

Assembly Elections in Meghalaya: A Historical Insight

Dr. Kailash Chandra Das

Assistant professor, Department, Political Science, BBS College, Shillong

Abstract: *The creation of the state Meghalaya as an independent state of Indian union explained mostly to fulfil the aspirations of the indigenous tribal people of the region. Through the creation of the state the political rights of the people are being exercised with a goal to bring development in the state as a separate unit of Indian union but not as a part of Assam. On the eve of its formation as a full-fledged state Meghalaya was allotted 60 seats in the Legislative Assembly. In Meghalaya the first general election to the newly created sixty members Legislative Assembly was held on March 9th 1972¹. In the present paper a sincere attempt has been made by the scholar to shed some light on the electoral history of assembly elections to Meghalaya legislative assembly since its very first election till the recent one. Ever since the state was carved out of the composite state of Assam, instability has been the rule rather than an exception in the electoral politics of the hill state. Baring the first election the electorate has never given a clear verdict. The electoral politics of Meghalaya found to be symbol of fractured verdict and instability. Both the regional parties and even the national parties including Indian National Congress tried to swell the vote banks and come to power but they did not find fully comfortable position in the sixty seated House. The fractured verdict has been paving the way for coalition government since the second general election in the state till the recent date. Therefore, Coalition politics is a very inevitable situation the state experienced so far.*

Key words: *Election, indigenous, instability, Legislative Assembly, electorate, fractured verdict, coalition politics*

I. Introduction

India is indisputably the largest democracy in the world. It is an enormous exercise to conduct the general elections of such a big country. This is a matter of great effort and huge cost that Indian citizens exercise their voting rights and elect their leaders to form the government. The provision of such rights of citizens is actualized in the process of election. This indeed is the most convincing evidence before the world that the "Democracy and Republic of India" is alive and vibrant.²

Elections are considered to be the integral part of democracy. The successful functioning of democracy depends to a large extent, on political participation in general and electoral participation in particular. Mass voting by the people is usually associated with the concept of participatory democracy. India has adopted the principle of Universal Adult Franchise and democratic rule which provides right to vote to all adults without any discriminations. Voting is undoubtedly the most important institution of political participation in a democratic system. Voting is a key mechanism of consensus and at the same time an important means of institutionalizing conflicts among different groups. The complex forces shaping modern society can't be properly assessed without a close examination of voting behaviour³. Voting behaviour therefore, attracted the attention of a host of researchers in different countries especially since the beginning of the present century.

In this paper the researcher has made an effort to have a detail discussion on election outcome since its first general election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly till the recent one. In addition to that some amount of light has been thrown on the post election development and government formation. A precise comparison is also made on the performance of different political parties since the first general elections to Meghalaya legislative Assembly.

Ever since the state was carved out of the composite state of Assam, instability has been the rule rather than an exception in the electoral politics of the hill state. Baring the first election the electorate has never given a clear verdict. A comprehensive analysis of party-wise performance both national and regional, in all nine general elections to the Meghalaya legislative assembly (1st to 9th) will provide some insight into electoral history of assembly elections of Meghalaya.

The purpose of this paper is to observe the performance of different political parties in each assembly elections and to evaluate the seat share and vote share by both regional parties and national parties and to draw an inference by analysing the result of all assembly elections which marked by fractured mandate.

With the help of data collected from the office of the chief electoral officer, Meghalaya the paper sought to analyse the result of different elections since its first general elections to Meghalaya legislative assembly

A reflection on all assembly elections to Meghalaya Legislative Assembly:

Party-wise performance in different elections to Meghalaya Legislative Assembly

Table 1 Party-wise Performances in the 1972 election to Meghalaya legislative Assembly (Election held on 9th March 1972)

PARTY	SEATS CONTESTED	SEATS WON	FD	VOTES POLLED	% OF VOTES POLLED	VOTES % IN SEATS CONTESTED
NATIONAL PARTIES						
CPI	2	0	1	1182	0.57%	16.03%
INC	12	9	0	20474	9.89%	44.06%
STATE PARTIES						
3.APHLC	49	32	4	73851	35.67%	43.82%
INDEPENDENTS						
IND	135	19	65	111506	53.86%	53.83%
GRAND TOTAL	198	60	70	207013		

Source: Information Book on Meghalaya Elections, Office of the chief electoral officer Meghalaya.

The first general election to Meghalaya Legislative Assembly held on 9th March 1972. The above table 1 shows that in the first general election to Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, performance of regional parties is remarkably better than the national parties. The APHLC (All Party Hills Leader Conference) as pioneering regional party always tried to gain the confidence of the electorate by claiming that, it is a regional party with a national outlook.

