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Editorial

First of all I regret the inordinate delay in bringing out this issue. Having accepted the editorship of two journals on North-East India and a host of other responsibilities both within the university and outside it has been difficult for me to maintain the publication schedule. What I have been able to present before the readers would not have been possible without the hard work put in by Dr. C. J. Thomas and Ms. Christine Blah of ICSSR-NERC.

I am very happy to start this issue with a very incisive article by Marie Lall on Indo-Myanmar relations. She shows through numerous examples that Myanmar is changing but India is unable to keep pace with its fast changing neighbour. The article also shows a rather dismal projection of the Look East Policy, what with the security-centric attitude of India, which is partly informed by the insurgency situation on the border. She argues in favour of continued engagement with Myanmar and the need to invest on infrastructure development of North-East India. She also advises that India's various ministries should show better coordination with each other in order to achieve what it wants to achieve.

The next article is by H. Srikanth, who grapples with the complex issue of land in Meghalaya. Although one may not entirely agree with him that the woes of tribal communities are due to colonial modernity he quite convincingly argues that it is so. He has also looked into the role of Christianity and rise of a strong middle class in changing the traditional land relations, which in turn is bringing about private ownership of land and landlessness, if not a weakening of the institution of matrilineality as well.

Siripurakapu Rao in the next article revisits the achievements and failures

Time to Rethink Indo-Myanmar Relations in the Light of Changes across the Border¹

Marie Lall*

Introduction

Myanmar is changing. Apart from China, even Myanmar's immediate neighbours, including India do not seem to have caught on. The changes are particularly evident in urban centres with the development of civil society organisations across the country and limited economic and political reforms. It all started with the dismantling of the old security and intelligence structure in the winter of 2004 that allowed for limited but growing space for civil society. The number of local grassroots organisations which had traditionally been under hefty controls, were suddenly able to develop and expand. Some middle class leaders started to become involved in education and research and think tank organisations were created to fill the gaps of a faltering public education system. The same middle classes who were unhappy with the public schools system started to set up private alternative schooling as business opportunities and as a way forward for their children. In December 2009 private schools were finally legalised, leading to a dramatic increase of the already growing alternative education sector.

* The author is a faculty member at the University of London and Chatham House, London.

The main pro-regime party, the Union of Solidarity and Development (USDP) took over 75% of the seats across the three parliaments, which was not a surprise given that the playing field was heavily tilted in their favour. Whilst the main opposition party – the National League for Democracy (NLD) decided not to stand for the elections due to the unfair election laws and their rejection of the 2008 constitution, their breakaway faction – the National Democratic Force (NDF) did quite badly. However the ethnic minority parties, especially in Shan, Chin and Rakhine states have done comparatively well at all the three levels and are well represented in their own local legislatures. Since none of the pro-democracy parties was adequately contesting in the sub-national parliaments, a large number of these seats in the ethnic states were taken by the ethnic opposition groups. The local legislatures are significant because they represent a potential new power base, with new members of parliament and a new civil service infrastructure to support the new institutions – in essence a new and legal political space where there was none before.

Despite the fact that the pro-regime USDP has kept overall control and will be supported by the military seats, this new parliamentary system still represents a structural change from a military *junta* to a presidential system with new institutions and resulting changes in governance. The military will have to learn new ways of governance and some level of discussion and compromise can be expected.

Myanmar is changing rapidly. However India's bilateral policy vis-a-vis Myanmar is not following suit. After briefly looking at historical linkages, this article will explore Indo-Myanmar relations under four headings: the North-East, the role of the economy in foreign policy making, energy security and China's regional influence. The article concludes that India's stumbling block seems to be located in the North-East as despite many promises for regional economic development and looking east through the North-East, the reality on the ground does not reflect the policy statements. India needs political will to develop the region as a cornerstone of the relationship with Myanmar as a neighbour.

India-Burma in History

Both countries were part of the British Empire, Burma being the

the Indian government maintained its support for the pro-democratic opposition. However active intervention by the Indian government was out of question. It was only in 1992 that New Delhi decided to break the deadlock and start with a policy of 'constructive engagement' with the military regime. The first Border Trade Agreement was signed in January 1994 and in 1995 a joint military operation named Golden Bird against insurgents based in the North-East of India took place. A bilateral border trade agreement was signed which was to be conducted through Moreh in Manipur (India) and Tamu (Myanmar) and Champhai in Mizoram (India) and Hri on the Myanmar side.

The real shift in India-Myanmar relations however took place under the advent of the BJP and the 'Eastern Strategy' pursued by Indian Foreign Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh. His predecessor George Fernandes had vociferously supported the student uprising, which had hampered the BJP's efforts to create closer ties with Myanmar, but Singh moved away from this position. In July 1999 a meeting between the Home Ministry of both countries in New Delhi identified means to strengthen cooperation on issues like cross border terrorism and setting up better communication links. India agreed to organise training for anti-narcotics officials. Military to military contacts started in 2000 with the meeting of Gen. V.P. Malik and Gen. Maung Aye. This was the first high level contact since 1988. Business and security were the main items on the agenda.

In October 2004 General Than Shwe, leading a delegation of eight cabinet ministers, visited Delhi and both sides signed an agreement on security, cultural exchanges and hydro-electric power.⁹ By mid January in 2005 international news reports focused on Myanmar's army cracking down on anti-India rebels operating from its territory.¹⁰ Cooperation from Myanmar was seen as crucial if rebels were not to simply slip over the border into a new country. During a historic visit to Delhi the Myanmar Foreign Minister U Win Aung promised Delhi to flush out Indian insurgent camps and in the last week of December India's chief of army staff announced jointly coordinated military operations with Myanmar. The cooperation between the two administrations continued when the Indian police destroyed one of the largest Burmese rebel bases in Mizoram in September 2005¹¹ and Naga rebel bases were attacked by the Myanmar forces in December 2005.¹²

India's North-East

Both countries share a 1,643 km common border, on India's side Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, and Chin state, Sagain Region and Kachin state on the Myanmar side. Many of the tribes in India's north eastern region are ethnically linked to tribes on the Myanmar side of the border.¹⁴ Since independence a number of these ethnic minorities have been demanding more autonomy or independence and many have organised themselves into separatist movements, fuelling violent insurgencies such as the Naga rebellion (led by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland) and the Manipur insurgency. This has been a domestic problem for India for over 50 years.¹⁵ However ethnic issues and resulting civil war have also been issues for the Myanmar government, more so however on the China and Thailand border side. Both governments have different problems with different sets of insurgents and so not necessarily have the same priorities vis-à-vis different groups.¹⁶

Whilst it could be expected that both governments would see advantage in such cooperation, anti-terror cooperation has been largely a priority for India. Little information is available on the relationship between the two militaries; but interviews in India point to the fact that when Myanmar army was cooperating with the Indian army, the Indian government was expressing support for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi¹⁷ and the political opposition. This resulted in less cooperation between the forces.

As a result of decades of instability in North-East states there has been less economic development in that region than in the rest of India. Violence has risen since 1990s and the economic liberalisations, and as prosperity has come to many states in India, it has barely touched the North-East. The BJP government understood that years of government infrastructure and educational underinvestment in the region was a part of the problem fuelling discontent. There was also an understanding that remedying such underinvestment was going to be a costly affair. The policy aim at the time was to allow for greater trade in the region, with the border opening up gradually, leading to more local prosperity. This in turn was hoped to quell the drug and arms trafficking for which the region is notorious. India is aware that it needs Myanmar's

as the IIM and IIT in Assam) despite an element of leakage. But whatever the government pledges or gives seems to have little effect on the ground. Problems with the law and order situation and active insurgency movements in all states as well as alcohol restrictions in some states (resulting in a huge black market) means that the region is economically underdeveloped compared to the other Indian states.

In fact interviews in Guwahati and Shillong pointed to the fact that the North-East policy has largely passed them by. They see an increasing disinterest in New Delhi in encouraging cross border trade by sea or air with more distant parts of Southeast Asia. Patricia Mukhim in particular has written extensively on how the Look East policy has failed the region. She confirms that the region is already a dumping ground for Chinese, Thai and Myanmar products, but that hardly any Indian goods make it across the border the other way.¹⁹ The closed border issues are obviously largely due to the security concerns. Little has changed in the past four years since Mani Shankar Aiyar was quoted in the *Assam Tribune* as saying: 'The whole area has been locked up on security grounds. Is our policy of Look East going to be dictated by security concerns or commercial and economic interests?'²⁰

It is interesting to compare the India-Myanmar border with the Myanmar-China or even the Myanmar-Thai border. Although these areas have active insurgents groups the areas are economically much more prosperous with high trade volumes and improving infrastructure. China in particular has made sure that the border roads are conducive to trade and Chinese currency is often used in the Myanmar border towns. One can therefore conclude that opening up the border is likely to bring increased prosperity to both sides as well as improve government to government relations.

