

Man and Society

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Contents

Editorial	v
Institutional Infirmities and Democratic Resilience - Javeed Alam	1
History, Time and the Construction of the Non-Violent Prajā/Nation: A Gandhian Intervention - Bindu Puri	21
Essay on Society and History: Issues in Theory and Interpretation - Mohd Shakil Ahmed	37
Insurgency and Nationalism in Manipur - Gurudas Das & K Gyanendra Singh	51
Colonialism and Ethnography: In Search of an Alternative Mode of Representation - Kailash C. Baral	83
The Indigenous Cultural Heritage of the Khasis of Meghalaya: Some Issues - R R Gowloog	95
Book Reviews	105

Editorial

It has been both a pleasure and a privilege for me to edit the sixth volume of *Man and Society*. This volume offers the reader a mix of theoretical and empirical essays which deal with the Indian nation state and the issues confronting democracy and governance. Interestingly, almost all the pieces seem to have some bearing, direct or otherwise, on the situation prevailing in the North-East and could help us arrive at a more balanced understanding of the issues that have surfaced in the process of nation-building in the region. Beginning with Javeed Alam's perceptive piece which presents quite an unorthodox approach to the rather complex relationship between state institutions and the functioning of democracy, one moves on to Bindu Puri's highly readable analysis of *Hind Swaraj* and the intricacies involved in Gandhi and Tagore's concept of the nation which sought to offer a civilisational alternative to the highly centralized nation-state. Shakil Ahmed, in his brief essay tries to show how the notion of Indianness has been the result of a process of synthesis of external and internal understandings of the land and its people while K.C. Baral presents an interesting critique of colonialism and ethnography and the need for an alternative mode of representation. Gurudas Das and Gyanendra Singh deal with the nature and course of Manipuri nationalism and Gowloog discusses the issues relating to the preservation of indigenous tribal cultural heritage and the need for a synthesis of traditional and modern systems of governance. Finally, there is a critique of the Yashpal Committee Report on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education and the book reviews. I hope all this will provide interesting as well as stimulating reading.

Udayon Misra

Institutional Infirmities and Democratic Resilience*

Javeed Alam

We have often come across observations to the effect that the continuity and stability of institutions is essential to the health and well-being of the society. Or, that open and norm based functioning institutions are necessary for the success of democracy. What is worth noting here is the strong assumption that there is a direct and straight-forward relation between the state of institutions and the functioning or legitimacy of democracy. In terms of the received wisdom this is seemingly true. But in relations to the conditions prevailing in India the relationship between the two is much more complex. While agreeing in a qualified way with the further observation that the public institutions in India appear to be in disarray, I would like to argue that in spite of this democracy in our country has proved to be both resilient and functional. Moreover, it is also possible to show that it now enjoys greater legitimacy than at any earlier time in our post Independence period.

In what follows, I will try to look at the nature of decline in the working of two key institutions, the political party and the representative bodies, that are central to the working of democracy. And in the context of these, I will also have something to say about Democracy in India. I will look at it through two events separated in time by two decades which set in motion processes that had long term implications on the institutions in our polity.

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I

The party system was securely stable and ideologically oriented in the first two decades of Independence and as the builders of our modern nation states expected was moving in the direction of greater openness as well as in decisively secular direction. In the late 1960's the institutionalised openness came under severe strain and in the wake of developments that followed this, the secular character, as an aside, also came to be challenged. Let us look at how this came about.

From 1967 there was a serious power struggle going on in the Congress party for power and control of the party organization. In 1969 Mrs. Indira Gandhi in a series of swift moves changed the character of the Congress party. Under challenge from what she dubbed as the right opposition, she changed the terrain of politics. The crucial change she brought about is this: before 1969 *elite conflicts* were insulated from public participation. These were sorted out without appeal to the people in rather complex ways within the organizational set up. One tactic in this was the Congress party moving to the Right or the Left of the ideological spectrum depending on who was gaining ground from among the numerous political parties.¹ It provided the polity with an adjustment mechanism based on both inner party and intra party shifts which were ideological but were rarely expressed in explicit ideological modes of contestations. Within the Congress party, this was more often done also as factional adjustments. This was the main way of handling disputes within the Congress party and of fine-tuning the relations of the Congress party with other parties, barring the Communist opposition.

All this changed with the split in the Congress Party in 1969. To corner opposition to her, Mrs. Gandhi brought this inter elite conflicts into the open with appeals to the masses to judge for themselves as to who is in the right and intervene in the battle being fought out. Till 1969 any shift in the political postures of the Congress party was fought out in the forums of the party before it could become the basis of mass politics. Let us take for instance the shift to the left with the adoption of the resolution on the "socialist Pattern of society" under Nehru. The fight over ideological differences among the various factions within the party was fought out within the organization away from the public glare. Nehru slowly isolated

the opposition to “socialism” and won a majority in the AICC (the highest body of the Congress Party) session of the party in 1956. The organization was assiduously used and kept informed. Before the AICC session the differences were sorted out in various party organs like the High Command and Central Working Committee. In other words, the organization and its various constitutive bodies were never bypassed in isolating the intra party opposition. Once the party democratically arrived at a definite position, it was left to the party factions and other opposition parties how best to position themselves in relation to the change. This often led to intense debates both within the Congress Party and in different opposition parties leading to various party leaders and the membership leaving their parties and joining one or another party in terms of their ideological predilections. That is how the Congress Party remained an open, democratic organization.

In a series of swift moves, Mrs. Gandhi to outwit the inner party opposition to her changed all this in an irreversible manner. When confronted with stiff opposition, she simply dubbed the leaders opposing her as anti-people and the opposition, baring the Left, as right-wing reaction supported by US imperialism. To gain popular support she bypassed the organization; there never was an inner party debate as she was already out voted in the party forums. To isolate the opposition to her she directly appealed to the people to come out on the streets and decide who is in the right. Now this tactic was not, as may seem on the surface, an instance of extra parliamentary agitation on class issues as the Left politics was. People were not actively mobilized on class or social issues. They were appealed to but were to remain passive supporters. The tactic was aimed at negating the importance of the organization as a determining body in deciding about policy and personnel to lead the party. The best example of this was her decision to turn against the official nominee of the Congress party for the President of the republic. She set up her own candidate against the official party nominee, an Independent who eventually won.

Mrs. Gandhi is the first person to inaugurate the *politics of spectacle*. Spectacle carried out successfully is looked at by the followers as a miracle. It can create false convictions in the ability of the leader and undermine the capacity for reasoning among those who gather around as followers.

Before continuing with the repercussions of this turn, let us quickly note two outcomes of continuing relevance. The present inability of the Congress Party to stir itself to go to people with a programme of action but rather to wait for an exceptional individual from a chosen family for periodic revival is rooted entirely in what Mrs. Gandhi did to the Congress. Congress is now, in a functional sense, a party without an organization. The organization has become fictional. It is an ad hoc presence which is sporadically called into existence for legitimizing “dynastic” functioning. All the elements of spectacle are there in the way the AICC functions. The party may have many capable persons but they have ceased to reasons out options or approach people but wait for the Charisma to do what otherwise looks politically impossible for them.

The ascendance to dominance of Mrs. Gandhi through a process of bypassing the organization and democratic decision- making has led, secondly, to an extreme concentration of power in the hands of an individual leader and hastened the personalization of authority in the running of the polity. What today we so much talk of as the undermining of the institutional frame- work of democracy is entirely rooted in this development. To note as an aside, it was only after the 1989 elections, more so the one in 1996, that is, with the rise of coalition politics that this trend would be partially reversed.

To come back to the narrative part again, these developments left the political opponents bewildered and confused. The opposition was in disarray including sections of the Left like CPI which later joined Mrs. Gandhi as representing a radical turn in Indian politics. It was to take some time for the *mainstream* Opposition to recover its poise. And when it did recover, it came up with new tactics of opposing the Congress by appealing to the people directly as Mrs. Gandhi had done but with a difference, and a crucial one at that.

But it had to wait before it could act because Mrs. Gandhi scored a series of stunning successes. Her political campaign on the slogans of *garibi Hatao* and the policy moves of bank nationalisation and the abolition of privy purses were a grand success. From the most insecure position that the Congress Party got into after the 1967 elections, she gave it a resounding success in the 1971 parliamentary elections. She looked like having established a hegemonic position in the Indian politics. But it was

fragile because it was founded on an **unrealizable populist rhetoric**. It neither radicalized the Indian politics nor did it lead to a minimal reduction in the unmet needs of the people.

So the charisma soon wore off. And with that the mainstream Opposition launched a campaign of mass mobilisation. It set itself to play the game on the terms set by Mrs. Gandhi, of appealing to people directly. The difference pointed above has to do with the militant mode of activity of the masses under the Opposition unlike in the case of Mrs. Gandhi where they were more of passive supporters in isolating any opposition to her. It is important to note here that the ruling class parliamentary opposition for the first time took to mobilizing people for militant political agitation of a protracted kind. Earlier, it was only the Left opposition led by the communist parties which took to extra parliamentary agitation. Now it became a common feature of the Indian politics but again with a difference. The Left mobilisation was always on class issues like land question or the rights of the working classes or the entitlements for the other toiling masses and so on.

The shift now was towards vague social issues like corruption in the ruling establishment, abuse of authority by a coterie surrounding Mrs. Gandhi, extra constitutional authority of Mrs. Gandhi's son and so on and also taking the easy and risky route of appealing to the traditional identities and inherited moorings of the people. What is note worthy is the beginning of mass mobilisations of a sustained nature based on appeals to primordial attachment. This is how the militant, sometime violent, movements were built up in the states of Bihar and Gujerat for the dismissals of the Congress led governments there. All this culminated into an all-India movement which is popularly remembered as the "J.P. Movement." It was a coalition of forces in which the militant Hindu right wing forces under *Jana Sangh* provided the organizational foundation for the movement and the scattered socialist groups gave to it some kind of a vague radical impulse. The whole of north India was convulsed over a prolonged period of time.

A few consequences need to be noted here. First, the *erosion* of the organization as foundation of a democratic party and the *personalization* of power and decision making as a result of the moves initiated by Mrs. Gandhi noted above got further strengthened and have continued to be a

feature of Indian politics ever since then. Secondly, the popular forces released by the J.P. movement have not yet been absorbed by any political party in a sustained manner. So a gap grew in Indian politics between what the popular energies want to strive for and the institutional disorder within the parties which did not allow them to channel this energy in a sustained way. The nature of the J.P. movement and the subsequent manner of political contestation between the contending forces, devalued the ideological debates which were till then such a prominent feature of Indian politics. Barring the Left there is no organized political force today, including among the parties of the oppressed, to articulate and debate ideological alternatives.

The struggle was so sustained that Mrs. Gandhi using the contingent development of the Allahabad High Court judgement unseating her from parliament declared internal Emergency and abrogated the fundamental rights. India became, like many other third world countries, an authoritarian regime with strong despotic tendencies and with all kinds of petty despots running the show under Sanjay Gandhi. Happily it was a short lived experience. Democracy soon got restored after the defeat of the Congress Party in the next general elections, under the first non Congress government at the Centre. What also changed as a lasting trend is the end to one party dominance and the alterations of governments at the Centre under different parties or coalitions of these.

One such was the short lived government of the Janata Party led by V.P. Singh. It was supported from outside by the two ideological extremes in Indian politics, the Left led by the CPI(M) and the Hindutva forces led by the BJP. Even though unviable from the beginning, the short lived government did something which completely altered the terrain of Indian politics. This event set in motion a reconfiguration which is still going on in many perceptible and imperceptible ways. V.P. Singh announced the implementation of the Mandal Award, lying under dust for ten long years, giving 27 per cent reservation to the OBC's in government services over and above the 22 per cent which were there for the SC's and ST's.

Two forces, among others, unleashed by the moves made by V.P. Singh's government need mention. First, the BJP, the leading Hindutva force in the *Sangh Parivar*, took it as a move to weaken it by dividing the Hindus into contending castes groups. To neutralise this, Advani, the President of

the party, started on a *Rath Yatra* from Somnath to Ayodhya. The idea was to mobilise and unify the Hindus in the name of constructing a Ram Mandir at the site of Babri Masjid by traversing the length and breadth of the country. This Yatra led to a trail of bloodshed in the killing of ordinary Muslim masses by the enraged Hindutva supporters. Moreover, the Muslims were singled out as the enemies of the nation by the militant Hindu right-wing, the Sangh Parivar. There was, secondly, widespread and organized vandalism by mobilizing the resentment among the Savarana (upper caste) Hindu youth encouraged by the bureaucracy, police and some political parties like BJP. There was simultaneously a concerted attack on the dignity and respect of the lower caste Hindus, these became a butt of ridicule by the upper castes.

Together, these brought about a qualitative change in the politics of the country. Politics was polarized between the communal forces in the shape of militant Hindu reaction and the “secular” camp made up of the parties and formations supporting V.P.Singh. These were made up of the numerous oppressed castes which saw a rapid ascendance in the structuring of the political process. It is this second tendency which I want to examine in the next section and look specifically at its influence on the working of representative institution.

II

What I do here is to look the how the oppressed castes are functioning within the political process in view of the constitutive changes in the making of Castes as important political actors. Causally, this is due to the internal differentiation and class formation among these castes. The insertion of the causal between the differentiation and the nature of participation requires some careful elaboration.

Two things have been occurring simultaneously within these vulnerable communities. First there was a long period of capitalist development, especially in agriculture, which was followed by land reforms, after Independence.² Many of the OBC's became propriety peasants. The long chain of dependence and bondage on the landlords was snapped. Education, employment, etc. among OBC's slowly expanded. New modern classes were slowly emerging among them. Among the Dalits

reservations as quotas in education and employment and other meekly implemented affirmative action also led to similar results though on a smaller scale. What thwarted the collective development of Dalits was the nature of land reforms where land often did not go to the direct tiller. Most of the Dalits remained dispossessed of land, having been earlier non-occupancy tenants or agricultural labourers.³

As a consequence of all this, class and income differentiation has been taking place, however uneven, among these castes-communities and therefore a dispersal of earlier forms of power with their traditional leadership. Earlier such castes organised as *Jatis* were internally egalitarian because of the same occupation and skill endowment and therefore similar income levels. The breakdown of the inviolable links between the ritual status and occupation had far reaching consequences. It encouraged the movement of people, imperceptible though among the oppressed unlike with the Sawaranas earlier, into different occupations and the acquisition of varied and dissimilar skills.⁴ With all these developments, jatis started becoming internally inegalitarian; the process though has had a different tempo (depending on the possession of prior assets, skills, and status) across the distinct castes leading to the formation of modern classes within the caste communities. Differentiation and dispersion of inherited bases of power, if we go by the global pattern of consequences of capitalist development, also sets in process the dissolution of the “primordial” communities. Nothing of the sort has happened in India so far nor seems likely to in the near future even with the rapid *individuation* of interests and persons.⁵

Within the class formation hinted above, a middle class as well has been in the process of formation and consolidation within these caste-based communities. Estimates of various surveys indicate that today more than 50 per cent of the middle classes are coming from these oppressed communities; in the colonial period the figure is estimated to be hardly 15 per cent. A further consequence of this has been the impetus given to a contrary process, or rather opposite to dissolution, of unification of these communities on wider scales. It is in the interest of these newly *emergent* middle classes, as distinct from the established ones who belonged overwhelmingly to Savarna castes, to unify these communities as blocs to compete for power in democratic contestations, especially the electoral competitiveness. We will refer to these emergent middle classes from among

the oppressed as a *neo-middle-class* to distinguish it from the earlier *established* one. These two contrary trends, differentiation and undermining of the inherited forms of constitution of castes and that of the process of internal unification, have had a simultaneous run over the last many decades.⁶

To sum up: Differentiation and Unification form the two opposite poles in the dialectics of caste politics.

Therefore the contradiction inherent in the class formation within the communities and the individuation of interests around these manifesting in some sort of class conflict did not fructify. There was thus a negation of the possibilities of the articulation of class tendencies as political positions. Instead what happened has been a consolidation of the caste groups on scales larger than ever before. What we need to observe here, in comparison to what happened in the West earlier, is the **significant reversal of tendencies** with the making of modern classes. What India is witnessing is the mutation of class conflict with the emergence of modern classes.

To digress here, this development has severely disadvantaged the Left in the entire Indo-Gangetic belt and led to its partial decline in this region, more particularly of CPI in U.P. and Bihar where it had strong popular bases. It is not easy to evolve a strategy to combat or outflank this development among the oppressed castes. The Left to re-work its way into the political arena in this region has precisely to work out such a strategy. What we instead have today, on the Left, is the politics of alliances to contain and defeat fascism. The Left has to continue to go on with the alliances because these are necessary in the present conjuncture but a strategy running parallel to the alliances has also to be in place as well; a challenge of a very difficult kind.

III

To come back to the main argument, a two-way contest has now come about in Indian society with deep repercussions for the democratic process. First, the neo-middle-classes see in white-collar jobs and professional positions the main route to gaining status and prestige in society. Unlike the established middle classes from the *Savarnas* they have no status or

other social assets to fall back on. So to break through into these, monopolised by the established middle classes, is crucial for their self-esteem. Hence the clamour for quotas as a necessary aspect of “social justice.” There is, secondly, a fierce contest on for a share in power. Self representation, share in power corresponding to the numerical strength, allotment of ministerial berths, and so on are all a part of what is now talked of as “*empowerment*”. These two terms sketch out the **self-definition of the politics of the oppressed communities.**

The struggle today is for recognition and bourgeois equality, without in any way implying a pejorative sense to bourgeois. In the hierarchy of the caste society where status degrading of the lower strata is in-built, the upper caste force recognition from others without **reciprocating** thereby denying equality and dignity to the other. In the situation that prevails in India the struggle for equality therefore becomes shrill and ruthless because recognition often has to be wrested from those who refuse to reciprocate. In a situation where egalitarian values prevail, people achieve recognition together; in other words, mutual recognition is recognition of the other as a human and therefore the moral and bodily integrity of the other is ensured.⁷

In tying up the discussion of this trend, here we can discern the second major change in the mode of “governance”. **The system of representation has come into direct contradiction with efficiency and economy in the exercise of state power.** The widespread insistence on the part of the oppressed communities for self-representation has led to the decline in the quality of “governance”. Given the historical inheritances which work to produce pronounced social disabilities among the lower castes, intrinsic merit, verbal skills, social attainment, intellectual sophistication, and related qualities all are in deficit among the neo middle classes who have emerged as the leaders of the oppressed castes. Rise in the din and decline in the decorum in the political debates have also followed this development. Is this something to despair about? I would only like to emphasise that a very important change, spread and expansion of democracy in India, is taking place in a rather *untidy* manner in the Indian politics.⁸

{ In parenthesis let us note in passing: talking of the strategy and limits of

development in India especially within the agrarian sphere a question needs to be raised here. Imagine a situation of land going to the direct tillers as well, many of whom were agricultural labourers or insecure tenants, and belonging overwhelmingly to the *dalits*. As the land reforms were conceived and implemented most of the land got passed on to the occupancy tenants belonging mostly to the intermediate and backward castes. If it had also gone to other tillers including Dalits, what could have been the consequences? It is obvious that the articulation of interests, the constitution of communities and contestations between and within them, and the formation of classes within these castes communities would all have been so different. The consolidation of the type that took place and the consequent ascendance of caste based communities like Jats, Yadavs, Kurmis, Marathas, Thevars, Kapus, and so on is inconceivable without the way land reforms got carried out. This question cannot be pursued in any detail here. But it is important to raise it as a counterfactual. It provides a link to the relations of production within the agrarian economy and its influence on the question of democracy in India-- both its trajectory and inner dynamics. It is just for this reason that I want to add here that what has been said so far and what will be said henceforth about Indian democracy is based on this background understanding. There is nothing inexorable about the course of development of Indian democracy being analysed here. It has been conditioned, quite deeply, by the peculiarity of the surrounding bourgeois condition confronting the Indian agrarian society. Any pre-existing social formation has many possible ways of developing in terms of the transformational strategies adopted and the nature of development of the popular movements. }

IV

The comprehensive institutional decline within the political parties and equally sharp erosion in the efficacy of representative institution has been a marked feature in the making of contemporary Indian politics. According to conventional wisdom, these should lead to the break down or undermining of democratic functioning. Nothing of the sort has happened in India. On the contrary, according to available data, there is a deepening of commitments to democracy among the ordinary people in India. They have a high sense of “efficacy” or usefulness of their vote. They turn out in

much larger numbers compared to the established middle classes or the elite to exercise their vote. This sense of efficacy of vote goes together with their distrust of political leadership including the one's they elect as representatives, parties, the institutions of the state and the other paraphernalia of democratic functioning. The question therefore is: How then did this commitment to democracy come about?⁹

Indian governments have solved none of the problems of livelihood—work, food, shelter, health, etc.— whether suffered singly or collectively by the people. The point that these problems are less severe or that fewer people statistically speaking are victims of these problems is a moot point. The point also is not that there has been very little development in building a modern economy in India. Even if it is less than what India was capable of, it is quite considerable looked at from the sheer increase in the size of science and technology, industry, trade, agriculture, infrastructure and so on. But what singularly marks the Indian experience with development even when we compare with it not with East and Southeast Asia but even countries like Tanzania for instance, is the relative inability of the Indian pattern of development to solve the basic problems of poverty, health, literacy, livelihood, housing, etc. Economic and technological development in India, in other words, has failed to provide solutions to social problems. So obviously the growing acceptance of democracy is not because it has solved the problems of society. Even today half the illiterates of the world are found in India and the number of children at the age of three suffering malnutrition is close to half of the total. Thus the Indian experience with democracy seems to me to be somewhat unique. It goes contrary to what James Stuart Mills theorised and which is taken as the epitome of democratic wisdom.¹⁰ Where then do we look to for such a widespread acceptance of democracy as desirable?

The clue, I would like to suggest, lies in what has happened to the social structure with the working of democracy, in the context of the development of capitalist relations, in India. This has unhinged the rigidity of the mechanism through which social conformity of the most severe kind was conventionally enforced in India. All traditional societies enforce strict conformity; that is, codes both at the level of morals and social relations are not advocated but imposed. It means that force rather than

persuasion and reasoning is the mode of enforcing compliance. This is important because advocacy implies persuasion whereas imposition is evidently coercive. But in India, in addition to this, much else is involved. With its caste system India has been quite a case by itself. There is a powerful, inbuilt mechanism in it to push people towards a status ridden, hierarchic downgrading and through this process a systematic denial of respect and dignity to people in the lower orders of the caste system. Rather, humiliation is systematically used as a weapon to keep people from developing self-confidence to stand up and speak. Because of the scriptural sanctions that it enjoyed, it has been a self-validating system of authority and traditions associated with it. All this started breaking up, slowly in the beginning but gathering strength as time went by, with the industrialisation and urban growth, increasing penetration of capitalist ways of accumulation of surplus in the country-side, subsumption of labour and all else which goes with the development of capitalism. And this ongoing process of capitalist development, since Independence, has all taken place within a framework of a more or less sustained working of democracy. This has given a specific flavour to the making of modernity in India.

Modernity may, as it is alleged, enforce normalisation-- everybody made to live by the same standards and norms-- but it is not conformist in any sense. Modernity allows for a great deal of autonomy of persons. It does so, first, by giving rise to an objective, historical process of individuation-- making persons bound up within communities into self-referring individuals and by putting a high premium on individual choices for life styles and self re-making.¹¹ It permits me to become different from my surroundings and to live at a certain distance from the communities out of which I may have emerged. It undermines those conditions, which make life unfree. Democracy when it functions uninterruptedly in the context of such a change, facilitating and checking its excesses, has a loosening effect on the inherited social structures, which were always seen to be excessively oppressive, especially their hierarchical features, sustaining notions of high and low in terms of purity and pollution. This is what, it seems to me, to have been happening in India over the years of functioning of democracy. Rule of majority, whatever its limitations in India, recognises individual level equality of vote and rights which enable people to wage struggles even when other aspects of equality are regularly denied in practice.

Denials and affirmations are a complex amalgam here in Indian society. As a Dalit I may be denied access to the village well or an upper caste house or even at the barbers shop. As a women I may not be allowed to regulate my time or work. Nevertheless, as a citizen my vote, whatever I am in social status, is not worth any less as compared to a Brahmin's or that of a patron. Similarly, my evidence as a witness in a judicial process does not count as any less in value. This disjunction between social existence and citizenship does, no doubt, lessen my functioning as a citizen but does not negate it. It in fact opens up a terrain for struggles and however constrained my struggles; they are means of enhancing my capacity to function as a citizen and to narrow the gap between this and my social existence. With this when people become conscious of group numerical strength, there also comes to them a greater sense of ability to moves things in their own favour, a little here and a little there.¹²

Democracy in India is therefore an assertion of the urge for more self-respect and a sense of dignity and to be better than what you were made to be. This is a clear manifestation of the secular power of society that is simultaneously the erosion of the self-validating nature of the power of the social structure. All this has conferred an added thrust to and taken forward the radical impulses generated through the powerful popular movements from the time of the Freedom Struggle, in spite of the ruling classes acting as a brake on the process. Let us look at this a little closely.

Indian society for ages unforeseen had given an effective voice only to a small stratum made up of what are called the *dwijya* castes or the *Savaranas*. It may have, perhaps, been overtly less repressive then the other pre-modern class societies but its mechanisms of conformity were more ideologically based on the internalisation of direct scriptural sanctions than anywhere else. This stratum called the Dwija headed by the Brahmins took the voice of everyone else away. The intention here is not to present a very unified picture of pre-modern Indian society. It is simply to draw a contrast, a stark one at that. I am quite aware that Brahminical hegemony was often challenged. This started with Buddhism and continued with Bhakti movements, Islamic Sufism, Sikhism, and similar less known trends among the oppressed. Yet the Brahminical hegemony never got disordered in any sustained way over widespread areas, as any Dalit or woman would vouch for. Alternatively the challenge to Brahminism was often beaten

back as Buddhism in 10-12 centuries or contained as minor trends as happened with much of the Bhakti movements.