It is perhaps that Congress being the national party did not have much support base in the newly created state. In the contrary APHLC being the local party had popularised its role and achievements in the process of the state formation. Nevertheless, the number of seats the INC contested and in proportion to that the total number of seats it bagged to its credit is not that negligible. However, the voters were more convinced by the regional party APHLC which appeared to have played a significant role in state formation. But CPI even as a national party had suffered very badly in the first assembly election. But the success of APHLC could be accepted due to the powerful agenda which had been put before the voters.⁴

The regional party APHLC got to remain happy with the majority vote in the first assembly election to the legislative assembly because of its election manifesto which was more appealing and convincing in its spirit. The APHLC promised that when elected its candidates would work for the firm establishment of democracy in the state under which every citizen will have full liberty and freedom, such as freedom of expression, the freedom of religion, culture and language and freedom of the press.⁵ In this context the APHLC stands for immediate lifting of the emergency and the restoration of the fundamental and democratic rights of the citizens of the state. The party's manifesto also reads that the party would run the administration democratically and stand firm to maintain state's autonomy in substance and in practice as envisaged in the constitution.

Whereas in the 1972 election manifesto, the Indian National Congress glorified their achievement in the Bangladesh War. But this victory left meghalayans with a serious problem. Over the years the Bangladeshi crossed over the borders and settle in Meghalaya and the adjoining state-thus threatening the very existence of local people. So this time the Congress (I) enthusiastically expressed its view to detect all foreign nationals who have extend into the state since 1971⁶ and find a constitutional solution to it. Adequate measures would also been taken to prevent the tribals from being uprooted from their original abodes in the North East.

One more interesting aspect of the first election to the Meghalaya legislative assembly is about independent candidates who could polled 53.83% votes in favour of them by bagging 23 seats out of 60 gives an impression that the local people do not have any specific inclination to any party or ideology but personality factor played a remarkable role in deciding the electoral verdict.⁷

Table: 2 party-wise performances in 1978 election to Meghalaya legislative Assembly. (Election held on 25th Feb.1978)

PARTY	SEATS CONTESTED	SEATS WON	FD	VOTES POLLED	% OF VOTES POLLED	VOTES % IN SEATS CONTESTED
NATIONAL PARTIES						
CPI	4	0	4	2361	0.62%	8.6%
INC	57	20	7	109654	28.96%	30.90%
INC (I)	9	0	6	5447	1.44%	10.30%
STATE PARTIES						
APHLC	52	16	7	94362	24.92%	29.29%
HSPDP	35	14	10	72852	19.24%	29.46%
INDEPENDENTS						
IND	105	10	68	93970	24.82%	28.03%
GRAND TOTAL	262	60	102	378646		

Source: Information book on Meghalaya Elections, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer Meghalaya.

The Second General Elections to Meghalaya Legislative Assembly held on 25th Feb 1978. In this election apart from Indian National Congress, Indian National Congress (I), CPI and some regional parties like All Party Hills Leader Conference (APHLC) and Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party (HSPDP), were in the fray. So far the performance of different political parties in the second general election to Meghalaya legislative assembly are concerned the INC could expand its support base little better in compare to the first assembly election. It is seen that in the second election to the assembly the INC managed to increase its account by bagging 20 seats could be analysed as expanding its acceptability among the electorate.

A new entrant, another regional party HSPDP in this election fray tried its luck in polarising the electorate and could manage to earn 14 seats out of its 35 candidates in the fray. The achievement of APHLC in this election found to be in decline as compare to the first general election and that is perhaps due to division of votes between APHLC and its counterpart HSPDP another regional party.

The support of people for the regional parties is mostly based on the expectation of benefit and development in the local or regional line. But one observation of 1972 and 1978 election is that the achievement of Indian National Congress is appearing gradually better.

The election of 1978 witnessed the emergence of the tribal students.⁸ They tend to put pressure on leaders of the regional parties to come to an understanding for the formation of the ministry as to prevent the Congress from coming to power in the state. The major slogans of all the regional parties were for the protection of tribal identity. The anti-outsider slogan was also used to mobilise people during the election.⁹ These regional parties saw a great political advantage in branding the Congress as a party of outsiders. In its manifesto the APHLC put the preservation of identity of tribals, the development of custom and culture and to play a constructive role in the national affairs. The HSPDP included the extension of reservation of seats for the schedule caste and tribe in the union and state legislature and to stop the transfer of the land to the non-tribals in the state. On the other hand the Congress pledged to uphold the idea of secularism, and ensure a sound administration, fight poverty, ignorance, to protect the tribal integrity and promise to continue the work of restoration of the contiguous areas inhabited by the tribal people. But when the election result was declared no single party could able to get majority, the Congress being the single largest party, expected to form the ministry, by convincing some leaders from other regional parties.

