



IN DEFENCE OF

**REGIONAL
ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
IN INDIA**

A CASE FOR THE NORTH EAST

P.M. PASSAH

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Edited by
P. M. Passah

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AKANSHA PUBLISHING HOUSE

4649B/21, Ansari Road

Daryaganj, New Delhi - 110 002

Phones: 011-23263193, 9811582579, 9435116718

Fax: 011-23263193

Email: ektabooks@yahoo.com

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*A
Felicitation Volume
in Honour
of
Dr. Basudev Datta Ray
The Secretary
North-East Council for Social Science
Research
A Freedom Fighter, A Teacher par excellence
and
A Champion of the North-Eastern Region*



M. M. Jacob

RAJ BHAVAN
Shilong 793 001
Meghalaya State

Foreword

This publication is a fitting tribute to a selfless scholar, whose contributions are much valued by all. I am glad that a felicitation volume in honor of Dr. Basudev Datta Ray is being brought out. It is also significant that this book is compiled and edited by an eminent Economist, Prof. P.M. Passah. I know Dr. Basudev Datta Ray intimately, for the past many years and I have great appreciation for the remarkable service rendered by him for the cause of promotion of research in various fields. As secretary, North-East Council for Social Science Research, he was always piloting the cause of North Eastern Region. It was his devotion, hard work and a vision that made him to conceive the idea of establishing NEICSSR way back in 1974 and thereafter, conducting large number of seminars, workshops and conferences, on various topics concerning North Eastern States.

His personal rapport with individuals and institutions in the country, enabled him to get prominent scholars, to attend the conferences held in Shillong. He was mainly responsible along with his colleagues to publish a series of publications, on behalf of NEICSSR. About sixty-six seminars and conferences organised by him and his colleagues attracted not only prominent scholars of North Eastern Region but also, from other parts of the country.

I had the good fortune of participating in some of the workshops and seminars in Shillong, during the last few years. The workshops and conferences were very useful and

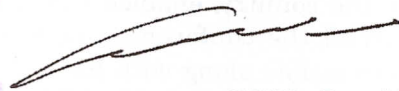
informative and attended by resource leaders competent to handle each topic under discussion. This felicitation volume is a useful publication as it comprises major contributions on topics of great interests in this North East Region as a whole.

Various papers on macro-economic and theoretical overview of the North East, by Amallesh Banerjee and others; Regional trade services and entrepreneurship by A.K. Neog and others; Micro-level studies by N.N. Bhattacharjee and others; socio-political aspects and women issues by Girin Phukon and others; are some of the topics of current interests to the readers. I do not wish to mention all the different topics included in this volume. This volume will be a treasure house to all those who wish to have a feel of North Eastern India.

Not only the choice of topics and themes for various conferences, NEICSSR is to be complimented for publishing many of the conference papers in the past. This publication is unique with a variety of topics from agriculture to industry including many other aspects pertaining to North East India in general.

I am happy that his contribution in social sciences are recognized by his colleagues through the publication of this "Felicitation Volume". I wish all success for this publication. May Dr. Basudev Datta Ray continue to serve the society through the NEICSSR, and I pray God to give him health and happiness to continue this endeavor to impart knowledge through this forum.

My best wishes,



(M.M. Jacob)

Shillong
The 28th June 2005

Preface

In the publication of this volume, the members of the North-East India Council for Social Science Research, Shillong are very proud and happy indeed. They had some time ago proposed to felicitate Dr. Basudev Datta Ray, the founder Secretary of the Council, and to publish a volume in his honour. Dr. Datta Ray deserves congratulations and felicitations not only from the members of the Council but also from all those who know him and his achievements in the field of social science research in the North-East. Many scholars and social scientists, young and old, in the North-East and in other parts of the country, have been provided with an ideal forum in the NEICSSR through the unstinted efforts of Dr. Datta Ray who continues as its Secretary for the last 31 years of its existence.

