

# **INDIA'S NORTH-EAST**

## **A STUDY IN TRANSITION**

**P S DATTA**

---

416  
GB0949

# INDIA'S NORTH-EAST

## A Study in Transition



P.S. DATTA



**HAR-ANAND PUBLICATIONS**

*in association with*

**VIKAS PUBLISHING HOUSE PVT LTD**

*Preface*

*For*  
*Professor Amalendu Guha,*  
*the relentless researcher,*  
*Who Moulded Our Perspective*  
*in so many ways*

## Preface

Planning for a volume of this type is generally done by a researcher when he is already well rooted in his academic soil. The present venture does in no way fall in that line. The following understanding that evolved during a span of last ten years infact is the witness to the attempt of a student of political sociology at appreciating the tension-producing fall-outs of development activities in the north eastern periphery of the country—to which he belongs, physically and emotionally.

It must go on record that in my attempts at understanding our part of the country and the people thereof I have been immensely guided and shaped by a number of my predecessors, none of whom incidentally happened to be a direct teacher of mine in the institutional framework. Of them I must mention Professor B.K. Roy Burman, Professor Amalendu Guha, Professor Iqbal Narain, Professor D.N. Dhanagare, Professor J.B. Ganguly, Professor Annada Charan Bhagabati and Professor Hiren Gohain. Two other scholars who in so many ways kindled in me the fire of faith are Professor Baniprasanna Misra and Professor Prasenjit Choudhury. On the other hand my young friends, Ms. Sunita Newar, Mr. Pat Keyhie, Mr. Santanu Sengupta, Ms. Chandana Bhattacharjee, Ms. Sujata Sharma and Mr. Rakhal Purkayastha, who were kind enough to associate me in their research ventures, too taught me a lot about our region. If the present volume serves any purpose the credit, if any, goes to the above scholars. The drawbacks and inadequacies are no doubt mine.

I am thankful to Editors and Publishers of *Seminar*, *Mainstream*, *Social Research* and *The Arunachal Times* for using here the writeups published by them in the past. I am also thankful to Dr. B.N. Bordoloi (Editor of *Constraints of Tribal Development*, Gauhati, 1990) and Professor Madhu S.

Misra (Editor of *Rural Development in Eastern and North Eastern India*, IIMC, 1988) for using the material that I was invited to contribute to the volumes brought out by them. I am also in debt to the Departments of History and Political Science of Dibrugarh University, Department of Sociology of North Eastern Hill University and Indian Association of Social Science Institutes for sharing my ideas on some of the issues covered here during the seminars organised by them.

I would also like to put on record my sincere appreciation for Mr. Gurudas Das of Department of Economics of St. Anthony's College for taking much interest in finalisation of the present volume.

Like my all other academic ventures, this one too owes a lot to my colleagues at ICSSR North Eastern Regional Centre. I am more particularly indebted to my colleague Ms. Jean M. Blah for all the trouble she had to shoulder in preparing the manuscript in type form.

If the citizens and scholars find the present volume provocative enough to look deeper into the pandora's box, *i.e.* the North East—my attempt will be more than rewarded.

**P.S. Datta**

# Contents

<i>Preface</i> .....	7
I Modernisation of the Hills of North East: Some Promises to Keep .....	11
II NEC and Tribal Development: A Note in Dissent .....	19
III Regional Integration through Power in a Power-Potent Region .....	27
IV Shifting Cultivation: Need for a Reassessment .....	38
V Roots of Insurgency .....	48
VI A Case for Immediate Legislative Measures for Land Reforms in Meghalaya .....	56
VII Ideological Bases of Regional Political Parties of Meghalaya .....	83
VIII Agrarian Situation in Mizoram: Few Points to Ponder .....	99
IX Electoral Dynamics in Eastern Himalayas: The Case of Arunachal Pradesh .....	112
X What Ails Assam? Need for Soul-Searching .....	140

# I. Modernisation of the Hills of North East Some Promises to Keep

## I

Each epoch in social history is identified with a dominant ideal, a guiding faith, a forceful target, a meaningful slogan and a set of corresponding concepts. This is true to all ages of social history. 'Modernisation' is one of the corresponding concepts of our age which very aptly represents the cross currents of ideals, faiths, targets and slogans of the contemporary period.

