



Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities in North East India (1947-97)

Editors

J.P. Singh • R. Gopalakrishnan • L.S. Gassah
D.R. Syiemlieh • C.J. Thomas



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AND HUMANITIES
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Foreword

The North Eastern Regional Centre of the Indian Council of Social Science Research is an academic institution mainly given to promotion of research in Social Sciences in the North East. Of and on, it has also been organising Special and Annual Lectures by Senior Social Scientists. Sometime back (October 1995) the Centre was also entrusted the task of organising a Sub-regional Workshop on Panchayati Raj by the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, New Delhi. The papers presented at the Workshop were recently published under the title *Power to People in Meghalaya* [Sixth Schedule and the 73rd Amendment (New Delhi, 1998)]. Besides, the Centre has also taken up certain other projects, the end results of which, will soon be available in print.

This being the 50th year of the country's Independence, the NERC also decided to celebrate it in an appropriate way. Being a Research organisation, the Screening Committee of the Centre decided to organise a one day Seminar on *Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities*. A number of eminent scholars in their respective fields were invited to contribute papers and participate in the deliberations. Some of them declined but many others readily accepted our invitation. I take this opportunity to thank all the contributors as well as others who participated in the deliberations. I am particularly thankful to Shri M.M. Jacob, Hon'ble Governor of Meghalaya, for kindly inaugurating the Seminar on 30th March, 1998.

I am sure that the work will provide a good idea of the work done on North East India not only within the region but also outside in the academic disciplines of Economics, Folklore, Geography, History, Philosophy, Political Science, Sociology,

Assamese, Garo and English during the last fifty years. The papers on Journalism, Contemporary North East and Health relate the volume to the present situation in the region. There is no doubt that there are many gaps in the work. In spite of our best efforts we could not fill them up and must apologise.

We are sure that this work will also be received well by the students and scholars interested in the region like our previous publications.

Jai Prakash Singh
Honorary Director
ICSSR-NERC
Shillong

Preface

The Screening Committee of the NERC-ICSSR decided to hold a one day seminar as part of the celebration of the 50th year of India's Independence. It was also decided to hold the seminar on the topic Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities in North East India (1947-97). For certain reasons later, contemporary North East, Health and Journalism were also included. The present volume includes the papers presented at the seminar. Several scholars invited to contribute papers to the seminar and participate in the deliberations declined the offer. Many others accepted our invitation but later expressed their inability to present their papers and participate in the seminar. There were others however, who readily accepted our invitation and kept their word. We thank them all for their cooperation.

Altogether twelve articles were submitted, out of these only eleven could be presented in three sessions. The twelfth paper was taken as read due to shortage of time. The seminar was organised in three sessions — The Inaugural Session, and the First and Second Academic Sessions.

The Inaugural Session of the Seminar was held in the Mayurbhanj Seminar Hall on 30th March 1998 at 10.00 A.M., and was presided over by Professor Milton Sangma, Pro-Vice Chancellor, NEHU Campus, Tura, and was inaugurated by Shri M.M. Jacob, the Hon'ble Governor of Meghalaya.

The Inaugural Session began with the Welcome address. Professor J.P. Singh, Honorary Director, NERC-ICSSR welcomed Shri M.M. Jacob, the Hon'ble Governor of Meghalaya, Professor B. Pakem, Vice-Chancellor, NEHU, Professor Milton Sangma,

the participants, colleagues and students and all the others. Thereafter, Shri M.M. Jacob, the Governor of Meghalaya delivered his inaugural address. The inaugural address was followed by the First paper of the Seminar by Professor B. Pakem on Trends in Political Science in North East India. The Seminar Hall was full to the capacity. Professor Milton Sangma then gave his Presidential remarks. Professor L.S. Gassah then proposed a vote of thanks to all.

