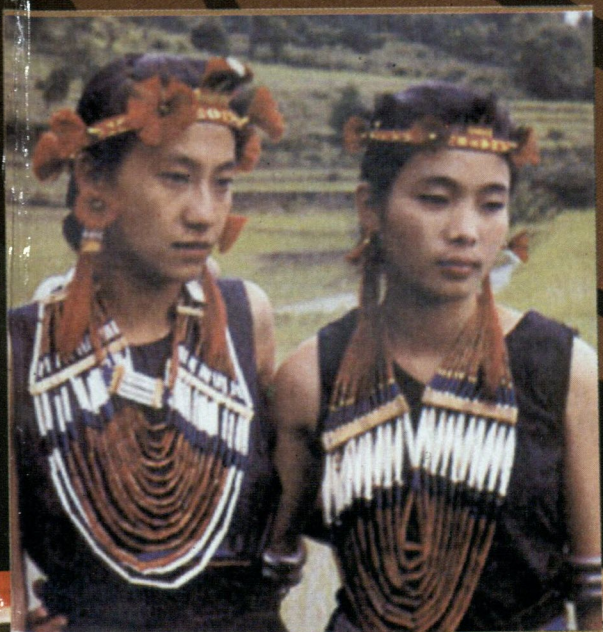


# Ethno-Social Mobility in North East India

Gautam Kumar Bera  
K. Jose SVD



The sphere of socio-cultural changes is a field wherein scholars of inter-disciplinary spectrum finds pleasure in understanding change in an existing structure. Therefore, the study on Ethno-Social Mobility is a decisive mapping of the movements of the people for socially shared values to bring in change in a given social system. This book brings into relief some observations on social and political movements of North East India in the contemporary period. Each contribution from the scholars of various disciplines such as History, English, Anthropology, Sociology, Education, and Social Work portrays detailed account of individual ethno-social movements over a sphere of time. It is hoped that this volume which is knit together in the back drop of peoples movement towards peace paves way for desirable social change in the years to come.

**This book is published in  
Collaboration with SANSKRITI,  
NEICR, Guwahati.**

**23 cm      HB      2010      Rs. 1050**

**ISBN 978-93-80031-63-7**

# ETHNO-SOCIAL MOBILITY IN NORTH EAST INDIA

**AUTHOR COPY**

*Edited by*  
**Gautam Kumar Bera**  
**K. Jose SVD**



**ABHIJEET PUBLICATIONS**  
DELHI 110 094

**ABHIJEET PUBLICATIONS**

2/46 Tukhmeerapur Extension

Delhi-110 094

Phone: 011-22960492, 65698474

E-mail: abhijeetpublication@gmail.com

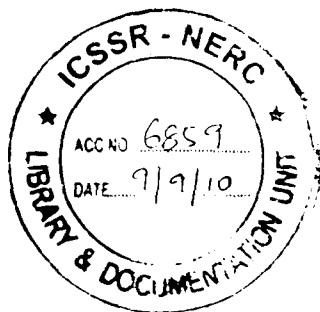
302-8025116  
BER

ETHNO-SOCIAL MOBILITY IN NORTH EAST INDIA

*First Published 2010*

© Reserved

ISBN 978-93-80031-63-7



[All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, copied, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or used in any form or by any means, whether electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission from the author or publishers, except for a brief quotations in critical articles or reviews.]

**PRINTED IN INDIA**

Published by J.K. Singh for Abhijeet Publications, Delhi-110 094,  
Lasertypeset by Gaurav Graphics, New Delhi and Printed at  
Himanshu Printers, Delhi.

# AUTHOR COPY

## CONTENTS

---

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| <i>Message</i>  |        |
| —Archbishop Thomas Menampampil SDB  | iii    |
| —Saroj Chaudhuri  |        |
| <i>Foreword</i> —Cyprian Pinto SVD  | xvii   |
| <i>Introductory Preface</i>   | xxiii  |
| <i>List of Contributors</i>   | xxxvii |
| 1. An Appraisal of Social Movements in India  | 1      |
| —Gautam Kumar Bera  |        |
| 2. Anthropology in India: Contributions of SVD Scholars                                       | 16     |
| —S.M. Michael SVD   |        |
| 3. Sanskritisation of the Tutelary Cults of the Sovereigns                                    | 32     |
| —Gautam Kumar Bera  |        |
| 4. Peace in North East India: Issues and Possibilities  | 44     |
| —A C Sinha  |        |
| 5. Early Education for Conflict Resolution in North-East India                                | 65     |
| —Ngazekmi Vashum  |        |
| 6. Towards a Meaningful Understanding of Peace for Peace in India's North-East                | 72     |
| —Joy Anne Gonsalves   |        |
| 7. Culture of Peace with Justice and Conflict Management for Human Development                | 88     |
| —Grace Thumra Shatsang  |        |
| 8. A Study of Conflict Management in Industrial Sector in North East India                    | 101    |
| —Bhaskar Athparia   |        |
| 9. Who are the Sublaterns?: Nationalism, Subalterns and the Politics of Subalternity in Assam | 112    |
| —Ankur Tamuli Phukan  |        |

