

Resebrev Nr 26

19 – 27 november 2005

KOLKATA–SILIGURI–GUWAHATI –SHILLONG–PHUENTSHOLING

Fantastisk månadslång tjänsteresa för Swedish South Asian Studies Network (SAS-NET) av radarparet Staffan Lindberg och Lars Eklund, med besök på ett 30-tal universitet och utbildningsinstitutioner i nordöstra delen av Sydasien – indiska delstaterna Västbengalen, Assam, Meghalaya, Orissa och Bihar, samt Bhutan, Nepal och Bangladesh. Sammanfattande rapport + en lång rad detaljerade rapporter från enskilda universitetsorter.. Del 1: Kolkata och nordöstra Indien



Staffan vid vårt besök till Gopal Krishna Gandhi, Västbengalens guvernör i Raj Bhawan

Resor med Sydasiennätverket SASNET

Efter att ha arbetat som journalist i 20 år – sedan 1980, avslutningsvis som nattchef på tidningen Arbetet med slutproduktion på natten, därtill ha varit chefredaktör för tidskriften SYDASIEN sedan 1982, rekryterades jag i januari 2001 till Lunds universitet för att bygga upp det webb-baserade och Sida-finansierade forskningsnätverket SASNET (Swedish South Asian Studies Network) av initiativtagarna, professor **Staffan Lindberg** och Dr. **Jan Magnusson**.



Det långsiktiga målet var att stärka den relativt svaga akademiska kompetensen i Sverige inom området Sydasien. SASNET blev snart ett framgångsrikt nätverk, finansierat av Sida i 10 år och därefter med fortsatt Lunds universitets finansiering. Fram till december 2016 var SASNET en unik skapelse – ett nationellt heltäckande forsknings- och informationsnätverk som inte finns någon annanstans i världen.

Den kompetens som jag hade att erbjuda förutom min journalistiska bakgrund var lång erfarenhet av Sydasien med många resor alltsedan 1972 och framåt, ett unikt nätverk av Sydasieninriktade forskare, journalister och biståndsarbetare i Sverige och Skandinavien tack vare min position som redaktör för SYDASIEN, samt djupa kunskaper i sydasiatisk historia, politik, religion och samhällsliv – som inneburit att jag under en lång rad år föreläst om dessa frågor på Sidans utbildningskurser för lärare.

I nära och förtroendefullt samarbete med Staffan Lindberg, SASNETs föreståndare fram tills 2007, och därefter med hans efterträdare **Anna Lindberg**, byggde jag upp SASNETs webbsajt med mer än 2000 sidor unikt material om svensk forskning relaterad till Sydasien inom alla områden, utvecklade nätverket till att omfatta inte bara alla svenska forskare med denna inriktning utan också Sydasienforskare i övriga Skandinavien och Europa, samt inte minst i Indien, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldiverna och Afghanistan.

Vi företog dessutom flera kontaktresor till Sydasien för att koppla samman SASNET-aktiviteterna med universitet och forskningsinstitutioner i regionens åtta länder. Våren 2002 besökte jag och Staffan Maldiverna, Sri Lanka, Indien och Bangladesh; hösten 2003 besökte vi Pakistan och Afghanistan; och hösten 2005 besökte vi ett stort antal universitet och forskningsinstitut i östra och nordöstra Indien; Bangladesh; Bhutan och Nepal. Slutligen planlade jag en extremt ambitiös Indien-turné som genomfördes hösten 2007 tillsammans med Anna Lindberg till 30 viktiga universitet och forskningsinstitutioner i norra, västra och sydvästra delarna av Indien.

Från och med januari 2017 omvandlades dock SASNET till ett lokalt forskningscentrum vid Lunds universitet. Webbsajten skrotades och mina månatliga nyhetsbrev med 3000 abonnenter över hela världen, fick inte längre ha nationellt eller internationellt innehåll utan enbart fokusera på Lunds universitet. Skamligt. Jag gick då i förtida pension.

Detta resebrev bygger på 2005 års resa.

För mer information om SASNET 2000-2016, läs historiken:

http://larseklund.in/SASNEThistory_complete.pdf

Resanteckningar från Kolkata och nordöstra Indien

18 november 2005

Lång jobbig resa

Staffan och Lars avfärd med taxi från Lund klockan 04:45 till Malmö och därifrån tåg till Kastrup. Flyg till Frankfurt 07:15. Trevligt vara på väg, men det blev en lång resa. Frankfurts flygplats jättelik, fick åka tåg till rätt terminal, och genomgå minutiösa säkerhetskontroller. Gulf Air avfärd klockan 11:45, fått usla platser på planet till Muscat, Omans huvudstad.

Nio timmars resa, varav 50 minuters mellanlandning i Bahrain, och sedan fyra timmars väntan i Muscat på avfärd mot Kolkata klockan 03:10 lokal tid. Jag fick migrän men lyckades köpa huvudvärkspiller i en bokhandel på Muscats flygplats och betala med indiska rupees.

På avslutande flygningen provade jag min nyinköpta ögonmask och uppblåsbara kudde. Läste senaste numren av indiska tidskrifterna Frontline och Outlook samt finlandssvenska kulturtidskriften Ny Tid men mest pustade jag ut efter en hektisk tid.

19 november 2005

Ankom Kolkatas flygplats klockan 08:30 efter nästan ett dygns färd. För första gånge kom jag till den nya utrikesterminalen och jag fick använda mig av mitt PIO-kort – *Person of Indian Origin* – som jag fått på grund av att jag är gift med **Bubu**. Det ger mig rätt att resa till Indien utan att söka visum.

Jag hade förberett att vi fick bo hemma med familjen på Tala Park Avenue och min sväger Tutu (**Pabitrajit Munshi**) – bild till höger – mötte oss på flygplatsen. Angenämt skönt väder. For med taxi till Tala Park. Varmt mottagande av **Manto, Polly, Bampa, Paromita** och **Banjul**. Vi var trötta och svettiga, så efter frukost lade Staffan och jag oss att vila. Jag hade inte trott att jag skulle återhämta mig så fort, men efter att jag stigit upp klockan 13 och ätit kitcheree till lunch var jag helt OK.



Bjudna på bröllopsmottagning



På eftermiddagen fixade vi, med Banjuls hjälp, ett indiskt telefonnummer. Jag ringde hem och talade med Bubu, **Marie** och **Daniel**. Upp på taket vid solnedgången och nu kändes det som att jag kommit hem. Och på kvällen var vi bjudna på en bröllopsmottagning, ett kusinbarn till Rana (**Shibashish Nag**) från Mumbai skall gifta sig i Salt Lake.

Bampa, Paromita och **Riju** med dit. Bruden såg ut som en docka. Bjöds på Nescafé och snacks. Presenterades för slakten och inspekterade jasmin-rummet där de nygifta skulle tillbringa bröllopsnatten.

En trappa upp serverades en underbar middag. Fisk rökt i bananblad, kyckling, lamm, glass och mycket mer. For hem i taxi klockan 20:30. Jag var dödstrött och gick direkt till sängs medan Staffan satte sig och tittade på TV till klockan 24.

20 november 2005

Vi bjöd **Swapna Bhattacharya** professor vid Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, på lunch hemma på Tala Park klockan 13, det vill säga jag betalade för maten, 200 rupees, och Polly tillagade (bild ovan). Swapna kom 13:30 och pratade oavbrutet i två timmar.



Behaglig morgon, upp 09:30, ingen jetlag. Efter frukost gick vi till ett Internetcafé med Banjul så Staffan kunde kolla mail. Hemma hade Tutu kommit på besök med dottern **Mambori**. Även **Buku** och Mishtu (**Avijit Bagchi**) med dotter Munjini (**Shivapriya**) kom på besök. På kvällen var vi bjudna att hälsa på **Ajit Roy** i Salt Lake, men det ställdes in då Ajits brors fru blivit svårt sjuk.



Istället bjöd Staffan hela Munshi-familjen på restaurang på kvällen. Ice & Spice på Northern Avenue i Paikpara. Middag för 10 personer, gick på 1100 rupees, billigt. Sedan hem för att dricka öl som Banjul köpt åt oss.

21 november 2005

Calcutta University, Asiatic Society och Raj Bhawan

Möte med rektorn på Calcutta University Professor **Asis Kumar Banerjee** klockan 12, på universitetets College Street campus. Ett möte som Swapna fixat åt oss.



Klockan 14.30 besöka Historiska institutionen på universitetets Alipore campus. Möte med professor **Arun Bandhopadhyay** och hans kolleger involverade i samarbete med Uppsala universitet.



Klockan 16:00, Staffan föreläsa på anrika Asiatic Society. Gick mycket bra. Fika efteråt på generalkreterarens, **Ramakanta Chakrabarty's** rum. All personal kände väl till min svärfar **Annada Munshi**. Mishtu kom och lyssnade.



