

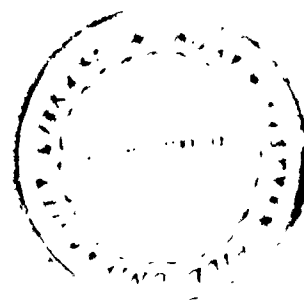
**MEGHALAYA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY:
THE ROLE OF THE OPPOSITION
(1972-1988)**

ABSTRACT

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Shillong**

2009



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MEGHALAYA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY:
THE ROLE OF THE OPPOSITION
(1972-1988)

Introduction:

Legislatures are representative bodies entrusted with the function of making laws to ensure the protection and safeguarding the interest of the people and oversee their welfare.¹ In a parliamentary democracy, the Government owes responsibility to the respective elected representative bodies. The members of the legislative as elected representatives of the people are entrusted with the task of ventilating public grievances as well as offering opinions of the people on various issues, to scrutinize the functioning of the Government on the floor of the legislative and to enact laws.²

It is the duty of the legislators to articulate the aspirations and the grievances of the people as well as try to fulfill the expectations and redress their grievances.³ The essence of parliamentary democracy lies in the accountability of the executive to the people as the legislative derives its power from the people. The legislature comprised the Treasury benches or the Ruling Party(s) that are in the majority and the Opposition that are in the minority. In the enactment of legislation, the relationship between the

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1. Benjamim Aksin: "Legislative" in *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, David Shils (ed.), Vol.9, Macmillan & Company, London, 1968, p. 226.
 2. H. S. Fartayal: *Role of the Opposition in Indian Parliament*, Chaitanya Publishing House, Allahabad, 1971, p. 81.
 3. C. M. Jain: *State Legislatures in India: The Rajasthan Legislative Assembly – A Comparative Study*, S. Chand & Co. Pvt.Ltd., New Delhi, 1972, p.200.

Government and the Opposition is that the majority proposes and the Opposition generally opposes what the Government proposes or in certain situations itself initiates or proposes alternative measures.⁴

The main function of the Opposition as derived from its connotation is to constructively oppose and criticize the functioning of the Government. It not only keeps the Government on its guard through constant criticisms of its acts of omission and commission but also can provide an alternative Government should the ruling party loses its majority. It endeavours to maintain continuous contact with the electorate and expresses their grievances in the legislative Chamber.⁵

The presence of the Opposition differentiates between democratic and dictatorial nations. It acts as a check on the otherwise enormous power exercised by the Government. The Opposition proposes alternative measures differing from those of the party in power. It ventilates public grievances through various parliamentary methods and procedures such as questions, half-an-hour discussion, adjournment motions, etc. and secures discussions particularly on those questions that agitate the public mind and therefore presses the Government to resolve these issues and questions.⁶

4. K. C. Wheare: *Legislatures*, Oxford University Press, London, 1968, pp. 79-88.

5. Harold J. Laski: *Parliamentary Government in England (A Commentary)*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1938, p. 15.

6. H. S. Fartayal: *op.cit.*, p. 211

The Opposition in a parliamentary democracy therefore is expected to play an effective role by performing two basic functions. Firstly, it is required to provide constructive criticisms to the programmes and policies of the party in power. Secondly, it must be ready to form an alternative Government in case a situation arises where the party in power is voted out of office. The objective of having an Opposition in a parliamentary democracy emanates from the basic concept of 'limiting power by power'.⁷

Meghalaya, the twenty first State of the Indian Union, came into existence on the 21st January 1972. Before the advent of the British into these areas, some form of direct democracy was in existence particularly in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. By the nineteenth century when the annexation of the hill areas by the British was total, the system of administrative institutions got eroded and was gradually replaced by the modern form of administration as introduced by the British.⁸ The hills experienced radical political and administrative changes which the British administration introduced.⁹ Through the various Acts, Rules and Regulations passed by the British Administration from time to time, modern administrative system was also introduced in the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills which remained in operation up to the period when India attained Independence.

With the independence of India on August 1947, the Federation of Khasi States signed the Instrument of Accession and also authorized its representative in Delhi to sign

7. Ram Sundar: *Role of Opposition Parties in Indian Politics*, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 30-31

8. H. Barih: *Meghalaya*, North Eastern India News & Feature Service, Shillong, 1974, p. 154.

9. R. S. Lyngdoh: *Government and Politics in Meghalaya*, Sanshar Publishing House, new Delhi, 1996, pp. 36-37.

the Standstill Agreement with the Indian Union on their behalf as it was realized that after the British left India, a vacuum would be created in the administrative arrangements between the Khasi States and the Indian Union. The administration of these areas was finally brought under the Indian Government. In order to ensure this merger between the Khasi States and Federation of Khasi States on the one hand and the Dominion of India and the Province of Assam on the other, an agreement was signed by the Federation of Khasi States in August 1947.¹⁰ Further, with the adoption of the Indian Constitution, the Khasi States and British Areas became part of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District within the State of Assam as stipulated by the Indian Constitution. As for the 'Garo Hills, there does not appear to have been much resistance as in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills to its integration into India.¹¹ Consequently, the hill areas of the present State of Meghalaya were constituted into two Autonomous District Councils namely, the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council and the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council as envisaged in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which were the first representative institutions of these areas.¹²

The transfer of power in 1947 brought in a number of political and administrative changes in the hill districts of the present State of Meghalaya paving the way for the formation and functioning of representative institutions which led to the development of

10. R. S. Lyngdoh: *op.cit.*, pp. 179-189.

11. D. R. Syiemlieh: *British Administration in Meghalaya: Policy and Patter*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 152-155.

12. P. R. Kyndiah: *Meghalaya: Yesterday and Today*, Har Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 17-21.

demand for statehood and culminating in the setting up of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly as the State Legislative.¹³

Review of Literature:

Various books have been written on Meghalaya, but this particular field of study and research on Meghalaya Legislative Assembly has not been undertaken so far. Earlier studies have not properly examined the role of the Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. Most of the studies conducted so far are general in character focusing on a wide range of topics. The book *Hill Politics in North East India* by S. K. Chaube dealt mostly with the politics in the hill areas of North East India with reference to various factors leading to the formation of Meghalaya. *A Century of Tribal Politics (1894-1974)* by V. V. Rao delved in detail on the political set up in the entire North Eastern region during the British rule and also on the gradual changes that had taken taking shape in the region. H. Barih's *Meghalaya* dealt extensively on the State of Meghalaya in general and on the cultural aspects of the people in particular. *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol. II, Meghalaya, (1874-1983)* jointly edited by V. V. Rao, Niru Hazarika and B. Pakem gave a detail account of Meghalaya, though the main focus is on the evolution of electoral process of the members of the various representative institutions. *Coalition Politics in North East India* by B. Pakem, a recent publication mainly focuses on the processes and practices of coalition of different political parties, an emerging trend in the politics of the North Eastern states over the past few years.

13. L. S. Gassah: "Traditional and Emerging Leadership Pattern in Khasi Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya" in B. C. Bhuyan (ed.), *Political Development of the North East, Part II*, Omsons Publication, New Delhi, 1992, p. 72.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the study have been divided into three main areas.

The first objective is to trace the emergence of representative institutions in Meghalaya and also to examine the party organizations of the different political parties in the State, party affiliations and their role in Government formation that came into existence with the formation of the State of Meghalaya.

Secondly, the study aims to analyse the role of the Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly during the period under study.

Thirdly, certain issues such as Land Tenure System and Land Relations; Boundary problems between Meghalaya and Assam; law and order problems especially in the State capital Shillong, together with the problem of influx, are taken up for critical examination and analysis under the purview of the study. The role, participation, articulation and contribution of the Opposition on these issues are analysed. This study covers the period from 1972 to 1988 because these critical issues were raised and discussed and kept on appearing in the agenda items of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly as these issues were considered to be critical and confronting the newly formed State of Meghalaya.

Methodology:

The data for this study is based both on primary and secondary sources. The reports of the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly from 1970 to 1988 and the

relevant Official Records and Documents pertaining to the above period constitute the most important and primary sources for understanding the role of the Opposition within the legislature. These Official Records and Documents have been critically analysed to assess the contributions of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly during the period of study.

The Secondary sources are drawn from the publications of the Government of Meghalaya and the Assembly Secretariat; books, research articles and seminar proceedings; journals, pamphlets and political manifestoes. Constitutions of the different political parties especially the Regional Political Parties form another important sources of information. The political parties' Constitutions are compared, examined and analysed while preparing the different chapters of the study.

Chapterisation:

The study is divided into six chapters.

- Chapter I : Emergence of Representative Institution in Meghalaya.
- Chapter II : Party Organisation: Their Role in the Legislative Assembly.
- Chapter III : Nature of the Opposition Parties in Meghalaya Politics.
- Chapter IV : Role of the Opposition I: Problems and Issues Relating to (i) Boundary between Meghalaya and Assam and (ii) Law and Order and the Problem of Influx.
- Chapter V : Role of the Opposition II: Problems and Issues Relating to Land and Land Relations.
- Chapter VI : Conclusion.

Chapter I:

This chapter traces the emergence of representative institutions in Meghalaya. It focuses on the historical administrative development that took place in the hill areas of North-East India in general and Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills in particular. Before coming into contact with the British, the people of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills had their own traditional system of administration and institutions. But with the advent of the British, the administrative system in these areas underwent changes which had tremendous effects on the traditional system of administration and institutions.¹⁴ Through the various Acts, Rules and Regulations passed by the British authority from time to time, the modern administrative system was introduced in these areas and it continues even after India's independence.

The present system of representative institutions had evolved over a period of time and in the process has undergone changes and also been influenced by various factors.¹⁵ The first representative institution in Meghalaya emerged when Meghalaya was formed as an Autonomous State on the 2nd April 1970 within the State of Assam and the Provisional Assembly was then set up consisting of 38 elected members and 3 nominated members bringing the total to 41 members.¹⁶ The members of the Provisional Legislative Assembly were elected by the elected members of the two Autonomous District Councils of Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills. In the election of March 1970 to the Provisional Legislative Assembly – 16 seats were returned from Garo Hills; 18 seats

14. H. Bareh: *op.cit.*, pp. 152-155

15. R. S. Lyngdoh: *op.cit.*, pp. 179-189.

16. R. S. Lyngdoh: *op.cit.*, pp. 97-98.

from Khasi Hills and 4 seats from Jaintia Hills. The result shows a clean sweep for the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC) which won 34 seats with the remaining 4 seats captured by the Indian National Congress (INC). 3 members were nominated by the Governor. This Provisional Legislative Assembly was characterized by a more or less homogeneous party structure owing to the absence of a well organized Opposition party. This set up could not satisfy the aspirations of the people of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills as there was bound to be administrative and other differences between the Autonomous State of Meghalaya and the State of Assam. Following intense political movement in the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills Districts, the Autonomous State of Meghalaya was upgraded into a full-fledged State in 1972, thereby fulfilling the political aspirations of the people. The first general elections to the newly formed Meghalaya Legislative Assembly were held on March 1972 paving the way for the installation of the first Legislative Assembly of the new State comprising of 60 elected members.¹⁷

Chapter II:

In a parliamentary democracy the Government is responsible to the elected Representative Legislature which derives its authority from the people. This chapter analyses the composition and structure of the political parties in successive Legislative Assemblies after every general elections held from 1972 to 1988 and also whenever there is any change of power.

The membership pattern of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly is also discussed and analysed in this chapter. The constitutions of the different political parties are

17. B. Pakem, *Coalition Politics in North East India*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, pp. 97-98.

examined and analysed in order to assess the performance of these parties. The emergence and the fall of these political parties operating in Meghalaya politics within within this stipulated period is also assessed in this chapter.

The role of the political parties in the formation of Government in Meghalaya is also discussed and analysed in detail. From 1972 to 1976 the APHLC was at the helm of power in the State. But in 1976, a section of the APHLC led by Capt. W. A. Sangma agreed to merge with the INC leading to the installation of a Congress Government that completed its first term in 1978. After the 1978 general elections, the three regional political parties – the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC), Hill State People's Democratic Party (HSPDP) and Public Demand Implementation Convention (PDIC) came together and formed a coalition government popularly known as the Three Flag Government. This coalition government remained in power for eleven months when in March 1979 the HSPDP was removed from the coalition. The two parties in the coalition – the APHLC and PDIC survived in power for a month when the coalition was overthrown by the United Meghalaya Parliamentary Democratic Front (UMPDF), a coalition of three political parties – HSPDP, a section of the APHLC led by B. B. Lyngdoh and the INC. This coalition remained in power until the 1983 general elections to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Assembly that emerged after the elections again witnessed the coming together of the regional political parties to form the Government under the banner of the Meghalaya United Parliamentary Party (MUPP). But this coalition from its inception was fraught with infighting among its members leading to its collapse barely a month of its being in office. The sudden collapse of the

coalition Government was viewed as a weak point of the regional political parties by the main Opposition – the INC. The Indian National Congress took advantage of the political instability and managed to bring some members to its side and then moved a No Confidence motion which was carried through in the Assembly. The MUPP lost the motion and the Congress formed the next Government which completed the term of the Assembly.

Chapter III:

This chapter deals mainly with the Opposition parties during the three successive Legislative Assemblies. All political parties in Meghalaya have at some point of time served the State as members of the Opposition. Even the Congress party did play the role of an Opposition though for a short stint. This chapter analyses the electoral performances of the different political parties in the State. The strength of these political parties, the number and percentage of votes polled by these parties in the 1972, 1978 and 1983 general elections are also taken into consideration.

This chapter also examines the reasons and causes for the rise of the Congress party to power which rose from being a party that rode on the popularity wave of the APHLC by forging an electoral understanding with this party in the first general elections of 1972, to being the party that wrested power from the APHLC and forming the next ruling party, in the process consolidating its support-base and power particularly in the Garo Hills where it dominated the politics of this area. Another area of enquiry in this chapter is based on the factors responsible for the decline of the main regional political

party – the APHLC, and its subsequent diminishing role resulting in the disappearance of this party from State politics. The dismal performances of the HSPDP and the PDIC, both of which are the off-shoots of the APHLC are also discussed. Both these political parties advocated the need to generate upliftment, development and welfare in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills but were unable to convince the voters of their policies and programmes of action. The result was the failure of the two regional political parties to come out successful in their electoral performance.

The formation of the Opposition party or parties in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly is taken into consideration in this chapter to examine the formation and role of the Opposition from 1972 to 1988. The role of the Congress party as a national party when in the Opposition, how successfully it has achieved its objective of dislodging successive ruling party (s) is also examined. The role of the Regional Political parties as members of the Opposition, their success or failure in achieving their main objective which is either to topple or form an alternative government is examined and analysed in this chapter. The factors and reasons for the emergence and decline of these Regional Political parties are analysed and encompassed in this chapter.

Chapter IV:

This chapter examines and attempts to analytically assess the role of the Opposition in the Assembly with regard to the problems and issues relating to the boundary problems between Meghalaya and Assam during 1972 to 1988.

Meghalaya and Assam share a common boundary that stretches from the northern to the south-eastern part of Meghalaya. Since there is no well define demarcation between the two States, boundary disputes are bound to arise. These issues proved to be contentious ones as they are continually raised in successive Assemblies and generating intense debates in the House. With no clear solution in sight, these issues kept cropping their heads whenever a dispute situation occurred in the border areas between the two neighbouring States.

Successive Opposition has initiated intense debate on this issue. However the successive governments, have not been able to find a solution though the issue was addressed in successive Assemblies from 1972 to 1988 (1972-1978; 1978-1983; 1983-1988). A permanent solution eludes both States. It has therefore been regarded as a contentious issue which has continuously appeared on the agenda items of the House.

In this chapter an attempt is made to study and analyse this issue in the political realm of the State and its impact on its politics. It discusses the way the issue is raised in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly by the political parties or individual members and assesses whether this has made any serious impact on the political parties of the State and the members of the House. It also analyses the role played by political parties, particularly the party(s) in the Opposition in bringing this issue to the Assembly, the debates that usually ensures and the outcome of the discussion if any, and also seeks to examine the reason why the successive governments have not been able to come out with any concrete and permanent solution to this issue.

The study also attempts to assess whether the initiatives made by members of the House representing these areas to highlight this issue as well as to bring to the attention of the House; the problems faced by these people with the people of Assam and the inclusion and intrusion by Assam made any impact on the ruling party or government to try to resolve this issue.

Chapter V:

In this chapter an attempt is made to examine and analyse the role of the Opposition with regard to three specified issues:

- i. Land and Land Relations
- ii. Law and Order Problems
- iii. Problem of Influx

In order to have an indepth study and understanding of the above mentioned issues and problems, this chapter is divided into two sections –

Section I examines and analyses the role of the Opposition with regard to the Land Tenure System and Land Relations in Meghalaya and other related issues or problems. This section traces the origin of this issue and discusses how this was initiated into the Assembly debates. In this section, we also examine and analyse the debates and discussions that followed thereafter when this issue was addressed in the House. This chapter in particular focuses and analyses the role of the Opposition in articulating the problems associated with this issue.

Section II deals with the issue relating to law and order situations/problems particularly in Shillong, the State capital. Such situations had resulted in the break down of law and order and had also its effect on the functioning of the House during such times. The agenda items of the House were usually interrupted by members through procedures of Call Attention notices to draw the attention of the House to the seriousness of the situation. Meghalaya witnessed serious law and order situations during 1979 to 1982. This chapter traces the factors responsible for the breakdown of law and order in Shillong particularly relating to the problems that took place between 1979 to 1982. The volatile situation that arose had generated heated debates and discussions in the Legislative Assembly between members of the ruling party and the Opposition. The Assembly debates pertaining to this issue are analysed to focus and understand the role of the Opposition in the Assembly.

In this section too, the Problem of Influx has been discussed and analysed as this issue is related to the law and order problems. These two issues are interconnected and thus influenced each other. It may thus be stated that during the Legislative Assembly debates whenever the first issue on law and order problem was raised, reference to the other issue, that is, the problem of influx to the State of Meghalaya was always referred or dragged into the Assembly debates and discussions.

Chapter VI:

This chapter sums up the major findings of the study. The following are the major findings of the study.



The role of the main political parties in the State as Opposition has been studied and examined particularly their role in projecting themselves as an alternative to the ruling party in matters concerning the formation of the government. This role of projecting itself as an alternative government was undertaken by the Congress party. The Congress party managed to wrest power from the ruling APHLC in the First Assembly in 1976 and formed the Government which also completed its term. The party succeeded in installing a Congress Government in 1976, when a section of the APHLC under the leadership of Capt. Williamson A. Sangma merged with the Indian National Congress thereby adding to the numerical strength of the party. In contrast, the regional political parties were not able to dislodge the Congress government due to lack of understanding and co-operation among themselves.

The regional political parties as Opposition was characterized by disunity and fragmentation. They were not able to present themselves as a United Opposition to the ruling party. Instead of coming together and forming a United Front, these regional political parties preferred to retain their individual identity. Hence, the party in power could exert dominance in the House. Disunity and fragmentation is a major cause that accounts for the weakness of these parties which in turn had an adverse impact on their role as an effective and vibrant Opposition.

The APHLC as a major regional political party synonymous with the attainment of statehood of Meghalaya gained prominence in the first general elections of 1972. It

successfully capitalized this image and secured absolute majority in the election to the First Assembly of the State. However, the APHLC could not retain its success in the successive elections. The party started disintegrating during the period of the First Assembly itself (1972-1978). The APHLC though it secured absolute majority and formed the Government was not able to complete even its first term in office, as some prominent members of the party decided in 1976 to merge with the Indian National Congress. The merger proved disastrous for the APHLC as it led to the disintegration of the party and in subsequent years, the party disappeared from the politics of the State.

The other regional political parties of the State – the HSPDP and the PDIC, both offshoots of the APHLC and formed by former members of the APHLC, who were disgruntled with the workings of the party. They therefore decided to make their entry into the politics of the State as independent regional political parties. The HSPDP entered state politics with a credible performance in the general elections of 1972 and followed by gaining ground in the two successive elections in 1978 and 1983. The PDIC another regional political party however was not successful in its electoral performance from the time it entered the state electoral arena. The reason being that even though the party takes up the cause or issue of the farmers community in the State, it failed to convince the majority of the rural voters to return its candidates to the Assembly. It managed to secure only 2 to 3 seats in a 60 member House and in the successive general elections till it disappeared from Meghalaya politics. These two parties were also unable to make any inroads in the Garo Hills which constitute a sizeable number of Assembly constituencies. The Garo Hills remained a strong hold of the Indian National Congress

party during this period due to strong and effective leadership provided by Capt. Williamson A. Sangma.

Another remarkable political development in the State is the history of a fragmented Opposition, consisting mostly that of regional political parties. In the history of Meghalaya politics, the regional political parties had made several attempts to unite and present a unified force against the Congress party. In 1984 the two main regional parties – the APHLC and HSPDP merged and formed the Hill People Union (HPU). This Union however proved shortlived as after their unsuccessful attempt to capture the Lok Sabha seat in the Lok Sabha elections of 1984, the HSPDP came out of the Union and continued to maintain its own original identity.

The Opposition gave a substantial performance, though at times their fragmentary nature hampers their effectiveness in performing their role in the House; the main factor being their inability to sustain a strong united front against the party in power.

Regarding the issues and problems of Land, inter-state boundary disputes, law and order and the problem of influx of outsiders to the State, these were addressed and discussed intensely during the period of study (1972-1988) by successive Governments whenever they were raised by members of the Opposition. It was found that successive parties whenever they were in the Opposition kept constant vigil on any move of the Government by raising questions and generating criticisms. But the reverse was practiced whenever the same parties come to power. This could be attributed as one of

the reasons for not reaching a permanent solution of the issues concerned. The solutions on these issues undertaken for study remain inconclusive during the period of study (1972-1988). The same situation continues till date with no final solutions to these issues.

The APHLC as an Opposition has not registered a significant performance in ventilating public opinions or grievances on the issues specified, except in extending support to any moves made by other opposition parties. Some independent members of the Legislative Assembly had shown a commendable record while performing their role as Opposition. Some of them were actively and continuously generated laudable performance in ventilating and raising issues considered significant for the newly formed State particularly the above mentioned issues.

It is felt that there is scope for the development of a strong Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly in future. For this to be achieved there has to be effective electoral alliances among the parties in the Opposition to provide a viable alternative to the ruling party. This can be made possible only if efforts to narrow down differences are seriously made by the parties concerned to build up a strong opposition. The tendency of forming minor parties is to be discouraged to prevent the emergence of splinter groups in the Assembly.

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**MEGHALAYA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY:
THE ROLE OF THE OPPOSITION
(1972-1988)**

Isabelle Marbaniang

**Submitted in fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Department of Political Science
North-Eastern Hill University
Shillong**

2009

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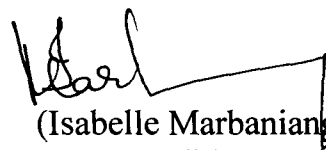
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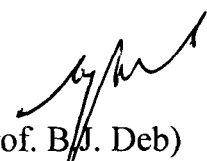
I, Isabelle Marbaniang, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, and that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis for the award of any previous degree to me or, to the best of my knowledge, to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/institute.

This is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science.


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Preface

The term 'Opposition' is derived from the Latin word '*opposition*' which means to oppose. As such the main function of the Opposition is to oppose any policy of the ruling party which is in contradiction to the will of the people. The Opposition is a fundamental part of the legislature which functions mainly on the basis of a parliamentary or cabinet form of Government.

The concept of the Opposition is not new to the State politics of Meghalaya as a semblance of Opposition had emerged when Meghalaya was not a State but were districts within the State of Assam. This opposition had culminated in the formation of the State of Meghalaya. With the emergence of Meghalaya as a State it paved the way for the inception of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, comprising the ruling party and the Opposition. The role of the Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly denotes a difference from the two party system as prevalent in Western countries. Here in Meghalaya no party remained in the Opposition for a longer period even during the fixed term of the Assembly. Rather, the Legislative Assembly in Meghalaya is marked by frequent changes in the groups of the Opposition parties during the period of study, that is, 1972-1988.

In this study, an attempt was made to trace the emergence of representative institutions in Meghalaya beginning with the formation of the Autonomous State, and to examine their nature in terms of membership pattern, party affiliations and role in Government formation. The study also traces the emergence and nature of the Opposition parties in Meghalaya. Finally, the study tries to focus and analyses the role of the Opposition in ventilating of public grievances as well as criticisms of the Government's policies relating to certain specified issues such as:

1. Boundary problems between Meghalaya and Assam.
2. Land Tenure and Land Relations.
3. Law and Order problems especially in the State Capital and the Problem of Influx.

This study proposes to cover the period of the first three terms of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly that is, from 1972 to 1988.

I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. L.S. Gassah, my supervisor for his encouragement, guidance and advice which makes it possible for me to complete this work. I would also like to especially thank Miss M. Lyngdoh, Librarian, Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Library, Shillong and the staff in the Computer room of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Library for being so kind and helpful to locate and provide me with the relevant materials for my work.

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Last, but not the least, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my parents, my sister and especially my brother, W. Marbaniang, for their unstinted support and encouragement for me to be able to come so far.

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the ~~29th~~ 27th May, 2009.



Isabelle Marbaniang

INTRODUCTION

Legislatures are representative bodies whose main function is to make law in order to protect the interest of the people and oversee their welfare.¹ In a parliamentary democracy the Government is always responsible to the elected representative legislatures. The members of the legislature as the elected representatives of the people are, therefore, entrusted with the task of ventilating the grievances as well as offering opinions of the people on various issues, sometime the functioning of the Government or the executive on the floor of the legislature and also to enact laws.² It is the duty of the legislators to articulate the aspirations and the grievances of the people as well as try to fulfill their expectations and redress their grievances.³ Parliamentary Government is a Government by Criticisms and a Government by expositions⁴ and therefore whatever may be the form of Democratic Governments, it is based on multi-party system. When one party gets a majority of seats, it forms the Government and the remaining parties remain in the Opposition. If no party gets a majority and there are more than three or four parties, two or three parties which together make a majority in the legislature and agree to work together, they form the Government and the remaining parties form the Opposition. The Ruling party or parties have the responsibility of carrying on the Government according to their programme consistent with democratic tradition and practices. The party or

¹ Akzin, Benjamin: 'Legislative' in *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, David Shils (Ed.), Vol.9. Macmillan & Company, London, 1968,p.226.

² Fartayal, H.S.: *Role of the Opposition in the Indian Parliament*, Chaitanya Publishing House, Allahabad, 1971, p.81.

³ Jain, C.M.: *State Legislatures in India: The Rajasthan ;Legislative Assembly: A Comparative Study*, S. Chand & Co. (Pvt. Ltd.), New Delhi, 1972, p.200.

⁴ Ram, D. Sundar (Ed.): *Readings in the Indian Parliamentary Opposition (Vol.1)*, Kaniska Publishers Distributors, New Delhi, 1996, p.1.

parties which form the minority have the task of forming the Opposition and have a definite role to perform.⁵ In the enactment of legislation, the relationship between the Government and the Opposition is that the majority proposes whereas the Opposition generally opposes the proposals or proposes alternative measures.

The word 'Opposition' is derived from the Latin word '*oppositio*' meaning to oppose. The idea of a parliamentary opposition emerged in the centuries following 1688. During the second half of the last century, the forms and conventions associated with such opposition took something like their present shape. With the development of political parties the Opposition has been transformed into a distinct entity.⁶ Dictionaries and books on political philosophy define the Opposition mainly as a party that opposes the Government or party in power. The *Grolier International Dictionary* defines it as a political party or organisation opposed to the group, party of Government in power. The *Readers Digest Great Encyclopaedia Dictionary* defines the Opposition as the Chief Parliamentary party opposed to that in office and extends it to cover any party that is opposed to some proposals. Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* defines it as a political party that actively opposes the party in power and is prepared to replace it if opportunity offers. Larouse *Illustrated International Encyclopedia and Dictionary* defines it the political group or groups in a democracy opposing the party in power and working to take its place by constitutional methods. The *Universal Dictionary of the English Language* defines it to denote a body of persons holding opinions adverse to a policy or proposal, and as the body of Members of Parliament who are opposed to the party in office. The *New Oxford*

⁵ Desai, Morarji: "Role of Opposition in the Parliament and the State Legislatures" in *The Constitution and the Parliament in India*, S.L. Shakhder (Ed.), Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi, 1976, p.547.

⁶ Laski, Harold J.: *Parliamentary Government in England: A Commentary*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1938, p.15.

Illustrated Dictionary defines it as Chief Parliamentary Party opposed to that in office. The *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary* expresses the same idea without restricting it to the body of Members of Parliament. It defines it as a body of opposers or the party that opposes the Ministry of existing Administration. The *Dictionary of American Politics* defines it as the members of a party in the Congress, whether in minority or majority politically opposed to the President and his Administration. It further elaborates that in a Parliamentary Government it would mean the members of the party or parties in coalition who oppose the ruling party.

In the special sense of the term the Opposition normally means a coherent group of people, regularly acting together, and able to present themselves collectively to the electorate as an alternative government with an alternative policy.⁷

The Opposition not only keeps the government on its guard through constant criticisms of its acts of omission and commission but also can provide an alternative government should the ruling party loses its majority. It endeavours to maintain continuous contact with the legislative chamber. Its constructive role as an Opposition is, therefore, essential for the successful working of a representative government. Hence according to Harold J. Laski, “men who are to live together peacefully must be able to argue together peacefully.” This rightly sums up the relationship between the ruling party and the Opposition.⁸ Thus Parliamentary Opposition is a permanent feature of party government and prevents concentration of power in an individual or group of individuals. It is compelled by the logic of the parliamentary system to adopt a responsible attitude.

⁷ Ram, D. Sundar: *Role of Opposition Parties in Indian Politics*, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, pp.1-2.

⁸ Laski, Harold J.: *Op. cit.*, p.15.

There can be no democratic government without an effective opposition, and a responsible opposition is as important as the party in power in a parliamentary system. If the ruling party is needed to take decisions and run the government, the Opposition is needed to ensure that the decisions are reached through proper debates and discussions.

The Opposition today has gained tremendous significance in parliamentary democracies. Several factors have contributed to their growing stature, chief being the temperamental difference among the people. The outcome is that people seek like-minded people and, therefore, organised themselves into groups which later developed into political parties with similar opinions on political questions. Therefore, there may be as many parties as there are opinions.

The presence of the Opposition differentiates between democratic and dictatorial nations. The Opposition acts as a check on the otherwise enormous power exercised by the Government. In the legislature it exposes the Government's omissions and proposes measures in the public interest. Therefore, through constant scrutiny and criticisms of the policies of the Government, the Opposition helps to make the Government a more useful instrument of democracy. "The Opposition", says Jennings, "is at once the alternative Government and a focus for the discontent of the people. Its functions are almost as important as that of the Government. If there be no Opposition then there is no democracy."⁹

The Opposition proposes alternative measures differing from those of the party in power. It ventilates public grievances through various parliamentary methods such as questions, half-an-hour discussion, adjournment motions, etc. and secures discussions particularly on those questions that agitate the public mind and, therefore,

⁹ Jennings, Ivor: *Cabinet Government*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1959, p.15.

press the government to solve them. The Opposition then prepares to be the ready-made alternative government. So the object of having an Opposition in a parliamentary democracy emanates from the basic concept of limiting power by power.¹⁰

The political opposition is an inseparable part of every party system. The nature and character of opposition vary from one party system to another. India has chosen the parliamentary form of Government because of ancient tradition and also due to its long association with the British who rule our country for nearly 200 years. Though the British influence is there in our democratic system but it is not a replica of the British system. It is entirely our own system, taken after due deliberation and constitutional thinking by our founding fathers.¹¹ The origin of the Opposition in Indian politics can be stated to have emerged simultaneously with the origin of the Indian National Congress during British rule. After Independence, India adopted a parliamentary form of Government following the British pattern, providing for the emergence of the Ruling and the Opposition party(s) in the Parliament and State Legislatures. Henceforth, the Opposition came to occupy a fundamental position in the legislatures both at the centre and the states. As Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out, “the parliamentary system of work requires not only forcible expression of opinions and views but on essential basis of co-operation between the Opposition and the Government.”¹² The Opposition is, therefore, required to play a vital role in the Legislature. It is required to focus attention on certain issues and urge the Government to see these issues from different viewpoints keeping the welfare and progress of the

¹⁰ Fartayal, H.S.: *Op. cit.*, pp.210-211.

¹¹ Ram, D. Sundar (Ed.): *Op. cit.*, p.1.

¹² Fartayal, H.S.: *Op. cit.*, p.211.

people as the ultimate criterion. The Opposition in a parliamentary democracy, therefore, has to play an effective role by performing two basic functions. Firstly, it is required to provide constructive criticism to the programmes and policies of the Government. Secondly, it must be ready to form an alternative government in case the party in power is voted out or goes out of office.¹³

Situation in Meghalaya

Before the 21st January, 1972, Meghalaya comprising the three districts – Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills were a part of the then composite State of Assam. The transfer of power from the British to the Indians in 1947 brought a number of political and administrative changes in the hill districts of the present State of Meghalaya paving the way for the formation and functioning of representative institutions which led to the development of demand for statehood. The long drawn but peaceful agitation by the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos culminated in the formation of Meghalaya as a full-fledged State on 21st January, 1972. The Meghalaya Legislative Assembly consisting of both the majority and the party(s) in the minority was inaugurated in March 1972 after the First General Elections of 1972 of the new State. Hence, the study of the role and functions of the Opposition in the State with regard to the specified issues – land relations; boundary issues with Assam and the law and order problems especially in Shillong and problem of influx within the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly is undertaken and analysed so as to gain a better understanding of the role of the Opposition in the State Legislature. The study also undertakes to evaluate how far the Opposition party(s) operating during the period 1972-1988 have been able to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of the people of Meghalaya with regard to the issues already

¹³ Ram, D. Sundar: *Op. cit.*, pp.30-31.

specified and also whether a permanent solution of the issues concerned have been realized or not.

Review of Literature

Taking the above propositions into account, the present study endeavours to examine and analyse the role and functioning of the national and the regional political parties as Opposition party(s) in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly which had remained unexplored so far. Several books have been written on Meghalaya, though, this particular field of study and research has not been undertaken. Earlier studies have not properly examined the role of the Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. Most of the studies conducted so far are general in character focusing on a wide range of topics. The book *Hill Politics in North East India* by S.K. Chaube dealt mostly with the politics in the hill areas of North East India with reference to various factors leading to the formation of Meghalaya. *A Century of Tribal Politics (1894-1974)* by V.V. Rao delved in detail on the political set up in the entire North Eastern region during the British rule and also on the gradual changes that had taken shape in the region. H. Bareh's *Meghalaya* dealt extensively on the State of Meghalaya in general and on the cultural aspects of the people in particular. *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol.II, Meghalaya, (1874-1983)* jointly edited by V.V. Rao, Niru Hazarika and B. Pakem gave a detailed account of Meghalaya, though the main focus is on the evolution of electoral process of the members of the various representative institutions in operation during this period. *Coalition Politics in North East India* by B. Pakem, a recent publication mainly focuses on the processes and practices of coalition of different political parties, an emerging trend in the politics of the North Eastern States over the past few years.

The present study is an attempt to make a thorough study and research on the various aspects of the role of the Opposition within the ambit of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly on the basis of the three issues already specified as this field has remained virtually untouched. Since not much research has so far been conducted on this area, the collection of data is, therefore, mainly based on primary sources – Reports of the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly from 1970-1988 and the relevant Official Records and Documents and Legislative Assembly Debates. The secondary sources are drawn from the publications of the Government of Meghalaya and the Assembly Secretariat; books, research articles and seminar proceedings; journals, pamphlets and manifesto(s) of different political parties and also the constitutions of political parties have been made use for this study. Most of the source materials, both primary and secondary, are available in the office and library of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, the Library of the North Eastern Hill University at Shillong, and efforts have been made to consult the relevant materials available with the past and present members of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. The private collections and libraries of the members are of great help when preparing the research work.

The study, which is on the role of the Opposition covered the period from the inception of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1972 upto 1988 the last session of the Third Assembly. This study traces the emergence of representative institutions in Meghalaya beginning with the formation of the Autonomous State, and to examine their nature in terms of membership pattern, party affiliations and role in Government formation. It also traces the emergence and nature of Opposition parties in Meghalaya. The focus of this study is on the role of the Opposition in ventilating of

public grievances as well as criticism of the Government's policies relating to issues such as:

- i. Boundary problems between Meghalaya and Assam.
- ii. Land Tenure and Land Relations.
- iii. Law and Order problems especially in the State Capital, and
- iv. The Problem of Influx.

Chapter Organisation

This study is divided into six chapters. In Chapter-I, the study traces the emergence of representative institutions in Meghalaya. It focuses on the historical administrative development that took place in the hill areas of North East India in general and Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills in particular. It traces how representative institutions evolved from the British period to the time when Autonomous State was granted and the realization of movement for Hill State culminating in the formation of the State of Meghalaya.

Chapter-II studies the organisation of the different political parties in operation in the State during this period – both national and regional political parties. It traces and analyses the constitutions of the different political parties as well as their aims and objectives. Analysis of the composition and structure of the political parties as well as success of these parties in their performance based on their objectives is attempted to be studied as well as their position in the politics of the State.

In Chapter-III of this study, attempts to study the formation and nature of the Opposition parties in Meghalaya is carried out. This chapter also deals with the electoral performance and poll prospects of the different political parties and their position in State politics within the period 1972-1988.

Chapter-IV deals with the roles of the Opposition with regard to three issues through debates and discussion within the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly – the Boundary Issue between Meghalaya and Assam, Influx and Law and Order problems especially in the State Capital, Shillong. In this chapter, the role of the Opposition in articulating and taking appropriate responsive measures to these issues in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly is being studied and analysed.

In Chapter-V, an attempt is made to analyse the role of the Opposition with regard to Land Problems and Land Relations in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. The articulation and response of the members of the Opposition on these issues is being studied in this chapter. An attempt in this chapter to bring out the various devices and procedures made use by the Opposition in articulating and raising these issues for discussion in the House is carried out.

Chapter-VI is the concluding chapter. In this chapter the study tries to sum up the major findings of the entire research work.

PROFILE OF MEGHALAYA

Meghalaya, the twenty-first State of the Indian Union was first coined by the Geographer, Dr. S.P. Chatterjee in reference to these areas in his work in 1936. *Megha* (clouds) and *Alaya* (abode) gave birth to the name *Meghalaya* which when translated means “the abode of the clouds” because of the clouds which seem to always hover over the central plateau. This name was officially adopted by the APHLC (All Party Hills Leaders’ Conference) a party that is synonymous with the demand for statehood which culminated in the passing of the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Bill, 1969 and this becoming an act in December 1969, whereby the

Autonomous State was inaugurated on 2nd April, 1970. Further developments occurred paving the way for passing of the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Bill 1971 on October. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Shillong on 20th January, 1972 to inaugurate Meghalaya as a full-fledged State of the Indian Union on 21st January, 1972.

The formation of the state of Meghalaya was the result of a long struggle by the people of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills. The demand for the separation of areas occupied by the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos was spearheaded by the All Party Hills Leaders' Conference (APHLC).

During the years of struggle and demand for a separate State a number of proposals and schemes were offered by the Central Government to the leaders of the APHLC which were rejected one after the other either by the Assam Government or the APHLC. Finally, the proposals of the Government of India on the 11th September, 1969, for the Autonomous Hills State Plan resulting from the announcement of a plan for the reorganisation of Assam was accepted by the political leaders of that time, with the exception of a few leaders. The reorganisation scheme effected the formation of the Autonomous State which was inaugurated on the 2nd April, 1970 at Shillong and named Meghalaya. Its jurisdiction will be over the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills Districts. The Autonomous State was set to have a Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers. With this the demand for a full-fledged State gained momentum. In its sitting on the 30th September, 1970, the Provisional Legislative Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution requesting the Government of India to grant full-fledged statehood to Meghalaya. When the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act 1971 was enacted by Parliament it set in motion the demands of the people of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya. On receiving the assent and

signature of the President of India on 30th December, 1971; it marked the culmination of the demands of the said people. This legislation generated the formation of the State of Meghalaya consisting the territories within the Autonomous State together with the territories within the Cantonment areas and municipality of Shillong which had earlier not been under the jurisdiction of the Autonomous State.

The State of Meghalaya shares a long international boundary with Bangladesh on its southern area, and an inter-state boundary on its northern side with the State of Assam. It covers an area of 22,489 sq. km. with a population of 23,06,069 (according to the 2001 Census). The Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos form the major ethnic groups of original inhabitants and other minor tribes make up 85 per cent whereas 15 per cent comprise the non-tribals. The capital of the new State is Shillong.

The State of Meghalaya started functioning with two Districts under its jurisdiction that is the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills Districts. These two Districts were formerly under the then composite State of Assam. These were detached from Assam after the passing of the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act 1969 to be part of the territories of the newly formed State of Meghalaya. Over the years, the Government of Meghalaya created new districts and sub-divisions by bifurcating the two original districts and carving out five more districts. At present the State has seven districts. United Khasi and Jaintia Hills was bifurcated to form a separate Jaintia Hills District with its headquarters at Jowai, and inaugurated on 22nd February, 1972. Subsequently, more districts were created in order to bring the administration closer to the people.

The new districts along with the headquarters and date of inauguration are shown below:

Former Districts	Name of New Districts	Name of Headquarters	Date of Creation
United Khasi & Jaintia Hills	Jaintia Hills	Jowai	21 st February, 1972
	East Khasi Hills	Shillong	28 th October, 1976
	West Khasi Hills	Nongstoin	28 th October, 1976
	Ri Bhoi	Nongpoh	4 th October, 1976
Garo Hills	East Garo Hills	Williamnagar	23 rd October, 1976
	West Garo Hills	Tura	23 rd October, 1976
	South Garo Hills	Baghmara	18 th June, 1992

The creation of new districts gradually paved the way for the opening up of more Civil Subdivisions. In order to accelerate the over all pace of development in addition to the districts and district administration the State administration is further organised into 15(fifteen) Civil Subdivisions to meet and serve the development needs of the rural areas.

Districts	Sub-division	Headquarters	Date of Creation
Jaintia Hills	1. Jowai	Jowai	
	2. Khliehriat	Khliehriat	27 th May, 1982
	3. Amlarem	Amlarem	12 th November, 1976
East Khasi Hills	1. Shillong	Shillong	
	2. Sohra	Sohra	22 nd May, 1983
Ri Bhoi	1. Nongpoh	Nongpoh	5 th January, 1977
West Khasi Hills	1. Nongstoin	Nongstoin	
	2. Mairang	Mairang	19 th October, 1976
	3. Mawkyrwat	Mawkyrwat	26 th June, 1982
East Garo Hills	1. Williamnagar	Williamnagar	
	2. Resubelpara	Resubelpara	30 th April, 1982
West Garo Hills	1. Tura	Tura	
	2. Dadengiri	Dadengiri	17 th August, 1982
	3. Ampati	Ampati	15 th October, 1982
South Garo Hills	1. Baghmara	Baghmara	7 th December, 1976

In order to bring about an integrated development of rural area covering all social, cultural and economic aspects of the community through various programmes, the Government realised that the 24(twenty-four) initially existing Development Blocks would not be possible to ensure that development percolates down to the grass root level of administration. This is due mainly to difficult terrain and transportation hurdles in the rural areas which prevent easy access from villages to block

headquarters. Therefore new Community and Rural Blocks were opened up by carving out of those existing Development Blocks so that inaccessible areas could be covered for administrative convenience and efficient functions. At present the State is covered by 39(thirty-nine) Community Developments.

