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# EDITOR'S NOTE

The Journal of Politics is an annual publication of the Department of Political Science, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh. It gives me immense pleasure to present to you the Vol. XVII of the Journal at a time when the Department is celebrating its 50 years of glorious existence. This volume brings to you diverse socio-political issues confronting our society. India is one of the most pluralistic nations of the world in terms of her diversity in language, culture, religion, ideologies, identities, etc. and the geographical, demographic size and the trends of graded interactions of communities, traditions and technology have greatly impacted the political scenario. Post Independent India has witnessed growing discontents due to communalism, corruption, economic inequalities among states, urban and rural India, caste based atrocities, invisibility of women, corporatization, environmental degradation, etc. These phenomena have led to the growth of social unrest like mushrooming of secessionist insurgent movements, violent regional movements for autonomy caused by unabated human rights violations. The situation in the Northeastern region of the country is more volatile due to its strategic location, unabated illegal immigration, natural and development induced disasters, cultural and identity insecurities fashioned by the trend of homogenization in the name of national integration and many more.

This issue of the Journal presents a diverse selection of stimulating articles shedding light on contemporary issues within the political science discipline with an interdisciplinary approach. Prof. Girin Phukon, former Professor, Department of Political Science, Dibrugarh University, in the first article looks at the politics of linguistic nationalism in Assam and its impact on the state and the Assamese society. The author tried to draw a genesis of the development of Assamese language as the symbol of Assamese middle class and nationality. He further analyses how

the language policy of the government of Assam has manifested in the creation of new states in Northeast India and facilitated to the growth of ethnic consciousness among different linguistic communities in Assam. In somewhat similar vein, Prof. Ronki Ram, Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Professor of Political Science, Punjab University, Chandigarh in the next article dealt with the emergence of caste based social exclusion and rise of Dalit assertion in Punjab. His article dwells around the complex caste structure practiced in Punjab, where the Brahminical tradition of social stratification has never been effective in the State and the Jat-Sikhs consider themselves to be superior. This downplay of the Brahmins has somehow benefited the Dalit doing away with the belief of purity and pollution. However, the author stresses that the phenomena have not in any way helped the Dalit in improving their socio-economic status which facilitated the emergence of Dalit consciousness in Punjab mostly the Dalit Deras of Punjab. Dr. Rudraman Thapa in his article, *Movement for Constitutional Status among the Nepalese of Assam*, focused on the genesis of the democratic movements of Nepalese of Assam. The article is intended to highlight the democratic movements spearheaded by the Assam Gorkha Sammelon and All Assam Nepali Students' Union in demanding constitutional status for the well-being of the community. The author traces historically and chronologically analyses the demand of the Nepalese to be recognized as a Minority Community to their demand for the inclusion into the list of Other Backward Classes and their present assertion for inclusion into the list of ST and SC. Dr. Dolly Phukon, penned on the theoretical understanding of Human development and security paradigm in the context of post-colonial societies and its gendered implications. Dr. Phukon tried to see how gender insecurity materialized from the practice of inequalities in public and private spheres are one of the epidemic challenges, continuing to undermine the security of women around the world whose manifestations are seen even in development discourses. The fourth article authored by Dr. Dibyajyoti Dutta, stressed on the viability of "Voluntary Departure Scheme" as an alternative political strategy to control influx and deportation of the illegal immigrants from Assam. Dr. Dutta raised an optimistic debate for engaging

economic and political dialogue with Dhaka to create employability in Bangladesh so that the problem of immigration could be solved to have a hassle free exit of the illegal immigrants from Assam. Dr. Borun Dey in his research piece debated on the role of Assam Sahitya Sabha (ASS), an apex literary organization of the State in stimulating language based cultural identity formation in Assam during the movement for imposing Assamese as official Language in 1960, the movement against the re-organization of State, 1955, movement against the Federal Plan, 1967, movement for medium of instruction in 1972, the Assam Movement (1979-85). Amrita Pritam Gogoi's article, *Women and their Fantasy of Liberation in Maoist Memoirs of Nepal*, is based on author's own interpretation drawn from the qualitative interviews conducted with the women combatants of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Nepal. The article has very articulately focuses on how the women combatants during their ideological and armed fight against the monarchy, the feudal - patriarchal state and society created spaces for themselves, even outside the domains of the movement to dream and fantasize a life outside the confines of the private. The following article titled *Dynamics of India's Neighbourhood Policies* authored by Obja Borah Hazarika examines the drift in India's policies after the end of the Cold War towards her neighbours and the reasons behind the transformations. Her article focused on how after the cold war India tried to abstain from being intrusive with her neighbour's internal affairs and opted for more cooperative ways of engagements with them. Further, another noticeable change is India's constant concentration on improving the social indicators of the country to mitigate the problems like migration and insurgency. The next article by Urbi Das is based on one of the most burning issues i.e. bride-trafficking. Her article dwells on understanding human trafficking as a threat to human security, nature of bride trafficking in India -its causes, manifestations and possible remedies. The article by Priyanka Sharma titled *Managing Water Conflicts in India: The Large Dam Perspective* focuses on various dimensions of water conflicts consequential on the construction of dams centered on Social and ecological disruption and Inter-riparian conflicts. Further the author suggested for a more inclusive local water harvesting

and management schemes with local people as the planners for finding solution to managing water conflicts in India. The next article by Chakrapani Patir is a theoretical incitement to the discourse on human rights of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The author discussed the reasons behind the formation of conflict, nature and development induced IDPs with a detailed situational analysis of the socio-economic and political conditions of the IDPs.

Partha Protim Borthakur's article, *Amartya Sen's Idea of Justice: A Review* is a theoretical analysis of the practicality of Sen's notion of justice in the present world especially in the Indian context. The author sees Amartya Sen's idea of Justice as an alternative to the preceding theories of justice as for Sen the demands of justice are not dealt with only in terms of principles of justice concerned with just institutional arrangements for a society, but also emphasized on the realizations of freedoms by the people in reality giving importance to the original lives of the citizen. However, the author submits that in the present era of globalization where the state has already withdrawn itself from distributive functions and has transferred its power to the capitalists, making social justice dismal, despite legislating welfare laws and adjudicating measures to deliver social justice, the Sen's notion of social justice needs to be redefined.

Deepjyoti Nath in her article, *River Ecology in the Post-Colonial State: Colonial Anxiety and the Transformation of River Centric Human Lives in India* gave an overview of the relationship between river, flood and people with emphasis on the conceptualization of the river by the modern state system in its development paradigm. The author stressed upon how the colonial wisdom of taming the river still persists in the development agenda of the post-colonial India affects her ecology, polity, economy and society.

In the compilation of this volume, I have received generous assistance from many sources which I take the pleasure to acknowledge. I express my gratitude to all the members of the editorial board, contributors of papers included in this volume. I am grateful to my colleague Dr. Dibyajyoti Dutta for his valuable

assistance in bringing out this volume. Besides, I have a word of appreciation for Ms. Madhusmita Dutta, Office Assistant of the Department who took pains to go though the proof pages of the volume and also did necessary computer work for the publication. I express my gratitude to Dibrugarh University authorities for the financial assistance without which, the publication of this issue of the Journal would have been a distant dream.

I sincerely hope that the academic community will be benefitted from the contents of this issue of The Journal of Politics and will be able to stimulate them academically.

*Dolly Phukon*
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# ROLE OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN DRAWING AND REDRAWING THE MAP OF NORTHEAST INDIA

*Girin Phukon*[*]

The British successfully utilized the contemporary geo-political situation and multi-ethnic character of the northeast for the convenience of colonial administration. In fact, they grouped and regrouped the territories and the people in order to suit their interest. It was done not because of their love and affection to the people. It was a simple colonial arithmetic and the people had nothing to do with this. Thus the colonial rulers gradually brought the neighboring hill areas within the administrative jurisdiction of Assam and she became much greater than ever before. As such the Khasi and Jayantia Hills were annexed with pre-colonial Assam in 1828, Garo hills in 1871, Naga and Lushai Hills in 1890 and NEFA (now called Arunachal) in 1911. Ethnologically, the tribes of these hills are primarily of the Tibeto-Mongoloid stock with a sprinkling of Austric blood. These Tribal people had never been brought together under any central power before the British annexation of this region. But in the post-colonial era the map of Northeast India was to be drawn and redrawn in the sixties and early seventies of the last century creating a number of states such as Nagaland (1964) Meghalaya (1972) Arunachal Pradesh (1972) Mizoram (1972) which were carved out of Assam. Even after the redrawing of map of the original state of Assam, the demand for creation of more states and the Autonomous region still continues. Thus the Karbis and Dimasas are articulating their demand for an autonomous state under Article 244 of the

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Constitution of India. The Bodos are demanding separate Bodo state. Similarly other tribals and ethnic groups such as the Mising, Tiwas, Rabhas, Garos, and Koch Rajbanshi have also been demanding separate political boundary for the purpose of maintaining their distinct socio-cultural identities. This paper is designed to focus on dynamics of Language Policy of the Government of Assam and its impact on the demand for creation of new states in the region.

Language is a complex communicative symbol which is inextricably related to social activity and indispensable tool for all social existence. It is the vehicle for the communication of thought and feeling provides the most effective single bond for uniting the people. Language is, however, not only the means of communication; it has also been an object of conflict between various groups. In most occasions, it has been used as an instrument for mobilizing politics in the post-colonial democracy that operates in a multi-cultural plural society with acute economic unevenness. Thus language has been an important political resource in India. It creates social cleavages like those created by religion and caste. It further gives a linguistic foundation for regional loyalty as opposed to national loyalties. Since independence, it has assumed serious political dimensions leading to disturbances in the social, economic and political life of the country. As is well known that federating states in India were reorganized on a linguistic basis in order to facilitate the diverse groups to develop their own language and culture. But in the post-independence period, the small linguistic groups began to feel the dominance of bigger groups over them. Therefore, the latter increasingly felt the need of asserting their linguistic rights in order to determine their distinct socio-cultural and even political existence. More importantly, some of them started demanding autonomous territorial existence to manage their own affairs. It is generally assumed that language is a cementing force in consolidating a particular region of the country. In view of this, it would be an interesting point to examine how linguistic nationalism in Assam tends not only to disintegrate the state but also the Assamese society as a whole.

## (II)

Assam is situated in the Northeast of Indian union, between 230 north and 270 north latitude and 89046´ east and 9704 east longitude. On its north it is bordered by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, on the east and south by Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Meghalaya. Its western boundary lies West Bengal, Tripura and Bangladesh. Geographically, Assam occupies a strategic position in the political map of India. It possesses 2.39% of the total area of land in the country with an area of 78,525 sq. km. Assam comprises of two natural regions (i) the plains consists of the entire Brahmaputra valley and a part of the Surma valley and (ii) the hill areas comprising Karbi and north Cacher Hills. Since independence, the political map of Assam has undergone several changes. It may be noted that the colonial Assam was much bigger than it is today, which, however, lasted till the early seventies when most of the hilly areas of the then Assam were constituted into separate states. Thus, after reorganization, the present Assam is reduced to the Brahmaputra valley, Barak valley and the two hill districts Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills.

In spite of the reduction of its size after reorganization, Assam's indigenous population is still diverse in nature in terms of lingo-cultural traits. Thus the 1971 census recorded Assam's population into speakers of 76 languages and dialects, and 48 other languages and dialects as residual category. Table 1 shows those languages which were declared as mother tongues of more than 50,000 people [*Census of India. 1971*]

## Table 1. Major Language Groups in Assam

| Languages | Number of speakers as Mother tongue | Percentage of total population |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Assamese | 8,904,917 | 60.89 |
| Bengali | 2,882,039 | 19.71 |
| Hindi | 792,481 | 5.42 |
| Bodo | 533,713 | 3.65 |
| Nepali | 349,116 | 2.39 |
| Mikir[Karbi] | 191,354 | 1.31 |
| Miri [Mising] | 177,226 | 1.21 |
| Oriya | 150,196 | 1.03 |
| Manipuri | 87,167 | 0.60 |
| Santhali | 86,086 | 0.59 |
| Munda | 76,894 | 0.53 |
| Garo | 76,004 | 0.52 |
| Others | 317,959 | 2.17 |
| **Total** | **14,625,152** | **100.00** |

Of the languages shown in this table, Assamese, Bodo, Karbi, Mising and Garo speakers are indigenous groups. The Assamese is the most important language of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam where it speakers vary between 85.77% in Sibsagar district to 61.16% in Lakhimpur district. In the rest of the districts of the valley, Assamese speakers vary between 63% and 80%. But the percentage of Assamese speakers are the lowest in the district of Karimganj, i.e. 0.08%; followed by Cachar 0.50%; North Cachar Hills, 2.8% and Karbi Anglong 13.61% ; [Sandhya Goswami, 1997]. It is interesting to note that while sizable Bengali' speakers are immigrants in the Brahmaputra valley, the 'Bengali' is an indigenous language in the Barak valley where 77.8% of the population speak Bengali. On the other hand,

Hindi, Gorkhali, Nepali, Oriya, Santhali and Munda are languages spoken by immigrant population. Among the indigenous language speakers the Bodos, the Karbis, the Misings and the Garos fall within the statutory category of 'Plains tribals'. Nevertheless, the ethnic, linguistic demography has a considerable influence on the state politics of Assam, particularly in the Brahmaputra valley. Thus, it appears that the language problem of Assam is peculiar in the sense that it is complicated by a multitude of languages and dialects spoken by its people. In fact, Assam represents a unique fusion of different racial and linguistic elements. As a result of the long migratory flow into Assam, it is linguistically and ethnically the most diversified state in India.

## (III)

Although language may be considered as a segment of the larger cultural whole as a means of communication, it would be naïve to ignore its historical and political roots and its symbolic value for a community. In order to deal with language policy of Government Assam, it would be necessary to situate it in its historical and social context. In pre-colonial Assam, there was no problem of language which became a sensitive issue only in colonial Assam. The language started moving from cultural to political arena and becoming an issue of conflict, even between speakers of two sisters' language in Assam. The colonialism, not only created the problem, it also became the adjudicator of the problem. In fact, linguistic affinity transformed into 'identity' as a part of one's political consciousness.

It may be reiterated that after occupying Assam in 1826, the British brought a large number of immigrants from outside the province, particularly from Bengal. The emerging Assamese middle class had to face keen competition with the Bengalis in respect of administrative jobs, trade, and business. They became more apprehensive after the inflow of Muslim immigrants from Bengal. Since the Muslim immigrants also happened to be Bengali linguistically, they constituted a sizable section of Assam's population and posed a socio-political threat to the Assamese.

Moreover, the British incorporated certain areas of Bengal such as the Sylhet, Goalpara and Cachar with Assam for administrative convenience , which further reinforced the Assamese fear of being swamped by the Bengalis. [Girin Phukon, 1996, pp. 26-27]. The colonial suppression of Assamese language and its replacement by the 'Bengali' as official language from 1837 to 1874 created the condition for conflict between the two major linguistic groups in Assam. The Assamese had to fight relentlessly to regain the lost status of the Assamese till its reintroduction of official language in 1874. In the subsequent period the incipient Assamese middle class mainly composed of high-castes like Brahmins, Kayastha, and Kalitas took special interest in developing the Assamese language and literature. Gradually, the language became an important and perhaps the most sensitive symbol of Assamese middle class and nationality.

It needs to mention that partition of the country made the Assamese numerically and politically powerful in post-colonial Assam and for the first time they became the single largest group in Assam.[2] The Bengalis gradually lost their dominance. The Muslims who were involved in Muslim League's politics in Assam also lost their political relevance. The tribals both in the hills and the plains remained backward and similarly other non-caste Mongoloid communities like the Ahom, Koch-Rajbonshis, Chutias, Moran and Mataks were not sufficiently organized and articulate. Under such circumstances the Assamese middle class, mainly composed of Assamese caste-Hindus, consolidated their position. They began to dominate the state politics, exercising their hegemony over other section of the Assamese and non-Assamese groups. The exertion of their hegemony, and the response to it of various groups, together with the nature of socio-economic and cultural development, determined the nationality and ethnic question in the hills and plains of Assam in the post-colonial period. [Monirul Hussain, p. 51]. Under this background, the language policy of the Government of Assam and its manifestation in the creation of new states in Northeast India may be better understood.

## (IV)

After independence, the Assamese middle class elite became increasing assertive of their socio-cultural and linguistic rights. Indeed, they intended to adopt certain measures to establish their language in its rightful place. Thus Nilamoni Phukon, the then MLA demanded that:

> All the languages of different communities and their culture will be absorbed in Assamese culture. I speak with rather authority in this matter regarding the mind of our people that this state government cannot nourish any other language in the province. When all state affairs will be concluded in Assamese, it will stand in good stead for the hill people to transact their business in Assamese with their Assamese brethren. (*Assam Legislative Assembly proceedings*, 1958 pp. 581-82).

As a part of this measure under the leadership of the dominant section of the Assamese elite, the Government of Assam introduced the State Official Language Bill in 1960. In April, 1959 the Asom Sahitya Sabha, a lingo-cultural front of the Assamese middle class, maintained that declaration of 'Assamese' as the State Language of Assam had been unnecessarily delayed and the people of Assam would no longer wait and that within 1960 the Assamese language must be declared as the state language of Assam [Moheswar Neog, 1961, pp.29-30]. The Sabha set the year 1960 as the deadline for the implementation of its demands. In view of this, 9th September 1959 was observed as the State Language Day throughout the Brahmaputra valley holding meeting and taking out a procession. [Sandhya Goswami, p.50]. Bimala Prasad Chaliha, the then Chief Minister of undivided Assam introduced the Assam Official Language Bill in the Assam Legislative Assembly on 10 October 1960 with a view to making the Assamese as the sole language of the state. While justifying the Bill, he argued.

> There are two important reasons which warrant enactment of a State Language Bill. The first is to make the official communication easily understandable to the common man and the second is lo break the barriers

of language which now separate the diverse population of Assam. I highly appreciate the zeal and enthusiasm with which demand for a declaration of Assamese as State Language had been made, particularly in the speaking section of our population. [*Assam Legislative Assembly Debates vol. II 1960*].

No sooner had the Bill introduced, the linguistic minorities sharply reacted to it which subsequently led to the disturbance of peaceful situation causing acute law and order problems. The effort of making Assamese as the State Language of Assam was vehemently opposed not only by the linguistic minorities (i.e. The Bengalis] but also all the ethnic organizations of the then undivided Assam pleading that it would deprive the English educated middle class from their share of government jobs unless they knew the Assamese well. Some of the arguments put forward by the tribal and non-tribal, ethnic organizations may summarize as follows:

1. Acceptance of the Assamese language would place the Assamese community in a more advantageous position to expedite the ongoing process of Assamisation.

2. It would adversely affect the opportunities and prospects of the Tribal ethnic groups (both in the Hills and the plains) in government service whose mother tongue is not Assamese.

3. There is no justification on the part of Assamese speaking people to demand the 'Assamese' as the official language of the state as this is the mother tongue of less than 50% of the then Assam's population.

In fact, emerging tribal middle class in the hills felt terribly insecure of their interest within a greater Assam. They were never happy with the dominant leadership of the plains since the colonial rule. The hill tribal possess their own language and culture which are characteristically distinct from the plains. After independence, the sense of deprivation and exploitation by the plains reached its extreme point in the minds of hill people. They very often complained that:

The Assamese who happened to be the single majority community in a heterogeneous state try not only to dominate others in all affairs of administration of the state, but also try to impose their language on the non-Assamese. We feel that it is quite unfair to divide the people into so any administrative units which are not same while the Assamese carry on their imperialist policy over the non- Assamese. [*Memorandum of the United Mizo Freedom Organization, 1954*]

The passage of the Assam State Language Bill, the hill elite thought, would lead to the separation of the hills from the plains of Assam [*Assam Legislative Assembly Debates, vol. II. Pp. 56-57*]. In the plains, both the tribals and the non-tribal ethnic groups like the Bodos, the Karbis, the Mising, the Tiwas, and the Rabhas were initially keen to adopt Assamese language thereby assimilating them with the greater Assamese society. But the growing inequalities between the communities and the hegemony of the dominant Assamese middle class have created a sense of relative deprivation among the ethnic groups. The degree of relative deprivation, i.e. the intensity with which it is felt, has reached its zenith with the attempt to impose the Assamese language on them which they feared would endanger their status and identity. In fact, the imposition of Assamese language backed by the movement made the tribals suspicious about the hidden motive of the dominant section of the Assamese.

In a situation, when the tribal elite used language, religion, ethnic history and other cultural resource to mobilize the respective groups in order to achieve certain economic and political ends, the government of Assam declared Assamese as the official language of the state ignoring the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic character of the state. It injured the emerging tribal identity and its resultant sentiment. Consequently, they became more organized in a bid to maintain their own lingo-cultural identity [Girin Phukon: *Working Parliamentary Democracy, 1998 p.186*]. Due to the influence of Christianity in the hills, and also parochial attitude of the dominant Assamese elite, the ethnic tribal elite preferred 'English' than 'Assamese' for all practical purposes. In view of this, the emerging ethnic

Tribal elite increasingly felt that in order to fulfill their lingo-cultural aspiration, they must possess separate political unit. In fact, the introduction of Assamese as the State Language of Assam had hastened the formation of All Party Hill Leader's Conference (APHLC) which submitted a memorandum to the President of India on 21st August, 1960 urging the separation of the Hill district of Assam. In effect, it reinforced the demand for separate political identity in the hills. As such, in due course, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram were formed separate state reducing the size of colonial Assam. Thus, it appears that the language policy of the Government of Assam had the expeditious effect of disintegrating the state. As a matter of fact, the hill elite became concerned with their oppressed status in the Assamese elite dominated undivided Assam. Indeed, there was a compulsion on the part of the hill elite to agitate not primarily because of a threat to their own ethnic identity, language, tradition and culture, but because they felt that their individual rights in the political sphere was virtually threatened. As a matter fact, the personal ambition of the hill elite was very much involved in the Hill State movement in the sixties which aroused the tribal ethnic sentiment in the hills against the Assamese.

## (V)

Further, in the early seventies, the Assamese middle class wanted to make 'Assamese' as the sole medium of instruction in the state as a measure of protecting their lingo-cultural interest. In view of this, Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities in conformity with the language policy of the Union Government decided to switch over to the regional language, i.e. Assamese as the medium of instruction in the state. The Asom Sahitya Sabha backed up this position by passing a resolution to the effect that Assamese alone should be the medium of instruction in the Brahmaputra valley and English along with Assamese should be retained for a few years for answering questions in the examinations [*Dainik Asom*, 9 June 1972]. A resolution to this effect was passed unanimously in the Assam legislative on 23

September 1972. It resolved that the medium of instruction at the college level under Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities should be Assamese. English should, however, be continued as a medium of instruction. But this decision has failed to satisfy both the linguistic groups-majority and minority. The students of Brahmaputra valley led by All Assam Student Union (ASSU) declared that the Assembly had failed to give due recognition to the Assamese language and that their decision would endanger the existence of Assam and Assamese people. Their main opposition to the resolution was that it would ignore the State Reorganization Commission, 1956 which suggested the formation of the state of Assam on the basis of the Assamese language spoken by the majority of the population of the State [*The Assam Tribune*, 14 October 1972]. On the other hand, a section of the Bengalis, demanded the 'Bengali' as the medium of instruction. As a result, a movement and counter-movement were launched leading to acute law and order problem in the state. In view of the situation arising out of the movement, the Academic Councils of the Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities had to rescind their decision and adopted "Assamese" as the medium of instruction and allowed 'English' as an alternative medium for a period of not exceeding ten years [Academic Council's revised decision on 12 June 1972]. Introduction of Assamese as the medium of instruction reinforced the demand for a separate state in Cachar. Besides, the ethnic groups, such as the Bodos, the Karbis, the Mising; the Tiwas, the Deories, the Ahoms who have been maintaining their lingo-cultural identity were also not happy to accept Assamese as the medium of instruction. As a result, surprisingly, though it may seem, the ethnic groups who greatly contributed in the Assamese nation-building process started demanding preservation of their own language and culture which, they thought, were the symbol of identification of their respective communities.[3] Even some of them began to plead for either separate or Autonomous State as a measure of maintaining distinct lingo-cultural identity.

## (VI)

Thus, it appears that even after the formation of the Hill States, the problem of language never disappeared as Assam still remained linguistically diverse. In fact, the formation of Hill States inspired the other plain tribals of Assam to demand either separate or autonomous states. It seems that the medium movement of 1972 further expedited the sense of alienation among various ethnic groups in Assam. Among the plain tribal the Bodos who are the aborigines of the Brahmaputra valley, became largely organized in a bid to maintain their distinct lingo-cultural identity. This would be possible, they believed, only in a separate Bodo state. However, the demand for a separate state for the Bodos was not a direct offshoot of the medium movement but it greatly inspired it. In fact, their demand for separate 'homeland' may be traced back to 1967 when the Plains Tribal Council of Assam [PTCA] submitted a memorandum to the President of India on 20 May 1967 demanding full autonomy of the plains tribal areas so that it can protect their land; give effective steps to check economic exploitation and political domination of tribals by the non-tribals, conserve their language, culture and customs, prevent imposition of anything which would disrupt their tradition and customs [*Memorandum of PTCA*, 1967]. The demand of the PTCA for full autonomy turned into an agitational form when in 1972 Assamese was recognized as the sole medium of instruction. In 1972, along with the PTCA, the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), opposed the 'Assamese' as the medium of instruction in Assam and pleaded for retention of English [*Memorandum of ABSU*, 1974]. Similarly, in 1974 the Bodo Sahitya Sabha started launching a movement demanding the approval of the *Roman* script for the Bodo language. Subsequently, however, the younger generation of the Bodos, gradually became unhappy with the leadership of the PTCA and formed the militant organization called the United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front which involves in insurgency and violent activities. Thus, it appears that the virtual imposition of the Assamese upon the tribals expedited the demand for a separate state if not independent state, which might ultimately lead to the further dismemberment of Assam.[4]

Besides the Bodos, the people of remaining two hill districts of Assam Karbi-Anglong and North Cachar were also not happy with what they called the "linguistic chauvinism" of the Assamese. In a joint Conference of the leaders of Mikir and North Cachar hill districts held on 18 February 1973, the introduction of Assamese as the medium of instruction was vehemently criticized. The Conference, submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India and complained that "the Assamese Junta is determined to Assamise them by forcing 'Assamese Language' upon them and wiping out their own language and culture which they cherish to develop" [*Memorandum Demanding Separate State*, 9 June 1973]. Thus, it appears that the people of the hill districts of Assam expressed a deep sense of dissatisfaction at, what they characterized as the "naked imposition" of Assamese language and culture on them by the dominant section of the Assamese. In a similar vein, the Action Committee of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills Separate State Demand Committee in its memorandum submitted to the then Prime Minister of India complained:

> Imposition of Assamese language as a compulsory subject in all non-Assamese secondary schools in the state has added to the injury in the tribal minds. Specially the tribal people of these two hill districts do not like to be confined within the sphere of Assamese language [*Memorandum Demanding Autonomous State*, 24 November 1980].

Thus, it is obvious that after the medium movement the Karbi and North Cachar Hills became more articulate and organized in a bid to preserve and protect their own language and culture. In fact, the hill leaders have been successfully utilizing the language issue in articulating their demand for an autonomous state under Article 244 of the Constitution of India. In 1985 there emerged a youth-based mass organization named people's democratic front (PDF) which contested the 1985 Assembly election and could send a representative to the Assam Legislative Assembly. Later on under the' aegis of PDF, Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) was formed in 1986. The ASDC encouraged reactivisation of the Karbi

Students Association and motivated its members to take an active interest in demanding an Autonomous State for the Karbis and the Dimasas. In a joint memorandum to the prime Minister of India, ASDC and KSA maintained that (i) dominant ruling elite of the Assam plains always feel and act as the superior to hill people; (ii) oppressive language policy and Assamization ambition continues even after young Assamese elite took over the reins of administration in 1985, (iii) Prospect of business and employment for the hill people becomes bleak (iv) Grant received from the centre under Article 275 has been continuously misused and therefore, the solution to all these problems lies in creation of an Autonomous State under Article 244 (A).[12] ( Memorandum for creation of an Autonomous State, 18 May, 1987) Thus the Karbi movement for creation of a state is still a living phenomenon in the politics of reorganisation of states in Northeast India.

Another effect of the medium movement has been the growing desire of the Mising for recognition of their language as a medium of instruction. The Mising previously known as 'Miris' constitute a major fraction of the tribal population of the state. Among the non-Christian tribes of the region, the Misings are comparatively more educated than their fellow tribes. The introduction of Bodo and karbi language as medium of instruction at the primary school level inspired the Mising to demand for recognition of their language as medium of instruction. The medium movement of 1972 reinforced the linguistic demand of the Mising. The Mising Agom Kebang (Mising Sahitya Sabha), All Mising Students' Union)Takem Mising Parin Kebang), Mising Bane Kebang (Mising Peoples Conference) made immense contributions in establishing the Mising language as a subject of study in the primary school and to make it a medium of instruction in the schools of Mising dominated areas of the state [D.D. Nath, pp. 165-70]. Besides the Misings, the Rabhas and the Tiwas also started demanding the recognition of their languages as the medium of instruction. Thus, it appears that after making the 'Assamse' as the medium of instruction, different ethnic groups started raising their voices for recognition of their languages as medium of instruction.

Similarly, in upper Assam, another organization, i.e. Ahom-Tai Mongoloid Rajya Parishad (renamed as Ujani Asom Rajya Parishad UARP) regarded the medium movement launched by AASU as an opportunity to reiterate its demand for the reival of the Tai language. The UARP viewed the movement as the 'caste Hindu conspiracy' to unseat the then OBC Ministry headed by Sarat Chandra Singha from power. To counteract this move an OBC, conference was organized at Dibrugarh in March 1973. [*The Assam Tribune,* 18 March 1973]. Thus the medium issue paved the way for the ascendancy of Other Backward Classes movement in Assam under the alleged patronage of the then Union Minister Deba Kanta Baruah and the then state Home Minister Hiteswar Saikia [S.K. Chaube, 1985, p5].

By and large, it seems that most of the ethnic elites wanted to capitalize on the medium issue in order to generate identity consciousness among their respective groups. As a measure of maintaining district identity, they want to preserve and protect their language and culture. Some of them even want to adopt their language as a medium of instruction, perhaps, they fail to understand that without the development of a literature to a required standard, the implementation of the language as a medium of instruction and subject of study would possibly harm the speakers themselves.

Over and above, it needs to mention that though the movement on the issue of Foreign National, 1979-85 did not have any specific educational agenda and it was concerned mainly with the deportation of foreigners from Assam, but when the movement began, the 'logic' for making Assamese as the sole medium of instruction and doing away with English as an alternative at the end of ten years grace period from 1982 was inherent in the situation. Therefore, after Asom Gana Parishad came to power in 1985, the Secondary Education Board of Assam issued a circular in 1986 according to which Assamese was to be introduced as a compulsory third language and making the knowledge of Assamese for all kinds of recruitments to the Government service mandatory (The SEBAS Circular, 1986). It clearly reveals that the underlying motive of the movement leaders to make Assamese as the sole medium of instruction as focused during 1960 and 1972.

Against this trend, in recent years, however, there has been the mushroom growth of English medium schools even in the Assamese dominated areas. In 1973 Assamese was made the medium instruction in the schools and colleges in Assam as a part of the effort to develop the Assamese language. But it has been found that the parents of the wards, who were once the ardent supporters of "Assamese" as medium of instruction, are now busy in educating their children in English medium schools. This trend is the result of the existence of a belief that Assamese as medium of instruction produced a horde of misfits. The students, who attained their education through Assamese in the college level found it difficult to master the English in the post-graduate level.

A section of the Assamese elite even feels that the sooner Assamese ceases to be the medium of instruction and is replaced by English, the better and brighter will be the standard of education. It may, however, be noted that the efficacy of regional language cannot be denied, but also that English is indispensable for higher studies. It is through English that the scholars can keep themselves abreast of the latest development in their respective areas of specialization. Perhaps, no one can deny the fact that the whittling down of the standard of English has immeasurably damaged the standard of education at the post- graduate and research levels and will deprive our educated youths of an opportunity to find employment in the national and international employment market. Another most disastrous effect of this policy as opined by some scholars is that the University will thus be forced to recruit scholars for the teaching faculty from within the region and therefore; cannot look for the best talent available in the country and will undermine the idea of national integration and national ethos [S. Manzoor Alam, 1978]. But another group of scholars are of the view that the regional language and for that matter, our Indian languages are quite capable of replacing the English. It is not the poverty of language, they argue, but the poverty of our bookish knowledge and word-bound concepts which are at the root of the lack of exposition in regional languages to the university [B.K. Bhattachrjee, 1973]. These arguments and counter arguments, though, no doubt, contain some truth but for a multi-lingual state like Assam, the solution lies

not in forcible imposition of the Assamese language but in recognizing and safeguarding the interests of the indigenous people of the State.

## (VII)

The above discussion reveals that after reorganizations and its consequent reduction of size the present political Assam still remains larger than the historically evolved homeland of the Assamese, i.e. the Brahmaputra valley which they are sharing with the plains tribals. As Assamese was imposed as the official language beyond the Brahmaputra valley, it was opposed in the hills and the Barak valley of the same state. It facilitated the hill tribals to consolidate their ethnic consciousness. Even the tribals of the Brahmaputra valley who became almost bi-lingual, speaking both the Assamese and their own tribal language resented the imposition of Assamese language and they now want to revive their own language.[5] Indeed, their languages have become a tool for the assertion of their distinct identity and opposing the Assamese hegemony in a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic state. The Census of 1991 and 2001 has shown tremendous growth rate of the tribal ethnic languages of Assam. For instance, the languages of Rabhas, Bodos and Mising have been shown 287%, 122% and 155% growth rate respectively during 1971-91. Consequently, the speakers of the Assamese language officially declined from 60.8% to 57% during this period. It is, however, important to note that the demand for creation of new states on the issue of language has been essentially a by-product of the uneven economic development in various regions of the state of Assam. The economic structure of Assam is so underdeveloped that neither agriculture nor industrial development of the tribal areas has created any avenues to meet the needs of its growing population. The problem of unemployment coupled with its neglect of the tribal areas agitates the tribal minds, and explains the fears of losing their rich cultural heritage and civilization and becoming a non-entity in their own homeland. The cultural and ethnic issues are inextricably linked with the economic issues. Thus, it appears that since the late sixties of the last century, the tribals of

Assam became more conscious and articulate about their distinct ethnic identity and started utilizing the 'economic disparity' and distinctness as a measure of gaining political power. The issue of language and culture and other primordial factors came to be articulated in the wake of emerging conflict between the governing and non-governing elites at various levels because of clashes of interest. The conflict of interest generated by a sense of deprivation and negligence motivates the elites of the ethnic communities to bring about an emotional integration in their respective communities so that they can fight against the dominant community. Thus the elite tend to generalize their conflicts and build up movements mobilizing their respective communities politically leading to demand for redrawing of a map of the state of Assam.

All these developments in the Northeast region are to be understood in the light of the basic character of the Indian State. The path of capitalist development pursued since independence has from the beginning brought stresses and strains on economic development of the region. The capitalist path of development has not only generated unevenness, but also created pockets of under developments in various sub-regions of the Northeast. Moreover, there has been the problem of feudalism existing side by side with capitalism. Feudalism nourishes primordial loyalties and thereby fuels regional and sub regional feeling. This trend obviously reinforces the ethnic identity symbols such as the 'Language' to generate particularistic sentiment among the diverse groups which finally manifests in the demand for a separate political boundary.

In any case, the introduction of Assamese as the state language and medium of instruction created hectic political activities coupled with a great deal of misplaced enthusiasm. The language issue appears to have been utilized as a 'pawn in the game of power politics' in Assam and it is unlikely that the conflict of local political interest would permit it to be judged on its own merits. The tendency throughout post-colonial Assam indicates that language agitation has predominantly been of middle class orientation. Disgruntled political leaders are found to be associated with the movements. In fact, language movements were organized by the reactionary

and chauvinistic elements of the Assamese. On the other hand, the working class and the peasantry have been a passive factor in these agitations. Thus, the social base of the state language and medium movement was spread mostly in urban areas, although it succeeded in rousing the people in semi-urban and rural areas under middle class leadership who became the instrument in the "game of factional politics" of the state (Sandhya Goswami, 1997).

Thus, it appears that complexity of the ethnic and linguistic situation in Assam is unique. After independence, the issue of language emerged as one of the most intransigent problems in Assam. It has been playing a unifying as well as a divisive force. More importantly, the language question has assumed a crucial role in the shaping of political process of Assam. Language being an important constituent of nationality and culture, there cannot be any solution to the problem without proper recognition of the urge for self expression of different ethnic groups of the state.

**Notes**

1.  After British occupation, the neighboring hill areas were gradually brought within the administrative jurisdiction of Assam. As such the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were annexed with Assam in 1828, Garo Hills in 1871, Naga and Lushai Hills in 1890 and the NEFA (Now called Arunachal) in 1911. But after independence, the states like Nagaland (1963), Maghalya (1972) Arunachal Pradesh (1972) Mizoram (1972) were carved out of the pre-colonial state of Assam.

2.  As a result of partition, Assam lost its Muslim and Bengali dominated and thickly populated Sylhet district in erstwhile East Pakistan. This substantially reduced the Bengali and Muslim population of the post-colonial Assam. However, predominantly Bengali speaking Barak Valley remained with Assam.

3. It may be noted that the plains tribal have been sharing the Brahmaputra valley with the non-tribal Assamese. Therefore, the rich tribal heritage cannot be separated from the composite Assamese society, culture and nationality.

4. In early 1993 an accord was signed between the government and the leadership of the Bodo movement which granted some autonomy to the Bdods in the form of an interim Boroland Autonomous Council (BAC). But lack of a clear cut boundary and presence of a considerable number of non-Bodo population in the proposed Bodoland areas from the non-Bodos selective massacres started from 1994.

5. In the absence of a well-developed language of their own, the plains tribal accepted Assamese voluntarily as the medium of instruction. As such they are regarded as sub-nationalities within the composite Assamese nationality. However, after the imposition of Assamese as official language the plains tribals became more conscious and articulate about their ethnic identity and utilized it to gain political power in order to overcome their socio-economic backwardness.

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# EXPLORING SOCIAL EXCLUSION
# AND DALIT ASSERTION
# IN CONTEMPORARY PUNJAB

*Ronki Ram**

Punjab is widely known for its rivers, fertile land and its sacred geography speckled with Hindu, Sufi, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist and indigenous/pagan shrines. It has also earned a distinct trade-mark of being a proud food-bowl-state of north India. Its engaging role in the freedom struggle of the country and the vast amount of sacrifices made by its freedom fighters are well known. The formation of the *Ghadar party* (also known as Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast) by the Punjabi immigrant in North America in 1913 for liberating India from the British rule; the rise of the *Babbar Akalis* in 1920s for self-rule; the emergence of the radical movement (Naxalites) in the beginning of 1970s for safeguarding the interests of peasants and workers; and the rise of the Khalistan movement in the 1980s for the formation of a separate Sikh state, all putting together represent Punjab as a land of resistance against all sorts of dominations and discriminations. Punjabi resistance draws heavily on the heroic deeds of the *Khalsa*[1], primarily aimed at establishing a *Halimi Raj*[2] in the name of formless God, where no one would be discriminated against on primordial or ascriptive values. Another peculiarity which sharply distinguishes Punjab from the rest of the country is the bloody partition forced on it on the eve of independence. Punjab partition, in fact, is one of the very few forced and violent mass exoduses of the last century that world has perhaps ever witnessed.

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The above mentioned specificities about Punjab can be designated as generalities. With some little interest in the region, anyone might claim to know something about them. However, there is much more beyond these generalities that characterize Punjab rather more critically, but often taken note of scarcely. Farmer suicides, female foeticide, forced marriages and honour killings, craze for foreign lands, wide-spread use of all sorts of drugs among the youth, old, and women in the country-side, green revolution driven ecological imbalances and the consequent spread of cancer in the Malwa sub-region of the state, water depletion and pollution of rivers and rivulets, caste-based social exclusion and Dalit atrocities, and the mushrooming of different sects, *Deras*[3] and *Babas* in the state are a few of the most obvious current social concerns that remain eclipsed under the wider canvas of much talked about generalities in Punjab. They get attention only as and when something unusual happens catapulting some of them into the whirlpool of local power politics with far-reaching national as well as diasporic implications. There is hardly any scholarly literature available about them. What to talk about mainstream academic, even in the vernacular literary circles one rarely finds a reference highlighting any of such contemporary social concerns.

