

ELECTORAL POLITICS IN MEGHALAYA

**A CASE STUDY OF THE GREATER SHILLONG AREAS
DURING THE 1983 (ASSEMBLY) ELECTIONS**

By

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INTRODUCTION

In India, the second quarter of the twentieth century appeared as a period during which certain processes were set in motion that transformed the age-old structure and character of the society. One such process is the politicization of Indian masses. The chief characteristics of this process is that it draws people with diverse historical and cultural backgrounds into a common universe of interaction and discourse based on principles of political equality and competition. This opens up a new area of political choice and influence for ordinary men and women, who until recently, were apolitical beings - that is, subjects not expected to intervene in the ongoing processes of allocation of power and privileges in the society.

The right of entry into the political arena is, however, not acquired automatically by all at the same time. It is through mobilization and involvement in competitive politics, and the resulting and perception of conflicting interests, that the various groups manage to enter organised politics and learn to play their part in it. This process is by no means smooth, nor is it equally open to all. Representative institutions, despite their formal openness, are in reality more open for some than for others. Those who are close to the power structure have a natural

advantage, for they possess the necessary means - high socio-economic status and better education - to turn the balance of political competition in their own favour.

But periodic elections, in a way, do satisfy the desire of the masses for their share in the political power. Once in a while, the masses get an opportunity of participation in the political process. For a time, they are the uncrowned sovereign. In the theoretical sense, power is dispersed and the masses are integrated into the main stream of political life.

The study of Election by political scientists and political sociologists started only after the Second World War to understand and explain social reality. It was for the first time that in such studies latest scientific techniques were applied to the political problems. The Behavioural approach opened up vast areas of fruitful empirical research. Eugene Burdick and Samuel S. Eldersveld, American political sociologists, made two good review studies of voting behaviour till 1951.¹ But their studies

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1. (i) Samuel S. Eldersveld, Theory and Method in Voting Behavioural Research in Heinz Eulau, et al., Political Behaviour, New Delhi, 1972.
 - (ii) Eugene Burdick, Political Theory and the Voting Studies in E. Burdick and Arthur S. Brodbeck (Ed.) American Voting Behaviour, Illinois, 1959.

did not throw any light as to how power is acquired and through what motivations power changes hand. Moreover, they do not explain how effective are elections, parties, groups and media of communication as instruments for democratic actions and discussions.

In India, the first Election study was done by S.V. Kogekar and Richard L. Park in 1952.² Since then, Election studies were made in Poona, Gujarat, Bombay, Goa etc. But the first major step to study voting behaviour was done at the time of the Fourth General Elections in 1967 by the Indian Council for Social Science Research under the chairmanship of Shri M.S. Gore.³ Some studies were also undertaken for the 1972 elections like Zaheer Masood Quraishi's, Elections and State Politics of India, A Case Study of Kashmir. Leaving Sachindananda's, The Tribal Voter in Bihar and R.P. Singh's, Electoral Politics in Manipur, none of these studies however dealt with the voting behaviour with special references to the tribal people.

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2. S.V. Kogekar and Richard L. Park (eds.), Report on the Indian General Elections 1951-55, Popular Press, Bombay, 1956.
 3. ICSSR, New Delhi, Studies of the Fourth General Elections, Allied Publishers, 1956.

The present study is an attempt in that direction. In Meghalaya B. Datta Ray's book, Electoral Politics in Meghalaya is only an analytical study of Parliamentary Elections held in 1977.⁴ The Contribution made by scholars for the seminar organised by the North East India Council for Social Science Research on December 14-15, 1983 on Electoral Politics in North East India dealt with only one aspect or the other of the whole Election process. Moreover, my study on Electoral Politics in Meghalaya: A Case Study of the Mawkhar Constituency during the 1983 Assembly Elections is only a micro study of one constituency which does not explain in general the Electoral behaviour of the people in the Greater Shillong Areas. Greater Shillong Areas have been taken up for study as it includes the more important constituencies of Meghalaya. (It includes both rural and urban constituencies as well as a conglomeration of tribes, communities, linguistics and religious groups. It is hoped that the area selected for study presents important characteristics of Electoral Politics in the State.)

The purpose of study is to examine the voting behaviour of the electorate with the following objectives:

4. B. Datta Ray, Electoral Politics in Meghalaya, NEISSR, Shillong, 1978.

- (a) To study the voters' political attitude and preferences, party preferences and identification, the pattern of orientation towards candidates and parties, the importance attached to local issues and their influence in electoral decision making.
- (b) To enquire into the process of electioneering of the different political parties and their candidates.
- (c) A comparative study of the Election manifestoes of the political parties.
- (d) The study of the various campaign techniques, the efficiency of campaign, the importance of campaign, voters' exposure to mass media, their resultant participation, involvement, etc.
- (e) The analysis of the results and the voting behaviour in general, and
- (f) The role of women in the whole election process.

The study for the Greater Shillong Areas is being conducted with the help of questionnaire, schedules, indepth interviews, primary documents, secondary sources and observation. The observation report is my own involvement in the General Assembly Elections held in 1983.

