



**Regional
Political Parties**
in
North East India

324.2095416

GAS
002879
ICSSR

L.S. Gassah

Political parties have become an indispensable factor in the working of a representative form of Government. India has a multi party system of Government.

In Northeast India, many regional political parties were initially set up only as pressure groups with the aims of achieving social & economic goals and welfare of the people, to protect and preserve the customs, traditions, customary laws, language, religion and distinct identity of their own section of the people, In hill areas, these pressure groups acted as the voice of the common people, these pressure groups were converted into political parties, but many such groups disappeared as soon as they formed themselves into political parties.

A few regional political parties emerged even before independence, some of them lost their individuality by submerging themselves with the ruling national party, to share the dividends of power shed by such a party in power.

After independence, a large number of strong regional political parties were formed for various reasons, posing a serious challenge to the National political parties in the region.

Mr. L.S. Gassah is teaching in the Department of Political science, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. He is one of the member of the Governing Body of the North East India Council for Social Science Research (NEICSSR), Shillong, and has contributed a number of research papers published in many books and Journal of the Council and in other Journals too.

Regional Political Parties
IN
NORTH EAST INDIA

Edited by

L.S. GASSAH

Department of Political Science
NEHU, SHILLONG



OMSONS PUBLICATIONS

NEW DELHI

GUWAHATI



002879

1992

© AUTHOR



ISBN 81-7117-093-5

Published by :

R. Kumar

OMSONS PUBLICATIONS,
T-7, RAJOURI GARDEN
NEW DELHI-110027.

Laser Composed by :

Enen Grafiks,

CB-178, Ring Road, Naraina,
New Delhi-110028.

Printed at :

Atul Offset Works,

A-24/1, Narayana Industrial Area Phase-I,
New Delhi-110028.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION (vii)

ASSAM

1. Public Opinion and Regional Political Parties in North-East India. — *Nitendra Nath Das* 1
2. Regional Political Parties of Assam. — *Nikunjalata Dutta* 11
3. Political Party Formation and Inter-action in Assam. — *Dhiren Bhagawati* 18
4. Regional Political Parties in Karbi Anglong. — *B.C. Bhuyan* 26
5. Regional Political Parties in Assam: An observation on Asom Gana Parishad. — *Arunjyoti Sengupta* 42
6. Emergence of the United Minorities Front in Assam. — *Girban Biswas* 47
7. The Hmar and the Dimasa Students Unions. — *Tanmay Bhattacharjee* 77
8. The Plains Tribal Council of Assam. — *S.K. Mukherjee* 82
9. Political Aspirations of the Aboriginal Primitive Tribes-vis-a-vis the UTNLF — *B.K. Basumatari* 88

MEGHALAYA

10. Regionalism and Regional Political Parties in North-East India : A case of Meghalaya. — *P.C. Biswas* 96
11. The Hill State People's Democratic Party of Meghalaya. — *B. Pakem* 103

(vi)

12. Aims, Objectives and Activities of the HSPDP.
— *H.S. Lyngdoh* 119
13. "ARMS". A Student Front in the Regional Politics
of Meghalaya. — *L.S. Gassah* 123
14. Hill People Union : Its Role in Meghalaya Politics.
— *L.S. Gassah* 128

MIZORAM

15. Mizo National Front. — *Indira Barua Phukan* 140
16. Mizo National Front Party and its Activities : A Study.
— *R.N. Prasad* 148

MANIPUR

17. Manipur Peoples Party. *Ksh. Bimola Devi* 170
18. The Kuki National Assembly : Its Social Base and
Working in Manipur. — *Asok Kumar Ray* 184

NAGALAND

19. Regional Political Parties in Nagaland : An Appraisal.
— *B.B. Kumar* 206

TRIPURA

20. Regional Political Parties in Tripura : A Genesis.
— *Pratap Choudhury* 211
21. The TUJS : A Regional Political Party.
— *Jagat Jyoti Ray* 218
22. The TUJS : From Petition to Power.
— *Mahadev Chakravarti* 226

Index

241

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the largest democracies in the world. India has also adopted the Westminster model of parliamentary form of government. In such form of government, the political parties are allowed to exist and operate as legal and legitimate organisations, both at the national and regional levels.

Political parties have become an indispensable factor in the working of a representative form of government. It lays down the irrefutable rule that a political party, whether at the national or regional level, in one form or another, is omnipresent. This phenomenon also signifies that the electorate has to express their confidence by way of casting their votes either in favour of a national or regional political party. Thus, citizens' commitment to political parties plays an important role for the maintenance of a representative system of government.

India has her own party system with its peculiar characteristics. Some commentators on Indian party system observed that India has neither a single-party system that smacks of a totalitarian model nor a bi-party as it prevails in a country like England. But what is operating in India is a multi-party system as obtaining in many countries of the World.

