

# JOURNAL OF POLITICS

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An Annual Publication of the Department of Political Science, Dibrugarh University

**Vol. XIII, 2007**

- 'SUBJECTS' OF THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION : An overview
- INDO CANADIAN RELATIONS : Retrospect and Prospect
- PRIVATISATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION : Where does it Lead Us?
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An Analysis of Indian Political Parties and Indian Democracy
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- CASTE SYSTEM AND DEMOCRACY IN INDIA
- HUMANISM IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN PHILOSOPHY  
—A study of "Spiritual Humanism" of Rabindranath Tagore

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Manjula Dowerah Bhuyan

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**'SUBJECTS' OF THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION :  
An overview**

**Rubul Patgiri**

Probably few other concepts have been more influential in international politics than the concept of self-determination. The concept of self-determination originated in the ideas of French revolution and since then has led to the demise of Empire, liberation of nations and redrawing of Political boundaries among states. However with the consolidation of state system in Europe and decolonization process out side Europe the days of self-determination seemed to drawing close. But contrary to it, the closing decades of twenty century witnessed proliferation of the demands for self-determination with serious implication for world order. And with this the concept has once again come under serious scrutiny.

The philosophical basis of self-determination is rooted in the emphasis of liberal tradition on individual autonomy as expressed in the writing of Rousseau, Mazini, Kant. Individual autonomy demands democracy as individuals can exercise effective autonomy only when they can participate in the government. Thus self-determination implies not only representative government but also freedom from any external domination. While there has been widespread and growing consensus regarding the internal aspect of self-determination. The external aspect of it remains shrouded in controversy. The dispute is both regarding the form of such self-determination and more importantly about the 'people' who can claim this. The ambiguity that surrounds the issue has brought the concept in to disrepute. In fact, much of the skepticism that the concept has recently been put in is the product of the apparent contradiction between the international order based on territorial integrity of states and

the demand for self-determination by different ethno-national groups and behind the contradiction lies the mability to define the 'self' of self-determination. Consequently the exact nature of the 'people' who can legitimately claim this right has remained an important theme of discussion on the right to self-determination.

This article is an attempt to address this issue. Here an attempt has been made to analyse the nature of the definition of 'the people' primarily in the light of the historical development of the right and the different meaning the term 'people' has assumed at different stages of its developments and in terms of legal formulation by various international bodies. The views of different claimant groups, scholars and academicians on this issue will be outside the preview of this article.

The concept of self-determination is ridden with number of ambiguities. The first and foremost among them is regarding the definition of the term 'self'. Who are entitled to self-determination ? In other words, there is no clear definition about who are the holders of this right. Various texts have vested this right on "the peoples", but they are silent on what constitute "the peoples". This lack of a clear definition of the notion of peoples introduces a severe ambiguity and an element of subjectivity into the concept, often leading to a double standard in the recognition of the right to self-determination in specific cases. In the words of Thomas M. Franck, ambiguity in the notion of the "the peoples" has led the gradual descent of self-determination into unprincipled conceptual incoherence.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the "self" of self-determination has assumed different meaning at different periods in history. For example, Dov Ronen has talked about five manifestations of self-determination, each of which has been dominant at successive periods, between the French Revolution and the present : mid-nineteenth century European national self-determination ; late 19th century Marxist class self-determination ; Post-World War I Wilsonian minorities' self determination ; post-world war II non-European racial self-determination ; and contemporary ethnic self-determination. In each self-determination movement, the subject of this right has remained different

: European nations, working class, cultural minorities, Black people of Africa and Asia and ethnic groups respectively.<sup>2</sup> He has also made a significant observation about the causes of the development of these various types of self-determination movements and the consequent changing meaning of the term 'self'. According to him the right to self-determination is an expression of the aspiration to rule one's self and not to be ruled by others.<sup>3</sup> This right has epitomized the aspiration of human beings to be free or to be 'free from' what they perceive as 'others'. So the "self" in self-determination, he argues, is the singular, individual human being and not any aggregation of human beings. In his own words, "It is only because the institutionalization of individual self-determination is not possible that the aggregation of "I"s, the "us" is substituted. But each aggregation is only a temporary "us" because it does not provide self-determination for each "I". The aggregation splits into a new "us" and "them" and becomes the stage for a new drive for self-determination, fueled by the hope that after freedom from "them" my self-determination will be realized. Because the new "us" often becomes just another framework that appears to limit the freedom of the individual, of the real "self" the perception of a new "them" is promoted and hence the formulation "us" for the further pursuit of the aspired "freedom" and "good life". And so a new quest of self-determination evolves with another new "us" ; and then another, possibly ad infinitum.<sup>4</sup>

As mentioned above the meaning and scope of the term "self" of self-determination has not been a fixed one so far. In the different time periods, it has acquired different meaning and now again its meaning is changing. So the best way to understand the meaning of the "self" is to analysis the past, present and possible future meaning of the term.

The age of self-determination can be said to have begun with the French Revolution. The French Revolution was a turning point in the history of self-determination, for it symbolized the recognition of the right of the "ruled" as such to turn against the "rulers".<sup>5</sup> The core of the principle lies in the French insistence that the government be responsible to the people.

However in the French Revolutionary thinking, the people who hold the right to self-determination had a very narrow scope. It was restricted to the right of already existing nations to abandon monarchical regime.<sup>6</sup> And this narrow interpretation of the subjects of this right remained unchanged, when this right was formally enshrined in the article 2 of the Title XIII of the draft constitution presented by Condorcet to the National Convention on 15th February 1793. Under this formulation this was to be applied only to the changes in states borders. Colonial people were not deemed to have a right to self-determination ; neither were minorities or ethnic, religious, cultural groups.<sup>7</sup> Under Article 3 of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, it is the nation which is essentially the source of all sovereignty, not a fraction of the nation.<sup>8</sup> Moreover the French leaders further restricted the scope of this right by misapplying it. They used this right mainly to justify the annexation of land belonging to other sovereigns but whose population expressed some desire to be united with the French and once the result of plebiscite was in favour of France, they annexed that territory. For example, in 1793 the French conducted plebiscite in Belgium and Palatinate and these territories were annexed in accordance with the populations' expressed desire to unite with France. Thus during the period of the French Revolution and in its aftermath, for all practical purposes the people who were entitled to self-determination were those who were living in the territory of another sovereign but who expressed a desire to be united with France.

The concept of self-determination which emerged out of French Revolution soon took the form of national self-determination in Europe and more particularly in Italy and Germany. From late eighteen century onwards the right to self-determination especially stirred Germans and Italians, who had come into intense contact with French people and culture during the upheavals of the Napoleonic Wars. But in Germany and Italy the right to self-determination became the struggle for liberation of themselves and their culture from French domination.

In Italy, for example, Mazzini invoked it as a right of nations to freely choose their status.<sup>9</sup> In the words of Hans Kohn, "concept of French Revolution spread to Italy and Germany were eagerly learned from France. But the emphasis shifted: the tyrants to be expelled were French influence and French armies of occupation; the liberty worshipped was not so much individual freedom from authoritarian government as national freedom from foreign governments."<sup>10</sup> The 'us' of the people as opposed to 'them' of the authoritarian ruler changed in the nineteenth century to the 'us' of the Germans and Italian nations opposed to the 'them' of the French nation and French foreign rule. This pursuit of national self-determination spread to other European nations too. An outstanding example is Belgium. In 1830, the Walloon and Flemish peoples rose against the alien Dutch rule and then choose to remain members of a single state.<sup>11</sup> In this period of national self-determination, the 'them' was not a foreign ruler but the rule of alien nation. Thus once liberated from Dutch alien rule, the Belgians offered the crown to a royal heir of France and then to a German Prince. Russia, France and Britain went along the principle of national self-determination when during the 1820, they supported the Greek rebellion against Ottoman rule.<sup>12</sup> Thus during this period the holders of the right to self-determination was the nation as a whole who were united against an alien nation.

Almost during the same period, when the right to national self-determination was gaining firm root in Europe, there emerged another type of self-determination but it did not remain confined to Europe only and spread beyond the boundaries of Europe. This new form of self-determination was the Marxist class self-determination. Under this new formulation of self-determination, the subjects of this right also assumed a new meaning. It no longer remained the 'nation' but became the working class of the world. The right of self-determination appeared in Marxist doctrine as a right of the working class only, to liberate themselves from capitalism and unify themselves for the proletarian revolution. According to Marx the fundamental dichotomy and conflicts are not between the 'us' and 'them' of nations, but between polar groups inversely related to the

means of production.<sup>13</sup> For Marx, the alien rule is the oppression by the owners of means of production. The proletariat quest for self-determination is to establish the true community of a communist society.

Then, with the advent of the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution the concept of self-determination emerged in the international scene. Woodrow Wilson and Vladimir Lenin emerged as the strongest proponent of this right.

Lenin basically derived his view on self-determination from Marx. Like Marx, he was also mainly interested in the liberation of working class and the establishment of a communist society. He sought to use self-determination as a means to achieve that ultimate goal. According to him, people are yet not ready to move towards the classless world communist society and therefore the era of self-determination should constitute the transitory phase in the long march towards the world communist society. Accordingly, Lenin envisioned self-determination as having three components. First, it could be invoked by ethnic or national groups intent on deciding their own destiny freely. Second, it was a principle to be applied during the aftermath of military conflicts between sovereign states, for the allocation of territories to one or another power. Third, it was an anti-colonial postulate designed to lead to the liberation of all colonial countries. Out of these three components, the first and the third throw some light on Lenin's view about the subjects of the right to self-determination. Under the first component, which granted ethnic or national groups the right to decide their destiny freely, all ethnic groups and not just those living under colonial rule, were to have the right to choose whether to secede from the power to which they were attached, or alternatively, to demand autonomy while remaining part of the larger structure. And the third component entrusted the right to self-determination to all those people who were under colonial domination.

As mentioned already, the political philosophy underpinning Lenin's concept of self-determination was socialism and his main goal was to further the cause of establishing socialism and the right to self-determination

was subservient to this larger goal. Therefore, Lenin and his successor supported the cause of self-determination when such support served their larger cause of establishing socialism and denied it when it was not so. Lenin asked rhetorically "which should be put first, the right of nations to self-determination or socialism? His answer was socialism."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, in the subsequent period USSR and other socialist countries consistently supported anti-colonialism as this conformed with their political and ideological goal but such support was absent in case of the right of self-determination of various ethnic and national groups of state. Ultimately Lenin and other Soviet Leaders were more interested in the self-determination of the working class in each state rather in the self-determination of populations in their entirety.

At the same time as Lenin was championing self-determination with an eye towards a worldwide socialist revolution, Woodrow Wilson was developing his own thoughts on the subject. And in due course, he became one of the strongest champions of the principle of self-determination. According to him "every people has a right to choose the sovereignty under which they shall live. And no peace can last, or ought to last, which does not recognize and accept the principle that governments derive all their just power from the consent of the governed, and no right anywhere exists to hand peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property".<sup>15</sup> However, a close look reveals numerous ambiguities and internal inconsistency in his concept of self-determination. The most important among them is the ambiguity with regard to the question of who is the 'self' of self-determination. Ivor Jennings in 1956, observed: "Nearly forty years ago a professor of political science who was also president of the United States, President Wilson, enunciated a doctrine which was ridiculous but which was widely accepted as a sensible proposition, the doctrine of self-determination. On the surface it seemed reasonable. Let the people decide. It was in fact ridiculous because the people can not decide until somebody decides who are the people."<sup>16</sup>

The seed of the difficulty is discernible in the genesis, development, and application of the Wilsonian idea of self-determination. Wilson derived his idea of self-determination from his notion of self-government. For Wilson self-determination is the logical corollary of popular sovereignty; it was synonymous with the principle that government must be based on the consent of the governed.<sup>17</sup> But the term self-government had an imprecise dual connotation for Wilson.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, it implied the right of a population to select its own form of government, yet on the other hand; it also strongly suggested that self-government must be a continuing process and must therefore be synonymous with the democratic form of Government. It was further more unclear as to how universally applicable 'self-government' was. From an initial position in which he believed the capacity for self-government to be confined to the English speaking world, Wilson apparently came to posit such a capacity in all people. "When properly directed", he stated, "there is no people not fitted for self-government".<sup>19</sup> Wilson's pre-war thought on self-government was thus a vague amalgam of what may be termed as internal self-determination, universal democracy and the tutelage of primitive people toward ultimate self-rule. The break up of empires on the basis of the principle of nationality was not then in contemplation; nor did the concept of 'self-government' embrace any notion of external self-determination, i.e., right of every 'people' to choose its own political allegiance and to be free of 'alien' sovereignty. Both ideas came to figure prominently only as a result of the outbreak of the war and subsequent developments.

The 'principle of nationalities', which during the war was used either interchangeably or in close association with 'the right of people to determine their own fate', was possibly one of which Wilson had not had a natural affinity.<sup>20</sup> The 'self' in Wilson's 'self-government' was not necessarily the nations of continental Europe. Indeed many indications point to a more atomistic and less historic view of the nation than was prevalent in Europe and a negative assessment by Wilson of European type nationalism. Thus he had contrasted unfavourably the German concept of 'volk' as a

community of blood and of origin with the Anglo-American view of the 'nation' as a 'community of organisation' of life and of tradition. But the war served to throw into high relief the question of subject nationalities, and as a result, new elements were super imposed upon Wilson's original concept of 'self-government'; thus multiplying the original ambiguities. Wilson began to include as a matter of 'consent of the governed' the right of people to choose their own sovereignty and their own allegiance and not to be handed about from sovereignty to sovereignty. The problem of external self-determination was becoming more prominent in his thought but it was still not clear that the 'self' who was to free itself from alien rule was synonymous with the 'nation'. Self determination did not necessarily require the coincidence, in so far as possible, of the ethnographic and political maps.<sup>21</sup>

So in the Wilson's formulation the subject of the right of self-determination remain vague and it remained unclear whether the unit in contemplation is a race, territorial area or a community.

Dov Ronnen has called Wilsonian self-determination as self-determination of minorities. According to him when Wilson appealed to 'people' he did not mean human beings in general, he meant the underrepresented minorities.<sup>22</sup> A striking aspect of Wilson's concept of self-determination is that it referred to 'those nations and territories whose destinies had to be resettled in one way or another because they had been unsettled by the war'.<sup>23</sup> This implies that Wilson conceived self-determination as an optional means of settling limited range of problems at the close of the war. These problems included the future boundaries of Europe, the future of Germany and the maintenance of peace among nations. Wilson suggested the formula of self-determination as a solution to these problems and not as basic ideology with universal applicability.

The problem of identifying the 'self', who holds the right turned out to be one of the major obstacle in putting the principle into practice in the Paris Peace Conference. In the absence of any clear-cut definition, the self of Wilsonian self-determination came to be misconceived by many.

They gave the term its most extreme meaning implying a right to political independence for every ethnic group no matter how small. In the words of Robert Lansing, Wilson's own secretary of state, "The more I think about the President's declaration as to the right of self-determination the more convinced I am of the danger of putting such ideas into the mind of certain races. It is bound to be basis of impossible demands on the Peace Congress and create trouble in many lands. ... Will it not breed discontent, disorder and rebellion? The phrase is simply loaded with dynamite".<sup>24</sup> This together with the victor's geo-strategic, political and economic interest had ultimately prevented the leaders of Allied powers to implement this right universally. They upheld this right only with regard to the people of defeated power's territories and to the people of Europe. So during this period the subjects of the right to self-determination effectively became the people of defeated powers and Southern and Eastern Europe.

During the second World War as early as 1941, the US and the UK proclaimed self-determination as one of the objective to be attained and put into practice at the end of the conflict. The Atlantic Charter drafted by U.S. President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Churchill, and made public on 14 August, 1941, proclaimed self-determination as a general standard governing territorial changes, as well as principle concerning the free choice of rulers in every sovereign state. But in the Charter the term 'self' was given a very narrow interpretation. Churchill on 9 September 1941, clearly stated in the House of Commons that the principle of self-determination proclaimed in the Charter did not apply to colonial people (in particular to India, Burma and other parts of the British Empire) but only aimed at restoring 'the sovereignty, self government and national life of the states and nations of Europe under the Nazi Yoke, besides providing for any alterations in the territorial boundaries which may have to be made'.<sup>25</sup> After the end of the war, the Allied leaders in tune with their war time declaration agreed to include the right of self-determination in the Charter of the United Nations. Accordingly the right to self-determination was inserted in Article 1(2) and Article 55 and into

chapters XI and XII on decolonisation. Article 1 (2) of the Charter states that one of the purpose of the U.N. is to develop friendly relation among nations based on respect for the principles of equal right and self-determination of peoples and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace. Article 55 is a logical continuation of Article 1(2) for it enumerates the objectives the U.N. shall promote "with a view to the creation of conditions of stability and well being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relation among nations, based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples". Thus under the Charter the repository of the right to self-determination is 'the peoples'. But the Charter remains silent as regards the constitution of the 'people'. However from the analysis of the debate on the issue of self-determination between various delegates of different countries preceding the formal incorporation of it in the Charter, it can be suggested that the Charter instituted self-determination only for pre-existing territorial units and for Colonial people to achieve independence.<sup>26</sup> Minority or an ethnic group or a national group does not enjoy this right to secede from a sovereign country.

Chapter XI and XII of the Charter also hold interesting clues regarding the holder of this right. The two chapters, though they did not contain any explicit reference to 'self-determination', did establish the principle indirectly. Article 73 of chapter XI calls upon states administering non-self-governing territories, territories "whose people have not yet attained full measure of self-government to promote self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the people and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institution". Article 76 of chapter XII states that a basic objective of the U.N trusteeships is to promote progressive development in the trust territories "towards self-government or independence". The important aspects of each of the chapters are its focus on territory rather than ethnicity. Progress towards self-government was to be promoted in self-governing and trust territories as a whole political entities- regardless of any internal ethnic,

linguistic or religious diversities. The emphasis on territory rather than on ethnicity limited the 'self' that was entitled to move towards self government. It also foreshadowed a future tension between the principle of self-determination and the competing principle of territorial integrity, which worked to prevent the extension of the right of self-determination to ethnic groups or minorities within territories administered as a single unit by a Colonial people.<sup>27</sup>

In the decade following the Second World War the demand for self-determination by Colonial people became very intense. During this period the right to self-determination became the right of Colonial people to be free from Colonial rule. Dov Ronnen has termed this new demand for self-determination as decolonisation or the second manifestation of the African quest for self-rule.<sup>28</sup> The first one was the Pan Africanism, formulated in the mid nineteenth century. Pan Africanism, according to Geiss, is an ideology of emancipation from white supremacy.<sup>29</sup> It may be said to have originated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century among black communities in the United States with the evolution of an African Consciousness. Pan Africanism did not primarily aim at liberation of Africa from the Colonial Framework. As Langley perceptively put it, "In spite of all these objections to 'alien rule' there was never any mention of severing relations with the Colonial power".<sup>30</sup> It simply awakened the awareness of racial discrimination and aimed at personal and social equality within the framework of a given Colonial political boundary. In this type of self-determination, it was the black people of African origin who became the subject of the right to self-determination.

Decolonisation or the second phase of African quest for self-rule was on the other hand a desire for liberation from Colonial rule, a rejection of political domination by foreign society, especially of a different race, and not merely the will to secure more rights within the Colonial Framework as during the Pan African phase. Lots of external factors contributed to the growth of this type of self-determination. But the most important cause was the internal changes in African society, which brought about the shift

from Pan-Africanism to decolonisation. These internal changes included the faster spread of education of Africans in Africa and abroad, urban growth and economic growth. Only with the termination of foreign rule could the growth have meaning and the problems that foreign rule had created can be solved. Decolonisation was the quest for liberation from Colonial rule, prompted by the perception of this rule as the hindrance to the realization of Pan African aspirations towards basic human equality. Thus in this phase the Colonial people became the subject of the right to self-determination.

The socialist countries and newly independent countries became the most active supporters of anti-colonial self-determination. They adopted and developed Lenin's thesis that self-determination should first and foremost be a postulate of anti-colonialism. Side by side with political doctrine, Eastern European legal literature also strongly advocated this concept. The Soviet internal lawyers G. B. Staruskenko and G. Tunkin, and their East German counterparts Arginger, Steiniger and Gracefarth, underlined that above all self-determination means the liberation of people subject to racist regimes (like that of South Africa) and Colonial Domination and its 'after-affect's.<sup>31</sup> Though the newly independent countries of the third world had actively supported the self-determination of Colonial people, their approach to self-determination was both less carefully developed and more linear. For these states self-determination mainly meant three things- (i) the fight against Colonialism and racism, (ii) the struggle against the domination of any alien oppressor illegally occupying a territory, (iii) the struggle against all manifestation of Colonialism and in particular the exploitation by alien power of the natural resources of developing countries. Ethnic and tribal conflicts being rife in many developing countries, the third world group ignored or even explicitly denied the rights of minorities or nationalities living within sovereign states. For the most part of the third world countries championed 'external', not internal self-determination, with external self-determination being granted only to limited categories of people.

Out of the growing pressure from socialist countries and third world countries, the U.N. General Assembly adopted an important resolution on 14 December, in 1960, widely known as Declaration on Granting Independence to Colonial Countries and People. Paragraph 1 of this declaration states, "All peoples have the right to self-determination ; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and culture development".

Although the title of the Resolution 1514 could give an impression otherwise, the right proclaimed in the Declaration is formulated as a general one. Paragraph 2 aims at a universal application of the right of self-determination of people and not just of Colonial people. Paragraph 1 declares that the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights. Subsequently, and constructed as one element or consequence of the general right to self-determination, the trust and non-self-governing territories are granted the right to independence. A special reference to Trust and Non-self-governing territories is made in paragraph 5 of the Declaration stating : "immediate steps shall be taken in trust and non-self-governing territories or all other territories which have yet not attained independence, to transfer all powers to the people of those territories . . . in order to enable them to enjoy complete independence and freedom". Thus this Declaration extended the right of self-determination beyond the Colonial people to the people of non-self-governing territories. However the members countries of the U.N., both Third World and Western Countries, were quick to ensure that this wider interpretation of the term people in the declaration did not encourage other self-determination demands. This is because the Third World countries were as vulnerable to secessionist demands as were their Colonial masters. Therefore, the very following day, they adopted another Resolution 1541 in order to uphold the principle of territorial integrity and to limit the 'self' to whom the right to self-determination could apply. The Resolution specifics that a territory would be considered non-self-governing under chapter XI of

the U.N. Charter only if it were both "geographically separated and ethnically and/or culturally distinct from the country administering it". Thus strictly read Resolution 1541 rules out classifying a minority or ethnic group of a state territory as a non-self-governing entity entitled to self-determination or self-government.

In 1966, the two international covenants on human right, the U.N. Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the U.N. Covenant of Economic and Social Rights-endorsed the right of self-determination of people. Article 1 of both covenants state.