Democracy with all the struggles, agitation, mobilisations of all kinds, electoral participation and such other things broke the rigidity of the enforcement mechanisms of the social structure. The lowliest placed in the Indian society, the worst victims of this, could feel a little less suffocated; in a minimal way they could feel what it means to breathe the air of freedom, a sense as well of what all freedom could become. Here both an emphasis and a reiteration are required. The erosion of the inflexibility and hardness of enforcement mechanisms should not be confused with the modernisation of social institutions or the replacement of caste and other traditional institutions with modern ones.

Here we must also be careful and not over read the situation. What the ordinary people have gained, given the conditions of their social existence, is very little. It is important to realise what is the limit on this freedom. It is exercised in a very narrow space. And this space becomes available by the traditional power becoming **loosely regulated and sporadic in its nature**. The power of the traditional institutions has not broken down completely and therefore conditions, which constrain the people from exerting their powers to enhance the realm of choices remains ever present. To put it in another way, it means that reprisals have become **ad hoc** in nature. Ordinary, poor people can go on doing things in their own way, contrary to inherited norms. But then at points unforeseen they may be hit at with varying severity. So reprisals have not gone but have become random and are not systematic like earlier. But then again they now can register a FIR with police and, more importantly, organise more people of their kind to fight back. Nevertheless this, I presume, is the opening they really cherish, in face of deprivations and denials. People have forced their admission, limited though, into the world of social dealings. In defending the democratic system it seems to be this little gain that they cannot think of being deprived of.

From the point made above, an important implication follows. The conditions of social existence being what they are, the inequalities within the society having, without becoming any less severe, changed, seen in a relative sense, their terrain in an important sense. What stared people in the face and which took away their voice were the ritual status inequalities.

Javeed Alam

In their place have come to fore the economic inequalities and with this those of power in the secular sphere. Inequalities of income and power in the secular world, unlike those of the ritual world, do not restrain the assertion of civic and political rights. In fact they encourage these and help bring together, as is happening all over the world, egalitarian values as integral to the democratic principle, for struggle and debate. It is in the very essence of economic and other secular inequalities to elicit a counter trend of fighting against this. And it is this, which is the basis of all radical consciousness.

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Let me conclude this discussion with a conjecture, which seems to me to be the central point of developments in Indian democracy. **The democratic process, or the processes around democracy, has detached itself** from the institutional infirmities surrounding it, whether they are of the parties or representation or whatever else and in the course of this the process has acquired autonomy of its own. The deepening legitimacy for democratic polity inheres here, in the process—the struggles including electoral battles and various others organised and unorganised agitations. The process is the space, which becomes available, contracting now and expanding then, for the range of resistance people are capable of. The invisible incremental advances and “concessions” won are registered here. This happens in spite of the shape that the organised field of politics has acquired. What I want to suggest in passing here is that a radical revision of the theories of legitimacy together with how it comes about and where it resides, as elaborated in academic studies in the West, is called for in relation to other experiences with democracy. With the growing commitments for democracy in India, it is doubtful if norms of democracy have not spread nor can we be sure if the deference for procedures has grown. Functioning of democracy in India has also not provided for an opportunity for radical solutions to problems of social life. Yet, as we have seen, it has given rise to a new kind of democratic progress, constrained no doubt by the hegemonic bourgeois condition and the remnants of the ritual world.

We thus have a disjuncture between the process of politics and the exercise of state power. These have become like horse powers harnessed

in opposite directions but with the balance always tilting in the direction of state power. Given this tilt, the conscience of the state is always in the deficit giving rise to incongruence between the reason for political participation and governmental outcomes. The defeat of the BJP in 2004 and the contradictions in the working of the UPA government over the last four years are clear indications of this severance. This lends a peculiar vibrancy to democracy in India. A silent class backlash is always in the offing. 2004 electoral verdict clearly tells us this and suggests what democratic “governance” ought to be like.

Postscript

An End Word on Governance: All the changes and developments we have talked about are taking place in the era of globalisation; the WTO lead liberalisation and structural adjustments. As we write this there the huge melt down going on of the financial institution given a free rein by the neo-liberal regime. Nevertheless, the period of the ascendance of (centralised) international finance capital has targeted the state as an institution of social welfare. It is a period of the decline of state as a benign institution providing small reliefs to people to make life liveable. This has serious repercussions for people’s wellbeing across the world. There are more poor people in the advanced capitalist countries today than ever before after the end of Second World War and a far greater concentration of income and wealth with the capitalists. But the consequences are much worse for the people in the third world.

Ordinary people here, as a routine, live a life of unmet daily needs. They cannot pay for education and health and shelter and so on. The state under the dictates of global capital has been withdrawing from these areas and privatising welfare, denying these basic necessities to people in dire need of these. The quality of life of the people in terms of nutrition and health has drastically declined over much of Asia and Africa in the last two decades

Globalisation has also led to the de-ideologisation of politics as can be seen in the position of all parties on the questions of “reform” baring the Left. The main function of politics is no more to tend to people’s needs but to facilitate the unfettered growth of capital, both domestic and global

Javeed Alam

in an unregulated manner. That is how we achieve for ourselves, in the third world, unhindered flow of investments from the global capital. For this to happen, the government and administration must function smoothly in a stable manner and with “transparency”. How well the state does this is being referred to as “good governance.”

Given that the main function of the government is facilitating the unfettered growth of capital, good governance is also dismantling of controls and tariff barriers, low taxes on the proprietors of capital and owners of wealth, privatisation of government assets, and so on; all round de-regulation for unhindered capital flows across the national barriers. The form of state that informs this process is one, which thinks like a corporation. It is therefore not surprising that Chandrababu Naidu, the chief protagonist of reform and the monitor boy of the World Bank crowd, felt proud when he was referred to as CEO rather than as Chief Minister. The state under him became internally akin to a corporation. This was the pinnacle of good governance. India was chided to become like Andhra Pradesh under Chandrababu Naidu.

Governance as a descriptive term is quite old and harmless but as a new import from World Bank with its conceptual baggage, it is deeply value loaded in favour of capital and market. “Corporate Governance” in vogue is the model for democratic governments. We should therefore be aware of implications when take to its use, uncritical use allows the World Bank assumptions to slide in.

It is interesting to note that the government of West Bengal with all its social commitments and democratic initiatives and devolution of powers to people has never been, as far as I am aware, looked upon as providing good governance. Kerala, which with a lower per capita income than many states in India but has the highest index for the quality of life has not had the honour of being called a good governed state. Nor have the governments of some of the Latin American states where people have revolted against globalisation and forced an alternative agenda on the state supposed to provide good governance. This is the case with many governments in Latin America and their number is happily growing. But Venezuela under Hugo Chavez is the prime example. The more it does for the basic needs of the people and to build the national economic well

being the more it is criticised for irresponsible governance. The manner in which the word has been selectively used for certain types of states makes it deeply suspect, in its current usage.

(This essay is based on the Frida Laski Memorial Lecture, which was delivered at Lucknow, on 3rd December 2008.)

Notes and References

- 1 Rajni Kothari, "The Congress System in India" *Asian Survey*, 4(12), December 1964; see also his *Politics in India*, (Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1970).
- 2 Talking of capitalist development in agriculture I do not want here to enter into the question about the "mode of production in agriculture" debate. I only want to point out that any mode of production can have reference to, methodologically speaking, the entire economy as such and not just to, I believe, this or that sector of the economy. I take it that capitalism has been developing in agriculture in all part of India, much more in some places than in others; whatever the empirical evidence of feudal practices and castes atrocities and gender violence. Anyway for those who are interested in the debate can see Utsa Patnaik, (ed.) *Agrarian Relations and Accumulation-the Mode of Production Debate*, (Sameksha trust Publication, Bombay, 1993)
- 3 For a general and comprehensive review of land reforms, see P.C. Joshi, *Land Reforms in India*, (Allied, Delhi, 1975); for the strategic implications of various patterns of land reforms contemplated in India and with what political implication these were implemented in different regions of India, a very incisive analysis is in Bhowani Sen, *Evolution of Agrarian Relations in India*, (People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1962).
- 4 See D.L.Sheth, "Secularisation of the Caste and Making of New Middle Class", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21—28 August, 1999; see also M.N. Srinivas, "An Obituary on Caste as a System", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1—7 February, 2003.
- 5 Javeed Alam, "Is Caste Appeal Casteism? Oppressed Castes in Politics", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27 March 1999; see also mine "Caste, Class and Social Consciousness: Reflections on Contemporary Indian Situation", in K.L.Sharma, *Caste and Class in India*, (Rawat, Jaipur & Delhi, 1994).
- 6 For the larger implications of these see my Sundaryya Memorial Lecture, "Class Formation among the Oppressed Communities and its

Javeed Alam

Political Implication”, *Social Scientist* (Forthcoming).

- 7 See Hegel’s discussion of “Lordship and Bondage” in *Phenomenology of Spirit* for the importance of recognition in the making of the self.
- 8 For details of this process see my book *Who Wants Democracy? (Tracts for the Time 15)* (Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2004)
- 9 For details on each of these like the sense of usefulness of vote, the greater proportion of the poor and oppressed among the voters, the distrust of the leaders, etc. see the chapters 1 & 2 of Javeed Alam, *Who Wants Democracy?* op.cit.
- 10 In *Representative Government*, (Everyman’s Library, London, 1960), J.S. Mill is clear that ‘universal teaching must precede universal enfranchisement’, p.280. In the following page Mill elaborates how this can be easily ascertained. The ability to read, write, and calculate... ‘should in all cases accompany universal suffrage...’ p.281. It is common sense among the western liberal theorist that democracy cannot go along with illiteracy and poverty. Indian experience asks for a different theorising about conditions of democracy.
- 11 See Javeed Alam, *India: Living With Modernity*, (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999), esp. Ch. 3.
- 12 For the importance of small things like these in the fight for equality and for dignity and the importance of capability see A.K. Sen, *Inequality Re-examined*, OUP, New Delhi, 1995).

History, Time and the Construction of the Non-Violent Praja/Nation: A Gandhian Intervention

Bindu Puri

This paper attempts a philosophical excursion into the Gandhian concept of nation. Interestingly the term, which Gandhi used for nation in *Hind Swaraj* in 1909, was Praja and not desh.¹ The term nation was first used by the critics of the monism of the enlightenment like Vico and Herder. Since the 1980's there has been a resurgence of academic interest in the category of nation. There have, consequently, been critical academic engagements with this category and a clear recognition that it is not a primordial category, fixed and unchanging. Even scholars who seek to argue that certain core features of nation happen to be pre-date modernity, will generally agree that in its recognized form, nation is the product of a specific historical moment born, as the European world emerged into modernity, from what, Eric Hobsbawm calls the 'dual revolution' at the end of the eighteenth century. One, which transformed the politics of Europe and the other, which transformed the economic field of production² Yet there is not much consensus about what the term nation should be defined as. Anshuman Mondal speaks of 'two main camps';

"... those who believe that the nation is primarily a cultural category, whom I shall call 'culturalists', and those who consider it to be primarily a political category, whom I shall term 'statists'. For the culturalists the nation can be defined as a cultural community

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which exists above and beyond any political organization of it into a state: it is therefore, 'pre-political'. These cultural communities, which Anthony Smith terms ethnies, provide the basis for modern nations."³

Anthony D. Smith argues that cultural communities form the basis for nation. They do this on the basis of a 'myth-symbol' complex, which forms a fund of shared historical meanings to which every possessor of that culture has an access. It is this shared collectivity of meaning, through common myths, symbols, narratives and other cultural forms, that binds people to a historic territory or motherland. For Smith and other such scholars politics is important for the expression of the pre-existing nation, but the nation exists objectively even if it is not politically organized into a state. It follows from this argument that true nations are those, which exhibit this confluence of cultural homogeneity with political statehood. The rest are state-nations, a product of nationalizing policy on the part of existing political units and not vice versa.

For statist like Ernest Gellner, "*Nationalism is primarily a political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.*"⁴ The statist argue that the nation emerged as a solution to socio-political problems faced as a result of modernization, the Industrial and French revolutions, social political upheavals, and transformations in the relationship between state and society, at the end of the eighteenth century. John Breuilly substantiates this argument when he points out that the nation cannot be conceived without the institutions and functions of the modern state.⁵ According to this view, the nation is a product of political nationalist ideology and not a pre-existing cultural category waiting to assume the form of the state.⁶ An influential and important argument for understanding nation has been that of Benedict Anderson. Anderson takes neither a purely culturalist nor a statist view of nation. To him nations and nationalisms are, themselves *cultural artefacts* of a particular kind, which came into historical being due to certain forces like the decline of religious orders and dynastic realms in Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century. However once created, they became modular, and capable of transportation, to a great variety of social terrains. These artefacts were not objective realities but created one's, for they were imagined communities. — "*and imagined as both inherently limited and*

sovereign."⁷ Nations are not cultural artefacts imagined, by being built up on historico-social traditions, but by being collectively imagined by going to the same schools, in some cases speaking the same language, viewing the same media, even reading the same paper. Further he argues that

*"... the distinctions between East and West Europe and Asia, are not the most interesting axes along which to think about nationalism."*⁸

In his influential book, *Imagined Communities*, Anderson argues, in, "*Census, Map, Museums*" that it was the imaginings of the colonial state reflected and actualized in census map and museums that made the nation state appear in certain erstwhile colonies. Map and census thus shaped the grammar, which would in due course make possible '*Burma*' and '*Burmese*', '*Indonesia*' and '*Indonesians*'. However, the concretization of these possibilities - concretizations which have a powerful life today, long after the colonial state has disappeared - owed much to the colonial state's peculiar imagining of history and power. This implies that there is no way that the nation could have been imagined outside that of the western and European imagination. Certainly the nation could not have been imagined by the colonized or as Anderson puts it in the last wave, just as, it had been first imagined in the western mind. For the western imaginings, as elaborately historiographed by Anderson, were shaped by powerfully contextualized histories specific to Europe and the Americas. However, the important question in comparative political philosophy is perhaps this, could the imaginings of a political community happen in non-western ways? If so, this would mean, that nationalism may in fact not be modular at all, but could have been different in different spaces, had authentic imaginings been taken seriously in concept and in practise. This paper attempts to engage in comparative political philosophy examining the imaginings of nation in two Indian political figures who were powerful dissenters of Euro-centric forces in the creation of the Indian nation. Accordingly, this paper looks at Gandhi and Tagore on Nation, with a view to arguing that here one can find, perhaps, the imaginings of a political community which is a nation without being a centralized monolithic, nation state, in the modern, predominantly western, sense. Hence the influential modular thesis about nations could be seriously challenged.

Bindu Puri

A fundamental problem with Anderson's way of colonializing the imagination, is well pointed out by Partha Chatterjee,⁹ He objects to the 'modular forms' thesis having to do with the way in which the nationalist imagination is fashioned in the post colonial states. Arguing that the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are not necessarily posited on identity but on difference with these modular forms of nationalism perpetrated by the west, Chatterjee shows how anti-colonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within the colonial society even when the state is in the hands of the imperial power. According to Chatterjee the nationalists have done this first, by dividing their culture into material and spiritual domains, and then, staking an early claim to the spiritual domain as their territory. Chatterjee attempts to argue that the middle class nationalist elites (he uses examples from the colonial history in India) first imagined the nation into being in this spiritual dimension and then readied it for political struggle with the colonial power in fashioning a modern national culture that is not Euro-centric. He concludes, that, "*if the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being.*" Though I agree with the fundamentals of Chatterjee's argument against the modular thesis of Anderson, I wish to show that the material/spiritual divide, may not be the correct way of looking at Gandhi as an alternative to modern western notions of nation.

In the next section I will examine how Gandhi has understood nation in **Hind Swaraj** and across his debate with Tagore. In this process I hope to do two things. One, demonstrate that nations may be political articulations of specific experiences of a people. Experiences, which are best, described as civilizational. For they incorporate, values, ways of life, traditional occupations, habitat, food, clothing, even climate. Where states are institutional arrangements of such authentic articulations, there may be more genuine nations, than where modules are adopted without regards to differences, which make for a collective and a distinctive identity. Two, incidentally I would like to show that despite conceptual differences about swaraj and nation, Gandhi and Tagore came very close in their attempt at defining the collective identity of the Indian people.

Praja in Gandhi

Antony Parel makes, it seems to me, a most important point in the introduction to the English edition of *Hind Swaraj*, edited and arranged by him, from the original Gujarati.

“That India is a nation was a contested issue at the time Gandhi was writing Hind Swaraj. He enters into the debate by claiming that India is a praja, the word he uses for nation. India was a praja already in the pre-Islamic period; the ancient acharyas (teachers of Indian philosophy) contributed immensely towards the consolidation of the idea of praja. The places of pilgrimage they established in the south and the north, the east and the west of India were important Praja-building centers. Moreover, pre-Islamic Indian culture was characterized by its openness to outside values and by its assimilative capacity. It therefore was able to assimilate the assailable values of Islam and other religions. The recent Hindu-Muslim hostilities are therefore resolvable within the context of the notion of Praja.”¹⁰

The term *Praja*, in Gujarati, as in Hindi, means a people, and the term *desh* refers to territory with which, a people has a historical tie. Gandhi used *praja* as nation as early as 1909. Quite interestingly Gandhi elsewhere noted the importance of the appropriate use of words. He was affronted by the use of the word independence rather than *Swaraj*. Again, in the lectures on the Bhagavadgita, *Anasakti Yoga*, while extending the meaning of the word *Yajna*, he debated about the ascription of word meanings and the changes in the same over time¹¹. Yet he used *Praja* for nation. This term clearly brings out the point that nation for Gandhi was based in the collective identity of the Indian people. The text offers arguments to explain this collective identity. The most important of these is the civilizational argument. Indians are a *praja* for they have a common civilization. Part of this argument is the fact of living in a certain territory to which there are historical ties. Hence there is the argument about geographical space. Another argument derives from the fact that neither religions nor races, can divide the people for those who cling to the spirit of nationality cannot let themselves be divided by religions. I will examine these arguments in some detail. However, prior to doing so, it would perhaps be interesting to examine whether the Gandhian understanding of

nation could be categorized in terms of any of the aforementioned categorizations of nation, in mainstream nationalist discourse.

Gandhi is quite clearly not giving, what has been termed, as a statist understanding of nation. For in terms of his argument, stated as early as 1909, nation as *Praja* exists before any state in the structure of colonial India. Nor does it seem correct to state that Gandhi is using the argument from cultural unity or *volk* in Herder's sense, or *ethnie* in A.D Smith's sense. For the very complex relationship of Myth-symbol –narrative that constitutes culture was expressed differently in the different groups-regional, linguistic, and religious –in India. As Tagore pointed out in his essay on nationalism the problem in India had always been that of different 'races'. Hence Gandhi's pre-existent *Praja* is perhaps, not a cultural collective but a civilizational one.

Yet the notion of civilization is itself not an easy notion. and there is need to attempt a philosophical re-construction of what Gandhi meant by civilization. This is all the more so, because it could perhaps, be argued, that all the arguments about nation used by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* rest in part, on the argument that the Indians are a nation because they have a common civilization. Gandhi defines civilization in *Hind Swaraj*.

“Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions. So doing we know ourselves. The Gujarati equivalent for civilization means ‘good conduct’.”

In the critique of modern civilization with which every reader of the *Hind Swaraj* is familiar, Gandhi displays an insight into the epistemic stance of modernity, even though he was by no means a philosopher in the academic sense. His basic objection to modern civilization is that it has no room for a wider ethical or religious order, being based entirely in the domain of the empirical. Modern civilization is committed to the epistemic stance of modern science and its offshoot technology. Hence it takes a one-sided material view of man having no room for a wider order of reality. In this Gandhi locates a feature critical to modernity. Despite the efforts of Kant, and after Kant, the attempt to make room for anything but utilitarian morality, in modernity, seems to have been problematic.

There are important conceptual reasons why this is so. Given its anthropomorphic individualism with man at the center of things and its commitment to empirical science, there is a conceptual difficulty in accommodating a religious or ethical order. Gandhi expressed this when he says; “*This civilization takes note neither of morality nor of religion*”

“*Let us first consider what state of things is described by the word ‘civilization’. Its true test lies in the fact that people living in it make bodily welfare the object of life.*”¹²

In contrast, ancient civilizations whether Roman, Greek, European or Indian, at the time of their ‘glory’ took a more complete view of man in the cosmos and had the sense of a wider order, in terms of which religion and morality could be epistemically accommodated. Religious and moral claims in those frameworks could be taken as unconditional or obligatory. They did not need utilitarian or linguistic legitimizations, which in any event are not able to retain their unconditionally, which is a part of their essential meaning. Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj*, cautions his fellow Indians to hold on to the wider order and to their civilization which makes room for it; “*The tendency of Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the western civilization is to propagate immorality. The latter is godless; the former is based on belief in god. So understanding and so believing, it behoves every lover of India to cling to the old Indian civilization even as a child clings to its mother’s breast.*”¹³ The collective Indian self in Gandhi is based on the argument from a common civilization. Though this notion of civilization is a complex notion, one element in it, seems on the Gandhian argument, to be, a common allegiance to the existence of a wider order—whether religious or spiritual—that order being the source of value, and hence of the moral life. This common commitment was expressed by ancient seers in their putting together of the vastly different climatic territorial zone’s in what was perceived to be one land; “*I do not wish to suggest that because we were one nation we had no differences, but it is submitted that our leading men traveled throughout India either on foot or in bullock carts. They learned one another’s languages, and there was no aloofness between them... But they saw that India was one undivided land so made by nature. They therefore argued that it must be one nation. Arguing thus they*

established holy places in various parts of the country and fired the people with an idea of nationality unknown in other parts of the world."¹⁴To the objection that this kind of argument from value and common civilization may hold across differences of climate and territory but not across religious divides, Gandhi clearly argues, that differences of religions cannot remove the oneness of belief in religion and value itself. He counters the idea that the introduction of British rule forged a collective albeit divided self; "*We were one nation before they came to India. One thought inspired us. Our mode of life was the same. It was because we were one nation that they were able to establish one kingdom.*"¹⁵ Again,

*"The introduction of foreigners does not necessarily destroy the nation, they merge in it. A country is one nation only when such a condition obtains in it. That country must have a faculty for assimilation. India has ever been such a country. In reality there are as many religions as they are individuals, but those who are conscious of the spirit of nationality do not interfere with one another's religion."*¹⁶

The Gandhian argument could perhaps be re-constructed in one way as stating, that since religion is a relationship with the divine in a sense every individual negotiates it differently and yet within the system of certain core beliefs people belong to a certain religion. In the same way to be Indian is to have certain civilizational commitments to religion and value; spelled out by the ancient mode of life and thought in India, which has had space for a belief in a wider religio-spiritual order. Such a belief is articulated in the fact that Indians irrespective of which religion they worship have a form of life in which religious beliefs and the surrounding systems of rite, ritual, festival, and, worship organize life in a religious calendar, as it were. This is consolidated by the fact that as a people they assimilate beliefs and practices across religions, to create a syncretic social order. Witness, for example, that in all smaller communities, villages, towns or local colonies all festivals are celebrated with some enthusiasm. The common civilization, based upon an understanding of civilization in terms of a worldview having certain commitments to, and relationships with, value and religion, is perhaps one way in which Gandhi could have understood the construction of the Indian Praja.

