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RURAL MESSAGING NEEDS IN MEGHALAYA

A Study in Telecommunication Information System in a Tribal Base

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PREFACE

The study on the rural messaging needs in Meghalaya is a modest effort in sociology communication. It was sponsored by the Development and Educational Communication Unit, Indian Space Research Organization, Ahmedabad. Two social scientist from ISRO, Dr. Binode C. Agrawal and Dr. Arbind K. Sinha, visited Shillong in November, 1987, and discussed the details of proposed study. The Project Co-ordinator, Professor A.C. Sinha, along with two of his research associates, visited Ahmedabad in the first week of February 1988, for a workshop in which details of the field work and research instruments were finalized. Field work was undertaken in the first part of the year 1988 by the two research associates, Mr. Y.N. Karna and Ms E. Tariang, and data were largely analyzed by the former.

A number of colleagues such as Professor P.K. Mishra, Dr. D.R. Syiemlieh, Dr. S.C. Daniel, Professor I. Hussain, Dr. L.S. Gassah and a host of others helped us to locate relevant materials for the research. Mr. M.N. Shukla, Dr. D.P.S. Seth (former and present CGMT, Shillong), Mr. ^{V.S.} R.P. Saksena (Addl. PMG, Shillong) and numerous others from the Telecom and Postal departments at Shillong and other places extended all possible assistance to us in spite of their busy schedule. Dr. John Sailo, M.O., NEHU; Mr. Eddy Kharbhih, B.D.O., Umsning; Mr. ^m Jones Syiem, Sardar of Nongpoh; Mr. ^g Glasor Myrchiang, Nongtalang; and many others helped the field workers in many ways. Ms Monideepa Sen,

(ii)

Dr. Lanu Aeir, Dr. C.L. Imchen, Dr. N. Kumar, Dr. P.M. Chako and Professor M.N. Karna, from the Department of Sociology, NEHU, to which the author belongs, stood to limitless field based rambling of the author. We appreciate their patience and articulate interventions in the formal and informal discussions.

Mr. Joseph F. Khongbuh ably typed the manuscript, Mr. Henley Dkhar handled xeroxing ^{ably}, Mr. N.P. Sharma prepared the sets for binding in a neat way. As in the past, Col. M.D. Commissariat (Retd) came forward to print and bound the report. We are thankful to all the above and many others, whose names are not possible to be enumerated. As it is an exploratory study, it may have its limitations and inadequacies. However, in case it is found relevant to this Department of Telecommunication (DOT), ISRO, communication sociologists and the academic community, in any way the author will feel gratified. At the end, we shall be looking forward to the readers for their critical comments and constructive suggestions.

SHILLONG

NOVEMBER 18, 1988.

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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

1.0.0. The Indian Communication Ideology

Trying to imbibe the merits of both, the 'free-world' capitalist market centred economy and the 'state-controlled' centralized socialist economy, India chose a 'mixed economy' in which certain aspects of it is centrally controlled, planned and implemented, while in other aspects, a type of limited laissez faire is permitted. This major decision affects a host of options not only in the economic spheres, but also in social, political, cultural and communicational priorities. In terms of communication the unstated Indian national ideology may be inferred as a 'mixed bag' of consumerism-cum-producerism (of the capitalist democratic world) and the Japanese public utility model. That is why 'market' plays a crucial role in Indian economic life for policy making body, foreign aid and trade, infrastructure, technology and even policy. However, it is the market situation, which creates social problems, but converse is not true as market is autonomous. While radio and television are under the state control, the print media and cinema are in the hands of the private investors. In such a situation, when income distribution, access to means of formal education and ownership of communication technology are very much unequal, the Government's efforts to increase the reach and access of information to all sections of the Indians alike appear to be unrealistic. Such policies and planning emerging from the above communication ideology assume the diffusion of traits and change

in attitudes in which attention is concentrated on producers and the audience is ignored.

1.1.0. Communication as such may be identified at various levels

Firstly, the interpersonal communication may include conversations among the members of the family, friends, neighbours, talks on telephone, correspondence by mail, etc. Secondly, the intermediate or medio-communication are related to community organizations, clubs, or hobby groups, publications like house journals, etc. And thirdly, mass communication is inclusive of national newspapers, local newspapers, nation-wide magazines, radio and television, books, movies, records and video cassettes.

1.1.1. Information Society

As against the informal and interpersonal background, a new phenomena of information society appeared in 1960's in Japan. It is more of metaphorical than a technical term. To begin with it is characterized by abundant information in terms of stock and flow, quick and efficient distribution and easy and inexpensive access to all its members. Social relationships both at individual and community levels are being reshaped significantly by new technological means of processing and distributing information. The entire information industry may be divided into: the primary and secondary sectors. While the former consists of telecommunications, broadcasting, publishing, movie education, medical services and various information service industries, the latter is made up of the ones, in which information workers are employed. The

scale of primary information sector may be measured by totalling value-added statistics using an input-output table. Its secondary counterpart may be calculated by estimating the income of information workers and capital consumption, allowance of information machines and facilities in non-information industries.

1.1.2. Information Policies

The new communication technologies cut across the entrenched lines of mass media, telecommunications, the postal services, industrial and commercial structures. As such technologies cannot be developed without some kind of input their development presupposes some kind of planning and regulation. Stemming out of them some basic issues pertaining to communication technologies arise afresh: issues of public/private relationship, regulation and privatization, privacy and security. The State information policies within the larger communication ideology arose mainly in the industrialized West, who were linked to a tradition of pluralism. Such policies emerged in response to a widening technological base and availability of a whole range of new forms: informatics, telematics, videotex, satellite distribution model etc. They also imply that a 'holistic' view must be taken of their contributory technologies such as mass media, telecommunications, computer development or a 'mix' of all three.

1.1.3. Informatization and Information Development

The basic social trends in the industrialized countries came to be known as informatization or information revolution

(Umessao, T. 1963) in 1960's. It was variously known as 'post-industrial society' (Bell, D. 1962), 'knowledge industry' (Machlup, F. 1962) 'technotronic era' (Brzezinski, 1979) 'the third wave' (Toffler, A. 1980). Its basic features may be identified with the following: Firstly, public needs for information have become increasingly sophisticated and diversified. Secondly, new communication media share certain border areas with such conventional media as mail, telecommunications and broadcasting. And thirdly, networks (data communications) are being formed on large scale. Informatization naturally leads to information development, which means promotion of economic and social development through information revolution. Information development is secured through promotion of information industries i.e. computer and communication industries, activation of information circulation in each area and construction of communication networks at the national level.

1.1.4. Information, Message and Messenger

Information (something being told, news, intelligence, facts, data, learning, lore or knowledge) applies to facts that are gathered in anyway as by reading, observation, hearsay, etc. and does not necessarily connote validity. It is different from knowledge (understanding of what is known), learning (knowledge acquired by study in special field), erudition (obstruse learning beyond comprehension of most people), and wisdom (superior judgement based on broad knowledge). It is closer to message, which

may be understood as any communication written or oral sent between persons or a formal written or oral official communication. Similarly, a messenger is a person who carries a message or goes on an errand, or whose work is delivering telegrams and official despatches.

As a whole, the rural India is relatively cut off from the transportation and communication networks. The message of the national objectives of all round rural development, economic prosperity and national integration into a secular, socialist and democratic plural India do not reach rural folk effectively. It is also believed that rural India suffers from indolence inertia and lethargy. With a view to all round rural development and securing the above national objectives, it is imperative that effective information and correct messages are given to the villagers. For that matter villages are to be effectively linked with regional, state and national centres, where significant decisions affecting them are taken, through a reliable communication system.

1.1.5. Indian Postal Communication in Retrospect

Postal communication was known in the ancient India and it was nurtured by the royalty and the feudal courts. Broadly speaking three strands in the communicational pattern of the ancient India may be identified. Firstly, the members of the ruling class invariably used pigeons, parrots etc. for communicating their message of love, separation, distress etc. to their

distant kinsmen and beloved ones. Secondly, messages were sent pertaining to war, strategy and defence through horse and camel riders, impersonators and other sources. Thirdly, business and commercial messages were sent through specially hired messengers incognito. However, only two distinct types of messages extensively used by the ancient lords may be identified: the one, messages of love and proposals of marriages and another, declaration of war and peace through musical instruments. For the first one, one may be reminded by the statue of the letter writing damsel at the famous Khujraho cave temples. However, the less privileged householders used to send their family priest and barber for negotiation of the various social ties and providing different types of information to their distant kinsmen.

By the Mughal period, the use of the organized postal service was extensive on the trunk routes. A number of urban centres on several routes were recognized as the official inns (sarais) where postal horse-runners (harkaras) could rest for the night. There was a relay horse-ridden mail service between the imperial seat of power and the other provincial towns, but this amenity was exclusively for the purpose of the court and the rulers. Though at times such infrastructure was used by the wealthy merchants, the system was neither geared nor meant for the commoners. It were British, who modified the earlier system and gave a broad based organizational set up throughout the extensive British Indian territory. They needed information from distant interior locations to their coast based Presidencies of

Bengal (Calcutta), Bombay and Madras for various purposes: administrative, commercial and strategic. In course of time, they evolved an organizationally complex postal organization based at the General Post Office (GPO), Calcutta, and extended to all the district, sub-divisional and other important towns through an effective network of service.

1.1.6. The Postal Communication in Meghalaya

The oldest post office in Meghalaya, Cherrapunjee, a branch subordinate to the district post office at Sylhet had been in existence since 1850's. W.J. Allen provides a telling scenario of its functioning through his Report prepared some 130 years ago:

"216: During the rains the Calcutta mails are not unfrequently eleven to twelve days in reaching Chera Poonjee and sometimes three or four mails arrive together. Boats are allowed for six months viz. from 1st June to the 30th of November for the conveyance of the mails between Decca and Sylhet. The rainy season usually commences in Sylhet early in May, and consequence there is always great irregularity and confusion in the mail service for about three weeks from the time the rains begin to the time boats can be put on the line.

217: Parcels sent by banghy from Calcutta to Chera Poonjee are often six weeks in reaching their destination and their contents are not unfrequently spoiled by the careless manner in which

they are conveyed ... the delay occurred owing to a large accumulation of parcel in the transit at Decca Post Office.

218: The transit of mails between Chera Poonjee and Assam seem to be susceptible of some improvement ... I am told that they (Dak stages) average from 12 to 16 miles and the last stage from Moirahpore to Guwahatty is not less than 21 miles. It cannot be expected that the Dak peons will be able to carry the mails at the rate the Dak ought to travel when stages are of such an unreasonable length. The number of runners ought to be doubled; the stages should be re-arranged so that the length of each should not exceed 7 or 8 miles; torch bearers should be allowed to accompany the Dak runners when they travel at night.

219: The letter mail from Calcutta to Guwahatty is now sent via Rangpore in nine days in the dry and about ten days in the rainy season" (Allen, W.J. 1858). Still the post office changes were not shown separately as Chera Post Office was only a branch of the Sylhet post office.

Meghalaya, one of the 6 states comprising the North Eastern Postal Circle with its headquarters at Shillong, was created as a separate State in 1972 out of the two districts (Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills) of Assam. Presently it has 5 revenue districts, 10 sub-divisions and as many as about 20 police stations. Talking in terms of postal amenities, the state has an average of 1 post office for 3,185 persons against the national figure of 4,185. Similarly, it has a post office for every

53.94 square kilometre of area, whereas the all India territorial average works out to be 22 square kilometre. Though Meghalaya is not connected with the railways, within its own area, it is reasonably well served by the Vayudoot (to Calcutta) and the Pawan Hans (helicopter service to Gauhati) and a fleet of the government and the private buses. For the postal purposes a postal Mail Motor Service operates between Shillong and Gauhati. Postal mail within the state is conveyed through the Meghalaya State Transport Corporation and private bus operators. As a whole there are 23 mechanized and 206 foot mail lines operative in the state. Besides the conventional postal amenities, the speed post service and the speed post money order have been introduced from January 1988 and May 13, 1988 respectively. However, in terms of revenue like its parent structure, the North Eastern Circle earned total revenue of Rs.1,336.95 lakhs and spent Rs.2,823.88 lakhs in the year 1987-88. Thus it had a deficit of Rs.1,486.93 lakhs.

1.1.7. The Indian Communication Scenario

Those were the days of Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India, who was known for his aggressive expansionism. Besides his administrative policies, he was also instrumental in introduction of railway and telephonic services to India. The first telegraph line was laid between Diamond Harbour and Calcutta in 1853. The empire had to wait for another three decades for introduction of telegraph system between Calcutta and Bombay

and Calcutta and Madras in 1882.¹ The first telegraph service between Shillong and Burma over land through the iron wires were introduced in 1914. Similarly, the first telephone line was introduced at Shillong after a decade in 1927 and Gauhati could be linked with it only in 1935. Shillong as the capital of the composite state of Assam remained a part of the Assam and Bengal Exchange Circle within the old department of Post and Telegraph with a network of 12 telephone exchanges, 1944 telephone lines and 146 telegraph offices till 1949. (See the Table 1.1.).

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1. "Monday, January 30, 1882: At 4 O'clock on Saturday afternoon the Bombay Telephone Exchange was formally opened, but in a very quiet manner. A few gentlemen assembled in the office of Messrs Benn, Ashley & Co., the local agent of the Oriental Telephone Co. The arrangements had been made to keep the telegraph wires from Calcutta open and shortly after 4 O'clock the following message from Calcutta was telephoned ... "Mrs Baring, Calcutta to the Telephone Exchange Bombay: I have the pleasure to declare the Bombay Telephone Exchange open this day and I offer my congratulations to the commercial community on the successful inauguration of a Telephone Exchange in Bombay." A similar message was also received in Madras; and Mrs. Baring opened the Calcutta Exchange in person. She really declared the three Exchanges to be opened within a few minutes of each other. After Mr. Chambers (of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce) had read out this message and after health and prosperity had been drunk to the new venture, Mrs. Baring's message was repeated to the Chamber of Commerce, the municipal offices, and other public offices and the subscribers were for the first time put in communication with one another by uniting their wires on the switch board. For about an hour the requests from one member to be put into communication with another came passing rapidly but only with a view to test the working of the instruments and wires, and the messages exchanged were of a private rather than business nature. Perhaps the only exception to this was the opportunity taken by Mr. Chamber as he stood in the Exchange room to put through a contract for 50 bales of cotton at Colaba ... on purpose to utilize the benefit of the telephone system" - Extract from The Times of India, quoted in the Netnews Vol.4(2), July 1988.

Table - 1.1: Providing Significant dates of Postal and Telegraphic Development in India and N.E. Region.

1853	: The first telegraph line between Diamond Harbour and Calcutta.
1882	: Inauguration of telephone service between Calcutta and Bombay and Madras.
1914	: Introduction of first telegraph service between Shillong and Burma.
1927	: Introduction of first telephone service in Shillong.
1937	: Second Telephone Exchange between Shillong and Gauhati.
1947	: Assam as part of A & B exchange with 12 telephone exchanges, 146 telegraph offices and 1994 telephone lines.
1963	: Creation of a separate N.E. Circle for Post & Telecom.
1966	: Microwave link between Shillong, Gauhati and Calcutta.
1966	: Telex Service at Gauhati.
1969	: First (2nd in the country) 2,000 LPC cross bar at Shillong.
1970	: STD Service between Shillong and Gauhati.
1974	: Creation of separate Telecommunication Circle at Shillong.
1980	: 800 L. Trunk Automatic Exchange at Shillong.
1980	: Domestic Satellite Com. System at Aizawl.
1985	: Introduction of Computerized Store & Forward Telegram (SFT).
1985	: Electronic Computerized Telephone Exchange at Dibrugarh.
1987	: Separation of Assam from N.E. Telecom Circle.
1987	: Introduction of International Subscriber Dialing facility (ISD) at Shillong.

1.1.8. It is not easy to reach the national communication objectives because of financial, technological, geographical, ecological and a host of other reasons. In our own country there have been conventional cheaper techniques of telecom used. However, for the geographically isolated and ecologically undulating North Eastern Telecom Circle special efforts are to be made to provide them with cheap and reliable information. That is how a beginning was made with microwaves and the satellite linked earth stations for the region. Because of its relative distance from the urban-industrial and metropolitan centres of the country, special efforts are being to introduce rural messaging systems in this remote region. Recently, the rural India is being covered with the help of INSAT system for telegraphic and telephonic network. Moreover, according to the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and the Department of Telecommunication (DOT) plans, 50 rural locations in the N.E. Circle will be connected soon with a satellite based rural telegraphic system. To begin with Meghalaya has been chosen for establishment of the Satellite Based Rural Telegraph Network (SBRTN) at five points such as Nongpoh, Jowai, Cherrapunjee etc. Before such network becomes effective, it is imperative to know the pattern of rural messaging needs, its economics and flow and direction. And that is how the present study on the State of Meghalaya from the region is proposed.

1.2.1. The Objectives of the Study

Before the programmes of the SBRTN is planned in a

big way and is effectively introduced, it will be advisable to uncover certain obvious questions: How much do the rural folk in the N.E. region need such a facility? How will this new system facilitate their lives? Who will be the users of this kind of communication system? With a view to answering the above and a host of other questions, it is important to know the communication needs of the people concerned. The study may also help discovering some of the not well understood aspects of rural communication like existing infrastructure available for sending and receiving messages, quantum of information going out of the village(s) and possible utilization of this communication technology in the rural set up. It may also help in determining and defining the pattern of future needs and use of the proposed system.

1.2.2. Keeping the above issues in mind, the study is proposed to have the following objectives

- (i) To identify the existing channels used for receiving and transmitting information of various types and the load on these channels in terms of frequency use, amount of traffic, and radius of communication;
- (ii) To assess the rural messaging needs and to understand the circumstances compelling or prohibiting the use of telecommunication facilities; and
- (iii) To analyse future demands and expected use for telecommunication in rural areas of the N.E. Region of India.

1.2.3. Researches on Telecommunication in India

The relationship between telephone and development

remained obscure partly because of the difficulty of disentangling the chicken-and-egg relationship. Hudson's emphasis is on rural development because modern telecom is capable of bridging distances more reliably than in the past and that's why investment in telecom technology for rural areas are attractive (Hudson, H.E. 1984). Without caring for the immediate return on the telecom investment for the rural areas, its indirect benefits to the users and to the rural economy justify it amply. However, sociological implications of point to point telecom was largely ignored by the social scientists and it was left to the engineers, many of whom worked on improving and advancing technology. Hudson's collection focuses on "the role of telecom in rural development. In addition to economic development, social benefits are considered that are likely to contribute to improved quality of life in rural areas" (Hudson, H.E. 1984: 7).

