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DISCOURSES OF SMALL PROVINCES IN INDIA :
A DEVELOPMENTAL PANORAMA

Pratick Mallick

Introduction

Time is the most significant tool of evolution in this world. Politics and political preferences, too, are a major parameter of that tool. Conflicts of the past turn out to be a choice of future. The reason why Machiavelli became eminent was important for the moments when the then epoch stepped just out of the medieval era. His main target was to unify Italy of his time, which was already divided into so many small constituents. Ahead in this age of democracy, the ideal of pluralism becomes the corner-stone of political expression and political maturity. A State which seems to be maturer in democracy is expected to allow pluralism to the extent of making more number of provinces in a State. Incidentally, it is noteworthy that the eruption of small provinces in lines with pluralism takes place preferably in a region which is *developing*, therefore, still unsettled as compared to the West.

India is glorified to be one of the largest democracies in the world. Geo-politically it has evolved as the *Indian Sub-Continent*. This region was basically found not unified all along if history of the land is explored down the timelines; it was rather broadly divided into two geo-political divisions, *Aryavarta* or North India and *Dakshinavarta* or South India, due to the consecutively posited Vindhyan and Satpura ranges. So, India despite a land in consistence could not develop a unified mode of administration with very few exceptions. It was perhaps during

the reign of the British, when the land in its entirety first came under the administrative purview of one single power, let alone the sporadically strewn power-pockets of the Princely States which were allowed to exist obviously as a political choice, not compulsion, of the British.

Incidentally, politics of India has also been influenced by demographic distribution of the society. In other words, India has had the tradition, often criticised vehemently, of erecting barriers between individuals on social grounds. As everybody is aware, the ancient Indian literatures promoted hierarchization of the Indian society in terms of *Varnashrama*, that is, categorization of people as *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*, all above the under-caste untouchables—the *Antyajas*. On the other hand, India has been witnessing religious bigotry and conflicts out of it for quite some time. The Medieval era India witnessed religiosity most predominantly before and during the Mughal reign. Further, the Indian society has been vulnerable to *realpolitik* through royal fights which later welcomed the Europeans to shift their interests in India from economic to political to the extent that the British chose to apply the *Divide and Rule Policy* over here. Consequently, India got finally divided as an indispensable output of that policy. Also, it became independent not with the geo-political land in tact but in broken form.

Such partition may be treated by some as a proof of democratic maturity in lines with pluralism. The people of India now started keenly bargaining among themselves to go divided, however not in lines with *sovereignty* but on grounds of *other* myriad issues, as if those issues earnestly disallowed them to remain collective.

Reasons behind breaking of states

As already indicated, the British India—bifurcated and independent in succession—did not go with the rationale for pluralist catalysts for more and more number of states. The partition of India was basically a protagonic indulgence of

the British in secessionism in lines with religions. But perhaps it made up the sense of pluralism to such an extent that reasons other than religions and sovereignty were opted by the Indians in choosing out division of large states into small ones within the federal ambit.

Immediately after independence, the Indian party system was not identical with the African type of democracy with one-party existence. It is argued that the Congress was against the one-party model.[1] But it is also a fact that pluralism became manifest to such a degree that there were differences or, better said, conflicts of opinion between the provincial leaders and the High Command of the Congress. And, this reality of the intra-party conflicts was certainly not a point of ambition for the Congress even if it consciously allowed 'free working of the electoral process, the crystallization of a factional structure within the party of consensus, the continuous pressure exercised by the opposition, and the general tendency of the leadership to preserve democratic forms....to avoid undue strife, and to hold various elements together in some sort of a balance of interests'[2] in order to maintain distinction from the so-called one-party model. Therefore, what Morris-Jones sought to argue in favour of the Indian type of 'one party dominance' based upon 'consensual authority'[3] needs to be re-examined. So, the Congress system[4] was dysfunctional from the very beginning due to want of unity within the party itself. The imbalance between the provincial committees and the High Command of the Congress can be said to be responsible for igniting the fray against the configuration of nationalism in reality and in favour of regionalism. They were two sides of the same coin leading to a dismal situation justifying pluralism in the *other* way. Whatever was the undercurrent for the situation at the helm, the breaking of large states or provinces like Bombay and Madras assumed conflicts over pluralism in language and economic prosperities. The division of Punjab into Haryana and Punjab was due to language discourse.

The first reorganization of states in India that occurred in 1956 can be said to have been initiated primarily with a view to introducing a *federation of*

language system. More broadly analysing, this aspect of *linguistic federalism* wanted the Indian society to avail various opportunities at par with Hindi as the Official language. This reorganization of states was rather welcomed as an approach to go beyond any single identity.[5] The problem was/is that there are so many languages in India. So, creating provinces only on the basis of languages is only an indulgence into artificial barriers amongst the countrymen. The situation got uncontrollable with the suicide of Potti Sriramalu. The problem became acute when the demand for new states on linguistic basis in Bombay and Tamil Nadu as well as in Punjab took to the political discourse.[6] As a consequence, the ultimate crisis found a Hobson's solution by bifurcating a larger state into two linguistic halves.

However, the reason behind the movements for Gorkhaland in West Bengal was different. The Government of West Bengal under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee took various measures to make the concerned residents happy with the issues of development. And, the good news is that West Bengal stands undivided. What it had suffered was basically a sort of sub-nationalism as distinct from separatism and secessionism. On the other hand, in the North-East the underworld forces have often put their efforts to secede from India. So, purposes and experiences for the government are not the same in this regard. ULFA, a key terrorist outfit in Assam was 'founded in 1979 with a revolutionary programme that aimed to liberate Assam from the "clutches of the illegal occupation by India" and to establish a sovereign independent Assam'.[7] In fact, in the North-East, there were many development issues as well as ethno-religious strifes[3] besides some socio-politico-economic complications that became acute with the reorganisation of this region during independence. In fact, still there are various policies and projects taken over by the Government of India (henceforth, GoI) to assure the prosperity mainly through the *Look-East Policy* (LEP). Now, there is also the *Act East Policy* (AEP). The problem is that a large number of the people over there are involved in the anti-establishment activities. It is also alleged that ULFA recruits cadres from among the Bangladeshis in Assam[8] who are 'involved with terrorism

activities, having joined with Muslim fundamentalists'[9]. In some cases, there are also reports of sponsoring of terrorism in this region by the neighbouring states or provinces like Myanmar. Actually, Assam has been assuming a complicated evolution over disputes of ethnicity, languages and religions. In fact, the *son of the soil* theory is a fluid concept; while the upper-caste Ahoms claim themselves to be the true Assamese, the Bengali Muslims living there are resolute not to accept that claim.[10] Earlier, the reason for exclusion of the Bengalis from Assam was targeted out of the Assamese' fear of 'cultural subordination at the hands of the Bengali middle class, and demographic conquest at the hands of the Bengali peasantry', a fear which 'aimed at driving the immigrants back to where they came from'.[11]At present, the scope of ethnonationalism seems to be veered to the revived nationalism by the *Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019* and the *National Register of Citizens* in the state.

On the other hand, in very early 2000s, the creation of three more states in central India like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttaranchal (later, Uttarakhand) was not on the basis of languages but backwardness. The findings show that these states despite created with developmental issues in mind, ultimately failed to yield the requisite results. Even more than one decade after creation of the three states, it was found out that Uttarakhand was at the lower end in the *Human Development Index* (HDI) while Chhattisgarh had suffered the significant tribal displacement in the past while Jharkhand was still very much backward[12]. However, very recently, the index of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) transpires that Uttarakhand has fared much better but Chhattisgarh is not in a position of relief; moreover, the conditions of Jharkhand and Bihar are seriously alarming. They ranked in succession in descending order in the SDG India Index 2020-21.[13] The recent *Inequality-adjusted HDI* (IHDI) of states in India shows that Uttarakhand's position is not too bad with 10th rank as against its 7th Rank HDI while Orissa gains a little improvement with Rank IHDI 17 as against Rank HDI 19. Bihar and Chhattisgarh stand on two sides of Orissa's Rank IHDI as 16 and 18 respectively against the respective Rank HDI 18 and 17.[14] The little fluctuation

of results between Rank IHDI and Rank HDI seems to be no significant fluctuation at all. These three states or provinces are standing more or less around the same position.

To the contrary, Telangana already got its demand fulfilled for a separate state carved out of the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. Interestingly, Andhra Pradesh once upon a time had to be carved out of the Madras province due to the outrageous movement and the ultimate death of Potti Sriramalu mentioned earlier. Thus, it is a learning experience to India that states keep on being cut into pieces over time. What rather prevails is that the social movement for the politico-legal reason becomes successful in getting the demand for new states into the reality. Therefore, yielding to the demand for bifurcation of large states is at first a democratic attitude. The entire process of implementation of such demands reiterates pluralism as a democratic right. By far, the success is treated as the ultimate democratic satisfaction.

Methodology

This study is basically a qualitative one. First, the quantitative data were consulted to identify or locate the states or provinces to understand merits or demerits, as the case may be, of creating more and more number of states. It also helped me for purposive sampling. It is noteworthy that purposive sampling of people living in those particular states was essential for interviews. In other words, I felt it was necessary to interview those people who, first, are from those particular state(s) which got carved out of the large state(s). Secondly, those people were the best sources for my knowledge of what the actual problems, challenges and crises they do suffer in the new small states, which they think they would not have faced, had the small states were not even formed. For the merits, too, the first-hand experience of such people, I believed, would be necessary for my study. In both cases, I also exercised snowball sampling. In fact, I tried to take interviews of the Indians into five regional categories—north, south, west, central, and east and north-east. I decided to take telephonic and virtual interviews of people from

among my acquaintances, both staying at and migrating from such new states in order of the categories. Basically, I preferred balancing between the structured and unstructured interviews to sticking to either of them strictly because I felt either of them in acute application might consist of some lacunae in getting desired knowledge. Then I tried to sort out the commonalities in terms of merits and demerits of their experiences. Besides, I explored articles and chapters of journals and books as well as content-analysis of some project-report of Government of India and those newspapers reports regarding this topic. I also consulted some judicial verdicts on various issues in this regard. Finally, I interpreted all of them and noted down the points into two broad heads as positive and negative impacts of breakage of large states into pieces, irrespective of the grounds.

Advantages

I. Economic Benefits

Before accepting the demands for a new province, the government at its administrative level has to assess the consequence, both positive and negative. To do it, what becomes necessary is to compare the economic potential of the two new states with that of the parent state. To begin with, focus should be on the *Central Place Theory* (hereinafter, CPT) developed by the eminent Economist— Walter Christaller.[15] CPT is found to be an important ingredient to making a new and small state self-reliant. The growth in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh shows that the natural resources in those states led to their economic stability and credibility, which had not been possible until they were parts of larger states. 'Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh...[albeit] the most backward parts of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh [and] in turn...among the most backward states of India......after becoming separate states....have emerged as industrial dynamos. ..... Both states [having] ample minerals like coal and iron ore....was not an economic advantage when they were part of larger states. Rather, their mineral revenues were diverted to state capitals [which] ended after they became separate states. .... [These two states] are not growing fast simply through mining. They have experienced a manufacturing

boom.'[16] Therefore, once a state comes up with its own existence, it gets the opportunity to generate its income directly from its natural resources, can levy taxes and collect and, finally redistribute the same through welfare schemes. It helps to ameliorate the socio-economic condition of the people living in the new states. In effect, it promotes the life-style of those people for better, towards the minimum standard followed in the urban fringes of India with the flavour of globalization.

Also, being a new state brings the opportunity to directly participate in the federal arrangement stipulated between the Centre and the states. As a consequence, a new state as well can go ahead with its financial budget and planning with a prime intention to cater the resources to the cause of the people living at the lower and middle tiers in the society.

Further, nowadays the economy is based on market that eclipses closed economy of the past. The discourse is that the new states are required to initiate the public-funded welfarism, on the one hand, and promote simultaneously the potentials of growth at the behest of the tertiary sector of the state economy. Incidentally, more often than not, the new states have the opportunity to initiate development projects on the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model.

It is also an opportunity for a new state to attract the foreign investments. It, thus, widens the scope of industrialization and redistribution of resources among the common people living in those states. Incidentally, it should be noted that in new states both the land and labour primarily remain cost-effective, which is a favourable condition for expansion in business and trade. This is also good for national income as well. Accordingly, the new states can wipe out the challenge of unemployment with the steady growth in purchase capacity and social security for the common people.

On the other hand, the making of new states means creation of new capital(s) as happened to Ranchi, Raipur and Dehra Dun as well as flourishment

of towns into new cities. Capital cities attract multifarious investments particularly in infrastructural projects. Incidentally, in recent past the investors have shunned the so-called big cities due to too much hike in land-price and taxes, and they have slipped into the suburban areas. There is another advantage of creation of new states; in larger states, there function various business lobbies in capacity of pressure groups, which in turn reflect making of policies in favour of the powerful lobbies at the sacrifice of the weak ones leading to the under-or-no-development of certain section of businesses. As a consequence, trade in those particular areas lag behind either other domestic producers in other provinces as well as the international producers.

II.   Small States and Green Economy

The recent changes in policy-making for some small states in India seem to be determined to go ahead with the global regime of green environment. In fact, it is the right time for India 'to ponder upon the need for a path of recovery that maintains the balance between economic recovery and environmental sustainability'.[17] Sikkim has taken it forward with the credential of being 'India's first fully organic state'[18] as well as 'the first organic state in the world [according to a statement].[19]'; this small state had started materializing this target as back as in 2003 under the aegis of Pawan Chamling as then Chief Minister of Sikkim.[20] Sikkim has been awarded with the 'Future Policy Award 2018'—"Oscar for best policies"—conferred by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations for 'the World's best policies promoting agroecological and sustainable food'.....'beating 51 nominated policies from 25 countries'.[21] Many Northeast states are already working so that single use plastics can be prohibited and organic farming can be encouraged; such states are Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.[22] On the other hand, two Union Territories (UTs) namely Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep Islands now generate 100 percent of their electricity from renewable sources.[23] 'In order to shift from diesel to cleaner and renewable sources for energy generation, the Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) ED

signed a 'Memorandum of Understanding' with The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) on November 30, 2013.[24] [In] future, power grids would be moving towards 100% renewable sources such as SPV and LNG with energy storage systems. .... [Further, it], focuses on stabilized grid operations for various supply scenarios in 2022 with techno-commercial implications'.[25] On the other hand, Lakshadweep's export strategy is based on blue green economy of the islands; Lakshadweep secures 'the status of second state/UT to be declared as 100% organic by Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India'.[26] Actually, there is a significant reason as to why these small islands like Andaman and Nicobar as well as Lakshadweep are so concerned with environmentalism. In a 2012 public report on Lakshadweep, supported by UNDP, it was clearly mentioned that due to their physical location and vulnerability to natural disasters and climate extremes, extreme openness of their economies, low adaptive capacity',....'their resilience to climate variability and change' is reduced.[27]

III. New Public Employment Opportunities

Creation of a new state yields the state administration to be arranged meticulously; after a large state gets broken into two, civil service officials and clerical persons are distributed between the two, leading to many vacancies. Further, creation of a new state obviously does have creation of additional vacancies particularly at the higher level of administration; for example, all the new ministries require Principal Secretaries, Departmental Secretaries, Joint Secretaries and so on. New districts, sub-divisions, divisions and zones may be created for better administration. The police administration also needs to be organized; some new portfolios equivalent to the rank of Director General of Police (DGP), Additional DGP(s) are created; in some cases, new police commissionarates, divisions and police districts may also be created. All these new posts make additional vacancies for Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Indian Police Service (IPS). To make the state administration more efficient, many new posts are created for the state civil services as well. Improvement of the Panchayat administration also becomes

a major necessity for the new state. Moreover, the Central Government needs to establish branches of central offices of *inter alia* the Auditor General, Income Tax etc. There are also chances for launching new or reinvigoration of the old airports, which further need more posts to be created. Even new High Courts as well as newer colleges and universities are also established. All these help to ensure the public-sector based employment of the educated youths. There are also various ancillary sources of earning which make the way for the growth of informal sector amidst the tertiary or services sector of the economy. Overall, this brings opportunities to youths—highly and lowly educated—to engage into earning by means of public and private employments as well as doing large and petty businesses or being engaged in ancillary types of jobs. This is also applicable to all those who benefit from the creation of new business hubs.

IV. Good Social Security eliminates Anti-Establishmentism

The relation between social security and anti-establishment activities is always justified in inverse proportion; the more there is social security, the less is the chance for motivation towards the anti-establishment activities. As already discussed, in a new small state it is easier to ensure socio-economic betterment for the people particularly those who are from the marginalized tier of the society. In terminological parlance, a small state is better equipped to provide near-meticulous *authoritative allocation of values*[28]. This is the way by which the beneficiaries of the constructive policies of the state can ensure their participation in the democracy of the state. Thus, it can be said employments as well as earning through businesses function as the major *confidence building measures* initiated by states. In fact, this makes way for the commendable volume of foreign investment inflows seeking a smooth and non-hazardous political ambience helpful for continuous investments.

Therefore, the most important advantage of a new state is that by this means, the government, through various welfare policies and applications thereof, can ascertain the less manipulation of the common people into various anti-

establishment outfits. However, it is also argued that internal security ultimately depends upon how governments of states, whether large or small, manage 'the aspirations and development of the people they presume to govern'.[29] So, it is necessary for a government to ensure 'credibility and confidence in government; keeping a continuous vigil for fulfilment of people's vision; effective protection; peace and good governance; rejuvenating tribal economy including social services; sustainable development...holistic planning...and negotiating crises by focusing on ending of confrontation'.[30] Yet, it is a reality that a portion of a large state, if overlooked for development initiatives, craves to detach from the large one and do exist with its own identity within the federal arrangement. Madhya Pradesh and Bihar as large states did not take any developmental initiatives for the areas which later came out as Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. 'Such callousness sustained poverty, maladministration and ensured rapid spread of Maoist rebels in these territories'.[31] In 2016, then Chief Minister of Jharkhand, Raghubar Das, declared the aim of his government was to free the state from extremism and crime.[32] In 2017, Jharkhand was already 'praised' by the Centre 'for tackling extremism, saying the state has done "good work" in curbing the menace'.[33] The recent success is that the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), GoI, has 'reduced the number of Left Wing Extremism (LWE)-hit districts to 16 from 19 in Jharkhand'.[34] The Chhattisgarh government, too, is serious about tackling the LWE activities; in 2020 Chhattisgarh Chief Minister, Bhupesh Baghel met Union Home Minister and 'discussed a 10-point action plan to tackle Left Wing Extremist (LWE) in the state' and their discussion covered some infrastructure development plans like 'central funds for aspirational districts, increasing telecom facilities in Naxal-affected regions, availability of iron ore at 30% discount to steel plants to be set up in Bastar, among others'.[35]

Disadvantages:

I. Economics of Bifurcation Politics

Large states enjoy privileges of neo-liberal market economies. 'Relatively developed regions within the larger states have invariably benefited more from

the flow of private investment as compared to the regions on the periphery with disturbed law and order situations and poor economic and social infrastructure.'[36] This may pose as a threat to the overall prosperity of the state in general and the region thereof oriented to get detached. In fact, once the demand for new state is accepted, it posits as a threat for the newly formed state to assume the development initiatives on industrial fronts as fast as required to keep pace with the market. It may be more acute if the main sources of primary sector the state economy slip into the parent state. The same challenge may also take place the parent state as well; in the case of Jharkhand being carved out of the erstwhile Bihar, the mines got into Jharkhand, and that triggered a challenge to Bihar itself. In case of Chhattisgarh *vis-à-vis* erstwhile Madhya Pradesh, some mines got into the former.

In the newly formed states, there is a great opportunity, however, to erect modern industries in lines with globalization. It promotes pursuits of professional qualifications of youths, which, to the contrary, leads to unemployment for the *unskilled* labourers. It may ultimately lead to *Jobless Growth* in the new state, which denotes concentration of resources into a small section of the society despite steady growth in *Gross State Domestic Product* (GSDP) of that state. As a result, despite good mission to implement need of the era to comply with globalization, the initiatives meet with unwanted protests and showcasing of public outrages. So, such condition may ultimately weaken the democracy of the state. Incidentally, there is a reason to revisit Joseph Stiglitz who once indicated the developing voice being heard too little with the voices of special interest being heard too loudly.[37] Though his remark was in response to the weaknesses in the US domestic processes, but it was mainly related to 'voter registration and campaign financing'[38]. So, theoretically this rationale can be accepted. Here, the governments of the newly formed states in India need to be careful enough so that the governance does not fail to generate allegiance from all the citizens living in the new states concerned. Therefore, providing sufficient employment is a basic responsibility of the government; but any new government (not the regime only) faces it difficult to manage all the things perfectly and properly. In fact, this depends upon two basic

conditions; first, the extent of people's agency towards work-culture, and secondly, the intensity of migration that often takes place in case of bifurcation of any large state. Normally, the old cities do have the potentials of feeding a large number of people in myriad ways. These cities are already developed enough by the time the parent state gets bifurcated. As a consequence, the new states attract two types of labourers—indented as well as educated ones. While the former are plentifully available from the backward areas which are otherwise attached with the newly created state(s), the latter are from the well-established urban fringes either based in the new states themselves or migrating from other states. Thus, the demographic profile gets complicated.

Thus, politics and economy are highly interdependent and over-lapping. The creation of small states, therefore, needs to be planned with proper roadmaps towards precautions against all odd issues and challenges feasible to pose as threats to the question of development.

II. Politics of Water-sharing

Bifurcation also leads to another crisis—*water-sharing*. In fact, when a long distance of a river flows through one state, there is no problem; but once the state gets geo-politically bifurcated, the river length, too, comes into legal purview of the new states accordingly.

So, sharing of river and canal water often becomes an issue of conflicts among few states that share the same river basins or canal water. These disputes cannot be tried either by the Supreme Court of India or by any other court under the *Inter-State Water Disputes Act* (1956)[39] which says that when the Central Government is requested by the State Government party to the dispute to refer the water dispute to a Tribunal for the purpose of adjudication and the Central Government is of the opinion that the water dispute cannot be settled by negotiations, the Central Government constitutes a Water Disputes Tribunal for adjudication of the water dispute.[40] The conflicts include not only issues of less cubic centimetre of water leading problems in the economy of pisciculture and navigation, but also

tackling the excess of water in the rainy season. In fact, the latter is also a great challenge to the cause of inundation particularly where rivers flow at the danger level following heavy shower.

III. Leadership Crisis

The next big challenge following creation of new states is the *leadership crisis*. In fact, in today's India, the leadership crisis has become the biggest political crisis. Apart from very few politicians, the bulky rest are *either* bereft of certain political ideologies, thereby, swung by the greed for power and positions *or* do have criminal records. This portion of discussion should be given particular weightage as because there is a link between the leadership crisis and the reality of pluralism. In fact, the creation of new states can be at most traced as an effect of pluralism, as earlier said.

But, the problem is the basic discourse between ideology and pragmatics, which underplays the behaviour in politics, found with both the leaders and common voters. In other words, the citizens always look for their leaders with certain ideologies, whom they believe they can depend upon. But, at the demise of ideologies, they become critical of the quality of leadership. Incidentally, it is important to mention that even when they criticise the leaders, they never take into account the dilution of politics also happens due to an overhauling change in the behaviour of themselves—the voters. Certainly, in this age of globalization, the voters are largely sick of sticking to a particular ideology; they rather love to float among political parties, not ideologies, for the choice of casting their votes in elections. Therefore, it can be said that they are extremely agnostic about ideologies at all.

Now, the challenge is with the leaders who are required to satisfy the voters who deliberately shrug off any limits of ideologies, in favour of utilities only; yet, they are the protagonists of criticising the leaders for shifting from one party to the other—the reality of freedom from ideologies.

Incidentally, the *anti-defection provisions* were passed vide the *Constitution (Fifty-second Amendment) Act, 1985* which added *Tenth Schedule*

to the Constitution of India. The Paragraph 3 of the *Tenth Schedule* termed defecting by a member of a House claiming a faction comprising not less than one-third of the members of a legislature party including himself and any other members of his legislature as a result of a split in his original political party as not a disqualification on ground of defection. On the other hand, the Paragraph 4 of the Tenth Schedule says that if a member of the House claims that he and any other members of his original political party, comprising not less than two-thirds of the members of the legislature party, merge with another political party, it will not be treated as disqualification on grounds of defection.[41] However, the Paragraph 3 has been omitted by the *Constitution (Ninety-first Amendment) Act, 2003* which further inserted Article 361B providing for the bar in case of a disqualified member of the House from holding any remunerative political post under the GoI or the Government of a State and the salary or remuneration is paid from the public revenue of that Government, or under a body incorporated or not and owned wholly or partially by GoI or the Government of a State and the salary or remuneration is paid by such body, except in compensatory nature.[42] In effect, therefore, this is a kind of protection to the political awareness and decision of the electors thanks to the number ceilings which the members of the House intending to defect are required to qualify from being disqualified. Even if they do not defect, the unity within the political parties does not remain all the same. A very awkward situation took place in response to the issue of bifurcation that happened to the Bombay province; the unity inside the Indian National Congress got rocked considerably when the then Union Finance Minister—C. D. Deshmukh—resigned in demand for a unilingual Maharashtra with Bombay as its capital. This created a rift between the state unit and central High Command within the Congress.[43] In fact, the regional and national issues often going antithetic to each other promotes ultimately a spree of pluralism, creation of more leaders and, possibly, new parties in future and, finally, inevitable circumstances of alliance that has the ramifications like *Shadow Cabinet* on the one hand, and the *Hung Parliament* on the other.

IV. Demographic Displacement Theory Reappraised

This is another demerit of creation of new states, which involves various forms of migration issues as already indicated. And, they need to be analysed accordingly. First, when a new state is created, the erstwhile suburban towns are aimed at being turned to a city, as similarly a semi-urban area into an urban one. Therefore, people from rural fringes migrate to the new urban ones in quest for their better financial fortune. On the other hand, the investors oriented to making profits in cost-effective manners always look for the rural and semi-urban areas for their investment, which ultimately rakes up the issues of land acquisition. For development purposes too, land acquisition takes place. In these cases, displacements happen due to 'projects of dams, roads, mines, power plants and new cities'.[44] On the other hand, internal displacement took place due to caste conflicts as happened to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, religious conflicts as happened to urban areas in Bombay, Coimbatore, Bhagalpur and Aligarh as well as 'son of the soil movements' as happened to Meghalaya by the Khasi students and to Arunachal Pradesh against the Chakmas[45] as also to Assam against the Bengalis[46]. Besides, there are some small areas already intending for a new state or province. All of these automatically usher the affected local demography in to another challenge—internal displacement. 'Identity-based autonomy movements, such as in Bodoland, Punjab, Gorkhaland and Ladakh, have also led to violence and displacement.'[47] Not always is there any incident of division of a large state into few small ones; but problems are plentifully found in many states which are not large in volume. Such state is West Bengal which assumed its present demarcation due to partition of India from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. The volume of erstwhile Bengal has been drastically reduced to what shaped as the portion of Bengal within India, in capacity of West Bengal. This state has suffered a lot particularly in agriculture due to that partition. In recent past, around 15 years back at most, this state underwent severe challenges in agriculture in two areas, Singur in Hooghly and Nandigram in West Midnapore districts. Internal displacements regarding land acquisition took place both the places. It also hampered

the agro-economy as well. What was most alarming was the force harnessed in Nandigram against peasant struggle protesting against land acquisition for building special economic zone.[48] The *Communist Party of India (Marxist)* [CPI (M)]-led ruthless chaos over there during the Left Front (LF) regime under Buddhadeb Bhattacharya as then Chief Minister of the state caused internal displacement on a large scale of the people who protested against the LF project over there. On the other hand, the erstwhile Kashmir witnessed internal displacement of the Kashmiri Pandits who 'were coerced into leaving the Valley, [still] the Indian government does not consider them to be IDPs'.[49] '[B]y 1996, 250,000 Pandits had fled to Jammu, Delhi, and various other Indian cities following an inability of authorities to provide safety from threats and violence by extremists.'[50]

V.   Politics of Corruption

To begin with, it needs to be remembered that bifurcation of a state is a politics of demand and supply. In other words, it relates to the cybernetics of a democracy. In some cases, the situation becomes complicated due to bargaining *sans* ideologies, thereby, leading to very much unstable coalitions. In that case, what happens is that the avaricious leaders try to maximize benefit by accruing large amount of black money. Such was the case with Jharkhand which was eventful due to relentless constructing and de-constructing of alliances. The most prominent leader involved in corruption was the then Chief Minister of Jharkhand, Madhu Koda who shifted between the NDA and UPA within a very short period of time by using undue tricks and became the Chief Minister ultimately, however, for a tiny period. He had to resign when situations became quite unfavourable and by that time, he was already involved in the corruption.[51]

So, corruption is by far the most deleterious output of the small states. Even if corruption may take place anywhere irrespective of new small states as well as the old large one, yet there remains a possibility of corruption in case of newly created states. Actually, this is not the issue of new states, but that of financial condition of the states concerned. In many cases of corruption, some

civil servants are found to be involved. To add to what is already exemplified above in case of corruption of Madhu Koda, there were also found guilty former coal secretary Harish Chandra Gupta and former Jharkhand Chief Secretary A. K. Basu.[52] Truly, as already mentioned above, the kind of political change in a new state is something different from that in an old state. So, what is essential is that the government should stick to zero-tolerance towards corruption both within the parties and bureaucracy. This is significant that the citizens' expectation of a better life in a new province should not go upset due to corruption, as happened to Jharkhand. Despite being a new state or province in 2000, Jharkhand could not improve a lot mainly due to continuous political overplay and corruption. The new state government should always remember that it is its sole responsibility to ascertain values of true democracy which sounds cybernetically reliable for the greatest number of people—crass and educated.

Conclusion:

So far analysed, it is primarily sufficient to say that it does not matter if a state is large or small. However, it is a fact that small states in India have already achieved in some cases, which are the prominent ones to give leadership to the rest of India, particularly the large states. For example, the smaller states are showing the ray of hope for the larger ones for a bioethical future in India in its symbiosis with the global regimes in this regard.

Now, it is a fact that India is truly a pluralist society. Federalism is an attempt to shape up pluralism to a certain acceptable extent. Moreover, creation of small states or provinces has been a pluralist necessity over time. It is, therefore, important to 'promote democratic values and temperament by recognizing, accommodating and protecting diverse regional identities and rights'[53]. There are both optimistic as well as pessimistic outputs concerning the emergence of new states or provinces. It requires the new states to initiate proper blending between *politics as an arena* and *politics as a process*. It is in order to justify democracy as a tool of promoting popular confidence in and allegiance to a new province or

state accordingly. However, secessionism or separatism should not be indulged at all. Negotiation is the best policy for overcoming any challenge. In fact, pluralism should not be reckoned as a weapon of deconstructing nationalism and national identity. 'The creation of smaller states [is rather expected to] contribute to the federal agenda of enhancing democratic development based on decentralized governance and greater autonomy for units.'[54]

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UNDERSTANDING NATIONAL REGISTER OF CITIZENS (NRC) IN ASSAM'S SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

Rimon Bhuyan Gogoi

Introduction

> *Proti oxomiya, ami bhal bharotiyo,*
> *Aru Duronir pora ahi*
> *Luitor parore matik matri boola*
> *Proti bharotiyo hol Notun roopor oxomiya..*

These lines from Bhupen Hazarika's classic piece '*Ami Axomiya Nohou Dukhiya*', first written in 1968, and later re-written in 1979 in the heydays of the Assam Revolt, embody both the spirit and anxieties of the people Assam in its swiftly changing social demography. Assam has a milieu of inherent social multiplicity and profuse histories. Its social history is a tale of integration and co-existence. A large section of its population had originated from Austro-Mongoloid and Tibeto-Burman parts. Most of the histories of these various communities go back to around 2000-3000BC[i] whereas the migration of the Ahoms, Aryans and Muslims was a later phenomenon. The ancient mythologies like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, various *tantras* refer to the people from these regions as '*asura*' or '*danab*' or '*kirata*' (Barpujari 1990: 81-82; Gait 1905: 11-15), thereby, simultaneously underscoring their difference and relegating them to 'otherness'. The earliest migration of the Aryans to these parts are believed to have been taken place around the first century AD. Aryan migration continued to take place at a gradual

yet regular pace, though, however, Aryanisation and Sanskritisation remained fairly limited among the indigenous communities here (Barpujari 1990: 305; Gait 1905: 9-10). Assam larger, continued to exist as home to numerous autonomous and inter-related communities, mutually co-existing, yet, fairly independent of each other. The coming of the Ahoms in the thirteenth century provided the first ever context for these communities to come together politically, and to some extent, socially. The Ahoms belonged to the Shan dynasty of their East-Asian kingdom of Pong. They came not as invaders but as migrants who in the course of time, built up a great kingdom unifying the greater parts of Assam and the various tribes, and laid the foundation of the composite Assamese nationality (Chatterjee 1955: 37-38; Gogoi 1992: 3). The Ahoms had distinct language (Tai) and distinct religion (worshippers of Somedeo). But, perhaps, they are a unique example of rulers in human history who gave up their religion and language, and adopted the Assamese language and the local religions. Though they maintained their traditional ways to some extent, they openly assimilated with the native people adapting their lifestyle, and established an overarching, and to some extent centralised, rule, that lasted for over six hundred years (Chatterjee 1955). The incessant attacks from the rulers of Bengal, and later the Mughals, could not fundamentally alter the social and political context of Assam[ii] which had persisted unaltered until the coming of the British in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, from whence started a new era in the socio-political history of the region.

Any debate revolving around the current updation of the National Register of Citizens or the NRC must be contextualised within the social milieu of Assam's unique demography and socio-political experiences. Any ahistorical reading of the developments surrounding NRC that are inconsiderate to the multi-cultural and multi-nodal nature of the region's demography, would end up being uninformed, parochial, and subversive. The NRC was first prepared in 1951 on the basis of the census conducted in that same year. The Citizenship Act of 1955 states all the provisions pertaining to citizens of India. It considers as eligible citizens those people who migrated to India before July 19, 1948. Assam stands as the only

exceptional case here, as also has been now stated in the Act. The Assam Accord of 1985 that was the culmination of the Assam Agitation that had begun in 1979, led to the agreement on the date March 24, 1971 being the date for conferring citizenship to the immigrant populations residing in Assam. Assam therefore has accommodated people migrating to its hinterland for many decades more than the rest of India. This also means that the NRC of 1951 is necessitated to be updated so that the large chunk of people who had come to Assam after 1951 and before March 24, 1971, and have not been given their due status as citizens because of lack of any such massive campaign, be given their rightful recognition as citizens of India.

The current updation process considers citizenship on three grounds: on the basis of the NRC of 1951, Electoral Rolls upto 1971, and in the absence of the above, admissible documents upto the midnight of March 24, 1971. The process of updating the NRC is limited to only enumerating a list of citizens of India residing in Assam, and in no way means any action against those whose names might not get included in the list. It is not an agency with any capacity of such action. This process must be considered as a step towards inclusion and acknowledgement of a large number of citizens who, so far, have not been given their due rights. Having come to reside in Assam before 1971, these people are rightful citizens of the state as had been decided in the Assam Accord of 1985. An updated NRC shall bring to them the privileges long denied to them. Secondly, it is important to note, this process is being conducted under the supervision of the Supreme Court of India, and must not be reduced to simple ideological battle between communal forces and their representative political parties. What is necessary here is a proper redressal mechanisms for which the Supreme Court of India has already provided directions. Third, the process of documenting the National Register of Citizens is still an ongoing process and has not reached any conclusion. With the Assam National Register of Citizens authority 'seeking comprehensive and time-bound re-verification of citizens' list' and the former coordinator of NRC Prateek Hajela now being booked on suspicion of gross manipulation of family-tree data, the

entire documentation process is now in question. On a different level, the very basis of NRC that rests on 1971 as the date for acquiring citizenship in Assam is also being challenged. And more importantly, the very fixation of 1971 through the Assam Accord for according citizenship in Assam as against 1951 for the rest of India is being challenged by the Assam Sanmilita Mahsangha (ASM) under the leadership of Motiur Rahman. ASM (along with other organisations like The National Democratic Front of Bodoland and Indigenous Tribal People's Front) has filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging the same. Finally NRC is not simplistically a legal issue or even a communal one. Understanding it requires a deeper and more thorough study of Assam's changing demography and its political complexity.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first is a brief analysis of Assam's complex socio-political history since the coming of the British. The second section argues against a reduction of this complex debate to communal binaries, highlighting the different nature of Assam's social context. The third section considers the humanitarian question vis-a-vis the issue of illegal immigration, pressing the need for an appraisal of the anxieties of the indigenous communities and the need for engaging in more constructive debates surrounding the settlement of the immigrant people. And the fourth and the final section revolves around the question of 'otherness' to which the entire north-eastern region of India has felt to have been relegated to.

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I

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THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: From the Coming of the British to the End of the Twentieth Century

British occupation of Assam began as an immediate effect of the Yandaboo Agreement (Treaty) between the British and the Burmese Government in 1826. Upper Assam was left (leased out) thereafter to an Ahom king. The king was later dislodged and the Ahom rule came to end by the year 1837. It was brought under the British rule after the Sepoy Revolt. Assam was brought into the direct

centralised authority of the British administration in the year 1874 through the Scheduled District Act 1874. Initially it was attached to the Bengal Presidency, but was later placed under a Chief Commissioner. The province of Assam at that time consisted of the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nagaon, Sivasagar, Lakahimpur, Cacher, Garo Hills, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and the Naga Hills. It was constituted as the Chief Commissionership of Assam. Sylhet, North Lushai Hills and South Lushai Hills are subsequently added to the province (Datta 1993: 5-7; Trivedi 1995: xii-xiii). In 1905, following the partition of Bengal, Assam was attached with East Bengal. This, however, did not prove to be a viable political development, and in 1912, Assam was detached and was brought under the Chief Commissioner once again. It became a Governor's province in 1921.

Assam underwent several waves of administrative organisation and reorganisation aimed at accommodating the complexities of the ethnic multiplicities of identities of the native people (Datta 1993). The 1872 Act had separated the remote and the intractable hilly areas of the North-East to ascertain the special context and status to the hill tribes, while the districts in the plains of the Brahmaputra and the Barak valleys were placed under the General Acts and Regulation. Section 52A of the Government of India Act 1919 empowered the Governor General-in-Council to identify and declare any area a backward tract for the safeguard of the indigenous people and their lands (Datta 1993). Areas so declared would remain outside any Legislative Act. Nine of the areas were identified as backward tracts. The Indian Statutory Commission or the Simon Commission, amidst tremendous protests, submitted its report in 1930, and reaffirmed the special status of Assam and its 'backward areas', thereby bringing them into more direct centralised authority. Government of India Act 1935 retained most of its recommendations, while replacing the terms 'backward tracts' with 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas (Datta 1993). The primary idea behind this was to ascertain the special context of Assam's ethnic indigenous communities and hence their need to be kept outside the absolute authority of the provincial legislature. The 'Excluded Areas' were: a) North east Frontier (Sadiya, Balipara, Lakhimpur), b) Naga Hills

District, c) Lushai Hills District, and d) North Cachar Hills sub-division of Cachar district. The 'Partially Excluded Areas' were: a) Garo Hills District, b) Mikir Hills in Nagaon and Sibsagar Districts, and c) British part of Khasi and Jaintia Hills District (Datta 1993: 7).

Given the alarming situation of drastic demographic change that began with the twentieth century with large influx of various migrant communities, especially East Bengal muslim migrants, in massive scale into the region, the British administration devised a mechanism, to control the transfer of lands of the indigenous communities, that popularly came to be known as the 'Line System' (Bordoloi 1999: 5-9). This came out in 1920, especially for Nowgong, and Barpeta subdivision of Goalpara district. The Line-System divided the villages into three categories: 'Open Villages', 'Closed Villages' and 'Mixed Villages'. Immigrant population was allowed to settle freely in the Open Villages, and were not allowed to settle in the Closed villages. In the mixed ones, they could settle on one side of the line drawn on the map. This, however, having proved not much fruitful, a Line-System Committee was formed headed by F. W. Hockenhull. The Committee observed that 'tribal villages were worst victims of unregulated encroachment of vacant land' which at times resulted in complete disappearance of many tribal villages (Bordoloi 1999: 5-9). The Gopinath Bordoloi government sought to protect the land of the indigenous people. But the Muslim League governmentunder Muhammad Sadulla that came to power alternately during the time of Second World War undid Bordoloi's efforts by reversing his land policies (Bordoloi 1999).

The census reports brought out details of this increasingly changing demography of the region. The 1921 Census Report highlighted some primary data. Mr. Lloyd wrote in the report that "in 1911, few cultivators from Eastern Bengal had gone to Goalpara. In the last decade (1911-21) the movement had extended far up the valley, and the colonists now form an appreciable element in population of all the four lower and central districts. In Goalpara nearly 20% of the population is made up of the settlers. The next district is Nagaon where they

form about 14% of the whole population. Almost every train and steamer brings parties of these settlers and it seems likely that their march will extend further up the Brahmaputra valley forth the river before long" (The 1921 Census Report). The 1931 Census Report proved his suspicion and worry to be true. To take an example, in 1911, the total Bengali speaking population in Goalpara was 77,000 and Mymensingh immigrants was 34,000. By 1921 these numbers rose to 1,51,000 and 78,000 respectively. By 1931, they further grew to 1,70,000 and 80,000 respectively. In Kamrup district, the total population of Bengali speaking population in 1911 was 4000 and the Mymensingh immigrants numbered 1,000. By 1921, the numbers rose to 44,000 and 30,000, and in 1931 they stood at 1,34,000 and 91,000 respectively. In Nagaon district, the same numbers stood at 4,000 and 1,000 in 1911, 58,000 and 52,000 in 1921, and 1,20,000 and 1,08,000 respectively in 1931 (Based on the data provided in Bordoloi 1999). In this context,M. A. Mulan, in his 1931 Census Report, stated that "These are startling figures and illustrate the wonderful rapidity with which the lower districts are becoming colonies of Mymensingh" (The 1931 Census Report). He went further and wrote that "wheresoever the carcass, there will be vultures gathered together. Where there is wasteland, thither flock the Mymensinghis"(The 1931 Census Report). The census reports reveal that, between 1911-21 the actual population increase was 1,61,538 which was a 26.9% increase, of which two-fifth was accounted for by natural growth, and three-fifth by migration of immigrant population. In Nagaon, during that same decade, there was a 40% rise in actual population rise, of which only 9.6% or two-seventh was due to natural growth. Kamrup experienced a 14.2% rise in total population (two-fifth) and only 5.7% rise in natural population. Between 1921 and 1931 there was only 15.8% rise in population in Goalpara (The 1931 Census Report). The Census Report of 1931 observed that "This falling off in the rate of increase is due to the fact that most of the suitable wasteland in the district had already been occupied by the Eastern Bengal colonists who poured into the district between 1901 and 1921, and that the main stream of immigrants has now found a larger scope for their activities in Kamrup and Nowgong" (The 1931 Census Report). In the same decade, Kamrup experienced a 27.9% rise in population. Of this the Gauhati Subdivision (where the immigrant population was

limited) witnessed only 15% rise whereas the Barpeta Subdivision witnessed 69% rise in population with an increasing influx of people from Mymensingh areas. The laying down of the Railways also brought about a high influx of migrant workers from Northern India and Western Bengal whose population, however, did not drastically increase. In a Report on Alienation of Tribal Land in Assam prepared in 1999, B.N. Bordoloi noted that, "The tribals in Assam generally did not like the presence of unknown people near their habitation and when they found that vacant lands adjacent to their villages were occupied by people which differed from them ethnically, linguistically and religiously, they abandoned their villages and went more inside towards the sub-montane. Sometimes their villages were forcibly occupied by the immigrants and consequently the tribals had to leave their hearth and home" (Bordoloi 1999: 4-5).

