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Government and Politics in Meghalaya



R.S. LYGDOH



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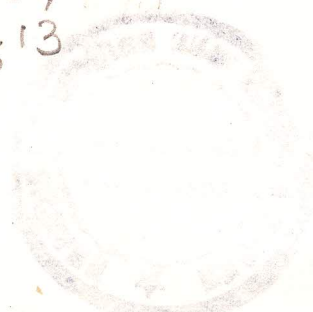
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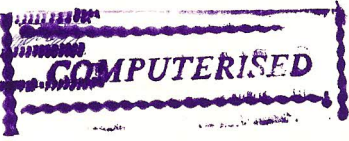
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Preface

"Hello good friend," Dr. V. Venkata Rao greeted me, when he entered my room, one fine day. He was beaming. "Good day, Sir", was my response. The day was bright and a gentle breeze was wafting through the windows. "Have you got that material which I requested you to collect for me?" asked Dr. Rao. I produced one file after another. After he had glanced over all the files, he suddenly posed me a challenge: "Why don't you write a thesis yourself?" As one of his old obedient students, I simply nodded with the same old apologetic smile. After a short discussion, we agreed that the title of the thesis would be "Government and Politics in Meghalaya". That was the beginning of my real endeavour to work tirelessly on the subject.

From that day onwards, I began to scrutinise, examine, analyse and assess the value of each document. I sincerely made an attempt to scan each and every line which I came across. It was a difficult task to decide which material was to be taken and which to be cast away. The declaration of emergency in the country was a blessing for my pursuit. It relieved me of the burden of mental stress and strain related to the political malady which the country was facing and allowed me the opportunity to devote myself more completely to the completion of my work.

I undertook to write this work not because I am myself a Khasi and a Meghalayan, and far less because I was among the leaders who struggled for statehood, but because I have an intense desire to enable our country to share the rich heritage which the people

of Meghalaya may contribute to the country. India is a beautiful garden of flowers with a variety of species and hues. The culture of the people of Meghalaya is one such beautiful flower which has bloomed from time immemorial but which had been hidden for long, unnoticed and unappreciated. The beauty of this garden lies in the correct blend of colours and variety—a panoramic picture of unity in diversity.

This work does not pretend to be exhaustive. Making it exhaustive would make it voluminous, and stale reading. It humbly presents the evolution of the political institutions and the formation of the Government of the people of Meghalaya. To the best of my belief and information, there has been no work by any scholar on the subject, although there have been some works on a few aspects of the theme of my work. My work is essentially based on original records official and unofficial, mostly unpublished, though some published works have helped me to supplement the original sources. It is more refreshing to drink fresh water from the source of a river than from its lower polluted course. A select bibliography may be found at the end.

Like obtrusive framing around a good painting, a lengthy introduction to any book is unnecessary. But for the sake of formality, it has become customary that when a new guest enters the banquet hall, he must be formally introduced to others by the host.

This work traces the evolution of political thought among the Khasis and the Garos. It discusses the traditional social and political systems among these communities. It gives a picture of the traditional form of government, the like of which cannot be found in any other part of the country. The traditional judicial system prevailing in Meghalaya, particularly that of the Khasis is so exemplary, the like of which cannot be found in any other part of the world. Then the period of political isolation was eclipsed by the British conquest. Hence it is necessary to discuss the changes which the British brought into the body-politic of the people of Meghalaya. This work also discusses the great debate which lasted from 1874 to 1935 about whether the Hill tracts should be brought within the Reformed Constitution or not. This was followed by

another long debate from 1937 to 1947 about whether the Hill tracts should be included in the province of Assam. The present book also discusses the formation of the District Councils—their administrative jurisdiction, their composition, their functions and their actual working. It supplements the discussion of the history of the formation of Meghalaya with a consideration of the various aspects of the functioning of the new State till June, 1976.

I will fail in my duty if I do not express my sincere gratitude to all those friends (whose names may not possibly be mentioned) for their valuable help in supplying me valuable material. I most heartily express my gratitude to Dr. V. Venkata Rao, without whose inestimable inspiration, sincere help, constant supervision and active guidance, this work could not have been completed in time.

