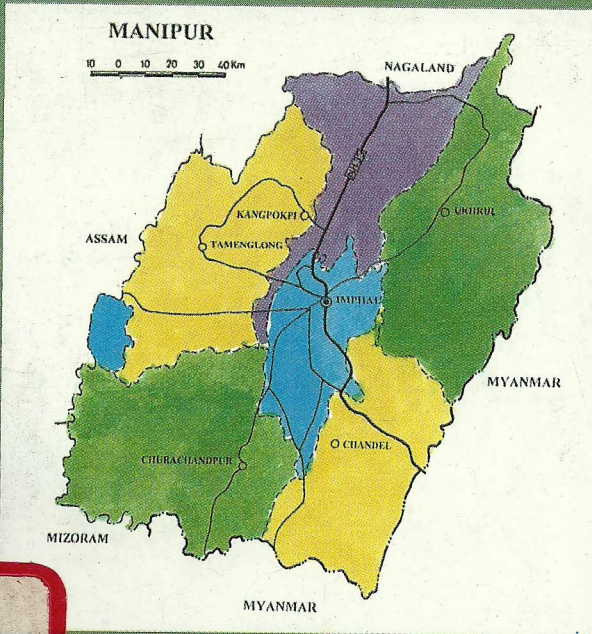


Research Priorities in North-East India

With Special Reference to Manipur



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Lucy Zehol

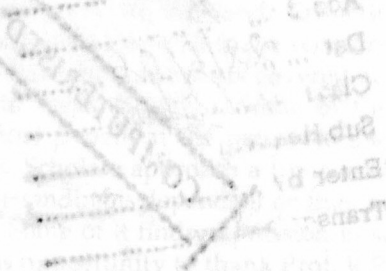
The book *Research Priorities in North-East India—With Special Reference to Manipur*, contains a collection of research papers contributed by various scholars of Manipur from different disciplines of Social Sciences, in a panel discussion sponsored by the ICSSR-NERC held at Manipur University. This small work will be found useful by those interested in North-East India, more particularly Manipur.

The Editor, **Dr. (Mrs.) Lucy Zehol** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. She has written a book on *Ethnicity in Manipur—Experiences, Issues and Perspectives* and also another book on *Women in Naga Society*. Her interests are Anthropological Theories, Methodology, Ethnicity, Gender Issues and Ethnography of the North-East India.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

(WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MANIPUR)

Editor
LUCY ZEHOL



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Foreword

Research Priorities in Social Sciences in Manipur largely results from the panel discussion held on October 28, 1993. It was sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research—North-Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong, and organised by Prof. R.P. Singh, Department of Geography, Manupur University, Imphal in association with the Imphal Chapter of Indian Institute of Public Administration. Several scholars from the concerned disciplines and others including administrators were invited and participated in the panel discussion.

Panel discussion on Research Priorities was purely an academic exercise to know from the scholars in different parts of the North-East about the areas covered adequately or not at all covered in Social Sciences. Some of the scholars invited presented short papers at the panel discussion indicating the priority areas. Scholars approach a topic as they understand it, and the understanding is dependent on their making background and attitude. Some of it finds expression in source of them.

I take this opportunity to thank Prof. R.P. Singh and all his friends and colleagues who contributed papers and participated in the panel discussion. I also thank Dr. Lucy Zehol for going through the papers and editing them. Dr. C.J. Thomas, to be thanked for all the personal interest he took in the Research Priorities.

I hope that this small work will be found useful by those interested in north east India, more particularly Manipur.

Shillong
July, 2001

Jai Prakash Singh
Ex. Hon. Director,
ICSSR-NERC

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MANIPUR

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Introduction

I

North-Eastern Region of India, has seven political units namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura.

The region bears a great deal of geographical, linguistic, social, cultural, religious and economic heterogeneity. The geographers and Human ecologists speak of some five major topographical units covering North-Eastern region. These are the plain areas of Assam, Manipur and Tripura, river valleys of Arunachal Pradesh, Plateaus of Meghalaya, Hilly areas of Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram and the Higher Mountain found in Arunachal Pradesh.

In terms of linguistic families and sub-families the North-Eastern region has three major Linguistic Zones namely the Indo-Aryan, the Austric and the Tibeto-Burman. Racially, most of the tribal population of the North-Eastern region is of Mongoloid origin. The Australoids, it is reported were followed by the Mongoloids after whom came the Caucasoids. The religious heterogeneity also characterizes the North-Eastern region. The tribals are Christian in general, Buddhists and animists while Non-tribal population in this region follows predominantly the Hindu faith. Economically, the region as a whole is very backward. In transport and communication also, the level of development is far from satisfactory.