Increasing trade seems to be a part of the policy advocated by the Ministry of Commerce. Already in 2007 they advocated greater cross border trade and linkages. However this has led to a battle between the various ministries in India where the ministry of commerce stands at 180 degrees from the ministry of defence: 'The Defence and Home ministries have the old psyche. They have missed that the world has opened up. They think you can stop things at the border.'²¹

Infrastructure and greater connectivity seem to be at the heart of any real

\$1.19 billion in 2009-10, an increase of 26.1% from the previous year India has contributed to Myanmar's infrastructure development with over \$100 million worth of credit and \$27 million in grants earmarked for roads and rail links in the border areas.²⁶

Border trade has been analysed in detail in Das, Singh and Thomas's book titled *Indo-Myanmar Border Trade: Status, Problems and Potentials*. They acknowledge that the value of Indo-Myanmar border trade through The North-East in terms of generating economic growth for the region is negligible, however arguing that with development on both sides of the border it could have a tremendous impact and growth. Since Myanmar mainly imports manufactured goods, the North-East India needs to industrialise.²⁷

Trade between India and Myanmar is conducted largely through Indian companies with representative offices in Yangon. The trade is hampered by the fact that India and Myanmar do not accept direct payment methods because of the banking system; consequently trade is diverted through a third country, most often Singapore. Exports from Myanmar are paid for via advance telegraphic transfer (TT) and Myanmar does not accept letters of credit (LoC), the preferred method used by Indian companies. Therefore Indian companies need a Singapore company which receives the TT from Myanmar and the LoC from India, reducing these transactions considerably due to their complex administrative procedures. The issue is further elaborated in Das, Singh and Thomas's book.²⁸

There are two Indo-Myanmar organisations based in Yangon: the India-Myanmar Association and the Myanmar-India Chamber of Commerce. The India-Myanmar association is a cultural organisation and a platform for Indian expatriates. Its aims are social as well as helping business people. There are around 150 Indian companies²⁹ across agriculture, pharmaceuticals, spare parts, steel, transmission lines, electrical goods and furniture registered with them. With regard to pharmaceutical companies, there are Indian representatives and local distributors. According to Naresh Kumar, the chairman of the India-Myanmar Association, who also owns India's oldest trading company in Myanmar, new companies do not tend to register.³⁰

Myanmar is a major exporter to India, mainly of agricultural produce

companies. However India was not interested then. Today India's investments lie in A-1 and A-3, offshore blocks in the Shwe gas fields off the Rakhine coast. India's state owned ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) holds 20 per cent and the Gas Authority of India (GAIL) and Kogas (the Korean Gas corporation) hold 10 per cent each of the equity stakes in both A-1 and A-3. Daewoo International holds 60 per cent of the stakes in the project.³⁴ The exploration rights for blocks A-2 and L have been acquired by ESSAR, a private firm. As of 2007 India was able to secure exploration rights for three deep sea blocks AD2, 3 and 9 (all owned by ONGC).

Yet despite the geographical closeness of the gas fields to India and long negotiations, the Myanmar government decided to sell the gas to China and allow China to build not only a gas pipeline to Yunnan, but also a deep sea port at Kyaw Phuy, a road linking the port and Kunming and a crude oil pipeline next to the gas pipeline to bring both energy resources to Yunnan province. The construction of the pipelines and the road have already started.

The problem in the end was not Bangladesh's demands, but the uncomfortable relationships between the various ministries, their differing visions with regard to Myanmar and China and the ensuing lack of drive which led to major delays. According to Mani Shankar Aiyar, the Ministry of External Affairs put energy security on par with the irritants of Bangladesh. 'This was a turf war and the insistence that the foreign ministry is in charge of foreign policy affairs.' According to him, the foreign secretary met Begum Khaleda in March 2006 for a SAARC meeting and was ready to do a deal. The deal did not come through because the Ministry of External Affairs did not trust Bangladesh.

U Soe Myint, at the time Director General of the Ministry of Energy in Nay Pyi Taw explained why the gas from A-1 and A-3 would be going to China - India took too long and was not perceived as sincere.³⁵ 'The Chinese will build another pipeline to avoid the Malacca straights for crude oil from Kyawk Pyu. There will be a "transportation corridor", a highway to China which will be comparable to the Silk Road.' The result of this has been a blow to North-East India as a pipeline would have allowed for greater energy security for the region³⁶ and potentially could have also allowed for greater industrial development.

Four years later India's energy cooperation policy is still unclear. There are rumours that Indian companies have invested in the China

state. Beyond infrastructure development and involvement in business, the Chinese have made the acquisition of land a priority. Some of this is granted by the Myanmar government in exchange for soft loans; in other cases Chinese companies do local deals. However all that is produced is exported back to China – just as all electricity produced from the Myanmar dams and rivers is meant for Yunnan province. But it is not only in the border areas that China's presence is felt. Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city has a big Chinese presence as well. Real estate prices are now through the roof due to Chinese investment, crowding out local buyers.³⁹

In effect India's policy should not be trying to match China's investments and influence. China has overtaken India in the last decade and its presence in Myanmar is a fact New Delhi has to live with. However the Indian government should find the areas where it can make a real difference in Indo-Myanmar relations. Whilst there has been some discussion about technical and educational cooperation, especially with English language training centres, none of this has been leveraged to date.

Conclusion and India's Policy Options

Today New Delhi needs to understand the structural change and challenges that the new Myanmar government is facing. This includes understanding and accepting the military as a stakeholder in Myanmar politics. Given the renewed fighting in Kachin state since June 2011, which lies not far from the Indian border, the role of the military will not wane easily. New Delhi also needs to take into account the role the ethnic minorities play and their newly formed political parties, many of which have seats in the various regional and national legislative assemblies. There are today more political actors playing their part in Myanmar's increasingly complex political arena. The opposition is no longer solely represented by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. There are also a number of civil society groups who are involved in changing the country at social and political levels. This was not the case five years ago. India would be best placed to develop relationships at four levels: beyond its government to government relations, there need to be independent relations between the state governments of North-East India and the ethnic political parties; there need to be relations between the state governments on both sides of the border and lastly New Delhi needs to engage directly with the representatives of the 'third force' who are changing

Thin Thin Aung and Soe Myint (2001) *India-Burma Relations in Challenges to Democratisation in Burma: Perspectives on Multilateral and Bilateral Responses*, Sweden: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), pp. 87-116.

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Notes

¹ Parts of this article are based on an earlier working paper: Lall, M. (2007) Indo-Myanmar relations, a shifting geopolitical scenario, ISAS working paper 29. (<http://www.isasnus.org/events/workingpapers/28.pdf>), 29 January 2010.

* The author is a faculty member at the University of London and Chatham House, London.

² As of 1923 Burma had a distinct government within the framework of British India. The separation of Burma from India was decided under the Government of Burma Act of 1935 and came into force on the 1st of April 1937.

³ F. Grare, and A. Mattoo, *India's confrontation with Chinese Interests in Myanmar in The politics of India's Look East Policy*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2001. See also B.N. Ganguli, *India's Economic Relations with the Far Eastern and Pacific Countries in the Present Century*, Calcutta: Orient Longman, 1956 and W.S. Desai, *India and Burma: A Study*, Bombay: Orient Longman, 1954.

⁴ This was an unusual move as Nehru in other cases of grievances of PIOs insisted that they had to either return to India or become nationals of their country of adoption. See M. Lall, *India's Missed Opportunity*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2001.

⁵ Thin Thin Aung and Soe Myint, *India-Burma Relations*, p. 90.

⁶ The frontier is divided between four Indian states: Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km) and Mizoram (510 km).

⁷ Ne Win's nationalisation of shops and stores in the early 1960s hit traders of Indian origin badly as no compensation was offered. Around 12,000 Indian concerns were affected. When they left the country Indians were not allowed to take anything with them. Many could not afford the passage, and were left in limbo due to both the Government of India and the Burmese policies. See Thin Thin Aung and Soe Myint, *India-Burma Relations*, p. 91. Nehru stuck to his traditional policies vis-à-vis the diaspora, not taking this up with the Burmese

- insurgency groups on the Indian side in Manipur alone.
- ¹⁹ Patricia Mukhim, writer and journalist, interview 28.07.07 Shillong.
- ²⁰ K. Barooah, Centre under pressure to open NE borders. *The Assam Tribune*, 12.04.07.
- ²¹ G.K. Pillai, Secretary of State, Ministry of Commerce, India, interview 03.08.07 New Delhi.
- ²² Transport Potentials of Myanmar as a regional hub, Ministry of foreign affairs, Government of the Union of Myanmar, November 2003.
- ²³ C.S Kuppuswamy, Indo-Myanmar Relations – a volte-face, South Asia, Analysis Group Paper number 162, accessed on www.saag.org/papers2/paper162.html (accessed 30 October 2004)
- ²⁴ The Kaladan River project was again discussed during Foreign Minister Krishna's visit in June 27 – July 3, 2011.
- ²⁵ H. Shivananda, (2011) *Tamanthi Hydel Project: India's Eastern Foothold*, IDSA, New Delhi.
- ²⁶ Tin Maung Maung Thann, Asian Regional Powers: Junta's Lifeline but not change agents? Paper presented at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung sponsored seminar, 27th April 2007, Singapore.
- ²⁷ G. Das, N.B. Singh, and C.J. Thomas, (2005) *Indo-Myanmar Border Trade: Status, Problems and Potentials*, pp. 31.
- ²⁸ G. Das, N.B. Singh, and C.J. Thomas, (2005) *Indo-Myanmar Border Trade: Status, Problems and Potentials*, pp.66-67.
- ²⁹ It is difficult to distinguish between Indian companies with representative offices and companies owned by Myanmar Indians doing trade with India. According to other sources there are 40-45 companies from India operating in Myanmar.
- ³⁰ Naresh Kumar, Indo-Myanmar Association, Interview, on 13.06.07 at Yangoon.
- ³¹ Zaw Win, Business man, interview, 17.06.07 Yangoon.
- ³² In fact Bangladesh is expected to run out of its own gas by around 2012, depending on its economic growth rate. See chapter by Shahidul Islam in M. Lall, (ed.) (2009) *The Geopolitics of Energy in South Asia*, ISEAS, Singapore.
- ³³ At this meeting the other areas for cooperation discussed were key areas of cooperation between the two nations including agriculture, human resource development, education, biotechnology, development of infrastructure to facilitate trade and tourism. See <http://www.mizzima.com/archives/news-in-2003/news-in-jan/20-jan03-21.htm>, 13 January 2010.
- ³⁴ <http://www.observerindia.com/analysis/A022.htm>, 15 January 2010.