"Modernisation is the current term for an old process—the process of social change whereby less developed societies acquire characteristics common to more developed societies." In the literature on modernisation, the 'less developed' countries are invariably referred to as traditional society. "Tradition means habits, customs, attitudes, ways of life which get embodied in institutions and then tend to get frozen because of the stability and autonomous existence of these institutions. Thus, tradition implies age and, with it, a fairly long period of continuity. It also postulates a certain rigidity that makes adjustment to changing conditions difficult, if not impossible, without the stimulus of some external force. Not all aspects of a traditional society need to be changed; at the same time, change is implicit in any traditional society that has continuing life in it. A traditional society can be progressive in some of its content . . ." <sup>2</sup>

Keeping this observation in mind an attempt may now be made to understand the salient features of modernity. There appears to be a large area of agreement, despite conceptual and terminological differences, "that among the salient characteristics (Operational Values) of modernity are (1) a degree of self-

sustaining growth in the economy . . . ; (2) a measure of public participation in the polity—or at least democratic representation in defining and choosing policy alternatives; (3) a diffusion of secular-rational norms—understood approximately in Weberian-Parsonian terms; (4) an increment of mobility in the society—understood as personal freedom of physical, social and psychic movement; and (5) a corresponding transformation in the moral personality that equips the individual to function effectively in a social order that operates according to the foregoing characteristics.”<sup>3</sup>

However, an agreement is yet to be achieved on the full matrix of modernisation which needs complete specification of interrelations and sequences among the components. Nevertheless a fair measure of consensus has been reached on the identification and conceptualisation of the components themselves.

“All models of modernisation that aim at generality have dealt in some way with the economic development variables that affect rising output per head directly and visibly, such as industrialisation, urbanisation, national income and per capita income. In their quest for a model sufficiently general to subsume the move from “rising output per head” to “self-sustaining growth,” sociologists have added to these variables an enlightenment variable measured in terms of schooling, literacy and added a power variable measured in terms of participation, party membership and voting; psychologists have added a cross-cutting variable of personality ... measured in terms of authoritarianism, empathy, and need achievement.”<sup>4</sup>

## II

“When a society changes from its traditional moorings into a modern society there is a gradual but fundamental change in the style of life of the people and in their outlook on the world. It involves a new orientation in the attitude. . . Modernisation is a total transformation of society, a movement in consciously chosen direction.”<sup>5</sup>

About this ‘chosen direction’ there appear in post-World War II period two major currents: (1) a dominant current arising from certain western liberal bourgeois assumptions and (2) a



current originating from Marxist and Socialist scholars. Certain similarities are to be found in these two currents: (a) both attempt to transform social structure from the ones based on ascriptive to achieving roles; (b) both attempt to transform the economy from subsistence-production based on human and animal power to mass production based on inanimate power (steam, electricity, atomic energy); (c) both attempt at transformation of the traditional political sub-system by making the sanction behind the sovereignty of the political power this worldly rather than other worldly, thereby making it accountable to people; (d) both appreciate the role of knowledge of science and recognise the significance of formal education; and (e) both emphasise the need for a centralised framework for economic growth, urbanisation and industrialisation and increasing involvement of larger and larger numbers of people.

However, inspite of these similarities, there are sharp differences in the content and shape of the two paths:

(a) Modernisation on capitalist lines assumes the private entrepreneur as the main axis of the entire social structure of modernised/modernising society whereas modernisation on socialist lines assumes public ownership as the main axis of the entire social structure.

(b) Modernisation on the capitalist lines assumes maximisation of profit as the central objective of production whereas modernisation on socialist lines assumes fulfilment of assessed social needs as the central objective of production.

(c) Modernisation on capitalist lines emphasises a social stratification wherein the fundamental distinction between classes in terms of ownership of means of production persists and perpetuated whereas modernisation on socialist lines aims at elimination of these unequal property relations and elaborates a new principle of stratification based on public ownership of means of production and transforming social groups in various strata of skilled and unskilled categories differing from one another in diversities of skills alone.

(d) The fundamental strategy adopted for sustained growth on capitalist lines relies on providing the primary incentives to the private entrepreneurs whereas modernisation on socialist lines relies on providing incentive to non-owning sections and

mobilises them through various measures.

