

## CHAPTER 10

# Ethno-Regional Identity and Political Mobilisation in Meghalaya:

## Democratic Discourse in a Tribal State

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### INTRODUCTION

Any attempt to understand the nature of competitive politics and the obligatory political mobilisation in the north-eastern states of India is a daunting exercise. This is not because of the complexity of social relations and almost non-liberal mode of organising social and political life, but because the standard ‘assumptions that go into scholarly analysis’<sup>1</sup> of competitive politics in India is least applicable to the societies of the region. Most of these states were carved out of Assam at different moments of post-Independence history in deference to claims for ethnic autonomy and other differences.<sup>2</sup> These states usually are collectively referred to as the North-East region of India. However, they don’t have intrinsic comparable markers either in terms of a common cultural history, demographic composition or even common political consciousness so as to be referred to collectively as the ‘North-East’. But as Sanjib Baruah puts it, ‘such generic locational placenames are attractive to political engineers *because* they evoke no historical memory or collective consciousness’<sup>3</sup> yet they recursively justify the potential of such a collective category to be someday incorporated as an oppositional political project.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter considers that such a generic designation is simply not the outcome of a deliberate political engineering but is the upshot of a common wavering and sense of alienation that the region experiences in its relationship with the Indian state. The political units that comprise the region—Assam, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya—at least, at some niche of popular imagination, experience a collective sense of estrangement from the Indian state. Though the source of this can be traced to the political strategy of integration in the post-independence phase along with the geo-strategic and cultural linkages of this region with neighbouring nations, contemporarily this sense of estrangement is employed more as a politico-cultural capital for bargaining with the Indian state.

This region, additionally, experiences a dense frequency of ethnic groups that are at different stages of political development organising their social and political life through political organisations that are habitually referred to as ‘traditional political authority structures’.<sup>5</sup> Several of these structures are recognised in numerous legal instruments including the Constitution<sup>6</sup> that accords them with a ‘strategic legitimacy’ alongside the institutions of the modern state. It is argued that these mechanisms endorsed the autonomy of ‘collective life-worlds’ of many of the ethnic communities residing in the region,<sup>7</sup> simultaneously allowing them the space to participate in the broader democratic mechanisms of the modern state. Indeed, it is the region’s ethnic pluralism that is also its provocation for cascading political claims and assertions that are also invariably crystallised into ‘ethnic insurgencies’ seeking independent ‘homelands’ that frequently overlap similar claims by ‘others’.<sup>8</sup> Briefly put, the region encounters escalating assertions by ethnic groups to reclaim their purported distinctiveness through ‘nativist movements’, as such political mobilisation and competitive politics frequently operate and are shaped by the margins established by the dynamics of these contestations.<sup>9</sup>

### THE STATE

Though the people inhabiting the present state of Meghalaya were initiated into modern constitutional governance in the late 19th century,<sup>10</sup>

their encounter with full-fledged competitive electoral politics began with the granting of statehood on 21 January 1972 vide the North Eastern Area (Reorganisation) Act 1971, where a single-tier legislature with 60 members were to perform the political tasks of the new state. This process, of course, ensued from the interim political arrangement made earlier when 'autonomous statehood' within Assam was approved as a 'Christmas gift'<sup>11</sup> to the hills people in 1969 (*Assam Reorganisation [Meghalaya] Act 1969*). In fact during the autonomous state phase a provisional Legislative Assembly of 41 members was established, where 38 members were elected and three members were nominated.<sup>12</sup> However, elections to this provisional assembly were not based on universal franchise since only an electoral college consisting of the representatives in the three hill districts autonomous councils of Khasis, Jaintias and Garos could cast their votes. In this provisional assembly, 34 members were from the All Peoples Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC), a group leading the Hills state movement; four members were from the Congress, who later aligned with the APHLC, and three nominated members who also later joined the APHLC.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, Chaube reflects significantly on the process of democratisation in the state in his comments that the lasting contribution of the APHLC to the politics of the region in general, and the state in particular, is the perfection it achieved in conducting constitutional politics in one of the most sensitive regions of India.<sup>14</sup> This assessment resonates prophetically if placed in the context of contemporary discourses and methods of expressing political protests in the region where disregard for democratic norms are *élan vital*.

This party-wise break-up of the composition of the provisional assembly may not be useful in terms of the electoral statistics of the state but is important in the context that it provides us a preliminary glimpse of the nature of political recruitment and ideological commitment of political parties in the emerging state. The nature of political alignments—pre and post poll—and the concurrent failure of any formidable opposition to develop, had a telling effect on the stability of future governments in the state. This pattern is evinced by the twists of political alignments in the provisional assembly. As Pakem<sup>15</sup> observes, governments in the state of Meghalaya were to always function

as a coalition with no opposition, and where all 60 members were to become ministers at some point in the five-year history of the assembly.

### BACKGROUND OBSERVATIONS

The state is dominated by three major tribal communities—the Khasis, the Jaintias (also referred to as the Pnars) and the Garos—who together constitute 80 percent of the total population of the state. Besides, other smaller tribal congeries of Bodos-Kacharis, Hajongs, Rabhas, Dimasas-Kacharis, Hmars, along with Mikir and a number of Kuki tribes inhabit the margins of the political landscape. The state also has a small section of ‘non-tribes’ who constituted only 14.5 percent in the 1990s. The non-tribes include the Bengalis, Marwaris, Nepalis and a small group of communities from other parts of India engaged in professional jobs, trading activities and petty services.

The distribution of seats for the 60 member assembly is made in relation to the relative demographic dominance of the ethnic groups residing in the state. As such, the Khasis who constitute 77.37 percent of the total population in the Khasi hills are represented in 26 seats, while the Jaintias who constitute 95.09 percent of the total population in the Jaintia hills are represented through seven seats. The Khasis and the Jaintias, who assert a common ethnic identity and origin myth, collectively share 33 seats among themselves. This contiguity of ethnic identity between the Khasis and the Jaintias is also shared in asserting a common set of political claims that often gets reflected and was recently made in their demand for a common Khasi-Jaintia State.<sup>16</sup>

The Khasis and the Jaintias are said to be of Paleo-Mongoloid origin, speaking an Austric language of the Mon-Khmer group; Garos are Indo-Mongoloid, speaking a Tibeto-Burman language.<sup>17</sup> The Garos are predominant in the Garo hills and represented through 22 seats. The remaining five seats are technically ‘open’ seats where ‘others’ can contest. Three of these seats are in the Shillong region of East Khasi Hills district, while the remaining two are from the West Garo Hills district. The ‘non-tribes’ who are legally eligible for electoral candidature from these seats are predominant in these ‘open’ areas.

