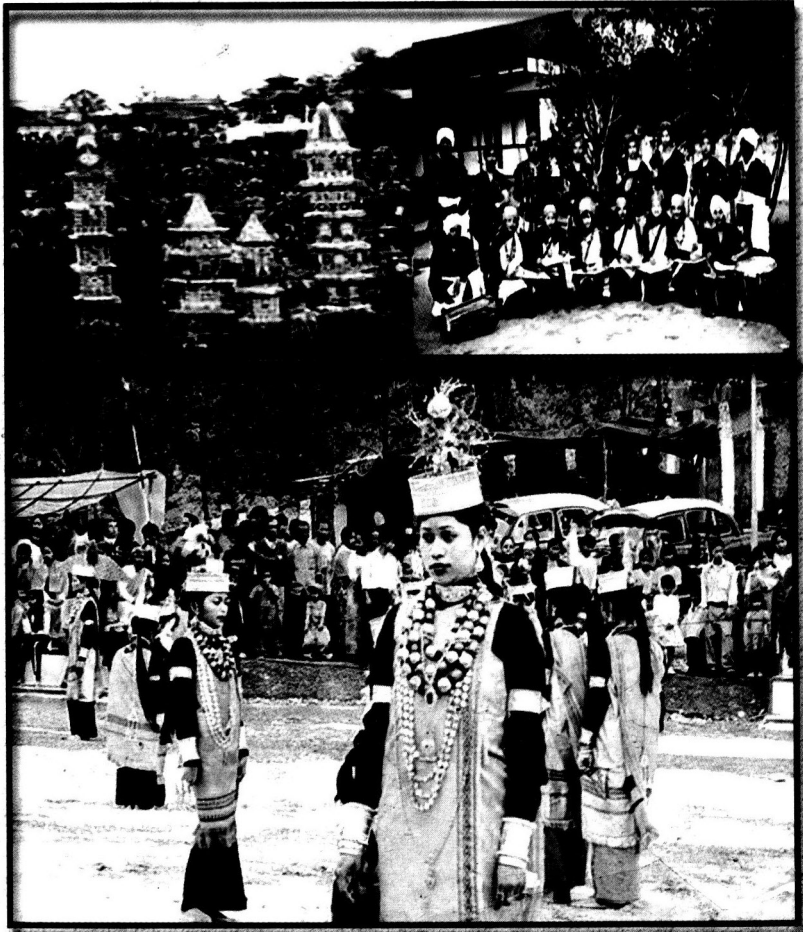


Meghalaya

Past and Present



H G Joshi

A Mittal Publication

MEGHALAYA-PAST AND PRESENT

THE AUTHOR

H.G. JOSHI (b. 1970) holds a Master degree in Political Science besides a Law degree from the Kumaon University. A journalist by inclination, he worked for a brief stint with a Delhi-based weekly. Propagating socio-political awareness among masses in the Central Himalayan region, he has been actively engaged in grass-roots level politics in Uttaranchal. Having great interest in fascinating study of north-eastern states, he has three books to his credit besides many articles on contemporary social issues in different newspapers. His latest book entitled *Sikkim—Past and Present* published by Mittal Publications has been widely acclaimed especially throughout the World and in North-Eastern region of India in particular.

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H.G. Joshi



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PREFACE

Meghalaya, literally meaning 'the abode of clouds', is one of the 'seven-sister states' of northeast India. It gained the status of a full state of Indian Union on January 21, 1972.)

Meghalaya primarily consists of three ranges of hills, the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, named after the tribes who are its predominant inhabitants, which divides the Brahmaputra and Surma Valleys. The Khasis and Jaintias are of same origin as they are linguistically and socially linked in the larger group of Mon-Khmers who, sociolinguists believe, are supposed to have migrated from South-East Asia. The Garos on the other hand are a branch of the Tibeto-Burman Bodos who are believed to have had their original place somewhere in Tibet. The unique common trait of all the three major tribes is matrilineality.

The Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills which form the central and eastern part of Meghalaya is an imposing plateau with rolling grasslands, hills and river valleys. The southern side of this plateau is marked by deep gorges and abrupt slopes, below which a narrow strip of plains runs along the international border with Bangladesh. Though there are a number of rivers but none of these is navigable.

People of Meghalaya are cheerful and sociable. Honesty, modesty, truthfulness and hospitality are strong traits of their character. They are adventurous, brave and witty.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the people. A power surplus state, Meghalaya is rich in mineral wealth like—coal, silimanite,

limestone, dolomite, quartz, fireclay and grass sand etc. Horticultural crops have good yielding and a big potential of it is there in Meghalaya. Abundantly bestowed with rich fauna and flora, Meghalaya is a state having scenic natural beauty. Hence a destination of great tourism potential in present day context.

