the tribal people have not been utilised to the optimum. The District Council has not been able to utilise properly the powers of making laws, rules and regulations vested in it under the Sixth Schedule. It may be noted that the MPCC(I) relies on the cooperation of both traditional tribal institutions as well as District Councils to preserve tribal culture and traditions. The party also expresses its national character by expressing full confidence in the provisions of the Constitution. But the Congress (I) cannot absolve itself from its share of the blame along with the regional parties for inadequate implementation of the proposed safeguards under the Sixth Schedule when it was the ruling party in Meghalaya. In 1987, the issue of protecting the indigenous tribal identity became the main election plank of all the regional parties. There was popular pressure on the then Home Minister of the Congress (I) Government in Meghalaya, Mr. D.D. Lapang, to tender his resignation. Ironically, the Congress (I) M.P., Mr. G.G. Swell and another party MLA,

77. See Appendix (I), discussion with D.D. Lapang, op.cit.
Mr. D.R. Nongkynrih, lent their support to the opposition demand that the State Government headed by Captain W.A. Sangma should immediately resign because it had failed to protect the interests of the tribal people of Meghalaya. It appears, therefore, that in spite of the Congress (I)'s commitment to protect tribal identity as expressed in its election manifesto, the party's stand on the issue has not convinced all sections of the tribal society.

Regarding the establishment of industries in Meghalaya, the MPCC(I) claims that it is not opposed to industrialisation and looks upon it as an avenue for creating employment potential. The party shows preference for agro-based industries and industries based on other local products and calls for imparting training to the local youth to man these industries. While supporting the motion of thanks on the Governor's Speech during the Budget Session of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly on 7th March, 1975, the Congress (I) Member, Mr. D.D. Lapang lauded the achievement of the Industries Department in taking over the Assam State Warehousing Corporation. In the same breath, he cautioned the Government to ensure that when other industries would come up, the employees are recruited from among local youth.

78. See the editorial titled "Shillong Portents" in the Assam Tribune, June 30, 1987.
the tribal people. He called upon the Government to check the influx of outsiders. It appears, therefore, that the Congress (I) is apprehensive of measures for industrialisation of the State lest the population structure of the state is disturbed. In this regard, the Congress (I) stands on an equal footing with the regional parties of Meghalaya all of which oppose industrialisation on the ground that it will lead to influx from outside the state. It may be noted that the Congress (I) Election Manifesto of 1988 does not mention at all about the party's industrial policy in Meghalaya while the earlier Manifesto of 1983 makes a casual reference to the development of small scale and cottage industries. This may be interpreted to mean that the Meghalaya Unit of the Congress (I) is neither convinced about the prospects of industrialisation in Meghalaya nor the party is in a position to allay popular misgivings in this regard through effective propaganda.

As far as the proposal for the establishment of railway lines in Meghalaya is concerned, the Congress (I) seems to lend its support on the ground that this will provide local traders and farmers with easy and cheap

81. See Election Manifestoes of the Congress (I) in Meghalaya, 1983 and 1988, op.cit.
transportation facilities for selling their products outside the State. But the issue does not figure in the programmes of the party which implies that the Congress (I) in Meghalaya does not have any genuine concern for the establishment of railway lines.

Our analysis of the views of the Congress (I) on various issues may be summed up by observing that the Congress (I) regards 'regionalism' as detrimental to the process of national integration. Indeed, the Congress (I) looks upon regionalism as a narrow ideology which is sustained by communal consciousness. The Congress (I) also favours centralisation of power and is not sympathetic to demands for federal autonomy. But there seems to exist some dichotomy between the Congress (I) stand at the all India level and the MPCC(I) stand on the relationship between regionalism and nationalism. While the MPCC(I) President emphatically states that his party does not regard regionalism as contradictory to nationalism, the INC(I) openly dubs regional aspirations as anti-national. The MPCC(I) expresses its concern for the preservation of the tribal ethos and proclaims its determination to maintain the existing demographic balance in the state. But the

82. See Appendix (I), discussions with D.D. Lapang, op.cit.
sincerity of the party in the attainment of these goals remains open to scrutiny. The MPCC(I) goes to the extent of declaring itself as a national party with a regional outlook and is confident of the capabilities of national parties to protect regional interests.