But when the crisis arose over the question of choosing the leader who would form the ministry, it was propagated that unless a stable ministry is formed, there might be imposition of president's rule. As response to that situation, B.B Lyngdoh the APHLC leader was ready to ally with Congress. Consequent to this in may 1978, under the United Meghalaya parliamentary democratic forum a coalition ministry was formed with B.B .Lyngdoh as chief minister for two years only. There was a solemn, serious argument honour by all the United Meghalaya Peoples' Democratic Front (UMPDF) members including the HSPDP that their member will become deputy chief minister for four years till the next general election. This arrangement worked out till the end of the term and B.B. Lyngdoh's handing over charge to captain W.Sangma, he became the chief minister, much of what went on among the party actually involved their leaders. It is possible to argue that people had little role in these power sharing arrangements in the state so the pattern which involved by manoeuvring did not actually reflect the opinion of the electorate. However, the parties forming this forum though run the administration for about four years faced the electorate separately without having any alliance during the election in 1983.¹⁰ However, the rise and performance of regional parties in North-East India in general and Meghalaya in particular are the off shoots of geo- politics and underdevelopment. The support of people for the regional parties is mostly based on the expectation of benefit and development in the local or regional line. But the interesting aspect of 1972 and 1978 election is that the achievement of Indian National Congress is appearing gradually better. And no single regional party could able to create enough support bases to form the government on their own strength.

**Table 3 Party wise performance in 1983 election to Meghalaya legislative assembly
(Election held on 17th Feb.1983)**

Party	Seats contested	Seats won	FD	Vote polled	% of vote polled	Votes % in seats contested
NATIONAL PARTIES						
CPI						
INC	7	0	7	2442	0	4.78%
JNP	60	25	13	130956	27.68%	27.68%
	1	0	1	42	0.01%	0.65%
STATE PARTIES						
APHLC	55	15	11	118593	25.07%	27.14%
HSPDP	46	15	17	91386	19.32%	24.6%
PDC	21	2	13	23253	4.92%	13.48%
INDEPENDENCE						
IND	127	3	96	106378	22.49%	13.48%
GRAND TOTAL	317	60	158	473050		

Source: Information Book on Meghalaya Elections (1972-2009). Office of the Chief Electoral Officer Meghalaya.

The third General Elections to Meghalaya Legislative Assembly took place on 17th Feb. 1983. From the above table it is observed that the vote share by all regional parties is significantly more than the national party but individually none of them could mobilise more vote share in ampere to INC. But the fact of the matter is that INC could get majority seat share in this election because of division of votes among APHLC, HSPDP, PDC and Independent candidates. This is perhaps in the last three elections the number of regional parties has been growing. As it is seen in the above table the National Parties all together polled 28.21% of votes where as all the regional parties polled 49.30% of votes in their support.

If we look into the very first general election there was only one regional party in the election battle, which has been increased in to three in the third election to Meghalaya Assembly. Along with APHLC, HSPDP, we saw PDC a new regional party made its appearance. The growth of regional parties in the State politics has taken up its speed just after the third assembly election in the state. It seems that people kept on trusting the regional parties down the line expecting developments in the state but emergence of several regional political parties left the political discourse of the state in the state of instability and coalition politics.

One more observation of this election reveals that the per cent of polling in compare to the previous elections appear to be relatively high in 1983 election. This high per cent of involvement of people in Meghalaya may be attributed to the realisation of importance of right to vote and to some extent the matrilineal traditions prevailing among the Khasi, Jaintias and Garos. If per cent of polling is any indication of a general degree of political involvement then it must be admitted that in Meghalaya the degree of political involvement is very high.¹¹

However, appearance of many regional parties and quite a good number of independent candidates had a fair amount of impact in the election fray. The general election of 1983 to the legislative assembly of Meghalaya revealed a political trends of the state, for it has produced some kind of political consensus in the process of choosing the parties that has to formulate the public opinions. In fact the merger of APHLC to the Congress party brought a drastic change in the political equation among the regional parties. This merger was a striking factor for the Congress party to become stronger in this tiny state. It may also be argued that in a society with a strong sense of traditional way of life, it is essential for a political party to adopt and to understand the sentiments of the people, thus the footing of Congress party in politics of Meghalaya is closely related its ideological stand which accommodate and formulate the principles and policies of the society. Since regional parties in the state did not have a clear ideology of it's won and the lack of political consciousness among the electorate it was easier for the Congress party to enter into the politics of the state by proving a room for the leaders of the state in the national level. Moreover like the other state of the country, the Congress party came back to power in 1980 at the centre also led to people to think that it would be better to give mandate for their socio-economic and political development in the state is in the need of the centrally assisted programme.¹²

However, the rising popularity among the different tribes always proved that no party was able to get an absolute majority in this election. Beside the stillness of job done by the regional parties like the APHLC and HSPDP, during the statehood demand was also one reason to check the increasing popularity of congress party, even if the Indira wave dispersed among the common electorates. But before the election an assumption was appeared that the Congress party was to show the dominant position in sharing the seats.