Before discussing the Electoral behaviour in the Greater Shillong Areas, it will be useful to have a

background of Meghalaya Politics in general and of the areas where field work is done in particular.

Following the Twenty-Second Amendment of the Indian Constitution on 24th December, 1969, Parliament enacted history by passing the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Bill simultaneously in the two Houses in order to create "an autonomous state to be known as Meghalaya" within the State of Assam, comprising of United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District and the Garo Hills District as defined in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. The most important feature of the Meghalaya Act (55 of 1969) was that it created a new tier in India's State structure similar to the Autonomous Republic of the USSR. The Executive power of the new unit was vested in the Governor of Assam, aided and advised by the council of ministers of Meghalaya, in relation to the Autonomous State. A legislative Assembly was also created with membership open to all Indians. Except Shillong, all seats in the Autonomous District for election to the Assam Legislature has been restricted to the Scheduled Tribes of the Autonomous Districts. Further the Governor was empowered to nominate upto three members from the minority communities if, in his opinion, they were inadequately represented.⁵

5. The Assam Reorganisation Act (Meghalaya) 1969.

But some of the Hill Leaders were not satisfied with it and demanded a full Statehood for Meghalaya which was finally granted to them on 21st January 1972, when it became a full fledged State of the Indian Union, Meghalaya is bounded by Assam on the North and the East and by Bangladesh in the South and the West. It has an area of 22,549 Sq. Kms according to the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act 1971. Meghalaya lies between 25.47° and 26.10° North Latitude and 89.45° and 92.47° East Longitude. It has a population of 13,27,874 (1981 Census).⁶ The total number of Electorates in Meghalaya is 6,81,400.⁷

In 1920, only a few selected (950) male citizens enjoyed the right to franchise.⁸ Under the Government of India Act 1935, females who were literates, wives of persons who paid municipal, cantonment or small town taxes were given the right to vote. Again, wives of retired pensioners, non-commissioned officers or soldiers of His Majesty's Regular Forces or of Assam Rifles or pensioned widows or mothers were regarded as electors. So in 1935,

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6. Tayeng, J., Census of India 1981, Series 14, Meghalaya, Director of Census Operations, Meghalaya, 1981, p. 3.
7. Chief Electoral Officer, Meghalaya, Election Handbook - Assembly Election, 1983, Shillong.
8. Rao, V.V. et al., A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India, Vol. II (Meghalaya) 1874-1983, S. Chand & Co., New Delhi, 1983, p. 94.

the number of voters registered were 21,436. There were 1,306 in Garo Hills; 6,154 in Khasi Hills; 10,767 in Jaintia Hills and 2,197 in the Shillong Women Constituency. In 1946, the number of electors in all these constituencies increased to 31,020. (Garo Hills 3,192; Shillong Women Constituency - 5,087, Jaintia Hills - 11,101, and Khasi Hills - 11,640).

India attained independence in 1947. The Constitution of India envisaged Universal Adult Franchise as one of its principle features. This means all adult citizens above twenty-one years of age were given the right to vote irrespective of their caste, creed, religion or sex. So in 1952, the number of electors increased enormously. It was as follows:

TABLE - I⁹

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>INCREASED BY</u>	<u>TOTAL ELECTORATES</u>
1920	-	950
1937	20,486	21,436
1946	9,684	31,020
INDEPENDENT INDIA		
1952	2,49,228	2,80,248
1957	32,380	3,12,628

9. For total electorates, Ibid.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>INCREASED BY</u>	<u>TOTAL ELECTORATES</u>
1962	37,759	3,50,387
1967	26,300	3,76,687
IN MEGHALAYA		
1972	41,806	4,18,493
1977	11,833	5,30,326
1978	54,687	5,85,023
1980	52,475	6,37,498
1983	43,902	6,81,400

Under Independent India and in the 1952 Assam Assembly Elections there were 2,80,248 electors in Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In the subsequent elections held in 1957, 1962 and 1967 the total electorate increased varied between 26,300 to 37,759 in these areas.

In the State of Meghalaya, the total electorates registered in 1972 was 4,18,493. That is, under the composite State of Assam and the separate State of Meghalaya 41,806 electors were added. But in between the two Assembly Elections (1972-1978) in Meghalaya there was an abnormal rise of voter by 1,66,530. Such an increase was never noticed before though elections were held at regular intervals. Moreover between the second (1978) and third (1983) general Assembly Elections the electors were further increased by 96,377.

If we look at the Table I we find that in 15 years (1952-67) under Assam, the total electorates increased in Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills by 96,439. Whereas within the span of five years (1978-83) almost the same number 96,377 were added. Moreover the table also shows that within a span of twenty years (1952-72) the number of electorates were increased by 1,38,245 (in Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills) and between (1972-83) that is; eleven years the voters increased by 2,62,907. If we analyse this we find that the addition in the last eleven years is more than double than the increase between 1952 to 1972.

