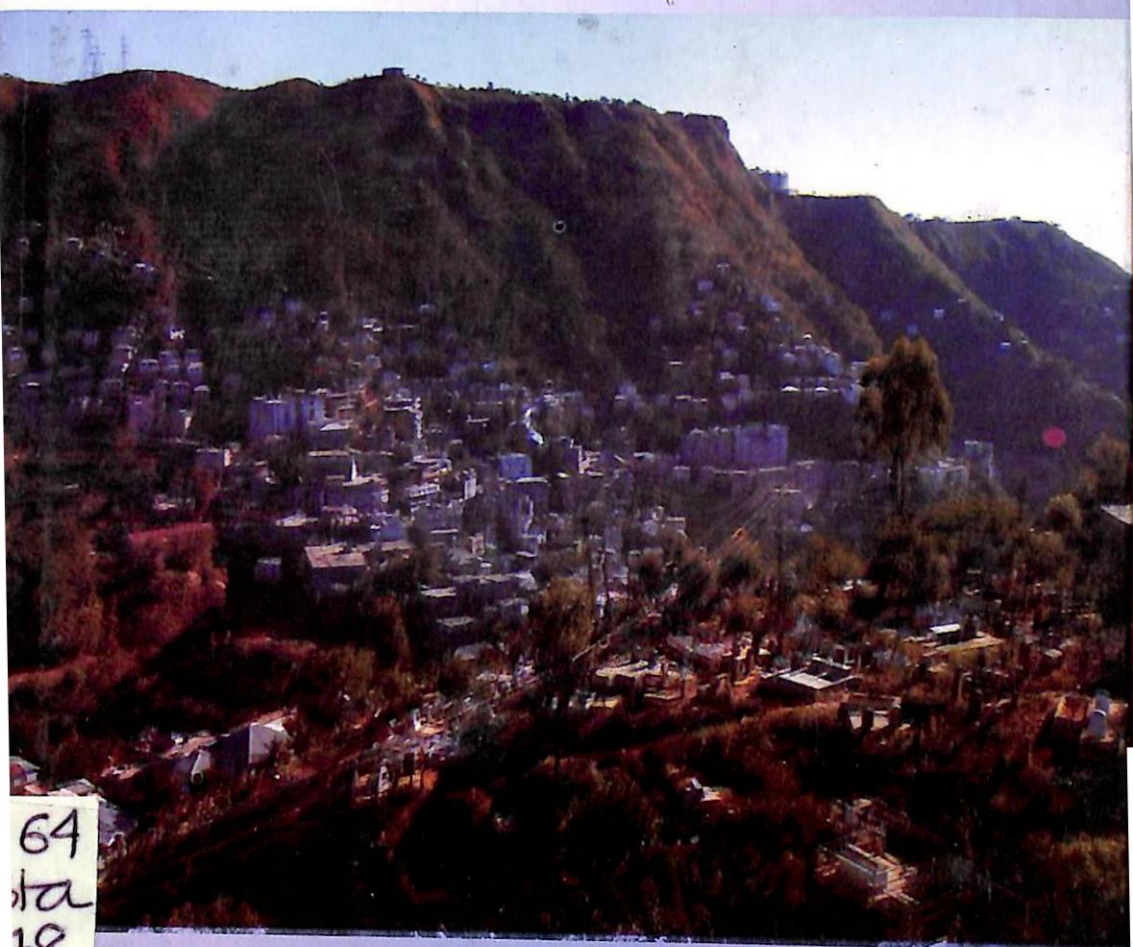


States of India

MEGHALAYA



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Vaibhav Dhaka

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Land and the People

Dress

Khasi: Khasi man can be identified with their unstitched lower garment (dhoti), jacket and turban that he wore. Such attire is seldom used today, except on ceremonial occasions. Their dress has to a large extent been westernized. The women, on the other hand, have retained their traditional dress consisting of an undergarment, and above it, a two-piece cloth pinned on each shoulder (jainsem) and a shawl (tapmoh).

The material mainly comes from the textile mills, for the Khasis have almost lost the art of weaving. Older women continue to wear another wrap of woollen cloth (jainkup) the use of which is fast disappearing. Women wear gold and silver, jewellery usually of very pure form and aesthetically crafted by local smiths.

