

Social Science Research and Information In North-East India: Problems and Prospects

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INTRODUCTION

“North-East India received modern scholarly attention rather late in the day, since it was a late comer into the British empire. The earliest report, mainly about the Brahmaputra Valley, published so far, was prepared by Captain Welsh who had led the first British military intervention in Assam in 1792”.¹

Two distinct periods are discernible in the development of social science research on North-East India. They can be distinguished as:

1. Pre-independence period; and
2. Post-independence period.

1. PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

The period witnessed the growth of ethnographic and historical researches in the field of social sciences, conducted by a few well meaning and capable British officials and some missionaries. The following monographs are mentioned as representative of this period :-

1. Memorandum on the North-East Frontier of Bengal, by Alexander Mackenzie (1829).
2. Report on the Province of Assam, by A J M Mills (1854)
3. Report on the Khasi and Jaintia Hills Territory, by W J Allen (1858).
4. Memorandum on the Province of Assam, by G R Barry (1859)
5. Report on the North-East Frontier of India, by J F Mitchell (1883).
6. The Mikirs, by C. Lyall (1908).
7. The Garos, by A. Playfaire (1909).

8. The Kacharies, by Reverend Endle (1911).
9. The Khasis, by P R Gordon (1914).
10. The history of Upper Assam and Upper Burma and North-East Frontier, by L W Shakespeare (1914).
11. The Angami Nagas, by J H Hutton (1921).
12. The Sema Naga, by J H Hutton (1921)
13. The Lhota Nagas, by J P Mills (1922).
14. History of Assam, by Edward Gait (1926).
15. Frontiers, by G. Dunbar (1932).
16. Recollections of a Tea Planter, by W.W. Fraser (1937).
17. The Naked Nagas, by Fuerer Haimendorf (1946).

The major sources of information for the period have been identified as :

1. Despatches from military officers and other administrators in the area to the Headquarters of the East India Company in London and Calcutta;
2. Reports published by the Government of Bengal till 1874;
3. Annual reports on the administration of Assam from 1874-75 to 1939-40;
4. Annual reports from the various departments of the Government of Assam and the Government of India;
5. Census reports;
6. Gazetteers;
7. Archival records, and
8. Letters and despatches of missionaries.

2. POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

The tempo of social science research remained quite slow in the period from 1947 to mid sixties. Even the establishment of *Gauhati University* in 1948 did not change the situation. Its first Ph.D. in economics was produced as late as 1964. However, the tradition of writing monographs by government officials continued during this period too. The names of *Verrier Elwin* and *N K Rustomji* stand prominent in this respect. *Elwin* also started a new trend of official research in the late fifties. The monographs brought out by the NEFA administration and later on by the Department of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh bear witness to this trend.

2.1 Take-Off

It is only after mid sixties, that research in social sciences can be said to have started with a take-off. The process of take-off was helped by the following factors:

1. Establishment of some new universities:-

- University of Dibrugarh (1963), Assam Agricultural University (1969), North-Eastern Hill University, (1973), and Manipur University (1980).*
2. Establishment of research institutions like *Agro-Economic Research Centre* at Jorhat in 1960.
 3. Research motivation from the *University Grants Commission, Indian Council of Social Science Research* and Government departments.
 4. Collection and dissemination of data by government departments and the regional body - the North-Eastern Council.

As a consequence of take-off, research literature in the form of books, theses, monographs, periodical articles, conference proceedings and government reports etc, began to flow without any conscious attempts for collaboration among the researchers. It resulted in duplication of research output and gaps in the vital areas, needing attention from the social scientists for integrated development of the region. These factors led to the need of bibliographical control and direction to research.

2.2. Initiation in Bibliographical Control

Efforts in bibliographical control were initiated by the Documentation Unit of the NEHU Library in collaboration with the North-Eastern Regional Centre - ICSSR. The unit has produced so far the following bibliographies:

1. Social Science research on North-East India; a select bibliography (1979).
2. Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram; a select bibliography (1981).
3. Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura; a select bibliography (1982);
4. Dissertations on North-Eastern India (1983).

2.3 Direction and Coordination of Research

Direction to research was taken up by the *Indian Council of Social Science Research*. The council set up an Advisory Committee for North-East India in 1980 to promote and coordinate research on various problems of the region. The committee felt that it was necessary to have a look at the extent of research before priorities could be fixed for future research. In view of this felt need, the ICSSR granted a research project to Prof. P C Goswami on the "*Status of Social Science Research in North-East India*" with the following objectives:

1. To assess the nature and extent of social science research in North-East India;
2. To prepare a bibliography of research and an inventory of scholars working in various fields of the social sciences; and
3. To assess the lacuna in social science research on the problems of the North-East and to fix priorities for future research.