In the following pages, I will focus on structures of social exclusion in Punjab and the rise of Dalit assertion in the region. Dalit assertion is quite clearly manifested through the potent agency of Dera culture in Punjab. Though Dera culture is prominent in the Doaba region, but over the years, it has also taken deep roots in other regions (Majhaand Malwa) of Punjab too. The dense following of Dera Sacha Sauda in Malwa is a case in point. Amidst mainstream Sikh Gurdwara culture in contemporary Punjab, the rise of all sorts of Deras assumed critical importance. It gave rise to a distinct Dalit religious space in the state where religion (read Sikh religion) deeply pervaded the structures of social and political power. Given the thick concentration of Dalits in Punjab, Dalit Deras have assumed a strategic position. Dalits find themselves in sharp contradiction with Jats; a dominant peasant caste heavily concentrated in the villages of Punjab. Quite interestingly, Dalits too are heavily concentrated in rural Punjab. But despite the fact of their

being in largest numbers in Punjab in comparison to their counterparts in the rest of the country (31.94% vs 16.64% for India as a whole, Census 2011), less than 5 percent of them were cultivators (Ram 2007; Ram 2009a).

Nowhere in India, are Dalits so extensively deprived of agricultural land as in Punjab. They shared only 5.98% of the total number of operational holdings in the state and occupy only 3.20% of the total area under cultivation[4].

Since ownership of0 land assumes utmost importance in Punjab (being an agrarian economy) in determining social status, landlessness among Dalits affects their social status tremendously. Acute landlessness among Dalits along with the absence of alternate job avenues pushed a large number of them into farm labor to work on the land of landowners, who invariably happened to be Jat Sikhs. Their share in the trade, industry, financial sector, health, religious establishments and media in the state are also negligible. The relationship of landless Dalit agricultural workers with the landed peasantry, thus, is that of landless agricultural workers versus landlords, which in turn led to contradictions between them. The two communities are engaged in a protracted power struggle (Ram, 2004b; Ram 2004c; and Ram 2010).

Despite their poor record in the occupancy of land, the Dalits of Punjab, however, over the years have strengthened their economic position to some extent through constitutional affirmative action, diversification into non-hereditary skilled occupations, and ventures abroad. In addition, they have also been politicized to a large extent by the socio-political activities of the famous Ad Dharm movement during the colonial period (Ram 2004a). In the aftermath of India's independence, the Ambedkar movement further influenced Dalit activism in Punjab. Thus armed with the weapon of improved economic conditions and social-political consciousness, the Dalits mustered enough strength to ask for a concomitant rise in their social status and their due share in the local power structures. However, in the absence of a conducive public sphere and amidst the all-pervasive ambience of religious shrines of the dominant religions in the state, Dalits of Punjab too preferred to choose a religious way to social mobility. This is what led them to look for

alternate ways of social emancipation and empowerment, giving rise to all sorts of Deras and steady upsurge of a separate Dalit identity in Punjab (Ram 2008). In search of an egalitarian religion where they can move freely without being put to any social discrimination, Dalits of Punjab expanded the mass followings of various Dalit Deras in the state emerged over the last century. The fast growing popularity of Deras and the enormous amount of wealth they receive in the form of donations from the local as well as diasporic followings eventually brought them into a sort of direct confrontation with the long established and deeply institutionalized Gurdwaras and other dominant Sikh Panthic organizations resulting in intermittent caste conflicts in Punjab over the last few years. The Vienna attack on the Sants of Dera Sachkhand Ballan (May 2009) and the Akalis-Dera Sacha Sauda row over the Dera's chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh's mimicry of the iconography of Guru Gobind Singh (May 2007) are a few instances of violent manifestation[5].

Thus the rise of Dalit Deras in Punjab may be seen as an index of emerging Dalit consciousness and a culture of separate Dalit identity in the state. In the face of the growing caste structures within Sikhism (Ram 2009a; Ram2009b; and Ram 2009c), a religion that theologically denies caste and known for attracting a vast constituency among the downtrodden, Dalits were but helpless to seek refuge in Deras where they were given the promise of social equality and dignity in the real sense of the term. Among Dalit Deras, Ravidass Deras are the most prominent. They are being raised in the sacred memory of Guru Ravidass, one of several Dalit *nirguni* Sants (devotee of God without attributes) of the medieval north-Indian Bhakti movement who unleashed a frontal attack on the long tradition of social oppression and Untouchability in the Hindu society and deployed Bhakti as a prototype of non-violent revolt by the untouchables against the centuries-old system of Brahminic hegemony. Guru Ravidass being one of the lower castes and what Omvedt called "the Bhakti radical" holds a special place in the heart of Dalits, who consider him their Guru (Omvedt 2008: 7) They have built temples, Gurdwaras, bhawans (memorial halls), educational institutions/chairs, cultural organizations and hospitals in his name all over Punjab. They have also founded several missions[6]

to accurately establish facts about his life, times, works, and to disseminate his message of love, compassion, equality, and brotherhood in India and abroad[7] (Hawley 1988:270). In fact, the lustrous image of Ravidass has played an instrumental role in mobilizing the outcasts[8], especially Chamars (leather workers), who joined the Ad Dharm movement in large numbers[9]. The charmers of Punjab in general and Punjabi Chamar/Ad Dharmi/Ravidassia diasporas in particular have organized themselves into various Guru Ravidass Sabhas (committees) and established a large number of Ravidass shrines popularly known as Ravidass Deras/ Temples/Gurdwara/gurughars both in Punjab and abroad. The number of such Deras has been on a steady rise.

There are over sixty Deras in Punjab that have an exclusive Ravidassia identity. If the small Ravidass Deras are included, the number could well cross hundred.  More than half of the Ravidass Deras are located in the four districts of Doaba sub-region of the state, considered as a heartland of Adharmis – one of the thirty nine ex-untouchables castes listed in the Scheduled Castes (SCs) list of Punjab. At least forty percent of Doaba's population consists of Ad Dharmis. Ad Dharmis are not only numerically preponderant in the Doaba sub-region; they are also happened to be the most resourceful, caste in comparison to the all other castes among the SCs of Punjab. They are on the top of virtually every parameter be it education, urbanization, government jobs, occupational diversification, cultural advancement or political mobilization. The management of all the Ravidass Deras is invariably monopolized by the Ad Dharmis. Ravidass Deras are not merely a religious space. They, in fact, symbolize the ongoing meticulous process of concretisation of a separate Dalit identity in Punjab. Their central concern has been to present themselves as different from the Hindu and Sikh shrines and to provide an alternative religious domain where Dalit followers need not hide their identity and suffer meekly onslaughts of social exclusion. In order to look different from the shrines of Hindu and Sikh religions, and to distinctly project their separate religious identity, Ravidass Deras have formulated their own sacred scriptures, religious symbols, ceremonies, prayers, rituals and messages of social protest against

the oppressive structures of caste domination in the agrarian society of Punjab (Rawat 2003:589-90). Their distinctiveness also lies in the fact that they neither take refuge in any of the established theology nor do they emulate the dominant socio-cultural ethos of upper caste society. On the contrary, they proudly distinguish themselves from the mainstream religious systems and also contest the long imposed supremacy of the dominant castes over the Dalits of Punjab. These Deras, in fact, have been functioning as missions to sensitize Dalits and to facilitate their empowerment (Ambedkari 2005:5).

The emergence of Dalit consciousness in Punjab and its manifestation in the form of separate Dera-based religious identity seems to have immense importance from the perspective of the interests of the marginalized sections of the society, on the one hand, and the politicization of the sacred sphere in the state, on the other. It is in this specific context that we explore the undercurrents of the structures of social exclusion and the emerging culture of transformation aim in contemporary Punjab. The dominant peasant caste often interpreted the emerging Dalit assertion in Punjab as a challenge to their long established supremacy in the state. This in turn has sharpened the contradictions between the landed dominant castes in the state and the landless Dalits who seek social mobility through the mushrooming growth of Ravidass Deras. The Dalits, who for centuries have been subjected to humiliation and untold miseries, now learnt to say a firm no, not only in the instances of violation of their human rights, but is also ready to take up cudgels with their tormentors face to face. The most obvious contesting site for a power struggle between the landed peasantry and the landless Dalits seems to be the ever expanding religious sphere in Punjab.

### (II)

**Caste and Social Exclusion:**

Though the phenomenon of social exclusion was not considered so strong in Punjab as in many other parts of the country, but it was also never alien to this

part of the country. Dalits in Punjab, like their counterparts in other parts of India, have been the victims of social exclusion, physical oppression, political neglect and economic deprivations. The repeated references to and loud condemnations of caste based discriminations in the teachings of the Sufis and the Sikh Gurus are a case in point. Moreover, the roots of caste based hierarchies have been so well entrenched in Punjab that the reform measures undertaken by various social reform movements such as the Arya Samaj, Singh Sabha and Chief Khalsa Dewan failed to weed them out. The Mazhbis of Punjab is a case in point.

> The Mazbis take the pauhl, wear their hair long, and abstain from tobacco, and they apparently refuse to touch night- soil, though performing all the other offices hereditary to the Chuhra caste.... But though good Sikhs so far as religious observance is concerned, the taint of hereditary pollution is upon them and Sikhs of other castes refuse to associate with them even in religious ceremonies (Ibbetson [1883] 1970: 294).

Even the conversion of a Shudra into Muslim religion hardly relieves him of his humiliations (Ibbetson [1883] 1970: 300; see also Bagha 2001:19; and Hutton 1963:39 & 204).

Moreover, in the initial years of proliferation of Christianity in Punjab, the curse of caste on the Shudras remained unabated. It was they (Shudras) who had to approach the missionaries for converting them into Christianity than the other way round as in the case of upper caste (Juergensmeyer 1988: 184). Christian missionaries thought of the lower castes "...as beyond the reach of the method they preferred - intellectual arguments and moral persuasion" Juergensmeyer 1988: 184). What came in the way of the missionaries not to make use of moral persuasion and intellectual argument as methods of approaching and winning the confidence of lower castes seem to be probably the prejudice on their part that the lower castes were really incapable of rational orientation? To quote Juergensmeyer

> ... lower caste requests for conversion not only baffled the missionaries, but embarrassed them: they saw no sensible or moral reason for keeping

the lower caste out, yet feared that allowing them in would sully the Church's reputation. In a brisk exchange of letters between the mission field and various denominational head offices, a number of missionaries warned about the consequences of 'raking in rubbish into the Church' (Juergensmeyer 1988: 184).

The indignation of being a Shudra continued to follow the entry of lower caste into the Church. The upper caste converts were distinguished by the title of 'Convert'..."whereas recruits from the lower caste were known as mass movement, Christians or simply Christian" (Juergensmeyer 1988: 187). To quote him further

It was only these lower caste Christians who adopted foreign names such as Samuel, Paul Masih... and the like; upper caste converts retained their ties to the caste system by continuing to use their Hindu or Sikh names (Juergensmeyer 1988: 187-88).

In other words, the adoption of foreign names by the lower castes doubly affected the identity of these converts in the sense that they could be easily singled out by the natives as belonged to the Shudra caste by virtue of their new names which only low caste had taken on. As far as the Christian missionaries were concerned, they could also, by the same logic of foreign names, easily identify who was a Shudra convert. Another way of distinguishing the upper caste converts from that of the lower caste was the mechanism of sitting arrangement in the Church, whereby the upper caste converts were allowed ... "to sit at the front of the Church so that they would use the communion implements first, before they became polluted by the Christians of lower castes" (Juergensmeyer 1988: 188).

Thus, caste, as discussed above, continues to pull strings in Punjab, even though it has long boasted of a caste-free society. Rarely a day passes when Dalits are spared of a social boycott by the dominant castes in the villages of Punjab over the last few years. Caste-based social boycott, in fact, has become, rather notoriously, a routine affair in the social set up by state. Social boycotts were first imposed on Dalits in Punjab during their Ad Dharm struggle in the early decades of the 20th

century (for details, see Ram 2004a: 332-35) Social exclusion continued to afflict them even after India became independent. As a reaction to the growing Dalit assertion for better working conditions and higher wages, the frequency and intensity of atrocities increased manifold during the green revolution (Singh 1980; Sidhu 1991; Gill 2000). It is generally seen that whenever the dispossessed raise voice for their human rights, they have been greeted with severe hardships.

After the much-publicized violent conflict in the village Talhan (2003), Punjab witnesses to a series of similar cases. The pattern of conflicts in all such cases often remained the same as it was during the green revolution phase. In almost all the conflicts, social boycott was imposed on the Dalits who were asserting for a share in the local structures of power such as partnership in the village common lands, membership in the management committees of the religious bodies, entery into the Panchayati Raj Institutions etc. PandoriKhajoor village in Hoshiarpur district, village Bhattian Bet in Ludhiana district, Talhan, Meham and Athaula villages in Jalandhar district, Patteraiwal village in Abhor district, Jethumajra and Chahal village in Nawan Shahr district, Aligarh village near Jagraon in Ludhiana district, Domaeli and ChakSaboo villages in Kapurthala district, Dhamiana in Ropar district, AbuulKhurana village near Malout in Mukitsar district, and Dallel Singh wala, Kamalpur and Hasanpur villages in Sangrur, and Jhabbar village in district of Mansa are among the prominent cases of Jat-Dalit conflicts in the state. The most recent one is about the clashes between the various groups of Sikhs and the Premisof the Dera Sacha Sauda in different parts of the Malwa region of Punjab.

The dastardly act of murderous attack on Ravidassia spiritual leaders of Dera Sachkhand Ballanin Vienna, the capital city of Austria, during a religious congregation on Sunday (May 24, 2009), followed by a sudden and most violent protests unleashed spontaneously by their vast Dalit followers across Punjab, once again brought into light the deep undercurrents of the institution of caste in this northern agricultural belt of India. The backlash has not only brought forth the dormant contradictions between the Dalits and the dominant castes in Punjab, but also ignited the 'burning fury' of the ex-untouchables who seem to have been

struggling hard in translating their newly earned wealth into a viable avenue of upward social mobility. Surinder Kaur, one of the millions of followers of Dera Sachkhand Ballan is quoted saying, "[t]his is happening to us because our community is making attempts to uplift itself." [10] Another devotee of the Dera interprets the recent Dalit upsurge as "a fight for equality."[11] He is quoted as saying that "[t]he dominated community is attempting to rise and the dominant community is fearful of its rise." [12]

## (III)

### Social Exclusion and Dalit Upsurge:

Social exclusion in Punjab is unique in comparison to its observance in other parts of the country. The Brahminical tradition of social stratification has never been so effective there. The word Brahmin did not carry a sacerdotal connotation in Punjab. It was used, rather, in a derogatory sense (Saberwal 1976: 10; Tandon 1961: 77). The Jat-Sikhs, who otherwise have been *Shudra* as per the Varna system, considered themselves socially superior to the Brahmins. Brahmins, whereas in the rest of the country, enjoyed the highest status in the Hindu caste hierarchy, are looked down in Punjab. The down play of the Brahmins in Punjab by the Jat-Sikhs might have diminished the purity-pollution practice to the benefits of Dalits (Saberwal 1973:256). However, it did not, in any way; help Dalits improve their socioeconomic status.

Punjab is a Sikh majority state. The Sikhs constitute 63 per cent of its total population. Among them the percentage of Jat–Sikhs is the highest. About 72 per cent of the Sikhs live in rural Punjab. Although Sikhism does not assign any place to cast in its 'doctrinal principle,' but the same is not true in its 'social practice' (Puri 2003: 2693). "Caste as occupational division of labor was, and is, very much a part of village life" (Kaur 1986: 229). Sikh religion is not an exception. In the Punjab censuses between 1881 and 1921 there were more than twenty-five castes within the Sikh community (Verma 2002:33). Among the Sikhs, Jat-Sikhs, *Khatri* Sikhs, *Arora* Sikhs, *Ramgarhia* Sikhs, *Ahluwalia* Sikhs, *Bhapa* Sikhs, *Bhattra*Sikhs,

*Ramdasia* Sikhs, *Ravidasia* Sikhs, Rahtia Sikhs, *Mazhbi* Sikhs, and *Rangreta* Sikhs, *Rai* Sikhs and *Sansi* Sikhs are some of the most distinct caste communities.

Jat-Sikhs in Punjab substituted Brahmins in terms of social domination as against the purity-pollution principles developed by Dumont.

> The Jat is in every respect the most important of the Pánjab peoples.... The Jat of the Sikh tracts is of course the typical Jat of Pánjab ... Politically he ruled the Pánjab till the Khalsa yielded to our arms. Ethnologically he is the peculiar and most prominent product of the plains of the five rivers. And from an œconomical and administrative point of view he is the husbandman, the peasant, the revenue-payer *par excellence* of the Province. ... But as a rule a Jat is a man who does what seems right in his own eyes and sometimes what seems wrong also, and will not be said nay by any man. ... The Banya with his sacred thread, his strict Hinduism, and his twice-born standing, looks down on the Jat as a Sudrá. But the Jat looks down upon the Banya as a cowardly spiritless money-grubber, and society in general agree with the Jat. (Ibbetson 1883, rpt. 1970: 102-103).

Jat-Sikhs are primarily agriculturists and landowners. They are mostly concentrated in villages. They have also diversified into transport business and considered employment in the armed forces as prestigious. "The Jat might be employed as a school teacher, or service in the military, but he sees his primary role as that of an agriculturist; his connection with the land is what he holds most dear and what identifies him" (Kaur 1986:233). Jat-Sikhs are the backbone of the Punjab peasantry (Kaur 1986:233). Although all the ten Gurus belonged to the Khatri caste, they found the majority of their followers in the Jat caste (Kaur 1986: 225). According to the 1881 census, 66% of Sikhs were Jats followed by Ramgarhias (6.5%) and Chamar Sikhs (5.6%). Khatris' share was only 2.2% (McLeod 1976: 84). Although Sikhs are prominently identified by a set of diacritical features which they are supposed to follow according to *Rahatnama* (the Sikh code of

conduct), the Jat Sikhs do not always observe them strictly. The majority of them trim their beards, cut their hair, and many often smoke or chew tobacco; very little wear the *Kirpan* (steel sword), *kachh* (knee length drawers), *Karra* (steel bangle or bracelet) and *kangha* (comb). They rarely visit Gurdwaras (Kaur 1986: 222-23). The majority of the Jats is non-baptized Sikhs. However, the baptized ones faithfully observe all the injunctions mentioned in the *Rahatnama*. Jat-Sikhs are generally liberal in observance of *Rahatnama*. In spite of their lackadaisical approach towards the *Khalsa* discipline, Jat Sikhs in their own eyes and in those of others remained Sikhs (McLeod 1976: 98). The Sikhs who strictly followed *Rahatnama* belong to the lower class of northern Punjab (Singh 1953: 179).

Within Sikhism, Dalit Sikhs are divided into various sub-segments:*Mazhbis* and *Rangretas*,*Ramdassias* and *Ravidassias*, and *Rai* and *Sansi* Sikhs.In terms of social status, the Mazhabi, Ranghreta, Ramdassia, Ravidassia, Rai and Sansi Sikhs are not considered equal to the Jat, Khatri Arora and Bhapa Sikhs(trader caste) who are placed above the Ramgarhia and Ahluwalia Sikhs – artisan castes. Thus the poison of caste has also penetrated into the religion of the followers of Guru Nanak as well (Singh, Balwant 2002: 332). Moreover caste hierarchy is also being practiced among the Dalit Sikhs. *Ramdasia* and *Ravidasia* Sikhs are considered superior to the *Mazhbi*and *Rangreta* Sikhs. Although *Ramdasias* and *Ravidasias* originated from Chamars, the former considered them superior to the latter (Ibbetson 1883, rpt. 1970: 297, 302). The evolution of Sikh community proceeded through a complex dynamics of interaction between religious principle, tribal cultural patterns of the dominant caste of Jats and their power interests. This resulted in the evolution of a Sikh caste hierarchy, distinct from and parallel to that of the Hindu caste system (Puri 2003: 2693).

The upper castes Sikhs (Jats, Kambohs, Tarkhans, Kumhars, Sunars, and Nais) are known as *Sardars*(chieftains). The upper castes Sikhs, however, fall in the *Shudra* (artisan/lower castes) category of the Hindu caste hierarchy and except the Jats all of them are declared as Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Although *Sardar* is an umbrella category, it too has its own caste hierarchy. Khatri, Arora

and Bhapa Sikhs (traders) belong to the upper caste category of the Hindu caste hierarchy. But in terms of social status in the Sikh dominated Punjabi society, they have to compete with the dominant caste of Jat Sikhs (agriculturists), which is included in the artisan category of the Hindu caste hierarchy (Singh, 1975, 279;Singh, 1977a, 69-71). Jat Sikhs and land ownership are two sides of the same coin (Habib, 1996, 97).

## Mazhbis and Rangretas

The Dalits whose profession were scavenging and cleaning are called *Mazhbis* and *Rangretas*. *Mazhbis* and *Rangretas* were *chuhras* who converted to Sikhism (Ibbetson 1883, rpt. 1970:294). "Of course a Mazbi will often have been returned as chuhra by caste and Sikh by religion; ... Mazbi means nothing more than a member of the scavenger class converted to Sikhism" (Ibbetson 1883, rpt. 1970:294). *Mazhbi* Sikhs are almost confined to the Majha sub-region of Punjab. They make good soldiers and some of the regiments in the British army were wholly composed of *Mazhbis*.

> The Rangreta are a class of Mazbi apparently found only in Ambala, Ludhiana and the neighborhood, who consider themselves superior to the rest. The origin of their superiority... lies in the fact that they were once notorious as highway robbers! But it appears that Rangretas very generally abandoned scavengering for leather work, and this would at once account for their rise in the social scale (Ibbetson 1883, rpt. 1970:294).

Their popularity in the Sikh religion has been established by a rhyme *Rangreta, Guru ka Beta* (the Rangreta is the son of the Guru), attributed to them on account of their valorous act of bringing the severed head of Guru Teg Bahadur from Delhi to Anandpur Sahib, the seat of the 9th and 10th Masters of the Sikh faith. However, in spite of *Mazhbis* and *Rangreta* Sikhs' meticulous observance of the Sikh religious principles, they were not considered equal by the other Sikh castes

who refused to associate with them even in the religious ceremonies (Ibbetson 1883, rpt. 1970:294). In other words, even after converting to Sikhism they were not relieved of the taint of hereditary pollution.

## Ramdassias and Ravidassias

The other segment of Dalit Sikhs consists of *Ramdassias* and *Ravidassias*. Before conversion to Sikh religion,they belonged to the Chamar sub-caste of the Hindu religion. Religious conversion also changes the caste name. In some cases a change of religion is also accompanied by a change of occupation (Ibbetson 1883, rpt. 1970:294). A scavenger is known as *chuhra* in Hinduism; *Musalli* and *Kutana* in Islam; and *Mazhbi* and *Rangreta* in Sikhism. A leather-worker is known as *chamar* in Hinduism; *Mochi* in Islam and *Ravidassia* in Sikhism. Weaver *chamar* is known as *Julaha* in Hinduism; *Paoli* in Islam; and *Ramdassia* in Sikhism. *Ramdassias*are also known as Khalsa *Biradar.*

> The Ramdasias are confused with Raidasi or Rabdasichamars. The former are true Sikhs, and take the *Pahul*. The latter are Hindus, or if Sikhs, only Nanakpanthi Sikhs and do not take the *Pahul*; and are followers of Bhagat Rav Das or Rab Das, himself a Chamar. They are apparently as true Hindus as any Chamar can be, and are wrongly called Sikhs by confusion with Ramdasias. (Ibbetson 1883, rpt. 1970: 300).

Most of the *Ramdassias* are *Julahas* (weavers). Whereas *Ravidassia* Sikhs are mostly engaged in the profession of leather work. Though there is a wide distinction between the *Ravidassias*, typical leather workers (*Chamars*) and the *Ramdassias*, typical weavers (*Julahas*), "yet they are connected by certain sections of leather-working classes who have taken to weaving and thus risen in the social scale..." (Ibbetson 1883, rpt. 1970: 296). *Ramdassia* (weavers) and *Ravidassia* (leather worker) are probably of the same origin. However, the distinction between them has arisen from divergence of occupation.

## Rai and Sansi Sikhs

Rai and Sansi Sikhs are two more main Dalit Sikhs sub-segments. Rai Sikhs are members of the Mahatam ethnic group. Mahatams were originally Hindus. Those who embraced the teachings of Sikh Gurus became Rai Sikhs. Some of them also professed Islam. The Rai Sikhs are strictly endogamous and practice clan exogamy. They are mainly concentrated in the low-lying river land areas of border districts of Ferozepur, Fazilka and Amritsar. They are also found in some pockets of Kapurthala, Jalandhar and Ludhiana districts. In the pre-Independent India, they lived in the Sheikhpura, Montgomery, Bahawalpur and Karachi regions of Pakistan. They mostly lived on river banks and in forests, which provided them ample scope for hunting and illicit distilling. They also used to earn their livelihood while making *rassi* (rope)and *sirki* (mat) from *sarr* (the wild grass) that they harvested from the river shrubs (Kumar, 2015, 96). Their distinct occupation of *rassi* and *sirki* making led them to be popularly called *rassiwat*and *sirkiband* (Rose, 1919, 50). Because of their indulgence in illicit liquor trade and petty crime, the British administration declared them a criminal tribe in 1918 (Major, 1999, 682).Their criminal status deprived them of land allotment in the canal colonies and recruitment in the armed forces. They were absolved of such severe deprivations and embarrassments after India's independence.

Rai Sikhs, the erstwhile Mahatams, in terms of social hierarchy, were considered almost at par with formerly untouchable castes. The colonial administration first included them in the list of the Depressed Classes in 1931 and subsequently brought them under the British Government of India (Schedule Caste) order 1936. However, the Kaka Kalekar Commission declared them as ''Most Backward Class of 1953-54 (Kumar, 2015, 97). But after their long struggle to be designated as Schedule Caste, the Constitution (Schedule Caste) order (Amendment) Act 2007 (Government of India, 2007) was passed that included Rai Sikhs in the Punjab list of Scheduled Castes at Sr. No. 39 (*Times of India*, Aug 17, 2007). There are different estimates about their strength in the state. They themselves estimated to be around 2 million and as per the Census of India 2011 their strength is 8.5 lakh

(Kumar 2015, 104). Politically they are very active and are not permanently affiliated with any political party in the state. They cast their votes as per the changing perceptions of their conglomerate vis-à-vis the manifestos of different political parties. Rai Sikhs have good presence in 35 Assembly and seven Lok Sabha segments of Punjab and have been pressing for reserve seats exclusively for themselves in the state legislative assembly and in the parliament.

Sansi Sikhs are gypsy and nomadic. They are divided into two main clans named after their two mythical ancestors, *Mahala* and *Beehdoo*. They also call themselves *Bhatus* or *Bhantus*. Before their conversion to the teaching of the Sikh Gurus, they were primarily Hindus. Their nomadic lifestyle is considered the main cause of their social exclusion and backwardness that had degraded them into a lower caste. Sansis were primarily hunters and shepherds. They also served as the hereditary genealogists of Jats and in return used to receive some amount of the grain at each harvest. The British government condemned them as robbers and thieves, and declared them a criminal tribe in 1873 (Major, 1999, 670), which was nullified only after India's independence (Puri, 2008, 322-23). Though a lower caste, they traced their origin to the Bhati Rajputs of Rajastan. After their defeat by Alla-ud-din Khiljiin 1303 AD, they were allegedly turned nomadic. They take immense pride in claiming Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab as belonged to them. However, in terms of social status, they are considered lower than the Mazhabis (Singh, 1975, 276)

However, what makes caste discrimination in the Sikh community different from that of the Brahamanical social order is the absence of purity-pollution frame of relations. The centre of power in Punjab revolves around the axle of land. Much of the land is owned by the Jat-Sikhs. Although SCs in Punjab constitute a high proportion of the population in comparison to the all India average of 16.32 percent (2001 census) their share in ownership of land is negligible. They cultivate only 0.4 per cent of all the landholdings occupying 0.72 per cent of the total cultivated area of the state (1991 census and All India Report of Agricultural Census 1990-91). Their being landlessness forced them to depend on the landowning castes in

the absence of alternative jobs in the agrarian economy of rural Punjab. Since cultivation involves Dalits in its various operations, it was not feasible to strictly follow the system of Untouchability based on the principle of purity-pollution as was observed in the rest of the country. It does not mean that the Dalits were not discriminated in Punjab. They were discriminated by the Jat-Sikhs. They were forced to remain confined to their lower status lest they dare to ask for a share in the power structures (Puri 2003: 2698). Untouchability did exist in Punjab and its practice was tied with the scheme of keeping the Dalits away from land ownership and political power in the state. Thus Dalits in Punjab, though relatively spared from the overt impact of purity-pollution syndrome, the asymmetrical structure of the agrarian rural economy has made them subordinate to the landowning upper castes. In fact, "the Scheduled Caste population of the region has been comparatively more vulnerable in the economic structure of the village" (Jodhka 2002: 1815).

## (IV)

### Spatial Structures of Social Exclusion:

The villages are divided into upper caste and lower castes/Dalit settlements. Dalit settlements are located, invariably, on the southwestern side towards which the dirt of the village flowed. Dalits were not allowed to build *pucca* (concrete) houses because the land on which they lived did not belong to them. The residential land on which they lived was claimed to be owned by the Jat-Sikhs (Virdi 2003: 2 &11). Till 1952, the Dalits along with other non-agricultural castes were deprived of land ownership by the Punjab Land Alienation Act (1901), even if a few of them have the means to purchase the land (Puri 2003: 2695, Ram 2010). In the villages, Dalits were often involved in the unclean occupations. Such occupations were like carrying and skinning dead animals, scavenging and working as attached laborer – *Siris*. Although such type of works, now-a-days, are performed on non-jajmani

basis (Ram 2016a). In Malwa region, there are many Dalits who still have been working as *Siris*. According to a latest study of 26 villages in the Malwa region, 21 had Dalits working as *Siris* (Jodhka 2002: 1816). However, the situation is entirely different in the Doaba region of Punjab, where the majority of the Dalits have dissociated themselves from such types of menial works. Although Dalit had interaction with Jat-Sikhs, being agricultural laborers, and *Siris*, they used to keep their own tumblers and plates to take meals or tea or water from the upper caste Sikhs. Many of the lower castes like *Chamars* and *Chuhras* converted to Sikhism in the hope of social equality. Even in Sikhism, the specter of Untouchability kept on haunting them.

> The upper castes Sikhs are a separate identity and like the upper caste Hindus, they also follow the ideology of a graded human society. ... The Sikhs may take food with the Dalit-Sikhs in Gurdwaras, but they have no bond of fraternity with them (Singh Balwant 2002: 333).

To quote him further, "the impact of Hinduism and caste is visible on the adherence of Guru Nanak and they monopolized Sikhism and could not accord an equal social status to the lower caste Sikhs in Punjab" (Singh Balwant 2002: 333). Dalit Sikhs in Punjab are cremated on separate cremation grounds along with their counterparts in the Hindu religion. Even in some villages the land meant for the cremation grounds in the *Shamlat* (common land under the control of Panchayats) have been grabbed by the upper castes. "Therefore the Dalit Sikhs in Punjab are in no better position than the other Dalits within Hinduism" (Singh Balwant 2002: 334).

Dalits Sikhs, as they often allege, did not get equal treatment in the Gurdwaras of the upper caste Sikhs. "Mazhabis were forbidden to enter the Golden Temple for worship; their offering of karahprasad was not accepted and the Sikhs denied them access to public well and other utilities" (Pratap Singh 1933: 146-47, 156-57 cited in Puri 2003: 2697). Dalit Sikhs were not allowed to go beyond the fourth step in the Golden Temple and the members of the four-fold varnas were instructed not to mix with them (Oberoi cited in Puri 2003: 2697). Evidence of

Untouchability against the Dalit Sikhs is vividly reflected in a number of *Gurmatas* (resolutions) adopted by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee from 1926-1933 (Puri 2003: 2697). Although removal of Untouchability figured in the Singh Sabha movement, no strenuous effort was made in that direction. "It was not surprising. For the Jats, who composed 70 % of the Akalis, and other high castes, caste equality or removal of Untouchability was contrary to their disposition for social domination and hierarchy" (Puri 2003: 2697). This has forced the Dalit Sikhs to establish separate Gurdwaras which in turn has further led to the strengthening of the already existing caste divisions among the Sikhs (Puri 2003: 2700;Muktsar 1999 and 2003). Moreover the observance of caste prejudices against the Dalit Sikhs has compelled them to 'search for alternative cultural spaces' in a large number of Deras, sects, dargahs of Muslim Pirs and other Sants (Puri 2003: 2700; for a detailed account of Sants see: Sachomer, Karine, and W.H. McLeod (eds) 1987).

Punjab has been a stronghold of Pirs and Sants, who vehemently campaigned against the system of segregation on the basis of birth. They preached unity of mankind. Farid and Bulle Shah of *Sufi* tradition, and Ravidass, Kabir, Nanak and Dhanna of the Bhakti tradition played a prominent role in diluting the substance and practice of Untouchability in the state. Social reform movements led by the Arya Samaj, Singh Sabha and Chief Khalsa Dewan further bridled the impact of Untouchability in Punjab. However, even these movements and saints could not succeed in stamping out the roots of the evil of Untouchability in Punjab. In the words of Ambedkar:

> The saints have never ... carried on a campaign against caste and Untouchability. They were not concerned with the struggle between men. They were concerned with the relation between man and God. They did not preach that all men were equal. They preached that all men were equal in the eyes of God – a very different and a very innocuous proposition which nobody can find difficult to preach or dangerous to believe in (Ambedkar 1995 3rdedn.: 109).

The religious and social reform movements were primarily concerned with the humane and civic sense of society by transforming and elevating the individual rather than striking hard on the asymmetrical structures of the society (Grewal 1994: 116). The issue of disproportionate landholdings which has been the crucial cause of social inequalities and economic deprivations had never been taken up by the social and religious movements. In other words, the agency was prioritized over the structure. The persistence of inegalitarian structure, with the passage of time, had led to the evaporation of social and moral reforms brought by these movements. The principles and social code of conduct formulated by such movements got routinised into hard-shell traditions and rules to be strictly obeyed by the followers. These movements themselves in turn got routinised into new religious orders or political organizations. Religion has become exclusive and been paraded as an index to the deep rooted social divisions based on economic differentiation. The followers of Nanak, Ravidass and Kabir are not only Nanakpanthis, Ravidasias and Kabirpanthis in the strict sense of the term; they also represent a distinct social and economic class different from each other.

## (V)

### Caste with a Difference:

However, what distinguishes caste in Punjab from the rest of the country is the primacy of the material and political factors over the principle of purity-pollution dichotomy [13]. Social exclusion has invariably remained attached to the notion of power in its varied dimensions. The concept of power in India needs to be seen in a peculiar sense as far as its socio-political and economic aspects are concerned. Power was seen as a sacred category. Its sacredness depends ultimately on something which has to be excluded from the purview of its sacred boundaries. Power sails between the boundaries, but its effects are felt within the boundaries. Untouchability has provided - in a metaphorical sense - the building blocks for such boundaries. For a Dalit to cross such boundaries, amounts to committing

blasphemy. They were simply asked to be continuously shut within their ghettos. In fact, it was the sacred facade of power which led to the evolution of Untouchability rather the other way round. Untouchability is the offshoot of power. The sacred structure of power led to its institutionalization. It was not that Untouchability provided stanchion to power. Untouchability has been projected as antithetical to power. Since Untouchability is profane, it cannot be the custodian of power; power being a sacred. In other words, the structure of power which emerged in India keeps no space at all for the Dalits share that power. Their position somewhere resembled that of the slaves in Aristotle's Athens. Hence, they have to be condemned to bear the shocks of power. In such a unique sacerdotal notion of power one need not be an entrepreneur of power. One needs to be a custodian of purity and sanctity. In ancient India the Brahmin held the key to power by way of projecting himself as the epitome of purity. Interestingly, his purity has something to do with his projection of himself as a person who voluntarily abnegates (Schweitzer 1989; Thapar 2000: 876-945; Gupta 2000). The more the renouncer you are, the more pure you would be. More the purer you are, the more powerful you would be. The institution of "Raj Purohit" in ancient India is a case in point. Even in contemporary India one can find such a phenomenon in existence where Gurus, Saints, and Babas shower blessings for the acquisition of power. What these Babas have been doing in India the Pope used to do the same in the West until the Treaty of Westphalia. But Pope need not be the renouncer in the similar sense as the sacred men in India used to be. The sacred connotation of power and its being surrounded by purity and abnegation was so powerful that even the efforts on the part of the Dalits to break the fetters of Untouchability required them to put on the mask of purity emanating from abnegation. Tukaram, Chokhamela, Ravidass, Balmiki, to name only the most prominent, were the Dalit renouncers who made a significant contribution to the amelioration of the down trodden. In other words, even the sufferers of Untouchability had to follow the route similar to that of upper caste to fight against their odds. These Dalits turned renouncers and gurus were the progenitor of the voice of protest and reforms against hierarchy based on purity-impurity. They were

the initiators of the Dalit consciousness. Their voice was not heard because of their being the leaders of the Dalit community, but for their being renouncer and so holy-men.

## Castes within Caste

Caste does not only operate along fault lines between the higher and lower caste, it equally afflicts the SCs from within. The SCs are as much divided among themselves as the other various twice born castes. The similar situation applies to the Other Backward Castes (OBC) too. Baba Sahib Dr. B.R. Ambedkar highlighted this aspect of the caste system in many of his speeches and writings. He was of the opinion that SCs were as much divided house within as the division between them and the rest of the twice born. Irrespective of the fact that they were socially excluded and pushed to the margins of the boundaries of the suffocating caste hierarchy, the Scheduled Caste themselves follow the same logic of social exclusion and discrimination on the pattern of Brahminical graded inequality. Baba Sahib Dr. Ambedkar reiterated that if the SCs wanted to get rid of the social exclusion and Untouchability, they have to say first goodbye to the social evil of Untouchability within. Unless and until the internal social division is not taken care of, the requisite unity among the various Dalit castes is difficult to evolve. Unity among the various communities among the SCs is the most necessary requirement for any democratic Dalit movement to come forward to take cudgels with the Brahminical Social Order (BSO).

In Punjab at present there are as many as 39 castes among the SCs. In the 2001 Census their number was 38. Later on in 2007, another caste of Rai Sikhs was added to the list of SCs in Punjab, thus making the figure thirty nine[14]. SCs in Punjab like their counterparts in the rest of India are not only divided along caste lines, they are equally splintered into various religions. SCs in Punjab are Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Buddhists. Some of them claim to be belonging to their indigenous religion Ad Dharm; though after 1931 census Ad Dharm did not figure in the decennial census of India. The 39 SCs castes Punjab have their peculiar

social hierarchical system whereby they have causally arranged themselves on low-high profile parallel to the prevailing Brahminical caste system in the rest of the country. It was against this social division within that BabuMangu Ram, the founder of the famous Ad Dharm movement, addressed almost all the then caste members of the ex-untouchables by their specific caste names to come forward on a single platform forgetting their insidious caste factor and fight collectively the monster of Untouchability.

Where SCs stand today? Are they not a divided house? Take for example, marriages. There is hardly any inter-caste marriage among the different castes within the SCs. Ad Dharmi will prefer to marry within the Ad Dharmi caste. In the matrimonial advertisements it is common to find that marriage alliances are sought strictly within castes. One hardly finds marriages between the Chamar and Balmiki castes. Buddhists Dalits like all other Dalits belonging to different religions equally follow the criterion of caste endogamy in the marriages. All this has prevented unity among the SCs (Ram 2017a).Probably this may be one of the most important reasons behind the failure of the SCs in Punjab to come into political power despite their large numbers. In the absence of a unified political front and a Punjab Dalit leader, the SCs of Punjab turn to Ravidass Deras, which are indeed mushrooming over the last few decades in an unprecedented way.