The inaugural session was followed by the First Academic Session at 11.30 A.M. It was presided over by Professor J.P. Singh, Honorary Director, ICSSR-NEHU and altogether six papers were presented by 1) Shri Wasbir Hussain, 2) Professor A.C. Mohapatra, 3) Dr. D.R. Syiemlieh 4) Dr. N. Srivastav 5) Dr. H. Ghonglah and 6) Professor Milton S. Sangma. The session was over by 1.45 P.M.

The Second Academic Session started at 2.15 P.M. after lunch. It was again presided over by Professor Milton S. Sangma. In this session also six papers were presented by 1) Dr. Soumen Sen, 2) Dr. S. C. Daniel, 3) Dr. Nikhlesh Kumar, 4) Dr A.S. Guhu and 5) Dr B.K. Deb Sarma. The next sixth paper of Shri Sanat Chakravarty was taken as read. Professor Sangma at the end gave his remarks, and asked Dr. Joshua Thomas to propose a vote of thanks.

Papers presented in both the sessions of the seminar were liked by all those who participated in the deliberations. Several participants asked searching questions and some of them also gave their own comments on the papers presented. The general response of the participants and their interaction indicated their appreciation of the papers presented.

The papers presented at the seminar, (in some cases) were revised subsequently.

Subsequently, these papers were revised and arranged in the same order, as they were presented at the Seminar. This was done, in order to retain thematic continuity.

In spite of all our efforts it is possible that many mistakes of omission and commission may have crept in this publication. We crave the indulgence of the reader for the same.

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Inaugural Address

Sbri M.M. Jacob
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I deem it a great honour and a privilege to be invited to inaugurate today's seminar on "Trends in Social Sciences in North East India 1947-97" organised by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, North Eastern Regional Centre. I am grateful to the Chairman of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, all its office-bearers and other members of the Council for giving me this opportunity.

The geography and the history of the North-Eastern Region have created a very distinctive socio-economic, cultural and political milieu. The socio-economic and political setting of the North-Eastern Region has direct linkages with the order where the tribal form of society and economy occupy the vantage position. The order that exists today has ramifications of the three-fold division of societies into tribal, traditional and modern ones to which have been associated different forms of economy. The topography, geology and the general natural setting of the region have endowed it with considerable natural resources — fertile soil, lush forests, fossil fuels, minerals and abundant water potential. The economic activities and growth impulses in the region find their base in these natural resources.

The geographic structure of the region, criss-crossed by numerous lines of hills and endless streams and rivers, made communication to and within this region immensely difficult.

The geographical isolation, coupled with a series of socio-political and historical obstacles, kept this region out of the caravan of national progress. When freedom of India dawned, the people of this region were found to be educationally backward, economically handicapped, socially confused and politically frustrated. However, the rapid expansion in the field of education which took place in the wake of India's Independence, exposed the people of this region to new ideas. When educational advancement came, a new consciousness for political identity arose and a new urge also was evident for early fulfilment of socio-economic aspirations.

The British first established their rule in the Brahmaputra Valley after the signing of the famous Treaty of Yandobo between the British and the Burmese on the 24th February, 1826. The British Government adopted a policy of keeping the tribal areas isolated from the rest of the country. The Government of India Act 1935, provided for delimitation of Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas, which were partly under the direct administrative control of the Governor. The dealings of the British with the hill areas of the then State of Assam underwent a change dictated by exigencies. This led to the introduction of the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 in certain areas of North East India.

The region under the British regime witnessed changes in all spheres of life. There was an expansion of activities of the missionaries in the spread of education, Christianity, health services etc. There were also far reaching effects in the field of economy of the region and its communication network. However, the British policy of 'Divide and Rule' led to gradual contempt and distrust for imperialism. A host of political leaders from this region took part in the freedom struggle led by Gandhiji.

Historically, the areas in the North-Eastern Region came under the British rule much later than the other parts of the country. The dualistic composition of the population — ethnically, the tribals and the non-tribals and geographically, the hill people and the plains people — is nowhere so well-marked as in the North Eastern Region. After Independence, the government's tribal policy, though not expressly stated as such, appeared to aim at overcoming the problems created by

long neglect and indifference of the Raj towards the tribal people. Jawaharlal Nehru, the main architect of government's tribal policy in the immediate post-Independence period, was in favour of going slow in the matter of inducing changes in the tribal areas. "Above all" he wrote "I hope there will be no attempt made to impose other ways of life on them in a hurry. Let the changes come gradually, and be worked out by the tribals themselves."