|     |  |     |
|-----|--|-----|
| 10. | Peace Channel: A Channel for Human Rights Education and Peace in Nagaland<br>— <i>C.P. Anto</i>                                    | 121 |
| 11. | Amity and Anxiety: An International Border with Assam<br>— <i>Bibhash Dhar</i>   | 128 |
| 12. | Ethnic Unrest and State Response in North East India<br>— <i>Sourajit Roy</i>  | 137 |
| 13. | Ceasefire and its Impact in Nagaland: A Critical Appraisal<br>— <i>Kedilezo Kikhi</i>  | 145 |
| 14. | Ethnicity and Ethnic Disharmony: Perspectives on Arunachal Pradesh<br>— <i>Rahaman Hasibul</i>                                     | 157 |
| 15. | IFAD's Tribal Development Programmes in India: Lessons in Development and Peace Building<br>— <i>Vincent Darlong</i>               | 176 |
| 16. | Social and Political Movements and the Emergence of the Left Front Government in Tripura<br>— <i>Sankar Bhattacharyya</i>          | 197 |
| 17. | Tribal Identity and Social Unrest in Tripura: A Case Study of the Bru/Reang<br>— <i>Lincoln Reang</i>                              | 211 |
| 18. | Threats in the Positive Development of the Riang Refugees of North Tripura<br>— <i>Sriparna Chakraborty &amp; Baishakhi Chanda</i> | 223 |
| 19. | Perspectives in Social Exclusion Among the Riang (BRU) Refugees of North Tripura District<br>— <i>Sharmistha Ganguly</i>           | 239 |
| 20. | Social Unrest and Peace Initiatives in North East India<br>— <i>Vijoy S. Sahay</i>   | 257 |
| 21. | An Immigrant Sema Village in Assam: Some Socio-Economic Changes<br>— <i>Dr. Mita Sarkar (Das) &amp; Dr. Palash Ch. Coomar</i>      | 267 |
|     | <i>Index</i>   | 278 |

## INTRODUCTORY PRÉFACE

---

*"Peace is not made at the conference table, or by treaties,  
but in the hearts of human beings,"*  
(Herbert Hoover)

Peace and Development are two sides of the same concept of welfare. If one hopes to build a sound nation devoid of insurgency and narrow-mindedness we have to creatively move towards shunning arms and search for alternatives. Our leaders — political and religious — have to play a proactive role for weaning away the misguided youth to learn to live in multi-cultural communities. We also need to understand the reality that people move towards unrest when their social cultural, economic, and political aspirations are chocked. As our societies are fast modernising, our aspirations have risen, everyone puts a higher premium on the greater training skills so as to make a mark in the community and society in which they live. As B.G. Verghese rightly says, "when the tranquillity is established, people who made a decision to give up arms once and for all should find an arena to make their hard work bear fruit" (2004:438).

At different points of historical time, our country has experienced emergence of great souls who not only mobilized the society through their saintly acts, but also they remained

in the minds of people as agents of change. Therefore, a fresh look on the condition of social unrest and peace initiatives in India became imperative to understand the situation in North East India as our special area of interest. This also gave us an opportunity to understand the ethnic situation of the North East where cultural diversities play a key role in understanding both social unrest and peace initiatives. We realized the fact that among the people of North East India this journey took quite a long and arduous path treading through unknown paths with much turbulence and desperation.