## (VI)

### Deras and Culture of Dalit Social Mobility

The rise of Deras in Punjab is not a new phenomenon. It is rather as old as the Sikh faith, even goes beyond. During the period of the historic Gurus, different Deras of Udasis, Minas, Dhirmalias, Ramraiyas, Handali, and that of Massandis cropped up. All these earlier Deras were primarily the outcome of the disgruntled and unsuccessful attempts of the 'fake' claimants to the title of Guru (for details see: Chaturvedi 1951:360-69; Marenco1976: 28-30; Bingley 1970: 85-93; Archer 1946: 221-226; Grewal 1996:39-46). Apart from these, there were many more Deras

that came up at different intervals on the long and tortuous consolidation of the Sikh religion. Some of the most prominent among them were Bandei Khalsa (Bandapanthis), Nanakpanthis, Sewapanthis, Bhaktpanthi, Suthrashahi, Gulabdasi, Nirmalas and the Nihangs (Chaturvedi 1951:361-69; Mcleod 1984:121-133). But what distinguished these earlier Deras from the contemporary ones is that they could not become the centres of Dalit mobilization.

According to a field study undertaken by the *DeshSewak*, a Punjabi daily published from Chandigarh, there are more than nine thousand Sikh as well as non- Sikh Deras in the 12 thousand villages of Punjab (Tehna et al 2007). In Sikh Deras, Sikh *rahit*(code of conduct) is observed strictly. Whereas in the non-Sikh Deras, different ritual practices are followed. The Radha Soamis, Sacha Sauda, Nirankaris, Namdharis, DivyaJyotiSansthan, Bhaniarawala and Ravidasis are among the most popular non-Sikh Deras. Almost all of them have branches in all the districts of the state as well as in other parts of the country. Some of them are very popular among the Punjabi Diasporas and have overseas branches in almost all the continents of the world. The composition of these Deras is along caste lines. Though majority of the followings in every case comes from Dalits, backward castes and poor Jat Sikh peasantry; their command is still in the hands of the upper castes (Muktsar 2007). Among them the chief of the Nirankari Deras belonged to the Khatri caste, and that of the Sacha Sauda and Radha Soamis come from the Jat Sikhs of the Sidhu and Dhillon sub-castes respectively. In the case of Sikh Deras, a large majority of their following comes from the Jat Sikh community and they are invariably run by Jat Sikhs. It is rare that the head of a Sikh Dera would be a non-Jat Sikh. Even if there would be one he could never be a Dalit. At the most Dalit Sikhs' participation in Sikh Deras is confined only to various kinds of menial services as well as the narration of the sacred text (Guru Granth Sahib) and performing of Kirtan (musical rendering of sacred hymns) (for detail see: Ram 2004c: 5-7). Those who perform *Kirtan* are known as *raagis*, the professional narrators are designated as *granthis* and others who render menial service are called *sewadars*. Majority of the *raagis*, *granthis* and *sewadars* are Dalit Sikhs. Very few

Jat Sikhs take up such professions [based on field conversations]. In the Sikh Deras, only Gurubani of Guru Granth Sahib is recited. But in the non-Sikh Deras along with the recitation of Gurubani from Guru Granth Sahib, other sacred texts are also referred to. Idol worship and devotion towards a human Guru is also not an anathema in non-Sikh Deras. It is due to the presence of such non-Sikh practices that the phenomenon of non-Sikh Deras has been described by Meeta and Rajivlochan as the 'alternate guru movement in Punjab' (Meeta and Rajivlochan 2007:1910).

Ravidass Deras began emerging in Punjab in the early twentieth century. According to a field-based study conducted by SomNath Bharti Qadian, the number of Ravidass Deras in Punjab has exceeded one hundred over the last few years (Qadian 2003). Since the publication of this study many more such Deras has been established in Punjab: twelve in 2005, eight in 2006 and seven in 2007 (calculated from the various volumes of *BegumpuraShaher*, trilingual weekly publication of the Dera Sachkhand Ballan). Paramjit Judge and Gurpreet Bal in their empirical study reported that the number of Ravidass Deras has reached the figure176 (Judge and Bal 2009:106). The strength of Ravidass Deras abroad has also been growing rapidly (Singh 2003:35-40). The followers of Dera Sachkhand Ballan abroad have established their own separate Ravidass Deras different from the mainstream Sikh Gurdwaras across the world, wherever they have settled. The foundation stones of almost all the Ravidass Deras both in India and abroad are laid by the Sants of Dera Sachkhand Ballan. It is pertinent to note that these Deras have come up not merely as centers of spiritual gatherings for Dalits but have also metamorphosed slowly into the epicenters of social protest (Ram 2007; Ram 2008).

Guru Ravidass has become very popular among the Ravidassia Dalit diaspora, especially of the Doaba Punjab, home to the highest concentration of Dalits in the state. A very significant part of the Ravidassia Dalit diaspora from Doaba happens to be the follower of Dera Sachkhand Ballan, also located in the same region. Some of the Ravidassia Dalits abroad are well settled and take an active interest in community activities in their host as well as home country. They

have constructed a large number of Ravidass shrines (interchangeably known as Deras, gurughars, temples and gurdwaras) in order to assert their separate Dalit identity. Some of the most prominent Ravidass shrines abroad are in the following cities: Vancouver, Calgary, Brampton, Toronto, Montreal (all in Canada), New York, Sacramento, Pittsburg, Seattle, Fresno, Houston, Selma, Fremont, and Austin (all in USA), Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Bradford, Coventry, Derby, Lancaster, Southall, Southampton, Kent and Bedford (all in UK). In the last few years, many RavidassTemples and Gurdwaras have also come up in Austria, Italy, France, German, Spain, Holland, New Zealand, Greece and Lebanon. Sant Niranjan Dass of Dera Ballan has laid down the foundation stones of all these Ravidass Deras[15]. The Sants of Ballan paid regular visits to these various overseas Ravidass gurughars and bless the vast Ravidass naamleevansangat (devotees of Guru Ravidass) over there.

In additions, Punjabi Dalit diaspora actively participates in various other community activities in the host countries. They organized an International Dalit Conference (May 16-18, 2003) in Vancouver (Canada), which launched a campaign in North America with a view to lobbying the MNCs in India to honour the principle of diversity for the Dalits in the private ventures. Dalit diaspora settled in the United States of America took out the float of Baba Sahib Dr B.R. Ambedkar on the occasion of the 60th India's Independence Day Parade in New York (on 19 August 2007). The float of Dr. Ambedkar organized by Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha of New York was perhaps the first of its kind in the history of Dalit Diaspora.[16] The Ravidassia community of British Columbia (Canada) also created a history on February 25, 2008 by celebrating Guru Ravidass Jayanti in the Parliament of British Columbia in Victoria (based on personal communication from Jai Birdi, Vancouver, Canada, February 26, 2008). It is important to note that the planning for all the community activities and their implementation is chalked out at Ravidass Dears.

The number of Ravidass Deras has been multiplying very fast. They have been playing an important role in the on-going Dalit struggle for dignity, social

justice and equality. It is pertinent to note that these Deras have come up not merely as centers of spiritual gatherings for Dalits but have also metamorphosed slowly into the epicenters of non-violent social protest (Ram 2007; Ram 2008; Ram 2009c). They are, in fact, a clear manifestation of the emerging distinct Dalit identity in Punjab(Ram 2016b). What distinguishes Ravidass Deras from their counterparts of other nomenclatures is that along with religious activities, they also follow an agenda of Dalit empowerment. After the Vienna incidence, Ravidass Deras, primarily led by Dera Sachkhand Ballan, announced a separate Dalit religious identity based on distinct holy scriptures (Amrit Bani Guru Ravidass) and new religion (Ravidassia religion). Dalits in Punjab pegged their identity on this newly declared religion. This has led to confrontation between the mainstream Sikh religion and Dera Ballan dominated Ravidass Deras. As argued by Tracy Piersma, "[t]his announcement of the Ravidassia could have been the beginning of a religious revolution; instead it emphasizes the chasm between the religious tenets of Sikhism and lack of adherence by followers" (http://rfiaonline.org/extras/article/654-Dalit-s0cietal-advancement accessed 7/13/2010).

Ravidass Deras have taken the form of a new socio-cultural movement for the emancipation of the Dalits. What distinguishes Ravidass Deras from their counterparts of other nomenclatures is that along with religious activities, they also follow an agenda of Dalit empowerment. The Ravidass Dera movement "...is silently sweeping the Punjab countryside offering a new hope to the untouchable, particularly the Chamars..." (Rajshekar 2004:3). It has generated a sense of confidence in them and provided them an opportunity to exhibit their hitherto eclipsed Dalit identity. The movement of Ravidass Deras "...reflects the fast changing socio-cultural scene of Punjab, where the once powerful and revolutionary Sikh religion is failing to meet the needs of the oppressed who discovered the right remedy to cure their wounded psyche in the Ballan experiment" (Rajshekar 2004:3). The secret of the success of this movement lies in the strategy to "...sell DrAmbedkar's socio-cultural revolution packed in an ingenious religious capsule" (Rajshekar 2004:3). Ravidass Deras are, perhaps, the only religious centers where

religious and political figures (Guru Ravidass and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar) are blended and projected publicly. They represent a critical Dalit space where Bhakti based cultures of social protest, propounded and practiced by Guru Ravidass, get finely blended with that of the *political* spearheaded by Dr. Ambedkar. In Ravidass Deras the ecstasy and reason of the song of the utopia of Begumpura (an ideal Dalit democratic state), as envisaged by Guru Ravidass, perfectly fits with the analytical resonances of the Prabuddha Bharat of Dr. Ambedkar, one of the most popular and reason based utopias envisioned by dalit-bahujan intellectuals and leaders of the anti-caste movement during the colonial period (Ram 2017b).The Ravidass Deras movement in Punjab represents what Johannes Beltz, an eminent authority on neo-Buddhism, describes "a new terrain of exciting future research" (Beltz 2004: 11) whose potential strength is yet to be fully exploited.

## *Notes*

[1]   A religious–military order with strict code of conduct mandatory for all the followers who are to believe in one absolute but formless God. This order was instituted by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Master of Sikh faith, on Baisakhi Day (the first day of the Indian year) probably in 1969. For details see: McLeod 1995:121-122).

[2]   Humble Kingdom where no one is put to any harm. This term is associated with the Fifth Master, Guru Arjun Dev, of the Sikh faith.

[3]   Dera, literally mean a holy abode free from the structural bindings of institionalised religious orders, is a headquarters of a group of devotees owing allegiance to a particular spiritual person, who is reverently addressed as Baba, Sant or Maharaj. A Dera thrives on a distinct philosophy, rituals and symbol, which are inspired by the teachings and philosophy of a particular holy person after whom it has been established.

[4]   On the basis of calculation done by Madan Mohan Singh and Kulwant Singh, Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), Chandigarh.

[5]   The attack was lauched on the two topmost Sants of the Dera Sachkhand Ballan during the sermon ceremony on May 24, 2009 at GuruRavidassTemple situated in Vienna-Rudolfsheim, the capital's 15th district near Westbahnholf, one of Vienna's

main train stations. The number of the persons involved in the attack was reportedly six, who were overpowered by around 200 devotes gathered at the occasion. In the melee around two 16 people were reportedly injured. Sant Ramanand, the second-in-command of Dera Ballan later on succumbed to his injuries in the hospital (http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2009/05/24/world/AP-EU-Austria-Temple-Shooting.ht accessed 5/25/2009.

6   The two most important missions are All India Adi-Dharm Mission (New Delhi), and Dera Sachkhand Ballan (Punjab). For details see: Schaller 1996:111-6; Hawley 1988:271; Hawley and Juergensmeyer 1988:19-20; Juergensmeyer 1988.

7   Dera Sachkhand Ballan has established the following international charitable trusts abroad for dissemination of the bani of Ravidass amongst the Dalit diaspora: Shri 108 Sant Sarwan Dass Charitable Trust [U.K.]; Shri 108 Sant Sarwan Dass Charitable Trust [Vancouver] Canada; and Shri 108 Sant Sarwan Dass Charitable Trust [U.S.A.].

8   The outcastes were beyond the *Varna* (literally color) and were known as *Achhuts, Ati Shudras, Chandalas, Antyajas, Pariahs, Dheds, Panchamas, Avarnas, Anariyas, NamaShudras, Harijans*etc. They were placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy and were meant to serve the *Varna*categories - *Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya* and even the Shudras. The British regime in the country clubbed them first under the legal category of Depressed Classes and then the term SCs. And in independent India the term SCs became a constitutional category. They performed hereditary menial occupation, such as scavenging, shoe-making and animal carcass removing. Some of them embraced Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and Buddhism in order to evade the oppression of Untouchability. However, even their conversion to other religions could not protect them from the ruthless onslaughts of Untouchability. (For details see: Ambedkar n.d.; Chopra 1982:121-2; Gokhale 1986:270; Juergensmeyer 1988:84; Puri 2004:190-224; Beltz 2005: 39; Ram 2001:146-170).

9   Though the founders of the Ad Dharm movement appealed to all the untouchables in the state, the response of the Chamars was tremendous. Majority of the total of 418,789 Ad Dharmis, who joined the movement within the four years of its origin, belonged to the Chamar caste (Juergensmeyer 1988: 77; see also Mendelsohn and Vicziany 2000: 102). Chamar is an umbrella caste category that clubs together "Chamar, Jatia Chamar,

Rehgar, Raigar, Ramdasi and Ravidasi" (Census of India 1981, Series 17 <Punjab> Part IX. They comprise about twenty six percent (1991 census) of the total Scheduled caste population of the state.  If clubbed with Ad Dharmis, they together comprised forty two percent of the total Scheduled caste population in Punjab (Gosal 2004:23). Since majority of the Ad Dharmis are Chamars, they are popularly called as Ad Dharmi Chamars. Chamars and Ad Dharmi Chamars are mostly concentrated in the Doaba sub-region of the state. Mazhbis (Sweepers who embraced Sikhism) is another top ranking caste among the SCs in Punjab. They constitute about 30 percent of the total SCs population in the state (1991 census). Their Hindu counterpart Chuhras (Balmikis and Bhangis) constitutes 11.1 percent of the total Scheduled Caste population. Thus out of the total 38 SCs the two major groupings of Chuhras and Chamars together constitute 80 percent of the total Scheduled Caste population. (See also: Deep 2001:7; Puri 2004:4).

[10]  Mishra, Vandita, "Inside Dera Sachkhand", *The Sunday Express*, May 31, 2009, p.5.

[11]  Ibid.

[12]  Ibid.

[13]  For a detailed theoretical understanding of this point in a broader context refer to: Srinivas 1956: 481-496.

[1]   *Mahatam, Rai Sikh* – another downtrodden community – has recently been included in the SCs list of the Indian constitution (Constitution (Scheduled Castes) order (Amendment) Act, 2007, No 31 dated 29th August, 2007 (Punjab Government Gazette, Regd. No. CHD/0092/2006-2008, No. 45, November 9, 2007).

[2]   Based on conversations with the priests of Dera Ballan, 14 April 2004; Virinder Kumar Banger, a devotee of Guru Ravidass and follower of the Dera Ballan, Vancouver, 17 May 2003.

[3]   As reported in one of the most popular Dalit web site: httop://www.ambedkartimes.com /about_Ambedkar.htm [November 11, 2007].

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# MOVEMENT FOR CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS AMONG THE NEPALESE OF ASSAM

*Rudraman Thapa**

The Nepalese of Assam comprising a sizeable chunk of the state's population remained diametrically backward and disorganized for a long time. But following decolonization of the country accompanied by democratization of politics and universalization of education there emerged a tiny middle class among the Nepali community. The upstart Nepali middle class increasingly conceived that in order to dispel out their community's squarely backwardness, it is mandatory to get themselves organized, articulate and assertive on the basis of distinctive lingo-cultural identity. This might be instrumental in accelerating the pace of development of the Nepali Community at large, they firmly believed. Such conception and conviction eventually got manifested in the formation of an array of socio-cultural and political organizations, among the Nepalese of Assam especially in the post-colonial era. Some of these organizations include (1) Assam Provincial Gorkha League, 1944 (2) Assam Gorkha Sammelon, 1966 (3) Nava Dhawai Sangathan, 1969 (4) Purbanchal Nepali Students' Union, 1969 (5) Purbanchal Nepali Yuva-Chatra Sangha, 1973 (6) Nepali Sahitya Parishad Assam, 1974 (5) Purbanchal Nepali Yuva-Chatra Sangha, 1973 (6) Nepali Sahitya Parishad Assam, 1974 (7) All Assam Nepali Students Union, 1976 (8) Assam Gorkha Sangram Parishad, 1990 (9) Nepali Liberation Front of Assam, 1992 (10) Assam Nepali Sahitya Sabha, 1993 (11) Nepali Jana Sangram Parishad, 1993. Of these, the two organization's views, the Assam Gorkha Sammelon and All Assam Nepali Students' Union emerged as the most articulate and vocal ones. However, these organizations, ever since of

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their inception launched a series of movements and as a part of them started putting forward a host of demands in democratic ways before the government of central as well as state seeking their amicable solution so as to ensure development of the community they represent. It may nonetheless, be observed that in course of movements the nascent Nepali elite rightly or wrongly developed a deep-rooted notion that certain extraordinary constitutional safeguards to be enjoyed by their community are indispensable for placing themselves at par with other forward segment of the state's population. By and large, the Nepali elite were of firm conviction that getting their community equipped with some constitutional status, such as the Other Backward Classes (OBC), Minority Community, Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Scheduled Castes (SC) are the primary requirements for their consolidation and elevation. Consequently, by the late sixties of the last century, the Nepalis movements were basically directed towards the demand for constitutional status. In view of this, the present article is intended to highlight the democratic movements, especially spearheaded by the Assam Gorkha Sammelon and All Assam Nepali Students' Union. Of the various demands of the Nepali organization, it is desirable to comprehend about the All India Gorkha League, founded on 15 May 1943 in Darjeeling and its consistent influence over the Nepalese of Assam. Indeed, the seed of movements for distinct identity of the Nepalese in India was first sown in Darjeeling of West Bengal. On the eve of the independence of the country, the Nepalese became increasingly conscious of their distinct identity. As such the All India Gorkha League (hereinafter the AIGL) in 1946 pleaded for recognizing the Nepalese as a 'Minority Community' as a measure of maintaining distinct identity. Apart from, the AIGL demanded the integration of Nepali- inhabiting areas of India into a single whole. As such, in a memorandum submitted to the Governor General of India in May 1947 the AIGL convincingly pleaded for the integration of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal into Assam. Perhaps, the Nepali elite of Darjeeling thought that the integration of these territories into Assam might facilitate them to consolidate their numerical strength. They, however, similarly well conceived that in order to protect their interests in India they must increase the contour of the organization. In view of this, they started mobilizing Nepali

speaking population living in other parts of the country seeking support for their pressing demands. Thus, at the initiative of the AIGL, the Assam Provincial Gorkha League was formed in 1944 with identical aims and objectives. The Assam Provincial Gorkha League (hereinafter the APGL) extended its full-fledged backing to the demands of the AIGL. As such, in its maiden Annual Conference held at Gauhati on 31 December 1946 and 1st January 1947 the APGL unanimously resolved:

> *The three million Gorkhas, though sharing a common tradition*
> *with the rest of the Indians, nevertheless, have a language, culture*
> *and tradition of their own: thus forming a distinct community in*
> *India. Hence, this session of the Assam Provincial Gurkha League*
> *demands the Constituent Assembly to recognize the Gurkhas*
> *statutorily as a Minority Community of India.*[1]

However, following decolonization of the country the Nepali elite of Assam began putting forward the demand for inclusion of Nepali into the list of Other Backward Classes (OBC). Because they, as stated above, well realized that it was necessary to get the Nepalese recognized as a backward class as an effective means of removing their socio-economic backwardness and get elevated their overall status. Keeping this in mind, Dalbirsingh Lohar, the lone Nepali member moved a resolution in the Assam Legislative Assembly (hereinafter the ALA) which maintained:

> *In view of appalling illiteracy and poverty of the bulk of the*
> *Gurkha community in Assam, this Assembly is if the opinion that*
> *the Government of Assam do move to the Government of India if*
> *necessary to recognize the said community as a backward.*[2]

In the meantime, the Government of India appointed a Backward Class Commission in 1953 under the chairmanship of Kaka Kalelkar in order to investigate the socio-economic conditions of different communities and recommend them as the backward communities. Taking advantage of it the Nepalese elite of Assam also submitted a memorandum to the Commission clamouring for the inclusion of

the Nepalis into the list of other Backward Classes (OBC). It may be noted that after considering the report of the Commission the responsibility of preparing the list of backward classes was entrusted in the hands of the state government at the same failed to carry out the accountability as required. Anyway, the Nepalese were unfortunately not included in the list of the backward classes by the Government of Assam till the middle of the sixties of the last century. Despite so, it is a matter of fortune that a few castes of the Nepalis were eventually accorded the status of other backward classes in 1955.[3]

In this context, it would be worthwhile to note that like any other caste system of the Nepali Community. The Nepalese belonging to Tibeto-Mongoloid group such as the Gurungs, the Rais, the Mogors, the Limbus, the Bhujels, the Sarkis, the Kamis, the Gaines are much more backward compared the Indo-Aryan group like the Brahmins (including Upadhyaya, Dahal, Sharma, Taimsina), Chetris, the Khatriyas, the Thakuris and the Ranas. The Tibeto- Mongoloid group of the Nepali Community is considered as low castes and probably for this ground they are included in the list of 'Other Backward classes' (OBC). However, the mere inclusion of backward castes of the Nepalese at large into the list of the Other Backward Classes, the Nepali elite felt, was insufficient for ascertaining their all-round development. As such, they furthermore came forward to plead for the inclusion of backward castes of the Nepali Community particularly belonging to the Tibeto-Mongoloid stock into the list of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes. Thus, in a memorandum submitted to the Government of India on 7 July 1968, the *Assam Gorkha Sammelon*[4] (hereinafter the AGS), the most articulate organization of the Nepalese convincingly demanded:

> *On behalf of the Indian Nepalis in general and the Nepalese of Assam in particular, it is requested that due consideration be made for their miserable plight to include the Nepalese as a whole as Scheduled Tribes in the proposed and revised list of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of the Constitution so that they may get scope for coming up to the level of their compatriot in course*

*of time and be able to share the sorrow and happening of the land under the same roof on equal footing with the rest citizens of the country.*[5]

It is, nonetheless worth noting that the Nepali elite not only remained content by demanding the recognition of backward castes of the Nepalese Community as Scheduled Trible but also justified for the recognition of socially depressed sections of the Nepalese as Scheduled Castes. They were of the belief that the socio-economic underdevelopment of the Tibeto-Mongoloid group of the Nepalese could not be erased and eradicated unless and until they were recognized as Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled castes. There was, indeed some justification of their argument that though similar castes of the Nepalese were being recognized as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC &ST) in other states of India, particularly in West Bengal and Sikkim, the same benefits were not extended to their counterparts in Assam. Obviously, therefore, the Nepali elite developed a sense of deprivation, discrimination as well as humiliation that led to raise the demand for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Caste status.

In the similar vein, All Assam Nepali Students' Union6 (hereinafter AANSU), another articulate organization of the Nepalese has also been very much concerned about the manifold problems of their community. It appeared to them that the Nepalese in Assam were more under developed than other backward communities of the state. They, therefore, felt the indispensability of some constitutional safeguards so as to erase and eradicate their backwardness. In view of this, like the AGS, the AANSU also put forward similar demands and grievances before the concerned authority seeking fair Redressal. It became evident when in a memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India in New Delhi on 24 July 1980 the AANSU logically pleaded:

*The Nepalese of India are Hindus by religion and as such they inherit the virtues and vices of the great Hindu society. They are traditionally backward and neglected castes and Tribes, including*

*'untouchable' have their counterparts among the Nepali-speaking people also, but they are not enlisted as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe. For example, Domoi, Kami, Gainay, Bhujil and sarki should be enlisted as Scheduled Castes. Similarly, Limbu, Rai, Mogor, Gurung, Bhutia, Lepcha etc. are the counterparts of the recognized scheduled Tribes of other Hindus. The list is not exhaustive. We urge upon the Government to prepare the list of the Nepali-speaking social groups who may be recognized as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes after consulting the various social organizations like Assam Gorkha Sammelon, All India Nepali Bhasa Samiti etc.*[7]

Furthermore, it appeared in a section of the Nepali elite that the Nepalese irrespective of their caste status was squarely lagging behind as a whole. Therefore, in the middle of the eighties of the twentieth century, they pleaded even for the inclusion of upper castes of the Nepali Community into the list of Other Backward Classes. As such, in its 18th Annual Conference held at Margherita in the then undivided Dibrugarh District on 30 December 1984 the AGS unanimously adopted a resolution demanding the recognition of upper castes of the Nepali Community as the OBC.[8] It was necessary, the Nepali elite perceived, for all round development of their traditionally entirely backward Community. They, as a matter of fact, gradually realized that unless such kind of constitutional safeguards were accorded to the Nepalese, they would remain much more backward than ever before for all the times to come.

Thus, it appears that with the growing consciousness and organizational strength, the Nepali elite began to consistently urge upon the government to fulfill their demands in a bid to establish their community into a rightful place. Mention may be made that like the Nepalese, other ethnic groups of the state also formed their respective organizations for the maintenance of distinctive social and cultural identities. In the eighties of the twentieth century, under the altered political situation

of the state, the leaders of different ethnic groups began to perceive the necessity of the common platform of all ethnic organizations of the state. They were virtually convinced that it would not be feasible to fulfill their variety of demands with their own single efforts. In view of this, the leaders of organizations such as *the All Assam Tribal Union, All Tai-Ahom Students' Union, All Assam Mishing Students' Union, All Assam Chutiya Sanmilan and Jharhand Sangram Parishad* floated an organization under the name and style of the United Reservation Movement Council of Assam (URMCA) in 1986 in order to safeguard the interests of the depressed classes.[9] The AANSU became a constituent organ of the URMCA which had included their demands in the charter of demands and abortively waged a joint trace to find out a solution. Despite such earnest efforts, the demands of the Nepalese of Assam for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Caste status have remained unfulfilled till date.

From the above discourse, it is evident that the Nepali elite seem to be concerned about the well-being of their community at large ever since the inception of post-colonial era. That is why they rightly or wrongly[10] like any other ethnic community's elite developed a brainchild that without being equipped with extraordinary constitutional safeguards, their dream of development would remain a utopia. They, therefore, initiated a consistent social movement clamouring for OBC, ST and SC status as an effective measure of all round development. It is nonetheless difficult to gauge how long the Nepalese in Assam would have to wait for getting their long-cherished demand for the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes status translated into reality.

## *Notes and References*

1    Resolution of the Assam Provincial Gurkha League adopted in its first Annual Conference held at Gauhati on December 31, 1946 and January 1, 1947.

2    Assam Legislative Assambly Debate, Vol. 1, No. 5, April 3, 1951, p. 1220.

3    The Nepali Castes viz., Thapa, Gurung, Lama, Mogor, Newar, Lohar, Domai, Gaine, Rai, Chetri, Limbu, Sarki i.e. cobbler were recognized as other backward class

(Government of Assam Personnel (B) Dept. of Office Memorandum No. ABP338/ 83/13 dated 4/1/1984)

4   *The Assam Provincial Gurkha League was renamed as the Assam Gurukha Sammelon in 1966.*

5   Memorandum of the AGS submitted to the Government of India on July 24, 1968.

6   On 12 March 2003 the All Assam Nepali Students' Union was rechristened as the All Assam, Gorkha Students' Union. Write justifying the name the students' leadership argued that the Nepalese means the citizens of Nepal. On the otherhand the term Gorkha connotes the Indian nationals of Nepalese origin. Thenceforth this students' outfit has been working as the All Assam Gorkha Students' Union (AAGSU)

7   The memorandum of the AANSU submitted to the Prime Minister of India, New Delhi on July 24, 1980.

8   The resolution of the AGS adopted in the 18th Annual Conference held at Margherita on December 30, 1984.

9   A leaflet published by Amarjyoti Gogoi on behalf of the united Reservation Movement Council of Assam, April 21, 1986

10  While substantiating the non-inclusion of Tea Garden Labourers (TGLs) community of Assam into the list of scheduled Tribes, the Government of India pleaded that the TGLs are entitled to get the said constitutional status only in the state of their origin, not other states of India. Therefore, it seems that such justification might be extended even in case of the Nepalese demand too for the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes status in Assam when required.

# HUMAN SECURITY AND GENDER
# IN DEVELOPMENT
# DISCOURSE: POST-COLONIAL DEBATES

*Dolly Phukon*[*]

The concept of security which was basically linked up with territorial and national security has undermined the insecurities that human being faces in their daily life like hunger, epidemics, environmental hazards, social conflicts, crime, political conflict and unrest, joblessness, etc... The UNDP report of 1994 for the first time addressed the issue of security in a much broader framework which made the concept of human security a universal concern by addressing and identifying seven dimensions of human securities i.e. economic, food, health, environmental, personal ,community and political. The UNDP discourse on human security signifies the process of transforming human development into human security in real life experiences of making the people capable of exercising the ability of making choices of the people safely and freely. With this, human development was defined as 'the process of widening the range of people's choices', while human security was defined as the ability to pursue those choices encompassing the seven dimensions of security. The human security paradigm is designed to provide a more holistic, comprehensive definition of security and protection from all forms of harm, including structural and cultural violence. The basic development policies that are universally adopted or enforced upon the postcolonial societies supported by the donor countries are basic needs, structural adjustment and human rights. Interestingly, if human development provides multiple choices to people and human

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security is a means to pursue the choices, the directives seemed to be contradictory if one inquires into the implications of the development policies in the post colonial world. For example, promotion of human rights is at the core of protecting human security, but more frequently the governments who need to follow the norms of human security in their policy formulation are themselves arbiters of security and violators of people's rights.

At present gender insecurity which materialized from the practice of inequalities in public and private spheres are identified as one of the epidemic challenge, continuing to undermine the security of women around the world which needed immediate attention. In the name of morality and ethics, the societies of the globe systematically confiscated women's rights and women's security. The most insecurity elements which haunts women are embedded in structural violence and finally gets legitimized by the culture which itself is a construct of the given structure. In that case, despite the broad and inclusive nature of human security discourse, the gender dimension tends to be overlooked. The definition of security too conforms to the male-defined values and the term human itself presented as gender-neutral happens to be an expression of the masculine (Hudson Heidi, 2005). Within this context, this paper tends to throw some theoretical underpinning of Human development and Security paradigm in the context of post-colonial societies and its gendered implications. The paper is divided into two parts dealing with human security and development with critical analysis of Basic Needs and welfare Approach, SAP and Good governance and Capability approach to human development which contradicts human security aspects in a post colonial world and some aspects of Human security and gender.

## Human Security and Development: A Theoretical Understanding

The development discourse initiated by UNDP is framed centered basically on human security rather than state security. The approach to basic needs as a development strategy of UNDP could be regarded as enhancing the arena of

economic security with a poverty alleviation agenda. Basic need approach is related again with the consumption oriented approach which believes that minimum universally determined primary and natural needs, i.e. food, shelter and clothing is required for people to become productive. Ilan Kapoor, post-colonial scholar debated how the coining of basic needs itself is a hierarchical and hegemonic construct where basic is identified with immediate material needs and the neglected the **Other** such as culture, politics, intellectuality as luxurious or secondary needs. He questioned, whose needs are being satisfied by the basic need approach and whether needs are sometimes confused with wants, or who want the 'Others' to need something? (Kapoor Ilan, 2008). In other words external agents use to frame the needs and rationalize the same by enforcing it through policy implementations in the postcolonial regimes by the Donors like World Bank, ILO, IMF, Trans-national NGOs like Amnesty International, CARE, and Oxfam etc. Thus the basic needs approach clearly relegated the third world voices to determine and address their own priorities.

Further it could be said that due to the failure of modernization theory, former Western Model for developing countries based on trickle-down theory which was implemented in India by Jawaharlal Nehru, Basis Needs approach happened to be a cosmetic surgery to cover up the wounds. If human security is defined as a capability approach then denying culture which happened to be the life-breath of a nation or community replacing with materialist need based therapy would certainly strip human beings from his/her very existence. In simplistic term, the access to the language and socialization which is the life-breath of culture is denied. It is the culture which promotes humanness and induces the human to need. Thus a belief that human could survive decently if they are provided with the basic needs is an inclination towards the State of Nature is itself dehumanizing.

Another phenomenon of development programe of UNDP which threatens their own construction of human security is the structural adjustment programe which is based on donor's prescription to the postcolonial government to cutbacks, privatization and free market in its development and economic policies, which is

exclusion to human security. Structural adjustment policies in the third world countries was implemented in order to speedily remove external imbalances of payment in the debtor countries by cut down of budgets from the public sector and social services such as health, education, food subsidizes etc. The debtor government was advised to withdraw as prime movers of development in favour of the private sectors of the economies in line with the neo-liberal economic philosophy leading to the need for free market, free competition and giving more importance to the private sector as providers of the economic growth of the society (Braidotti Rosi etal., 1994). The consequences of the structural adjustment policies clearly shows the duality of the development programs initiated by the donors where on one hand they spoke of human security, development on the other by implementing the structural adjustment policies they are eroding the social securities of the people. The postcolonial countries have to pay many times more than the development aid they received and new loans were offered for the implementation of SAP. This process led to the policy of export by substituting imports. Thus the economic cum agricultural policies tended to go for producing goods to be sold in industrial countries rather than what the local people requirements leading to more poverty and conflict in the society. As a result, acute food insecurity created a detrimental effect on large majority of people in India. To cope up with the situation, India adopted the targeted Public Distribution System but due to lack of clear-cut guidelines for identification of families below poverty line made it a failure.

Another development policy for the postcolonial world is the stress on good governance. Good governance meant meaningful and inclusive political participation so that the institutions and processes could be made more responsive to the needs of the poor by strengthening electoral, legislative and justice delivery system. This concept came into the development debate due to the adverse effects of the structural adjustment policies on the post-colonial state which adopted free-market ideology, minimizing role of State apparatus etc. The donor agencies found out the ineffectiveness of the SAP due to bad governance characterized by non-transparent, corrupt and undemocratic policy formulations. With this, the term good

governance became a prime condition for availing development assistance from the donor agencies. Ilan kapoor, observed that the post-colonial states were blamed with bad governance and in lieu of it they tend to face some sort of external intervention from the first world in the shape of policy directives to convert bad governance into good governance (Kapoor Ilan, 2008). Good governance also demands for a strong civil society as debated by the neo-liberalist agenda which tame the civil society by constructing the civil society by funding its NGOs. Neera Chandoke refers the return of civil society as a part of neo-liberal projects such as privatization, de-nationalization, de-regulation and de-stabilization with an aim to roll back the state. Thus civil society tends to unleash the market forces and retreat the state from social engagements (Chandoke Neera, 1995). The market on the other-hand tries to rationalize and legitimize social inequalities with the hegemonic ideologies and mythologies which tend to universalize the character of the civil society as an arena of free choice for the individual (Chandoke Neera, 1995). Thus if one looks critically, the role of civil society to check bad governance happens to be a profitable agenda of the donor agencies. The civil society in the post-colonial state is different from that of the first world. The civil society of the post-colonial states are of fragmented nature due to the long history of colonial rule, emergence of political leadership from a small group of educated class mostly belonging to the wealthy sections among the colonized people and finally ended up with bureaucratic, patrimonial rule after independence.

Amartya Sen's capability approach found a very prominent position in UNDP which criticized the Basic Needs approach as it believed that income or wealth is not what people are seeking for, but stresses the importance of capability which could convert income to achievement. Sen believes poverty as capability deprivation and also the reason behind lack of choice. His approach emphasizes on freedom by building capabilities by providing choices to people to determine which capabilities they sought most rather than measuring poverty as lack of basic necessities. But Sen's approach contradicts with the framework within which he tried to fit his capabilities approach, i.e. the neo-liberalism. Under neo-liberalism,

where market rationality and hegemony works aiming at maximizing personal profit by the individualistic private enterprises, seldom works to maximize capabilities. According to, *Karl S. Comiling Rachel Joyce Marie O. Sanchez* "Sen's notion of uplifting the poor or empowerment is building the capabilities of the poor so that they can function or participate in the market. However, this market economy has transformed itself into a hegemonic and oppressive system. While this system impresses upon people the semblance of freedom and flexibility, it is not really open and respectful of other possible ways of relating. By enabling the poor to become absorbed in this dominant system, Sen's capability approach becomes another instrument of hegemony" (Karl S. Comiling etal., 2014). Thus Sen's approach is criticized as to be a liberal and individualistic approach prioritizing on individual liberty rather than social solidarity.

Under neo-liberalism many of the double standards maintained by the donors and their colonization of post colonial culture stripping the people of their own identity is established by the post-colonial scholars. Bill Ashcroft opined that post-colonial thinkers tries to analyze how the post-colonial voices are being silenced and marginalized by the imperial centre by appropriating the language and culture of the centre. Franz Fanon, a pioneer on colonialism in his book, *Black Skin, White Mask*, clearly debated the phenomena how the colonized are stripped off their individuality by colonizing their language and minds or knowledge structure. The universal category Man in the hegemonic discourse tends to mean White Man and White Man becomes the standard and established as the model to be followed. The imperialist agenda of the first world has been naturalized with the help of imperialist production of texts and literatures and a discursive reality is being enforced upon the people of post-colonial countries to accept the European standards to be the reality and universal hereby silencing the locals' own understanding (Nayar Pramod, 2008). If the colonized and the post-colonial society's voices are submerged in the Universalizing agenda of the European giants, the concept of human security from the imperial centre would certainly be futile and damaging in the context of the post-colonial world. The plurality and multifaceted insecurities of the post-colonial

societies were not being addressed in the human development models. The discourse of human development has been enacted in institutional practices of the postcolonial world by funding and disseminating a favoured body of knowledge. In doing so, the plural dimensions of third world societies and within it the marginalized communities were denied their right to define and address their own priorities. The finances, privatizations, economic planning and policies, rural development programs, gender and development plans are being controlled by the donors whose manifestations are seen even in India's policy formulations as well.

## Human Security and Gender development approach:

After discussing extensively on the Post-colonial critic of the human development approach to human security of the UNDP, WB, ILO and other trans-national NGOs, it has been established that the post-colonial societies were denied to their right to decide for their own set of priorities in the human development approach. Within this context, Women happens to be a vulnerable group from multiple fronts namely as women, as women of the post-colonial societies and the subsequent development policies adopted for securing human security. In societies where patriarchy from time immemorial has maintained a strong grip, the realization of security for women would not be a fruitful one unless some sort of positive discriminations for women like special social protection is not given. But these could happen only when the development planning intervention are integrated with a gender perspective, which on the other hand requires to develop mechanisms to ensure that the resources and needs of both women and men are addressed in all stages of program, planning, management and evaluation systems. There has been a gradual shift in the way women are perceived in the development debate. During the1950s and 60s the economic role of women in reproduction as home makers, bearers and rearers of children and house-wives was perceived by the development organizations, which was reflected in the inclusion of family planning, population, mother and child care policies in development planning without challenging the existing gender relations and patriarchal structures in society.