Initially, all the areas of the region, excepting Manipur and Tripura, were within the then State of Assam. Arunachal Pradesh, then known as NEFA, had a separate arrangement; it was kept as an Agency, to be administered and developed under the special care of the Centre. Some autonomy in the form of the Autonomous District Councils was provided under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution for administrative convenience. However, with the passage of time, a number of causes led to several demands for separate Statehood within and even outside the Indian federal set-up. These developments led to the emergence of Nagaland as a State in 1963, and subsequently, of Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura as full-fledged States and Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram as Union Territories in 1972. The region continued with this set up for a long time until 1987, when both Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram were declared as States of the Indian Union. The North Eastern Council (NEC) was also set up under an Act of Parliament in 1972 as an advisory body and to serve as a common platform for all the seven States where they can come together to discuss common problems involving more than one State or all of them.

The North-East, which comprises 8 per cent of India's total area and just 4 per cent of its total population is nature's paradise. Its hills and valleys have witnessed centuries of migration. It was a gateway of commerce and culture that linked India with the East and South East Asia.

Looking back on the 50 years of Independence I think the North-Eastern region has grown and progressed with the rest of India, though many gaps remain still. I would say that we need to concentrate on the strengths of this region which are:

— High literacy rate as compared to that of some other States of the country.

- Tremendous hydro-electric potential.
- Proximity of South-East India.
- High percentage of untapped mineral wealth.
- The fertile areas available in the plains, capable of feeding the entire region if properly utilised.

Today, we live in a globally inter-connected world, in which biological, psychological, social and environmental phenomena are interdependent. We need an ecological perspective, a holistic approach, which the earlier 19th century did not provide. It would be indeed a new paradigm, a new vision of reality. India's North-East is not an island. It is linked culturally and politically with other parts of India. Much has been written and spoken about mistakes leading to problems in the region. We should learn from past mistakes. We must view the positive and negative developments that have taken place during the past five decades in this region with scientific detachment and come to rational conclusions. I am sure this seminar will be a major step in this direction.

With these words I have great pleasure in inaugurating the seminar on "Trends in Social Sciences in North East India 1947-97" and wish the deliberations all success.

Jai Hind,
Khublei,
Mithela.

Trends in Political Science Studies in North-East India, 1947–1997

B. Pakem

The study of Political Science is one of the important areas of study for the under-graduate and post-graduate studies among the arts students of North-East India ever since 1947. Till that year the colleges of North-East India were affiliated to the Calcutta University. It was only in 1948 that the first University in the region was established in Guwahati. However, the study of Political Science was only a part of the course in the Department of Economics both at the under-graduate and post-graduate levels. A separate Department of Political Science was established only during 1959-60. The establishment of other Universities of Dibrugarh (1966); North-Eastern Hill University (1973); Manipur (1980); Arunachal (1985); Tripura (1987); Assam (1994); and Nagaland (1994) also include courses in Political Science Studies.¹

So, during the period of Fifty Years after India's Independence we can see the rapid progress in the study of this important academic discipline. In fact, the majority of students in North-East India have always opted for this course both at the under-graduate and post-graduate levels. In spite of the ever increasing number of degree holders in Political Science and the saturation point has been reached during the last fifty years, the trend continues to be in the upward swing.

So far nobody has made any serious attempt to analyse this extra-ordinary trend in Political Science Studies, excepting

for a general statement that (a) Political Science is an easy course for general students, and (b) a study of politics is both exciting and exhilarating. But this is only an over-simplification of the true status of Political Science Studies, since a number of students in competitive civil service examinations would opt for some other courses which are more scoring than in Political Science. The reason must lie somewhere else.