The state is represented in the Lok Sabha by two seats, one from the Khasi-Jaintia hills and the other from the Garo hills, and is represented in the Rajya Sabha by one seat. Though the people began sending their representatives to the Parliament as members, especially, from the autonomous united Khasi-Jaintia districts, the turning point of this representation came after the 1976 split in the APHLC, after the formation of the new state in 1972.<sup>18</sup> As Chaube states, it was only from the 1977 elections that 'local issues crept in' the electoral agenda of political parties contesting the parliamentary elections. In fact it was from these elections that the contest between regional agenda and national identity received political articulation and internal schisms between the regional parties also began to get revealed.<sup>19</sup>

But of course the interesting question would be how does one explain this simultaneous loyalty for 'localism' and preference for 'national' linkage? This can partly be explained by the analysis of the discourse and rhetoric of 'culture in politics'<sup>20</sup> that utilises culture as a resource for 'transactional' goals and partly by the historical conditions<sup>21</sup> of the region. The circumstances become a little escalating and complex when the grammar and principles of competitive politics compel home-grown political forces to adopt these cultural symbols in an aggressive bid to recapture lost or losing political space to 'national' political forces. Besides, as Chaube<sup>22</sup> has expressed in a different context, the simultaneous swings between 'localism' and preference for 'national allegiance' is the outcome of a 'fairly middle-order choice' by an emerging middle class that adopts the strategy for 'convenient bargaining' motivated by rational electoral exigencies.

As a natural corollary to what we have already said about the political perception of the region in general towards the state of India, it follows that competitive politics is also perceived in many parts of the North-East as a subtle oblique system of introducing the legitimacy of the Indian state into these 'disputed'<sup>23</sup> areas. Nonetheless, it is also true that such a perception does not hold the fort when weighed against the degree of popular participation in elections to the state assemblies, at least statistically.<sup>24</sup> Though compared to its more virulent regional neighbours, Meghalaya is a relatively peaceful state; a nascent insurgency engaged in by sections of the indigenous groups is experienced to the extent that reports of insurgent groups having influenced

the outcome of electoral politics have dominated popular discourse in the state.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, the participation level of the electorate has often been above 50 percent in Meghalaya.

Another issue that has dominated competitive political experiences in Meghalaya, which is similar in most of the states of the region, is the concern for the preservation of indigenous identity given the popular perception about the 'sustained exodus and influence of non-indigenous communities' upon the fragile socio-economic and cultural fabric of the state. As such, all parties including 'national' ones like the Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party or the nascent Nationalist Congress Party along with the 'regional' parties have emphasised issues like 'preservation of tribal culture', 'preservation of local self-governing institutions' and more 'rights for the indigenous communities in determining their destiny'.<sup>26</sup>

This central feature of balancing regional aspirations with national demands by the parties in the state encouraged Sengupta<sup>27</sup> to observe that in Meghalaya a 'national' party like the Congress calls itself a 'national party with a regional outlook,' while regional parties call themselves, 'a regional party with national outlook'. However, besides the Congress and the BJP (prior to 1998), other 'national' parties like the Communist Party of India, that have been contesting elections since the inception of the state, could not build a social base in the state. This, Sengupta<sup>28</sup> believes, is due to their adherence to a classical Marxist model, which seeks the presence of an organised working class as a ground for the initiation of class-consciousness complemented by the absence of an 'exploited class' in a un-stratified tribal society.

The state has, however, experienced a plethora of regional parties, especially prior to an election to the legislative assembly. Beginning with the All Peoples Hill Leaders Conference (1970), the most prominent have been the Hill State Peoples Democratic Party (HSPDP) (1971), the Hill Peoples Union (HPU) (1988), the Public Demands Implementation Convention (PDIC) (1983), the United Democratic Party (UDP) (1998), the Youth Democratic Front (YDF) (1993), the Peoples Democratic Movement (PDM) (1998) and the Meghalaya Democratic Party (MDP) (2002). The regional parties have often expressed the claims of the dominant tribal groups of the state to the

extent that some of the radically pro-tribal groups have demanded the exclusion of non-dominant groups from any political participation and social rights.<sup>29</sup>

Nonetheless, most of the regional parties have often merged with national parties like the Congress after winning a few seats or even after receiving electoral setbacks. Besides, as we had stated, regional parties have often entered into a 'strategic alliance' with the Congress to form governments. We say this alliance is 'strategic' because the regional parties and the Congress have perceptively different political constituencies. Where the Congress down-plays issues that have regional and ethnic significance, the regional parties are vociferous in their assertion of the same, and as such they cater to divergent political constituencies and interests.

Yet it would not be proper for us to establish a clear polarisation of the social base of the Congress and the regional parties, keeping in mind the general outlook of the 'national' and 'regional' parties we explained earlier. This becomes apparent if we also explore some 'pre-electoral manoeuvres' of these parties. For instance, during the 1977 parliamentary elections, the Congress 'issued a press note reminding the people that unauthorised transfer of land ... from tribals to non-tribals and from non-tribals to *other*<sup>30</sup> non-tribals ... was illegal, void and punishable under the Meghalaya Transfer of Land Act 1971'. Moreover, it is the Congress-led coalition government that today (2005) seeks to promulgate the amended 'Meghalaya Transfer of Land Act 1971', wherein provisions for including a few more tribes as 'indigenous' to the state to enable them to purchase and sell landed property within the state and stop all sorts of sale and transfer of land from non-tribals to non-tribals, are to be prohibited.<sup>31</sup> The press note of 1977, Chaube claims, was 'directed to get tribal support for the Congress candidates countering the opposition campaign' being built predominantly around 'regional' issues<sup>32</sup> and the amendment sought in 2005 is merely a reflection of the consolidation of vested interests initiated during the early phase of 'state building'. Furthermore, it was a national party like the Congress that had opposed land reforms in the state on the plea that the concept was alien to Khasi culture,<sup>33</sup> while to the contrary, the APHLC had been planning some kind of land reform.<sup>34</sup>

The tenuous nature of the 'balancing act' between the Congress and the regional forces was also evident during the 2004 Lok Sabha elections. During these elections, the regional parties silently denied the call by the Congress for a common candidate for the parliamentary seats, by the coalition partners. This refusal by the regional forces was partly dictated by the distrust among the regional forces that any such direct electoral alliance would lead to a categorical appropriation by the Congress, which has been the dominant partner in the ruling coalition in the state, and would lead to the forfeiting of political space to the Congress.

