

Report on
Weaving History of Northeast India Conclave Series-3: Including Histories of
Northeast India in National Curriculum

Date: 3 & 4 May 2013

Venue: India International Centre, New Delhi

For more than 63 years in the history of the independent Republic of India, the history/histories of 45 million of its citizens living in 8 states of the Northeast region of the country have been absent from our school, college and university text books. Northeast India is home to over 272 ethnic groups and communities. However, there is no collective writing, publication or inclusion of its varied histories in the syllabus or the text books of the country's schools and universities.

This ignorance or lack of awareness is one of the major causes of the wrong perception about people from the region. This is one of the main reasons that people of the northeast region are discriminated against when they travel for study and work to different parts of India.

Understanding and noticing these major lacunae, a team led by Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network, Control Arms Foundation of India and Northeast India Women Initiative for Peace started work in September 2012 wherein they met with Chairman of Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR). Later, a meeting was convened in Manipur on 13 October 2012 and New Delhi on 21 November 2013 regarding the issue.

On 3 and 4 May 2013 Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network, Control Arms Foundation of India, Northeast India Women Initiative for Peace in collaboration with India International Centre (IIC) with support from Heinrich Böll Stiftung, New Delhi successfully hosted a conference on the theme "Weaving History of Northeast India Conclave Series-3: Including Histories of Northeast India in National Curriculum" at India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi.

The session commenced with an introductory speech by Ms. Binalakshmi Nepram, Founder of Manipur Women Gun Survivor Network and Secretary General of Control Arms Foundation. Her speech stressed on the fact that the history or histories of Northeast India that constitutes 45 million people had been neglected for many years. She said that with the help of that conclave, and the two others which were organized in 2012, strategies needed to be evolved through deliberation with eminent scholars, education institutions and members of the government.

Shri B.G. Verghese, Renowned Writer, Magsaysay Awardee & Visiting Professor, Centre for Policy Research spoke about the details of the important histories of the North East India and suggested to build a "grand narrative" for the region as a whole. He too shared the view of the extraordinary ignorance of the region, but said that Indians did had a tendency of forgetting their pasts and further said that it was not only the Northeast India they were ignorant of, but North India was ignorant of South India and vice-versa. He stressed on the

fact that Northeast India had been surrounded by unfriendly neighbours; it had been subjected to violence and neglect. He went on to question the geographical aspects of the Northeast India and said that it just did not compose of the seven sisters but also Sikkim and northern part of West Bengal. He laid emphasis on the use of geography with history and cartography and that those were essential for building reliable narratives. He also introduced two works he was impressed with, first a book by Kunal Verma titled "Northeast Trilogy" and the Shri S.P Shukla Commission Report titled "Transforming: The Northeast" stating that according to the report, "The ICSSR and ICHR should support, undertake, expedite or strengthen research into and the writing of Northeast history texts for different levels of learning and scholarship."

Shri Vineet Joshi, Chairman of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) spoke on behalf CBSE and gave a practical approach to the discussion. He started with clarifying what CBSE actually did saying that it dealt with the evaluation of the students. He explained that the local environment influences the children's education and that environment changes from region to region and also the learning experience was influenced by how much the teacher and curriculum were able to connect with the local community. And stated that, for that and through CCE (Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation), CBSE was trying to give as much flexibility to the local schools to use local means to teach a basic foundation of education. He urged that State Council of Educational Research & Training (SCERT) of each Northeast India states and National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) to include more contents on Northeast India Region. For why the question papers set for evaluation were the same, he explained that it was to set a common benchmark for the nation.

Shri Sanjoy Hazarika, Saifuddin Kitchelw Chair and Professor Centre for North East Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia spoke about the important looming questions of what was the history that they seek to weave or formalise and who would narrate that. He explained that there were many people who could tell the history like the Royal chronicles but those could not be understood as the history of the people. He further said that if the change in curriculum had to be sustainable, there needed to be proper collaboration and documentation. He was resistant to the idea of Northeast becoming a part of India but wanted India to be a part of the Northeast.

Shri M.A. Sikandar, Director of National Book Trust (NBT) spoke about the initiatives taken by the National Book Trust regarding the issue. He announced that the National Book Trust would be opening two of its centers in the Northeast India, one at Tripura and one at Guwahati in order to give more focus on the Northeast. He acknowledged the fact that there were not many books on the Northeast India and hence he called for authors to write stories and books on the Northeast so that they could publish.

Mrs Priyam Goswami, an eminent historian from Guwahati University spoke in detail about Assam's history and its representation and lack of it in national curriculum. She narrated Assam's history starting from 4th century to the contemporary times. She explained that once the students start to read the history, they would realize that it was not isolated and

that it was an important part of the nation. She stated that the Northeast was home to more than 200 communities and that it was a pity that they were almost invisible even though there had been great efforts by every kind of media, there was a sense of alienation which was a great injustice.

Dr Sukhendu Debbarma, Associate Professor, History Department, Tripura University spoke about the social-economic history of Tripura focusing on the indigenous people. He said that the indigenous people were the minority of the land and being the minority the decisions of the land could not be able to make by them. He gave the example of the legislative assembly where only little seats were reserved for the indigenous people.

Dr Thounaojam Chanu Ibemhal, Poetess and scholar of Manipur Literature and Mythology spoke about the documentation of the history of Manipur and its inclusion in the national curriculum. She informed about the ignorance of many historians of few of the important civilization that settled in Manipur. She went on to talk about the uniqueness of Manipur's political history and said that it is important that the people of Manipur wrote their own history in an indigenous way.