After India's independence in 1947, the Constituent Assembly retained most of the administrative provisions of the the Government of India Act 1935 pertaining to the tribal areas of Assam, barring the authority of the Governor over the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas. The Bordoloi Subcommittee was formed to investigate into the condition of these areas and its reports were incorporated in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution (The Constituent Assembly Debates). The Sixth Schedule was incorporated in the Constitution to accord autonomous status to the intractable hill areas of the then undivided Assam. The Constituent Assembly debates surrounding the the Sixth Schedule focused on the unique situation of Assam. The Bordoloi Subcommittee Report of 1947 noted that "the atmosphere of fear and suspicion which now prevails, even if it is argued that it is unjustified, is nevertheless one which must be recognised and in order to allay these suspicions and fears, it would appear necessary to provide as far as possible such constitutional provisions and safeguards as would give no room for them" (The Constituent Assembly Debates). The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution led to the formation in Assam of two autonomous hill districts, namely, North Cachar Hill District and Karbi Anglong District for protection of the tribal land and people.

The Sixth Schedule, nonetheless, only covered the hill tribes (two at that time in present Assam: Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao), and left the indigenous communities of the region outside the purview of constitutional protection. The plain tribes as well as the non-tribal native communities continued to live in a condition of acute existential crisis. In this context, at least for the protection of few plain tribes and their rights, the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation of 1886 was amended in 1947 under the leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi and a tenth chapter was added to the Regulation in the interests of the plain tribes of Assam. This Chapter introduced by the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Amendment Act of 1974 is the "bedrock to provide protection to the backward classes for ensuring sufficient land for their maintenance and then warding off all attempts by all and sundry to deprive them of it by any method whatever under any law" (Saikia 2003: 253). Accordingly, Eleven Tribal Belts and Twenty-Four Tribal Blocks were created in Assam. Six categories were brought under its jurisdiction: a) Plain Tribals, b) Hill Tribals, c) Tea-Garden Tribals, d) Santhals, e) Nepali Cultivators, and f) Scheduled Castes. The Act, however, has so far not been able to fulfil its functions to any considerable extent in regards to protecting the lands within the tribal belts and blocks. Tribal communities like the Rabhas, Tiwas, Mishings have been demanding incorporation into the Sixth Schedule. Only the Bodos have so far been incorporated into the Sixth Schedule and given an autonomous area along with Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao. The Rabhas, Tiwas and Mishings have been accorded statuary autonomous councils in 1995 and later the Deuris, Sonowal Kacharis and Thengal Kacharis were accorded the same in 2005. The actual capability of these councils in protecting the lands of their people is matter of another discussion. The task, definitely, is a very complex and difficult one. In the meantime,many non-tribal native communities who have so far been outside any constitutional protection, too, are agitating for tribal status for safeguarding their indigenous identity and protection of whatever remains of their lands.

Various tensions, however, continued to persist for the indigenous people of the region. 1960 saw emergence of lingual strifes in Assam over the issue of

Official Language. Objection came from the Hills people against the demand for Assamese to be given the Official language status in Assam. But, the more radical and organised protests came from the Bengali-speaking population residing in Assam. In a Memorandum submitted to the then Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru on his visit to Assam in July 1960, Assam Sahitya Sabha, the 'oldest and biggest literary organisation of Assam', pleaded that 'through realisation of the aspirations of the Assamese people, the great ideal upheld by the Congress, namely right of self-determination and self-expression according to the genius of the people, would be fulfilled'.[iii] After much altercations and violent encounters on both sides, the Assam Official Language Act was adopted in 1960 which declared Assamese as the official language. Soon after this, Nagaland was separated from Assam and became an independent state in 1963. Subsequently, Meghalaya attained statehood in 1972 and Mizoram was declared a Union Territory. The following years saw many attempts to organise and reorganise the state according to the demands of the Hills people. After the divisions, two hill districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao (North Cachar Hills), covered by the Sixth Schedule, remained in Assam. The Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) has of late been brought under the Sixth Schedule. By the end of the decade, resentment among the native population regarding the slow pace of economic development and the high rate of population growth resulting in massive demographic change had already begun to grow.[iv]

In March 1979, following the death of a sitting member of Parliament in the Mongoldoi constituency, a by-election had to be held. Voters' list was revised and the exponentially high number of registered voters that the new list brought out came to everyone as a shock. In the Memorandum submitted by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) to the Prime Minister on February 2, 1980 noted that about 70,000 names in the list were claimed to be objectionable out of which 45,000 were declared as foreigners by the competent Courts (All Assam Students' Union Memorandum, in Trivedi 1995: 635-639). This was the spark that led to the agonising years of the Assam movement. The Memorandum called

the developments 'burial of Indian democracy' (All Assam Students' Union Memorandum, in Trivedi 1995: 635-639). The mid-term Parliamentary elections were already approaching. Yet, the CEC refused to strike off the names detected as foreigners from the electoral rolls. The people of Assam felt betrayed, and under the leadership of AASU, came out to the streets in large numbers. The demands included detection and deportation of foreign nationals, constitutional safeguard towards the indigenous people, and updating of the National Register of Citizens of 1951 (All Assam Students' Union Memorandum, in Trivedi 1995: 635-639). The AASU Memorandum stated that 'The people of Assam must always agitate to draw the attention of the whole nation and leaders, Assam is almost a forgotten state'. Assam has shown a surprisingly high rise of population, indeed topping all states with 174% rise in population between 1911-1961, with a higher concentration in the areas with larger migrant communities. Percentage increase of population in 1951 was 31.31 for India and 19.94 for Assam, in 1961 it was 21.64 for india and 34.98 for Assam, and in 1971 it stood at 24.80 for India and 34.95 for Assam (All Assam Students' Union Memorandum, in Trivedi 1995: 635-639). The Progressive Plains Tribal Council of Assam's Memorandum to the Prime Minister on July 8, 1980 noted that "all the 33 Tribal Belts and Blocks of Assam have also now come under engulfment by the so-called population of immigrants and foreign nationals, and even the practice of settling down in such tribal areas by the immigrants and foreigners is still going on" (Progressive Plains Tribal Council of Assam's Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India The Extracts, in Trivedi 1995: 639-641). In 1983, the infamous Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act was passed by Indira Gandhi ministry which shifted the onus of proving a person as foreigner from the accused to the accuser, the same year that saw the unfortunate Nellie massacre take place. The Act under sub-sections 8(1) and 8(2) as well as 8(A) makes it mandatory for an applicant to satisfy the Central government and/or the Tribunal regarding the validity and admissibility of the claim made in the application in reference to those accused as being illegal immigrants (Illegal Migrants

(Determination by Tribunal Act) 1983). (The Supreme Court repealed the Act later in 2005 and noted that "the enforcement of the IMDT Act has no doubt facilitated to a very large extent the illegal migrants from Bangladesh to continue to reside in Assam, who on account of their huge number affect the language, script, and culture of local people" (Sarbananda Sonowal Vs Union of India, 12/07/2005, Writ Petition (civil) 131 of 2000)). After five years of turbulence and instability, the Assam Accord was finally signed on August 15, 1985 between AASU and AGSP, and the Government of India. The Memorandum of Settlement decided on conferring citizenship to people who had been residing in India as on 24.03.1971 thereby making Assam a special case in consideration of foreigners. It also provided for securing of the international border and issuing of citizenship certificates on the basis of an updated national register (Memorandum of Settlement, August 15 1985, in Trivedi 1995: 649-653). The Accord brought back stability to the state for some time. Political processes were resumed.

However, for the following decades, Assam also had to go through the violent activities of the ULFA. Also, a large number of people belonging to the Plain Tribes who were outside the Sixth Schedule continued to live in an environment of threat. The Bodo Accord was signed on February 20, 1993, after long years of struggle for their rights and recognition. The objective of the Accord was noted as "to provide maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution to the Bodos for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement" (Bodo Accord in Trivedi 1995: 654-661. The Bodoland Autonomous Council came into existence subsequently. Three more tribes were able to achieve autonomy in 1995. The Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, The Lalung (Tiwa) Autonomous Council, and the Mishing Autonomous Council were formed for the protection of land and other rights of these increasingly marginalised communities. Many other native communities of the state still continue to struggle for constitutional protection. How far these constitutional arrangements have been able to give the desired security to the dwindling population and increasing marginalisation of these communities is questionable. This, however, is

a matter for another debate. Constitutional protection has, nonetheless, undoubtedly, strengthened the faith and hope of the indigenous scheduled tribes of Assam that they have unfailingly kept on India's democracy. However, other indigenous communities still await such protection.

THE COMMUNAL QUESTION

Assam has never primarily identified itself with any religious community in its political, social or economic existence. Interpreting the current developments surrounding the updation of the NRC solely on communal binaries of Hindu-Muslim rift is a result of a more dominant perspective of Indian politics loaded with polarised binary communal identities and its associated politics that has been characteristic to mainland India. Such interpretations shall only strengthen the already growing communal forces in politics today and throw to the background the real issues that have been haunting Assam's political and social life for decades now. These issues need a historical and multicultural understanding of Assam's changing demography on the one hand and its stagnating economy on the other. As has been mentioned, the demand for updation of the NRC is not new, but has existed since the immediate after-years of Independence (and was renewed during the Assam Agitation. But the subsequent ministries at power in the state failed to fulfil this demand).

Given the special nature of citizenship provisions that prevail in Assam, the updation of the NRC is a legitimate demand. The people who migrated to Assam between 1951 and March 24, 1971 deserve to get recognition and benefits owed as citizens of India which they are by virtue of the Assam Accord. To look at the process strictly from communal perspective, and identifying Assam and its people, struggling for protection of their identity and land, with the rising tide of Hindutva politics would only alienate these already forgotten communities and create religious strife where none may have existed before. The recent intrusion of a new Brahmanical regime into the larger Vaishnavite culture of Assam can be understood as an indirect result of this 'othering'. The India that Assam had

consciously joined after independence and has remained an inseparable part of, has historically wronged the people of the region on many occasions. Even the progressive forces that have widely accepted the special nature of Indian politics accruing to the injustices based of caste and gender, have not so far given much thought on the 'voiceless' and 'under-represented' indigenous communities of Assam. To recognise the fate of these struggling communities and their struggle against the powerful state's indifference and the impositions in the interest of the larger and more dominant groups, would be one step forward to undo the injustices done.

It is essential to understand the special nature of the ethnic Assamese society. Assam, and most parts of the North-Eastern region, have never been in themselves or even a parts of a larger Hindu or a Muslim empire. Repeated attempts of the Mughals to conquer Assam also were never successful. Internally, the large sections of the native populations thwarted the attempts of the Hindu priests at Hinduisation. Edward Gait (1905) wrote, "Large sections of the population are still outside the pale of Hinduism, or in the lower stages of conversion, where their adopted religion still sits lightly on them. They (the Hindu settlers and adventurers) would convert them, admit their nobles to Kshatriya rank and invent for the king a noble descent, and then enjoy as their reward lucrative posts at Court and lands granted to them by their proselytes. They would not interfere with the tribal religious rites, as to do so would call forth the active animosity of the native priests; nor would they trouble about the beliefs of the common people, who would continue to hold their old religious notions" (Gait 1905: 10). This religious autonomy of the tribal people, and their staunch refusal to be incorporated into any dominant system of religious beliefs has defined Assamese socio-religious identity, and also, probably, has turned them into the forgotten and alienated people of the modern India. H.K. Barpujari (1990), Hiren Gogoi (1992) note that Assam never totally came under the fold of the Brahmanical Hindu religion, and in the context of independent and open societies of Assam's tribal people, the migrant Aryan Hindu religion also lost much of its

orthodox and hierarchical fervour. Barpujari writes that the tribal people "could not be absorbed nor assimilated into the Hindu system nor could they be motivated to give up their faiths and practices completely. Whatever faiths they had, still linger with them at large, and even those whom we consider to have assimilated with the Hindu system have retained the best of their traditional ones and have added them to the Hindu system" (Barpujari 1994: 259). Later, after series of failed attempts, when Mughals momentarily seized Assam's territory, all they could establish was a temporary military rule, and never were able to command the allegiance of the native people who unfailingly continued to resist these invasions. 'These movements sprang up from the inborn desire of an independence loving people, forcibly conquered'(Barpujari 1992: 108). The powerful and dominant kingdoms of the mainland India, and their religious ideologies and priests, could never fundamentally alter the inherently independent, autonomous and indigenous nature Assamese social life.

This spirit of co-existence and multiplicity could not be better appreciated and encouraged in modern India than by the popular leader and the state's first Chief Minister in Independent India, Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi. Bordoloi, with his deep understanding of Assam's social milieu, tirelessly struggled for constitutional safeguards of the indigenous communities. His Report submitted to the Constituent Assembly (The Bordoloi Sub-Committee Report) led to a detailed debate on unique context of the region, which in turn led to the formation of the Sixth Schedule for them. His report was endorsed by most of the members of the Assembly who could, with open minds, appreciate the unique character of Assam's religious and social life. Ambedkar appreciated the difference of the native people of Assam and expressed that, "The difference (between the tribal people of Assam and the rest of India) seems to be this. The tribal people in areas other than Assam are more or less Hinduised, more or less assimilated with the civilisation and culture of the majority of people in whose midst they live. With regard to tribals in Assam this is not the case. Their roots are still in their own civilisation and their own culture. They have not adopted, mainly or in a large part, either the modes or the

manners of the Hindus who surround them" (The Constituent Assembly Debates, 1949). Rev J. J. Nicholas Roy, who had been a resident in the region, reiterated the same sentiment, "They have never been under a Hindu or a Muslim rule. They had their own rule, own language, court and culture. To say that the culture of these people must be swallowed by another culture, unless it is a better culture, and unless it be by a process of gradual evolution, is rather very surprising to anyone who wants to build up India as a nation and bring all people together" (The Constituent Assembly Debates, 1949). Even in my own field work in the hinterlands of Goalpara and undivided Nagaon districts, the tribal people consciously refused to be identified with the Hindus. There was also a kind of remorse for those among them who had assimilated to a larger degree with the Hindu society and adopted its hierarchical practices.

It is also to be noted that, apart from the recognised tribal communities, non-tribal indigenous communities too have been maintaining distinct cultural identities different from dominant Brahmanical Hindu culture of India. Any discussion on these issues should be inclusive of the histories and agencies of the indigenous peoples and communities. The probable proposals for outcomes, too, should be empathetic to the indigenous tribal and non-tribal communities who fear loss of their customary lands and identities in a context of increasingly changing demographic patterns. Denying or overlooking the special nature of Assam's social context andahistoricising the matter will only alienate the people and the region. Uninformed accounts will further aggravate the 'othering' of the natives of the region. The frustration and anxiety that shall rise from such alienation will only create religious animosity and an environment of insecurity. Already the entire process of preparing the NRC that has been released is replete with serious charges of corruption and mishandling. The resultant document is now believed by most of the indigenous communities to be doing more harm than good to the native people and their faith in democratic and constitutional process. Have such misappropriations risen out of the threat of the growing dominance of the immigrant population is a question for serious consideration. Consistent and perpetual neglect

of the indigenous concerns in the north-east shall, in the future, lead to further alienation of the region and subsequently might even cause extreme polarisation and instability in the society.

THE HUMANITARIAN QUESTION

Assam and its indigenous people have not often been the the centre of analysis of many debates on Indian politics. Owing to the disruptions of the Assam Movement, they have actually been seen in a more negative light. It is this very Assam, ironically, that is home to some of the most diverse socio-cultural communities that have lived in mutual tolerance and relative harmony now for centuries. It has been very comfortably unacknowledged and unappreciated that Assam has accepted and housed foreign migrants from the neighbouring state for twenty-three more years than the rest of India. The Foreigners Act 1946 declares as a citizen any person who 'has migrated before the nineteenth day of July, 1948 and has been ordinarily resident in the territory of India since the day of migration'. The Assam Accord and the subsequent Amendments to the Citizenship Act of 1955 mark the date March 24, 1971 as the benchmark for conferring citizenship. The Assam Accord 1985 notes that the 'foreigners who came to Assam on or after March 25, 1971 shall continue to be detected, deleted and expelled in accordance with law'. Clause 6A of the Citizenship Act 1955 at length describes the exceptional nature of citizenship rights for Assam. Such exception in a national Act is exemplary and forbearing for a people who have had prolonged struggles for protection of their own identity, culture, and language.

The humanitarian question is straight forward and involves three important poles: the indigenous people, the immigrant population who would get included in the NRC and those who would be excluded. The Government of India in the Assam Accord had made a commitment to the agitating masses in its Sixth and Seventh points that "constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people" and that

"the government takes this opportunity to renew their commitment for the speedy all round economic development of Assam, so as to improve the standard of living of the people". Yet none of these commitments were fulfilled by subsequent administrations both at the state and central level. The AGP government utterly failed to live upto the hopes and aspirations of the people. The Congress ministries entangled itself with its own opportunistic and communal vote-bank politics leading the way for other communal forces to enter Assam. The current BJP administration has further aggravated the situation by giving the question of indigeneity a religious colour. The Left has ingeniously failed to acknowledge the complexities of ethnic societies like Assam, and therefore, their stringent class analyses have made them increasingly irrelevant in the region. What is essential here is to raise the more important humanitarian questions. The Citizenship Amendment Act and the debates following it only diverted the issue further. The indigenous people, the plain tribals of the Brahmaputra Valley particularly, have been pleading with the central government for protection of their languages, cultures, and most importantly land. Humanitarian consideration must be extended to the dwindling populations of these communities, and their right for protection of their identity and ensuring their existence on the very lands that they are native to.

A large section of the immigrant population having been settled in Assam before 1971 would be included in the NRC. With the inclusion they become legal citizens of the state and get entitled to the privileges and securities that come with it. Then, in the third pole, are those who would be outside the list for having settled after 1971 which deprives them from legal citizenship. They do raise humanitarian concern. The Government of Bangladesh refuses to acknowledge them or take their responsibility. It is a humanitarian responsibility of the Government of India, provided the ideals on which its Constitution bases itself, to provide considerate rehabilitation to the people. Such ways of accommodation need informed deliberations. The discussions on rehabilitation of the foreigners must be held vis-a-vis the interests of the indigenous people of Assam. Proposals have already come up within Assamese academia about the provision of work-

permits and empowering these people to have a dignified work and life across the territory of India. The Government also should provide for their settlement across the Indian state. This is not self conclusive. What is important here is to acknowledge that the indigenous people have a legitimate concern, and then proceed to deliberate upon ways to settle the issue with humane dignity of the people intact.

THE 'OTHERING' QUESTION

It was with the British colonial policies that the entire North-East became an integral part of what became the state of India. As such, even with some sparse attempts to imagine an inclusive India, this part of the country has often been missed out in the popular discourse about the nation. In this process, the idea of the 'other' that the decolonisation movement was struggling against, and the discourses on alternative/multiple civilisations that leaders like Gandhi and Fanon had hoped for, in turn, was recreated and restaged in newer forms in the postcolonial state. The North-East India emerged as the 'other' in the idea of Indian nationalism even during the freedom struggle. Tagore's imagination of the Indian nation embodied in the poem that later became the national anthem of the newly independent India is exclusive of the very acknowledgement of India's North-East. The idea of modern India mostly has excluded its geographical fringes from its popular imagination. Edward Gait wrote that, "There is, probably, no part of India regarding whose past less is generally known. In the histories of India as a whole, Assam is barely mentioned" (Gait 1905: VIII). Suniti Kumar Chatterjee in his Banikanta Kakati Memorial Lecture noted that, "The echoes of happenings in Assam, concerned as they were with the (sic) backward aboriginal peoples of the North-Eastern India mostly, did not reach parts of India; and Assam remained in the background which her geopolitical position seemed to condemn her to" (Chatterjee 1970: 5). The fear that the indigenous people of the region might not be given consideration in the matters of national concern, and that ideas and ideals of modern Indian nation and its developmental agenda might

not be inclusive of the North-East with an agency in these formative discourses, was quite openly expressed in the Constituent Assembly debates, particularly in the Bordoloi Sub-committee Report. The 1962 war had led to the then Prime Minister Nehru to bid farewell to the citizens of Assam and the region with a note of heartfelt apology. Rita Choudhary's Sahitya Academy winning novel 'Makam' is replete with tales of the tragic experiences that the people of Assam had to go through with during the war with China, and the disheartening negligence, delinquency and rejection that came from its very own government at the centre. The betrayal has lurked in the popular memory for a long time now.

This betrayal, however, could have been redressed; but instead, has been reiterated in the refusal of the centre to even consider the continuous pleadings of the indigenous communities to demarcate and protect the North-Eastern international borders. The idea of the 'border' and its glorification in the 'national interest', all products of the Westphalian nation-state, have obsessively occupied the Indian national psyche vis-a-vis Pakistan. The reflection of this obsessive occupation can easily be found everywhere from news coverage, social media, cultural media to Bollywood. The open borders, on the other hand, between India and Bangladesh, proved to be too prosaic and inconsequential to concern anyone in the mainland India. The hierarchy in imagination and expression of borders exemplifies and perpetuates the 'otherness' of the north-eastern India in the modern India's national developmental discourses. Not surprising, then, that even the school textbooks of India (NCERT etc) can still continue to imbibe in the children a sense of history of the 'nation' without actively considering the North-east as an essential part of it, one with different and multiple histories and societies. It is only ironical that generations of Indian children have grown up without ever having any sense of the accounts and narratives of their own indigenous communities and their associated multiculturalism.

There is another very important aspect to the process of othering of the region. Assam has historically been largely a land of indigenous communities and kingdoms. It has never been a Hindu state nor a part of any Hindu empire of

mainland India. It has also never been an Islamic state. Assam never even could be incorporated in the mighty Mughal empire. Its multi-ethnic, autonomous, indigenous social and political fabric has defined Assam apart from other regions. But the fast changing demography of the region in the past few decades now seriously challenges this very socio-political fabric and nature. Disproportionately growing Muslim population and related politics in many parts of the region, as has already been discussed, has also led to an equally communalised Hindutva politics in the last few years. These new trends that more and more force the region into the matrix of Hindu-Muslim political binaries in themselves are part of the process of othering. Neglecting and disregarding the nature of the region's socio-political history as well as its indigenous interests and imposing on it a binarised form of politics is itself a process of denying an entire region its discursive autonomy. The 'other' is seen as an extension of the mainland 'self'. It also robs the people of the region of any agency in their own politico-historical developments. Ranajit Guha's study of peasant insurgency in colonial India gives insight into the problem at hand. Guha writes how the peasant is led to identify himself in terms of distance from those who are in power - 'in differentials of wealth and culture' or simply as a negation of what he is not. 'He learnt to recognise himself not by the properties and attributes of his own social being but why a diminution, if not negation, of those of his superiors' (Guha 1999: 19).

In conclusion, we must understand that the problem of growing population of the immigrants and increasing threat that the indigenous communities have felt for their survival has persisted in Assam for over a century now. This problem needs more studies and analyses than few news reports and some random commentaries. Comments on the issue must come from informed perspectives that would accommodate both the humanitarian concerns of the immigrant population and the indigenous entitlements of the native population. As Bhupen Hazarika writes in that same song, "aanore logote oxomiya oxomote, jodihe nebase baru kot nu basibo?", if, along with the rest, the natives of Assam do not get a chance for survival on their very lands, where else would they go?

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IDEOLOGY AND THE POLICIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

Rinkumoni Gogoi

Introduction

The education system of a country is not only the channels through which the economic and social infrastructure of the state can be strengthen but it is also the means for the upward mobility of the country. It helps the state to reformulate and modify the values, beliefs, attitudes and sociopolitical behavior of the people of a country and influences the collective performance of the people as citizens and producers. Globalization and economic reforms has its impact on higher education parameters such as quality, access, faculty development, reputation of foreign degree, income generation, export, cultural integration at global level, curriculum development and development of research & technology which will impact and influence standard of education, volume of student exchanges, faculty exchanges, and research exchanges in the higher education. Hence it is essential to examine the new actors, new rationales, new programmes, new regulations, and the new context in the present globalised world.

National Education Policy:

The National Education Policies are the tools of a government to improve the educational opportunities in a country. These are directed towards providing equity, access and quality in educational sectors to every section of people in the country. These policies focus on bringing a systematic change in education system. They help the government of the country to operate the educational institutions of different stages.

Objectives of the study:

1. To understand the backdrop of the formation of National Education Policy in India.

2. Correlate the recommendations and actions for the higher education in India.

3. Evaluate the role of the ruling government over the Education Policies of India.

4. Examine the impact of economic reforms of 1991 over the higher education in India.

National Education Policies of India since Independence:

India became independent during the era of decolonization in 1947 when many other countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America was also became newly independent from their colonial rule and were in the process of reorganizing their educational systems and structures. Although, there were many institutions of higher learning established even during the time of colonial rule in India, but independence of the country brought with it the need to formulate a national pattern of education in India. Thus, in order to achieve this goal, in1948 itself, a University Commission was formed under the Chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishanan to reconstruct the sector of higher education and to make it suitable for scientific, technical and development other human resources. The higher education sector of the country was in need to fulfill the demands of socio-economic development of India at that time.

The Radhakrishnan Committee gave many significant recommendations in order to restructure the higher education sector in India. It emphasis on 10+2 structure of Pre-University stage and gave importance on technical and professional education. It also mentioned about the use of three languages at university stage – regional, federal and English and making universities as the autonomous bodies.

After independence of the country, there was a demand to form a national education system. And the recommendations of the Radhakrishnan Committee in this direction were further complimented by the formation of the Education Commission in 1964 under the Chairmanship of Dr. D.S. Kothari. This commission

was formed to recommend the government the general principles and policies for all the stages of education in order to develop them.

In 1966, Kothari Commission submitted its voluminous report where it suggested for a degree course in higher education not less than 3 years. It also recommended for up-gradation of facilities in higher education institutions and the investment of at least 6 percent of the nations income in education sector. It also retained the recommendations of Radhakrishnan Committee over the use of three languages but only with some minor modifications as three languages for lower levels and two languages in higher secondary stage.

The report of the Kothari Commission became one of the world's most detailed reports on educational planning. The government at that time widely circulated this report within its own organs and the press and referred it to a Committee of Parliamentary member for consideration. The discussions over this report by both the houses of Indian Parliament led to the formation of first National Education Policy in India in July, 1968.

On 5th January, 1985 the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi announced that a new education policy will be formulated for the development of country's education system. A document was prepared and presented in the parliament on 19th August, 1985 on the basis of the document "Challenge of Education – A Policy Perspective" prepared to discuss problems of then education system. The CABE and the National Development Council (NDC) had discussed over the draft and finally in 1986 the second National Education Policy was adopted in India. Along with the policy, a 'Programme of Actions' (POA) was also prepared for the purpose of implementation of the NEP 1986. The NEP 1986 attempts to implement the policy guidelines provided under the NEP 1968.

There are 12 parts in the NEP 1986 and in part V the discussions over the higher education of India is included. The NEP 1968 is referred in this document in its very first part. The policy in the beginning itself highlights the importance of education for the promotion of socio-cultural identity of the citizens of the country, it also urges for scientific temperament and freedom of mind and spirit for upholding the principles of secularism, socialism and democracy in the country. The policy

focused on protection of the higher education institutions from degradation. It recommended replacing the affiliating colleges with autonomous colleges. It also suggested for encouragement in research in science and technology along with the multi-disciplinary research in social sciences. Open universities and setting up of rural universities on the lines of Mahatma Gandhi's revolutionary ideas were also encouraged.

In 1992, the then P. V. Narasimha Rao government modified some of the principles laid down in the NEP 1986. These modifications were later on adopted by the Manmohan Singh government in 2005 which was then recognized as "Common Minimum Programme".

The main provisions of these modifications are:

- All India based common entrance examination for admission in all professional and technical programmes in the country.

- Under this the government of India through 2001 resolution dated 18th October, a Three-Exam Scheme for admission to Engineering and Architecture/Planning programme was laid down.

- The state level institutions will have the option to join AIEEE

The NEP 2020 is the first new education policy to be introduced in India in the 21st century, the last having been implemented in 1986, and 34 years ago. The NEP, thus, replaces the National Policy on Education, 1986, which was modified once in 1992. Before that, the first education policy was passed in 1968.

Right from the goal of increasing of GER to 50 percent to the formation of large multidisciplinary universities, colleges and HEI clusters are some of the important recommendations of NEP 2020. It also recommended for 4 years undergraduate degree course with multiple exit points and also suggested for discontinuation of the M.Phil. Program. The NEP 2020 recommended for the implementation of a 'Academic Bank of Credit (ABC)' and the provision for graded autonomy to the colleges and HEIs eventually transforming them to autonomous degree granting colleges or a constituent college of a university. Another significant recommendation of the NEP 2020 is the setting up of one single regulator for the higher education sector, including the teacher education, but excluding the medical and legal education.

Impact of Ideology over the Education Policies of India

From the earlier discussions, it has been clear that since its independence, India has seen formulation of many educational policies till now and also their modifications and changes with the change of regime in its political sphere. In this context, ideology plays a great role in the change of attitude and approach of the ruling party over the education sector. The very nature of Indian society gives rise to different ideological formations. The society of India, which is plural in nature, is composed of people speaking different dialects and languages, following different religions and cultures, and practicing different social norms, customs and behaviors often that are regulated by their castes and classes, including minorities. It is not only specific to India but all over the world it has been seen that these diversities many a times splits the societies into contradictions and divisions between opposing forces. These contradictions and divisions are also reflected over the education system of the country, sometimes directly or indirectly. As a result, the education sector becomes the sphere of struggle between the opposing and sometimes the antagonistic social forces. The education system of modern India shows the implications of such struggle of opposing forces over it. The independence of India brought an enlightenment among the Indian population and with the rise of socially backward castes and classes in national politics and administration, there were also the rise of some serious contradictions over education sector too which may be reflected in the form of views often expressed by a host of political parties consisting heterogeneous elements from the different segments of the Indian society. As a result, whenever a ruling party initiated educational reform, were often resisted at various levels whenever they were pushed for implementations. This is also the reason of frequent modification and change of approach in education policies with the coming of a new government in power.

The approach of the government towards education had a drastic change with the adoption of economic reforms policies in India in 1991. After these reforms, it has been witnessed that a considerable cut in the public budget for higher education in India. As a part of this whole process, in1997, a discussion paper of the government subsidies was published where higher education was put in the

"non-merit" category citing that it only benefits the individual instead of the ordinary people of the society. The erosion of the state's principle of being a welfare state and the emergence of neo-liberalism is one of the basic reasons for such ideological transition of the state over the policies of higher education. These developments were influenced by the distinct political vocabularies used by some prominent multi-lateral organizations, such as World Bank, IMF, OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) etc who were promoting the potential reformations and supporting public education privatization program.

So far the recent developments in higher education and also the New Education Policy 2020 is concerned, it is evident that higher education institutions across the country are influenced by the majoritarian politics and their ideologies. The provisions like the primacy over the use of mother tongue in teaching, the over emphasis on Indian knowledge system neutralizing the fundamental elements imposed by the western culture and left ideology, establishment of one single regulating body then making the system more centralized and the provisions to give graded autonomy etc has their roots in the ideologically inclined approach of the government towards the education system of the country. Although, there are many welcoming steps taken under the NEP 2020, but the policy document has several contradictions which needs to be resolved in order to make the higher education of India more equitable and accessible to the masses.

Regarding the current ideological atmosphere within the institutions of higher learning, the institutions are witnessing the encroachment over their academic and administrative spaces. There are many examples may be given here, like, the 2016 developments in JNU campus, the protests in the universities like **Jadavpur** so on and so for.

It is ironical to see that although these institutions constantly retained their positions as the top ranking universities in the rankings of **NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council)NIRF (National Institutional Ranking Framework)** etc but the campus developments of these very universities are again branded as against the national sentiments and national security as well.

All these may be cited as the impact of ideology over the institutions of higher learning. The 2019 protest of Banaras Hindu University (**BHU**) students against the appointment of a non-Hindu faculty in the Department of Sanskrit (**Feroz Khan**)and ultimately his resignation is a harsh example of how the majoritarian ideological narratives are being constructed around the education sector of the country.

It is very interesting to notice that these ideological foundations are not only influencing the academic sphere but also their administrative spaces. Providing the tag of **"Institutions of Eminence"** to the non-existent institutions like '**Jio Institute**' even before their establishment is an example of intermingling of political masters and the capitalist forces. The sector of higher education, therefore, may be said, is serving the interest of the capitalist rather than the general masses. Thus, there is a growing inequality and lack of access of higher education for the people of the country along with sub-standard public education institutions who are lacking behind in terms of their quality and standard. There are many other such areas which need to be focused and studied with more emphasis in this direction.

Conclusion

For the national life of a country, education and education policies are very important. National goals and civic duties of the citizens are accomplished with the help of these policies. They regulate the education system of a country and help them to work on the teaching, assessment, curriculum etc by formulating the necessary set of rules and regulations in this direction. Different policy actors are involved in the formulation and implementation of the education policy of a country like any other national policy formulation. The political leaders, administration and the academicians are the lead actors towards the formation of education policies. In terms of political ideologies over the formation of educational policy making process and their implementation, the political elites and the politically powerful people have a large share of influence. In the recent developments of education sector of the country, it has been seen that the faith of the educational

institutions are depending upon the ideological standpoint of the state. The ideology of the state is becoming the deciding factor that whether an institution will be supported by the state or not, whether the institution will be privatized or education itself will be treated as a social good or a commercial service all are depending upon the ideological formation of the state. This type of conditions marginalizes the emancipation power of higher education and undermines the developmental needs of the students and teachers.

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INDIAN FEDERALISM AND THE ISSUE OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION IN ASSAM: CONTEXTS AND CONTESTATIONS

Robin Hazarika

Introduction

Federalism is a political system of promoting self rule and shared rule and it is a way of balancing the interest of the nation and the regional units. Typically in Federalism power is equally divided into the national government and the other governmental units, so that it could maintain a balance between the two units of government. Federalism is a constitutional design of sharing of power between the governmental units and it is also a societal mechanism of bringing government closer to people by maintaining their distinct identity and reconciling the conflicting interest among the different cultural groups. Federalism as political mechanism has been a topic of debates and discussion among the scholars and has been receiving wide academic attention. Federalism being an institutional means of establishing an orderly arrangement among the different tiers of government has been getting wide responses in different countries of the world. Indian constitution is also based on the spirit of federalism although it is not explicitly mentioned nowhere in the constitution. Indian federalism is the offshoot of its own circumstances which prepared the design of creating an Indian nation with strong centre and cohesive states. Although Indian model of federalism cannot be counted among the world's oldest federal system, nevertheless it is steadily emerging as a salient feature of Indian political system.

India's federal design was constructed in a different situation. India's federal mechanism was created to maintain a durable political order that had been disturbed due to the result of partition and it had created a path of consensus among the members of constituent assembly to adopt the federal design. Indian Constitution has adopted federal mechanism with its own variation and has intentionally avoided using the word ' Federation' instead adopted the term ' Union'. The reason for adopting the term federation was explained by the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, Dr B. R Ambedkar, was to convey it clearly that although India has adopted the model of federal political system but Indian Federal mechanism was not the result of an agreement by the states to join the federal process, and it does not provide any right to the States to secede from it.(Mitra and Pehl,2010) Indian constitution was designed to create a political system by incorporating more than 500 units of provinces, princely states and special territories in the frontier areas. Indian federal structure is considered as a 'holding together' rather than 'coming together' federation. (Alfred,1999) It is a mechanism of accommodating diverse identities and interest by granting different rights to federal sub units through constitutional provision. Indian constitution has allowed the centre to get precedence over the states, and has intentionally created a strong centre. Different mechanism of division of power between the centre and states, alteration of boundaries of the states, sharing of resources, making of legislation for the states etc are some of the deliberate attempt of allowing decisive advantage of the centre over states. Indian federal structure has been deviated from the original federal process. It has been done so due to the persistent threats to India's security from both internally and externally and to strengthen the India's process of national building and to meet the challenges of development by adopting centralized economic planning so that it could channelize the growth and development in the nation. Thus for constitutional and socio political reason, the strong institutional federal structure have been seriously compromised since its adoption.

It is in this context the confrontation between Assam as a federal constituent unit of India with that of the central government has been analyzed in the next section. The tension of illegal immigration and centre's lackadaisical effort to solve this issue has been a major cause of tension between Assam and centre. Perceived insecurity of Assamese middle class from the migration of Bengali and muslim groups of people from East Bengal (recent Bagladesh)become a major cause of concern for claiming more provincial autonomy for the state. This has been clearly manifested during the making of the constitution itself. Assamese elite section have become assertive of their socio economic and political rights in order to protect their, ' legitimate Assamese interests' and they criticized the process of making centre more powerful in the federation. (Phukan, 2020) Attitude of Assam towards the Indian federation has been developed on the basis of state's own context of socio economic and political factors. It may be noted that unlike other peovinces in India, Assam had certain peculiar socio, economic and political problems, such as tension between the Assamese and the non-Assamese, the tribals and non-tribals, the hill people and the people of the plains, in addition to this state's economic backwardness and strategic position of the border state. All these factors have played a significant role in the context of Assam's relation with the centre. Therefore in the following section, politics of migration in Assam has been dealt and how does it become a cause of tension between centre and state ? How the centre takes the issue of illegal immigration and How recently amended Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) has become a cause of confrontation between centre and the people of the state. Assam has witnessed historic Assam movement (1979-85) which culminated in the formation of Assam Accord and the recent concluded the process of NRC in the state. Despite the people's anti CAA protests, state has seen the coming of BJP in the state for the consecutively second time. Therefore in this context although both the state and centre has been ruling by the same political party , the fear and insecurity of the masses against the illegal immigration has not been solved. Anti CAA protests of recent time, Assam movement of late 1970s has disrupted the people's faith over the institutional

structure of the India's federation. Because federation itself means, protecting the diverse interest of its constituent units. In this context, Assam's prolonged debate over the issue of immigration has still failed to get adequate centre's attention and rather state got CAA which itself contradict the historic Assam Accord signed between centre and state in 1985. With this end in view, following section intends to explain these questions.

Politics of Migration in Assam and Confrontation between Centre and State

One of the significant causes of confrontation between the centre and the state of Assam is the issue of influx of people from outside India especially from erstwhile East Pakistan now Bangladesh to Assam which has lead to the threat of very existence of the indigenous people of Assam. Migration to Assam is not a new phenomenon; Assam has been getting the migrated people both from the Indian Subcontinent and from the countries lying to its east. Assam has been a meeting ground of different ethnic groups such as Austric, Mongoloid, Dravidian and Aryan who entered into Assam from time to time during different phase of history. But the issue of migration has begun to affect Assam with the annexation of Assam under British Rule in colonial period. There has been a continuous flow of migration into Assam ever since the British Domination. Amalendu Guha has thrown some light on the issue of immigrants by dividing the immigrants in Assam into four groups,- (a) Tea garden labourers (b) migrants who came from East Bengal prior to independence (c) Hindus who came as a result of migration d) the Nepalis who came in search of livelihood (Guha,1977). In the initial period Britishers started bringing the staff for the colonial administration outside the Assam, especially from Bengal and these are such as clerks, officers, teachers, lawyers, doctors and other persons familiar with the company administration.(Phukan,2003) Apart from these middle class professional, number of other people to take up the growing economic opportunities in Assam. British administration also started bringing in East Pakistan Bengali peasants to reclaim Assam's wasteland for meeting the

needs of food output outside the Assam. The Britishers began to feel that Assam is a land which requires more settlers and they started bringing a good number of people for engaging in cultivation, agriculture and other related jobs. Colonization of Assam also led to the establishment of number of enterprises such as tea industry, coal mines , oil fields and the construction of road and railway lines which encouraged the colonial administration to brought the migrated workers to Assam. Therefore the coloniasation of land by the settlers from East Bengal began in a big way in the second decade of the 20th century and on a reduced scale continued even beyond the partition of the country in 1947. (Ibid,2003) As the migration from the different parts of India to Assam increased, the states demography began to undergo an unprecedented change. This has resulted change in to the overall socio economic structure of the state and particularly the nature of land ownership has faced a great transformation within the state with this huge number of influx to the state. The large scale influx from East Bengal and later on from Bangladesh have not only increased the population but also created tremendous pressure on cultivable land in Assam. As their numbers increased, they gained possession of land rights, the situation have changed. Although the effect of migration were seen all over the parts of Assam but it was particularly the ethnic population of Assam who bears the burden of losing the land in the hands of encroachers and later it resulted into the number of conflict between the immigrants and ethnic people.

The issue of illegal immigration remains the single-most variable for xenophobic identity crystallisation in north-east India in general and Assam in particular. (Mahanta,2013)Large scale immigration over the past one hundred years to Assam has become the main factor of political turmoil. Illegal immigration does not only limit to the demographic change in the state but it is also followed by the issue of land alienation which is the main reason of serious ethnic tension in Assam. The issue of land alienation and loss of land of the indigenous group of people has been discussed since the early decades of the 20th century. It is since the Colonial intervention in Assam and northeast India, land relationship, land ownership and

demographic structure of Assam has been dramatically changed. Even in the post independence India, the unchecked migration in Assam has caused a serious concern over the issue of land. As a result of the unchecked immigration of landless peasants from neighbouring areas the pressure on land in Assam has increased in an unprecedented rate which cannot be ignored.