Like other states of the region, in Meghalaya too, students and student bodies have had a very prominent role in configuring the politics of the state. They have often floated regional fronts during elections, though many of them have not been able to continue as a party after their electoral defeats, except for a few like the Khun Hynniewtrep National Awakening Movement (KHNAM) formed by members of the Khasi Students Union (KSU) in 2003, though their future prospects cannot be foretold. The other fronts floated by students or their supporters during various phases of the state's electoral history included the Hynniewtrep National Front (HNF) (1978), the Democratic Hills Movement (DHM) (1984), the Alliance for the Reconstruction of Meghalaya (ARM) (1988) and even the already mentioned PDM. Students' organisations like the KSU have often tacitly backed these fronts since student bodies, especially the KSU, always had a 'soft corner for the regional political parties'.<sup>35</sup>

What's more, irrespective of the partial successes by regional forces backed by the emerging intelligentsia, students have been at the forefront of political movements that set the agenda for numerous political leaders and parties. They have for instance led the anti-foreigners agitation in 1979 and 1987, which in a sense initiated the ethnocentric divide between the dominant communities and the assortment of minorities residing in the state and which continues to determine the dynamics of not only electoral outcomes but also popular democratic mobilisations.<sup>36</sup> The students have also demanded the non-extension of railway head to the state; 100 percent job reservation and seats in the assembly; implementation of the inner-line regulation, revision

of electoral rolls to eliminate alleged 'foreigners', and implementation of work permits for non-indigenous workers. Public representatives in Parliament have often pleaded for similar demands on behalf of the students when arguments for the extension of the inner-line regulation to check the entry of 'outsiders' into the state and 100 percent reservation of seats in the legislative assembly for the indigenous tribes,<sup>37</sup> were made by them.

In fact, student bodies like the KSU are so hegemonic that parallel 'secular' students bodies like the National Students Union of India (NSUI) are denied any role or legitimacy in the affairs of the state through categorical assertions that 'there is no student union other than the KSU in the Khasi Hills'.<sup>38</sup> Even when other pan-regional platforms of students were established in the state, for example the All Khasi-Jaintia Students Union (AKJSU) in 1987, the North Eastern Hills Students Association (NEHSA) in 1970, the North East Region Students Union (NERSU) in 1979 or the North Eastern Region Indigenous Students Federation (NERISF) in 1985, the president of the KSU presided over them.<sup>39</sup> These student bodies have also often defied traditional authorities, whose legal recognition and institutionalisation have often been demanded by them,<sup>40</sup> obtained the resignation of ministers<sup>41</sup> and influenced the formation of post-electoral political alliances in the state.<sup>42</sup> These instances highlight the importance and influence of students and student bodies not only on political alignments and political decision-making but also on the organising of socio-political discourse in the state.

Another feature that needs emphasis in any analysis of political mobilisation in Meghalaya is the influence and role of 'traditional political authorities' and a 'tradition-guided' society on the nature and outcome of modern liberal multi-party democracy. The traditional political authorities that have in the recent past been vocal on the granting of legal recognition to their systems of governance have received political backing for their assertions. For instance the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) that came into being after P.A. Sangma parted ways with the Sonia-led Congress, became a staunch supporter for the granting of constitutional recognition to the traditional bodies, whereby a quasi rational-legal legitimacy could be accorded to these bodies.

Though the issue of constitutional recognition to traditional authorities had gathered momentum after the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, the issue was further politicised by the NCP.<sup>43</sup> We can attribute this action on the part of the NCP to the political compulsions it encountered, since being a new political competitor in the state it had to carve out a separate segment of the state's social base. To do so, it adopted a cultural–political discourse to distinguish itself from the other players that had already patented political issues and social bases. It, thus, effectively provided political expression to an already familiar and popular social belief that traditional authorities require constitutional recognition to be legally able to exert their already existing comprehensive authority over the people without interference from modern state structures and institutions.

This issue has been so highly politicised that the Federation of Khasi States, a body of traditional authorities, pleaded to all parties to support its candidate to the Lok Sabha in the parliamentary elections of 2004. However, the adaptable nature of the relationship between the institutions and processes of liberal democracy and the traditional sources of political authority prevented any political party, even the regional ones, from extending any such direct political support. It is important to stress here that the relationship between the traditional authorities and the liberal democratic authorities is complicated and dense—at times the traditional authorities act as appendages to the state institutions and at times they contest its legitimacy.<sup>44</sup> In fact, many of the legislators are often themselves traditional authorities or members of these institutions and the popular view has also been that these institutions are apertures to political aspirations in the institutions of the modern state. Nonetheless, despite this tenuous relationship between institutions of modern government and the traditional authorities, the issue of 'recognising' the traditional authorities has a wide cultural and political appeal among a section of the people, though skeptic voices question their role in a modern political setting.<sup>45</sup> The silent refusal of support by political parties to this proposal of the traditional authorities during the 2004 elections reveals that current political entrepreneurs are unwilling to wholly accord legitimacy to cultural symbols that might induce a new set of actors into the political arena but, nonetheless, they are willing to adopt these

symbols only to the extent that they provide them with some 'transactional' benefits in everyday politics.

The candidate proposed by the traditional institutions had to ultimately refrain from contesting since it was evident that the political constituency of the traditional authorities was insecure and unreliable even though they could evoke an effective (cultural) political interest through such demands. Needless to emphasise that though traditional institutions serve as 'mobilising structures' for collective actions laced with ethnic rituals and cultural symbolism in a discursive space where 'culture is politics'<sup>46</sup> they continue to occupy the fringes of contemporary political discourse without any significant and homogenous political base.

