

Man and Society

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Man and Society
A Journal of North-East Studies

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Editorial

The responsibility of editing this issue of *Man and Society* has come to me by default when I assumed the charge of Honorary Director of the ICSSR-NERC in April this year. However, my editorial burden was made much lighter by Dr. C. J. Thomas, the Managing Editor, and Dr. Sukalpa Bhattacharjee, the Copy Editor for this issue whereas the editorial responsibility of selecting the papers was kindly shared by Prof. David R. Syiemlieh, Prof. L. S. Gassah, Prof. Udayon Misra and Dr. C. J. Thomas. Hence this issue would be published inspite of me. If at all, my contribution has been perhaps negative, as my careful reading of all the articles and book reviews has slightly delayed the publication of this issue for which my sincere apologies are to all the subscribers.

We start this issue with an article by Dr. Sukalpa Bhattacharjee who problematizes the understanding of 'tribe' with special reference to North-East India. Indeed understanding 'tribe' has no simplistic formula, as the rich theoretical literature cited by the author clearly shows. The next article is by Mohan G. Ramanan on some nineteenth century texts by E. Veeraswamy, C. Menon and Bankim Chattopadhyaya with a kind of postscript on Tillotama Misra. With these two very sound articles the present issue of the journal is on a firm footing. In this issue, we also present a very well researched article on various myths surrounding the River Brahmaputra written by M. Mahanta. This is followed by an interesting article on the char dwellers of this river and how they are socially excluded as 'refugees' when they come out of their habitat in search of employment. Gorky Chakraborty, the author, argues beautifully that the very geographical location of the char dwellers is constitutive of social exclusion. The third article on Assam, included in this issue, deals with ethnic conflicts and crisis of governance. Indeed, as Pranjit Saikia, the author of this article shows, ethnic conflicts are a recurrent feature of Assam's social fabric and crisis of governance is certainly one of the important factors responsible for the same.

The next article in this issue deals with a relatively less-explored phase in the history of Naga movement, i.e., 1950s to 1970s, when the Naga leaders established contacts with and received various kinds of support from some neighbouring countries like Pakistan and China as well as the United States of America. The last article in this issue is by Ishani Naskar on the challenges thrown by the rise of Chinese power in Southeast Asia.

In this issue we have also included two shorter articles besides a number of very well written book reviews. The first of the two shorter articles is on ethnicity and ethnic identities in North-East India by H. Srikanth and Thianglalmuan Ngaihte, and the other one is on HIV transmission from mother to child by Y. Santoshkumar Singh.


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Understanding the 'Tribal': Postcolonial Identity and Creative Writing

Sukalpa Bhattacharjee *

In understanding the formation, legitimacy, claims and counter claims of postcolonial identities in North-East India one has to re-examine the nature of colonialism experienced by the indigenous communities of this region. Of the two types of colonialism, 'Settler Colonialism' involved a large number of colonists who came to the colony seeking fertile land to farm and turned indigenous people into the minority in their own land. Contrastingly, 'Exploitation Colonialism' involved fewer colonists who captured administrative machineries and ruled the indigenous people, who were still majority in their own land. In other words, in colonies where the indigenous people were not displaced from their land and where they still had their own cultural life-world and religion, colonial exploitation which was mainly at the economic and political level also stretched to the psychic and the spiritual life of the people. It may be mentioned here that colonialism in countries like Africa and India, (particularly the North-Eastern region of India) was of the second variety and so tribal communities in particular have suffered from a unique form of cultural dispossession which alienated them from their roots and landed them to a crisis at the spiritual and cultural level. Such a form of colonial domination manifests in the form of psychic violence which according to Albert Memmi is a 'colonization of the mind'.¹ Colonialism in these countries therefore with its effect on the life-world

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of the indigenous people, stretched its boundaries to the cultural sphere which involved indigenous religion, the lived experiences and values that were central to their being. Along with its apparatus of domination at the social, economic and political sphere cultural representation of the natives by the colonizer became another strategy of domination which influenced the self image of the natives. Edward Said has argued that Orientalism could not represent itself and had to rely on the West to produce the histories of its colonies which in turn affected the postcolonial imagination and the self-image of the indigenous people.² Apart from religion and culture, language becomes another contesting field for colonial imposition contributing to Imperial domination.

In response to the systematic violence done to their own languages, some postcolonial writers and activists either advocated a complete return to the use of indigenous languages or used the imposed English language to appropriate the dominant European tongue re-forming it in new literary forms. In the former category one finds the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o who says that African writers should write in African languages while in the latter category one has writers like Chinua Achebe and writers of the so called Third world who like Shakespeare's Caliban in *The Tempest* adopted the strategy of writing back to the empire: "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse." Literatures that emerged in the postcolonial countries had to address the grand project of a cultural and political imperialism and so Gayatri Spivak talks of the impossibility of reading nineteenth century literature by a Third World audience,

...without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English. The role of literature in the production of cultural representation should not be ignored. These two obvious "facts" continue to be disregarded in the reading of nineteenth-century British literature. This itself attests to the continuing success of the imperialist project, displaced and dispersed into more modern forms.³

Such an appropriation is particularly visible in postcolonial novel writing in postcolonial societies like Africa and India where authors struggled to represent indigenous themes and conflicts, within the parameters of a western genre like the novel. Postcolonial literatures in

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English therefore has to contest the imperial 'worlding' of the indigenous life-world and reproduce a counter-narrative of their own societies as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact literary heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted. Here the issue of representation becomes important - the indigenous life-world as represented by the indigenous *self* and that represented by the *other*.

In the context of representation of indigenous people of North-East India by themselves and by the *other* another dimension of dispossession needs to be addressed - the loss of the indigenous script and the importance of the 'spoken word' in transmitting a cultural and a written tradition.⁴ A deconstruction of the term tribe, used as a signifier by white ethnographers and missionaries who came to North-East India in their 'civilization' mission becomes inevitable from a postcolonial perspective as 'tribe' according to several postcolonial thinkers has been a colonial concept. Charlotte Seymour Smith writes:

...the concept of tribe was largely a colonial creation...tribal division and tribal consciousness were largely a creation of the efforts of colonial rulers to impose order and supralocal unity among the previously largely autonomous local communities, and where there was previously a loose and contextually relative sense of ethnic identity, colonial rule often imposed a tribal division which then acquired increasing concreteness due to the need to adapt to the administrative and political demand of colonial rule.⁵

By a kind of perverted logic, colonialism had turned to the past of the colonized tribe and distorted, disfigured and destroyed their culture, often even their indigenous knowledge systems and literatures. The systematic demolition of cultural roots, the conflict between the traditional belief system and the modern cultural and religious institutions, and the widening gap between the individual concerns and collective demands are some of the main issues that disturbed indigenous people of all colonized societies.

In North-East India a cultural uneasiness and dilemma has always persisted in the incompatibility of a communitarian life lived during pre-colonial days and the modern statecraft that was superimposed on a people.⁶ An interesting dimension of this complexity was the colonial

cartography drawn by the nineteenth century explorer's imagination, which was a bewildering colonized geography extending from Africa to the north-eastern frontiers of India and beyond.⁷ The construction of the 'others' who inhabited such geographies was primarily a colonial and racist construction which gave birth to disciplines like Anthropology and devised mechanism for assessing civilizations. Colonial imagination stretched beyond geographical maps to territorialize people with similar histories and cultural practices. What the first chief commissioner of Assam, Colonel Richard Harte Keatinge stated while narrating his responsibilities in North-East India is very significant:

There is no part of our vast Indian frontier about which we have so little military or geographical information as the north-east...there is no like extent of it bordering upon savage tribes, so sparsely garrisoned; yet in this remote corner of our empire there is more English capital invested in land than in any like extent of our dominion⁸

Therefore a self recovery of the indigenous people through their representational agencies also involved a recovery of their cultural specificities not only in relation to the colonizers but also with reference to other indigenous cultures with which they were clubbed. But can the postcolonial Indian imagination in a collective sense address ethnographic and historical misrepresentation of indigenous people and cultures of North-East India? Consequently how would indigenous communities in North-East India appropriate both western and mainstream Indian representational categories and stereotyping of the indigenous as 'native' or 'tribal'? Gayatri Spivak's query, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"⁹ evokes two senses of representation: the scholarly representation of knowable objects and the democratic representation of political subjects. The question exposes the slippage between a scholarly project of portraying "others" and a political project of speaking for "others," both of which deny these "others" voices and the complex subject position that would be irreducible to static images or statistical averages. Such representational modes one could argue creates a category of 'internal orient' like 'internal minorities'.¹⁰ Writer-activist Mahasweta Devi says, "The tribal and the mainstream have always been parallel. There has never been a meeting point. The mainstream simply doesn't understand the parallel..."¹¹ Later

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in the same conversation she mentions “Each tribe is like a continent”. In the 1940s leading anthropologists like Verrier Elwin and G.S. Ghurye tried to theorize and understand tribal identities. Elwin is accused of being ‘protective’ or ‘romantic’ towards tribal life-world and claimed specificities for their representation while Ghurye propagated assimilation theory.¹² Elwin like Mahasweta Devi lived among indigenous people like an insider, allowing their life-world to unveil itself through narrative agencies. Devi is more confident about the authenticity of the life-world of her characters as she says;”I know that area like the palm of my hand. I have seen the person I have called Mary Oraon...”¹³. One can read such descriptions against Robert Lindsay’s narrative on his experiences in the Khasi Hills in 1789 where he finds the beauty of the land like the Garden of Eden but is shocked to find ‘wild looking’ people dancing on the land.¹⁴ Postcolonial critique generated by such a mode of imperialist representational mode invites a critical stance on the issue of representation. It is also a political imperative in a postcolonial sense to look into the history of nomenclature of indigenous communities in North-East India, which is being interrogated by contemporary scholars on North-East India. The politics of naming has been central to the idea of representation.¹⁵ In such a representational context Aime Cesaire remarked:

The colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other as an animal, accustomed himself to treating him like animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal....¹⁶

Stuart Hall also argues that representation, culture and language are tightly connected in the process of producing meaning. He writes:

In part, we give things meaning by how we represent them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the way we classify and conceptualize them, the values we placed on them.¹⁷

Politics of representation leaves room for misinterpretation and unfair assessment of culture and values associated with a community. Therefore one has to evolve a hermeneutic strategy of recovery,

...from the lost terrains of historical and temporal sense of being that finds its closure within contemporary language games. Such lost terrains consist of (a) an originary sense of place and the subsequent loss of the place and (b) The construction of an other as an antithesis to the self in the form of racism, xenophobia and other such forms of violence.¹⁸

Literary intervention has been a dominant mode of postcolonial recovery in North-East India. Creative authors of indigenous communities of the region particularly those writing in English have appropriated the dominant colonial weapon-the English language to represent themselves and their communities. But a critical question that one has to encounter is –can their writings be called “Tribal Literatures”? In the context of postcolonial literature the word ‘tribal literature’ used in the Scandinavian Writers’ Conference in 1967 sought to denote by this term the distinctive feature of representing people, things and ideas with their cultural authenticities.¹⁹ But will the rubric “Tribal Literature” fit into the postcolonial descriptive categories like “Third World Literature or “Indian Literature” or will this term make up for the in-between in “post” and “colonial”? Or will it be the “blank space” of postcolonial literature in the sense of unidentified and unexplored peoples and regions?²⁰ Postcolonial critic of the Indian sub-continent Aijaz Ahmad has vehemently argued against the theoretical category of “Third World Literature” because of “its equally homogenizing impulse to slot very diverse kinds of public aspirations under the unitary insignia of ‘nationalism’ and then to designate this nationalism as the determinate and epochal ideology for cultural production in non-Western societies;...”²¹ In the same vein he says:

I find it all the more difficult to speak of a ‘Third World literature’ when I know that I cannot confidently speak as a theoretical coherent category of an ‘Indian’ Literature...

The difficulty lies, rather, in the very premises that have governed the narrativisation of that history, which has (1) privileged High Textuality of a Brahminical kind to posit the unification of this literary history; or (2) assembled the history of the main texts of particular languages (in a very uneven way) to obtain this unity through the aggregative principle; or (3) attempted to reconstruct the ...themes in several languages but

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with ...the canonizing procedures of the 'great books' variety, with scant attempt to locate literary history within other sorts of histories in any consistent fashion.²²

Postcolonial narratives are considered to be contested terrains where the discourses of imperialism and its subjected others struggle for control over the field of representation. In such a contestation the category of "Third World Literature" or "Indian Literature" definitely does not provide for a conceptual or normative framework for the inclusion of 'difference' characterized by "Tribal Literature" or a tribal world-view. In her most widely-read essay, "Where Have All the Natives Gone?" Rey Chow examines the construction of images of the 'native' which, despite their ubiquity, remain elusive. 'Native' works, bifurcated as either timeless (the art museum sentiment) or historical (the ethnographic museum), are determined in post-imperialist discourse by the search for 'authenticity.' The concept of time in a tribal life-world cannot be represented within the western notion of a linear or chronological time internalized by dominant postcolonial societies. Chow argues that questions about the native are questions about the irreversibility of modernity: if technological reproduction is inevitable, so is cultural displacement.²³ Therefore, in a theoretical sense it is a postcolonial imperative before indigenous writers of North-East to transcend the qualitative space given by the connotation attached to the term tribe from a colonizer's point of view discussed above. The complex and dynamic nature of postcolonial identity formation is undoubtedly manifesting itself in the manner in which writers from indigenous communities of the region are positioning themselves against dominant cultures which they attempt to counter through their literary texts.²⁴ From a literary perspective it is important to examine the author's conception of the symbiotic relationship that exists between fiction, the society and the author. Representative authors from indigenous communities of the region writing in English and published by mainstream publishing houses have projected the specificities of their cultural life-world. But the question is can these literary work be placed under the rubric "Tribal literature"? In other words are the writings of these authors at least over the past decade necessarily 'tribal' in its content? Again how do writers writing in their own indigenous languages encounter the postcolonial? What is the postcolonial discursive space

represented by “Tribal Literature” in the emerging genre of “Literature of North-East India” - a canon that is gradually getting attention in the institutional space of metropolitan universities in India and abroad?

It has been widely debated the world over as to whether those who write in unrecognized tribal languages are a part of the postcolonial canon or not. The literary voices from below or the margins written in a lesser known language, without the privilege of being expressed in an alien cosmopolitan tongue is the predicament of a majority of writers in the post-colonial tribal world of the North-East. Unfortunately most of these writers do not occupy primacy over the English language writers. In the very popular mode of theorizing the post-colonial in English or in French, writers writing in their native tongues often get excluded from the post-colonial canon unless they also write in English. This throws up a double problematique: (1) indigenous writers writing in English on indigenous themes get reduced to only a special genre within the Post-Colonial rubric and (2) writing in English takes away much of the refinement available in tribal and indigenous languages. This problematique can neither be resolved within the rubric of the uncontaminated “tribal” or “indigenous” nor it could be reduced to the mere post-colonial. One might say that this displaces the tribal into the post-colonial, while it cannot recover the ‘tribal’ in the very form of the ‘tribal literature’. Then when and how does one exactly remove this binary division between the ‘tribal’ and the ‘post-colonial’?

As one looks for a space of intervention, ethics of self-representation interferes with the realm of ‘top-down’ working of the English language in producing a gentry of English language writers in the indigenous communities. This is also a moment of transforming the agency of the indigenous writer into the dominant canons of language and literature to *write in* or to *write back*. The contemporary phase for post-colonial theory considers this aspect of ‘transformation’ by describing how cultural and political schemata of the dominant ‘imprint themselves upon the bodily experiences and motivate agents in powerful ways’.²⁵ If this is how the dominant imprints work, there is ‘little payoff in separating the world of emotion and affect *from* the world of language and self-representation’.²⁶ So again what is then the possibility of an ethical intervention in what is unavailable for reflection and representation? Can we hear the pre-ontic murmur of the tribal self and the tribal world

beyond the devices of representation?

One has to take an epistemological stance here moving beyond both the anthropological as well as the ethical. The epistemological stance here does not concern with an object or subject of knowledge, it rather concerns here with a choice of what is beyond the alterity of the tribal. By beyond the alterity, one would mean a non-nativist non-symptomatic reading of ways of world-making as it happens in tribal literatures of India's North-East. For example, how do tribal spiritual experiences constitute the multifarious lived experiences of the tribes? Can this be defined in a language of representation? Or, does it produce an alternative to existing 'modern' ways of writing about oneself? Mrinal Miri articulated this epistemological stance, when he argued,

One thing that can certainly be said in favour of the tribal vision is that the disjunction between the disengaged original self and the samsaric world of the received view of spirituality (...) does not exist in this vision. The world of the tribesman is seamlessly continuous between the inanimate, the animate and the human; she/he is concerned with the contingencies of time and space as anything else in the world. Self-knowledge for the tribesman, therefore, must be bound by these contingencies. The episteme of the tribal vision is similarly continuous between the natural, the moral and the spiritual.²⁷

This epistemic continuity acts as the mediating factor between incommensurable worlds of alternatives and assists in recovering the tribal world from its representational contours. But it is also to be noted that such a recovery would serve as a decoy that would also substitute the ethnology and anthropology of the tribes by a visionary understanding of the 'signifying spaces' of the tribal universe. The question is, does such a signifying space that establishes continuity between apparently disjointed spaces of self-representation and spaces of signification within the tribal world act as a 'condition' for recovery of the tribal world?

These are questions which would enlarge the scope of postcolonial discourses on identities in North-East India both methodologically and politically, specifically addressing the issue of 'tribal identity'. If the idea of tribe has to be retrieved from the colonial descriptive categories and recast through self representation, postcolonial tribal narrative, both

literary and non-literary, can be said to be one which is conspicuous of an emerging identity-in-difference: firstly, it provides the terms in which the author gains a sense of his or her identity as 'other' and secondly articulates the ideological framework in which he or she understands the world as an insider of an indigenous life-world. Postcolonial narratives thrive on a celebration of identity-in-difference and it is in articulating this identity-in-difference that "Tribal Literatures" can occupy a very prominent place within the genre of Postcolonial Literature beyond the hierarchy and individuation which categorizes canonical/ institutional postcolonial studies. One finds that in the institutionalization of postcolonial studies in metropolitan universities, even in conceptualizing categories like "Literatures of North-East India" the word 'tribe' has not been problematized adequately in relation to the 'postcolonial'. Simon During writes:

It is important not to forget that the postcolonial paradigm appeals largely to whites and diasporic Indian intellectuals working in the West. It does not appeal to those closest to the continuing struggle against white domination – to Kooris activists in Australia or the South African PAC, say; to offer another instance, I do not think there is a Maori word for 'postcolonialism'.²⁸

Here During insists that concept or term such as "postcolonialism" is utterly foreign and irrelevant to the Maoris in their struggle for autonomy and self-determination. The Maoris of New Zealand or Kooris, the aboriginal people of Australia, perhaps do not have a word for 'postcolonialism' in their native language, because they have no need for it. Probably many tribal languages in India also may not have a word for 'postcolonial' in their languages. Postcolonial critics have admitted to the ambivalence of their own critical predicament of having to say "no" to a structure which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately, because of the hegemonic mode of self vigilance of a theory that paralyzes thought into binaries and yet cannot represent 'the unrepresentable' of native culture and history. Creative writing has the potential to claim cultural or linguistic autonomy, as never fixed and isolated but always on an ongoing articulation of differences. In doing postcolonial studies in the mixed space *between* centre and periphery, between First and Third Worlds

postcolonial intellectuals have always experienced the unstable combination of power and powerlessness, identity and difference. Alternative textualities produced through the agencies of creative writing, particularly by indigenous writers from North-East India could be the in-between of the literature of the First and Third Worlds without seeking a narrative closure, in the sense in which Barthes would describe as 'going beyond the sentence'²⁹. It is in transcending the limits of a meaning in a sentence that the closure of the sentence is saved. In the process of reinscription and negotiation of identities through creative writing, the literary self can assume a new meaning in the in-between of subjective and intersubjective experiences. This new dimension in literary representation emerges as the process of agency both as a historical development and as the narrative agency of historical discourse. The emergence of such a process of urgency allows the articulation of native and subaltern in tribal discourses to emerge as relocation and reinscription. The possibilities of creative writing as a representational agency lies in this relocation and re inscription and therefore has great potential for articulating alter/native identities.

Notes

- ¹ Nadine Gordimer in the New Introduction to Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, London: The Orion Press Inc., 2003.
- ² Edward Said, *Orientalism* New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p. 24.
- ³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 1, "Race," Writing, and Difference" (Autumn, 1985), pp. 243-261.
- ⁴ See Esther Syiem, "Pushing Frontiers: The Continuing Evolution of Khasi Literature" in B War ed. *Tribal Literature Of North-East India*, Shillong 2009. pp9-16. The author refers to the work of R. S. Lyngdoh to examine the dichotomy and ambivalence in the context of Khasi literary tradition, which may be relevant for such an examination in the literary traditions of other communities in North-East India.
- ⁵ Charlotte Seymour-Smith, *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1986), p. 281.
- ⁶ See Sukalpa Bhattacharjee, "State, Insurgency and (Wo)man's Human Rights: Two Cases From North-East India" in R. Dhamala and S. Bhattacharjee eds. *Human Rights And Insurgency: The NE-India* New Delhi, Shipra Publications. 2002. pp126-139.
- ⁷ See Liisa Malkki's "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholar and Refugees" *Cultural Anthropology*, 7(1). pp24-44, 1992 as quoted by Dolly Kikon in her essay, "From Loincloth, Suits, to Battle Greens," in Sanjib Baruah (ed.), *Beyond Counter-*

- Insurgency: Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 83.
- ⁸ See John F. Mitchell's *Report (Topographical, Political and Military) on the North-East Frontier of India*, Calcutta: Superintendent of Government printing, 1883.p 9. Quoted by B.Kar in "When was the Postcolonial?" in Sanjib Baruah ed. *Beyond Counter-Insurgency: Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009, p50.
- ⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" was originally published in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg's eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- ¹⁰ See David Lloyd's "Genet's Genealogy: European Minorities and the Ends of the Canon", *Cultural Critique*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987 pp 161-185. Lloyd speaks of internal minorities within a minority group which may be extended to 'internal orient'.
- ¹¹ Mahasweta Devi, "The Author in Conversation" in *Imaginary Maps* (Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) Thema, Calcutta 1993, p ii.
- ¹² Rualzakhimi Ralte's "Representing the Tribal in Indian Literature" in B.War (ed.) *Tribal Literature of North-East India*, Shillong 2009.p159.
- ¹³ Mahasweta Devi, "The Author in Conversation" in *Imaginary Maps* (Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) Thema, Calcutta 1993, pxi.
- ¹⁴ See Robert Lindsay, *Anecdotes of An Indian Life*, Shillong, NEHU, 1997.
- ¹⁵ See J.N. Chowdhury's *The Khasi Canvas* (A Cultural And Political History), Shillong 1978 and Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf's *The Naked Nagas: Headhunters of Assam in Peace and War*, Guwahati: Spectrum Publishers, 2004.
- ¹⁶ Aime Cesaire as quoted in Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 30.
- ¹⁷ See Stuart Hall's *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage, 1997. Quoted in S. Khaiminthang's unpublished thesis "The Tribal World of Chinua Achebe's Novels: A Postcolonial Perspective", 2011.
- ¹⁸ See Prasenjit Biswas, "Ethnophilosophy: Conceptual Artefacts, Wisdom and Critique of Anthropocentrism in India's Northeast" in Seminar Proceedings entitled *Literatures And Oratures As Knowledge Systems: Texts From The North-East*, Centre of Advanced Study, Department Of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, 2009.
- ¹⁹ As quoted by Anuradha Ghose in "The Notion of Identity Formation and the Paradigm of Cultural Resistance in the Novels of Chinua Achebe," *Chinua Achebe: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*, edited by Mala Pandurang, Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006, p. 34. Quoted in S. Khaiminthang's unpublished PhD. thesis "The Tribal World of Chinua Achebe's Novels: A Postcolonial Perspective", 2011.
- ²⁰ The 'blank spaces' were unexplored regions where the colonialists thought the cannibals and monsters lived. See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, New York, Routledge, 1995.
- ²¹ Aijaz Ahmad, "'Indian Literature': Notes towards the Definition of a Category" in *In Theory: Classes, Nations Literatures*, Delhi OUP 1994.p243.
- ²² Ibid.pp243-44.

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- ²³ Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993), p. 48.
- ²⁴ See Tilottoma Misra eds. *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India* (2 Volumes) New Delhi, OUP, 2011.
- ²⁵ Arjun Appadurai, "Life after Primordialism" in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p.148.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Mrinal Miri, "The Spiritual and the Moral" in Tilottoma Misra (ed.) *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India: Poetry and Essays*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010, p.116.
- ²⁸ Simon. During, "Postcolonialism and Globalization." *Meanjin* 51.2 (1992): 339-53.
- ²⁹ Roland Barthes and Lionel Duisit, An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative, *New Literary History*, Vol. 6, No. 2, *On Narrative and Narratives*, Johns Hopkins University Press (Winter, 1975), pp. 237-272.

Some 19th Century Texts and the Indian Nation

Mohan G. Ramanan*

The idea of India is still in the making and there can be no India if we continue the sad neglect of marginalized regions of our country. Although the texts cited in this paper are not about tribal India, there are glancing references to what Partha Chatterjee called the fragments of the nation. Nations are constructed through language and in my context it would be constructs in the best use to which language can be put and that is in literature. Further it is not about English mainly, though English is central to my concerns. It is about Bhasha texts and their transmission to us through English. The original authors, of course, were innocent in the main about the English rendition of their works originally written in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Urdu or Bengali, but they were not unaware of the importance of English in their lives and in the life of the nation which they were conceiving. Writers like Enugula Veeraswami, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, Chandu Menon, Vedanayagam Pillai or Veereshalingam Pantulu were fully conversant with English, had exposure to English education and many of them were in fact employed by the British Raj in various capacities. In their work we see the Indo- British literary and cultural encounter somewhat dramatically and the result of this encounter is a division of the soul which is a necessary and sufficient condition for creativity. “Out of our quarrels with others we make rhetoric,” says Yeats, “out of our quarrels with ourselves we make poetry”.

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Our writers were not necessarily great admirers of everything British but they had a healthy appreciation of the benevolent rule of the colonial power and they probably shared Dadabhai Naoroji's sense of the fortune visited on India by Providence in enabling the rule of law and order to prevail in the country.

After all many of them were aware of the evils of child marriage, the plight of widows, Sati or concremation, the threat posed by Thugs and Pindaris. The school system was to a large extent managed privately in Tols or Patshalas and in the Bengal Presidency the Kayasthas were employed in Kulin Brahmin homes and those of other notables to teach the young children. The punishment for small infringements has been graphically detailed in Pandit Sivanath's study. Here is one particularly obnoxious example.

Now we come to the modes of punishment that prevailed in *Patshalas*. The punishments commonly inflicted were barbarous in the extreme. They were *hat-chari*, *laru-gopal*, *tribhanga*, etc. One doomed to the first had to receive as many cuts from the cane on the palm of the hands as the Guru was pleased to inflict. In *laru-gopal*, the offender was made to stoop with his knees and one of his hands on the ground, and then to stretch out the other hand, on which a full-size brick or some other heavyweight was placed. The victim was required to remain in this condition for some prescribed time, and if, his hands being tied, the weight was even slightly displaced, he had to receive a sound caning. In *tribhanga*, the sufferer was made to stand on one leg, placing the other on it so that the two might form something like a prop, then as in *laru-gopal*, some heavy weight was placed on his stretched out palm. If in this painful position the poor boy bent a little, changed his attitude in the least, or happened to throw down the weight, then who could count the cuts he received from the cane of the tyrant? There was another mode of punishment, which was called *chyangdola*. This was inflicted on boys playing the truant. So and so has not come to the patshala, or has run away from it, and the Guru deputed half a dozen strong lads to capture him. They do their errand in the best way they can. They seize the delinquent, throw him on his back on the ground and then lift him up in the air, some holding him by the arms and others by the legs, and carry him off to the Guru, who gives him a severe flogging (Lethbridge 1907: 23-24).

It must have come as a contrast that in the English schools run by missionaries and other philanthropists this Indian version of Wackford Squeers and Dotheboy's Hall were conspicuous by their absence and indeed what one found was Christian charity, unctuousness and an earnest attempt to win hearts and souls for Christ to which the more susceptible among the natives were easily drawn. But these conditions did not blind our writers to the negative aspects of British rule and I believe it is this factor which to some extent accounts for the sharpness and clarity of their work.

Enugula Veeraswamy was a Dubash in the service of the Company. He, as his title suggests was familiar with two languages (in his case actually English, Telugu and Tamil) and he was engaged in interpretation and translation for the English masters. He was well regarded by his employers because he rose quickly in his career. In 1830 he, now a man of means and with good contacts, set out on a journey to Kasi. The route he took more or less was the classic pilgrimage route and covered good parts of South, Central and Eastern India. That someone goes on a pilgrimage and in now good social conditions (the Thugs have been rooted out, roads and bridges have been built, choultries for tired travelers exist) is not the remarkable fact but what is noteworthy is that Veeraswamy at the urging of his friend Komaleswaram Srinivasa Pillai wrote an account of the journey. Writing in India was not unknown though the strong oral traditions were sufficiently overwhelming and writing was a secondary activity. But English education and literacy allowed a man like Veeraswamy to write a Telugu account of his journey. This was first compiled by Pillai, who arranged the letters Veeraswamy wrote chronologically in a beautiful book form. The title in its Telugu MS was "Narrative of Enugula Verraswamayya's Pilgrimage to Kasi" and it is stated that it was composed by the author, suggesting that the narrative is not his doing. Pillai as we saw was the compiler. But compiling is one thing, publishing it is another. In fact the narrative first appeared in published form in Tamil. It was translated into Tamil by Panayuri Venku Modalari and published by him. This, one may speculate, had an impact on Veeraswamy's large circle of Tamil friends since he himself was a resident of Madras. It was subsequently translated into Marathi by Nagapuri Veeraswami Mudalari and it is from this version that an English translation was done at the instance

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of the Resident at Nagpur. The Englishman's motive was to disseminate Veeraswamy's narrative more widely. One may speculate if this was not the result of the colonial desire to spread the message of the Pax Britannica, an idea which informs Veeraswamy's work. But Veeraswamy wrote back saying that he himself was getting the work translated into English and even sent the Resident some samples. But this translation was incomplete and in fact is not available today. The English work now available is a rendering into that language by Sitapati and Purushottam in 1973. This little publishing history reveals much. First it tells us how much struggle there has been in getting something written and in the context of an oral culture this must have been a significant event. Second the text we are using is the end result of several versions and can by no means be directly attributed to Veeraswamy. Between his first writing of the work and the contemporary translation much water has flowed under the bridge and we are left with a problematic text. But it is the text we have and I want to explore it a bit. Let me first of all assert that this is a Text in the Barthesian sense of the term because it is not just a single person's account of a journey. It embodies a discourse on Sacred India and is useful for an understanding of what Partha Chatterjee has spoken of. This is the tension in native minds between the public sphere of the Raj and the inner or private sphere of unviolated Hindu sentiment and values. In Veeraswamy's journal *Kasiyatra Charitra* we see a dramatization of this issue.

Veeraswamy adopts the conventions of the western journal or diary. The entries are chronological and dated and we do get from his account a sense of the landscape and the society of his times. There is a Jamesian solidity of specification, a thinginess about the narrative. It is about real places, real people and real things. Here is a sample entry, the first in the Journal, dated 18May 1830:

I left Madras on the 18th, Tuesday of May in the year 1830 at 9 in the night and camped at Madhavaram village. This place is situated at a distance of about an hour's journey from my garden at Thandayaruveydu. A salt canal, which has been bridged, has to be crossed on the way. The water-table is high in the soil here. Water is also sweet and plentiful. The *Dravida Vaishnavas* who reside here make a living by trading in *Samidhas* and such other materials at Madras. (*Kasiyatra Charitra*, 1)

I have chosen this passage not only because it is the opening and initiating letter in the Journal but also because it is so clearly representative of the tone and tenor of the work. It tells us so much about the landscape, the soil, the kind of water, the people, their occupation, and their economy. For a culture slowly emerging into modernity the act of writing is an act of recovery, of preservation. This passage and others like this tell us about the time frame in which Veeraswamy was operating, the road taken, the soil and agricultural features of the place, the rivers, the crops, the culture, rituals and practices of the people, the dress worn and many other details of the minutiae of daily existence. To this extent it is close to the newly emerging form of the novel in India, which as we know was an import from the West and influenced greatly by the novelistic tradition of England, predominantly realistic as it is. But something else is happening in this Journal. Every now and then Veeraswamy disrupts the realistic details by alluding to what we call the *Sthala Purana*, the legends and myths associated with the place. This may be due to Veeraswamy's desire to transcend the real and go to the realty behind appearances. Again and again Veeraswamy's interruptions gesture towards a time and space matrix which is Transcendental, ahistorical and which recalls the pristine truths of our culture. This has the effect of putting the real place in perspective and allowing us to see the place as having a hoary tradition. The interruption of the realistic narrative by infusing it with a transcendental dimension gives the narrative a spiritual character. It is Veeraswamy's attempt to trace India's Sacred Geography.

Why does he do this? I believe the answer is in Veeraswamy's problematic relation with his English masters. He is acutely conscious of criticism levelled by his English associates on Hindu practices, religious traditions, social life and rituals. The charge usually is that much of this is hocus pocus, that it is dark and evil and pagan and that Hindus are in the grip of superstition. I believe that the author is combining, to use Meenakshi Mukherjee's inimitable formulation, the Nutana with the Purana, and is satisfying on one hand the modern hunger for information and English curiosity about the customs and practices of their subject race and on the other hand gesturing towards the sacred. It also has the entirely modern dimension of tracing the contours of a nation by giving us the narrative of its geographical space. At the same time Veeraswamy repeatedly shows his desire to go beyond mere information (a task he

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did as Dubash) and to assert the sacred character of the geographical space and to foreground this sense of an India of the imagination which is spiritual and nothing less than that. In what follows below I shall consider some novels and attempt to trace similar, though not identical, trajectories in the narrative.