One more factor is that the dispute between national and regional parties was exploited to a great extent. One of the Congress candidates in this election claimed that, it is only the Congress Party which can led Meghalaya to progress and prosperity, that the regional parties are only engaged in factional disputes, among themselves, that the actual APHLC saviours of statehood have themselves joined the Congress (I) for further development of the state and electorate should shake of their loyalties and vote for Congress.

The Regional Parties, on the other hand, accused the Congress for all the ill confronting the society. The regional parties spread the message that the Congress Party is a foreigner party who will serve their own interest in Meghalaya, that it is regional parties which have time and again fought for the protection and preservation of distinct identity of the tribal people, and that if they vote national parties one day they will be uprooted from their own state and became an insignificant minority at the hands of non-Meghalayans.¹³

Evidently, none of them could criticise the policies and programmes which the government sought to implement during the outgoing forum ministry. So no party placed any concrete election manifesto before the electorate and depended on individual propaganda as they liked. The Congress however, circulated their All India Manifesto which actually did not count much during the election campaign which varied according the composition of the particular electorate. However, in face of the campaign by the regional parties against the 'foreigners' whereby the non-tribal minority people for providing adequate protection to them and this had a great impact and in the constituencies where nontribal voters formed a considerable force, Congress party own. It has been observed that there is always a considerable support from the non-tribal voters in favour of Congress party rather than regional parties.

The candidates sponsored by the left parties like CPI and CPI(M) who were more popular than the Congress candidates among the non-tribal voter could not win because they were not relied upon to provide adequate protection to the minorities. The tribal people also had a great suspicion about the Left Parties mainly on the ground of religion.

In short perhaps the electorate were not politically educated by any of the parties. Since the voters were not in the position to judge the parties and candidates set up by them on the basis of any programme or activity, the result of the election actually did not reflect the considerable opinion of the voters about their political preferences. Those who own the election on the basis of the ticket of parties had no scrupulous to change the sides, as they had no political conviction of their own and the party or the electorate had no organised force behind them to exert any pressure on the elected MLAs to remain loyal to their mandate.

**Table 4 party wise performance in 1988 election to Meghalaya legislative assembly
(Election held on 02. 02 .1988)**

Party	Seats contested	Seats won	FD	Vote polled	% of vote polled	Vote % in seats contested
NATIONAL PARTIES						
CPI	9	0	9	2206	0.36%	2.35%
INC	60	22	8	198028	32.65%	32.65%
STATE PARTIES						
HPD	31	6	16	76884	12.68%	23.65%
HPU	55	19	12	162806	26.84%	29.44%
PDC	15	2	12	19402	3.20%	12.39%
REGISTERED UNRECOGNISED PARTY						
6. AHL (A)	18	2	11	28391	4.68%	16.09%
INDEPENDENCE						
7. IND	83	9	55	118816	19.59%	25.73%
GRAND TOTAL	271	60	123	606533		S

Source: Information book on Meghalaya elections (1972-2009). Office of the Chief Electoral Officer Meghalaya.

The Fourth Assembly election to Meghalaya legislative Assembly held on 2nd Feb 1988. The major fight of the general election of February 1988 was between the ruling congresses (I) and the main opposition party the Hill Peoples Union (HPU). Before the election it was found that Meghalaya is being ruled by a congress (I) government formed with the help of the defectors from the APHLC, the United Meghalaya Democratic Party ((UMDP) and independents. This was led together by a liberal infusion of funds pocketed to a considerable extent by the ruling courtiers.

However, when the result came out, even counting in two seats having been withheld, the Congress (I) captured 21 seats as against 19 by the HPU. In this election, the role of regional parties and independent candidates who have bagged the remaining seats, assumed the importance of forming a coalition government. The Hill State People Democratic Party (HSPDP) could maintain 5 seats, the Peoples Demand Implementation Convention got 2 (PDIC) the APHLC got 2 and independence able to bag 9 seats. Thus, the Congress emerged as a largest group but without a clear majority and a government was formed by combination of regional parties.¹⁴ One thing appear to be clear from the above information that in all the elections the new entrant could manage to gain good number of seats may be by convincing the voters in selling new dreams in their manifestos. As a new entrant in this election the HPU bagged fairly a good number of seats.

Interestingly, the government lasted hardly a month, due to the dissensions cropped within the alliance parties and thus the congress (I) was become the alternative one to form the government. The observance to the electoral history of Meghalaya reveals that Congress as a national party could always proved to be the better alternative. Post election period in Meghalaya has been found to be always leading towards coalition government. But the fact of matter is that the regional parties though together mobilise more electorate in their favour but continuous rift among them did not create a suitable condition for governing the state. However, at the end the job of governing the state retained by the Congress party.