Another significant feature of the political culture of the state is that despite being a matrilineal and matrilineal society (among the Khasi, Jaintia and Garos), the participation and visibility of women in politics is negligible. Very few women have played any significant role in politics so as to represent the people in the state legislature or in Parliament. They also play an insignificant role in the traditional political institutions.<sup>47</sup> An explanation of such a failure is presented by Baruah and Sharma,<sup>48</sup> who argue that this society pursues matrilineal traditions but operates through rules of patriarchy. Effective power, thus, remains with male members of the society and who hold negative images about the capability of women in decision-making roles.<sup>49</sup> But this analysis does little to explain why there is the emergence of a growing dissonance among a section of the Khasi men folk against the matrilineal and matrilineal form of society.<sup>50</sup>

### DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL MOBILISATION

As we have already indicated, like the other states of the region, Meghalaya too is in a state of political transition where democratic mobilisation and competitive politics is a recent and modern phenomenon. Its initiation into modern political mobilisation began with the formation of the Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU), which was formed by a group of tribal leaders in the state of Assam to seek more

autonomy for the tribals within the state.<sup>51</sup> The opening elections to the legislative assembly were held in March 1972 when a new state was established vide the North Eastern Area (Reorganisation) Act 1971. It would be useful to recall here that the new assembly was to be composed of 60 seats, 50 to be 'reserved' while 10 were 'open' seats. The number of 'open' seats was subsequently reduced to five seats<sup>52</sup> from which, technically, non-dominant 'non-tribes' could contest. This democratic limitation to non-dominant groups in the state must nevertheless be assessed in the context of the social transformation the state is experiencing where an increasing assertion of 'indigeneity'<sup>53</sup> and ethnic identity has placed effective limitations upon the political empowerment of non-dominant groups and, as such, their participation in any form of democratic mobilisation is tangential to actual political decision-making.<sup>54</sup>

During these elections, the regional parties together secured a majority in the Assembly, while the Congress contesting in 12 seats, secured nine. The remaining seats were captured by the Independents (See Table 10.1). A crucial feature of Meghalaya previously noted is that the politics of defections and coalitions began immediately after the 1972 elections. A faction of the APHLC led by Captain Williamson A. Sangma merged with the Congress after the APHLC's Mendipather conference in 1976.<sup>55</sup> The other group led by B.B. Lyngdoh was to remain the guiding light and hub of regional forces in the state, though the taxonomy and nature of political alignments of the party was to undergo alterations time and again. This merger provided the Congress with a strong footing in the new state, which it further consolidated, especially in the Garo and east Khasi hills. The political history of the Congress in the state has passed through assorted trajectories, where it has often received more votes than the regional parties separately, but could never form a government on its own. It always had to engage in the politics of defections from, and coalition arrangements with, the regional parties to form governments in the state. Even in the case of parliamentary elections, the history of the Congress is a series of swings and slides. For instance, from an all-time high of 74.3 percent of the vote-share in 1980, it received only 53.6 percent of the total vote-share in 1996.<sup>56</sup>

**Table 10.1**  
Party-wise seats share in the Meghalaya Assembly: 1972–2003

| Year | National Parties |     |     |     |       | Regional Parties |      |          |     |     |     |       |       | IND | Total |     |     |
|------|------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------|------------------|------|----------|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|-----|-------|-----|-----|
|      | INC              | NCP | BJP | CPI | APHLC | PDIC             | MPPP | APHLC(A) | UDP | MDP | GNC | HSPDP | KHNAM |     |       | PDM | HPU |
| 1972 | 9                | -   | -   | Nil | 32    | 0                | -    | -        | -   | -   | -   | 8     | -     | -   | -     | 11  | 60  |
| 1978 | 20               | -   | -   | Nil | 16    | 0                | -    | -        | -   | -   | -   | 14    | -     | -   | -     | 8   | 60  |
| 1983 | 25               | -   | -   | Nil | 15    | 2                | -    | -        | -   | -   | -   | 15    | -     | -   | -     | 3   | 60  |
| 1988 | 22               | -   | -   | Nil | -     | 2                | -    | 2        | -   | -   | -   | 6     | -     | -   | 19    | 9   | 60  |
| 1993 | 24               | -   | 0   | Nil | -     | 2                | -    | 3        | -   | -   | -   | 8     | -     | -   | 11    | 10  | 60  |
| 1998 | 25               | 0   | 3   | Nil | -     | -                | -    | -        | 20  | 0   | 1   | 3     | 0     | 3   | -     | 5   | 60  |
| 2003 | 22               | 14  | 2   | Nil | -     | -                | -    | -        | 9   | 4   | 0   | 2     | 2     | 0   | -     | 5   | 60  |

Source: *Election Handbooks/Statistical Records*, Election Commission of Meghalaya, Election Commission of India.

Nonetheless, the Congress is generally perceived by a majority of the dominant tribal groups as a 'national' party that sponsors<sup>57</sup> the interests of the non-tribes—the cultural and political 'other'. As such, the Congress is seen with distrust by a significant section of the tribal population, especially in the Khasi and Jaintia hills. This distrust is evident in the low number of seats won by the Congress in these areas.

The regional parties, on the other hand, are seen as sponsors of tribal interests, and if we view their membership profile we find that it is overwhelmingly composed of indigenous tribes. Besides, the issues that have often been flagged by the regional parties are those that the dominant tribal groups perceive as securing their protection from 'outside' influence and intervention.

This estimation of the social base of the Congress as well as the regional parties can also be made from an analysis of the vote-share of these parties in the 'non-tribal' pockets of the state. The regional parties invariably receive a lower share of the votes compared to the Congress in areas of 'non-tribal' dominance. Often, the support of 'non-tribal' electors for the regional forces is strategic to their survival needs and is relative to their thin demographic distribution in areas of overwhelming 'tribal' concentration. This is evidenced in the support for the KHNAM candidate during the 2003 Assembly elections in the Jaiaw constituency, which is a predominantly 'tribal' constituency, with a sparse 'non-tribal' presence.

This assessment of the social base of the Congress and the regional parties, however, is applicable in a limited sense in the case of the Garo hills, where the Congress has had a strong support base among the tribal population. This difference in the social base of the Congress in respect to the Khasi and the Garo hills has been attributed by Baruah,<sup>58</sup> taking an imperfect cue from a more nuanced argument provided by Brass,<sup>59</sup> to the degree of political consciousness and consolidation of an emerging educated middle class. Baruah believes that when an educated élite or middle class begins to emerge in a less developed community it ensures its benefits by remaining close to more powerful and hegemonic forces, but when it gains strength it uses regional or ethnic politics as a bargaining strategy.<sup>60</sup> This is partially true since the nascent élite in the Garo hills have not desisted from

introducing ethnic politics or regional issues during political mobilisation in the areas dominated by them.