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. East Khasi Hills | - 8 Community Development Blocks |
| 2. West Khasi Hills | - 6 Community Development Blocks |
| 3. Ri Bhoi | - 3 Community Development Blocks |
| 4. Jaintia Hills | - 5 Community Development Blocks |
| 5. East Garo Hills | - 5 Community Development Blocks |
| 6. West Garo Hills | - 8 Community Development Blocks |
| 7. South Garo Hills | - 4 Community Development Blocks. |

Another significant aspect of district administration is the traditional institutions of administration that had existed over a long period of time in the form of Syiemship, Doloiship, Wahadadarship in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and the traditional institution of Nokmanship and Laskership (this was a creation of the British administration) in the Garo Hills. With India's independence and the creation of the Autonomous District Councils in 1952 under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, these traditional institutions by law became part of the District Councils and were subordinate to the administration of these Councils. Today, the number of Councils in Meghalaya is the same which is three Autonomous District Councils in the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills Districts of Meghalaya.

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Name of Autonomous District Councils	Area of Jurisdiction	Name of Head-quarters	Year of Establishment
1. The United Khasi Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council*	Khasi and Jaintia Hills	Shillong	1952
The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC)	1. East Khasi Hills 2. West Khasi Hills 3. Ri Bhoi	Shillong	-
2. The Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC)	Jaintia Hills	Jowai	1964 (but Became operational in 1967)
3. The Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC)	1. East Garo Hills 2. West Garo Hills 3. South Garo Hills	Tura	1952

In March 1970, there was an indirect election to the provisional Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya. The total strength of the Legislative Assembly was 41, of whom 18 were from the Khasi Hills, 16 from the Garo Hills and 4 from Jaintia Hills. The Assembly comprised of 38 elected members and 3 members were nominated by the Governor as the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act 1969 had provided for the setting up of a separate Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers. The Provisional Legislative Assembly was inaugurated on 14th April, 1971 in Tura (Garo Hills District).

With the coming of Meghalaya into statehood on 21st January, 1972, the Provisional Assembly became the legislature of the new State. The members of the Provisional Legislative Assembly became the members of the new Legislative Assembly until elections were held in February, 1972. The elections to the new Assembly occurred shortly after. In the final arrangement by the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act 1971, 60 seats was provided for the Meghalaya Legislative

* Today, it is the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC).

Assembly — 50 out of 60 seats of the Assembly was reserved for Scheduled Tribes (Garo, Khasi and Jaintia) and 10 seats for open contest — Khasi Hills 29; Garo Hills 24; Jaintia Hills 7. In 1978, Meghalaya was reorganised for administrative purposes wherein new districts and new sub-divisions were created and seats or constituencies were allotted as follows:

<u>Khasi Hills: 29</u>	<u>Jaintia Hills: 7</u>	<u>Garo Hills: 24</u>
1. East Khasi Hills – 19	Jaintia Hills – 7	1. East Garo Hills – 7
2. West Khasi Hills – 6		2. West Garo Hills – 15
3. Ri-Bhoi District – 4		3. South Garo Hills – 2

All constituencies are single member constituencies. At present the total number of constituencies remained 60(sixty), out of which, 55(fifty-five) seats are reserved for Scheduled tribes (ST) and 5 in the general category. There are at present 3(three) in Khasi Hills, namely, Pynthorumkhrah, Mawprem and Laban and two general constituencies in Garo Hills, namely, Phulbari and Mahendraganj. Recently, there is a new proposal for delineation of constituencies in the entire State of Meghalaya. This issue is not discussed here as it is beyond the purview of the study.

The North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act 1971 assigned one Reserved Seat for the Scheduled Tribes of the State in the Rajya Sabha and 2(two) Reserved Seats in the Lok Sabha — the Shillong Parliamentary seat and the Tura Parliamentary seat. The first election for the Shillong Parliamentary seat was in 1971 mid term election whereas the Tura (ST) Parliamentary election was held on February 1972. The election for the Rajya Sabha seat was also held in 1972.

From its inception as a State in the Indian Union, Meghalaya has gone to the polls 7(seven) times with the 8th(eighth) General Elections scheduled in the year 2008. The first General Elections to the State Legislative Assembly were conducted on

9th March, 1972. February 1978 was the year the second polls were held. The third General Elections were held on 17th February, 1983. The 2nd February, 1988 was the year the fourth General Elections were conducted. The General Elections to the fifth Legislative Assembly were held on 15th February, 1993. The sixth General Elections were held on 16th February, 1998 and the seventh General Elections were conducted on the 26th February, 2003. The Meghalaya Legislative Assembly consisted of 60 members.

Chapter-I

EMERGENCE OF REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTIONS IN MEGHALAYA

Meghalaya, the twenty-first State of the Indian Union came into existence on 21st January, 1972. It was carved out of the State of Assam. The first step leading to the formation of Meghalaya was the grant of Autonomous State for the same territorial jurisdiction on 2nd April, 1970. When Meghalaya was formed it originally comprised two districts — United Khasi Jaintia and Garo Hills Districts. The present system of representative institution in the State was evolved over a long period, in the process had undergone several changes and been influenced by various factors and situations prevailing over the years.

Before coming into contact with the British, some form of democratic practices prevailed where representative institutions existed in the hill areas, particularly, in the Khasi Hills. During the nineteenth century, however, when the annexation of the entire hill areas by the British was total, the indigenous people lose not only their rights and liberty but their administrative traditions and institutions got eroded.¹ With the British administration becoming firmly entrenched after annexation, the traditional institutions for so long responsible in running the administration in these areas were replaced by the modern form of administration introduced by the British. The hills were automatically caught in the vortex of radical political and administrative changes which the British rule introduced.²

¹ Bareh, H.: *Meghalaya*, North Eastern India News of Feature Service, Shillong, 1974, p.154.

² Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Government and Politics in Meghalaya*, Sanshar Publishing House, New Delhi, 1996, pp.36-37.

The British administration of the hills initially was carried on through the operation of paramountcy and political practice, similar to other areas under the British rule. This paramountcy was based mainly on treaties concluded with native rulers, engagements and issuance of *sanads* and usages though, simultaneously, British supremacy existed independent of the traditional institutions. The British administration was governed by the design to ensure isolation of these areas from the plains through the introduction of the multi-tier system that indirectly involves the traditional chiefs as agents of colonial interests. The much professed British policy of non-intervention in the hills was tampered with as and when the convenience or need was felt to suit British interests. Later on, this caused serious erosion of the long practiced indigenous institutions of these areas. The assumption of power over the whole of India by the Crown in 1858 ushered in a more definite and formal relationship between the twenty five Khasi States and the British Government. In this period the District Deputy Commissioner acted and functioned as the Government's Political Officer in carrying out the administration in these areas.³ Next, the State of Assam was constituted into a Chief Commissionership wherein the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills were also included in the administration of Assam.

Before the introduction of the 1917 Reforms, the entire Assam was declared to be a scheduled district under the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874. When Bengal was partitioned, the hill areas of Assam became a part of East Bengal and Assam. In 1917, the Montagu-Chelmsford report recommended that the typically backward areas be excluded from the jurisdiction of the Reformed Legislative Council, which meant that if a territory was wholly excluded from the scope of reforms, no legislation should be

³ Syiemlieh, D.R.: *British Administration in Meghalaya Policy and Pattern*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, 1989, pp.152-153.

enacted and no resolution should be moved in the legislative council affecting the areas concerned. Legislation for such areas are to be undertaken entirely by means of Regulations made by the Governor-General in Council. The Government of India agreed to the recommendation of exclusion from reforms but did not assent to the taking over of their administration. Further, the Government recommended that as all the hill areas were not totally backward, therefore, total exclusion was not desirable. The areas should be classified into two — the areas in which reforms should not be introduced and the areas in which reforms may be introduced. The Garo Hills were declared totally backward areas and were included in the list of the completely Excluded Areas. These would remain under the control of the Governor, and legislation for these areas would be by means of Regulation. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills were considered less backward and were put in the list of Partially Excluded Areas and were to be administered by the Governor-in-Council, with the legislature being empowered to make laws for these areas. To this effect the Khasis and Jaintias in the British enclaves demanded representation in the Legislative Council but not the Garos.⁴

The national movement and political consciousness sweeping throughout the country together with the stipulations of the Act of 1919 stating the Governor-General-in-Council can declare any territory in British India to be backward area had an adverse impact on the hill areas, creating an awareness of their position under the British rule and spurring them to make certain demands of the Government. Prior to 1920, these areas were not represented in the Legislative Council as a result of their

⁴ Rao, V.V., Hazarika, Niru: *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India Vol.II (Meghalaya) 1874-1983*, S. Chand & Co. Ltd., New Delhi, 1984, pp.5-7.

being classified as backward tracts but henceforth they were affected by the changes taking place in 1920 and became a part of this significant change.⁵

The changes resulted in the creation of the Shillong Urban constituency and the subsequent election of the representatives of the hill areas to the Assam Legislative Council, wherein the age of representation had been ushered into these areas. Simultaneously, giving representation to the other totally backward areas, in 1921, the Governor of Assam nominated one member to represent the Garo Hills.⁶ From 1874 up to 1927, the hill areas of North Eastern India had no share in the Provincial Government. In 1927, the representative from the Shillong Urban constituency, Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy was appointed minister in the Assam Legislative Council though for a brief period.⁷ This further generated more political awareness amongst the hill people that crystallized in the establishment of the Khasi National Durbar, comprising all the Khasi chiefs, on 4th September, 1923. This can be considered the first political organisation in Khasi Hills, whereas in the Jaintia Hills the Jaintia Durbar as a socio and cultural organisation was established in 1900. With the emergence of the Khasi National Durbar the leaders of the Jaintia Durbar sought to activate it as a political platform whose aim was the demand for revival of the Sutnga State and raise it to the status of any Khasi State. This organisation in 1957 became a component part of the Eastern Indian Tribal Union (EITU). The Khasi National Durbar being a common organisation for all the Khasi states sought to bring about unity among the Khasis and improve the system of administration in the Khasi States.⁸ It was only in 1927-28 that full scale political activity was generated in the

⁵ Syiemlieh, D.R.: *Op. cit.*, p.177.

⁶ Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Op. cit.*, p.444.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.465.

⁸ Syiemlieh, D.R.: *Op. cit.*, pp.117-118.

Khasi and Jaintia Hills following the announcements in the British Parliament that an Indian Statutory Commission and an Indian States Committee was to review and make recommendations for changes in the administration of British India and the Indian States. This unified the Khasi chiefs who met and formed the Federation of Khasi States in 1933 whose main objective was to act as the representative and administrative organ of the Khasi States.⁹ The Federation presented a memorandum to the then Viceroy demanding that they should be placed in direct relations with the Viceroy through a Political Agent appointed exclusively for the states in the Khasi Hills. This demand was rejected. The Khasi chiefs met the Viceroy again in 1938 wherein they reiterated their previous demand including a new demand for representation in the federal legislature, and curtailment of the powers of the Deputy Commissioner which the Government, however, did not entertain. These developments reflected the growing political consciousness and ambition of the Khasi chiefs.¹⁰ Under the Government of India Act 1935, the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills were declared as partially Excluded Areas and were, therefore, represented in the Assam Legislative Assembly. After the 1937 elections in Assam, under the Provincial Autonomy Scheme the representative of Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills too was represented by two elected members.¹¹

In March 1928, N.E. Parry formulated a plan for the future of the hill areas suggesting for the establishment of a North Eastern Frontier Province comprising the hill areas of Assam and Burma. This remained the central focus of the British administration until the changed scenario emerged preceding independence. The angle of approach to this question has been changed as a result of the constitutional

⁹ Bareh, H.: *Op. cit.*, pp.156-157.

¹⁰ Rao, V.V., Hazarika, Niru and Pakem, B.: *Op. cit.*, p.28.

¹¹ Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Op. cit.*, pp.445-465.

developments taking place between 1930-1935. Until 1930 the plan was to place these hill areas under an Indian administration. A new phase, however, developed after 1935 with the aim of separation of these areas from India and Burma, and to establish a Crown colony directly administered by Britain. This plan was met with little interest by the people of these areas and was resisted by certain tribal leaders.¹² On the eve of the British departure, the whole of India became hectic as to the constitutional adjustment that would serve best for the people. In 1944, at the first Hills Youth Union (HYU) comprising representatives from Naga, Lushai, Khasi-Jaintia and Garo communities, wherein public attention was focused on the need for evolving of a separate pattern of administration for the hill districts of Assam in the new constitutional set up. The interim period was eventful for during that time the Federation of Khasi States was revived in 1946 and it managed the affairs of the states according to the powers derived from the Instrument of Accession and Annexed Agreement signed with the Dominion Government. The party supporting this Institution was the Khasi States People's Union. However, the Khasi-Jaintia National Conference (KJNC) another party was opposed to the continuance of the Federation and came forward with the plan for the Autonomous District Council in the regular set up. The seeds of oppositional politics had been sown even before Meghalaya became a State. Agitations of the two parties filled up the constitutional forums during the last stage. During the plebiscites held in 1948, the Khasi States People's Union swept the polls, and during the Khasi constitution making Durbar it secured majority of members present that the Federation should continue. However, during the final arrangement, the Sixth Schedule was applied to both states and British areas.¹³ The

¹² Syiemlieh, D.R.: *Op. cit.*, pp.189-190.

¹³ Bareh, H.: *Op. cit.*, pp.157-158.

transfer of power from Britain to the Dominions of India and Pakistan was laid down in the Cabinet Mission Plan of May 1946 in which the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy in consultation with the British Government issued a statement embodying their suggestions and recommendations towards a solution to the Indian political question. The position of the States was further elucidated by the Cabinet Mission in its memorandum of State's Treaties and Paramountcy in 1946 which stated that with the transfer of power His Majesty's Government would cease to exercise paramountcy.¹⁴ The Cabinet Mission further suggested that the void caused by the lapse of paramountcy be filled up either by the States entering into a federal relationship with the successor Government or Governments in British India or by entering into particular political arrangement with it or them. It further made provisions for the entry of the States into the proposed Union of India.¹⁵ This led to differences of opinions and agitations between the two parties of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills on acceptance or non-acceptance of the suggestions put forward. The seeds of oppositional politics had been sown in these areas even before Meghalaya attained statehood.¹⁶

On February 1947, the British Government made a declaration to quit India, and on this day, the Standing Committee of the Federation of Khasi States met and prepared a Draft Constitution for its future course of action which was then circulated to all the Khasi States for their consideration and approval which was presented in the Constitutional Assembly by its representative. The proposal of the Draft Constitution was not accepted by the Constituent Assembly as it was deemed too rigid, and it,

¹⁴ Syiemlieh, D.R.: *Op. cit.*, pp.195-196.

¹⁵ Rao, V.V., Hazarika, Niru and Pakem, B.: *Op. cit.*, p.31.

¹⁶ Bareh, H.: *Op. cit.*, pp.157-158.

therefore, made suggestions for changes to be made. While the Federation of Khasi States were hammering out its plan for its future relationship with the successor Government, great changes were taking place over the whole country, which culminated in the transfer of power from the British to the Indians. The States Department of free India came into existence on July 1947 to take charge of the negotiations with the rulers of different states. Further, the Government of India entrusted the task of negotiating with the rulers to Lord Mountbatten, who was then the Crown representative. Lord Mountbatten called a special full meeting of the Chambers of Princes on 25th July 1947, wherein he advised the rulers to accede to any of the Dominions* in regard to three subjects — Defence, External Affairs and Communications. It was against this background that the Federation of Khasi States faced a dilemma. The decision to arrange a referendum in Sylhet clearly indicated that Sylhet would become a part of Pakistan. For centuries, the Khasis had trade relations with both Assam and Sylhet. The dilemma was how to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable views expressed by various leaders and organisations in Khasi and Jaintia Hills wherein on the one hand, the representative of Khasi Hills, Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy, in the Assam Legislative Council favoured the idea that the Khasi States should be brought within the framework of the Sixth Schedule of the Draft Constitution of free India. This was opposed by leaders of the Khasi States' People Union who strongly supported the stand taken by the Federation to separate the Khasi States from Assam and placing them in direct relation with the Government of India. The prevailing situation would have generated great confusion but most of the Khasi chiefs gradually decided to accede to the Indian Union.

* During this period the British dominion of India was divided into India and Pakistan dominions.

On August 1947, the Federation of Khasi States signed the Instrument of Accession and also authorized its representative in Delhi to sign the Standstill Agreement with the Indian Union on their behalf as it was realized that after the British left India, a vacuum would be created in the administrative arrangements between the Khasi States and the Indian Union. The administration of these areas was finally brought under the Indian Government. In order to make the stop-gap arrangement between the Khasi States and Federation of Khasi States on the one hand and the Dominion of India and the Province of Assam on the other, an agreement was signed by the Federation of Khasi States on August 1947.¹⁷ Further, with the adoption of the Indian Constitution, the Khasi States and British areas became part of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District within the State of Assam as stipulated by the Indian Constitution. As for the Garo Hills, there does not appear to have been much resistance as in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills to its integration into India.¹⁸ Consequent to the adoption of the Constitution of India by the Constituent Assembly, the hill areas under the present State of Meghalaya, were constituted into two Autonomous District Councils, namely, the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council and the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council as envisaged in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. This Schedule gave a certain measure of self-government a taste of their own representative institution to these areas, though the laws and regulations to be made by the District Councils were subjected to the control and assent of the Governor of Assam. The first District Councils were formed in 1953-54 after the General Elections of 1952. The first representative institution under the Indian Constitution was ushered in the areas with the functioning of the United Khasi-Jaintia

¹⁷ Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Op. cit.*, pp.179-189.

¹⁸ Syiemlieh, D.R.: *Op. cit.*, p.204.

Hills Autonomous District Council and the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council.¹⁹ The transfer of power in 1947 brought in a number of political and administrative changes in the hill districts of the present Meghalaya paving the way for the formation and functioning of representative institution which led to the developments of demand for statehood and the setting up of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly as the State Legislature.²⁰

In the midst of all these developments new elements for tribal solidarity rather than individual existence started taking roots in the post-Independence period in which history became integrated among the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos.²¹ The movement for a separate Hill State was spearheaded by the Khasi National Durbar, a socio-political organisation that had emerged from the British period wherein they had stated for a separate hill districts for Khasi Hills on the eve of Independence. By 1952, this movement had gained momentum in the whole of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills District. The formation of the District Council was the stepping stone to the formation of the State of Meghalaya,²² as the provisions of the Sixth Schedule were unable to generate adequate power to safeguard the interests, customs and traditions of the hill districts, they were meant to serve and this generated in the areas concerned to strive for more autonomy. It is against this backdrop that in 1954, the Conference of the members of the Executive Committees of the Lushai Hills, North Cachar Hills, Garo Hills and the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Councils met in Shillong and discussed the need to launch a movement for a separate State and agreed

¹⁹ Kyndiah, P.R.: *Meghalaya: Yesterday and Today*, Har Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1990, pp.17-21.

²⁰ Gassah, L.S.: "Traditional and Emerging Leadership Pattern in Khasi-Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya" in B.C. Bhuyan, *Political Development of the North East*, Part II, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1992, p.72.

²¹ Bareh, H.: *Op. cit.*, p.159.

²² Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Op. cit.*, pp.306-307.

to proceed with its demand for such a State. The year 1954 can, therefore, be regarded as a landmark in the political history of the districts of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills, when the movement demanding separation from the State of Assam gained momentum.²³

The Hill State demand assumed the dimension of a mass movement during the visit of the States Reorganisation Commission in 1955 to vent their disapproval of its recommendations which was against grant of demand for a separate State. The demand for separate state drew considerable attention when, in the second General elections of 1957, the Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU) spearheading the demand for a Hill State fought the elections on the issue of separate Hill State swept the polls in most of the Hill districts.²⁴ This tremendous success at the polls made them more vocal and the demand for separation from Assam became more vociferous.²⁵ At this time, the Garo Hills was represented by the Garo National Council and the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills by the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC) which were both component units of the Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU). The major issue that had ensured resounding victory in the 1957 elections to the EITU experienced a lull when a coalition ministry was formed between the Congress and the EITU in the Assam Legislative Assembly under B.P. Chaliha ministry.²⁶ The EITU as a political party was doomed not to survive as the two parties which formed the ministry had conflicting interests and this had an adverse influence on their relationship. This union broke apart as a result of the controversial language bill which seeks to make

²³ Kyndiah, P.R.: *Meghalaya: Yesterday and Today*, Har Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p.21.

²⁴ Ray, B. Datta and Agrawal, S.P.: *Reorganisations of North East India since 1947*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1996, p.62.

²⁵ Rao, V.V., Hazarika, Niru and Pakem, B.: *Op. cit.*, p.39.

²⁶ Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Op. cit.*, p.321.

Assamese the sole official language in the whole State of Assam including the hill districts.²⁷ With the introduction of the Assam Official Language Bill in July 1960 in the Assam Legislative Assembly, it generated stiff opposition in the entire Hill districts accelerating the demand for separation from Assam by these areas.²⁸

The Assam Official Language Bill and Opposition politics – An Analysis

The introduction of the Assam official Language Bill in the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1960 was the final and vital factor which made the dream of a separate State not impossible for the hill districts of Assam. It was during this period that the hill state movement took a new turn when the Eastern India Tribal Union, a coalition of the ruling party, pulled out of the coalition of the B.P. Chaliha ministry. This indicated the firm resolve of the leaders to continue with the movement which had been suspended when the leaders of the hill districts were in the coalition. The exit of the leaders of the hill areas from the coalition resulted in the coming together of all the leaders of all political organisations under the auspices of the Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU) paving the way for a strong opposition to the intended action of the Assam Government. The role of the people from these areas as an Opposition to the government policy had taken firm roots and eventually ensured their victory and their success in forming an alternative measure. The Eastern India Tribal Union was disbanded paving the way for the formation of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC)²⁹ wherein the Council of Action of the APHLC resolved to adopt peaceful

²⁷ Kyndiah, P.R.: *Op. cit.*, p.22.

²⁸ Ray, B. Datta *et al.*: *Op. cit.*, pp.62-63.

²⁹ Sten, H.W.: *The Meghalaya Year Book 1971*, North East India News & Features Service, Shillong, 1971, p.62.

and constitutional methods for the achievement of a hill state.³⁰ In the Conference at Haflong, the APHLC voiced its strong and determined opposition to the stand taken by the Assam Government and henceforth the demand for full autonomy accelerated, with the successive delegations meeting the Prime Minister and Home Minister on this issue. The last delegation that met the then Prime Minister, Nehru, was in November 1960 wherein he presented his own plan to the delegation as an alternative to the hill state demand. This clearly indicated that the APHLC as an Opposition in the Assam Legislative Assembly was successful in voicing the opinions of the hill districts which were against the passing of the controversial Bill, in the process, the party proposes an alternative in the form of demand for Hill State comprising all the hill districts of Assam.³¹

The success of the APHLC in their endeavour as the party representing the hill districts resulted in the Central Government initiating various schemes and proposals to resolve the continuing problem between the Assam Government and the hill districts without sacrificing the stand of either side. The first such proposal was the Scottish Pattern advocated by the Government of India in 1960-62. This scheme suggested for a loose federation with certain autonomy. The APHLC thought differently as it was felt that this proposal would not be able to tackle the language problem nor safeguard the interests and satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the hill areas and, therefore, the proposal was rejected.³² In the ensuing elections of 1962, the

³⁰ Rao, V.V. *et al.*, *Op. cit.*, p.42.

³¹ Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Op. cit.*, p.487.

³² Ray, B. Datta and Agrawal, S.P.: *Op. cit.*, p.63. The following were the Schemes, Proposals, Commission and Plans put forward by the Government of India from time to time:

1. Scottish Pattern Plan.
2. Nehru Plan
3. Pataskar Commission
4. Union Territory Plan

Scottish Pattern Plan was made the poll issue and the decision of the APHLC was made known. This election witnessed keen contest between the ruling Congress and the APHLC which secured landslide victory for the latter. This indicated that the party though in the Opposition commands the acceptance of their electorates on the decision made and ensured its efficient functioning as an Opposition. The next proposal was the Nehru Plan advocated in 1963 whose objective was “full autonomy for the Hill Districts” subject to the preservation of the unity of the State of Assam. This proposal was agreed by the leaders of the APHLC to give it a fair trial at its Tura Conference in 1964 but the ruling Congress in Assam showed its dissention to this proposal in its present form. In the meantime a three-man Commission known as the Pataskar Commission was appointed to work out the details of the Nehru Plan. Certain recommendations were made by the Commission which did not find favour with the leaders of the APHLC who rejected the recommendations. After the rejection of the Pataskar Commission Report by the APHLC, several alternative proposals were made, such as the Union Territory Plan by some leaders of the Congress Party suggesting that Khasi-Jaintia Hills be converted into a union territory. This proposal was rejected even by the District Congress Committee. This showed that the two parties had vast differences of opinions though they were members belonging to the districts. However, the APHLC was the only political party that could mobilize mass support by launching a non-violent direction action by the end of 1966 after the two successive proposals — the District State Plan proposed by the Central Home Ministry and the Vishnu Sahay Plan influenced by the Ausgleich of 1867 scheme

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5. District State Plan
 6. Vishnu Sahay Plan
 7. Federal Plan
 8. *Mehta Plan*
 9. Autonomous State Plan.

between Austria and Hungary and the government of Ireland Act, 1920 as well as the Cabinet Mission Plan 1946 suggestions for making these districts into a federation, could not satisfy the aspirations of the hill districts. In December 1966, the Government sent an important member of the Planning Commission, Tailok Singh to visit the hill areas and suggest or recommend a solution to the ongoing hills state problem. The Tailok Singh Plan was also drawn on the lines of the Vishnu Sahay Plan recommending the constitution of the North East India into a regional federation. He, therefore, strongly urged that in the interest of the country and the North-East, the existing union between the hills and the plains was to be ended, and recommended the area be constituted into a union territory which was stiffly opposed by the hill districts.³³ Thus 1966 witnessed intense political activity in the hills,³⁴ wherein the party representing the hill districts, the APHLC effectively and determinedly carried out the opposition to the policy of the Assam Government and carried forward the hill state movement, pressurising both the Assam Government but mostly the Government of India through successive delegations to find a solution to the problem. These developments were considered of prime importance in view of the strategic position of the entire North East which shared international boundaries with China and then East Pakistan.

On January 1967, the Government of India announced its decision to reorganize the State of Assam on the basis of federal structure conferring upon the hill districts equal status with the rest of Assam. This proposal was welcomed by the people from the Hills but met with stiff resistance from the people of the plains.³⁵

³³ Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Op. cit.*, pp.63-64.

³⁴ Chaube, S.K.: *Hill Politics in North East India*, Orient Longman Ltd., Calcutta, 1973, pp.122-23.

³⁵ Rao, V.V. *et al.*: *Op. cit.*, pp.55-56.

Under such circumstances the APHLC was compelled to launch a non-violent direct action on September 1967 and urged the Government of India to implement its decision or create a separate State for the hill areas. The Government urged the APHLC to participate in a joint discussion involving the Government of India representative, the Assam Government and members of the APHLC, but this yielded no solution, instead creating bitterness amongst the two contending parties. Not succeeding in finding a solution, the Government of India next appointed the Mehta Committee consisting of the Government of India, and representatives of various political parties of both the plains and hill areas. The recommendations of this committee include grant of maximum autonomy to the hill areas, but the Federal Plan must not be the basis for reorganisation. The ruling Congress accepted the recommendations as even though it grant maximum autonomy but maintained the unity and integrity of Assam. The APHLC, the major Opposition in the Assam Legislative Assembly refused to accept the Mehta Plan on various grounds, one of which, was the APHLC was never a party to its formulations. The Government of India was finding difficulty in satisfying either side. The APHLC as a party representing the hill districts was getting firm roots in these areas, and hence the people were willing to abide by any decision of the leaders of the APHLC.

On December 1967 the APHLC stated that since the Government of Assam refused to accept the Federal Plan, a hill state should be formed, at the same time it threaten to launch a direct action if this demand was not conceded.³⁶ On September 1968, the Government of India announced its plan of reorganisation of Assam which contemplated the formation of an Autonomous State within Assam, with jurisdiction over the two existing districts — the Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills. This indicated

³⁶ Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Op. cit.*, pp.398-412.

the success of the APHLC as a party representing the people of these areas and as well as an Opposition in the Assam Legislative Assembly by being able to prevail in their endeavour even to the Government of India. This Autonomous State Plan was finally approved and accepted by the APHLC on January 1969, though initially they resisted as in the envisaged plan only United Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills were included with the exception of North Cachar Hills and Mikir Hills who intended to remain with Assam.³⁷ The acceptance of the Autonomous State Plan was not unanimous as a section of youth leaders who differed with the other leaders of the APHLC left the party. The party which had remained unified so long was marred by discord on the eve of their achievement of their own hill state. This would later have an adverse impact on the APHLC as a political party spearheading the hill state movement.

The hill districts of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills had undergone several changes as a result of the developments prior to the formation of Autonomous State. The Autonomous State Plan was the culmination of several plans and proposals initiated by the Government of India wherein the Central government had tried to satisfy the aspirations of both the ruling Congress and the Opposition — the APHLC. Following the 22nd Amendment of the Indian Constitution on December 1969, the Bill for the formation of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya was passed by the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha simultaneously and the Autonomous State of Meghalaya was born on 2nd April, 1970.³⁸ Under the provisional arrangement chalked out, Meghalaya would have its own legislature which is the Provisional Legislative Assembly consisting of representatives from Meghalaya itself. In addition, it would

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.412-415.

³⁸ Chaube, S.K.: *Op. cit.*, p.132.

also have representation in the Assam Legislative Assembly and also in the Assam Cabinet if appointed. The Provisional Assembly would consist of not more than 35 and not less than 5 members who shall be elected from single member constituencies through adult franchise.³⁹ But until this was constituted, the Provisional Legislative Assembly consisting of not more than 55 and not less than 35 members would be constituted. These members would be elected by an electoral college in each Autonomous district consisting of all the elected members of the existing Autonomous District Councils by proportional representation and by single transferable vote. Three(3) members were also to be nominated to represent the minority communities in Meghalaya. This Assembly would cease to operate once the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was constituted under the Meghalaya Act 1970, paving for the second representative institution of the new State to be. Representative institutions or State legislature had finally been formally established with the formation of the Provisional Legislative Assembly which unlike Autonomous District Councils were given autonomy from the Assam Legislative Assembly. This legislature would include the ruling party and the opposition party or parties.

The Provisional Legislative Assembly of the State of Meghalaya had two sessions during 1970. The first session was held at the Garo Hills District Council chamber that lasted for one day only, the 14th April, 1970. The Assembly in this session, elected R.S. Lyngdoh as the Speaker who was present when the members* were administered their oath by the Governor. The session was then adjourned and met again in the Assembly Chamber from 20th-22nd April, 1970. the second or Budget

³⁹ Bareh, H.: *Op. cit.*, p.173.

* List of Members of the Provisional Legislative Assembly is given in the Appendix.

Session was held from 21st September to 5th October, 1970. This legislature was, therefore, constituted to carry on the affairs of the Autonomous State.⁴⁰

The Autonomous State of Meghalaya, similar to other newly emerging states, was beset with many challenges and problems especially in its relations with the full-fledged State of Assam, as the constitutional status of the Autonomous State was less than that of Assam. Moreover, the Government of Assam could direct the Government of Meghalaya to undertake agency functions.⁴¹ These actions generated in the minds of the leaders of the Autonomous State to take decision as to revert back to their original demand for a full-fledged State.⁴² So with this intention, in its session on 22nd September, 1970, the session of APHLC adopted a resolution urging upon the Government of India to take steps for upgrading Meghalaya into a full State.⁴³ This was followed by a Resolution passed by the Meghalaya Provisional Legislative Assembly demanding full statehood. Taking cognizance of these developments on 10th November, 1970, the Union Government made a decision to take up a final Reorganisation of Meghalaya into a full state.⁴⁴

Towards the close of October 1971, the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Bill was almost ready. It was introduced and passed both by the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha in 1971.⁴⁵ The State of Meghalaya was finally inaugurated on 21st January, 1972. On January 1972 morning, the members of the Provisional Legislative Assembly were sworn in as members of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. The

⁴⁰ Sten, H.W., *Op. cit.*, p.14.

⁴¹ Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Op. cit.*, pp.427-433.

⁴² Kyndiah, P.R.: *Op. cit.*, p.25.

⁴³ Bareh, H.: *Op. cit.*, p.189.

⁴⁴ Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Op. cit.*, p.438.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.438.

general elections to the newly formed Assembly occurred shortly after that, in March 1972. The total strength of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly was fixed at 60(sixty). Initially, of the 60 seats as many as 50(fifty) seats were reserved for the tribals and 10(ten) seats were considered general constituencies for open contest where non tribal residents of Meghalaya were able to contest the elections. Through facing severe criticisms, the allotment of seats was changed wherein the open seats were reduced from 10(ten) to 5(five) seats and the system of nominated element was abolished. At present all the 60(sixty) members are elected from single member constituencies. The first general elections of 1972 returned the APHLC to power where it formed the Government. The other parties elected to the new Assembly included the Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party candidates as well as Congress and Independent candidates who being in minority occupied the Opposition benches. Meghalaya had emerged as a full-fledged State with its own autonomy. It was ensconced with its own representative institution — the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly which consist of a 60(sixty) members, out of which, 29(twenty nine) are from Khasi Hills, 7(seven) from Jaintia Hills and 24(twenty four) from Garo Hills. It is a unicameral legislature.⁴⁶

The twenty-five Khasi States that existed prior to the advent of the British, imbibed some form of representative institutions. This system ceased to function, once the British annexed the entire hill areas. The next State of emergence of representative institutions from these areas was during 1920-1921 when as a result of political changes in the country, the British administration was compelled to make changes in the system of administration in these areas. Provisions were made for representation of these areas into the Assam Legislative Council with the creation of

⁴⁶ Bareh, H.: *Op. cit.*, p.195.

the Shillong Urban Constituency to represent Khasi-Jaintia Hills and nomination of one member from the Garo Hills. In 1937, with the promulgation of the Government of India Act 1935, the number of representation was increased that is three single member constituencies were created for Khasi-Jaintia Hills — Shillong, Shillong-Women and Jowai. Garo Hills was represented by two single member constituencies.

Next, under the Indian Constitution, the Garo Hills was allotted 4(four) seats and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills 5(five) seats. Thus the areas now covered by Meghalaya were represented in the Assam Legislative Assembly by 9(nine) members. Though they were not endowed with a separate representative institution even after independence, since they were still a part of Assam, but they were adequately represented in the legislature of Assam.⁴⁷

Changes were brought in, with the setting of the two Autonomous District Councils of United Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills. Representative institutions had emerged in the hill districts, consisting of 24(twenty four) member each, of whom 18(eighteen) were elected and 6(six) were nominated. The setting up of the Autonomous District Councils can be considered to be a prelude for further political developments in the hill districts.

The political developments during 1960 necessitated the Government initially to grant Autonomous State to the hill districts of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills. With this, the second representative institutions of these areas was set up in 1970. The Provisional Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya consisted of 38 members indirectly elected and three nominated members bringing the total strength of the House to 41(forty one) members.

⁴⁷ Rao, V.V. *et al.*: *Op. cit.*, p.93.

The full-fledged State of Meghalaya was inaugurated two years later on 21st January, 1972, paving the way for the setting up of a full-fledged representative institution of their own with the setting up of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly consisting of 60 elected members. The setting of the representative institution in Meghalaya was achieved after a period of struggle from the British period to the period of free India and intense struggle and demands preceded the year 1972, when Meghalaya was finally declared a State.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Rao, V.V. *et al.*: *Op. cit.*, pp.93-94.

Chapter-II

PARTY ORGANISATION: THEIR ROLE IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Party system is an integral part of the parliamentary form of democracy. Barring a few members who may not be attached to any political party, most members of the legislature have a dual capacity; they represent a constituency and party.¹ Political parties constitute a basic element of democratic institutional apparatus. These perform an essential function in the management of succession of power, as well as in the process of obtaining popular consent to the course of public policy.² Political parties perform functions which is essential for the operation of a democratic order. These parties seek to build majority coalitions powerful enough to control the Government. In all they advocate broad views on public policy; designate candidates and once in power they attempt to run the Government in a manner to hold together the coalition that put them in office. The minority party maintains a critical vigil against the day when circumstances will permit it to oust the majority.³

In all liberal democracies political parties maintain dual organisation — one outside the legislature and the other inside. A mass organisation achieves effectiveness by formulating adequate policies, selecting candidates for office, raising funds and holding its supporters in line. The organisation of the party in the legislature influences the procedures of the Houses and determines the quantity, quality and speed of business transacted as also the discipline in the Houses.

¹ Shakhder, S.L. and Kaul, M.N.: *Practice and Procedure of Parliament*, Metropolitan Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1978, p.285.

² Key Jr., V.O.: *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups (5th Edition)*, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1967, pp.9-10.

³ *Ibid.*, p.283.

In the legislature members of the organised parties meet from time to time for deciding party business and removing differences, as far as possible, to enable them to act unitedly at the sessions of the Houses. Both the sides — the Government and the Opposition have their respective leaders that is the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the House is the Chief spokesman on behalf of the Government and he usually keeps the House informed about the intentions of the Government. The Leader of the Opposition is a member in the House of the party in Opposition having the greatest numerical strength in the House. In case of doubt as to the numerical strength of the parties in Opposition or their leaders, the Speaker is generally given the power to give the final decision. The Leader of the Opposition is just as much a part of the constitutional system of Government as the Chief Minister. He is responsible to the members from whom he derives his position. He is under a special obligation to defend the rights and privileges of private members, particularly the right of every member to express his opinion freely on all matters of public policy. He consults the Leader of the House and usually both the leaders — the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition balance each other.⁴

One of the consequences of focusing on the concept of ‘power’ in the political process has been the relative neglect of the role of formal structures in the political system. The quest for the ‘power structure’ is a quest for an informal structure of the political process, a structure which is often relatively ephemeral or which evolves as the people operating the system change. This informal structure is, however, limited by a set of rules, procedures and functions which are laid down and constitute a formal organisation or structure.

⁴ Fartyal, H.S.: *Role of the Opposition in the Indian Parliament*, Chaityan Publishing House, Allahabad, 1971, pp.58-59.

The creation of a formal structure helps to give several functional needs:

1. The existence of a formal structure helps to give the party credibility within the system. A clear cut organisation can project a public image more easily.
2. Certain ends, e.g. vote-winning can better be achieved consistently by means of people operating within a formal, clearly defined structure.
3. A formal structure plays an important role in determining the pattern of party loyalty.
4. As parties become larger, communication problems appear, the solution of which, requires the creation of permanent communication and organisational channels.
5. Formal structures also provide for some form of balance between leaders and members. Constitution sometimes offer members opportunities to control leaders, for membership usually carries with it certain rights of participation in the affairs of the party.
6. Formal structures in most organizations, while allocating superior power to key individuals (Secretaries, etc.), attempt to a greater or lesser degree to equalize the power wielded by members generally.

In any given political party, a particular structural feature may have arisen in response to any or all of these needs, or to none of them. However, not every structural feature in society has an obvious functional explanation. Changes in the formal structure can occur for a variety of reasons. It may be that there is concern that some of the basic functions of the party are not being performed adequately, or that those operating the structure find certain restrictions hamper their informal arrangements, or that it is felt desirable to limit the informal structure in some way.

Concern and support for the formal structure is often related to the historical role which a party has played in the political system.⁵

Constitutions

As the main vehicles of structural delineation let us examine some provisions of the Constitutions of the parties which we are concerned.

NATIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES

The Indian National Congress (Congress-I)

The INC or later the Congress party is the sole national political party which has been able to penetrate and till today played an active role in the politics of Meghalaya.⁶ It is the oldest political party in the country and its inception can be traced to the period during the British rule. The INC which came to power after Independence later face dissensions and splits into different parties under different leaders, and has over the years evolved into its present stage as the Congress(I) under the leadership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi prior to the attainment of the State of Meghalaya. When the INC was spearheading the freedom struggle the leadership from the hill areas were closely associated with the party. Its presence in the north-eastern region was felt from the pre-independence period. After Independence, the leadership in the INC prevailed upon the leaders of these areas to participate in the Assam Government to which they acceded. The situation changed when the ministers from the hill areas resigned over the issue of the Assam Official Language Bill, and spearhead the

⁵ Lees, John D. and Kimber, Richard (Ed.): *Political Parties in Modern Britain*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1972, pp.12-13.

⁶ Dutta, P.S.: *Electoral Politics in North East*, Omson Publications, New Delhi, 1986, pp.85-86.

demand for separate State. The INC government at the Centre initially came up with several plans for bringing an amicable solution but short of acceding to the granting of statehood. The leaders from these areas, however, refused to accept these terms and proposals of the Centre and went ahead with their demand for full-fledged State. In 1970, the INC led Government at the Centre and the leaders of the APHLC reached an amicable solution with the creation of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya which attained full-fledged Statehood in 1972. This attainment of Statehood of Meghalaya was, therefore, considered a gift of Indira Gandhi to the people of the hill areas of Meghalaya as she was the Prime Minister and leader of the Congress party during this time. This sentiment was later reflected in the Congress Manifesto and campaign during the first General Elections in 1972. This also helped to narrow the rift between the Congress and the regional political parties in the new State.⁷

The ideology of the party is as follows: “With faith in our people, with pride in our distinctive way of life; with faith in our country toward peace, progress, prosperity and a better tomorrow.”⁸ The ideology of the party is based on Secularism and Democracy which is imprinted in the party’s manifesto.

Constitution of the Party

The objective of the Congress party in Meghalaya is the well being and advancement of the people of Meghalaya and the establishment in Meghalaya peaceful and constitutional means, of a Socialist State based on parliamentary democracy in which there is equality of opportunity and of political, economic and

⁷ Ray, B. Datta: *Electoral Politics in the North East*, N.E.I.C.S.S.R., Shillong, 1978, p.51.

⁸ Congress Manifesto, Meghalaya Elections, 1988, p.2.

social rights and which aims at national peace and fellowship. Towards this end the party called itself a national party with a regional outlook.

The Congress party or INC fought the election on national platform but taking into consideration the regional aspects which is reflected in its manifesto.

1. The Indian National Congress is the biggest democratic organisation and the largest mass based political party in the world, commanding the confidence of all regions, communities and religious groups. The Congress stated that it struggled for the emancipation of the country and achieved India's freedom and since then it is taking the country forward towards unity, peace and prosperity based on democracy socialism and secularism.
2. The Congress appealed to the sentiment of the people of Meghalaya in stating that the party had given to the Meghalaya people an honourable place in the country by granting them a statehood with special safeguards and provisions for the preservation and promotion of unique tribal culture of Meghalaya. The supreme task of managing the affairs of the State rests with the people of Meghalaya.⁹

In the socio-economic sphere the main objectives of the party are as follows:

- a) To increase agricultural production in the State.
- b) To promote and encourage large scale rubber plantation through assistance from the Central Rubber Board, a well as coffee plantation through the Central Coffee Board.
- c) The party strove to achieve physical targets in road construction by undertaking an ambitious scheme for the construction of "Link roads" to connect every village to the existing road network.

⁹ Congress Manifesto Meghalaya Elections, 1988, pp.1-2.

- d) To improve health facilities in the State.
- e) The party will strive to improve the water supply and sewerage and to provide drinking water to all.
- f) To develop sports and youth welfare activities in the State.
- g) To generate employment for the youth of the State by generating self employment schemes for the educated unemployed.
- h) To eradicate illiteracy and bringing about a quantitative and qualitative education.
- i) The party championed the cause of the other tribes in Meghalaya.
- j) The party also stated its commitment and future programme for rapid economic progress, industrialisation of the State and scientific and technological development. In this clause is included the solution of the inter-state boundary by democratic, legal and constitutional means.
- k) The improvement of the lot of the common man and the raising of his standard of living.
- l) The continuous attempt to banish want and to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor.

The objective of the party is to achieve peace; continuous progress, prosperity, stability and unity based on secularism, socialism and democracy.¹⁰

Constitutional Structure

The Executive Committee of the party, i.e., the PCC consists of the President, one Vice-President, Treasurer and 21 members from amongst its members and from amongst the members of the Executive, the President shall appoint not more than 2 General Secretaries. The President may also appoint other office bearers such as the

¹⁰ Congress Manifesto, pp.6-18.

Secretaries and Joint Secretaries from amongst PCC members Such office bearers need not necessarily be members of the Executive Committee. The heads of Frontal Organisations are the ex-officio permanent invitees of the Executive Committee.