With reference to North-East India, it may be pointed out that many of the regional political parties at the initial stage were set up only as pressure groups. In general, the aims of such groups were mainly to achieve social and economic goals and welfare of the people. Their initial formation was also because of the need that was felt necessary to protect and preserve the customs, traditions, customary laws, language, religion and the distinct identity of their own section of the society. In the hill areas, in some cases, a common feature that prevailed was that the pressure groups acted as the voice of the common people to protest against the exploitation of traditional Chiefs or the colonial rulers. Subsequently, these pressure groups were converted into political parties. Some of them managed to survive as political parties and run the state administration with a

commanding majority, but still many such groups disappeared as soon as they form themselves into a political party.

In North-East India, few of the regional political parties had emerged in the political scene even before Independence. But the fate of some of these parties was the off-and-on fragmentation. It may also be found that some such regional political parties totally lost their distinct individuality by submerging themselves into the fold of the ruling national party, especially the Indian National Congress, or they happily accepted the position of behaving like an adjunct of the ruling party for no other reason than to share the dividends of power shed by such a party in power.

After Independence, a large number of strong regional political parties were formed in the North-Eastern region. These parties had a strong regional base and they were therefore posing a serious challenge to the national political parties in the region. Various reasons are responsible for the emergence of such strong regional political parties. In general, one of the reasons was that, after the 1970s there were no such charismatic local leaders in the Congress party which was the ruling party in the then composite State of Assam.

Secondly, the Congress party also lacked strong organisational structure and leadership at the grass-root level. This paved the way for the local leaders with local background and grass-root followers to offer a positive alternative leadership in the region.

Thirdly, the interests of different races and tribal groups of the region were not properly accommodated in the policies and programs of national parties. This resulted in a feeling of insecurity among the minorities in a national party which did not take sufficient interest in trying to solve or redress local problems and grievances. This therefore, obviously led to the formation of new regional political parties in different pockets and newly formed States.

Fourthly, the demand for "Autonomy" especially by the hill people was a demand to help them administer and manage their own affairs under the Constitution as they are a distinct community with very distinct language, customs, traditions and cultures. The essence of "Autonomy" is the right and freedom of the community to select their own leadership and government and evolve their own policy and programme for their own preservation and development.

To meet these challenges, it was necessitated to form political parties at the regional level.

Finally, factionalism gave birth to regional political parties. With regards to policy matter, some regional political parties claimed themselves to be "regional parties with a national outlook". To counter-act such claim, other regional parties maintain that such parties have lost their relevance and failed to represent the true tribal or regional interest. And on this basis some regional parties did not hesitate even to align themselves with the national parties in power. Such alignment led to further split in the party and thus more regional parties came into existence as a sort of protest or to build up a new base. To such parties there is no such "national outlook" as differentiated from the "regional outlook".

Ethnic politics is one of the major concerns of any regional political party in North-East India. For instance, the formation of the APHLC was the outcome of ethnic consideration against the imposition of Assamese language as the official State language. There are other major considerations too of the regional parties like – preservation and protection of their rights, lands and tribal identity, culture, language and traditions. This kind of policies and programmes, drew the immediate attention of the people. Such political parties therefore emerged as a distinct political force in the region.

It is generally said that regional political parties are parochial, anti-national and a dis-integrating force. National political leaders also used to level charges that such parties do not adopt positive and constructive attitude towards national problems. But this is debatable. On the contrary, it must be said to be credit of the regional parties, a fact which could not be easily denied, that they provided political stability, efficient Government and continuity. As the regional parties are deeply rooted at the grass-root level, they are in a position to understand the regional problems and grievances of the people better and in this way they succeeded in developing the region and delivered the goods. Whatever may be their initial attitudes to win elections, it is wrong to say that they offended national sentiment.

The regional parties which have emerged in the region are not to be considered as something incongruous to our federal system of

governance which emphasises regional development and adopts devolution of powers and resources. The role and relevance of the regional parties have to be assessed against the background of the functioning of the national parties. The regional parties are bound to continue growing and playing an important positive role in political development of the North-Eastern region.

It is the endeavour of the contributors to present in this book the origin, emergence, role, policies, programmes, ideologies and contributions in various ways and forms of the diverse regional political parties that existed in the North-Eastern region of India. These various regional political parties have a distinctive role to play in the state and national politics. We are trying to cover a wide canvass of such regional political parties of all the States in North-East India except Arunachal Pradesh, as none of the scholars have come forward to contribute a paper on any regional political party from this State. We hope this book would be of rich contribution and fill the gap in understanding the role of the different regional political parties of the region.

I take this opportunity to express my thanks and gratefulness to the Governing Body of the North-East India Council for Social Science Research, Shillong, for the privilege given to me to edit the volume and particularly, to its Secretary, Dr. B. Datta-Ray, whose constant help and support made the tasks easier. I am also thankful to all the contributors of the papers for their kind effort and co-operation. I am very much aware of my shortcomings and would like to crave the indulgence of the readers for the errors that might have crept in.

Shillong

L.S. GASSAH