The fact is that Political Science as a separate academic discipline is flourishing only by mid 60s and new departments of Political Science in the colleges started coming up around that time. There is, therefore, ample opportunities for students of Political Science to gain employment in the ever growing number of colleges offering course of studies in Political Science. True by 1986 the requisite qualifications of 55% alongwith National Eligibility Test Certificates have to a certain extent affected student of Political Science to gain entry into the college and university teaching posts. However, unlike disciplines like Anthropology and Sociology, students of Political Science can still enter the job market at the Higher Secondary School level apart from jobs in the public sector. Now that the rate of educated unemployed Political Scientists is gradually rising, the trend may undergo a change after 50 years of fruitful experience in the field of Political Science Studies.

From the under-graduate and post-graduate studies in political science we may pass on to the field of research in the discipline. The trend in this area of study is somewhat halting and slow in the beginning. It was only during 1969-70 that there were four doctorate degree holders in political science under the Gauhati University — D.P. Barua on Indo-British Relations 1950-60; L.C. Singh on British Relations with Manipur 1824-1891; M.N. Borgohain on the Assam Legislative Assembly 1937-67; and S.K. Barpujari on Anglo-Naga Relations.²

If we add Public Administration which was then a part of Political Science then we have another doctorate degree in Political Science during the same period — N.I. Singh on The Manipur Administration 1709-1907.³ As a matter of fact, the first Ph.D. in Political Science was U.N. Bordoloi on Local Finance in Assam who was awarded the degree in 1967 but listed under the discipline of Economics.⁴ By the same token another Ph.D. in Political Science in 1977 was P.S. Reddi on

The Working of the Sixth Schedule in North-East India though he was listed under the discipline of Law.⁵ Thus, there is no detailed account of Political Science research under one list. We have to do a little more exercise in searching for the total output of research works in the discipline of Political Science over the last 50 years.

The other new Universities started opening their innings late in the 70s. Dibrugarh University produced a first Ph.D. in Political Science in 1972— B. Pakem on India-Burma Relations;⁶ and the North-Eastern Hill University in 1983 — D. Bhattacharjee on Higher Bureaucracy in Meghalaya and its role in Development.⁷ I have yet to lay my hands on the list of research work in Political Science in the other Universities in the region. Perhaps the list of 100 Ph.D. degree holders under the supervisorship of Prof. V. Venkata Rao would indicate the true trends in the field of research in Political Science in North-East India ranging from local Government to Public Administration, history, foreign relations and government and politics.⁸ This is still the trend today even after 50 years of Political Science Research in North-East India not only in the colleges and Universities but also among the non-governmental research agencies in Social Sciences.

In the 80s the universities in North-East India had also started courses for M.Phil students in Political Science. The main thrust of the M.Phil courses in these universities is on Research Methodology preparing research students for further research in Political Science in a more scientific way. Since there is not enough literature in the field of studies for M.Phil. degrees it is somewhat difficult to properly assess the trend in M.Phil. research programme. But from my experience in the M.Phil. programmes of the Department of Political Science of the North-Eastern Hill University and as an evaluator of M.Phil. dissertations of some universities in the region it indicates that the trend in M.Phil. studies in Political Science is more towards understanding the local issues and less on other issues like foreign relations, political theory and law.

Another aspect of the M.Phil. courses in the Universities of the region is that the importance of the M.Phil. degree in Political Science is being devalued in the sense that some universities would offer a direct Ph.D. course in Political Science

rather than the M.Phil course. Even students would prefer to do a direct Ph.D. course instead of spending about two years for the M.Phil degree, thus reducing the number of years for completing their Ph.D. Programmes. In some universities like the North-Eastern Hill University, the M.Phil course which was compulsory during the 80s and early 90s has now become optional. The M.Phil course which is a good preparatory ground for sound research pursuit in later years of the scholars has of late attracted mainly the teachers who would like to earn an M.Phil degree as a faculty improvement programme for their career advancement. It is an alarming trend indeed which may require a serious attention by political scientists of the region, more particularly on the "pronounced weakness" of M.Phil syllabi.⁹

