

## **NESRC AT FIVE: A REPORT**

**North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati, April 2004-March 2005**

NESRC started functioning on March 1, 2000 with Dr Walter Fernandes as Director and Sanjay Barbora as research associate. Sanjay Barbora continues to be associated with NESRC without being on its regular staff since he is doing his doctoral thesis. Dr Alphonsus D'Souza, Director, St Paul Institute of Education, Phesama and Professor of Sociology, St Joseph's College, Jakhama, Nagaland continues to be its Associate Director. Apart from the Director and Associate Director on March 31, 2005 we had the following staff:

*Research Associates:* Gita Bharali, Melville Pereira, Kazimuddin Ahmed, Vizalenu Khatso..

*Secretary:* Geetima Bhuyan. *Librarian:* Neetu Das.

*The mandate of North Eastern Social Research Centre is to be a centre that combines serious intellectual pursuits with involvement with persons and groups active in the field of social change in the region. In the context of ethnic and political conflict, NESRC would like to provide a platform for different groups in the Northeast to meet and search for solutions. In this search the effort of NESRC is to assist and encourage voluntary agencies and others in their intellectual and activist pursuits. Our main activities are around research, library and networking have been planned within this perspective.*

### **1. Library and Documentation**

The library is meant to be a place where scholars, social activists, students and others can meet and consult each other on issues of relevance to the region. With the addition of several hundred titles, today the library has over 3,000 volumes, more than half of them on the Northeast. The documentation centre consists of newspaper cuttings and documents and papers from conferences and journals. We receive ten dailies from Kolkata, Delhi, Guwahati and Shillong and 38 periodicals, many of them not easily available in the Northeast. We hope to get newspapers States of the Northeast and also make the library more accessible.

### **2. Research**

An important contribution NESRC would like to make to the Northeast is serious data based research on issues of relevance to the region. Since most studies done in the region are on conflicts as such, we decided to focus on issues that can help one to understand their causes and identify possible solutions and limit ourselves to it dynamics. Being a small Centre we have decided to focus on a few tribes with priority to livelihood and gender issues. During the year we completed only one study but continued four others and began two more.

### **Studies Completed and in Progress**

Walter Fernandes and Melville Pereira. 2004. *Changing Land Relations in the Northeast: A Comparative Study of Six Tribes and a Non-Tribal Group*. Completed in May 2004.

This study is based on our earlier findings that there has been much change in the use and ownership pattern of land. Most ethnic conflicts in the region have been around land. Within our perspective of identifying the causes of conflicts and finding possible solutions to them, we looked at the implications of immigration, land alienation and encroachment.

Alphonsus D'Souza, Suresh Shelke and Kazimuddin Ahmed. *Tribal Learning Systems*. To be completed in June 2005. Being done together with St Paul Institute of Education, Phesama.

Experience shows that most tribal children find it difficult to learn mathematics and science. Schools and colleges change their teaching methods to help them to learn better. This study explores the possibility that the tribes may be having methods of abstraction and learning that are different from those of the non-tribals. An understanding of this issue can help educational institutions to adapt their teaching methods to their needs.

Walter Fernandes, Melville Pereira and Vizalenu Khatso. *Gender Implications of the Tribal Customary Law Interface with the Modern System*. To be completed in August 2005.

Studies show that modernisation without protective measures results in class formation and deterioration of women's status in the egalitarian tribal societies. An area of such change is their customary law that is patriarchal by its very nature. There are indications that under the influence of the modern administrative systems, the tribal leadership is giving greater patriarchal interpretation to it than in the past. Its implications have to be studied.

Walter Fernandes, Shanti Chetri and Sherry Joseph. *Development-Induced Displacement in West Bengal, 1947-2000*. To be completed in September 2005.

Walter Fernandes and Gita Bharali. *Development-Induced Displacement in Assam 1947-2000*. To be completed in October 2005.

Gurudas Das and Gita Bharali. *Development-Induced Displacement in Meghalaya*.