The organisation of the Congress party is as follows:

1. The Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee.
2. The Executive Committee.
3. The District/City Congress Committees.
4. Committees subordinate to the District Congress Committees like Block or Constituency Congress Committee and other subordinate Committee to be determined by the Pradesh Congress Committee concerned.*

The District Congress Committee is constituted in all the districts of the State of Meghalaya and also include Shillong city and Tura city. These are as follows:

District Congress Committees:

1. East Khasi Hills.
2. Shillong City Congress.
3. Jaintia Hills District Congress Committee.
4. Ri-Bhoi District Congress Committee.
5. West Khasi Hills District Congress Committee.
6. East Garo Hills District Congress Committee.
7. West Garo Hills District Congress Committee.
8. South Garo Hills District Congress Committee.
9. Tura City District Congress Committee.

* In this Constitution wherever the word "Pradesh", the word "District" will occur include "City" as required by the context.

The Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee also consists of the 60(sixty) Block Congress Committees which falls under the jurisdiction of their own District Congress Committees.

The Pradesh Congress Committee which is the Central body of the party consists of the members elected by the Block Congress Committee, active members of the party, Ex-presidents of the PCC, AICC members who reside in the Pradesh, members elected by the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) and members co-opted by the PCC Executive. All the members of the Pradesh Congress Committee are delegates to the Indian National Congress.¹¹

After the creation of Meghalaya, the Congress party could increase progressively their influence in the Hills. The Youth Congress was formed and the DCC was made active. Though the party was present even prior to the formation of the State, but was overshadowed by the influence of the APHLC. In 1972 General Elections, the Congress and the APHLC had an electoral adjustment and this ensured 9 seats to the Congress.¹² The Congress experienced phenomenal rise since November 1976 when the Congress and APHLC merged under the leadership of Capt. Sangma. Since then the Congress organisation in Meghalaya was in a state of slow but steady growth but with the installation of the Congress Government the organisation ramified itself in every direction. Initially, the Congress never had grassroot support among the hill people. Rather, it was often alleged that it was a party for the interests of the non-tribals. It is, therefore, interesting to note how far the Congress could reconcile the interests of the tribals and non-tribals. As long as the party was in the opposition it had to play the role of a reconciliator in the conflict of interests between

¹¹ Constitution of Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee and Rules, 2000, pp.2-3.

¹² Ray, B. Datta, *Op. cit.*, p.47.

the tribal and non-tribals. In the Autonomous State the APHLC Government had to enact a law providing restrictions on transfer of land from tribals to the non-tribals because the existing law on the subject was set aside by the Supreme Court. The INC (Congress) members in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly were so much opposed to the Bill that they moved a motion against the Bill and refused to withdraw it. The full-fledged State immediately did not bring any changes in the role of the Congress (INC). The Residential Permit Bill brought by the APHLC Government in 1973 raised severe objection and criticisms from the party, and this was a major factor that ultimately killed the Bill.

Though the policy of the Congress benefitted the non-tribals, the aversion of the tribals towards the party grew deeper. Exploiting this sentiment, in 1978, the regional parties set to govern the State and isolate the Congress in the hills but due to infighting amongst themselves were unable to stand united for long and were not able to prevent the Congress from coming to power which it retained under a Coalition Government that lasted until the 1983 elections.

The Congress leadership being affronted at the allegations that it was a party of the non-tribals oscillated its position to ensure that it can win tribal votes. Its members in the Assembly retreated from their earlier opposition to the land reforms in the Khasi Hills and withdrew from the House during the discussion on the subject. When the party captured power after the merger of the APHLC with it, the State Government clarified its stand on land transfer and other tribal interests to remove misgivings among the tribal people. Alliance of the Congress with the APHLC and the HSPDP to capture power in 1979 gave a tribal orientation to the policies of the Congress. In this period the PCC demanded more autonomy both for the organisation and the Government and adopted a more regional outlook. The change of the policies

of the party in the hills could be attributed to the merger of the APHLC with the Congress and the dominance of the tribal leadership in the State Congress.¹³ In the three successive Assemblies from 1972-1988 the party was able to consolidate its position particularly in the Garo Hills district. In 1972, the party captured 9 seats and by 1983 General Elections the party maximises its innings by capturing 25 seats emerging as the single largest party. After the fall of the coalition Government comprising of the regional parties, the Congress formed the Government which completed its five-year term. The above indicated that the party had slowly but steadily made inroads into the politics of Meghalaya and is the sole national party which had remained in State politics. The Congress in Meghalaya stated itself to be a national party with a regional outlook and orientation.¹⁴

The Congress, though being a national party, preferred to use the term “a national party with a regional outlook”, which can be found in its earlier manifesto and Constitution. This was aimed at appealing to both tribal and non-tribal voters. Being a national party the objectives were basically broad and general in character. However, one of its objectives specifically dealt with the State of Meghalaya which refers to the finding of a solution of the inter-state boundary through democratic, legal and constitutional means. It may, however, be stated that the party hardly sat in the Opposition and whenever the party was in the Opposition, it was for a brief period. In such a situation, members of the party hardly raised or brought this issue for discussion in the House.

Other National Political Parties such as the Communist Party of India (CPI) and Janata Party entered the political arena during 1972-1988 but were unsuccessful.

¹³ Dutta, P.S.: *Op. cit.*, pp.89-90.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.115.

The CPI projected an economic programme and had a well knit organisation but was not able to capitalise on this image and was unsuccessful in capturing any seats in the 1978 and 1983 General Elections to the State Legislature. These parties were confined mostly in the urban areas where the population of the non-tribals was quite significant. Their sphere of influence was too weak to have any considerable impact on the political life of the State or on electoral politics.¹⁵

Regional Political Parties

In the beginning the idea of regional political parties in India emerged as an alternative to the attempts of other weak national political parties to oppose one political party hegemony over the States. With reference to North-East India, it may be pointed out that many of the regional political parties at the initial stage were set up only as pressure groups. In general the aims of such groups were mainly to achieve social and economic goals and welfare of the people. Their initial formation was also because of the need that was felt necessary to protect and preserve the customs, traditions, customary laws, language, religion and the distinct identity of their own section of the society. In the hill areas, in some cases, a common feature that prevailed was that the pressure groups acted as the voice of the common people to protest against the exploitation of traditional chiefs or the colonial rulers. Subsequently, these pressure groups were converted into political parties. Some of them managed to survive as political parties and run the state administration with a commanding

¹⁵ Dutta, P.S.: *Ibid.*, p.79.

majority, but still many such groups disappeared as soon as they form themselves into a political party.¹⁶

In Meghalaya, however, the growth of regional political parties originated from the Hill State Movement for the preservation and protection of the separate identity and culture of the hill people. On the basis of the above, we propose to analyse in our study the following regional political parties in Meghalaya.¹⁷

REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES

All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC)

The APHLC is the oldest regional political party in Meghalaya. Its genesis can be traced to the period prior to the formation of the State. The APHLC was born under compelling circumstances. On 22nd April, 1960, the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee directed the Chief Minister of Assam to take immediate steps for making Assamese the State language. The immediate reaction to this was the meeting of the leaders of the Hill Areas of Assam at Tura under the chairmanship of B.M. Pugh. The Conference unanimously resolved to oppose the official language bill. It also resolved to form the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference – APHLC which was destined to play a vital role in the formation of Meghalaya.¹⁸

In the beginning, the APHLC was formed mainly for the purpose of opposing the introduction of the Assam Official Language Bill. It was only at the third Conference held at Haflong that the APHLC demanded the formation of a separate Hill State. It had to fight for separation for eight long years. The Government of India

¹⁶ Gassah, L.S. (Ed.): *Regional Political Parties in North East India: Introduction*, Chand & Co. Ltd., New Delhi, 1992, pp.VII-VIII.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.103.

¹⁸ Rao, V.V., Pakem, B. and Hazarika, Niru: *Government and Politics in North East India Vol. II (Meghalaya) (1874-1983)*, S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 1984, p.194.

proposed a series of plans for the reorganisation of Assam but the APHLC consistently demanded a separate State and ultimately succeeded in its aim.¹⁹ At the twenty first session of the party, the APHLC resolved to accept the Autonomous State Plan. But at its twenty second session it enumerated the various difficulties encountered in the working of the Autonomous State Plan and stated that the Plan would not work. It prevailed upon the Government of India to take immediate steps for the grant of statehood to Meghalaya. The Government of India accepted the arguments of the APHLC and an announcement was made on 10th October, 1970 that Meghalaya would be a State. Thus, after ten years long struggle, the APHLC was able to achieve its aim. The party is, therefore, accredited with the attainment of statehood and was able to generate spectacular performance in the 1972 polls.²⁰

Constitution of the Party

The aims and objectives of the party is comprised of both national and state programmes.

National Programmes

The APHLC is a regional party with a national outlook. It stated that its candidates when elected will work and co-operate with the democratic forces in Parliament for the firm establishment of democracy in the country under which every citizen will have full liberty and freedom of religion, culture and language and the freedom of the press. The party stated that it will cooperate in the implementation of

¹⁹ Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Government and Politics in Meghalaya*, Sanchar Publishing House, New Delhi, 1996, pp.480-481.

²⁰ Rao, V.V. *et al.*, *Op. cit.*, p.196.

national programme for the advancement and welfare of the people.²¹ It also promises to bring into existence an egalitarian society — a society in which everyone would get enough to eat and enough to clothe.²²

State Programmes

The APHLC stated that it will run the administration democratically and will stand firm to maintain the State autonomy in substance and practice as envisaged in the Constitution.

The party will continue all efforts for the peaceful settlement of outstanding boundary disputes with the sister State of Assam. The APHLC also reiterates its resolve to negotiate for the transfer into Meghalaya certain contiguous areas predominantly inhabited by the people belonging to the Scheduled Tribes. In these matters the good office of the Government of India will be sought, if necessary.

The APHLC being specially concerned with the welfare of the people inhabiting the areas bordering with Bangladesh will make every possible effort for the economic rehabilitation and upliftment of these Border people.

The APHLC stands for providing minimum wages to workers and the rights of farmers, industrial workers and the Government employees to organise and form associations for their welfare and protection.

In the social and political sphere the APHLC will strive to maintain the unique peace, harmony and tranquility among all sections and communities as existed both during the period of struggle for a separate State.

²¹ Ray, B. Datta (Ed.): *Electoral Politics in Meghalaya*, N.E.I.C.S.S.R., Shillong, 1978, p.20.

²² Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Op. cit.*, p.483.

In the economic sphere the objectives of the party are as follows:

- a) to make all efforts towards self-sufficiency in food through increased agricultural output by encouraging farmers to take to modern methods of cultivation and by providing them with all possible assistance and incentives in the matter of irrigation, land reclamation and procurement of seeds, fertilizers, etc.;
- b) to enrich the State and its people through a judicious and scientific exploitation of the mineral and other natural resources;
- c) to eradicate illiteracy and to bring about a change in the system of education so as to ensure for the youth of the State a more useful and meaningful course of studies in the school and colleges;
- d) to expand and improve the social services in the State so as to enable the people to live a richer and fuller life;
- e) to create employment opportunities for the people of the State by tapping all available resources and promoting industrial undertaking;
- f) to promote a healthy social and moral life by eradicating various types of social evils.
- g) to undertake special schemes such as Border Area Rehabilitation programme including the re-grouping of villages in the border areas of Garo Hills, border road schemes and the like;
- h) to undertake urban development schemes;
- i) to do every other thing possible to make Meghalaya a boon to the people and an asset to the nation.

The aims and objectives of the APHLC was, therefore, ambitious. Being a party which is accredited with the attainment of statehood, the APHLC strove to achieve lofty ideals for the State.²³

Constitutional Structure of the APHLC

The Executive Committee of the party consisted of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, a General Secretary, Joint Secretaries, a Treasurer and Eleven Executive Members. Later on the Chairman was designated as President. At first there were two Vice-Chairmen but later on the number was increased to four Vice-Presidents. So also the post of Joint Secretaries were increased from two to three. The party's High Command, therefore, consists of all executive members and some permanent invitees.

There were three district branches at the district level and two constituent unit. The two constituent units were the All Garo National Council and the Garo District National Council. The main organs of each District level are the General Conference, the Executive Committee and the Working Committee. Each district is divided into a number of circles and each circle has similar organs. At the lowest level there are units. A village or a group of villages form a unit and each unit has similar organs like the circles.²⁴

At first the Central APHLC consisted of all the members of the District and Regional Councils, five representatives from each political party in the Autonomous Hill Districts which subscribed to the aims and aspirations of the APHLC, five additional delegates from the host district, one representative from each newspaper of the Autonomous Districts which subscribed to the objectives of the APHLC, five

²³ Ray, B. Datta: *Op. cit.*, pp.20-22.

²⁴ Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Op. cit.*, p.481.

representatives from each of the district branches and two invitees of each of the Chief Executive Members, and all MLAs and MPs who belonged to the APHLC.

In course of time, some of the political parties like the Congress and the Mizo Union left the APHLC. On the other hand, some political parties like the Eastern India Tribal Union and the Khasi Jaintia Federated State Conference preferred to merge themselves completely with the APHLC. At first, all the Autonomous Districts except the Naga Hills were represented in all the bodies of the APHLC. But by 1971, when the Autonomous State of Meghalaya was formed, the APHLC was confined only to Meghalaya.²⁵

The rise of the APHLC since 1960 was phenomenal. It played a significant role in the Hill State Movement and has been accredited with the achievement of a full-fledged State of Meghalaya. The party achieved a spectacular innings in the first General Elections to the State, and formed the Government in the first Legislative Assembly. As a ruling party in the State for almost seven years, i.e., from April 1970 to November 1976, the APHLC has a proud record of achievements, progress, political stability and administrative efficiency.²⁶ But after 1975, the story of the APHLC was one of disintegration and disunity. The process of disintegration of the party was not an overnight event. Since on closer examination the process of disintegration had started prior to the attainment of statehood. On 3rd December, 1971, the question of dissolution of the APHLC came up in the wake of the achievement of statehood of Meghalaya. But the party thought that it should continue to function, and should not be dissolved. At the same time, it said that it would support the policies and programmes of the INC.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.488-489.

²⁶ Ray, B. Datta (Ed.): *Op. cit.*, p.19.

On 19th June 1973, the merger of the APHLC with the INC was again discussed. Sangma informed the party that there is no difference between the INC and the APHLC so far as the programme of action was concerned. Therefore, he suggested the merger of the APHLC with the INC(R). The Khasi leadership in the party was strongly opposed to the idea. So the party resolved to retain its identity and at the same time support the INC at the centre. Indira Gandhi was, however, anxious for the merger of the APHLC with the INC. Sangma was pressed by Mrs. Gandhi to secure the merger of the APHLC with the INC. He agreed and persuaded his colleagues in the party to accede to the request of Mrs. Gandhi. He called for a general special conference of the APHLC at Mendipathar on 16th November, 1976. The conference attended by 121 of the 145 members decided to dissolve the APHLC and join the INC. Some of the Khasi leaders did not attend the Mendipathar Conference. Since the APHLC was dissolved, its symbol 'Flower' was frozen by the Election Commission. Sangma submitted the resignation of the APHLC Government on the 27th November, 1976, and formed the INC Government. Four Khasi leaders of his APHLC Government, B.B. Lyngdoh, P.R. Kyndiah, D.D. Pugh and S.D.D. Nichols Roy resigned from his Government. The dissidents filed a suit in the Supreme Court against the decision of the Election Commission for freezing the symbol allotted to the APHLC. The Supreme Court restored the symbol to the APHLC.²⁷ The merger considerably weakened the party and speeded the process of disintegration of the party. Another split of the party occurred when D.D. Pugh formed the Second Coalition Government in 1978-1979 and differences cropped up between the two prominent leaders of the APHLC (D.D. Pugh and B.B. Lyngdoh) leading to emergence of the two factions in the party. Efforts were made to bring the two

²⁷ Rao, V.V., Pakem, B. and Hazarika, Niru: *Government and Politics in North East India Vol.II (Meghalaya) (1874-1983)*, S. Chand & Co. Ltd., New Delhi, 1984, pp.196-197.

factions together but they were not able to reconcile their differences and continued to exist as two groups within the same party. The group led by B.B. Lyngdoh formed a coalition Government with the Congress and ruled the State until the Third Assembly Elections in 1983, while the group led by D.D. Pugh remained out of office. Several committees were set up to bring about unity in the party but did not succeed in ending the feud. On June 1982, Pugh and Lyngdoh finally parted company. As a result Pugh's following in the Assembly dwindled to six and that of Lyngdoh increased to fourteen. In 1983, both the factions came together and fought the elections. Pugh did not contest. The party was led by B.B. Lyngdoh in the election battle. But the party fared badly in the polls. The APHLC managed to capture 15 seats, whereas its main rival, the Congress, secured 25 (twenty-five) seats and another regional party, the HSPDP captured 15 (fifteen) seats and PDIC 2 (two). The APHLC formed the coalition ministry with the other regional parties with B.B. Lyngdoh as its head. It existed for 29 days. After the fall of this ministry some of its members defected to the ruling Meghalaya Democratic Front (MDF) led by Capt. Sangma (Congress).²⁸ Before the 1988 General Elections to the State Assembly, there was the 1984 General Elections to the Lok Sabha. With the announcement for the 1984 elections and five weeks before the polling, the regional Opposition parties (APHLC and HSPDP) made an attempt for an Opposition Coalition or alliance to the ruling party's candidate. Both the APHLC and the HSPDP after prolonged discussions came to the decision to unite the two parties under the banner of the Hill People Union (HPU) on November 1984. The HPU after being defeated in the Lok Sabha polls again became a divided house with the HSPDP claiming a separate existence. Similarly, there was another faction of the dissolved APHLC which claimed a separate existence of the APHLC and was

²⁸ Rao, V.V. *et al.*, *Ibid.*, pp.203-204.

later on recognised by the Election Commission as the APHLC(A) with Armison Marak as its leader. This APHLC(A) existed in the Garo Hills and made its presence felt in 1988 and 1993 General Elections to the State Assembly securing two and three seats respectively.²⁹

The APHLC referred itself as a regional party with a national outlook by stating in its Constitution that the party would work and cooperate with the democratic forces in Parliament to ensure firm establishment of democracy in India. With this view, it had broadened its political activities into national and state programmes.

Under the state programmes, one of the objectives of the party concerns the solution of the interstate boundary between Meghalaya and Assam through peaceful settlement. Further, it resolves to negotiate the transfer to Meghalaya certain contiguous areas considered to be predominantly inhabited by the people belonging to Schedule tribes from Assam. However, the party has not given a credible performance with regard to this issue either when in power or as an Opposition. As an Opposition, the APHLC can hardly be credited with raising this issue to be discussed in the House. Moreover, it had not shown any indication of having extended support to any members of the Opposition whenever the issue was raised in the House.

The APHLC as one of the oldest and strong regional parties of the State prior to the emergence of Meghalaya as a State gradually went into political oblivion and finally disappeared from State politics. It had strong support base in the whole of Meghalaya but because of factions and defections, these factors weakened the party and forced the APHLC to disappear from Meghalaya politics.

²⁹ Pakem, B.: *Coalition Politics in North East India*, Regency Publications, New Delhi , 1999, pp.101-102.

The Hill State People's Democratic Party (HSPDP)

The HSPDP is an off-shoot of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC) which was spearheading the Hill State Movement in Assam during the 1960's. The APHLC had a Volunteers Wing called the Non-Violent Direct Action-Volunteers (NVDAV). The volunteers consisting of men and women were given intensive training on the basic principles and techniques of the movement such as *hartals*, demonstrations and the like.

The role of the Volunteers in the Hill State Movement reached its zenith on 10th September, 1968, when they picketed the Secretariat buildings in response to the call of the APHLC. The main objective of the picketing was to realise the fulfillment of the hill peoples' objective for the creation of a separate Hill State. The peaceful picketing was deemed a great success for, on the following day, that is, 11th September, 1968, the Government of India announced the creation of the Autonomous Hill state of Meghalaya which was accepted by the political wing of the APHLC. This decision of the political wing of the APHLC was met with stiff resistance from the Volunteers Wing who immediately formed the Hill State Volunteers' Adhoc Committee (HSVAC) to strongly oppose the Autonomous State Plan and carry on the struggle for a full-fledged Hill State. The growing dissent of the HSVAC had then penetrated a section of the political leaders. These leaders refused to associate themselves with the decision taken by the APHLC with regard to the Autonomous State Plan. Among these leaders H.S. Lyngdoh the MLA from West Khasi Hills was the most prominent. His association with the HSVAC resulted in his expulsion from the APHLC. The leaders of the HSVAC then invited him to join their group and continue to struggle for a full-fledged Hill State. All the dissidents met together in Shillong on November 8th, 1968 and formally formed a political party

under the name of the HSPDP with H.S. Lyngdoh as the President, and A. Basaïawmoit as General Secretary.

During 1969, the newly formed HPDP was busy organising an 'Action' Plan for the attainment of a Hill State separate from Assam. The party was involved in different agitational programmes for realising their aim during 1969-1971. But the party was not satisfied merely with demonstrations. It had to enter itself into the regular political arena as well. Accordingly, it contested from both the parliamentary seats of Shillong and Tura in 1971 but lost. Though the party lost the elections but it was able to create an impact in the State. Immediately after the Lok Sabha elections, the HSPDP had to face the First General Elections to the State Assembly in early 1972, wherein its candidates contested the elections as Independents since the party was not yet recognised by the Election Commission.³⁰

Constitution of the Party

From its inception, the HSPDP set its aim for attaining a full-fledged separate State for the hill people and also how to run it when it is achieved. The following aims and objectives were envisaged in its Constitution.

- A) To demand and struggle for attainment of separate Ri Khasi-Jaintia State under Article 371 of the Constitution of India, the territory of which, comprises the then Khasi and Jaintia Hills District and the erstwhile Khasi States.
- B) To strive for social and political justice and speedy attainment of education and economic uplift of the tribal people in particular and of the State in general.

³⁰ Gassah, L.S. (Ed.): *Op. cit.*, pp.104-107.

- C) To safeguard the rights and interest of the tribal people in respect of land and forest, and to encourage and improve traditional arts and culture and to strive for the development of the tribal people according to their own genius.
- D) To run the Government in the State and the District level for the achievement of the above aims and objectives.³¹

In addition to the above the party also mentioned setting up of definite boundaries for the State as well. It also stated that it is ever opposed to the influx of outsiders from other parts of India and on this issue it had even urged upon the highest authority of the Government of India for the prevention of the influx of outside people into Meghalaya. The party stated that it did not have any special programme for any other section of people in Meghalaya. But it claimed that it could not be regarded as communal, although it was opposed to the influx of outsiders from other parts of India to Meghalaya. This is all reflected in subsequent manifestos and other election appeals which appeared only in Khasi.³²

The constitutional set up of the HSPDP are as follows: The Central Executive Committee of the party consists of the President, Vice-Presidents, the General Secretary, the Joint Secretaries, the Finance Secretary, the Treasurer, the Auditors of the party, all MPs, MLAs and MDCs. In addition, it also consist of the Chairman and Secretary of the Central Working Committee of the party, the President and General Secretary of the Women's Wing and the Youth Wing and the Presidents and Secretaries of the District Committees.

The District Committees will function at the district level and will consist of the above mentioned functionaries but these are at the district level, as well as MLAs

³¹ *Constitution of the Hill State People Democratic Party*, p.3.

³² Ray, B. Datta: *Electoral Politics in Meghalaya*, N.E.I..C.S.S.R., Shillong, 1978, p.28.

and MDCs of the constituencies falling within that district and not less than 2 and not more than 20 other members to be nominated by the District Committee.³³

So far as the party organisation is concerned, Article 4 of the party constitution provided:

- a) General Council is the highest body with a Central Executive Committee to be elected by the General Council.
- b) District Committees in every district, the membership of which, has been mentioned. But the members would be elected by the primary units. Every District Committee would elect the District Executive Committee.
- c) Primary units were at the bottom of the organisation. They covered an area which could be a village, a cluster of villages, or a section of the big villages or towns. These units acted through a unit committee which would elect a unite Executive Committee.³⁴

From the beginning the HSPDP's activities were meant to struggle for achieving its aims and objectives for the benefit of the hill people. During the year 1969, 1970 and 1971 several programmes of agitation were launched in which thousands of volunteers along with the leaders were arrested and put in jail when they struggled for a separate State. After the attainment of statehood, the party did not rest but continued with agitating for the right and justice of the people. The party contested all the elections from 1972 onwards. The performance of the party was not as spectacular as that of the APHLC in the 1972 General Elections, but was able to consolidate its position in the subsequent elections in 1978 and 1983. The HSPDP sat in the Opposition in the First Assembly (1972-1978). In 1978, after the General

³³ *The Constitution of the Hill State People's Democratic Party*, pp.5-8.

³⁴ Gassah, L.S. (Ed.): *Op. cit.*, pp.110-111.

Election to the State Legislature, a coalition Government was formed where the HSPDP was also one of the partners. Again in 1983, a Coalition Government was formed since no party could command a majority after the elections, and the HSPDP was again made one of the coalition partners. But this coalition survived for a short period due to the defection of some of its members. The above were instances showing how the party had grown since its inception.³⁵ The HSPDP, however, similar to the APHLC was dogged by political differences among its prominent leaders which weakens the party and nearly led to political oblivion of the party. These differences within the party reared up after the 1972 General Elections when the party was in the Opposition, other centres of power struggle within the party began to emerge. Some leaders within the party question the leadership of the party President, but were unable to put up a united faction and so did not pose a threat to the party. The factional politics in the HSPDP began after the Second General Elections in 1978, when the party was one of the partners in the Coalition Government. This was reflected in the inner conflict between its members who were ministers in the Government. The conflict was solved through the intervention of the party leadership. Ever since the incident, the party was plagued by a series of internal strives and squabbles on different issues. The party was plagued by defections and the defections of 3 of its members to the Congress led to the downfall of the Coalition Government in 1983 which comprised of all the regional political parties.³⁶ The final setback to the party came in 1985 when some members again defected from the party to form the Hill People Union (HPU) with a section of APHLC members. This event had adverse

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.121.

³⁶ Ray, B. Datta: *Op. cit.*, pp.113-115.

impact on the party leading to setback in its performance in the General Elections of 1988 where it bagged only 6 seats in the 60 member Legislative Assembly.³⁷

The Constitution of the HSPDP differs from the other two regional political parties — the APHLC and the PDIC. the party identifies itself with promulgating the interest of the tribal people in particular the Khasis and the Jaintias. Towards achieving this aim, the HSPDP from time to time raised the issue relating to the demand for a separate State for the Khasis and the Jaintias. This indicates that the party showed more preference for regionalism unlike the APHLC.

Another objective of the HSPDP which is of importance in this study is the interest generated towards the issue of land, which till date, eludes a solution. Towards this end, the party had strived to raise this issue time and again in the House, but its efforts remained unsuccessful. As an Opposition, it was unable to convince the Government in power to bring about a solution to the problem created by land relations.

In its Constitution, the party has included the setting up of definite boundaries between Meghalaya and Assam as one of the objectives to be achieved. Members of the party had voiced their concern in the case of any reference to this issue and it was accorded top priority by the party. As members of the Opposition whenever any situation or development occurred, the party had made strong protests and voiced their concern and even taken the Government to task over this issue. Because of its least numerical strength, it could not prevail upon the Government to accept its proposal.

The problem of influx is another issue in which the HSPDP showed its deep concern. The party had voiced strong opposition to the influx of people from outside

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.121-122.

the State. In this regard, the party had strove to convince not only the Government of Meghalaya but the Government of India as well to set up preventive measures to check influx into the State.

As an Opposition, the HSPDP can be stated to have been the sole party to have keenly followed any developments on the issues specified above. The party was able to exert pressures on the Government by ensuring that these issues be debated and discussed in the House.

Hill People Union (HPU)

The Hill People Union (HPU) is the result of the amalgamation of two strong regional parties — the APHLC and the HSPDP. Between these two parties, the APHLC was the original and the oldest party in the State, while the HSPDP was formed in 1968 following a split in the former.

As a prelude to the formation of the new political party, the APHLC and HSPDP formed a 'Joint Action Committee' whose main aim was to achieve 'tribal solidarity and unity.' The Committee was empowered to undertake such programmes of action for mobilising public opinion in favour of amalgamation of the two major state-based parties. The main thrust of the action was to launch a vigorous campaign against the Congress for being responsible in engineering defections by fraudulent means. Moreover, the leaders of the two parties have been trying to rouse the people's consciousness about the 'paramount importance' of the tribal unity which they deemed could be achieved only through the regional political parties in the State. However, it should also be noted that the 'unity move' by these political parties was felt urgently necessary in the wake of the elections to the three District Councils in the State — the Khasi Hills, the Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills Autonomous District

Councils scheduled to be held in 1983-84 with the primary objectives to capture the reins of power in these Councils.³⁸ The HPU was formed with the concerted effort of the leaders of the APHLC and HSPDP to provide a strong challenge to the Congress which was continually on the upswing by capturing power in the Legislative Assembly. It was a concerted effort by those who sat in the Opposition to generate an alternative to the ruling Congress party in the Lok Sabha Elections 1984.

Constitution of the Party

The aims and objectives of the HPU are:

1. To safeguard and preserve the identity of the tribal people and to protect their interests especially in respect of land, their democratic institutions, language, customs and culture.
2. To ensure the territorial integrity of the State of Meghalaya and to restore the State the rightful areas and those contiguous areas predominantly inhabited by the tribal people.
3. To promote the economic development of the tribal people in particular and of the State in general.
4. To ensure social justice and democratic freedom in the State.³⁹

In addition to the above, the HPU also strives to work for clean and efficient administration, prevent influx of outsiders to the State, and with regard to the urban areas the party wanted to prevent expansion of military cantonments and restore the lands to the people under the cantonments' control and ease congestion in Shillong city. These objectives were aimed at appealing to voters in the urban areas where the party hoped to fare better since the former APHLC was generally accepted by the

³⁸ Gassah, L.S. (Ed.): *Op. cit.*, pp.128-129.

³⁹ *Constitution of the Hill People Union*, p.1.

urban areas. The former objectives were taken from the constitution of the HSPDP and these were aimed at the supporters of the former HSPDP.⁴⁰

The constitutional set up of the HPU are:

- A) The General Council was the supreme body of the party consisting of all members of the Central Executive Committee: Presidents and Secretaries of all circle units; not more than 10(ten) members to be nominated by the Presidents and the Secretaries of the respective District branch.
- B) District Branches where each civil district shall have a District Branch of the party. It should have the following organs: A District General Council; An Executive Committee Circle Units and Primary Units.
- C) Circle Units. In each District Branch there shall be Circle Units of the party, each shall ordinarily correspond to an MLA constituency.
- D) Primary Units. Under each Circle Units there shall be Primary Units. Not more than one Primary Unit will be organised in each village and two or more villages may be organised under one Primary Unit.⁴¹

The HPU being a party formed by the amalgamation of two parties with constitution of their own has incorporated both the aims and objectives of the two constitutions. The APHLC being the party which ushered in the new State, had many ambitions which it sought to fulfill. It laid greater stress on system of administration, economic development and development of the urban areas as reflected in the latter part of the constitution of the HPU. Whereas the HSPDP whose ground root support remains in the rural areas strove to achieve the objectives which had an appeal to

⁴⁰ Gassah, L.S. (Ed.): *Op. cit.*, pp.138-139.

⁴¹ *Constitution of the Hill People Union*, pp.1-4.

traditional society as reflected in the first part of the objectives of the constitution of the HPU.

The election appeals of the HPU cover a wide range of important and strategic areas which really needed an urgent attention by the Government both at the Centre and the State. The party performed badly in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections, but the result did not dampen the spirit of the party leaders to forge ahead with their programmes and policies. The party suffered another setback when many political leaders, some of whom were eminent HPU members before the elections left the party and joined the Congress. Another setback for the party occurred when a section of the members of the former HSPDP left the HPU to revive their party. Despite these setbacks, those who remain loyal to the HPU went further ahead even after the election debacle to strengthen the hands of the party.

On the issues and objectives such as provisions to protect the interest of land and maintenance of territorial integrity, there was no scope for the party to raise these issues in the House as there were hardly any situations or developments arising on the specified issue during the period from 1984-1988.

The performance of the party as a unified Opposition and presenting itself as an alternative, to the Congress party, on the eve of the Lok Sabha polls was unsuccessful and proved short lived. The unity of the Opposition (regional parties) was loosened with the defection of some members who joined the ruling party (Congress) and some of them specifically left the unity fold in order to revive the HSPDP to which they originally belonged.

Public Demand Implementation Convention (PDIC)

The Public Demand Implementation Convention (PDIC) is another regional party which appeared during the period under study. In comparison to the two major regional parties — APHLC and HSPDP, the PDIC is a late entrant into state politics. It entered the political arena of Meghalaya in 1973, two years after Meghalaya had achieved statehood. The emergence of the PDIC was a result of the political differences which its founder and President G.G. Swell, Lok Sabha MP, had with his parent party, the APHLC, which led to his being suspended from the party. After his suspension he quit the party and made the decision to float the PDIC as a party. Initially, the PDIC was founded not as a political party but rather as a non-partisan organisation of the Farmers' Movement whose main aim was to cater to the needs and aspirations of this particular group. However, soon it developed its own political leanings. This party too can be considered to be an offshoot of the APHLC as its founder G.G. Swell was a member of the APHLC and also the APHLC MP from Khasi and Jaintia Hills. After the PDIC was founded in 1973, G.G. Swell contested the 1977 Lok Sabha Elections as a candidate of the PDIC, but he was not successful. Swell was later appointed to a diplomatic post and the party he had founded became virtually defunct. In 1978, the PDIC was revived and M.N. Majaw became its President, and the party set up candidates for the ensuing General Elections 1978, though they contested as Independents as the party was not yet recognised by the Election Commission.⁴²

⁴² Rao, V.V. *et al.*, *Op. cit.*, 1984, pp.204-205.

Constitution of the Party

The PDIC identifies itself as a party that would work to meet the demands of the people and its boundary would extend to the whole of Meghalaya.

The aims and objectives of the party are:

- A) To uplift the country, the people and the State with a clean, honest, responsible, strong, knowledgeable wise means of administration.
- B) To maintain and improve the culture and to respect the religions of all the tribals.
- C) To develop the economy of the people by securing for them, through the Government, adequate prices for the various agricultural produce like potato, ginger, orange, betel nut and leaf, *tezpata*, pepper, broom and other products that can be expected.
- D) To see that the aids granted by the Government are used for the benefit of the people not only through the Government offices, but also through the village durbar, welfare associations or religious organisations that can get the confidence of the people and the Government.

Similar to the other regional political parties operating in the State, the constitutional set up of the PDIC also consists of the Central Executive Committee, the District Executive Committee and the Primary Unit of the village.

The Central Executive Committee is the apex body which consisted of not more than 100 members, with office bearers from each and every District Committee of the Party.

The office bearers of the party are as follows:

- 1. President – 1.
- 2. Senior Vice-President – 1.
- 3. Vice-Presidents – 5.

4. General Secretary – 1.
5. Assistant General Secretary – 1.
6. Chief Organiser – 1.
7. Assistant Chief Organiser – 1.
8. Finance Secretary – 1.
9. Treasurer – 1.
10. Joint Secretaries – 10.

The party further states that all the activities of the PDIC shall be carried out in accordance with the Constitution of India. This constitution came into force on August 1982 as confirmed in the convention of the PDIC.⁴³

The PDIC initially was formed in 1971 with the objective to gather the people of the State and functioned as a non partisan organisation, seeking instead to fulfill mostly the economic and social aspirations of the people. Its attempt to function as a non party organisation was not successful to eliminate the party feeling of the people and it, therefore, evolved into a political party when it fielded a candidate for the Lok Sabha elections in 1977. On its maiden entry it managed to secure 21 per cent of valid votes making the PDIC eligible to be recognised as a political party. From among the regional political parties operating in the politics of Meghalaya from 1972-1988, the PDIC can be considered to be the last entrant in state politics.

The PDIC sought to consider itself as having a national outlook when reference is made in the first objective that is to uplift the country but its regional outlook dominated, when stress is laid out on maintenance and improvement of culture and religion of the tribals who inhabit the State. As a non party organisation when it was first formed to support the Farmers' movement, this found reflection in

⁴³ Sen Gupta, Susmita: *Regionalism in Meghalaya*, South Asian Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2005, pp.230-235.

the third objective of the Constitution which laid stress on economic development through enhancement of agricultural products. Thus, the party identifies itself with the farmers' community and strove to improve the plight of farmers through successive election manifestoes which laid stress on improvement of agriculturalists of the State.

The party though it identifies with the sons of the soil were unable to make much inroads into the rural areas with the exception of Nongkrem, Sohryngkham and Mawhati constituencies in the Khasi Hills. The PDIC as a regional political party could not scale the heights of the APHLC, HSPDP and HPU the main regional political parties in the State. The party entered the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly with two legislators but were unable to increase the number of legislators in successive Assemblies. Though it professed to stand for the plight and sought to achieve the improvement of the farmers' community, the party was unable to convince this community in other constituencies, and thus could not achieve electoral success as the other political parties in the State.

The PDIC as a regional political party was unable to attract or induce eminent personality to its side, with the exception of its founder and leader G.G. Swell and M.N. Majaw, who were vocal on several issues concerning the State. The PDIC was, therefore, a political party that could not achieve spectacular success at the polls but remained dominant only in the few constituencies who remained loyal to the causes it espoused.

Having studied and analysed the Constitutions and Manifestoes of the different regional political parties, it can be stated that there is a similarity of objectives attempted to be achieved by each party. This would have rendered the task easier for a unified Opposition to the dominance of the Congress party. Unfortunately, these regional political parties were adamant in maintaining their individual identity

Any move for unity is defeated as they could never agree in sinking their differences. They remain in groups and maintaining their own individual party identity. This is one of the reasons which hampers their effectiveness irrespective of whether the regional political parties were members of the Government or the Opposition.

It is paradox that even after a decade of achievement of a separate Hill State, the APHLC and HSPDP continue to exist as loose platform rather than true political parties.⁴⁴ Electoral politics in Meghalaya is mainly centred round some generalisations and influenced by personalities rather than any political or economic programme.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Dutta, P.S. *Op. cit.*, pp.82-83.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.79.

Chapter-III

NATURE OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES IN MEGHALAYA POLITICS

A political party is an organised group of citizens who profess to share the same political views and by acting as a political unit, try to control the Government. Political parties are organised on various issues such as political, social, religious, etc.¹ Political parties have become an indispensable factor in the working of a representative Government. It lays down the irrefutable rule that a political party, whether at the national or regional level, in one form or another is omnipresent. This phenomenon also signifies that the electorate has to express their confidence by way of casting their votes either in favour of a national or regional political party. Thus, citizens' commitment to political parties plays an important role for the maintenance of a representative system of Government.

India has her own party system with its peculiar characteristics. Some commentators on Indian party system observed that India has neither a single-party system that smacks of a totalitarian model nor a bi-party as it prevails in a country like England. But what is operating in India is a multi-party system as obtaining in many countries of the world.² In a multi-party system, the Opposition comprises of heterogeneous groups and these groups often fight against each other. Where no single party is returned in strength to form the Government, shifting alliances lead to the fall of the Government, and the rise of a new combination which may administer the State for a brief period until it meets the same fate as the former. This is the case

¹ Fartayal, H.S.: *Role of the Opposition in the Indian Parliament*, p.8.

² Gassah, L.S. (Ed.): *Regional Political Parties in North-East India : Introduction*, Chand & Co. Ltd., New Delhi, 1992.

with politics in Meghalaya, particularly in the years 1978-1979, which was marked by political instability. Because of the unstable nature of Meghalaya politics, the State witnessed different coalition Governments as well as Opposition groups.³

When India gained Independence, it adopted a parliamentary form of Government with the cabinet responsible to the legislature — a party in power and a number of political groups in Opposition.⁴ The Federation of Khasi States became independent of British control from the midnight of 14th August, 1947, and were integrated into the Indian Union. The Indian Independence Act 1947 provided that all parts of the Province should be governed as nearly as might be in line with the spirit of the Government of India Act 1935; the Order-in-Council; and the other instruments there under. After Independence, the same system prevailed though the administration of the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas was transferred to the Government of Assam.⁵

Before 1947, the Garo Hills was represented by two and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills by three members in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Under the Indian Constitution the Garo Hills was given 4 seats and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills 5 seats in the Assam legislature.⁶ The members from the areas, however, mostly sat in the Opposition or sometimes boycotted the sessions in the House in protest against measures adopted by the Government in the Assembly which were contrary to their political interests. It was only towards the latter part of 1969-70 that representatives

³ Fartayal, H.S.: *Op. cit.*, p.3.

⁴ Shakhder, S.L. and Kaul, M.N.: *Practice and Procedure of Parliament*, Metropolitan Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1978, p.286.

⁵ Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Government and Politics in Meghalaya*, Sanchar Publishing House, New Delhi, 1996, pp.104-192.

⁶ Rao, V.V. *et al.*: *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India Vol.II, Meghalaya*, S. Chand & Co., New Delhi, 1984, p.93.

from these areas took active participation in the deliberations of the House, realizing the importance of being independent and strove hard to maintain their separate identity from that of Assam. The idea of a separate hill state was born and the demand for a full-fledged state started taking shape and gained momentum as this received the support of the people of these areas. This was realized when the Indian Parliament passed the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act in 1969 even after stiff opposition from the elected representatives as well as other hill districts who were not in favour of merging with the Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills districts.⁷

The passing of the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act 1969 by Parliament resulted in the formation of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya in 1970, within the State of Assam. The Autonomous State was provided with a separate Provisional Legislative Assembly comprising of 38 elected and 3 nominated members bringing its total membership to 41.* The hill districts of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills had their first experience of a representative legislative institution of their own, in the form of the Provisional Legislative Assembly in 1970.⁸ The members of the Provisional Assembly were elected by the elected members of the two Autonomous District Councils of Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills. In the election of March 1970 to the Provisional Legislative Assembly, 16 seats were returned from Garo Hills; 18 seats from Khasi Hills and 4 seats from Jaintia Hills. The result clearly indicated a clean sweep for the APHLC which won 34 seats, with the remaining 4 being captured by the INC. Three(3) members were nominated by the Governor. Both the members of the INC as well as the nominated members later joined the APHLC paving the way

⁷ Pakem, B.: *Coalition Politics in North East India since Independence*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, p.97.

* The details of the names of the members of the Provisional Legislative Assembly is given in Appendix.

⁸ Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Op. cit.*, pp.97-98.

for installation of an APHLC ministry. This first legislative set up was marked by the absence of an Opposition.⁹

The Provisional Assembly of the Autonomous State could not satisfy the aspirations of the people as there was bound to be administrative differences between the Autonomous State and Assam. The APHLC was the main regional party which fought relentlessly to create a separate state for the hill districts of Assam. Following these intense political development in these areas, the Autonomous State of Meghalaya was upgraded into a full-fledged State in 1972, thereby fulfilling the political aspirations of the people. The new State comprised of the former three hill districts of Assam – Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills. The first general elections to the newly formed Meghalaya Legislative Assembly were held on March 1972.

The newly formed Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya included members from the regional political parties as well as the national party (INC). Similar to the Provisional Legislative Assembly the APHLC which spearheaded the demand for statehood was the main party which captured power in the first general elections. Another regional party the HSPDP made its maiden entry in the First Assembly though its candidates contested the elections as Independents since the party was not yet recognized by the Election Commission in 1972. The INC, the only national party to have gained a foothold on State politics again retained the number of seats it previously held, also in the new legislature. Later the party consolidated its hold on politics in the State and played an important role in successive Legislative Assemblies.

⁹ Pakem, B.: *Op. cit.*, pp.97-98.

In this chapter an attempt is made to analyse the electoral performances and role of the political parties, both regional as well as national, in the three successive Legislative Assemblies. Elections.

The Table-3.1 shows the poll performance of the different political parties in 1972, 1978 and 1983 General Elections to the Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya.