Dr. Datta Ray is well known as a teacher and research scholar of repute even though he had a chequered career as a student during his young days. At the young age, he joined the ranks of Freedom Fighters who fought for the freedom of India in the early part of the last century. He was born to a humble family at Bankura, West Bengal on the 10th of March 1924. His ancestral home was in a village in the District of Bakarganj, East Bengal where he had a part of his school education. He wrote his Intermediate Examination from Dum Dum Central Jail. He graduated from the Scottish Church College, Calcutta; obtained his M.A. degree in 1949 from the Calcutta University and then came to Shillong in 1950 to join the St. Edmund's College as a Lecturer in Economics and subsequently opened the Department of Political Science in 1962 and headed it till 1985. He was incharge of the

Faculty of Post-graduate studies in Political Science which was functional for seven years from 1973 in the St. Edmund's College. He gave lectures in the I.A.S. Pre-Training Centre as well. He was also a member of the Voluntary Health Association, Meghalaya and the State Resource Centre, N.E.H.U. Dr. Datta Ray obtained, in between, his B.T., LL.B., and Ph.D. degrees from the Gauhati University.

It was in the middle of 1974 that Dr. Datta Ray brought together a number of teachers and social scientists of the North-East in a meeting at Shillong on the 30th June of that year under the Chairmanship of late Prof. V. Venkata Rao of the Gauhati University. The meeting with one accord decided to establish the NEICSSR with the principal objective of undertaking, organising and facilitating research activities in the North-East besides other activities related to research. Earlier he founded the Shillong Political Science Association and the Inter-Disciplinary Forum and guided them for a few years.

Dr. Datta Ray who has been able to effect good rapport with many research centres and institutes both in the North-East and in other parts of the country, is guiding the Council which has since held more than 66 seminars, conferences, symposium, workshops, etc. and published as many research proceedings in the form of Books. Many national and international organizations have been attracted by the fairly high standard of publications of the Council mostly dealing with the question of socio-economic problems and issues of the North East. The Journal of NEICSSR is being published regularly since 1977 under his guidance.

By the 1st of March 1985, Dr. Datta Ray's service in the St. Edmund's College was superannuated but the college authorities continued to assist him and to utilize his service. Immediately in April 1985 he started the Women's College in the St. Edmund's College premises where the new college continued to function upto 1991. He was the founder Principal of the college upto 1992. In fact as the Secretary of the organization known as 'The Shillong Academy', he had earlier helped to revive a dying Secondary School at

Laitumkhrah and made it functional. The School had since shifted to its own campus at Upper New Colony. Dr. Datta Ray was instrumental in organising, as the Rector, both the School and the Women College under the sponsorship of the Shillong Academy, which are now functioning in the same campus. Dr. Datta Ray never retires. From 1993 onwards he has exclusively devoted his time to the cause of the NEICSSR.

He wrote a number of books including the *Assam Secretariat: An Administrative History of North-East India* (1978); *Tribal Identity and Tension in North-East India* (1989); and a volume of *Bengali Poems* (2004). He edited 20 books published by the NEICSSR and authored more than 40 research papers.

As an editor of the book, I am indeed very grateful to the members of the Council for the opportunity they have given me in associating myself with this work, and I join in with all of them in felicitating Dr. Datta Ray, the Secretary of the Council all the time. I am especially grateful to the authors of the Papers contained in this volume for their generous response and for their scholarly researched contribution. It must now be said that this Felicitation Volume is published, to use the words of one contributor, "in honour of Professor B. Datta Ray, a freedom fighter, a teacher *par excellence* and above all, a social scientist with deep concerns for the underdevelopment of the North-Eastern States (Region) of India. This octogenarian thespian has spent over the last three decades in herding the social scientists of the Region into the secular forum of the NEICSSR, of which he is the Secretary General. In times when the polity is fragmented and even this fragmentation is assigned morality and legitimacy, the aging Nehruvian Scholar still spends sleepless nights in building a new India, a dream consigned to ashes of history a long time ago." The title of the book justifies his conscious efforts as the Champion of the North East.

In a very special way, I must express my thankfulness to His Excellency, the Governor of Meghalaya, Shri M.M. Jacob for writing a Foreword to this Volume.

We must also thank M/s. Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, for agreeing to expeditiously publish this book. Last but not the least our thanks are also due to Mr. Godfrey Pathaw for partly helping in computerised work.