Easter Boserup in her book **Women's Role in Economic Development** published in 1970 demonstrated that development processes have been strongly male-biased and bypassed women, led the international aid community to attempt to integrate women into the production (market) system to accelerate economic growth. Her book ignited a worldwide discussion on the need of women's participation. It has been an important contribution to WID approach as it brought out clearly the dimension and importance of gender within the development process. Consequently the term WID was coined in the early 1970s. WID approach was based on the philosophy that women are lagging behind in society and the gap between men and women can be bridged by remedial measures within the existing structures. WID became institutionalized first in the form of separate sections, departments, project components and so on within the donor countries' development bureaucracy and later on women and development bureaus and ministries were formed in the countries of the South also. WID approach seeks to integrate women into development by making more resources available to women, in an effort to increase women's efficiency in their existing role. In other word, it was a demand for social justice, welfare, anti-poverty, empowerment and equity for women. In the first world though this approach emphasis was on productive labour of women, in the post colonial societies, But the WID approach in its process didn't take any steps to transform the unequal gender relations. Thus as a result over and over again this practices increased women's workloads, reinforced inequalities and widened the gap between men and women. In postcolonial societies, the development agencies, government and NGOs identified women solely as wives and mothers and as such the policies concentrated much on welfare concerns like nutritional education and home economics and very less recognition was given to women's role in productive work. It was Easter Boserup who uncovered the lacuna of WID stressing that WID enhanced man's monopoly over new technologies and cash crops undermining women's traditional roles in various productive areas like agricultural production. With this debates were on to scrutinize and find out the obstacles which excluded women from the market place to be discussed on economic

domain. With this, CEDAW was initiated in 1979 to secure women's rights as well as to recognize women's rights. But the human development strategies adopted by the donors like anti-poverty strategy, SAP, Basic needs approach shows the shallowness of the WID as it shifted its emphasis from women's needs and priorities to calculate what development needs from women (Razavi Shahrashoub, Miller Carol, 1995). These phenomena necessitated to reduce infant mortality and educate women to reduce family size and fertility rates so as to economize the use of resources and also to satisfy the basic needs. This approach again initiated a state control over women's body and sexuality. For example, in India, the termination of pregnancy (MTP) Act of 1971 was enacted to make abortion legal not because of women's concern but as a method of population control (Menon Nivedita, 2012). Thus though omen came to be seen as a valuable resource to be harnessed for economic development, the WID approach in its process didn't take any steps to transform the unequal gender relations.

Since the late 1980s there was a shift from the WID approach to the GAD approach. The GAD advocates for basic intervention with the analysis of men's and women's roles and needs, in an effort to empower women, to improve their position relative to men in ways which will benefit and transform society as a whole. The term gender arose as an analytical tool for analyzing the inequalities between the sexes due to the patriarchal institutional structures. It started with assessing gender role and gender analysis on the basis of GAD tool and gender needs, gender interests and perspectives. GAD approach also analyses the nature of women's contribution inside and outside the household and sees women as agents of change rather than as passive recipients of development assistance.

## Gender and Environment Security -

Nivedita Menon identified the **process of Statization** by which the colonial state promoted the notion of planting commercially profitable species at the cost of the local species and local needs of the people residing in the area nearby forest areas and restricting them from using the forest resources. The process of Statization

led to the process of privatization and also erosion of community resource management system to state and to private corporate or individual ownership and control. With the rising trend of rise of population led to the Green Revolution which on the other hand deteriorated the environment further. Under the aegis of Green Revolution, the traditional knowledge and resource management were replaced further by synthetic scientific agricultural production. With this, consequences led to an adverse effect on human security of women basically on those sections of women whose family depended more on the communal resources. The gender division of roles which assigned women the task of household responsibility now couldn't sustain due to lack of water, village commons and with the cuts on the social safety nets by the government under the SAP. The outcome of these consequences is many and one of them is on health issues where women mostly are directly exposed to the polluted water borne diseases leading to arthritis and gynecological problem (Agarwal Bina, 2013).

**SAP and Human Security of Women:**

SAP is the dictate of IMF which was implemented in the debtor countries enhancing export led industries which led to the increasing demand for labour force. Due to the profiteering motive of the neo-liberal agenda, increase in labour force was adjusted by feminization of labour i.e., increase female participation, women took over jobs traditionally assigned to men (during work related migration, women borne the burden of women household or single mother), increase in double day, low-paid, irregular, part-time job allotment to women ( packaging and assembling tasks were assigned to women whereas man performed the supervising and maintenance tasks) due to lack of technological know-how and gendered job-segregation. The export oriented production which was implemented in the post colonial societies basically hit hard at the agricultural production by intensifying cash crops which led to the soaring price of the locally consumable food products. Further cuts in government subsidy in PDS, employment scheme (no family pension under NPS), cuts in public expenditure in health sectors, increase in price of drugs,

water, fuel, electricity adversely affected women with low nutritional status, high child and infant mortality, maternal mortality rates, more work loads on women in household activities like fetching water, fuel, multiple jobs for sustaining which ultimately ended up with insecurities for women (Shah Nandita, etal., 2013).

## Human Security and Violence against Women:

The Human development approach and the human right approach were criticized by feminist to be gender neutral rather than gender specific. But the needs and priorities of women differ from man. Because of the phallocentric construction of human rights discourse, women are not addressed as women, but only as childbearers and childrearers, reducing women's concerns to motherhood. Women demanded for equal rights as man but though granted equal rights, the human rights of women were discussed in the human rights platform only when their rights are violated in the public sphere. But most gendered violations of women's rights usually take place in the private sphere. The home, family and workplace were left outside human rights law and were often rationalized and justified in the name of cultural traditions (Saksena Anu, 2007). During the time of the WID approach when it was realized that women's rights has been deprived in the name of culture, family and community norms, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted in 1979 the UN General Assembly which came into force on 3rd September 1979. The lacuna of CEDAW is that as the mandatory SAP, CEDAW is not mandatory but is based on the principle of state obligation. The governments or states which wanted to ratify CEDAW; right to reservation for not implementation of some provisions of the convention was given which made it the most reserved treaty of UN human rights document which made it ineffective. Even India has made a reservation with regard to articles 5 (a) : To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women and 16 (1): States Parties shall take all appropriate

measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women by ensuring same right to enter into marriage; right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent; same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution; same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount; same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights; same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount; same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation; same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property, whether free of charge or for a valuable consideration.

India clarified that it shall abide by and ensures these provisions in conformity with its policy of non-interference in the personal affairs of any Community without its initiative and consent.

Art 16 (2) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Government of the Republic of India declares that though in principle it fully supports the principle of compulsory registration of marriages, it is not practical in a vast country like India with its variety of customs, religions and level of literacy.

With this, women rights continued to be violated in the name of culture and traditions. No doubt, the Domestic Violence Act and Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act was a part of implementation of CEDAW are the positive outcome, but due to silencing of women's voices by the hegemonic patriarchal order, still curbing violence against women remained a distant dream.

**Concluding Remarks:**

From the above discussion, it could be concluded that Human Security discourse is embedded with development approach, globalization, and hegemonic literatures of the donor agencies as a part of the neo-liberal agenda. The priorities of the local people or plural voices of the post-colonial societies are undermined. Women being the vulnerable section of the society are more prone to insecurities. Postcolonial feminist thinker Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticized the use of Women in Development and security discourses undermining the class, ethnicity and demography. The first world feminist and development theorist always deduce third world women as oppressed, exploited, illiterate, lack of leadership qualities so the responsibilities lies on the first world to judge the religious, cultural and economic structures of women of postcolonial world. Spivak, another post-colonial thinker termed the developmental discourses as a neo-colonial successor of the civilizing mission of imperialism. Postcolonial women faces the trauma of environmental degradation, SAP, controlling the reproduction in poor countries with a justification of aid, enhancing consumerism etc as a part of the neo-liberal agenda under the veil of human development and security discourses. As an alternative the feminist has laid down new ideologies like eco-feminism to enhance environmental security, post-modern feminist ideologies to deconstruct the myth of hegemonic economics which idealizes that market works neutrally where man and women are treated equally, feminist inclusion of the concept of productivity of care which has been excluded so far by the development discourses who analyses development as consumerist development.

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# LINGUISTIC IDENTITY OF ASSAM AND THE *ASAM SAHITYA SABHA*: INTERPRETING THE ROLE AND IMPLICATIONS

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Language is a cementing force acting in every society (Majumder Paramananda ,2014) . Being primarily one of the most important aspects of human life, language is also a very distinctive mark of identity affiliation. D. P. Pattanayak asserts, 'language gives identity to a person, to a social group, to a geographical entity and to a nation.' He further points out, 'language symbolizes social and cultural identities, and therefore, in any clash of cultures, in any crisis of identities, language is used as the instrument of political action' (Pattanayak D.P. ,1981). Besides, language being a cementing force in consolidating a particular community, it may at the same time, have an opposite effect too. Sudipta Kaviraj argues that language does not only unite people, it also as effectively divides them (Kaviraj Sudipta ,2009 ). The *Asam Sahitya Sabha* (ASS), a civil society organization of Assam established in 1917 with principal motto of development of Assamese language, literature and culture has always stressed on the socio-cultural aspect of development, in which language gets the prime attention because of certain difficulties which were encountered during the progress of Assamese language in history.

The issue of identity politics in Assam based on language was mainly a product of the colonial administration which gained its footprints during late 19th

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century when Bengali was declared as official language of the state. Language ultimately had become the corner-stone of political recognition and the formation of its identity surpassing all other cultural traits in Assam. The Assamese middle class used language as the most forceful weapon to cut down all difficulties that came its way. This small section of English educated urban middle class Assamese could gather support in its assertion from the rural Assamese peasantry and also plains tribal who, of course, at a later stage carved a separate position from the Assamese. Therefore, the progressive minds in Assam made the development of Assamese language as the benchmark to all progress and its identity.

In this regard, this paper has been an attempt to discuss the role of the ASS in language based cultural identity formation in Assam and to look into their interface. The first section deals with the issues and problems of language and the linguistic identity of Assam while the second section is dealing with the role and responses of the *Sabha* in the problem of language and linguistic identity formation in Assam.

## ▪ LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN ASSAM: A CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING:

According to Ashutosh Varshney, language has been the most important marker of identity of an ethnic community or group (Varshney Ashoutosh, 2006). The language issue cannot be discussed in aloof from the issues of nationality formation. The role of language in nationality is both subtle and cardinal. Language, together with culture, religion and history, is a major component of nationality formation. A language is not only a vehicle of the history of a nationality, but, is a part of the nationality itself (Samuel John, 1993). The functional and symbolic value of language has far-reaching significance in the transitional continuum from community to ethnicity and from ethnicity to formalized nationality. Every stage of this transition is linked to language, whether indexically, implementationally or symbolically (Samuel John, 1993).

In the early 19th century, nationalism in India had been developing at two levels – one all India on the basis of pan-India cultural homogeneities and an anti-imperialism shared in common; and another regional on the basis of regional-cultural homogeneities. During that period both the nationalisms were found intertwined and merged. But, in the post-colonial India, it appears that the later form of nationalism has somehow overshadowed the pan-Indian form of nationalism where language has played a more critical role. Furthermore, language has also been one of the most controversial issues in determining the political structure of India because violent expression of the issues had not only influenced the political spectrum, but, also forced the independent India to pursue the policy of re-organization of states on the basis of language. Therefore, language has remained one of the central questions of wider socio-political discourse and identity in India.

In this context it is to be reiterated here that Assam presented a unique instance of identity politics expressions. Here, language was contrasted with cultural nationalism without religion, caste affinities that were so important markers of identity in other parts of India. When the British capitalism, in the pretext of colonialism, penetrated into India, they brought class conflicts in the center-stage for most of the Indian provinces. But, the situation in Assam remained something different. In Assam, class-conflicts were put into back-burner and language identity took the center-stage (Dhar. I, 2006). The seed was sown in 1836 when Bengali language was introduced as the official language of Assam which continued to remain so until 1873.

It is also to be reiterated that the British policy of language had far-reaching implications in the polity, economy and society in Assam province and thereby formation of Assamese identity. The British policy did not affect the Assamese community commonly; different social classes were affected differently. But, the sentiment of all the classes as a result of this experience was the same: that they were not being allowed to use their own language which caused them immense hardship. This consciousness brought the feelings of various conflicting classes together making language a supra-class entity. This was the pre--condition that

seemed to have preceded the emergence of a collective linguistic patriotism (Nag Sajal, 1986). Thus, language became a symbol of collective unity surpassing class inequalities and ultimately attaining the height of Assamese sub-national identity.

The context of Assam was similar to this conceptual explanation. Such collective consciousness was elementary to the birth of Assamese sub-nationality and this consciousness emerged as a result of the language policy that the British had introduced as a part of their capitalist mechanism. The language policy affected various social classes as a 'class', and not as a nationality. Language was becoming a supra-class entity. The Assamese middle class was in nascent stage to take the leadership of the Assamese, they were still weak as a class to infuse the ideology of linguistic patriotism or organize any powerful movement. The task was carried on by the Missionaries who helped the formation of the Assamese identity. Later on, the cause for Assamese identity was backed by the Assamese middle class. New ideas began to enter the Assamese mind. However, the collaboration of the Assamese based on the criteria of language had initiated a new identity sign which was not seen in the earlier period. The Assamese middle class, by achieving the support of the peasants and the upper class, led the language based Assamese identity by way of different institutions; the ASS has been the forerunner in this context. In this context, Mahanta argued that the *Sabha* has been the linchpin of linguistic nationalism in Assam (Mahanta Nani Gopal, 2013) . Thus, the language based identity formation of Assam was a product of colonial administration and the same has been carried forward by the ASS till date.

- **LINGUISTIC IDENTITY OF ASSAM AND THE *ASAM SAHITYA SABHA*: ROLE AND IMPLICATIONS:**

Identity may be defined as a specific concept which is not inherent in a community or a people, but, evolves through a historical process, manifesting itself at a particular stage of that community's development. It is also a constantly changing phenomenon which can have its political, cultural or even religious dimensions depending upon the primary values involved in the process of

socialization (Sharma Manorama, 1997). Keeping in view this definition here an attempt has been made to explore the issues and challenges of Assamese linguistic identity and the role of the ASS there into. The ASS, a civil society organization of a century in existence, has been the forerunner in the direction of building Assamese sub-nationalist identity thorough Assamese language was instrumental in the movement against the reorganization of state 1955, Assam official language movement 1960, movement against the federal plan 1967, Assamese language in the NEFA as medium of instruction, medium of instruction movement 1972 etc.

## 1. 1960 Movement for 'Assamese' as Official Language in Assam:

To meet its objective one of the most important demands of the *Sabha* was the question of 'Assamese' as an official state language of Assam which began under the leadership of Ambikagiri Ray Choudhury, the 21st president of the *Sabha*. Its effort on this issue is remarkable in the history of the organization. The *Sabha* reiterated that the Assamese had been used in the past as a means of communication between the hills tribes of the province; Assamese was a major language of the province as a cementing force and it was a myth that Bengalis, including those of Cachar, did not identify with Assamese language; therefore, there was no reason why Assamese should not be the state language.

The first resolution of the *Sabha* on this question was adopted on March 11-12, 1950 in its 21st conference demanding Assamese as Assam's official language. The resolution declared:

> "*This twenty-first annual session of Asam Sahitya Sabha, held at Margherita, strongly places its demand before the Government of Assam that the Assamese language be declared as the State (official) language of Assam and as the medium of instruction in all the high schools of Assam, with the exception of the high schools in Khasi and Jayantia, Lushai and Garo Hills Districts, in the session of the Assam Legislative Assembly to commence from the 13th March next...*"( Neog Maheshwar, 1961).

The *Sabha* left no stone unturned to reach its goal and ultimately had a profound impact on the government. After due deliberations, the Legislature passed the 'Assam Official Language Bill 1960' under the provisions of the Article 345 of the Indian Constitution, on October 24. It was an Act to declare the Assamese as the Official Language of the state of Assam. 'The Official Language Act 1960' extends to the whole of Assam.

The 'Assam State Official Language Act 1960' had far reaching impact in Assam. It disturbed the normal life of Assam in both the valleys and in the hills. The implementation of the language Act resulted in agitation by the Bengalis and the hills tribes also began to assert their separate identity. The 1959-61 agitation of the *Sabha* to give recognition to Assamese as the official language of the state led to violent incidents in the state. It was perceived by the tribal population of Assam as a barrier to their advancement and an obstacle to get jobs in government offices because they did not want imposition of Assamese language in tribal dominated areas. The language Act also accelerated the formation of 'All People Hill Leaders Conference'. It submitted memorandum to the President on 21 August 1960, urging for separation of hill districts of Assam as they perceived the Act as imposition of Assamese language upon them. The Act ultimately caused the separation of the Naga hills district from Assam in 1963. Again, on 13 January 1967, the union government had to decide to reorganize the state of Assam. On this decision, Assamese leaders felt that it was not mere reorganization of Assam or division, but, destruction of Assam. There were widespread protests against the decision terming it as undemocratic and unconstitutional. In course of time, the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo hills were separated from Assam and formed into single state called Meghalaya (1972). The NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh) earned the status of Union Territory. Mizoram became Union Territory and states of Tripura and Manipur were also carved out. All the nascent states and union territories namely Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and Arunchal Pradesh were placed under the NEC in August 1972.

## 2.   Movement Against the Re-organization of State, 1955:

It is the ASS had made a very strong move on the issue of state reorganization of Assam. As early as March, 1955, the *Sabha* decided to send a delegation to the 'State Re-organization Commission' (SRC) which envisaged the reconstitution of the states. The *Sabha* was totally against the political division of Assam on the basis of language and was in favour of the intact integrity of Assam. On arrival of the three-member commission, the *Sabha* submitted a memorandum which stated the modest and legitimate claims against the reconstitution of Assam from the historical, cultural and linguistic viewpoints (Boruah Indrani, 1990) .

It also laid down that the ill-conceived plans of separate states on this frontier like 'Purbanchal' and 'Hills State' be not approved. The *Sabha* justified these claims on the multilingual character of Assam which presents a picture of unity in diversity, a brilliant fusion of Indo-Aryan and Mangoloid cultures. Here, also the *Sabha* received remarkable response from the government as far as the state reorganization issue was concerned. The state of Assam that came into being following the States Reorganization Act of 1956 did not undergo any major change.

## 3.   Movement Against the Federal Plan, 1967:

Like the movement for the official language, movement against the state reorganization, the *Sabha* also played a substantial role in the movement against the 'Federal Plan' as prepared by the government of India. The Union Home Ministry on 13th January 1967 announced in the Lok Sabha of regional federation in Assam, composed of federating units having equal status not subordinate to one another (Asam Sahitya Sabha Patrika, 1967). Under such circumstances, the Sabha viewed that such a proposal is unconstitutional, undemocratic and unfeasible by all standards which seem to have been improvised to placate fissiparous and recalcitrant tendencies (Asam Sahitya Sabha, Abhilekh). Considering the geographical and imperative needs of security and co-ordinated development of the region as a whole, the *Sabha* opposed to any cleavage that might be conceived of in the body of this frontier state.

The move of the *Sabha* in this regard had profound impact. Following the proposal of the Mehta Committee published on 31st August, 1967 the proposals of the regional federation as well as separate hills state were abandoned and it was decided to amend the Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution so that the hills districts may be endowed with more powers. In this way, the timely effort of the *Sabha* could prevent the imposition of the Federal Plan and, therefore, the disintegration of the state too.

### 4. 1972 Movement For Medium Of Instruction:

After the official language movement the *Sabha* has significantly sought for Assamese as the medium of instruction in educational institutions from 1958 onwards. In the year 1958, the *Sabha* expressed its concern over the medium of instruction used in educational institutions run by the railway department. The executive committee of the *Sabha* on September 1967, demanded from the two universities of Assam, the Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University, to make Assamese as the medium of instruction at the university level and to take up measures for the publication of books and other literary material in Assamese at an early date. Following the executive committee's demand, the 35th annual conference of the *Sabha* in 1968 at Tezpur had organized discussions on the regional language as medium of higher education and adopted a resolution urging the two universities of Assam to introduce Assamese in all the courses of study (Neog Maheshwar,1976).

Like the official language movement, the *Sabha* became very successful in its demand for Assamese as the medium of instruction too. The two universities of Assam had approved the resolutions favouring the stand of the *Sabha*. The Gauhati University at the pressure of the *Sabha* decided on June 12, 1972 that Assamese would be the only medium of instruction upto pre-university level while English would remain side by side upto 10 years. The university also came to a decision that the regional language would be introduced as a medium of instruction in the degree classes from 1974-75 sessions (Boruah Indrani, 1990) . Same was done the Dibrugarh University.

Thus, it is evident that the movement by the *Sabha* for the medium of instruction found its direct response from the government. The *Sabha* was not only successful in the declaration of Assamese as the official language of the state, but, it was also successful in fighting for it as a medium of instruction in higher education.

But, the situation worsened when the government of Assam declared in 1972 that the sole medium of instruction in the two universities of Assam would be Assamese. Immediately after this declaration, the 'Assam Linguistic Minorities Rights Commission' (ALMRC) was set up. The political atmosphere was already surcharged because of the introduction of North East Reorganization Act in 1972; the medium of instruction issue gave a further incentive to the plains tribal movement.

On the other hand, the *Bodo Sahitya Sabha* (BSS) did not take kindly to the policy of the government of agreeing to abolish English as the medium of instruction and introduce Assamese in its place at both Gauhati and Dibrugarh University. The BSS joined with other linguistic minorities group to appeal for the retention of English as the medium of instruction. This movement, however, has left a very long lasting impact on the political-territorial and ethnic integrity of Assam.

### 5. Issue of Foreign National or the Assam Movement (1979-85):

The issue of foreign nationals in Assam is another important concern in the history of the *Asam Sahitya Sabha*, which, in fact, has been the most influential issue in the politics of post-independent Assam. The *Sabha* was an active constituent of the '*All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad*' (AAGSP) which was constructed to deal with the issue of foreign nationals from the side of the civil society. During the first two years of this agitation, which was marked by massive *satyagraha* and *bandhs*, the *Sabha* through its more than 500 branches played an active part in mobilizing the people (Misra Udayan, 1984). But, it also played a moderating role and its presence in the AAGSP was viewed with some sense of relief by the government of Assam. Historically speaking, it can be traced back to the Margherita

conference of the *Sabha* in 1950 which demanded from the state government of Assam that the non-Assamese residents should never be termed as Assamese in the next Census of India (*Asam Sahitya Sabha Patrika*, vol. 1211). The same sentiment had been repeated at the annual conferences of the *Sabha* in 1975 and 1979. During this period, the role of the *Sabha* was very much vital in giving institutional support to the feeling against the Bangladeshi immigration issue in which it was less involved during the colonial period. In its crucial 46th Sualkuchi session in February 1979, it appealed to the government to take effective steps against the outsiders and urged the government to protect the state language (Mahanta Nani Gopal, 2013). In this very session, the *Sabha* took the following important resolutions:

1. Effective steps should be taken to drive out the illegal foreigners from Assam.

2. Undesirable influx from other parts of India should be resisted and proper pressure should be exerted on their respective states and union government to settle them from where they come (Mahanta Nani Gopal, 2013).

However, while dealing with the issues of Assam Movement and the participation of the *Asam Sahitya Sabha*, Mishra argued 'relations between the Assam government and the *Sabha*, the premier literary-cultural organization of the Assamese-speaking people, have hit an all-time low' because of its decision of participation in this movement (Misra Udayan, 1984). The *Sabha* fell from official grace when, on the eve of its 49th session at Diphu in 1982, the government decided to stop all grants to this CSI on the plea that the *Sabha* was no longer a cultural organization, but, had turned highly political through its involvement in the anti-foreigner upsurge. At that time, the *Sabha* leadership had reacted with courage and confidence born out of its involvement in the mass movement and had refused to be cowed down by the government pressure. It refused to oblige the government by giving an undertaking that it would desist from 'anti-government and unwanted activities' and it declared that it would try to do without governmental assistance. Even while taking such a stand, the *Sabha* leadership had hoped that once a popular

government was installed (those were the days of direct Central rule), the *Sabah*'s confrontation with the government would end and the grants would resume. The *Sabha* was obviously too big an institution for any state government to ignore (Misra Udayan, 1984) . But, this was not happened. The scenario became something different.

The participation of the *Sabha* in the Assam Movement from 1979 to 1985 was very much self-contradictory in nature. It wanted to satisfy both the parties, i.e., the government as well as the AAGSP. This, however, led it to be viewed distrustfully by both the sides. It had to lose its grants for a while from the government and, on the other hand, its one member was expelled from the AAGSP. However, one aspect needs to be mentioned here that during the colonial period of its existence, the *Sabha* was not seen concern about the immigration policy of the British. But, in the post-independence period, the *Sabha* somehow participated in the Assam Movement. But, it could not justify its stand both in terms of the nature of participation and its ideological position on the illegal immigration.

## CONCLUSION

The middle class made the presentation of Assamese identity very lucid through the *Asam Sahitya Sabha*. They emphasized on protecting the Assamese language identity from any further incursion. The *Sabha*'s central aim has always been to bring all-round development of Assamese language and literature, and preserve the dignity of Assamese culture. However, the way of addressing these objectives changed as Assam went through various phases of socio-political developments. For example, in the period before independence, the *Sabha* had moderately put its explanations forward to make Assamese as the medium of instruction. In the post-independence era, the *Sabha* became very aggressive in its attitude because the status of Assamese language remained unclear. Hence, it began to press for Assamese to be used as the official language of the state and demanded that Assamese should be used as medium of instruction not only at the secondary and higher secondary level,

but also in state universities. In fact, such assertions created both positive as well as negative image of the *Sabha*, having far more implications in the composite Assamese identity and its political-territorial boundary too.

The *Sabha* has an agenda of aggressive cultural nationalism. As early as 1950, it demanded that Assamese be made the official language of the state and that, barring those in the Khasi and Jaintia hills, Mizo hills and Garo hills, all schools should switch to Assamese. At this point, the argument of Udayan Mishra is quite mention-worthy to conclude the discussion. According to Misra, the *Sabha*'s rigid stand on the question of Assamese being recognized as the sole official language of the state, contributed significantly to the alienation of Assam's smaller nationalities and their demand for separation (Misra Udayan, 1984). He believes that 'a more imaginative language policy of the *Sabha* could perhaps have slowed down the alienation of the hills tribes from the Assamese people'. Therefore, in the post-independence period, the *Sabha* through its role and responses to the contemporary socio-cultural and political issues has made a sea-change in the entire political and socio-cultural jurisdiction of Assam and thereby to the very identity of Assam.

Therefore, the post-independent Assam had to witness the systematic assertion of identity by the various hitherto suppressed communities. These communities had often whined for not getting proper access to the resources that required for socio-political and economic upliftment. The rejection of Assamese language, they viewed as an end of long drawn socio-cultural subjugation of these smaller ethnic groups who believed the 'so called Assamese' had 'illegally occupied' the state of Assam. The *Asam Sahitya Sabha* has been the instrumental in this venture. Such intentions of the *Sabha* have often been assumed to be hegemonic, chauvinist and elitist. It was felt that the *Sabha*, while trying to mobilize the Assamese community and to articulate the Assamese national interest was rather expressing middle class aspirations and terming them as mass appeal. Amalendu Guha described the whole argument of Assamese nationalism as chauvinist, called that the *Asam Sahitya Sabha* had also shown shades of chauvinism.

*Sabha*'s language policy and its subsequent implementation by the Assam government have, among other factors, led to the disintegration of the political boundary of Assam. This has also been reason, to some extent, for the ethnic assertion as well as the ethnic conflict in Assam in the post-independent period. Therefore, the responses of the *Sabha* towards the Assamese sub-nationalist assertion have been bearing far reaching impact in the entire arena of socio-political and cultural life of Assam and its people. Sudipta Kaviraj's argument that language does not only unite people, it also as effectively divides them, somehow explains the context of Assam and its identity too.

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# INFLUX IN ASSAM AND 'VOLUNTARY DEPARTURE SCHEME'

*Dibyajyoti Dutta\**

Off late, the issue of illegal immigration has been occupying centre stage in the popular political discourse in the state of Assam predominately because of the ongoing updation process of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and hasty introduction of The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 in the lower house of the parliament seeking Indian citizenship for persons belonging to minority communities, namely, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. While the Apex Court monitored NRC updation process is being lauded at different quarters except for some agitations on the ground of 'harassment of genuine Indian citizens', the precipitous move towards granting citizenship to certain 'religious' communities have been decried and reprobated without much disagreements. The common people sense politics in the timing of the introduction of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 as it is perceived that the proposed changes in the Citizenship Act, 1955 would influence the NRC updation process thereby muddying up the entire illegal immigration issue into further contestations and conflicts. It is criticized that acting contrary to the electoral assurance of protecting *'Jati' 'Maati' and 'Bheti'* i.e. nation, land and house, the ruling Government led by BJP has been working against such spirit. Whatever polarized and baffling the politics may be, it is generally agreed that a solution needs to be reached at in order to settle the question of illegal immigrants in line with the 'Assam Accord'- an accord signed between All Assam Students' Union (AASU), All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) and the Central and

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State Government (Assam) on the Foreign National Issue on 15th August, 1985. The Government of Assam has established one specific Department called "Assam Accord Implementation Department" to monitor and coordinate between different Departments of the State and Ministries of Government of India for implementation of the Assam Accord. Despite the presence of a plethora of legal and institutional mechanisms in place and the verdict of the Supreme Court of India, striking down the 'Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act, 1983 (seen as hindering the identification of illegal immigrants), no significant headways could be made to address the issue. In these backdrops, an attempt has been made here to mull over an arrangement which could help in a big way to deport the illegal immigrants from the soil of Assam. 'The Voluntary Departure Scheme' is relatively a new concept and is being tried by countries like the United Kingdom, Israel and France to deport persons who are illegally staying in their territories. As part of the scheme the illegal immigrants are asked to return home and are provided with all administrative support and logistics. The French Government have been offering one time financial assistance so that once home the beneficiaries can start a small business to earn a living. In 2015, there were 40,896 people who were removed from the United Kingdom or departed voluntarily after the initiation of removal (The Migration Observatory, COMPAS, 2016).[1] This is undoubtedly true that the nature of migration to the European countries does not match with the case of India or for that matter Assam. The migration to European countries has been happening primarily because of the unsettled Middle-East, War torn Africa and inflow of persons from different countries in search of better livelihoods. Inter-European migration is although a parallel phenomena but is very limited. Apart from that, the immigrants can easily be identified from their distinct ethnicity, culture and language and thus it becomes easy for the European Governments to expedite the process of deportation. The same explanation cannot be made to describe the issue of immigration confronting Assam. Owing to the geographical, lingual, cultural and religious similarities and the socio-political conditions conducive for their cause immigrants find a safe adobe in Assam. If continued

unabated, the issue has the potential to make and unmake the political discourse in the state. The legal battles are taking long period of time to deport the illegal immigrants, therefore a parallel system viz. 'Voluntary Departure Scheme' (VDS) may be introduced. Questions may be raised as if how and why VDS can become an effective tool since a large chunk of the immigrants has already been accommodated in the greater social fabric. Why to accept the Assam Accord as sacrosanct and supreme when it does not possess the attributes of a law? These questions invite serious and rational academic deliberation.

## Immigrants, Immigration and contemporary Political Discourse in Assam

The global Human Development Report 2009 estimated the number of people on the move at nearly 1 billion. The largest group of migrants comprises those who move within their own borders (approximately 740 million people). Most are labour migrant and some are internally displaced persons (IDPs). An estimated 200 million people are international migrants who cross borders mostly into neighbouring countries or countries in the same region. Some 14 million refugees (approximately seven percent of all migrants) are temporarily settled in a neighbouring or other receiving country (UNDP-HDRO, 2010, P.1)[2] These statistics reveals quite succinctly the fact that immigration is quite a natural process and has been happening unabated. Legal and legitimate forms of immigration cannot be stopped. In fact, it is required for rapid economic growth of a country as flow of skilled personnel increase productivity. Illegal settlements in foreign land on the contrary, are objectionable to many as it has the potential to fuel serious socio-economic and political circumstances. Among many such instances, mention may be made of the Assam Movement which was fought in order to deport the foreign nationals from the soil of Assam. The anger and frustrations took an organised form resulting in the signing of the 'Assam Accord' between the AASU, AAGSP, the Central and State Government.

To clarify its stand on the foreigners' issue, the Government of Assam came up with a 'White Paper' in 2012 after strong political pressure from the

opposition parties and civil society organisations. The 'White paper' while illustrating the complexities of deportation apparently tried to defend Government's position by inducing arguments of legal hurdles and intricacies. Highlighting the oft-quoted provisions of the Assam Accord (i.e. the cut-off date of March 24, 1971 for identification and deportation of immigrants migrated from erstwhile East Pakistan), the 'White Paper' mentions some least cited and highly conspicuous fact that the Accord provided for. As part of the Accord, the paper states, "the citizenship status was provided to those who came to Assam between January 1, 1966 and March 24, 1971 after disfranchising for a period of 10 years subject to registration. Thus, those who migrated without proper legal documents to Assam on or after 25 March 1971 are illegal immigrants. But, the children born to these illegal immigrants may or may not be lawful citizens of India by birth. The section 3 of the Citizenship Act, 1955 (amended time to time) would apply to determine their citizenship:

(a) A person born in India on or after 26th January, 1950, but before 1st July, 1987, is a citizen of India by birth irrespective of the nationality of his/her parents.

(b) A person born in India on or after 1st July 1987, but before 3rd December 2004, is considered a citizen of India by birth if either of his/her parents is a citizen of India at the time of his/her birth.

(c) A Person born in India on or after 3rd December, 2004 is considered citizen of India by birth if both the parents are citizens of India or one of the parents is a citizen of India and the other is not an illegal migrant at the time of his/her birth.

Apart from the above, any minor child can be registered as a citizen of India under section 5(4), if the Central Government is satisfied that there are "special circumstances" justifying such registration. Each case would be considered on merit (Government of Assam, 2012)".[3] Without an iota of doubt, it evidences the fact that March, 1971 deadline to deport illegal immigrants is a far cry since the

Citizenship Act, 1955 treats persons born India on or after 26th January, 1950, but before 1st July, 1987, as a citizen of India by birth irrespective of the nationality of his/her parents. How a person born to illegal immigrants during this period can be called an immigrant? It would be a matter of gross injustice to them as by the provisions of the law, they are equal Indian citizens.

If one excogitates the Assam Accord and consequent legal and statutory provisions of deporting foreigners, the apathetic attitudes of different dispensations towards addressing the concern becomes evidently clear. The amendments to the Citizenship Act, 1955 provides space for the illegal dwellers to find ways to assimilate in the Indian society. The 2003 and 2016 (not yet passed by the parliament) amendments under the UPA (United Progressive Alliance) and the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) triggers off massive hue and cry in the state owing to the sharp mismatch between the words and works of both the regimes concerning citizenship. Without going to the numbers and statistics of foreigners settling on the state, one can have a clear image of the present state of affairs and the political discourse of Assam on foreigners' issue by looking at the power politics being played by three main political parties viz. the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), the Indian National Congress (INC) and the AIUDF (All India United Democratic Front). While the INC and the AIUDF are at loggerheads to win the hearts of East Pakistan origin Muslim voters (who are majority in some border districts of Assam), the BJP on the other hand makes all legal and constitutional provisions to accord citizenship to those (religious minorities excluding Muslims) who have been the victim of religious persecution in the neighbouring countries, taking a sharp 'U turn' from its electoral promises.

Contrasting the claim of the explosive growth of Muslim population in the state owing to the illegal infiltration from Bangladesh, Abdul Mannan (2017) noted that the Census data speaks quite the opposite of the popular belief. Highlighting the decadal growth of Muslim population in the state (28.43% in 1991, 30.92% in 2001, 34.22% in 2011), Mannan contemplated that the average growth although is a matter of concern (with certain district level variations) requires to be seen from

the perspectives of socio-economic and human development of the community (Mannan, 2017, Pp: 71-73).[4]

It becomes evidently clear from the above that there exist confusions, contestations and political blame-games in addressing the issue of illegal immigration. With the starting of the process of NRC updation, this question has further compounded the equations of respective parties drawing undue political advantage. A new twist has surfaced only recently with a Minister of the State Government claiming that the March 24, 1971 deadline is unacceptable because, to him, the Assam Accord is riddled with inherent problems. Instead of it, the Government should mull over going back to 1951 when the NRC was updated for the state.[5] The irony is that, the same person once headed the 'Assam Accord Implementation Department' and was responsible for implementing the provisions of the Accord. Later, with the coming of the BJP led coalition Government in 2016, he was entrusted the Finance Ministry. In the budget speech for the year 2016-17, he acclaimed the Assam Accord 1985 as "it is the bedrock of many of the developmental and protective measures taken by the Government. To have a fresh insight into the proper implementation and impact of the Assam Accord, the Department will be revamped and made more robust (General Budget, Government of Assam: 2016, P. 30).[6] Further, it was stated that, "The Assam agitation was not only an agitation for saving Assam from the aggression of foreigners but also it was an agitation to protect sovereignty and integrity of the country. During the agitation many young sacrificed their lives for the sake of their great mother land. No amount of monetary award or recognition can be compared with the sacrifices of the martyrs of Assam. However, as a token of appreciation we propose to pay one-time ex-gratia of Rs 5 lakh per family of the Martyrs of Assam Agitation. I propose a budgetary allocation of Rs 30 crore in this budget" (Government of Assam: 2016, P. 31). These political shibboleths confuse common people. They treat political slogans as facts. They never doubt the hidden electoral agendas of the politicians. Thus, it explicates, quite palpably the fact that there exist messy politics concerning illegal immigrants and immigration. The attempts made by the

respective governments are not effective and adequate enough. Only, a haze is created in the eyes of the commoners which is, not easy to be deciphered.

**Why to consider Voluntary Departure Scheme?**

The politics of infiltration off late, has occupied centre-stage in the popular political discourse of the state. It is mentioned earlier that, this happens primarily because of the NRC updation process and the Central Government's move towards granting status of citizenship to some foreigners facing religious persecution. The situation has further been aggravated with the eviction drive carried out by the administration in Kaziranga National Park to evict more than 190 families allegedly considered to be illegal Bangladeshis (The Hindustan Times, Sept. 19, 2016).[7] In such a backdrop, the Government may think of considering Voluntary Departure Scheme (VDS) so that those who are willing to leave Assam may have a dignified exit. It is avowedly true that those who have been living in the state for a longer period of time may not consider it, but those who are still struggling to assimilate may come forward. This is indeed a complex process and hence, the Central Government must initiate negotiations with Bangladesh (which is considered to be the source country). It has been argued that, immigration occur primarily to those countries which have higher human development index and better standards of living (UNDP-HDRO, 2010, P.1).[8] Again, massive unemployment in the country of origin fuels such exodus. India is relatively a strong economy compared with its South Asian counterpart and owing to cultural, lingual, religious proximities immigration to India is not something unnatural. Therefore, New Delhi must engage in constructive dialogues with Dhaka in order to elevate standards of living in Bangladesh as well as to create more employment avenues for the unemployed. If unemployment is perceived to be the key factor of the migration, then a healthy financial aid to the Government of Bangladesh (since India could afford it) for kick-starting employment generation would certainly yield positive outcome. Making walls at the borders alone cannot check infiltration. Inter-Governmental negotiations and favoured trade engagements are equally significant. The United

State's experience with Mexico can be cited here. Assuming the seat of power as the 45th President of the US, Donald Trump made public a sudden plan to wall the Mexican border in order to check immigration. Even, he asked Mexico to fund the programme or else get ready to face economic sanctions. In sharp contrast to Trump, Barack Obama chose the opposite route. Obama advocated for greater economic engagements and diplomatic dialogues in order to create job opportunities for the Mexicans in Mexico so that the issue of migration can be handled amicably. Trump administration's move not only outraged Mexico but also fuelled an acrimonious relationship. Such temporary diagnosis cannot cure a perpetual problem.

If further immigration is to be stopped, Government must experiment new and futuristic plans to check infiltration. The VDS can certainly be one of such new strategies.

## Pre-conditions for implementing VDS?

As has been discussed earlier, a cordial relationship with the source country of immigration, stringent adherence to the rules in the host country to identify and expedite the process of deportation, new laws restricting engagement of alleged migrants as cheap labourers, making land sale and settlement rules tougher etc. are some popularly cited remedies to address infiltration. Apart from that, a strong political will and active citizen's participation also holds significance. The political will can be asserted through formulating and implementing schemes which supports easy identification of illegal settlers without harassments.

While mulling over implementing the VDS, certain pre-conditions needs to be fulfilled. It has been mentioned already that the nature and pattern of migration to Assam does not match with the migration trends of other countries. The case of Assam is distinctly distinct because of the following:

(a) Most of the immigrants entering Assam are illiterate, poor and ill-informed about legal intricacies.

(b) They settle in low lying *char* areas where the administration has no or little reach.

(c) Assimilation becomes easier because of the common language, ethnicity and religion.