Klockan 18:00 träffa **Gopal Krishna Gandhi**, guvernör för Västbengalen, tidigare indisk ambassadör i Norge. Bjudna

på te i guvernörspalatset Raj Bhawan. Kul att få komma in i denna magnifika byggnad, känt som Government House under kolonialtiden, för första och förmodligen enda gången. Vi hade blivit introducerade genom **Arild Engelse Ruud** i Oslo.

Klockan 19:30 till Tala Park och åt middag innan det var dags att bege oss till Sealdah Station för färd med Darjeeling Mail, avfärd klockan 22;15.

Biljetter levererade i sista stund

Alla våra bokade tåg- och flygbiljetter för de kommande veckorna hade vi beställt genom den resebyrå som Lunds universitet har avtal med – Via Travel och en resebyrå i Delhi. Men de måste hämtas ut i Kolkata på en resebyrå. På morgonen for jag och Tutu med taxi till deras kontor på Waterloo Street och gick igenom bokningarna.

Tutu återvände dit på eftermiddagen och kunde då hämta tågbiljetterna, men flygbiljetterna var inte klara. De fick vi först klockan 21.45 av en kurir när vi redan satt på tåget. Dessvärre var det flera felaktigheter i biljetterna som vi får lösa på något sätt. Som tur är ska vi inte flyga förrän om ett par veckor, då från Bhutan till Nepal.



22 november 2005

Stort möte på North Bengal University

Ankom New Jaipalguri tidtabellsenligt 08:40. Professor **Chandanashish Laha** från North Bengal University (NBU) mötte oss på järnvägsstationen. Han deltog i den 18:e europeiska Sydasienskonferensen som vi på SASNET arrangerade i Lund 2004. För nu till universitetets gästhem i Siliguri där vi fick vila

11:30 – 13:30. Möte på NBU i aulan för ett 70-tal professorer, forskare och lärare.. Mycket stort intresse för vår presentation. Kemisten **Basudeb Basu** (bild till höger) som bodde i Lund 1994-96 så glad över vårt besök. Han som nu är professor på NBU var ett år *pujari* för vårt Durga puja-firande i Lund.



Fortsatt färd till Assam



Efter mötet bjöds vi på lunch med ett helt gäng lärare på gästhemmet innan det var dags att åter ta oss till stationen för ny tågresa österut till Guwahati i Assam. Tåget hade ordinarie avgångstid 15:20, men det var försenat – kom iväg 16:30. Och ankom Guwahati först klockan 03:30 på natten. Ägnade första timmarna av färdens till att skriva rapporter från våra universitetsbesök.

Vi har fullständig tillit till varandras omdöme och kunskaper så vi delar på skrivandet, vi skriver varannan rapport var men undertecknar

samtliga med bådas namn. Större delen av resan satt vi mest och vilade oss. Jag ringde till min dotter Marie som befann sig inte långt bort från oss, i Sikkim.

23 november 2005

Gauhati University & IIT Guwahati



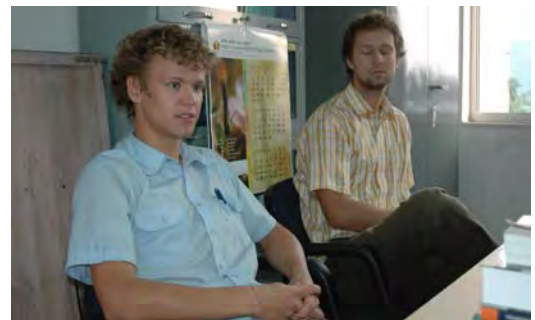
Guwahati. Landmark Hotel, bokad rum genom vår lokala värd, professor **Abu Nasar Saeed Ahmed** från Institute of Social Change and Development (OKD). ISCD). Trots kort sömn var jag ändå pigg på dagen. Frukost i Yellow Table, Hotel Landmarks matsal klockan 09:30. En OKD-bil hämtade oss klockan 11.

Men dessförinnan hann vi kolla mail och kommunicera med **Mikael Herrström** på Via Travel och be honom fixa flygbiljetterna.

Vårt program för dagen började med en presentation av SASNET på Gau-

hati University klockan 12, kompletterat med separat möte med professor **Bezbaruah** och forskarna på Department of Economics. Mycket givande möte.

På eftermiddagen för vi vidare med OKD-bilen över Brahmaputrafloden till IIT Guwahati (Indian Institute of Technology) en bra bit från Guwahati som har flera samarbetsprojekt med svenska universitet, bland annat KTH och Uppsala. Välkomnades av Dr. **Chandan Mohanta** som forskar om problem med arsenik i grundvattnet. Vi fick också träffa flera andra forskare med Sverige-kontakter, och dessutom två svenska utbytesstudenter från Uppsala, **Daniel Nordborg** and **Gustav Enmark**.



24 november 2020



Durgatemplet mäktig upplevelse

Efter frukost för jag och Staffan till Kamakhya Durga-templet i Guwahati som jag först lärde känna genom **Zac O'Yeahs** underbara beskrivning sin bok "*Guru*" av ett besök i detta tempel, ett av få tempel i Indien tillägnat gudinnan Durga.

Känsan av att man klättrar ner i en varm fuktig grotta några meter under marken är som att man befinner sig inne i gudinnans livmoder. Pilgrimer som kommer hit betalar en rupie i inträdesavgift och ställer sig därfter i en jättelång kö. Turister, som vi var då, kan istället betala 501 rupees och få tillträde direkt, vilket vi gjorde.

Institute of Social Change and Development & resa till Shillong

Saeed Ahmed hämtade oss från hotellet klockan 11, för idag var det bestämt att vi skulle besöka hans forskningsinstitut



OKD – Institute of Social Change and Development. Där hade vi ett bra möte med alla forskarna på institutet. Vi bjöds på lunch och fick fina presenter. En fantastisk generös och fin människa och samtidigt eminent forskare.

Sedan var det dags att lämna Guwahati och fara med taxi till Shillong i Meghalaya, en delstat som är bergig och i regel har ett angenämt klimat och därför ibland kallas för Indiens

Skottland. Vacker väg upp till Shillong, men väl där hade vi problem att hitta universitetets – North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) – gästhem.

Körde vilse, så vi fick fråga oss fram och till sist följde en kille med oss i taxin och visade vägen. Vår lokala värd – sociologiprofessorn **C. Nunthara** väntade på oss. Gästhemmet fridfullt beläget i en tallskog och i kuperad terräng. Behagligt lugn kväll, och mysigt varmt och skönt med element på rummen.



25 november 2005

North Eastern Hill University & Tanglura-familjen



Shillong. Frukost hemma hos Nunthara, som är kristen, presbyterian. Han och hans familj kommer från Mizoram – en annan av tre indiska delstater med kristen majoritetsbefolkning, de båda andra är Meghalya och Nagaland.

Staffan hade fått ont i ryggen. klockan 11 hämtades vi med bil och for till NEHU. Vi hade ett bra möte med forskarna på universitetet.

Träffade Dr. **T. B. Subba**, kompis och forskarkollega med socialantropologen och min vän **Beppe Karlsson** på Uppsala universitet.



Bjöds på en stadsrundtur med och såg många vackra hus och sedan lunch – mulligatawny-soppa på klassiska Pinewood Hotel.

Jag hade bestämt att jag skulle besöka familjen Tanglura när vi kom till Shillong. Min gode vän **Daniel Carlsson** i Göteborg lärde känna denna familj, som också ursprungligen kom från Mizoram, när han besökte Shillong 1986.

Familjen hade idel döttrar och Daniel blev förtjust i en av systarna som jobbade som flygvärdinna. Dock blev det ingen fördjupad relation mellan dem, Daniel är en obotlig ungar. Men istället introducerade han sin kusin **Hans Nellbrandt** i Göteborg för familjen, och det ledde till att Hans något år efteråt gifte sig med en annan av systarna, **Rita**, och hon flyttade till Sverige.

Nu sökte vi rätt på familjens hus och framförde hälsningar från Rita, och vi träffade hennes mamma samt en lillasyster, **Josefin**. Några år efter Ritas flytt till Sverige hälsade för övrigt en av systarna på i Göteborg och träffade en svensk arkitekt – vilket ledde till äktenskap, så nu bor två systrar Tang-lura i Sverige



På eftermiddagen återvände vi till Guwahati med taxi, och tillbaka till Landmark Hotel och på kvällen åt vi en utomordentlig middag med vår värd, Saeed Ahmed.



26 november 2005

Resa med tåg från Guwahati till Cooch Behar i norra Västbengalen. North East Express avfärd klockan 09:00 och framme 13:55. Dr. **Samanta** från North Bengal University (NBU) mötte oss på järnvägsstationen tillsammans med en bekant.

Käkade lunch och for sedan genom vackra Dooars till Jaygaon, gränsstaden till Bhutan, som på Bhutan-sidan heter Phuntsholing. Anlände klockan 19, helt mörkt, ingen gränskontroll på kvällen, så plötsligt var vi i Bhutan.