New Social Forces and Changing Land Relations among the Khasis in Meghalaya

H. Srikanth*

Introduction

Ever since they came in contact with colonial modernity, the tribal communities in mainland India were subjected to worst forms of exploitation, oppression and forced displacement. The manner in which the tribal communities have lost control over their resources and found themselves marginalized during colonial and post-colonial periods has been well-recorded in several scholarly writings on tribes (Elwin, 1991; Furer-Haimendorf, 1985; Fernandes, 1992, Singh, 2002). However, the experiences of tribal communities in North-East India, especially of those tribes inhabiting the hill areas is quite different compared to the tribal communities of mainland India. During the colonial period, the geo-strategic interests compelled the British colonizers to leave the hill areas almost unadministered. Colonial declaration of the hill areas as 'backward', 'excluded' or 'partially excluded', prevented to some extent the migration of non-tribal Indians into these areas and allowed considerable autonomy to the hill communities to continue with their traditional tribal life-styles without much of interference from the colonial government. (Chaube, 1999; Syiemlieh, 1989; Bhattacharjee, 1978; Nag,

* The author is Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong.

further. However, the experience shows that although the government interventions could protect the tribal communities from the exploitation and domination of the non-tribal communities, they could not prevent changes in tribal land relations, leading to the birth of class distinctions within the indigenous tribal communities. The present paper throws light on the changes taking place in land relations in the Khasi villages in Meghalaya and assesses the impact of these changes on their traditional tribal ways of life.

Traditional Land Relations among Khasis

Khasis are basically matrilineal, wherein the lineage and inheritance are determined along maternal lines. The ancestral property is inherited by the youngest daughter, known as *Khaddu*, who acts as the custodian of the family property. Theoretically women are in control of the property, but in practice men – in their capacity, as husbands, uncles and brothers – influence the management of the use of land and other resources inherited (Mukhim, 2011; Nongbri, 2003). Traditionally, the villages were organized along clan lines. The head of the clan who established the village acted as the village head and was expected to manage the clan lands on behalf of and in the interests of the clan members. Although the members belonging to other clans could also come and live in the villages, the founding clan members had greater say in the affairs of the traditional villages.

Land is central to traditional Khasi life. To them land is not only a primary source of livelihood, but is also something that carries cultural and religious meanings and identities. Primarily in Khasi villages, two types of land relations were visible. The villages had common lands – *Ri Raid* – over which the whole community could lay claim. The community councils (*raid durbars*) decided as to how the *Ri Raid* lands had to be used. Usually the *Ri Raid* lands were allocated for shifting cultivation. The nature of shifting cultivation itself was such that the land could be cultivated for a short period, after which the cultivators have to switch over to other lands for cultivation. If a person to whom the *Ri Raid* land was allocated failed to occupy or make use of it, the land reverted to the community. But alongside *Ri Raid*, Khasi villages also had *Ri Kynti* lands, where those who invested their labour and capital

Science, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, has revealed that much of the earlier assumptions about the land relations in Khasi Hills are now redundant. Contrary to the general assumptions that there is uniform pattern of land relations among Khasis, one can see differences in land relations across clans, villages and districts. In many of the surveyed villages in West Khasi Hills and Ribhoi districts, Ri Raid lands and clan lands are almost privatized. The Meghalaya Land Transfer Act no doubt restrained the purchase of tribal lands by non-tribals. But as there are no restraints on the purchase and sale of land among the indigenous tribes, one can see people buying lands in different villages. As a result, many villages in the Khasi Hills have ceased to be single clan villages. As there are no restrictions on how much land one could acquire, in some villages we come across big landowners owning hundreds of acres of land. Although most small peasants cultivate lands and produce food crops mainly for self-consumption, we also come across villages where the better off peasants going for horticulture, plantations and commercial crops. The growth of population and decline of common lands is forcing the poor peasants and jhumias to become tenants. Where tenancy is not found economical, one can see landless peasants opting to work as casual labourers in agriculture and mines. For understanding how these non-tribal practices could make way in the Khasi Hills, it is necessary to understand new indigenous social forces that decades of colonial and post-colonial rule have given birth to.

Emergence of New Social Forces

Colonial rule initiated a decisive change in the traditional social structure of the Khasi community. Although the British avoided direct interference in the day-to-day affairs of the hill communities, certain interventions such as building of the city of Shillong as an urban centre and making it the capital of the province of Assam, migration of non-tribal communities to the city of Shillong to assist colonial economy and administration, colonial patronization of Christian missionaries and their educational institutions in the Khasi Hills facilitated the growth of educated indigenous elite in the Khasi Hills. (Chaube, 1999; Bareh, 1997; Lyngdoh, 1996). They found jobs in government offices, educational institutions, Christian missionary establishments and in service and retail trade sectors. These sections showed that it is possible to eke out a comfortable living outside the villages. This led many indigenous tribal people to flock to the urban centres

its subjects. The city of Shillong was built by the British by purchasing land from local Khasi clans. Even then some clan members who understood the significance of money started leasing lands for commercial and residential purposes to the non-tribal people who came to reside in Shillong city (Syiemlieh, 1989; Giri, 1990). It was during the British rule itself that land could be used for purposes other than agriculture. As a result of urbanization, land value in and around Shillong city increased by leaps and bounds and made certain clans and households very rich.

The Shillong urbanization experience had its impact in interior villages as well. The emerging proto-bourgeois class entrenched in state politics, administration, mining, contracts, real estate, inter-state trade business and commercial agriculture, began to show interest in buying lands in villages far away from urban centres. Enterprising clan members in different villages, either with or without the consent or knowledge of the clan members / villagers began to facilitate the transfer of large chunks of communal / clan lands to the rich indigenous elite, interested in using the land for different commercial purposes. In some villages, the community received some material benefits in the form of royalty, employment or compensation. But in most cases the transfer of communal / clan lands was done by a handful of indigenous elite in the villages, taking advantage of people's illiteracy and ignorance. In all such cases, only some indigenous elite developed at the cost of other villagers.

In her study, Tiplut Nongbri (2003) shows how the state government policies also have contributed to the alienation of tribal lands. After the formation of Meghalaya, the state government modified the status and functions of ADCs and introduced certain policy changes which enabled the state government to acquire lands in the name of development and general welfare. The government invoked its special powers to force some village communities to part with their lands for hydro-electric projects, factories, government buildings etc., giving them token compensation. This apart, the government's bias against shifting cultivation and its support to settled cultivation has also led to changes in landholding pattern among the Khasis. Earlier, most cultivators relied on shifting cultivation for their livelihood. In steep hilly areas where communication is inadequate and sufficient land for terracing is not available, shifting cultivation was the only alternative. Jhum was indispensable in tribal areas owing to the limits of the technology-absorption capacity of the local communities. As long

weak. But of late, one can see purchase and sale of lands. Although the Meghalaya Land Transfer Act prevents outright sale of tribal lands to non-tribals, there is nothing which prevents the rich indigenous elite from purchasing lands from other tribal cultivators. Because of land transactions, homogenous clan villages are becoming extinct in Khasi hills. There is nothing that stops a villager from buying lands from other villages. Some enterprising clans from Shillong have in fact bought lands in West Khasi Hills and Ribhoi districts. Hence most villages are multi-clan villages. Exclusive rights of the founding clans are visible only in some villages. Earlier, the sale and purchase of lands were negotiated between the parties and the village dorbars were giving them sale deeds for a nominal fee. But of late, the people started registering their sale deeds in the district councils, so that they can have the advantage of seeking bank loans or sell lands to the government for commercial purposes.

Since there are no tenancy laws in the state, most tenants are to part with about 50 percent of their produce, even in cases where the landowners do not invest in cultivation in any form. Earlier, shifting cultivation was undertaken in Ri Raid lands. As common lands started disappearing, one could see landless peasants seeking lands from big landowners and practising shifting cultivation in private lands. Some landless labourers, small tenants and marginal farmers, who have very little lands, make their living by working as wage labourers in other's lands. Factors like limited scope for other reliable sources of income, weakening of traditional support systems in the villages and failure of the government to rehabilitate the landless jhumias, force them to seek employment in mines and factories and even migrated to urban areas to work as casual labourers (Ganguly, 1997). They are forced to enter into occupations with which they are not familiar and compete with non-indigenous workers.

Another significant outcome of the changing land relations is further weakening of matriliney. In traditional Khasi society, despite all limitations, women did have some control over property, including land. Taking formal consent of women in charge of property, some enterprising men facilitated the sale of clan / joint property. Further, privatization of communal lands and commercialization of agriculture intensified competition among men for possession of land. Because of all these

different kinds, not familiar to the tribal milieu. Unfortunately the existing political and administrative framework does not seem to have the capacity to direct the development processes in a way beneficial to all sections of the Khasi society.

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Pre-Independent Development Thinking

The under-development of India at the time of independence and the perceptions of Indian leaders that colonialism was largely responsible for it had a significant impact on the formulation of post-independence development strategies. The political basis of the freedom movement had also much to do with the shaping of the policy after independence.

Most economic historians today agree that during the colonial period, the economic policies of the British Indian government were concerned more with promoting and protecting British interests than the development of Indian economy (Vaidyanathan, 1982). In the half century prior to independence, the gross domestic product of India grew at a meagre rate of 0.8 per cent per year, registering a negative growth in per capita income in the 15 years prior to independence (Acharya, et al, 2003).

Agriculture was barely growing at the annual rate of 0.3 per cent per year during 1900-46. Per capita availability of food grains, which was already low at 51.2 grams per day in the first decade of the 20th century, declined further during the next three decades. The zamindars or landlords had little incentive to invest (Chandra, 1992). The market for agricultural goods was limited by the poor growth of industry and per capita income. For those with the surplus to invest, usury or acquiring rent-collecting rights through sub-infeudation was more profitable than direct investment in agriculture. There was neither public investment in agriculture nor availability of new technology to change this calculus. Agriculture, which absorbed nearly three-fourths of the total workforce, contributed just over two-fifths of the GDP - indicating vast disparities in productivity and levels of living between the rural and urban areas (Chandra, 1992).