However, what seems a most significant argument, also utilized by Gandhi, is that about *the spirit of nationality*. Gandhi as early as 1909, speaks about the *spirit of nationality* as itself a bond of unity among people overriding the instinct to dwell on religious divides. This *spirit of nationality* is perhaps, a part of what is meant by belongingness to a country; which is felt by the Indian people, besides living in varied climatic and territorial habitats. It is also the case that by the 1900's the spirit of nationality became an essential part of understanding the common civilization that was Indian. All retrospective understandings of the past then were from the vantage point of the present where the fact of having a common mode of life, and belief in religious moral values, was mediated by a spirit of nationality. This spirit became a part of the unity that was perceived as a common civilization. The sense of what constitutes the Indian civilization is well unpacked by the poet Rabindranath Tagore who debated with Gandhi on certain central issues, such as, spinning, swaraj and nation.¹⁷ Though Tagore and Gandhi, differed significantly on just how the bonds of unity should be devised to put political arrangements in place in postcolonial India, they shared similar insights into the importance of what they termed civilization. Tagore was sharply critical of nation as a western institution, which was impersonal and purely mechanical. He argued that it was nothing but the economic and political organized self-interest of a people, while society was natural and had no such ulterior motive. He speaks of the nation as disruptive of the "*living bonds of society*", due to the soulless mechanical organization of a people for self-interest alone.¹⁸ Tagore's argument has two important philosophical points. One, that the nation is an abstraction and hence soulless, mechanical and without the personal ties which make the human realm distinctively human. The second point is that the abstract entity, termed nation, has no room for the complete man and hence must deal only with human abstractions as its constituent parts. That is, incomplete man, the man of limited purpose, "*This history has come to a stage when the moral man, the complete man, is more and more giving way, almost without knowing it, to make room for the political and commercial man, the man of the limited purpose.*"¹⁹ In his critique of nationalism in Japan, Tagore is very clear on what a civilization means for a people. Both Tagore and Gandhi spoke more of civilization than of culture for they saw civilization as the

product of generations of history, of living together in a particular habitat and solving the problem of man by the 'art of living'²⁰. Tagore saw that the uniqueness of India lay in its many races, in modern terms multi culturalism, and hence he preferred to seek a basis of unity not in terms of a political civilization like that in the west but in an inward looking spiritual civilization like that which was India's own. Elsewhere Tagore explained civilization as, "*civilization is to express man's dharma and not merely his cleverness, power and possession.*"²¹ This concern with goodness and correct living, and with different articulations of moral value, is then, what particular modes of being impart to people who live their lives as participants in a particular civilizational context. Tagore illustrates this with the story of how, driving through Bengali villages in an overheated car, he found the people closer to the traditional contexts of the ancient civilization of India, procuring water for him, with great inconvenience to themselves. This was reflective of their belief in the supreme value of treating strangers as honored guests in their habitat, that is, in their village. Contemporaneously, however, those living in the relatively modern metropolis Calcutta were accustomed to buy water. The point, which Tagore drew from this story, was that the simple act of hospitality, the procuring of the water was actually a result of years of contextualization in a way of life and in the civilizational framework of a community. Such, "*Simplicity takes no account of its own value, claims no wages, and therefore those who are enamored of power do not realize that simplicity of spiritual expression is the highest product of civilization.*"²²

It will suffice for this paper and its central argument that Tagore had a sense of community and tradition, as the necessary context, for the inculcation of persons into the moral life. Gandhi like Tagore was against the imitation of the civilization of another. He was an appreciator of tradition and history in the shaping of human identity. Of course for Gandhi it was the Indian civilization, which was to be the bond of unity between the multi cultural Indian society and the basis of *praja* or nation. Again while, like Tagore, he was happy to engage with other nations in, ahimsa as a sort of universal goodwill and love, he wished for the Indians to remain rooted in their own civilizational context. He also, favored the community to remain as small as possible in order to sustain ties with the human and, also, the non-human other.

Time, history and the singular nation module

To take the discussion back to Benedict Anderson's analysis of nation, one relationship crucial to modernity and nation is that with the past. Anderson speaks of time as important to the peculiar imagining that constructs the national community:

*"The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history. An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000 old fellow-Americans. He has no idea what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity."*²³

The print and the electronic media, which gives the idea of the community, reading and watching the same items with a religious regularity, consolidate this confidence. Note, in this context, Gandhi's use of print media by his forays in journalism as also the experiment of the whole community spinning as also wearing khadhi. These were devices that helped to construct the idea of a community simultaneously engaged in a pure national effort at the same time and in unison. In this context the insistence on engagement in spinning, is not just the reassurance of the community imagined as receptively reading the same paper, but, the idea of constructing the community by engaging it in a nation building activity. Hence Gandhi's imaginings are of a distinctively different nature from those, which led print capitalism and linguistic vernaculars to create modules of nations in Europe. Further, unlike what Partha Chatterjee argues, these imaginings are not all proceeding by delineating spiritual from material space and locating nationalist imaginings in that spiritual space from which the colonializer is shut out. Gandhi by his engagements with spinning, salt Satyagraha, the agitation over indigo is reclaiming the material space for the nationalist imaginings.

An essential part of the relationship with time is that with the past. In terms of Anderson's, argument the east west divide is not pertinent to nationhood for that module is available for all imaginings in fairly indistinguishable ways. However given the speed of change and the intense concern about the future, characteristic of modernity, peoples ideas about

the past has had to be re-negotiated in fundamentally altered ways, in the process of the imaginings of the political communities. He argues, “*The accelerating speed with which social, cultural, economic, and political changes took hold, motored by the industrial revolution and modern communication systems, made the nation the first political-moral form which based itself on the notion of progress.*”²⁴

“*But this means that our relationship to the past is today far more political, ideological, fragmentary, and even opportunistic than in ages gone by.*”²⁵

This ideological fragmentary contestation with the past was a part of the nationalist narratives in colonial India. This is well elaborated by Anshuman Mandal, as he points out that in order to gain political legitimacy the nationalists had to, “*respond to both colonial and traditional positions and it is only in relation to them –augmented by the internal dynamics within itself-that nationalist discourse emerged.*”²⁶

In this context, the one text that comes to mind is Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Anandmath*. This text, first appeared in book form in 1882, but was set in the past, about a hundred years before it was written, at the time of the famine of 1770 and its aftermath. It dramatized a sanyasi rebellion which had, on this account, brought the British into political ascendancy in order to drive out the Muslim rulers, as also, to gain by the English education which would be instrumental and strategic in attaining the new order. British rule was acceptable as purely instrumental, only on the basis of this ulterior Indian objective. This text is creating the future in the past. It attempts to create a fictitious space in which it engages with history in the making. By rejecting an objective account of actual events, and, conventional history Bankim is re-negotiating the past and by his fictional imaginings he is appropriating historical space in order to imagine a politically sovereign India. Hence in this text, one sees evidence of Anderson’s account of ideologically fragmentary contestation with the past as part of the construction of nation. Yet in the writings of Gandhi, the relationship with the past is not fragmentary. Gandhi speaks of history in *Hind Swaraj*. He says there, in context of, the discussion on historical evidence for the working of passive resistance, that a more complete record of the past would be preserved if history would be understood in the Gujarati translation

of it; Gandhi clarifies, "*The gujarati equivalent means; 'It so happened'.*"²⁷ However at the same time, he is conscious that moderns understand history in a fragmentary way. Hence he seems aware that there is an ideological appropriation at work, in the very construction of what a history means for a people. "*History, as we know it, is a record of the wars of the world, and so there is a proverb among Englishmen that a nation that has no history, that is, no wars, is a happy nation. How kings played, how they became enemies of one another, and how they murdered one another is found accurately recorded in history, and, if this were all that had happened in the world, it would have been ended long ago.*"²⁸ Gandhi in the *Hind Swaraj* is self-consciously taking a view of history, which is different from the ideologically contested space that makes for the modern engagement with the past. This engagement is necessary for nationalists to negotiate for it is part of constructing a modern nation, with the related idea of progress, to use history selectively.

The important point here is a philosophical one. Namely, that Gandhi negotiates the past from the standpoint of modernity, not to legitimize the present as is attempted in the text, *Anandmath*, nor to use history to gain the idea of progress to nationhood. Quite contrarily, Gandhi wants to look at the past as a complete record of the lives of men. History then is, on this view, a civilizational narrative. It is to be used to keep alive an engagement with the past and with value. Nations of the present, India in the making has to take the complete past seriously, and this is the point of *Hind Swaraj*. This is an issue, which Gandhi articulated at various levels, all his life. In his nation building exercise, in terms of decentralization and village republics, he tried to retain this enterprise of taking the past seriously, as a going concern.

In Gandhi and Tagore, there, seems to be, an alternative understanding of the re-organization of political space, post the exposure to the enlightenment and its conceptual-scientific-technological implications. This alternative is of crucial importance for it has implications, which can serve as useful interventions into many philosophical debates. For instance, Tagore's critique of nation, sense of Indian civilization, Gandhi's concept of the same and sense of nation as a decentralized democracy largely

panchayat based, is an authentic sense of the re-organization of socio-political space in terms of a particular historical civilizational paradigm. This means that the nation state largely centralized need not have emerged as the only organization of socio-political space, if alternative trajectories of historico-socio-political experience had been taken seriously by the constructors of nation hood, and by the academics who understood such constructions. Another Gandhian intervention is into the debate about nation and nationalism itself. For it emerges from the discussion, that Gandhi was neither a culturalist espousing a cultural unity pre-dating the emergence of the Nation in India. Nor was he a statist interested in imposing a nation state from above. In his imaginings of the political community Gandhi had his own imaginings, which followed neither a western nor an eastern paradigm. Evidencing a critical openness to both, Gandhi yet invented his own module in terms of, how he understood peculiarities of a certain civilizational framework. In this context, his use of khadi and salt, his ideas on history, have disproved Anderson's central assumption about the singular national module and its adaptation to various terrains. Gandhi did not borrow that nation module from the west, he created his own module based on a certain political imagination, and a certain view of the past and of ancient Indian civilization. In this Gandhi belies all standard and euro centric assumptions which amount to a colonialization of the mind and its categories of understanding experience.

This has implications for mainstream academic debate on nation. It indicates that there may have been alternative imaginations of political communities, which, if they had been treated seriously, could have led, to the emergence of more authentic forms of nation. Which means there could have then emerged, not one module of nation hood, which helped communities in the third wave to construct nations, but a family of different modules. Each module would have been a political articulation of a particular civilizational experience of a varied differentiated world. Each articulation would have shown an alternative re-organization of socio-political space, true to the space, which it sought to re-organize. In this very brief excursion into Gandhi and nation, I have attempted to de-colonialize the academic space of euro-centric definitions of nation. In a Gandhian sense it works to have interaction with all else and learn from it as well, only one's feet

need to stand on a particular space on the ground. Taking that space seriously, perhaps, is the only way to solve the dichotomies posed by, the conflicting demands of local identity and nation construction.

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Essay on Society and History: Issues in Theory and Interpretation

Mohd Shakil Ahmed

Not only is it in the pursuit of addressing basically the Hobbesian problem of order that most of sociological theories are formulated, but also the conceptions of history appear to have been able to grasp only aspects of reality. And interaction and interpretative process appears to be the key in forging and sustaining images of the reality.

History, whether it is driven by forces of production in Marxian sense or thymotic urge in the sense employed by Francis Fukuyama, has been with us ever since men began to make “history” on earth. The Hegelian concept of dialectic – that of internal contradiction giving way to a new form which again continues to operate in the same fashion - is integral in both of these conceptions of history. It is perhaps this dialectic that provides dynamism to the journey of men on this planet. These grand conceptions of history can, however, be broken down to analyzing every single cultural trait - the atom of society. The construction of human civilization – Arnold Toynbee saw the cycle of the rise and fall of civilizations as the course of history - atom-by-atom or trait-by-trait gives the hope of providing a picture closest to the “reality”. Unless and until we find the comprehensive picture, everything else is only an attempt.

Understanding Indian society and history: Approaches

There have been approaches employed by different scholars belonging

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to different cultures and geographical backgrounds to understand and interpret India and its various sections of people. Scholars of Indian society (and history) have tended to categorize these approaches into varying degrees of approval and disapproval, emphasis and neglect. All these *understandings* of India and its groups were not *always* what the groups saw themselves as. However, it was through a process-delicate and complex at the same time – of interaction between *external* interpretation and *internal* understanding that the notion of *Indianness* came to take shape, and over a period of time had taken roots.

Attempts from outside India to understand and interpret traditions of the country, according to Amartya Sen, can be put into at least three distinct categories. They were: (1) Exoticist (2) Magesterial (3) Curatorial approaches.¹

The Exoticist approaches were stimulated by the observation of exotic ideas and views. He writes,

“Exotic interests in India can be seen again and again, from its early history to the present day...Perhaps the most important example of intellectual exoticism related to India can be seen in the European philosophical decisions in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, among the Romantics in particular”².

Important figures in Romantic movement were influenced “by rather magnified readings of Indian culture”³.

The Magesterial approaches were concerned with the exercise of imperial power and saw India as a subject territory. With such an attitude they had read Indian traditions as something not at par with what they held as theirs. James Mill’s *The History of British India* (1817) was taken as a “good example” of this approach. This *History* of James Mill introduced the British governors of India to a particular characterization of the country. Amartya Sen writes,

“Mill disputed and dismissed practically every claim ever made on behalf Indian culture and its intellectual traditions, concluding that it was totally primitive and rude. This diagnosis went well with Mill’s general attitude, which supported the idea of bringing a rather barbaric nation under the benign

and reformist administration of the British Empire. Consistent with his beliefs, Mill was an expansionist in dealing with the remaining independent states in the subcontinent⁷⁴.

This kind of interpretation where the imperial concerns played a pivotal role and self-image of the people themselves was pushed to the backburner or even neglected completely was in consistent with the views of those who had the “burden” of colonizing a vast territory and administering it. James Mill “recommended a radical alteration of Indian society, to be achieved by imposing the correct legal and administrative system in India”⁷⁵. James Mill’s analysis and the solution suggested by him suited the “aims and needs of imperial requirements”⁷⁶. His attempt was to actually help facilitate British interference. This interference was conceived as necessary because if left unchanged Indian institutions may have, in one way or the other, hampered the British design. This is not to say that social institutions in India did not need reforms but to stress the point that the *Magesterial burden* intervened in such a way as to appear the intervention majestic, necessary or even inevitable. Romila Thapar observes,

“His analysis came in very handy to British administration since he maintained that legislation could change a society. This was, in a sense, a sanction to the British administration to legislate change in its own interests. Mill’s criticism of what he called the Hindu system of taxation, which according to him, did not provide for either free trade or the free play of capital, and also meet with approval of those who were formulating British economic policy in India”⁷⁷.

Ronald Inden called Mills *History* of India the “oldest hegemonic account of India within the Anglo-French imperial formation”⁷⁸. And it remained a hegemonic text book of Indian history throughout nineteenth century.

The third category – Curatorial approaches – include various attempts at noting, classifying and exhibiting diverse aspects of Indian culture. The Curatorial approaches had inclinations of their own, with a general interest in seeing the object – India – as very special and extraordinarily interesting⁷⁹.

Alberuni’s *Tarikh al-hind* (‘The History of India’) written in Arabic in the early eleventh century is an example of Curatorial approach. Alberuni

“became very involved with India and mastered Sanskrit; studied Indian texts on mathematics, natural sciences, literature, philosophy and religion; conversed with as many experts as he could find; and investigated social conventions and practices. His book on India presents a remarkable account of the intellectual traditions and social customs of early eleventh-century India”¹⁰. There were others who fell into this category such as Faxian (Fa – Hsien) and Xuanzang (Hiun-tsang) – both Chinese travelers spent many years in India in the fifth and seventh centuries Christian Era respectively – who provided extensive accounts of what they saw¹¹. Amartya Sen concludes,

“The internal identities of Indians draw on different parts of India’s diverse traditions. The observational leanings of Western approaches have had quite a major impact – positively and negatively – as what contributes to the Indian self-image that emerged in the colonial period and survives today. The relationship has several dialectical aspects, connected to the sensitivity towards selective admirations and dismissals from the cosmopolitan West as well as to the mechanics of colonial confrontations”¹².

These approaches, in brief, roughly represent outsider’s interpretation of Indians and their traditions. However, it was in the 18th century that an eruption began in the interpretation of Indian culture and tradition with the founding of Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784. The *Society* translated a number of Indian classics – religious documents (such as the *Gita*) as well as legal treatises and literary works¹³. With these translations a “Golden Age of Indian Culture”¹⁴ was posited by the Orientalists such as Wilson Jones, H. H. Wilson, H. T. Colebrooke, and others. Their works aroused a cultural pride among the Indians. However, in the early nineteenth century a new direction in the attitude of the administrator-scholars of the East India Company towards Indian history was witnessed¹⁵. James Mill’s *History* was one such direction.

It was during this period that interpretations of “others” were carried out. In this context it may be relevant to quote Susana B.C. Devalle who observes thus,

“The constructs of ‘tribe’ and ‘race’ as social category

became the elements through which Europe reconstructed – intellectually as well as in administrative practice – part of the reality of the societies that came under its dominance. The categories ‘tribe’, ‘caste’ and ‘religion’ performed this role in colonial India. ‘Racial’, ‘ethnic’ and ‘tribal’ stereotypes were forged, conflating a variety of modes of production, forms of social organization and cultures, ignoring the complexities, dynamism, history and civilizational patterns of the societies thus catalogued. In the end, taxonomies acquired the power of truth. In sum, these societies were rendered ahistorical. The indigenous societies’ socio-cultural diversity was given new meanings. Existing differences were enhanced to preclude any unified action of the colonized people. A new opposition expressed in racial and/or cultural terms came into being, i.e. the one between the superordinated European group and the people under their domination”¹⁶.

We have seen in this extremely brief sketch of some of the approaches of outsiders to the study of Indian society and history. Their approaches were marked by different shades and shifts. While some were “balanced”, others working as they did under the “burden” of running an Empire were found tilting the scale. And it was in the nineteenth century that there was a profusion of attempts to understand Indian society - and in doing so they had produced materials and sources which were interpreted in multiple directions.

T. K. Oommen argues that the “systematic articulation of the other in social science began only in a century and a half ago”¹⁷. He further observes, “With the publication of Henry Maine’s *Ancient Law* in 1861 and L. H. Morgan’s *Ancient Society* in 1877, the foundation for the ‘great rupture’ between ‘modern’ and ‘primitive’ society was laid and the construction of the Other became a staple in social science”¹⁸.

History, Sociology and the Reality

History and Society reflect each other. Society tends to take the form or shape of its historical trajectory. But simply saying “historical trajectory” is not enough to understand the interplay between the two. “Historical trajectory”, when forged, is executed with obvious selection process from

the rich bits of information. Therefore a particular society, more so in the fragmented and highly differentiated ones, may contain many “historical trajectories” within its belly – each vying with the other for prominence. So the discourse couched in one trajectory may not be found in harmony with the other.

In fact there could be sociological history too. Applying the conceptual model drawn from the general tradition of sociological thought, Neil J. Smelser approached the study of Industrial Revolution¹⁹.

Definition holds the key. It is the definition of the “entity” which enables the investigator/scholar to trace its trail back in time. “Indeed one cannot undertake the history of any historical entity – whether a nation or a scientific discipline – without establishing its definition”²⁰, writes Raymond Aron. However the definition of the entity is done in diverse form. Likewise history and society have been conceived/defined in different forms – each perhaps only capturing aspects of the reality. Conception of history in different ways gives rise to the problem of relating historical facts/events in the study of man and society. Despite the difficulty, knowledge of history is indispensable in studying man and society. Sociology is sometimes viewed as historical. In Paul Sweezy’s phrase, it is an attempt to write “present as history”, though it may be controversial. Both disciplines with a process of pushing and penetrating into each other have the *promise* of generating significant appreciation of the wide and wild – and also not-so-wide and not-so-wild – experiences of men as members of society in different places. On the use of history, C. Wright Mills observes,

“The productions of historians may be thought of as a great file indispensable to all social science – I believe this is true and fruitful view. History as a discipline is also sometimes considered to contain all social science – but only by a few misguided ‘humanists’. More fundamental than the either view is the idea that every social science – or better, every well-considered social study requires a historical scope of conception and a full use of historical materials. This simple notion is the major idea for which I am arguing”²¹.

In the works of Pierre Bourdieu, a philosopher turned sociologist,

we note the centrality of both history and interdisciplinarity. Historical enquiry, as is reflected in the journal *Actes*, became increasingly a part of preoccupation in Bourdieu's last decade. However, Bourdieu chose to become not a historian. Indeed in his major writings references to historians are considerably rarer than those to philosophers etc. But according to Eric Hobsbawm, past is central to him and history, for him, has a double function²². Eric Hobsbawm, writing on Bourdieu, is of the view that history is not simply a gate to pass to reach the reality it is the reality itself. He quotes Bourdieu thus:

“I endeavour to show that what is called the social *is* history. History is inscribed in things – in institutions (machines, instruments, laws, scientific theories etc.) and also in bodies. My whole effort aims to discover history where it is best hidden, in people's heads and in the postures of their bodies. The unconscious is history. That's true, for instance, of the categories of thought and perception that we spontaneously apply to the social world”²³.

It appears from the above quotation that Bourdieu's “history” has a considerable overlap with what may be called “social” aspect of reality. His attempt to “discover history” in the heads and in the bodies of people may obviously, as he says, link to unconscious, categories of thought and perception applied to the social world. If indeed “social is history”, in studying social aspects of reality we may also be studying history. While Bourdieu wants to show that “social is history”, for E.J.Hobsbawm the “history of society is *history*”²⁴. Thus this view of history, and social, goes to show, if not prove, significant closeness between these different aspects – social and history – of reality. Doesn't this then show that reality could be approached from multiple perspectives? And this multiplicity of approaches/theories/views/perspectives could go, when arranged in respective places, to reveal the reality. But that will be the ultimate achievement.

Interpretation and the Reality

But the difficulty arises in the process of interpretation of historical materials. Flat description of ‘facts’ is perhaps of no particular use. ‘Facts’ themselves may have been constructed under particular circumstances

and particular interests. The social study needs to be placed within a particular framework or different frameworks if necessary. Theoretical orientation of social studies with historical knowledge stands to enrich building of knowledge from multiple directions/perspectives. However, interpretations, since they are couched in the subjective feelings as well as theoretical orientations the investigator has chosen, are bound to be different. Max Weber's concept of ethical neutrality, though indispensable and extremely fruitful when it comes to research, may even find it difficult to neutralize the urge or the impulse to tilt the balance, as it were, in the interpretation process. Yet, sociology requires interpretative understanding. Interpretation is not only necessary but also inevitable.

To make the writing of history more meaningful, it may also be framed within a theoretical orientation. That it is important is shown by C. Wright Mills when he observes,

“if historians have no ‘theory’, they may provide materials for the writing of history, but they cannot themselves write it. They can entertain, but they cannot keep the record straight. That task now requires explicit attention to much more than ‘the facts’ ”²⁵.

So the ability for a multi-pronged imaginative process refined by a rigorous interpretative endeavor is crucial in both history and sociology. It is this capacity of man which enables him to locate himself and others within a range of players in the social world. This ability to imagine and interpret may also enable social players to appreciate their life chances and life situations within the changing course of social existence. From this perspective deterministic understanding of the course of history as well as social life - and everything in it - is a bit removed from what happens or what should actually happen in the ‘real world’. In fact, the reality, it appears, is looked at, learned about, analyzed and forged in the process of interpretation - itself is done from multiple perspectives.

Community, Self and the Other: Parts of Reality, Products of Interaction

Beyond the popular understanding of “we-feeling” seen as a pivotal element of a community, the strands that came to web their way into a unified social reality manifested through certain distinguishable elements

or characteristics have been the products of the particular historical trajectory experienced by the formation of the people concerned. The cumulative effect of each stroke, single or collective, has nourished the internal as well as external perceptions of any people or group or community (as differed from a *collectivity*). Yet the formation of people may be manifested itself on different premises. We have national, racial, religious, cultural, political, economic, linguistic, etc *formations*. Each of these formations of people has a narrative which intermingles, overlaps and at the same time contradictory with other narratives since each of them tries to carve out a *premise* for the particular formation (or formations, as the case may be) of people.

How a group sees itself is not necessarily what or how others perceive the same group. However it is through the delicate process of interaction between these two critical views (perceptions) – one internal and the other external - that the *idea of self*, and of others, gets *inculcated*, *internalized* and ultimately *institutionalized*. It is in the process of institutionalization of the idea of self through inculcation and internalization that the “consciousness of kind” of the group has developed. The emergence of the idea of self appears to be coincide with the formation of the idea of “belonging together”, therefore society. It is in this sense the idea of self is used here in relation with Gidding’s concept of “consciousness of kind” on which he says society rests. However it may be possible to see this consciousness of kind in different layers as one’s identity can only comprehensively be conceived in layered terms or in a multiple way. That there may be different layers of consciousness of kinds. And each has its own premise. And which consciousness of kind takes precedence is perhaps dependant on the context – itself defined by a plethora of factors.

Different ruptures may have marked the transition from obscure and hazy past when contours of a “group” may not have well established to a more solid and consolidated appreciation of the self. Yet these ruptures, as historical hiccups, might have stamped their own imprint to continuing evolution (not in the Darwinian sense) of any group.

Challenge of Postmodernism

The coming together of a group may have required choosing image(s) for itself from the multiple images being floated during a particular period

of time. Because “coming together”, as it were, involves building of a “reality”. The “reality” itself may not be freezed in a particular time frame. But it may be a “moving” outcome/result of the efforts to build a “reality”. This line is particularly emphasized in postmodernist attempts to “understand” social “reality”.

“Postmodernism” is, as a concept, pulled to different directions. Yet its primary thrust is reflected in its posture of denial that there exists a reality or a truth. Postmodernism is seen as a Philosophical and cultural movement²⁶. There has been considerable controversy, under the influence of the ideas of Postmodernism, concerning “the validity of theories and methods that claim ‘scientific’ or universal applicability”²⁷. It’s a powerful fire that threatens to burn everything including itself. Noted scholar Ziauddin Sardar observes,

“Moreover, postmodernism suggests, there is no ultimate Reality. We see what we want to see, what our position in time and place allows us to see, what our cultural and historic perceptions focus on. Instead of reality, what we have is an ocean of images; a world where all distinction between image and material reality has been lost. Postmodernism posits the world as a video game: seduced by the allure of the spectacle, we have all become characters in the global video game, zapping our way from here to there, fighting wars in cyberspace, making love to digitised bits of information. We float on an endless sea of images and stories that shape our perception and our individual ‘reality’ ”²⁸.

However the paradox is that in the ultimate analysis postmodernism has serious problems in justifying even its own position as the Philosopher Richard Tarnas states postmodernism “cannot on its own principles ultimately justify itself any more than can the various metaphysical overviews against which the postmodern mind has defined itself”²⁹.

Postmodernism, Interactionism and the Mind

If we care to see the postmodernist approach, its problems notwithstanding, with the interactionist approach in the sociological tradition

than the historical process of interaction and resultant enrichment of dynamism between formations of people may be “clearer”. W.I. Thomas’s beautifully phrased “definition of the situation” may prove to be helpful in capturing parts of the “moving” relations between formations of people. It may be through interaction that not only images are chosen and reality forged but also definition of the situation is carried out. Defining the situation is intrinsically a part of any interactional process – be it at the individual or the national level etc. And the defining the situation is basically an interpretative process which itself may again be determined by the context.