The increase in the number of voters was due to various reasons. First, there was an improvement in the registration of voters. Second, the political parties interested in the outcome of elections must have evinced interest in the registration of voters. Third, the improvement in the sanitary conditions and the provisions of essential commodities at controlled rates resulted in the reduction of death rate and increase in the span of life. Above all, the unsettled economic and political condition in East Pakistan (Bangladesh) accelerated the migration. Apart from immigration from Bangladesh there was also immigration from other parts of India. A substantial number of them must have settled down in Meghalaya and acquired the right to vote.

On the eve of its formation as a full fledged State, Meghalaya was allotted 60 seats in the Legislative Assembly. After the First General Elections held on 9th March 1972, the APHLC which won 32 seats in the Assembly was called upon to form the Government. Capt. W.A. Sangma, an ardent APHLC leader formed the Government with Stanley D.D. Nichols Roy, B.B. Lyngdoh, Edwinson Bareh and Sandford K. Marak as Cabinet Ministers and with D.D. Pugh and Grahon Singh Marak as Ministers of State.

From time to time attempts were made to unseat the Sangma Ministry. During the winter session of the Assembly (December 1974), there was a lobbying by some of the members of the opposition like H. Hynniewta and M.N. Majaw to throw out the Sangma Ministry. There was also a demand in the party itself for the expansion of the ministry. The situation was, therefore, delicate for Capt. Sangma. To strengthen his position and that of his ministry, Sangma requested R. S. Lyngdoh, the Speaker to join his cabinet so that one of his aspirants for office P. R. Kyndiah, may be dropped in the Speaker's chair. The Speaker did not like to involve himself in partisan politics. Since the Speaker did not accept the offer, Sangma had no alternative but to take P. R. Kyndiah into his cabinet. Otherwise, Kyndiah's followers would leave the party. Further, some

of the members aspired promotion. Therefore, D.D. Pugh and Grohon Singh Marak were promoted as Cabinet Ministers. In their place, three others were taken as Minister of State - P.G. Marbaniang, B.B. Shallam and Salseng C. Marak. Thus, the ministry was expanded on 6th February 1975.¹⁰

On 16th November 1976, a meeting of the APHLC was convened at Mendipathar to merge the APHLC with the Congress. Leaving B.B. Lyngdoh, S.D.D. Nichols Roy, P.R. Kyn-diah, D.D. Pugh and Jackman Marak, all the APHLC legislators supported Capt. Sangma's move which was formally announced at the Jawahar Nagar session of the Indian National Congress on 19th November 1976. On 22nd November 1976, Capt. Sangma formed the Congress Ministry with eight members which was further expanded on 24th January 1977. It included Capt. Sangma as Chief Minister, five Cabinet Ministers - E. Bareh, S.K. Marak, G. Marak, Maham Singh. P.G. Marbaniang and five Ministers of State - S.C. Marak, B.B. Shallam, U. Kharbuli, D. D. Lapang and F.K. Mawlot.

In the Second Assembly Elections held on 25th February 1978, no party obtained an absolute majority in the Assembly. The I.N.C. won 20 seats, APHLC 16, HSPDP 14 and Independents 10. Of the 10 independents, two belonged to

10. Ibid., p. 121.

the PDIC. Since no party obtained an absolute majority, coalition became inevitable. On 3rd March 1978, the central Executive Committee of the HSPDP called upon all the regional parties to come together and form a coalition government. The General Secretary of the APHLC, D.D. Pugh welcomed the proposal. On 4th March, the Parliamentary Party of the APHLC decided to negotiate with the HSPDP. Three independents - Mrs. Miriam D. Shira, Shri Mackenson K. Sangma and Shri Tylli Kyndiah promised to support the APHLC. The two members of the PDIC also promised to support the coalition. Another independent, Shri H. Britainwar Dan joined the coalition.¹¹ The representatives of the three regional parties, the APHLC, HSPDP and PDIC convened a meeting to form a three-flag government but they could not arrive at a solution as to who should be the Chief Leader. They were about to disperse when the Meghalaya Tribal Youth Organisation came into the political scene and forced the leaders of the regional parties to come to an understanding. To solve the problem of the Chief Leader, a church leader, Father Sngi Lyngdoh had to be called to settle the issue by drawing of lots. Accordingly, D.D. Pugh, an APHLC was elected as the leader of the coalition. Then

11. Ibid.

the parties entered into an agreement which stated that the strength of the ministry should be 13 - one to the PDIC and six each for the APHLC and the HSPDP. Thus, the coalition government was formed on 10th March 1978.

In the meantime, B.B. Lyngdoh who aspired the post of the Chief Minister engineered defections to increase the strength of the APHLC. He was eminently successful in this matter by having as many as 31 legislators. On the other hand, D.D. Pugh played the game dexteriously by enacting an impression that he would be resigning and facilitate the election of B.B. Lyngdoh as the Chief Minister. At the same time, he saw to it that the APHLC Parliamentary Party elected him as its leader.

B.B. Lyngdoh wrote to the President of the APHLC party that the choice of the chief minister should rest in the party. Accordingly, the Parliamentary Party decided to form a single party government with D.D. Pugh to continue as Chief Minister. But D. D. Lapang's counter question brought the truth out that the government would be a coalition one again (APHLC and PDIC). This frustrated B. B. Lyngdoh who, now decided to come to an agreement with the Congress and the HSPDP. Capt. Sangma of the Congress and S.D. Khongwir of the HSPDP responded to his call to unite together to form the government.