As a cauldron of ethnic violence and insurgency, as northeast has been, Meghalaya is rather calm. Since the advent of missionary movements in the area, the tribal society has undergone sea changes. Traditional administrative system and traditional social institutions are greatly affected with the British annexation of the area and in the post-Independence era, many change are witnessed.

Population growth due to foreign immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh has affected the demographic equations in the northeast India. Meghalaya is also not untouched from it. Limited resources, population pressure, growing unemployment, deforestation and consequent environmental hazards and other problems have infested Meghalaya in big way.

Cherrapunji in Meghalaya has the distinction of being a place with the heaviest rainfall in the world. Probably the name Meghalaya is subscribed to this phenomenon. Now the situation is changed.

Once secluded and isolated, Meghalayan society is marching ahead with the mainstream of India. Their participation in national politics, administration, and other walks of life is gradually increasing. This is evident from the case of P.A. Sangma, the former Speaker of Lok Sabha, and a noted contemporary leader and Dr. Lyngdoh, former Chief Election Commissioner of India besides a host of great scholars and able administrators.

Meghalaya, its society, economy, language, polity, and history etc. have been researched and accounted by great scholars of yore days as well as of present time. Those great

men of letters have presented authoritative graphic notes from their expert view points.

This book is prepared with information based on all secondary sources—information contained in books, journals, reports, official correspondence and documents etc. As such the entire credit goes to those scholars whose creative research findings are subscribed wholesomely.

I am deeply beholden to them for making use of their writings, with the sole intention of disseminating authentic information. Equally, I owe a deep sense of gratitude to them, their publishers and copyright holders.

I am also thankful to all them who have rendered assistance and cooperation while working on this project. I am thankful to my friends and family members for their constant moral support and inspiration. Finally, Mr. K.M. Rai Mittal of Mittal Publications, New Delhi deserves all appreciation for his patronage and foresight and bringing out this book in nice get up.

H.G. JOSHI

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MEGHALAYA

-Current Overview

As suggested by literal meaning of (Meghalaya in Hindi—'The Abode of Clouds', this state was inaugurated as an autonomous state within Assam on 2 April, 1970. It was declared a state of Indian Union on Jan. 21, 1972. Administratively, Meghalaya consists of seven districts namely, East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills, Jaintia Hills, East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi and South Garo Hills District. These are predominantly inhabited by the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos) These tribals communities are the descendants of very ancient people having distinctive traits and ethnic origin. The Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills which form the central and eastern parts of Meghalaya is an imposing plateau with rolling grassland, hills and river valleys. The southern face of this plateau is marked by deep gorges and abrupt slopes, at the foot of which, a narrow strip of plain runs along the international border with Bangladesh.

(A number of rivers, none of them navigable, drain the mountainous State. In the Garo Hills, the Manda, the Darming and the Jinjiram flow towards the north while the Ringge and the Ganol flow in the westernly direction. Rivers flowing to the south are the Simsang which is the biggest river in Garo Hills and the Gugi. In the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the rivers that flow in a northerly direction include the Khri, the Umtrew, the Umiam, the Umkhen besides the Kupli on the border between Jaintia Hills and North Cachar Hills. The Kynshi, the

Umiam Mawphlang and the Umngot flow to the south into Bangladesh.)

Agriculture

(Basically an agricultural State, Eighty-three per cent of the total population of Meghalaya depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihood. The topography, physical features and land conditions as prevailing in the State provide extremely limited scope for extensive cultivation or to bring additional area under irrigated cultivation. (Rice and maize are the major food crops; Wheat has been introduced a few years back and the result is quite encouraging. (Potato, jute, mesta, cotton, mustard, arecanut, ginger, turmeric, betelvine, black pepper, *tezpata*, etc., are some of cash crops. Orange, pineapple, banana, lemon, guava, *litchi*, jackfruit and temperate fruits such as plum, pear and peach are some of the important horticultural crops grown in Meghalaya. Apart from the above crops, the State has achieved success in the cultivation of tea, mushroom and tomato.)

Irrigation and Power

The State has power potential for nearly 1,200 mw. It could tap about 193.76 mw upto 1994-95. It is a power surplus State. About 36 per cent of electricity generated in the State is supplied to the neighbouring states. The estimated irrigation potential of State is about 2.13 lakh hectare out of which 55,182 hectares is only irrigated.

Industry and Minerals

The Public sector cement factory at Cherrapunjee has been re-activated to raise the production to 1,65,000 mt per annum. The tantalum capacitor unit of the Meghalaya Electronics Development Corporation at Umiam-Khawan is in production. The mini cement plant, one at Damas in East Garo Hills district and the other at Sutnga in Jaintia Hills district have also gone

into production. The number of small scale industrial units covering service industry, bakeries, furniture making, iron and steel fabrication, tyre retreading, spice, etc., is increasing and the government is giving greater thrust on entrepreneurship development. The Meghalaya Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) is assisting the industrial units by way of term loans and also by participating in equity capital.