The Communist Party of India's response to regionalism marks a sharp ideological contrast from that of the Congress (I). The Communists had advocated the theory of multi-national India and maintains that the right of self-determination is an essential condition for the unity of India. It is this ideological specificity of the Communist Party of India which accounts for its relevance for our present analysis.

Lenin saw the rise of nationalism as a transient political phenomenon more than counterbalanced by a concurrent trend towards increasing internationalisation of economic, political and cultural life. This is why he did not come up with explicit definitions of such concepts as nation, nationality and nationalism. But the basic thrust of his thinking was to see these as economic and political phenomena - the result of the centralising tendencies of

It is this methodology that has dominated the thinking of the Indian Left on the 'national' or 'nationality' question where this question now refers essentially to the internal political arrangements of an Indian Union comprising a number of linguistic territorial state units and confronted with a variety of regional pressures.

The Communist Party of India, as a matter of fact, has never accepted the new Indian political system. It has been eager to see India organized either on the Soviet or the Chinese model rather than on the democratic model of the West.\textsuperscript{85} The Second Congress of the CPI which met in March, 1948, took a decision for a determined democratization of India and its conversion into a Union of national people's democratic republics on the basis of the principle of national self-determination and the abolition of princely states.\textsuperscript{86}

In sophisticated Marxist accounts, there is recognition of the existence of a 'dual consciousness', of a pan-Indian identity as well as of regional, linguistic-

\textsuperscript{84} For details, see V.I. Lenin, \textit{Collected Works}, Vol. 24 (Moscow, 1964).


\textsuperscript{86} Cited in \textit{Taufiq Ahmed Nizami, The Communist Party and India's Foreign Policy} (New Delhi, 1971), p. 10.
based 'nationalism'. The National Movement is said to have fostered and promoted both kinds of identities. It is believed that behind these regional, nationality or national movements are not distinct regional bourgeoisie but different sections of the ruling class alliance or bloc, as well as sections of the working class and peasantry with their specific democratic aspirations. In general, the Marxists support the demands for greater state autonomy because it is said to enhance democracy. However, they make a distinction between regional claims or movements backed by the oppressed classes and those backed by oppressor classes. This divergence reveals itself largely through the kind of opposition parties leading these movements or making claims, or in the character of the party in government in the states. Thus, CPI and CPI(M) led states by definition express the aspirations of the working class and oppressed peasantry just as bourgeoisie parties in the states represent the interests of segments of the ruling class or bloc. In other words, the Communist Parties in India judge regional demands on the basis of their class

87. Of course, as we shall see later, there are exceptions to this general Marxist posture in specific situations.

character and support or oppose these demands accordingly, at least from the theoretical point of view.

As we have already noted, the Communist Party of India has been opposed to the conception of India as a multi-lingual nation, and has been advocating the theory of a multi-national state based on the Soviet model. It, therefore, opposes the present centralization and has been advocating maximum autonomy for the states. The party even advocated the formation of tribal states on district level.\textsuperscript{89} It has been difficult for the party to project an image of typical Indian nationalism due to its international character. Many of the Communists even doubt whether it was wise to participate in the democratic process of election. In its election manifesto of 1967, the CPI demanded that, wider power and authority, particularly in financial and economic matters be given to the states of the Indian Union. The Seventh Schedule of the Constitution must be revised and amended so as to enlarge the powers of the state and abridge those of the Central Government.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{89} See Kousar J. Azam, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 226. The Communist attempts to subvert the existing order in the states of West Bengal and Kerala through the agency of coalition governments were indications of the same trend. In fact, they earlier attempted a subversive movement to topple the existing regime in the Telengana region of the state of Hyderabad.

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Election Manifesto of the Communist Party of India, 1967}, p. 29.
As guided by their ideology, the Marxists would make every effort to promote integration and to break down the barriers separating people, particularly the working classes. This general principle would entail respect for the equality of all languages and culture. It would mean rejecting privileges for any particular ethnic group while safeguarding the interests of minorities. In India, this would imply the adoption of a policy of 'positive discrimination' or 'affirmative action' for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Tribal movements for autonomy would, in general, be supported by Marxists because these are quite often perceived as the result of non-tribal exploitation and displacement of indigenous tribals.