While the colonial government encouraged investment in railways in order to facilitate trade between India and Britain, there was not much encouragement for the growth of other industries. The opening up of trade opportunities led to the development of textile and jute industries (the latter predominantly in British hands) during the latter part of the 19th century. But with the exception of iron and steel industry that was established after 1907, the other industries - sugar, cement, paper and engineering, that came to be established predominantly under Indian ownership in the 1930s, were mainly a consequence of the disruption to

their knowing it. Any attempt to dispense with the middle classes and bring about a premature conflict on class lines would lead to chaos and possibly to prolonged inability to build anything.” (Gopal, 2004:127)

An opportunity came in the wake of the elections held in 1937 in which the Congress won power in a number of provinces under the limited constitutional reform agreed by the then British Indian government. This gave the Congress a limited opportunity to initiate reforms, raising the question of what the Congress government can do when India became fully independent. A National Planning Committee was set up in 1938 with Jawaharlal as Chairman. The task of the Committee was to produce a plan that would act as a framework for action for the Congress government. This decision was taken despite some strong opposition. The Gandhians and representatives of the business and propertied classes opposed, though for different reasons, the efforts of radicals led by Nehru to commit the party to drastic land reform, centralised state planning and ensured a dominant role for the state in the economy (Vaidyanathan, 1982:949). However, the radicals were able to gain upper hand in view of the realisation that the Congress would not be able to acquire a mass base without addressing the problems of the peasantry and the middle classes who were yearning for greater employment opportunities, and consider how the economy may be lifted out of stagnation through coordinated efforts. Moreover, a significant section of industrialists also began to see the value of focused efforts by the state in creating a positive environment for growth by the independent government of India. The desire to have a much more modulated approach was reflected in the composition of the Committee. Of the 15 members of the Committee, four were leading merchants or industrialists, five were scientists, two were economists, one an engineer, and three were persons with political credentials, including a Gandhian. They represented a wide spectrum of national opinion.

The work of this Committee, though incomplete following the removal of the Congress governments in 1940, made the idea of planning familiar to the Indian public.

It is also interesting to see that some of the main policy planks of planning that we were to become familiar with in independent India were already evident in the thinking of Jawaharlal Nehru by this time.

to ensure that the private sector's activities dovetail well into a national economic plan, and the promotion of large scale industry while preserving space for the cottage and small scale industry. There was also considerable support for tackling feudal relations in agriculture and achieve a better distribution of land.

The partition of the country and the communal riots in its aftermath, the resettlement of a huge number of displaced people, the political energy needed to bring round all the princely states into the Union of India, the framing of a constitution for the country and the immediate problems of post-War transition and adjustment to independence consumed the energies of the new government headed by Jawaharlal Nehru, who was appointed the first Prime-Minister with the support of Mahatma Gandhi.

While these developments have pre-occupied the attention of the government, its determination to pursue self-sufficiency and planning for growth had not lessened. The Cold War between the Western countries and the Soviet bloc, the West's anxiety regarding the possibility of India moving close the Soviet, India's pre-occupation with the status of the sterling balances that she accumulated with Britain during the War - all these had a role in reinforcing Nehru's determination to pursue self-sufficiency.

Much of the international opinion in the post-War period with regard to laissez faire and the possibilities for economic growth through international trade was rather pessimistic. The celebrated Singer-Prebisch thesis that projected a secular decline in the terms of trade of developing countries, which were primarily exporting commodities and importing manufactures (Singer, 1950; Prebisch, 1950), was not encouraging: clearly one had to plan for industrialisation, but could one rely on free market and open trade policies to deliver it? There was much pessimism in this regard.

So the pre-independence thinking on the need to push for industrialisation through a coordinated plan at building up industry that allocated the scarce domestic resources carefully and offered a degree of protection to the domestic producer gained strength. In fact the 1945 Statement of Industrial Policy of the Government of India had already introduced the concept of industrial licensing and emphasized the development of heavy industries, reflecting the mood of new thinking

mode to generate higher growth.

The First Plan projected a rise in the rate of investment from about 5 to 7 per cent. The memory of Bengal famine, the dislocation of the Punjab peasantry and the early shortages of food naturally led the government to put emphasis on irrigation, large river-valley projects such as the Bhakra-Nangal, community development and the production of fertilisers (Patel, 2002:38-9). Overall, irrigation and agriculture accounted for 37 per cent of the total public sector outlay and infrastructure an additional 34 per cent. The Plan also addressed the problems of the under-privileged groups and allocated more than a fifth of the total outlay to address their needs (Acharya, et al, 2003: 45). A major objective of the Plan was to achieve its investment goals without inflation, without depleting the sterling balances that India accumulated during the War that now constituted a precious asset.

Over all, the performance of the economy met with the expectations of the Plan. Gross investment levels reached a level of nearly 10 per cent in the Plan period as a whole, and the rate of growth of the economy rose to 3.6 per cent per annum, compared to less than one per cent in the preceding half a century of British rule. The production of foodgrains rose from a level of about 51 million tonnes at the beginning to about 67 to 70 million tonnes by the end of the plan period, with the rise in yields contributing a part of the increase.

A major promise of *swarajya* (i.e. self-government) was land reform. Its objectives were two fold: (a) to abolish intermediaries, such as the zamindars and jagirdars between the government and the tillers so as to provide security of tenure for the latter; and (b) to impose ceilings on the ownership of landholdings and distribute the surplus land among the landless poor. The Congress government was able to act on the first because the zamindars and jagirdars had in general supported the continuation of the British rule under which their feudal authority was protected; and thus were at loggerheads with the Congress. A most visible sign of freedom from British rule was the abolition of the intermediaries within a few years of independence. As a result, the actual tillers, accounting for about 40 per cent of the cultivated area, became owners (Rao, 1992:118-19). This provided a major incentive for investment in agriculture in large parts of the country; the exception being north Bihar,

wanted to see India transformed into a successful industrial economy began to dream of a totally different kind of plan to succeed it. Their success in lifting the growth rate in the early fifties without running either into the problems of inflation or balance of payments crisis gave them much confidence. There was a consensus that the Second Plan should be bigger and bolder; should aim to accelerate the rate of investment and growth but without risking inflation; while not neglecting agriculture, there should be greater emphasis on industry; production of steel and fertiliser should be increased substantially; the plan must generate employment on an adequate scale; and the equity and distributional aspects should not be overlooked. (Patel, 2002: 41).

These ideas began to coalesce in the form of a model which assumed that the possibilities for export growth are limited, and if industrial investment has to go up India must learn to produce the investment goods herself rather than look to imports in view of the limited import capacity. As the employment coefficient of such investment might be low, and income and consumer goods need to be also stepped up levels of living are to be improved, a solution was needed in a two-track policy which emphasized investment in capital goods/heavy industry on the one hand, and the nurturing of a cottage or small scale industry on the other.

With support from Nehru, the strategy behind the Second Plan was largely drawn up by P.C.Mahalanobis, who was trained in physics but turned to statistics as his profession, and founded the now famous Indian Statistical Institute in Kolkata. His thinking, and to some extent the vision of Nehru, was influenced by the Soviet example of building heavy industry without foreign help. Impressed by the personality of Nehru, and what India was trying to achieve in a democratic framework committed to non-alignment, a number of eminent economists visited India both to learn and contribute to the thinking on economic policy. They included Ragnar Frisch, Tinbergen, Myrdal, Galbraith, Goodwin, Lange and Bettelheim, who all had visited the Indian Statistical Institute, where Mahalanobis was leading the discussions on the Second Plan. The Institute also attracted some Russian and Chinese scholars. In fact, in the Cold War atmosphere of the times, the presence of so many advisers who were seen to be leftist in their thinking led the Americans to suggest that the Ministry of Finance should invite some Americans to balance the forces, so to speak! So India received Milton Friedman and Neil Jacob,

of taxes and subsidies was put in place to direct private investment into the desired sectors and areas.

The enhanced role of the public sector in the Second Plan was reflected in the rise in her share of total plan outlay to 61 per cent compared to 46 per cent in the First. The share of industry and minerals increased sharply from about one-twentieth of the total outlay in the First to a little less than quarter of the total outlay in the Second Plan (Acharya, et al., 2003).

These strategies had the intended effect of raising the growth rates of industry and the GDP, though not by as much as the planners hoped for, partly because of the high capital output ratios associated with investment in heavy industry. The share of basic and capital goods in the total industry value added rose to nearly two-fifths by the end of the Plan period compared to just above a quarter at the beginning, while that of the consumer goods fell. (Acharya, et al, 2003).

The share of the public sector also grew rapidly. By the end of the Second Plan, 55 per cent of the new investments and one-third of the country's capital stock were in the public sector.

In formulating these strategies, the planners assumed that domestic savings would rise sufficiently to finance investment; and that there would be no problems on the balance of payments front. A plan that set targets in physical terms for the investment and consumption goods has to satisfy itself that the financial saving (and by implication consumption demand) generated through myriads of decisions of income earners does broadly correspond to the physical capacities created for producing investment and consumption goods in the economy. The planners assumed that as public sector enterprises built up capacities for capital goods, they would also realize considerable surplus so that the problem of any imbalance between savings and investments can be partly addressed by the public sector itself.

In the event, these calculations were belied right from the beginning of the Plan. The investment-savings gap widened significantly from about 0.4 to 2.7 per cent points of GDP between the First and Second Plans, as the share of public investments went up. (Acharya, et al, 2003). A huge gap therefore emerged between savings and investments by the public sector, and various monetary devices were used to capture private savings

sector. Comparative costs were not the issue, and where investment was financed with tied aid, the nature of technology and the quality of equipment was determined by the aid givers and the supplying firms. It created opportunities for the industrialists abroad to market their own products, creating a vested interest in such a growth strategy.