These studies are integral to the effort to create an all India database on "Development-Induced Displacement 1947-2000" since the country lacks data on the number and type of persons displaced or otherwise deprived of livelihood in the age of planned development and the extent of their resettlement. Studies completed till now in two southern States, one of the West and three of the East point to 50 to 60 millions affected by development projects all over India. We had to interrupt these studies in the Northeast because of shortage of funds. Depending on funds we hope to complete them in four States during 2005 and in four more in 2006. We are assisting others in Gujarat and Maharashtra to do them in their States.

### **3. Publications**

A way of going beyond academic research is to publish our studies in the form of books, booklets and professional and newspaper articles. During 2004-2005 we brought out a book and reprinted an earlier publication on Angami forest management systems. Ravi Sagar who won the public interest litigation of the Garo refugees who were threatened with eviction,

summarised the laws around forests, evictions and the proposed forest bill in the form of a booklet. We also hired a stall at the Shillong book fair organised by the National Book Trust, March 22-28, 2005. The following are our publications of the financial year 2004-2005:

### **Books**

Walter Fernandes and Melville Pereira. 2005. *Land Relations and Ethnic Conflict: The Case of North Eastern India*.

Ravi Sagar. 2005. *Forest Rights of the Scheduled Tribes and Forest Dwellers: The Gauhati High Court Judgement and the Central Forest Bill* 25 pages. Rs 15, USD 1.50. Euro 1.50.

Alphonsus D'Souza: 2005. *Traditional Systems of Forest Conservation in North East India: The Angami Tribe of Nagaland*, 68 pages, Rs 40 (USD 4.00) (Reprint).

### **Professional Articles**

Walter Fernandes. 2004. "Challenges to Tribal Culture in the Context of Globalisation," in Agapit Tirkey (ed). *Promoting Tribal Rights and Culture*. Bangalore: NBCLC, pp. 28-39.

Walter Fernandes. 2004. "Priestly Ministry for Building up a Just Society," in Thomas Manjaly, Peter Haokip and James Thoppil (eds). *Towards Building up the Local Church: Priestly Ministry for 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Shillong: Oriens Publications, pp. 170-178.

Walter Fernandes. 2004. "Limits of Law and Order Approach to the North-East," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39 (no. 42, Oct. 16-22), pp. 4609-4611.

Walter Fernandes. 2005. "The Impact of Displacement on Tribal Women," in Deepak Kumar Behara and Georg Pfeiffer (eds). *Contemporary Society Tribal Studies: Volume Six, Tribal Situation in India*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, pp. 49-69.

Walter Fernandes. 2005. "Reservations and Social Change: The Case of the Northeast," in Stephanie Tawa Lama-Rewal (ed). *Electoral Reservations, Political Representation and Social Change in India A Comparative Perspective*. Delhi: Manohar Book Centre and Centre de Sciences Humaines, pp. 83-104.

### **Newspaper Articles**

#### **Kazimuddin Ahmed**

"Uranium Mining in Domiasiat," *The Telegraph*, January 15, 2005.

"Whither Indigenous Rights?" *The Telegraph*, March 14, 2005.

"Bishwa Xamajik Mancha, Tritya Biswor Oiko Mancha" *Ahom Vani*, Feb. 11, 2005.

**Gita Bharali**. "Dam Threat to Livelihood," *The Telegraph*, November 29, 2004.

### ***Walter Fernandes***

“A Travesty of Justice,” *Down to Earth*, April 30, 2004.

“Loopholes Galore in Tribal Policy,” *The Telegraph*, June 4, 2004.

“Dams and Displacement Woes,” *The Telegraph*, July 15, 2004.

“As Condescending as Ever,” *Down to Earth*, July 15, 2004.

“Kids Have Work, Adults Don’t,” *The Telegraph*, August 26, 2004.

“Population and Communal Politics,” *The Assam Tribune*, September 21, 2004.

“No Information on Forest Policy,” *The Telegraph*, November 8, 2004.

“Manmohan Singh in the Northeast,” *The Hindu*, December 11, 2004.

### **4. Bringing People Together**

The mandate of NESRC is to combine serious professional research with involvement in the field. One way of achieving this objective is to do most studies with civil society members involved in the field, assist them with the analysis of their surroundings and work and to be part of the processes affecting the people of the region. According to this objective we are involved with the people who will be affected by the Pagladia dam and are attempting to network with others in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. This involvement is important because 48 major dams are expected to be built in the region during the next decade and their implications for the people are not clear. The costs to the people have to be understood.