(d) The Assam Movement (1979-1985) was solely directed at deporting foreigners from the soil of Assam and the people of the region have got a firm position on the issue.

(e) There exist strong political differences, confusing statistics and contesting viewpoints with regard to the presence, identification and deportation of illegal immigrants.

These factors not only muddied up the issue but also stimulate electoral mileage to many political parties. Prior to the implementation of the VDS or for that matter any scheme of deportation, these issues requires to be considered holistically.

The VDS has got some positive aspects. Since, the entire exercise rests on the idea of voluntary deportation; hence, it does not involve lengthy administrative impediments and legal intricacies. The person wish to go to the country expresses his/her willingness voluntarily and thus deportation becomes easier. Questions may be raised at this point as what would happen, if the source country expresses reluctance to accept the person? It is in fact a strong apprehension. A friendly and cordial relationship with the source country and by signing agreements to accept genuine persons may definitely pacify such apprehensions. Extensive awareness programmes must be carried out by the Government, civil society organizations and political parties so that illegal immigrants get convinced of a dignified, respectful and hassle-free exit. One time financial grant may also be announced so that once home, the person can start some business to earn a living. Apart from that a special amnesty scheme may simultaneously be announced to expedite the process.

**Conclusion:**

The existing literatures on immigration explicate in lucid terms the complexities of identification and deportation of illegal immigrants. The onward march of neo-liberal Globalization facilitating a persistent consumerist culture

further compounds the matter as Indians have started shifting livelihoods from traditional agricultural mode to service and Information Technology (IT) based sectors. It allows illegal dwellers to grab the opportunity to enter in the agriculture with low wage, engagement as menial jobs in many states, including Assam.

There are certain sections of believers who contemplate that man made borders should not divide societies and cultures. Unless poses an existential threat to the indigenous communities, in-migration should not be controlled with iron hands. The justifications behind such humane arguments are really laudable. But, such projections do not have wider acceptance in the state partly because of troubles created by the illegal settlers and partly because of strong political assertions spearheaded by indigenous communities. In such backdrops, a scheme which ensures dignified exit of the foreigners may be considered.

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# WOMEN AND THEIR FANTASY
# OF LIBERATION
# IN MAOIST MEMOIRS OF NEPAL

*Amrita Pritam Gogoi**

On the 13th of February, 1996; the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the armed wing of the CPN(M) (Communist Party of Nepal), attacked three police outpost one each in Rolpa, Rukum and Sindhuli to mark the beginning of the People's War (PW) of Nepal. The PW was the class war that the Nepali mass fought against the monarchy, the feudal and the patriarchal state and society. Backed by the left ideological apparatus it was also a war against capitalism, imperialism and expansionism. In the attack on the 13th of February, 1996 three women guerrillas participated. Gradually the number of women fighters in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) increased and as verified by the UNMIN (United Nations Mission in Nepal) there were 3,846 women cadres. The party, however, rejects this number and claims that the number was much higher. The war that began in February, 1996 ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in April 2006 between the Government of Nepal and the Unified Communist Party of Nepal. Apart from its armed wing the PLA, the PW opened up all its units of the party and the mass front for women creating spaces for women even outside the folds of the movement to dream and fantasize a life outside the confines of the private. Even old women who could not leave their homes to join the war helped the movement in various ways. Balika, Sapana and Kalpana, whom I met often during my one month stay in Dang told me stories of many women and children in the villages smartly deceiving

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on the Royal Nepal Army to help the Maoist escape. One such story was that of an old lady who carried a Maoist in her back in the bamboo basket when the RNA (Royal Nepal Army) personnel run into her house looking for the cadre.[1]

During my fieldwork in Nepal, I remember Sapana repeatedly telling me, 'adorned in the combat dress and with the gun hung upon the shoulder we felt like the most powerful person in this world'.[2] However, the women cadres in the PW fought not only with guns, they also used the pen to fight different structures as Kamala Roka, the first woman guerrilla of the PW writes, "I begun to write as the war continued. I promised that I will use both the weapons equally; the gun in one hand and the pen on the other" (Roka 2014). Kamala Roka who has written a series of articles on different issues of the PW could avail formal education only for a day. On knowing that Kamala had gone to school her mothers' worries knew no bounds; she cried, saying that Kamala shamed the family pride by going to school (Roka 2014). Like for Kamala the war inspired many women to write from and about the war. Women cadres contributed to *Janadesh* the Nepali mouth piece of the CPN (M) during the war and to the many other magazines and memoirs published by the women's organization of the party like the *Mahila Dhwani, Mahila Zhankar* etc. They filled diary pages after a war and wrote heartfelt verses and gifted them to their fellow cadres when they parted. They wrote inspiring letters when a friend was in pain. These pages and words contained their ocean of experiences, dreams and the vision of their tomorrow. It gave them power and at the same time became the reason behind many unwanted troublesome situations. Their enemy had a special interest in these letters and diary pages as they contained a lot of information about the PLA; its policies, differences within party members, etc. Therefore, many a times, they would burn them, hid them under some rock in the mountains or by some spring thinking some day they would return and recover. Kalpana says, "Our histories thus lie under the earth in the mountains or in the jungles. Some flow along the rivers".[3] Balika, on the other hand, got a tight slap when the army caught her along with her diaries. They read her diary and inquired about her formal education. When she replied, class 8, one of them slapped her for telling a lie. A

girl of 8th standard would not write with such maturity the RNA agents claimed.[4] In a context like this the books, articles, poetry, songs and letters written by these women serve as a storehouse of knowledge about different aspects of the war, war-societies. At the same time, the very act of writing signifies the extent to which women have been able to liberate themselves from the traditional patriarchal shackles.

For the purpose of this paper the autobiographies of two female cadres of the People's War have been re-read The two books taken are *Yudhaka Sangsmaran* i.e. *Memoirs from the War* by Sita BK 'Samjhana' and *Samarka Smritiharu* i.e. *Memories of Samar/War* by Sobha Kottel 'Pratibha'. In Pratibha's book the word *Samar* in the title signifies both the war and her martyred husband whose revolutionary name was Samar. While both the books are autobiographical in the genre yet they are written at different points in time. During my interaction with Samjhana she said that she has not manipulated anything after the end of the war. She has directly published pages from her diary. It was even more interesting to learn that to protect her writings, the letters from her martyred husband and friends, etc. in one of her visits to her uncle's place, during the war; she packed them all with plastic and kept the packet buried under the cow shed.[5] Pratibha, on the other hand, takes on the very difficult journey of reliving the war days again while writing the autobiography. She writes, "While writing I once again dive into the sea of memories and emotions. Many a times I cried while writing and in other times I wrote while crying" (Kottel 2011). The different temporal settings of the autobiographies can be clearly observed from the difference in the level of imagination. Since Pratibha has written the book after the end of the war she has been able to use a lot of poetries, songs, and letters in presenting her arguments, anger and the fantasy of liberation. These efforts made by Samjhana and Pratibha to preserve wartime moments and memories indicate the significance of these writings in their lives.

Michel Foucault (Martin L H,1988) in his *Technology of the Self* writes about how important practice writing is in the "culture of taking care of oneself.

One of the main features of taking care of the self involved taking notes on oneself to be reread, writing treatise and letters to friends to help them, and keeping notebooks in order to reactivate for oneself the truth one needed"( Martin , L H et al 1988). A careful reading of the two autobiographies, therefore, might open up a great variety of purposes (like the kinds of truth they sought to keep alive, for whom, why and how, etc.) it served to the writers and others mentioned and associate with it.  However, this paper will specifically deal with the fantasies of liberation that different sections of the autobiographies unfold of the writers and different characters mentioned. The paper will try to dig into many fantasies of freedom and change that the women warriors of the People's War cherished and worked for. It will try to reflect upon how writing was used to articulate and practice these fantasies of liberation. The paper would delve into how the act of writing itself was performative of this fantasy.  For the purpose of this paper writing will be considered as a 'technology of the self' that women cadres of the war used to adopt certain skills and attitudes to fight different structures within and outside the war.

## Leaving to Live: The home and the fantasies beyond

In Nepali society feudal, patriarchal values ruled the home (Roka, 2014). The home and every other allied structures or institution like the kitchen, the cattle or the loom defined the zones around which the life of a Nepali woman functioned. Etiquette manners, specific body temperament, size and attire all clearly crafted out. Women could hardly engage themselves in discussions on any public issue. If someday they tried to engage in any such discussion they would be asked to leave for their own work,[6] i.e. to shift to some other space within the family structure assigned for women. Women are treated with disrespect and are often addressed as *tui* i.e. a form of addressing someone considered inferior. A woman or the idea of a woman was thus framed within a definite frame. Therefore, breaking different norms, ideas associated with this frame seemed one of the pre-condition to liberate themselves.

Butler (2009) notes, to be counted and grieved when lost, to live as lived lives 'one has to break the frames that makes life precarious and enter or create frames that makes life more grievable, more livable'. For women in Nepal too it became very essential to break away from the psychological, social and economic frames of the home and built and belongs to a different frame; lives within which are considered more grievable, more valuable. This section of the paper will unfold the fantasy associated with breaking away from the institutions and ideas that frame the home as witnessed in the mentioned work of Pratibha and Samjhana. A few women, like Pratibha herself, did engage themselves in political activities but after marriage that space was taken away from them. In the chapter *Pesewar Rajnitik Jibanka Ukali-Uraliharu (The Ups and Downs of Professional Political Life)* Pratibha denoting the significance of the PW writes, "After marriage, it was often seen that women remained confined to household duties and responsibilities and politics becomes a matter of the past. In a situation like this the PW became a tool to break such traditions. It was a weapon to break the feudal values families and societies were entrenched in" (Kottel 2011:29).[7] Pratibha expresses how joining the PW from its frontlines was one platform through which breaking certain ideas and notions seemed possible. "It was to Pratibha, a blend of opportunities and challenges" (Kottel 2011:29).

In Nepali society, one structure that decided the grievability of bodies is the caste system. Caste although made life vulnerable for both male and female equally yet when it fuses with other structures like patriarchy, Brahmanism, feudalism etc. makes life more precarious for woman than man. Perhaps that is why both Samjhana and Pratibha do not fail to inform their readers what leaving home in a feudal, patriarchal society like Nepal meant and in doing so aptly exhibits the interplay of caste structures with other patriarchal institutions like the home. Samjhana says that although she belonged to a Dalit 'Kami' family yet their family was bound by patriarchal Brahminical values and therefore it was a big deal for a daughter to leave home (Sita BK 2012:36). She was well aware that she will have to bear all the moral, social tags that are attributed to a woman who defies the

institution of the home. Denoting the existence of a similar kind of situation Pratibha, who belonged to the upper caste, too, claims that 'it is not possible for women to return home after becoming a whole-timer. Men who leave education and politics can always go to India or some foreign land to work. But for women that is not possible'. Pratibha's uncle who worked hard to train her in over ground politics declared that he would not feed her a meal if she leaves home for the underground. Adding more power and value to the role of women in the war, she adds, "Perhaps that is why the party recruited more and more women"(Kottel 2011:29). Her words, in fact points towards the strategic significance of appointing women, and also by using the same pre-existing exploitative structure in a war that was directed against these structures.

Through their work Pratibha and Samjhana also conveys to their readers the different other empowering experiences like the ability to argue; to assert their decisions, lie and deceive to help escape from the confines of the homes to participate in party meetings, raids, etc. Samjhana gives a detailed account of how she had gone to a *mela* in the next village along with her mother and managed to escape from it to join under-ground politics. Her brother and mother came the next day to take her home and her brother promised her a good education. But she was determined and replied, "You do not worry about me. I will never let you down. If I die, I will become a martyr and if I live I will work for the poor and the downtrodden" (Sita BK 2012:39) . Her words reveal a certain kind of confidence when she says that 'she will never let them down'; the confidence in herself and the ideology of the party, i.e. Prachandapath and *Maleimabad* (Marxism-Leninism-Maoism) for she writes it was in the practices and ideology of the party she gradually begun to identify all that she wanted to do and to be. She felt that the kind of socio-political changes that she expected and wanted to work for, were a part of the ideology of the party. By writing about her promise to work for the people and her willingness to die, she informs her audience of the kind of commitment she had for the cause. This idea of the future, personal as well as political, that Samjhana cherished and that motivated her to break all ties with the home points towards the

promise of a life they foresaw in joining the war from its frontlines. The fantasies that accompanied with the idea of walking out of the family is clearly revealed from Pratibha's desperation and struggle to join the war since she was already an active over ground worker of the party. But she writes how she longed to have a 'firsthand experience of the war'; she wanted to join the war 'from its frontline'.

## Trespassing the Corporeal Borders

One of the sites where the impact of gender norms and regulations are significantly witnessed is the body; the way she uses her body, the temperament she carries, and the kind of efforts she makes in the accomplishment of a task. In trying to understand the body of a woman and what constrains her from using her own body, Iris Young (1980), contradicting the generally accepted belief that women are physically weaker than men, argues that women use their body differently than men because in their case, '[…] a space surrounds them in imaginations which are not free to move beyond; the space available to them is a constricted space […]. Women often approach a physical engagement with things with timidity, uncertainty, and hesitancy. Typically we lack an entire trust in our bodies to carry out the aims'. Perhaps in war zones, during combat, women are able to move beyond that constricted space to a certain extent and use their body with greater confidence. And among many things, the fantasy of breaking corporeal ties seemed to attract Pratibha and Samjhana to join the PW. The relationship between the need to break corporeal boundaries and joining the war is evident from Pratibha's account of how she entered in a row with her uncle when she learned that he was part of the team that raided the Kishan Vikash Bank to celebrate an event of the party. She questioned him again and again why he did not take her along. Why was she considered insignificant for the purpose? She asked him if it was because she was a woman. Although Pratibha does not explain what ideas about the body of a woman refrained her uncle from including her in the raid, but her words do help us understand that the body of a woman is considered incapable of performing warlike duties and responsibilities. It also reflects an urge within Pratibha to alter stereotypes associated with her body.

Samjhana, on the other hand, was overwhelmed to see a single woman in a group of men coming to their village and getting married in her combat dress. She writes, "Nishana didi was the only woman cadre in the huge group of Maoist present in the program. The gun that slung from her shoulder and her combat dress attracted me a lot and there was an urgent avidity (*tibro issa)* to become a combatant myself" (Sita BK 2012:35). Apart from the gun and the combat dress, there were other things about the movement too that helped women break many corporeal boundaries and ties. They were told that women in the PLA did not wear ornaments and they cut their hair short. They were also asked to stitch T shirts and half pants. "We did that all", (Kottel 2011:27) writes Pratibha. "We accepted each and every condition placed before us unconditionally"(Kottel 2011:27).[8] Gun, short hair, combat dress none of these have historically and socially been always associated with men and masculinity. This is particularly true for societies like Nepal where women are not allowed to kill a chicken. Among certain communities in Nepal it is believed that if a woman touches a bow it loses all its power. It becomes ineffective.

The thrill of the gun, the urge to trespass borders of the mind and body is revealed in Samjhana's account when on the first night she was confused if she will be able to sustain herself in the harsh conditions of the war. She illustrates how Comrade Kumar's, a senior cadre's, words made her feel comfortable and decisive. Interestingly enough, he did not say anything pacifying to comfort her, but placed before her a harsher but glaring vision of the tomorrow. He said, "The hands that once ground spices will now grind grenades and the hands that once operated scissors will now operate guns. Only then Nepal will change" (Sita, B.K. 2012:38). And this is how she gathered courage to 'moved ahead with the length of the Nile and in the pace of the Karnali' (Kottel 2011:23) to bring about the much desired change in the Nepali society.

The fantasy of carrying a gun, which attracted her to the movement, brought Samjhana immense pride and happiness when she actually could. She writes, about her first days in the underground as their team marched through the hilly tracts of Pyunthan towards the borders of Dang,

"We only had rifles as big weapons. The commander was carrying that. The Vice Commander was carrying a 12 bor. As he had to attend some other work I was asked to carry it. I was the FGL of our squad. That I was carrying a 12 bor instead of an ordinary rifle made me proud. I looked at my bullet purse. It contained 10 bullets. That feeling of carrying a gun and bullets made me so happy and proud that it reminded me of the warriors of China I read about. I was so happy to carry the weapons that I became completely unmindful of the ups and downs of the hilly track" (Sita B K 2012:40-41).

It is to be noted that, the gun and the bullets not only made her proud and happy, but it gave Samjhana an opportunity to compare herself with the warriors of China. It helped her identify herself with an international cause and characters that finds reference in books.

## Breaking Bones of the Tongue

'Breaking laws' as Walter Benjamin (1978) argues, is one of the two main criteria for any act of violence to fulfill its validity. By joining the war from its front lines, trespassing different social, psychological, physical boundaries associated with the home, indeed women cadres of the PW did in Benjamin's understanding qualify the basic test of the functions of violence. Bodies that were not allowed to kill a chicken or touch a bow now write about swimming across the blood of the enemy. They now wear garlands made of bullets around the neck challenge to overthrow all exploitative regimes (Gurung Chunu, 2012). But creating new ontology of their lives, bodies, identities necessitated breaking layers of feudal, patriarchal laws, both at the individual and the societal level. Butler (2009) claims, creating a new ontology would require rethinking precariousness, vulnerability, work, claim of language. This section of the paper will try to understand how women combatants of the PW made new claims over language from a situation when they were not able to make eye contacts while talking to someone.

The tongue has no bone, we are all aware of it, to constrain it in its movements and use. However, very often bones have been fixed into languages for power politics and this has been widely discussed and analyzed by different scholars. On the case of women too, a lot of control over her body takes place through the tongue. Her body is not controlled through her dress and by confining her to the private alone. Even within the private she is to maintain her womanly temperament. Language/vocabulary defined; she could hardly make any eye contacts with elders or seniors [9] or she was most often addressed as *tui*.[10] Pratibha also talks of the embarrassing situation during the initial years, when she was still an over ground activist, she was unable to talk, to communicate ideas or deliver speech when she was supposed to congratulate a couple in their progressive wedding. In writing her autobiography Pratibha takes the opportunity to place before her readers how she managed to overcome this uncomfortable juxtaposition she often encountered otherwise. She expresses how women cadres liberated their tongues from the many psycho-social boundaries that limited it. She mentions other women cadres too who exercised their agency through their words and other non violent methods against the Royal Nepali Army and defeated them morally.

During her stay in the different camps of the enemy class Pratibha and her Co inmates were subjected to different form of torture and humiliation. They were constantly under pressure to surrender and to identify workers and leaders of the PW. Pratibha's husband Samar was killed when she was in the prison and, as she writes, nothing pained more than to be informed of Samar's death by an enemy. She expresses her pain and her urge to take revenge. She writes how painful death could be! Yet, on the night when she and her comrades were taken out of the barrack to be killed, she replies to the major who mocked at their condition, "You can only kill us physically. But you can do no harm to our ideas and therefore my identity remains independent of my bodily existence. You have control only over my body, not my mind"(Kottel 2011:71). If those were the words spoken within, she reflects, "Today we will fulfill the promise of death that we had vowed on the first day of the revolution. Sacrifice is essential for any kind of freedom. Today we

will fulfill our quota by giving lives for the movement" (Kottel 2011:79). Pratibha thus, not only informs her enemy of the ideological superiority she is positioned in but also mocks at their inefficiency to kill beyond the body. At the same time, the very act of replying with such strong ideologically rooted arguments at a time of pain and suffering and, a moment before she would be killed exposes her liberation from many socio-psychological boundaries of the tongue.

Although, that night they were taken out of the barracks saying they would be killed, Pratibha and her friend were returned to the barrack after interrogation and threat. Such events continued in a routine manner, but even after much torture and threat of death, she and Ashmita was frequently exposed to, they denied revealing a word about the plans and policies of the party so much so that major Mohan Nirola ended up remarking, "Pratibha, I thought you were a leader, but you do not seem to be one. Leaders are selfish, they love themselves. They dream big. But you do not seem to have a dream. That is why you wish to die" (Kottel 2011: 73). Although she didn't reply to his words she thinks, she writes, "But we were not dreamless. We cherished the dream of becoming a martyr ourselves to fulfill the dreams of the martyrs."(Kottel 2011: 73).[11] On another incident Pratibha recalls one of the sessions with the major who was humiliating and rebuking them asked, "You must really be angry at me"? (Sobha Kottel, 'Com Pratibha, 2011,p 74). Ashmita who got really irritated by his behavior replied, "Only angry? We feel like grinding you like a tomato, mix with chili and salt and eat you up like chutney" (Kottel 2011:74). While saying this Pratibha recalls Asmita not only used her voice, but her hands and eyes equally to express all anger. In another instance, they were shown pictures of fellow cadres and were asked about their details; their area of work, party name, etc. Instead of identifying their comrades, Pratibha in reply thanked the major for showing them their friend' 'faces before being killed.

These incidents in the camps of the enemy that Pratibha mentions in her book reflect her transition from an inconfident person to an articulate, assertive revolutionary. This transition, however, was not immediate and spontaneous. Although both Pratibha and Samjhana craved for this shift, yet they had to undergo

many struggles and win over them. The struggles that cadres, particularly women cadres had to undergo were numerous, but for the purpose of this paper the next section will try to interrogate into the many inner-struggles that found frequent reference in both the autobiographies.

**Inner struggle! As they call it**

Mao in his On Contradiction (1937) argues "Contradiction is universal and absolute; it is present in the process of development of all things and permeates every process from beginning to end." The PW of Nepal with Maoism as its ideological base continuously relied on the understanding and analyzing the different inner contradictions within the party, individual etc. and external contradictions with the society, the enemy class etc. to assess its development. Different literature finds significant reference of different kinds of contradictions they encountered with different groups and ideas in their revolutionary journey. Only the ones who could overcome these contradictions could grow and evolve as a true revolutionary. Both Samjhana and Pratibha write about the extreme level of suffocation when they are unable to come out of the inner contradictions. Both mentions of the *antar sangharsha* i.e. inner struggle they went through when they were indecisive if they should leave home to join the war. Out of the thesis and antithesis between different emotions and reason it was essential for them to come out with a synthesis, they express.

Pratibha who was an activist of the party even before the war begun talks of her first ever field experience. In the year 1994 for the first time she got the opportunity to address a group of women and explain the objectives and ideology of the party with the goal of getting more and more women involved in the affairs of the party. She writes, she could hardly talk for 15 minutes. The women present there wanted her to speak more. But she couldn't. This was perhaps because she was entering an altogether new field. In the same year, on another occasion, she was supposed to deliver a greeting speech on the occasion of the student leader

Comrade Sadan Baral's progressive wedding. She was speaking on behalf of the women's wing. For long, she could not utter a word. But gradually things seemed easier and as seen in the previous sections she became a fearless revolutionary fighting alone in the camps of the *khuni satta* (killer government) against all odds. This ability to overcome the many inner-contradictions made her feel that 'her dreams are beginning to assert their worth and meaning' (Kottel 2011:23).

Similarly, Samjhana too speaks of her first ever experience of war. She felt as though all the bullets were directed towards her. She was a little scared and Nabina and she kept calling each other. They could not use their guns and kept their heads low and hidden. Internalizing the depth and responsibilities did not happen in a day. During my fieldwork in Nepal, Kalpana informed me of how the cadres were given lessons in the arms and the combat dress. There were different protocols to be followed when one is wearing a combat dress. For example a cadre cannot wear his/her combat dress when on leave or on vacation. [12] It signified responsibilities, duties and commitment. Samjhana although was attracted to the movement, seeing Nishana in her combat dress she says, "…because of our age and inexperience even with a gun and a combat dress Nabina and I could not resist ourselves from laughing at the little things. We looked at each other and laughed. We also could not hide our excitement at the many things we saw and experienced on the way to the battle grounds" (Sita B K 2012:42). Gradually fighting many inner struggles they internalized the rules, the ambience and the attitudes of war so much so that they felt worthless in the absence of a war. Samjhana at another instance, describes,

> 'For long we have been trying to move ahead with an attack. But we were not able to. It felt like we have become a people without tooth. We had to go in search of our enemy from one place to the other. We were anxious to go to the war field. Pain and sufferings were things that least concerned us then. For us the most important point was to gain new experience and we were dying for it. Finally,

we got to hear of a war and we joined it. It was the battle at Mathuradanda. We fought the war valiantly and got hold of a lot of weapons. These weapons were technologically advanced weapons. We lost four friends in the battle with the RNA. Therefore, it was a mixture of pleasure and pain. It felt like we have now fixed golden tooth'(Sita B K 2012:102-105).

On a very serious note explaining to her readers how difficult yet significant these contradictions were in the life of a combatant Pratibha writes, "…in the beginning I had to pass through professional inner-contradiction i.e. *peshawari antar sangharsha*. But this, I feel, continues till the end. These contradictions help a person to express herself.… But we moved ahead, breaking all boundaries through class struggle, inner-party struggle and inner struggle" (Kottel 2011:31). She claims, "…changing each and everything that we encounter on our way we moved ahead" (Kottel 2011:31). Thus a sense of pride and happiness of overcoming and changing everything that contradicted them and deterred their development can be very clearly read from Pratibha and Samjhana's account. The ability to liberate, not only their bodies from familial, societal, patriarchal ties, but also the sheer joy of liberating their minds and thought processes by engaging in serious contradictions both internal and external, has been very clearly placed before the audience by both the revolutionaries.

**Liberating Pain! Liberating Womanhood!**

Getting married, making oneself entwined by the affection and warmth of a person when one is aware of all the uncertainties of war was never an easy task for the cadres of the war. Many promised that they would not get married to suffer like Comrade Chunu Gurung. [13] Pratibha talks of Comrade Sarada who kept her promise and died unmarried. But many were thrilled by the urge to make their love and partnership revolutionary. They promised to be revolutionary couples. They would resist all temptations of a life together and fight, sacrifice everything about

the relationship for the people. Revolution too would not miss the opportunity to take its test. They take away their dear ones while suffering in the jail alone or while fighting a war together next to one another. But powerful! Powerful our comrades wouldn't or couldn't cry in front of the enemy; who while conveying the news laughed as though "he had won the last battle of his life" (Kottel 2011:63). Pratibha, who claimed again and again how Comrade Samar helped her in the inner-party and inner struggle, writes how it pained to hear of his death. She expresses how she wished she could evolve as a bomb out of the contradiction of emotions of hatred and pain. She regrets at her pitiable condition when she could not take revenge on the enemy class for Samar's death. Pratibha missed her friends and senior leaders of the party. She felt like hugging them tight and crying her heart out. Yet she manages to liberate herself from all the loneliness and pain and writes, "In his absence, I have now become my own militia, my own commander" (Kottel 2011:74).

Samjhana, on the other hand, was fighting next to "the dearest person of her life" (Sita B K 2012:110) till one at night when she had to leave the battleground injured expecting that her partner will take revenge on the enemy for injuring her. She was not aware that even before her injury Jalan became a martyr of the war. Upon getting the news of his martyrdom, that "he no longer exists physically" she felt a "feeling that I never felt before" (Sita B K 2012:113). It was, she writes, an "unacceptable truth of life"(Sita B K 2012:113). She realizes, "War in itself is cruel and out of the contradictions of all these experiences and pain that new emotions and ideas takes birth"(Sita B K 2012). Samjhana do not see Jalan's death beyond the physical. As an ideology, as an emotion, as a brave commander of the war Jalan continues to live for her. Moreover, she expects the birth of new ideas and new emotions from his death. Although a cruel reality to her, Samjhana is hopeful that the pain associated with his death will lead to something new and good.

Pratibha too unfolds the pain that the experiences of PW brought into the lives of many. Pain invaded their lives, not only in the form of death in the battle grounds, but in having to deal with rape, treason, loot etc.. She writes,

"*Janayudha* i.e People's War was gradually becoming an intolerable pain or suffering. Even ordinary people were killed, looted, women raped and kidnapped, etc. But the enemy could rape and cease only the purity of our bodies but not that of our mind or our ideology. They are not aware that only our bodies might fall as a result of their deeds, but not our trust in the movement. The People's war is full of brave truths to stand against the will of the enemy. We have mothers fighting brave wars on the battlefield, leaving their three month old child alone. I also played a supportive role in the war with my 8 month old son next to me" (Kottel 2011:61).

Pratibha's words inform us of how cadres liberated themselves from the conventional ideas of receiving and reacting to various forms of pain and suffering. Her argument helps us understand how pain was redefined beyond its bodily terms and existence and transformed into a political weapon against the enemy. Pratibha also helps to break traditional ideas of motherhood, which again is very contradictory to the claims made by senior leaders of the party. For example, in trying to unleash the various ways in which patriarchy crept into and sustained itself within the party and its workers, Hisila Yami alias Comrade Parvati, an active member of the party who later became a Constituent Assembly member, observes that the patriarchal construct of marriage and the pressure on young women in the movement to marry and take on gendered burden of child- bearing and child rearing significantly affected their career as combatants which in turn, to a significant extend inhibited women combatants from taking leadership roles within the movement. However, in a war where sacrifices everything dear for the cause of the class struggle became a mark of one's power, ones' agency, ones' share in the People's War why would women miss this opportunity this experience of motherhood. For, if progressive marriage could be a means to break conventional ideas of marriage, motherhood in times of war too could be a way to project to the world that motherhood is never a very good argument to push women back to the confines of the private. That happiness of breaking taboos relating to motherhood, that Pratibha informs her readers, of the many women who mothered during the

war; stands in contradiction with the conventional understanding that, motherhood is one of the greatest hindrances in women joining the battle fronts.

In many of her chapters Pratibha keeps mentioning of her son; how she longed to see him while in jail, how she struggled to have him after being released from jail. Her mother in law denied handing over their son to her. She informs her readers again and again of her pain; yet once her mother in law allows her to take him along she leaves him again to join the party work. In her autobiography, Samjhana too writes of the sacrifices that mothers have made in the name of the war and how mothers have broken the belief that compassion and love towards the child will refrain them from performing warrior responsibilities. Although Samjhana did not mother a child during the war, she dedicates a chapter explaining the painful scenario when Jayapuri Gardhi drops by to see her two and a half year old daughter on the way to some meeting in Rolpa. Jayapuri didi in Samjhana's words did not shed a drop of tear but kept turning back again and again till she could see her daughter as she left for her place of work (Sita, BK 2012). Samjhana indeed makes and attempt to inform how ideas relating to the institution of motherhood was challenged and changed by the women cadres of the war. Or it can even be argued that the war was used as a tool to break and proof that certain beliefs about motherhood are untrue. They in a way liberated motherhood from its victim, precarious position to one with voice and agency.

## Conclusion

A minute observation of different claims and arguments that Samjhana and Pratibha make in their autobiographies, thus, reveals how politically significant a journey they traversed while writing. Apart from being a book full of information on the war ranks and profile of different cadres, the role they played, the places they travelled and the wars they fought; the books are a source of great theoretical analysis on Maoism, on body politics, on the politics of writing and publishing etc. The political significance and relevance of the books also owes to the fact that they have to a certain degree attempted and succeeded in building new ontology of

woman and womanhood by telling us how they lived, how they negotiated spaces to liberate themselves using different mechanisms, structures, institutions and emotions. That is why it can be rightly claimed that the revolutionaries through the act of writing have carried out a revolution. This revolution was guided by a fantasy of liberation as pointed out in different sections.

## *End Notes*

[1] Author's interactions with Com. Balika, Com. Kalpana and Com Sapana from 2oth July, 2016 to 13th Aug 2016.

[2] Author's interactions with Com. Sapana from 2oth July, 2016 to 13th Aug 2016.

[3] Author's interaction with Com. Kalpana on the 2nd of August 2016.

[4] Author's interaction with Com Balika on the 18th of July 2016.

[5] Author's interaction with Com. Samjhana on the 20th of July, 2016.

[6] Author's interaction with Com Balika and Com Kalpana on the 2nd of August 2016.

[9] Author's interaction with Aastha on the 14th of August, 2016.

[10] Author's interaction with Jyoti on the 8th of August, 2016.

[12] Author's interaction with Kalpana on the 2nd of August 2016.

[13] Chunu Gurung was a revolutionary woman leader of the PW of Nepal, a poet and a famous cultural activist. She wrote and sang many revolutionary songs. Her song was very popular among the oppressed people of Nepal. She was the Central Committee Member of 'All Nepal People's Cultural Association', a sister organization of CPN (Maoist). Chunu Gurung could spend only 9 days in the company of her husband after which she returned to her area of work. On the 31st day of their wedding her husband became a martyr of the war. During the PW, she was captured by Royal Army and was brutally assassinated in custody.

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# DYNAMICS OF INDIA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICIES

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Neighbourhood policies reflect a nation's ambition as well as an assessment of itself; they signify the relative power of a particular country in the neighbourhood, the region as well as the world; they are axiomatic of a neighbourhood's history and geography; they betray external power influence, as well as resistance or acceptance of such influence by the countries in the particular neighbourhood. Thus, neighbourhood policies of countries' portray a comprehensive picture of the approaches applied by a country towards the world, the region as well as towards its neighbours; apart from contextualizing the dynamics of relations between neighbouring countries.

India's neighbourhood policies are also reflective of the ambitions which India holds with regard to its position in the neighbourhood, in the region and in the world. They also portray the dynamics of India's visions of its role in the world. While non-alignment and strategic autonomy have remained the leitmotivs of India's foreign policies and also its neighbourhood policies, India's policies towards its neighbourhood have undergone changes over the years which are a result of alterations in the structure of global politics, as well as transformations in the ambitions harboured by India.

In 1947, India was a newly independent nation, which had only just broken out of the colonial yoke. It began charting its own route with regard to its foreign policies, which were mostly idealistic and loft, bereft of deep strategic thinking. In

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2015, India has undergone much transformation. From a country of naked fakirs and snake charmers, India has emerged as an IT power, a nuclear power, a fast-growing economy, a power with great power aspirations as is indicated by India's search for a role in the UNSC, from a jungle to a land of concrete jungles, (the naked fakirs and snake charmers continue as well, this time not as symbols of backwardness but as soft power potential!). Although, this transformation has occurred, India's has not been able to 1) Tackle the problems of poverty, illiteracy, health maladies and other socio-economic evils, 2) Tackle problems which are being trans-neighbourhood in nature, 3) Shake the image of it being a regional hegemonic power, among other maladies which continue to plague India in the most searing manner.

India is seen as a rising power in the post-Cold War era. India's nuclear power capabilities, its fast paced growth, and its ambitions to acquire a UN SC seat point to the fact that India is a power in search for a greater role in global politics. The US, EU, Russia and the major powers of the world are also interested in India as a market and a strategic partner. There is also a consensus that India is a regional hegemon in South Asia.

Although, India has never articulated a formulation of the neighbourhood, it has at times been defined as extended from the Suez Canal to South China Sea and at other times as the countries of the SAARC, minus Afghanistan. In India's neighbourhood, India is dominant in terms of population, size, and resources-military and economic, making it a dominant power among its neighbours. The manner in which a country influences its neighbourhood is an important aspect of great power behaviour. India's role and approach towards its neighbourhood also reflects is aspirations for great power status.

There are a few theoretical considerations which examine the case of rising powers and their relations with their neighbourhoods. The neo-realist school states that a regional power can be identified if it can influence its neighbours by the dint of its hard power- economic and military capabilities (Christian, Wagner, 2005)

Also, they are able to withstand outside powers from indulging in their neighbourhood. In contrast to this, soft power aspects have been stated as the means required by a regional power to influence its neighbours by liberal institutionalists, Soft power resources including with cultural attraction, ideology, and international institutions as the main resources. (ibid. P 2.)

A rising power, it has been argued, needs to at first pacify its own neighbourhood into a zone of peace for it to finally emerge as a great power (Sandy Gordon, 2010). This applies to the offensive realists school of thought, which argues that a power needs to be able to consolidate and pacify its own neighbourhood to become a great power, India falls far short of this aspect, especially as external power involvement, like the US and China, in India's neighbourhood is carrying on without India being able to prevent it from happening. On the other hand, "neoclassical realism suggests a view of the world in which systemic and domestic factors are both dominant.... though domestic and neighbourhood problems may be intimately connected (as in the case of terrorism in India... it may not be possible for a country to shape the neighbourhood issues that play upon its domestic concerns if it is not powerful enough within the broader international system to do so" (Ibid. p.201). In order for India to influence its neighbourhood, it needs to acquire power greater than that of its neighbours but also than that of regional powers like China which continues to meddle in India's neighbourhood.

## Challenges in India's Neighbourhood

In order to emerge as a power of importance in the world, India needs to either influence its neighbourhood favourably or to ensure that peace prevails in its neighbourhood. There are several challenges in South Asia which India currently faces. South Asia is over populated; it is poor, and low on almost all political, economic and security indicators. Terrorism, epidemics, natural disasters, militant Islam, ecological insecurity, national and human insecurity all plague South Asia. It is also an area of great power interest which further complicates issues for India

to influence the region. During the Cold War era, the US and Soviet Union were involved in an around the Indian sub-continent which complicated matters between nations. During the global war on terror, the US saw Pakistan as a frontline ally, which once again, made matters difficult between nations of the region. (Ibid. p.202) Border issues, Kashmir, river-water sharing issues with Pakistan. The Tamil problem with Si Lanka, the perceived hegemonic role in Nepal were but some of India's challenges in its immediate neighbourhood. (Rajesh, Basrur, (2010) India has fought four wars with Pakistan over issues which were created by colonial cartography and political machinations. The insurgency is rife in India's Northeast and Kashmir, both having extra-territorial help. There has been incessant immigration from Bangladesh into Northeast India, which has led to communalisation of the political landscape leading to clashes and death, a situation which has been hijacked by political forces and further fuelling ethnic clashes. There also exist problems like water-sharing between India and Pakistan, India and Nepal, India and Bangladesh. Problems like terrorism exist in South Asia, and terrorist activities in India are often traced to Pakistan, which derails any attempts at cooperation between the nations. China's immense involvement in the region, from its all-weather friendship with Pakistan, to its investments in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal and Myanmar are responsible for heightened tension between India and China, as India is wary of Chinese involvement in a region which India considers its neighbourhood. China's presence in the Indian Ocean and its investment in building ports in Pakistan, Myanmar ad Sri Lanka is seen by India as tactics of China to build bases surrounding India.

These above mentioned issues are but a few bilateral, regional structural level problems which are present in India's neighbourhood. These are extremely potent and intractable in nature thus far, preventing the region from emerging as a united area, preventing cooperation and fostering hostility and animosity. Instead of emerging as a successful zone, South Asia is a tinder box, of terrorists, nuclear bombs, civil wars, illiteracy, global power involvement, and masses of poor, unemployed people. Most of the South Asian nations wary of each other and

especially of India. The net result is a "…sub region in which global, sub regional and domestic factors are tightly, and often negatively, woven together. It is a sub region affected by some of the most significant global problems and tensions, embracing ideological–religious conflict, great power competition around energy and resources and deep antagonisms between neighbours arising from a difficult post-colonial settlement." (Sandy Gordon, 2010)

## Options for India's Pursuit of Great Power Status

Often, in a race to emerge as great powers, countries have sabotaged themselves as was evident when the USSR tried to catch up with the US and invested heavily on nuclear warfare, S&T at the cost of economic health of the citizens, finally leading to its disintegration.( Ibid. p.207) There are a few options which India has in order to fulfil its great power aspirations. First, India could apple both soft power or hard power tactics to settle these issues or it could invest in "…getting its own house in order so as to be less vulnerable to cross-border activities from hostile neighbours and only then proceed to deal with perceived neighbourhood problems". (Ibid. p.202) Second, it could seek to "…disentangle itself from regional problems in order to stake a solid claim to a global standing. Attempts to control its neighbours can only enmesh it locally and detract from its global image and interests." (Rajesh, Basrur, 2010) Third, it could outsource the neighbourhood problems to powers like the US as little has been/will be "…gained from attempting to establish regional hegemony, and its neighbours have less to worry about than they did in the past." (ibid. p. 267) This approach will also aid India to ward off its image as regional bully or hegemon and will allow it to delink its economic cooperation with the neighbours from other more contentious issues. Fourth, India could continue to engage its neighbours on matters other than the most contentious ones to encourage a community of cooperation while at the same time, enunciate a broader neighbourhood policy with nations, with which India does not have historical, border related, resource sharing illegal migration and terrorism links, thereby paving the way for India to engage extended neighbours. The rest of this

article will examine the manner in which India has been attempting to deal with its neighbourhood and ensure its pursuit of great power status by employing each of the four above mentioned tactics. While in the Cold War era, India displayed hegemonic tendencies which reached their zenith under Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, in the post-Cold War era, India opted for more cooperative, hands-off approaches as well as articulating the version f an extended neighbourhood while continuing to engage its neighbours on matters of trade and culture.