The growth of the public sector was also very popular with civil servants and politicians at home, who saw it as a place for plum postings and jobs for the unemployed. The trade unions were happy to see the public sector grow as it offered greater security of employment; a new elite began to take root. This is not to say that there were not a great number of people at all levels who rendered sterling service out of a sense of pride in the emergence of India as an industrial nation but there was also a rise of professional efficiency.

The Second Plan period thus saw a change in the economic and political landscape: the growth of public sector; the emergence of a License Raj; a private sector that began to depend on protection for growth; and the emergence of a strong lobby of civil servants, politicians and the Unions for a growing public sector who saw opportunities for patronage. These are features that continued to characterize the economy for the next three decades until reforms were attempted in the early 1990s.

The strategy underlying the Second Plan continued to inform the Third Plan (1961-66), even though there was a greater consciousness of the need to promote exports and of working out the requirements of a 'minimum needs programme', with explicit reference to the elimination of poverty. As in the Second Plan, the public sector was assigned the leading role, with nearly three-fifths of the total plan outlay going to it; and within the public sector outlay, the share of agriculture fell marginally, and that of heavy industry and infrastructure went up. It continued to rely on industrial targeting and licensing, and exchange control on all transactions. It projected a higher rate of investment, but a lower rate of growth, implying a rising capital output ratio.

But the accent on large investments in heavy industry did not result in a corresponding acceleration in the rise of industrial output, due to higher capital-output ratios and the inefficiencies in public sector management. During 1956-65 that spanned the Second and Third Plan periods, total factor productivity rose at a mere 0.4 per cent per year, compared to 2.8 per cent in

These adverse years, however, had one positive outcome. The droughts in 1965 and 1966, and the need to negotiate food shipments from the US under the PL 480 scheme, had focused the minds of the planners on agriculture. Strenuous efforts were made to capitalise on the potential for increasing yields by using the new varieties of seeds that were being developed by scientists abroad and in India. On another front, however, the disappointment of the government with export growth led it to adopt even more restrictive policies to keep the balance of payments deficits at manageable proportions by import minimisation, although some attempts were also made to promote exports through various incentives.

By the end of the late sixties, the food crisis and the impact it was having on the poor, the disappointment with devaluation to produce better performance, and the questioning of the trickle down theory of growth (i.e. higher GDP growth will trickle down to the poor in terms of improved incomes), and the more populist stance that Mrs Gandhi adopted as a way of winning the elections led to the birth of the Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-74), billed as a plan for abolishing poverty. (Patel, 1986:5-6). Banks were nationalised to give substance to the slogan of '*garibi hatao*' or elimination of poverty; it was carried out ostensibly with the aim of directing credit to the priority sectors such as agriculture, and was welcomed by the forces on the Left. In the long run, it was doubtful whether it had succeeded in its ostensible aims; rather it was to result in a rise in the non-performing assets, over-manning and a downward rigidity in interest rates.

To prevent the concentration of economic power, the government also enacted, in 1969, the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act that sought to promote medium and small scale industries, adding another layer of objectives to those already contained in the Industrial Policy Resolution of 1956. The government reserved some 800 items for production by small-scale enterprises. The philosophy governing such a reservation was that production in small-scale units was more labour intensive and promoted the entry of new entrepreneurs.

The most positive feature of the economic statesmanship of the late 1960s was the pursuit of Green Revolution that was to raise agricultural yields in a spectacular manner. While initially fears were expressed that it was biased in favour of rich farmers and would accentuate rural

success of China, are throwing up new insights and perspectives. But to be fair, even before the East Asian experience became known, there were economists in India and abroad who were critical of the development strategies in India, laying basis for the reforms that we witnessed in the 1990s.

A major achievement of the planning process associated with Nehru is that it made the people of India - and indeed the wider world - development conscious (Narasimham, 2002:45). This was a huge gain psychologically, for it raised people's aspirations and desire for change. Secondly, the planning process was also successful in raising gross saving and investment rates - from about 6 to 7 per cent in the half century before independence to about 15 per cent by the end of the 1970s, and 20 to 25 per cent by the end of the 1980s. This was a remarkable achievement. (Narasimham, 2002; Reddy, 2003:7). The growth in GDP, similarly, accelerated from about 0.8 per cent per year in pre independence times to about 3.5 per cent on average till the mid-eighties, since when it accelerated. With the growth of population at first accelerating and then decelerating, the higher growth in GDP began to translate into higher per capita income growth as time went by from about the mid-eighties. Thirdly, with the launch of the Green Revolution in the late sixties, India became self-sufficient in food. Fourthly, its industrial structure became quite diversified, with India developing considerable capacity for the production of capital goods. Fifthly, India built up a considerable reservoir of skilled manpower and indigenous technological capacity through its investment in science and technology education and institutions of research. Fifthly, it was able to pursue its development policies by maintaining a stable inflationary environment except in the 1970s when, in the wake of oil price shocks, most countries saw a spurt in inflation. Sixthly, while foreign aid began to finance a larger gap than anticipated in the early years of independence, by and large India's external debt never became unsustainable (though it came close to it in the early 1990s in the wake of the First Iraq war and the sharp rise in oil prices) - and it never defaulted on its external obligations. Finally, it achieved significant improvements in its indicators of human development like literacy, mortality, and access to health clinics, even though they remained far below the levels achieved in East Asia and China, and deep poverty remains.

Despite some positive aspects of development strategies and policies between 1945 and 1970 critics opined that these strategies and policies had their origin in the fifties and sixties. It is argued that:

payments on internal public debt. The interest payments alone amounted to some 4 per cent of GDP by 1990-91, and subsidies another 2.3 per cent (Bajpai, and Sachs, 1999). Faced with this situation, contrary to the intentions of India's leaders in the early decades of independence, she was forced to seek help from abroad.

Could India have done it any differently? With the hindsight of East Asian success, many believe that India should have pursued an export-oriented rather than import-substituting strategy, with private sector playing the leading role and market incentives rather than the ubiquitous system of licenses directing investment. (Bhagwati, 1998; Ahluwalia, 1998, 1999; Acharya, et al, 2002; Joshi, and Little, 1996) Indeed economists like Bhagwati and Manmohan Singh have argued right from their early years of research that India might be underestimating the possibilities for export growth (Ahluwalia, and Little, 1998). Freed from the demand for maintaining various subsidies, the government could have given more attention to building infrastructure, and human development - education and health - that could have advanced development both through productivity increases and reductions in population growth that literacy and declining infant mortality would have brought about. The government could also have invested more in improving the infrastructure for agriculture where, in the absence of public investment, growth rates began to stagnate after the initial spurt of the green revolution.

One should not, however, underestimate the problematique that confronted the leaders of the freedom movement in the early years of independence in reaching the above conclusion. Firstly, it was not clear that in the absence of a strong public sector, the inducement to invest would be strong enough for the private sector to raise the levels of investment in the economy. Eventually, the expanding world trade could have played a role, but the Japanese and East Asian experience suggests that the state played an active role in nurturing private industry for export orientation; it could be argued that such a focused policy was possible in those countries because of the authoritarian character of the state that was able to rise above the democratic compulsions that call for a dispersal of the largesse. They also enjoyed the comfort of being part of the Western alliance.

Perhaps, the government could have started the process of de-licensing

agriculture, health, education and law and order to the states; at the same time, the states have comparatively limited powers to levy taxes - with the result that expenditure on areas that have a direct impact on poverty are resource constrained. The management of the Centre-State fiscal transfers is an aspect that is hugely political, particularly in recent years when no single party holds power in the whole of India, as was largely the case with Congress in the first two decades of independence. The management of public finances and development strategies and policies were in turn affected by the democratic pulls and pushes that the federal relationship generated in India.

Should we then conclude that the Indian development strategy was a failure? We have already highlighted some of the positive aspects of India's growth experience above. Keeping in mind the experience of the 1990s, and the achievements of East Asia and China, we should not discount some of the more enduring features of India's development experience that owe their origin to the planning strategies adopted in the Nehru era.

One such feature is the creation of a large body of technically qualified people through her institutes of technology and engineering, and the opportunities for learning by doing provided by the growth of public sector, which is now standing in her good stead. The fruits of this were becoming evident from the mid-1990s onwards with the growing salience of a knowledge based industry and exports such as the IT and pharmaceuticals. Secondly, it may be argued that under the strategies pursued by India, her entrepreneurial class had become more numerous, and in recent years more confident. The policy stance it adopted towards foreign investment, and the protective market it provided, helped the growth of an indigenous class of entrepreneurs; the East Asian regimes themselves took particular care to nurture their own indigenous bourgeoisie, and were careful to modulate foreign investment with this in view. Thirdly, the policies pursued by India did attach importance to a regional spread of growth, even though whether in the end the aim of reducing regional inequalities was achieved or not is difficult to say. Fourthly, the levels of poverty, which tended to rise in the first two decades (partly because of the bulge in population growth, and partly because of the crop-failures in the 1960s), tended to fall by the 1980s. By the end of the first fifty years of independence, millions of people were lifted out of poverty.

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Politics of Identity and Violence in North-East India

Ranju R Dhamala*

Identity of a group is generally conceived with reference to some commonality shared among its members. This commonality is further explicable in terms of ethnic nationhood based upon ascriptive identities, ties of kinship, common history, collective experiences and memories. These are accentuated further due to mobilization for political and material purposes. While identity is taken as a social construction its formation or transformation remains fluid and subject to the role of political entrepreneurs who would play a critical role in attuning the alternative identity in keeping with changing circumstances and the demand, more often than not, to favour their own political prospects.¹ Identity thereby gathers a temporal character. It is observed that the ethnic or cultural boundaries are grounded much on the articulation by the leaders and it varies in terms of time and context. Such constructions may even incorporate identity, which was earlier counted as the 'other'. Political entrepreneurs seeking political gains may thus manipulate identity.² This kind of understanding of identity formation emphasizes the instrumental role of the political entrepreneurs.