So the social world moves with the twin processes of interaction and interpretation. Interaction, which involves interpretation of self, others and self through the interpretation of perceived views of others, could generate both conflict and accommodation. Therefore, it entails two faces – violence and cooperation - of society. However society as seen by symbolic interactionists particularly by George Hebert Mead is not possible without mind, which is seen not as a structure but as a *process* following the lead of John Dewey. It is the interactional process with multiple players that may be bundled as the “other” that the mind as *process* has developed. And it is this aspect of mind is a continuous one, thus it gives the possibility of altering the view(s) held by the individual concerned. It is perhaps for this reason that it is very difficult to study man and society.

From this perspective, society represents an “organized and patterned interactions”. From this it would seem that the “patterned interaction” (which is identified with society) is dependant upon the mind as a *process*, since society without mind is not possible. Ability of the human mind to weigh different alternatives, shaped by different contexts, generates mind as a process which enters into interactional and interpretative process with the “other” and this process, in turn, forms, sustains and changes formats of patterned interaction. So the conception of self, mind and society are interdependent in this perspective. However, this too, like others, is only an attempt to grasp parts of the reality.

The question remains

Though it is true that only through theory can Hobbes’ basic question about the *problem of order* may be attempted to be addressed, the reality as such appears to be constructed though a complex process of a series

of combination of multiple bits – social as well as physical. Conception of history in various ways may be a manifestation of this phenomenon. And how to conceive and define the reality in its totality appears to remain as a challenge.

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Man and Society A Journal of North East Studies

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Insurgency and Nationalism in Manipur

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A study of the growth of nationalism in Manipur is important in understanding the evolution of the complex political situation in the state. Much of the ideology of the secessionist movements in Manipur is rested on the history. Historical accounts of the growth of ethnic identity, formation of the territorial boundary of the state, its incorporation into the Indian state – need to be read and interpreted for understanding the diverse trends of ideas that have been at the root of socio-political disintegration of the state of Manipur.

1. Growth of Meitei Identity

Manipur has a unique history. According to the state Royal Chronicle '*Cheitharon Kumpapa*' the state has a history of state formation right from 33 A.D. The first maker of Manipur according to the Chronicle is Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (Parratt, 2005: 21; Singh & Singh, 1989: 1).

The history of the origin of the indigenous people of Manipur is, in fact, shrouded in mystery. There is a number of contesting hypotheses (Brown, Grierson, Hodgson, Hodson, Mc Culloh, Pemberton and Singh) about the origin of the Meiteis. It is widely believed that like the other Mongoloid

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groups in the North Eastern Region, Meiteis also migrated from South West China. They defeated the earlier settlers like Poireiton and established themselves in the Imphal valley (Parratt, 2005: 2, 12, 22).

Meitei tradition indicates that the Manipur valley was occupied by several tribes, the principal of which were seven in number, viz., (i) the Ningthouja or Meitei, (ii) the Angom, (iii) the Khumal, (iv) the Moirang, (v) the Luwang, (vi) the Sarang Leishangthem and (vii) the Khaba-Nganba. For a time the Khumal appeared to have been the most powerful and after its decline the Moirang became prominent. And ultimately the Ningthoujas or Meiteis subdued the whole and the name Meitei has become applicable to all the tribes (Allen, 2002: 11-12; Brown, 2001: 57; Dun, 1981: 13; Hodson, 2007: 5-6; Kabui, 1988: 12-15, 1991: 17-18; Kamei, 2008: 5-10; Manikchand, 1988: 145- 158; Mc Culloh, 1980: 4; Singh, 1992: 22).

The social dynamics of transformation of these clans into a single ethnonym Meitei is not recorded. However, historians attempted to construct the early history of the Meiteis based on scant information available in *Cheitharon Kumpapa* and other clan-based genealogies and manuscripts of the different clans of the Meiteis.

1.1 Social Transition: From Clan to Tribe

The evolution of pristine states usually passes through three stages, viz., tribal polity, chiefdom and state (Kamei, 2008: 79). Manipur Valley, known as *Kangleipak*, was believed to be the habitat of innumerable tribes in the historical antiquity. Following the process of social evaluation and working of the process of fusion, these tribes/clans were regrouped into seven major clans as has already been mentioned. These tribes had their own principality and were independent of each other. A continuous struggle among these principalities to overpower one another was a common phenomenon until the emergence of the Ningthoujas or Meiteis as the supreme power. Tribal chiefs of the Ningthoujas, who were called as kings by their subjects, occupied the territory of Kangla, which played the pivotal role in the subsequent history of this country. Being located at the centre of the valley, Kangla had a strategic importance as far as the inter-clan relation is concerned. The early history of Manipur is the history of the inter-clan war centering around the Ningthoujas. Right from Pakhangba (33-153 A.D.), the first Ningthouja chief, to Ningthoukhomba (1432-1467 A.D.), throughout

these long one thousand and five hundred years, the Meitei identity emerged following a process of inter-clan war and accommodation. Ningthouja or Meitei chiefs subdued some clans through repeated expeditions and endeared some others using the institution of marriage. Ningthouja chiefs practiced polygamy. They used to marry girls from other clans like Khuman, Angom, etc. Although the practice of polygamy had often created intrigue in case of succession, but the adherence of strict rule of primogeniture had saved the office of the chief. Ningthouja chiefs gradually accommodated the chiefs and powerful people from other clans. They were regularly consulted along with the important people from within the clan. This process eventually gave birth to the institution of nobility.

Although no historical account is available on the nature of land relations at this stage of social evolution, oblique evidences, like the introduction of the system of pana in relation to the division of land by Loiyumba (1074-1121 A.D.), suggest that land was under the control of the chiefs (Kabui, 1991: 111). Commoners had to pay taxes in kind to the chief. This land-relations had matured further in due course of time leading to the firm establishment of feudal land relation. In fact, the right over the land by the chiefs and feudal lords became firmer as they became stronger politically and militarily.

The system of *lallup*, an unique system developed by the Ningthoujas and also perhaps by the other clans as well, a compulsory obligation of the male members of a particular clan to provide free services for the cause of the collective interest, had developed into its embryonic form. This system had been refined overtime and took a definite shape only after the transition of the society from tribalism to feudalism. We shall have occasion to refer to this unique social system later.

A system of social division of labour was in the making. The chief had assigned different activities for different lineages. Right from worshipping the gods to weaving of clothes - activities were assigned to different people having different family surnames. Even a particular activity had been subdivided into a number of categories and each category was assigned to a particular family surname. Thus the clan-economy had elements of meticulous planning although embedded in larger socio-political formation. While role reversal is often observed in tribal communities perhaps due to

the smaller size of the social space, it is, indeed, remarkable that the clan chiefs had adopted such elaborate functional division of labour in those days. With the evolution of the society, although these functional division of labour was supposed to be institutionalized, as had happened, say for example, among the Hindus, but due to the Vaishnavite revolution, which had completely re-orientated the Meitei society during the 18th century, it had lost its relevance.

The clan-economy was based on agriculture and forest. As the tradition goes, early settlers brought the seeds and art of agriculture while they had migrated to *Kangleipak* from the South West China (Kabui, 1991: 80; Singh, 1992: 15). The fertile valley soil and climate were conducive for agriculture. As plough was introduced in Manipur only after the arrival of the Muslim war captives, it appears that the technique of shifting cultivation was applied even for the wet rice cultivation that had developed in the valley. Besides agriculture, forests used to play a significant role in providing the sustenance. The forests were rich in animal lives and plant lives. Other economic activities mentioned were fishing, weaving, hunting and animal husbandry.

Although the society was egalitarian to a large extent, a silver lining of social stratification was also in the offing. The chiefs enjoyed the highest social status followed by their kith and kin that formed the nobility. Maibas, the priest and doctor, also hold an important position in the society. Commoners remained at the bottom.

1.2 The Tribal-Feudal Continuum

The process of inter-clan war and accommodation reached to its culmination during the reign of Ningthoukhomba (1432-1467 A.D.) when Moirang, the last independent principality, was defeated and subjugated. In the process of integration of the clans into a common tribe, the ethnonym of the Ningthoujas known as the Meiteis (Parratt, 2005: 12-13) was gradually adopted by others. Meitei chiefs extended their sphere of control over both the social and territorial spaces. With the accommodation of the clan chiefs in the court of the Meitei chiefs, who were virtually graduated to the position of king, the size of the nobility had expanded. The Meitei identity was consolidated as the king mobilized the people of different clans to invade the surrounding hills and the Kabaw valley. With the sharpening of the

binary perception between “we” and “they” among the Meiteis and Non-Meiteis, the identity formation took a definite shape.

In the process of expansion of the territorial boundary of the kingdom of *Kangleipak* and the political supremacy of the kings, different groups of people were brought into the valley as war captives including the Shans, Muslims, Tangkhul, Maring, Maram, Moyon, Kabui, Koirang and the Purum. Brahmins from the Mughal India particularly from Bengal also started arriving in Manipur. Thus, different identities were being integrated to enlarge the identity boundary of the Meitei.

With the end of inter-clan warfare, the Meitei kings began to expand their kingdom in the surrounding hills and neighbouring countries. Kiyamba (1467-1508 A.D.), the successor of Ningthoukhomba brought the Kabaw valley under the political control of Manipur and extended the eastern boundary of his kingdom to the Chindwin river. This led to the international recognition of the Meitei kingdom in upper Burma (Kabui, 1991: 196; Parratt, 2005: 38-39; Singh, 1992: 90; Singh & Singh, 1989: 19-20). A frequent feud between Burma and Meitei kingdom over the Kabaw valley continued in the years that followed. This struggle continued till the Burmese invasion of the Meitei kingdom for seven years in 1819 which will be referred later.

The king was the administrative head. He used to rule the kingdom through a number of local level *lakpas* (administrators). Imphal city area was divided into four sectors. One member from the royal family was assigned the job of a *lakpa* for each area (Kabui, 1991: 218). Other parts of the valley were administered through the local clan chiefs. Areas brought under suzerainty through war were administered through the local chiefs who acted as tributary heads. At the centre, various departments had been created to look after different activities and the members of royal family or the nobles of the king's court were entrusted to work to head such departments.

The traditional clan-economy saw a new era with the coming of the Muslim war captives. They introduced the system of transplantation of paddy and the plough drawn by bullock and buffalo. In order to withstand the high water level and floods Khagemba introduced a new paddy *taothabi* (a red and tailed paddy) (Kabui, 1991: 219; Parratt, 2005: 77; Singh, 1992: 120; Singh & Singh, 1989: 39). Agriculture flourished with the annexation

of the fertile Kabaw valley. New market sheds were established and the contacts with Ahoms, Tripuris and Burmese further strengthened trade and commerce. The revenue system was systematized with the improvement in agriculture. A currency called *Sel* was introduced. However, the payment of tax in kind by the land owners still continued. Farmers had to pay 60 pots (two baskets known as *sangbai*) per pari (hectare) to the king. The revenue officials (*Lourungpurel*) used to get their salary in kinds as well. King also used to make land grants to the nobles and other officials in return to their services. A system of centralized storing facilities was developed by establishing *keis* (royal granaries) in different parts of the state to meet the requirements during natural calamities. The village chief was appointed as *keirakpa* (caretaker of the granary) and the villagers had to contribute to the royal granaries a share of their produce amounting to 12 pots per pari (Kabui, 1991: 218-219).

Besides agriculture, non-farm activities like weaving, pottery, blacksmithy, brassmaking, weapon making and gold washing were also developed during this period. Meitei craftsmen also learnt brick making, perhaps, from their Chinese counterparts. Meitei craftsmen also mastered the art of working with copper, silver, wood and bamboo.

The system of *lallup* was refined and strengthened further. It became a unique mechanism to provide the military security of the kingdom. The kingdom of Manipur was neither very big nor very rich. It was considered to be uneconomic to raise a regular army to ensure the territorial security of the kingdom. Hence *lallup* came in handy in mobilizing the people as soldiers in case of war. This system also ensured the supply of labour not only for royal works but also for the public activities undertaken for the welfare of the society. Except the women, old and children, it was mandatory to all the able bodied persons to participate in *lallup* (Johnstone, 2002: 110). Even the members of nobility, the influential *maibas* (priest) and the local chiefs were not spared from this system (Mc Culloh, 1980: 11-12).

1.3 From Tribe to Ethnic Group

The tribal kingdom of Manipur had experienced a qualitative change since the beginning of the 18th century. The wave of the Vaishnavite movement from Bengal swept over the Imphal valley resulting into a sudden

transformation of the socio-economic formation in the valley from tribalism to ethnicity. Unlike Assam, where Vaishnavite movement of Sri Sankar Dev took a pretty long time to transform the tribal Ahoms into ethnic Assamese, Meiteis embraced the Vaishnavite faith without much resistance within a pretty short time which had brought a revolutionary social change.

The forty years rule of Pamheiba (1709-1748 A.D.), who is popularly known as Garibniwaz, had been the crucial turning point in the evolution of Meitei identity. Garibniwaz made it a point to draw all his subjects within the ambit of this new enlightenment. Garibniwaz realized the importance of a philosophical framework which could explain the life beyond the mere physical existence. He was completely swayed over with the transition from nature worshipping to Vaishnavite variety of Hinduism.

With the arrival of Shanta Das, the religious guru of Garibniwaz, the process of sanskritisation gathered a new momentum. The king forbade the eating of meat and rearing of pigs and poultry was banned in the capital area. The Meitei religious books (*Puya*) were burnt and even the tombs of former kings and queens were opened and cremated again. The king went to the extent of destruction of the temples of the traditional Meitei gods like forests gods (*Umanglais*). Myths were invented about the traditional festivals and religious believes and rituals in order to connect the Meiteis with the Hindu heritage. The Hindu life-world was superimposed on the traditional Meitei believe system. Hindu system of god and goddesses were synchronized with that of the Meiteis. Meitei festivals were rechristened by way of labeling the names of Hindu festivals. To rationalize the social system *a la* Hindus, the system of gotras was also introduced. Even the evil practices of the Hindu society particularly prevalent in Bengal, like the practice of Sati, was also embraced, of course, fortunately only by a few segments like the members of the royal family and the Brahmins (Kabui, 1991: 258; Parratt, 2005: 143; Singh & Singh, 1989: 96). The influence of Vaishnavism became very strong and it was visible in the change of dress, food habit and even in the adoption of Bengali script for Meitei language (Kabui, 1991: 277). Perhaps it was during this period that the kingdom of *Kangleipak* was rechristened as Manipur. However, the cultural influence of Bengal and Vaishnavism could not only be found in the nomenclature of the kingdom, even people, including the members of the royal family, began to use Hinduised names. In fact, commoners of Manipur developed a hybrid

culture accommodating some elements of Vaishnavism alongside the elements of traditional Meitei culture.

Garibniwaz practiced both Vaishnavism and militarism. Vaishnavite philosophy of love and worship could not detain him from expansion of his kingdom and waging war against the neighbouring countries. He fought several wars against the Burmese and even penetrated to the Burman capital Ava. The rise of Manipur under Garibniwaz and the weakening of Burma under Toongoo dynasty coincided. His Burma campaign left a trail of severe cruelty and devastation perhaps due to the fact that he wanted to teach a lesson to Ava against the injustice done to the royal Meitei family. It may not be out of place to note that invasion of Manipur by the Burmese forces led by Maha Bandula in early 19th century appeared to be the retaliation against the insult and humiliation inflicted by Garibniwaz during the first half of the 18th century. However, we shall come back to this point later.

In fact feudalism bloomed to its full and reached to the zenith during the rule of Garibniwaz. His constant war efforts had further solidified the Maitei society. In order to face the collective efforts of Burma and Tripura, he fought vehemently in both the fronts. He had developed very cordial relations with the Kabuis, Thangkuls, Marams, Kukis and other hill tribes residing in the surrounding hills and enrolled them in his army (Kabui, 1991: 246). His campaign against different hill tribes surrounding the valley, their political incorporation through the extension of *lallup* and their induction into the royal army had extended the effective boundary of the feudal Manipur beyond the Valley. Indeed, the outline of the present political boundary of Manipur emerged during this period.

The administration of the kingdom was reorganized in the line of Hindu system. The system of ministers known as the Mantris and the offices of Yubraj (crown prince) and Senapati (general) were introduced in the royal court (Kabui, 1991: 280). The administrative divisions in the capital were still headed by the royal family. With regards to the administration of the hill areas, the villages were administered under the control of *Khullakpa* assisted by *Luplakpa*. Earlier the heads of the hill villages were referred to as chiefs. The administration was further improved with the experiences from Bengal and Assam.

The system of *lallup* had further entrenched deep into the society. With the expansion of political influence over “other” groups of people like the hill tribes, its reach had widened. As the feudal society was increasingly getting stratified, the upper echelon including the nobles, Brahmins, Vaishnavite gurus, chiefs were gradually exempted from *lallup* (Kabui, 1991: 278) and the burden of the beast fell on the ordinary man. Frequent war, expansion of the kingdom, rise in public activities had called for the intensive *lallup* services.

The king was the ruler, law maker and judge. For administration of justice a two-tier judicial system had been developed, ‘*Singlup*’ or wood-club at the village level and the Cheirap at the apex level. *Singlup* was like old Panchayats and headed by village headman and it was given powers to dispose of cases within their jurisdiction. A special court for Muslims was also established to try cases relating to Muslims. Besides these, there were two other courts established in the capital viz., Pacha and Military court. Pacha tried cases relating to women and military court was meant for soldiers. The Cheirap was the highest court and it tried both civil and criminal cases. The people can appeal to the Cheirap if they feel justice had not been done at the lower level courts (Bhattacharyya, 1963: 300; Mc Culloh, 1980: 19-20; Singh, 1987: 106-107; Singh, 1998: 9).

The feudal economy was firmly rooted in agriculture. Besides tax on agricultural production, land management had been greatly improved for mobilization of additional resources. Land records were prepared under the revenue department by *Loukok Eba* (recorder of field plots). The entry fee was 50 *shels* for one pari. Those who claimed fresh land were charged additional premium. Of course, the agricultural tax continued to be the same, i.e., 60 pots per pari. Several coins, although lacked standardization, were issued and the process of monetization of the economy was in the progress. The non-farm activities also gained momentum. Bell metal industry, tannery, boat making and turnery were developed. With the widening of exposure with the neighbouring countries and particularly with Bengal, scope for long distance trade had also increased. The cultural transformation of the people had generated demand for culture-specific goods which were procured from Bengal.

Be that as it may, the power of the feudal system in Manipur began to

decline from the beginning of the 19th century. While the rise of feudal power in Burma in the east and the British colonial power in the west were posing new challenges, internal strife among the members of the royal family for power and the immature handling of the neighbouring powers by some of the princes ultimately led to the subjugation of this great Meitei civilization initially by Burma and then by the British colonial power.

1.4 The Feudal-Colonial Era

The period after Garibniwaz and Bhagyachandra was marked by the decline of the kingdom of Manipur. The successive rulers were weak and frequent feuds among the princes to dethrone one another were one of the prime reasons for the decline of the kingdom. The Meitei princes went to the extent of seeking help from their old enemy, Burma, to fight their own brothers. Moreover, the Burmese were bent upon avenging the humiliating defeats meted out to them during the reign of Garibniwaz. During this period the Burmese had grown very strong under the great general Maha Bandula and they were advancing to invade Manipur. The end result was the defeat of the kingdom in 1819. Burmese ruled Manipur for seven years (1819-1826) through their puppet rulers. This period is known in the history of Manipur as '*Chahi Taret Khuntakpa*' (Seven Years Devastation). This was the darkest period in the history of Manipur. The torture and cruelties inflicted upon the inhabitants by the Burmese were unbearable. Many were taken to Burma as war captives and many fled to the nearby Cachar. Even king Marjit, who was instrumental behind the Burmese invasion had to take refuge at Cachar. Seven years of Burmese rule, thus, led to depopulation of the Imphal valley. While majority of the male members of the Meitei society were either carried away or fled away, the women were only left to fend themselves, look after the child and the old. The supply of labour in Manipur's agro-forest based feudal economy severely fell short. Both production and consumption declined to a significant extent. Economic life was completely dislocated.

However, the western thrust and empire expansion of rulers of Burma had been a cause of security concern for the eastern border of British India. This concern had led to the first Anglo-Burmese war which led to the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 and the withdrawal of Burmese forces from Assam, Manipur and Cachar.

Accordingly, Gambhir Singh, son of Bhagyachandra, who fought against the Burmese along with the British, was recognized as the “Rajah” of Manipur. British had no territorial ambition in Manipur. Rather, the colonial government wanted Manipur to remain as an independent country as a buffer between Burma and British India *a la* Nepal Bhutan and Sikkim along the Himalayas. A stable and strong Manipur was, thus, viewed to be of British interest.

Following the installation of Gambhir Singh in the throne as per the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 series of expeditions were carried out in the surrounding hills in order to subjugate the hill tribes and realize tributes from them for the restoration of the devastated economy. The western thrust of Manipur was extended to Jiribam, a small valley lying between Cachar and Manipur, which was included into the kingdom in the year 1833 and the Jiri river became the boundary line between Assam and Manipur (Aitchison, 1931: 196).

Although Manipur regained her independence but her strategic geo-political importance brought her under the surveillance of the British colonial government. Manipur levy under the British generals stationed at Imphal till 1835 and then on its withdrawal the office of the Political Agent had been created to look after the British interest in Manipur and to deal with the security concerns of the eastern frontier of British India.

The office of the Political Agent in Manipur, avowedly as subordinate to the office of the king, had drawn into the palace politics due to internal squabbles among the princes for power leading to the widening of the political space for the British to intervene in the internal affairs of Manipur. The power-centered palace politics had degenerated to such an extent that the stability of the country was threatened due to frequent coup and re-coup. It was, indeed, an irony that while palace politics had been the source of political destabilization, the office of the Political Agent worked for its restoration. In the process, the office of the Political Agent became the real centre of power by early 1840s. Competition among the princes for getting the support of the British in one's favour had led to gradual acceptance of the recognition of the colonial government as the single most important yardstick for the claim of the throne. British took this opportunity to increasingly dictate terms to the rulers of Manipur. British high-handedness was once challenged in 1891 only to bring Manipur under

direct control of the colonial government. Although Manipur was never formally annexed to British India, since 1891 it was virtually ruled by the British in the name of the king, as he was made completely dependent not only for the territorial security of the country but also for the political security of his office as well, till the lapse of the paramountcy in 1947.

The Anglo-Manipur war of 1891 subjected the office of the king conditional to the recognition by the British government. The king could remain in power as long as British want him. The succession to the throne along the line of primogeniture was made conditional to the recognition by the British. It was made obligatory for the king to obey all the “orders” of the “British Government” (Aitchison, 1931: 198; Sanajaoba, 1993: 309). Thus, Manipur had effectively lost its independence in 1891. The sovereignty of the Monarchy was no more in vague after the acceptance of the *Sanad* of 1891.

The *Sanad* was granted to a minor boy, Chura Chand Singh, who was only 5 years old, on September 18, 1891. He was the great grandson of Maharaja Nara Singh and the last of five brothers. This caused some resentment among the people of Manipur, especially among the Rajkumars (sons of Rajas) as he was appointed independently by breaking the traditional line of primogeniture. During his minority period, the whole administration was vested in the hands of the Superintendent of the State and the Political Agent, who of course was only one person with two separate posts and these posts were held by Major H. St. P. Maxwell. The Raja was handed over the administration of the state on May 15, 1907, when he attained the age of fifteen. But the Raja would be assisted by a Durbar in managing the affairs of the state in accordance with a ‘Set of Rules’ called the ‘Rules for the Management of the Manipur State’ sanctioned by the Government of India. The Raja would be the President of the Durbar and the post of Vice-president would be held by a gazetted officer of the Eastern Bengal and Assam Government (Singh, 1989: 1-9).

During the period between 1891 and 1907 Manipur was under the direct control of the British. A number of significant changes had been made during this period under the leadership of Maxwell, the Political Agent and the Superintendent of the State.

The land system underwent a major change. Under the feudal era the

land belonged to the king and he distributed the land according to his wishes. The British introduced the Rayatwari system of land holding. Accordingly, a new patta system was introduced, according to which, anyone having a claim on land after 1892 was to obtain a patta from the government. These patta holders were given inheritable and transferable rights on their land. A uniform land tax of Rs. 5 per pari was realized. Taking advantage of the new land system, the nobles and influential people began to apply for independent lands on a mass scale. The new government issued pattas for as many as 14,000 paris in 1892-93 only and in the next year 24,887 paris were issued. This process led to the concentration of land in the hands of few like the rural rich, members of the Durbar, salaried bureaucrats and other employees of the government. Though the Durbar passed a resolution in 1924 prohibiting any person from acquiring more than 10 paris of land, there is little doubt that it hardly had any effect (Singh, 1998: 49-55).

British abolished the age-old tradition of *lallup* in April, 1892. Over the years the system of *lallup* had developed into an oppressive system for the poor. As noted earlier the Brahmins and other influential persons were exempted from this feudal service. The system of *lallup* was not codified and arbitrarily executed by the king. Under such circumstances the favourites of the king never attended to such service. The nobles and the rich people also started escaping by paying fines. As such the system had become an exploitative system for the poor. The replacement of the system by house tax of Rs. 2 per annum in the valley and Rs. 3 in the hills (Singh, 1998: 50) had peoples' support.

