

North Eastern Social Research Centre Guwahati



Annual Report *April 2019 to March 2020*

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Introduction

With immense joy we present to you the 2019-20 Annual Report of North Eastern Social Research Centre (NESRC), Guwahati. During the year, NESRC organised a national seminar and joined its partners in organising local level seminars at Agartala, Dimapur and Imphal. It had to cancel a few planned meetings because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The national seminar of November, 2019 focused on the role of religion in conflicts and peace. It brought together scholars, students, peace activists and civil society leaders on a common platform to engage with issues around peace and religion. The one-day seminars at Dimapur and Agartala focused on local issues. The sessions on peace processes for teachers and students held at Imphal were training programmes with some sharing of information. The meeting of leaders of ethnic communities in conflict scheduled in BTAD and a local seminar scheduled at Agartala were cancelled because of the pandemic. Some staff members also presented papers at seminars organised by other institutions.

NESRC published eleven books during the year, nine of them on the theme of gender implications of tribal customary laws in Northeast India, and two in the conflict and peace series. One more book written by a staff member was published by others. Some staff members also wrote professional articles as well as newspaper articles during the year.

NESRC continued to improve its library and documentation centre in order to make it more accessible to its users. The library has more than 10,000 volumes, around 50 percent of them on the Northeast. Steps are also being taken to digitalise the documentation centre that has newspaper cuttings and other documents such as papers presented at seminars. These facilities are available free of cost to scholars and others who want to consult and they were used fairly well by many researchers during the year.

The pages that follow collate details of the work done by NESRC from April 2019 to March, 2020. This was a year of change. On 23rd August, 2019 Dr Melvil Pereira handed the charge of Director of NESRC over to Dr Hector D'Souza. He held that position till 31st March, 2020 and on 1st April, 2020 handed the charge over to Dr Walter Fernandes, its Founder-Director.

TRIBUTE



2019-20 was also a year of loss.

Prof. Alphonsus B. D'Souza (1941-2019), Associate Founder-Director and later Senior Fellow of NESRC left for his heavenly reward on 6th September, 2019.

NESRC owes him an immense debt of gratitude for the manner in which he mentored some of its staff members, assisted it in organising the library and for his companionship as a scholar and as a friend. While condoling his death all of us thank God for the gift that he was.

STUDIES

Research is the mainstay of NESRC. Some studies were completed during the year and others are ongoing. The main study completed is on the Gender Implications of the Tribal Customary Law in the Northeast. Others included conflicts and peace and land issues.

A. Studies Completed

1. Melvil Pereira and Meenal Tula: *The Impact of the Customary Tribal Law and Its Modernisation on Women in North Eastern India: A Comparative Study of Fourteen Tribes in Seven States.*

The effort of this study begun in 2012 was to understand the role that the tribal customary laws play in gender relations and the impact of unguided modernisation on tribal women. The process included local seminars with the leaders of the tribes studied in order to reflect together on possible reforms of their customary law in favour of gender equity. The publications were their final outcome.

2. Walter Fernandes and Kusumika Ghosh. *The Role of Religion in Conflicts and Peace in North East India.*

As growing religious fundamentalism in India results in communal conflicts, lynching and other forms of discord, an effort was made to study whether the North East too follows this path in a new form. The study started in September, 2018 was completed in August, 2019. It was published in book form in November, 2019.

3. Walter Fernandes, Savio Abreu, Niraj Naik and Simon Fernandes (Done jointly with XCHR, Alto Porvorim, Goa). *Development-Induced Displacement in Goa 1965-2010.*

It is one of the series of study undertaken by NESRC from its inception on development-induced displacement (DID), in order to create a database on the extent and type of land acquired for national development since the first five-year plan, the number and type of people deprived of sustenance, the number rehabilitated and their present state. This database will hopefully become a tool for advocacy for policy changes in favour of the marginalised.