June 1976

R.S. LYNGDOH

Abbreviations Used

A.A.D.R.	=	Assam Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Councils) Rules, 1951
A.I.C.C.	=	All India Congress Committee
A.L.C.P.	=	Assam Legislative Council Proceedings
A.P.C.C.	=	Assam Pradesh Congress Committee
A.P.H.L.C.	=	All Party Hill Leaders' Conference
C.E.M.	=	Chief Executive Member
D.C.	=	Deputy Commissioner
D.M.K.	=	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
E.I.T.U.	=	Eastern India Tribal Union
E.M.	=	Executive Member
G.N.C.	=	Garo National Council
H.S.P.D.P.	=	Hill State People's Democratic Party
M.L.A.	=	Member of the Legislative Assembly
M.N.F.	=	Mizo National Front
M.P.	=	Member of Parliament
N.E.F.A.	=	North-Eastern Frontier Agency
P.S.P.	=	Praja Socialist Party
S.R.C.	=	States Reorganisation Commission
U.M.F.O.	=	United Mizo Freedom Organisation

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1. Introduction

FORMATION OF THE STATE OF MEGHALAYA

Meghalaya was created as an Autonomous State on 2nd April, 1970, comprising the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District and the Garo Hills District. The three Wards of the Shillong Municipality—the European Ward, the Police Bazar Ward and the Jail Road Ward—and the Cantonment Area remained with Assam.¹

Meghalaya was raised to the status of full statehood on 21st January, 1972.² At a later date the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District was bifurcated into Khasi Hills District and Jaintia Hills District.³

The birth of Meghalaya as the twenty-first State of the Indian Union marked the beginning of a new era in the history of north-eastern India. It marked the triumph of peaceful democratic negotiations, mutual understanding and love over violence, intrigue, misery and hatred. While addressing the mammoth crowd at the Garrison Ground in Shillong at the inaugural function of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya on 2nd April, 1970, the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said: "Meghalaya is a musical sound evoking thoughts of high hills created with clouds. The inauguration of this frontier State is yet another example of the democratic process which shows that with goodwill, understanding and patience, even the most intractable human problems can be solved amicably."

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Meghalaya is a beautiful State, one of the most beautiful in the whole country. Nature has blessed her abundantly with heavy rainfall and clear sunshine, with deep dark forests, high plateaus and deep gorges where the air is pure and invigorating, with tumbling waterfalls and crystal-clear rivers, and dreamy streamlets; and above all, with sturdy, intelligent and virile people. In his inaugural address at the Conference of the Presiding Officers at Shillong on 5th November, 1974, Dr. G.S. Dhillon, Speaker, the House of the People, depicted the State of Meghalaya in the following words:⁴

Tucked away in the soaring hills of the eastern Himalayas, Meghalaya, nestling in the clouds, is a brave romantic dream. With its own distinct identity, its own traditions in culture, arts, music and social customs, this dream-child of the hill people is a bright skein in the fabric of Indian polity. Teaming with a flora, perhaps the richest in our subcontinent, and blessed with Nature's bounty in minerals and forest resources, with a cheerful hospitable and extremely individualistic people, this young State stands as a proud witness as much to the incredible wealth and diversity of our land as to the great resilience of our political system. Meghalaya is a land of pregnant potentialities awaiting unfoldment. It is a gratifying thought that these sturdy and exceptionally gifted people are now on the road to development on a challenging programme of reconstruction and modernisation, uninhibited by any sense of encroachment on their traditions and style of living. There can be no doubt that this young State now stands poised for a future of great growth and progress.

Nomenclature: Meghalaya is a finely appropriate Sanskrit name meaning "abode of clouds". This State owes its name to Dr. S.P. Chatterjee, Professor Emeritus of Geography, Calcutta University. Dr. Chatterjee, during his first field work in these hills as early as 1926 could perceive an inherent bond of unity among the natural phenomena through the excessive clouds hanging over the region, making it the rainiest area in the world. That idea took deeper roots during his subsequent visits to this area during 1928-32, and

he christened it as "Meghalaya". A doctoral thesis was subsequently submitted by him to the Paris University on the "Geographical Analysis of Meghalaya". At a much later date, Dr. Chatterjee popularised the name "Meghalaya", through his writings of the Chapter on Physiography for the *Gazetteer of India*, Vol. I, 1965, which attracted the attention of the Union Home Ministry when they were looking for the creation of a new State of Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills. This name received unanimous acceptance.

General Status and Topography: The State of Meghalaya is situated in the north-east of India, approximately between 90° and $92^{\circ}45'$ meridians of longitude and $25^{\circ}15'$ and 26° parallels of latitude. Its extent is about 300 kilometres in length and 100 kilometres in width. It is bounded on the north by Goalpara, Kamrup and Nowgong districts of Assam, on the east by the Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills of Assam, and on the south and west by Bangladesh. Thus, Meghalaya has international boundaries on two sides.