2.4. Report on Status of Research

The report² containing the bibliography and inventory of research scholars came out in September 1982. The importance of the report lies in presenting an analysis of 602 documents including books, theses and project reports (both published and unpublished). Some of the findings of the report on the extent of research can be mentioned as follows:-

Scatter of research output by major disciplines

Anthropology	98
Education	31
Geography	19
History	38
Political Science	51
Statistics	6
Sociology including village studies, folklore and social philosophy	127
Economics including commerce, management and agricultural economics	232
	<hr/> 602 <hr/>

Spatial dispersion of the research

Assam	47.4%
Arunachal Pradesh	9.4%
Manipur	5.2%
Meghalaya	8.4%
Mizoram	1.3%
Nagaland	3.3%
Tripura	1.7%
General	13.7%

Scatter of contributions by Universities and Research Institutes

Agro-Economic Research Centre	79
Anthropological Survey of India	2
Arunachal Pradesh Govt. Research Department	15
Census of India	32
Gauhati University	174
Dibrugarh University	43
ICAR Research Complex	12
Naga Institute of Culture	2
Nagaland Peace Centre	6
National Productivity Council	26
North-Eastern Hill University	40

North-Eastern Council	23
North-Eastern Council for Social Science Research	8
Tribal Research Institute, Assam	4
Universities outside India	20
Others	27

Scatter by type of publication

Printed	153
Mimeographed	80
Unpublished	59

2.5. Gaps in Research

The report also indentified the following lacunas in social science research:

1. Demography
 - (a) Pattern of family living and habits
 - (b) Nutritional standards
 - (c) Immigration problems
 - (d) Intergroup relationships
2. Resources endowment and utilization
 - (a) Inventory and utilization of resources
 - (b) Manpower planning
 - (c) Problems of unemployment and underemployment
 - (d) Process of settlement to new areas
 - (e) Soil erosion and deforestation
3. Development strategy
4. Indigenous institutions
5. Infrastructural developments
 - (a) Development of railways and transport service
 - (b) Pattern of trade in relation to inflow and outflow
 - (c) Market organisation
 - (d) Financial institutions
6. Political parties
7. Technology transfer
8. Social and economic history

2.6. Priority Areas for Research

As a sequel to the report by Prof Goswami, the North-Eastern Regional Centre of the ICSSR sponsored a meet of the social scientists of the region at Agartala on "*Social Science Research in North-East India*". The meet was organised by the Department of Analytical and Applied Economics, Calcutta University Post-Graduate Centre. The meet identified priority areas for research in various disciplines as follows:

Sociology

- (a) New social elements and forces that are being superimposed ;
- (b) Social differentiation and stratification;
- (c) Disorganisation in family and community life and value system;
- (d) New concepts of property ownership;
- (e) New concepts of money and power;
- (f) Mass media as a factor of social change;
- (g) Modern transport and communication and the changes brought about by them in the modes of living;
- (h) Newly emerging occupations;
- (i) Sociology of the frontier regions;
- (j) Social, economic and cultural deprivation as a result of demographic changes and the introduction of new technologies; and
- (k) Growing elitist movement in old societies.

Anthropology

- (a) Preparation of monographs on the life and culture of each tribal community;
- (b) Enquiries into economic problems such as shifting cultivation, traditional land tenure systems, labour conditions, market economy etc;
- (c) Problems of acculturation, ethnic migration and movements, industrialization, urbanization etc; in tribal areas;
- (d) Social change brought about by the implementation of different development and welfare schemes; and
- (e) Bio-medical research to study the problems of health, hygiene, nutrition and growth among tribal communities.

Political Science

Following dimensions of state politics:

- (a) *Administrative dimensions* : State administration, local government, developmental administration and rural development management.
- (b) *Political dimensions* : Cabinet formation, politics of coalition government, political parties: their organisation and performance, pressure group activities, legislative behaviour.
- (c) *Social dimensions* : Rural and urban political leadership, the process and mechanism of political communication, inter-caste relations class-caste relationship, role of ideology, impact of local political culture, politics of untouchability, politics of land reforms, politics of union-state relationships etc.

