



# An Analysis on the Participation of Pressure Groups in Meghalaya's Politics.

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## Abstract

Meghalaya, as a state in its political affairs, has seen the active engagement of various pressure groups taking part frequently, in the state's politics. Groups like the Khasi Students Union (KSU), Federation of Khasi, Jaiñtia and Garo People (FKJGP) among others, have been actively engaging in the political arena of the state especially at present. Their active role in this field can be widely seen when various policies and events that took place, where they have challenged the government with regards to such issues and policies. In this paper we shall look into such policies and various issues that has compelled these groups to come forward to protest and show their disagreement against the government's plans and policies. The policies like the **Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, Inner Line Permit, Influx, Railway Connectivity**, and several others have not only created an absence of peace and normalcy in the state but it has also compelled the government to take several critical steps to bring down and take measures on these policies.

Keywords: Pressure Groups, Meghalaya's Politics, Safety and Security.

## Introduction

Meghalaya is one of the states located in North-Eastern part of India. Before it was given statehood, it fell under Assam, until 21<sup>st</sup> January 1972, after which it received the status of an independent state. It was after this that the role of these groups came to existence as seen today and ever since those times. These groups have been questioning, protesting against the government with regards to various issues and policies of the government. Their main motive collectively, as an organisation, was to protect the indigenous land, property and community and make sure that their role as a group serves the interest of the tribal community and protect the minority tribal community from external aggression.

There were several issues ever since, that these groups have taken up seriously and have been counter attacking the government in such plans. **The Electronic Photo Identity Card (EPIC)** issue which deals with the cut off year of enrolling voters in the state; the **Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE)** issue is another issue, where in this case, these groups, but mainly the KSU, have actively engaged in questioning and demanding from the government to locate the board in the state's capital and not in the Garo Hills; the **Railway plans** which received a mixed response from both the government and the people of the state; and the **Border issue** which is a long pending issue. What these groups have been continuously engaging and always in opposition with the government is the **Influx issue**, in which maximum participation of these groups have been seen from time to time.

At present, their role has been observed to have risen rapidly, due to the various policies and plans of the government. When the policy of Citizen Amendment Bill, Uranium Mining, Inner Line Permit, etc came up, the Pressure Groups have been consistently opposing such plans and acts of the government, as they feared that with the introduction of such plans this would affect the indigenous people in the state and therefore these tribal communities would be taken over and controlled by the majority masses from other non-tribal communities.

When such incidences take place, in order to keep the law and order situation under control and to protect the population from any unwanted behaviour and situations, the government was compelled to take severe steps at such times, by imposing curfews, lockdowns, bans on internet services and several other measures. At such circumstances, we are able to see the steps taken by these groups as they call for bandhs, public meetings and rallies, in order to show their anger and protest against the government. It is at such uprisings that we can see a series of attacks and violence on property and life of the common man which are the consequences of such incidences. It is when such problems arise that several members of such groups are arrested for creating unrest in the state. The outcome of some of these events indicates an unhealthy method of protesting against the government by them.

### **Research Methodology**

The methods adopted in the writing of this paper was mainly accomplished with the help of secondary sources of information, of which some of these include books, research journals and articles, newspapers and various online sources that is related to the topic. It is on the information collected that has enabled the researcher to understand and analyse the topic and how it was done.

### **An Analysis on The Various Role and Participation of the Pressure Groups in Meghalaya's Political Affairs.**

Firstly, if we look into the participation of these groups in the politics of the state, we see that the **Border issue** is one of the main issues that these groups have engaged in. Meghalaya shares its border with both Assam and Bangladesh. As a result of not having a proper demarcated area with Assam, as Meghalaya was under Assam until 1972 when it was declared statehood, the state had a huge problem in this regard with

Assam which has led to many conflicts and created a huge problem for those people residing in these disputed areas, mainly in Langpih.

In this matter, the Pressure groups like the KSU have been actively involved, especially when the tribals of the state were affected by this conflict. They did so by organising sit-in demonstrations, questioning the government in its role to solve this issue and protecting its people from danger. This issue has led to the loss of lives too in the past and this has made the KSU to attack the government on its failure. They asked for the deployment of military forces in the disputed area; and if it failed to provide security to the people there, then they themselves would go there and assure the safety of these affected people. On the 47<sup>th</sup> Meghalaya day, the leader of the KSU made a statement stating, “How many more years will there be a state without a boundary?”