Table1: Rate of Population Growth (in Percentage)

States	1945-51	1951-61	1961-71	1981-91
Assam	19.93	34.98	**34.95** *	24.24
Andhra Pradesh	14.02	15.65	20.90	24.20
Bihar	10.27	19.78	21.31	23.54
Orissa	6.38	19.82	25.05	20.06
West Bengal	13.22	32.79	26.89	24.75
Kerela	22.62	24.76	26.79	26.39
Tamil Nadu	14.66	11.85	22.30	15.39
All India	13.31	21.51	24.80	23.85

*Including Meghalaya 1981 Census could not be held in Assam.
 Source: Census of India(1991)

The population size of a minority and its rate of increase are important cause of ethnic conflict in Assam. The problem of influx was officially recognised by the Central Government way back in 1950. However the Act did not bring any efficient changes to the trouble subsequently went into disuse by 1957. Immigration continues unabated. The state of Assam has recorded the highest rate of population growth in India during pre and post independence periods. The politics of this region has been deeply influenced by the influx of people from other regions as well as neighbouring countries like Bangladesh. It is with the failure of the administration to stop illegal immigrants which resulted into the growing number of cases of encroachment of land and resources of indigenous people of the state. Shubir Bhwmick in his book '*Troubled Periphery*' has mentioned that land in north east India is not merely an economic resources but also it is seen in terms of collective and here the loss of land is generally related with the loss of social and

political power.(Bhaumik,2015) Bodos who are the indigenous tribal communities of Assam have suffered because of the issue of the immigration. Bodos have been pushed back by internal migration and systematic policy of the colonial state to encourage migration of peasantry from the erstwhile East Bengal.(Pathak,2012) While the line system introduced by the colonial government for protection of tribal land, it simultaneously also encouraged immigrants to settle and used the cultivable waste land in Brahmaputra Valley to increase the yield and expand revenue returns. However even in the post independence period , created tribal belts and tribal blocks have failed to stop land alienation and restore the loss of land of bodos and hence it evoked a number of serious conflict among the bodos and non bodos surrounding the issue of land alienation. The issue of Land alienation can be termed as serious cause of eruption of violent clashes among the 'Bodos and Adivasis', 'Bodos and Immigrant Bengali Muslim' and 'Bodos and Non Bodos' in Assam, where the former see the later as the encroachers or outsiders, which deprived both the communities from enjoying their rights and pushed to lead a marginalized and tensed life in the state.

The Sixth Schedule, the Inner line and other restrictions historically were mostly designed to set some limits of demographic transformation in the region. Some of these instruments were designed under the very different political conditions of British colonial rule, but these designs were difficult to reverse back, especially against the political backdrop of pro-independence rebellions. (Baruah,2005) Apart from the immigration issue, one serious rouble which made the state discomfort is the language issue. In the post-independence Assam, the issue of the state language, closely related to the immigration, became most crucial for the Assamese elites, because they faced a stiff challenge from the Bengali language. The latter became the majority language in Assam in the pre-partition days when Sylhet was a part of the state. Even after independence tension continues. It is for this reason Assam has witnessed two serious language centric conflicts in 1960s and 1972. On both the occasion Muslim immigrants supported

the Assamese language and subsequently it helped to retain the majority language status in Assam. Therefore predominance of language issue pushed the immigration issue for some time away from the public domain. (Deka,2010)The issue of immigration in Assam did not become a subject of political controversy during the period between 1947 and 1979, but only when the Assam movement began. According to Sanjib Baruah two factors that helped to keep the immigration issue out of the political agenda. Firstly it is the centrality of language issue in defining the contours of ethnic conflict in the state. Secondly the aggregation of interest within political parties primarily the Congress, but in the other parties as well, which in effect produced a tacit agreement not to raise this explosive issue. (Baruah,2006) The increasing fear among the Assamese of losing their land and identity due to the influx is a basic issue which creates turmoil and conflict in the region. According to Sandhya Goswami it is because of the absence of any positive step by the Government, Assam continued to be the coveted lebensraum for the illegal immigrants. (Goswami,2001)The Assam movement that started in 1979 the issue of Assam's demographic transformation as a result of immigration returned to the state's political agenda. It gradually ruptured the ethnic coalition which was the foundation of political stability in the state, later on it created the stage for prolonged political turmoil. The period of Assam Movement from 1979-85 was primarily aimed at ensuring the cultural linguistic identity of the Assamese people in the face of a massive influx of immigrants. The Assam Accord which is the outcome of the Assam movement is a futile exercise. It is the consequences of accumulated frustrations among the ethnic Assamese and among the various tribal communities which lead to the assertion of identities and the creation of militancy in the region. The politics of the state since independence has been based on a continuous apathetic towards the inherent ethnic problems of the state.

The politics of immigration has also created the contested discourse of citizenship in the state. The whole debate of citizenship issue in context of Assam can be seen in relate to the meticulous process of updating National Register of Citizens (NRC), debates in case of implementation of clause 6 of Assam accord

and recent enactment of Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019. Updating NRC in Assam, which has been generally identified as a crucial instrument of differencing the legal citizens from the illegal immigrants, is highly discussed and contested notion in the politics of Assam in recent time. The process of updating NRC in Assam was both complex and contentious. NRC is the follow out of Assam Accord. The Assam Accord of 1985 attempted to achieve a political resolution following a six-year long mass agitation. The accord extended the constitutionally mandated cut-off dates of granting Indian citizenship to immigrants, resulting in the enactment of the first ever amendment to the Indian Citizenship Act, 1955, which was adopted in 1985. This particular amendment incorporated Section 6A into the act, allowing for the extension of the date of granting citizenship to immigrants from the constitutionally mandated cut-off date of the "day of enforcement of the Constitution," that is, 26 January 1950, to 24 March 1971. (Dutta,2018)Thus NRC has legalized citizenship status to the people according to the cut-off date accepted in Assam Accord. With the publication of the final list of NRC, it excludes more than 1.9 million people and thereby invited huge debates around the notion of citizenship in Assam. The whole process of updating NRC and the post NRC have created a dismal picture for large section of people. Many protests and controversy generated during the process of updating NRC. Several people have faced harassment and humiliation during this course of action and have further pushed around two million people to the brink of statelessness. (Siddque,2020) The experiences of NRC were not same equally for all the residents of the state. More than 19 lakh people have been excluded from the NRC and these excluded have to approach controversial foreigners tribunals to lay claim to their citizenship, which is a costly affair for the marginalized sections of those excluded group. Moreover the living experiences of detention camps of excluded NRC people are also created a huge question in the state of governability in Assam. Now the question emerge in regard to fate of those left out, most of them are hapless and poor, after these appeals are excluded. As noted scholar and critic Hiren Gohain has mentioned that deporting them is not an option. (Gohain,2019)However, many

of the Assamese people, living in a state are still underdeveloped and are not willing to take the burden of these people for fear of losing their identity, political power and most importantly fear of losing job opportunities. Therefore it rest on the responsibility of the states to rehabilitate and look after those who are left out in the exercise.

The contestation related to NRC is not end here; it is also related to the Center's recent enactment of Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019(CAA). The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 intends to remove the tag of "immigrants" from relevant rules under the Foreigners Act, 1946 for six religious minorities: Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. This CAA has generated a huge debates and protest in India in general and Assam in particular. The Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 has exempted most of the hill states of North East India and two hill districts and the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts in Assam, which are under either the Inner Line Permit system or provisions of the Sixth Schedule. Therefore, the bill-turned act will primarily impact the Brahmaputra Valley. However, the anti CAA move has angered many in Assam, because they view the amendment as a violation of the Assam Accord, which treated all those (regardless of their religious identity) who entered the state after 1971 as illegal immigrants. They are unwilling to accept the transformation of even Hindu migrants into legitimate citizens for fear of more in-migration and more claims on diminishing employment opportunities in the state. (Gohain,2019)Thereby it devalues the whole process of NRC and contradicts the Assam Accord. This recent enactment of CAA is a setback to the federal structure of the nation. This imposition of CAA despite the huge public outcry against the bill has further created a disruption on the Indian federalism. Devolution of power and authentic federalism is clearly the solution for human dignity and social justice in country as vast and diverse as India. This people's resistance against CAA should be recognised or otherwise it gives glimmer possibilities of restructuring of the Indian state towards governance that is more accountable to the people.

The problem of migration is still a living phenomenon in the Politics of Assam. It is because of the issue of migration Assam has been witnessing the

series of movement and resistance since independence, which affect the federalisation process of the nation. The series of movements such as 'Foreign National Movement' (1979-85), the issue over IMDT Act, and the recent anti – Bangladeshi foreigner uprising and more recently the mass protest and movement against Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2016 are the manifestation of the people resentment on the issue of illegal migration in Assam. Confrontation between the union and Assam requires asymmetric solution. Because of the lack of sustainable design to solve the issue of immigration has generated serious ethnic conflict between the indigenous communities of Assam and immigrant population of the state. Therefore Indian federalism has to be more accommodative and it requires the asymmetric and divergent solution and step to deal the diverse north east region and its issues. Indian federal design requires to make its conventional asymmetric federal arrangement more sensitive, more evolving, dynamic and flexible to include the interest of the divergent groups.

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HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF COMMUNAL RIOTS IN ASSAM BETWEEN THE ASAMIYAS AND THE MUSLIMS OF EAST-BENGAL ORIGIN

Sangita Bora

Introduction

After years of struggle, India attained independence giving rise to new rays of hopes for millions of people. However, the joy of independence marred with an endless pain of partition. Conflict at political level entered to community level that divided the Hindus and the Muslims in India. Hence, it can be said that the historic event of partition not only gave birth to Pakistan but also communally divided the mindset of a large section of people. Aggressive communalism provoked them to indulge in communal riots. Communal riots always threaten the unity, integrity, fraternity and security of a nation. It increases bloodshed and destruction and put a stain on the society as the violence, hostility among the communities has been increasing, even the peace, integrity, communal harmony among the communities has been decreasing day by day. A section of social scientists like R. Puniyani (2003), B. Rajeshwari (2004), are of the opinion that, communal riots in India are not spontaneous, rather they arise out of communal politics and the conflicting political interests within the political leadership. Rajeshwari argues "Communal riots have become a distinct feature of communalism of India. During the time of partition, it was the clash of political interest of the elites of the two different communities which resulted in communal riots. But from the 1960's till 1980's, the local political and economic factors played a very important role in instigating riot" (Rajeshwari 2004:p1).

In 1950, for the first time, post-colonial Assam witnessed large scale communal riots in the areas inhabited by Muslims of East-Bengal origin (Tewary Commission Report, 1983: p101). Rezaul Karim (2007) argues the riot of 1950 as the mother of all communal riots in Assam .The riots originated in the undivided Goalpara district which later spread to Barpeta sub-division of the then Kamrup district. In the present study, an attempt has been made to understand the social and historical background of communal riots in post colonial Assam, mainly between the *Asamiyas* [1] and the Muslims of East-Bengal [2] origin. In this backdrop, the present study also deals with the socio-political scenario of Assam between 1920 to 1947.

Origin of Communal Conflicts between the Assamese and the Muslims of East-Bengal Origin- The Line System

At the beginning of the twentieth century, many poor peasants of East-Bengal, mostly belonging to Muslim community, were brought to Assam by the British administration. The poor peasants concentrated on cultivation in the low lying and abandoned areas which later helped in the production of food grains in the province. Thus, they were allowed to settle in the wastelands. But later on the introduction and execution of Line System forced many poor Muslims peasants of East-Bengal origin to the *Char* areas. But their growing populations become a vexed political issue only in the absence of a clear cut government policy and far-sightedness. The local Assamese feared the loss of their identity and started fighting against these newly migrated people through political parties like Congress party and other social organizations of Assam like '*Asam Sangrakhani Sabha*' and the '*Jatiya Mahasabha*'. To overcome the situation, British administration decided to formulate a new policy to satisfy the demands of the native Assamese. Accordingly in 1920, the Line System was introduced in the districts which aggravated conflict due to large scale migration. This system was first introduced in Nagaon district and Barpeta subdivision of the then Kamrup district.

The migrant Muslims were segregated both physically and psychologically by the Line System (Hussain 1993:p205). The most interesting fact was that some

sections of the Assamese were not against the migration of poor peasants of Muslims of East-Bengal origin. Amalendu Guha showed us the picture how "Local Marwari and even Assamese moneylenders financed the immigrants so that the latter could reclaim land" (Guha 2006:p167), because, the coming of new settlers not only helped them to reduce the burden of their oppression, but also helped both the Marwaris and a section of the Asamiyas to gain financially (Hussain 1993:p205).

The Line System ran into a hail of controversy in 1937 when the first elections to provincial legislature took place. The major poll issue was the Line System which the migrant Muslims and the Muslim League wanted to settle. The Line System was a communal-——— dividing line which created a communal atmosphere in Assam. Therefore, the British officials did not put strict observance on the working of the Line System rather they encouraged inflow of new settlers for enhancing colonial revenue. This resulted conflict between Muslims of East-Bengal origin and earlier settlers of Assam. Moreover, the British officials did not show interest on the resolution of those communal conflicts as they followed the path of twofold game. On one hand they encouraged influx of Muslims of East-Bengal origin and on the other hand, they generated sense of identity crisis in the minds of native people. That twofold game aggravated the communal harmony and entire Assamese society entered into double dilemma.

Thus, the introduction of 'Line System' gave rise to communal animosity and political discrepancy particularly between the Assamese and Muslims of East-Bengal origin. Communal harmony in Assam deteriorated with the introduction of the Line System. Moreover, it contributed towards the outbreak of communal riots in the later period between the Assamese and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin.

Muslim League Politics in Assam

In Assam, Provincial Muslim League was formed in the Sylhet district on January 28, 1928. Abdul Matin Choudhury took leading role in the formation of the Muslim League in Assam .As the Congress refused to form the government after the first provincial election of 1937, the Assam Union Muslim League leader Syed

Saadullah formed the government with the help of the British administrators. Saadullah was known for his secular outlook and commanded respect from all the sections of the society. But at a later stage, political instability arising out of reshuffling his ministry a number of times diverted the politics of Assam towards a different path and put a slur on his secular outlook.

Formation of Government by Saadullah and Elections of 1937

Saadullah took the office as the first Premier of Assam on 1st April 1937. He was determined to promote the interest of the *Asamiya* Muslims and the Bengali Muslims of both Brahmaputra and Surma Valley. From the very beginning he was very energetic and determined to run the provincial administration. Assam Valley Muslim Group, Surma Valley United Muslim Party, Muslim League, Assam Valley United People's Party, European Group, etc. came forward to support Saadullah. Thus, Saadullah formed a non-Congress coalition government in Assam. For the survival in the politics of Assam Saadullah and his Asamiya Muslims supporters had to join the Muslim League in 1940. His entry into the Muslims League added a new chapter in the Muslim politics of Assam. On the basis of the popularity M. Kar called him "as the unchallenged and unchallengeable leader" of Assam (Kar 1990:p255) with the record of being five times Premier of Assam from 1937 to 1946. At the same time, we have to analyse the arguments of other writers (Rezual Karim 2007) who claimed that politics of Saadullah under the banner of the Muslim League led to the outbreak of incompatibilities, hostilities between the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam.

Politicized Environment and Controversies over the Line System

In order to look into the matter of abolition of Line System as was raised by Munawar Ali, United Muslim Party of Surma Valley, an enquiry committee was established in 1938. Both the Muslim League and the Congress were the part of the 'Enquiry Committee'. The representatives of the Muslim League condemned the Line System and demanded its abolition while the representatives of the Congress supported the Line System and demanded its continuation. Because of

the contradiction between the Muslims members of the Muslim League and the Hindu members of Congress party, the committee could not adopt any clear resolution (Ahmed1999:p29). Saadullah resigned on 13th September 1938 and consequently a Congress Coalition ministry under the leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi came into power on 20th September 1938. The government was against the abolition of the Line System and determined to evict the new settlers (Muslims of East Bengal origin). Saadullah again formed government on 17th November' 1939 after the fall of the Gopinath Bordoloi government. He adopted certain policies in favour of the migrant settlers in the second term of his ministry. "Sadullah announced the Land Development Scheme which envisaged opening particular areas for settlement only to indigenous landless people and immigrants who had come to Assam before 1938" (Goswami 2012:pp266-267). This policy paved the way for migrants to acquired land and settle down permanently. The scheme faced strong opposition and compelled the Congress government to adopt eviction policy against the migrant settlers in its second term of the legislature. It also generated apprehensions in the minds of the local people towards Saadullah's approach. His pro-immigrant policies were vehemently criticized by his opponents as well as the Assamese, and compelled him to resign in 1941. But Sadullah again took his position on 25th August 1942. That time he adopted the policy of 'grow more food' under the British patronage, which provided all possible help to increase the Muslims of East Bengal origin. "…In the name of the Grow More Food Campaign, Saadullah Government had settled 1, 60,000bighas of land with the immigrants alone to the exclusion of the indigenous people…" (Kar 1990:p77). His policy of opening up the grazing and forest reserves for the settlement of migrant Muslims had resulted clashes between the migrants and the local people in several places of Assam. Thus, the controversies on Line System and different stands of the Congress and the Muslim League on it, led to unprecedented polarization between the Hindus and the Muslims in the politics of Assam.

Provincial Muslim League and Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani

While the local people of the Brahmaputra Valley voiced their opinion against new settlers and favoured the Line System, the Muslim leaders of both

Surma Valley and Brahmaputra Valley opposed the voice of local people against new settlers. Such demand against the Line System took more concrete form under the leadership of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, who articulated his voice in favour of land for migrant Muslims in Assam. He was one of the leaders behind the formation of Provincial branch of Muslim League in Assam. The provincial branch was first established in 1938, at 'Alitangani', a village of Nagaon district of Assam.

Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani spearheaded the agitation for abolition of the Line System much to a major relief for the poor migrant farmers. "He did not hesitate to exploit the religious sentiments to organize and unite oppressed Muslim peasants" (Guha 2006:p175). But the local people and the Congress party of Assam was dead against the abolition of the system and thus the escalating difference took place between the indigenous people and the migrant Muslim farmers. "Communal feelings were running high since the observance of the Muslim League's Direct action Day on 16 August 1946. There was a minor communal clash in Sylhet resulting in injuring some thirty people and loss of property worth a few thousands of rupees" (Guha 2006:p257). But situation gave rise to stiff resistance and opposition between the Congress leaders and the Muslim League leaders. *Asam Jatiya Mahasabha* popularized the '*son of the soil*' sentiment and Bhasani's protest against Congress oppression in the form of *'Black Flag Day'* on 3ʳᵈ January 1947 aggravated the political atmosphere of Assam.

The Second Congress Ministry, 1945 under the leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi decided to evict the migrants settlers of East-Bengal. The eviction process started in different districts such as Nagaon, Kamrup and Darrang. The eviction was vehemently criticized by the Assam Provincial Muslim League and under the leadership of Moulana Bhasani, the League launched a strong protest movement in the form of civil disobedience in March 1947.

Priyam Goswami argued that the Muslim League politics in British India had centered round the issue of Pakistan. The author further said that, in Assam

the protest by the Muslims League leaders and the migrant Muslim settlers against the eviction policy initiated by Congress Party had been channelized towards that end. When Jinnah visited Assam in 1946, he repeatedly raised the demand for inclusion of Assam with Eastern Pakistan zone (Goswami 2012:p273).

The demand of the Muslim League was partially fulfilled as Sylhet was included with East-Pakistan after the partition of India. In Sylhet, public voting known as Sylhet Referendum of 1947 was organized on the issue of inclusion of Sylhet with Pakistan. Majority of voting was in favour of the inclusion. Accordingly Sylhet was included in East-Pakistan. However, the Karimganj part of the Sylhet was allotted to Assam.

The Assam Land Revenue Regulation which was adopted in the year 1948 added a new chapter to the communal hostility between the ethnic Assamese and migrant Muslims in Assam. This regulation was set to provide protection to the tribal people mainly from the migrant settlers. But it failed to protect the interest of the tribal people, which resulted hostilities in Assam.

Another government arrangement which created panic situation in Assam was the Immigration (Expulsion from) Assam Act on 13th February, 1950. The Act was enacted to discourage the flow of Muslim of East-Bengal origin to Assam (Guha 2006: p271). The communal implementation of the Act again widened the communal gap between the local Assamese and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin.

Implementation of the Immigration (Expulsion from) Assam Act had apparently stopped the migration of Muslim peasants from East-Bengal. However, a new problem emerged in Assam. "A huge number of Bengali Hindus, Buddhist and Christian refugees entered Assam from then East- Pakistan. The problem became serious as it added to the existing tension between the major religious and linguistic communities in Assam" (Guha 2006: p271).

The local political leaders were quick to take the advantage with a massive agitation against the Muslims of East-Bengal origin and called them conspirators

advocating separation. A large number of Assamese feared the loss of their identity and culture at the hands of these new settlers. In the census report of 1931, census official C.S. Mullan stated that if the immigration went on unrestricted, the indigenous Assamese would be outnumbered in all districts except one or two upper Assam districts. This statement carried the threat to Assamese identity to the forefront (Misra 1999:p1260). This entire political situation together with extreme poverty compelled the migrant settlers to depend completely on the Muslim League for their rights over land and settlement. But a year later the great partition took place. The British provinceof Assam too was partitioned—the Sylhet district opted for Pakistan.The Muslim League heavyweights had gone to Pakistan and left the Muslims of East-Bengal origin in the lurch. However, many panic-stricken Muslims left Assam in search of safety and security. But a majority of them decided to stayin Assam come what may. Consequently, they largely remained neglected, unwanted and virtually leaderless in independent Indian state.They suffered from a sever sense of political alienation in the immediate aftermath of independence and partition.

Communal Riots during Post- Independence Period: 1950'S

Assam witnessed communal riots in 1950 which caused massive displacement in the region basically in the lower Assam. This was outcome of the anti-Hindu strife of East-Pakistan. Many writers like V.I.K Sarin (1980), Amalendu Guha (1993), also argued that the communal riots in Assam in 1950 had direct link with the anti-Hindu strife in East-Pakistan.

Sarin wrote, "Communal disturbance rocked Assam in February-March 1950. After partition discrimination against the religious minorities by the rulers in Pakistan also resulted in a mass exodus of Hindus from the then East- Pakistan to Assam" (Sarin1980: p21).

The main rivalry communities were the Muslims of East-Bengal origin and the Bengali refugees. Guha wrote, "In the early part of 1950, communal feelings in Assam were worked up to an unprecedented height in the wake of anti-

Hindu riots in Eastern Pakistan" (Guha 2006:p271). Guha further observed that, Assam had no record of any communal incidents before the settlement of these Bengali refugees. The situation to leave their original homeland with land and opportunities made these refugees, more communal in attitude and further created the situation for communal disturbance (Guha 1993:pp71-72). As soon as they reached Assam for shelter, the Hindu refugees revealed their overflowing sorrow resulting in a rising anger against the Muslim migrants of Assam. They kept telling the tales of oppression and suppression by the Muslims in East Pakistan which was on the boil. A section of the people in Assam, lost their patience and attacked the Muslims. The first incident of communal riot occurred at Lumding, a railway station of Nagaon district, "where Muslim passengers going to Pakistan were assaulted and robbed by miscreants who were apparently not residents of Assam" (Goswami1997:p29). But the great tragedy of communal riots occurred in Goalpara and the adjoining part of Barpeta sub-division which forced thousands of Muslims to quit Assam. Guha estimated that "nearly one lakh according to Indian official estimate, to quit the riot-affected lower Assam for East–Pakistan in search of security. It was indeed the province's first big riot against a religious minority community" (Guha 2006:p271). Hussain considered it as "the first major internal displacement of a religious minority in post-colonial Assam" (Hussain 2000: p4519).

Abdur Razzaque, a 1950 riot victim from Gunial Guri in the present Barpeta district observed that nearly eight lakhs of Muslim population had to bear the brunt of that riot. Caught in the fear of attack, many of them were forced to flee to East-Pakistan to save their lives. Hundreds of people lost their lives and many houses were burnt to ashes as the riot gathered steam. Soon after, these uprooted victims left their homes and hearths, the perpetrators occupied their houses and properties. The affected people were quite ill prepared for this gory chapter (Razzaque 2007:pp10-11).

The first incident of communal clash took place on March 2, 1950 much to the surprise of the Muslims of undivided Goalpara district and in the western side of the Barpeta sub-division. Violence erupted without any provocation. Many

people lost their lives and hundreds of houses were torched. But the media kept mum on the ruthless killing of peasants. After a brief silence of one month, the second wave of communal clash erupted in the first week of April, 1950 (Razzaque 2007:pp10-11).

Rezaul karim mentioned that the first orgy of violence erupted in a remote hamlet of Bhandara area under Bijni police station of Goalpara district where three people were brutally killed on March 3, 1950. Tension started escalating the next day in the form of murder and mayhem in Kirtanpara, Bagulamari, Japeyar Char, Mulbari, Tapeswara, Nadialpara, Dabondia, Kokila, Chakla, Banglapara, Numberpara, Solmari, Titapani, Khudrakuchi and Balagaon along the Goalpara-Barpeta inter-district border and where eleven dead bodies were recovered (Karim 2007:pp77-78).

Hundreds of houses belonging to the Muslims were torched and many of these people were forced to flee to East Pakistan. But normalcy was restored within a couple of days without any resistance. The fear of more conflagrations, the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru talked to his Pakistani counterpart Liaquat Ali Khan. A series of initiatives had resulted in the Nehru-Liaquat Ali Pact, which was signed on 8th April 1950. The historic pact paved the way for the riot victims who took shelter in Pakistan, came back to Assam by December 31, 1950. However, it generated much anger resulting in the second phase of ethnic flare up on the day the pact was signed. Thousands of people left for Pakistan leaving their properties behind in India.

The entire administrative machinery was not prepared to firmly deal with the situation as the campaign against the Muslims of East-Bengal origin confused them. A section of them stayed back while some others started coming back to Assam from July 1950, six months before the deadline set by the Nehru-Liaquat Ali Pact. Hussain argued, "However, following the Nehru-Liaquat Ali Pact of 1950 involving India and Pakistan, which assured them safe return as well as rehabilitation, many returned home about two years later" (Hussain 2000:p4519).

After returning back most of these people found an adverse situation here. It was difficult for them to restart their lives as their means of livelihood were severely constricted.

Rezaul Karim informed that, a few news stories in *Paigam* (a weekly newspaper in Bengali published from West Bengal) suggests that the then Goalpara Deputy Commissioner asked the Hindus occupying the plots of the Muslim to vacate their houses. Nobody listened to the directive forcing the Muslim in East Goalpara area to take shelter in Kamrup district *(* Karim 2007:p80*)*. Those who could not reoccupy their houses and properties had no option but to remain in dying agony. From July to December 1950, 771 people hailing from 24 villages in the northern side of Goalpara died of starvation (Karim 2007:p83).

Thus, the poor farmers who fled from Assam in wake of communal riot of 1950, were forced to survive in abject poverty and distress when they came back to Assam, in response to the pact which promised to provide them a conducive environment on their return. Many farmers who stayed back made up their minds to leave for East Pakistan once more for safety and security. Some of these people exchanged their houses and properties with their Hindu counterparts in East-Pakistan just to leave this country.

The state government refused to go soft on these poor people who finally left for East Pakistan in 1952 negating the impact of the Nehru Liaquat Ali Pact. On the other hand, those who were taking shelter in East Pakistan to get rid of the riot in Assam could not come back after the end of deadline. The Census of 1951 did not cover them as their names were left from being included in the National Register of Citizenship (NRC) of 1951. Even those who came back, failed to be covered in 1951 electoral rolls .Again in the next census of 1961, a large number of migrant Muslims of Goalpara and Kamrup district were not covered as they might not have been able to come back to their place of habitation in Assam during the census (Karim 2007:p85). We have reasons to believe that neither the Census Report of 1951, and nor the NRC of 1951 can give us substantial evidence of the real picture of migration of Muslims from Assam to East-Pakistan and *vice versa*.

The Muslims of East-Bengal origin, who came back to Assam after communal riots of 1950, accepted Assamese language as their mother tongue and send their children to Assamese medium schools (Guha 1993:p31). Records are still not available regarding the number of persons left for Pakistan or came back to Assam. This is one reason for not having the real figure on the growth of Muslim population in Assam unlike other states in the country.

Movements that Developed Communal Atmosphere (1950 to 1970)

Apart from the communal riots in some districts of lower Assam in the wake of partition of India, Assam, especially Brahmaputra Valley, came experience several movements based on language, ethnic and cultural identity. These movements too propelled a communal atmosphere in the society and politics of Assam.

State's Re-organization 1954

Violence took place in 1954 when the government was exploring the possibility of re-organizing Assam by transferring Goalpara and Barpeta Sub-division with West-Bengal. The proposals to transfer of Goalpara to Bengal on the basis of the claim that majority were Bengali speaking, heightened tension in the Goalpara and Barpeta subdivision. Conflicts emerged between anti-merger and pro-merger lobbies.

Nagar Chhatra Sangha of Barpeta along with the communities like Rajbanshis, Bodos, Muslims of Dhubri, Nepalis and even some local Bengalis of Kokrajhar district, took active part against the merger. And a few Bengali lawyers and businessmen took the lead in the pro-merger demand with Bengal (Goswami1997:pp 41-42). Group clashes occurred in different parts of Assam. Houses were burnt and looting took place at different places. Disturbances affected Kamrup, Darrang, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Goalpara and Nagaon districts. "About 50,000 Bengali speaking people werse displaced in Assam during the riots" (Tewary Commission1984:p101).

Official language movement in Assam, 1960

In 1960 communal riot took place due to the passing of Assam official language Bill. The Bengali Hindus were main sufferers of these communal incidents. In April 1959, *The Asam Sahitya Sabha* came out with a resolution to make 'Assamese' as the state language of Assam. The members of this literary body of Assam demanded that within 1960, the Assamese language must be declared as the State language of Assam (Goswam1997:p49). The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee also agreed with the demand and made a resolution declaring Assamese as official language in the state (Goswami1997:p53).

Large scale violence erupted in many parts of Assam in May 1960, when non Assamese speakers of Shillong staged a demonstration against the government move to make Assamese as the state language and the resolution of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (Goswami1997:p53). Agitation started in different districts of Assam and gradually it took a violent turn. Initially though the protests were confined to urban centers, later disturbance extended to rural pockets too. As a result, police atrocities too increased against the agitators. The entire issue generated very soaring apprehension in the Brahmaputra valley

Movement for Medium of Instruction (1972)

Series of political violence took place in Assam in 1972 on the issue of language, popularly known as 'language Movement' in Assam. It again disturbed the communal harmony throughout the Brahamapura Valley. Hussain opines that, "By and large, it once again generated violence and terror against the Hindu Bengalis living in the Brahmaputra Valley" (Hussain 2000:p4520). Violent incidents frequently occurred between the Asamiyas and the Bengali Hindus.

Communal Riots During Assam Movement (1979-1985)

From 1979 onwards a new episode emerged in the soil of Assam in the form of a popular mass movement —-'The Assam Movement' spearheaded by the All Assam Students' Union. The major demand of the movement was to detect

and deport the foreign nationals spread across the state. The movement "brought to the fore the Assamese mass concern about the continued large scale illegal immigration from Bangladesh and how it had posed serious challenge to the political and cultural identity of the indigenous communities" (Sharma 2016:p97). Initially, the movement was non-violent but later many incidents of violence took place during the course of the movement wherein thousands of people died. Thus, it left a dark chapter in the history of Assam. However, the entire movement took a more communal turn in 1983, because of the violent incidents in different parts of Assam. All these incidents occurred during controversial Assembly polls of 1983.

Figure.1.1: The places that were severely affected by massive violence and killings during 1983
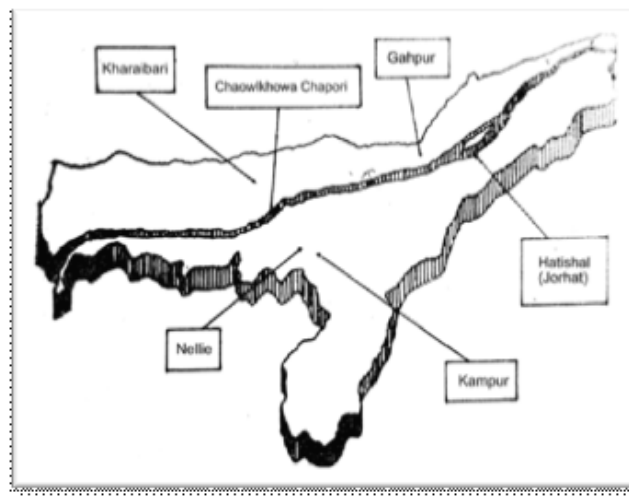
(Source: Prantik issue 16- 31 March 1983: p7)

The environment of the movement threatened the entire fabric of social co-operation and national integration. Kimura argued, "The anti-foreigners movement in Assam was one of the biggest ethnic movements that threatened the national integration of India. After the movement, various movements emerged, including militant ones" (Kimura 2003:p228).

Communal Riots in Post Assam Movement Period

Assam witnessed organized systematic massacre of Muslim peasants in the month of October 1993. It mainly occurred in Bangaigaon district of lower Assam. Again, on July 1994, communal riots took place between the Bodos and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin in Barpeta district. "It is estimated that about 1,000 people, mostly women and children, were killed, thousand injured and about 60 villages burnt down to ashes (Hussain 1995:p1154).More than 100 people were killed including Muslim people in relief camps in Bansbari. Riots erupted between the Bodo and the Santhals in Kokrajhar and Bangaigaon districts in the month of May 1996. Two years later in May 1998, again there were communal violence between the Bodos and the Santhals in Kokrajhar district. Riots between the Muslims of East Bengal origin and the Bodos erupted in 2008 in the district of Udalguri and Darrang resulting in displacement of thousands of Muslims. On July 2012, riots occurred between the Bodos and the Muslims of East-Bengal origin in Kokrajhar and it spread to neighouring districts like Chirang and Dhubri. Muslims of East- Bengal origin were again attacked and killed by insurgents in Baksa district on 1st May 2014. On 2nd May again the community was attacked and a number of people were killed in Kokrajhar district.

It is difficult to realize the fact that religion has a deep- seated impact still ingrain in the mindset of the people of Assam, which has already been proved by the nature of clash between the Muslims and the Hindus, Recently communal clash occurred in Hailakandi on 10th May 2019 between the Hindu Bengalis and the Muslims over offering jumma-namaz.

All these incidents have revealed that conflicting interests among different communities on religious, linguistics and ethnic lines have been permanently rooted in post-colonial Assam. The consequences of these situations have propelled communal and ethnic thoughts among the different communities of Assam, who have felt that the values and interests of their respective communities were in crises. This perception has developed irreconcilable differences and contributed towards growing resentment and hostility among the communities.

Conclusion

A historical analysis of the society of Assam reveals that Muslims (Muslims of East- Bengal origin) supported the Assamese nationalism and helped the Assamese in the official language movement during 1960. However, 1960 the situation changed and they were labelled as Pakistani foreigners. But they again stood with the Assamese in the language movement of 1972. During the Assam Movement they were labelled as Bangladeshi foreigners. A number of acts were enforced from time to time to detect and deport the foreigners. Foreigners Act (1946), Pass-port (Entry into India) Act (1920), Passport Act (1967), Citizenship Act (1955) and the Immigrants Expulsion (from Assam) Act (1950), IM(DT) Act 1983, (applicable only in Assam), have been applied to detect the foreigners. But the worst part of it was the process of communal implementation that led to communal divide in the society and politics of India and especially in Assam. It is very important to distinguish between the citizens and the foreigners. However, we need to adopt a secular and humanistic approach to deal with it. There is a need to protect the rights of citizenship without any discrimination on the basis of religion and language. Most importantly, the government should play a strong and impartial role in the whole process. Kaustavmoni Boruah argued that "immigration into Assam was under British machinations and supported by the Assamese middle class is beyond doubt. These immigrants who settled down in Assam with their blessings have become overnight "outsiders" or "foreigners" and the target of virulent attack. The problem is so complicated that it cannot be resolved in an atmosphere surcharged with passions and emotions. Only on an objective and judicious solution of the problem rests the harmony of the diverse races and linguistic groups inhabiting Assam and the ultimate unity and integrity of the country" (Boruah 1980:pp56-57).

Notes 1. The word *Asamiyas* is used in this study to indicate the indigenous or local Assamese.

2. Muslims in Assam are a heterogeneous community with several recognizable distinctive groups. They can be broadly divided into 'indigenous / Asamiya Muslims' and 'Muslims of East-Bengal origin'. The

Asamiya Muslims migrated to Assam since the 13th century till the take-over of Assam by the British. On the other hand, the Muslims of East-Bengal origin migrated to Assam under British colonialism. A large section of this community lives in Brahmaputra valley and takes education in Assamese medium. This section living in Brahmaputra valley identifies Assamese as their mother tongue during census enumerations. This section of East-Bengal origin Muslims is known as the 'Na-Asamiya' (Neo-Assamese) Muslims' in the society and politics of Assam. The Muslims of East-Bengal origin living in Barak valley, whose mother tongue is Bengali, are known as 'Bengali Muslims'(for details see Hussain 1993: pp196-225).In the present study all the above terms will be used according to the situation. The terms 'Immigrant Muslims', ' Migrant Muslims' ' Bengali speaking Muslims', ' Na-Asamiya Muslims', 'New Settlers' are used to refer to the Muslims of East-Bengal origin of Assam.

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JOURNAL OF POLITICS

THE FUTURE OF BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE POST-COVID-19

Shreya Upadhyay

Introduction

The Belt and Road initiative (BRI) was announced by Chinese Premier Xi Jinping in 2013 during the official visit to Kazakhstan and Indonesia (CFR, 2020). In 2017, the BRI was also written into the constitution of the Communist Party of China signaling its national and foreign policy importance. Belt and Road (*yi dai yi lu*) is a "21st-century silk road,"made up of a "belt" of overland corridors and a maritime "road" of shipping lanes (Guardian, 2018). It is loosely defined and built on bilateral trade deals and infrastructure projects—a vast network of railways, energy pipelines, ports, highways, etc connecting China from Europe to Africa. The initiative when announced led to Chinese political operators, banks, and companies- state-owned and private, jumping on to the bandwagon (Forbes, 2017). The BRI is a revival of sorts of the original silk road that arose during the westward expansion of the Chinese Han dynasty (CFR, 2020). The route forged trade networks the Central Asian countries of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as modern-day India and Pakistan, extending thousands of miles to Europe. The route saw trading of valuable Chinese silk, spices, jade, and other goods while China received gold and other precious metals, ivory, and glass products. This trade route has been embellished by a "maritime silk route" that passed through the Indian Ocean in the unspecified period of history. China published a White Paper in 2015 that elaborated on five policy areas — policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bond among the country along the Belt and Road

(Zhexin, 2018). As of February 2021, the number of countries joining the BRI by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China is 140. China till 2020 spent around $4 trillion on the BRI, signed 200 cooperation documents for the joint construction of the "Belt and Road" with 138 countries and 30 international organizations, and the interconnection framework of "six corridors, six routes, multiple countries and multiple ports" (Baruzzi, 2021). For example, Beijing's has invested more than $35 billion in Bangladesh, funded more than 20 projects in the Maldives, $62 billion network of motorways, railways, and power plants in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor linking China's Xinjiang region to Gwadar Port in southern Pakistan. Other major infrastructure projects include a high-speed rail link in Indonesia and a massive industrial park in Cambodia (Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2018).

A Geostrategic Concept

By employing economic tools such as policy lending and "memorandum-of-understanding diplomacy", China is extending its sphere of influence, fostering new norms of international economic cooperation, and promoting a new world order(Eisenman, 2019; Wijeratne, Rathbone & Wong, 2018). Chinese activist foreign policy has reinforced the impression that the initiative is driven by broad geostrategic aims. The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor is a prime example. It is widely regarded as one of the flagship projects of OBOR and is enthusiastically supported by both Beijing and Islamabad. The proposed corridor is expected to connect Kashgar in Xinjiang in China's far west with the Port of Gwadar in the province of Baluchistan. Given the port's proximity to the Persian Gulf, it could be used as a transshipment point for China's energy supplies obviating the need to go through the Strait of Malacca in Southeast Asia (Lowy Institute, 2017). In a testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, it was stated that the BRI will likely result in increased overseas access and presence for the People's Liberation Army. Taking over of Hambantota port in Sri Lanka alarmed policymakers who suspect that China has gained a strategic foothold in the Indian Ocean along an important commercial and military waterway. The CPEC project has also sunk into debt.

Negative externalities will develop from BRI if recipient countries are subject to corruption and coercion, or caught in debt traps that China exploits for political and strategic ends. Beijing's potential inducements and perceptions will lead countries to become less assertive to push back against Chinese assertiveness. (CFR, 2018). Chinese debt-trap diplomacy involves offering cheap loans for transformative infrastructure projects, which involve a substantial investment in low or middle-income countries. In several cases, these projects are not economically viable. Countries are unable to keep up with the repayments and Beijing gets a chance to demand concessions or advantages in exchange for debt relief. BRI is helping China to assert its regional leadership through a vast program of economic integration. It aims to create a regional production chain, within which China would be a center of advanced manufacturing and innovation and the standard setter.

More importantly, BRI was designed to help China meet some of its most pressing economic challenges. It will help China to encourage regional development within the country. The inequality between inland western regions and prosperous eastern seaboard states is a huge challenge for the ruling party. For example, the coastal mega-metropolis of Shanghai is five times wealthier than the inland province of Gansu, which is part of the old Silk Road (Lowy Institute, 2017). Attempts to close the gap between these provinces have not been successful. The BRI focuses on real capital and industrial cooperation, infrastructure construction, and job enlargement (Turkish Policy Quarterly, 2019). This is largely done to develop trade routes to the West. Creating a new Silk Road to China's west — either through the likes of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russia or, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Syria — and eventually linking with Europe, it will lead to further economic convergence within China itself (Stephen King, 2016). This developmental model is seen by Beijing as a way to reduce the risk of social unrest and political instability, along with discouraging religious radicalization, fundamentalism, and terrorist recruitment.

It will also help China deal with excess capacity. During the global financial crisis, the Chinese Government delivered one of the largest stimulus packages in the recent economic history of Rmb4tn. It aimed at boosting sagging demand and

involved massive public infrastructure investment, social welfare spending, and rural development. Though the stimulus program was effective, one of its lasting side effects was the creation of massive excess capacity in many industrial sectors from steel to cement. In the steel industry, for example, China's annual steel production surged from 512 million tonnes in 2008 to 803 million tonnes in 2015. The extra 300 million tonnes is larger than the combined production of the United States and the European Union (Lowy Institute, 2017). Dealing with this excess capacity became one of the top economic priorities for the Chinese government. One of how the Chinese government has tried to address the issue of excess capacity is exporting the excess industrial products to neighboring countries and moves the excess production capacity out of China.