The next point to be discussed in this paper is on the course content of Political Science Studies in North-East India during the last 50 years or so. The *Survey of Research in Political Science* conducted by the Indian Council for Social Science Research has dealt with the Five main fields of Political Science Studies in five volumes on Political System, Political Process, Political Dynamics, Political Thought and International Studies.¹⁰ A cursory glance over the courses, and research programmes in Political Science in the Colleges and Universities of North-East India indicates that the trend in North-East India is on the study of the first two and the last two groups while the study of Political Dynamics takes a back seat. This is true at all levels of studies — undergraduate, post-graduate, and research programmes in Political Science. True, of late, Political Dynamics is also gaining ground indicating thereby a promising trend in modern Political Science studies in North-East India.

Similarly, the same courses of Political Science Studies and research programmes in the region fall more or less along with the five main divisions of the courses of studies as pointed out by the *Curriculum Development Centre in Political Science* sponsored by the University Grants Commission. These five divisions cover the fields of studies in Political Theory and Research Methodology; Public Administration; International Relations; Indian Government and Politics; and Comparative Politics.¹¹

The Universities in the region are offering two kinds of courses for the post-graduate students — the conventional two years' eight-paper course and the sixteen-paper course of four semesters' duration of six months each. Both the courses, however, have a number of optional courses for almost all the above five divisions. In the North-Eastern Hill University which adopts the semester system has a provision for an internal assessment as well. In the 70s and early 80s the internal assessment was of 50 per cent weightage which has been later on reduced to 25 per cent only. There was, however, a line of thinking in NEHU during the mid-90s to do away with the system of internal assessment, citing among other reasons the question of the system being less objective. It only indicates about the trend in the discipline of Political Science in the region leading towards more objectivity in studies and research.

In this connection, it is perhaps worthwhile to ponder over what the Curriculum Development Centre in Political Science had observed in connection with the optional courses and the semester courses. In the case of optionals it was observed that there has been a "draw back" of "the vast array of options offered" which in fact is "merely a paper exercise".¹² This is true in the case of the Universities in the region for no fault of theirs. The implementation of any ambitious scheme for a wider range of optional courses would require adequate infrastructural facilities like the lecture halls, library books and periodicals. It also requires a sufficient number of faculty members to properly handle the optional papers. But the Universities in North-East India are not well equipped with these requirements due to financial constraints.

Similarly, the semester system has not been well received by the Curriculum Development Centre in Political Science. The Centre has observed that, "An eight-paper work-load cannot be transmitted into an (apparently) sixteen-paper work-load without damage to quality and comprehensiveness of the instruction imparted."¹³ In spite of this observation, Universities, like NEHU, still follow the semester system in view of the fact that a continuous assessment of the students is expected to produce a better result. The contention of NEHU seems to be justifiable in view of the fact that its Political Science students can successfully compete in the national level examinations

and tests. This can be verified from the statements issued by the University Grants Commission from time to time.

Another discernible trend in Political Science Studies in North-East India is the special thrust area given to the study and research of regional issues, problems and prospectives. But, this is perhaps true of every University in the country. The only difference is that the emphasis in Political Science Studies in North-East India on indigenous studies and research is on a priority basis rather than of a perfunctorily character as in the Universities outside the region. This trend is perhaps due to the exceptional political situations prevailing in the region. In fact even in some Universities outside the region, as in the Calcutta University, we have a strong centre of North-Eastern India study in the Department of Political Science for similar reasons. While this may become a healthy trend in knowing more about one's own area, yet there is a danger in such a trend which may lead to studies and research in political science being isolated from the universal trend towards an integrated programme of study and research in the discipline. I fully subscribe to the observation made by the Curriculum Development Centre: "A carefully elicited curriculum necessarily had to reflect and stress indigenous needs; but a study of these could prove sterile unless they were anchored to, and a reflection of, universal referents, and made their own, creatively indigenous contribution to the latter."¹⁴