No one will blindly believe that the government as such is interested in situations of absolute peace... which will put the government officials and bureaucrats on the toes of development. They can not wish away the projects which are sanctioned from centre and other agencies without action plan and completion reports. On the other hand the turbulence is allowed to remain up to a certain extent that under the shadow of these anomalies much more resources can be amassed and utilized for reasons other than the project proper. Now, surely this is a case existing in the north eastern part of our country. Anyone who keeps a track record of social unrest among the people of North East can not but notice the innermost craving for peace with justice and development. This is to reaffirm that one of the major concerns of North East India today is Peace. Many well meaning people think and propagate that civil society has no power to decide for peace and thus this engaging theme of building peace rest with both state and central governments. Some on the other hand put the complete responsibility with the central government who rush to the spot with large contingents when the scenario is too grim for the State to handle. But what is the best way to intervene when there is conflict and discord. Obviously there is a need to see and understand the fact and answer the question: what exactly is the underlying problem on which the unrest axle is revolving?

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the first decade of the 21st century and the third millennium, the years 2001 to 2010, as the International Decade for the Promotion of a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the

Children of the World. We at *Sanskriti* wanted to be a part of this endeavour of promoting peace not only for the Children of the World but all the people, with special reference to North East India. This takes us to the various papers presented in this volume. No one is so naïve as to think that they have given all the answers to all the problems of unrest. Still, we know that once again a new effort is made to re-emphasise that peace is possible in our day, only we need to make a commitment and work harder with greater focus and creativity.

## II

*Gautam Kumar Bera* in his *Key Note Address* discusses the interaction of the major historical, cultural, economic and political factors underlying the social movement among communities living in this country. He particularly mentions regarding the social movements among the tribes, castes, and peasants. It would appear that the social movements, which took place in this part of the country, tend to serve several interests at the same time. Generally, anthropologists search for satisfying and rational truths and structured explanations based primarily on Western scientific models. It was, therefore, felt that nothing but a special paper on ethno-social movements, devoted exclusively to the subject, could attempt to give a theoretical backdrop to some of the movements that occurred in India. The common threads involve the conflicts between the social scientist and humanist, between differing values, realities, and actions of cultural appropriateness, and between what we know from our culture and history and what we have learnt by understanding other cultures and their histories.

In 2008 NEICR commemorated the birth centenary of Prof. Stephen Fuchs SVD who was an eminent anthropologist. It was then decided to host a memorial award in his honour to be conferred upon a scholar of eminence. The awardee remains responsible to deliver the *Memorial Lecture* in his honour. *S.M. Michael SVD* in his Memorial Lecture rightly observes that from the beginning of the existence of SVD the study of cultures of humanity was one of the major concerns of its members. Father Wilhem Schmidt SVD, a

linguist turned ethnologist gave a sound footing to this endeavour with his manifold involvements. *Anthropos* Institute and *Anthropos* Journal are well known to the academic world especially to the Anthropology, Folklore and other social sciences. Among others who joined Schmidt were Stephen Fuchs SVD, Mathias Hermann SVD, Kloster Mayer SVD, Stanislaus Wald SVD, George Praksch SVD and Jungblo' SVD. The anthropological tradition of Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt SVD has been perpetuated in India by his German SVD scholars. Among them Dr. Fuchs' contribution is something very special. The Institute of Indian Culture, Mumbai and other young Indian SVD anthropologists in India have a rich legacy to be continued.

The second *Memorial Lecture* in honour of Prof. Fuchs SVD was delivered by *Gautam Kumar Bera* on 20th December 2009 at Agartala, Tripura. Since the topic of the lecture was confined to an aspect of non-directed phenomenon of social change delimiting in the territorial jurisdiction of North East India, it has been incorporated in the present volume. Arguing in favour of one of the most influential agents of social change that has been put forth in the last century the author has brought into light a major aspect of social mobilization to delineate the tutelary cults of Tripura sovereignty. Citing anecdotes from scriptural texts he refers to Sanskritization as a process that engulfed the sovereigns and subalterns in Tripura through propitiation of their tutelary cults. The cults of the state principality emerged out as a process of secularization and universalization over a long range of historical time frame, and have been understood here as an integral part of the whole process of social evolution rather than as self-congruent and self-contained domains that generate non-assimilative meaning. As a result the cults have emanated through the cultural process of progressive Sanskritization over ages. It also manifests the process of existence of polity through an assimilative attempt of ritual performances stabilizing a culture in a particular frame of time that goads towards Sanskritization.