Moreover, it must be emphasised that personalities, rather than ideological polarisation, matter more in electoral politics in the Garo hills in particular, and in the state as a whole in general. The influence of W.A. Sangma and P.A. Sangma has been almost all-embracing in the political milieu of the area and their relations with the Congress had been responsible, to a great extent, for the influence of the Congress in the area. Only in 1972 and 1988 did the regional forces secure 17 and 12 seats, respectively from the Garo areas. This can be explained by the fact that during 1972, the regional forces had just achieved statehood—but under the leadership of W.A. Sangma. In 1988, it can be attributed to the pre-election tribal–non-tribal ethnic clashes that shook the entire state, including several parts of the Garo hills, which generally remain unaffected by ethnic clashes that occur in other parts of the state. These ethnic clashes that made the tribal people more defensive, helped shift the allegiance of the people towards the regional forces who argued for more protection to the tribes. Besides, during these elections, W.A. Sangma experienced personal problems that affected his leadership.<sup>61</sup> In 1988, the Hill Peoples Union (HPU), which was formed with the partial amalgamation of the APHLC and the HSPDP during the parliamentary elections in 1984,<sup>62</sup> secured a total of 19 seats in the assembly. Ten of these were<sup>63</sup> from the Garo hills, the highest for any regional party from the area after the dissolution of the APHLC.

In 1978, the elections to the legislative assembly took place in the backdrop of this merger of a section of the regional élite with the Congress, which resulted in the strengthening of the Congress's position (in the total seats won) after the elections. The Congress contested 57 seats and won 20 of them, 11 of which were from the Garo hills. HSPDP and APHLC, regional parties, won 14 and 16 seats, respectively especially from the Khasi and Jaintia hill areas, while the remaining 10 seats were won by independents. The combined strength of the regional parties was more than that of the Congress and close to a majority, but personality and ego clashes between the leaders of the

regional forces made it difficult for them to join hands against the Congress. It required pressure from a tribal body, the Meghalaya Tribal Youth Organisation (MTYO), for the regional parties to come together and form the first 'non-Congress coalition' in which the leadership issue was solved by the toss of a coin, thus teasingly referred to by the Congress as the 'first lottery government'. The pressure of the 'tribal body' upon the nature of political alignments in the state reflected the growing influence of a nascent tribal élite who were to utilise 'ethnic identity' and 'regional demands' simply as political capital for self-serving motivations. This assessment can be made from the fact that most of these social bodies and 'regional parties' had an ephemeral existence in the political landscape of the state before their dissolution, alignment or merger with the Congress.

This assertion of 'indigenous identity' and 'regional aspirations' reached its culmination in 1979, when a student-led movement and the regional forces backed a gory 'anti-foreigners movement' that polarised political interests and claims along ethnic lines. The movement fractured the polity in terms of 'tribes' and 'non-tribes'—two opposing poles of the political spectrum whose claims and interests were considered contradictory. The subsequent consolidation of the communities, especially the non-tribes, in 'ethnic enclaves' as a psychological defence mechanism against perceived threat from dominant groups, initiated their disenchantment with politics. It may be said to have initiated a form of 'confessional politics'<sup>64</sup> that found expression initially in the support for Congress candidates from the 'non-tribal' areas and later in 1998, the election of BJP candidates from the same areas.

However, the nature of this 'confessional politics' is that it is neither motivated nor processed simply by religion but also by the idea of ethnic difference, where ethnicity became a source of political disempowerment. As such, the hint of scepticism that we perceive among the 'non-tribes' for the regional parties initially *vis-à-vis* the Congress and then, with the arrival of the BJP, *vis-à-vis* the regional parties as well as the Congress, can be attributed to this politics of confession. Many scholars have hinted that this scepticism for the regional forces among the non-dominant 'non-tribes' of the state was inherent in

the birth of the state since measures for the protection of 'tribal' interests in the new state would, they perceived, affect their interests.<sup>65</sup>

The election to the legislative assembly in 1983 was thus held in the backdrop of this sustained 'anti-foreigners' assertion by regional forces throughout the state. Even though the regional parties collectively secured a majority in the elections (see Table 10.1), because of 'disunity, defections and differences' among the regional forces, they could not unite under a regional coalition to form the government. The opposition split with an ensuing drama<sup>66</sup> under the leadership of the veteran leader of the opposition B.B. Lyngdoh, and the Congress formed a United Meghalaya Parliamentary Forum (UMPF) government under P.A. Sangma with the HPU (BB), APHLC (A) and Independents. In the early 1990s, this Congress-led forum was reduced to a minority because of a split that led to the establishment of B.B. Lyngdoh as the chief minister heading a combined government of the regional parties, labelled the Meghalaya United Parliamentary Party (MUPP). But dissidence was a perennial 'ideology' in Meghalaya politics and ultimately President's Rule was imposed in October 1991,<sup>67</sup> which was revoked and a Congress government came to power in 1992. Even if subsequently the Supreme Court gave a ruling favouring the regional combine, MUPP, it had no political impact since by then another election had taken place and a coalition government was in power after the 1993 elections.

This coalition government called the Meghalaya United Front (MUF), formed by the Congress along with a splinter group of the HSPDP (L) and the APHLC (A) and some Independents, happened to be the only 'United Front' government in the political history of Meghalaya to complete its five-year term.<sup>68</sup> In the 1998 elections, the efforts of the regional parties to constitute a pre-poll alliance achieved partial success, with a regional combine called the United Democratic Party (UDP) resulting from the amalgamation of the HPU, PDIC and a section of the HSPDP. Nonetheless, the drama concerning government formation continued with efforts by the Congress to foist a government lasting a proverbial 12 days when the 'coalition' government resigned without facing a trust vote. Later a coalition government was formed under B.B. Lyngdoh, but ultimately dissidence forced him to pave the way for another chief minister from the regional

parties—E.K. Mawlong. Some significant aspects of this election are that the BJP secured three seats in the Assembly, thereby making its presence felt in a predominantly Christian state,<sup>69</sup> while the UDP secured all the seven seats in the Jaintia hills, the most ever by a regional party in the state.<sup>70</sup> However, ‘splits’ in the regional parties continued and the UDP reconciled to a group breaking from it to form the Meghalaya Democratic Party (MDP). This government for the first time faced a strong coalition of civil society organisations, called the Peoples’ Rally Against Corruption (PRAC), that rallied together to force the resignation of the government on charges of corruption.