Kaul notes that the crucial issues facing telecom planners in India is the distribution of the additional exchange capacity. The Indian planners have to decide what mix of urban and rural facilities to instal and how to distribute them jto achieve maximum developmental benefits. Some way or other Kaul fails to examine the role played by the INSAT (Indian Satellite) for rural telecom. Though demand for rural telecom increases substantially once the process of rural modernization has begun, he questions the consumer surplus approach in measuring the benefits of rural telecom investments (Kaul, S.N. 1981). At last,

he identifies some ^{men} come problems in rural telecom such as in accessibility, poor reliability and 'market' pricing.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in its Nairobi session in 1982 appointed an Independent Commission under the chairmanship Sir Donald Maitland for preparing a comprehensive report for universal telecom development. Its recommendations, if put into effect, will bring all mankind within easy reach of a telephone by the early part of the next century. It was suggested that the developing countries in setting their targets and priorities may distinguish between rural, urban and more remote areas. While the important economic advantages of satisfying demand in urban and areas should not be ignored, extending the network into rural and remote areas is essential, if the aims of the development are to be achieved. In any event, the developing countries should aim to ensure that the whole population has reasonable access to telephone.

The Commission noted that the rate of the telecommunication expansion will vary widely according to the circumstances of individual countries. Recent advances in telecom technology enables reliable communications to the farthest and remotest locations. An efficient telecom system can help reduce distance; diminish regional disparities; help lessen urban migration and reduce the need to travel. Similarly, an efficient telecom system plays vital role in emergencies and health service; facilitates better use of existing transport facilities; confers

direct and indirect benefits regarded as public good; and increases ~~creases~~ the efficiency of public administration, commerce and other economic activities. It was recommended to the members of the ITU to accord higher priority and self-reliance to the telecom and the missing link (among the human beings) was to be bridge. The Commission sets its objective: "we believe that by the early part of the next century virtually the whole of mankind should be brought within easy reach of a telephone and, in due course, the other services telecommunications can provide. That should be the overriding objective. Achieving this will require a range of actions by industrialized and developing countries like." (I.T.U. 1984).

India rightly took the challenge in proper perspective and the Department of Telecommunication, Government of India, assigned the onerous job of examining the feasibility of providing 'a phone in every village' to the Director, Telecommunication Research Centre, New Delhi (^{Murthy}~~Ministry~~, B.S. 1987). As the provision of telephone service for villages is not remunerative by itself, the service is provided on a subsidized basis. Considering that the public telephone (PT) is a socio-economic need, a detailed study was made in 1970's with a view to providing telephone within the reach of every village in the country. It was proposed to install village cluster cells (V.C.C.) at potential local exchanges for an area of 65 square kms within a radius of 5 Km from the Exchange. These hexagonal cells located

within a walking distance of 5 Km were suited for untimed unit free calls. Making an allowance for forests, mountains, deserts and other uninhabited areas, a total of 46,858 VCC may cover the entire country. Out of them 35,000 cells had been provided with telephone exchanges by 1987. At the present rate of about 1,200 cells per year, may be by the end of the present century, this task will be complete. As a village cluster cell costs between one to one and half lakh of rupees, the total cost of providing telephone to every village in India will run into Rs.6000 crores.² As per the above calculations there will be 2,293 V.C. Cells at the cost of Rs.20.9 crores in the N.E. Telecom Circle with 346 requiring Rs.6.1 crores for the State of Meghalaya itself. The NE Telecom Circle appears to have taken its task seriously and started installation of V.C. Cells from the eastern most border of India, i.e. Manipur.

B.S. Murty found that the average number of calls per P.T. in a month worked out to be one call in three days. At the present level of national development and very limited availability of rural telephones (only 33,000 villages out of 5,76,000), not more than 30 calls a month from a Village Telephone (VT)

2. "Each village in the country would get a public telephone booth by 2,000 A.D. with a massive government investment of about Rs.49,000 crores during the 8th and 9th Plans in the telecommunication sector, Mr. A.K. Wakhle, member technical development and engineer-in-chief, telecom engineering centre (TEC), said ... there would be 90 lakhs additional connections covering semi-urban and urban areas" Telegraph, Calcutta, October 9, 1988.

is expected in near future. This is too little a traffic to justify a PT for the use of village. Consequently, the service has to be subsidized for the community benefit only. On the other hand, as a villager has to pay trunk call charges when speaking from one village to another at a distance of even beyond 5 Km, the tariff is highly pitted against the rural telephone subscriber. Thus, unless and until telephone service is made available in all the villages, it is difficult to expect higher calling rates and better traffic loading (Murty, B.S. 1987: 24 & 25).

He suggests to have dialing access to all the villages not only within a group areas (i.e. subdivision, taluka or tehsil), but also to other villages within the same district besides having access to the national network. However, the technology used for rural telecom is 'costly on a per circuit basis, fault-prone and lacks versatility' (Murty, B.S. 1987: 32). For that he recommends the FIRST (Fully Integrated Rural Switching & Transmission) system and the TP at the group area (Tehsil) as the ideal. All the Tehsils could be grouped into 9 categories ranging from less than 50 villages to more than 400 villages. However, an average Tehsil will have about 300 villages. With the 4 metropolitan nodal points, primary switching areas in the state capitals, 319 secondary switching areas known as the Telecom Districts (TD) against 441 revenue districts in the country and about 2,000 Group Areas, the rural telephone can be organized at the nation level. For obvious reasons, the rural network is proposed (Murty, B.S. 1987: 45) to be in three parts:

television are counted' that the information system is considered as the factors of ^{regional} development. Even among the information systems, telecommunication as a fact of development is almost universally ignored. The benefit of the telecom is not necessarily to affect those who possess the instrument. It is the community, locality and the region, which are positively affected by its presence. Telecom is a two-way channel, which presumes mapping out of the information needs at the grass root level. However, in a hierarchical society such as ours, rural development is supposed to be initiated by the agencies from the 'above'. In a salutary study on the role of the Community Development Projects as agents of communication and change, Dube found the same in 1958: "In actual practice the Projects have tended to assume the role of the giver and the village people have mostly been at the receiving end. The assumption underlying this practice has been that the major needs and the problems of the village people are well known, and that for a considerable time the Projects will have to work to provide for the recognized needs of the people Thus communication is mostly one-way and from top down. A close examination of the records of the various advisory bodies shows that so far there has been little efforts to set up the complementary upward channel of communication". (Dube, S.C. 1983:128).

The present study may broadly be included in the area of Sociology of communication. Such limited researches in India were conducted by the following major agencies: (i) AIR, Doordarshan, Directorate of Field Publicity, Film and T.V. Institute,

Pune; (ii) Management institutions and other professional bodies; (iii) The Indian Institute of Mass Communication & Journalism, Agricultural Universities and Rural Development Institutes (Malhan, P.N. 1985: 28). Besides the above three bunch of agencies, the turning point came with the SITE (Satellite Instructional Television Experiment), which led to intensive field study and extensive macro level surveys (Sen, M. 1988: 32-33). Agrawal (1978; 1985) and Sinha (1985) highlighted the methodological aspects of various SITE sponsored studies. Among the significant contributions in terms of methodology, Agrawal distinctly identifies 'holistic study' and 'research through committee' approaches (Agrawal, 1987). So far N.E. region is concerned there are not many examples of the studies on the mass communication with possible exception of Sinha (1986) and Sen (Sen, 1988).

1.3.2. The present study proposes to study the rural information needs in general and telephonic needs in particular in the State of Meghalaya. Though postal services are familiar to rural Meghalayans for decades, telephone is a new information speciality. Except Shillong and Tura, the entire State is predominantly rural. There are telephonic^{graphic} installations at the district, subdivisional and even various police stations, telephones, however, are yet to catch up with the universal use as with the postal service. Telephone continues to be an instrument largely for the administration. The telecom department has been asked to take the instrument to the rural masses. There may be apparent

reticence reservation and apathy among the personnel of the tele-com department, but the targets are fixed, which are to be achieved. Keeping the above scenario in mind, we decided to select two locales for our intensive study. One, which is already on the telephonic network of the State and another one, which may be an immediate and potential cite for telephonic installation in the near future.

1.3.3. Selection of the Field

Out of the five locations where SBRTN is to be stationed, one is the subdivisional town of the East Khasi Hills District at Nongpoh, almost midway between Shillong and Gauhati at a distance of about 52 Kms from Shillong. It is ideally located on an important trunk road in a commercially rich locality and in the proximity of the significant forest based industrial establishments of the State. It has all the administrative infrastructure, banking facilities and commercial establishments. Next to Shillong, it is one of the most frequented places for the Meghalayans. Besides post office and telephone exchange it boasts of a wireless sub-station. In consequence, Nongpoh is the place, which provides an example of the problems faced by Meghalayans in the best and the worst ways. It may also present the potentiality for the future messaging development. Thus, we decided to concentrate on Nongpoh for the field work before the SBRTN is established.

Nongtalang, one of the biggest villages in the neighbouring Jaintia Hills District, has all the infrastructural

facilities which a progressive village in a hill state can boast of. It has a number of educational, administrative, commercial, welfare, and voluntary institutions. It is linked with Jowai (the district headquarters) and Shillong (the state capital) with daily bus service and has a post office for the last three decades. With a population of about 5,000 it is an old seat of the traditional rulers and its cultural values are immense. In case the department of telecommunication is looking for a potential site for locating its next village telephone (VT) exchange in the district of Jaintia Hills, Nongtalang will be an obvious choice. Thus, we decided to collect field data from the village Nongtalang on its messaging needs.

1.3.4. Research Instruments

As rural messaging system is a relatively new area of social science research, we tried to proceed cautiously. It were the two social scientists from the Development Educational Communication Unit of the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), Ahmedabad, who visited Meghalaya in December 1987; initiated an academic discussion with us and examined the possibility of including various field sites to be studied intensively. Then in the first week of February 1988, the research project coordinator along with two of his research associates travelled ^{to} Ahmedabad for a research workshop on rural messaging system. The workshop continued for about a week in which besides the technologists a number of experts participated. At last it was agreed

to evolve two sets of interview schedules, our research instruments: RM 01 for the householders and RM 02, for the various institutions involved in the rural messaging system.

The RM 01 includes age, sex, marital status, number of the family members, educational qualification of the respondents, the highest formal academic degree attended by a living member of the family, main and secondary occupations of the respondents, annual income and the number of family members employed outside the village. Next set of 10 questions (11 to 20) were addressed to ethnic, linguistic and media exposure. Then the data on number of relations living outside the village, communication pattern with the relations living outside, general channel and occasion of communication and need and contents of telegrams sent were solicited. We also enquired on the factors inhibiting telegraphic message, number, types, size and radius of telegrams, and proximity and cost of the telegrams.

The research instrument RM 02 enquired on a general profile of the locale with various types of data based on secondary sources, availability of print media, and transport pattern of the location. Data on various institutional amenities, centres of social interaction, and public communication, purposes of the written communication sent outside, occasions for sending postal communications, types, contents and addressees of telegrams, factors inhibiting it and listing of 25 names who receive maximum number of letters, use the telephone most frequently

and send the maximum number of telegram outside the locale were collected.

1.3.5. The Universe, Sample and the Procedure of Data Collection

'The rural messaging needs in Meghalaya' prescribes that 80 per cent rural folk residing in 4,583 villages constitute our universe. However, we would like to hasten to add that our generalizations at socio-cultural level may not be applicable to the western half of state in two Garo Hills districts. As SBRTN scheme is intially proposed to be introduced in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills districts, we had to choose a site from among the five locations. And that is how Nongpoh was selected as one of the two units of the field study. For a limited controlled comparison, we decided to select a village, where telephone is yet to be introduced. The village should be automatically known for its historical and cultural tradition; should possess demographic features of complexity and should have adequate infra-structural support base. Nongtalang, a village from the eastern most district of the state, suited our requirements and, thus, was conveniently selected. Furthermore, we had an added advantage in having one of the two research associates - Ms Eleebon Tariang - hailing from the village.

The two research associates along with the project co-ordinator participated in the workshop at Ahmedabad on February 2-5, 1988. Besides the social scientists such as Dr(s) Binode Agrawal, Arbind Sinha, S.R. Joshi, Kiran Karnik, technologists

like Kalyan Bandopadhyaya took part in the deliberations and ~~obtained~~ ^{explained} the functioning of the SBRTN and the satellite systems. These explanations helped a lot to the field researchers in understanding the working of the device. It was agreed that an equal emphasis should be placed on first hand field data and the secondary data collected from the institutions, establishments and postal and telephone departments. For the first lot a sample of 100 respondents from each of the two sites were to be selected on random basis as the entire village was considered as one unit for the purpose of messaging needs. For the second category of respondents, 10 units were considered adequate enough for providing breadth of the institutional data. While Nongtalang village may be termed as unilingual i.e. Jaintia (Khasi) speaking with exception of formally educated persons conversing through English, Nongpoh is a multi-lingual site, where Khasi, Assamese, Bengali, Nepali, Hindi and English are freely spoken. The field work was conducted in the former case in Khasi (Jaintia) while in latter it was English and Bazar Hindi.

Problem of creating a rapport with the respondents did not arise at Nongtalang, as researcher was a born member of the village community. On the other hand, Nongpoh is a mixed locality with peasants and businessmen. Though Khasis of Nongpoh are more exposed to outside influence than many of the interior villages, still theirs is a traditional society under their own headman and Sardar. The researcher visited the village with his

identity papers, but was simply ignored. Then he contacted the local authorities; introduced himself and acquainted them with the urgency of his studies. Incidentally, one of our former students was posted there as the Block Development Officer. He was of great help in introducing the researcher to the village authorities. After the initial reluctance, the researcher was provided with all the relevant data he needed.

The business community is by nature suspicious of outsiders and wary of the written documents. The researcher could not get prompt response from them. However, his perseverance and patient probing in an informal manner was of great help. In the process he had to drink numerous cups of tea in the company of the ~~busy~~ ^{business} men. Visiting government offices was a very cumbersome job. Many of the functionaries travel to and from their offices from distant places as far as even 52 Kms (Shillong) every day. They reach at their working tables by noon and naturally ^{are} ~~hard~~ pressed for the normal official work, as they usually leave their offices by 3 p.m. or so. In these limited hours, it was almost impossible to persuade them to provide us with scattered information, which they did not consider as part of their normal official duty. Moreover, return from the research is unknown to them. They do not attach much significance to it.

At the higher level the functionaries at the North Eastern Telecommunication and Postal Circles, Shillong, were extremely helpful, interested and keen to help the researchers

out. But their major problem was paucity of time. These functionaries are extremely busy, go on inspection tours and attend a number of official, business, and formal meetings. It was rather difficult to locate them, but once they were available, it was pleasure to communicate with them. However, there was a nagging problem. It was difficult to contact them on phone between July and October 1988, as almost all our telephones were not functioning, a telling example of the reliability and functioning of the telephone system. There were occasions, when the researchers personally visited the telecom circle office only to come back without meeting the functionaries, as the latter were either out of the office on some official work or engaged in some or other formal seatings from which they were not to be disturbed. It was not only waste of time, but also a big embarrassment to both the parties. At the same time it exposed the worthlessness of the existing telecom system and emphasized the urgency of a new look to it.

As it happens frequently with the field workers, field work creates certain types of expectations among the respondents. It so happened that Nongtalang (a progressive village by any standard) respondents mistook our research as a possible effort from the government to examine the viability of locating a telephone exchange at the village. Our research associate from the village was partly responsible for this impression, as she informed her kinsmen, friends and villagers about the organisation

of the ISRO and the treatment she received at Ahmedabad on her visit. The knowledgeable villagers more than once enquired of the project coordinator whether he had recommended for installation of telephone urgently. Informed of the Government's policy to provide telephones to every village in the country, they appeared disappointed, as they believed that implementation to the policy decisions takes a longer time.

1.4.0. Chapterization

The entire analysis is presented into eight integrated sections. The Chapter one begins with the Indian national communication ideology, information policies, Indian postal and telegraph communication, objectives of the study, researches on telecom in India, methodological background to the present study, research instruments and procedure of the data collection. The Chapter two on the Ethnography of the Locale examines the various factors at the national, regional, state and local levels. The next Chapter on human and social communication portrays various traditional pattern of Khasi communication, courier and other non-postal systems of messaging, symbolic communication and the varieties of interactions of family, community and formal occasions. The communication scenario in the Chapter four describes various centres of communication, interaction and entertainment inclusive of Khasi cinemas and cinema houses. The Chapter five on the telecom scenario portrays the existing messaging system at the two locations. The next Chapter examines the telecom needs

and future projection on the basis of the data collected from the two field sites and overall needs of the State. And lastly, in conclusion (in Chapter VII~~F~~) we state the implications and recommendations as part of the researchers' vision based on the above analysis.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE LOCALE

With her 700 million population spread in 32.88 million square kilometre, India is one of the biggest and the second most populous contry of the world. Such a vast country is naturally divided into zones for inter-state infrastructural coordination and development. One of the four, the Eastern Zone, is one of the largest with Andaman Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Orissa, Sikkim, Tripura and West Bengal. This is divided into two almost equal halves by the presence of Bangladesh into the western (Bihar, Orissa, Andaman Islands, Sikkim and West Bengal) and the Eastern Frontier region (with rest of the seven states mentioned above). The eastern half of the zone (known as the North Eastern Region under the North Eastern Council) is linked with rest of the country by a thin bottleneck of about 15 kilometre stretch between Nepal and Bangladesh. Incidentally, the international borders with China and Bhutan are hardly 50 kilometre away from this thin bottleneck point. From this thin chunk of territory pass the vital life lines of country: railways, roadways, petrol pipeline, telecommunication network and other supplies in men, materials and goods. The entire infrastructure on this thin life line was created slowly and steadily during the last four decades of independence.

2.1. The Region

The North Eastern Frontier Region (for short North East), a huge landlocked enclave between Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma and

China, is about 7 per cent of the territory and 3.5 per cent of the Indian population. With exception of the Brahmaputra Barak and Imphal valleys, the region is almost entirely mountainous. While the plains in the valleys are thickly populated, as one moves towards the eastern Himalayan and the Patkoi ranges on the international borders, population gets thinner. There is not a single unit in the region without international borders, around which inhabit some of the smaller tribal communities invariably residing on both sides. Besides a multitude of the Hindu castes, the region harbours about 200 communities legally known as the scheduled tribes. The region boasts of the sizeable followers of all the major religious denominations - Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christianity and even animism. This is the region of multi-lingualism having the Aryan, Austric and Tibeto-Burman families of languages and there are pockets, where the literacy rate is even higher than that of the national figure.

The modern history of the region starts with the Indo-Burmese war, 1824. The Ahom ruled Assam was overrun by the Burmese between 1816 to 1824. The Ahom sought the support of the British to drive the Burmese invaders away, which was promptly provided. As per the provisions of the Yandabo Treaty 1826, besides the four districts (Goalpara, Darranga, Kamrup and Nowgong) of Lower Assam, rest of the territory was restored to Ahom, Manipuri, Cachari, and Jaintia rulers. Then followed a slow and steady British expansion with raids and armed expeditions to various hill regions. And that is how Upper Assam, Naga Hills (Land), Cachar, Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, Lushai Hills (Mizoram), the Bhutanese Duars and present day Arunachal

Pradesh were added to Assam by 1912 (Gait, E. 1982; Dubar, C. 1984). On the event of independence in 1947, the composite British province of Assam consisted of 8 plains (Kamrup, Goalpara, Sylhet, Cachar, Nowgong, Darrang, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur) and 6 hill districts (Naga, Mikir, Lushai, Khasi, Garo and the NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Agency) besides the princely states of Manipur and Tripura. With independence, major part of Sylhet district went to Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and Assam's natural riverine and land links with other parts of India were snapped.