In the *Special Theme Address* delivered by *A.C. Sinha* one can observe that looking for Peace in North East India is a very serious and important national task that may be held

in the process of nation building. He has followed three steps to look into the aspect of peace starting from the year of independence till date, analysis of aspects of peace, and finally true governance of the region meeting the genuine regional aspirations under guidance from constitutional framework. Historically speaking following sporadic as well as organized armed insurgency as a mode of social unrest the North Eastern States' Reorganization Act was passed in 1971 that led to emergence of independent states in this frontier region. This, however, was again followed by a demand for regional autonomy at a further micro level. All these aspects have been dealt upon in detail by the author who delineated the need for peace for true governance of the region.

*Ngazekmi Vashum* has brought into relief early education for conflict resolution in North East India. The author has discussed the factors lying behind conflicts in a group or a community and has suggested some view points for its resolution in a generic sense. Along with that steps to promote conflict resolution in North East India have been highlighted by the author. He emphasizes upon social responsibility at all levels as a concluding remark to understand conflict as a social reality.

*Joy Anne Gonsalves* writes saying the richness and resourcefulness of India's North East is threatened by unrest which is escalating by the day. Unrest and its manifestations in almost the entire region are presently subjected to heightened scales of violence. The many efforts underway at different levels and from various quarters, and many of these have not proved to be successful and have not appeared to have the desired lasting effect. It is within this complex mix of evolving variables within the ethnic groups that the need for identification, celebration and protection of the common, shared, deeply unique elements of group name, culture, language and land upon which the group executes — its socio-political existence becomes imperative.

*Grace Thumra Shatsang* as a social activist observes that there are many factors causing conflicts, tensions in the world between individuals, groups, communities, and between rulers and the subjects. She highlights a few realities, especially

with special reference to conflicts arising from social, economic and political differences and aspirations in the context of her experiences from Manipur and Nagaland. She also speaks of amicable settlement and peace resolutions as a 'culture of peace' through several factors including promotion of customary laws and interventions of women wing of the society for bringing peace in the society.

*Bhaskar Athparia* in his paper observes that the conflict is a theme which has occupied every aspect of human society. Such conflicts pose a threat to a community's continuing life and its recurrence destroys the community's total cultural backbone. Inter ethnic conflicts thus imposes heavy burden on the civic population. It brings up social unrest which causes social disorganization, namely, increase in juvenile delinquency, attitudinal changes, drug use, homelessness, etc. leading finally to economic instability arising out of poor management of resources, hampering normal trade and business, free flow of goods and essential items, unemployment due to incapability of the system leading to poverty. This is an attempt by the author to see what the areas of conflict in the industrial sector and how they are handled by the management.

The question of nationalism, subalterns and subalternity has been discussed in detail by *Ankur Tamuli Phukan* who views that the nationalist upsurge does not represent the real subalterns. He conceives of subalterns as people living in the lower strata of the society with an imagination and consciousness that is different from the dominants of society. In a world where there is historically uneven development, the imaginative frame depicts multiplicity which creates a relative autonomy of the subaltern groups. On the contrary, nationalism creates a ground for the elites of the peripheral communities to hegemonies its lower order. Thus, there is formation of an elite history, which is the history of the dominant group. So, there is a domination of core over periphery where, if necessary, history is rewritten in its own manner.

*C.P. Anto* highlights the five decade long journey of Naga society towards peace and promoting human rights. Anto says for the Naga a tragic history of war and bloodsheds

without and within that took thousands of lives and generations of youth times. Wisdom seems to have finally dawned upon us after decades of bloody experiences. Today, every Naga is proud of being Naga as the peace processes has established their identity in the international community. The major issue of their unrest is also related to the Government of Independent India that took over the Nagas against their wills promising fundamental human rights enshrined and rooms for self-determination within its Constitution also became the major source of human rights violation.

*Bibhash Dhar* studies the situation in the Indo-Bhutan border in the Baksa district of Assam. He observes that in many of the over-populated countries the international borders become the habitats of multi-ethnic communities. Peace and amity is, however, maintained on the borders at their own interest because creation of ethnic or communal upheavals may result in mass eviction from the borders which would cause a major breakdown in their economic life. It is to be noted that in most of the multiethnic habitats on the international border two types of human environment prevails. Apparently it would be found that the communities are leading a life of amity and understanding but on further enquiry it would be found that there is an air of uncertainty and anxiety in their minds about their future due to various political developments.

