

Conservation Management Plan for the Heritage Precincts of Sohra (Cherrapunjee)

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Sohra (Cherrapunjee) lies 25°12' north latitude and 91°35' east longitude just north of the plains of Sylhet (Bangladesh) at an elevation of 1313m above sea level. It falls within the Khasi Hills District, south of Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, and nestles amidst a range of hills which drop steeply to the southern plains. (Refer Photo. 1)

Sohra is a sprawling plateau consisting of rolling hills, rising to an elevation between 50 to 150m from the plateau, and marked in many places by deep gorges. To the south and east, the region is bounded by gorges of about 200 to 300m above sea level, which runs for many miles in a north-south direction.

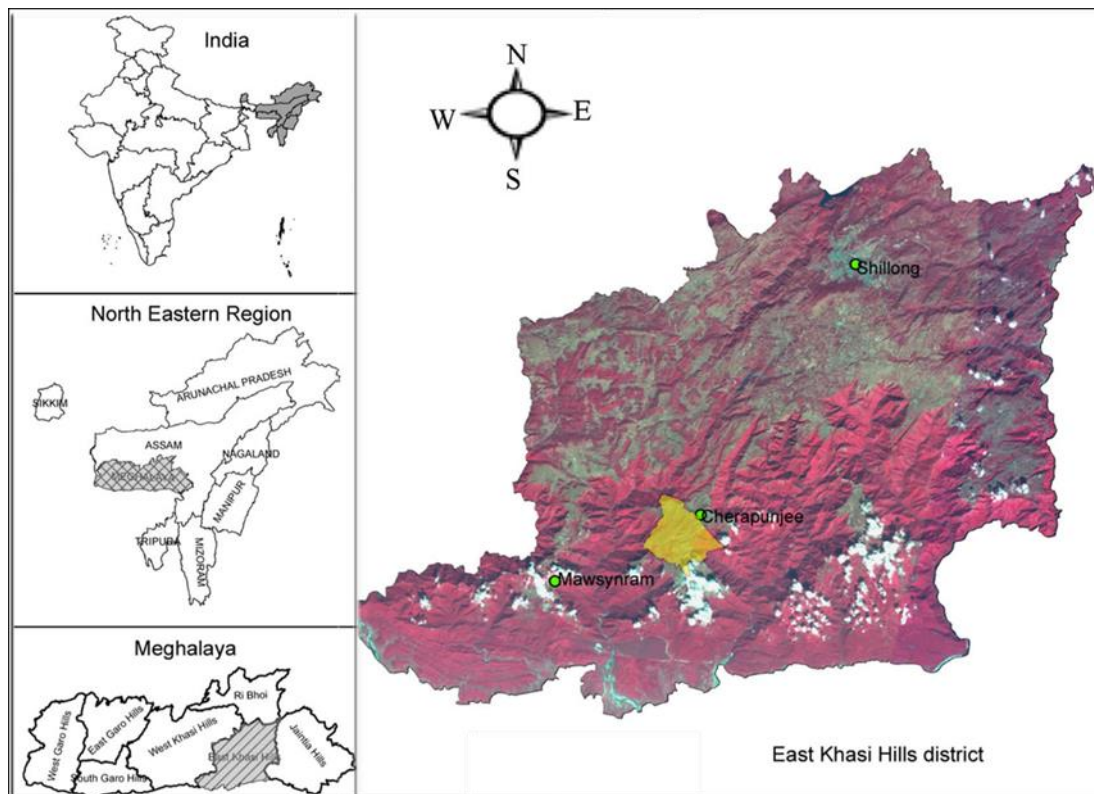


Photo 1. Location Map (Source: www.cgwb.gov.in)

Modified and redrawn by Author

From a market place, Sohra (Cherrapunjee) grew into a settlement and is presently a census town with a population of thirteen thousand, four hundred and two. Since the earliest inhabitants settled in the landscape, i.e the Khyrniam Khasis, the region came to be ruled by many Khasi Syiems (kings) who practiced their ancient system of democratic governance. This exist even today, side by side with the constitutional mechanism of the country. The Khasis, as a community with a lifestyle that

is strongly based on strong traditional values, there seemed to be good synthesis of nature, culture and built form in the settlement of Sohra. The Khasi culture thrived until the 1826 when the British arrived in the Khasi Hills, which eventually resulted in the British annexation of the Khasi Hills in 1833 and established Sohra (Cherrapunjee) as the first British capital of North-East India. Christian missionary work also began in the late 19th century. This brought about a great cultural impact on the landscape as well. A small but typical European settlement came up on the landscape of Sohra (Cherrapunjee) (Refer Photo 2).



Photo 2. The heritage precinct of Nongsawlia

After the arrival of the British and the missionaries, there are changes in the belief system of the Khasis exposing them to a new lifestyle and a new set of values and this has been reflected in their built form as well. Different building typologies like educational institutes and churches came up. The earthquake of 1897 wiped off almost everything in Sohra (Cherrapunjee) but some stood the test of time. Today, people have painfully neglected the cultural heritage that still exist in the settlement. Sohra (Cherrapunjee) offers a lot of tourism opportunities. But the cultural heritage of Sohra (Cherrapunjee) is not something, most people know about. The changes in land use, absence of management of cultural heritage, mismanagement of natural heritage, etc. have impacted the region with higher concentration of cultural heritage resources. This thesis, aims at projecting the importance of delineating the heritage precincts and thereby establish the heritage zone of Sohra (Cherrapunjee).



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