Economics

- (a) Quantitative analysis of economic problems;
- (b) Development strategy;
- (c) Transport economics;
- (d) Trade and commerce;
- (e) Resource inventory;
- (f) Land utilization, flood control and soil conservation;
- (g) Manpower planning, employment and unemployment;
- (h) Project evaluation;
- (i) Economic history;
- (j) Tribal economy;
- (k) Constraints in adoption of recommended practices in agriculture;
- (l) Institutional arrangements for developments;
- (m) Public finance;
- (n) Demography and population growth;
- (o) Social dimensions of planning; and
- (p) Regional economic cooperation.

History

- (a) Social tension;
- (b) Mass movements;
- (c) Ancient and medieval period;
- (d) State formation;
- (e) Role of imperialism;
- (f) Nationalist movements;
- (g) Dating and scientific reporting on archaeological data; and
- (h) Protection of archives and monuments.

2.7. Priority Areas for Interdisciplinary Research

The meet also stressed on inter-disciplinary approach to social phenomenon and problems. It was realised that multidisciplinary attack on the problems facing the region was necessary to find solutions to them. This realisation led to the organisation of the second social scientists' meet at the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong in 1983 on the theme: "*Research priorities and inter-disciplinary interaction in social sciences in the context of North-East India, with special emphasis on the tools of research*"⁴. The meet was also sponsored by the North-Eastern Regional Centre of the ICSSR. The following priority areas were identified at the meet for inter-disciplinary research:

- (a) Social tension;
- (b) Ethnic identity;

- (c) Regionalism;
- (d) Problems of education;
- (e) Agricultural and industrial development;
- (f) Shifting cultivation with related studies on agrarian structure, ecological questions, development programmes, rural indebtedness, land use patterns, unemployment, role of banks and market control etc.

3. CURRENT SCENE OF RESEARCH

The survey of social science research in North-East India presented so far, indicates that 1981-83 were quite decisive years when social scientists of the region made conscious attempts to assess the status of research and fix priorities for future. What is the trend in social science research after these attempts? To answer this question, information on theses, research reports and seminars papers from 1981 onwards was collected from various sources*. 1981 was taken the demarcating point as the ICSSR research project on status of research had covered upto 1980. An analysis of 216 theses, 23 ICSSR sponsored projects and 500 seminar papers reveal the following trends on social science research in North-East India:

- * 1. University News. 1980- March 1988.
- 2. ICSSR research project, 1969-1987
- 3. Seminars on North-East India conducted by N E India Council for Social Science Research during March 1975-1984, compiled by Lalit P Pathak, P K Mitra and S Wahlang, NEHU Documentation Unit, 1985 (Memographed).
- 4. Bibliography of Academic Materials presented in seminars and conferences sponsored by ICSSR-NERC during 1977-87, compiled by C Khonglah. Bibliography No. 5. ICSSR-NERC, Documentation and Analysis Unit, 1988 (Memographed)

Scatter of Research by Major Areas of Research

Economics

Theses and Research Reports

Seminars and Conference Papers

Agricultural and rural

Economics	13	79
Cooperative	2	-
Economic Development	-	-
Assam	3	1
Manipur	2	-
Meghalaya	1	4

Nagaland	1	4
Tripura	1	1
Mizoram	-	-
NE in general	-	7
Industries	4	-
Cottage Industries	5	2
Jute Industries	1	-
Tea Industries	2	-
Land holdings	2	-
Land reforms	2	11
Poverty	3	-
Resources	-	25
Forest	3	-
Water	2	-
Road Transport	1	-
Shifting cultivation	1	-
Taxation	2	-
Trade and Marketing	1	14
Total	52	148

Sociology and Anthropology

Theses and Research Reports

Seminars and Conference Papers

Agrarian Structure and Sociology	9	22
Culture	3	23
Crime	1	21
Folklore and Folk Art	7	23
Industrial Sociology	1	-
Marriage	-	2
Medical Sociology	1	-
Occupational Pattern & Mobility	2	-
Physical Anthropology	6	-
Political Anthropology	1	-
Social Change	7	21
Social Ecology	1	-
Social Problems	-	10
Stratification	2	-
Tribes and Tribal Culture	8	19
Social Classes	1	11
Urbanisation	5	-
Women Studies	5	2
Total	60	154