1. "All peoples have the right of self determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.
2. All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispense of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.
3. The states parties to the present covenant, including those having responsibility for the administration of non-self-governing and trust territories, shall promote the realization of the right of self-determination, and shall respect that right, in conformity with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nation".<sup>32</sup>

During the drafting process of this article the issue of what constitutes "the peoples" that are entitled to self-determination turned out to be a matter of intense debate. The debate was mainly between Third World countries and Western countries. Initially the debate was mainly regarding the inclusion of this right in the covenant but later the debates shifted to the definition of the people. While most of the Third World countries favoured to limit this right to the colonial people only, the western countries wanted to confer this right to other people as well.

Most of the Third World countries wanted to restrict the right to colonial people only. They feared that if the scope of the right was not limited then it might be interpreted as conferring right on national minorities, which would disrupt the sovereign states. The Soviet Union insisted that self-determination should only afford a right to colonial people.<sup>33</sup> Similarly India explained that the word "people" was to apply only to large compact national groups . . . who made a conscious demand for the right to self-determination.<sup>34</sup> Venezuela understood the term "people" in the most general and unqualified sense and therefore as not applicable to racial, religious or other groups or minorities.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, Western countries were in favour of a wider interpretation of the term "people". These countries were initially opposed to the induction of this in the Covenant, but once it became apparent that their view would not prevail they changed their view. But they insisted that if the right to self-determination were incorporated, than it should also apply to the people of sovereign states oppressed by their own governments.<sup>36</sup>

In the end no consensus could be reached on the issue. The drafting states vaguely vest the right in peoples without clarifying what the term "people" means. However Antonio Cassese argues that the general spirit and context of the Article and combined with the preparatory work, suggest that the Article confers this right to the following categories of peoples, (i) entire population living in independent and sovereign countries, (ii) entire population of territories that have yet to attain independence, and (iii) population living under foreign military occupation. It is thus, according to Cassese apparent that the existence of a right to self-determination is not necessarily determined by reference to a territory's international status.<sup>37</sup>

On 24 October 1970, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 2625 entitled 'the Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among Nations States' in accordance with the Charter of the U.N. According to the preamble of

the Declaration on Friendly Relations, the principles enunciated codified and constitute the basic principles of international law. One of the principles included in the Declaration is that the principles of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. The provisions regarding the self-determination of Declaration states -

- (i) By virtue of the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, all peoples have the right freely to determine, without external interference, their political status and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development, and every state has the duty to respect this right in accordance with the provisions of the Charter.
- (ii) Every state has the duty to promote realization of the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples . . . and bearing in mind that subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a violation of the principle.
- (iii) The territory of a Colony or other Non-self-governing territories has . . . a status separate and distinct from the territory of the state administering it.
- (iv) Nothing in the foregoing paragraph shall be construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would hamper . . . territorial integrity of sovereign and independent states, conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples as described above and thus possessed of a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction as to race, creed or colour.

During the drafting of this article the issue of defining the "peoples" came to the fore. India argued that the right to self-determination did not apply to all peoples but only to Colonial Peoples or Peoples living under alien subjugation, domination and exploitation.<sup>38</sup> Ghana and Arab did not go that far, but nevertheless believed that the right to self-determination applied essentially to peoples living under Colonial domination.<sup>39</sup> Britain

and Australia, on the other hand, protested against this narrow interpretation, stressing the universal applicability of the principle. They argue that giving the principle of self-determination any other meaning would be contrary to the Charter.<sup>40</sup> The joint proposal submitted by Algeria and other non-aligned states also insisted that the subjection of people to alien subjugation, domination, exploitation as well as any other form of Colonialism constitute a violation of the principle.<sup>41</sup> The Algerian delegates explained that he distinguished three situations to which the right of self-determination applied. The first one was the case of independent peoples in their relations between each other. The second situation concerned self-determination of people within states. He did not accept the right of secession, as he believed it fell entirely under the domestic jurisdiction of states to grant such a right or not. The third and last case in which the right to self-determination could be invoked was in the case of oppressed people, namely those living under Colonial or racial domination. Thus this joint proposal of non-aligned states does not restrict the right of self-determination to peoples under alien subjugation, domination and exploitation, and granted this right to other people also, namely independent people. This view that right of self-determination extended to dependent and independent peoples were shared by many delegates.

In the end a compromise was reached. Paragraph 2 of the Declaration on Friendly Relations, declares that every states has to promote the realization of the principle of self-determination of people, bearing in mind that subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation. Independent peoples of existing states can see their right of self-determination violated too, though this does not necessarily imply that they are under alien subjugation, domination and exploitation.

Another issue that came up regarding the scope of the holder of the right was whether, besides independent people of existing states and colonial peoples, there are other peoples who hold the right of self-determination. Some states accepted the right of secession from existing states as inherent in the right of self-determination.<sup>42</sup> Other opposed this

view stating that it was doubtful whether such a right existed and could be codified.<sup>43</sup> Under the U.S. and British drafts, a limited right of secession was accepted. The US proposal included "a zone of occupation ensuing upon the termination of military hostilities" and a territory geographically distinct and ethnically diverse from the remainder of that state's territory, even though not as a colony or other non-self-governing territory.<sup>44</sup> However if a state possessed a representative government effectively representing as such all distinct peoples within its territory, the principle of self-determination was satisfied.

Ultimately the final Declaration emphasizes the preservation of territorial integrity, but added a qualification. It specifies that protection of territorial integrity applies only to states "possessed of a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction as to race, creed or colour". One author suggests that the provisions constitute an unambiguous affirmation of the applicability of the right of self-determination to people inside the political boundaries of existing sovereign and independent states in situations where the government does not represent the governed.<sup>45</sup>

However, other commentators view this provision of the Declaration as having far less sweeping implication. Noting that the requirement of 'representative government' appears in a racial context, they argue that the principle of territorial integrity is superceded by that of self-determination only in the case of racist regimes.

Thus while there is no doubt that there is an international legal right of self-determination in the context of decolonisation, the extension of that right to non-colonial situation was not clear as the war came to an end. Most scholars and governments had concluded that the principle of political unity prevailed over any expression of self-determination within a state. As one author has noted, the international community "subscribes to a highly conventional interpretation of the principle of national self-determination. It cannot be invoked, at least with any hope of securing widespread support, by dissatisfy minorities within the states.

The concealment of the right of self-determination to colonial people however, did not conform to the reality. The world, particularly since the seventies have witnessed increasing demands of self-determination by different ethnic groups of the existing states. During the seventies, Van Dan Berghe, commenting upon the magnitude of this phenomenon had complained that "everybody began to talk of revival of ethnicity . . . Now everybody (or nearly so) is on an ethnic kick".<sup>46</sup> The demand for ethnic self-determination has become more intense after the cold war. With the lifting of the constraints of the ideological war, the world today is witnessing what is come to be termed as retribalisation. This is so much so that today most of the conflicts are motivated by the factors related to ethnic self-determination. And this is not confined only to the poor and backward countries of Asia and Africa but equally prevalent in the developed countries of the West also.

Different ethnic groups today all around the world are advancing their demand for self-determination. In some cases these demands for self-determination have been restricted to the demand for autonomy for the groups within the states. While in some cases it has taken the form of claim for establishment of separate state for that group.

Ethnic group can be defined as a group of people who feel distinct from others because of their different culture, religion, language and race. The ethnic groups believe that their distinct culture, religion, language and race make them a distinct people from other and therefore, according to them, they are entitled for self-determination. Every ethnic group of the world who feels separate or distinct from other because of some objective differences is the subjects of the right of self-determination. Thus under this formulation the criterion for determining who is entitled to self-determination are the same as those for identifying an ethnic nation : a common ancestry, common language, common religion, common culture or any combination thereof. The ethnic self-determination emphasized that an ethnic nation should thus have its own political institution and international recognition to give it a political identity.

During the cold war, as mentioned earlier international law was against the extension of the right to self-determination beyond colonial people. But in post cold war, in conformity with the new realities of the proliferation of demands for self-determination by different categories of peoples, the international law as well as states practices are beginning to move towards more accommodative stand to govern the claims of self-determination. Three developments in international law and states practices : in the protection of minorities' right, protection of democracy and the law of recognition are indicative of these developments.

During the cold war, the concept of minority right was narrowly construed and rarely applied. In the post cold war era, however, the international law is evolving to provide greater protection for minority rights, in part because such protection has the potential to prevent dismemberment of the multi-ethnic states. In the cold war period, whatever was offered in the name of minority rights was very limited in scope and imprecise. Moreover, the major concern of that period was the protection of individual human rights rater than groups' rights of minorities. The beneficiary of minority rights was the individual member of a minority group and not the group as a whole.

In the aftermath of cold war, minority rights in a collective sense have found their expression in several important documents. Some of them are, Draft Declaration on the Rights, of Minority, 1991, by U.N. Sub Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Copenhagen Documents, 1990, adopted by the Conferences on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the Charter of Paris 1990, signed by SCCE heads of sate and government, the report of the Geneva CSCE meeting of Experts on National Minorities.<sup>47</sup> These Declarations reaffirm the traditional linguistic, cultural, religious, social and political rights of the minorities and also extend the scope of them to include political functions and powers to minority groups as a whole. Some of them have emphasized the need of democratic governments and rule of law as necessary for protection of minorities. More importantly,

issues concerning national minorities, as well as compliance with international obligation and commitment concerning rights of persons belonging to them under these Declarations no longer remain s matter of internal affairs of states but have become a matter of legitimate international concern.

Today, entitlement to democracy is seen as an emerging principle of international law. The advocacy of democratic governance as emerging principle of international law has influenced and will continue to influence both characters of self-determination movements and international communities' response to them. This will create a right or even an obligation for international community to protect and promote democracy. Today major democracies and multi-lateral institutions are extending, consolidating, and defending democratic process and principles throughout the world.

The European countries through the adoption of various documents have emphasized and committed themselves to build, promote and protection of democracies and condemned the overthrow of the elected governments and to support vigorously - the legitimate organs of that state upholding human rights, democracy and rule of law. Thus the European countries have put the commitment to democratic pluralism, human rights and fundamental freedom above the legal principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of state.

Similarly, OAS has declared their purpose as to promote and consolidate representative democracy. Electoral democracy has been endorsed by the U.N. too. These growing support for democracy has been reflected in the international community's greater involvement in or greater willingness to help resolve internal dispute of states.

These democratization processes can often resolve self-determination claims by giving rise to a political system capable of protecting and accommodating groups that would otherwise be seeking changes in political arrangement or borders.

The United States and the European Community have developed criteria for recognition for successor states, while responding to the break up of Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Before this most of the international communities including the US had minimised the conditions as relevant to the decision of the recognition of a state or government. However the new criteria developed by the US and the European Union have begun to reverse this general practice and to inject a significant list of political condition into policies of recognition. Thus international law on recognition, minorities' rights and support for democracy is evolving to address the new demands of self-determination.

Thus the demands for self-determination have been made mainly in three categories of situations : (a) the situations of non-self-governing territories, including occupied territories ; (b) the situations of independent countries where the population for some reason is unable to govern itself; (c) the situation in parts of a territory of a sovereign state where an ethnic group challenges the legitimacy of the central government to exercise authority over that group.

There is a near universal consensus that the population of non self-governing and occupied territories has a right to self-determination : the main content of the right is to determine the political status of the territory as a whole. In these cases, the beneficiary of the right (the 'people') is the population of the territory as a whole.

There is also a broadening consensus that the population in every independent state(the 'people' as a whole) has a right to self-determination. This means that population must have an effective democratic system of governance where all parts of the populations participate. It needs to underline system of government where all parts of the populations participate. It needs to underline that beneficiary of this right is the people as a whole meaning that members of the different ethnic, religious, linguistic and other groups must be allowed to participate without discrimination in the government of the country and that no part of the population can demand to govern alone.

And there is very little if any, support in international law for claims by separate ethnic, linguistic or religious groups inside sovereign states to secede from the territory of the sovereign states.

However, during the last years, there has also emerged some support for the right of other ethnic, religious or linguistic groups under some circumstances to obtain a degree of autonomy if that is required from them to be able to preserve their identity and ensure effective political participation within the national society as a whole. This scope and nature of such a right remain vague and need to be developed through future practice.

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## INDO CANADIAN RELATIONS : RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

**Dr. P.K. Panigrahi**

Relations among nations are established on the basis of national interests of the concerned countries and furthered towards the attainment of the aims and objectives charted out by them. Every nation formulates its foreign policy in relation to its national interest. Before establishing relations with another country, every nation analyses the pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages of the same. While carrying forward the relations, it is not necessary that it has to be always steady. At times strains and stresses enter into the relations due to misunderstandings and misconceptions. Some times, due to changed international scenario or situational of demand of the international environment, disruptions occur in the bilateral and multilateral relations. This article is an attempt to understand the nature and dynamics of Indo-Canadian relations in the past and to find out the future prospects, as the international scene has undergone a dramatic change after the end of cold war.

Indo-Canadian relations have undergone several upheavals since its inception. The relations between both the countries began due to a variety of common interest in the late 1940s and evolved by the 1950s into a partnership from which both countries derived advantages. But it was not long before, the conditions on which the relationship was founded began to erode and both drifted apart. The early phase of the Indo-Canadian relation, which could be characterized as the halcyon days, based on mutual understanding and shared concerns were quite cordial. However, what seems certain is that 'the romance of the Indo-Canadian relationship of the fifties and sixties is gone for ever and is not likely to

return<sup>1</sup>. But it does not mean that a better productive and substantive relationship is not achievable. It only needs closer understanding and firm commitment as both sides to pursue a sustainable relationship grounded in realism and mutual interest.

### **Friendly Past**

In the past, South Asia has never been a high priority area for Canada, as with USA-India has been further ignored within South-Asia. As stated by Salin Mansur, 'South Asia was not of much interest because it was not only distant, but also marginally relevant to Canadian affairs.<sup>2</sup>

The last few years of the 1940s brought about a transformation in the world politics. There was a shift from European balance of power to a new world order of bipolarity shaped by military rivalry and ideological confrontation - relentlessly trying to contain the spread of influence of each other. The Indo-Canadian relationship at that point was shaped by several commonality of historical legacy shared interests, concerns and perspectives. What brought both India and Canada closer to each other was their commonality in understanding the cold war superpower rivalry and the resultant growing danger of arms race. Right from the beginning, both countries due to their common historical legacy could understand each other's concerns about the then dynamics of world politics. Further, both countries were trying to create new space for themselves in the then emerging world order. India was trying to carve out a place for herself as the world's largest democracy and a prominent entity within the region, whereas, Canada was trying to free itself from the isolationist tradition and come out of the shadow of the Great Britain. Both being multi-ethnic, having the threat of secessionism and a federal and democratic parliamentary political structure, have several common experiences.

The first step of an emerging Indo-Canadian partnership was the effort of both countries to forge a new multiracial commonwealth from the remnants of the British Commonwealth. In the changed climate of

post-war world politics, the Ottawa mandarins preferred to form a new multiracial commonwealth accommodating the newly independent states of the British Indian Empire as Canada was trying to project its new image dedicating itself in the ethos of multilateralism. It was also considered at that juncture by Canadian political establishment that it will be an opening to develop relationship with the "Third World". Further, due emphasis was attached on the membership in the commonwealth to use it as a 'corrective to continentalist preoccupation<sup>3</sup> and as a counterweight to the dominant bilateral relationship with the United States<sup>4</sup>, which characteristically presented by Escott Reid :

"In the 1950s membership in the Commonwealth helped Canada to break out of the confines of Canadian isolationism, North American isolationism, North Atlantic isolationism. It helped to inoculate Canada from some of the misleading simplicities of much of the cold war propaganda of the time. It helped us realize sooner than we otherwise would have that most of the crucial problems : Colonialism and its aftermath, racial discrimination, cultural imperialism, the misery of half of the world"<sup>5</sup>

This faith on multilateralism was in fact an important basis of closeness between both the countries. Further, the emergence of the cold war brought both the countries nearer to each other. Though both approached the issues of the deepening East-West rivalry from different perspectives, Canada & India could carve a space for themselves in world affairs distancing themselves from the extremes represented by Stalinism & McCarthyism. "The Canadian government attached special importance to role of India as perhaps the leading neutral in the modern world. In an international community which seemed in danger of division into two warring camps, India because of its size and the quality of its leadership appeared the natural leader of a possible middle group"<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, Nehru perceived India as a new force in world politics. India equally

took note of the role played by Canada in the Kashmir issue. Despite the fact that both America and Great Britain were not satisfied with the India's reluctance to accept McNaughton's proposal over the settlement of Kashmir dispute, Ottawa was determined to take an independent position and protect its own "special relationship" with New Delhi. The protective attitude of Pearson in the Kashmir issue facilitated an opportunity to Canada for shaping its images as an "honest broker". While Pakistan was unhappy with Canada for its role and not joining the corose with USA and Britain. Canada, which very systematically carved out a space for itself as a "middle power" was not ready to join the bandwagon in isolating India in the security council<sup>7</sup>. Canada, as required to have an Asian Partner in the United Nations and intended to come out of the shadow of the Great Britain and the dominant USA, automatically opted for India.

There were several factorial reasons which caused this special consideration. First of all Canada intended to project itself as a well meaning "middle power". Secondly, it also intended to spread its influence ending the *continental images* of its relations. Thirdly, Canada intended to use India as a potential bulwark against growing Soviet influence in this region. These factors are responsible in explaining the sustained efforts which Canada made to foster a special relationship.

The **Colombo plan** in 1950s was another step ahead in the direction of an enduring relationship between India and Canada. The developed Commonwealth countries, who subscribed the **Colombo plan** to meet the challenges in the socio-economic front faced by poorer nations, for which Canada advanced its support, was Canada's first major venture into the field of economic development assistance. India became and was to remain the largest single beneficiary of the Canadian development assistance over a period of more than four decades (2.7 billion from 1950 to 1993)<sup>8</sup>. While the early part of the 1950s characterized by several cohesive issues strengthened by the Colombo plan, by the mid 1950s the

Indo-Canadian relationship had evolved into a real partnership between a leading actor in Asia and Third World affairs, and a significant member of the Western community of nations, from which both derived advantages. The lead role played by India during the *Bandung Conference* of 1955 was perceived by US establishment and West with suspicion, as the north-south dialogue was forcefully pronounced, leading to disruption in Indo-US relations. But in case of Canada, being an ally of USA who could have gone very well with US<sup>9</sup>. Instead of following the American line, Canada made a policy departure and projected its autonomous actor status. No doubt, Canada maintained an ambivalent stature, if not opposed to the American approach. This was due to mutual understanding which has been suitably stated by the Canadian scholar :

Both powers were internationalist, enjoyed clear stature within the commonwealth and the UN and dealt with each other as if they respected that stature. Each accepted the other as sympathetic, powerful in its own right, and a prime conduit to larger interests. As long as these conditions held, they formed a sound basis for an effective relationship<sup>10</sup>.

### **From irritant to erosion**

The foundation of the "special relationship" during the early 1950s based on common perception and attitude towards the changed global scene could not hold it for long. Differences surfaced from both sides. The entry of US in the South Asian region through the US - Pakistan security pact was the major cause of concern for India which perceived Canada as an ally of the US "Grand design". Since 1954, erosion started in the Indo-Canadian special relationship. Subsequently another major international issue caused the drifting apart was the Hungary issue of 1956. India's failure to condemn the Soviet Union's actions in Hungary was perceived by Canada like the USA as double standard and advanced scathing criticism against India. On the other hand, the Indian government

criticized Canada for doing exactly the opposite : condemning the Soviet Union but not issuing a strong public denunciating of the actions of Great Britain and France in the Suez crisis. These allegations and counter allegations led to a state of souring relations between the two governments<sup>11</sup>. Another added irritant was in relation to difference in the International Control Commission (ICC). There was a mutual distrust towards each other. In the late 1960s Canadian distrust of the Indian government deepened. The Chinese aggression of 1962s was quite disturbing for India and as the relations of India with west was not very cordial which was demonstrated subsequently. Particularly by USA during the Indo-Pak War in 1971. India entered into a *treaty of peace, cooperation and friendship* with Soviet Union keeping in mind her own security. However, Canada, like most of its western allies, did not take it in the right spirit. Rather it was considered as detrimental to Canadian interest and joined the Western allies labeling India as an indirect party to Warsaw Pact.

### **From erosion to disruption**

All these irritants were responsible for the erosion occurred in the bilateral relationship between both the countries. But the nuclear detonation of May 1974 by India caused total disruption in the relationship. The detonation was taken very seriously and perceived by Canada as a blatant violation of the mutual agreement and provoked heavy reaction not only in the government circle but also among the general public. India's efforts to clarify her stand was not heeded at by the West Canada was not an exception. It was unilaterally perceived by Canada that it will lead to nuclear arms race in the subcontinent. With reference to the detonation, a former Canada's High Commissioner commented that it "had a catalytic effect on Indo-Canadian relations. It demonstrated that so far as Canada was concerned, the special relationship had ceased to exist"<sup>12</sup>. For the India government, the Canadian reaction to her peaceful nuclear explosion

was unsolicited and considered to be unnecessary and hypocritical. Canada's protest against India and outrage were unconvincing to New Delhi. Finally, when Canadian government announced the termination of the nuclear programme co-operation in 1976 despite India's efforts to convince the Canadian establishment about her good intentions was a major set back to the Indo-Canadian bilateral relationship. Disruption also emerged in relation to Canadian economic assistance under (CIDA) to India. Assistance was drastically curtailed from \$101 million in 1971-72 to \$ million by 1978-79. It had also its telling effect in the trade front. With the nuclear detonation issue, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the 1985 Air India Crash and its impact were the last few issues which did cast a pall over relations for nearly a decade. There was a benign neglect by Canada towards the subcontinent in general and India in particular. However, a difference could be made in the Indo-Canadian relations, taking into account the international issues and the bilateral issues. So far the security and nuclear issues are concerned ; Canada always maintained a pro-West stand. In case of bilateral issues and issues where USA maintained positive view of India, Canada had shown its convergence with India. The bilateral extradition treaty in 1987 is a case in point<sup>13</sup>. But even this did not turn out to be an unqualified asset to the relationship, since there have been several occasions when Canadian government called upon to remind Indian government about observance of Human Rights while combating the Sikh separatists in Punjab<sup>14</sup>. In fact the whole Cold War period could be characterized as lack of interest or indifference towards each other which was mostly due to mutual ignorance.

### **Partnership in Perspective**

Though in the past, the Indo-Canadian relationship has gone through rough weather, a perceptible change in the attitude could be observed in the post-Cold War period.

This century has stood witness to many unexpected and crucial

events in the global political scenario. The most important one is the end of the cold war ending the superpower rivalry. The post-Cold War world Order offered a new situation. The cold war era was dominated by a 'bipolar' structure in which military competition and ideological rivalry of the super powers were the dominant issues<sup>15</sup>. But the post Cold War situation is so ambiguous that even nearly after a decade and half since the cold war ended, there is no certainty, neither a clear cut direction of the global politics<sup>16</sup>. Everything is still in flux. Despite the fact that the global political scene is yet to take a definite shape, one important change has already occurred in the global scene the economic issues are gradually emerging as major issues replacing the issues relating to military competition. From the state of cold war bi-polarity, a multi-polar world is gradually unfolding in the post cold war world order.