Table-3.1: Electoral Performance in Meghalaya (1972-1983)

Year	Sl.No.	Parties	Total No. of Seats	Seats won	% of Seats	Valid votes polled	% of Valid Votes
1972	1	A.P.H.L.C.	49	32	35.50	93,851	35.50
	2	I.N.C.	12	9	10.00	20,274	10.00
	3	C.P.I.	2	-	0.50	1,182	0.25
	4	H.S.P.D.P.*	29	8	-	32,488	15.69
	5	Independents	106	11	-	79,018	
1978	1	I.N.C.	57	20	30.39	1,09,654	18.74
	2	I.N.C.(I)	9	-	-	5,447	0.93
	3	C.P.I.	4	-	0.62	2,361	0.40
	4	A.P.H.L.C.	52	16	24.92	94,362	16.13
	5	H.S.P.D.C.P.	35	14	19.24	92,852	12.40
	6	P.D.I.C.**	23	2	-	17,938	3.06
	7	Independents	82	8	-	76,032	12.99
1983	1	I.N.C.(I)	60	25	27.68	1,30,958	19.21
	2	J.N.P.	1	-	-	42	0.006
	3	C.P.I.	7	-	0.51	2,442	0.35
	4	A.P.H.L.C.	55	15	25.06	1,13,593	17.40
	5	H.S.P.D.P.	46	15	19.31	91,386	13.41
	6	P.D.I.C.	21	2	-	23,253	3.41
	7	Independents	127	3	-	1,06,378	15.61

Source: Election Handbook, February 1983.

* H.S.P.D.P. was at that time not recognized as a Political Party but received recognition from the Election commission on 25th January 1978. Its candidates contested as Independents for the General Elections in 1972.

** P.D.I.C. was also not recognized as a Political Party until September 1978. Its candidates contested as Independents (1978).

From this table it can be seen that some parties, the INC, in particular indicated its rising trend. Another party showing its consolidating power is the HSPDP. The APHLC, however, which had shown spectacular performance in the

1970 and 1972 General Elections, showed degenerating features at a rapid pace. These three parties proved to be the major players in the State politics in the period 1972-1988. Other national parties also entered the political fray but with minimal results with the exception of the INC, which later became the Congress Party. This party showed an upward swing from 1972 onwards and consolidated its position in Meghalaya, though its support base was confined mostly to Garo Hills. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills witnessed the power play between the regional parties — the APHLC, the HSPDP and PDIC. These parties on the other hand did not show spectacular results with the exception of the APHLC though it was for a brief period in the 1972 General Elections. Thereafter it started declining rapidly as indicated by its performance in the 1978 and 1983 General Elections. The other main regional party, the HSPDP, could not enhance its poll performance and remained static for the two consecutive elections of 1978 and 1983. The PDIC, another regional party garner 2 seats in the 1983 Legislative Assembly after entering state politics in 1983 itself.

From the configuration showed in Table-3.1, the Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya witnessed the power play among the three main political parties of the State — the APHLC, the INC and the HSPDP. As a result of this, the Assembly experienced frequent changes of Government particularly in 1978-1979, as defections from one party to another was rampant. Moreover, the regional parties due to political rivalry among themselves were not able to provide a formidable challenge to the Congress party and even members of these regional parties were not averse to aligning themselves with the Congress and identifying with its policies and programmes. Their role were, therefore, limited by the turn of events.

The Indian National Congress (INC)/Congress

Table-3.2: Poll Prospects of the Congress Party (INC) in Meghalaya

General Elections	Khasi & Jaintia Hills				Garo Hills			Total
	East Khasi Hills	West Khasi Hills	Ri Bhoi Sub-division	Jaintia Hills	East Garo Hills	West Garo Hills	South Garo Hills	
1972	3-	-	1-	-	1-	4-	-	9
1978	7	-	2	-	5	5	1	20
1983	5	-	1	1	6	11	1	25

Source: Meghalaya Election Handbook, February 1983.

In the 1972 General Elections held in the new State, the Congress(I) had poll alliances with the APHLC, and riding on the victorious wave of that party, it secured 9 seats mainly in dominantly non-tribal constituencies. The Congress(I) as the second largest party in the Assembly is designated as the main Opposition, but due to the poll alliances it entered with the APHLC the party remained on the side of the ruling party. A decisive major turning point for the party occurred in 1976, following the split in the APHLC, where one group merged with the Congress and adding significantly to the strength of the party. This move made it possible for the formation of a Congress Government after the dissolution of the APHLC Government. From 1976 onwards to the next General Elections in 1978 the Congress(I) remained in power in the State. Henceforth its strength continued to swing upwards making the party to be able to make more inroads into state politics in particular in the Garo Hills which later proved to be the strong bastion of the party in the successive elections.

In the Second General Elections in 1978, the party enhanced its performance securing 20 seats in the House of 60 members, thereby emerging as the single largest party in the Second Assembly. This time round, the party remained in the Opposition, allowing the regional parties to form successive coalition Governments but without

much success. The State faced a period of political instability during 1978-1979. It was only during the later phase of the Assembly that the Congress(I) took a shot at Government formation with a coalition Government between Congress(I) and APHLC led by B.B. Lyngdoh. This Government ensured stability back to the State which lasted until the State went to the polls.

The 1983 elections showed that the Congress(I) had again improved its performance by winning 25 seats, five more seats than the last elections. Majority of the seats were from Garo Hills; whereas the party secured only 3 seats from Khasi and Jaintia Hills. This clearly indicated that the party's hold in these areas was beginning to wane whereas its hold in the Garo Hills was gaining strength. Though emerging as the single largest party in the State, the Congress(I) chose not to stake its claim to form the Government but instead allow the other parties to stake their claim, while choosing to sit in the Opposition itself. The coalition Government cobbled up by the regional parties remained in power for 30 days only as a result of rivalry and infighting among its members. The Congress party then staked claim to form the Government and retained power completing its term until the general elections.

The Congress party has proven that it is the only national party that has been able to make inroads into State politics. It significantly improved its poll performance ever since it entered the politics of the State. "After the creation of Meghalaya, the Congress party could increase progressively its influence in the Hills and helped in extending congress influence in these areas.¹⁰ This was largely influenced by the fact that it identified itself as a party that will safeguard the interests and unique tribal culture as stated in its manifesto. The party also capitalize on the image that it projected that it was the Congress party which granted statehood to Meghalaya under

¹⁰ Ray, B. Datta: *Electoral Politics in Meghalaya*, NEICSSR, Shillong, 1978, p.47.

the leadership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. This was projected in its election manifesto and campaign slogan during 1972 and 1978 General Elections. But the past legacy of its association with non tribal interests in particular during the First Assembly when it opposed the proposed Land Reform measures and this together with the imposed merger with the APHLC a party that was largely identified with the Khasis, damaged the prospects of political participation in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In the first General Elections in 1972, the party gained its foothold on the politics of Meghalaya and fared slightly better than in the successive years in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In this election it secured 4 seats in Khasi Hills but drew a blank in Jaintia Hills. This was partly because of its pre-poll alliance with the APHLC — a party synonymous with the achievement of statehood and partly due to its campaign slogan — ‘the attainment of statehood being a gift from Indira Gandhi’, leader of the Congress party and Prime Minister of India during this period.¹¹ The party slightly improved its performance in the next General Elections (1978) securing 9 seats from both Khasi and Jaintia Hills. This was a reflection of the political stability that the Congress party was able to ensure in the State from 1976-78, thus enhancing the credibility of the party. In the elections held in 1983 the Congress lost its hold in some areas of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The party was able to bag only 7 seats from these two major districts of Meghalaya.

In the Garo Hills the party enjoyed a slight edge over the regional parties ensuring that this region became the strong bastion of the Congress party. The Congress made its presence felt in this area with 4 seats in the first General Elections in 1972. Its being in the Government from 1976-78, enhanced its poll innings. The party generated significant inroads in the Garo Hills and continued to retain its power

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.50-51.

base in the successive years. In 1978 General Elections to the Second Assembly, the number of seats captured by the party rose to 11, greatly enhancing its performance here and paving the way for the establishment of a strong base. The party increases its area of influence with 17 seats which it secured in the third General Elections in 1983.

The achievements of the Congress party in the Garo Hills can be attributed to the fact that the party had strong personalities in its camp in the presence of (L) Capt. W.A. Sangma whom many considered as the founder of the Congress in Meghalaya particularly in the Garo Hills, though the Congress had been in existence in the Hills prior to the formation of the State of Meghalaya. Moreover, politics in this State mostly revolve around personalities and not on principles. Even though the merger of the APHLC with the Congress in 1976 was not without revolt from the old members of the Congress, the leadership of the party was able to perform well in the successive elections. In the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, however, it could not generate the same level of performance and fared badly in the polls. This can be attributed to the manner in which the leadership of the Congress effected the merger of the APHLC with the Congress even after stiff resistance from a section of the APHLC, the party definitely lost much of its image in these areas and lost what ever hold it had here. The Congress party never had any strong roots in Khasi and Jaintia Hills, even though eminent personalities such as Maham Singh and J.E. Tariang were nursing it from a very long time. They could never achieve what Capt. Sangma was able to generate in the Garo Hills. Though the entry of Capt. Sangma in 1976 brought dissension both in the Garo as well as Khasi and Jaintia Hills but this had a negative impact more in the latter than in the former. This is because Capt. Sangma had emerged as the undisputed leader of the Garo people, whereas the Khasis and Jaintias had prominent leaders such as B.B.

Lyngdoh, D.D. Pugh and others who were popular and were well accepted by the people.

Another factor is that the Congress went to the polls with built-in advantages. Being the ruling party at the Centre as well as the State had certain advantages, even if the Congress could not use all levers of powers at its command.¹²

In a State which is increasingly being dominated by regional parties and where national parties have so far had to exist at the sufferance of regional ones, the growth of the Congress party has proven to be very interesting and will be an interest to study.

The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC)

Table-3.3: Poll Prospects of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC) in Meghalaya

General Elections	Khasi & Jaintia Hills				Garo Hills			Total
	East Khasi Hills	West Khasi Hills	Ri Bhoi Sub-division	Jaintia Hills	East Garo Hills	West Garo Hills	South Garo Hills	
1972	11-	1-	-	2-	6-	9-	3-	32
1978	6	-	-	2	1	6	1	16
1983	8	1	-	1	1	4	-	15

Source: Meghalaya Election Handbook, February 1983.

The APHLC is the main regional party of the State. Its existence was prior to the formation of Meghalaya and, in fact, its formation was the result of the consensus arrived at by the leaders of the hill areas when they spear-headed the demand for a State for these areas. Therefore, its involvement in State Politics was much longer than the other regional parties which came up later. It is the party which entered the new legislature of Meghalaya with an overwhelming majority which no other party till date has achieved.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.60-62.

In the newly formed Meghalaya Legislative Assembly of 1972, the APHLC dominated the House with 32 members and formed the Government with its ally, the INC. In the 60 member House, the ruling party with 41 members totally dominated the proceedings in the Assembly leaving no scope for a strong Opposition. On November 1976, a new political situation emerged in Meghalaya as a result of the Mendipathar Conference, when the APHLC under the leadership of Capt. Sangma merged with the Congress (INC). This proved to be a major turning point for politics in Meghalaya with disastrous consequences for the APHLC. The APHLC which had dominated the Provisional Legislative Assembly as well as the First Assembly of Meghalaya lost power, leading to a split in the party. Then came the verdict of the Election Commission in de-recognising the party and freezing its symbol 'Flower'. Some of its loyalists under the leadership of B.B. Lyngdoh, revived the party with the intention of regaining its past glory but with little success. The party had lost the confidence of the public especially in the rural areas and it fared badly in the forthcoming polls.¹³

In the elections of 1978, the APHLC was not able to achieve the same level of success as in the previous elections. Rather it can be said to be a dismal performance, as it secured only 16 seats in the 60-member House. Its performance was better in the East Khasi Hills and West Garo Hills where it retained the seats from its previous elections, but it totally lost in the other districts. The party instead of consolidating its position started declining rapidly. This speeded up the entire process of political disintegration and finally of political oblivion of the APHLC from State politics. The APHLC could no longer dominate the Second Assembly as it had done in the First Assembly. Though the party did not emerge as the dominant party, still the party took

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.54-55.

a shot at forming the coalition Government with other regional parties (HSPDP and PDIC). The coalition Government could not remain stable, as due to political differences and infighting between the leaders, the Government collapsed. The APHLC under the leadership of D.D. Pugh formed the Government and lasted for a short time. Then B.B. Lyngdoh, another prominent leader of the APHLC, with some of his colleagues broke away from the party leading to the collapse of the D.D. Pugh Government. He made an alliance with the Congress and formed the Government which lasted until the General Elections. In the Second Assembly, the party had enjoyed a brief stint as an Opposition as for the most part, it was in the ruling coalition.¹⁴

The APHLC, though being a part of the ruling coalition, was not able to capitalize on its position — that of being the main and foremost regional party in the State, and the first ruling party in the Assembly, and fared badly at the polls in the General Elections of 1983. The party could not retain its hold in the Garo Hills and lost some seats in this district, reducing its strength to 15 seats from the 55 it contested. This indicated clearly that the APHLC was losing its hold on State politics at a rapid rate. However, the party formed the coalition Government with the HSPDP and PDIC under the banner of the Meghalaya United Parliamentary Party (MUPP) which lasted for less than a month due to political defections.

In 1984, before the Lok Sabha Elections, the APHLC and HSPDP resolved to formally form the new political party and accepted the Constitution of the Hill People Union (HPU). The HPU failed to win the parliamentary seat for which it was formed. Later a section of the HSPDP left the HPU and revived their old party. The APHLC

¹⁴ Rao, V.V. *et al.*: *Op. cit.*, pp.121-124.

was then totally submerged into the HPU and disappeared from the politics of Meghalaya.¹⁵

The APHLC which had strong support base in the whole of Meghalaya, gradually lost its hold leading to oblivion of the party from State politics. This support base was eroded when the party merged with the Congress on November 1976. The rise of the Congress proved to be disastrous to the poll prospects of the APHLC. As a ruling party in the State for almost seven years, i.e., from April 1970 to November 1976, the party has a proud record of achievements, progress, political stability and administrative efficiency. Problems developed when the Party merged with the Congress in 1976 leading to a split, as some loyalists revived the APHLC.

The hill areas of the Garo Hills were always a traditional home of the APHLC and GNC (an ally of APHLC). After 1976, the party no longer retained its hold in this area. This can be attributed to the fact that the party lost one of its eminent personality, Capt. W.A. Sangma to the Congress. The hold of the APHLC on the youths from Garo Hills waned after 1972. The APHLC had sponsored a students' forum during the days of the struggle for a Hill State. Later on after the achievement of Meghalaya State, the students' community felt neglected by Capt. Sangma's inability to fulfill their demands of regional interests. This led to many student leaders leaving the fold of the APHLC. The party lost the support of the youth and this had an impact on its poll performance in the Garo Hills. Another decisive factor for the dismal performance of the party was the constant in-fighting and rivalry among the leaders that considerably weakened the APHLC.¹⁶

¹⁵ Pakem, B.: *Op. cit.*, pp.101–102.

¹⁶ Ray, B. Datta (Ed.): *Op. cit.*, p.47.

In Khasi and Jaintia Hills the presence of the party was felt more in the former than in the latter. In Khasi Hills the sway of the APHLC was strong particularly in the urban areas but after 1976 the party lost the confidence of the public especially in the rural areas. The failure of the APHLC Government from 1970-76 to initiate programme for economic reconstruction antagonize the rural voters. This was taken advantage by the other regional political parties (HSPDP and PDIC) to consolidate their position leading to the erosion of the support base of the APHLC. The public in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills did not fully accept the merger of this influential party with the Congress party and this merger proved disastrous for the APHLC.

The power of the APHLC began to decline since 1973 when Prof. G.G. Swell, MP elected on the APHLC ticket and a strong leader was suspended from the party. He later formed the PDIC and contributed much in undoing the work of the APHLC in the rural areas of Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

The APHLC as a party was characterized by the presence of strong and eminent personalities of the same calibre. Eminently, there was bound to be clash of interests and this lead to intense infighting among the leadership of the party. These took turn for the worse when these infighting on the leadership issue led to another split in the already weakened party.

The APHLC being the oldest regional party of the State, whose presence was felt not only in Meghalaya, but whose area of influence initially extended to the other hill areas of the region should have emerged as a strong regional party to be reckoned with in the politics of the State. Yet within a short span of time after the emergence of

Meghalaya as a State, it went through a spate of disintegration till finally it went into political oblivion and completely disappeared from State politics.¹⁷

Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party (HSPDP)

Table-3.4: Poll Prospects of the Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party (HSPDP) in Meghalaya

General Elections	Khasi & Jaintia Hills				Garo Hills			Total
	East Khasi Hills	West Khasi Hills	Ri Bhoi Sub-division	Jaintia Hills	East Garo Hills	West Garo Hills	South Garo Hills	
1972	2	6	-	1	-	-	-	9
1978	3	8	-	3	-	-	-	14
1983	4	5	-3	3	-	-	-	15

Source: Meghalaya Election Handbook, February 1983.

The Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party (HSPDP) was founded at a time when the APHLC had accepted the proposed formation of an autonomous State of Meghalaya within the State of Assam. The main plank for which the party stood for, was the demand for full-fledged state for the hill people where the traditional democracy of these people would remain intact. The party stands for territorial reorganisation of Meghalaya and make it the homeland of all tribals in the contiguous areas of the State.

The party after its organisation in 1968, had to face elections in 1971. Even though the party was not yet recognized by the Election Commission, it decided to field its candidate as an Independent in the Fifth Lok Sabha General Election, with quite a promising outcome for the party.

In 1972, First General Election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, the HSPDP returned 9 candidates in the House of 60 members, though its candidates

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.62-65.

again contested as Independents, the party as yet not recognized by the Election Commission. The 9 seats included 1 from Jaintia Hills, 6 from West Khasi Hills and 2 from East Khasi Hills. This indicated that the party had won the confidence of the rural voters of West Khasi Hills which remained its strong bastion till date. In the same year it captured 11 seats in the Khasi Hills District Council Election. But as neither the APHLC nor the Congress could form the Executive Committee, the HSPDP took over the Executive Committee supported by nominated members and the Congress MDCs. This helped the party to have grassroots contact with the people thus consolidating its position considerably. The HSPDP with 9 members in the Legislative Assembly was the first political party to sit in the Opposition together with some Independent members who did not join the ruling coalition. Due to political defections the number of members was reduced to 4 MLAs by the end of the term. The party had made some inroads into Khasi and Jaintia Hills but drew a blank in Garo Hills.¹⁸

The Second General Election to the Legislative Assembly was held in February 1978. The party fared slightly better at the polls by capitalizing its position in all the 3 districts – East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills. The total number of seats won by the HSPDP in this election was 14; 3 seats from East Khasi Hills, 8 from West Khasi Hills and 3 from Jaintia Hills proving that it had consolidated its position considerably. This time the party did not sit in the Opposition but was a part of the ruling coalition comprising all the regional parties (HSPDP, APHLC, PDIC). The party, however, showed no favourable sign from the Garo Hills district as again it drew a blank at the polls. The Coalition Government did not last long and in 1979 the HSPDP partners were thrown out. The members of the HSPDP

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.63-64.

joined the ranks of the Opposition but this too was brief. The HSPDP was again made a partner in the third Coalition Government comprising the Congress, APHLC led by B.B. Lyngdoh and the HSPDP. In the Second Legislative Assembly, the party enjoyed a dual performance. From 1978-79, it was part of a ruling coalition. Then it had a brief stint as an Opposition from February-April 1979. Again it was made a ruling partner which lasted until General Elections were held in 1983.

In the 1983 General Elections the HSPDP fielded candidates in all the districts of Meghalaya. Its performance was the same as the previous elections with the exception that it added 1 more seat to its number. In this election, the party generated better performance in East Khasi Hills and Ri Bhoi subdivision, bagging 7 seats as compared to 3 in the previous elections. However, its performance in West Khasi Hills, once considered its strong base went down slightly. It retained its 3 seats in Jaintia Hills. Again there was no return from the Garo Hills. This clearly indicated that the Garo people consider the party as representing the Khasi people only. As in 1978, after elections, the HSPDP and other regional parties came together and formed a coalition Government. This coalition lasted less than a month and collapsed as a result of political defections. After the collapse of this Government, the remaining members of the HSPDP as well as those of other regional parties sat in the Opposition till the completion of the term in 1988.¹⁹

The HSPDP as the new party emerging after Meghalaya attained statehood represented the new awareness of the people. It initially seeks to represent an alternative and new trend to the older parties in the State. Because of its main aim which is integration of all areas which comprises Khasi and Jaintia Hills. District which is reflected in its constitution it gained immediate acceptance in rural Khasi

¹⁹ Pakem, B.: *Op. cit.*, pp.100-101.

society which is traditional bound. The party could generate significant performances in West Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills and could retain its hold on these areas for three consecutive elections from 1972-1983. On its entry into State politics the party made huge inroads in West Khasi Hills bagging all the constituencies from this area. This can be attributed to the fact that its founder and President H.S. Lyngdoh hails from this district. He could maintain his magnetic hold over his people. Being a leader whose firm roots is in the rural interior, he has been able to consolidate his party's position in this district comprising mainly of the rural areas. The party had grassroots appeal and received tremendous support from the masses. Since these areas had generally accepted the leadership of H.S. Lyngdoh as the undisputed leader of the party, the HSPDP was able to play a pivotal role in State politics and emerge as an alternative to the APHLC and Congress.²⁰

Within a short time the HSPDP was able to penetrate into the Jaintia Hills and created a strong base here. The main issue which the party took up in the Jaintia Hills was the boundary dispute with Assam in relation with the Mikir Hills. It was also able to have eminent personalities from this area within its fold. These helped the party in consolidating its position in this area.

In the Khasi Hills the party's performance was not the same as in the other two districts. It was confined only to certain pockets. The HSPDP was not able to provide strong challenge to the APHLC which dominated this area. This can be attributed to the fact that the APHLC was then at the peak of its power. However, even after the power of the APHLC waned, still the HSPDP could not capitalize on this development. Another factor was that there were few opinion leaders joining the party. Though the party made a strong base in certain areas of Khasi Hills it could not

²⁰ Ray, B. Datta: *Op. cit.*, pp.63-64.

consolidate its position and gradually the support base of the party was eroded particularly when the party merged with the APHLC to form the HPU.

In the Garo Hills the HSPDP could not make any inroads into the political scene. Both the first and second general elections saw the party with no returns to the Legislative Assembly. This is because the Garos in general consider the party as representing the Khasis only, as the main issues taken up by the HSPDP were specifically meant for the Khasis and Jaintias. This trend changed after the party secured the Shillong Parliamentary seat in 1977 and when the party secured a berth in the Coalition Government of the State in 1978. There was some organisations of the party in Garo Hills. But this presence generated by it in Garo Hills was short-lived when all the HSPDP members from Garo Hills joined the HPU in 1984 and presently the party ceases to exist in this area.

The existence of the HSPDP in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills slowly eroded and in particular from West Khasi Hills once considered its stronghold. This is because the party did not have a strong organisational basis. The main problem which hindered it from expanding its area of influence can be attributed to its weak organisation and resources which gradually hastened its dwindling performances in successive elections. As a result of this it could not have firm hold on its members. Coupled with this, factional politics was also rampant within the party which makes it ineffective in tackling critical issues within the party. The failure of the party to achieve its main objectives as stated in its constitution also contributed to the erosion of its vote bank in the Jaintia Hills and to some extent in the West Khasi Hills district. Presently, the top leaders of the party are ageing and are isolated between tradition and modernity in their political outlook which had an effect on the performance of the party especially in the urban areas. Its influence had so much declined to the extent

that by 1988 the party was confined only to certain pockets even in West Khasi Hills apart from certain constituencies of East Khasi Hills which had returned six elected representatives to the State Assembly more on personal rather than party considerations.²¹

Public Demand Implementation Convention (PDIC)

Table-3.5: Poll Prospects of the Public Demand Implementation Convention (PDIC)

General Elections	Khasi & Jaintia Hills				Garo Hills			Total
	East Khasi Hills	West Khasi Hills	Ri Bhoi Sub-division	Jaintia Hills	East Garo Hills	West Garo Hills	South Garo Hills	
1972	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1978	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
1983	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2

Source: Meghalaya Election Handbook, February 1983.

The PDIC did not contest the General Elections of Meghalaya during 1972 and 1978.

Initially, the Public Demand Implementation Convention (PDIC) was founded not as a political party but as an organisation representing a section of society which is the 'Farmers' Movement'. The main aim of the party was to air the needs and aspirations of the farmers. This organisation included in its demands some of the vital issues affecting the farmers, potato growers, etc. and carried some demonstrations. Gradually, it developed political leanings as these demands seemed to be only for the purpose of gaining popularity among the Wars for achieving electoral gains.²²

In 1978, when the party was revived, M.N. Majaw became the President. In the 1978 General Elections the party made its maiden entry into the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly by winning 2 seats although its candidates contested the

²¹ Gassah, L.D. (Ed.): *Op. cit.*, p.116.

²² *Ibid.*, p.100.

elections as Independents since the party was not recognized as a State Party. The PDIC was not able to play a significant role in Government formation since it had only 2 members in the 60 member House. The PDIC was made a partner in the ruling coalition made up by the regional parties of the State. This coalition did not last long as due to political differences among the coalition partners the coalition collapsed and the PDIC had to sit in the Opposition and remained so until General Elections were held.

In the 1983 General Elections held on February, the PDIC again secured only 2 seats being unable to consolidate its position even in Khasi and Jaintia Hills though setting up 22 candidates in the fray. It did not set up any candidate in Garo Hills. The party President was also defeated and was held responsible for this debacle. The two MLAs joined the ministry of Sangma when the Congress Government was formed. Some of the prominent members of the PDIC left the party and this considerably weakened the party.

The PDIC is the least popular of the regional parties that were in operation in this period. It could not make much inroads into State Politics. The party was not able to consolidate its position in Khasi and Jaintia Hills with the exception of 2 seats it secured from the time it emerged into the political scene. It could not make its presence felt in the Garo Hills. The victory of the party in these 2 constituencies can be attributed to the members who were able to gain the confidence and acceptance of the people through personal contacts with the electorates. This can be seen from the electorates' preference of electing the party's candidates in the two successive elections of 1978 and 1983. Another factor is that the area of influence of the PDIC are rural areas where the majority of the people are agriculturists and so the issues and

programmes for which the PDIC stood for gained wide acceptance and sent these two representatives to the Legislative Assembly.

Though, the PDIC had dynamic leadership in G.G. Swell and later M.N. Majaw who became the President of the party, still the party was not able to fare better in the State Politics and were not able to consolidate their position. The party stood for the farmers community but it was unable to garner the support of the rural voters. This may be because apart from these two leaders, there was no other leaders who could effectively carry these issues to the people. Another factor may be the dominance of the other two regional parties — APHLC and HSPDP on politics of the State. The party lacked strong organisational structure and leadership at the grass root level. Therefore it could not provide a strong alternative to the dominant parties in the State.²³

Hill People Union (HPU)

The Hill People Union (HPU) appeared in Meghalaya prior to the Lok Sabha elections in 1984. This party came into being because of political compulsions generated by Congress hegemony in Meghalaya politics. This necessitated the leadership of both the main regional parties during this time, to sink their differences and come together on the same platform, to present a strong alternative to the electorates. In their endeavour to keep the Congress out of power, the two combined parties — APHLC and HSPDP have been going all out to bring about this unity move. The leaders of these two political parties experienced that in the the past it has shown that fragmentation has only frustrated the concept and reality of a mass based political loyalties in the State. However, this unity move apparently ended only in

²³ Rao, V.V. *et al*: *Op. cit.*, pp.204-205.

electoral adjustment of seats to be contested by the parties involved in the ensuing District Councils elections to be held in the State. This experiment was a failure as the two parties failed to dislodge the Congress in the two districts of Jaintia and Garo Hills. It did, however, perform slightly better in Khasi Hills. Many of the prominent leaders of the two parties were disillusioned with the results but the results in the Khasi Hills gave an impetus and hope to the parties to press forward in cementing the unification.²⁴

The first comprehensive and substantial ground work of the long ensuring unity move of the two regional parties was the electoral agreement arrived at during the Jaintia Hills District Council elections in 1983. Subsequently, in a joint meeting the two parties held in Shillong, they formed the Constitution Drafting Committee for the proposed new regional political party. The approval for the final Draft was accorded after subsequent meetings involving the leaders of the two parties. Finally, on the 16th November 1984, the APHLC and HSPDP formally accepted the Draft Constitution and the new political party, the Hill People Union (HPU) came into being.

The agreement to form a new political party was postponed for sometime to avoid any unnecessary misunderstanding of the party' stand in the District Councils elections by the electorates. However, the parties resolved to first make poll adjustments of seats in the ensuing Khasi Hills District Council elections, and also publishing a joint Manifesto. The results of the elections went in favour of the combined regional parties. This further strengthened the move for unity.

The unity move of the two regional parties received slight set back over the question of whether the parties should retain their own separate identities or to totally

²⁴ Pakem, B.: *Op. cit.*, pp.101-102.

submerged themselves to the new party. On the one hand, the HSPDP was against submerging their identity whereas the APHLC was in favour to achieve unity by dissolving the two concerned parties. The two parties were trying to create a common platform without sinking their identities through protracted meetings which went on for a year. But this fluid situation suddenly took a new turn, with the announcement of the Lok Sabha elections. The two parties, therefore, decided to renew their efforts for forging unity.

Five weeks before the Lok Sabha elections the APHLC and HSPDP decided to form the new party — the HPU, and fielded candidate for both Lok Sabha seats in Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills. The joint meeting of the two parties on 16th November, 1984, formally decided to form the new political party — HPU and accept the new Constitution of the new party. The party was recognized by the Election Commission as a State party on 10th September 1986.

The acid test for the HPU as a new regional political party in the State of Meghalaya came when the Lok Sabha elections were held. These elections were crucial in the sense that it would prove the acceptance of the party by the electorates. Moreover, out of the two seats in Meghalaya, the most prestigious was the Shillong seat. It was a foregone conclusion that the Tura seat was in favour of the Congress as Garo Hills was a bastion of the Congress party. Whereas the Shillong Parliamentary seat is a different story. This seat had never been captured by any national party, not even the Congress. It was a seat won by the regional party, the APHLC and for one term the HSPDP since regional parties have always enjoyed huge support from the electorates in Khasi and Jaintia Hills. For the first time, after the creation of Meghalaya, the Shillong Parliamentary seat was won by the Congress. The Tura seat too went in favour of the Congress. So both the two Parliamentary seats from

Meghalaya went in favour of the national party for the first time in the history of the State. This indicated that the concerted effort of the regional parties to challenge the national party had proved unsuccessful.

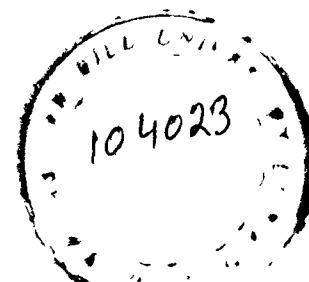
Even though the HPU failed to win this election, the result did not discourage the leaders to go ahead with the programme and policies of the party. However, though the HPU was a new party and yet untested in the Assembly Elections, the party was already facing political differences and defections by eminent members, who switched allegiance to the victorious party — the Congress. This proved that the regional parties were never free from infighting and these parties were always under the saga of political defections which had a demoralizing effect on the party. But in spite of these problems plaguing the new formed party, those who remain loyal to the HPU went further ahead even after the election debacle to strengthen the party.²⁵

Though the party's performance in the Lok Sabha Elections was poor, but it had proved to be the strongest regional force able to take on the might of the Congress which ruled the State. The party was formally recognized as the principal Opposition in the Assembly during the Budget session in 1986. This add a new dimension to the role of the HPU in the state politics. The real test for the party as an alternative to the ruling Congress was its performance in the General Elections to the State Legislative Assembly in 1988. However, the analysis of the party's performance in this election has not been incorporated in this work as it does not fall within the purview of the years covered by this study.

“Regional political parties, it has been stated, grow out of a reaction to the local problems of the region.”²⁶ This statement seemed to be true of the regional

²⁵ Gassah, L.S.: *Op. cit.*, pp.134-135.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.11.



parties in Meghalaya. These parties had emerged as a reaction to the problems plaguing Meghalaya both prior and after the attainment of statehood. However, these parties have not been able to consolidate their positions, and have disappeared from the political scene within a short period of their emergence. The regional parties in Meghalaya have a common feature, i.e., the central demand for maintaining the “Tribal identity”. The Congress which is a national party also voiced the same demands. The actual differences between the regional parties and the Congress is not clear. This has led to acceptance and merger of these parties with the Congress as the case when the APHLC merged with the national party as soon as the identity of the hill tribes were accepted by the National Government in the form of Meghalaya. Moreover, the Congress with immense resources at its command could win over people and also the MLAs elected on opposition party tickets to run the State. The regional parties were, therefore, not able to present a united front to the power of the Congress, as these parties are often plagued by political differences and infighting among their leaders. This trend often led to floor crossings and splits within the party which finally led to their political demise. Movement of the Opposition parties (regional parties) to fight against the Congress seems to be a regular feature in the State, because elections are fought not on the basis of any concrete policy and programme, but on personality basis and extent of resources at the disposal of the respective parties, but these attempts by and large remain unsuccessful. The Congress even though failing to gain an absolute majority in the election always manages to rule the state with defections or coalition with splinter groups which is evident from the period (1972-1988) covered in this study.²⁷

²⁷ Gassah, L.S.: *Op. cit.*, pp.100–101.

The regional parties were mostly confined to Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Even here the parties fight was mostly amongst themselves rather than against the Congress. Whereas the Congress had carved a strong bastion in the Garo Hills and the regional parties could not penetrate into this district. This also had an influence on their electoral performance and was taken advantage by the Congress in Government formation after successive elections. The regional parties were marked by fragmentation and so could not present a united front to the Congress in the State. However, efforts were made by these parties to present a united front against the Congress which is reflected when the HPU was formed just before the 1987 General Elections. It remains to be seen whether this effort will succeed. This study is, however, outside the period covered by this work. It can, therefore, be summarized that the role of regional political parties in Meghalaya, are limited to the extent that they are short-term politics.

Electoral politics in Meghalaya do not project any clear cut political preference based on programme and policy. Parties choose their candidates on the bases of their personality and local popularity to ensure victory. Such candidates often lack any strong conviction to any policy and programme of the party concern. Elections in Meghalaya is apolitical and therefore, manipulations, maneuvering and money power play the dominant role in patching together a majority for ministry making and the poll verdict is rendered rather irrelevant. Because of little differences amongst the parties often the spectacle of floor crossing is being witnessed in this state affecting the stability of any ministry.²⁸

²⁸ Dutta, P.S: *Electoral Politics in the North East*, Omson Publications, New Delhi, 1986, pp.79-83.

Composition of Opposition Parties in Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1972-1983

The word "Opposition" is derived from the Latin word *oppositio* which means 'to oppose'.²⁹ As such, the main function of the Opposition is to oppose any policy of the ruling party which is in contradiction to the will of the people. It is the alternative Government and focus of the discontent of the people.³⁰

The Opposition is a fundamental part of the legislature which functions mainly on the basis of a parliamentary or cabinet form of Government. If the ruling party is needed to take decisions and run the Government, the Opposition is needed to ensure that the decisions are reached through proper debate and discussion.³¹ Prof. Ronald Butt has said that, "the Opposition itself participates in the process of governing because it helps to condition the contemporary climate of opinion through which the Government of the day is itself influenced in the production of its policies. He further observes that apart from the real if indirect effect it has on the evolution of Government policy, the Opposition can also by a carefully fought and reasoned campaign get the details of legislation amended."³²

The electoral results give authority to a certain party or group of parties to form the Government and other party or parties which represent the minority opinions functions as the Opposition. The Opposition tries to win the support of the people by

²⁹ Jennings, J: *Cabinet Government*, Cambridge University Press London 1959 p. 15.

³⁰ Laski, Harold J.: *Parliamentary Government in England – A Commentary*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1983, p.15.

³¹ Ram, D. Sundar, *Readings in the Indian Parliamentary opposition* Vol. I Kanishka Publishers distributors New Delhi 1996 p. 176.

³² Butt, Ronald: *The power of Parliament*, Constable & Co. Ltd. London 1967 pp.316-318.

exposing the defects, loopholes and blunders of that Government. It is always a readymade alternative Government.³³

There were traces of democracy in India, but the opposition as such was not a distinct institution. The origin of an opposition in India can be stated to have emerged simultaneously with the origin of the Indian national congress during the British period as this party was formed by some Indian leaders to oppose the British and later this evolved into a party for the national movement in India to secure independence from the British rule. Independent India adopted a parliamentary form of government following the British pattern which is the existence of the Ruling as well as the Opposition parties in Parliament as well as in the States.

The first Opposition in Independent India was formed in 1950 under the leadership of Prof. K.T. Shah. This Opposition had only 14 members. Its main purpose was simply to take corrective measures with regard to policies of the Government. Though its leanings were towards the Left parties but it had no basic differences with the Congress party. The real Opposition to the Congress party which had remained unchallenged for long emerged in 1952 after the 1952 General Elections under the new Constitution.³⁴

Opposition Parties in Meghalaya Legislative Assembly

The concept of the Opposition is not new to the State politics of Meghalaya as a semblance of Opposition had emerged when Meghalaya was not a State but were districts within the State of Assam. The birth of the State was the result of the Opposition of the leaders of the hill areas to the decision of the Assam Government to

³³ Fartayal, H. S. *Role of the Opposition in Indian Parliament*, Chaitanya Publishing House, Allahabad, 1972, pp.3-4.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p.211.

introduce the Assam Official Language Bill in the Assam Legislative Assembly to make Assamese the official state language. This was vehemently opposed by the people from the hill areas which led to the spearheading of the demand for statehood, culminating in the formation of Meghalaya as a State. The main regional parties of the State also owed their origin and existence to their opposition on certain issues that had developed in the state politics. The emergence of Opposition is not a new development, rather it was the result of oppositional developments of the political set up of the State.

The newly formed Meghalaya Legislative Assembly is a 60-member House. For a brief period from 1972-1976, the House was dominated by the ruling party (APHLC) which had emerged as the single largest party in the 1972 General Elections. From 1976 onwards, however, coalition governments were the order of the day, and the House witnessed the overlapping and continuous shifting of Opposition parties generated by engineered defections in the power play exercised by different political parties. The General Elections of 1972 saw the complete dominance of the APHLC. The parties which were in the minority were the Congress with 9 members, HSPDP 8 and Independents with 3 members. These parties together constituted the politically minority groups in the Legislative Assembly and were destined to perform the role of Opposition to the APHLC led ruling party. Because of the poll alliance of the APHLC and Congress, the Congress automatically became a part of the ruling party leaving the HSPDP to don the role of the main Opposition party. The HSPDP was the first official Opposition party in the State, that lasted until 1976. The political scene took a new turn after the Mendipathar Conference which saw the merger of the APHLC with the Congress. This led to a split in the APHLC wherein a section decided to revive the APHLC. These members made a decision to stay in the

Opposition and so the numbers of the Opposition had increased with the addition of the members of the revived APHLC. The Opposition parties from 1976-1978 included the HSPDP and the APHLC and some Independents. The HSPDP was led by H.S. Lyngdoh and the leader of the APHLC was B.B. Lyngdoh. These parties did not form a united Opposition party but functioned as individual opposition groups. In the first half of the tenure of the First Legislative Assembly, the ruling party totally dominated the proceedings of the House as the Opposition (HSPDP) was numerically weak. But in the second half (1976-1978) the strength of the Opposition rose, when the APHLC joined the ranks of the Opposition.

The Second General Elections 1978 did not give a clear majority to any political party. The Congress (INC) emerged as the single largest party with 20 elected members but it did not form the government as the regional parties came together in one banner, the Meghalaya United Legislature Party (MULP) and formed the Government. The Congress became the Opposition party in the Legislative Assembly under the leadership of Capt. Sangma together with 6 Independent members under the name Meghalaya United Legislature Front (MULF). The coalition of the regional parties was short-lived as political differences emerged leading to the expulsion of the members of the HSPDP members, leaving the APHLC and PDIC to remain in the Coalition Government. The HSPDP joined the Opposition parties with the Congress and Independent members. The Opposition had grown in strength as it comprised of 20 Congress, 15 HSPDP and some (6) Independent members. The main Opposition was made up by the MULF (Congress and Independents) and the HSPDP formed another opposition group. This time the Opposition were able to make their presence felt and this enabled them to play a constructive role in the Assembly. This period, however, was characterized by political instability which had started emerging

in State Politics. This term was marked by frequent change of Government and the configuration of both the ruling and Opposition parties frequently changes. The Two-Party (APHLC and PDIC) Coalition Government did not survive for the remaining period of the second term due to contentious issue for leadership of the Government. This led to a political crisis which culminated in the split of the APHLC to two groups — one led by D.D. Pugh and another by B.B. Lyngdoh. The APHLC under the leadership of B.B. Lyngdoh aligned itself with the Congress (Capt. Sangma). These two parties together with the HSPDP (H.S. Lyngdoh) formed the United Meghalaya Peoples' Democratic Front (UMPDF) and staked claim to form the Government. The APHLC led by D.D. Pugh and the PDIC and some Independents formed the Opposition parties. The strength of the Opposition had considerably dwindled and, therefore, these parties could not provide a strong and viable opposition to the ruling coalition. The strength of the Opposition alternated between an upward and downward trend depending on the role played by the political parties that constituted the Second Legislative Assembly. This House had its first taste of political instability in the State which was engineered by defections of members of the political parties. It also witnessed the power play between the parties in the State. The Congress (INC), a national party, emerged as the single largest party but initially sat in the Opposition. But the frequent changes in the political scenario as a result of different political alignment made matters more confusing in which both the national party as well as the regional parties had their stints as ruling and Opposition parties. The initial term of the Second Legislative Assembly witnessed a strong Opposition Congress 20 and Independent members in terms of numerical strength, whereas the latter part of the term witnessed a weak Opposition comprising PDIC (2) and some APHLC members. The Opposition parties were not united and functioned as loose political units and so

were not able to provide a strong and viable Opposition to the dominant ruling coalition.

The Third General Elections 1983 again saw the emergence of the Congress as the single largest party with 25 elected members. But no party gained absolute majority to ensure smooth installation of the next Government, as well as political stability. The State witnessed political instability prior to the formation of the Government by the regional parties and this continued for the duration of the coalition government made up by the regional parties, named the Meghalaya United Parliamentary Party (MUPP). The Congress with some Independent members became the Opposition. This Government lasted a month as due to dissidence and defections by its members, it lost the vote of confidence sponsored by the Opposition (Congress). This proved that the Opposition could engineer defections in the ruling party and win members to its side. This led to the formation of another coalition by the Congress with Independents and some members who had defected to its camp leading to the installation of the Congress led government, the Meghalaya Democratic Front (MDF). The Opposition was now made up by the regional parties. For the first time in the history of Meghalaya politics, the regional parties (APHLC, HSPDP, PDIC) came together to form an Opposition to the Congress Government. However, these parties could not form a United Opposition, rather it was a fragmented Opposition as most of the members of the regional parties had defected to the ruling coalition thereby reducing the numerical strength of the regional parties. Initially, after the installation of the Congress Government, the Opposition parties comprising of the regional parties was quite sizeable with the exception of a few members who had defected to the Congress and voted in favour of the No-Confidence Motion sponsored by the Congress. Gradually, this configuration of the Opposition parties

was reduced following the defection of more members to the ruling party. The regional political parties were unable to present a united front as an Opposition, on the contrary they were characterized by disunity and, therefore, could not dislodge the Congress from power for the remaining tenure of the Assembly. However, The regional parties united under a common platform during the 1984 Lok Sabha Elections when they sponsored a consensus candidate for the elections. Prior to the Lok Sabha Elections, the two main Opposition parties merged and formed the Hill People Union (HPU) and fielded a common candidate for the ensuing elections. The party, however, did not generate a good performance at the polls and this had a demoralizing effect on a section of the members of the party. This created a rift in the party resulting in some members of the HSPDP to leave the party and revived their old party (HSPDP), while another group of the APHLC led by Armison Marak revived back the APHLC to be known as the APHLC(A).³⁵

From the above, it can be seen that the Congress though being in the Opposition yet it was able to project itself as an alternative Government and was successful in its main objective of toppling the ruling coalition of the regional political parties. Whereas the regional parties failed to present themselves as an alternative to the ruling party as there was no unity among themselves and they remained a fragmented political parties. But whether it was the Congress in Opposition or the non-Congress parties (regional parties) in the Opposition none of them ever settled down to fulfill this vital function in a democratic polity. Their orientation is how to capture the Treasury benches as soon as possible, how to retain them by any means possible, and this has led to the spate of defections and floor crossings by political parties which has in turn generate political instability in the

³⁵ Pakem, B.: *Op cit.*, pp.98-101.