Besides *lallup*, British had also abolished *pothang* in June, 1913. As the custom was often misused by the nobles and had become a means of exploitation of the people in remote villages by the state official, there were a number of anti-*pothang* revolts. British considered this custom to be derogatory and hence abolished it. Instead the land tax was increased from Rs. 5 to Rs. 5.15 per pari (Singh, 1998: 54). In fact, this reform was in favour of the people rather than the king and the nobility.

Although Manipur was not formally annexed to British India, her economy was incorporated into the colonial framework. Forces of the colonial economy were brought in through the practice of free trade. Manipur being extremely underdeveloped compared to British India, the backwash effects

of free trade had swayed her in no time. Except the fertile land, Manipur hardly had anything to boast off. In no time, the lucrative rice trade went into the hands of the comprador Marwaris who entered Manipur along with the British. The British commercial interest in rice trade of Manipur had threatened her food security and caused the historic *Nupi Lan* (women's war) in 1939 about which we shall talk later. Not only the idyllic self-sufficiency was broken, the traditional crafts and livelihoods also faced the colonial onslaughts. The traditional weaving, salt making, weapon making and pottery were gradually washed out on the face of competition from goods brought by the Marwari businessmen [Parratt (J), 2005: 13].

British followed a dual policy in conducting the administration of Manipur. While the Imphal valley was governed in the name of the king involving the traditional nobles, hills were exclusively administered by the British through the *lambus*. The Vice-president of the Durbar, a British officer, was directly responsible for the administration of the hills. King had virtually no say in the affairs of the hill administration (Devi, 2000: 171-172; Lal Dena, 1990: 80-82). In fact the integration of the people of the neighbouring hills with the people of the valley had been halted due to the British isolationist policy towards the hill tribes of Manipur. As the hill tribes were fiercely freedom loving people, British followed a policy of minimal administration and inculcation of royalty through proselytism. In fact, immediately after British took over the rein in Manipur in 1891, William Pettigrew, a Baptist missionary, was invited to work among the Thangkuls in 1894 [Constantine, 1981: 246-247; Lal Dena, 1990: 105-107; Parratt (J), 2005: 61-62]. While the isolationist policy was followed for the hill tribes vis-à-vis the Meiteis, the similar policy was also followed for the Meiteis vis-à-vis the mainland India. To insulate the strategic eastern border, British introduced the Inner Line and prohibited the free movements of the British subjects from the mainland. Indeed, British were largely successful in isolating Manipur from the political awakening that was taking place in the mainland India.

A refined judicial system was introduced during the British period. The old age Cheirap and Muslim courts were retained. In villages, the *Singlups* were replaced by Panchayat courts. In the capital, Imphal, one Town Panchayat Court was established. The Durbar was, however, the highest court of appeal. There were also two British courts and it tried cases of the Europeans, British Indian subjects and hill tribes. However, the confirmation

of the Chief Commissioner of Assam was required for severe punishments like death sentence, transportation of life and imprisonment for more than seven years (Singh, 1989: 5-6; Singh, 1998: 40-41; Singh, 2002: 98-100).

At the fag end of the monarchy in Manipur, kings lost much of their authority and independence to the British. The role of the king was virtually restricted to the management of society while British handled the state revenue and other economic and business affairs. As a result, sources of revenue were dried up for the king. In fact, king's expenditure from the state exchequer was controlled by the British.

2. Political Awakening and the Rise of Meitei Nationalism

Although the political renaissance in Manipur is supposed to have started with the establishment of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha (NHMM) in 1934, the political mobilization of the masses actually began about 30 years before with the first *Nupi Lan* in 1904. The first (1904) and second (1939) *Nupi Lan* were directed against the British administration in Manipur. The first *Nupi Lan* might be seen as the feeble effort of the traditional nobles particularly the Rajkumars to mobilize the people against the colonial ruler. The sabotage was believed to have been instigated by the Rajkumars, who were discontented a lot. They were against the decision of the British to nominate young Churachand as the heir. On the other hand the villagers no longer cultivated their lands on rack-renting terms as it was easier to take up new lands under the new patta system. They were all along disloyal to the British government which did not permit them to enslave and ill-treat the poorer inhabitants and when in jail they were treated at par with other convicts (Singh, 2006: 41-53; Singh, 1998: 75-81; Singh, 1990: 118-125, 2002: 109-118).

Another implication of the first *Nupi Lan* had been the emergence of the sense of unity. This was an incident where the interest of some of the Rajkumars coincided with the interest of the ordinary people. The revolt had tremendous potential to give birth anti-colonial freedom movement but failed to assume that character because of the inherent convergence of interests of the monarchy and the colonial British in Manipur.

Be that as it may, the first half of the 20th century had been the most rewarding for the people of Manipur. Political awakening coupled with cultural renaissance had revolutionized the age-old social thinking as the

educated elites became increasingly aware of the happenings around the world and simultaneously started movements to create a niche for themselves. The all round movements of these elites had transformed the Meitei society from tradition to modernity. The king and the Rajkumars initially encouraged and played a crucial role in this socio-political transformation. The king himself was the first president of the NHMM established in 1934. Initially the NHMM acted as a socio-cultural body and wished to work for the betterment of the Manipuri society. But in no time, the organization dropped the Hindu label and began to press for political demands. The Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha (NMM) demanded for: (i) the creation of a Legislative Body, (ii) release of Rani Gaidinliu, (iii) keeping the hills under State Administration, (iv) dissolving the Brahma Sabha, (v) abolition of various socio-religious impositions (Singh, 1989: 75-77). The process of politicization received a tremendous boost following the second *Nupi Lan* that took place during 1939.

The second *Nupi Lan* may be seen as the revolt of the Meitei women against the colonial commercial interest of the British who allowed unrestricted export of rice from Manipur leading to the gradual building up of unprecedented food crisis for the people of the country. The increase in export over the years had pushed up the domestic price of rice and the Marwari mill owners were being benefited at the cost of ordinary people of Manipur. The increasing demand-supply gap and consequent persistent rise in price of rice had become a major concern of the ordinary people. By the end of 1939, the price of rice had become double the normal price. In spite of growing peoples' concern, the administration failed to stop export of rice. The specter of famine was looming large while the Marwaris in connivance with the British officials continued to export rice from Manipur. The burden of the situation fell directly on the shoulder of the women who had to arrange two square meals for their family. The women in the marketplace took up the cause and demanded immediate ban on rice export. From the State Durbar to rice mills, they rallied everywhere to prevent the impending food crisis. Unlike the first *Nupi Lan*, this time the women became victorious as they could force the administration to stop the export of rice (For details, Singh, 2006; Singh, 1990: 145-149, 1992: 70-92, 2002: 137-144).

The political fall out of the second *Nupi Lan* was very significant. The

movement had cemented peoples' unity which had accelerated the formation of political party outside the NMM. Irabot, the social reformer cum politician, who played the pivotal role in the renaissance and political awakening of Manipur, *a la* Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in India's freedom struggle, stood firmly behind the second *Nupi Lan* and guided it to the victory. He was a founder member of the NHMM and became the President of the NMM in 1937 and played the key role in directing the organization to launch anti-colonial as well as anti-feudal political movements. His quest for political freedom led him to form the Manipur Praja Sanmeloni in 1940 in order to mobilize the masses in support of the second *Nupi Lan* as the majority members of the NMM wanted to avoid confrontation with the administration on this issue. However, before the Manipur Praja Sanmeloni took off, Irabot was arrested and imprisoned for three years. While he was allowed to enter into Manipur in 1946, he established another party, viz., the Manipur Praja Mandal (MPM). Later on the Manipur Praja Sangha (MPS) was established combining the Manipur Praja Sanmeloni and the MPM. While the MPS was an urban based organization, Irabot also became the president of the Manipur Krishi Sanmeloni in 1946 and rechristened it as the Manipur Krishak Sabha (MKS). Both the MPS and MKS played a very important role in the subsequent political development of Manipur (Singh, 1989; Singh, 2002: 147-169). His people oriented politics ultimately drove him to embrace communist ideas while he was in jail in Sylhet. Thus, Irabot introduced the communist political trend in Manipur politics.

In 1946 while it was becoming increasingly clear that British is going to leave India, the anti-communist liberal members of the NMM formed the Manipur State Congress (MSC) and kept Irabot out of this new organization. Although the MSC was independent of the Indian National Congress (INC) initially, but it worked in tandem with the INC and ultimately got itself affiliated to it following the merger of Manipur with India.

Another political party, viz., the Praja Santi Sabha (PSS), was established in 1948 by the King and his close associates to protect the interest of the monarchy.

Thus, three diametrically opposite political camps evolved in Manipur. Communists at one extreme who wanted to bring a radical change in the

Manipuri society and the PSS on the other who supported orthodoxy and status quo. In between them was the MSC who were liberal and compromising.

Besides political awakening, socio-religious movements also took root in Manipur during the first half of the 20th century. Two different movements, viz., *Sanamahi* movement and sanskritization movement, were resurfaced and fiercely debated. While the *Sanamahi* movement had been the manifestation of religious backlash against the degenerated-Brahmin-dominated-Hinduism and wanted to revert back to traditional belief system, the sanskritisation movement was basically an effort to reform it. The *Sanamahi* movement, propounded by Naorem Phullo, although failed to draw immediate attention of the educated Meitei elites, do provide the cultural alternative to Hinduism and had become instrumental in the policy of cultural disengagement practiced and propagated by the regional political ideologues. On the contrary, the sanskritization movement led by Pandit Atombabu Sharma advocated for socio-religious reform to rectify the evil practices of Hinduism. Atombabu tried to establish that the Meitei society has been a part and parcel of the grand Hindu tradition evolved through centuries right from the age of the Mahabharata. He translated many Hindu scriptures including Bhagabad Gita, Rig Veda, Gita Gobinda and Srimad Bhagavata. Atombabu, one of the leading social reformers of Manipur, worked tirelessly for the cultural integration of the Meiteis with the Indian heritage. Besides these two views, Irabot also put forward his views on cultural traits of the society which would provide social stability. He believed that strict adherence to Vashnavite philosophy could only resolve the *Mangba-Sengba* problem (Singh, 1998: 120-122).

The educated elites also started taking up literary activities to mobilize the masses and disseminate ideas and information to people. As early as 1922, Irabot edited the first Manipuri journal named *Meitei Chanu* (Kabui, 1990: 159). Two newspapers (*Deinik Manipur Patrika* and *Manipur Matam*) and two journals (*Yakairol*, a quarterly journal and *Lalit Manjuri Patrika*, a monthly journal) were brought out during 1930 and 1940. Other literary activities like theatre plays were also encouraged. They also established schools at private initiatives in order to encourage higher education and female education. Churachand High School and Tombisana High School were established in 1932-33 at the initiative of Dr. Lairen

Singh, Gopal Singh and K. Amubi Singh. One of the significant achievements was the establishment of Dhana Manjuri College in the year 1946 (Singh, 1998: 118-122).

3. Political Dynamics of Transition to Democracy and Merger

With political awakening started taking the root, competitive politics between the communist and congress parties led to the popularization of the demand for representative democracy based on universal adult franchise. The office of the king would act as the titular head of the country while the elected representative would actually rule. The MSC, MPS and MKS demanded this political transformation *a la* the INC in India. The king was reluctant to give in to this demand initially for obvious reason [Parratt (J), 2005: 97; Singh, 2002: 175-176]. However, he had to finally agree to switch over to democratic political framework as the British also advised him in favour of this change. Accordingly, a constitutional making body was constituted and the draft constitution was adopted in 1947. The members of the MSC played the key role in drafting the constitution as the MPS and MKS had boycotted the election of the constitutional making committee.

Meanwhile, in view of imminent departure of the Raj, two agreements were signed between the Governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydari and the Maharaja as well as the Members of the Manipur State Durbar. It was agreed that an Interim Council be formed without delay in order to adjust with the new political environment arising out of the departure of the Raj. As a result the implementation of newly adopted constitution was delayed by one year.

It may not be out of place to note that these two agreements along with the Standstill Agreement and the Instrument of Accession signed on August 11, 1947, just before Independence, have allowed the political status of Manipur vis-à-vis British India to continue even after the lapse of the paramountcy. It may be emphasized here that all these agreements, having enormous polemic importance at present, had been signed between the British and the king of Manipur well before the Independence of India.

However, the Independence and the Interim Council could not bring political stability in the state. Widespread agitation for the establishment of a full responsible government had disturbed the peace and tranquility in the state. With no option left, the Chief Minister of the Interim Council, M. K.

Priyobrata Singh made an official announcement on November 23, 1947 that a full responsible government would be established by April, 1948 (Singh, 2002: 186).

The much awaited election to the first Manipur State Assembly began on June 11, 1948 and continued upto July 27, 1948. Results were announced in batches with the final list coming on August 20, 1948 (Singh, 1989: 294).

No party could secure an absolute majority. While the MSC emerged as the single largest party securing 14 seats out of 53, MKS won 5, PSS won 12, Manipur Socialist Party (MSP) won 3, and independents from hill areas won 18 (Kabui, 1990: 168). One member was nominated by the king. Through an unexpected post poll alliance between the royalists and communists, the PSS formed the ministry under the leadership of Maharajkumar Priyobrata Singh with the support from the members from the hill areas on October 18, 1948. This apparent unthinkable political chemistry between the PSS and MKS might have been the result of hostility between Irabot and the leaders of the MSC. Being sidelined politically in spite of emerging as a single largest party, the leaders of the MSC tilted towards the INC and demanded the merger of Manipur with India (Singh, 1995: 108-112).

In fact the Meitei polity was sharply divided into two equal camps on the question of merger. The royalists (PSS) and the communists (MKS) were opposed to merger while the liberals (MSC) and socialists (MSP) proposed it. However, the convergence of approach between the royalists and the communists was due to altogether different reasons. The royalists opposed merger because it would dislodge them from power and privilege and hence they would be benefited if status quo was maintained. The communists opposed the merger as they were guided by the Leninist principle of right to self-determination of the nations. People in the hills of Manipur, however, were not politically organized as the political parties concentrated only in the valley could hardly have any influence over them.

However, there was a congruence of opinion across the political spectrum on the issue of the political status of Manipur in Indian Union. All the political parties in Manipur opposed to the idea of forming Purbachal Pradesh combining the territories of Tripura, Cachar and Manipur as suggested by the leaders of the INC. Political elites of Manipur could visualize that the

Meiteis would become minority in such an arrangement and the Bengalis of Cachar and Tripura would dominate the political space. The ethno-cultural identity of the Meiteis would be at stake in case Manipur is combined with Cachar and Tripura. This anti-Purbachal movement had led to the articulation of Meitei community interest and even cemented the inter-community bonds across the plains and the hills.

There was a widespread agitation by the political parties against the Purbachal proposal. So far the state authorities had only listened to the claims forwarded and no drastic actions had been taken upon the agitators. But when Irabot, on behalf of the MKS and MPS, had called a meeting on September 21, 1948 at Manipur Dramatic Union (MDU) Hall to protest the Purbachal proposal, matters changed drastically. On the said day of the meeting, an unfortunate incident happened at Pungdombam which led to subversive actions of the police against the members of the sabha. Arrest warrant was issued against Irabot, who was already a member of the Assembly from Utlou constituency, thus preventing him from attending the session of the State Assembly. The MKS and MPS were declared unlawful organizations. Following this declaration, Irabot and his close associates had gone across the border in Burma (Myanmar) and tried to forward the cause of communist goal from there by forming the Red Guards (Singh, 1989: 311-326). Although, Irabot could not do much from underground and died in 1951 in Burma hideout, the legacy that he created had been reinvented later by the Meithei youths in their fight against deprivation and injustice.

After Irabot's departure from Manipur, the anti-Purbachal movement lost its momentum and subsided as the INC perceived it to be an unrealizable goal. Instead of the Purbachal project, the Union Government of India wanted, like the other Indian princely states under the Standstill and Instrument of Accession treaties, Manipur to merge with India. In fact Manipur had two options left: first, completely merge with India and become a part of the Indian federation; second, stay as a sovereign country under the indirect rule of the Indian state *a la* colonial-feudal arrangement which was institutionalized through the Standstill Agreement and the Instrument of Accession. In fact, the Instrument of Accession along with the appointment of the Dewan, in whose hands rested the whole administrative power of the state, had virtually made the second option meaningless.

Moreover, as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the then Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of India, wanted to integrate all the princely Indian states with the Indian Union, an indirect pressure had been created upon the Maharaja of Manipur to sign the merger agreement. Sri Prakasa, the then Governor of Assam, and his advisor, N. K. Rustomji, translated Patel's wish into reality and finally made Bodhachandra, the Maharaja of Manipur, to sign the Merger Agreement on September 21, 1949.

On October 15, 1949 at 9 am the ceremony of Integration of Manipur state was performed at Assam Rifles ground, Imphal. With this, the rule of the Maharaja ended and the Manipur State Council and the Assembly were later dissolved with effect from October 15, 1949. Manipur, thus, became a province ruled by a Chief Commissioner under the category of Part 'C' State. The Dewan, Major General Rawal Amar Singh, was appointed as the Chief Commissioner.

4. Demand for Statehood and Growth of Nationalism

Manipur experienced very fast political change during the last fifteen years of the first half of the 20th century. From 1934, the year of the establishment of the NHMM, to 1949, the year of the merger, within these 15 years, sweeping political developments had taken place in Manipur. The pace of political awakening had, indeed, been lightening with the advent of the World War II (1939-45), penetration of the Azad Hind Fauz into the Valley under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose, adoption of constitution, introduction of Legislative Assembly, transformation of the office of the king from monarchy to the titular head of the state, ideological polemics among the communists, socialists, royalists and liberals and withdrawal of British from the Indian sub-continent. To be precise, the change was astounding and dumb-founding and all the parameters were not under the control of the people of Manipur. Events occurred even before national consensus was built around them. There was hardly any scope for the people to exercise their choice. In fact, the political choices were extremely limited due to fluid and volatile nature of political environment arising out of the transfer of power.

5. From Part 'C' State to Union Territory

Following the signing of the Merger Agreement, Manipur State Assembly,

formed only in 1948, was dissolved, the state was made a Chief Commissioner's Province, and the power was transferred to the Chief Commissioner, Major General Rawal Amar Singh, who was selected by the Government of India. The Chief Commissioner was empowered to rule without any accountability to the people of the State. Thus, unfortunately, Manipur experienced a negative political change from peoples' government to a bureaucratic government. The appointment of an army Major General as the Dewan and subsequently as the Chief Commissioner was an obvious indication of the security concern of the Indian state to her north-eastern border. Perhaps, the activities of Irabot Singh, the MKS and MPS as well as the emergence of communist China and strengthening of Burmese Communist Party during that time - all these had been factored into while deciding the political fate of post-merger Manipur by the leaders of the Indian state.

The Part 'C' status of Manipur had become the rallying point for the political forces cutting across fences. The political demand for responsible government or statehood has helped in galvanizing the people in the valley in particular into a strong nationality. Parties across the political ideologies have mobilized the masses in support of this demand. The movement provided a common political space where people forged a strong bonding across the social strata, religious hierarchy and economic status. The movement started in 1950 and continued till the statehood is achieved in 1972. The 22 years long political agitation for statehood in Manipur is itself a unique event in the political history of modern India.

The Manipur National Union (MNU) was formed, perhaps, in 1950, to mobilize the people of the state in support of the demand for statehood. It may not be out of place to point out the fact that the word "national" had been used explicitly for the first time to mean a political organization. Although the Chief Commissioner, under the severe pressure from the political parties, had constituted the Advisory Council on October 9, 1950, under his presidentship, the formation of the toothless body, however, could not satisfy the political ambition of the people of Manipur. The representatives of the MSC had resigned on February 6, 1951, and the party called for non-cooperation with the Chief Commissioner and observed February 25, 1951 as the Anti-Chief Commissioner's Regime Day. The MSP and PSS joined hands to demand for the establishment of an Advisory

Council with executive power. Although the MKS, MPS and all types of activities by the communists were banned in 1948, the influence of the communists could not be eliminated. Members of the communist organizations went underground but were politically very active. Perhaps, the MNU had the back up from the communist activists. The administration of the Chief Commissioner was up against the communists who had swept over the state in early 1950s. They used cyclostyled bulletins and printed leaflets for mobilizing the masses in their fight against the repression of the government and in favour of the establishment of responsible government. They also criticized the government for converting Manipur into a police state. They also threatened the people of dire consequences if they help the police. In the meantime, the police in collaboration with the Assam Rifles (AR) and Manipur Rifles (MR) conducted operations and raided many villages day after day in search of communist activists and captured many ring leaders. They were tried in July, 1951 and many of them were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment varying from 3 to 14 years (Singh, 1989: 377-401). After this trial the communist activities had subsided. Following the death of Irabot in September 1951, the communist inspiration gradually died down only to resurface in other forms to fight against injustice, perceived or real, meted out to Manipur during the post-merger era.

Alongside the communists, the MNU was also very active during the early 1950s. They were mobilizing the people in support of the establishment of a responsible government in Manipur. The idea of territorial secession and political independence of Manipur was rooted in the MNU movement. It preached for a trade off between political independence and establishment of responsible government. The movement was, however, crushed with the arrest of the top leadership of the MNU (Singh, 2002: 200-201).

Besides communists and the MNU, both the MSC and MSP were also demanding for the establishment of representative government. When the communists and the MNU became weak, the baton of the movement passed over to them. On the face of political opposition against the Part 'C' state, political parties participated in the 1952 general election. Out of 30 seats, Congress won 10, Socialists 1, Communists 2 and Independents won 17 (Singh, 1997: 8). Based on the election results, the Advisory Council was reconstituted in 1952 with 4 members from Congress and 1 independent.

The MSP which won only one seat could not find a place in the Council.

However, the MSP took up the cudgel of the popular demand for responsible government to strengthen its support base and began to mobilize the masses. Intense political agitations had been organized throughout 1953-55 to rally the people of Manipur by way of blocking roads, organizing strikes, gheraoing the members of the Advisory Council, organizing mass meeting, forcing the closure of markets, asking people not to pay taxes, calling upon people not to cooperate with the administration, asking the hill people to boycott taxes and registering the students, women, youths, farmers and professionals to join the movements. Unprecedented political mobilization across the hills and plains united the people and strengthened the intercommunity bonds. At times and places, the administration applied force to suppress the movement which had led the police to open fire on the unarmed agitators. Many people became the victims of state repression. Many leaders of the movement were arrested under the Preventive Detention Act. This political mobilization against the Indian state for the perceived social justice had made way to the growth of Meitei nationalism.

It was this intense political movement which perhaps made Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India, to disagree with the recommendation of the first State Reorganization Commission, 1953 (SRC), submitted in 1955, for merger of Manipur along with Tripura into Assam. In spite of strong plea from all the political parties, the recommendation of the SRC deeply hurt the sentiments of the people of Manipur. Even the MSC sent SOS to the Prime Minister to take measures to protect the political and cultural identity of Manipur. While the SRC report was placed in the parliament in 1956, Jawaharlal Nehru firmly advocated in favour of maintaining separate identity of both Manipur and Tripura. As a result, Part 'C' states were converted into Union Territory. Manipur also graduated from a Part 'C' State to a Union Territory with a provision for elected Territorial Council in 1956 (Singh, 2000: 34-35; Singh, 2002: 208-213).

6. From Union Territory to Statehood

The election to the 30 member Territorial Council was held in 1957 along with the general parliament election. The result exhibited a fast politicization of the people of Manipur cutting across the plains and the hills. Out of 30 seats, Congress won 12, Socialists 6, Communists 4 and Independents won 8 (Singh, 1997: 9). Political parties could reap the dividend at the cost of

the independents. The intense political mobilization by the communists and socialists in favour of the responsible government expanded their sphere of influence significantly. The socialists made a gain of 19 per cent in terms of their share of the total votes polled compared to 1952 election. Similarly the communists gained by 8 per cent and congress by 1 per cent. However, the independents lost by 22 per cent.

However, the euphoria of Territorial Council soon died down as it was realized that it was no better than the earlier Advisory Council. The members of the Territorial Council, although duly elected, had no real power and had to act virtually as the appendage of the Chief Commissioner. The second phase of the movement for responsible government and statehood began with added vigour and enthusiasm since the beginning of 1960. The socialists and communists jointly formed the Assembly Demand Co-ordination Committee (ADCC) on March 26, 1960. With the formation of ADCC, a political platform, mass base of the movement, cutting across political identities, had expanded to a large extent. The ADCC soon established frontal organizations like the Manipur Youth Assembly Demand Committee (MYADC) and Women's Assembly Demand Committee (WADC). Series of political programmes like road blockade, closure of markets, boycotting government office, boycotting schools, non-cooperation with the government administration, disrupting communication channels, strikes, bandhs, etc were undertaken to achieve the political goal of attaining statehood. In order to counter these programmes the administration of the Chief Commissioner used repressive measures like the imposition of Section 144 Cr.P.C., curfew, lathicharge, firing and arrest (Snahal, 1988: 177-179). Cycles of protests and violence, actions and repressions, claims and denials, commotions and sanity reverberated the political air of Manipur throughout the 1960s. The feeling of deprivation was so intense that revival of the pre-merger representative assembly was sought from certain quarters as an alternative to the denial of the responsible government. Socialists, the then parliamentary opposition, had made it a national issue and brought the matter to the notice of the Indian Parliament for redress. The MSC also drawn the attention of the central leadership and urged for statehood. It was, perhaps, due to egoistic approach of the national ruling elites, over estimation of security threats arising out of the activities of the communists and socialists in Manipur, or uncritical dependence of the leadership of the INC

upon the Assam Pradesh Congress, who were lobbying for the administrative merger of Manipur with Assam, that the legitimate demand of the people of Manipur was not acceded to. The social psychology of the people of Manipur was reflected in the 1962 election. Out of 30 seats in the Territorial Council, Congress won 15, Socialists 5 and independents 10 (Singh, 1997: 10). As far as the percentage share of votes is concerned, both Congress, and the socialists and communists combined together had received 29 per cent each. It appears that the rising Sino-Indian animosity over the Chinese occupation of Tibet had cast a doom spell upon the communists in Manipur which led to the shrinking of their support bases in 1962 election.