With the end of the cold war and growing prominence of economic issues, the liberalization process in India since 1990s has opened up new economic opportunities. The economic reforms systematically persuaded through disinvestment and clearing the bureaucratic bottlenecks has attracted attention abroad for intensive economic interaction. The economic liberalization has created opportunities for a better Indo-Canadian economic partnership. After the collapse of Soviet Union, India has lost one of its most important trading partners. India has since turned increasingly to the west as well as East-Asia in search of new market and new source of foreign investment. Taking into account the economic performance, Indian economy has fared impressively in recent years. Government approvals of foreign direct investment went up from US\$4.5 in 1994 to US\$10 billion in 1995<sup>17</sup>. Since 1991, there has been substantial and sustained reform in India's external economic policies relating to foreign trade, investment, external debt and currency convertibility<sup>18</sup>. Although the economic reform through liberalization, deregulation and privatization has generated considerable internal opposition and has been only slowly implemented, it does mark a definite

break with the past and poised to integrate into the international trading system<sup>19</sup>. In the post cold war world, where per capita income and trade surpluses rather than the size of nuclear arsenals have become the denominator of national stature, India is reshaping its future, politically, economically and even ideologically<sup>20</sup>. Now, India has entered into second generation of reforms. The slow but steady economic reforms do suggest that India is in a period speedy economic expansion and that Indian economy is bound to attract attention from abroad increasingly.

However, despite the fact that India is moving in the direction of establishing herself as an economic giant, until 1994, the response of the Canadian government was not very forthcoming. Only in October 1994, the Minister of International trade Roy McLaren led a major trade mission constituted of 40 businessmen representing various sector made it clear that there has been a changed perception and attitude of the Canadian government<sup>21</sup>. As a response to the Canadian mission the India Minister of Energy visited in June 1995 and the Minister of External Affairs in September 1996 are obviously indication of India interest<sup>22</sup>. There was a serious effort to initiate the process of consultation by the Canadian Government with the private sector corporations in order to develop a coherent strategy to pursue Canada's trade and economic interests in India. The result of which was the detailed document entitled "Focus India : Building a Canada-India Trade and Economic Strategy". In 1996, India was the focal point of a so-called 'Team Canada' Mission to Asia. Canada's 'look Asia' under the leadership of Prime Minister Chretien is enough indication of Canadian interest in Asia and India. The 'Team Canada' Mission, in the words of secretary of State Raymond Chan, had served to 'revitalize' the relationship and held out the prospect of 'a very close, mutually rewarding and multi-dimensional relationship between India and Canada in the 21st century'<sup>23</sup> is quite ambitious. However, there has been no substantial effort, nor a fitting response in the form of 'Focus Canada' is forth coming from Indian side. There are enough economic opportunities

for both to draw mutual advantage from better coherent economic relationships.

### **The Economic Prospects**

India being the seventh largest and second most populous country in the world had often been considered as a country of unrealized potential. It will not be wrong to say that India is a reservoir of multiple natural resources yet to be utilized meaningfully. During the past decade India undertook sweeping economic reforms which have had far-reaching consequences. An average annual GDP growth rate of 5.4 per cent during the 1980s accelerated to 6.4 per cent during the period, 1992 to 2001 (a much more impressive growth rate than countries such as Brazil or the Philippines.) This growth was, however, below most estimates due to the poor performance of the agricultural sector which only grew by 0.2 per cent. The sector contributes approximately 30 percent to India's GDP and more than two-thirds of India's population depends upon their livelihood on agriculture.

India has fared well in stabilizing its inflation rate at 4 percent which is substantially lower, for example, than inflation rates reported for Indonesia (8 percent) and South Africa (6.8 percent). The Indian economy is increasingly integrating with the world economy. Exports rose further in 2000-01 due to continuing trade liberalization - tariff reductions and more openness to foreign investment in export-intensive sectors like information technology. Foreign direct investment inflows amounted to \$4 billion in 1999 and \$4.5 billion in 2000. Foreign exchange reserves, have shown a healthy increase from \$38 billion during 1999-2000 to \$43.5 billion at the end of June 2001. Consistent with its earlier policies of economic liberalization, in its 2001 budget, the government launched its second set of economic reforms.

Since the mid 1970s, the Indian state has consciously pursued a

strategy of direct attack on poverty through measures such as the anti-poverty alleviation programmes. This had the impact of reducing the poverty ratio from 54 per cent in 1993 to 35 per cent during the period 1987-2000. Similarly, India has improved its ranking in the Human Development Index (HDI). The United Nations Development Programme has moved it from the low HDI to the medium HDI category. Nevertheless, there are persistent concerns that India, as compared to China, has not fared well in terms of its integration with the global economy. While both India and China had approximately similar shares of world trade (less than one percent) in the 1970s by the year 2000 China had dramatically surpassed India, increasing its share of the world trade to 4 per cent as compared to India's 0.7 per cent. In an essay in the Economic and Political Weekly of India (June 29, 2002), Sanjaya Baru suggests that China's economic performance and capability has given it strategic consequences which India has yet to acquire. "China has used its economic and trading power to build strategic relationships with all major powers and, equally importantly, with each one of her Asian neighbours from the Central Asian republics in the west to Japan and Korea in the east and ASEAN in the south. For India to be able to restore the balance within Asia it will not only have to pursue faster economic growth and domestic economic modernization, but also increase its share of world trade and widen its economic links with the Eurasian landmass as well as with the trans-Atlantic and Asia-Pacific economies". In early December 2002, India's Finance Minister Jaswant Singh unveiled the country's maiden midyear economic review and suggested a series of measures to bolster growth. In addition to proposing labor reforms, rationalization of government supports for food grain prices, reductions in the government's subsidies on fertilizer, and state divestment in public sector units, he sought a push toward foreign direct investment. This last measure was seen as urgently needed in light of the fact that foreign direct investment for the first six months of the current fiscal year was \$3.6 billion, well below the projected

annual figure of \$10 billion. India's economic reforms are most likely to endure and deepen. For example, the 2003 budget presented by Jaswant Singh on February 28, which carries forward the "growth oriented agenda", presents proposals for financial liberalization, allowing foreign direct investment up to 74 per cent in Indian private banks (this is an increase from the current 49 per cent) as well as the "merger" of private banking companies with nationalized banks.

Canada has not taken much advantage of India's liberalization policy. While the United States has emerged as India's largest trading partner, Canada has lagged far behind. As Arthur Rubinoff points out, "In 1998 Canada's exports to India were just 0.1 per cent of its world exports, while Canada's imports from India were a mere 0.3 per cent of its world imports. Canada ranked 17th among foreign investors in India with only a 1.4 per cent share. By the same token, India's exports to Canada were only 1.6 per cent of its total exports, and its imports from Canada were only 0.8 per cent of its total imports".

For decades Indian policy makers have felt constrained by the trade-off between economic growth and redistribution aimed at the alleviation of poverty. It is becoming increasing clear by the Chinese experience and by the Indian experience itself that in a large complex economy, economic growth and prosperity will evidence pronounced regional specificities, i.e. that there are and will continue to be concentrated pockets of extraordinary economic growth contrasted with regions of relative stagnation. There is no single India ; rather there are a number regions, states and cities with strong economic prospects, often differing significantly from each other and with which successful potential investors will have to become familiar. Gradual deregulation of the Indian economy has been accompanied by competition among Indian states to secure investment, especially foreign investment, in manufacturing.

The big three states, Maharashtra, Gujrat and Tamil Nadu account

for approximately 40% of all value added in manufacturing. The success of the manufacturing industry and the foreign and domestic investment in these three states has resulted in the division of India into 'forward' and 'backward' states. Among the forward states are included the western and southern parts of the country. The eastern and central parts of the country such as Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan constitute the backward part of the country. Thus, what has emerged is a global trend, dividing the country along a vertical axis. On all scales of both economic and human development (education, social development, per capita income, level of poverty, infrastructural development etc.), the forward states fare much better than the backward states. According to Kurien, the forward states do much better than the backward states in all development indicators, patterns of private investment and infrastructure expenditure. However, the backward states and the economically less developed regions are endowed with varieties of natural resources which are if meaningfully harnessed could be a boon for economic development of the states and the nation at large. The hydroelectricity potential of one of the backward states like Arunachal is a case in point. As it is estimated, Arunachal Pradesh has the potentiality of about 87,000 megawatts.

If Canada does not want to be shut out of this huge market, its foreign policy vis-a-vie India will have to focus intensively on the gathering of business intelligence and information about the potentialities and the particularities of the Indian economic phenomenon. From the point of view of trade, finance and investment, it is as if Canada were dealing with several distinct rapidly developing countries under the umbrella of a larger entity called India. It is to become the gateway to this plurality of opportunities that the commercial efforts of Canadian diplomacy should be directed. It is perhaps increasingly true that diplomacy between friendly nations is not only a question of state-to-state relations but of market-to-market relations through the conduit of the diplomatic apparatus.

### **The Indian Diaspora**

There are an estimated one million Canadians of Indian origin. Indian immigrants rank second, after China, as the major source of Canadian immigrants. In addition to constitution a strong socio-cultural bond between Canada and India, the diasporic community has the potential to create stronger economic linkages between the two countries. The strengthening of Canada-India relations is predicated on the assumption that the Canadians of Indian origin would lead to a deeper and broader people-to-people contacts. In India's economic growth, foreign remittances from expatriates (known in India as Non Resident Indians or the NRIs) have been significant source of revenue. According to one estimate, out of the \$70 billion foreign exchange reserves, between \$12 to \$15 billion comes from the remittances sent by India living outside the country. The Indian government is at present attempting to facilitate a strong collaboration with the Non Resident Indians-converting remittances into investments, taking advantages of the human resources etc. In January 2003, India's Ministry of External Affairs and the Federation of Indian chambers of Commerce and Industry organized a major conference, first of its kind - *Privasi Bhartiya Divas* - inviting prominent members of the Indian diaspora (People of Indian Origin). Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee informed the delegates that during the forthcoming Budget session of Parliament, the government intends to introduce legislation allowing NRIs dual citizenship. This government decision is based on the recommendation of high level committee, constituted in 2002, under the chairmanship of Dr. Singhvi, the former Indian High commissioner to the UK, which found that there were persistent demands by the Indian community living aboard (particularly living in North America and Europe) for dual citizenship. The Citizenship Act of 1955 stipulates that a person would lose Indian citizenship by voluntarily acquiring the citizenship of another country. The proposed legislation would initially extend citizenship to the citizens of only a few countries on the basis of reciprocity, such as the US, the UK,

Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and a few European states. The underlying objective of this extension of dual citizenship is to facilitate investments by the Indian living abroad in areas such as trade and tourism. India is hoping to count upon its diaspora to contribute towards Indian's social, economic and technological development. India is also proposing that dual citizens would not be double taxed in India.

There is apprehension that Indian intentions to grant dual citizenship are shallow: the new legislation would be confined to measures of providing a PIO card which would facilitate the buying and selling of property and not having the need to apply for a visa and India's actions are motivated by the BJP's connections to its major source of overseas funding in North America and Britain. Nevertheless, there appears to be a real opportunity, as correctly recognized by the Canadian government, in people-to-people relations between the two countries. As mentioned above, India is now Canada's second leading source of immigrants after China. The total number of South Asians of all origins, by the government's own figures, is now nearly one million or one out of every thirty Canadians.

The Indian Diaspora in Canada at the present time is much less organized and much less influential than its counterpart in the United States. It is true that the Indian diasporic influence has been increasing in Canada (there are members of Canadian legislatures of Indian origin and there are emerging business lobby groups, such as Canada India Business Council and India Canada Chamber of Commerce). However, the great preponderance of lobbying activity centered on Indo-Canadian relations has been carried on by the Punjabi (Sikh) and the Kashmiri (Muslim) communities some of whom support secessionist movements and are hostile to the Indian government and its interests. This is almost certainly about to change.

Lobbying activity is highly correlated with an immigrant group's professional integration into the community and that in turn reflects their

general educational attainment. At present, the Indian immigrant community in Canada is virtually polarized into two categories - either highly educated and professional individuals or persons with less than grade five education and unskilled workers. Because education is so highly valued in all segments of the Indian community, we should expect that the next generations of Indians will enjoy a stronger and more homogeneous educational and professional profile. As this comes about, it is almost inevitable that the community's lobbying efforts in favour of a much closer and a more positive relationship between India and Canada will expand and intensify. It would be prudent for current Canadian foreign policy to take this trend into account and, at a minimum, lay the ground work early rather than late to adapt to possibly significant changes in the domestic foreign policy context for relations with India. It is encouraging to see that, as a result of the PIO conference in India, Canada has responded by drawing attention of the Focus India group to explore ways whereby the Indians community in Canada can play a role of cooperation between the two countries.

### **Conclusion**

Beyond the realm of intentions, however, there are several objective realities, which are having much scope for a better and closer Indo-Canadian relationship. The factors could be the large size of Indian immigrants in Canada, the recent effort by Canadian Universities' to attract Indian students through organization of Educational fairs, specifically to tap the Information Technology (IT) professional aspirants, the growing trade relations, the common concern for International Terrorism, the focus on environmental issues etc. No doubt the differences over political issues of nuclear weapons proliferation<sup>24</sup> and security related issues will continue to be there, the new relationship with proper emphasis on trade, investment, joint venture and development assistance with mutual understanding will go long way in this millenium.<sup>25</sup>

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## **PRIVATISATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION : WHERE DOES IT LEAD US ?**

**Dr. Bolin Hazarika**

Education can be understood as the key in a man's life for cultivating, instilling and ensuring the reach of reasons and rationality.<sup>1</sup> It ensures fullest development of human personality. Being at the top, higher education possesses wide and long term objectives and a broad vision in tune with the projected future of the country. Its contextual relevance in the case of India has to be conceived in terms of our civilizational history and the contribution we wish to make to the future of humanity.<sup>2</sup> However, under the domain of privatization where the logic of the market is being propagated as the ultimate determinant of the future, the objectives of higher education is under serious threat. This paper makes a modest attempt to analyze the Indian situation where the government is observed with increasing interest for privatizing higher education. It also searches for the possible link of such a change of attitude on the part of the government and the nature of the higher education presently available in the society at large. An analytical method is adopted in the preparation of the paper.

The 2006 - 07 union budget shows a significant increase in the allocation of fund to education. Compared to the 2005 - 06 revised estimates, there is a 32 percent increase in the total allocation to education. In the previous year, there was 40 percent increase over the actual expenditure in 2004 - 05 (Table-1). There is also a noticeable increase in the percent of share of education in the total budget expenditure of the union government. Table - 1 shows that it increased

form 2.6 percent in 2004 - 05 to 3.6 percent in 2005 - 06. The same is proposed to be increased to 4.3 percent in 2006 - 07 budget. In both the cases the increases are almost fully confined to plan sector. In the non-plan sector the increases are very small.

Such increase in the budgetary allocation of fund to education however, does not mean that the same is allotted equally to all the departments of education. A careful analysis of this aspect will show that the Union Government is paying more attention to the department of elementary education and ignores secondary and higher education. Table - 2 shows that more than 60 percent of union budget expenditure is allocated to elementary education in both 2005 - 06 and 2006 - 07. The share of higher education in the two years were only 12.34 percent and 11.50 percent. The figures indicate that the allotment in elementary education increased from 61.19 percent to 63.74 percent in the last two years. But the allotment in higher education is reduced from 12.34 percent to 11.50 percent in the same period.

Table - 1

**BUDGET ALLOCATION TO EDUCATION**

(In Rs. Crore and percent of total union budget)

SL No.	Yearly Budget	Plan	Non Plan	Total
1.	2004-05 Actual	10120 (7.65%)	2978 (0.81%)	13098 (2.63%)
2.	2005-06 Revised Estimate	15042 (10.46%)	3295 (0.90%)	18337 (3.60%)
3.	2006-07 Budget Estimate	20744 (12.01%)	3371 (0.86%)	24115 (4.28%)

*Source : Budget Documents.*

Table - 2

ALLOCATION TO VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION  
IN THE UNION BUDGET (In percent)

Sl. No.	Departments	2005 – 06 budget	2006 – 07 budget
1.	Elementary	61.19	63.74
2.	Adult	1.43	0.89
3.	Secondary	8.85	7.62
4.	Higher	12.43	11.50
5.	Technical	7.66	7.11
6.	Total*	100.00	100.00

\*Total includes others not listed here.

*Source :* Economic and Political Weekly, April 8-14, 2006. P.1332

This shift in government attitude occurs in such period when the World Trade Organization (WTO - formed in 1995) under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) has made education a tradable good.<sup>3</sup> It also coincides with the imposition of IMF - World Bank conditionalities upon the States during 1990s to withdraw from all social sector services including education and thereby to commercialization of all services. Surprisingly, at the same time the World Bank began funding various literacy programmes to achieve 'Education for All' target set by UNESCO at the Jomtien Conference in 1990.<sup>4</sup> Both these aspects explain why India is putting much money in literacy programmes like Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, Anganwari etc., and simultaneously letting higher education to be gradually privatized.

Article I of Part I of GATS puts forth main modes of trade in services including education.<sup>5</sup> Those models and their underlying meanings are as under.

- (i) Consumption Abroad : Under this mode the students can go to foreign countries to receive education.
- (ii) Cross-Border Supply : This mode has recognized the supply of educational materials to foreign countries through Internet, Postal services etc.
- (iii) Commercial Presence : It enables foreign investors to set up educational institution in foreign countries either through foreign direct investment or joint ventures.
- (iv) Presence of Natural Persons : It allows movement of individual educators across the countries for providing education. Although the time-span for the stay of such foreign educators are not fixed by GATS documents, roughly it extends from six to ten years.

The Government of India has not yet given consent to the GATS proposals. But the recent happenings in the State indicate that she is preparing ground for allowing foreign direct investment in higher education specified in 'Commercial Presence' model. "A group of ministers has cleared a proposal on foreign service providers and a bill is expected to be prepared shortly".<sup>6</sup> The Government expects that it would be in a more suitable position to take care of elementary education and the literacy programmes if the public expenditure on higher education can be lessened, if not fully withdrawn. It is also expected that under it, the foreign universities will establish their centers in India. Therefore, the scheme will contain the outflow of money to other countries in the shape of fees and related expenditures, which the Indian students studying abroad are spending. Besides, such a mode is expected to produce graduates from our youths with "international mindedness" so that they do not feel alienated while working in any part of world.<sup>7</sup> Yet another expectation is that the scheme will be helpful for our education providers to set up educational centers abroad.

Education, in fact, has a complete economic meaning under the WTO. The documents of WTO explicitly says, "Education enables them (students) to face the challenges of technological change and global commercial integration. Through its capacity to provide skills and enable effective participation in the workforce, education is crucial to economic adjustment".<sup>8</sup> Besides, under WTO the States have to compromise with even their sovereign authority in educational matters. Part II, Article II of GATS implies "that no country can now set legal and administrative compulsions to direct education system according to its national requirements."<sup>9</sup>

Government's growing interest to make education as merely a training process to produce industrial workers is manifested also in its setting up of various educational committees headed by industrialist in 1990s. Two such committees are Punniah Committee and Birla-Ambani Committee. The Birla-Ambani report was submitted to the Prime Minister's Council on Trade and Industry in 2001. It recommended that entire higher education sector must be allowed to be privatized.<sup>10</sup> This report is a strong indicator of the fact that the industrial sector is keen to see education not as socially relevant but as market relevant. Like the general people, the industrialists also believe that there is no dearth of educated unemployed in India. But along with it the "industry claims that only about one-fourth of the graduates from the Indian higher education institutions are employable. As a result there are skill shortage despite large graduates unemployment".<sup>11</sup> In other words in India more than the employment employability is a serious problem.

It is rather shocking to note that the Judiciary in India has changed its earlier stand where it conceived of education as a sovereign function and looked at private intervention only as a supplemental effort. In a number of judgments provided during 1990s such change of stand is quite evident. The first such case was the Mohini Jain Case (1992) that led to the Unni Krishnan Judgment (1994) in which the supreme court ruled, "private educational institutions are absolutely necessary and they must be allowed to continue" and "they must be allowed to recover the costs by charging higher fees".<sup>12</sup> Likewise in T.M.A. Pai Foundation Judgment (2002) the supreme court observed, "the governmental domination in the educational field must be resisted."<sup>13</sup>

All these manifestations point out that the State is now setting the stage ready for looking at higher education as one of the many consumers goods. Under such a situation higher education will be available to those few who can purchase it. As a result, it will lead to greater inequality and more stratification of the society. As the purpose of privatization is to produce human machines for the market and not human beings, all humanistic values, creativity, cultural, moral and spiritual dimensions of teaching will vanish from the curriculum of higher education. Social and national values will face erosion and the pass-out students will be highly individualistic in nature. Education Commission (1964-66) suggested "the inculcation of values in students such as initiative, self-confidence, creativity and the spirit of social service."<sup>14</sup> But such inculcation of values will have no meaning under privatization. The notion of being educated will have the sole meaning of being able to sell oneself. Therefore, it can be safely argued that privatization of higher education at the present stage will make mockery of the prevailing Indian situation where 45 percent of the population cannot read or write (57 percent of whom are female population) and where 44 percent people survive on less than Rs. 50/- per day.<sup>15</sup>

Disapproving privatization in higher education however, does not provide any justification in retaining it in the present form. Because higher education today has failed miserably in producing either an earning human machine or a responsible man. In order to ascertain the reasons thereof a survey was conducted in a very old college of Jorhat. It shows that in a particular department teaching was provided for only 125 days during 2006 - 07 academic year while as per the UGC guidelines minimum number of teaching days in a year should be 180.1173 periods were attended by the teachers of the department in the year whereas the syllabus of the subject provided by the university demands that there should be atleast 1750 classes. It is found that each teacher of the department attended on an average 1.88 number of classes a day while as per UGC rule a college teacher should attend 3-4 classes a day. The college and the department under study is not an exceptional one; rather they represent the average colleges and their departments in Assam. All these show that now-a-days teaching in colleges are provided in such a way which fulfils neither the norms of the UGC nor that of the University. Privatization infact, makes inroads

through such loopholes. A simple calculation will show that to complete discussion on the contents of the syllabus by following the norms of both the UGC and University, we need a maximum period of six months. It is hightime to search for other meaningful areas of knowledge, which can be effectively provided to college students in the rest six months time.

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## THE GREAT INDIAN DRAMA

### An Analysis of Indian Political Parties and Indian Democracy

Pranjit Saikia

"Short of a threat to the integrity of the national political system, the major threat comes from the possibility of the disintegration of the governing party. That the stability of the central government seems to depend so heavily on a single leader dominating a weak party is a cause for concern." (Weiner, 1989, p.37).