The emergence of smaller identities from within a larger group is often due to some deprivation in its social psychological sense. It is this feeling which makes a community aware of its minority status leading to the cultural exploration, solidarity formation and construction of social identity. Deprivation of a group is understood mainly within the framework of its identity. Identity

* The author is Professor, Department of Political Science, Assam University, Silchar.

Lushais want the Kukis of Manipur and other areas within their boundaries. The Nagas want the Zemi areas of North Cachar Hills in their district and so on.⁶

In addition to this, the plains tribes' demand before the Simon Commission underscores their struggle for asserting their cultural distinctiveness and political autonomy. The All Assam Plains Tribal League formed under the initiative of Bodo and Kachari in 1933 launched a movement for separate electorate status for Bodo and other plain tribes.⁷

The politics of identity became more pronounced in the post independence period. The formation of the Naga National Council and the demand for recognition of distinctiveness of the Nagas as a nation in the form of independent state was the first claim made on the Indian state by a group on the basis of ethnic nationality. The reorganization of the states on ethnic lines further strengthened the ethnic mobilization and this was marked as a signal for other groups to make similar claim. In the subsequent years following the reorganization of the states one can find the shaping and reshaping of different identities as gathering momentum. The outcomes are usually cultural revivalism, emphasis on using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, valorizing one's culture, myth and negation of the influence of the dominant culture of the region on that particular group. This can be observed in the ethnic assertion of the Bodos and Karbis who refused to be subsumed under the Assamese identity or the Kukis under the Mizo identity. The movement launched by the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) for the introduction of Roman script in Bodo language in place of Assamese or to replace the use of Bengali script in Manipuri language with the traditional Meitei script becomes a unifying force in the face of the perceived or real danger to their existence.

Thus, identity politics is mostly about bringing together people on a common foundation of distinctive cultural history. In addition to the cultural markers, which homogenize one group under a common umbrella, land and territory remain crucial components of identity. Consequently most of the struggle is characterized by the use of identity as a political ideology.

The political history of the region in the post independence period has been conflict-ridden. The conflicts have different targets or objects of

Schedule of the Constitution.

Different groups have emerged over the years like the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and Bodo Liberation Tiger Force espousing the cause of separate state.

Another area where the demand for autonomous statehood is prominent is Karbi Anglong. The reorganization of states on ethnic lines raised the hope of the Karbis who submitted a memorandum to the then Prime Minister. With the formation of Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) a mass movement was launched in 1986. Instead of conceding to the demand of autonomous state there was an upgradation of already existing councils with the signing of MOU between the government of Assam and the leaders of ASDC. The main reason for such demand is the disillusionment with the working of the Autonomous Hill Council.

With the formation of United People's Democratic Solidarity Group (UPDS) in 1999 through the merger of the erstwhile Karbi People's Front (KPF) and Karbi National Volunteers the demand for autonomous state gave way to demand for a separate state. Following a split in the UPDS the Karbi Longri National Liberation Front (KLNLF) was established. The KLNLF demanded the exercise of right to self determination for the Karbi people settled in Karbi Anglong and the Karbi dominated areas of Assam and Meghalaya, creation of a separate state and eviction of non-indigenous people who had settled in the area after 1951. One can observe a metamorphosis of demand and agitational programme of different organizations. The peaceful programme of submitting memorandums in favour of their demand, as in 1970s, is no longer considered effective. The present groups which claim to represent the aspirations of Karbi people, do not hesitate to use violent methods. For example, the Karbi Anglong region is engulfed in a cycle of violence directed not only against the state government but also against other tribal groups such as Khasi-Pnar, Kuki, Dimasa and non-tribal groups.

The articulation of demand for a separate homeland for Dimasa in the North Cachar Hills of Assam shows the phenomena of xenophobia and irredentism spearheaded by Dima Halam Daogah (J). In the ongoing conflict their main target has been the Hmar tribe. The Hmars are viewed as infiltrators and are targeted for the perceived reason that their infiltration could be a

alleged by the latter that non-adherence to the demand made on them to conform to the general culture and religious standard followed in the state led to the destruction of their religious places. The clashes between Mizos and Reangs have resulted in displacement of the latter who had to take shelter in neighbouring states of Assam and Tripura.¹⁷

Identity remains central to the conflict situation in North-East India and these are interlinked with the question of land and territory. Demand for territorial autonomy and exercise of right to self-determination are recurrent themes in different movements. For example, the proposed Nagalim aims to integrate the areas where Nagas are in dominant position and are contiguous to the present state of Nagaland. These are spread over states of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. The proposed boundary of Karbi state comprises the present Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills, contiguous Karbi dominated areas of Nagaon, Morigaon, Kamrup districts and Ri Bhoi district of Meghalaya; Dimaraji or 'Dimaland' for the Dimasa tribe, comprises the North Cachar Hills district of the State and some adjoining areas outside Assam; Kukiland comprises the areas which are also included in the proposed area of Nagalim and parts of Manipur.

The overlapping of geographical boundary in the proposed ethnic homelands is a potential source of contest and confrontation because the traditional cultural boundary, which defined the territorial boundary with different tribes living within that territory, has been transformed by political boundaries¹⁸

Interestingly, there is not only overlapping of territorial boundaries, but also the overlapping of taxation areas, which trigger ethnic violence such as the Kuki-Karbi conflict of 2003.¹⁹ Various armed groups are involved in an organized network of extortion or 'indigenous network of tax collection system that sustains the militant governments, maintains their staff, security infrastructure and allied activities.²⁰ The tribal people are compelled to contribute part of their income for this purpose. The nexus between politicians and militant groups is an open secret and is used to win democratic elections, settle business deals and fight political rivals.²¹ The symbiotic relationship is the biggest stumbling block to law and order, which is the responsibility of a democratically elected government. This encourages corruption and undermines the moral authority of the state. The common people

of the Autonomous Hill District Council is marred with many problems²⁴. There is no genuine devolution of power to the councils in the true spirit of federalism. In addition to this it has led to similar expectations from other groups. The Paite taking the cue from the Hmar formed Paite National Council to demand a separate district.²⁵ Moreover, the practice of the governments both at the Centre and the state to ignore the issue at the initial stage exacerbates the situation further leading to more violence.

At the societal level the role of civil society cannot be overlooked. Civil society can play effective role in creating social basis for collective action. The role of different community organizations and the influence of the church leaders played important role in diffusing the Hmar Dimasa conflict or Naga Kuki conflict. However, the civil societies are as fragmented as the tribes. Thus, there are Kuki Women's organizations, Naga Mothers' Association, etc. These organizations work for the interest of their own tribe. There were sporadic attempts at forging the unity of different organizations but these unity-initiatives hardly continued for a reasonable length of time. As Rita Manchanda points out "In the Chandel district, Naga, Meitei and Kuki women worked together against hostage taking and providing humanitarian aid to those displaced by the conflict. But there remains the legacy of a bitter trust deficit, reinforced by conflict entrepreneurs with vested interest in conflicts, who have pitted Nagas against Meiteis and Kukis, especially on the contentious issue of the demand for political unification of the hill territory of the Naga people"²⁶ Organizations representing members of different groups can provide a common platform for finding a formula for conflict reduction or conflict resolution through accommodation of the aspiration and demands of different groups but there is hardly any inter-linkage between the organizations of different tribes.

At present cease-fires between different armed groups and the government have been declared. Ceasefire is generally seen as a prelude to negotiation and dialogue for peace or conflict resolution as seen in the case of the cease-fire between NSCN (IM) and government of India and the peace parleys that have been going on for more than a decade.

As discussed above territory and land remain central to identity and related violence. The boundaries for separate state proposed by different communities usually overlap. Under the circumstances piecemeal negotiation or dialogue by talking separately with the different groups

- 14 Singh Aheibam Koireng: 'Growth of Sub Nationalism and Displacement in North East with special reference to Manipur', paper presented at the National Seminar on Problems of Governance and State of Human Rights In North East India, organized by Dept. of Political Science, Dibrugarh University, Feb.21-22, 2005.
- 15 Ibid, p.243.
- 16 Ibid, p.243.
- 17 Bornali Bhattacharjee: Reang Refugees from Mizoram A study of Displacement & Rehabilitation, Unpublished M.Phil dissertation submitted to Assam University, Silchar 2001
- 18 Subir Bhaumik, cited in 'Sitting on a Volcano', www.e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp
- 19 Tom Mangattuthazhe: Violence and Search for Peace in Karbi Anglong, Assam, North Eastern Social Research Centre, 2008, pp. 14.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid, p. 6.
- 23 James G. Kellas: 'Cultural Pluralism and the Politics of Accommodation', *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, London, Macmillan Press, 1991,1998, pp. 177-188.
- 24 L.S. Gassah (Ed), *Autonomous District Council*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1997.
- 25 Pradip Phanjoubam, Ethnicity, Identity & Conflict, *Faultline*, vol 10, p.3. <http://satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume10/Article5.htm> 3/11/2009.
- 26 Rita Manchanda: 'The Role of Civil Society in Peace Building', in *Search for Peace with Justice Issues around Conflicts in Northeast India*, (Ed) Walter Fernandes, North Eastern Social research Centre, Guwahati, 2008, pp.155-156.
- 27 DL Horowitz: 'Ethnic Groups in Conflict', quoted in James G. Kellas, op.cit.

guaranteed wage employment at an unprecedented scale. The Act was notified on 7 September 2005. The significance of the Act lies in the fact that it creates a rights based framework for wage employment programmes and makes the government legally bound to provide employment to those who seek it. It is currently the biggest self-targeting programme in India, open to all rural people who are willing and able to undertake manual labour in their villages. It provides at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult member volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Through this Act the ultimate aim of the government is to create durable assets and at the same time strengthen the livelihood of the rural poor. The choice of works suggested in the Act addresses causes of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation, soil erosion, etc., so that the process of employment generation can be carried out on a sustainable basis. Launched in February 2006, MGNREGA covers all the 614 districts across the country. In this way, the legislation goes beyond providing a social safety net, and towards guaranteeing the right to employment. The experience with MGNREGA so far suggests that it is one of the main planks of rapid poverty reduction in the Eleventh Five Year Plan.

