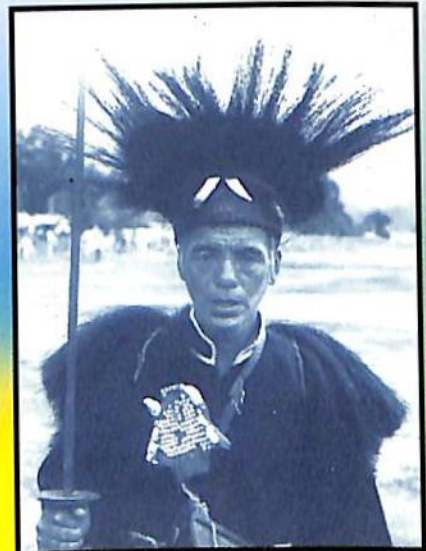


# Survey of Research in Political Science on North-East India (1970-1990)



L. S. Gassah

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SURVEY OF RESEARCH IN POLITICAL  
SCIENCE ON NORTH EAST INDIA  
(1970-1990)



*L.S. Gassah*

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## Foreword

The Advisory Committee of the NERC-ICSSR at its meeting held on November 22, 1991 decided to review the literature on North East India in the academic disciplines of Economics, Geography, History, Political Science and Sociology during the period 1970-1990, and sponsor the projects. Consequently scholars in these fields were identified and the work was entrusted to them. Most of the scholars who were entrusted to review the literature in their subjects have either completed their work or are in the process of completing it soon. We are, therefore, in a position now to publish these reviews one by one.

Review of published literature on North East India in Political Science was entrusted to Professor L.S. Gassah, of the Department of Political Science, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. Professor Gassah has taught the subject for a number of years and has published a number of books and articles. He makes full use of his wide teaching and research experience in this review of literature in Political Science.

Political Science as we study and understand it today is primarily an academic discipline of Western origin. India also developed a branch of study known as *dandaniti* quite early. *Arthasastra of Kautilya* is too well known a work on the subject. A number of works of the subject were written in later periods also. Most Political Science Departments have a paper of Ancient Indian Political thought in their Syllabi. This area of study has been occasionally studied by political scientists. This area of study is now being taken up mostly by historians and is usually studied on Western lines.

A work of this kind requires the cooperation of a number of scholars in the field as well as adequate resources. North East India is an extensive region having its own problems and difficulties. Keeping all these in view the review of literature was limited to publications in English alone. Professor Gassah has tried to collect all the available publications in English in this work and has made it as complete and comprehensive as possible.

We take this opportunity to thank him for his painstaking work and for cooperating with the NERC-ICSSR, Shillong.

We are glad to offer this work to the general public and the students and scholars interested in the study of different aspects of the literature developed on Political Science on North East India during 1970-1990, not only within this region but also outside, and hope that it will be useful both to students and scholars alike.

Jai Prakash Singh  
Honorary Director

## Preface

This book *Survey of Research in Political Science on North East India (1970–1990)*, is the result of the Project assigned to me by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, North-Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong. The objective behind this whole exercise is to review the literature in Political Science published in English either in the form of a book or printed articles published in different Journals about the North-Eastern Region during the period of twenty years (1970–1990). The period of twenty years is indeed very vast to cover the whole field of literature in Political Science in North East India. However, this humble, timely and earnest exercise in trying to give such a review has brought some of the least known pieces of literature in the concerned discipline to light and provided ready references to those who are interested in this field of study.

The 1960s proved to be eventful years of political movements in North-East India. The movements veered round the demand for more political autonomy to the hill people of the region which later culminated with the creation/formation/establishment of separate hill States in the region beginning with Nagaland as a full-fledged State in December 1963. Autonomous District Councils under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India were however in existence since 1952 in certain hill districts of the then composite State of Assam.

The demand for separate hill States gave rise to a number of proposals, plans, suggestions, etc., which were offered to the hill people from time to time to meet their demands for



both administrative and political structures in different shades and forms. Against this background of the hill State movements, one would also expect a rise and an increase in literature concerning politics and political development — both constitutional and administrative. This expectation did take a serious turn and systematic analysis of the political situation that took shape during that time had an immense impact in the later years.