(e) Modernisation on capitalist lines assumes that work, education, medical facilities and other social amenities are commodities to be purchased their availability being dependent upon the purchasing power of the citizen and the market conditions in the society whereas modernisation on socialist lines assumes at the very start that education, medical facilities, work and number of other social amenities are to be supplied by society as a basic right to its people.<sup>6</sup>

The illustrations made above are in no account exhaustive yet they are enough to establish a *prima facie* basis for urging that a clear distinction between modernisation on capitalist and socialist lines is very urgent if confusion in studies of modernisation is to be avoided.

### III

“It is always difficult to seek the roots of change in history, especially in a complex society like India where stagnation of some parts and dynamism of others have characterised its long history. Anyone who draws the picture of a stagnant civilisation that suddenly began to stir under an impact such as colonialism is likely to meet with justifiable ridicule. We have seen that the Muslim invasions and the consolidation of the Moghul empire shattered the complacency of the traditional order. Upon this came the period of colonialism which provided law and order, integrated the sub-continent under one rule, and stimulated certain large-scale changes in society and its intellectual bearings, including the momentous reaction to alien rule which provided the framework of the new nation. Viewed in this light there is little doubt that the major stimulus for change came from the diffusion of technological, institutional, and ideational influences from the West, of which British colonialism was an important bearer.”<sup>7</sup>

When Indian heartland was in the process of being colonised by the Britishers the dominant property relation was feudal in nature. But the same is not true in case of the hills of the North-East, which was at best some where in the tribal-feudal continuum. Although the internal organisation of most of the

tribal societies in north-east contained certain strong elements of an emerging landlord-serf relationship,<sup>8</sup> yet the practice of jhumming continued to generate some degree of egalitarianism in the tribal socio-political arrangement which was altogether absent in broader Indian milieu which was decidedly developed in feudal mould.

Different tribes had different types and names of political arrangement. The Garos had the institution of *Nokma*,<sup>9</sup> the Khasis had the institution of *Syiem, Doloï, Sirdar*,<sup>10</sup> the Mizos had the institution of *Lal*,<sup>11</sup> the Konyak Nagas had the institution of *Ang*,<sup>12</sup> the Angami Nagas had the institution of *Phichhu-U*,<sup>13</sup> and the Thangkul Nagas had the institution of *Awunga*.<sup>14</sup> Although this tribal leadership exerted much authority even then it was not possible for them to become autocrat for obvious economic reasons. Roy Burman and Sharma<sup>15</sup> observed that "whatever may be the position in the statute, shifting cultivation is frequently associated with the tradition of communal ownership of land . . . Very frequently, individual households do not have absolute ownership right over the lands cultivated by them; their rights are of the nature of usufruct. They can hold the land so long as they make effective use of the same. As soon as they stop their operations, their right ceases." Moreover, the very system of jhumming underlines the fact that with the help of a set of almost primitive tools and instruments of production, the volume of production can not be raised to such a level which can bear the burden of an economically lazy class (i.e., who do not take active part in production but enjoy the fruits of it). This was the situation in most part of the hills of the north east when the first footsteps of the colonisers reached their doorsteps. Although the colonisers maintained a policy of 'Inner line' and 'Leave-them-alone' to minimise the sources of conflict between them and the traditional tribal elite, yet the impact of monetization, market economy and other practices alien to tribal way of life was gradually felt in tribal economy. The colonisers were neither philanthropists nor a dedicated agent of modernisation. Hence due to internal weakness tribal socio-economic arrangements were allowed to readily surrender to the alien economic patterns. And gradually the egalitarian social bases of the tribals gave way to a stratified system where

land emerged as the most precious possession<sup>16</sup> and the hitherto unknown process of land alienation in one hand and land concentration on the other, appeared as natural phenomena in tribal societies of north east.

The process half-heartedly initiated by the colonisers got momentum after 1947 by the policies of the central and state governments. The Government of India declared to allow the tribals 'to grow according to their genius' and at the same time continued to pursue policies which directly go against the tribal traditions. The case of pampering terrace cultivation on individual ownership basis in the name of controlling and restricting Jhumming is an important illustration in this regard.<sup>17</sup> The result of all this is very much visible today. Tribals are no longer tribals in economic sense. Economically the relations of production among the tribals of north east is no different than that among the non-tribals surrounding them. This is due to a faulty approach of the policy makers which suited the emerging haves of the tribal society at the cost of the emerging have-nots. The standard deviation in a tribal society today is equally high as in the non-tribal societies.