Area: According to the 1941 Census, the total area of the Garo Hills and United Khasi-Jaintia Hills was 24,032.7 square kilometres. Whereas the total area of Garo Hills District remains unchanged, that of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills has undergone a change.

A new district known as the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills was formed by transferring the whole of the North Cachar subdivision from Cachar District of Assam and by carving out certain areas from Sibsagar and Nowgong districts and certain areas from the Jowai subdivision of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District. The area transferred from Jowai subdivision to the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills was 1543.7 square kilometres. As a result of this development, the total area of Meghalaya is at present 22,489 square kilometres.

Physiography: Meghalaya is a plateau generally of rolling grasslands intersected by river valleys which in the southern portion take the form of ravines. This plateau is surrounded on all sides except on the east by densely settled, low-lying plains—the plain of the mighty Brahmaputra river on the north and west and the plain of the Surma river along with its tributaries on the south.

Regionally, and not politically or administratively, the Meghalayan plateau continues eastward beyond the administrative limit of the State, embracing the districts of Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills including the high Barail Parbat.

Physiographically, the Meghalayan plateau may be divided into three divisions. The valleys of Rongdi, Simsang and Non shram stand as dividing lines between western Meghalaya and central Meghalaya whereas the deep valleys of Umngot and Sung separate eastern Meghalaya from central Meghalaya.

Situated between longitude of $91^{\circ}2'$ and $92^{\circ}5'$ E and latitude of $25^{\circ}9'$ and 26° N, central Meghalaya (Khasi Hills) covers an area of about 10,500 square kilometres. This area appears as a flat-topped range running east to west about 1,400 to 1,800 metres with a steep face towards the plains of Bangladesh out of which it appears to rise very abruptly. This range rises gently from east to west. It rises to 1953 metres in the Shillong peak, the highest point. The general appearance of central Meghalaya is that of a cliffy island rising as if from an ocean. The top of the plateau is formed of horizontally bedded sandstones and limestones of marine origin and the same beds bend southward forming steep precipices. Magnificent waterfalls can be seen cascading over the cliffs into the valleys.

Western Meghalaya (Garo Hills), situated between longitude of $89^{\circ}47'$ and $91^{\circ}2'$ E covers an area of about 9,084 square kilometres. It extends about 90 kilometres east to west and for about the same distance north to south. Its relief ranges generally from 100 metres along its northern, western and southern belts to over 1,400 metres in the central part at the Tura range. The Tura range is not visible because of a wide stretch of low-lying hills intervening the low lying plain. But the south-eastern part of western Meghalaya, the Kylas-Balpakram-Pendengra range shows some of the characteristic features of central Meghalaya. This range dominates the landscape of this region. Topographically there is no marked difference between the Garo Hills and the Khasi Hills. A low saddle, a minor watershed or a shallow river basin often mark the boundary line.

Eastern Meghalaya (the Jaintia Hills) is limited between longitude $92^{\circ}6'$ and $92^{\circ}50'$ E. It covers a small area of 3,895

square kilometres. The precipitous valley of Umngot runs from the greater part of the boundary between central and eastern Meghalaya. The Sung Valley forms a dividing line of the northern part. On either side of Umngot rise structural platforms of about the same height, descending into deep ravines southward. The Jowai upland forms one such structural platform on the eastern side, extending right up to the border of the Jaintia Hills and southward in narrow ledges overlooking the plains of Bangladesh. A somewhat horizontal shifting of the southern escarpment is noticeable in this region which may be attributed to normal faulting with horizontal displacement of rocks. Much dissection of the scarp face has taken place by swift flowing streams in deep gorges. The eastern plateau rises to a maximum height of 1,522 metres near Jowai.

Viewed from Bangladesh on the south, the whole range of Meghalaya seems to rise abruptly as if it were the highest mountain range in the world; but when it is viewed from Assam Valley on the north, the landscape of Meghalaya appears to be different. Instead of deeply pleateau scarred scarp of the south, low isolated hills, gradually rising to higher altitude in the interior are the general landscape feature of the entire Meghalayan range.

Climate: The whole of Meghalaya is subject to the monsoon but the climate varies with altitude. On the whole, the climate is temperate, and, even in the lowest altitude, the temperature generally does not rise above 26°C. The climate of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts is pleasant and comfortable. But in the Garo Hills, the climate is warmer, sometimes oppressive except in winter. Some scholars have observed that the climate of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts is conducive to sustained intellectual work.