Elections to the Assembly in 2003 was held amidst a severe division in the social base of the regional parties because of ‘splits’ in the regional parties and the entry of newer regional fronts like the KHNAM. This possibly allowed ‘national’ parties like the Congress and the BJP to collectively secure their highest ever seats in the Khasi-Jaintia hills areas.<sup>71</sup> (Table 10.2)

**Table 10.2**

Party-wise performance in the Garo and Khasi-Jaintia areas: 1972–2003

| Year | Garo Hills |          |             |       | Khasi-Jaintia Hills |          |             |       |
|------|------------|----------|-------------|-------|---------------------|----------|-------------|-------|
|      | Regional   | National | Independent | Total | Regional            | National | Independent | Total |
| 1972 | 17         | 05       | 2           | 24    | 23                  | 4        | 9           | 36    |
| 1978 | 08         | 11       | 5           | 24    | 24                  | 9        | 3           | 36    |
| 1983 | 05         | 18       | 1           | 24    | 27                  | 7        | 2           | 36    |
| 1988 | 12         | 07       | 5           | 24    | 17                  | 15       | 4           | 36    |
| 1993 | 02         | 14       | 8           | 24    | 24                  | 10       | 2           | 36    |
| 1998 | 03         | 18       | 3           | 24    | 24                  | 10       | 2           | 36    |
| 2003 | 02         | 19       | 3           | 24    | 15                  | 19       | 2           | 36    |

**Source:** *Election Handbooks/Statistical Records*, Election Commission of Meghalaya, Election Commission of India (courtesy: Baruah and Malngiang).

The history of elections to Parliament also saw similar vacillations on the part of the regional parties and more often than not the Congress won the parliamentary constituencies.<sup>72</sup> Pre-poll alliances and mergers between regional parties were merely temporary as they often could not be sustained after the defeat of candidates. In the 2004 general elections to Parliament, the Congress as the dominant partner in a

coalition government formed after the 2003 state elections in association with regional parties, made an appeal for a common candidate but it was rejected by the regional parties. Therefore, during these elections, there were three candidates from the Shillong constituency and two from the Tura constituency. Paty Ripple Kyndiah of the Indian National Congress, Sanbor Swell Lyngdoh of the Bharatiya Janata Party and S. Loniak Marbaniang as a joint representative of the regional forces contested the elections from the Shillong constituency. P.A. Sangma of the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) and Dr Mukul Sangma of the Congress contested the elections from the Tura constituency.

If we consider the pattern of voting during these elections we will appreciate the ethnic polarisation we had tried to examine earlier in the case of elections to the State Assembly. During these elections, the BJP candidate received the highest number of votes in the Pynthorumkhrah, Laban and Mawprem constituencies as compared to the Congress and the Independent candidates.<sup>73</sup> These three constituencies have the highest number of 'non-tribal' voters than any other constituency in Shillong, besides the Pynthorumkhrah and Laban constituencies which have sitting BJP MLAs. Likewise, the Congress candidate received a significant portion of votes from the Jaintia-dominated constituencies of Rymbai, Raliang and Jowai. In the case of the Congress candidate, it is possibly ethnic kinship that influenced electoral outcomes, while in the case of the BJP candidate it is more due to party-based support. This can, as we have indicated earlier, be attributed to the nature of the politics of confession pursued by the disempowered 'non-tribes'. The BJP provides this group, who are restricted by the dynamics of ethnic demography and politics from contesting parliamentary elections, with an immediate 'national kinship' by exploiting their sense of disempowerment released by the dynamics of ethnic polarisation.

The political contest was between the Congress and the Independent candidates put up by the regional parties combine. While the Congress candidate secured majorities in 26 out of 36 assembly constituencies under the Shillong constituency, the regional party candidates won in seven assembly segments. The BJP candidate secured

a majority in only three assembly segments. Between the BJP and the regional parties' candidate, the BJP could take a lead in only five assembly segments that includes the three 'non-tribal'—dominated segments.

In the Tura constituency, the veteran Purno A. Sangma, an AITC candidate, was pitted against his one-time political ally and apprentice Dr Mukul Sangma, the Congress candidate. Surprisingly, the regional parties of Meghalaya put up no candidates and some, like the UDP, tacitly supported P.A. Sangma. Ethnic polarisation was also visible in the Tura constituency where Mukul Sangma received overwhelming support of the 'non-Garo' voters, especially in the Phulbari and Mahendraganj assembly segments where significant sections of the electorate are 'non-Garos' and many of the voters looked upon Mukul Sangma as a person with multiple ethnic identity and, possibly, loyalty.

The dominant influence of P.A. Sangma in the Garo hills led to his securing majorities in 21 assembly segments out of the total of 24 in the Tura constituency. Mukul Sangma could secure majorities in only three assembly segments, which also have a large concentration of 'non-Garos'.

The major issues during these elections, especially in the Garo hills, i.e. the Tura constituency, had been the need for development and peace. The concern for development is in fact another issue that divides the perceptions of the Garos and Khasi-Jaintias. Garos often express the view that the Garo hills is the most neglected segment of Meghalaya, despite a large number of Garos holding powerful positions in the political hierarchy. The Khasis view the Garos as having always dominated the political hierarchy in the state. In the Khasi hills, the issues were very adaptable since all parties, except the BJP were part of a coalition government. Both the Congress and the regional parties, candidate harped on the successes of the coalition government and promised more from the same. It was only the BJP which highlighted the issue of corruption and lack of accountability on the part of the state government. The final election results favoured the Congress candidate in the Shillong constituency with 52.68 percent of the total vote share, while in the Tura constituency the AITC candidate, receiving 61.69 percent of the vote share, trounced his Congress rival.

**Table 10.3**  
Candidates returned to Parliament: 1977–2004

| Year | Tura Constituency |                 |                | Shillong Constituency |       |                 |                |
|------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------|----------------|
|      | Party             | Candidate       | Vote Share (%) | Year                  | Party | Candidate       | Vote Share (%) |
| 1977 | INC               | Purno A. Sangma | 57.64          | 1977                  | IND   | H.S. Lyngdoh    | 30.27          |
| 1980 | INC               | Purno A. Sangma | 74.31          | 1980                  | –     | Not Held        | NA             |
| 1984 | INC               | Purno A. Sangma | 74.3           | 1984                  | INC   | G.G. Swell      | 55.75          |
| 1989 | INC               | S. Marak        | 62.7           | 1989                  | INC   | P.G. Marbaniang | 50.77          |
| 1991 | INC               | Purno A. Sangma | 68.31          | 1991                  | INC   | P.G. Marbaniang | 48.75          |
| 1996 | INC               | Purno A. Sangma | 78.47          | 1996                  | IND   | G.G. Swell      | 56.18          |
| 1998 | INC               | Purno A. Sangma | 67.27          | 1998                  | INC   | P.R. Kyndiah    | 35.1           |
| 1999 | NCP               | Purno A. Sangma | 63.18          | 1999                  | INC   | P.R. Kyndiah    | 39.75          |
| 2004 | AITC              | Purno A. Sangma | 61.69          | 2004                  | INC   | P.R. Kyndiah    | 51.68          |

Source: www.eci.gov.in.

