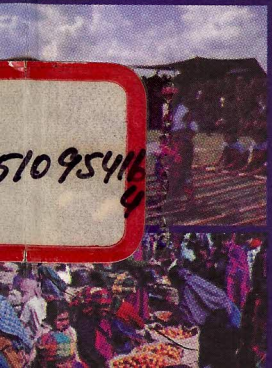
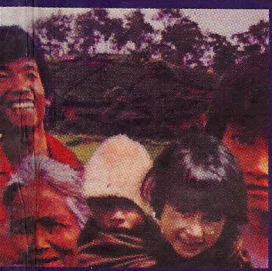




# Meghalaya

Issues and Legacies  
of its Early Years



Dhiren Bhagawati



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# MEGHALAYA ISSUES AND LEGACIES OF ITS EARLY YEARS



By  
**Dhiren Bhagawati**



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## Preface

This book is about a society; a movement in that society; the attainment of the objective of the movement; certain issues which were selected by the political leadership, on attainment of their objective to debate and to translate into policy decisions. It is the society of the three tribal groups namely the Khasis, the Pnars and the Garos along with a significant section of non-tribal people. The movement was for creation of a separate state within Indian Union. The objective of the movement was attained at the grant of the state by the national political leadership. The issues were those taken up by the political leadership of the new state for debate in the state legislature. All this happened about thirty years before. This is now a part of history. History is not merely a study of the past. It has its context in the present and it has its focus on the future.

When a state is born in India two types of reaction follow. First, it creates a feeling of rejection assuming that certain fissiparous forces have ultimately won the day and it will further weaken the already fragile Indian nation. The national bourgeoisie though a centralizing force, always need an expanding market. They need to adjust and readjust their interests in their rivalry with regional bourgeoisie and the feudal elements. Their response to the proliferation of states is not consistent but determined by the compulsions of the market. But the regional bourgeoisie are not well-disposed towards the creation of new states. They will certainly be critical of the emergence of new competitors to their hegemony.

There is also a positive and favourable response to the creation of new states. A new state in this opinion is a new avenue for decentralization of the democratic process in the country. A new state brings administration nearer to the people. It provides for more representatives of the people in the national and state legislatures; and reduces the number of people that such a representative will represent. It enhances the effective performance of the welfare activities of the state. It makes the state more homogeneous. It facilitates better participation of the people in the democratic process. However, all this is a hypothetical assumption. The real gain of decentralization accrues from progressive and people oriented policies of the political leadership.

(A fragment of history though the creation of the state is but it is a turning point in the history of the tribal society of Meghalaya. A new identity comprising at least two, if not more, distinct elements was formed. Promises that were made, expectations that were raised had to be fulfilled. Suspicion and distrust on the part of the tribals against different sections of the non-tribals, though some of it was manufactured and the rest was bred by the gulf of economic situations between the two groups; persisted in the newly emerged society. Recently militant groups also surfaced and sporadic violence occasionally erupted bringing the state to the verge of tribal exclusiveness.

(It is too simple to hold that the genesis of the present situation could be traced back to the time of creation of the state. Perhaps the generally volatile situation of the Northeast in this period generates the stimulus for these developments. However, a subdued but discernible resentment was underlying the consensus building process of the initial years.

In spite of all that happened in the last few years the creation of the state certainly vested a sense of responsibility, belongingness and involvement in the people of the state. Meghalaya still remained an open land both in physical and intellectual sense. The political maturity of her leadership is unique in the situation of the Northeast. Other groups seeking to assert their identities may emulate the way chosen by

Meghalaya to build herself. Of course, the pitfalls have to be avoided. But that is a safe road to travel. This book takes a stance that the future of a democratic India rests on the possibilities of decentralization of the political process by creating more states and vesting real powers in the state.

Thanks are due to the members of my family, my friends and my publishers for all the help and inspiration in bringing out this volume.

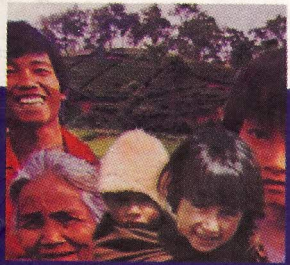
January 2006

**Dhiren Bhagawati**

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