We also tried to get involved in policy making. A national rehabilitation policy was promulgated in February 2004 and most of those who are involved in work among the project affected persons found it extremely disappointing. However, the Government that came to power in May 2004 has decided to revise it. Equally disappointing is the draft national tribal policy. A new forest policy has been drafted for the Northeast and a national policy on the environment has been circulated. It was important to generate inputs on these policies from the point of view of the region. Accordingly we ourselves organised a regional meeting on the forest and environment policies and joined the Department of Political Science, Gauhati University in organising a second one on the remaining two policies.

1. *Seminar on the National Environment Policy and North Eastern Forest Policy*, October 29-30, 2004. It brought together environmentalists and representatives of forest dwellers to reflect on these policies and give feedback to the Government of India.

2. *Seminar on the National Rehabilitation Policy and the Draft Tribal Policy*. February 11-12, 2005. Organised by the Department of Political Science, Gauhati University with support

from NESRC and another organisation, it brought together scholars and social activists from four States of the Northeast. The process of reflection and feedback is continuing.

We also attended seminars and conferences organised by others, gave courses and training programmes, were resource persons at some and presented papers at others.

### **A. Conferences Attended**

#### ***Kazimuddin Ahmed participated in***

The Northeast Convention on the Draft Tribal Policy, Dhemaji: June 2-5, 2004.

Open Discussion on the Domiasiat Uranium Mining Project. Shillong: Khasi Students' Union, July 15, 2004.

#### ***Gita Bharali participated in***

*Pan-Amazon Social Forum*, Manaus, Brazil, January 19-21, 2005.

*Founding Convention of Women Power Connect*, New Delhi: February 25-26, 2005.

#### ***Gita Bharali and Walter Fernandes attended***

*The South Asia People's Initiative (SAPI) Convention*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, April 1-4, 2004.

"Child Labour," Guwahati: CACL and Indo-Global Social Service Society, August 26-27, 2004.

#### ***Walter Fernandes Participated in:***

*Adivasi Sambad* (Tribal Dialogue), Addeteegala, Andhra Pradesh, February 1-4, 2005.

*UN Systems and Civil Society Initiatives*. Mumbai: February 21-23, INECC, JPC, ICOR and VAK.

#### ***Was a resource person at:***

*North Eastern Conference on Stopping Trafficking in Women*, Guwahati: NED Social Forum, May 25-26, 2004.

*Training Programme for Administrators and Practitioners of Rehabilitation*. New Delhi: Council for Social Development, June 28-30, 2004.

"Social Analysis: Pastoral Implications," Deacons' Pastoral Course, Oriens Theological College, Shillong, November 12-13, 2004.

*Training Programme for Field Workers and Animators of DBSS-CNI on Livelihood Issues*, Tezpur: February 14, 2005.

Gave several lectures at Marquette University, Milwaukee, September 25-28 and at Creighton University, Omaha, October 10-12, 2004.

**Walter Fernandes, Melville Pereira and Vizalenu Khatso** participated in the Seminar on Tribal Customary Law and the Gender Issue organised by Omeo Kumar Das Institute for Social Change and Development and the law Research Institute, Guwahati, March 7-8, 2005.

***Melville Pereira participated in***

*Look East to Northeast*, CINESIAS Conference, September 10-11, 2004.

*SAPI Convention on the Tribal Policy, Women's Status and the Youth*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, September 17-19, 2004.

**B. We presented the following papers:**

***Kazimuddin Ahmed***

“Anthropology, Development and Tribals: A Few Thoughts and Observations,” *Seminar on Tribal Development*, Department of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University, November 5-6, 2004.

***Gita Bharali:***

“Development and Extent of Human Displacement in Assam: A Case Study,” *Second Northeast Consultation on Dams*. Shillong: Citizens Concern for Dams and Development, August 22-24.

“Pagladia Dam in Assam: A Case Study,” *Conference on Redressing Inequalities of Displacement by Development: Dams and Mines*. Ranchi: Council for Social Development, November 6-8, 2004.

“Development-Induced Displacement: The Struggles behind it,” *International Conference on Development and Displacement: Afro-Asian Perspective*. Hyderabad: Osmania university, November 27-28, 2004.