Political Science

Theses and Research Reports		Seminars and Conference Papers
Election	2	32
International Affairs	2	-
Inter-State Relation	-	9
Judiciary and Law	-	3
Legislature	3	-
Local Administration	5	2
National Integration	1	15
Political Development	8	24
Political Parties	2	7
Political Leadership	1	-
Political Philosophy	2	-
Public Administration	3	4
Traditional Political Institutions	7	-
Village Administration	4	-
Total	40	96

Geography

Immigration	1	9
Land Use	2	13
Medical Geography	1	-
Migration	1	-
Political Geography	2	-
Population Geography	1	-
Rural Settlement	1	-
Social Geography	1	-
Total	10	24

History

Administrative History	3	-
Judicial Administration	1	-
Revenue Administration	2	-
Archeology and Architecture	1	9
Christian Mission	2	-
Economic History	1	-
Historiography	-	6
Medieval History	2	12
Modern History	3	19
National Movement	1	-
Political History	1	-

Social and Cultural		
History	3	26
Tribal-uprising	1	
Total	21	72

EDUCATION

Theses and Research Reports		Seminar and Conferences papers
Educational Development	4	4
Educational Psychology	2	
Educational Sociology	1	
Higher Education:		
Administration	2	
Examination	2	
Financing	1	
Non formal and social education	5	1
Primary Education	2	
Secondary Education		
Administration	1	
Curriculum	2	
Development	1	
Examination	1	
Extra curricular activities	1	
Stagnation and wastage	1	
Subject Teaching	2	
Teaching method	1	
Vocationalisation	1	
Technical Education	1	
Teaching profession		
Value/Moral education	1	
Women education		1

Scatter of theses and research reports by area studies

Arunachal Pradesh	8
Assam	85
Manipur	32
Meghalaya	27
Mizoram	16
Nagaland	17
Tripura	6
North-Eastern India in general	17
Others	8

Scatter of theses and research reports by institutions

Assam Agricultural University	3
Dibrugarh University	26
Gauhati University	104
Manipur University	22
North-Eastern Hill University	42
Others	19
Aligarh Muslim University	1
Avadh University	2
Baroda University	1
Bihar University	1
Calcutta University	2
Delhi University	3
Jawaharlal Nehru University	2
Kashmir University	1
Kerala University	1
North Bengal University	3
Ravindra Bharti University	1
Centre for the Study of Developing Societies	1

A further analysis of the trends, shown above, indicates to the following characteristics of social research in North East India from 1981 onwards:

- (a) More emphasis on problem oriented research;
- (b) Interdisciplinary approach to the problems; and
- (c) Universities, outside the region, taking interest on North-East India.

On the basis of the data as presented in the preceding tables, the following areas can be identified for future research in some of the disciplines:

Economics: Demography, Natural resources, Manpower planning, Transport and communication, Financial institutions, Labour and unemployment problems, Public finance, Production economics, Regional Planning, Trade and Marketing, Shifting Cultivation and Poverty.

Political Science : Political parties, National Integration, Local Administration, Central-State relations, Legislative behaviour, Rural and Urban politics, Insurgency, Developmental administration, and Traditional political Institutions.

Sociology and Anthropology: Modernisation and social change, Women's studies, Social ecology, Mass media, Social movements, Leisure and tourism, Art and literature, Health and medicine, Agrarian structure and rural sociology.

4. INFORMATION ACCESS

Research in social sciences has now produced a fairly good amount of literature on North-East India. The question arises whether the information created is available to a researcher. This is necessary because research to be fruitful and effective, needs access to the prior state of knowledge on the problem. This lands us on the question of access to information. Research on any problem of North-East India, will need not only information sources pertaining to the area but also the global sources focussing on the problem. Even a cursory glance at the facilities available to researchers in North-East India will reveal that the situation is far from satisfactory. He has to struggle for information from library to library. Inadequate transport and communication facilities add more to his injured feelings. Secondary sources of information are nearly nonexistent on North-East India excepting some stray attempts.

4.1 Scatter of Social Science Literature

Social science literature presents a peculiar phenomena of its scatter in the various sources as:

- (a) Books;
- (b) Periodicals;
- (c) Newspapers;
- (d) Conference proceedings;
- (e) Research reports;
- (f) Theses;
- (g) Government documents;
- (h) Archival records,
- (i) Census and other data; and
- (j) Non-book materials.