## Cold War Neighbourhood Policies: Hard Power, Hegemonic tendencies, Indira as Monroe, Rajiv as Bonaparte

During the Cold War era, India began to acquire the image of being a regional hegemon. This image began to take shape during the rule of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, whose assertiveness in her foreign policies was evident. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's rule witnessed the formulation of a more-defined policies towards South Asia policy which were perceived by India's neighbours are being a manifestation of Indi's visions of acquiring dominance in the region and thus Indira Gandhi's policies were commented upon as the 'India doctrine' (some even called it the Indira doctrine), (Gupta S B, 1983) a 'Brahmanic framework of power' ( Gupta A, 1990) or a 'regional Monroe doctrine'(Gupta S B, 1988). The rule of Indira Gandhi was turbulent, both internally as well as externally. Internally, the emergency which Gandhi declared was first of its kind, and was deemed a threat to the entire democratic process of India. Externally, as well, Gandhi was muscular in her policies. Indira Gandhi's decision to help in the fragmentation of Pakistan, and denying the involvement of outside powers in the matters of South Asian politics were symptomatic of India's policies of achieving hegemony which needed India to ensure that outside powers wielded no influence in India's neighbourhood. Indi's nuclear test of 1974 furthered the perception of her neighbours of it becoming a hegemonic power in the sub-continent.

Rajiv Gandhi also carried on with his mother's policies of a muscular or a more military dominated approach towards India's neighbours. (A. Behuria, 2012) India was involved militarily in the neighbouring states during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure, one in 1987 when the Indian Peace Keeping Force was sent to Sri Lanka and again in 1988 to forestall a coup in Maldives in 1988. (Dilip Bobb, D., 1987) India's policies towards Nepal and Pakistan were also lacking in diplomacy and more muscular during Rajiv Gandhi's era and such neighbourhood policies led some analysts to suggest that Rajiv Gandhi was a Bonaparte in the making. (S.B. Gupta, 1988)

## Post-Cold War: Changes in India's neighbourhood policies

There were several changes with regard to India's neighbourhood policies as well as conceptualization in the post-Cold War era. These may have been due to one or more of the following reasons- changed systemic level factors, redundancy of non-alignment, failure of hard power, India's great power aspirations, opportunities sighted at extended neighbourhood range, realization of the use of letting outside powers handle issues in the neighbourhood as well as realization that economic matters and security issues can be delinked.

At first glance it is evident that in the 1990's India began to undertake several reconciliatory or hard power devoid of actions with regard to its neighbours. In the early 1990s, India-Nepal relations witnessed a process of normalisa-tion which began with the signing of the accord in June 1990, which effectively restored the status-quo ante April 1987. Moreover, there was the revision of trade and transit treaties, which had become conflicting issues between India and Nepal during 1987–88. In Addition, India agreed to provide economic concessions to Nepal in order to encourage trade and an understand-ing on the issue of mutually beneficial utilisation of the Mahakali River was reached between the two transboundary countries. In the case of Sri Lanka, the withdrawal of the IPKF in 1990 paved the way for the improvement of relations between the two countries. In 1991, India

and Sri Lanka agreed to establish and institu-tional framework of their bilateral relations. India's relations with Bangladesh during the Khalida Zia government, which came to power in February 1991, lack lustre save the resolution of the Tin Bigha issue. However, India's relations with Pakistan continued to languish with some streaks of cooperative signs however, not on the issues relating to security. Although Rao's government adopted a hands-off attitude towards countries of the Indian subcontinent, it was regarded by some as a departure from the previous administrations' "interventionist approaches".( S. Kalyanaraman 2013)

While not neglecting its immediate neighbourhood, India soon began articulating its version of an extended neighbourhood. India began to concentrate on engaging nations beyond its immediate neighbourhood. The Narashima Rao government of 1991-1996 was responsible for advocating the Look East Policy, under which India began to cultivate close economic and later on security ties with the countries of South East Asia, Myanmar began to emerge as a crucial link between India and the rest of the countries of the Association of the East Asian nations and relations which were hitherto shunned with Myanmar as India was loathe to engage the junta regime, began to pick up as India began to promote realpolitik in place of idealism, which allowed it to mend ties with Myanmar, a nation rich in hydrocarbons and a land-ridge to prosperous nations of the ASEAN which India perceived offered hitherto untapped economic prospects for rising India. Apart from the Looking East, India also re-worked its ties with Israel and the US, all these areas had been thus far more or less neglected due to the systemic constraints which had been in place due to the Cold War.( A. Behuria, 2012)

The tenure of Prime Minister I.K Gujral was a monumental one with regard to the change in India's attitude towards its neighbours. The Gujral Doctrine favoured reciprocity towards its neighbours, i.e. asymmetric concessions, and non interference in matters of its neighbours. (P. Murthy, 1999). In return, India was not expecting anything except not letting their territories be used for anti-India uses, and to settle all bilateral disputes peacefully. (S.B. Gupta, 1997) Gujral has got considerable kudos for such an initiative that appeared to some as a long-

sighted and strategic move, given the need for India's to pacify its neighbours about its intentions vis a vis its neighbours given the obvious difference in economic and military stature of India when compared to others in South Asia.

India's economy began to grow in leaps and bound s by the time of the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) rule under Atal Behari Vajpayee which consolidated India's expanded version of its neighbourhood. Added to this, was the lacklustre performance of the SAARC which compelled India to look beyond the immediate periphery for opportunities to fuel India's growth and to break out of the confines of South Asia as well as a sub-continental mindset. (Gupta S B, 1997; Singh R K, 2004)   Prime Minister Vajpayee continued to pursue the Look East policy and described East Asia as India's "extended neighbourhood" (D. Scott, 2009). The term "extended neighbourhood" began to be used by Indian governments after 1998, as a notion which implied countries and regions beyond India's immediate littoral nations.[Ibid]

The reconciliatory and hard power devoid approach continued under Vajpayee, except Kargil. Apart from expanding India's approach and concept of neighbourhood beyond the sub-continent, Vajpayee did not ignore the close neighbours and continued the Gujral Doctrine. More significantly, he floated the idea of a South Asian Union based on the European model. A new regional concept of Southern Asia concept was wildly articulated in the academic circles during his term which delineated India's regional ambitions in an area consisting of West, Central, and Southeast Asia, and such an articulation underlined the BJP's aspirations for India's future global role. (Christian, Wagner, 2005) The Vajpayee government also made break with the past by accepting and promoting outside powers, like the US, in the sub-continent, a matter, which thirty years ago had led to a war which split one nation into two. The US and India then began mutual consultations on a range of security issues including "the management of the political instability in Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh".( S. Kalyanaraman 2013) Such an attitude of India towards US involvement was symptomatic of India's acceptance of outside influence and the realization that it is better from an outside interested

party to sort matters out in these countries, other than only India getting its hands dirty and then being blamed for harbouring hegemonic tendencies towards them, Having the US consult on the matters of these states, allowed India to appear as a concerned party, instead of a assertive power of dominance.

Despite the Kargil war, India was keen to promote soft power strategies to promote cooperation and understanding with Pakistan. BJP applied soft power strategies in the relations with Pakistan which included the Lahore process in 1999, the Agra summit in July 2001 and Vajpayee's proposals in Srinagar in April 2003 opened again the road for dialogue. The Islamabad statement of January 2004 also underlined India's soft power approach as it opened prospects for bilateral negotiations.

In the Kargil conflict, which was obviously an exercise in hard power, the new Indian approach to its neighbourhood, of having external powers take the pressure was noticeable. The US was worried that the Kargil war could lead to a nuclear outbreak which let US President Bill Clinton to exert immense pressure on Pakistan (an erstwhile and future frontline ally) to withdraw its forces. On its part, India pressured the US to intervene in this matter, which can be seen as India's exercise in "coercive diplomacy was aimed especially at inducing American involvement on its behalf."…Since then, India has followed a two-track policy. It has, on the one hand, made a concerted effort to negotiate with Pakistan, and on the other, encouraged the US to compel Pakistan to curb militancy."( Rajesh, Basrur 2010)

Another instance of India not using hard power unlike in the Cold War era, to solve issues in the neighbourhood in its favour is with regard to the insurgent links and illegal immigration from Bangladesh, which is threatening the socio-economic and political milieu of states like Assam. Although, militarily more dominant than Bangladesh, India has not "…attempted to put much pressure on Bangladesh, preferring instead to publicize the threat of fundamentalism and terrorism and hope that the US and others will put pressure on it."(ibid.) This is very interesting given the fact that one of the reasons cited for the 1971 use of

force by India and then East Pakistan was an exodus of refugees into India, a situation which is similar today, although not cause of political reasons this time but because of economic reasons.

With regard to Sri Lanka as well, India's behaviour showed changes from the Cold War years. Unlike its past stance of being involved in matters of its neighbours, it was remarkable that India was not involved in the civil war that raged in Sri Lanka for most of the 1990s. (Christian, Wagner 2005) In addition, and unlike its behaviour in the past, India "… had no objections against a mediation of Norway starting in spring 2000 and refused the request of the Sri Lankan government to evacuate troops from the North. In early 2002 the Indian government rejected the request of the LTTE to locate their chief negotiator Anton Balasingham in Chennai. The new focus on economic cooperation became obvious in the common activities of both countries within the SAARC and in the bilateral Free Trade agreement that was signed in 1998"…. Thus, in the case of Sri Lanka- India relations, "…the political and military interventions that dominated bilateral relations throughout the 1980s were replaced by an intergovernmental approach that emphasised traditional forms of political and economic co-operation on the bilateral and multilateral level. In accordance with the ideas of the Gujral doctrine the economic interdependence was more in favour of the smaller neighbour." (ibid. p.9)

India's relations with Nepal in the post-Cold war are also indicative of the strategic restraint which India has been exercising with regard to its immediate neighbours. India followed a hands-off approach, refrained from intervening in Nepal and allowed outside powers to play a role in Nepal. In 1996, the Maoist rebellion shook the foundations of Nepal's' political fabric. These Maoists had links with various militant left wing groups, like People's War Group (PWG) or the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), that were operating in neighbouring Indian states, which made the external security implications for India amply clear, however, India was not interested in enmeshing itself in the political rebellion in Nepal over such links.

The Maoists links between India and Nepal were bolstered when "...In July 2002 the Co-ordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA) was founded which aimed at the creation of a revolutionary corridor from Andhra Pradesh to Nepal"...However, despite the formation of such formidable cross-border security threats "...India was not willing for a greater unilateral intervention in Nepal but restricted her support to delivery of arms, intelligence technology and training of the security forces".[ibid. p.10] In addition, to such restraint and uncharacteristic of Cold War India's neighbourhood policies "...India was also ready to accept external interference by outside powers like the United States and Great Britain that also intensified their military support for the Nepalese government to fight the Maoist rebellion." (ibid. p. 11)

The UPA government which followed the NDA government was also keen to ensure that security matters which complicate neighbourhood relations do not hamper India; great power aspirations as well as prevent the possibility of better cultural, trade and connectivity ties in the neighbourhood. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government attempted to increase connectivity in the Indian subcontinent and emphasized its desire to expand intra-regional trade and promote "social development and regional economic integration" in South Asia. (Rao Nirupama, SAARC, 2011)

On the issue of terrorism, India has again been reluctant to pursue forceful settlement of external links on terrorism, especially those emanating from Bangladesh. For instance, "....despite repeated Indian demands that Bangladesh crack down on groups such as the Harakat-ul-Jihad al-Islami-Bangladesh (HUJI-B), there was no substantial response." (Rajesh, Basrur, 2010) In September 2006, in response to West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya's demand that Indian forces destroy terrorist groups in Bangladesh, India did not pursue this plan of action, stating that India could not meddle the internal affairs of another country, a refrain which is ironical given the fact that in 1971 India did meddle in the matters of this very same country, leading to its bifurcation. India also ensured that it did not meddle in internal politics of Bangladesh and instead India let the

US and EU diplomats take the pressure of dealing with the political instability in Dhaka for instance, "...during the large-scale violence that led to the postponement of elections in early 2007, New Delhi did little but watch as American and European diplomats hurried back and forth and pressurized the main parties to come to some sort of understanding ...All of this reflects not a hegemonic approach on the part of India, but rather a low-key response and a preference for letting others pick up the burden."(ibid. p. 276)  Instead of pursuing hard power solutions to settling issues with Bangledesh India took the path of developing goodwill in Bangladesh in the form on providing credit to the tune if US$1 billion , as well as securing an agreement from Dhaka to permit transit of Indian goods through its territory to the remote Indian state of Tripura and India's state-run National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) Ltd signed a contract to invest US$3 billion in the construction of two power plants in Bangladesh. Thus, India's politically cautious role not only meant that "...other states bore the burden of intervening in Bangladesh, but it also brought benefits by way of an improved relationship. In the meantime, India was able to focus on its extra-regional strategic pursuits."(ibid. p. 277)

The UPA began to give priority to issues beyond the immediate neighbourhood, which included establishing relations with extra-regional organs like the EU, BRICs, Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Shanghai Cooperation Council (SCO), as well as major powers. (P. Chattopadhyay, 2011)  By 2004 the Indian government was affirming the concept of an extended neighbourhood for India which "...stretches from the Suez Canal to the South China Sea and includes within it West Asia, the Gulf, Central Asia, South East Asia, East Asia, the Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region." (Y. Sinha, 2004)

Towards the south, India's extended neighbourhood covered the Indian Ocean. (D. Scott, 2006)  The southwards prong of the extended neighbourhood concept included "...the Persian Gulf in the west to the Straits of Malacca in the east . . .to the Equator in the south"; which rendered it necessary for the Indian navy to safeguard the Indian Ocean. (Annual Report, Ministry of Defence, 2001) By expanding its southern horizons to cover the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean,

India intended to "...deter hostile powers from operating against India, to maintain SLOC (Sea Lines of Communication) for general trade and particularly energy supplies, and to project India's general presence and power." (D. Scott, 2009) India's eastwards neighbourhood was characterized by India's Look East Policy. (International Herald Tribune, February 24, 1994) The LEP began with engaging the countries of the ASEAN economically; it then went to engage countries of East Asia and Australasia economically as well as in matters of strategic convergence. (The Hindu, October 9, 2003) India's northwards expansion of its neighbourhood covered the countries of Central Asia, thereby bringing India as yet another player in the brewing New Great Game over the hydrocarbon reserves of these countries. (M.S. Roy, (2001) The westwards expansion of India's neighbourhood covered countries of West Asia. A formal Look West policy was announced in 2005 which emphasized greater cooperation with the Arab countries. India-Iran links are enshrined in the 2003 New Delhi Declaration and Road Map to Strategic Cooperation. (C. Fair, 2007)

Due to continuities in the policies of the NDA and UPA governments, a Vajpayee-Manmohan Doctrine has also been identified, which includes "...a prioritisation of the country's economic development, an emphasis on diplomacy, a strict maintenance of Indian sovereignty, a distrust of alliances, a consideration of balances of power, an abstention from direct interference in the internal affairs of other states, and a willingness to bilaterally engage all states, including those with competing interests".(Pragati - The Indian National Interest Review, 10, 2008).These policies broadly underlie India's attempt to define a neighbourhood beyond its immediate littoral states. This is indicative of India's desire not to be involved in internal matters of its neighbours, by doing which it had earned the reputation of a regional bully as well as exhausted many of its resources on keeping their houses in order instead now India is keen to promote economic ties and let external powers with similar interests bear the burden to maintain political civility in India's neighbours.

**Conclusions:**

The main contention of this article was to examine the kinds of change and the reasons behind this transformation which India's neighbourhood policies have undergone changes over the years, especially after the end of the Cold War. India's neighbourhood which consist of the SAARC nations, minus Afghanistan are countries with which India has had acrimonious relationships in the past, and India had tended to behave in a high-handed fashion, however, after the Cold-War and coinciding with India's aspirations of acquiring a seat on the high table of nations, India began to take a step back from meddling the internal affairs of these countries and instead opting for more cooperative ways of engaging these states and even accepting outside influence (save China), in their matters. Along with this change, India also embarked on two other modes of action. First, it began to concentrate on improving the social indicators of the country-health, education, poverty. Improving itself along domestic parameters will enable India to withstand cross-border problems like migration and insurgency in a more forceful manner. Additionally, instead of spending resources on neighbours, it is better to spend it on uplifting the calibre of the population of India. Second, it articulated a broader and extended version of neighbourhood, one encompassing lands and water bodies spanning from the Suez Canal to the South China Sea, New Zealand to the east coast of Africa. In its ambitions of acquiring great power status, India has not let the squabble in its immediate neighbourhood, prevent it from exploring cooperation, economic and security, with nations beyond the immediate and in this regard India has expanded its horizons, both as a way of circumventing the conflict ridden Sub-continent as well as a way of signalling its expanded realm of influence, befitting a would-be great power. With regard to the immediate neighbourhood, India has also become restraint in its actions, preferring its neighbours sort their own problems, or even have outside powers step in, rather than involving itself in their internal matters which would prevent it from leveraging its resources where they could help it secure for itself great power status.

Going round the immediate neighbourhood is a way for India not to be caught up in conflict ridden South Asia, however, without solving/ managing the problems in its immediate proximity, India's aspirations for great power status would remain out of reach as, among other thing, one of the first criteria which a great power must fulfil is for it to be able to manage its neighbourhood and fit it to its interests, including preventing outside powers from being involved in it. Not only has India mostly failed in doing this, it seems to have forfeited its attempts in doing this. Nonetheless, the silver lining is apparent in the tactic employed by India, if it is a success, is that India is fashioning a new model for future great powers, which take the soft power route, including improving economic cooperation with acrimonious neighbours, effectively delinking more contentious issues, and concentrating on more cooperative aspects of the relationship, and letting outside powers solve the problems of weaker neighbours, and thereby killing two birds with one stone-that of reducing its image of a regional bully and preserving resources which otherwise would have been wasted in keeping others' houses in order, to enable power projection far beyond the horizons. As a post-script it would be prudent to mention here, that China is following a method quite opposite to that of India's, as relations with its immediate neighbours have become progressively sour especially with regard to maritime issues.

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# LIFE WITHOUT DIGNITY: EXPLORING BRIDE TRAFFICKING AS A CRUCIAL SUBSET TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN INDIA

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In the globalized world order of the twenty-first century, nation states are confronted with numerous challenges. Globalization suggests that countries are no longer isolated from one another. The world today is integrated and interdependent in such a manner that the challenges are no longer limited within the boundaries of a particular state and has ramifications, if not uniformly, for all countries. All the nations now belong to a global village where diversity across nation-states are acknowledged and celebrated. Globalization is one phrase can be identified as the 'integration of everything with everything else' (Friedman and Kaplan, 2002). This, on the one hand, means mutual sharing of the benefits and on the other, suggests that threats and problems are no longer limited to boundaries. Therefore, the wave of globalization has led to the broadening of the concept of security to include within its ambit the traditional and the non- traditional dimensions. The traditional dimensions or what is otherwise known as the conventional dimension of security is nevertheless present and added to it, nations now have to cope with the challenges of non-traditional security threats.

Nation-states now have to deal with both traditional and non-traditional security issues. The non- traditional security threats are more complex since they extend beyond the perimeter of the states. Therefore, the concept of security is no longer limited to the narrow definition of securing the borders from the military

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interventions of other nations. The enemies of humankind are many and so has the concept of security enlarged itself from the narrow definition of traditional to include the non-traditional dimensions of security threats. These are the threats which come from sources other than military, political and diplomatic. These kinds of threats are more dangerous since the enemy is not easily identifiable. Its nature and form are varied and its presence is difficult to detect. As such the non-traditional security threats can pose serious challenge to the very survival nations and humankind cutting across diverse geographical and cultural boundaries. Hence, it is a mistake to underestimate the potential of the non-traditional security threats since it cripples a nation without a bullet being fired.

Political scientists and scholars have therefore embarked on a broad-based definition of national security. National security can be broadly defined as 'an action or sequence of events that threatens drastically and over a relatively brief span of time to degrade the quality of life for the inhabitants of a state, or threatens significantly to narrow the range of policy choices available to the government of a state or to private, non-governmental entities (persons, groups, corporations) within the state' (Ullman, 1983). One such significant dimensions of non-traditional security is human security. The United Nations Development Programme defines human security to include two crucial aspects. 'It means, first, safety from the chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily- whether in homes, in jobs or in communities. Such threats can exist at all levels of national income and development' (UNDP, 1994). Here, it is significant to mention that the concept of human security was pioneered by Pakistani economist Mahabub-ul-Haq who was also instrumental behind drafting the Human Development Report of 1994. According to Mahabub-ul-Haq, 'Human security is not a concern with weapons. It is a concern with human dignity' (Haq, 1995). The goal of human security is to protect, promote and enhance the 'vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment' (UN Commission on Human Security, 2003). Therefore, human security denotes a comprehensive concept since anything

that threats the well-being of people including both material and non-material ones and denies the right to live peacefully and affects the dignity and right of decision making can be categorized as a threat. The significant point to note is the right to live a dignified life. Life without dignity is unworthy in the sense that human beings are then no less an animal. It is dignity that makes life worth living. One of the major concerns with human security today is human security. Human trafficking is the most significant threat to human security and is one of the most serious issues being debated around the world.

## Human Trafficking: A Significant Threat to Human Security in India

Given this ever-expanding scope, human trafficking can be regarded as the most significant challenges to human security. Human trafficking or trafficking in persons is regarded as the greatest abuse to human right. The Secretary General of United Nations, Kofi A. Annan regards the trafficking of persons, chiefly women and children as 'one of the most egregious violations of human rights that the United Nations now confronts' (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004). The United Nations Organizations defined human trafficking as 'the recruitment, transport, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person by such means as threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud or deception for the purpose of exploitation' (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2016). It denotes the displacement of human being against their wishes into a life of bondage. This could mean bonded labour, forced marriage or any work which is of forcible nature where coercion and commodification of human life is the reality. It is important to note that human trafficking is not gender specific, men and women both can be victims of trafficking. However, the problem is more pronounced in case of the 'second sex'. Human being are trafficked for various reasons- for the purpose of sexual exploitation or sex trade, forced labour, domestic servitude, bonded labour, forced marriage, organ removal, physical, mental and sexual exploitation of children and forced begging. In all these cases, the consent of the

person concerned is considered irrelevant since the trafficked person is considered equivalent to physical property having no rights at all even over his/her own body. Here, it should be remembered that women are the most vulnerable section followed by children.

The concern over human trafficking is shared by all nations since it endangers human security. Exploitation is the single most intention behind human trafficking. It takes places either directly where the person is aware but is helpless, or it might take place behind a façade, for example bride trafficking where the victim is totally unaware of the situation due to the socio-cultural setting of the society.

In India, the situation is more acute. For a developing country like India, the challenges are many. India has the second largest population in the world and the population growth rate is also high. India is a home to people of diverse socio-economic and cultural background. Again, the number of poor people living in India is also high. As per the study of the Rangarajan Committee 29.5% of the India population still lives below the poverty line (The Times of India, 2014). Although according to the CIA Factbook, about 71.2 percent of the total population above the age of 15 can read and write, people, mostly those living in rural and semi-urban areas are believers and practitioners of meaningless superstitions. All these factors combine to making India vulnerable to human trafficking.

The US Department of State identifies India as a 'source, destination, and transit country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking' (US Department of State, 2013). The startling fact of human trafficking in India is that 90 percent of trafficking in persons is either interstate or intrastate and only 10 percent takes place across global borders (Hameed et al, 2010). The complexities of globalization have fuelled the rise of trafficking in persons and the situation is becoming worse than ever. It is not only multifaceted but also difficult to identify. As per data from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the number of registered human trafficking cases has increased by 38.3% over five years from

2,848 in 2009 to 3,940 in 2013. The conviction rate for such cases has declined 45%, from 1,279 in 2009 to 702 in 2013 (The Indian Express, 2015). Again, data collected in the year 2013 reveals that about 65.5% of the crimes were registered under the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act of 1956. Trafficking of minor girls accounted for 31.1% of the crimes. In 2013, the state of West Bengal was identified as the prime arena of human trafficking in India with 669 registered cases. This was followed by Tamil Nadu with 549 registered cases, Andhra Pradesh 531, Karnataka 412 and Maharashtra (The Indian Express, 2015). Therefore, it remains an undeniable fact that trafficking in persons is the primary threat to human security in India. It endangers lives of millions of people around the world by violating their security, dignity, and social, political, economic and most importantly human rights.

In short, India presents a dismal picture where 90 percent of trafficking takes place internally by virtue of unplanned and unbalanced regional growth. The people susceptible to human trafficking mostly come from the most disadvantaged section of the social stratum including the lower castes. Enmeshed in the whirlpool of baseless superstitions, prejudices and meaningless rituals and practices, the situation becomes more complex. Combined with poverty and illiteracy, these factors act as a vicious circle that aggravate the situation, which facilitates the traffickers in luring the victims, mostly women and children and trafficking therefore becomes an enemy of humankind whose roots lies within the very base of our society.

**Understanding the Meaning and Nature of Bride Trafficking in India**

Bride trafficking is one of neglected dimensions of human trafficking in India. This form of trafficking is very difficult to locate since marriage as an institution hides the whole act. People present including the bride herself is totally unaware of the fact that she is being sold to an unknown male person who from henceforth will be her so called 'husband' in exchange of a 'bride price'. The

victims are the poor, helpless young girls do not even know that they are nothing more than a commodity whose value-in-exchange has already been decided. The traffickers masquerade themselves as marriage brokers and a price is paid to the girl's family which is known as 'bride price'. The girl is then married off to an unknown individual who is ready to pay for the bride, residing at an unknown geographical location, mostly inhabitants of states other than the girls own, and in a wink, she becomes somebody's property, giving human trafficking a new name and a new dimension. It is quite interesting to note that the 'bride price' is not a fixed rate but varies region to region and depending on the girl's age, beauty, virginity. The girl is in demand just because of her reproductive capability and nothing else. Derogatory as the system is, it amounts to conditions nothing short of slavery.

In the place where she is married, including the household where the girl is married, she is known as 'paro' or 'molki' which is a derogatory term meaning 'one who has a price' (Raza, 2014). Hence neither does she command any respect in her husband's family rather her status if worse than a servant. It is important to note that coercion lies at the core of bride trafficking. The girl has no other way but to accept the situation and in case she refuses, coercive means is used to discipline her since she has been sold off via her 'bride price'. Sometimes, the situation is worse when she as 'molki' or 'paro' is resold by her husband to another man through the same process. Hence the torture, abuse and human right violation that the girl faces is tremendous and since it happens under the name of 'marriage' there is nothing can that rescue or redress her from the pathetic condition.

## Identifying the Causes of Bride Trafficking

The causes of bride trafficking lie at the socio-economic background and cultural setting of our society. Bride trafficking is mostly prevalent in states where the sex-ratio is poor. The phenomenon lies in our cultural prejudices of preferring boys over girls. States such as Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh have very poor

sex ratio and consequently the lack of women of marriageable age has given rise to the organized bride trafficking agencies. The sex ratios of these states are pitiable. Female foeticide is rampant in states such as Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. Reports by the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reveal the crude reality of decline in the sex-ratio in India. In the year 1991, the ratio was 947 girls to 1000 boys and after ten years, instead of becoming better, it declined to 927 per 1000 boys (UNICEF, 2015). According to 2011 Census, Haryana has 879 females per 1000 males; Punjab has 895 females per 1000 males. The girls trafficked in the name of bride mostly come from the economically backward regions of Assam, West Bengal and Orissa. A study conducted in Haryana involving more than 10000 households, it was found that about 9,000 married women were bought from other states (Shetty, 2015). Therefore, it can be said that globalization and liberalization instead of leading to betterment of the situation has led to worsening of the situation and the result being that about 80 percent of the districts in India since 1991 have witnessed a decline in sex ratio with Punjab depicting the worse scenario

The states of India can thus be divided into supply states and buyer states. The eastern part of India where the sex-ratio is relatively better constituting the supply states. Some of these states are Assam, West Bengal and Orissa. The girls from the economically backward regions of these states are trafficked in the name of marriage and are transported to the buyer states where the sex-ratio is poor. These are the states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. The traffickers who masquerade themselves as marriage brokers take advantage of such a detrimental sex-ratio coupled with the socio-economic backwardness and traffic women from one corner of the country to another in the name of marriage. They pretend as if they are engaging in a noble deed by helping a man find a bride and also helping a girl coming from a poor family to find groom. They act as marriage brokers and charge a certain amount from the groom whose family is unable to find a girl of marriageable age due to the skewed sex-ratio. Sometimes, the family of the bride-to-be also gets some amount of money for arranging the marriage

ceremony. However, this is nominal compared to the huge sum that the so-called marriage-broker takes from the groom's family. The poor girl hence is tagged with a price, that reveals her value-in-exchange and she is sold off under the impression of something as holy as marriage.

Poverty is another important factor contributing to the alarming increase in bride trafficking. The girls bring trafficked under the veil of marriage are often helpless at the face of their socio-economic conditions. These girls come from economically backward families. And a typical feature that accompanies such economically downtrodden families is high population. It is to say that poverty having large families is two sides of the same coin and therefore acts like a vicious cycle, one reinforcing the other. A high growth rate of population especially among the poor is mainly responsible for the problem of poverty in India. Population growth among the poor sections of the society is high because of their lack of education, traditional attitudes, meaningless prejudices, lack of family planning and the preference for male child. They often do not get the basic minimum food and other necessities required for survival. It is to say that poverty leads to high growth rate of population and large families among the poor and large population in turn leads to poverty. Both poverty and population growth are two sides of the same coin and therefore acts like a vicious cycle, one reinforcing the other. The poor are therefore caught in what is known as the 'vicious circle of poverty'. Studies based on the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) model undertaken by the World Bank's International Comparison Program reveal that in 2011 about 23.6 per cent of India's population which is approximately about 276 million people were living below dollar 1.25 per day.

Illiteracy comes just after poverty. Literacy rate is an important qualitative aspect of the nation. A highly educated and skilled population can become a nation's asset. However, a nation where the majority of the population is illiterate can actually be the reason for a nation's underdevelopment. In India, the general scenario shows that women are less literate than men. The literacy rate is lower among females as compared to males. For example, 2001 data reveals that 54 per cent of females are

literate as compared to 76 per cent literacy rate among males. Poverty and illiteracy are intrinsically linked to one another and one reinforces the other. It can be said that exploitation and ignorance are inherently linked to another.

Again, the problem lies at the very understanding of the concept of marriage in society. Our society considers marriage as pious. It is an institution which manifests the wishes of the Almighty and is made in heaven and accomplished on earth. Such is the understanding of the institution of marriage that nobody even tries to investigate as to what happens behind it. Since trafficking hides behind the name of marriage, the whole society celebrates it, being completely unaware of the reality.

Then comes the question of empowerment. The girls who are victims of bride trafficking are mostly illiterate. They are neither vocal nor can they assert their rights in any way. Here it should be mentioned that in order to assert the right on should know what these rights are. In order to fight for rights, knowing them is very important. Again, even if the girl is vocal about her rights, there is nobody to listen to her problems. Her consent is never considered important, neither before the marriage nor after. The girl is just her husband's private property who can use her in whatever means possible. Women are often regarded as 'second class citizen' possessing no rights and hence the very notion of fighting for these rights are absent. They are neither vocal nor can they assert their rights in any way.

The mindset of the people is another important factor that perpetuates the problem of bride trafficking. Women here are regarded as a mere commodity, as a production machine. They are not even considered a human being who can assert her wish. Obeying whatever her husband and in-laws say becomes her only task. It should not be forgotten that the very marriage had taken place by paying the bride price due to the lack of women in the locality, i.e., the lack of a womb. The demand for 'Molki' or 'paro', is only because she can procreate and nothing more.

## Exploring the Exploitation inherent in Bride Trafficking

The life of 'molki' or 'paro' is a life without dignity. As already stated since the whole process of the so called 'marriage' is flawed and she is identified by the name 'molki' or 'paro', and not a wife, she can be sold off by her husband again and again.

In another instance, if her husband dies, she is not entitled to her husband's property. 'Molki' as she is called suggesting that she has been purchased in other states and brought to the region is thrown out of her in-law's house and often spends her whole life in utter misery (Raza, 2014). After the marriage is consummated they cannot even go back to their parental homes. The reason for this is numerous. First is the geographical distance. These girls are brought from distant states and going back to their home becomes difficult. Secondly, the timid rituals and superstitions prohibit the parents to accept these girls. Girls after being married off are treated as the property of their husband and they belong to the husband's family. Hence, they are treated as guests in their parental homes. They are denied of any right of inheritance of their parental property. In some cases, if the girl is accepted by her parents after being thrown out of her in-laws, the family has to face the wrath of the society and sometimes they are secluded and debarred from engaging in any socio-economic transactions. Hence the poor girl is often shunned by their family and slum becomes her only place of shelter. Here again she is prone to either trafficking or has to serve as bonded labour or has no other way but to take up the profession of a sex- worker. All this is violation of dignity of a woman but then she has no other choice but to accept her destiny.

Bride trafficking is nothing but an 'old wine in a new bottle'. The term in the first instance may seem to be very confusing and deceive since nobody understands that the 'veiled girl' is actually being sold off in the name of marriage where her life is a perpetual bondage. She under the mask of a heavenly institution called marriage is sentenced to life of living hell, a life of slavery until death. The garlands are nothing but shackles and behind the veil hide the exploitative nature. The society feasts and celebrates such kind of bride trafficking knowingly or

unknowingly. The whole thing works like a whirlpool that initiates with marriage and end in servitude.

**Bride Trafficking: Is There a Remedy to this Farce?**

The very first possible solution to this complex phenomenon of bride trafficking lay in creating awareness of what bride trafficking is, what are its dimensions are how this problem is slowly ruining out society by denying the basic human rights to women. Educating the masses especially the women folks regarding their rights and empowering them will halfway solve the problem. There is an intrinsic link with education and betterment of the society. This will also free the masses from the meaningless prejudices and make them vocal to address their issues.

Secondly, it should be mentioned that protection against exploitation is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution of India. Article 23 of the Constitution of India enumerates, 'Traffic in human beings and begar and other similar forms of forced labour are prohibited and any contravention of this provision shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law' and 'Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from imposing compulsory service for public purpose, and in imposing such service the State shall not make any discrimination on grounds only of religion, race, caste or class or any of them' (Article 23, The Constitution of India).

Under this background, the government should enact strong laws which directly hit at the problem of bride trafficking. The requirement of proper laws and regulations is the foremost requirement to solve the problem. Without legal enforcement, nothing can take a concrete shape. The rights, remedies of the violated ones should be legally addressed. The role of the Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) should be strengthened and they should take serious steps to stop bride trafficking in India.

Thirdly, all marriages should be registered according to the established marriage laws in India. Registration of marriages should be made mandatory and strict penalties should be implemented for non-registration. By doing this, women will at least enjoy the Constitutional and legal status entitled by the law and marriage act, and therefore legal actions can be taken for any kind of violation and exploitation. Rule of law should be strictly implemented and severe penalties should be imposed on violators

Fourthly, single handed focus should be given to alleviating poverty and improving the sex ratio. Government agencies and nongovernmental agencies should work hand in hand to alleviate the problem of skewed sex ratio and implement poverty alleviation mechanism.

Finally, society needs to take up the problem and find meaningful ways to address it. If the intellectuals and educated ones in cooperation with various nongovernmental agencies work together in addressing the question and creating awareness, the problem will be solved much earlier. Media both print and electronic needs to be more vocal in taking up the problem of bride trafficking by reaching those who have been affected by it.

The solution therefore lay in the amalgamated efforts of all these actors, the governmental, nongovernmental including individuals themselves since the enemies of human kind are spread in a clandestine manner.

## The Pathos of Bride Trafficking: Concluding Observation

The fate of women in a society where 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' is pitiable (Beauvior, 1949). Bride trafficking is one most challenging threat to human security. It denies the right to a dignified life and hence violates a woman of her fundamental human and constitutional rights. A woman is known by her dignity. She should be life any free man in society and should enjoy all the fundamental rights that Constitution enumerates. Bride trafficking is one of the challenges to human security and hence a non-traditional security threat to India. It

leads to problems such as a life of slavery and forced prostitution. She is denied of the rights to her own body which then becomes the property of her so-called husband since she is stamped as sold and a 'bride price' has been paid in exchange of her. The development of single section of humankind, known as women is retarded and reversed, and misery and pity are the only two things she is left with. States and international agencies should take immediate steps to address the rising cases of bride trafficking in developing countries like India, so that no more 'molki' or 'paro' exist in any corner of the world and every woman can enjoy equal rights in a marriage where her consent is equally important and can lead a dignified and respectful life and an individual, as a bride, as somebody's better half.

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# MANAGING WATER CONFLICTS IN INDIA: THE LARGE DAM PERSPECTIVE

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*'Water in India is more valuable than Gold of Australia.'*

- Gen. Sir A.T. Cotton (1885)

(Singh, Satyajit. 1997:23)

Water is one of the most crucial elements for the sustenance of life of humans, plants and animals on earth. Its availability and usability determines the growth of life on the planet. Whether for human consumption, agriculture, energy generation and maintenance of ecological balance and biodiversity, water is the critical life sustaining element on earth. The demand of water for both agricultural and non agricultural uses has grown rapidly because of increasing population, increase in per capita income, industrialization as well as urbanization. But the supply of water (surface and ground water) has not increased with its demand; thereby pushing the world towards an imminent water crisis. Climate change is effecting a change in the patterns of rainfall and snowfall; the glaciers which are the largest reserves of fresh water, the only suitable form of water for human use are melting; sea water is rising and there has been a change in the global temperatures leading to a change in the entire eco- systems. This has generated competition and conflict among nations and states over access to and use of water at different levels with India being no exception. India is also entering into a period of water crisis, which not only threatens the basic human right of access to safe drinking water, but, also puts the livelihoods of millions of people at risk. Groundwater levels are

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falling, rivers are getting polluted and storage and use of waters through dams have led to serious political turmoil and dissidence on several occasions regarding the usage of waters of inter -state rivers. Let us begin by understanding the dam building exercise undertaken by independent India as part of its water resource planning programme.

## Water Resource Planning in India: The Dam Building exercise

Throughout history water has been treated as a common property accessible to all. For Iyer (1998), the idea of water resource planning in India is relatively of recent origin, although water harvesting or water management has been practiced since the pre-colonial times. In pre-colonial times, water management was essentially local and in the hands of the community (Iyer, 1998:3198). What changed in the colonial and the post-colonial times is the fascination with western engineering technology that boasted of tripling the size of profits earned through investment and hence dawned the era of large scale concrete projects. Taming the free flowing river water through large dams seemed to be the favourable destination of the techno-savvy Indian state. Ownership and control over resources got transferred from the community to the state characterized by the relationship between the bureaucrats and technocrats and conflict over water rights emerged with the treatment of water as an 'economic good' rather than a 'common good'.

Planning in India started with the independence of the country in 1947 with the five year plans, marking the beginning of planned economic development in the country with increased emphasis on accelerating economic growth in order to re-organize the economy of the country. Jawaharlal Nehru, hailed as the architect of modern India, favored the use of technology and modern industries as the epitome of ushering the new nation towards development and modernity. Large dams were favored for augmenting agricultural production through irrigation facilities which in turn would be necessary to feed the nation teeming with a billion population. Controlling flood and generation of hydroelectricity were the other push factors behind the rationale favoring large dams. If Nehru hailed the Bhakra Nangal project

as 'an emblem of modern India', Ambedkar too supported the Damodar Valley Project as 'an exemplar of a new India, where the bounds of caste would weaken and a new division of labor, based on merit rather than on birth, would prevail'(Rangarajan, 2010: 111-121). It had been estimated that between1951-82, India had built more dams than any other country after USA, USSR, China and Japan; a staggering figure of about 883 dams as opposed to 202 before independence. Such measures saw a seven fold increase in wheat output and tripled rice production in the four decades after independence. Moreover, the hydroelectric power output also grew by a factor of twelve. In fact, in peninsular India characterized by seasonal rivers, large dams became an 'attractive' option (Ibid, 2010:123).