Shillong:
The 30th June 2005

Editor

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Empowering Women through Self-Help Group: A Meghalaya Experience

—Biloris Lyndem

Introduction

In spite of the constitutional guarantee and India's ratification of the 'Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women,' gender inequalities still persist. It is true that the conditions of women have improved since Independence in respect of literacy, life expectancy and maternal mortality; but still they continue to occupy a subordinate position in economic, social and political spheres of life.

The developments in the 1990s had witnessed the globalization of economy and the decentralization and localization of political empowerment. The availability trends indicate that globalization is having an impact on both men and women. Women whether in matrilineal or patrilineal society have always low productive endowment base, and lower access to credit, extension services, inputs and market information. This is more evident with the marginalized group. This is different with women in the urban areas where they have more access to capital contacts and education. It is only the educated women from relatively privileged groups who have benefited from the increase in employment opportunities in manufacturing and services.

In most parts of India, it is the women and the girl children who bear the brunt of any cuts on the consumption of essential goods within a household as globalization leads to the degradation of the environment, worsening of the condition of drinking water and energy situation. Reduced food intake and increased work burden have pushed many women from being the marginalized communities to malnutrition trap.

Gender and Development

Since the United Nations Declaration of 1980-1990 as the International Decade for Women, greater interest has been evinced in the world to look at women and development not as a separate development stream but as part of the mainstream development process. The approach on development changes from viewing women as beneficiaries of social services to accepting them as contributors of social and economic development process in nation building. This is evident from the national policies and approaches pursued by different countries. India formulated a comprehensive National Policy for the empowerment of women in 2001 which primarily outlines the following:

1. Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
2. The *de jure* and *de facto* enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by women on equal basis with men in all spheres—political, economic, social, cultural and civil.
3. Equal access to participation and decision—making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.
4. Equal access of women to health care, quality education, career and vocational guidance, employment and equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security, public office, etc.

The 1990s saw the globalization of the media also. The life-styles promoted by the mainstream media opened the eyes of women marginalized groups to the range of consumer goods which they could access if they had the purchasing power. The escalation of dowry price, the spread of technologies such as ultra sound scanning, and the decline in economic contribution of women in marginalized sections in rural areas, have enhanced preference to sons in some communities and led to the spread of anti-social practices such as female infanticides and foeticides.

On the whole two major problems seemed to have confronted women in the 1990s in the context of globalization of the economy. The first was the issue of poverty affecting women as the economically and socially marginalized groups. The second was the issue of human rights affecting all groups of women.

The decentralization and localization of political process with reservation for women has opened up opportunities for them to take part in political processes and community resources. However, there are still resistance to women exercising political powers and the upper caste resistance to lower caste occupying public positions due to women's lack of knowledge leading to lack in the proper functioning of the panchayats and gram sabhas and lack of access to literacy, numeracy and other functional skills.

Women in Meghalaya

The Khasi, Jaintia and Garo tribes of Meghalaya are followers of a matrilineal system. In a matrilineal society women cannot be members of any decision-making body. This is more pronounced in the rural areas than in the urban sector. In such a society the female takes the main role in the home front to maintain the lineage of the family but over anything outside the family circle the men reign. The political sphere in particular has been monopolized by men. This is the main characteristic feature of the traditional institutions being followed in Meghalaya.

IF AD Project Initiatives for a change

The development intervention of the International Fund for Agricultural Development in the West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya appears to have indeed facilitated some change in its matrilineal society. The IFAD agency helped form the Khawkylla Community Resource Management Society in the district for poverty alleviation. Its main programme is to increase participation of rural women in decision-making in local institutions. The objectives of this society are highlighted as follows:

1. To provide and improve a more sensitive approach to the design and implementation of development interventions, with emphasis on community participation;
2. To enhance the capabilities of local people to manage new technologies and institutions at the village level;
3. To increase incomes through the development of more sustainable farming system and the establishment of non-farm enterprise;
4. To make people more aware of the need to preserve and regenerate natural resources, particularly forests and biodiversity;
5. To establish effective and appropriate delivery systems for input (credit, extension, etc.) and for the maintenance of assets and resources;
6. To increase the participation of women in local institutions and in decision-making processes within the community;
7. To enhance savings capacity and establishment the habit of thrift;
8. To increase accessibility to basic services and infrastructure facilities.