The Nagas rose in rebellion with the British withdrawal from India and the Lushai (Mizos) repeated it in 1966. The princely States of Manipur and Tripura were recognized as distinct administrative units in 1950's. The multi-lingual and multi-ethnic state of Assam could not contain the movement for autonomous hill states. Nagaland was created as a separate state of the Naga Hills district and the Tuensang Division of NEFA in 1963. Meghalaya consisting of the districts of Khasi Hills and Garo Hills was carved out and the Mizo Hills District and NEFA (with a new nomenclature of Arunachal Pradesh) were recognized as the Union Territories of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh in 1972. In the same year, North Eastern Council (NEC) was established at Shillong with a view to coordinating the developmental activities of the seven eastern frontier states. These two Union Territories had to wait for another 15 years for the Indian Parliament's approval of their statehood.

2.2. The State of Meghalaya

The State of Meghalaya, the abode of the clouds, is the land of the matrilineal Khasis, Garos and Jaintias. This is a mountainous state with a primitive technological base, subsistence slash and burn type of rotational cultivation and the communal ownership on the landed property. Its 22,489 square kilometre geographical area and 1,328,000 population are divided into five administrative and autonomous districts: East and West Khasi Hills, East and West Garo Hills and the Jaintia Hills. Unlike the national decennial growth rate between 1971 to 1981, which was 24.64 per cent, Meghalayan figure was 31.56. However, it has about 80 per cent scheduled tribal population rather thinly spread within (only 60 persons per square kilometre against the national density of 216 persons per square kilometre). Its 232,000 households with 5.2 persons per household were spread in 5,048 villages and 7 towns as the 1981 Census. The State was divided into 15 police stations with a police force of 4,259, 18.9 police men in every square kilometre and 34.5 police men for every ten thousand Meghalayan in the year 1982.

2.1.1. Telecommunication is one of the most effective means of information, which links individuals, places and communities with each other. Their very availability and reliability ensures a sense of belong among the peoples at the receiving and transmitting ends. In this context, the Indian telephone scenario presents a case of utter inadequacy. There was .43 persons out of 100 who possessed telephones in 1982. Even this inadequate presence converged largely on the urban areas. While the largest

Indian city boasted of 1.96 persons per hundred possessing tele- phones, the main Indian cities claimed 2.38 persons for a 100 individuals and for rest of the country this figure worked out to be only .17 (The Missing Link: 1984: 107). In such a situation even with 22.95 million working telephone lines, there remains a registered demand of 28.89 million telephones with an unmet demand of 5.94 million telephone connections in 1982. The eastern half of the Eastern Zone, popularly known as the seven sisters with 255 thousand square kilometre of territory and 20,608 thousand population has got a separate developmental identity in the planning process of the country since 1972. It had a separate Post Master General for Post and Telegraph till early 1970's at Shillong. The two wings were separated in 1974 and the North Eastern Telecommunication Circle, Shillong, was placed under a General Manager, Telecom. Again this Circle was divided into Assam and North Eastern on January 19, 1987.

Presently the North Eastern Circle, catering the needs of the Arunachal, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Tri- pura, is headed by a General Manager, who is assisted by an Addi- tional General Manager. The operation and maintenance are looked after by 6 Telecom District Managers/Engineers in each of the states known as the Districts. The Circle has 151 telephone exchanges, 24,815 switching capacity 19,723 direct exchange lines, 7 district telecom offices, 114 combined D.T.Os and C.T.Os, 205 long distance public telephone (LDPT), 3 telex exchanges with

Table 2.1: Status of Telecommunication Network in N.E. Telecom Circle

Sl. No.	Items	1947	Status as on				Net increase during 1987-88
			1.4.80	1.4.85	1.4.87	1.4.88	
1.	No. of Telephone Exge.	5	86	127	140	151	11
2.	Switching capacity	NK	13875	19480	23360	24815	1455
3.	Direct Exchange lines	460	11916	15805	17642	19723	2081
4.	Telephone Waiting list		946	2052	4137	3438	(-)699
5.	Telegraph Offices:						
	(a) DTO/CTO		6	7	7	7	-
	(b) Combine offices	58	231	229	114	114	-
6.	L.D.P.Ts.		161	180	195	205	10
7.	Telex Exchange		2	3	3	3	-
8.	No Telex Cxn.		-	42	55	67	12
9.	Telex capacity		40	90	90	90	-
10.	Nos of Stations connected to TAX		1	5	9	111	2
11.	Nos. Pt to Pt STD Routes		1	2	144	20	6
12.	Nos of Satellite Earth Station		-	6	6	6	-
13.	Nos of Manual Trunk Exchanges		13	20	27	28	1
14.	Nos of Wireless stations		33	33	33	35	2
15.	Nos of Wireless circuits		90	90	90	110	20

90 telex capacity, 11 stations are connected with TAX with point to point STD, 6 satellite earth stations, 35 wireless stations and 110 wireless circuits on April 1, 1988 (Table 2.1). A glance at the table will suffice change in these amenities during the last 8 years. For example, while there were only 5 telephone exchanges in 1947, 86 in 1980, their number went almost double (151) in 1988. Switching capacity between 1980 to 1988 has gone up from 13,875 to 24,815. Telex exchange increased from 2 to 3, telex connexion from none to 67, telex capacity from 40 to 90, stations connected from 1 to 11, point to point STD route from 1 to 20 and manual exchanges from 13 to 28 in this period. However, there were 3,438 wait listed telephone customers. With installations of 1455 switching capacity and 2,081 direct exchange lines during 1988-89, the above demands will be met. It is also proposed to instal 12 new telex connexions, 6 point to point STD routes, 2 wireless stations and 20 wireless circuits in the coming year.

2.2.1. Infrastructural Amenities

Because of hilly terrain, as against the national figure of 47.02 kilometre of road per square kilometre, Meghalaya had only 23.17 kilometre. But because of the thin population, it had 3.92 kilometre of road against the national figure of 2.26 kilometre for every one thousand of

population in 1983. However, one point needs to be noted that the State has no navigational and railway communication at all. With 133.66 MW installed electric capacity (mostly hydel) it has only 69 units of per capita electric consumption, while the country has 154 units per capita electric consumption. Again as against almost two-thirds of the Indian villages (64.11%) being electrified, only 27.54 per cent out of 5048 Meghalayan villages are electrified.

Though bulk of the rural Meghalaya has a higher illiteracy, Shillong, its capital town is known for being an educational centre of the region. It boasts of a university, a dozen of colleges, scores of high schools and many primary and pre-primary schools. We have some 5 years old (1983) figures available with us about the educational status of Meghalaya: Colleges about 20; high schools 240; middle schools 560, primary and pre-primary schools about 5,000; teachers training and polytechnic schools 15. About every third of Meghalayan (34.08: 1981) is literate. The State has a presence of print media, with one daily, 4 triweeklies, 27 weeklies and 24 of other news magazines, in total 56 only.

2.2.2. For the State of Meghalaya, there is the Circle Telecom Officer at Shillong with Sub-Divisional Officers (SDO's) at Shillong, Tura and Jowai and also Joint Telecom

Officers and Engineers at the Sub-divisional headquarters. There are technicians for the internal and linesmen for the external works in each of the Sub-divisions. There are 24 telephone exchanges, 1650 switching capacity, 5644 direct exchange lines with a circle telephone office, 17 combined offices, 53 long distance public telephones (LDPTs), a telex exchange with 50 telex capacity and 38 telex connexions, 3 national (NSD)/international (ISD) subscriber dialing stations, 2 point to point STD routes, one station each of satellite earth and microwaves, 3 wireless stations and 16 wireless connexions in 1988 (Table 2.2). It is proposed to instal 3 electronic exchanges with 128 lines each, upgrade Tura exchange from 400 lines to 500 lines and Nongstoin from 100 to 200, connect Cherrapunjee, Baghmara and Mahendraganj with low cost satellite terminals (LCST) and introduce Multi Access Rural Radio System (MARRS) to the rural areas with 13 substations each with Shillong, Tura and Jowai. Moreover, 5 rural points have been identified for an experimental installation of rural telegraphs known as Satellite Based Rural Telegraph Network (SBRTN) in the Khasi Hills.

Table - 2.2: State-wise Status of Telecom Facilities in N.E. Telecom Circle as on 1.4.1988

Sl. No.	Items	Meghalaya	NETC
1.	Nos of Telephone Exge	24	151
2.	Switching capacity	6585	24815
3.	DELS	5644	19723
4.	Telephone Waiting List	1019	3438
5.	Telegraph Offices:		
	(a) CTO/DTO	1	7
	(b) COS	17	114
6.	L.D.P.Ts	53	205
7.	Telex Exges	1	3
8.	Telex capacity	50	90
9.	Nos. of TLX Cxn.	38	67
10.	TAX Xges.	1	1
11.	TAX Capacity	1500	1500
12.	Nos of stations having NSD/ISD	3	11
13.	Nos. PT to PT STD Routes	2	20
14.	Nos. of Satellite Earth Station	1	6
15.	Nos. of Stations linked by M/W	1	5
16.	Nos. of Stations linked by UHF	2	20
17.	Nos. of Manual Trk Exges	4	28
18.	Nos. of Wireless Stn.	3	35
19.	Nos. of Wireless ccts.	16	110

2.3. The Village of Nongtalang

The village got its nomenclature from 'Talang' clan, who founded and occupied it. It is located in the War Jaintia country about 15 Km from the Indo-Bangladesh border town of Dawki, less than 5 Km, from Amalrem the sub-divisional centre and 50 Km from Jowai, the district headquarters of the Jaintia Hills District. It is linked with a reasonably good motorable road with Shillong the state capital and regional metropolitan centre via Dawki and Jowai. As a part of the pre-British Jaintia Kingdom, it was the seat of one of the 15 Doloiships (district governor's), centrally located among the villages to be controlled. The responsibility for carrying out administration rested with the Dolois, who were assisted by deputies (pators) and priests (Lyngdoh). Nongtalang was one of the 5 Doloiships among the War Jaintia located on a commanding strategic and trade route to the Capital, Jaintiapur in the plains (Allen, W.J. 1858: 65-67). Originally the Dolois were first selected and then elected by the council of the eldest uncles of the original clans of the Elaka (territory). But the British introduced three year term for the Dolois in November 1850. Once the choice was unequivocally made, certain investiture ceremonies were conducted by the Lyngdohs. However, as the present Doloi got converted to Christianity, no investiture ceremony on the traditional faith was performed (Gassah, L.S. 1985: 499).

Presently, it is the biggest village in the region with as much as 2,771 souls in 1988. As there is no cadestral survey

done, it is not possible to indicate its areal size. It is located on such a diverse topography that it had enough forest patch for Jhumming valleys and slopes for wet paddy and horticultural products. The actual village administration centres around the Durbar of uncles (Durbar Manniew), consisting of uncles of 12 clans (Kur). The Durbar is assisted in its various functions by a priest (Lyngdoh Niam) and a secular functioning (Lyngdoh Korbar). With a view to keeping the records, a secretary is selected from among the literate members of the 12 **original** clans of the village. All these functionaries except the Secretary must belong to original faith. "It is a developing village with many well-to-do families. Just a decade ago (around 1970), if one could visit the village, one could see only the old thatched roof dwelling houses and many hamlets, but now R.C.C. buildings, sometimes two-to-three storeys, have come out due to the advancement of the people in terms of wealth or impact of education and the closer contacts with the outside world. Shillong and Jowai ... are no longer felt as very distant places. At present, it is only a matter of two-to-three hours journey and one can return the same day." (Gassah, L.S. 1980: 10).

2.3.1. The village situated at an altitude of about 4,000 feet above sea level and is divided into 8 hamlets. It had only 158 households, with an average size of 9.5 person and a total population of 1508 in which there were more female (793) than male (715) in 1971 (Table 2.3). The population has risen to 2771 in 1988 with about 500 households and a literacy rate of about

40 per cent. There were more male (579) against (309) workers) than female, more than one-fourth population was engaged in livestock, fishing, quarrying etc. and as many as half of them were non-workers in 1971. It has a village Primary Health Centre since March 3, 1921, which has 10 bed hospital attached to it besides a dispensary. Its Post Office was established in March 1956. The primary school was started in the first decade of this century; a middle school on March 3, 1961, a high school on March 3, 1974, and college a year back. The number of primary schools has risen from 2 to 7; middle schools from 1 to 3 from 1971 to 1988. The traditional faith centre around Lyngdoh raid (a sacred centre) and then four Christian missionary churches belonging to Catholics, Presbyterians, Church of God etc. located in the various hamlets. A branch of Ka Bank Nongtalang Ri Khasi-Jaintia is functioning since July 16, 1984. The village has its own marketing bus service to Jowai and Shillong. Besides that one has to travel to Dawki or Jowai to catch a bus for Shillong. A number of affluent villagers mostly traders, contractors and politicians possess automobiles of their own.

2.4. The Sub-Divisional Village of Nongpoh

As per the tradition, Nongpoh (the inhabitation of the bottom) was a sub-Syiem (chieftainship) of Nongkhlaw Syiemship. Accordingly, the Syiem of Nongpoh sided with U Tirot Singh, the Syiem of Nongkhlaw and a freedom fighter in 1830's against the British in the Anglo-Khasi War (Bareh, H. 1985: 107). For

about three decades, Nongpoh was tagged to Kamrup district and it was reinstated to the Khasi-Jaintia Hills District only 1863. A decade after, in 1872 its Syiemship was abolished and a system of Sardarship was introduced. Presently, there are 50 villages under their elected headmen under Nongpoh Sardarship. In all there has been five Sardars; the present one ascended to the position in 1936 at the age of 24. The Sardarship is matrilineally inherited by the eldest son of the former Sardar's sister. He is formally elected by the Myntris (representatives of the hereditary clans) and holds the office as long as he can look after the welfare of his people. His election has to be approved and he can be removed by the District Council on the ground of misbehaviour. He may summon a meeting of the village headmen whenever the need may arise. Sardar, Myntris, headmen and Lyngdoh do not get any salary from the Government. However, the Sardar gets some money when some of his subjects sell their land or on the eve of disputes between them.

It is a Khasi village of 8,368 persons spread in an area of 11,363 hectares at a equi-distance between Shillong and Gauhati on the National Highway No. 41. Nongpoh means a habitation in the mud or a low lying village indicating that it is known for its wet paddy cultivation. The villagers do have hilly tract of land for Jhumming and horticultural products as well. It was a small wayside sleepy village before 1940. However, a temporary camp was pitched on the spot during the World War Second leading to opening of a few sundry shops and eating houses

by the roadside. Since then it never looked back. Traders from distant Rajasthan, Bihar, Bengal and Assam joined Meghalayans in making it a thriving small commercial centre. Its fortune rose with division of the Khasi Hills District into two and a new sub-division was established at Nongpoh. It gives the impression of a scattered settlement pattern between the hillocks and in fact, the Khasis are still unwilling to settle by the roadside. However it turned out to be a commercial centre, when vehicles plying to and from Shillong stop for a quick meal or refreshment. Thus, it came to be known for its eating houses, fruits and vegetable stall, honey and grocery shops. Besides the various offices of the State Government at the Sub-Divisional level, it has a police station, forest range office, public works department, a hospital, a post office, a telegraph office, a wireless office, 3 branches of commercial banks, an Eri research centre, 10 primary schools, 5 middle schools, 2 secondary schools, a college and other educational and welfare institutions run by the Christian missionaries. Among others it boasts of a weaving school, a night school-cum-library, a Nepali school sponsored by the State Bank of India and another one run by the District Council.

2.4.1. The number of households and population increased more than three times in decade between 1971 to 1981 (Table 2.3) from 210 to 771 in the case of former and from 901 to 3,009 in the latter. The literacy rate went up four times in the same period. The number of workers is relatively smaller. The number of agricultural labourers went down from 208 to 190 possibly because

Table - 2.3: Infrastructural Statistics about Nongtalang and Nongpoh, 1971 and 1981

Items	Nongtalang			Nongpoh		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
No. of Households 1971	-	-	158	-	-	210
No. of Households 1981	-	-	500('88)	-	-	771
Total Population 1971	715	793	1508	501	383	901
Total Population 1981	-	-	2771('88)	1804	1590	3009
No. of Literate 1971	188	116	350	229	110	339
No. of Literate 1981	-	-	40%	781	489	1270(40%)
No. of Workers 1971	579	309	888	361	59	420
No. of Workers 1981	-	-	-	882	263	1125
No. of Agri. Labour 1971	102	141	243	166	42	208
No. of Agri. Labour 1981	-	-	-	153	37	190
No. of Persons in Livestock, Fisheries etc. 1971	243	149	392	6	-	6
No. of Persons in Trade & Commerce 1971	-	3	3	37	104	47
No. of Persons, other services 1971	17	3	20	9	104	113
No. of Persons, other services 1981	-	-	-	445	104	549

Table - 2.3 (Contd.)

Items	Nongtalang			Nongpoh		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Nos of Non-workers 1971	336	484	820	159	324	483
Nos of Non-workers 1981	-	-	-	914	1324	1238
Nos of Primary Schools 1971	-	-	2	-	-	3
Nos of Middle Schools 1971	-	-	1	-	-	1
Nos of Secondary Schools 1971	-	-	-	-	-	1
Availability of tap water 1971	-	-	Yes	-	-	Yes
Type of road 1971	-	-	Kuchha	-	-	Pucca
Medical Facility 1971	Village Primary Centre FPC/MCD					
Post Office 1971	-	-	Yes	-	-	Yes
Staple Food 1971	-	-	Rice	-	-	Rice

Source: Jala, J.M. 1975, The Census of India 1971, Series 13, Meghalaya, Parts X - A&B, Government Press, Shillong, (pp. 13, 125, 192-93 and 390-91) and data collected from the Government of Meghalaya.

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year and above, while the female heads of the households (39% of the total) were younger in age below 39 years (Table 2.4). 92 per cent of the total respondents were married, 6.5 per cent, all from Nongpoh, were widow and widowers and 1.5 per cent respondents, all from Nongtalang, were unmarried.

2.5.2. Sex, Size of the Family and Education of the Respondents

While 82 per cent families have 5 to 10 members (89% at Nongtalang and 75% at Nongpoh), another 5 per cent possess more than 11 persons in their families, a mere 13 per cent respondents reported small families consisting of 2 to 4 members (Table 2.5). More than one-fourth (27.5%) respondents were illiterate and they were predominantly from Nongtalang (as many as 41%). About 50 per cent from Nongtalang and as much as 79 per cent respondent of Nongpoh had their educational achievements below matriculation, which works about 64 per cent for both the villages. Six per cent respondents had Intermediate education only 2 per cent were graduates and none had postgraduate degrees in the two villages (Table 2.7).