Our next text is Chandu Menon's *Indulekha* (1889). It is the story of a spirited Nair woman called Indulekha and her love for Madhavan, an English educated young Nair man. Both love each other even though Indulekha's guardian, Panchumenon, the maternal uncle, is opposed to Madhavan, whose learned insolence displeases him. The uncle is, in fact, party to the enactment of the Sambandham rite, with Indulekha promised to the old lecherous Surinambuthiripad. Indulekha rejects the advances of the old man who to save face proposes that he should at least have a Sambandham with a helpless young maid in Indulekha's home, called Kalyanikutty. This happens but the world thinks that Indulekha has been conquered by the Nambothiri. Madhavan who has gone away on a long journey unable to bear Indulekha's coquetry and her uncle's opposition to their union is in despair until he is told the truth. There is a happy reunion between the couple but this is possible only because the journey undertaken by Madhavan has taught him many lessons. It is a voyage of self discovery which takes him to Bombay, Calcutta and other places and this serves the dual purpose of delineating the landscape of India, her territorial space as it were and also allowing Madhavan to take in the lie of the land apart from enabling him leisure to despair. He rails against fate and women but quickly finds friends from other parts of India who help him to learn the value of human friendship and the ways of the world. With Madhavan falling ill, the author contrives a meeting of Madhavan with Govinda Pannikar and Govindankutty Menon, friends of the former, who rescue him from a bad fate and take him back home and to Indulekha. The novel, of course, is more than this bare outline. The finely delineated characters, the description of landscape, place and locale are all part of Chandu Menon's realistic craft. But Menon is a Sanskrit scholar and he is also unable to accept the hegemony of his British masters, particularly when they interfere with age old Nair customs like the Sambandham. The reformer in Menon, of course allows him to write a spoof on Kerala social customs and he is unsparing in his criticism of institutions like the marriage rites of the Nairs. He is obviously

sympathetic to what Partha Chatterjee has called the fragment of the nation - the woman who finds herself receiving unwelcome attentions from males and indeed having to succumb to patriarchal pressures by accepting unwelcome sexual relations. It is also about the new Indian woman and the new Indian man, symbolized in Indulekha and Madhavan. The English learning of both is highlighted. Indulekha's proficiency in the arts and in music and in Sanskrit, not to speak of English is foregrounded. Madhavan's rationality and rejection of religion and effete traditions is brought out in the famous 18th chapter of the novel where the characters are discussing matters of faith, scepticism and belief and this is linked to discussions about the kind of nation which is to be imagined. The book is valuable for its exploration of Kerala life and its foregrounding of the new Indian Woman. But it is not as though Chandu Menon was a feminist. If anything he wants reform from within but progressive legislation by the British masters, particularly on matters of property rights and women and marriage rites like the Sambandham, evoked in him a nascent fury. He wrote a long memorandum to the Malabar Marriage Commission wherein he defended local customs and usages, which on the face of it fell foul of secular governmental legislation. His point was that women married according to Marumakkathayam practices were not necessarily ill used or enticed away by lecherous men or to be seen as committing adultery. His ambivalence on the Sambandam question is interesting. He opposed the colonial power's attempts to get the Sambandam system banned because he saw this as an unwarranted intrusion into the domestic or inner sphere of native life. He would not mind the Nairs reforming but it had to come from within. However it should be noted that the tendency of the novel is to accept the idea of progress which is linked to English education and to oppose the superstitions of the Hindu faith. In style also we see Menon trying to write a novel which will have the linearity one associates with the English fictional realistic tradition but in many ways he subverts linearity by invoking a Pauranic way of seeing. This is most dramatically available in his introduction of Indulekha which is an imitation of the classical Sanskrit Kavya tradition of description. Here is a passage of Sterne like self reflexivity:

When I began writing this chapter, a fear that crept over me led me to the sad conclusion that I might lack the ability to describe beautiful heroines.

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But there is no escape; write I must and according to my ability. Indulekha is about eighteen years old, when this story begins. To me it seems easier to say something about the overall radiance of her form than to present in detail individual features. The various qualities, which constitute beauty cannot be listed easily. In different situations, different combinations of features make a form beautiful. A dark complexion is generally associated with lack of beauty in a person. All the same alongside a combination of other attractive features, a dark complexion is considered beautiful. In my opinion, beauty is the result of an inner glow, of an inner radiance. In traditional Indian literature, jet-black hair and blue- black eyes are considered to be an important aspect of beauty. Yet while describing the quality of beauty in a woman, English poets generally speak of golden hair and light –blue eyes- precisely what we in raw Malayalam speech derisively term 'cat-eyed'. (*Indulekha*,5)

Chandu Menon goes on to consider catholically different kinds of beauty and settles for that kind which is both appealing at first sight and continues to attract on recall. This is not the monopoly of either Indian or European women. In opting for this universalism Chandu Menon seems to be keen on obliterating the inferiority Indian women felt in relation to their European counterparts. But Indulekha transcends boundaries:

If you survey some women from head to foot it may not be possible to fault any feature, yet overall, they may not seem attractive at all. On the other hand, others, if observed carefully, may have faulty features but look extremely beautiful and appealing. For one to recognize beauty in a woman or to say that a woman is beautiful, her features should charm and attract both at first sight and in the thoughtful scrutiny of recall. At that time, when the features are recollected as a whole, the result should be an intense inner glow. A real beauty should not only captivate (the mind) at first sight, it should continue to fascinate and arouse a continuing desire to contemplate its form. It is such a woman that I conclude a beauty. Indulekha is the epitome of such beauty in women. Let me make just one observation about Indulekha's complexion. Only by touch could one distinguish between her skin and the brocade border of the mundu, which normally covered her midriff. It was impossible to tell by mere

sight where the gold-threaded border of the mundu she normally wore ended and where her body began. The deep black of her locks, its length, its abundance, and softness was most alluring. As for her lips, I wonder whether it is possible to see their likeness in women who are not Europeans. Her eyes – their length, their triple tone, their sparkle, the way she uses them on occasion, and the intense fire in them—can be described only by young men who have been subjected to their effect. In addition, she was at an age when her bosom was filling out. Is there a man invulnerable to the power of those growing breasts? Can any one describe the bewitching beauty of this Indulekha. (*Indulekha*,6)

This is, as Udaya Kumar (Mukherjee 2002:161-192) in a perceptive essay has pointed out, in the classic Sanskrit tradition of description of female beauty. By employing an indigenous tradition and convention Menon was demonstrating the power of the Pauranic on Indian sensibility. But the point, of course, is that this kind of description is framed in a realist convention drawn from English or Western tradition of the novel form. One could quote many other instances but space prevents me from further instantiation of the point I am making which is simple enough. Chandu Menon is using a European narrative genre but instilling in it Indian forms of narration to make a hybrid genre. This synecdochically mimes the efforts of Indians to forge a modern temper without necessarily negating their own culture. India is, therefore, a Third space – eschewing the extremes of both unbridled Europeanization or the extreme of fundamentalist native tradition and usage. Also by peppering his narrative with Sanskrit quotations and learning Menon hints at a way of life, which is pristine and native. But the point of course is that this, like Veeraswamy's text, represents a hybrid blend of two cultures and in this respect it is a parable of the Indian nation, then in its nascence, which is a blend of tradition and modernity.

When Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, fresh from Calcutta University set out to be a writer he chose the English language for creative expression. He wrote *Rajmohan's Wife*, a version of Romantic fiction from the English tradition. We have in the novel the ingredients of coincidence, intrigue, Gothic violence, villainy, heroism and Platonic love, characteristic of the Romance.. The novel is interesting as an allegory of the nation as Makarand Paranjape (Mukherjee 2002:143-160) has

pointed out but its less than vigorous style flaws the whole enterprise. Chattopadhyaya quickly made the logical and correct decision to write in his native Bengali and soon he created Bengali fiction of a magnitude which put the language on the map of modernity. He is a maker of modern Bengali prose. In *Ananda Math* (1882) we see the features of his historical writing which is instructive for our present purposes. He is writing a piece of historical fiction. It is, in Lukacian terms, more a historical romance and less a historical novel. The difference between the two is that in the historical romance history has only a cardboard existence and scarcely determines the nature of the events being played out. This is what happens in *Ananda Math*. In a historical novel we find that history is a character and determines the fate of individuals. The Santans were a historical fact but their activities in historical terms were far more sporadic than the novel allows them to be. Here there is determination to embarrass the English though a passage elided out in subsequent editions praises British rule. Bankim's real enemy is the intruder Muslim and he is attacking them for their role in marginalizing Hindus. Hindu pride, vigour and manhood can come alive if the almost religious sense of the nation as Mother can galvanize them into action. Thus he conceives of the nation as Mother Goddess. By combining a political with a religious sense he set the tone for a particular brand of nationalism, which we now associate with the Hindu Right. It is exclusive, authoritarian and violent. At the same time the implications of this kind of nationalism for Woman needs to be noted. Suddenly Woman, who is otherwise exploited and oppressed, has to bear the burden of national culture and become the repository of values. If this were to liberate her, that would not be a bad thing but as Tanika Sarkar and other scholars have pointed out the conflation of Hindu nation with Hindu wife is only another strategy of an unrepentant patriarchy to keep gender relations in an unequal state. Chattopadhyaya's women characters are all powerful and colourful and they play the role of leader but when the action is over, a woman like Debi Chaudhurani retreats into domesticity, as does Kalyani in *Anand Math*. She reunites with Mahendra after the rebellion concludes, so to speak. In fact the depiction of Woman in this novel shows her as a sexual snare, someone to be shunned if you want to be the nation's Santan. Only if the woman takes over the role of man and disguises her sex is she safe for men. This is unflattering and he has been severely criticized for

this depiction. But we must also not forget that if he seems regressive in this matter of gender then in terms of the decolonization of the mind he has forthright views. His was no passive Hinduism and in his prose works like his commentary on the *Gita*, his *Dharmatattwa* and in his apotheosis of Lord Krishna into the overbearing aggressive philosopher in *Krishnacarita*, Chattopadhyaya indulges in a recovery of tradition, eschewing those aspects of it which did not suit his nationalistic purposes. In his *Letters on Hinduism* we see him explaining Hindu traditions, practices, mores and customs from a refreshingly positivistic perspective. He is hardly orthodox and he is able to explain the Sraaddha ceremony, which William Hastie had criticized, in enlightened rational terms. Bankim, in other words, plays out his profound ambivalence and we come away from his work convinced that Sudipto Kaviraj was correct in assessing Chattopadhyaya's consciousness as fractured. It is the working out of a Positivist mindset engaging with an age old culture. It seems that in his fiction and in *Ananda Math* he could dramatize these conflicts far better than he could in discursive prose.

Chattopadhyaya's nationalism is at odds with that of Mahatma Gandhi or Tagore's. Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* had delineated the contours of his idea of India. It was not to be exclusive and if his subsequent writings and actions are a criterion he was inclusive to the extent of wanting Muslims and Harijans to be a part of the nation as equal citizens. But the real point of *Hind Swaraj* was the call to introspect and to purify oneself from within. One could not have Swaraj or independence if one did not have Swaraj, control over oneself. For Gandhi, India was a spiritual idea and nothing if not universal in its acceptance of the inward life. That introspection was to change the way we viewed the other. It allowed for the play of difference. This meant that the Dalits and the minorities would have an honoured place in the national scheme of things. It was a compassionate nationalism and to some extent it was determined also by ideas of the nation having to do with Spirit. As Ernst Renan would have it, a nation is a spiritual idea. Gandhi says that India in the traditional conception was not simply a geographic space but a cultural entity. He was alluding to the traditional concept of Bharatavarsha which united in the spirit Gandhara (modern day Khandahar of hijacking notoriety) in the West with Khambhuja (modern day Kampuchea) in the East and the Himalayas in the North with Kanyakumari in the South. It is a view of

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the nation as a cultural space and the sense of the sacred is of course integral to it. That is why Gandhi repeatedly spoke of Rama Rajya. He has been criticized for using Hindu terminology but this is the kind of criticism, which is literal, and refuses to see the larger question. Gandhi's Ram Rajya was not about Hindu hegemony. It was above denominations and simply drew on cultural memory. I believe this was understood keenly by the Hindu Right because it sharply differentiated itself from Gandhi in the similar recourse to cultural memory it itself promoted. The difference is between exclusive cultural hegemony, which the Hindu Right represents, and Gandhi's inclusive acceptance of plenitude and plurality.

However, Gandhi comes through as a stern moralist who stresses Duty. In Tagore, who Gandhi called Gurudev, we see a negation of the Western notions of the nation which were the direct result of capitalism, industrial revolution and colonialism, much of it located in and originating in the revolutions of 1848 in Europe. The western nation state was the result of the scramble for power among European States, which until then had an almost undifferentiated sense of the mind of Europe. Tagore saw in this European enterprise nothing but the will to power and the mechanical organization of a people for economic and commercial exploitation. The nation and nationalism therefore became ideas deeply suspect for him. In contrast he speaks of a global world of interdependence. Live locally, think globally, was his motto. This is seen in his efforts at urging an Idea of Man and of Creative Unity and East-West rapprochement. He saw India as having in her the potential of telling the world how important it was to live adhesively in friendship and in a spirit of active tolerance. The local, the specific and the region mattered for Tagore who scarcely spoke of India in any pan Indian manner. However, he was Indian and patriotic alright but with an idea of India which promoted diversity and celebrated difference. His excellent essays on nationalism bespeak as much but I believe it is in *Gora* that it gets brilliant artistic expression and representation.

I believe *Gora* serialized in the Bangla monthly *Probasi* between 1907 and 1909 and published as a book in 1909 articulates Tagore's sense of India suggestively. It is about religious fundamentalism, religious reform, human relationships and about friendship—all important Tagorean themes. In a way this book does much more to project Tagore's inclusiveness and eclecticism than any discursive argument might. *Gora*

is the story of a character eponymously named who is an orthodox Sanatani Hindu. While he has a respect for the Brahmos he is unable to accept their heterodoxy. His friend Binoy who is like a disciple, drifts away from him because of his affection for the dignified Brahmo gentleman Paresh Babu and the latter's daughters—Sucharita and Lolita. Binoy, moreover falls in love with Lolita after an initial affection for Sucharita and increasingly draws away from Gora's orthodoxy. The Brahmo elder is a foil for the Brahmin mother of Gora, Ananda Moyi, who in spite of her orthodoxy has the tolerance and wide sympathies which a Brahmo in that nineteenth century context presumably would have. But it is not as though the Brahmos are entirely tolerant and accepting. Paresh Babu certainly is but in contrast there is a fundamentalist streak in Brahmos like Baradasundari who in spite of the liberation from superstition their faith entails, have as much pride and prejudice as an extreme Sanatani might. Thus the characters are ranged against and with one another and Tagore writes a masterpiece of a discussion novel or a novel of ideas. The upshot of it all is that Gora moves away from his orthodoxy for the love of Sucharita, the Brahmo girl and even countenances the marriage of Binoy on heterodox lines, an act encouraged by Anandamoyi who at this point gets transformed almost into an allegorical picture of Mother India herself. The Brahmo gentleman, Paresh Babu has none of the pettiness of the average Brahmo and leans heavily on the Sanatani lady, Anandamoyi to resolve the issues. The book is about the choice between extreme attitudes and moderation and I believe moderation wins. Thus we see a satire on both Brahmos and Sanatanis and a rejection of extreme attitudes. The centre is where Tagore wants his characters to belong and clearly that is where Gora and Binoy are headed as are the two sisters, Sucharita and Lolita. Meenakshi Mukherjee is absolutely right when she asserts: "By the end of the novel we recognize this interpellation to be an enrichment ; the reticulation of the public domain of debate and the private arena of love, affection and friendship seems to initiate a process that might lead to wholeness" (Mukherjee1997,xi). Tagore's quest for wholeness was lifelong and it would not be wrong for us to see the novel as an allegory of nationhood. If India is to be a nation it should be based on principles different from that of aggressive nation states in Europe. It is indeed inevitable that the Indian nation must reflect a principle of wholeness, integrity of the inner

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and the outer and affirm, as it cannot but do so, the plenitude and plurality of a democracy. Tagore's India is also a spiritual idea but unlike Gandhi's view it is made up of the fragments of the nation—the local spaces, regions and language groups—each is a part of a whole and India is that Transcending principle of Wholeness. In such a scheme of things, neither the religious Right nor the secular Left is relevant. Right wing Hindu ideas and extreme Left wing scepticism both get short shrift from Tagore, a point we must note at a time when in his 150th year there is an attempt at appropriation by both the Right and the Left of Tagore's legacy. A spiritual basis for the nation, which Tagore implies and which is implicit in *Gora*, can rest only in a fusion of both Sanatana Hinduism and Brahmoism collaborating and adjusting each to the other. It must also effect a rapprochement between East and West. After all Gora is no Sanatani Hindu. He has Irish blood in him. The crisis comes when the Puritan Gora realizes that he is after all a firangi and that his claims to ritual purity are false. Similarly Binoy cannot accept all the restrictions of extreme Brahmoism and Paresh Babu, the Brahmo gentleman, cannot but see the necessity of relaxing his high minded Brahmoism for the sake of the happiness of his ward. The idea of India on this showing is flexible, plural, hardly rigid and is precisely in tune with Tagore's description of the nation as he understood it to be.

For want of time I shall not attempt any elaborate analysis of novels like *Rajasekhara Charitra (Fortune's Wheel)* by Veereshalingam Pantulu, a Telugu writer who does an imitation of both Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* and Dr. Johnson's *Rasselas*, with the same moral overtones and the same picture of a gullible but pious man who is constantly paying the price for his uprightness and truthfulness. There are grim moments when women are forced against their will, of heroic fights put up by chivalrous young men, of evil personified and of good winning over evil. The point to note is that here is an example of a highly developed modern consciousness attempting in Telugu to repeat Goldsmith and Johnson, two eminently imitable writer, who were the stock in trade of the reading public made up of English educated and cultivated native gentleman. Veereshalingam Pantulu in other words is attempting to modernize the Telugu novel by using the conventions of the English novel but neither Goldsmith nor Johnson who are his models are in the realistic tradition. Indeed they stand for a neo classicism within the English

ambience and even for a conservative rearguard action against the modernity of the English Eighteenth century. My view is that the Indian nineteenth century in a way presents the same problems to the writer as the eighteenth did to the English ones. There is the tension between age old values and modernity and Veereshalingam surely a reformer is not so radical that he will willingly barter away the age old verities for the sake of progress. This tension is visible in the form of his novella which moves seamlessly like Veeraswamy's text from the actual to the ideal, the real to the transcendental. That in a way captures the spirit of India which for our intelligentsia of the nineteenth century is a spiritual entity facing the humiliation of being controlled by the British, admiring of some aspects of that rule but fiercely proud of the inner, private, domestic sphere where the Hindu values remain supreme. This then is an enactment of the Partha Chatterjee thesis of the public and private sphere, one led by colonial rule, the other by the patriarchal male Hindu.

Space also prevents me from spending too much time on a similar text from Tamil *The Life and Times of Pratapa Mudaliar (Pratapa Mudaliar Charitram)* written by a Christian convert from Mayuram in the erstwhile Madras Presidency—Mayuram Vedanayagam Pillai. He was English educated and a Munsiff in the service of the Raj and deeply concerned about social ills and in particular the condition of Woman. His novel in Tamil, sometimes referred to as the first Tamil novel, has several passages of philosophical wisdom and instruction. He wrote an English Preface to his Tamil novel in which he states that he wrote this work in order to supply the want of prose works in Tamil and to give practical illustrations of moral maxims. He was clearly a social reformer and this novel contains passages on themes like the effects of corruption, the importance of the mother tongue, the greatness of parents, education of children. Here is the heroine Gnanambal, appropriately named, teaching Pratapa:

Good looks are not universally acknowledged. A person may be considered beautiful by some but ugly by others. And then there are people who see beauty where there's none. Even the crow sees golden beauty in its young. But is there anyone who does not acknowledge good nature and good sense? A noble and learned man is of much use to the world. But beauty is evident only in youth and vanishes gradually with age. Good nature

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and good sense do not change with time or place. Cattle are not lovely to look at, yet they are very useful. Beauty is of little practical benefit. Poets compare Beauty to lightning but just as lightning produces thunder, beauty can bring misfortune, like acts of lust (*Pratapa Mudaliar Charitram*, 90)

To make this kind of instruction pleasant for his readers Pillai inserts many passages of amusing anecdotes, interesting stories, and humorous autobiographical sketches. Some critics have found fault with these frequent interruptions to the narrative but it must be noted that such procedures were not unknown to eighteenth century English novelists, that Johnson does the same in *Rasselas*, that Vedanayagam Pillai was in a way introducing a new literary genre into his culture and he was not necessarily the most sophisticated of artists. But what is important for me in this novel is the concern with a fragment of the nation - the condition of Woman. In the charming character of Gnanambal, we see the manner in which a patriarchal society puts forth obstructions to a woman's growth and how she excels in education and provides a beacon light to the men in her life.

At this point it would be appropriate to discuss two works by Kripabai Sattianathan, the Christian convert and proponent of Women's rights. I shall also refer to Pandita Rama Bai, the High Caste Brahmin woman who converted to Christianity and wrote about the Hindu widows and women, caste, and conversion. The two authors go hand in hand and in the context of my essay they represent one aspect of the nation – a fragment of the nation if you will, that is Woman. Sattianathan's novels *Kamala* (1894) and *Saguna* (1895) respectively focus on the Brahmin woman and on a converted Christian woman. The two novels are complementary because one is about the near impossible conditions under which a Brahmin woman functions and in particular the humiliations and troubles heaped on a child widow for no fault of her own. In the other it is about a Brahmin woman who has a fair understanding of her inferior status in Hindu society converting to Christianity. As a Christian she is able to get more space but then she is not completely free from the exploitation her sex is subjected to. The two novels put together can be seen as autobiographical because like her senior contemporary Pandita Rama Bai, Kripabai Sattianathan belonged

to upper caste Hindu stock and her parents converted and she grew up to be an intrepid fighter for women's rights and the education of her sex. She excelled in medicine and her writings had quite an impact on society which after a lull in the matter, now began taking up Women's issues. In particular the Woman Question got focussed on the debate regarding Nautch Girls and Devadasis which raged in the first decades of the twentieth century. Ramabai was a pilgrim to the United States which she posits as a democratic alternative to Britain which after all rules her land. In Ramabai we see both a postcolonial mind set and a fierce gender consciousness. It is tempered by her Brahminical ways and her obvious inwardness with Hindu values. Can we say that while her religion is Christianity her culture is Hindu? This is also evident in Kripabai's novel. She shows occasional irritation with Christian missionary zeal which she feels is an interference and while she is proud of her Christianity and even believes that the way to India's salvation is to accept the majesty of Christ, it is balanced by a reverence for Hindu ways. On the whole the *Upper Caste Hindu Woman* (1897) and the novels of Sattianathan are a stinging indictment of Sanatana Hindu mores. Ramabai shows her familiarity with Sanskrit in her profuse quotations from the Manu Smrti and her tract can be seen as an expose of the Manu Smrti. Kripabai Sattianathan's novels are a plea for the education of the Indian woman and her amelioration, a strain strongly available in Rambai. It is in education that freedom lies. That is the burden of Shevantibai Nikambe's *Ratanbai: A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Young Wife* (1895) and even a classic like Govardhanram Tripathi's *Saraswatichandra* (1887-1892) where the woman is seen as highly educated and cultivated and this is seen as a measure of her freedom. In Ruzva's *Umrao Jan Ada* (1899) the high class Nautch girl Umarao is educated and clearly while her profession has declined and got degraded, a woman of learning and charm like Umrao is irresistible. The education of Woman was a strain in nationalist thinking which would get stronger with the arrival of women like Muthulakshmi Reddy, the first woman legislator of the Madras Assembly and Sister Nivedita, devotee, educationist and founder of the first college for Women in India – Bethune College.

It was not as though women were alone in their struggle. In upper caste Indian men there was sufficient awareness of the dispossessed and the downtrodden. In lower caste Malayalam novels, as Dilip Menon

(Mukherjee 2002:41-72) has brilliantly pointed out, the fragment of the nation represented by the subaltern Dalit classes gets focus. In Potheru Kunhambu's *Saraswativijayam* (1893) we see the injustice meted out to a Dalit by the Namboothiri landowner and his rise to a position of importance in the legal field and his Christian compassion for his Brahmin oppressors. The Dalit cause is today firmly espoused but it is novels of this kind that set the trend and all this happened in our native languages at the high point of our national struggle.

It would be possible, if I had the knowledge of North-East India, to make similar observations but Tillotamma Misra in her well known survey of early Assamiya Novels provides me valuable information to enable me in a manner to complete the picture (Mukherjee 2002:6-26). While the earliest novels in Assamiya are like the novels in other linguistic traditions part of the late nineteenth century these writers had the chronicles of the Ahom Kings as a prose model but did not really exploit them. The *buronji* as these chronicles are called were also a storehouse of folk lore and it should have been possible for Assamiya writers in their encounter with the missionaries, who gave a fillip to Assamiya prose, to draw some of their fictional strategies from indigenous traditions like this. But that had to wait. In any case as Misra has pointed out a fictional narrative like *Sudharman Upakhyan* (1884) by Padmavati Devi was an imitation of *Pilgrim's Progress* and drew from moral fables written in Assamiya by the missionaries. It is not clear if the missionaries at least drew from folk lore. The Assamiya novel's trajectory is similar to that of novels in other linguistic traditions with English educated writers attempting to not only assert their Assamiya identity but like the Oriya writer Fakir Mohan Senapati to distance that identity from Bengali hegemony. After *Sudharman Upakhyan* a number of novels were written using the English novel as models—Laksminath Bezbarua's *Podum Kunwari* (1890), Padmanath Gohain's *Bhanumoti* (1891) and Gohain Barua's *Lahori* (1892). These are commendable efforts but as Mishra points out their great weakness is their inability to move beyond their class and caste boundaries and their willingness to write romantic tales which are colourless and pale before the vibrancy of the Bihu songs which celebrate love and passion which these writers could not but have been familiar with. It was Rajanikanta Bordoloi who transformed the Assamiya novel by concentrating realistically on ordinary people and their lives

and saw these changes in terms of the interventions of history. His novels include *Miri Jiyori* (1894) and *Manomati* (1900). He is also sensitive to the condition of woman and gives space to them, a feature we have seen as common to other novels we have been discussing.

There is a rich folk lore among the tribal people of North-East India but the recent spurt in scholarship and creative expression among Nagas, Manipuris and Meghalayans, much of it self assertion but also an attempt to represent themselves in opposition to the writings of the missionaries and colonial masters, is a pointer to a very vibrant national culture with due respect to its diversity. While there was a vibrant oral culture which is only now being foregrounded by scholarship in the nineteenth century the missionaries and colonial officers were the ones who represented the tribal people. Today we see a refiguration of that representation in the self assertion of these people. Thus a composite picture, an inclusive picture of India emerges as a result of this literary activity. I have provided only a sketchy analysis but it is clear to me that in our pocomo zeal with identity questions it will be entirely profitable for us to turn to those pivotal years of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth to get our bearings. What we will get is a nineteenth century prefiguration of an India of multiplicity and plurality.

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Reading of Myth as Telling Communal Identity

Mridusmita Mahanta*

Myths are cultural inheritance; a tradition handed down from one generation to other and therefore invested with communal values. This explains the close association between community and its mythology.

- Donald Mills

The question of identity is connected with the question of affiliation. It is a longing to belong. In connection with identity it is not only about binding people together, but also about being bound. It results in generating a system amongst the members of a community rendering identification. The system is the culture of the community. It is a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society.

To exist is a spiral process that dramatically unfolds in time. Inherited world of meaning relates to our fundamental experiences of us as a person. This very idea leads to a concept of multidimensional construct of human self. That is why the social construction and production of identity is a psychodynamic that would seem fairly fundamental to the understanding of human behaviour. To recognize oneself as a member of a particular nation, one needs to feel a powerful sense of belonging and also needs to be recognized by others as a prerequisite for the formation of the inside-outside, self-other boundaries. Questions can be raised as to whether human cognition is culture based, whether culture influences knowledge

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formation, whether it is rational to bring cohesion between communal identity and surviving narrative tradition of a culture.

However as David Me Crome has argued, the study of communal identity is more often concerned with the manner in which identities are forged and reproduced across time and space and the way in which a national identity maintains temporal continuity, exerting its fierce gravitational pull from generation to generation. Memory, rather collective memory, helps to function as a link to capture the imagination of people in continuing the temporal aspect of identity. (Crome 1998)

Folk narratives are products of people's collective memory. They play an important role in all cultures. It refers to the community stories which are passed from one generation to the other through verbal telling, often a mixture of fact and fiction, myth and legend conveying lessons about life, self, character and conduct of any community.

As Bascom considers, myths are prose narratives which are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the past. (Bascom 1981:98). They are accepted on faith, they are taught to be believed and they can be cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt and disbelief. Stories including the myths are the fundamental constituents of memory, knowledge and communication. Myth makes meaning for the community in which it survives.

A desire to know about the past, origin of the universe as well as our existence gives rise to the formulation of the myths irrespective of age and space. Myths are constructed around the natural phenomenon around us which is termed as 'operation of physical phenomena' by the pioneering English anthropologist E.B. Taylor (1832-1917). Levi-Strauss in his structuralist approach regards myth as a classifying phenomenon. So the subject matter of myth according to Levi-Strauss is the encounter with the world experienced as contradictory not as alien.

To define, myth refers to a traditional story which embodies a belief regarding some fact or phenomena of experience and in which often the forces of nature and of the soul are personified; a sacred narrative regarding a god, a hero, the origin of the world or of a people etc. Myth originally meant speech or words from the Greek 'mythos', meaning a story or word. As stories or narratives, myths articulate how the characters undergo or enact an ordered sequence of events. The term myth refers to a certain genre of stories sharing characteristics that make the genre distinctly

different from other genres of oral narratives such as legends or folktales. Myths are symbolic tales of the distant past that concern cosmology and cosmology may be connected to belief system or rituals or may serve as social action and values. As opined by J.A. Colen in his *The Dictionary of Mythology: An A-Z Themes, Legends and Heroes*,

To most people myths are stories passed orally from one person to another, from generation to generation, telling of some hero or of some God, some formulation of an abstract idea such as creation. Some of these became written records and so survive for us to know them and such is their power that, despite disappearance of their culture that gave rise to them, modern literature abounds with illusions and direct references to those marvelous tales, many of which are still endlessly retold.(2007:7)

Myths and systems of myths have been created by human beings for many reasons for thousands of years. Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), an American mythologist, defined myths as having four basic functions, viz. the Mystical Function—experiencing the awe of the universe; the Cosmological Function—explaining the shape of the universe; the Sociological Function—supporting and validating a certain social order; and the Pedagogical Function—how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances. While delineating the functions of myth Bernard Doyle suggested that apart from the explanation of the creation of the universe, myths seek to explain everyday natural phenomena as well as human institution and practices. Campbell's sociological function considers the role of myth as a 'personal mentor', in that its stories provide a psychological road map for the finding of oneself in the labyrinth of complex modern world. Campbell derived his philosophy from the pioneering works of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung on psychoanalysis.

While analyzing myth as telling identities here is an attempt to analyse myth as discourse that can be employed in the construction of communal identity. In order to make an attempt to project the concept of identity, culture plays an important role in the development and functioning of the psyche. Folk narratives being the umbrella term to include myth play an important role in all cultures. They encompass all genres of oral literature initially and written ones later. They are the more potent means of transmitting perception, values and attitudes from generation to

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generation. This journey proves to be a discourse to translate a sense of affiliation among the members of the same group. Identity takes shape in the stories we tell about ourselves. They are narratives that we construct as we orient our present choices and actions in the light of our imagined futures and versions of our own past that fits with these projects. Narratives have become a favoured concept among the practitioners of human science who study collectivities. The stories that the individuals create often strike variations upon a repertoire of socially available narratives that in turn legitimate the community and guarantee its existence.

The traditional view of the self which can be conveniently traced back to Descartes classed the ego as a *res cogitans*, a substance endowed with the power to think and above all to represent a reality different from itself viz. the *res extensa* or extended substance. This Cartesian dichotomy always harbored instability for it could be easily pushed in either of the two directions. There is an attempt to escape from this dilemma by treating personal identity as that which emerges in and through narratives. As Kerby remarks 'the self is not a thing in the metaphysical sense of being a substance, residing beneath experience. It is rather a being of semiosis, a sign or symbol functioning within a semiotic field.

Bronislaw Malinowski states that myth is not symbolic but a direct expression of its subject matter. Malinowski's approach to myth is consistent with the notion of a symbolic ordering of the world which cuts across many aspects of natural, social and supernatural reality. Malinowski is considered to be a functionalist because he insisted that myths serve as charters for social action. Many other myth scholars also discuss this aspect of myths. Anthropologist and folklorist Paul Radin considers myth to be distinctive because of its function and implications as determined by certain individual members of the society. The myth-makers then explain symbolically how to live, as Radin notes: "A myth is always explanatory. The explanatory theme often is so completely dominant that everything else becomes subordinated to it . . ." (370). Myths serve to explain and encourage worldview and good action within society. Many other theorists of myth concur that it has a functional dimension. Myth is a way of making meaning.

Structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss expresses similar sentiments about

myth's functions when he postulates that myths serve to mediate conflicting or dualistic elements of society and life. Lévi-Strauss recognizes "a basic antinomy pertaining to the nature of myth" and to human nature (1974: 85). This antinomy provides a structure of myths which according to him help classify them and help one to scientifically decipher their meaning. Antinomy or contradiction is often evident in the form of dualities such as good and bad, night and day, etc., which Lévi-Strauss emphasizes to have appeared in "bundles" in myths (1958: 87). Looked at as whole structures, myths reveal a typical pattern: "mythical thought always works from the awareness of oppositions towards their progressive mediation" (1958: 99). The symbolic mediation in myths offer inspiration for culture and culture members to heal, flourish, or accept their reality.

The Brahmapura and Myth

It is observed that myths are found around almost all the major river systems in India. In the rivers of India tributaries make up the river system. Most of the rivers pour their water in the Bay of Bengal, however some of the rivers whose courses take them through the western parts of the country and towards the east of the state of Himachal Pradesh empty into the Arabian sea. The river systems provide irrigation, portable water, cheap transportation, electricity and the livelihoods of a large number of people all over the country. This easily explains why nearly all the major cities of India are located on the banks of the rivers. The rivers enter into Hindu mythology and are considered holy.

Irrespective of its source rivers have been the focal centre around which civilizations have evolved. A river is an apt metaphor for life. Rivers formed a vital component of the eminent awe and worship, being shaped by human imagination into breathing presence. Our ancestors understood metaphors as well as we do although their perceptions varied. But myths serve us better as means of understanding our ancestors if we accept their capacity for complex intellectual and artistic expression. The more we can understand the context of a myth, the culture it came from, the individual who told it, when and for what purpose, the audience who received it, the better chance is there of offering an acute interpretation. They are the deep stories of cultures that reflect its human tendency to organize its representatives of past, future and present according to a

particular emphasis and moral highlight. Jerome S Bruner in his essay 'Myth and Identity' comments that myth is at once an external reality and the resonance of the internal vicissitudes of man. Consideration of myth in the context necessarily provides an insight into the cultural aspect of its origin.