State particularly after each General Elections and in particular during 1978-79.³⁶ Therefore, in such situations both the structure of authority and the structure of Opposition are found to be amorphous and fragmented. Consequently, there are no clear lines between Government and the Opposition and both seem to dissolve into the ruling class. This also makes the lines between Government and the Opposition party difficult to draw.

Therefore, we can see that the Opposition parties have made several attempts to unite but have failed to provide a stable alternative to the ruling party for the most part, the Congress.³⁷ The efforts of the Opposition parties towards a single Opposition party based on one flag, one programme and one leadership as in England failed to materialize in the wake of the leadership aspiration and the quest for keeping a separate entity of each of the constituent party as is the case with the HPU. This makes it impossible for these parties to come together to demonstrate their firm belief in the Opposition unity. Even the poll accords that Opposition parties' alliances forged on the eve of General Elections to the Legislative Assembly were inadequate and insignificant and lacked sincerity and commitment to the poll pacts due to defections and floor crossings. Subsequently, they hardly lasted after the elections are over and the race for capturing political power begins.

³⁶ Ram D. Sundar (Ed): *Indian Democracy Prospects and Retrospects*, Kanishka Publishers and Distributors p.231.

³⁷ Ram D. Sundar (Ed): *Readings in the Indian Parliamentary Opposition*, Kanishka Publishers and Distributors p. 221.

List of Configuration of the Members of the Opposition Parties and the Leaders of the Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly (1972-1978)

Table-3.6: Configuration of Opposition Parties (1972-1988)

Legislative Assembly 1972-1988	Opposition Parties	Total No. of the Members of the Opposition	Period Effective from 1972-1988
1 st Legislative Assembly (1972-1978)	HSPDP – 9 & Independent- 1	10	1972-1976
	APHLC – 13 & HSPDP – 5 (B.B. Lyngdoh Group)	21	1976-1978
2 nd Legislative Assembly (1978-1983)	Cong.(I) – 20 & Independents (MULF)*	25	1978-1979
	Cong.(I) – 20 & HSPDP – 14	34	Feb-May 1979
	APHLC – 22; PDIC – 2; Janata – 1 & Independent - 1	26	1979-1983
3 rd Legislative Assembly (1983-1988)	Cong.(I) – 25 & Independent – 3	38	Feb-Mar 1983
	APHLC – 11; HSPDP – 10; PDIC – 1 & Independents – 2	24	1983-1986
	HPU – 16; HSPDP – 3; APHLC(A) – 1 & Independents – 1 (RDF)**	21	1986-1988

Table-3.7: Configuration of Leaders of Opposition Parties (1970-1988)

Chain of Events	Leader of the Opposition	Opposition Parties	Period Effective from 1970-1988
Autonomous State of Meghalaya	Shri Akramozzaman	INC and Independents	2.1.70 – 21.1.72
Full-fledged State of Meghalaya (Interim Govt.)	Shri Akramozzaman	INC and Independents	21.1.72 – 18.3.72
FIRST GENERAL ELECTIONS 1972			
1 st Legislative Assembly 1972	H.S. Lyngdoh	HSPDP	18.3.72 – 21.11.76
Changeover of Ruling Party from APHLC to Cong.(I) (Mendipathar Conference)	B.B. Lyngdoh	HSPDP and APHLC (B.B. Lyngdoh Group)	22.11.76-3.3.78
SECOND GENERAL ELECTIONS 1978			
2 nd Legislative Assembly 1978 (Coalition Govt. under 3 Flags)	Capt. W.A. Sangma	MULF – Cong(I) Independents	10.3.78 – 21.2.79
Coalition Govt. under 2 Flags	Capt. W.A. Sangma	Cong(I) & HSPDP	21.2.79 – 6.5.79
United Meghalaya Parliamentary Democratic Forum (UMPDF)	P.R. Kyndiah	APHLC; PDIC; Janata and Independents	6.5.79 – 24.2.83
THIRD GENERAL ELECTIONS 1983			
3 rd Legislative Assembly 17.2.83 Meghalaya United Parliamentary Party (MUPP)	Capt. W.A. Sangma	Cong(I) and Independents	2.3.83 – 31.3.83
Change of Ruling Party MUPP to MDF (Meghalaya Democratic Front)	S.D. Khongwir	APHLC; HSPDP; PDIC and Independents	31.3.83 – 2.4.86
	B.B. Lyngdoh	HPU; HSPDP; APHLC(A) and Independents (RDF)**	2.4.86 – 5.2.88

* MULF – Meghalaya United Legislative Front;

** RDF – Regional Democratic Front.

Chapter-IV

ROLE OF THE OPPOSITION I: PROBLEMS AND ISSUES RELATING TO (i) BOUNDARY BETWEEN MEGHALAYA AND ASSAM AND (ii) LAW AND ORDER AND THE PROBLEM OF INFLUX

In a parliamentary democracy both the Government and the Opposition equally play a vital role for the successful administration of the nation. The legislature is a distinctive feature of representative democracy whose main function is legislation meaning, “the carrying out or making of laws.” The Government is responsible to the elected representative legislature wherein the Opposition play a vital role in checking any arbitrariness on the part of the Government while carrying out or making laws.¹ In the legislature, the role of the Opposition is very significant as it can pursue a Government with sustained criticism and keep before the voters, between general elections, the option that will eventually confront them.² According to Jennings, ‘the one permits the other to govern because the second permits the first to oppose and together they lead their parties in the operation of the constitutional machinery’.³ The members of the legislatures as the elected representatives of the people are entrusted with the task of ventilating the grievances as well as offering opinions of the people on various issues, scrutinise the functioning of the Government on the floor of the legislature and also to enact laws.⁴

The presence of a strong and effective Opposition is an essential ingredient for the effective functioning of a parliamentary democracy. Since the system admits of dissents, conflicts are bound to arise between the Ruling and the Opposition parties.

¹ Wheare, K.C.: *Legislature*, Oxford University Press, London, 1968, p.2.

² Butt, Ronald: *The Power of Parliament*, Constable & Co. Ltd., London, 1967, p.309.

³ Jennings, Ivor: *Parliament*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1957, pp.18-22.

⁴ Wheare, K.C.: *Ibid*, p.153.

The role of the Opposition is described variedly to criticise the Government, to take the initiative to oppose but not to oppose for the sake of opposition and not to obstruct so as to bring into contempt democracy and the parliamentary system of Government, which briefly stated means to be a responsible opposition.⁵ In the legislature the main function of the Opposition is to expose the Government's omissions and commissions and generally oppose those measures which are contrary to public interest,⁶ and will reflect the point of view of their supporters in the legislature. The Government should be prepared to listen and to consider opposition arguments and representations.⁷ An effective opposition is an Opposition which can perform two basic functions in the set up of parliamentary democracy. First it provides constructive criticisms and corrective measures to the policies and programmes of the party in power. Secondly, it is able to form an alternative Government when the party in power goes out of office as a result of loss of mandate of the electorate or due to constitutional deadlock.⁸

The Opposition gives expression to public opinion and reflects the current public reaction to the policy of the Government. It is, therefore, termed as the mouthpiece which the Constitution provides for the expression of public opinion and which the ruling party must not disregard however large their majority is.⁹ Though the influence of the Opposition over the formulation of Government policy is not negligible, yet it cannot influence the Government once the Government has firmly

⁵ Ram, Sundar (Ed.): *Provisional Parliament of India*, Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, Agra, 1975, p.279.

⁶ Fartayal, H.S.: *The Opposition in Indian Parliament*, Chaitanya Publishing House, Allahabad, 1971, p.5.

⁷ Morrison, L.: *Government and Parliament*, Oxford University Press, Ely House, London, 1967, p.109.

⁸ Ram, Sundar: *Role of Opposition Parties in Indian Politics*, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1992, p.31.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.37.

decided on a course of action. The Opposition is not likely to be able to force a change unless with the aid of the governing party's own backbenchers. Thus apart from the influence of Opposition on the evolution of the Government policy the constructive amendment of legislation, and the defence of rights of minorities and citizens, an Opposition will also on occasion be able to frustrate a decision of the Government. The success of the move of the Opposition depends on whether it enjoys the support of the public and whether it can succeed in enlisting some sympathy from the Government's own backbenches. But whether the Opposition succeeds or not in its efforts to force the Government to mend or abandon the controversial policy, yet it has been able to perform a vital role in focussing public opinion or attention upon an issue which ministers might be glad to leave unemphasised.¹⁰ If the Opposition is genuinely convinced that the Government has no mandate for controversial measures and that they are not urgent, it considered itself to have a moral justification for sustained opposition.¹¹

The Opposition, therefore, highlights the weaknesses in the administration and compels the Government to make improvement. The Opposition proposes alternative measures differing from those of the party in power. It ventilates public grievances through various parliamentary methods such as questions, half-an-hour discussions, call attentions, adjournment motions and secures discussion particularly on questions that agitate the general public and tries to press the Government to solve them.¹² The debate which ensues in the Legislative Assembly gives an opportunity to the Government to explain and defend their proposals and to the Opposition an

¹⁰ Butt, Ronald: *Opp. cit.*, p.323.

¹¹ Morrison, *Opp. cit.*, p.112.

¹² Fartayal, H.S.: *Opp. cit.*, p.5.

opportunity to air their grievances or to criticise the general policy of the Government.¹³

In the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly from its inception in 1972, the Opposition, though not strong numerically, had generated considerable effort as a viable opposition to the ruling party. During the three successive terms undertaken to be studied in this chapter, that is, 1972-1978; 1978-1983; 1983-1988; an attempt has been made to study the role of the Opposition in articulating the problems and issues confronting the newly created State of Meghalaya, and how successive Opposition had played their role whether constructively or otherwise. This chapter attempts to study the problems and issues which were brought up by the Opposition in the successive Legislative Assemblies (1972-1988), and whether these were successful or otherwise.

Meghalaya being a new State is beset and confronted with many issues and problems. Though the role of the Opposition is new to the elected representatives of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly but they made attempts to play an effective role as members of the Opposition during the period 1972-1978. In the latter two successive Legislative Assemblies from 1983-1988, there was tremendous improvement in the performance of members of the Opposition as they voraciously participated in the proceedings of the House. The Assembly witnessed intense debate and discussion on several issues connected with new legislation being raised by the Government. A wide range of issues on several subjects were raised for debate, some initiated by the Government and some by the Opposition, but it will not be possible to incorporate all the issues and problems articulated in the Assembly by the Opposition into the present study.

¹³ Ram, Sundar: *Op. cit.*, p.31.

The present study has attempted to confine the role of the Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly to four specific areas of issues and problems. The time or the period to be studied has also been confined to the first three Legislative Assemblies from 1972-1988.

In trying to study and understand the role of the Opposition party(s) which alternate between the national as well as the regional parties in the ensuring period 1972-1988, Chapter IV of this study attempts to trace and analyse the role of the Opposition party(s) with regard to the specific issues and problems mentioned which had dominated the proceedings of the House. This chapter is divided into two sections. Each section covers the particular issue to be studied and is spread over the three successive periods already mentioned. Section I deal with the issue of boundary dispute between Assam and Meghalaya. It is concerned with tracing and analysing the performance alternately of the Congress and the regional parties as Opposition with regard to their articulation of this particular issue during the intervening period of the three successive Legislative Assembly(s) from 1972-1988. Section II deals with the second issue taken up which is the Law and Order problem, especially in the state capital, Shillong, and the Problem of Influx covering the period 1972-1988.

This work has been undertaken to study and analyse the role of the Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly with regard to the following issues that were raised in the Assembly generating intense and heated discussion in the House:

1. Boundary problems between Meghalaya and Assam.
2. Law and Order situations/problems especially in the State capital, Shillong and Problem of Influx.

The first issue relating to boundary dispute between Assam and Meghalaya can be considered a core issue as it had originated from the inception of the State and

continually appear in the succeeding years. This issue was first raised during the session of the Provisional Assembly but because no long term solution was arrived at, the problem was again raised in the First Assembly 1972 and since then continually appear in the House generating intense debate in the Assembly between members of the ruling party and the Opposition. This is a contentious issue which time and again dominated the proceedings of the House and was raised by members whose constituencies were clearly affected by this problem.

The second issue dealt with in this chapter is with regard to the law and order problem especially in Shillong, the state capital, being a cosmopolitan city inhabited by different communities and the Problem of Influx. This can be considered an on-going issue and whenever any problem has arisen in Shillong, it has dominated the proceedings of the House.

Section-I

Boundary Dispute between Meghalaya and Assam: 1972-1988*

The boundary dispute between Meghalaya and Assam is a long standing issue between the two north eastern states as Meghalaya was formerly a part of Assam. This border extends on three sides involving the three Districts of Ri Bhoi, West Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills, and two Districts in Assam that is Kamrup and Mikir Hills. The study attempts to analyse the boundary disputes between Meghalaya and Assam with reference to the Block I and Block II areas.

Historically, the Block I and II were originally part of the former Jaintia Kingdom before the arrival of the British to this area. With the advent of the British annexation of Jaintia Kingdom, it caused a division of the Jaintia Hills and Jaintia

* The period of study is confined to the above period mentioned, due mainly to the comprehensiveness of the subject matter.

plains. Jaintia Hills was attached to District Nowgong of Assam whereas the Jaintia plains was attached to District Sylhet (now in Bangladesh) for administrative purposes. The Jaintia Hills was turned into Jowai Subdivision. The Assam Government took out Block I and II from Jowai Subdivision in 1951 and merged these areas to United Mikir and North Cachar Hills (present Karbi Anglong). Block I comprised of 143 villages whereas Block II comprised 213 villages.¹⁴ Meghalaya became a full fledged State in 1972 and accepted the boundary on the basis of the new Districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. The United Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills Districts of Meghalaya shared contiguous areas with Kamrup, Mikir Hills (now Karbi Anglong) and Goalpara Districts of Assam. The people residing in these areas were mostly tribes from Meghalaya and had for long favoured inclusion with Meghalaya giving rise to tension and problems between the two States. The contiguous areas in Ri Bhoi District were transferred to Kamrup District; Block I and II of Jaintia Hills to Mikir Hills (Karbi Anglong) District and areas in Garo Hills to Goalpara District. When Meghalaya was in the process of attaining statehood, these areas showed intention of being included in the new State. Therefore, a plan was drawn up regarding the areas to be included in the proposed Hill State. A decision was reached whereby the Autonomous Districts of the composite State of Assam will form part of the proposed Hill State including the contiguous areas inhabited by the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos, at the meeting in Haflong convened by the APHLC and attended by all leaders from the Hill Districts of Assam. This plan never materialises as the Government of India did not concede to this demand. Instead it gave the Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills Districts the option to join or not to join the proposed Hill

¹⁴ Kharkongor, S.: *Ban lai Sah Kynmaw*, Published by Biangty Kharakor, Shillong, 1982, p.57-58.

State. They opted to remain with Assam citing certain differentiating factors with the other constituent Hill Districts. This later resulted in the boundary problems between Assam and Meghalaya, when people from these areas refused to accept the jurisdiction of their respective District Councils, and refused to pay taxes. The leaders from these areas had sent representation to the Government of Assam asking it to reconsider the desirability of re-transferring these areas back to Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills Districts. A Boundary Commission was set up but nothing concrete was achieved. So when the demand for Hill State was made, originally it was envisaged to include all the Hill Districts of Assam, and this problem was kept in abeyance as the people from these areas were convinced that they would be a part of the new State.¹⁵ This plan never materialises as there was no consensus among the Hill Districts on inclusion with Meghalaya. The areas which suffer from boundary problems with Assam are:

- a) The contiguous areas of Khasi Hills District in particular Ri Bhoi District which shared a common boundary with Kamrup District of Assam.
- b) The Jaintia Hills District in particular the Block I and II areas sharing a common boundary with Mikir Hills (today Karbi Anglong) District.
- c) The Garo Hills District which has a porous border with Goalpara District of Assam.

But there was no clear cut demarcated boundary between Meghalaya and Assam. As a result, this has been a contentious and vexed issue which had created problems for successive Government in Meghalaya since 1972 This had appeared and dominated the political scene in Meghalaya time and again as successive Governments both in Assam and Meghalaya have not been able to resolve the

¹⁵ Lyngdoh, R.S.: *Government and Politics in Meghalaya*, Sanchar Publishing House, New Delhi, 1996, pp.424-427.

boundary problems. In this chapter an attempt is made to study and analyse the appearance and domination of this issue in the political realm of the State and its impact on politics. It covers the way the issue is raised in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly by the parties or individual members; whether it made any serious impact on the political parties of the State and the members of the House. It also analyses the role played by political parties especially the party or parties in the Opposition in bringing this issue to the Assembly, the debate that ensued and the outcome of the discussion, if any, and will also try to see why successive Governments have not been able to come out with any concrete and permanent solution to this issue. The study attempts also to gauge whether attempts made by members of the House who represent these areas or those adjacent, to bring to the attention of the House, the problems faced by these people with the people from Assam and the incursion and intrusion by Assam, had any impact on the ruling party or Government to make serious attempts to resolve this problem.

The term of the Legislative Assembly is 5(five) years and the Governor of Meghalaya summons, prorogues and dissolve the Assembly. There were altogether 53 sessions of the first three consecutive Assemblies during the period under study, that is, March 1972 to March 1988; these include 22 sessions in the First Assembly 1972-1978; 17 sessions in the Second Assembly 1978-1983 and 14 sessions in the Third Assembly 1983-1988. Usually, the Assembly sessions were held during the months of March and May and sometimes extend to June to discuss the budget and in the months of August, September and December to transact other business. The maximum number of session in a year was four and the minimum was two.

The Legislature performs three-fold functions which includes:

- a) Legislation.

- b) Exercising financial control.
- c) Critically examine the policy.

This chapter emphasises more on the last function that is critically examine the policy pursued by the Government with regard to the Boundary issue by members of the Opposition. The Opposition adopted various techniques to influence the Government. It rendered advice to the Government, criticise the wrong decisions and scrutinize the information generated by the Government. It ventilate public grievances and try to persuade the Government to redress them.¹⁶

The First Legislative Assembly to the new State was inaugurated on March 1972. This Assembly commences with the address by the first Governor of Meghalaya, Shri L.P Singh. After every General Elections the newly created Legislative Assembly commences with an address from the Governor of State [Art.176(1)].* This address is a resume of work done by the Government as also what the Government intended to do during the current year. A motion of thanks is moved and seconded by another member. This occasion provides for a general debate commonly known as the debate on the Governor's Address. This is the first chance for the Opposition to make itself felt. This is done either by general criticisms or by moving amendments to certain specific proposals in it.

The Opposition made use of criticisms and amendments to modify the issues given in the Governor's Address. Being a newly formed State, the boundary of the State was a subject that was bound to be brought up before the elected members of the State. From the beginning of the first session of the House the contentious boundary

¹⁶ Fartayal, H.S: *Op. cit.*, p-81.

* At the commencement of the first session after each general election to the Legislative Assembly and at the commencement of the first session of each year, the Governor shall address the Assembly as required by Article 176(1) of the Constitution.

issue had made its entry into State politics creating different stands between members of the Ruling and the Opposition parties especially members whose constituencies were affected by this dispute. This escalated into a big issue as there was no clear cut boundary between Meghalaya and Assam, as also because the areas was jointly claimed by both Meghalaya and Assam. These areas were previously a part of Meghalaya and majority of the inhabitants were tribes (Pnar) from Meghalaya but were tagged to the Karbi-Anglong District of Assam when it was created. In the first session in 1972, a discussion on the boundary issue was brought up when members asked questions seeking clarification from the Government regarding the statement made on paragraph 6 of the Governor's Address relating to the stated transfer of Block I and II from Mikir Hills to Jaintia Hills. Debating on this, the Independent member (M.N. Majaw) from Mawhati constituency through his speech criticised the action of the Government of Meghalaya with regard to the settlement of the boundary issue with Assam, implying that considering the urgency and serious nature of the matter, the Government of Meghalaya had only two meetings with its counterpart in Assam, thereby proving its lack of commitment in solving the dispute. Subsequently, member of the HSPDP (H. Hadem) took up this issue supporting the stand of the Independent member, when people from these areas sought refuge in Meghalaya claiming harassment from the people of Assam. The members of the Opposition though in minority, sought to press the Government to institute an Enquiry Committee to study this problem and come up with a solution, and to initiate a dialogue with the Government of Assam regarding re-transfer of Block I and II to Jaintia Hills. The Opposition were very vocal in their criticisms and questions raised on this issue, especially those members whose constituencies were affected by problem created in these areas. Their demand was for immediate solution to the problem as it was

considered to be vital for the new State. The Government on its part gave strong assurances about its commitment to a permanent solution of this problem. But nothing concrete emerged and the matter was kept pending.¹⁷

In 1973, this issue was again raised in the Assembly as no solution had been reached the previous year in the First Assembly. The Opposition as well as some members whose party supported the Government expressed dissatisfaction with the Government for not being able to solve this problem and that encroachment of boundary by Assam continued as there was no well demarcated boundaries. In this session, the debate centred mostly on those contentious issue relating to the contiguous areas of Khasi and Jaintia Hills with brief reference to some unpleasant situation in Garo Hills by some MLAs from Garo Hills. During the debate of the Governor's Address many of the ruling party members supported and praised the policy of the Government as reflected in the Governor's Address which stated that the Government was making earnest efforts to amicably reached a settlement through mutual consultation between Meghalaya and Assam. The lone voice of dissent in the House was made by the Independent member (M.N. Majaw) whose constituency and adjoining area was greatly affected by this dispute. He vehemently raised his objection to this statement showing facts which contradicts the Government. According to these facts, he stated that the boundary between Meghalaya and Assam was already considered, settled and defined when the ruling party (APHLC) had accepted both the Assam Re-organisation Meghalaya Act 1969 and the North-Eastern Areas Re-organisation Act 1971 and thereby leaving no scope for mutual consultation between the two states as given in the Governor's Address, unless an amendment is moved in Parliament. He further added that the Government of Meghalaya should

¹⁷ Debates on the Governor's Address, Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Proceeding, 1972.

have moved the Government of India to re-define the boundaries between Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills of Meghalaya with the State of Assam.¹⁸

Another development on this issues in 1973 was related to the encroachment by Assam into the contiguous areas of Meghalaya and the threat and harassment from the people of Assam, as well as the police force of Assam dominated the proceedings of the House, since the Opposition did not allow the Government to escape discussing this development which affect the people of these areas. The Opposition defined maps clearly showing the demarcation of boundaries to resolve all problems relating to boundaries. Further, members of the Opposition pressed the Government to seek clarification by studying the documents to clarify to which State the boundary pillars belong, and on this the Opposition had moved a Cut motion. This Cut motion was later withdrawn following the Opposition's acceptance of the answer and assurance given by the minister concerned. The members of the Opposition had initially raised its voice against the Government with regard to its policies. Later, they capitulated and were won over by the Government's assurances when they withdrew the Cut motion. The efforts of the Opposition did not sustain leaving this problem unresolved.¹⁹

The Government clarified its stand with regard to the boundary problem in the 1974 session. This stand, however, drew the attention of the House to another district of Meghalaya that is the Garo Hills district which faces encroachment and harassment at the hands of the Assam police. The move was initiated by the leader of the HSPDP (H.S. Lyngdoh) who drew the attention of the House to the discussion on the resolution of the Garo National Council (G.N.C.) of Goalpara and Kamrup units

¹⁸ Debates on the Governor's Address, Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Proceeding, 1973.

¹⁹ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, 1973.

expressing the determination of the Garo people in these areas to merge with their counterparts in Meghalaya. This debate was also taken up by members from Garo Hills demanding clarification of the statement in the Governor's Address. In this session, this issue continually dominated proceedings of the House as heated exchange of words were heard from members of the Opposition with regard to the series of incidents occurring in those areas adjoining these disputed areas. But what generated vehement criticisms was the revelation made by the APHLC member (P.R. Kyndiah) on the State of affairs pertaining to the boundary problem. What was most disturbing was his statement on the acceptance of the APHLC Government of the North Eastern Areas Reorganisation Act 1971 which already defined the boundary of Meghalaya. This evoked heated exchanges in the House as members of the Opposition expressed shock at this revelation by a member of the ruling party. They, therefore, questioned the sincerity of the Government to resolve the boundary dispute. Members of the Opposition further pressed the Government to appoint an officer, to sort out old records containing details of demarcation of boundaries from the Secretariat of Assam, to help identify the boundary between Meghalaya and Assam. This was taken up by members of the HSPDP as well as Independent members. This session unlike the previous sessions, witnessed a vocal and vociferous Opposition, and for the first time, the boundary problem in Garo Hills was brought to the House. Revelations by the ruling party member evoked strong response and severe criticisms from the Opposition who made a strong stand and demanded immediate action from the Government to resolve the issue.²⁰

In 1975 session a motion was moved by the Opposition to discuss the necessity of retransfer of Block I and II to Jaintia Hills. This was actively supported

²⁰ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Debates 1974.

by the Independent members especially those from Jaintia Hills whose constituency shared common affinity with the people in the disputed areas. The members accused the Government of not being sincere in its efforts to resolve this issue. Two Independent members (M.N. Majaw and Lewis Bareh) asked for a unanimous resolution from the House, to add strength to the demands and arguments of the Government of Meghalaya's stand with the Government of Assam, presenting a unified stand on the issue of re-transfer of Block I and II to Jaintia Hills. The Government was not yet ready to endorse it as it stated that steps had already been taken to speedily expedite the issue. The resolution was put to vote and as the Government was not ready to endorse it, the resolution was lost. This led to the Opposition questioning the seriousness of the Government to tackle the problem as people in these areas were daily facing harassment and encroachment of Assam into areas of Meghalaya. The Opposition severely castigate the ruling party (APHLC) for what they termed blindly accepting the Autonomous State without clear cut boundaries with its former State. They lambasted the Government for not conducting any proper survey on the boundaries of the State. In this session, the Opposition were more vociferous in their criticisms of the Government and these were through motions and resolutions. In spite of their efforts, they were unable to persuade the Government to resolve the long standing issue at the earliest. The Government proved its superiority by not endorsing the resolution which was lost. This goes to show that the Government viewed the Opposition as weak as they were numerically not strong, and therefore, their efforts were not taken seriously.²¹

In 1976, in the Governor's Address, mention was made of the Government's resolve to solve the boundary dispute peacefully with mutual cooperation of both the

²¹ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Debates 1975.

Governments of Assam and Meghalaya. Members of the Opposition especially Independent members while welcoming the move of the Government of Meghalaya in taking the first step to resolve the boundary dispute, at the same time sought information about the progress made in the discussion between the two Governments. General discussion and debate ensued later when a motion was moved against what the Opposition termed demarcation defined in the Notification of 1876 as it was not properly plotted out on the ground, and problems are, therefore, bound to arise now and then. Some members were in favour of Notification 1826 whereas others favoured Notification 1876. The HSPDP member who moved the motion sought clarification from the Chief Minister of his statement which states that these areas “were under dispute,” whereas the Minister of Law states otherwise. The member of the APHLC sought clarification and information on the progress made in the discussion between the two states. In 1976, the numerical strength of the Opposition had risen as members of the APHLC who did not join the ruling INC(Congress) Government sat in the Opposition. However, this increase in strength did not add to the voice of the Opposition with regard to the boundary issue, as this can be seen from the proceedings of the House, where most of the questions and interest on this issue were raised by Independent and HSPDP members. This proved the revelation made by its member on the APHLC’s acceptance of the Autonomous State without discussing its boundaries, to be true, as none of the members of the APHLC who were in Opposition raised any question on this issue. This session saw the Government, clarifying its stand with regard to resolution of this pending issue by initiating a dialogue with Assam. This stand taken by the Government did not seem to satisfy the

Opposition especially members of constituencies contiguous to these disputed areas, as they sought information on the progress and development made on these talks.²²

In the 1977 session, this issue no longer occupy centre stage as in previous session. It generated low key discussion when the debate on the Governor's Address was made. The reason being the Opposition were awaiting the results of the dialogue for an amicable solution of the problem between the two States by both the Government concerned.

With regards to the boundary issue and problems, it was continuous during the first term of the Legislative Assembly 1972-1978. This issue generated intense debate and criticisms from members of the Opposition. The role of the Opposition during these intervening years was very vocal especially those members whose constituencies were affected by these problems. Members of the Opposition were always ready to scrutinize the policy of the Government through the Governor's Address and raised questions regarding the moves of the Government with regard to border dispute and problems which arise from this. The Opposition viewed this as a sensitive issue and hardly any session pass without this issue being taken up. So though the Opposition were numerically weak and unable to defeat the decision of the Government, yet were always vocal and vociferously initiated discussion on this subject pressing the Government to clarify its decisions and steps taken to solve this problem. But most of the members who raised this issue and problems associated with it were those members whose constituencies adjoins these areas, and are, therefore, affected by the situations and incidents which took place in these areas. Since Meghalaya was a new State this issue was bound to have an important impact on the representatives of the State as these areas were viewed as being significant areas of

²² Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Debates 1976.

the erstwhile United Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills Districts. The Opposition, therefore, continually raised the border dispute and pressed the Government to amicably solve the problems related to boundary. Though the Opposition were vociferous in their criticisms of what they termed the 'lackadaisical attitude' of the Government towards a permanent solution to the boundary issue, these criticisms remained mere criticisms without resulting in any concrete solution and any move by the Opposition to bring about time bound decision by the Government such as resolution was defeated as they lacked numerical strength especially in the initial years of the Assembly of 1972-1978. Members of the Opposition whose constituency stands affected by any developments or problems in the disputed areas were unable to achieve their aim which is retransferring of Block I and II to Meghalaya, as they were the lone/sole voice of Opposition in the sea of a House dominated by members of the ruling party. Through questions seeking clarification of statements made in the Governor's Address; information on the progress and development of the Government's initiatives towards solving this problem and through strong criticisms of any wrong decision or policy of the Government, the Opposition managed to make this issue alive and occupy centre stage in the House in the intervening years of the First Assembly 1972-1978 with the intention of pressing the Government to ensure clear cut boundaries or demarcation with the neighbouring State of Assam so as to prevent further encroachment and harassment by people and police of Assam into areas of Meghalaya. From this study, it showed that there was lack of a unified and coordinated stand of the Opposition against the Government, as only the Independent member was very vocal with regard to this issue and there was no unified Opposition from the other party during the First Assembly, except in certain cases. From this, it can be seen that boundary problem between Meghalaya and Assam was confined

mostly to the Block I and II areas and this problem hardly arise with regard to the Garo Hills District, as only once was any discussion on this District made in the House during the First Assembly. The demand of the Opposition on this issue which are demarcation of boundaries; to stop encroachment from the other side (Assam); to get back those areas which had been tagged to Assam (Block I and II) and to ensure that harassment of people in the border areas is stopped remained unresolved even towards the end of the First Assembly. These issues remained pending with the Opposition hoping a solution would be reached in the next Assembly.

Second Legislative Assembly 1978-1983

The Second Assembly was constituted in 1978 after the General Elections. In this session 1978-1983, frequent political changes took place in the State, and coalition Governments emerged in Meghalaya. The year 1978-79 witnessed frequent changes of Government when the regional political parties were in the ruling party and the Congress(I) or INC was the main Opposition. But when the Congress(I) formed the Government, it ushered in political stability which was intact till the 1983 General Elections. In the initial years when the Congress(I) was the opposition party, the Opposition was strong, but when the regional parties were in the opposition, the strength of the Opposition dwindled, engineered by defections of members of the Opposition to the ruling party.

The boundary issue was an issue which was unresolved during the first Assembly and was brought into the Second Assembly in 1978 being referred in the Governor's Address during the stint of the regional parties in power led by the APHLC in 1978. The Opposition consisted of the Congress(I), the HSPDP and some Independents called the United Meghalaya Parliamentary Democratic Front

(UMPDF). The members of the Opposition, while debating on the Governor's Address raised several questions on the defects and loopholes in the Address. The member of the UMPDF, Albinstone Sangma, Congress(I), raised question on the absence of any reference towards the boundary issue between Garo Hills District and Assam, that is, Goalpara District. Being a representative from this area, he stated that this area faces the same situation and problem as Block I and II and deserved the same level of attention. Another member from the Garo Hills drew the attention of the House to the encroachment problem where he stated that the Assam police had uprooted the pillars erected in these areas and encroached further into Meghalaya. He urged the Government to take immediate necessary action as this was a serious problem that could have a drastic effect on the State. Another member (Snomick Kalwing, HSPDP) questioned as to the reason for the absence of any mention of the dispute between Khasi Hills District and Dispur District where the Assam Government had encroached into large areas of Meghalaya. So during the discussion on this debate, members of the Opposition had raised questions on all the areas that share the boundary dispute with Assam. The Block I and II dispute again received special attention when the HSPDP members (H. Hadem) moved a motion to discuss the prevailing situation in the border areas of Jaintia Hills and Mikir Hills (now Karbi Anglong). The member insisted on a permanent solution to what he termed had been a long pending issue since the time of the composite State of Assam. Giving details on how these areas were tagged to Assam, he stated that despite the agreement between the Governments of the two States to maintain status quo, encroachment was still going on from the Assam side. This motion received the attention and support of the Opposition. The Government in reply refuted this allegation. A heated discussion ensued but the motion was defeated. The Opposition further drew the attention of the

House to a move made by the Minister for Revenue (M.N. Majaw) in removing the boundary pillars from the disputed areas. This move generated strong criticisms from the Opposition, as they felt that this move could jeopardise the settlement of the issue. Again, the Opposition questioned the Government's lack of information on the boundary issue between Garo Hills District and Goalpara District of Assam. Another development regarding this situation in Garo Hills was questions raised on what the Government's intention was with regard to those areas where the boundary pillars had been washed off, as it was felt that this would create problems when demarcation of boundaries is taken up. In the 1978 session this issue received considerable attention and the Government was made to reply to several questions with regard to developments on this issue. The Opposition generated strong criticisms on the Government's handling of this problem as they felt that there was no permanent solution in sight. Garo Hills District received focus as members raised question on the lack of serious attention and neglect by the Government towards the same problem faced by this District. Regarding the Block I and II areas also came into focus with a motion being moved by the Opposition. Though this motion was defeated but it showed the level of seriousness that this issue generated in the Opposition camp.²³

In the session of 1979, the boundary issue was raised in the first sitting as a result of developments of harassment which took place on January at Langpih. These developments generated strong criticisms from the Opposition towards what it termed on the part of the Government, in protecting the inhabitants of this area and lack of reaction to the Assam Government for these incidents. The UMPDF member (H. Hadem, HSPDP) moved an adjournment motion to discuss the prevailing situation.

²³ Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Debates 1978.

Heated discussion and exchanges between the Opposition and the ruling party took place whereby the Opposition strongly condemned the action of the Assam police in harassing the people of Langpih. Reacting to the Government's reply the Opposition demanded to know what steps the Government was going to take 'to prevent such atrocities and high handedness of the Assam police, also making suggestions for the creation of police outposts in these areas to prevent any more untoward incidents. One member of the Opposition (G. Myllemngap) differed on this suggestion as he maintained that creation of border outposts all along the Meghalaya-Assam border was not feasible, but should be done only in those vulnerable and sensitive areas. The members of the Opposition were unanimous in their motion and pressurised the Government to consider the matter seriously and initiate steps to solve this problem at the earliest. Following the incidents of harassment by the Assam police, the Opposition took up this issue at the earliest, criticising the inaction of the Government to the happenings. They raised demands for the Government to take steps to solve this problem.²⁴

In the 1980-1981 sessions there was respite for the Government from the Opposition's attack on the boundary issue since there were no untoward incidents in these areas.

In 1982, a discussion ensued after the Governor's Address. Initially, the Governor's Address was welcomed by the members of the House. One member (Snownik Kalwing, HSPDP) made reference to the Government's initiative through the Chief Minister to initiate peaceful settlement of boundary dispute with Assam and in successfully prevailing upon Assam not to prevent conduct of elections in an area

²⁴ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1979.

in West Khasi Hills District. He then drew the attention of the Government to an incident of harassment of the inhabitants of the border areas at the hands of the Assam police and asked the Government to take necessary steps to prevent such incidents in future and to involve C.E.Ms of all District Councils, officials of local administration and local chiefs to come together and to chalk out a plan of action to solve this ongoing problem. He further demanded that the Government should bring this matter to the attention of the Central Government. Other Opposition members who took part in this discussion questioned the Government's inability to resolve this long pending issue. Criticising the Government's passive attitude they stated that this unresolved issue would lead to drastic consequences for the State in the future. Urging the Government to constitute a body or wing consisting of members from all parties and solve the matter at the earliest. This session also witnessed the focus being given to the Garo Hills District when the PDIC member (M.N. Majaw) drew the attention of the House towards the letter of the Governor of Assam with regard to the question of readjustment of boundary between Garo Hills and Goalpara Districts of Assam. He strongly criticised the Government especially the Chief Minister (Capt. Sangma) for his inability to resolve the issue, in the process causing hardships to people in these areas, as this was a problem generated during the Hill State Movement when Capt. Sangma was the President, and had stated in the Haflong Conference that the contiguous areas would be included in the new State of Meghalaya. This motion was taken up by other members of the Opposition from Garo Hills who supported it and agreed with the member's statement regarding the Chief Minister. The members further stated that in 1973, Capt. Sangma then Chief Minister had assured the House that this issue would be resolved at the earliest. Still no solution was in sight. This was vehemently refuted by the Chief Minister stating that the issue of contiguous areas

cannot be linked with the merger issue. This ensued in heated exchange between members of the Opposition and the ruling party. The PDIC member (M.N. Majaw) persisted in his arguments. The Opposition also alleged that the Government of Meghalaya was weak as it was prevailed upon to accept the 1876 Notification which favours claims of Assam whereas the 1826 Notification favouring the claims of Meghalaya was disregarded. Another related issue being discussed was the p[roblem of incursion by Assam 10 miles into Meghalaya. The APHLC member (S.D.D. Nichols Roy) was not satisfied with the statement of the Finance Minister to his reply, and further sought the Government to furnish correct and exact information on the steps taken to stop incursion by Assam into Meghalaya. The Opposition also raised questions on whether a Commission had been instituted for enquiring in an incident in 1974 in Garo Hills involving an incident of firing on silent protestors resulting in death and casualties. This matter was even raised in Parliament and the Central Government had assured the people of Meghalaya to institute an enquiry into this unfortunate incident.²⁵

In the Second Assembly 1978-1983, the boundary issue was taken up during 1978, 1979 and 1982 evoking heated exchanges in the House. The issues mostly taken up in this term was the problem of encroachment which members of the Opposition viewed with apprehension as this would have an adverse impact on the future of the State. The border problem in Garo Hills District received considerable attention with members from Khasi Hills taking a broad view of problems in the State when this issue was brought before the House.

²⁵ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1982.

Third Legislative Assembly 1983-1988

The Third Legislative Assembly was instituted after the 1983 General Elections. The Congress (former INC) emerged as the single largest party, but declined to form the Government leaving the field for the regional parties to come together and formed a coalition Government. This remained in power for a month before being toppled by the Congress. In the initial period the Congress and some Independents formed the Opposition, later the Opposition comprised of members of the three main regional parties. This Opposition was not a unified Opposition but a fragmented Opposition with all parties retaining their identity. It was, therefore, a group of Opposition parties with the exception in the later part of the Assembly when the HPU was the main Opposition party.

The Third Legislative Assembly 1983 witnessed heated exchanges and debate between the ruling and the Opposition. Discussions and questions were raised by the Opposition on the decision of the Government to institute a Joint Survey team between Meghalaya and Assam to conduct survey on the inter-state boundary. This raised serious doubts with the Opposition as they deemed this would create disastrous consequences on Meghalaya. The Opposition questioned the Government's move at this juncture as it had sought the opinion of jurists of the country on this issue. Further members of the Opposition, criticised the Government's inability to reply to the questions asked, instead seeking for more time. But even after the Government's reply that survey would be conducted only on those areas where there was conflicting claims by both parties, the Opposition remained unsatisfied. Terming this a very important and serious issue, the Opposition sought further clarification and information on development of this issue. What further aggravated and raised doubts on the minds of the Opposition with regard to the Joint Survey was the action of

encroachment of Assam into areas of Meghalaya which contradicts and violates the agreement reached between the two Chief Ministers (Meghalaya and Assam) to maintain status quo which Meghalaya had abide by. The Opposition sought to make this matter known to both sides before any survey is conducted and not to make any move without clarifying this stand. One member of the Opposition made a proposal for a sitting of at least 2 to 3 hours to further and openly discuss this issue so as to arrive at conclusion on whether to go ahead to institute this team or not. The Government was not in favour of this sitting. However, the Speaker/Chairman of the House after careful consideration ruled in favour of the Opposition and further insisted on a camera discussion on this. In this instant the Opposition secured a victory and were able to compel the Government and members of the ruling party to comply to their demands and an intense discussion on this ensued thereafter.²⁶

In the 1984 session, the same developments, that is, the refusal of the Opposition to endorse the Government's move to institute a Joint Survey Committee took place. A member of the Opposition (H.E. Poshna, APHLC) strongly criticised the 'lackadaisical attitude' of the Government with regard to this issue. They reiterated again that instituting a Joint Survey team for demarcation was not feasible as long as the issue of encroachment remains. The Opposition were also strongly against the members of the proposed Committee which would consist of officers who they felt, had no thorough knowledge of the areas of Meghalaya which only the local people knew and so Meghalaya cannot depend on these officers whom one member of the Opposition (H.E. Poshna) termed "here today, elsewhere tomorrow", and, therefore, advised and urged the Government not to sell out the interest of the State.

²⁶ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1983.