Rainfall: The southern region seldom remains free of clouds. This region is the rainiest spot on earth. Rainfall in this region varies from 7,000 mm to 13,000 mm. The average rainfall in western Meghalaya is about 2,689 mm, in the north it is between 2,500-3,000 mm and in the south-east 4,000 mm. In the central and eastern Meghalaya rainfall is as high as 7,196 mm. There is a great difference in the rainfall within the different regions of Meghalaya especially from south to north. For instance, the rainfall

at Cherrapunjee (Sohra) is as high as 12,033 mm and Mawsynram is higher with 13,923 mm. Shillong, which is located only at a distance of 50 kilometres from these two places receives only 2,296 mm, whereas Jowai in the east receives 3,077 mm and Mawphlang in the central plateau receives 3,309 mm.

Flora and Fauna: Due to heavy rainfall and well-drained terrain, Meghalaya is rich in natural vegetation, both of tree and grass types. This also accounts for an exuberance of wildlife. The hills are covered with green vegetation and present a landscape of sylvan beauty. The stately sal trees of the Garo Hills, the magnificent evergreen trees of the lower hills, of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the tall pine trees (*Pinus Khasiana*) of Shillong and Jowai plateau and the undulating green meadows of the Jaintia Hills present an enchanting panorama. The variety of orchids found in the evergreen forests add beauty and value to these forests. By far the greater part of western Meghalaya is clothed with tropical forests of which the dense mixed type occurs in isolated patches. Central Meghalaya, on the other hand, has a varied type of natural vegetation. The uplands here support temperate grass and even alpine meadows occur at the highest elevation. Temperate forests clothe higher elevations descending some 1,200 metres lower in central Meghalaya than in the eastern Himalayas. The flora of eastern Meghalaya resemble those of central Meghalaya, but tropical trees and grasses are rather more predominant in this region. According to Hooker, the Khasi flora are the richest in India, in extent, number and variety of flowering plants; some 2,000 species of flowering plants, and 150 firs could be found within 16 kilometres of Cherrapunjee.

The present estimated forest area in Meghalaya is 8,510 square kilometres or 38 per cent of the total area of the State. But, out of this total forest area, the total area under the State Reserved Forests is 884 square kilometres only. All the other forests are unclassified forests and they are managed and controlled by the District Councils. In the Khasi Hills some of those unclassified forests are private forests.

Wildlife in Meghalaya comprises elephants, bison, tigers, bears, leopards, clouded leopards, golden cats, golden langur, cat bears,

gibbon, barking deer and sambhars. The wild birds commonly found are jungle fowls, black pheasants, peacock pheasants, partridges, hill mynas, hornbills and the like. Wildlife in Meghalaya has been considerably depleted by reckless hunting, shooting and capturing. Some of the rare species are facing extinction. The State Government has enacted the Meghalaya Wild Animals and Birds Protection Act to check wanton destruction of wildlife. Some of them have been declared as protected animals and birds.

Minerals: Meghalaya is rich in mineral resources. But the economic exploitation of these minerals has been hindered by a number of bottlenecks such as poor transport communication, non-availability of cheap power, non-availability of cheap labour, lack of capital, lack of local talent and the like. So far, only coal, limestone and sillimanite have been exploited commercially. The most important mineral resources of Meghalaya are the following:

Coal: Coal is essentially found along the southern plateau from east to west. The total recorded reserves of coal in the State are 1,190 million tonnes, of which approximately 30 million tonnes are estimated reserves in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts and 1,160 million tonnes in the Garo Hills.

Limestone: The southern region of Meghalaya is also rich in limestone. The total known reserves are estimated at around 2,100 million tonnes.

Sillimanite: Meghalaya is the only State in India which possesses this rare mineral. A total reserve of over five lakh tonnes of sillimanite is estimated to occur at Sona Fahar-Nongper-Nongbali area of the Khasi Hills.

Clay: The largest deposits of clay occur at Nangalbibra (about 3.5 million tonnes) and at Rongchugiri-Khera (about 3 million tonnes) in the Garo Hills. It is also found at Cherrapunjee, Mehadeo, Tura and Songsak-Damgiri Khobal-Dobo Nengkhra areas. The total deposit in the State is estimated around 10 million tonnes.

Kaolin: Kaolin, which is suitable for the manufacture of china clay and porcelain products, occurs at Thadlaskein area in the Jaintia Hills and at Mawphlang area in the Khasi Hills. Estimated reserves are 45,000 tonnes and 540,000 tonnes respectively.