The most obvious function of myth is the explanation of the natural or the cultural. Myth as explanation of the cosmos and ways of life are parallel to science in many ways.

Mythic thought operates in a unique way. While analyzing myth Levi-Strauss, Franz Boas and Dell Hymes used deductive methods. "A myth appears as a system of equations in which the symbols, never clearly perceived, are approximated by means of concrete values chosen to produce the illusion that the underlying equations are solvable". If an attempt is made to peep into the psychoanalytical aspect of the creation myth it would help to understand how a well defined culture shaped the theme and integrated it into a context that include both empirical observation and ideas and opinions that constituted the world view.

As far as the river Brahmaputra is concerned, it is one of the great rivers in Southern Asia, the longest and the largest in the North-East and among the widest in the world. Its fertile banks have always been inviting numerous groups of people to find their settlement. Assam has long been a region of in-migration hosting new generations of settlers from pre-historic times to the present. As observed by B.K.Barua in his *Cultural History of Assam* for generation, Assamese have watered their fields and drank from the river and so their whole history and cultures are intimately connected with the Brahmaputra. The very name of the river has established a kinship among the people.

As far as the question of the people of Assam is concerned, a heterogeneous landscape prevails with diverse groups of people scattered through the region. The idea of an Assamese Assam is nothing but a myth. The environmental elements too differ from area to area within the same geo-political region. The banks of the Brahmaputra have a multiplicity of ethnic entities living among them since the prehistoric times. R.M.Nath in his *The Background of Assamese Culture* comments that the first race of people to inhabit the province now known as Assam was the Austro Asiatics or the Austrics. From then on the land is inhabited by various groups of people such as the Negroids, the Kiratas, the Bodos,

the Dravidians and the Aryans, the Asuras, the Naraka Dynasty, the Varmana Dynasty the Mlecha dynasty, the Pala dynasty, the Kacharis, the Tepperahs, the Mikirs, Garos and Laloongs, Pators and the Sylhetties. Finally, the Ahoms established their rule that continued for long six hundred years. The history of Assam was made and unmade on the bank of this river during the six hundred years of the Ahom rule and the river was utilized both for the defensive and offensive purposes.

From the study of the famous writings, songs, books written by people of this region it is evident that they were invoking a cultural spirit of unity through the river i.e., the Brahmaputra from Sadiya to Dhubri turns out to be the only unique element to provide a common sense of association for the people living in this vast land. The association of the river system in the field of agriculture, transportation, trade, occupation like fishery and boatmanship transmission of culture as well as rituals bears testimony of the people's kinship with the river. The river flowing from one end of the valley to the other has been imparting to the region a political and cultural centrality which aided the evolution of a vibrant society. In this respect reference can be made to Gunabhiram Barua's *Assam Buranji* where he mentions of a race called 'Brahmaputra Bansa'.

As river the Brahmaputra needs no introduction. Originated in the glacial womb of the Kailash range of the Himalayas, south rake of Kanhhyen Tso (Gun Kyad) lake in the south west Tibet at an elevation of 5300 metres, passes through the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. Near Sadiya in Assam it changes its courses to south west. After about 800km in this direction it turns south again going through Bangladesh. At the Ganges delta, the river divides into two channels and the main channel comes to be known as Jamuna. Both the channels finally plunge into the Bay of Bengal.

As observed by Arup Kumar Dutta in his book *The Brahmaputra*, few rivers in the world are called by as many names testifying to the diverse culture which has sprung up on its bank during the course of its long journey. Beginning from its source the river traversed a long journey bearing names Mutsung Tsangpo, Moghung Tsangpo and Tsangpo in the Tibetan region. In the Chinese map it is known as Yalu Tsangpo Brahmaputra. Sir W. Lloyd and Capt. Alex Gerard write in their 'Narrative of a Journey' (London 1840) that the Brahmaputra is named Tanjoo kohampa or Erechoomboo. Sometimes it is called Tsangpo-Chimbo.

Entering India the river is identified with the names of Siang, Dihang, Shyama or Senglai, Siyem etc. The old Sanskrit name for the river is Louhitya meaning 'red blood'. In Assam beside the main name it is known as Lohit, Luit, Borluit, Burhaluit and Siriluit. However, the river does not flow as a single continuous flat span of water but as a web of channels of variable nature, interspersed with *chaporis* or *char* areas. People of the valley feel great identifying themselves by the term 'Luitporia' meaning living on the bank of the river Luit i.e., the Brahmaputra.

Burha Luit, as 'old man' Brahmaputra is fondly called by the people of the valley, was instrumental to a large extent for the migration of different ethnic groups into the region. With a passage of time, through a recurrent process of conflict and assimilation, a composite society and culture evolved. Culture of any society is too complex a phenomenon for simplistic appraisal - in the case of the Brahmaputra Valley it is even more so, the role of the river as a highway and the valley as a corridor ensuring that exorbitantly disparate religio-cultural elements went into it.

The river was the safest and the convenient route in a region of dense vegetation and hostile population. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries were central to the economies of each civilization that evolved in the past upon their banks. Prosperity of an area is dependent not merely on political and social activity, but also a vigorous and dynamic economy which fully satisfies the consuming urges of section. Water routes for exchange of ideas and culture, as well as for exporting the region's surplus and importing necessities not available locally were added bonuses.

Individual's expression of selfhood is manifested through one's interaction with the phenomena one lives. The interaction with the river Brahmaputra takes place in a variety of issues viz. transportation, economic support from occupations like fishing, boatmanship, laundry etc. water based religious rituals like, use of the river banks for congregation of people, use of the river ghats for collecting water for daily use as well as different ceremonies, disposition of fresh alluvium ensuring a fertile soil which yields its plenty with least toil etc. In this connection reference can be made to Arup Kumar Dutta's comment on the nature of the Assamese people: 'the ease of life offered by the environment made them chary of hard labour and incapable of sustained toil'. At the same time, it is easy going, tolerant and liberal temperament which is instrumental in some of the positive traits universally shared by the composite society of the

valley'.¹¹ The interaction can broadly be understood in respect of both individual and social. To have a stroll on the bank of the river or to assemble in the river bank for important discussion are part of individual's day to day lives. To perform the collective Bihu dance, the national dance of Assam, on the sand of the riverbank has been recognized as a major custom of the national festival of Assam. The river ghats have been the prime spots for the women to assemble for collecting water and thereby to communicate the necessary social information and to gather psychological strength by sharing the feelings. Hindus have long considered its water an efficacy against sin. There are evidences of offering the mortal remains in the Brahmaputra on the day of the *Ashokastami* in the Assamese month Chaitra. On that very day Hindus take a dip in the river and pray to it to wash off their sins.

Myths abound regarding the Brahmaputra. *Kalika Purana* and *Kamrupar Buranji* by Surjya Kumar Bhuyan are the major works of art containing the myths related to Brahmaputra. *Kalika Purana* is one of the eighteen Puranas of Indian ancient literatures written in the tenth century. The earliest reference to the mythology is found in the copper plate grant of King Indrapala (c.1030-1055). Here the Louhitya i.e. the Brahmaputra is described as being born of the body of Brahma and the story of Parasurama letting out of the waters of Louhitya is mentioned. *Kalika Purana* records two stories, one under the subtitle 'Brahmaputra Utpatti' (emergence of the Brahmaputra) tells about how Brahmaputra was born in the form of a river. Accordingly, Shantanu, a famous ancient sage began a long meditation in the Ashrama (heritage) of Marjyada (name of a mountain) in Kailash Manasarovar area along with his beautiful wife Amogha. One day when Shantanu was away to bring flowers as well as fruits for themselves Kamalajoni i.e., Lord Brahma enters into their ashrama, becomes enchanted by the beauty of Amogha and requested her to make love with him. Lord Brahma felt Amogha was the right person to give birth to his own son whom he wanted to create for the benefit of humanity. Shantanu would then place him in the midst of four mountains, the Kailash, Gandhamadana, Jarudhi, and Sambaka. The son would assume the form of a large mass of water where the Gods and heavenly maidens would have their bath. Deriving from this myth, the Brahmaputra is considered a male river even today. He is the most important among the seven male rivers in the country. But, to go back

to the myth Amogha did not accept Brahma's proposal. However, by that time Lord Brahma had become so excited that his semen got discharged at that place. When Shantanu came to know about this, he inseminated Brahma's semen in the womb of Amogha. Subsequently, Amogha gave birth to a son and he was called Brahmaputra. The tank near the ashrama of sage Shantanu is known as the Brahmakunda.

The other one deals with the saga of Parasurama. According to the legend recorded in the *Kalika Purana*, one day Renuka, mother of Parasuram, went to fetch water. While returning she felt drawn towards King Chitrnatha playing with celestial nymphs. Consequently, she was late in returning to the ashram. Jamadagni, her husband, was worried over her delay as it was getting late for the midday worship. On perceiving through his divine power the reason of his delay, Jamdagni was so enraged that on her arrival he asked his sons to kill her. None of the six sons except Parasuram could oblige. He immediately beheaded his mother. But the axe stuck to his hand. Parasuram then asked for six boons and one was the immediate recovery of his mother. However, this did not wipe out his sins. He was told that the only way to wash off his sins was by taking a dip in the Brahma Kunda. Only then the axe stuck to his hand would drop. Parasuram immediately came to Brahma Kunda, presently in Lohit District and made a passage to the kunda to come out by digging the bank of the Brahma kunda. The spot where the axe dropped from his hand came to be known as Parasuram kunda. The *Kalika Purana* states that a mere bath in the Kunda leads to emancipation.

The story narrated above is also found in the 'Sristikhand' of the *Padma Purana*. As the mention of the river as Brahmaputra is not found in the earliest references it is believed that the name Brahmaputra is thus the product of the mythology in *Kalika Purana*. There is a deliberate attempt on the part of *Kalika Purana* to raise the status and sanctity of certain rivers and places of ancient Kamarupa.

Many of the famous histories of Kamrup and Assam bear testimony on the role of the Brahmaputra in the lives of the people of Assam. Gunabhiram Barua in his *Asom Buranji* named a race as 'Brahmaputra Bansa' (race). In a number of cases episodes of history are transformed by the people into folk legends. The story of Arimatta, a king who is assumed to have ruled a part of Assam in the 14th century, is an illustration. In the 'Kamrupar Buranji' (History of Kamrup) Surjya Kumar Bhuyan

revealed incredible tales regarding the river in relation to the lives of the king Arimatta and his parents king Pratapsingha and Chandraprava. King Pratapsingha dreamt of an orde given by the mighty river to sacrifice his wife Chandraprava. The king did accordingly and the Brahmaputra accepted the queen. After some days the queen was rescued by one Brahmin and provided her shelter. The queen gave birth to a son who in his face and head bore the shape of an Aari (the name of a local fish) fish because of her conjugation with the river. The river is hence personified.

Every few yards there is a ruin or a site that brings mythological associations with it. One site, which is considered very holy, is the Kamakhya temple, about 2 km from the banks of the Brahmaputra, near Guwahati. It is believed that if one does not go up the steps leading to this temple of feminine power, Shakti, or the consort of Shiva, he will be made to cross the Brahmaputra seven times. That was quite a threat, for the Brahmaputra is not a quiet river that lets you pass easily. In fact, there are stretches that are so dangerous that locals believe that a monster lives in those patches. Every year that monster takes a toll on the human life as boats capsize or floods swallow the neighbouring areas.

Though it is not always easy to decipher the river myths, the most obvious function of myths is the explanation of the natural or cultural. In the middle of the 19th and 20th century efforts were made to understand the mythologies of the nations. In this respect Laurence Coupe's comment is worth mentioning:

“...cultural and literary criticism may involve mythography, or the interpretation of myth, given that the mythic is important dimension of cultural and literary experience”. (2003)

Unlike the other critics of myth, Claude Levi-Strauss, Franz Boas and Dell Hymes provide a structural approach to myth and use the deductive method for analyzing myths. According to Levi-Strauss myth is the instance of thinking *per se*, modern or primitive, because it classifies phenomena. It leads to the apprehension of myths synchronically. Now the question arises how the myths can be understood removing the diachronic aspect in order to find the timeless core of it. Diachronic element in a myth is a factor which makes it possible to tell the myth. A

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mythology is inevitably bound to the society and time in which it occurs and cannot be divorced from this culture and environment. Enriching the value of myth Donald Mills opines:

Myths are cultural inheritance; a tradition handed down from one generation to other and therefore invested with communal values. This explains the close association between community and its mythology. (2002:4)

Myths convey serious truths learned over generations and provide practical advice for living within the society. Human experience of the landscape permits the community consciousness. This consciousness is defined by shared memory, story, experiences that help to bind a community. Through the telling of stories repeatedly a community organizes myth into oral and iconic memory.

While a few rivers of the hoary past have disappeared, most of them have survived the vicissitudes of time, the rise and fall of civilisations on their banks, their continuous flow suggesting the passage of ages. Even when their gross origins are traceable, their real sources remain hidden, suggesting their role as the link between the mysterious and the mundane. No wonder that some of the most sublime and poetic experiences of the ancients should remain crystallised in the myths and legends around them.

It is found that all the great river systems in India enchanted people on its bank in such a way that myths are constructed around them. In this context reference can be made to the comment provided by the first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru. He considered myth as a symbol of India's age long culture and civilization, ever changing, ever flowing. The rivers have such an extraordinary hold on the imagination of the people of India as for millennia, she has watered and nurtured an entire civilization, and has become a symbol of eternity, a theme of art, myth, legend and literature. The moods of the rivers are fascinating to watch but even more so are the faith and reverence they evoke in the heart of millions. While striving between multiplicities of identities living in the vast land of Assam myths regarding the Brahmaputra provide a sense of affiliation of identifying with the alluvial civilization of the river. While considering the underlying system of meaning and the message of the myths of the Brahmaputra it can be observed that the emergence of the

river generates a habitable place holy and divine in nature. The age old civilization on the bank of the river proves to be a testimony of the same. That Lord Brahma has selected Amogha to carry out his strength for the betterment of humanity and that Parasurama washed away his sins by the waters of Brahmakunda is suggestive of the holiness conferred on the river thereby channelizing the reflective consciousness on which it rests.

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From Isolation to Desolation: Analysing Social Exclusion among the *Char* Dwellers of Assam

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Introduction

The post-World War-II euphoria over economic reconstruction and solidarity in the European nations was short lived as new social problems emerged. The severity of these problems was such that they challenged the edifice of the welfare state paradigm. It was during this time that the rise of the 'underclass', the issue of 'new poverty' and the concept of 'social exclusion' became an inseparable part of any discussion associated with disadvantaged people. It was a pan-European phenomenon, more profound in France in particular.

During the 1960s, the extremely poor in France was referred to in various economic debates as *les exclus* by a group of 'Social Catholics', especially the ATD-Fourth World movement headed by Father Joseph Wresinski. This perhaps laid the foundation for the concept of exclusion (Silver 2006). In 1970s the French Left mobilized people around the issue of exclusion where they fought extensively for recognizing subjective exclusion. In hindsight, it seems that this was the period when the Left in France started to move away from class-conflict to mass urban and social struggles. In 1980s there was growing realisation in France that poverty was a problem, economic growth could not resolve and therefore during the mid-80s both the Left and the Right blamed the Socialist government for the rise of 'new poverty' where unemployment, inequality

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and exclusion became the main issues for mobilization. In order to deny the advantage to the Opposition for rallying around the issues of exclusion, the French government during late 80s dealt with the problem in an imaginative way. Therefore, from early 1990s they initiated programmes to deal with social exclusion and created separate ministries to bring about integration concerning the excluded people (Silver 1994: 532). The European Union and various other individual states in Europe followed similar patterns. Thus exclusion as a concept, which started as a part of economic debate, soon became an inseparable part of the dominant discourse in the First World.

The issue of social exclusion gained momentum as it was widely realised that the post-war welfare state lacked ethical and moral values which hampered social solidarity, cohesion and inclusion of the French society. There was a lack of reconciliation between the tradition of solidarity and the rise of individualism that resulted in exclusion of the individual from the society as well as population groups who were at socially disadvantageous position. Thus, exclusion resulted in the gradual breakdown of economic, institutional and individually significant bonds that attached an individual with the wider social order both at real and symbolic levels.

However, the authorship of the term 'social exclusion' is ascribed to the French administrator Rene Lenoir, who published *Les Exclus: Un Français sur dix* in 1974. According to his estimates about a tenth of the then French population was socially excluded. Lenoir provided with a list of category of persons who were regarded as excluded namely, "mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial persons, and other social 'misfits'" (Silver 1995:63). While Lenoir introduced the concept of social exclusion and identified the groups who were termed as excluded, it was Silver who analysed the conditions bereft of which a person or a population group can be termed as excluded. It was also a long list that included exclusion from "a livelihood; secure, permanent employment; earnings; property, credit or land; housing; minimal or prevailing consumption levels; education, skills, and cultural capital; the welfare state; citizenship and legal equality; democratic participation; public goods; the nation or the dominant race; family and sociability; humanity, respect,

fulfilment and understanding” (Silver 1995:60). A person or a population group can be compared and contrasted with these conditions to be judged qualitatively whether he/she or they is/are socially excluded.

There has always been a debate concerning poverty and its estimation. The monetary definition has been ascribed as restrictive since it failed to take into account the relational, dynamic and process-oriented dimensions associated with poverty. This has been mitigated to a large extent by Amartya Sen when he analysed the issue of poverty from the stand point of social exclusion. By including the non-economic parameters associated with poverty, Sen has enriched the domain of poverty analysis. In this regard, his application of the issues related to social exclusion has been an important benchmark. In his words, in order to analyse poverty “we must look at impoverished lives, and not just depleted wallets” (Sen 2000:3). According to him social exclusion helps us to understand the intrinsic and instrumental issues related with *impoverished lives* much beyond the capability deprivation thesis which analyses the cause of the *depleted wallets*. While analysing the issue of poverty from the stand point of social exclusion, Sen has categorised exclusion into ‘active’ and ‘passive’ exclusion and ‘unfavourable’ inclusion (Sen 2000:14-16).

But how is social exclusion manifested? Is it revealed through individual experiences or understood through *departure* from certain societal norms? In terms of ‘norms’, according to Saith (2007) social exclusion refers to a state of exclusion from the ‘normal’ activities of society. It therefore involves consideration of social relationships and of opportunities to alter their situation. On the other, studies on social exclusion in case of the individual-society reveal that they vary among population groups around the world. In this relational aspect, Silver identifies three paradigms that deal with different patterns of individual-social interface. One is *solidarity* paradigm, more prevalent in France rooted to their Republican thoughts, where exclusion is the rupture of the social bond between the individual and society manifested in cultural and moral terms. Second is the *specialisation* paradigm, rooted in Anglo-American liberalism and dominant in the US, where exclusion reflects discrimination that denies individuals full access to or participation in exchange or interaction. It assumes that individuals differ, giving rise to specialization in the market and in social groups. Third, is the *monopoly* paradigm, influenced by the European Left (drawing heavily on Weber

and to a lesser extent Marx), more popular in Britain, where exclusion is defined as a consequence of the formation of group monopolies. In this paradigm exclusion arises from the interplay of class, status and political power and serves the interests of the 'included' (Silver 1994: 539-43). de Haan cites examples related to income deprivation and social exclusion among two nations to illustrate the efficacy of the differing paradigms. He states that while in France income deprivation is a part of social exclusion, it is different in Britain following the Anglo-Saxon traditions. In France, people who lose their jobs are not only deprived of income, but are also more likely to have marital problems, less contact with friends and families, and feel socially disqualified. It is not the case in Britain. According to de Haan the differences are schematic representation of traditions which are also reflected among the policy makers who suggests various measures for inclusion (de Haan 1999).

Other than the aspects of social exclusion being a departure from the social norms and the individual-society interface there are differences or rather debates in terms of their different manifestation among the developed and the developing nations. According to Saith among the industrialised countries, patterns of social exclusion are institutionalised and fairly clearly defined. In developing countries, however, defining what is 'normal' and therefore what is outside accepted norms is more complicated (Saith 2007). So the absence of welfare state and formal labour market make the use of European criteria for exclusion problematic in the developing nations. On the other, according to Bhalla and Lapeyre in poor societies, economic exclusion is at the heart of the problem of exclusion and so in countries "where a majority is excluded from adequate livelihoods, the distributional aspect becomes the most important" (Bhalla and Lapeyre 1997:413-33). While in the industrialised countries "the relational aspect of social exclusion is more important because people have a minimum survival income and so the quality of relationship between the individual and the society is at the heart of social exclusion" (*ibid*).

Recognising the difference in the role of social exclusion and its interpretation among the developed and the developing societies Thorat provides with meaningful insights through his studies on the Scheduled Castes in India. According to him, social exclusion in India moves ahead of the conceptual differences. Here it is "the denial of equal opportunities

imposed by certain groups of society upon others which leads to inability of an individual to participate in the basic political, economic and social functioning off the society” (Thorat 2005:1). He states that two defining characteristics of exclusion are particularly relevant - the deprivation caused through exclusion or denial of equal opportunity in multiple spheres and secondly, it is embedded in societal relations and societal institutions - the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society in which they live. Thus, social exclusion depends crucially on functioning of social institutions.

Within this framework of social exclusion this paper deals with understanding the process of exclusion of the *char* dwellers of Assam. In the next section, is provided a brief review of the historical period when the wastelands in Assam were facilitated to be brought under cultivation through transfer of population from the populous districts of erstwhile East Bengal (present day Bangladesh) by the British administrators. The contemporary socio-economic status of this population group, many among whom settled in the *char* areas of Brahmaputra and its tributaries is provided in the third section. The issues related with social exclusion in the introductory section are then related with the existential realities of the *char* dwellers in the state along with the last section where these issues are reframed for proper understanding of the exclusionary practices affecting this population group in Assam and their varied manifestations.

Habitation in the *Char* Areas of Assam¹

The colonizers (British administrators) intended to attract the peasants from densely populated districts of East Bengal into Assam to cultivate the wastelands (a colonial construct) yet it never materialized till the First Partition of Bengal in 1905, whereby Assam and East Bengal became a single politico-administrative entity. Movement from one region of this newly formed entity to another became easier, which thereafter resulted in large-scale transfer of human population from East Bengal to Assam. Initially, they entered into Goalpara district of Assam from the Mymensingh district of East Bengal and thereafter within a short span of time, spread to various districts of the Brahmaputra valley. It heralded the transformation of these eco-habitats into zones of agro-systems.

According to the birthplace data of 1911 Census, immigrants from adjacent Bengal districts numbered 51,000 in Goalpara and 3,000 in

Assam proper. By 1921, altogether 141 thousand East Bengal immigrants had settled down in Goalpara and 117 thousand in Assam proper, namely 42,000 in Kamrup, 55,000 in Nowgaon and 15,000 in Darrang. In other words, a total of 2,58,000 immigrants from East Bengal entered the plains of Assam and according to another estimate, the number of East Bengal settlers together with their children in the Brahmaputra Valley, was estimated at 300 thousand. Thus, during 1900-01 and 1920-21, the population of Assam increased by 41 per cent mainly due to immigration. The number of immigrants increased to 5,75,000 in 1931 and during 1941, their number shot up to 9,00,000 which brought about a sea change in the demographic profile of the province.

The availability of huge tracts of wastelands encouraged the flow of immigrants into the Assam valley. The colonial administrators acted as their facilitators. Accordingly, in the Brahmaputra valley, a total of 737,367 acres of land was settled with the immigrants from Mymensingh during 1920-21 to 1929-30. This increased to 5,967,000 acres during 1930-31 to 1939-40. It has been estimated that the area of land settled with all immigrants coming from outside Assam was about 1.1 million acres in 1940-41 of which East Bengal immigrants alone accounted for nearly half a million acres. During the period 1940-41 to 1947-48, another 6,213,000 acres of wastelands was settled with the immigrants from East Bengal in the Brahmaputra valley. This had a tremendous effect upon the demographic profile and the agricultural scenario in the state. It also laid the foundation for social schism and sowed the seeds that germinated in the form of social exclusion of this population group in post-colonial Assam, particularly those who occupied the *char* areas of the River Brahmaputra and its tributaries.

Contemporary Socio-economic Reality of the Char Dwellers²

The *chars* are in a state of continuous flux. The geomorphology of the *chars* does not allow anything to be enduringly settled - neither land nor its dwellers, which adversely affects their socio-economic status. According to the Socio-economic Survey Reports concerning the *char* areas of Assam, from 1992-93 to 2002-03, the number of *char* villages of the Brahmaputra has risen from 2,089 to 2,251. [See Table-I & II] But this increase has not been uniform among all the districts of Assam. During 1992-93, Barpeta district had the highest number of *char* villages (351)

followed by Dhubri (313) and Jorhat (210). Currently, Dhubri district has the highest number of *char* villages (480) followed by Jorhat (293) and Barpeta (277). The total area under *char* is 3,608 sq. km., which is 4.6 per cent of the total land area of the state. The flow pattern of the river, sediment discharge due to soil loss, erosion of bank material of the riverbanks and topsoil in the hills along with occurrence of floods determine the intensity of *char* formation in a particular time period and a specific area. Any change in these factors result in the drastic change in the rate of formation and survival of the *chars*. Consequently, it affects the human habitation, as well as livelihood patterns of the *char* dwellers as the loss of land renders them landless and also habitat less.

The total population of the *char* villages in Assam was 16,00,244 in 1992-93. It increased to 24,90,397 in 2003. The decadal growth rate has been 55.63 per cent compared to 18.85 per cent for Assam. Barpeta had the largest population (2,75,525) followed by Dhubri (2,33,206) and Jorhat (1, 41,901) during 1992-93. Presently Dhubri district has the largest *char* population (6, 89,909) followed by Barpeta (2,68,344) and Jorhat (2, 15,095). It is interesting to note here that there is a great degree of resemblance between the number of *char* villages and the size of human population inhabiting there. Any change in the number of *char* villages in a particular district simultaneously changes the number of *char* dwellers in that area. For whenever a new *char* is formed, it is occupied immediately by the landless *char* dwellers that provide no chance for these natural habitats to prosper as ecological sites. Of course, the people who occupy these new *chars* are themselves the victims of erosion who struggle for existence under precarious conditions.

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood of these people. It is noteworthy that they have continued with cultivation, the same occupation for which they were brought into Assam. But a rapid population growth along with shrinking agricultural land has created tremendous pressure in these areas. The *char* areas inhabit 9.37 per cent of the total population of the state while they possess only 4 per cent of Assam's agricultural land. Again, the density of population in these areas is 690 persons per square km., which is more than double the state average of 340 per sq. km. Under these conditions, on one hand due to the absence of alternative source of livelihood there is enormous pressure on agricultural land and on the other, due to the absence of innovation; lack

of institutional support and continuous problem of flood and erosion has further compounded the problem resulting in falling yields and presence of disguised unemployment in these areas.

The *char* villages are one of the largest repositories of illiterate population in the state. In fact, they are among the most illiterate population groups in the entire region. Between 1992-93 and 2002-03 their literacy level has risen from 15.45 to 19.31 per cent. It is extremely low by any standards. Whereas the literacy rate in Assam is 53.79 per cent for the rural areas it is 50.48 per cent.

During the decade of economic liberalization the *char* dwellers have turned from bad to worse. The official poverty estimates point towards this reality. During 1992-93, 48.89 per cent of the total population in these areas resided below poverty line, which has gone up substantially during the next period. Currently 67.89 per cent of the total population in the *char* areas is below the officially determined poverty line, while for the state as a whole it is 36.09 per cent and for the India, 26.10 per cent only. Thus for a population group with poor socio-economic indicators, hostile natural environment and lack of market entitlements; liberalization of the Indian economy hardly meant anything positive. Rather it was a period when they experienced a downward slide through the socio-economic ladder.

Under these conditions, large number of the *char* dweller either migrate to urban centres where the perceived threat of an 'identity-crisis' looms large over their head or occupy new *chars* or move into more hostile natural habitats for survival.

Social Exclusion of the *Char* Dwellers

It is emphasised that there have been two approaches for operationalizing the concept of social exclusion. Hills, Grand and Piachaud explain that one concentrates on specific problem taken to be examples of social exclusion and the other characterizes social exclusion as a lack of participation in key aspects of society. In terms of identifying the causes of non-participation of the people they not only focus on the aspect of lack of resources as a cause but also identify broader factors such as geographic location, which fosters exclusion (Hills, Grand and Piachaud 2002). If we relate this factor to our area of study it can be surely assumed that the foremost sense of exclusion among the *char* dwellers stems from

their geographic location. Their secluded domain of habitation acts as a roadblock for their integration into the mainstream society of Assam. In the words of Sen, “being excluded can sometimes be in itself a deprivation and this can be of intrinsic importance on its own” (Sen 2000: 16). If a person or a population group is unable to relate to others and/or participate in the community life, it can directly lead to impoverishment. This bears a *constitutive* relevance of social exclusion which is in fact *instrumental* for further aggravating other forms of exclusion. This is absolutely true for the *char* dwellers and their exclusion from the mainland population groups in Assam.

On the other, when these *char* dwellers move out of their secluded habitats into the mainland either as victims of erosion or in search of better livelihood their status resembles that of refugees. Above all, the people in the mainland are unaware about the existential threat in the *char* areas that forces its dwellers to migrate to these areas. So, an unfamiliar terrain, unfriendly social milieu and absence of residential proof make these migrants suspicious in the eyes of the people, which alienate them from the mainland population. Moreover, the cultural differentiation (in terms of attire, language and socio-cultural traits) between both these two population groups creates such a situation where the *char* dwellers are regarded as intruders into the economic and the cultural space of the dwellers in the mainland. So the cultural boundaries of the social space of the people in the mainland are perceived to be threatened by these ‘outsiders’ or the *char* dwellers. This process reaffirms the group solidarity of the mainland population groups against the ‘other’ i.e. the *char* dwellers, which lays the foundation for social exclusion.

Similarly, labour market discrimination can be another case that creates conditions for social exclusion. It can assume varied proportions. Becker as well as Phelps provides with two different insights in this regard. In *Economics of Discrimination*, Becker highlights that an employer affected with discriminatory bias while employing labour will always hire from the favoured group despite of no qualitative difference between the favoured and the disfavoured group of labourers. The employer will employ labourers from his preferred group even if it means forgoing benefits or incurring extra cost. In Becker’s case of discrimination, the labourers from the disfavoured groups have no other option but to engage in onerous jobs which are only available since non-onerous jobs are

assigned to the labourers from the favoured groups (Becker 1971). Phelps, on the other, shows how belief based discrimination works as criteria for discriminatory bias. He states that characteristics of a group are ascribed to the individuals belonging to that particular population group, which acts as a discriminatory bias for hiring labourers from the respective group (Phelps 1972). In both the cases discrimination occurs due to exogenously held beliefs of the employers which act as conditions for exclusion.

Becker's discriminatory bias of choosing labourers from the favoured group and rejecting others from the disfavoured group is more than often observed in various areas of North-East India. There are occasional press reports stating that the *char* dwellers (who visit these areas in search of livelihood) are often evicted and deported from the districts of Upper Assam (where the people are less aware of the *char* areas vis-à-vis the districts of Lower Assam) by pro-active groups in tune with their prophesied goal of liberating their homeland from the invasion of the illegal aliens (read *Bangladeshi!*). This amounts to denial in the labour market which results in exclusion by force. Similarly, the discriminatory bias as explained by Phelps is also evident in the North East in general and Assam in particular. There are often press statements and appeal by people belonging to civil society and their organizations for not employing labourers from disfavoured groups referred as Bangladeshis. While one can understand the sense of patriotic flavour in their appeal to employ non-Bangladeshis it is often puzzling as to why are they blindfolded about the civility of the hapless *char* dwellers, who despite being equal citizens are labelled as Bangladeshis! So labourers belonging to different sub-cultures are viewed by the employers as the least reliable and therefore become the targets of exclusion.

Another phenomenon is observed in the urban centres of Assam in general and Guwahati in particular, where there is seldom denial of entry of the *char* dwellers into the labour market by force but deprivation occurs as they are paid less than the prevalent wage rates for their manual labour. Any protest on the part of the labourers not only results in loss of job but also raising an alarm about the suspicious identity of the *char* dwellers. So due to their differences in language and culture, the employers expect the cost of extraction of economic surplus from these labourers to be higher, for which they are given the access to the labour market albeit with an exploitative notion. Thus, while the earlier cases may be

related to active exclusion the last one is similar to unfavourable inclusion if not passive exclusion.

While the geographical location of the *chars* happens to be the *constitutive* element of social exclusion there are certain *instrumentalities* related to exclusion that stems from this constitutive feature. Lack of occupational diversification, lack of formal credit, lack of food entitlements, lack of access to proper health care are some of the instrumentalities that arise from the locational exclusion. The geographic locational of the *chars* are such that they create conditions for economic exclusion. Conventional economic theory assumes that all markets are 'Walrasian' i.e. individuals can buy or sell goods or a service as much as they want at the prevailing market price. In these markets no one willing and capable of buying and selling could be excluded from exchange. But there were instances particularly during the Anti-Foreigners Movement (1979-85) in various *char* areas, where the dwellers were denied access to the market in the mainland areas (Chakraborty 2009). Thus access to markets, which otherwise conventionally operates on the principle of free entry and exit became a potent tool for exclusion against the *char* dwellers.

On the other, there are some markets, where despite of having sufficient real income or productive capacity, some people are excluded from the exchange process. These are the non-Walrasian markets which include labour, credit and insurance markets. While we have discussed about labour market discrimination earlier, the same is also true in insurance and credit market operations. In the non-Walrasian markets, exclusion are not random, they depend upon social and cultural asset endowment of individuals, those who are poorly endowed, will be excluded from these markets. This is true in the *char* areas, where due to lack of socio-cultural asset endowments, those among them who have the means of entering credit and insurance markets are also excluded.

Institutional exclusion occurs when the agencies of the state falls short of providing necessary means of livelihood and infrastructural support to the *char* dwellers in Assam. Even the institutional agencies that exist such as the state level organization (Directorate of *Char* Area Development) entrusted with the task of developing these areas spends more than 70 per cent of its allocated budget on revenue expenditure for its staff, leaving meagre amount for development activities for the people residing in the *char* areas.

Field level data concerning the *char* areas are difficult to come about. This acts as a roadblock to empirically prove the instrumentalities associated with social exclusion in these areas. However, we will compare our selective field based data related to various socio-economic parameters (Chakraborty 2009) along with the state level averages of Assam (NFHS-III, 2005-06) in order to highlight the problem.