Pressurizing the Government to immediately take steps to stop further encroachment by Assam, the Opposition urged that this matter be immediately taken up with the Government of Assam. They urged the Government to ensure that it has the full knowledge constitutionally as to where Meghalaya stand with regard to several areas under the erstwhile *Syiemship* and also the matter of re-transfer of Block I and II. Heated exchanges again erupted when the Government informed the House that the Committee had been instituted involving traditional chiefs also to authenticate areas of Meghalaya. This was strongly criticised by the Opposition who demanded a secret session of the House to be convened owing to the sensitive nature of the matter. In this session, the boundary issue occupy centre stage in the House. Another development on this, was brought up by P.R. Kyndiah on the Garo Hills District. He highlighted the aspirations of the people of the contiguous areas of Kamrup Districts (Assam) and Garo Hills District (Meghalaya). The same member then sought information on the salient features of the report of the finding of the officials of the Joint Survey Committee. Replying on this the Government assured the House that the report was under consideration and would be made available to all members before any decision is made and leaders of the Opposition would be taken into confidence. Still not satisfied, he again sought more clarification on this but the Government refused to divulge more information citing confidentiality of the subject. Changing tactics the Opposition then sought knowledge on whether according to the findings of the officials, the areas of differences had been identified by Assam. The Government gave the same reply. The Opposition did not let the matter drop and sought to know the time limit set to study the report. The initiator of the zero discussion (P.R. Kyndiah, APHLC) stated that the Opposition understood the delicate and sensitive nature of the matter and realise that confidentiality was necessary, but felt that the

Government was withholding information from the House with this attitude. He further drew the attention of the House to the reply of the Minister for Revenue that a meeting of the *Lyngdohs* and *Sirdars* had been convened and termed that certain information was made available to them but not to the House. He, therefore, made suggestion for a secret meeting to discuss this matter. In this session, the boundary issue completely dominated proceedings of the House and on several occasions the Opposition never allowed the Government to shirk from replying to questions put up by the Opposition. Though numerically weak, the Opposition was able to make its wishes prevailed when they managed to secure the secret meeting they demanded to, discuss this issue.²⁷

During the Debate on the Governor's Address in the 1985 session, members of the Opposition raised question on the problem of encroachment which was occurring on a continual basis. The members criticised the Governor's Address terming there was nothing new on the subject but it was just rephrased and reparagraphed, indicating that the Government's lackadaisical attitude, in comparison to the aggressive attitude of Assam which encourages encroachment in these areas. The most severe criticism levelled against the Government was made by HSPDP member (B. Pakem) who called the present ministry, "a compromise ministry" because of its attitude towards the boundary problem. Simultaneously, the member lauded the efforts of the Government for its single achievement on this subject so far as and that is where the Chief Ministers of both States had agreed that the boundary dispute will be settled on the basis of the constitutional boundary, all along demanded by the Opposition. Another achievement relates to Block I and II where for the first time the

²⁷ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1984.

issue was reopened after a long hiatus, and Assam had agreed to discuss it. Another sitting of the House that generated intense discussion was when the HSPDP member (H. Hadem) moved a cut motion on undue delay in the settlement of this boundary problem. Members of the Opposition strongly criticised the Government for making this issue to remain pending for 10 to 12 years without finding any lasting solution. Stating that this undue delay had led to encroachment problem which had taken gigantic proportions and in these situations the people in these areas had to face undue sufferings and hardships. The Opposition further stated that in the case of amicable solution not feasible, the Government ought to request the Central Government to intervene and take necessary action to finalise the matter once and for all at the earliest. The Chief Minister replying stated his Government was satisfied with the discussion but it should not be prolonged. He, therefore, requested the mover to withdraw his motion since progress had been made. The mover refused to comply stating it was the only way to express his grievances with regard to the Government's handling of the situation especially in the Mikir Hills (now Karbi Anglong). Another development which raises this issue to the forefront was when the Government proposed to constitute the Chandrachud Committee to study the boundary problems between the States. Members of the Opposition raised several questions against the Government's decision, stating that several questions would arise when this Committee was constituted. The leader of the HSPDP (H.S. Lyngdoh) moved a cut motion to discuss this issue. This motion received the support of the entire Opposition in questioning the legal bindingness of the Committee. Many of the members of the Opposition in supporting the cut motion, criticised the appointment of the Chandrachud Committee, since it does not possess adequate knowledge of the situation and this will further complicate matters. They, therefore, urged the

Government to stop the work of the Committee in this regard which was envisaged would culminate in the solution of this problem. The Opposition countermanded this, instead urging the Government to adopt a cautious approach as constituting this Committee may hamper the interest of the State. The Opposition were not able to stop the functioning of this Committee, but had ensured that this action of the Government did not escape scrutiny from members of the House.²⁸

In the session of 1986, the Opposition introduced two cut motions on the issue, but because of similarity they were clubbed together. This issue was raised because the Government asked for supplementary grants to continue the work of the Committee as the allotted fund was insufficient. The Government also sought for extension of the time limit for the work of the Committee to be completed. The demand for supplementary grant and extension of time was not favoured by members of the Opposition and this generated intense criticisms. This armed the Opposition with a strong basis for opposing the Committee and pointing the defects and loopholes of the Committee. Questions against the Committee's use of the term "constitutional interpretation of the erstwhile Khasi State" were raised as reference to the people of Garo origin who reside in Kamrup and Goalpara districts of Assam found no mention in this statement. Members of the Opposition were against granting of extension of time as it was felt this would lead to further encroachment of areas in Meghalaya and harassment of the inhabitants of these areas. This motion was unanimously supported by the Opposition with one member (H. Hadem, HSPDP) urging the House to ensure that the Committee should give an interim report by this time otherwise the Committee must be winded up. He further stated that the demand for supplementary grants was a delaying tactic of the Government that consumes both

²⁸ Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Debates 1985.

money and time thereby allowing the Assam Government to further encroach into Meghalaya. This statement was echoed by others who deemed that the Committee was not enhancing its performance. This allegation was strongly refuted by the ruling party as the reasons given by the Opposition were not convincing, instead urging that the demand be granted to expedite the work at the earliest. The ruling party further in defence of the Committee highlighted the performance of the Committee amid the difficulties it faces. In its defence the Government alleged that the Opposition themselves were not in favour of finding a solution to this problem as they continually hamper the policy of the Government by their opposition and criticisms. In countering this allegation, the Opposition stated the neglect of the Government in taking them into confidence prior to the appointment of the Chandrachud Committee. In defiance of this the Opposition staged a walk out to oppose the policy of the Government. In this session the Opposition made use of several measures to indicate their displeasure of the policy of the Government but their moves were not able to prevail upon the Government to withdraw their policy(s).²⁹

During the last session of the Third Assembly in 1987, before the Fourth General Elections to the State in 1988, the boundary issue was taken up from the beginning of the session when the Governor address the House. When the debate on the Governor's Address was taken up, members raised questions on the Government's decision to abide by the report of the Committee, which was not reciprocated by the Government of Assam. Encroachment and harassment was still continuing in the disputed areas. Members of the Opposition drew the attention of the House to a section in the news stating the displeasure of the Government of Assam to removal of

²⁹ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1986.

boundary pillars by P.H.E. workers in the disputed areas, which they supported. Other members belonging to the ruling party decried this move, stating it will create more problems. This ensued in heated exchanges between the two sides.³⁰

In the Third Assembly members of the Oppositions were vocal and strongly criticised the Government's action in the appointment of the Joint Survey Team and the Chandrachud Committee. These two policies united the Opposition and they were unanimous in their criticisms and supported any motions moved by members from their benches. As a result of this unified action, the Government was forced to give statements informing the House of the actions taken, and also at times due to the persistent attitude of the Opposition, the minister concerned or even the Chief Minister had to give assurances to the House that the matter would be looked into and later on to inform the House of the action it had taken with regard to this matter.

Most of the debates and discussions emanated from the Governor's Address wherein the Opposition often seeks to find faults with or pick holes in the Address, where Government issued statements claiming or stressing on amicable solution of boundary dispute with Assam which the Assam Government frequently contradicts with its actions. The use of the term "amicable solution" was often at the receiving end of strong criticisms from the Opposition. They stated that the Government was simply adopting a passive attitude unlike the aggressive policy of the Assam Government who was encroaching into areas of Meghalaya. The sincerity of the Government for final solution was always doubted by the opposite benches because of the policy it adopted.

³⁰ Debates on the Governor's Address 1987; Meghalaya Assembly Debates 1987.

Question Hour

The Opposition used the Question Hour to seek information on the development and progress made in the process to finding solution to the boundary issue. Questions were asked for the purpose of ventilation of public grievances. The ventilation of such issues on the floor of the House revealed that the Opposition was alert and active and has the ability to have daily contact with the public at large. During the period under study 1972-1988, a number of questions were raised by the Opposition on this issue, thereby showing the seriousness with which the Opposition regarded the boundary problems of the State. The Government was compelled through intense questioning, to give assurances or promises to consider the matter and later on it had to inform the House of the action it had taken with regard to the matter concerned. During 1972-1978 session questions asked on this issue include 10 both starred and unstarred questions showing the seriousness this issue was viewed by the members of the House, as it was also the First Assembly of the new State. In the second session 1978-1983 only 4 questions were raised on this issue as it was taken up for discussion only in 1978; 1979 and 1982. In the Third Assembly session from 1983-1988, the Opposition raised a number of questions on boundary issue as it was actively taken up by the Opposition in this session. In this session the number of questions raised by the Opposition on boundary issue was 6 in number. During the three consecutive Assemblies (under study) there were 20 questions related to the boundary issue. Table-1 shows the number of questions raised by different members of the Opposition and Independent members in the three sessions of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly.

Table-4.1: Showing the number of questions raised in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly

Sessions	Number of Questions asked
First Assembly 1972-1978	10
Second Assembly 1978-1983	4
Third Assembly 1983-1988	6
Total	20

Through questions the Opposition made the Government conscious that it was functioning under a close public scrutiny and that it could not take the House for granted even though it may be in majority. On many occasions, the Government had failed to give adequate information asked by the Opposition and give assurances to do so later. There had also been instances when the Government tried to conceal the information sought by the Opposition. Despite this, the Opposition tried to force an unwilling minister to reveal the truth by putting supplementary questions. The Question Hour had thus been adequately utilised by members of the Legislative Assembly from 1972-1988 on matters related to boundary problems with Assam. However, though the questions asked caused a stir in Government circles, yet it can be said that all questions were asked from the political point of view and from vested interests and sometimes even to get a statement of general policy from the minister concerned.

Zero Hour

Zero Hour is taken up immediately after the question hour and before the list of business of the day is entered upon. The members, therefore, got an opportunity of raising various matters concerning their constituencies at the earliest. While raising such a point in the House, it is not permissible for a member to deviate from or add to

what he has stated in his written notice.³¹ During the three consecutive Legislative Assemblies, on the boundary problem the matter came up for Zero Hour Discussion once in 1984 in the Third Assembly Session. The Zero Hour discussion was moved by the APHLC member (P.R. Kyndiah) to draw the attention of the Government to the demand of the Garos living in the areas contiguous to Goalpara and Kamrup Districts of Assam for inclusion of their areas into Meghalaya. The Government raised points for inadmissibility of this discussion and through sheer majority its will prevailed and no discussion followed on this matter

Privilege Motion

Privileges are the special rights enjoyed by the House, its members and Committees as referred to in Article 194 of the Constitution.

Breach of privilege means the disregard of any of the rights, privileges and immunities either of members of the legislature, individuals or of the House in its collective capacity. In practice, the term breach of privilege is also applied to contempt. Contempt is generally defined as an act of commission which restrict or impede the legislature in the performance of its functions or which obstruct or impede any member or officer of the House in the discharge of his duty. In order to constitute a breach of privilege, a matter must related to the character of conduct of a member in his capacity as a member of the House and must be based on matters arising in the actual transaction of business connected with the House. A motion on a matter of privilege arising during the sitting of the House is entitled immediate precedence over

³¹ *Meghalaya Legislative Handbook*, p.40.

all other business. The Speaker may also refer any question of privilege to the Committee of privileges for examination, investigation and report.

In the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, three privilege motions were raised during the period chosen for study. All three privilege motions were raised in 1973. The other two privilege motions deals with other matter not related to the boundary issue. One privilege motion concerning the boundary issue was raised by the member of the HSPDP (F.K. Mawlot) against the Minister for Agriculture (E. Bareh) for gross breach of privilege and contempt of the House for giving wrong information thus misleading the House on the issue of boundary. This motion, however, did not receive the support of the entire Opposition and was defeated.

Adjournment Motion

The moving of an adjournment motion is a powerful weapon in the hands of the Opposition. The purpose of an adjournment motion is to draw the attention of the House to a definite matter of urgent public importance and to seek discussion on the subject forthwith by adjourning the business before the House. This gives an opportunity to a member to raise an issue to discuss it on the floor of the House.

During the period 1972-1988, five notices of adjournment motions were moved in the Assembly. Of these, two notices were admitted and discussion took place while three notices were disallowed. Of the five notices on adjournment motions only two notices were concerned with the boundary problem.

Regarding the boundary problem, the Opposition moved two adjournment motions. The adjournment motion in 1979 was moved by the UMPDF member (H. Hadem) to discuss the atrocities committed by the Assam police in Rambrai. This motion was strongly opposed by the Government and it was disallowed. The will of

the Government prevailed over the Opposition as no discussion took place regarding the incident. Another motion was moved in 1982 by the PDIC member (M.N. Majaw) on the problem of encroachment by Assam into Meghalaya. This motion was admitted and discussion by members of the House on this issue followed. The Opposition sought to initiate a discussion on this issue with success and an intense debate ensued displaying the importance with which the Opposition treated this matter.

The Opposition fully utilised the opportunities of moving adjournment motions on this issue. But of the two motions submitted, only one was admitted by the Speaker in the Second Assembly (1978-1983). The attitude of the Government was also not favourable towards the motions raised by the Opposition. However, most of the motions were tabled with a view to redressing the public grievances and calling the Government to public accountability. They served well enough to draw the attention of the House and the public to the existing grievances and highlighted the performance of the Government or non-performance.

Call Attention Notices

A member wishing to call the attention of the minister to any matter of urgent public importance on a day, may give a notice in writing to the Secretary at least two clear days in advance. A copy of notice should be given to the minister concerned also. The purpose of endorsing the copy of the notice to the minister is to give him advance intimation and also to enable him to appraise the Speaker, if necessary, of the facts of the matter placed therein, in order to assist him in deciding the admissibility of the notice.

Rule 54 of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly states that:

- a) a member may, with the previous permission of the Speaker, call the attention of a minister to any matter of urgent public importance and of recent occurrence and the minister may make a brief statement or ask for time to make a statement at a later hour or date;
- b) there shall be no debate on such statement at the time it is made;
- c) not more than one such matter shall be raised at the same sitting;
- d) in the event of more than one matter being presented for the same day priority shall be given to the matter which is in the opinion of the Speaker, more urgent and important;
- e) the proposed matter shall be raised after the question and before the lists of business is entered upon and not other time during the sitting of the House;

On the boundary issue, during the 1972-1978 sessions there were 7(seven) Calling Attention Notices raised by the Opposition. Of these 1(one) was submitted in the 1973 session; 1(one) in the 1974 session; 3(three) in the 1975 session and 2(two) in 1976 session.

Table-4.2(i) shows the name of the member(s) and number of Calling Attention Notices raised by the Opposition in the First Legislative Assembly. There was no multi member notices. All these notices appear in the name of a single individual member.

Table-4.2(i): List of Calling Attention Notices raised by Opposition Members in the First Assembly, 1972-1978.

Sl.No.	Name of the Member	Name of the Elected Constituency	Name of the Party	No. of Single Member Calling Attention Notices
1	D.D. Lapang	Nongpoh	Independent	3
2	S.D. Khongwir	Mawlai	HSPDP	1
3	H.E. Poshna	Nongtalang	Independent	1
4	H. Hadem	Mynso-Raliang	Independent	1
5	G. Myllemngap	Sohryngkham	Independent	1

Single Member Notices Calling Attention

1. The Independent member (D.D. Lapang) tabled three Calling Attention Notices: one in 1973; one in 1974 and one in 1975 — all the three notices seek to draw the attention of the Government towards the boundary disputes and problems.
2. The HSPDP member (S.D. Khongwir) raised one Calling Attention Notice. It was tabled in 1975 seeking to discuss the boundary dispute between Meghalaya and Assam.
3. The Independent member (H.E Poshna) raised one Calling Attention Notice in 1975 drawing the attention of an incident in the Jaintia-Mikir border.
4. One Notice was tabled by Independent member (H. Hadem) again on boundary issue in the 1976 session.
5. The Independent member (G. Myllemngap) drew the attention of the House to the issue of boundary problem during the 1976 session of the Assembly.

Nearly all the Calling Attention Notices were tabled by the Independent members except for two members who belonged to the HSPDP.

Table-4.2(ii): List of Calling Attention Notices raised by Opposition Members in the First Assembly, 1978-1983.

Sl.No.	Name of the Member	Name of the Elected Constituency	Name of the Party	No. of Single Member Calling Attention Notices
1	G. Myllemngap	Sohryngkham	APHLC	1

During the Second Assembly 1978-1983, there were two Calling Attention Notices raised by the Opposition but only one notice concerned the boundary issue. The notices were submitted in 1978 and the other in 1979.

1. The APHLC member (G. Myllemngap) raised one notice to discuss the problem of encroachment in the border areas.

During the Third Assembly 1983-1988 only 2(two) Calling Attention Notices were submitted both in 1987.

Table-4.2(iii): List of Calling Attention Notices raised by Opposition Members in the Third Assembly, 1983-1988.

Sl.No.	Name of the Member	Name of the Elected Constituency	Name of the Party	No. of Single Member Calling Attention Notices
1	W. Syiemiong	Nongspung	HSPDP	1
2	H.S. Lyngdoh	Pariong	HSPDP	2

Table-4.2(iii) shows the number of Calling Attention Notices raised by the HSPDP in the Third Assembly. All the 3(three) notices were raised in the last session 1987 of the Third Assembly.

1. W. Syiemiong tabled his notice in 1987 session seeking to discuss the recent incidents in the contentious Block I and II of Mikir Hills in Assam.
2. H.S. Lyngdoh raised two notices: one was on the recovery of boundary pillars and the other also on the boundary issue.

Though the Opposition was alert about the day-to-day happenings in the country, the Government had sometimes failed to make statements on the appointed day, since it failed to collect adequate information. The Opposition members compelled the Government to promise an enquiry on a particular incident. In short, the Opposition never misses one opportunity in securing day-to-day information from the Government.

Motions on Policy and General Interest

The discussion on a matter of general public interest and policy or situation or statement or any other matter also provides ample opportunities to the Opposition to enlighten itself. The notice of the motion is required to be given in writing to the Secretary.

The members of the Opposition sponsored motions to discuss matters of general public interest. During the First Assembly 1972-1978, the Opposition moved motions in successive sessions seeking to discuss the boundary problems arising in the State's boundary with Assam. In 1973, the motion to discuss the boundary dispute between Meghalaya and Assam was raised by HSPDP member (R. Lyngdoh). The discussion was closed following the adjournment of the House. Another motion in 1974 session was moved by another HSPDP member (F.K. Mawlot). In 1975, the Independent member (H. Hadem) moved a motion to discuss the boundary issue on retransfer of areas in Block I and II of Mikir Hills District of Assam to Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya. The other motion raised by HSPDP member (S.D. Khongwir) sought clarification from the Government on its stand towards the encroachment problem in the border (inter-state) areas. The motion was closed after the Government clarified its position. The last motion during the First Assembly was moved by the

Independent member (H. Hadem) in 1977 to discuss the prevailing situation in the disputed areas between Jaintia Hills and Mikir Hills of Meghalaya and Assam, respectively. The discussion was closed following clarification from the minister concerned.

In the Second Assembly 1978-1983, two motions were moved regarding the boundary problem. In 1979, the motion was moved by HSPDP member (S.D. Khongwir) and another in 1982 by PDIC member (M.N. Majaw). Both these motions relate to the incidents of encroachment which occurred in the inter-state boundary between Meghalaya and Assam. In both these discussions, the Chief Ministers concerned had to give clarification and the discussion was closed.

During the Third Assembly 1983-1988, two motions were moved seeking discussion on the problem of boundary between Meghalaya and Assam. The motion moved by APHLC members, B.B. Lyngdoh and J.S. Khonglah, in 1984 sought to discuss the boundary problems especially the function of the Joint Survey Committee. In 1985 another motion on the same issue was moved by the HSPDP member (H.S. Lyngdoh).

These motions were intensely debated in the House, forcing the Government to clarify the points raised by the Opposition to satisfy their demands. Therefore, during the discussion on matters of general public interest, particularly with regard to the boundary problems and issues, the Opposition especially the HSPDP showed that they were active and alert towards any developments on these vital issues of the State. The Government was, therefore, compelled to take steps to meet some of the demands and to pacify the Opposition in order to ensure smooth conduct of business in the House.

Resolutions

A resolution may be in the form of a declaration of opinion, or a recommendation may be in the form so as to record either approval or disapproval by the House of an Act or policy of the Government or to convey a message, command, urge or request an action or call attention to a matter or situation for consideration by the Government in such other form as the Speaker may consider appropriate.

Regarding the issue of boundary problems only one resolution was moved by the Opposition in the period 1972-1988. This resolution was moved by the PDIC member (M.N. Majaw) in 1975 during the First Assembly. This resolution witnessed intense debate in the House but this resolution was never adopted. During the debate almost the entire Opposition were united to ensure that the resolution was adopted. Their efforts proved futile and the Government's will or resolution always prevailed.

No Confidence Motion

The No Confidence Motion is the extreme form of the Opposition attack on the Government policy. Rule 31 of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly states that a motion may be made to express want of confidence in the Council of ministers to disapprove the policy of the Council of Ministers in a particular respect.

During 1972-1988 6(six) No Confidence Motions were tabled by the Opposition but were unsuccessful. Of the 6(six) only 2(two) No Confidence Motions against the Government were moved by the Opposition on the boundary problems.

1. The No confidence Motion tabled in 1975 session against the APHLC Government by the PDIC member (M.N. Majaw) was the second No Confidence Motion against this Government after the creation of the new State. One of the

major grounds on which this motion was tabled was the Government's lack of seriousness in solving the boundary problem.

2. The second No Confidence Motion on the boundary issue was the last motion of the period 1972-1988. This motion was tabled by four members of the HPU, a newly formed party resulting from the amalgamation of the APHLC and PDIC. The four HPU members (K. Singh, W. Syiemfong, B.M. Lanong and B.B. Lyngdoh) moved a No Confidence Motion in 1987 against the Congress Government led by Capt. W.A. Sangma. The main ground for this motion being tabled was the policy of the Government with regard to the settlement of the boundary with Assam. Another reason was the constitution of the Chandrachud Committee to study and investigate the boundary problems.

Both the motions were lost as the Government had absolute majority in the House. The loss of these two motions, however, revealed the weakness of the Opposition in making a united voice and the ensuing debate brought the House and the State face to face with the crude reality that virtually one party rule existed and exposed the weakness and fragmented nature of the Opposition. But at the same time, it can be said that though it was a known fact that the No Confidence Motion would be defeated by force of majority, the Opposition never missed the opportunity to embarrass the Treasury benches and to alert the public about the misuse of power by the Government. The Opposition succeeded in highlighting the mistakes and what it termed lack of sincerity of the Government towards this issue.

Walkouts

The walkouts from the House or the Legislature is an expression of protest and resentment against the indifferent attitude and decision of the Government. During the

period 1972-1988, only one walkout was staged by the Opposition against the decision or policy of the government with regard to the boundary issue. This walkout occurred in 1986 by the entire Opposition against the move of the Government to refer the boundary issue to the Chandrachud Committee. Though the entire Opposition staged a walkout in protest against this decision of the Government, its efforts was not successful in stopping the constitution of the Chandrachud Committee as this was instituted by the Government to study and investigate the boundary problem between Meghalaya and Assam.

In the Budget session, when the Annual Budget was presented, there were two stages:

- i. General discussion, and
- ii. Voting of demand for grants.

In both the stages, the boundary issue was mentioned and discussed in the House. During the general discussion, the boundary problem was brought up for discussion in two sessions. In the 1978 session of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, the boundary issue was introduced by the APHLC member (S.P. Swer) and the UMPDP member (B. Choudhury) to discuss the prevailing situation in the border areas. The other discussion on this issue was brought up during the 1982 session. This matter was initiated by the HPU member (S.D.D. Nichols Roy) who drew the attention of the Government to what the Opposition viewed as a mild statement with reference to the inter-state boundary of Assam by the Finance Minister. He drew the attention of the House to the incident on encroachment by Assam into Meghalaya especially in the Khanduli area of Meghalaya and urged the Government to take immediate steps to stop this encroachment.

The Opposition amply used the second stage of the Budget session to show its disapproval of the policy of the Government. Cut motions with regard to the boundary problems were tabled only during the Second Legislative Assembly. The first Cut Motion was tabled by UMPDF members (M.N. Deb and D.N. Joshi). The aim of this motion was to initiate discussion on the boundary of East and West Garo in the matter of demarcation of boundaries between East and West Garo Hills District with the adjoining districts of the State of Assam. This motion was later withdrawn by the movers after receiving assurances from the Government to look into the matter.

During the Third Assembly 1983-1988, the Opposition voiced its disapproval of the policy of the Government by tabling seven Cut Motions in the 1985 sessions. Two of the motions were moved by HPU members and HSPDP member (HSPDP). The Cut Motions sought to deny the supplementary demand for grants for the constitution and the maintenance of the Chandrachud Committee. The Cut Motions sought to deny the supplementary demand under No.1 Assam-Meghalaya Boundary Committee and the demand is for Rs.8,87,000/-. The Cut Motion of H.S. Lyngdoh sought to criticise the delay in settling the boundary dispute between Assam and Meghalaya Cut Motion No.1 moved by B.B. Lyngdoh sought to raise the question of Legal Binding and Recommendation of the Committee No.2, raised question on discussions on matters connected with the Assam Meghalaya Boundary Committee. No.3 relates to the same discussions as the above. No.4 sought to ventilate the grievances of the people. No.7 sought to criticise the appointment of the Chandrachud Committee. Some of these motions were later withdrawn after those members who moved these motions were satisfied with the answers from the Government. Those that were put to votes were lost. The Government, therefore, succeeded in ensuing

that its demand for grant for the working of the Chandrachud Committee was passed through though the Opposition offered stiff resistance.

In 1986 session, Cut Motions were moved by the members of the Opposition against the Chandrachud Committee. When the Government submitted the Supplementary Demand No.2 for grant of Rs.5,60,000/- move to the Committee for completion of the work already taken up, two Cut Motions were moved by the HPU member (B. Pakem) and HSPDP member (H.S. Lyngdoh). Due to their identical nature they were clubbed together. The Cut Motion was submitted to initiate discussion and criticise the performance of the Committee which the Opposition felt was being conducted at a slow pace. The Cut Motion to reduce the demand to Rs.100/- initiated by the Opposition was put to vote but the cut motion was lost and the demand was passed. But inspite of their inability to ensure that their motions were passed, the Opposition had utilised these Cut Motions to criticise the policies of the Government and thus ensure that the public are made aware of this issue which is considered of vital importance to the new State.

Table-4.3: List of Cut Motions submitted by the Members of the Opposition 1982-1988.

Sl.No.	Sessions	Name of the Party	No. of Notices submitted	No. of Cut Motions admitted	
1	1972-1978	-	-	-	-
2	1978-1983	UMPDF	2	2	Withdrawn
3	1983-1988	HPU & HSPDP	9	7	Withdrawn Lost

The members of the Opposition made use of several devices at their disposal to secure information on any action taken by the Government; exposing the Government's weakness and what the Opposition termed the 'passivist attitude' on this issue in its relation with the Assam Government. The Opposition also prevailed

on the Government to redress the public grievances in those areas where encroachment occurred by drawing the attention of the Government as well as the general public to these incidents through discussion and debates in the House. In cases where after intense debate the Government failed to give a satisfactory answer to the questions asked, the Opposition made use of supplementary questions and motions to extract assurances from the Government to supply at a later date. There were instances where the Government had failed to supply the necessary information before the House, the Opposition had forced the Government to issue statement and to agree for a discussion on the issue. Through these discussions, the Opposition were also able to force the Government to accept their demands and suggestions in certain cases. Any adverse action of the Government was met with severe criticisms. The Government was also criticised for what the Opposition termed the 'lackadaisical attitude' of the Government with regard to this subject. Those members whose constituencies were particularly affected by any incidents and situations in the contiguous areas were particularly alive to any new developments and usually raised questions and moved motions to ensure discussions on this issue ensued and were always pressurising the Government for early solution of the problem. The Government on the other hand was made aware that it was functioning under close scrutiny and in certain instances, the Government tried to conceal information under the very facile answer given "it is not in the public interest to answer this question". Despite this, the Opposition made use of supplementary questions to elicit the truth. The ventilation of such issues on the floor of the House revealed the active role of the Opposition and its ability to have daily contact with the public. The Opposition at times adopted a united stance to ensure a discussion on the issue is set and took place

at a fixed date. With regard to this issue there were times when the Opposition took a united stance and others they were not unanimous but left to individual members.³²

Section-II

Law and Order Problem Especially in the State Capital, Shillong and Problem of Influx

Public order is within the extensive jurisdiction of the State. The maintenance of law and order is accorded top priority by the Government, since without this, the effective administration of the State cannot take place. Each year, in the Governor's address, this subject finds specific or simply general reference. The instrument by which the State maintains law and order is the police. Police too is a state subject, but there is the Central Reserve Police (CRP) which is also engaged in the maintenance of law and order in the State. These forces are stationed in different parts of the country and is maintained by the Central Government. Subject to the availability, contingents of the force are made available to the State Government for the maintenance of law and order for whatever period they are required.³³

Shillong, the present capital of Meghalaya came into being during the British rule. Prior to the advent of the British, Shillong and for that matter the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills were unexplored. This, however, did not mean that there was no contact with the plains people. As geographically, the link with the people of the plains — Sylhet (and Bengali) in the South and Assam in the West, was a regular feature and trade interests usually brought the border areas into direct contact with the plains. The fertile plains also lured the tribal chiefs into acquiring lands there. And through these mutual interests, the transfusion and exchange of culture with the

³² Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1972-1988.

³³ Rao, V.V. *et al.*, *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India*, p.215.

people of the plains was natural outcome.³⁴ In the beginning of the 19th Century the British sought an entry into these Himalayan foothills. Their reason was political coupled with the desire to exploit these areas for their mineral wealth. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills would be the connecting link between Sylhet and Assam. From 1830 to 1864, the centre of British administration was Cherrapunjee. In 1874, the British discovered Shillong and because of the unfavourable conditions of Cherrapunjee, the seat of British administration was shifted to Shillong and it became the capital of Assam. With the advent of the British into these hills, also saw the entry of a substantial number of people (non tribals) from the plains of India to Shillong. They were the Bengalees who were attached to the British administration centred at Calcutta (Kolkatta). Also the Nepalese who were attached to the British army. The non tribals who came to Shillong took land on lease from the British who had already acquired lands from the tribals, which resulted in the settlement of the non-tribals in the capital city. Till 1900 there was a steady rise in the non-tribal population. Initially, Shillong had by then become a cosmopolitan city inhabited by different communities where there was peaceful co-existence. This close affinity between tribals and non-tribals was generated as each identified with the other against the British designs and domination. There was also as yet no business conflicts as the major businesses was with the British, but wherever the British sowed the seeds of divide and rule. This, however, did not lead into any open clash between tribals and non-tribals as both the communities remained aloof from any nationalist movement.

It was in 1938 during the Assam Ministry headed by Gopinath Bordoloi that the first law and order problem in Shillong took place. The Bordoloi ministry was

³⁴ Gupta, Kollol Sen: *Without Roots*, No.1, Kollol Press Shillong, 1978, p.7.

formed after the breakdown of the Suadullah Ministry. The British helped the creation of bitter conflict amongst the nationalists. A meeting was called by the ex-minister, Rev. Nicols Roy and Gopinath Bordoloi at Mawkhar to condemn the new ministry. This led to clashes between supporters of the two groups, and a fight between members of the Congress mainly non-tribals and members of the group led by Rev. Nichols Roy. The clashes continued until the police restored peace in the area. Thus Shillong had witnessed the first open tribal-non tribal clash.³⁵

With the formation of Meghalaya in 1972, after the Indo-Pak War 1971, the new State was beset with the problem of influx of refugees from across the border.³⁶ This created apprehensions in the minds of the people that they would be completely swarmed by foreign nationals. In addition, the new State offered new and attractive opportunities for people from outside who migrated to Shillong from other States. This put a stress on the fragile atmosphere, later culminating in serious law and order problem in the years 1978-79. The sense of apprehension of being swarmed by whom they consider outsiders manifested in social tensions which gripped the State capital. So from the time of the Provisional Legislative Assembly 1970-71 till date there were occasional flare up of social tensions which led to law and order problems in the State. This necessitated action by the police to contain the situation through promulgation of Section 144 Cr.Pc.³⁷ The State especially the Capital, Shillong, witnessed large scale violence in 1979-1980 as a result of social tension between tribals and non-tribals leading to huge and irreparable loss of lives and property.³⁸

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.9-19.

³⁶ Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Debates 1972.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1970-1971.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1979-1980.

This Section II deals with the situation created by law and order problems in the State capital, Shillong from 1970-1988. The break down of law and order affected the entire functioning of the Government machinery as well as the State. Meghalaya witnessed serious law and order problem situations which had generated heated exchanges in the Legislative Assembly between members of the ruling party and the Opposition. In this Section a study has been made of the law and order problems in the State capital, Shillong which had affected normal procedure of the House. Serious law and order problems took place in 1970-1980 generated by social tensions in the city resulting from antagonism and animosity between two communities (tribal and non-tribal). Besides these major problems, there were minor law and order problems but were resolved immediately and the city returned to normalcy.

After its inception the new State of Meghalaya first experience with this law and order problem arose during the Autonomous State, when this was a subject still with the State of Assam. Both the subjects of public order and police were retained by the Assam Government even after resistance from members of the Provisional Assembly of the Autonomous State to this move. This proved to be one of the reasons for the demand of a full-fledged State which culminated in the formation of Meghalaya on January 1972. An incident which led to law and order problem in the State occurred on 23rd June, 1971 between CRPF personnel and the local people. It was a trivial and insignificant matter which took place during a routine checking later escalating and leading to firing by the police on crowd which resulted in casualties on both sides. This incident was brought before the House on the 24th and 25th June, 1971 by members of the Opposition. The Opposition moved an adjournment motion to initiate discussion on this urgent matter considered of public importance. In the debate the Opposition criticised and decried the Government's inept handling of the

situation, and also criticised the involvement of CRPF personnel terming this as highhandedness of the police. The Opposition pressed the Government to answer the questions raised by members of the Opposition as well as the ruling party. The Chief Minister (Capt. Sangma) made a statement under Rule 55 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly on 25th June, 1971,. He stated that a serious clash took place between the police and some unruly elements in Shillong town on 23rd June, 1971, giving details of the incidents. A member of the ruling party APHLC (P.R. Kyndiah) moved a motion on the basis of Rule 50 for a discussion on the subject. Thereafter intense discussion on this incident followed with members from both sides denouncing the actions of the police personnel, and urging for withdrawal of the CRPF from Shillong. Some of the members also stated that unless the Government of Meghalaya has total control over police and law and order in the whole State, such troubles cannot be avoided. This led to a demand for full-fledged State of Meghalaya which was realized on January 21st, 1972.³⁹

First Legislative Assembly 1972-1978

In the period 1972-1978 of the First Assembly of Meghalaya, the question of law and order problems in the State as well as its capital, Shillong arose only once in 1973. This incident was similar to the 1971 incident as it involved clashes between police personnel and the public. The incident was similar to the 1971 incident as it involved clashes between police personnel and the public. The incident occurred on 23rd February, 1973. It was a skirmish which later escalated when an irate mob gathered in front of the Garikhana (Lumdiengjri) Beat House. The situation was

³⁹ Debates in the Provisional Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya 1971.

contained with the promulgation of Section 144 Cr.Pc. As the incident involved law and order situations, it was viewed with serious concern by members of the Legislative Assembly. The matter was brought up for discussion in the House by the HPDP member (S.D. Khongwir) who called the attention of the Chief Minister under Rule 54 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of the Assembly, to a news item published in the Democratic Review dated 26th February, 1973 on the incident which occurred on 23rd February, 1973. The same member seek further clarification from the Chief Minister. In his reply, the Chief Minister gave a statement based on the report received from the concerned department, allowing no more room for further discussion on the subject. Since the situation was fast returning to normalcy, other members of the Opposition did not support the member to actively pursue the matter and the discussion was closed following the statement given. This indicated that there was no unanimity even amongst the Opposition, and there was no consistency from the Opposition to pursue the matter to its conclusions, as they had to accede to the will of the ruling party. This, however, showed that the Opposition succeeded in ventilating public grievances whose constituents they represented, and ensured that the Government gave an account of its actions on the floor of the House. The Government had to clarify the necessity for the presence of the CRPF personnel whose presence and action on these areas was questioned. The members who represented constituencies in Shillong city viewed such incidents with serious concern as tensions causing law and order problems could have adverse effect on the functioning of the administration in particular in a new State. These members voiced

concern over the presence and functioning of the CRPF personnel in the State. The Government being in the majority ensured that its actions and decisions prevailed.⁴⁰

Second Legislative Assembly 1978-1983

The Second Legislative Assembly was instituted in 1978 after the Second General Election 1978 to the State of Meghalaya. In this session there was serious breakdown of law and order in the state and as a result, Meghalaya and Shillong in particular witnessed large scale violence and escalation of tension between two communities. The subject of law and order occupied centre stage during this term as then communal violence rocked the State. The year 1978-80 particularly witnessed large scale communal tensions and violence which lasted for several months before normalcy could be returned to the State. This violence was the result of social tension generated by aberrations between two communities during the festivities of 22nd October, 1979. As soon as the House convened for the Winter Session in December, the subject of law and order problems was immediately taken up owing to the urgency and serious nature of the matter. The Opposition under the leadership of APHLC member (P.R. Kyndiah) moved a special motion to initiate discussion what is considered a burning issue. Heated arguments and counter arguments were exchanged between members of the ruling party who supported the actions of the Government, and members of the Opposition who oppose them. The Opposition voraciously criticised the Government's handling of the volatile situation, which they termed as inadequate and inept, which led to further escalation of the situation. The Opposition were severe in their criticism of the highhandedness of the police in particular, the

⁴⁰ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1972-1978.

CRPF whom some members alleged were colluding with one community against the other.* They also denounced the failure of the intelligence network to provide information on the serious nature of the tension which escalated after the *hartal* called on 25th October, 1979, which continued even to December. Members of the Opposition as well as some from the ruling party urged the Government to withdraw the CRPF from the city and to provide relief and compensation to those families who were affected by these incidents. Members of the ruling party defended the actions of the Government while participating in the discussion, the members expressed their apprehension of the volatile situation and urged the Government to find an immediate solution to regain normalcy in the State. Serious allegations were also leveled against some members of the ruling party who belonged to a certain community as colliding with those who initiated this tension, by the members of the Opposition. There was linkage of this incident with the general problem of influx, as the Opposition argued that these tensions stemmed from apprehension caused by influx of outsiders as given by one member of the Opposition. Others attributed this incident to be the work of anti-social elements and that it was the duty of the Government to stop them and prevent lawlessness in the city and undue harassment to the public. So during the winter session of 1979 the Opposition succeeded in convincing the House to convene a special session by tabling a special motion to discuss the deteriorating law and order situation in the capital, Shillong. the Opposition unanimously demanded the Government to give a statement clarifying its stand and decision to ensure normalcy is returned to the city. The Government through the Chief Minister (B.B. Lyngdoh) issued a statement giving detailed information on the incidents and the sequences of events and also clarify the necessary action taken by the Government to help the city

* The motion was ruled out of order by the Speaker and therefore not admitted.

return back to normalcy as this subject affects the functioning of the State administration.⁴¹

In the 1980 session the subject of law and order occupy centre stage as a result of the events in 1979. This issue was brought to the House through the Governor's Address. During the debate on this Address the Opposition moved an amendment for initiating discussion on the statement of the Governor that stated that law and order in the city had deteriorated since 1979. In the discussion members of the Opposition raised questions on whose responsibility these incidents occurred, and the reason for their occurrence. They also criticised the Government for not having an in depth study and analysis of the problem and the solution to this problem, but the Opposition accused the Government of using repressive measures on the local population both the implementation of the Meghalaya Preventive Detention Ordinance 1979. The question of influx problem was raised and linked with the law and order problem since many members felt that the presence of large number of foreign nationals in the State was bound to affect the social structure which resulted in social tensions. The Chief Minister (B.B. Lyngdoh) then gave a statement to the House defending the promulgation of the MPDO 1979 as the only device to contain the escalation of violence in Shillong. He also stated that the city was limping back to normalcy. Another incident which brought the question of law and order problem into focus was the what the public considered to be the highhanded attitude and excesses of the police in particular, the CRPF in handling the situation. The Leader of the Opposition submitted to the House information regarding incident which involve highhanded attitude of the police while arresting students who had staged a demonstration outside

⁴¹ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1979.

the Assembly premises. Other members of the Opposition followed up in the discussion, strongly condemning the actions of the CRPF and demanding immediate withdrawal of the forces from the State. This time the Opposition secured an assurance from the Government that the matter raised by the Leader of the Opposition would be inquired into. The Opposition pressured for the inquiry to be immediately taken up but the Chief Minister was not ready to commit on this. The Opposition were, therefore, assured on the previous assurances only.⁴²

Two adjournment motions were moved by the Opposition on issue of law and order problem. In 1979, leader of the Opposition, P.R. Kyndiah, moved a motion to discuss the prevailing situation in the State. This was ruled out of order by the Speaker and not admitted for discussion.

The Opposition fully utilised the opportunities of moving adjournment motions on this issue. But these motions were not admitted. The attitude of the Government had also not been favourable towards the Opposition's motions since it always tried to minimise the importance of the subject even though the subject of an adjournment motion was of public importance.

The Opposition also initiated discussion, immediately after Question Hour by raising the issue during the Zero Hour discussion. On the question of law and order problem, this matter was raised only once for Zero Hour discussion and was moved by the Independent member (M.N. Majaw) during the 1982 session. This discussion was initiated to draw the attention of the House on the need for the Government to withdraw all cases against students which arose out of the disturbances of 1979.

⁴² Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1980.

However, the Government raised points for inadmissibility of this discussion and it was lost.

Call Attention Notices is another device used by the Opposition to draw the attention of the House to a particular issue and to initiate discussion on it. The Opposition made good use of this device to initiate discussion on the law and order situation in the State particularly in the years when this created a problem for the State. In the year from 1972-1988, two Call Attention Notices were tabled in the House on the law and order situation in the State:

1. In 1973, the HSPDP member (S.D. Khongwir) raised two Calling Attention Notices, of which, one notice was to discuss the law and order situation in Meghalaya and Shillong, in particular.
2. The UMPDF member (B.K. Roy) who was elected from the newly created constituency (Pynthorumkhrah) in the 1979 session tabled one notice seeking to discuss the prevailing law and order situation in the capital, Shillong. This same issue was raised by another UMPDF member (B. Choudhury).

Through these notices tabled in the House, the members of the Opposition ensured that this issue was taken up in the House for discussion and to secure information from the Government on developments of this issue which was very vital for the State.

The Opposition also give notice of resolutions which relate to the law and order situation/problem as it relates to matters of public interest. Of the four resolutions moved by the Opposition and one by the Government during the First Assembly in 1972-1978, only one resolution dealt with matters concerning law and order in the State. In the Second Assembly 1978-1983, one resolution was moved by the Opposition and it concerns the prevailing law and order situation in the State.

Three resolutions were moved in the Third Assembly 1983-1988 and one only concerns the issue discussed in this section:

1. A resolution on the issue of law and order was moved by the PDIC member (M.N. Majaw) in the 1973 session of the First Assembly.
2. One resolution was submitted in 1980 by the PDIC member (M.N. Majaw). In this resolution details were given of the atrocities committed by the CRP and the resolution sought unanimity from the House to be passed to ensure the withdrawal of the said forces from the State. The resolution was, however, not adopted.
3. A resolution on problem of influx which had an influence on law and order situation was moved in 1985 by the HSPDP member (G. Lyngdoh). After the discussion, the resolution was later withdrawn.

It can be seen that the Independent member, later the PDIC member (M.N. Majaw) and the HSPDP viewed the subject of law and order with serious concern by the number of resolutions tabled in the House by these members. Despite the unanimity of the Opposition in supporting these resolutions, the Government was successful in having these resolutions withdrawn or not admitted as they commands absolute majority in the House during the period 1972-1988.

Another device to be made use of by the Opposition against policy(s) of the Government with regard to the problem of law and order whenever the situation arises especially in the capital, Shillong, was the No Confidence Motion. Six(6) No confidence Motions against the Government were tabled by the Opposition between 1972-1988. the last two No Confidence Motions were tabled by the Opposition citing breakdown of law and order in the State especially in Shillong, the capital city.

- a) The first No Confidence Motion was tabled by the APHLC member (E.K. Mawlong) of group led by B.B. Lyngdoh citing breakdown of law and order in Shillong after the riots in the capital. The motion generated heated discussion in the House though it was not carried through as the motion was lost since the ruling party commands absolute majority in the House.
- b) The second No Confidence Motion tabled on grounds of law and order problem was in 1985 when B.G. Momin of the APHLC tabled a No Confidence Motion against the Congress(I) led Government. Citing law and order problem as the main ground for lost of confidence of the House (Opposition) and their constituents in the Government, the Opposition demanded the resignation of the Council of Ministers for their failure to control the situation as a result of the violence in the State especially in the city, Shillong. Similar to its predecessor the motion was defeated and the Government remained in power.