On 17th April 1979, the Congress, HSPDP, one PDIC and seven dissidents of the APHLC formed themselves into a group styled as United Meghalaya Parliamentary Democratic Forum (UMPDF) under the leadership of B.B. Lyngdoh and entered into a 'solemn serious agreement' which read as follows:

In this emergency situation, we the representative in the Assembly have agreed to form a sort of national government by selecting the best team of leaders, irrespective of party, affiliation, with an accepted common object, plan and programme. We will all work for the evolution of the broad based organisation in the state, federal in form that will always ensure a stable majority in the Assembly.

All important matters in the government shall be decided in the cabinet or sub-cabinet. The chief minister or any other minister shall not decide any important matter alone.

We recommend to all the political parties in the state to make a definite provision to safeguard that the interest of the minorities are not jeopardised in the interest of the individuals. All important matters shall be decided by the party.

No reasonable person in the State would think or take lightly the above agreement and belief in the mischievous propaganda being thrown around by the interested elements. We are determined to implement the pledges contained in the above agreement and stand firm and work unitedly for the maintenance of the stability of the present government to ensure confidence in the minds of the public and greater progress in the State and the country as a whole.¹²

12. See, Rao, V.V. et al., A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol. II (Meghalaya) 1874-1983, S. Chand & Co., Delhi 1984, p. 125.

The UMPDF further agreed that B. B. Lyngdoh would hold office of Chief Minister for two years and the remaining two years by Capt. Sangma.

On 28th April 1978, the leaders of the UMPDF called upon the Governor to say that they had 32 legislature in the house of 60. But D.D. Pugh informed the Governor that his ministry had the following of 34. To find out the actual party position, the Governor summoned the Assembly to meet on 4th May 1979, where the speaker W. Syiemiong put the motion to voice vote. In this motion the UMPDF polled 30 and the Pugh's ministry 29. Thus D.D. Pugh was defeated who then submitted the resignation of his ministry and B.B. Lyngdoh was sworn in as Chief Minister on 7th May, 1979. His ministry consisted of Deputy Chief Minister S.D. Khongwir, nine Cabinet Ministers - Salseng C. Marak, H. Hadem, D.D. Lapang, M. Reidson Momin, B. Pakem, Y. Fuller Lyngdoh, P.G. Momin, P.G. Marbaniang, Maham Singh and two Ministers of State - H. Britainwar Dan and Pritington Sangma. Capt. Sangma was appointed the Chairman of the State Planning Board.

According to the 'Solemn Serious Agreement', B. B. Lyngdoh completed his two-year term and handed over the chief ministership to Capt. Sangma and became the Chairman of the State Planning Board.

Towards the expiry of the second Assembly tenure, that is, just before the third Assembly Elections B. B. Lyngdoh left the Forum. In his letter to the Chief Minister, Lyngdoh said:

We the members of the UMPDF are going to contest against one another in the Assembly Elections to be held next month. It will not be in keeping with the healthy Parliamentary practice for the parties in the ruling party to confront each other in the election arena. You may recall the discussion, you, Mr. Khongwir and myself had on 24th September 1982 in your office, where we examined two alternative actions; viz. winding up of the UMPDF or individual withdrawal before the start of the election campaign. Since there has been no move for the first step, withdrawal is the other course to be taken. Some of my colleagues have already declared their withdrawal.¹³

Thus all the members of the UMPDF withdraw from the forum before the commencement of the election. The third General Elections to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was held on 17th February 1983.

Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, is an agglomeration of four towns - Shillong municipality, Shillong Cantonment, Mawlai and Nongthymmai. Different wards of the municipality and different towns present great internal differences. Shillong has the following five physiographic

13. Ibid., p. 127.

divisions: the Northern slopes of the Shillong ranges, the Umshyrpi valley, the Laitumkhrach-Mawkhar upland, the Umkhrach valley and the Umkhrach-Umshing divide. Malki, Lumparing, Madan Laban, Laban and Kench's Trace, Rilbong are situated mainly on the Northern slopes of the Shillong ranges and partly in the Umshyrpi valley. These wards are more than 1,465 m above sea level, Laitumkhrach, European Ward, Police Bazar, parts of Jail Road, Mawkhar, Mission Compound, Jaiaw, South East Mawkhar and Mawprem are situated on the Laitumkhrach-Mawkhar upland and for most parts are between 1,430 and 1,545 m above sea level, parts of Jail Road and Mawlai occupy the Umkhrach valley and the Umkhrach-Umshing divide. Shillong Cantonment spreads over either side of the Umshyrpi. Nongthymmai, situated between the Wah Demthring, Wah Nongthymmai and Umkhrach spreads over the hills with heights between 1,500 and 1,615 m above sea level.¹⁴

For Electoral purposes, Greater Shillong Area was divided into the constituencies of Jaiaw, Laitumkhrach, Laban, Mawkhar, Mawlai, Mawprem, Malki-Nongthymmai, Pynthor-umkhrach and parts of the Myllem Constituency. These constituencies are inhabited by the Khasis, Jaintias, Bengalis,

14. J.B. Singh, Shillong: A Geographical Analysis of Internal Variations in B.B. Goswami, ed., Cultural Profile of Shillong, Anthropological Survey of India, Government of India, Calcutta, 1979, p. 69.