Spännande vara i Bhutan, men vi hade ingen aning om var vår guide fanns eller vilket hotell vi skulle bo på. Ringde **Karma Galey** på Centre for Bhutan Studies (CBS) i Thimphu och fick besked. Rum var bokat på Druk Hotel. Guiden kom dit. Åt middag och drack bhutanesisk öl och whiskey med honom samt Samanta och hans vän.

Imorgon fortsätter resan till Thimphu.



First Report from Kolkata 2005:

by Lars Eklund and Staffan Lindberg

Industrialisation under protest

The political climate seems calm today compared to earlier days. The state of West Bengal is doing fairly well economically under the firmly established Left Front regime, dominated by the Communist Party of India – Marxist, CPI(M), with its current plans to re-Industrialise the state after several decades of capital's flight for fear of communism and strong trade unions. Now the situation is different, strikes are uncommon, foreign Investments are welcome and the IT sector is booming.

Still Frontline magazine, in its 18 November 2005 issue, had an article about protests against plans

by the Multinational Salim Group of Indonesia to Invest in what is called a 'knowledge city' south of Kolkata ([read the article](#)). It was going to begin with a motorcycle manufacturing unit in Howrah, on the western bank of the river Hooghly, but later on the plans for the knowledge city also included a 'health city' for health tourists from abroad, research in the fields of biotechnology, nanotechnology, biophysics and so on.

The protesters come both from the opposition party Trinamul Congres, led by Mamata Baneerji, and from the ultra-leftist CPI-ML who have launched demonstrations and built road-blocks to get their message out: land will be taken from farmers and sold to foreigners. Though compensation would be given to the farmers, this does not impress on the protesters, who claim that West Bengal should continue to rely on its rich agriculture for development, reminding of the utopias against industrialism fought by the Luddites in England as well as the Narodnikles in Russia more than hundred years ago. What is not mentioned though is the close connection between the dictatorial Suharto regime and the Salim Group, which also seem to be a strong motive of the protesters.

Commerce as the driving force in academic development

No such protests seem forthcoming, however, about the West Bengal government's plans to set up a big biotechnology park at Calcutta University in collaboration with the city based firm Chem Gen Pharma to promote investment and research in this field. Similar projects are planned by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Kharagpur and by Kalyani University, both institutions close to Kolkata. The parks will be open for Investments by private firms, have world class laboratories and aim at attracting scholars also from abroad. To us this is but one of many evidences of India's quick ascendancy to world leading positions in science and technology and that too driven and funded by commercial forces. So is this the tune of the future for Indian academia? What can Swedish university based science offer, or maybe learn, under these circumstances? What of the future of the humanities and the social sciences then? Will it become all business and management oriented? Will there be a slow but steady starvation of history and culture oriented research? We have just about started our journey.



SASNET in the Northeast

Report from a contact journey to India, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, November–December 2005

by Lars Eklund and Staffan Lindberg

[India/Kolkata](#)

[India/Siliguri](#)

[India/Guwahati](#)

[India/Shillong](#)

[Bhutan](#)

[Nepal/Kathmandu](#)

[Bangladesh/Dhaka](#)

[Bangladesh/Savar](#)

[Bangladesh/Rajshahi](#)

[Bangladesh/Sylhet](#)

[Bangladesh/Dhaka 2](#)

[Bangladesh/Chittagong](#)

[India/Kolkata 2](#)

[India/Bhubaneshwar](#)

[India/Patna](#)

In the Spring 2002 we made the first SASNET contact journey to four countries of the South Asian region. The purpose was to network with researchers and institutions, and get to know under which conditions and with what expectations they function.

We followed this up in the Fall 2003 through another journey, this time to visit universities in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Now two years later it was time to make a third tour covering the northeastern part of the subcontinent (India, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh). We travelled for a full month and visited a large number of universities and research institutions in the region, and had fruitful meetings with vice-chancellors, researchers, teachers and students everywhere. The aim of the journey was to spread information about SASNET and higher institutions of learning in Sweden, and at the same time promote research cooperation and student exchange. [Read the detailed itinerary for the tour](#) (as a pdf-file).



• [Report from the contact journey to Maldives, Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh in February-March 2002](#)

• [Report from the contact journey to Pakistan and Afghanistan in November-December 2003](#)

After returning to Sweden we have compiled the reports from all meetings. Welcome to read our reports.

Kolkata, Saturday 19–20 November 2005

We arrived in the morning at Dum Dum Airport, now renamed Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport. We had had a 24 hours long and tiresome journey with Gulf Air with stop overs at Frankfurt, Bahrain, and Muscat. And we had witnessed the intensive travelling of South Asians to and from the Arabian Peninsula – we were among the very few Europeans on board our flight to Kolkata.

The mid-November weather was pleasant and calm with a clear and sunny sky and around 25 Degrees Celsius as we drove through more or less crowded streets on our way to the area of Paikpara in North Kolkata, and Lars' in-laws house where we were going to stay on our first stop in India. Few beggars are nowadays to be seen in the streets, except at places in the city centre frequented by tourists, but street dwellers are still common here and there. New residential areas have sprung up east of the city, and the air is cleaner, even though it is still heavily polluted. Kolkata has indeed come a long way from the days when Louis Malle shot his film 'Calcutta Calcutta' in the late sixties.





Kolkata, Monday 21 November 2005

Today we dived straight into the centre of this mega-city of eastern India. From our side in North Kolkata we travelled on the very long Chittaranjan Avenue, the former Central Avenue, which when it was built in the 19th century cut through and brought down already existing buildings and streets of old congested Calcutta. The closer we came to central Kolkata, the more we felt the nerve of the world city that Kolkata still is, even after losing out in this 'battle' to Bombay after Independence, and also the rising force of the left.

To the right, we passed the huge 'red light district' Sonagachchi, famous now for its, compared to Mumbai, 'less oppressive forms' of sex-trade, if that is at all appropriate, with many women members of a trade union, running their own 'family business' and demanding use of condoms.

To the left we passed an innumerable number of plywood shops – does it really result in price competition to have them all in one place or more to air pollution by having all the building contractors go there to pick up the wood? Anyway, the dirty air thickened as we came into the city centre full of monument houses of the colonial city with an aura of British culture. We passed the police headquarters – Lal Bazar, the Writers Building – the old office complex of the British East India Company now turned into administration building for the West Bengal government, and the famous Great Eastern Hotel, for a long time now run by the City Corporation, but which has just been closed and sold to private interests amidst fierce resistance from the servants' union. 'Times they are changing.'

During the day we had meetings at Calcutta University (note that it still carries this name even though the city has changed its official name to Kolkata several years ago), first with the Vice-Chancellor Prof. [Asis Kumar Bannerjee](#) at his office in the College Street campus, and then with faculty members of the Dept. of History at the Alipore Campus.

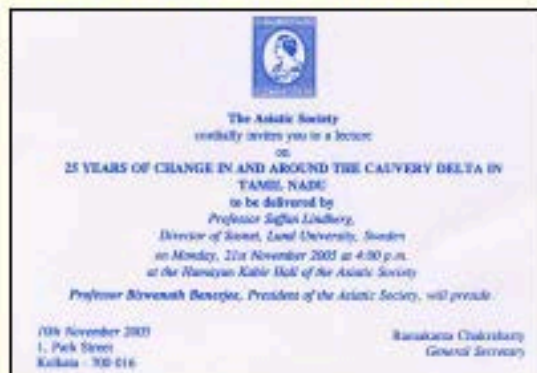
[Read report from the meeting with the Vice-Chancellor, Calcutta University](#)

[Read report from meeting at the Dept. of History, Calcutta University](#)

At 4 P.M. Staffan was scheduled to give a lecture at the prestigious Asiatic Society in Kolkata, see the invitation card to the right.

After the seminar we were invited to visit the Governor of West Bengal, Mr. Gopal Krishna Gandhi, at his office in Raj Bhawan.

[Read report from Asiatic Society, and from the meeting with the Governor of West Bengal](#)



A long and hectic day full of interesting meetings was over. We returned to Paikpara in north Kolkata to have dinner, then bringing our luggage to Sealdah Station and the express train Darjeeling Mail, departing at 22.05.



Meeting with the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, 21 November 2005

University of Calcutta web page: <http://www.caluniv.ac.in/>

Calcutta University (CU) was founded in 1857 and must be considered one of the most prestigious universities in the Indian subcontinent. Today it has about 190 colleges affiliated with about 300 000 students. At the university itself, more than 600 teachers/researchers lead the work and teach around 11 000 graduate students. CU has the following faculties and campuses:

- Humanities in College Street Campus
- Social sciences in Alipore Campus
- Science and Law at Ballygunge
- Science College at Rajabazar
- Economics Department on BT Road



Medicine and Technology are not part of the CU, but have their own independent organisation in Kolkata and in West Bengal at large, with Calcutta Medical College and Indian Institute of Technology at Kharagpur as main bodies respectively.