Secondly, when there was a plan by the government to bring railway connectivity into the state capital, there was a series of wide criticisms and disagreements from all sections of the state. The KSU was the major group that was against this project while some other political leaders and groups were in favour of it. The KSU was not in favour of this project as they feared that with the coming of this railway line. This would lead to a huge influx and will in turn harm the tribal community in the state. At that time the state didn't have proper laws to check influx. Another reason for them to not favour this project was because this would adversely affect the association of the local truck drivers who transported goods to the state.

Thirdly, Meghalaya is a state which is rich in Uranium. Earlier there was a plan to extract this mineral, by the **Atomic Minerals Directorate (AMD)**. **The Uranium Council of India Limited (UCIL)** had started extracting these resources from Domiasiat village. But the active engagement and stiff opposition of many leaders in the state, particularly the KSU, forced the UCIL to stop the mining process in 2017. It was in 2018, that the KSU demanded the Union Government to stop all plans for mining in the areas of the state where uranium is found. It was under the leadership of the KSU that the issue of the leaking of the various uranium tanks in 2020 was brought to light, as they feared that the high radiation from these tanks would be hazardous and it would affect the villagers in the nearby areas especially the water bodies that flow from the nearby mining areas.

Another role that these groups have been politically engaging is with regards to the **Citizenship Amendment Act** in 2019. When the bill was introduced, the various groups were not in favour of this bill. But when it was passed by both the Houses of the Parliament, the various groups organized protests in the state, by calling for mass rallies, public meetings, demonstrations, and several other means of mass protests. The leaders of these groups made it clear that they will not accept this bill whatever the condition. This bill not only saw an active participation of these pressure groups but the state witnessed a mass involvement of people showing their disapproval of this bill. It was under the leadership of the KSU and several other groups that various public meetings were organised in many parts of the state to create an awareness about the bill and how it would affect the indigenous people of the state. It was in one such meeting that there was a clash which led to the death of one member of the KSU and several other members were injured. This event led to a serious

problem, as many non-tribals were attacked and stabbed in the state. This incident disrupted the normalcy and security in the state; and the government was compelled to impose lockdown in the state in order to prevent the situation from escalating into another issue.

Lastly, one important issue that these groups have been involved with is their demand for the **Inner Line Permit (ILP)**. With the introduction of the CAA, the demand for ILP by various groups have been emphasised more; in order to control the flow of people from outside the state. They strongly believe that the ILP is the only way to check the flow of illegal immigrants into the state. This has been a long pending demand of the various groups from one government to the other but till now it has not been granted. It was only in 2016 that the Meghalaya government passed the **Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act, 2016** which is seen as an alternative to their demand for ILP. This act simply means that there should be a complete registration of outsiders, who wish to reside in the state and that they should comply to the various rules under this act, through the various forces set up by the government, in order to ensure the safety and security of the citizens. Even though a unanimous resolution was passed by all the members of the Legislative Assembly in 2019 in the state to implement ILP, this resolution however, was not accepted by the Central government. The demands of these groups under the umbrella of the **Confederation of Meghalaya Social Organisation (CoMSO)** are still prevalent and are still insisting in their demand for ILP. In regards to this, the leader of the KSU has mentioned that if there are people who do not want the implementation of ILP, then they should leave Meghalaya. The leader laid emphasis on the fact that the indigenous people have only one land and that they will not let their land and culture be taken away by outsiders.

## Conclusion

If we look into their role then we can see that these groups, particularly the KSU, have been actively engaging in the politics of the state, especially when it concerns the interests of the indigenous people. Even though their role in it at times may not seem to be so pleasant, due to unwanted reactions that followed when several incidences took place, but their participation can be seen as an effective machinery, as it enables the government to re-think and plan their policies wisely so that it serves the interest of the citizens of the state. There may be some demands and role of these groups which may be seen as an obstacle to developmental progress in the state, but their role in such policies and issues can be looked at from one angle, and that is to make sure that any policy and plan should not prevent the success or development of the tribal community, particularly the Khasi, Jaintia and the Garo.

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