Strategy Adopted

The first strategy adopted is the introduction to

participatory planning processes and finance priority activities identified through the involvement of the entire community in the formulation of Community Resource Management Plan (CRMP). This reflects more on productive and sustainable use of the available resources and technology.

Natural Resources Management Groups (NaRM-Gs)

In the context of the above objectives and planning, formation of Natural Resource Management Group (NaRM-G) and Self-Help Group (SHG) becomes evident in fructification of the project's objectives.

Sustaining long-term interventions especially in developmental activities, requires strong institutional arrangement. Institution building becomes necessary not only to respond to the preferences of the people but also to utilize efficiently the available resources and traditional knowledge of the areas. Such Institutions must provide the services consistent with spatially differentiated taste and preferences of the people.

Salient Features of the Natural Resource Management Groups

- The NaRM-G is a complimentary institution to existing traditional institutions in the villages. NaRM-G comprises both of women and men from each household of the village. Of the three signatories for the NaRM-G fund operation, one must be a woman member.
- No funds can be withdrawn or utilized without a written resolution passed by all members of the NaRM-G.
- All members must attend meetings which are held at regular intervals.
- Inbuilt mechanism such as community action plan, monitoring activities of all members and imposing sanctions against the defaulting members.

The NaRM-G are democratic and participatory in decision-making with transparency and accountability to all its members.

Insensitivity to Gender Issues

The traditional institutions like the *Dorbar Shnong* and the *Syiemship* exclude women membership. However, an awareness has been created amongst the men to work with women.

Nonglang Village Project Area

Nonglang village came into existence in the early 1960. The settlers of this village were mostly migrant labourers working in the un-organised timber industry. After the Supreme Court ban on felling of timber, this village was severely affected and its people turned back to agriculture for their livelihood. People practise *jhum* cultivation and land was available on annual rental basis. The village is poorly connected with other villages, the road is *kutchra* and for health facilities one has to travel 4 kms to reach Kynrud Public Health Centre. There is one lower primary school with two teachers.

Project Intervention and Inputs in Nonglang Village 1999

The village was sensitized and the objective of the project formed the NaRM-G to look after the development of the project with the formation of Self-Help Group to address the need of the community.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) with the villages in which resource mapping, social mapping, time line, women's mobility chart, etc. were done. Vision building and perspective planning were facilitated in which the community came out with a clear vision.

A lot of technical inputs were provided involving different departments/agencies like health, agriculture, horticulture, sericulture and low cost sanitation.

With this the level of participation increases especially among the women group. They have been able to co-ordinate the various Government Departments like agriculture, veterinary, etc. A lot of enthusiasm is seen among the people.

The impact of this project is commendable in the following particular aspects:

1. Kitchen garden is being practised in every household;
2. The women village health workers are seen to be more active than before;
3. Low cost sanitation are constructed in every household;
4. Rice mill is installed in the village run by the Proscovie SHG;
5. Income from broom-sticks has increased without expansion of the area;
6. The SHG members have started petty shops, handicrafts and fishery ponds to augment their income and reduce dependency on land.

Pre-Primary Schools-cum-Creche

The women SHG establish a pre-primary school-cum-creche to help the women who are out in the fields for work. The teachers are from the village itself and all of them had been working on voluntary basis.

Achievements

As per the information gathered, after the intervention of Khawkylla Community Resource Management Society, Nonglang village now is self-sufficient and empowered in many fronts. For example, the village was having a water supply scheme a long time ago but the contractor did not complete the work. After the formation of the self-help group, the villagers organized themselves and sent a petition to the Public Health Department to revive the water supply,

offering free labour from the community. This is only one of many instances of community participation in providing the basic needs for their own village.

Conclusion

The Khawkylla Resource Management Society, West Khasi Hills is a blessing to the people of the area. It has a positive impact on the socio-economic life style of the people. Now the migrant labourers settled at Nonglang can afford to rent agricultural land for longer tenure and look forward for a better tomorrow.

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