Mr Jarpun Gamlin, founder of Sentinel spoke in detail about Arunachal Pradesh. He revealed that Arunachal Pradesh did not have much documentation of history; they mostly had oral history hidden in the form of traditions, stories and lullabies. He reasoned that many of the local languages of Arunachal Pradesh did not had a script and so documentation was difficult. He argued that it was actually not the fault of CBSE or any other such institutions, but the people of Arunachal Pradesh who had failed to depict their importance.

Mr Peter Lauenstein Denjonpa who is the Principal of Taktse International School, Sikkim gave the perspective of a school in the discussion. He started by questioning why history would be important in a place where everyone wanted to become scientists and lawyers. He brought out its importance by explaining that history brings out practices and values embedded in the culture that would gave an edge to the students.

Dr David R Siemlich advocated for the inclusion of Northeastern history not only in school but in college and university curriculum. He said that it was the moral responsibility of those organisations which conduct examinations, to get that incorporated and within a few years made amendments to the neglect done.

Dr Noopur Singh a representative of Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) made a statement on behalf ICHR Chairman Prof Basudev Chatterji stating that there was a need to collect documentary and oral history materials for the region. She also announced the launch of an ambitious project of surveying and assessing archives all over India. She gave details of the project pertaining to the northeastern states of India. She also stated the earlier meetings and discussions with Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network regarding collection of varied Northeast history and proper documentation. She further told about the collaboration between the Center of Northeastern Studies (Jamia Milia Islamia) and ICHR

that had bring out some new publications. She stated, "ICHR is ready to give full support on all matters concerning the Northeast region."

Professor P. Sinclair, Director, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) spoke about the need for the rectification of the flack going around about Northeast not being included in the curriculum. She disclosed the attempts being made to project every state of India in the national curriculum and said that the national curriculum was just an advisory curriculum, textbooks were a resource and that the teacher was the agent for each learner. She impressed on a dream that the teacher be given so much confidence that they were able to make their own resources.

Shri Nepram Bihari, author of Cheitharol Kumbaba: The Royal Chronical of Manipur spoke of the difficulties he faced while documenting and translating "Cheitharol Kumbaba, the Royal Chronicle of Manipur" into English, an effort that took 17 years. He explained that documentation could not be understood unless the local language was well understood. He said that "Cheitharol Kumbaba" chronicled each and everything that involved the kings of Manipur from 33 A.D. till its last king Maharaja Bodhchandra's rule that ended in 1955. He said that the book was studded with information on how the royal game of polo had its birth in the State; that the art of making Chinese silk and bricks were commonly practiced in earlier times of Manipur.

Ms Atiya Zaidi, Publisher, Ratna Sagar Pvt. Ltd. showed with examples how in various ways the Northeast India could be incorporated in the curriculum. She explained that not only the history was important but other aspects were important too. She stressed on the fact the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) should gave them the freedom to create their own textbooks, taking into consideration the curriculum, and that their textbooks could include activities, lessons and stories involving the Northeast India.

Shri Pratyush Kumar Mandal and Shri M.V.S.V. Prasad, representatives of National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) gave the perspective of NCERT and gave details of how the NCERT has designed the curriculum and syllabus that has sufficiently included Northeast India in it not as history but in other forms. They explained that curriculum development was a work in progress and stating that there was always a scope for change and development. They stated that one of the factors they could focus on for the curriculum development was connecting life outside the school with the syllabus to develop a critical understanding of society and minimizing load of information to promote debate and discussion. They denied the fact that inclusion of Northeast was tokenistic but it could be called insufficient. They also stated that State Council of Educational Research & Training (SCERT) to include more contents on Northeast India Region. And added that they were focussing to do more teacher training programs for primary and upper primary teachers of Northeast India region.

The following resolutions or conclusions had been made:

1. Formation of a Northeast India Resource Group consisting of historians, educationists and scholars to continue work on the issue of ensuring inclusion of Northeast India history in National Curriculum.
2. To put pressure so that Shukla Commission Report of 1997 titled, "Transforming: The Northeast" recommendations that ICSSR (Indian Council of Social Science Research) and ICHR (Indian Council of Historical Research) should support, undertake, expedite or strengthen research into and the writing of Northeast history texts for different levels of learning and scholarship.
4. Commitment was given by Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) Chairman to give full support on all matters concerning the North east region of India.
5. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) have agreed to work with Northeast historians and scholars and resource person group to make Northeast history include in School Curriculum. National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) also agreed to include our group in the process as per the New Syllabus Committee Meeting 2014
6. Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to work with the Northeast Resource Group in including Histories of Northeast India
7. National Publishers like National Book Trust to give their commitment and to call for authors to write stories and books on the Northeast for Nationwide publication

The event concluded successfully. More than 100 people attended the two day event that consisted of renowned historians, scholars from Northeast India, institutions such as CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education), NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) , ICHR (Indian Council of Historical Research) ;publishers such as National Book Trust (NBT), Ratna Sagar Pvt. Ltd., scholars, media, students and professors from various universities such as Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi University (DU), Jamia, IGNOU and concerned citizens.

For more information, please contact:

Office of Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network & Control Arms Foundation of India.
Websites: www.cafi-online.com & www.womensurvivorsnetwork.org