The main and historical buildings of Calcutta University are located in College Street, which is also the site of the Presidency College, the most famous of all the colleges affiliated. We enter the gate and the busy narrow lanes between old and new buildings pressed into the campus. Students and teachers are on their way all over the place. We get a vague feeling of a wakening giant.

Prof. **Swapna Bhattacharya**, our local host in Kolkata has arranged for the meeting. Today she was leaving her assignment as head of the Dept. of South and Southeast Asian Studies after a period of two years, and would have met the Vice-chancellor anyway.

The Vice-Chancellor Prof. **Asis Kumar Banerjee** (*photo to the right*) spent a long time with us despite delays and a changed schedule in his programme for the morning hours. He is an eminent economist, but gives a strong impression of broad interests in history and culture and of what is going in all the faculties.

We sat in his office room, with portraits of Rabindranath Tagore, Vivekananda and Karl Marx hanging on the walls, and discussed the new initiative to build a biotechnology park in co-operation with private industry ([see our first Kolkata report](#)). Prof. Banerjee was very optimistic about the prospects and also says that it is typical of the new advanced industrialisation in Kolkata of today.

The traditional industries, like the jute industry, had actually started to decline already before partition in 1947, but the crisis worsened with the enforced separation of industry in Kolkata and raw jute producers in East Bengal (that became the eastern wing of Pakistan). A further blow came with the flight of capital in the 1980s, but the state is now turning the tide and industry is growing fast actively promoted by the government. An important factor in this is also, the Vice-Chancellor says, that the Green Revolution was introduced in West Bengal from the 1980s, and has created an increased demand for industrial goods in the rural areas.



If Swedish biotechnologists are interested in collaboration in this venture it would be more than welcome. The Dean of the Science Faculty, **Dhrubajyoti Chattopadhyay**, Prof. of Biochemistry, Calcutta University, would be the contact person for this.

We also discussed the international collaborations at Calcutta university. They have a Memorandum of Understanding, MoU, about general exchange of faculty and students and joint research projects with Brookes University in Oxford, UK. They also have MoU's with universities in South Korea, Singapore and, most importantly for us, with Uppsala University in Sweden. There is scope for much more. Prof. Banerjee expressed his deep appreciation of the co-operation between the departments of History and Cultural Anthropology at Uppsala history and the Dept. of History at Calcutta University, more about this below.

Meeting in the Department of History, Calcutta University, Alipore Campus

From the Vice-Chancellor's office at College Street, right in the middle of north Kolkata, we travelled down south, passing the city centre, Victoria Memorial, the race course, Taj Bengal Hotel and Zoo, reaching the highrise building of Alipore Campus, just in front of the historic National Library.

We were invited to a meeting with some of the researchers at the Dept. of History, who have an established collaboration with Uppsala University.

[More information about this collaboration.](#)



Six faculty members had gathered in the conference room for a lively meeting, led by Prof. [Arun Bandhopadhyay](#),

Dean, Post-Graduate Faculty of Arts (photo to the left). This is strong department with 300 students at MA and PhD level, and with 16 people in the faculty. The co-operation in a programme on "Environmental History as an Emerging Field of Education and Research" with Dr. [Gunnel Cederlöf](#) and others at the departments of History and Cultural Anthropology at Uppsala University was greatly appreciated. Arun and [Sanjukta Das Gupta](#) had recently been to Uppsala for a month and found it a very fruitful visit. They also thanked SASNET for the Planning grant given, which resulted in a Linnaeus-Palme grant for exchange of teachers and students.



In connection with the ongoing year-long Post-centenary Golden Jubilee Celebration (150 years) of the founding of Calcutta University, the Dept. of History will organise a seminar on 'Environment, livelihood and development' on 6-8 March 2006. Scholars from many countries have been invited to participate and present papers in the seminar. Among them are the Swedish researchers [Gunnel Cederlöf](#), [Maria Ågren](#), [Mirja Juntunen](#), [Beppe Karlsson](#), [Hans Blomkvist](#) and [Emil Uddhammar](#), all from Uppsala University. [More information on the seminar](#) (as a pdf-file).

Prof. Bandhopadhyay suggested a more general collaboration with SASNET on organising seminars and conferences, and we promised that if they, along with Swedish partners, apply for planning such events we will look into the possibilities for this.



After this exchange of information we discussed the situation of the history discipline today. 'Nobody wants genuine historical research on particular histories, they all want generalisations, as done by you sociologists,' Prof. [Bhaskar Chakrabarty](#) (photo to the left) said for a start. Staffan replied that even in the individual cases and trajectories there were patterns that could be laid bare, and that he thought that sociology and history should cooperate to build suitable models for that type of analysis. He thought that this was fruitfully done at for example Lund University.

We also discussed the need for inter-disciplinary work. In history, that would need the coming together, of for example medical researchers and historians to write specific medicine or health histories. Historians alone could not possibly understand chains of causation in disease etiologies and medical treatment trajectories.

People we met at the Dept. of History, University of Calcutta:

• Prof. [Arun Bandyopadhyay](#), Nurul Hasan Professor of History & Dean, Post-Graduate

Faculty of Arts

- Prof. [Bhaskar Chakrabarty](#)
- [Sanjukta Das Gupta](#), Lecturer. Research interest: Agrarian history of Colonial India, Tribal economy, and Society in Chotonagpur
- [Raj Sekhar Basu](#), Lecturer
- [Chakrabarti Shantanu](#), Lecturer
- Dr. [Suparna Gooptu](#)

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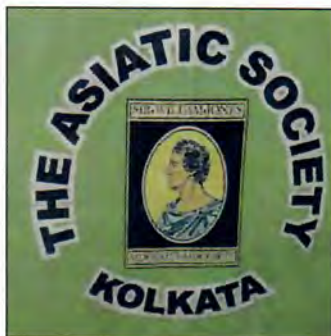
Lecture by Staffan at the Asiatic Society, 21 November 2005

Asiatic Society web page: <http://www.asiaticsocietycal.com/>



Invited to speak by this old institution, started in 1782, located at 1, Park Street, right in the city centre of Kolkata, Staffan had chosen to speak about an ongoing panel study of 240 agricultural households in six villages along the Kaveri in Trichy and Karur districts, a study he is currently working with. These households were interviewed 25 years ago about economic, technical and social conditions and they are asked the same questions again. The study, which is undertaken by Lindberg and four colleagues, covers agricultural economy, household economy, migration, social and political organisation. In the lecture social transformation of local politics and gender relations were dealt with.

There were about 30 people in the audience and after the lecture there were a good deal of questions and comments. The meeting was presided over by Professor **Biswanath Banerjee**, President of the Asiatic Society, and the lecture was concluded by a nice tea party in the office of the Asiatic Society's General Secretary, Dr. **Ramakanta Chakrabarty** (photo to the left).



Meeting with the Governor, Mr. Gopal Krishna Gandhi

Dr. Arild Ruud at Oslo University, former Director of the Nordic Centre in India, had introduced us to the Governor of West Bengal Mr. **Gopal Krishna Gandhi** who till recently was the Indian Ambassador to Norway (here seen on the photo along with Prof. Lindberg).



We entered the massive and imposing Raj Bhavan (that used to be the Government House in the colonial days), with a certain respect, not being used to such a visit, and with thoughts about the marriage of the British Colonial system and the modern democratic India. Feelings that quickly melted in the air when we were informally and cordially received by the governor in his office. 'The marriage,' he said, 'was not a happy one, but the relationship had changed a great deal in the political process after Independence.'

We had an interesting discussion about the current problematic situation facing agriculture and the need for research networks to work on the many problems facing contemporary India. He was already well informed about SASNET and appreciated our work and the plan for our contact tour.



North Bengal, 'Garden of Eden', Tuesday 22 November 2005



Next morning we woke up onboard the train surrounded by a flat green landscape with tea plantations, interspersed by paddy fields, grazing grounds and scattered farmsteads surrounded by fences made of a kind of coir. It looked a bit tribal but village people walking around in sarees and dhotis reassured us that this was ordinary plainspeople. They were lightly dressed so we sensed that the outside temperature was quite pleasant, which later on proved to be quite true, peaking at about 25 °C.

Prof. [Chandanashish Laha](#), Reader in the Dept. of English (*photo to the left*), met us at the New Jalpaiguri Railway station (NJP), and had organised a well-structured meeting for us, and also a warm local hospitality. Chandan, as he is called, participated in the 18th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, that SASNET organised in Lund in July 2004. He was a member of Panel no 39, on Bengal Studies ([read about the panel](#)), and we had become good friends.