Water resource planning in India was largely oriented towards the dam and reservoir projects that would harness and tap water for potential human use mainly for irrigation. Damming rivers in fact is seen as the panacea of the development paradigm; the fit –all solution to problems of agricultural production, flood control, irrigation in arid and semi –arid regions, electricity generation as well as urban development. In fact, it is now a well – established fact that the large dams are the most suitable form of clean and cheap power generation and as countries compete in the global market, they need to enhance and ensure their energy security which is crucial for their economic development. And as states strive to meet their evolving energy needs, dam building has emerged as an important policy priority among the policy makers. However, the planning process rarely included the environment factor and ignored the consequences of such modernizing efforts on the livelihood of the people as well as the on the environment.

The National Water Development Agency had been working on possibilities of water storages, linkages and transfers from the 1980s onwards. The government of India had set up the National Commission on Integrated Water Resources Development Plan in 1996 which deliberated on the issue of 'inter-basin transfers'. But the principles of water sharing between riparian states and between different segments of river basins and sub basins within each state are not clearly defined. River interlinking has become another important component of water resource

planning in the country. There has been a comprehensive plan to link the Himalayan rivers with those of peninsular India for inter-basin transfer of water. But such a grand plan is diagnosed with major problems like taking into account the reasonable needs of the different states, the dry-land areas of central and western India, sediment supply to the downstream areas besides land submergence, rehabilitation and resettlement issues as envisioned by Shah (Shah, 2013:41). Consciousness regarding a 'National Water Policy' has figured in the agenda of the ruling coalition since the late 1980s. The National Water Resources Council had also adopted a National Water Policy in September 1987 emphasizing more on resource planning and management rather than concentrating only on major irrigation and large dam projects (Iyer, 1998:3203). The Indian state is also planning to convert the Brahmaputra basin into a potential power house for the entire country through construction of about 168 dams in the river basin. Hydro power generation has been considered as one of the major sectors for bringing about economic transformation for the North Eastern region of India. The potentialities of the region have been explored and the water resources are set to be tapped to meet the ever increasing demands of energy security. Such measures come in a moment when the country is faced with an imminent water crisis that threaten the basic right to drinking water and also threaten to destroy livelihood practices of different communities. Climate change, depleting groundwater table, increasing instances of flood, growing demands of an industrialized economy have augmented the necessity of water related projects in order to aid the supply side particularly in a country which is heavily dependent on the monsoons for its water supply.

## Water conflicts in India: The Dam experience

Conflicts around water are not a new phenomenon. It has been in existence since pre-colonial times, but its manifestations became prominent with water being used as a commodity rather than a 'common'. The commodification of water through dams has been at the centre of debates in the present day development discourse. The following is an attempt to illustrate the diverged dimensions of water conflicts owing to the construction of dams.

## *Dams: the Dark Side*

Large dams have become a prominent instrument for economic development in the present day world. It has been estimated that by 2000, the number of large dams had reached to over 45,000 and were spread across 140 countries. On the positive side, they provide water storage, enabling regions with difficult terrain to grow economically like the cities of Arizona or Phoenix; provide hydropower to industrial and urban centers; foster agricultural production through irrigation etc. (WCD,2000). The World Commission on Dams Report (2000) estimated that the large dams contribute about 12-16% of global food production. Besides, irrigation, they are definitely needed for the generation of hydroelectric power which is clean and non- polluting unlike thermal power plants. If properly designed and built, dams can actually aid economic and social development.

But of late, environment impacts of large dams are becoming visible on public policy making through their impacts on watersheds, riverine ecology, water quality etc. Large dams cause significant changes in river hydrology, sediment load, riparian vegetation, submergence of land, destruction of fish species etc. Moreover, socially these projects attract strong opposition due to large scale displacement of people and huge submergence of land, including forest cover, thereby, uprooting communities from their natural habitat and depriving them of their livelihood. River flows are altered by dams often disrupt or destroy aquatic habitats bringing in hardships to river-dependent populations who rely on flood plain eco-systems for their livelihood.

Large dam projects involve huge finances, which generally escalate due to non completion of projects in a time bound manner burdening the government budget as well as failing to ensure adequate returns for reinvestment and projected benefits. The influence of the powerful capitalist lobby of the planning process coupled with political corruption at different levels has plagued the damming process in the country with benefits accruing to the landed class rather than the displaced and the dispossessed. Political economy issues apart, environmental and social issues like land submergence, habitat destruction, displacement and loss of

livelihood opportunities are some added that have forced the policy planners to rethink their stand on large dam projects. Although EIA studies have been made mandatory in recent times, but such exercises are often carried out by the in house parties (or private companies) which are more concerned about their profits and projects getting approved rather than exhaustive and elaborate analysis of the environmental impacts. Affected persons rarely get the 'benefits' (improved agricultural production, increased irrigation facilities, employment facilities in project sites etc) of the projects or get the chance of involvement in the policy making process as important stakeholders. Moreover, compensation paid to the displaced persons either in terms of cash or land can hardly mitigate their loss of resources or sense of belongingness to the earlier environment.

## Social and ecological dimensions

Large dams carry potential of catastrophic disaster for the society as well as the environment. Large dams have been a part of the Indian government's development plan since independence. Recent studies however have been critical of the dam building paradigm undertaken by the Indian state. According to Mihir Shah (2013), 'a World Bank study shows that "there is little value to additional storage in most of the peninsular river basins (the Kaveri, Krishna and Godavari) and in the Narmada and Tapti" (Briscoe and Malik 2006: 32). Similarly, "a study (Amarsinghe et al 2007) by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) suggests that the Krishna and Kaveri have reached full or partial closure. Another IWMI study shows that in the Krishna river basin, the storage capacity of major and medium reservoirs has reached a total water yield (Venot et al 2007), with virtually no water reaching the sea in low rainfall years" ' (Shah, 2013:40). Cautioning the ongoing projects in the Himalayan basin, Shah analyses that being young mountains, the Himalayas are prone to high rates of erosion, which increases the risk of high sedimentation in the reservoir which in turn can render the power turbines becoming dysfunctional. Citing Pomeranz (2009), Shah remarks that around '40% of hydro-dams built in Tibet in the 1940s had become unusable due to siltation of reservoirs' (ibid, 2013:41).

In case of the Hirakud dam constructed in 1956 across the river Mahanadi in Orissa about 249 villages (108 fully and 141 partly) in Sambalpur district of Orissa and 36 villages (3 fully and 33 partly) in Pusar and Saria P S of Madhya Pradesh and around 112,038.59 acres of cultivated land were submerged. While the gains of the project have been recorded in terms of irrigation, the loss in terms of revenue of the submerged land, the output from it, forest and produces, grassland, fields, fish, wildlife, spread of peculiar disease from humans/animal and loss of occupation of certain categories (especially of the service castes) of people, etc, have not been properly evaluated. The affected people underwent tremendous psycho- logical set-back and economic hardships for survival and rehabilitation (Baboo, 1991: 2373-2379).

The ambitious Sardar Sarovar project expected to bring a sea change in the economic scenario of the country as per the neo-liberalization thrust of the economy has rendered thousands of people homeless with loss of cultivable land and livelihood opportunities. Reportedly, it displaced more than 43000 families who still have not been properly rehabilitated. Same is the case with the Tehri project where the project affected persons are still living in miserable conditions. (Baboo, 1991: 2373-2379)

Floods from the Kurishu dam in Bhutan and the Ranganadi dam in Arunachal Pradesh have wrecked havoc in the lives of the people in Assam, particularly the farming community. The hasty attitude of the central and state governments in implementing projects to tap the hydroelectric power capacity of the Himalayan rivers of North East India has been met with severe resistance from the civil society. Terming such development agenda of the government as 'predatory development', Hiren Gohain (2008) warns of the impending calamity that the state seems to unleash on the people of the region (Gohain, 2008:19).

Assam is a bio-diversity hotspot and exhibits a unique blend of cultures and traditions of diverse communities, many of whom depend on Common Property Resources (CPR) for their livelihood. The 2000 MW Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric power project in Assam with a height of 116m, India's biggest so far; the Pagladia

project, Kameng, Middle Siang (Arunachal Pradesh) and others have been at the centre of criticism in recent times for their potential adverse effects on the fragile ecology of the seismologically active region along with the potential negative effects on the life of the people displaced, depriving them of their livelihood opportunities. Concerns over damming the river Kopili for development purposes reached a new height when the Lower Kopili Hydro Electric Power Project (LKHEP) proposed in 2012. The catastrophic flood of 2004 in Assam that affected about 132 villages in the Kampur area of Nagaon district and other parts of Morigaon district of Assam and displaced about 1,92,000 people is a perfect example of dam induced flood which was held to be a consequence of the release of water from the Kopili reservoir (SANDRP,2013). In such a situation construction of another dam in the same river might increase the flood frequency in the downstream areas affecting thousands of people. What is ignored is the fact that although direct displacement of communities may be relatively smaller, but people to be 'affected' by the dam in the downstream areas will be high.

### Inter-riparian conflicts

Inter- riparian tensions also form a part of the dissatisfactions associated with large dams in India. Entitlements over water were defined in terms of the volume of water that riparian states can use. Farmers in the command area of projects who have land are entitled to use water for irrigation purposes but with certain conditions. Property rights in water were linked to the distribution of land which means that the majority of the landless farmers have technically no rights over the 'common' natural resource i.e. water. Conflicts have erupted over the entitlement rights to waters of the Krishna, Godavari and Narmada which were decided by special tribunals in the 1960s and 1970s. (Vaidyanathan, 2013: 133). As for the other interstate rivers, the Central Water Commission decides the utilizable flows in each state. The Inter State Water Dispute Tribunal has been set up as a dispute resolution mechanism. But the tribunal proceedings and the decisions are often shadowed by political maneuvering without any specific binding judgements.

India has 18 rivers out of which 17 are interstate rivers. Damming rivers either for irrigation purposes or power generation or any other factors creates large reservoirs which supply water for irrigation and other activities. Upstream areas are in an advantageous position in receiving water than downstream areas. This is where the conflict starts between upstream states and downstream states regarding the sharing of water of inter- state rivers. Although water supplies, canals and drainage are subjects of the State list, Sections 130 to 132 of the Government of India Act, 1935 limits states' use of inter - state rivers. Moreover, Article 262 of the Indian Constitution empowers the Parliament to adjudicate between states on any dispute or complaint with regard to use, distribute or control of the waters of any interstate rivers or river valleys. Article 262(2) provides for the establishment of special tribunals to look into such conflicts. (Radhakrishnan, 2016:12). Indian history is replete with such water conflicts and solutions to such conflicts seem to be far - fetched. The Cauvery dispute between the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu is a testimony to the long drawn struggle for the sharing of water.

Indian economy is predominantly agrarian and the agricultural sector is mostly dependent on the monsoons. In years of normal rainfall, supply of water to meet the demands of agriculture as well as drinking seems to be satisfactory. But in years of distress, conflict over water may rise to the levels of bloodshed and violence. The recurrence of the Cauvery dispute in 2016 with protests and blockades between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu reminds us of the new age conflicts that are based more on resource distribution than on traditional security factors. Radhakrishnan (2016) suggests that the 'reappearance of the Cauvery crisis shows that only equitable sharing of river waters combined with scientific water conservation and management measures and time tested farmer-to-farmer initiatives can be the solution to the dispute.' (Ibid, 2016:12).

On the other hand, supporters of large irrigation projects point out that although these projects involve huge costs, but there is also the 'cost of not doing' anything. Iyer (1998) remarks that "there is a tendency to treat the project as sacrosanct and to keep on saying that while social and environmental issues should

be looked into, the project must go on and must not be disturbed"(Iyer, 1998: 3201). It exemplifies the fact that engineering aspects are mostly preferred rather than social and environmental aspects. Despite such experiences, the Indian state in alliance with private firms seems to be obsessed with large dam projects in order to generate 'hydro dollars' at the cost of the livelihood of the common man.

## Managing Water Conflicts: The Road Ahead

In view of the large scale destruction and threats to the natural habitat that large dams pose as well as the risk to human life, such planning measures have faced sharp criticisms in recent times. Civil society organizations have strongly reacted against large damming projects which not only alter the environment, but pose a severe threat to human life. Large dams may not always provide the fit all solution to problems like flood management or generation of electricity. Rather other alternatives may bring down the social and environmental costs that large projects involve.

It has been generally held that future wars among nations will not be based on the arms, but resources like water, which has speed up the technology-driven planning for larger projects in countries like China and India in order to meet the growing demand. One such alternative to large projects is giving importance to local water harvesting and management schemes which can boost the supply side in view of the growing demand for water and the imminent water crisis set to hit the world in the coming decades.

Secondly, planning at the micro level will be more effective and people – oriented than planning at the macro level which seeks to overlook many social aspects.

Thirdly, water resource management should be given priority rather than water resource development. Specially, management at the local level should be stressed.

Fourthly, traditional methods of water conservation like *canals, talabs* etc. should be revived for irrigation purposes.

Fifthly, planning measures such as preparation of EIA, environment clearance, rehabilitation and resettlement issues etc. should be strictly adhered to.

Lastly, people's participation and cooperation at all levels should be properly ensured. Consultation with the project affected persons and their consent is a must before commissioning of large dam projects, if at all they are inevitable.

## Conclusion

Dam building has emerged as an important policy priority of individual countries to cater to their water and energy needs which, on the other hand, carries significant geo-political concerns. Damming trans-national as well as interstate rivers increases inter-riparian tensions and strains relationships between upstream and downstream states characterized by mutual distrust. Water politics have seemed to emerge as the new dimension of state politics in recent years. Concerns over food security and water security – the basic elements of life- have risen manifold. Under such circumstances, competition for appropriation of natural resources, particularly water has emerged as the next generation war, providing the underlying collision over inter-riparian tensions, besides, other social and environmental tensions.

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# HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*Chakrapani Patir*

The concept of human rights is as old as human civilization. Human rights are inherent and inalienable rights which are due to every individual of the world by virtue of being a human being. Earlier these rights were characterized as 'Rights of Man' or 'Natural Rights'. The basic rights and amenities for a free and dignified existence for human beings are generally known as human rights. These rights are specially related to our life, liberty, equality and the most fundamental needs of human beings, without which one cannot live as human being. In fact, human rights being an eternal part of the nature of human beings are very essential for individuals to develop their personality, talent, intelligence, human qualities and conscience and to enable them to satisfy their spiritual and other human needs. It is based on the assumption that human beings are born equal in dignity and rights. So, these rights are universal in nature, which equally belong to all members of the human family irrespective of one's race, caste, color, religion, nationality, language, sex and any other factors.

Human rights are primarily concerned with those basic rights and amenities which are very essential for a free and dignified existence of every human being. The main objective of human rights is that every human being of the world must have a favorable atmosphere where he/she can develop human qualities and fulfill other fundamental human needs. The most significant aspect of human rights is

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that they are so intrinsic to human life that if they are taken away the human beings are reduced to the level of animals. Due to their inextricable link with human beings, these rights are called human rights. As such the basic idea behind the concern for human rights stems from the realization of the fact that human life and human dignity cannot be restored if they are taken away. That is why The United Nations Centre for Human Rights defines human rights 'as those rights which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as human beings'.So, the deprivation of human rights creates a dehumanized condition in society. Therefore, the universal respect and observance of human rights is a major concern for every sensitized person on the globe.  But in reality the universal realization of human rights is still far away from the achievement of the mankind. Besides, there many newly emerging issues which are severely threatening basic human security of a large section of people in society. Among them the issue of Internally Displacement Persons (IDPs)  induced by various natural and antrophogenic  factors can be considered as the most significant one in recent time. But observations show that this crisis most often remains out of the social domain and  human security discourses. In view of this, the present study makes an endeavour to draw a theoretical framework of human rights and IDPs.

## (I)

The problem of IDPs has drawn attention of social scientists and policy analysts from the last few decades. It has been noticed that every year, millions of people have been uprooted in their own countries for various man-made and natural factors and this phenomenon brings drastic changes to their lives and livelihoods. The IDPs are the largest 'at risk' population in the world and has emerged as one of the most pressing humanitarian, human rights, political and security issues facing the mankind today. The IDPs are generally in desperate straits as they are forcibly separated from their homes, communities and livelihoods and thereby become more vulnerable to starvation, diseases and soft targets for physical assault, forced recruitment and sexual abuse (Barman, 2009, pp.219-220).

The phrase 'IDPs' is of quite recent origin in academic domains. Being forced migrated community the status of displaced people is very akin to refugees and usually both the terms are used synonymously. But many social scientists are deliberately trying to differentiate it from the refugees, as the IDPs mean another vulnerable group of people; though they share some uniform chacteristics with the refugees. A lot of studies and discussions have focused on refugees, but there is hardly any mention of IDPs. On the other hand, there is neither any international law, nor any municipal law to define the IDPs. That is why most of the time the phrase 'internal refugee' or 'in-country refugee' is used to refer to the IDPs. Empirically both the terms refer to the two different types of unprotected, a helpless and marginalized group of people. In fact, the IDPs mean the persons who are forcefully displaced and who flee from one place to another within the territory of their own country. They are unable to cross the international state borders and reach to another country where they could receive the protection and assistance. The reasons for their displacement may be numerous, i.e. armed conflict, foreign aggression, occupation, internal upheavals, torture, terrorism, development or natural causes but their conditions are similar to that of the refugees. Both are desperately in need of protection and assistance. The only difference between the refugees and IDPs is that the former are persons without documents, thereby giving rise to uncertainty as their nationality status and even of their domicile. The condition of the IDPs may be more precarious than that of the refugees due to the fact that they are forced to remain in unsafe areas where they cannot have access to food, drinking water and other basic needs of life. In simple words, it may be concluded that when a group of uprooted persons take shelter in foreign countries, they are known as refugees, and while they remain within their own country, they are categorized as IDPs.

Throughout history, and in every part of the world, people have been uprooted by persecution, conflict or environmental disaster. Various studies reveal that the frequency, size and dire consequences of this global problem have been increasing subsequently in recent times. The humanitarian community is

increasingly aware about this humane problem. The last few decades have witnessed an enormous increase in the number of IDPs in the world. Yet there is no comparable structure for supporting the IDPs. It is noteworthy that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has a mandate to assist only refugees. So, an international mechanism to address the problem of the IDPs is felt to be very urgent. Only recently the international community has developed a mechanism that is popularly known as UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Therefore, in order to fill this gap the UN Secretary General in 1992 appointed Dr. Francis Deng, of Sudan as Special Representative for IDPs. In 1998, Dr. Deng presented this guiding principle after a diligent effort. This document contains thirty principles to guide governments and non-governmental organizations in providing protection and assistance of the IDPs (Baruah, Das & Lahkar, 2007, p3).

The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement not only lay down the rights of the IDPs relevant to the needs they encounter in different stages of displacement and but also provides a handy scheme to design a national policy or law on displaced persons by the concerned states but it has also developed an acceptable definition of 'IDPs'. The Guiding Principle has defined the IDPs as "Persons or group of persons who have been forced to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violation of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border"( Baruah, Das & Lahkar, 2009, p. 9).

From the above definition we find three categories of IDPs:-

a) Conflict induced IDPs.

b) Natural disaster/calamity induced IDPs.

c) Man-made or development induced IDPs.

IDPs generated from various conflicts or violent activities, i.e. war, armed conflict, persecution, racial conflict, communal violence, ethnic conflict, etc. are included under the conflict induced IDPs. Environmental disasters like, earthquakes,

tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, cyclones, landslides, droughts, deforestation, desertification, flood and erosion lead to the creation of a vast magnitude IDPs in the world each year, which may be categorized as natural disaster/calamity induced IDPs.

Besides, many developmental activities generate a large number of IDPs. At present, it is a well-accepted fact that though the development projects lead to the qualitative changes and stability in political and economic lives of various classes and communities, it also degrades the socio-economic and cultural lives of many marginalized social groups of the same society. Thus, development is neither neutral nor equal rather it is biased and unequal. In many cases it is brutal, ruthless and inhuman. It is evident that in many developing countries, land is being systematically appropriated in an attempt to fuel economic growth. In many cases, local inhabitants are simply told to leave their land or are forcibly evicted from it. The IDPs resulting from industrialization, urbanization, construction of dams, highways, railways, mines, energy pipelines are counted under man-made or development induced IDPs.

## (II)

Involuntary displacement directly attacks on the basic human security issues of human being. Studies show that the IDPs become very vulnerable and marginalized social group after the forceful ejection from their home and original habitats. The forced displacement from their home and habitat creates a very pathetic atmosphere as it leads to the immense loss of life sustaining resources, social networks, neighbours and access to common property rights. The involuntary deprivations of the life sustain system leads the IDPs towards the state of massive deficit of the basic rights and amenities for human survival. It exhibits that some undesired external forces compel the marginalized section of the society to flee from their native places and which imposes a very painful and helpless life circle for them. An acute crisis of basic human security awaits them. This evidently shows that the forced migrated communities are alienated from their livelihood, including

land, food, occupation and house and go without any assistance and protection. In reality, the refugee crisis anywhere often receives considerable international attention when a large number of refugees cross into neighboring countries and their arrival sets off a chain of events that result in extensive international involvement. But on the contrary, when people are displaced within their own country's border, then such involvements fail to draw similar attention. The crisis, neither receives national nor international attention and most of the times the victims go unnoticed, unprotected and unassisted (Haokip, 2002, p222). And it is very pertinent, to be noted that though in general assumption the issue IDPs are very similar with the refugees yet in reality the plight or status of the IDPs are even worse than refugee as the former cannot cross international borders and has to seek help from that authority which is very often responsible for their displacement. Like many other countries, the Indian Government lacks any formal structure or mechanism regarding IDPs. And no national government, including India wants external involvement in what they consider to be a 'national affair'.

Internal displacement causes a very traumatic effect on the life and the livelihood of the victims. The IDPs are deprived of their 'right to life with dignity' after the exodus from their most important possessions— land, home and livelihood. The significant aspect of the forced migrated deprivation is that it leads to the decline in their social and economic status and extreme poverty. Investigations on IDPs reveal that most of the victims of the population displacement are agro-based people. The lands which are the only source of their livelihood are taken away by the government in the name of developmental purpose or become unsafe for their survival due to various conflicts or may be destroyed by natural calamities. So, the situation of landlessness totally removes their main sources of income and pushes them to the state of destitution. The experience reveals that landlessness and joblessness increase after displacement which leads them to occupational shift from cultivation to daily wage earners, domestic servants and so on ultimately resulting in the decline in their socio-economic status and to a situation of impoverishment and marginalization. In Northeast India, it has been witnessed

that the condition of landless peasants, after the forceful ejection from their native places has become very painful. The lands are the fundamental foundation upon which their productive system and the livelihood are based. So, the alienation from their lands is the principal form of de-capitalization and pauperization of the IDPs. The loss of the main sources of livelihood brings massive crisis of survival. Empirical investigations on uprooted communities depict that they do not get adequate food to eat, access to safe drinking water and even enough cloth to cover themselves. Even, many of them die because of starvation.

This evidently highlights that the occupational shift from cultivation to daily wage earnings and other degrading professions become endemic among the IDPs. The lands, their basic source of livelihood is lost for from them for ever, after their displacement. So, occupational shift becomes a natural outcome among the IDPs. This condition is very much common among the IDPs in Assam, especially induced by floods and erosions. The persons who had maintained a dignified life based on their lands are transformed into economically destitute and socially rootless after their involuntary migration. Apart from being daily wage earners even many of them become vagrants. Along with occupational shift the problem of migrated laborers also emerges among the IDPs. It has been noticed that, most of the time it becomes impossible for them to cater to their basic needs within their locality, and under such circumstances, many members of the displaced families are bound to go to other places in search of work. From field studies, it is seen that many displaced persons in Northeast India are working as daily wage earners i.e. rickshaw puller, *motia*, domestic servants, *thela-wala* etc. in many parts of the region. In such a situation displaced families tend to become vulnerable.

Forced migration leads to homelessness. The IDPs remain homeless within their own country. That is why Das (2005, p. 113) has referred to them as 'homelessness at home'. In fact, IDPs are a result of the loss of their home and homestead places and their condition begins to worsen after their displacement. Various researches on population displacement show that the IDPs are persons who flee from their houses either for various man-made or natural activities, i.e.

conflict, violence, development activities or by natural disasters, especially floods and erosions, these people are compelled to stay at relief camps or to be sheltered at the road sides or high embankments in very unsafe and unhygienic atmosphere.

Various reports on IDPs of the Northeast India show that millions of displaced people still remain homeless in this region for many years. Most of them, are taking shelter in various relief camps for many decades and a great chunk of them are also living at road sites, high embankments in sub-human condition. Even the government does not provide enough food items, drinking water, medicines and other basic services for the displaced persons who are sheltered in the various relief camps. It is very pathetic to see that the temporarily set up relief camps or their sheltered places become permanent address for the uprooted people. For instance, in his study, Barman (2008, pp.172-173) reveals that there are more than 200,000 displaced people who have been living in 78 relief camps in Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar district of lower Assam since 1996. Besides, in Assam every year, millions of displaced people are displaced due to flood and erosion alone. Records and empirical investigations show that due to the lack rehabilitation and resettlement the victims have to survive in a dehumanized condition at road sites, dykes, high embankments, highways and so on for decades after decades. And it is astonishing to see that the condition of these unfortunates is leading to more alarming because of the substantial increase of the enormity of flood and erosion in the state.

Mass exodus causes a very negative impact on health. IDPs become mentally and physically very weak due to destitution and alienation. It induces social stress and psychological trauma. Lack of food, non-availability of safe drinking water, absence of adequate place for housing and the dearth of cloth to protect their body worsen their physical and mental strength. They also suffer from malnutrition and subsequent diseases are very high among them. Among them the infants, children, women and the elderly are the weakest segments. Besides, deprivation from minimum health service makes the situation more critical. It is surprising to see that many displaced persons in the Northeast, even living at government sponsored relief camps, die of hunger and lack of basic health services.

Studies reveal that there are no immunization programs for the children in the relief camps and many of them die because of simple diseases.

Many social scientists caution that IDPs are very vulnerable to infection by various diseases, especially HIV and AIDS. Because, it shows that many members of the displaced families engage themselves as migrated labouers and most of them work as daily wage-earners and stay in slums. In such an atmosphere, the risk of infection goes up. Under such circumstances, migrated labors may become carriers of such diseases in their community. A survey carried out in Jharkhand (Rural Palma District) on migrated rural youths, who migrated to other places (especially urban areas) in search of alternative sources of employment due to the lack of employment opportunities and low agricultural productivity in their area, reveals that they have a very high risk of infected by HIV( Dhapola, Mrinalika. Mona Sharma & Bharat Sahah, 2007.pp. 40-47).

Involuntary displacement substantially degrades the social status of the IDPs. Studies show that the consequences of forced migration not only completely destroy the economic lives of the victims, but it cause very severe impact on the social and cultural lives of the IDPs. The forceful ejection from ancestral lands totally de-establishes the long standing social establishments of the IDPs. It fragments and destroys community life, social organizations, kinships, families, neighborhood and the social order. The fracture of long established community, the dismantling production system, scattered kinship group/family, destruction of all community support systems creates a state of massive socio-economic and cultural insecurity. Such insecurity results in marginalization or what Cernea (2000, pp.11-55) calls 'social disarticulation'. Experience shows that the displaced communities constitute one of the largest excluded groups in the society. And it is noteworthy that very often their occurrences remain unnoticed from the public realm. Hence, they experience a high degree of alienation and deprivation from the larger society. On the other hand, investigations on the issues of population displacement highlight that the worst suffers of this humanitarian crisis are the socio-economically and politically most disadvantaged communities. So, the

consequence of displacement heightens their marginality, vulnerability and social exclusions of the already marginalized and vulnerable community of the society. Moreover, the adoption of nomadic lifestyle in search of livelihood and shelter makes them undesirably unwanted and strange in the eyes of the hosts. Ultimately IDPs become people of nowhere within their own places.

Involuntarily uprooted people deprived of common property rights. Investigations reveal that the condition of the IDPs becomes more intolerable due to their loss of the access to common (non-individual) property assets that used to belong to their communities before their displacement. The loss of common property, such as forest lands, grazing lands, ponds, burial grounds etc. further deteriorates their condition. Non-individual property works as a safety-valve for the agro-based communities in their life sustaining system. It is observed in Northeast India that most of agro-based communities directly depend upon common assets for their day to day life. For example, public ponds are used for fishing, from the forest, they collect most of their needs like, wood, bamboo, cane, thatching grass, etc. for construction of houses and many edible fruits, vegetables, other edible forest products, medicines, firewood and other basic needs.

The act of forced displacement also impinges on the political aspects of the IDPs. They become politically insignificant communities. This devaluation resulted from their economic destitution and social disarticulation. Being scattered, voiceless and unorganized people they start to deprive of the basic political rights enshrined in the constitution. Investigations reveal that the IDPs not only deprived of various schemes and policies initiated by the government for the benefit of the poor and weak section of the society, but most often they debar from the most important democratic right- right to vote. It has noticed that most of the time the IDPs are not counted as voters in the relocated places. In an investigation Goswami(2008, p. 187) highlights that the displaced persons by the Bodo militants in Kokrajhar and Chirang districts have not returned to their places from which they were displaced due to fear of loss of life and limb. And because they are enlisted in the electoral lists there, they have not been able to vote since 1993.

Again, because they are enlisted as belonging to those villages from which they were uprooted, benefits which they could have otherwise availed of- like the facilities under the below poverty line schemes of the state-are closed to them.

Sometimes the issues of IDPs create major political turmoil viz. the crisis of citizenship and voting right. This serious issue has been plaguing among the Chakma and the Hajong refugees in Arunachal Pradesh since the few decades. In is noteworthy that the Chakma and the Hajong refugees who were settled in Arunachal Pradesh under the sponsorship of the Government of India in the mid 1960s are now facing a serious threat to their existence due to sharpening Arunachali identity there. They even after having lived in Arunachal Pradesh for about five decades, are still remained as 'stateless community' waiting endlessly for an elusive citizenship (Hussain2002, pp.286-287).

Involuntary displacements bring different kinds of problems to the affected people depending on time and circumstances. The consequences of displacement are felt differently by men, women and children as issues of livelihood, education and health are different for each group due to age and sex. Among the displaced communities, women and children are in the majority as well as very vulnerable segments. A study carried out by the University of Dibrugarh (2007/8) highlights the plight of displaced womenfolk in Assam. It focuses how the conditions of women became very pathetic after their displacement. The forced to seek refuge either at relief camps or a road sites, dykes, high embankments so on without privacy humiliate them. The plight of homelessness, foodlessness and other basic needs of human survival completely rob their privacy and dignity. Investigations have highlighted that the women IDPs suffer from acute health deteriorated due the lack of food items, shelter and psychological trauma. Moreover, the absence of primary health service and care makes their condition more vulnerable. In such situation, the condition of the mother of babies and pregnant women becomes very pitiable. Instances show that consequence of the forced displacement mortality rate of women IDPs during delivery as well as among the newborn babies subsequently go high.

Women displacees are more vulnerable to violence at every stage of their displacement. They not only lose their privacy and dignity, but very often they become easy prey to sexual abuse and human trafficking. Even in the relief camps they do not have any privacy and security. In his case study Barman (2009, pp. 230) has highlighted the pathetic conditions of women IDPs from lower Assam, victimized by the Bodo Movement. He has mentioned that due to the fear of rape and other atrocities women IDPs cannot go out of the camps to work and even within the camps they are not secure and usually become victims of sexual harassment. Besides, they are in the camps are highly vulnerable to trafficking. There are a number of news reports of women trafficking from the IDPs of lower Assam. And many of them adopted prostitution as the last option for their survival along the national highway 37.

It is worth mentioning that though women are the worst victims of population displacement, yet their issues are virtually overlooked. Most often the displaced women face discrimination in having access to relief supplies, education and training and usually have little or no possibility of participating in income generating and employment opportunity. The womenfolk have to face these problems more intensely than their male counterparts. Sri Lankan social scientist, Mario Gomez comments that the refugee women are first to address the question of income generation and many other coping mechanisms precisely because it is their responsibility to put food in the mouths of their family and fight for their survival. Yet rehabilitation and care are hardly ever built on the premise of gender sensitivity (Banarjee, 2006, p. 2).

Involuntary displacement also creates a very painful condition for the children IDPs- children whom mankind owes the best it has to give. Every child is entitled to adequate nutrition, medical care, education, housing and recreation. They should get an adequate opportunity to develop physically, mentally, morally, socially, in a healthy and moral manner. But investigations show that the forced displacement takes away all the basic rights and amenities that should be possessed

by a child. They are deprived of primary health care, safe drinking water, primary education and other fundamental facilities of human development.

It is seen in Northeast India, many children taking shelter in relief camps have died due to starvation, malnutrition and various diseases. They do not get minimal food to eat, no facility for safe drinking water and no provision of primary education. Besides, the emergence of child labors is very usual among the IDPs because of extreme poverty. Usually they are engaged as domestic servants, hotel boys and so on. Most often the children become a big burden for their parents. It is reported that in Assam many children IDPs have been sold out by their parents due to their extreme poverty and helplessness (Hussain, 2006, p. 4522).

## Conclusion

Displaced persons start to face from multifaceted insecurity. Plight of displacement makes them landlessness, foodlessness, homelessness and jobless. Like the refugees the IDPs are also most often ejected from their homes and land, and are usually forced to live in relief camps. But they are not treated as refugees as unlike refugees, they have not crossed any international state border. Therefore, they are not entitled to the protection guaranteed by the international community to the refugees. Moreover, many nation-states cannot provide protection to the IDPs, and even they too are unwilling to seek international help and protection, because it affects their prestige as a 'nation-state' and its 'sovereignty'. Therefore, most often IDPs have to survive in dehumanized condition due to lack of humanitarian assistances from the state and other non-state actors. Hence, in certain situation, the status of the IDPs is worse than that of the refugees due to the apathy of their own state and the absence of international protection.

The traumatic condition resulted from forced displacement is very heart-rending. The trauma created by population displacement may differ according to time and circumstances, but they share some universal characteristics. Various researches and experiments on population displacement have highlighted some

important common characteristics shared by the IDPs threaten their human security/ basic human rights. In this regard, it can be cited to the leading World Bank consultant and policy analyst Micheal M Cernea's model called the Impoverishment, Risk and Rehabilitation Model. According to him model, the various kinds of risks that threaten the survival of the IDPs are- landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality, loss of common property resources and service and social disarticulation (Cernea, 2000, pp. 11-55).

Empirically, the emergence of IDPs is the result of the high degree of violation of human rights of the vulnerable sections of the society and their conditions become more alarming after their displacement. The vast magnitude of human rights violations within their own country becomes endemic for them. In-depth examinations on population displacement and human rights indicate that IDPs are the final outcome, owing to the massive violation of basic human rights of the weaker section people in society and move their life towards more insecurity and vulnerability after they flee. In this regard, human rights violation on the IDPs can be viewed as per-displacement violation and post-displacement violation. So, the maintenance of basic human rights is the only way to prevent the occurrence of this great humanitarian crisis. Finally, we can come to the conclusion that 'safeguarding human rights is the best way to prevent the conditions that force people to become IDPs'.

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# AMARTYA SEN'S IDEA OF JUSTICE: A REVIEW

*Partha Protim Borthakur**

How should we distribute the scarce resources and opportunities among the individuals in a society? What should be the aim of distribution be? How could we begin to make improvements towards creating a globally just world? There has been a vigorous debate and discussions on such questions from Plato to Rawls to provide a more systematic way of managing our collective interest and to define the concept of justice. Ideas of social justice became a common reference point in almost all political discourses and philosophical enquiry. As such, concepts such as rights, liberties, equality, needs and deserts have been accommodated into justice's sphere which has increased its influence in political philosophy over times.

From the publication of Plato's *Republic*, to the emergence of new approaches and theories on analysing the concept of justice, complemented by changes in Europe (due to Renaissance and Industrial Revolution), the concept too got developed and elaborated, becoming a vital exercise in the modern era of political philosophy (Pappas, 2003, pp. 50-62). This practice arguably reached its high point in 1971 with the publication of, *A Theory of Justice*, by John Rawls. Reviving the themes of classical 'social contract' thinking, especially that of Immanuel Kant, Rawls understood and defined justice not in terms of law of nature or something based on reason, but as a fair distribution of primary goods among the people which consist of the basic rights, liberties, opportunities, and also benefiting the least advantage persons (the marginalised people) thus making the procedure fair and just (Rawls, Justice as Fairness, A Restatement, 2001, pp. 41-42)[i]

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However in the present scenario, the demands of justice (in terms of principles of justice) cannot be formulated by focusing only on just institutions or on distributing the primary goods, thereby ignoring the broader outlook of social realizations of the people. Taking the case of India, a multicultural and multilingual state where needs of the diverse sections of the society have to be protected and given adequate representation, a theory of justice has to focus on actual lives in the assessment of justice. Though we cannot ignore the importance of the institutions and rules influencing the part and parcel of the actual world as well, but when the focus is on the actual lives of the masses, while assessing the notion of justice, the implications are very wide ranging in terms of the nature and attainment of the idea of justice. Under such an circumstance, an alternative having a influential and significant analysis of the idea of justice is provided by Amartya Sen, when he formulated the demands of justice not only in terms of principles of justice that were entirely concerned with just institutional arrangements for a society, but also emphasised on the broader outlook of social realizations, the freedoms that people can achieve in reality, thus giving importance to the reasonable behaviour and original lives of the citizens (Sen, Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny, 2007, p. 117).

Unlike, former theories of justice that endeavours to limit the questions of justice, to the nature of perfect justice; the central theme of Sen's theoretical proposal is to eradicate manifest cases of injustices. It can be seen in his book, *Poverty and Famines,* where Sen analyses the causes of starvation in general and famine in particular through various case studies in various parts of the world (the Great Bengal Famine of 1943, Ethiopian famines of 1973-75 etc.) and has come to the conclusion that poverty is a very significant problem and not that simple as is it seen and so the actual causes of deprivations need to be understood and removed (Sen, 1982, pp. 52-87). As we commonly pursue justice in terms of our understanding of the present world, how it is being ordered or controlled and to visualize and analyse the change by becoming a part of it, hence the paper tries to analyse critically the practicality in Sen's notion of justice in the present world especially in Indian context.

**Understanding Amartya Sen's idea of Justice:**

Amartya Sen in an article written in 2006, *What Do We Want from a Theory of Justice?*, concluded that political philosophers should categorically end chasing, in the style of Rawls, the grand question, what a just society should be (Sen, 2006, pp. 215-238). Sen provides a detailed critique of universal accounts of justice and advances the idea of value pluralism within the design of social justice (Sen, 2009, pp. 5-9)[ii] He promotes the notion that people should have their own perspectives and accounts of justice; thus socially, just outcomes will not be universal across all cultures and societies. However, there is less doubt that the tradition of theories of justice that Sen has in mind has been positioned and dominated by the spirit of John Rawls from which he has learnt so much, hence Sen endeavours to put forward an alternative to the dominant theory of justice by critically engaging with it in his book, *The Idea of Justice*.[iii] Sen differentiates between the two models of classical Indian philosophy, 'Niti' (strict organizational and behavioural rules of justice) and 'Nyaya' (concerns with what emerges and how such rules affects the lives that people are actually capable to lead), wherefrom he draws the idea of realization perspective on social justice (Sen, 2009, p. 20). Sen criticizes the earlier philosophers like Rawls for neglecting and focusing on 'niti centred' approach and thus underrates the essential combination of just institutions and correspondent actual behaviours that makes a society practically just, from which he formulates his central argument. Sen thus subsequently emphasizes the opposite 'nyaya centred' approach according to which, 'what happens to people', must be the core concern for a theory of justice and thus provides a better understanding for justice. It should also be mentioned that Sen calls into question the fundamentally deontological approach to justice that we find in Rawls and hence puts forward more of an apparent consequentialist approach (though he himself does not refer to it as a strict consequentialist idea of the classical utilitarian era) in order to remove manifest injustices.