*Sourajit Roy* observes that the first voice of secession in North-East India was heard from the land of Nagas, the next was the tribals of Lusai Hills district of Assam followed by tribals of Tripura who experienced marginalization in their own home land. While in Manipur, the ethnic unrest took shape as a reaction of perceived deprivation from Central Government which was deeply rooted in left ideology. The author writes that in its initial stage, the ethnic movements in North-East India were primarily motivated to fight against the hegemony of Indian state and maintenance of cultural autonomy as well as the control over the territory, which they perceived as their own. They were also oriented to reconstruct their own concept of nation as against the nationalism propagated by Indian state. But, in due course,

these movements have re-oriented to spread their hegemonic power to grasp all the benefits provided by state agencies for their own respective groups. The paper ends by observing that in the process of conflict resolution, not only the contending groups, but also the civil groups and commoners have to be involved to find out conclusive solution.

*Kedilezo Kikhi* passionately explains that the Nagas underestimated how Delhi would interpret their being made a part of India at the eastern fringes by the British against their wishes when the bureaucrats would eventually discover the stand the Naga pioneers had taken. Before the Nagas realized what was happening the struggle gave birth to the state of Nagaland. To the majority of the Nagas it was an illegitimate birth. The state was Delhi's response to the challenge and crisis that the Nagas presented to the newly established Indian Republic. The question is who is actually paying for the extorted money? Again, the different factional groups have entered into ceasefire with the government of India, but there is no ceasefire among them. Is it not important to recast ceasefires in the light of the factional killings and the unfortunate distractions that have occurred due to the internecine skirmishes? This paper is a modest attempt to address some of the questions raised above.

*Rahaman Hasibul* says that Arunachal Pradesh which was a peaceful state for a long time has awakened to the ethnic identity axle. His objective of the study is to know the most leading factors for tribal unrest in Arunachal. Among the major ones he mentions mistaken identity, number of many tribes, prominent differences in census records, disharmony among the tribal social structure, development work and inter-ethnic disharmony, influx of non-locals and ethnic disharmony, reducing trend in the per centage of tribal population and Refugees and outsiders in Arunachal and ethnic disharmony.

*Vincent Darlong* argues that the tribal communities of Northeast India had different challenges of under development and development-isolation. They generally remain starved of the social and physical infrastructures needed for the people to play a role in India's growing modern economy.

This made them becoming fertile ground for elements opposed to Government control and seeking return of tribal lands and tribal autonomy. These groups, especially be it the Naxalites in the mainland tribal areas or the various socio-ethnic based insurgent groups in Northeast India, have resulted in serious security problems for Government and donor officials in tribal areas and, as a consequence, have made it difficult to provide the development services needed. Since 1988, exclusive tribal development models were designed for interventions in the conflict-prone areas of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Northeast India in the states of Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya.

Over the last century the frontier state of Tripura has witnessed some socio-political upheavals that encompassed both feudal Tripura and democratic Tripura. As a logical conclusion to all these, *Sankar Bhattacharya* has given a detailed picture of socio-political movements and the emergence of left front government in Tripura in a historical frame of time. The movements have succeeded in fulfilling the democratic aspirations of both the tribals and the non-tribals of Tripura and both unitedly struggled for any of their just and legitimate demand, because a vast majority of the tribal and the Bengalee people in Tripura believe in democracy and in united democratic movement. In his study he observed an evolutionary picture transcending from one phase to the other and highlighted the attestation of socio-political and constitutional rights of the people belonging to both indigenous society and contemporary society.

*Lincoln Reang* argues that in the North Eastern part of India among different ethnic communities there is a strong sense of fear of loosing identity. This factor has led to a number of ethnic clashes which inturn lead to social unrest are escalating relentlessly day after day like Naga-Kukis, Kuki-Paites, Naga-Meiteis, Bodo-Santhals, Dimasa-Hmar clashes in Assam or the Mizo-Reangs conflict in Mizoram. While delimiting himself in the arena of Bru/Reang, the author takes us through a number of unrest situations beginning with the Reang Rebellion of 1942-43, the displacement factor and finally the case of Reang refugees

who immigrated to Tripura in 1997 as a large scale exodus from Mizoram. Lincoln gives a clarion call to find out the problems relating to different ethnic identities and the root causes of social unrest.

*Sriparna Chakraborty* and *Baisakhi Chanda* in their study on the Threats in the Positive Development of the Riang Refugees of North Tripura dwell at some length on the genesis of social tension in the study area. The major findings of the study are truly disturbing to any well meaning citizen of our country. Various socio-economic problems engulfing the affected people are to be treated with adequate humanitarian grounds on the one hand and with greater pace as well. This will no doubt throw up challenges for both the government and the civil society for a long time to come.