In 2003-04 NESRC studied DID 1947-2000 in West Bengal (published in 2012) followed by DID in Assam 1947-2000 (published in 2011). During 2008-10 it was the turn of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura 1947-2000. The Meghalaya study was updated to 2010 and published in 2016. The remaining two are being updated. In 2011-12 DID in Sikkim 1945-2007 and Nagaland 1947-2007 was studied. Sikkim was updated to 2010 and published in 2016 and Nagaland in 2017. Andhra Pradesh-Telangana whose study had stopped at 1995 because of lack of funds was updated to 2010 and published in 2019. The Goa study has been updated to 2010 and is getting ready for publication.

B. Ongoing Studies

Four more DID studies are being conducted or updated, along with the study on conflicts and peace. These ongoing studies will be completed during 2020-21.

1. Walter Fernandes, Gita Bharali and Thomas Malsom: *Development-Induced Displacement in Tripura 1947-2010*. It was done till 2000 and is being updated to 2010.

2. Walter Fernandes, C. Zonunmawia, Vanlalpari and Lalhruaimawii (Done jointly with St Xavier's college, Lengpui, Aizawl). *Development-Induced Displacement in Mizoram 1947-2010*. It was done till 2000 and is being updated to 2010.

3. Walter Fernandes, Ratika Yumnam and Augustin Millik. *Development-Induced Displacement in Manipur 1947-2000*.

4. Walter Fernandes, Marge Nyori, Augustin Millik (Done jointly with Don Bosco College, Itanagar). *Development-Induced Displacement in Arunachal Pradesh 1947-2010*.

5. Walter Fernandes and Namrata Kalita. *Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in the Tribal Customary Laws in North East India*.

Most tribes in the region have within their tradition customary mechanisms of conflict resolution and peacemaking both for conflicts within the tribe and with outsiders. The aim of the study is to understand these mechanisms and look at possibilities of updating them to suit the present situation and turn them into modes of conflict transformation. This study was done in collaboration with Bongaigaon Gana Seva Society, (BGSS), Peace Channel, Dimapur, DSSS, Imphal and Jana Unnayan Samiti Tripura (JUST), Agartala.

SEMINARS, WORKSHOPS AND COLLOQUIUMS

1. National Seminar on the Role of Religion in Conflicts and Peace. *November 15-16, 2019*. The seminar was a follow-up of the study done during 2018-19 on the role of religion in conflict and peace processes in the North East. It began with two keynote addresses by Prof. Shiv Vishwanathan who focused on the national perspective and by Dr. Jumyir Basar who spoke on the North East. Sixteen papers were presented on various aspects of religion, conflict and peace at the seminar that had more than 80 participants. Two books emerging out of the previous year's studies and seminars were released by the two keynote speakers.

2. State level seminars were held at Agartala, Dimapur and Imphal, in collaboration with local partners. On 18th April, 2019 Peace Channel and North East Institute of Social Science Research, Dimapur, organised in collaboration with NESRC a seminar on conflicts and the role of the media in Nagaland. On 25th May, JUST organised a seminar in Agartala, in collaboration with NESRC on the impact of conflicts on children in Tripura. On 4th March, 2020, DSSS, Imphal, organised in collaboration with NESRC a training programmes on peace processes for teachers and on 5th March for students.

PUBLICATIONS: BOOKS

For effective advocacy in support of the marginalised, the findings of the studies and deliberations of the seminars or workshops are made available in the form of professional and popular publications. NESRC published eleven books during 2019-2020. The books on the

Gender Implications of the Customary Law are offshoots of the study that examined the status of women against the backdrop of the introduction of modern inputs such as modern education, monetisation of the economy, embracing mainstream religions, availability or absence of health facilities and other irreversible changes taking place in North East India. Four of the 14 books in this series were published during 2018-19 and nine during 2019-20. The fourteenth book will be published during 2020-21 since the lockdown began before it could be sent to the press. The books in the conflict and peace series are based on a study conducted and a seminar held during 2018-2019.

01. Melvil Pereira, Jyotikona Chetia, Lincoln Reang, Romita Reang. 2019. *Plural Voices, varied Perceptions: The Reangs of Tripura*. pp. xvi+ 236. Rs 250, USD 15, Euro 10 PB; Rs 500, USD 25, Euro 20 HB. ISBN: 978-81-938785-8-3.

02. Melvil Pereira, Jyotikona Chetia, Jekap Halam, Jaya Rupini. 2019. *Changing Context, Changing Customs: The Halams of Tripura*. pp. xvi+ 236. Rs 250, USD 15, Euro 10 PB; Rs 500, USD 25, Euro 20 HB. ISBN: 978-81-943578-3-4.

03. Melvil Pereira, Meenal Tula, Lalnghakthuami, H. Lalrinthanga . 2019. *In Transition: The Mizos of Mizoram*. pp. xvi+328 Rs 250, USD 15, Euro 10 PB; Rs 500, USD 25, Euro 20 HB. ISBN: 978-81-938785-1-4.

04. Melvil Pereira, Meenal Tula, K. Robin, Ellen Hlychho. 2019. *Continuity and Change: The Maras of Mizoram*. pp. xvi+304. Rs 250, USD 15, Euro 10 PB; Rs 500, USD 25, Euro 20 HB. ISBN: 978-81-938785-7-6.

05. Melvil Pereira, Anuprova Ghose, Stephen Puokho, S. Monica Kaothala (2019). *Preserving Heritage, Exploring Change: The Poumais of Manipur*. pp. xvi+315, Rs 250, USD 15, Euro 10 PB; Rs 500, USD 25, Euro 20 HB. ISBN: 978-81-938785-2-1.

6. Melvil Pereira, Anuprova Ghose, S. Thangboi Zou, Ronica Vungmuankim. (2019). *Ingrained Tradition, Changing Practices: The Zous of Manipur*. pp. 255, USD 15, Euro 10 PB; Rs 500, USD 25, Euro 20 HB. ISBN: 978-81-943578-0-3.

7. Melvil Pereira, V. Ltu, A. Husca, T.Yepthomi. 2019. *Documenting Voices, Understanding Realities: The Sumis of Nagaland*. pp. xii+300 Rs 250, USD 15, Euro 10 PB; Rs 500, USD 25, Euro 20 HB. ISBN: 978-81-938785-5-2.

8. Melvil Pereira, V. Ltu, S. Konyak, K. Bangmei. 2019. *Documenting Past Practices, Seeking New Directions: The Konyaks of Nagaland*. pp. xii+310 Rs 250, USD 15, Euro 10 PB; Rs 500, USD 25, Euro 20 HB. ISBN: 978-81-938785-6-9.

9. Melvil Pereira, Jyotikona Chetia, Edmond Lamare, Pynhunmiki Susngi. (In press). *New Approaches, New Aspirations: The Jaintias of Meghalaya*. pp. xvi+ 236. Rs 250, USD 15, Euro 10 PB; Rs 500, USD 25, Euro 20 HB. ISBN: 978-81-943578-4-1.

10. Walter Fernandes (ed). 2019. *Power and Powerlessness: Mainstream Media and the Northeast*. Pp. 4+106. Rs 150, USD 15, Euro 12. ISBN: 978-81-943578-2-7.

11. Walter Fernandes, Kusumika Ghosh, Jasmine Muchahary, Garrol Lotha, Nongchim Casimir Tijaansha. 2019. *Landscape of Conflicts and Peace in the Northeast: The Role of Religion*. Pp. vi+186. Rs 200, USD 15, Euro 12; ISBN: 978-81-943578-1-0.

12. Walter Fernandes. *Reading the Past to Write the Future: Kohima Jesuit Region 1970-2020*. Pp. viii+162. Published by Kohima Jesuit Region, Guwahati. NPG.

PROFESSIONAL ARTICLES

Apart from our own publications, NESRC staff members share their findings also through professional journals, edited books and newspapers. They published the following:

Walter Fernandes (2019)

1. "Tribal Customary Law: To be Reformed, Codified or Abrogated?" in Nilakantha Panigrahi (ed). *Tribal Economy, Culture and Society in India*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Private Ltd., pp, 21-37.

2. "Northeast India: Secular Issues Communalised," *Indian Journal of Secularism*, 23 (n. 2), July-September, pp. 25-38.