The region has multi ethnic groups of people. Added to all the above mentioned features of the North-East, one can also mention the long history of openness of the region to alien influence, and instances of fast changes in the socio-cultural and religious life of the people.

II

Manipur is located in the extreme eastern part of India. A small tip of southern Manipur adjoins Mizoram. Its other neighbours are Nagaland in the North and the Cachar district of Assam in the west, the North Cachar Hills of Assam in the south east. Like the other states in the North-East, Manipur too has its international borders with Myanmar in the south and the east.

Among the seven sister states of the North-East India (Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura), Manipur in many ways is distinct from other states for the following reasons:

Manipur is the home of the now famous Manipuri classical Raslila dance. It is also known for the famous and beautiful Manipuri handloom products. Manipur is the land of the legendary Rani Gaidenliu. Moreover, during the Second World War, besides Nagaland, Manipur was part of the country which witnessed the march of the Japanese forces, subsequently, converting it into venue of war. Much prior to this, before the British rule in India, Manipur had been twice captured by the Burmese. In other words, Manipur has been the venue of many wars. After Independence, Manipur has been the scenes of some of the worst forms of insurgencies. Ethnic situations is undoubtedly the worst of its kind in the present decade. Last but not the least, the population of Manipur is unique, it has two distinct category of tribal and non-tribal population. What is distinct about this is that, it is only in Manipur that there is rather a very sharp and distinct cultural differences between the two sections of the population. Compared to this in Assam and Tripura, both of which also have "mixed population" like Manipur, there is much of culture transfer between the tribal and the non-tribal sections of the population.

The topography of Manipur comprises of two geographical regions. The valley and the surrounding hills. The hills of Manipur are the abode of the different tribes inhabiting the state. The hills comprises of nearly 90 percent of the total area of the state, while the tribal population inhabiting it account for nearly 27.30 percent of the total population of the state. In

other words, more than that of 70% of the total population of the state is concentrated in the 10 percent of the land of the state i.e., the Imphal valley. This is the abode of the Meiteis who accounts for nearly 60 percent of the total population of the state.

Manipur is ethnically heterogeneous. The people inhabiting Manipur can be divided into two broad categories—the tribal communities and the non-tribal communities. In terms of distinct ethnic identity the people in Manipur can be broadly classified into four distinct groups:

- (i) the Meiteis, including the Loi (Scheduled Castes)
- (ii) the Bishnupriyas
- (iii) the Pangans (Manipuri Muslims) and
- (iv) the hill tribes

The Meiteis are the main inhabitants of the valley. The Imphal valley and the Meiteis are usually taken as synonymous. The Loi scheduled castes are scattered throughout the valley, interspersed with the Meiteis. The Bishnupriyas are concentrated in some villages around Bishnupur. The Manipur Muslims, locally referred to as the Pangans, are to be found mainly on the fertile tracts of land between the Imphal river and the Iril river. The tribes inhabiting Manipur are concentrated in the hills with some tribal pockets in the valley.

The tribes inhabiting Manipur can be divided into two broad groups—the tribes belonging to the Naga group, and the tribes belonging to the non-Naga group.

Officially, the tribes of Manipur have been classified into three groups:

- (i) The Naga group of tribes
- (ii) The Chin-Kuki-Mizo group of tribes and
- (iii) The intermediary category of tribes, i.e., which strictly speaking, undecidedly traces linkage of identity with both the major groups.

According to official recognition (Directorate of Tribal Welfare and Backward Classes, Manipur, 1981.) the total number of tribes and their names in each of the groups are as follows:

(i) Naga group of tribes

Kabui (Rongmei and Puimei), Kacha Naga (Liangmei and Zemei) collectively known as Zeliangrong, Moa, Maram, Tangkhul and Maring.

(ii) Chin-Kuki-Mizo group of tribes

Gangte, Hmar, Lushai (Mizo), Paite, Simte, Thadou (Kuki), Vaiphei and Zou.

(iii) Intermediary group of tribes

Aimol, Chiru, Koireng, Kom (collectively called Komrem), Anal, Chothe, Lamkang, Koirao/Thangal, Purum, Mongsang and Moyon.

III

Keeping in mind the above background of the region and while reviewing the researches in the historical and contemporary context, it can be observed that a lot more remains to be done.

In the beginning British administrators, missionaries, travelers and others wrote about the life and culture of the people of this region. More so over the years scholars from India and abroad have made their contribution along with some administrators and defense officers.

A review of the research contributions suggests that

- (1) There is a need for more monograph on ethnographic accounts of communities of this region.
- (2) Many of the tribes/non-tribes are yet to be studied in a holistic perspective.
- (3) There is a need of professionally trained local scholars to work on their own tribe or society.
- (4) The need of restudy over a period of time either by the same scholar or others to understand the dynamics of change.
- (5) While collecting data, one should also explore the principles governing each society.
- (6) Last, but not the least, is the need for more empirical studies.