Above all it will help China scout for new markets for its goods. This becomes especially important as China-US relations have hit a rocky phase. Beijing expects that the plan will help it gain influence and support among countries where US influence is limited. Lastly, the acceleration of investments in infrastructure would enable Beijing to deal with its anxieties, related to its energy security. Beijing has been looking for alternative routes to circumvent the so-called "Malacca Strait dilemma", that are under the surveillance and protection of the US navy. Therefore, it is trying to create more land-based energy supply routes from Iran, the Gulf countries, and eastern Africa, while increasing its imports from Russia and Central Asia. This will help China bypass Malacca Strait and the South China Sea thereby, reducing the risk of being cut by a potential American naval blockade in case of military conflict (Rolland Nadege, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing, 2018)

Covid-19 and Challenges with the Belt and Road

Long before Covid-19, the initiative had run into controversies for being opaque and riddled with conspiracy and corruption. Many of the BRI investments are considered opaque. The projects are often built on low-interest loans, as opposed to grants. Many investments have been criticized for involving opaque bidding processes and required the use of Chinese firms. As a result, contractors were accused of inflating costs (CSIS, 2019). This led to canceled projects and political

backlash. Often the lack of transparent bidding and procurement processes constitute a recurring obstacle to the participation of interested European companies (Forbes, 2020).Secondly, the confusion surrounding the projects. BRI has often been termed as a loose set of projects designed and implemented. It has been bundled as any project that involves China. Private companies both Chinese and foreign, have leveraged the catchall phrase—whether to claim bragging rights or perpetrate outright scams (Forbes, 2020) Tales of corruption have become common. The third is the unsustainability of the projects. Several China-driven development projects across Asia have become white elephants rendering the BRI an unattractive proposition in many markets (Forbes, 2020).A fourth and related issue is the "debt trap" arguments that have led to skepticism concerning the initiative. This has led to growing opposition in several countries to the Belt and Road. A 2018 report by the Center for Global Development, notes that the risk of debt distress is rising in 23 countries with Belt and Road funding and eight countries are vulnerable to debt crises. The countries already facing unsustainable levels of sovereign debts are Mongolia, Montenegro, Pakistan, Maldives, Djibouti, Laos, Kyrgis republic, Tajikistan. CFR's Belt and Road Tracker (2019) shows an overall debt to China has soared since 2013, surpassing 20 percent of GDP in some countries. Important questions arise on sustainable financing of the initiative within BRI countries, and how the Chinese government will position itself on debt sustainability. Infrastructure financing, which often entails lending to sovereigns or the use of a sovereign guarantee, can create challenges for sovereign debt sustainability. And when the creditor itself is a sovereign or has official ties to a sovereign as do China's policy banks—China Development Bank (CDB), the Export-Import Bank of China (China Exim Bank), and the Agricultural Development Bank of China (ADBC)—these challenges often affect the bilateral relationship between the two governments. (CGD Policy paper, 2018)

The fifth issue is the over-dependency on China. The debt issue can create an unfavorable degree of dependency on China as a creditor. Increasing debt, and China's role in managing bilateral debt problems, has already exacerbated internal and bilateral tensions in some BRI countries, such as Sri Lanka and Pakistan, where civil society has regularly clashed with police over the presence of Chinese

workers, corruption, spending of public money, etc. Sri Lanka's case is rather interesting where it was alleged that Chinese construction funds were used for former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's failed re-election bid (CSIS, 2019). Unsustainable levels of foreign debt mean poor returns on loans for China, as well as potentially disastrous economic outcomes for the countries involved. The affected nations are among the poorest in their respective regions and will soon owe more than half of all their foreign debt to China. In 2011, China reportedly agreed to write off an unknown amount of debt owed by Tajikistan in exchange for some 1,158 square kilometers of the disputed territory. At the time, Tajik authorities said they only agreed to provide 5.5 percent of the land that Beijing originally sought. Sri Lanka's inability to service an $8 billion loan at 6 percent interest that was used to finance the construction of the Hambantota Port led to a debt-for-equity swap accompanied by a 99-year lease for managing the port and the surrounding 1500 acres of land.

How Covid-19 Altered the BRI: Challenges and Opportunities?

Covid-19 has ushered devastating trends for demand and supply all over the world testing the resilience of the world order. The weakening of China's economy in 2020 led to disruptions to the country's manufacturing and supply chain activities. There was a freeze on the flow of Chinese labour as a result of the travel restrictions due to the pandemic leading to suspended and slowed progress in partner countries like Cambodia, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, etc. Contract-signing of projects were delayed, such as the Bangkok-Nakhon-Ratchasima section of Thailand's high-speed rail, Pyra power plant in southern Bangladesh, and the Port city development project in Sri Lanka(Carnegie: Bhatia, Pal, 2020). Pakistan is poised to sustain an $8.2 billion loss, according to a preliminary assessment by the Asian Development Bank (The Diplomat, Tonchev, 2020). Bangladesh might lose up to $3 billion while Thailand is bracing up for a recession. Project failures, cases of insolvency, and bankruptcies are expected to grow exponentially along BRI routes. Host countries or even China might cancel contracts in a few cases. According to the UNCTAD Investment Trends Monitor's report, global Foreign Direct Investments ("FDI") collapsed in 2020, slowing down by 42 percent to an estimated $859 billion, from $1.5 trillion in 2019, while China became the largest

FDI recipient, attracting an estimated US$163 billion in inflows. This will have an effect on timely completion of projects, closure of sites, and non-starter of new projects. These are however short-term pain points, and the connectivity and infrastructure established under BRI routes will be important for many countries seeking industrial innovation, access to critical resources, and to promote trade enterprise. What is more noteworthy is that Covid-19 has impacted as to how the host developing countries will be able to repay debt. It is still to be seen as to how China will respond to potential nonpayment of debt in the post-crisis world (Buckley, 2020).

Another additional factor is the tarnished reputation of Beijing as a result of its attempts to conceal the outbreak when it was discovered in Wuhan back in December of 2019. This has resulted in geopolitical rivalry, trade tensions, and intellectual property disputes. The ongoing rhetorical war with the US can further impact China's soft power status. This might prompt China to engage in debt restructuring. This might be used as a tool to win support in the post-Covid new world and curry the political favours necessary to fuel Xi's "China dream."

The BRI has till now been a physical infrastructure plan. However, with the Covid-19 ushering the era of social distancing, less travel, and work from home culture, the need for physical infrastructure is on a decline, at least shortly. There has been an increased use of digital communications technology that has given rise to "firms from nowhere". Virtual reality, Artificial intelligence, and robotics provide scope for the reduction of person-to-person contact. Covid-19 has sped up trends that were already underway, including rationalizing global value chains (GVCs), building flexibility (and alternative locations) into GVCs, holding more inventory and other forms of insurance against hold-ups and breakdowns, and localization (Buckley, 2020)

BRI has also been focusing on the healthcare and digital sectors. The BRI is also a tool through which China attracts foreign investments. By means of the BRI, China allows foreign capital and knowledge to further flow into its market while also creating the conditions needed for increasing domestic demand and diminishing dependency on foreign countries. The Covid-19 scenario is also the time when the developing world will need foreign resources, investors, and loans.

As the governments of the World and multilateral organizations will be busy in tackling the crisis, China might be the only nation with cash reserves to marshal the world economy forward. Countries might be forced to choose China because of a lack of available alternatives.

China is reaping in opportunities by capitalizing on the digital aspects of innovation. The new way forward is the Digital Silk Road. Introduced in 2015, the DSR aims to fill the gaps in digital infrastructure across the Belt & Road through the expansion of China-centric digital and telecoms infrastructure projects. COVID-19 has created new opportunities for the country's technological ambitions to flourish (Belt and Road news, 2020). Cross border e-commerce is an important pathway to transform the supply chain. In the last few years, Chinese tech companies such as Huawei and ZTE have invested in healthcare technology in several countries. With the spread of the pandemic, countries will be compelled to hone in on the use of health surveillance technology. Facial recognition technologies, smart phone apps, and color-based health codes have been rolled out over the last few months to monitor public health and contagion risk. Chinese Digital Silk Road thereby paves the way for the Health Silk Road. During Covid-19 Beijing exported its medical soft power by sending a team of doctors, face masks, respirators, and other equipment along with vaccines.

This "health diplomacy" provided foreign policy gains. When the European Union was battling the worst of the crisis and was running low on medical protective equipment, countries turned to China for help. China worked with Serbia and Italy in the European Union to battle the virus (Mouritz, 2020). In the first half of 2020, China-Europe freight trips rose 36 percent year-on-year to 5,122, transporting 3.67 million pieces and 27,000 tons of anti-pandemic materials to European countries, including Italy, Germany, France, Spain, Poland, and Hungary. China's push for global health leadership has been loud and clear; the country has exported equipment and medical assistance on a bilateral basis to no fewer than 89 nations. Beijing's mask diplomacy has targeted the likes of Ukraine, Uganda, the Philippines, and Indonesia. The Health Silk Road (HSR) is not new. It has been written into the BRI agenda since at least 2017 under the auspices of enhanced health connectivity parallel to the BRI's land and maritime networks. The COVID-19

crisis has merely acted as an accelerator for the HSR. It will be a natural fit for Chinese tech companies such as Alibaba's DingTalk, Tencent's WeChat Work, and Huawei's WeLink to bid for market share outside of China, especially in the BRI region. China's MedTech sector may similarly find opportunities abroad. In the past few months, online doctor consultation platforms (Alibaba Health, Ping a Good Doctor) have seen consultations soar.

A post-covid 19 scenario will welcome "soft infrastructure" – that includes human capital and services, healthcare, financial systems, education systems, law enforcement, etc. China can provide "fringe benefits" such as handouts, favors, education grants, donations, and rely on personal equations with the leaders of the host country to increase bargaining power versus the West. A telling example in this regard is the tweet by the Chinese ambassador in Kathmandu regarding the medical aid to Nepal promising, "We are praying for Nepal and trying our best to coordinate some medical materials to help our Nepali friends. You will never be alone!" This reflected China's attempt to win over Nepal and garner the global appreciation of its healthcare aid and medical assistance efforts. China donated testing kits, PPE, masks, and other supplies to Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, and extended a $500 million loan to Sri Lanka along with sending a team of medical professionals to treat patients and train others. In Pakistan, China built makeshift hospitals and supplied ventilators. In the early days of the Covid-19 vaccine rollout, Chinese shots saved countless lives. They kick-started inoculation programs across Asia, Latin America and the Middle East with millions receiving either a Sinovac or Sinopharm jab. By July 2021, more than 30 Asian countries brought Chinese jabs or received donated shots. However, with preliminary studies hinting that Chinese vaccine could offer 20 per cent less protection against the new variants.

Challenging the BRI

The BRI has been considered by the United States and several of its allies as a conduit for pursuing global domination (CFR, 2021). Under former President Donald Trump, China was targeted for the spread of the Covid-19 virus. In the Indo-Pacific region, the Quad countries comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the United States have been taking note of Chinese growing footprints in the

region and deepening ties with Sri Lanka and Pakistan, particularly. The United States recently added China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) and some of its subsidiaries to the Entity List by the US Department of Commerce. The reason cited for the licensing restrictions by the US State Department is that the company indulged in malign activities in the South China Sea. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said, "CCCC led the destructive dredging of the PRC's South China Sea outposts and is also one of the leading contractors used by Beijing in its global 'One Belt One Road' strategy. CCCC and its subsidiaries have engaged in corruption, predatory financing, environmental destruction, and other abuses across the world." (US Department of State, 2020)

From the Gwadar deep water port in Pakistan to a port city project in Colombo, the CCCC has several strategic overseas projects around India and the Indo-Pacific region. The Australian federal government is pursuing legislation that can scrap any agreements by state governments with a foreign country. The Victoria government had signed on a project under the BRI in 2019 which sparked concerns regarding the foreign influence. The Scott Morison government can use the legislation to scrap that project or any other to weaken China's BRI move in Australia (News 18, 2020). The Japanese Government has been extending loans to Japanese companies operating in China to relocate back to Japan, and even to third countries. This backlash comes on top of the extensive relocation of activities away from China, particularly by US firms under domestic political pressure. India on its part has also indulged in coercive diplomacy banning Chinese apps, checking the Foreign Direct Investment, scrutinizing imports that abuse the Free Trade Agreements. In April 2020, India sought out more than 1000 American companies to offer incentives for manufacturers seeking to move out of China. Within South Asia, India helped to evacuate overseas nationals from Bangladesh, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Nepal using commercial and military aircraft. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the lead to convene a video conference of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) states to respond to the pandemic. Using a regional fund initiated to tackle the pandemic; India supplied vaccines, medicines and equipment to several countries and collaborated with Quad nations as well as countries such as New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam to synergize actions against the virus.

The US and other status quo powers have a clear interest in adopting a strategy that both pressures China to alter its BRI practices and provides an effective alternative to BRI—one that promotes sustainable infrastructure upholds high environmental and anticorruption standards, ensures U.S. companies can operate on a level playing field, and assists countries in preserving their political independence. The US-led Blue Dot Network that seeks to develop international infrastructure and is beginning to show signs of offsetting Chinese BRI influence. The BDN centers on the 'Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership' involving military, space, and energy cooperation. It will work to address BRI-induced debt crises and to promote adherence to high-standards lending practices. The US has set aside $60 billion and plans to catalyze private capital across the Indo-Pacific arena on track with targets. The BDN is "a multi-stakeholder initiative that will bring governments, the private sector, and civil society together to promote high-quality trusted standards for global infrastructure development". Mobilizing private capital is central to the BDN's purpose. No government has the financial wherewithal to meet the huge need for infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region or around the world alone. However, they can work to deal with risks that come with infrastructure investment— environmental, social, health, and safety risks; inflation, foreign exchange, and other macroeconomic risks; and contract disputes, weak rule of law, as well as other legal and political risks (Kuo, 2020). The infrastructure projects supported by the BDN will have to adhere to the globally-recognized standards that uphold principles of transparency and financial viability, such as G-20 principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment, aimed at sustainable lending and borrowing, the G7 Charlevoix Commitment on Innovative Financing for Development, and the Equator Principles, which mandate financial institutions to assess and manage environmental and social risks in a given project (Basu, 2020). A developing country that agrees to implement BDN standards signifies that the government values high-quality infrastructure that benefits local communities. The Blue Dot Network embarks on robust anti-corruption campaign that will provide countries with clear project standards that can build public confidence in their commitment to good practices (CFR, 2021).

Along with that the democratic governments are also taking a note of Chinese digital diplomacy as an attempt to further expand its sphere of influence. Quad for instance has formulated a working group with the aim to critical and emerging technologies, which will drive coordination on standards, encourage diversification of equipment suppliers and future telecommunications technology (particularly, 5G), and convene regular dialogues on critical-technology supply chains. It will have to cover wide array of digital issues, including data governance and law-enforcement cooperation. It is being increasingly realized that countering a "Digital Sinosphere" on a global basis will require getting the world's netizens to choose non-Chinese platforms at scale. This requires multilogue to a number of issues with regard to the digital-trade governance, data flows and data privacy in order to build common solutions to shared concerns (Linscott, Raghuraman, 2021).

Conclusion

The Belt and Road Initiative has developed as Chinese sharp power. Sharp power as explained in the National Endowment for Democracy (2017) report refers to a regime's capacity to influence the thoughts and opinions of the audiences in a target nation to change their behavior and minds to undermine the political system of a target country using manipulative diplomatic policies. The Belt and Road Initiative has been creating asymmetric foreign dependencies between China and vulnerable nations in the developing world. The very fact that the BRI has been written into the constitution of the Communist Party of China underscores not only the primacy of the project but the degree to which China's rise has been institutionalized. These predatory tones have grown further in the Covid-19 times and are working to continue serving Beijing's overseas ambitions, even at the expense of the economically weak.

The pandemic has shown that societies can function with decreased physical connectivity. In the mid to long run, ongoing BRI projects will pick up again. However, the new BRI will have a different colour to it. As physical globalization recedes, digital globalization will continue to grow. This brings with itself enormous challenges over the governance of the internet. Notably, Beijing is yet to formulate a clear cut definition of the BRI. Lack of a concrete vision is

something that has made the initiative controversial, mired in chaos, and attracting backlash. A refocusing is mandatory for the BRI to meet its objectives. In this regard, is coming up of Blue Dot Network in an attempt to monitor or challenge the BRI. The long list of BDN involving human rights, environmental protection, accounting, sovereignty, labour rights aims to create global standards in infrastructure development. BDN is till now taking baby steps and needs to involve more nations. However, the signal is clear. The end game of BDN is to convince the developing world that the quality of projects is as or even more important than the quantity and that over-reliance on Chinese money is a recipe for disaster. While setting up quality standards is noteworthy, freeing countries from the Chinese hub and spoke system will require putting more resources and money, along with sound investment standards.

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JOURNAL OF POLITICS

LIVELIHOOD SECURITY OF UNORGANIZED SECTOR LABOURERS : A CASE STUDY OF THE STREET VENDORS OF UPPER ASSAM

Sivanath Chutia

Introduction

Street vending is one of the most familiar occupations in the unorganised urban sector. They are identified as self-employed workers who offer goods and services for sale to the public without having a permanent built-up arrangement in public space (National policy on urban street vendors-NPUSV, 2009). In most Indian cities, street vendors migrated from the rural area due to poverty and lack of opportunities. Different reports and surveys revealed that street vendors constitute a substantial proportion of the unorganised urban sector, accounting for two-thirds of urban employment. Around 10 million street vendors existed in Indian cities (Bhowmik, 2001).

Due to fast-growing urbanisation, street vendors are often considered an obstruction to the development process like infrastructure, sophisticated markets like shopping malls, entertainment parks etc. In many cases, it directly posesthreat to their livelihood once the administration allows the construction of some big projects.After the 1990's most of the Indian cities have experienced a rapid boost of street vendors. However, government attitudes are not favourable towards this large segment of society. The fundamental problems street vendors face during their business and activities are lack of workspace, insignificant demand, low productivity, unorganised sources of credit, abuse, etc. They access neither any legal rights nor able to cover under any social security scheme. Moreover, basic

amenities like education, formal credit source and health security; uncertainty in employment and income, lack of space, eviction, harassment and abuse by civic authorities and lack of infrastructural provision make their livelihood quite vulnerable(De Soto 1989, Begari, 2018; Bhowmik, 2001).

Methodology

This study is carried out with the help of both secondary and primary data. The secondary data have been collected from different online and offline sources prepared by several institutions, agencies and government officials of Assam. There is a shortage of data sources and studies as this study was carried out to examine the livelihood security of the street vendors in the daily and weekly market in Upper Assam. Here, an venture is made to understand the issues and challenges of street vendors in operating their activities. The primary data is collected from the three major developing cities Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Tinsukiawith structured questionnaires.It covers basic livelihood requirements of the street vendors like Workplace security, Sanitation facilities, License acquiring process, PDS Access, Heath Security andemployment days, unions and associations, government role in operating these markets and issues and challenges at their workplace. The total sample size is 300, consisting of daily and weekly market.Random Purposive Sampling has been employed to identify the respondents.

Unorganised Sector in Assam

Inadequate job source in formal sector, the unorganised sector has become a common source of livelihood and income generation for a large scale of people. For many purposes, the unorganised sector becomes an essential component of urban economies due to its durable goods and services that create more opportunities for earning. It enhances the chances of people from rural areas thathave limited opportunities for finding recognised employment or business. Thus it minimises the chances of social exclusion and marginalization to this lager segment.

Unorganised sector economic development is one of the main instruments of the informal urban economy of Assam. Generally believed that in thesecond

half of 1990s,the State has introduced latest development reforms and tools that have made a dramatic transition towards the mainstream economy. With incremental urbanisation and industrialisation, people migrate to cities searching for a job or better livelihood possibilities. However, a dramatic shift was witnessed in the unorganised sector over the last four decades.It became omnipresent in the State, partly attributed to the influx of numerous ethnic groups and residents from other related to the urbanisation systems. Thus informal sector has been the only area in many parts that has witnessed some job prospect.

A considerable section of the population is involved in unorganised sector due to theabsences of a sufficient number of formal jobs, easy entry, and minimal expenditure, small scale of operations, low educational and skill requirements. The types of employment opportunities provided by the unorganised sector are diverse, particularly in investments, technology and employment. It can range from self-employment or family work supportto unorganised manufacturing, cobbling and waste collection etc.without investing a considerable amount. Many employees who have been deprived of the formal sector due to job pressure or instability, social safety and representation are attracted by this sector, which offers a chance to secure their basic survival needs. This plays a crucial role in maintaining significant wellbeing in the short section of society.

Issues and Challenges of the Street Vendors in Assam

The Indian Government first acknowledged the role of street vendors in urban economics in 2004 after much litigation and judgment of the honourable Supreme Court. The National Policy on Urban Street Vendor, 2004 and 2009, Model Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Bill, 2009 are some of the initiatives implemented by the Government so far. Although the national policy was formulated in 2004 and revised later in 2009, the provisions have yet to be materialised. ASVA (Assam Sivanath Chutia224in a metropolis and the total number of street vendors in the country is estimated to be around 10 million. They have enjoyed poor social security and their working conditions on the streets expose them to various safety and health issues(Robert, 1991). The SNDT – ILO study on Guwahati observed that around 85 per cent of the street

in a metropolis and the total number of street vendors in the country is estimated to be around 10 million. They have enjoyed poor social security and their working conditions on the streets expose them to various safety and health issues(Robert, 1991). The SNDT – ILO study on Guwahati observed that around 85 per cent of the street vendors complained of stress-related diseases like migraine, hyperacidity, hypertension, diabetes etc.

Street Vending plays a significant role in impacting people's lives associated with the unorganised sector in the State, which experienced urbanisation and industrialisation just after the 1990s. Cities have faced the problem of settlement and offering the minimum facilities to the people, especially the urban poor. Many of these rural migrants are primarily illiterate and low skilled. Due to insufficient job opportunities and family survival, most migrants accepted Street vending as a livelihood in different urban areasas the unregulated urban market is one of the best ways to live.Street Vending Act, 2014 was implemented by the Govt. of Assam as per the guideline passed by the honourable Supreme Court of India.In most of the urban areas, the Town Vending Committee (TVC) has been formed.As per the regulation of this Act, livelihood protection was included in the Gazette of Assam in section 36. While the Act is usually exemplary, but it has been futile in several times to came up with the expectations. Act provides a timetable for implementation of vending policies and regulations in the urban areas but does not impose a single penalty for non-compliance within the time limit. It also does not authorise the vendors a flexible and understandable license availing process deemed to be granted if the license application is not processed within the stipulated period. Unfair delays are also prejudicial to traders which benefited the police and local Government to blight the provision. Similarly, the states and local governments are predictably falling behind in implementing the Act within the timeframe specified by the Act.

Livelihood Security and the Street Vending

Livelihood security of Street Vendors is a matter of discussion over public space in different parts of Assam within the purview of experts and activists. In

most cities and towns of the State Street vending was blamed for many problems in the process. They are an integral part of the urban economy on the one hand and at the same time, contentious presence on the street vendors has shaped a critical engagement in utilising the public space. The growing number of vendors daily makes it extremely difficult to generate daily needs and raise a question of their survival. Street vending is also one of the critical manifestations of urban poverty, especially in developing cities of upper Assam. However, the absence of security at the workplace, health hazards, and poor living conditions keep their livelihoods stagnant. It leads to insecurity, sickness, and low work participation, ultimately leading towards the poverty trap and unsustainable livelihood. In addition to this, inadequate social security and lack of gainful employment in rural areas drive many people to the cities searching for better livelihoods.

The majority of the research found Street vendors are recent migrants who are unable to find work in the formal sector, and their motivation is usually transformed to obtain a sufficient income to survive, relying on their local resources to create work.It is difficult to point out the exact magnitude of Street vending, but there is general concurrence that it has contributed positively to achieving a secure livelihood and helps to expand the scope forpoor people to construct their ways to out of poverty. Notably, in the State, 65 per cent of the labour force is engaged in Street vending to make a living in the urban areas of Assam.

Consequently, vendors also earn less in less developing cities. They contrive in very miserable working conditions and a state of uncertainty. They do not have a fair workplace and access to the facilities such as drinking water, proper food during working hours, sanitation, electricity, etc. Most of them have to use any rented toilet in the locality and buy drinking water have to pay daily. For electricity facilities, they either use lights operated through batteries or depend on street lights. Quite a few of them have electricity connections through electricity boards, depending on their locations. The Act, which the State implemented in 2016, gave them the right to livelihood but still deprived them of health, housing, and education. In addition, they have to face seasonal hardship during the rainy season owing to

absence of permanent structure that can save them and their goods. Working hours vary from 10-12 on average, but they still earn less than their counterparts engaged in an organised or formal sector. They have to change the vending pattern according to seasonal variations. Thus, they are always vulnerable as they do not have a sustainable livelihood. Table1 depicts a clear picture of the issues faced by this sector in competing with the formally organised one.

Table 1: Respondents' View on Common Issue at their Workplace

	Accessibility (In %)		Response (In %)		
Issues	**Yes**	**No**	**Manageable**	**Easy**	**Complex**
1. Workplace Security	37	63	29.67	24	46.33
1. Sanitation Facility	29	71	32	24.33	43.67
2. License	39.67	60.33	27.33	19.67	53
3. Credit Facility	19	81	25	20.67	54.33

Table 1 clearly shows that the respondent's view on workplace security at their business is a significant obstacle. 63% of the respondents have faced various problems in operating their activity at the vending zones. Only 37% of them positively reply that they have not faced any difficulty in their workplace. 29.67% of respondents have pointed their views as somehow it is manageable, and the rest, 43.33%, faced complexity due to formal and informal sources of operation.

Sanitation facility is a significant concern for the street vendors in the majority of the cities of Assam. The primary sanitation facility like drinking water, toilets are not available in any of the cities. Most of the vendors carry drinking water from their homes, and the rest purchase from shops. Due to the unavailability of the toilet, women are experiencing several problems more acutely because they cannot use the open place. Even if it is urgent, the local people stop them. Data proves that accessible sanitation facilities cover only 29% of the total vendors in the vending zones. Due to unplanned and harsh conditions of the vending zones, 71% of the vendors use unhygienic ways to meet their sanitation requirements.

License is another issue regarding using vending zones by the street vendors. In most of the parts of upper Assam, people engaged in their activity without a vending license. Vending License is also known as identity proof for vendors that offer to carry out their activity in allotted zones. Due to the absence of flexible mechanisms and organisational knowledge, they failed to avail and preferred cash payment to run their activity daily.It was found that 39.67% of the vendors have a license issued by the municipal board.60.33% per cent of the vendors are not interested in it due to the difficulty in managing application and other required details.

On the other side, respondents indicated that it is challenging to avail a credit facility to run their everyday business. A considerable amount of paperwork and documents are required to grant a small amount of credit.81% of vendors comment that they have faced many problems due to low education, awareness, and necessary documents required for any credit facility. Only 19% have somehow managed to avail it from traditional sources. 54.33% of the total respondents have mentioned that the terms and conditions relating to this credit facility are very confusing and out of their scope of understanding. Respondents argue that the formal credit institutions are not satisfied with the documents that have and low level of income is always made some additional problem in returning it timely. It can be said that the majority of vendors feels comfortable with the non-institutional sources of creditas it does not require much documentation and paperwork.

Street vending and Question of Survivability

Survival as a street vendor needs some skills that can provide a viable livelihood, but due to low earnings they faced significant risks at workstation. Especially those who sell fresh commodities such as vegetables and cooked foods. Absences of storage spaces, theft or damage to stock are common issues that create a significant impact. Moreover, it is difficult for the street vendors to get licenses for conducting business and leads many vendors towards vulnerable situations like harassment, confiscations of goods, and evictions. It found that even vendors who possess licenses have also faced difficulties finding a secured vending location and even those who follow the regulations. Their goods are

confiscated most of the time. In the absence of state-led measures offering engagement to the urban poor throughout the State, Street vending has become an excellent source for income generation and livelihood prerequisites. Despite two decades of intensive economic reforms and the modernisation of infrastructure, street vendors remain a highly vulnerablesocial group that needs legal protection to use space in cities.

Street vending is one of the sectors in the State where most of the people are socially, economically and educationally backwards. Due to less earning, they cannot save money so that it can be usedfor other purposes. Apart from that, the most significant problem of street vendors in the State is that they face innumerable problems at the hands of the police and other authorities since they are not allowed to run their business in public spaces. It is practically demanded that unorganised workers be protected and encouraged to solve the growing problem of employment in Assam and all over India. The Government should initiate some tangible steps towards the wellbeing of different sectors and to this large segment of the informal economy. Like other informal economy sectors, street vendors are also playing a considerable role in the development of society, especially in urban areas. However, both the Government and the general public consider them a stigma on society as they occupy public spaces but never look towards the services they offer. The crucial issue that the street vendors face is their existence in the urban informal sector: the consideration of the municipalities and local authority as an unlawful one. Due to this reason, they were not living their lives with dignity and were ruined to benefit from the right to decent work. The Government is not fascinated enough to provide the space to run their business without any harassment and any threat of eviction. Some specific kind of rules and regulation is mandatory to assist them to fulfil their primary requirement. Moreover, the Street Vendors continuously insist on the Government safeguarding their privileges from civil society and the Municipal Authorities to earn well and live their lives with full dignity.

Role and Perception of the Government towards Street Vendors

After 2009, the Indian Government has initiated various schemes to address the issues of this large segment of society. In major cities like Mumbai, Delhi,

Hyderabad, and Bengaluru Street, vendors are more concerned about the Government's facilities. Different NGOs, street vending associations and other social activists support the vendors in their services. However, the tragedy isthat Assam is still far more behind in acknowledging the vendor's rights and measures for fulfilling their needs and requirements.

a) Access of Public Distribution System (PDS)

Covering the vendors under the Public Distribution System is still a boundless skirmish matter. Under PDS, vendors can avail rice, wheat, cooking oil, sugar and kerosene etc. Table 2 explains access to the Public distribution system (PDS) offered to the vendors. 65.66% of vendors do not have access to PDS benefits as they are temporary inter-district migrants. Most respondents only receive PDS access when they are born in the cities or migrated several years ago and are not covered under PDS access. Since theyno longer belong to their locality in the cities, government officials do not consider them because they did not have any local addresses or PDS cards that prove their residential identity.

Table 2: PDS Access

City	Jorhat	Dibrugarh	Tinsukia	Total
Yes	37(35.92)^	27(26.21)^	39(37.86)^	103(34.33) ^
No	77(39.09)^	59(29.95)^	61(30.96)^	197(65.66)^
Total	114(100)^	86(100)^	100(100)^	300(100)^

^*Figures in the parentheses are in percentage*

However, few of the interviewees get access to PDS based on temporary cards for which they have to pay some extra charges to shop dealers as a bribe.

a) Social Security Access

Social Security is a significant determinant of Livelihood Security. Here, Table 3 explains the access to the pension for age-old and widows. The Government has offered a small token of amount as pension. It is a supplementary income for

those who do not receive funds from another government scheme for livelihood protection under a minimum age or disability.The data reveals that 61 per cent of vendors do not have the facility of pension. Only 39 per cent of vendors have this access.

Table 3: Distribution of Pension

City	Jorhat	Dibrugarh	Tinsukia	Total
Private Insurance	41(36.28) ^	39(34.51) ^	33(29.20)	113(37.66) ^
Atal Amrit Abhiyan	25(30.12) ^	31(37.35) ^	27(32.53) ^	83(27.67) ^
No	45(43.27) ^	22(21.15) ^	37(35.57) ^	104(34.67) ^
Total	**111(100)**	**92(100)**	**97(100)**	**300(100)**

^Figures in the parentheses are in percentage

a) Health Security

In India, the Government is concerned for the rights to health of the individuals who live below the poverty line or havevery little income. There have been a couple of schemes to address the vendor's problems during operations and everyday life. Table 4depicts the picture of the health rights of vendors in these three cities. It showed that 34.67% of the vendors have no health coverage at all, while 27.67% of the vendors have a health card for*Atal Amrit Abhiyan* facilities, and the rest 37.66 per cent of vendors can avail themselves Private Insurance. For example, a vendor worked on the roadside if he lost his hand or leg during a mishap and unable to work, he got a monthly pension of 250 rupees from the company. Vendors regularly suffer from fever, cold, and dust allergies because their vending spaces are busy or on the highway. Most of them rely on private hospitals, and the government claim health and accidental cards.

Table 4: Health Security

City	Jorhat	Dibrugarh	Tinsukia	Total
Private Insurance	41(36.28) ^	39(34.51) ^	33(29.20)	113(37.66) ^
Atal Amrit Abhiyan	25(30.12) ^	31(37.35) ^	27(32.53) ^	83(27.67) ^
No	45(43.27) ^	22(21.15) ^	37(35.57) ^	104(34.67) ^
Total	**111(100)**	**92(100)**	**97(100)**	**300(100)**

^Figures in the parentheses are in percentage

Several studies have shown that street vendors have too long working hours (10-12 hours). Depending on the type of vending items, working hours vary as they have to collect the commodities early in the morning. The durable goods sellers buy material from various locations in the city and elsewhere regularly, once or twice a month.

Conclusion

The in-depth analysis of the livelihood and socio-economic facets of the street vendors in Upper Assam has led to the unambiguous conclusion that Street Vending activity in the developing cities like Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia, likewise in other cities of India is unsecured and challenging. The study reveals that the excessively long working hours of the vendors, poor safety and security conditions at their workplaces and the conflict with the local municipal authorities are contributing towards deterioration in their working environment. They thus need to be provided certain proper rights to access the necessary facilities to utilise the public space. There is an earnest need for a detailed action plan to ameliorate the livelihood and socio-economic conditions of the street vendors. Street vendors are a regular part of urban culture. The Government should simplify the rules and regulations that prevent them from carrying on their occupation with dignity and freedom. The National Policy on Urban Street Vendors was re-examined by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India in 2009

(NPUSV, 2009), though the new policy is much the same as the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors, 2004. However, these policies are still on paper only and have not been implemented in the State so far. Therefore, it is prime responsibility of the state government to fully implement the national policy.Moreover, The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street vendors) Bill 2012, which the Parliament passed on February 19, 2014 and received the assent of the President on March 4, 2014, is now an act Street Vendors Act 2014, the date of commencement of the Act has not been announced yet. The street vendor's Act 2014 should be made operative without further delay, which would help the vendors to achieve decent working conditions and enjoy an adequate means of livelihood.

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JOURNAL OF POLITICS

MOTHERING IN THE TIME OF WAR: REFLECTIONS FROM MPW OF NEPAL

Amrita Pritam Gogoi

Women, War, Motherhood: An Introduction

Socio-cultural meanings assigned to motherhood and war makes the relationship between the two dichotomous, often using the former in denying women agency within war discourse. While motherhood is understood as representing creation or nurture of life, war is interpreted as signifying killing, destruction and death. This has resulted in assigning mothers in conflict societies with the role of peace makers or negotiators between warring factions, or according them the status of 'patriotic mothers' who are expected to serve the war by giving birth to patriotic sons or raising them to become patriots. Such ways of seeing and understanding motherhood has affected states', groups' and women's approaches towards knowing and acknowledging women's, particularly mothers', varied experiences and contribution to violent wars. Within war narratives even when women participate valiantly as warriors armed and shouldering important military responsibilities their decision and actions are often portrayed as acts of revenge either for the loss of their sons or husbands. Meaning — it is her instinctual desire to be maternal that motivates her for engagement in political violence. Such discourses see women's violence as a need to belong, a need to nurture and a way of taking care of and being loyal to men or as motherhood gone awry. Sjoberg and Gentry argues, within war narratives this nurturing mother terrorist is considered to be fairly non-threatening. Thus, while she is still a terrorist, revolutionary,

genocidaire or criminal, one does not have to worry too much about her personal violence. She is, thus, a 'domesticated terrorist'. Hence, even by living and working outside the domestic she does not defy women's field of honour (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). Åhäll (2012) in her work on representation of female agency in political violence observes that agency to female perpetrators of violence is always accorded at the expense of motherhood. She argues that such representation of agency always involves a tension between a life-giving and a life-taking task and agency is enabled by removing or overcoming this tension. Through her work, she depicts how writings of heroines depend on ideas about female bodies' association with motherhood. This however, reinforces essentialist ideas about gender, mother and violence. Factors like these, according to her, make essential attending to issues of mother in the context of political violence.

Women as mothers, nonetheless, has been playing diverse roles as perpetrators, promoters, supporters and critics of violence in many conflict societies. For example, the Argentinian organisation Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo confronted the military's "dirty war" that was waged against its ordinary citizens suspected of harbouring subversive sentiments[1]. Similarly, the Association of Parents of Displaced Persons (APDP) founded by Parveena Aahagar in Kashmir, India have mobilised motherhood in fighting against forced displacements[2]. Peace initiatives by Naga Mother's Association (NMA), on the other hand, amongst different factions of Naga nationalist groups, and between these groups and the state remain exemplary in bringing forth how mothers creatively stylize traditional roles and status as mothers to respond to contemporary events and course of politics[33] For more see Rita Manchanda, 2001. In the Indian state of Manipur, on the 15th of July 2015, 12 imas (mothers in Manipur) disrobed themselves in protest against the brutal rape and killing of Thangjam Manorama by personnels from the Assam Rifles. Protesting the brutality these 12 imas shouted "We are all Manorama's mothers. Rape us, kill us." They carried banners that said, "Indian Army Rape Us", "Indian Army Kill Us". Similar appeals to motherhood were invoked in South African Political trials where both prosecution and defense used images of

motherhood in the trial of the murder of Amy Biehl. These instances of the use of the maternal, from within and outside South Asia, informs how women use and mobilise their maternity, their maternal thinking, affection, status and the like for promoting peace and in mobilising political resistance against powerful institutions and mechanisms that abuse power with much impunity.

A discussion on women, war and motherhood also necessitates a discussion of mothers who choose violent means for meeting political, ideological, personal and collective ends. The usages made of maternity and maternal thinking by women perpetrating political violence varies as per the time, context, ideological and individual needs and aspirations that guide their actions. Women soldiers' decisions, actions and lived experiences relating to their motherhood however, in the first place, come to challenge many core beliefs about women and motherhood. Analysing women combatants' experiences of motherhood in the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN) of El Salvador, Norma Vazquez (1997) observes that the war situation altered women's sexual and child bearing experiences substantially as these experiences in many ways contradicted the teachings of their childhood. It questioned the assumption that pregnancy was a natural consequence of sexuality and women in the FMLN learned ways to control their fertility, and gaining knowledge of the fact that they could have sexual relations without getting pregnant came as a confront to the strongest imperatives of traditional female identity in El Salvador which was the obligation to have children. Women soldiers in many militant organisations, however, have also experienced much pressure from the leadership to control their motherhood. Vazquez notes, women militants in the FMLN too experienced such pressure which made them feel a violation of their right to motherhood (Vazquez 1997: 143). Such birth control policies were in practice among other revolutionary groups too like the Naxalites of India or the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) of Colombia. Women have also used their maternal statuses and bodies to perpetrate violence. Women suicide bombers, for example have disguised themselves as pregnant bodies in order to carry out their attacks. Dhanu who killed the Indian prime minister

Rajiv Gandhi and Hanadi Jaradat who killed 19 civilians in a restaurant in Israel, 2003 are instances where women feigned pregnancy in carrying out violent attacks. These instances raise serious questions on the general understanding that women are passive beings in need of protection and their biological role of reproduction makes them aversive to violence. These bodies, disguised as pregnant in order to carry out violent acts, set in motion the creation of new meanings, new ways of understanding women's bodies, particularly in the context of war and violence.

In this essay I explore the motherhood experiences of women combatants who participated in the Maoist People's War (MPW) of Nepal, which was a decade long war from 1996 to 2006 fought under the leadership of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) [CPN(M)]. Women combatants' experiences of motherhood posed noteworthy challenges that relegated the female body as incompetent, physically and emotionally, to warlike situations. This helped break many other conventional ideas about women, motherhood, gender, war, birth impurity and the like. In unfolding women's agency in their choices and decisions for political violence and motherhood at the time of the war, this essay engages with the ideological, personal, political, individual and collective factors that guided their decisions relating to motherhood — opt for permanent contraceptives, abort or delay motherhood and the like. This essay is based on the accounts of women ex-combatants of the MPW, I interacted with during my field trips in 2014, 2016, and 2019, and also on the reading of memoirs written by them published in the post-war period.

Motherhood and Combatancy in the Maoist People's War

In Maoist People's War (MPW) of Nepal, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) [CPN(M)] in its effort to engage with the women question during the war itself retained women combatants' right to motherhood. The CPN (M) adopted the policy of 'learning by doing' and, as the war progressed, and with increased participation of combatants as issues relating to maternity, child care, leave, contraception, abortion, and nutrition begun to surface within the movement, the

party framed policies as per the increasing needs and demands of the movement. Rai (2017: 213), in discussing this policy of the CPN (M) mentions Amrita Thapa who complained and criticised the party for demoting her after her return from maternity leave. After her complaint her demotion was withdrawn. However, although women retained the right to motherhood unlike many movements where women cadres are expected or forced to sacrifice their motherhood for the sake of the 'end' for which the war was/is being fought, yet, the pressure on female combatants of the MPW to delay motherhood remained all pervasive. It was believed that motherhood affected the careers of women combatants and it deprived them from attaining leadership positions. Likewise there were also discussions on the role male combatants needed to play and a policy was adopted for them to shoulder one-third of parenting responsibilities (Rai 2017: 213). However, this was hardly seen in practice and men were often seen to be reluctant at taking child rearing responsibilities not wanting to give up their privileged positions. The Party policies too were brought under serious discussions for its inability to formulate policies to help build creches and generate other facilities that deprived mothers from reaching leadership positions (Parvati and Lee 2006). Renu Chand, in her essay *Garbhawati Ladaku Ko Bakpatra* shares her experience when she asked her husband to share tasks associated with child care. In response to her request he declared that he would not want to take away her historic and biological responsibility by doing so (Bhattarai 2017: 138). Thus although policies were formulated and efforts were made at eradicating patriarchal cultures associated with motherhood, undoing such norms from within the organisation remained a difficult task affecting women's careers within the movement severely. Motherhood therefore, was seen as one factor that hindered women's rise to leadership position within the movement.

For these reasons women combatants considered motherhood related issues and decisions seriously and hence, even when they rejoiced on the fact that their motherhood rights were respected as a fundamental right within the movement unlike their naxalite cousins in neighbouring India (Gayer 2013) many women

combatants made every possible effort to avoid motherhood at the time of the war either by trying to convince their family and life partners to accept their decision, or by trekking miles to undergo an abortion or by undertaking one at one's own risk without the knowledge of a second person. Yet, during the war, a number of them became mothers at their own will, some because of the unavailability of contraceptives, and others for inadequate medical facilities to undertake an abortion in the right time. There were others who were persuaded, overtly or covertly, by family or husbands. This meant that while women's ideological commitments were evaluated based also on their decisions for motherhood, lack of institutional, material and ideological support from the party made it difficult for women to delay motherhood. Not only did they become pregnant without plans, but they failed to get proper support when they decided on an abortion. This does not owe only to the Party's failure to provide adequate facilities for an abortion but also in the age old belief that motherhood consists of women's primary responsibility. It has to be noted that until 2003 it was a criminal offence for women to carry out abortion and even after abortion was legalised in 2004, in April 2004 Shakya et al (2004) notes, 31 women were in prison on charges of imprisonment.

That problems relating to pregnancy, malnutrition and lack of proper institutional policy to support women's needs while expecting of them to grow ideologically and politically to be able to renounce/delay motherhood persisted within the organisation becomes evident from a survey conducted by the Women's Department of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) [CPN (M)] in 2002-2003 where in a question about the specific nature of mental and physical health related issues that they were experiencing 64.45% of the unmarried respondents mentioned menstrual disturbances, 21. 97% mentioned scarcity of menstrual pads and 7.65% mentioned malnutrition. To the same question, 44.08% of the married women replied 'menstrual disturbance' and 15.79% replied 'scarcity of appropriate family planning material' and 12.5% mentioned 'malnutrition'. In Bagmati region 73. 63% respondents, that included both married and unmarried women, responded that they faced specific problems relating to their reproductive health 'sometimes or

the other' whereas 10.99% replied 'often'. When asked to specify the nature of the problem 70.97% in Bagmati region mentioned 'menstrual disturbances' (Parvati 2006 68-69). These factors made motherhood a site through which women lived and exercised their personal, ideological and political freedom and resistance. It made motherhood an arena through which women broke patriarchal taboos associated with motherhood.