Feldspar and quartz: These minerals are found in Athiabari-Tynghur area in the Khasi Hills and at Tura area in the Garo Hills. Reserves of feldspar are estimated at 25,000 tonnes in the former and 1,700 tonnes in the latter. Quartz reserves are estimated at 20,000 tonnes in the former and 7,000 tonnes in the latter.

Glass sands: About 2 million tonnes of glass sands are estimated at Leitryngew area of the Khasi Hills alone.

Economy: Meghalaya is an underdeveloped State. About 84 per cent of the working population is engaged in agricultural activities. In western Meghalaya about 94 per cent are involved in agriculture. Approximately 1,37,695 hectares of area is under ploughing. This area forms only about 7 per cent of the State's total area.

The principal agricultural crops of Meghalaya are rice, maize, cotton, jute, potatoes, oranges, pineapples, pulses, oilseeds, tapioca and bananas. The main problems of agriculture in Meghalaya are lack of uniformity in soil condition, jhuming or practice of shifting cultivation, difficulties in undertaking irrigation projects, lack of adequate marketing facilities, complexities of the land tenure system and the like.

Economically, the people living in the areas bordering Bangladesh have had to find non-traditional outlets for their produce. Before partition, the border trade with Sylhet and Mymensing sustained the border economy. This was shattered with the emergence of Pakistan. It was hoped that a friendly Bangladesh could reverse the trend, but the political instability in that country has not improved the situation.

In spite of these hurdles, the State has other economic potentialities. Meghalaya, a veritable darling of Nature, abounds in minerals, forests and hydel resources. There is a great future for the construction of many hydel projects, and for the growth of mineral-based and forest-based industries.

The People: Meghalaya is the homeland of two communities, the Garos and the Khasis. The Garos have their homeland in the Garo Hills or western Meghalaya and the Khasis have theirs in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills or central and eastern Meghalaya. The Garos belong to the Bodo-Kachari group of the Tibeto-Burman

family. But the Khasis belong to the Austro-Asiatic race and their language belongs to the Mon-Khmer family. The term "Khasi" is a general name given to the people of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills districts. They have a common language, common customs, traditions and usages. They have the same way of life, the same mores and manners with the same common belief. Popularly, the Khasis of the eastern plateau are known as Pnars or Syntengs, those of the southern slopes as Wars, those of the low-lying hills in the northern area as Bhois, and those in the west-by-north area as Lyngngam; the Khasis of the western plateau are known as Khyngriams to the Pnars, and as Nongphlang to the Wars. There are some other groups of people known as Labangs, Khyrhangs, Nongtungs and others, but all of them are known by the generic name Khasi. The Lyngngams are known as Megams to the Garos. Their area is west-by-north of the Khasi Hills and east-by-north of the Garo Hills. After the coming of the British, people of different communities of India, Nepal and Bangladesh have also settled in Meghalaya.

The matrilineal society of the Garos and the Khasis should not be confused with any matriarchal society. In popular belief, it is understood that in matriarchal society, women play a more important role than men in the material and mental life of the people but in the matrilineal society like that of the Khasis and the Garos we find that although descent is traced through the mother, it is the father who plays a more important role in the material and spiritual matters of the people. Referring to the Khasi society, David Roy wrote, "A man is the defender of the woman, and the woman, the keeper of his trust."⁵

Population: According to the 1971 Census, the total population of Meghalaya was 1,011,699 with 520,967 males and 490,732 females. The unique feature in the sex ratio in Meghalaya is that the number of females dwindled steadily from 1901 to 1961, but it rose a little in 1971. The following figures show the changes in the proportion of the sexes, i.e. females per 1000 males from 1901 to 1971:

1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971
1036	1013	1000	971	966	949	937	942

In the rural areas the sex ratio fell from 1047 in 1901 to 958 in 1971. But in the urban areas, there was an increase from 764 in 1961 to 853 in 1971. It is interesting to note that in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, there were more females than males from 1901 to 1921. The ratio fell from 978 in 1931 to 936 in 1971. But the overall sex ratio in the State is higher than the sex ratio in the country which stands at 930.⁶

Meghalaya has a low population density of 45 persons per square kilometre. The density of population is 39 persons per square kilometre in rural areas and 3,852 persons per square kilometre in urban areas. The Garo Hills show a heavier density of 50 persons per square kilometre, whereas the urban density is heavier in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills with 4,525 persons per square kilometre.⁷