We can argue that the characteristics and dynamics of political mobilisation in the state remain almost similar for the elections to both the legislative assembly and Parliament, with only subtle differences in the degree of emphasis.

### IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION

This synoptic analysis of the conditions and dynamics of politics in a predominantly tribal state exposes certain issues that require more sustained engagement by scholars and policy framers alike if we are to understand the agency for 'political discontinuities and social upheavals' in many of the states of this region euphemistically referred to as the 'North-East'. The overwhelming concern for identity and ethnic difference that unite groups against a 'common' adversary often fail to coalesce the groups making such claims towards any common agenda for political justice and emancipation. Groups and clusters that emerge as a result of the cascading politicisation of ethnic identities have merely resulted in the shallow ethnicisation of politics where justification of claims and their legitimisation can take place only on ethnic terms. The shrinkage in the representative voice of the non-dominant groups<sup>74</sup> occupying the margins of political decision-making have only served to undermine democratic dispensations resulting in social tensions and ethnic rivalry.

Besides, the emergence of regional parties as a logical corollary to the growing consciousness of exploitation by the 'majority/outside' have not in any sense been able to establish themselves as an alternative to the non-indigenous bias exhibited by 'national' parties. On the contrary, the regional forces have often been censured for elevating 'pure materialism and self-aggrandisement as the ultimate in political idealism'.<sup>75</sup> Even authorities that seek constitutional legitimacy for being the 'authentic cultural inheritors' like the traditional authorities, have been condemned for 'exploiting the ... wealth of the state'.<sup>76</sup> All these emerging social and political dilemmas are said to have 'manifested themselves into an identity syndrome'<sup>77</sup> in the state, indeed the entire region, where insular defensive political slogans and regional sentiments seem to be the only genuine political idioms.

However, it may be worth noting that a nascent but alert and inclusive civil society is emerging in the state. The emergence of such 'a site where public opinion is formed through discourse in which private individuals forge a common understanding about public goals and exercise scrutiny over the state'<sup>78</sup> could possibly allow the space for a 'public' unanointed by primordial loyalties. The formation of the PRAC, which for the first time forced a chief minister to resign, indicates the possibility of a transformation of the social and political agenda in the state in a manner where ethnic solidarity may not remain the major base for political mobilisation. Such a development would possibly ensure that greater democratic visibility and political accountability is a strategy still worth being pursued in an ethnically fashioned society.

## NOTES

1. See Subrata Mitra. *Culture and Rationality: The Politics of Social Change in Post-colonial India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999, pp. 70–71.
2. Rajesh Dev. 'Human Rights, Minorities and Relativism in the North-East'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23 October 2004.
3. Sanjib Baruah. *Durable Disorder*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 4–5. Emphasis mine.
4. Ibid.
5. See J.N. Sarkar and B. Datta Ray (eds.) *Social and Political Institutions of the Hills People of North East India*. Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1990.
6. For example, the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Indian Constitution or Article 371 grants special status to the state of Nagaland. Also relevant is Abhijit Choudhury, 'The Contextual Dimensions of the Sixth Schedule', *Contemporary India*, Vol. 1, No. 4, October–December 2002.
7. Dev. op. cit., 2004.
8. For instance, the Dimasa, a tribe predominantly from Assam, claim Dimapur a city in the neighbouring state of Nagaland as part of their homeland, or the more publicised claims of 'Nagalim' by the Naga separatists that include parts of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.
9. For instance, in the state of Nagaland, political parties are alleged to be frequently guided by the interests of various factions of Naga insurgents combating the forces of the Indian state for a separate homeland. For details, see Rajesh Dev,

- 'Nagaland: More Space for Democratic Politics'. *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 17, 26 April 2003.
10. See S.K. Chaube. *Hill Politics in Northeast India*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Ltd., 1999 reprint, pp. 13–15.
  11. *The Implanter*. Shillong, 28 December 1969.
  12. For details see B. Pakem. *Coalition Politics in North-East India*. New Delhi: Regency Publications, 1999, and R.S. Lyngdoh. *Government and Politics in Meghalaya*. New Delhi: Sanchar Publishing House, 1996.
  13. Pakem (1999) op. cit., p. 97.
  14. S.K. Chaube. *Ectoral Politics in North East India*. Madras: Universities Press, 1985, p. 8.
  15. *Ibid.*, p. 98
  16. 'H.S. Lyngdoh Leaves for Delhi Today'. *The Shillong Times*, 30 August 2004.
  17. See P.S. Datta. 'Ideological Bases of Regional Political Parties in Meghalaya', in B. Pakem (ed.) *Regionalism in India*. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publishers, 1993, p. 91.
  18. S.K. Chaube. op. cit., 1985, pp. 137–62.
  19. See *ibid.*, pp. 139–40.
  20. See Subrata Mitra. op. cit., 1999, p. 207.
  21. For a delineation of these conditions, see Chaube, op. cit., 1985, pp. 7–14.
  22. Chaube. op. cit., 1999 reprint, p. ix.
  23. I have used 'disputed' since many of these states are experiencing movements that base their resentment on the questionable nature of their accession to India. In Manipur and Meghalaya, for example, groups engaged in contesting the legitimacy of the Indian state often argue that the Instruments of Accession signed by the respective rulers with the Government of India have not been honoured in letter and spirit and numerous legal ambiguities remain.
  24. See Statistical Records, [www.eci.gov.in](http://www.eci.gov.in).
  25. See Avirook Sen, 'Tightrope Triumph'. *India Today*, 23 March 1998.
  26. Election manifestoes of the parties convey these themes.
  27. See Susmita Sengupta, 'Regionalism in Meghalaya'. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, 1997.
  28. See Susmita Sengupta, '*Communist Party of India in Meghalaya*'. Unpublished M. Phil Thesis, North Eastern Hill University, 1988.
  29. For instance, the HSPDP has been asserting 'no person who is not a member of the Scheduled Tribes of the Autonomous District has the right to represent or contest elections from the autonomous districts of Meghalaya'. See *The Shillong Times*, 12 December 1987. Besides, parties like the KHNAM have been exclusively formed to assert the rights of the indigenous groups. (See manifestoes of regional parties.)
  30. Italics mine. The 'other' expresses the contestation evident in Meghalaya since the formation of the new state between groups who are considered indigenous and groups considered non-indigenous. It is widely believed that since the

state was formed in deference to the avowed claims of the Khasis, Jaintias and the Garos—three dominant tribes of the state—the principle of ‘indigeneity’ as the justification of rights and claims must always be in their favour and tribes, or even non-tribes, who have been residing in areas that became part of Meghalaya cannot be assigned the ‘indigenous’ status.