The fate of India's democratic political system and the strength of Indian political parties have often been linked. As many of these parties are regarded to be in decline it seems an opportune moment to re-assess the contribution of the parties to sustaining democracy in India and to examine the consequences of party fragmentation on the democratic infrastructure of the political system. The development and maintenance of democracy has frequently been traced to the role of the nationalist movement and its successor the Congress Party. However to focus on the Congress Party exclusively runs the risk of underestimating the contribution of other parties in maintaining the conventions and procedures necessary for the functioning of democracy in India. Undue emphasis on the Congress Party would understate the ability of non-Congress coalitions to win general elections and form governments in recent years. Having entered these caveats I will deal with the Congress Party first as its foundational role cannot be ignored and the manner and causes of its decline reflect factors that continue to be relevant to the health of representative democracy in India. Before that I will reflect on the place of political parties in giving form to democracy.

## Democracy and Political Parties

Some conceptual clarification is required about what we take to mean by the term 'democracy' in the Indian context. I use the term to refer to liberal representative democracy except in the few instances that I make a distinction. Among the conditions that have to be fulfilled for Indian democracy to qualify for this label are a fairly and directly elected assembly to direct the activity of the state. Also critical are the protection of political freedom and civil liberties that enable individual participation in a democratic system (Beetham, 1993, pp.56-7). I am aware that some writers, most notably Ayesha Jalal, have expressed reservations about using the term 'democracy' as a shorthand for the liberal representative variant. She prefers to use the term 'formal' democracy for that purpose. Jalal uses 'democracy' to refer to what she describes as substantive democracy; a form that enables people to pursue 'their interests with a measure of autonomy from entrenched structures of domination and privilege' (1995 p.3).

While we take the normative view that democratic development is incomplete and the autonomy of citizens needs expanding in India (and elsewhere) I also follow Rueschemeyer et al (1992, p.43) and take the view that liberal representative democracy brings with it important advantages that make it a worthwhile project in spite of its failure to eliminate socio-economic inequality. There is also the possibility, with Jalal's approach, that India's considerable achievement of maintaining a representative democracy, though marred by the lapse into overt authoritarianism during the Emergency period 1975-77, is diminished. A brief comparison with the experiences of other post-colonial political systems puts India's achievement in perspective. This cannot disguise serious shortcomings with regard to the quality of representative democracy, the accountability of the institutions of the state to elected representatives or the protection of civil liberties in India. It could further

be argued that in addition to the shortcomings in the preservation of liberal democratic rights these rights have been interpreted in an uneven fashion with regard to gender. The arrangements intended to guarantee groups rights in the area of personal law has resulted in a legal system that fails to uphold equality for women across a range of issues (Menon, 1998, pp.243-4). This is not to suggest that liberal representative democracy is an inappropriate project but to note the need for its re-articulation in a more thoughtful manner (Philips, 1993).

The role of political parties in strengthening democratic political systems has been much debated in the classic literature on the subject. The early elite theorists, such as Michels, saw parties as inherently elitist and likely to frustrate the control of government by the mass of ordinary people. This view was paralleled by the aspirations of the Populist and the Progressives in the United States who deliberately tried to limit the role of parties with reforms to encourage direct democracy and limit the power of party bosses (Lipow, 1996, pp.46-7). Others have taken a less pessimistic view of parties and noted that they structure democratic politics. Schattschneider reflected that high view of parties when asked the rhetorical question 'How else can the majority get organized?' (1942, p.208). They are considered to do this by aggregating and articulating mass preferences as they compete to win elections. In addition to this parties reconcile conflicts as they endeavour to win support from a wide selection of groups (Pomper, 1972, pp.47-53). Following an election victory parties become the vital link between the people and government and thus facilitate popular sovereignty. The literature on parties and democracy in India tends to endorse this positive view of parties and in an ironic counterpoint to Michels the nationalist elite are credited with responsibility for setting democratic norms and disseminating them among the wider population (Sisson, 1994, p.37).

### The Indian National Congress and Democracy

A number of scholars have argued that the Indian National Congress provided a critical (Das Gupta, 1989; Manor, 1990; Weiner, 1989) institutional basis for the development and sustenance of democracy in India. The protracted process of constitutional reform under British rule, designed to give limited representation to Indians, leading up to Independence in 1947 is often given credit for successful democratisation in India. However Varshney argues that a more accurate explanation lies in the complex relationship between the democratically inclined nationalist movement and a retrenching colonial regime (1998, pp. 38-41). This view accords the nationalist movement much greater responsibility for democratizing the political structures that were bequeathed to the people of independent India by the departing colonial power. The democratic path adopted by the nationalist elite was consistent with its liberal orientation. Sisson notes the '*power liberal persuasion of a nationalist political class*' that achieved and maintained dominance in the nationalist movement' (1994, p. 37). This included a commitment to the liberal political rights and freedoms vital to the success of democracy. Gandhi's leadership helped unify the nationalist movement and keep it on a moderate path. While he was less enamoured of Western political ideas than some he certainly prevented extremists from dominating the movement and kept the path clear for the liberal elite that was to lead the Congress party after 1947.

The pre-Independence experience of the nationalist movement also shaped an organization that could be transformed rapidly into political party. Its early success as a political party was congruent with the demonstrated ability of the nationalist movement to mobilize disparate groups into a unified coalition. The devolved nature of the Congress organization required for the successful articulation of a national movement in a regionally diverse country meant that the Congress was well prepared for the transition to a federal system and the associated state level party

systems (Manor, 1990, p. 28). The prominence of the INC and its leaders in the nationalist struggle gave the Congress Party a powerful aura of legitimacy (Kothari, 1964, p. 1166). The legacy was not entirely benign as the cumbersome coalition assembled before 1947 proved inimical to social reform and difficult to sustain in the longer term.

The Congress Party under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru was profoundly influential on the institutions and norms of the new Indian state (Khilnani, 1993, pp. 198-201). The Congress Party and more especially the leadership elite orchestrated the drafting of the new Constitution from the 'representative' elections to the conclusion of the Constituent Assembly debates (G. Austin, 1966). This process embedded the values of the nationalist elite, democracy, secularism, economic development, social and economic reform, into the rhetorical structure of the Indian state even if the policy consequences of this commitment were uneven. The foundational role of the Congress Party has encouraged some observers to describe the Indian state as 'a party-based state' (Das Gupta, 1989, p. 71). The Congress Party added more than the legal basis to Indian democracy. It also did much to propagate the conventions and values that determined the pattern of democratic behaviour required by the new constitution. It was unsurprising that the Congress Party emerged as the dominant party and won comfortable parliamentary majorities in the face of a diverse array of opposition parties until 1977. This dominance was somewhat exaggerated by the single member single plurality electoral system under which the Congress Party never won a majority of the vote. The methods used to achieve these results were modified as the first generation leadership of the Congress Party was displaced following the death of Nehru in 1964.

The electoral strength of Congress in the early years of the new republic has been ascribed to the institutional strength of the party. Kothari famously described the Congress 'system' that allowed district leaders to distribute patronage and incorporate social groups at the local level. This

was built up on pyramidal fashion with links to the state and national party. The organisation provided space for factions within the party to compete for influence and so 'an intricate structure of conflict, mediation, bargaining and consensus was developed with the framework of Congress' (Kothari, 1964, pp. 1163-4). In the terminology outlined in the preceding section it could be said that the Congress Party, by aggregating and articulating mass preferences, was the vital link between the people and government that facilitated popular sovereignty. The party also carried out the critical function of conflict mediation within its organisation. Objections could be posed to the effectiveness of popular sovereignty as the interests of the wealthier members were not ignored and the Nehruvian social revolution, intended to emancipate the large indigent minority who disproportionately backed the Congress Party at successive elections, did not occur (Jalal, 1995, p. 45).

The ruling style of Indira Gandhi has been identified as a critical factor in determining the move away from the early Congress 'system'. The outcome of a contest for absolute control of the party between senior party leaders and Indira Gandhi was a split in 1969 into the Congress (R) faction under the leadership of Mrs Gandhi and the Congress (O) faction. The latter maintained control over the formal party structure and the former dominated the parliamentary party. By 1972 the Congress (R) had achieved supremacy with a series of significant election victories (all references to the Congress Party hereafter refer to the faction led by Mrs Gandhi). Mrs Gandhi increasingly relied upon direct appeals to the voters and did not rebuild the old 'system'. Attempts were made to rebuild the organisation but central dominance robbed it of its old vitality (M. Singh, 1990, pp. 60-1). Das Gupta observed that Mrs Gandhi 'increasingly transformed the nature of the organisation from an institutional mode of accommodation to an electoral instrument beholden to a ruling leadership' (1989, p. 70). Kohli provides an account of the hollowing out of the Congress Party at local level in Gujarat that resulted in virtually defunct

organisation by the mid-1980s (1991, pp. 42-7). He observed that the Congress 'party' remained as a symbol used by candidates to further their electoral ambitions. These candidates had some links to the local population and reflected a coalition of dominant groups among the electorate. The old dominant castes had been successfully challenged by upwardly mobile castes. However candidates' nominations remained the gift of the central leadership and the local party had ceased to aggregate and conciliate the concerns of disparate groups. Congress continued to win elections but its institutional weakness meant that its eventual decline was never in doubt.

This illustration raises the interesting relationship between elite agency, mass participation, social change and the role of political parties. So far the discussion has emphasised the role of the party elite securing democracy and then weakening the party as an institution. The question needs to be raised as to whether changes in the parties are entirely elite determined or can be traced to wider structural factors. There is also the interesting issue of the role of the electorate in interpreting and adhering to democratic values. Since 1947 the trend has been one of increasing participation in elections and demonstrable sophistication on the part of ordinary voters. Attitudes towards parties have become markedly less positive since the 1960s though voters continue to expect the government to have an important function in society (Sisson, 1994, pp. 45-6). One sign of a strong willed electorate is the retribution visited upon governments that fail to govern effectively. This trend is particularly clear at the state level (Manor, 1995, p. 68). The nationalist elite may have set India on a democratic trajectory but ordinary voters have taken to democracy and set about using it for their own purposes.

The growing assertiveness of a variety of social groups at the very least challenged the ability of the Congress Party to conciliate a broad cross section of social groups. Bardhan links the 'demand overload that has short-circuited the Congress system' to the popular perception that

democracy should open up opportunities for as many people as possible (1998, p. 192). Upwardly mobile groups that were not accommodated by the Congress system took a while to organise themselves effectively but once they had reached a certain point on the political learning curve they proved to be formidable opponents even if they were not always able to displace the dominant party. For example in Uttar Pradesh (UP) the increasingly prosperous middle castes, excluded from patronage and political office by the upper caste ruling elite, began to challenge the Congress hegemony from the mid-1960s onwards (Hasan, 1989, pp. 175-8). The Schedule Castes took longer to assert themselves in UP but when they did in the late 1980s they severely weakened the Congress Party. The dislocation caused by social change continues to have an impact on the relationship between political parties and democracy that will be discussed later in the paper. For the moment it is sufficient to say that Congress had lost its monopoly position as the mediator between the ordinary people and the national government by the mid-1970s. Other parties were making reasonable claims to a piece of the action.

The institutional decline of the Congress Party diminished the ability of the political system to manage disputes in a democratic manner and thus contributed to the intensification of civil conflict in India. Weiner argues that the failure of state Congress parties in Assam and Punjab to negotiate settlements to local disputes was prelude to deterioration in political stability (1989, pp.33). In other words the Congress leadership found it difficult to govern effectively without a strong party. The organisational paralysis of the Congress Party also contributed to the fragmentation of the party and the rise of opposition parties. The brief 'success' of the Congress Party, such as described above in the case of Gujarat, in winning elections on the basis of unmediated appeals to the electorate encouraged others to follow a similar approach. The move away from conciliating and mediating politics also opened up the way for other forms of political mobilisation. The use of caste and religion became much more apparent

in this changed environment. It is ironic that the Congress Party in the 1980s, disoriented in the absence of a strong federalised party organisation, played the majoritarian card and thus legitimated a strategy that the Bharatiya Janata Party could use with much greater credibility (Manor, 1988, pp. 80-1 ; Hasan, 1998, pp. 196-205). The patronage basis of the Congress 'system' was a powerful incentive to encourage potential dissidents to remain loyal and also a means of encouraging new entrants to the political market to join Congress. The more open political competition competition created by a weakened Congress made opposition parties at the national level a more credible alternative for political entrepreneurs and voters alike.

### **The Fragmentation of Indian Political Parties**

The Congress Party was defeated in 1977 by a unified opposition that combined to form the Janata Party. The Janata Party included the Hindu nationalist Jan Sangh, elements of the Congress (O) and the Bharatiya Lok Dal. The latter party had strong connections with the middle castes of UP who had chafed at the Congress dominance in the state. Janata also attracted a number of Congress leaders who defected just prior to the Election (Jaffrelot, 1996, p.282). The Janata Party proved to be more successful at winning elections than governing as pre-existing tensions between the members of former parties surfaced and cabinet divisions became irreconcilable. However the principle of anti-Congressism had been established as electorally viable and some of the constituent parts of the Janata Party were able to re-establish themselves. The weakening Congress Party was given an appearance of rude political health by a landslide result in the 1984 general elections but the sympathy vote in the wake of Indira Gandhi's assassination disguised its organisational fragility (Hewitt, 1989, p. 161). The BJP, formed in 1980, inherited the nationalist mantle of the dissolved Jan Sangh but remained in the political wilderness until the late 1980s. The Lok Dal element of the Janata Party retained a following among the middle peasantry of Bihar

and UP. In October 1988 the political legatees of the Lok Dal joined with leaders of the former socialist parties and a new group of Congress defectors led by V.P. Singh to form the Janata Dal (JD) (Fickett, 1993, p. 1151). While the JD had pretensions to national status it realised its limitations and entered a limited electoral alliance with the BJP to fight the 1989 general election.

The Congress Party, after a poor spell in government, was defeated. In contrast to 1977 no party emerged with an overall majority and the JD minority government was unable to complete a full year term. It also followed the Janata pattern and spilt in spectacular fashion while still in office. It was at this point that the fragmentation of political parties accelerated. The Congress Party emerged as the largest party after the 1991 election, but still short of a parliamentary majority it had clearly not recovered the dominant position it enjoyed before 1989. The BJP emerged as the largest opposition party but its support was regionally limited and it could not make a convincing claim to be a national party.

Regional parties began to challenge Congress successfully at the state level from the 1960s onwards. This resulted in a greater number of non-Congress governments at the state level but did not make a significant difference to majorities at national level. The national consequences of this were seen indirectly as Mrs Gandhi interfered at the state level to maintain Congress supremacy. It is only in the 1990s that the full significance of the regional parties for national politics became apparent. The current influence of regional parties at the national level was previewed by the occasional support extended by the AIADMK to the minority Congress administration between 1991 and 1994. The inability of a national party to win a clear majority meant that regional parties became important partners in coalitions and electoral alliances. The strength of the regional parties also explained why national parties could not win majorities in the Lok Sabha (J. Chiriyankandath, 1996).

The 1996 general election result was inconclusive but it established the trend away from national party dominance. The Congress Party looked set to lose on a wave of antiincumbency sentiment but it was further undermined by splits by and a lack of party discipline. In Tamil Nadu the state party rebelled when the national leadership ignored local judgement and entered into an electoral pact with the AIADMK. The Congress Party in the state broke away and formed the Tamil Mannila Congress that swept the elections in alliance with another regional party the DMK. In Maharashtra the presence of rebel candidates, disappointed at being denied nominations, helped the BJP, in alliance with regional Shiv Sena Party, to sweep the state. In Madhya Pradesh and UP leaders who had spilt from the Congress Party and formed their own parties undermined the already weak parent party. The BJP was not completely immune from this trend as the dissident leader Vaghela formed the Rashtriya Janata Party and ran candidates against his former party in the state of Gujarat.

Following the 1996 election the BJP, as the largest party, made an unsuccessful attempt to form a coalition government. The United Front coalition of regional and left of centre parties proved able to form a minority government in June 1996 but were dependent on 'outside support' from the Congress Party. By December 1997 Congress had withdrawn support from the UF government and fresh elections were called. The process of party fragmentation continued while the government was in office with the JD splitting. The RJD emerged as the party backing the Chief Minister in the state. The impending elections were a catalyst to further party splits. The Lok Shakti Party in Karnataka and the Biju Janata Dal in Orissa spilt from the JD and formed electoral alliances with the BJP. In West Bengal a breakaway section of the Congress Party led by Mamata Banerjee formed the Trinamul Congress which also aligned with the BJP. A number of senior Congress figures also decided to run as independents. Only Sonia Gandhi's decision to campaign on behalf of the Congress Party appears to have saved the Congress Party from further disintegration.

### **The Consequences of Party Fragmentation for Democracy in India**

The fragmentation of parties has resulted in volatile electoral outcomes and has diminished the power of national political parties to determine the agenda. This may be seen as a useful corrective given the weakened institutional structure of the Congress Party. As the party ceased to aggregate and conciliate interests at the local level and reverted to plebiscitary and populist politics any claims to be an effective mediator have to be considered with considerable scepticism. However there is little evidence that the parties that have gained influence at the expense of Congress are any more institutionalised than the Congress. Many of the regional parties and the newer splinter parties are even weaker in terms of organisation than the Congress Party. Some of the splinter 'parties' can only make weak claims to function as parties in the sense described above and are organised with the intention of securing influence for the notable who launched the party. The 'influence' may be as securing a parliamentary seat for the party leader. Thus the veteran Congress Leader, Jagannath Mishra, floated his own party, the Bihar Jan Congress, to contest the 1998 election (Asian Age, 24/12/97, p. 2).

The dominance of the leaders of some of the newer parties suggests few institutional constraints on their actions. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), provides a useful example. The dominance of the BSP leaders has also been commented on in the party in UP (O. Mendelsohn & Marika Vicziany, 1998, pp. 229-233). Other leaders, such as Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party, are also keen to give the impression that they have strong control over their parties. Other evidence of weak institutionalisation lies in the inability of some parties to mobilise volunteers and raise money to fund election campaigns. Again the Congress Party illustrates this malaise (Asian Age, 27/12/97, p. 2). There are two notable exceptions to the general trend towards weak institutionalisation. The parties of the left have stronger institutional structures and norms. The BJP also gains considerable strength from its institutional depth.

One consequence of the demise of Congress as a national party has been the emergence of the BJP as a contender for the position of the national party. The rise of the BJP has many causes but among them has been the political space created by Congress decline (Basu, 1996, p. 67-8). It needs to be emphasised that the BJP has yet to emerge as a full national party. In the 1998 election the party fielded only 383 candidates - a figure that falls well short of the 543 candidates a national party could field. The Congress Party, still nursing national ambitions, came closer to full coverage by fielding a total 471 candidates ([http://www.indiavotes.com/parties/parties\\_summary.shtml](http://www.indiavotes.com/parties/parties_summary.shtml)). Furthermore there are whole states where the BJP gains negligible electoral support. It remains to be seen whether India's electoral geography is a structural constraint on the BJP or if it is simply a case of the slow accumulation of momentum that will eventually see the party achieve effective all - India strength (Manor, 1992). The BJP is an exception to the trend towards weak party institutions in India because it has a strong network of activists and possesses stronger party discipline. However this has to be qualified by identifying the source of the BJP's organisational strength. The close links with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) provide the party with activists, funds and an ethos that encourages discipline. The BJP was formed at the behest of the RSS and it remains close links to it. While the party includes many who are not members of the RSS the influence of the parent organisation is profound. For example, most of the BJP members of the current union cabinet are RSS members.

The association of the BJP with the RSS brings into question the ability of the party to perform the mediating function between government and voters that has been described above. The RSS aims to transform Indian society into one that reflects its religious nationalist ethos (Akbar, 1999, p.8). The BJP is an element in a wider project and though it has to be responsive to the voters, a frequent source of tension inside the party and between the party and the RSS, it has other responsibilities. The

nationalist agenda of the BJP/RSS is damaging to democracy in other ways. The liberal values that are the basis on which liberal representative democracy must be built only command selective support from the BJP. The mobilisation of political support around communal issues has been at best damaging to the status of minorities and at worst endangered civil peace. An example of this was the pattern of local violence that was associated with the rise of the BJP in certain areas of UP (Hasan, 1998, pp.212-213). Similarly the ambivalent response on the part of the BJP to attacks on Christians since the 1998 election demonstrated a weak commitment to some of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Other political parties also demonstrate a casual attachment to liberal patterns of behaviour, and have made instrumental use of violence, but such a position on the part of a party with aspirations to national leadership is a worrying development for the future of Indian democracy.

In some respects what the parties lose the voters gain. The increasing frequency of elections gives citizens more power over parties. Voters have opportunities to express their preferences more often. The expectation of an early election also makes parties reluctant to pursue policies that lack widespread support. Having said this voters lose out in other ways. The ability of parties to assemble a platform, gather majority support (especially at the national level), and govern is severely compromised by the current process of fragmentation. In other words the mechanism of popular sovereignty is not functioning effectively. The extent to which the people, in any representative democracy, have control over the detail of government policy is questionable. However under normal conditions we would expect some broad equivalence between government actions and public opinion with the caveat that significant deviation on the part of the government would lead to its defeat at the next election. Platforms have only been partially implemented since the onset of national government by coalition in 1996. One reason for this is that coalition

governments have so far proved unstable and are unlikely to come close to completing their full term under current conditions. Secondly, the compromises required by the exigencies of coalition government result in ad hoc outcomes. This is not to argue that coherent policy is unachievable under the conditions of coalition government. However the circumstances under which coalition governments are currently formed in India are not conducive to stability or coherent policy implementation.

A certain amount of the current problem of coalition government instability must be ascribed to the ongoing process of party fragmentation and electoral re-alignment. Thus we see members of the BJP led coalition who are only prepared to give limited support to cabinet decisions. Mamata Banerjee and the Trinamul Congress provide erratic support apparently hoping to dilute the negative electoral consequences of associating with the BJP. Membership of the coalition has brought a package of benefits to Banerjee's home state of West Bengal but the association with the coalition is less about participating in government and more about the outcome of the next election (Asian Age, 11/2/99). Thus while electoral futures remain uncertain and parties fight for political survival the process of coalition government will be fraught (Wyatt, 1999). It may be that the proliferation of parties will be a temporary phenomenon as new parties fall by the wayside. It seems unlikely that any one party will be able to win a majority in the Lok Sabha in the medium term but if the two main parties gain a larger proportion of seats government by coalitions with fewer parties may provide the context in which coalitional behaviour at the national level can habituate in India. There are precedents for successful coalitions at the state level but India's electoral diversity at the national level sets more demanding conditions for successful coalition government. (J. Chiriyankandath, 1997).