It is not a surprising that, ever since the state was created out of composite state of Assam the state has witnessed coalition and instability in its politics. The 1998 election has also produced the same condition as it is not an exception. All regional parties could together capture more seats than the national parties but failed to form the government as there is no unanimity among all regional leaders belonging to different regional parties.

Like the previous elections in the state this election also produced fractured mandate. As it has been observed the performance of the regional parties once again found to be better than the national parties but all regional leaders appearing to be not having unanimity in their understanding which ultimately paved the national parties to form the government once again in a coalition system. In other words despite very good

hold over the electorate regional political parties have not been able to govern the state without sharing the powers with the national parties because the regional parties suffered from repeated splits and frequent defections as a result national parties play significant role in exercise of political role. This incompatibility reflects an ideological inconsistency because the particular regional forces seem to find them more comfortable in coalition with national parties rather than in alliance with other regional parties of the state.

**Table 5 party wise performance in 1993 election to Meghalaya legislative assembly
(Election held on 15 .02.1993)**

Party	Seats contested	Seats won	FD	Vote polled	% of vote polled	Vote % in seats contested
NATIONALPARTIES						
BJP	20	0	14	29948	3.68%	11.44%
CPI	4	0	4	1138	0.14%	1.98%
INC	60	24	6	282139	34.62%	34.62%
JD(B)	8	0	8	2586	0.32%	2.33%
JP	3	0	3	841	0.10%	1.77%
STATE PARTIES						
AHLC(AM)	27	3	15	64603	7.93%	17.36%
HPSD	13	8	2	79824	9.80%	40.40%
HPU	45	11	12	175487	21.53%	29.50%
PDI	4	2	1	17423	2.14%	33.65%
REGISTERED UNRECOGNISED PARTY						
MPP	11	2	7	20117	2.47%	33.63%
INDEPENDENCE						
IND	95	10	71	140793	17.28%	24.68%
GRAND TOTAL	290	60	143	814899		

Source: Information book on Meghalaya Elections (1972-2009). Office of the Chief Electoral Officer Meghalaya.

The 5th General Election to Meghalaya legislative Assembly held on 15th February 1993. Like the previous election in this election INC also increased its account in same rhythms and proportion. In one hand the seat share by all regional party is same with the seat share by INC. One more thing is clear from the above data that if there are more regional parties in the fray the INC gains more seats because the support of the whole electorate get divided among several regional parties and national parties.

Prior to the election, there was a common agenda for all the regional parties to come ¹up as a single voice under the pressuring motive of the tribal people in the state. But it was not an easy task for them, for a state like Meghalaya where the ethnic division was clearly seen in the time of election. In fact it was a usual scenario that the election in the state was one way of showing the tensions among the different ethnic or tribal groups in to the different political parties dominated by each political party. Here it may be noted that different leaders from different political parties dominated by each of the ethnic groups have to look the electorate for their own benefits. Even there was a move for all regional parties to merge and get united under the name of Hill Peoples Union (HPU) ¹⁵but due to failure of bringing out of an agreement among the different regional and state political parties, there had to be a tougher fight among the parties in this election.

Moreover, under some circumstances cropped up suddenly, one of the strongest parties APHLC was also split away when most of the prominent leaders joined the HPU and only few remained under the name of APHLC (AM). Besides formation of another party called Meghalaya People's Party (MPP) was also a demoralizing factor to the political situation of the state as its emergence was a negative indicator in the politics of power sharing among the regional parties.

In a true sense the party is a bi-product of dissents group develop from personality conflict among the political leaders. In sort the party does not care much about the regional sentiments. On the other hand, the rising factionalism among the regional parties only benefited Indian National Congress which had a wide spread net work coupled with its capability to convince the electorates through its long history of dominant position in Indian politics. Even though the party had a small vote bank in the Jaintia Hills areas, it is in dominant position in other larger areas viz. Khasi Hills and Garo Hills which constitute 53 of the total 60 Assembly seats. This was a major factor in the Congress party's ability to attract the electorate. One more significant feature of this electoral scene was the larger number of independent candidates falling into the electoral process. This is one of the indicators that the parties of state are highly around the personality of the candidates. ¹⁶

1

However, when the results were declared, no party could get an absolute majority. But the congress party secured the largest number with 24 seats, HPU-11, HSPDP-8, APHLC (AM)-03, MPP-02, PDIC-02, and the Independent 10. It can be mentioned here that the larger the number of independent candidates winning the bigger is the chance of the single largest party i.e. the Congress to form the government. In the 1993 election again the Indian National Congress like other years proved to be the single largest party by securing 24 seats but failing to secure absolute majority to form the government. The regional parties secured 41.40 % votes while national parties could secure 38.86% of which Indian National Congress alone secured 34.62%. Though Indian National Congress had increased its strength from 22 seats in 1988 to 24 seats in 1993 in the sixty numbered House, still the regional parties always term Indian National Congress as untouchable party.