If by exercising their right to abortion women broke age old beliefs that saw abortion as an evil and a criminal offence, by giving birth to a child during a war or while in the escape from the enemy women combatants destabilised notions that regarded the female, pregnant, mother body as weak and impure. For example, Asha Mahatara in her essay *Bagarma Baccha Janmaunda* writes how she was denied entry into a house for shelter even when she was beginning to have her labour pain. The next morning she gave birth on the banks of a river one hour after which she had to start walking for fear of a possible raid in the area (Rai 2017: 214). Such forms of motherhood experiences helped raise questions against practices of birth pollution practiced amongst most communities in Nepal. During the period of birth pollution both the mother and the child are considered impure and they are confined to a secluded place for weeks from childbirth until rituals are performed to purify the body. Manjushree Thapa (2004) recounts her experience of eating food cooked by a Maoist combatant woman who gave birth to a child a day ago. Surprised to see that she was not resting, Thapa enquired about it to which the area commander replied that this was a part to break traditional beliefs that treats such mothers as impure. While efforts to break such beliefs seems important and logical, yet it cannot be denied that the approach towards it seems irrational, unthoughtful and in certain ways reinforces traditional ideas about women and care/domestic labour. Issues, questions, practices and policies on motherhood during the war made motherhood a highly political institution and it became an arena through which women tried to prove their commitment and loyalty towards the movement. It was transformed into a zone through which women performed and expressed their awareness of issues, their class consciousness, and their

efficiency in guiding texts of the war. In the following section some of these experiences and performances of ideology and politics through women's experience of motherhood during the war shall be evaluated.

Combatant mothers active in revolutionary movements are often understood as mothers who were emotionally and physically absent from their children's lives i.e. from the primary role that mothers in patriarchal societies are expected to perform. This places female revolutionaries, across societies, under much hatred and criticism from family, society and from the children themselves making them the 'bad mother' who violated their womanhood not only by adopting violent ways but also for their ability to leave their breastfeeding children at the hands of others, or for raising their children amidst terrifying scenes of the battlefield risking lives. In the MPW, like most other experiences, women combatants received, processed and lived their experiences of motherhood through an intense inner struggles, inner party struggle and class struggle. In analysing and deciding a matter of motherhood, they found themselves engulfed in contradictions between emotions and reason, and in between their commitment towards one's responsibilities as a warrior and as mothers with a revolutionary goal. As these combatant mothers of the MPW fought, debated and rejoiced over their ability to retain the right to motherhood (either to become or not to become one) they never stepped back to sacrifice their motherly love and affections for the sake of the revolution. In this section, in order to locate the transformations they lived in their gendered bodies and identities I engage with and explore the experiences of combatant mothers of the MPW as they mothered during the 'exceptional times of the war'. It explores women combatants' actions, decisions and struggles in their navigation from what Morey and Santos (2014: 72) called the "bad biological mother" to the "good ideological mother" changing perceptions and practices on motherhood.

Rai (2017) in her analysis of the memoirs written by female ex-combatants of the MPW, published in the post-war period, observes that women ex-combatants have not addressed and illustrated their experiences of motherhood during the

war in sufficient detail in their memoirs. While many of them have not included this part of their wartime experience, a few have merely touched upon it. Out of the 86 women who have written about their wartime experiences in memoirs, Rai notes, only Asha Mahatara has written about her motherhood in detail (Rai 2017: 213). If not about the process of pregnancy, some of their writings do inform us on how women experienced motherhood, the sacrifices they made as mothers or the pressures exercised on them both from within the party and the state evoking their biological capacity to reproduce. For example, Sita B. K 'Samjhana' who did not mother during the war dedicates a chapter of her autobiography in narrating the day when Jayapuri Gharti, who Samjhana was then working with, had gone to meet her daughter then living in the care of sympathisers at Dang. The chapter is a depiction of the pain and sacrifice combatants mothers endured performing their love and commitment for the cause of the war and their children simultaneously. Samjhana, in the chapter, details on the pain and helplessness she witnessed (also experienced it herself while witnessing it) on the day Jayapuri Gharti Magar visited her daughter while on her way to a meeting they were heading towards. While the child repeatedly requested the mother to take her along and not leave her alone, Jayapuri controlling all emotions and tears started her journey towards Rolpa but kept turning back again and again till she couldn't see her daughter anymore.

Recalling the day, during our very first interaction, Samjhana highlighted the significant contribution mothers and children together made for the war enduring much physical and emotional hardships. It is women's emotional exercises as mothers, the labour of nurture and care historically attributed to women that is used to portray them as incapable of a violent role in wars characterised by intensities of emotional and physical experiences. Jayapuri's trajectory of motherhood, from getting pregnant to the point that finds reference in Samjhana's autobiography, where she meets and departs once again with her daughter living with sympathisers, throws much light on the gendered experiences of women as mothers. Jayapuri, a central committee member, never wanted to be a mother during the war. When she learnt that she was pregnant she decided for an abortion. To get the abortion

done she makes a perilous journey to Dang. At the clinic as she waited for a doctor who didn't turn up in time she learnt that waiting longer could risk her life and her husband too convinced her that giving birth to the child would not affect her career. This is how Jayapuri decided on having the baby. After her child was born not only was her life endangered, but that of her newborn baby too. In one such episode, while being taken uphill in Dang, her two month old daughter caught pneumonia and stopped breathing. Jayapuri lost all hope of her baby surviving. Since neither time nor circumstance allowed her to take care of her baby, she left her with a Women's Association in the village saying, 'Foster her if she survives, and throw her away if she dies'. The women cared for the little baby and saved her from dying through the use of local medicines (Women's Caucus 2011). Yet, Jayapuri also takes pride in the fact that until two years she carried her daughter on her back in the jungles, to the meetings and places she visited after which she left the baby with the people of Dang till the age of eight. Jayapuri's trajectory of motherhood reflects the determination, strength and uncompromising attitude with which she shouldered her commitments towards the revolution and the child. Upon analysing the testimonial writing on militant motherhood in Latin America Morey and Santos (2014) argues that the active participation of the militant mothers embodies not only removal of the woman from the private and oppressive sphere of the patriarchal home but also reposting of the active mother figure as an intrinsic part of a new home — the revolutionary movement. While Jayapuri understands the gendered power dynamics associated with mothering she does not shy away from it, but instead combats it time and again in various ways; sometimes by deciding to abort and leaving the sick child in the hands of villagers and in other times by taking up added pain to keep her child secure. In her interaction with Rai (2017), Jayapuri recollects how she walked all night, with her child in the back, to cover long distances in order to keep her child safe.

The process of militant mothering in which mothers left their children at the care of sympathisers or family members in the first place extended the idea of motherhood beyond the womb and, secondly, helped separate the biological

responsibility of giving birth to a child from child rearing tasks. These practices in the MPW of Nepal led to the politicisation of motherhood not only amongst the female combatants but also among women outside the movement who cared and fostered the children in the physical absence of the parents. To Alexandra Kollontai, in a socialist set up, the ability to build up such a culture of motherhood remained extremely important. Maternity, according to her, did not involve the mother always being with the child or devoting herself entirely to its physical and moral education. The mother was expected to take care of herself and give birth to a healthy baby and to breastfeed her baby. The other tasks involved in caring for the younger generations could be carried out by the collective which would allow women to contribute better to production processes. To her, the responsibility to educate the children as members of the collective also lay with the state, not the parents. While she agrees that the maternal instinct is strong and there is no need to stifle it she questions why should this instinct be narrowly limited to the love and care of one's own child? According to her, if this instinct is developed vigorously to reach its highest stage, where the woman not only cares for her own children but has a tender affection for all children, it might prove to be a valuable potential for a labour republic (Lokaneeta 2001). Motherhood experiences of women revolutionaries like Jayapuri Gharti reflect an effort towards achieving this political goal of freeing motherhood from the responsibilities of child caring and child rearing. Hence, while on the one hand, in Nepal women combatants' right to motherhood was retained, at the same time, efforts were made, at extending it beyond the womb to the community level taking care of the fact that motherhood did not come to affect the militant careers of these women.

Shobha Kattel 'Pratibha' in her memoir too writes of her desire and longings to have a glance of her son when in jail. Her son lived with her mother-in-law and much against the wishes of her martyred husband Samar, she decided to leave their eight month old son at the care of her mother-in-law so that she could fight without any hindrance. After Samar's martyrdom, when she was still in the custody of the state security forces, their son was the only memory in material form that

remained with her. During this very sorrowful time, when she learned of her husband's martyrdom when in custody, dealing every day with different forms of verbal and physical torture her motherly emotions were often evoked by the state forces and was targeted to force her to surrender or to extract information. She was told, "You do not survive for Samar. A husband gets a wife. A wife gets a husband too. But your son will never get the mother who bore him again. So survive for your son" (Kattel 2011: 59). To this she replied, 'I will live on for my son, but as an immortal and a great person. My son will see life in my greatness. For a revolutionary, a cowardly life is death. Therefore, I agree with the ideas of living on for my son, but you and I have a different understanding of life and death' (Kattel 2011: 59). Challenging and resisting the enemy in such forms even when she longed to be with her son Pratibha presents a different kind of ideological offensive strike she could place against the enemy class. The state security approach was guided by the conventional idea that motherhood makes women weak and hence it would lead to Pratibha's surrender and her conversion into an ally of the state. Pratibha's reply, her resistance then works at altering such views about women and motherhood — that motherhood makes women emotionally weak and therefore incapable of being in emotionally intense and demanding exercises like war where destruction of life and property is seen as a norm.

In his study of the Huk people's rebellion in Philippines, Jeff Goodwin (1997) argues that affectual and emotional ties weakened the group solidarity and eroded collective identity and discipline which eventually led to disintegration of the movement. Female combatants in MPW of Nepal too were under great pressure into proving that libidinal and affectual ties would not demotivate and deviate them from work. This pressure was more on female combatants than their male counterparts as war is always seen as a norm for men. By standing firm and undeterred even when lured on her motherly instinct Pratibha generates a new understanding of motherly love and emotion. Pratibha's resistance however, is double fold. Her resistance also needs to be read in the context of her choice and decision to inform a larger audience by including these accounts in her autobiography. Pratibha's aspiration for her experiences to reach a wider public is indeed an act of resistance against narratives that denies women agency within

wartime narratives, and deforms, distorts information about women's contribution to war. Her's is indeed an act of resistance against narratives that sees motherhood as a personal, private act. By writing and presenting before her readers how she deterred all attempts at her maternal instinct being often used to detractor from her revolutionary goals, she chooses to break silence and seeks to make the public aware of her strength, commitment and determination. She thereby challenges the notion of women as powerless and subservient to the state. Motherhood, on the other hand, is transformed into a tool to prove their political consciousness and commitment. She informs her readers of her ability to transcend the idea that marks mothers as weak, vulnerable, emotional and anti-violence.

Mothers like Asha Mahatara, Jayapuri Gharti, Pratibha who mothered under extreme conditions of war and took up different forms of physical, emotional, ideological labour in challenging the belief that motherhood makes women incapable of warlike life and situations. There were also others like Anoopam, a battalion commander, who on her own undertook abortion without informing anyone. Under the wartime circumstances she couldn't procure the pills until she was three months pregnant. When she did, she was asked by the pharmacist to take them at an interval of two hours, but Anoopam swallowed them all at one go as she wanted to make sure that the pills worked. Anoopam wanted to rise in the ranks and didn't want motherhood to affect her career. As she still bled she let her troops to battle (Bhattarai 2016). Jayapuri's failed attempt to abort, Anoopam's adoption of life risking methods in undertaking one informs of the lack of a space where women could place their demands, or a culture where they could express their concerns and worries. Despite the CPN (M)'s effort and claim that they wished to create new men, new women and new relations, women combatants' real experiences of motherhood during the war speaks of the prevalence of patriarchal mindset that affected women's motherhood experiences. Although women's participation was considered significant for a continuous revolution, policy and institutional support to facilitate women's growth and functioning within the movement seemed inadequate.

Notes:

[1]For more on Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo see Nora Amalia Femenia and
Carlos Ariel Gil, 1987.

[2] For details see Ather Zia, 2019.

[3] For more see Rita Manchanda, 2001

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NON TRIBAL MIGRANTS AND THE QUESTION OF TRIBAL LAND ALIENATION IN INDIA'S NORTHEAST

Ankur Protim Mahanta

Introduction

Indian tribals are thought to be the country's most primitive populace. They are defined as those who have a common ethnicity, dialect, and region, as well as those who have assessed the system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligations and have persisted for generations with their unchanging way of life. They can be referred to as "submerged humanity"(Bijoy, 1993) since they live in jungle areas, mountainous regions, and deep valleys, and are still in a primitive stage, isolated from the rays of modern civilization. Culturally they are very rich; bearing a unique cultural and linguistic identity. They have, however, experienced significant challenges in maintaining their uniqueness over time. They are frequently denied their traditional rights which causes them to be stressed out and more worried. Here, the phrase 'space' has a specific definition: it might signify the social space, in which the tribal interact with other people, societies, and the world around them. The term 'space' is designed to describe the tribal homeland and its relationship with the land, forest, and other common property resources.

The land they inhabit is not just an economic source of sustenance, but also a critical component of their identity. Not only is land simply a "means of property," but it is also a way of life. Traditionally, tribal people have a strong commitment to their land; a complicated web of relationships. It is, nevertheless, entwined with traditions, family, ties, and religion. The land is the birthright for the tribals because it considers as the lifeblood of the tribal communities irrespective

of culture and identity. Therefore, without land, the existence of a tribal community is not possible. Hence, since the time of the colonial period, they have faced the problems of land alienation. The mere existence of this problem makes the tribal one of the most vulnerable and deprived segments of society.

One of the most burning challenges facing indigenous people today is the alienation of their land. This develops the tribals' sense of dissatisfaction, which empowers them as a community in opposition to outsiders who would want to take away their unique identity. To save themselves from losing their identity and territory, indigenous communities generally into a confrontation with those who attempt to grab the area. It is their major concern about land and identity alienation that is due to the huge increase in non-tribal migration to the tribal homeland. There are, however, alternative theories that are just as credible that might explain the tribe's land alienation.

Concerning the issues of tribe's contest for space and identity in general, and the specific question of whether non-tribal migration is entirely to blame for tribal land alienation, the concentration here is on tribal concerns and debate about "tribal identity and space versus non-tribal migration".

Research Methods

The entire research paper is largely based on historical, descriptive, and analytical methods to understand the issue of contested space and identity and also to find out if non-tribal migration is entirely responsible for tribal land alienation. Data on the majority of these topics is found in reports by government agencies and journals. On the other hand, internet sources are employed to keep the study current by updating empirical data, and also help round out the research. The overall research study is qualitative in nature.

Research Questions

1. What are the main reasons that are associated with the alienation of tribal land?

2. Is migration entirely responsible for the alienation of tribal land?

3. How does alienation of land assist in the alienation of identity?

Understanding alienation and conflict through the lens of migration

Migration is regarded to be a significant phenomenon in modern global politics, and it has been occurring from the dawn of time, as the history of the globe is widely known as the history of migrants. Almost from the beginning of human civilization, people have been migrating to suitable locations in search of food, shelter, security, and a better way of life. This has harmed society because the places where they have settled have altered the socio-economic, cultural, and political fabric of the society. As a general rule, migrants are more well-educated, creative, and hardworking than the locals of a given country, giving them the capacity to exert influence over the physical and intellectual parts of society. It has been observed that migrants always choose to settle down in tribal regions, which are extremely rich in minerals and other raw materials; they attempt to seize control of the community, sometimes by force or by deception, as has been seen. The indigenous people's poverty and fragility make them appear weak in the eyes of outsiders, which eventually leads to their estrangement from their land and identity. For them, the land is everything; it is not just the source of economic resources, but it is also the center of their sense of self. Nowadays, they are not lagging behind their counterparts; rather, they are moving in lockstep with the rest of society. The growth of resistance in their thoughts against outsiders is a result of their growing awareness of their own identity, their land, and their long-term viability. Such rising feeling eventually results in the escalation of violence as they seek to reclaim their right to self-determination and identity in their own country.

Land encroachment has been a major cause of ethnic unrest in India's North-Eastern region for the past 40 years. In *Mandai*, 300 Bengali Hindus were massacred by tribals in June 1980(Bhaumik, 2009, p.62). About 2000 Bengali Muslims were massacred by *Lalung* tribesmen in *Nellie* in February 1983, just after three years (Bhaumik, 2009, p.62). However, *Kuki* Villagers were massacred by *Naga* militants at *Zopui* in 1993, killing about 87 people (Bhaumik, 2009, p.63). This was only the beginning of an ethnic conflict over land alienation. Although the

investigation into extermination has proven that militants are involved and it has also demonstrated that the movement against unlawful land acquisition by infiltrators becomes a violent one when militants join the cause. However, high numbers of casualties have been reflected during the time of extermination due to the involvement of local peasantry as they lost their lands in the hands of infiltrators (Bhaumik, 2009, p.63).
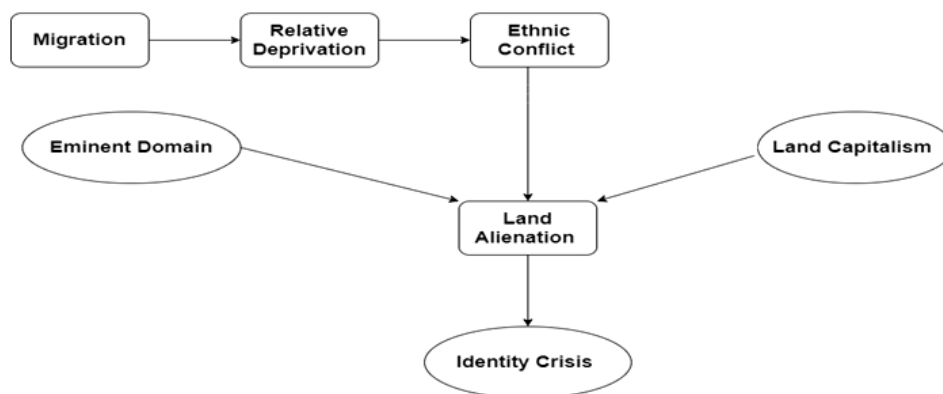
Figure 1

Tribal and Land Alienation: Deciphering the causes of Land Alienation

The massive numbers of the influx of migrants into the region of Assam have resulted in the alienation of tribal land and other resources that led to the growth of agitation in the minds of tribal communities. The infiltrators have grabbed the tribal land and that smashed their distinctive culture and identity. The massive influx of infiltrators to the region, whom the local tribesmen consider as an enemy, ultimately provokes a sense of hatred in their minds that in turns fallouts in the form of massive contrast between the 'outsiders vs. insiders'. The incessant nature of conflict in the region begins massive victimization, extermination and also starts the politics of ethnic cleansing. In addition to this, the present political structure of the society capitalizes on the politics of "*minoritization*" and "discrimination". Due to the massive infiltration and 'migration induced conflict', tribal has alienated

from the ancestral land; accentuated the problem of an identity crisis. The North-Eastern region is the best example for understanding the scenario of tribal land migration and migrants induced ethnic conflict. The *Bodo-Muslim, Bodo-Santhal* conflict has reflected the immense volume of tribal land alienation in *Bodoland.*

B.N. Bordoloi, who has been associated with tribal research, planning, and development conducted a study in the 10 tribal villages, which were located within the Tribal belts and blocks and the study reflected that despite the existence of provisions prohibiting the transfer of land belonging to tribal communities to non-eligible persons, the incidence of alienation is found to be quite sizeable. 16.44 percent of the tribal families under the purview of the survey are found to have transferred and alienated their land and the alienated lands constitute 25.94 percent of the total landholdings of the land alienated families and this is a startling figure since the alienated land is slightly higher than one-fourth of the total landholdings of the affected families. However, the analysis shows that lands transferred by tribals to non-tribals constitute 82.99 percent of the total land alienated involving 10.38 percent of the tribal families surveyed. This is in contravention of the provisions of existing laws and such transfer is quite illegal. Though this was due to the inadequate nature of the law, the real problem is that not enough provisions were put in place at the field level to properly implement the law.

The state is considered to be one of the essential institutions and mechanisms to protect the interest and aspirations of the citizens. The state has the primary responsibility of protecting and promoting the rights of the indigenous community of the country. Tribals are the aboriginal community of the country that can be considered as 'son of the soil'. However, as a consequence of their disadvantaged status and the exploitative character of the state, they have been deprived of land and CPRs, which are believed to be necessary for their well-being. Again, their identity and origination are also related to the land and CPR's. The exploitative nature of the state has been revealed since the time of the British colonial period. To get naturally rich forest areas and riverbank areas for developmental purposes,

the colonial administration enacted several laws such as the Permanent Settlement act of 1793, Bengal Resolution I of 1824, Bombay Resolution I of 1839, Act XLII of 1850, Act XX of 1852, Act VI of 1857, Land Acquisition act of 1894, etc. It was Lord Cornwallis who introduced the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, which required estates to pay a land tax to the government. They imposed heavy taxes on the homelands of tribal that was resulted in the form of deprivation and alienation of tribal land. After that British enacted several land acquisition policies for different regions and finally, in 1894, they enacted a common law for the whole country that is the Land Acquisition act of 1894 to take private property for urbanization, industrialization, and developmental purposes. During the period 1894 to 2013, the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 governed India's land acquisition procedure. However, in 2013, the Indian parliament enacted a new Land acquisition act, known as the 'Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement Act, 2013', which governs the process of land acquisition in India and also provides for compensation, rehabilitation, and resettlement for those affected by land acquisition. Again, the government has the authority to purchase any land for public purposes through legal announcements and rules, as well as to offer proper rehabilitation and resettlement facilities for the individuals who have been displaced as a result of the acquisition. However, in practice, such a strategy is never applied when private land is being acquired for development purposes. Individuals who are harmed by this are ultimately alienated from their homes and denied access to their land.

Tribals are the weaker section of the society, who are socially, economically, and politically marginalized and disfranchised, and are mostly affected by the land acquisition policy of the government. In Assam, the government has acquired land for public purposes bearing 3.83 percent of the tribal, which is not illegal as per provisions of the Assam Land and Revenue regulation amendment act 1947. For the installation of the Dhansiri Irrigation project, 39072 acres of land belonging to 1001 tribal families were acquired.

The tribals and several other ethnic communities who are marginalized and deprived sections of the society are fundamentally dependent on forest land and their resources. In contrast, a catastrophic wave of forced forest eviction policies has been observed across the country, resulting in the displacement of tribals from their ancestral lands in the forests. A large number of indigenous tribes are now considered "encroachers" on forest land by the government since they have been utilizing forest land without any sort of legal documentation from the beginning of time. According to Dr. Jean Dreze (2005), forest departments are encroaching on the indigenous rights of tribal people in many instances. In addition to stripping tribal groups of their birthrights, forcible evictions from forest lands put them farther into a position of marginalization and disenfranchisement than they were already in.

As stated in the latter document on 'Traditional rights of tribals on forest lands', which was issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests on December 21, 2004, under the Indian Forest Act, 1927, the government has the authority to designate any forest land or wasteland that is the property of the government or over which the government has proprietary rights as a reserved forest by issuing a notification to the tribes. To further its commercial interests, the former British government continued to classify more and more territories as reserved forests, without first determining the rights of tribals and other forest dwellers that lived on these grounds. However, even after the country gained independence in 1947, and during the process of amalgamating the princely states, the practice of consolidating government forests persisted. Reserved Forests were declared by the state governments and union territories administrations on the grounds of former princely states and *zamindar* holdings. However, no meaningful measures were made to resolve the rights of tribals and other forest inhabitants at the same time. They were hampered in their efforts to resolve this matter by a lack of records of their rights, which never existed in the first place. This has led to the erroneous perception that rural people, particularly tribals and woodland dwellers who have been living in the forest since the beginning of time, are infringing on the rights of natural resources (*Traditional rights of tribals on forests lands, 2004*).

Generally, due to the eviction, the tribals and other forest dwellers, which are not the tribals but their socio-economic conditions, are mostly related with forest are ferociously resisting eviction from their ancestral rights. A groundbreaking law was enacted by the government of India in 2006, namely 'Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers(Recognition of Forest Rights) act' regarding the issue of non-recognizing and pre-existing rights of the tribals and traditional forest dwellers to and legalize their ancestral rights over the forest land and resources. They have been living in the region since the time of immemorial and sustained their livelihoods from the forest. The act not only allows the scheduled tribes and other forest dwellers to hold and live in the forest areas, but several other rights such as the right to proprietorship, right to access, collect and dispose of minor resources, and also provides the right to defend, rejuvenate, converse or accomplish the community forest resources that has been conventionally protected and conserved by them for sustainable use *(Press Information Bureau*, 2014). Despite having such protective legislative measures, the tribals and other traditional forest dwellers' rights are continuously victimized and their ancestral rights over the forest are taken away from them. On 16 August 2004, the Ministry of Environment and Forest has released a statement where they revealed the fact that from 1.5 *lakh* hectares of land encroachers has been evicted (Dreze, 2005, p.7). But a network of more than 200 organizations, namely 'Campaign for Survival and Dignity' concerned with the protection of tribal rights over the forest exposed that about 30 *lakh* tribal families have faced a threat from the forced eviction of government in the name of "encroachment" (Dreze, 2005, p.7). In July 2004, 50 houses were burnt during the time of eviction by the forest department in *Bomiliaput* village in Madhya Pradesh (Dreze, 2005, p.22). Again, in 2004, the forest department evicted another 73 families from the forest in the district of *Betul*, Madhya Pradesh (Dreze, 2005, p.21). Recently in 2017, 400 families belonging to *Mishing, Karbi, Rabha, Dimasa, Bodo, Koch*, and other ethnic communities were forcefully evicted and deprived of *Amchang* Wildlife Sanctuary by the forest department of Assam (Chaudhry, 2017). Such type of evidence is enough to show the government's

failures in the protection and promotion of the rights of the tribals and other traditional dwellers despite having legislative protection.

Again, land capitalism and temporary land agreements are also responsible for the alienation of tribal land. As most of the tribal families are from a weak economic background so the capitalization of land becomes a major threat to their land. In the hands of crony capitalist sections of the society, their land is continuously alienated from them. From a recent study, the Tribal Research Institute reveals the fact that through the system of *Paikas, Sukti Bandhak, Koi Bandhak,* and *Mena*, a large amount of tribal land is temporally transferred to the hands of the capitalist section of the society and after generation, they ultimately lost their ownership over their land due to their marginalized and impoverished condition in the society (Bordoloi, 1991, p.64). Such a type of temporary land agreement among the individuals also leads to the alienation of land of the weaker section of society. The terms and conditions that are followed for the cultivation of land by cultivators and the land allotted to them by the landowners under different systems gradually lead to temporary land alienation. There are several forms of temporary alienation of lands that ultimately result in a full-flagged alienation of land and CPR's.

Paikas: The *Paikas* system seems to be very much responsible for the temporary alienation of land, especially in the case of tribes. As mentioned by Dr. Lipson Rongpi (2015), under the Paikas method, a landowner accepts an advance (money) from a cultivator and, in exchange for the advance, alienates his land to the cultivator for one or two years. The cultivator must vacate the occupied land at the conclusion of the tenure. In practice, however, this does not occur since the landowner obtains another advance from the farmer before the stipulated term expires. Once a tribal enters into this vicious cycle, he can hardly get out of it and the alienation of cultivation land becomes perpetual.

Sukti Bandhak: In *Sukti Bandhak* system, the land is primarily given to the cultivator instead of payment of a certain quantity of paddy to the landowners per year per *bigha*, after executing a formal agreement to this effect and during

that period of the agreement, the landowner shall have no right to cultivate in his land or to raise question its utility, while the cultivator becomes the temporary owner of the land like the *paikas* holder (Rongpi, 2015). As like as the *paikas* system, if a tribal landowner once enters into this system, he can hardly get out of it that finally results in the form of alienation of land.

Khoi Bandhak: *Khoi Bandhak* system is also firmly responsible for the alienation of land of the tribal. "Under this system, a landowner temporarily transfers his land for use and occupancy to another person for a minimum period of five years against the certain amount of money calculated at a certain rate per *bigha* per annum. The entire amount in cash shall have to be paid to the settlement holder only once at the beginning. At the end of the period of an agreement, the land automatically comes back to the owner. But before the period of agreement comes to an end, the landowner again enters into another contact and thus his land is temporarily alienated again" (Rongpi, 2015).[1]

***Mena*:** B.N. Bordoloi (1991) asserted, "Under this system, the un-reclaimed virgin lands in possession of the tribal families, suitable for cultivable, are given to non-tribals for recuperation and agriculture for some years varying from 3 to 5 years. In return, the landholder gets nothing except the reclaimed plots of land at the end of the period of the agreement. The incidence of this system is gradually declining because un-reclaimed virgin land is decreasing at a faster rate." The system of *Mena* boosts the process of alienation land of the tribal community.

***Adhi*:** *Adhi* is considered to be one of the important factors for the alienation of tribal land. While elaborating the system of *Adhi*, Bordoloi (1991) asserted, "Under this system, the settlement holder temporarily transfers his right of use and occupancy of land to another person for a specific period. The cultivator cultivates the land and provides half (50%) of the crops or products to the landowner and the other half (50%) is kept for himself." This system is quite prevalent among the tribals that also assist in the alienation of tribal land.

These are the issues that have contributed to the alienation and relocation of tribal populations from their lands, which can have ramifications for their identity and future because their culture, tradition, and religion are all attached to the territory in which they reside. The alienation of land leads to the alienation of one's own identity, which is one of the most pressing problems of tribal people in contemporary society.

Concluding statement

The foregoing debate on the alienation of land and identity makes it obvious that there exist numerous factors behind it. Most of us just blame, the enormous invasion is completely accountable for the alienation of land and identity. But this notion is somewhat accurate; even there exist other important factors for which land alienation is constantly happing. Blaming immigrants aid to cover up other connected problems that are also involved with alienation. The involvement of political leaders transforms this problem into a complicated one, where they utilize it for evoking political milieu and as a weapon of electoral politics. The issue of land alienation usually leads to ethnic conflict in the tribal homeland; and especially it has been seen in the north-eastern part of India. The contemporary India's North-East has witnessed ethnicity driven conflict due to the appearance of growing ethnic consciousness among the ethnic communities, where prime issue is land alienation. The region is considered to be the one of the problematic field, where ethnicity and land alienation become a major instrument of unrest. The massive influx of infiltrators to the region, whom the local tribesmen consider as an enemy, ultimately provoke a sense of hatred in their minds that in turns fallouts in the form of massive contrast between the 'outsiders vs. insiders'. The incessant nature of conflict in the region begins massive victimization, extermination and also starts the politics of ethnic cleansing. Along with this, politics of '*minoritization*' is also industrialized by the existing political structure of the society. The current political politics constantly strive to encourage the tribals but never seeks to safeguard and promote their identity and land. Here, consciousness and strong representation in the society from the side of tribals are extremely required for the conservation of their land and identity.

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CONNECTING 'STATE SIMPLIFICATION' WITH KARBI MODEL VILLAGES: NOTES FROM BORJAN MODEL VILLAGE

Ankur Saikia
Borun Dey

Introduction

"People are made of places;

They carry with them

the hints of jungles and mountains".[1]

The relation between land and people are not mere economic but psychological and emotional too as land or natural environment is the major source of human culture. Human settlements around the world are differed from one another as geography, natural resources and paths of survival differ. It is the natural space that determines the life sustaining processes of human being. In the plain lands, agriculture and allied activities are relatively easy. Whereas, in geographically challenging spaces like hills, desert or unfertile landscapes people have to find alternatives of agriculture and settled life. In most instances, people in such spaces live through continuous shift from places to places in search of livelihood. Yet, the complex and harsh conditions of life do not reduce people's love and attachment towards the way they live and the space where they live. The generations of attachment between land and people are blossomed into unique forms of culture, economy and life-style. Therefore, a sudden revert from people's way of life consists of enormous risks of subjugating and degrading the natural flow of life. The

present study has primarily intended to critically investigate the interests of state behind resettling the Karbi Hills communities in the state organised Model Villages.

Objective and Methodology

The main objective of the paper is to outline and present the contradictory interests between state and people. The paper has attempted to highlight the phenomenon of State Simplification in the context of Karbi Hills where nature and people's life-ways are being re-designed to preserve the interests of State overpowering the interests of people.

The methodology of the present study has basically been descriptive and analytical. All the data used in the paper are collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data are collected from a Pilot study conducted in the Borjan Model Village of East Karbi Anglong district of Assam in the year 2017. Secondary sources include books, journals and newspapers. TheBorjan Model Village is located in Lumbajong Development Block near Longnit of the East Karbi Anglong district. It is roughly 25 KM north of Diphu and can be arrived through NH-36 towards the way to Nagaon. The village has nearly 230 households and most of them are relocated families after Karbi-Kuki ethnic clash of 2003. The villagers previously lived in the villages ofKhonbamon and Thekerajan in the Singhason hill and resettled in Borjan Model Village under state initiative.

A Brief Outline of the Karbi Hills

The present Karbi Anglongdistrict is situated in the South of Brahmaputra valley sandwiched between Shillong Plateau and Naga Hills. In past, Karbi Hills were popularly referred as 'Mikir Hills'. TheKarbi Anglong district of Assam is a mosaic of diverse culture and ethnic identities as it situates in the midst of hills of North-East India. The present Karbi Anglong district shares its borders with Naga Hills in east, Khasi Hills in west and North Cachar hills in south. Such geographic location made the Karbi hills a crossroad for several ethnic communities who migrated to these hills or through these hills in different periods of history. In

course of time, many communities settled in both plains and hills of Karbi Anglong to create a diversity of culture and life-style. Further, certain historical trajectories also made the Karbi hills and plains as safe refuge for many ethnic communities who fled form their own lands. In 1820s, the Burmese invasion in the Ahom Kingdom made many communities of Brahmaputra valley including Assamese speaking communities to flee to the interior spaces of the Karbi hills.[2] Afterwards, the exploitation of colonial government, separation of India and creation of Bangladesh also made many communities to enter the plains and hills of Karbi Anglong district.Thus, the history of life in the Karbi Hills can be said as a history of co-existence. The Karbi Anglong district is presently inhabited by Karbis, Dimasas, Kukis, Hmars, Bodos, Tiwas, Khasis, Nagas and many other non-tribal communities like Assamese, Bengali, Nepali etc. However, among all these groups Karbis are the dominant group demographically within the district.

During the British colonial phase, the Karbi Hills had a very limited influence of the colonial power than compare to the nearest valleys. The Karbi Hills were categorized into 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' regions with limited political and economic influence from outside of the Hills. After the independence, the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council (KAAC) was formed under Sixth schedule of Indian Constitution with certain amount of economic and political autonomy. Recently in 2016, the Karbi Anglong district is separated into two districts to create East Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong. Yet, both districts are under the authority of KAAC. Karbi Anglong has a population of merely 8 lakhs and with a population density of less than 100.

Re-designing Karbi Villages into Model Village

The present re-design of the natural and social milieu of Karbi hills are brought by the state with the justification of developing people's life in a sustainable manner. The modern state mechanism preserves a view of the present condition of people's life in the interior Karbi hills as primitive and beyond civilization. James C. Scott in his celebrated work '*The Art of Not Being Governed*' argues that the

popular definition of civilization is too rigid, dogmatic and based on forms of knowledge created under certain structures. It regards the people in the lowlands are only the fully civilized. Those dwelling in the midlands are partially civilized and those who live on high elevation are complete savage. Scott explains *"Degree of civilization is based on the level of legibility to state and appropriability of surplus by state. Therefore, people who appeared to have no fixed adobe, who moved constantly and unpredictably are beyond the pale of civilization".*[3] Under such justification, state has enormous duties to civilize and modernize these communities that does not produce surplus for the state by relocating people's life-style or by re-designing the nature they live with. Therefore, the newly introduced Model Villages build various suspicions regarding the actual motive of the state. Does model villages of Karbi Hills are part of developmental strategy? Or they have greater economic, political and strategic interests of the state? Yet, there is no doubt that the 'Ideal' or 'Model' life that state produces has a lot of contradictory elements with the 'Ideal' or 'Model' life of the hill communities. Its obvious thatlife in hills is not an easy one. Yet, the hill communities are more or less able to sustain through their agricultural practices and less dependent on outside resources. For them, the way they are the best as their ancestors lived in that certain way following the generations old culture of the community. But, the quality of life in these interior hills is often measured by state mechanism under quantitative figures of agricultural productions, people's level of income, and accessibility to government schemes. Of course, it is really difficult to get uninterrupted facilities of health, education in the hills. Further, some other facilities like transportation, public distribution system and housing are still inaccessible for people living in the interior Karbi hills. Such inaccessibility to government-initiated schemes is often used as a justification by the state to show the life of the hills as backwardand uncivilized. But, the hill communities' definition of a good life in the hills is not fixed by level of income or rather accessibility to government schemes. It is the unique natural environment in the hills and social interactions among the hill communities that are the unbreakable part of people's kind of 'Model' life. However, these

socio-cultural aspects of people's life are vehemently rejected by the state in the process of re-designing life in the Karbi Hills. Rather, state monopolistically imposed the state's design of 'Model' life or Model Village on people.

Processes of 'State Simplification'

The monopolised imposition of state design of life and order on people, on their living space and on natural environment can simply be interpreted as a process of 'State Simplification'. Under this process, every living and non-living object within the state are simplified in a way that simplifies or in other words fulfils the greater interests of state and its agencies. All the ambiguities of people and nature are systematically erased under the process of state simplification. Through the process of state simplification, it becomes easy for the state to control every existed phenomenon as its objects and exploits them for its further improvement. Modern state prefers and uses similar lens of life-style for all people living in the rural or urban areas, hills or plains and thereby paved the way for state to smoothly function.[4] Therefore, the state intervenes in the processes of society and nature to make it legible through the means of state simplification such as relocation, census, maps, and standard unit of measurement. Through these means, it has been easy to identify tax proceeds, list of tax prayers, land records, average incomes, and unemployed number of people etc. to eliminate local hindrances of flow of information to outside. The state simplification of natural resources and spaces treats the indigenous knowledge and customs as non-scientific and un-productive.[5] State justifies that only its actions as scientific and rational than other existing knowledge forms.Anthony Smith remarked that the present development models and strategies are grouped under the concept of modernization have come to constitute a legitimising ideology for post-colonial state that justified the state as the only producer of institutional conditions and infrastructure for development.[6]

According to a widely held position, State Simplification among the highlanders is based on a clear-cut formula of resettlement via assimilation. Stan B H Tan, a South-East Asian scholar in his article on relocation of Vietnamese

Highlanders argue the process of resettlement of highland communities of Vietnam as mere assimilating the highland population with the plain ethnic Vietnamese to build one nation with similar identity, language, culture and life-style. These governments' programmes of resettlement or re-location of highlander communities near the plain ethnic Vietnamese was rationalised by the state authority as improving people's livelihood.[7]The establishment of Model villages also represents a similar task of state simplification in the Karbi hills. But it is presented in a rather modest way with the mask of developmental or civilizing strategy. The process of designing Model Villages in the hills shares some similarities to the concept of German Structured forestry which was developed in the wake of capitalism and colonialism. German structured forestry or scientific forestry was developed from 1765-1800 in Prussia and later spread to throughout the world. The scientific forestry was a process where forestry is re-designed in a way that produces surpluses or profits to the economic system. Forests were thus refashioned as a commodity machine.[8] Plants with economic profits have only the legibility to grow and numerous species of plants with no or less economic benefits are cut down in this process. In this process of surplus creation, diversity of natural vegetation is brutally exterminated. The new monopolised scientific forest was a disaster for the peasants who were now deprived of all the grazing, food, raw materials and medicines that the earlier ecology had provided. As the scientific forester wants to plant a legible forest with single species, uniform trees growing in a straight line, the modern state builders are also aspired to form a legible society with easily recognisable identity, identifiable occupations, similar way of life and common languages.

In the Karbi hills too, the similar design of state simplification is being followed under programmes of Model Village. Life in the Karbi hills is complex than in the plains. In the Karbi hills, the state and its institutions have loose grip with the hill communities and their activities. Scattered located Karbi jhum villages practice land ownership that is neither permanent nor individual. Such ambiguous way of life makes it almost impossible for the state to extract surpluses from remotely located communities. Therefore, state and its agencies have obvious

interests to merge 2 or 3 villages and relocating these sparsely populated communities into space easily accessible to the state. Further, military goals are also there to legitimise the process of state simplification. Resettlement is always regarded as clear expression of the state to preserve its monopoly in the management of violence and other human activity.[9] Simplification of people's living space and ways of life are seen as instalment of mechanism that makes state surveillance an easy task. Most of the illegal activities like drug trafficking, insurgent activities are smoothly run in these hills where institutions of state become lazy. The insurgent activities of different ethnic groups in Karbi Anglong are centred around the hills beyond the plains or the urban spaces of the district. The Karbi-Kuki ethnic clash of 2003 was also originated in the Singhason hills where roads and other facilities are poorly connected. In such spaces, the military operations often run into failure with the hilly and rogue terrain. Thus, state has obvious military reasons to initiate redesign of living spaces of the Karbi hill communities. Foucault described state as an institution of 'panoptic' surveillance. 'Panoptic' refers to the mechanism of power that solves the problem of discipline created by a large number of people in the hands of few.[10] Thus, state acts in many times an all seeing institution to control its subjects and impose its interests. Shreya Kapoor describes the expression of state regarding resettlement freed from opinions of non-political power or institutions of social self-management.[11] The non-involvement of the local communities in the process of re-settlement is a severe setback to the whole community. The artificially created space of Model Village becomes an alien space to the community as it did not come through social interaction among the community members. In Karbi Model Villages, the jhum plots, community forests and water resources are made rarely available or in many cases completely unavailable from the crucially dependent communities. The Karbi Communities witnessed the changes of occupation and livelihood after settling in a new space far from their old habitant. The resettlement in Model Village has essentially improved people's accessibility to state provided health, education and public distribution system. At the same time, the new settled communities are exposed to newer challenges of livelihood,

sustainability, preserving culture and communitarian values in the Model Village.The Model village is a kind of internal colonization process whereby communities are made to fix in the life made under the authority of state.

State Making in Borjan Model Village: Some Ground Notes

The present relocation or resettlement policies of remotely located Karbi communities in state organised Model Villages don't seem merely an economic initiative. It has several political and strategic motives covered under the umbrella of economic initiative. The relocation of communities in Borjan Model village was pre-conditioned by resettling in a space swiftly accessible to state as well as to market. The swift accessibility assured an easy maintenance of law and order in the village and in this sense, resettlement has strategic motivations. The location of Borjan Model village has fulfilled all the criteria that makes easy for the State military forces to move fast in any condition of emergency. The village is well connected with road from north with Nagaon and from south with Diphu. Inside the Borjan Model village roads are under governmental initiatives that are easily permissible for any military movement. Most importantly, there is a military camp of Assam Rifles in the Diphu-Manza Road roughly 8 to 10 KM away from Borjan Model village. The resettlement of highlander communities in easy accessible spaces also ensure that the surplus of the newly organised labour force in the Model Village to be uninterruptedly extracted. Previously, the communities were engaged in jhum cultivation where labour cannot be extracted. The state and its capitalist agents always argue the jhum cultivation as merely a waste cultivation and thereby the labour powers of jhum cultivators as also waste. But, the resettlement in Borjan Model Village ensured the state enforced rationalized use of labour force in nearer coffee plantations and stone queries at Longnit. The swift accessibility also works as the focal force for the spread of the ideas about the state andits institutions among communities previously unknown to the complexities of life under the state. The nearer the communities resettled in the urban and transport hubs, the faster the community adopts the new life-ways fixed by state.