The preceding paragraph should not be read as an implicit argument in favour of single party government though there are some advantages to

having a national government that can complete its full term and we are still waiting for a national coalition government in India to achieve this distinction. Coalition governments can be criticised for lacking the single party's ability to aggregate interests and articulate a version of these interests, based on conciliated and compromise between different groups of supporters, as a national platform. This objection has a number of weaknesses. Firstly, a deinstitutionalised Congress Party did not have the resources to aggregate or conciliate interests from the late 1960s onwards. The Indian political system has not had a majority party capable of providing these democratic functions at the national level for several decades. Secondly it is a mistake to assume that parties in a coalition cannot aggregate and conciliate interests. The Congress 'system' could be described as an endogenous process of coalition formation. It is one that was difficult to observe in action because the coalition was serviced inside the institutions of the party. This lack of transparency may have given the outcome a deceptive air of coherence. The conduct of coalition politics is less discreet in the 1990s because compromises are negotiated between parties and the press is relatively well informed of the positions of different parties. In contrast to the earlier period it is more appropriate to talk about an exogenous process of interest conciliation and articulation between **parties** in government. The process of translating the preferences of the majority into policy is complicated in a period of coalitions politics by two main considerations. Firstly, the constraint on coalitions associated with competitive realignment that has been discussed above. Secondly, the institutional weakness of the newer parties means they are unlikely to be completely effective mediators between voters and government. However the trends are not altogether negative. The emergence of new parties, such as the **BSP**, means that parties are more likely to represent a more homogeneous constituency. Accountability for non-performance is much clearer in these circumstances and the incentives to favour one part of a party's constituency are reduced. These circumstances are more

conducive for the articulation of the interests of a well-defined constituency. Whether or not this occurs is an open question.

The shift away from endogenous interest articulation can be traced back to the impact of social change discussed earlier on the shape of Indian political parties. In the past the Congress Party in UP took responsibility for conciliating the interests of the three main groups that supported the party, the Brahmin castes, the former untouchables or Scheduled Castes and the Muslim minority. The latter two groups benefited least from this arrangement as the Congress Party became less effective as an institution for carrying out this task. At the same time the subordinate groups in this coalition became more assertive. The identification of the Congress elite in the state with Hindu nationalist causes encouraged Muslim voters to look to other parties to articulate their interests. In the case of the Scheduled Castes this assertion took shape around a growing sense of dalit Identity (Pai, 1997). The label 'dalit' identifies the Scheduled Castes as oppressed and prepared to mobilise in order to rectify this situation.

The BSP offered a new channel for the articulation of dalit interests in the state and further undermined the Congress Party's electoral strength. This part of the democratic equation has been restored to equilibrium. The failure of the old arrangement to express the views of two important minorities has been addressed. However the second half of the equation is unresolved. The ability of the political parties to facilitate popular influence over the state government is limited as no single party can win a majority and coalition arrangements have been notoriously unstable in UP (Wyatt, 1999). The old arrangement that sustained stable Congress governance involved the quiescence of the subordinate groups. This is no longer forthcoming even though the subordinate groups have not substantially improved their socio-economic status. The link between economic and political power has been broken but the new arrangement that links control of government power and electoral influence functions in an erratic fashion.

The BSP has a certain amount of veto power in coalition formation based on the numerical strength of the dalit population in the state. Responsibility for creating a new equilibrium lies with the political parties even though they may face a difficult task in the context of cleavage conflict.

The breakdown of old arrangements for maintaining the dominance of elite groups within the Congress Party can be seen at work elsewhere in India. In the state of Maharashtra many dalit voters broke from the Congress Party and backed the Republican Party of India (RPI). This experiment failed as the RPI split into numerous factions and could not resist the depredations of the Congress Party who co-opted some of the more prominent RPI leaders. The RPI was widely regarded as a spent force in the 1970s and 1980s. However the party has become more united in recent years and entered a successful electoral arrangement with the Congress Party to fight the 1998 general elections. In other words if party leaders decide to they can re-assemble a new majority on the basis of an exogenously structured aggregation. The resulting compromise, should the parties form a government, may not be completely coherent but at least the interests of the supporters of the smaller party will not be ignored. The temptation to govern in favour of the dominant interests inside the Congress Party is displaced as coalition survival rests on the recognition of all parties. The subordinate groups that used to be marginalized inside Congress have in many cases gone it alone and now have much greater power of veto. Social change is important in determining the framework in which the parties perform their democratic function but elite leadership remains critical in determining its success.

The democratic infrastructure provided by the Congress Party in the early years of the republic is no longer a feature of Indian politics. The elitist leadership approach of direct unmediated appeals to the electorate has also been shown to wanting. The strength of regional parties means that coalition politics is likely to be the mode of governing at the national level for the foreseeable future. There are those who are skeptical about

the possibilities for consolidation among the parties or stable coalition politics on the basis of parties organised on regional and caste lines (Kothari, 1996). However it is possible to be more optimistic about the prospects for stable government in slightly different circumstances. In December 1998 an opinion poll indicated that Congress would win a clear majority if a snap election were held (India Today, 28/12/98). Notwithstanding this evidence there are serious doubts as to the ability of the Congress Party to compete in the electorally critical states of Bihar and UP. These states return 139 of the 543 seats to the Lok Sabha and Congress won only 5 of them in 1998. A limited revival on the part of Congress, a more likely scenario, would create the conditions for a more stable pattern of coalition politics to develop. This would involve regional and some smaller parties. This may not see a greatly improved democratic task being performed by the Indian political parties. However it seems to me a more plural and democratic outcome than government by a single national party that does not mediate effectively.

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## POLITICS OF TEA TRADE UNION : A STUDY OF THE ASSAM CHAH MAZDOOR SANGHA

**Rudraman Thapa**

With the democratisation of politics of a country like ours there has been proliferation of a galaxy of both national as well as regional political parties in a bid to grab power and in turn to serve the cause of the society. Since our society is fragmented into various units on the basis of profession one has opted for, it has obviously become difficult for a political party to mobilise the various section of society evenly and simultaneously. It has therefore, become mandatory on the part of every political party to intensify its organisational base among all sectional and professional categories of people. Such compulsion has led them to float various wings of a party which generally include the students' wing, youth wing, woman wing, peasant wing, community wing and so on. These party wings are supposed to disseminate the party ideology and in turn to widen and galvanize the support base among the people and ultimately to uplift the communities they represent. It is nonetheless, worthwhile to mention that the party wings apparently act as the backing forces of the parties concerned more especially in the event of ensuring their winning prospect in the periodical elections. As such the various wings of political parties have come to play a momentous role in the contemporary electoral politics of the state. The wings of political parties, by and large, serve twin purposes - (i) to look into the manifold grievances of the community they represent and (ii) to popularise the party ideology and thereby to ensure its victory in elections. The present paper, however, aims at highlighting the politics of tea trade unions in the state with special reference to the *Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha*.

## II

Tea plantation in Assam was experimentally started by the British colonizers in 1837 at Chabua under the undivided Dibrugarh district of upper Assam that soon began expanding fast during the period of 1850-1900. As the tea plantation was manually done, the Britishers required a substantial number of labourers for this purpose. They initially recruited the local tribal people like the Kacharis, Muttacks, Morans who were eventually found to be unruly and reluctant to work in tea plantation. This forced the planters to look for an alternative way of recruiting cheap labourers especially from outside of the then province of Assam. These provinces chiefly included Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu where from the impoverished tribal people were brought to Assam as the indentured cheap labourers. Their import thus started from the year of 1841 to till 1914 who in due course constituted a sizeable chunk of the state's total population<sup>1</sup>. It may however, be reiterated that the tribal labourers were imported primarily to serve the colonial interest and it was therefore, obviously not the basic concern of the tea planters to look a after the well-being of the Tea Garden Labourers (herein after TGLs), rather they were forced to live under a subsistence level. While describing the TGLs pathetic living plight R.K. Kar - a social anthropologist rightly opined that - "the strategy of the planters to keep the labour force subservient and totally dependent on the employer for survival and incapable of thinking beyond the necessities of life, reduced it to the level of a primitive economy"<sup>2</sup>. Under such circumstances, it was beyond imagination on the part of the TGLs to get themselves mobilised and organised for the cause of their upliftment and hence they remained squarely backward and unorganised. The situation however, did not remain unchanged. Slowly and steadily changes started taking place among the TGLs more conspicuously in the post-colonial period.

After independence, as a part of strategy of competitive politics different political parties began to organize the TGLs in order to garner

their support under the banner of labour trade unions apparently to bring about their emancipation from exploitation by the tea planters and ensuring their victory in the periodical elections. On the other hand, as a result of universalisation of education there emerged an enlightened elite among TGLs who increasingly felt the need of sharing political power as a tactics to serve their community. The thriving TGLs, in fact, became conscious and vocal of their constitutional rights. Consequently under the leadership of both TGL as well as non-TGL elite a host of tea trade unions affiliated to various political parties came into being which mainly include - (i) *Assam Bagicha Mazdoor Union*, (CPI), (2) *Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha* (INC), (3) *Bharatiya Chah Mazdoor Sangha, Assam* (BJP), (4) *Assam Chah Mazdoor Union* (CPI-M), (5) *Assam Sangrami Chah Shramik Sangha* ((CPI-ML), (6) *Assam Chah Shramik Union* (Samajbadi Dal), (7) *Assam Tea Workers Union* (Assam Labour Party), (8) *Assam Chah Shramik Parishad* (Asom Gana Parishad), (9) *Assam Tea Labour Union* (ATLU), (10) *Federation of Tea Labour Union, Assam* and so on. In this context it is worthnoting that although originally most of these tea trade union were dominated by the non-TGL leaders<sup>3</sup> but with the gradual spread of enlightenment, as stated above, there emerged an educated elite among the TGLs and the politically ambitious section fo them got associated with various tea trade unions in order to safeguard what they called, the "legitimate interests" of their community. Tea trade unions, to speak in other words, are concerned with the welfare of the TGLs through bargaining with the tea planters and the ruling elite of the state as well. Anyway, among the aforementioned tea trade unions the *Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha* has emerged as the dominant tea trade union in Assam.

The victory of the INC in the tea labour dominated constituencies in the 1946 election gave an impetus to the *Assam Provincial Congress Committee* (APCC) to expedite welfare and political activities among the TGLs that culminated in the formation of the *Indian National Trade*

*Union Congress (INTUC), Assam Branch* on 3 September 1947 with Kamakhya Prasad Tripathy as its president<sup>4</sup>. Subsequently the INTUC activities were extended to the tea gardens of the state in a big way that gave birth to a host of independent tea trade unions. Some of the were - - (i) *Dibrugarh Zila Chah Mazdoor Sangha*, (2) *Sibsagar Zila Chah Mazdoor Sangha*, (3) *Jorhat Zila Chaha Mazdoor Sangha*, (4) *Tezpur Zila Chah Mazdoor Sangha*, (5) *Lakhimpur Zila Chah Mazdoor Sahgna* (6) *Mongoldoi Zila Chah Mazdoor Sangha*. Later on it was however, decided to amalgamate all these Sanghas into a single whole under the name and style of the *Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha* (herein after ACMS) on 9 August 1958 at Bordubi under the undivided district of Dibrugarh with Robin Kakoti and Mohendra Nath Sarmah as its president and general secretary respectively. The ACMS affiliated to the INTUC has been working as the tea wing of the INC (I) in Assam ever since its inception whose jurisdiction of activities is strictly confined to the tea gardens of the Brahmaputra valley with its head office at Dibrugarh<sup>5</sup>. Presently it has all total twenty two branches all over the state excluding the tea gardens of the Barak valley. The professed aims and objectives of the ACMS in pursuance of its constitution (amended in 1989) basically include - (i) To organise and unite all the tea workers of 15 years age or above working either as daily wage labourers or monthly salaried employees ; (ii) To protect the collective interests of the TGLs such as wage hike, bonus, provident-fund, abolition of child labour, medical facilities and other allied issues (iii) To publish newspaper, produce moving picture reflecting TGLs culture, organise symposia to discuss the appalling plight of TGLs and thereby to arouse awareness; (iv) To maintain a reciprocal understanding between the employers and employees; (v) To undertake measures to popularise education among the TGLs (vi) To raise political fund to meet election campaign expense on behalf of the ACMS-sponsored candidates; (vii) To put pressure on the Legislative Assembly and Parliament on for legislation pertaining to TGLs security and upliftment

and many others.<sup>6</sup> The declared aims and objectives unequivocally reveal that the ACMS - as the INC (1) labour using is primarily concerned with the improvement of working conditions of TGLs and protection of political interest of politically ambitious TGLs leaders as a means of serving their society at large. By and large, the aims and objectives of the ACMS can for the sake of convenience of discussion broadly be categorized into two parts viz. (i) Socio-economic and educo-cultural; and (ii) Political ones.

#### IV

Since the primary aims and objectives of the ACMS, as stated above, are to ameliorate the working and living conditions of the TGLs, its leadership has relentlessly been putting pressure in a democratic manner upon the tea planters and the Governments of the state and centre. In this connection, the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 - the maiden piece of labour laws deserves special mention. As is well known that the constitution of India has confirmed that no state shall deny to any person equality before law or that all states shall ensure equal protection of law within the territory of the country. In pursuance of this constitutional provision the Government of India formulated an Act popularly known as the Plantation Labour Act 1951 (hereinafter PLA) exclusively dealing with plantation labourers to be enforceable to the entire territory of India except the state of Jammu & Kashmir. The basic aims and objectives of the PLA are to regulate the terms and conditions of work and ensure the all round welfare of the plantation workers.

Keeping conformity with the PLA the Government of Assam decided to enact the Assam Plantation Labour Rules 1956 (hereinafter APLR) with the objects of ameliorating the overall working conditions of the workers including the TGLs. The ACMS being the dominant messiah of TGLs has been making efforts right from the day of its inception for the implementation of the APLRs.

The most important concern of the ACMS is to look after the enhancement or revision of tea workers' daily wage. Based on the information available it is found that the Government of India set up a Wage Board in 1960 for the fixation of tea workers' daily wage. In pursuance of the instruction of the Wage Board and Assam Tea Planters Association, Jorhat and the ACMS reached an agreement on 25 February 1966 to fix the tea labour wage for a period of five year with effect from 1 January 1966 to 30 March 1970. While concluding the agreement the Assam Tea Planters Association, Jorhat and ACMS unanimously agreed:

Under the present Excise Zone (which includes Assam valley except Nowgong, Mangaldoi, Kamrup and Goalpara) for gardens of over 150 acres will be increased as under -Men-16 paise, women 13 paise, children 8 paise ... The wages with the above increase shall continue upto 31.03.1967 when on the basis of the average All India Consumers price Index for the year 1966 the wages in all districts shall increase by 0.4 of a paise per point of increase over 170 increase and any one year.<sup>7</sup>

This fixation was, however, not static rathe subject to further revision in the days to come. Of late, a bilateral agreement taken place between the ACMS and 5 associations of tea planters on 30 Novermber 2005 decided to enhance the TGLs wage rate from Rs. 48.50 to 58.50 per day to be implemented in three phases. Accordingly in the first phase the TGLs would be entitled to get Rs. 51.50 per day to be effective from 1 December 2005. In this way they would ultimately get Rs.58.50 per day w.e.f. 1 September 2008.<sup>8</sup>

Bonus constitutes a potential source of strengthening the workers' including the TGLs overall economic capability. In this context it is not out of context to state that the Governement of India set up a Bonus Commission in 1961 which submitted its report in 1964. Based on this

report the Government of India issued an ordinance pertaining to the Bonus procedure to be implemented by the employers of workers. Accordingly the tea planters in Assam decided to award bonus to the TGLs on the basis of profit a tea company makes in a given fiscal year and later on it was made mandatory. Generally the TGLs are paid the bonus on the eve of Durga Puja festival of every year that enables them to celebrate it in a big way. Subsequently the TGLs seemed to be unhappy with the mere payment of bonus as a result of which the ABITA was compelled to sign an agreement with the ACMS in 1975 that fixed the minimum rate of bonus at 8.33 per cent<sup>10</sup> on the total earning of a TGL in a fiscal year and later on it was raised to maximum 20 per cent. However, over the past few years the tea planters seemed to have been reluctant to pay bonus at the maximum rate of 20% on the ground of allegedly declining price of the finished tea product in the global market that resulted untoward incident including labour casualty especially on the eve of Durga Puja festival. Under such circumstances, the TGLs used to accuse the ACMS of being failure to subside the contentious bonus issue giving them favour. Furthermore, they even seemed to have gone to the extent of alleging the ACMS-management nexus that ultimately benefit both of them at the expense of TGLs. By and large, the TGLs bonus issue has been critical day by day.

Likewise coming under the ACMS pressure a significant amendment made by in Government of Assam in 1975 brought about a few more facilities for the TGLs to be effective from July 1975 that mainly include - (i) to provide special facilities for medical treatment; (ii) to make necessary arrangement for canteen system and supply of foodstuff in the work spot; (iii) to provide an umbrella, a piece of blanket, a piece of raincoat and a pair of chappal to every worker after every two years and (iv) to provide CRECHE and supply of sports materials for the TGLs children<sup>11</sup>. Another important achievement of the ACMS was the agreement concluded with the Assam Branch, Indian Tea Association (ABITA) on 21 May 1965 on

the issue of providing firewood to the TGLs per family to be effective from 1 June 1965. Similarly as per another agreement reached on 10 November 1979 every TGLs family would be entitled to get the finished tea of 600 gram per month for family consumption. Of course it was decided to disburse annually on the basis of the agreement. The partial implementation of this amended labour Acts has made the ACMS leadership unhappy and their demand for full implementation of it still remains lingering.

In addition, the ACMS was also equally concerned about the lingo-cultural development of the TGLs. They are of the firm opinion that the preservation, cultivation and advancement of their colourful lingo-cultural heritage would help them accelerate the overall development of the TGLs community. Keeping such a view in mind on 6 August 1974 the ACMS submitted a memorandum, to the Director General of the All India Radio, Delhi urging him to inaugurate a regular programme for broadcasting the TGLs manifold culture. As a result the Central Government decided to initiate an AIR programme titled - *Chah Mazdoor Achor* w.e.f. 6 April 1975 originally once a week on every sunday evening for half an hour. Now it has been extended to thrice a week. Similarly in this connection a moving picture named Ratanlal (1975) and Kechahoon (1958) reflecting the socio-cultural life of TGLs produced by the ACMS deserves special mention.

As a part of their strategy for literary development the ACMS undertook a venture of publishing a newspaper (in Assamese) titled CHAH MAZDOOR at a minimal price of Re. 1.00 per copy since 1969. It is, virtually speaking, the mouth piece of TGLs that gives an opportunity to their boys and girls to flourish their intellectual genius. Its publication from the ACMS Head office. Dibrugarh still continues. Likewise the ACMS has, of late, published a number of books and some of them include - (i) Robin Kakati's, *Gandhiji, Asom Aru Asom Chah Mazdoor* (1989), (ii)

Bishnulal Upadhyaya's (ed) *Swadhinata Sangrami Shramik Neta Dalbir Singh Lohar* (1993), (iii) Sushila Rajbanshi's, *Kechahoona* (2006), (iv) Prahlad Tasa's, *Chah Bagichat Sikhyar Prachar* (2005) and *Chah Bagichat Gana Sakharata* (2005), (v) Hema Prova Tasa's *Jiban Nadir Ghatat and Ardha Akash* and (vi) Mancharam Patowari's, *Bharatiya Shram Andoolon*.

Last but not the least demand raised by the ACMS was the vexed demand for the inclusion of TGLs community into the Scheduled Tribes list. Like the *Assam Tea Tribes Student's Association*, the ACMS leadership also believed that the squarely backwardness of the TGLs community could not be eradicated unless they were endowed with the constitutional status of the Scheduled Tribes. It may be recalled that as far back as 1970 in its plenary session held at Golaghat the ACMS unanimously resolved to urge upon the Government of India "to treat or count all the people living in tea and ex-tea gardens as Scheduled Tribes irrespective of their caste or creed as they are in their states of origin."<sup>12</sup> This demand of the ACMS however, still remains unfulfilled.

## VI

The ACMS, by birth itself, is inextricably connected with the INTUC affiliated to the Indian National Congress. As such it obviously got involved into the electoral politics ever since its inception. The ACMS leadership was of a deep-rooted conviction that the involvement of theirs into the electoral politics in conjunction with the INC was the most effective means of ensuring "their security and development by way of enactment of law" as per the ACMS constitution itself. The INC on the other hand thought it prudent to mobilise the TGLs under the banner of the ACMS in order to garner their support en masse and thereby to wrest political power and perpetuate it in the state. The INC, therefore, on the eve of every Assembly election takes cognizance of the demands of the ACMS-while nominating candidates to contest election from various

constituencies. It may be evident from the fact that the founder president of the ACMS, Golaghat Branch Sanu Keria was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly (ALA) as the Congress nominee in 1967 election followed by Maliya Tanti (Doomdooma) and Upen Sanatan (Chabua). Thus a host of ACMS sponsored leaders of both TGLs as well as non-TGLs communities got elected to the ALA from time to time. They included Bijoy Chandra Bhagawati, Kamakhya Prasad Tripathy, Biswadev Sharma, Jaganath Bhuyan, Durgeswar Saikia, Maliya Tanti, Upendranath Sanatan, Gojen Tanti, Chatragopal Karmakar, Bishnulal Upadhyay Narendra Nath Sharma, Mohikanta Das, Lily Sengupta and many others. Among them Chatragopal Karmakar elected to the ALA from Sarupathar Constituency as the INC candidates was first inducted into the Council of Ministers in the capacity of the Minister of State for Labour<sup>13</sup>.