Assamese, Nepalis, Marwaris, Biharis, Punjabis and Mizos. Most of the Khasis and Jaintias and Mizos follow their own indigenous religion or are either Christians or converted into Christianity. The Bengalis and the Assamese are either Hindus or Muslims, the Punjabis belong to the Sikh religion and the others are Hindus.

In the following chapters a more detailed study will be made to cover the purpose of this work. The first chapter will deal with the political study of Greater Shillong Areas.

CONCLUSION

On the eve of its inauguration as a State on 21st January 1972, Meghalaya was divided into sixty single member constituencies. The constituencies: Myllem, Malki-Nongthymmai, Laitumkhrach, Pynthorumkhrach, Jaiaw, Mawkhar, Mawprem, Laban and Mawlai falls in the Greater Shillong Areas. The first general election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was held on 9th March 1972. In this election the APHLC was voted to power (APHLC secured 32 seats, the INC - 17 and Independents 11). But the elected members hoodwinked the masses by deciding in the Mendipathar Conference on 16th November 1976 to merge with the Congress. They were formally inducted into the Congress on 19th November 1976 at the Jawahar Nagar Session of the AICC. In the Second General Election held on 25th February 1978 no party secured an absolute majority. Therefore political instability emerged resulting in the formation of coalition governments. There were also defections.

The third Assembly election was held on 17th February 1983. In this election, the electorates in the Greater Shillong constituencies varied from 8,629 in Mawkhar to 13,390 in Jaiaw constituency. In most of the constituencies we find that the females especially the tribal women took an active part in the election. Moreover,

the voters between 30-50 age-group took the election more seriously than the other age groups. If we take the community and religious-wise break-up of the voters we find that only the Khasis, Jaintias, Bengalees and Nepalis are represented. These elected representatives belonged to Christianity, Hinduism and the Indigenous Khasi religion. Voters belonging to other communities or religion were not represented at all in the elections. Excepting one Marwari candidate who did not enjoy the confidence of the voters no candidates from other groups had ever contested. Non-representation of community and religion did not however, daunt the voters' spirit. They participated in the election equally and sportingly.

Coming now to the sample electorate a question was asked: When was the last General (Assembly) elections held? Here most of the voters were confused of the actual date because two other elections were held after it, District Council and Lok Sabha. Moreover, candidates repeatedly elected in constituencies were spontaneously identified than fresh winners. Regarding the sitting M.P. only a small section of the sample voters knew that the Lok Sabha election for Shillong Parliamentary Constituency in 1980 was boycotted on the issue of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh to North-Eastern Region. Again, the sample constituents

were at a loss in identifying the election symbols. Though they knew that 'Flower' and 'Lion' belong to the APHLC and HSPDP respectively they were confused with the INC's symbols - 'hand' and 'cow and a calf'. Only a fraction of the constituents knew that 'spade' is the symbol of the PDIC. In the media of communication we find more males came in contact with the mass media and printed materials. The females were influenced by inter-personal media. They also said that only when they could find time and in a relaxed atmosphere they would read newspapers and other handbills.

Questions were asked from the sample electorate regarding the local and the national problems facing the society. It is observed that educated voters assigned higher priorities to law and order, security within the country, defence, corruption, bribing, problems in Punjab and Assam etc. The female voters laid stress on high price-rise, unemployment, housing facilities, drinking water supply, breakdown of law and order system in the country, inadequate food stuffs in fair-price shops and co-operatives, sanitary conditions of roads and lanes, fall of public morality and the like.

Regarding the preference of the candidate some voters emphasized the personality of the candidate while

others looked at the party of the contestants. Moreover, the candidates who actually won the elections were themselves highly educated. Two of them are medical practitioners, four post-graduates, two graduates and one matriculate. In addition to this, some of them also hold LL.B. and B.T. degrees. Besides being representatives of the people, social workers and political activists, they also earn their livelihood as Medical practitioners, Advocates, Lecturers and Journalists. These representatives who belong to fifty years and above (leaving Oris Lyngdoh of Myllem constituency and B.K. Roy of Pynthorumkhrah constituency) have been elected as MLAs ever since Meghalaya was inaugurated. The MLAs belonging to the other age group have been active members or supporters of their respective parties. Ethnically, five MLAs belong to Christianity, three to Hinduism and one to the Indigenous Khasi Religion. Being seasoned politicians, three of them were elected for three terms, while two of them were elected for a two term and the remaining four for a single term.