2.5.3. Education and Occupation of the Respondents

Illiterate respondents are cultivators and manual labourers. Among them, 22 per cent with middle school educational background are also engaged in cultivation. More of under matric respondents are either employed in the service or their own business. Those who have educational achievements above matric are either ~~doing~~ government jobs (13.5%) or business (7.5%) of their

Table - 2.4: Age and Sex of the Respondents

Sl. No.	Age Group	Nongtalang			Nongpoh			Total		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1.	Between 20 - 24	-	-	-	3	11	14	3	11	14
2.	" 25 - 29	-	-	-	5	9	14	5	9	14
3.	" 30 - 34	-	-	-	5	8	13	5	8	13
4.	" 35 - 39	2	-	2	8	9	17	10	9	19
5.	" 40 - 44	6	2	8	9	4	13	15	6	21
6.	" 45 - 49	22	2	24	6	3	9	28	5	33
7.	" 50 and above	61	5	66	13	7	20	74	12	86
8.	All age groups	91	9	100	49	51	100	140	60	200

Table - 2.5: Sex and Family Size of the Respondents

Sl. No.	Size of the Family	Nongtalang			Nongpoh			Total		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1.	Upto 2 Members	-	-	-	-	3	3	-	3	3
2.	Between 3 to 4 Members	5	2	7	7	9	16	12	11	23
3.	" 5 to 6 "	25	4	29	14	23	37	39	27	66
4.	" 7 to 8 "	31	2	33	14	11	25	45	13	58
5.	" 9 to 10 "	26	1	27	9	4	13	35	5	40
6.	11 Members and above	4	-	4	5	1	6	9	1	10
All sizes		91	9	100	49	51	100	140	60	200

own. So there is a positive correlation between literacy and non-agricultural employment (Table 2.6). 18 cultivators from Nongtalang have a secondary occupation of business; 20 service holders are as well cultivators and 10 businessmen claimed to be cultivators. From Nongpoh 4 cultivators were in business, 5 and 1 service holders were doing cultivation and business respectively.

2.5.4. Ethnicity, Language and Income of the Respondents

Nongtalang is a typical mono-linguistic unit. They speak and understand War-Khasi with a few exception of English knowing educated youth. 93 per cent Nongpoh respondents speak Khasi and the rest Hindi, Mizo, Garo, Meitei and Assamese. Outside the house they speak Hindi (87), English (24) and Khasi (18). From ethnic point, while Nongtalang is exclusively a Jaintia village, Nongpoh has 93 per cent Khasi population and others are marginal communities such as Mizo, Garo, Manipuri, Bihari, Assamese etc. Most of the respondents informed that they had an income between Rs. 5000 and Rs. 20000 per annum (77%) whether they were engaged in cultivation business or service. Nongtalang appears to be a relatively poorer village than Nongpoh (Table 2.10). As much as 12 per cent respondents affirmed that their annual income was anything between Rs.25,000 and above Rs.40,000 and above per annum.

2.5.5. Respondents' Educated Relatives and their Dispersal

We are conscious that education employment and dispersal of residence are closely correlated. Thus we enquired of

Table - 2.6: Sex and Education of the Respondents

Sl. No.	Education	Nongtalang			Nongpoh			Total		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1.	Illiterates	37	4	41	3	11	14	40	15	55
2.	Upto Middle School	29	1	30	19	25	44	48	26	74
3.	Under Matric	8	2	10	9	9	19	18	17	28
4.	Matriculate	9	-	9	12	5	17	21	5	26
5.	Intermediate	5	1	6	6	1	7	11	2	13
6.	Graduate	3	1	4	-	-	-	3	1	4
7.	Post-Graduate	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
All		91	9	100	49	51	100	140	60	200

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Sl. No.	Education	Nongtalang			Nongpoh					Total
		Culti- vation	Ser- vice	Busi- ness	Culti- vation	Ser- vice	Busi- ness	Labour	Other	
1.	Illiterates	40	-	-	6	-	1	4	3	55
2.	Upto Middle School	24	1	5	20	3	11	6	4	74
3.	Under Matric	2	4	4	3	3	4	2	6	28
4.	Matric	-	7	2	-	6	10	-	1	26
5.	Intermediate	-	5	1	-	5	2	-	-	13
6.	Graduate	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
	All	66	21	13	29	17	28	12	14	200

Table - 2.8: Respondents' Primary and Secondary Occupations

Sl. No.	Primary Occupation	Nongtalang				Nongpoh			Total
		Busi- ness	Ser- vice	Culti- vation	None	Busi- ness	Culti- vation	None	
1.	Cultivation	18	-	-	48	4	-	24	94
2.	Service	-	-	20	1	1	5	11	38
3.	Business	-	-	10	3	-	7	21	41
4.	Labour	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	12
5.	Others	-	-	-	-	2	1	11	14
		18	30	50	57	13	59	59	199

Table - 2.9 : Respondents' Occupation and Income

Sl. No.	Income brackets	Nongtalang			Nongpoh			Labour	Others	Total
		Culti- vation	Ser- vice	Busi- ness	Culti- vation	Ser- vice	Busi- ness			
1.	Upto Rs. 5,000	-	-	-	3	-	3	3	1	10
2.	Rs.5001 to Rs.10,000	35	9	6	3	-	1	6	-	60
3.	Rs.10,001 to Rs.15,000	26	10	2	6	5	7	2	5	63
4.	Rs.15,001 to Rs.20,000	5	2	4	6	3	6	-	5	31
5.	Rs.20,001 to Rs.25,000	-	-	-	3	4	3	-	2	12
6.	Rs.25,001 to Rs.30,000	-	-	1	3	3	6	1	1	15
7.	Rs.30,001 to Rs.35,000	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	2
8.	Rs.35,001 to Rs.40,000	-	-	-	3	1	1	-	-	5
9.	Rs.40,001 and above	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	2
All Income Groups		66	21	13	29	17	28	12	14	200

the respondents about the highest formal degree obtained by a living member of their family. There were 17 graduates in the families of the illiterate respondents, 4 post-graduates in the families of those educated upto Middle school, 1 from an Under-Matric respondent's family and 2 such degree holders from the respondents with Matric degree from the village of Nongtalang (Table 2.10). Similarly four intermediate degree holder respondents reported that they had graduates in their families. From Nongpoh only one illiterate respondent could report a living member with graduate degree. Respondents upto Middle school had as many as 5 graduates and one postgraduate in their families. Those of respondents with Matric degree themselves indicated that they had a Matric, 6 intermediate and one each of graduate and postgraduate degree holder in their families.

As much as 85 per cent respondents of Nongtalang said that all their friends and relatives were within their districts; 70 per cent of them informed that all their relatives were within Meghalaya and only 5 per cent of them could identify their relatives and friends outside India (Table 2.11). From Nongpoh 71 per cent respondents had their friends and 65 per cent their relatives within the district. Only one-third of them could identify their relatives and friends within the State. 16 per cent of them had their relatives and 7 per cent had their friends within India and only one could identify a relative and two others did so for their friends abroad outside India.

Table - 2.10: The Highest Degree held by a Living Member of Respondents' Family

Respondents' Educational Status	Nongtalang							Nongpoh							Total
	Number of Persons							Number of Persons							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Illiterates	1	6	8	9	17	-	6	5	1	1	-	1	-	55	
Upto Middle School	-	4	5	7	10	4	-	10	8	12	8	5	1	74	
Under Matric	-	2	2	4	1	1	-	-	10	4	3	1	-	28	
Matric	-	-	4	2	1	2	-	-	-	9	6	1	1	26	
Intermediate	-	-	1	1	4	-	-	-	-	2	2	3	-	13	
Graduate	-	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	
	1	12	20	25	35	7	6	15	19	28	19	11	2	200	

2.6. Ethnography of the Locale introduces the reader to the North Eastern Region as a communicationally handicapped region because of its geopolitical location. It has been rather late in catching up with its western Indian counterparts in terms of infrastructural facilities. The case of Meghalaya is an example of a forest based agrarian economy, in which in the absence of secondary sector of production, the service sector has increased faster. The best example is provided by the emerging urban centre of Nongpoh, an ex-Syiemsip of yesterday turned into a Sub-Divisional headquarters. Nongtalang presents the case of a handicapped tribal village in relative isolation on a topographically difficult location. For a rural tribal setting it is a large village with expanding population, rising expectations and widening horizon. We have provided various information on the respondents selected from two locales selected for the study. With this background we shall take our readers to the pattern of communication and information among the Khasi in the next chapter.

CHAPTER - III

SOCIAL AND HUMAN COMMUNICATION

Khasis (and Synteng, changed to Jaintia), children of an ancient mother, are a matrilineal community. At the family level, mother is the priestess and custodian of family rites. The mother, the maternal uncle and the father are revered as the makers of clan (Bareh, H. 1985:290). Father as the executive head of the new home occupies a very high place and is second to none but U Kni (i.e. maternal uncle). It is the father/who bears the burden of the daily life and the maternal uncle comes when it is a question of life or death (Gordon, P.R.T. 1914: 78-79). The youngest daughter inherits all the property. However, her other sisters also receive shares of inheritance from their mothers' family in the form of land, vessels, ornaments etc. After the marriage, a man is U Nongda (protector) and a woman Ka Nongri Iing (keeper of the house). Society is administered as per the tradition by Syiem (Chief), Myntris (Counsellors), Lyngdohs (Priests), sardars and headmen. The land based resources are divided into communal (Ri Raid), individual (Ri Kynti) and sacred (Law Lyngdoh). By tradition, Khasi economy was based on subsistence farming (jhumming and permanent cultivation), hunting and collecting, artisan work and horticultural products. Besides being good agriculturalists, the Khasis were hunters and warriors. There was an insipient state system, in which court culture was emerging.

3.1. Bareh mentions that the Syiems had a highly organized intelligence system. He refers to at least two cases of espionage

in which women used their feminine assets to vanquish the competing parties (Bareh, H. 1985:279). One of the main constituents of the Khasi troops were the spies (Nongsyntiat). The word Thma has special significance: Ka thma ka ktien i.e. waging of war arguments (the battle of words) and ka thma ka wait (the waging war with swords). Infrequently a single duel between two leaders were preferred to a large scale warfare. Such duels were started with an exchange of betel leaves and areca nuts among the two warriors. Iing Samla (male youth dormitories) were established in some of the villages in the vicinity of Jinang and Mawphu, where training in warfare and strategies were imparted. With a view to wishing a heroic future for a male child symbols of three arrows and a bow were used. In special cases consorts of female Syiems were brought on horse back accompanied by pipe music and beating of drums. A system of conveying special messages by means of knotted ^{Cords} (kyrwoh) were used by the Chiefs. (Shadap Sen, N.C. 1981:265).

3.1.2. Festivals and special dances: In every village and the hamlets there are dancing grounds, where men and women congregate for folk dances. In this context a special ^{mention} may be made of Ka Shad Rongkhla (Tiger dance) celebrated at Nongtalang. It so happens that if anybody kills a tiger, his clan must bring any part of tiger's body or in its absence even an effigy of the tiger and must arrange the dance with a view to getting rid of the community of disease thus caused. There are other festival dances in which men and women participate such as harvest dance. These are the occasions of social celebration, entertainment and rejoicing.

3.1.3. The Markets

The Khasis have their markets at every eight day, every fourth day and at places even every day. Both the places, Nongtalang (Dawki) and Nongpoh, the market plays a significant role in the villagers' lives. It has a commercial value because the villagers take their betel leaves, areca nuts, tejpatta, pine apples, vegetables, fruits, etc. to the markets. They buy consumer goods such as salt, tea, sugar, spices, meat, dry fish, clothes, medicines, stationery, toys etc. The business men - invariably non-tribals - come from Gauhati, Shillong and far away places for trading with the local people. The markets provides an opportunity to exchange visits, commodities and ideas. Of late even the politicians have been using markets for their political publicity. For the last some years educated villagers have been visiting markets for collecting print media such as newspapers and magazines and seeing the movies on mobile videos.

3.1.4. The Markets and the New Occupationals

Of late a number of educated Khasis have taken up the jobs of contractors for constructing public buildings and other installations and supplying various articles to the Government offices. Another class of new occupationals are business men - specially timber merchants who supply various types of logs, sawn timber, fuel wood, charcoal, bamboos, straw and other forest products to the urban centres. It is a common sight in the interior areas to see the villagers felling jungle trees, removing

the timber, leaving the branches to rot on the spot and taking the logged timber to the nearby timber depot for onward despatch to saw mills. It is a pathetic scene to see the yesterdays' famous evergreen rainfed dense forests of the Khasi Hills reduced to naked barren patch of land. To add to the deforestation, the Jaintia Hills of late has discovered coal under its soil. A number of villages have taken up coal mining on the fields and forests with the help of their kith and kin and at times hired labour. Another class of occupational - the truck owners, transporter, truck drivers and helpers, vulcanizers, coal merchants and suppliers, automobile spare parts salesmen and repairers - have emerged who frequently travel to Jowai and Shillong.

3.1.5. There is a daily private bus service besides the long distance buses between Nongpoh to Shillong. Similarly, from Nongtalang to Jowai there is a direct bus every day. As mentioned above it takes about 3 to 3.5 hours to reach Shillong from Nongtalang. Normally, it takes about 4 hours to travel to and come back from Shillong and costs about Rs. 20 to Rs. 30 to a Nongpoh resident. Similarly, to a Nongtalangite it takes about 6 to 7 hours for both ways journey to Shillong at the cost of Rs. 40 to Rs. 50. Similarly, a visit to and return from Jowai costs about Rs. 10 and 2.5 hours to a villager from Nongtalang. He has to spend about Rs. 5 and more than an hour from going to and returning from Jowai, his nearest market-cum-urban centre (See Table 3.1).

Table - 3.1: Time and Cost in Urban Visits

Travel from and to	Distance (one way)	Time taken (both ways)	Cost of the travel (both ways)
1. Nongpoh to Shillong	52 Km	4.0 hours	Rs.20 to Rs.30
2. Nongtalang to Shillong	115 Km	6 to 7 "	Rs.40 to Rs.50
3. Nongtalang to Jowai	50 Km	2 to 3 "	Rs.10 to Rs.15
4. Nongtalang to Dawki	15 Km	1 hour	Rs. 5

Normally it is the person concerned, who travels to Dawki, Jowai or Shillong from the two villages. However, in case a message was just^{to} be reached to and from a relative a business partner, an institution, the villagers use the courier service provided by the bus operators through the good offices of the bus drivers and conductors; and regular truck drivers. Such automobile operators frequently^{like} route very regularly, are known to the message senders personally and^{are} thoroughly reliable for the work assigned. These types of services are rendered almost free of charge. At times there are special treatments such^a a cup of tea and refreshment in the road side stalls, ^a peg of Indian made foreign spirited drinks, help in repairing the automobile on mechanical failures etc. One point may be noted that those who use the courier service are themselves parts of certain business ethics in which helping each other and oral promises mean so much. The two villages are still inseparable parts of the traditional communication pattern in which informality and mutual help and trust play significant roles.

3.2. The Traditional Instrument of Communication

The Khasi and Jaintia society had a status differential even before the British came to Meghalaya. The Raja, Syiem, Doloi, Sardars, Myntri, Lyngdoh, headman - the Bakharwal - were entitled special treatment befitting their location in the authority structure. Accordingly, they were entitled special apparel, ornamentation and precedence over the commoners. While any Khasi young man could use cotton turban, it were only the ruling officials like Doloi, Syiem etc., who were entitled silk turban (Bareh, H. 1985: 313). With the Khor (flowery design and decoration on the turban) and silk dhotis. Bareh refers one Linsays' observation on the Jaintia festival of combat between the elephants and buffaloes in the late 18th Century. The festival 'was inaugurated by the loud and hollow sound of the war drum (nagara) and the discordant tones of the conch shells announced a new arrival'. The 'sharati', the bamboo pipe, is used even today on the occasion of demise of important persons for lamentation of mourners. By tradition trumpets were blown to warn the villagers of the surprise invasion by their enemy. Various types of drums are played on festives, public demonstrations and sessions of the formal councils.

3.2.1. All men without consideration of age can dance, but dancing women should be a virgin. The spectators stand around the dancing court (Lympung shad) which is infrequently the site of a market place (iing shad). Music is played by beating of

drums (nakara or nalai) and by blowing pipes (tangmuri) in many transitions of tunes and arts. The art of music during the dances is divergent. Sword dance (shadwait) belongs to males and exhibits a type of old wardance, in which vigorous drum beating is resorted to. Among the Jaintia and Bhoi there are dances associated with cultivation and fertility. There are dances (longhai, shyrnai etc.) associated with agricultural activities such as removal of weeds from the fields and harvest (Lukhimai, Loho), which are performed with piped music and drum beating. There are various types of drums: Ka Sing Diengphong (made of reed or cane), Ka nakara (a kettle drum made of wood with head of deer skin), padiah (a small wooden drum), ka ksing kynthei (female drum played on occasion of female dance), katasa and sing navila (other small drums).

3.2.2. The common string instruments among the Khasi are: Duitara, made of wood with strings of 3 or 4 silk threads, Maryngod, another variation of duitara played with a bow, Maryn-thing has only a single thread, Sarong is played with a bow and has got three threads. Ka Duitara is considered as the queen of music for its inspired performance. The instrumentalists playing on it sing in the form of proverbs, lamentations and parables. At times they form impressive choral groups and engage themselves in debate along with music on their strings and eloquence on their words. Many themes, such as tales of wonder, magic, miracle,

philosophy, legend, romance etc. are mixed up in the singing of the Duitara players. Thus it is not only contributes to the field of music, but also gives expression to the Khasi thoughts and sentiments.

3.3. Symbolic Communication

Besides drums, trumpets and Duitara, the Khasis have evolved an intricate system of symbolic communication with the help of the Kwai (betel nut, betel leave and lime). It has clear cut procedures for its handling, sharing, distribution and consumption. It is leisurely prepared and chewed by young and old, men and women and, in fact, every Khasi during most of the day time. Its chewing raises the blood circulation and heat is felt in the body. It is believed that it helps people to work and walk for long hours without feeling thirsty, hungry and fatigued. The Khasi concept of supreme happiness is when one is able to chew kwai and has relaxed conversation. It is the women, who offer kwai to the men at all the levels. However, on the occasion of marriage, it is the maternal uncle of the bride, who offers kwai to the groom's maternal uncle signifying a welcome and beginning of the marriage rituals. It plays the same significant role during the burial of the dead. By tradition, the Khasis put kwai for the dead and say Bam kwai ha iing U Blei (chewing kwai peacefully at the house of God).

It is claimed that kwai offering mitigates the disadvantages to men and resolves the structural contradictions

among the Khasis. It does smother the creases and facilitated the communication to follow naturally (Mishra, P.K. 1987). It is never offered in silence; rather while extending the kwai, welfare of each other is solicited and related information are exchanged. In this way, it becomes a mediator between the actors who are pitted, if not as adversaries, as favoured and less favoured by the existing structure. In normal situation, kwai helps in prolonging casual interaction between acquaintances, friends, relatives and even strangers. It as well relates the world of dead with the world of living. The dead are supposed to be blissfully chewing kwai in their world. If there is a crisis in the living world, even the dead ones are requested to set things right by supplying the choicest unblemished kwai. In brief, any initiative - casual and serious - may begin naturally with exchange and chewing of the kwai.