Khynriam: The women of this community can be distinguished from others by their dress, which is referred to as jainsem. It consists of two unstitched pieces each of two yards, tied at the shoulder. Under it are worn a blouse and a petticoat, depending upon the temperature. On top of the jainsem, is worn the tap-moh khlieh or jain-tapmoh which is a large woollen shawl of bright coloured cheques covering the head as well. This is knotted at the neck and

hangs loose from the shoulders. With the passage of time, the length of jainsem and jainkup has decreased and presently these garments reach above the knee. Traditionally, they use to hang below the ankles. The wrapper or jainkirshah, which was originally meant to cover the head and the shoulders, is now used as a work apron. It is made of a thick cotton cheque cloth.

It is tied on one shoulder thus protecting the jainsem from getting spoiled during work. Another important part of women's dress is the cotton haversack (pla-kieng), which holds her cash, arecnut, betel leaf, knife and keys of the house. It remains within the folds of her dress. The men, no more wear the jynphong or the sleeveless coat, except during the ceremonial dance, when the silken turban is also worn. They wear shirts and trousers in western styles. The Khyrnium are marked out as a tribe that uses gold. The women use gold bracelets (ka. khadu kti), gold necklace (u kynjri) with gold balls and coral beads.

War Khasi: The traditional dress of the male war khasi consists of a sleeveless coat, (jymphons) a small piece of cloth around the waist and a cap or a turban. The khasi women wear an inner garment (ka jyaanpien) a long piece of cloth upon the knees called jainsem and a shawl. The women are fond of gold ornaments for neck, ears and wrists.

Bhoi Khasi: The bhoi khasi women wear two garments, one over the other. There is an inner one kajampein and a cloth (ka jainsem) covering the body from the shoulders to the knee. A wollen shawl is also commonly worn. The dress worn by the men consists of sleeveless coat, jymphong, a small cloth below the waist and a turban. The bhoi women put on gold necklaces, bangles and earrings.

Khasi Muslim: The women wear jainsems, sarees and the men wear pyjamas, and shirts as well. A form of Hindu seems to be developing amongst them as the lingua franca, known as 'bazar hindi'.

Jaintia: The khasi and jaintia male dress is of the same kind. But jaintia women can be distinguished from that of a khasi woman because her dress is somewhat different. An earlier account of a jaintia women's above the breasts and dropping down to the ankles, while another occasions very handsome and expensive dresses are worn by both men and women. Women put on earrings and other ornaments of gold and silver. On such festive occasions the women wear a circlet of silver with spearhead ornament in front, rising four or five inches from the forehead.

Garó: In the interior villages, women still tie a short cloth called eking around the waist and the men wear a loincloth. But in the more accessible areas, the garo women tie a long unstitched piece of cloth called dakmanda around their waist. The dakmanda is hand woven and has a six to ten inch border with a motif or floral designs.

Rabha: The women wear ruphan, an unstitched cloth tied from the waist and the men have taken to wearing modern clothes like trousers. But they can be identified by the gamuchha that they carry, which is a green towel with a design.

Hajong: Women use a piece of cloth, of standard size, with broad and medium borders with a typical colour combination and is known as pathani. The men wear a small piece of cloth as a lower garment, known as gamocha or vija kapod.

Man: The dresses of the men consists of dhoti (unstitched lower garment), Assamese gamocha (towel), pyjama and baniyan (undershirt). Nowadays they wear shirts and trousers. The women wear mekhola (unstitched lower garment) and the sari when they go out. They wear silver ornaments. Some well-to-do families also wear gold ornament.

Kóch: The Koch is a tribe inhabiting the western Garo hills of Meghalaya. The women of this tribe are skilled in the art of weaving and prepare their dresses at home. The

women wear a cloth round the waist (lufan), one over the body (kambang) and the men wear, dhoti (unstitched lower garment) and shirt. Now recently sari, blouse, pant, shirt, coat are now commonly worn by women and men respectively. The traditional dress of the women of this community is called Tintikiya (three piece of cloth) wear one cloth round the waist (lufan) one over the body (kambang), and a piece of cloth on the head (paga).