The transition of Karbi communities from their original inhabitants to the Model Village witnessed major changes in their relation to state and its institutions. In their life in the Singhason hills, people had rare interactions with the state.KensingRongpi, one of the villagers recollected that they have nothing to do with '*Sarkar*' as most time of their life in the hill villages of Singhason were passed only in earning livelihood through jhum cultivation. They visit the revenue office only once in a year to pay the 'House Tax' and used to vote during elections. The word '*Sarkar*' that means 'Government', KensingRongpi used to connote the 'State' portrays his definition and idea of the state. In the early village, people like KensingRongpi did not have any fixed amount of land-holding.Agriculturalfields are rotated and size of land-holding is also fluctuated. Such, ambiguous and shifting nature of land-holding hinders the state to perform census and revenue related queries. It is important to note that till 1979most of the villages of Karbi Anglong were non-cadastral villages. There were no records of people's occupation of land. The land-holders did not know the exact amount of land at their possession and how much revenue they have to pay to the government. Even the villages that practices jhum cultivation till today only pay a House tax at a very nominal rate due to the non-cadastral nature of these Karbi villages.[12]After the transition to Borjan Model village, earlier way of ambiguous land-holding pattern was systematically overthrown as such way of practice contradicts with that of the super-simplified model of state. Every household were brought under direct supervision of government Revenue Department where households are categorised into different categories based on their land-holding, occupation and labour power. Thus, in the newly created Borjan Model Village, every household become source of revenue and surplus collection for the state. To make the way easy for the state, a post of official Village Headman is created in Borjan Model village. Earlier positions of traditional '*Sarthe*' or Village Headman still exit but faces a massive setback of power and influence among their own communities with the introduction of official Village Headman.The naming of the Karbi village after the name of the Village Chief or '*Sarthe*' is a long-established custom. Therefore, the death of the

village chief in a Karbi village leads to the change of the village name. Thereby, the process of recording village names for official purposes like for census, surveys run into various difficulties.[13]Anthropologist James C. Scott argued such mechanism that works in fluctuation as common among the South East Asianhighlanders to evade the state and its exploitative tax mechanism. But these strategies are now constructively erased so that state and its institutions can perform their activity smoothly without facing any ambiguity. The newly resettled communities of Borjan were officially fixed with the village name as 'Borjan Model Village'.

Conclusion

From the discussion, one aspect gets clear that the ends of 'People' and 'State' are not necessarily complementary to each other. Many a time, the ways of both are found to be contradictory to each other. The flow of people's ways adventures through various curves and thereby fulfils their diverse needs and aspirations of life. But, the flow of the ways of the state necessarily travels in a straight, single and pre-specific way by avoiding any curves or any diversity of life and culture. In the process of pursuing the ends of the state, many of the diversity of natural environment and the plurality of human lives and cultures are thrown away. Nature, Culture and People's life-ways are forcefully simplified in a manner to support state institutions. Most of these attempts of state simplifications are portrayed under pro-developmental propaganda of state. In reality, underneath most of such state-initiated actions carry elements and mechanisms that exclusively serve interests of the state than the interests of larger masses.

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PRESERVATION OF ETHNIC IDENTITIES AND THE POLITICS OF FOOD : ANALYZING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE TAI-AHOM WOMEN OF ASSAM

Dolly Phukan

Introduction

'Food', its preparation and cooking in domestic domain has been regarded as a women's sphere, however in public domain, i.e. consumption of food happens to be a dominant factor in national and global politics with multiple hierarchies representing race, class and social networks. On the inception of the people's movement against CAA in Assam, some introspection into our cultural domain has forced me to think on the very issue of 'politics of food' and its role in creating and preserving social and ethnic identities, how it contributes engagements among the various communities to conceptualize their differences as well as relationships with each other through various memories, smell, taste of food they devour. Food as well represents as a marker of cultural, religious, national as well as global identity. It speaks the stories of colonialism, migration, cultural exchange and most of all cultural integrity. Talking about food highlights diverse characteristics having political reflections relating to the identity one belongs to, ethnic, regional, local, gender specific, generation specific and so on.

Thorough food, one can express one's identity, the relationship and differences with the other. Nationalism engages with everyday imagination, construction and reproduction of identities, in which food plays a vital role. For

example, in cook books, we always come across National / regional/ ethnic brandings like Mexican style, Italian Pasta, Thai style, Chinese noodles, *Punjabi Tardka, Assamese Thali* etc. Again counter idea to a national food culture, there has been a counter or alternative cuisine like organic, vegan, non-GMO where we can sense how, food from domestic spaces travel across gastro-nationalism towards branding, politics of providing authentic produce (polished/unpolished dal, Puro salt, organic/non-organic produced), commodification of food, politics of consumption, preparation, food aids-extending the area to international arena, government policies on economic and food security etc. Furthermore, the questions like, how we eat, what we eat, when we eat and where we eat, whom to serve and what to serve- respect/welcome or provide protection adds more political domains in understanding food, nationalism and identity. Another important dimension to look into is to understand how food culture changes in accordance to various factors such as migration, climate, globalization, economic policies of the state.

 In view of these insights, this paper tries to look into two things; firstly the paper seeks to understand theoretically the relationship between State, power-relationships and food in colonial and postcolonial debates; secondly the paper seeks to understand the issue of food as a marker of communal identity.

Food, Nationalism and National Identities

Food has been a dominant factor in identifying the colonial Indian natives with the colonizers. Bengal being the first to encounter colonialism, food happens to be the criteria of reading the qualities –physical and mental of the colonial subjects. They were ridiculed as rice eaters (easily digestible which can be obtained with little labour) which made them lazy and effeminate the subjects. As per the accounts of a surgeon, Charles Curtis, the British food consist mostly Meat and liberal use of wine, which when consumed in Bengal's hot climatic conditions had biliary complaints among the British officers, but denounced the use of Indian dietaries. Indian dietary goes against the luxurious lifestyles of the rulers (Sengupta Jayanta, 2009, pp. 81-98).

Further food has become a signifier of bodily difference between the British and the Indian subjects and eating habits became the cultural signifiers of physically superior and masculine British rulers, modern etiquette, and racial superiority of the Britishers. Whereas the Orientals were ridiculed on the basis of food as less nutritive (contains carbohydrates and less protein), kitchen were mostly seen as filthy, dirty, lacks privacy, inadequate cooking equipment which led to the use of hands which makes devouring almost impossible in the eyes of the colonizers. Further, the misgovernment, religion, morals, diet, dress and climate were perceived to be the reasons behind degenerate culture of the Bengalis (Martin J.R, 1827, pp. 43, 45, 52; Sengupta Jayanta, 2010, pp. 81-98). Ironically, in this binary relationship between the colonizers and colonized, the accounts of Raj reflect of ignoring the scientific viewpoints and climatologist's arguments of Indian diet but was based on racial value symbolism.

Against this cultural crisis over food, the Brahmo reformist in Bengal, namely Raj Narayan Basu, even tried to offer a western alternative to food by revolting against western modernity and resorting to indigenous customs and etiquette but after cleaning it from native superstitions. Further, as a sign of rising nationalist consciousness, in a Hindu Mela organized in the year 1868, topics of discussion were about proper dietary practices by increasing intakes of fish, eggs, meat and milk to revive the martial traditions of the natives.

Finally with a more assimilation with the colonial modernity, a new middle class injected with a recipe of modern cuisine was observed. Along with rising nationalist sentiments, movements for education, education for providing social etiquette, cooking, culinary arts, came to be dominant discourse for newly-wed modern Indian women. Cooking has always been regarded as the primary domain of women within domesticity. The cooking skills taught composed of Native Brahmin Dishes- Rice, curry, Meat in Moghul style; western style Cakes, Jams, Pudding, Indian style rotis, puris etc. Thus, culinary taste was a cross-cultural mix reflecting Hindu Nationalist idea of domesticity with elite tadka.

Again, during the last part of the nineteenth century, discourse on food was based on vegetarianism and non-vegetarian domain with a question of cultural identity of the East with that of the West. Western culinary reflects materialism whereas Eastern culinary dominated by vegetarianism was dominant by spirituality which also played an important role during the nationalist movement and its course. Vegetarian diets were proclaimed to be discovered by the early Aryans and laid a counter argument of the laziness of Indians as rice eaters. As per the writer, Kshirode Chandra Raychaudhuri, vegetarian diet provides more leisure which was essential to the progress of a civilization against the time consuming non-vegetarian diet. This was the reason perhaps for the progress of Aryan civilization of the East in the past in comparison to the Western Civilization (Raychaudhuri Kshirode Chandra, 2009, pp.96.). Further, Prajnasundari Devi created a binary by categorizing people into Divine origin and Demons owing to the dietary practices. Swami Vivekananda, the renowned nationalist visionary and exponent of the Warrior Monk, for the first time tried to link non-vegetarianism as the reason behind the eclipse of national independence and encouraged non-vegetarianism as a must for masculinity and physical strength of the warrior and people engaged with physical toil(Sengupta Jayanta,2009, pp. 98-99).

Interestingly, Susan Zlotnick, in her paper 'Domesticating Imperialism: Curry and Cookbooks in Victorian England' has drawn a different dimension which saw women as agents of cultural exchange by domesticating curry. She viewed, on one hand, when utilitarian like Maculay and James Mill were busy trying to assimilate India into the British Empire and Anglicizing it through educational and legal reforms, British women incorporated Indian food into the national diet and made it culturally British. This was how cultural exchange between colonizers and colonized took place and women were its agents (Zlotnick Susan, Frontiers, Vol. XVI, No 2/3 pg. 52) Utsa Ray, in her book 'Culinary culture in colonial India' wrote extensively how, with the advent of colonialism, cuisine has been a dominating factor in understanding the formation of the colonial middle class in Bengal. Where the colonial modernity has taught the newlywed Bengali bride adapt at making

cutlets as well as cooking *Shaker Ghonto* (green leaves finely chopped and cooked with or without vegetables, generally with some gravy) (Ray Utsa, 2015).

In a Lecture delivered at a TEDx event organized by a local community by Prof. Pushpesh Pant, food critic and historian talked about how food can make and unmake a nation (PantPushpesh, 2017). He questioned about the freedom of choice to food in contemporary India where people are being lynched for consuming beef and the polarization of community over consumption of beef and pork. He talks about how food happened to be an identifier of a nation- Chinese, Italian, Mexican, continental food etc. He laid down a very interesting political statement criticizing Nehru who suggested for reorganizing Indian State on the basis of Language, where tongue happens to be the signifier and if taste from food could have been used instead of language where still tongue plays a significant role in altering the map of India. Within this context he questioned whether could we really find difference between Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan food with that of Indian food in real sense. Further he spoke that even the food that caste Hindus during Navratri and Diwali devours which are basically composed of Potatoes and Chili are not Indian food but potatoes and chilies were brought to India by the Portuguese during the sixteenth Century.

A Short documentary, "Caste in the Menu Card" prepared by five students of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, which was banned from screening (available in YouTube) very lucidly speaks about how the food items in menu card signifies exclusionary politics, questions the freedom of choice over food and how food has been segregated on caste and religious basis in contemporary India. The film also highlighted the issues related to livelihood, beef-eating practices in Mumbai (Caste in the Menu Card, http://smcs.tiss.edu/films/caste-on-the-menu-card/ 2017).

Another dimension on the political space of food could be analyzed from the commodification of food and government policies on economic and food security. The green revolution was introduced in India to deal with the great famine which led to food scarcity. Green revolution characterizes with more use of chemical

fertilizers, pesticides and genetically modified seeds. This was imposed by state policies by providing huge subsidies to the farmers opt for hybrid crops on commercial basis altering the native methods of organic farming-characterized by sustainable agricultural techniques only for subsistence, recycling organic wastes, crop rotations, intercropping, biological pest control etc. Transition to organic farming motto was first brought by colonial state by introducing plantation industries, cash crops –cotton, indigo, opium, tea for external needs hereby lessening down the fertility of soil. The nest transition was promoted through the structural adjustment programe by the Indian state by initiating the USA developed genetically modified seeds. Interestingly, now in recent trend, owing to the environmental and health effects of the HYV seeds, crops, returning back to organic farming have been initiated which requires government certification (Roy Abhik, Kumar Nikhil, Down To Earth, 2019). But the organic food which has been ordinarily consumed by traditionally throughout Indian civilization has been commodified targeting the elite class who can effort to buy the organic products from the markets.

From the above discussion, it could be ascertained how food has the ability to understand a class, caste, interactions between community, making of a nation. In the context of India's northeast, food of the numerous tribes, communities are often termed as exotic which refers to unusual food or food being rarely served whereas for the diverse ethnic people of the State the food they devour are ordinary and daily consumed food, a marker of their belongingness to the community. In the context of food, besides caste factor, a hierarchy relating to food has been a dominant identifier of pan-Indian nationalism. Food consumed by the ethnic communities of NE region is not representative of Pan-Indian cuisine. The national cuisine reflects the food practices of the dominant groups relegating the others to the margins. Within this context, the statement of Prof. Pushpesh Pant, who has been exploring the food Atlas of India that he has only one aim, 'to dispel the Myth of Mughlai, overthrow the tyranny of Tandoor and get rid of the curse of curry, identifying the multi-taste and cuisines across India' becomes relevant.

Dolly Kikon in her article, 'Fermenting Modernity: Putting Akhuni (fermented soya beans) on the Nation's Table in India' has debated how Akhuni, the traditional food of the tribes and ethnic groups of Northeast India has created conflict in Cafeterias, dining halls in colleges, Universities and neighborhoods across metropolitan cities leading the police in New Delhi issue a directive in 2007 to issue a directive for the people of Northeast India titled Security tips for Northeast Students/Visitors in Delhi' relating the use of Akhuni and Bamboo Shoot as smelly. In this context, one can observe the challenge pose to the concept of modern sensory system, who categorizes Akhuni as smelly, but for the northeastern tribes, it invokes memories, belongingness and delicacy flavor.(Kikon Dolly, 2015, pp. 320-335).

In her article she very lucidly dealt with the politics of food which shapes everyday engagements with the notion of modernity, where on one hand tribal societies were termed as remote, backward, underdeveloped. Kikon quoted a Travel section of a daily from the United Kingdon, 'Daily Telegraph', which published about the dietary habits of Naga People written by Stephen McClerence under heading, 'No Silkworm Curry Today Sir' which depicted the Eurocentric views which reflects the binaries between modernity/primitive, civilized/savage, center/exotic etc. (Kikon Dolly, 2018, pp. 21). The quote goes as such:

> '*Delicacies include roast dog, snake kebabs, silkworm curry, pig skin (Various recipes), and steamed hornet, and snail stew. A friend who spent six years there recalls one challenging feast of bison cooked in dog blood.*
>
> *We've even heard, we tell a young woman who dropped in for tea, that Nagas enjoy eating whole frogs. 'No, no, not frogs', she protests. 'Tadpoles only, I think'. The seven Northeastern States are usually, and accurately, described as remote.*'

(McClerence Stephen, 2007).

In totality, foods of Northeast tribes and ethnic groups has been placed within the European stereotypes on being exotic, uncanny and within the national discourse too as simple, which are mostly boiled and lacks refinement, sophisticated techniques, garnishing, absence of oil and masala (lacks innovation)…in other words it does not fit into the frame of tandoor, Mughlai and curry.

Women, Domestic Kitchen and identities:

Domestic kitchen tasks have always been the responsibility of women and are regarded as non-political space excluding the domain from political discussions. As have mentioned earlier, the theme, politics of food and how food represents one's identity, consolidation, emotions, repulsions and the contribution of women in this domain came to my mind owing to the crisis that Northeast India specially Assam has faced during the first week of December 2019, leading to the movement against CAA and the imposition of curfew. Curfew has led to the soaring prices of essential commodities like rice, dal, potatoes, Onions, eggs, vegetables, fuel (LPG) which created lot of hassles both in market and inside the kitchen. Interestingly, my kitchen garden which yields papaya and some few coarse leafy veggies rarely gets much attention from me, but during the days of curfew, the papaya became my sole treasure I was proud of. The market and kitchen conditions made me introspect, how dependent we have become regarding the accessibility to our basic requirement, i.e. food. How the binaries of civilized/savage, sophisticated /boiled, ordinary/exotic has intruded into our societies that, we have isolated ourselves from producing, cultivating, nurturing and preparing food. Within this scenario, the question, how far our culture could be saved only by resisting against CAA, if we don't sustain our food is very pertinent. Preparing traditional ethnic food requires lot of methodologies starting from, seed to harvest, cooking to offering (temperature, personality of the maker- {preparing rice-beer/bamboo shoot}, personality of the consumer, knowledge of ingredients etc. Thus, ecological knowledge is equally important in this regard. Within this context, the role of traditional knowledge becomes very important.

Women, mostly the third world women who are depended on rural economy are the repository of traditional knowledge and skill with the help of which they sustain themselves and their families. Cultural feminists and Eco-feminists have elaborately dealt with the role of women and her knowledge in the survival strategies of a community. Eco-feminists assert that patriarchal developmental agendas are characterized with modernization/industrialization and technology dependency which leads to environmental degradation and is also harmful to women, children, and other living things. They tried to establish a connection between dominance of women and dominance of nature (Shiva, Vandana, 1988) Both the environment and women have been viewed as exploitable resources that are significantly undervalued (Perkins, E., Et.al, 2005, pp. 107-150). Connections between environment and gender can be made by looking at the gender division of labor and environmental roles rather than an inherent connection with nature (Nightingale, A., 2006, pp. 165-185). The gender division of labor necessitates a nurturing, sacrificial and caring role for women, like the characteristics of nature which places women closer with the environment. The knowledge of nature is shaped by the experiences an individual has. Due to the assigned gender role, women have developed a distinct knowledge of the land, its resources and nature but yet are excluded from policy decisions of development on that land. Cultural feminism takes an essentialist standpoint supporting the biological differences of gender, but try to celebrate and value these differences to overcome sexism. They wanted to establish more female only culture and wanted to revive women's traditional art forms, women's spirituality and Goddess traditions, etc. They tried to construct hypotheses that, "women are kinder and gentler than men," leading to the mentality that if women ruled the world there would be no wars.

Ethnic women of Assam, like other community women are the custodians of practicing and preserving the unique tradition of the community. Gender roles as assigned by the society demands women to be a wife, mother, care-taker, child bearer, homemaker and kitchen manager. These consequences made women to learn many traditional skills and these skills are generally transmitted from the

mother to the daughter. Likewise, the domain of food and kitchen has also been preserved by women. Food here can be categorized as Healing Food (Swamp eel/kusia-/ medicinal herbs), Protective Food (roasted snake head fish-*goroimaasorpurapitika*), food representing respect (duck-meat with white gourd-*kumura*) Preserving-Fermentation, Cultural Delicacies- *Lau Pani* (Rice-Beer), *Khorisa* (Banboo Shoot), *Hukoti*(indigenous dry fish), Leta (Silk Worm), *Bhekula* (Frog Meat), *Hukan Mas* (Dry Fish), red ant-eggs, wasp eggs, etc which reflects the traditional cultural belief system. These delicacies fall as discussed in the first section not in the National cook book cuisine but something which cannot fit into the modern-sophisticated platter. Religious, racial and caste-based myths tend to exclude these foods towards extinction at present.

Further during scarcity and slack season traditional food preservation system practiced by the women are commendable. For example, fermented salted lemon, *Kharoli* (mustard chutney), *pani-tenga* (tangy mustard chutney), *kol-khaar, Handoh* (boiled rice powder), *Sira, Muri*, pickles etc are prepared out of the traditional skill of preservation and fermentation. Further, due to their knowledge of the use of traditional herbs they tend to maintain kitchen garden and preserve these herbs in the garden and save the same from extinction. Their knowledge of the herbs like *piralipaleng* (Beta vulgaris vartbenghalenis), *tengamorapaat* (roselle leaves) etc, they prepare the unique ethnic cuisine called *masortenga* (sour fish curry). The ethnic cuisine prepared from medicinal herbs: *matikanduti* (Sessile Joyweed), *khutura* (amaranth), *Piralipaleng* (Beta vulgaris vartbenghalenis), *shewali fool/paat* (night jasmine flower and leaves), *seng mora*(Lasia spinosa) tikoni*barua* (smilax perfoliatalour) etc are rarely been accounted. Thus, women have played a great role in preserving the bio-diversity, maintained food security with their art of food- storages and by depending upon domestic local herbs they contribute towards a good family budget.

These contributions of women in preserving the ethnic food traits of a community help to identify one with a sense of belongingness to the said community. Further the kitchen itself reflects the traditional traits of a community. The Mising kitchen, Naga kitchen, Tai-Phakiyal kitchens has successfully till date has been

maintaining its sanctity. The unique traditional use of fire of the kitchen has been sustained keeping the food flavor intact which the Ahom families have lost excluding a few. Today we are worried about language and land (gendered slogan "we cannot lose our mother's language and father's land in the hands of illegal immigrants"), but ethnic food which is a significant political domain of one's identity has been at the verge of extinction. Food has been turning to be homogenous, taste-buds are trying to be homogenous, but gastro-nationalism still revolts (gastric, bile-upset, vomiting, indigestions) which has been kept unheard. The work culture of our community has been diminishing, lands are kept barren except one season, harvesting and cultivation tasks has been done not be the natives but people are being hired. In this scenario, until and unless all these significant issues which were earlier though to be non-political entity needed to be looked with conscious engagements to safeguard the cultural, linguistic sanctity of the region.

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CONFLICT AND EVERY DAY LIFE IN NORTHEAST INDIA: AN ANALYSIS

Kaustubh Deka

Introduction

> *"Northeast India is in an apparent state of being marginalized, rediscovered and redefined."*[i]

By now it is well acknowledged that the term 'Northeast India' is fast becoming 'an umbrella con-notation which tends to wipe off its immense diversity of history, culture and politics" (Misra, 2016, p.7-8). In this context, bodies of work have brought new ways of understanding the region's history, politics, culture, ecologies and issues of development. What has been emphasised is that India's Northeast is a region undergoing tremendous and rapid transformation (Hazarika, 2017). This is a transformation that has a complex context and a chequered history. What needs to be kept in mind is that the postcolonial history of Northeast India represented in many ways a significant departure from pan Indian narratives of democracy and nationalism as the dissenting voices from the region for long time have remained peripheral to the concerns of successive national govern-ments; the region understood largely as a liability with respect to national security that requires state regulation(Baruah, 1999, 2005). At the same time, however, a sense of aspiration and commitment pervades too, while the region seem poised to enter a phase of unprecedented changes, being pro-jected as the heart of India's 'Act East Policy' for connecting to Southeast Asia and build trade and people-to-people ties with the ASEAN bloc.It is important to understand the significance of these

multiple, cross cutting and at times seemingly contradictory narratives unfolding in the Northeast experience. One effective way to make sense of the many pieces of these unfolding narratives will be to anchor them around the multiple axis of conflict, as the many facets of the conflicts continues to drive the demands, aspirations and imaginations emanating from the region. The paper therefore stresses on the need to examine the received and perceived ideas of conflict that inform the making and unmaking of the region, in order to understand the many ways the conflict discourse plays out in the region and impacts on the everyday 'lived reality' of people here. The paper draws from ex-isting works as well as the author's own ethnographic observations to look into the nuances of con-flict in North East India in terms of its history, geo-politics and ecology.

Typologies of Conflict and their Significance

The North East region of India comprising of eight states, a region poorly connected to the Indian mainland by a small corridor and located at the junction of South, East and South East Asia is the setting for a multitude of conflicts that represents durable challenges to the integrative and accom-modative capacity of Indian democracy. However in its pervasiveness, conflicts in the region has not only affected the territorial and political sovereignty of the Indian state, but also the life of the various people living in the region in numerous ways resulting in an all consuming 'culture of con-flict'. Conflicts in the region are mostly built around aspirations of 'identity-recognition' and 'eth-nicity-nationality' claims. Though the conflict in the region is mired with complex political-economic issues, such as, struggle over natural resources, migration related issues, displacement, social exclusion, and so on, the politics of identity lie at the heart of the bigger part of the current conflict constellations in the Northeast. However in the last two decades or so there has been a surge of aspiration in the region, the growing sway of a globalised worldview on the inhabitants of the region, especially on the region's youths/students is fairly discernible as the last two decades have transformed the region in ways incomprehensible to a previous generation. Consequently alongside the long standing narrative of neglect an emerging narrative of participation is felt too in the region. An attempt needs to be made to understand the coexistence of

the seemingly contradic-tory narratives of protest and participation in the unfolding socio-political discourse in the North East Region, especially given the strong context of multifaceted conflicts in the region. In a scenario such as this, it becomes imperative to go beyond the often highlighted 'conditions' and 'narratives' of conflict and look into the manifold manifestations of it. Every day life in the North East to a large extent is framed by these norms of exceptionalism. The paper argues that there is a need to conceptualise the region as a place where the life experiences of people are informed and condi-tioned by these many layers of 'contentions' that occurs in the process of a society coming in terms with historical changes.

In a document titled 'Conflicts in Northeast India' DoNER ministry[ii] conflicts in the region are broadly grouped under the following categories:

a. 'National' conflicts: Involving concept of a distinct 'homeland' as a separate nation and pursuit of the realisation of that goal by its votaries.

b. Ethnic conflicts: Involving assertion of numerically smaller and less dominant tribal groups against the political and cultural hold of the dominant tribal group. In Assam this also takes the form of tension between local and migrant communities.

c. Sub-regional conflicts: Involving movements which ask for recognition of sub-regional aspira-tions and often come in direct conflict with the State Governments or even the autonomous councils.

While critically elaborating on these, this paper seeks to add some more layers to this complex ty-pology of conflict.

A. Northeast as a Site of 'Ethnic' Conflicts : Understanding the Discursive 'Ethnic' Category

Although the phenomenon of ethnic separatism is not unique to Northeast India, the secessionist nature of the demands and strategic location of the region renders it critical from the point of view of national security. In Northeast India, we thus see democratic institutions and protective discrimi-nation to safeguard

the interests of certain ethnic communities existing side by side with extra-constitutional laws that severely impinge on civil liberties of those very communities (Dutta, 2015).

As described in the conflict studies literature, causes of 'ethnic war' can be broadly divided into material-based arguments (e.g. strategic issues, resources), non-material- based explanations (ethnic fear) and elite-manipulation (emphasizing the role of charismatic leaders). A large body of anthro-pological and related research has detailed how identity-based political violence depends on mobili-zation (or 'ethnic action') and the politics of difference or 'othering'. Arguing against popular views of ethnic conflict, anthropologists have also shown how ethnic identity, rather than causing conflict, 'emerges out of conflict.' (Deka, 2017). Given thecomplexity and irreducibility of social identifica-tion in a diverse region like the Northeast absolute ethnic solutions merely expounds identity fetish-ism. Reinforcing or creating exclusivist antagonisms it fragments local coalitions and sets the stage for more violence.

Ashlid Kolas (Kolas, 2015) looks at the issue of 'ethnic conflict', 'ethnic violence', and 'ethnic clashes' as constructs that are employed in the discursive framing of acts of violence. Kolas argues that in making sense of the social construction of conflict we should take into account how frames are employed to attribute acts of violence to social groups such as ethnic minorities or 'tribals', and how violence is politicized and even institutionalized. One must emphasise here the larger theoreti-cal premise that the character of the state constitutes the dominant influence upon the character of ethnic politics, ethnic consciousness being 'an emotionally powerful ideological response to the pat-tern of insecurities generated by the power structure of the state' (Brown 1994: 258). Brown calls for the need to examine the 'state promulgated national identity, the ideological parameters within which ethnic consciousness develops and operates' (Ibid: 1).Commenting on the Indian situation, Paul Brass mentions that 'ethnicity and nationalism are modern phenomena inseparably connected with the activities of

the modern centralising state' (Brass 1991:8). This is where the Northeast experience becomes extremely crucial to look into as the region has been the ground for some of the most innovative constitutional and policy experiments in the Indian political system, such as the arrangements of substantial autonomy under the provision of Sixth Schedule status. The implica-tions of this constitutional-policy framework of the Sixth Schedule has been approached variously. However as many examples from the Northeast shows, the provision has not been enough to miti-gate conflict, prompting scholars to call it an institutionalisation of a politics of difference and 'an instrument that incentivise conflict' (Baruah & Rouleau 2011: 178). Some again look at it as an 'in-novative model of ethno federalism and political autonomy' that often has unintended consequences of propelling renewed conflict and violence (Saikia et al. 2016: 137).

B. North East as a site of Ecological Conflicts: Ethno-nationalism in Reference to the Natural

Given the volatile identity discourse in the region, violent conflicts over the issue of 'rightful own-ership' over natural resources have come up fast. This has become a story of entrapment scripted in much blood and tear not only of people from their surrounding environment but also of entrapment of people from people. In this context one can talk of Stockholm based Social Anthropologist B.G.Karlsson's recent fine book " Unruly Hills-Nature and Nation in India's Northeast" (Karlsson, 2011), where he examines how India's northeast has gradually turned into a 'resource frontier', most of the conflicts in post colonial northeast being related to issues of resource control and the growing inability of the people to interact meaningfully to the ecological habitat. Here we go with the crisp but comprehensive definition of ecological nationalism as "ways in which varieties of na-tionalism are mediated and constructed through reference to the natural." (Cederlof and Sivarama-krishnan,2015,p.3) Ecological Nationalism can provide helpful lenses to understand the competing claims over resources as it allows one to consider nature as elements of identity and the strategic use of such

identities to wage political struggles. This approach also carefully looks into the articulation of indigenous rights doctrine in the context of interfaces between people,nature and nation state. Thus the paper will argue that future studies need to keep the following three assumptions in mind. First, Nature is no more a passive backdrop to political events. Second, there needs to be efforts to relate environmental change to aspects of political economy, cultural politics and social transformation. And thirdly, the presumed boundary between nature and culture needs to be critically interrogated. It draws from Bruno Latour's recent call to turn to "geostories", instead of exclusively "natural" or "cultural" histories. (Latour, 2013). The situation is this that the natural resources and as an extension the ecology is seen as an appendage to the structure of 'ethno-nationalistic' aspirations. What is 'natural' becomes 'national' at much different level. In such situations of ongoing and expanding resource extraction regime, connotations of terms like 'nationalism' and 'group and customary' rights needs renewed understanding.

C. Northeast India as a Site of Contentious Politics: the Resource-identity Matrix

Sanjib Baruah in his significant publication India against itself: Assam and the politics of nationality[iii] approaches the study of the social movement in the Northeast from the perspectives of "the continuation of a "contentious politics" as explained by the diffuse presence, often in the back-ground, of an inchoate constituency that feels unrepresented. In another place commenting on the perseverance of the movements and the organisations he writes, "this constituency can derive a sense of representation, meaning, and even identity through a social movement, an insurgency, or a political party—not necessarily in that order. Not only can these political phenomena all relate to one another, but together they can be understood in the context of a society coming to terms with historical social change"(Baruah, 952 :2001). Pahi Saikia in her work Ethnic Mobilisation and Vi-olence in Northeast India also draws from the literature on contentious politics, particularly the mo-bilizing process approach that focuses on the development of

movement-supporter networks, as well as the political process approach that emphasizes the relationship between movements and the responses of the political system. She prefers the usage of 'contentious politics' "as it encompasses a range of movement outcomes from small-scale protest demonstrations to large-scale violent rebel-lions. In this sense, the violent and non-violent ethnic rebellions of the Bodos and Misings can be considered two different versions of contentious politics" (Saikia, 2:2011).Scholars have supported the view that resource competition is a cause of conflict between different emerging 'faultlines' in Northeast India. For instance, Sanjib Baruah maintains that conflicts in these areas are caused by competition for resources, especially cultivable land, coupled with policy failures and structural problems facing shifting cultivators:

"As shifting cultivation declines, largely as a result of official policy discouraging it, the shifting cultivators of yesterday can hardly be expected to transform themselves overnight into viable settled cultivators without sustained assistance. Under these circumstances [. . .], the cash-starved former shifting cultivator tends to turn actual control of his land to immigrant denizens" (Ibid.)

D. North East as a Space of Adjacent Identities and Emergent Network of Solidarities: Impact on Conflicts due to the out Migration Scenario

In recent times as more and more people from the region, especially the youth, have been moving to 'Indian' metros engaging and accessing the structures and services of the nation, a set of adjacent identities are emerging, that are both ascribed by others and articulated among Northeast people. They do not overhaul existing identities, and certainly much consternation usually results from any suggestion that identities can be conceived of beyond narrow micro-identities affixed to place in the borderland. Macduia calls it 'an instrumental response to changing circumstances.' (Mcduie-Ra, 2015) Decades of conflicts and violence, have paradoxically co-exited alongside the aspirational zeal of the youth for a 'good life.' Only the articulations of these have changed with the opening up of the economy and betterment of communication channels across regions. A survey released by the North East Support Centre and Helpline in early 2011 puts the

number[iv] of migrants outside the Northeast at 414,850. The same report cites a 12-fold increase in migration out of the Northeast from 2005 to 2011. American social Scientist Charles Tilly (Tilly, 2005) says that trust as a social resource becomes primary when people move from one place to another. Perhaps in the context of high level of discrimination faced by the people of the region trust based networks of solidarity amongst people from the region has become crucial and relevant. Various surveys on discrimination against Northeast people in the Delhi-NCR region puts the percentage of the people having expe-rience of discrimination of some form at an alarming percentage of over seventy percent. Almost all the cases cited in these studies are cases of discrimination on the ethnic/racial ground and the major cause against such discrimination, according to the studies are prejudices and lack of understanding of the Northeast. This author's study across the University student's of the Northeast throws some interesting light on the rising aspiration quotient within the region. A hand down 74.5% majority of the youth in the NER would like to get settled outside the region/state for a better career and job prospects. Only a 15.4% of the respondents prefer not to leave the region/state and 10.1% of the youths are undecided on it. And how do the Youth in the NER view the globalization process? The majority opinion seems to be that it is a mixed force (54.3%), followed by a positive take on globalization (29.8%). Only 10.5% of the youth looks at it as a negative force, whereas 5.5% of the respondents feel that globalization has no impact on the region. Besides there seems to be a situation of what can be termed as 'existential duality' There exists both a sense of dissatisfaction as well as a sense of engagement with the political system amongst the youth of the NER. A big majority of youth, around 64%, has some experience or the other of some social protests/movements. At the same time, 66.6% of the youth recorded their decision to vote in the 2014 general elections and a significant majority of 57.3% of the interviewed youth in the NER claims to have been voting regularly (Deka, 2016).

The ways that processes of migration, diasporas, trans-border networks and solidarities, tourism etc. play a role in changing the meanings and narratives around conflict in the region needs to be criti-cally interrogated further.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the ways in which the narratives of conflict has been evolving in India's northeast, manifesting itself through some major forms that has been instrumental in shaping the imaginations of the region, both as lived experiences as well as aspirations. The paper has tried to show the existing complexity of social conflicts in the region that often has more than one (some time co existing) mode of expression. There has been an essential co-existence of trends of protest with that of a spirit of participation in the region.To unlock these apparent contradictions, meaning-ful research on the region therefore needs to put attention on 'the more subtle processes of commu-nity formation that take place in the other, subaltern domain tied to peoples' everyday struggle for survival.' (Karlsson 2001: 34) and emphasise on the 'need to devise strategies to privilege everyday forms of engagement over associational forms' (Varshney 2001: 265). The continuing cycles of conflict in the region needs to be understood through a social construction of it, through representa-tions of conflict by local stakeholders, focusing on the discursive framing of political violence. This requires a tracing of the violence all the way to the very pattern of interaction between the post-colonial state and a society modelled as 'peripheral' and 'multi-ethnic.' Northeast India has meant different things at different points in time and different things to different groups of people too. This continues to be the case all the more with the increasing opening up of the region to the 'outside world' when distances are reducing but gaps are not. Ambitious policy frameworks like Act East Policy is being launched to catapult the region into a pan Asian imagination. There are recent attempts to seriously look into and understand instances of 'homeliness and homelessness, movements, interactions and friendships between people in Northeast India and those in South, Southeast and East Asia. (Saikia and Baishya, 2018 :10).To come out of the trapping of the manifold conflicts, the first requirement is to understand the nuances of them better. One needs to adopt approaches more nuanced to make better sense of the complex mosaic called Northeast India, a region that has lived a thousand years in a life time. Towards this the paper attempted to present a board outline.

Notes

i Andrew J. May, 2017

ii www.mdoner.gov.in/sites/default/files/ARC_7thReport_Ch12.pdf, accesed on 10.01.2018.

iii Sanjib Baruah, *India against itself: Assam and the politics of natinality,* (Oxford university press, 1999).

iv http://www.nehelpline.in/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/NE-Migration-Challenges-Research-Report.pdf,accessed on 05.01.18.

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TRANSCENDING A SUBALTERN IDENTITY: THE MATUAS OF WEST BENGAL

Mainak Putatunda

Introduction

This article is intended to be a work tracing the evolution of a group's identity who, unquestionably, represent 'an' other to the author and the views expressed in this article surely represent the etic viewpoint. It is startling to think how much universally efficient small-scale segregation can be when backed by a hegemonic explanation that the 'others don't want' to integrate and exchange (Gruner, 2009, p. 276). The Matuas are a group of Bengali speaking people traditionally engaged as cultivators, fishermen and boatmen belonging to the lowly *Namasudra* caste who are followers of the late nineteenth century reformer Harichand Thakur who lived in Orakandi, a village situated in Gopalganj district of the Dhaka division of modern Bangladesh. Following the partition of Bengal and in the aftermath of the 1971 war, a large number of them have migrated to the border districts of Nadia and Twenty-four Parganas of West Bengal along with a section of the Thakur family, Harichnad Thakur's descendants who founded a new religious center at Thakurnagar in North Twenty-four Parganas. Despite their ubiquity, they are still a largely unknown entity to the upper castes. Many, in the safe confines of their homes, refer to them merely as a group of *'chotolok'*, i.e., non-elite low caste people who offend the cultural sensibilities of the elite with their 'wild' war-drum beating, unruly processions and ecstatic dance which they perform during their religious festivals. The elite also feel mortified by the open

participation of women in such activities, ignoring the revolutionary attitude of the Matuas who accept the equality of women in social and religious matters as a matter of creed.

The title of this article will appear to suggest that 'subaltern' is an identity, in contrast to how Spivak defined it as a 'relational position in a conceptualization of power,..a space without identity' (Pandey, 2006, p. 4735). On the other hand, Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern Studies Project (SSP) in general, have taken a view where the subaltern appears as the archetypical figure of the third world peasant; illiterate, superstitious, isolated and non-political (Pandey, 2006). This makes the subaltern merely a 'subject' without agency. Imposition of such an identity overlooks the modernity and complexity of the peasant as well as the third world itself vis a vis the west. The peasant can't really exist frozen in time as a completely self-contained unit. There is no 'requirement' for him to undergo a transformative process whereby he becomes a part of the organized labour force and acquires political agency (Ibid, p. 4736). He can be part peasant and part worker, rotating freely between a rural and an urban identity as per his needs. As the political history of the Matuas reveals, they perfectly encapsulate this dynamic nature of the subaltern and transcend the conceptual straightjacket of how South Asian subaltern is supposed to behave. However, it is important to clarify that *Namasudra*as a caste and Matua as a group belonging to that caste merits different treatment from a sociological point of view. Harichand Thakur inspired a section of the *Namasudras* to break free from the shackles of Brahmanism, reject mediation of Brahmin priests in matters of worship, forego pilgrimages, reject the prevalent customs related to purity and pollution and become financially self-sufficient (Biswas, 2015, p. 70). Thus, he created a group which did not conform to the Gramscian concept of subalternity whereby the 'native consciousness' of the subaltern mind must be secondary to an imposed 'alien consciousness' which is the consciousness of the ruling class (Patrick, 2020, p. 103).

Not only do the Matuas challenge the subaltern identity, but they are also hard to classify as a group. Membership in the group is based mostly on birth and acquired memberships are rare and often cause friction in the group. In that sense,

the group behaves like a caste. However, unlike a caste group, they don't follow a strict set of rules regarding marriage and commensality. Unlike a *Jati*, they are not tied to any traditional profession. They are different from other Scheduled Castes like Rajbanshi or Koch of Bengal as well because they do not present a political demand based on a distinct political history, premised ultimately on ethnic differences. It is also problematic to classify them as a 'Sect'. Sect is defined in the sociology of religion as a set of beliefs followed by a group of people where there is a clear tension between those beliefs and that of the mainstream or major religion from which that sect has sprung but broadly, the sect's teachings and ideas remain within the boundaries of the principal religion. Sects also usually have an ascetic founder who is a historical figure. This definition of a sect is a western notion though and is inadequate in fully explaining the religious groups of India which identify as Hindu. For example, the *Ravidasis* or *Kabirpanthi*s will definitely qualify as a sect according to this definition but it will be more problematic to accommodate the Lingayats or Vira Shaivas of Karnataka (Bayly, 1999, p. 287). They consider Vishnu worship as an abomination, while identifying as religious Hindus. In the same vein, it is hard to classify Matuas as a *Bhakti* sect as there is considerable debate among the Matuas themselves regarding the nature of their beliefs. There is a vocal group of ambedkarites among them who view 'Matua' as a distinct religion and as a revival of a supposedly glorious Buddhist past (Walker, 1999, p. 570) while a large number of lay Matuas think of Harichand Thakur as a reincarnation of Chaitanya Deva and an *Avatara* of Vishnu. The Matua identity is therefore, a contested one which is evolving with the Matua consciousness. It is certainly not monolithic and does not seem subaltern.