In other words, Research priorities in the North-East have to be a mixture of descriptive, analytic and explanatory studies. There are significant differences between descriptive,

analytic and explanatory studies. The presence of this difference should not be taken to imply that there is no significant inter-relationship between these three types of studies.

In fact, descriptive research forms the basis for the other two categories of research. Similarly no explanatory research is possible without available analytical accounts. Descriptive research comprise of an arranged presentation in terms of the units of the phenomena. In case it is a study of say a village, a descriptive account of the village will comprise of information about the units as location, environment, population, land types, economy of the people, social and religious life of the people, the political organisation of the village, material and non-material communication of the village with its neighbour etc.

Analytic research are descriptive research plus an analysis of the inter-relation between the different units, as for example, education and political organization. Analytic studies focus attention on the nature of behaviour of one unit with relation to change in the characteristic of the other unit. Analytic studies with references to descriptive studies, extend and include analysis of pattern of change between two or more than two related units.

Explanatory studies/Research extends beyond where analytic studies stop. In explanatory research, the focus of attention is not only to outline the trend of relationship (analysis) but also outline causal analysis which deals with questions like: if this (cause) then that (effect) the effort is to explain the change.

We believe that our task is not to offer solution or provide an answer to the various problems we face today but to add a little more to our knowledge of human society and culture to better understand some of these problems.

Understanding North-East India in general, and Manipur in particular, is a challenging task for all of us. Let us take up this challenge with fortitude.

IV

The papers brought together in this book were presented at a panel discussion on "Research priorities in the North-East for

the 90s" organised by Prof. R.P. Singh, Department of Geography, Manipur University, in collaboration with the Imphal Chapter of Indian Institute of Public Administration, and Indian Council of Social Science Research, North-Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong on 28th October 1993. Several academicians, administrators, students and others actively participated in the panel discussion.

The papers are arranged here serially as per the sequence of academic sessions.

A.K. Ray in his paper 'Basic Issues and Resource Guidelines' covers the research priority areas in Social Sciences more particularly in socio-economic and political fields relating to Manipur. While dealing with the primary source materials preserved in the different archives of India, he highlights the nature and contents of the archival records preserved in the National Archive of India at Delhi, West Bengal Archive at Calcutta, and the Archives at Shillong, Guwahati and Imphal. Not only this, he also refers to secondary source material preserved in different institutions. He also refers to valuable documents published so far as source material useful for the purpose of carrying out researches on different aspects of history and culture of Manipur and other neighbouring States.

Bimola Devi in her paper on research priorities 'A Political Approach' stressed the need for undertaking further researches on the interaction between traditional political institutions of the tribal people of Manipur and modern political institutions, role of voluntary organisations in the politics of the State, working of political parties both at the national and regional level, role of women in the socio-economic and political life in Manipuri Society.

R.N.P. Sinha in his paper 'Geographical Approach' emphasises the need of undertaking extensive and intensive researches for planned development at various levels—village, block and district, on quality of life, hierarchy of settlements both rural and urban, rural settlement patterns, land use, particularly in the tribal areas, administrative boundaries, impact of planning process on the socio-economic life of the people and its impact on environment, etc. He covers all aspects in a wide perspective in the context of the entire region.

R.K. Ranjan Singh, in his paper 'Determining Research Priorities in Manipur' stressed the need of carrying out further investigation into various problems related to development and progress of the State. The research priority areas covered by him encompass the following—the effect of traditional jhum cultivation on land and forest, low productivity of land, land use and problems associated with it, under the prevailing climatic and physiographic conditions, food habits of the people, changes in the cropping or farming pattern of the State, particularly in the hills, problem of introduction and implementation of natural farming technique, the impact of environmental upheavals or uncertainties in the social context, various economic programmes for hills as well as valley, etc. He laid special emphasis on the foothill zone of the State, which is normally neglected in any type of study or research.

N. Ram Singh deals with developmental research in his paper entitled 'Physiographical Approach' and emphasises on the need for studying physiographic characteristics like altitude, climate, soils and environmental endowments which provide necessary backdrop for developmental planning of an area. The research priority areas suggested by him included water harvesting, agricultural production and productivity, rural technology, power and energy resources, and flora and fauna of the State.