However, under the severe political unrest, Government of India passed the Union Territories Act, 1963. Following this Act, the Territorial Council of Manipur was converted into the Manipur Territorial Assembly with a Council of Ministers on July 1, 1963 (Singh, 2000: 35).

Meanwhile, to quell the “Naga-armed-movement-for-secession” led by Naga National Council (NNC) under the leadership of Phizo that began immediately after the Independence, which will be discussed at length in the next section, the Government of India conferred statehood to the Nagas of Nagahills in 1963. This conferment of statehood to the Nagas and the denial of the same to the Meiteis had snowballed bitter criticism against the Indian state. The perspective of the Indian state in this regard remained mystic to the perception of the people of Manipur. There had been a deep sense of deprivation and feeling of being discriminated permeated in the psyche of the people of Manipur. The national pride of the Meities was severely hurt. It was, indeed, a baffling question as to Why Manipur was denied statehood in spite of the fact that the process of state formation was completed here long before it got merged with the Indian Union? While the Nagas, without any history of state formation, were conferred a state, why the Meiteis were denied of the same? This arbitrary decision of the Indian state was beyond the comprehension of any logic and the people of Manipur were shocked and dumbfounded. It may be pointed out that the Meiteis did not oppose conferring of the statehood to the Nagas, but what baffled them as to why do the Indian state deny their claim?

Let us digress a bit here to look into contemporary perspectives of the Indian state that had denied the statehood to Manipur. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, the security concern of the Indian state about her eastern border

arising out of communist revolution in China, political influence of Irabot and Communist Party upon the people of Manipur, Chinese occupation of Tibet, perceived nexus between the communists of Manipur and Burma, and the propagation of the communist ideology of right to self determination and their support for secession of Manipur, had been the overriding considerations for not granting the statehood to Manipur. Secondly, there was a strong opinion at the centre against the creation of unviable states. The proposal for the creation of Purbachal including Manipur, Cachar and Tripura floated by the central congress leadership corroborates this hypothesis. Thirdly, as the socialists had a strong presence in Manipur and spearheading the statehood demand movement, according the same to Manipur might be seen as the political defeat for the congress.

Be that as it may, the intensity of the movement came down following the Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962 and Indo-Pak war of 1965. Nationalists could mould the political discourse in their favour accusing the neighbouring countries for destabilizing the Indian Union. As a result, communists and socialists were virtually routed in 1967 election while the nationalists and *primordialists*, protagonists of ethno-social identities, could fare much better.

The movement was revived again in 1968. Socialists and communists formed the “All Manipur Statehood Demand Committee” on February 29, 1968, to intensify the movement for the statehood. They organized political conferences, public meetings demonstrations, etc. to mobilize the people. The Manipur Congress also organized political conferences. They submitted memorandum to the Prime Minister and urged the centre to take bold decisions. They launched ‘dharna’ and hunger strike as a part of their action and even carried out the same in Delhi. With the Central Government turning a deaf ear to all these demonstrations, all the political parties decided to form a common platform. Accordingly, the “All Parties Statehood Demand Coordinating Body” (henceforth referred as Body) was formed on April 26, 1970.

A mighty democratic movement was launched under the Body. The leadership of the Body had adopted a strategy of disengagement with the Indian democratic framework until the goal is achieved. Accordingly, besides organizing political programmes like bandh, hartal, road blockade, rally, mass meeting, etc., the Body also called for the withdrawal of the elected members

of different democratic institutions like Municipal Boards, Town Committees, Assembly and Parliament.

Although democratic programmes had been the principal form of the statehood movement, the social frustration arising out of the refusal by the central government to pay any heed to the demand for statehood, had strengthened the alternative thoughts which advocated to go the Naga-way for achieving the goal. The left-wing extremism within the movement had led to the formation of United National Liberation Front (UNLF) in 1964.

While the depth and expanse of the movement for statehood was spreading fast, the security perception of the Indian state about the region had also undergone a sea change. The Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962 and Indo-Pak war of 1965 coupled with the cold war matrix, India was literally cordoned off by the USA-China-Pakistan axis. The East Pakistan had become the launching pad for the anti-India subversive activities. Indian intelligence had warned that in the event of simultaneous thrust from China and Pakistan, the chicken's neck might be disconnected and it would really be a difficult task for India to hold the north eastern region (Das, 2002).

The internal security environment of the region had drastically worsened further with the formation of Mizo National Front (MNF), under the leadership of Laldenga, to launch a secessionist movement in 1966. Thus, the rising grievances of the different communities within the region were easily utilized by the destabilizing forces across the border to worsen the security environment in India's north eastern frontier.

To deal with these dual security challenges, Government of India, under the leadership of Indira Gandhi, overhauled the Nehruvian perspective of north east and came out with a more accommodative policy framework. The North Eastern Areas (Re-organization) Bill which was passed in 1971 and officially enforced in January, 1972, granted the statehood to Manipur and Tripura as well as conferred the status of Union Territory to Arunahal Pradesh and Mizoram. Thus, after 23 years of merger, Manipur became a full-fledged state on January 21, 1972, which was inaugurated by Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, and in the process shaped and consolidated the idea of Meitei nationalism.

The Meitei nationalism has grown through mobilizing the people against

the Indian state. A 23 year long agitation for statehood had galvanized the sense of oneness and a strong “we” feeling in them. The binary relation between “we” and ‘they”, i.e., “we” fight for justice against “them”, help in cementing the social bond among the elements of “we” on the one hand and a sense of distrust between “we” and “they” on the other. The accommodation of Meitei aspiration within the larger Indian nationalism was not easy. The present accommodation is rather hard earned. While there was widespread demand for a better accommodation, Meiteis were denied for long. This denial is standing on the way of nation-building at present. The accumulated grievances for being discriminated had led to the articulation of demand for secession by some quarters. In fact, the demand for secession is an extreme expression of wounded nationalism. The issues of militancy, insurgency, regionalism, fringe psychology and disengaging-with-mainland-syndrome all are related to this wounded nationalist feeling.

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Gurudas Das & K. Gyanendra Singh

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Colonialism and Ethnography: In Search of an Alternative Mode of Representation*

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...the anthropological machine which- in its two variants, ancient and modern- is at work in our culture. In so far as the production of man through the opposition man/animal, human/inhuman, is at stake here, the machine necessarily functions by means of an exclusion (which is always already a capturing) and an inclusion (which is always already an exclusion).

Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, 2004:37

Ethnography, as we know, is a product of colonial mode of knowledge production that sees the non-Western, colonized people through the Western lens. Following the field-study practice, colonial anthropologists and administrators have recorded ethnographic data thereby textualising pre-literate or in anthropological language “primitive societies.” Ethnography is contested on the ground that none of the activities of field study practice: observing, watching, listening and recording ways of life is a neutral, value-free act, nor does it exist beyond the assumptions of the discourse of the observer’s own culture. Not even the knowledge that is produced by the practice is value-free because *what* is known depends on *how* it is known.

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Kailash C. Baral

How something is known is not of course free from methodological critique. The methodological critique of ethnography is complex as different theoretical perspectives with different objectives set the terms of the critique for our understanding of the world, the cultural and historical narratives in which the fragile and meaningful subjectivities are formed, deformed and reformed. If ethnography considers face-to-face mode of interaction, on the one hand, is the right way to collect information thereby constructing a social life and crediting ordinary people as contributors to an understanding of social institutions, on the other hand, elitist discourses either undermine such a method or question its subjective diversity. One such critique of face-to-face interaction is encompassing the “backstages” method of constructing various social groups and their public encounters either abstracting or rationalizing the categories thus making an opportunistic reification of social life. Identifying the complex relationship between colonial knowledge in which the colonised body becomes ethnographic text and colonial history in which the empire subsumes and subordinates all other considerations, the present paper would make an attempt to address the postcolonial need for an alternative mode of representation that is theory sensitive; takes into account our present knowledge practice while exploring some nineteenth century approach to the production of ethnographic texts about some tribes of North-East (NE) in order to examine “the anthropological machine” that valorizes “absolute difference” on the one hand, and, on the other, the need for an alternative mode of representation that forces us to rethink not only about the mode but, as I propose, for producing a metatheory to take on the West as well as acknowledging the fact that we need a robust “postcolonial knowledge archive.”

Ethnography and Otherness

Citing Oscar Wilde that “Most people are other people” (2006:xv) in the preface to his work *Identity and Violence: the Illusion of Destiny*, Amartya Sen underlines an interesting point on *difference*. In knowing the otherness of “other people” whatever designations they may carry under ethnic, racial and cultural categories, a difference has always been essentialised. The global vision of anthropology of which ethnography is a part was formulated on the basis of evolutionary scheme and progressive measurement of “rational” values thereby making comparison implicit in

any ethnographic text (Marcus and Fisher 1986:23). The diversely different world under colonialism was differentiated and subsumed in the binary of “civilized/barbaric or primitive.” These two dominant categories with attendant sub-sets have been central to ethnography that is being challenged by post-historical developments. Traditional ethnographic studies and its methods, as we know, are challenged in general on the issue of exclusion of “native point of view.” This theoretical critique also questions how “the communicative processes by which the anthropologist in the field gains knowledge of his subjects, systems of cultural meaning in order to represent them in ethnographic texts”(Marcus and Fisher1986:24). Theories advocated by Clifford Geertz, James Clifford and of the Frankfurt School besides other theoretical developments have impacted the study of anthropology taking the discipline to a higher level of sophistication. However, the views from the New Left throw challenges to anthropology’s global project underwriting the uneasy relationship between colonialism and anthropology. As Wendy James notes whereas the moral rights of people living under colonial administration are defended in terms of universal categories; the moral right of the ruling community premised on a monopoly of self-justified righteousness was questionable (1973:46). D. Goddard (1969) in his critique of British Anthropology (the Evans-Pritchard model that Anthropology is basically a discipline of study of primitive people) emphasizes the fact that instead of considering some people primarily as “colonized” then whatever they were they were described simply as “primitive.” Thus the expression “primitive” undercuts “colonized” in that as J. Banaji (1970) remarks that there was lack of attention to the colonial situation therefore the description “primitive” was used outside “colonized.” Following similar arguments G. Gjessing (1968) is also critical of both a historical Radcliff-Brown and an ahistorical Malinowski model of classical anthropology. For our purpose the New Left critique of Goddard and Banaji is important for understanding the disjuncture between “colonized” and “primitive” used within a colonial dispensation that privileges colonialism’s process of differentiation between them and us.

Talal Asad in his perceptive observation on colonial encounter and anthropology maintains: “The colonial power structure made the object of anthropological study accessible and safe- because it sustained physical proximity between the observing European and the living non-European

Kailash C. Baral

became a practical possibility. It made possible the kind of human intimacy on which anthropological field work is based, but ensured that intimacy should be one-sided and provisional. It is worth noting that virtually no European anthropologist has been own over personally to the subordinated culture he has studied ;...”(1973:17). There is a dialectical asymmetry in the power relation between the object of study and the one who studies that object; hence a sense of paternalism is always already implicit in the act. The unequal power relation that defines the colonial project has always dominated ethnographic works. Differences in race, culture and ways of life have always provided the occasion how a particular ethnic group is constructed and an identity is assigned to it. Nineteenth century ethnographic study was guided by two basic principles: one is race and the other is imperialism. While race as a category is constructed and historicized for the slave trade it also becomes instrumental to put the colonized races under the Darwinian parameter to give the whole exercise the required scientific legitimacy. Levi-Strass underlined colonialism as one “historical moment” but it is certainly the most important historical moment that shaped and reshaped the colonized societies beyond comprehension. The colonial encounter has given the West “access to cultural and historical information about the societies it has progressively dominated, and thus not only generates a certain kind of universal understanding, but also re-enforces the inequalities in capacity between the European and the non-European worlds (and derivatively, between the Europeanized elites and the traditional masses in the Third World)” (Asad 1973:16).

19th Century Assam and the Hill Men

The incorporation of NE as a geographical space into the colonial cartography and the diverse tribes into the colonial discourse have accentuated the production of ethnographic writing primarily targeted to understand the people and their ways of life so that the colonial state could administer them in an effective way. This engagement was further strengthened with anthropologists and missionaries helping the colonial administration providing with ethnographic data about the colonized people. Tribe as a category was placed in opposition to the people from the plains by identifying and differentiating the tribe’s habitat and describing its racial features. In case of NE tribes most of the basic data were collected by the

colonial administrators although they were not trained anthropologists. However, the parameters they used for such exercise are anthropological.

The colonial experience in NE was not similar to its experience in the mainland. The annexation of Assam in 1826 and the hills surrounding the Brahmaputra valley had two colonial imperatives. Tea in Assam was the most dominant colonial interest and to protect the Raj's economic interest, the hills and the inhabitants of these hills were conquered and subdued through punitive measures at different stages of the British rule. One confronts a huge problem in getting adequate material on the tribes before the arrival of the British in these hills. The colonial administrators, travellers and traders, who had documented these tribes reveal the colonial method of constructing these tribes while incorporating them into colonial discourse. Of course we have to note that the early information about the diverse hill tribes of NE comes to us only from the colonial documents and ethnography. How the ethnographic texts are produced and to what objectives are important points for discussion. Verrier Elwin has offered a summary of works by colonial administrators, anthropologists and travelers on the NE tribes who lived in excluded areas that have become the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram. The tribes in these writings are negatively described under a regime that describes them less than human and abominable. These early works if not relevant for their accuracy nonetheless are significant in the manner some of the tribes are described. J.P. Mills' ethnographic bibliography is a descriptive study of different ethnic groups of Assam which carries some substance, according to Elwin, but other early works describe them in abominable ways. John Butler in [*A Sketch of Assam*(1847), *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam During a Residence of Fourteen Years* (1855)] speaks of "the general degeneracy of Assamese people"; of the Khampatis as "a discontented, restless, intriguing tribe; the Singphos as "a rude treacherous people"; the Abhors "void of delicacy as they are of cleanliness; Nagas as a "very uncivilized race, with dark complexion...hideously wild and ugly visages, reckless of human life" (1989:186). M' Kosh who included a chapter on the hill tribes in his *Topography of Assam* (1837), describes the Miris as "wild, barbarous and their persons filthy and squalid;" J.F Needham calls the Mishims as "treacherous and cowardly curs"; they are "blustering" and leniency is as little understood by this tribe "as by other similarly

uncivilized and savage” (1989:187). Elwin further cites from a leading article in the *Pioneer* in 1865 summing up the whole scenario: “ the only idea which most men had, with reference to the hills and forest (of Assam), was that they were the habitat of savage tribes, whose bloody raids and thieving forays threatened serious danger to the cause of tea” (Elwin 1989: 186). The negative stereotyping of the tribes is not something new or surprising. The tribes were described in the same manner as other colonized people. Expressions such as barbaric, unclean, sly, treacherous, bloody, dogs or cur, ugly, black, devilish etc. are also used for describing the people and cultures of main land colonial India as well. The colonial linguistic register in general was negative when it came to describing the native and it was at its worst use during 19th century.

Apart from the material interest, the British had a dubious method of carrying out its “civilizing mission” in the hills by patronizing missionary efforts. It was E.T. Dalton [*Descriptive Ethnology of Bangal*] who had the experience of dealing with the tribes of Chota Nagpur and introduced Christian missionaries there. As the administrator of Assam he also encouraged the Christian missionaries to be involved in the hills. James Johnstone in his work *My Experience in Manipur and the Naga Hills* (1896) wrote on Dalton’s work in Chota Nagpur saying that the tribes of Chota Nagpur “wanted a religion, and they were the Christians; they would be a valuable counter-poise in time of trouble to the vast non-Christian population of Bihar. In the same breath he also wrote about the Hillmen of NE: “it cannot be doubted that a large population of Christian Hillmen between Assam and Burma would be a valuable prop to the state” (Cited in Elwin 1989:188). Further Butler adds in 1847 that the missionaries will be invaluable in endeavouring to awake in the tribes a sense of Christian virtue.

The Colonised Body as Text: Identity and Representation

Just like geographical description of a place in which the physical phenomena is more important than the underlying principle that holds together and defines a particular ecology, the physiognomy of the colonized subject along with their habitat was the object of curiosity and analysis. The task is not only to describe the people and places but to consider them as specimen of a discovery like a bird or animal species. The so-called

scientific authenticity to make the westerners believe that such a species under the name of *human* exists in the world goes beyond writing and study, following Western Enlightenment's central principle "to clarify and classify" as the very tools of rationality. As imperialism heavily leans on the Western project of Enlightenment, ethnography also becomes a project for history. In fact through ethnographic texts those oral communities are historicized. Historicisation of tribes is a product of the anthropological machine as no other knowledge archive was available except their folk culture and existing material practices as significant components of pre-colonial knowledge which were not considered valuable for colonial ethnography. Therefore they were constructed over and over again with assigned identities without participating in the making of their own history. The colonial construction of the tribe went beyond the book resulting in physical exhibition of the "body" as text. It was important for legitimizing the authenticity of ethnographic narratives. I think most of us know about the so-called great event in 1940 where an Igorot man from Philippines was brought for exhibition at the Saint Louis fair. Such an exhibition was planned in India too which of course could not be carried out because of administrative constraints. However this piece of information is important to know how colonial gaze moved from physical representation of the species of man to photographic as well as narrative representation.

The [ethnological] Congress (organized in 1866) which was to have been an adjunct to a general industrial exhibition was dropped on account of practical difficulties of bringing the 'strange shy creatures', the tribes men of the hills, to a great city. The Commissioner of Assam stated his conviction that even twenty typical 'specimens of the hill tribes of his province' could not be conveyed to Calcutta and back at any time of the year 'without casualties that the greatest enthusiast for anthropological research would shrink from encouraging'. If any of the more independent tribes were to die on the way, 'it might lead to inconvenient political consequences' (Elwin 1989: 194).

Physical exhibition was important in order to authenticate the narratives. As it was not possible, photography and illustrations were used to supplement the written texts. In fact Dr. B. Simpson one of the most successful

Kailash C. Baral

photographers was deputed to Brahmaputra valley to take photographs and the skills of Dr. Brown, the Political Agent of Manipur was pressed into service for making illustrations of the people of Manipur.

Alternative mode of Representation and the Postcolonial Knowledge Archive

Representation whether physical, photographic, illustrative or narrative still has gaps that inveighs colonial ethnography. Representation as such is problematic on the issue of “who speaks for whom?” Extending the issue beyond “who speaks for whom?” we can legitimately ask what is the content of the textual representation although we know how it is produced. We know about some of the gaps in colonial ethnography such as the absence of “native point of view”, no use of mnemocultural material in construction of identity and world views and there could be so many; for example how do we explain “colonized” and “primitive” and the relationship between the two at the level of discourse as has been raised by New Left theorists. For me what is important to examine is the postcolonial methodological imperative for ethnographic representation. Is it then possible to produce an alternative theory of representation outside the West as discourse? What should be our starting point? In asking these questions we have to be also conscious of the need for consolidation of a postcolonial knowledge archive. It is of course impossible to ignore the West, as the West is theory and the rest still praxis. Then how do we legitimately and theoretically produce a discourse that is independent of the West in reproducing an alternative mode of representation. Leela Gandhi maintains, “Although postcolonial theory has been instrumental, over the last fifteen years or so, in bringing a new prominence to matters of colony and empire, it is by no means unique or inaugural in its academic concern with the subject of imperialism. So too it is methodologically and conceptually indebted to a variety of both earlier and most recent ‘Western ‘theories’ (1998: 23). As we understand this dependency, any knowledge produced ultimately becomes “subjugated.” One way of undoing the West is provincializing it and the other way is in consolidating the postcolonial knowledge archive, a process Bhabha has said as re-membering, “ a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (1994:63). Re-membering is part of putting together the knowledge of mnemocultures along side our present

textualised cultures in exploring all discourses whether folklore, material, spiritual practices and technological developments in less evolved societies along with their narratives while refining the methodological imperative for representation. It is in this context, I would go with Vivek Dhareshwar's argument that we need a metatheory to take on the West and make our own knowledge practice more transparent particularly in the area of social sciences. Dhareshwar has placed his arguments beyond Saidian Orientalism in contextualizing human sciences in the postcolonial site of knowledge production. With Dhareshwar, S.N Balgangadhar (1987) has also posited his thesis in the context of action knowledge as one of the imperatives beyond the strictures and structures of Orientalism. As we discuss the problematic of knowledge production in the postcolonial context, we cannot ignore the contribution of the West. As Dhareshwar puts it:

The awareness of the divergence between what we say and what we experience, which provides the point of departure for these reflections, was in no small measure due to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). The great merit of this work was to estrange, in one stroke, the familiarity and even naturalness of a whole body of discourse that has seemingly been part of our self description. It did so by the apparently simple method of pointing to the vast body of discourses about the 'Orient' - missionary writings, travellers' narratives, administrators' reports, scholarly and imaginative works - produced by Europe. The striking thing about this body of discourses was its 'textualizing', attitude, its inter-textuality and consistency (its 'sheer knitted-together quality' despite the temporal and spatial dispersal of the authors). The other important feature was the hallucinatory quality of even the most empirical of these discourses - it was as though essential truths about the Orient were always known and that the empirical studies, travellers' impressions, administrators' reports were simply confirming these truths. There were of course stereotypes about the 'inferior races', again very limited and very insistent. All this led Said to argue (1978:42) that 'Orientalism is better grasped as a set of constraints upon an limitation of thought than it is simply as a positive doctrine (1998:213)

The point that Dhareshwar underlines is significant that our knowledge of ourselves mostly comes from the West that Said has written about and

the national discourse that has emerged is still derivative particularly in contemporary social sciences. This process has been further engendered as “This realisation produced a whole spate of studies which tracked orientalist knowledges in the colonial achieves and produced accounts which purported to show western (but also colonial and nationalist) constructions of x , where x could be caste, criminal tribe, tradition, sexuality, communalism, race, suttee, etc.” (214). Anthropological discourse, according to Dhareshwar, could not overcome the problem of representation as “it could never make clear whether the ground for that was epistemological, moral/political or linguistic” (214). If the otherness of the other or the other culture is a way for the West to understand a variation of itself then we need to theorise the West to understand variations of our own self. It is in this context what Dhareshwar says is significant:

For instance, theories about Indian culture will, as we have seen, typically use or presuppose notions of tradition/practice, action, belief, etc. Now turn to philosophical theories of action, belief, propositional attitudes, practice, truth, etc. Our problem now is not the rather easy one of showing how the ideas from the latter are used in the former (as they indeed are sometimes consciously). We should be able to show how a set of problems persist in and motivate the theories so far apart otherwise, temporally methodologically and substantively. Consider this sample list: tradition/practice is embodiment of beliefs; action is execution of belief (intention, desire); the problem of specifying what is involved in understanding another language (culture, action) is resolved by specifying the requirements of a theory of translation/interpretation, which involves attributing (largely) truths to the alien sentences and true and rational beliefs to aliens (‘natives’) uttering those sentences. The philosophical tradition takes specific features and problems and constructs theories that are supposed to apply universally; the sector that busies itself with other cultures finds/attributes (unwittingly validating the philosophical theory of translation/interpretation) the same features and problems in other cultures. No wonder then that the philosophical tradition cannot formulate a theory of cultural difference (think of the arid debates on relativism, the recent debate on multiculturalism) and the

anthropological tradition cannot give an account of what it is to understand the other (1998:223-24).

It is not possible to say that Dhareshwar and Balgangadhar whom he has discussed in his paper on “action-knowledge”, have provided us the magic formula on how to move beyond the orientalist structures and produce knowledge that can transparently describe us. Dhahreshwar’s thesis may have its limitations but what is fascinating for me is that he offers a fresh way of thinking about knowledge production, theory building and representation. If ethnography has to move beyond being narratives only of otherness, in our postcolonial times, it needs to come up with a mechanism of describing the self and its other, not romanticising it or making it hallucinatory, but in an authentic and transparent way.

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Kailash C. Baral

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The Preservation of Indigenous Cultural Heritage of the Khasis of Meghalaya: Some Issues

R. R. Gowloog

Introduction

Meghalaya is the homeland of many tribal communities, predominant among them being Khasi, Garo and Jaintia. Other tribal communities inhabiting the State in much smaller numbers are Tiwa, Hajong, Man, Boro, Karbi, Rabha, and Koch besides a host of other linguistic and religious groups like Bengali, Nepali, Assamese, Bihari, Marwari, Muslim and Sikh. The State has attracted the attention of anthropologists, social scientists and non-academicians alike for decades as the only abode of matrilineal communities in India after matriliney slipped completely out of the Nayar community in Kerala by the middle of the previous century. The distinctiveness of matrilineal tribes is visible in their social customs and practices, art, craft and architecture, religious beliefs and practices, political institutions, language and dialect, expressions, knowledge and skills. In short it is visible in the realm of all tangible and intangible cultural heritages of the local tribal communities.