3.4.1. Community Interaction at the Level of the Family

It is the mother, who holds the most strategic place in the Khasi family. As the community is matrilineal, female children are preferred. Among the daughters, Ka Khadduh, the youngest is the centre of attraction, as she is destined to inherit the ancestress' house, immovable property, ornaments, vessels, etc. as the custodian of the family line, priestess and caretaker of the old parents. A man, when he is bachelor, earns for his mother. A married man earns and contributes to the family budget. It is the maternal uncle, who is consulted for all significant

decisions in the family affairs. The maternal grand mother is the most revered person, followed by the mother, maternal uncle, father and elder sisters.

3.4.2. Community Interaction at the Village Level

A Khasi village, lineage and clan are significant in terms of a person's welfare. The headman, clan elders, the council of the clan uncles, Myntris, Lyngdohs are the guardians of the young ones of the village. As these village officials control the village resources such as land, forest, water, right of passage, etc. the younger generation look to them for guidance in the life and lore. After the conversion to Christianity the role of the church in the lives of the villagers has turned out to be another significant factor of restraint. The religious congregation on Sundays and other festival occasions has become obligatory. A new concept of morality, ethical value and a sense of affiliation has emerged. All of a sudden the relatively isolated Khasi village is now linked with the Christian world for extended than that of the clan, Syiemship and the Khasi Hills.

Christianity was introduced to the Khasi Hills some 150 years ago. In the beginning it was not a welcome trend. The converts, considered as the deviant, were just permitted to shift their residence in corner of the village and build their chapel, dispensary and primary school to begin with. One of the 8 hamlets of Nongtalang is known as the Mission Compound, away from the main thickly inhabited sector. Slowly and slowly the number of

the converts grew because of the concerted efforts of the missionaries through their preaching and persuasions, medical, education and other welfare activities. Apart from the priests and the missionaries, the newly converted, educated and enlightened Khasis helped in faster spread of the Christianity in the Khasi Hills. Unlike the Hindus and the Muslims elsewhere in the country, the Christian and non-Christian Khasis do not suffer from the concept of purity, pollution and food comensality. In this way, the converted Khasis continue to be acceptable to the believers of the indigenous faith. Both may join any congregation, seat with anybody and partake meals without inhibition. The conversion to the Christianity does not deter the non-converted Khasis from interacting with their Christian tribal counterparts.

3.4.3. An interesting interaction is going on at the village of Nongtalang. The Christians of the village host the annual/bi-annual congregations at the pastorage level for two to three days in a year. It is normally held from Friday to Sunday or Saturday to Sunday and a large number of Christians from all over the neighbouring churches participate in the discourse, discussion, sermon and prayers. For the Nongtalang Christians the last day of the congregation i.e. Sunday is specially very haxing as they have to provide, cook, serve food and accommodate their numerous guests besides they themselves take part in the various religious activities. Here they get spontaneous help from the non-Christian villagers in arranging for the food and

accommodation to the guests ungrudgingly as the guests come to the village. The missionaries run dispensaries and schools have earned enough goodwill for the Church. The Christians hold various types of religious congregations at Jowai and Shillong on various occasions. The school children under the guidance of their teachers irrespective of the faith attend these meetings. They get free ride to and fro Jowai/Shillong and free food from the organizers. The choral singing bus loads of school children on occasions are common sight in Shillong. The organizers send the message in advance and a good number of buses are specially chartered for the occasion.

3.5. The rural Khasi world continues to be largely traditional, where a few formal communications are sent in the either direction. However, it goes without saying that these villages are no more isolates. The roads - metalled and unmetalled - have reached the villages. A rudiment of postal service has been ~~in~~ introduced. Wheeled transportation is no more a curiosity, rather it has become inseparable to more mobile villagers. Schools have been opened and thus literacy is ^{no} more magic words: it is within the easy reach of the villagers. Not only that, even a few copies of vernacular newspapers and magazines find their patrons among the villagers. A most significant fact is that the village economy is meaningfully linked with the national monetary system by raising cash crops for marketing. Bartering of the commodities ^{was the} is practice of the past. With this changing scenario, a

new class of neo-rich contractor-cum-politician-cum-business men have emerged on the scene. In fact, this section of the villagers need the formal communication most. And in the process they are the link between the traditional rural setting and urban-industrial India, which is looming large on the scene.

CHAPTER - IV

THE COMMUNICATION SCENARIO

4.0. We have seen the overall social and human communication pattern among the Khasi of Meghalaya. In this chapter we propose to analyse various aspects of communication at the two sites selected for the field study. Firstly, we would like to describe various communication centre. Secondly, we will introduce locales of interactions. Thirdly, we would like to examine various types of entertainment centres. Fourthly, we propose to inform the readers of the varieties of Khasi films and the environment of the Khasi cinema houses. And lastly, we shall like to examine the use of the mass media for entertainment, information, education and development in Meghalaya.

4.1.0. The chapter II above provides the information base for the two selected villages. Nongtalang is a compactly settled village of 8 hamlets spread in an oval shape. Nongpoh has 4 hamlets scattered around in a circular manner. 85 per cent and 80 per cent villagers are cultivators at Nongtalang and Nongpoh respectively. While 11 per cent Nongpoh residents are businessmen, another 9 per cent are employed in the various formal organizations and institutions. 15 per cent residents are engaged in a variety of works such as trading, shop keeping, teaching, forest contract and other sundry occupations at Nongtalang. This village falls under Dawki Development Block, Amlarem Sub-division and Jaintia Hills District (Jowai). For Nongpoh its Development Block is located at Umling (about a distance of 10 Km on the

National Highway to Gauhati), Sub-divisional headquarters at Nongpoh itself and the district headquarters at Shillong. Shillong, Gauhati, Nayabungla, Umling and Barapani are the significant communication centres in that order for Nongpoh. For Nongtalang, Dawki, Jowai, Shillong and Amlarem are the communication and business centres in that order.

4.1.1. Communication and Transportation

Besides the human beings carrying the goods on their back and shoulders, trucks, jeeps with trollies, lorries, taxis, buses and minibuses are used at both the places for transporting goods and commodities. For the passengers they use buses, jeeps and occasionally taxis on the important routes to the district and capitals. At times loaded and partly loaded trucks are used by human transportation. A unique feature on the interior routes such as Nongtalang from Shillong is the famous and versatile bazar bus. They ply on fixed dates and times between the destinations. These are wretched and over-worked wooded structures, over-laden with passengers and all possible commodities on the roof, footboard, and even on the ladder behind. The passengers are packed in the bus like tinned sardins and perched high on the top. It is a miracle that these over-used automobiles still ply. For Nongtalang besides Shillong and Jowai, the most frequented markets are Dawki, Muktapur, Umpiong and Mulong - all within a radius of 15 Kms. Nongpoh boasts of cycle rickshaws, bicycles and three-wheelers for local travel.

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4.1.2. Both the villages have basic medical facilities and educational institutions (upto college level) so that these purposes one need not go outside the village. As their district headquarters are located at Jowai and Shillong respectively, they travel occasionally for administrative necessities. Nongpoh is linked with Shillong for postal and telegraphic networks. Nongtalang post office receives and sends its postal mails via Dawki branch post office. Their nearest telephone and telegraph office is Dawki at a distance of 15 Kms. A person has to travel to Dawki for any telecom service. It may cost him about Rs.40 (Fare Rs. 5 + food refreshments Rs. 10 + a day's wage @ Rs.25 per day) to visit telecom office. Assuming that he would spend for sending the message or talking to the other party depending on his urgency, time spent and the range of the contact, every successful call saves a Nongtalang resident a minimum of Rs. 40 plus physical exertion. However, the telecom devices at Dawki are allged to be perennially out of order, or locked out, or the relevant man is not available or they reach beyond the office hours.

4.1.3. Post, Telegraph, Telephone and Wireless:

Nongtalang post office is in existence ^{since} in 1956 and has a small staff of four persons. It sells postal stationery, books registered and ensured letters and money orders and distributed mails and money orders. Nongpoh post office is an established one since the British days with a monthly transaction of Rs. 3 lakhs. The telegraph office is also attached to it. The telegrams

The telegrams are routed through Shillong for its onward transmission. So far telephone is concerned, consumers complain that it is invariably out of order and they are just paying the rent. The wireless is located at the police station and it is almost exclusively used for the administrative purposes such as informing the authorities of road blocks due to landslides or an automobile accident etc. However, the common people rarely use it as a means of communication.

4.1.4. Nongpoh Post Office

This Sub-divisional post office, with 15 branches and as much as 40 members of the staff, is in its own campus with the residence of the Post Master attached to. Besides the normal sales of postal stationery, it sells good number of National Saving Certificates. Upto 1976 the post office is used to even ensure cash amount of money. Normally, it receives and dispatches approximately 120 post cards, 100 inland letters, 100 envelopes, 6 to 15 registered letters and 4 to 5 telegrams daily. So far postal mail is concerned, it is linked with the regular Mail Service. However, with regards to telegrams, there is no regular telegraphic connection from Nongpoh. First of all telegrams are sent by post to Shillong G.P.O, from there it is sent to C.T.O. and only then it is transmitted on wards ~~its~~ destination. In such a situation, customers send telegrams through this circuitous and time consuming way only when they are desperate.

4.1.5. Nongpoh Telephone Exchange

It is functioning on paper since 1985 with 5 members

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of staff. They rarely get the connection with their main exchange at Shillong. In the words of a telephone operator: "We have no work because telephone exchange is not functioning properly. We are not getting connection from the Shillong Exchange. Therefore, consumers are also not getting it." It is alleged that the exchange is out of order for as much as 200 days in a year. (Dawki telephone exchange (Nongtalang) was out of order for 366 days in 1979). The customers are just paying 'donation' (charges) without any service. When pressed for such an urgent need, they take help of messengers and couriers. The situation is so desperate that Sub-Divisional Officer, Civil, has been sending messengers or using wireless for transmitting the messages. Same is the case with the Superintendent, Food and Civil Supply and Manager, Meghalaya Apex Bank, who had been either travelling to Shillong at the cost of other work or sending messengers or using courier services. Superintendent, Food and Civil Supply, Nongpoh, was so desperate that he said, "Sometimes I feel like throwing the telephone connection out, but being a government servant, I cannot do that."

4.1.6. Automobile Stand and the Courier Service

As both the places are located on significant road route between the important towns, buses, taxis and other automobiles stop over at both the places. The Meghalaya Transport Corporation maintains its stand at both the places, which are used by the private bus operators, taxi drivers and other commuters. At both the places important messages, letters and light articles

are sent through friends, relatives and couriers regularly. In view of the low credibility of the telecom services at Nongpoh, messages sent through the courier service reach either Gauhati, Shillong or any place on the road within two hours. For sending messages beyond Shillong and Gauhati they take help of the postal service.

4.2.0. Interactional Centres

4.2.1. Temples and Churches

There are two Hindu temples and two Christian Churches at Nongpoh. The temple caters to the needs of the business, service and other types of floating population from Assam, Bihar, Bengal, Nepal and Orissa. As it is a Vaishnava temple various sets of worship, celebrations and rituals are organized on festive occasions such as Krishna Janamasthmi, etc. Besides the regular Brahmin priest, there are roving holy saints, who take shelter at the temple. Its role as a sacred shrine for the Hindus is rather subdued and lacks anything overtly public. On the other hand, the Christian Churches, because of the patronage they receive from the local tribal population, have regular Sunday prayers, where villagers congregate irrespective of linguistic and denominational barriers. A number of welfare activities such as education, medical, help to destitutes etc. are organized through the church. Marriages and baptism are also organized at the Church.

The Presbyterian Church at Nongtalang has the same function as that of its counterparts at Nongpoh. At times special

even annual and bi-annual conference of the Diocese are organized through these churches, in which large number of villagers assemble. Similarly, whenever some special function, congregation, communion, sermon, procession etc. are organized at Shillong by the apex bodies of various church organizations, these churches send bus - loads of their faithful members from these villages.

4.2.2. Bazars, Bus Stands and Playgrounds

There are community dancing grounds in both the villages, and dances are still very much part of the Khasi cultural life at Nongtalang. The dancing ground is also usef for football matches, holding meetings and other congregations. At times archery is also organized on these grounds. However, the residents of both of the villages are inveterate archers and whenever they happen to be at Shillong, they make it a point to visit teer sight and bet on it. Of late there has been village community halls constructed at both the villages for holding village Durbars (Courts) and other meetings. It is all the more useful during the rainy seasons.

Scholars have studied the cultural role of the tribal markets (Sinha, D.P. 1967). The village weekly markets serve as informal occasion and venue for exchange of information. New fashions, novel articles and attractive alien objects are introduced in the villages through these markets. The weekly bazars at both the villages attract a big number of salesmen, customers

and sundry visitors who travel to markets for meetings friends and relatives and exchanging ideas, information and news.

Near these bazars on the highway there are the bus stands in both the villages. At Nongtalang the bus stand is a modest one with mean looking eating houses around. However, the Nongpoh bus stand is a famous landmark on the Gauhati-Shillong Highway, where almost every driver stops for a cup of tea, refreshment, or buying fruits, vegetables, honey or wine. It is an important commercial centre with a number of shops of various types. Among them there are as many as 15 eating houses. Some of these eating houses are spacious enough to accommodate as much as 150 chairs at a time. Their working hours begins early morning at 6 a.m. and are stretched for 15 hours a day. They serve snacks, lunch, dinner, sweets and other delicacies, which are normally not local dishes. There are restaurants for the vegetarians and then there are others for jadoh (Jaintia pulao). There are eating houses serving rice and curry, pork and beef for the predominantly local tribal clients. By the side of these eating houses, are the inevitable kwai (betel) stalls, selling soft drinks, toffees, biscuits, cigarettes etc. besides the betel leaves and betel nuts. And just on the corner there is the shop of the newspaper vendor. This joint of trio shops - reataurants, Kwai stalls and news vendors - is the key place around which the idel youth of the locality hang on exchanging their notes on various issues ranging from the girls' changing

hair style to the World Disarmament Conference. And note very far are the three video parlours located, where these young people might have a longer seating.

4.3.0. It is claimed that Khasis possess an innate ability to initiate, assimilate and adopt themselves to the world outside (Majaw, M.N. 1971: 166). Such abilities were further channelized through the influence of the Western Missionaries with Christian church, schools and other institutions. Thus, Western thought appearance and behaviour came to permeate the entire Khasi way of life. Within no time the western musical tunes and instruments such as drums and guitar turned to be part of the Khasi cultural life. In this context, with the emergence of Shillong as the most westernized and cosmopolitan city in the region during the last 100 years, certain perceptible developments occurred in the cultural life of the Meghalayans. Firstly, western music, dance, concerts and performances came to be patronized by the hotels, clubs, tea planters, education, and other occasions. Secondly, Shillong came to be recognized as a centre for indigenously made musical instruments such as guitar and drums.

4.3.1. Besides music and dance, Khasis are a sports loving people. In most of the villages there is the dancing ground (Lympung Shad) for the traditional community dances such as tiger dance at Nongtalang. Such grounds are used by the students of the village primary schools as their football ground. It has been noted (as in the case of Nongtalang) that the Christian Missionaries begin their modest church establishment in the form

of a chapel, dispensary and primary school at the other end of the village. Slowly and slowly, the ground around these establishments are levelled to turn it into an open space for games and sports. In both the villages, these grounds are used by the young people for the games of football and ^evolly ball.

4.3.2. " The favourite game of the Khasis, archery/was origina- 91
ted from the myth of Ka Mei Nonghukum, and played between the H
brothers. In course of time, it came to be played between the
villages. By tradition, each competing party selects one of its
elders as the U Nongkam for invoking the wishes of the ancestress
2/ mother of their side. Originally the archers played for the glory
of their villages or display of individual skill. Now each side
selects four best archers (who shoot last of all) to count the
number of archers taking part on both sides and to check that
each archer is holding an agreed number of arrows. When every-
thing is set, shooting starts one side after the other. Winnder 8/
is determined by the four selected archers after counting the
maximum number of hits on the targets. Then the winning side
dances on the playground itself holding their arrows high and
calling the losing side names to the tuned rhyme of Ki Phawar
(the couplets). It is said that this dance has greatly enriched
the Khasi literature through the practice of composing couplets.

The traditional game of archery has now been turned into gambling of arrows (teer). For the first time this teer gambling was introduced at Shillong in 1935 with a view to raising funds during the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the coronation

of King George V. Since then it was frequently used as a way to raise funds for some good cause. It is normally played on significant festive occasions such as Independence Day. However, it is no more a game played for the sake of the funds. It has degenerated into gambling on number of arrows hitting the target (skum). Whoever bets on the correct number, gets the stake of money offered i.e. a bet of Re.1 may fetch Rs. 80 as dividend. In this case dreams are claimed to have significance in number of the teer. They are interpreted into numbers. For example a dead man dreamt to be signifies number 9; a marriage 88; a pair of lovers 56 and so on. A correctly matched dream fetches rewards. "So in Shillong even dreams ^{fetch} felt money" (Khongwir, R.J. 1979: 164).

Needless to say that besides the urbanites a number of rural folk visit Shillong on specific days - specially the market days with their agricultural products to sell them out. They prefer to return by the evening. In between they visit hotels and restaurants; occasionally watch football match either at Pologround or Garrison grounds; and stake their bets on the teers. Of late dozens of licensed teer stalls have been opened, where bookies book the abettors. Some of the rural visitors decide to stay back in Shillong for the night and they frequently visit the cinema houses and restaurants and attend to musical evenings for entertainment.

4.4.0. Cinema and Films

Though the Assamese were the premier movie makers of

the Indian film industry, full length feature films in Assamia and Manipuri - the two most developed regional languages - were produced much ^{later} better. With the recognition of statehood for Meghalaya and Mizoram, Khasi, Garo and Mizo languages came to be recognized as the state languages and slowly emerging as significant languages of the region. Specially Khasis are a culturally conscious people, who are rightly proud of their traditions. They have talented individuals, who excelled in the western music and instruments, organized themselves into professional concerts and turned out to be successful professional singers performing in various cities ^{for} decades (Majaw, M.N. 1976). In such an environment, it is surprising that it took long to experiment with movie making.

4.4.1. The first full length feature film in Khasi, Ka Ri Ki Laiphew Syiem was produced in 1983 and was proudly screened at the State Central Library Hall (Shillong) for a select audience. Since then two more features ^{films} have been produced. They are I Mei Jongnga and Manik Raitong. More than a dozen (15) video films have been produced during the last five years. In the first four (1983 to 1986) ^{years} only 5 such films were produced. However, it pick-^{made}ed up from 1987 onwards as about half a dozen films were ^{made} in last year. Most of these films have comedy, musical, romance, dance, even education as their themes.

4.4.2. Environment of a Khasi Cinema Halls

Most of the cinema halls in Shillong are located in a crowded commercial-cum-residential localities with limited

open space and much less facilities for the public conveniences. In most of the cases the picture halls are old with tainted walls, broken furniture and seats full of bugs. They screen Hindi, English, Bengali, and occasionally Assamia, Nepali and a few other commercial feature films on the regular shows. The shows begin at 11 a.m. and go up to 10.30 p.m. Most of the time, there is the 'housefull' of the spectators to the extent that it is difficult for a casual visitor to buy a cinema ticket from the open counter between 12 noon to 5.30 p.m. One invariably encounters black marketeers selling cinema tickets right in front of the ticket counter on any day during the busy shows. The audience cheerfully chew their betel nuts, spit around leisurely and smoke with relish inside the picture halls. There may be infants and children in good number hawling and crying in laps of their proud parents. In fact, it is a homely, relaxed and leisurely crowd.