31. See. ‘House to Study Land Transfer Bill’, *The Shillong Times*, 19 April 2005.
32. See Chaube, 1985, pp. 144–47.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *The Statesman*, 11 May 1968, quoted in Chaube, *op. cit.*, 1985, p. 144.
36. For elaboration, see Dev, *op. cit.*, 2004.
37. Malngiang, *op. cit.*
38. *The Implanter*, 28 November 1983.
39. Malngiang, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
40. ‘KSU—Admn Heading for a Showdown’, *The Shillong Times*, 12 September 2001.
41. Mr. D.D. Lapang resigned as Home Minister in 1987. See ‘Resignation Letter of State Home Minister Accepted’, *The Shillong Times*, 24 June 1987.
42. In 1978, the student-backed Meghalaya Tribal Youth Organisation called all regional parties to align together to form the first non-Congress coalition of the state. See. B. Pakem, *op. cit.*, 1999.
43. Public opinion regarding the granting of constitutional recognition is sharply divided and many observers feel that such a move would encourage ‘tribalism’ in a heterogeneous state. For details see Abhijit Choudhury ‘The Contextual Dimensions of the Sixth Schedule’. *Contemporary India*, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Vol. 1, No. 4, October–December 2002, p. 33.
44. For a more elaborate assessment of this relationship, see Rajesh Dev et al., ‘Liberal Democracy, Traditional Institutions and Politics of Representation’, A.K. Baruah, et al., ‘Tribal Traditions and Crisis of Governance in North East India’. [www.crisisstates.com](http://www.crisisstates.com).
45. Patricia Mukhim. ‘Importance of the Smit Summit’. *The Telegraph*, 20 January 2004. Also see T. Blah, ‘Fifteen Years of Back Pedaling–II’, *The Shillong Times*, 10 October 1987.
46. See Subrata Mitra, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 207.
47. See Pascal Malngiang, ‘Women and Elections in Meghalaya’, *Proceedings of the North East India Political Science Association*, 1996.
48. A.K. Baruah and Manorama Sharma, ‘Matriliny, Land Rights and Political Power in Khasi Society’, *Indian Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 3, No. 1 & 2, January–December 1999, pp. 210–28.
49. This was revealed in a survey conducted for the Crisis States Programme of LSE conducted by a group of scholars, including this writer, for parts of Meghalaya. See [www.crisisstates.com](http://www.crisisstates.com).
50. For details on the debate, see Purabi Shridhar. ‘Report on Threat to Matrilineal System in Meghalaya’, *Femina*, 1 December 2000.

51. See Diren Bhagawati, 'Meghalaya: The struggle of the three sisters to have a place in the sun', in Girin Phukon (ed.), *Political Dynamics of North East India*, New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 2000, pp. 175–86.
52. See 'Election Commission declares 5 "general" seats for Meghalaya', *The Shillong Times*, 28 December 1987.
53. Indigeneity is a term that has a fuzzy and imprecise connotation since it is open to myriad interpretations according to the social and political proclivities of the agents seeking to define it. It is meant to refer to a collective consciousness among members of groups who are 'recognised' or even seek recognition, by the state and its institutions and perceive themselves to be the 'first' peoples of a territorial region. In the North-East it can refer to a 'social organisational system' through which members share a cognitive perception of 'peoplehood' in relation to a specific territory. Frequently, members of the same ethnic group contest each others' claims on the basis of 'indigeneity' rather than 'ethnicity'.
54. See Dev, op. cit., 2004. See also, an open letter to the chief minister by five non-tribal members of the Legislative Assembly entitled, 'Non-tribals are being used as Scapegoats', *The Shillong Times*, 9 November 1987.
55. See Pakem, op. cit., pp. 98–99.
56. Calculated from the Election Commission of Meghalaya sources.
57. This support for the Congress has its roots in the state's history with Congress opposing the Land Transfer Act as being discriminatory to non-tribals or slow-peddalling issues that concerned the non-tribals. For elaboration, see *The Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Debates*, Vol. V, No. 1, 1971.
58. A.K. Baruah, 'Middle Class Hegemony and the National Question in Assam', in Milton Sangma (ed.), *Essays on the North East India*, New Delhi: Indus Publishing House, 1994.
59. See Paul R. Brass. *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, New Delhi/Newbury Park/London: Sage Publications, 1991, pp. 22–26.
60. Ibid.
61. See 'CM Capt. Sangma defends move for Inner-line regulation', *The Shillong Times*, 16 May 1987, 'CM admits Lapses in protection of Non-tribals', *The Shillong Times*, 5 October 1987.
62. See Pakem, op. cit., 1999, p. 102.
63. Calculated from Election Commission of India, *Statistical Reports*. [www.eci.gov.in](http://www.eci.gov.in).
64. For a discussion on 'Confessional Politics', see Susanne Rudolph and Lloyd Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
65. See Diren Bhagawati, 'Ethnic Conflict in Meghalaya: An Epitome of Northeast India', in Girin Phukon (ed.) *Ethnicity and Polity in South Asia*, New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 2002, p. 246.
66. See *The Shillong Times*, 21 February 1988.
67. For a detailed historical note, see Pakem, op. cit., 1999.
68. See Pakem, op. cit., 1999, for more details.

69. The State has around 85 percent Christians according to the Census Reports of 1991.
70. Pakem, op. cit., 1999, p. 105.
71. See Election Results of Meghalaya, 2003. [www.ceomeghalaya.nic.in](http://www.ceomeghalaya.nic.in).
72. See *Statistical Records*, [www.eci.gov.in](http://www.eci.gov.in).
73. [www.ceomeghalaya.nic.in](http://www.ceomeghalaya.nic.in).
74. See 'Four Rebel Ministers oppose Non-tribal representation in Meghalaya Assembly', *The Shillong Times*, 7 November 1987.
75. T. Blah, 'Meghalaya—15 years of back pedalling—1', *The Shillong Times*, 9 October 1987.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. See Carolyn M. Elliot, *Civil Society and Democracy: A Reader*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 7.