Subaltern is not just a conceptual category, though. It is always a political state as well. In the Indian context, the political in subaltern is generally identified through the politics of the depressed castes or *Dalits*, who has been the focus of Indian politics since the nineties. Despite this, caste has often been treated as an insignificant and indeed, outmoded object of research pertaining to the society and politics of West Bengal in the post-independence period. Sekhar Bandopadhyay

has pointed out that such an outlook is a testimony to the survival of colonial and orientalist sociology in vogue in British India which viewed the caste system entirely through the prism of Hindu religion (Bandopadhyay, 2004, p. 12). Even modern structural sociologists like Louis Dumont, who accepted separation and functional differences as two major planks of the caste system, ultimately resorted to explaining it as a simple hierarchy based on a scale of purity and pollution determined by the Hindu religion and failed to properly distinguish between *'Varna'* and *'Jati'*. The *Jati*, a sub-stratum of a caste based on differentiation of work, is of much more contemporary relevance than the Vedic Varna system which was already quite ineffectual as an organizing principle of the Indian society by the time the British arrived. However, they found it a familiar and convenient reference point in grasping the complexity of the Indian system, hence the colonial scholarship's focus on caste as a clear subset of Varna, governed by religion. The western scholar's mindset is prone to analyze a particular society on the basis of a single system of stratification. Therefore, he calls the American society as 'class society', the European one as 'estate society' and the Indian one as 'Caste Society' (Beteille, 1969, p.19). Andre Beteille has referred to modern sociologists like Leach and Bailey who believe that the Caste Society as seen in India is distinct from all influences of a class-based one as it is based on the principle of 'non-antagonism' between different castes placed at different rungs of social hierarchy (Ibid, p. 26). They argue that there may be competition within a particular caste for individual dominance but never between castes. This echoes the Ambedkarite understanding of caste as static class and class as dynamic caste. Such interpretations have greatly influenced the dominant current of Indian scholarship on caste which happens to be Marxist in nature. Therefore, when analyzing the inequalities existing within the social system of Bengal, the Marxist scholarship has focused on the dynamics of class division between the landless sharecroppers and the wealthy landowners or on the socio-economic changes brought about by the influx of refugees from East Pakistan. There was a tendency to presume that after the post-independence Congress paternalism and subsequent three-decade long rule

by a leftist coalition, Bengalis have successfully dropped their caste baggage and caste was no longer a significant social fault line in Bengal. The supporters of this view could lend credence to their claim by pointing out that Dalit movement never took a serious form in independent Bengal. Partha Chatterjee has pointed out that this has led the ruling Bengali upper caste to claim a kind of exceptionalism which insulates Bengal from the currents of caste-based politics in the rest of India (Chatterjee).The *'Bhadrolok'*, i.e., the educated and respectable Bengali, ostensibly the most egalitarian of the locally dominant classes in India, finds it deeply uncomfortable to discuss caste, as such a discourse can challenge its political and intellectual hegemony premised upon its claim of inclusiveness and acquiescence of the lower castes (Bandopadhyay, 2016, p. 36). The *Bhadrolok*, comprised almost entirely of the three upper castes of Brahmin, *Vaidya* and *Kayastha*, some 'clean' Sudra castes (the *Kayasthas* themselves were considered to belong to a clean Sudra caste in the not-too-distant past) and even some educated Muslims, was greatly successful in containing the voices of dissent from non-dominant caste groups during the long decades of Left Front Rule in West Bengal. But their claims to such exceptionalism and caste harmony can be countered if one takes into account the virulently anti-elite militant peasant movements which swept large parts of north and wester Bengal in the decades of sixties and seventies. A majority of the participants in these struggles belonged to lower castes such as *Bagdi*, *Bauri* etc. Ranabir Samaddar (Samaddar, 2013, p. 77) has observed that despite participation of many lower caste peasants in such movements, the *Namasudra* caste, known for their political awareness and pre-independence struggle for political recognition and representation, was noticeably absent. He reasoned that such absence was due to the partition-induced displacement suffered by the *Namasudras* who were primarily concentrated on four districts of East Bengal such as *Barisal* and *Bakarganj*. Such was not the case for most other major lower castes those were based in districts which fell under West Bengal. 2001 Census data shows that *Namasudras* comprised 17.4% of the Scheduled Caste's population in West Bengal, whereas the other large Scheduled Caste groups like

Rajbanshi and *Bagdi made up 18.4% and* 14.9% respectively while *Pod* made up*12%*(Ibid, p. 78).Because the *Namasudra* was identified as the 'immigrant' whose needs and demands were very different from the other Scheduled Castes, they could not make demands to the political system in a united manner. Samaddar has further showed that the Scheduled Castes of Bengal have different economic interests as they practice different professions. Also, low rate of literacy among some of the castes like *Bauri* led to disconnect between the immediate goals and ambitions of these castes, thereby leading to a situation where a unified Dalit movement in Bengal did not materialize.

The fiction of caste harmony in Bengal become more apparent upon a study of the political movement which arose to nullify the decision to divide Bengal taken in 1905 by the then Viceroy, Lord Curzon. This decision spurred a fierce outpouring of Bengali nationalism across both sides of the newly created border. The movement it engendered has been lauded in nationalist historiography as the first instance of spontaneous resistance by common Bengalis against imperial politics. However, as the likes of Sekhar Bandopadhyay and Dwaipayan Sen has ably demonstrated, the movement didn't enjoy the full support of lower caste Bengalis, especially that of the Matuas, the vast majority of whose members belong to the *'Namasudra'* caste. They were considered lowly and 'unclean' and previously called by names such as*'Chandala'* and *'Dom'*, according to Risley (Risley, 1891, p. 184). The hagiographies of the great Matua leader Guruchand Thakur, son of the sect's founder Harichand Thakur, clearly show that he was opposed to the participation of lower castes in a movement which he viewed as an attempt by the wealthy upper castes to continue their domination in Bengal (Halder, 2009, p. 170). In one such passage, he is shown to express anger at his fellow caste members who were adopting *'Swadeshi'* measures and chastised them by saying that the *'Babus'* of Kolkata were coming to the doors of the *Namasudra*, which they have never done before, because their own interest was involved. As soon as their purpose was served, the *Namasudra* would be left to rot in the same misery that he had always faced (Ibid, p. 171). There is evidence that Guruchand

Thakur was successful in influencing his followers to stay away from the movement. Dwaipayan Sen mentioned that in parts of Barishal and Bakargunj, where the Matuas were present in large numbers; they refused to accept the dictates of the Congress and attempted to buy cheap Manchester clothes, instead of the costlier Khadi, resulting in clashes between Congress volunteers and the Matuas. It is interesting to note that much before this agitation took place, Risley was reporting in his famous 'The Tribes and Castes of Bengal', news of a section of the Namasudra caste not accepting rice or water from the upper castes and wearing shoes in defiance of them (Risley, 1892).The Matuas, under the leadership of Guruchand Thakur, became the first low caste group in Bengal to secure government positions (the first government employee being his own son), hostels for low caste students in Kolkata and an English medium school in his village run by Australian missionaries and supported by the British government. Moreover, he successfully convinced the British administration to change the caste name of the Matuas from the highly derogatory *'Chandala'* to *'Namasudra'* in the 1911 census, the name by which they are still known today. Such unprecedented success in the face of staunch opposition and derision from the upper castes led Guruchand Thakur to two conclusions. Firstly, that the British government was far more likely to fulfill the aspirations of the lower castes than the caste Hindu leadership of the Congress and secondly, that the only way for the Namasudra and other lower castes to break free of the shackles of the oppressions impose by the caste system is through western education which would enable them to find jobs under the British administration. Matuas already had a number of wealthy businessmen among their ranks as a result of both Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur's emphasis on business and commerce using the water routes of East Bengal. Now, with this newfound resolve and financial backing of these wealthy merchants, Matuas established thousands of small local schools all across east Bengal wherever their people lived. Guruchand Thakur emphasized the need to educate both Matua boys and girls, even if their families were facing economic hardship. He was quite revolutionary in his thinking for his time and his social situation. Matuas today

argue that he should have received the same importance in the history of Bengali renaissance as more celebrated figures like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, who is notable for his great zeal for spreading school education in Bengal. They state that Vidyasagar, considered a great humanist, nevertheless found it unnecessary to make school and college education accessible for lower caste children; as he feared that would upset the powerful upper castes to an extent where they would sabotage his project for introducing modern education altogether. School education, coupled with a strong community bonding, helped Matuas and generally, members of the Namasudra caste, to become the most politically aware of the non-elite castes of Bengal.

The two decades before independence is generally considered to be the most active period of nation-wide caste-based agitations and movements in the pre-Mandal era, and the Scheduled Castes of Bengal took an active part in this movement. Guruchand Thakur declared in a historic 1923 conference at Khulnathat Matuas need to be united and function as an organized political pressure group if they are to be counted seriously by the Indian ruling class. Their political significance was acknowledged by leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, who kept regular correspondence with Guruchand Thakur and Subhash Chandra Bose, who facilitated him in Kolkata. The 1932 Poona Pact between Gandhi and Ambedkar following Ramsay MacDonald's Communal Award ensured thirty seats in the Bengal Provincial Legislature for the Depresses Classes and this markedthe beginning of electoral politics of the *Namasudras*. After Guruchand Thakur's death in 1937, and his grandson Pramatha Ranjan Thakur remaining a Congress loyalist, Ambedkarite Jogendra Nath Mandal rose as the tallest leader of the *Namasudras* who founded the Bengal Provincial Scheduled Caste's Federation along with the formation of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation by B.R. Ambedkar in 1942. Jogendra Nath Mandal advocated Dalit unity against the Congress which he perceived as a Caste Hindu partyand proposed an understanding between the Dalits and Muslims of Bengal. Under his leadership, the first Dalit minister Mukunda Behari Mallick was installed in the cabinet of the first Fazlul

Haq ministry after 1937 general elections. But Mandal and his supporters started facing problems after the dissolution of the Haq ministry. The Muslim league ministry of Khwaja Nazimuddin was not overtly sympathetic to the cause of Dalit representation. Their political fortunes started eroding further after a vigorous campaign by Congress to project it as the party for all Indians including Dalits and the efforts of the Hindu Mahasabha for Hindu unity against Muslims. The 1946 elections took place against the backdrop of a looming threat of partition and creation of Pakistan which made lower caste Hindus apprehensive about the Federation's political line of friendship with the Muslim League and this resulted in poor showing in the 1946 elections for the Federation where Congress managed to win twenty-four of the thirty seats reserved for Scheduled Castes. Dwaipayan Sen has illustrated in his book on Jogendranath Mandal that the poor result was also contributed to by electoral fraud, rigging and intimidation by the Congress to ensure that their chosen candidates win in the reserved seats and did not represent the integration of Bengal's Scheduled Castes in the 'mainstream' of Indian politics as Partha Chatterjee and Sekhar Bandopadhyay both have suggested (Sen, 2018, p. 137). Sen also mentions how the Poona Pact was responsible for disenfranchising almost ninety percent of the Dalits in Bengal because of the property and education related requirements for determining eligibility to vote. Under a joint electorate system, such exclusions led to the caste Hindus enjoying the power to choose Scheduled Caste candidates palatable to them and this explains the extraordinarily good result of Congress (Ibid).

Considering the above, one may be curious to know what explains the contemporary political resurgence of caste politics in Bengal, spearheaded by the Matuas who are being courted by all major political parties. In order to find an answer, it is important to understand how the political aspirations of the lower castes living in mostly rural settings were effectively channelized and controlled during the Left Front era. This was achieved through a curious dual process of centralization and devolution of political power. On one hand, crucial decision-making powers were firmly concentrated in the hands of the party elite while

district and local level functionaries enjoyed considerable autonomy and power within a clearly designated sphere (Chatterjee, 2012, p. 70). On the other hand, complete politicization of the local self-government units was encouraged, where the common party supporter was able to fulfill his aspirations for political inclusion and received a taste of power. The Bengal peasantry, usually a mere spectator in the grand events of Indian politics, tasted power for the first time, albeit in a 'controlled' miniature. Besides vitiating the societal atmosphere of the Bengal village to an unprecedented degree, this led to the slow rise of a non-elite ruling class at the village level. This class, comprising working professionals, medium land owners and small businessmen gave a fillip to 'clean' Shudra castes of Bengal, who enjoy numerical majority among the Bengali Hindus.The political rise of the clean Shudras, comprising of both the landowning farmer castes of *Mahishya, Satchasi* and *Sadgopa* as well as the commercial castes such as *Subarnabanik* or *Kansabanik*, is directly responsible for the political re-awakening of the Matua community. While their resurgence was already being felt during the end phase of the Left Front's rule, the demise of that rule as well as that of the centralized command structure pervading every sphere of Bengali life, has given further impetus to the politicization of the Matuas. The leaders of the community have long shed any notions of inferiority vis a vis caste Hindus and proudly showcase their cultural and ritualistic differences rather than attempting to integrate with the Hindu society or attempting to be 'Sanskritized' in any way. In their pursuit of temporal power, the religious aspect of the Matua identity has become secondary for the leaders. The Thakur family, the descendants of Harichnad Thakur and keeper of the shrines at Thakurnagar, have broken up into two competing factions, both supporting different political parties. Matuas traditionally do not accept *'Guruvada'* and there is no concept of formal religious training under a Guru or teacher. As such, open participation of the Matua 'first family' into party politics has further diluted the religious aspect of the group's identity. It can be said with conviction now that the Matuas have been successful in transcending their 'subaltern' identity and have become part of the political mainstream of Bengal, changing the very nature of Bengali politics in its wake.

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GROWTH OF MAJORITARIAN POLITICS AS A COUNTER TO MINORITY POLITICS: THE CASE OF BARAK VALLEY FROM ASSAM

Monoj Kumar Nath

Introduction

The Barak valley is the only region from North-east India affected by the Partition at independence. Before independence, like the Brahmaputra valley, it also became a communal playground of the Muslim League. However, at the time of independence, unlike the Brahmaputra valley, it had to face the Sylhet Referendum, the only referendum in British India for communal division at independence.

Since the beginning of the 1940s till independence, the region was sharply divided between the nationalist movement of the Indian National Congress (INC) and the communal politics of the Muslim League. The Muslim League, which ruled Assam majorlybetween the 1937 and1946 provincial elections, designed to include Assam in Pakistan by increasing the Muslim population of the state through large-scale immigration of landless Muslims from East Bengal. As a result, the Brahmaputra valley experienced extensive Muslim immigration from that region under the aegis ofits provincial government. However, the design of the League to include Assam in Pakistan was defeated at independence. Consequently, Barak had to sacrifice a lot and had to bear the suffering of the Partition. As the British decided to divide India on communal lines, the Sylhet Referendum was held on 6 and 7 July 1947 in Sylhet to decide whether that district should remain a part of the province of Assam in India or go to Pakistan. The outcome of the referendum

was in favour of Sylhet's inclusion in Pakistan.While 56.6 per cent of the valid votes cast in the referendum were in favour of Sylhet's inclusion in Pakistan, 43.4 per cent were for an undivided Assam within India.As a result, the Sylhet district was awarded to Pakistan except three thanas of Patharkandi, Ratabari and Badarpur and about one-half of the thana of Karimganj (Guha, 2006, pp. 261-262). After independence, the loss of Sylhet at the hands of Pakistan always remained a bitter memory for the region.

Due to the communal division, the Barak valley has always remained communally sensitive and divided in the post-independence period. The division forced several lakhs of Hindu families to leave East Pakistan and become refugees in India. Along with West Bengal and Tripura, Assam also sheltered lakhs of those refugee families. In a letter sent on 22 June 1950 to Home Minister of India, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel,Assam Chief Minister Gopinath Bardoloi disclosed that his government already shouldered the responsibility of rehabilitating one lakh new refugees in addition to 1.25 lakh who had come one-and-a-half years ago, and some ten thousands of the earlier batch was already allotted land (Pisharoty, 2019, p. 259). Most of the refugee families settled in the Barak valley, as it was neighbouring to East Pakistan and Bengali was the language of the region. These refugees, settled anywhere in India, carried with them the bitter memory and sufferings of partition. Even after independence, the immigration of Hindus from East Pakistan to the Barak valley continued which has significantly contributed to keep the valley communally divided in the post-independence period. However, such communal divisions did not become electorally visible till the beginning of the Assam Movement due to the dominance of Congress in Assam politics in the absence of any political party that could challenge it. However, following the signing of Assam Accord (1985) that brought a closure to the Assam Movement, the formation of Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) as the representative of Assamese regionalism; the gaining of ground by the BJP nationally as a result of the Ram Mandir Movement; and the formation of AIUDF by the Assam unit of Jamiat-ul-ulema-E-Hind (Jamiat), a Muslim religious organisation, changed the electoral politics and equations of the valley significantly. In several occasions since the Assam Movementhad started, the valley started to show peculiar electoral

behaviour. It opposed the movement but supported Congress in the 1985 Assam assembly election, despite the fact that the party signed the Assam Accord.During that election, the valley people did not support the United Minority Front (UMF), whichwas formed by a section of leaders from the valley to oppose the accord. In the next election in 1991, the BJP registered surprising success and started its journey in Assam from the valley, while the party had to wait another decade to win from upper Assam of the Brahmaputra valley, which mainly determines the political equations of the Assam. In the 1996 elections, the valley, however, did not rally behind BJP as solidly as it did in 1991, although AGP was supported by Assam Jamiat in this election which influenced the Barak valley also. In the 2001 election, aligning with the BJP, the AGP could not repeat its performance of the previous election in the valley when it had aligned with Jamiat. Even the BJP could not be benefitted in the valley from its alliance with AGP. After AUDF was formed in 2005 under the patronage of Assam Jamiat, the valley experienced the coming of a new wave of communal politics in the 2006 election. However, despite the growing strength of the AIUDF, in 2011 assembly election, Congress swept the valley, while BJP, for the first time after 1991 election, had to draw a blank, and AIUDF could get only one seat. Finally, in the 2016 assembly election, the Barak valley showed a clear polarisation between the BJP and AIUDF.

It should be noted that the Barak valley showed peculiar electoral behaviour than the Brahmaputra valley even before independence. In this regard we can cite the example of 1946 provincial election. In the provincial elections held in Assam in 1937 and 1946, 34 seats were reserved for the Muslims. By the 1946 election, the Muslim League emerged as the political platform for the Assam Muslims. In this election, the party won 31 seats out of the total of 34 seats. The rests were won by Jamiat, the Deoband School of Islamic theology, which supported Congress's view of independence and opposed communal division of India demanded by the League. Out of the 34 seats reserved for Muslims, 18 were from present Assam, 16 were from Sylhet. In both the elections, Congress could not win even from a single constituency reserved for Muslims. Among the three seats won by Jamiat, only one was from present Assam. Abdul Matlib Majumdar won from the Hailakandi constituency of the Barak valley as a Jamiat candidate.

In this election, while even the Muslims from upper Assam of the Brahmaputra valley, who are mainly indigenous Muslims1 and live far away from Sylhet, supported the League for a communal division, and the Muslims from Hailakandi, adjacent to Sylhet, supported Jamiat for an undivided India.

Barak Valley's Religious Equations

The Barak valley, named after the river Barak, consists of three southern administrative districts (Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj) of Assam. The valley occupies around nine per cent of land mass of Assam (total 78,438 sq km) while 11.62 per cent of total population of the state (total 31.20 million according to 2011 census) live here. Almost equal number of Hindus and Muslims live in the valley as per the 2011 census (Hindus: 49.99 per cent; Muslims: 48.14 per cent)[2] which has made the region interesting in contemporary political discourse because of the success of religion-based political parties. In 1951, the percentage of Hindu and Muslim population of the valley (the then Cachar district) was 60.6 and 38.5, respectively. In the post-independence period, both Hindus and Muslims have been illegally immigrating to entire Assam because of porous Indo-Pakistan and then Indo-Bangladesh border, and a section of these immigrants have settled in the Barak valley. Because of the continuous immigration of Muslims to Assam and very high growth rate among these East Bengal-origin Muslims, the Muslim population in the Barak valley, like in the Brahmaputra valley, has risen abnormally in comparison to Hindus in subsequent decades after independence[3].

As the growth of Muslim population is faster than other communities, the electoral equations of the valley have significantly changed in favour of Muslims. At present, among the total 15 assembly constituencies of the valley, five are Muslim majority, and the community can decisively influence the outcome of other four constituencies[4].

Assam Elections (1951-1983) and Congress-Barak Alliance

Since the first Assam assembly election until the seventh assembly election held in 1983, Congress dominated the Barak as well as the Brahmaputra valleys. Congress lost power in the state in the 1978 election, and in the 1983 election,

which was held amidst the Assam Movement. In all the seven elections, except the one held in 1983, the Barak valley's electoral behaviourwas ordinary and similar to the Brahmaputra valley. From 1951 to 1972, Congress dominated polls in the valley (Table I).

Table: I

Performance of Congress in the Barak Valley in Assam Assembly Elections (1951-1972)

Assam Assembly Election	No. of total Constituencies	No. of constituencies Congress won
1951	14	13
1957	13	10
1962	13	9
1967	14	10
1972	14	14

Source : www.eci.gov.in

The number of assembly constituency in the Barak valley was fixed at 15 before the 1978 elections, and it remained the same in the following elections. Congress lost power in Assam, for the first time in the post-independence history, in this election held after the internal Emergency (1975-1977). Congress was defeated in Assam only because of the party's division nationally into INC and INC (I) just before the election. It can be said so because, in the Lok Sabha elections held in 1977, while Congress fared very poorly in most of the states, it won 10 of total 14 parliamentary constituencies in Assam. From the Barak valley, in the 1978 election, while INC won from three constituencies, INC (I) won from two. Both the factions of the Congress together polled more votes in three constituencies than the winning candidates. The performance of the party in Barak in this election was almost similar to its performance in the other valley of the state.

However, the Barak valley showed a totally different electoral behaviour compared to the Brahmaputra valley in the 1983 election. This election was held amidst the Assam Movement, in an extraordinary situation. It was held forcefully by the central government as the leaders of the Assam Movement opposed and boycotted it. As a result, violence marred the election and thousands had to sacrifice their lives in election-related clashes. Election could not be held in 17 constituencies from the Brahmaputra valley because of the absence of contesting candidates. From four constituencies, candidates (all from INC) won unopposed. It should be noted that by the time of the Assam assembly election of 1983, the INC (I) which was led by Mrs. Gandhi in the 1978 assembly election, became the INC. The 1983 Assam assembly election was held only in 105 constituencies, and many ethnic Assamese communities who supported the movement boycotted it. In several ethnic Assamese dominated constituencies from the Brahmaputra valley where election was held, the voting percentage was extremely low, even below one per cent. In a sharp contrast to this, election was held peacefully in all 15 constituencies from the Barak valley and people participated in huge numbers. While the average polling percentage of all 105 constituencies was only 32.74, the average polling percentage of the Barak valley constituencies was 62.63. In this election, the Barak valley supported the Congress overwhelmingly, and the party won from 12 constituencies. The almost opposite electoral behaviour of the Barak valley to the Brahmaputra valley in this election is understandable. The Assam Movement was concentrated mainly in the Brahmaputra valley, and it did not have much influence the Barak valley. Moreover, Bengali Hindus and Muslims from the Barak valley strongly opposed it. As a result, they participated in the election and supported Congress hugely which had opposed the movement.

It is evident that Congress overwhelmingly dominated the electoral politics of the Barak valley till the 1983 assembly elections with the minor exception in 1978 election, that too because of the parallel division of the party. It is well-known that Congress did not have a formidable opposition party nationally as well as in Assam (at least till 1978), which helped it to continue its influence over the

electorates of the Barak valley. Still, it is interesting that Congress managed to become a common platform of both Hindus and Muslims from the valley despite the fact that communal division at independence left a legacy of political distrust between the communities. The religion-based political parties could not make any inroads into this communally divided region during this period.

In the 1951 Assam assembly election, All India Bharatiya Jana Sangha (BJS) and Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha (HMS) contested. Of the total three seats contested by BJS, two (Lakhipur and Silchar) were from the Barak valley (the other was Shillong). The party could not secure more than seven per cent of the votes polled in those two seats. HMS fielded candidate only from Shillong, now the capital of Meghalaya. After this election, Jan Sangh (JS) contested from four constituencies in the 1962 Assam assembly election and none was from the Barak valley. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh contested from 20 constituencies in the 1967 Assam election, of which only four were from the Barak valley. In two constituencies (Udharbond and Borkhola), the party was runners up, although its performance in other two constituencies (Silchar and Katigora) was dismal. The last Assam assembly election that BJS contested was in 1972, where it put candidates in only three constituencies and there was no candidate from the Barak valley. After the BJP was formed in 1980, it did not contest the 1983 Assam assembly election, supporting the boycott call of the Assam Movement leaders. During this period, a Muslim political party, Eastern India Muslim Association (EIMA), emerged in 1977 to look after the political and economic interests of the Muslims in the state. It contested the 1978 Assam election and disappeared just after the election. The party did not have any influence over the Muslims of the Barak valley.

After independence, the Congress came to power both at the centre and in Assam and got an opportunity to form a political alliance with both the Hindus and Muslims of the Barak valley. These alliances, of course, were formed under different circumstances created by the Partition. Let us first try to understand the

Congress alliance with the Hindu Bengalis of the valley. After independence, the Hindu Bengalis from the valley were not at all satisfied with the Assam Congress led by Assamese leaders from the Brahmaputra valley. The Bengalis in Assam strongly believed that the Sylhet Referendum happened only because of the Assamese Congress leadership. They believed that AssameseCongress leaders under Gopinath Bardoloi wanted the transfer of Sylhet to Pakistan to get rid of the Muslim domination and so they agreed to the referendum. However, this popular impression is wrong, becausethereferendum was agreed to by the Congress Working Committee, and even Hindu Bengali Congress leaders from Sylhet like Basanta Kumar Das did not oppose it (Pisharoty, 2019, p. 254).

Although the Bengalis were not satisfied with the Congress leaders of Assam, they aligned with the party after independence because of the proactive role of Congress central leadership in settling the Hindu refugees in Assam after the Partition of the country. There was a huge influx of Hindu Bengalis from East Pakistan to Assam just after the Partition, and the state shouldered the burden of lakhs of immigrants. At that time Gopinath Bardoloi communicated to Prime Minister Nehru that independence of the country had made little difference to the problem of influx of migrants to Assam. He argued that not much land was available to settle droves of Hindu refugees and Muslim immigrants arriving from East Pakistan. Nehru reacted angrily and compelled the Assam government to settle the Hindu refugees (Deka, 2015, pp. 37–39). However, Bardoloi continued his demand that illegal immigrants should be expelled from Assam. Only because of the repeated demands of Bardoloi, the central government under Nehru enacted the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950. The act was to expel 'certain immigrants' from Assam. By using such categorisation, the central government very tactfully prevented the identification of a Hindu Bengali as an illegal immigrant. This type of gestures convinced the Hindu Bengalis of Assam that the central leadership of Congress was really concerned about their interests. This realisation made them to rally behind the party although they were apprehensive about the party's Assamese leadership in the state.

The Partition on communal line also contributed to an alliance between the Congress and the Muslims from the Barak valley. Although Assam had become a battleground between the Congress and the Muslim League before the independence, the state did not experience any major communal clash till independence. However, after independence, in March 1950, Assam experienced a major communal clash between the Hindus and Muslims in lower Assam of the Brahmaputra valley, where nearly a lakh Muslim immigrants had to quit riot affected areas for East Pakistan in search of security (Guha, 2006, p. 271).Most of these displaced immigrant Muslims returned to Assam after the Nehru-Liaquat Pact was signed in April 1950. However, the communal clash made the entire Muslims community in Assam to realise that security was their main concern, and they sought to minimiseit by aligning themselves with the Congress, which had become the sole political party in India after independence.

The communal clash exposed the vulnerability of Muslims in a Hindu majority Assam. After independence, the Assam Provincial Muslim League was dissolved in June 1948 and several prominent leaders of the party, including Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, the most prominent leader from East Bengal-origin Muslim community, created a peculiar situation for the Assam Muslims where they felt vulnerable. Against this backdrop, the Muslims of Assam did not have any other option but to supportthe Congress. Before the first Assam assembly election of 1951, there were hectic activities of Muslim leaders from both the Congress and former Muslim League to form an alliance between the Congress and the Muslims of Assam. While the former premier of Assam under the Muslim League,Muhammad Saadulla,tried to create the atmosphere for the*enmasse* joining of Muslims into Congress, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed from Congress acted as the interlocutor in the whole process. Saadulla joined Congress before the 1951election, and he claimed that the Muslims of Assam joined Congress *enmasse.* However, the alliance took place between the Congress and the one-time Muslim League leaders. The Congress realised that support of Saadullaalone was not enough to get the support of entire Muslims of the state as he was an indigenous Muslim and

did not have much influence among the East Bengal-origin Muslims. In view of this, Congress took the help of Jamiat to influence the entire Muslim community of Assam to lend their support to Congress. The party even imported Muslim religious leaders of Jamiat from Cachar and Uttar Pradesh to create its support base among the Muslims of Brahmaputra valley (Hoque, 2007, p. 310). This provided Jamiat a new lease of life in the politics of Assam after independence whose influence over the Muslims in Assam was nominal before independence. The patronage of the Congress party and its government in Assam to Jamiat helped it to occupythe space vacated by the Muslim League. Till the Assam Movement, Jamiat worked as an agent of the Congress to gather Muslim votes for the party.

After Assam Movement: 'Peculiarities' and Rise of BJP

The Assam Movement and Assam Accord brought significant changes to the existing political order of entire Assam. Although the Barak valley was not much influenced by the movement, the accord ushered in phenomenal political changes to the valley in the post-Assam Movement period. The movement strongly attacked the negligence of the state to the continuous illegal immigration of both Hindus and Muslims from the erstwhile East Pakistan and present Bangladesh which had threatened the identity and existence of indigenous population of Assam. As a result of the movement, the Assam Accord was signed and it fixed a cut-off date (24 March 1971) for Assam,which meant that any immigration after that date from neighbouring countries to Assam would be treated as illegal. Moreover, the clause 6 of the accord provided forconstitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to the Assamese people for protecting their cultural, social and linguistic identity and heritage. Although the movement was not taken seriously by the Barak valley, the accord emerged a big threat to both the Hindus and Muslims of the valley. A large section of both the communities had recently immigrated after independence; therefore, they started to see the accord as a future threat to their citizenship. Moreover, the idea of 'Assamese people' excludedthe Barak valley. The accord immensely contributed to make future political equations of the valley different from the previous period after independence.

1985 Election

After the Assam Accord, the leaders of the Assam Movement formed the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a regional political party. Several organisations led by immigrant Muslims and Hindu Bengalis like Citizens' Right Preservation Committee (CRPC)[5], All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU), All Assam Minority Front, All Assam Minority Yuva Parishad, Assam unit of Jamiat etc., which had opposed themovement, constitutedthe United Minority Front (UMF), a regional political party, with an objective to protect the minorities of Assam from the anticipated perils that might arise out of the accord. The CRPC, led mainly by Hindu Bengalis, was the chief force behind the party. In the meantime, BJP central leaders also tried to make inroads into Assam by actively supporting and participating in the Assam Movement. The party contested the 1985 Assam assembly election, fielding 37 candidates. These developments signalled big political challenges for the Congress whichhad been dominating the politics in the state until then in the absence of a strong opposition party. The Janata Party, formed in Assam before the 1978 assembly elections, emerged as a big threat to the Congress; however, the party was a conglomeration of leaders from different ideologies which started to crumble soon after its victory in the election.

The AGP won the 1985 assembly election and formed its first government in Assam. The Barak valley exhibited very peculiar electoral behaviour in the election; it overwhelmingly supported the Congress, which performed poorly in the Brahmaputra valley. Of the total 25 seats won by the party, 10 were from the Barak valley. The performance of the partyin the Barak valley was noteworthy because both Hindu and Muslim Bengalis of the valley were dissatisfied with Congress asit was part to the Assam Accord. The dissatisfaction lies in the fact that the valley overwhelmingly supported the Congress in the election held in 1983, responding the call of the party to lend their support to opposing the movement. But two years later, the same Congress-led central government signed the Assam Accord which brought a sense of betrayal to these communities. Still,the valley supported the party in the election of 1985. The situation becomes even more

peculiar when the question of UMF comes. The UMF was formed mainly by the leaders from the Barak valley, and it was an alliance between the Hindu Bengalis and East Bengal-origin Muslims against the betrayal of Congress and to counter the Assam Accord and the newly formed AGP. In this election, UMF showed surprising success by winning 17 seats. But it could not win a single seat from the Barak valley.

The Hindu Bengalis from Barak largely voted for Congress in this election and dumped UMF, a partyset up and led by their own leaders as a response to the Assam Accord. It was because, although CRPC leaders took the lead to form the party, the main constituents of the party were Muslims student organisations and the Jamiat. This discouragedthe Bengalis from the Barak valley to support UMF in this election. They, without an alternative, supported Congress despite strong dissatisfaction towards it. On the other hand, the Muslims of the valley did not support the UMF as it was led by a Hindu Bengali dominated organisation—the CRPC. This clearly shows that communal considerations on the part of both Hindus and Muslims helped Congress in the Barak valley in this election. Another factor that helped the party in the entire Barak valley was the Illegal Migrant (Determination by Tribunal) [IM(DT)]Act, 1983. This was an act enacted by the Congress-led central government during the Assam Movement in an attempt to safeguard the interests of the recently immigrated communities in Assam. After the act was enacted, the Congress leadership intensely campaigned in Assam that it was a safeguard to the minorities living in the state. The act was not withdrawn during the singing of the Assam Accord, although the movement leaders repeatedly demanded for it. This helped Congress significantly in this election to convince the people from the valley that their interests could not be hampered by the accord in the presence of the act.

1991 Election

The Barak valley showed remarkably peculiar electoral behaviour in this election by handing the BJP nine victories in15 seats it contested election in the valley. The party won a total of 10 seats (the other seat was the Dhubri constituency

from lower Assam of the Brahmaputra valley). The Congress managed to win only four seats from the valley although it won thisassembly election comfortably.The BJP started its political journey in Assam on the back of its stellar performance in the Barak valley in this election. The party managed to win from upper Assam of the Brahmaputra valley only in the 2001 assembly election.

The BJP could not win any seat from the Barak valley (contested from four constituencies) in the 1985 assembly election, as it had actively supported the Assam Movement. However, by the 1991 election, the failure of the AGP-led government and the disintegration of the party significantly eroded the political importance of the Assam Accord. The Barak valley Hindus had supported Congress in the previous election despite their strong reservation towards the party's role in signing the Assam Accord, and they waited for an opportunity to punish it electorally. The BJP, by the 1991 election, started to gain ground nationally because of the Ram Temple movement. The Barak valley Hindus, in this election, accepted BJP as an alternative to Congress. However, the factor which created a situation favourable for the BJP was the Jamiat. As has been mentioned earlier, Jamiat, till the 1983 election, silently worked as an agent of Congress during elections to assemble Muslim votes. In the 1985 elections, it stood against Congress and formed the UMF under CRPC. However, after this election, Jamiat alienated itself from UMF. In the 1991 election, it openly lent its support to Congress. This was the first time Jamiat openly supported any political party in Assam assembly elections. The open support to Congress drove away a section of Hindu voters from it who rallied behind the BJP.

1996 Election

The behaviour of the Barak valley in the 1996 election also was peculiar. In this election, Congress lost power and AGP formed its second government in the state. In the Barak valley, a significant portion of the Hindus came back from BJP to Congress's fold,and consequently Congress's tally of seats rose to seven from four andBJP's tally declined to four from nine from the previous election.

The reason was that, in this election, Jamiat openly supported the AGP-led coalition against Congress. To prevent the AGP-led coalition from coming to power, they did not have any option but to support the Congress. In this election, the Muslim voters also became conscious of the electoral move of the Hindus. As a result, the coalition led by AGP won four seats from the valley. It should be noted that the electoral support of the Jamiat to AGP-led coalition itself was very interesting,because it had vehemently opposed both the Assam Movement and Assam Accord. A significant portion of the Barak valley Muslims supported AGP at the behest of the Jamiat, although both the Hindus and Muslims from the valley had treated the party as a threat when it was formed just one decade back.

2001 Election

The outcome of this election in the Barak valley again reflected curious electoral behaviour. In this election, BJP and AGP formed a pre-poll electoral alliance and Jamiat lent support to Congress. At that point of time, the BJP-led NDA under A.B.Vajpayee was in power at the centre. Still, BJP won only four constituencies from the valley. In the absence of Jamiat's support, AGP managed to win only one constituency from the valley. Congress's tally of seats from the valley declined to five from seven from the previous election. The remaining five seats were won by independents (2), Samajwadi Party (SP; 1), Samata Party (SAP; 1) and All India Trinamool Congress (AITC; 1).

The Congress won this election comfortably. But the Barak valley was totally divided. Although Congress fared well in the Brahmaputra valley due to the support of Jamiat, it could not replicate the same performance in the other valley. A section of the Hindu voters again deserted Congress due to the Jamiat factor. The Muslim voters also did not stand solidly behind the party despite Jamiat's support. Moreover, Jamiat's credibility among a big section of the Muslim voters declined due to its erratic electoral strategy of supporting different parties in subsequent assembly elections. On the other hand, BJP was not supported by a section of Hindu Bengalis because of its electoral alliance with AGP. These electoral

calculations made both the Hindus and Muslims from the valley divided in this election. As a result, even parties like SP, SAP and AITC won from the valley which could not influence the electorates of the Brahmaputra valley much. The Barak valley had not showed such fractured mandate in the post-independence history like in this election.

2006 Election

In May 2005, the Supreme Court of India repealed the IM(DT) Act, 1983. The Assam Jamiat, in response, formed a new political outfit, Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF), by bringing together several Muslim organisations of the state. It was formed against the alleged negligence of the Congress-led central and Assam governments in repealing the act, and to safeguard the interests of the minorities in the post-IM(DT) situation. By forming the AUDF, the Assam unit of Jamiat started to play a direct political role in the state. The AUDF is the first political party formed by Jamiat after it became non-political following the Partition and independence. In Assam, it emerged as a purely Muslim political party after the EIMA. The UMF, formed in 1985, cannot be called as a purely Muslim political party.

Because of the emergence of the AUDF, the electoral politics of the Barak valley started to get communally polarised. The valley, in 2006 election, witnessed a triangular contest among AUDF, BJP and Congress. The outcome of the election was also surprising. While Congress got six seats—highest among any contenders—the BJP secured five, and newly formed AUDF claimed three. From the electoral outcome, two things emerged which were peculiar to the valley. The first is the success of the AUDF. Its tremendous performance, just within months of the formation of the party, was helped by EIMA not having any presence in the valley and the UMF's inability to influence the Muslims of the valley. AUDF won from three constituencies out of the 12 it fought election in the valley, while it garnered another seven seats from the rest of Assam(they contested from a total of 69 constituencies in entire Assam). The factor which mainly contributed to

their success was that it was purely a Muslim political party and Jamiat patronised it. The EIMA was not supported by Jamiat and could not sustain itself for long. In case of UMF, although Jamiat became a part of its formation, the party was led mainly by Hindu Bengali leaders in the 1985 election.

The other peculiarity was that even after the strong presence of AUDF with the support of Jamiat, the BJP won five seats from the valley. This indicates that Hindu votes were not polarised. It was because, like other parts of the state, in this election, AUDF was not taken seriously by the non-Muslimsvoters in the valley. While a large chunk of Muslim voters deserted Congress and rallied behind AUDF, the non-Muslim voters were divided between Congress and others. As the Congress lost the Muslim votes, it failed to get majority in this election and had to ally with Bodo Peoples Front (BPF), a Bodo ethnic political party, to form its second consecutive government in the state. The non-Muslims of entire Assam started to take AUDF seriously only after it got 10 seats in this election.

2011 Election

In this election, the AIUDF (AUDF relaunched itself as AIUDF in 2009), like the other parts of the state, was taken very seriously by the Barak valley. But what was surprising was that BJP, which had a strong support base in the valley, could not win a single seat. Congress dominated this election in the valley and won 13 seats, highest in the post-Assam Movement period. Despite the religious polarisation, AIUDF won only one seat from the valley although it emerged as the main opposition party in the Assam Legislative Assembly after winning 18 seats.

The BJP's defeat in all 15 constituencies in this election, which it had been winning at least four seats in the subsequent elections since 1991, was peculiar in the light of religious polarisation against AIUDF. It was due to the Congress strategy of soft-Hindutva against AIUDF. Since the formation of AUDF, Congress Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi bitterly criticised the party and its leader Ajmal as communal. He even, in public meetings, used to question the identity of Ajmal, an

East Bengal-origin person, a religious leader of high esteem and the president of Assam Jamiat. This made Gogoi the warrior against the Muslim communalism of AIUDF. And to contain the growth of Muslim communalism under AIUDF, the Congress was widely supported by non-Muslims from both the valleys of Assam(Nath, 2019, p.39). As a result, Congress won 78 seats in this election, against 53 in the previous election, and formed the third consecutive government in Assam under Tarun Gogoi. To help Congress to contain AIUDF, the Barak valley Hindus did not rally behind BJP,which did not have much influence in the other valley.

Although AIUDF was patronised by Jamiat, in three assembly elections it contested till 2016, the party could not get more than 13 per cent of the total votes polled despite the fact that Muslims consisted of more than one-third population of Assam. This means, the influence of the Jamiat over Assam Muslims is not absolute. A large section of Muslims hasalways remained with Congress because of its secular character. In this election, the Muslim voters from Barak remained sharply divided between Congress and AIUDF which affected the latter. It happened because the party in favour of which the support of the Hindus was going, was Congress, not any communal political party.

2016 Election

The communal division of the Barak valley clearly exhibited in this election. Among the 15 seats of the valley, BJP won 8, AIUDF 4 and Congress 3. The story of this election was simple than the previous elections. The emergence of AIUDF as the main opposition party in Assam Legislative Assembly after the 2011 election threatened the non-Muslims of the state of losing political dominance at the hands of Muslims who are increasingly becoming dominant in electoral equations of the state because of their fast-growing population. In the meantime, the BJP showed unprecedented success under Narendra Modi in the 2014 Lok Sabha election. The third term of Gogoi led Congress government, at the same time, also started to face two major problems:anti-incumbency and the defection of few very active

young leaders to BJP. Against such backdrop, the soft Hindutva of Tarun Gogoi was taken over by the BJP. Just before the 2016 election, the BJP smartly formed electoral alliances with AGP, BPF and few tribal organisations of the state. The result was that the BJP-led alliance won the election with more than two-third majority (86 seats).

The 2016 election was communally polarised in entire Assam. The Barak valley also was no exception. As a consequence, the AIUDF won from four constituencies of the valley, highest in the last three elections, and against just one in the previous election. In this election, while the number of seats won by AIUDF from the Brahmaputra valley declined to nine from 17 in the previous election, the Barak valley showed a rise of AIUDF. However, in this election, even after clear communal polarisation, AIUDF could manage to win only four constituencies from the valley despite the fact that it has at least nine constituencies where Muslims can be a determinant factor. It was, again, because of the division of Muslim votes between AIUDF and Congress. From among eight seats, BJP won from the valley in this election, the division of votes between Congress and AIUDF directly helped it to gain four seats (Patharkandi, Sonai, Udharbond and Katigora).

Conclusion

Despite the Hindu Bengalis' dislike towards the Assamese-led state leadership of Congress, both the Hindus and Muslims of the Barak valley became a support base of the party because of the pro-immigrant policies of its consecutive central governments. However, the Assam Movement brought about a significant change to the Congress-Barak electoral alliance. The post-Assam Movement assembly elections, particularly the ones held in 1985, 1991 and 1996, showed peculiar electoral behaviour of the valley compared to the Brahmaputra valley. The Barak valley exhibited interesting electoral behaviour in the other assembly elections held during this period. The BJP started its success story in Assam from the valley in the 1991 election. As a response, the AIUDF has also influenced the valley Muslims heavily. The 2016 Assam assembly election had shown complete

religious polarisation between the Hindus and Muslims in the valley which started in 1991with the rise of BJP. The outcomes of the elections held after the Assam Movement in the valley have always been heavily influenced by communal divisions even when Congress had comfortably won the valley constituencies. The electoral behaviour of the valley in this period reflects the legacy of communal division of the region at the time of independence.