From the above analysis it is clear that in this election the HSPDP and HPU two major regional parties put all their effort to capture majority of the seats in the sixty seated House, but failed to do so. The independent candidates in two previous elections just could remain happy with single digit seats like 3 and 9 respectively but in 1993 election they got 10 seats. Interestingly in 1993 elections there is more number of national parties in the fray than the previous elections. But, however, except Indian National Congress all other national parties failed to open their account. Another aspect could be observed here that there were total 95 contenders contested from different national parties and there were total 100 candidates contested from state parties including one registered unrecognised party. As it has been a standing feature of the state electoral history there are 95 candidates appeared in the election battle from independents. In other words the number of independent candidates is always more in number from any other group of political parties.

**Table 6 party wise performance in 1998 election to Meghalaya legislative assembly
(Election held on 16.02 .1998)**

Party	Seats contested	Seats won	FD	Vote polled	% of vote polled	Vote % in seats contested
NATIONAL PARTIES						
BJP						
CPI	28	3	20	41924	5.01%	10.59%
INC	9	0	9	1387	0.17%	1.09%
JD	59	25	6	293346	35.03%	35.66%
	1	0	1	38	0.00%	0.26%
STATE PARTIES						
HPDP	19	3	10	56682	6.77%	19.93%
PDM	19	3	9	58225	6.95%	22.24%
RJD	8	0	8	1253	0.15%	1.30%
SP	5	0	5	1253	0.09%	1.22%
UDP	56	20	19	742	26.99%	28.98%
REGISTERED UNRECOGNISED PARTY						
GNC	16	1	14	17650	2.11%	8.86%
HSP	3	0	2	4754	0.57%	12.44%
INDEPENDENCE						
IND	85	5	65	135356	16.16%	24.09%
GRAND TOTAL	308	60	168	837383		

Source: Information book on Meghalaya elections (1972-2009). Office of the Chief Electoral Officer Meghalaya.

The 6th general election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly held on 16.02.1998. The above table shows that INC could keep its performance as good as in all previous elections than any of the individual regional party. The other national party that is Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which has been persistently trying to do well could able to make its appearance for the first time by getting 3 seats in this election. BJP in the last election tried to open its account but failed to do so. For BJP the state of Meghalaya though is not that conducive ground as it may be in case of mainland India, still its performance to get represented in the House got fruitful after continuous effort. It seems that the state is mainly Christian dominated state and people are having the understanding that BJP is a Hindu dominant party. Therefore, probably the party could not create expected support base in the state.

If we analyse the result of 1998 election it had once again fail to produced majority. After the election, the congress (I) formed the government led by S.C Marak. However, it lasted for only 12 days thereby creating a history of the shortest tenure in the Meghalaya politics. It may be noted that Meghalaya had the distinction of having a lottery government and a 50:50 sharing of power. In fact the state continuously had coalition government of one national party i.e. Congress and number of regional parties rather local parties or its combinations. The congress had always manage to survive and in spite of the local pressure group whose slogan was the preservation of tribal identity and development of their customs and culture, urge to have a regional

party in power, but no strong regional party of the khasi could emerge. Although there are a number of them like APHLC, HSPDP, PDIC, etc, one single party reflecting the khasi aspirations failed to emerge. This has happened because the tribal elites eager to become MLA and ministers have no ideological inclination or any intention or agenda for the development of their region. In the absence of such inclination neither a regionalist ideology nor regional party which could develop the regional sentiments of the people was born.

In such context, the Congress, while stressing the necessity and the benefit of the tribal people remaining with the national party that controls power in the centre, express its concerned for the development of the tribal areas, providing the tribal identity in order to gain peoples, support. As a result people are at a loose to different between regional parties and national parties as none of them had any specific socio-economic programme for the common people. Because of this little difference among the parties after that, the spectacle of floor crossing is being witnessed in the state affecting the instability of any ministry.

The performance of Indian National Congress seen to be little better as it succeeded in adding one more seats to its account in compare to the last assembly election. While in 1993 election the Indian National Congress had put forward 60 candidates in the election battle but in 1998 the party remained content with leaving 59 candidates in the fray. So far the regional parties are concerned UDP is the only regional party which could get the second place in the electoral result of the 1998 election to the assembly. The graph of independent candidates as it has been observed going down ward since the first general election to the state assembly. The independent candidates in the first election in the year 1972 were happy with 19 seats in their bag but they could only captured 3 seats in the 1998 election. The result of 1998 election reduced their position to the bottom.

Another aspect of this election which appeared to be little different from previous elections to the state Legislative Assembly is that, barring some local state parties like HSPDP, PDM,UDP,GNC AND HSP, the state parties from other states like RJD and SP also tried their luck. But the fact of the matter is that they even could not able to save their deposit. An electoral field, where, the party like the Indian National Congress has been treated as foreigner's party and party of untouchables, then how the parties from different states could be able to crate space in the electoral scenario.