Some of the literature on Political Science *per se* as a discipline did not take place immediately. Very few books which may be said to cater to the needs and understanding of the discipline of Political Science did not find an appreciable place even in the later part of the 1960s. However, many teachers and researchers belonging especially to the disciplines of Political Science and History, both at the College and University levels, did make use of the situations prevailing in the 1960s as starting points, because this period offered them immense background materials to analyse the later political developments in the region. Therefore, a decade later, saw a number of printed materials in the form of books, journals, magazines, proceedings of seminars and newspaper reports which have really enriched the discipline of Political Science. This kind of academic exercise brings the whole of North East India into focus and limelight even outside its own geographical boundaries. The increase number of literature on such studies of political development of the region also brings more understanding about the political situation and reality that takes place not only among the Political Scientists of the region but outside also. It gives way to attract more attention of the experts in the discipline by way of their interaction with the local scholars or their comments on what was happening in the region. Against this background, the review of the two decades (1970–1990) of literature in Political Science with special reference to the North Eastern region makes it interesting and worthwhile as far as the discipline is concerned.

The present exercise is a humble one — and by no means complete. However, a beginning is made in trying to unearth the literature in Political Science with a North East perspective.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the Chairman, the Honorary Director and the Deputy Director of ICSSR (NERC), Shillong for this task assigned to me and to Regency Publications, New Delhi for their timely publication of the Volume.

L.S. Gassah



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## Introduction

Political Science as an independent discipline among other Social Science disciplines has already gained an important status especially in the field of teaching in all North East India Universities. It is very encouraging to see that Political Science is one of the most popular subjects taught both at the under-graduate and post-graduate levels; the subject is even taught at the higher secondary school level but under a different subject matter. More encouraging in this respect is to find that all colleges with Arts stream have Political Science Departments. So also at the University or post-graduate level. To this effect, the UGC panel in its report entitled, *Political Science in India: State of the Discipline and Agenda for the Future* (1982), stated clearly that Political Science in India is a very popular discipline with the students at the under-graduate as well as post-graduate levels; even its M.Phil courses have begun to attract a number larger than what policy-makers visualised only a couple of years ago. In quantitative terms at least, the discipline can be regarded as having consolidated itself in the mainstream of Indian academic life. However, the report did not hesitate to state that this phenomenon of popularity is because of the general feeling among the students that Political Science is one of the easier disciplines to pass.<sup>1</sup> This is also true in particular with the students of the North Eastern Universities.

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1. Narain, Iqbal and Mathur, P.C. *Political Science in India: State of the Discipline and Agenda for the Future*, UGC, New Delhi, 1982, p. 5.

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But as far as 'research' strictly or directly dealing with Political Science is concerned, much area is still left to be empirically covered by researchers interested in the discipline. This is because of the fact that some research works submitted to different Departments of Political Science in the Universities of the North East do not have direct bearing of the discipline *per se*. This is because of the importance being given to inter or multidisciplinary approach. Thus it is opined that during the last three decades in the name of research in the discipline of Political Science, a few monographs came out from the Universities of North East India which have meaning in their respective fields and each of which reports and states the fact about the particular situation but the general relationship of these studies have yet to be rigorously pursued.<sup>2</sup>

Political Science is, at the global level, an intellectual discipline of great antiquity. Political Science, along with a host of other disciplines, made its appearance on the Indian scene only in the twentieth century and the history of its separate development in independent university teaching department spans less than half a dozen decades.<sup>3</sup>

Political Science began in the United States of America. In this sense it has become a western discipline which has come to occupy an important position in academics all over the world. Prior to the emergence of this western discipline, there were attempts at understanding state craft and also reflections on what could be called political philosophy. But systematic study of politics as a profession had never been taken seriously. Emergence of Political Science marked an interest in what is called 'real politics'.<sup>4</sup> Political Science studies in Indian universities originated, generally speaking, under the institutional auspices of History departments, both at the level of teaching and research. In some universities, however,

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2. Ray, B. Datta, The Status of Research in Political Science in North East India: Some Observations, *Journal of NEICSSR*, Vol. 14, No. 2, October 1990, p. 53
  3. Narain and Mathur, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
  4. Baruah, A.K., Mainstream Political Science and its Pitfalls, *Proceedings of the North East India Political Science Association* (hereafter NEIPSA Proceedings), Second Annual Conference, Guwahati, 1992, p. 44.