4.4.3. Of late small establishments of video parlours have come side by side the cinema halls in most of the urban centres. It may be a restaurant or a part of a hotel or any room big enough to accommodate between 15 to 50 persons in a parlour. It invariably screens a Western English cowboy type of movie on the theme of musical, romance, dance or sheer violence. It is alleged that they screen films on pornography on odd hours to select gathering. At times pirated popular Hindi films are also screened. As these establishments cost relatively a smaller sum, they do a good business. The young westernized tribal folk crowd these stalls. It seems that the cinema halls and the video

parlours have come to co-exist side by side and accordingly they have divided their viewers. Invariably they function in proximity with each other and do good business with their specific patrons.

4.4.4. We had noted in the past: "In this (entertainment) context, two points are to be kept in mind. Firstly, the cinema halls are available only in the urban areas. Since there are few urban centres in the hills, there are fewer cinema halls in these states. Secondly, in these states folk dances and other theatrical performances are very popular in the rural areas" (Sinha, A.C. 1986: 67). Among the two sides of our study none of them possess a cinema hall. The villagers have to travel to Jowai and Shillong for a cinema show. However, in the case of Nongpoh, the situation has improved with establishment of three video parlours, which attract even those rural video viewers, who normally do not get chance to visit Shillong for entertainment. With the setting up of the Black & White community television sets at 630¹ important villages, one hopes the Meghalayans will have a better access to entertainment. To ^{begin} ~~big~~ with 10 television sets will be installed in each of 60 Assembly Constituencies and another 30 on the relatively isolated villages on the Bangladesh border.

4.5.0. Media Exposure

At both the villages audio-visual and print media are available. Among the former television, video and radio are

1. The Shillong Times, October 13, 1988.

accessible to the villagers either in the village itself or the towns which they visit frequently. We have stated above the cinema and the video scenario. So far television is concerned, there is no production studio in Meghalaya. Thus they depend on the national-hook-up for the software. Radio continues to be a tried and conventional medium, which caters to a wide range of objectives and tastes of Meghalayans. Even in such a situation, Nongpoh viewers patronage Gauhati television station (22%) for its Hindi programmes for more than 50 minutes daily.

4.5.1. All India Radio, Shillong

It broadcasts various programmes for 11 hours (660 minutes) daily from 6 a.m. to 10.30 p.m. Besides its broadcast it has its production unit at Shillong. Again apart from the national programmes, it produces its own broadcasting materials in Khasi, Garo, Mizo and Jaintia languages. With a view to understanding its wide impact on the audience, we tried to analyze the contents of its programme (Table 4.1). About half of the broadcast (44.29%)

Table - 4.1: Content Analysis of the Weekly Radio Programme on AIR, Shillong.

Sl. No.	Types of programs	Minutes spent	Percent of total time
1.	Entertainment	2,046	44.29
2.	Information	1,225	26.52
3.	Development	490	10.61
4.	Educational	255	5.52
5.	Miscellaneous	595	12.88
Total		4,611	99.82

is spent on entertainment, one-fourth (26.52%) on information and one-eighth (12.88%) of it on miscellany. Themes on development (10.61%) and education (5.52%) occupy a lower weightage. Nongpoh residents patronize AIR, Shillong (58%) and Gauhati (38%) for Khasi (98%), Hindi (45%) and English (42%) programmes for 10 minutes (6%), about half an hour (17%) and for about an hour (46%) every day.

4.5.2. Print Media

Among the newspapers Dongmusa (Khasi, Shillong), 'Shillong Times' (Shillong) and 'Telegraph' (Calcutta) are read in both the villages. The Paila Ksiar (Jaintia) and Apphira (Khasi), the tabloids in the local languages are preferred at Nongtalang and Nongpoh respectively. Besides them the 'Times of India' (Delhi), 'Statesman' (Calcutta), 'Sentinel' and 'Assam Tribune' (Gauhati), 'Sunday' (Calcutta), 'India Today' (Delhi) and 'Illustrated Weekly of India' (Bombay) have readers at Nongpoh. They prefer Khasi (51%) and English (30%) language papers and spend about an hour (62%) on reading it daily. We tried to analyse the contents of the banners of the two most well read local newspapers, Dongmusa and Shillong Times, universally patronized by the educated youth of both the villages. We read both the newspapers for nine months from January 1 to September 30, 1988 (Table 4.2). We found that education and development were accorded low priority in the coverage of both the papers. While Dongmusa provided more news on entertainment, Shillong Times chose to provide for Information. Needless to add that more than half of the banners (180 for the

former and 151 for the latter out of 274 days each) were not concerned with either entertainment, information, education or development.

Table - 4.2: Content Analysis of Two Daily Papers from Shillong, January 1 to September 30, 1988

Sl. No.	Themes	Dongmusa	Shillong Times
		No.	No.
1.	Entertainment	38	-
2.	Education	13	9
3.	Information	13	96
4.	Development	30	18
5.	Any other	112	76
6.	No. Information	68	75
Total		274	274

4.5.3. Both the villages appear to be dependent on the radio (84% and 71%) for a number of reasons. Television, cinema and newspapers have been able to influence Nongtalang (Table 4.3) in a better way than that of Nongpoh. Only two respondents from Nongtalang reported that they visit cinema house for Hindi and English pictures twice a month. Between the two, Nongpoh villagers are more used to visiting video parlours and reading newspapers. The reasons are not far to be found. Inexpensive video parlours and 9 relatively fresh newspapers naturally attract them. They prefer social themes (45%) on the video in Hindi (36%),

English (22%) and Khasi (5%) languages and watch the video shows from 2-3 hours (34%) to 6 hours (8%) every day.

Table - 4.3: Respondents' Media Exposure

Sl. No.	Media	Nongtalang		Nongpoh		Total
		Yes	No	Yes	No	
1.	Radio	84	16	71	29	200
2.	Television	58	42	22	78	200
3.	Cinema	86	14	16	84	200
4.	Video	29	71	42	58	200
5.	Newspapers	42	58	62	38	200
6.	Magazines	16	84	9	91	200

4.6. The communication scenario presented in this chapter takes the readers to two locales of the study. We have described the status of communication amenities - specially postal and telecommunication - at both the locales. We have noted that while postal service has an amount reliability, telecom is a shame to itself. In such a situation, it is natural for the customers to turn to other informal arrangements. We have discussed various interactional and recreational centres for the two villages. At last, we have examined the media exposure of our respondents through audio-visual and print media. It continues to be an inadequately served region in terms of communication. We shall further examine many of these issues through Chapter V, when we shall be examining the telecommunication scenario.

CHAPTER - V

THE TELECOMMUNICATION SCENARIO

The Chapter IV on Communication Scenario provided the background in terms of transportation network, communication centres, different points of interaction, various sets of entertainments, Khasi films and cinema houses for the two locales of the study. We also examined the available audio-visual and print media in terms of entertainment, information, educational and developmental contents of it. Taking the discussion further in the same direction, this chapter is devoted to telecommunication scenario at two locales of the study in particular and Meghalaya in general. First of all we propose to map out the existing postal communication amenities such as postcards, envelopes and registered letters. Secondly, we would like to detail the situation in which the postal and telecom messages are sent from the two locales. Thirdly, we wish to analyse the situation, types, contents and the factors inhibiting the spread of telecommunications. Fourthly, we propose to enquire of our respondents how much did they use the telegraphic facility in the previous year. Fifthly, we intend to know the respondents' views on the location of telephone in their locality and the factor of cost on the number of telegram to be sent. And lastly, we wish to identify the top ten users of the postal services, telegrams and telephones.

5.1.0. The normal channel of communication at Nongtalang is by sending messengers to the destination, a practice largely

about one-third each of the respondents from both the villages informed that they did not have relatives within the state.

More than half (52%) of Nongtalang respondents and about one-fourth of Nongpoh (24%) do not write letters to their relatives, friends and others (Table 5.1). About one-third (34%) respondents from Nongpoh sent telegrams to their relatives once in a week in one case, once in a fortnight in another, once in a month in 6 cases and once in a year in as many as 26 cases. Only 12 per cent respondents from Nongtalang sent telegrams to their relatives regularly and two such persons to their friends. None from Nongtalang, because of its non-availability, and only two from Nongpoh claimed to telephone their relatives once in a year.

Table - 5.1: Respondents' Postal and Telecom Needs

Types of Media and Frequency	Nongtalang		Period	Nongpoh	
	Relatives	Friends		Relatives	Friends
<u>Letters</u>					
1 to 2	14	17	Weekly	11	1
3 to 4	21	17	Fortnightly	10	1
5 to 6	13	9	Yearly	47	19
7 and more	-	-	Yearly	5	17
None	36	46	-	3	38
<u>Telegrams</u>					
1 to 2	12	12	Weekly	1	-
3 to 4	-	-	Fortnightly	1	-
5 to 6	-	-	Monthly	6	-
7 and more	-	-	Yearly	26	-
None	36	46	-	42	76
<u>Telephones</u>					
No one	-	-	Fortnightly	2	-
None	48	48	-	74	76

5.1.3. Occasion for Postal and Telecom Messages

We enquired of 10 institutions at both the places in what situations various types of communications did they use. All the respondents from both do not feel the need for using telephone. 75 per cent felt the need for sending telegrams for most urgent and confidential messages. Postcards are used for simple information at the places. It appears no much of distinction is made between inland letters and envelopes, as 80 per cent Nongtalang and 50 per cent Nongpoh institutions use them for what they consider as secret, confidential and not important in nature. Besides that inland letters at Nongpoh appear to be more acceptable as they are used for ^{family} ~~fauntly~~ affairs, marriages and greetings, festivals and home based business purposes. The above picture was confirmed by the individual respondents. Postcards are used for simple domestic information (96%), inland and envelopes for secret and confidential purposes (96%), telegrams for urgent social situations (84%) and greetings (90%) and in special and urgent cases such as death telephone is used at Nongtalang.

Table - 5.2: Use of Messaging Media at Nongpoh

Sl. No.	Messaging Media	Family affairs	Illness	Death	Confidential	Greetings	Others	N.A.	Total
1.	Postcard	12	1	-	-	-	-	63	76
2.	Inland letters/ Envelopes	37	31	16	11	20	12	26	153
3.	Telegrams	16	14	18	-	3	1	46	98
4.	Telephones	1	-	-	-	1	-	74	76

Nongpoh respondents appear to be more discriminating. Maybe because of its poor reliability, telephone is rarely used, except for calling and greeting the relatives in extremely urgent situations. Besides the above two purposes, telegrams are sent mainly for social reasons such as death in the family (18%), illness (14%), and family affairs like marriage (16%). It appears that inland letters and envelopes are used for all the purposes as postal service continues to be reliable. These are used for family affairs (37%), illness in the family (31%), greetings for birth day and festivals (20%), information about death (16%), and other confidential messaging (11%). It also appears that postcards are not taken seriously, only about one-eighth of the respondents use it for domestic and family affairs.

5.2.1. Telegrams: Situations, Type and Contents

We wanted to identify the institutions and individuals sending Ordinary, Express and Reply Paid telegrams from our fields. As such facilities are not available, Nongtalang respondents did not reply to the question. At Nongpoh 'urgent messages' require ordinary telegrams, and death, sickness and calling a relative necessitate Express telegrams. Other uses of Ordinary telegrams are death and sickness, business and official works. It looks that Reply Paid telegrams are not within the fancy of the Meghalayan consumers. In case one ranks it, staff and officials of institutions constitute two-thirds of the telegrams senders followed by the businessmen and the farmers. The predominant purpose of telegrams appears to be official, followed

by family crisis (death) and rejoicing (marriage, festivals), calling the relatives for urgent consultation and business and commercial interests. Incidentally, all the telegrams are hand written in Roman script.

5.2.2. Enquired of the compelling situation in which the respondents would like to send telegrams, about half of Nongpoh and one-fourth from Nongtalang replied in the negative. Various types of greetings constitute more than half of the desired telegrams from Nongtalang. Marriage (5%), recalling a relative (7%), illness (7%) and a lack of feeling for sending telegrams are the other compulsive situations at Nongtalang (Table 5.3). Out of 47 per cent positive responses from Nongpoh death (14%), illness (14%), marriage (7%), recalling relatives and seeking for their welfare (3% each) and greeting are significant considerations.

Table - 5.3: Compulsive Situations for Sending Telegrams

Sl. No.	Villages	Illness	Death	Marriage	Greetings	Recalling	Welfare	Others	N.A.	Total
1.	Nongtalang	7	-	5	51	7	-	5*	25	100
2.	Nongpoh	14	14	7	2	3	3	4	53	100
	Total	21	14	12	53	10	3	9	78	200

*Don't feel like sending.

There were only two Express telegrams sent from Nongtlang; one, for informing the addressee of his grand mother's death and asking for his return and the other, for discussing and setting the family affairs. So far Nongpoh was concerned only 34 per cent respondents sent the following telegrams (Table 5.4).

Table - 5.4: Contents and Types of Telegrams sent from Nongpoh

Sl. No.	Contents	Types of Telegrams		N.A.	Total
		Ordinary	Express		
1.	Come son for Death Rituals	2	3	-	5
2.	Mother/Brother/Father/Son died	-	6	-	6
3.	Illness of Father/Brother	3	3	-	6
4.	Come for Marriage	4	2	-	6
5.	Comme immediately	2	3	-	5
6.	Come birthday/child birth	-	2	-	2
7.	Give news of welfare	1	1	-	2
8.	There is tension for land come soon	-	1	-	1
9.	Come soon to Husband	1	-	-	1
10.	Send Money	1	-	-	1
11.	Send Goods immediately	1	-	-	1
12.	N.R.	1	-	-	1
13.	Not Applicable	-	-	66	66
Total		16	21	66	103

5.2.3. Inhibiting Factors in Telegraphic Message

Because of their own experience of working with the telegraphic system only Nongpoh institutions could react to it. For them it continues to be a time taking process, delays the

message, does not work properly and not reliable for sending the messages. Cost, distance, language, education, and socio-psychological factors were not seen as problems. The Nongpoh respondents believed that the telegraphic system at Nongpoh was complicated, was not maintained properly and, thus, they had little faith in its working. The Nongtalang respondents were not aware of the various inhibitive factors in telegraphic spread except the two: its non-availability at their place and its non-functioning at Dawki. So far Nongpoh is concerned, the respondents were unanimous that the system was unreliable, as when approached it was found out of order and when the message was accepted for onward transmission, it was sent through postal mail at a considerable delay. Seasonal cycles, agricultural operations and marriage seasons do not affect telegraphic traffic in a big way in Meghalaya.

5.2.4. Telegraphic Message during the Last Year

We enquired of our respondents whether they sent any telegrams during the last year. Nobody from Nongtalang sent any telegraphic message anywhere during the last year. Ninety per cent of them did not feel the need for doing so. However, ten per cent of them felt the need of sending telegraphic messages (Table 5.5.) on the eve of the Christmax (5), New Year (2), birth of a child, success in examination and trouble in business (one each) to friends (4), brother (2), sister, cousin, nephew and daughter (one each) to Calcutta, Manipur, Gauhati (2 each), Dibrugarh, Tura, Shillong and Bombay (one each).

One-fourth of Nongpoh respondents sent small (13), medium (10) and big (2) Express telegrams within the district (4), State (19), country (1) and abroad (1). Similarly, 80 per cent respondents sent small (4) and medium (76%). Ordinary telegrams within the state (8%) and the country (72%), as per the Table 5.6. Only 11 per cent Nongpoh respondents desired to send telegrams during the last year. They wanted to do so on the Christmas (3), illness (3), marriage (2), birthday, family tension and death (one each) with a message on festival celebration (3), illness and tension in the family (3), birth day, marriage, wife's misbehaviour, return home and just to call on to brothers (4), father (2), sisters (3), husband and friend (one each) from a distance of 50 miles and beyond.

5.2.5. We enquired the respondents, why they did not send the telegrams in the previous year. Ninety-one per cent respondents from Nongtalang and 77 per cent from Nongpoh provided various reasons. At Nongtalang half of them did not feel the need of sending a telegram and 29 per cent did not do so because the facility was not available to them (Table 5.7). Similarly, Nongpoh respondents felt that sending messengers and letters serve better purpose (24%), they had been visiting their friends and relatives frequently (17%), their friends and relatives were around their place (10%) and the telegram did not serve their purpose. Other interesting answers were the following: No faith in telegraph system (4% Nongpoh); Transport facility is more

Table - 5.5: Telegraphic Messages Proposed to be sent

Categories	Nongtalang	Nongpoh	Total
<u>Occasions</u>			
'X'Mas	5	3	8
Illness	-	3	3
New Year	2	-	2
Death	-	1	1
Marriage	-	2	2
Examination Result	1	-	1
Birthday	1	1	2
Family Tension	-	1	1
Business Problem	1	-	1
			21
<u>Messages</u>			
Happy Xmas	5	3	8
Happy New Year	2	-	2
Illness in Family	-	3	3
Congratulation on Success in Examination	1	-	1
Disfunctioning of Business	1	-	1
A New Baby is born	1	-	1
Just come Home	-	2	2
Misbehaviour of wife	-	1	1
Come for Marriage	-	1	1
Come for Birthday	-	1	1
			21
<u>To Whom</u>			
Friend	4	1	5
Father	-	2	2
Sister	1	3	4
Brother	2	4	6
Nephew	1	-	1
Daughter	1	-	1
Cousin	1	-	1
Husband	-	1	1
			21

Table - 5.6: Size and Radius of the Desired Telegrams from Nongpoh

Type of Telegrams	SIZE				RADIUS				
	Small	Medium	Big	Total	Within Dis- trict	Within State	Within country	Abroad	Total
Express	13	10	2	25	4	19	1	1	25
Ordinary	4	76	-	80	-	8	72	-	80
Total	17	86	2	105	4	27	73	1	105

Table - 5.7: Reasons for not sending Telegrams

Sl. No.	Reasons	Nongtalang	Nongpoh	Total
1.	Need did not arise	51	4	55
2.	Does not serve our purpose	-	6	6
3.	Sending Messengers and letters are more useful	-	24	24
4.	Facility is not available	29	-	29
5.	No faith in system	-	4	4
6.	Transport facility is more effective	5	4	9
7.	Lack of money/address	-	3	3
8.	All relative and friends are here	-	10	10
9.	They visit us every week	-	3	3
10.	We visit them frequently	-	17	17
11.	Telegraph Office is far away	3	-	3
12.	It is taken for sadness	2	1	3
13.	Don't send it for simple information	1	-	1
14.	No contacts for 12 years	-	1	1
15.	Not Applicable	9	23	32
Total		100	100	200

Table - 5.8: Nos of Telegrams Proposed to be sent if cost is reduced

Units	Yes	No	Total
Nongtalang	93	7	100
Nongpoh	74	26	100
Total	167	33	200

effective (5% and 4%); it is taken for sad news (2% and 1%); lack of money; the visitors come themselves; telegraph office is far away (3% each of the three); don't send for simple information and 'No contacts for 12 years (1% each of the two)'. .