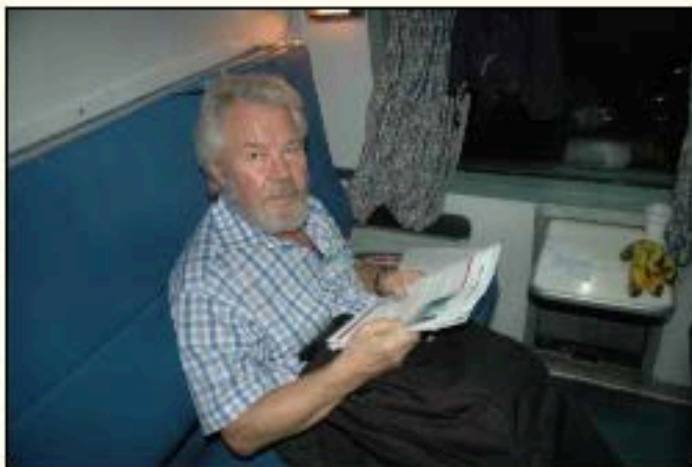
After refreshing ourselves at the nice University Guest House we proceeded to the main building of North Bengal University, NBU.

[Read report from the meeting at North Bengal University](#)

Assam – Land of rivers, mountains, trees and conflicts Guwahati, Tuesday 22 November 2005

After a delicious Bengali style lunch with rice and sweetwater fish at the University Guest House in Siliguri we continued travelling by train towards Guwahati in the afternoon. We were supposed to board the Jodhpur-Guwahati Express, departing from New Jalpaiguri railway station (NJP) at 15.20.

The train was however one hour late from start, and when we finally arrived in Guwahati the time was not 23.45 in the evening (as it was scheduled to be), but close to 4 o'clock in the morning.



We literally tumbled into bed at Landmark hotel, booked well in advance by our local host Prof. Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed from OKD Institute of Social Change and Development (see our report from OKDISCD).

After a few hours of sleep, we woke up to an interesting day in this 1.4 million town, the capital of Assam. Our programme for the day included a visit to Gauhati University with a SASNET meeting at the Dept. of Economics, and then in the afternoon on to IIT Guwahati (Indian Institute of Technology) located outside Guwahati.

[Read report from meeting at the Dept. of Economics, Gauhati University](#)

[Read report from our visit to IIT Guwahati](#)

Meeting at North Bengal University, Siliguri, 22 November 2005

North Bengal University web page:

<http://www.nbu.ac.in/>



The meeting was arranged for us at the Conference Hall of the North Bengal University (NBU). We

were greeted by Prof. D.K. Hazra, Dean of the Faculty of Science, and Dr. T.K. Chatterjee, the University Registrar. Prof. P.K. Sengupta, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Commerce and Law presided over the meeting.

There were about 70 persons present, mostly teachers but also a fair deal of PhD candidates, all of them representing the various faculties and disciplines: Botany and Chemistry, as well as Political science, English literature, Sociology, Anthropology and Women's studies. NBU is a 'medium-sized university' with a close interaction, it appears, between faculty of different disciplines.

Such a blending and attendance would be hard to expect when presenting SASNET at one of the metropolitan universities in India. Like most of the big universities in Sweden the latter consist of 'watertight' departments without much interaction. Is BNU a haven of inter-disciplinary co-operation or could it be like the smaller universities and colleges in Sweden?

After our presentation of SASNET's core activities we had a very lively interaction to clarify what SASNET could do and not do. We also presented alternative ways of co-operation and exchange of researchers and students, including the planning grants from SASNET and the Linnaeus-Palme exchange programme for teachers and students.



Two PhD students at the Dept. of English, Rosy Chamling and Chiradhini Rai.

The North Bengal University caters to the six northernmost districts of West Bengal and the State of Sikkim. Besides faculties for science, arts and law, a medical college and a science & technology college are affiliated (but administered separately). BNU is organised like most other Indian universities, so that 70 000 undergraduates attend 87 affiliated colleges, while only graduate studies are organised by the university itself. There are 180 teachers/researchers and about 1 500 Masters and PhD students. Besides, about 30 000 students study in the distance education organised by NBU. From January to September 2005 a total of 35 PhD students passed their degrees, most prominently in Philosophy, English, History, Economics, Botany, Chemistry and Zoology.

The University has collaboration with some universities in the SAARC countries but so far not outside South Asia. However, researchers frequently go to International conferences, and visit and work at institutions all over the world. Quite a few Indian and foreign scholars also come to lecture at NBU. NBU was founded in 1962 and still gives an impression of a young and fresh university. This is reflected in the research interests of the staff: No heavy backlog of ancient disciplinary focus on classical learning but more of contemporary issues, many of them related to the area and region in which it thrives.



Professor S R Mondal, Chairman, Dept. of

Here is an interest in tribal and immigrant studies against the background of ethnic awakening among the multitude of tribes and nationalities mixing in the area. There is a Centre for Himalayan Studies, and political scientists engage in regional relations with

neighbouring countries. Here is an interest in the recent history of Bengal, the partition and Anthropology the plight of the many immigrants, especially after 1971 and the formation of Bangladesh.

There is a very active Centre for Women's Studies organising a lot of research, also in many other departments of BNU.

The Dept. of English is now more into contemporary English language Indian literature, Bengali and other (rather than Shakespeare, Wordsworth...).

In Botany, there are for example, studies of tea and health, and of herbs used as folk medicines in Darjeeling hills; in Zoology there is a project on socio-economic upliftment and empowerment of women of backward rural communities through backyard fish breeding; and in Chemistry, there is for example a project on biodegradable thermoplastic starch. The university already has a strong link to Sweden in Chemistry: Prof. [Basudeb Basu](#) (photo to the right) studied in Lund 1994-96 and now has collaboration with Umeå University.



Specific networking ideas

There was a very positive attitude towards research co-operation and student exchange with Swedish institutions, and there was even a suggestion that a MoU ought to be signed between SASNET and NBU...

The Centre for Women's Studies is organising an international seminar on women's situation and women's studies 12-13 April 2006. The Director, Dr. [Sanchari Roy Mukherjee](#) (photo to the left), would be very happy if there were Swedish participants.

The Dept. of English would be happy to organise a comparative literature project on contemporary novels from Sweden and India.

Another project from the same department is about folk culture, including folk theatre jatra of Bengal, that is, today's West Bengal and Bangladesh.

Other projects and ideas would be forwarded to

us at a later stage and we have promised to try to liaison with our Swedish partners about these.

All in all this was a very rich and promising interaction in the 'garden of Eden' that is inside the lush green campus of the University of North Bengal.

Names of participants with whom we interacted most:

- Dr. [Chandanashish Laha](#), Dept. of English
- Prof. [Pradip Kumar Sengupta](#), Professor of Political Science. Dean, Faculty Council for Postgraduate studies in Arts, Commerce and Law. Honorary Director, Centre for Adult and Continuing Education. Director, Directorate of Distance Education
- Professor [D K Hazra](#), Dean of Science Faculty
- Dr. [Tapas Kumar Chatterjee](#), Registrar
- Professor [Basudeb Basu](#), Dept. of Chemistry
- Professor [B N Chakraborty](#), Immuno-Phytopathology Laboratory, Dept. of Botany
- Professor [S R Mondal](#), Chairman, Dept. of Anthropology
- Dr. [Maitreyee Choudhury](#), Reader, Centre for Himalayan Studies
- Dr. [Sanchari Roy Mukherjee](#), Director, Centre for Women's Studies,
- Dr. [Sanjay K Roy](#), Reader, Dept. of Sociology
- Dr. [Soumyajit Samanta](#), Dept. of English
- Dr. [Dilip Kumar Sarkar](#), Controller of Examinations
- [Chisadhini Rai](#), PhD Candidate, Dept. of English
- [Rosy Chamling](#), PhD Candidate, Dept. of English

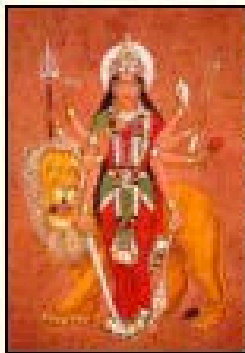


Dr. Maitreyee Choudhury, Centre for Himalayan Studies



'Born again'

Guwahati, Thursday 24 November 2005



Early morning we went to the famous Kamakhya Durga temple, located on a small hillock with a wonderful view over Guwahati. After paying a special entrance fee of Rs. 501 (instead of the ordinary Rs. 1 fee) in order to be able to enter a preferential queue, we

still stood in a tight row behind pilgrims from all over India, and slowly stepped inside the temple and down into the womb of the all-mighty goddess Durga. This was

shakti (women's power), we felt intensively as we mixed with devout men and women, surrounded by the rising temperature to comforting warmth, and touched the water on the ground of the cave – remembering our own foetal past?