These motions revealed the weakness of the Opposition and their failure to present a united voice and the ensuing debate brought the House face to face with the crude reality that virtually one party rule existed in Meghalaya and that the Opposition face a strong ruling party. Though it was known that these motions would be defeated by force of majority of the ruling party, the Opposition never missed any opportunity to embarrass the ruling party and at the same time alert the public about any misuse of power by the Government, if any. The Opposition at times were successful in exposing any weakness or mistakes of the Government.

Special Motion

With regard to motions, the Opposition at times make use of the Special Motion to initiate discussion of urgent public importance, whenever report is made on

the matter. Such a motion will get precedence over motions under Rule 131. The Speaker shall fix the time and date for the discussion on such a motion.

In the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly a Special Motion was tabled ~~once~~ during the period under study (1972-1988). This motion was tabled in connection with the statement of the Chief Minister during the 1979 session. The Statement made was with regard to the law and order situation in Shillong, after the violence that had erupted in the capital city. The Special Motion for discussion was moved by the APHLC member (P.R. Kyndiah) as this matter was considered to be of urgent public importance, taking precedence over other matters.

The riots and violence in 1977-78, that the State witnessed warranted the Opposition to criticise the actions of the Government in the Budget Session of 1978 for not being able to contain the situation. The UMPDF member (B. Choudhary) criticised the Government for the deteriorating law and order situation in Shillong and urged the Government to take necessary action immediately to restore normalcy in the State and to remove the panic and tension prevailing among the people.

The voting of the demand for grants affords the Opposition to offer opposition to any move of the Government and ensure that any demand of the Government receives intense scrutiny from the Opposition. Regarding the issue of law and order problem, the Opposition made use of the voting of demand for grants to oppose the demand of the Government once only in the 1980 session of the Legislative Assembly. In this session two cut motions were brought in the House. The first cut motion was moved by the PDIC member (M.N. Majaw) on the question of total provision of Rs.25,00,000/- under Grant No.16.225-Police, Sub head (d) payment towards charges for requisition of CRP (outside Battalion) be reduced by Rs.17,00,000/- i.e. the amount of the whole grant of Rs.5,12,06,000/- be reduced to

Rs.17,00,000/-. This motion aims at highlighting the excesses and brutal treatment of the CRP personnel on the public. The motion was negatively and lost when put to vote. Another Cut Motion in the name of APHLC member (J. Pohrmen) was termed to be similar to the first motion by the Speaker and was not admitted.⁴³

The problem of influx sometimes lead to law and order problem especially when taken up by non-governmental organisations. Law and order problem is an issue that can occur any time. Any unfortunate or minor incident can trigger law and order problem especially in Shillong, the State capital which is inhabited by different communities.

Even after the formation of Meghalaya as a State there has always been an under-current of tension between the indigenous tribal population and the outsiders (those who are non-tribals) and also those from across the border (Bangladesh) who had migrated to this State after the 1971 Indo-Pak War. These two issues have been taken up simultaneously as both had an impact on each other.

The Opposition, however, have shown that inspite of the comfortable majority of the ruling party and inspite of their fragmentation nature could seriously embarrass the Government and disrupt the process of orderly parliamentary procedure.

⁴³ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1972-1988.

Chapter-V

ROLE OF THE OPPOSITION II: PROBLEMS AND ISSUES RELATING TO LAND AND LAND RELATIONS

The Opposition constitutes the line that demarcates between democracy and dictatorship since it functions as the guardian or watchdog of the liberty of the people. It can be defined as the alternative Government and serves as a focus for the discontent of the people.¹ As Gilbert Campion defines, “the Opposition is the party for the time being in the minority organised as a unit and officially recognised which has had experience of office and is prepared to form a Government when the existing ministry has lost the confidence of the country. It must, therefore, have a positive policy of its own and not merely oppose destructively.”²

In the legislature, the Opposition exposes the Government’s omissions and opposes those measures which are contrary to the public interest. The majority enjoys the mandate from the people to conduct the affairs of the State and continues in office as long as it possesses this mandate; the Opposition though in minority is also an essential component of the legislature and it also represents the electors and, therefore, acts as a check on the ruling party.³ Through constant scrutiny and criticisms of any Government policy, it keeps the Government on its toes, making it accountable for its actions to the legislature. It is the function of the legislature to

¹ Jennings, Ivor: *Cabinet Government*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1959, p.15.

² Gilbert Campion: “Development in Parliamentary System Since 1918” in *British Government Since 1918*, p.19.

³ Fartayal, H.S.: *The Role of the Opposition in the Indian Parliament*, Chaitanya Publishing House, Allahabad, 1971, p.5.

enquire into the conduct of the administration and exercise control over the activities of the Government through various parliamentary methods or devices.⁴

Meghalaya, similar to other hill states of the North East occupies a unique position in the country in the sense that it is a State where the majority population belong to different tribal categories and where the responsibility of political and social decision making is vested on them with regard to which, their monopoly can neither be questioned nor challenged by any other ethnic group. The three main groups inhabiting Meghalaya are the Khasis, Jaintias (Pnars) and Garos (Achik) and they have their own unique customs.

In this chapter, attempt is made to study the role of the Opposition party(s) in the Assembly with regard to the Land Tenure System and Land Relations, and other such related issues or problems contained within this issue. This chapter will attempt to trace the origin of this particular issue and how it was initiated in the Assembly and the subsequent debate and discussion that ensued thereafter, whenever this issue was raised. The role of the Opposition in articulating the problem in the legislature will be studied. The study covers the first three successive terms of the Legislative Assembly (i) 1972-1978; (ii) 1978-1983; (iii) 1983-1988. However, the problems and issues relating to land under cantonment or lands under the occupation of the defence forces will not be discussed in this study as they form part of another area which is not intended to be included in this study.

Meghalaya similar to other hill states of the North East occupies a unique position in the country, in the sense that it is a State where the majority population belong to different tribal categories and where the responsibility of political and social decision making is vested only on them with regard to which, their monopoly can

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.81.

neither be questioned nor challenged by any other ethnic group. The three major groups inhabiting Meghalaya are the Khasis; Jaintias (Pnars) and Garos (Achik) and they have their own unique customary ways in regard to matters relating to land.⁵ The Khasi-Jaintia-Garo Societies were traditionally characterised with a customary tenure with regard to land. the “customary tenure” refers to ‘the distribution of rights to use land or to dispose of/use/rights over land as recognised by the community, the distribution pattern is not necessarily based on statutory or recorded evidence, the institutionalised relationship being more often than not a product of evolution through local customs and community acceptance rather than legislative intervention.’ A characteristic feature of this tenure system is the absence of the concept of land as a marketable commodity and lack of any distinction between community ownership of land and the right of an individual or group to occupy and use a piece of land at any given point within the framework of the rights of the community as a whole.⁶ The non existence of land records, lack of cadastral surveys, inaccessibility and hill terrain encouraged the continuation of the traditional pattern. The agrarian structure is, therefore, characterised by an increasingly number of uneconomic holdings.⁷

With the adoption of the Sixth Schedule in 1950 and creation of District Councils in 1952, the homeland of the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos graduated from the Scheduled Districts of 1874; to Backward Tracts of 1919; to Partially Excluded and Excluded Areas 1935 and finally to the Autonomous District Councils of United Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills of 1952. The Autonomous District Councils were

⁵ Dutta, P.S.: *India's North East: A Study in Transition*, Vikas Publishing House, 1992, pp.56-61.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.61.

⁷ Gopalakrishna, R., *The North East India – Land, Economy and People*, Har Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1991, p.114.

constitutionally provided with sufficient amount of autonomy to protect their tradition, custom and integrity.

Since the creation of the District Councils in Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills a few legislative measures was undertaken by them with regard to matters relating to land. In the 35 years of their existence no District Councils appeared to have felt the need for initiating land reform measures with specific reference to:

- a) abolition of intermediary rights,
- b) fixing of ceiling, and
- c) tenancy reforms.

Of the 8(eight) enactments on land by the District Councils only 3(three) are somewhat related to land reform measures in the sense that these enactments prohibited the transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals and from non-tribals to non-tribals thereby, establishing the legal rights of only the tribals over land and thus strengthening the attempt to check alienation of tribal lands and concentration of the same in non-tribal hands. These enactments concerning transfer of land were no doubt a good start but since no follow-up measure for progressive land reforms was attempted by the District Councils of Meghalaya,⁸ therefore, after the Autonomous State of Meghalaya was set up and the Provisional Assembly instituted the members of the Provisional Assembly felt the importance of this issue and since the existing law on the subject of land was set aside by the Supreme Court,⁹ the new government felt that need for proposing a new policy by introducing the Bill on Transfer of land. As agriculture is the mainstay of the people, therefore, land and land relations are bound to play a pivotal role even in the politic of the State and so the issue was bound

⁸ Gopalakrishna, R.: *Op. cit.*, p.58.

⁹ Dutta, P.S.: *Electoral Politics in North East India*. Omson Publication New Delhi 1986 p-89

to be raised and discussed in the Legislative Assembly in order for legislation on this issue to be passed. In the Provisional Legislative Assembly, the issue on land and land relations was given due importance by the ruling party as well as the Opposition party(s) since any legislation was going to have a tremendous impact on the State as a whole and in particular the constituencies of individual members of the Assembly.

The issue of land and land relations was introduced in the Provisional Legislative Assembly since Meghalaya was an Autonomous State in 1970-71. It was focussed from the first Address of the Governor in the March session of 1971. In the Governor's Address a statement on the policy of the Government towards land read as henceforth "the system of land tenure in Meghalaya differs from place to place and also that the entire area has also not been cadastrally surveyed. District Councils are being financially assisted to evolve a system by which ownership of land can be identified so that the credit requirements of the agriculturalists can be more easily met by the different financial institutions." This statement generated discussion in the House between members of the ruling party, as well as the Opposition culminating in the demand of land reforms which was the need of the hour for the State. The side of the Opposition lacked numerical strength as practically all the members of the House belonged to the ruling party with the exception of few Congress(R) members. This demand received unanimous support of the House to be implemented.¹⁰ But in the next session, the April session the Opposition withdraw support to the demand for land reforms, when the leader of the Congress(R) (Shri Akramozzaman) instead raised the issue of enunciating the land distribution and land settlement and further insisted for the introduction of a Ceiling Act at the earliest to prevent exploitation of the farmers. He further pressed the Government to initiate a solution to the land problem

¹⁰ Debates on the Governor's Address March 1971.

especially in the Garo Hills District which he represented, as the “land capitalism” was acute here, he stated. No further debate on this issue raised, took place in this session.¹¹ An intense debate on the issue took place in the winter session when the Government introduced the Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) Bill 1971. This Bill generated heated debate and criticisms from the Opposition especially the Leader of the Opposition, and they offered stiff resistance to the passing of the Bill. The Opposition under the leadership of Shri Akramozzaman strongly opposed the move of the ruling party to pass the Bill which he deemed went against the interest of the non-tribals who constitute sizeable part of his electorates. This opposition further intensified when the Leader of the Opposition moved an amendment Motion to the Bill and called for the formation of a Select Committee comprising both ruling party and opposition members to scrutinise the Bill and to make amendments especially with regard to one Clause which he stated was against the interests of the non-tribals while very much favouring and protecting the interests of the tribals whom the member felt constitute the majority in the State. The Opposition [Congress(R)] felt that the non-tribals were the minority group in the State and, therefore, their interests should be protected. The Bill, it was felt by the Opposition to be against non-tribals who were also residents of Meghalaya. The Motion for amendment of the Bill was, however, defeated and the Bill was carried through and passed during this session. This Bill considered to be an important bill for an emerging State did not receive intense scrutiny and discussion as members of the Opposition could not initiate or introduce any concrete stand to support the amendment moved by their Leader. The ruling party easily defeated the amendment and ensured easy passage of the bill because of their numerical strength. The Bill was passed and enacted in 1971. But this

¹¹ Proceedings of the Provisional Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya April Session 1971.

Bill could not solve the problem generated in the land tenure system and land relations of the Autonomous State and this issue continually cropped up for discussion in successive Legislative Assemblies.¹²

First Legislative Assembly 1972–1978

In the First Assembly from 1972-1976, the numerical strength of the Opposition was practically non-existent as the ruling party gained absolute majority in the first General Elections, 1972. From 1976-1978, the numerical strength of the Opposition was raised following the split in the ruling party (APHLC) after it merged with the Congress(I). The second phase of the Assembly saw the conglomeration of the Opposition comprising regional parties — the HSPDP, the APHLC* led by B.B. Lyngdoh and some Independent members.

In the first Assembly of the new State the issue of Land and Land Relations formed a basic issue for the people. When the issue was brought and raised in the House, intense debate ensued from members of the House — both ruling and opposition. This issue was first raised when the Government sought to introduce the Meghalaya Land and Revenue (Application and Amendment) Bill in the 1972 session. The introduction of this Bill resulted in protest from the Opposition and the Independent member (M.N. Majaw) moved a Motion seeking for the Bill first to be circulated for eliciting public opinion before being adopted by the House. Other members of the Opposition strongly supported for the move for amendment leading to heated discussion between members of the ruling party and the Opposition. Yet the

¹² Proceedings of the Provisional Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya Winter Session November 1971.

* After the merger of the APHLC with the Congress(R), some members of the APHLC left the ruling party and revived the APHLC under B.B. Lyngdoh.

Opposition were unable to successfully carry the amendment move through. This Motion was defeated and the Bill was passed and adopted making the Government successful.¹³

In 1973 session, this issue emerged and occupied centre stage when the Government proposed to set up the Land Reforms Commission in order to undertake an indepth study/survey of the lands in the Khasi Hills District. This proposal raised stiff objections from the Opposition as they felt that the proposed survey must not be confined only to the Khasi Hills District but must cover the entire lands in the State, as only this can facilitate the finding of a solution to solve the problems related to land tenure system and land relations. The Opposition in this session moved a Cut Motion to this effect to represent strong disapproval of the policy of the Government and to ventilate its grievances against the proposed move of the Government. This move did not yield any result as they were unable to thwart or stall the Government in its move and the only option left was they decided not to extend their support to Government on this move. The Opposition further insisted that the Government set the record of rights and ensure that cadastral survey of land was carried out. The first Cut Motion was tabled by the Independent member (H. Hadem) that the total provisions of 47,000 under Grant No.13 for the Directorate of Land Records be reduced by Rs.100. The aim of this Motion was to discuss the failure of the Department to maintain the up-to-date records of the area within the State as well as the working of the particular department. The other three Cut Motion Notices by Congress(R) member (Maham Singh); HSPDP members (H.S. Lyngdoh and Y.F. Lyngdoh) were not moved as these members later supported the first Cut Motion. This Motion ended in withdrawal as after the debate and after clarification from the Leader of the House as well as the

¹³ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly (20th June, 1972).

minister concerned, the mover withdraw his Cut Motion. The original demand for the grant was put to vote. The Motion was carried and the demand was passed and granted. In this session, the Opposition were partially successful in ensuring close scrutiny of the proposal and demand of the Government who had to clarify its stand on the floor of the House before the demand was granted. This Opposition successfully utilised the Cut Motion to ensure debate and scrutiny of the policies of the Government with regard to land system in the State.¹⁴

In the session of 1974, originally four Cut Motion Notices were submitted by the Opposition but because of the similarity of their demand, the Speaker bracketed all the four Motions to one Motion moved by the Independent member (M.N. Majaw). This Cut Motion seeks to reduce the supplementary demand for grant of Rs.44,000/- be reduced to Re.1/- under Supplementary Demand No.1 for Land Revenue-Land Records; Sub-head Land Reforms Commission. This Motion sought to oppose the setting up and the continuation of the Land Reforms Commission. This Motion was supported by some Independent members, but the main Opposition party — the HSPDP remained silent on this and supported the move of the Government. The Motion was, therefore, negated and the Cut Motion was lost. The demand of the Government was passed after being voted by an overwhelming majority. The Opposition though in minority, but, had there been no division in its ranks, would have forced the Government to clarify its position in regard to this Commission and to give justification for its continuation. But because of the division in the Opposition the demand was easily granted. Another discussion of this issue during this session was when the Meghalaya Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Bill 1972 under Article 200 of the Constitution (to exclude the 3 Wards of Shillong from its

¹⁴ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1973.

purview) was sent back by the Governor for reconsideration by the House. The ruling party members were in favour of amendment but the Opposition were against amendment of the Bill. The ruling party was able to endorse their stand as they were in majority and the Motion was carried through wherein the suggestions of the Governor were accepted. The Opposition, particularly the HSPDP bitterly disappointed with not being able to stop the passage of the amendment of the Bill* staged a walk out in protest led by the Leader of the Opposition, H.S. Lyngdoh, and refused to participate in the proceedings during the voting of the Motion. The Bill was passed without the presence of the entire Opposition. When the Report of the Land Reforms Commission was tabled in the House, its recommendations also generated prolonged debate between the two sides. The Opposition raised objections to certain clauses of the Report of the Commission. However, there was lack of unity of the Opposition to sustain their criticisms and the Commission was deemed to be successful, as the Report was tabled in the House.¹⁵ The Opposition through the Independent member (M.N. Majaw) introduced the Amendment to the Meghalaya Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Bill 1974 which seeks to amend Clause I and II of the Government Bill. The Bill was introduced and intense discussion followed. During the ensuing debate two other members (P.N. Choudhury and D.N. Joshi) also moved amendments to the Amendment Bill 1974. Their motion was lost by voice vote. The Amendment Bill of M.N. Majaw after lengthy debate was put to vote but it was lost by voice vote.

Following the tabling of the Report of the Reform Commission for the Khasi Hills in the latter part of the 1974 session, where due to lack of cohesiveness in the

* Meghalaya Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Bill 1974.

¹⁵ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1974.

Opposition, the Motion was left pending and got carried into the 1975 session of the Assembly. In this session the Government sought to introduce the cadastral survey of lands in the Khasi Hills, as was recommended by the Commission. This move of the Government initiated intense discussion in the House as the Opposition felt that cadastral survey should be undertaken for the whole State and this was not possible without proper demarcation of boundaries. Three Cut Motion Notices were submitted during 1975 by the HSPDP members (R. Lyngdoh, S.D. Khongwir and F.K. Mawlot).

- a) The first Cut Motion to be taken up was the Motion moved by R. Lyngdoh that the total provisions of Rs.11,31,000/- under Grant No.6 on Land Revenue, be reduced to Re.1/-. This Motion sought to highlight the problems of delay of registration and compensation and criticised the Government for encouraging the land owners to give or issue *patta*. Some members sought clarification on the statement made by the Minister for Revenue with regard to sales deed. The mover of the Motion after being satisfied with the clarification, withdrew his Motion.
- b) Another member of the HSPDP (S.D. Khongwir) also withdrew his Motion which was similar to the first one.
- c) The third Cut Motion was submitted by HSPDP member (F.K. Mawlot) and was similar to the first Motion but the aim of the discussion was different. The aim of this Motion was to urge the Government to undertake a cadastral survey of the land in the State. During the voting, the mover was absent but the Motion was put before the House. It was negatived and the Cut Motion was lost.

Though the Opposition made use of Cut Motion to thwart the moves of the Government especially when the Report of the Land Reforms Commission was tabled, but they were unable to prevent the continuance of the work of the

Commission but succeeded only in initiating discussion in the House and discussed the demands of the Government.¹⁶

During the 1976 session of the Assembly, the issue was raised when some members of the Opposition while debating on the Governor's Address referred to the statement made with regard to setting up of land reform measures together with District Councils. The HSPDP member (Y.F. Lyngdoh) was against any land reform measures as this will affect the existing customs and patterns of the people, and was in favour of only cadastral survey and record of rights. Another member from the Garo Hills [Akramaozzaman, Congress(R)] pressed the Government for abolition of the *jothdari* system prevalent in this District.¹⁷ In this session, the Minister for Revenue, moved a Resolution with regard to the issue of land. This Resolution was adopted with the exception of the Leader of the Opposition who refused support to adopt this Resolution "seeking for protection of the indigenous people from exploitation.

In this session, another Bill with regard to land system was introduced — the Meghalaya Transfer of Land [(Regulation) (Amendment)] Bill 1976. The Bill did not evoke much response from the Opposition with the exception of HSPDP member (H.S. Lyngdoh) and an Independent member (M.N. Majaw). The former while welcoming the move of the Government to introduce this Bill felt that there should have been more measures to regulate this issue. The latter supported the above statement of the HSPDP member that there ought to be changes in the Bill at a later period. At the same time, the member made reference to an earlier Amendment Bill on this subject which was brought by the Opposition, but was not endorsed by the Government. He drew the attention of the House to the fact that though similar in

¹⁶ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Debates 1975.

¹⁷ Debates on the Governor's Address 1976.

nature, the ruling party rejected the Opposition sponsored Bill but easily adopted the Government Bill thereby referring to non co-operation between members both ruling party and Opposition in the House, but the ruling party being in majority its will prevailed. When the Resolution on Urban Land Ceiling Act was moved, the issue was brought back into focus and there was general discussion on this. But due to its being introduced at the later stage of the session, members of the Opposition stated that there was hardly time to study and analyse the provisions of the Resolution as the House was to be shortly adjourned and were, therefore, against adopting this Resolution. This subject and subsequent discussion was carried over to the next session.¹⁸

In the 1977 session, the Urban Land Ceiling and Regulation Acts and Rules which was earlier introduced in the Assembly session of 1976, dominated the proceedings of the session. Members of the Opposition raised objections to certain provisions in the Act. Mostly favouring the erstwhile Land Transfer Act of the District Council which they deemed had generated commendable performance. The Opposition in the form of Private Members' Bill introduced a counter Bill, to Meghalaya Transfer of Land Regulation (Amendment) Bill 1977 by R. Lyngdoh which did not include the provision "time limit", a provision* which most members were against when discussion of the sponsored Government Bill was introduced. This Bill did not receive much support from the members of the House and ultimately the Bill was negated and lost. In this session, the issue of *patta* system or sales deed emerged and evoked strong reaction from the Opposition who favoured abolishment of the system and pressed for the introduction of a Bill to ensure speedy compensation

¹⁸ Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Debates 1976.

* Provision — "Seeking for protection of the indigeneous people from exploitation."

to people whose lands were acquired by the Government. This discussion further gained momentum, when APHLC member (B.B. Lyngdoh) former Minister for Revenue brought to the attention of the House, about the presence of such a Bill framed by the previous Government, thereby implying that this Bill was put aside by the present Government. This evoked heated reactions from the Opposition.

- a) The Opposition then moved two Cut Motions to press the Government, to clarify the position of the Government on this issue. The first Cut Motion was moved by the HSPDP member (S.D. Khongwir), a Cut Motion on amount of Rs.13,99,000/- under 229 – Land Revenue “be reduced to Rs.100/-. The Motion was about the sale or transfer of land and not about allotment. This Motion insisted on giving *patta* to the Government in all those cases where the Government acquired land, to ensure speedy compensation to the owners, as well as the lessor and the ‘lessee’, so as to avoid undue hardships to the occupant of the land. This Motion was later on withdrawn.
- b) Another Cut Motion by another member of the HSPDP, seeking to highlight the delay in land compensation was also withdrawn.

The Cut Motions were withdrawn after the Government had assured the House that the matter was being looked into. This goes to show that the Opposition amply made use of the devices to seek clarification from the Government regarding its programme and after satisfying itself from the clarification and assurances from the Government withdrew their Motions. These Motions of the Opposition served as devices with which the Opposition tried to ensure that no Bill sponsored by the Government were readily accepted by the House but ensured that discussion ensued after each move of the Government. In this session being the last before the second General Elections to the State, the issue on land relations occupied centre stage and

was widely discussed and debated in the House as the issue was considered of great significance particularly to a new State, as it was a core issue.¹⁹

Table-5.1: List of Cut Motions submitted by the Members of the Opposition 1972-1978

Sl. No.	Year	Name of the Party	No. of Notices submitted	No. of Cut Motions admitted	
1	1973	Independent; Cong(R); HSPDP	4	1	Withdrawn
2	1974	Independents	4	1	Lost
3	1975	HSPDP	3	3	2-Withdrawn 1-Lost
4	1977	HSPDP	2	2	Withdrawn
Total			13	7	

With regard to this subject, the Opposition utilised Cut Motions whenever any policy or Bill of the Government was introduced in the House. By utilising Motions to ensure that the Government do not readily get such policy or bill passed in the House, the Opposition though aware of their numerical strength, but ensured that full discussion and debate follow any such move of the Government, thereby proving that it sought to be a viable Opposition keeping the interest of its constituents in focus, and ensuring that the public are made aware of such moves of the Government. Because of their numerical strength, the Opposition were unable to endorse their opposition nor compel the Government to endorse their stand but were able to ensure that any action of the Government received scrutiny and discussion of the House before being passed or implemented. Lack of unity among the Opposition hamper any move to consistently pursue their agendas and as such they were no match for the ruling party. There was division in the ranks of the Opposition and in most cases, individual members raised objections and Opposition to any move made by the Government. In only one instance, the Opposition presented a united front when they staged a walk

¹⁹ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1977.

out in the voting of a Bill they were adamantly against being passed. In another instance where they acted in unison was when they refused to extend support to the Government on a particular matter. The Independent members usually were the ones who were vociferous in their arguments and opposition towards Government policy and were persistent in their efforts to seek clarification and answers from the Government. Though the numerical strength of the Opposition from 1976 slightly rose with the presence of the APHLC (B.B. Lyngdoh group), but the Opposition did not form one major Opposition but remain fragmented and this had an effect on their performances in the House as each group was concerned with its own interests.

Second Legislative Assembly 1978-1983

The Second Legislative Assembly was instituted after the 1978 General Elections. In the initial year 1978-79, the Assembly was marked by political instability as there were frequent change of Government. The main Opposition in this period was the UMPDF, a coalition of the INC and some Independents. From 1979 onwards, however, there was political stability with the installation of the INC and APHLC a ruling coalition. The Opposition comprised the regional parties — APHLC, PDIC and some Independents.

In the 1978 session of the Second Assembly, the issue of land and land relations was taken up once, amidst heated exchanges on both sides. Heated exchanges erupted when the Opposition drew the attention of the Government to its Notification dated 7th June 1978 which was published on the 8th June 1978 whereby transfer of land was prohibited from “tribal to non-tribal” and from “non-tribal to non-tribal,” irrespective of the fact whether the non-tribal is a bonafide resident of Meghalaya or any other State. This Notification clearly indicated the Government’s

intention to implement the Meghalaya Transfer of Land Regulation Act 1971 inspite of the fact that as a result of severe criticisms in previous sessions, it was not implemented. But this time the Government had serious intention of implementing the Act as indicated by the Notification. The Opposition (UMPDF) especially those members whose constituents were made up mostly of non-tribals though bonafide residents of Meghalaya raised their objections to the intention of the Government and severely criticised it for going against the interest of a certain section of the residents of Meghalaya. The Government on its part, however, accused the Opposition stating that this Act was already passed by the House in 1971, and members of the UMPDF, at that time had not raised any objection, in the process the Bill was passed. Claims and counter claims flowed from both sides each accusing the other of introducing and passing of the Act. The House was adjourned though this problem continued. The Opposition introduced a Cut Motion on this seeking to reduce the demand of the Government of Rs.39,40,000/- under Grant No.15 to be reduced to Re.1. This Motion aims at raising opposition to the Land Transfer Act and its provisions. This Motion was later withdrawn by the mover after receiving assurances from the Government.²⁰

In 1979 session, the issue received considerable attention from the Opposition. In this session, the Government introduced the Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) (Amendment) 1979. This Bill generated heated discussion in the House. The Leader of the Opposition moved a Private Members' Bill, the Amendment to the Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) (Amendment) Bill 1979 countering the Government Bill. This Bill seeks amendments to Clause II of the Bill be adopted (that is substituting old wordings with new wordings in this Clause). Heated exchanges erupted as the ruling party supported the Government Bill whereas the Opposition

²⁰ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1978.

supported the Bill moved by the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition was prevailed to withdraw his Motion as it was similar to the Government's Bill but refused to do so. The Motion was put to vote but it was defeated, as the ruling party commands majority in the House and they refused to endorse it. The Government sponsored Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) (Amendment) Bill 1979 was adopted and passed. Though the Government did not lend its support to such Bills, the discussion on these Bills had been fruitful, since individual members had drawn the attention of the Government to the necessity of changes in the existing laws.²¹

This issue was not raised in the 1980 session. But in the 1981 session this issue dominated proceedings in the House and the House witnessed heated discussion between the two sides. Twice members moved and introduced amendments of their own, and thrice the Meghalaya Land Act generated intense debate and in one session, the member from Garo Hills raised questions on the issue of land relationships in Garo Hills.

The lone Janata member (M. Rehman) raised questions when the Meghalaya Land Transfer (Amendment) Act was introduced in April 1981 session. Initially, welcoming the Amendment initiated by the Government, but at the same time criticised the Clause 4B of the Act stating that Amendment would not be of any use as this will have an adverse effect on permanent residents of the State who are non-tribals. Further, the member moved a separate amendment with regard to Clause 4B and urged the House to consider the sentiments and interests of people of all sections of Meghalaya. Therefore, he appealed to the House to consider his suggestion and endorse the amendment he proposed. The Government refused stating that the

²¹ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1979.

Meghalaya Land Transfer (Amendment) Bill 1981 was introduced after having considered all the drawbacks and correcting them. The member was asked to withdraw his Motion but on his refusal to do so, it was put to vote but was lost by voice vote. The member staged a walk out in protest.

Another PDIC member (M.N. Majaw) moved the Land Acquisition (Meghalaya Amendment) Bill 1981 but this Bill was considered withdrawn due to the absence of the mover from the House on the day it was taken up.

Two members of the Opposition moved separate Private Members' Bills to seek amendment to Bills introduced by the Government. The other incident which raised question in the House was when the Relief and Rehabilitation Scheme granted to Garo families who had migrated to Meghalaya from the erstwhile East Pakistan (Bangladesh) during the Indo-Pak War 1971, was brought up and discussed in the House. As part of this scheme, the Government had allotted 89 *bighas* of land to 45 Garo families. In this session, the PDIC member (M.N. Majaw) drew the attention of the House to the reality of the situation which was different from the claim of the Government. The member questioned the contradictory statement of the District Council that no land had been given to any non-tribal. The reality was different as in 1981, 600 *bighas* of land was requisitioned by the Soil Conservation Department to help the villagers of Monabari village. In reality the officials clandestinely made hasty measurement of this reclamation in favour of the Muslim from Goalpara District of Assam by issuing 13 Annual *Pattas*. The member insisted the Government to reply to this question on whether the "District Council had issued these *pattas* to the non-tribals", and pressurised the Government independently to conduct a survey on whether this allegation had any bases or not. This matter was even brought up and discussed in Parliament. This unsettled the Government wherefore the Chief Minister

had to clarify the questions raised and issue a statement on this development, clearly refuting the allegations made against the District Council as well as the Soil Conservation Department.

The PDIC member (M.N. Majaw) introduced the Land Acquisition (Meghalaya Amendment) Bill 1981 in which he incorporated a number of important matters connected with land relations in Meghalaya. The member stated that he was prepared to send it to a Select Committee if the House allowed for the introduction of the Bill. The Government was unwilling to endorse this move stating that the Government of India was considering certain amendments to the Land Acquisition Act to ensure “uniformity and basic law of land acquisition for all States.” The Government was, therefore, the competent authority to send its recommendations on this to the Government of India. Further, the Chief Minister opposed the Private Members’ Bill terming it to be full of complications. The member justified his Bill to prevent delay in legislation. This Bill receives support from the other Opposition members with APHLC member (S.D.D. Nichols Roy) asking members to give their suggestions and recommendations to incorporate them in the Bill and sent to the Select Committee entrusted with studying amendments of the Land Acquisition Act to ensure a uniform Land Transfer Act for all the States. The Government at this juncture called for deferment of the discussion on the Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) (Amendment) Bill 1981 which it had introduced as it had received communication from the President about the presence of a Committee to study this problem. This move to defer the discussion and introduction of this bill received severe criticisms from the Opposition as they felt that the Government lack seriousness and commitment to solving this problem, as it called for discussion on this issue to be deferred though a Special Session had been called to discuss this issue.

The Opposition, therefore, sought information about the policy of the Government with regard to lands leased out to non-tribals in the European wards as these lands remained vacant due to non occupation of these lands. They further render advice to the Government to reclaim such lands to be used for public purposes. In this session, the issue of land and land relations received much attention and occupied centre stage in the House as a result of the policies introduced by the Government.²²

The discussion on the issue of land in the 1982 session of the Assembly before the Third General Elections to the State was focused on the issue discussed in the previous session. In this session members of the Opposition simply sought clarification and information on the Government's intention to these issues. They reiterated their demand for reclamation of lands leased out to non-tribals. The Opposition also sought information on Government's intention on whether compensation will be paid to owners whose lands are acquired by the Government for public purposes. In this session, the issue of land and land relations was carried over from the previous session in 1981 and no new developments took place.²³

The second Assembly of the State covering the period 1978-1983 saw the Opposition utilized Cut Motions, moved amendments to Bills introduced by the Government and introduced Private Members' Bills in the House to counter policy of the Government though without much success as their Motions were either withdrawn or lost when put to vote. In this session, the Opposition were more aggressive and dogged the Government to justify and clarify its position with regard to this issue. In this session too, the Government was not successful to solve the vexed issue of land

²² Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1981.

²³ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1982.

problems as any move on its part did not escape close scrutiny from the Opposition and lengthy and heated discussion usually ensued.

Third Legislative Assembly 1983-1988

The Third Legislative Assembly 1983-1988 commenced after the General Elections in 1983. Except for a brief period in the beginning, the ruling party was the Congress(I), with the exception of one month from February-March 1983 when the regional parties were in the Government. Initially, the strength of the Opposition comprising the regional parties – APHLC, HSPDP, PDIC and some Independents was strong but gradually due to defections to the ruling party the numerical strength of the Opposition dwindled especially of the APHLC. Another development in the Third Assembly was the merger of the APHLC and HSPD to form the HPU which became the main opposition in the latter part of the term 1986-87. The HSPDP though considerably weaker was revived by some loyalists under the leadership of H.S. Lyngdoh and became the second main Opposition group. The Opposition were not united but were fragmented.

The issue of land relations received considerable attention only in two sessions of the Third Assembly that is from 1984 to 1987 sessions. In the 1984 session the issue was raised by the APHLC member (P.R. Kyndiah). He drew the attention of the House to a news item in which the Government had stated “that all Government lands held by individuals, under different kinds of leases will be settled by the Government.” This statement agitated the public particular those sections who stand affected by this proposed move, and the member was ventilating their grievances by raising these questions. Another member from Garo Hills (P. Rava) moved a Motion seeking to discuss the matter on necessity of production of Permanent Residential

Certificate (PRC) in the land settlement in *Mouza No.IV* of West Garo Hills. Highlighting the difficulties of locals suffering in *Mouza No.IV* in respect of land transfer. He observed that since land settlement is the jurisdiction of the Garo Hills District Council, therefore the Government ought to empower the District Council to keep in check any nefarious attitude of those holding the *Mauzza* land (*Mouzzadars*) by insisting on the Permanent Residential Certificate. This action will ensure protection of *Mouzza No.IV*. Those supporting the Motion agreed with the statement made by the member who moved the Motion and urged the Government to insist on production of such document on the part of the non-tribal who wants to transfer his land to another non-tribal. This Motion was opposed by members who belonged to another community. The member (Md. K.R. Khan) defending his stand stated that production of this document does not guarantee prevention of illegal transfer of land, as genuine. Residents of Meghalaya who belong to other communities are in most cases denied this certificate. Further, he observed that the District Council was the competent authority to ensure legal transfer of land, since a law had been promulgated to regulate transfer of land in Meghalaya. This statement in turn was opposed by the Opposition who stood by earlier stand of insisting on the Certificate for this particular *Mouzza IV* as it is the only provision to safeguard the land to be enjoyed by the people of Meghalaya. The Government supported the earlier stand taken by one of its members of accrediting the District Council as the competent authority for the whole District. With regard to initial allotment, the Government assured the House particularly the Opposition, that this would be done taking into consideration the Assam Land Regulation Act which was present; whereas regarding transfer of land, the Meghalaya Land Transfer Act would be considered. This ensued in heated discussion, whereby in conclusion, the Government stated that the matter under

discussion was outside the purview of the law and that transfer of land could not be restricted. The discussion of this issue in this session ended unresolved with no commitment from the Government towards ensuring a solution.²⁴

In the 1985 session, the issue was taken up by the Independent member (H. Hadem) who observed that the Government's tendency of amending the Land Transfer Act would have an adverse effect on the policy of land in the State as the provisions of the Act itself guarantee to safeguard and preserve the land for the original inhabitants of the State. He, therefore, urged the Government against introducing any amendment to the Act in the future. The HSPDP member (H.S. Lyngdoh) moved a Motion to discuss the Land Transfer and Land Acquisition but this Motion was lost as it lacked support from the other members of the Opposition.

In the 1986 session, the issue of land relations was brought to the House when HPU member (K. Singh) moved a resolution on the issue of the Land Transfer Amendment Bill 1981 but it was not adopted as no discussion took place over this proposed move of a member of the Opposition.²⁵

The 1987 session witnessed a resurgence of this issue as in this session intense discussion ensued following the Government's introduction of the 20-Points Programme in the wake of directive from the Central Government. This was necessitated following the Government's move to distribute surplus land to the landless mostly belonging to the other community. A resolution was moved by the HPU member (W. Syiemñong) seeking a discussion not to implement the programme as this will affect the existing land regulation in the State. The member questioned the meaning of the term "surplus" as in Meghalaya people were still short of land due to

²⁴ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1984.

²⁵ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1985-86.

the hilly and stony terrain. Two observations were made by the Opposition. Some members raised objections to the proposed usage of surplus land as land is considered scarce in Meghalaya. Other members sought clarification from the Government on who constitute the “landless” people in Meghalaya as even most of the indigenous people — the real owners of the land according to customary laws were landless. Each side supported their own observations and stand. Members of the Opposition supported the resolution whereas the ruling party supported the move of the Government as being taken for the betterment of the living conditions of all sections of people in Meghalaya. Strong objections were raised by the ruling party members against charges of the Opposition that the programme was a policy of the Congress party being in the ruling chair, and further clarifying that this was a national policy of the Central Government for the betterment of all. Further, reiterating that the Congress party never took any decision arbitrarily but through consensus of all and it was never the intention of the Government to forcibly acquire lands as was charged by the Opposition.

The Opposition also brought a Cut Motion to initiate discussion on the Government’s decision to claim lands for mining purposes. The Cut Motion was introduced by HPU member (H. Hadem) seeking to reduce the demand of Rs.80,83,000/- to reduce to Re.1/- under Grant No.56 for Land Revenue. In the ensuing discussion the Opposition raised apprehension that in most cases lands acquired by the Governments always remained vacant, and this the members feared, would generate encroachment. The members further urged the Government to adequately compensate owners for land acquired. In the case of acquisition for mining purposes the members of the Opposition vehemently opposed it and supported the Cut Motion. The Motion was put to vote but it was lost. However, it secured assurances

from the Government for a thorough study of the case and that the matter would be dealt according to the provisions of the Constitution. Further, replying to questions asked on surplus land, the Government assured the House that the matter had been referred to the Central Government which, in turn, had replied that it had no intention of disturbing the customary tribal rights.

Another Cut Motion on the same subject of Land Revenue was submitted to the Speaker by the same member. But when the Speaker asked the member to move his Motion he did not comply and the Motion was considered withdrawn.²⁶

In this Third Assembly (1983-1988), the issue of land in Garo Hills District received due attention. Opposition members were in favour of issuance of PRC for any transaction of land between the people residing in Garo Hills so as to safeguard the interest of the indigenous people. This was not received well by members from other groups wherein reservations were raised, as it was felt this will hamper transactions of land to genuine permanent residents of Meghalaya who do not belong to the indigenous community. Another issue receiving considerable attention in this session was the question of surplus land. Members of the Opposition raised strong protests to the Government's use of the term "surplus land". Stating that in Meghalaya there is dearth of surplus land and were against requisitioning of land by the Government. Cut Motions were brought to initiate discussion of this issue in the House. Resolutions and Amendments were also initiated by the Opposition. Though these devices were not accepted by the Government, they succeed in ensuring full discussion of this issue and the Government was forced to clarify its stand and to give assurances to the House on its decisions and actions towards any development in this regard.

²⁶ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1987.

The Opposition utilised the discussion during the Budget session whenever this subject was included.

- a) In 1973, when the subject of land was mentioned in the budget with the proposed setting up of the Land Reforms Commission there was discussion when members of the Opposition sought clarification on whether there would be changes in the land tenure system.
- b) When the budget was presented during the 1975 session, the Government also laid on the table of the House, the Report of the Land Reforms Commission, and invited discussion of members from all sections. The HSPDP was the most active party that participated in the proceedings of the Land Reforms Commission. This ensured that there was intense discussion in the Budget session 1975.
- c) Two members, Akramozzaman [Congress (R)] and Y.F. Lyngdoh (HSPDP) actively participated during the 1976 Budget session, when there was general discussion on the budget, presented. The former called upon the Government to abolish the system of land tenure or the *Zamindari* system in Garo Hills as he stated that this system is a “stumbling block on the operational side of the Land Reforms Commission” while the latter stated and urged the Government to undertake cadastral survey of the whole State to facilitate maintenance of land records.

The issue of land and land relations considered to be a core issue was viewed with serious concern by the Opposition keeping in mind the interests of their constituents. This was revealed by the Motions and amendments tabled by the Opposition at regular intervals whenever the Government initiated or introduced any bill on this subject. From the time of the Provisional Legislative Assembly when this

subject appeared in the Governor's Address in the statement that "land reforms was needed in the State", the issue dominated proceedings of the three successive Assemblies (1972-1988).²⁷

The introduction of the Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) 1971 in the Provisional Assembly created the first heated exchanges between the two sides. Vehement opposition were voiced by opposition members whose constituents also constitute a sizeable number of non-tribals but were bonafide and permanent residents of this State and so this Act is an infringement of their rights. The Opposition in most cases often took advantage of loopholes in the Governor's Address with which to badger the Government through general criticisms or by making amendment Motions to certain specific proposals in it. There was no unity among the members of the Opposition in most cases, and this coupled with their weak numerical strength affected the fate of these Motions. So though the Opposition were most active during the Debate on the Governor's Address in pointing out weaknesses in the Government's policy, programmes and administration, there was little chance for the Opposition to modify the Motion of thanks moved by members of the ruling party. After lengthy and heated debates, such Motions were adopted as the ruling party were in majority and opposition sponsored Motion and amendments were voted down either by voice vote or after vote count.

The Opposition utilised questions to elicit information on the actions of the Government particularly with regard to the reports of the Land Reforms Commission constituted by the Government. Adjournment Motions were utilised for initiating discussion and obtain information from the minister concerned regarding policies and decisions of the Government. The Opposition used Cut Motions particularly in the

²⁷ Governor's Address in the Provisional Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya 1971.

Third Assembly to initiate discussion and to thwart the proposals or demands of the Government, to be easily acceded to without having a full discussion in the House. Members of the Opposition also moved Private Members' Bill to counter the bills introduced by the Government though without success. Most of the questions asked caused a stir in Government circles, yet all the questions were not meant to ventilate public grievances. Rather some of the questions were asked from the political point of view, or represent vested interest of constituents of the members or simply to obtain a statement of general policy from the ministers concerned which is often the case.

In articulating the problems and issues of land and land relations, more often the Opposition were never united and this was one of the causes why Motions sponsored by the Opposition were easily defeated. Yet at times they were able to vehemently persist with their agenda and demands to achieve their objective — to draw the attention of the House to the problem at hand and compelled the Government to either issue a statement or give information to the House. In certain cases the Opposition managed to wrest assurances on the matter from the Government. What was not achieved by the Opposition from the Government was the acceptance of their proposal and suggestions by the Government. A case in point is the walk out by members of the Opposition to protest against adamant attitude of the Government though the Government sponsored Motion was carried by the House.