The CPI, from the beginning, has been to advocating the linguistic reorganisation of India. The party takes the various linguistic groups in India as national groups and has been advocating their linguistic cause as the nationality cause. This doctrinal commitment on the part of the Communists has enabled them to support all regional and autonomy movements by linguistic groups irrespective of their political desirability.

93. But the dichotomy in the Communist stand becomes evident when in specific situations like the Assam movement or the GNLF movement, the Communists fail to live up to the aspirations of smaller nationalities. See A.K. Baruah, op.cit.
Speaking on his party's position on regionalism, the veteran CPI leader of erstwhile Assam and of the present state of Meghalaya, Prafulla Misra observes that the term 'regionalism' has been wrongly used to denote the narrow interests of a particular group, of a particular area. During the struggle for independence, various regional groups came together to fight against colonialism. According to the Meghalaya Unit of the CPI, Misra argues, championing the cause of a particular ethnic group should not be branded or dubbed as 'regionalism' because India, being a homeland of various nationalities, the rights of every segment of the population must be guaranteed and this alone will ensure the unity of India. The CPI does not seem to agree with the term 'regional parties' as it is commonly used, but concedes that these parties in Meghalaya, like their brothers in the rest of the country, champion the cause of their own people, strive to safeguard their identity as small nationalities and to ensure that they may develop according to their own historical tradition and genius.\(^9\) It is striking to note that while the MPCC(I) looks upon regionalism as a narrow ideology, the CPI adopts a less strident and more sympathetic posture towards this phenomenon, in conformity with the Marxist doctrine. But,

\(^9\) See Appendix (2). Discussions with Shri Prafulla Misra, Communist Party of India leader, on 4th January, 1991, in Shillong.
in spite of the CPI's disapproval with the term 'regional parties', the party stops short of suggesting a suitable, alternative term to substitute the same.

The CPI in Meghalaya seems to consider regionalism as a natural phenomenon. Tracing its roots in India, the party leader, Prafulla Misra refers to the uneven and lopsided development in India. After independence, as a result of mass education and development of roads and communications, more and more backward people who were not in the social and political map of India so far have started asserting their rights. The CPI considers this as a welcome development which should not be termed as 'regionalism'. According to the Meghalaya unit of the CPI, the regional parties are popular because they champion the cause of the region. The national parties too, deal with regional problems, but the CPI admits that sometimes parties with a national allegiance fail to project regional issues in an effective manner as a result of which the regional parties assume preponderance over the national parties. As far as regionalism in Meghalaya is concerned, the CPI does not seem to regard it as antagonistic with nationalism. Misra justifies his party's stand in this regard by citing Mr. B.B. Lyngdoh, the APHLC leader's declaration that "Ours is regional party with a national
Thus, the CPI in Meghalaya seems to view regionalism as a natural phenomenon arising in response to the socio-economic and political situation of India. In other words, the Communists in Meghalaya do not doubt the legitimacy of regionalism as such. But once again, the party continues to disapprove the use of the term 'regionalism', although the party finds nothing wrong with the activities that are associated with it.

Speaking about the CPI's stand on the clashes between the tribals and non-tribals in Meghalaya, Misra observes that the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos hoped that all their problems would be solved once they got rid of Assamese political domination and achieved statehood. In reality, however, they got only political freedom, but not economic freedom. In the field of trade and business, the tribal traders had to face stiff competition from their non-tribal counterparts. This, according to the CPI, is the crux of the problem. As a possible solution to the problem, the Meghalaya Unit of the CPI suggests the decentralization of the market place to ease the pressure on Barabazar and urges that the local tribals be given first preference to carry on trade and business. It is surprising that the

95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.
CPI in Meghalaya does not explain the tribal-non-tribal divide in terms of class struggle. This is because class polarisation in the Marxist sense has not taken place in Meghalaya and the friction basically concerns the same class with different ethnic affiliations. It is, therefore, a case of intra-class and not inter-class conflict that marks the politics of Meghalaya today.

The CPI does not consider its national commitments a liability at the State or regional level. Citing the party's programme on the tribal problem, Misra emphasizes the CPI's deep concern for the tribal cause. This implies the party's commitment to the promotion of tribal welfare both at the national and at the state levels. The CPI's stand is that every nationality or ethnic group, whether big or small, must be given some political rights in his or her homeland. There must also be some safeguards to ensure that small tribal people are not 'swamped' by migration from outside. That is, the demographic balance of the tribal societies must not be affected. The Meghalaya CPI's views on the tribal issue follow from the general party doctrine of recognition of the rights of different nationalities and ethnic groups.