According to [Devimahatmya](#), part of the *Markandeya Purana* scripture, dedicated to the goddess Durga, she saved the world from the demon king Mahisasura, after he had taken over the power in Heaven. None of the male gods had been able to stop him. The Great Goddess Durga was then born out of the combined energies of the male divinities – the energies created a supernova, throwing out flames in all directions and turning into a female form. The awesome Goddess was then adorned with the crescent moon, and her multiple arms held auspicious weapons and emblems, jewels and ornaments, garments and utensils, garlands and rosaries of beads, all offered by the gods.



With her tremendous power – the cosmic energy, shakti, Durga managed to kill Mahisasura and his armies of demons after terrible fights, and finally save the world.

[Read the full story about Durga's fight with Mahisasura](#) in an article called "*Durga – Narrative Art of an 'Independent' Warrior Goddess*", by Nitin Kumar in *Exotic India*, April 2001.

We left the temple, one of very few temples in India devoted to Durga, 'born again' and filled with female power, maybe not yet in the status of advaita but almost. We headed for our main destination for the day, the Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Deveopment (OKDISC) in Guwahati, one of the 27 prestigious institutions funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). A meeting was planned for us with the faculty members and scholars of the Institute at 11.30.

[Report from meeting at Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Deveopment \(OKDISC\)](#)



Visit to the Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development (OKD), Guwahati, Thursday 24 November 2005

Web page: <http://www.okd.in>

Omeo Kumar Das was a famous freedom fighter and educationist of Assam, born in 1895. The Institute was founded in 1989, and got the name of OKD Institute of Social Change and Development at the time of the birth centenary of OKD in 1995. It is one of the 27 prestigious institutions all over India that are funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR).



It is still a small institute, most of the staff joined only in 1999, when proper funding came to the Institute. At present there are eight in the faculty, consisting of economists, political scientists, education researchers, cultural geographers and historians. The institute is now very active in publishing research reports, books and articles. It also has its own journal: **Social Change and Development**, started in 2003. Lately it has also started a Centre for Northeast India, South and Southeast Asia Studies, funded by Ford Foundation. From the latter source OKD has also got funds to create an endowed Chair entitled Professor of Peace Studies.

The Director of OKD, Prof. **Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed** (photo to the left), a political scientist from Dibrugarh University, had organised a meeting for us with about 20 faculty members and PhD students at the Institute.

Same agenda as at Guwahati University

It turned out that the research at OKD has about the same priorities and thrust as Gauhati University, with the difference that research can be more focussed and integrated at a special full time research institute like this despite its smallness and paucity of funds.

Ethnicity figures high, of course. Here are studies of immigrant populations, militancy, women as peace makers in Nagaland, internal displacement of people in western Assam, etc.



Regional relations are also prominent as a study area, extending from the relations between the countries neighbouring the North East (for example, Indo-Myanmar relations) to the whole of South Asia and the SAARC community.

Livelihood, rural development and commercialisation are popular topics as are education, health, and information technology.

We had a lively discussion of some of these areas of research and discovered that there are several opportunities for cooperation with Swedish and Nordic scholars. Be sure that you will see OKD again in SASNET's Internet Gateway fairly soon.

Persons we met and interacted with:

- **Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed**, Professor and Director
- Indraneel Dutta, Prof., working with health and education
- Partha S. Ghosh, Visiting Prof., South Asian comparative studies
- **Saswati Choudhury**, Lecturer, economics, banking, rural development, regional studies
- **Joydeep Baruah**, Lecturer, economics, econometrics, regional development, policy analysis
- Bhupen Sarmah, Reader, agrarian relations, ethnicity and autonomy, devolution of power
- Kalyan Das, Lecturer, regional development, labour economics
- **Aruna Dutta**, Peace Studies



Prof. Partha S. Ghosh, South Asian comparative studies, and Prof. Indraneel Dutta, working with health and education.



admin

Meeting at the Dept. of Economics, Gauhati University, Guwahati

Web page: <http://gu.nic.in/>

Gauhati University (GU) was founded 1947 and is just like the North Bengal University in Siliguri, a medium sized university with 250 affiliated colleges and about 100 000 student at the undergraduate level. In the university campus there are about 3 000 students at the Post Graduate level and it has a faculty of 350. There are six faculties: Arts, Science, Commerce, Law, Engineering, and Medicine. It is the central university for Assam and the seven smaller states in the Northeastern part of India. Note that the university retains its name Gauhati University, even though the city today is spelt Guwahati.



The meeting had been organised by Prof. **M.P. Bezbaruah** (*photo to the right*), head of the Dept. of Economics, and was attended by about 25 scholars , most of them researchers/teachers and PhD students in Economics. There were however also three researchers from Political Science present. There are 20 PhD students in the Dept. of Economics. After our presentation of SASNET and clarifications of our aims and ways of workings, we had a discussion about the research in the two departments and at the university at large.



Laboratory of ethnic conflicts

The faculty and students at GU are very much engaged in the conditions and problems of this region, where ethnic relations and politics quite naturally are recurrent themes. The North-East consists of eight states, out of which three originally were parts of Assam, namely Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. The other states Tripura, Manipur, Nagaland and Sikkim have equally complex histories plagued by ethnic conflicts and separatism ever since the formation of independent India in 1947. After the bifurcation of Assam into several states in the 1970's Assamese people themselves started to mobilise for a dominant influence. This agitation that mainly was directed against the large group of Bengali settlers in the state (especially Bangladeshi immigrants arriving since 1971) had a blood-stained peak around 1980. It subsided with the Assamese population gaining a dominant hold on state politics. But it did not put an end to ethnic conflicts in the state, which includes a large number of tribal people (13 % of the population, belonging to 25 different groups). The previous bifurcations, the ascendancy of the Assamese and the generally liberalised atmosphere during the recent past have all inspired these tribal groups, especially the Bodos, to demand more autonomy in the form of separate homelands and in some cases even the status of statehood.

Given the smallness of these groups, the limited area they command and their scattered settlement pattern (interspersed by other groups) these demands are however almost impossible to satisfy. Violent agitations have ensued and a criminality associated with this. Today, there is more violence in the form of assault on neighbouring communities, kidnapping, and most of all criminal acts of theft and murder than peaceful democratic mobilisation and negotiation. Thus, this is troubled state with insecurity felt in many locations. These issues figure high on the agenda of the research carried out in the university.

Another important theme is the changing role and status of Assam and the North-East within the Indian Union. During the colonial period this was in a way a central part of the British territory with its large tea plantations and large settler population. Tribal groups, not being controlled by Brahminical Hindu caste hierarchies responded to the call of Christian missionaries and converted (Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland are the three states in India in which Christians are in majority). With conversion came an early modernity.

After Independence, the North-East gradually slipped into oblivion.



Through the formation of Bangladesh, the area was cut off from the rest of India when ships no more could sail on river Brahmaputra all the way up to Dibrugarh in Upper Assam. Eventually the railway and road links were also disrupted, and transports to and from Assam and the other northeastern states became an expensive and time-consuming affair. In spite of being India's main producer of tea, oil and gas Assam is almost a forgotten part of the country.

Today the situation is again turning and the North-East is becoming a hot spot in India. The anticipated large land based trade with China will go through these states. Cross-border trade and regional political relations also with the other neighbouring countries of Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar is, therefore, important issues for research at the university.

One needs only to take a trip on the so called highway passing on the other side of the river. The traffic jam at rush hour is undecipherable and almost intolerable.

Other topics that figure high on the research list are, for example, economic development of Assam (agriculture, tea, and forest products); institutions and governance; demographic change; and environmental problems.

After the meeting, we took a stroll through the nice green campus of the university. We found that there is Centre for Women's Studies (*photo to the right*). Unfortunately, none from that department had come to our meeting.



Researchers we interacted with during the meeting:

- Prof. [M.P. Bezebaruah](#)
- Prof. Srinath Baruah, Mathematical economics and econometrics
- Prof. Runumi Dowerah Baruah
- Prof. [K.K. Burman](#)
- [Nani Gopal Mahanta](#), senior lecturer in Political science, and Co-ordinator, Peace and Conflict Resolution
- Dr. Dhruva Pratin Sharma, lecturer, Political Science, GU
- Dr. Sakiya Khan
- Dr. Nissar Ahmed Baruah
- [Soi Jitu Jamuli](#), Research Associate
- Sri Sadananda Nath, Research scholar
- M.R. Kasi, research associate, OKDISCD
- [Pradyut Guha](#), guest lecturer in Economics, Kokrajhare Campus, GU
- [Geetall Sarma](#), senior lecturer in Economics, Tangla College, Dist. Darrang, Assam
- [Abdul Haque Ahmed](#), senior lecturer in Economics, Bikall College, Dhupdhera, Dt. Goalpara, Assam
- Prof. [Archana Sharma](#)
- Ms. [Indira Baruah](#)
- Dr. [Gayathi Goswami](#)

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admin

Visit to Indian Institute of Technology – Guwahati,

Web page: <http://www.iitg.ernet.in/>

From Gauhati University we proceeded 10 km outside the city, passing the imposing bridge over the river Brahmaputra. In a hilly area covered with bushes, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati, is located. IIT



Guwahati was established already in 1995 in hired premises in Guwahati proper, but new buildings are now constructed in what used to be wasteland on the northern shore of Brahmaputra. It currently has a faculty of 200, and around 1.800 students, but the number will increase when all the buildings are completed in 2006.