Mikir: The Mikir of Meghalaya are presently and popularly known as Karbi (brotherhood) or Arlong meaning man. The mikir can be identified by the vertical tattoo marks that they have on the nose, by the pattern on their shawls and their traditional dress. The men wear a dhoti called rikong, an artistic jacket called choi and a turban called poho. The women wear pini (mekhela), pekok (a cloth that covers the upper portion of the body) and wam kok (which is worn around the around the waist). All these clothes are woven at home. Despite some changes in dress patterns, they have not done away with their traditional dress.

Lalung: Their traditional dress has changed considerably. At present the men wear pants and shirts instead of their traditional loin cloth and black collarless jacket. Women are using colourful blouses and petticoats.

Boro: Gamsa (loin cloth) for males and dakhana (an upper garment mostly yellow in colour, made of handwoven cloth draped in an unusual manner) and phasra (lower garment) for females are the typical dress. They are listed as scheduled tribes and grouped as a minority community. Some of their morphological traits are the presence of epicanthic fold, straight-to-way hair, yellow skin, egg and dry fish but do not take beef.

The Assamese: The assamese community can be identified by their traditional dress mekhela-chadar and riha which are worn by the women. Mekhela covers the body

from waist to ankle and chaddar and riha are long clothes wrapped round the upper half of the body. Erichaddar is a shawl used by men and women and is made of eri-thread in a typical design.

The typical assamese ornaments are the dholbiri, jonbiri, bana, dugdugi, galpata, gamkharu, thuria. The dholbiri, made in the shape of an assamese drum called dhol, the jonbiri is made of gold in the shape of half moon, the dugdugi is a large locket. All these are worn round the neck. Gamkhans are bracelets made of silver rods shaped cylindrically, plated with stones, is worn in the ear. Though at present these ornaments are rarely seen, the conservative families still prefer the assamese ornaments. Dhoti-panjapi is a traditional assamese dress for men - dhoti covers the lower half of the body and panjapi is a loose shirt. This has been replaced by pants and shirts. But on special occasions like social or religious functions they put on their traditional attire.

Marwari: The traditional dress of the men consists of dhoti and shirt. However, the younger generation have adopted trousers and shirts. The women wear the sari. But their ceremonial attire is ghagra, a long flared skirt and orhni or lungri a cloth covering the upper part of the body. Younger women wear salwar (baggy trousers) and kameez or shirt-like top, as well. The traditional jewellery of the women is sheesh phul ornamenting the temples, borla or teeka a studded ball hung at the hair parting, nathni or nose pin, guluhand or golden collar worn around the neck, baju bandh or armlet.

Nepali: Nowadays, almost all the adult males wear trousers and shirt, though the traditional male dress consist of dorwala trouser like lower garment, sorwal, a shirt like upper garment and aajcoat, a sleeve less coat. Few use these traditional dresses now. The women wear a six yards of cloth and a blouse, some wear lungi a lower garment and some young women and girls who belong to the poorer sections

have adopted Jain kryshah shilliang, Khasi-Jaintia dress, an apron like cover worn on top of the garment. The women use a cotton waist belt called photuka. The men wear a cotton cap known as Dhaka topi. Kukri, a big knife, is the symbol and the men carry it.

Thus we see that the each community in Meghalaya has its own dressing style and its own set of clothes used, maybe for the daily use or for the ceremonial occasion. Each woman is a skilled weaver and not only weaves for the household use but for the market.

Meghalaya pronunciation is a small state in north-eastern India. The word "Meghalaya" literally means "The Abode of Clouds" in Hindi and Sanskrit. Meghalaya is a hilly strip in the eastern part of the country about 300 km long (east-west) and 100 km wide, with a total area of about 22,429 km². The population numbered 2,175,000 in 2000. The state is bounded on the north by Assam and by Bangladesh on the south. The capital is Shillong, which has a population of 260,000.

About one third of the state is forested. The Meghalaya subtropical forests ecoregion encompasses the state; its montane forests are distinct from the lowland tropical forests to the north and south. The forests of Meghalaya are notable for their bio-diversity of mammals, birds, and plants.