Moreover, Rawls argues in the opening pages of his book, *A Theory of Justice*, that his aim is basically to derive principles of justice for a 'well ordered society', that is society of 'strict compliance', where the objective of each and

every individual is to act in a fair and just manner to create a perfectly just society (Rawls, 1999, pp. 3-5). Sen considers this as a *transcendental institutionalist* perspective to justice, categorized by the focus on perfect justice, thus overlooking the non-institutional aspects of human relations, which in practice, and would determine how actual societies would function (Sen, 2004, pp. 315-356). Thus what differentiates Amartya Sen from earlier theorists was that his evaluation of justice aimed not at recognizing the nature of just (whether it is just institutions or society) but rather to construct a theory that helps people to realize and make ways how to reduce injustice and advance justice, as well as understanding the factors affecting the degree of justice in any existing society.

Sen vehemently focuses by providing examples of various cases of injustices in society such as slavery, the discrimination of women, the lack of universal healthcare in most countries of the world, the lack of medical facilities in parts of Africa or Asia, the tolerance of chronic hunger, for example in India, and the extreme exploitation of labour can all be recognized, besieged and removed without any need to hypothesize at all as to what would be perfectly just social arrangements or what would be just institutions. Sen makes his argument more clear when he uses another analogy. Sen argues that, when we were asked whether a Van Gorh or a Picasso is the better painting, it barely helps to be told that Da Vinci's Monalisa is the best painting in the world (Sen, 2009, p. 101). Though this analogy does not makes the picture clear as what comprise the best painting, but what Sen here wants to point out is that in order to practice justice we have to make comparisons, meaning whether pursuing that method will help make the world a somewhat better place as opposed to that method, unlike the ideal world (as emphasised by Rawls) where this process for comparison has a very limited scope and platform.

Sen in his book, *The Idea of Justice* has emphasized (also being an advocator of Social Choice theory), that we cannot attain justice by making an equal distribution of primary goods or benefiting the least advantage sections by giving them some special privileges, we have to go beyond it as justice cannot be indifferent

to the lives that people can actually live.[iv] In an article written way back in 1990, entitled, *Justice: Means versus Freedoms,* Sen articulated a freedom based idea of justice (Sen, 1990, pp. 111-121). Making 'capabilities' as the most appropriate method for assessing wellbeing rather than the utility space of Rawls's primary goods, Sen in his 1979 Tanner Lectures, and more expansively in his Dewey Lectures, argued that capability can provide more appropriate informational basis for justice (Sen, 1985, pp. 169-221). Sen agrees that an index of primary goods signifies a vector, which is why it comprises more than income or wealth, but cannot act as a useful tool as it is still directed to serve the general purpose, rather than analysing the individual differentiation. Sen alleges that this is incorrect because what really reckons is the way in which different people convert income or primary goods into good living, as poverty is dependent upon the different characteristics of people and of the environment in which they actually live (Sen, 2009, p. 66). In fact the applicability of Sen's capability approach can be seen in the form of evolution of the 'much-awaited' Human Development Report, which is published annually by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), since 1990, to consider development problems in both poor and affluent countries (Parr, 2003, pp. 304-305). Besides Sen's contribution to the field of development and welfare of the people can be seen practically through the devices and tools which acts as a measuring index in the global scenario.

However, Sen was also conscious of the fact that, in diversified and multicultural society citizens will definitely have different voices and interests and will have different choices; hence citizens will apparently differ as to which conception of political justice they think most reasonable. Sen here therefore pursues an approach that is based on open impartiality, favouring Adam Smith's 'impartial spectator' rather than Rawls 'veil of ignorance', which he calls 'closed impartiality', as Rawls account considers only members of the given focal group (Sen, 2009, p. 133). What differentiates the Rawlsian method from the Smithian approach is the 'closed' nature of participatory exercise that Rawls invokes by restricting the 'veil

of ignorance' to the members of a polity that are being constructed.ᵛ Sen on the contrary to Rawls traditional concept of 'primary goods', rebuilds his own capabilities approach as elements of his theory of justice by borrowing from the social choice theory. Sen's while assessing the notion of justice builds its own concept at this time, when he adopted the comparative method (comparing the values and priorities of the people and ranking them after proper scrutiny and public reasoning) in order to make the demands of justice much more possible to achieve. It means that a theory of justice has to be based on partial orderings (through ranking the alternatives based on the connection or commonality of distinct rankings portraying different reasonable positions of justice), that all can endure the scrutiny of public reason seen in any democratic structure. Though Sen also argues that by taking the comparative route while dealing with the cases of justice people will agree on a particular pair wise rankings on how to enhance justice, despite the comparative assessments on the values and priorities of the people involved through discussions and scrutiny remains incomplete (Sen, 2009, pp. 31-51).

Perhaps, Sen's notion of justice, which is pluralistic, multi-dimensional and existential because it is an arrangement of various aspects of what can be called variables of justice, in our own view, has given a new direction in the arena of theorizing social justice. Sen is definitely correct to believe that comparisons of relative justice and injustice should also be a major concern to move from an ideal theory of justice to a workable idea of justice. Yet it is not wholly acceptable that the existing genuine problems seen in various parts of the globe and their going unaddressed will be solved by some general shift – perhaps moving away from the social contract model while perpetuating justice. Moreover, the definition of social justice is still not and settled one and the principles conflicting but the practical aspect of social justice cannot be ignored, as such David Miller has emphasised that the practical relevance is necessary for a theory of social justice which is right and in order to have universal validity (Miller, 1976, pp. 20-22).

## A Critical Analysis of Sen's idea of Justice:

Amrtya Sen's ambiguous relationship with liberalism, and calling into question the fundamentally deontological notion of justice that he finds in Rawls and putting forward more of a consequentialist approach (a key feature of utilitarianism) with his comparative approach to justice and assessment of states of affairs in terms of their consequences of people's wellbeing through the method of public scrutiny has created a new road map towards global justice. The key aspect in Sen's account is how we should approach justice is by public reasoning and deliberation. For that reason, he has placed democracy at the heart of his account of justice. For Sen, democracy, in order to deliver justice on ground and create a just society must go beyond the niti (procedural) aspects of ballots and elections to freedom of expression, the right to information, and the practice of public discussion (Subramanian, 2010, pp. 33-42). The importance, in this context, of a free media and of parliamentary democracy for the pursuit of justice is supreme. However, he is also aware of the fact that democratic procedures do not ensure just outcomes, and observes that though in the constitution there is place for fundamental rights and protections of minorities, but people are always exploited and discriminated. In his book, *Engaging Freedom*, Dhiren Bhagawati, distinguishes between majoritarian and libertarian democracy and emphasizes how libertarian democracy pursues a narrow and limited scope to individual freedom (Bhagawati, 2009, pp. 19-31). Bhagawati argues that the real democracy is when people gets the opportunity to participate in the life of the community as its equal members and gets the opportunity to express their voice in the formulation of public policy. However, analysis's like John Dryzek, one of the major thinkers in deliberative democracy, have criticized Sen for a 'facile treatment of Democracy', in the sense that it seems institution-free and does not discuss who should participate in discussion, how this process produces outcomes, and so on. According to Dryzek, Sen thinks of deliberation in terms of public reason (singular), and thereby places too much emphasis upon logic and reason in deliberation (Dowding, 2011, pp. 83-98). Dryzek points to those who suggest that such an idea of reason diminishes the

views of those who find it harder to articulate their viewpoints. Besides, it is also not clear that any agreement where people agree partially through orderings will rank actual social arrangements as more and less just. As such the question again arise that, why should public reasoning, rather than focusing on institutions, on configurations of rights or duties that need to be implemented, will focus on removing manifest cases of injustice. Onora O'Neill believes that, Sen seeks emphasis of these welcoming claims about imperfect as well as perfect obligations, and his argument probably directs further than he explores; as such it rules out drawing any very clear boundary to justice (O'Neill, 2010, pp. 384-388).

Perhaps the most debated aspect of Sen's approach is the difficulty in translating his theory into an operationalised measurement index. As such, how Sen's capabilities can be transformed into something that is reckonable is still a question not discussed by him (Macpherson, 1973, pp. 53-70)[vi] Martha Nussbaum agrees with Sen that the capability approach as a scaffold for examining social justice is far better than the utilitarianism, resource-focused analysis, the social contract tradition, or even some accounts of human rights (Nussbaum, 2003, pp. 33-59). At the same time, she argues that to make the capability approach more useful for exploring social justice, Sen needs to take a more definite stand on which capabilities are important in our ethical judgments and our conceptions of justice. According to her, without endorsing such a list, the capability approach cannot offer reliable prescriptions on gender justice (Nussbaum, 2003, pp. 39-44). As Sen along with his friend Mahbubul Hoq, while formulating the UNDP report predicted that although there would be increase in the per capita income and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), on the contrary there would also be rise in the number of people living below poverty line if the capability aspect is not given importance (Sen, 2002, pp. 1-8). However the process of measuring the relevant capabilities in order to practically exercise it is not taken into consideration by Sen. Emphasising on the need for a list of capabilities was further extended by Ingrid Robeyns, arguing that Sen has underspecified the capability approach (Robeyns, 2003, pp. 61-92). She argues that certain contextual dimensions should

be given importance like the existing literature in the field, formulating a publi discussion on the issue, to give the list academic as well as political legitimacy. Martha Nussbaum further proposes a list of ten capabilities which according to her are valuable normative guidance, relevant in any aspect, although she also emphasizes that the list could be modified by context.

Sen's understanding of the notion of justice, has illuminatingly discussed the enormous difficulties of achieving a perfectly just society, but that does not take away the importance of searching and establishing ideal principles of justice. Evaluating Sen's own analogy of comparing between the picture of a Picasso and a van Gogh, he is right that we do not need an ideal theory to adjudicate and present, *Mona Lisa* as the best painting in the world for the purpose of the comparison at hand, but that does not in itself wipe out the importance and position of *Mona Lisa* in this context (Sen, The Idea of Justice, 2009, pp. 16-17). If for a time being we assume to agree on deciding to set a criteria through which we can evaluate whether *Mona Lisa* is indeed the best painting in the world. The same criteria can also be applied to compare between the paintings of Picasso and a van Gogh? If this is possible, than we can derive and arrive at a conclusion that the transcendental 'theory' of painting is also sufficient for the comparative purpose. Further Sen argues that in contemporary societies due to plurality of values and reasoning, there can be different descriptions of a perfectly just society or even with no agreed description at all. For instance while analysing Sen's notion of justice,considering the question of gener inequality, we will receive different suggestions and results for improving the unequal social position of the women (like, providing reservations for women, abolishing gender hierarchy, restructuring the social institutions etc.), depending on the variety of our evaluation pattern and understanding of the phenomena and also on the social situations on which we are actually standing. Thus in order to solve this complex problem exemplified through the question of improving the status of women, does press us to move to a higher level of abstraction. However, if we do want to move this higher level, the problem will be such, that people would obviously disagree with one another, though might

reach an agreement but would be based on options and thus has the chance of rejection. And, importantly, an individual might, through a process of reflective equilibrium, clarify what he/she thinks, as the framework of reasoning that Sen has applied fails to address this problem. Debra Satz while analysing Sen's idea, points out that, when such a situation arise a person can never figure out which ranking to select or which superior position to move, among the various alternative available for him, without working out his own conception of what 'perfect justice' entails (Satz, 2012, pp. 280-282). There are times when we need a Mona Lisa to guide our judgments about Picasso and Dali. It can also be argued that an approach focused on ranking the available alternatives through a comparative method is at risk of ignoring unpresented possible choices (Silveria, 2016, pp. 21-22).

However it should also be noticed that Amartya Sen's criticisms of perfect justice as finding difficulty in figuring out what to do in complex non ideal cases has been the central point of the beginning of Sen's idea and the departure of Rawls's theory. However, in *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls does not begin by trying to provide a particular solution for the very intense injustices that motivate Sen (Rawls, 1999). Rather he simply denotes such injustices as wrong. For instance slavery is wrong; likewise extreme poverty and avoidable deprivation is wrong and thus should be removed in order to perpetuate justice. It seems like Rawls never believed that a separate theory of justice should be designed to measure these practices and categorizing it as right and wrong or in Sen's view just and unjust. Rawls formulates his theory by taking such wrongness, injustices practised in the society as the starting point and later goes on to develop his principles of justice. In this sense Rawlsian theory cannot be discarded only as a theory formulating ideal justice. Thus, Rawls's ideal theory was never originated to play a extensive independent role in dealing exclusively with these practices, and so Sen's charge that ideal theories of justice are 'redundant' at least in this context, misses the mark (Satz, 2012, pp. 281-282).

This takes us to another point of limitation which concerns, Sen's emphasis on the importance of public discourse and reasoning in scrutinising capabilities. Sen argues that in order for a society to decide on which freedoms and capabilities should be

prioritised, there need to have public discussion. Although in principle it is very much useful as it promotes peoples participation beyond cultures thus strengthening democracy. However, the problem lies in how this can be actually translated into action (especially in a country like India), and if it is exercised how effective it will be in giving a voice to the most vulnerable is still a question (Agarwal, Humphries, & Robeyns, 2003, pp. 3-12). Besides, Sen's prescriptions to justice (or a wider range of normative concerns) should also address issues like the differences between sound and unsound public reasoning in order to function properly (O'Neill, 2010, pp. 384-388). Evidently, as public reasoning speaks on behalf of the entire mankind therefore Sen accepts that it needs the support of 'free, energetic and efficient media' (Sen, 2009, p. 337). Yet what is to be done if the media is working contrary to it? Where as in the present scenario it is seen that, media power is driven by partisan agendas, and news are often made and paid for deliberation, under such a situation the so called free press can further corrupt the public discourse and can confuse the public, even if no voices or considerations are excluded. Further, Sen emphasizes the importance of 'unobstructed discussion and scrutiny', but gives limited information on measuring this reasoning to set standards in discussion and scrutiny or about which publicly offered deliberations have normative force (Sen, 2009, pp. 386-387).

Moreover, Sen seems to believe too much on the institution of state as a neutral actor, with the propaganda of achieving national interest. The reality at present is that states often seek to realise the interests of the 'dominant social classes'. Consequently, if the most vulnerable are not engaged in the discussion, it is unlikely that their voices will be heard, resulting in the continuation of the status quo. However, while evaluating the history of India it can be concluded that religion is still a very powerful force in the social and individual life of the people. In fact, despite constitution granting women equality and equal right to worship, it is seen that most of the temples in India have strict taboo on women worshipping gods and goddesses. However Amartya Sen's abundant use of Indian literature, history and philosophy as being methodologically consistent with his attempt to formulate a

non parochial conception of justice, fails to mention the persistance of problems associated with caste system and untouchability. As caste system being one of the major social problems in India, however, the most alarming feature of Sen's work is its complete silence on the subject of caste- based discrimination in India, and the depleting conditions of the untouchables (Rathore, 2011, pp. 178-179)[vii].Though Sen's notion of justice based on public reasoning, emphasizing on the social realizations and freedom of the people, should have taken the issue of caste seriously as such socio-political and and religious-cultural problems cannot be neglected and overlooked, while taking into consideration the capability aspect of the people. As Neera Chandoke has rightly argued that communities that have suffered from multiple historical injustices is not because they are economically deprived, but also socially backward, politically insignificant in terms of the politics of 'voice', and so before romanticizing and advocating for a global notion of justice, Sen should focus on such local and direct issues of social justice first (Chandoke, 2015, pp. 30-36). The recent democratic uprisings in various parts of the world against terrorist atrocities and fight for their basic human rights is a sign of Sen's rightful assessment of the idea of justice where people are agreed and protesting to remove the injustices from the society which will ultimately enhance global justice. However the problem that has arisen is that (not addressed by Sen), the world in where we live has so much of deprivation of one kind or another (like about 30% of the population of India live below poverty line), can the actual lives of the people be realized? Sen's emphasis on understanding and uplifting the lives of the people and focusing on the fairness of global arrangements, (rejecting the questions like whether poor are getting poorer or rich are getting richer) fails to address a simple question- how to strengthen democratic process at the global level. It is seen that the forces of globalization like the, Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and financial donors, has created new forms of disparities and has widened the gap between rich and poor, while exploiting the deprived sections (Stiglitz, 2005, pp. 228-241). Justice has not been ensured to significant sections of population in underdeveloped societies and indeed we found new forms of injustices haunting

the plebs. Thus in practice, Sen's understanding of justice and its explicit critic of the Rawlsian theory, limiting it to nation states and his emphasis on public reasoning that should accommodate voices from different societies and cultures puts justice within the domain of the liberal marketplace of ideas now vehemently spread through internet and the other social networking mediums, and hence does not go beyond the structure of liberalism.

Sen by limiting his notion of justice to comparative judgements about individual lives, fails to give due attention to the structural nature that effects the human life. While formulating the notion of justice, the character of the structures like, whether they are 'just' or 'good', whether they provide the environment for people to live a decent life, should be taken into consideration, in order to have effective implementation. Injustice is not only related to the freedom, resources or rights that people enjoy or achieves whether it is more or less in quantity and quality but also about the structures being corrupted and deviated from the good they serve (Deneulin & McGregor, 2010, pp. 501-519). For instance, it was nearly impossible for a white person living in South African, following apartheid system to have relations with black people, as it was against the system of racialism practised under the system. Hannah Arendt while identifying three fundamental kinds of structure (cultural, economic and political) argues that if any of this structure becomes unjust or perverted, the life of the common people will be severely affected (Arendt, 1958). Structural injustice carries with it a sense of dismal; hampering the mental state of an individual, with a risk of isolation. As common people might not be able to perceive such injustices (for example, it was very difficult for the people within the untouchability system to define untouchability as unjust). Therefore, in order to have a full scale implementation of the idea of justice, a prior judgement of the nature of structures, whether they are 'just' or 'good', whether they provide the conditions for people to live flourishing human lives, should be studied and analysed. Thus a reasoning approach to justice (which Sen emphasises) will remain incomplete if the questions of the good life and the extent to which structures have relation with the aim of the good life are not taken under consideration (Sandel,

2009, pp. 124-126). Moreover, the present alarming event of environmental degradation and human misery calls, Sen's notion of justice towards a more structural and all-inclusive destination, as freedom and reasoning are certainly excellent starting points to formulate an idea or approach to justice, however the journey does not end here and hence needs to continue.

**Conclusion**:

It is and should be the objective of each and every justice oriented theory to move towards a world of shared responsibilities and shared benefits of a 'fair globalization', and to an ethics of 'global justice', and it is only possible, by actually serving the interests of all of the world's people specially the marginalised and deprived ones. The paper recognizes the fact the though Sen admits the importance of Rawls's approach, its influence not only in his work but also on the later philosophers and the proximities between both the paradigms of justice, however cannot disregard the theoretical dissonances and its importance in political philosophy. Formulating an alternative approach to justice, differentiating it from the traditional notions, Sen's idea of justice has been heralded as a theory of justice 'for an imperfect world', as 'dedicated to the reduction of injustices on earth practically rather than to the creation of ideally just castles in the air' (Osmani, 2010, pp. 599-607). But despite the dual ambition of practically implementing political philosophy to the actual lives of the people, with the intention of limiting the gap between the institutions and people's realisation through the instrument of public reasoning and of centering justice to the heart of development thinking, Sen's notion of justice however, in practice does not do much in the real world, beyond generic references to famines, gender injustice or malnutrition. Besides, the state in this current era of globalization has abandoned its distributive functions and has transferred its power to the capitalists, making social justice dismal, despite legislating welfare laws and adjudicating measures to deliver social justice. In this changed world, the concept of social justice at a new dimension needs to be explored. The question therefore, is how to formulate the principles of social justice. Even

after 70 years of getting independence, are the provisions of Indian constitution appropriate and able to create the ladder of equity and deliver social justice? In fact the caste system is getting itself adopted with new changing society. The problem for us is now to find out whether the new world has forced to revisit and redefine Sen's notion of social justice in order to make it practically more feasible.

## *Notes:*

i   Rawls main concern were social and economic inequalities and he tries to deal with them by looking at the firmest convictions about basic rights and liberties, the fair value of the political liberties as well as fair equality of opportunity.

ii  Amartya Sen argues that the various theoretical arguments advanced by libertarians, utilitarians, egalitarians and the like have real significance in the sense that they contribute to our understanding of justice. None of those set of values, however, overrides the others. Furthermore, each of the theories provides important insights but cannot club into a simple or indeed complex, calculative function. Hence there is no universal system of justice that provides a set of principles or weighted calculations such that for any given question.

iii One of the many pleasures of *The Idea of Justice*, is Sen's vast analysis of India's culture and literature, which helps him to emphasise and formulate the public reasoning aspect of justice seen in many societies across the nation.

iv  It should be noted that social choice theory should not be confused with rational choice theory, as the latter defines rationality as the pursuit of self-interest. However, Sen assumes that fairness involves a reasonable concern for the interests of others and his depiction of social choice theory reflects this thinking.

v   The impartial spectator approach that Sen applies, does not seek unanimity. It may not even reach an agreement that is clearly just. Perhaps, it will yield an outcome that is plausibly just or at least not manifestly unjust.

vi  According to Macpherson any democratic theory must treat and measure an individual power in terms of (quantity) developing his capacities and measuring hindrances in using his capacities, that is impediments to the maximum attainable in principle at any given level of social productivity and knowledge (1973, p. 70).

vii Surprisingly, Sen's major works such as *Development as Freedom* or even *Inequality Reexamined*, also fails to mention the genuine and common problems associated with untouchability and the chronic poverty of that sizable community.

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# RIVER ECOLOGY IN THE POST-COLONIAL STATE: COLONIAL ANXIETY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF RIVER CENTRIC HUMAN LIVES IN INDIA

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## River, Flood and the Modern State:

Being an integral part of human life, the river plays a very pivotal role in the development of human civilization. Most of the largest deltas of the world are densely populated as well as heavily farmed. But at the same time, a large portion of these people are vulnerable to flooding and subsequent conversion of land to open ocean. This vulnerability has always brought back the concern of how to deal with rivers and the problems associated with them. It is worthwhile to mention that earlier the people inhabited in the river valley, always tried to adjust and co-exist with the river without harming its ecology. But with the increase in population, industrialization, urbanization people started to settle down in the delta of the river which interrupted the regular course of the river. This resulted in the flooding of the river in a more destructive manner causing severe loss to the human being and their property. This had made the river and their flooding process antithetical to human development, urging a concrete mechanism to control it as soon as possible.

It is evident that for centuries, rivers have been very significant to human society. Apart from the soil, no other feature on Earth than water is as closely bound to the development of human civilization. However, along with the development of science and technology, continuous efforts have been made to

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control rivers, as like as the other natural organisms. Starting from enlightenment, modern science had envisioned and begun to sustain a discipline of hydrology where the foremost transformation had taken place in the form of continued use of rivers for transformation. In order to escape from natural flooding as well as to take benefit that flood plains offer to agriculture, various steps were taken by the civil engineering of the modern state. Additionally, regulating rivers can also fulfill human desires to store water for times of drought. Thus, civil engineers have tried to conserve water flow for discharge at times when the necessity is felt by human beings. They had tried to keep water value above suitable levels and to restrain flood flows to designated channels or to prearranged flood storage areas. As a result of this intervention, rivers are embanked, straightened and impounded all over the world. This might be reason why varied river systems have become uniform, wetlands have disappeared, and amphibians, water birds, fish and other water depending organisms become rarer or even get extinct.

Thus, in the modern state system, the river has been conceptualized in such a way that modernization and development agenda of the government has created two-fold oppositions such as "traditional vs. developmentalist, anti-dam vs. pro-dam, local vs. global, bio centric vs. anthropocentric and small vs. large". In this regard, Ram Swarup has made a detailed analysis. According to him, "In the earlier times, the ecological and environmental effects of the developmental activities were not taken seriously, which gave the chance to science and technology to be thought as a superior one over other things. As a result of this, the water flowing through the river turned into a resource and was to be treated as a figure in the landscape, rather than an image related to time and place" (Sarup Ram, 1959). No doubt, the belief that modern science on its own can provide a systematic and consistent interpretation of all the phenomena that one can see around originated in the modern western countries. However, with the colonization, this idea has been spread all over the world. In fact, even after decolonization, these ideas have remained intact in these post-colonial countries in the form of colonial legacy. Thus as like as the western imperial states, through the symbolization of rivers in

a specific way, these post-colonial states also generate an illustration of it as a regulator of all components of the natural environment, hence bestows itself with the performative power with regard to river control.

Under such post-colonial state, flood has been viewed as a hazard, and it is supposed that the state will bear the responsibility of resolving it. Under this responsibility, the state machinery has come up with a consensus for the need of some measures for river control. There has been seen frequent use of terms such as 'taming' and 'harnessing' the river in the literature on water resource development. It is mention worthy that in the post-colonial states, the subjugation of a wild river by taming it or the use of other scientific measures to control it were completed in the similar fashion that is adopted in the western developed countries. Like all other post-colonial states, India also accomplished a mechanical or structural model of river control developed in the United States on the Eastern Indian Rivers, which depicted their belief in the application of the universal principles and denial of the uniqueness of the rivers of India.

Above all, the technical resolutions adopted to regulate rivers have curtailed the rights of the river to move over space. This has given birth to both political and technical problems. In the context of river development, as Kuntala Lahiri Dutt mentions, "This knowledge was seen as automatic and objective, values such as reason and rationality had been constructed as good and co-terminus with development" ( Lahiri-Dutt, Kuntala 2014). This world view reveals an intoxicated arrogance of human armed with scientific knowledge and technology, borrowed from the colonial rulers. The fundamental characteristics of this knowledge include its universalism, its image of nature as an adversary, its assumption of replicability, and its agenda of March of its progress. In short, the strong belief was that what is appropriate to all over the world would definitely work in India or anywhere else for that matter. As a result water resource planner did not favor the difference between European Rivers or American Rivers and those of India, ignoring particularly the distinctiveness of the socio-ecological circumstances of the latter.

## Colonial Wisdom and River Control in India:

India is drained by major river systems such as the Himalayan Indus-Gang-Brahmaputra system and the peninsular Godavari, Mahanadi, Krishna, Cauvery on the east coast and the Narmada and Tapti on the west coast. The country is also dependent on the south western monsoons which bring rainfall to the country in the month from June to September. However, the high Himalayan Mountains form an effective barrier to the south west monsoon. This is responsible for intense and massive precipitation in the catchment areas of the rivers of the Himalayan region, such as the Ganga and Brahmaputra and their tributaries. Often, therefore, the river channels carrying capacity is exceeded and the rivers overflow their banks causing inundation, bank erosion and extensive damages to crops and structures on the flood plains. In comparison, the rivers of the Indian peninsula have adequate channel carrying capacity. Therefore these rivers experience floods less frequently.

Like other places, the human civilization in India is also developed in the flood-plains. In fact, the riverbed itself is time and again a place for habitation and settlement throughout India. However, notably, the approach of communities in the past was driven and dictated by the moral principles of living with floods rather than mastering the flows. But with the coming of the British, the equation has changed and floods were viewed as a problem which needed to be tackled. People who lived in flood prone areas and their knowledge was considered to be 'traditional' and hence obsolete in the face of superior technical knowledge. The new practice of colonial revenue administration towards the last two three decades of the 18th century, developed by the East India Company, had shaped the official perception about floods through an endeavor to protect the rivers, mainly of the Bengal estuary. It drastically reordered the company's codes of social administration.

In most of the thickly inhabited areas of the Bengal, agriculture is treated as a secondary occupation. As Kuntala Lahiri Dutt mentions, "In this water-based artisan economy, the countryside was dotted with dispersed local markets attesting to a highly commercialized economy that boasted impressive industries. The rivers

were not just channels of water; they carried a thriving trade, transporting people and goods from one part of the delta to another"( Lahiri-Dutt, Kuntala 2014). During the colonial period, this essential character of Bengal as a fluid landscape had changed because of the legal interventions which were designed to stabilize land as well as waters. In a land where rivers shift its course so frequently, the colonial government had tried to create permanent boundaries between land and waters, expecting to privilege land above water. In order to fulfill the aim of isolating land from water, the first and foremost initiative adopted by the British in the form of a legal framework that gradually entered the popular vocabulary. As such, the colonial government passed a law called BADA "Bengal Alluvion and Diluvion Act", in 1825 following the "Permanent Settlement of 1793" in order to legalize the creation of such formations " ( Lahiri-Dutt, Kuntala 2014). But the rivers in Bengal have some unique characteristics because of which such regulation was not proved to be much helpful.

Before the East India Company rule, zamindars (big landholders) and local rulers used their own resources to try and control rivers locally, typically in the form of embankments. However, the colonial government believed that embankments on a heavily silt-laden river not only prevented river-water from spilling over, but also, by trapping the silt and sand within, slowly raised the riverbed. Therefore, in the long run, this would require them to increase the height of the embankments accordingly. Despite knowing the evils of embankments on the river, they still gave preferences to construction of bunds and embankments. There may be two reasons for their undue importance to control floods in any way they can. First was, the Company needed a public works infrastructure for its own survival and to enforce its government. Since they had to face a lot of resistance from the native rulers, they desperately needed roads, bridges, canals, embankments, barracks, and cantonments to facilitate the movement of their troops. In fact, a bill to promote the construction of lines of communication as feeders to railways, high roads, navigable rivers, and canals was presented in 1863. On account of this, the construction of a new railway line between Howrah and Mirzapur was planned.

But the tragedy was that it was designed parallel to the Ganges, which obstructed the regular flow of the flooding river. Correspondence related to the administration of the Ferry Funds of Bengal of the 1850s and 1860s indicates that the collected funds were used to make new embankments along the southern side of the Ganges. The idea was not only to protect the new settlement but also to provide 'roads as feeders' in connection with the railways. At that time, the colonial government had ignored the very fact that all three rivers surrounding Patna—the Ganges, the Son, and the Punpun—had had a long history of shifts in their river channels.

The second reason behind this techno-fetishism of the British government to control rivers had an economic base which is clearly described by Professor Rohan D'souza as Colonial Capitalism. He in his book "Drowned and Dammed: Colonial Capitalism and Flood Control in Deltaic Orissa" argued that

"In order to institute it as a specific social form deployed a set of hydraulic interventions that transformed the deltaic Orissa from a flood-dependent agrarian regime into a flood vulnerable landscape. From the moment that the East India Company introduced the permanent settlement in the Bengal presidency which privatized and gifted all arable land to a new class of landlords, capitalism was the driving force behind flood control in Eastern India."(D'souza Rohan, 2006)

In contrast to the local revenue officials who ascertained the periodic differences in agrarian output, the revenue administration under the British was intended towards accumulating a fixed rent for thirty years. In this materialistic process of their revenue collection, the flood or drought problem always brought a severe negative impact. The colonial government especially the revenue department was always in an intention to increase the land revenue but did not succeed due to hydraulic instability. Thus, the Britishers needed to enforce a standardized rental installment, based preferably on an expected average production of the season's crop urging them to keep the land decisively isolated from the devastating hydraulic action. As such, the ecological context for the existence of capitalist property in land was that of structuring it to relate to deltaic inundation as natural calamity

rather than as hydraulic process. As such, by the middle of the 19th century, large numbers of mechanical measures were built across Bihar, Orissa, Bengal and parts of rivers from south India (D'souza Rohan,2006). With the believe that they could transcend the limitations of the environment and climate through superior science and technology and also with a complete disenchantment with nature, the colonial government engineered, controlled, tamed the rivers and made them into a source of artificial canals. They embanked the rivers in order to prevent the interruptions in revenue flows, dug large numbers of canals with a view to harness water for irrigation and navigational development and lastly initiated many "Multi-Purpose River Valley Projects" in the last decades of their rule in order to facilitate power and energy for capitalist production. Being a political project, it had profoundly implicated in the economic, political and social calculations of capitalism in general and colonialism in particular.

In contrast to the other major rivers of India, the river Brahmaputra has abled to gain very little attention from the British. In spite of having a crucial importance, no such detailed study of the river Brahmaputra has been done till the coming of the British. It is only at the end of the 18th century; James Rennell started examining the lower reaches of the Brahmaputra River which laid groundwork for the future possibilities. After him, a few other British explorers had planned to study the hydrology of the Brahmaputra, but the main focus was not to understand the nature of the said river but to explore the river route to China, in other words to find out the easier routes that are existed beyond the eastern most states of India (Saikia Arupjyoti , 2013). However, before the coming of the Britishers, the Ahom rulers appreciated the construction of embankments in order to protect the agricultural land from the flood. As such, the old roads like Dhudar Ali, Garh Ali and various others were constructed as the bund roads. Notably, the colonial government admitted the necessity of repairing the old embankments for agrarian expansion. But in reality, what it had done towards ensuring this was very little. The situation remained almost unchanged till the first decade of the twentieth century, when the great earthquake of 1897 and its effects on agrarian expansion

once again brought back the important question of flood-protection through embankments to the government. Because of this earthquake, many rivers have got blocked as well as dry, many rivers changed their course entirely and due to these reasons, the subsequent floods caused much more damages in the valley. This resulted in some major projects of embanking the flooded rivers being taken up in the eastern districts of the Brahmaputra Valley.

Another reason that has motivated the colonial government to find out a solution for the flood problem in Assam was the extraction of higher revenue from the valley. The char and chaporis (riverine Tracts) in the river Brahmaputra are used temporarily for the cultivation of various winter crops. As these chaporis were cultivated temporarily, so the colonial state unable to raise any revenue from these tracts as there has been no survey done to find out the crop yield or production pattern. Thus, transforming these tracts into productive category had gained a serious attention of the British in the end of the nineteenth century. By this time, the valley became famous for its petroleum, tea-plantations, coal mining and forest dense with timber (Saikia Arupjyoti, 2010). As such, the transformation of riverine tracts of the valley into permanent land had done by the British by introducing the cultivation of Jute in those tracts. They had to choose Jute instead of tea plantation as the land was not suitable for the later.

In the western part of the Valley, "the Brahmaputra and many of its tributaries occasionally overflow their banks, but the area subject to inundation is well known, and the villagers do not attempt to cultivate anything more than summer rice or cold weather crops in these flooded tracts."(Allen B.C., 1905) The Chaporis, covered by long grass were inundated regularly by the rivers. So, here Pam which means temporary cultivation was done by the peasants in the earlier times. Disappeared during monsoon, these lands were used heavily for the production of winter crops like mustard, opium or cereals etc... Apart from cultivation, the farmers used these riverine tracts of Brahmaputra as grazing fields. It is mention worthy that in the early twentieth century; jute was the uppermost export earner for India. The revenue earned from the jute trade helped Britain to overcome its

trade deficit with the United States and Germany. The colonial government wanted to expand the jute acreage beyond Bengal as the latter had exhausted all its land and was by now saturated. The riverine tracts of the Brahmaputra in Assam were consisted of grassland and savannah similar to Bengal which is best suitable for cultivation of jute. As the rainfall pattern, texture of the soil and accessibility of water in the alluvial tracts of the Brahmaputra Valley also fulfilled the criteria for jute cultivation (Saikia Arupjyoti , 2013). As such, inviting the peasants from Bengal, the colonial government started the cultivation of jute which in a way resulted in the movement of a large number of peasants from the northern districts of East Bengal into the districts like Goalpara, Darrang and so on. Notably along with this transformation, floods in those areas acquired new meaning, posing a new challenge to the jute. As jute was washed away, damages became more visible. It pushed the government for the need of protecting those cultivated land from flood.

So, while the demand for new 'public' embankments were frequently turned down by the colonial state in the nineteenth century on the basis of financial calculations, the same reasoning also prompted it to take up the construction and repair of such embankments in the beginning of the next century.

## Withering away of the Flood: The Continuation of Colonial Anxiety in Independent India:

Becoming independent from the colonial rule, the Indian state started its journey with full commitment to growth and social transformation; thereby a clearly politically directed development trajectory was visualized. Planned state led modernization envisaged pursuing with the assumption that social change can be orderly and predictably manipulated by a benevolent state. But it is mention worthy that freedom from the colonial rule need not necessarily imply freedom from colonial policies. The policies that were formulated by the colonial government, continued to be adhered to in the same vein even after independence. The fascination of the

post-colonial state with policies as well as development had continued from the colonial past. As such, newly independent state of India fell into the routine of nation-building by undertaking the development activities. Policies were the prescriptions for development. Those are often formulated by the 'experts' who rarely have experiences at the grassroots. So almost all present day Indian policies whether in law, education, social welfare, legislative matters, conflict resolution or the environment, still carries a legacy of the colonial past.

The traditional strategy of adaptation to floods declined in India when river management was taken over by the irrigation departments of the ruling British government. In the governmental perception, floods in India slowly became a natural disaster that had to be controlled. This view continued till 1947. In independent India, rapid growth in population coupled with increased human activities in the lower areas of the flood plains, increasing economic aspirations of a newly independent nation and the knowledge of European engineering tradition provided the backdrop for keeping the floods away from most part of the floodplains through structural interventions as a political agenda. Hence, the idea to eliminate floods emerged as a central theme in the present day governmental agenda on water management. As such, the government in their five year plans sanctions a huge amount of money only to build embankments. Further, with the significant contribution of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, a new water resources policy had been initiated under the banner of which three river valley projects on the rivers Damodar, Mahanadi and Sone were being constructed. Thus, with the inauguration of three river valley projects under the leadership of Ambedkar, the journey of independent India started with a fascination towards controlling floods with embankments and large dams. In July 1954, India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1947–64), likened the large dam to a 'modern temple'. With the charismatic leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, the modern state of India fully insisted upon "the supreme belief in development which inculcated faith in modern technology and advocated an unwavering confidence in positivist science." (D'souza Rohan, 2008)

As par Assam is concerned, such interventions on the river Brahmaputra were made after an interval, yet the same colonial legacy had affected the policies adopted for river basin management. Notably, while the independent state of Assam had been influenced by the colonial legacy, depending upon structural solutions for flood control in the valley, some local ecologists had developed a different perspective on the flood problem. Haladhar Bhuyan, a member of the Assam Constituent Assembly, condemned the indiscreet policy of the government for settling land for permanent settlement on the bank of the river. According to him, this has accentuated the flood problem more than the natural cause. Forests always acted as the buffer between the river and the villages as flood water cannot pass across the forests in speed. "With a very few man-made impediments on the river's natural path of drainage in the form of embankments, dykes, etc., floods in general used to remain on the fields only for three to four days' duration. This was natural, and since there were miles and miles of forests on the Brahmaputra, floods did not trouble the villages much, and whatever water percolated to the villages was in fact beneficial to the agriculture", Bhuyan argued (Goswami Rituporn, 2011). This, according to him culminated in the intensification in the magnitude of damage caused by floods in the Brahmaputra Valley. So, Bhuyan prescribed to undertake a re-forestation programme along the banks of the Brahmaputra of at least a quarter-mile width as an effective way of countering flood. "The flood water passing through this forest cover will raise the level of the banks, and after a gradual gain of height the spilling of the bank would be stopped completely", Bhuyan suggested (Goswami Rituporn, 2011). But the opinion of these intellectuals was continuously ignored by the modern state of Assam. Following a national consensus, the modern state of Assam developed a political economy of river control in the valley.

Concluding the study, it can be said that rivers have always had a dominant hold on the humankind. So, while locating the rivers in the human history, it is much important to understand the interconnection between natural environment and human being. As far as the river ecology in the post-colonial state is concerned,the people of both ancient India and Assam made use of water resources

for their survival very habitually, yet the real exploitation of the river had happened only after the coming of the British. Earlier people accustomed to the flood problem, hence adopted their own means of flood protection measures. As for example, they normally avoided the places near the river bank which were more vulnerable for floods. The population was not that increasing due to which avoiding those places and settled in a secured one was not an issue. But as time passed, population also increased demanding more land for settlement as well as habitation. This problem was intensified by the British through the inauguration of a development project dominated by industrialization, capitalization as well as urbanization, considering the nature as a mere commodity. So when the British came to India, they came with an idea of rivers as only water pipes to be harnessed and this hydraulic intervention had made the flood a calamitous event rather than a normal natural process. Consequently, the attitude of the modern state of India in terms of its relation with the nature in general and with the rivers in particular is not only affecting the ecology only but it has also been affecting the polity, economy and society of the country.

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