Our contact person was Dr **Chandan Mohanta** (*photo to the left*) at the **Department of Civil Engineering**, and he received us in his office. Dr Mohanta is involved in two collaborative projects with Swedish researchers. One is a project on arseniferous groundwater, with Associate Professor **Prosun Bhattacharya**, **Department of Land and Water Resources Engineering**, Royal Institute of Technology, KTH, Stockholm. Arsenic in groundwater is a very serious problem to inhabitants of the region, mainly in Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal. The main research task is to find out how the arsenic in the sediments is dissolved and gets into the groundwater, and the methods for the removal of arsenic.

Two Swedish students, Daniel Nordborg and **Gustav Enmark** (*photo to the right*), from **Air & Water Science/Hydrology**;



Department of Earth Sciences, Uppsala University (but supervised by **Prosun Bhattacharya** and **Chandan Mohanta**), happened to stay at IIT Guwahati during our visit, carrying out Minor Field Studies measuring the groundwater arsenic contamination in wells in the Brahmaputra basin near Guwahati. This will result in two 15 credits papers when they return back home. They had been at the campus since the beginning of October and would stay another few weeks. They told us about their experiences of hostel life and their interaction with Indian students.

The other Swedish connection is a new collaborative project on prediction of earthquakes, that **Chandan Mohanta** is involved in together with Professor **Alasdair Skelton** from the **Dept. of Geology and Geochemistry**, Stockholm University. The project, called "**Monitoring the effect of seismic activity on groundwater chemistry in NE India**" has recently got a Swedish Research Links funding from Sida and the Swedish Research Council, and it aims at finding means of accurately predicting earthquakes by studying the seismic activities in North East India, an extremely vulnerable area where a major earthquake is expected to hit the region in the near future.

Dr Chandan informed us about the specific facts that make IIT Guwahati a bit different from the other, older Indian Institutes of Technology, for example those in Kanpur, Chennai and Kharagpur. Due to the geographical isolation of the North East from the rest of India there are less foreign



collaboration in Guwahati (the [German Exchange Academy](#), DAAD, being an exception). There are also few Internationally funded research projects and not many senior researchers among the faculty. Less students make IIT Guwahati their primary choice. On the other hand Guwahati has an edge over other IITs in that the institute is brand new, so that laboratories can be better planned already before the buildings have been completed.

IIT Guwahati is also different in that it clearly puts a focus on local/regional issues of importance. The motto for IIT Guwahati is "what can we do for this region", and therefore give priority to research that provides support to the civil society, by offering small, meaningful and relevant technological interventions. Besides the subjects previously mentioned, Dr Mahanta added GIS mapping of the region, groundwater management, and specifically for the chemical engineers, the problem of pollution.



Just like other people we met in the academia of the North East Dr Chandan was optimistic about the future. If the borders can be opened up and India's dream of going east, that is expanding trade and other ties to South East Asia and China through Burma, it means big possibilities for IIT Guwahati.

We also met the Head of the civil engineering department, Dr [Sudip Talukdar](#), who was trained at IIT Kanpur; and Dr [Gautam Barua](#) (*photo to the left*), doing research on fluid mechanics, trained at the North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST) and leaving for a conference in New Zealand a few days later.

After visiting the department Dr Mahanta invited us together with Daniel and Gustav to go for on the hairpin road up the small mountain, from where we got a nice view over the IIT campus and its adjoining student hostels.

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Nöjd med tillvaron efter besök till Kamakhya Durga-templet i Guwahati

A nice ride to Shillong, Thursday 24 November 2005

After our meeting at OKDISC we went in a comfortable Tata Indica Diesel, again arranged by Prof. Abu Ahmed, a journey to Shillong, capital of the neighbouring hill state of Meghalaya. It is a one hundred km ride through the lovely green and low mountains of Meghalaya.

Traffic was intense so the speed was limited and safe as we were gradually swallowed by this the perhaps most westernised of all Indian states – with churches and wine-shops almost on a string line along the road. Is this what western civilization is to Indians?



It was almost pitch dark when we finally arrived at the Guest House of the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) after the three hours long ride, prolonged at the end by the darkness and our difficulties to find the whereabouts of the university. Once inside we however immediately felt at home in the wooden buildings that make up much of the Guest House (photo to the right). And of course, as a sign of heavenly intervention after our morning prayers, our local host Prof. Nunthara was just walking up the steps to receive us warmly.

[Read our first report from Meghalaya, land of coal, potatoes and peace](#)

After a nice sleep in the peaceful surroundings of NEHU campus we spent the following day, **Friday 25 November**, in Shillong, visiting the university and meeting researchers representing Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science and Environmental Studies.

[Report from meeting at North Eastern Hill University in Shillong](#)

In the afternoon our host, Prof. Nunthara, took us around in Shillong and showed its main sights, including the Pine Wood Hotel. We also visited the family Tanglura, members of which now reside in Sweden and being friends of Lars. In late afternoon we then returned with our taxi to Guwahati, for another night's stay at Landmark Hotel, next to the stadium of Guwahati.



Journey from Guwahati to Phuentsholing in Bhutan, Saturday 26 November 2005

Saturday morning at 9 o'clock we again boarded a train, seated in an AC 2-tier compartment on the North East Express, bound for Cooch Behar in West Bengal. Professor Abu Ahmed had picked us up at the hotel and driven us here in the car belonging to OKDISC. What a fantastic host! In Cooch Behar we were then going to be met by Dr. Soumyajit Samanta from North Bengal University, and travel by private car to the Bhutanese border town Phuentsholing.

[Read our report from the journey from Guwahati to Phuentsholing](#)

Journey from Phuentsholing to Thimphu, Sunday 27 November 2005

We woke up Sunday morning at Druk Hotel in Phuentsholing, our first morning in Bhutan. After checking out from the hotel we were picked up by our guide and driver, Mr. Samdruk, a Bhutanese with a degree in Commerce from Bangalore in India. He works as free-lance guide for foreign tourists and is connected to the Centre for Bhutanese Studies in Thimphu.



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About 55 % of the population is Christian, belonging to a number of churches like the Presbyterian, Baptist, Roman Catholic, and Church of North India. The rest of the people are either tribal or Hindu. A significant feature is that all the tribes in Meghalaya are matrilineal and matri-local. However, studies of these societies reveal that this in no way signifies female power and gender equality in society. Rather, here patriarchy is organised via a matrilineal kinship system, in which the maternal uncle plays a crucial role. Nevertheless, there is a story about a male demonstration in Shillong at the turn of the last century in favour of a patrilineal kinship system. It was quickly stopped by women coming into the street, and chasing these men away with their broomsticks! (Source: Prof. [Nikhlesh Kumar](#), Dept. of Sociology, North Eastern Hill University).

There is a constant inflow of Bangladeshi immigrants who come over the long and unwatched border every day to find a gainful employment in Meghalaya, which has a more dynamic economy than the one they come from. Many settle on uninhabited and uncultivated land, others go to the cities and take up any job (our taxi driver on the journey from and to Guwahati may have been such a person). The friction this causes is however mild compared to reactions in other parts of the the Indian North East. The Indian government currently sets up a fence along the border, something that the Bangladeshi authorities strongly object against, and even Indian villagers living along the border as they now often lose the right to till their fields in the borderland. Read an article by BBC correspondent Roland Buerk, called "[Villagers left in limbo by border fence](#)" (28 January 2006).

The state of Meghalaya is divided into separate hill areas with ethnic groups that differ when it comes to language and culture. The major division is between the Khasis, inhabiting central Meghalaya, including Shillong, and the Garos in the west. Though there is resentment among Garos and others that the Khasis dominates politically, there is no movement for a separate state as such and no violence in relation to this. The most dangerous development is instead the recent growth of criminal gangs of young men in certain parts of Shillong who attack and rob people after dark. Strangely enough the area surrounding the university campus, Maulawi, is one of the worst affected areas.



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SASNET visit to North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Friday 25 November 2005

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Web page:

<http://www.nehu.ac.in/>

North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) in Shillong is a rather small university founded in 1974, with students coming from all over the North East. There are about 200 teachers and 2 000 students at the PG level, that is, the masters level. The university, beautifully located in a hilly area covered by pinewood trees, is divided into six schools:

- Education, which is the biggest school
- Social sciences (sociology, political science, history, and law)
- Physics
- Life sciences
- Economics and Management
- Human and Environmental Studies (including anthropology)



Researchers/teachers come from all over India. There are about 50 colleges affiliated with about 30 000 undergraduate students.