- Nearly 42 per cent of the surveyed households are without any safe source of drinking water in the *char* areas, which as a category even does not exist in the state level report.
- The combined (male and female) contraception use in the *char* area was less than 6 per cent which was 55 per cent for rural women in Assam and 46 per cent for Muslim women in the state.
- The Child-Women Ratio in the *char* households was 2208 whereas for Assam the overall ratio was 1443 and 2136 for the rural areas.
- Nearly 68 per cent of the children in the *char* areas went without a single dose of polio vaccination whereas for the state it was 18 per cent.
- Average Monthly Household Consumption Expenditure for the surveyed villages in the *char* areas was Rs. 557.54 which for the state was Rs. 626 (NSSO, 62nd Round, 2005-06).
- There are some other micro-level data which also depicted the instrumentalities of exclusion in these areas, particularly related to the non-Walrasian markets as mentioned above, such as:
 - Only 2.43 per cent of the households could avail institutional credit in the *char* areas,
 - More than 67 per cent of the surveyed households were indebted to the moneylender, and
 - nearly 35 per cent of the surveyed population earned less than Rs. 40 per day.

These findings are not exhaustive in any way but are only some suggestive indicators that throw some light related to various socio-economic realities in these areas.

There is another dimension to this aspect of exclusion which throws light about the skewed pattern of institutional support and distribution of public resources in the *char* areas. It is interesting to note the observation of Wilson in this regard. He states that the more unequal

the distribution of scarce resources among groups in a society, the more differentiation there is in group social participation in the institutions of society and in group culture (Wilson 1987:36). Provision of institutional support shows not only limitation but also discriminatory bias within the *chars* of the Brahmaputra River. If one compares the health and education infrastructure facilities in Majuli along with all the other *char* villages in River Brahmaputra, the difference becomes apparent. Table III and IV exhibit this pattern of institutional discrimination. These patterns of institutional discrimination often leads to social exclusion by the creation of social boundary or permanent divisions between the ‘ins’ and ‘outs’, which takes the form of social distancing over time or of social distance at any one point in time (Chakraborty 2010: 219-27). These actions of exclusion become structural when it is repeatedly confirmed through social relations and practices.

In the ultimate analysis whether exclusion occurs due to *constitutive* factor or is *instrumentally* related to it, the result is deprivation, which robs the deprived (in our case the *char* dwellers) of their confidence and this adversely affects their capacity to function. Barooah in her study highlights this linkage between lack of confidence and social exclusion (Barooah 2010: 32). Under such a situation the welfare orientation of the state bears a big question mark and secondly, even if the intention of the state and its institutions is to harness development, it produces unintended consequences, which adds to further exclusion.

In Lieu of Conclusion

We have deliberately avoided two things- one, defining social exclusion and secondly, fitting our analysis to a particular paradigm of social exclusion. This is mainly done since the concept is still emerging particularly in the developing nations especially in those countries where the nation and the state are not necessarily (always) same, as it is the case with Republican France, a nation-state where the roots of this concept are located. Moreover, every attempt to typify exclusion into a close ended concept may result in reductionism, which should always be avoided considering its multi-disciplinary nature. Here in our analysis, we have used the concept of social exclusion in a simplistic way as proposed by Julian Le Grand (1998) “a (British) individual is socially excluded if (a) he/she is geographically resident in the United Kingdom

but (b) for reasons beyond his/her control, he/she cannot participate in the normal activities of United Kingdom citizens, and (c) he/she would like to participate” (Le Grand 1998) If we remove the Anglo-Saxon connotation from this proposition and then collate it with the realities of the North Eastern Region in general and Assam in particular, it can be a good beginning for initiating research on social exclusion with specific regional characteristics.

One might argue and examine the reverse of ‘exclusion’? If it is ‘inclusion’, then what is the relationship between the two terms? Is it a case of zero-sum situation? Does exclusion always mean lack of inclusion and vice versa? A cursory understanding of the concept would reveal that social exclusion is a dynamic term which simultaneously is “both a condition and a process” (Silver 2006) and there are many mechanisms through which the act/sense of exclusion operates: “extermination, exile, abandonment, ostracism, shaming, marginalization, segregation, discrimination etc.” (Silver 2006) are some of them. Similarly, social exclusion has different forms in different social context. As observed by de Haan, unemployment can be a form of social exclusion but its exclusionary dimensions are much deeper in France compared to Britain. Similarly, poverty can be another form. Discrimination in labour market and distribution of public resources can also be forms of exclusion. On the other hand, lack of socialization and civic engagement is also a form of social exclusion. Although there is lack of proper agreement among the scholars about the exact forms of social exclusion and the related indicators to measure them, it can be surely agreed that “very few people are totally excluded from all social relationship at once; there are many more people who are socially excluded in some respects than there are people excluded in all respects” (Silver 2006). Thereby, it is opined that “it is virtually impossible for human beings to exist totally outside societal influences” (Silver 2006). While summing up our discussion, we will try to relate some of these experiences among our referred population group.

Information-deficit about the *char* areas are an important source of discrimination, deprivation and subsequent social exclusion in the region. It gets manifested when the *char* dwellers migrate in search of livelihood options. Their attire, traits, behaviour, language and religion on one hand and the lack of knowledge on the part of the people of the mainland

about the *chars* on the other, ultimately leads to a scenario where these *char* dwellers are straightaway labeled as *Bangladeshis* or illegal immigrants. It leads to further exclusion. Here, the role of the third estate as well as organizations from the mainland areas, are less than expected. Their myopic vision “produce narrow citizens who have difficulty understanding people different from themselves, whose imaginations rarely venture beyond their local setting” (Nussbaum 2003: 14). Due to which, they have a tendency to dump them as illegal immigrants, without displaying the courage to trace the root cause of their migration from the *char* areas. This not only creates mistrust, suspicion and discord among the population groups, but also generates a public opinion which becomes unfavourable for the inclusion of the *char* dwellers into the mainstream. Any additional public expenditure gets highlighted as *feeding the Bangladeshis* at the cost of depriving the *Indian nationals*. This self-imposed false consciousness of the mainland organizations and ‘enlightened’ civilians leads to further social exclusion of the *char* dwellers in Assam.

It is usually believed that increased participation and representation of the disadvantaged groups in political process translates into lessening social exclusion. In this regard, in terms of participation in the political process by the legal migrants there is a glaring contrast between the European vis-à-vis the Indian experience. According to Sen “in much of Europe (mainly in Germany and France but not in United Kingdom), legally settled immigrants do not have the political right to vote because of difficulties and delays in acquiring citizenship” (Sen 2006:15-17). This keeps them “outside the political process in a systematic way- which is clearly an active exclusion” (*ibid*). It is not the case in India and for that matter in Assam. In our example the names of the *char* dwellers have been legally included in the voters list while preparing the electoral rolls and so they have been protected against active exclusion, as observed in case of Europe. While acknowledging this inclusionary aspect of the Indian system that establishes the equality of the powerful and the powerless at the same pedestal through adult suffrage, it can always be debated whether political inclusion is a sufficient safeguard against other forms of exclusion, say social exclusion. Existential reality suggests that there is a spin-off here and political inclusion does not automatically protect a population group from other forms of exclusion. The *char* dwellers are not an exception to this phenomenon.

On the other, since it is axiomatic that political power enables access to not only economic goods and services but also political goods like freedom and the ability to influence economic policies, understanding the role of the elected members from the *char* areas as well as how the ordinary *char* people judge their representatives will be interesting. It is generally stated by the *char* people that the promise of political representatives fall far short of actually what they deliver. But having said so, many among the ordinary voter in these areas ascribe that their representatives, once they move out of the *char* areas to the citadel of power, become the victims of the same process of discrimination, which accentuates their exclusion from the power-center, turning them into pawns merely following the official agenda. If we paraphrase the feelings and aspiration of the *char* dwellers it sums up that the political dimension of exclusion involve the notion that the State, which grants basic rights and civil liberties, is not a neutral agency but a vehicle of society's dominant classes and since they and their representatives are never a part of the dominant classes, discriminatory bias and exclusionary principles work against them³.

Lastly, if we compare and contrast our findings related to the *char* dwellers along with the conditions highlighted by Silver bereft of which a person and/or a population group can be referred as excluded, we will find that in almost all counts except citizenship and legal equality, this population group suffers from exclusion in one from or the other or from various degrees of unfavorable inclusion. Discrimination remains embedded within the social structures and social relations, which are expressed through both conscious and unconscious actions that ultimately contribute to and sustain deprivation. But does this suggest that the *char* dwellers have been totally excluded from all aspects of life and livelihood in the region? As mentioned earlier, in normal conditions, no individual or population group can be totally excluded rather there are differences in degrees of inclusion. The *char* dwellers are also hostage to this kind of discriminating degrees of inclusion when they move out of their geographical isolation or the *char* areas. In the mainland, there are occasions when this degree of inclusion turns unfavorable and at its extremes, results in exclusion. So, neither exclusion-inclusion is a zero-sum expression or a watertight phenomenon. It is an osmosis process where the semi-permeable socio-historical and politico-economic fabric determines the levels of inclusion and exclusion. In this regard, the more we root our

thought and practices to the multi-cultural notions, the more successful we appear in avoiding the extremes i.e. social exclusion.

Table I
Selected Statistics of the Char Areas in Assam, 1992-93

District	Char Villages	Total Population	Total Land (ha)	Total Cultivable Land (ha)	Literacy (%)	BPL Population (%)
Kamrup	148	105687	5401.72	3781.20	16.85	53.0
Nalbari	58	62892	8558.97	5500.58	7.90	54.2
Barpeta	351	275525	27881.36	19516.95	12.90	55.0
Goalpara	187	130007	11623.45	8136.41	8.38	53.2
B'ngaigoan	150	110215	11367.00	7956.90	12.85	54.0
Dhubri	313	233206	86925.22	60847.65	19.06	54.2
Darrang	121	135876	6661.36	4662.95	10.12	55
Morigaon	41	55581	6804.66	4763.26	8.02	52.5
Nagaon	29	45161	3265.25	2285.67	9.44	55
Jorhat	210	141901	5576.38	3903.46	31.90	25
Sonitpur	118	92061	24014.06	20309.84	12.63	43
Lakhimpur	182	110200	12069.51	8455.65	14.01	49
Dhemaji	95	68998	13517.00	9461.90	14.44	46.8
Tinsukia	86	33034	10324.00	7226.80	14.20	34.5
Total	2089	1600244	239000.00	167300.00	15.45	48.90

Source : *Socio-economic Survey Report, 1992-93*, Char Areas Development Authority, Government of Assam

Table II
Selected Statistics of Char Areas in Assam, 2003-04

District	Char Villages	Total Population	Total Land (ha)	Total Cultivable Land (ha)	Literacy (%)	B.P.L. Population (%)
Kamrup	175	154508	17162	11654	15.16	68.0
Nalbari	32	83602	13432	8996	16.24	68.36
Barpeta	277	268344	36655	24736	17.63	66.78
Goalpara	179	186826	19860	13728	13.65	68.57
B'ngaigoan	117	135809	14256	9520	12.46	67.50
Dhubri	480	689909	99898	67124	14.60	69.00
Darrang	134	142405	16756	11239	12.34	66.94
Morigaon	39	91324	11932	7954	18.50	67.00
Nagaon	43	89803	12036	8056	17.59	66.79
Jorhat	293	215095	42174	28016	60.55	64.00
Sonitpur	145	145729	24168	16410	16.93	68.00
Lakhimpur	109	143235	21523	14451	18.50	69.02
Dhemaji	149	91203	16976	11347	15.69	70.93
Tinsukia	79	52605	14094	9496	14.00	68.90
Total	2251	2490397	360927	242277	19.31	67.90

Source : *Socio-Economic Survey Report, 2003-04*, Directorate of Char Areas Development, Government of Assam

Table-III: Comparative Analysis of the Educational & Health Institutions In Majuli & Other Char Areas of Assam

Educational Facilities	Majuli	Other Char Areas
L.P. School	23	1429
M.E. School	138	436
High School	90	128
Higher Secondary	4	4
Colleges	8	10
P. H. C	8	44
Sub-centre	18	114

Source: [http:// assamgovt.nic.in/aarc/interim_report5.doc](http://assamgovt.nic.in/aarc/interim_report5.doc)

Table-IV: Comparative Analysis of the Population Served By Each Educational & Health Institutions In Majuli & Other Char Areas of Assam

Educational Facilities	Majuli	Other Char Areas
L.P. School	508	1592
M.E. School, High School & Higher Secondary	968	4005
Colleges	26875	227500
P. H. C	26875	51704
Sub-center	11944	19956

Source: [http:// assamgovt.nic.in/aarc/interim_report5.doc](http://assamgovt.nic.in/aarc/interim_report5.doc)

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Notes :

- ¹ All the population figures and land distribution estimates are from Guha, Amalendu. (1977) *Planter-Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947*: New Delhi: ICHR.
- ² The estimates are from the two Socio-economic benchmark surveys conducted by Char Areas Development Authority, Assam (during 1992-93) and Directorate of Char Areas Development, Assam (during 2003-04), Dispur, Government of Assam.
- ³ This has been the common analogy of the *char* dwellers surveyed at various places of Barpeta district during 2004-06, when the field survey was conducted.

Ethnic Conflicts and Crisis of Governance in Assam

Pranjit Saikia*

The Indian state has survived with democratic stability for a long period since independence, despite various frequent ethnic conflicts over the period of time. Democracy in India has taken deep roots inspite of low-income economy, widespread poverty and illiteracy and immense ethnic diversity. Indian state has succeeded for more than six decades in strengthening democratic processes, 'within the framework of a centralized state, moderate accommodation of group demands, especially demands based on ethnicity, and some decentralization of power.'¹ The proposed paper seeks to explore the genesis of conflicts among various ethnic groups in Assam which some time paralyse the machinery of governance even though there is a strong governance system. The question is whether such conflicts play a productive role in generation of legitimacy for the state. The question involves complexities which need to be probed. Such complexity is enhanced further by the fact that violence is a characteristic feature of the modern state – which claims its legitimacy from the role and of the modern nation-state.

The Problem

The politics in North-East India has long been in a confusing state of affairs. But still the region is democratically vibrant contesting John Stuart Mill's proposition that democracy is 'next to impossible' in multi-ethnic societies and completely impossible in linguistically divided countries².

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The region itself, though in most of the literature there has been a tendency to consider the North-East region as one unit, is highly divided ethnically and linguistically. One of the single units of this region, Assam consists of as many as 24 ethnic groups with distinct languages and cultures³. Though democracy exists in the region, various aspects such as fundamental cultural and linguistic differences between the tribal people and Assamese speaking people, the process of unequal assimilation into the Assamese sub-national formation, the 'chauvinistic' mind-set of mainstream Assamese people, and linguistic hegemony over other sub-national groups of the state forced them to seek 'recognition of their identity'.⁴

Since the colonial period, a new form of native resurgence could be witnessed which led to the struggle to forge new identities on the ruins of old ethnic and caste identities. Western educated elite made a conscious effort to construct and propagate through language, literature, education, culture and social work, new socio-political group identities.⁵ In the early part of 19th Century, we could see the development of our nationalism on the basis of pan-Indian cultural homogeneities and anti-imperialism; but at the same time we could also see the rise of distinctive characteristics of our regional-cultural homogeneities which was much different from pan-Indian characteristics. In Assam a section of Western educated elite attempted to construct the Assamese identity from the perspective of language, literature and culture. As the first attempt in this direction, in the early 19th century Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan talked of an Assamese 'nation' and tried to uphold the pride of the Assamese language by making it a symbol modern national consciousness.⁶ In the early days of the British rule in Assam, for their administrative convenience, the British introduced Bengali language in administration and in courts of law. With the increasing dominance of Bengali language, Assamese language lost its due position in its own land among its own people. This made Assamese speaking people furious and took various steps to bring back the glory of Assamese language and literature which prompted the Calcutta based enlightened section of Assamese to bring out their own literary journal *Jonaki* in 1989.

Even after independence the public space was dominated by various regional-cultural issues, which have paralyzed our governance system. After independence, India adopted democratic governance system which

is, in the words of Weiner, mainly a legacy of British colonialism.⁷ Atul Kohli aptly argued that India inherited a number of political traits from British rule such as a relatively centralized state, including a well-functioning civil service; early introduction of elections, and socialization of the highest political elite in values of liberal democracy. But such colonial structure of Indian democracy failed to accommodate the aspirations of the people of some peripheral states of North-East. Even though there were some constitutional arrangements made to accommodate these sections of people, but already a new form of consciousness had awakened among various ethnic groups for better life, opportunity and society. These ethnic groups had to fight for all kinds of amenities and social-cultural securities. But unfortunately, instead of looking it as a natural phenomenon, Assamese middle class visualized such struggles of self-determination as a challenge to the very existence of the Assamese life, literature and society, which eventually became more dangerous for the society.

But the Assamese middle-class was in no mood to concede any economic, political or social space to the different ethnic communities of the state. For example, the Assamese delegates to the Constituent Assembly fervently argued that the benefits of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution should not be extended to the plains tribal in Assam, as the latter were allegedly keen to assimilate with the greater Assamese society.⁸ Likewise nowhere during the Assam movement, the leaders of the movement had raised their voice for the preservation of the unique identity of different ethnic groups. The education facilities, employment opportunities, health services were far below the advanced Assamese areas. Such forcible assimilation and shrinking social, political, and economic space of various ethnic groups frustrated them in a bigger way which led to violent confrontations. Such violent confrontation eventually led to complete break down in the process of ethnic accommodation in the state.

In the 80s the question of ethnic identity took a radical turn with the rise of various militant groups. The self proclaimed custodian of the interests of the 'natives' by the militant groups against foreign immigrants had made the issue more complex and obscure. Looking at the nature of activities of these groups, one can presume that these groups were more interested to assert their group interest rather than the interest of the community as a whole. This had resulted in intra-community conflicts

which have been supposed to be more dangerous because two militant groups of a particular community have been fighting against each other just to uphold their own group interest out of which the community at length achieved nothing except bloodshed. For example, in Bodo community they had two militant groups — National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT). Both the groups had vowed to protect the interest of the Bodo community. But more often, their competition to assert their influence over the community had led to violent confrontations against each other.

In Assam, growing competition for limited social and economic space has intensified the hostilities and prejudices among the ethnic groups since the colonial period.⁹ But in the post-colonial period successive governments have failed to contain the ethnic clashes over the period of time. Even though we have adopted democratic culture as political process, federalism as administrative structure, unable to administer ethnic aspirations effectively eroded the legitimacy of the governance system. Myron Weiner argued the weakening of modern political institutions to deal with local religious, linguistic, castist and regional concerns that led to sectional contestations resulting in the spiral of community conflicts and violence in India generally and particularly in the North-East.¹⁰ Some other scholars argued that the violation of federal principles and the emergence of the patterns of ‘cosmetic federalism’ – the national state’s centralizing tendencies and the overriding power to cut-up sub-national territories have been resulted into frequent violence in the region.¹¹ Baruah and Chandhoke further state that contrary to conventional wisdom, public policies promoting self governance for particular communities in the region may actually be contributing to the problem as these practices encourage competitive mobilization other groups resulting in mutual contestation that fuel intensification of conflicts and violence¹² which ultimately leads to, in Arun Shourie’s words “total breakdown of governance”.

Understanding Ethnicity

The term ‘ethnicity’ implies the sense of kinship, group solidarity and common culture. In 1973 edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary*, it is defined as “1. The condition of belonging to a particular ethnic group; 2. Ethnic pride. Thomas Erikson in his book *Ethnicity and*

Nationalism conceptualized 'Ethnicity' as the classification of peoples and the relations between groups, in a context of 'self-other' relation.¹³ According to Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan 'ethnicity' can be attributed to having the character or quality of an ethnic group.¹⁴

According to Richard Schermerhorn¹⁵ "An ethnic group is a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood." and the symbolic symbols are such as kinship patterns, physical contiguity, religious affiliation, language or dialects forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotypical features, or any combination of these. Conceptualizing the term 'ethnicity', Manning Nash¹⁶ argued that there are some boundary-markers for every group based on culture which distinguish who is a member of what group and what minimal cultural items are involved in membership. He says, "The most common ethnic boundary markers, in the ethnographic record, and the most pervasive, in any system of ethnic differentiation, are *kinship* that is the presumed biological and descent unity of the group implying a stuff or substance continuity each group member has and outsiders do not; *commensality*, the propriety of eating together indicating a kind of equality, peership, and the promise of further kinship links stemming from the intimate acts of dining together, only one step removed from the intimacy of bedding together; and a *common cult*, implicating a value system beyond time and empirical circumstance, sacred symbols and attachments coming from *illo tempore*." He further says, "These cultural markers of kinship, commensality and religious cult are a *single recursive metaphor*. He argued that if these boundary markers were breached with regularity, the group as a differentiated entity would cease to exist. According to Nash, there are some secondary pointers also which include dress, language and physical features. The indices of separateness of these secondary pointers can be layered on: house architecture, and interior arrangements, ritual calendars, specific taboos in joint social participation, special medical practices, special economic practices and a host of other secondary and tertiary markers of differentiation. He pointed out that language as group marker has "more social and psychological weight than dress does."

Distinguishing between ethnicity, race, class and nation, Thomas H. Eriksen¹⁷ says the term 'race' has dubious descriptive value because - i)

there has always been so much interbreeding between human populations that it would be meaningless to talk of fixed boundaries between races; ii) the distribution of hereditary physical traits does not follow clear boundaries. In fact, there is often greater variation within a 'racial' group than there is systematic variation between two groups. He, therefore, did not distinguish relation between race relations and ethnicity. He opines, ideas of 'race' may or may not form part of ethnic ideologies, and their presence or absence does not seem to be a decisive factor in interethnic relation. Arguing on the issue further, he says, "It is doubtless true that groups who 'look different from majorities or dominating groups may be less liable to become assimilated into the majority than others, and that it can be difficult for them to escape from their ethnic identity if they wish to. However, this may also hold good for minority groups with, say, an inadequate command of the dominant language. In both the cases, their ethnic identity becomes an imperative status, an ascribed aspect of their personhood from which they cannot escape entirely. Race and skin color as such is not the decisive variable in every society." Distinguishing between ethnicity and class, he says, "The term ethnicity refers to relationships between groups whose members consider themselves distinctive, and these groups may be ranked hierarchically within a society. It is therefore necessary to distinguish clearly between ethnicity and social class." Theories of social class refer to systems of social ranking and distribution of power. Ethnicity, on the contrary, does not necessarily refer to rank; ethnic relations may well be egalitarian in this regard, he compares. "Still" he argued, "many polyethnic societies are ranked according to ethnic membership. The criteria for such ranking are nevertheless different from class ranking: they differ in imputed cultural differences or 'races', not to property or archived statuses." Both class differences and ethnic differences can be pervasive features of societies, but they are not one and the same thing and must be distinguished from one another analytically, he concludes.

Walker Connor in his book *Ethno-nationalism: The Quest for Understanding*¹⁸ begins with clarifying nationalism and patriotism which he refers to two quite distinct loyalties: the former to one's national group; the latter to one's state and its institutions. Nevertheless, according to him the two loyalties tend to blur into a seamless whole. But in a world containing thousands of ethnonational groups and less than two

hundred states, it is evident that for most people the sense of loyalty to one's nation and to one's state do not coincide. And they often compete for the allegiance of the individual. To understand why nationalism customarily proves to be a far more powerful force than patriotism, it is necessary to take a closer look at national consciousness and national sentiment. For Connor, nation was a community of people characterized by a common language, territory, religion and the like. The essence of a nation is a psychological bond that joins a people and differentiates it, in the subconscious conviction of its members, from all nonmembers in a most vital ways. So nations can be characterized as a sense - a feeling - of consanguinity. All that is irreducibly required for the existence of a nation is that the members share an intuitive conviction of the group's separate origin and evolution, and the convictions concerning the singular origin and evolution of one's nation belong to the realm of the sub-consciousness, emotional and non-rational. In this regard Connor cited a tract written by a person who was found guilty of anti-state activities in the name of Ukrainian nationalism where he wrote, "A nation can exist only where there are people who are prepared to die for it/ Only when its sons believe that their nation is chosen by God and regard their people as His highest creation/ I know that all people are equal/ My reason tells me that/ But at the same time I know that my nation is unique/ My heart tells me so/ It is not wise to bring the voices of reason and emotion to a common denominator." Thus, it is worth repeating that the national bond is subconscious and emotional rather than conscious and rational in its inspiration.

Abner Cohen¹⁹ put forward his idea by saying that contemporary ethnicity is the result of intensive interaction between ethnic groupings and not the result of complete separatism. He rejected 'the glue theory of tribalism' which states that the colonial powers had acted as 'glue' in sticking the tribal groups together within the framework of new, artificially established, centralized states, but as soon as the colonial powers withdrew, the glue was removed and each began to disintegrate and fall into its original parts. The fact of the matter is that during the colonial power, some tribal groups could develop their vital interests while other tribal groups remained relatively underprivileged. As soon as the colonial powers withdrew, an intense struggle for power ensued among them. The privileged became exposed to the danger of losing power and had to

mobilize their forces in defence while underprivileged aligned themselves to gain power. For Cohen, such alignment was possible because of the intense interactions between tribal groups when they were under colonial rule. In the process, Cohen had developed some characteristics of political ethnicity. Firstly, he says, bitter struggles broke out between tribal groups over new strategic positions of power: places of empowerment, taxation, funds for development, education, political positions and so on. In many places the possibilities of capturing these new sources of power were different for different tribal groups, so that very often the resulting cleavages were on ethnic lines. As a result of this intensified struggle, many tribal groups mobilized their forces and searched for ways in which they could organize themselves politically so as to conduct their struggle more effectively. Secondly, tribalism involves a dynamic rearrangement of relations and of customs which was not the outcome of cultural conservatism or continuity. He points out that the continuities of customs and of social formation are certainly there, but their functions have changed. To support his argument Cohen cited Gluckman's statement, 'where in a changing system the dominant cleavage is into two culture-groups, each of these groups will tend to set increasingly greater value on its own endo-culture, since this expresses the dominant cleavage.'²⁰ Thirdly, ethnicity is essentially a political phenomenon, as traditional customs are used only as idioms, and as mechanisms for political alignment. Fourthly, ethnic grouping is essentially informal. If an ethnic grouping is formally recognized, either as a state or as a region within a federal framework, then no longer it can be said that we are dealing with ethnicity. It is only when, within the formal framework of a national state or of any organization, an ethnic group informally organizes itself for political action, that we can say that we are dealing with ethnicity.

Paul Brass²¹ identifies three ways of defining ethnic groups - in terms of objective attribute, with reference to subjective feelings and in relation to behaviour. He argues that ethnicity is an alternative form of social organization and identification to class. Brass states that ethnic groups use ethnicity to make demands in the political arena for alteration in their status, in their economic well-being, in their civil rights or in their educational opportunities as a form of ethnic group politics. He further states that some ethnic groups demand corporate rights in which they would be given control over public system of education so that they can

teach language, history and culture to their own children. Moreover, they also demanded to have a major say in the political system as a whole or control over a piece of territory or a country of their own with full sovereignty. Dealing with movement from ethnic group to community, he pointed out the transition that some groups never make and those that others make initially in modern times and those that still others undergo repeatedly at different points in time. The first category, he puts, are the various 'lost' peoples and speakers of diverse dialects who have merged into or are merging into other peoples, in the second category. The second category are the newly-formed ethnic groups and nationalities of the 19th and 20th centuries and the third category comprises the ancient peoples of the world. Brass argued that the richness of a group's cultural heritage, the stage of development of its language and the distinctiveness of its religious beliefs do not by themselves predetermine that one group of people will be more in internal solidarity than another and will be more likely to perpetuate itself throughout. He also argued that the distinctive minority groups in modern times have often been developed into ethnically self-conscious community and they have been using or creating the religious differences among themselves to establish or emphasize barriers between peoples. He says that ethnic communities are created and transformed by particular élites in modernizing and in postindustrial societies undergoing dramatic social change. According to him, this process invariably involves competition and conflict for political power, economic benefits and social status between competing élite, class and leadership groups both within and among different ethnic categories. However, inequality between different groups or culturally distinct regions does not by itself spur the development of communal or national consciousness. Ethnic self-consciousness, ethnically-based demands and ethnic conflict can occur only if there is some conflict either between indigenous and external élites and authorities or between indigenous élites. He has out forwarded four sources of élite conflict that may spur the development of ethnic communalism or separatism in preindustrial or early modernizing societies which are - (a) between a local aristocracy attempting to maintain its privileges against an alien conqueror; (b) between competing religious élites from different ethnic groups; (c) between religious élites and the native aristocracy within an ethnic group and (d) between native religious élites and an alien aristocracy.

Pranjit Saikia

Assessing what religion adds to ethnic identification and inter-ethnic relations, Cynthia Enloe²² says, it is essential to note that there are critical differences among religions which bear directly on how ethnicity is expressed and maintained collectively. She suggests that when ethnic boundaries are firmly established on extra-religious grounds, group members who appear to be increasingly identical will have a stake in denying religious homogeneity. She says many nation-states have been formed on the assumption that religion and ethnicity were separable, but that when an overwhelming majority of citizens confessed an identical religion - ethnicity would lose saliency and functional value. However, she also states that even when religion is a constant, ethnic boundaries remain and sometimes ethnic group members even hold them in greater esteem. According to her, religious homogeneity may not be the *sin qua non* of ethnic boundary maintenance but religious pluralism within a community still has genuine consequences in the operation of the community in society at large.

Ethnic Discontentment and Crisis of Governability in Assam

The Language Question

After the Ahom Kingdom came under the British rule in 1826, according to Yandabo Treaty which ended up the Anglo-Burmese war, it was for first time in the history that Assamese heartland became politically incorporated into a pan-Indian imperial formation.²³ But since then till 1947 the colonial rulers kept on changing the boundaries of Assam purely for their administrative convenience. Until 1874, Assam was ruled as a part of Bengal. In 1874, when Assam was made into a colonial province under a chief commissioner, the new province included the East Bengali district of Sylhet – a historically unconnected area to Assam, apart from Ahom administered areas and some of Bhutanese influenced areas. Even after Assam became a separate province the colonial ruler once more experimented with a composite province of East Bengal and Assam from 1905 to 1912.²⁴ But this administrative arrangement was short-lived. After that Assam once again made a separate administrative unit with Sylhet as its part till independence.

Immediately after independence, Assam had to face severe immigration problem. With separation of Sylhet district of erstwhile East Pakistan there was heavy immigration of Hindu Bengali refugees to

Assam till November 1949 and the number of Hindu Bengali immigrants sharply went upto 6 lakhs in 1961 in comparison to 2.62 in 1951²⁵ which made the problem further complicated and acute. Frightened by such heavy immigration, a section of Assamese middle-class raised their voice to strengthen the Assamese sub-national identity for which as the first step they demanded to declare Assamese as the official language. They believed that such heavy immigration would affect the future of Assam and Assamese in a big way. Taking this belief further a number of news papers and civil society organizations played its part to mobilize people on linguistic sentiments. Being gravely concerned about the future of Assam, *The Assam Tribune*, an English daily from Assam cautioned, “the Centre must not be blind to Assam’s interest and must not adopt any policy that will ultimately lead to the annihilation of Assam. The danger point has almost been reached, and the Centre expects Assam to commit suicide with her eyes wide open’.²⁶ An alarmist Assamese middle-class had also expressed their concern by writing letters to the editors on many occasions.²⁷ An orthodox Assamese organization, the Axom Jatiya Mahasabha had expressed its concern in a memorandum submitted to Sri Prakash, the then Minister of Scientific Research and Natural Resources, Government of India and President of Assam Refugee Rehabilitation Enquiry Committee, on 4th July, 1951 stated “The problem of Bengal refugees in Assam definitely means a vision of the creation of Brihattar Banga Samrajya, based on Bengalism of Bengali language in which combined efforts of a powerful section of Bengali speaking old settlers of Assam, West Bengal, East Pakistan and also the Bengali settlers in other parts of India...”²⁸ and demanded that (1) the influx of outsiders must be stopped, (2) full representation of Assamese interest in all departments of central government should be given, (3) Assamese language should be given full recognition in every sphere of governmental activities including all central departments, (4) Assamese must be declared as the medium of instruction in all educational institutions.²⁹ In consonance with the prevailing mood of the state, the literary organization Axom Xahitya Xobha with its motto “My mother language — my eternal love”³⁰ also demanded Assamese should be state language. In response to the intense public sentiments of Assamese people over the language issue, the Assam Government Education Department had issued a circular to take steps for making Assamese the compulsory

medium of instruction in all schools of Assam valley.³¹ This circular agitated the Bengali speaking people and because of which organizations like Cachar District Committee, Assam-Bengal Association, some news papers from Calcutta and reactionary elements immediately plunged into the politics of hatred which further aggravated the animosity between the two communities³² .

Rifts between Assamese and Bengali got further deepened before and after passing the Assam Official Language Bill in 1960. The Axom Xahitya Xobha issued an ultimatum to the Government of Assam and set 1960 as the deadline for implementation of its demand for introducing Assamese as the state language. As the situation became very delicate, in the month of May, 1960 a section of non-Assamese speaking people staged a demonstration in Shillong with provocative statements against Assamese language. Back in Brahmaputra Valley, Assamese speaking people also agitated against such provocative incidents where students were the forerunners in mobilizing people. Such allegations and counter-allegations gradually took a violent turn in the mid-1960s. Incidents of stopping of train, looting, damages to public property specially the railways became rampant. Shouting anti-Bengali slogans on the streets, burning down cinema halls where Bengali films were screened, dislocation of people due to acts of violence created complete breach of peace between the Assamese and Bengali communities. Amidst such uproar, the Government of Assam decided to introduce the Assam Official Language Bill. In such increasing tension between the two communities, on 4th July, 1960 a student called Ranjit Borpujari was killed in police firing who was also reckoned as the first 'martyr' of the language movement. Such deaths surged the emotions of the people and they got more violent. The areas worst affected in such acts of violence were the regions of Goraswar, Bokulgiri, Tengazhar, Silkajhar and Mohipara.

The question of language once again became the matter of controversy as Gauhati University decided to introduce Assamese as medium of instruction in 1972. In the subsequent political decisions on the issue of medium of instruction at the degree level, which gravely deepened the animosity between the Assamese and Bengalis had become a pivotal point of political issue. The decision of Gauhati University was opposed by many quarters of Bengali people which demanded Bengali language to be the alternative medium of language. As there were heavy protests in

Bengali dominated areas over the issue, the Government of Assam decided to establish a separate university for Cachar for an early resolution of the matter. But the Bengali people felt such a decision of the government meant allowing permission for implementing the decision of the universities of Brahmaputra valley on the medium of instruction. Such short-sighted and thoughtless decision of the government over the issue further deteriorated the situation. The All Assam Student Union (AASU), a student body of the Brahmaputra valley, had alleged that the state government failed to give due recognition to the Assamese language. They called for 'bandh' in protest against the government's decision. At Kharupetia, in a violent incident 42 people got injured. Following that incident, a number of violent incidents took place at different places of the state which took 33 lives.

