

**ELECTORAL
POLITICS
IN
NORTH EAST
INDIA**

P. S. DUTTA

The present volume contains twenty papers on different aspects of electoral dynamics in the plains and hills of north-east. It covers a period of about four decades from 1946 to 1983 and focusses attention on the political parties and people of north-east at three levels of our constitutional operation namely, the elections to the House of the People, to the Legislative Assembly and to the Autonomous District Council.

The papers unravel the fascinating experiences of our parliamentary operation in an otherwise indifferent (and also hostile at times) soil of the hills of north-east. They also document the history of transition of the system to a growing frustration towards it in the plains of north-east.

By no means complete, the present volume however is a modest beginning in understanding the sequences of political development in one of the most vibrating corners of our polity—i.e. the north-east.

Dr. P.S. Datta presently teaches Sociology in North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, prior to which he taught in Regional Engineering College, Silchar and St. Edmund's College Shillong. In 1980 he was awarded the Ph.D., degree by Dibrugarh University for his thesis *Social Mobility and Political Behaviour in Upper Assam*. The U. G.C. awarded his a pos-Doctoral Fellowship in 1981 to work on *Muslim Political Behaviour in Assam: 1965-1980*. He has been associated with two ICSSR sponsored research projects to study the Sixth and Seventh General Elections in Assam. He maintains a keen interest in matters pertaining to north-east and has contributed papers, to a number of collections of papers, journals and regional and national seminars. He also writes for the regional press on north-east in Bengali and Assamese as well. His Ph. D. thesis is shortly to be published.

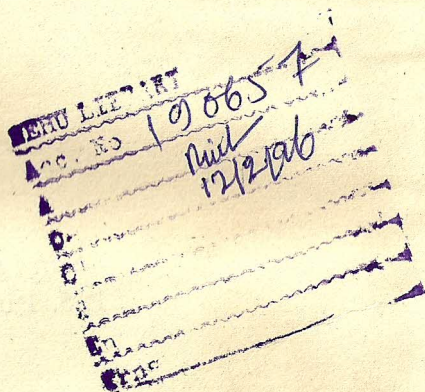
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P R E F A C E

Every political system has a social base. In north-east India we observe and experience a dimension of social base which is unique. Here we experience tribal egalitarian social tradition along with deep rooted feudal social experience both of which are now exposed to the forces of modernisation. The economy which is based on agriculture is poor and the per capita income is one of the lowest in the country. The settled cultivation has attracted very little investment and the land-relation is feudal in character. The shifting cultivation is a life style in many parts of the hills. Industrialisation is not worth the name excepting a few high technology units with little employment potentiality. The religious, linguistic, cultural pluralistics add new dimension to politics of north-east India.

Political participation is one essential component of any political system. Election is an important process ensuring linkage between different essential political component, such as political authority, legitimacy, political parties, political participation and alienation. Because of plural social base people politically react differently in different areas of the region in the hills and plains. The political parties, national and regional take unique stand in this region.

The seminar on Electoral Politics in North-East India held by North-East India Council for Social Science Research on 14-15 December 1983 was an important exercise to appreciate the problems of participation of the people of the region in our social and political system which makes democracy functional and viable. A large number of scholars and practicing politicians participated in the seminar and brought into focus data based experience for realistic appraisal of the issues. The papers

contributed to the seminar have been edited by Dr. P.S. Datta, a political sociologist with rich experience of electoral study. We are grateful to Dr. T.K. Majumdar, Director (Research), Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, Dr. Partha S. Ghose of ICSSR, Mr. V. Ramakrishnan, the then Chief Electoral Officer, Meghalaya and now Deputy Election Commissioner, Rev. Brother M.G. Shannon, Principal, St. Edmund's College, Shillong and the scholars and participants who contributed much to the success of the study.

I take this opportunity to thank Mr. Ramesh Kumar of Omsons Publications, Guwahati & New Delhi, for undertaking early publication of the volume. I have no doubt this book is a significant contribution to the north-east India study.

B. DATTA RAY

Secretary

North-East India Council for
Social Science Research

Shillong,
15 June, 1985

EDITOR'S NOTE

Of late the North East has emerged as one of the most fascinating fields of study and this increasing focus on North-East has been constantly widening newer horizons with regard to 'regional studies' in our country. However, notwithstanding the new urge to understand and explain the North East, a general confusion among the public till now continues. The North East is very often taken as a single unit of analysis which is not only misleading but also at times counter productive.

(The North East as we see it today consists of five states *viz.*, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Tripura and two union territories *viz.*, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram). The social bases of these constituent units are not the same. Two parallel bases have two parallel socio-political trends. The less differentiated tribal bases generated a set of expectations which is difficult to be understood in a framework relevant only to a highly differentiated social bases of the plains. Thus the 'non-tribal' bases of North East and the 'tribal' bases of North East produce two distinctly different trends which are naturally manifested in politics. The fusion of the centrepetal and centrifugal forces and the consequent tension generated through it together make North East a unique case of political aspiration and management in India since 1947.

The present volume presents twenty papers by twenty insiders. The aim of the seminar to which originally the papers were presented was to generate a sense of enthusiasm among the academic activists and attract their attention to the necessity of understanding the political dimension of the socio-economic complexities of North East through the electoral periscope. Except some scattered involvement by some researchers, election

studies in North East continue to be more or less neglected. The lack of professional approach is also very much evident. Nevertheless, the success of the seminar will be evident from the present volume itself since it is the first of its kind which between the covers include information and analysis about the electoral process in different constituent units of North East.

However, in the present volume no paper on Arunachal Pradesh, which entered the electoral arena in 1977, could be included. On Assam there are six papers, on Manipur one, on Meghalaya ten and on Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura one paper each. The appendix contains a paper by the then Chief Electoral Officer, Meghalaya and the present Deputy Election Commissioner, India.

One of the drawbacks of this type of publication is that sometimes the unifying thread becomes missing between the papers. While the present volume is also not free from this, we are confident, the readers will not miss the general commitment of the authors to the North East, which incidentally provides the most impressive unity of thought in an otherwise canvass.

We understand this volume will go a long way as a pioneering effort in studies in electoral process in North East. It was indeed my proud privilege to be associated with this effort. I express my sincerest gratitude to the Governing Body of the NEICSSR and more particularly to its Secretary, Dr. B. Dutta Ray, for giving me an opportunity for the same, which I am sure, I do not deserve on merit.

P.S. DATTA

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