Political Science courses formed an integral part of Economics curricula, while in others Philosophy occupied a dominant position in relation to Political Science courses. In strict theory, such a situation, could have conceivably led to cross-fertilization of Political Science studies by insights drawn from such sister disciplines as History, Economics and Philosophy. However, in actual practice the subordination of Political Science to other disciplines, not only retarded its growth, but also prevented the students from taking advantage of latest developments in teaching and research which are taking place in the discipline all over the world, particularly after the mid-forties.<sup>5</sup> The North East experience came much later in this period as we shall see in the following paragraphs.

The UGC Panel Report (1982) in its analysis of the 'state of the discipline' (Political Science) further found that, in a very fundamental sense a discipline like Political Science with its emphasis on a tradition of free and frank enquiry into political issues can prosper only after a country has attained independence. It is, therefore, not surprising that the emphasis in pre-independent India remained largely confined to the study of political classics, political history and constitutions. Beyond this foci, Political Science studies and also a large number of research institutes received a fillip only after India attained independence in 1947.<sup>6</sup> In the case of North East India, the position and status of Political Science in teaching and research came much later even from the Indian standard point of view. It took more than ten years even after the establishment of the first University in the region in 1948 at Guwahati that the first batch of Political Scientists came out successfully in 1961. Before that period, students desiring to study Political Science had to opt for Political Science group in Economics, both at the under-graduate and post-graduate levels. But during the last more than thirty years, the number of Political Scientists is gradually increasing with the increase in the number of Universities in the North Eastern region. In fact, it is the most popular course of study among students in the

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5. Narair and Mathur, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

faculty of Social Sciences.<sup>7</sup> The response of students was so good that sometimes it becomes a problem to accommodate or admit all those who seek admission at the post-graduate level.

Gauhati University being the oldest University in the North Eastern region took the lead in respect of giving certain status to the discipline even though at the initial stage, the University which was started in 1948, came to have a separate Department of Political Science ten years after that, that is, in 1958. From then on, there was no looking back. Political Science as an independent discipline has made rapid strides and faster development and therefore attained an unparalleled weight and status in terms of its importance, significance, prominence and popularity among the teachers and students of the North Eastern region. In many Colleges and Universities of the region, its popularity can be easily judged from the number of students intake, being the most sought after discipline both at the under and post-graduate levels.

In 1966, another University in Assam was established, that is, Dibrugarh University with Political Science as one of the Departments; next followed the J.N.U. Centre at Imphal (now Manipur University) which also has the department of Political Science.

The North Eastern Hill University was established by an Act of Parliament in 1973. But Political Science Department of this University was started only in 1974 with few students. But since 1975, the number of students intake of the Department increased rapidly. NEHU being a Central University, attracted a large number of students from all over the North Eastern region and even outside. As stated earlier, Political Science is one of the most popular disciplines among the students at the under-graduate level. The same popularity is also experienced at the post-graduate level of all the Universities in the region that have the Department of Political Science.

As far as teaching of the discipline like Political Science is concerned, there are few limitations that both the teachers

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7. Pakem, B., North East India Political Science Association: Presidential Address, *NEIPSA Proceedings*, Second Annual Conference, Guwahati, 1992, p. 2.

