

The State of Meghalaya

Meghalaya became a state along with Manipur and Tripura in 1972. However the major difference lay in the fact that both Manipur and Tripura made the transition from being princely states to Chief Commissioner's provinces in 1949 to Union Territories in 1963 and full-fledged states in 1972, while for Meghalaya it was the fulfilment of a longstanding demand, first of a really effective Autonomous District Council within Assam, but insistence on statehood after the attempts to impose Assamese throughout the state. The story of Meghalaya is also intertwined with the lost glory of Shillong, as well as the shrinking territorial contours of Assam.

The creation of Meghalaya is best expressed by Swarna Rajagoplan in her Report on Peace accords in North east India '*the formation of Meghalaya began as a demand for a sable hill state in the North east, but was replaced by demands from several groups for their own states, and the All Party Hill Leaders Conference focused its attention on the Khasi – Jaintia and Garo Hills, which already had autonomous councils provided by the sixth schedule. A proposal to create a Hill Areas committee in the Assam state Assembly quickly yielded to the demand by the residents of Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills for statehood for Meghalaya when the Assamese language was adopted statewide as a medium of instruction*'.

Within the first decade of Independence, the ethnic and linguistic assertions sought the reorganization of states, and the representatives of all the hill tribes of Assam met in Tura in 1954 to prepare a memorandum for the States Reorganization Commission demanding a Hill state as 'the autonomy granted by the Sixth Schedule was not real and substantial'. The structure of the proposed Hill state included a Legislative assembly, a council of Ministers and a Governor who would also be responsible for the administration of NEFA, which

ultimately should be a part of the Hill state, but the Hill state and the residual state of Assam should have a common High Court, Public service Commission, Accountant General, and in the interim Shillong as the common capital. The counter proposal from Assam was a state for the entire eastern Himalayas, including Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri Cooch Behar and NEFA!

It must be mentioned that in the early fifties , most of the legislators from the hill districts were pressing for greater autonomy for the Councils under the Sixth Schedule , elected Chairmen for all the district councils, representation from the Councils in the Cabinet , limitations on the veto powers of the Governor , and last but not the least , the control of Shillong Municipality by the Khasi Hills Council. In fact the wish to control Shillong was also at the root of the contest between the state of Assam, and the protagonists of Khasi assertion, especially when some parts of Shillong were named after plainsmen.

By 1962, the APHLC had become a political party, contested elections, and had an outstanding success in all the autonomous districts except Mikhir and North Cachar districts. However discussions with PM Nehru were inconclusive and his successor Lal Bahadur Shastri appointed the Pataskar Commission, whose recommendations stopped short of a separate state, and were hence rejected by the APHLC. By 1967, the Centre proposed a reorganization of Assam on the basis of a federal structure – two units, one for the hills and