97. See details of the CPI's programme on the tribal problem as cited in ibid. Also see CPI on Burning Problems of Meghalaya issued by the Meghalaya State Council, CPI, October 20, 1983 and Draft Programme of the Meghalaya Coordination Committee of the CPI.

98. Ibid.
The CPI favours the establishment of industries in Meghalaya. The party urged the Government to select some industries and arrange necessary training for the local people to man these industries. The party regrets that these suggestions have fallen in deaf ears.\textsuperscript{99} The establishment of industries seems to be one major issue on which the CPI's position is fundamentally different from that of the regional parties. The regional parties of Meghalaya have made no secrets of their opposition to industrialisation, although they are not against the establishment of small scale industries. While all parties talk about the need of training local manpower, no significant breakthrough has so far been made in this regard which has, in turn, hampered the long-term prospects of industrialisation in the State.

Regarding Centre-State relations, the CPI claims to have demanded for a long time the restructuring of these relations in order to vest more power in the states. The party believes that the Government of India's grant of certain rights to different ethnic groups through the signing of a number of accords was necessary to maintain the federal character of the Constitution.\textsuperscript{100} The CPI,

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
however, does not suggest measures to reverse the centripetal tendencies of the Indian Constitution. The party also fails to take note of the fact that most of the autonomy accords have been rendered ineffective due to non-implementation of their provisions and reluctance of some State Governments to part with financial and decision-making powers.

The CPI's stand on the issue of the Hill State reflects the party's attitude towards regional aspirations in the hills. The CPI felt that the problem of the hills people was basically a problem of their regeneration. The hills people wanted full opportunities for self-expression and for shaping their future freely within the great family of Indian Union. According to the CPI, the fulfilment of genuine aspirations in the hills had become urgent to promote integrity of the nation and prosperity of the region. Thus, the CPI did not look at the problem merely from the point of view of the 'development' of the people of the area, but took the question of national integration also into consideration. Though the CPI rejected the proposal of the Union Home Ministry for the creation of a federal structure, the party recommended in its memorandum to Chavan that,

… each of the Hill peoples … should be granted full autonomy within their respective distinct region, with the right to constitute them into Union Territory, if any one of them so desire, with clear provision to remain, out of their own volition, within the State of Assam as Autonomous Region. 102

The CPI was the first national party to welcome and support the formation of Meghalaya so that the tribal people might develop their way of life in accordance with their tradition and culture. 103 It must be noted, however, that although the CPI stands for the preservation of tribal identity, the party finds no contradiction between the legitimate rights of the tribal majority and the non-tribal minorities who are permanent inhabitants of Meghalaya. 104 This is certainly a significant point of departure from the positions adopted by the regional parties. Moreover, the party's proposal for an integrated State of Assam with safeguards for the hills people marked a sharp contrast from the standpoints of the regional parties.

On the whole, it may be observed that the CPI supports regional movements and other centrifugal forces, at least on the theoretical plane. The Communist mainstream

102. "CPI Memorandum to Y.V. Chavan", Published in Shillong Observer, June 1, 1967, Vol. IX, No. 4, p. 3.
103. CPI on Burning Problems of Meghalaya issued by the Meghalaya State Council, CPI, October 20, 1983, p. 5.
104. Ibid., pp. 4-5.
characterises the existing linguistic division of states as a division reflecting the existence of different nations or nationalities. This is done in order to lend legitimacy to regional demands in consonance with the Marxist concern and consideration for the 'Nationality Question'. In conformity with the views of the national leadership the Meghalaya Unit of the CPI also endorses its support of regional aspirations. The Congress (I)'s response in this regard appears to be fundamentally different from that of the CPI. As the rise of regionalism poses a threat to the support-base of the Congress (I), the Congress-ruled Centre seems to have few options but to resort to repression to cope with regional and centrifugal forces.

In the next chapter, we propose to take up an analysis of the position adopted by the regional parties of Meghalaya on the question of national integration and nationalism.