Clashes over Resources

The clashes over resources in Assam have been a problem since the colonial period. The problem over the period of time has been a major irritation among various ethnic groups as these groups are competing over limited resources. Going back to pre-colonial period, use of land resources was at the disposal of the Ahom kings. During the Ahom period, entire non-servile population had to contribute to the state in one way or another. The *pikes* – male members of the non-servile population and their family got two *puras* of wetland and another portion of land for their household. Apart from these, individuals were free to absorb uncultivated land for their use.

With the arrival of the British, the land regulations were altered altogether. The new systems had mainly evolved to serve the interest of the colonial rulers. The introduction of capitalist form of land regulations in the province forced it to break away from the pre-colonial socio-economic structure. The colonial authority brought entire land resources under strict regulations which certainly helped the tea planters to grab a large amount of land resource for tea plantation.

Francis Jenkins, one of the earlier rulers of colonial authority, had spearheaded to establish British industrial interest over the newly conquered Assam. Before Jenkins, in September 1927, Scott proposed a plan in colonial interest to grant wastelands on condition that the guarantee should bring one-fourth of the allotment into tillage by the expiry of

third year, one fourth by the sixth year and another one-fourth by ninth year after which the gurantee should be entitled to hold the land in perpetuity on paying usual rent upon three-fourth of the whole.³³ The most problematic criterion of this scheme of land resource arrangement was that the applicant had to deposit a security equal to the revenue of the first two years. Failing to do so, at the end of the fourth year the land allotment would be withdrawn from the occupants. But this scheme failed to attract European entrepreneurs. To attract European entrepreneurs, Captain Jenkins in his report dated July 22, 1833 suggested for more simplification of regulations which could facilitate the easy settlement of European entrepreneurs. As a part of initiative, in 1836 he suggested to the Government of Bengal the introduction of the *Gorakhpur* rates with some modification for similar grants in Assam.³⁴ Jenkins was so desperate to settle British planters in Assam that he did not mind the displacement of the local *ryots* from their lands through the operation of a discriminatory land revenue policy in favour of white colonialist.³⁵ Giving an impetus to his motive, in 1832-33, the colonial authority had abruptly increased land revenue in four districts – Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Darrang and Nowgaon (a 15 to 30 per cent increase). Once again in 1868, the land revenue rates were increased throughout Assam proper. As a result the total land revenue had increased from Rs. 1001,773 in 1864-65 to Rs. 2165, 157 in 1872-73.³⁶

In a bid to spread and strengthen colonial rule, the colonial authority eyed on the growing prospects of tea plantation. The formation of the tea committee in 1834, initiation of the Government Experimental Tea Gardens in 1836 and first successful manufacture of Assam tea in 1837 made colonial authority's intention more clear. After such successful experiments on tea, to attract Europeans in tea business the authority had many changes in the existing regulations which were completely against the interests of the local people. The technicalities and requirements were so difficult that only British could fulfill them and the local people were unable to derive any benefits out of their own resources. Such anti-people initiatives vehemently annoyed the local people.

Such economic transformation had rapidly changed the demographic scenario of Assam. The growing demand for labourers for tea gardens led to a huge mass mobilization in Assam. The colonial authority also actively encouraged immigration. The native Assamese people had shown

little interest to work as wage labourers as they were unable to reconcile with the terms and conditions of their new commitments. Moreover, as the society was conservative, the women working in the tea gardens were viewed as undignified. In such situation planters usually complained that the Assamese people were reluctant to reorient their views regarding the value of permitting “their women to come into tea gardens.”³⁷ So, they had to turn to labourers from outside. Apart from tea gardens, the coal and oilfields, construction of bridges, roads, railways attracted huge amount of immigrant labourers. Moreover, a large section of educated Bengalis absorbed a major portion of government jobs in Assam. In sum immigration was a major phenomenon in Assam in nineteenth century.

In the post-colonial period the immigrant people had become the permanent settlers in Assam and occupied a large amount of land and other economically profitable resources. The growing consciousness among Assamese middle class about the resources absorption by immigrants, resulted in campaign against such immigrants. They suspected that these immigrants had not only absorbed natural resources but also put the Assamese language, culture and way of life at stake. As they enjoyed life at the cost of the resources in Assam, the Assamese middle class people wanted their Assamisation. But since these migrated people tried to resist such forceful assimilation and assert their own identity, it led to violent conflicts between them and the mainstream Assamese people which in many time adversely affected the social harmony of Assam.

Assam Movement, Ethnic Rifts and its Impact on Governance

The six years long Assam Movement under the leadership of All Assam Students' Union (AASU) began in 1979 after a bye-election to Mongoldoi Parliamentary Constituency, where there is heavy concentration of East Bengali, to draw the public attention on the issue of demographic transformation of Assam as a result of immigration. The movement soon became a mass movement and all sections of society, for example, literary societies, cultural associations, newspapers, magazines, and school and college teachers associations offered unprecedented support to the call to 'save' the motherland from the immigrants. The ethnic subgroups directly threatened by the demands of the movement were the East Bengali immigrants, both Hindu and

Muslim.³⁸ The movement neither demanded for self determination nor asked for more power for the state but it solely emphasised on expulsion of a very big proportion of Assam's population, irrespective of their local birth and /or long residence.³⁹ As this demand caused displacement of a large portion of population, they decided to fight for their interest which in the later period became major cause of concern for the movement's leaders because they were aware of the fact that a unified Assamese society was very essential for the success of the movement. So the movement's leaders had to work hard to find out a conflict management formula to assure these frightened groups, yet there were reports of clashes between tea workers and student picketers attempting to close down tea plantations.⁴⁰ Moreover, by opposing the demand of the movement a new organization, the All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU) was formed mainly comprising Muslim and Hindu East Bengali immigrant students. The AAMSU soon spread its mass base among minority communities who provided leadership to take up the issues concerning them. Though the AAMSU accepted the seriousness of the issue it demanded that harassment on the minorities be stopped and the immigrants who came to Assam before 1971 be given citizenship. But the AASU angrily opposed such demand. Allegations and anti-allegations between the AASU and AAMSU led to violent conflicts which further increased the rift between the two communities.

The 1983 election was a challenge to the Assam movement. At that time who would win the election was not the matter of question, but whether there would be election at all was the billion dollar question because by holding elections the Centre wanted to prove its legitimacy which would weaken the movement's claims about its representativeness and its power capability.⁴¹ The AASU termed the election as Assam's "last battle of survival". On the other hand, East Bengali immigrants had supported the Centre's move to hold election as they thought that a democratically elected government would better protect their life and property. Such contested interests among themselves led to violent confrontation which completely broke down the process of ethnic accommodation in the state. Terming the situation a "Hobbesian war of all against all" eminent journalist Arun Shourie wrote "They testified not so much to "communalism" as to the total breakdown of governance:

in Nellie Lalung tribals killed Bengali Muslims, in Kokrajhar sub-division Boro Kacharis fought Bengali Hindus and Muslims; in Goreswar and Khairabari Sarani and Boro Kacharis fought Bengali Hindus; in Gohpur Boros fought Assamese Hindus; in Dhemaji and Jonai Mishing tribals fought Bengali Hindus and Muslims; in Samaguri Muslims killed Hindus; in Dhaila and Thekrabari again Muslims killed Hindus; in Chaowlkhowa Chapori Assamese Hindus and Muslims together killed Bengali Muslims. And a community that was a victim in one place was a predator in another.⁴² Such inter-ethnic conflicts created “total breakdown of governance” in the state. Portraying the situation another eminent journalist Shekhar Gupta wrote in his book *Assam: A Valley Divided* that such conflicts “brought out in sharp relief the basic weaknesses and contradictions of Assamese society and had a far-reaching impact on the course of the agitation later.”⁴³

With the coming of Hiteswar Saikia as Chief Minister of Assam desperate attempts were made to weaken the movement by combining political maneuvering with the use of coercion. To weaken the Assam movement the State Government on its part allocated patronage to the Bodo Xahitya Xabha instead of Axom Xahity Xobha- an active component of the movement. As the Government stopped all grants, the Xobha found itself in serious financial crunch which forced it to abandon or keep in abeyance most of its publication programmes and annual activities such as writers, workshops, seminars, lecture, programmes and literary awards⁴⁴ and compelled it to reconsider its involvement in the Assam movement.⁴⁵ On the other hand, indiscriminate killing of Muslims in the elections inflamed the Muslim leaders of the movement and they became dubious towards the approach of the movement’s leadership towards the Muslims. Signaling the rift in the AASU, the Muslim members of the organization issued an ultimatum to its leadership to correct “pro-Hindu communal tilt” and demanded “firm definition” of a foreigner.⁴⁶ Rifts were also evident in other weak links of the Assamese sub-national formation — mainly with Bodos. Historically the tribals were skeptical about the hegemonic tendency of the Assamese middle-class. The dream of the Assamese middle-class to turn Assam into a homogenous society by embracing the Assamese way of life angered them and they felt that they had no chance of preserving their own cultural heritage⁴⁷ and asserting their distinctiveness from ethnic Assamese, they

demanded that recognition of Bodo as an associate official language, the adoption of the Roman script instead of the Assamese script for writing certain other tribal languages, and creation of autonomous districts and regions for plains tribals.⁴⁸ The political patronage had also played a major role in bringing serious ethnic rifts. Though the government adopted appeasement policy to weaken the mass base of the Assam movement, the magnitude of its impact on society as a whole was far-reaching, perpetual and far from expectation.

Recent Trends

Immediately after the Assam Movement, sub-national politics in Assam took a much radical turn with the rise of United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). In subsequent period, a number of militant organizations like National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), Karbi National Volunteers (KNV), Dima Halam Daoga (DHD), United Peoples' Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), Koch Rajbangshi Protection Force, Muslim United Liberation Tigers Association (MULTA), etc have been floating in Assam which further complicated the Assamese sub-national formation. All these militant groups avowed to protect the interests of the 'natives' from foreign immigrants by formation of autonomous district/state and creation of a separate state within the Indian Union by complete secession from the Indian Union.⁴⁹

Historically, Assam is a state of fractured identity divided into national and ethnic lines. The process of Assamese sub-national formation was started in the early 19th century when Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan talked of an Assamese 'nation' and tried to uphold the pride of the Assamese language by making it a symbol of modern national consciousness.⁵⁰ In the later period the process of Assamese sub-national formation had been carried forward by the Axom Xahitya Xobha with its cultural activities since 1917. Meanwhile, the western educated Assamese middle-class eventually had to fight to reassert its cultural pride against Bengalis. The imposition of Bengali language by the British for smooth functioning of the administrative work made the newly rising Assamese middle class feel threatened with loss of their distinct language and culture. An alarmist Tarunram Phukan, the president of Axom Xahitya Xobha Session in 1927 said "We, Asamiyas, are a distinct nationality

amongst Indians. Though our language is Sanskrit based, it is a distinct language. A rising nationality shows signs of life by way of extending domination over others. Alas! It is otherwise (with us); we are incapable of self-defense today! We are not only dependent, but even a dependent neighbour is trying to swallow us, taking advantage of our helplessness. Brother Asamiya! recollect your past glory to have an understanding of the present situation.”⁵¹ Though the Assamese middle-class had strong sub-national outlook with powerful connection to their language it eventually paved the way for the foundation for pan-Indian nationalism⁵² which further strengthened the Assamese sub-national formation against any domination by others. So, the love and hate relationship between the Assamese and Bengali continued for long which culminated in the language movement in 1960s. Till then though it was claimed that the Assamese sub-nationalism had been getting stronger, but gradually cracks in it could be seen almost unconsciously.

In colonial period the leaders of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee had committed themselves to the tribal leaders of limited self government in the hill and certain safeguards for the plains⁵³. But in the post-colonial period, certain measures were adopted/ proposed by Assamese middle-class who felt threatened about losing their identity. Moreover, during this period of time no powerful tribal leader could emerge because of unswerving power capacity of the Assamese middle-class. But tribal communities could not resist their discontent as they had been squeezed out of their land, badly neglected their interest during the successive governments and negligible growth of economic, political and social situation. By asserting themselves, the tribal people of Assam formed Plain Tribe Council of Assam (PTCA) and demanded a new state named Udayachal to be carved out of Assam. But that demand could not attract much attention of the Central and the State governments. In late 90s only the new generation of Bodo youth could launch a populist movement demanding a separate state – Bodoland. The animosity of these tribal people had become so deep-rooted towards ethnic Assamese that they rejected every practice that could result in “Assamesization”.⁵⁴ Further arguing for a separate state, All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) says, “One of the most responsible factors as to why the tribals have become alienated from mainstream Assam is the attitude of the Assamese people. The Assamese people have never accepted

the tribals as a part and parcel of the Assamese community and society in a real sense, though they talked of Greater Assamese nationality. As for instance, a Goswami Brahmin family never allows or agrees to give its daughter for a social marriage with a tribal youth.”⁵⁵ Moreover, the success of Assam’s student leaders in sustaining a prolonged campaign and then capturing political power inspired other student movements in the northeast⁵⁶ (which) has become their reference group.⁵⁷

In sharp contrast to Assam movement, the ABSU - led Bodoland movement has been a more violent one. The AASU led Assam movement was by and large peaceful, but the violent tactics adopted by ABSU had made the situation more volatile. For example the numbers of victims of ethnic riots of May, 1996 were 129,000.⁵⁸ To understand the gravity of the ethnic rifts following are the major episodes of ethnic violence cited mostly from Sanjib Baruah’s *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*⁵⁹ :

- There were riots against Muslims of Bengali descent in October 1993 and May 1994 in Kokrajhar and in July 1994 in Barpeta. In May 1994, 22 Muslims of Bengali descent were massacred. More than 3000 people became homeless; about 1000 took shelter in a relief camp at Hakaipara and another 700 at Bhotgaon. In July 1994 in Barpeta, about 1000, mostly women and children, were killed and about 60 villages burnt down to ashes.⁶⁰
- On October 9, 1995 militants killed eight people in Kaligaon. The killings were believed to be retaliation against the Samagra Assam Bengali Yuva Chatra Parishad (SABYCP). The organization had called a rally which was scheduled to be addressed by BAC Chief Prem Singh Brahma as well as two Assam ministers. The target of the attack was the Kalaigaon Ancholik unit of the SABYCP.
- On October 15 the BSF killed 8 in Mussalpur in Nalbari. Those killed included one ethnic Assamese, a Bengali and rest Nepali. It was viewed that the killings were “viewed as a kind of retaliation by the BSF against non-Bodos settled in the BAC area.”
- There were riots against Santhals in May 1996. There were “not less than 200 dead, perhaps more, tens of villages torched and 200,000 refugees.” In June 1996 new cases of arson were reported against Santhals; at least 12 houses of Santhals were set on fire and in

November 1996 there were more ethnic clashes between Bodos and Santhals.

It is not that only non-Bodos have been the sufferer of these ethnic clashes. But in-fightings between the Bodos caused a huge loses of life in course of time. Moreover, the ethnic clashes are not one-sided. There is a long list of examples of retaliatory attacks by the victim communities.

From the above discussions we find a long history of ethnic rifts in Assam. The growing competition for limited social and economic space has further intensified the hostilities and prejudices among the ethnic groups since the colonial period.⁶¹ But in the post-colonial period successive governments have failed to contain the ethnic clashes. Although we have adopted democratic culture as political process and federalism as administrative structure, yet we are unable to administer ethnic aspirations effectively, which has certainly eroded the legitimacy of governance system.

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Naga Movement: Linkages with the Other Countries from 1950s to 1970s

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Background

The Naga movement is one of the oldest unsettled political issues in world's politics. It started in the early part of 19th century with the British's forceful occupation of the Naga territories. The Nagas put up strong resistance against British rule, when the British rulers attempted to invade the Naga inhabited areas from 1832 until peace was concluded on 27 March, 1880, though there was no formal written agreement.¹ The Naga representatives under the aegis of Naga Club submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission in January 1929 demanding that they should be left alone to decide and shape their own future when British left India.²

With the end of World War II and the approaching of independence from British rule, the Nagas too hoped and looked forward to India granting them the right to become a nation, but the reverse happened. The Naga leaders continued to discuss with Indian leaders, but they (Indian leaders) kept changing their stands and even gave false assurance to the Nagas. The Naga leaders lost faith in the motives of the Indian Government, and not wanting to accept any form of foreign control and dominance, the Naga National Council (NNC) formally declared their independence on August 14, 1947 from the British rule just one day before India got independence. The declaration message was sent to the King of England, the Government of India and to the Secretary

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General of the United Nations.³ The Government of India ignored the Nagas' decision.

The Indian Government representatives dismissed the Memorandum of the Naga Club that was submitted to the Simon Commission in 1929, as only being the handiwork of very few persons with vested interests and it did not represent all the Naga tribes.⁴ Arguing in support of it, Murkot Ramunny said: "The signatories did not represent all the Naga tribes. Only those leaders from Kohima, many of them connected with the administration some way or other signed the memorandum. There were no representatives of the Aos to meet the Simon Commission."⁵ Ramunny and others, citing that "no representatives of the Aos" were present to meet the Simon Commission, attempted to belittle the Naga movement and there were seeds to further divide the Naga people.

During the Indian freedom struggle, the British officials tried to belittle the independence movement led by the Indian National Congress (INC) using the same argument against the INC by the British Government representatives. Winston Churchill, the then Prime Minister of Britain argued that: "The Indian National Congress does not represent all India, it does not represent majority people of India, and it does not represent even the Hindu masses. It is a political organisation built around a party machine and sustained by certain manufacturing and financial interest."⁶

However, there were some others who considered that the Memorandum of the Naga Club submitted to the Simon Commission in 1929 was a significant step which indicated the farsightedness of the Naga people. Mr. E. Cadegen, the House of Common, Special Committee, member commenting on the memorandum said that: "These little tribesmen are far more sophisticated in their own particular way than perhaps the Committee (Simon Commission) may imagine. They have a very shrewd suspicion that something is being done to take away from their immemorial rights and customs."⁷

Initially, the Naga people dreamt of independence in the hope that the leaders of India like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru who had fought against the colonialism and imperialism in any form in Africa, Asia, South America, and Europe would certainly approach and respect the similar sentiment of the Naga people. But no favourable response

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came from the Government of India and it was not what colonialism and imperialism implied in this context from the Indian leaders point of view.⁸

The Nagas had high regard for the Indian leaders particularly Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Rajagopalachari and depended upon their magnanimity and respect for the right to self-determination. They pleaded before the Indian leaders with petitions, memoranda, and by sending their representatives, but they were refused the right to determine their own future outside India⁹ The Nagas were forced to take up arms against India in order to press for their independence.

The Japanese forces in collaboration with the INA (Indian National Army) reached Kohima, the farthest point, into British India during the World War II in 1944.¹⁰ The Nagas, with their indigenous guerrilla method and the collection of dumped arms and ammunitions from the Japanese and the British forces in the World War II, fought against the Indian troops. The Nagas realized that they could not go on fighting without the foreign countries' support.¹¹

The Nagas, in the pursuit for independence, were thus compelled to seek assistance from other countries. Any movement without the support from the outside forces or countries cannot survive for long. The long survival of any movement depends on the help rendered by external powers that extend support based on the commonality of perspective, interpretation of historical development, ideology inspiration, inducement, and various form of financial assistance, arms, sanctuary, shelter etc.

The Naga nationalist leaders in the mid-fifties began appealing to various countries to support them. The Nagas received help and support from various countries like Pakistan, United Kingdom, USA and China. The problem became acute in the wake of foreign powers' involvements. The Naga movement would not be possible without external help and support.

The relationship of the Naga movement with the other countries - Pakistan, United Kingdom, USA and China can be examined here. However, the role of Burma and Bangladesh would not form a part of this discussion.

Pakistan

Pakistan was one of the first countries which came forward to provide

moral and financial support to the cause of the Nagas. The relationship between India and Pakistan for reasons well known was never cordial. The main objective of A Z Phizo's journey to other countries was to mobilize and raise support for the Naga cause in various international forums.¹² While Phizo was in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) before leaving to United Kingdom, he sought Pakistan's help for raising the Naga issue in the United Nations.

Phizo's visit to East Pakistan had opened the way for other Naga leaders like Zhekuto Sema, Director of Intelligence of the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN), Thungli Chang, ex-chief of Naga Home Guards and Mowu Angami, the then Naga Youth leader, to visit East Pakistan in 1957.¹³ Consequently, a special "Liaison Cell" was established by the Pakistani authorities for contact and to look after the military training camps. Besides, political briefing was also given to the Naga leaders by the Pakistani Ministers and high officials.¹⁴

The first group of leaders of advanced training in arms included General Kaito, Mowu, Khodao Yanthan and Yankang who reached Pakistan in 1962. These leaders went to London to meet Phizo, the then president of NNC, with the travel documents provided by Pakistani authorities.¹⁵ Gen. Mowu recalled that: "Indian Government tried its best and strongly requested the British Government to arrest us and surrender to its (India) Government. But the British Government refused to do on the ground that we (Nagas) are not Indians."¹⁶

The Indian intelligence operating in Pakistan received information that Government of Pakistan set up training camps and was the main supplier of arms and ammunition to the Naga rebels. The whole operation was well-planned and at the highest level. The Pakistani radio and press propaganda also played very active role and came out with statements like "the Nagas were not a part of India even during the days of British paramount. But the Indians marched their troops into free Nagaland to cow down, subdue and suppress the proud sensitive people. The Indian jawans have proved more brutal." On 23 August 1967, Radio Pakistan said: "Our struggle for freedom has its impact on other areas of Bharat also. Today the 'Bharati' Nagas are following the footsteps. The Naga nationalists today are fighting against colonial power 'Bharat' as the Kashmiris are doing. They want freedom; they

do not want to bow before the satanic power of Bharat Government. The Nagas and Mizos were allowed the facilities to contact foreign missions in Dacca and were allowed free use of port facility to enable them to send their representatives to visit foreign countries via Pakistan for furtherance of their goal.”¹⁷

In May 1964, Z A Bhutto, Foreign Minister of Pakistan said in the Security Council meeting that: “The Indian representative had been silent about the violation of human rights in Nagaland, that systematic and brutal persecution of the Nagas which has been going on in eastern India for many years...But the United Nations members still considered the Naga problem as a civil conflict within the Union of India and to raise any question would be intervention in the Indian domestic affairs or assistance to the rebel forces aiming at overthrowing the legitimate Government of India.”¹⁸

India had been lodging complaints to Pakistan against its support to the Naga movement stating that such an act of Pakistan constituted a gross interference in the internal affairs and also a clear violation of the accepted standards of international behaviour.¹⁹ Pakistan never admitted her complicity, however the role of Pakistan was revealed and released by the External Affairs Ministry in New Delhi on 4 October 1968 when some Naga rebels and Mizo rebels along with 90,000 Pakistani troops surrendered to the Indian forces in Dacca on 22 December 1971, after the Indo-Pakistan War.²⁰ Evidences of the collection of the Assistant High Commission of Pakistan in Shillong with the Naga insurgency came into light. Eventually, India asked Pakistan to wind up its Assistant High Commission in Shillong.²¹

The war between India and Pakistan in 1971 for the liberation of Bangladesh was a severe setback to the Naga insurgency with the loss of its training camps and sanctuaries in East Pakistan. However, Pakistan did not completely abandon the idea of encouraging them and secret talks were reportedly held between Mohammad Ali, Chief of Pakistan Democratic Party, Golam Aza President of the Jamat-e-Islam and the various prominent members of political parties and Nagas and Mizos insurgents during their visit to Akaran and Akyap in Burma (now Myanmar).²²

The Government of Pakistan’s strategy of supporting the Nagas would probably be seen as retaliation against what India did in the

liberation of Bangladesh from Pakistan. And also Pakistan wanted to disintegrate or destabilize the unity of India.

United Kingdom

In 1957, the NNC sent their leader, A Z Phizo to Zurich on an El Salvadorian passport provided by the Pakistani authorities to mobilize and campaign for the cause of Naga independence movement into the western countries. From Zurich, Phizo went to London with the help of Rev. Micheal Scott.²³ According to his (Phizo) own admission, what the British Government did was that he was allowed to enter United Kingdom as a commonwealth citizen and later on conferred him British citizenship after one year completion of staying in United Kingdom under the British Nationality Act of 1948. Thus, Phizo started his mission in London and subsequently established the NNC headquarters.²⁴

Phizo wrote a pamphlet entitled “The fate of the Naga People and Appeal to the World”. In this pamphlet he stated that: “The Indian armed forces violated the human rights of the Nagas and inflicted inequities atrocities on Naga innocent Nagas in the form of torture, crucifixion, scalping and flogging, rape of women, forced prostitution, concentration camps and starvation”. He also produced a document of almost 75,000 deaths of Naga people including women and children caused by the Indian armed forces from 1955 to 1959.²⁵

The Times, London on 3 September, 1960 in the editorial article carried out and stated that “On the straight issues of independence for the Nagas, it is true that the Nagas differ from Indians in all important aspects of their civilization. They are Mongoloid untouched by Hinduism and partly Christianised.”²⁶

Sir Paul Gore Booth, the British High Commissioner in India paid a visit to Nagaland on 29 February 1964. He did not say anything about the British policy towards the Nagas but conveyed the good wishes of the British Government and her people to the people of Nagaland.

On 9 July 1966, *The Guardian* stated that: “India has been leaning over backwards to find some way of giving the Nagas satisfaction without actually giving what they want. The Nagas want independence and no diplomatic formula can dress up the solution that falls short of this aim. Conceivably Indians would move from their inflexible position if it were

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not for the fact that in addition to traditional dislike which any central government has for seceding Province of Nagaland is in their most sensitive border area, contiguous with Burma and close to East Pakistan and China. The Nagas could hardly have been unfortunately located. For strategic reasons India is unlikely ever to budge.”²⁷

Rev. Michael Scott and Bertrand Russell were some of the prominent British supporters to the Naga movement. Rev. Michael Scott said, “They (Nagas) want to be associated with the West because of the religious and other affiliations with what they have been taught to think of a free world, if the West is not prepared to help them they will go on fighting without. But they want it to be known that the time may come when the fighting forces will have to seek help elsewhere despite unfavourable political implications. This they want to be understood, will be the logical consequences of India’s past and present policy. It would not be their (Nagas) choice nor would it, they say be right for the world than to blame those to whom they may be forced to turn.”²⁸

Patrick Montgomery, Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society had urged the British people to speak for the Nagas as the latter supported the British allied forces during the World War II. He compared the India’s pacification drive and alleged atrocities committed in Nagaland to Mozambique and press the British people to support the cause of the Nagas.²⁹

A booklet entitled “India and the Nagas” by Neville Maxwell, a former correspondent of *The Times*, London brought out a 32 pages document accusing Indian Government with a series of atrocities, violation of Fundamental Rights and Human Rights following the end of ceasefire agreement in September 1972.³⁰

In view of the above comments, Mrs Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India addressed a public meeting at Kohima on 1 December, 1973 on the first anniversary of Nagaland statehood, said that she wondered why these people who had never shown any concern for development of Nagaland or Northeast India, who never hesitated to exploit the whole country for their own purpose, should take interest in Nagaland. She asked the Naga people not to be misguided by the propaganda of interested elements and think seriously why these people who lived so far away from Northeast showing sudden interest in Nagaland and what the motive of this people would be.³¹

Phizo established NNC headquarters in London and tried to internationalise the Naga case. He did not receive full support from the British Government because of his complicity against the British Government during the World War II, siding with Subhas Chandra Bose in collaboration with Japanese forces against the British troops.³² Historically speaking, the British Government was responsible for the Naga problem. The British Government did not do anything more than giving refuge to Phizo and not stopping him from establishing his NNC headquarters and continuing with his crusade from there.

United States of America

The Americans' support to the Nagas movement was quite similar to that of the British. They had been lending material and moral support to the Nagas till the latter leaned towards China in mid 1960s. On 4 April, 1967 Phizo went to USA from London to seek support for the independence movement of Naga and also to meet the officials of America in Washington.³³ Phizo claimed that his visit to USA was a great success and he wrote a letter to Khugato and Mhiasi. In his letter he stated: "The present talks with India will have to be continued, as we will not be the first party to break a series of consultants. If the Government of India wants to discontinue the talks, we shall leave the matter to it. We can now be sure that nothing can prevent us from appealing to the world for justice. My mission to America has been a great success and people outside have been begun to study our case very seriously. We have come very near to our goal and we now do not have to wait long".³⁴

Phizo's visit to USA raised a wild controversy between the American Government and India, as to how Phizo was allowed to enter America. The American Government explained that he had come to America for his medical treatment. On 14 August, 1967, Chester Bowles, the American Ambassador to India said in a statement that the private American citizen expressed a view that was not held by the American Government. He also said that it would be just as unconceivable for USA to develop a policy concerning Nagaland as it would be for India to have a policy for Illinois.³⁵

But the American involvement got exposed when the former American secret agent John Smith revealed that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had supported and financing the Naga underground

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movement till 1950s. He revealed that the American spies handed the tribal leaders a million of rupees, weapons and secret instrument prepared in Washington.³⁶ On 7 December, 1966 the American designs in the eastern part of Indian sub-continent was revealed in the “Blue Print” circulated by Agencia International De Prensa (International Press Service). USA had conjured a plan with other western powers to create an “Independent Bengal” comprising of East Pakistan, West Bengal, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Bhutan. The “Blue Print” claimed the support from the Mizos and the Nagas and stating that “the formulation of this new country is of special interest to the hill tribes of Mizo and Naga. And also it acknowledged that “the proposed settlement of the problem of Assam tribes, Mizo and Naga in the framework of a new state set up is of great significance in the attainment of stable conditions in this corner of the world”.³⁷

The USA continued to be the patron and supplier of arms and ammunitions to the insurgent groups of Northeast India from Bangkok in 1970s. Bangkok became the operational headquarters of CIA.³⁸ With the liberation of Bangladesh, the CIA’s plans of destabilizing India could not be fulfilled because Sheikh Mujibur Rahman refused to cooperate with them (CIA). The alleged conspiracy to assassinate Mujibur Rahman and later its involvement in the sacking of Moumud Ahmed, the then Deputy Prime Minister of Bangladesh indicated the interest to which USA can go to have an influence and foothold in parts of the Indian sub-continent.³⁹

A circular was issued on 21 July 1972 by the United States International Communication Agency entitled “Project Brahmaputra”. The Project Brahmaputra was to be carried out under the supervision of special research cell of George Washington University. The special research cell of George Washington University had instructed several teams of investigators to conduct research in the Northeast states of India, Sikkim and Bhutan with the approval of the State Department. These teams of investigators were to conduct opinion poll on the constitutional position of different Northeast states and to probe into the possibility of forming the “New States”.⁴⁰

The American secret agent, CIA was believed to be operating through its Indian employees that include journalists, academicians, and public leaders. The *Blitz* magazine alleged that American agents

have been coming to Manipur occasionally to supervise the anti-national activities.⁴¹

The support of America to the insurgent groups of Northeast was to find out the problems and grievances of the people and then try to exploit the people for their own purpose by helping them in seceding from India. This strategy was a grave danger to the unity, integrity and sovereignty of India.

China

The Naga leaders' overturning to China came in the wake of the disappointing response from the United Kingdom and USA, to their call for help. Phizo realised that he could not expect his British and American patrons to support him to the extent of going in open fighting against India. He told his colleagues who came to visit him in London that the time had come to switch-over to China for political, economic and military support.

On 29 May, 1963 the Nagas sent a letter to Peking through Pakistani authorities explaining that they were fighting for their "territorial independence". Through their letter, they recalled some of the alleged atrocities and appealed to Peking to recognize the "territorial rights of Nagaland, her people now and forever". The communication anticipated that the Chinese would honour and follow their principles of safeguarding and upholding the cause of any suppressed nation of Mongoloid stock. The Nagas openly endorsed the same letter to the Prime Ministers of India and the United Kingdom and to their leader Phizo.⁴²

The Nagas foresaw that their demand made to the Indian Government was not going to be considered by the Peace Mission and their talks with the Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi. They decided to seek support from China in spite of opposition from the people (Nagas) who feared imposition of Communism against their Christian faith. Pakistan and China encouraged the Nagas to go on fighting against India for freedom which Nagas had been demanding for years without hatred or ill will towards India but as the fundamental rights for Nagas only wanting to live as a Naga nation.⁴³

The Nagas got encouragement from China and in May, 1966 the Federal Government of Nagaland sent Thuingaleng Muivah and Brigadier

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Thinosellie with 300 men to China⁴⁴ to present the Naga case and ask for any possible help. They were welcomed and placed in military training camps. The Chinese supported the Naga cause by imparting training, supplying of arms and ammunitions and provided the Chinese Radio services for publicity and internationalisation.⁴⁵

The Chinese assured that the Nagas of its support and asked them to come in thousands of young educated, persons having unshaken conviction in the ideal of Nagaland's sovereignty for training arms and guerrilla tactics. They also wanted the Nagas to coordinate the activities with the Meiteis, Mizos, Chins, Shans, Karens and the Kachins.⁴⁶ In this pursuit, Phizo appealed to the people of Northeast that: "We are all of the Mongoloid stock and so let us merge ourselves with each other."⁴⁷

Unlike the Burmese rebels, the Chinese further assured non-interference with their religion because of Chinese Government allows freedom of religious belief according to Article 88 of their People's Republic of China's Constitution.⁴⁸

After receiving training and arms, Brigadier Thinosellie and some Nagas from the first batch came back from China in small groups. The China-returned Nagas were believed to have told the underground leaders that China would openly support them in their freedom movement and help in the establishment of an exile government in the Chinese territory contiguous to the Indian border and would guide its foreign relations.⁴⁹ When the Sixth and final rounds of talks with Mrs Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India broke down, the second batch under General Mowu and Isak Chisti Swu went to China in 1967.⁵⁰

The Nagas went to China, one batch after another batch, some of them were sent to North Vietnam to make first hand study of how the Vietnamese were fighting against the Super Power, America. The North Vietnamese Government also supported the Naga people and extended all possible help with their ability for the liberation of the Nagas from the reactionary Indian Government.⁵¹

In March, 1968, the Peking radio in its Burmese language broadcast attacked General Ne Win for having "secret talks" with the Indian Government to "suppress the Nagas and the revolutionary working people who would not be defeated by him". China, through its radio broadcast threatened General Ne Win that he would pay dearly for his

act.⁵² Thus, the Chinese support to the Nagas movement did not remain a secret.