The subject of land and land relations can be considered an important issue as this has an impact on many developments in the State. The problems on this issue has eluded solution for a decade though successive Governments had introduced several Acts and Regulations to regulate the transfer and transactions of land. This contentious issue continue to crop up in successive Assemblies whenever new developments and initiatives were proposed by the Government. Till date no Act

acceptable to all sections of residents of Meghalaya has been introduced or passed by the Legislative Assembly.

Table-5.2: List of Calling Attention Notices raised by Opposition Members in the First Assembly 1972-1978

Sl. No.	Name of the Member	Name of the Elected Constituency	Name of the Party	No. of Single Member Calling Attention Notices
1	D.D. Lapang	Nongpoh	Independent	3
2	S.D. Khongwir	Mawlai	HSPDP	2
3	H.E. Poshna	Nongtalang	Independent	1
4	H. Hadem	Mynso-Raliang	Independent	1
5	G. Myllemngap	Sohryngkham	Independent	1

In the First Assembly 1972-1978, Table-5.2 shows the number of Calling Attention Notices submitted by the Opposition with regard to the issues of land, boundary and law and order. In this Assembly with the exception of one notice in 1973, all the notices tabled in this Assembly concerned one particular issue only and that is the Boundary problem. Being a newly formed State this issue was bound to occupy an important part in the proceedings of the House particularly by members whose constituency stands affected in any problems arising in the border areas between Meghalaya and Assam.

From the above table, it can be seen that most of the members of the Opposition who sought discussion of the boundary issue through submitting Calling Attention Notices were Independents with the exception of one member of the HSPDP.

The HSPDP though in its constitution laid stress on this issue, yet in this Assembly it did not actively participate in tabling such notices to ensure discussion of this issue in the House regarding any developments taking place in any of the areas bordering Assam. The APHLC which became one of the Opposition parties in 1976

did not resort to tabling of Calling Attention Notices to draw the attention of the Government towards the boundary issue. Independent members were very active in this period with regard to the boundary disputes and problems.

Table-5.3: List of Calling Attention Notices raised by Opposition Members in the Second Assembly 1978-1983

Sl. No.	Name of the Member	Name of the Elected Constituency	Name of the Party	No. of Single Member Calling Attention Notices
1	B.K. Roy	Pynthor-Umkhrah	UMPDPF	1
2	G. Mylliemngap	Sohryngkham	APHLC	1
3	B. Choudhury	Laban	UMPDPF	1

In the Second Assembly 1978-1983, Table-5.3 indicates the number of Calling Attention Notices tabled by the Opposition on the three issues – land, boundary and law and order problems. The two issues taken up in this Assembly through tabling of Calling Attention Notices were on boundary problems and law and order problems. Two issues tabled by UMPDPF members on law and order problems in 1979 were considered similar and clubbed together. The other by the APHLC member in 1978 concerned boundary problems.

From the table, shown it indicates that the movers of the notices on law and order problem were representatives whose constituencies are in Shillong, the capital and are, therefore, directly affected by the then prevailing situation.

The lone notice on boundary problems was raised by the member of the APHLC.

Table-5.4: List of Calling Attention Notices raised by Opposition Members in the Third Assembly 1983-1988

Sl. No.	Name of the Member	Name of the Elected Constituency	Name of the Party	No. of Single Member Calling Attention Notices
1	W. Syiemñong	Nongspung	HPU	1
2	H.S. Lyngdoh	Pariong	HSPDP	2

Table-5.4 shows the number of Calling Attention Notices tabled by the Opposition on any of the three issues concerned. In this Assembly only 3(three) Notices all on boundary problems or incidents were tabled in the House. All the three Notices were raised in the last session 1987 of the Assembly.

In this Assembly the HSPDP played an active role in drawing the attention of the House to problems in the border areas through tabling of Calling Attention Notices. Both the members were originally members of the HSPDP, the former stayed with the HPU while the latter went back to the old party (HSPDP). Being members of the HSPDP, this issue was bound to occupy an important role as stated in its Constitution and successive manifesto of the party.

The Opposition utilised the Calling Attention Notices to the maximum to draw the attention of the House towards any developments or incidents in the areas bordering Assam. In the three Assemblies the Opposition's usage of Calling Attention Notices was not uniform. Rather, it started dwindling from the First to the Last Assembly. In the First Assembly maximum number of notices were tabled numbering 7(seven). In the Second Assembly only one notice concerned the boundary issue while in the Third Assembly all the three notices are with regard to this issue. From this, it can also be stated that this issue occupied centre-stage in the First Assembly of the new State. This indicated that members of the Opposition whose constituency falls in areas or adjoining areas bordering Assam were influenced to draw the attention of the House to any incident in these areas and that the matter should be settled as early as possible as this had an adverse impact on these areas. Whereas in the successive Assembly, the number of such notices had dwindled considerably as other matters were considered of importance — 1(one) notice in the Second Assembly and 3(three) in the Third Assembly.

This indicated that this issue continually dominated proceedings of the House whenever any incidents occurred in these areas. The Opposition through such notices ensured full discussion in the House on such incidents and at times compelled the Government to promise an enquiry on a particular incident.

The other notices tabled by the Opposition in these Assemblies concerned the law and order problem in Shillong, the capital city. Three notices — one in 1973 tabled by the HSPDP member and two notices in 1978 tabled by the UMPDF members who represents constituencies in Shillong.

From the tables shown, it can be seen that the Opposition were never united or uniform in their endeavour to draw the attention of the House towards these problems. This can be seen from the Three Assemblies wherein in the First Assembly majority of members who tabled Calling Attention Notices were Independents; whereas in the Second and Third Assemblies the movers were members of political parties but in some cases whose constituencies were not affected by developments or incidents in the border areas. In the First Assembly with regard to the boundary problem, the political parties did not introduce any notices though this new Assembly was beset by many problems and issues on boundary and also to a certain extent some law and order problem. In the two successive Assemblies, the political parties participated in tabling notices with regard to the issues concerned. The HSPDP the oldest surviving regional party sought to initiate discussion on the boundary problems only in the Third Assembly.

Cut Motions

The voting of the demand for grants affords the Opposition an opportunity to oppose any move of the Government and to ensure that any demand of the

Government receives close scrutiny from the opposite benches. During the period 1972-1988 and with regard to the issues concerned — land, boundary and law and order problems, several Cut Motions were moved by the Opposition, ventilating their disapproval of the policy underlying the demand moved by the Government.

Table-5.5: List of Cut Motions submitted by the Opposition Members in 1972-1978

Sl. No	Year	Name of the Party	No. of Notices submitted	No. of Cut Motions Admitted	
1	1973	Independents; Congress(R); HSPDP	4	3	Withdrawn
2	1974	Independents	4	1	Lost
3	1975	HSPDP	3	3	2-Withdrawn 1-Lost
4	1977	HSPDP	2	2	Withdrawn
Total				7	

In the First Assembly 1972-1978 a total number of 13(thirteen) Cut Motions were submitted and only 7(seven) Motions were admitted as is shown in Table-5.5. Of the 7(seven) Motion admitted for discussion in the House and after full discussion, the Motions were either withdrawn by the mover after clarification or replies from the Government, or were lost after being put to vote. None of the Motions were accepted. The Motions in this Assembly were all concerned with the land and land relations issue. So in this Assembly maximum numbers of Cut Motions on any initiatives by the Government dealing with land and land relations were moved though without securing any decisive outcome.

The members of the Opposition seriously concerned with this issue were the HSPDP and the Independents, the HSPDP being the main Opposition from 1972-1978. Independent members were also very active with this issue and it was envisaged

that these would culminate in a Land Reforms Act to the satisfaction of all sections of Meghalaya. Members of the Congress(R) though in the ruling coalition of Congress(R) and APHLC till 1976, yet moved Motions against the Government as the proposed policy of the Government would adversely affect the rights of section of constituents of its members. So demands for grants by the Government on any policies or programmes were not readily accepted by members of the Opposition but made use of initiatives for full discussion in the House through their Cut Motions.

Table-5.6: List of Cut Motions submitted by the Opposition Members in 1978-1983

Sl. No	Year	Name of the Party	No. of Notices submitted	No. of Cut Motions Admitted	
1	1978	UMPDF	2	2	Withdrawn
2	1980	PDIC; APHLC	2	1	Lost
Total				2	

Table-5.6 indicates the number of Cut Motions moved by the Opposition with regard to the three issues undertaken that is land and land relations; boundary problems and law and order problem. In this Second Assembly 4(four) Cut Motions were submitted though only 3(three) Motions were admitted by the Speaker for discussion in the House. The Motions introduced in this Assembly were concerned with all three issues. In 1978, 2(two) Cut Motions were admitted — one on boundary and one on land. The Motions were later withdrawn. In 1980 session 2(two) Motions were submitted and only 1(one) was admitted because of their similarity. This Motion concerned the law and order situation as a result of the situation in 1979. This Motion was lost when put to vote.

In the Second Assembly, the three issues were actively pursued by the Opposition as a result of policy(s) initiated by the Government. In this 1978 session for the first time members of the Congress party as part of the UMPDF actively participated in the discussion of issues on land and boundary problem by moving the 2(two) Cut Motions in 1978 session. Whereas in 1980 session, Opposition comprising the regional parties moved Motions to initiate discussion on the demand of the Government for requisition of forces for the maintenance of law and order in Shillong.

Table-5.7: List of Cut Motions submitted by the Opposition Members in 1983-1988

Sl. No.	Year	Name of the Party	No. of Notices submitted	No. of Cut Motions Admitted	
1	1985	APHLC & HSPDP	7	7	Withdrawn Lost
2	1986	HSPDP & HPU	5	1	Lost
3	1987	HPU	2	1	Lost
Total				9	

In the Third Assembly covering the period 1983-1988, the Opposition were very active in responding to any policy or demand of the Government with regard to the matter concerning the three issues mentioned as is indicated in Table-5.7. In the previous Assembly the number of Motions on these issues were less whereas in this Assembly total number of 14(fourteen) Cut Motions were submitted and only 9(nine) Motions were admitted for discussion. Similar to previous fate of Motions these Motions too were either withdrawn or lost when put to vote. In the 1985 and 1986 sessions, Cut Motions were moved by Opposition to ventilate their disapproval and opposition of the workings and continuance of the Chandrachud Committee for studying the boundary problems. Total number of 12(twelve) Cut Motions on this issue were submitted and only 8(eight) Motions were admitted to initiate discussion in

the House. In the 1987 session the 2(two) Cut Motions submitted concerned the land and land relations problems. Only 1(one) was admitted but when put to vote it was lost.

In this Assembly, the two main regional parties — APHLC and HSPDP introduced the Cut Motions indicating their serious concern over this boundary issue and expressed their disapproval of the Government's appointment of this Committee. The HSPDP viewed with serious concern the developments of the boundary problem with no solution in sight after many years.

The Oppositions' utilisation of Cut Motions was put to maximum with a view to hinder ready acceptance of any demand for grants by the Government to ensure smooth functioning of any of its policies or programmes. Though the demands were always passed, the Opposition through their Cut Motions ensured that full discussion took place before such passage. The number of Motions moved in the Assembly was not uniform as is indicated in Table-5.7. This issue taken up were not the same with the exception of Motions against the Chandrachud Committee in 1985-86. In the first Assembly Cut Motions were introduced to discuss the demands by the Government pertaining to the issue of land and land relations.

In this Assembly as many as thirteen(13) Cut Notices were submitted on land and land relations issue. In the Second Assembly only 1(one) Motion was submitted on land relations and in the Third Assembly, 2(two) Motions were submitted on this issue. This issue continued to appear in successive Assemblies pending solution to be acceptable to all. The second issue boundary problem was raised through 1(one) Cut Motion in the Second Assembly whereas in Third Assembly the Opposition moved several Cut Motions 12(twelve) to voice their disapproval over the appointment and workings of the Chandrachud Committee. During the period 1972-1988 only once in

the Second Assembly was a Cut Motion used by the Opposition against demands of the Government to requisition outside Police force to deal with the law and order problem in Shillong.

Though most of the Cut Motions introduced by the Opposition on supplementary grants and general grants were usually withdrawn after clarification and assurances from the Government, yet they served as valuable instruments for the Opposition to criticise the policies of the Government and voice their disapproval of any policies therefore ensuring the general public are made aware of these issues of vital importance to the State. The regional parties as indicated by the tables, as Opposition parties introduced Cut Motions to any demands of the Government, whereas the Congress(R) a national party actively sponsored such Motions in the Second Assembly on the issue of land by members of another community representing the interest of a section of their constituents who were against the policy of the Government with regard to land relations in Meghalaya.

Resolutions

Resolution may be in the form of a declaration of opinion, or a recommendation or may in the form to record either approval or disapproval by the House of an act or policy of the Government. Members may give notice of resolutions relating to matters of public interest.

Table-5.8: Resolutions Moved by Opposition Members in the Three Assemblies 1972-1988

Sl. No.	Sessions	Name of the Party	Resolutions moved by Opposition	Resolutions moved by Ruling Party	
First Assembly					
1.	1973	HSPDP (L) PDIC (L & O)	2	-	Lost
2.	1975	PDIC (B)	1	-	Lost
3.	1976	Congress(R) (L)	-	1	Adopted
Second Assembly					
1.	1980	PDIC (L & O)	1	-	Not Adopted
Third Assembly					
1.	1985	HSPDP (L & O)	1	-	Withdrawn
2.	1986	HPU (L)	1	-	Withdrawn
3.	1987	HPU (L)	1	-	Withdrawn

(L) - Land issue; (B) – Boundary problem; (L & O) – Law and order problem.

From the Table-5.8, it can be seen that in the First Assembly 1972-1978, 4(four) Resolutions were moved. Three(3) were Resolutions moved by the Opposition and 1(one) was moved by the Minister for Revenue on the issue of land. The Resolutions moved by the Opposition were lost but the Government sponsored Resolution was adopted.

Only 1(one) Resolution on question of Law and Order problem was moved by the Opposition in the Second Assembly 1978-1983. The Resolution moved in 1980 was not adopted.

During the Third Assembly 1983-1988, three Resolutions were moved in 1985, 1986 and 1987. In this Assembly issues of Land and Land Relations and Law

and Order problem were considered important and the Opposition moved Resolutions on Law and Order problem in 1985 but 1986 and 1987 Resolutions on land were moved by the HPU.

The Independent members (later PDIC) moved 2(two) Resolutions in the First Assembly — one on boundary issue another on law and order problem. Whereas the main Opposition – the HSPDP moved Resolution once only on the issue of land relations. In the Third Assembly the two main regional parties indicated their disapproval of the policy of the Government by moving Resolutions — 2(two) on issue of land and 1(one) on law and order problem.

The two issues that warranted the maximum number of Resolutions were land and land relations issue and law and order problem. The First and Third Assemblies witnessed the same number of Resolutions moved by the regional parties who were in the Opposition. The Resolutions were either lost or withdrawn.

In these Assemblies, the PDIC played an active role in recording disapproval of the policies of the Government in tackling the law and order situation in Shillong once in 1973 and twice in 1980 sessions after the capital witnessed tension in these previous years. The HPU and HSPDP the two main regional parties also moved Resolutions on land relations issue indicating the intensity this problem generate in the minds of the Opposition by the actions, decisions and policies of the Government. Almost all the resolutions proposed by the Opposition were not accepted but the resolution of the Government was almost unanimously adopted with the exception of the Leader of the Opposition who was absent.

Legislation: Private Members' Bills and Government Bills

In a Cabinet form of Government the legislative business is generally divided into two groups, namely, the Government business and the Private Members' business.

In the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly every Tuesday and Thursday is allotted for the transaction of the Private Members' Bills. The Opposition and other private members fully utilised this opportunity. During the period 1972-1988, with regard to the three issues undertaken some bills were introduced in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. Most of the Private Members' Bills were indirect legislative proposals, which aimed at altering the Government's legislations by inserting new clauses, omitting some clauses and modifying Government's amendments.

Table-5.9: Private Members' Bills introduced by Opposition and Ruling Party Members in 1972-1988

Sessions	Name of Party	Private Members' Bill moved by Opposition	Private Members' Bill moved by Ruling Party	
1974	PDIC	Meghalaya Land and Revenue (Regulation) Bill, 1974	-	Lost
	Congress(R)	Amendment Bill to the above Bill	-	Lost
	APHLC	-	1*	Passed
1977	HSPDP	Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) (Amendment) Bill, 1977	-	Negatived
1979	Congress(R)	Meghalaya Transfer of Land Regulation (Amendments) Bill, 1979	-	Lost
	APHLC	-	1*	Passed
1981	PDIC	Land Acquisition (Meghalaya Amendment) Bill, 1981	-	Lost

* 1973 - Meghalaya Transfer of Land Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 1973 introduced by the Government comprising the recommendations of the Governor, was passed.

* 1979 - The Government Bill – the Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) (Amendment) Bill 1979, was passed.

Table-5.9 indicated the Private Members' Bills by the Opposition and ruling party during the Assemblies with regard to the issues of land, boundary and law and order. All the Private Members Bills were concerned with the sole issue of land relations. In the First Assembly Private Members' Bills by the Opposition were introduced in two sessions - 1974 and 1977 sessions. Both the bills were lost or considered negative by the Speaker of the House. The lone Government sponsored Bill in 1974 was passed. In the Second Assembly, in the 1979 session only one Private Members' Bill introduced by the Opposition and one Government sponsored Bill was moved. The Bill of the Opposition was lost; the Government sponsored Bill was passed.

The Third Assembly's sole Private Members' Bill was introduced by the PDIC in 1981. The Bill was lost.

These Bills moved by individual members were all based on the issue of land and land relations. Though the Government did not extend support for such bills as they contravenes its own bills, however, the discussion on these bills were fruitful, since individual members of the House had drawn the attention of the Government to the necessity of changes in the existing laws by introducing amendments to bills passed by the Government.

With regard to the issue of land relations members of the Congress(R) expressed concern over the proposed move by the Government's introduction of Bills on land as it was felt that this would adversely affect and infringe the rights of certain sections of the residents of Meghalaya and in this regard, the party whose members who moved these bills were members of a particular community, moved such amendments seeking changes in the Bills proposed by the Government. In this connection, the Congress(R) moved two Amendment Bills – one in 1974 seeking

amendments to the amendment Bill 1974 of the PDIC member the Meghalaya Land and Revenue (Regulation) Bill 1974 and another in 1979 the Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) (Amendment) Bill 1979, seeking amendments to certain clauses in the Bill passed by the Government.

Another Opposition party viewing with serious concern the Bills being introduced by the Government was the PDIC. The party introduced two Private Members' Bills twice – one in 1974 seeking amendments to the Clauses I and II of the Government Bill, and another in the 1981 session the Land Acquisition (Meghalaya Amendment) Bill, 1981. Both the Bills when put to voice vote after discussion were lost.

The attitude of the Government was negative as indicated by the position of the Government towards the Amendment Bill moved by the PDIC which was lost by voice vote, due to opposition from the ruling party which refused to endorse the amendments sought. However, the same amendments which were not endorsed by the Government later were made the main provisions of the Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) (Amendment) Bill, 1976 introduced by the Government. Though stiff resistance was offered by the Opposition alleging the Government of adopting double standards and negative in its approach towards the Opposition, this Bill was passed as the Government never favoured the Opposition, the Opposition never miss any opportunity in drawing the attention of the Government and the House towards the need of changes in the State of existing laws and public grievances.

Motions on Policy and General Interest

The discussion on a matter of general public interest and policy or situation or statement provides ample opportunities to the Opposition to enlighten itself. The

notice of the Motion is required to be given in writing addressed to the Secretary. The Speaker decides the admissibility of a Motion with reference to the rules and disallows any Motions or part thereof which abused the right of a Motion.

Table-5.10: Motions Moved by Opposition Members 1972-1988

Year(s)	Name of Party	No. of Motions Introduced	Issues on which Motions are based	
1973	HSPDP	1	Boundary	Closed
1974	HSPDP	1	Boundary	Not admitted
1975	Independent HSPDP	2	Boundary	Closed
1977	HSPDP	1	Boundary	Closed

Motions Introduced in First Assembly

Table-5.10 indicated the number of Motions introduced or moved by the Opposition with regard to the Boundary issue considered to be vital to the new State. Total number of 5(five) Motions were moved solely on this issue. This indicated the matter to be of general interest and concern.

The HSPDP which remained the main continuous Opposition party in the First Assembly raised maximum number of Motions on this issue as the boundary issue occupied prominence in the Constitution of the party.

Table-5.11: Motions Moved by Opposition Members in 1978-1983

Year(s)	Name of Party	No. of Motions Introduced	Issues on which Motions are based	
1979	HSPDP	1	Boundary	Closed
1982	PDIC	1	Boundary	Closed

Motions Introduced in Second Assembly

In the Second Assembly 1978-1983 less number of Motions were moved by the Opposition. Motions were moved only in two sessions – 1979 and 1982 sessions of the Assembly. Motions moved in this period also were on the issue of boundary. Both the Motions were closed after the members were satisfied with the reply and clarification of the minister concerned.

In this Assembly, the HSPDP and the PDIC, regional parties in the Opposition moved Motions seeking clarification and discussion in the House on matters relating to the boundary issue.

Table-5.12: Motions Moved by Opposition Members 1983-1988

Year(s)	Name of Party	Number of Motions Introduced	Issues on which Motions are based	
1984	APHLC	1	Boundary	Closed
1985	HSPDP	2	1-Land 1-Boundary	Closed

Motions Introduced in Third Assembly

Table-5.12 indicated the number of Motions moved by the Opposition in the Third Assembly. In this Assembly 2(two) Motions on the boundary issue were moved by the APHLC and HSPDP each in 1984 and 1985. Only one issue concerning land relations where a Motion was moved by HSPDP in 1985. Total number of 3(three) issues were introduced in this Assembly.

In this Assembly, the HSPDP again moved two Motions one on land and one on boundary. For the first time, the APHLC being an Opposition party moved a Motion on the boundary issue. The Motions were closed after discussion, and no concrete solution was arrived at.

In all the three Assemblies, the issue generating maximum number of Motions moved by the Opposition was the boundary issue. This issue totally dominated the first Assembly when Motions were raised by the Opposition in successive sessions with the exception of the 1976 session when there was a change in the set up of the House. Thereafter, in successive Assemblies — the Second and Third Assembly continuously were raised in the House by the Opposition though not with the same intensity as in the First Assembly, clearly indicating the level of the importance of this issue in the minds of the public. Members of the regional parties especially the PDIC and HSPDP viewed with serious concern any developments or incidents arising with regard to the boundary issue.

The HSPDP showed consistency with regard to monitoring any developments on the boundary issue. In the three successive Assemblies, the party raised Motions on this issue. The First Assembly saw the maximum number of Motions raised by the party in successive sessions of the Assembly from 4(four) in 1972-1978 to 1(one) in 1978-1983 and 1(one) in 1983-1988. The party indicated its commitment to solving this issue facing the new State though without much success as all the Opposition sponsored Motions on this issue were either closed or withdrawn. The other regional parties — PDIC, APHLC and Independents also moved Motions on this issue seeking discussion in the House.

This boundary issue occupied a vital stance in the politics and development of the new State. During this period several incidents occurred necessitating the Opposition to move Motions to initiate discussion in the House and the Government to clarify its position with regard to the solution of this problem. The Government was forced to take steps to meet some of the demands of the Opposition arising in the House on the discussion of the Motions.

Adjournment Motions

Adjournment Motions are considered powerful weapons in the hands of the Opposition to be used to tackle any moves of the Government. The purpose of an adjournment Motion is to draw the attention of the House to a definite matter of urgent public importance and to seek discussion on the subject forthwith by adjoining the business before the House. This gives an opportunity to a member to raise an issue to discuss it on the floor of the House.

Table-5.13: Number of Adjournment Motions Moved by Opposition Members in 1972-1988

Year(s)	Name of Party	Number of Motions Introduced	Issues on which Motions are based	
1979	UMPDP	2	1-Boundary 1-Law & Order	Disallowed Ruled out of order
1982	PDIC	1	Boundary	Admitted for discussion
1987	HPU	2	1-Land 1-Law & Order	Admitted for discussion Disallowed
Total		5		

In Table-5.13 is shown the number of adjournment Motions moved by members of the Opposition in the three successive Legislative Assemblies on the three issues undertaken for study. From the above table, it can be seen that adjournment Motions on the three issues – boundary, land, law and order were moved once in each Assembly that is 1979 session only in the First Assembly; 1982 session in the Second Assembly and 1987 session in the Third Assembly. With regard to the three issues, the boundary issue was taken up twice as also the law and order problem whereas land issue was taken up once only in the last Assembly. Some of the Motions were admitted by the Speaker and ensuing debate followed in the House, others were either disallowed or ruled out of order by the Speaker.

In the 1979 session two adjournment Motions were moved by the same party (UMPDP – the coalition of regional parties in Opposition) seeking discussion on the two issues but both Motions were not admitted for discussion thus thwarting the attempts of the Opposition to initiate discussion in the House. In 1982 only the PDIC moved a motion for discussing the boundary issue. The Motion was admitted and discussion ensued making for a victorious move by the Opposition. The newly formed HPU moved two adjournment Motions in 1987 session seeking to bring to the attention of the House the land problem and law and order problem in the State. One Motion was admitted for discussion whereas the other was disallowed. This caused for mixed reaction from the main Opposition party as there was mixed results of the Motions it had moved in the House.

The Opposition's utilisation of the opportunities of moving adjournment Motions resulted in mixed results. The number of Motions admitted by the Speaker was few considering that the Opposition moved few motions on these issues. The attitude of the Government towards these moves was not favourable since the Government always tried to minimise the importance of the issues even though the subject of an adjournment Motion was of public importance. Most of the Motions were tabled with a view to redressing the public grievances and calling the Government to public accountability. These served well enough to draw the attention of the House and the public to the existing grievances.²⁸

To conclude, therefore, it can be stated that the Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly for the most comprising the regional parties have utilised devices in its armory with which to thwart the adverse moves or policies of the Government; to initiate discussion on the stated issues in the House; to draw the

²⁸ Proceedings of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1972-1988.

attention of the House to a matter considered to be of urgent public importance, to hamper any adverse actions of the Government; to seek clarification and answers from the Government with regard to the issues considered of significance to the developments of the State.

Chapter-VI

CONCLUSION

Prior to the advent of the British into the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills, these areas remained isolated from the plains and hardly any contact existed with their neighbours except in isolated incidents such as whenever the people from the hills ventured into the plains to plunder, loot and declared internecine wars against the people of the plains. The societies in the hills had a grass root system of democracy and were administered by their traditional chiefs and institutions.

It was only after the colonial expansion to this part of the region that the hill areas were formally united under the British rule. In 1864 the district headquarters of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were shifted to Shillong which also became the headquarters of the new province of Assam in 1874. These hill areas became a part of the province of Assam in 1905 when Bengal was partitioned and they were tagged to the newly created Assam province and Eastern Bengal. However in 1912, the British Government reversed the partition of Bengal and these areas became part of the revived province of Assam.

In 1921, following the Montagu-Chelmsford Report of 1917,* and the Government of India Act of 1919, empowering the Governor-General-in-Council to declare any territory in British India as a backward tract, this Council made a declaration in 1921, that the Garo Hills, the British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills other than the Shillong Municipality and the Shillong Cantonment were declared a backward tracts. Following the Simon Commission Report and the Government of India Act, 1935, the British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills became Partially

* This Report made a specific recommendation that “the typically backward tracts should be excluded from the scope of the Reformed Council.”

Excluded Areas within this Act. These areas were represented in the Assam Legislative Council since 1920 and subsequently also in the pre-independence Assam Legislative Assembly.

The interim period in India was eventful as the Khasi States' Federation managed the affairs of the Khasi states according to the powers derived from the Instrument of Accession and Annexed Agreement signed with the Dominion Government. The Khasi-Jaintia National Conference, however, was opposed to the continuance of the Federation and came forward with a plan for the Autonomous District Council, and during the final arrangement, the Sixth Schedule was implemented which applied to both states and British portion in 1952. The developments in the re-organisation did not end here as agitations for a Hill State originated and reached a climax in 1954-55 when the States Reorganisation Commission visited these areas, on which occasion the Hills Union and other parties, submitted their respective memoranda in favour of a Hill State. After more than a decade of peaceful constitutional agitation for a separate Hill state, the Government of India partially conceded to this demand and Parliament passed the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act, 1969, constituting the Autonomous State of Meghalaya within the existing State of Assam. The then Prime Minister, Smti Indira Gandhi inaugurated the Autonomous State on 2nd April, 1970. The old Council Chamber in Shillong was selected as the legislature of the Autonomous State constituting 38 elected members who were indirectly elected by the two District Councils of Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills and 3 members nominated by the Governor bringing the total to 41 members. In 1971, the Parliament passed the North Eastern Areas Reorganisation Act 1971 which conferred full fledged statehood on the Autonomous State. Meghalaya became a state on 21st January, 1972. The formation of

the new State ushered a new era for the people of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills and secured for them an opportunity to govern themselves through their own legislature comprising the ruling party and the Opposition. This study focussed on the role of the Opposition party or parties in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly within the purview of the three successive Legislative Assemblies from 1972-1988.

The role of the Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly denotes a difference from the two party system as is prevalent in the Western countries. It was found that no party remained in the Opposition for a longer period even during the fixed term of the Assembly. Rather, the Legislative Assembly in Meghalaya is marked by frequent changes in the groups of the Opposition parties during the period under study. The Opposition in the State was numerically weak and divided into groups and a number of independent members within the period of 1972-1988. But in spite of being numerically weak particularly during the period 1972-1978 (First Legislative Assembly), the Opposition accounts for a good record on ventilation of public grievances with regard to the specified issues through discussions, motions, questions on matters of public importance indicating the importance of these issues, by the different political parties since most of these issues were the objectives of these parties as reflected in their Constitutions. Instruments such as no-confidence motions were tabled by the Opposition citing the weaknesses or the inability of the Government in power to attend to or solve some of the pertinent problems. There were instances of staging of walk-outs of members of the Opposition in protest against any adverse actions of the Government in power. On the other hand, it may also be stated that the regional political parties had not been able to hold out the threat of an alternative Government. There was no party which could provide an alternative Government and dislodge the Congress party from the seat of power. However, the

same cannot be said of the Congress party whenever it was in the Opposition. The Congress though being a national political party, often managed to successfully project itself as an alternative and managed to wrest power from the ruling party in the state politics of Meghalaya. This indicated that the Congress though it was not a regional political party had somehow managed to gain a strong foothold in the State and provide stiff competition to the regional political parties. There was lack of an effective democratic Opposition in the sense in which it is understood in the West.

The regional political parties irrespective of whether they occupy the ruling seat or in the Opposition were characterised by infighting and internal conflicts. In the process the regional political parties were dragging the State into the problem of political instability whenever they were in power. The Congress party, therefore, managed to capitalise on the unstable nature of regional political parties and engineered floor crossings, thereby strengthening its own stable position.

For the most part of the period within the purview of this study (1972-1988), the regional political parties were in the Opposition. In the rural areas of Meghalaya, most of the people being illiterate, party manifesto and propaganda literature could not wield much influence on the electorate unless the top leaders visited them for canvassing. The regional political parties also lack ideology and their organisation was also weak. The electorate were also influenced by leaders rather than by the party, though in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, regional political parties had great influence on the electorate.

Two political parties — the Congress and the APHLC capitalise on the sentiments of the people with regard to the attainment of statehood to strengthen their position. The Congress through forging an electoral alliance with the APHLC managed to secure a foothold in Meghalaya politics by securing 9(nine) seats in the

First General Elections 1972. Then after its merger with the APHLC in 1976, the Congress further consolidated and strengthened its position in the State in particular in the Garo Hills. The APHLC fought the First General Elections on the plank of a party synonymous with the attainment of statehood, emerging victorious with absolute majority. But this victory was not able to be maintained by the party. When Capt. W.A. Sangma along with his followers decided to merge with the Indian National Congress in 1976, the prospects of the APHLC dwindled seriously leading to its split and subsequently its disappearance from Meghalaya politics. The merger of the two political parties in 1976 proved advantageous to the Indian National Congress but was a disastrous experience with catastrophic implications for the APHLC. It indicates a contrast in the performances of the two main political parties which had entered Meghalaya politics simultaneously.

The multi-party system dominated the political scene in Meghalaya during these years (1972-1988) with one strong party in power, the Congress, and several minor parties and groups in the Opposition comprising the regional political parties and some independent members.

In Meghalaya, the Opposition parties have never formed electoral alliance with the exception in 1984 ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. The two main Opposition parties — the APHLC and HSPDP came to an understanding prior to the elections under the banner of the HPU and together fought the 1984 Lok Sabha elections. This alliance was, however, short-lived as after the defeat of its common candidate in the elections, the HSPDP decided to retain its own identity, whereas the APHLC submerged itself in the HPU. Both the parties were concentrating and engaging in their own internal problems instead of presenting a unified Opposition, thereby ensuring smooth victory for the Congress party. Another factor contributing

to the lackluster performance of the regional parties and which hampers their effectiveness, is the presence of many independent candidates in the electoral arena, and they are largely responsible for the fragmentation of the Opposition votes.

The Opposition accounts for a substantial performance though at times their fragmentary nature of approach hampers their effectiveness in performing their role in the House. Though weak and fragmented, the Opposition were vocal in expressing and ventilating public grievances and bringing out in the House the acts of omissions and commissions of the Government. But another factor which went against them was their inability to sustain a united front against the party in power.

On the three issues — land relations boundary dispute between Meghalaya and Assam, law and order problem together with the problem of influx during 1972-1988 have been taken up by successive Opposition. In the three successive Assemblies these issues were taken up almost in all sessions generating intense debates and discussion in the House with the Opposition placing the Government in a difficult situation, whenever needed, though they were unsuccessful in securing the Government to concede to their demands. The Opposition were, however, successful in their endeavour of playing the role of a watchdog by ensuring that every action of the Government was well scrutinised on the floor of the House. It may also be stated that successive parties whenever they were in Opposition voraciously followed any move of the Government by raising questions and generating criticisms. But the reverse was followed whenever these parties were in the ruling seats. This could be one of the reasons why permanent solution of the issues concerned have been eluded so far without any tangible solution.

The Congress had devoted its energy to raising the issue on land relations when it sat on the Opposite benches. Its role as an Opposition was the role of a

conciliator in the conflict of interests between tribals and non-tribals. This was because its members are drawn from constituencies where non-tribals form a sizeable number. The party successfully opposed the law passed by the APHLC Government in 1972 and refused to withdraw their motion resulting in stalling the Bill from being passed. However, this action earned the aversion of the tribals wherein the party's performance in the Khasi Hills became insignificant leading to the outcome that members of the party withdraw from the House when the Bill was tabled and discussed. This affected the performance of the party in the Khasi Hills as it was viewed as a national party which tried to serve and further the interests of the non-tribals.

The HSPDP was actively involved with the boundary issue which viewed it with serious concern and continuously criticised the inability of successive Governments to resolve this contentious issue. This is because this issue is one of the aims of the HSPDP where it laid stress to be achieved by the party as stated in its Constitution and its successive manifestoes. For a brief period, when it was part of the Government, the party was itself unable to achieve any concrete solution to this problem. Though at times being part of a coalition Government the fact remains that this party too could not achieve success or find a lasting solution on this issue.

Another regional party actively involved in the boundary issue is the PDIC. This party continually raised this issue in successive sessions of the House, though the party comprised of only 2(two) members in the Assembly. The members of this party voraciously pursued this issue and secured discussions of the same in the House and questioning to what is being termed as "passive attitude", of the Government towards this vital issue whenever or irrespective of what Government was in power. This can

be attributed to the fact that constituencies of the members belonging to this party were mostly affected by such a situation arising in the border areas.

The fate of the three issues undertaken for study remains inconclusive as no permanent solution was realised during the period of study (1972-1988). Till date no solution has been reached and these issues continually appeared in nearly every successive Assembly debates whenever any new developments took place.

As an Opposition, the APHLC has not given a significant performance with regard to ventilating public opinions or grievances on the specific issues except in extending support to any moves made by other Opposition parties. Independents also have a good record of performing their role as members of the Opposition. Independent members in particular, M.N. Majaw and H. Hadem actively and continuously generated laudable performance in ventilating issues considered significant for the new State particularly the specified issues though they later joined their respective political parties PDIC and Congress(R). These leaders have raised vehement criticisms against what they considered adverse actions of the Government leading to heated debates in the House. The same level of intensity of their performance as members of the Opposition was pursued even when they became members of the political parties. This attempt has forced the Government to act responsibly since its actions were being scrutinised closely by a vigilant Opposition.

The Provisional Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya was formed on 2nd April, 1970. It was marked by a grand coalition and the absence of an Opposition. During this period, though officially there was no Opposition party in the Legislative Assembly some level of Opposition was provided by the Congress party in the form of Opposition to the passing of the Meghalaya Land Transfer Bill 1970, which sought to prohibit transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals. The Congress party was against

the passage of this Bill as according to the party, this would have damaged the projection of the party as a conciliator in the conflict of interests between tribals and non-tribals. Therefore, though being a part of the ruling coalition, the Congress party took up the role of the Opposition as the stance taken up by the then Government was against the interest of the party.

The first Meghalaya Legislative Assembly (that is from 1972-1978), may be divided into two phases: (i) from 1972 to 1976; (ii) from 1976 to 1978. In the first phase (1972-1976), the HSPDP was the main Opposition party together with some Independent members who actively participated in the discussions on land and boundary issues. In the second phase (1976-1978), the strength of the Opposition rose with the inclusion of the members of the APHLC who refused to align themselves in the merger with the Congress party and instead joined the ranks of the Opposition. The performance of the APHLC as an Opposition remained insignificant as the party members lacked vigour while pursuing any acts of omission and commission by the Government on the specified issues, although they extended support to initiatives of other members of the Opposition.

The initial period of the Second Assembly (1978-1983) was marked by political instability during the period between 1978 to 1979. During this period, the Congress together with some Independents formed the UMPDF and played the role of the Opposition. As an Opposition, the party emerged as a numerically strong Opposition, and its members as well as the Independents played a responsible role in the articulating the voice of the people and drew the attention of the Government and the House to the problems concerning the State, especially the boundary issue in Garo Hills which was left virtually untouched in the previous sessions. From 1979 to 1983, there was a change in the Opposition. The Opposition in this period comprised of the

regional parties that is the APHLC and the PDIC. This oppositional group was numerically weak and was characterised by a weak Opposition, though the PDIC with only 2(two) members tried to effectively perform its task as the main Opposition in the House.

In the third Assembly (1983-1988), the Congress party briefly occupied the Opposition bench for a period of one month only (March 2nd to March 31st, 1983). From the month of March 1983 onwards up to 1988, the regional political parties became the Opposition groups in the Assembly. Initially, the groups were numerically strong but due to defections to the ruling party the numerical strength of the regional parties declined leading to the fragmentation of the members of the Opposition. It was found that during this Assembly, the first attempt of merger of the regional political parties was tried though without much success. After the defeat of the united sponsored candidate in the Lok Sabha Elections of 1984, the merger split. It is interesting to note that this merger proved disastrous for the regional parties. The APHLC which remained for so long the main regional party in the State, got totally submerged in the merger and a few years later disappeared from Meghalaya state politics. The HSPDP re-emerged on the political scene being revived by some of its loyalists. This has, therefore, portrayed the negative role of the regional political parties. It also clearly indicated their inability to overcome their differences as the political parties were marked by disunity and fragmentation. The regional parties were unable to present a united front against the Congress whether as the ruling party or the Opposition. They remained a fragmented group and this encouraged the defections of their members to the ruling party. Infighting among the leaders of the APHLC led to the breakdown of the party which finally led to the culmination and its disappearance from the State politics of Meghalaya.

The Opposition in Meghalaya can be stated to be fragmented into several groups in addition to being numerically weak. Under these circumstances, the role and actions of the Opposition were very much strenuous. But it would be wrong to conclude that it fared very badly as an Opposition. In spite of these drawbacks, the Opposition exhibited a good record of ventilating public grievances through questions, half-an-hour discussions, motions and discussions on matters of public importance with regard to the issues specified for this study, though for the most part they could not carry through their suggestions and opinions due to lack of adequate numbers for voting. However, it has also been observed that a party's response to incidents and events involving law and order situations or problems and its stand on issues of political significance depends upon the side it occupies, either as the Treasury benches or the Opposition benches.

Whether the role of the Opposition has been effective or otherwise, is a question that is debatable. But what has been observed from this study is that till date, what Meghalaya lacked is a strong Opposition that can keep the Government perpetually on its toes and can offer alternative programmes for the electorate to choose from, and to be a vigilant and vibrant Opposition with members vigorously pursuing any initiatives or actions of the Government.

In spite of the lack of strength of the Opposition affecting their effective performance, this however, does not suggest that there is no scope for the development of a strong democratic Opposition in the future. There has to be an effective electoral alliances among the Opposition parties to counter the ruling party. This can be made possible only if efforts to narrow down differences are made by the parties concerned. The tendency of forming minor parties is to be discouraged to prevent emergence of splinter groups in the Assembly, though this may not be

possible in reality, as Meghalaya is a small state and the presence of various political parties has hampered the development of an effective and strong Opposition. A strong Opposition can effectively carry out the task of being a mouth piece of the people, ensuring the stand taken by the Opposition is regarded as important by the Government and also forging a close relationship between the Government and the Opposition.

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APPENDIX

List of Members of the Provisional Meghalaya Legislative Assembly 1970 under the Provision of the Assam Reorganisation Meghalaya Act 1969

Names of Members Elected by the Members of the District Council

1. Shri Williamson A. Sangma, Chief Minister.
2. Shri Stanley D.D. Nichols Roy, Minister.
3. Shri Brington Buhai Lyngdoh, Minister.
4. Shri Edwingson Bareh, Minister.
5. Shri Stanford Marak, Minister.
6. Shri Radhon Sing Lyngdoh, Speaker of the House.
7. Shri P. Ripple Kyndiah.
8. Shri Simon Jenkin Duncan.
9. Shri Molendronath Swer.
10. Shri Darwin D. Pugh.
11. Shri Rokendro Dkhar.
12. Shri Justman Swer.
13. Shri E. Bremly Lyngdoh.
14. Shri Justly Rynshon.
15. Shri Gilfred Singh Giri.
16. Shri S.P. Swer.
17. Shri Lobendri Hujon.
18. Shri Humphrey Nongrum.
19. Shri Kalingstone Laloo.
20. Shri Alwot Berry Diengdoh.
21. Smti Maysalin War.
22. Shri Grohonsing Marak.
23. Shri Bronson Momin.
24. Shri Samarendra Sangma.
25. Shri Nural Islam.
26. Shri Brojendra Sangma.
27. Shri Mody K. Marak.
28. Shri Nimosh Sangma.
29. Smti Josephin Momin.
30. Shri Choronsing Sangma.
31. Shri Witherson Momin.
32. Shri Singjan Sangma.
33. Shri Akramozzaman.
34. Shri Khelaram Bormon.
35. Shri Nimai Rava.
36. Shri Johndeng Pohrmen.
37. Shri Ohiwot Khonglah
38. Shri Beryl Sutnga.

Members Nominated by the Governor

39. Dr. H.C. Bhuyan.
40. Dr. S.C. Deb.
41. Shri Mon Bahadur Newar.

BIO-DATA

Name: Isabelle Marbaniang
Sex: Female
Marital Status: Single
Citizenship: Indian
Religion: Christianity
Whether SC/ST/OBC: Scheduled Tribe
Father's Name: Mestonath Kharchandy
Mother's Name: Siwilda Marbaniang
Employment: Lecturer (Political Science), D.I.E.T., Sohra
Present Address: Riatsamthiah BL 3, Shillong-793 001
Permanent Address: Riatsamthiah BL 3, Shillong-793 001

Educational Qualifications:

<u>Course</u>	<u>Board/University</u>	<u>Year</u>
B.Ed	IGNOU	2004
M.A. (Pol. Science)	NEHU	1995
B.A. Honors (Pol. Science)	NEHU	1992
B.A. Pass	NEHU	1990
P.U. Arts	NEHU	1988
Matriculation	MBOSE	1986

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