Technologies for management of environmental resources were part and parcel of the traditional 'knowledge systems' of the tribal communities inhabiting the area. It is learnt by the people by observing the elders at

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work and assisting them once in a while whether it was in the youth dormitories in the past or in individual households today. They managed their environment in such a way that their basic needs were met from their immediate physical environment without threatening the environmental resources. Their non-exploitative techniques helped them to conserve biological diversity, maintain favourable climatic conditions, and prevent erosion of soil, water and wild life resources. The biological diversity of the region also in turn helped them to develop a tradition of indigenous health care and medicine practices supported by a holistic concept of well-being. Historically, the relative geographical isolation of the region also helped them to protect their rich cultural heritage for centuries. It was only after the advent of Christianity and expansion of British rule to the area that people began to come into contact with other groups and cultures leading to acculturation processes resulting in absorption of more and more traits from other cultures. In the present context there is tremendous pressure for socio-cultural change threatening the traditional knowledge base of many of the local communities, which is why it is important to document such knowledge as extensively as possible before such knowledge is degraded or disappeared.

In an era of liberalization and globalization protection of their cultural heritage of the tribal people from depredation by multi-national companies in particular and safeguard of their intellectual property rights are some urgent tasks ahead. But preservation of a knowledge system finds it difficult to survive once there is imbalance in physical environment either due to overpopulation or over exploitation of some natural resources. It is also vulnerable because such knowledge is not recorded; it simply exists in the collective consciousness of the people and is transmitted from one generation to another orally. In recent years there is an increasing awareness especially among the educated elite to revert themselves to the essence of their cultural past. Though it is a welcome sign, it may also be seen as a tendency to distance themselves from other ethnic groups and thereby reinforce their self identities. This trend is important to watch because such tendencies may also contribute to the preservation of natural resources, as most such resources in the region are based on communal rather than state ownership.

The present paper discusses how the Khasis of Meghalaya have been conserving and protecting the rich forest and other environmental resources of their area for centuries and sustaining it for future generations. It also discusses some local level initiatives in this regard.

Forest Management

Like any other community, the indigenous knowledge of Khasis is partly based on their observations and experiences, and partly on their beliefs and practices. Their relation with nature is symbiotic rather than hostile, as they depend directly and indirectly on nature. Many of their practices associated with management of forest resources have been strongly inculcated in their religious and cultural activities. The *shnong* or village is the basis of almost all activities and is therefore the enforcing authority of any collective resolution. The decision of the village council is final and binding on all the villagers. Their traditional wisdom has helped them to classify forests into different categories for the purpose of its preservation and management as well as for its exploitation. This is prominently highlighted through beliefs and customary rights.

One such category of forest is the sacred groves locally known as *Ki Lawkyntang*. They are patches of jungle generally located on the periphery of Khasi villages. These groves are considered sacred and contain a variety of plants, trees and animal species. Most of these groves are actually primary forests. These groves are believed to be the abode of a deity who has been sent there by the gods and goddesses of the second chamber in the order of the supreme god (Misra and Rangad 2008). No one is allowed to disturb these groves and from time to time appropriate rituals and offerings have to be made to keep the god in good humour. In turn the deity will provide protection to the people, their cattle, their crops etc. Beneficence of the deity will continue to flow in many respects. But if the abode is disturbed the retribution may not be immediate and directly on the persons responsible for it but it will certainly be on their family members, relatives, or the village as a whole. Therefore it becomes the responsibility of all concerned to see that sacred groves are not disturbed. There are no guards for the sacred forests. A Khasi is supposed to be aware of 'self peril' if he violates any norms associated with such forests like cutting trees, whistling loudly, or urinating. These forests are managed by a

lyngdoh (community priest). The community has for generations preserved the rich forest wealth in the name of religious beliefs which in turn is responsible for the ecological balance of the region, water supply, control of soil erosion in the sloppy terrains and safeguard of the area from air pollution. Approximately about 105.11 sq.kms of land in the state is under sacred groves (Tiwari 1997). Provision for registration of the sacred groves is with the District Council under the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Management and Control of Forests) Rules, 1960.

Besides sacred forests called *law kyntang* there are several other types of forests in Khasi society such as reserved forests (*law Adong*) managed by Sirdars or headman with the help of village *durbar* or council and maintained by the villagers for specific purposes like firewood for cremation, timber for construction of public buildings like schools, community halls etc. There are also clan forests (*law kur*) under the ownership of a particular clan or a group of clans, which are also used for burial of clan members. Maintenance of forest is the collective responsibility of all the families of the clan and the forest products are distributed equally among all its members but those families who do not contribute towards its maintenance are deprived of such benefits (Cajee *et al* 2005). Another category of forest found in the Khasi Hills is community forest called *law raid*, which is looked after by the Syiems or chiefs. There are also forests under individual ownership known as *law ri-kynti*. These forests are inherited by families through generations. These forests are managed and exploited by the owner families as per their needs. In Khasi Hills District, the Autonomous District Council exercises its authority over 95 percent of the forest area, while the state government has control over a little more than 4 percent of the total forest area.

Degradation of Forests

It is a commonplace knowledge today that the sacred forests are being degraded and half of the total 72 sacred forests of Meghalaya are already heavily degraded. There are basically three factors responsible for the degradation of sacred forests. One, the Khasis who were afraid to cut the trees in the sacred forests surreptitiously hire people from the plains to do the job so that the forest deity would not harm them. Two, the unscrupulous leaders of some villages have sold the trees in such forests to timber traders

for petty financial gains. Three, Christian churches have always ridiculed the belief in existence of gods and goddesses in sacred forests as mere superstition. Today considerable part of *law raid* (community forest) has been subjected to *jhum* or shifting cultivation, which has also contributed to further degeneration of such forests. Though practice of *jhum* has decreased due to various reasons, the overall increase in population has led to increase in agricultural and house-building activities and caused pressure on forest resources. The non-availability of sufficient fund for the functioning of the Autonomous District Councils has also compelled them to sell timber from the forests of which they are the constitutional custodians. Revenue from timber exports accounts for over 70 percent of the revenue of the District Councils (Jyrwa 2002: 68-69), which clearly indicates who are directly responsible for the depletion of forest resources. The forest department of the state government does not have any control over the forests which are under the administrative control of the Autonomous District Councils. The clan forests (*law kur*), owned and protected by particular clans, have also declined as and when the clan councils (*Kur Durbars*) have distributed it among the needy members for cultivation and other human activities. As a result of all this, indigenous valuable species are vanishing along with the diminishing forest cover.

Preservation and Challenges

It is clear from the above that sacred and other forests, preserved for centuries by Khasis, are under severe threat of degradation and ultimately extinction unless proper steps are taken early towards stopping that process. If proper care and effective steps are not taken it may upset the very symbiotic relationship between forests and environment that nurtured the Khasi people for centuries. People alone are not always powerful enough to protect and conserve such heritages whatever be the values of such forests for them. Rampant poverty and materialistic pursuits of the people often lead them to exploit their physical environment in a manner that is not sustainable. Therefore any effort to arrest further exploitation of forest resources need multi-pronged approach, as shown below.

1. Government initiative by framing appropriate laws or providing security to forests by employing forest guards and/or banning the sale of forest products, especially timber.

2. People organizing themselves and coming forward to protect such heritages voluntarily.
3. Alternative sources of employment and livelihoods can go a long way towards reducing pressure on forests, and
4. A blend of all the three approaches above could be tried.

The government initiatives so far in this direction are not only meagre but also ineffective due to a variety of factors. Local level organizations have to take initiative to preserve the cultural heritages with people's participation at all levels for which an organizational set-up enabling bottom-up planning and implementation is required. Initiatives towards this direction can also be taken by the local village councils.

Local Administration

In the Khasi Hills the traditional village councils with *Rangbah Shnong* or headman as its head form the grassroots level organization close to the people. The state (*Hima*) administration, which looked after numerous villages, was earlier headed by a *Syiem* or chief. Now it is under the administrative control of the District Council. In between the village council (*Dorbar Shnong*) and state council (*Dorbar Hima*) there is an intermediate council called *Durbar Raid* presided over by an official called *Sirdar*. The powers and functions of the traditional socio-political institutions have greatly been curtailed and marginalized by the Autonomous District Council (ADC) after Meghalaya came under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. With the introduction of the District Councils, the traditional arrangement of the local self-government became complex with overlapping jurisdictions. The ADC has powers over a number of subjects pertaining to land and forest, customs and traditions, village and town administration, etc. Besides the above powers the ADC can establish its own courts and make laws. It can also regulate the appointment and succession of chiefs and headmen. The laws passed by the ADC are sent to the Governor for his approval, but once approved it can have far-reaching consequences on traditional institutions of the Khasis and Jaintias (Gassah 1997).

The village councils are not fully representative bodies as women and non-tribal people living within the jurisdiction of the village cannot be its

members and thus have no role in its functioning. Recently, some village councils have started including women in the Electoral College to elect the headman but their involvement in the totality of its functioning is still very limited. Another commonly observed negative point against the traditional institution is the reservation of executive functions within the council to persons from selected clans only.

One of the basic problems with this traditional institution is that it is usually not supported by the state in its planning and undertaking developmental projects though financial assistance from MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) and MP (Member of Parliament) funds is available for such purposes. Another drawback is lack of proper maintenance of records of accounts of money handled by them, as traditionally maintenance of records was not necessary and word of mouth was sufficient. Yet another problem in implementing the programmes at the village level is that the local level administrative bodies in Meghalaya are traditional or customary and not constitutional bodies, which could play a more significant role in the functioning of such institutions at local level. The Panchayati Raj institutions which came into existence in the country with the 73rd amendment to the constitution have not yet been extended to the state of Meghalaya since the required resolutions have not yet been passed by the state Assembly. Government of India constituted a committee of members of Parliament and experts on 10th June 1994 to suggest steps for harmonization of the Panchayati Raj institutions with the tribal areas and to formalize the salient features of a law to be enacted so that the provisions of the constitutional amendments may be extended to the tribal areas. Sri Dileep Bhuria, MP was its chairman. But only those areas that came under the Fifth and Sixth schedules of the constitution came under its purview. As a result the entire exercise proved to be inconclusive.

If traditional institutions do not accommodate contemporary realities they may fall short of the challenges in future. If these traditional institutions could accommodate the 1996 Panchayati Raj Extension to Scheduled Areas Act and come under the purview of the 73rd Amendments to the Constitution, they could effectively act as local self-government bodies with assured funds and infrastructure to conceive, plan and implement local level development initiatives for conservation and protection of their

rich cultural heritages for posterity. It may be recalled here that one major instrument provided in the constitution's 73rd Amendment Act to protect and strengthen local democracy is the constitution of a State Finance Commission. This would free the District Councils from the clutches of the state government but that was not to be in Meghalaya.

In recent years, especially after the United Nation's declaration of the year 1993 as the World Indigenous People's Year, there is a growing realization among Khasi elites of the need for revival of traditional institutions and are hence campaigning for constitutional recognition and direct funding of traditional institutions. The poor performance of modern democratic institutions of governance has made them to think in this direction. The culmination of these campaigns is the grand assembly or the People's *Dorbar* at Smit, a place of great politico-religious significance to Khasis, on 14th January 2004. About 30,000 people, many of them from outside Meghalaya, participated in it.

Local Initiatives

Once the local councils have been supported with necessary funds and infrastructures each local council can use the expertise and resources locally available to:

- 1) Evolve a set of models for participatory and sustainable conservation and preservation techniques appropriate to each area.
- 2) Develop local expertise and comprehensive short and long term action plans based on locally available resources.
- 3) Generate a team of state level resource persons to achieve the local initiatives at village level, and
- 4) Generate a source of integrated implementation practices.

People at the local level have to strive for evolving elementary models of people's action for conservation and preservation of their cultural heritages in their respective localities. They have to locate resource personnel with technical knowledge for proper technical support. They can also seek support from State/Central government for such expertise and training. They can prepare a Perspective Preservation Document, starting with an extensive and participatory survey to assess the diversified

cultural heritages, which are to be saved from extinction. If the effort is to become really effective the communities should also have a clear knowledge about the resources of the area, their distribution, their nature and extent, present use and future possibilities. The village resources mapping can be an effort in this direction. Voluntary organizations with roots at the state level can come forward to organize people and make them aware of the importance of preservation of such cultural heritages and the need for their participation through various demonstrations, songs, booklets, street plays, short stories, children's stories, etc.

At the local village level community cultural centres may be built with voluntary support and rare specimens of the village can be exhibited there. The financial burden involved towards achieving this can be met from the village council funds or from grants-in-aid received from central/state organizations earmarked for such projects or can be achieved purely with the voluntary support of the people of the area. These centres can be of use to researchers and administrators interested in the life and culture of the people of the area. This can also be developed into tourist destinations. Tourists can experience the local ways of life at such centres. The income from such ventures can be used for the maintenance and development of the centres.

Conclusion

That the traditional knowledge of the Khasis is gradually evaporating from their collective consciousness in the face of gradual incursion of modernity is evident before anyone who visits the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. To prevent its complete erosion a proper institutional framework for bottoms-up planning is very much required. A creative alteration in the traditional system of governance is also essential for this. People generally do not have any objections to accepting new faiths and beliefs but when the question of governance comes they seem to have strong reservations. What is required is a synthesis of traditional and modern systems of governance. It is to be realized that we are passing on our knowledge to a generation that is computer savvy and capable of adjusting with any situations. So the effort to preserve the knowledge system can be effective only if it is properly integrated with sustainable development practices of the community. Such efforts should also help increase the income level

and standard of the people. No doubt all indigenous knowledge systems and practices may not be scientific or even sustainable. But with necessary technical and scientific inputs, there can be ample scope for formulating development alternatives at local community levels with minimum costs. The successful implementation of developmental schemes depends on local acceptance, environmental viability and sustainability. The indigenous knowledge system will be vital in this regard.

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Book Review

Review of Growth and Human Development in North-East India
edited by **Purusottam Nayak**, Oxford University Press, New Delhi,
2009. pp.348, Rs.550/-

The seventh *India Today* State of the States Survey reveals that the human development (HD) index in terms of health care, education, poverty alleviation and rural income in India remains as dismal as before with marginal changes in the performance of some states. The *Bimaru* states where 62 crore Indians reside languish at the bottom of the rankings without any visible change. The social welfare measures undertaken by the UPA Govt., it seems, have not yielded any dramatic results indicating the fact that poor governance and corruption still rule the roost, ironically, India having registered before the recession about 9% GDP growth. This disconnect is a matter of worry as Shankkar Aiyar says, 'India lives in the states and just as every inch of India is ruled by the states, every decimal of GDP growth comes from the states. Unless the Centre and these states engineer a common programme to lift these economies, the shadow of poverty will haunt India and thwart its tryst with destiny'. After 62 years of Independence, there is hardly anything to cheer about on the human development front in the country that undermines the euphoria about India shining or India emerging as an economic super power.

'Growth' and 'human development' are interrelated and dynamic concepts. Drawn from Kant's and Rawls's concepts of enlightened humanism and deliberative rationality, HD as a key area of economic

Book Review

development is emphasized by UNDP under the leadership of Mahbub ul Haq and variously engendered, among others, by Amartya Sen and Meghnad Desai. Concerned with real human development or development with a 'human face' in ensuring longevity of life, health care and access to education and reducing income disparity, UNDP continues to publish its annual reports on HD since 1990 and in turn has come up with startling facts, as the editor to the volume under review maintains, 'The development experience of many fast growing developing countries reveals that their high GNP growth rates failed to reduce the socioeconomic deprivation of substantial sections of their population. Even developed industrial nations realized that high income is no protection against the rapid spread of problems such as drugs, alcoholism, AIDS, homelessness, violence, and the breakdown of family relations. At the same time, some low-income countries demonstrated that it is possible to achieve high levels of human development if they skillfully use available means to expand basic human capabilities. This establishes the fact that expansion of output and wealth is only a means to development'. It is indicative of the fact that the conditions of growth and human development in general are entangled and complex; hence the Northeast region could not be an exception.

It is in this context a volume on *Growth and Human Development in North-East India* is timely and topical. Northeast, of late, has turned into a theme for all kinds of writing even major publication houses in the country have a Northeast section. The editor and the contributors to the volume under review have underscored the singular significance of this volume amidst a plethora of publications on politics, economics, militancy and so on in Northeast. Unfortunately, most works on/about NE hardly differ from each other; hence a reader is confused whether she/he is reading one book under different covers or different books. Of course, it is premature to predict the usefulness of the present volume at this juncture nonetheless the volume surely has given some direction and has made a sincere attempt to study the human development scenario in Northeast in the context of the over all economic growth of the region.

The volume includes three clusters of essays divided into three sections: (i) conceptual and measurement issues of growth and human development, (ii) the national scenario, and (iii) the issues concerning the

Northeastern region. The first cluster of essays opens up the conceptual discussion on HD and the quantitative implication in human development measurement. Besides Nayak's and Chubey's articles that deal with the history and conceptual development of HD, Mishra critiques some aspects of HDI and offers the suggestion how a quantitative study on HD could be expanded. The second cluster of essays carries on the premises of the first section and broadens the discussion on HD at the national level. Baruah's essay in this section may be singled out for he offers an ideological critique of HD emphasizing the Soviet Model that has, according to him, ensured better human development than other models. Borbara takes on HD as a chain relationship in that it moves between the vicious and virtuous cycles. Roy expresses his concern over regional variations and differences in income levels and disparity in human development indicators across states. Banik and Bhaumik are critical of the measures adopted by Govt. of India for rural poverty reduction and underline Govt.'s failure attributing it to structural and administrative rigidities. Tripathy and Mishra bring to the fore the paradoxical situation in Orissa between growth and HD in analyzing the situation in much talked about and overtly politicized *hunger* in Kalahandi. The last cluster of essays, fifteen in number, addresses specific issues concerning HD in NE including surveys on individual states. The surveys include Agarwal's essay on Mizoram, Singh's on Manipur, Mishra's and Nayak's on Tripura, Roy's and Adhikary's on Assam, Neogi's on Arunachal Pradesh and Mishra's and Nayak's on Nagaland. These surveys variously contest and confirm to the HDI published by GOI and other agencies in that these essays underscore urban-rural disparities, ethnic and gender discrimination and inter-district inequality that challenge a number of claims in terms of education, health care and income distribution in these states.

Besides the survey essays, Bezbaruah in a perspective analysis of development in Assam maintains that 'development experience in the region has been mixed and uneven. While there are periods of high growth for individual states, the region as a whole has been increasingly lagging behind in the country in terms of per capita income.' Endorsing Bezbaruah's position, Nayak also concurs that even if the entire region is experiencing good human development it has failed in achieving real economic growth.

Book Review

Other essays by Srivastav on 'poverty', by Panda on 'Economic Growth and Human Development', by Biswamber Panda on the role of NGOs, by Nayak and Roy on 'Inter-District Disparities in Meghalaya', on 'Micro Finance and Human Development' by Pati, on 'Public Expenditure and Human Development' by Suresh and Mishra and on 'Antenatal Care and Human Development in Meghalaya' by Rajput address various economic issues visa-a-vie human development in Northeast. These essays variously underline the achievements and failures of the individual states in the region in relation to HD.

In a broader sense, the issues concerning economic growth and human development are related to the region's geography, poor infrastructure, and law and order problem accentuated because of prolonged militancy that in turn has resulted in low outside investment in the region. These factors also hinder the desired human development in the whole area as militancy not only challenges the federal Govt.'s authority but also the very social fabric and its cohesiveness. On the face of these myriad problems, some states of the region have made significant progress in human development thereby drawing attention at the national level. However, all policies relating to economic growth and human development in NE, as the editor suggests, should be premised on the region's specific problems and advantages. Therefore, there is a need to think of alternative models of economic planning that would ensure better human development premised on efficient micro management of resources in enhancing human capabilities. For ensuring better economic growth if effective governance and efficient delivery are a must so also the participation of the beneficiaries in the process of development. Among the contributions, I'm personally impressed by the essays of Bezbaruah, Roy and Nayak, to name a few, for their clear understanding of the problems and critical insight. All things considered, I would maintain that the volume is an honest attempt that reflects a coherent and mature understanding of the region's problems by the editor and the contributors. I hope the thinking heads those who are at the helms of planning and policy making for the NE to take note of this book. The front cover of the book looks attractive with a rush of deep purple and is semiotically meaningful as the expectant face of the young girl looks beyond the horizon for a

bright and optimistic future that would ensure the freedom of choice, making life meaningful in terms of good health, better education and economic prosperity. The book is a must read for those who are interested in NE and the developmental concerns of the region as well as students and researchers of development economics.

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Book Review

Christianity and Change in North East India edited by **T.B. Subba, Joseph Puthenpurakel** and **Shaji Joseph Puykunnel**, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2009. Pp. 362, Rs.750/-

Change is a ubiquitous and continuous phenomena as said by T.K. Oommen in his keynote address to the seminar, the proceedings of which form the content of the book under review. Thus, change is inevitable for any community. There are a number of factors responsible for social and cultural change of which the primary factor may be identified as the advent of Christianity in North East India.

Today, there is considerable literature available relating to the topic covered by the present volume i.e., Christianity and Changes in North East India. It is seen that generally the Christian authors have the tendency to give the entire credit to Christian missionaries for all the development that has taken place in this region. But this book is outstanding in the sense that, it has emerged out of the idea of having a dialogue between the missionaries and social scientists working on the tribes of North East India.

The present volume comprising of twenty four articles edited by T.B. Subba, Joseph Puthenpurakel and Shaji Joseph Puykunnel is an attempt to analyse the role of Christianity in bringing about socio-cultural change in North East India. The book is thematically divided into four sections. The first section titled "Concepts" has four articles, two of which are by social scientists (T.K. Oommen and A.C. Sinha) and two by missionary academics (Archbishop Menampampil and Sebastian Karotemprel). The first article is actually the keynote address of a seminar held on "Christianity and Change in North East India." The first section of this address deals with the various approaches to understand culture, its basic dimensions, etc. The second section deals with Northeast India and highlights the author's comments on the three major perspectives called assimilationist, isolationist, and acculturationist. Oommen also discusses cultural monism, cultural subalternism, cultural pluralism and cultural federalism as four major factors of culture change. In the third section he discusses three sets of dual processes, that is, displacement and accretion, pluralisation and hybridization, and traditionalisation and modernization. In brief, the keynote address truly covers most of the conceptual issues related to culture and culture change in India in general and tribes of

Northeast India in particular. What is left conceptually or historically untouched in this keynote is taken care of by A.C. Sinha in the second article.

Archbishop Menamparampil's main argument in the third article is that in today's Northeast the speed of change is more than the speed of reflection, whereas ideally it should have been the other way round so that culture change could be guided properly. But since the desirable is not happening, a lot of undesirable changes are taking place in the region that are threatening the long term values like commitment to the common good and respect for other's uniqueness. He finds the communities in the region at crossroads and pleads for more reflection. Karotemprel also regrets that the multi-layerity of human identity is ignored today and the world is moving towards a reductionist and fundamentalist kind of identity that negates the very humanity. He provides thought-provoking definitions of identity, culture, cultural change and Christianity in this article.

The second section is titled "Christianity and Northeast India: Regional Perspectives". Although the whole book deals with Northeast India, this section has been proposed here to highlight the regional perspectives of social scientists and missionaries. The first article in this section is by Amaresh Dubey and Veronica Pala, who demonstrate with the help of statistical evidence based on data collected by the National Sample Survey Organisation in 1983 and 1999-2000, that Christianity has played a positive role in fostering literacy among the tribes of Northeast India. The next article by Walter Fernandes and Gita Bharali picks up the issues relating to the difficulties being faced by the tribes of this region because of the adoption of formal legal system without abandoning the customary laws. They try to show how this interface has affected tribal culture and identity, specially their class and gender relations. Francis Kulirani in the next article argues for the need of the missionaries to extend their support to the tribal efforts to preserve their heritages. Kanjamala in the subsequent article seeks to find as an answer to why the tribes of the region, who are otherwise Christians, are poorly integrated with Indian nationhood. He lists out several obstacles to their integration like tribal attitude towards external exploitation and domination, sense of alienation and deprivation, "cultural separatism", politics of identity, etc. He also emphasizes on the role of the churches in fostering integration in the region.

Book Review

In the same section, Barnes Mawrie demonstrates how Christianity has played the most important role in the genesis and spread of socio-political consciousness among the tribes of the region. In the same vein, Snaitang shows, through the activities of various missions and churches, that Christianity has also played an important role in the development of language and in providing relief and rehabilitation services in times of crisis. The last article in this section by George Plathottam deals with the relationship between language plurality, biodiversity and ethnicity in the region. He argues that the region would be much better off if primary and secondary education could be provided through the mother tongue and if the minority linguistic and ethnic groups received the attention they deserve.

Section III deals with “Christianity and Tribes in Northeast India: Community Perspectives” where we have papers highlighting community perspectives on individual tribes of the region. The first article in this section is by Nongbri. He discusses the role of Christianity in the development of Khasi language and literature, particularly through the adoption of the Cherrapunjee dialect as the standard language of the Khasis and the Roman script in lieu of Bengali script. Cecile Mawlong, in the next article, takes a critical view of the role of the earlier missionaries in eroding the rich megalithic tradition of Khasi-Jaintias and notes with appreciation the recent efforts of the Catholic Church to revive the same. Amena Passah in her article deals extensively with the contribution of the Christian missionaries to health-care services in Khasi-Jaintia hills, especially in challenging situations due to the stiff resistance shown by the local people in accepting western medicines and medical practices in the early years of their contact. The next article in this section, written by Rekha Shangpliang, shows how deeply immersed are Khasi traditions in nature and how their dependence on nature is threatened today due to indiscriminate deforestation going on in their habitats.