In the 1972 election to the ALA Gojen Tanti from Mariani constituency as the INC nominee got elected and happened to be the first cabinet minister with the portfolio of labour and supply. In this election another ACMS - sponsored INC candidate named Dipak Murmu was elected from Lahowal constituency. None of the independent labour candidates not backed by the ACMS could win this election. This election thus gave an impression that unless a TGL or Ex-TGL candidate was backed by the ACMS in collaboration with the INC it was impossible to get elected to the ALA. Thereafter there has been an increasing scramble among the TGLs leaders to occupy an office either in the ACMS or its branches so as to acquire the capacity to bargain with the INC for its nomination to fight election with TGLs en bloc support. This can be evident when a good number of ACMS-backed TGLs and Ex-TGLs leaders fought the election of 1985 onwards as the INC candidates. They were Kumari Rabidas (Ratabari), Monilal Gowala (Patharkandi), Mithius Tudu (Gossaigaon), Dinesh Prasad Gowala (Lakhipur) Silvius Condopan (Majbat), Rameswar Dhanowar (Digboi), Dileswar Tanti (Doomdooma). All of them got elected to the ALA while the ACMS-backed Congress

candidates from TGL community who lost this election included Boloram Nag (Kaliabor), Arklius Tirki (Sarupathar), Rupam Kurmi (Titabar) Narad Kumar (Mahmora), Satya Tanti (Sonari), Dipak Murmu (Lahowal), Paban Singh Ghatowar (Tingkhang), Upendra Nath Sanatan (Chabua).<sup>14</sup> Thus all total 15 ACMS - sponsored TGLs candidates were accorded the INC nomination in 1985 Assembly election. This trend, however, continues to be increasing in the subsequent elections that led the INC(I) to accommodate more and more ACMS-supported TGLs and EX-TGLs candidates as its nominees so as to ensure their win and perpetuate power. They under the banner of the ACMS, in fact, had acquired incredible capacity to play a decisive role in the contemporary electoral politics of Assam. Virtually speaking the TGLs including Ex-TGLs community became "a traditional supporter fo the Congress party". This became clear from the memorandum submitted to the Congress High Command, Sonia Gandhi on 20 December 2000 in New Delhi in which a group of TGL MLAs under the leadership of the ACMS president Paban Singh Ghatowar (Ex-Union Minister) categorically maintained:

Tea and Ex-Tea Tribes Community known as Tea and Ex-Tea Labour Community had been brought by the Britishers more than 150 years age to engage them as labourers in tea plantation of Assam. They are now part and parcel of Assam and Assamese society and are traditional supporters of Indian National Congress. It is needless to say that the Tea and Ex-tea Garden labour voters are continuously supporting the Congress party in the State. There are number of instances when other people left the congress party, this population remained intact in support of the Congress party. The whole tea population cannot think of any other ideology other than the Congress.<sup>15</sup>

Probably for this reason currently there are all total ten TGLs members in the ALA<sup>16</sup> out of it seven were elected as the ACMS-sponsored Congress candidates. Moreover, out of seven TGL congress members two viz Dinesh Prasad Gowala and Prithivi Majhi have been inducted into the Council of Ministers as the cabinet ministers while Jibontara Ghatowar - the lone TGL women membe is appointed as the Parliamentary Secretary with the health and family welfare portfolio under the chief ministership of Tarun Gogoi. The INC (I) party, in fact, has accorded substantial weightage to the TGLs and Ex-TGLs community in the event of its nomination and the formation of Ministry as well so as to keep their support to the party intact. Despite so, the TGLs leadership of late, seems to be discontent with the representation they are having in the ALA so far. What they actually want is more representation in the ALA which they deserve, the TGLs elite believe. It becomes substantiated from the resolution adopted by the ACMS in its executive meeting held on 27 August 2000 at Dibrugarh pleading for the reservation of thirty five seats of ALA and fifteen parliamentary seats for the TGLs and Ex-TGLs Community. While justifying this demand in a memorandum submitted to Sonia Gandhi, the AICC President on 10 December 2000 Paban Singh Ghatowar forcefully pleaded:

Tea and Ex-Tea Tribes population dominated as many as 35 Assembly seats directly and 15 Assembly seats indirectly as deciding factor, Secondly at the time of Lok Sabha Election the Tea and Ex Tea Tribes community are the determining factor for the Congress candidates in as many as seven Lok Sabha seats. They are Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Kaliabor, Tezpur, Mongoldoi, Silchar and Karimganj. But according to the population of Tea and Ex-Tea Tribes Community, the representation is not sufficient in Legislative Assemgly, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. With the growing political awareness

in this community a feeling has already developed among them that they are not adequately given representation at the time of finalisation of party nominations. We are under heavy pressure from our community to apprise you of their feeling and request you to examine this matter and take corrective steps to improve the situation and this makes our people feel that AICC under your leadership is sympathetic of our cause.<sup>17</sup>

Like the ACMS, the tea cell of the APCC has also demanded 35 ALA constituencies to be reserved for the TGLs and Ex-TGLs community<sup>18</sup> so as to ensure their adequate representation. Similarly the *All Tea Tribes Students' Association* (ATTSA) and *All Adivasi Students' Association of Assam* (AASAA) - the two students' organisation of the TGLs and Ex-TGLs community too have expressed a deep sense of regret that their community has not been accorded due share by political parties while nominating candidates in the elections. They, therefore, once decided to form a political party of their own by unifying all their leaders associated with various parties so as to fight election separately. This demand is yet not materialised for the reason not known.

From the above discourse, it is clear that the ACMS was given birth with twin purposes. First in order to muster the en bloc support of the TGLs for the dominant Congress to ensure their victory and perpetuate power in the state. Taking cognizance of this aspect, the budding educated elite belonging to the TGLs and Ex TGLs also started to get themselves associated with the ACMS and its branches that enabled them to build up their future political career. As a result, in due course a host of TGLs leaders actively associated with the ACMS got elected to the ALA as well as Parliament. Thus the ACMS has virtually been a platform to build up the political career of the politically ambitious TGLs and Ex-TGLs leaders. As such there has been a scramble among them to occupy important portfolio either of the ACMs or its branches so as to justify

their claim for congress nomination in election that provides them an opportunity if elected to serve their community. Of course, while projecting the interests of the TGLs community at large, it is seriously complained that the personal interests of the TGLs political leaders are given priority over the former. Secondly the ACMS made appearance in the form of messiah of the hapless TGLs who remained backward and unorganised for a long. Perhaps for this reason, the ACMS with the passage of time started intensifying its jurisdiction of activities from socio-economic to culturo-literary welfare of the TGLs as well as Ex TGLs community in the state. In view of this, it may be concluded that the ACMS has virtually been a platform (affiliated to INTUC) backed by the INC(I) for the cause of all round development of the TGLs including the Ex-TGLs community of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam by way of active involvement in the electoral politics of the state.

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7. Bilateral Agreement between Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha and All Employees Associations upto 16th July 1997 compiled by ACMS Central Office, Dibrugarh 1990, p.2-3.
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9. On 30 November, 2005 an agreement was signed between the ACMS and five associations of tea planters (Indian Tea Association, Tea Association of India, Bharatia Chah Parishad, Assam Tea Planters Association and North-Eastern Tea Association). According to the agreement it was unanimously decided to enhance the daily wage of labourers from Rs. 48.50 to 58.50 in three phases) i.e. from the period 2005-2009 (Reported in the Dainik Janambhumi 1 December 2005).
10. Secretarial Report, Ninth State Conference of the *Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha* held at Biswanath Chariali prepared and read out by Paban Singh Ghatowar, General Secretary, ACMS on 22-23 May 1982, p.16-17.
11. Secretarial Report, Eighth Biennial Conference of *The Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha* held at Dibrugarh on 20-21 May 1978 and read out by Chatragopal Karmakar, General Secretary, p.14-16.
12. Memorandum submitted to the Chairman, Backward Class Commission (ST & SC), Government of India jointly by *Adivasi Council of Assam* and ACMS dated 13 April 1978, Secretarial Report, 4th Plenary Conference of ACMS held at Tinsukia on 30 April 1967 prepared and read out by Durgeswar Saikia, General Secretary ACMS, p.63.

13. Sushil Kurmi, *Rajnitir Patharat Chah Janajati vote-bank* appeared in the *Amar Asom*, 3 October, 1997.
14. Report on the Eighth General Election to the Assam Legislative Assembly and the House of People 1985, Election Department, Government of Assam.
15. The Memorandum presented Mrs Sonia Gandhi, President of All India Congress Committee by a group of TGLs MLAs under the stewardship of Paban Singh Ghatowar, the President of the ACMS, New Delhi 20 December, 2000.
16. The names of the TGLs and Ex TGLs community elected to the twelfth ALA as the Congress nominees in the last 2006 general election include: (1) Durga Bhumiz (Doomdooma), (2) Rameswar Dhanowar (Digboi), (3) Raju Sahu (Chabua), (4) Prithvi Majhi (Lahowal), (5) Jibontara Ghatowar (Moran), (6) Rupjyoti Kurmi (Mariani), (7) Dinesh Prasad Gowala (Lakhipur).
17. The Memorandum submitted to Mrs Sonia Gandhi, op.cit.
18. The ALA constituencies demanded by the ACMS and the Tea cell of the Congress to be reserved for the TGLs and Ex TGLs Community include:
  - (i) Patharkandi, (2) Udarband, (3) Gossaigoan, (4) Lakhipur, (5) Borchalla, (6) Paneri, (7) Dhekiajuli (8) Ratabari, (9) Majbat, (10) Gohpur, (11) Behali, (12) Biswanath Chariali (13) Rangapara, (14) Kaliabor, (15) Sarupathar, (16) Bokakhat (17) Khumtai, (18) Mariani, (19) Titabor, (20) Teok, (21) Nazira, (22) Sonari, (23) Mahmora, (24) Thowra, (25) Moran, (26) Tingkhong, (27) Naharkatia, (28) Duliajan (29) Tinsukia (30) Digboi (31) Margherita (32) Doomdooma (33) Sadiya, (34) Lahowal (35) Chabua (Reported in the DAINIK JANAMBHUMI 9 January 2006).



and it is a well known fact that they have an important role in the field of food production, marketing, storage, distribution and processing of agricultural produce. Women are the backbone of the rural economy and their contribution to the family income is significant.

## **WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION-A FIELD LEVEL EXPERIENCE**

**Nivedita Deka**

### **Introduction:**

Agriculture is the mainstay of Assam economy as over 70 per cent of its population depends upon agriculture and allied activities for their livelihood. Virtually, agriculture in the state is a combination of peasant and tenant farming with a bulk of the cultivable land belonging to small and marginal farmers. More than 80 per cent area under agriculture is rainfed. Natural calamities, particularly floods occur with regularity. Almost 90 per cent of the populations are rice eaters. Rice is the principal food crop of the state occupying 74.25 per cent of the total cropped area. It has three broad groups according to the season of harvest, viz., winter rice popularly known as *Sali* rice, summer rice known as *Boro* rice and autumn rice known as *Ahu* rice. Deep water rice locally known as *Bao* rice is another rice crop being cultivated in the state in few small pockets of marshy land with high water depth once in a year. Rice cultivation in Assam heavily depends on manual labour and the major contribution is from women. In an economically backward region like North Eastern part of India the male out migration from rural to rural / urban areas is relatively higher in order to seek employment in relatively developed cities and / or rural areas, living behind female relatives to manage their own. As a result women often become the backbone of subsistence food production in rural areas - A phenomenon that has been termed as feminization of agriculture, particularly in the rice based agriculture of Assam. The rural women often called as farm women constitutes more than 50 per cent of farm work force and play a significant role in Assam agriculture (Annon, 2000). In any family,

both husband and wife participate evenly in different household activity. Their role are generally complementary not only in physical participation in farm and home related activities but also in the decision making process concerning such activities. Women as agricultural labour participate in various farm activities and operations such as seeding, transplanting, weeding, fertilizer application, plant protection, thinning, harvesting, processing, winnowing, storage etc. In the case of decision making it is observed that husbands generally consult their wives in deciding different agricultural activities like seed storage, seed selection, time of selling farm products, purchase of implements, farm borrowings, application of manures and fertilizers etc. The women are also involved actively in decision making on diverse production activities either solely or jointly with their husbands. Although women's participation is seen in a wide range of activities the vital aspect of transfer of improved farm related technologies to the rural women has largely been neglected. With the rapid development of new agricultural technologies it is being increasingly felt that the technical knowledge of the farm women acquired over the generation is being not updated, they are in urgent need of understanding and acquiring improved knowledge and skill so that they could contribute more effectively to the production process. In addition to performing various agricultural operations, women are also managing large farms. However, a number of factors like age, education level, religion, caste lack of skills and knowledge, economic condition etc. influence women's participation in adopting the agricultural technologies. This paper attempts to reveal part of the results of the project on "Accelerating technology adoption to improve rural livelihoods in the rainfed eastern Gangetic plains" funded by IRRI/IFAD.

### **Methodology:**

The IRRI/IFAD project on accelerating technology adoption is being carried out in the Upper Brahmaputra Valley Zone of Assam since 2004-05. Since a vast rice cultivated area falls under flood prone ecosystem in this

zone the technology selected for adoption was introduction of modern *Boro* rice varieties and comparatively low cost biofertilizer based integrated nutrient management (BINM) in *Boro* rice. After extensive survey of this zone, Sibsagar, Golaghat and Jorhat districts were selected for the study purpose. One village each in all the three districts were selected in due consultation with the concerned district agricultural officers namely Aphala in Sibsagar, Alengmora in Jorhat and Joraguri in Golaghat district. Then a list of the farmers in the selected villages were prepared and a sample of 19 households in Aphala, 23 in Alengmora and 15 in Joraguri was selected based on the area under *Boro* rice. Participatory Rural Appraisal was done to find out the perception of the women towards agricultural technology available to them, problems and opportunities relating to various technologies, and probable remedial measures to overcome the problems associated with the adoption of the available technologies. Women farmers were asked several questions regarding their participation and involvement in the agricultural production process by the help of schedules and questionnaires. Simple tabular and statistical analysis were used to examine the involvement of the women in decision making and crop production in the study area (Sarungbam, 2006). The technologies selected for validation were introduction of short duration modern variety of *Boro* viz., Joymoti, Jyotiprasad and Kanaklata and low cost biofertilizer based nutrient management in *Boro* rice.

### **Results :**

The modern *Boro* Varieties were tested in the *Boro* season against traditional long duration varieties. On an average the modern varieties produced 75% higher grain yield (4.92 t/ha) than the tradition ones (2.80 t/ha) (Table 1). The performances of all the three modern varieties were similar, although some location specific variations in yield were observed.

**Table 1. Grain yield of modern rice varieties and farmers' variety in Boro season in 2004-2005.**

Villages	Grain Yield (t/ha)				
	Joymoti	Jyotiprasad	Kanaklata	Average of modern varieties	Farmers varieties
Aphala	4.30	4.10	4.20	4.20	1.90
Alengmora	4.80	4.80	5.00	4.86	2.20
Joraguri	5.80	5.90	5.40	5.70	4.30
Average yield	4.96	4.93	4.86	4.90	2.80
Duration(days)	170	160	170		200

The performance of biofertilizer based integrated nutrient management (BINM) was tested against recommended dose of fertilizer (60-30-30) and farmers practice with three modern varieties and a farmers' variety through a farmers participatory experiment. Under BINM, biofertilizer, Azospirillum + PSB at 4 kg/ha and cow dung at 1 t/ha, rock phosphate at 56 kg/ha, muriate of potash at 33.3 kg/ha and one fourth of the recommended dose of urea were used. BINM produced higher grain yield than the farmers practice BINM generated about Rs. 9,800 / ha and fertilizer dose at recommended doses generated Rs. 8,500/ha higher income than the farmers practice (Table 2). BINM was more economical and remunerative, with higher B:C ratio. MVs produced 68% higher grain yield (4.9 t/ha) than the farmers variety (2.9 t/ha) and the performance of all the modern varieties was similar under all the treatment levels.

**Table 2. Effect of nutrient management practices on cost and returns**

Treatment	Total Cost (Rs/ha)	Net Return (Rs/ha)	Income advantage over farmers' practice (Rs/ha)	B:C ratio
BINM	5973	19027	9810	3.18
Recommended practice	6691	18309	8499	2.74
Farmers practice	5190	9810	-	1.89

Women's participation in decision making relating to different farm related activities is presented in Table 3. The participation of women in decision making on different aspects differs from village to village. In Aphala village, women had taken most of the decisions on various aspects. In Alengmora, most of the decisions were taken by both husband and wife while in Joraguri, the husband had taken most of the decisions as compared to their female counterpart. Regarding technology adoption, women of Aphala village had taken most of the decisions whereas in Alengmora, both husband and wife had taken the decisions regarding technology adoption. In Joraguri, husbands were found to have taken most of the decisions relating to technology adoption. However, it was interesting to note that men had taken most of the decisions relating to financial matters whereas women had taken decision in other aspects in all the villages (Paris and Chi, 2005).

**Table 3 Women's participation in decision making**

Decision type	Aphala	Alengmora	Joraguri
Crop to produce	1	3	1
Rice variety to be grown	2	3	2
Labour hiring	2	3	1
Household expenditure	3	3	3
Farm expenditure	2	2	1
Child's education	2	3	3
Borrow money (Private)	2	1	1
Borrow money (Formal)	3	1	1
Voting	3	3	3
Number of child	2	3	3
Adoption of technology	2	3	1

1 = husband

2 = wife

3 = both

The participation of women in rice production activities varies from village to village. In Aphala, participation of women in all the activities was comparatively higher than that of the other two villages. The male to female ratio regarding involvement in different activities like transplanting, harvesting and winnowing was 0:100 in Aphala village while it was 0:100 for transplanting, 20:80 for harvesting and 0:100 for winnowing in Alengmora. In Joraguri, this ratio was 60:40 for transplanting, 20:80 for harvesting and winnowing. In the case of technology adoption activities such as pesticide application, selecting and storing of seed for the next season, women involvement was found to be higher in Aphala than the other two (Table 4).

**Table 4. Women's participation in rice cultivation**

Activities	Aphala	Alengmora	Joraguri
Land preparation	60:40	80:20	100:20
Seedling raising	50:50	60:40	70:30
Broadcasting	50:50	50:50	70:30
Transplanting	0:100	0:100	60:40
Weeding	20:80	30:70	80:20
Manure/Fertilizer application	60:40	60:40	100:0
Pesticide application	60:40	60:40	100:0
Harvesting	0:100	20:80	80:20
Threshing	60:40	80:20	100:0
Hauling paddy to homestead	80:20	100:0	100:0
Winnowing/drying	0:100	0:100	20:80
Selecting/storing seeds for next Season	40:60	40:60	70:30
Selecting seed from apportion in the field	50:50	60:40	80:20
Selling paddy in the market	60:40	70:30	80:20

The analysis of factors influencing and hindering the participation of women in decision making and rice production activity reveals that age and lack of skill and knowledge were influencing factors in participation in both decision making and rice production activities in Aphala and Alengmora village whereas these had no effect on participation in Joraguri village. Economic condition had negative effect on participation in all the villages, whereas caste has no effect in Aphala and Alengmora village and had hindered the participation in Joraguri village. In Aphala, the women belonged to scheduled tribe Mising community where women are physically very strong

and are actively involved in all types of field work. In Alengmora, they belonged to general caste and the women were involved as much as the men in the field though the types of activities differ from men to women. In Joraguri, they belonged to scheduled caste Bengali where the women merely took part in field activities. They were hesitant to work in the field alone. However, they took part in some post harvest operations that were carried out in the home stead (Table 5).

**Table 5. Factors affecting women's participation**

Factors	Aphala	Alengmora	Joraguri
Age	1	1	1
Education level	2	2	2
Religion	3	3	3
Caste	3	3	2
Lack of skills and knowledge	2	2	2
Economic conditions	2	2	2
1 = influencing	2 = hindering	3 = indifferent	

The problems faced by the women in all the three villages were, lack of knowledge on improved variety, seed selection, methods of planning, input-output prices, farm record and accounts, low access to crop loans, high input cost, non availability of HYV seeds in time etc. The women of Aphala village felt the need of training on improved production practices, farm records and accounts. The women of Alengmora felt the need of exposure visit to the university experimental plots so as to have practical knowledge. The women of Joraguri wanted to have some self group specially working in the field as they felt shy to work alone in the fields.

#### **Conclusion :**

Women have a definite role to play in the agricultural production process and technology adoption. Involvement of women varies from village to village

due to some factors like age, caste etc. Considering the problems in their involvement, it was felt that training on technologies such as improved variety, seed selection, fertilizer application, other production practices would help the women farmers to take more rational decisions regarding adoption of improved agricultural technology in the study area. Assam Agricultural University, in collaboration with Government of Assam and some international organization (IRRI) had imparted training to the farmers including women in the field level and at the university level which contributed to the effective participation of the women in rice production and thereby increase the productivity. Field visits by the non project villages farmers could make them aware of the technology. Formation of self help group (SHG) also helped to increase the participation of women in adopting improved technology.

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**FISCAL MANAGEMENT AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY:  
ISSUES AND REFORMS IN SPECIAL CATEGORY STATES  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM**

**Monimala Devi and Devashis Bose\***

Fiscal federalism is critical to economic growth and development. It refers to efficient organization of multi-level fiscal system and depends on the state of fiscal decentralization. Historically, fiscal transfers in India from the centre to the states; and in the recent past to the local bodies have been mostly in the form of share of centrally levied taxes and, grants. These transfers are made on the basis of the recommendations of the Finance Commission. The formula for devolution of found changed over a period of time and the states of the Indian Union have benefited to a large extent from such transfers. The traditional tenet is that, at the most general level the central government should have the basic responsibility for the macroeconomic stabilization function and for income redistribution in the form of assistance to the poor. Thus, transfers to the sub-national governments are a step towards redistribution of meeting the broader goals of economic growth and development. However, there has been a sharp deterioration in the fiscal health of most of the states of the Indian Union, especially since the mid-nineties. The fiscal performance of the Special Category States (SCS) has been equally, if not considered to be more, precarious. This paper attempts to examine the fiscal indicators of the SCS vis-a-vis the other Indian states. Primary objective of the paper is to examine -

- 1) the fiscal performance of the Special Category States
- 2) the prospect of fiscal reforms in the Special Category States in order to pursue the goal of economic growth and development.

Recent studies on fiscal health of states in India have relied on the data on Debt to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) ratios. It is pertinent to analyze the Debt to GSDP ratio in order to examine the level of fiscal discipline, or otherwise, amongst the states. It is found from Table I, that except Bihar that has had a negative growth rate of GSDP, all states have registered an increase in the Debt-GSDP ratio. However the quantum of such increases, and quality and composition of the increase, differs substantially. Compared to rest of India, and even the other north eastern states, Assam's growth has been modest.

**Table I**  
**Debt-GSDP Ratios and Percentage Share of States in Overall**  
**Debt in 2002-03**

Sl.No.	General States	Debt-GSDP Ratio	Share in Total Debt of States
1	Andhra Pradesh	28.85	7.50
2	Bihar	55.33	4.79
3	Chhattisgarh	25.46	1.20
4	Goa	28.15	0.45
5	Gujrat	33.93	6.61
6	Haryana	2.85	2.70
7	Jharkhand	24.28	1.29
8	Karnataka	25.12	4.72
9	Kerala	36.34	4.65
10	Madhya Pradesh	32.28	4.07
11	Maharashtra	21.56	9.51
12	Orissa	62.93	4.23
13	Punjab	48.51	5.52
14	Rajasthan	45.38	6.31
15	Tamil Nadu	26.80	6.02
16	Uttar Pradesh	39.08	11.90
17	West Bengal	41.15	10.46

Special Category States			
18	Arunachal Pradesh	55.45	0.18
19	Assam	33.91	1.94
20	Himachal Pradesh	63.25	1.71
21	Jammu & Kashmir	53.80	1.65
22	Manipur	43.08	0.31
23	Meghalaya	32.17	0.22
24	Mizoram	81.56	0.27
25	Nagaland	52.10	0.38
26	Sikkim	60.27	0.13
27	Tripura	37.78	0.46
28	Uttranchal	32.37	0.80

*Source: Twelfth Finance Commission Report*

But the comparative modest increase in Assam's Debt-GSDP Ratio is not a matter of complacence. This is evident from the fact that the formula of fiscal transfer may not reflect fiscal performance. Fiscal imbalance in the states is a reality. The magnitude of such imbalances has increased in the post-economic reforms period. During the reforms, the 5th pay commission revision has played havoc with the state finances. This is reflected in Table II.