The socialist pretensions of the policy makers ultimately degenerated into capitalist formulations with regard to modernisation. Instead of preserving the progressive elements of a traditional society<sup>18</sup> the policy makers spoiled the tribal tradition and brought them in to the national mainstream of growing inequality and discrimination.

A new political elite has emerged representing this newfound economic interest and taking the help from the provisions of the Sixth Schedule they are expediting the process of pauperisation of the tribal masses. Parliamentary Democracy and the institution of District Council—both are foreign to tribal tradition. Thus emerging elites with a slogan of 'preservation of tribal identity' are using the benefits of these institutions for themselves.

Modernising the tribal economy was a real test of honesty of the decision makers—both tribal and non-tribal. And both failed miserably. They could have followed the experience of the USSR in settling and uplifting Kazakhs and Kighiz and others in Central Asia and Kazakhstan and thus could have assured the preservation and development of tribal egalitarian spirit.

But the policy makers decidedly sided with modernisation on capitalist lines about the success of which the scholars all over the world are gradually becoming pessimistic (*viz.*, Myrdal's *Asian Drama*, Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Peter Worsley's *The Third World* etc.) It is high time to revitalise our fire of faith and start our journey towards the next milestone of Indian history to be able to keep the promises of this age.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Daniel Lerner, "Modernisation: Social Aspects" in *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, Vol. 10, p. 386.
2. V.K.R.V. Rao, "Some Problems Confronting Traditional Societies in the Process of Development" in A.B. Shah and C.R.M. Rao (Ed.), *Tradition and Modernity in India* (Bombay: Manaktala, 1965), p. 60.
3. n. 1, p. 387.
4. n. 1, p. 389.
5. S.P. Aiyar, *Modernisation of Traditional Society* (Delhi: McMillan, 1973), p. 4.
6. For a detailed discussion on paths of modernisation, see A.R. Desai, *State and Society in India: Essays in Dissent* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1975), pp. 19-39.
7. Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1975), pp. 86-87.
8. B.P. Misra, "Society and Politics in the Hill Areas of North East India" in B. Datta Ray (Ed.), *The Emergence and Role of Middle Class in North East India* (New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1983), p. 22.
9. D.N. Mazumdar, "Changing Role of Nokma in Garo Hills" in a Seminar on *Social and Political Institutions of the Hill People of North East India* (Shillong: A.S.I. and NEICSSR, 4-5 July 1977).
10. Hamlet Bareh, "Ancient Khasi Polity" in n. 9.
11. Lal Dena, "Hmar" in n. 9.
12. N.K. Das "The Naga Political Systems" in n. 9.
13. J.B. Bhattacharjee, "Social and Political Institutions of Angami Nagas" in n. 9.
14. M. Horam, "A Brief Socio-Cultural History of the Thangkul" in n. 9.
15. B.K. RoyBurman and P.S. Sharma, "Tribal Agriculture in India" in *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics* (Vol. XXV, 1970, Researchco Reprint), p. 150.
16. I. Lanu Aiyer, "Urban Land Pattern and Social Consequences (A

- Case Study of Mokokchung Town)" in a seminar on *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).
17. B.B. Datta and P.S. Datta, "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias—The Tradition and the Deviation" in a National Seminar on *Alienation of Tribal Land and Tribal Indebtedness* (Gauhati: TRI, Government of Assam, 7-9 March, 1984).
18. n. 2.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Datta, B. B. (1981). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias: A Case Study of Mokokchung Town" in *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).

2. Datta, B. B. (1984). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias—The Tradition and the Deviation" in a National Seminar on *Alienation of Tribal Land and Tribal Indebtedness* (Gauhati: TRI, Government of Assam, 7-9 March, 1984).

3. Datta, B. B. (1981). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias: A Case Study of Mokokchung Town" in *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).

4. Datta, B. B. (1981). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias: A Case Study of Mokokchung Town" in *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).

5. Datta, B. B. (1981). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias: A Case Study of Mokokchung Town" in *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).

6. Datta, B. B. (1981). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias: A Case Study of Mokokchung Town" in *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).

7. Datta, B. B. (1981). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias: A Case Study of Mokokchung Town" in *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).

8. Datta, B. B. (1981). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias: A Case Study of Mokokchung Town" in *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).

9. Datta, B. B. (1981). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias: A Case Study of Mokokchung Town" in *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).

10. Datta, B. B. (1981). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias: A Case Study of Mokokchung Town" in *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).