Ashan Riddi, a Tagin himself, discusses the various strategies adopted by Christian missionaries to convert the Tagins and the consequences of their conversion on their kinship and systems of reciprocity. The next article by Sarit Chaudhuri is also on Arunachal Pradesh. He takes up the case of Wanchos and explains the various endogenous and exogenous factors responsible for their conversion into Christianity and the positive as well

as negative consequences thereof. In the third article in this section, Kedilezo Kikhi discusses the case of a group of Angami Nagas who are called Southern Angamis by outsiders but who would like to call themselves Zounuo-Keyhonuo people. The focus of his article is the institution of marriage. He looks at continuity as well as change in the same and the factors responsible for both. Then the section moves on to Manipur and the two tribes chosen by P. Venkata Rao and M. Kennedy Singh are Maring and Aimol, who according to the authors had an old connection with the Meiteis of the Imphal Valley, but who moved away from the latter after Manipur became a state of India. The last article in this section is authored by Sajal Nag. He demonstrates through numerous examples that there is a strong link between disasters like famines after bamboo flowers and waves of revivalism and mass conversion of the people into Christianity in Mizoram.

Section IV is titled “Christianity and Women: Gender Perspectives” and has four articles on women by women. The first article by Tejimala Gurung Nag deals with the role of women missionaries in the successful spread of Christianity in Northeast India. She shows how through girls’ education they could reach where the men missionaries had no access. The next article by Sister Lotsuro deals specifically with the role of Catholic women missionaries like Salvatorian Sisters, Loreto Sisters, and Catechist Missionary Sisters in bringing about socio-cultural change among the tribes of the region, especially in the fields of education, health care and spread of the Christian faith. Lucy Zehol’s article is on the role of Christian women belonging to Khezhakenoma village of Nagaland in changing the status of women. She particularly notes how they have been successful through their church and youth activities to bring freedom, education, new outlook, new personality and so on without much affecting their clan organization and calendar of festivals. The last article in this section is an essay on the role of missionary wives in evangelical work in North-East India. Suryasikha Pathak, the author, also brings in a biographical bend in her article by focusing on the life and works of one such woman, P.H. Moore.

Though the essays in the collection try to analyze the socio-cultural changes brought by Christianity in North-East India, yet one feels that there has not been any serious attempt to discuss as to why Christianity,

Book Review

and not some other religion, brought about such changes. However, in conclusion, it may be said that the different essays in this volume have succeeded in highlighting the role of Christianity in bringing about socio-cultural changes in the Northeast. The strength of this volume lies in the fact that several of the authors have tried to critically analyze the entire process of change and have attempted a comprehensive approach to the whole issue. This volume will certainly be of great value to teachers, scholars, researchers and all those interested North-East studies.

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Look East Policy and India's North East: Polemics and Perspectives edited by **Thingnam Kishan Singh***, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2008, pp. 225, Rs. 650/-

The Look East policy has emerged as one of the prominent foreign policy initiative India has undertaken in the post-Cold War period. It was launched in the year 1991 by the then Narasimha Rao Government with the aim of developing multifaceted relation with countries of Southeast Asia. Such aims include renewing political contacts, increasing economic integration, and forging security cooperation with several countries of Southeast Asia as a means to strengthen political understanding, and enhancing India's political role in the dynamic Asia-Pacific region in general and Southeast Asia in particular. As a result the Look East policy is responsible in making India an inalienable part of the Asia-Pacific's strategic discourse. It is rather a late recognition of the strategic and economic importance of the region to India's national interests.

After 17 years the Look East policy has yielded many benefits and supported India's economic transformation and growth, including closer strategic contacts between India and Southeast Asian countries, an impressive increase in the quantum of bilateral trade with other developing countries in Asia and increased people-to-people interaction. India's trade with countries bordering the Northeastern region witnessed a dramatic expansion, with the share going up more than five times. However, this increase in the volume of trade with India's eastern neighbours has had little or no impact on the Northeast. As a result, in the second phase, the Look East Policy has been given a new dimension wherein India is now looking towards partnership with the ASEAN countries integrally linked to economic and security interests of the Northeastern region.

Thingnam Kishan Singh edited book *Look East Policy & India's North East: Polemics and Perspectives* published by Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi is a collection of articles published in the first four issues of a quarterly journal *Alternative frames* which was rechristened as *Alternative Perspective*. The essays are an attempt to highlight the core issues confronting the Northeastern region vis-à-

Book Review

vis India's Look East policy. Thingnam Kishan Singh traces the historical factors and circumstances leading to the origin and conceptualisation of the Look East policy. He analyses in detail the role of capital moving across national boundaries during the colonial period and the integration of world economy. Like many of the decolonialised nation-states in the post-war era, India too adopted capitalist path of economic development. The economic crisis in 1991 forced India to succumb to the pressures of IMF and World Bank led economic reforms, which eventually helped to open up India's economy. With this India felt the need to integrate and consolidate its India's trade through regionalism and regional trading blocks. The Look East Policy was adopted as a means to integrate India's economy with the Asian economies. Konthoujam Indrakumar observe that the Look East policy is responsible for breaking the confined and opening up the region to South East Asian region. He traces the attempts by India to forge alliances and its participation in significant world issues and analyses the emerging economic and strategic convergence. In another essay Indrakumar contends that a persisting concept of being a frontier region inherited from the British colonial legacy continues to dominate the overall attitude towards this region on the part of the ruling class of post-colonial Indian State. As such for the Indian State it is not economic considerations but political and strategic compulsions that force it to hold on to the Northeast. He argues that there exists a sense of 'otherness' both in historical and cultural terms from the rest of India accompanied by a high degree of alienation. But he fails to analyse that looking to the east or integrating the Northeastern region with Southeast Asian economies would lead to further alienation of the people.

In the introductory part of his article Laishram Churchill deviates from his main focus of assessing the environmental impact of the Look East policy by raising the persisting sensitivity of the Northeastern people towards ethnicity and cultural patterns. He does not analyse how the northeastern people can cope with or resist the impending juggernaut of cultural imperialism, economic imperialism, Indianisation and globalisation. Churchill emphasises the incorporation of environmental issues in the process of national planning which is crucial to the development process. However without prescribing the alternative course of action left with the

government, he cautions about the possible environmental degradation by citing some major infrastructural projects in the region and around the word.

Neumais essay makes a critical analysis of the developmental approaches of the Northeastern region. He asserts that despite the various strategies adopted by the central governments there is no positive headway in the development of the region due to the virtual absence of economic and industrial infrastructure. He asserts that security fears have suppressed developmental concerns. Sanjeev Thingnam contends that the Northeast India was conceptualised as a frontier region during the British period and the legacy of geo-strategic concerns persisted and were carried over even under independent India's administration. The Look East policy would not be free from implications and challenges like the trade route schemes proposed by M'cosh which conflicting beset with varied were opinion raised by the colonial officers. In their essays Senate Khuraijam H. Sharma and Thingnam Kishan Singh argue that opening the economy of the Northeast will only further reduce it to a market for the developing economies of Southeast Asia just as Northeast India has been a market for mainland India. Mere opening up of the Northeast economy through the Look East policy therefore, entails the risk of destroying the fragile household industries in the region.

L. Suraj Singh traces the relationship between India and Myanmar since 1948 and its implications for Manipur. He identifies some of the strategic, economic that led to the change of India's policy towards Myanmar in the early 1990s. Suraj Singh argues that the concerns of Look East policy are more political and security oriented than economic concerns with border trade. The right type of planning attempts to go beyond the narrow outlook of security maintenance by taking into confidence the local authorities would be a positive improvement in the direction. In his essay Kangujam asserts that the opinion of the Northeastern people, who are going to be the most affected as a result of the implementation of the Look East policy, been has not taken into consideration. The reversal of India's earlier policy towards Myanmar has been due to strategic considerations and it has deviated from its cherished principles of supporting the democracy movement in Myanmar.

Book Review

Kamujam further points out that the concept of border trade has been meticulously dragged into the picture only with a design to lend an economic colour to the various diplomatic initiatives undertaken with regards to Myanmar. He demands that India snap all diplomatic ties with the military junta calls this a 'far-sighted foreign policy'.

The Indo-Myanmar and Indo-Bangladesh border is inhabited by a host of ethnic communities who were separated by the division of British India and the then Burma in 1937 and the Partition of British India in 1947. These ethnic communities have more in common with the population living across the border than with their immediate neighbours in India. The affinity of groups with their kin groups across the border and the sense of support (both material and non-material) they derive from them, have had serious implications. The pangs of separation coupled with several post-colonial aspirations have led to the emergence of various ethnic movements in the region and the inter-ethnic relations are being guided by competition for resources and land. Though there is a wide recognition of the co-ethnics in the border areas of the Northeast with its neighbouring countries in all the essays, there is hardly any attempt to put forth new ideas on the said issue. The insertion of the Northeast into a larger transnational region is largely advocated for removing the ills of development and the cult-de-sac situation; however, the proposal may not be a perfect answer to the interwoven ethnic questions of the region. In a recent study of Mexican trucking across borderlands, Alvarez (Robert R. Alvarez Jr., "The Mexican-US Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, October 1995, Vol. 24, pp. 447-470) argues that Mexican truckers continually constitute and recreate ethnicity as part of an entrepreneurial process of successful penetration of foreign markets. He points out that the ambiguities of identities in borderlands can also be strategically played upon to forge, reformulate, and even mobilise ethnic identity to advantage. Dona K. Flynn (Donna K. Flynn, "We Are the Border: Identity, Exchange, and the State along the Bénin-Nigeria Border", *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 24, No. 2, May, 1997, pp. 311-330) also illustrates that the Shabe border residents in Bénin-Nigeria Border have similarly forged a sense of border identity in the face of economic change

and decreased transborder trade. As such, the proposed transnational regime under the Look East policy is not likely to be effective if the ethnic factors of the region are taken into account. As witnessed in Africa and North America, there could be mobilisation based on ethnic identity to take advantage of the transborder trade. And the already fragile inter-ethnic relations in the region could be in constant peril.

***Dr. Thingnam Kishan Singh**, Sub-Divisional Officer of the Ukhrul district of Manipur, was abducted and killed by militants in February, 2009.
The reviewer, **Thongkhohal Haokip**, Senior Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong

Report on The Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education (Yashpal Committee Report), published by **Ministry of Human Resource Development**, Government of India, New Delhi, 2009, pp.94, unpriced

Professor Yash Pal Report (YPR) makes right noises about many of the inherently self-defeating practices, ideas and notions that have been the 'ruling ideas' of India's higher education sector for last four decades. The report significantly persuades the existing university system and its ensemble of policy makers, bureaucrats and teachers etc. to go for self-corrective measures that would redeem them from many a closure. As we go through the report, its frank and straightforward espousal of several unpalatable truths about Universities, IITs and IIMs engage the reader in a therapeutic introspection. Much of this introspection is also inspiring and enticing, as it takes one to a realm of hope, the hope of recovering the idea of University from the labyrinth of insider's subversion. A careful reflection on every section of this first-of-its-kind report shall unravel a depth of intellectual and practical resources that are presented to the nation in a spirited optimism of will and pessimism of intellect. In reconceptualizing the idea of university, the YPR states,

You would notice that we are placing supreme importance on the character of universities. They must create new knowledge. Besides making people capable of creating wealth they have a deep role in the overall thinking of society and the world as a whole. This job cannot be performed in secluded corners of information and knowledge. (...)But narrow expertise alone does not make educated human beings for tomorrow. Indeed, speaking more seriously, one could almost say that most serious problems of the world today arise from the fact that we are dominated by striations of expertise with *deep chasms* in between. (5, emphasis mine)

This is reaffirmation of the Nehruvian vision of university as 'centres of humanism'. The report broadens this idea when it speaks of holistic educational framework and substantial reduction of bureaucratic control. Seemingly, the report raises serious concerns about the existing mechanisms of repressing both the seekers and givers of knowledge by disciplining them.

Correcting the University

YPR takes on the 'dead uniformities' that many of the present rules impose on universities, especially too many inspection and control by an overarching bureaucracy. The burden of university bureaucracy and its mis/interpretation of statutes, rules etc. act as a source of permanent ruination of any sense of justice that the Universities are supposed to deliver to everyone. In sharp contrast to such a deeply ingrained culture of distortion in the normative framework of the Universities, the YPR reminds us of the grounding values of higher education as a whole, which are autonomy and freedom of mind. It says,

The principle of moral and intellectual autonomy from political authority and economic power is ingrained in the very idea of the university. This autonomy ensures freedom in research and training and it is expected that the governments and the society would respect this fundamental principle. Teaching and research have to be inseparable, because the task of the university is not only to impart knowledge to young people but also to give them opportunities to create their own knowledge. Active and constant engagement with the young minds and hearts of the society also implies that the universities are to serve the society as a whole, and in order to achieve this, considerable investment in continuing education is essential. (9)

This represents the deeper malaise of overpowering intellectual freedom by the disciplinarian and personified authorities of the University system, who in turn are subjected to political and economic powers of the State and the corporate. The situation is such that the Universities provide a soft site of marketing of ideas and knowledge products along with the space for legitimizing reasons of the State. All these grow within the University at the cost of the very purpose for which it has been created. YPR, for the first time in the history of post-colonial India clearly spells out the ways and means of removing these burdens of bureaucracy, state and corporate. The report substantially recovers the lost space of autonomy of Universities by emphasizing the specific sites of advantages and disadvantages of the higher education scene, namely, socio-historical and cultural specificity and local conditions. Wherever a University/ Institution moved away from this primary locale of knowledge, the report prescribes a return to its 'roots' from the higher levels of knowledge enterprise *without*

Book Review

lowering itself.(12-3) The report indicates the impending task of a live interface between the local and the global, the success of which can be observed in the role of the university in devising new ways of understanding and action in relation to real world problems. This is the kind of post-deconstructive realism that the report evinces in. The report suggests a self-conscious breaking of the walls of narrow isolationist practice of learning, research and specialization. It gives a paradigm statement toward such an objective when it says,

We can then look forward to the day when IITs and IIMs would be producing scholars in literature, linguistics and politics along with engineering and management wizards who would have substantial motivation for engagement with the local community, and the opportunity to use and enhance learning by solving real-life problems in their immediate environment.(15)

The utopic contour of such an expectation is translated by the report in practically realizable terms. YPR recommended that the present state of erosion of democratic space¹² needs to be stalled by refraining from issuing diktats and by engaging oneself in listening to ‘other’ voices. In fact, this aspect of the report can be read as a silent recognition to responsible dissent within the system. A culture of consensus in every critical decisions resulting into a seamless uniformity is critiqued in every recommendation of YPR.

Once again, the report for the first time asserts the role of sufficient use of local data so that ‘knowledge covered in the syllabus come alive as experience’. (18) This is one of the crucial steps towards translating the vision of holistic knowledge system that requires an integrative mechanism between disciplines, which can be achieved, as per YPR, by learning from the real life situations as well as by learning across disciplines. The syllabus should therefore be cross-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary, instead of merely being disciplinary. For the first time, YPR affirms the role of foundational and basic disciplines that open up the minds of pupils to an art of synthesizing and creativity, in sharp contrast to what has been a practice of selective mingling of disciplines on a narrow pragmatic basis. YPR, rather, advocates a line of exposing students to ‘work’ and its ‘performance’ in a *playful* mode: being free from narrow constraints of the discipline, the student directly learns from various kinds of works and

workers in order to return to both academics and society. Earlier reports laid stress on performative aspect of work and study to lead the students to the ultimate goal of honing skills for a job, while YPR makes it clear that skills divorced from theoretical grounding would only lead to a mechanical ineptitude. It suggests redesigning of the curriculum by relating theory and practice and developing a line of thinking that suggests a return of professional education within the university system. For this, the University system must create enough space by developing the interfaces between various disciplinary frames and skill based institutes that would help removing isolation of professional education as well as steep inequities between rural-urban sectors. Setting up of a national skill development council is appreciated by the report and it further suggested lowering of entry barriers to students trained from professional and vocational institutions for facilitating upgradation of their skills at any stage of career.

Academic Freedom

Apart from this large integrative and holistic paradigm of higher education, the YPR advocates a lot of institutional freedom and removal of top-down control. It takes a bottom up line of educational thinking that could be put to use by a single and a multipurpose seven-member National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER) under an Act of Parliament. YPR designs two steps for achieving this: subsuming all the bodies such as UGC, ICMR, BCI etc. under one regulator and then reorganizing the university system bottom up by allowing the good quality affiliated colleges to become university in its own right. Other bottom up measures include the freedom to design curricula to address various needs such as keeping the community abreast of the cutting edge, many sided inter and trans-disciplinary linkages with social and cultural environment. For reforming the whole system of higher education, the report evolves a novel path of constituting only one regulatory body for the entire higher education that acts as a think-tank with the power of intervention for facilitating self-correcting mechanism. The purpose of this kind of indirect regulatory role is to ensure the fullest autonomy of everybody within the system. YPR spells out details of how both the regulator and the institution in particular is going to evolve the right perspective on any educational concern. YPR states,

Book Review

Co-ordination among agencies which have different views of knowledge and education and which tend to treat knowledge within narrow confines is extremely difficult, if not impossible. It would, therefore be necessary to have a single apex body in the field of higher education which treats all knowledge areas in an integrated manner and works towards convergences which overarching regulatory powers. Only such a body would ensure that there is a live and close interaction among cothinkers and co-workers and there is no dilution of any idea, which it has to suffer if made to traverse a bureaucratic maze. (53)

In other words, the highest regulatory body would exercise its power by way of sharing and deliberating together with co-thinkers and co-workers. This is the exact opposite of the current top-down style of functioning of authoritative bodies that run diktats and decide unilaterally by a select coterie of experts. YPR makes a radical shift from current state of exercise of power that tramples difference of opinion by invoking arbitrary positional authority that gets sanctified under some act of legislature. Diktats from MHRD or UGC rules the roost now as such orders and directives carry the weight of the system. YPR lightens such bureaucratic feats that institutions suffer from. It states,

The National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER) would perform its regulatory function without interfering with academic freedom and institutional autonomy. It would not take recourse to inspection-based approval method. From the current inspection-approval method, it would move to a verification and authentication system. As a matter of fact, we envisage universities and institutions to put out self-declarations mandatorily in the public domain for scrutiny. Universities are to be seen as self-regulatory bodies and the Commission is to be seen as a catalytic agency which is more interested in creating more and more space for the individuality of each university and protecting their autonomy. (57-8)

This aspect of 'individuality' of the institutions in terms of transparency and self-regulation would enable the Indian universities to become more 'authentic' about itself, as it would play out its specific characteristics in the public domain. This is also a long-term vision for transforming universities into self-sustaining citadels of knowledge. This is what YPR terms as

‘recovering the idea of university’, which essentially is directed at recovering the lost space of autonomy and creativity in both the areas of academics and administration. In academics, YPR suggests creation of ‘virtual departments’ that develop emerging thematic concerns of various disciplines and departments.(59) At the level of administration an evolution toward self-regulatory and transparent mechanism that would ensure bottom-up participation of faculty has been the mainstay of its recommendations.

Can we really recover the idea of University?

The first thing that one notices in this ambitious plan for “Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher education” is an agenda for institutional autonomy, accountability, transparency and a suitable mechanism of delivery and reach-out to all possible beneficiaries. This objective of realizing the ideal goals of higher education through the proposed single commission on higher education could have been better contextualized by way of suggesting means and ways of democratization of various decision making bodies within the University/ Institution. Although the report speaks of the minimization of the freedom of the VCs vis-a-vis faculty members (61), it does not spell out how this internal curtailment of freedom can be overcome. One concern that arises from the current scenario is the non-representation of elected representatives of teachers, students and non-teaching staff members etc. in the board or executive council of a University/institution. Most often, the Vice-Chancellor, even bypassing the acts and statutes of the University indiscriminately decide on all crucial matters and thereby reducing every other shade of opinion into a non-entity. That the Vice-Chancellors create their own bureaucratic mechanism to stifle academic freedom is one area of concern that the YPR does not speak of in so many words. The report emphasizes on the criterion for evaluation of teachers by the students, which is a highly debatable proposition. The thrust of the report on self-regulation and the talk of ‘formal procedures’ against teachers in case a teacher whose ‘feedback report remains poor in successive years’(44) are absolute contradictions. It gives the impression that the teachers can be subjected to hire and fire in the service conditions and the concerned authorities in the university are empowered to do so. This may in a moment may establish an area of tyranny within the self-

Book Review

reforming, self-regulating body of the university, as it strengthens penal provisions, which Universities, as liberal and humane institutions are by definition opposed to. In a country deeply divided in ideological, religious, casteist, tribal and other such divisive categories, any assessment would have these hidden parameters that can mar academic neutrality. The YPR is also silent about the democratic rights of teachers and students, which is considered as an essential component of any idea of autonomy. Internal democracy in an academic institution is possibly the most important contributing factor towards protection of its autonomy against external interference. It would have been possible to connect academic excellence with the level of internal democracy in an institution, as this stands out as the most crucial parameter of autonomy in an institutional setting where Vice-Chancellor's/Director's word most often becomes the last word on any subject. The report seemingly disconnects the need for a representational democratic practice in running the affairs of an institution from its academic, financial and research objectives.

This disconnect calls for a little more introspection on some of the disparaging practices of the University system today. One example that comes to my mind is the disproportionate allocation of funds for construction of buildings, roads and communication hubs in comparison to purchase of books, journals and grant of scholarships. This is a recent phenomenon that most of our central universities/institutions are busy in new constructions and projects for beautification as they have already become haven of contractors and builders. YPR could have laid emphasis on a separation of regular duties of academic and administrative authorities from such engineering activities so that the tendency of financial mismanagement does not arise at all in public funded institutions. Many of the Universities and IITs and IIMs are busy sprucing up campuses to give it a five star look, while academics and research wise, they do not make an equally outstanding mark. Compounding such malaises is the random commercialization of university services, starting from transport to health to photocopying facilities. YPR could have suggested some checks and balances on such commercialization. YPR retains a neo-liberal streak in it as its autonomy talk is not complemented by an idea of expanding the academic and administrative freedoms in the University in all possible

ways. Minus this little loophole, the YPR promises to plug many an afflicting loopholes that subvert and damage out institutions today beyond any hope of redemption. Although the report is politically correct in bringing out the new ways of reconnecting the University with society, yet it falls short of addressing the crucial link between education and the political status-quo.

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Man and Society
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Notes for Contributors
Style Sheet

1. Manuscripts should be submitted in duplicate, typed in double space on one side of the paper only, and with ample margins on all four sides. Contributors must provide their affiliations and complete mailing addresses on the last page of the article. All correspondence regarding manuscripts should be sent to The Managing Editor, MAN AND SOCIETY - A Journal of North East Studies, ICSSR (NERC), NEHU Campus, Shillong 793 022, Phone 0364-2550432/436; Fax 2550428.
2. Notes should be typed in double space, numbered serially, and appended at the end of the article.
3. Reference should be embedded in the anthropological style. For example, '(Nayak 2002: 54)'. Citations should appear alphabetically, for example, '(Barpujari 1998; Gassah 1992; Nayak 2002 : 54)'. Multiple references of the same date for anyone author should be distinguished thus: '(Nayak 2002a, 2002b)'. The detailed style of referencing follows:

(a) **Books:**

Barpujari, H.K. 1998. *North-East India: Problems, Policies and Prospects-Since Independence*. Guwahati : Spectrum Publications.

(b) **Articles in Edited Volumes:**

Das, Nitendra Nath. 1992. Public Opinion and Regional Political

Parties in North-East India, in L.S. Gassah(ed.), *Regional Political Parties in North East India. New Delhi, Omsons Publications.*

(c) Articles in Journals:

Das, Samir Kumar 2000, 'Towards Developing an Agendum of Refugee Studies in North East India', *Journal of Indian Council of Social Science Research*, 24 (2): 21-25.

(d) Edited/Edited and Translated Volumes:

Das, Gurudas and R.K. Purkayastha (eds.) 2000. *Border Trade North East India and Neighbouring Countries.* New Delhi, Akansha Publishing House.

Becker, C. 1923. *Early History of the Catholic Missions in Northeast India (1598-1890)*, edited and translated by F. Leicht and S Karotemprel 1989. Shillong: Vendrame.

(e) Unpublished Works:

Duna Hazarika, Sujata. 2002. Women Labour of Tea Estates in Upper Assam'. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, North Eastern Hill University.

Phukan, Girin. 2002. Politics of Urbanisation and Democratic Decentralisation in the North - East India. Paper presented at the National Seminar on Urban Local Self-Government in North-East India: Problems and Prospects, Aizawl, 28-29 May.

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4. Where alternate forms exist, choose '-se' instead of 'ize' spellings. Thus, use 'organise', 'civilise', etc. Use British, not American spellings. Thus use 'labour' nor 'labor' and 'programme' not 'program'.

5. Use single quotation marks, reserving double quotation marks for quoted words within a quotation.
6. Use capitals and italics sparingly but consistently. Words familiar to an average reader of North-East India and those which appear in a commonly used dictionary need to be italicized. Proper names in a foreign language, as also terms like 'etal.', 'ibid', and 'vis-avis' should be roman.
7. Use a stop after abbreviations (such as 'p.', 'vol.' and 'ed,') , contractions (such as 'Dr.' 'end' And 'Mr.') and between initials (such as 'V.V. Rao'), but not between capitals (such as 'ICSSR', 'UNESCO' and 'POTA').
8. Numbers from one to nine should be speIt out, 10 and above will remain in figures. However, figures should be used for exact measurements (such as '5 km', 5 year-old boy and '5 per cent'). Use 'thousands' and 'millions' not 'crores' and 'lakhs'. Use fuller forms for inclusive numbers in the case of dates and page numbers (such as '2002-02' and 'pp.125-30').
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