“Labour Unrest in Assam: Focus on the Plantation Labourers,” *World Social Forum*, Porto Alegre, Brazil, January 26-31, 2005.

“Land Acquisition and Development-Induced Displacement in Assam: Implications of the Rehabilitation Policy,” *Conference on the Rehabilitation Policy and the Draft Tribal Policy*.

Department of Political Science, Gauhati University with NESRC and Omeo Kumar Das Institute for Social Change and Development, February 11-12, 2005.

“Development, Displacement and Bodo Livelihood,” *Seminar on Tribal Demography in the Northeast with Special Reference to the Boros*. Department of Economics, Dibrugarh University, March 31, 2005.

**Walter Fernandes:**

“The Northeast: Social Change with Justice or with Conflict?” *National Conference on Social Change in the Northeast*. Guwahati: National Institute of Advanced Studies, April 28-30, 2004.

“Globalisation and the Northeast.” *Training Programme for Women Religious*, Guwahati: NED Social Forum, June 5, 2004.

“Priestly Ministry for Building up a Just Society,” *Silver Jubilee Symposium on Priests in the Northeast*. Shillong: Oriens Theological College, June 22-25.

“Impact of Globalisation on the Northeast,” *Workshop on Globalisation*. Shillong: Rilum Foundation for Sustainable Development and Voluntary Health Association of Meghalaya, July 28-29, 2004.

“Land Relations and Conflicts in North Eastern India: A Look at Modernisation, Immigration and Livelihood Loss” *Workshop on Land Markets and Rural Poverty*, Mussoorie: Centre for Rural Studies, Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy of Administration, August 10-11, 2004.

“Implications of the Major Dams in the Northeast,” *Second Northeast Consultation on Dams*. Shillong: Citizens Concern for Dams and Development, August 22-24.

“North Eastern India: Land, Identity and Conflicts,” *Silver Jubilee Lecture, Gobind Ballab Pant Social Science Institute*, Allahabad, August 26,

“Development-Induced Displacement: A Case for Priority in Research,” *Workshop on Typologies of Relevance to the Study of Forced Migration*. Washington D.C.: National Research Council, National Academies, September 22-23, 2004.

“Major Dams, Livelihood and Insurgency in the Northeast,” *Conference on Redressing Inequalities of Displacement by Development: Dams and Mines*. Ranchi: Council for Social Development, November 6-8, 2004.

“Can the Rehabilitation Policy Stop Impoverishment?” *Conference on Redressing Inequalities of Displacement by Development: Dams and Mines*. Ranchi: Council for Social Development, November 6-8, 2004.

“The Role of the Laity in Reconciliation in the Northeast” *Laity Convention*, Guwahati, November 17-18, 2004.

“The Right to Rehabilitation and the New Rehabilitation Policy,” *Conference on Development and Displacement: Afro-Asian Perspective*. Hyderabad: Department of Political Science, Osmania university, November 27-28, 2004.

“Land Relations and Culture among the North Eastern Tribes,” *National Seminar on Society and Culture in Northeast India*. Bagdogra: Department of Sociology, North Bengal University, December 6-8, 2005.

“Rights of Indigenous Peoples in India,” *South Asian Consultation on Indigenous Rights*, Durgapur: CNI-CWM, February 5, 2005.

“Is the Rehabilitation Policy Acceptable as a Livelihood Alternative?” Keynote Address, *Seminar on the Rehabilitation Policy and Draft Tribal Policy*. Department of Political Science, Gauhati University with North Eastern Social Research Centre and Omeo Kumar Das Institute for Social Change and Development, February 11-12, 2005.

“The Impact of Globalisation on the Northeast,” *Seminar on Globalisation and Tribal Identity in the Northeast*. Tezpur: Himalayan Research Studies Institute, March 19-20, 2005

“Social Implications of River Inter-linking,” *Seminar on River Interlinking*, Guwahati: Indian Science Congress, Guwahati Chapter, March 28, 2005.

***Melville Pereira***

“Globalization and Changing Land Relations in the Northeast,” *Seminar on Globalisation and Tribal Identity in the Northeast*. Tezpur: Himalayan Research Studies Institute, March 19-20, 2005.

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