Mineral wealth of Meghalaya include coal, silimanite, limestone, dolomite, fire-clay, felspar, quartz and grass-sand. The total estimated reserve of coal in the State is 562 million tonnes and that of limestone is around 3,743 million tonnes.

Forests and Wildlife

The total forest area in the State is 9,357 sq km under the control of the State government and the rest under the district councils and private managements. The principal timber species are teak, titachap, gomari, bola, pine, birch, and makrisal. Principal forest products include timber, bamboo, reed, cane, ipecac, medicinal herbs and plants, cinnamon and thatch grass. Azaleas and rhododendrons grow wild in the forests of Khasi and Jaintia Hills and many kinds of beautiful orchids are found in the forests.)

Pitcher plant, the insect-eating plant of botanical wonder, is found in plenty in the South Garo Hills and West Khasi Hills district and it is said that such a plant is found nowhere else in the world. Many rare and interesting plants are also found endemic to the State like wild citrus and pygmy lily.

Meghalaya is also rich in wildlife. There are elephants, tigers, bears, wild boars, leopards, golden cats, leopard cats and jungle cats, deer of various kinds, bintorongs, slow loris, monkeys of different types including capped *langurs*, golden *langurs* and hoolocks, flying squirrels and giant squirrels. There are also many rare and interesting birds including the hornbills, partridges, pheasants, teals, snipes, geese, ducks and quails. All these are protected by law. The State has two national parks,

viz. the Nokrek National Park and the Balpakram National Park and two wildlife sanctuaries, namely, the Nongkhyllem Wildlife Sanctuary and Siju Wildlife Sanctuary.

Festivals

Ka Pomblang Nongkrem popularly known as Nongkrem dance is one of the most important festivals of the Khasis. It is a five-day religious festival held annually at Smit village 11 km from Shillong, the headquarters of the syiem (chief) of Khyrim. The festival is held as a thanks-giving ceremony to God Almighty for harvest and to pray for peace and prosperity. Shad Sukmysniem is another important festival of the Khasis. It means 'Dance of the Joyful Heart' and is also a thanks-giving dance. Maidens dressed in traditional fineries and men folk in coloured costumes participate in the dance to accompaniment of drums and flute. It is held in Shillong sometime during the second week of April every year and lasts for three days. Behdiengkhlam, the most important festival of the Jaintias is celebrated annually at Jowai in Jaintia Hills during the month of July. It is very popular and colourful festival where men, young and old, take part in dancing to the tune of drums and flute. Wangala one of the most important festivals of the Garos is held during October-November, and it lasts for a week. This festival is observed to honour and offer sacrifices to their greatest god called Saljong (Sungod). The occasion is initiated, right in the field by a simple but impressive ceremony known as Rugula. After that the ceremony of incense known as Sasat Soa is celebrated. This is performed inside the house of the chief of the village. On this occasion people, young and old, boys and girls in their colourful costumes with feathered headgear dance to the tunes of music played on long oval shaped drums.

Tourist Centres

Meghalaya is dotted with a number of lovely tourist spots where nature unveils herself in all her glory. Shillong the capital

city has a number of beautiful spots. They are: Ward's Lake, Lady Hydari Park, Polo Ground, Mini Zoo, Elephant Falls and Shillong peak overlooking the city and the golf course which is one of the best in the country.

Transport

Road

Six national highways pass through Meghalaya for a distance of 461 km. The State had 7,328 km of both surfaced and unsurfaced road under PWD.

Railways

The State is not connected by railway network as yet.

Aviation

Shillong is the only airport in the State.

Area, Population and Districts

		Area (Sq. km.)	Population (2001 Census)	HeadQuarters
1.	East Garo Hills	2,603	247,555	Williamnagar
2.	East Khasi Hills	2,748	660,994	Shillong
3.	Jaintia Hills	3,819	295,692	Jowai
4.	West Garo Hills	3,714	515,813	Tura
5.	West Khasi Hills	5,247	2,94,115	Nongstoin
6.	Ri-Bhoi	2,448	1,92,795	Nongpoh
7.	South Garo Hills	1,850	99,105	Baghmara

Source: India 2003.

Meghalaya: Vital Statistics

Total Area	:	22,429 sq. km.
Capital	:	Shillong
Languages	:	Khasi, Garo and English
Districts	:	7
Population	:	2306069
Density of Population	:	103
Literacy	:	63.31%
Sex Ratio	:	975