Officially China kept denying its support to the Nagas but it was exposed when the Indian army captured a Naga underground camp at Jotsama. The photographs and documents found from the rebel camp proved that the Chinese were involved in the Naga movement. Not only the Peking broadcast talked of the cause of the Naga hostiles and claimed “it was just”. It tried to comfort and encourage the Nagas by saying that they would “assuredly win the final victory in their struggle”.⁵³

On 22 October, 1968 the Taiwan’s Foreign Minister, Wei Tao-Ming brought up the issue China’s support to the Nagas in the United Nations Assembly stating that the People’s Republic of China was providing training to thousands of Naga nationalists in Yunan and was sending them back to India to fight against the Government of India.⁵⁴

On his coming back from China in 1979, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the then Indian Minister of External Affairs sought to assure the country that Peking had indicated to him that it would no longer assist the various insurgents groups of Northeast India.⁵⁵

However, despite Indian and Russian accusations, the Chinese Government continued to help the Naga rebels. Chinese Government even instructed the Communist Party and other pro-Chinese rebel outfits in Northern Burma to provide assistance to the Nagas.⁵⁶

The Chinese felt betrayed by the Nagas’ signing of Shillong Accord, and the surrendering of their arms to India. The bilateral relationships between China and India have been improving since 1970s. Though in February 1979, the Chinese assured the Indian Government that such support was a thing of the past, but the Chinese continued to help the Nagas in Northern Burma by imparting training and supplying arms from its stock of armory with the Burmese Communist Party which includes sophisticated arms and even U. S. 3.5 rocket launchers.⁵⁷

Conclusion

The insurgency of Naga is one of the oldest and most intractable separatist movements in South Asia. The Nagas were the first to start insurgency against India and also they encouraged, guided and advised the other insurgents groups of Northeast region to join hands with

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them in resisting and repulsing the Indian rule. The Nagas received supports from various countries like Pakistan, United Kingdom, USA and China. These countries played a vital role in helping and encouraging the Nagas in various ways like supplying arms and ammunitions, financial assistance, sheltering and publicity in the international forums. The involvement of the external powers in the insurgency of the Nagas was brought to international limelight. All these situations posed a serious challenge to Indian Government. The Indian Government had to deal with the Naga problem with maximum care, which was arising from domestic as well as international involvement. India's diplomacy played an important role in mobilizing and seeking cooperation from various countries that were involved in the insurgency of Nagas. The task of diplomacy is to achieve national interest as much as possible in the prevailing situation. India's diplomacy had achieved significant diplomatic victory by succeeding to stop various countries that lended support to the cause of the Nagas. But it is not surprising if the Nagas re-establish their connection with various countries. Besides, the territory of Naga is strategically located for receiving help from neighbouring countries. The Government of India had taken various measures towards settling the Naga problem in the domestic front also, by granting statehood to Nagaland, funding lots of money for developmental purposes and monetary grants to those who lay down arms, which led to the signing of the Shillong Accord in 1975. The Shillong Accord was one of the greatest achievements of the Indian Government. But the Accord had not brought about the expected results. On the contrary, it paved the way for the formation of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), the dreaded extremist outfit in the North-East India. The NSCN emerged as the strongest underground army in the entire India's North-East region. One can state that until the Naga problem is rightly settled, the whole North-East region would be at unrest, because the Naga insurgency is the mother of all insurgencies in North-East India.

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The Rise of the Red Dragon: Geopolitical Implications for Southeast Asia

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The subject of geopolitics is interesting because it delves into the political layoffs of power shifts across geographical regions. For instance, during the Cold War the Indo-China wars had witnessed rapid and quaint power shifts within the region of Southeast Asia. With the defeat of the United States in the Vietnam War, there was a sense of triumph within the victorious Communist states party to the War – Vietnam, Soviet Union and China. China, a vital state in the East Asian Rim, assisted North Vietnam. Subsequent to the Vietnam War, the Vietnam-Cambodian conflict witnessed a quixotic alliance between the United States and China against the Soviet Union. In turn, the Sino-US support to the Cambodian dictator Pol Pot, was pitted against the Soviet Union supported Heng Samrin regime in Vietnam. In geospatial terms, the entire Indo-China wars could be explained through the vacillating links between the regional and extra-regional powers wherein the Soviet Union was a Eurasian Heartland power, the United States is an Asia Pacific Rim member, China was an influential member of the East Asian Rim, while Vietnam and Cambodia belong to the Southeast Asian region. The end of the Cambodian conflict became possible because of the ebbing of the Soviet power. Subsequently with the end of the conflict, China emerged as the most confident state of the East Asia Rim. Even the United States that projected itself as the only surviving superpower was concerned with China as a serious challenge to their new global position. China proved

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its resilience by being able to resist pressures both external and internal. Whereas Soviet Union collapsed under immense systemic pressure, giving rise to a crisis in socialism across the Eurasian heartland, in the East Pacific Rim, China proved its ability to survive by putting its house in order and resisting immense crisis of the socialist order. Therefore in order of credibility, China emerged as a resilient state with an eye to take care of the entire neighbourhood and spread its influence beyond it in an incremental manner. Such an image of the Red Dragon challenged the entire concept of US unilateralism across rims and regions.

Southeast Asia is China's neighbour and at present is representative of an emergent dynamic region. It is a geographical space that has both economic and strategic significance particularly because of its natural access to vital sea passages; it straddles the crucial maritime passage that connects the Indian Ocean with the Pacific – the Malacca Straits, Lombok Straits. Besides it is a geographical space that maintains a geographical continuity between two enormous Asian states India and China. There are no doubts that Southeast Asia, by virtue of being China's neighbour as much as of India's, had strong historical links with both. As far as China is concerned, the historical links are ancient enough before this space was given the formal identity of Southeast Asia. Apart from trade links, the Chinese rulers had political relations with certain Southeast Asian countries like present day Vietnam and Cambodia. There are extensive records of China's commercial and political links with ancient kingdoms of Srivijaya. Commercial expeditions were encouraged by Chinese ruling like the Song Dynasty along the coasts of Indo-China, Siam (Thailand), the Malay Peninsula and the islands of Java and Sumatra.¹ In fact most of the historic cores of the Chinese geopolitical stretch lay in Southeast Asia.² Later the Chinese Nationalist Revolution was planned and executed to a large extent from Southeast Asia.³ Subsequently with the defeat of the Kuomintang Party in the Communist Revolution, a large number of defeated members sought shelter in the Shan state of Northern Myanmar. They waged war against Communist China especially Southern China and were later pushed by the Burmese forces towards Laos and Thailand.

Mention of China's historical association with the Southeast Asia provides substance to Chinese allusion of the Middle Kingdom. It infers from a locational perspective wherein the Chinese geographical space has evolved from a loose collection of small kingdoms to a united system

that gradually started expanding on the one hand towards Korea and on the one hand towards the Tonkin Delta. It reinforces thousands years of historic and cultural claims that has manifested through Chinese self-esteem and national ego. Therefore Chinese perspective on western rule in the earlier colonial periods and later in course of its conflict with major powers during the Cold War period is based on the argument that they are outsiders to what constitutes Chinese Middle Kingdom and therefore encroachers. The territorial encroachments by alien cultures have been viewed as a challenge to the Sino-Centricity of the Chinese mainland and its adjacent areas inclusive of the Southeast Asia. Yet this has only reinforced Chinese determination to protect their claims to the Middle Kingdom. Even Mao's Revolutionary China while espousing its credibility as a different political system based on a western ideology (Socialism) did not produce any basic positional incongruence because while exporting revolution to the Third World, it maintained its central position in it as advocated by Norton Ginsburg.⁴ Further in light of the Sino-Soviet schism, Lin Pao emphasized that China could exploit its position of centrality within the Third World to counter circle both the West and the Soviet Union in the colonial world.⁵ The Indo-China Wars in Southeast Asia can be interpreted in the light of Pao's advocacy for China's centrality and its zeal to support states that would counter both the superpowers. Within Southeast Asia, it is also indicative of the Chinese challenge to the creeping influence of both the US and the Soviet Union.

One of the path-breaking developments that could be earmarked in Socialist China during the Cold War was the shift from a staunch ideological position to a more flexible hybrid socialistic-capitalist economy introduced by Deng Xiaoping and furthered by his successors. It was paralleled by a similar shift in focus in geospatial priorities wherein Chinese focus shifted from a continental orientation to a maritime one. In fact, this paper would like to submit that it was by following Deng that a change in Chinese priorities was in order and it was corresponded by Chinese push to assume centrality in a geostrategic realm that could harness the potential of the Heartlandic forces as much as the Maritime Realm elements. One may perceive this as China's attempt to strengthen its reach across the vast expanse of the East Asian Rim, yet one cannot rule out the fact that such a development will have significant implications for the Eurasian Continental (Russia dominated) Heartland. Particular

to Southeast Asia is the fact that the solution of the Cambodian conflict is symptomatic of the end of the Cold War in the region, - true; but what is more important in geospatial terms is the extension of the Continental Maritime East Asian Rim to include this geographical space. The end of the Cambodian Crisis resulted in the withdrawal of both the US and the Soviet Union which left the Chinese triumphant in the region. Consequently the Chinese spread their influence over Indo-China and beyond to expand their influence in the aforesaid geostrategic realm. Therefore until the Cold War, at no point time in history one could locate a disjuncture in China's relation with Southeast Asia either in terms of physical presence/distance or in terms of economic contacts or in terms of political influences. In the post-Cold War period the character of engagement has taken onto an interesting turn and this discussion while focusing on the change within the content of the relationship between China and Southeast Asia, would also like try to analyse these developments in terms of geopolitical configurations involving both the sides.

With an end to the global ideological divide that accompanied super power rivalry until the 1990s, the neoliberal agenda of the 'free market' travelled across the Asia Pacific to find an access into the once prohibited socialistic orders of both China and the Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam (CLV countries).⁶ Yet the vital point of reference is that while the neoliberals emphasize on the ideal combination of free market and liberal democracy, free trade in either China or in a number of countries in Southeast of Asia is not necessarily supported by a liberal political order. On the contrary, many of these countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar follow the Chinese trajectory by keeping free market economy separate from expected liberal political reforms. For China, this change in the global as well as regional dynamics is being utilized to ascend as new economic, political and military power with global ambitions but more important with a prominent regional role. In Southeast Asia the basic proposition is that Chinese interest in this part of the East Asian periphery is marked by a change in China's image posturing from a hard ideology driven socialist state to a more prosaic state trying to build relations across differences. Subsequently there is a shift from China's radical political position given a multiplier effect through military engagement to a more accommodating stance that

believes in economic engagement over military options and attempts to build cultural inroads into the region. This is popularly known as China's 'Charm Offensive'. In addition, the submission here is that while Charm Offensive is the primary diplomatic instrument, the military component in the post-Cold War is not totally ruled out especially where China wishes to demonstrate its desire not to compromise on issues that it considers integral to its image as the Middle Kingdom. Therefore China's engagement in Southeast Asia has taken a multi-pronged approach – economic engagement, political interactions, cultural relations and last but not the least military assistance (and not involvement). The following discussion will look at these different venues of China's strategic engagement with Southeast Asia.

Chinese engagement with Southeast Asia: A Soft Power Approach

The nature of Chinese engagement has undergone a noticeable change. China's earlier strategic engagement were in terms of containing US influence in various countries by sponsoring wars like the Indo-China wars or by supporting communist parties and guerilla outfits in countries like Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Burma. At present China's strategic interest is rooted in its economic benefits but it does not overlook the importance of mutual benefit of both the Chinese and the ASEAN that is representative of Southeast Asia. However, Southeast Asia is not bereft of competition from other major powers. For instance, Congress Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly expressed US tension in China's new engagement strategy, wherein economic engagements were seen as political ploy – "but they serve notice of how China is using its newly won economic power to expand its presence and political influence among the southern neighbours."⁷ Whether US apprehension is true or not China has taken rapid strides in expanding trade links with Southeast Asia as is explicit through trade statistics between them. ASEAN-China trade totaled US\$ 39.5 billion and US\$ 41.6 billion respectively in 2000 and 2001. China moved up from ASEAN's the fifth biggest partner to ASEAN's third largest trade partner by 2005 and in 2009 the country emerged as ASEAN's main trading partner accounting for 11.6 percent of ASEAN's total trade. In response, ASEAN rose to be China's 4th largest trading partner accounting for 9.7 percent of China's total trade.⁸ Alongside, China has been making serious investments in Southeast Asia.

Chinese State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) have been investing heavily in mining, natural gas and logging operations. China is now interested in helping ASEAN establish its Community by 2015. The Chinese Premier in 2009 Thailand at the 12th ASEAN-China Summit initiated setting up of a US\$ 15 billion credit facility and a US\$ 10 billion China-ASEAN Investment Cooperation Fund with a focus on areas of priority such as infrastructure and connectivity, particularly transport infrastructure and projects relevant to people's livelihood, thereby helping realize the ASEAN Community by 2015.⁹ However, there is a growing apprehension within Southeast Asian states that they will not be able to compete with China's low priced consumer goods that are based on low wages. It is also feared that China is a threat to Southeast Asian economies like Thailand and Southeast Asian economies in foreign markets like the EU, the US and Japan.¹⁰ Besides, there is quite a bit of skepticism regarding the benefits of individual ASEAN countries from the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area (FTA). It is feared that China has relative economic advantage over a number of ASEAN countries.¹¹

Another very crucial reason for China's growing strategic interest in Southeast Asia is fuelled by its spiraling need and thus desperate search for energy. There is a shift from China's basic position in its earlier years when it believed in meeting its own requirements internally to one of net importer of oil particularly in the post-Cold War period. It is said that the Chinese economy at present is the second largest consumer of oil next to only the US. Southeast Asia is important in China's energy map because of two reasons. First, that in Southeast Asia is home to some of the very important oil and natural gas producing countries like Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia and Myanmar. Besides, Singapore is considered as the largest petroleum transaction centre. Second as mentioned earlier, that Southeast Asia straddles some very crucial sea passages of the East Asian Maritime Rim – the Straits of Malacca, Sunda and Lombok besides the Isthmus of Kra. These maritime passages are indispensable for transporting large portions of China's oil needs that come from the Middle East. China is interested in ensuring smooth supplies through these sea lanes as well through land routes. There is a feeling that China's energy relations with Southeast Asia is still at an exploratory state. This is because the current state of energy relations between the two sides is confined to import and supply of oil with very

little investment in up or down stream units.¹² Primarily Indonesia is the major oil and gas supplier to China. Energy relations with Indonesia have been on the rise. Former Indonesian President Megawati signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish an Indonesian-China Energy Forum in 2002. Subsequently China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) purchased stakes of a foreign oil and gas company in Indonesia to become the second largest offshore oil company and accounting for 12 percent of Indonesian output.¹³ Besides Indonesia, China has established energy relations with Vietnam, and the Philippines. While there is the trilateral partnership in the disputed South China Sea, there are bilateral deals between China and both the countries at a bilateral level. China is fast entering and winning gas bids in Myanmar. In early 2006, Petro China signed a gas export MoU with Myanmar and completed the survey for a 2,389-km pipeline from Kyakphu in Myanmar to China's Yunnan province. Subsequently, in early 2009, China announced the construction of oil and gas pipelines through Myanmar into its South-western Yunnan Province. Already China is exploring gas in some seven blocks in the Rakhine region.¹⁴

China's strategic interests in this part of the East Asia Rim is ensured by its ability easily access the region. Therefore China has strengthened its connections with the region both through land and the sea. There is a proposal to link Kunming with Bangkok according to the North South Corridor. Thus China is building roads and rail connections at a furious pace. It is helping Myanmar construct roads and building ports along the Myanmar coast. In 2007, a decision to build port built on the Burmese island of Ramree specifically to service China's shipping needs was taken. It will have the capacity to handle the largest cargo ships. Besides, the port at Kyauk Phyu will be connected to a new 1,950-km highway to be built through Burma directly to Kunming, the capital of China's Yunnan Province. In 2011, the Myanmar military government has awarded to Chinese company Yunnan Construction Engineering Group and the junta-backed Yuzana Group the contract for a 312-km road, linking Myitkyina in Kachin State to Pangsau Pass on the Arunachal Pradesh border in India. It is obvious that China is keen to get maritime access for its landlocked states like Yunnan, but also it is helping China move from its continental orientation towards a maritime one within the East Asian Rim. Not only that, this discussion also point out to the fact that

by gaining noticeable access in Myanmar, China gains ample scope to remain closest to the South Asian geographical region that features India as the largest state. Whether South Asian region could therefore be included within the East Asian Rim in the future is beyond the scope of this discussion. Meanwhile China Daily as recent as March 11, reported that a railway project linking China to mainland Southeast Asia through Laos will be initiated from April 2011.¹⁵ Chinese contractors will build the 421 km long railway, with Laos providing the land for the project, linking Southwest China's Yunnan province with the Lao capital Vientiane. Chinese authorities think that this project would bring "China closer geographically and diplomatically with its trading partners".¹⁶ Cambodia has received assistance to build a railway link that would link Yunnan to the Cambodian seashore. China is also busy building bridges across the Mekong in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) which will further the North South Corridor. Such great involvement in Southeast Asia is an indicator of increase Chinese strategic interest in this region and is a source of concern for other regional powers like Japan. Apprehending growing Chinese access into Southeast Asia, Japan balked at funding the highway project.¹⁷

Chinese authorities believe in peaceful engagement that corresponds to Chinese scholarly concept of *heping jueqi* or Peaceful Rise. It is hoped that this will work as an antidote to the China's image as a threat. Yet China believes in building a ring of nations around Beijing who share Beijing's suspicion of nations intervening in other countries' affairs. To a certain extent it explains why China is not very concerned about the nature of political regimes of a particular state and thus supports the *junta* in Myanmar. Through enhancing political relations, there is a Chinese strategy to increase political space within Southeast Asia. It has resorted to multilateral engagement through ASEAN that gives it dividends at the bilateral level. For instance, China and Indonesia have normalized relations since 1990 and in 2005 both the countries have signed Strategic Partnership Agreement. Bilateral trade between the two states is also increasing – bilateral trade figures in 2010 hovered around US\$ 25.5 billion and they aim to increase to US\$ 50 billion by 2015.¹⁸ This is an important development considering the fact that Indonesia is a very important member of Southeast Asia. 2010 also marks the "Vietnamese-China Friendship Year". At the fourth meeting of the China-

Vietnam steering committee on cooperation held in the same year, both the sides emphasized that developing China-Vietnam friendship is in the fundamental interests of the two countries and their peoples as much the peace and prosperity of the region.¹⁹ 2011 marks twenty years of China-ASEAN dialogue. The dialogue process has five channels which are progressing smoothly according to the Chinese officials.²⁰ China has also signed the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 2003. China's efforts has earned it membership within ASEAN+3 arrangement; it shows how ASEAN thinks China is important for the region. China has is a dialogue partner of the ASEAN Regional Forum. Such multilateral involvement has led to a political breakthrough in the form of the South China Sea Code of Conduct 2002. The Code does not provide a permanent solution, but at the least wills restrain from the use of force. ASEAN countries consider it a reflection of Chinese goodwill because China is also a signatory to the declaration. China, by signing this political document has earned some quick cookie points and reiterated its position as a well-meaning peaceful neighbour.

As a part of the soft power image Chinese culture has become a component of the Public Diplomacy efforts especially in relation to the developing countries. The 'New Public Diplomacy'²¹ as it is termed is aimed at selling the idea that China will not be a threat to other nations. Thus it is a means to propagate the concept of Peaceful Rise. China is now encouraging involvement of the foreign academia as a part of their cultural activities, for instance, Thai scholars and academics have been invited to conduct research on Chinese history, art, culture at Chinese Universities. The country is hosting informal summits that will boost its image and enhance its economic and political interests; in Southeast Asia the ASEAN-China Eminent Persons Group is expected to help chart the future roadmap of China ASEAN Relations. At the level of official diplomacy, Chinese are now extra careful in appointing ambassadors to states where they have strategic interests – Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia are some of those states in Southeast Asia. Such diplomats are well versed with those countries and know their language. There is an equal encouragement to learn Chinese; promotion of courses in Chinese culture and Chinese Language is a major component of New Public Diplomacy. In Cambodia, for instance, the Chinese government, working with provincial governments in China, sends hundreds of instructors to

Phnom Penh's Chinese schools, but there are requests for still more instructors from China. Chinese language programmes are a part of primary education in certain Southeast Asian states like Thailand Cambodia and they are funded by China. Elsewhere special language programmes are funded also by China. In Southeast Asia there are 21 Confucius Institutes providing language courses. Thirteen of these institutes are located in Thailand, with others scattered throughout Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma, Philippines, and Singapore.²² Chinese teachers are sent on short term contracts to such places. China is assisting the poorly funded Cambodian education system especially the schools. At a higher level, overseas students are also being provided with scholarships. The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the Chinese government has provided scholarships for poor Cambodians to study in China since 2000; in Laos, the Chinese government hands out some 230 scholarships per year for students to attend Chinese universities.²³ A very important component of Chinese endeavours at cultural diplomacy is the involvement of ethnic Chinese that are spread in large numbers in Southeast Asia. In Thailand and the Philippines, in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and many other Southeast Asian countries, Chinese Diaspora-business community has enjoyed striking success. Since Deng Xiaoping such overseas Chinese are looked upon as assets. This policy has worked. Between 1990 and 2002 foreign investors—primarily overseas Chinese—invested nearly \$30 billion in Fujian Province alone, almost 7 percent of all foreign direct investment in China during that time period. Overall, between 1990 and 2002 just five countries—Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines—invested roughly \$90 billion in China, with most of the capital coming from diaspora Chinese firms.²⁴ In recent years, Beijing has rebuilt relations with ethnic Chinese organizations and directly called on these diaspora Chinese to help boost relations between China and the developing world. According to Hong Liu of the National University of Singapore, in 2001 top officials from Beijing's Overseas Chinese Affairs Office visited more than twenty countries to hold meetings with leaders of diaspora Chinese communities. These meetings inspired diaspora Chinese to return to China.²⁵ In any case, some rebuilding involves cultivating leading ethnic Chinese tycoons in each nation, wooing them to publicly support for Beijing. They can be mobilized for lobbying for issues on behalf of China like the issue of Taiwan.

Although China's Charm Offensive discounts the involvement of the military component, China cannot totally disengage the military relationship as a part of inter-state relations. Therefore China is also active in Southeast Asia in providing military assistance and enhancing military cooperation. Herein it is necessary to clarify that providing assistance is not similar to military activism. China has ongoing bilateral military relationships with all of the countries in the subregion. Senior Chinese military figures or PLA delegations have visited all of the 10 ASEAN states at least once in the past three years.²⁶ In the past few years, China has also conducted a number of military exercises with Southeast Asian countries. These include bilateral military exercises with Thailand in July 2007 and July 2008, and a multilateral maritime exercise in May 2007 in Singaporean waters.²⁷ Between 2000 and 2008 China sold an estimated US\$264 million worth of arms to Southeast Asian states. Of this total almost two thirds (62%) reportedly flowed into one country—Myanmar.²⁸ Thus Myanmar has received maximum military assistance from the Chinese. In fact it is claimed that China started supplying arms to Myanmar since 1989, it has only increased over the years.²⁹ Before general elections in Myanmar, the Chinese army Chief came on an official visit to Myanmar. Chen Bingde, chief of the general staff of the People's Liberation Army, met with Than Shwe, calling for developing stable bilateral ties and military cooperation between the two states. China has also reportedly been involved in the construction of military facilities on several islands controlled by Myanmar in the Andaman Sea. This is once again indicative of China's encroachment into the South Asian geographical region. The other country that is also blessed by Chinese military assistance is Cambodia such that some Cambodian officials are a little apprehensive of Chinese designs in their country. In November 2003, China and Cambodia signed military agreement under which Beijing provides military training as well as equipment.³⁰ Whether Chinese military assistance and military cooperation with the members of ASEAN betrays Chinese soft power image is a question that need to be debated.

Implications of China's Engagement: Geopolitical Dimensions

China's engagement with Southeast Asia has been largely facilitated due to China's new formed *avatar* – 'Soft Power'. But it has also been possible

at the expense of US involvement in Southeast Asia in the post-Cold War period. US involvement had hit a high in the immediate post 9/11 period but its intensity has decreased. Yet the element of competition has not become dysfunctional. A sense of opportunism that had seized US experts after 9/11 has gradually receded and the China has seized the occasion to improve its relations with the region. Yet US interests cannot evaporate or be even compromised because US interests in seeking centrality over the Asia Pacific Rim and Chinese aim at dominating the East Asia Rim and even perhaps extending its sphere of influence to South Asia will ultimately lead to conflicts at some point or even several times. As in the post-Cold War period Chinese were opposing US global hegemony, the US around the new millennia apprehends Chinese hegemony and thus seeks to oppose it in South Asia, East Asia and in Southeast Asia. Yet there are points at which Sino-US interests will meet. In the maritime rim both the states have common goals - specific example will be the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) where US has similar interests with China. They both want the security of these SLOCs. However irritants will continue to test relations based on common goals. In this context US attempts to intervene in South China Sea was not taken too well by China when the US vessel Impeccable was stopped by the PLA Navy in March 2009. It is in apprehension of such uncompromising attitude by the Chinese state that the US is seeking involvement in multilateral forums in East Asia including its desire for membership in the East Asia Summit. Thus both the powers have realised that in order to balance each other's desires and designs multilateral engagements are essential. In the East Asian Rim as also the Asia Pacific Maritime time the most successful organizations are the ASEAN, and its affiliate ARE, APEC and even the SCO. In this China has access to all the organizations but US has no access to the SCO. Therefore in terms of balancing through multilateral involvements, it seems that China is the fore runner. Sino-US relations will be conditioned by the larger Sino-US competition that has been propelled on many other factors – the questions of democracy and human rights, the question of nuclear assistance to rogue states especially, and specific to the East Asia Rim, the question of Taiwan. All these will determine the course of Sino-US relations in this part of the world. As a regional organization, ASEAN is perhaps the most successful of multilateral forums in the entire East

Asian Rim. Yet, the only thing that ASEAN can do in context of the Sino-US competition in this region is ensure that the Cold War history is not repeated. In case of Sino-Japanese relations the issues of tensions that imperil the East Asian Rim are not physically present within Southeast Asia. Yet like the US even Japan would not like to see a hegemonic China either aggressive or in its soft power capacity. Neither are the Chinese happy with the close and consistent relations between the US and the Japanese. Hence, that is also a factor that will bother Sino-US relations. The Japanese also have territorial dispute with the Russians over the Kuril Islands. But it is far distant from Southeast Asia. For ASEAN it is not only desirable that the big powers maintain a good relation with the region, but it is equally essential that the powers maintain good relations among themselves. ASEAN has to look at the equations between these competing powers that will affect the future of the East Asian Rim as much as the Asia Pacific future. But it is more concerned with the fact that China is not only one of the very active and keen contenders who take interest in this region, it is its most dominant neighbour who is now making serious forays into their world.

Yet China's enterprise towards Southeast Asia has its own challenges. There is a factor of intimidation that is rooted in history. It is well founded in most of the states of Southeast Asia that China can easily overpower them. It has the economic power, political capacity and the military prowess to achieve such a goal. Recent history show that that in the states of continental Southeast Asia—Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam—China's legacy was one of war and revolution. And for the states of maritime Southeast Asia—Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam—China's legacy was as a fomenter of revolution. China's periodic military responses to the South China Sea disputes including the recent one involving the United States indicate that China's soft power approach is not an alternative to military engagement. Although it has signed the Code of Conduct, two points are extremely important in this case, first the Code is a political document and thereby has no binding effect on the signatories. Second, by signing the Code the Chinese have managed to put away the need for a permanent solution under the carpet. In addition, the 1995-1996 Taiwan crisis is also a testimony of its no-compromise stance, it has a demonstration effect on ASEAN.

Neither are the ASEAN states comfortable with China's economic adventures in the region. For instance, China's immediate primary interests are in expanding markets and securing natural resources. Continental Southeast Asia has seen a higher profile for Chinese manufactured exports, investments, and extraction of raw materials. This has led to controversy over the negative impact of Chinese economic hegemony, including damage to domestic economies and 'theft' of national resources. In Vietnam, for example, public outrage erupted in 2008 over the efforts of a Chinese corporation to mine bauxite. Again no issue has captured the concern of continental states more than management of river systems. The headwaters of some half a dozen major rivers including the Irrawaddy and Mekong are in China and flow through Indochina into the Bay of Bengal or South China Sea. Upstream Chinese dam building has serious downstream impact. Thus the threat of non-traditional impact also challenges Chinese involvement with Southeast Asia. Yet another vital issue is the apprehension that Chinese assistance in certain states of Southeast Asia is not only resulting on a lopsided development situation within Southeast Asia that, some fear a split in ASEAN as a result of sub-regionalism namely the GMS. The GMS nominally comprises Cambodia, Laos, Burma and Vietnam, as well as Thailand and two of China's southern provinces, Yunnan and Guangxi. propelled by China with the help of the Asian Development Bank, the area along China's border has been transforming into a bloc of its own — a trend that could permanently divide ASEAN.³¹

Concluding Remarks

Contemporary global politics features three prominent players: the US, the European Union and China. The European Union neither has serious economic or political stakes in the region nor do they have the military potential that is characteristic of both the US and China. The other two players – US and China – will remain long-term players in the Asia Pacific. China holds a unique position because it is at once a regional power and an emerging global player. As a regional power China seeks to maintain its sphere of influence within the East Asia and as an aspiring global player, it hopes to amass its national interest by maintaining its presence across continents and maritime rims. In contrast, the US is a major power but is external to the region and its interest in the region will be conditioned

by its relation with China. With the changing nature of international politics, both these countries have two common interests – economic resource interests and security-related interests. For both these countries, the entire Asia Pacific Maritime Rim is very important. Therefore, their relationship within Southeast Asia is likely to be competitive. In this context, compared to the US, China has another advantage. China occupies a geographical position that projects the Heartland Maritime Continuum. Moreover, by virtue of its position, it claims centrality in the East Asian Realm. Not only the US, every other state within East Asia must acknowledge the fact that this unique geographical position gives China a natural access to its heartland neighbours as much as an easy way into the Asia Pacific Maritime zone. China's position as a heartland-maritime continuum state gives it geopolitical advantage. On the other hand the same geopolitical position gives the Chinese authorities a sense of vulnerability to foreign attacks. In the 2011 the Defense White Paper, Chinese authorities have expressed their apprehension about their security. The Report clearly emphasizes that the pressure to protect Chinese territories and internal integrity is on the rise. In order to ensure its security it avails two strategies – first, to build around itself a cordon of follower-states particularly in the heartland region; second, build strong armed forces that can defend its borders especially the maritime border. In fact China's aggressive posturing is partly related to its sense of vulnerability and partly rooted in its ambition budding from its conviction as the Middle Kingdom.

As a regional power China stresses on its physical security and its ability to build and augment its military power. As an aspiring global power it concentrates on its political actions and diplomatic skills. Within the East Asian Rim China has employed a combined strategy of force and diplomatic skills. The trajectory of China-ASEAN relations is a good example of this combined strategy. On the one hand for long China has maintained an uncompromising position on South China Sea. On the other hand of late China signed the 2002 Code of Conduct on South China Sea. It is a manifestation of China's attempt to become flexible. Subsequently, the 2003 China-ASEAN Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity is a part of China's 'Charm Offensive'. It is a manifestation of its diplomatic engagement and a conscious attempt to project itself as a well meaning neighbour and a

peaceful responsible member of the East Asian Rim.

Recent trends project that Chinese interest in the maritime rim will continue to increase as its energy security is also related to uninterrupted supply of petroleum. Chinese maritime interests are based on two necessities – first, its obsession to ensure secure maritime boundaries, and second its the necessity to ensure safe maritime passage. Alongside, a good control over the sea passage that cordons the East Asian Rim will give it a strategic leverage as much as a political one. The stretch around the Malacca Straits into the South China Sea and further north is a very busy international sea route and China is eyeing for control of this passage in belief that it will give it considerable strategic leverage. Correspondingly China is putting in a lot of resources and energy in developing a strong maritime force – a blue water navy. A strong navy will not only ensure maritime security, in the long term it is associated with China's quest for economic security. It will also ensure Chinese preponderance in the Asia Pacific Maritime Rim.

Southeast Asia as an economic power house is indispensable to China for several reasons – economic, strategic and political. For instance Southeast Asia is a big market, a resource bank (including petroleum) and the region will provide crucial sea links to the landlocked regions of China. Therefore, in the future Southeast Asia will remain permanently in China's geopolitical strategies. Besides, in the post 9/11 period China has managed to increase its acceptability within the region vis-à-vis the US. This will yield good political dividends for China in the future. However China's engagement with Southeast Asia will have its own share of challenges. A crucial factor that challenges Chinese engagement in Southeast Asia is the perception of the states of the region towards it. With a lack of uniformity in perception about Chinese intention towards this region China has to make every effort to quell fears about China's intentions. Perhaps because of apprehensions it will be not possible for China to wean Southeast Asian states completely from the US. In fact, a Sino-US competition is not totally ruled out within the ASEAN region but perhaps it will not be an aggressive one. Again one must take note of the fact that China's geographical location gives it an advantage over the US. Southeast Asia is China's neighbour and not of the US, thus China needs a separate and focused viewpoint towards the region within its schema of things for the East Asian Rim. The US is an external power

and will remain so; therefore, in comparison to China it will not be easy for the US to find a natural channel of influence into the region. In this context a point that needs attention is the fact that by using similar geographical advantage the state that could challenge Chinese engagement and designs in Southeast Asia is the South Asian state India. Besides being Southeast Asia's western neighbour, she bears similar geostrategic advantage of having a heartland-maritime continuum. Moreover the Chinese consider the rise of the elephant as a serious challenge to the dragon's leadership in Asia. There are concerns within the Chinese authorities that Southeast Asia may look towards India as an alternate to an overbearing China. Perhaps more than the US, China worries about an impending competition with India in Southeast Asia in the future. Already some elements of this competition are evident in some countries of Southeast Asia particularly in Myanmar. Consequently, growing Sino-Indian competition in Southeast Asia has become a subject of research and academic debates.

Yet the discussion wishes to emphasise the fact that China not only aims to maintain influence over its neighbourhood but wishes to reach beyond the neighbourhood into the far reaches of Asia and beyond. As a growing economic power reaching out is a necessity but as a growing political power increasing influence is the design of an ambitious state. This ambition is so prominent that there is an apprehension that it will impinge partly upon the Eurasian Heartlands' geostrategic realm where Russia is prominent. It is also impinging into the Asia Pacific Realm where the US is active and even intrudes into geographical regions like South Asia where India is conspicuous in its dominance. China's necessity and ambition are taking the country far beyond the Asian continent into Africa, Middle East and Latin America. In reality, Chinese ambition is feared to create more challenges for itself than benefits because Chinese ambitions are not going to go unchallenged from the countries having similar or some interest in the region. In addition what the Chinese authority must keep note of is that their enthusiasm to expand spheres of influence and establish relations across continents and oceans does not rule out a power over-stretch. Consequently, a fatigue in its ability to maintain a consistent hold over all the areas of interest both geographically and on vital issues will do more harm to its image. Instead China should set the priorities in terms of the benefits to be derived from it. A

neighbourhood engagement policy has been a good initiation in this direction. In this context, China is working meticulously to engage with its Southeast Asian neighbourhood with a projection that it will be a win-win situation for both the sides. What is awaited is the test of time.