Table 7 Performance of NATONAL Political Parties in 2003 and 2008 Assembly Elections

YEAR	NATIONAL PARTIES	SEAT CONTESTED	SEATS WON	VOTES POLLED	VOTES %
2003	BJP	28	2	48932	5.42%
	CPI	3	0	551	0.06%
	INC	60	22	270269	29.96%
	NCP	54	14	174972	19.40%
TOTAL		145	38	494724	54.85%
2008	BJP	23	1	29465	2.71%
	CPI	3	0	282	0.03%
	INC	59	25	357113	32.88%
	NCP	49	14	221341	20.38%
TOTAL		134	40	608201	56.01%

Source: Information book on Election: Office of the Chief Electoral Officer Meghalaya.

TABLE 8 Performances of State Parties and State Parties from other states in 2003 and 2008 Assembly Elections

YEAR	STATE PARTIES	SEAT CONTESTED	SEATS WON	VOTES POLLED	VOTES %
2003	HSPDP	22	2	44520	4.94%
	PDM	8	0	16245	1.80%
	UDP	45	9	144255	15.99%
	SAP	3	0	811	0.09%
	SP	1	0	245	0.03%
	GNC	7	0	8483	0.94%
	KFDP	4	0	2478	0.27%
	KHNAM	22	2	32677	0.62%
	MDP	18	4	47852	5.31%
	TOTAL		130	17	297566
INDEPENDENTS		58	5	109686	12.16%

	GRAND TOTAL	188	22	407252	
2008	LJP	18	0	6827	0.63%
	MDP	18	0	30691	2.83%
	UDP	53	11	201976	18.60%
	GNC	4	0	4081	0.38%
	HSPDP	15	2	42235	3.89%
	KHNAM	16	1	48833	4.50%
	TOTAL	124	14	334643	
	INDEPENDENTS	73	5	143122	13.18%
	GRAND TOTAL	197	19	477765	

Source: Information book on Election: Office of the Chief Electoral Officer Meghalaya

The Seventh and eighth Assembly elections in Meghalaya held respectively, on 26th February 2003 and 3rd March 2008 resulted in fractured verdict. The seventh assembly election caused some major upsets because 28 sitting MLAs and two former chief ministers lost. A comparison of results of assembly elections of 1998 and 2003 would make one wonder whether the support structure of parties and political equations, in terms of regional and national, in the state had undergone radical changes. In 1998 United Democratic Party (UDP) a regional party with 20 seats and the Indian National Congress a national party with 25 seats were the major players in the post election scenario. But in 2003 the major players were two national parties viz., the Indian National Congress (INC) with 22 seats and National Congress Party (NCP) with 14 seats. The largest number of seats that a regional party could win in 2003 assembly election was only nine, won by the UDP, whereas all other regional parties put together could win only seven seats suggesting the beginning of the decline in regionalism.¹⁷ This was for the first time that the regional parties were so marginalized. The other interesting development of this election was that in an assembly of 60 members the INC won 22 seats which was less than in 1998 election. The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) a new entrant in Meghalaya electoral politics captured 14 seats, BJP got two seats, and UDP won nine seats. A breakaway group of UDP christened as Meghalaya Democratic Party (MDP) with strong pro-khasi sentiments managed two seats and Khun Hynniewtrep National Awakening Movement (KHNAM) won two seats.

Performance of National Parties as against Regional Parties:

It is interesting to observe that till 1998 the regional parties together had successively polled larger percentage of votes than the national parties polled together, which suggests that Meghalaya politics remained dominated by the regional forces. It was only in 2003 and 2008 the trend was found reversed, the national parties polled larger percentage of votes than the regional parties. In fact in those two elections, the percentage of votes garnered by the national parties exceeded 50%, whereas the regional parties are found to have exceeded this percentage only in 1983 election. It is also interesting to find that Independent candidates together polled votes exceeding this percentage only in the first election i.e., 1972 election. But the percentage of votes polled by Independents largely showed a steady decline, except in the 1988 and 2008 elections, when a marginal increase was observed compared to the 1983 and 2003 elections. Despite the dominance of regional forces in the elections from 1972 to 1998, except after the first general election, no regional party could form government on its own. Amongst national parties, the Indian National Congress had shown a steady increase in its strength except a marginal decline in 1988 and 2003 elections; in 1972 its strength was 9 and in 2008 it reached 25. As against such performance of INC, Bharatiya Janata Party, (BJP) which appeared in electoral scene in 1993 but could not open account in this election, exhibited a steady decline in its strength in assembly, from 3 in 1998 election to 1 in 2008 election. Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) that made its debut in 2003 election maintained the same strength of 14 both in 2003 and 2008 elections, whereas Communist Party of India (CPI), which has been in the election fray since 1972, could not open its account in any of the elections.