The history of research in Political Science in the North Eastern region is of very recent origin. The reason for starting this important aspect late is obvious. As stated earlier, the first University in the region, Gauhati University, was started only in 1948. At the level of research, it was only in 1967, that the first doctorate degree in Political Science was conferred on a research scholar whose field of study was more relevant to Economics. Later on, the M.Phil and Ph.D research degrees were also conferred on a number of research scholars in the region. In addition to these, there are also teachers and other research students who had undertaken research works in the field of Political Science who did not work for a research degree. Such research papers produced by research scholars of North East India cover topics on local, regional, national and international issues.<sup>9</sup> A further analysis of these researches conducted both at the University departments and outside point out to the various and varied research activities in the field of Administration-Educational, Jail, Municipal, Revenue, Personnel, University, Secretariat, British-Relations with North East India, Centre-State Relations, Inter-State Relations; Community Developments, Rural Development Programmes and Panchayats; Electoral Studies, Voting Behaviour; Federalism, Regionalism; International Relations — Indo-British, Indo-Burmese, Indo-Sri Lanka, Indo-Bangladesh, Indo-Pak and International Politics; Legislative Assembly, Local Self-Government, Political Development and Change, Modern and Traditional Leadership, Elite studies, Middle class, Political Parties, Political and Social Change, Public Service Commission; Sixth Schedule, Governor, Deputy Commissioner, Traditional Institutions, Social and Cultural Life, State Politics, Urban Politics, Students' Movements and Politics, Ethnicity and a host of other political problems and issues. But we have yet to have standard research works in the field of Political Theory which is an important aspect of Political studies.<sup>10</sup>

On the question of appraisal of research on Political Science in North East India, it may be said that no appraisal of the extent and nature of such research has ever been made so

9. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

10. Pakem, B., *op.cit.*, p. 4.

far. It is only after a proper survey of the research materials on the discipline and summaries of the same are made that a critical appraisal of research in Political Science in North East India can be done.<sup>11</sup> There is also the problem of the lack of knowledge and co-ordination among various University's departments in the region itself. This gives rise even to the problem of the research students doing research on the same topic in more than two University Political Science Departments. This is because no one knows what others are doing in their research works. This should not have happened had there been an exchange of idea and information among the various Political Science departments of different Universities and other research institutions in the region. It is high time therefore among the various University Political Science departments and other research institutions in the region in order to avoid duplication of doing research on the same topic(s) as well as to know who works on what problems or issues. This will also help to enrich the discipline especially in terms of research. Perhaps because of this fact, it led to the formation of such associations like the former Assam Political Science Association (APSA) and the present North East India Political Science Association (NEIPSA). The advantage of forming such associations is to bring together during the Annual Conferences all those Political Science teachers, students and others who are interested in political studies into a common platform where they can share and discuss the common problems and issues confronting them. Against this background, therefore, the Second Annual Conference of NEIPSA held under the auspices of the premier University in the region, that is, Gauhati University in 1992 that the organisers felt it is urgently necessary to discuss an important issue on *The Status of teaching and research of Political Science in North East India*. The result of this exercise is immensely fruitful. Thus in the Proceedings of NEIPSA published after the end of that Conference, there are as many as 5(five) research papers on the above theme. This shows the anxiety and concern of the Political Scientists of the region towards the discipline both in terms of the problem of teaching and its status in research.

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11. *Ibid.*



This is a very welcome trend set in the right direction. Serious discussions of this nature in the near future may also be able to bring to light many other important aspects of Political Science studies in the region.

The 1960s proved to be eventful years of political movements in North-East India. The movements veered round the demand for more political autonomy to the hill people of the region which later culminated with the creation/formation/establishment of separate hill States in the region beginning with Nagaland as a full-fledged State in December 1963. Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution were however in existence since 1952 in certain hill districts of the then composite State of Assam. Before the reorganisation of Assam, the hill leaders have had a second look for scrutiny of the initial autonomy granted to them through the Autonomous District Councils and found that such constitutional arrangement was inadequate. The hill leaders even in 1954 were of the opinion that 'autonomy' under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution was not a 'real autonomy' as per the resolution passed by the Chief Executive Members in their conference held at Tura in 1954. Thus, besides the demand for the amendment of the Sixth Schedule, an added dimension was given to the demand for separate hill States for the autonomous districts, till then under the composite State of Assam.

The demand for separate hill States led to the appointment of different committees, sub-committees and commissions to examine and study the varied demands of the hill people in North East India. This gave rise to a number of proposals, plans, suggestions, etc. which were offered to the hill people from time to time to meet their demands for both administrative and political structures in different shades and forms

Against this background of the hill State movements, one would also expect a rise and an increase in literature concerning politics and political development — both constitutional and administrative. This expectation did take a serious turn and systematic analysis of the political situation that took shape during that time had an immense impact in the later years.