Notes

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Ethnicity and Ethnic Identities in North-East India

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Ethnicity related issues and conflicts have received considerable attention of scholars working on social and political dynamics of North-East India. Every year seminars and workshops are organized in different universities and colleges across North-East India to understand ethno-dynamics in the region. A cursory look at research papers and publications of the scholars on North-East also shows that many of them have the prefix, “ethnic” attached to the titles of the books and articles. No doubt, these publications and papers brought to focus certain dimensions of ethnic reality in North-East. However, there are several aspects of ethnicity, which needs to be explored in greater depth. One such feature that deserves attention is the issue of ethnic identity.

Ethnic identity is the pivot around which much of the politics of North-East India revolves. Identity aspirations are capable of influencing, inspiring and mobilizing the communities in pursuit of self-government, autonomy or independence. In one sense, identity struggles have the potential to undermine the dominant power structures that cease to be democratic and responsive. But taken to another extreme, identity assertions can also end up in chains of fratricidal conflicts, leading to genocide and mutual destruction. North-East India provides instances of multiple forms of manifestations of ethnic identity . Hence there is a serious need for undertaking research to comprehend the different aspects

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and dimensions of ethnic identity.

Any study on ethnic identity should start with prior understanding of what one means by an ethnic community. Elsewhere in the country and even abroad, the term 'ethnic community' is used in academics to refer to different politicized cultural groups – religious, linguistic, racial, tribal and immigrant communities – which are already drawn into the hold of modernity. Coming to North-East India, although one comes across certain works, wherein conflicts between nationalities and linguistic communities were viewed as ethnic conflicts, it should be admitted that most studies on ethnic politics identify ethnic movements with tribal movements. Very often the terms - tribes, ethnic communities and nationalities - are used as inter-exchangeable expressions. Very little efforts are made to distinguish one from the other. Even those who claim to be conscious of differences in the meanings and content of the terms, continue to use these expressions uncritically, partly for convenience and partly for political reasons.

Theoretical works on ethnicity have brought out clearly that ethnic identity struggles are waged not by isolated tribal communities, but by politicized cultural communities already drawn into the web of modernity. Identity assertions, in essence, if not in form, are not for seeking restoration of their past, nor are they necessarily secessionist in their objectives. Nearly all of them are basically struggles of modernizing communities seeking autonomy and respectable accommodation in the nation state structures. The ethnic communities in North-Eastern states may invoke their tribal roots to unite their people against other competitors, but they do not have any intention of preserving or reverting back to 'pristine' tribal ways of life.

Some dimensions of ethnic identity become evident, when one examines the nature of ethnic conflicts in the region. Several works on North-East have reflected on ethnic conflicts in the region but most of them are empirical, historical and descriptive in nature. When it comes to theoretical content, one can see their works oscillating between primordial and instrumentalist explanations. According to scholars like Geertz and Grosby, peoples' identities emanate from the primordial human givens such as kinship, race, culture, religion, language and traditions. In line with the primordial tradition, many scholars from anthropology and sociology have written books on different tribes,

viewing them as ethnic communities that existed since time immemorial. In North-East India several communities have been claiming separate identities based on the above mentioned 'naturally inherited' features. But very often one encounters instances wherein some culturally-related communities start espousing separate identities and also the apparently unconnected communities bonding up together with one identity. Reliance on primordialism cannot explain these contradictory social processes, which question the salience of the 'naturally givens' in the development of ethnic identity. It is also pointed out that most conflicts between communities although packaged in the name of kinship, culture and traditions, are actually motivated by material concerns – land, jobs, political power etc. Further, economic inequalities have made their appearance felt in almost all indigenous communities, raising questions about their 'tribal' nature. Identities do not emerge naturally and spontaneously, as primordialists tend to contend, but they need to be socially constructed.

Rational Choice models developed by scholars like Michael Hechter explain ethnic dynamics by looking at ethnicity as means or resource mobilized in pursuit of particular material objectives. It assumes that the emerging social forces - be it middle class or ethnic elite - which attained hegemony over the rest of the community, consciously use ethnic identities as resources to promote group or sectional interests. The instrumentalist studies on ethnicity of this kind emphasize on how the emerging classes and elites within the traditional communities form organizations, invent traditions, articulate ethnic differences and practice ethnic politics to achieve the materialist goals that have been set. Some scholars working on North-East did take instrumentalist position to explain ethnic processes in the region. Their studies took note of changes taking place within the tribal societies ever since the region came under British rule. They show how factors like colonial rule, Christian missionaries and modern education contributed to the birth of educated elite that played an important role in giving shape to ethnic identity of the respective community. Ethnic identity politics in the region is viewed from economic interests, ideological hegemony and political expectations of the upcoming indigenous educated middle class elites. Despite its merits, the instrumentalist interpretations of ethnic processes in North-East have their limitations as well. First, the indigenous elite are themselves

a part of the community and hence it cannot construct or articulate any identities which are not acceptable to the members of the community. The parameters that a community sets for elite maneuvers should not be ignored. Secondly, the indigenous elites are not always homogeneous. Factionalism and competition within the emerging indigenous elite can give birth to more than one identity in a given culturally-related group of people. Finally, ethnic identities and sentiments are not always amenable to cost-benefit calculations.

The instrumentalist interpretations of ethnicity run into difficulties at times due to complex nature of the political economy of nation states within which several communities emerge, evolve and develop. Even in developing countries like India, the operation of market forces is able to integrate several inaccessible areas of North-Eastern region into the Indian national market. Developments like growth of settled cultivation, commercialization of agriculture, increase in mining activities, state induced development projects and programmes etc. have given birth to indigenous business entrepreneurs, contractors, real estate owners and rich peasants, and along with them a class of landless peasants, unemployed or underemployed youth and casual labourers working in unorganized sectors. Hence it would be wrong to focus only on ethnic elites, ignoring interests and dynamics of different antagonistic classes that have come into existence. But at the same time, development of classes should not however drive one to place North-Eastern societies on par with advanced societies. In the more advanced societies where classes and class struggles are the norm, the ruling classes, as scholars like Bonacich point out, invoke ethnic sentiments to divide the working masses to their advantage. Class explanation has its limits in transitional societies which are simultaneously witnessing the birth of ethnic communities as well as classes. Notwithstanding the process of class differentiation taking place in each of the communities, one cannot subsume ethnic rivalries and conflicts operating in the region to the calculated interests of the ruling classes. More sophisticated theories are required for understanding the inter-relationship between class and ethnic politics in underdeveloped regions like North-East India.

One way of enhancing our understanding of ethnic identities is by relating them to the study of ethnic boundaries. Scholars like Fredrik Barth, Sylvia Fuller, and Andrea Wimmer have come out with complex

socio-political processes involved in construction and maintenance of ethnic boundaries. Ethnic identities make sense only within the ethnic boundaries. But just as ethnic boundaries are subject to contestations and change, ethnic identities need not be permanent. There is every possibility of new ethnic identities emerging and the old ones disappearing. Many such instances of changes in identity and boundaries are visible in North-Eastern region but very few academics working on North-East have reflected on the relationship between ethnic identities and ethnic boundaries.

As mentioned earlier, ethnic communities are much more than mere tribes. Presence of primordial attributes such as kinship ties, racial and cultural similarities are not enough to make a cultural group into an ethnic community. Transformation of tribes into ethnic communities requires several other material and psychological conditions. In their works on nations and national identities, scholars like Ernst Gellner, Anthony D. Smith, and Benedict Anderson have thrown light on factors like evolution of linguistic communities, development of print media, growth of literature, penetration of market forces, expansion of transport and communication networks, weakening of primordial loyalties, increasing competition and claims over national resources, working of democratic institutions and politics etc. in contributing to national politics. Although ethnic communities cannot claim the status of nations, some factors relevant to the advent of national identities seem relevant to the growth of ethnic identities as well. There is a need to bring in all these missing or neglected links in the study of social forces and ethnic politics in the region.

Further, post-colonial studies initiated by scholars like Partha Chatterjee have thrown light on how colonial and post-colonial states through administrative interventions such as census studies, anthropological surveys, classification of people on the bases of cultural and racial differences, and official recognition of certain communities have facilitated the growth of ethnic identities. Systematic studies of ethnic dynamics in North-East India along these lines are still its infancy. A recent book edited by Sanjib Baruah (2009) has a few interventions along these lines. Similarly, substantial literature has come out in recent years explaining how policies of liberalization and globalization, far from eliminating ethnic loyalties, in fact reify and recreate ethnic identities

and ethnic politics. Of late, because of BIMSTEC and the Look East policy, the North-Eastern region, which borders East and South East Asian countries and also Bangladesh and Nepal, has acquired considerable significance. Positive or negative effects of the policies of liberalization and globalization pursued by the Government of India on ethnic identity assertions and conflicts in the region need much more attention than the ones given so far. It is possible to have a new look at the manifestations of ethnic identities from these perspectives and vantage points.

Very often ethnic identities are by-products of ethnic movements and conflicts. While it is true that the identities inspire the ethnic movement, it is also true that the course of the movement further consolidates and strengthens ethnic identities. Similarly, the causes, course and effects of ethnic conflicts contribute to further reinforcement of the ethnic identities. Conversely the cessation of conflicts and establishment of peace lead to weakening of certain ethnic identities. North-East India bears witness to all these processes of appearance and disappearance, strengthening and weakening, and making and breaking of ethnic identities. Unfortunately, these empirical realities have not been properly theorized.

At the end, one may also note that ethnic identity manifests in different forms in North-East India. Social forces that facilitate or abet or lead ethnic politics are not always same. Even when they are similar, the manner in which each of them reacts may differ from situation to situation. Hence no single theory of ethnicity could explain identity politics of the northeastern region as a whole. Which theory of ethnicity is relevant or useful for explaining a particular ethnic identity movement or conflict can be assessed only after empirical study of the ethnic phenomenon. Very often we may have to use a variety of theories to understand the ethnic complexities. Hence scholars trying to understand ethnic identities should be open to all theories and possibilities and not restrict themselves to preconceived theories and explanations.

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HIV Transmission from Mother to Child: A Case Study

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Introduction

India is a country having more than one billion population and an estimated 2.27 million people infected by Human Immunodeficiency Virus at the end of 2008. (UNGASS INDIA, Country Progress Report, March 31, 2010). Among the HIV infected adults, 39% of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA) are women while children account for 3.8%. the HIV surveillance among antenatal care (ANC) clinic attendees is used as a proxy for the general population.

This epidemic shows an overall declining trend in India. Its prevalence among adult population in 2007 was 0.38% and in 2008 it was 0.29%. In spite of a low prevalence rate of HIV infection, India carries the largest burden of HIV behind South Africa and Nigeria, because of the large population the country is having. At present, the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) has been successfully implementing the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) in a phase manner in the country. As part of the Prevention of Parent to Child Transmission (PPTCT) programme by NACO, Manipur State AIDS Control Society (MACS) had started PPTCT programme on 1st December, 2002 at the Center of Excellence, Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital (J.N.Hospital), Imphal. Gradually the programme had been scaled up and it covered all the 9 districts of Manipur.

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Manipur is a small state having approximately 2.4 million people in North-East India. Out of total nine districts in the state, Chandel is located very close to the notorious 'Golden Triangle' (between Thailand, Myanmar and Laos) where more than 20% of world's illicit opium (heroin) is reportedly produced. In the early 1980s drug use became popular in North-East India and it was not long before HIV was reported among injecting drug users in the region (Kumar, 2009). Manipur is one of the six high prevalent states in India with HIV prevalence rate among pregnant women attending ANC being 1.3% (HSS 2006). The combination of drug use and sex is reportedly the major cause of concern at Chandel district, indicating that the infection has now spread to the female sexual partners of Injecting Drug Users (IDUs) and their innocent new-born. Hence women and children have been increasingly infected with the virus.

Prevention of transmission of HIV involves tackling simultaneously individual risk taking and contextual or societal vulnerability. Effective programming requires messages to be customized to meet the local needs, and to take cultural differences into account. Although a concerted effort to prevent transmission of HIV from mother to child has been made, a large proportion of HIV positive mother seemed to be transmitting the virus to their innocent new-born. In this case study, attempt was made to find out the way in which, the HIV positive pregnant women dealt with the expectant baby in such a way that transmission of HIV could be minimised.

There are major differences between the 2010 recommendations and the previous guidance issued in 2006. Under the 2010 new HIV and AIDS guidelines on PMTCT (preventing mother-to-child transmission) guidelines, all HIV positive mothers, identified during pregnancy should receive a course of antiretroviral drugs to prevent mother to child transmission. All infants born to HIV positive mothers should also receive a course of antiretroviral drugs and should be exclusively breastfed for 6 months and complementary feed for up to a year (WHO. HIV & AIDS guidelines for prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission (PMTCT) & Breastfeeding, July 2010).

Methods

Participants

A random sample of HIV positive women having one or more children was not possible to draw. Enumeration of the entire population of HIV

infected women at Chandel was not possible. Therefore, a sample was taken from the facility centers like PPTCT, NGOs, District Level Network (DLN), and those attending vocational trainings and support group meetings. A total of 70 HIV sero-positive women participated in the study. Purposive sampling technique based on the inclusion criteria was used to find out the respondents within the age group of 18- 41 years.

Inclusion criteria

- 1) Women diagnosed as HIV- seropositive at Chandel district.
- 2) Age range: 18 – 41 years.
- 3) Married, divorced, widowed who is HIV- seropositive.
- 4) Able to give consent.

Exclusion criteria

- 1) Unmarried person.
- 2) HIV-seropositive women who are out of station during the study period.
- 3) HIV-seropositive women not having child.

Procedure

Attempts were made to approach all the participants who fulfilled the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Two stage consent procedure was adopted in recruiting participants in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. In the first stage, potential study participants were approached by a peer or known service provider who explained to them the aim of study, interview procedures, and methods of maintaining confidentiality and sought their oral consent to participate. If they agree to participate in the study, then the researcher made repeated contacts and visited the respondents two to three times in order to develop a good rapport. Winning their confidence, the researcher again reminded them that the confidentiality would be strictly maintained and read out a prepared script that provided an overview of the study aims and risks and benefits to each woman who approached for participation. After hearing the script, all the participants were asked to sign the consent form. Once the consent was obtained, the interviewer proceeded to conduct a focused group discussion at private location, mainly at NGO offices, followed by structured interview in a private location at their home.

Tools used

1) The study has used semi-structured interview guide for collecting information on socio-demographic characteristics and in-depth interview and observation were also used.

2) Information on mechanism adopted to prevent vertical transmission: Participants were asked the question, “can HIV transmission from parents to child be prevented?” (Yes /No), those who responded in the positive were then asked to provide the background information related to their preventive efforts taken up for the new-born so that the awareness level of the respondents could be assessed.

Result

The 70 HIV positive mothers on an average had 2 children. Out of a total of 141 exposed children, 50 per cent were delivered at government hospital, 3 per cent were delivered at private hospital while 47 per cent had home delivery. Nevirapine was given as per the PPTCT protocol. 68 MB pair received Sd-NVP while 6 new born babies received pediatric drops of nevirapine. Nevirapine coverage rate was only 52 per cent.

Regarding the feeding of the babies, majority (55%) of HIV positive mother opted for formula feeding and only 3 per cent of them opted for exclusive breast feeding. 42 per cent of the HIV exposed children were still getting the mixed feeding which was not advisable for HIV positive mothers. It indicated low level of awareness. On the other hand, most (84%) HIV positive women at Chandel were aware of PPTCT programme. Thus, such knowledge did not necessarily lead to an enactment of risk reduction or elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV.

63 per cent women acquired the virus from their husband and 18 per cent of them acquired the virus through unprotected sex. One respondent out of 70 got the infection through blood transfusion. It suggested that blood transfusion is still not 100 percent safe.

21% women had previous marriage and 32.8 per cent or 3 in 10 HIV positive women had experienced sexual encounter with men other than their husband or partner. Only 9 per cent HIV positive women correctly and consistently used condom while having sex in the past 12 months.

24(17%) babies tested HIV positive out of total 141 exposed

children. 46.8 per cent were tested HIV negative. Result of 51 children (36.1%) was still not known. 18 (12.7%) children died, out of which 11 (7.8%) were tested HIV positive.

Discussion

Generally maximum number of respondents had marriage at the age range 25-29 years. Their desire to have children free from HIV infection was not proportionate with their corresponding efforts to prevent HIV transmission to their new born. Many factors like the low level of education, income, and service seeking behaviours probably influenced the preventive efforts.

The district HIV prevalence rate for pregnant women attending ANC in 2008 was 1 per cent. If we look at the trends of HIV prevalence at Chandel since 2003 as against the state prevalence, the district figure is always higher except in 2004 (Table 5). Again the district ANC prevalence is always on the higher side, suggesting that the comprehensive knowledge on the PPTCT programme is still lacking at Chandel district.

The present study depicted that strikingly a large number of pregnant women did not attend institution for child delivery where PPTCT services were available. Home delivery was still common among the HIV positive women at Chandel district. 66 (47%) had opted for home delivery. Pregnant women from the remote villages could not afford the high cost involved in the private maternity home, besides this there was no private maternity clinic within the district. This indicates that the government health care system needs to be strengthened to meet the needs of the people in general and positive pregnant women in particular.

Almost half (48%) was not covered under the Nevirapine (NVP) prophylaxis, which was mainly in the beginning of the PPTCT programme. A large number of HIV positive women still lack the comprehensive knowledge on HIV and AIDS especially in the areas of NVP intervention and infant feeding choices. Correct and consistent use of condom seemed to be neglected. The probability of acquiring new infection with the virus having different strain if they had sex without condom seemed to be ignored by couples who were both HIV positive.

Relatively low level of health seeking behaviour was found among the HIV positive pregnant women and lack of motivation among the service providers was noticeable. It was observed during the field visit that there was no NVP at the emergency labour room. The researcher's

Careful observation and interaction with respondents and service providers revealed that instead of opening new facility centres in the district, the existing ones might be strengthened which, could really bring a positive impact on preventing mother to child HIV transmission at the district.

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Table1: Socio-Demographic variables of the respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		% age
18-23	4	5.70
24-29	20	28.50
30-35	17	24.20
36-41	29	41.40
Age at marriage		
15-19	17	24.20
20-24	20	28.50

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25-29	25	35.70
30-34	8	11.40
Religion		
Hindu	18	25.70
Christian	51	72.80
Muslim	1	1.40
Other	0	0.00
Ethnic group		
Meitei	18	25.70
Anal	30	42.80
Monsang	6	8.50
Thadou	10	14.20
Muslim	1	1.40
Other	5	7.10
Education		
Never attended School	17	24.20
I-VIII	16	22.80
IX-XII	25	35.70
XII-above	12	17.10
Occupation		
House wife	22	31.40
Daily wage earner	37	42.80
Small business	3	4.20
Salaried(pvt/govt)	8	11.40
Income		
Upto 3000	39	55.70
3001-8000	19	27.10
8001-10,000	5	7.10
10,000-above	7	10.00
Housing		
Pukka	3	4.20
Semi-pukka	9	12.80

Kucha	47	67.10
Rented	11	15.70

Table 2: Delivery & Neverapine coverage

Delivery	Frequency	Percentage (%)	NVP coverage	Percentage (%)	Total NVP coverage (%)
Home	66	47	20	14.8	
Govt.	71	50	53	37.5	52
Hospital					
Pvt.	4	3	1	0.7	
Hospital					

Table 3: Feeding Practices & Status of child

Feeding practices	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Exclusive breast feeding	4	3
Formula feeding	77	55
Mixed feeding	60	42
Delivery outcome		
Reactive	13	9
Non-Reactive	66	47
Unknown	44	31
Unknown & death	7	5
Reactive & death	11	8

Table 4: Knowledge on HIV

PPTCT Knowledge		
Yes	59	84.2
No	7	10.0
Don't know	4	5.7
If yes, how to prevent		
Through PPTCT prog.	44	62.8
By Correct & consistent Condom use	6	8.5
Any other	9	12.8

Acquired route		
Needle/Syringes	0	0
Blood transfusion	1	1.4
Unprotected sex	13	18.5
From husband	44	62.8
Any other	1	1.4
Condom use(in past 12 months)		
Always	6	8.5
Half	2	2.8
Sometimes	36	51.4
Never	26	37.1

Table 5: District HIV Prevalence rate for women attending ANC as against State:

ANC	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Chandel	1.7	1.5	3.5	1.7	3.0	1.0
Manipur	1.3	1.7	1.3	1.4	1.3	0.5

Source: MACS (Sentinel Surveillance)

India–China: Trade Strategy for Frontier Development, Eds. Gurudas Das and C Joshua Thomas, Pp. xviii and 431, Bookwell, New Delhi 2010, ISBN 978-93-80574-07-3.

This book has 20 chapters, divided into three sections: six chapters on Reforms, Trade and Growth; seven on Bilateral Relationship, Strategic Engagement and Development; and seven on Border Trade and Frontier Development. Of the twenty five authors, one is from China, one from France, and the remaining Indian – although one of them is based in the USA. I suspect that a similar project based in China would have produced a mirror image – with most authors Chinese, and a small Indian representation.

The chapters in the first section cover such issues as Chinese trade policy, particularly with regard to WTO regulations, inward foreign investment, and sectoral composition of exports and imports. India-China trade is still fairly small, but it is growing fast, starting from the reforms of the 1990s. It also displays some stark asymmetries: a significant bilateral surplus for China and deficit for India, yet at the same time, China is more significant as an export market for India, while India is not very significant for China. At present China's exports to India are value-added manufacture goods, especially in electronics, whereas India's exports to China are mostly commodities, with an emphasis on iron ore. As China develops its services sector, there are opportunities, already being pursued, for exporting more Indian expertise (in international business IT for example). However, communications between India and China are poorly developed – in air and land links, and in telecommunications, so that growth in this trade is hampered. The chapters in this section repeat a lot of the same assessments. Individually they are good, but cumulatively they add less and less as one reads through the section.

The second section is more varied. The chapters cover the history of India's international diplomacy, and therefore China's place within India's world-view. The simmering lack of trust towards China, because of border disputes and the 1962 war, is noted, along with China's close relationships with Pakistan, Bangladesh and Burma. This leads to various deliberations on the internal structures of policy making. Unfortunately, this section lacks a Chinese statement of China's world-views, and its vision of India within it. At a different scale, another chapter deals with the details of Track Two initiatives, while simultaneously dealing with big ideas on the geo-historical significance of the new Trilateral Conference of Russia, China and India. Sanjib Baruah, in discussing India and China's ideas on 'modernity' notes that 'infrastructure-envy' is a recurrent theme in India's perception of China – but that in part stems from China's ability, and India's unwillingness, to suppress the dissent of project oustees.

The third section on border trade gets down to nitty-gritty details. A chapter on trade through Himalayan mountain passes concentrates on Nathu-la, opened between Sikkim and Tibet for a restricted number of commodities in 2006, but seen by both sides as a Confidence Building Measure. But confidence could be dented by contrasting behaviour – such as the claim that Indian visitors could stay overnight on the Chinese side, while the Chinese were not allowed to stay overnight on the Indian side. Several contributors make the case that India's North-East region would benefit most from freer cross-border trade, particularly with Southwest China. One chapter concentrates on the benefits that would flow from the re-opening of Arunachal Pradesh's historic trade with Tibet. This local trade is in local commodities and simple manufactures. It does not replicate the sectoral composition of ocean-borne trade. There is a very interesting account of the two national State perceptions of ethnicity on each side of the border.

This is a well edited and well presented volume, more original and more significant on important issues confronting border zones than on the generalities of India-China trade. It highlights the opportunities and constraints on trade and growth in India's border regions, and the potential for transforming the lives of border peoples.

Reviewed by Professor Graham P Chapman, Department of Geography, Lancaster University, United Kingdom.

Book Review

Rakhee Bhattacharya, *Development Disparities in Northeast India*, Foundation Books, (Cambridge University Press India Pvt. Limited), New Delhi, 2011. ISBN 978-81-7596-798-4.

The term development from a financial economist's point of view merely means investment and expenditure, as it lacks a plausible social assessment of short term and long term impact of a dosage of money expenditure. The book commits itself to bureaucratic-securityist-developmental perspective of utility of money, while its thorough disutility in terms of disparity, maldevelopment and stifling of voices from India's North-East gets a minimal place within the rubric of an explicitly monetarist understanding of development in India's North-East. The book mobilizes the existing databases of the Centre for Monitoring of Indian Economy (CMIE), Central Statistical Organization (CSO), CAG reports and many other even unverifiable but 'reliable' (p.115) primary data resources to tell us that India's North-East suffers from lack of self-sufficiency and as a result it does not get its adequate share of royalty from natural resources. Both this 'lack' arises from disparate causes such as lack of development-centric policies (p.74), lack of investment (p.54), 'new economy of terror' (p.95), misutilization and wasteful spending of public funds (pp.81-87) etc. The causes are indirect that can affect finances, they rather affect the so called unilateral decision-making top-down grid of bureaucrat-policy think tank-corporate-security-intelligence-media nexus and others in the business of running the public expenses, as they really cannot control anything in real life. This nexus cannot ensure rising surplus or growth, as such an outcome depends on degree of corporatism, as some of Bhattacharya's data mining shows in the cases of 'prosperous states in India' (p.47). Certain sectors such as service sector can act as a

proxy for financial growth and hence the author speculates that there is a shift from agriculture to manufacturing and services by alluding to an argument given by B.B. Bhattacharya (p.46). But her data in Table 2.9.4 on the very next page shows mixed results such that in a prosperous state such as Punjab, highest contribution to NSDP comes from agriculture, the primary sector. One is also awakened to the shock of learning from the same table that the contribution made by manufacturing, trade, hotel, insurance and other secondary and tertiary sectors indeed declined since 1980-81 to 2007-08 in most of the prosperous states that she cited. So the question arises, is it valid to think that financial growth is the only panacea to instability, crisis and decline in the productive base of the economy of a state?

Let's take the question in the context of India's North-East. In North-Eastern states, one witnesses serious decline in the contribution of State Domestic Product (SDP) in all the states as a rule. Does it mean there is growth in secondary and tertiary sectors? In terms of contribution to NSDP, the calculated growth of contribution by these sectors taken together overtakes agriculture, although the latter remains to be single largest sector in terms of NSDP. How does one explain these contrary results between mainland and India's North-East? Free market model of investment of public funds in India's North-East to act as a catalyst to private players portrays the excessive circulation of taxpayer's money in the form of 'capital expenditure'. Bhattacharya is tongue in cheek about this process of capitalization in the infrastructure and service sectors by terming these investments as a measure of how dependent the economy of North-East is. In building such an argument, the notion of special category state and 90% grant-in-aid from Centre with respect to NEI comes handy. What remains unexplained in this so called 'dependency syndrome' is why the Centre pumps in "so much money" as it does not yield a ready return? From the finance point of view such a propitiation of a white elephant called NEI is simply a waste and Bhattacharya cites CAG reports on such wasteful infrastructure expenses in almost all of social sectors including social welfare of STs, PHE, flood control, repayment of bank loan etc.(pp.76-89) in a major segment of her work under this review. To add to this insurgency related violence result into poor economic performance (p.123) and increase of non-performing assets (ibid), while credit-deposit ratio improves between 2003 and 2009.

The situation remains paradoxical as much of these credit services are offered to the *novu* rich of the region or to groups such as Jindal, TATA, Sutlej or Reliance etc. Farmers, middle classes and other economically poor sections are consistently denied credit, except in a very limited way to serve conspicuous consumption. Bhattacharya's thesis on dependence syndrome assumes that such maladies of finance capital can be improved if there is more investment. This is pressing hard an argument about financial prospects although such prospects are mired with the so called 'dependency syndrome'. Here again what remain unclear is that the free market with its neoliberal capital-as-power regime of policy look for an expansion of consumer market by way of excluding larger segments of population and their productive capabilities in order to maximize profits. Still the balance sheet cannot be made up to show much of profit and hence the only way is to keep pumping more money. Who depends on such money? Obviously, starting from hoarders, industrialists, bankers, traders to a small segment of 'new middle class'¹ across the states of NEI and it is they who are dependent in their macroeconomic interest. In a top heavy exclusionary and immune to market onslaught class of consumers and producers, such a macroeconomic model borrowed from the Asian Development Bank and its Indian satellites offers the carrot and stick of investment and credit, the dual glands of milking, although much of the milk cannot be absorbed here. What the argument glosses over is the political economy of exchange relation between mainland and NEI, which is 'allocation of social capitals into circulatory activity on an extending scale', to put it in the words of James F. Becker.² But then, why does not this strategy generate returns from investment? The most significant reason that the book could have explored by going beyond the commonsense talk is whether these institutions of public investment in a transition economy such as India's North-East is embedded in social, historical and cultural milieu of the region.³ The question assumes significance as the Indian corporate class treats India's North-East as racially and culturally different, so their money does not pay them off in the same coin. More seriously, returns from investment comes through an altogether different channel of steady depletion of natural resources from NEI, which is not accounted in the balance sheet of capital expenditure. An increase in allocation of social capital both through institutional and non-institutional channels creates sub-peripheries in the economy and

results into an extractive flight of capital, a part of which is added to the existing social capital to accelerate a further flight of capital from the region. I would put this argument in a counterfactual manner: If there has not been flight of capital from the North-East Indian region, there would have been capital formation within the region itself. Bhattacharya should have engaged herself on this issue of why there is almost no capital formation in the region, when there is “so much money” pumped in by the Centre. The institutional political economy of such an act of pumping in lies in what Ha Joon Chang would call deregulated market mechanism that shifts the agency of growth from people to the market and the state and that is when smaller subsystems (read States in North-East India) become completely controlled and dependent on larger financial institutions authored by bigger systemic entities.⁴ This is also a syndrome of not developing democratic institutions in a deep, diverse and enriched manner, a precursor to economic predatoriness.⁵ Compounded with failure of developing democratic economic institutions at both national and international level, funding by the State and external funding agencies to carry out selectively chosen economic projects only marginally benefits the common men and this explains why there is near complete misutilization of public funds in North-East India, a concern that the book raises in so many words.

The book only locates the case of mismatch between supply side and demand side (p.vii) or between per capita gross transfer and per capita gross expenditure (Table 3.14), but this only shows how consumer economy grows to sustain the extractive flight of capital. One needs to draw here shades of conceptual distinction between market mechanism, finance and productive processes. The disjunction between these three aspects cannot be blurred in a macroeconomic accounting of NSDP and CD ratio calculation. One probably needs to think a little out of the box to interpret how stagnation of economic growth can counterintuitively act as a condition for increased doses of investment with a resultant flight of capital from the region. Just to empiricize the argument, one should find out from ‘reliable’ sources the rates of profit by tea companies of Assam. Does the book value tally with the assets, both running and fixed of these companies? Or even better, why do starting from ONGC to tea companies talk of loss in Assam and yet run the show? Answering these questions is not only data laden but they are also dipped in political economy of the region.

Apart from this gloss on dependency syndrome, the book attempts to offer some slippery slope arguments about 'economy of terror' and 'energy sector' in India's North-East. Following Zharikov's notion of 'parallel economy' created by global growth of 'terrorism', the author adds up the factor of terrorism to the already existent processes of maldevelopment and malgovernance. It is here that the book turns security-centric instead of development-centric. The coinage of 'economy of terror' following Zharikov, Ajay Sahni and H.N.Das sounds a little exaggerated as in a dependent/comprador stage of development of Capital in India's North-East, within which globalization increases the possibility of political and social turmoil. This intensifies 'ephemeral investor psychology' and 'unpredictability of confidence'. The book only offers a solution such as 'Insurgents and their ideologies can never set the region in right order (...) therefore their activities need to be truncated vigorously' sounds like a statement in exasperation which scholars working on the region should keep away from. Already the saga of violation of civil, political and cultural rights of distinct peoples of India's North-East has gone into turning it into a heavily militarized conflict zone in which the police and the army carry with them a lot of impunity. State terrorism in the form of counter-insurgency has created unbridgeable chasm between the mainstream and India's North-East. Use of statement such as 'indigenous people of the North-East are otherwise exempt from paying taxes to the government, but a major share of their income goes to the militants, helping them to run a parallel economy of terror' (p.121) attributes the blame on the people of the region. Such a statement is biased and it smacks of gross generalization. Is there a connection between the Constitutional right to exemption from income tax and the so called 'parallel economy of terror'? Even if there is, one cannot blame the people as such and that too, indigenous people of the region.

Coming to the energy sector, Assam's oil and gas sector in its manifold contribution to nation's energy needs finds a balanced and refined description in the chapter entitled, "Energy Interplay in the North-East". The chapter discusses how Assam is deprived of the official rate of royalty that should have been paid by public sector ONGC and OIL. The last chapter entitled, "Development Initiatives in North-East India" charts out various developmental agencies such as NEC and MDONER that draw up ambitious programmes of development since independence.

Yet, the lack of development experienced by the region as a whole has been explained in terms of many a structural deficit, notably lack in physical and social infrastructure despite very high per capita plan allocation. Once again the question of failure to increase NSDP and build capacity in various sectors of economy by expanding the scope of participation has been dealt with in this extremely readable interpretation of data and situations. Although the chapter highlights the Vision 2020 as a document with a lot of insight, it falls short of pointing at the rehearsal of hackneyed economists' perspective on vicious cycle of growth in the so called Vision document. Taking a step further, the chapter adores the Look East policy without raising the issues of its security-centric tailoring of the economic needs of the region. An assertion such as "[i]t is time to revisit the region in the dual paradigm of economic development and security concerns, in conjunction with its neighbours with whom its destiny is tied up" (p.163) sounds more like a stereotypical Statist agenda with which the mainstream India misunderstands the region. The fragile ecology of the region and the proposed big dams counting almost 200 alongwith national and multinational extraction of its mineral and other natural resources open up the region to the massive external plunder of its resource with steady depletion of its vital resources poses a grave threat of socio-cultural crisis on the cards. The chapter does not touch upon this sensitive chord of the regional maldevelopment as envisaged by Vision 2020 and Look East Policy. Instead its advocacy for opening up the region for such extractive economic exploitation by doses of private investment seemingly turn a blind eye to the concerns raised by various quarters to such financial and cultural invasion into North-East region, all in the name of development and security.