3. "Land and Indian Tribals Towards 2018," in K. Jose, Bhaskar Gaur and Ankit K. Gaur (eds). *Re-Imagining Social Science Researches: Contexts, Perspectives and Priorities*. Guwahati: DVS Publishers, pp. 125-139.

4. "Communalising Muslims in Northeast India," *Salaam: Quarterly to Promote Understanding*, 40 (3 & 4), July-October, pp. 218-226.

Melvil Pereira (2019)

1. "Re-Imagining Social Science Research: Context, Perspectives and Priorities," in K. Jose, Bhaskar Gaur and Ankit K. Gaur (eds). *Re-Imagining Social Science Researches: Contexts, Perspectives and Priorities*. Guwahati: DVS Publishers, pp. 17-46.

2. 'A Spirituality of Justice: Reading the Signs of the Times and Responding with Faith,' in Stanislaus Chinliankhup & Samuel Kapani (eds). *The Spiritual Dimension of Pastoral Ministry*. Shillong: Oriens Publications, pp. 129-139

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Walter Fernandes

1. “In Fighting for NRC Excluded, Rights and Aspirations of Assamese People Cannot be Excluded.” *The Wire*, September 2, 2019.
2. “Zameen Hai Fasad ki Jad,” *Dainik Jagaran*, December 15, 2019.
3. “That Bangladeshis are Fleeing Persecution is A Lie,” Interview with *The Forward Press*, December 19, 2019.
4. “The Citizenship Bill and the Northeast,” *JIVAN*, February 2020.

PRESENTED PAPERS

Apart from organising seminars, the staff members of NESRC also present papers at seminars and function as resource persons. Dr Walter Fernandes presented the following papers:

1. “Jesuit Contribution to the Social Sciences,” at the National Seminar organised on the 150th Anniversary of St Xavier’s College, Mumbai on *Jesuit Initiatives in Higher Education in South Asia*, November 20-21, 2019.
2. “Children of Tea Garden Workers,” at the *National Conclave on Synergising Knowledge*. Tezpur University, 28th January 2020.
3. “Land Laws, Development Pattern and Land Alienation in Northeast India. Valedictory Address at the *National Seminar on Land Laws, Locals and Livelihoods: Tenure, Dynamics and Development Paradigm in Northeast India*, January 31, 2020.

RESOURCE PERSON

Dr Meenal Tula was a resource person at the *UGC Refresher Course on Gender Studies for College and University Teachers* at Gauhati University for the topic Gender Dimensions of Customary Laws of Northeast India on November 30, 2019.

Dr Walter Fernandes was a resource person at:

1. *The National Conference of the Franciscan Family*, on “NRC, CAA and the Northeast,” February 29, 2020.
2. National Seminar on Gender Issues in North East India: Challenges and Way Forward, Puthimari College, March 13-14, 2020.

PARTICIPATED IN SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES

Dr Walter Fernandes participated in

1. The Meeting of Jesuit-run Research Institutes, Chennai: Satya Nilayam Research Institute, August 29-30, 2019
2. “Peace Initiatives in South Asia: Preparing a Peace Project,” Organised by JCSA at New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, September 3-4, 2019.

CONCLUSION

NESRC was able to make some contribution to the people of Northeast India thanks firstly to the commitment of its staff members: Dr Hector D’Souza, Director, Dr Walter Fernandes, Senior Fellow, Dr Meenal Tula, Senior Research Associate, Ms Vizhokole Ltu, Mr Augustin Millik and Ms Namrata Kalita, Research Associates, Ms Ashpriya Rohman, Accounts & Administration, Ms Rita Xess, Library, Mr Nirab Bora, Publications.

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We have worked in partnership with many individuals and organisations. Among our partners are LCHR, Guwahati, Laya, Vishakhapatnam, Peace Channel, Dimapur, JUST Agartala, DSSS, Imphal, BGSS, Bongaigaon, Jirsong Asong, Diphu, Tata Institute of Social Sciences Guwahati Campus, OKD Institute of Social Change & Development, NED Social Forum, Guwahati, St Xavier’s College, Lengpui, Don Bosco College, Itanagar and many others.

We place on record our immense gratitude to all of them.

Guwahati
31st July, 2020

Dr Walter Fernandes
Director