**Table II**  
**State wise Fiscal Imbalances**

States	1990-91		1995-96		1999-2000	
	Revenue	Fiscal Deficit	Revenue	Fiscal Deficit	Revenue	Fiscal Deficit
Andhra Pradesh	0.46	2.79	1.03	3.36	2.34	5.16
Bihar	2.17	6.11	2.81	4.09	5.45	9.37
Gujrat	2.51	6.42	0.34	2.71	2.75	6.01
Haryana	0.16	3.04	1.35	3.84	3.02	5.76
Karnataka	0.33	2.30	-0.12	2.76	1.71	3.29
Kerela	2.67	5.06	1.15	3.71	3.88	5.49
Madhya Pradesh	0.62	3.17	0.83	2.85	2.93	4.45
Maharashtra	0.09	2.65	0.43	2.93	4.11	6.03
Orissa	0.19	5.98	3.38	5.85	6.24	9.35
Punjab	3.36	7.67	1.31	3.98	5.74	7.93
Rajasthan	-0.76	2.45	1.67	6.13	5.92	8.85
Tamil Nadu	1.74	3.55	0.44	1.79	3.09	4.16
Uttar Pradesh	2.16	5.39	2.29	4.28	4.68	7.24
West Bengal	3.03	4.85	1.86	4.02	6.71	9.00
Major States	1.33	4.18	1.17	3.50	4.06	6.34
SCS	-0.40	8.04	-2.53	4.65	3.70	10.69
All States	0.93	3.30	0.73	2.60	2.94	4.75

*Source:* Rao, M. Govinda (3 August 2002): "State Finances in India: Issues and Challenges in India", Economic and Political Weekly

The effect of the pay revisions were severe on the Special Category States (SCS) as both that revenue and fiscal deficits as percentage of NSDP of these states deteriorated by over 6 percentage

points. The trend in revenue and expenditure growth during the 90s show that the growth rate of the latter has been much higher leading to larger revenue deficits. On the other hand growth of states' own tax revenue was much lower than growth of revenue expansion. For example, during 1980-81 to 1989-90 the states' own tax and non-tax revenue grew by 15.92 and 12.54 percentage, whereas, the growth rates for these heads were 14.08 and 12.38 percentage during 1990-91 to 1998-99 respectively. In fact, the average annual growth rates of states' revenue and capital expenditure have been steadily falling (see Table III). For the Special Category States (SCS) including Assam, the average annual growth rate of own tax revenue was 19.36 percentages during the decade of 1980-81 to 1989-90, whereas it grew by 13.79 percentages only during the period of 1990-91 to 1999-2000. A reference to Table III reveals the extent of fiscal imbalances in the states. The changes in the magnitude of revenue deficit and fiscal deficit over the period of time from 1990-91 to 1999-2000 is alarming. In case of all states, the revenue deficit increased from 0.93 percentages to 4.75 percentage of NSDP during the aforesaid period. The fiscal deficit increased from 3.30 in 1990-91 to 4.75 percentages 1999-2000, for all states. However the situation in the Special Category States (SCS) has been more precarious as revenue deficit of these states increased from -0.40 percent of NSDP to 3.70 percent during the same period. Fiscal deficit increased more alarmingly from 8.04 to 10.69 during the same period. As discussed earlier, one of the major reasons for such a fiscal deterioration was implementation of the 5th Pay Commission recommendations.

**Table III****Annual Growth Rates of States' Revenue and Expenditure**

States	1980-81 to 1989-90			1990-91 to 1999-2000		
	Own Tax Revenue	Revenue Exp.	Capital Exp.	Own Tax Revenue	Revenue Exp.	Capital Exp.
Andhra Pradesh	17.15	17.13	11.15	13.76	15.54	7.84
Bihar	14.28	16.36	10.63	10.18	10.89	6.78
Gujrat	16.05	17.90	8.13	15.51	16.56	14.77
Haryana	15.79	17.19	6.94	14.86	17.66	9.79
Karnataka	16.43	16.49	6.78	14.20	15.09	10.99
Kerela	15.97	15.68	8.92	16.64	16.62	14.44
Madhya Pradesh	16.20	16.89	6.48	12.95	14.65	4.30
Maharashtra	15.77	16.67	9.13	13.13	15.45	13.66
Orissa	16.60	14.73	12.67	12.36	15.20	7.30
Punjab	14.22	16.47	15.86	14.68	15.78	3.15
Rajasthan	17.05	17.71	7.62	13.35	15.63	12.87
Tamil Nadu	14.61	16.27	2.90	14.38	13.28	22.48
Uttar Pradesh	15.43	17.84	7.53	11.64	13.54	7.18
West Bengal	16.26	14.78	9.90	11.25	15.44	21.18
Major States	15.82	16.69	8.80	13.50	14.82	11.39
SCS	19.36	21.14	17.00	17.30	16.12	9.42
All States	19.92	17.07	9.69	13.68	14.94	11.13

*Source:* Same as Table II

Besides, the states have routinely failed to recover the cost of public services and utilities. One has also to add the inadequate returns on public investment made by the states. For example, the rate of return on capital of Assam for the Assam State Electricity Board (ASEB) is -31.50 percent. Refer to the Table IV given below that gives a performance of the SEBs on the basis of selected indicators.

TABLE IV

**Performance of State Electricity Boards (SEBs) and Electricity Departments - Selected Indicators**

State Electricity Board	T & D Losses	Share of Agri. Consumption	Cost of Supply	Average Price per unit (paise/kwh)	Commercial Losses (Rs.cr.)	Rate of Return
Arunachal Pradesh	20.5	—	608.0	150.0	52.4	—
Assam	35.0	3.1	511.4	312.1	357.5	-31.5
Manipur	40.0	6.0	431.5	163.0	69.0	
Mizoram	42.5	—	516.1	96.0	49.2	
Nagaland	28.5	0.1	393.3	189.9	28.8	
Tripura	28.0	21.9	294.0	96.3	83.3	
Meghalaya	20.3	—	229.9	131.4	52.6	-24.7
Sikkim	20.0	—	209.0	100.0	12.8	
All India	-----	31.6	283.6	199.0	18537.6	
All SEBs						-33.8

*Source:* Annual Report on the Working of SEBs & Electricity Departments planning Commission, Govt. of India, June 2001

There are some major reasons for slow growth, or even deceleration in growth of revenue of states. In case of the Special Category States, and specifically Assam, a major reason has been non-extension of the sales tax to the services as per constitutional provisions. To this has to be added the problem of large-scale tax evasion and exemptions. The nature and magnitude of tax evasion and exemptions is critical in Assam and the other north eastern states (majority of the SCS). Due to high level of inefficiency and corruption in the tax administration in these states, the

situation has worsened. Non-introduction or limited application of electronic administration in the state revenue departments has allowed continuance of operational inefficiencies that translates into lower revenue growth. As M. Govinda Rao points out, "the bases of state taxes are rendered narrow also because of large scale exemptions, evasions and avoidance of taxes. In the case of sales tax for example, besides wide ranging exemptions, there are generous schemes of incentives in terms of tax exemptions and deferment. While the efficacy of such fiscal incentives in promoting industrialization is limited, revenue forgone is significant. These incentives do not enhance the availability of capital in the country, but nearly redistribute the existing capital in distortionary ways". Extension of CSD facilities to the civilians of a state as part of extension of the public relation exercises costs the revenue collection of the states. The issue is of some concern to the Special Category States (SCS) as most of them are under the Special Armed Forces Act.

As deliberated earlier, performance of the SEBs plays an important role in the fiscal health of states, as a large amount of public investment goes into the state power sector. In most of the states 85 percent of the total public investments are in SEBs which give a negative rate of return.

## **FISCAL REFORMS**

Sustainability of the current fiscal profligacy, and many a times indulgence in fiscal indiscipline can be maintained at the cost of subverting long-run growth and development strategies. Therefore, the paper underscores the need for fiscal reforms, especially with reference to the Special Category States (SCS). The pertinence of special treatment of these states, in this paper, arises from the fact that they have been allowed to self-governance with some amount of special conditions (fiscal) that entails advantages. For example, the formula of fiscal transfers has ruled a status of 90 percent grants and 10 percent loans (unlike the rest of the states given 30 percent grants and 70 percent loans). The reasons have been historical, political and definitely economic to certain extent that is

not in the purview of the paper. But the urgency of fiscal reforms cannot be denied. The paper looks into some fiscal reform measures.

1. One important step is in the direction of reforms through enactment of the Central Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act for 2008-09. The main provisions of the Act are-

○ **TERMINAL TARGET-**

Fiscal Deficit: 3% (2008-09)

○ **ANNUAL PATH TARGETS:**

Revenue Deficit: 0.5% of GDP (reduction)

Fiscal Deficit : 0.3% of GDP (reduction)

○ **ANNUAL CAP ON GUARANTEES:**

< 0.5% of GDP

However, there are lacunae in the FRBM Act that can jeopardize growth objectives. The main aim of the FRBM Act is to contain fiscal deficit to 3 percent of GDP by 2008-09. This must be seen in the context that the current Debt-GDP Ratio for India (combined of states and the center) stands alarmingly at more than 80 percent of GDP. According to C. Rangarajan and D. K. Srivastava , "The FRBM Act, as it stands at present, is incomplete in two respects. First, it does not define a debt-GDP ratio that would be required for keeping the economy on its potential growth path, and secondly, it does not define suitable limits of departure from the mid-term stance to cope with cyclical fluctuations". Thus, the FRBM Act being implemented in the SCS is a matter of importance. These are states those have had very poor growth rates and equally poor economic performances. Whether these states will be able to cope with the pressure of the FRBM Act or not, is a moot issue. Neither compromise on growth, nor is fiscal indiscipline, justifiable. The synthesis of both the

objectives is important. The plausible answer is to curtail non-capital expenditure that may include harsh implementation of decisions, like withdrawal of subsidized higher education that defies logic, and more facilitation of the private enterprise, and so on.

2. Implementation of VAT at the state level is also an important step towards fiscal reforms at the sub-national level. VAT has increased revenue of the states. So VAT is likely to improve the fiscal position of the states. However, it needs to be implemented across all the states and it is advisable to have a single rate VAT rather than multiple rates (India's variety has 2 rates) that nullifies the very aim of simplicity of the regime.
3. To these reforms we need to introduce economically viable user charges for public utilities. Whether continuance of subsidies towards public services is viable in the long run is a matter of serious concern. This fact becomes more serious in the light of the reported misuse of the utilities by a class other than the targeted group.
4. The sixth (6th) pay revision needs to be derailed and all fantasies regarding another hike that, shall cause irreversible damage to the fiscal health of the states like Assam, must be abandoned. This was the primary reason for the substantial fiscal damage to the financial health of most of the states of India in the mid-90s.
5. Implementation of the Electricity Act 2003 , may be with some modifications to incorporate the solution to the failures of electricity reforms in some of the states, is another area that can turn-around the fiscal health of states like Assam and the other SCSs.
6. As argued earlier, in case of SCS, an important area of concern is the continued financial support to the government aided institutions (as elsewhere in India) those are non-viable. The time is ripe to amalgate institutions that are non-viable if found so in post- cost-benefit analysis, notwithstanding the awards of the National

Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) that failed to some extent to capture the actual performances and productivity of such institutions. Continuance of, subsidized higher education to many, and large grants to institutions of traditional higher education, should be reviewed. At this juncture, transport and communication bottlenecks have diminished substantially even in case of the SCS, specifically in Assam. Thus the justification of government aided institutions, offering the same mix of traditional courses, where work efficiency and value-addition by the employees being highly questionable and real output at best diverting (and absorbing 3 valuable years that could have been used for picking up market oriented skills) a majority of the learners towards collection of degrees, is open to debate. Disinvestment in these areas and revision of subsidized higher education in traditional courses needs to be reviewed. The emphasis must be on transfer of resources towards elementary and technology and market demand based education.

### **Political Implications of the Fiscal Reforms**

The issue of fiscal reforms is not confined to the textbook economics prescriptions on public finance, be it of the classical variety or as a matter of fact the latest policy suggestions made by Political Economists like Amartya Sen and Joseph Stiglitz. For example, the political implications of fiscal reforms, especially in a developing nation where the electorate rejoices on totally economically and hence in the long-run, politically, unviable policy decisions, are risky to initiate as far as the electoral fortune of the political parties is concerned. Implementation of VAT, that became very unpopular for the traders, seems to have caused political debacle of the erstwhile Om Prakash Chautala government in Haryana. So, the prescription to cut down non-plan expenditure may not be well taken by the class capture (including the unscrupulous bureaucracy-politician-middlemen-public nexus) that continues to illegally benefit from the existing system. Cutting down subsidies relating to agriculture, may result in

political upheaval on the part of the rich farmers of certain locations. It is understood that enactment of the FRBM rules and regulations will cut through into the system that largely benefits the non-developmental (wasteful variety) government expenditure. Thus FRBM Act and populism does not go hand in hand until and unless the citizens are politically conscious and economically literate. Another area that has caused something near to public commotion is the introduction of viable user charges for public utilities. This issue had reached volcanic proportions in the state like Andhra Pradesh where introduction and/or increase of user charges for power supply for irrigation purposes made the Chandrababu Naidu government quite unpopular. However, one also needs to contend with the fact that the quality of public services (utilities) has been far from satisfactory and at times outrageous from the public point of view. So a general anathema that "why the use of paying for *sarkari* services" is not very illogical though, somewhere the vicious circle must end. Submission of the 6th Pay Commission Report and the subsequent implementation of its recommendations though are full of fiscal dangers, the political danger in the short run far outweigh the fiscal ones. Any resistance to implement on the part of the government, once the report comes out, is likely lead to breakdown of the government machinery and industry due to *bandhs* and *hartals*. In addition to these political and social implications, reforms of the grants in aid and other forms of financial support to the institutions of higher learning may have far reaching political ramifications. These are the institutions where majority of the intelligentsia, those who influence streams ranging from media to student movement, live and think. Varma writes, "In every society, there is an unceasing movement of individuals and elites from higher to lower levels, and from lower to higher levels resulting in a considerable increase of the degenerate elements in the classes which still hold power, and on the other hand, in an increase of elements of superior quality in the subject classes". In the context of fiscal reforms, if it causes such movements and qualitative changes in the stock of people

in a society as a whole and/or in parts, there may evolve a new resisting group that can be Pareto's *individuals in the lower strata forming new elite groups and entering into a struggle for power with the existing class* as referred to by Varma. This happens as the benefits accruing to the earlier elite class from a loose fiscal policy, say in the form of wasteful government expenditure or the benefits of kerosene subsidy siphoned off by the black marketers and adulterators may shift to an emerging new elite class. This is somewhat akin to the conflicting movements witnessed in the recent times across the nation pertaining to many issues. The moot issue however, remains that whether the benefits from fiscal reforms are so encompassing and fast, that the resistance to reforms wears out. And in case that does not happen, it must be ordained that either reforms are not called for, or the time is not ripe, or management of reforms have been inefficient, etc. It can be said without any complacence that economic reforms can percolate and finally diffuse at the sub-national level only when there is synchronization of the polity with fiscal policy. May be the time is ripe to push vigorously for reforms in the fiscal policy and its efficient administration.

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9. Please refer to Table IV, and the discussions contained in the earlier part of this paper
10. Before the publication of the "Wealth of Nations" by Adam Smith in 1776, the discipline of Economics was called *Political Economy* and the treatise, discourse, teaching, etc., on Political Economy sufficiently contained references from Political Science. Amartya Sen, Joseph Stiglitz and many other economists have, transcended the constraints of theoretical economics and supplied text and prescriptions that matter in the political paradigm and hence makes the approach more interdisciplinary in nature.
11. Latest studies conducted separately, by two prestigious think-tanks of India namely the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP), have come out with expected results for the Indian kerosene subsidy regime. Every year, 5 million kilolitres of kerosene worth Rupees 10,000 crore or approximately 50 percent of the total kerosene allocated to the Public Distribution System (PDS) for distribution to the BPL families is siphoned off by the black marketers, not only to sell in the open market at prevailing market prices, but also for adulterating diesel and other fuels/lubricants. Thus, the cost of this diversion is not only restricted to Rupees 10,000 crore but also is incurred in terms of loss of economic and social welfare of the poor, adverse effects due to use of adulterated fuels by consumers and producers, and so on. This is only an example of how subsidies create serious distortions in distribution, and ultimately in consumption and production. The same could be said regarding the crore of rupees

of subsidies on food, fertilizers, general higher education, etc. The type and magnitude of distortions may vary for different heads, but the ultimate issue is of diversion of subsidies towards the middle and richer sections. And in case it is not so, the diversion is in the form of distorting production that does not match with what is demanded in the market like what has been the trend in higher education, or for that matter of fact in case of the *Minimum Support Price (MSP)* for the farmers.

12. Economic Literacy refers to a degree of attainment of knowledge that is inclusive of the fundamentals of the political economy and is complementary to, and not a substitute of, the existing constituents of the traditional definition of literacy.
13. India's poor state of governance and infrastructure in the form of pot-holed roads, obsolete transport system, torturous yet high cost power supply, poor administration, low credibility of the law and order machinery, delayed justice and what not, asserts that the common citizen receives drastically lower social benefits compared to the amount of direct and indirect taxes he or she pays. We all pay taxes and/or user charges in some form or the other but the quality of India's governance and public services leaves much to be desired for. As A. Raghunathan of GMR Foundation comments in the Economic Times that it is not that the Americans like to pay more taxes (the tax compliance rates in the United States is very high), but they receive high standard public services that makes them apprehensive of loosing such public facilities in case of non-compliance or evasion.
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## CONTRIBUTION OF AMERICAN MISSIONARIES TOWARDS ASSAMESE LITERATURE

Dr. Chandana Goswami

The Ahoms, the pre-British rulers of the Brahmaputra valley, were not entirely unmindful of the cause of education although they had to devote much of their time to conquests, consolidation and warding off foreign aggressions. Retrogression however set in towards the close of the Ahom rule when in the confusion of civil wars, insurrections, and repeated invasion by the Burmese (1816-1824) and the neighbouring hills tribes education reached its lowest ebb<sup>1</sup>. When David Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General, North-east Frontier, obtained sanction for assignment of land from the Government of India in October 1826, eleven schools were set up mostly in lower Assam and each **Pundit** was required to undertake to teach at least thirty pupils<sup>2</sup>. It were the Christian missionaries in Assam, particularly Nathan Brown and Miles Bronson, who were able to appreciate the racy qualities of the pure Assamese<sup>3</sup>.

The work of the American Baptist missionaries in Assam was patronized by the East India Company from the very beginning. Though the British Baptist had established a mission at Guwahati as early as 1829, it could not make a mark because of financial constraints<sup>4</sup>. In 1831 one Atmaram Sharma of Koliabor in Nagaon district translated the Bible into Assamese at the initiative of missionary Kerry. The book was printed at Serampore missionary and it was the first printed Assamese work<sup>5</sup>. Meanwhile on 23 March, 1836, Nathan Brown arrived at Sadiya with a printing press. Here he learnt the Assamese and Khamti languages and also established a school. From here he proceeded to Jaypur on the south

bank of the Brahmaputra. One year after Brown's arrival Miles Bronson came to Assam with object of spreading Christianity<sup>6</sup>. It was only in 1841, almost five years after their arrival in Assam, that the American Baptists settled down at Sibsagar and began to concentrate fully on the missionary work among the people of the Brahmaputra valley. They established two other missions at Nagaon and Guwahati in 1841 and 1843 respectively. The printing press bought with them by the missionaries, was setup up at Sibsagar. It was from the press that for the first time a few Assamese books like Bible stories and religious tracts, a grammar of the Assamese language<sup>7</sup>, a dictionary<sup>8</sup>, a history of Assam<sup>9</sup> and several other books were published. The publication of the first Assamese journal, the *Orunodoi*<sup>10</sup>, from the Sibsagar mission Press in 1846 was a land mark in the history of Assamese literature<sup>11</sup>. This journal set a new trend in Assamese literature which can be termed as a modern secular trend. Like the *Dig Dashan*<sup>12</sup> and the *Samachar Darpan*<sup>13</sup> of Bengal the Orunodoi devoted itself to the task of spreading religious education and also to the progress of "science and general intelligence". Referring to the usefulness of the journal A.J. Moffat Mills commented:

A monthly paper called "*Orunodoi*" or Dawn of Light began its career of usefulness in 1846, and for many years was the only paper published in the province for several years. It was most carefully edited, profusely illustrated, treating in all subjects, both secular and religious in a manner calculated to instruct and interest the people.<sup>14</sup>.

The popularity of the Serampore publications, specially of the *Samachar Darpan* in Assam perhaps convinced the missionaries of the necessity of introducing a similar journal in their mother language in Assam<sup>15</sup>. Besides the missionaries also felt that for the Assamese people "the most direct and successful medium" in which "the blessings of science and true religion" could be conveyed to the people was their mother tongue.<sup>16</sup>

The Baptist missionaries not only supported the cause of the Assamese language on paper but also made much contribution to the progress and development of Assamese language by publishing numerous Assamese school books for use in the various missionary schools in different districts of Assam<sup>17</sup>. In Sibsagar alone by 1844 as many as fourteen missionary school are said to have been set up<sup>18</sup>.

The missionaries had to learn the local language in order to spread the message of the gospel. A Shan scholar is said to have taught Brown the Shan language while the latter was on his way from Goalpara to Sadiya where he arrived on the 23 March, 183619.

Among the missionaries Nathan Brown made noteworthy contributions towards the development of Assamese language and literature. He stayed in Assam for a period of twenty years and also served as editor of *Orunodoi*. He translated the New Testament of the Bible into Assamese in four sections under the title *Christor Biworon Aru Suva Yatra* in 1848. A book on arithmetic named *Gananar Kitap* viz. elementary arithmetic on the inductive system was jointly written by Mrs. E.W. Brown and Nathan Brown<sup>20</sup>.

Bronson, Brown and Nidhi Levi, a Hindu convert whose full name was Nidhi Levi Farwell --- the trio laid the foundation of the modern Assamese language. A regular contributor to the *Orunodoi*, Nidhi Levi is credited with the translation of the *Bharatiya Dandabidhi Ain* and Natural Science in familiar dialogue from Bengali (1855)<sup>21</sup>. Bronson's work, *A Dictionary in Assamese and English* published in 1867 is a notable contribution to Assamese literature. The book contains 14,000 Assamese words with their Assamese and English meanings. Bronson took full fourteen years to complete it<sup>22</sup>.

Another missionary who came to Assam in 1874 was A.K. Garney. An important composition of his was *Kamini Kantar Charitra* published

in 1877. His wife Mary F. Lawrence published a novel in 1877 named *Phulmoni Aru Koruna*. In 1880 Garney published another book named *Euohshire Aru Bisar Kortar Puthi Aru Ruthor Biworan*. His other important work was *Ruth Aru Josephor Kahini*. Garney, who was not satisfied with the earlier translation of the Bible, set to translate the original Hebrew Bible and published it in 1903. Apart from Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Garney two other lady missionaries also contributed towards the development of Assamese literature. They were Mrs. Cutter (Assamese Vocabulary and Phrases, 1864) and Mrs. S.R. Ward (*Pap Khema Powa Ejoni*, 1879, *Guru Ahil Tomak Matise*, 1879 and Barir Mitro, 1879). Mrs. Ward also served as editor of *Orunodoi* for sometime<sup>23</sup>.