11. Datta, B. B. (1981). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias: A Case Study of Mokokchung Town" in *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).

12. Datta, B. B. (1981). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias: A Case Study of Mokokchung Town" in *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).

13. Datta, B. B. (1981). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias: A Case Study of Mokokchung Town" in *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).

14. Datta, B. B. (1981). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias: A Case Study of Mokokchung Town" in *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).

15. Datta, B. B. (1981). "Land Holding Pattern Among the Khasi-Jaintias: A Case Study of Mokokchung Town" in *Land and Land Relations in the Hills of North East Region* (Shillong: NEICSSR, 28-30 May, 1981).

## II. NEC and Tribal Development

### A Note in Dissent

In the wake of reorganisation of the North Eastern Region in 1971, following a Presidential Order, North Eastern Council came into being on August 1, 1972 and was formally inaugurated on November 7, 1972. The policy alternatives involved in and debated over before coming into existence of NEC was dealt by us somewhere else and hence we are not presently going over that here.<sup>1</sup> However, to recapitulate our understanding of the functions of NEC, as envisaged by the consequent NEC Act, we deem it necessary to mention Section 4 of the same Act, which states that,

(1) The Council shall be an advisory body and may discuss any matter in which some or all of the States represented in that Council or the Union and one or more of the States represented in that Council, have a common interest and advise the Central Government and the Government of each State concerned as to the action to be taken on any such matter, and in particular, may discuss and make recommendations with regard to:

- (i) any matter of common interest in the field of economic and social planning;
- (ii) any matter concerning inter-state transport and communications;
- (iii) any matter relating to power or flood control projects of common interest.

(2) For securing the balanced development of the North Eastern area, the Council shall forward proposals

- (a) formulating for the States represented in the Council a

unified and coordinated regional plan (which will be in addition to the State plan) in regard to matters of common importance to that area;

- (b) regarding the priorities of the projects and schemes included in the regional plan and the stages in which the regional plan may be implemented; and
- (c) regarding the location of the projects and schemes included in the regional plan, to the Central Government for its consideration.

(3) The Council shall

- (a) review from time to time, the implementation of the projects and schemes included in the regional plan and recommend measures for effecting coordination among the Governments of the States concerned in the matter of implementation of such projects and schemes;
- (b) where a project or scheme is intended to benefit two or more states, recommend the manner in which
  - (i) such project or scheme may be executed or implemented and managed or maintained; or
  - (ii) the benefits therefrom may be shared; or
  - (iii) the expenditure thereon may be incurred;
- (c) on a review of progress of the expenditure, recommend to the Central Government the quantum of financial assistance to be given from time to time to the State or States entrusted with execution or implementation of any project or scheme included in the regional plan;
- (d) recommend to the Government of the State concerned or to the Central Government the undertaking of necessary surveys and investigation of project in any state represented in the Council to facilitate consideration of the feasibility of including new projects in the regional plan.

(4) The Council shall review from time to time the measures taken by the State represented in the Council for the maintenance of security and public order therein and recommend to the Governments of the States concerned further measures necessary in this regard.<sup>2</sup>

When at the backdrop of the above information we refer to



the demographic composition of the hill states of Northeast, it appears that basic target group in NEC's scheme of planned development is by and large the tribal population of Northeast. If we take the distribution of scheduled tribes in the hill states we find the following situation—Mizoram (93.55%), Nagaland (83.99%), Meghalaya (80.58%), Arunachal Pradesh (69.82%) have overwhelming tribal population while Tripura (28.44%), Manipur (27.30%), and Assam (10.99%), have a sizeable extent of the same. So logically, though Section 4 of NEC Act does not directly talk about tribal development, the inference may naturally be drawn that the whole set of policies and programmes and aims and objectives of NEC is aimed at development of the tribal population of Northeast. Development can never be solely understood in territorial terms alone. Planned development has always an implicit human essence and if devoid of that human essence any reference to planned development becomes nothing short of mere vulgarism. In this way the expectation generated through the creation of and growing importance attached by NEC is generally supposed to be oriented towards development of the hitherto backward tribal population of Northeast.