From the above data it is clear that of regional parties in election fray, the only regional party that maintained its presence throughout (1972-2008) was Hill States Peoples' Democratic Party (HSPDP). Peoples' Demands Implementation Conventions (PDIC) did not survive after 1993 election; AHL, HPD, PDC and APHLC did not survive after 1983 election though a splinter group of APHLC as APHLC (a) appeared in the electoral scene in 1988 and 1993 elections to wither away thereafter. In these two 90 elections another new regional party viz., Hills Peoples' Union (HPU) was found to be in fray and thereafter disappeared. The regional parties like UDP, MDP, GNC, and KHNAM, which appeared for the first time in 1998 elections did continue till 2008, whereas PDM, which also appeared in 1998, was not in the election fray in 2008 election. Meghalaya Peoples' Party (MPP) appeared in electoral scene once and that is in 1993, and then after disappeared. Another interesting observation is that when many regional parties in one election or another have failed to open their accounts, never the House was bereft of Independent members. Such proliferation of regional parties, their split and frequent defections from them explains as to why despite their polling together larger percentage of votes than the national parties in the first six general elections to Meghalaya Assembly, none of them, on its own, could form government after first general election in 1972. Further these regional parties never came to any

understanding amongst them to facilitate formation of a government. Rather these regional parties found themselves more comfortable to share power with the Congress party. It is therefore that after the first government of Meghalaya being formed exclusively by the regional party APHLC, which bagged 32 seats in 60 had seated Meghalaya Assembly; all successive governments were formed with the help of Congress party

II. Conclusion

Despite very good hold over the electorate regional political parties have not been able to govern the state without sharing the powers with the national parties because the regional parties suffered from repeated splits and frequent defections as a result national parties play significant role in exercise of political role in all most all elections since the very first general election to legislative assembly of Meghalaya. This incompatibility reflects an ideological inconsistency because the particular regional forces seem to find them more comfortable in coalition with national parties rather than in alliance with other regional parties of the state.

We could observe from the above analysis that, there are several typical features in the electoral politics of Meghalaya. Except the first general elections, the Congress party has always captured the highest number of seats in the Assembly. Even in the first Assembly also, it was the coalition partner of the regional party APHLC. It implies that people of Meghalaya prefer national party over the regional parties and more specifically the Indian National Congress. The regional parties since then have made several efforts to dislodge the Congress party from the centre stage either singularly or collectively. Because of that, there have been frequent alignment and realignment in the state. And the Congress party has always been able to form government in the state except very few occasions.

-
- [1]. Information Book On Meghalaya Elections, Office Of The Chief Electoral Officer, (1972-2009) Shillong, 2010, P. 11
 - [2]. R.P. Bhalla, Elections In India, 1952 To 1993, New Delhi: S.Chand And Co., 1973 P 1
 - [3]. Ganguly And Ganguly, Voting Behaviour In A Developing Society, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1975, P 1.
 - [4]. S.K.Caube, Electoral Politics In Northeast India, Madras : University Press, 1985, P. 135
 - [5]. Ibid
 - [6]. Ibid, P. 145
 - [7]. P.C.Biswas, Electoral Politics In North East India: With Special Reference To Meghalaya; In P.S. Dutt's, (Ed) Electoral Politics In North East India, New Delhi: Omnos, Publications, 1986 P. 83
 - [8]. S.K.Chube, Op.Cit, P 137
 - [9]. Rajiv Singh, Keshtri, Political Alliance: A Study Of Parties And Party System In The North Eastern State Of Manipur And Meghalaya, Unpublished Thesis, Centre For Political Studies , School Of Social Science ,JNU, New Delhi : 2002
 - [10]. P.C.Biswas, Op.Cit., P, 83
 - [11]. Ibid. P 114
 - [12]. Rajiv Singh, Keshtri, Political Alliance: A Study Of Parties And Party System In The North Eastern State Of Manipur And Meghalaya, Unpublished Thesis, Centre For Political Studies , School Of Social Science ,JNU, New Delhi : 2002
 - [13]. Sulachana Bawri, Electoral Politics In Meghalaya, 1983 Assembly Election, In P.S.Datta's Electoral Politics In Northeast India, New Delhi : Omnos, P 143
 - [14]. Information Book On Meghalaya Elections 1972-2009, Office Of The Chief Electoral Officer, Meghalaya, 2010
 - [15]. Rajiv Singh, Keshtri Political Alliance: A Study Of Parties And Party System In The North Eastern State Of Manipur And Meghalaya, Unpublished Thesis, Centre For Political Studies , School Of Social Science ,JNU, New Delhi: 2002
 - [16]. Ibid
 - [17]. Apurba K. Barua, (2003). Elections 2003: Decline Of Regionalism, Economic And Political Weekly, April 19, 2003, P. 1538.