Our host, Prof. **C. Nunthara** (*photo to the left*) from the Dept. of Sociology (and also Dean of the School of Social Sciences) told us that this department has seven teachers (should be 11 actually) and 90 Masters students. There are about 20 PhD students. M Phil is on the way out and has only few students now.

Some departments have already skipped this level altogether. Initially, Sociology and Anthropology was included in one department, but in 1981, when the university also wanted to develop Physical Anthropology, the two twin sciences were separated. However, research interest and methodology overlap between the two departments today.

The university has a fair number of foreign collaborations in the Physical and Life Science areas, where MOU's have been forged with Japanese and German institutions. Similar collaborations are much less in the humanities and social



sciences.

13 people gathered at the meeting with us, organised by Prof. Nunthara and Prof. **T.B. Subba** (*photo to the right*), anthropologist and Dean of the School of Human and Environmental studies. They represented Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science and Philosophy. Other disciplines had not been attracted by the call for the SASNET meeting, maybe not properly informed about our ambitions to network among all the sciences.

The main thrust of research at NEHU is socio-cultural and biological variety in the North East. However, most of the research undertaken is donor driven and relates to environment, health and



identity. One interesting combination is medicine and physical anthropology, the latter rather than 'measuring skulls', engaging in medical examinations of physiological traits of various people in the area. More specifically: Political science researchers are engaged in a variety of studies relating to tribal development, ethnicity and identity, and conflict patterns (peace studies). They are also working on regional cooperation and globalisation, and on the conflict between India and Pakistan.

Sociology researchers engage in a vast canvass of social changes taking place, a development they both want to monitor and participate in as active agents of change. Historically a turning point in the social transformation here is the conversion to Christianity and the coming of modern education, which is therefore an object of study. More recently, the conflict between indigenous people and settlers, and the development of delinquency and drug addiction among young people catch their attention.



Anthropology researchers, finally, engage in a variety of studies with an attempt at a holistic approach. They identify with the British social anthropological tradition with fieldwork and social interaction and have no major tussle with the sociologists. In fact, both disciplines take an active interest in the kinship system of Meghalaya and its contemporary transformation. Identity and gender studies are also high on the agenda.

A common complaint is that there is lack of money to study the many smaller tribes of the North East. Donor driven research does not allow for that, which means that the task of ethnographic documentation of these groups remains unfinished. Soon much of their special and unique features may have been lost in the ongoing social transformation. Prof. T.B. Subha from the Anthropology department informed us that he has a collaboration with the [Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique \(CNRS\)](#) in Paris, about the study of identity and its political, economic and environmental aspects. As an example, he tells about the hill tribes who settle in the plains and develop a new identity. Besides Prof. Subha has been involved in a long-standing research collaboration with Dr [Beppe Karlsson](#) from the [Dept. of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology](#), Uppsala University for the past 20 years. In 1997 Beppe wrote his doctoral thesis in Social Anthropology (at Lund University) about the Rabha community in Assam, and more recently they have together edited a book called "*Indigeneity in India*", which was published in the end of 2005 in London.

Researchers we met at NEHU:

- [C. Nunthara](#), Professor of Sociology, Dean of the School of Social Sciences. Research interest: Sociology of North-East India; Resource conflicts between indigenous people and settlers
- [T.B. Subha](#), Professor of Anthropology. Research interest: Identity, culture and development
- [Niklesh Kumar](#), Professor of Sociology. Research interest: Sociology of medicine, occupations and professions
- [L.S. Gassan](#), Professor of Political Science. Research interest: Government & politics in North-East India
- Dr. [Elisabeth Laitflang](#), Dept. of Political science. Research interest: Tribal institutions in North-East India
- [Biswajit Mohapatra](#), Dept. of Political science. Research interest: Conflict & peace, regional cooperation, information technology
- John Kayina, Research scholar in Sociology
- A.K. Nongkynrih, Reader in Sociology. Research interest: Sociology of Development and Sociology of Entrepreneurship and Management. Besides, he is a facilitator of Appreciative Inquiry and Sustainable Livelihood Approaches. He is also a facilitator of Community Development in the North-Eastern region and is associated with many national and international organizations.
- Immanuel Zargosangaik, Research scholar in Anthropology. Research interest: Development studies
- [Lucy Zehol](#), Reader in Anthropology. Research interest: Theory, women and development
- [Berit Fuhrman](#), Guest lecturer in Social Anthropology (coming from the South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, Germany). Research interest: Ritual healing, social structure and kinship
- [Valentina Pakyntein](#), Lecturer in Anthropology. Research interest: Matrilineality & gender
- [Xavier Mao](#), Dept. of Philosophy

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Journey to Phuentsholing

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Journey from Guwahati to Phuentsholing, Saturday 26 November

It doesn't come as a complete surprise, but as the train leaves Guwahati railway station heading westward, we travel along miles of slum dwellings, small miserable shacks and an incredible dirty surrounding with litter everywhere. This is also India in the era of IT and world economic and political aspirations! This is, of course, the real challenge: when



will there be a progressive linkage between the dynamic service and science-based future economy with its enormous global potential and that other half still trailing in such a misery?

On the train itself, a stream of beggars appears, all of them physically handicapped. There is no way you can avoid or escape and we have to part with coins and small notes. The heart simply caves in as we sit comfortable in our spacious AC two-tier compartment.

We pass the mighty Brahmaputra and surrounded by green mountains we move into the rich green flatlands of its basin, and after a few hours we leave Assam and once again enter the state of West Bengal.



At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, one hour late, we arrived in the North Bengal town of [Cooch Behar](#) – till 1949 the capital of the princely state with the same name. The Maharaja of Cooch Behar ceded his country to the Dominion of India only on the 28th of August 1949, the so-called Cooch Behar Merger Agreement ([read details about the agreement](#)). Still the

city is dominated by the old Royal Palace, called Rajbari (*see photo to the left*).

Unfortunately we did not have any time to look around in this interesting town, as we had to proceed to the Bhutanese border before evening. We were met at the railway station by Dr. [Soumyajit Samanta](#), an acquaintance from our visit to North Bengal University in Siliguri, a week before ([see the report](#)), and his friend [Debasish Bhowmick](#), called Debu. They had promised to take us to the border town of Jaygaon/Phuentsholing by car, and after a quick late lunch at Sarbashree Lodge we departed from Cooch Behar with Debu's Hyundai car and set out northwards in the direction of the Bhutanese border.



At first we passed villages and small farmsteads somewhat elevated on clay platforms to avoid floods during the monsoons, a phenomenon so typical of Bengal. Flat lands, cattle, green plots with a variety of crops. After a while we reached the highway going through the thick forest jungle. This was Doars, the rolling landscape of North Bengal stretching all the way up to the foot of the Himalayan mountains, a region full of tea plantations and forests with leopards and other wild animals. As it started to become dark outside Debu drove fast, being a bit apprehensive about

parked vehicles - this area is infested with thugs, he said.

The journey should have taken a couple of hours, but due to absence of proper road signs we missed the turning from the Highway towards Jaygaon, drove much too far and had to return and search again for a turning. It was 7 P.M. when we finally drove into the twin towns of Jaygaon (on the Indian side of the border) and Phuentsholing (on the Bhutanese side). In fact the two towns are totally built together, and people cross the open border without any control. Without realising it we did the same. When parking the car outside a shop complex it turned out we have already passed the imposing gate and entered Bhutan without passing any passport control or customs office! The registration bureau closes already at 5 o'clock.



This created a problem, because we thought that we were going to be met by our Bhutanese guide, arranged for us through the Centre for Bhutan Studies (CBS) in Thimphu, right at the border. But how to find him now without knowing neither his name nor his telephone number? What should we do? This was the first mistake in our otherwise elaborate planning of the Journey (it later turns out we had failed to receive an e-mail from CBS giving the contact information about the guide). The problem was however solved with a phone call to Thimphu, yes fortunately there were still people working at CBS, and through them we got hold of our host, Dr. Karma Galay. He informed us about which hotel we are booked into, and he gave the mobile number to our guide, Mr.

Samdruk.

Hotel Druk is the nice place where we are going to stay, and we get installed in this already classic establishment. We called Mr. Samdruk (photo to the right) and he was with us in few minutes, and we got the schedules already prepared for our stay in Bhutan. Since we missed the border control, he said, we must go back to Jaygaon (India) next morning and get our emigration stamps, before leaving for Thimphu with a brand new Hyundai Jeep.



We spent the evening at Druk Hotel, eating late supper with our Indian friends, and having a typical Bengali wide-ranging intellectual discussion on issues as varied as Harold Pinter's 2005 Nobel prize, Bengali literature, Alexander the Great, why there will be poor people in India even in 2025... Then we had a bidding farewell, warmly thanking them for bringing us safely here in the darkness amidst thugs and other dangers. A few words of eternal wisdom from Lord Buddha and a long sleep. We were now inside Druk Yul - the Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon.