When we take stock of the priorities identified, and policies formulated and implemented by NEC over a period of more than a decade and half we see that "the main thrust has been on removal of constraints/impediments from which the region suffers, on development of infrastructure facility as in almost all the fields of economic activity, to stimulate growth and help accelerated development of the region."<sup>4</sup> We do not feel the urgency here to document the claims of achievements of NEC. NEC itself is very much vocal on that and a number of NEC publications appear to maintain a continuous eloquence on the subject<sup>5</sup> which provide us the picture how through putting emphasis on infrastructure development pertaining to transport, communication and power, assessment of resource potential, industrial surveys and preparation of data base, manpower planning and manpower development, improvement and development of agriculture and allied activities (horticulture, sericulture, plantation crops, forestry, animal husbandry and fisheries) etc. NEC is continuously aiming at improving the conditions of

tribal population and no one can deny the positive elements in the painstaking efforts of NEC. But two point blank points need to be mentioned at this juncture. The interest of the policy-maker-cum-policy-executioner and the interest of the academicians-intellectuals need not be the same. Both are proud of (or both suffer from) their different value premises. The interest of the policy-makers *et al.* is generally geared to preserve the order (that they serve) in essence, while the academicians-intellectuals are involved in knowing the existing reality and exploring likely directions of change (trying to even ponder over the question of "development at what social cost?").

Before talking about policy alternatives we deem it necessary to mention that there are as many as 20 articles and 2 special schedules in the Constitution of India concerning the welfare of the tribals.<sup>6</sup> Articles 14, 15, 16, 17, 19 of Fundamental Rights as also Articles 23 and 24, several Articles in the Directive Principles including Articles 38, 39, 39A, 41, 43, 46, 47, 48, 48A are very often referred to regarding the protection, welfare and development of the Indian Scheduled Tribes. If we assess the performance with regard to tribal development (of which NEC is only a very minor contributor) since independence we find little solace. It seems the pious dreams of the constitutional provisions turned out to be nightmares and barring a few island-like development spots in the whole milieu of tribal backwardness (both in northeast and in the rest of the country) there appears to be little ray of hope when one takes into account the social content of developmental implications. Statistical analysis talks of something while a deeper content analysis shows something else. And that is the reason why we, those who are not in the bureaucracy, do not feel elated by statistical accounts of development churned out by NEC and other governmental agencies regarding infrastructural and peripheral improvements in tribal life.

Nehru, the great visionary, outlined five fundamental principles within the broad framework of which tribal development should be pursued. Nehru opined that "(i) people should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them, (ii) tribal rights in land and forests should be respected, (iii) we should try to train and build up a

team of their own people to do the work of administration and development, (iv) we should not overadminister these areas to overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes, we should rather work through, and not in rivalry to their own social and cultural institutions, (v) we should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved.”<sup>7</sup> Nehru further observed that “It is obvious that these areas have to progress. But it is equally obvious that they have to progress in their own way . . . . we have to make them progress, but progress does not mean just an attempt to duplicate what we have got in any part of India. . . Any element of imposition has to be absent as far as possible.”<sup>8</sup>

Nehru’s understanding of the tribal situation and India’s official tribal policies (of which NEC appears to be only a marginal extension with localised responsibilities) amazingly appear to be contradictory. While Nehru was talking of quality of life in terms of social values, the official policy in India appears to have had a *volte face* emphasising only mundane material development and forgetting or ignoring social dimension of such policy implementation. And as a result we find today land concentration and glaring inequality showing its ugly face in tribal societies of northeast, egalitarian values giving way to self seeking corrupt calculations and standard deviation with regard to ownership of social assets growing everyday. We do not expect NEC to take a qualitative stand with regard to the basic structural questions of social system. But we can not be silent when NEC’s publicity campaigns continue to burden us.

Policy formulation is basically a political question, to miss this is to rob the analysis of its fundamental context. Besides, the tribal situation can not be viewed in isolation from the wider contexts of the themes and strategies operating in national life. We strongly feel that through NEC and other agencies a set of “Colonised personalities” can only be promoted who never are the successors of the “tribal genius” of Nehru’s vision and through the so-called uplift programmes and policies of NEC only a crafty section of the tribal societies will become materially advanced, while the majority will continue to sink deeper and deeper into the abyss of poverty. This is mere “tokenism” and this “tokenistic” solution is a natural product of a “paternalistic”

approach retaining in substance the classical internal colonial relationship and exploitation. In other words, solutions to the problems of masses can not be made superficially in symptomatic ways. The problems arise from very character of the social order and hence their solutions have also to be viewed in the context of the present moribund socio-economic system prevailing in India.