5.2.6. Location and Cost of the Telegrams

All the respondents from Nongtalang and 48 per cent of them from Nongpoh desired to have their telegraph office within their own locality. 30 per cent of Nongpoh conceded its location within 5 Km from their residence and another 21 per cent of their co-villagers wished to locate the telegraph office within 5 Km and just in their locality.

As many as 93 per cent respondents from Nongtalang and 74 per cent from Nongpoh affirmed that in case the cost is reduced, they would be sending more telegrams (Table 5.8).

5.2.7. Cost of the Telegram

We proposed four hypothetical price prepositions at Rs.4, Rs.2, Re.1 and less than a rupee. 76 per cent Nongtalang and 40 per cent Nongpoh respondents felt that they could send as much as 5 telegrams a month; only 12 per cent (10 + 2) felt that they could send upto 10 telegrams a month. In case the price is reduced to Rs. 2 per telegram 14 per cent from Nongtalang would send upto 5 telegrams, 66 per cent upto 10 telegrams and another 10 per cent upto 15 telegrams a month. From Nongpoh 30 per cent respondents would despatch upto 5 telegrams, 11 per cent upto 10 telegrams, 3 per cent between 16 to 20 and one each

upto 15 and more than 21 telegrams a month respectively. While only 23 per cent from Nongpoh visualized and increased telegraphic message between 6 to 20 a month, from Nongtalang as much as 81 per cent respondents proposed between 6 to 20 telegrams a month, if the existing price is brought down to Re. 1 per telegram. In case the price is reduced to less than a rupee a telegram, 88 per cent Nongtalang respondents felt that they would be sending more than 21 telegrams a month. Here again Nongpoh respondents are in restrain. Even if the price is reduced to less than a rupee, only 3 per cent would send upto 10 telegrams, 4 per cent upto 15, 2 per cent upto 20 and only 15 per cent of them would send more than 21 telegrams a month.

Among a dozen persons receiving maximum number of postal mails at Nongpoh, first three happened to be private business men and fifth and sixth also belong to the same category of persons. In between at number four in terms of receipts of postal mails is the local administrative head, i.e. the Sub-Divisional Officer, Nongpoh (Table 5.10). Out of 1448 mails received by first 10 persons at Nongpoh, more than half of the mails (750) are received by first three persons, who happened to be the businessmen. Similarly, in terms of sending telegrams out of Nongpoh, the first five private individuals (two businessmen and three Christian mission centred educationists) used 250 telephones out of a monthly total of 370.

Table - 5.9: Price Preference for increasing telegraphic traffic in a month

Number of Letters	Price				Price			
	Nongtalang				Nngpoh			
	Rs.4	Rs.2	Re.1	Less than Re.1	Rs.4	Rs.2	Re.1	Less than Re.1
Upto 5 telegrams	76	14	2	-	40	30	11	-
6 to 10 telegrams	12	66	30	-	2	11	10	3
11 to 15 telegrams	-	10	41	-	-	1	7	4
16 to 20 telegrams	-	-	10	-	-	3	3	2
21 telegrams	-	-	2	-	-	1	3	15
More than that	-	-	4	88	-	-	-	-
N.R.	5	3	4	5	30	26	40	49
N.A.	7	7	7	7	26	26	26	26
Total	100	100	100	100	98	98	100	99

Table - 5.10: Number of Mails received and Telegrams sent from Nongpoh

Sl. No.	Name	No. of letters daily	No. of Letters monthly	No. of Telegrams sent monthly
1.	Murlidhar Joshi	10	354	50
2.	Tiwariji	4	121	50
3.	Rev. Brothers, St. Paul Aca.	-	-	150*
4.	S.D.O. (Civil), Nongpoh	5	152	30
5.	K. N. Mishra, ADM	3	91	30
6.	B.R. Mandal, SBI	2	61	30
7.	Khalid Ansari	7	213	-
8.	R. Singh	6	183	-
9.	P.K. Sarkar (Tailors)	3	91	-
10.	S.D. Sharma (Bookseller)	4	121	-
11.	Apex Bank	2	61	30
		46	1448	370

*Rev. Fr. K. Paul, Rev. Sis. Bibiana and Rev. Sis. Arudiya.

5.3.2. We have a list of a dozen individuals ranked in order of the number of mails received by them (Table 5.11). Half of them work at Shillong in the various departments of the state government (3 in number), autonomous institutions (one), as a teacher (one) and as a Minister in the State Government. Three of them work as petty government functionaries at the district headquarters at Jowai. And out of the rest work as contractor cum businessmen and another one as a teacher at Nongtalang. Seven

out of a dozen work as the Government officials, two as school teacher, a lone one as a full time politician currently a Cabinet Minister in the State Government and only last two are businessmen. It is interesting to learn that contractor-cum-businessmen are ranked number second and tenth respectively; teachers at fifth and ninth, lone politician as the last (12th) and the rest were the white collar employees in the State Government. The two contractor-cum-businessmen deal in betel leaves, areca nuts, oranges and spices besides undertaking construction work for the Government.

Table - 5.11: Persons Receiving Maximum Number of Mails at Nongtalang

Sl. No.	Names	Vocations
1.	Miss Promila Myrchiang	Dept. of Social Welfare, Government of Meghalaya, Shillong.
2.	Mr. Fedallo Pohrmen	Contract-cum-business, Nongtalang
3.	Mr. Lewis Poheyryar	District Office, Govt. of Meghalaya, Jowai.
4.	Miss Maloty Myrchiang	District Office, Govt. of Meghalaya, Jowai.
5.	Miss Glorida Pohrmen	School teacher, Nongtalang.
6.	Miss Flora Baner	District Office (L.D.), Govt. of Meghalaya, Jowai.
7.	Mr. Vincent Myrchiang	Cashier, PHE Dept., Govt. of Meghalaya, Shillong.
8.	Mrs. Rubina Myrchiang	U.D., PWD Dept., Govt. of Meghalaya, Shillong.
9.	Mr. Min Pohrmen	School teacher, St. Anthony, Shillong.
10.	Mr. Bishar Myrchiang	Contract-cum-business, Nongtalang
11.	Mr. Glasor Myrchiang	NEHU Library, Shillong.
12.	Mr. J.D. Pohrmen	Minister, Govt. of Meghalaya, Shillong.

While 7 are men and five are women. It appears it is the emerging middle class white collar and contractor-cum-businessmen, who desire telephone connections. On probing, it was found that every few of them send personal letters through the postal mail. It is invariably the formal official communication, which they receive through the post.

5.3.3. Telephone at Nongpoh

We could identify only 7 agencies at Nongpoh, which use the telephones most frequently (Table 5.12). The first six among them were business and commercial establishments. Even among them first one is that of an eating house, followed by a tyre vulcanizing shop, General Stores, an Oil Depot, two branches of the Banks, and at the end, the Sub-Divisional Officer (Civil), Nongpoh. It means that the existing postal and telecom facilities are being used mostly by the commercial establishments and administrative officials. Agricultural, voluntary social work, political and educational institutions are conspicuous by the absence.

5.4.1. Case Studies in Telecommunication

Dawki is the border market place in Jaintia Hills District in Meghalaya, 15 Kms away from Nongtalang village. It happens to be the headquarters of the Block Development Office, besides the border checkpost manned by the Border Security Force (BSF). Some forty years back it was a small insignificant border market between Sylhet plains (now Bangladesh) and Khasi Hills

Table - 5.12: Persons Using Maximum Numvers of Telephones at Nongpoh

Persons	Rekha Res-taurant	Tyre Com-pany	Gene-ral Bhan-dar	Assam Oil	Megha-laya Apex Bank	S.B.I.	SDO Civil
Rajeshwar Singh	→						
Md. Watif	————→						
Murlidhar Joshi	————→						
Assam Oil	————→						
Meghalaya Apex Bank	————→						
SBI	————→						
SDO Civil	————→						

(now Meghalaya) in Assam. It used to be a thriving trading centre for cash crops and horticultural products such as spices, fruits - specially oranges, betel leaves and areca nuts, rice and fish. Now the trans-border trade is subject to the national customs regulation. However, the residents around Dawki are mostly local tribals, whose kinsmen, friends and associates are also found across the border. They have been using traditional forms of communication for sending and receiving messages even for the illegal silent trade in contrabands.

As Dawki is located on a strategic point, it quickly developed into a semi-urban centre with many permanent shops, offices, regular bazar, transport network and security establish-

ments. In terms of communication, it has a post office, a telephone exchange and a wireless station. The post office has its conventional image of being a formal department of the Government, run on the rules framed for the purpose. The wireless station, located with the police force, is mainly used for the administrative purposes and convenience and no member of the public ever use it for transmitting a private message.

So far the telephone exchange is concerned, it is notorious for its non-functioning, as it is normally out of order. Thus, even the employees of the telecom department are not available to provide the basic information. Besides Dawki, this exchange is to serve the nearby rural areas. When the rural customers with spending their money and time in undertaking the journey visit the telephone exchange for calling somebody at a distance, they either find it closed or out of order. It is reported that in the year 1979(?) it was out of order for as long as 366 days at a stretch. The customers did complain against its malfunctioning and to the extent that they even complained to the office of the T.D.O. Shillong, but nothing was done to positively restore the customers confidence in its smooth functioning. In such a situation, the available telephone facility is a shame and embarrassment to the telecom department.

5.4.2. There is another aspect of telecom, which makes it still uncertain. It so happened that during the last general election for the State Assembly in Nagaland in November 1987,

there were four candidates in 23rd constituency of Impur. It consists of 5 Ao villages of Aset Kang range. The Congress candidate was from Mupungchukit, only 9 Km away from Mokokchung town, and there was a telephone connection in the Village Church. The other candidates were T. Chuba from Longjang, 15 Km from Mokokchung and two independents from Sonratsu village. There were rumours of violence, arson, intimidation, political defections and consequent administrative steps and counter-steps as per the situation. The atmosphere was exciting and uncertain to the extent that the villagers had ^{put} up to night long vigiles. All the four candidates had their supporters, partymen, clansmen and associates, who were canvassing for their respective candidates. These big number of volunteer force was to be fed, sheltered and transported. With a view to checking the veracity of the rumours, political developments and administrative steps and ordering for food and other supplies the candidates had to send their couriers to Mokokchung. The Congress candidate used the Church telephone to check with the development and information and place orders for supplies of essential commodities and spent their time in other organizational work in a relaxed manner.

Some 10 days before the polling, the Longjang villagers cut ^{the} 9 Kilometre long telephone cable passing through the forest and brought Mapungchukit at the level of other villages in terms of communication access. They tried to get the telephone line repaired, but the telecom department moved rather slowly

and unit, he feels helpless because telecom system does not function. He took pains to explain that his poor co-villagers are forced in the circumstance to spend time and money in travelling to Shillong and other places even for little bit of information, which should have been received at nominal price telephonically.

5.4.4. Mr. X (25) is the son of the former Sardar and cousin of the present Sardar of Nongpoh. His family of 9 members is very important in the village, because his ancestors were the settlers of the village. He has extensive relations in Shillong, Jowai, Dawki and elsewhere in the Khasi Hills. He owns good paddy and horticultural land in and around the village. His father was not only the Sardar of the village, but also a freedom fighter, as his ancestors had sided with U Tirot Singh, against the British in the past. He is educated upto B.Sc. and travelled abroad. Now he manages the family business of fair price shop and the general stores with the help of 5 Khasi employees.

His family wanted to get a telephone connection at his residence, but refrained from it because of its non-functioning. His sister was to be married in March 1987. They wished to send invitation to their relatives telecommunicationally. As it did not work, they had to send messengers with invitation to Shillong, Jowai, Dawki, Nongstoin, etc. In fact, no ^{body} thinks of using telephone now. And how can they? In January 1987, he sent a message to the district office, Food and Supply, Shillong, for despatching certain essential commodities. When supplies

were not received, messenger was sent to track down the supply line from Shillong. It was found that till then no message had been received in the office. In such a situation, how can one rely on telecommunication system?

5.4.5. Mr. Y (70) is the owner of one of the busiest eating houses at Nongpoh. He came to Nongpoh in 1930's at the age of 18 along with his father from his native place in Kamrup district, Assam, and ^{least} began the present business in a modest scale. On an average at least two thousand persons take their refreshment and about 4 spend their night in his hotel per day. He has two sons: one runs a printing press at Gauhati and another one is employed in the Assam State administration as a civil servant. He himself runs his big business show at Nongpoh with the help of his 30 employees. Two-thirds of them are from his native village and the rest are Khasis and Biharis. He finds it convenient to maintain a business link with Gauhati, for which he prefers travelling frequently or sends his messengers through the transport network.

He receives about 10 letters a day. He used to own a telephone connection till 1986, but then he decided to dispense with it. The telephone used to be out of order for most of the time and thus, it did not give him any relief in his commercial transactions with Gauhati, Shillong, or elsewhere. Moreover, local bullies used to book the calls frequently, which was two much of a headache. The outsiders used to book the calls without

payment. It was more of harassment. "So far my telecom needs are concerned, all the local functionaries, who matter, visit my place at least once in a day, giving me chance to talk to them on business. Thus, my work does not suffer in the absence of telephone. Moreover, I can always send a messenger for a communication as I have enough hands available with me."

Some two years back one of our employees got sick. We sent a telegram to his native place for someone to come over, but nobody turned up. So after waiting for a few days I sent the sick man with another servant of my suffering sufficient loss and inconvenience. In fact, we have a more ^{reliable} ~~satisfiable~~ transport system not only for travel but even also for sending messages. For example, I may try for ⁵ hours to contact Gauhati at a distance of 50 Kms telephonically and I may not get the line in all the probability. But I may travel to Gauhati, buy perishable goods such as fish and reach back to Nongpoh on time to get it cooked and served.

5.4.6. Mr. Choudhury (40) is the manager of the local branch of the Meghalaya Co-operative Apex Bank at Nongpoh. It is one of the 25 branches of the parent body with 10 employees of its own. The bank provides short, medium and long term credit to the farmers and horticulturists with its about Rs. 5 lakh of monthly transaction. The manager is the key functionary, who has to attend meetings at the headquarters, visit villages on inspection and secure relevant information and instructions from

Shillong quite frequently. But, "for every ordinary information either I have to travel or send a messenger as telephone does not work. But see its functioning. We are fed up of complaining times and again without an appreciable change for the better. Once the telephone engineer (quite peeved with our frequent complains) came to my office in my absence and started shouting for non-payment of their rental, which was in fact paid on time through the post office. Informed of the fact, he offered an apology. But this did not help me to get the smooth telephone line. |

"I had to attend a meeting with other functionaries for some rural development schemes at a distance. We failed to send the telecom message as the system was not functioning. Unfortunately the place of meeting could be reached only through the jeep. As no jeep was available, I had to walk on foot the distance for hours. In the process, I did not do my normal daily office work, a practice, which is quite common, leading to the credibility gap in our banking system vis-a-vis our customers. In 1987, we got the information that a gang might commit dacoity in our branch office. We desperately tried to contact head office at Shillong, but without success. At last I had to leave the office unattended at my personal risk and travelled to Shillong to arrange for precautionary measures. At times | feel like throwing the telephone instrument for which we are in fact paying donation to the telephone department." 9/

5.5. To sum up, we have presented above our quantitative and qualitative data pertaining to the telecom scenario in Meghalaya. The Meghalayans use the interpersonal communication mainly. The postal service has enough reliability, though of late it is leading towards uncertainty. The telegrams are rarely sent from the interior villages such as Nongtalang. Even when it is sent, it is mainly for administrative and domestic purposes. As it stands the telecom suffers from the problems of accessibility and reliability. We asked a hypothetical question whether the number of telegrams would increase in case it ^{price} was to be reduced. The response is not very encouraging. As a whole the telecom does not find support from political, voluntary, social workers and other social institutions. It is considered to be an article of luxury for the administrators, businessmen and rich people, who can afford to pay its rent even if the service is not rendered.

CHAPTER - VI

THE MESSAGING NEEDS AND IMPLICATIONS

6.0.0. The outlook of the above presentation is rather confusing. Be it mass communication or telecommunication, or hardware to software, there is a sense of drift, adhocism, and lack of concerted linkages. It appears that technology is ascribed a higher standing, which is invariably to be imported. 'Technology for what?' Pat comes the answer: 'It is for the service to the nation?' All these clearly indicate the lack of a national communication ideology, from which various national communication policies may emerge. We have noted elsewhere (Sinha, A.C. 1986) the nature of the unstated Indian national communication policy and have identified its basic elements with 'a mixed bag of free market economy and a limited state control' (Chapter one). Any technology and specially the technological choice is guided by the above policy. In fact technology plays a secondary role in identifying the objectives and priorities, coming out of the national ideology.

6.1.0. The Post and Telegraph Department was created by the British administration as an adjunct to effective administrative control over Indian people. The department was run on the cost-benefit consideration. However, it was also 'to serve the people' (those who could afford to). The department was rather slow in adopting new technological innovations. But it did increase its network to the length and breadth of the country and with the dawn of independence, the department was geared to the cause

of the national priorities and programmes. As a government department, it slowly turned out to be one of the biggest employers of unskilled and semi-skilled persons. With the massive emphasis on rural development and overall demand for social transformation, the department did try to modernize itself technologically to meet the ever increasing demands on it. As a whole this modernization phase in the department is largely based on technological transfer. No serious efforts are being made to ask whether the technological transfer fits in the national policy of self-reliance. In fact, its adoption is based on the principle of trickling down the benefits from the top and what is known as technological diffusion.

So far North Eastern region in general and Meghalaya in particular is concerned, it is not only inaccessible from transport, communication and telecommunication point of view, but it is also economically at a subsistence level. By tradition, the vital resources - land, water, forest and even minerals - are controlled by the community, in which technological investment is minimal. The British introduced monetary system on this fragile base some 150 years back resulting in a very limited cash transaction. A limited number of locales were employed in the Government service, Christian mission activities and petty trading. In this way, till middle of the 20th century it did not have a sound and effective economic support base for the state sponsored efforts for infrastructural modernization and overall social transformation.

The Indian independence brought in a new situation through the constitutional safeguards for job reservations in the various sectors for the scheduled tribes and large scale financial investment through the successive development plans. This process led to a disequilibrium in the communal ownership of resources leading to an emerging middle class and a set of neo-rich contractor-politicians as effective spokesmen of the communities. It is they, who articulate the community demands as per their perceptions. Moreover, even the traditional leadership is adopting modern techniques to strengthen its hold on the society. We have seen above (Chapter V) the cases of Mr. James Syiem and his nephew from Nongpoh. Moreover, we have enough data to indicate how communally owned resources are being transferred as private property by the individuals in the Khasi Hills. These articulate neo-like - the modernized traditional leaders or the contractor-politicians - are bound to use the telecom amenities to further their hold on the community at the cost of the common tribals. Further access to modern technology may provide stimulus to widen the gap between the masses and the elite.