But some of the literature on Political Science *per se* as a discipline did not take place immediately. Very few books which may be said to cater to the needs and understanding of the discipline of Political Science did not find an appreciable place even in the later part of the 1960s. However, many teachers and researchers belonging especially to the disciplines of Political Science and History, both at the College and University levels, did make use of the situations prevailing in the 1960s as starting points, because this period offered them immense background materials to analyse the later political developments in the region. Therefore, a decade later, saw a number of printed materials in the form of books, journals, magazines, proceedings of seminars and newspaper reports which have really enriched the discipline of Political Science. This kind of academic exercise brings the whole of North East India into focus and limelight even outside its own geographical boundaries. The increase number of literature on such studies of political development of the region also brings more understanding about the political situation and reality that takes place not only among the political scientists of the region but outside also. It gives way to attract more attention of the experts in the discipline by way of their interaction with the local scholars or their comments on what was happening in the region. Against this background, the review/survey of the two decades (1970–1990) of literature in Political Science with special reference to the North Eastern region makes it interesting and worthwhile as far as the discipline is concerned.

The present exercise is a humble one — and by no means complete. However, a beginning is made in trying to unearth the literature in Political Science with a North-East perspective.

## Literature on General Problems/ Issues of North-East India

It is interesting to note the presence and availability of literature discussing the general political problems and issues of N.E. India. Some such books are edited volumes. They are actually the outcome of Seminars, Conferences, Symposia, etc., held by different research organisations and institutions, mostly involved on research activities on the problems of N.E. India. A number of interesting topics could be found in such edited volumes covering different disciplines (mostly Social Sciences). While reviewing these literature, an attempt is made to sift them carefully in order to extract information relating to Political Science. Wherever necessary the articles which could be said to have contributed to enrich understanding of political problems and issues, are listed in the review. This makes it easier for those who go through this report to find out specific articles in a particular book(s) as reference source(s). However, some of these articles may not be on Political Science *per se* but at least they are falling under the applied side of the discipline.

A cursory examination of these books will show that they cover a wide canvass of political problems and issues relating to N.E. India.

One interesting aspect of these books is the analytical framework provided to understand the social and political significance of the traditional institutions prevailing among the people of N.E. India of the causes/factors responsible for the abolition of the same. Where these traditional institutions

are still in existence, an attempt is also made to analyse the situation in their relations with the modern constitutional setup or institutions. Two things could be derived here: One, the problem of conflict between tradition and modernity or in other sense, the tradition-modernity dichotomy, and secondly, the co-existence between the two institutions in spite of certain problems.

Some of these books are based strictly on the historical and constitutional development of N.E. India since the British period. Therefore, we find few scholars both from the disciplines of Political Science and History who made serious attempts to place those documents as they are with their comments and still others tried to analyse the contents of the documents in order to understand the political situation of N.E. India both during the British period and after that. These books become very important reference materials on which a scholar who is interested to study the political dimensions of N.E. India has to consult them.

Broadly speaking, the third common dimension that may be pinpointed here about these books is the basic information that they try to bring out on certain sensitive issues and problems that may be said to have shaken even the feeling of "Indianness" to put it bluntly. Therefore, such basic fundamental questions like 'nationalism', 'regionalism', 'nationality', 'identity', 'social and political tension', and such other crises of the twentieth century N.E. India have been discussed by many prominent figures in these books, keeping in view the data which come from North-East India.

The book *Problem of the Hill Tribes: N.E. Frontier (1822-42)* Vol. I by H.K. Barpujari (1970) is an appraisal of the problem of the hill tribes of North East Frontier in its early phase. The factors and forces at work in moulding the British policy towards these tribes are analysed and examined in this volume. The book has given an analysis of the political situation in North-East India in the early phase of the British administration. Though historical in its approach, the book contains an enormous piece of information relating to British contact with the Hill Tribes of the frontier region and the type of administrative acumen introduced by them.