Keeping the foregoing revelations in mind alongwith the egalitarian psychological traditions of the tribal people, the single most important suggestion could have been encouragement of communal control of land and cooperative farming. But this is beyond the capacity of NEC even to dream of and we are further skeptical of its acceptance as an alternative for the simple reason that it would endanger the availability of cheap labour and agricultural produces, besides usury and speculative trade, for both tribal and non-tribal exploiting classes. Still as an experiment in a few places, at least where NEC and other government agencies are leading people away from jhumming to settled (wet rice or terracing) cultivation, it can be launched. Its growth however would largely depend on the attempt at political education and consciousness of the tribal populations.

As a second preference, there should be two sets of policies, one for the unstructured tribes and another for the class structured ones. In case of the former (which is becoming almost rare) the present strategy may continue but with much vigour to safeguard their special interests. In case of the tribes who have developed class forces within themselves and have wider interactions with the larger political economy, the protections and concessions should be profitably directed mainly in favour of the exploited and deprived sections from among them.

In short, we do not think in our understanding of "tribal development" NEC can play any qualitative role and we differ from the view of the majority of tribal researchers who stress the necessity of studying the whole community in isolation and who treat tribal development as a supra-class measure. Instead we argue that development denoting a vague humanitarianism and class-conciliation expressed in palliatives serve as a diversion from the basic social tasks confronting the toiling people. Further material advancement at the cost of age old social

values and moral fabric is not development as we understand it. The question of tribal development can not be separated from the broader historical and social context nor from the implicit ideology. And NEC in our framework is not only incapable but also redundant in the context of tribal development. If only it operates in an altogether different political-economy maybe NEC will become relevant. Otherwise a fringe role is the destiny of NEC so far as tribal development, in qualitative terms, is concerned.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. P.S. Datta, "Regional Integration through Power in a Power Potent Region" in ICSSR sponsored seminar on *Interstate Relations in North East India* (Dibrugarh University, March 1985).
2. See *Yojana* (16-31 August, 1982), p. 58.
3. K.R. Debnath, "Demographic Aspects of Development Planning in the North Eastern Region" in *Journal of NEC* (January-April 1985), p. 24. The data of Assam refers to 1971 census while the rest refer to 1981 Census.
4. Gian Chand, "NEC's Role and its Activities and Programmes—A Review" in *A Decade of Service* (Shillong: NEC Secretariat, 1982), p. 14.
5. (a) One whole issue of *Yojana* was sponsored by NEC in which not less than 15 articles talked of various achievements of NEC. See *Yojana* (16-31 August 1982); (b) As part of its decennial celebration NEC published 14 articles in *A Decade of Service* (Shillong: NEC Secretariat, 1982); (c) In almost all issues of *Journal of NEC* a number of sponsored and/or on duty articles are published focussing on the achievements of NEC in various facets of life in North East.
6. We deliberately avoided conceptual assessment of the term "tribe" here though we strongly feel the tribes in today's India are not tribes in either sociological or anthropological or mode of production yardsticks. These are simply politico-administrative categories at the moment. For a detailed discussion see (a) Andre Beteille, *Six Essays in Comparative Sociology* (Delhi: OUP; 1974), p. 62; (b) Jaganath Pathy, *Tribal Peasantry—Dynamics of Development* (New Delhi: Inter India Publications, 1984), pp. 1-12; (c) Ramkrishna Mukherjee, "The Sociologist and the Social Reality" in T.K. Oommen and P.N. Mukherjee (Ed.), *Indian Sociology* (Bombay: Popular, 1986) pp. 73-100; (d) P.S. Datta, "Movement for Scheduled Status in

a Poly-Ethnic Society: The Case for Koch Rajbongshis of Assam" in *Journal of NEICSSR* (October 1987), pp. 29-39.

7. Nehru on the people of North East India as quoted in *Yojana* (16-31 August, 1982), p. 59.

8. *Ibid.*

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The Central Government Information through Powers of State. *Journal of NEICSSR* sponsored seminar on Imphal, Manipal, 1982.

2. *Yojana*, 16-31 August, 1982, p. 59.

3. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

4. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

5. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

6. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

7. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

8. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

9. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

10. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

11. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

12. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

13. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

14. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

15. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

16. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

17. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

18. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

19. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.

20. *Journal of NEICSSR*, October 1987, pp. 29-39.