For the spread of education the missionaries also wrote *Bare-Matara*, *Pratham Kitap*, *Padartha Vidya*, *Pratham Ganana*, *Dwitiya Ganana* and story books like *Afrikar Konwar*, *Mauri Caoli*, *Egolor Bah*, *Dharmik Chaha*, *Rekir Kahini*, *Rampotir Kahini* and several other books<sup>24</sup>.

In 1837 when Bengali replaced the Assamese as the language of the court, the missionaries had just arrived in Assam. They took up cudgels against the imposition of the Bengali language and on July 19, 1853, Brother A.H. Danforth of the Guwahati missionary submitted a memorandum to Mills, Judge, *Sadar Diwani Adalat* on deputation to Assam, urging for the re-imposition of the Assamese as the language of the court<sup>25</sup>. The Baptists not only supported the Assamese language but also stressed the importance of learning English. The preservation and printing of old books as well as the *Buranjis* of the Ahom period were also undertaken by the missionaries<sup>26</sup>. The *Orunodoi* published facsimiles of coins of the Ahom, Kachari, Jaintia, Koch and Mughal kings, thereby paving the way for the study of numismatics. The Baptists tried to spread the gospel among the masses through the *Orunodoi* by publishing articles like the 'Pilgrim's Progress', 'Scriptures Narratives' and 'Parable of Sower'. Though they basically aimed at spreading Christianity their mouth piece

*Orunodoi* found support among a large section of the Assamese society<sup>27</sup>.

The American Baptist missionaries came to Assam with intentions which were partly evangelical, partly political as well as commercial. Though initially Assam was not considered to be commercially very profitable but with the discovery of the tea plant<sup>28</sup> this region showed signs of becoming a profitable business center in the near future<sup>29</sup>. The American Baptist missionaries made laudable efforts towards the spread of education among the common people. The establishment of a vernacular press paved the way for the creation of a new and rich Assamese literature which despite its very old heritage lay in complete shambles on account of the repeated Burmese invasions and British entry into Assam.

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## CASTE SYSTEM AND DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

Manashi Sarma

The institution of caste system is one of the basic pillars of the Hindu society that can be considered as old as the Hindu society itself<sup>1</sup>. The caste systems as a form of social stratification and cultural phenomenon is found only in India but when viewed as a structural phenomenon it is found in other societies also<sup>2</sup>. It is an inseparable aspect of the Indian society. The caste system is supposed to have a divine origin and sanction behind it. The caste stratification of the Indian society had its origin in the Chaturvama system. According to the chaturvana doctrine, the Hindu society was divided into four main varnas namely, the Brahmins, Kashtriya, the vaishyas and the Sudras. The verna system which was prevalent during the Vedic period was mainly based on the division of labour and occupation. The Rigveda refers to the 'Supreme Purusha' (lord) as the creator of the four groups. The Brahmins originated from the mouth of the Lord The Khatriya from his arms, the Vaishya from his thighs and the Sudras from his feet. Each class was allotted specific functions to perform and they were rated in the society according to the task they performed.<sup>3</sup>

There is no evidence to show that inter dining and inter marriages were prohibited in the Vedic age. In fact, up to 300 B.C restrictions on food habits and marriage rituals for Brahmins were not at all rigid as they became in medieval and modern times. The innumerable castes now prevalent in the country must perhaps be the offshoot of the inter-caste marriage that had taken place. The original scheme of classes (varna) was natural and was, based on the occupation of a person rather than on birth. The system of caste which is prevalent in India today and which

lays emphasis on birth and heredity has nothing in common with the four varnas based originally on race, culture, character, and profession<sup>4</sup>.

The spirit of exclusiveness, the sense of superiority and pride which differentiated the Aryans from non-Aryans did however, influence the division and subdivision of people into innumerable jatis based upon difference of occupation, sect, and other causes which are now prevalent in the Indian society. When the spirit of exclusiveness and exaggerated notions of ceremonial purity which were applied to non-Aryans in connection with sacrificial ritual, were expounded systematically and extended to other groups because of the supposed impurity of certain occupations, it gave rise to untouchables, a malady peculiar to the Hindu society<sup>5</sup>.

The Indian caste system encompasses certain characteristics. First it leads to segmental division of the society. Hierarchy is another basic feature of the caste system. Restriction on feeding and social intercourse, endogamy, civil and religious disabilities and privileges of the different sections, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation and restrictions on marriage to name a few<sup>6</sup>.

The division which was initially made for the smooth functioning of the society, in due course of time however turned into a rigid and watertight compartment. The dominant section in the society tried to retain their hegemony and protect their interest in the name of caste<sup>7</sup>. When India gained her independence, the caste system was at the zenith of its darkest phase. The leaders of the independent movement realized this and felt that the entire society was at stake and it eroded the credentials of the people. This aspect of the Indian society undermined the very principles of democracy. The framers of the constitution never aspired for a country that was torn asunder because of the internal rift which was purely man-made. The newly born country continued with the democratic ideologies, a legacy which they had inherited from the British.

Though decisions relating to governance are taken by the state, in a

democratic system the people themselves get involved in the decision making processes. They elect their rulers and while electing these representatives the needs, expectations and aspirations of the people are made clear to the representatives at the time of their election.<sup>8</sup> Democracy today has come to be regarded as one of the most acceptable forms of government perhaps because of the principles that engulfs democracy. Democracy allows every individual to speak, criticize and disagree with others and even to criticize the government. Democracy is based on the principle of tolerance. Democracy upholds the dignity of human personality and various kinds of rights are given to every individual. Democracy aims at the welfare of all<sup>9</sup>. Democracy aims at protecting and promoting the dignity and fundamental rights of the individuals, instill social justice and fosters economic and social development. A democratic government is carried on according to the principles laid down in the constitution. The Indian constitution is imbued with democratic ideals. So when India became a republic in 1950 the constitution envisaged the building of a social order around the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity reflected through the preamble and the Directive principles of the constitution. An egalitarian and secular social order is the core and spirit of the constitution<sup>10</sup>. The framers of the constitution provided safeguards in the constitution, which would treat all people at par with one another. Hence the preamble of the constitution states that the people of India resolved to constitute India into a sovereign Socialist Democratic Republic and to secure for all its citizens the following objectives namely liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and opportunity, fraternity, asserting the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation. The preamble of the constitution states briefly the broad and long term objectives of the type of society which the people of India aimed at evolving. The framers of the constitution were convinced that the traditional values of Indian culture which aimed at the spiritual and moral perfection of the individual, could be realized only within the national democratic frame work.<sup>11</sup>

The Indian constitution derecognizes caste as an ideal and also strives through various provisions incorporated into the constitution to build a casteless social system. The various articles of the constitution prohibits discrimination in the public sphere on grounds of religion, race, caste, gender, or place of birth. It directs that there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to economic aspiration or to appointment of any office of state. It lays down positive measures for amelioration of the socio-economic condition of traditionally deprived social groups so that, eventually, they do not suffer caste-based discrimination. Further the constitution makes preferential provisions for the socially and economically backward strata of society. - Articles 330 and 332; 15 (2) (4) and 29, 29 (2) 16 (4) 35, 244, 320 (4), 333 and 335. This was considered necessary because of a scarcity of opportunities and the prevalence of age-old caste community-based discrimination. The fathers of Indian constitution had nurtured the hope that the overall conditions in the country would improve within ten years, rendering reservation unnecessary. H. V. Kamath, a member of the constituent assembly, expressed the hope in the following words:

*"I only wish to express the hope that, before ten years have expired from the commencement of the constitution, in this country of ours which is ancient, but ever young, there will be no socially and educationally backward classes left, but that all the classes will come up to a decent, normal human level, and also that we shall do away with this stigma of any caste being Scheduled. This was a creation of the British regime which happily has passed away. We have taken many strides forward in removing or doing away with the numerous evils that were associated with the British regime: that is one of the few that still remains. I hope that, this stigma too will disappear from our body politics and we shall all stand before the world as one single Indian Community".<sup>12</sup>*

There is a near consensus among the educated political elite of all political shades that castes are antithetical to the idea of India's

democracy.<sup>13</sup> The caste system has also undergone a metamorphic change since ancient times. Uniform legal system introduced by the British made the Indians feel that "all are equal before law".<sup>14</sup> A number of legislations introduced by the British struck at the very root of the caste system. Post independent India also continued to make legislations in the same pattern thereby shaking the very foundation of the system itself. Impact of modern education introduced by the British enabled all sections of people to avail these facilities. Education no longer became the monopoly of the few. It created awareness among the people and the hold of the caste over the people slackened. Industrialization, urbanization, westernization opened wider horizons for all sections of people and the traditional concepts of castes gradually diminished. Influence of modern transport and communications helped to erode the existing rigid caste system as it provided people enough scope to intermix and come out of the narrow world of the caste. Freedom struggle and establishment of democratic system of government paved the way for loosening age old hold over the caste system.<sup>15</sup>

India re-affirmed her faith in democratic ideologies and philosophies but there will be no democracy in India unless there is a strong and integrated national society. India has been the meeting place of many races and culture. While maintaining its separate identity it is imperative that the cultural groups live in harmony, have an emotional identification with the national society, and participate actively in strengthening its bonds. The national consciousness in India has neither a long history nor very deep roots. India attained its status of nationhood in the modern sense only in the process of opposing and overthrowing the British rule. The moment the British stepped out of the Indian soil, the binding knot of national unity began to loosen itself, and the narrow loyalties to caste, sect, or language began to raise its ugly head. The future of Indian democracy will depend on the way it can meet the challenges arising out of the various social problems arising in the Indian subcontinent because of the people's misconceptions and false affinity to cling to the traditional past.<sup>16</sup>

To alleviate the wrongs done due to blind faith and support in the caste system, the constitution has adopted various measures. The constitution by incorporating various articles, guaranteeing equal opportunities to all citizens in all matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state. It specifically lays down that no citizen shall, on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth residence, or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office under the state.<sup>17</sup>

The constitution also forbids the practice of untouchability in any form. The right to freedom provides among other things, the right to the practice of any calling without restrictions. The right to non-exploitation guarantees freedom from forced labours. Through the incorporation of these articles, utmost attempts have been made to establish equality among all sections of the society. Through the implementation of the articles incorporated in the Indian constitution, the major thrust has been shifted from the caste to the individual as the unit of Indian society.<sup>18</sup>

It would be wrong to think that the constitutional measures have succeeded in minimizing the impact of caste on the society. The caste system still continues to exercise a powerful influence on the political, social and economic life of the people. With the introduction of adult franchise, people have become conscious of the power of the vote. Since castes are the most organized groups, politicians find it easy to woo the people. In fact, political parties take special care to select those candidates who gets the majority of votes of a particular caste.<sup>19</sup>

Caste bonds are very strong in rural India. People in rural areas are often guided by caste interest rather than political or economic interest. Political parties fully exploit this feeling and thereby direct the voting pattern in the villages. The candidates also often seek the support of the religious leaders who can exercise a commendable influence over their jatis.<sup>20</sup>

The caste system which has shown great resilience in the past, poses the greatest threat to Indian democracy. Untouchability, the worst feature

of the caste system, has been deeply, entrenched in the Indian society and its impact is crystal clear not only in the social field but also in the political as well as in the economic field.<sup>21</sup> Laudable efforts have been made from time to time from various quarters to eradicate the system. A new consciousness has to be created among people that the concept of untouchables is the most disruptive element in our society and it stands in the way of economic development as well as national integration. A system which cuts off human beings from one another is incompatible with the ideals of equality and social justice, which are enshrined in our constitution. It is a major stumbling block to national integration, economic development and moral regeneration of Indian society. Hence for the successful functioning of democracy in India and for the people to savor the fruits of equality as provided in the constitution, the disruptive institutions should be kept at bay. It will be difficult to wipe out an age old tradition with one stroke of the pen and it would continue to prick the society for many more decades to come, but the mind set of the people should change and with all sincerity, the people and also those at the helm of affairs should try to implement the provisions of the constitution in letter and spirit, thereby paving the way for a society, to be based on democratic principles and thus making democracy a success instead of a mockery.

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19. Ghai, K.K., *op. cit*, p.432.
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## HUMANISM IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN PHILOSOPHY —A study of "Spiritual Humanism" of Rabindranath Tagore

Dreamsea Das

Different philosophers have conceptualized Humanism at different periods. It has different types and can be easily separated and defined. Thus there are different verities of humanism like *Literary Humanism*. *Literary Humanism* is a devotion to the humanities or literary culture. *Renaissance Humanism* is the spirit of learning that developed at the end of the Middle Ages with the revival of classical letters and a renewed confidence. It the ability of human beings to determine for themselves truth and falsehood. *Cultural Humanism* is the rational and empirical tradition that originated largely in ancient Greece and Rome, evolved throughout European history, and now constitutes a basic part of the Western approach to science, political theory, ethics and law. *Philosophical Humanism* is any outlook or way of life centered on human need and interest. Sub-categories of this type include *Christian Humanism* and *Modern Humanism*. *Christian Humanism* is defined by Webster's Third New International Dictionary as a philosophy advocating the self-fulfilment of man within the framework of Christian principle. This more human oriented faith is largely a product of the Renaissance and is a part of what made up Renaissance Humanism. *Modern Humanism*, also called *Naturalistic Humanism*, *Scientific Humanism*, *Ethical Humanism* and *Democratic Humanism* is defined by one of its leading proponents, Corliss Lamont, as a naturalistic philosophy that rejects all supernaturalism and relies primarily upon reason and science, democracy and human compassion. *Modern Humanism* has a dual origin both secular and

religious, and these constitute its sub-categories<sup>1</sup>. *Secular Humanism* is an out growth of 18th century enlightenment rationalism and 19th century free thought. Many secular groups, such as the council for Democratic and Secular Humanism and the American Rationalist Federation, and many otherwise unaffiliated academic philosophers and scientists, advocate this philosophy. *Religious Humanism* emerges out of Ethical Culture, Unitarianism and Universalism. Today many Unitarian-universalist congregations and all Ethical culture societies describe themselves as humanist in the modern sense.<sup>2</sup> The present paper is not intended to find out an operational of humanism but is submits that the sort of answer one will get to the question What is Humanism? - depends on What sort of humanist you ask?

(I)

Every philosophy bears the mark of its origin. That is why British philosophy is generally empirical and American philosophy is rooted in realistic and pragmatic considerations. French philosophy is rationalistic, while German philosophy is pre-eminently speculative. In that vein, Indian philosophy can be described as meditative. It arises as the result of a kind of meditation on the holy powers of the soul and of Nature. Generally, Indian philosophy is described as "spiritual"; by this is meant that it lays emphasis on values that are super-natural and otherworldly. But this description is not adequate because it gives the impression that Indian Philosophy has no concern with this-worldly values. At least contemporary Indian Philosophy has no concern with this-worldly values. At least contemporary Indian Philosophy should not be described in that way. It emphasizes the ultimacy of, what is called, spiritual values; but it dose not do so in a completely one-sided manner disregarding absolutely considerations that are empirical and this-worldly. In fact, the contemporary Indian thinker tries his best to reconcile the tow. He explicitly says that spiritual awakening cannot take place in a void—that

that for spiritual growth the physical nature is not to be rejected but perfected. That shows that it is better to describe the general character of Indian philosophy as meditative. In this context, the word 'meditative' is more comprehensive than the word 'spiritual', because it incorporates in it even the word spiritual. What is being suggested here is that the Indian philosopher comes to discover certain holy powers of Nature and also a capacity of self-transcendence within man himself.<sup>3</sup>.

For the contemporary Indian thinkers the roots of philosophical thinking lie in considerations that are existential. Tagore and Radhakrishnan, in particular, analyse the existential consideration of man. There is one particular point with respect to which there appears to be an implicit agreement among all the contemporary thinkers of India. They are all, in a particular sense, humanists. Some of them combine both humanism and humanitarianism. For example, Swami Vivekananda tries to give to his philosophy a humanistic grab, and at the same time, recommends very strongly humanitarian work and service. But their philosophical humanism is of a particular type. In a very basic sense every standpoint has to be humanistic. The minimum, of humanism is inevitable, because the basic equipment for viewing things is itself human equipment. But there is no controversy with respect to this. Humanism these days has come to acquire a definite import, it is scientific humanism. It is based on the realization that it is man himself who can shape his own destiny. The achievements of science and technology, the ever-increasing successes in controlling and even subduing the force of Nature have given to man a sort of a self-confidence a confidence in his own capacities. Consequently he comes to assert that everything concerning man depends ultimately on man himself. As such, he does not feel the need of relying upon any super-natural or spiritual powers. Thus, this kind of Humanism becomes positivistic, secular and this-worldly in its outlook. These days the work 'Humanism' has come to stand this particular type of doctrine.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, the humanism that the modern Indian thinkers adopt is by far more comprehensive than scientific Humanism. Indeed it incorporates even that within its bosom and says some thing more. The contemporary Indian thinkers have succeeded in obliterating the opposition between 'Humanism' and 'Spiritualism', by suggesting that the former envelops and comprehends the latter. Tagore and Radhakrishnan, in particular have developed this point by analyzing the concept of humanism itself. Whatever else may be meant by the expression 'Humanism' this much is certain that it is a way of viewing things by relating them to man's concerns. Tagore and Radhakrishnan said that giving expressions to humanistic urges of man is man's Dharma. At this point at least theoretically 'humanism' and 'Dharma' become almost synonymous. Spiritualism no longer remains incompatible with Humanism, but becomes an aspect of it. It is in this sense that contemporary Indian philosophy, in spite of its emphasis on spiritual ideals, is humanistic.<sup>5</sup>

Indian thinkers have a faith in the ultimacy of spiritual pursuits and ideals. Contemporary Indian philosophy has a humanistic outlook, which is different from modern humanist. In fact humanism that Contemporary Indian thinkers adopt is by far more comprehensive than scientific humanism. The Contemporary Indian thinkers have succeeded in obliterating the opposition between humanism and spiritualism by suggesting that the former envelops the latter. Rabindranath Tagore in particular develops this point by analyzing the concept of spiritual humanism. Whatever may be meant by humanism it is certain that it is a way of viewing things by relating them to man's concern. It centered round Man and man has to be given fullest expression. Like Tagore Radhakrishnan, Vivekananda also strengthen the concept of spiritual humanism.

## II

*What is spiritual humanism? How Rabindranath Tagore conceptualized spiritual humanism?* The part - II of the present paper

addresses the above two questions. Spiritual humanism means humanism that nurtured on spiritual foundation inculcating that man has to be interpreted in the perspective of the eternal.<sup>6</sup> The Supreme person "Antaryamin" dwells in the human personality<sup>7</sup>. With this meaning of spiritual humanism the paper attempts to analyse Tagore's conception of spiritual humanism.

Like the Renaissance Humanist, Tagore believed in God and hence believed in man<sup>8</sup>. To Tagore the individual human selves are the replicas of the creative Supreme Spirit. Man is a unique modelisation of God<sup>9</sup>. As a humanist he was a prophet of love, fellowship and co-operation. He concentrated his attention on concrete humanity as an organic whole. He gave to the organization of man a gospel of unity and harmony. He saw the vision of peace and love. Finitude is the only medium for the multiple expression of the Infinite. Love is mysteriously realizing itself through man's delight and pain. Disappointment, pain and anguish are a part of God's plan to make man complete. The human body is the sacred laboratory for God's creative experimentation. God's to be worshiped not only in the temples but also through tilling the ground and breaking the stone. The Supreme Spirit is expressing its eternal creativity through mankind<sup>10</sup>. The soul of man represents a qualitatively higher manifestation of the infinite being than the object of external universe. Thus Tagore wanted the Exaltation of the spirit of man<sup>11</sup>. Tagore wanted the freedom of human spirit. To Tagore humanism can alone save us from separatism and sectarianism.

Tagore also advocated a humanist conception of truth. To him Reality alone is the truth of man. Man, Tagore regarded as the culmination of the creative process of God. In the Mahayana concept of Dharma - kaya the doctrine of embodiment of infinite wisdom and love in Buddha - Tagore found the prime root of Spiritual Humanism. It was the first time in human history that man felt in himself the concrete manifestation of the infinite. But the personality that made a Buddha was latent in every human being.

He said :

"Truth which is one with the universal being, must essentially be human, otherwise whatever we individuals realize as true can never be called truth - at least the truth which is described as scientific and can only be reached through the process of logic, in other words, by an organ of thought which is human... in the apprehension of truth there is an eternal conflict between the universal human mind and the same mind confined in the individual. The perpetual process of reconciliation is being carried on in our science and philosophy, and in our ethics. In any case, if there be any truth absolutely non-existing... My religion is in the reconciliation of the Supreme-personal Man, the Universal human spirit, in my own individual being."<sup>12</sup>

Tagore was a prophet of Universal man. He laid great emphasis on the empirical human values. Although he is a prophet of cosmic beauty and spiritual unity he pleaded for love, harmony and peace. The stress on the empirical and the concrete is greater in Tagore's theory of humanism<sup>13</sup>. He accepted the Reality of an Infinite being who is identical with eternal creativity<sup>14</sup>. The Infinite Supreme Person appears as finite in his manifestation in individuals. A man has to reveal the Supreme Person through creative service. He had formulated spiritual conception of man's personality. Personality is the spiritual principle of unity. Tagore's concept of personality exalts the individual human being<sup>15</sup>. Tagore, as a humanist, refused to be blind to the sufferings of neighbours. The humanistic attitude of Tagore includes all aspects of his thoughts. He humanizes not only nature and objects but also God. Humanism of Tagore is the application of the belief that anything is human. His idealism is humanistic.

A human touch is noticed in the writings of Tagore. If a river is described, a ferry at once appears, if a landscape is painted, a human

form must remain there. When a flower is presented, it is presented as bringing a message for human soul and if the quietness of solitude is pictured, its peace has to be intensified with the joy by a song. The outer world according to Tagore is nothing but a cradle for the human spirit. He made an approach with the heart full of filling and interest - is a human approach.

Tagore was almost a universal personality. He has given to modern India a philosophy of world-and-life-affirmation. The political philosophy of Tagore proceeds from his deep spiritual humanism. His condemnation of power, his bitter denunciation of nationalism and his stress on a social organic living based on co-operation and fraternity necessarily proceed from this fundamental humanism. Tagore has given the message of love of man. His spiritual humanism is a great contribution to the Indian philosophy. The study of Tagore's spiritual humanism, thus reveals that there are three basic notions of spiritual humanism - *First, the religion of man, the humanist conception of truth and the universe, and, the insistence on the uniqueness of the empirical individual.*

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