The political parties that contested the 1983 elections in Meghalaya are the J.N.P.; C.P.I.; I.N.C.(I); A.P. H. L.C.; H.S.P.D.P.; and the P.D.I.C. At the national level, the Janata party won the majority of seats in the 1977 Lok Sabha elections. The main programme of the party

was to end Emergency and restore people's fundamental rights, to uphold the independence of the judiciary, freedom of the press, repeal the Maintenance of the Internal Security Act (MISA) and the Forty-Second Amendment of the Constitution, to delete the right to property from the list of fundamental rights. This party also pledged to end unemployment, give higher priority to rural development, irradiate illiteracy, provide drinking water for all etc. But the party being a heterogeneous group of non-communist opposition parties disintegrated within two years. So most of the policies and programmes which were promised to the people could not be implemented. In Meghalaya, though the JNP has no base yet Rabindra Das Choudhury was sponsored from the Laban constituency in the 1983 Assembly elections. But he had to forfeit his security deposit.

The next political party to be assessed is the C.P.I. Since 1943, a provincial committee of the CPI was set up in Assam. In 1972, a separate unit of the C.P.I. was also created in Meghalaya. The CPI is time and again driving home to the people of the present disparities in society. They try to explain to the people that in today's world there should be no inequality among human beings. All people are born equal. But the masses according to the active member of the CPI have not yet understood this message of the CPI. The other programmes which the party highlighted

are: immediate implementation of land reform measures; nationalisation of big industries, banks and insurance companies; minimum wages for all; fixed working hours; free the tribals especially of Meghalaya from the economic, cultural and political oppression. In spite of the eye-catching programmes and policies of the CPI for the general improvement of the oppressed lot yet, the ethnic group of Meghalaya have not so far reconciled to the CPI's ideas. Even after eleven years of functioning the CPI has yet to gain a seat in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly.

We now come to the performance of the INC. With the passage of time the Indian National Congress (INC) which fought for the independence of India evolved into the INC(I) (Indira). In Meghalaya, a regional party secured majority of seats in 1972. But the INC with its politics of manoeuvring was able to install its own government by 1976. In the 1978 and 1983 elections though no party secured an absolute majority to govern the State. Yet, the INC(I) formed a coalition government with the split group of the regional parties like the APHLC, HSPDP, and PDIC to run the affairs of the State.

The INC is the oldest organisation in the country. From its very inception it has committed itself to end

poverty and improve the economic standard of the people. The main aim and objectives of the party is to establish socialist society in which both the public and the private sectors will be allowed to work together for economic development, where agriculture will be given maximum attention and small and large scale industries enough encouragement. The party also stands for non-alignment, non-violence, twenty-point economic programme and five-point programme of Sanjay Gandhi. In addition to these, in Meghalaya the party has promised to protect and preserve the distinct identity of the tribal people, their customs, languages, culture and traditions. Reservation of seats in the services for the scheduled tribes has been further extended for ten years till 1990.

Coming to the regional political parties, the APHLC and the HSPDP are the two important organisations. The main reason for the APHLC and the HSPDP to form themselves into a political party was to demand a separate State of Meghalaya at par with other States of India. Once this objective was achieved, the parties harped round the emotional slogans, "Protection and Preservation of the distinct identity of the tribal people, their customs, traditions, language and culture." The APHLC claimed to be a regional party having a national outlook. The main programmes of the APHLC and the

HSPDP was to move towards self-sufficiency in agriculture, exploit the mineral and natural resources, to irradiate illiteracy and unemployment, to adopt border area rehabilitation programme, border road schemes, regrouping of villages in the border areas of Garo Hills and the like. The HSPDP went a step forward and resolved to get more authority from the government in the administration of the North Eastern Hill University so that it could render more help to the University's tribal students.

Another regional political party is the PDIC. The PDIC on the other hand, wanted to voice for the agricultural labourers and farmers. It pledged to fight for their legitimate rights. The farmers do not get remunerative prices for their crops. These perishable goods like potatoes are bought by the middle man at a very low price, which at times do not suffice even the cost price. So the party wants to remove the present exploitation of farmers and provide them a fair deal in the society. The party also pledges to settle the boundary dispute between Meghalaya and Assam, to restore back the lands which are either in Bangladesh and Assam, to erect a supply gate at Byrnihat, to restore the Tataw hills which has been taken over by the ICAR and the like.

So far as the manifestoes of the different political parties in Meghalaya are concerned, they have something in common, for example, the regional or State political parties resolved to detect and deport all foreign nationals who have entered into the State. At the same time, the manifestoes of the political parties in Meghalaya highlighted international, national and local problems of the society. In 1983, the main problem agitating the minds of the citizens was the foreign national issue. The immigrants had infiltrated into the North-Eastern Region from the erstwhile East Pakistan and Bangladesh. The other eye-catching slogan which swayed the mind of the constituents was the protection and preservation of the distinct identity of the tribal people. Other problems like inadequate education, inter-state boundary dispute, uplifting the farmers and using modern techniques of cultivation, exploiting the natural resources for the betterment of the State, providing opportunities for the youth to utilise their talents in the proper channel, restoration of the reserved seats, unemployment, land reforms and economic development. The parties also pledged for remedial measures like - health and sanitation, drinking water supply, electrification, sports, financial assistance, clean administration, resident accommodation with reasonable rents, roads and communications and the all round development of the State.