History: Meghalaya was formed by carving out the two districts of the state of Assam: the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and the Garo Hills on 21 January 1972. Prior to attaining full statehood, Meghalaya was given a semi-autonomous status in 1970.

The Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes each had their own kingdoms, until they came under the British administration in the 19th century. Later, the British incorporated Meghalaya into Assam in 1835. The region enjoyed semi-independent status by virtue of a treaty relationship with the British Crown.

The Mizo tribes originally lived in the hills of Burma. The Lushai tribe moved into India and became the dominant tribe in the region that came to be known as the Lushai Hills. Early in the 19th century the Lushai came into conflict with the British. In the year 1895 the territory was annexed to British India. The British encouraged missionary activity among the tribes. As a result the Lushai and some other tribes converted to Christianity.

When Bengal was partitioned on 16 October, 1905 by Lord Curzon, Meghalaya became a part of the new province of 'Eastern Bengal and Assam'. However, when the partition was reversed in 1912, Meghalaya became a part of the province of Assam. At the time of Independence of the country in 1947, the present day Meghalaya constituted two districts of Assam and enjoyed limited autonomy within the state of Assam.

On 3 January, 1921 in pursuance of Section 52A of the Government of India Act of 1919, the Governor-General-in-Council declared the areas now in Meghalaya, other than the Khasi States, as "backward tracts". Subsequently however, the Government of India Act of 1935 regrouped the backward tracts into two categories, namely, "excluded" and "partially excluded" areas in place of backward tracts.

At the time of Independence of the country in 1947, the present day Meghalaya constituted two districts of Assam and enjoyed limited autonomy within the state of Assam.

The Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act, 1969 accorded an autonomous status on the state of Meghalaya. The Act came into effect on April 2nd 1970, and an Autonomous State of Meghalaya was created within the State of Assam. The Autonomous state had a Legislature in accordance with the Sixth schedule to the Constitution. The Legislature had 37 members.

In 1971, the Parliament passed the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act, 1971, which conferred full statehood

Climate

Climate of Meghalaya plateau is influenced by elevation and distribution of physical relief. On the basis of weather condition, the Meghalaya plateau has 4 distinct seasons: They are

- (a) The rainy season from May to early October.
- (b) The cool season from early October to November.
- (c) The cold season from December to February.
- (d) The warm season or hot season from March to April.

In this period the entire plateau witness strong winds. This is due to northward migration of jet streams from the Gangetic plain to Tibetan plateau and development of low pressure in the Tibetan plateau at this time of the year.

The western part of the Garo hills is relatively lower in elevation as compared to Khasi and Jaintia hills. Garo hills experienced higher temperature conditions and humidity from February to October. April and May are the warmest months and January is the coldest month.

The nature of elevation and slope has also influenced the distribution of rainfall. The rainfall is heaviest in the southeastern Garo hills and decreases in the central regions and in the north.

The Khasi and Jaintia hills experiences a moderate climate because of higher elevation. Warm and humid conditions are prevalent in the foothills region in the south and sub-montane region in the north and central uplands. The plateau experiences a temperature of 24°C throughout the year.

The southern parts of the plateau has the Cherrapunji -Mawsynram region. It receives the heaviest rainfall, an annual average of 12670 mm. This is due to its location at the head of Bangladesh plains. The south west monsoon strikes these margins as it raises abruptly from the plains. The vertical movement of this moist monsoon streams

precipitate heavily in the escarpment region. This type of rainfall is known as orographic rainfall.

The Khasi and Jaintia hills receive an average of 7700 mm of rainfall and lies in the rain shadow area. Cherrapunji and Mawsynram lying about 55 Km south of Shillong receives an annual rainfall of about 14,000 mm which is the highest amount of rainfall in the world.

Natural Vegetation

The region has variety of natural vegetation ranging from tropical mixed forests of the Garo hills to pure stands of pine forests in the higher elevation of the plateau. The region has been adversely affected by reckless cutting, grazing and jhum cultivation. In some areas these forests have been completely destroyed while others due to inaccessibility have retained their original character. These have become protected forests.