4.2. Tried Measure to Increase Availability of Information

This scatter of information in various sources becomes all the more crucial when research orientation is problem oriented. Current social science research in North-East India exhibits problem-oriented trend. In such an orientation, information does not know the limit of disciplines. Rather it crosses the boundaries of disciplines and expects the researchers to search for information over a wide spectrum of subjects. As such, the access to information presents a complicated phenomenon. Solutions tried so far, can be mentioned as:

- 1) Production of bibliographical tools like indexing and abstracting periodicals, current and retrospective bibliographies and state-in-art reports;
- 2) Creation of location tools like Union Catalogues and computerized

- 2) Bibliographical data bases with on-line access facilities;
- 3) Resource sharing;
- 4) Subject specialization among the libraries;
- 5) Creation of data banks;
- 6) Establishment of national and regional centres; and
- 7) Training social scientists as users of information.

4.2 Role of the NCC and the ICSSR-NERCC

North-East India shows an ignorance of the solutions tried excepting some bibliographical attempts. The situation needs to be rectified at the earliest. Initiative will have to be taken by regional organizations like the North-Eastern Council and the ICSSR-North-Eastern Regional Centre. The North-Eastern Council initiated the process of dialogue among various institutions of the region by organising two seminars.^{5,6} Interaction among the experts in these two seminars led to the idea of Regional Information Centre. The idea has now taken a concrete shape with the constitution of an advisory committee by the North-Eastern Council. The first meeting of the advisory committee was held on 31st January, 1988. Some of the decisions taken, at this meeting, were as follows:

1. Compilation of a bibliography on the socio-economic and socio-cultural life of the people of the North-Eastern Region;
2. Preparation of a list of publishers and printing presses in the region;
3. Preparation of a directory of the libraries in the region;
4. Compilation of a list of eminent persons of the North-Eastern Region settled outside the region in the country and abroad.

However, one of the major decisions regarding location of the centre could not be decided and was left to the discretion of the Chairman.

The ICSSR-North-Eastern Regional Centre is also at present actively engaged in bibliographical projects like preparation of retrospective bibliographies, literature surveys and union catalogue of periodicals in the university libraries of the region. There is every danger of the efforts of the North-Eastern Council and the ICCR-North Eastern Regional Centre to result in duplication. Coordination is necessary to avoid this. To foster this coordination, it is imperative that one organization comes up as the apex body and other organizations develop links with it. Analysed from this point of view, the *Regional Information Centre*, being created by the North-Eastern Council, should develop as the apex body with the following objectives:

1. Provision of library and information services relevant to the present and future needs of the region;
2. Optimum utilization of existing services and systems in the region and

the development of new ones;

- A. Promotion of regional, national and international cooperation and liaison for exchange of information.

To fulfil these objectives, there is need for the Regional Centre to start with a survey of the existing services, especially those of the university libraries, state central libraries and special libraries and identify the collections for subject-specialization. This identification will help in the creation and strengthening of specialized collections in particular sectors, disciplines or missions. At the next stage, the collections should be interlinked for resource sharing by preparing union catalogues and developing computerized bibliographical database at the Regional Centre. In addition to the functions mentioned above, the centre should also undertake the following activities and services:

- (a) To build a comprehensive data bank on the region;
- (b) To build a strong reference and lending collection on the areas not covered by the scheme of subject specialization;
- (c) To provide reprographic services;
- (d) To provide translation services;
- (e) To provide current and retrospective bibliographical services;
- (f) To promote and foster links with the national and international information services and data banks;
- (g) To collect and disseminate information on regional expertise and on-going research projects;
- (h) To support research in library and information science;
- (i) To provide adequate funds to the libraries selected for subject specialization.

The information role of the ICSSR-North-Eastern Regional Centre may be spelled out as a link in the regional information system with the following functions:

- (a) A depository of social science theses;
- (b) To award study grants for consultation of library and information sources in the region.
- (c) To bring out survey reports on various disciplines in social sciences indicating research completed, gaps identified and areas of further research;
- (d) To acquire organize and maintain the social science data generated by ICSSR Research Projects on North-East India and government reports; and
- (e) To organize training courses for social scientists in the use of information sources.

CONCLUSION

Lastly, it may be mentioned specifically that any scheme of regional corporation will not be a success unless the libraries and information centres participate in the venture. Bibliographical control and resource sharing are the ways to increase availability of information. Resource sharing, in its turn, will necessitate allocation of areas, sectors, and disciplines among the libraries for developing specialized collections in the region; and creation of location tools and linking the libraries and centres by adopting the latest innovations in communication and information technology.

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