In addition to these certain special emphasis have been laid by different political parties. The Congress party highlighted their achievements in the socio-economic field and emphasized that it alone can bring stability and unity in a State like Meghalaya. The other parties charged the Congress for all the ills confronting the society. The Congress party laid stress on the 20-point economic programme and the central leadership of (late) Indira Gandhi. The regional parties on the other hand, stressed that Meghalaya is a land of the Khasis, Jaintias and the Garos and so, they alone should be the best judge in the governance of their State.

On the eve of the election the political parties, candidates and their supporters carried on door to door campaign, organised street-corner meetings, processions, shouting of slogans round the constituencies, distributing pamphlets, leaflets and manifestoes, sticking posters and appeals at vantage points of the constituencies to attract as many voters as possible. The contesting candidates also organised feast to win the goodwill of the voters. Some of the parties invited all India leaders like Mrs. Gandhi, P.A. Sangma, Mrs. M. Kidwai etc. to campaign for them. Newspapers, especially the local, openly advertised in favour of a particular party or candidate. Some parties also gave television sets to create a favourable image for themselves.

But unlike the rest of India no unruly scenes were reported from any part of Greater Shillong Areas. Everyone accepted the electoral battle sportingly and fairly.

In Jaiaw, Mawprem and Laban constituencies it was observed that wall writings like 'Vote for D.N. Joshi. Stamp your vote on the hand' was mutilated into an independent candidate Narayan Joshi's name. Miscreants made the symbol 'sun' on the alphabet 'D', the symbol 'hand' was changed into the symbol 'sun'. Similar writings were seen in the Jaiaw constituency where P.R. Kyndiah's name was changed into Maya Kyndiah and vice versa. This created confusion in the minds of the public regarding the candidates' party identification. In Laban constituency Bhaskar Choudhury's name (INC(I)) was changed into Manas Choudhury's name (IND).

Each recognised political party was allotted two broadcasts over the All India Radio. Radio reaches the electorates largely missed by newspapers. Majority of the housewives listen to radio during their daily chores. Some of the local newspapers openly advertised for a particular candidate or party. The candidates selected vantage points like main roads, bus stops, tea shops, cinema houses and walls of schools and colleges to advertise their election campaign.

The Congress (I) campaign was displayed so lavishly that it would make everyone salivate but they consoled themselves by saying "after all they get a lot of money from the Centre". Some of the candidates even calculated how many votes he is likely to poll. A candidate in an interview said that if all his loyal voters would have cast their vote, he could have easily won.

In the analysis of the election results we find, that in Greater Shillong Areas the total electorates ranged in between 8,629 in Mawkhar to 13,390 in Jaiaw. Among these the highest number of males and females were found in Jaiaw, 6,699 males and 6,691 females. The lowest ratio of males 4,259 being in Mawkhar and of females 4,186 in Mawprem. The total votes polled was the highest in Myllem 8,991 votes and the lowest in Malki-Nongthymmai 7,423 votes which is 78.93 percent and 66.19 percent respectively of the electorate. The total valid votes polled in comparison with the electorates of Greater Shillong Areas was the highest in Myllem (8,712 votes) and the lowest in Mawkhar (5,460 votes) that is, the total valid votes polled in these areas was between 63.27 percent (Mawkhar's) and 76.48 percent (Myllem's). The highest number of rejected votes were found in the Pynthorumkhras constituency (454 votes) and the lowest in Laitumkhras constituency (193 votes). This constituted 5.32 percent and 2.69 percent respectively in

comparison with the total votes polled in these constituencies. Out of the sixty-two contestants in Greater Shillong Areas we find that thirty-four of them had to forfeit their security deposits.

In the 1983 Assembly Elections there were two-triangular contest in Jaiaw and Mawlai, four-cornered contests in Laitumkhrah and Mawprem. Two constituencies — Myllem and Malki-Nongthymmai had seven-cornered contests and there were eight-cornered, nine-cornered and ten-cornered contests in Mawkhar, Pynthorumkhrah and Laban constituencies respectively. On scrutiny, all except one (Bina Acharya's) nomination were accepted.

S.D. Khongwir of the Mawlai constituency polled (4,274) the largest number of votes but the greatest marginal difference was between B.K. Roy's 2,993 votes and Surjit Kumar Dhar's 9 votes in the Pynthorumkhrah constituency. The smallest marginal difference 276 votes was found in Mawkhar constituency between Korbar Singh (1772 votes) and W.H.D. Syngkon (1,496 votes).

In Greater Shillong Areas we find that the uncertain constituencies were Malki-Nongthymmai, Myllem and Laitumkhrah. In Malki-Nongthymmai constituency there was a stiff contest between Upstar Knarbuli and Bindo M. Lanong, in

Laitumkhrach between P.G. Marbaniang and Dr. J. Khonglah and in Myllem between Oris Lyngdoh and Dentis Mohan Roy Kharkongor. In other constituencies though we find that the APHLC has a stronghold in Jaiaw and Mawkhar, the HSPDP in Mawlai and the INC(I) in Mawprem, Laban and Pynthorumkhrach constituencies. Yet, there was a key contest between Korbar Singh and W.H.D. Syngkon in Mawkhar constituency and between P. Ripple Kyndiah and S.M. Jyrwa in Jaiaw constituency.