The Act ranks among the most powerful initiatives ever undertaken for transformation of livelihoods in rural India. The unprecedented commitment of financial resources in human history is matched only by its imaginative architecture. The emphasis on planning of works and mechanisms of social audit means that quality of works is centrally important. This is not a welfare programme dishing out doles but a development initiative, chipping in with crucial public investments for creation of durable assets, which can provide much needed momentum to growth in the most backward regions of India. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of MGNREGA, making a decisive break with the past, is the complete ban on contractors. Ever since independence, most government programmes in rural areas have been implemented through the agency of local contractors, who have emerged as major agents of exploitation of the rural poor, especially women. They have run roughshod over basic human rights, paid workers a pittance and used labour-displacing machinery. This Act bans the use of such machines, mandates payment of statutory minimum wages and provides various legal

and West Bengal, all of which are poor states except Andhra Pradesh. The lowest demand for employment came from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab and Haryana, all rich states. Of the assets created, 57 per cent were in water conservation, 13 per cent in irrigation, 17 per cent in roads, and 14 per cent for land development. Of the water conservation works, 347,000 or 43 per cent of the total value were for water harvesting, 13 per cent or 98,000 for water bodies such as ponds and 20 per cent to irrigate land owned by SC/STs. There were 113,000 tree plantation works. What the report does not say is how many of these assets were lasting ones.

MGNREGA and Sustainable Development: The Possibilities & Potential Impacts

Strengthening Democracy: The Act visualizes the involvement of local people in every decision — whether it be the selection of works and work-sites, implementation of projects or their social audit. It strengthens the democratic decentralization processes at the grassroots-level by incorporating gram sabha in the entire planning and decision-making process. It also infuses transparency and accountability in grass roots democratic processes through social audits.

Encouraging Natural Resource Management: Focusing on strengthening natural resource management such as afforestation, drought proofing, flood proofing, water conservation the Act has become a significant vehicle for regeneration of India's depleting natural resource base. In the long term, MGNREGA might have a huge impact on our country's environment and gross agricultural output as it emphasizes on works that target water conservation, afforestation and drought proofing.

Preventing Migration: By securing livelihood and creating employment opportunities at the village level itself MGNREGA mitigates seasonal/distress migration.

Controlling Spread of HIV/AIDS: The MGNREGA also has the potential to address other major sociological issues like the spread of HIV/AIDS, stop farmers suicides etc. since migration of rural population is one of the leading causes for the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Transforming rural economic and social relations: It is also increasingly recognized that the MGNREGA has the potential to transform rural economic and social relations at many levels. The Act is having a positive

fodder etc and other household work. Moreover, improved economic condition will encourage parents to send their children to school.

Kannan has stressed that the potential of MGNREGA could be more fully realised if human development had been more fully prioritised, including, for instance, improved childcare facilities, which would help mothers to work under the scheme. Furthermore, MGNREGA limits employment to manual labour and does not include, for example, setting up local businesses that could have a long-term impact on improving livelihoods.

The Growing Criticism and the emerging issues

Experiences across the country suggest that greater awareness among the people and greater systematic supervision by elected local bodies can help minimize misuse of the scheme and maximize benefits to the eligible population. It has also been reported from across the country that in sites where the MGNREGS has been effectively implemented, there has been a significant reduction in labour migration and an improvement in the livelihood of the poor. The programme has largely been self selecting, with landless and land poor households, SCs and STs participating to a greater extent than other categories.¹ While the Act mandates that at least one-third of MGNREGS beneficiaries should be women, the percentage of women workers to total has exceeded this by a large margin in states like Tamil Nadu. In some parts of the country, women working in MGNREGS have been able to obtain the same wages as men possibly for the first time in rural India. Some basic data on MGNREGS provided by the report on MGNREGA for 2006-2008 of the Ministry of Rural Development of the government of India is given below:

Besides, traditional economic theory on development has always suggested that the rural workforce must move to towns and cities to find gainful employment to help ease the burden on agriculture and aid the move to higher value-added sectors.

Complaints about payment delays and even inadequate payment, lack of facilities at the work site such as shade and safe drinking water are piling up. The financing of the scheme continues to be an issue of debate. The affordability of MGNREGA has been an issue of wide debate in India, and opponents have warned that the programme will contribute to a fiscal crisis. Estimates of how costly the programme will be vary between 1% and 5% of GDP. It has been argued that the programme is too open-ended, i.e., it entitles anyone to obtain employment, which could also lead to escalating costs.

From a poverty-reduction point of view, one of the most fundamental criticisms of MGNREGA is that the types of activities for which work can be funded such as water conservation, land development, afforestation, provision of irrigation systems, construction of roads, or flood control are prone to being taken over by wealthier sections of society. In their monitoring study of MGNREGA in Madhya Pradesh, Samarthan and colleagues found that the types of activities undertaken were more or less standardised across villages. This raises the questions about whether effective local participation had taken place, and whether the activities would be relevant to improving livelihoods.

In most other locations, social status, social networks, nepotism, religion and politics have influenced access to the scheme, and wealthier sections of local society are, in some cases, manipulating the implementation of MGNREGA in much the same way as they do with other government initiatives. Social audits have revealed discrepancies between the numbers of job cards issued at the panchayat level and the number of people working, suggesting that numbers have been inflated to generate more funds than needed, which are then embezzled by local officials. A delay in the distribution of cards is also common, which suggests that people are unable to work even though employment may be available.

There is conflicting evidence over how far the assets created by public works benefit the poor: some support the notion of substantial

This would help institutionalize the CSO-PRI partnership, putting pressure on both CSOs and PRIs to learn to work together. Strictly speaking, these reforms should have been in place well before MGNREGA was launched. But it is obviously better late than never.

Under the social protection umbrella, public works have probably had the largest outreach. But these have been criticized because they often fail to generate employment through the creation of productive assets and, without this, they cannot contribute to the generation of sustainable and productive employment. The MGNREGA in India is an example of a public works programme with diverse social protection objectives that include providing a minimum income alongside stimulating local development, and operating in a gender-sensitive manner. It can serve as a model and provide lessons for the development of similar social protection initiatives in developing countries. To conclude it can be said that MGNREGA is an unusual and instructive example of a social protection measure that is demand-driven and gender-sensitive, has nationwide coverage, and provides a minimum income alongside stimulating local development.

Conclusion

Without a doubt, MGNREGA has the potential to change the socio-economic landscape in rural India in the long term. But as with any other legislation, it is practically impossible to make it foolproof. Middlemen coming into illegal nexuses with corrupt government officials are to be expected. The only way corruption can be stemmed is by proactive people's involvement in the implementation process. People should start asking the officials for transparency in the process and get proper information about creation of muster rolls and disbursement of funds.

The debate on merits of decentralisation needs to be set at rest and all efforts now need to be made to strengthen the capacities of the decentralised institutions and to improve their role clarity following principles of subsidiarity. Planning and implementation of natural resource management based activities, community participation and accountability are best addressed at the habitation level and Panchayats in most states are still too remote an institution for these functions. The governance

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political institution under the headship of the *Siarkalim*² which is concerned with issues relating to customary laws and practices or, in other words, all non-governmental matters. Whenever the Biate tribe establishes a village the foremost thing they do is to set up *Siarkalim Devan*.

The *Siarkalim Devan* or *Khuo Devan* comprises *Siarkalim*, *Jiaktu*³, two *Khuo Chor*⁴, two *Tlangva*⁵ and *Thirsu*⁶. The functionaries of the village council are appointed after arriving at a consensus on a particular candidate by the method of proposal and selection. In the meeting it is mandatory for every household in the village to be represented by the head of the household or in his absence by an adult male member. Women are not allowed to attend the meeting. However, a widow is allowed to attend if there is no male member to represent her household.

There are certain customary rules that set the eligibility criteria or qualification for the selection of the village council functionaries. The first and foremost rule requires a man to be the progeny of parents who are both Biates and also he should be married to a Biate woman except for the *Tlangvas* who are selected from among the youths. A Biate man whose mother or wife is a non-Biate can never occupy any of the offices in the *Siarkalim Devan*. Again the persons occupying the offices of *Siarkalim*, *Khuo Chors* and *Tlangvas* must not belong to the same clan. In other words, all the five Biate clans are represented in these offices. But *Jiaktu* and *Thirsu* may come from any clan. *Jiaktu* is selected on the basis of his personal ability and the office of *Thirsu* goes to the person who has the highest dexterity as a blacksmith. For a person to be eligible for the position of *Siarkalim* he must have held the offices of *Khuo Chor* and *Tlangva* earlier, and for a person to become a *Khuo Chor* he must have held the office of *Tlangva* earlier. This eligibility rule ascertains that the persons occupying the higher offices have already gained knowledge and experiences in the village administration and that they are well acquainted with customary laws and usages. The *Siarkalim*, *Jiaktu* and *Khuo Chors* hold office for a period of two years and *Tlangvas* for a period of one year. But *Thirsu* does not have a fixed term.