6.1.3. The Khasis of Meghalaya in particular are well-connected with the world outside because of Shillong - their cultural and political capital and one of the most cosmopolital towns of the region. About a decade back the Central Government decided to extend railways to link Meghalaya with an effective and cheaper transport system. In the peculiar ethnic-political scenario

of the state, the neo-rich contractor-politician elite successfully opposed the extension of the railway line (which might have broken their relative isolation and insularity) to the state. The same elite demands a reliable telecommunication and air link to Shillong (which may increase their contacts with the outside in a selective way). They rarely raise the issues around the nature of development, but they do demand an access to a reliable telecom service for development and modernization of the backward region. One may raise the question how and for whom is the state sponsored technology in general and telecom in particular helping the process of development in the state.

6.2.1. Starting in the last quarter of the 19th Century as a cart track, the present Gauhati-Shillong Road (NH 37) used to have a horse driven tonga service between Shillong and Gauhati for the British Officers. Since then this road, turned into a double lane National Highway, has become the life line for the supply of the essential consumer commodities to the capital. Similarly, all the district and sub-divisional towns are linked with metalled roads. However, with only 16.40 Kms roads for every 100 Square Km and 3.17 Kms of road for every 1,000 Meghalayans, it is definitely insufficient.

There will be no second opinion on the need for an effective, reliable and comfortable all weather surface transportation to the state, as most of the goods, articles and common man use these roads. It is a fact that in a topographically undulating and landlocked state such as Meghalaya, the cost of road

construction and maintenance is higher. Besides importing the consumer goods from outside the state, local horticultural and mineral products may reach the markets for a better price. Health care and educational facilities may be made available to the needy without much delay. As better transportation leads to better awareness for alternatives, these roads may help the community to generate alternative sources of livelihood.

6.2.2. Among the audio visual media, radio is known in the state for a long period of time. We have noted above that it is largely used as a means of entertainment (which is in itself a very important aspect), much less for information and the least for development and educational purposes (Chapter IV). The need of hour is to reorient this scenario and introduce a more balanced treatment to the various programmes. It must be used effectively as a vehicle to bring about change. The question should be raised that should the Government owned media such as radio and television spend most of their time and programmes on entertainment? At the same time since the bulk of the population continues to be illiterate, audio visual inputs are to be improved for better acceptance.

6.2.3. Among the audio visual media / television is a very powerful means of communication. Within five years since 1982 it has spread to the every nook and corner of the state. Along with it has come the video boom, which is undermining the conventional means of entertainments such as folk dances, theatres

and cinema. Violence prone and cowboys type western feature films are mostly screened on the video anywhere for private or commercial viewing. At times uncensored pornography and blue films are also screened, which is causing irreparable damage to the younger generation. Though Khasis are producing video films, need of the hour is to produce aesthetically sound films acceptable and attractive to the young people. There is no television studio at Shillong to produce software in the locale language on the local themes. The two television relay stations at Shillong and Tura relay national programmes for the Meghalayans. In a study of television coverage in Meghalaya (Sen, M. 1988, p. 167) we found the viewers' disinclination to the national **programmes**. Like radio, it is largely taken as a means of entertainment followed by information and this medium is taken seriously by very few viewers for its role in educational and developmental purposes. Now that the State Government has decided to introduce 630 community television sets, should it not think of producing or helping those agencies which are competent and willing to produce educational and development oriented programmes in local languages? However, it goes without saying that continuous exposure to the national programmes through television does diffuse some elements of national programmes to the distant places leading to the national integration.

6.2.4. We have done the content analysis of the banners of the two most read newspapers (an English and a Khasi) in Meghalaya. Our analysis gives a confused picture of the purpose behind

the publication of the two newspapers. They do not provide entertainment, but even the information they give are lopsided, least educative and development oriented. Besides their claimed purpose of providing information and political education to the readers, the newspapers may have their latent functions, which are unstated and even our analysis did not enlighten us very much. So far the larger public is concerned, the newspapers are read for political gossip, 'contractor tender' information, black-mailing some persons etc.

6.2.5. Between the postal and telephone departments, postal service continues to be more reliable. For the limited requirements of the Meghalayans, it continues to serve their purpose in terms of providing mails and postal stationery within a reasonable time limit (though of late it is complained that postal stationery is not available in the post offices quite frequently). There were little of complains against the postal department, as nobody expects it to deliver the mails urgently considering the overall transportation system.

It is the post office, which books the telegrams for onward transmission. They still operate on old Morse type of mechanical devices for transmitting the messages. In the ecologically hazardous topography such as Meghalaya, there is frequent landslides during monsoon months leading to quite frequent traffic disruption. In such situations telegrams are sent to the T.D.O. Shillong through the ordinary postal mails for onward

transmission. This entails undue delay in reaching the message to the addressees causing further problem of reliability.

6.2.6. There is another dimension of the post communication. It is considered to be a public utility service, which is for years now running on loss. Many believe that the postal deficit is mainly because the government does not introduce pricing policy of its stationery and services as per the cost. "That the average cost of postal service should be cheaper than entertainment costs makes a mockery of the economic priorities. That some of the postal rates are unrealistically low in the context of the steep erosion of the money value can be seen from the price of postcard, which since May 15, 1974, has remained static at 15 paise ... cost of providing this service has increased ... today is about 58 paise. At the present rate of staff escalation (30% per annum) the position in 2001 A.D. would be: population 101 crores, traffic (ordinary mail) - Rs. 2,114 crores, working expenses - Rs. 4,000 crores, Revenue at the present rate of tariff Rs. 1,072 crores and deficit of Rs. 2,932 crores."¹

In such a context of low postal rates when finance will be in a permanent state of deficit, the service will tend to adjust itself to rising costs by pruning its operations or reducing frequency or duration of various services such as mail collection, delivery or counter services. However, such efforts

1. 'Cheap Postal Tariff at What Cost?' The Hindu, Sept. 20, 1988.

in economizing operations may evoke popular dissatisfaction and resentment. In the North Eastern Postal Circle itself, the year 1987-88 showed a deficit at Rs. 1486.93 lakhs. At the national level with Rs.557.5 crores revenue and Rs. 770.12 crores expenditure there was an annual deficit of Rs. 216.43 crores in 1986-87.² In such a situation, a radical departure from the present tariff policy is strongly recommended.

6.2.7. In spite of the mounting losses, postal service is still considered, and rightly so, a device to ensure a balanced rural development. We are informed of the new norms for opening of the new post offices.³ It is proposed that the population of the village should not be less than 5,000 in normal areas and 2,500 in hilly, tribal and backward areas. For the purpose of identification of a tribal area, it has been laid down that only areas identified as tribal for purpose of implementation of projects would be considered as such. The hilly areas should be identified as such by the Hill Area Development Programme. The permission limit of loss is fixed at Rs.2,400 a year in normal areas and Rs. 4,800 a year in hilly, backward or tribal areas. Similarly, the stipulated income from the post office should not be less than 50 per cent of its anticipated cost in normal areas and 25 per cent of its cost in backward or hilly areas. In such a situation, the overall annual financial district deficit will increase for the national postal service.

2. The Annual Report, Postal, 1986-87.

3. The Telegraph, Calcutta, October 24, 1988.

6.3.1. Telegrams

Our findings suggest that the predominant purpose of telegrams sent is that of official and domestic crisis and they are sent in handwritten English language. It is a time consuming process, which delays the message and does not work properly. Cost, language, education and socio-psychological factors were not seen as problems. As a whole, it was considered to be desirable, but unreliable device for sending the messages on time to a distant place. The messages are sent to Shillong, Tura, Gauhati, Dibrugarh, Imphal, Calcutta and upto Bombay, but it is predominantly regional in character. They universally desired that the telegraph office should be located within a distance of 5 Km in their locality. It appears that the cost and the number of telegrams to be sent are not related. For example, even when the price of a telegram is reduced to a ridiculous less than a rupee per message, there is no considerable increase in the number of telegrams to be sent from Nongpoh, because they have to locate the situation and the individuals for such a messaging. The Nongtalang respondents (88% would like to send more than 21 telegrams a month) seem to have not realized the implications of their statement, because they do not express 'whom would they send the message' and 'for what purpose'.

6.3.2. Telephone

The persons who use the postal mails most and send the maximum number of telegrams out of Nongpoh are private businessmen, administrators and bankers. Similarly, though the

telephone exchange functions far from satisfactorily, out of the seven agencies using it most frequently, first six are private business and commercial establishments and the seventh and the last one is the administrative head of the area (Sub-Divisional Officer, Nongpoh (Civil)). Persons associated with agriculture, voluntary social service, political parties, educational institutions are conspicuous by their absence. Then the valid question: 'who is going to talk to whom and for what purpose?' in case rural telephone is installed in Meghalaya need to be answered.

6.3.3. The Problems with the existing telecom in the region

The problems can be identified at three levels: accessibility, reliability and credibility of the service. By and large rural folk interacts more at interpersonal levels. Most of their relatives, friends and associates with whom they work are normally available within a walking distance. They prefer to walk to the place for a face to face interaction. Moreover, the special services available to urban centres, which might be made available telephonically, are not present in the rural areas. On the other hand, the telecom installation is invariably located in an establishment owned by the Government, from which the common man has learnt to keep a distance. It is normally considered as an item of luxury for administrators, affluent, educated and wealthy businessmen. There is another aspect of basically illiterate rural folk's reaction to telecom: how to

reach it? How much will it cost? Whom to and what to talk? Thus, the impression is that telecom is not for common man and a common service and it is an exclusive preserve of the elite. And it is one of the reasons that only .34 persons out of 100 who possess the magic wand of telephone in India.

6.3.4. That the messages sent through the telecom transmission will certainly reach the destination is not normally accepted proposition in the region. The rural consumer approaches a telecom device in a desperate bid such as an accident, a calamity or a disaster, or sickness has befallen on him. He finds that the telecom staff and office works between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and is between the operating staff on duty is in the habit of going for a cup of tea or refreshment, which may range from a few minutes to even hours. Even if the telecom station is open and the staff is on duty, it is very likely that the mechanical system might be out of order for days together. We have noted above the experiences of our respondents from Dawki and Nongpoh telephone exchanges. Then comes another problem. Even if the message is accepted, it may take time to get the line. In not infrequent cases, the telegraphic message is routed through postal service taking any time between 3 to 7 days to reach its destination. Invariably, by then the urgency to use the telecom is over.

6.3.5. The national average of the fault rate per 100 telephones per month is 24.35. The highest fault rate in the country

is recorded in Assam (47), which is very closely followed by N.E. region with 46.5 and then West Bengal (39.65). The main reasons for the poor performance in these areas compared to all India figures is said to be old, worn out cables, old telephone instruments and worn out exchanges. Some states such as Assam and N.E. region in particular are also prone to natural calamities like heavy rain and floods. There are a number of hilly areas, where faults in the external plants are frequent. Due to financial and resource scarcity, only 12 per cent lines of the total installed capacity as on March 1988 and those exchanges, which have outlived their average prescribed life on April 1990, will be replaced during the Eighth Plan period, 1990-1995.⁴ Thus, the customers have no prospect of a reliable telecom. Service even after 1995.

The Maitland Commission was aware of such a situation. While enumerating various possibilities under 'Quality of Telephone Service' a hypothetical similar to Indian scenario was described: "Country".

(A low income economy with a telephone penetration of less than 1 per 300 population.

"Service ... very poor and under present operating conditions is deteriorating from day to day ... Lack of spare parts drastically reduces the traffic capacity...causing bottlenecks and unreliable service ... countrywide only 49% of manual long distance calls are connected the day they are booked.

4. The Telegraph, Calcutta, October 21, 1988

... Five minutes to obtain a dial tone in the busy time of day. ... 22% of lines in the country out of service ... 80% of faulty lines ... out of operation for more than one month. 50% of faults were due to local cable networks, 45% to subscriber plant and 5% to switching equipment" (I.T.U. 1984: 114). In such a situation, the worst casualty is the reliability of the telecommunication system.

6.3.6. The problem of reliability gets further complicated by the quality of service provided to the common customers. Again this may be seen from two angles: mechanical and human. So far telecom machines located in the rural areas are concerned, they are old ones manually operated, providing an inferior quality of service as a whole. Not infrequently it is difficult to get through the line. While conversing, it is a common experience that the line gets crossed, jammed or simply goes silent. Then comes the human aspects. The telecom operating staff very much like their machines lack social credibility. In spite of all the rules to check the inefficiency and lodge a complain against misbehaviour, they are invariably unattentive to customers' complains and unresponsive to even queries. In such a situation, telecom suffers from a serious credibility gap.

6.4.1. The Role of Telecom in the Process of Development

The role that telecom plays in development has remained obscure because of difficulty in measuring its impact. Such difficulties arise because besides point-to-point benefits, telecom generates immense indirect benefits to the users and local

economy, which is difficult to be measured statistically. In addition to the direct benefits to the users, its social benefits are likely to contribute to improve the quality of life in rural areas. These emphases reflect current concern with equity, decentralization and self-reliance. To achieve these goals, developing nations such as ours must pay greater attention to rural human development (Hudson, H.E. 1984). Otherwise lack of access to critical information can place the rural residents at a major disadvantage, and can impede the improvement of rural social and economic conditions. However, the provision of telephone service for rural users is not a remunerative proposition in itself. As it is considered to be a socio-economic need of the bulk of the population residing in rural areas, it has to be provided on a subsidized basis.

6.4.2. Our data indicate that, by and large, rural population interacts locally, say within a radius of 50 to 75 Kms and at most within the district for most of the purposes. Unless and unit telephone service is made available in all the villages within the sub-division or district, it is difficult to expect higher calling rates (Murty, B.S. 1984: 24). It is imperative to expect certain level of infrastructural, economic and administrative activities to reach for expecting an appreciable rate of even indirect benefits. "Although telecommunications can be used on occasion as a substitute for transport, their effectiveness in co-ordinating the movement of goods in reducing inventories, in finding the best markets for produce and so on depends on the adequacy of the transport system. The same is true of

the role of telecommunications play in emergencies. The telecommunications link between patient and doctor will not fulfil its purpose unless transport is available to move the patient to hospital or to deliver drugs and other supplies" (I.T.U. 1984: 10). And only then telecom infrastructure plus other complementary infrastructures can together lead to more economic growth and more effective social service delivery.

6.4.3. Back to Shillong, the N.E. Telecom Circle has drawn an ambitious plan to achieve certain targets fixed in terms of B.S. Murty's proposals. Out of a number of telecom devices, they have decided to instal Multi Access Rural Radio (MARR) system at 50 locations in Manipur this year and another 200 locations will be linked up next year. In this way, 75 per cent of the proposed hexagonal Village Cluster Cells (VCC) in the State will be covered. Similarly, by the end of this year 10 each villages around Shillong and Tura will be linked with the help of MARR system. For that matter village sites have been identified, antennas at Shillong and Tura are fixed and actual operators in the respective villages as agents of the telecom department willing to make the device available to the users are being identified. In this way, a beginning has been made in the state of Meghalaya. However, it was surprising that the Chief General Manager, N.E. Telecom Circle at Shillong did not appear to be aware of the SBRNT experiments.

6.4.4. It is encouraging to note that the Indian Prime Minister has included "Mission Better Communication" as one of the

five elements of his 'Technology Missions' for the modernization of the country. His technology adviser, S. Pitroda maintained that "car telephones (proposed to be installed in Delhi) are mere gimmicks and we have no need for such a (tele)phone system, which would cost Rs.75,000 a piece. For every three car phones we can have on rural (telephone) exchange, which should be the focus".⁵ Further, he informed that the Union Government had taken up a plan to instal one rural digital exchange with 80 lines, per day from April 1988 for a year. Under this plan 250 such exchanges would be set up all over the country and the cost per phone to the Government would be about Rs. 10,000. Expressing his resolve to set right the urban bias in telecom he maintained, "The need is not to increase the (tele)phone density, but to give a thrust on the accessibility of communication for rural masses ... we realize that the modernization process has to relate to the larger sections of the community."

Enumerating the various performances of the N.E. Telecom Circle in the year 1988-87, M.N. Shukla, the C.G.M., informed that the Telecom Board had taken a decision not to instal any more electromechanical or old technology equipment in this region.⁶ He exhorted the telecom employees in the spirit of Pitro's quoted above, "The modernization of service puts a certain responsibility on the officers and staff working in this Circle.

5. The Telegraph, January 3, 1988.

6. From 'G.M's Desk' Netnews, Vol. 4, No.2, July, 1988, The House Journal of the N.E. Telecom Circle, Shillong.

Firstly, the outlook of every day should simultaneously undergo a change: to think modern and to tune oneself to the new situation, thus, making the process of modernization total. Every one will also need to develop the skill to handle the modern technology. My advice to the staff is not to be left out from the alround change taking place but to plunge whole heartedly in it."

6.5.0. As a whole, the telecommunication (i) provides information; (ii) plays a vital role in emergencies and health services; (iii) increases efficiency of public administration, commerce and other economic activities; (iv) assists in national integration, self-reliance and political stability; (v) reduces regional disparity within the country; (vi) helps shrink distance; (vii) can reduce need to travel, and (viii) facilitates better use of existing transport facilities. However, full utility of rural telecom can be realized only when most of the villages are telephonically linked and other associated infrastructural amenities are extended to the area. Though its indirect and imperceptible impacts take time to be felt, the measurable economic impact of the use of telecom channel in an area such as Meghalaya will depend on two factors: (i) the increase in information flows achieved by telecom in comparison to other communication networks and (ii) the extent to which new messages change economic agents' opinion of the probability of events (i.e. the social receptiveness of the rural folk to new information).

CHAPTER - VII

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The rural messaging needs in Meghalaya have two aspects: the mechanical, pertaining to installation, service, management and organization of the telecom delivery system and the human, relating to local requirements, acceptance and spread of the interaction process. The foregone chapters indicate that while mechanical aspects of telecom are yet to make their presence felt, the sphere of human communication remains equally uncharted. In such a situation, it is rather hazardous to rely very much on the statistical explanations. Thus, we feel advisable to make general statements, which are more likely to be relevant than the specific statistical figures. Thus, we conclude that:

- (1) the Meghalayans depend on interpersonal channel of communication by travelling to or sending messengers through automobile transportation;
- 70 to 90 per cent messages are transmitted within the district and the state, as identity of Meghalaya as a state is yet to emerge;
- 20 to 8 per cent messages are sent within the North Eastern region; and
- less than 5 per cent messages are sent beyond the region within the country and abroad.

- (2) As no viable and autonomous centres of industry and commerce have emerged in the area of our study, the felt messaging needs are predominantly for individual urgencies, administration and small scale business;
 - The existing telecom infrastructure suffers from serious problem of accessibility, reliability and credibility of the service;
 - (3) Because of its strategic location, a reliable telecom will have an impressive demand in future provided;
 - all the villages in the sub-division, district, state or region are linked telecommunicationally;
 - supporting secondary information sectors such as education, health care, industries etc. move in to take advantage of telecom; and
 - laws of land are liberalized to encourage interaction at social, economic and industrial levels.
 - (4) Access to telecom amenities may affect the social equilibrium widening the gulf between the elite and the masses.
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