On observation in the Greater Shillong Areas it was seen that the women-folk took a more active part in the whole election process. Right from the preparing of refreshments, banners, campaigning and waiting for the election results women outnumbered the menfolk. But in spite of being enthusiastic participants, no women was elected from Greater Shillong Areas either under the post-independent composite State of Assam or in the present State of Meghalaya. While probing this issue the respondents clarified that "women manage the house and men the affairs of the society. It is only a matter of interest that makes a woman more active in politics". The ladies on the other hand, stressed that they would like to contest the election but they must be supported by the men-folk and the society as a whole. But it is heartening to hear that in the Nongthymmai area

the ladies with the help of the gentlemen have filed a case in the Subordinate District Council Court for the post of (a local headman) Rangbah Shnong in a democratic set up. This case is yet to be decided which means women may be emancipated from this angle.

Communal riots as found in the rest of the country was not observed in the Greater Shillong Areas during election time. The electorates of these Areas that is, the tribal people, the Scheduled Castes and others (non-tribal and other minority groups) reacted differently to the Assembly elections. The scheduled castes had no representatives and so they remained indifferent to the whole election process. Among the seats with dominant non-tribal groups namely, in Laban, Mawprem and Pynthorumkhrah tribal people as well as non-tribal groups contested the elections. So majority of the voters were represented. But in Mawkhar constituency we find that the non-tribal groups had but one candidate who does not enjoy the confidence of the voters. So they too, did not ardently participate in the elections. As common in Indian electoral battle we had expected a great tussle of stone-throwing, disrupting election meetings, abusing and threatening the opponents' supporters especially between the Congress and the Regional parties or between the APHLC and the HSPDP but, no such cases were reported from any part of the Greater Shillong Areas. In fact, the same

supporters were found to be canvassing for different candidates on different days. Most of the electorates maintained a neutral attitude towards the candidates.

The tribal-non-tribal issue did not arise because as stated earlier the non-tribal groups had their representatives in Mawprem, Laban and Pynthorumkhrah constituencies. Only in the Mawkhar constituency, a non-tribal contestant had no support from his constituents. A peculiar fact observed in the Mawkhar constituency over the years is that a non-tribal voter would never support a non-tribal candidate. They would rather cast their vote for a tribal candidate and enjoy his confidence than giving it to a non-tribal candidate who would serve his own interest. Taking advantage of this, the tribal candidates and their supporters employed all the election techniques to capture as many non-tribal votes as possible.

Lastly, the dispute between the national and the State party was exploited to the maximum extent in these areas. The Congress (I) stressed that if they want their State to progress and prosper they should vote for Congress (I). This party declared that they alone were capable of bringing stability in the Centre (after the Janata regime 1977-79) and the State of Meghalaya (after the 1978 elections). They accused that the State parties are only engaged

in factional disputes among themselves. Those that brought the Statehood of Meghalaya have themselves joined the Congress for the further development of the State. The Congress (I) wanted the electorates to realise this, shake off their loyalty to the State parties and vote for Congress (I).

The State parties on the other hand, accused the Congress for all the ills and corruptions confronting their society. They spread the notion that the Congress party is a Dkhar (outsiders) party serving their own interest in Meghalaya at the expense of the tribal people. The State parties brought home to the people that they have time and again fought for the protection and preservation of the distinct identity of the tribal people. They further spread xenophobia that if they vote for any national (outsiders) party, one day, they will be uprooted from their own State and become an insignificant minority in the hands of the non-Meghalayans.

Some reforms were suggested. For example, the single-member constituency has often failed to reflect the true popular will or exact electoral divisions. The basic contradiction is that parties securing a relatively small proportion of voters are able to bag a majority of seats. For example, in Mawkhar constituency the elected representative enjoys the confidence of 1772 voters out of 8,629 electorates.

Even after several general elections to the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies of the State, one of the peculiarities in this country is the haphazard growth of political parties regardless of their validity. The multiplicity of parties had been not only creating confusions among the electorates but also administrative problems during the elections whenever the number of contesting candidates is large.

The recent trend of non-serious candidates jumping indiscriminately into the election fray makes the task of the election machinery difficult in making administrative arrangements even such routine matters as printing of ballot papers. It has also the effect of confusing the electorates and upsetting the election campaign of serious candidates. The following preventive measures would help tackle the problem effectively:

- (a) Increasing the security deposit;
- (b) Increasing the minimum number of votes required for the refund of security deposit from one-sixth to one-fourth; and
- (c) Denial of facilities like telephone connection, subsidies, printing papers etc. to independent candidates.

Some of these suggestions arise from the experience which the country has gained during the last forty years. In short, the immediate reforms should be to:

- a) strengthen the party system;
 - b) end the disparity between the popular votes secured and the number of seats obtained under the present single-member constituency system,
 - c) curb the money power in election;
 - d) stop the misuse of official machinery and other corrupt practices;
 - e) establish proper voting rights and election procedures, and
 - f) provide speedy disposal of election petitions.
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