G.P. Singh discusses Research Priority in a 'Historical Perspective' and stresses upon the need for carrying out further researches on the origin, ethnology of the tribal people along scientific lines with the help of all available sources. He also pointed out towards undertaking archaeological explorations and excavations for rediscovering the past. The research priority areas outlined by him embrace all the three periods of history—ancient, medieval and modern and cover the political and cultural contacts of the people. The rise and growth of Hinduism and Buddhism, tribal republics, internal and external trade and commerce, the role of the tribal people in frustrating the repeated attempts of the Muslims for subduing them and thereby extending their authority, tribal renaissance and reform movements, anti-British movements, etc.

Asha Gupta in her paper priorities in 'Environmental Research' highlighting the multi-disciplinary nature of environmental sciences laid stress on the need for local initiative for undertaking collaborative research projects of three categories—(i) Based on local needs like low cost sanitation, both urban and rural, non-conventional energy resources etc., (ii) Based on community needs like disposal and recycling of waste, flood management and water pollution, and (iii) Theoretical and experimental studies that need long monitoring like conservation of fragile ecosystems, impact of development actions (dam, hydro-electric projects in the hilly areas) on environment and settlements. She specially mentioned in this category conservation, management and improvement of wild-life with particular reference to Sangai, animal-plant relationships and growing ecosystems.

V.S. Pai in his paper 'Export Potential of Manipuri Handloom Products and its Economic Implications for the State' touched upon the handloom products of Manipur with special reference to their export potential for the domestic as well as external markets. He underlined the importance of indigenous cottage industries in the socio-economic set-up of the State and also identifies areas to be researched.

E. Bijoy Kumar Singh in his paper 'Research Priorities—Economics (I)' emphasised the need for adopting an interdisciplinary approach for the study of the resource bases of the region, for formulating development plans with the help of appropriate technology, for demographic studies and the studies about shifting cultivation and its impact on environment. He also stressed the need for adopting technological innovations in the field of agricultural development and for accelerating all-round growth of the state economy.

Y.S. Singh, discusses 'Research Priorities—Economics (II)' in agricultural and industrial development of Manipur. The priority areas for further researches suggested by him include: (a) Physical resources of the region, (b) Land use pattern, (c) Planning process, (d) Performance of public sector undertakings, (e) Industrial potential, and (f) Power, transport, communications, etc.

Although the authors have not adopted uniform methodology, their concern for research priorities for the state of Manipur comes up well in their presentations.

I hope this book will inspire and help scholars and others who are interested in this region. I wish to thank all the contributors and ICSSR, Shillong particularly Dr. C.J. Thomas for making this monograph possible.

Lucy Zehol

INDIAN COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH NORTH-EASTERN REGIONAL CENTRE

Upper Nongthymmai, Shillong, Meghalaya

The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) is an autonomous organisation established by the Government of India in 1969, engaged in promoting research in social sciences.

The Council has set up six Regional Centres at Shillong, Calcutta, Chandigarh, Bombay, Delhi, and Hyderabad as part of its programme of decentralising administration and broadbasing social science research. The main roles of Regional Centre are: to act as the agent of the ICSSR within the region; to act as the representative of the social scientists of the region and to bring their ideas and problems to the ICSSR; to provide a platform for the social scientists of the region to come together for promotion of social science research and to serve as the link between the social scientists of the region and the national and international community of the social scientists.

The North-Eastern Regional Centre covers all the eight states of the region—Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim. The main objectives of the NERC are: (i) to render essential bibliographical and documentation service for research work; (ii) to organise or to assist the organisation of Seminars, Workshops, Research Methodology Courses, Conferences, at different Universities, Colleges, and other Institutions in North-East; (iii) to award Study Grant for research scholars in order to collect data in the Libraries in North-East; (iv) to organise Lectures by distinguished scholars; and (v) to disseminate information about the programme of the ICSSR.

NERC has a Library-cum-Documentation Analysis Unit exclusively on studies related to the social, political, cultural and economic affairs of North-Eastern Region. At present it has a collection of around 3000 books on various social science disciplines and about 500 unpublished Seminar, Symposia, Conference and Workshop proceedings sponsored by the NERC. It has also more than 1000 collections of occasional papers from different research institutions.

The Centre as a part of its documentation and bibliographical services has compiled major bibliographies on academic material presented in Seminars and Conferences sponsored by the NERC, Journal maintained in eminent libraries of the North-Eastern Region, dissertations and articles on North-East. It has published NERC Annual Lecture Series (priced) and Special Lecture Series (unpriced).

The Chairman of the NERC is the Head of the Organisation and the Honorary Director, as its Executive Head. The Deputy Director is responsible for the day-to-day administration and management of the activities of the NERC under the guidance of the Honorary Director.

Further information may be obtained from the Deputy Director, North-Eastern Regional Centre, Indian Council of Social Science Research, Upper Nongthymmai, Shillong 793 014, Meghalaya.

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