Notes:

1. The Muslims in Assam can be divided into two broad categories on the basis of their time of immigration into the state: indigenous and immigrant. The Muslims who had immigrated to Assam until the state was taken over by British in 1826 are known as indigenous Muslims. On the other hand, Muslims who immigrated to the state during the British colonialism and until24 March 1971after independence are known as immigrant Muslims. Notably, the Assam Accord (1985) fixed 24 March 1971 as the cut-off date for the identification and deportation of illegal foreigners living in the state of Assam. Theimmigrant Muslims are also known as East Bengal-origin Muslims, as they were immigrated mainly from East Bengal under British colonialism and then East Pakistan after independence. Here, we have used the term East Bengal-origin Muslims to denote this group of Muslims.

2. Of Assam's total population as per the 2011 census report, Hindus and Muslims account for61.46 and 34.22 per cent, respectively.

3. Percentage of Muslim population in Assam in different census after independence: 1951- 24.68, 1961-25.26, 1971-24.56, 1991-28.43, 2001-30.92, 2011-34.22. Census was not conducted in Assam in 1981 because of the Assam Movement.

4. The Muslim dominated constituencies—Karimganj South, Badarpur, Hailakandi, Algapur and Sonai (Ahmed, 2018, p. 34). The constituencies where Muslim voters are decisive are Katigora, Borkhola, North Karimganj and Katlichera (Nath, 2015, pp. 151–153).

5. After the partition of India, a Bengali Hindu forum, known as the Indian Citizens' Rights Preservation Committee (ICRPC), was formed by the displaced persons from East Pakistan who had settled in Assam. During the Assam Movement, it also inducted immigrant Muslim members to its fold to fight against the movement and renamed itself as CRPC (Ahmed, 1999, pp. 149–151).

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CHINA-INDIA CONTESTATIONS: TOWARDS A GREATER STRATEGIC TUSSLE

Netajee Abhinandan

Introduction

There is perceptible deterioration in India's relations with China since the Galwan clash in June 2020. The conflicts and contestations that have ensued between the two neighbours in the wake of bitter dispute in Ladakh should not be viewed merely as a bilateral border row, but rather as part of the evolving power-tussle that might very well spill over affecting peace and order in Asia. The tussle stems primarily from China's push towards initiating a Sino-centric regional order in Asia and India's efforts to safeguard its strategic interests in its own backyard, especially in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). In this context, the growing significance of the 'Indo-Pacific' as a geo-strategic narrative must be factored in to analyze its impact not only on India-China relations, but on the overall security atmosphere in the entire region. The promotion of this narrative is part of the American efforts to formalize a strong and cohesive platform to counter China in concert with countries like India, Japan and Australia who are troubled by Chinese moves to consolidate its unilateral maritime control in the IOR. The move to institutionalize the Quad and expand its ambit by including new members and create some sort of consensus against China's expansionist policies and its violation of international norms can be considered as aligned features of this strategy. The proposed paper would endeavour to contextualize China's 'rise' and decode the

dynamics of evolving restructuring of power-relations in the Indo-Pacific region. It would also examine the challenges that India has to contend with as it seeks to play a proactive role in Asian politics.

Though the tensions that arose in the wake of this bloody clash have subsided to some extent, the disagreements persist resulting in the continuance of an atmosphere of uncertainty and anxiety in the bordering areas. The Galwan clash, in many ways, symbolized the deep levels of distrust and animosity that have been simmering for quite some time between the two neighbours behind the façade of normalcy and constructive engagement. The fact that they have not been able to sort out their differences despite having series of deliberations and negotiations at the top levels of politico-security establishment during last one and half years reflect the vulnerabilities of the bilateral ties. While the channels of negotiations are open between the two countries, China has brought Land Border Law for the management of its borders with fourteen countries, which might have serious repercussions for India's claims over the contested areas. China's unfounded claims over Indian Territory in both the eastern and western fronts of the border could be seen as part of its sinister strategy to expand its territory surreptitiously at the expense of its undoubting neighbours. To counter China and its expansionist moves, it is imperative to think beyond defence strategies and decode the strategic philosophy that guides Chinese behaviour.

It was during Prime Minister Vajpayee's China visit in June 2003, the decision to appoint Special Representatives to resolve border disputes was taken with the hope that such a mechanism would provide the much needed political impetus to the negotiations and help in bringing a closure to the long standing conflict between the two neighbours. Since 2003, a total number of 22 rounds of talks have been held between the Special Representatives of two sides. In terms of constructive engagement, India has traversed a long path starting from Brajesh Mishra to Ajit Doval without achieving a single point of resolution. Despite India's push for a time-bound and mutually acceptable resolution of all the outstanding

disputes, China has remained mostly non-committal on the border question. It seems China does not want any resolution in the first place. China's evasive approach towards border-resolution is a well-calculated strategic ploy to keep India on the tenterhooks.

China's aggression against India in Galwan valley of Ladakh on 15 June, which resulted in the death of twenty Indian soldiers, should not, in any way, be considered as a sudden outburst emanating from any misunderstanding regarding the management of border areas. It was rather a well-calibrated move-part of China's grand strategy as it is evolving to the utter dismay of international community- to expand its territory surreptitiously through deceit and deception, establish Sino-centric regional order in Asia and challenge the US supremacy in world affairs. For long, China had been at pains to convince the world that its dramatic rise must be seen as 'peaceful' and it does not pose any threat to any country as it moves up the ladder of modernization. However, the recent policies and incidents suggest that the 'peaceful rise' dictum has been shunned by Xi regime to realize the 'Chinese Dream' that is nothing but the Chinese euphemism for 'hegemony'. To achieve this, China, of late, has adopted coercive or offensive diplomacy against countries like India, Australia, and United States that is being dubbed as 'wolf-warrior diplomacy. This new approach, gaining ground inside China, signals a transition of Chinese diplomacy from conservative, passive, and low-key to assertive, proactive, and high-profile.

Indo-Pacific: The New Strategic Paradigm

The world politics is going through a transition in the wake of rapidly changing power relations and the emergence of geo-strategic conflicts between the major powers. The reluctance of the U.S. to play an active role in the conflict zones, the emergence of China both as a challenger and proponent of alternative political order, the fissures within the European Union and demands from countries like India and Japan for inclusion into the (global) decision making structures and processes have created significant challenges for the global political order. There

is a sense of uncertainty that pervades the global political scene as there is a steady rise in conflicts and contestations across different regions of the world that involve not only regional players but dominant players like the U.S., Russia and China. Nowhere this conflict is more apparent than the Indo-Pacific, where there is intense contestation over resources and territories. The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the newest and yet the most volatile theater of power-rivalry between 'big' powers who are at loggerheads to expand their control and influence across the region.

China is very much perturbed by the strengthening of Indo-Pacific paradigm as it challenges China's predominance in the maritime spheres of the region and counters Chinese efforts to establish unipolar control over maritime resources and trade routes. As a strategic narrative it has helped in bringing all those countries of Asia and Europe together who perceive China as a threat to the established international order and democratic norms governing global commons. Much to the consternation of China, 'Indo-Pacific'-as a strategic construct-has gained substantial ground in recent days. It has since been embraced by all the major players who have been equally wary of China's rise and its expansionist policies. Key European countries like France, Germany have come out in the open strongly supporting this new strategic construct that allows more leverage to them to use maritime routes and resources. Most notably, the ASEAN-most of whose members have intensive engagements with China- also adopted 'Indo-Pacific Outlook' in open endorsement of the strategy in 2019. The very term Indo-Pacific— referring to the nations bordering the Indian and Pacific Oceans—is the manifestation of the maritime dimension of the issues confronting the region that connects Europe and the Americas with Asia. This way, the Indo-Pacific is a key geostrategic and economic area not only for the littoral states, but also for the US, the EU, as well as other great powers outside the region. However, China is not comfortable with the advancement of this new framework as it fears losing control and influence in the region.

China is keen to initiate a new regional order in Asia that would not only establish its predominance but also allow it to have greater control over trade and resources in the region. Despite protests from countries like Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam and adverse international judicial pronouncement, China has solidified its control over the South China and East China Seas, and moved swiftly to militarize the whole region. Using its economic prowess, it has made deep inroads into countries surrounding the Indian Ocean like Pakistan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives, by launching huge infrastructural projects under initiatives like the BRI. China's large economic projects in the Indian Ocean, mostly ports, roads and airports, being referred to as the 'string of pearls' stretching from the South China Sea to Pakistan, have allowed it to enhance its strategic presence along the region's key sea lines of communications (SLOCs) while guaranteeing access to developing markets and international trade.

In addition, in recent months, China has intensified its drive to claim territory—both land and maritime—against India, Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei, Taiwan, Malaysia, Japan, Indonesia and Bhutan leading to conflicts and contestations. With the US hardening its stand against China, and India fighting hard to counter Chinese territorial claims, conflict—either between China and the US or India—looks more likely than ever. The US considers the Indo-Pacific as a priority theatre which can in no way be allowed to be dominated by any power unfriendly towards Washington. It has been very vocal in calling for a 'free and open' Indo-Pacific, and deriding China for its obtrusive policies and actions in the region. The US is keen to work closely with India to maintain 'strategic stability' in the Indo-Pacific and establish a rules-based democratic order that would accommodate the interests of all the littoral countries, especially its long-standing allies in Southeast Asia, as well as Japan and South Korea. After outlining a set of maritime security principles under 'Joint Strategic Vision for Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean Region' in 2015,[1] India and the U.S. have moved forward in cementing their maritime partnership by finalizing a number of key agreements that include Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), and the

Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement(COMCASA). Through these agreements, both the countries intend to enhance their logistical cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and also counter China's growing naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). However, India and the U.S. are yet to have a joint structural architecture to face the Chinese challenge.

Countering China: India's Strategic Reorientation

Foreign policy, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was redefined so as to not merely manage India's external relations and institutional engagements but rather project India as an important and responsible stakeholder in the global political system. To achieve this goal, the Modi government adopted a multi-pronged strategy that entails the following priorities; revitalizing relations with its neighbours; deepening engagement with countries in extended neighbourhood; strengthening its regional position in Asia; enhancing partnerships with major powers like the U.S., Russia and China; breaking new ground in relations with middle-level powers like Germany, France, Australia, and Israel; playing a proactive role in world affairs by becoming an part of the global political and economic architecture; and finally, intensifying the process of economic modernization in the country through vital support from different countries.[2]Moreover, there was a conscious move towards a pragmatic reorientation of foreign policy priorities, reworking some of the old policies and initiating a number of new policies- such as "Act East", "Connect Central Asia", "Look West" and "Project Mausam"- to revitalize relations with those countries and regions, which were previously not part of India's primary foreign policy agenda.[3]

There has been a push by India towards enhancing the scale of engagement with the major powers and others through a series of regional organizations such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus (with the U.S., Japan, Russia and others), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (with Russia, China and others), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), and the BIMSTEC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan) grouping.

When Modi rechristened 'Look East' to 'Act East' to revitalize relations with South East Asian countries, he had been making efforts to establish some sort of alliance in Indo-Pacific among friendly countries to protect India's maritime interests.[4] Modi's focus on economic diplomacy and his push to market "Brand India" through initiatives like "Make in India" achieved significant outcomes in the economic, technological and energy sector.[5] Programs like this helped link domestic policy with foreign policy facilitating investment, innovation, skill development, and manufacturing infrastructure in India to make the country part of the global supply chain. All these initiatives can be seen as part of serious effort by India to become a more influential strategic player in East Asia and the Pacific.

Act Indo-Pacific': India's New Strategic Paradigm

The Indo-Pacific perhaps constitutes the most recent and yet most vital strategic paradigm for India. India realizes that it cannot afford to remain stagnant in the face of growing dominance of China in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and its attempts to militarize India's oceanic neighborhood.[6]Moreover, the increasing focus on the maritime sphere for both trade and security has made India move towards protecting its interests in the Indian and Pacific Oceans vis-à-vis China. This explains India's renewed efforts to firm up a coherent Indo-Pacific strategy, in consultation with other Pacific countries, that would help in not only pursue its own maritime-strategic interests, but also counter Chinese influence.[7]

It is not only India that is perturbed by increasing Chinese presence in the Pacific maritime zone, countries like Japan, Indonesia, Australia, and above all the U.S., are equally disturbed by what they see as Chinese attempts to unilaterally control all the commercial trade routes and maritime-mineral resources in the region. These countries have been pushing for advancement of the Indo-Pacific, both as a geo-strategic construct and a new strategic sphere of influence that would be more open, democratic, and inclusive. The Trump administration, after assuming power in 2016, altered Obama's "Pivot to Asia" strategy to vigorously pursue the "Indo- Pacific" to ensure that the strategic balance in the Asia Pacific does not become Sino-centric and there are enough opportunities for southeast

Asian countries for pursuing their economic goals. Significantly, both the "Pivot to Asia" and the "Indo-Pacific" strategies while attempting to redefine the geo-strategic space, called for the strategic restructuring of Asia-Pacific, that traditionally included East and South East Asia, by incorporating South Asia and Indian Oceans regions as one single strategic theatre. Also, both the strategies wanted India to play a more proactive role in the region to maintain the balance of power. The continuing "Asia-Pacific" construct was considered narrow and ambiguous in terms of incorporating India in the affairs of the region.[8]

India, keen to develop a sound strategic deterrence against China, grabbed the opportunity provided by the Indo-Pacific construct to build partnerships with resident countries and major stakeholders in the region. Since assuming power in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been working vigorously towards reviving India's maritime connections with its extended neighbors and allies in Asia and thereby boosts the evolving Indo-Pacific narrative. His call for "open, inclusive, democratic and transparent Indo-Pacific region" during the Shangrila Dialogue in 2018[9], as well as India's strenuous efforts to augment maritime connectivity with various countries through initiatives such as "Sagarmala"[10] could be seen as part of this strategy. To expand India's strategic presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and build mutually beneficial partnerships, India has undertaken several policy initiatives.The "'Act East Policy", that has achieved significant results for India in recent years, might evolve into "Act Indo-Pacific" signaling India's intent to play a major role in the region.[11]It must be noted here that the Indian Navy, in 2015, launched a new maritime security strategy, which sought to expand India's "areas of maritime interest" to the entire western and southwestern Pacific Ocean.[12] These efforts reflect India's eagerness to firm up a coherent and forward-looking Indo-Pacific strategy that would not only help in countering China's coercive diplomacy but would also help in enhacing its strategic capabilities.

Is QUAD the Way Forward?

A consensus appears to be emerging against China's military adventurism, intrusive diplomacy, and most importantly its unilateral control over islands in the

SCS and ECS regions in utter disregard of global conventions and international judicial verdicts. There is resentment among many countries, both littoral and non-littoral, against Chinese attempts to establish a Sino-centric order in the Indo-Pacific and completely control the trade routes and maritime resources. Against this backdrop, the role of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between India, Japan, Australia, and the U.S.- becomes extremely important. Particularly as China has of late adopted coercive and offensive diplomacy tactics against countries like India, Australia, Japan, and the United States, in a strategy that has been dubbed as "wolf-warrior diplomacy". In the context of China's increasingly offensive diplomatic stance, the Quad members have intensified their efforts to put in place a robust strategy to counterbalance China. The first real open shift to this strategy when the Quad countries met at the ministerial level in September 2019, signaling a shift in India's approach.[13]

Initially starting as an informal strategic dialogue mechanism, the Quad is now in the process of being formalised as an indispensable forum that could play the most vital role in maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific by countering China and preventing its unilateral moves. With the U.S. hardening its stance against China on issues related to Taiwan, Hong Kong, the SCS, unfair trade practices, as well as ineffective and opaque management of Covid-19,the Quad seems to be the most viable strategic option for the four democracies to be worked upon most earnestly.[14]There is deepening of understanding among India, US, Japan and Australia in terms of information and intelligence exchanges, personnel interactions, interoperable equipment. The institutionalization of 'Quad', now just a dialogue mechanism, as a multilateral politico-security framework, might pave the way for greater understanding and collaboration with important countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, and South Korea, as well as with smaller countries.

Strenghtening the Quad may take the centrestage in foreign policy priorities of these countries as they are trying to firm up a cohesive strategy in response to Xi Jinping's more assertive diplomacy and policy tactics. India, once reluctant to

be openly associated with any formal alliance against China, has become more proactive in promoting the forum in a post-Galwan scenario. As was mentioned earlier in the paper, with the signing of the Logistics Agreement with Japan, India now has pacts with all the members of the Quad to strengthen defence exchanges and military interpolability. There is a discernible forward movement towards deepening the understandingamong the members in terms of information sharing and intelligence exchanges, personnel interactions, and above all putting in place a new supply chain and framework that would cater to both the economic and security requirements of countries.

With more countries coming forward to voice their concerns regarding Chinese belligerence, there is talk of expanding the Quad to include more like-minded members.[15] It now looks more probable than ever that the Quad could transform from being a mere "confabulating forum" to an "assertive alliance" to work towards bringing in greater structure and order to the Indo-Pacific. Though countering China's growing power has been the most dominant, yet undeclared, agenda of the Quad, there are attempts on the part of members to put forward a more constructive and development-oriented roadmap. The Quad might be institutionalized as a multilateral politico-security framework and also be expanded under the nomenclature of the Quad-Plus -to foster greater understanding and collaboration with important countries like France, Vietnam, Indonesia, South Korea, and even Canada and New Zealand.[16]The Quad might very well be the strategic game changer that would lead to initiation of a new politico-strategic order in Indo-Pacific.

India, shedding its reservations, has shown greater willingness to join other members of the Quad to initiate a grand strategic narrative that would help in countering China's aggressive diplomacy. India has all the required credentials; demographic, economic, military, and ideological- to emerge as the "balancer" in the region. India cannot afford to watch silently as China moves towards rapidly expanding its power and influence across regions in Asia, especially in the IOR;

strategic imperatives compel it to work for balancing against China in the region.[17] India would benefit significantly in assuming a more leader centric role to encourage a strategy that creates greater opportunities for all the stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region instead of allowing the most dominant player to exert total control.

China and India are locked in a classic security dilemma, where any action taken by one is perceived by the other as inimical to its interests. India's challenge in the Indo-Pacific is to navigate successfully the geopolitics of the region by striking a balance between an assertive China and an uncertain United States. Further, the security situation in Indo-Pacific is playing out along the expected lines. Despite assurances from China of its benign rise, the other Pacific states are increasingly feeling the growing Chinese assertive and aggressive policy. While the US continues to be the dominant power in the Indo-Pacific, the region is in search for a new balance in which India is an important pillar.

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QUESTION OF AUTONOMY IN THE SUBALTERN MOVEMENTS: PROTESTS AND RESISTANCE OF THE TEA GARDEN WORKERS OF ASSAM IN COLONIAL AND POST COLONIAL INDIA

Phulmoni Das

Introduction

In order to understand the nature of autonomy in the subaltern movement, it is at the outset needs to be highlighted that the struggle waged by the subaltern groups are not new to Indian history; instead it has deeply been imprinted in a long historical time. These struggles have not been part of the mainstream academic discourses in the history writings for quite some time. It was the Subaltern Studies Group who first tried to make a serious attempt to trace the missing linkages of Subaltern struggle and to bring it to the mainstream discourses. Broadly speaking the approach initiated by the Subaltern historians is referred as 'subaltern historiography', which seeks to maintain a balance by highlighting the role of the politics of the people as against elite politics played in Indian history. They asserted how the elite politics has failed to acknowledge the contribution made by the people (masses) on their own way which is independent of the elite politics. In parallel to the domain of elite politics in colonial period there always existed another form of politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the society. These actors are the 'subaltern' classes and groups constituting the masses of the laboring population and the intermediate strata in the town and country – the people'.[1] Subaltern historiography considers subalternity of the masses as an autonomous domain which neither originates from elite politics nor depends on

them. According to Ranajit Guha, the mobilization of the domain of elite politics is achieved vertically but the subaltern politics takes place at the horizontal level. Guha also admitted that due to the diversity of the social composition among the subaltern groups and lack of uniformity in ideological element in terms of quality and density in the subaltern groups has sometimes led to the pursuit of their narrow sectional and economic interest as well as sectarian splits which destabilize the horizontal alliances of the subaltern groups.[2] Therefore Guha also made the observation that the two domains of politics have not been isolated from each other but most often overlapped with each other. It is mainly the elite domain which always had tried to mobilize and integrate the domain of subaltern into the elite domain of politics to accomplish their own interests. However the subaltern groups managed to come away from the domination of elite control and able to put their characteristic imprints on the campaigns initiated by the elite domain.[3]

It is in this context the debate around the question of autonomy in subaltern movement can be discussed. The present article seeks to analyze the foundational proposition that whether the subaltern politics constitutes an autonomous sphere or not. Article seeks to understand through the discussion of the some of the instances of tea garden workers movement of Assam both in colonial and post colonial period, it has been realized that the foundational question of subaltern autonomy has turned into different direction. It gives new dimension to the subaltern autonomous domain, by shifting particularly towards a more porous boundary definition of elite and popular politics which turns autonomous domain to relational practices. Therefore in this context present study has been divided in four aspects; first part of the article deals with understanding of subaltern resistance as autonomous domain and second aspect of the paper locating the protest of the tea garden workers by concentrating on the Chargola exodus of colonial period and also gives general observation on the contemporary movements and protests of the tea garden workers for their different socio- economic and political causes. Third and fourth aspect of the paper deals with the contextualizing the debate on subaltern autonomy; also and tries to highlight a concluding observation on the debate.

Subaltern Resistance as Autonomous Domain

Here, the words subaltern and subalternity refer to those who are subordinate to a ruling group's policies and initiatives, who have been marginalized, distorted, suppressed and sometimes even whose history is forgotten and whose voice is never heard. It reinforces the point as Gyanendra Pandey has mentioned that not all citizens (or human beings) are born equal because they are treated as 'second class' in spite of granting the formal status of citizens, who are deprived and denied formal citizenship altogether. The Subalternity as a concept gained worldwide attention with the collective effort of the group called subaltern studies headed by Ranajit Guha. The group comprises several South Asian historians, social critics and scholars such as Shahid Amin, Dipesh Chakrabarty, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, Gyanendra Pandey and Sumit Sarkar. People's resistance is the core of the subaltern studies group.

Subaltern historiography provides useful framework for studying social movements in general and tribal and peasant insurgencies in particular. Subaltern historiography was very pertinent in terms of understanding the Indian national movement from the subaltern perspective. Ranajit Guha said that, ' The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism and bourgeoisie- nationalist elitism- colonialist elitism and bourgeoisie-nationalist elitism'[4]With this assertion Guha said the arrival of a new and fundamentally oppositional historiographical perspective which would become foundational for a whole school of studies of political protest and social movements in historical and contemporary India.[5] Moreover the popular mass struggle or the subaltern struggle of many peasants and tribal uprisings against the colonial dominations are never considered as the struggle of the masses within the dominant discourse of elitist historiography. According to Guha this is an 'un-historical historiography', which ignores the 'politics of the people':

'For parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were

not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial societies but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the laboring population and the intermediate strata in town and country –that is, the people. This was not an autonomous domain, for it originated from elite politics, nor did its existence depend on the latter.'[6]

Therefore the politics which had its source in this domain was traditional in the sense that it could be traced back to the precolonial period. However, it was not archaic but developed itself in relation to, and adapted itself to the changed conditions caused by, British colonialism.[7]For example, the peasant and tribal tenant rebelled against elite domination many times, for example, uprisings of Bhumij, the Kol insurrection, the Santal revolt of 1855 and the indigo disturbances of 1859-62 and the Deccan riots of 1875 etc can be referred as some of the subaltern struggle which are accomplished by the masses not with the help of the politics of elite. Colonial rule and its commercialization adversely affected the tribal societies and their life which later on became the reason for the various tribal uprisings in colonial period. Because of the oppressive colonial policies, the Adivasis were deprived from their forest rights which led to the rise of fundamental questions of land and forest on which they were traditionally been dependent for their livelihood. The struggles led by the subaltern groups symbolized on how they have been fighting for their existence since historical times. However the history of the peasant and tribal insurgencies in India were replete with 'myths, rituals, rumors, hopes for a Golden Age and fears of an imminent End of World'.[8] Conventionally, these factors are rendered as meaningless by the historians by declaring them as manipulative actors to rouse the peasantry. But it is the attribution of Subaltern historiography which has considered the importance of these elements which not only potentially unite the rebels but also divide them. Subaltern Studies scholars were among the first to acknowledge the role of superstitions and religious beliefs as legitimate causes in understanding rebel consciousness, even when such beliefs defied rational explanations by social scientist[9]. Many of the issues raised by the Subaltern historians such as Shahid Amin's account of rumours and beliefs about colonial

India's great personality or symbolic figure ; M.K Gandhi, again Gyanendra Pandey's accounts of sectarian movements related to predominantly agrarian communities in northern India, and in David Hardiman's analysis of tribal uprisings in western India under the apparent command of a local goddess. In Shaid Amin famous essay, ' Gandhi as Mahatma : Gorokhpur District, Eastern UP,1921-22', shows how the Mahatma Gandhis's image as great leader, great soul was the factor which empowered the peasant to undertake 'direct action' against the existing order of village society. In fact sometimes it evoked the multiple acts of violence which are carried out in the name of Gandhi. For example in Gorakhpur a 'criminal tribe' called *Badhik* looted a market in Gorakhpur and attracted violence to anyone who opposed their immediate goal. Likewise, they attacked the money lenders, judges, local landlords and Englishmen who are the symbols of authority in rural hinterland. At the same time they justified their acts as that it was the command of the Gandhi in their dreams or in miracles to carry out the act of violence as they were also chanting the slogans in the name of Gandhi or 'Gandhi's Swaraj'. [10] Again David Hardiman has discussed a particular tribal movement of South Gujrat during 1922-23 which is known as Devi movement. Devi according to the Adivasi was a female divinity called Salabai who possessed immense power. It is under 'Devi's' command and inspiration which led the Adivasis to agitate against the local liquor and landlords.[11] But according to Hardiman, unfortunately historians have not written much about such tribal movements. It is not always about the limitation of archival information. More importantly these occurrences are not accepted as the standard 'nationalistic or socialistic' historiographies of colonial India. There is no recognition in nationalist history about the fact that peasant and Adivasis fought against colonial domination on their own. Therefore the Subaltern historians were interested in developing a rebel historiography because they believe that conventional studies of Indian nationalism have been shaped by the dictates of colonialist and bourgeois –nationalist elitism. The same attitude was formed in aspect of the subalterns like tea garden workers of Assam also. Tea garden workers of Assam had to work under extreme bad environment in

Assam. From the recruitment in tea plantations to their settlement, these workers had to gone through unending struggle for their living. Both in colonial and post colonial period, workers have fought and resisted against the exploitations and injustices made towards them by the colonial authority and post colonial plantation management. Their protests and movements are mostly termed as sporadic, violent and unorganized and therefore neither consider as the part of the nationalist movement nor considered as the authentic movement against the exploitative power regime. Therefore the next section of the study deals with the nature of the movement and protests of the tea garden workers of Assam both in colonial and post colonial period from the subaltern perspective.

Understanding the Nature of the Protests of Tea Garden Workers of Assam in Colonial and Post Colonial Period

Protest of tea garden workers is an integral aspect while referring to the tea plantation in Assam. Strikes and protest of the workers were not unknown to the tea garden workers during colonial and even in the postcolonial period, though they have come in different forms and nature. The deprivation, suppression and exploitation of the workers at large sometimes led to sporadic violent outbursts and protests between tea garden workers and Planters during the colonial period. Nevertheless, the legacy of the exploitation had continued even after post independence period where the nature of the protest has become diverse and has broadened with multiple concerns that remain unanswered till today.

The earliest attempt of going against the planters and their authority was in the form of 'absconding', 'desertions' and even strikes in the Assam Company's tea estates[12]. Desertions were considered as the way of escaping brutalities of life in the tea plantations. The planters often referred those desertion made by the workers as 'absconding' which was regarded as a serious offence under the existing law Even officially resistance of the workers were referred as ' assaults', 'riots' and 'intimidations' and they were considered as offences. In cases where a large number of laborers were involved, the term unlawful assembly was added. Between

1900 and 1930 about 272 cases of 'unlawful assembly' and 'rioting' were reported along with 79 cases of 'assault', 'intimidation' and 'violence'[13]. However there were no official details about those cases.

Tea plantation workers perhaps were the first section of workers who has continuously initiated a violent struggle against the capitalist regime in the form of tea plantation authority since the day's formative stage of the industry. The acts of violence against the managers of tea gardens were mostly retaliatory in nature. Most of the acts of resistances of the workers were collective in nature. In most of the cases the issues of the protest were mostly economic such as, low wages, denial of rice as part of the wage in kind, extraction of excessive work, etc. There were other reasons involved such as anger against the physical coercion, confinement and indignities done against the workers –like insults and beatings, public caning of male and female labourers and sometimes even children, causing injury and occasional death[14]. But absence of united organized movement among the workers during those protests was noteworthy although the workers stood up against the colonial authority were an unusual step by them.

Moreover the magical role played by Mahatma Gandhi's teachings has also made a significant impact on tea garden workers movement of Assam. During the Chargola Exodus the tea garden workers were influenced by the Gandhian principles. On 2nd May, 1921 tea garden workers in Chargola –Valley struck work demanding a pay increase. In the mean time the historic labour exodus from Chargola and Longai Valley in Karimganj subdivision had started with the return of 750 men, women and children from Anipur Tea Estate on 3rd May. The workers were only demanding for the hike of their wages which were never given any concern by the plantation authority. Tea garden workers during that time were enthralled by learning about Gandhi's nationalistic missions and accepted Gandhi as a messiah-an avatar. Their sufferings ultimately guided them to follow Gandhian path- to return back to their villages and live a simple and plain life[15]. Thousands of laborers, particularly from the tea gardens of Chargola and Longai Valley left

their gardens and trekked to the nearest railway stations, while shouting 'Gandhi Maharaj Ki Jai' as they passed along the road.[16] Therefore the spread of rumours of the greatness of Mahatma Gandhi played a great part in encouraging the workers to leave their workplaces or motivated them to continue their resistance against the colonial authorities.

The charismatic image of Mahatma Gandhi inspired the militancy of the subalterns such as workers and poor peasants who got a political consciousness from the teachings of Gandhi. The teachings of Gandhi were like a healer to all forms of exploitation they suffered in the hands of the colonial authority. But in reality it offered a grim picture of negligence by the bourgeoisie leadership. Sometimes the politics of the subaltern tried to imbibe the spirit of the bourgeoisie Congress leaders without comprehending the ethos of National Movement, to which the entry of the subalterns was strictly prohibited[17]. The reason behind the silence of the local Congress leaders for the cause of the workers was because several of the local leaders were either planters themselves or were socially matrimonially related to the planter families. Besides that ideological reservation of the Congress against the method of protest of the working class struggle was also an impediment for the workers to get favor from the Congress. *Hartals*- not strike – suited the Congress ideology and its organization[18]. Therefore the poor workers of India and their struggles were not able to be a part of the main aspects of National Movement because of Gandhi's disapproval of the political methods of the subalterns. The struggle of the workers was largely made up of their own theory of struggle it was not driven by bourgeoisie but by the subaltern themselves.

Moreover the struggle of the tea garden workers still has been continuing in the post colonial period. With the collapse of colonial structure and the establishment of sovereign state, discriminatory polices persisted as the colonial policies of exploitation was integrated with the aspirations of the elites of state. Therefore the protest still continues in different tea gardens of Assam which includes their different issues such as enhancement of wages, demands for the

implementation of Plantation Labour Act 1951 and to protect their culture, land and identity. Strikes are frequent between tea garden workers and the authority even after independence. In case of the protests and movement of the tea garden workers of Assam in colonial period it can be said that they were not able to organize themselves nor get any support from other agencies such as trade union or nationalist leaders. But the protests and movements of the tea garden workers of Assam in post colonial period have been done under the banner of different organizations such as the trade unions , students organizations such as Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha(ACMS), Asam Tea Tribes Students Association(ATTSA), Adivasi Students Association of Assam (AASAA). Here in this context the most prominent dissimilarity in case of the protests of tea garden workers of Assam both in colonial and postcolonial period is their nature. Earlier strikes and protests are mostly sporadic and unorganized and are completely independence of the elitist politics. Whereas the protests of the post colonial period are mostly organized, though in some situations they exhibit unorganized and sporadic nature. For example as the field work done by the researcher during 2018, January, in Bogidhola and Gobindpur tea estates of Golaghat District of Assam, it has been found from the conversations with the workers that protest happened in these tea estates were sporadic and unorganized. Both the tea gardens have witnessed two major protests made by the workers in 2005 (Gobindpur) and 2017(Bogidhola) regarding the main issue of not getting their daily wages and ration from the authority. Workers in Gobindpur tea estates have attacked the owner of the garden because of their long pending demand of not getting their daily wages, which was not even taken seriously and it has led to the death of the owner of the tea estate. Moreover in Bogidhola Tea Estate, 14 workers have been injured by the indiscriminate fire made by the owner of the tea estate for their protests against the plantation authority. Protest was made primarily for not getting of ration, wages, medical facilities, water, bonus etc. However the protests made by the Sapoi Tea Estate of Tezpur district for their various demands such as enhancement of wages, implementations of Plantation Labour Act 1951etc are guided by the trade unions such as Central Indian Trade Union(CITU).[19]

Apart from these case studies, there are different protests which have been made by the workers through different organizations. The workers and different organization and trade unions are voicing their dissatisfaction with the current wage structure and demanding the government to enhanced its legal responsibilities and set a decent wage of Rs. 350.[20] The basic demand of enhancing the wage of tea garden workers of Assam is being raised by the different organizations, as they have been repeatedly pointed out that low wage is the cause responsible for the deplorable socio economic conditions of the tea garden workers of Assam. Forums like Joint Action Committee for Tea Workers Wages (JACTWW) demanded for the hike in tea workers' daily wage to Rs. 351.33. JACTWW is a forum of eight tea workers and youth organizations - All Adivasi Students' Association of Assam, Akhil Bharatiya Chah Mazdoor Sangha, Assam Sangrami Chah Shramik Sangha, Chah Mukti Sangram Samiti, Assam Tea Labour Union, Assam Majduri Shramik Union, Assam Mazdoor Union and All Adivasi Women Association of Assam-formed to demand a hike in tea workers' daily wage.[21]

New group of elites that emerged within the community have gradually helped to formulate different socio economic and political organization such as ACMS, ATTSA, AASAA, Adivasi Sahitya Sabha, Adivasi Council of Assam etc. These organizations later on carried forward the issue of recognizing certain groups of the community as scheduled tribe. Along with the demand for identity, the aspiration for recognition of their language 'Sadri' as the medium of instruction in the primary level of education also geared up through the activities of different cultural and social organization. The history of a community is considered to be incomplete without giving recognition to their identity, language and culture. Recognition of Adivasis language such as Adivasiya (Sadri), Kharia, Mundari, Santali was one of the major demands put forwarded by ATTSA, AASAA, and by the Adivasis Mahasabha in their different programmes held in different times[22]. 'Adivasis Mahasabha' is one of their collective promotions of literary and culturally event which is organize by AASAA every year to discuss their demands in terms of recognizing their identity and language.

It is with the independence and with the process of democratization of the political process various organizations began to organize the tea workers which resulted in the formation of a number of trade unions and other socio cultural organizations in order to improve their working condition. Many demands such as enhancement of wages, recognition of scheduled tribe and caste status, allocation of land to the landless tea garden workers, recognition of their language etc are some of the major issues which have been mobilized and articulated by the different organizations of the tea garden community of Assam.

Therefore all these movements of the tea garden workers of Assam both in colonial and postcolonial period are the clear manifestation of deprivation and these are the movement against the betrayal and deception by the privileged and powerful section of the society. If the autonomy had been a defining feature of the politics of the people then these movements have given different dimension to look into it. Because the feature of autonomy in terms of the subaltern movements have been manifested and changed according to the context and situation. Autonomy being a significant feature of the subaltern movements like tea garden workers of Assam is more contextual and situational in nature. Therefore the following section deals with the debate around the nature of movements and the question of autonomy of the subalterns movements of the tea garden workers of Assam.

Debate on Autonomous Domain

Subaltern autonomy cannot be understood in its own. Understanding of the Subaltern cannot come into being its own. The consensus has been arrived on the dependence of the subaltern on the dominant discourse. Arising of the Subaltern started to be visualized not outside but inside the dominant discourse, 'in its interstice' as Gyan Prakash has mentioned. Although it has been argued that the subaltern has arisen within the dominant discourse, the power of the subaltern clearly reveals their ability to exert pressure on the dominant structures as well. Therefore the cultural, economic and political assertion of the tea garden community do not happen

in vacuum and are not inspired by their own subjectivity. Rather they emerge as a response to the hegemony of the dominant discourse. Noted subaltern scholar Partha Cahtterjee expressed his view on the changes in the conceptualization of the subaltern. Presently the political activism of the subaltern is no longer manifested the actual confrontational rebellion, as it was in the case of peasant insurgency discussed by Ranajit Guha. In contemporary time subalterns use bureaucratic and institutional means in fulfilling their objectives. Using of that strategy and tactics resembles the elite politics. As happened with the context of the movement of the tea garden community of Assam where the earlier protest and strike were most often sporadic and although some of the strikes and movement of tea garden community are spontaneous outburst of their anger but most of their movement such as enhancement of wages, demand for bonus, demand for their land rights and forest rights and assertion of scheduled tribe status is guided and articulated by different organizations.

In terms of the nature of the protests of the tea garden workers during colonial period, it can be said that despite the existing potential of the struggle among the tea garden workers, it did not crystallize into a unified and organized form. It was because of the factors such as strict surveillance over the lives of the workers, isolation and protective policy of the Britishers made for the workers of tea plantation, oppressive policies of the colonial authority to suppressed any form of emergence of political leadership, socio economic backwardness of the workers and geographical isolation or formation of enclave like structure in the tea gardens of Assam, their protests remain mostly isolated and unorganized. Similarly in case of the workers protests of Bogidhola and Gobindpur tea estates of contemporary time manifested the unorganized and sporadic character in their outburst. But in case of Sapoi tea estate and overall movements and protests done by the workers over different issues shows that they are mostly organished and done under the banner of different trade unions and other organizations.

Different organizations such as ACMS, ATTSA, AASAA, Adivasi Mahasabha, Adivasi Sahitya Sabha etc have mobilized different issues and

grievances of the community and presented in front of the government through memorandum, letters and discussion. One more aspect related to the subaltern nature of the tea garden workers of Assam is their issue of mobilization. As Subaltern Historian Ranajit Guha views that the mobilization of subaltern and elitist politics differs from one another. According to him mobilization in the domain of elite politics is achieved vertically whereas in domain of subaltern politics this is achieved horizontally. Elite politics such as different steps of the tea garden management are more inclined towards legalistic or constitutional in orientation. Similarly the activity of trade union and different organizations and bodies of tea garden community in most of the time is dominated and guided by the elite sections of the community. Movements and the politics of these groups are more like organized, systematic and depended on the democratic and constitutional means. The 'conscious decisions' of the protests of the workers are mostly made through different organized platforms, therefore autonomy being sole define elements of subaltern movements cannot be counted. Because like the elitist politics, subaltern politics and mobilizations have also been guided by the leaders and their organizations and the method of protests have also become organized and constitutional. Subaltern movements cannot be fixed and separated from the elitist politics, as the subaltern movements have also been influenced and mobilized on similar method as the elitist politics and movements have been done. The discussion held on above about the protests of the tea garden workers in colonial and postcolonial period, depicted that although the protest were unorganized and unsuccessful in most of the time, they are capable enough to deliver themselves to justice which had been denied hitherto. Moreover the notion of subaltern and subalternity is fluid and contextual. The group or the individual who may be considered as subaltern in certain situations may also be considered as elite for the other subaltern sections. Here it can be referred to the tea garden workers as subaltern in compare to the other communities of Assam, because of their deprivation, poor and backward socio economic conditions. But the leaders, despite belonging to the tea garden community, who constitutes the members of the different tea garden's organizations are become

elite mostly for their socio economic and political status for the larger tea garden workers sections. In this context the question of the autonomy of the protests of the tea garden workers is again subjective. Because the mobilization and articulation of the tea garden workers by the educated elite sections of the community has again somewhat robbed of the subaltern sense of autonomy. Therefore movements of the tea garden workers under the different socio political organizations have made the nature of the subaltern protests similar to the elite politics.

Thus the politics of subaltern and elite shows significant interconnectedness with each other. It is also not true that the autonomy of the subaltern never existed, rather in post independence period it has been affected by many elements. Throughout the discussion of the movements of the tea garden workers of Assam as subalterns in colonial period, it is possible to see how the workers as subaltern groups take the hold of symbols and messages from elite politics, interpret these in relation to their own horizons of understanding and use these interpretations to legitimate actions which clash with the elite's political agenda. As reflected in Chargola Exodus, workers found a legitimacy of their exodus and they were supposedly taken that as Gandhi's orders, and considered as their actions as just, fair and possible. Guha's view on Subalten as an autonomous political and cultural agent is deconstructed by the Spivak and O'Hanlon as they focused on recent shifts to the interdependency between the subaltern and the dominant culture.[23]

Therefore it is necessary to add in the debate on the subaltern autonomy that, subalterns and their movements in contemporary time, started to be seen as arising not outside but inside the dominant discourse. At present the subalterns use bureaucratic and institutional means or the ways to achieve their goals, resembling the characteristics of elite politics. Because the contemporary political activism of the subaltern is no longer manifested through an actual confrontational rebellion as it was the case of peasant insurgency as expressed by Ranajit Guha. Subaltern politics in contemporary time is reflected through different institutional and constitutional means to achieve their objectives which resembles the politics of

elite and which also differs from the earlier notion of subaltern movements. Thus, it can be referred that the politics of the subaltern and the elite shows significant interconnectedness in the making of the Indian nation. So, the politics of subaltern and elite cannot be formulated or separated under watertight compartments, rather they are more flexible and interconnected. It is in this context it can be questioned whether there is real political autonomy of the subaltern classes existed or not if the politics of the elite and subaltern interconnected. But it is also not always true that the political autonomy of the subaltern never existed. Rather in contemporary time autonomy of the subaltern politics is affected by several influences. As it has been mentioned earlier that spontaneous or sporadic rebellion of the subaltern have transformed the subaltern politics to a new form of politics where they have operated the strategy of elitist which gives a new dimension to the subaltern politics. The autonomy of subaltern politics from elite politics as referred by Ranajit Guha can be reinterpreted. Therefore, the subalterns as an autonomous political and cultural agent have been deconstructed by Spivak and O' Hanlon whereas recently the emphasis shifts to interdependency between the subaltern and the dominant culture. The subaltern politics, therefore, can be considered as an alternative culture and politics but it cannot be identified as an independent autonomous domain since dominant and subaltern discourse has become reciprocal in the present socio-political context. Through the above discussion it can be realized that the nature of the subaltern autonomy is a relational practices. It is difficult to maintain the rigid formulation of subaltern and elite politics in a separate entity, rather it is relational. The boundaries between dominant and subaltern politics are porous and fluid.

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