Sal, pine, bamboo, etc. are important varieties of the flora in the plateau. In the western part of Meghalaya, the northern and southern foothills with warm and humid climate are characterised by dense tropical mixed forests with Sal (*Shorea robusta*) and bamboo as main species of trees. The most important Bamboo species are Dalu and Muli. Other species that are found in the region are Gurga, Haldu, Canes, Agariu, etc. In the higher altitudes, in the Tura range, temperature forests are found with pines and firs as common occurrence.

Mixed tropical hardwood forests are found in northern and southern parts of the central upland. The main species are Sal, Nahar, Champa, Gomari, etc. Bamboo thickets, Canes and wild bananas occur in many of the hill slopes in the region. Rolling grasslands are found in abundance in the elevation ranging from 900m-1350m above sea level. Pine forests are found above 1350m. Main species of pine are found mixed with willow, mangnolia, oak, etc.

The important crops of the state are potato, rice, maize, pineapple, banana, etc.

Districts

S.No	Districts	Area in Sq Km	Population	Headquarters
1.	East Garo Hills	2,603	1,88,830	Williamnagar
2.	East Khasi Hills	2,748	5,37,906	Shillong
3.	Jaintia Hills	3,819	2,20,473	Jowai
4.	West Garo Hills	3,174	4,03,027	Tura
5.	West Khasi Hills	5,247	2,20,157	Nongstoin
6.	Ri-Bhoi	2,448	1,27,312	Nongpoh
7.	South Garo Hills	1,850	77,073	Baghmara

Meghalaya currently has 7 districts. These are: East Garo Hills, East Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills, Ri-Bhoi, South Garo Hills, West Garo Hills and the West Khasi Hills.

The East Garo Hills district was formed in 1976 and has a population of 247,555 as per the 2001 census. It covers an area of 2603 square kilometres. The District Headquarters are located at Williamnagar, earlier known as Simsangiri.

The East Khasi Hills district was carved out of the Khasi Hills on 28 October 1976. The district has covers an area of 2,748 square kilometres and has a population of 660,923 as per the 2001 census. The headquarters of East Khasi Hills are located in Shillong.

The Jaintia Hills district was created on 22nd February 1972. It has a total geographical area of 3819 square kilometres and a population of 295,692 as per the 2001 census. The district headquarters are located at Jowai. Jaintia Hills district is the largest producer of coal in the state. Coal mines can be seen all over the district.

The Ri-Bhoi district was formed by further division of East Khasi Hills district on 4th June 1992. It has an area of 2448 square kilometres. The total population of the district was 192,795 as per the 2001 census. The district headquarters are located at Nongpoh. It has a hilly terrain and a large part of the area is covered with forests. The Ri-Bhoi district is famous for its pineapples and is the largest producer of pinapples in the state.

The South Garo Hills district came into existence on 18th June 1992 after the division of the West Garo Hills district. The total geographical area of the district is 1850 square kilometres. As per the 2001 census the district has a population of 99,100. The district headquarters are located at Baghmara.

The West Garo Hills district lies in the western part of the state and covers a geographical area of 3714 square kilometres. The population of the district is 515,813 as per the 2001 census. The district headquarters are located at Tura. The West Khasi Hills district is the largest district in the state with a geographical area of 5247 square kilometres. The district was carved out of Khasi Hills District on 28th October 1976. The district headquarters are located at Nongstoin.

Climate

The climate of Meghalaya is moderate but humid. With average annual rainfall as high as 1200 cm in some areas, Meghalaya is the wettest state of India. The western part of the plateau, comprising the Garo Hills Region with lower elevations, experiences high temperatures for most of the year. The Shillong area, with the highest elevations, experiences generally low temperatures. The maximum temperature in this region rarely goes beyond 28 degrees, whereas winters temperatures of sub-zero degrees are common.

The town of Cherrapunji in the Khasi Hills south of capital Shillong holds the world record for most rain in a calendar month, while the village of Mawsynram, near town of Cherrapunji, holds the distinction of seeing the heaviest yearly rains. Best time to visit Meghalaya is during the months of March to July. Originally the British and Assam Tea Estate owners would shift here during the summer months to escape the heat of the Indian Plains.