The book, however, succeeds in bringing out some of the critical facts of economic life of the region, such as slow pace of growth of state domestic product, levels of Central investment and its mis-utilization, overall impact of development initiative by agencies of state on income and employment. The presentation of data and its strategic use in building an argument are spectacular, while much of these arguments could not converge into unconventional wisdom about understanding the feature of disparity. Had the book offered a critical perspective by an engagement with many an argument and counterargument about utility and futility of idea of economic growth and as it is applied to the NER, it could

have charmed us more. The idea of development has been presented in quite a straight-jacketed manner and its given orientation towards an old concept of military security instead of human security could have been critiqued in such an important book. Yet the lack of it could be condoned by its raising of significant concerns of economic growth, albeit by making a conscious exception to its lack of concern for human well-being. The book espouses the cause of neo-liberal opening up of the vast resource base of the region and churns out a dream of prosperity. The argument could have been more nuanced instead of re-articulation of the official line of matching development and security, which is expected of an independent research project such as this one. It could have been highlighting extraordinary moral substance of the very specific cultural and communitarian virtues of people themselves that could have given a robust ethical foundation to 'discursive regime' of economic policies, which the book sadly misses out. All said and done, the book makes a novel attempt to explain many a difficult and intricate issue of development in the contemporary context of North-East India. The dual paradigm of development and security, or let's say human security comes out in the analysis as the baseline of issues of disparity that exist between the nation-state and the region. One would worth remember what Verrier Elwin had said about the political economy of the region, "Gandhi developed the idea of Daridranarayana, the God of the poor, the God who appears in each poor man in whose service his worship is fulfilled. Among many tribes, for all their poverty, Daridranarayana appears as a God of beauty and enchantment (...)".⁶ The book could have invoked this God of the poor to critique the fetishism of the neo-liberal notion of deregulated market that has already proven to a flop elsewhere in the world. The book succeeds in invoking such a critical reading curve that promises a lasting effect, albeit with occasional hiccups. Hopefully readers would like it immensely for its lucidity of presentation and freshness of perspective.

Notes

- ¹ New middle class is that which sends off its children to metros like Delhi, Bangalore and Hyderabad to get their studies done and join the corporate, civil service, army etc. This is contrary to the old "rooted" middle class sensitive to culture, identity and place and territorialized itself inside the region. One of the crucial criterion of belonging to this new middle class is to have an MBA degree alongwith any other

professional qualification in medicine, engineering, finance etc. There is a noticeable transition from the old middle class to the new middle class in North-East region.

- ² James F. Becker, *Marxian Political Economy: An Outline*, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p.238.
- ³ Michael Graff, "Financial Development and Economic Growth in Corporatist and Liberal Market Economies", *Emerging Markets Finance and Trade*, vol.39., no.2., March-April, 2003, pp.47-69.
- ⁴ Ha Joon Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective*, Anthem Press, London, 2002, pp. 50-55.
- ⁵ Karl Polanyi, The Mechanisms of the World Economic Crisis". Translation from German by Kari Polanyi Levitt of "Der Mechanismus der Weltwirtschaftskrise" *Der Oesterreichische Volkswirt.* Vol. 25, 1933, pp.13-4.
- ⁶ Verrier Elwin, *The Oxford India Elwin*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p.293.

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Human Security in India: Health, Shelter and Marginalisation by Monirul Hussain, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Bangladesh, 2010, pp. 246, Rs 400/-

The term Human Security is a contested social concept and like all significant concepts it is still in the process of development, maturation and evolution. A layman's interpretation of the term security is the sense of stability in all aspects of human life, wherein, all basic material needs are met and human dignity realized. In the words of the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Human Security can be defined as: "Human Security, in its broadest sense, embraces far more than just the absence of violent conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health care, and ensures that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfill his or her potential. Every step in this direction is also a step towards reducing poverty, achieving economic growth and preventing conflict. Freedom from want, freedom from fear and the freedom for future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment— these are the interrelated building blocks of human development, and therefore, national security" (Annan, 2001)

That Human Security is essential to Human Development is highlighted by the United Nations through its various agencies, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1994 which categorises it into seven broad areas: Economic Security, Environmental Security, Food Security, Health Security, Personal Security, Community Security and Political Security. The South Asian continent is largely deficit in human security and this book is the outcome of a larger collaborative project "Human Security in South Asia" an initiative taken by scholars from different countries of the region. This volume by Monirul Hussain focuses

primarily on India, and the two most important components - Health Security and Security of Shelter - have been discussed exhaustively.

In order to delve deeper into this concept, the volume is arranged schematically into eight chapters, each devoted to one core issues.

In a bid to introduce its readers to the term “human security”, and to help them understand the concept, the author gives perspectives from different organizations and countries, like the UN, Canadian and Japanese perspectives. He also makes a study of the current scenario in South Asia, and rues the fact that despite India being a democratic nation, it sadly continues to be a human security deficit region. He goes on to state the objectives of the study and the methodology adopted, which benefits the readers as they clearly know what to expect in forthcoming chapters, at a glance. Next he moves on to the important issue of health security, and his explanation of how in a country like India, good health, ultimately becomes a significant contributor towards the economic growth of the nation. Over the decade, India’s achievements with regard to health services remains laudable. With enough emphasis laid on health infrastructure, the scenario is steadily improving and an initiative of the government worth mentioning is the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) whose sole objective is to provide effective health care to the rural masses. Prior to this, the Government of India had constituted the National Health Policy (NHP) to oversee the health care system of the country. Health insecurity remains an issue even to this day, further realized by the onslaught of globalization. The need of the hour, the author puts forward suggestively, is a mass movement for attaining the right to a humane and more affordable health care system.

Security of shelter is yet another aspect of human security that this volume handles effectively. Food, clothing and shelter are integral to human life and the significance of shelter can be both physical and psychological aspects of security. The absence of the security of shelter is most acutely felt in African and Asian countries, India being no exception to this. According to the Census of India, 2001 nearly half of the Indian population have no access to proper shelter, a little less than half the people live in “livable” houses and the remaining 5.5% live in “dilapidated” houses. The author further explores how sanitation is directly linked to the availability of shelter which ultimately has a direct bearing on the health of many Indians, particularly, those residing in the rural areas. The

government's approach to shelter both at the State and Centre has been almost negligible, and is also the possible reason for a major chunk of India's population residing in slum areas, Dharavi in Mumbai being the largest. Lack of proper shelter creates a divide between the haves and the have-nots, and the poor inevitably suffer due to lack of this fundamental right to live.

The volume further highlights issues concerning women and children in the present context. The author successfully presents a collage of insecurities faced by both these groups in India, the worst social ill being child labour, which deprives children of a childhood, a proper environment to foster healthy relations, and a future of promise and hope. These children in such situations are more vulnerable to abuse, trafficking and violence. The author also points out that according to a report of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) entitled "The State of the World's Children, 2005" over a billion children are violated because they are deprived of one or more basic services required to grow, survive and develop. The "missing girl child" is a syndrome plaguing India which does not spare even a female foetus in the mother's womb from insecurity. Can we move ahead when women and children who constitute the backbone of our society are still subjugated to various forms of oppression at a time we call ourselves educated? We seriously need to rethink and re-evaluate our approach if the nation is to head towards progress and development.

The United Nations Convention held on 28 July 1951 defined a refugee as any person who is persecuted for reasons such as race, religion, nationality, etc and decides to leave his/her country of origin and as such is unwilling to return to it. The author now turns to the situation of such refugees and Internally Displaced Persons as they are called. He observes that, most of the refugee flows are into third world countries mostly Africa followed closely by Asia. The influx of such people into India and the North-East in particular is examined further in the book. As far as refugees are concerned their security is at an all time low owing to the fact that they are the most neglected group and as such need the immediate attention of national and international communities, he recommends. Another issue that the author draws our attention to, is, the State of the disabled persons in the country, and goes on to state that to them human rights and security is more essential than ever for their

existence with respect and dignity. People with disabilities are often ostracized, excluded from the society, which tends to breed insecurity and a feeling of helplessness within them. For its part, the government passed the “Persons with Disabilities Act (Equal Opportunities, protection of Rights, and Full Participation)” in the year 1995, which further elaborates the responsibility of the Central and State Governments and local bodies to provide services, facilities and equal opportunities to people with disabilities for participation as equal citizens of the country, which like so many Acts has yet to prove its efficacy and functionality.

In conclusion, this volume urges its readers to look at Human Security with special reference to India, and discusses how a major chunk of India’s 1.1 billion plus people suffer from an acute sense of marginalization. It goes without saying that, what we all need is security to be able to live without the fear of discrimination. The author ends by suggesting that as a means to enhance human security and foster development and progressive change in the country one needs to address the existing problem of class inequalities that is rampant in India. Perhaps, by dismantling the social structure that has existed since time immemorial, a plausible method of bringing a sense of security to the people of this country can be visualized.

The efforts of the author and his associates in bringing out this volume is indeed commendable. To persons ignorant and unaware of this concept, it is an extremely informative read and, without doubt, it will prove to be equally useful to researchers and teachers alike.

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Uprooted for whose benefit? Development-Induced Displacement in Assam 1947-2000.-by Walter Fernandes and Gita Barali, North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati, 2011, 734p.

First in the series of NESRC Displacement Studies, this book is an extensive study on Assam which probes into the adverse effects of the various development projects in Assam. The authors have done a commendable job, by introspecting the problems and expectations of those, whose lives have been literally ruined by the development projects necessitated in the name of 'National development'. There are some who are forced to leave their homes and relocate themselves elsewhere, others lose some or most of their lands but are not physically relocated. All fall in the category of 'displaced persons'. The book incorporates thirteen chapters. Chapter 1 sketches the pre and post independence scenario of the state of displacement and rehabilitation in India as a whole, before venturing into an in-depth study of Assam in Chapter 2. A very pertinent issue is raised regarding development. The standard perception is that development raises the standard of living through economic growth and improved services, but recent studies have revealed that the benefits do not reach every class. On the contrary, some classes pay the price of the benefits that other classes get. This is majorly in the context of development projects which require big tracts of land. Many such tracts of land are inhabited by tribal and other rural, economically weak classes who the project uproots and deprives of their sustenance in the name of national development without compensating them for it. Except in some areas in the Northeast that come under the customary law or the sixth schedule, land which does not have an individual title is considered as state property. The displacement causes social and cultural dislocation

and thereby alienates them from the traditional identity attached to their land. Thus the displaced persons not only have to struggle for resettlement and rehabilitation but also struggle against impoverishment and marginalization. Chapters 4 to 8 give a vivid account of the various development projects in Assam, the extent and nature of land used for development and the people affected by them since 1947. The authors have questioned the need for some new projects. For example does irrigation necessarily mean major dams that submerge enormous areas? Does transport mean eight lane highway meant for private vehicles when public transport can benefit the poor? The use of CPRs (Common Property Resources) is a controversial issue. Most of it is tribal livelihood, but under the colonial land laws, that the country continues to follow, it is state property.

Chapters 9 to 12 focus on the lives of the displaced persons, examining the extent to which they have been affected after the projects. In order to deal with this multidimensional problem valid alternatives have been explored and suggested in Chapter 13 where 726 respondents from 12 projects chosen according to their caste-tribe and gender and the time period of the project are analyzed. The authors bring forth a woeful tale of the government's indifference to the agonies of the affected (because the policies only speak of the need to minimize displacement without specifying the modes of doing it. In the case of Assam, the situation is all the more alarming). The state does not have a rehabilitation policy for persons displaced by them and even if the displaced persons are resettled, their number is limited to actually prove the fact or appear compensatory. That has resulted in the impoverishment and marginalization of the already marginalized. Displacement has resulted in unemployment. A large number of people were compelled to give up cultivation and become daily wagers or serve as domestic help. Income and other disparities had both caste and gender implications. The tribals were the worst sufferers as they found it more difficult to adjust to the new environment they were pushed into. Women did not have as much access to information about the project as men did and were less paid. Children of those displaced were also not left unaffected. They had limited access to facilities like schools because the projects built facilities like schools, hospitals for their own staff and not for those who were displaced. Alarmingly, some children who were at school before the

project were pulled out of it and were forced to become child labourers, to fend for themselves and their families. Poor quality of amenities like houses and toilets led to poor hygiene and health hazards. Further introspection into the process of deprivation, revealed that the problems were rooted in the initial stages of the projects. Information was not correctly circulated to many people in order to prepare themselves for change, resulting in generating insecurity and resentment. Many project officials tried to lure the people by making promises which remained unfulfilled, and majority of respondents remained dissatisfied with compensation received by them. Very few of them could invest the amount received on productive assets since they had to spend much of it on food and other needs that their land used to provide till then.

In order to deal with this multidimensional problem valid alternatives have been explored and suggested in Chapter 13. Serious thought has been given to the issue of compensation. It was revealed that 11.43% of the respondents got no compensation from the projects. Many of the respondents complained about the officials who kept back a part of the compensation amount as “expenses incurred”. Others paid bribes to middlemen or village leaders or state officials. It was well suggested that compensation could be given through a bank amount in order to reduce abuses like bribes. Rehabilitation was yet another major issue which required immediate attention. The alarming exposure was that project budgets made no provision for it. The state thus added to the backlog of unemployment and had impoverished people in the name of national development. It is an imperative that a rehabilitation policy be so that the livelihood losers become first beneficiaries of the project because they pay its price. Catering to this requirement it was suggested that the local people be trained to take up as many project jobs as possible. That would reduce land acquisition since a township would not be needed when the displaced get most jobs. The influx of outsiders would decrease and the few persons, who would come, could rent houses in the locality, thus adding to its economy instead of turning the area into an extraction zone. If the project had a marketable product, a part of it could be used to rehabilitate the ‘displaced’. For example, some of the iron or steel that a steel mill produced could be given to them to produce other goods using it as raw material. The problem is of a huge magnitude and we have to begin from scratch. The last word suggested is ‘rethinking on LAA’ (i.e.

Land Acquisition Act) that was enacted in the colonial age when the objective was to change the Indian economy to suit the needs of the British industrial revolution. Now if 'national development' is the objective, the law has to be changed according to the constitutional The authors of the book have done a commendable job by exploring the negative dimensions of the development projects in Assam. It reveals that when the project planners speak of national development, they pay little heed to the people who are forced to sacrifice their livelihood for it. The result is a contradiction between the economic and social components of development. The project may result in economic growth, but the human factor is sacrificed to it. Thus rightly asked: 'Uprooted for whose benefit?'

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Beyond Borders: Look East Policy & North-East India edited by Dilip Gogoi (Delhi/Guwahati: DVS Publishers), 2010; pp xiv + 317, Rs 670.

From a barely known policy in the 1990s to a buzzword of the media, academicians and bureaucrats of North-East India in recent times, the Look East policy is the paradigm shift in India's foreign economic policy. Recognising the need to focus on the benefits of the Look East policy more sharply on India's Northeastern region the second phase of the policy was launched in 2003 by giving a new dimension wherein India is looking towards a partnership with the ASEAN countries, both within BIMSTEC and the India-ASEAN Summit dialogue as integrally linked to economic and security interests of the North-Eastern region.¹ The new phase of India's Look East policy is believed to usher in a new era of development for the Northeastern region. As such, this realignment of the Look East policy in 2003 made people of the region to fancy this policy. With the conceptualisation of the Look East policy vis-à-vis North-East India and its transnational neighbours by Sanjib Baruah,² various books have been published which critically assess the prospects, potentials and challenges of this policy.

Dilip Gogoi's edited book *Beyond Borders: Look East Policy and Northeast India* is a collection of 12 essays contributed by scholars who have special interests on issues concerning the North-eastern region vis-à-vis the Look East policy and its transnational neighbourhood. It is the product of ideas deliberated at Cotton Conclave under the banner of National Young Scholars' Meet on February 20 and 21, 2008. As the editor spelled out in the introduction, the aim of this book is to critically engage with the issues of security, foreign policy, regional economy and

sub-regional corporation, pertaining to the North-Eastern region and its neighbourhood which could not only help better the understanding of the region but also help the policy makers to frame a holistic approach toward development of the neglected borderlands and frontier of North-East India.

In the introductory chapter Dilip Gogoi made a pertinent remark that North-East India is physically isolated from the rest of India, iron curtailed political control and the reluctance to provide research visas to foreign scholars have cast shadows on contemporary research on political relations with its neighbours, along with issues of border trade and transnationalism” (p. 2). In the national imagination the idea of the frontier or borderland still prevails. Logically, India’s Look East policy will have limited value if it does not have any impact on the region. The Look East policy begins with North-East because it shares direct land borders with East and South East Asian neighbours (p. 5).

Mapping the North-East on India’s Foreign Policy Agenda

Jayanta Brahma, in an interesting chapter and emerging field of analysis, deals with the interaction between domestic issues and foreign policy. He regarded foreign policy as “the result of the interplay of a large number of factors that effect the formulation of policy in different ways in different circumstances”, which include “history, geography, politico-economic imperatives, socio-cultural milieu, perceptions of the ruling elite of national interests and ideological consensus”, and is also shaped by domestic, regional and international balance of forces (p. 13).

Holding the view that the linkage between foreign and domestic politics is increasingly becoming significant in international studies, which is primarily due to interdependence of nation-states and globalisation of economy, Brahma argues that in modern times, domestic politics and foreign policy have inseparably merged into one. To him the external and internal threats are obviously not mutually exclusive but feed on each other. As a result, the North-East as a region of strategic location with its external linkages assumes significance in the agenda of India’s foreign policy formulation. He argues that India and its transnational neighbours need to take advantage of their geographical contiguity, even though their relationships are both rivalry and cooperation.

However, Brahma does not go beyond the need of India “to articulate

its foreign policy preferences in alignment with the interests of the North-East region as the execution of foreign policy is inevitably influenced by regional considerations within the nation” (p. 32). Instead of the relatively optimistic analysis of the relation between the North-Eastern states and its neighbours, an in-depth micro-analysis relevant for policy decisions in the later part of the essay could have made the discussion more interesting and insightful.

Looking East through the North-East

In an interesting chapter Dilip Gogoi explores the factors that led to the evolution of India's Look East policy and examines the opportunity and potentials of North-East India in the context of the intra-regional arrangement with the South East Asian countries in the light of India's Look East policy. Putting a positive note he argues that the future development and stability in North-East India could be possible with the successful implementation of the Look East policy through the North-East.

To Gogoi India's Look East policy is more of a search for political and economic convergence with the East and South East Asian region by fully exploiting the new opportunities with a pragmatic approach towards regional integration aimed at serving India's long term national interest. He assesses both economic and cultural relations of North-East ethnic groups with the South East Asian groups which remained untapped.

Acknowledging the challenges posed to development by insurgency and the consequent law and order problem coupled with drugs and arms trafficking in the whole region Gogoi put forward two level parallel strategies at the external and internal fronts to achieve the goals of the Look East policy. External strategies: i) a concrete rational policy choice which could focus beyond the present military regime and remove present anxieties and ambiguity, ii) a more positive engagement with China in a spirit of equality and mutual benefits and remove future potential power rivalry in the region, iii) a better road and communication network for the realisation of better future of the region, iv) effective joint border management supported by institutional mechanism to encourage cross-border trade and discourage illegal border trade, v) India should capitalise on North-East India's historical and traditional cross-cultural linkages with the South-East Asian region as a soft power resources, and vi) to

think of a common house that can ensure free and fair competition, remove tariffs and non-tariff barriers and standardise the trading system among the participant countries. Some of the internal strategies are: i) India needs to reorient itself more towards the outward looking approach, ii) ensuring human security and creating better human resources to keep up the pace of development in today's competitive environment, iii) more mobility of the North-Eastern people to take part in the competitive economic environment, and iv) adopt a sustainable development model and promote green economy in North-East India.

Infrastructure Projects

In another chapter Yogendra Singh assesses the infrastructure projects undertaken by India under the Look East policy and also the prospect and challenges of India's involvement in such infrastructure projects which aimed at enhancing connectivity between India's North-East and South-East Asia. India's interest in infrastructure development is to "extract all the benefits from its Look East policy" (p. 64). He believes that the shift in this policy was due to "China's massive engagement to promote the rapid development of strategic infrastructure linkages with Myanmar and Mekong sub-region, facilitation of the sub-regional initiatives such as BIMSTEC and MGC and the acceleration of the development in the Indian North-Eastern region." He argues that improved connectivity within the region is not only needed to tap the potentials of the North-East but also to prepare the region for enhanced linkages with South East Asia.

Dividing the infrastructure development projects into land routes, energy and telecommunication linkages, Yogendra Singh assesses the detailed status of India's involvement in various ongoing and potential infrastructure projects such as the India-Myanmar Friendship Road or the Moreh-Tamu-Kalewa Road, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Trans Asian Railways, Kaladan Multimodal project, Stilwell road, Myanmar-India-Bangladesh gas pipeline, Tamanthi Hydroelectricity project, and the optical fiber network between North-East India and South East Asia.

Yogendra Singh seems to be obsessed equally as the Indian government does with the law and order situation in the region and therefore fails to look the other way around. For instance, the Indian government failed

to negotiate with the Bangladesh government on the Myanmar-India-Bangladesh gas pipeline. However, this is not the dead end as gas pipeline can be built till Tripura and from there it can be transported to the mainland through railways. Insurgency in Tripura has receded after tripartite agreement of Memorandum of Settlement (MOS) has been signed between Government of India, Government of Tripura and NLFT (NB) on December 25, 2004,³ and subsequent surrenders and crackdown of other smaller insurgent groups of the state by police and paramilitary forces.⁴ So, there is no excuse on the part of the government of India other than infrastructure development in the region.

Border Disputes and Border Provinces in Foreign Policy

Shubhrajeev Konwar, in chapter five, slightly deviates from the main theme and analyses the border dispute of India and China by dividing the border into three sectors: Kashmir (Western sector), Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh (Middle sector) and, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh (Eastern Sector). He pays special emphasis on the border dispute in Arunachal Pradesh, government efforts to resolve it and suggest remedial measures as well as identify the major challenge ahead in arriving at a peaceful settlement to the border dispute.

As mentioned by Konwar, the conversion of the Kameng sector as a militarised zone is not a step towards peaceful settlement of dispute between India and China. However, regarding the presence of civilians in this area as a deterrent towards a militarised solution to the border dispute as China cannot afford to have civilian casualties due to fears of worldwide condemnation from the international community (p. 106) is some sort of an euphemistic edifice. It indirectly implies the colonial mindset of a North-East frontier where the region as well as people were regarded as a buffer to British India. Konwar regarded the improvement of infrastructure in the eastern sector as key to India's security. He raises an interesting observation that if large amount of funds are being pumped into Arunachal Pradesh and misutilised and the benefits are denied to the locals, then indigenous Arunachali terror outfits might emerge in the coming years. In addition, if major insurgent groups of the North-East like ULFA and both factions of NSCN continue to operate freely in eastern parts of Arunachal, there is also a possibility of forming militant groups by smaller ethnic groups to protect themselves from rampant

extortions and intimidations, as seen in many cases in the region.

In another chapter Jabin T Jacob compares China's Western Development Strategy (WDS) and India's Look East policy (LEP) and looks at the results derived and their implications. Jacob contrasts that while China's WDS "originated as an internal development programme targeted at the country's large western region", India's LEP "began as a foreign policy strategy to enable New Delhi to reach out to East Asia and in particular, to Southeast Asia" (p. 128). He complains that while the WDS of China "serves as a public and symbolic demonstration of the central government's concern with national unity, inequality and poverty... India does not yet really have a comparable North-East Development Strategy in place and even the LEP's inward focus towards the North-East is of recent vintage and is far from being a coherently-articulated strategy" (p. 129). Like Yunnan's role in China's foreign policy New Delhi has to pay greater attention to the voices from its North-Eastern states and accept interdependence and crossborder linkages as a means of ensuring development and stability in this region.

North-East India and Myanmar

Åshild Kolås and Camilla Buzzi, while acknowledging the *cul-de-sac* situation with poor infrastructure as the reason for underdevelopment of the North-Eastern region, they regarded "connectivity" as the *mantra* of the Look East policy. However, they seem self-contradictory when they explain from China's experience of extensive engagement with Myanmar, stating that India's opening-up to Myanmar is a risky business in which North-East India could be adversely affected. They assume that opening the borders has non-traditional security risks emanating from Myanmar, including drugs trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking and the spread of infectious diseases.

In fact, the Indo-Myanmar border is porous and instead of being apprehensive of an open border, proper border management by both the countries can more effectively control the non-traditional security risks. While border crossing cannot be stopped totally by fencing borders, the "concept of border management is undergoing rapid transformation with the increasing acceptance of globalisation. Nations are coming closer. Barriers are being lowered. Trade and commerce are bonding people across the international borders. The restrictions along the borders are no longer

as stringent as they were in the past.”⁵ C. Raja Mohan, an analyst on Indian diplomacy, observes: “Borders in the subcontinent need not necessarily remain political barriers. They need to be transformed into zones of economic cooperation among regions that once were part of the same cultural and political space.”⁶

Thailand’s Look West Policy and India’s North-East

Considering India’s Look East policy and Thailand’s Look West policy as a convergence, which not only consolidated the areas of cooperation but also expanded horizontally, bringing new areas within the ambit of cooperation, Vibhanshu Shekhar explores the potential areas of bilateral cooperation which can benefit North-East the most. Even though Mani Shankar Aiyar, the then Minister for the Development of North Eastern Region, identified 35 sectors of cooperation between India’s North-Eastern region and Thailand, Shekhar identifies three key sectors, which offer immense opportunities for Thai investment in the North-East, and which are labour-intensive production activities, thereby, having the potential for large-scale employment generation within the region. They are the agro-based and food processing sectors, energy sector, and development of local transport networks in the region. He felt that the ability of the region in taking benefits from the market-driven and investment-centric Look West policy depends on “level of infrastructure development in the region, the ability of the provincial and central governments in managing the challenges of insurgency in the region, and the level of government control and bureaucratic entanglement in the region” (p. 180).

The positive note of redeeming an employment starved region turns again into the of exploitation of raw materials lexicon when he says “resources of the region will be exported to production factories located in Thailand, where these resources will be processed for the final products, to be sold in distant market.” Shekhar, however, does not prescribe measures beyond the exploitation of raw materials, to ways to produce final products within the region.

Border State, Look East Policy and Mizoram

Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman and Julien Levesque assesses the two major non-traditional security issues, the inflow of narcotics and a large Burmese

(Chin) population, and how Mizo society tends to react in a rather conservative way. Considering that Mizoram has been left out in the overall framework of the conscious incorporation of the North-East in the Look East policy, they felt that “appropriate control and monitoring must be maintained on the inflow of people and narcotics so that Mizo society sees favorably the enhancement of connectivity in the region” (p. 206).

However, they blindly followed national reports considering Mizoram as having a peaceful situation and a highly educated population, and therefore the state should be a perfect recipient of the Look East policy. Literacy to the Mizos means a person who can read and write Mizo or the Duhlian language. In fact, most Mizos cannot read and write the global language English or the Indian national language Hindi. Though Mizoram is relatively peaceful compared to some other North-Eastern states like Manipur, Nagaland and Assam after the peace accord of the Mizo National Front and the Indian government in 1987 leading to the formation of Mizoram state, there are still Hmar and Paite militant outfits demanding various levels of autonomy within the state albeit in a lesser degree due to the affinity they have with the majority Mizos.

Strategic Concerns and Asymmetric Conflicts

Olindita Gogoi, in Chapter 10, discusses the host of tensions that exist between India and Bangladesh viz.- the immigration of Bangladeshis into North-East India and its outcome, continuous aid, abetment and sheltering insurgents, cross-border criminal activities, the mass inflow of small arms through Bangladesh and the network among the Jehadi groups. Such activities, to her, fuels insurgency and terrorism in North-East India.

The coming into power of the Awami League under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina on January 6, 2009 in Bangladesh has initiated an accommodating and cooperative relationship with India. Gogoi makes a trivial mistake stating that Sheikh Hasina came to power in January 2010 (p. 226). With the signing of five important agreements on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, transfer of sentenced persons, combating international terrorism, organised crime and illegal drug trafficking, power generation and a cultural exchange programme between India and Bangladesh in January, 2010 have built up a positive and mutually beneficial linkage. As security is the primary infrastructure of economic

activities, social stability and essential prerequisite of investment, she considers that the coming into power of a friendly government in Bangladesh will help in abetting the persistent insurgency atmosphere and subsequently reduce economic stagnation of the region.

In another essay, which has less linkage to the Look East policy, Namrata Goswami tries to outline a research framework for understanding the armed ethnic movements in North-East India and also draws attention to important research conducted over the years on internal conflicts within insurgent groups. She selectively chooses and analyses the origin and causes, depth of violent ethnic movements, nature of violence, affected societies, and support base of ULFA, NSCN(IM), UNLF and DHD(N). While probing deeper into the antecedent causes of the conflicts in the region Goswami observes that most of the problems have arisen “due to issues of identity, ethnicity, social and cultural assertions, political empowerment, land, and the hill-plains divide” (p. 223).

She says that the demands of the NSCN (IM) for a Greater Nagaland, the UPDS for a Karbi state, the DHD for a Dimasa state and the Kuki Revolutionary Army for a Kuki Regional Council consist of conflicting claims to overlapping territorial space. However, she does not explain in detail the nature and extent of such overlappings.

Inter-State Relations and Foreign Policy

Cultural analysis has emerged as an important but elusive area of analysis in the past two decades. Biplob Gogoi, in an insightful chapter, observes that “Culture forges a potent and unique linkage with the strategic parameters of national foreign policy of a particular state” (p. 262) and attempts to relocate a culture paradigm of the North-East in India’s foreign policy. Due to the ethnic and cultural affinity with South East Asian neighbours North-East India has a special place in the Look East policy. He says “At a time when ethno nationalism has emerged as a subject of contention, deliberation and debate in international politics, the external ethno-nationalist linkages of the North-East Indians deserve a legitimate and a plausible place in the realm of Indian foreign policy” (pp. 267-268).

As the growth priority for North-East India involves the development of cultural and travel corridors in the form of physical infrastructures,

activities or exchanges, Gogoi opines that these cultural and travel corridors can be linked with larger South East Asia and South West China destinations. As the North-Eastern people live in a region far from the centres of mainstream culture, he argues, they can maintain connectivity in a variety of ways with the near periphery or South East Asian neighbouring countries.

However in dealing with the emergence of culture as an important area of analysis in the post-Cold War globalised world, Gogoi makes a mistake in categorising the Kukis as one sub-tribe of the Nagas, (p. 265). The term “Kuki” and “Naga” existed even before the coming of British in India, as Majumdar and Bhattasali refer to the Kukis as the earliest people known to have lived in prehistoric India, preceding the “Dravidians.”⁷ But they were popularised by the British as a generic term for many tribes settling in North-East India, Burma and Bangladesh. Some of the Kuki and Naga tribes straddle both in India and Burma along the international border.

North-East in India’s Security and Diplomacy

In the last chapter Pradip Saikia discusses the challenges faced by North-East India from its neighbours - China, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar. With the launch of the outward looking economy under the economic reforms in 1991 the relations between India and countries neighbouring the North-East has steadily changed. Pradip argues that “despite an optimistic attitude, the Look East Policy can be derailed by these security issues” (p. 271). In this light Saikia analyses the various security concerns that can emerge as an impediment to the entire process and tries to find valid explanations and policy alternatives that could avoid strategic pitfalls in implementing the Look East Policy. He feels that there is a need to re-prioritise of the issues pertaining to the North-East.

Terming the Look East Policy as “successful”, Saikia considers India’s cooperation with China as vital due to its overwhelming presence in South-East Asia including the huge Chinese business diaspora as well as to re-establish historic trade ties with China. However, as the focus of the present book is on North-East India, the success of the Look East policy has to be measured in terms of how much North-East benefits from this policy.

Concluding Remarks

Dilip Gogoi's edited book reads as a diverse group of essays dealing with various aspects of Look East policy and North-East India. Individual chapters in this volume provide useful analyses of specific political, economic and strategic dimensions of India's Look East policy. However, the main weakness is the inclusion of some essays which have not analysed such issues in relation to the Look East policy. Such essays could better

One pertinent question that needs to be raised and analysed at this juncture is how the government of India dealt with the issue of security in relation to the borderless world. The international borders in the region are mostly porous and these porous borders absorb the shock that could be produced by the separation of Burma from India in 1937 and the subsequent hardening of borders since 1947. Pranab Mukherjee in his address to the first interaction with the public organised by the Public Diplomacy Division of the Ministry of External Affairs says "geography is opportunity and the very geographical location of the North East makes it the doorway to South East and East Asia and vice versa, a doorway to economies into India."⁸ The Look East policy in principle aims at the creation of an enabling environment so as to end the landlocked situation and isolation of the North-Eastern region by opening up the borders and re-integrating the region's economy through improved trade and connectivity between the Northeast India and Southeast Asian countries

Despite the enormous potentials of the Look East policy India's border trade with the countries neighbouring the Northeastern region is declining. Border fencing is followed fervently to check drug trafficking and narco-terrorism along the Indo-Myanmar and Indo-Bangladesh border. Recently, India has resolved to raise the iron fencing along Mizoram's 404 km border with Myanmar. It has also ordered the fencing of the 14 kilometres of the porous international boundary at Moreh in Manipur. This may insulate the age-old ties existing between the ethnic kins living across the border despite the separation between two different nations and further alienate them.⁹

The contributors to this volume are reputed scholars like Camilla Buzzi, Åshild Kolås and Julien Levesque along with research scholars from various institutions. The book needs to have another edition correcting some of the grammatical mistakes and typographical errors.

Notes and References

- ¹ “Year End Review 2004”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. New Delhi.
- ² One of the first essays on India’s Look East policy and North-east India is Sanjib Baruah’s *Between South and Southeast Asia: Northeast India and the Look East Policy*. CENISEAS Papers 4, Guwahati, India: Centre for Northeast India, South and Southeast Asia Studies, 2004. In this paper Baruah conceptualises the prospects of de-emphasising borders in the north-eastern region under the Look East Policy for the region’s development and reduction of alienation.
- ³ Speech for the Chief Minister’s Conference, April 15, 2005. <http://tripura.nic.in/SpeechesforCMConference.htm> (Accessed on July 15, 2011).
- ⁴ Tripura Landmarks http://cdpsindia.org/tripura_landmarks.asp (accessed on July 15, 2011).
- ⁵ Prakash Singh, “India’s Border Management Challenges”, *Dialogue*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Oct.-Dec., 2006.
- ⁶ C. Raja Mohan. *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India’s New Foreign Policy*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2003, p. 269.
- ⁷ R.C. Majumdar and N. Bhattasali. *History of India*. Dacca: Chandra Dutta, (Fifth revised edition), 1930, pp. 6-7.
- ⁸ Speech by Pranab Mukherjee, Minister of External Affairs at a seminar on Look East policy, Shillong, June 16, 2007.
- ⁹ Thongkholal Haokip. *India’s Look East Policy and Northeast India*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, 2010, p. 202.

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