*Sharmishta Ganguly* in her paper on Perspective of Social Exclusion among the Riang Refugees of North Tripura calls an attention to the Riang crisis in the given district which is the study area as well. The scholar brings into light various pathetic situations faced by the people who are displaced and exhorts the authorities that it is not enough at all to include them in education and health care but they too need to take into consideration the present political and cultural transformation taking place in both the places of their origin and in the place they are presently living in. A number of recommendations presented in the paper give a clarion call to provide them with adequate support system so as to make their lives meaningful and happy.

*Vijoy S. Sahay* in his *Valedictory Address* confesses that he has relied on the secondary data to prepare for his address, yet he rightly observes that North East is truly 'unique and unparallel'. He says in this part of the country where Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity, all have their respective strongholds. This land of great religious tolerance is amazing to behold a land, the flora, the fauna, the soil, and climate with every physical, social, and cultural element in it. On the other hand he observes that it is an indication that all is not well in the northeast; therefore, there is need of peace initiatives. While asking a pertinent question, 'Do we want once again foreign hands to take advantage of

such disunity among the Indian population in general and that of the Northeast in particular?' one does not fail to hear the sobbing of his heart. He exhorts every leader to shun every form of corruption and gently reminds us the need of the hour is to think 'homocentric', and formulate 'homocentric values' which will be the beginning of any peace initiative.

*Mita Sarkar (Das) and Palash Chandra Coomar*, in their paper discuss about a Sema village, Longtong in Dibrugarh district of Assam. A group of retired Sema Naga soldiers from British Indian Army in 1923 settled in that village, and their paper studies the changes in their life-styles, customs and socio-economic conditions in the village society. They have imbibed many influences from their Assamese and Nepali neighbours. The study also shows some cultural differentiation from their original counterparts from Nagaland.

It is some time since we are sharing the sufferings and anxieties of our brothers and sisters in India, most particularly in North East India. Some of us are following it up from the last many decades. As civil society we are concerned about the intolerance which has affected thousands of people in North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, Nagaland, Manipur and elsewhere. Peace as an organizing principle is a revolutionary idea that if applied at the National, state, regional, block, village and individual levels, would radically change the world we live in. Peace does begin inside each and every one of us because we all carry the seed of peace within. As with other universal human ideals, like Justice, Freedom, Beauty, or Truth, Peace is one of those 'capital-letter' words that speaks an yearning and a striving within every human beings that cuts across all boundaries of culture, ethnicity, and religion. While we might define and understand 'peace' differently, we all hold it as one of our highest values.

We are sure this volume at the fag end of the decade of the international year for the culture of peace is a timely intervention among many others to understand the intensity of Social Unrest in North East India in the context of Peace Initiatives with special reference to case studies from individual states which have shown ways and means to proactively intervene in the peace building measures. Our

initiative at *SANSKRITI* was to make a point that we need to network with many others including Government and Non-Government agencies, activists, scholars, professors and researchers to make understanding between communities more cohesive that peace prevails to promote development and vice-versa. Today we are much more convinced that the concept of early education for conflict resolution need to be given a very sound footing by building up initiatives in schools and other educational institutions. Later on other institutions of higher learning should carry forward lessons of peace and harmony with justice.

At this juncture we want to place on record our gratefulness to all the collaborators—Indian Council of Social Science Research, Shillong; Anthropological Survey of India, Koltata; SVD our parent Society and our learned scholars who presented papers based on the in depth studies they had undertaken in the immediate past. A number of people lend their helping hand in organizing this National Seminar, among them John Bosco SVD, Manoj Anthony SVD, Julius Ekka SVD, Cyprian Pinto SVD, Shri Nabajit Deka, and others deserve special mention. We gratefully acknowledge the kindness with which Prof. Birinchi K. Medhi of Gauhati University and Dr. R.P. Athparia of Anthropological Survey of India, Shillong who encouraged us all through this work and Rev. Fr. Cyprian Pinto SVD who graciously wrote the Foreword for this volume. If the academic world take notice of our efforts and disseminate some of the ideas to ease out unrest by which peace can be reinstated in our homes, neighborhoods, villages, towns, states and the country, and why not in other parts of the world as well, our efforts will be highly rewarded.

Guwahati  
February 2010

K. Jose SVD & Gautam Kumar Bera  
*SANSKRITI-NEICR*