The village council makes rules and regulations for the village which are to be followed by the villagers and a breach is subjected to punishment. The *Siarkalim Devan* also has the power to ostracise any person

their lives. Thus the status of *Thirsu* or blacksmith was considered in the past to be equivalent to that of the *Siarkalim*. Despite technology and easy availability of tools and implements in the market in the present time, the Biates still rely to a great extent on the blacksmith's service. Moreover, even today, in a Biate village, only the authorised person can perform the blacksmith's work even if the villagers are able to purchase the implements required for the work. In return for his service every household gives him one *Khamlu*⁹ of paddy annually or works in his *jhum* field for one day in a year.

According to the Biate custom hunters are required to apportion their hunt of wild animals and place it at the disposal of the *Siarkalim*. If the animal is killed with a gun the bigger part of the neck called *Saringitung*¹⁰ is given and if the animal is killed with a trap, one of the forelegs in full length called *Sadar*¹¹ is given to the *Siarkalim*. Another small portion which is big enough for a family's meal called *Sapukrisua*¹² is also given to the *Siarkalim* for his family's consumption. The first two portions deposited by the hunters, however, are not to be consumed by the *Siarkalim* alone, but it is to be dried upon his *izar*¹³. When the collection of such meat is large the *Siarkalim* organises a feast called *Satuklok*¹⁴ in his house and it is partaken by the village council and the *Siar Ulian*¹⁵. The arrangement for this feast is made by the *Tlangvas*. This occasion is used for enjoyment and interchange of ideas by the elders. Sometimes it is also used as an occasion for the village council to discuss different issues of the village. The act of depositing a portion of the hunt by the hunters signifies their respect for the *Siarkalim* and the village elders. And in return, the *Siarkalim* and the elders are bound to recognise the hunters if any mishap befalls them during their hunt. If a hunter disregards this custom of apportioning the hunt, the *Siarkalim* may summon the hunter and impose a fine on him or he may choose to refrain from recognising him and in extending help if any mishap befalls him during his hunt.

Conclusion

In this era of globalisation and fast changing world the traditional village council of the Biate tribe has been least affected. Kinship still plays a very important role in the structure of the *Siarkalim Devan*. However, some changes have taken place such as the creation of the office of *Jiaktu* and in

¹⁵ Village Elders.

irrespective of the educational, financial and career achievements. She is seen first as a care-giver and a house-holder.

A child's earliest exposure to gender stereotypes, comes from his or her parents or caretakers. From the time their children are babies, parents treat sons and daughters differently, dressing infants in gender specific colours, giving gender-differentiated toys and expecting different behaviour from boys and girls. As soon as a child is old enough to play with toys, they are taught that boys play with big and strong action figures while girls play with dolls, barbies through which other stereotypical image of feminine figure and glamour are imprinted. Undeniably, this has reinforced the gender-based idealizations leading finally to where it has become second nature for the human race to associate certain traits with specific genders and as desirable or undesirable gender behavior.

Male infants are judged by their intelligence and physical ability. They continue to retain the effects of those earliest imprints. Thus, while a child passively internalises the models and suggestions from society at large, the adult continues to perpetuate the attitudes and choices suggested in his earliest exposure to societal influence.

The sex stereotyping is evident even in adults' behaviour towards infants, as adults openly display affections differently to boys and girls. For example among Nepalis, little girls are treated as baby dolls by fathers for a few years of infancy and then with cordial formality.

Obviously, society shapes gender stereotypes in both children and adults. This internalising of societal stereotypes about gender difference is so pervasive in social constructs that it becomes difficult to un-entangle every one of them.

In a patriarchal society, men play the dominant role in a household that consists of mother, father and children. These dominant roles once bestowed upon men explain the dominant and sometimes "chauvinistic" manner of men. Thus in India women are seen as inferior to men and are treated as their dependants regardless of the women's education or economic attainments, discrimination against women starts from their birth and continues throughout their life. At home they are inferior to their sons and subservient to husbands, in offices they are most often clerks and secretaries to men officers. In the socio-political life they are used as eye witnesses to policies and decisions made by men. In all spheres,

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the inevitables of human society or civilization.

1. The “rational animals” or the human-beings cannot remain ever-content with whatever they have at a certain point of time or in a certain geographical space. They constantly aspire for better and more. So the “happy” humans desired to become “happier” and wanted to see/know what was beyond or up above.

2. This urge of curiosity is healthy as human development and progress will stop otherwise;

3. At the same time, a sense of “my own” and therefore, I am different is an inevitable response of human beings.

4. Dialects or mode of expression is the foremost requirement for any human; otherwise, how can one tell the other what one has discovered and/or understood or known? Thus, dialect or oral communication has been the mark of identity of any individual or any community.

Another folklore of Arunachal explains the natural phenomenon of floods. There are mythical stories about various other good and bad natural phenomena also. The story goes like this:

An old, helpless widow (helpless because of the patriarchal laws debarring women from inheriting or owning property) had been waiting for a catch of a big fish (for her daughter) the entire day and caught nothing. She prayed to the river-god (we know the tribes have gods to protect them from all vagaries of nature) and the god agreed to her desire on the condition that her daughter had to be given away to him. As we have noted above, powerful males like the gods, the kings or the village chieftains, are full of lust and demand a female at the slightest pretext. This practice continues today although not too uncommonly. The old widow had to agree. But, she forgot her promise in the pleasure of having a few sumptuous meals because of the big fish. So, most predictably, the river-god became furious and punished the entire village by causing a huge flood.

This folklore may be a simplistic/naïve explanation of the cause of floods, but we also know of the great flood that had inundated the entire earth and of one specimen of each creation surviving on Noah’s Ark or of the wrath of the rain-god (in Hindu mythology) Varuna trying to inundate Vrindavan and Krishna, the “god-superior” saving the town by holding Govardhana hill on his little finger as an umbrella. But this folklore

stocked again.

Apart from cooking, cleaning, fetching water and firewood, etc. the most binding for women of the entire North-East, including Assam, has been weaving. A great deal of superstition is attached to this. The men going to war needed to wear a particular kind of woven garment, viz. *kavach kapor* (meaning protective cloth) otherwise death became inevitable whereas “ana-kata-kapor” was a must for the newly married to have a smooth sailing in their conjugal life. In the context of traditional societies it may be mentioned that the children and even the infants are taken good care of by their fathers when their mothers were busy in their feminine duties.

There are many folksongs describing both the benevolent and the malevolent natures of Mother Nature, with emphasis on the imminent destruction of human civilization if “development” entails the disturbance of the *environmental balance*, desired and ordained by the Creator or the God.

The renowned linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterjee coined a word “lokayana” for folktales and folksongs or the rhymes (which in Bangla is called “chhara”); “lok” means people and “yana” means a “mode of moving” or a “way of life”. Thus, folktales and songs are “a means of expression of a group’s own attitude and cultural life. Almost all the Arunachali folktales speak about the importance of the Sun and the Moon gods, who are the children of the “father sky” and the “mother earth”. The Sun and the Moon are primary and major gods of most of the non-Buddhist or animistic tribes of this area. The Sun and the Moon together are called Donyi Polo. Right in the beginning of human life on this planet, sky, the male and earth the female used to be together but they had to be separated by miles and miles to make space for their children, viz. all the animate and inanimate objects. Needless to say that such beliefs are quite similar to the Hindu mythological beliefs. But, what is strikingly dissimilar is that the ferocious-looking, life-preserving Sun, around which the Earth (and various other planets) constantly revolve, is the female and the docile Earth is the male in these stories. This is how oral tales, folklore and myths have played an integral role in shaping human values and therefore a recasting of these narratives alongside contemporary civilizational discourses can provide an alternative source of knowledge.

This volume is divided into three sections. The first section contains five articles. These articles deal with the question of belonging to a territory. Despite the fact that people move from one place to another, a strong sense of belonging to the village (where they originally come from) does not get diminished. People continue to nurture an intense emotional sentiment of commonness arising out of a sense of belonging to a village. For example, David Gellner's article strives to show how different ethnic groups in Nepal claim a specific territory as their homeland and argue how that territory belongs to them and they belong to that territory. Similarly the highly fluid situation between the Meghalaya plateau and the Assam region in North-East India has been neatly documented by Philippe Ramirez in his article. The recent 'ethnicisation of spaces' caused by the creation of new states has emboldened different ethnic groups living there to claim exclusive rights over specific territories. The article by Sanjay Kumar Pandey elucidates how the forces of Christianity and modern education acted as a great unifying force in Nagaland which was earlier riven with diverse groups without any institutionalised pattern of interaction among them. These groups have now been accorded rights over exclusive territories and political control over it.

The second section contains articles which deal with the issues of belonging to religion. Religion, it hardly needs to be emphasized, exercises great influence over the lives of people. Considerable amount of emotional investment is made in religion. The symbols of religion such as temples assume great importance. Questions such as who has the right over a temple are hotly debated leading at times to physical violence. The article by Axel Michaels in this section takes up the Pashupati temple in the Kathmandu valley as a case study. Historically the priests in the temple are drawn from the Brahmin community in South India. This has frequently led to a sense of disillusionment among the Nepalese priests (Newars or Parbatiyas). To whom does the temple actually belong is the question which continues to provoke vehement debate in the Nepalese religious circles. Another article by Gerard Toffin looks at how the sense of belonging to a Krishna religious group is evoked through devotional songs and rendering of highly religious texts. How a religious figure such as Nanda Devi becomes a powerful unifying symbol between people of Kumaon and Garhwal regions is the subject of discussion in the article by William Sax. As a matter of fact, ethnicity and language are not very useful in terms of strengthening sentiments of commonality in the newly recognised

the central concern of the volume under discussion.

Reviewed by D.V. Kumar, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong.