The Economy of Meghalaya

TRADITION TO TRANSITION

Hamlet Bareh Ngap Kynta

This techno-economic history-cum-current survey reveals the existence of once flourishing trades when indigenous skills accounted for a variegated character of products,, besides which the land abounded in rich forest and other natural resources. Conduct of trade did face some constraints in the last century particularly during alien rule.

The Khasi and Jaintia Hills has had a long tradition of quality iron-smelting and the production of pig-iron, but with their gradual extinction, the loss has been somewhat compensated with the boom in coal-mining in Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills districts. Limestone excavation is another important activity. Swamp-rice cultivation, floriculture and horticulture, orchid growing and other agricultural inputs have vast potential in this predominantly tribal state of Meghalaya. Livestock production, pisciculture, sericulture and weaving and handicrafts have been given due attention by the state government, but a lot still needs to be done.

Avenues for vocational education have to be expanded and availability of labour both skilled and unskilled has to be ensured so that Meghalaya can boast a robust economy in today's global marketplace. All this has to be done keeping in mind that the tribal genius is encouraged, and local ethnic identity maintained, and not overwhelmed by the trappings of modernity and mass tourism, which are likely as knowledge of Meghalaya's natural beauty spreads.

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Dr Hamlet Bareh Ngap Kynta has had a distinguished academic career and despite his having retired as Head of the Dept. of Creative Arts, NEHU, Shillong in 1994, his academic pursuits still continue. He was awarded the National Fellowship from 1991 to 1993 and again the Emeritus Fellowship of the University Grants Commission from 1998 to 2000.

Beginning his career as Publicity Officer of Union Christian College, Barapani (1957-58) he served in St. Edmund's College, Shillong as a Lecturer (1958-65). Thereafter he held the post of Editor, District Gazetteers, NEFA (*now* Arunachal Pradesh) and Nagaland till 1973. In 1974 he joined North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) as Reader in the Dept. of Continuing Education.

Dr Bareh Ngap Kynta continues to deliver lectures on various themes at the national and international level and has several published articles and books to his credit. His *magnum opus* is *The History and Culture of the Khasi People* now in its third enlarged and revised edition and a biography of William Carey which is currently in press.

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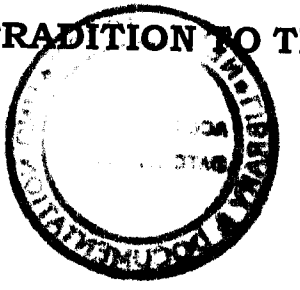

by

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CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

Characteristic features of Physiography

Meghalaya occupies the western position in the North-eastern region. The area of the State is composed between 80° 49' and 92° 42' East Longtitude and between 20° 1' and 26° 5' North Latitude. It is bounded on the north by Goalpara, Kamrup and Karbi Anglong District of Assam, on the south by Bangladesh, on the east by North Cachar Hills District and Barak valley of Assam and on the west by Goalpara district of Assam and Bangladesh. The State contains a total area of over 22,429 sq.kms.

The *Gazetteer of India* Vol. I (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1965), notices on the features of the hilly terrain of Garo Hills as follows:-

"The Tura range occupies a middle position in the Garo Hills running east to west, where the Nokrek peak (1,631 metres above sea level) is located. The parallel range on the north is Arbella. The Someswari range occupies mainly the south-eastern part of the region." The Tura range contains also other eminent peaks, *viz.*, Megonggiri (1,283 metres), Meiminram (1,196 metres) and Gowangdara (1,011 metres) The Simsang river follows mainly the direction of the central and southern ranges. The other peaks are Chitmang

Pinderu, Jaksongram, Chandodenga, Aratacha Renggira and others.*

In the Khasi Hills, ranges are intertwined with curved alignments, the east-west direction which the spurs throw, being more dominant on the central highlands. Some central table lands-Smit, Mawphlang and Langkyrdem break through the spurs to become entangled with Sohra and Mawsynram platforms lying further south which impress themselves like the imposing mountain scenery. Spurs of ranges lying in Jaintia Hills) excepting the southern steepish terrian) are shorter in altitude than the central range, in which the Shillong peak (1,967 metres) is located. Unlike the southern potion of Garo Hills dominated mostly be gentler slopes, the southern portion of Khasi-Jaintia hills, looks to be more precipitous.

The central highlands serve themselves as the fitting watersheds particularly the outer flanks of Shillong and of Nokrek peaks. Damring or Krishnai rising south of Tura range flows northward and is joined in the Assam plains by Dudhnai, a river from Garo Hills before, she converges into the Brahmaputra. Bugi (or Bughai) and Dareng with their head-waters confined on Tura range flow southward, and after a distance past, debouch the hills for Bangladesh plain. The Simsang, a river which winds along the base of Tura and Kylas ranges, also flows westward and after a little distance past, breaks through southward and having passed the hills, debauches thence for the plains, carrying her tributaries - mainly the Rompa, Chima and Rongdik and other streams. Rivers flowing southwards further are Nita, Sanda and Bandra; the Mahadeo also winds along the base of Balpakram peak. Moheskhali with her head-water located on the base of that peak flows likewise southward. A few rivers, on the contrary, *viz.* Ringge, Galwang, Daru and Rangkai flow westward where after draining a considerable portion of the terrain, finally debauch the highlands either

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* Chitmang - (3,365 feet): Pinderu - (2,986 feet) in elevation. The elevation varies roughly, thereupon, from 750 to approximately 1,000 metres, before it rises to the top of Nokrek.

near Goalpara district or the southern plains. Rivers flowing southward are finally emptied into the larger rivers which wash the Surma valley.

Rivers which rise from the base of Shillong peak are Um-iew or Umiam (or Wah Shella) sometimes called Rupa Tylli and Umngot, both flowing southward into Bangladesh, Mynkhen with its head-water located on that range flows north-eastward, and after winding past for a considerable distance, is finally converged into the Brahmaputra in the Nowgong plains. Kynshi, a western river rises from near Sohiong in mid-west: she flows for a considerable distance on her westernmost edge, she then receives tributaries named Umblei and Rilang, and then winds south-eastwardly, before she leaves the hills for the plains in Bangladesh.

Umiam Khwan also rises in a lower spur of the central range: she flows northward then eastward covering a distance through and finally parting off the hills for Assam plains. One of her tributaries is Umkhrah* Umtrew river, which having flown for a shorter distance through the hills, joins Assam plains at Byrnihat; she flows thence eastward and falls into Kolong river. Kupli which washes the eastern most terrain has flown for a considerable distance; (its length approximately is around 220 kms) : she is joined by tributaries named Um-iu-rem, Myntang and Mynriang: she flows northward; on her northern most edge she makes the exit into the plains, and after having covered a little more distance, she coverages with Kolong, and after proceeding a little further she is emptied into river Brahmaputra in Nowgong. Other rivers which make exit into Bangladesh are Lukha, Myntdu, Rew and Prang. Lukha rising in Jaintia Hills flows eastwardly into Barak and then winds westward into Sylhet plain where she becomes Surma river. In fact most of the rivers which wash the southern terrain are finally emptied into the river Surma so called in Bangladesh.

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* Umkhrah rises in the same direction of the range and flows through the capital city of Shillong before she converges with Umaim at some distance, in a lower reach of the hills. Her tributary is Umshyrpi.

There are a number of waterfalls *viz.* Bishop falls, Elephant falls, Spread Eagle falls, Beadon falls, Crinoline and Sweet falls: Most of them are confined inside Shillong and on her close suburbs. Towards Sohra, are Dain-thlen, Noh-sngithiang, Noh-kalikai, Wah-kaba, Iap-khnai and Latara water falls. Mention is also found of Mawklor a falls lying near Mawsynram, also Wei Syntai near Tyng-nger and Umrem near Mawlong. Some of these falls, however, are seen entirely dried up during the winter season.

The famous waterfalls in Garo Hills are Rongbang, Chibok, Mrigi, Warima and Regingsa.

The well known caves are Lum-Lawbah (Sohra), Syndai and Mawsynram. The rock cave of bats lying near Siju is one of the wonderful caves. There are other rock caves situated on the bank of southern rivers in Garo Hills, named Chibe, Dareng and others. Stone structures inside some of the caves in the shape of halls, stages, corridors and lanes of water are reported to have been noticed.

Physiography present its varied features. Rolling ranges running from the lower base of table lands are noticed. The elongated ranges again are seen protruding themselves into fixed directions constituting a precipitous terrian, with mounte up ridges and narrow ravines below. A charming scenery also occurs as and when the base of lower ranges intervene themselves into lower valleys and shorter level lands. A gentler terrain serves better also for the purpose of passage, transport and traffic. The mid-southern plateau forms one of the most precipitous tracts. A marked stratification of rocks and cliffs of an intensive craggy formation intervenes at the steepish part of terrain, where saddles and table-lands dominate. Narrow ravines and gorges intervene inside the base of precipices separating as well the direction of ranges. On the contrary the southern tract although precipitous, has served through the ages as the cradle of various mining and agricultural undertakings. Open valleys show as well the concentration of gentle dales, alleys and meadows.

The *'Himalayan Journals'* first published at the middle of the last century with Reprint editions in 1969 tell us that, "the Khasi flora is in extent and number of fine plants the richest in India and probably in all Asia. We collected upwards of 2,000 flowering plants within ten miles of the station of Churra" (or Sohra) "and a profusions of mosses, lichens and fungis, orchideae where fully 250 kinds grow, chiefly on trees and rocks, but many are terrestrial, inhabiting damp woods and grassy slopes". There are also the balsams, palms, bamboos, birches, horsechestnut oaks, nut-tree, banyans and others.

The same thing applies also in Garo Hills perhaps, in lesser intensity, as a variety of 200 orchids existing as collected were reported before Independence growing on the spurs of Balpakram hills, Simsang valley, Baghmara and the Nokrek range.

Vegetation ranges from decidous to evergreen in the hills. It is characterised also by the transitional sub-tropical which intervenes on the lower hills and adjoining plains. On the higher Khasi terrain, it is partly characterised by wet decidous pine trees of a singular character.

About fauna even three decades ago, we had ourselves seen the small herds of apes, monkeys, stag, hares, deer, *sambar* and elephants, (seasonally, yet rarely, roaming about on the outer fringes of jungles). They were spotted, of course, at more isolated places. Various cubs were also been.

Wild life in jungles, decades ago, comprised of tigers, leopards, wild pigs, wild buffaloes (*masi-prut*), wolves, jackals, *mithuns*, bears and others. Wild life varied as well to squirrels, musk-rats, civet cats, pangolins, antelopes, porcupines and many others.

Birds and wrens were also once plenty; so pheashants, jungle fowls, wood-cocks, teals, partridges, parrots and others composed their respectively large flocks; crows, kites, eagles, owls and thrushes, were also spotted. Herds of more ferocious kinds, consisting of wild elephants, tigers and bears were known to have migrated, at the given seasons

from Bengal to Assam, through hill tracts. But the bulk of wild life, for obvious reasons, has greatly been reduced.

Inspite of a near extinction of wild life, it is a paradox that five villages in a radius falling within the confines of Mawshynrut block, located in West Khasi Hills, recently were even threatened by a herd of ferocious elephants, frequenting those places. They had caused considerable damage to crops under plantation as well as dwellings of people and also caused loss of lives (by news report - *U Mawphor,* October 24, 1998). It seems that they still have shelter in wild jungles lying more remotely.

Some varieties of fauna are common in the hills and plain areas of the State. Others choose their abodes according to the climate and elevation.

Fish species also show variation between the hill character and plain character in their physique, colour and shape.

Some of the species declining in number to their verge of extinction are Indian bison, hoolock, gibbon, sub-bear, serow, panther tiger, green hornbills, hill mynas, leopards, porcupines and others. The 1993 State census shows a number of 63 tigers and 2,872 elephants. But these numbers are also fast declining.

On Geology, we may sum up briefly below:-

Garo hills is rich in mineral resources. The most valuable minerals consist of coal, felspar, glass sands, gypsum, iron ore, limestone, pyrites, phosphates and clay. Coal, a couple of decades ago, admixed with sandstone was found lying scattered about near Tura, Rongrengiri, Darrangiri, and Siju, with an estimated reserve of 127,000,000 tonnes within an area, stretching for about a distance of 50 sq. kms and 118,000,000 tonnes confined into a contiguous area measuring about 65 sq. kms. and of a good quality. The deposits, however, extend further into Simsang valley and further east, into the gorges of Nongstoin situated in West Khasi Hills. Rongrengiri is known to contain two thin seams which cover a total area measuring about 65 sq. kms.

Deposits of felspars occur near Tura, Anongiri, Gengjalgiri, Senthagiri, Chisakgiri and there are small deposits of glass sands near Siju and neighbouring places.

Gypsum is found at Tarapara, Meringipara and Mogapara ranges.

Limestone lies along the southern flank of the Tura range extending from Athambing running through Siju, Dapsi, Darugiri and advancing towards Damalgiri.

Traces of white clay are met near Sohrarim and smaller pockets seem to exist near Sutnga and Shangpung.

Fire clay exists near Jowai, but deposits of the better plastic clay exists near Larnai with an estimated reserve of about 5,000 tonnes.

Kaolin which represents pure and white types perhaps has its this seam near Sutnga.

Then, there are traces of lithomarge in the area comprised between Nongryngkoh and Myntrang and within the confine of the river Kupli-Kharkor junction.

Some flimsy traces of bauxite are supposed to occur near Bapung.

Copper-lead-zinc graded into what is called 'polymetallic sulphide mineralisation' is reported as traceable at Um-pyrtha: traces of copper are met inside the bed of Um-sohryngkew, a stream below Mawsmai: thin green film of copper salt yet sparsely occuring, exists inside craggy formation along the course of river Rilang in Langrin.

The final stage of mineralisation seems to have occurred because rock ingredients mixed with sillimanite were found and even worked out near Sunapahar. Also some coarse elements of dumortierite are known to exist near Mawshynrut. Glass-sands in combination with quartz grains, mica and other ingredients are reported to exist near Laitryngngew with an approximate reserve of 40,64,00 tonnes.

Traces of gem stones mixed with saphirine have also been reported near Pathar Knang.

More details on common resources including limestone and coal have been provided in the forthcoming section.

Mondon Bareh in this connection, postulates that, "in the bosom of our land are stored the precious minerals - limestone and coal and metals - silver and gold". He further emphasised that, "that in our Khasi and Jaintia Hills, buried in the crust of the earth, there lie hidden for ages, unexplored and unused vast gold mines and mica fields" (quoted from his English Original as appeared in 1930-31).

In 1961 we saw several shells called *tyngka-myrsiang* which is fact were fragments forming the outer covering of a shale of mica. They lay scattered about on hill sides of Khasi West, particularly near Pariong in part of Mawiang State. But when we visited the place recently, bulk of these have disappeared. Micaceous formation on the crust of earth appears to have intervened during the long ages past.

Owing to the range in elevation, climate therefore, varies from place to place. Climatic conditions, in general vary from tropical to temparate. Shillong plateau being higher than Tura, the former's climate is more pleasant. Garo Districts have hot summers and pleasant winters. Climate of Tura and other Garo interior places is similar to that of foothills, hot, humid and malarious. The temperature goes down in the higher altitudes. Simsang valley as an exception, has a more pleasant climate. The foothills obviously share the climate of their neighbouring plains with hot summers and warmer winters. Weatheric variation is shown as follows:–

Place	- average maximum in April	- average minimum in January
Garo Hills	34°C	14°C
Khasi Hills	24°C	12°C*

The State records an average rainfall ranging from 2,000 to 4,000 mm. annually, excepting Sohra or Cherrapunji and Mawsynram, which are the rainiest places in the world, located on mid-southern highlands. The two

spots mentioned seem from year to year, to have been racing up among themselves, to scale up to their heights. The highest precipitation would have varied from 8,993 mm. to 12,988'6 mm. in Sohra or Cherra in 1995-1996 and 13,832 mm. at Mawsynram in 1995.

Syndai and Mo-te-leknup located further eastward are also known to be the rainier places. Southern Garo Hills lying along the same belt, would have received also a higher precipitation of rainfall. Heavy downpours in Sohra (cherra) or Mawsynram, a decade ago, would have stretched up at a time to 14 days without break. Rainy season starts usually in April and continues recently till October. Hail stones occurring sometimes in early spring seem to signalise the advent of spring time.

The gales also occur during the spring time. The sky often is, overcast during the heavy downpours, and fog is seen to envelop the shadowed areas such as Langkyrdem or Laitryngew lying on the mid-southern highlands.

Towards the foothills bordering on Assam and Bangladesh, temparature during the hot seasons ranges between a maximum of 23-26 degree centigrade and minimum 12-17 degree centigrade. The mean winter temperature otherwise is 9 degree centigrade.* Ground frost occurs at the coldest places at winter time, and is noticed at the earliest morning hours.

During the last two decades (by DIPR August 15, 1997) rainfall ranges from 11,995 mm. to 14,189 mm in Sohra and over Mawsynram it was 10,689 mm. to 13,802 mm

Figures for the year 1995 are further shown below:–

Shillong	.....	2,108'1 mm.
Tura	.....	3,094 mm.
Mawsynram	.....	13,832 mm
Sohra (Cherrapunji)	.....	12,805 mm
Tura (1994)	.....	4,022 mm.

* During the cold wave, temparature is likely to fall to 5°C and below.

Rainy places, on a moderate scale, would have received a total of 2,500 mm. and above per annum.

	Population of Meghalaya	*1991 Census*
1.	East Khasi Hills District	— 5,37,906
2.	West Khasi Hills District	— 2,20,157
3.	Ri Bhoi District	— 1,27,312
4.	Jaintia Hills District	— 2,20,473
5.	East Garo Hill District	— 1,88,830
6.	West Garo Hills District	— 4,03,027
7.	South Garo Hills District	— 77,073
	Break up - *For Khasi-Jaintia Hills only*	
	Khasi Jaintia Hills population	— 11,05,848
	Tribal Population	— 9,48,033
	Non-Tribal Population	— 1,57,813
	Total number of Christians	— 6,39,614
	Total number of non-Christians	— 4,66,234
	Other religions	— 1,57,234

Taken the State as a whole, approximately nearly half of the population who inhabit the State is Khasi: a little more than half of the population is Christian: in Garo Hills also, more than half of the indigenous population have become Christians.

The total number of rural population is estimated at 80.40 percent of which 75 percent is dependent for their means of livelihood on agriculture. Approximately, 14,45,000 persons are comprised in the rural population. The total population of the State in 1991 numbered 17,74,778 persons.

Basic features of Forest cover as of June 1990.

	Total forest area under the State Government	— (000 hectares)
(*a*)	Reserved forests	— 949.60 hectares
(*b*)	Govt. protected forests	— 71.32 " "

(c)	Wild Life sanctuary	.....	— 1.24	" "
(d)	National Parks	.....	— 26.74	" "
	Total area under District Councils	.....	— 850.30	" "
	Percentage of forest area in the State	.....	— 39.17	Sq. Kms.
	Grand total forest area	.....	— 8784	Sq. Kms.
	Geographical area of the State	.....	— 22,429	Sq.Kms.

Weather - 17th December 1999

Maximum Temparature	—	15.4°C
Minimum Temparature	—	6.6°C
R. Humidity morning	—	77%
R. Humidity evening	—	96%
Rainfall	—	nil

Extremes of a fast changing weather in one day some times are not our uncommon experiences.

The existing Districts are East Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills, West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi, West Garo Hills, East Garo Hills, and South Garo Hills with their respective headquarters located in Shillong, Jowai, Nongstoin, Nongpoh. Tura, William Nagar and Baghmara. Each of the districts is in the charge of the Deputy Commissioner.

The known Civil Sub-Divisions are Sohra, Khliehriat, Amlarem, Mawkyrwat, Mairang, Rasubelpara, Ampati and Dadengiri and each of them is attached to their respective Deputy Commissioner.

Ethnologically Khasi consists of *Khynriam* of Ri-Lum who live in the central highlands, *Pnar (Jaintia)* on the east, War on the Southern highlands (*Riwar*) and *Bhoi* on the north located in *Ri-Bhoi.*