The process of urbanisation was very slow in Meghalaya from 1901 to 1951, but it jumped suddenly from 1951 to 1961. In 1951, there were only two towns in Meghalaya, but in 1961 the figure rose to six. The following is the list of towns according to 1971 Census classification.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Classification</i>
1. Shillong	Municipality	87,659	Class II
2. Nongthymmai	Non-Municipality	16,103	Class IV
3. Tura	Town Committee	15,489	Class IV
4. Mawlai	Non-Municipality	14,260	Class IV
5. Jowai	Non-Municipality	8,929	Class V
6. Shillong Cantonment	Cantonment	4,730	Class VI

In Meghalaya, there is no town having population of over one lakh. But on closer scrutiny, it is found that (1) Shillong Cantonment is geographically a part of Shillong itself, and (2) Nongthymmai and Mawlai towns are the fruits of expansion of Shillong. Therefore, Greater Shillong has a population of 1,22,752. The increase in the number of population is therefore confined mostly to Greater Shillong. If we take Greater Shillong as one single entity, the only town which has come up after 1951

is Jowai, and as such the increase in the number of towns from 1901 to 1961 is only one. The total number of urban population is 1,38,241 which constitutes only 11.58 per cent of the population of the State.⁸

The major part of the population lives in the villages, which have grown in number. In 1901, the number of villages was 2,865 but in 1971 it increased to 4,583.⁹

The percentage of literacy is 29.48 and this figure compares well with the all-India average of 29.35 per cent. But the percentage of literacy in the urban area is as high as 64.68 whereas in the rural areas it is as low as 25.32. The percentage of literacy is higher among the males than among the females. It is much higher in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and much lower in the Garo Hills.¹⁰

Roads and Communications: Communications are considered to be the blood-vessel of a country's economy. Judged by any standard, they are the primary infrastructure for economic development. Hemmed in by a foreign country on the south and on the west, Meghalaya is connected, along with the whole of the north-eastern region with rest of the country through a narrow corridor between the mighty Himalayas on the one side and Bangladesh on the other. Before 1947, more than 60 per cent of the trade was carried on through the Surma Valley by means of road, rail and river communications. But after independence, the whole bulk of trade has been carried on through Gauhati, the hub of trade in the north-eastern region. Geography has created major impediments for establishing rail and water transport facilities. Therefore, Meghalaya has to depend solely on road communication. In hill terrains like Meghalaya, there are great difficulties in speeding up the construction of roads. Nevertheless, the development of roads is the most important precondition for an economic breakthrough in Meghalaya.

When Meghalaya came into existence as an Autonomous State in 1970, it had only 2,639 kilometres of roads of which only 721 kilometres were surfaced. In other words, it had only 12 kilometres of roads per square kilometre, which was among the lowest in the country and fell far short of the national average. At present, however, Meghalaya has more than 3,200 kilometres of roads.

Apart from the development of roads, Meghalaya needs a railhead and a network of ropeways to ease the manifold problems facing the State.

Problem of Defence: Last but not least, Meghalaya is situated in a strategic area. The problem of security of the State is intimately interlinked and intertwined with that of the whole north-eastern region. The whole region has international boundaries nearly on all the sides. On the west, there is the silent Burma; on the south and the west, there is an unpredictable Bangladesh; and on the north, there is an unfriendly China. Before 1950, the Himalayas were regarded as the safest defence for north-eastern India. What was the position then? We had a friendly Tibet which acted as a bulwark between India and China. The Chinese were still in great domestic troubles. A divided China could not pose any problem to us. But after 1950, the Chinese became united and strong especially after they had swallowed Tibet. The Chinese had become so strong that even a powerful country like the USA was forced to negotiate for friendly relationship. Had it not been for their strength, it would have been next to impossible for the USA to forget all the hatred that it bore for the Chinese.

Moreover, China has raised a strong and disciplined army which has humbled the Americans in Korea and Vietnam. The Chinese have been following the philosophy of Mao Tse-tung which may be summed up as: "Settle everything by discussion but keep a million bayonets behind. Power grows out of the barrel of a gun." Further, China has also developed nuclear weapons and missile bases. The present position is such that neither the snows nor the unscalable heights of the Himalayas can defend our frontiers in north-eastern India any longer. Above all, there are many followers of Maoism in our country who may betray their own country for the sake of an ism. India has had the experience of a number of untrustworthy sons at the most critical period of the country's history.

The safety of north-eastern India is the safety of the country. Unless this problem is tackled with understanding, reason and wisdom, north-eastern India may become an eastern Panipat of modern times.