It may also be noted here that in the course of the last 50 years of political science studies and research in the region, the discipline tends to become unwieldy in the sense that more often than not it has to cross over into the fields of study and research pertaining to other disciplines. But this trend is taking place in the rest of the country too. These days, we usually hear more and more about the need to have an inter-disciplinary study covering not only other social science disciplines like Political History and Political Sociology but also in the other inter-related science streams, like Political Geography, Political Anthropology and Political Philosophy. While in the rest of the country, particularly in the cosmopolitan universities, inter-disciplinary studies and research have become almost a modern academic fashion, the universities in North-East India offering Political Science courses are by and large

still traditional in outlook and have yet to fully join the mainstream of modern intellectual fashion. But does it really matter much? True in the West, political scientists have a more rigorous intellectual exercise in inter-disciplinary studies and research. In India, however, the Curriculum Development Centre has rightly cautioned the political scientists that inter-disciplinary studies and research in Political Science may “degenerate into the sterile, unfocussed multi-disciplinary (or cross-disciplinary) of an a-disciplinary (or counter-disciplinary) sort”, and “inter-disciplinary studies in India were often little more than descriptive, information-trotting exercises.”¹⁵

This caution may be a very sound one indeed. But in North-East India we have not yet reached even the threshold of this caution. The trend in North-East India lies somewhere else. Before North-East Indian Political Scientists could further delve into the intricacies of inter-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary, a-disciplinary or counter-disciplinary studies and research, the mere vastness of the size and extent of the current status of political science discipline makes it necessary for some of its divisions to claim the status of an autonomous discipline. Public Administration is quite illustrative. The trend today in the Universities of the region, like NEHU, is to have a separate discipline/department of Public Administration. The next trend in autonomy development in the region, say, by the beginning of the third millenium, would be the autonomous status for International Relations. Ultimately, we as political scientists of the region, may have to be contented with the core content of the discipline of Political Science — Political Theory, Government and Politics.

When we talk about the trends in Political Science studies and research in North-East India, we cannot also ignore the emerging trend regarding the problem of regional language concerning translation, writing, and publication of text books. This is a particular problem for the Brahmaputra Valley. But the trend is gradually spreading to other areas starting with the regional language components of reading materials in Political Science studies at the higher secondary school level. Even in the hill areas of the region where English has been the language for the study and research in Political Science, many find it necessary to take recourse to local language in

the absence of a regional language. In narrating all this, it is not my intention to question the decision of the authorities concerned for switching over to a regional language. There is nothing wrong in having a regional language for the purpose of study and research in Political Science. It would have been a more welcoming trend provided the quality of regional language text books in the discipline would be at par with the English, French or German text books. As late as 1991, the finding of the Curriculum Development Centre is that there is a "woeful dearth of reading materials of even reasonable quality in the regional languages."¹⁶ This, to a certain extent, is also true in the case of North-East India situation. Unless the concerned authorities pay their serious attention to the need producing adequate teaching and reading materials in regional languages, it would be an alarming trend in political science study and research. It would be an alarming trend in the sense that the political scientists of the region may be deprived of the sources of knowledge in the discipline that may be otherwise available in each other language groups. There are definitely better sources of knowledge in Assamese or Bengali languages which political scientists from the hill areas of the region may be deprived of and vice-versa.

In view of the fact that today political science covers a vast field of knowledge. It is very necessary that political scientists of North-East India should keep abreast with the latest development in the ever growing literature of this "master science". Because of its vastness, it is also imperative on the part of the political scientists of the region not to remain contented with its general aspect alone. We should also appreciate the specialised aspect of the discipline. This has to be emphasised because in North-East India, the current trend is, for a majority of political scientists, to have only a general study of their discipline and very few of them would go for a particular specialisation. I am only indicating the trend rather than entering into a debate on the issue between the generalists versus the specialists. However, for those who are entering the teaching profession in political science, it would be advisable that they should have specialised at least in one field of the discipline particularly at the post-graduate and research levels. I hope that this trend may also reflect itself at the collegiate

level during the next fifty years of political science studies and research in North-East India.

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